

[FRONT COVER]

Enhancing The Quality Of Life For All

Sustainable Community Plan for Tunbridge Wells Borough 2006-2011

[INSIDE COVER]

What is the 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, community and public organisations have identified, and sets out measures where collective action and joined-up thinking could make significant improvements.

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Enhancing the attractiveness of towns and other centres in the borough as thriving places to visit, shop and do business.
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3 Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure activities

Focusing on providing activities and facilities for children and young people.
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Providing appropriate places for people to pursue their leisure interests.

4 Maintaining community safety and reducing the fear of crime

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

5 Transport – getting around the borough

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.

6 Meeting the need for housing

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.

7 Promoting health and improving well-being

Promoting healthy lifestyles.

Improving access to health services.

Improving hospital cleanliness and performance.

8 Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence

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

9 Learning for all

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.

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.

The Community Plan Partnership – our aims and values

This is our second Community Plan for the borough of Tunbridge Wells, building on the success of the first. There is a challenging agenda for all partners, working together to address the issues you have told us matter

The Community Plan Partnership we have formed comprises a group of organisations working in the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. We will be responsible for delivering the action plans. Our aim is to enhance quality of life for all. This sounds simple but is by no means easy. We face many challenges and opportunities in the future, and must work together to maximise the benefits for all who live, learn, visit and work in the borough.

We are proud that the borough we serve benefits from a healthy economy with high employment, low crime rates, good educational attainment, and one of the highest quality environments in Britain. However, we recognise too that we have major challenges ahead of us.

We need to raise our area's economic potential, make affordable housing more available, and enhance local skill levels, particularly amongst young people seeking work in the area. We need to ensure that our transport systems enable us to move around the borough and to address inequalities in terms of aspirations, opportunities and outcomes for all parts of our community. We value diversity and recognise the strength it brings, and will work collectively to ensure that our borough is a place where everyone feels welcomed, valued and involved. Together we will continue to improve opportunities for everyone.

Our plan, which will now be updated each year, sets out a vision for the borough for the next five years and beyond. Economic, social and environmental sustainability will be its key focus towards enhancing the quality of life for all.

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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 with equal access to opportunities and services.
- Improved educational achievement across the borough and opportunities for everyone to acquire the lifetime skills needed to find and remain in work.

A taste of success from the first Community Plan, just a few of our achievements...

- Saving our environment – 45% household waste now recycled, amongst the top ten in the country.
- Cleaning our borough - Graffiti Cleaning Hitsquad and hotline established (01892 554159). Flytipping and abandoned vehicle hotline established (01892 548154).
- Enhancing our environment – Dunorlan Park was awarded a Green Flag – given to the best parks in the country.
- Improving training opportunities - Construction Trades Centre and Motor Vehicle Service Training Centre opened.
- Protecting the vulnerable - No Cold-calling Zone set up in Cranbrook.
- Keeping crime levels low - 15% reduction in vehicle crime and 5% reduction in burglary.
- Improving travel safety - 45% reduction in children killed or seriously injured on our roads.
- Preserving our countryside - over 97% new homes built on previously-developed sites.
- Protecting our health – Smoke-free Awards and Healthy Eating Awards Schemes established.
- Reducing hospital waiting times – no patient has to wait longer than six months for treatment and 98% of Accident and Emergency patients are seen and treated within four hours.
- Empowering communities – partnership agreement to re-develop Sherwood Community Centre and develop Sherwood Community Trust.
- Promoting volunteering - increase in volunteering by 19%.
- Educating our young people – 80% of 16 year olds achieved five or more GCSEs (or equivalent) at grades A*-C.

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 Ashford, which is rapidly growing.

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 sets out what these are, and how they will be addressed.

Linking it up

Vision for Kent

Our Community Plan reflects the priorities set out in the 'Vision for Kent', the Community Strategy for the county, and shows how these will be addressed at a local level in the borough.

The Kent Agreement

The Kent Agreement is a Local Area Agreement (LAA), a new way in which government funding is used to support the implementation of national and local priorities in local areas. This has been piloted in Kent, with an agreement between Government, Kent County Council, district councils and other partners (working through the Kent Partnership) to improve public services throughout the county. Our Community Plan contributes towards this.

Local Development Framework

The Community Plan will inform the Local Development Framework. This sets out the long-term spatial strategy, or land-use plan, 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. 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.

What you told us

To ensure that this plan reflects your priorities, we carried out a thorough review of the first Community Plan, including comprehensive consultation. This consultation was undertaken during a period of over 12 months and included: a Stakeholder Conference, Networking Event, Borough-Wide survey, Residents' Focus Groups, Gypsy and Traveller Survey, Parish and Town Council workshops, an online consultation on draft priorities, and a formal consultation on the Draft Community Plan.

We asked you what were the most important issues for the future of the borough and the Community Plan has been developed to address these.

- You told us that health issues, particularly access to health services and the need to promote healthy lifestyles, were most important to you.

- The environment was also of high importance to you, in particular recycling, keeping public areas clean and maintaining parks and open spaces.
- You told us that community safety was important, in particular reducing crime and increasing visible policing.
- You said transport was a concern, particularly the provision of public transport - especially in rural areas - reducing congestion, and parking in Royal Tunbridge Wells.
- You raised education as an important issue and we have added a new chapter entitled 'Learning for All' since our previous Community Plan, to reflect this.
- In terms of leisure opportunities, you told us that providing accessible and high-quality leisure facilities and encouraging healthy lifestyles were important to you.
- Looking at the local economy, you said that supporting local businesses and maintaining low unemployment were priorities.
- You told us that increasing the provision of affordable housing and preventing homelessness were significant issues.
- You also told us that helping people to become more involved in local decision-making and promoting the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of young children were priorities.

We asked children (aged 5 to 11) and young people (aged 11 to 16) what matters to them.

- Around a fifth of young people and a quarter of children told us they do not feel safe, with traffic being of most concern to children, and intimidating groups of people being of highest concern to young people.
- A quarter of young people were unsure whether they are healthy, and children and young people enjoy many activities but access to facilities and cost were issues for both groups.
- Although educational attainment is high in the borough, a quarter of young people told us they felt they are doing 'average', and over a fifth felt they are not doing well at school.

You helped us to identify the issues that are most important for the future of the borough, and you will see that each of the themes in the Community Plan has been developed to address these issues, and to focus on your priorities.

Partnership working

Developing the Community Plan is as much about the process as it is the final document. A wide range of partners from the public, private, voluntary and community 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 'Vision for Kent', the Community Strategy for the county of Kent. The public, private, voluntary and community 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, voluntary and community 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
- Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum
- West Kent Primary Care Trust
- Town and Country Housing Group
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- Voluntary Action West Kent
- West Kent College
- Kent Police, West Kent

The Community Plan 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
- 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 Borough Strategic Business Group
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Public Transport 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

Parish and Town Councils

Parish and Town Councils are locally-elected and have statutory powers and duties. They continue to be engaged in developing and implementing the objectives in this Community Plan and in representing the views of local people.

The urban area of Royal Tunbridge Wells is not a parished area and does not benefit from a Parish or Town Council. However, the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum was established in

2005 to help to address local issues in the town and surrounding unparished area, and is also engaged in the community planning process.

Key themes

There are nine themes that make up the Community Plan. The plan should be read as a whole as each of the themes impacts on the others. There is no significance to the order of the themes as each is as important as another.

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.

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

Children and young people

Children and young people, up to the age of 19, make up over 26% of our borough's population. They are the future. We have responded to the comments we have received from children and young people, who want to feel safer, to have more to do, to feel more healthy, to do better at school, to be able to afford to participate in activities, and to be able to access transport to utilise facilities.

People with disabilities

Over 14% of the borough's population has a limiting long-term illness, health problem or disability.¹ Disabled people have told us they would like greater independence, to be given the opportunity to work, and better access to public transport. This plan seeks to address these key issues through access to the countryside, improvements to transport, support to enter the workplace, and access to facilities.

People of black and minority ethnic origin

Our borough has a small number of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (under 3%). This means they are in a greater minority than may be the case in other areas of the country so we need to be sensitive to their needs and to ensure they achieve equal access to services.

Equality and diversity

This plan seeks to promote equality and to recognise the strength in diversity. Exclusion from opportunities not only disadvantages those who experience discrimination and harassment, but also deprives the wider community of the full contribution of their talents and energies.

¹ 2001 Census

Older people

Older people already represent around 16% of our borough's population² and this is due to increase in the future. Population forecasts estimate a 10% increase in the number of people aged between 65 and 85 living in our borough from 2006 to 2011, and a 24% increase between 2006 and 2016.³

Older people are increasingly wishing to remain independent and we need to ensure that we support them to be able to do so, such as providing adaptations to their homes. Many older people live healthy and active lives, and this plan looks at how we can support and encourage them to continue to do so, such as through leisure and volunteering opportunities. Older people are a valuable resource to the community, with one fifth of women between 60 and 64 providing informal care to others nationally.

However, older people also have needs that we seek to address in this plan. Many, particularly women, live alone, and this is increasingly likely as they become more advanced in age. Older people are also likely to require additional health care, and are more likely to suffer from a long-term illness or disability, for example. In this plan we aim to plan for the needs of older people, both now and in the future.

Deprivation

Whilst the majority of Tunbridge Wells borough is relatively prosperous, there are pockets of deprivation that exist within the borough. These pockets are moderately small in size, but nevertheless suffer in terms of poverty, health inequalities and disability, education skills and training deprivation, and crime. They face a contrast with the surrounding, more affluent areas where house prices are high. Sherwood and Showfields are both in the 20% most deprived areas in Kent and Medway, with a further six areas in the next most deprived 20%.⁴

Sustainability

One of the main purposes of the Community Plan is to promote sustainable development. This is defined as 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Brundtland Report, 1987). Specifically, sustainability looks at reconciling environmental, social and economic aims.

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.

² www.statistics.gov.uk 2003 based subnational population projections

³ Kent County Council Strategic Planning Directorate (Kent Structure Plan)

⁴ ODPM 2004, Superoutput areas

Over two-thirds of the borough of Tunbridge Wells is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; over 80% a Special Landscape Area; 2% 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. There are 14 historic parks and gardens on the English Heritage schedule and 25 on the Kent county list. 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.

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, to save 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 pressure 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. In 2005/06 39% of household waste in Tunbridge Wells borough was recycled and composted. This has doubled during the life of the first Community Plan and we have exceeded the Borough Council's statutory target of 30% by 2005/06. It has already risen to 45% during the first quarter of 2006/07. You have told us that recycling is important and we wish to continue to encourage residents to reduce the amount of waste they produce and to increase the quantity of material that is recycled and composted. We aim to do this: by expanding the brown bin scheme to enable kitchen waste to be composted, by promoting recycling and waste minimisation, and through the introduction of plastic bottle recycling, via a pilot scheme, to provide banks to collect plastic bottles at ten of the Council's recycling sites across the borough.

Air quality

Tunbridge Wells borough benefits from good air quality, but there is an area along the A26 from Royal Tunbridge Wells to Southborough where there is a higher concentration of pollutants and an Air Quality Management Area has had to be declared. It is important that air quality continues 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.

The 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 appearance of our towns. 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 look at promoting 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.

Many issues relate to more than one theme, and this diagram illustrates how they link up (*diagram to be circular*)

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

Building on success – our priorities for the future

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

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 to report incidents, and three Street Scene Enforcement officers with the power to issue fixed penalty fines or prosecute fly-tippers. We aim to continue to clear fly-tipped waste quickly and reduce the number of incidents in the borough as part of the Clean Kent Campaign.

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 Street Scene 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 our heritage 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 waste recycling has increased, with 39% of all material recycled and composted in 2005/06. We have introduced a pilot scheme for recycling plastic bottles at ten of the recycling sites across the borough.. 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.

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, Cranbrook and Hawkhurst. 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 research with the public 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.

Future challenges

Attracting new business and retaining existing businesses

The borough has a high number of businesses in relation to its population, and 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 retain existing businesses, to attract new businesses to the area and to encourage the formation of 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. There is also growing competition from Kings Hill, the Thames Gateway, and Ashford for businesses and workforce. We need to provide more support for businesses, with the retention and improvement of appropriate business accommodation, as well as improvements in transport and enhanced training opportunities.

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. Affordability of housing is an issue for keyworkers and 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. Housing issues are addressed in detail in theme 6, 'Meeting the need for housing'.

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 include parts of East Sussex), such as transport, and parking. 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 Pantiles is one of a number of important retail areas in Tunbridge Wells, and in partnership with the Pantiles Traders' Association we are investing in the area through marketing, developing empty shops and other initiatives. Due to increased competition from other retail centres in Kent we will improve the town centre to ensure it continues to compete as a quality shopping destination.

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'.

Paddock Wood and Hawkhurst have recently launched their intention to carry out a Market Towns 'Health Check' to look at how the community can work in partnership to identify the towns' 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

Many rural communities have suffered from a reduction in local businesses and services in recent years. Village shops, post offices, pubs and garages have closed. In agriculture, too, traditional types of employment have disappeared due to changes in farming methods. Villages face becoming dormitories for nearby towns and having no local services of their own.

The importance of the local village and neighbourhood shop, pub/restaurant and other services are recognised in maintaining the quality of life for village and town residents. Supporting these vital rural services, shops and visitor facilities to become sustainable ensures jobs and services are retained in our smaller settlements. We want to work with partners to help communities to assess the need for services and to plan projects in response to that need, including advice on all aspects of retaining and improving village shops and post

offices, and on many other local services. This can help develop a sustainable local economy for the benefit of all who live there. We also want to provide information on grants available for regeneration projects and on best practice already taking place in Kent.

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.

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 continue 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 Tunbridge Wells Borough Strategic Business Group 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.

Many issues relate to more than one theme, and this diagram illustrates how they link up

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	Developing opportunities and support mechanisms to provide pathways to employment for those currently not in work

Building on success – our priorities for the future

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 was completed, with Phase Two under way, and further development took place at Tunbridge Wells Business Park and Longfield Road Industrial Estate.
- We wish to provide appropriate business accommodation to encourage new business to the borough and encourage the formation of new enterprises.
- We want 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.

Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure activities

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 not everyone can get to them easily. 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. With over 16% of our population over the age of 65 (2001 Census) and growing life expectancy, it is equally important that we provide opportunities for older 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

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.

Maximising the impact of the major sporting events

The Tour de France will be coming through the borough in 2007, and 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.

The Tunbridge Wells Borough Leisure Forum

The Tunbridge Wells Borough Leisure Forum includes representatives from local sports, arts and play organisations from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. 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.

Many issues relate to more than one theme, and this diagram illustrates how they link up

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	Providing a wide range of facilities and establishments for people to use during their leisure time
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	Encouraging participation in leisure activities
Learning for all	Making use of local schools and other facilities as venues for leisure activities

Building on success – our priorities for the future

Focusing on providing activities and facilities for children and young people

- A variety of holiday activities are provided for children and young people, and we 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.

Increasing Community Safety and Reducing Fear of Crime

Our aim:

To reduce crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

We will achieve this by

- Developing partnership activity to achieve safer and stronger communities.

A safe borough

Tunbridge Wells borough benefits from a crime rate below the national average. 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

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)
-

The Community Safety Partnership carries out regular audits in order to identify trends and establish how best to target resources to tackle crime and fear of crime in the borough.

Many issues relate to more than one theme, and this diagram illustrates how they link up

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 – our priorities for the future

Through the Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Partnership and its sub-groups, a great deal has already been achieved.

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

- The 'all crime' figure for 2003/04 showed a decrease since 2000/01, and there was also a decrease in domestic burglary and vehicle crime when the 2004 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 us to improve our work to tackle anti-social behaviour, and we will continue to work to deter individuals from behaving in an anti-social manner.

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

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. 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.

Many issues relate to more than one theme, and this diagram illustrates how they link up

Transport – getting around the borough	
Safeguarding our environment	Providing transport options that have a reduced impact on our environment and improve air quality
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	Educating the wider community regarding the impact of our travel choices
Learning for all	Developing school travel plans to reduce the impact of the school run

Building on success – our priorities for the future

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 though 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

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

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. 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.

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

Affordability of homes in our borough is a key issue. 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 and community groups/advice agencies.

Many issues relate to more than one theme, and this diagram illustrates how they link up

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 in our neighbourhoods
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	Providing training in construction and building trades

Building on success – our priorities for the future

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

- The Borough Council has already changed the policy in its Local Plan so that housing developers are now required to include affordable homes on smaller sites (now 15 units or more), and has 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.
- Together 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)

- A number of supported housing projects for vulnerable people have already been developed. 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 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 are working together 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 Borough Council's *In touch* Home Improvement Agency and the Kent Energy Centre.
- The Borough Council plans 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 been working in partnership 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.

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 was 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. Most of us 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 to access 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 were the next most important.

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 keyworker 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. 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. In Royal Tunbridge Wells, 61% of GPs are due to retire in the next five– eight 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 West Kent Primary Care Trust, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust (Hospital Trust), Kent and Medway NHS Trust, and Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils. Its role includes the development of the strategic plan for delivery of national and local targets. It aims to improve the health of the population of West Kent, and to ensure that partnerships and initiatives are linked to real clinical priorities.

The Health Action Group

This group includes representatives from West Kent Primary Care Trust, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and other agencies. We work together to prevent unnecessary death, and to help people who want to live healthier lives. We aim to address:

- Smoking
- Obesity
- Sexual Health
- Mental Health
- Alcohol and drugs

Many issues relate to more than one theme, and this diagram illustrates how they link up

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 – our priorities for the future

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, we 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 substantial investment 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. Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust aims 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.

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 and community sector provides a diverse range of community services from social care, advice and counselling to support groups. Additionally, voluntary and community 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, private and voluntary and community 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 from having 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 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. Tunbridge Wells Learning Disability Partnership.
- **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.
- **Older People:** Tunbridge Wells Borough Older People's Forum.
- **Sexual Diversity:** West Kent Sexual Diversity Advisory Group.

Many issues relate to more than one theme, and this diagram illustrates how they link up

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	Pro-actively encouraging business to provide opportunities for those seeking independence through employment
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 – our priorities for the future

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

- 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. One example of a key project is the re-development of the Sherwood Community Centre and the establishment of a resident-led Community Trust, providing a valuable asset in a priority neighbourhood. This demonstrates our joint commitment to promoting strong community leadership.
- A West Kent Compact with the voluntary sector has been adopted by the Borough Council.

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.
- The borough of Tunbridge Wells is to be a pilot for a new type of partnership, a Childrens Trust. Children's Trusts bring together all services for children and young people in an area, underpinned by the Children Act 2004 duty to cooperate, to focus on improving outcomes for all children and young people⁵
- 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.

⁵ Every Child Matters website September 2006 www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

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 statistic of more concern 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 their 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.

Many issues relate to more than one theme, and this diagram illustrates how they link up

Learning for all	
Safeguarding our environment	Raising awareness of environmental issues
Maintaining a thriving local economy	Ensuring everyone has the opportunity to gain skills for employment
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 how we can improve our health through our life choices
Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence	Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity for learning throughout their life

Building on success – our priorities for the future

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 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, we will work 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.

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

Joel A Barker