

SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

CONSULTATION DRAFT

JULY 2014

Foreword

Sevenoaks District offers both exciting opportunities and interesting challenges in terms of its economy. With strong retail offers, a highly skilled workforce and unrivalled connectivity; the District can look forward to a prosperous and bright future. We continued to perform excellently throughout the recession, with town centre vacancies some of the lowest in the country and business survival rates continuing to be higher than the county and national averages. We continue to attract strong inward investment and ensure that the most innovative and exciting companies stay here in Sevenoaks District.

Despite the success of the local economy, this is no time to rest on our laurels. As a council we are proud of being proactive with our businesses. One of our biggest challenges is retaining land in employment use at a time when residential values are compelling for potential developers. This strategy aims to support for business, attract inward investment and growth and provide more innovation and employment opportunities. We want to continue to make this a great place to live, do business and prosper.

Cllr Roddy Hogarth

Portfolio Holder for Economic Development

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INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the major priorities for economic development in the District over the next three year period (2014-2017). Sevenoaks District Council is committed to developing the local economy and securing future jobs and growth. The document sets out 8 key priorities which support the vision set out in the Sevenoaks District Council Corporate Plan and the Sevenoaks District Council Community Plan. Specifically, it supports *Promise 5* in the Corporate Plan which is 'Supporting and developing the local economy'. It also supports the 'Dynamic Economy' and 'Sustainable Economy' priorities in the Community Plan.

We have consulted widely with the business community and partners to shape the content of this strategy. We are confident that the strategy reflects the concerns and aspirations of local businesses.

Who have we consulted?

The following groups have been consulted in the preparation of this document:

- Businesses through a District-wide questionnaire.
- Business Support organisations
- Inward investment organisations
- Tourism groups and businesses
- Rural support groups and businesses
- Sevenoaks District Council Members
- Town Partnerships
- Town and Parish Councils
- Sevenoaks District Council officers engaged in Planning, Property and Housing and Business Rates
- Young people at the Youth Café at Stag Community Arts Centre, Edenbridge House Project and students at Hextable School

ABOUT SEVENOAKS DISTRICT

Sevenoaks is a large District lying to the south east of London with an overall area of just over 143 square miles (370 square km). It is long and relatively narrow measuring 20 miles north-south by about 7 miles east-west. The Thames Gateway lies to the north, Surrey and East Sussex to the west and south and the rest of Kent, including Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells to the east and south east.

Despite adjoining the outer edge of London it is predominantly rural with 93% of the District designated as Green Belt. The quality of the landscape is a distinctive feature of the area. The national significance of the landscape is recognised by the inclusion of 60% of the District within either the Kent Downs (to the North) or High Weald (to the South) Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are also extensive areas recognised for their nature conservation importance. It is rare to find such extensive areas of high quality landscape so close to London. This uniqueness makes Sevenoaks District one of the most desirable places to live and work in the Country.

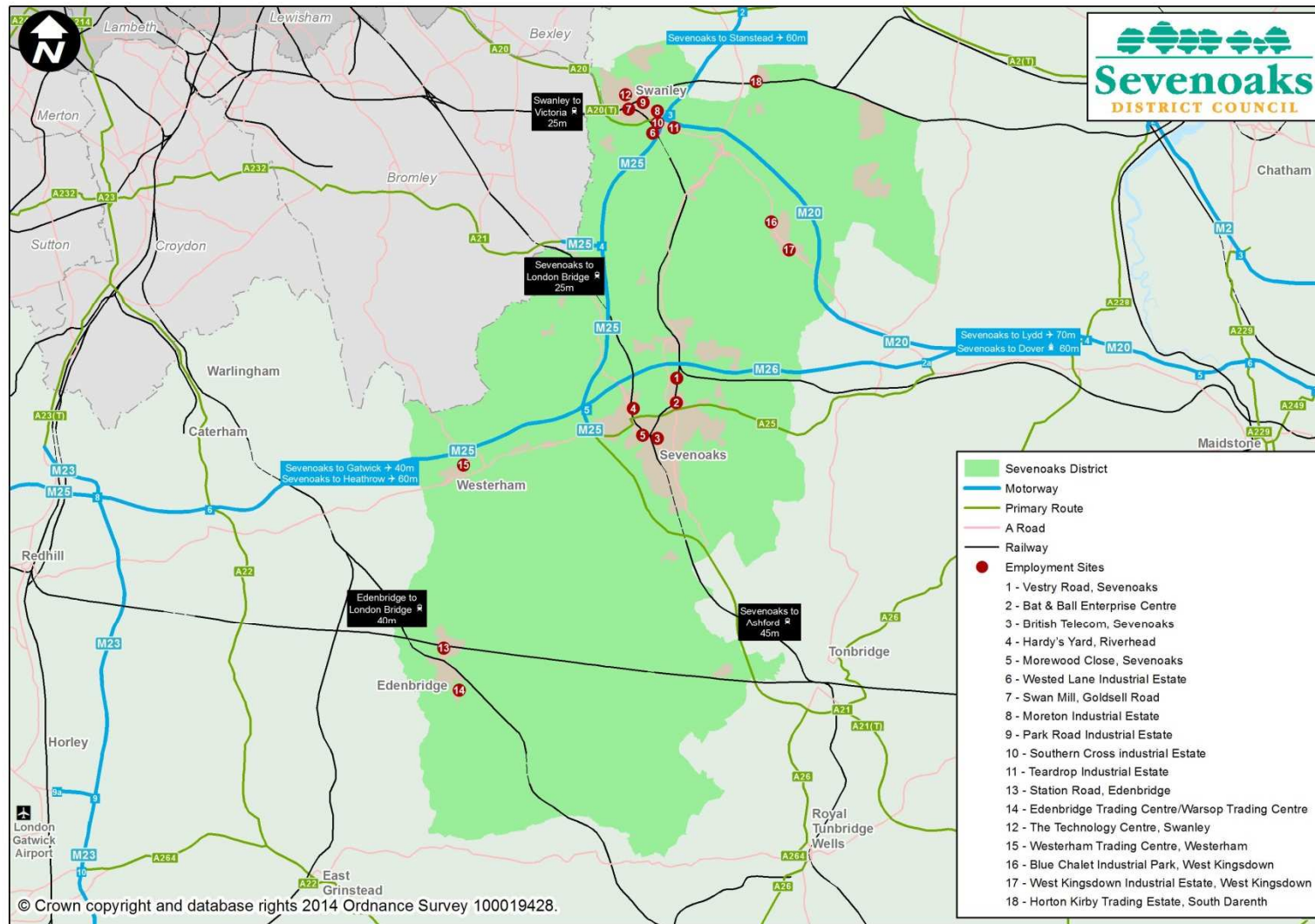
The District has a thriving business community and strong foundations in place for future economic growth. The resident workforce is very highly skilled, with nearly 50% of the resident population educated to degree level or above. There is a culture of entrepreneurialism; we have a very small number of larger employers. The vast majority of businesses are what are called 'microbusinesses' which have 5 employees or less. We also have some of the highest levels of homeworking, self-employment and home-based businesses in the County.

Our highly skilled local population is reflected in our large finance sector and continually growing businesses in the 'knowledge economy'. These firms and others are brilliantly placed to access the powerhouse of the finance industry, the City of London, often in less than 40 minutes. Locating in Sevenoaks District gives them to distinct advantage of far lower overheads, cheaper business rates and access to a highly skilled, yet competitively priced workforce.

Even during a time of fiscal conservatism, the District's main urban settlements have continued to attract strong inward investment. The land West of Bligh's in Sevenoaks Town Centre is being redeveloped by Marks and Spencer. Late in 2014 a new supermarket store and apartments will be completed. Swanley Town Centre has made a remarkable recovery since the recession, with a number of new high street brands opening in the shopping centre. Edenbridge Town Centre is awaiting the start of construction on a brand new Sainsbury's store and recently welcomed Waitrose to the town.

The District has an important tourism offer and historic and cultural legacy with 17 nationally designated historic parks and gardens including Knole House and Park. Sevenoaks has a number of historic houses including Penshurst Place, Hever Castle and Lullingstone Roman Villa. The District features a substantial legacy of historic towns and villages, with 40 Conservation Areas, 2,112 listed buildings and 23 scheduled ancient monuments. We hosted the Paralympic Games 2012 at Brands Hatch which boosted our profile even further. This legacy acts as an important base for our burgeoning tourist industry which is worth over £232 million a year, and is continuing to grow.

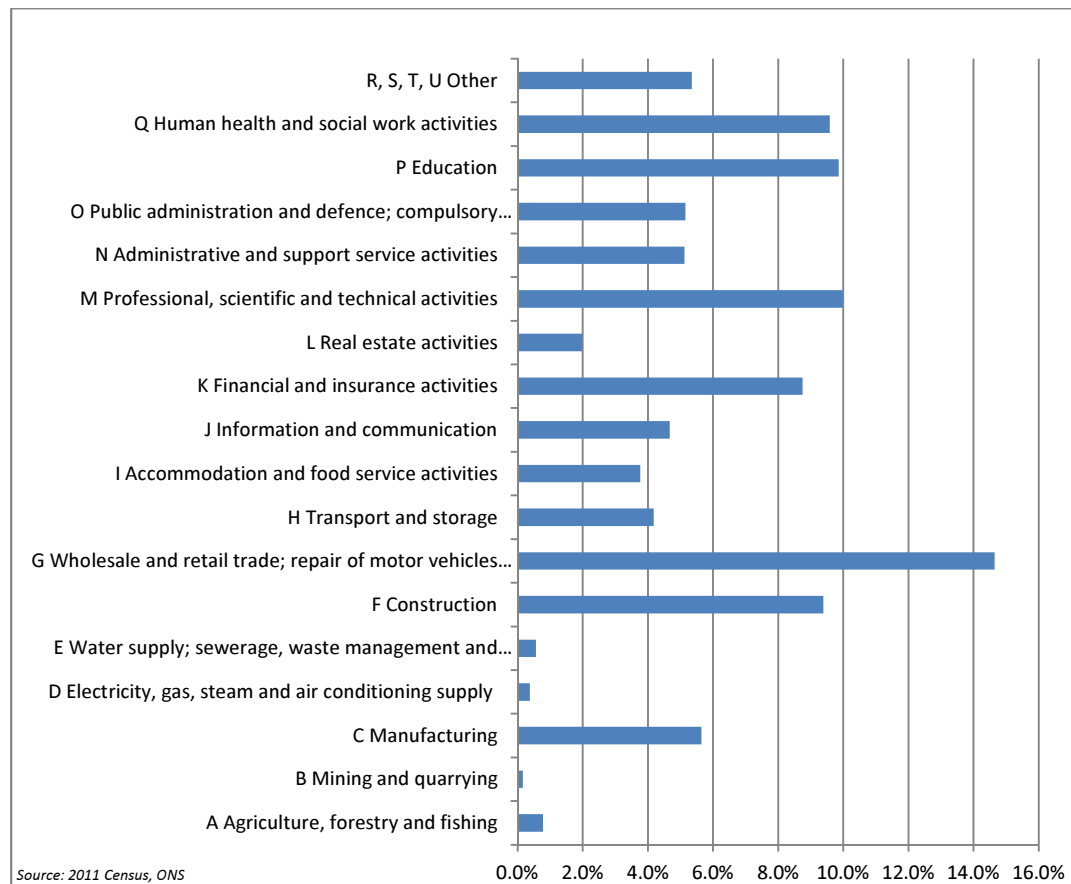
The rural economy plays a large part in the economic success of the District with over half of the population living in the 40 or so villages and hamlets around the District. The success of the West Kent Leader Programme highlights the strength of our rural business offer. The recent investment in Westerham by the Westerham Brewery and Squerryes Estate highlights the strength of this sector.



THE ECONOMY

The economy in Sevenoaks is broad based. There are no dominant sectors or large employers that substantially skew the balance of employment. The District has low public sector dependency.

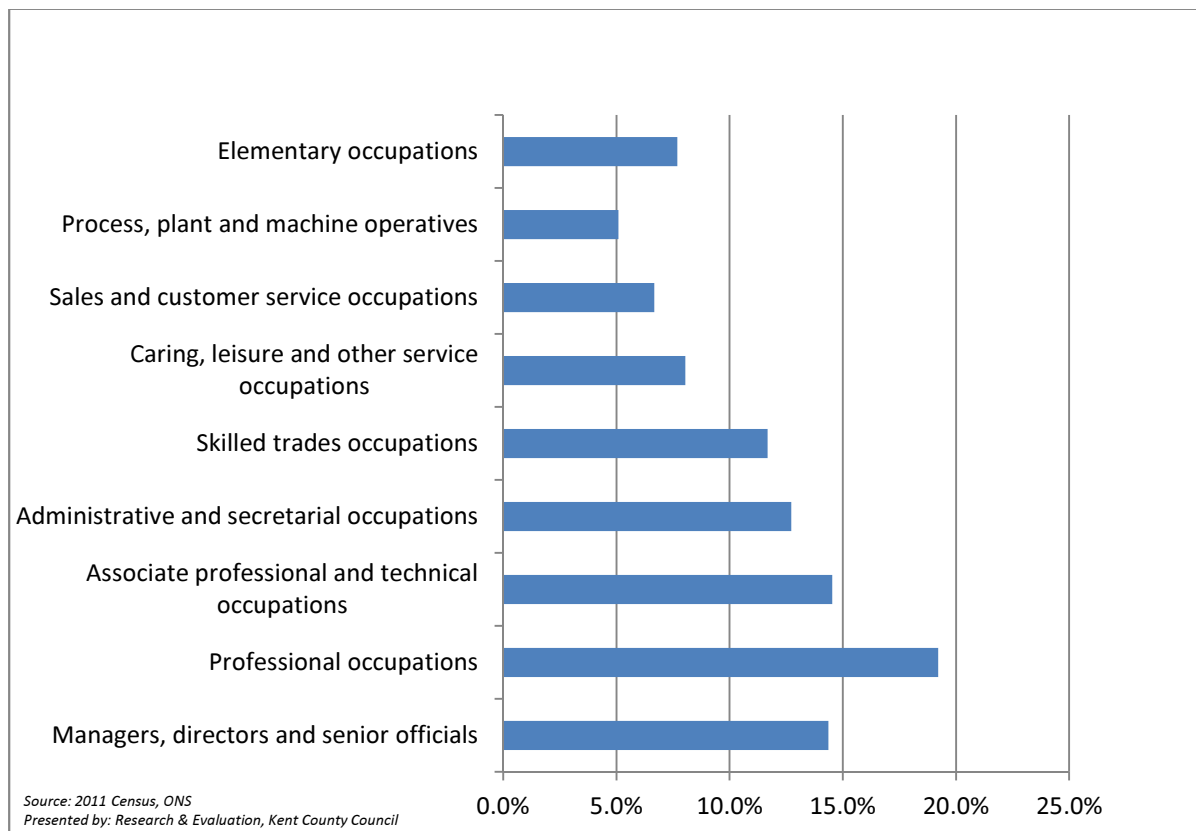
Figure 1: Employment by industry



The District also has a large 'knowledge economy' with around 7,500 jobs in 2010. Sevenoaks has one of the highest concentrations of jobs in knowledge rich sectors in Kent. Using Kent County Council's definition of the knowledge economy it is evident that the majority of these are in scientific research and development, most of which are likely to be linked to operations at Fort Halstead.

There are also notable concentrations of employment in head office and management consultancy activities (800), legal and accounting services (700), architectural and engineering activities (700), activities auxiliary to financial services and insurance activities (600) and computer programming and related activities (500). Such employment tends to be focused in smaller sized organisations. In 2008 around 40% of knowledge economy jobs were in businesses of 1 to 10 employees and a further 20% were in businesses of 11 to 49 employees. There were only around 20 knowledge economy businesses with 50 employees and over in the district.

Figure 2: Employment by occupation



The District is not dominated by large employers; 87% of businesses employ less than 10 people. Businesses employing 50 or more staff only account for 2% of the total businesses in the District. This is further reflected in the very high percentage of home-based workers, home-based businesses and self-employed people we have in the District.

Workforce (Economically Active population)

Economic activity relates to a person who was aged 16-74 and working, looking for work or not working at all at the time of the 2011 Census. Those who are economically active include; employees (both full and part time), the self employed, full-time students and the unemployed. Those who are economically inactive include; a person looking for work but not able to start within two weeks, as well as anyone not looking for work or unable to work such as people who are retired, looking after home/family or disabled.

Sevenoaks District has a current economic activity rate of 71.5%. This is above the county average of 69.9% and the national average of 69.7%. However Sevenoaks will see a 6.4% decline in the resident workforce up to 2030.

Earnings

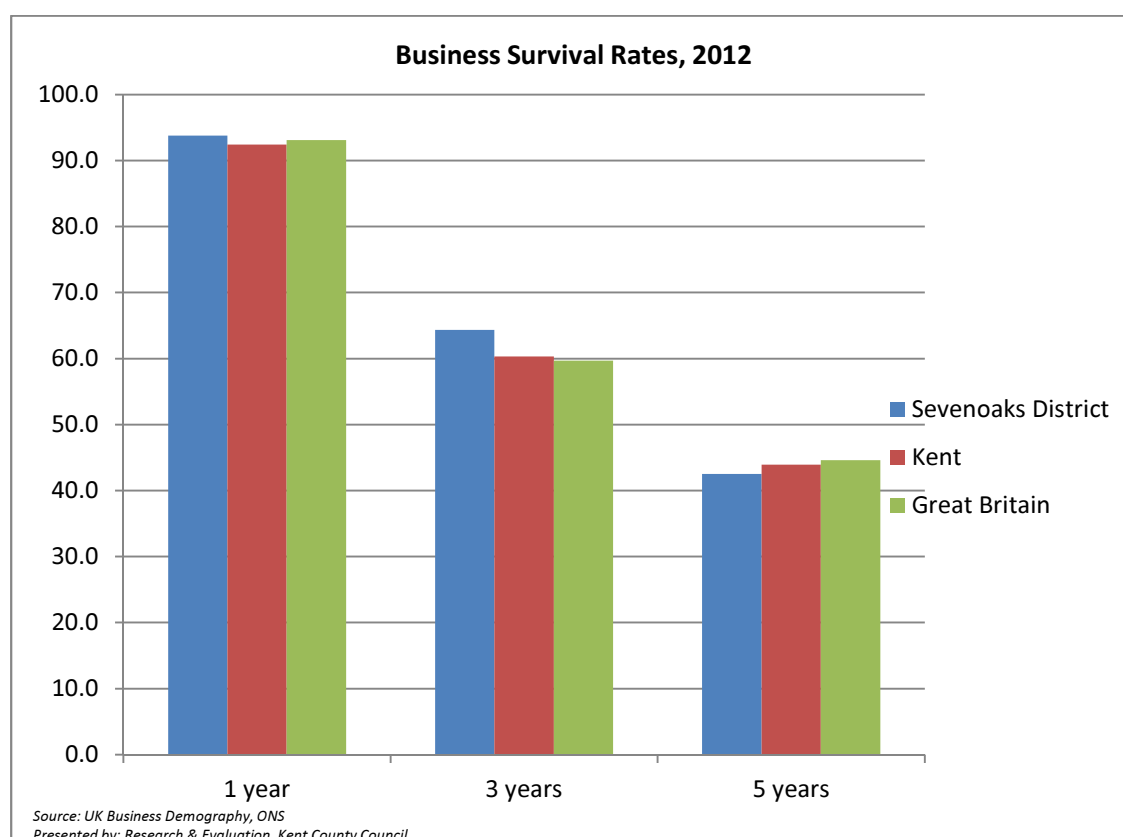
Average earnings for those resident in the District are typically far higher than the County and national average. Median weekly full-time earnings in the district are £690.70, compared with £610.40 in Kent and £558.80 in Great Britain. This translates to high local spend locally and undoubtedly has a positive impact upon our high streets and cultural attractions. The median

workforce earnings show a similar trend. Median full-time earnings in the district are £602.00, compared with £542.70 in Kent and £558.30 in Great Britain. Median workforce earnings are slightly higher, reflecting the highly skilled nature of the resident workforce.

There is a significant disparity between the resident earnings and workplace earnings in the District. The likely reason for this is due to the high levels of out commuting that the district experiences, with median earnings in London significantly higher than in Kent.

Business Survival Rates

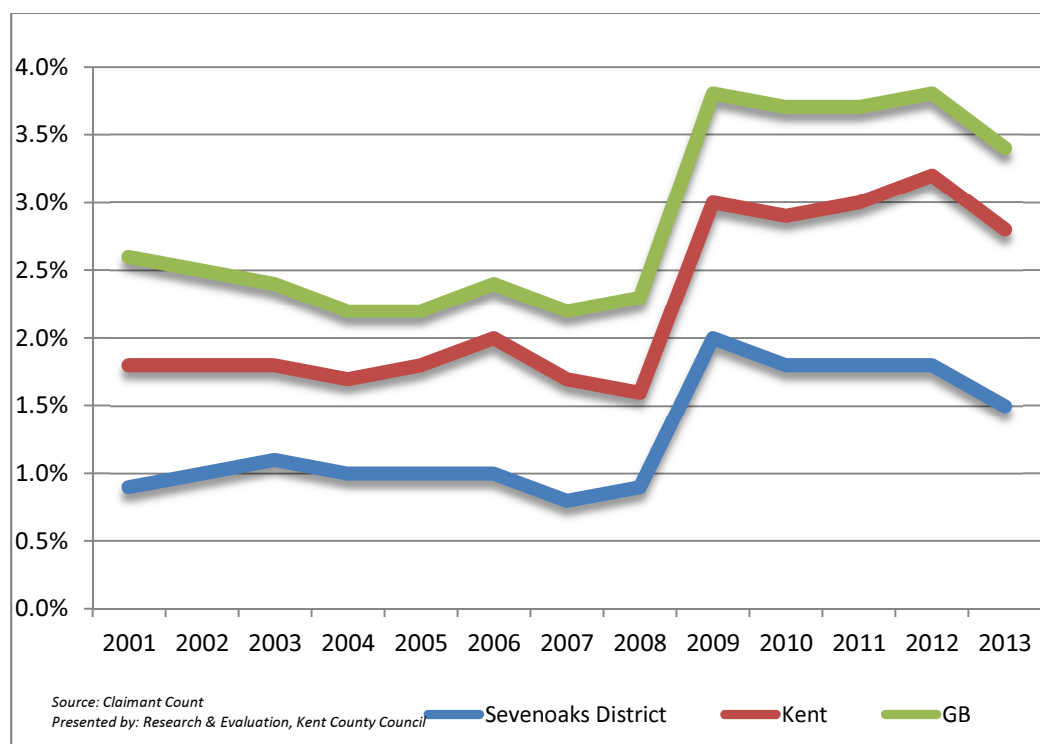
Business survival rates in Sevenoaks in Year 1 and Year 3 are above the county and national average. Survival rates are below the county and national average for Year 5. This indicates that although businesses find it easy to start up and survive within the District in the first instance, they are slightly less likely to sustain this than average.



Unemployment

Unemployment is typically low in most parts of the District. The average rate of unemployment has consistently stayed below the regional and national averages, even during the 2008 recession. The district has pockets of unemployment which are above the regional averages; these are often found in Swanley and Edenbridge.

Figure 4- Annual Average Unemployment Rate- 2001-2013



Economic Output (Gross Value Added)

Gross Value Added (GVA) is a measure of economic output. It is primarily used to monitor the performance of the national economy and is now the measure preferred by the Office for National Statistics to measure the economic wellbeing of an area. GVA and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are not the same. GVA measures the economy excluding tax and subsidies.

Sevenoaks District has a GVA of (£mil) 2,090; this is the 6th largest in the County. The GVA per head is also the 6th largest in the County at 18, 112.

We must exercise caution with these estimates for a number of reasons. Firstly, national statistics are not available for District GVA. It is an approximation based on the total GVA for Kent. This can be misleading as the estimate is based on the number of employees, rather than actual productivity. Secondly the estimate excludes the self-employed. We have one of the highest self-employed workforces in Kent. Thirdly the GVA per head figure is grossly affected by out-commuting. A high proportion of our residents commute to London each day.

Connectivity

The connectivity in Sevenoaks District is often seen as one of its most appealing traits for the commercial sector. There are excellent transport links to London, Europe and the Thames Gateway via rail, air and road. There is also easy access to a number of major roads which cross the District including the M25, M26, M20, A25, A20 and A21. The rail services are excellent, with services to London, Kent/Sussex coasts, Redhill, Uckfield and East Croydon. The main priority airports are easily accessible and the Port of Dover is just over an hour away.

Large areas of the District have been part of the countrywide expansion of the 4G service for mobile communications. Broadband is one of the top issues for businesses throughout the

District. There has already been significant investment in this area through the BDUK project led by KCC, independent providers and community based projects. However broadband speeds are still substandard in some parts of the District and this must be addressed. This form of connectivity is vital to the ongoing growth of the rural economy and will continue to be a priority.

Economic Strengths

The economy continues to perform strongly in the face of increasing economic uncertainty and pressure:

- There are strong levels of **inward investment** such as Blighs (Sevenoaks) and the West Kent Cold Store (Dunton Green). We host some of the most exciting companies in Europe and the rest of the world such as BT, Siemens Nixdorf, QinetiQ and Marks and Spencer.
- Sevenoaks District has **exceptional connectivity**. There is excellent access to London (London Bridge, Waterloo, Charing Cross, London Victoria and Blackfriars) from any of the major towns in the District (Sevenoaks: 25 minutes, Swanley: 26 minutes and Edenbridge: 40 minutes). All of the major airports in the south east (Gatwick, Heathrow, Stansted and London City) are easily accessible by rail or car. Road access is exceptionally good with strong links to the M25, M26, M20, A25, A20 and A21. Access to Europe is easy with the Port of Dover a short distance away.
- Sevenoaks District has a strong base of **very high skilled** workers. Over 40% of workers in the area have qualifications at NVQ4 and higher level. This is far above the UK and South East average.
- There are a number of **key sectors** with strong growth potential such as: Tourism, Financial Services and Professional Scientific and Technical
- **Unique landscapes and scenery** which attract people from all over the world.
- **Superb cultural and leisure** facilities.
- The District has a **very high quality of life**. Sevenoaks is consistently named as one of the top places to live in the UK, combining beautiful countryside with a host of cultural attractions.
- The **tourism industry** continues to grow strongly year upon year. It is now worth over £230 million annually and continues to go from strength to strength.
- **Resilient and entrepreneurial** culture. Our business survival rates in Year 1 and Year 3 are better than the UK and County average. We have some of the highest levels of **self-employment** in the County.
- **Robust retail offering**. Sevenoaks, Westerham, Swanley and Edenbridge have some of the lowest retail vacancy rates in the County, offering an eclectic mix of independent shops and high street brands.

Key Challenges

The local economy faces a number of challenges that need to be addressed in order to facilitate further growth:

- Swanley Town Centre has seen some incremental improvements since the recession, however there are still areas in the town centre which could be improved and regenerated. **Bevan Place and the Meeting Point** are key strategic sites for regeneration.
- New Ash Green Village Centre can no longer provide the services and amenity that residents require. **Regeneration** of this area is a key strategic priority for the Council.

- **Fort Halstead** is a major developed site within the green belt. The current occupier is DSTL, who have announced that they will be leaving the site in 2017. This one of the largest employment sites in West Kent and as such, needs strong commercial development.
- **Bat and Ball and the BT Exchange** have been identified as potential regeneration sites within Sevenoaks Town. The future development of these sites will play a vital role in the prosperity of the town in years to come.
- **Loss of employment land to residential**
- Supporting growth in our burgeoning **tourism industry** through increased marketing and the availability of suitable accommodation for tourists.
- Making sure **broadband speeds** are superfast in rural areas of the District.
- **Graduate retention** is falling and more level skilled staff is being lost to London due to out-commuting.
- Ensuring we continue to have the best transport links to London. Enabling **Zone 6** in Swanley and Bat and Ball will kick start regeneration and further improve connectivity.
- A high proportion of the District have a high level of skills and qualifications, however there is still a small proportion that **lack of skills and work readiness**.
- Apparent affluence masking pockets of **deprivation** and low levels of educational attainment.

NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

The vast majority of public funding to support the local economy and employment is channelled through various national, regional and sub-regional agencies. The government has introduced a series of policy initiatives and legislative changes designed to assist economic growth. The main channels for stimulating economic growth are:

Localism Act

The Localism Act aims to give more power to local authorities and communities to influence planning and housing decisions. In particular, the Community Right to Challenge could potentially foster a spirit of entrepreneurialism in local communities. Another important aspect of this act is Neighbourhood Planning, allowing communities the opportunity to get the right type of development for their community.

Local Enterprise Partnerships

In 2010 the government decided to abolish the Regional Development Agencies (RDA) and replace them with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). LEPs are private/public sector partnerships that have a clear remit to drive sustainable private sector led growth. Sevenoaks is part of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), which consists of Kent, Essex and East Sussex. The Lord Heseltine review 'No Stone Unturned' in 2013 encouraged the government to devolve further powers and funds to LEPs so that they can drive economic growth. The SELEP has developed a strategic growth plan which includes our two major growth areas in the District, Fort Halstead and Swanley.

Our submission to the LEP included a number of other areas for growth which they have not currently accepted into their plans but that we think is vital to the further regeneration and prosperity of the District. They are listed as priorities below.

Growing Places Fund

The Growing Places fund is designed to improve local funds in order to unlock growth on specific development sites, infrastructure projects and stimulate economic growth.

Regional Growth Fund

The £1.4 billion Regional Growth Fund has been developed to support the creation of more private sector jobs. Currently, businesses in Sevenoaks are able to access the £5.5 million Escalate fund. The fund is designed for high growth businesses along the A21 corridor.

Regional and Local Context

At the District and sub-regional level there are a number of plans that either link or support delivery of our economic priorities.

Unlocking Kent's Potential

Unlocking Kent's Potential sets out Kent County Council's overarching vision for how the County should look in the next 10 years. It assesses the major opportunities and challenges facing the County.

West Kent Priorities for Growth

The WKP for Growth is a strategy developed by the West Kent Partnership which is an economic partnership of Sevenoaks District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. The strategy sets out a proactive and strategic approach to the future investment needed to support the West Kent economy now and in the future.

Sevenoaks District Council Core Strategy

The Core Strategy was adopted by full council in February 2011. It sets out the vision and policies for future development in the District up to 2026. The core strategy sets out the general approach to the scale and location of development, it does not deal with specific development sites, nor does it deal with the most detailed policy issues.

Sevenoaks District Council Draft Allocations and Development Management Plan (ADMP)

The ADMP allocates specific sites for development such as housing and employment land.

Sevenoaks District Council Corporate Plan

The Corporate plan sets out the council vision up to 2015. It commits to 5 promises in the coming years which are to provide value for money, to work in partnership to keep the District of Sevenoaks safe, to collect rubbish efficiently and effectively, to protect the green belt and to support and develop the local economy. The overriding vision for Sevenoaks District is "to sustain and develop a fair, safe and thriving economy".

Community Plan

The Economic Development Strategy has been developed to complement the Sevenoaks District Community Plan. The Community Plan sets the long term vision for Sevenoaks District and encompasses the community's priorities for action. This vision already includes a number of

priorities related to economic growth and employment. The document is a 15 year vision which is the result of widespread consultation with the community.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1. Economic Growth and Investment

The core aim of any Economic Development strategy is to deliver projects and actions which facilitate business growth, expansion, inward investment and to create an atmosphere of entrepreneurialism.

It means that we have to ensure that businesses already located here are sufficiently supported in being able to grow. The Sevenoaks Business Demand Survey, compiled by URS in September 2013; has given us a robust evidence base for understanding the needs of businesses in the future. The following results give us a strong steer for our future objectives:

- The top issue effecting businesses surveyed was the 'Building or site size'.
- The majority of respondents to the survey expected the market to grow gradually over the next five years.
- For businesses intending to move, the most popular reason is that they are ready to expand and need larger premises. Furthermore, the majority of businesses intending to move required larger office space.
- 87% of those businesses planning to move premises want to stay within Sevenoaks District. This is a 23% increase since the last telephone business survey in 2005.

It is clear that Sevenoaks District is becoming a much 'stickier' location for businesses. Businesses want to stay within the District, and are anticipating strong growth in the future. It is vital that the size and quality of office space is developed to ensure that these businesses stay here.

Our consultations corroborated the findings from the business survey and identified additional need for employment space that is required. Start up business units or a 'business hub' was frequently mentioned throughout the consultations. It was felt that there is a lack of space for people starting a business who might need flexibility with their working arrangements until they are able to grow their business and move into a longer term lease on a property. This is a need which has also been identified in the West Kent Investment Strategy. Additional units or hubs would help engender a stronger sense of entrepreneurialism and ensure that more businesses develop and grow in the district.

A recent report compiled by Locate in Kent confirmed that there is significantly less commercial property to choose from in Sevenoaks District in comparison to the rest of West Kent and the County.

Our pro-business attitude at the Council has led to significant amounts of inward investment such as the recent Marks and Spencers development in Blighs. A number of innovative multinational companies have chosen to locate and invest in the District such as BT, Siemens

Nixdorf and Bayerngas. As well as growing businesses already located here, we want to ensure that the District continues to attract strong investment and the most exciting businesses.

We cannot achieve significant economic growth in the District without enforcing strict protections on our current employment land. Current land values mean that it is more profitable for developers to build housing than good quality commercial premises. Our planning policy stipulates that we will protect employment land where feasible. This is vital if we are to attract and keep businesses in the District.

The following aims will be progressed by the Council in order to achieve this ambition:

Aim 1.1: Market Sevenoaks District as a place to invest and grow

Aim 1.2: Development of local business support and advice

Aim 1.3: Develop start up units and work hubs

Aim 1.4: Encouraging viable and vibrant town centres through a range of partnerships

Aim 1.5: Ensure fast growing businesses are able to access finance and support.

Aim 1.6: Maintain and protect employment land and commercial premises

2 Employability and Skills

Sevenoaks has a very highly skilled population who are primarily educated outside the District in some of the highest achieving schools in the country. The District has a higher proportion of individuals with NVQ4 and NVQ3 and above equivalent qualifications compared to the South East (41.9% in Sevenoaks District compared to 36.2% in the South East and 32.9% in Great Britain). The District has a higher proportion of individuals with NVQ3 and above equivalent qualifications (62.7% in Sevenoaks compared to 56.7% in the South East and 52.7% in Great Britain). People rightfully point out that we have a very skilled populace.

The issue is that we also have a high proportion of residents with very low qualifications. The proportion of individuals in Sevenoaks District with no qualifications is higher than for the South East as a whole, but lower than Great Britain (11.1% in Sevenoaks District compared to 9.1% in the South East and 12.3% in Great Britain). Evidence of low skills in the District has been corroborated by a number of local businesses who have had to import workers from outside the district due to a skills shortage at the local level. A common theme throughout the whole consultative process is that businesses struggle to find the right staff with the right attitude. The following points are just a selection of those that were mentioned during consultation:

- Not enough young people with the right attitude to work
- Generational worklessness
- Poor links to training for young people in the District
- More links with businesses needed.
- Gap in sector skills- especially catering

The Local Strategic Partnership Employment sub-group; which is a multi-agency partnership of organisations who work to reduce unemployment were also consulted. They highlighted two important issues: the trouble young people have in getting to work from rural areas in the District

and the lack of links between themselves and the private sector. A similar response was encountered in the consultations with young people who found public transport expensive and unreliable and wanted more links with local businesses so that they can build up their experience.

Unemployment in Sevenoaks District is below the county and country average. The perception is that unemployment is low throughout the District. This is incorrect. There are a number of unemployment hotspots throughout the District.

We are unfortunate in that we do not have a Jobcentre plus within the District or a College.

The following aims will be progressed by the Council in order to achieve this ambition:

Aim 2.1: Improve the skills and employability of residents in the District.

Aim 2.2: Work with businesses to identify skills gaps.

Aim 2.3: Ensure that jobs and training within the District is well marketed and available to all people.

3 Transport and Infrastructure

Infrastructure is vital to the continuing economic growth of the District. There are a number of key infrastructure projects that need to be delivered over the timescale of this strategy in order for us to facilitate economic growth. The Sevenoaks District Strategy for Transport (2010-2026) is a document which sets out the range of transport issues facing the District. The strategy will seek support the initiatives identified in this document. The consultation process identified a number of other key areas of improvement in the District such as the inclusion of Swanley and Bat and Ball in Zone 6.

The Sevenoaks Business Survey (2013) indicated that Transport and Infrastructure were still very important considerations for businesses throughout the District.

The consultations highlighted that many areas want to take advantage of our close proximity to London. In particular, those in Sevenoaks and Swanley want to be included in zone 6. This has obvious advantages for businesses and residents. For Swanley, inclusion in zone 6 would help to kick start significant regeneration in the area and create new jobs. For Bat and Ball, zone 6 would take pressure off the service to London Bridge and also stimulate local regeneration projects.

The flooding and bad weather that visited us over Christmas 2013 had dire consequences for residents and businesses. Our consultations identified that those areas flooded would like additional support from us to engage with the Environment Agency on flood protection and funding for those affected.

Car parking has been another consistent theme during the consultative process. Businesses and local communities are very concerned about future parking capacity.

The following aims will be progressed by the Council in order to achieve this ambition:

Aim 3.1: Inclusion of Swanley in Zone 6 and improvements to the rail station

Aim 3.2: Inclusion of Swanley in Zone 6 and improvements to the rail station

Aim 3.3: Support efforts to improve car parking in the District

Aim 3.4: Ensure areas are sufficiently protected from extreme weather and flooding

4 Support and Services for business

The District Council delivers a number of services to businesses. It is vital to ensure that different departments in the Council communicate to one another to enable businesses to feel welcomed into the District and that they can turn to the Council if they need assistance. Whether it be from a planning application, business rates or licensing. It is clear that we need to be able to work more closely together to ensure that businesses are nurtured and feel they are supported by the District Council rather than simply looking upon us as the billing authority.

Our consultations identified a need for the Council to provide more clarity in regards to businesses support and what funding is available. Businesses sometimes find the large amounts of information on offer confusing and don't know who to contact in order to get the best information. We need to ensure that the Council is providing clear, concise advice that businesses find easy to access.

The following aims will be progressed by the Council in order to achieve this ambition:

Aim 4.1: Set up the 'team around the business'- the purpose of the team is to assist businesses coming into the District.

Aim 4.2: Clarify the business support and funding available and ensure that there is one single point of contact.

5 Energy and Sustainability

Local authorities are being encouraged to make cuts in energy costs and 'go green'. Businesses are also looking to cut overheads in the face of ever climbing energy prices. The 2013 and 2014 Sevenoaks District Council business surveys indicated that energy costs were one of the most important concerns for businesses looking forward.

The District Council is supporting the Climate Local initiative led by Kent County Council. This is a Local Government Association initiative to drive, inspire and support council action on climate change. As part of this we are committed to a number of actions to reduce our carbon footprint and ensure that residents and businesses are given the right information to cut costs and go green.

We have already started a number of initiatives to support this exciting programme of work. In partnership with the KCC Low Carbon Team we have delivered two Steps to Environmental

Management (STEM) workshops. We are also developing an information pack for businesses so that they can make the right decisions when it comes to being energy efficient. Our consultations showed that there was some confusion amongst businesses and other organisations as to what schemes are operating and that there needs to be greater clarity and understanding about what support and funding is available.

We need to ensure that the green infrastructure is in place to enable businesses and residents to be able to buy more energy efficient vehicles. Charging points for electric vehicles are becoming increasingly prevalent in London and surrounding boroughs. The installation of charging points in the District will be a priority.

The following aims will be progressed by the Council in order to achieve this ambition:

Aim 5.1: Ensure that businesses are able to access training and funding opportunities that will enable them to become more energy efficient and cut costs.

6 Places for Growth and Improvement

After consulting our corporate plans, emerging local plans and the business community's, a number of areas were identified for improvement:

Swanley Town Centre

Swanley is the second largest town in the District. It is located adjacent to Junction 3 of the M25.

It has services which include a youth and community centre, leisure centre, library, civic centre, schools, railway station and a range of other community facilities and support services. The town centre itself contains a pedestrianised shopping centre which includes a major food superstore. There is scope for improvement to the town centre.

The Retail Study update 2009 showed that the town was at that time only capturing a low proportion of available spend, particularly for non-food goods and suggested that the town could be more attractive to shoppers if larger units were available in order to attract more high street names. Currently there is no additional land available adjacent to the pedestrianised centre to enable this. However, recent incremental improvements have been welcomed.

The local market continues to attract a large number of people into the centre and there is scope for additional marketing.

Land at the vehicular entrance to the town could provide additional employment and possibly a small business hub for new businesses and workshops and at the same time improve the attractiveness of the 'gateway' to the town. This could nurture a new generation of businesses which will go on to stimulate further economic growth and jobs in the town. Land at Bevan Place is earmarked for housing.

A key part of the regeneration of Swanley is ensuring that the transport links are of sufficient quality and dealing with some traffic congestion. The train station is not currently up to standard and the aim of the local community is that they be included in Zone 6.

Another opportunity to help skills and employment on Swanley would be to bring back into use the technical and vocational centre at the Orchards Academy.

New Ash Green Village Centre

New Ash Green was developed as a new community in 1960s with its own village centre. The centre has proved to be far less successful than other aspects of the development and continues to suffer from a high amount of vacant units and environmental issues. The Council is attempting to work with landowners and the local community to develop proposals for its regeneration so that it better meets the needs of the local community, while retaining a scale appropriate to the size of the community it is intended to serve and a form that respects the distinctive character of the settlement. An element of residential development could be included as part of the regeneration scheme. The final form of development will follow local consultation and will likely be mixed use.

Sevenoaks Town Centre and Bat and Ball

Sevenoaks has a successful town centre although it faces competition from other larger centres outside the District and, in common with other town centres has suffered from an increase in vacant premises due to the recession. It has benefited from the completion of the Bligh's Meadow development in 2007 and has a good range of independent shops and services and multiple stores. The town centre benefits from a high quality environment that needs to be maintained and enhanced as it continues to develop. An active town partnership ensures a focus on the town with a variety of events and marketing activities.

Further growth will be needed over time if the town is to maintain its position relative to other centres. Vital to this is two main regeneration projects, Bat and Ball and the BT Exchange.

Bat and Ball lies just to the north of Sevenoaks Town and has an issue with empty properties. The rail station is of a substandard quality and the surrounding environment could be significantly upgraded in order to support the vibrant business atmosphere at the Bat and Ball Enterprise Centre. The inclusion of Bat and Ball in Zone 6 is key to the regeneration of this area and will hopefully take pressure off the London service from the nearby Sevenoaks town station.

The BT Exchange site is located in the centre of Sevenoaks Town and is of vital strategic importance for the town's economy. There is strong demand for high quality office space from businesses looking for a location with excellent connectivity to London, but without the hefty business rates and rent bill.

Fort Halstead

Fort Halstead is a previously developed site situated in the Green Belt and the Kent Downs AONB that was originally a Ministry of Defence research establishment and is still occupied by defence related industries. It is currently the largest employment site in the District.

Since the adoption of the Core Strategy, DSTL, the largest employer, has announced its intention to withdraw from the site by 2017. The Council is working with DSTL, QinetiQ and the site owners to develop redevelopment proposals for the future. In line with our policy (Fort Halstead is identified as a Major Employment Site in the Green Belt) we expect future development to be employment led.

The site currently employs over 1200 people. The District Council expects that any future redevelopment would provide the same number of jobs. QinetiQ have indicated that they plan to stay on the site and are keen to work with us on the site. Our ambition is that Fort Halstead is transformed into a park specialising in science and engineering. We want to develop a new

studio school onsite which will provide businesses with the specialist skills they need and young people with the bespoke training, education and experience that will land them a job straight after leaving school. We want to take advantage of the excellent strategic position and expansive location at Fort Halstead and develop a start up business hub. Our vision is that the site will harness the skills and expertise of residents in West Kent either with new innovative start up businesses or working for a smorgasbord of high flying science and engineering firms. There is also space on the site for a high quality hotel with conference facilities. This would support business visitors and take care of a well established need in the district for high quality conference facilities. It would also accommodate our growing tourist industry.

Vestry Estate

The Vestry Estate is located on the edge of Sevenoaks Town with access to the motorway network via Junction 5 of the M25. The estate comprises a mix of industrial, warehouse and workshop units covering a range of sizes. Some of the B1 and B8 properties located on this site are old and need redevelopment. This site has been identified as an area appropriate for new business development within these areas, including the provision of sites for small and medium sized businesses and start up facilities.

A number of other sites are listed in the draft ADMP which are identified for intensification and regeneration for B1-B8 uses:

- Erskine House
- Hardy's Yard, Riverhead
- High Street, Sevenoaks
- London Road, Sevenoaks
- Morewood Close (excluding housing area), Sevenoaks
- South Park, Sevenoaks
- Lime Tree Walk, Sevenoaks
- Wested Lane Industrial Estate, Swanley
- Swanley Town Council Offices, Swanley
- Swan Mill, Goldsel Road, Swanley
- Media House, Swanley
- Moreton Industrial Estate, Swanley
- Park Road Industrial Estate, Swanley
- Teardrop Industrial Estate, Swanley
- The Technology Centre, Swanley
- Edenbridge/Warsop Trading Estate
- Station Road, Edenbridge
- Westerham Trading Centre, Westerham
- Blue Chalet Industrial Park, West Kingsdown
- West Kingsdown Industrial Estate, West Kingsdown
- Horton Kirby Trading Estate, South Darenth

The following aims will be progressed by the Council in order to achieve this ambition:

Aim 6.1: Positively engage with landowners and relevant partners to encourage the successful redevelopment of these key growth sites.

7. Tourism and the Rural Economy

The tourism industry is a major contributor to economic growth in the District. We have a wealth of excellent tourist attractions which bring hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. The tourism industry is worth over £230 million to the local economy and visitors are increasing on a yearly basis. The District hosted the Paralympic Cycling events as part of the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics at Brands Hatch and has a high profile in the South East. During our consultation with tourism businesses and town and parish councils a number of important issues were raised:

- Join things up with Visit Kent- more work with other local businesses and providers
- Limited accommodation an issue
- Parking- integrated transport
- Large central hotel
- Tourism hub

The rural economy is a significant part of the District's economic output. We have some of the highest levels of homeworking, self-employment and home businesses in the County. We also have a broad and diverse agricultural industry which continues to dominate in the smaller rural hamlets and villages throughout the District. There is a large amount of

A key part of our support for the rural economy is the West Kent Leader programme. This £1.5 million pound fund worked diligently to support rural enterprise. We are hopeful that the next funding round will start in 2015 and continue to support rural businesses in accessing funding and providing local jobs.

The following aims will be progressed by the Council in order to achieve this ambition:

Aim 7.1: Enhance and improve the rural economy

Aim 7.2: Market the District as a place to 'stay, play and visit'

Aim 7.3: Help facilitate growth in the tourism industry

8. Broadband and Connectivity

Broadband is a vital 21st century amenity for both residents and businesses. The speed and access to services can have a severe detrimental effect on business performance and is even starting to negatively hit house prices. The 2013 business phone survey indicated that broadband is now the number 1 concern of businesses within the District. Many of our

businesses are located in rural areas which may not feel the benefit of normal commercial broadband upgrades. For the district to remain competitive we must ensure that superfast broadband services are rolled out to all areas of the District. The number one concern for businesses in the 2014 Business Survey was access to superfast broadband services; 91% of those surveyed thought that this was the most important issue. In the face to face consultations with business groups this was highlighted as the most important infrastructure upgrade in the District.

Our consultations also highlighted another important issue. Mobile phone signals and 3G/4G signals are often very poor in the rural parts of the District.. We must ensure that future connectivity is first rate. Wifi is an increasingly sought after service and currently the service is limited. Increasing the scope of Wifi is vital for the visitor experience, for those accessing services and shopping in our main towns.

The following aim will be progressed by the Council in order to achieve this ambition:

Aim 8.1: Ensure that the District has 21st Century connectivity to encourage growth and promote well-being.

Equality and Inclusion statement

We recognise that everyone has a contribution to make to our society and a right to access services without being discriminated against or disadvantaged because of their:

- Race, colour, nationality, ethnicity
- Gender, marital status or caring responsibility
- Sexual orientation
- Age
- Physical or mental disability or mental health
- Religion or belief
- Health status
- Employment status

Abbreviations

3G- Third Generation Wireless

4G- Fourth Generation Wireless

ADMP- Draft Allocations and Development Management Plan

AONB- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

DSTL- Defence Science and Technology Laboratory

GVA- Gross Value Added (£)

LEP- Local Enterprise Partnership

NVQ- National Vocational Qualification

RDA- Regional Development Agency

SELEP- South East Local Enterprise Partnership

WIFI- Wireless Local Area Network

WKP for Growth- West Kent Partnership for Growth

Economic Development Strategy- Action Plan

| Action | How are we going to do this? | Outcomes |
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| <p><i>Economic Growth and Investment</i></p> <p>1.1 Market Sevenoaks District as a place to invest and grow</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an investment prospectus featuring the USPs and case studies of successful businesses. • Work closely with partners; especially Locate in Kent to advertise business development opportunities. • Work closely with commercial agents in the District to identify and market important strategic sites. • Promote access to vacant buildings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Investment prospectus is completed and distributed to businesses and associated organisations who deal with inward investment. • The SDC website is easy to use and provides excellent up to date information for businesses. |
| <p>1.2 Development a programme of local business support and advice</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with colleagues in the West Kent Partnership to develop a business support offer that reflects local concerns and needs. • Engage with the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) to ensure that we can access funds and specialist advice. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme of local business support and advice successfully implemented in West Kent. • Funding is successfully bid for to support the delivery of a business support programme. |
| <p>1.3 Develop start up units and work hubs</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review our available land and office space. • Work with colleagues in the Property team to identify investment opportunities. • Work with private sector partners to identify opportunities for start up units and hubs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses in the District |
| <p>1.4 Encouraging viable and vibrant town centres through a range of partnerships</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with town partnerships to help them progress their objectives. • Help town partnerships access funding and support for local priorities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requests for support progressed. |

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| 1.5 Maintain and protect employment land and commercial premises | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocating and safeguarding the District Council's planning policy land for employment use. • Resisting changes of use from employment to other planning use classes • Encourage viable and vibrant town centres through a range of partnerships • Encourage, through the planning system, a supply of modern, well designed business accommodation • Work proactively with developers to identify new brownfield sites for development. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment land is protected conversion to residential. • New commercial space is developed. |
| 1.6 Ensure fast growing businesses are able to access finance and support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicise and engage with businesses interested in the Escalate fund. • Work with partners to investigate further European funding opportunities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of businesses in the District accessing the Escalate funding |
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| <i>Employability and Skills</i> | | |
| 2.1 Improve the skills and employability of residents in the District. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting 16-24 year olds into employment through a range of training courses. • Work with the Local Strategic Partnership to progress actions on employment issues throughout the District. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in the number of young people who are not in employment or education. • Number of opportunities for unemployed people to access skills and employment advice. |
| 2.2 Work with businesses to identify skills gaps. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with businesses in the SELEP and at the West Kent Partnership to understand the skills that businesses want. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and skills providers well informed about local skills needs and responding to those needs. |
| 2.3 Ensure that jobs and training within the District is well marketed and available to people. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with partners to create a series of jobs fairs showcasing local employers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People accessing job fairs in the District. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> and training providers. Support job fairs and other initiatives around employment | |
| Transport and Infrastructure | | |
| 3.1 Inclusion of Swanley in Zone 6 and improvements to the Rail Station | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange meetings with TFL to discuss future expansion of Zone 6 outside London. Arrange meetings with South Eastern to discuss further improvements to the Bat and Ball and Swanley Rail Stations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements to Swanley Rail Station Improvements to Bat and Ball Rail Station. Inclusion of Swanley in Zone 6. Inclusion of Bat and Ball in Zone 6 |
| 3.2 Inclusion of Bat and Ball in Zone 6 and improvements to the Rail Station. | | |
| 3.3 Support efforts to improve car parking in the District | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the development of Buckhurst 2 decked car park. Support the expansion of the Darenth car park in Westerham. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buckhurst 2 decked car park is built. The expansion of the Darenth car park is successfully delivered. |
| 3.4 Ensure areas are sufficiently protected from extreme weather and flooding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with the Environment Agency to support flood relief in specific hotspots. Enable businesses to access funding for flood protection if they are liable to flood. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of businesses accessing support for flood prevention measures. |
| Support and Services for Businesses | | |
| 4.1 Set up the 'team around the business'- the purpose of the team is to assist businesses coming into the District. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with all departments at the Council who have some kind of contact with businesses. Distribute the Sevenoaks Business Guide and Burrows Directory to ensure that businesses have a clear understanding of our services. Clarify the business support and funding available and ensure that there is one single point of contact. Continue to publish the monthly Real Business newsletter. Continue to advertise and promote | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Businesses are satisfied with contact with the District Council. Information channels are clear and the number of businesses accessing the Real Business newsletter increases. |

| | sources of funding. | |
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| <p><i>Energy and Sustainability</i></p> <p>5.1 Ensure that businesses are able to access training and funding opportunities to become more energy efficient.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a series of STEM workshops in partnership with the Low Carbon team at Kent County Council. • Work with colleagues in the Housing team to collate and distribute information to businesses on funding opportunities • Contribute and complete actions in the Climate Local Kent framework. • Engage with local businesses who work on sustainability issues to see if we can partner on specific programmes or projects. • Support the rollout and delivery of the Green Deal. • Work with colleagues to install charging points for electric vehicles. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of businesses accessing the Green Deal. • A completed energy efficiency information pack. • Deliver three STEM workshops a year with the Low Carbon team. |
| <p><i>Places for Growth and Employment</i></p> <p>6.1 Improve and redevelop the sites mentioned</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work proactively with landowners and developers to encourage redevelopment opportunities. • Engage with the SELEP to leverage funds which will progress development on these sites. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increase in the amount of commercial space in the District. |
| <p><i>Tourism and Rural Economy</i></p> <p>7.1 Enhance and improve the rural economy.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a funding bid for the next round of Leader funding and, if successful, promote the scheme. • Work with relevant partners to identify projects around community hubs. • Ensure that rural and home-based businesses are able to receive business support and advice • Promote local produce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of businesses taking up West Kent Leader funding. • The number of rural and home-based businesses taking up business support services. |

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| <p>7.2 Market the District as a place to 'stay, play and visit'.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the visitor experience by working with a wide variety of partners. • Provide additional support, networking and skills workshops for tourism businesses. • Work with town councils, tourism businesses and town partnerships to ensure that the tourism offer for each area is sufficiently supported and marketed widely. • Develop cultural attractions and activities with relevant partners. • Promote the District to travel journalists and tourism promoters. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of tourism businesses accessing workshops and networking events. |
| <p>7.3 Help facilitate growth in the tourism industry</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase staying accommodation for tourists. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of bedrooms provided by tourist accommodation providers. |
| <p><i>Broadband and Digital Connectivity</i></p> <p>8.1 Ensure that the District has 21st connectivity to encourage growth and promote well-being.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prove the need and demand for faster broadband by engaging with local communities. • Applying for funding to support communities in getting superfast broadband • Support local communities in finding alternative broadband solutions. • Work with independent broadband providers to develop innovative solutions in rural areas of the district. • Work with mobile phone providers to ensure that rural areas have sufficient mobile signal coverage. • Work with broadband providers to ensure that towns in the District have a reliable and fast WIFI service. • Develop a programme of Digital inclusion with appropriate partners to | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding is successfully applied for to improve broadband connectivity. • The number of communities accessing superfast broadband. • A programme of skills workshops/events is developed to support Digital Inclusion. • A Wifi service is set up in each main town in the District. |

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| | ensure that all residents and businesses have the skills to embrace new technology and connectivity. | |
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