

Consultation Draft

January 2006

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Tunbridge Wells **Economic Strategy**

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Foreword

Tunbridge Wells Economic Strategy Consultation Draft

This strategy follows on from the West Kent Area Investment Framework (the AIF) which was produced by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council in conjunction with Sevenoaks District and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Councils in January 2003, following an assessment of common economic issues. The AIF brought forward a range of actions relating to three main economic themes:

- Learning and Skills
- Business Development
- Regeneration of the most deprived communities

This strategy now seeks to deal with the remaining economic issues that affect the residents and businesses of Tunbridge Wells borough. It must be read in conjunction with the AIF and also the 'Economic Overview' which was produced by consultants in late 2004. These documents are available on the Borough Council's website*.

In the spring of 2005, the Borough Council convened a number of working groups and a Business Forum to help develop a strategy and a draft action plan. The working groups and the forum will consider your response to this document and will be involved in the development and implementation of a much more detailed action plan.

Prevailing economic forces are strong and increasingly subject to global influence. Working together we can help to maximise the economic strengths of the borough and build a more sustainable local economy.

The partners involved in the strategy will monitor and review the document to ensure that it continues to respond to changing circumstances.

I look forward to hearing your comments on this draft strategy.

Peter Davies

Portfolio Holder for Economic
Development and Transport
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

January 2006

*Please note – The documents can be viewed on the website www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk or are available from Sue Little on 01892 526121 e-mail sue.little@tunbridgewells.gov.uk.

Executive Summary

Background

Tunbridge Wells borough has a population of some 104,000 people. A high proportion are economically active, are highly skilled and are self employed. Unemployment levels are extremely low (generally around 1%). Nevertheless, there are pockets of deprivation, characterised by higher levels of unemployment and lack of skills.

The cost of housing is high relative to average local wages and about 40,000 people commute in and out of the borough for work purposes.

The borough has about 5,700 businesses that employ approximately 53,000 people. Retailers, hotels and restaurants comprise the largest business sector with some 15,400 jobs. Tourism contributed £194.8m to the borough's economy (2003).

There is limited land available for major commercial or housing development.

Employment in the borough 2001/02	Businesses	Jobs
Primary industries	45	1,400
Manufacturing	353	4,000
Construction	452	1,700
Retail, hotels and restaurants	1,861	15,400
Transport and communications	182	2,500
Banking and business services	1,944	12,500
Public administration, education and health	377	12,500
Other services	512	2,500

Trends and Issues

Over the last few years a number of major employers 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 Tunbridge Wells town centre the premises have been converted or redeveloped for housing, losing opportunities to accommodate new businesses, with a consequent impact on the hotel and restaurant trades. In part, these losses are offset by the formation of new small companies, however, there is a limited supply of suitable floorspace for these businesses to occupy. Furthermore, there is rising competition from Kings Hill, Thames Gateway and Ashford for businesses and workforce.

There is growing competition for all retailers. In small villages and the market towns, loss of shops means the loss of local services and jobs. Royal Tunbridge Wells is under particular pressure from out of town shopping centres and the significant investment going into most of the major towns in West Kent and East Sussex. The viability of the town is also threatened by real and perceived traffic congestion.

There has been a long-term decline in farming, with implications for a treasured countryside largely created by traditional farming methods.

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

A long term vision

The borough's economy will:

- be highly entrepreneurial – building on current strengths and accommodating new businesses in appropriate growth sectors
- be a recognised centre for business and professional services, a local growth sector with higher value added enterprises
- include Royal Tunbridge Wells – a high quality shopping and leisure destination with a broad range of employment opportunities
- include good market-town centres at Paddock Wood and Cranbrook, providing employment opportunities and services for surrounding communities
- have a strong and diverse rural economy, including the production and marketing of quality food and other crops
- have a workforce equipped with appropriate skills to capitalise on local employment opportunities
- be an area renowned for its health and education services
- not involve significant growth in the number of jobs, but the provision of better and more sustainable jobs in sectors and businesses with good potential for success

Objectives

There are three key objectives:

- to encourage the continued development of a wide range of enterprise in the borough
- to enhance the attractiveness of towns and other centres in the borough as places to work, visit, shop, and establish new, and enhance existing, enterprises
- to support the sustainable development of the more rural areas and communities

The Economic Strategy

This document provides more information about the issues, trends and objectives set out above. It also includes a draft action plan that indicates how the Borough Council and its partners will work to improve the local economy.

1 Introduction

Background – The West Kent AIF

1.1 The West Kent Area Investment Framework (AIF), prepared in 2002/3, highlighted the importance of the West Kent economy relative to Kent as a whole. The AIF also recognised that West Kent was possibly losing ground, in terms of economic growth, relative to other sub regions in the South East, notably Surrey and Berkshire. Five strategic objectives and a range of actions were identified in the AIF which have been taken forward by various sub groups of the West Kent Partnership (WKP) to shift the West Kent economy to a higher level and to deliver actions in line with the Kent Local Area Agreement (LAA). These are currently addressing issues concerning:

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

An Economic Strategy for Tunbridge Wells

1.2 In 2004, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council decided to develop a local economic strategy that would complement the West Kent AIF. It was envisaged that this would enable the development of specific local priorities and actions, pertinent to the borough. These would be designed to complement the more strategic actions at the West Kent level.

1.3 In part this approach was developed because the West Kent AIF did not consider the detailed economies of the individual districts, specific town centres or rural issues (the latter was subject to a separate county-wide study). In addition, since the production of the AIF, more detailed data from the 2001 Census, in particular, had become available.

1.4 In developing this strategy, a detailed appraisal of the borough's economy was undertaken (Economic Overview of Tunbridge Wells Borough, Elizabeth Haggart Associates, October 2004). This looked at the most recently available data, the Rural Strategic Policy Investment Framework (SPIF)¹ and other documents. This strategy draws on the overview report's key findings, which are outlined in Section 2. The Economic Overview and the AIF are available through the Council's website or from Sue Little on 01892 526121.

1.5 Informal consultation was carried out during late 2004 and early 2005. A series of workshops were held across the borough. These were useful in testing the findings of the Economic Overview and each looked at a specific topic. These included: rural issues, the land-based sector, land and property generally, tourism, Tunbridge Wells town centre, and Cranbrook market town. Other consultation took place during the Community Plan Stakeholder Conference in April 2005.

1.6 A wide range of people representing businesses, partner organisations, voluntary groups, etc, attended the workshops and conference and made valuable contributions which have been incorporated in this document.

¹ Strategic Policy and Investment Framework for Rural Kent, CSES, 2004

2 Economic Context

Characteristics of the local economy

- 1 There are a number of key characteristics of the local economy that provide the context for the strategy²:
- 104,000 residents live in the borough
 - a high level (71%) are economically active
 - unemployment levels are extremely low
 - there are below average levels of young adults living locally

Business in Tunbridge Wells borough by sector	No
Primary industries	45
Manufacturing	353
Construction	452
Retail, hotels and restaurants	1,861
Transport and communications	182
Banking and business services	1,944
Public administration, education and health	377
Other services	512
Total	5,726

Source: ABI, 2002

- about 5,700 businesses employ approximately 53,000 people
- retail, hotels and restaurants comprise the largest business sector with 15,400 jobs
- tourism contributed £194.8m to the borough's economy in 2003
- there has been an overall decline in the number of employees in the borough between 1995 and 2000 (2.2%)³
- a high level (12%) of working residents are self-employed with many living in the more rural areas
- about 40,000 people commute in and out of the borough for work purposes

Business in Tunbridge Wells borough by sector	No of jobs
Primary industries	1,400
Manufacturing	4,000
Construction	1,700
Retail, hotels and restaurants	15,400
Transport and communications	2,500
Banking and business services	12,500
Public administration, education and health	12,500
Other Services	2,500
Total	52,500

Source: ABI, 2002

² Elizabeth Haggart Associates, 2004, [www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk /business & economy/borough economy](http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/business%20&%20economy/borough%20economy)

³ 1995-2003 data, Annual Business Inquiry, 2003

- the proximity to London
- one in four jobs is filled by people living outside the borough
- a high proportion of residents have very high skill levels but this tends to mask those with low skill levels (38% with no or low qualifications)
- the cost of housing is high relative to average local wages, making housing affordability problematic
- the quality of the built and natural environments is high
- there is limited land available for major commercial or housing development

Recent trends

- 2.2 In recent years a number of often inter-related changes have occurred in or have affected the borough. These include:
- a reduction in the number of businesses operating in the land-based sector owing to the overall long-term decline in profitability
 - the loss of major non-retail employers in Tunbridge Wells town centre, particularly in the financial services sector eg NPI/AMP. Between 2002-2003 1,300 fewer financial services jobs were recorded in the borough (Source: ABI, 2003)
 - an increase in the number of small new businesses being established locally, particularly in the business services sector
 - changes in the tourism market, particularly with the availability of cheap flights for weekend breaks as well as for longer holidays, but also an increase in domestic short breaks
 - the loss of services and employment through the closure of post offices, banks, pubs, etc in rural villages
 - the conversion of former employment sites and premises to housing, in both rural and urban areas
 - recruitment difficulties for some local employers
 - increasing traffic congestion, particularly in and around Tunbridge Wells town centre
 - the increasing popularity of out-of-town shopping centres, eg Bluewater, causing Tunbridge Wells town centre to suffer from fewer long stay/high value shopping trips

Future trends

- 2.3 Alongside these, there are a number of developments that will impact on the local economy. These include developments both outside and within the borough, as well as prevailing economic changes.

Entrepreneurial culture

- 2.4 In recent years the number of businesses starting in the area has been high. There is no guarantee that this will continue in the future. In particular, if the relative shortfall of younger adults in the population is maintained, this could lead to fewer people available to consider starting a business locally. The role of schools and the provision of suitable business premises and support are also critical to success.

Retail sector

- 2.5 Increasing competition is occurring within the retail environment with the opening of new centres, such as The Fremlin Centre in Maidstone, together with the rise in the use of the internet for the purchase of consumer goods, financial and other services.
- 2.6 Set against the relative decline of Tunbridge Wells town centre as a shopping destination, concerted action is needed, as more intense retail competitiveness generally is likely to reduce margins for local retailers.

Land-based sector

- 2.7 Retail competitiveness is likely to put further pressure on the land-based sector. An additional factor is the introduction of changes in payments to farmers (The Single Farm Payment) which does not depend on production. The likely impact of these factors on producers in the borough, as well as for the maintenance of the countryside, is unclear.

Health sector

- 2.8 Within the borough the development of the new hospital looks likely to result in some services being transferred from Maidstone, with implications in terms of staffing levels and traffic. The relocation of medical services from the town centre to Pembury is likely to result in a reduction in footfall in the town. Overall, however, the wider, long term impacts are unclear.

Large developments elsewhere

- 2.9 Large scale physical developments outside the borough include the development of Kings Hill, in the short term, and Thames Gateway North Kent and Ashford in the longer term
- 2.10 It is unclear whether the anticipated longer-term employment levels in these areas will be achieved, but these may significantly change the local labour markets.

3.1 The Economic Strategy has to address a number of issues revealed by recent trends. However, it is recognised that there are major economic and societal trends that cannot be addressed locally. Furthermore, it is also recognised that there are limited resources at the Borough Council's and other partners' disposal.

Narrowing of the economic base

3.2 The narrowing of the economic base is of concern. More and more employment in the borough is service-sector based. Although some sub-sectors have reduced the sector as a whole, it grew to 82% of all employment in 2002. This narrowing has occurred through:

- economic changes generally, eg the reduced profitability and closure of businesses in the land-based sector. The stock of agricultural businesses in the borough reduced by 14% between 1994 and 2003
- major restructuring within financial services operations resulting in closures of firms in Tunbridge Wells town centre
- conversion of employment land and premises into housing owing to the greater investment return
- growth within the retail sector

3.3 Particular growth has occurred in relatively low paid customer service jobs in retail and restaurants, for example. This had required more people to travel into the area to work, owing to the generally high skill levels and aspirations of local residents (ie seeking higher paid, often London based, work).

3.4 Another facet is that the decline in major employers results in a smaller business market for local hotels, restaurants, etc.

3.5 There is a danger of the borough becoming more of a 'dormitory' for people who live in the borough but who work elsewhere, with a limited availability and range of local employment opportunities. Consultees were particularly concerned that if current perceived trends were to continue, it would make the economy increasingly unsustainable and they queried the adequacy of transportation systems to cope with this.

3.6 There was a prevailing view, from the preliminary consultations, that the Borough Council, in partnership with local businesses, needed to be clear about what sort of economy is wanted for the area. This was a key message. It was also considered desirable for the Borough Council to be more proactive, for example, through its promotion work and in partnership development.

Loss of floor space

3.7 The net loss of floor space and land for economic activities, within the borough, which occurred between 1998 and 2003, is a key issue in its own right. This has been mentioned previously as a factor contributing to the narrowing of the borough's economic base.

3.8 Employment sites and premises have been converted or redeveloped for housing use, in both rural and urban areas, although this has been tempered by gains in employment land in the more rural areas of the borough. In other cases, 'lost' sites have been developed for retail use, mainly out of town.

3.9 There have been some notable large units lost and consultees reported a limited availability of small units within the borough. This may be restricting the potential of some of the smallest businesses to grow. A lack of serviced accommodation has also been identified by consultees, with those that are available (eg the Southborough Centre) being full.

- 3.10 The borough has experienced dynamic growth in small business starts; it has the highest level of self employment in West Kent and a high number of home-based businesses, across a wide range of sectors, which may have growth potential⁴. A lack of grow-on space has been identified by consultees.
- 3.11 These small business activities could be highly sustainable given their distribution throughout the borough in both rural and urban areas, and the impressive survival rates or length of operation of many of the home-based businesses.

Decline in agriculture/horticulture in rural areas

- 3.12 Agricultural employment in the borough declined by one third between 1995 and 2002. Although varying by nature of produce, low profitability has been a feature of many sectors of the land-based economy⁵.
- 3.13 There is general agreement on the huge financial value of landscape management performed by agriculture, which is essential to maintaining the attractive countryside. This is enjoyed by residents and visitors alike and is one of the area's assets.
- 3.14 Consultees highlighted that there were many well-run businesses in the area, but that there was a risk of the sector contracting further unless other businesses can adapt to changing market conditions, including the move to Single Farm Payments.
- 3.15 Scope was identified for continued support by partner organisations in advising farmers and building on existing initiatives such as farmers' markets. In addition, more co-ordinated marketing was highlighted as an option, together with local purchasing and supply chain initiatives to strengthen the sector.

- 3.16 Diversification, including appropriate and co-ordinated leisure, recreation and green tourism, was also identified, whilst the SPIF report highlighted the need to encourage business in rural areas generally, rather than purely land-based businesses.
- 3.17 The decline in village shops, banks and, most recently, post offices, represents another facet. The loss of key services not only makes small communities less sustainable, but also removes points of contact in people's lives.

Accessibility and Congestion

- 3.18 Congestion and access issues generally were key concerns raised during informal consultation amongst businesses and residents.
- 3.19 There is also evidence of the increasing level of travel into and out of the borough for work purposes. This, together with increased use of the car for journeys to school and shopping, results in high levels of traffic congestion on certain routes and in Tunbridge Wells town centre.
- 3.20 Poor accessibility was seen as a deterrent to firms considering locating within the area, as well as to existing businesses, visitors and shoppers.
- 3.21 The development of park and ride schemes, car parking improvements (including pay on exit), longer shopping hours, travel plans and car sharing schemes, were some of the many suggestions made to improve congestion within Tunbridge Wells town centre.

⁴Forthcoming WKP report

⁵The Land Based Economy of Kent, Land Use Consultants with Kernon Countryside Consultants, 2002

Tourism/profile

- 3.22 The value of the co-ordination role and promotion activity currently carried out by Borough Council staff was appreciated and endorsed by businesses in the sector.
- 3.23 Changing tourism markets meant that some businesses were adapting much more to local activities, such as hosting/catering for weddings at weekends.
- 3.24 Also raised was the difficulty in distinguishing between tourism promotion and the promotion of Tunbridge Wells town centre or the countryside as a whole.
- 3.25 Possible solutions put forward included developing a broader marketing function, ie with a wider remit to include identity and branding for town centres, retail promotion, business promotion, etc, as well as tourism. In so doing, the Borough Council and its partners need to have a clear view about this in their objectives for tourism.

Our Approach

- 3.26 Taking all these factors into consideration, the following sections outline our proposed way forward. We define our vision and key objectives together with the proposed broad activity areas. We propose to develop a three-year rolling action plan, which is updated annually. A first draft of that plan is appended.
- 3.27 There are, however, a number of actions on the economy which are already in hand at a West Kent and Borough Council level, and are not repeated here. These include:
- work to develop a range of affordable housing for local people by the Housing Group of the West Kent Partnership⁶
 - the important area of skills development for local children aged 14+, through to further/higher education, including vocational skills development, the subject of extensive research, consultation and activity development as part of the Kent and Medway LSC's StAR process⁷
 - activity looking to improve the economic circumstances of children, young people and their families in the less affluent areas of the borough (already the subject of considerable activity locally, via the Community Safety Partnership)⁸

⁶www.westkentpartnership.org.uk/AffordableHousing

⁷www.lsc.gov.uk/kentandmedway/Documents/Learning+and+Assessment+2003-04.htm

⁸www.westkentpartnership.org.uk/WestKentPriorityCommunitiesSummaryReport0105.pdf.

4 Vision for the Economy of Tunbridge Wells

4.1 Our long term vision for the borough's economy is outlined below, together with the three strategic objectives which provide the focus of our approach.

4.2 The future economy is characterised as follows:

- highly entrepreneurial, comprising mostly small and medium-sized enterprises, building on current strengths and accommodating new businesses in appropriate growth sectors
- a recognised centre for business and professional services; a local growth sector with higher value added enterprises
- Royal Tunbridge Wells is a high quality shopping and leisure destination; a vibrant, accessible and attractive sub-regional centre with a broad range of employment, retail, tourism and leisure opportunities
- good market town centres at Paddock Wood and Cranbrook providing an appropriate range of employment opportunities and services to meet the needs of their surrounding communities
- a strong and diverse rural economy
- agricultural activity providing quality food and other crops with increased added value, that are well marketed locally and more widely, securing/preserving a treasured landscape
- a workforce equipped with appropriate skills to capitalise on local employment opportunities
- an area renowned for its good local health services, building on the investment being made in developing the new hospital, and also its education services

- no significant growth in the number of jobs, but the provision of better and more sustainable jobs in sectors and businesses with good potential for success

In summary our vision is:

For the borough of Tunbridge Wells to have an increasingly diverse and thriving economy, with profitable businesses across all sectors, providing a wide range of products, services and local employment opportunities, while nurturing high quality, rural and urban environments.

4.3 Our three key objectives are:

- to encourage the continued development of a wide range of enterprise in the borough
- to enhance the attractiveness of towns and other centres in the borough as places to work, visit, shop, and establish new, and enhance existing, enterprises
- to support the sustainable development of the more rural areas and communities

These are additional to the objectives in the AIF, relating to skills, regeneration and business development.

- 4.4 In addition to monitoring progress at detailed project level, progress towards the overall vision can be measured annually at a borough level and compared with data for West Kent, Kent and the South East through a range of regular government statistics.
- 4.5 These statistical sources are consistent with those identified to check progress of the West Kent AIF.
- 4.6 Other surveys and consultations will also be useful, but these are not necessarily carried out annually (eg The Value and Volume of Tourism – Cambridge Model).

Monitoring progress at borough level

Growth and diversity of the economy

- New businesses and business de-registrations. (Source: VAT registration data).
- Total number of registered businesses by sector. (VAT registration data).
- Number of jobs (employees in employment). (Source: Annual Business Inquiry data).
- Workforce skill levels. (Source: Labour Force Survey note subject to sufficient sample size at borough level).
- Land use planning data – Annual Monitoring Review (Planning Department).

Attractiveness of and opportunities in town/village centres and rural areas

- Perceptions of businesses and residents through borough-wide surveys and forums.

5 Key Objectives

5.1 The broad activity areas under each key objective are outlined in this section.

Objective 1:

Encourage the continued development of a wide range of enterprise in the borough

The key areas to be developed include:

- Undertake the Employment Land Review to inform the development of appropriate policies in the Local Development Framework supporting economic activities in rural and urban areas (TWBC Strategy and Development Services) and consider the need for policies to retain existing employment land and premises.
- Promote identified sites through planning briefs to optimise the use of available land and premises (TWBC Corporate Projects, Strategy and Development).
- Monitor the demand and supply of small business units and research the specific needs of small businesses (TWBC Corporate Projects/WKP/Locate in Kent).
- Attract new business ventures to the borough (including technology-based and professional service businesses), building on the strengths of the business services sector and locally available skills (TWBC Corporate Projects/Locate in Kent/TW Business Forum).
- Increase the level of local procurement (TWBC Corporate Projects/WKP/KCC/partners).

- Encourage the development of a wide range of alternative business ventures eg social enterprise, co-operative ventures and the voluntary sector organisations as viable business organisations, in support of the borough's Community Development Strategy (BLK/WKP).

Objective 1 Initial Measures

Context measures

- increase the diversity of employment
- increase the rate of business starts
- decrease the rate of business closures

Direct measures

- take up of sites/premises
- increase the number of inward investing companies
- increase the proportion of locally procured goods and services
- increase the number of social enterprises
- increase the number of local school children taking part in enterprise-related activities/work placements

- Provide advice and support for the growth of existing and new local (including home-based) businesses to widen employment opportunities (BLK/West Kent Partnership).
- Encourage the development of enterprise-related activities within local schools, local opportunities for work experience and greater involvement of businesses, to foster a continuing entrepreneurial culture (TWBC/KCC/partners).

Objective 2:

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

The key areas to be developed include:

- Establish a proactive town centre marketing/management function in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre initially (TWBC Corporate Projects).
- Develop a programme of environmental improvements to include car parks, lighting, planting, and street scene enhancements jointly with town centre businesses (TWBC Corporate Projects/KCC/Highways & Parking Services/Transportation).
- Undertake a review of options for improving accessibility of Tunbridge Wells for workers, businesses, visitors and shoppers (TWBC Transportation).
- Create a distinct identity and develop further, specific marketing initiatives, jointly with local businesses, to encourage people to shop in, and visit, Royal Tunbridge Wells initially (TWBC Tourism).

Encourage the development and enhancement of market towns (Cranbrook and Paddock Wood) (TWBC/partners).

Objective 2 Initial Measures

Context Measures

- National surveys examining relative success of:
 - town centres
 - quality of life
 - business success, etc

Direct Measures

- Successful marketing initiatives resulting in:
 - additional visits
 - longer car parking stays
 - increased turnover
 - perceptions of residents, businesses and visitors

Objective 3:

Support the sustainable development of the more rural areas and communities

The key areas to be developed include:

- 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 services, retail and other activities, as appropriate) (BLK/EANK).
- Increase the level of local produce procured by TWBC and other local companies and organisations (TWBC/partners).
- Provide continued support to the land-based sector through farmers' markets (TWBC Corporate Projects).
- Encourage partner organisations to provide continued support to the land-based sector, including the development of supply chain, marketing and distribution initiatives (TWBC Corporate Projects/BLK).
- Seek opportunities for development and facilitate joint action by necessary partners (TWBC Corporate Projects).

Objective 3 Initial Measures

Context Measures

- maintain/increase employment in rural areas
- employment/land use data

Direct Measures

- increase in the value and range of locally procured goods and services
- increase in number of businesses and people at farmers' markets
- development of specific projects
- perceptions of residents, businesses and visitors

6 Role of the Borough Council

The Borough Council will work closely with businesses and partners to maximise opportunities for continued economic development.

The role of the Borough Council will comprise:

- monitoring the local economy and developing the rolling programme
- development of specific initiatives
- working with businesses
- working with those partners who can provide support
- seeking and acting on feedback from businesses and residents

Our partners include:

- Businesses
- Business Link Kent (BLK)
- Enterprise Agency of North Kent (EANK)
- Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)
- Hadlow College
- Heart of Kent
- Kent County Council (KCC)
- Kent Tourism Alliance (KTA)
- Learning and Skills Council Kent and Medway (LSC)
- Locate in Kent (LIK)
- Produced in Kent
- Tourism South East
- West Kent Chamber of Commerce (WKCC)
- West Kent College
- West Kent Partnership (WKP)
- Enterprise Agency of West Kent (EAWK)
- Learning and Skills Group (LSG)
- Voluntary Action West Kent (VAWK)
- Rural Working Group (RWG)
- Safe Town Partnership (STP)
- Town Centre Forum (TCF)
- Royal Victoria Place (RVP)

This Draft Action Plan provides a first impression of the sorts of actions needed to address the issues outlined in the main part of the Economic Strategy.

Following consultation, work will be needed to:

- form necessary partnerships
- gain the agreement of partners to a more detailed (SMART) action programme
- find the resources needed to deliver the programmes of work and action

Objective 1: Encourage the continued development of a wide range of enterprise in the borough

No	Possible Action	Indicative Timescale	Lead Agency	TWBC Lead Team	Possible Partners	New Resource Required
1.1	Complete an Employment Land Review to ensure the Local Development Framework takes full account of the need for employment floor space.	Year 1	TWBC	Strategy & Dev	~	No
1.2	Develop better intelligence/monitoring relating to the demand for floorspace to provide a basis to promote development and/or retention of valuable employment land and floorspace.	Year 2	TWBC	Corp Projects	LiK and Local Agents	Yes
1.3	Promote the development of employment opportunities (identified in the Local Plan) and vacant sites and premises to provide accommodation for growing local and selected inward investing companies.	Ongoing	TWBC	Corp Projects	TWBC S&D, LiK and Local Agents	Yes
1.4	Work up development briefs for key sites to provide a framework for the development of key employment land and building.	Ongoing	TWBC	Strategy & Dev	~	No
1.5	Re-activate work to identify the demand and supply of small business units across West Kent to provide evidence for marketing the area and key sites to potential developers.	Year 2	WKP	Corp Projects	T&MBC and SDC	Yes
1.6	Continue to deliver high quality business start-up and business development advice across all sectors (including 'sustainable' business practice) to help new and established businesses to succeed.	Ongoing	BLK	Corp Projects	EAWK	No
1.7	Support the establishment and development of a wide range of 'business' ventures, including voluntary organisations, social enterprises and development trusts to provide training and employment opportunities to all those who seek to work and to provide services to key communities.	Ongoing	VAWK	Corp Projects	BLK	Yes
1.8	Develop and implement an Inward Investment Strategy to attract key targeted businesses across all sectors (including retail) to the borough.	Year 2	TWBC	Corp Projects & Tourism	Business Forum and Working Groups, LiK, BLK	Yes
1.9	Implement new TWBC procurement procedures and review effectiveness in ensuring local procurement where appropriate.	Year 3	TWBC	Finance	KCC	No
1.10	Encourage local businesses and organisations to procure local goods and services.	Year 3	TWBC	Corp Projects	WKCC, FSB	Yes
1.11	Review the scale of enterprise-related activities in local schools.	Year 3	WKP Skills Group	Corp Projects	Schools	No
1.12	Develop and implement an action plan to enhance enterprise-development initiatives in schools/colleges.	Year 3	LSC	Corp Projects	Schools, Colleges, WKP Skills Group	Yes

NB For the full names of the Lead Agencies and Partners section abbreviations – see page 17

Objective 2: Enhance the attractiveness of towns and other centres in the borough as thriving places to visit, shop, and establish new enterprises

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No	Possible Action	Indicative Timescale	Lead Agency	TWBC Lead Team	Possible Partners	New
2.1	Establish a proactive Town Centre Forum (TCF) in Royal Tunbridge Wells (RTW) to improve communication between the partners; oversee the development and implementation of projects to attract visitors to the centre and ensure they enjoy the experience.	Year 1	TWBC	Corp Projects	Key retailers and land owners, KCC Highways, TWBC Parking, Tourism, etc	No
2.2	Develop a Marketing Partnership to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ develop a joint vision on retail mix for RTW and its component parts ■ identify target retailers ■ market vacancies to target retailers ■ retain existing national retailers ■ initiate and consider visitor surveys ■ market RTW town centre to its catchment area ■ develop an annual programme including special promotions and events 	Years 1-3	TCF Marketing Partnership	Corp Projects	RVP, Trader Groups, TWBC Tourism	Yes
2.3	Enhance and maintain RTW shopping website to ensure the town maintains a high and attractive profile to potential users.	Year 2	TWBC	Corp Projects	RVP and Traders already on the shopping website	No
2.4	Review the support and potential for a Business Improvement District (BID) in RTW.	Years 2-3	TCF	Corp Projects	~	No
2.5	Introduce an 'integrated street management' pilot scheme in RTW to raise the quality of the town centre environment.	Years 1-2	TWBC	Consultant	~	No
2.6	Continue to support the Safe Town Partnership.	Ongoing	STP	Corp Projects	Traders already members of the scheme, TWBC, Police	No

NB For the full names of the Lead Agencies and Partners section abbreviations – see page 17

2.7	Seek to prioritise components of the Transport Plan for the area to manage traffic on congested parts of the radial routes and in RTW town centre.	Ongoing	TWBC	Highways	KCC	Yes
2.8	Encourage businesses to develop transport plans for their employees to reduce congestion and improve air quality.	Ongoing	TWBC	Strategy & Dev	Business Forum and the TCF	No
2.9	Review parking policies and practices to include short term (eg freedom to 'feed the meter' and use the same ticket in different car parks on any one trip) and long term (eg park and ride) opportunities, to improve customer satisfaction with ease of access to the town centre.	Years 1-2	TWBC	Parking	~	Yes
2.10	Establish a programme of improvements to the environment of car parks to provide a suitable welcome to all visitors.	Years 1-3	TWBC	Parking	~	Yes
2.11	Develop and implement a Cranbrook Town Centre Marketing programme (including customer surveys, events development and promotion) to help support the continued success of this important service centre.	Years 1-3	Cranbrook Rural Partnership	Tourism, Corp Projects	CBA, CPC, Tourism Forum	Yes
2.12	Implement the Cranbrook Tourism Strategy to draw additional visitors to attractions and accommodation in the area and help sustain local businesses.	Years 1-3	TWBC	Tourism	Tourism Forum, Cranbrook Rural Partnership	Yes
2.13	Examine the potential for developing the evening economy in Cranbrook town centre to help sustain local businesses.	Year 1	Cranbrook Rural Partnership	Corp Projects	Queen's Hall, local restaurants and hotels, Tourism Forum	
2.14	Review opportunities for delivering SEEDA Market Town projects in Paddock Wood and Hawkhurst to help support the continued success of these important service centres.	Years 1-2	Kent Partnership	Corp Projects	PWTC, HPC	No
2.15	Examine the need for joint marketing initiatives in Paddock Wood and Hawkhurst to sustain these centres.	Year 2	PWTC, HPC	Tourism	Local businesses	No
2.16	Bring forward the development of the food store and the 'Hub' in Southborough to underpin the vitality and viability of the centre.	Year 2	TWBC	Corp Projects	KCC, STC, Coop	Yes
2.17	Market the Tunbridge Wells area as a tourist destination to draw a low volume of high spending visitors to sustain heritage aspects of Tunbridge Wells including historic parks, gardens and other visitor attractions. Support businesses serving rural communities and to support the vitality and viability of them as key centres.	Ongoing	TWBC	Tourism	Southern Cities, Kent Tourism Association, Heart of Kent, Seven Wonders, National Trust, etc	Yes
2.18	Develop partnerships which enhance and promote tourism and heritage creating packages and joint marketing opportunities.	Year 2	TWBC	Tourism	The attractions	No

NB For the full names of the Lead Agencies and Partners section abbreviations – see page 17

Objective 3: Support the sustainable development of the more rural areas and communities

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No	Possible Action	Indicative Timescale	Lead Agency	TWBC Lead Team	Possible Partners	New Resource Required
3.1	Ensure the Local Development Framework takes full account of the need for employment floor space to allow the growth and retention of employment and services in rural areas and settlements.	Years 1-2	TWBC	Strategy & Dev	~	No
3.2	Facilitate a Rural Working Group to identify and bring forward initiatives including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ joint and direct marketing ■ distribution channels for local food ■ diversification of production and added value ■ development of tourism and business floor space ■ strategic investment for crop diversification (eg woodchip facilities) ■ to develop sustainable farming and the retention of a treasured countryside 	Years 1-3	RWG	Corp Projects	NFU, Hadlow College, BLK, Farmers, LSC etc	Yes
3.3	Seek the provision of generic and specialist business support and training in rural areas to sustain rural enterprises and services.	Ongoing	WKP Skills Group	Corp Projects	RWG	No
3.4	Continue to deliver farmers' and special markets.	Ongoing	TWBC	Corp Projects	Producers	No
3.5	Examine how best to support rural services, shops and visitor facilities to become sustainable to ensure jobs and services are retained in smaller settlements.	Year 2	TWBC	Corp Projects	Village Shops Associations, relevant businesses and BLK	No

NB For the full names of the Lead Agencies and Partners section abbreviations – see page 17

8 Management and Co-ordination

In order to manage and co-ordinate the implementation of the strategy, a number of actions are required:

- Establish a monitoring framework for the local economy and undertake an annual review of the key economic indicators.
- Ensure that research and intelligence carried out at a West Kent/county level is utilised to inform the ongoing Action Plan development.
- Review the success of the Economic Strategy Actions on an annual basis. Amend and roll forward a three-year programme.
- Maintain the interests of the borough through active participation in the West Kent Partnership at both officer and member levels (including involvement in the Partnership sub-groups)
- Review current practice and ensure appropriate representation of the borough in a range of economic partnerships (at local, sub regional and regional levels).

9 LDF Studies impacting on the Economic Strategy

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Subject/Title	Author	Programme
Urban Capacity Study	Strategy and Development Service	Spring-Autumn 2005
Housing Market Assessment inc Local Needs Assessment	Consultants	Spring-Autumn 2005
Retail Study	Consultants	Summer-Autumn 2005
Employment Land Review	Strategy and Development Service and Consultants	Summer-Winter 2005
Hotel Needs Study	Consultants	Spring-Autumn 2005
Community Facilities Study	Strategy and Development Service	Spring-Autumn 2005
Car Parking Provision in Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre	Strategy and Development Service and KCC Highways	Summer-Autumn 2005

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