

Vision2026

Enhancing the Quality of Life for All

Operating in a changing environment

The forces that shape local government are constantly changing. The successful local Councils of the future will be those which best understand and anticipate these changes and respond with confidence, flexibility and commitment. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will ensure that it is well positioned to be able to respond to challenges and ensure we accrue benefits from the opportunities that arise in this complex changing environment

Changing Demographics

The future will clearly be about a **larger, older population**: demographic projections suggest that the population will increase, with a 50 per cent increase in people aged 65 plus between 2001 and 2016; at the same time, there will be a significant decrease in 0-15 and 25-44 year-olds in the borough. It is predicted that this will place **significant pressure on the economy, housing, infrastructure and care services within the borough**,

In the area of housing, one-person households it is predicted will increase by 30 per cent between 2001-2016, the **number of older people living on their own will grow, there will be a national rise in demand for residential care home** places by 23 per cent and, it is predicted that, by 2016, 23 per cent of households will be living in accommodation unsuitable for their needs

In terms of the economy, the borough currently enjoys low unemployment (the lowest levels in Kent) but it is heavily reliant on the service-sector; male full-time earnings are below the South East average. At the same time, 19.7 per cent of the working age population is economically inactive, 8.5 per cent are benefits claimants and 14.5 per cent of the population have a long-term illness. Worryingly, **30 per cent of the working-age population have low or no qualifications**.

In terms of the environment, it is likely that a major challenge will continue to be balancing the **ever-increasing demand for housing** with a strong desire to **preserve the built and natural environment** which makes the borough an attractive place to live, work and enjoy life.

Congestion – already identified as a key issue for residents, visitors and businesses – is likely to remain an issue and **key improvements to transport infrastructure will be vital to economic prosperity. Climate change is and will increasingly become a major problem** and the Council will have to think about both reducing the impact of the borough on climate change but also (through its planning and building control functions) improving the resilience of the borough to adapt and respond to events such as flooding. As an organisation, it will also have to think about how to reduce its carbon footprint.

For public services, it is almost inevitable that they will be **facing higher expectations**, cost constraints and, for local government, it is likely that structures will be reviewed and, in all probability, changed. **Partnership working will be key to meeting higher expectations and dealing with resource scarcity**.

Customer as 'King'

Customer choice and service personalisation will be at the heart of service delivery in the future. The Council must continue to work to ensure all communities and service users feel engaged and involved in both shaping and monitoring services.

Research and consultation is essential for highlighting public priorities in the borough. This Vision is based on the responses of a comprehensive range of surveys and consultation exercises. It also includes feedback from key stakeholders (for example borough, county and parish councillors) and qualitative information from residents. The key highlights are set out below.

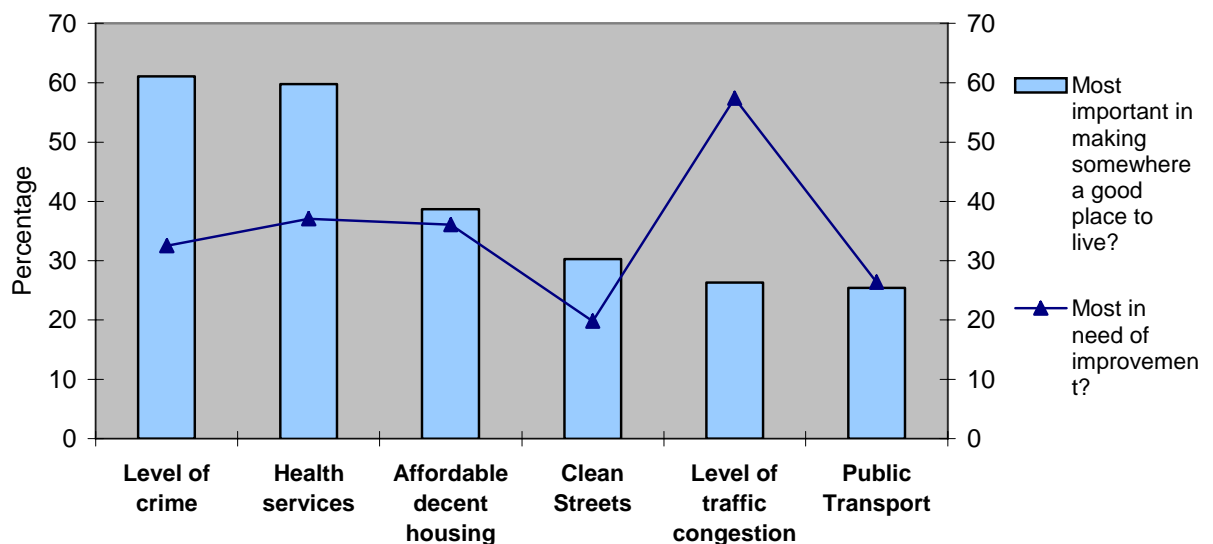
BVPI General Survey (2006/07)

The BVPI General triennial survey is completed as a statutory requirement set by central government and is shortly to be replaced by the Place Survey in 2008/09. In 2006-07, questionnaires were sent to 2,400 households, of which 1,174 completed and returned their forms, producing a response rate of approximately 50%.

Residents regarded the following six indicators as most affecting quality of life (see figure 1 below):

- Level of crime
- Health Services
- Affordable decent Housing
- Clean Streets
- Level of traffic congestion
- Public Transport

Quality of life: Top six indicators

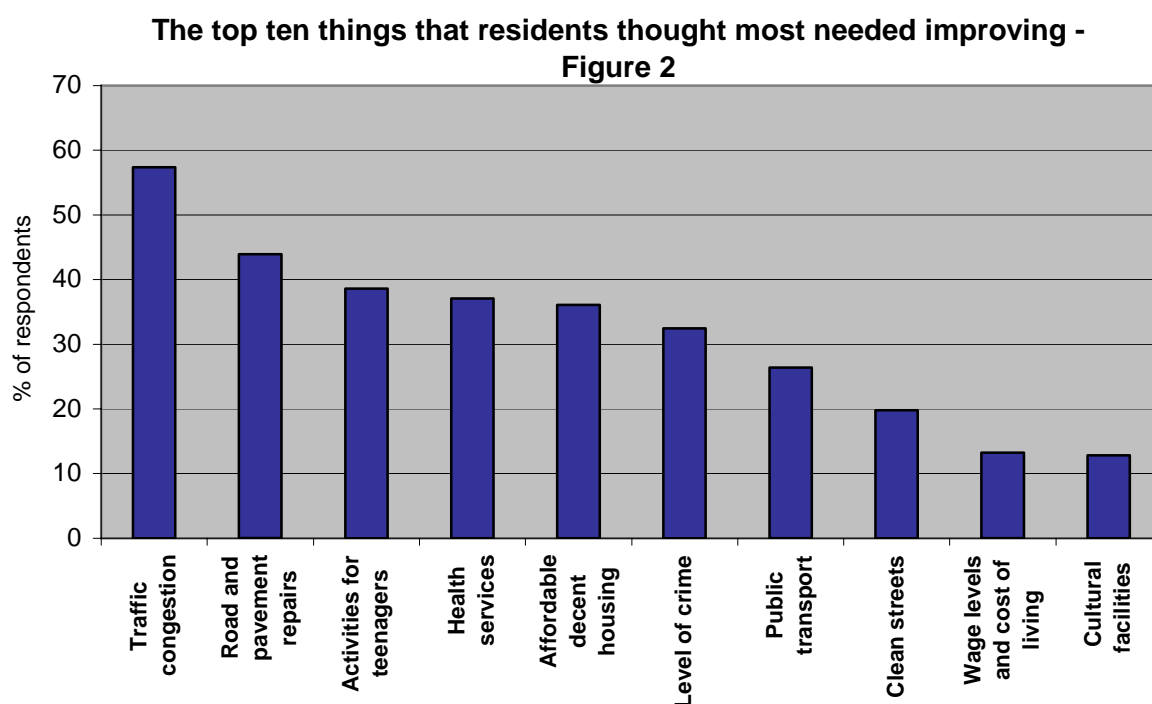


The top three indicators that respondents thought most needed improving were:

Traffic congestion (57.4%)
Road and pavement repairs (43.9%)
Activities for teenagers (38.6%)

In fact the top ten indicators that respondents thought most needed improving covered a wide spectrum of issues (see figure 2 below). These indicators indicate and supports the Council's commitment to work closely with other agencies in delivering improved services in the borough.

The Council's commitment to working closely with other agencies highlights the need to continue doing so in the future.



In addition to these key areas, the survey also highlighted the need for the Council and partner agencies to improve communication with residents. Residents felt less well informed on:

- What the Council and partners are doing to tackle anti-social behaviour
- How well the Council is performing
- How well the Council is delivering on their promises
- Where we are meeting Value for Money

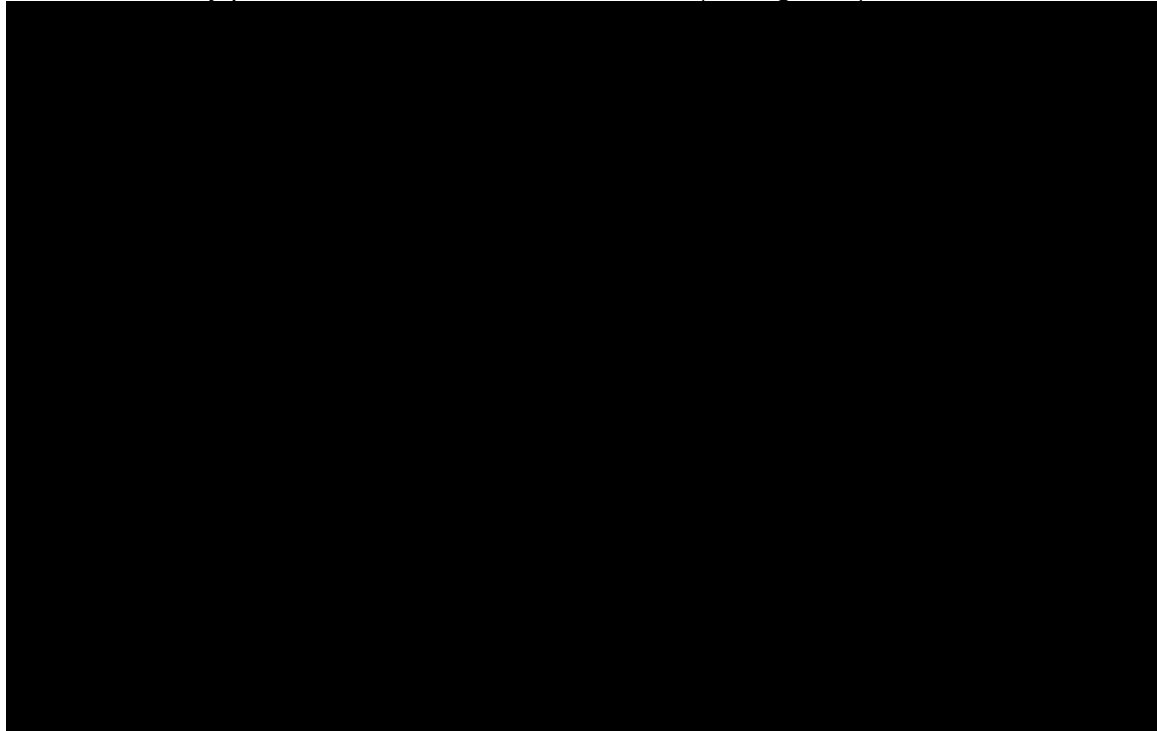
Borough Wide Survey 2007/08

Eight borough wide surveys have been completed since 1999/2000. The survey uses face to face methodology and targets approximately 1,000 residents across the borough, ensuring a representative sample of age, gender, employment status, ethnicity and location by super output area.

Residents were generally satisfied with their local area as a place to live. However there were some issues that residents least liked about the borough of which the top three were:

- Traffic congestion (25%)
- Poor quality roads/highways (15%)
- Lack of facilities for young people (14%)

Residents were also asked to think about the future and what they regard as the top three community priorities for them and their families (see figure 3).



So the top three community priorities recorded for residents were:

- Good community safety and policing (55%)
- Education (43%)
- Health and well-being (36%)

Once again this survey also highlighted the need for the Council and partner agencies to improve communication with residents. 71% of respondents thought that the Council needed to make more effort to find out what people want and only 51% of residents thought that the Council acted on residents concerns.

Destination 2026

Our vision is simple. **We seek to enhance the quality of life for all.** This is a key message we have received from a wide range of consultation exercises – not least those that accompanied the development of our Sustainable Community Plan. For the Council, this means that **we will continue to celebrate the past and shape the future so that, by 2026, we will have healthy confident communities within a prosperous, accessible and attractive borough.**

By 2026 the borough of Tunbridge Wells will be characterised by stronger communities, who feel safer, well served, well housed and with access to excellent health services. Our residents will benefit from better education and skills development, leading to a thriving and diverse local economy. Tunbridge Wells will be a regional hub, attracting visitors and new business to the borough – both from elsewhere and from within the borough. Everyone will benefit from a range of cultural and leisure offers, in an attractive environment. Underpinning our ambitions is a key desire to ensure the borough remains sustainable, in terms of our current and future prosperity and ensuring the benefits enhance the quality of life for all.

We recognise that we will need to work with all our communities and a range of partners to ensure we can deliver this vision for 2026. The Council will lead in delivering, shaping and lobbying partners and Government to ensure we maximise benefits for our current and future communities.

At the heart of our vision will be the enhancing our reputation for providing excellent customer, staff and citizens experience. Based on our Values, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will have a reputation for:

1. Developing a high quality customer experience, so people understand what they get from the Council. This will be based on our values of customer focus, respect, transparency and responsibility;
2. Creating a supportive, development and listening environment for our staff so that they are able to excel and feel valued;
3. Being open, involving, engaging and transparent with our customers, and the public, around our services and their delivery. Understanding what communities want and being prepared to be shaped by this.

Progress to Date

In 2005, the Council set itself a focused set of four Corporate Priorities:

1. Promote and maintain a thriving and diverse local economy.
2. Care for our environment.
3. Have housing suitable for local people.
4. Develop safer and stronger communities.

The priorities were also underscored by three supporting ‘customer service commitments’ which set out the Council’s approach to how it delivers its services:

- delivering high quality services to our customers
- improving customer service and satisfaction

- ensuring that we are well managed, proactive and deliver value for money services

These priorities have served us well and a great deal has been accomplished in each of these areas. Further details are provided in the Strategic Plan.

In 2007/08, we met 80 per cent of targets of our Key Performance Indicators, Best Value Performance Indicators and Local Performance Indicators. These measure the extent to which we are achieving our Corporate Priorities. Overall, using the Audit Commission's base of indicators, the Council was in the top 11 per cent of District Councils for three-year improvement.

The Council has had a high degree of success in improving its performance in priority areas.

Consultation Draft

The shape of things to come

Our Vision to enhance the quality of life for all our communities can be captured in four words: 'Prosperous', 'Green', 'Healthy' and 'Confident'.

For each of these headings, we have set out our vision for the borough and the Council. We will seek to deliver these aspirations through our medium-term Strategic Plan and other associated strategies. We have also set out some key commitments: explicit projects we will look to have completed by 2026.

Prosperous

By 2026:

- Royal Tunbridge Wells will be best town centre in the South East to live, work and visit supported by thriving centres of Paddock Wood, Southborough and Cranbrook
- The borough more generally will have enhanced its natural and built assets while planning for and accommodating future growth
- The borough will have capitalised on the new PFI hospital at Pembury by using it as a hub to boost the health based economy of the wider area.
- The borough would use its designation as a Regional Hub to increase investment infrastructure, such as roads and public transport
- We will have increased local employment opportunities for our residents
- We will ensure that people have access to training and educational opportunities to upskills them whilst seeking employment or in existing work employment

By 2026, the Council will have:

- Increased the amount and quality of retail and commercial floorspace consistent with enhancing the character of our towns
- Given our rural economy a competitive advantage by support successful industries such as tourism, quality food production and explored biomass heating and power generation
- Transformed the environmental quality and choice of homes on our larger estates in partnership with Town and Country Housing Group
- As a result of partnership working with Kent County Council, provided high quality public transport options to allow more people to choose how to get to work, the shops and leisure activities.
- Work with employers and training providers ensure those no in employment or in need for upskilling are provided with the training required.

Green

By 2026:

- Tunbridge Wells will remain a beautiful place to live, work and relax.
- Transformed the vacant, derelict and run down sites that currently spoil some of town centres
- The historic built environment that provides a powerful sense of identity will be maintained in good order and enhanced by high quality redevelopment of existing poor built assets, set within an immaculate and distinctive public domain.

- The superb countryside of the Borough will be managed for sustainable objectives that protect and enhance its contribution to the quality of life whilst accommodating a vibrant rural economy.
- All residential properties in the Borough should conform to the highest standards of sustainable resource conservation to minimise energy use, carbon footprint, fuel poverty and water consumption.
- Residents, workers and visitors will enjoy sustainable transportation options that reduce congestion, minimise air pollution and energy use, free up road space for other public domain use, whilst maintaining individual choice of transport mode and enhancing accessibility to centres.
- The citizens of the Borough will continue to enjoy easy access to open space for recreation, including parks and play areas and the countryside.
- The Borough will have locally derived energy resources to reduce carbon footprint including renewable energy (wind and solar) and biomass.
- The need to travel to work within and outside the Borough will be reduced by increased opportunities to work from home, and encouragement of green travel plans amongst business and public sector employers.
- The quantity of waste generated by citizens of the Borough will significantly decline supported by less packaging, and coupled with recycling and composting activity.

By 2026 the Council will

- ensure a quality built environment through a pro-active planning approach incorporating achievement of good design in new development, coupled with the delivery of a high standard of public domain.
- use its planning, economic development and tourism resources to sustain and protect the character of the countryside.
- ensure that all new residential properties are built to the highest standards in relation to energy and water conservation and insulation through the operation of its building control services.
- We will support improvement and renovation of sub-standard residential properties already in existence through a pro-active housing renewal grants and local programmes and assist occupants to install energy efficiency installations.
- participate with the Transportation Authority to develop a contemporary public transport plan to improve quality of rail links by working with service providers through a quality bus partnership in order to counter pollution and sustain air quality and to encourage modal shift whilst retaining freedom of choice for travellers in the Borough.
- maintain the quality of open spaces directly under its management and by the provision of advice support other open space providers across the Borough.
- work with providers of sustainable energy to maximise the potential contribution from this source to the energy requirements of the Borough. The Borough Council will work with the private sector and public sector employers to minimise their carbon footprint. The Borough Council will seek to lead by example in this area.
- campaign through educational programmes and through the operation of practical systems to reduce the amount of waste generated in the Borough in conjunction with the Kent Waste Partnership.
- seek to reduce its own use of resources and its carbon footprint through energy efficient design and through relocation to more modern accommodation.

Healthy

- By 2026 residents of priority areas of the Borough that currently experience poor health outcomes, will have improved to the level of the best today. Health Outcomes for the population as a whole will substantially exceed national, regional and county averages.
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- The community will be active with very high levels of participation in physical and cultural activities, engagement in organisations and volunteering.
- The housing market in the Borough will provide a range of high quality homes meeting the housing needs of all residents with a range of tenures including affordable homes which provide real housing options for local people.
- The housing conditions of the Borough's most vulnerable residents will have significantly improved through targeted support.
- Residents will enjoy improved home energy efficiency, which will positively benefit both them (through reduced fuel costs and improved living conditions) and the environment through reduced carbon emissions.
- Our older population will be active independent participants in the borough with increased opportunities to take part in recreation and physical activities

By 2026 the Council will

- work with its partners to understand the causes of all health outcomes in priority neighbourhoods and elsewhere, and particularly the needs of young and elderly persons, and put in place programmes and activities to counteract these problems and to improve life expectancy.
- work with partners to prepare for the projected increase in the numbers of elderly people within the borough
- provide an array of facilities encompassing sport and fitness centres, open spaces and play areas, theatre and museum operation that are accessible to all and maximise opportunity for active living.
- enable the provision of new affordable homes both to rent and part buy. The Council will significantly reduce homelessness through interventionist advice and through accessible housing options for local people.
- improve housing conditions through targeted support to assist vulnerable people to carry out essential repairs and improvements to their homes.
- have improved the energy efficiency to both new and existing homes to reduce fuel poverty and carbon footprints .
- Promote healthy lifestyles by emphasis on sport, fitness, healthy eating, reduction of smoking etc. in partnership with local Health Authorities and Trusts

Confident

By 2026:

- The borough will continue to have some of the lowest levels of crime in the South East and, as a result, communities will feel safe
- A thriving civic culture will have developed with high levels of volunteering and public involvement in shaping and informing public services
- Tunbridge Wells will be a cohesive borough – a place where people with different backgrounds, faiths and beliefs and where different generations will get on well together
- The borough will be a place of opportunity – with high levels of educational attainment and skills, ease of access to a range of good quality employment and opportunities for independent living

- Families and in particular young people will be supported to achieve their full potential
- Ensure adults and children have access to lifelong learning through improved access to educational facilities
- Our older population will be fully engaged in ensuring services that are provided are personalised and increase their ability to lead active independent lives.
- Ensure our new communities are integrated within the borough
- Tunbridge Wells will be recognised as one of the major cultural destinations in the South East

By 2026, the Council will:

- Have developed a culture of community involvement and volunteering amongst staff and councillors
- Have taken advantage of voluntary and community organisations in the provision of services
- Be broadly representative of the communities it represents
- Have significantly increased civic participation in both formal decision-making processes and informing the overall direction of Council policies and services

Consultation Draft

Turning the vision into a reality – milestone for achievement

We operate in an ever more complex environment and will be able to deliver few of these aspirations in isolation. We have consulted with partners on this Vision but it remains the Council's vision; a separate process is already underway with the Council's Local Strategic Partnership to refresh and extend the Council's existing Sustainable Community Strategy. In practice, many aspirations for the borough will be shared by us and partners but, as the elected authority with overall responsibility for 'place-shaping' across the borough, we felt it was important to set out our vision and use it to inform the development of the new Sustainable Community Strategy.

Key Commitments (Suggestions for discussion at this stage)

Our Strategic Plan sets out our priorities for the medium-term – in other words, the next five years. However, for a number of key challenges facing the borough – climate change, balancing the housing market, improving our retail rankings and tackling congestion – require a longer-term perspective. As part of the process of developing our Vision, we have developed a number of key long-term commitments:

- Dualling the A21
- Delivered a combined heat and power facility within the borough
- 10 per cent of people in the borough will be volunteering on a regular (at least annual) basis
- Completed the redevelopment of the borough's four major towns
- Built xxx houses, yyy of which will be 'affordable'
- Increased GDP in the borough by xxx / contributed yyy per cent increase to the GDP of the South East
- Increased the number of 60+ residents involved in volunteering annually.
- Narrowing health inequalities by 2010
- Modal shift???
- Adult participation in sports and active recreation will increase by xxx % (awaiting data from KA2)
- Reduced outward commuting and inward commuting???