


Enhancing the Quality of Life



Consultation Draft

Tunbridge Wells Borough Community Plan 2006



Your
opportunity to
tell us your views

As a result of involvement so far, this draft version of the Community Plan has been produced. We would welcome your comments, either in support of, or for change to, this document.

The consultation period will be from 15 May 2006 to 26 June 2006.

You can register your comments in the following ways –

By e-mail to: Communityplan@tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Or by completing our on-line comments form at:
www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk

In writing to: Community Plan Partnership
Town Hall
Royal Tunbridge Wells
Kent
TN1 1RS

Please call 01892 554064 if you have any queries.

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What is the Tunbridge Wells Borough Community Plan?

This is a draft of the second Community Plan for the borough of Tunbridge Wells. Also referred to as a 'Sustainable Community Strategy', this document builds on the success of the first plan, which was entitled 'Stepping in the Right Direction'. It is a long-term strategic document, which sets out a vision for the future of the borough and how this will be achieved. It is built on the main aspirations and concerns that people and local businesses, voluntary and public organisations have identified, and sets out measures where collective action could significantly improve things.

Enhancing the quality of life

The plan has been developed by the Community Plan Partnership and seeks to provide a positive force for change to improve quality of life for all those living, working and visiting here; to meet the needs of the community; and to promote sustainability.



Taking a broad perspective

It is not intended to be an exhaustive document, but instead takes a broad perspective, setting out shared aims and objectives and providing a framework for the wide range of partner organisations involved in it. The Community Plan looks ahead over the next ten years or so to provide a long-term vision for the borough, and includes shorter-term actions, which will help achieve the vision. The plan informs other strategies, including the Local Development Framework, which sets out the long-term spatial strategy for the borough (as it gradually replaces the Local Plan).

The impact of change

This Community Plan has been developed during a period of great change. At the time of writing, restructuring of the health sector is under way, and proposals to move from a two-tier local authority system with county and district or borough councils to a single tier are in their early stages. The voluntary sector as a whole has been developing a new infrastructure and the Borough Council is also undergoing changes to its internal structure. Demographic and economic changes bring forward new needs for our community. This level of change will impact on aspects of the Community Plan, as will any changes in resources, and for this reason the Community Plan actions will be reviewed annually, but the vision for the future of the borough will set a clear goal to enable us to continue to work together on joint priorities.

Involvement in the Plan so far

Local residents, stakeholders and partners have been encouraged to tell us what should be included in the Community Plan, in a number of ways:

- A Stakeholder Conference was held in April 2005 which a wide range of local organisations from the public, voluntary and private sectors attended, and workshops were held to discuss issues to go forward in the Community Plan.
- A series of residents' workshops were held in Cranbrook, Paddock Wood and Royal Tunbridge Wells, inviting residents selected at random from across the borough to share their views about the key issues in the borough.
- The results of the residents' workshops were published in the Borough News, asking residents to tell us whether or not they shared these views.
- The annual Borough-wide Survey asked over 1,300 residents for their views about the key issues in the borough.
- A survey of the gypsy and traveller community was carried out to seek their views on issues for the Community Plan.
- Workshops were held with Parish and Town Councils and discussions held with the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum to ask for their input regarding key issues in the borough.
- Children at the Youth Council's Schools Conference were asked for their views.
- A Networking Event was held in November 2005 to enable all of the various partnerships working towards the Community Plan to meet, exchange ideas, and develop actions for the future.
- Other groups and residents wrote to us on an individual basis.

- Opportunities were taken to attend various meetings to raise awareness of the Community Plan and ask for input, including meetings of the Access Group; West Kent BME Forum; Youth Council; Parish Chairmen; and Churches Forum.
- An online consultation was held on key themes and priority objectives, resulting in amendments to the objectives and influencing the action plans that set out how these objectives were to be achieved.

Members of the Community Plan Partnership and the associated forums (see below) have listened to the local views expressed and also brought forward priorities identified from their own research, consultation, or nationally-driven agendas. It is important that any strategic document is well-informed, and some of the research used is listed at the back of the document.

There is also considerable guidance, legislation and research that applies to each of the organisations involved in community planning, and to each of the themes covered within this document. This extends from an international level, such as the Kyoto Agreement, to a local level, such as Parish Plans. The Community Plan must conform to relevant legislation, must be informed by guidance, and must be produced with consideration for the resources, opportunities and constraints that are evident at the time it is written. It is regularly updated to take into account changes in these factors and in the public's needs and aspirations.

Your opportunity to tell us your views

As a result of involvement so far, this draft version of the Community Plan has been produced. We would welcome your comments, either in support of, or for change to, this document. Please use this opportunity to tell us your views. There is more information on page 46 of this document about how you can do this.

Partnership working

Developing the Community Plan is as much a process as it is a final document. A wide range of partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors are involved in the Community Plan, particularly in delivering its aims and objectives through local actions. This is an ongoing process as partnership work grows and different partnerships evolve.

The Kent Partnership

The Kent Partnership is responsible for the Community Strategy for the county of Kent, entitled 'Vision For Kent'. The public, private and voluntary sectors are all represented on the Kent Partnership, which oversees the development and delivery of the Vision For Kent. Local representatives from the borough are members of the Kent Partnership, as well as partners from elsewhere in the county. This ensures that the needs of Tunbridge Wells borough and its contribution to the well-being of the county are integrated into the Vision For Kent.

The West Kent Partnership

The West Kent Partnership includes representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors from the districts of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, and Tunbridge Wells. This body, also known as a 'Local Strategic Partnership', focuses on strategic issues that affect the whole of West Kent, such as major transport issues; the economy; housing issues; and so forth. By combining the forces of the three districts, this partnership offers joint working at a strategic level and greater influence in terms of lobbying and bidding for funding. It has a number of sub-groups, which include:

- Skills and Learning
- Business Development
- Housing
- Transport
- Regeneration

The Tunbridge Wells Borough Community Plan Partnership

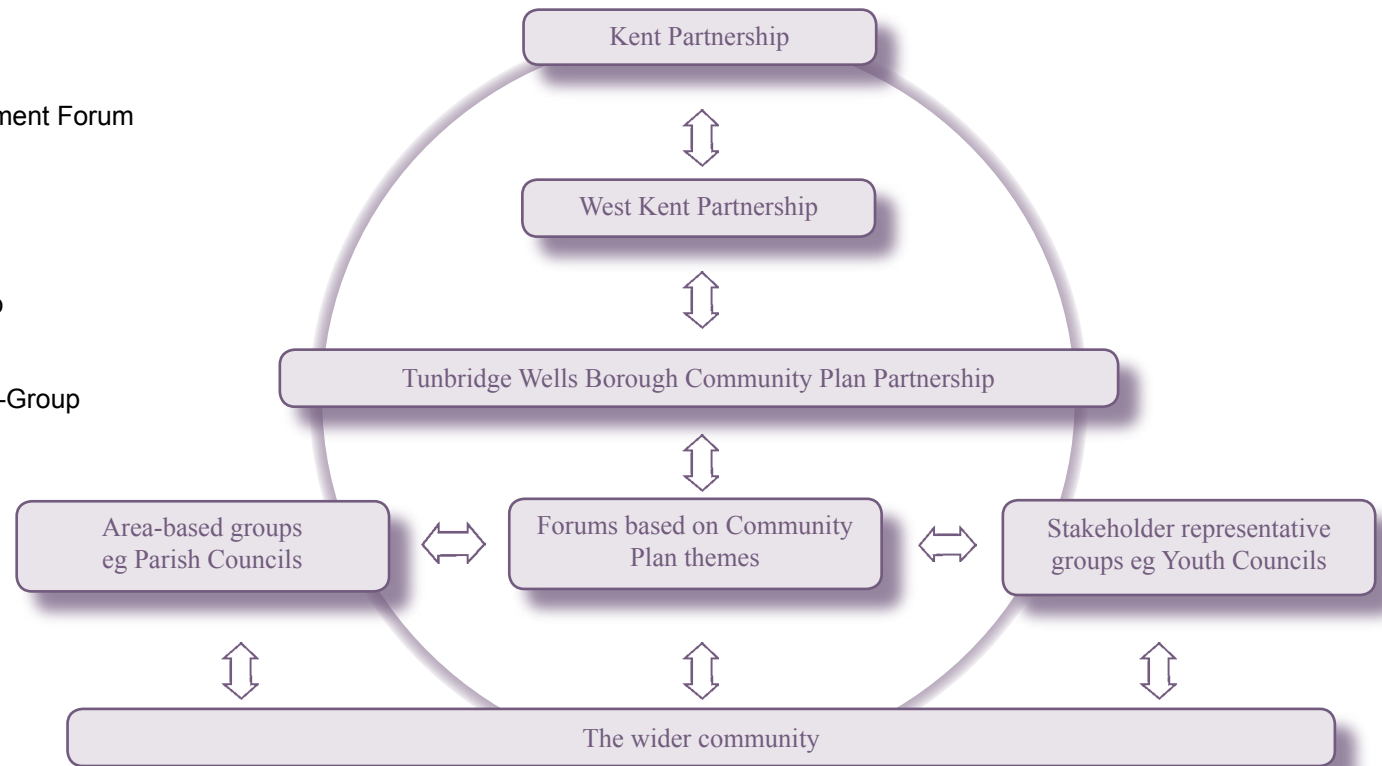
The Tunbridge Wells Borough Community Plan Partnership was formed in July 2005 to enhance the work already being done by the other partnerships by adding a local emphasis.

Its members include those listed below, and may change over time as different issues arise:

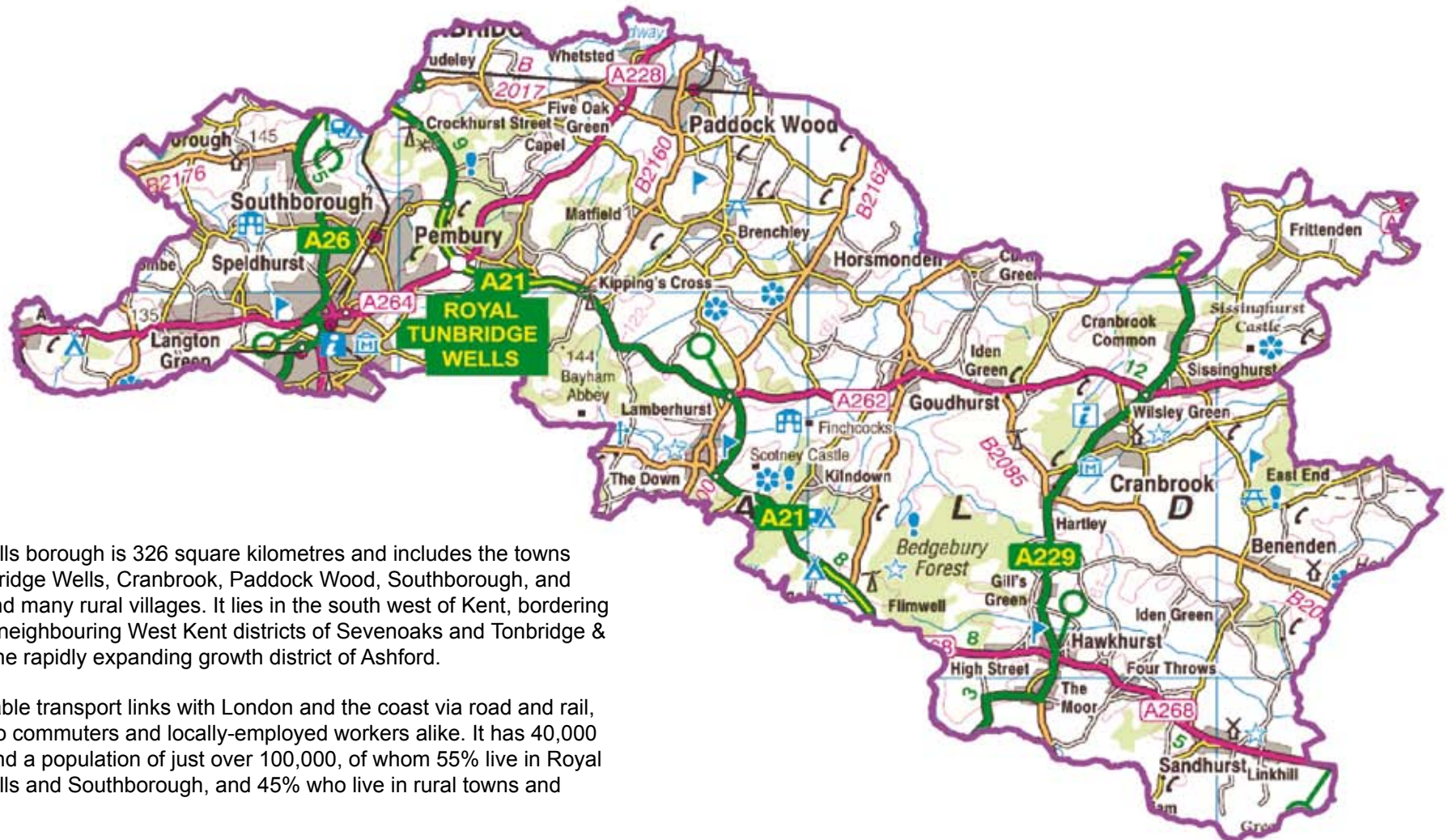
- Kent Association of Parish Councils
- Kent County Council
- Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust
- South West Kent Primary Care Trust
- Town and Country Housing Group
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- Voluntary Action West Kent
- West Kent College
- West Kent Police

This partnership focuses on the borough of Tunbridge Wells to ensure that important local issues can be addressed, and that the borough continues to have a promising future ahead. It works with all of the partnerships listed here and others, as well as with local groups and these too may alter over time as other partnerships develop:

- Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Business Working Group
- Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum
- Rural Business Working Group
- School Cluster Boards
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Community Development Forum
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Environment Forum
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Housing Partnership
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Leisure Forum
- Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Partnership
- West Kent Partnership Health Policy Board
- West Kent Partnership Skills and Learning Sub-Group
- West Kent Partnership Transport Sub-Group



Tunbridge Wells Borough at a glance



Tunbridge Wells borough is 326 square kilometres and includes the towns of Royal Tunbridge Wells, Cranbrook, Paddock Wood, Southborough, and Hawkhurst, and many rural villages. It lies in the south west of Kent, bordering East Sussex, neighbouring West Kent districts of Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling, and the rapidly expanding growth district of Ashford.

It has reasonable transport links with London and the coast via road and rail, and is home to commuters and locally-employed workers alike. It has 40,000 households and a population of just over 100,000, of whom 55% live in Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough, and 45% who live in rural towns and villages.

Well-known for its picturesque countryside, local heritage and thriving town centres, this is a borough to be proud of. Like any other borough it faces some tough challenges for the future, and the Community Plan seeks to set out how these will be addressed.

Our vision

Our vision for Tunbridge Wells borough is that we should expect to have:

- An environment that is conserved and enhanced, both for ourselves and for the benefit of future generations.
- A prosperous local economy.
- A wide range of high-quality and enjoyable leisure opportunities.
- A reduction in crime and the fear of crime.
- Safe, convenient and sustainable travel options to work, school, health, and leisure facilities.
- Housing and related support which meets the needs of local people of all ages.
- Access to healthy lifestyle choices and the right healthcare facilities to meet the community's needs.
- An opportunity for everyone to lead a fulfilling life.
- Improved educational achievement across the borough and opportunities for everyone to acquire the lifetime skills needed to find and remain in work.

Key themes

The Community Plan is broken down into the nine themes that follow, each addressing a particular key local issue. However, equally important is the interaction between them and how, collectively, they determine the well-being of individuals and organisations. There is no significance to the order of the themes as each is as important as another. The aim has been to produce a sustainable plan that safeguards and enhances the local economy, environment and social well-being for the benefit both of ourselves and future generations.

Threading through the plan are some specific concerns and needs of groups within the community.

Children and young people need affordable and accessible opportunities to lead active, healthy lifestyles, to contribute to the community and develop their full potential.

The needs of people with disabilities, of those with learning disabilities or mental health problems, of the homeless and of ethnic minorities, need to be reflected in future actions.

Older people play a huge role in the social support of others, but may also have special housing needs and problems of access to basic health and other services and facilities.

Key priority objectives

Each of the nine themes has a number of key priority objectives that we aim to achieve during the next five years. These do not represent everything we hope to achieve, but the key objectives we aim to work towards collectively.

Action plans

There is a set of action plans for each of the themes. These set out in more detail how we will work together to meet these objectives. They are loose-leaf so that they can be updated every year as current actions are progressed and new initiatives and projects are developed. These action plans are not exhaustive, but contain some of the actions that we are committed to. The specific strategies for the organisations and partnerships will contain more information about other actions they are working on, either as part of, or in addition to, the Community Plan.

Sustainability

Sustainability is a key theme throughout the document. To ensure that the Community Plan achieves its aim of promoting sustainable development, a 'Sustainability Appraisal' was undertaken. The Sustainability Appraisal aims to ensure that the policies and proposals in the Community Plan reflect the principles of sustainable development.

Sustainable development is defined as 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Specifically, sustainability looks at reconciling environmental, social and economic aims.

Generally the Community Plan performed well against the sustainability objectives. However, as a result of undertaking the Sustainability Appraisal, recommendations were made and taken on board to improve the overall sustainability of the Community Plan.

1

Safeguarding our environment

Our aim:

To conserve and enhance the environment of Tunbridge Wells borough both for ourselves and for the benefit of future generations.

We will achieve this by:

- Protecting and enhancing the natural environment and landscape.
- Conserving and improving the built environment, including public spaces, and particularly local heritage.
- Reducing the local contribution to climate change through the efficient use of resources.

An environment to be proud of

Tunbridge Wells borough benefits from a high-quality natural and built environment, and this is something residents have told us they most like about living here. It attracts tourists from near and far, and is of historical and ecological importance far beyond our borders.

Over two-thirds of the borough of Tunbridge Wells is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; over 80% a Special Landscape Area; 22% Metropolitan Green Belt; and 12% is ancient woodland. It also includes 11 Sites of Special Scientific Interest; around 3,000 listed buildings; and 25 conservation areas. We benefit from this rich, natural and built environment and have a responsibility to conserve, protect and enhance it now and for the future.

Over 50% of people surveyed in the borough said that the environment was one of the three most important issues to them and, in particular, recycling and reducing waste, keeping public areas clean, and protecting the landscape were the most important aspects and you can see these reflected in our priorities for the next five years.



Photograph provided by Keith High Weald



Photograph by Chris Parker



Future challenges

Pressure on land

The need for more housing, accommodation for business, leisure and roads places pressure to develop our land. In our first Community Plan we committed to developing 90% of new homes on brownfield (previously-developed) sites, saving our countryside. We met and exceeded this target and need to continue to aim to protect our countryside in the future.

Changes in the rural economies

The decline in farming is threatening rural economies and is placing stress on farmers to diversify. Some of our borough's characteristic features, such as hop gardens and orchards, have been lost in recent years. It is important that careful consideration is given to the impact on the landscape, biodiversity and long-term sustainability of new infrastructure and facilities and necessary changes in farming practices.

Waste

Landfill is a limited resource and it is important that we reduce our contribution to it. At present, 40% of household waste in Tunbridge Wells borough is recycled and composted. This has doubled during the life of the first Community Plan and we have exceeded the national target of 30% by 2005/06. Residents have told us that recycling is important and we wish to continue to reduce waste and increase recycling and composting, by expanding the brown bin scheme to enable kitchen waste to be composted,

by promoting recycling, and through the introduction of plastics recycling, through a pilot scheme, to provide banks to collect plastic bottles at six of the Council's recycling sites across the borough.

Air quality

On the whole, Tunbridge Wells borough benefits from good air quality, but there are a small number of pockets where there is a higher concentration of pollutants along main roads. It is important that these areas continue to be monitored and appropriate action taken to reduce pollution levels. We also wish to continue to be proactive in reducing pollution through the promotion of more sustainable transport options (developed further under the Transport theme in this plan) and by considering impacts on air quality as part of the assessment for planning applications.

Water resources

Below-average rainfall has resulted in below-average groundwater and reservoir levels, placing increased pressure on our limited water resources. Bewl Reservoir, just outside the borough, and an important source of water for our residents and businesses, reached its lowest ever level for the time of year in January 2006 at only 36% full. With reduced supplies, our impact on demand for water is even more critical. We can work proactively to promote the provision of water-efficient systems in new and existing buildings, and encourage everyone to minimise demand by conserving water wherever possible.

Land contamination

In a small number of locations, the previous use of land has caused contamination and remediation measures will be identified for those sites.

Protecting our built environment

Tunbridge Wells borough is home to a rich built heritage. However, the need to provide new homes and other important development has led to increased pressure to develop in our towns and villages, which is changing the townscape. In addition, our borough has not escaped problems with graffiti, fly-tipping and chewing gum, which can spoil our streets if left unchecked.

The global climate

Climate change is a well-documented global issue that we all share an individual responsibility for at the local level. We must make the best use of our energy, water and other resources. Both individuals and organisations must actively seek to reduce their resource use in order to limit the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that are released into the atmosphere. In doing so we protect our local and global environment for current and future generations. Under the Transport theme in this plan we look at ways to make travel more sustainable, and under the Housing theme we will promote energy efficiency in the home.

The Tunbridge Wells Borough Environment Forum

Representatives from a number of organisations and groups in the environment field have joined together to form a forum, through which key environmental issues can be discussed, information shared and partnership working developed. This forum plays a vital role in delivering the objectives in this Community Plan and its members include the Environment Agency; the National Trust; Bedgebury Pinetum; Government Office for the South East (GOSE); The Kent Energy Centre; the Kent High Weald Project; Parish and Town Councils; Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society; English Nature; Weald of Kent Preservation Society; Campaign to Protect Rural England (Tunbridge Wells); Cranbrook Conservation Area Advisory Committee; and others.

Safeguarding our environment

Maintaining a thriving local economy	Enhancing rural economies whilst ensuring they are developed in a sustainable way
Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure activities	Enabling people to benefit from the borough's countryside and heritage
Maintaining community safety and reducing the fear of crime	Reducing environmental crime such as graffiti, vandalism and abandoned cars
Transport – getting around the borough	Promoting and developing sustainable travel options
Meeting the need for housing	Ensuring that new housing is developed on brownfield sites to protect our countryside
Promoting health and improving well-being	Improving access to the countryside for people's physical and mental well-being
Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence	Ensuring that access to the countryside is available to all, including people with disabilities
Learning for all	Raising awareness of environmental issues through working with the community



Building on Success

The first Community Plan helped to build on the work being done by a wide variety of public, private and voluntary sector organisations. Already, actions have begun and have enhanced the local quality of life.

Protecting and enhancing the natural environment and landscape

Volunteers and school children have been involved in a range of projects to raise awareness of countryside issues and to improve the environment through the restoration of hedges and ponds, and planting of new woodland. We aim to continue this work.

Already, 95% of new homes have been developed on brownfield sites. This has preserved much of our countryside that could have otherwise been built upon. We aim to continue to preserve our natural landscape in this way.

Local and borough-wide organisations have worked together to control the amount, location and design of new development through the planning process, and will continue to do so.

We have worked at a local level to reduce fly-tipping, by introducing a fly-tipping hotline and street scene enforcement officers with the power to issue fixed penalty fines or prosecute fly-tippers. We aim to continue to reduce fly-tipping in the borough.

Conserving and improving the built environment, including public spaces and particularly local heritage

Listed building grants will have been given to assist owners with repairs to buildings at risk of serious deterioration, and conservation area appraisals have been carried out with the involvement of local residents and groups

to ensure that the characteristics that make conservation areas special are preserved, and we will continue to protect our heritage for the future.

Children have learned about the impact of graffiti through the 'Safe Schools' project and there are now enforcement officers working around the borough with the power to issue fines or prosecute those responsible for causing graffiti.

We will continue to stimulate interest in and raise awareness of the area through booklets, conservation awards, talks, walks and trails and seek to develop this further.

Reducing the local contribution to climate change through the efficient use of resources

Energy resources were saved in the borough through the promotion of energy-efficiency measures and advice on energy conservation, saving people money on their fuel bills and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. We aim to continue to promote energy efficiency.

Household recycling has increased, with more than a third of all household waste being recycled and composted, and we plan to pilot plastics recycling with a view to introducing this across the borough if successful. Recycling, and in particular plastics recycling, was something residents told us was particularly important.

The action plan at the back of this document contains more information about how we will seek to achieve these objectives.

2

Maintaining a thriving local economy

Our aim:

To maintain the prosperity of the local economy.

We will achieve this by:

- Encouraging the continued development of a wide range of enterprises in the borough.
- Enhancing the attractiveness of towns and other centres in the borough as thriving places to visit, shop and establish new enterprises.
- Supporting the sustainable development of the more rural areas and communities.

A prosperous local economy

Tunbridge Wells borough can be proud of its high levels of economic activity. More people work full-time and are self-employed than in other parts of Kent, and self-employment levels are particularly high. We also have a highly skilled resident workforce. We have thriving and dynamic town centres, including Royal Tunbridge Wells, Paddock Wood, Hawkhurst, and Cranbrook. But in order to ensure our economy continues to be successful and prevent stagnation it is important to look ahead at the challenges we face for the future.

Through our public engagement and involvement with local business groups, the top three issues that came from this consultation were: maintaining low unemployment; supporting local businesses; and keeping our towns and villages thriving. You will see that these have been translated into our three priorities for the future.



Photograph by Chris Parker



Photograph by Chris Parker



Future challenges

Attracting new business and retaining existing businesses

In recent years a number of major employers in the borough have closed, downsized or moved from the area, reducing the number and range of local jobs and reducing trade for local companies who did business with them. In some cases, in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre, business premises have been converted or redeveloped for housing. In part, these losses are offset by the formation of new, small companies, but there is a limited supply of suitable floorspace for these businesses to occupy. Furthermore, there is growing competition from Kings Hill, the Thames Gateway, and Ashford for businesses and workforce.

Creating a diverse employment base

Retailers, hotels and restaurants provide over 15,000 jobs in the borough, have shown the largest growth and are now the largest business sector. This is followed by banking and business services and public administration, education and health, which provide over 12,000 jobs. There has been a loss of jobs in the primary and manufacturing sectors, further emphasising reliance on the service sector. With recent losses in some service sector employment, we need to guard against the loss of breadth or diversity in the borough's employment base.

Our local workforce

There are relatively few young adults (aged 18–29) living in the borough, particularly in rural areas. A high number of young people leave the borough to work or

to attend higher education elsewhere. Although there has been evidence of young families moving into the area, there are concerns about an ageing population and a declining workforce, leading to future shortages of labour and potential gaps in management and leadership skills.

Some local employers find it difficult to recruit and retain staff, with skills shortages in key sectors, in part caused by commuting to London. The high cost of housing in the borough means that some of those working in the area live outside the borough, which then adds to traffic congestion problems.

Our town centres

The presence of strong, diverse and expanding retail and leisure sectors, together with larger businesses, is especially important to the vitality of Royal Tunbridge Wells. We will need to address issues that affect both the town and its large catchment areas (which includes parts of East Sussex), such as transport, parking and the availability of new floorspace for additional facilities.

Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre has a vibrant day and night-time economy, which offers residents and visitors a range of arts and entertainment venues. Restaurants, cafes and the local arts scene all contribute to this important sector which will need to guard its competitive edge if it is to complement the attractions of London. The night-time economy encourages communities to be active and interact positively, helping to populate streets after dark and increase the sense of a safe environment.

The challenge, therefore, is to keep Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre lively, attractive and safe for all it serves.

The centre of Southborough is to be revitalised as the focus for the local community through the provision of a new supermarket, and a community 'hub'.

The focus for the rural areas will continue to be Cranbrook, Hawkhurst and Paddock Wood as far as shopping, leisure and other services are concerned. Paddock Wood has recently launched its intention to carry out a Market Towns 'Health Check' to look at how the community can work in partnership to identify the town's strengths and weaknesses and draw up a plan of action. Cranbrook has already completed a Health Check and work is being done as a result of this to actively promote the town and attract more visitors.

Villages and local neighbourhoods

The importance of the local village and neighbourhood shop, pub/restaurant and other services should be recognised in maintaining the quality of life for village and town residents.

The rural economy

There has been a long-term decline in farming, resulting in a loss of land-based employment. In addition, there has been fairly widespread conversion of rural premises to alternative employment use and residential use in the borough. Diversification and innovation (including non-food products) will be important to retain the vitality of the rural economy.

Future challenges (continued)

Threats to the tourist industry

Drawing visitors to the area to visit towns and villages, to use the countryside and many of our excellent historic houses and gardens, is critical to our economy. The rise in cheap flights and in domestic short breaks continues therefore to be both a threat and an opportunity for our borough.

We need to meet the current needs of tourists, while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. We will have to manage the development of this activity with great care and aim to achieve 'Sustainable Tourism' which safeguards our unique environment, heritage, culture, diversity of landscape, and local communities.

Pockets of deprivation

Despite the general affluence of the borough, there are pockets of deprivation, the impact of which is worsened by the comparable wealth nearby. Residents of these mostly inner-town communities tend to suffer from lower skill levels and higher levels of unemployment. We need to ensure that everyone in our borough has the opportunity for a good quality of life.

The Tunbridge Wells Business Forum and Rural and Town Centre Working Groups

The existing Tunbridge Wells Borough Business Forum will be further developed, through linking together two working groups to identify and tackle business issues relevant to them. The Rural Business Working Group will look at rural business issues in the borough and the Town Centre Business Working Group will seek to address key issues in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre. They will play a key role in delivering the objectives in this Community Plan.

Maintaining a thriving local economy

Safeguarding our environment	Attracting tourists to visit our beautiful towns, villages and countryside
Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure activities	Supporting the leisure industry by making use of leisure facilities
Maintaining community safety and reducing the fear of crime	Taking on the challenges and opportunities of the night-time economy
Transport – getting around the borough	Providing suitable transport networks for businesses and visitors
Meeting the need for housing	Providing key-worker housing to enable people to live and work locally
Promoting health and improving well-being	Improving the physical and mental health of employees to raise productivity and reduce sickness
Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence	Establishing social enterprises
Learning for all	Equipping children, young people and adults with appropriate skills needed for business

Building on Success

Much work has already been done through the first Community Plan and through other partnerships, most notably the West Kent Partnership, which has been working on the Area Investment Framework for West Kent. This sets out a long-term strategy for West Kent and this second Community Plan aims to integrate this into its actions. Through the involvement of partners and residents, we have identified the following three key objectives for the next five years.

Encouraging the continued development of a wide range of enterprises in the borough

The Business Link Support Strategy was established and delivered under the previous Community Plan, and complementary one-to-one guidance sessions for businesses were also provided. These are two examples of ways in which we have supported businesses so far, and we aim to develop this support further.

Phase One of the development of Decimus Park (business park) off Kingstanding Way has been completed, with Phase Two under way, and further development has taken place at Tunbridge Wells Business Park and Longfield Road Industrial Estate.

The borough already has a high number of enterprises in relation to its population, but research has indicated that there is a high level of demand for the formation of new businesses, but this is partly frustrated by a lack of business

premises. We want to encourage the formation of new businesses in the borough. To do this we need to provide more support, with the retention and improvement of appropriate business accommodation, as well as improvements in transport and enhanced training opportunities. In particular, we wish to broaden the economic base of the borough, to decrease reliance on any one type of employment, and increase the number of highly-skilled and highly-valued jobs.

Enhancing the attractiveness of towns and other centres in the borough as thriving places to work, visit, shop, and establish new enterprises

We want to make the most of our towns and aim to market them to encourage businesses to locate within them, and to encourage people to visit them. Under the previous Community Plan, we made improvements to the food court at Royal Victoria Place, in Royal Tunbridge Wells, and to the Assembly Hall Theatre.

We want to bring forward the development of the supermarket and 'hub' in Southborough, and to establish a Town Centre Business Working Group to work on joint marketing and other initiatives in Royal Tunbridge Wells, and through the Cranbrook Business Association to develop and implement a marketing programme in Cranbrook.

We aim to make improvements to the appearance, accessibility and facilities offered by Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough and our market towns of Hawkhurst, Cranbrook and Paddock Wood.

Supporting the sustainable economic development of the more rural areas and communities

We want to encourage the development and retention of diverse enterprise within the more rural areas to provide locally-based employment and services (including tourism, leisure and recreation activities, business and other activities, as appropriate).

We wish to seek to increase the level of local produce procured by local companies and organisations and provide continued support for the land-based sector, including support for sustainable farming and uses of the countryside, to retain a treasured landscape, and provision of farmers' markets to provide quality local food and other products. We also need to find ways for local shops and services to flourish, particularly in small rural settlements.

The action plan at the back of this document contains more information about how we will seek to achieve these objectives.

3

Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure facilities

Our aim:

To ensure that a wide range of high quality and enjoyable leisure opportunities is available.

We will achieve this by:

- Focusing on providing activities and facilities for children and young people.
- Encouraging people of all ages and abilities to participate in a good variety of leisure opportunities and activities.
- Providing appropriate places for people to pursue their leisure interests.

Leisure in the borough

Leisure is an important aspect of people's lives and has a desirable impact upon health, well-being and quality of life. It provides opportunities for people to relax, learn, socialise, develop new skills and build confidence. Leisure activities can bring communities together, reducing isolation and social exclusion. What people choose to do in their own leisure time is varied and diverse, and we wish to encourage people to participate by ensuring that a range of high quality activities and facilities are available to them.

The borough is well-served by leisure facilities, but its geographical nature means that these are not always accessible or available to all. It is important that these facilities are affordable and accessible to everyone.

Residents tell us that among the things they like most about living in the borough are the sports and leisure facilities, parks and Commons areas and theatre facilities. However, this is not the same for everyone and affordability and accessibility are issues for some people. Residents are concerned about the lack of opportunities for children and young people to participate in leisure activities.

Our recent Recreation Open Space Study highlights the need for some new facilities and recommends that existing facilities need to be maintained to a high standard. The study also found that, although there is a good range of community buildings such as village halls and community centres, they do not fully meet residents' needs. To help meet any shortfalls, community use of school buildings should be encouraged.

Future challenges

Maximising the impact of the major sporting events

The Tour de France will be coming through the borough in 2007. In 2012, London will be hosting the Olympics and Paralympics. These events are an opportunity to inspire and encourage people to become actively involved and to aspire to greater things. New diving boards are being installed at Tunbridge Wells Sports and Indoor Tennis Centre, making it an Amateur Swimming Association Centre of Excellence for Synchronised Diving and well-placed to host divers preparing for the London 2012 Olympics.

Encouraging participation

People who actively participate in leisure activities benefit from improved mental and physical health. By socialising and volunteering they help to build stronger, safer communities. Consequently, increasing levels of participation is very important to the future well-being of the community.

Accessibility

Different people experience different barriers to participation. These can be psychological, economic, social or physical. It is important to work towards reducing or eradicating these barriers, including making buildings accessible for people with disabilities, and providing public transport, as well as encouraging participation.

The Tunbridge Wells Borough Leisure Forum

The Tunbridge Wells Borough Leisure Forum includes representatives from local sports, arts and play organisations, both voluntary and commercial. The forum is newly-formed. Its first task was to help develop the action plan at the back of this document as a response to the consultation feedback it had received. It intends to continue to meet to help steer leisure provision and development in the borough.



Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure activities

Safeguarding our environment	Enabling people to have access to the countryside to pursue their leisure interests
Maintaining a thriving local economy	Ensuring that leisure activities are affordable
Maintaining community safety and reducing the fear of crime	Providing diversionary activities as a tool to reduce crime
Transport – getting around the borough	Enhancing transport links to leisure facilities
Meeting the need for housing	Improving play facilities in residential areas
Promoting health and improving well-being	Promoting healthy lifestyles through participation in sport and other leisure activities
Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence	Increasing volunteering activity
Learning for all	Making use of local schools and other facilities as venues for leisure activities

Building on Success

Focusing on providing activities and facilities for children and young people

We provide a variety of holiday activities for children and young people, and wish to re-focus these to areas with the greatest need. We also want to continue to involve children and young people in planning the provision of new facilities, and have recently started a consultation exercise regarding a proposed play area in Rusthall.

In a new initiative, we plan to collectively offer a 'Go and Try' incentive scheme, to encourage young people to make use of voluntary, commercial and Council-run facilities.

Encouraging people of all ages and abilities to participate in a good variety of leisure opportunities and activities

To encourage more people to be involved in running sports activities we plan to run good-practice training courses, and have recently begun to promote 'Clubmark', a quality mark for sports clubs. We wish to increase the number of clubs that are part of this scheme. To be accredited, clubs need to show they are well-run with qualified coaches, and appropriate first aid, child protection measures and training. Importantly, they also need to have a development plan to show how they will build up their youth section, and an appointed person who ensures that there is equal access for all people, including those with disabilities, of different ages and from black and minority ethnic groups.

Providing appropriate places for people to pursue their leisure interests

We have previously provided activities for young people at the Trinity Theatre, made improvements to play areas, playing pitches and parks, and wish to continue to develop appropriate places for people to access leisure opportunities.

Schools play an important role in the community and we want to increase access to these valuable facilities for leisure organisations. We also plan to work together to improve play provision in the parishes through grants and improvements to facilities.

The action plan at the back of this document contains more information about how we will seek to achieve these objectives.

4

Increasing Community Safety and Reducing Fear of Crime

Our aim:

To develop partnership activity to achieve safer and stronger communities.

We will achieve this by:

- Reducing crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

A safe borough

Tunbridge Wells borough benefits from a crime rate below the national average, and the lowest in Kent. The 'all crime' figure for the borough decreased in the three years from 2000/01 to 2003/04, and there was also a decrease in domestic burglary and vehicle crime. A strong and successful Community Safety Partnership has been operational in the borough since the 1990s and continues to tackle crime and the fear of crime through a range of innovative initiatives.

Residents' focus groups, the Borough-wide Survey, and the Gypsy and Traveller Survey all highlighted community safety as one of their top three issues.

Reducing crime, and reducing fear of crime, were particular priorities raised, and these have been included in our priorities for the next five years.



Future challenges

Perception of crime

Whilst progress has been made in reducing certain crimes, other crimes, such as criminal damage, violent crime and anti-social behaviour, have increased. Paradoxically, through raising awareness, encouraging reporting and other improvements in tackling crime, some crimes can appear to have increased, resulting in a greater fear of crime. Whilst the fear of crime is also difficult to measure, and often bears little relation to actual levels of crime, it is important to aim to reduce the fear of crime. Personal safety and fear of crime are particularly important for older people, as their quality of life can be reduced if they fear going out after dark or visiting certain parts of our towns.

Anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour has received much attention in recent years, and national and local trends show an increase in reports of anti-social behaviour. There are two distinct types of anti-social behaviour: the environmental aspect, which includes vandalism, graffiti, fly-tipping and abandoned vehicles; and the behaviour of particular individuals, including loud music, drunkenness and neighbour disputes. We recognise the effects of anti-social behaviour on the quality of life and well-being of communities and need to continue to address them.

Reducing crime rates

Half of all serious crime is carried out by 10% of active offenders. Identifying these prolific offenders, and those at risk of becoming prolific offenders, (through the government's 'Prolific and other Priority Offenders' scheme) is an important and demanding task in reducing crime in the borough.

The Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Partnership

Multi-agency working during the 1990s led to the development of the Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Partnership, and this was formalised following the enactment of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Partnership delivers its work through a series of sub-groups, which focus on the following themes and geographic areas:

- Anti-social behaviour
- Children and Young People
- Domestic Abuse
- Drugs and Alcohol
- Priority Neighbourhoods
- Rural Issues
- Sherwood
- Town Centre (Royal Tunbridge Wells)

Every three years a full audit is carried out by the Community Safety Partnership in order to identify trends and establish how best to target resources to tackle crime and fear of crime in the borough.

Maintaining community safety and reducing the fear of crime

Safeguarding our environment	Striving to maintain the street scene free from graffiti and vandalism
Maintaining a thriving local economy	Reducing retail and other crime
Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure activities	Providing positive activities for people to steer them away from crime
Transport – getting around the borough	Providing safe transport solutions
Meeting the need for housing	Ensuring good design to reduce crime and improve safety
Promoting health and improving well-being	Reducing anti-social behaviour that has a damaging effect on the fear of crime and a person's well-being
Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence	Providing initiatives to protect vulnerable groups from becoming the victims of crime
Learning for all	Working with schools to help to prevent crime

Building on Success

Reducing crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour

Through the Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Partnership and its sub-groups, a great deal has already been achieved. The 'all crime' figure for 2003/04 showed a decrease since 2000/01, when the previous Crime Audit was carried out by the Community Safety Partnership. We want to build on this success by reducing crime further.

The partnership has tackled environmental crime such as graffiti, fly-tipping and abandoned and illegal vehicles, including involvement in Operation Cubit which deals with illegal vehicles. This work has contributed to a reduction in vehicle fires of 30% from 2002 to 2005. Environmental crime is one example of crime that can have a detrimental impact on people's fear of crime, and their quality of life, and we aim to continue to tackle the issues that undermine efforts to reduce fear of crime.

The adoption of an information-sharing protocol has enabled monthly meetings between a range of organisations to take place to tackle anti-social behaviour. This has resulted in 94 people being referred to this group for consideration and action since October 2002. Action to deter these individuals from behaving in an anti-social manner includes warning letters from the Partnership; Acceptable Behaviour Agreements; and the imposition by the courts of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). Individuals continue to be monitored until it is agreed that their behaviour has improved sufficiently for them to be removed from the list.

The action plan at the back of this document contains more information about how we will seek to achieve these objectives.

5

Transport – Getting around the borough

Our aim:

To ensure that residents and visitors can get to work, school, health and leisure facilities in Tunbridge Wells borough in a safe, convenient and sustainable way.

We will achieve this by:

- Reducing traffic congestion and pollution by increasing responsible travel options and enhancing accessibility to key destinations.
- Pursuing improvements to key transport routes and public transport to promote the role of the Tunbridge Wells/Tonbridge Regional Hub, as defined in the South East Plan.
- Improving travel safety for all – in towns, villages and rural areas.

Transport in the borough

The borough has some major road and rail links to London and to Tonbridge, Sevenoaks, Maidstone, Ashford, Hastings and other parts of East Sussex.

Traffic congestion, pollution and poor take-up and provision of public transport services mean that there is much to be done to continue to improve transport around the borough.

Transport was rated as one of the top three issues in the borough by a third of those surveyed. Improving public transport, reducing traffic congestion and improving travel safety were rated as the most important issues.



Future challenges

Sustainability

The level of private car and commercial vehicle use is putting pressure on our road networks and resulting in pollution and traffic congestion. As well as lobbying for much-needed improvements to some of our major roads and railway, we need to look at other travel options which can help to reduce these problems and provide more sustainable options that will reduce the impact on the environment for future generations.

More responsible travel options such as walking and cycling, car sharing or taking public transport, reduce our impact on the environment and, in the case of walking and cycling, can contribute to our health and provide more affordable means of travel. They also reduce the levels of traffic and therefore improve road safety and ease traffic congestion and pollution.

Planning policies continue to be developed to focus new development in sustainable locations where there is already appropriate infrastructure and facilities so that travel is minimised.

Encouraging people to change their behaviour and consider other options instead of taking their car will take time, and in order to do this the alternatives must be affordable and practical.

Improvements to public transport and the provision of safer cycle routes and walking routes will help to support this aim and there is much to be done to increase awareness of the impact of each individual's travel choice.

Public transport

Residents have told us that improving public transport is an important issue for them, and this is key to ensuring that people are able to access facilities around the borough. The young and older people, and people with disabilities, are more likely to rely on public transport, as are the 19% of the borough's households who do not have a car. For disabled people, it is important that public transport, including stations and bus stops, is accessible. Public transport needs to be a suitable, safe, attractive, accessible and affordable means of travel, not just for non-car owners, but as a more sustainable travel method for us all.

The South East Plan designates Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge as a 'Regional Hub' with the associated transport corridors passing through the borough. This provides us with a good opportunity to improve local infrastructure and public transport to enable people to travel within the borough and beyond.

Traffic congestion

Considerable traffic congestion is experienced on the A21 between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells and within the towns of Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough, particularly at peak periods. Upgrading the A21 to a dual carriageway is important for local businesses and the new district general hospital alike. However, sustainable alternatives to the car have been, and must continue to be, promoted including car share, walking, cycling and use of public transport. A number of larger companies in the borough now have travel plans to encourage their staff and customers to travel in a sustainable way.

Accessibility

In order to help movement around Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre for those with mobility difficulties, a programme of improvements will continue to be implemented. Strategies to improve access throughout the borough will be informed by the Accessibility Strategy for Kent.

The West Kent Partnership Transport Sub-group

The West Kent Partnership Transport Sub-group includes representatives from Kent County Council (the Highways Authority); Tunbridge Wells Borough Council; Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council; Sevenoaks District Council; and Arriva Southern Counties. The new train operating company, GoVia, and the train infrastructure providers are to be included.

This group has lobbied for strategic road and rail improvements and has worked in partnership to understand each other's needs for travel in the area and to maximise the benefits of local investment and best practice.



Transport – getting around the borough

Safeguarding our environment	Improving air quality caused by vehicle pollution
Maintaining a thriving local economy	Ensuring suitable transport networks to our towns and rural areas
Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure activities	Developing appropriate and affordable transport to leisure facilities
Maintaining community safety and reducing the fear of crime	Providing safe means of transport for everyone
Meeting the need for housing	Ensuring new housing is sustainable in terms of minimising the need to travel
Promoting health and improving well-being	Providing facilities for healthy travel options including cycling and walking
Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence	Improving access to public transport for people with disabilities
Learning for all	Developing school travel plans to reduce the impact of the school run

Building on Success

Reducing traffic congestion and pollution by increasing responsible travel options and enhancing accessibility to key destinations

With a primary focus on the congested corridors into Tunbridge Wells, initiatives such as school and work travel plans; cycle routes; bus travel; and road efficiency improvement continue to promote safe, convenient and sustainable travel. Options such as car sharing, 'walking buses' for children, encouragement to walk or cycle to work through the provision of safe cycle storage, showers and other facilities, and the use of public transport will all continue to be pursued.

This has the impact of reducing traffic congestion and pollution and also reducing our impact on the environment.

Pursuing improvements to key transport routes and public transport to promote the role of the Tunbridge Wells/ Tonbridge Regional Hub, as defined in the South East Plan

Specifically, improvements to the A21 and A228 will be pursued, together with improvements to bus and train services and infrastructure.

The South East Plan designates Royal Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge as a 'Regional Hub', which is a good opportunity for our borough. In order to maximise the benefit of this we need to improve connections and transport routes to and from this hub.

Improving travel safety for all – in towns, villages and rural areas

Whilst personal safety on public transport in the borough is very good, the perception of danger is an important consideration. It is therefore important to design-out people's perception of danger.

Annual figures for 2004 showed that deaths and injury from road accidents in the borough have reduced from the 1994-98 average for cyclists and pedestrians and halved for children for the same period, and it is our aim to continue this trend. Through the 'Safer Routes to Schools' programme, improvements have been, and will continue to be, made to pedestrian and cycle facilities to encourage people to use these methods, and reduce car journeys. This enables children to benefit from safe and healthy ways to get to school and has an additional benefit of reducing the impact of the 'school run'.

In the rural area, improvements to local connections are important, including changes to surfacing, junctions and the 'Quiet Lanes' initiative, which seeks to protect rural lanes, making them safer for cycling, walking and horse riding, and preserving their rural character.

The action plan at the back of this document contains more information about how we will seek to achieve these objectives.

6

Meeting the need for housing

Our aim:

To meet the housing and related support needs of local people of all ages.

We will achieve this by:

- Providing affordable homes (including social-rented homes, low cost-home ownership and housing for key workers).
- Supporting independence for all vulnerable people (including older people, young people and those with disabilities).
- Preventing homelessness.
- Improving the quality of existing homes and housing-related services.
- Promoting safe, sustainable communities through housing-related initiatives.

Housing in the borough

Tunbridge Wells borough currently houses over 40,000 households. There is a high proportion of detached and semi-detached houses and bungalows in the borough and almost one third of the population own their home outright.



Future challenges

Affordability

For many, a home in the borough is out of the question. Taking into account average incomes and house prices, Tunbridge Wells is the second least affordable place to live in Kent, after Sevenoaks. The income level required to purchase even the smallest of homes in the cheapest area of the borough is well above the average, and rental levels are also high. There is evidence to suggest that many of those who have grown up in the borough and are in their 20s and 30s cannot afford to buy or rent here. This has implications for employers, who need to attract and retain staff for a variety of jobs, including key workers. Annually, 825 affordable housing units are needed, but only 419 are met by supply from letting existing accommodation. This leaves a shortfall of 406 units each year, which is almost eight times current levels of housing provision.

Changes in household size

Adding to the need for housing in the borough is the increase in the number of households due to a reduction in household size. Relationship breakdown, young people living on their own, and an increase in the elderly population are all contributing factors towards smaller households, both nationally and locally. With more people living on their own, the demand for homes, and in particular smaller homes, will rise.



Suitability of existing housing

Improving the quality of existing properties, both in terms of their condition of repair and making them suitable for the needs of their occupants, can help meet housing needs. Research undertaken in 2003 indicated that a total of 14,527 homes in the borough did not meet the Decent Homes Standard. 11,709 were owner-occupied or privately rented and, of these, 900 homes were occupied by vulnerable households (those receiving an income-related benefit). Without continued investment, the private sector would continue to decline. Elderly and disabled people may require adaptations to their homes to enable them to remain living independently, and vulnerable people may need to receive care and support services to ensure their needs are met. These services are important to ensure that people's differing housing needs are met.

Housing Partnership

The Housing Partnership was formed in July 2005 to enable housing professionals to work together to address key related issues in the borough. The partnership includes representatives from a number of housing associations, private sector landlords, the Southern Private Landlords Association, the Borough Council, and other related organisations such as Kent County Council Social Services, the Youth Offending Team, the Probation Service, the Health Primary Care Trust, Parish Councils, community/residents' associations, specialist supported housing providers, and voluntary groups/ advice agencies.

Meeting the need for housing

Safeguarding our environment	Minimising our impact on climate change through sustainable construction methods and energy efficiency in our homes
Maintaining a thriving local economy	Providing affordable housing to enable people to continue to live and work in the borough
Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure activities	Ensuring adequate provision of leisure activities
Maintaining community safety and reducing the fear of crime	Providing support for victims of domestic abuse
Transport – getting around the borough	Ensuring appropriate transport links, including in rural areas
Promoting health and improving well-being	Striving for affordable warmth for all homes
Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence	Further developing services to enable older people and those with disabilities to remain in their homes
Learning for all	Ensuring that children are accommodated in good quality housing

Building on Success

Providing affordable homes (including social rented homes, low cost home ownership and housing for key workers)

We have already changed the policy in our Local Plan so that housing developers are now required to include affordable homes on smaller sites (now 15 units or more), and have increased the proportion of affordable homes that must be provided to 30%. It is envisaged that this will assist in increasing the supply of affordable housing.

We plan to develop an affordable housing programme to increase the supply of a range of affordable homes, including social-rented homes, low-cost home ownership and key-worker homes and to continue to lobby government for increased funding for affordable housing.

Supporting independence for all vulnerable people (including older people, young people and those with disabilities)

We have already developed a number of supported housing projects for vulnerable people. We plan to further develop services to assist older and disabled households to remain in their homes, including:

- Increased funding for Disabled Facilities Grants, Home Improvement Grants and Affordable Warmth Measures Grants.
- Improved Occupational Therapist services.
- Improved links with health services.
- The development of a an equity release loan scheme endorsed by the Borough Council.

Preventing homelessness

We have already reduced homelessness by developing a range of initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness and helping people find accommodation.

We plan to develop the range of housing options for young people to reduce homelessness, and increasingly work in partnership with local agencies to provide further support when moving from temporary accommodation into a more permanent home.

Improving the quality of existing homes and housing-related services

We have adopted a multi-agency approach to meeting the needs of older, disabled and other vulnerable owner-occupiers and private tenants for repairs/improvements to their homes, through the work of the Council's Care & Repair Agency and the Kent Energy Centre.

We plan to develop a Private Sector Landlords' Accreditation Scheme (possibly in partnership with other West Kent authorities) and develop an Empty Homes Strategy to improve the condition of empty properties and bring them back into use.

We will seek to ensure that all social housing stock in the borough meets the Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

Promoting safe, sustainable communities through housing-related initiatives

We have already developed a multi-agency approach to tackle nuisance and anti-social behaviour on housing estates within our communities.

We plan to champion new initiatives to increase the number of renewable energy installations to both new and existing homes. We are committed to encouraging developers to maximise use of sustainable construction and secured-by-design techniques in future developments within the borough. In addition, we will continue to improve home security and safety through grant assistance and agency working, particularly for younger, older and disabled people living in the borough.

The action plan at the back of this document contains more information about how we will seek to achieve these objectives.

7

Promoting health and improving well-being

Our aim:

To enable people to access healthy lifestyle choices and provide the right health care facilities to meet the community's needs.

We will achieve this by:

- Promoting healthy lifestyles.
- Improving access to health services.
- Improving hospital cleanliness and performance.

A healthy borough

The borough has the fourth highest life expectancy of all local authorities in Kent and in the 2001 census the proportion of our residents who stated that their health is not good was below the national average. We experience lower hospital admittance, lower infant mortality rates, lower rates of poor health, and longer life expectancy. We also live healthier lifestyles, with below-average smoking, obesity and binge drinking, and higher than average healthy-eating rates.

However, residents in some areas of the borough have better health than others. We want to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to lead a healthy lifestyle and access to appropriate health services.

In our Borough-wide Survey, health was rated as the most important priority of all of the themes and in particular provision of, and access to, health services was rated as the most important priority. Promoting healthy lifestyles and improving hospital cleanliness and performance followed this.



Future challenges

Health inequalities

The inequalities in health across the borough mean that we must do more to improve the health of residents in areas where it is less good, in order to move towards the level of good health in the rest of the borough.

Lifestyle choices

Many of the factors that contribute to poor health are avoidable to some extent, by making healthier lifestyle choices. The government's 'Choosing Health' agenda seeks to provide information and advice, as well as other support to help us all to choose healthier lifestyles. Under the 'Leisure' theme we looked at how leisure time can be used to benefit health. We seek to encourage people to live healthier lifestyles and provide them with the support to do so.

A new hospital for the borough

The borough is due to benefit from a new district general hospital at Pembury in 2010, to replace the Kent and Sussex and Pembury hospitals with more modern facilities. We will continue to develop and lobby for supporting infrastructure, such as public transport links and road improvements, and the provision of key-worker housing. In the meantime, the Kent and Sussex and Pembury hospitals continue to provide services in the borough.

Longer life expectancy

Life expectancy nationally has risen to 78.24 years and in the borough it is 79.99. With people continuing to live longer, health services for the elderly are likely to be put under more pressure, and we will continue to develop proactive methods of helping older people to stay healthy, such as the 'Falls Prevention Strategy Working Group', which looks at ways of reducing falls.

Our health service providers

In Royal Tunbridge Wells, 61% of GPs are due to retire in the next 5–8 years. This could lead to a shortage of doctors and of appropriate accommodation as a result of their premises being sold.

The West Kent Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Health Policy Board

The West Kent Health LSP Policy Board members include senior representatives from the South West Kent Primary Care Trust, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust (Hospital Trust), South West Kent Mental Health Services, and Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils. Its role includes the development of the strategic plan for delivery of both national and local targets to improve the health of the population of the South of West Kent, and ensuring that partnerships and initiatives are linked to real clinical priorities.

The Choosing Health Group

This group includes representatives from South West Kent and Maidstone Weald PCTs, and Tonbridge & Malling, Sevenoaks, and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils. It works on the 'Choosing Health' agenda to prevent unnecessary death, and to help people who want to live healthier lives. It is underpinned by three key principles of informed choice for all, personalisation of support to make healthy choices, and working in partnership to make health everyone's business. A total of £3.2m of funding has been made available for the South of West Kent for 2006/07 and 2007/08. It has sub-groups to tackle:

- Smoking
- Obesity
- Sexual Health
- Mental Health
- Alcohol

Promoting health and improving well-being

Safeguarding our environment	Ensuring that we have a clean and safe environment to live in
Maintaining a thriving local economy	Ensuring the provision of health services which provide important employment opportunities in the borough
Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure activities	Encouraging people to take part in leisure pursuits as part of a healthy lifestyle
Maintaining community safety and reducing the fear of crime	Reducing the incidence of alcohol-related disorder
Transport – getting around the borough	Improving travel safety and reducing accidents
Meeting the need for housing	Increasing the quality of existing homes
Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence	Reducing health inequalities
Learning for all	Raising awareness of health issues

Building on Success

Promoting healthy lifestyles

Healthy Eating and Smoke-Free Awards have been promoted and granted to workplaces, restaurants and schools that have met the criteria for the awards. Smoking cessation services have provided help to people to give up smoking. To further develop this work, the sub-groups of the 'Choosing Health' group will focus on providing services, advice and information, and raising awareness about sexual health, mental health, smoking, obesity and alcohol use.

Improving access to health services

New ways to deliver healthcare within communities will be investigated, with the possibility of involving other partners outside the 'health' arena so that other community services can also be provided to meet people's needs. We aim to improve access to health services and reduce inequalities in health across the borough.

Improving hospital cleanliness and performance

Whilst working to deliver the completion of the new district general hospital at Pembury, the improvement of cleanliness and performance of the Kent and Sussex and Pembury hospitals will remain a top priority. Improved standards within the hospitals and co-operation from patients and visitors should help to maintain high levels of cleanliness, and measures detailed in our action plans will seek to improve the performance of the hospitals.

Already, hospital performance has improved so that no patient has to wait for longer than six months for treatment; no outpatient has to wait longer than 13 weeks for an appointment; and 98% of Accident and Emergency patients are seen and treated within four hours.

There will be £20m invested each year in capital schemes such as cardiac catheter laboratories that will enable heart patients to be seen in Kent rather than in London. There is also increased investment in cancer services with additional radiotherapy, treating even more patients here in Kent rather than in London. We aim to continue to improve hospital services in the borough.

The action plan at the back of this document contains more information about how we will seek to achieve these objectives.

8

Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence

Our aim:

To give everyone an opportunity to lead a fulfilling life.

We will achieve this by:

- Encouraging volunteering and empowering local communities to participate in decision-making and delivery of service.
- Promoting the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of children and young people.
- Engaging with, helping realise the potential of, and meeting the diverse needs of older people, people with disabilities and Black and Minority Ethnic groups.



People in Tunbridge Wells borough are relatively affluent, well-educated and in good health. Residents are predominantly white with English as their first language, and a high proportion of people own cars. The provision of services for the majority can lead to marginalisation and exclusion, whether real or perceived, of those in different circumstances so we need to do more for those who are at risk of becoming socially excluded. The pockets of deprivation within the borough have a disproportionate impact on those affected within this area of general affluence.

Over 15% of residents in the borough consider they have a long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits their daily activities or the work they can do. 70% said that this was due to mobility difficulties. Just over 3% of people who responded to the Borough-wide Survey said that English was not their first language, or the one they use at home. These are examples of barriers to inclusion that need to be overcome when services are provided. Low income, unemployment, poor housing, age, health, educational achievement, disability, language barriers and poor access to transport and other facilities can contribute to any of us being, or feeling, socially excluded.

We must do more to ensure that everyone in the borough is able to access employment, education, leisure activities, and health and other services.

Pockets of deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation measures income, employment, health and disability, education, skills, training, housing and geographical access to services, and shows that Sherwood is the most deprived ward in the borough, and falls within the top 30% of most deprived wards in the country. Broadwater is the next most deprived ward in the borough, and has a high level of child poverty.

Sherwood, Southborough and High Brooms were identified as key wards in relation to education and skills deprivation.

Our survey of Gypsies and Travellers identified health as the most important issue for them, followed by employment, training and education and the local environment.

Some residents in rural areas may also be disadvantaged because of geographic isolation.

Future challenges

Encouraging volunteering

The voluntary sector provides a diverse range of community services from social care, advice and counselling to support groups. Additionally, voluntary groups contribute to community activity and sports, youth groups and other leisure activity. Without the continued commitment from dedicated volunteers, our local groups, societies and clubs would be under threat. Volunteering can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience, enabling people to learn new skills, gain in confidence, and pass their expertise on to others. It is important that we promote and value volunteering to support our local organisations.

Older people

It is important to ensure support mechanisms are available for vulnerable older people and to ensure that their contribution through voluntary activities is maximised.

People with disabilities

Within the wider community, we must make special provision for people with disabilities to ensure equality of opportunity under the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005, particularly in respect of transport and the physical environment. Under the transport theme we look at the needs of people with disabilities and how we can help to address them.

We need to encourage opportunities for the public and voluntary sectors to work in partnership to improve access to lifelong learning by providing education, training and employment opportunities, including for those with learning disabilities.

In addition, more could be done for people with disabilities, whose usage of sports facilities in the borough is low by national standards. Their health and well-being can benefit from equal access to health services and a healthy lifestyle.

Black and Minority Ethnic needs

We must ensure that no minority groups or communities suffer discrimination or feel excluded, and that they have equal access to information, services and support. Partner organisations will work together to raise cultural and ethnic awareness throughout the borough, and promote tolerance in a just and fair society.

Working together to tackle social exclusion

There are a number of groups and partnerships working towards different aspects of social inclusion. The following list is not exhaustive, but names some of the umbrella organisations that represent the views of other groups and organisations:

- **General:** Voluntary Action West Kent.
- **Disability:** The Tunbridge Wells Access Group – this is a campaign group working on behalf of those, including members, with a disability .
- **Children and Young People:** The Tunbridge Wells Borough Youth Council; Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Partnership; Children and Young People Sub-group; and Children’s Consortium.
- **Black and Minority Ethnic:** West Kent Minority Ethnic Advisory Group; West Kent Sexual Diversity Advisory Group.
- **Older People:** Tunbridge Wells Borough Older People’s Forum



Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence

Safeguarding our environment	Ensuring that the natural and built environments are accessible to all
Maintaining a thriving local economy	Developing social enterprises
Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure activities	Encouraging people to participate in leisure activities and ensuring that these are inclusive
Maintaining community safety and reducing the fear of crime	Addressing anti-social behaviour and supporting vulnerable people
Transport – getting around the borough	Providing accessible transport options to enable people to access key destinations
Meeting the need for housing	Offering supported housing for vulnerable groups where the need is identified
Promoting health and improving well-being	Improving access to health services for vulnerable groups
Learning for all	Providing training for adults and pre-school provision for children in more deprived areas

Building on Success

Encouraging volunteering and empowering local communities to participate in decision-making and delivery of service

A Compact with the voluntary sector has been adopted. A Volunteer of the Year Award system is in place – the first award ceremony was in November 2005, during the Year of the Volunteer. Community representatives are engaged in key initiatives in priority neighbourhoods. We will continue to work with the voluntary and community sector to increase the level of volunteering, particularly engaging with older people, young people, people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups and those living in deprived and rural areas.

Promoting the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of children and young people

The Tunbridge Wells Children's Consortium is a partnership to commission quality, integrated, preventative services for vulnerable children and young people and has developed initiatives to provide better and earlier access to services for children, improve speech and language, work with schools and reduce school exclusions. We want, along with other partnerships working in the borough, to further develop our work for children and young people.

Public, voluntary and community sectors have delivered a range of out-of-school activities and support for parents and families. We will enhance this work in areas of deprivation by the provision of a dedicated family centre and by targeting vulnerable families.

Engaging with, helping realise the potential of, and meeting the diverse needs of older people; people with disabilities; and Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

We have engaged with a wide range of groups with specific needs and designed services, such as a gardening project in Cranbrook, which benefits older people and people with learning disabilities. We have supported the work of the Access Group in conducting access street audits, and have worked with partners to engage with minority ethnic groups. We will continue to engage with groups on a regular and formal basis in order to meet their needs and develop service provision and hence positive outcomes.

The action plan at the back of this document contains more information about how we will seek to achieve these objectives.

9

Learning for all

Our aim:

To raise educational achievement across the borough and develop the opportunities for everyone to acquire the lifetime skills needed to find and remain in work.

We will achieve this by:

- Improving literacy, numeracy, behaviour and school attendance in early years, primary and secondary education and ensuring that collaboration between agencies continues to improve services for those young people most at risk, including those with additional education and welfare needs.
- Increasing the number of students leaving schools and colleges that have skills, and academic and vocational qualifications which meet business needs.
- Further developing the wider role of schools and colleges within their community, and increasing their focus on community and adult learning.

Learning in the borough

Schools in Tunbridge Wells borough generally have a record of high achievement. Most schools in the borough surpass the national average for GCSE results, and many young people go on to further education, often outside the borough. It is important that we continue to prioritise the raising of standards for all young people within education. However, there is a recognised need to support those young people with lower than average attainment levels. We need to acknowledge their educational and personal achievements, and strive to support them in adding value to their learning.

Education was ranked fourth of all of the Community Plan themes in terms of importance to those surveyed. In particular, people were concerned with improving literacy and numeracy in schools, improving secondary education, and improving early years and primary education. These views are reflected in our priority objectives for the future.

Some 12% of the population of the borough of working age have no qualifications. This is the third lowest in Kent, but represents a section of our community who may benefit from the opportunity for some educational achievement. A more concerning statistic is the fact that one in five people (20%) has poor literacy skills. Although this is below the national average, and the third lowest in Kent, it still represents a large number of people who may face barriers to employment and in everyday life. Sherwood, Southborough and High Brooms were identified as key wards in relation to education and skills deprivation.

However, the proportion of GCSE students gaining more than five GCSEs of grade C or higher was highest in the county, and sixth highest in the country, at 73%, compared with the national average of 53%. It is helpful to contextualise these figures, and recognise that four out of the nine secondary schools within the borough are selective.

Future challenges

Our future generation

Children are the key to sustainability, forming the next generation. It is crucial that we equip them with the appropriate toolkit for life, and provide support for those with additional needs at an early stage to give them the best chance. Joint working is essential in order to identify these young people and seek out the best help for them. Ensuring that all children and young people have good numeracy and literacy skills, and improving behaviour and attendance in school provide them with the best opportunities for their future. This reduces the risk of them becoming excluded from school, and therefore potentially socially excluded.

Raising standards in educationally deprived areas

In areas where there are pockets of deprivation, where people have few or no qualifications, it is important to provide support and encouragement to help people to gain confidence and learn new skills. Family learning is a positive way of enabling parents and children to learn together, and numeracy and literacy classes have been developed for adults to assist with everyday life. Employment opportunities can be enhanced through raising people's skills levels, and in doing so they gain more confidence. Between 1997 and 2003 the proportion of people with no qualifications in the borough declined by 32.57%, the highest in Kent, and far higher than the national average decline of 9.16%. This is an encouraging trend that we wish to see continue.



Meeting business needs

Despite rising examination results, there has been national and local criticism from the business community that school and college leavers are not equipped with the appropriate skills needed by employers. Businesses, schools and higher and further education establishments will need to continue to work together to ensure that school leavers are well placed in the employment market and are able to meet local employment needs.

Lifelong learning

Learning does not stop when we leave school. Providing people with opportunities to enhance their skills and learn new ones increases the capacity of communities. Schools can be at the heart of these communities, opening their doors outside normal school hours to enable other activities to be hosted and to encourage adults to continue their education.

Learning for all

Safeguarding our environment	Raising awareness of environmental issues
Maintaining a thriving local economy	Providing opportunities for increasing skills in construction, health and social care, and other sectors
Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure activities	Encouraging people to try new activities
Maintaining community safety and reducing the fear of crime	Working with schools to reduce crime, the fear of crime, and anti-social behaviour
Transport – getting around the borough	Raising awareness of more sustainable means of transport
Meeting the need for housing	Providing advice and information to prevent homelessness
Promoting health and improving well-being	Increasing awareness of health issues in schools
Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence	Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity for learning throughout their life

Building on Success

Improving literacy, numeracy, behaviour and school attendance in early years, primary and secondary education, and ensuring that collaboration between agencies continues to improve services for those with additional education and welfare needs

Schools, education providers and our multi-agency partners have worked together to develop a number of initiatives and strategies to identify those young people most at risk. Support is provided to ensure a smooth transition from primary to secondary school. Specialist, non-teaching staff are working within a number of schools to enhance the social and emotional development of young people.

Over the last two years, Literacy and Numeracy statistics have improved across seven out of eight targets. Some of the highlights include:

- 4.4% increase in attainment at Writing Level 2
- 9.9% increase in attainment at English Level 4
- 1.6% increase in attainment at GCSE Maths A* – C

Attendance at primary and secondary schools has improved over the past two years and we are working collaboratively with our multi-agency partners to develop further creative ways to ensure that this trend continues.

Increasing the number of students leaving schools and colleges that have skills and academic and vocational qualifications which meet business needs

A development strategy based on new Foundation Degrees with stronger employer links, and the capacity to deliver full and part-time Honours Degree programmes has been implemented, beginning with Fine Art in 2005, and adding to this in the future.

West Kent College, Hadlow College and the three universities based in Kent are working in partnership to develop a 'land-based' higher education programme. These are just some examples of the work we are doing to ensure that students are well-equipped for the workplace, and local employers are able to recruit people with appropriate skills to meet their needs.

Further develop the wider role of schools and colleges within their community, and increasing their focus on community and adult learning

This objective fits with the government's agenda to develop services in and around our school provision. Extended schools provide a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of children, their families and the wider community. We would like all schools and children and families to be able to access a core of extended services, which are developed in partnership with others. Many schools are already providing these extended services and have been doing so for some time. At present we have five pilot community schools.

Extended services can include childcare, adult education, parenting support programmes, community-based health and social care services, multi-agency behaviour support teams, and after-school activities. By consulting parents and involving them in the planning of services, schools will be able to develop the package of services which best meets the needs of their community.

For primary schools, this will mean working with a range of local providers to enable children and families to have access to extended services. We do not expect all primary schools to offer extended services on their own sites. For secondary schools, we want to see all secondary schools open from 8am-6pm all year round, offering a range of activities for young people.

We have recently completed an extended schools audit to see what our schools are already providing across the district. We would like to build on this to identify gaps in service provision and work closely with other agencies to enhance and develop new services.

The action plan at the back of this document contains more information about how we will seek to achieve these objectives.

What happens next?

Your feedback

We have produced this consultation draft to give you the opportunity to comment on whether you think we are addressing the right issues, whether there is anything missing from the plan, or perhaps you think something should not be included. You may have something that your organisation can contribute to the borough, which could be included in the Community Plan.

Comments are welcomed from individuals and from organisations. Whatever your comments, we would like to hear them. Please use this opportunity to tell us.

The consultation period will be from 15 May 2006 to 26 June 2006.

You can register your comments in the following ways:

By e-mail to: communityplan@tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Or by completing our on-line comments form at www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk

In writing to: Community Plan Partnership
Town Hall
Royal Tunbridge Wells
Kent
TN1 1RS

Please call 01892 554064 if you have any queries.

Once the consultation period has ended the Community Plan Partnership will consider all of the comments made and make appropriate amendments to the document. It is envisaged that the amended document will be approved in October 2006.

Working towards the vision

Some of the work in this plan has already begun, whilst other initiatives have yet to be developed. The work of all of the partners involved in this – the second Community Plan – has not been delayed during the process of reviewing the first Community Plan, and will not be delayed whilst we consult on, and amend, this consultation draft.

This is not to say that the consultation will not, or cannot, alter the programme of work. Quite the opposite is true. We look to your response to help us to steer our partnership working towards the right issues. It is important that the Community Plan continues to be a living and dynamic document that is strong enough to provide good vision and direction, yet flexible enough to adapt to change.

The Community Plan will continue to be reviewed on an annual basis, to respond to changes in trends, legislation, public opinion, and to adapt to developments in partnership working, and improvements in best practice.

The Community Plan Partnership would like to thank you for taking the time to read this document, and we look forward to receiving your response.

Research and Guidance

Substantial research has been undertaken to look at various issues in the borough, and this information has been used to help shape the Community Plan. It will also be used to help to translate the Community Plan into a 'spatial' document as part of the Local Development Framework, which will replace the Local Plan. Research undertaken includes:

- A Better Education for Children in Care (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003)
- Annual monitoring of energy efficiency of local housing stock (completed by the Kent Energy Centre)
- Annual Health Check. The Health Care Commission. March 2005
- Annual Public Health Report (2004-2005)
- Better Education, Better Futures (Sonia Jackson, 2001)
- Community Safety Audit (2005)
- Community Venues Study (2006)
- Cranbrook & Paddock Wood Cluster Plan (2006)
- Economic Overview of Tunbridge Wells Borough (October 2004)
- Education Act (2002)
- Employment Land Review (2006)
- Environment Strategy, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (2005)
- Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004)
- Extended Schools: Access to Opportunities and Services for all – A Prospectus (2005)
- Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Survey 2005 (jointly commissioned by Tunbridge Wells, Ashford and Tonbridge & Malling Councils – completed by DCA consultants)
- Hotel Needs Study (2006)
- Housing Needs Study (2005)
- Kate Barker Review of Housing Supply 2001
- Kent Community Schools Development Strategy (2004 – 2007)
- Local Transport Plan
- National Standards, Local Action: Health and Social Care Standards and Planning Framework 2005/06-2007/08. July 2004
- Parish Plans and Health Checks:
 - Cranbrook Parish Plan 2005/6
 - Cranbrook Health Check 2002
 - Hawkhurst Development Strategy 2005
- Promoting Resilience (Gilligan, 2001)
- Public Service Agreement 2 / Local Area Agreement
- Recreation and Open Space Study (2006)
- Retail Study (2006)
- Review of Young People's Housing Needs Report 2005 (completed by Caroline Kemp)
- The Role of the School in Supporting Children in Public Care (DfES, 2003)
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Housing Needs Survey 2005 (completed by DCA)
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Profile (2005)
- Tunbridge Wells Cluster Plan (2004)
- Tunbridge Wells Private Sector House Condition Survey 2003 (completed by MSC Consultancy Ltd.)
- Urban Capacity Study (2001)

- West Kent Area Investment Framework (January 2003)
- West Kent Area Investment Framework Review (September 2005)
- White Paper Our health, our care, our say - Partial regulatory impact assessment. March 2006.
- Useful links to further information on health:
 - www.dh.gov.uk (for MRSA information)
 - www.healthcarecommission.org.uk (for AHC, MRSA and performance information)
 - www.18weeks.nhs.uk/public
 - www.mtwnhstrust.nhs.uk

‘Vision without action is merely a dream.
Action without vision just passes the time.
Vision with action can change the world.’

Joel A Barker

If you require this information in large print, Braille, on audiotape or in any other format, please contact us on 01892 526121.



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