

Date: 8<sup>th</sup> April 2015

Location: Brambletye Hotel

Time: 5pm

**The April meeting of the Forest Row Business Forum – Panel of Parliamentary Candidates (Wealden)**

Thank you to Nas, Peter & Paul for taking the time to come and attend the April meeting of the Forest Row Business Forum at the Brambletye Hotel.

**Parliamentary Candidates**

Nus Ghani (Conservative)

Peter Griffiths (UKIP)

Paul Sparks – representing Giles Goodall (Liberal Democrats)

Solomon Curtis (Labour) was due to attend

Dr Mark Smith (Greens) invited

The meeting gave Forum members a great opportunity to discuss subjects which potentially have a major impact on small businesses in the run up to the General Election. It was good to see not just the parliamentary candidates but also representatives from the Parish Council, East Sussex Council, the Chamber of Commerce and the local businesses.

The debate was chaired by Martin Chadder and a diverse range of questions were submitted prior to the meeting - topics debated included.

**Vat** – all parties stated they no plans to increase VAT, the discussion included how any reduction could be funded e.g. reduce cost of health tourism

**Red tape and bureaucracy** is a key concern for small businesses. The discussion was around whether there are too many levels of bureaucracy and how easy it is to access the right person.

It was generally agreed by the parliamentary candidates and Forum members that localism is more important to people than strategy and sometimes the two seem to conflict with each other.

Paul Sparks suggested that monthly surgeries with representatives from all levels of Government is a good opportunity to gain joined up representation.

Peter Griffiths focused on the EU and the impact on legislation and representation on other organisations such as the WTO which ultimately influence legislation within this country.

**Broadband** – Nus Ghani is keen to ensure that Wealden is included in plans to upgrade broadband from dial up to support local business and people who work from home.

**Apprentices** – these provide opportunities for both the young unemployed and employers to facilitate employment within the local area.

**Funding & grants** – the discussion was around how grants to regenerate & support the high street can be accessed. The vast majority of businesses and therefore employers in Wealden are small businesses. Chris Lawson from the Chamber of Commerce is a contact who can facilitate the best way to access information at local and district level.

The general agreement was that funding and spending with local responsibly would facilitate support to small businesses and local areas.

**The 7km exclusion** zone and the policy of Wealden Council provided an interesting debate. There are concerns about interpretation by Wealden Council and the impact of this on local businesses and employment.

Refreshments were provided by the 221 restaurant at the Brambletye Hotel.