



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2018 – 2021

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# Foreword

I am proud of the many achievements since the last Economic Development Strategy was prepared. Successes have included:

- Funding awards to provide faster broadband in rural parts of the borough to support rural and home-based businesses
- The Escalate Loan programme and LEADER grants scheme, awarding funding to borough businesses
- Employability and skills initiatives including regular Jobs & Training Fairs attended by borough businesses and jobseekers
- Improvements to borough transport infrastructure including the A21 dualling and the Longfield Road improvements providing better access for local businesses
- Funding awards for transport schemes to improve junctions, the public realm and cycling infrastructure in the borough.
- Delivery of the West Kent Business Support Programme to provide advice to local start-up and new businesses
- Forming the town centre partnership, Royal Tunbridge Wells Together, and the appointment of a town centre manager in RTW to deliver initiatives to support footfall and business in the town centre
- Preparation of a Destination Management Plan for Tunbridge Wells and delivery of projects including new wayfinding signs in Royal Tunbridge Wells
- Opening of The House – flexible workspace to support the creative business sector in Tunbridge Wells
- Ongoing delivery of the Farmers Market and Tourist Information Services, supporting local businesses
- Improved digital communications with local businesses via social media and our business e-newsletter

However, there is still much to do, so this updated Economic Development Strategy sets out the approach that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and its partners will take to create the best conditions for business investment and sustainable growth in the borough in the next three years.

By 2019, the Council will no longer receive any funding from the Government, so we will need to be working better with local businesses and other partner organisations both to address the constraints to economic growth and to embrace opportunities as they arise.

This Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed regularly to ensure that it continues to respond to changing circumstances.



**Cllr Jane March**

Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

April 2018

# 1 The Local Economy



The borough of Tunbridge Wells is located in West Kent and borders Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone and Ashford and Rother and Wealden in East Sussex. The economy of West Kent plays a vital role in promoting and sustaining the Kent economy as a whole. It has historically enjoyed strong job growth and is forecast to continue to do so with good prospects for securing economic growth over the next 20 years. West Kent has the highest proportion of business start-ups in Kent, a stronger representation of higher value, knowledge-based industries than anywhere else in Kent and boasts the strongest business survival rates. The area provides significant employment to those living elsewhere in Kent including high skilled, well paid jobs.

The population of the borough is approximately 116,200 and this is anticipated to rise to 122,700 by 2022. Royal Tunbridge Wells is the main urban area in the borough and is a primary/ major retail centre as defined by the Local Plan. It is a vibrant town and draws trade from a wide catchment. Other towns in the borough include: Southborough, Paddock Wood and Cranbrook, acting as key service centres for the local population. In addition to this, there are 17 villages with varying levels of facilities and services available.

Tunbridge Wells is an attractive business location. The economy is characterised by a large number of small and micro-businesses (SMEs). However, there are a number of key major employers that contribute significantly to the economic health of the borough. Sector strengths include: finance & insurance, scientific & technical, wholesale & retail, human health & social work, hospitality, creative and education. In addition, there is a small, well-skilled manufacturing sector.

The borough has a high quality built and natural environment. More than two thirds of the borough is designated as the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and across the borough there are numerous conservation areas and listed buildings. Health, leisure, culture and tourism first made Tunbridge Wells a destination in the 1600s and it has continued as a high quality visitor destination since then. The tourism sector remains an important part of the local economy. The Council has a clear and ambitious vision to *'grow our role as the cultural centre of the Kent & Sussex High Weald, so that by 2024 the borough of Tunbridge Wells is nationally recognised for its vibrant cultural provision'* (Tunbridge Wells Cultural Strategy 2014–24).



The Table below shows some key economic statistics for the borough and compares the area with the whole of Kent and the South East region.

**Table 1: Key Economic Statistics**

| Indicator Value (published 2017/2018)                                      | TW     | Kent   | South East | National |
|--|--------|--------|------------|----------|
| Unemployment rate (%)  | 0.9    | 2.0    | 1.4        | 2.2      |
| Median Gross Weekly Workplace Earnings Full Time (£)                       | 515.30 | 552.10 | 574.90     | 552.30   |
| Median Gross Weekly Resident Earnings (£)                                  | 582.50 | 574.90 | 596.80     | 552.70   |
| 3 year business survival rate (%)  | 63.4   | 59.6   | -          | -        |
| Gross Value Added per Head (£) (value of goods and services in an economy) | 26,027 | 21,933 | 28,683     | 26,621   |
| Employees in the Knowledge Economy (%)                                     | 35.7   | 16.6   | 22.0       | 19.8     |
| National Vocational Qualification Level 4+ (%)                             | 49.4   | 36.7   | 28.1       | 37.9     |

The table shows that borough residents are very well qualified and there is a very low unemployment rate (although the overall figure hides pockets of deprivation in a small number of wards). There remains a large outflow of labour and expertise to London on a daily basis. There are also a high number of employees who work in the Knowledge Economy. The Knowledge Economy comprises those industries whose main purpose centres on knowledge or information, from highly technical industries and knowledge intensive services to creative industries.

Tunbridge Wells SWOT analysis and infographics provided in Appendix 1

## National Picture

In 2016, the referendum on membership of the European Union set the UK on course for Brexit. Business groups and other organisations have already started work to ascertain the likely impact of this on the Kent economy but it is difficult to make any firm predictions as yet. The uncertainty surrounding Brexit is likely to last for a number of years and will have an impact on our businesses.

In November 2017 the Government published their Industrial Strategy 'Building a Britain, fit for the future'. The Strategy sets out five foundations for productivity including: Ideas, People, Infrastructure, Business Environment and Places. The Strategy covers issues that are relevant to this local strategy including improving skills and upgrading infrastructure and it is likely to form the framework for funding opportunities in the future.

## Key Partnerships

The Council is engaged in a number of economic partnerships, as follows:

The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) is the business-led, public/private body established to drive economic growth across East Sussex, Essex, Kent, Medway, Southend and Thurrock. It is one of 39 partnerships set up by the government to be the key body determining strategic economic priorities while making investments and delivering activities to drive growth and create local jobs. SELEP is currently updating its *Strategic Economic Plan*, setting a regional context for this Strategy (first published in 2014). The Council is engaging with SELEP in the preparation of the Strategic Economic Plan.

The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) aims to drive forward economic growth and prosperity throughout the region. It was set up in 2013 and is one of the four federated partnerships which comprise the SELEP. KMEP is governed by a Board and chaired by the private sector, with membership drawn from businesses, local government, further and higher education. KMEP is responsible for the delivery of the objectives set out in Kent and Medway's Growth Plan '*Unlocking the Potential: Going for Growth* published in

2014'. Kent County Council has also prepared a Growth & Infrastructure Framework for Kent & Medway which sets out the infrastructure that is needed to support proposed housing and employment growth. This document is updated regularly and the Council engages by ensuring that the infrastructure needed in Tunbridge Wells is included in the document.

TWBC is an active member of the West Kent Partnership (WKP) along with the neighbouring local authorities of Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling. The WKP vision is to sustain a dynamic and well-connected local economy, to ensure that West Kent remains a key location for business success and growth and that our local population has access to quality jobs and skills development. The Partnership promotes West Kent, champions key economic issues, engages with industry and business and pursues external funding opportunities to develop and deliver initiatives that support our local economy. The three boroughs work together to make the most of the financial and other resources available to them to seek to deliver more for our local businesses. In 2015 the West Kent Partnership published its *West Kent Priorities for Growth* document and this will be reviewed in the next year.

Appendix 2 provides a list of partner organisations that the Council works with on Economic Development issues.

## Five Year Plan 2017 – 2022

The Council has adopted a Five Year Plan that sets out a clear vision for the borough. It seeks 'to encourage investment and sustainable growth, and to enhance quality of life for all'. It highlights eight projects that the Council will work to deliver over the next five years including:

- A new Local Plan for the borough
- Creating new sports facilities across the borough
- The development of the Community Centres in the borough
- Enhancing the public realm in the borough
- A new Cultural & Learning Hub in Royal Tunbridge Wells
- Exploring the delivery of a new Theatre in Royal Tunbridge Wells

- Exploring the delivery of a new civic centre and office space in Royal Tunbridge Wells
- Provision of more off-street car parking in Royal Tunbridge Wells

The Plan seeks to build on the area's heritage as a spa town destination, which people visited for health, leisure and cultural reasons. The Council will seek to invest in the borough's cultural venues, sports facilities and parks, not only to improve the overall quality of life for residents but also to ensure that it remains an attractive destination, supporting many local businesses.

Appendix 3 provides a list of relevant plans and strategies, prepared by the Council or other partners.

## Local Authority Resources and Finances

The grant that the Council will receive from central government will disappear by 2018/19 and therefore the Council will need to become self-sufficient. The Council also has to compete for central Government funding linked to economic and housing growth (for example for transport infrastructure).

However, Kent & Medway has successfully been selected by the Government as one of the pilot areas for 100% retention of business rate growth in 2018/19. Beyond 2018/19 it is understood that the Government's current intention is that local government will be able to retain 75% of business rate growth.



## 2 Key Issues for Economic Development Strategy



There are a number of key issues that are shaping the local economy at present and that this Strategy is seeking to address.

### Employment sites and premises

Local businesses have raised the shortage of sites and premises as a major constraint that they currently face and it is also a barrier to inward investment from outside the borough. The shortage has been exacerbated due to the conversion of floorspace from office to residential under Permitted Development Rights legislation, particularly in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre.

The key employment areas (KEAs) in the borough, as defined in the adopted Core Strategy are:

- Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre
- Royal Tunbridge Wells – North Farm/ Longfield Road Industrial area
- Southborough – High Brooms Industrial Park
- Paddock Wood – Eldon Way and west of Maidstone Road
- Paddock Wood – Transfesa Road East and West
- Gills Green – Former Hawkhurst Railway Station and sidings
- Capel – Brook Farm

In the 2017 Economic Needs Study (commissioned for the new Local Plan) all the KEAs were assessed as good and were shown to have high levels of occupancy. North Farm, Paddock Wood and Gills Green are considered well-suited for B1-B8 occupiers, while financial and professional services are driving town centre office demand. There is a strong demand for Grade A office floorspace in accessible locations but there is limited residual capacity for new development within existing allocations.

The Economic Needs Study recommends that the Council should plan positively for economic growth (approximately 10,000 new jobs) which equates to between 11-15 hectares of new business floorspace in the period to 2033 as a minimum. This is in addition to maintaining the existing employment floorspace. Appropriate employment sites will therefore be included in the new Local Plan. It is recognised that sites are needed in a variety of locations across the borough including within the rural areas, for example through the re-use of redundant rural and agricultural premises.

The Economic Needs Study recommends that the following types of areas would be met with occupier demand:

- areas close to main arterial roads (such as the A21), where accessibility to the highway network for business operations is quick
- areas which are close to public transport nodes or sites which have space for ample car parking for staff and customers
- areas which have a critical mass of employment uses and amenities

The retention of existing employment space is currently managed via a broad criteria-based policy in the Core Strategy (within Core Policy 7 Employment Provision), however this has had limited success due to the impact of Permitted Development Rights. Criteria-based protection policies will also be included in the new Local Plan, requiring that there is: robust evidence that a site or property is no longer viable for employment; and evidence of marketing activity (for a minimum 2 years).

As a result of concerns about the impact of conversions from office space to residential under Permitted Development Rights, a detailed Town Centre Office Study was commissioned for Royal Tunbridge Wells. The results of the study show that the loss of offices is of significant concern. The findings of the study will inform the development of the new Local Plan – both site allocations and development management policies – and in addition, the Council is now exploring the option of making Article 4 Directions to remove Permitted Development Rights from specified premises worthy of retention. It should be noted that this does not prevent planning applications for change of use from employment being submitted, but would allow a full consideration of the impact of such applications by the Council (as the Local Planning Authority).

As well as the policy approaches set out above, the Council is taking proactive steps to deliver work space as opportunities arise. In particular, the proposed civic development will provide office accommodation for the Council and also much needed commercial office floorspace (20,000ft<sup>2</sup>) that can be let to local businesses in the centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells. The Council has also worked with private and public sector partners to open a flexible workspace for creative businesses in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre known as The House.

## Enterprise (Supporting new and growing businesses)

Tunbridge Wells is a highly entrepreneurial borough. The local economy is dominated by small and micro-businesses with 90.3% of businesses employing less than 10 people and 80% employing less than 5. Tunbridge Wells has a high level of self-employment and also a high number of home-based businesses across a wide range of sectors.

The start-up rate for new businesses in the borough is high but not all of these succeed. In recognition of this, over the last 3 years, the Council has pooled resources with West Kent local authority partners (Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling) to deliver a successful programme of business support and advice to start-up and pre-start-up businesses.

There is now a wide range of advice available to businesses and this has been brought together on the Kent & Medway Growth Hub website, which is funded through SELEP, and helps new and existing businesses find the most suitable type of support in their area.

The borough has a large number of active business forums, from the formal e.g. Chambers of Commerce through to online or local networking groups. This is very positive for the local economy and provides a source of advice, mentoring and marketing opportunities for many businesses. The Council seeks to engage with these groups providing support and information.

The Council has worked hard to improve its communications with local businesses in order to understand the issues that they face and also to provide information to them on opportunities for loans, grants and learning. The Council's quarterly business e-newsletter reaches over 1000 contacts and the Council's website and social media activity provides up to date information for the local business community.

## Town Centre Activities

The 2017 Retail & Leisure Study (commissioned for the Local Plan evidence base) included a review of national trends relating to retail and leisure, and also a healthcheck of key centres across the borough. There are a number of national trends that are influencing the retail environment. In particular the report recognises that *'the popularity and increased availability of the internet, as well as the growing confidence of consumers in making purchases online, has led to a distinctive change in the way in which goods and services are purchased.'* An increasing number of retail sales, in particular are now made online (2016 estimate of 20%).

Nevertheless, Royal Tunbridge Wells remains recognised as a wider regional centre and draws considerable trade from a wide catchment. The Retail & Leisure Study identifies the need for new retail floorspace for both food and comparison goods (e.g. clothes and household items). It is proposed that most of this growth is directed to Royal Tunbridge Wells. There are already a number of developments that are proposed for the town centre that will boost



the current retail and leisure offer including the redevelopment of Royal Victoria Place for additional retail floorspace and a cinema, and the former Cinema site for mixed use commercial and residential.

As a result of changes in shopping behaviour, town centres across the country are being transformed. One related trend is the increasing number of cafes and restaurants in Tunbridge Wells. There is a greater need for visitors to enjoy the shopping experience and combine it with leisure activities as an alternative to shopping online. Royal Tunbridge Wells is the focus for a wide range of events throughout the year, many music related but also food festivals/markets and sporting events. In addition, the high quality independent shops in the town also help to attract visitors and it is recognised that these local businesses make an important contribution to the borough's economy as more spend is retained in the local area.

In response to the pressures on town centres, and led by a number of key local businesses, a town centre partnership, known as Royal Tunbridge Wells Together, was launched in 2016 and a town centre manager appointed to lead on projects and initiatives that will help to maintain the town's competitive edge over other locations in the south east. The feasibility of a Business Improvement District (BID) for the town is now being explored to provide equitable and sustainable funding for this work. A BID is a business-led partnership created through a ballot process to deliver improvements and additional services to local businesses within a defined area, for example a town centre.

The borough's other larger centres, Paddock Wood, Cranbrook, Southborough and Hawkhurst are significantly smaller, but nevertheless play a key role in providing retail and other services to their local catchment. They have a retail offer of both convenience goods (supermarkets/express) and independent comparison goods shops. There are plans for improved community facilities across a number of these centres. The Council is also supporting the Town and Parish Councils that have chosen to prepare Neighbourhood Plans in order to shape new development in their local area.

## Visitor Economy

The most recent study on the economic impact of tourism in Tunbridge Wells was undertaken in 2015. The results highlight the continued importance of the visitor economy to the borough and show that in 2015, 4.4 million trips were undertaken in the area with a total of £261 million spent in the local area as result of tourism (taking into account multiplier effects). The visitor economy supports 4,909 jobs both for Borough residents and those living nearby.

The Council is committed to continuing its support for the local tourism sector which is dominated by small or micro-businesses, many of which are in rural locations. In 2014, a Destination Management Plan was prepared for the borough, setting out priorities for the sector. Since the preparation of the plan, the Council has worked to implement many of the recommendations including: the provision of new visitor signs in Royal Tunbridge Wells town



centre, the preparation of promotional leaflets for the Tunbridge Wells Circular Walk, inspirational blogs on the [visittunbridgewells](http://visittunbridgewells.com) website and free specialist business advice to accommodation providers (via Visit Kent).

The provision of tourist information remains a priority, both digitally (via the [visittunbridgewells](http://visittunbridgewells.com) website) and through the face-to-face and telephone service provided at the Tourist Information Centre in Royal Tunbridge Wells. Information is also available at the Weald Information Centre in Cranbrook. In addition, leaflets to promote the whole Borough are printed and distributed widely each year. Other Council projects/services that will support the visitor economy include the:

- Proposed Cultural & Learning Hub to include an enlarged Museum and Art Gallery as a major new attraction (£12 million project).
- Redevelopment of a new 1200 seat theatre as a major new cultural facility for the borough that will inject at least £14 million into the local economy
- Creation of Royal Tunbridge Wells Together to encourage joint working between local businesses to support the vitality of the town
- On-going support for, and facilitation of, events/festivals in the borough e.g. Local & Live and Jazz on the Pantiles

The 2017 Hotel Capacity Study, undertaken for the Local Plan evidence base, has also

highlighted the need for more affordable hotel accommodation in the borough.

## Rural Economy

The countryside is recognised as one of the borough's major assets. Agricultural land occupies nearly 90% of the land in Tunbridge Wells and this sector is a very important part of the local economy. The landscape management performed by agriculture and horticulture brings huge benefits to the local economy and is essential to maintaining the quality of the countryside, which attracts so many visitors (see above) and residents to the area. It is recognised that in recent years, some farms and rural buildings have been redeveloped for residential use or adapted to provide facilities for new business uses in the leisure, tourism and office based sectors. There has also been a continuing loss of some services in rural areas including the closure of shops, pubs and post offices which makes some of our rural communities less sustainable.

However, programmes such as LEADER (Defra/ EU funding) have helped rural enterprises and communities to diversify and grow through providing grant funding. The last West Kent LEADER programme (which closed in 2013) awarded over £1.25 million of grant funding to 62 projects which generated over £3.4 million investment into West Kent. A new Local Development Strategy for LEADER was developed in 2014 and has successfully secured further funding of £1.5 million to March 2019.



Examples of businesses that have benefited include the Benenden Community Shop which stocks locally produced foods and has a post office and community hub with small café area. Other projects supported have included farming and forestry business support and diversification, tourism ventures and breweries/distilleries.

Broadband provision in the rural areas of the borough has improved since the last Economic Development Strategy was prepared. The successful completion of the Kent Broadband Delivery UK contract Phase 1, under which KCC and TWBC secured additional funding for the deployment of superfast infrastructure, saw improvements in the following village communities: Brenchley & Matfield, Horsmonden, Cranbrook & Sissinghurst, and Speldhurst.

KCC is now progressing the deployment of the Phase 2 broadband contract which aims to bring superfast broadband to a total of 95% of premises across the county by the end of 2017. This phase is more challenging as it is seeking to provide superfast connectivity to more rural premises requiring the negotiation of wayleaves with private landowners for example. Some known 'not-spots' within the borough are to be addressed as a consequence of Phase 2 deployment including parts of: Lamberhurst, Benenden, Iden Green, Tudeley and Hawkhurst. In the meantime, the Council is aware that this is constraining business growth in some of these locations.

Partnership working with some commercial developers to install superfast broadband as part of the package of core utilities remains challenging. However, the Council considers that it is not acceptable that some new homes are built without access to a superfast connection. This could be addressed within the new Local Plan and then through the development management process.

## Employment and Skills

The borough has a very low unemployment rate at less than 1% and skills levels are also strong with a high proportion of residents with National Vocational Qualifications at Level 4 or above. Primary and secondary education provision is good in the borough and Further Education opportunities are provided by the Hadlow Group in neighbouring Tonbridge (at West Kent College). Higher Education (HE) is

less well represented although new opportunities are arising as HE providers seek to work in new ways to attract students. Canterbury Christ Church University has recently moved its Clinical Psychology Faculty into accommodation in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre and courses are also offered in the area through the Hadlow Group, the University of Kent and the University of Greenwich. The Council is seeking to engage with these HE providers to bring more higher education opportunities to the borough.

Recruitment difficulties are frequently cited as a barrier to business growth in the borough, across a range of sectors including retail, health/ social care, legal and hospitality. Along with the neighbouring authorities of Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling, the West Kent Partnership has been working with other organisations to develop employability initiatives across the area. These have included the annual Jobs & Training Fairs in Tunbridge Wells (2014 -16) and more recently in Tonbridge (March 2017) and Sevenoaks (March 2018), successfully bringing employers and jobseekers together from across West Kent.

Improving skills is one of the keys to increasing productivity and business growth. Evidence suggests that in the future there will be a trend for lower skilled jobs to become mechanised, but there will be a greater need for more highly skilled employees. It will not be possible to rely only on better qualified younger people, but will also require upskilling the existing adult workforce. The Council is part of the local KCC-led Adult Skills Forum that is seeking to address this issue.

In 2015, the Confederation of British Industry stated that for the 14-18 age group, employers believe that a top priority for schools should be 'developing awareness of working life' with support from businesses. In line with this approach, the West Kent Partnership along with the Hadlow Group and the Careers Enterprise Company is now funding an Enterprise Adviser Network for West Kent. Over 20 schools have been successfully recruited to the West Kent network and are being matched with business mentors that will engage with each school's careers leads, providing input on careers activities and providing helping to link the schools to the wider business community.

Last year, the UK Government announced all large businesses should shoulder the responsibility of growing apprenticeship numbers and introduced the Apprenticeship Levy from April 2017. It aims to raise £3 billion a year to meet the target of funding 3 million high-quality apprentices by 2020. There is more for the Council and its partners to do to inform local businesses about the benefits of taking on apprentices and ensure that they are aware of the funding available to them for this and how this can be used.

In addition, there is now an opportunity to take up Degree Apprenticeships. These are the latest model to be developed as part of higher apprenticeship standards, with participants achieving a full bachelor's or master's degree as a core component of the apprenticeship. A key feature of degree apprenticeships is that they are co-designed by employers. This is intended to ensure that apprentices are equipped with the skills employers need, and to boost their employment prospects. All the local Higher Education providers are seeking to engage with this agenda and develop appropriate provision.

The Skills and Employability Service at Kent County Council has recently convened a number of 'Employer Guilds'. Each Guild is a Forum representing employers within a sector, along with colleges and training providers that offer training in the relevant sector. Their purpose is to provide an interface between employment and education. Over 200 employers, and 30 colleges and training providers currently attend eight Guilds. The Guilds cover the following sectors:

- Construction and the Built Environment
- Creative and Media
- Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing
- Financial Services
- Health and Social Care
- Hospitality, Catering and Transport
- Land Based
- Science

Officers from across the three West Kent local authorities attend Guild meetings and contribute to their initiatives.

## Transport & Access

Having an efficient transport network is essential to the vitality and competitiveness of the borough's local economy. The Council is working in partnership with the local Highway Authority, Kent County Council, to prepare a new Transport Strategy for the borough in support of the Local Plan.

There have been recent improvements to the road network with the dualling of the A21, the Longfield Road widening scheme and junction improvements on the A26 in Southborough. However, the A264 and A26 remain congested corridors during peak hours. In addition, the A228 and A21 south of Tunbridge Wells are bottlenecks, preventing the flow of traffic and acting as a constraint on businesses in the area. These roads provide important access to and from the Key Employment Areas (KEAs) identified above. Transport congestion is also an issue in other parts of the borough including, for example, the centre of Hawkhurst.



A number of highway schemes have been identified as priorities by the Council including:

- Junction improvements on the A264 at Woodsgate Corner and at Halls Hole Road/Blackhurst Lane
- A228 Colts Hill Relief Scheme
- A21 dualling between Kippings Cross and Lamberhurst (Highways England responsibility)

The Council works closely with KCC colleagues and other partners to lobby for improvement schemes such as those listed above. Applications for funding are made to SELEP as opportunities arise (e.g. Local Growth Fund) and Section 106 contributions are also sought from developers where this is appropriate.

Local communities are increasingly bringing forward concerns about speeding traffic (including Heavy Goods Vehicles) both in urban and rural locations and a number are seeking improvements to pedestrian and cycling facilities and the introduction of 20mph restrictions (particularly in residential areas and village centres). A Cycling Strategy for the borough was adopted in 2016 and work to design and implement safer routes to encourage more journeys to be made by bike is underway. In addition, the programme of improvements to the public realm in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre will encourage walking and cycling and support the local economy by providing a more pleasant environment in which to spend time.

Parking provision in town centres (of all sizes) across the borough remains a key issue for many businesses with reference to both customers and employees. However, there is a balance to be

found between providing parking that encourages short journeys by car (that could be made by more sustainable modes) and necessary provision to allow businesses to attract custom and to recruit suitable employees.

TWBC and KCC have jointly commissioned a park & ride study as part of the evidence base to support the Local Plan. The study will consider the feasibility of introducing park & ride services on the radial routes into Royal Tunbridge Wells. This work will also consider the characteristics of a town centre parking regime that would complement park & ride.

The public transport network is also vital to local businesses. The Council continues to work with Southeastern (current rail franchise holder), Network Rail and local bus operators to get the best services possible for local people to access goods and services. The Council responds to consultations from bus and train operators to ensure that the priorities for the borough are recognised.

The lack of good bus services linking rural villages with service centres has been highlighted in the 2017 Settlement Role and Function Study (Local Plan evidence base), while urban bus services suffer from reliability issues due to congestion and there is limited road space for bus priority measures to address this issue. Although providing improved bus services is challenging, local bus operators are utilising new technology and adapting their services, for example introducing smart ticketing, apps with real time information for waiting passengers and piloting smaller shuttle buses/on-demand services on selected routes to improve the passenger experience. The Council will seek to support the operators with these new initiatives.



### 3 Strategy Aims and Objectives



The overall goal of the Economic Development Strategy is *to seek to create the best possible conditions for business investment and sustainable growth in the borough.*

The 2018 Strategy themes are a response to the issues set out in Section 2 and are consistent with those in the previous Strategy:

#### **Objective 1: Place Shaping and Promotion**

Enhance the attractiveness of Royal Tunbridge Wells and the other town centres in the borough as thriving cultural places to visit, shop, work and do business.

#### **Objective 2: Accessibility & Connectivity**

Develop efficient transport & digital communication networks to support the vitality and competitiveness of the borough's local economy.

#### **Objective 3: Skills & Employability**

Develop a workforce equipped with appropriate skills to capitalise on local employment opportunities.

#### **Objective 4: Rural Economy**

Develop a strong, diverse rural economy to sustain local communities.

#### **Objective 5: Supporting Enterprise**

Encourage the continued development of a wide range of enterprises in the borough, including through the provision of new workspace.

*Strong local economies around the world tend to have some key attributes. They have a good supply of skilled labour; they are well connected and have land available for homes, offices and factories; and they have rich innovation ecosystems, often built around a university. They have an attractive cultural environment.'*

(from the Government's Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain fit for the future, 2017)

# 4 Economic Development Action Plan



| Project/Service  | Timescale | Delivery Partners  | How we measure success   |
|--|-----------|--|--|
| <b>Place Shaping &amp; Promotion</b>   |           |  |  |
| New Local Plan – Evidence Base Studies<br>- Economic Needs Study<br>- Town Centre Office Market Review<br>- Retail & Leisure Study<br>- Settlement Role & Function Study   | 2017–21   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Town & Parish Councils<br>Royal Tunbridge Wells Together<br>Local businesses  | Allocation of sites for employment uses<br>Allocation of sites for retail & leisure uses         |
| Inward Investment Marketing Strategy<br>- Ongoing work with Locate in Kent<br>- Meetings with developers/investors<br>- Sponsorship of Viewpoint Magazine  | 2018      | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Locate in Kent<br>Developers<br>Local Commercial Agents<br>One Media  | Number of new businesses locating in the borough   |
| Town Centre redevelopment/regeneration projects:<br>- Civic Development including new theatre and office space<br>- Cultural & Learning Hub<br>- Public Realm Phases 2 & 3<br>- Royal Victoria Place redevelopment<br>- Former Cinema site development<br>- Corn Exchange redevelopment<br>- Union House redevelopment   | 2017–21   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Kent County Council<br>Royal Tunbridge Wells Together<br>Heritage Lottery Fund<br>Arts Council<br>Tourist Information Service<br>Developers                               | Delivery of projects   |
| Destination Management Plan Implementation<br>- Tourist Information – Tourist Information Centre, Weald Information Centre and visittunbridgewells website<br>- Marketing and promotion – social media, website and print (including distribution)<br>- Promotion and facilitation of Festivals and events<br>- Town interpretation - Cultural & Learning Hub<br>- Support for Press and Tour Operator visits<br>- Specialist business support for accommodation providers and attractions | 2017–21   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Visit Kent<br>Tourism South East<br>Seven Wonders<br>Royal Tunbridge Wells Together<br>Blue Badge Guides<br>Explore Kent<br>Kent High Weald Partnership<br>Local Bloggers | Number of visitors<br>Social media/ website engagement<br>Jobs in visitor economy                |
| Royal Tunbridge Wells Together (RTWT)<br>- Increase in membership and funding<br>- Promotion/marketing of town centre<br>- Established as a voice for business<br>- Quarterly Business Intelligence Report<br>- Business support activities<br>- Feasibility of Business Improvement District (BID)  | 2017–19   | RTWT Board (including TWBC)<br>RTWT Members<br>RTWT Staff  | Service Level Agreement<br>Increased Membership<br>BID Feasibility Study<br>Events & Information |

| Project/Service  | Timescale | Delivery Partners  | How we measure success   |
|--|-----------|--|--|
| <b>Accessibility &amp; Connectivity</b>  |           |  |  |
| Review of Transport Strategy to support Local Plan and growth agenda   | 2017–19   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Kent County Council<br>Highways England<br>Bus operators<br>Southeastern<br>Network Rail                            | Delivery of Transport Strategy and evidence base for Local Plan<br>Support from KCC for Local Plan                                 |
| Highway scheme pipeline<br>- Identify priority schemes<br>- Commission survey/design work<br>- Prepare and submit LGF bids   | 2017–19   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Kent County Council<br>Highways England<br>KMEP<br>SELEP  | Successful LGF bids  |
| Sustainable Transport pipeline including cycling<br>- Identify pipeline of schemes<br>- Commission survey/design work<br>- Prepare and submit bids   | 2017–19   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Kent County Council<br>TW Cycling Forum<br>KMEP and SELEP   | Successful bids  |
| Work with public transport operators:<br>- Improve bus ticketing, services and infrastructure<br>- Improve rail ticketing, services and stations<br>- Respond to consultations by transport operators to lobby for improvements<br>- Facilitation of Public Transport Forum<br>- Continuing involvement in Quality Bus Partnership | 2017–19   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Arriva/Other Bus Operators<br>Network Rail<br>Southeastern<br>Kent County Council<br>Borough Public Transport Forum | Bus services and passengers<br>Rail services and passengers<br>Station improvements  |
| Parking facilities and services<br>- Revise TWBC Parking Strategy and link to Transport Strategy<br>- Assessment of parking requirements in RTW town centre as part of Parking/Park & Ride Study<br>- Improved signage and other information about parking   | 2017–19   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Kent County Council<br>Royal Tunbridge Wells Together   | No. parking spaces in town centre<br>Town centre performance – vacant retail units etc.<br>Provision of information about parking. |

| Project/Service  | Timescale     | Delivery Partners  | How we measure success   |
|--|---------------|--|--|
| <b>Skills &amp; Employability</b>  |               |  |  |
| 2 x West Kent Jobs & Training Fairs per year:<br>- Spring – Tonbridge or Sevenoaks venue<br>- Autumn – Tunbridge Wells (Assembly Hall Theatre)   | Annual events | West Kent Partnership (TWBC, TMBC, SDC)<br>Jobcentreplus<br>Town & Country Housing Group<br>Local employers<br>Training providers  | Number of employers attending<br>Number of job seekers attending<br>Number of jobs filled  |
| Business and Schools link – careers advice and guidance<br>- Attend West Kent Careers Education, Information, Advice & Guidance Network (CEIAG)<br>- West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network operating<br>- Deliver annual Skills Fest – Assembly Hall Theatre, Tunbridge Wells | Ongoing       | West Kent Partnership (TWBC, TMBC, SDC)<br>West Kent CEIAG Network and local schools<br>Enterprise Adviser Network<br>Local and National employers<br>Training providers<br>Higher and Further Education providers | Number of schools attending<br>Number of businesses or training organisations attending<br>Successful bid for Careers Enterprise Adviser Network and recruitment of advisers and schools |
| Apprenticeships and other pathways to careers<br>- Promotion to employers<br>- Promotion with schools<br>- Work with providers   | Ongoing       | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Hadlow Group<br>Rosemary Shrager Cookery School<br>Higher Education Providers<br>Enterprise Adviser Network<br>Local businesses   | Number of businesses with apprentices<br>Number of apprentices in place  |
| Explore options for Higher Education/Further Education in Tunbridge Wells<br>- Canterbury Christ Church University re-locate to town centre<br>- University of Kent course offer<br>- Hadlow Group HE course offer   | 2017–20       | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Canterbury Christ Church University<br>University of Kent<br>Hadlow Group   | HE courses being offered within the borough/West Kent  |

| Project/Service   | Timescale | Delivery Partners  | How we measure success   |
|---|-----------|--|--|
| <b>Rural Economy</b>  |           |  |  |
| Destination Management Plan<br>- Promotion of whole Borough as a destination via social media, website and print<br>- Business support for accommodation providers<br>- Hub Tourist Information Centre in RTW and visitor information in Cranbrook at Weald Information Centre<br>- Themed Itinerary development across the borough<br>- Walking and cycling projects across the borough<br>- Tourist Information Points across the borough | Ongoing   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Visit Kent<br>Tourism South East<br>Local attractions<br>Local accommodation providers<br>Kent High Weald Partnership<br>Explore Kent | Visitors to the borough<br>Visitors to the Tourist Information Centre<br>Visits to the visittunbridgewells website |
| Promote the uptake of LEADER grants by borough businesses   | 2017–18   | West Kent Partnership (TWBC, TMBC, SDC)  | Number of borough businesses receiving grants  |
| High speed broadband delivery (with KCC)<br>- Delivery of Phase 2 of Kent Broadband Plan<br>- Delivery in new residential developments<br>- Assess developments in new technology   | 2017–19   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Kent County Council<br>BT Openreach   | % of borough with high speed broadband   |
| Farmers Market<br>- Increase number of stalls<br>- Marketing to increase footfall<br>- Work with other markets and events/festivals   | Ongoing   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Kent Farmers Market Association<br>Royal Tunbridge Wells Together   | Number of stalls<br>Footfall and spend   |
| Neighbourhood Plans – market towns/village centres<br>- Hawkhurst<br>- Benenden<br>- Goudhurst<br>- Sandhurst<br>- Cranbrook & Sissinghurst<br>- Paddock Wood   | Ongoing   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Parish Councils   | Services in market towns and village centres   |

| Project/Service   | Timescale | Delivery Partners  | How we measure success   |
|---|-----------|--|--|
| <b>Supporting Enterprise</b>  |           |  |  |
| TWBC 'Open for Business' approach<br>- TWBC Procurement Strategy review<br>- Ongoing 'Better Business for All' approach   | Ongoing   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Local businesses  | Feedback from local businesses on Council services   |
| Business loans/grants schemes<br>- Promote new loans/grants funds<br>- Lobby for new loan/grant schemes via LEP and other   | 2017–21   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council/West Kent Partnership<br>South East Local Enterprise Partnership   | Number of Borough businesses getting loans/grants  |
| Business Advice & Support<br>- Financial support for West Kent Business Support Programme (start-ups and young businesses)<br>- Promote Kent & Medway Growth Hub and membership of Steering Group<br>- Delivery of other business events across the borough with partner organisations  | Ongoing   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce<br>Kent County Council<br>West Kent Partnership<br>Local districts/boroughs<br>Department for International Trade<br>Kent & Medway Growth Hub          | Number of businesses/prospective businesses accessing advice   |
| Business Communications<br>- TWBiz quarterly newsletter<br>- @TWBC_Business #TWBiz<br>- TWBC Business pages<br>- Networking events<br>- Employer visit programme  | Ongoing   | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Local businesses<br>Other partners  | Number of businesses receiving newsletter<br>Number of social media followers<br>Number of employer visits |
| Cultural & Creative Industries:<br>- Continued support for existing creative workspace – The House<br>- Continued delivery of Business Advice programme and networking events at The House<br>- Update Tunbridge Wells Cultural & Creative Industries Framework (2012)<br>- Explore options for new workspaces in the borough and opportunities for Creative Enterprise Zones<br>- Bid for funding to support the sector as opportunities arise | 2017–2020 | Tunbridge Wells Borough Council<br>Workspace Collaborations Ltd.<br>Kent County Council<br>Local cultural & creative businesses<br>Tunbridge Wells Cultural Consortium<br>Assembly Hall Theatre<br>Cultural & Learning Hub | The House SLA  |

## 5 The Role of the Council



This Strategy is set in the context of very limited Council resources. The Council will therefore work closely with its many partners to deliver the Strategy and maximise opportunities for continued economic development. The role of the Borough Council will include:

- commissioning evidence base studies as required;
- development of specific projects/initiatives (where resources are available);
- Preparing and submitting funding bids;
- working with local businesses and other relevant organisations to deliver initiatives;
- monitoring the local economy;
- seeking and acting on feedback from businesses and residents;
- monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan; and
- annual reporting on successes

A full list of partner organisations is contained in Appendix 2.

# Appendix 1:

## SWOT Analysis

This SWOT analysis sets out some of the opportunities and challenges facing the borough and was used to develop Section 2 of this Strategy.

### Strengths

- Highly skilled workforce
- Culture of entrepreneurship and strong SME businesses
- Low unemployment
- Business networking opportunities
- Regional shopping centre/service centre
- Visitor, cultural and heritage offer
- High quality rural landscape and AONB
- Good quality primary and secondary schools
- Good road and rail links to London
- Sector strengths in Creative, Finance, Education

### Weaknesses

- Traffic congestion in urban areas
- Shortage of sites/premises for business use and expansion
- Ageing stock of office floorspace particularly in RTW
- Limited Higher Education facilities
- Small number of larger employers
- High house prices causing recruitment issues
- Rural broadband infrastructure incomplete
- Recruitment and skills retention issues
- Pockets of deprivation

### Opportunities

- TWBC's Five Year Plan 2017 - 22
- Private sector investment in the town centre
- Formation of Royal Tunbridge Wells Together
- West Kent Partnership
- Potential for Higher education expansion
- New Local Plan with employment allocations
- Active business community
- Possible Brexit opportunities
- Business Rate Retention pilot

### Threats

- Limited opportunity for additional road capacity
- Competition from other areas for funding infrastructure
- Out commuting, especially of the highly skilled
- Changes in shopping habits
- Competition from other town centres and out of town shopping centres
- Pressure for residential development over employment uses
- Possible Brexit challenges
- Limited Local Authority resources

## Indicator Value 2017

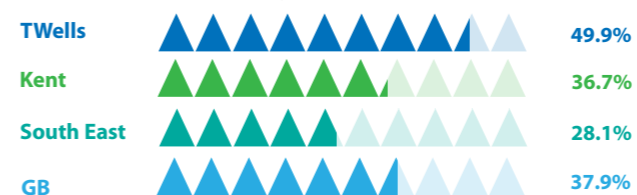
### Unemployment rate



### Employees in the Knowledge Economy



### National Vocational Qualification Level 4+



### Median Gross Weekly Workplace Earnings Full Time



### Median Gross Weekly Resident Earnings



### 3 year business survival rate



### Gross Value Added per Head (£) (value of goods and services in an economy)



# Appendix 2:

## List of partner organisations

Arts Council  
Assembly Hall Theatre  
Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU)  
Careers and Enterprise Company  
Cultural Consortium  
Creative Media Guild  
Department for International Trade (DIT)  
Explore Kent  
Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)  
Hadlow Group  
Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)  
IMAGO  
Jobcentre Plus  
Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP)  
Kent and Medway Growth Hub  
Kent Apprenticeships  
Kent County Council (KCC)  
Kent Cultural Transformation Board  
Kent Farmers Market Association (KFMA)  
Kent High Weald Partnership (KHWP)  
Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce  
Local Bus Companies  
Local Businesses  
Local Schools  
Locate in Kent (LIK)  
National Centre for Microbusinesses  
Network Rail  
Private Sector Developers  
Produced in Kent  
Royal Tunbridge Wells Together (RTWT)  
Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum  
Safe Town Partnership (STP)  
Seven Wonders of the Weald  
South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP)  
Southeastern (rail)  
The Forum  
Tourism South East (TSE)  
Town and Country Housing Group (TCHG)  
Town and Parish Councils  
Trinity Theatre  
Tunbridge Wells Bicycle Users Group (TWBUG)  
University of Kent  
Visit Kent  
West Kent Chamber of Commerce (WKCC)  
West Kent College (Hadlow Group)  
West Kent Partnership (WKP)  
Workspace Collaboration Limited (The House – creative workspace)

# Appendix 3:

## Relevant Plans and Strategies

There are a number of plans and strategies already published that set the context for this new Strategy. We are not seeking to duplicate these, but to make sure that we have drawn together the relevant issues and actions into the Strategy.

- Borough Cultural Strategy 2014-2024 – TWBC
- Borough Cycling Strategy (2016)
- Borough Parking Strategy 2015-2026 – TWBC
- Borough Transport Strategy 2015-2026 – TWBC
- Five Year Plan 2014-2019 – TWBC and Five Year Plan 2017-2022 – TWBC
- Local Plan/Site Allocations Development Plan Document: including
  - o Settlement Role and Function Study 2017
  - o Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Economic Needs Study 201
  - o Tunbridge Wells Retail and Leisure Study 2017
  - o Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Office Study 2018
  - o Hotel Capacity Study 2017
- Destination Management Plan for Tunbridge Wells 2014-2017 – TWBC
- Tunbridge Wells Cultural and Creative Framework (2012) and 2018??
- West Kent Priorities for Growth 2015 – WKP
- Government's Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain fit for the future, 2017– BEIS
- Strategic Economic Plan 2014 – SELEP
- Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth Without Gridlock 2016-2031 – KCC
- Kent & Medway Growth and Infrastructure Framework 2018 – KCC
- Refresh of the 14-24 Learning, Employment and Skills Strategy (2015-2018) – KCC
- Kent SME Internationalization Study (March 2017) – KCC
- Kent Broadband Plan
- Kent and Medway: Making a success of Brexit: a sectoral appraisal 2016 – CCCU for KMEP
- Unlocking the Potential: Going for Growth 2014 – KMEP
- KCC Business Intelligence Reports
- Active Travel Strategy 2016 – KCC
- Economic Impact of Tourism, Tunbridge Wells 2015 – Visit Kent
- State of the Nation 2017: Careers and Enterprise Provision in England's Schools – Careers & Enterprise Company
- Kent and Medway: Making A Success of Brexit, A Sectoral Appraisal (Dec 2016) CEFEUS
- Kent and Medway: Making a Success of Brexit, A Sectoral Appraisal of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises And the Rural Economy (July 2017) CEFEUS
- The Local Economic Effects of Brexit – Centre for Economic Performance (November 2017)