

West Kent Economic Priorities for Growth 2019-22





Foreword

West Kent has a long history of collaborative working and the Partnership has been delivering benefits for the area since 2001. West Kent has many shared themes and issues and through various iterations of economic strategies the Partnership continues to work successfully for its businesses and residents. We demonstrably deliver benefits to the local economy on small amounts of funding. We also deliver jobs for residents from elsewhere in Kent and make a very positive contribution to the wider Kent Economy.

West Kent Economic Priorities for Growth builds on the achievements of earlier strategies, in particular focusing on the delivery of projects which will make a difference to the business environment and quality of life in the area, building on the strong sense of place and playing to the strengths of our innovative small businesses.

The Government's Industrial Strategy aims to create an economy that boosts productivity and earning power throughout the UK and outlines five foundations of productivity. Our Strategy is based on these five foundations with actions to deliver the conditions to increase productivity in West Kent. This Strategy is intended to make the case for much needed investment into the area to facilitate business innovation and growth and afford our businesses some of the advantages enjoyed by their peers elsewhere where proximity to universities and higher levels of public and private investment provides a framework for growth. Enabling West Kent to deliver similar levels of productivity to bring it in line with other areas adjacent to the M25 and with neighbouring Surrey will bring greater strength and resilience not only to West Kent but to Kent as a whole.



Nicolas Heslop, Chairman, West Kent Partnership



Tonbridge Castle

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LONDON



KEY

-  WEST KENT
-  EAST KENT
-  NORTH KENT

West Kent

West Kent

About West Kent

West Kent comprises the boroughs of Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge & Malling as well as Sevenoaks District. These areas share many characteristics, which make for a strong West Kent identity. Much of the area is designated as Greenbelt or within the Kent Downs/High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, delivering a high quality of life but resulting in restrictions on development.

Royal Tunbridge Wells is a regional retail, cultural and commercial centre and Kings Hill is a thriving office cluster. The area has a number of market town hubs servicing a predominantly rural economy the largest of which are Sevenoaks and Tonbridge.

With close proximity to London, house prices in the area are the highest in Kent but local businesses benefit from the wealth earned outside of the area.

West Kent has excellent primary and secondary schools and a further education facility but no university campus to retain and attract young talent and support innovation in local businesses.

Whilst largely prosperous, there are pockets of deprivation which, when aggregated, represent a small but significant population facing challenges around housing, skills and worklessness.

West Kent has a strong sense of place, with residents and businesses alike proud to be based in a beautiful and historic country landscape but with excellent connectivity to London and the Coast and on to Europe.

West Kent Economy

West Kent is a well-functioning economic area and 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 and a

stronger representation of higher value, knowledge-based industries than anywhere else in Kent. The area provides significant employment to those living elsewhere in Kent including high skilled, well paid jobs.

However, future growth in the West Kent economy is constrained by high land values, a shortage of available development land, full employment, lack of investment in infrastructure and congestion on our transport networks. Whilst the West Kent economy is one of the best performing sub-regions of Kent, it under-performs compared to many other areas adjacent to the M25. West Kent provides a significant number of jobs for residents outside of West Kent.

There is a significant rate of churn within the West Kent economy with high levels of business births and medium to high level of business deaths. The five-year survival rate for businesses stands at around 45% which is consistent with Kent and Nationally.

The datasets¹ accompanying The State of Small Business report² (NESTA/SAGE 2017) show that 90% of the West Kent economy comprises micro-businesses with a total number of SMEs of over 18000. The strongest SME sectors by both employment and turnover are:

- Professional, scientific and technical (11900, £1855K)
- Business administration and support (8428, £1465K)
- Construction (8055, £1517K)
- Production (7208, £968K)
- Wholesale (5693, £2209K)

The data sets show that West Kent productivity levels are the highest in the County along with Dartford but local variations in productivity are significant even across West Kent. This could be attributable to the gain or loss of large, highly-productive SMEs. Care therefore needs to be taken in interpreting the productivity indicator in isolation.

Across West Kent more than 20% of jobs are in the knowledge economy, compared to 15% in Kent as a whole. Investment in supporting growth in the knowledge economy in particular has the potential to contribute to increased productivity.

¹ <http://stateofsmallbiz.com/about>

² <http://stateofsmallbiz.com/downloads/the-state-of-small-business.pdf>

The knowledge economy is seen as a key driver for economic growth in the UK. The industries that fall within this sub-set of the economy are the ones that deal extensively with the processing, exchange and communication of information and knowledge. They are likely to have a high dependency on technology and provide highly skilled and technical jobs. They are also likely to contribute a higher level of “value added” to the economy (a higher level of output per head). Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells district are within the top 20% of GB local authorities with the highest concentration of Knowledge Economy jobs³.

	SDC	TMBC	TWBC	Kent
GVA per head 2017 ⁴	£26,870	£29,606	£30,679	£23,149
SME Productivity * ⁵	£144,511	£287,980	£132,419	-
% NVQ level 4+ 2018 ⁶	39.6%	35.2%	40.2%	33.6%
Workplace median weekly wage 2018 ⁷	£543	£536	£515	£522

The West Kent economy both benefits and suffers from proximity to London. Large numbers of residents commute to London taking high level skills away from the local economy. However, local businesses benefit from the additional spending power and their operating costs are lower than in London. House prices are the highest in Kent, reflecting easy access to London, but pricing many young local employees out of the market.

The Economic Vibrancy Index published by Grant Thornton in 2018 provides an overview of economic performance encapsulating some of the broader indicators of economic success – Prosperity, Dynamism and Opportunity, Inclusion and Equality, Health, Wellbeing and Happiness, Resilience and Sustainability and Community, Trust and Belonging – to create an overall vibrancy ranking for each district. Overall the West

Kent districts rank in the top 25% of local authorities on an average of all indicators.

West Kent has a strong culture of entrepreneurship. Some of these are lifestyle businesses reflecting proximity to London. We have a highly skilled resident workforce, many of whom commute to London. The area also provides employment for those living elsewhere in other parts of Kent (and East Sussex). Net commuting in 2015 totalled 11,700 people.

The West Kent economy has traditionally been regarded as the ‘power-house’ economy in Kent. To continue competing and growing, it is vital that we build on our areas of strength and face up to growing challenges which could impede economic prosperity and well-being.

³ The Knowledge Economy, October 18 https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/8194/Redefining-the-knowledge-economy.pdf

⁴ https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/8187/Kent-economic-indicators-report.pdf April 2019 (2017)

⁵ <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/launching-the-state-of-small-business-report/>

⁶ https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/8187/Kent-economic-indicators-report.pdf

⁷ https://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/8187/Kent-economic-indicators-report.pdf



Tonbridge

West Kent Partnership

The West Kent Partnership is the strategic economic partnership covering the local authority areas of Tonbridge and Malling, Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells. The three local authorities work closely together to make the most of the financial and other resources available to them in order to deliver more for local businesses. The Partnership has been successful in obtaining funding for a number of programmes, such as West Kent LEADER and the West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network.

The Partnership promotes West Kent, champions key economic issues, engages with industry and business and pursues external funding opportunities for our local economy.

As a public-private sector Partnership of some 17 years standing, we seek to:

- Add value to the economic delivery of our local authority partners;
- Act as a voice for West Kent on funding and other shared issues; and
- Deliver business engagement and support initiatives.

As an established, productive and progressive partnership the West Kent Partnership is able to deliver a real benefit in representing the shared themes and issues both within and outside of West Kent. The Partnership is able to extend the reach of any of the constituent local authorities and brings greater weight and influence where needed. Examples of this include accessing LGF funding for key infrastructure projects; identifying local priorities for the Pilot Business Rates Retention scheme in Kent and linking through the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership to the South East Local Enterprise Partnership.

The West Kent Partnership has delivered a number of notable successes since West Kent Priorities for Growth 2015-18 was published including:

- Securing funding to deliver a second West Kent LEADER programme
- Funding the ongoing West Kent Business Support service and working

with Partners to provide an extended programme through South East Business Boost (SEBB);

- Securing a West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network;
- Delivering the West Kent Jobs & Training Fairs and Skillsfest events; and
- Partnering on an annual West Kent business event.

Our vision for West Kent 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.

Policy Context

This Strategy focuses on developing the shared themes and issues for West Kent and links closely to the three Economic Development Strategies of the local authorities all of which have undergone review during 2018.

Regionally and sub-regionally the strategy is aligned with SELEP Strategic Economic Plan, KMEP's Unlocking the Potential: Going for Growth, Kent & Medway Growth and Infrastructure Framework and Kent Adult Skills Strategy. The West Kent pages of the Kent & Medway Growth & Infrastructure Framework have been drawn on, as have West Kent authority data sets from KCC and SELEP's Skills Strategy. The work being undertaken on the Kent & Medway Enterprise & Productivity Strategy will provide valuable data and insight and inform future iterations of our Priorities for Growth.

At a national level, the opportunity has been taken to structure the West Kent Strategy as a local Industrial Strategy, with a view to creating the right interventions at a local level to increase productivity as the key objective.

Strengths

- Strong base of highly skilled labour
- Proximity to London, M25 and Europe
- Embedded and successful sub county partnership and strong LEP alignment
- High quality of life, cultural and leisure facilities
- Vibrant key sectors
- Resilient SME sector
- Good business start-up rates with high survival rates
- Strong visitor economy
- Consistently low levels of unemployment
- High quality rural landscape and AONB
- Good quality primary and secondary schools
- Recent investments delivered (e.g. A21 dualling, Peters Pit, Tonbridge Town Centre) and plans for further significant investment (e.g. Tunbridge Wells Theatre/civic centre, Leigh Expansion and Hildenborough Embankments Scheme)

Weaknesses

- Traditional economic strengths under erosion
- Lower GVA than comparable areas around M25
- Pockets of deprivation that can fall below radar
- Limited Higher Education facilities
- Small number of large employers
- High house prices causing recruitment issues
- High levels of out commuting for work
- Shortage of good quality sites and premises for business use and expansion
- Traffic congestion in urban areas
- Planning and environmental constraints
- Rural broadband infrastructure incomplete
- Skills retention issues
- Local resistance to change
- Limited rural public transport services and poor evening services

Opportunities

- Low level investment can unlock high levels of local growth
- Strong entrepreneurial culture
- Access to business support programmes – e.g. Kent & Medway Business Fund, LEADER, South East Business Boost
- Development of supported business premises around key sectors
- Potential to optimize Apprenticeship Levy to address skills shortages
- Potential for Higher Education expansion
- Active business community
- Possible Brexit opportunities
- Develop Higher/Degree Level Apprenticeships offer
- Provision of flexible workspace
- Technology/AI

Threats

- Lack of capacity in strategic road and rail networks
- Competition from other areas for funding infrastructure
- High local house prices and need for additional affordable housing
- Aging population
- High commuting costs, service and reliability issues
- Need for higher skilled jobs
- Pressure for residential development over employment uses
- Possible impact of Brexit on business confidence to invest and availability of labour in some sectors
- Climate Change challenges
- Technology/AI



Tunbridge Wells Pantiles

Objectives

The Key Objectives of the West Kent Partnership are to:

- Deliver a dynamic and well-connected economy;
- Become a key location for business growth where businesses are supported to innovate and thrive; and
- Ensure our local population has access to high quality jobs and opportunities for skills development.

We will support our businesses to maintain and enhance productivity through five themes:

- **Ideas:** Securing investment and funding to underpin innovation and growth
- **People:** Delivering the West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network to secure our future workforce and championing training and inclusivity in the workplace
- **Infrastructure:** Representing the need for infrastructure and transport investment for West Kent at a local, county and regional level
- **Business environment:** Delivering an environment that supports start-ups and stimulates growth
- **Place:** Engendering a strong West Kent sense of place with vibrant town centres and a sustainable rural environment. Quality of life maintained and enhanced with a balanced approach to development and equal opportunity for all

Ideas

1 Securing investment and funding to underpin innovation and growth

Although West Kent benefits from a research Institute (NIAB EMR) and some Higher Education provision through The Hadlow Group, there is no University campus located in the area to act as an innovation

hub. Opportunities to access research and development facilities, and attract undergraduate or post-graduate talent to the area are therefore limited at present.

1.1 Greater access to Higher Education Provision

In order for businesses to secure a talent pipeline and to benefit from closer links with universities, greater access to Higher Education provision is a key priority for this strategy. The Partnership is committed to working with potential Higher Education partners, alongside The Hadlow Group to increase the provision in West Kent and to support the expansion of the number of degree level courses being delivered through The Hadlow Group. Opportunities to deliver an additional campus facility, possibly an expansion of the Canterbury Christchurch University campus in Tunbridge Wells will be explored as will the potential to develop a cohesive degree level apprenticeship offer across the area.

1.2 Business access to innovation investment facilitated

We need to ensure that our businesses can benefit from both public and private sector investment offers. Communicating the availability of various schemes is a key role for the Partnership, as is fostering relationships with innovation leader enterprises in West Kent. The Partnership will seek to work collaboratively with organisations such as NIAB EMR at the East Malling Research Station to bring forward inward investment.

1.3 Business access to innovation support facilitated

Given the lack of a University, ensuring businesses have access to innovation support is a challenge for the area and the Partnership will work with Canterbury Christ Church University to deliver local access to this specialised type of support with an aspiration to secure a Kent & Medway Engineering, Design, Growth and Enterprise (EDGE) hub in West Kent.

People

2 People – Delivering the West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network to secure our future workforce and championing training and inclusivity in the workplace

2.1 Work Ready Young People

Delivering on a key objective from West Kent Priorities for Growth 2015-18, the Partnership is at the heart of better collaboration between business and schools to bring forward work-ready young people. Since September 2017 the Partnership has co-funded an Enterprise Coordinator with the Hadlow Group and Careers & Enterprise Company to establish an Enterprise Adviser Network linking young people with local business and generating meaningful encounters with the world of work. The target network size of 20 schools matched with 20 business people has now been achieved and work is underway on consolidating the Network and extending the reach of its activities. It is a priority to extend the Network in West Kent so that all mainstream and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) schools can benefit from an Enterprise Adviser.

The West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network Steering Group is a forum through which an innovative approach to apprenticeship delivery in West Kent can be driven and opportunities explored to deliver initiatives to broaden the horizons of young people and, where appropriate, retain their skills and talent in the local labour force.

Other initiatives to engage and support young people and to raise career aspirations will be delivered through the Network. These will include

- the continuation of an annual Skillsfest event attended by some 1200 year 9-12 every year and supported by around 50+ mainly local employers
- working with partners to support world of work experiences and

initiatives throughout West Kent Schools such as the Federation of Small Business 30:30 model

- working with Partners such as Gatwick Airport to deliver a STEM (Science Technology, Engineering and Maths) event

2.2 Young adults attracted and retained in the local economy

Large numbers of West Kent students leave the area post A Level to study elsewhere. The Partnership plans to adopt a role in promoting awareness of degree level apprenticeships to young people and employers so that we can grow our own graduates and supply local businesses with the skills they need.

Initiatives will also be explored to encourage graduates to live and work in the area.

2.3 Adults supported to be economically active and provided with opportunities to reskill

Improving workforce skills leads to increased productivity and business growth. A critical part of boosting productivity in the area is empowering the workforce and potential workforce to become competent in the area of digital skills. Digital skills have been identified in the Industrial Strategy as a key area for development if businesses are to benefit from the advances in technology. The House of Lords has stated that digital skills should be taught as a third core subject, and treated with the same importance as numeracy and literacy⁸. One definition of digital literacy is ‘the ability to find, evaluate, utilize, share and create content using information technologies and the Internet’⁹. The West Kent Partnership will support businesses to upskill their staff in this area by signposting to national digital skills initiatives such as the Digital Business Academy and will continue to work with partners to deliver workshops and events on digital skills.

West Kent has near full employment and vacant jobs to be filled. With increasing use of automation the balance could start to shift. Equipping the current workforce with digital skills so that they can

work alongside and with automated processes is one way to help mitigate the impact in terms of potential jobs lost in the future. Working with young people through the Enterprise Adviser Network, we are able to make them aware that the jobs of tomorrow may not exist yet and encourage the development of skillsets that will be transferable and flexible in the future.

The Partnership will continue to work with Jobcentre Plus to bring forward two West Kent Jobs and Training Fairs per year and work

closely with the National Careers Service to identify opportunities locally to support adults in their career choices.

New Initiatives will be explored to support those who are economically inactive including those in disadvantaged groups and young people, building on the Tunbridge Wells 'Working Families Everywhere' project and linking to the SEND focus of the expanded West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network.



⁸ UK Parliament, Select Committee on Digital Skills Report, Make or Break: The UK's Digital Future, 2015.

⁹ <https://digitalliteracy.cornell.edu/>

Infrastructure

3 Representing the need for infrastructure and transport investment for West Kent at a local, county and regional level

The West Kent Partnership Infrastructure and Transport Group includes representatives from rail and bus operators, county strategic planners, district planners and draws in colleagues/organisations on an ad hoc basis to address infrastructure and transport issues for the area.

3.1 Transport infrastructure fit for purpose and with East-West links enhanced

The Infrastructure and Transport Group informs the West Kent Partnership so that appropriate lobbying activity can be put in place to work towards mitigating the impact of delays and congestion on the roads and providing better rail connections and capacity for commuters, residents and businesses alike. As well as major strategic transport issues the group also addresses public transport and sustainable transport and will be working collaboratively to improve the active travel offer in West Kent.

The Partnership, through the Infrastructure and Transport Group will link with SELEP, KCC and Highways England to identify a pipeline of potential projects to support key transport infrastructure including highways and rail.

3.2 5G broadband to be in place where deliverable and solutions for rural connectivity where not.

High quality broadband infrastructure is a key component of a productive economy and the Partnership will work with other organisations to deliver innovative solutions to this issue enabling our rural businesses to remain competitive in a digital world and for residents to take advantage of flexible and agile working opportunities and work effectively from home.

3.3 Adequate flood defences in place to protect homes and businesses

This Strategy has an ambition to secure funding to ensure adequate flood defences are in place to protect homes and businesses and the WKP will be working with partners towards delivering this for the areas around Leigh and East Peckham.

Business environment

4 Business environment – Delivering an environment that supports start-ups and stimulates growth

4.1 More High Growth Businesses

West Kent businesses have already demonstrated an appetite for growth through the high take up of the Escalate funding programme in the area. Building on this success, a Scale Up programme is being delivered in partnership with Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce to deliver intensive, bespoke support to targeted businesses that have the potential to create jobs and wealth and increase productivity.

4.2 Commercial space delivered for business growth

All three authorities recognise that a shortage of commercial space is currently restricting inward investment and local business growth. Space to attract businesses to West Kent is needed, just as start-ups working from home, other microbusinesses and SMEs will flourish more readily with appropriate grow on space. We will work with private investors and local councils to bring forward suitable space to support growth at every level.

4.3 Support programme available to start ups and established businesses

The West Kent Partnership has a long history of delivering business support to our local businesses which will continue alongside promoting the support available to business through the Kent and Medway Growth Hub. The West Kent support programme

comprises advice to start ups and microbusinesses, delivery of the SEBB programme, grant support through West Kent LEADER and signposting/facilitating access to County, LEP and national support and funding.

4.4 Regular communication/networking between WKP/Councils and business

Facilitating business networking is a proven way of stimulating local collaboration. The Partnership will continue to work with Partners to deliver, support and promote events and utilise social media and other communication channels to keep businesses informed of opportunities.

Ongoing business engagement events will continue to be delivered in order to understand the key areas of concern to our businesses. The Partnership will continue to work with partners such as the Chambers of Commerce and FSB to canvas the views of their members.

West Kent businesses are well placed to benefit from our proximity to Gatwick Airport and Gatwick Diamond businesses and we will look to facilitate collaboration and supply chain opportunities.

The Partnership also has a role to play in signposting businesses to the service available through Better Business for All and in promoting business funding opportunities as they become available.

4.5 Support the Rural Economy

Stimulating growth and innovation in the rural economy remains a priority. The current West Kent LEADER programme has supported 30 projects, created 45 jobs, awarded grants totalling £1.1 million and drawn investment into the area of nearly £3 million. The land based sector in particular faces significant challenges around access to labour and the cost of automation and it is essential that there is a smooth transition to support for rural businesses through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund as the current programme draws to a close. The Partnership will allocate funding to providing an ongoing business support offer to rural businesses during this transition period, designed to help them access other available funding streams.

Support will also be provided to traditional agricultural industries to help them become more resilient during the seven-year transition period as direct payments are phased out following the Agriculture Bill 2018.



Place

5. Place: Engendering a strong West Kent sense of place with vibrant town centres and a sustainable rural environment. Quality of life maintained and enhanced with a balanced approach to development and equal opportunity for all

West Kent is a great place to live with a high quality landscape, historic built environment, full employment, easy access to London and a strong sense of place. Many organisations define their geographic scope as West Kent and residents identify with the sub-region.

5.1 Key locations for growth brought forward

Previous West Kent Priorities for Growth strategies focused on key locations for growth and enabling them to be brought forward for appropriate and sustainable development. This work will continue and priority projects will be identified and work undertaken to secure funding and other support for their delivery. Locations include

- NIAB East Malling Research
- Peters Village – commercial and community facilities
- Swanley – mixed use redevelopment of Bevan Place and 27-37 High Street
- Fort Halstead – employment led redevelopment scheme
- Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre
 - Calverley Square
 - The Amelia (Cultural and Learning Hub)
 - Other town centre projects

5.2 Sustainable Housing Development

Planning constraints preserve the high quality landscape but this has implications for bringing forward housing numbers to meet the needs of the local population and balancing this with preserving the supply of employment land and sites. House prices are high due to these

constraints and proximity to London pricing many younger people out of the area. These planning issues are addressed through the three Local Plans and the West Kent Partnership will work to support the development of the new Local Plans for the West Kent authorities.

5.3 Vibrant town centres incorporating integrated office, retail, leisure and residential units

West Kent's vitality is dependent on having vibrant town centres which are focussed around a modern model of integrated office, retail, cultural, leisure and residential uses. Supporting those towns to build a mixed offer through various initiatives and investments is a priority for the well-being of the local economy.

The business rate retention pilot focuses on supporting town centre vitality and the West Kent scheme provides support for both specific larger developments and more bespoke support to town centre teams. In Sevenoaks the District Council is keen to support the economic growth of Swanley Town Centre by introducing new residential and commercial uses in the town sites it owns at Bevan Place and in the High Street.

Tonbridge & Malling will be bringing forward a Town and District Centres Improvement Programme focusing on improving their vitality and viability and including a commercial (retail) frontages grant scheme, Tonbridge Town Centre initiatives (including the creation of a pop-up shop) and an initiative focused on delivering additional tourist promotion for the Malling Centres.

Royal Tunbridge Wells will support the new Calverley Place development which includes a new 1,200 seat theatre, 6,000m² new office space and 258 car parking spaces. This development will deliver 152 jobs and a high quality public realm including a new public square, enhanced entrance to Calverley Grounds and a public roof terrace. Other town centre initiatives will see Royal Tunbridge Wells with a Business Improvement District from 1 April 2019, which will focus on

four key themes, prioritised by local businesses including: Business support, events, promotion & marketing and transport & access.

West Kent has rich tourism assets with a wealth of historic properties, a growing cultural offer and beautiful market towns, villages and countryside. Encouraging greater length of stay and spend across a range of associated local businesses will be facilitated/directed through joint working between Visit Kent and the three local authorities, supported by the West Kent Partnership.

5.4 Opportunities through proximity to London exploited

West Kent enjoys many advantages through its proximity to London but our businesses could build better networks and benefit from strengthened supply chain opportunities through the Partnership facilitating relationships with London based businesses and organisations. We have strong links within Kent and throughout the South East LEP area but it would be beneficial to explore greater links to London.

5.5 Levels of deprivation reduced in priority wards

Looking at West Kent from outside, it can be easy to overlook the pockets of deprivation in what is largely an affluent community. The focus that develops from the emerging KCC Enterprise & Productivity Strategy will help to inform addressing this priority in West Kent. Local authorities deliver various initiatives to improve the quality of life and to reduce deprivation in terms of housing, health and welfare and the West Kent Partnership will support these and seek to identify funding to deliver joint initiatives across the area.

GB's Grand Challenges

The Industrial Strategy identifies developments in technology that are set to transform industries and societies around the world and the Government is taking a strategic lead in supporting the development of new technologies to position the UK at the forefront of the industries of the future. Four Grand Challenges have been identified.

- Putting the UK at the forefront of the artificial intelligence and data revolution
- Maximising the advantages for UK industry from the global shift to clean growth
- Being a world leader in shaping the future of mobility and
- Harnessing the power of innovation to help meet the needs of an ageing society

The Government called on the Nation for ideas to tackle these challenges and now a series of themed missions are being rolled out and further public engagement on the Challenges will be undertaken.

The West Kent Partnership has a role to play in doing what we can to position our local economy to contribute to the Grand Challenges.

We will work towards putting mechanisms in place to enable our businesses to access funding and support to deliver innovative solutions to GB's Grand Challenges



NEPICAR PARK

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Future Trends West Kent Economy

Working patterns

As working patterns change with many more commuters now working several days a week from home and choosing to work hours to suit them, this should impact positively on over-stretched rail services and could create a demand for more flexible workspace in West Kent. This in turn has the potential to encourage new collaborations and business start-ups.

Brexit

Uncertainty around our future outside of the European Union constitutes a very real threat to the future vitality of significant sectors in the economy such as rural, retail, hospitality and tourism where many workers are single Europeans living in houses of multiple occupation. A trend has begun for these workers to leave as sterling devalues and uncertainty looms. With employment opportunities for local people so readily available in London there is a danger jobs will remain unfilled, reducing productivity and impacting on economic vibrancy. Workers from the EU are also undertaking a variety of jobs outside of those sectors, many of them highly skilled, especially in construction, but also in research, financial services and other professional careers. Nurturing a pipeline of local labour, connected whilst still at school with local business is a priority for the area.

The Agricultural Bill 2018 and Brexit brings challenges to traditional agricultural industries as subsidies will be gradually withdrawn. Supporting these businesses to plan for the changes, develop a more commercial business model and seek to diversify is an important element to agricultural sustainability in the years ahead.

The move towards full devolution of business rates

This provides an opportunity for West Kent to invest directly in supporting the economy, both in terms of infrastructure and business support. Developing a close understanding of the local business landscape and involving local businesses in discussions about economic policy will be an essential

part of delivering support which will increase output per worker and raise productivity.

As part of the Business Rates Retention Pilot in Kent, West Kent has taken an innovative approach to developing some area-wide initiatives which can deliver benefits to business.

- Funding has been allocated to supporting a business Scale Up Programme. The NESTA/SAGE research highlighted the importance of high-growth firms, or scale-ups, achieving 'breakthrough' growth. These are of interest since they contribute disproportionately to net new job creation.
- Expanding the West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network will enable greater interaction between young people and employers, helping to build a talent pipeline that is flexible, creative and skilled to take on the jobs of the future. This will play a vital role in equipping West Kent businesses to become more productive and at an individual level, empower our young residents to aspire to a fulfilling career.
- Support to develop opportunities in the workplace for disadvantaged groups, such as those who are disabled, have learning difficulties or are long-term unemployed as a response to anticipated skills shortages post Brexit.
- Support for rural businesses to include facilitating access to funding to ease the transition from LEADER to any programme under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and to address the need for agricultural businesses to develop new business models as subsidies are gradually withdrawn.

Upskilling Digital Skills

The NESTA/SAGE analysis of local authority level SME productivity supports the case for attention to skills, finding that productivity is positively linked with the share of the local population with NVQ4+ level qualifications and identifies that this skills gap is particularly wide in the digital space.

Climate Change

West Kent should be proactive in engaging with research and modelling taking place at a National level to help inform the likely impacts to our local economy in the decades ahead.

Car use

Increased automation will change the way people use cars and have an impact on our local economy in terms of travel to work patterns, congestion levels, pollution, rural accessibility, parking requirements and other areas.

Empowering our SMEs

The NESTA/SAGE research concludes that the strength of the UK economy long term is in the hands of its SMEs. If we are to see wages rise and income inequality fall, then targeted local intervention to build a landscape of thriving, productive SMEs, should be the main priority of every layer of government. In West Kent this empowerment can be initiated through the interventions outlined in this strategy.



West Kent Economic Priorities for Growth 2019-2022 Action Plan

A West Kent Priorities for Growth progress report on active projects will be submitted to West Kent Partnership quarterly meetings.

A final report will be produced at the end of the Action Plan period covering all success measures and productivity indicators

Bold = priority projects

1. IDEAS – Securing investment and funding to underpin innovation and growth

Objective	Action	Timescale	WKP Partners	Success Measures
1.1 Greater Access to Higher Education provision	Explore options for Higher Education provision in West Kent	Ongoing	Universities Hadlow Group	Number of HE courses on offer locally increased Additional campus facility delivered or courses delivered in West Kent
1.2 Business access to innovation investment facilitated	Support the development of a new research campus and associated inward investment at East Malling	Ongoing	NIAB EMR and the East Malling Trust, TMBC	Creation of masterplan for the campus No of new sector specific businesses on site
1.3 Business access to innovation facilitated	Kent & Medway Engineering, Design, Growth and Enterprise (EDGE) Hub secured in West Kent	2021	Canterbury Christ Church	EDGE Hub in place

2. PEOPLE – Delivering the West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network to secure our future workforce and championing training and inclusivity in the workplace

Objective	Action	Timescale	WKP Partners	Success Measures
2.1 Work ready young people	Support and expand the West Kent Enterprise Adviser Network (WKEAN)	Ongoing	Careers & Enterprise Company TWBC/TMBC/SDC Hadlow Group Local Employers, Local Schools	No. of schools engaged in the initiative and supported by an Enterprise Adviser
	Promote apprenticeships and other pathways to careers	Annually	Hadlow Group Apprentice Kent Local training providers	Apprenticeship event delivered
	Support delivery of Skills 30:30 events	Annually	Federation of Small Businesses, WKEAN, Local Employers, Local Schools	No. of employers attending No. of students participating
2.2 Young adults attracted and retained in local economy	Deliver West Kent Skillsfest	Annually	West Kent CEIAG Group SDC/TWBC/TMBC Local Employers, Local Schools	No. of employers attending No. of students participating
	Promote awareness of degree level apprenticeships to young people and employers	Ongoing	Local training providers Apprentice Kent	No. of Higher Level degree participants
2.3 Adults supported to be economically active/provided with opportunities to reskill	Develop strategy to encourage graduates to live and work in the area	2021	SDC/TWBC/TMBC Housing Associations Local Employers	Project scoped
	Digital Skills training facilitated/promoted	Ongoing	SDC/TWBC/TMBC	Ongoing social media activity
	Deliver 2 West Kent Jobs and Training Fairs per year	2 pa	SDC/TWBC/TMBC Jobcentre Plus/employers	No. of employers attending No. of Job Seekers attending
	Support initiatives developed for unemployed and those with a disability	Ongoing		No. of people entering employment or training

3. INFRASTRUCTURE – Representing the need for infrastructure and transport investment for West Kent at a local, county and regional level

Objective	Action	Timescale	WKP Partners	Success Measures
3.1 Transport infrastructure fit for purpose and with East-West links enhanced	Lobby for the delivery of better rail connections and capacity including SE Franchise schemes and improved rail links to Gatwick	Ongoing	SELEP, KCC WK Infrastructure & Transport Group Rail operators, Network Rail	Views of Partnership effectively communicated
	Identify a pipeline of potential projects to support key transport infrastructure – inc. highways and rail	2019	SELEP, KCC, Highways England WK Infrastructure & Transport Group	Costed schemes produced inc. Colts Hill and Swanley Interchange
	Lobby for and bid for funds for design and delivery of improvement schemes on the Major Road Network including A228 Colts Hill and A229	2023	WK Infrastructure & Transport Group	2 priority schemes funded
	Work collaboratively to improve the active travel offer in WK through design and implementation of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cycling & Walking improvement routes Lobby and work with bus operators to ensure network supports growth and work with operators to develop new and innovative services 	Ongoing		New cycling routes introduced as identified by three authorities
5G broadband in place where deliverable and solutions for rural connectivity where not	Work with partners to implement high speed broadband services across WK and to address local problems with mobile phone coverage	2021	KCC SDC/TWBC/TMBC Broadband providers	5G in place Rural solutions in place
Adequate flood defences in place to protect homes and businesses	Secure funding to support delivery of flood defences	2020-23 Ongoing	Environment Agency Kent County Council TMBC Local businesses Local residents	Leigh Flood Storage area delivered Progress towards implementation of a viable flood relief scheme in East Peckham

5. PLACE – Engendering a strong West Kent sense of place with vibrant town centres and a sustainable rural environment. Quality of life maintained and enhanced with a balanced approach to development and equal opportunity for all

Objective	Action	Timescale	WKP Partners	Success Measures
5.1 Key locations for growth brought forward	<p>Identify priority projects and work with Partners to secure funding and other support for their delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIAB East Malling Research • Peters Village • Swanley town centre • Fort Halstead • Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Calverley Square - The Amelia (Cultural and Learning Hub) - Other town centre projects 	Ongoing	SDC/TWBC/TMBC	No. of projects delivered
5.2 Sustainable housing development	Support the development of new Local Plans for the WK authorities	2019	SDC/TWBC/TMBC	Allocation of sufficient sites for employment uses Adoption of the Local Plans
5.3 Vibrant town centres incorporating integrated office, retail, leisure and residential units	Seek funding to support Town Centre Teams	Ongoing	Town Teams/Town Councils/ RTW BID SDC/TMBC/TWBC/	No. of events and initiatives delivered
	Bring forward further retail and mixed use developments and townscape improvements to strengthen the viability and vitality of town centres	Ongoing	Private Investors	Planning permission in place for new schemes
	Work with Visit Kent to promote and market WK's tourism assets	Ongoing	Visit Kent SDC/TWBC/TMBC	No. of visitors Visitor spend
5.4 Maximise opportunities through London proximity	Strengthen relationships with London business/council groups/partnerships	Ongoing		No. of new contacts
5.5 Levels of deprivation reduced in priority wards	Enterprise & Productivity Strategy output Identify joint initiatives to improve quality of life	Long term	KCC	Levels of deprivation reduced



Fruit Farm, Tunbridge Wells