

VISION

Balanced Communities

2010

Foreword

The key issues facing the future of the District are contained within 'Balanced Communities'. As a District, we are under enormous pressure being located so close to London and with the majority of the District within the Green Belt. As a Council, we have to face the need to provide housing off all sizes, prices and tenure types, the need to provide opportunities for investment in quality jobs located and staffed locally, the need to protect and enhance our rural communities and our towns, and to continue to provide an environment that people wish to live in. At the same time, the national need to reduce the budget deficit will impose a new age of austerity on the public sector, meaning that the Council will have less resources with which to achieve our aspirations.

'Balanced Communities' sets out the Council's aims and priorities for balancing the housing market and to create and maintain sustainable communities that will shape the future of the District.



**Cllr Peter
Fleming- Leader
of the Council**

**Cllr Carol Clark-
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for Balanced
Communities**

Introduction

The Sevenoaks District vision for Balanced Communities primary aim is to develop and encourage thriving communities. This includes ensuring that there are equal opportunities and access to affordable decent homes in all tenures, education, health and leisure services, transportation and jobs. The vision is high priority for the Leader and Cabinet and forms an important part of the corporate policies and plans.

The key issues facing the future of the District are captured within 'Balanced Communities' ethos . As a District, we are under a number of pressures being located so close to London and with the majority of the District within the Green Belt. As a Council, we have to face the need to provide housing of all sizes, prices and tenure types, the need to provide opportunities for investment in quality jobs located and staffed locally, the need to protect and enhance our rural communities and our towns, and to continue to provide an environment where people wish to live. First voiced in 2006, the issues remain as relevant today. At the same time, significant financial constraints will impose new challenges in terms of dealing with the issues outlined in this paper, with fewer resources.

The Council's Vision for Balanced Communities 2010 sets out the Council's continued aims and priorities with new initiatives for creating and maintaining sustainable and balanced communities that will shape the future of the District. The Sustainable Community Action Plan sets out the overall priorities for the District and embraces the Council's Vision for Balanced Communities. The aims and objectives of this Paper will be achieved through the delivery of the Sustainable Community Action Plan 2010 to 2013.

Summary

The Council's Vision for 'Balanced Communities' incorporates the main Communities and Local Government (CLG) targets for 'Sustaining Communities' and embraces and includes the 'Balanced Housing Market' theme from the Government Office for the South-East (GOSE).

The Council's Vision for Balanced Communities is to:

- Provide a thriving community, where there is equal opportunity and there is access to affordable decent homes in all tenures, education, health and leisure services, transportation and jobs
- Produce a robust and effective Local Development Framework, supporting the wider economic and environmental objectives to sustain communities
- Recognise that housing is not just about 'bricks and mortar' and that vulnerable people must be supported to sustain tenancies and owner-occupation, to avoid social exclusion and to foster community cohesion.
- Assist groups of individuals who need extra support to engage with the community, for example, the young, older people, ethnic minorities and the disabled.
- Ensure that crime remains low in all parts of the District.
- Continue consultation to identify gaps in provision and to ensure that residents' views drive Council policy.

The Need for Balanced Communities

The concept of balanced communities in Sevenoaks District is vital if social polarisation and “gated communities” are to be avoided. Although overall the District is viewed as a relatively affluent and attractive place to live, this masks pockets of deprivation which are in stark contrast to their surroundings. There are six areas in the District which are more deprived than the national average. Due to its “green and pleasant” appearance, it requires an ongoing dialogue with policy makers to convince them of the need for further investment in the District. These pockets of deprivation are recognised by the Council as priority areas for additional support and regeneration to ensure communities are balanced.

Housing in most areas of the District has become increasingly unaffordable to those on modest incomes, creating communities accessible only to those on high incomes. House prices in the District are on average 1.5 times higher than the

South East average. There is thus a risk of house prices excluding all but the very affluent from residing in the District and this in turn leading to the prospect of lower paid workers not being able to afford to live locally. The advent of high speed rail links from London to other attractive but more affordable parts of Kent, will exacerbate the polarisation of very rich and poor living within the District.

A polarised and unbalanced community is a problem for a number of reasons:

- A large disparity between households can in extreme circumstances create social tensions through an increased awareness of inequality which leads to reduced trust and engagement between members of the community.
- Without sufficient affordable housing in the District, we risk excluding lower paid workers from living in the District. At the same time, high transport costs may provide a

disincentive for even seeking work in the area, creating a shortage of key-sector workers.

- Unbalanced communities tend to be more unsustainable- Out-of-town housing developments are more likely to be car dependent, and are less sustainable than “compact” towns, where a good mix of housing, infrastructure and employment space are provided in close proximity to each other.
- An unbalanced society is more likely to be a socially immobile society, where the wealthier individuals in society either opt for private education, locate near high performing state schools and thus distort the housing market, or better prepare their children for grammar school entrance exams. This can entrench inequalities in future generations by creating an “hour glass profile” of skills with high numbers of individuals who are highly qualified sitting alongside individuals with no qualifications.

With the recent publication of the National Equality Panel report *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK*, which revealed that the gap between rich and poor in the UK is wider now than 40 years ago, the polarised and unbalanced nature of British society has become more apparent. The report reached some interesting conclusions. For example, it concluded that, if trends continue, children who are more affluent will overtake poor, but more able, children by the age of six. Similarly, men who are more affluent are now expected to live longer than poorer women.

To address these issues, it is important to have Balanced Communities as a central strand in the Council’s policy-making process, and in any long term strategies for the District. Clearly Balanced Communities can only be achieved with the help of local partners and central Government, though Sevenoaks District Council can continue to promote a balanced community through a range of initiatives.

This Balanced Communities paper outlines the Council's aspirations and plans to ensure both that Sevenoaks is a pleasant place to live, and a place where there are equal opportunities for all people in the District. The plans are set out in the Council's main strategy, the Community Plan and its associated Sustainable Communities Action Plan.

The creation of Balanced Communities is a common thread running through wider, overarching strategies including the South East Regional Housing Strategy 2008 – 2011, the former South East Plan, the draft Kent & Medway Housing Strategy 2010 and Kent County Council's Vision for Kent. In addition, the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 gives an opportunity for councils and communities to put forward new thinking on how best to improve quality of life and wellbeing in their local areas.

All actions contained in the Sustainable Communities Action Plan related to Balanced Communities can be easily identified

by the symbol



OUR ASPIRATIONS

1. A Balanced Housing Mix

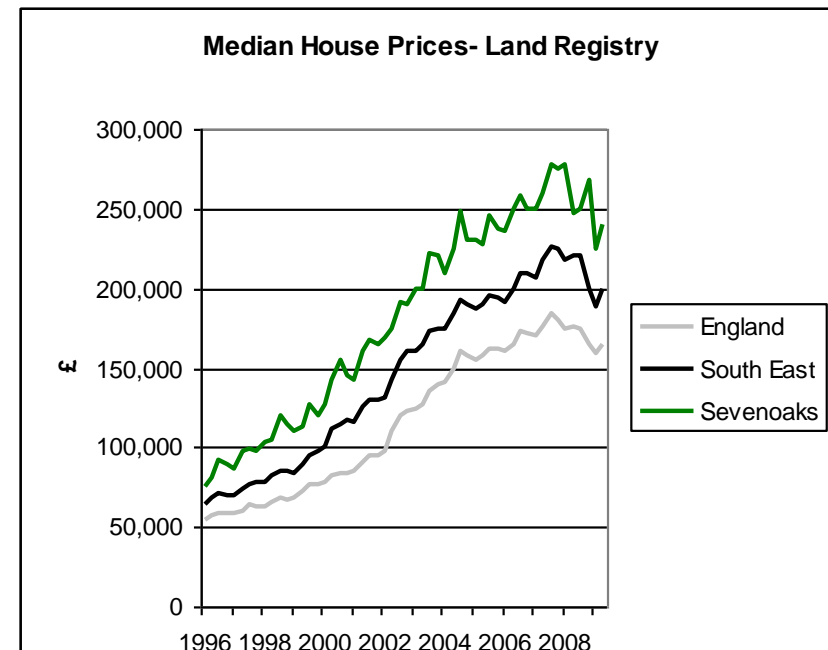
Will be delivered through Sustainable Community Action Plan priority 11- Housing to meet residents' needs

At 1 April 2009, there were 48,032 dwellings in the District. House prices in Sevenoaks District are very high relative to both the rest of Kent and England as a whole. This has implications for job retention and attracting employees for low wage jobs into the area - high house prices and rents make living within the District unaffordable, yet the relatively low wages of some jobs mean there is little incentive to pay the transport costs to commute into the District to work.

The former South East Plan was the regional framework for managing future development in the South East. It set the standards and principles for the physical development of the region between 2006 and 2026. Critically, the South East Plan set the housing requirement and the policies on infrastructure

for Sevenoaks District. The target net increase in dwellings between 2006 and 2026 for Sevenoaks District was 3,300 in the South East Plan (165 per year), and Sevenoaks District Council remains committed to meeting this target through the LDF Core Strategy.

The 2008 West Kent Strategic Housing Market Assessment identified a need for 646 new affordable homes to be provided in the District each year. Based on current house-building appraisals as outlined in the LDF Core Strategy, our target is to deliver 67 new affordable homes annually to add to the 7,000 plus affordable homes already provided in the District.



The notion of a balanced housing stock extends much beyond the *number* of houses in the District, and considerable thought must be given to the design and mix of new housing developments. Concentrations of social housing can create neighbourhoods of deprivation, which are not just symptoms of disadvantage, but can also *cause* disadvantage.

Living in an area of deprivation can be isolating and can result in stigmatisation, a levelling-down of aspirations and being cut off from essential networks, for example about the job market. It is therefore essential that we promote socially mixed and balanced neighbourhoods throughout the District.

The Council is currently preparing its Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF Core Strategy sets out a planning framework and policies to guide development in the future. The Core Strategy vision aims to deliver new housing in a sustainable way with a balance of new housing including increased provision of affordable housing, smaller homes and

housing designed to meet the needs of older people. Affordable housing means housing designed to meet the needs of eligible households whose needs are not met by the market and can include social rented and intermediate housing.

Many of the District's affordable homes will be provided on new build developments through the planning process and the District Council will seek to negotiate up to 40% affordable housing on site, with a split between social rented and intermediate housing. Core Strategy Policy SP3 provides the local policy framework for securing new provision.

Through Kent Homechoice, affordable housing applicants now choose where they want to live rather than being told where they shall live. A Kent-wide Sustainable Communities Protocol promotes the development of mixed communities through the use of sustainable lettings plans. A Kent-wide mobility scheme will provide greater geographical and social mobility

by creating opportunities to take up employment or to give and receive support across the County.

Because of shortage of land for development, residents with low incomes and high property prices, there can be a high need for affordable homes in small villages. Where a local housing need is identified, Green Belt restrictions can be overridden – therefore allowing much needed development. These “rural exceptions” sites contribute to village sustainability and are essential in ensuring mixed and balanced communities within the District’s many small villages.

It is also important to recognise that housing extends beyond “bricks and mortar”. It is often the *homeless* who are some of the most vulnerable in society, and there is often a close correlation between homelessness and drug and or alcohol use and mental and physical disability.

To help prevent homelessness that may result from financial hardship, Citizens Advice Bureaux are funded to provide

specialist debt counselling and mortgage arrears advice. Similarly, the Council is offering the Mortgage Rescue Scheme in partnership with Moat Housing Group, which supports homeowners who have exhausted all the hardship options offered by their mortgage lender.

Due to the proactive work of the Council’s Housing Team and partner landlords, would-be homeless households can be assisted into good quality private rented accommodation before their situation becomes desperate. Private rented accommodation is dotted all over the District and beyond, thus avoiding concentrations of deprived households. Overall despite the economic downward trend, the level of homelessness acceptances in the District has decreased by 50% over the last year (March 2009 to March 2010).

Gypsies and Travellers are thought to form the largest ethnic minority group in the District, and it is important that a balanced housing mix recognises the needs of Gypsies and Travellers. Sevenoaks has the highest number of permanent

public pitches in Kent . There are a number of unauthorised developments on private land, some with temporary planning consents and others at various stages of planning appeal or enforcement.

The 2004 Housing Act introduced a requirement to carry out need assessments of Gypsies/Travellers and to develop a strategy setting out how identified need will be met. The assessment originally identified a need for 64 new permanent pitches between 2006 and 2011. Following the abolition of regional planning local councils now have responsibility for setting future levels of provision for their area. The Council will develop a Gypsy/Traveller Housing Strategy .

Stock condition surveys are used to monitor the physical state of existing housing. A Stock Condition and Energy Efficiency Survey was carried out in 2004. A new stock condition survey is being developed and will be completed in 2010 and the findings from the survey will be taken into account in the development of future housing policies.

The Council is working with private landlords to provide a thriving and safe private rented sector. It has done this through the development of a Property Accreditation Scheme (Private Accredited Letting Scheme) in association with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and licensing of houses in multiple occupation (HMO's). HMOs are subject to increased fire risk and often house the most vulnerable groups in society.

Empty properties are a wasted resource, particularly in areas such as Sevenoaks with high housing needs, and can cause an area to be dragged down through vandalism and anti social behaviour. Since 2004, the Council has directly assisted property owners to bring a total of 33 long term vacant properties back into use. In 2008, elected Members carried out an in-depth scrutiny of the Council's empty homes function. The resultant Empty Homes Action Plan 2009 sets out the Council's actions and targets including ambitious targets for the number of long-term vacant properties to be returned to use.

Under- used affordable housing is also a wasted resource; a situation which is exacerbated when there are so few opportunities to develop new affordable housing, and so the Council is working with others across Kent to develop suitable incentives which will encourage householders to downsize. Such incentive schemes will free up larger housing for families in need and also assist the downsizing household into accommodation more suited to their needs which is also cheaper to heat and maintain.

The Council recognizes its older residents may have specific housing needs. The Sevenoaks Older People's Strategy and Action Plan outlines how the Council, and partners, can support older residents. Examples are the local Home Improvement Agency service and Disabled Facilities Grants, which help to enable older people (and those with disabilities) to retain their independence and stay in their own homes if their home is otherwise suitable for their needs.

It is good practice for local authorities to develop local housing strategies setting out how they intend to meet the needs and aspirations of the local community. The Council is assessing housing requirements in order to develop a new strategic housing action plan which will outline the key aims and objectives to meet future need and demand in the District. Priorities will include the provision of affordable housing, improving the quality and use of existing housing, and providing housing-related support services. It is important that reducing the carbon footprint and energy use is a high priority. The above can only be achieved by working in partnership. Sitting under the main strategic housing action plan, sub-strategies and action plans deal with specific issues (see Appendix 1).

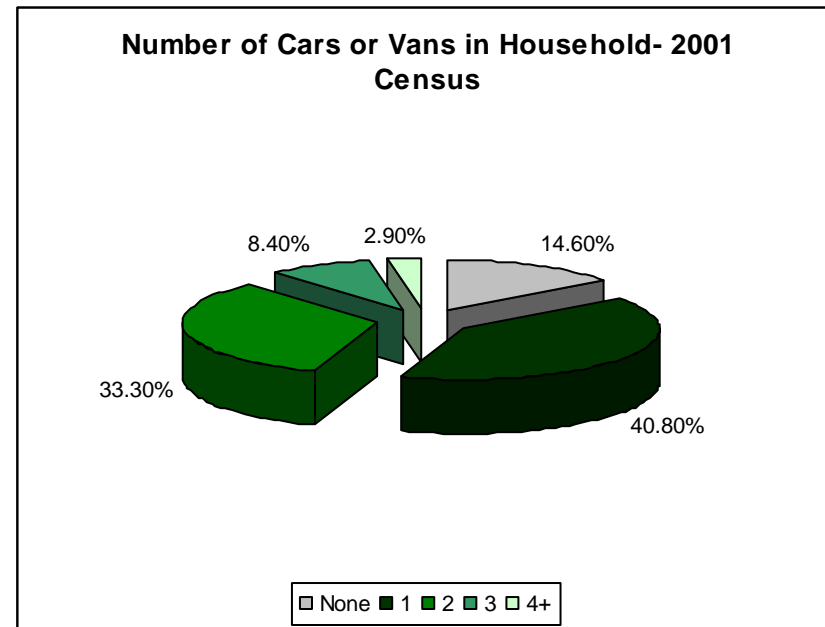
2. Sustainable Transport

Will be delivered through Sustainable Community Action Plan priority 10- Keep Sevenoaks District moving

Sevenoaks District has a high level of car dependency- At the time of the 2001 Census, only 14.6% of households were reported to own no cars or vans, much lower than for England as a whole (26.8%). Whilst this is a positive reflection of the District's affluence, one must also recognise the social and environmental impact of car dependency in the District, and the centrality of transport and infrastructure to the issue of balanced communities.

Areas which lack access to public transport are more likely to fall into isolation. Moreover, areas which cannot be easily accessed by public transport discriminate against those unable to afford a car and those unable to drive as a result of

disability or age. Poor public transport increases the District's car dependency, with implications for sustainability and congestion.



However, the problems to be overcome are not trivial. Rural transport is often intrinsically unprofitable given low population densities. It is important that the needs of users of non-car based travel, voluntary or non-voluntary, be considered in a

district-wide strategy. The predicted increase in the number of elderly people will create further pressure to provide non-car based modes of travel.

To help foster sustainable transport in the District, Sevenoaks District Council has been supporting KCC in producing the Sevenoaks District Transport Strategy. The Strategy will include specific initiatives for promoting non-car based travel. Moreover, the Council is aiming to publish an updated Staff Travel Plan, to reduce car use amongst SDC employees. Consultation has taken place on draft proposals and it is anticipated that the plan will be finalised by the end of the year.

The LDF Core Strategy focuses the majority of new development on the District's main towns which have the greatest range of services and facilities and the widest range of public transport. This will help to ensure that occupiers of new development will be less dependent on the car to access

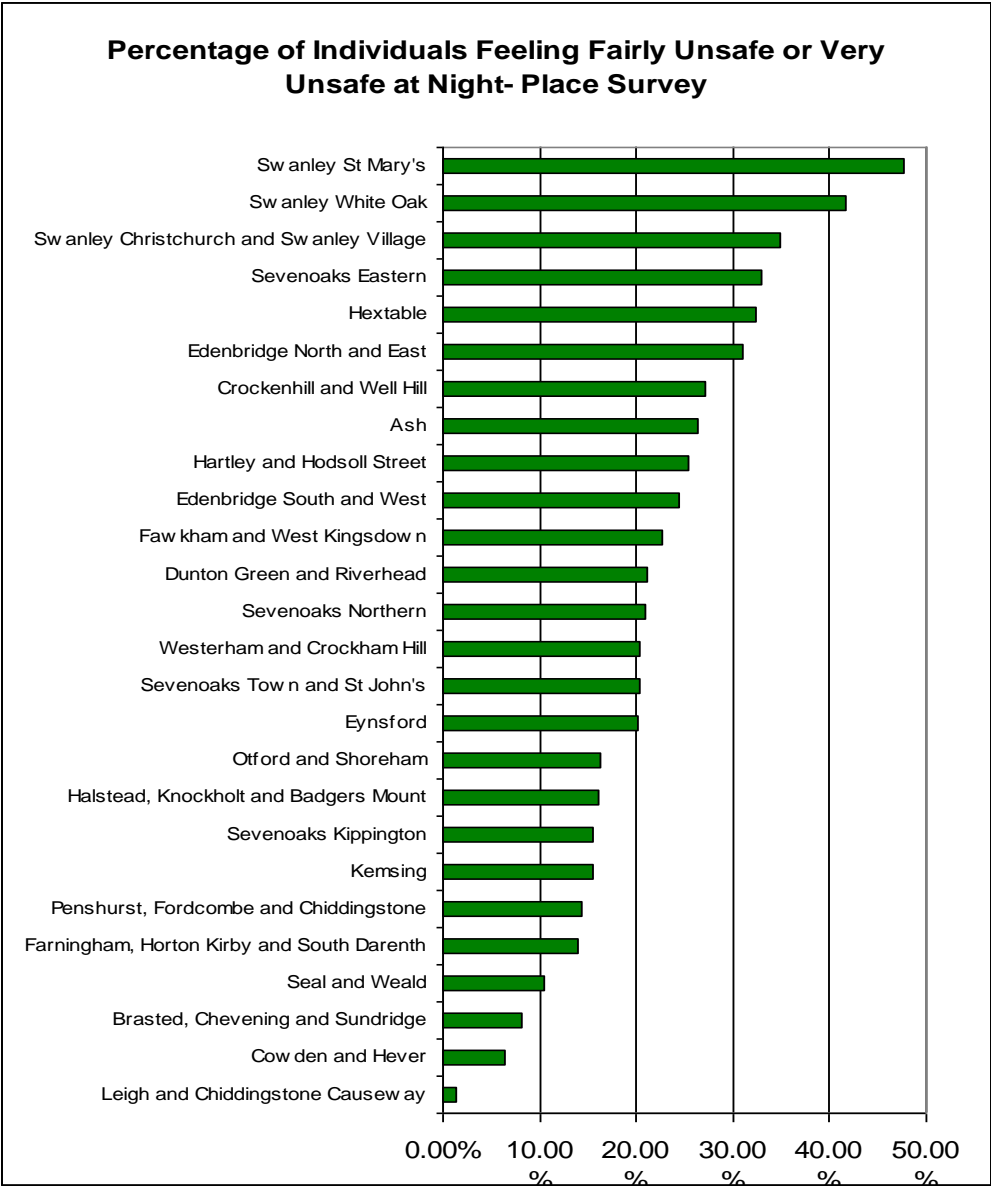
jobs and services. It also requires larger developments to include travel plans aimed at reducing car use.

3. Low Crime

Will be delivered through Sustainable Community Action Plan priority 1- Help Communities to feel safe and be safe

Community safety is about tackling crime, anti-social behaviour and fear of crime. It is about improving the quality of life for those who live and work in the District through multi-agency partnerships including statutory agencies and the voluntary sector.

Overall crime rates in the District are the lowest in Kent. However, *perceptions* of crime vary much across the District. For example, in the 2009 Place Survey, 47.6% of respondents in Swanley St. Mary’s ward felt fairly unsafe or very unsafe at night. This compares to 23% for the whole District. It is thus critical that future policy addresses the fact that perceived and actual safety is not uniform across the District.



To address these issues, a partnership approach to tackling crime in the District has been adopted. The Sevenoaks District Community Safety Partnership was formed in 1998, engaging partners, community groups, local workers and residents in order to deliver effective solutions to community safety issues. The Partnership works together to achieve three aims:

1. Reduce and detect crime.
2. Reduce anti-social behaviour and fear of crime and reassure people across the District.
3. Strengthen community involvement.

To achieve these three aims, the Partnership has published a Community Safety Strategy & Action Plan 2008-2011 which runs from April 2008 to March 2011- see

http://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/documents/strategy_plan2008_2.pdf

The Community Safety Unit (CSU) was set up in September 2009, and is jointly run by Sevenoaks District Council and

West Kent Police and is based in Sevenoaks District Council's Argyle Road Offices. The CSU brings the Police, the Council and other agencies together to give a more co-ordinated response to Community Safety concerns. Residents in the District can use the unit to report various Community Safety issues such as anti-social behaviour, graffiti, fly-tipping, drug problems, abandoned vehicles and environmental nuisance

Residents can also obtain crime reduction advice, information about Neighbourhood Watch and other Community Safety issues. The CSU can be contacted by calling 01732 227000 or emailing community.safety@sevenoaks.gov.uk

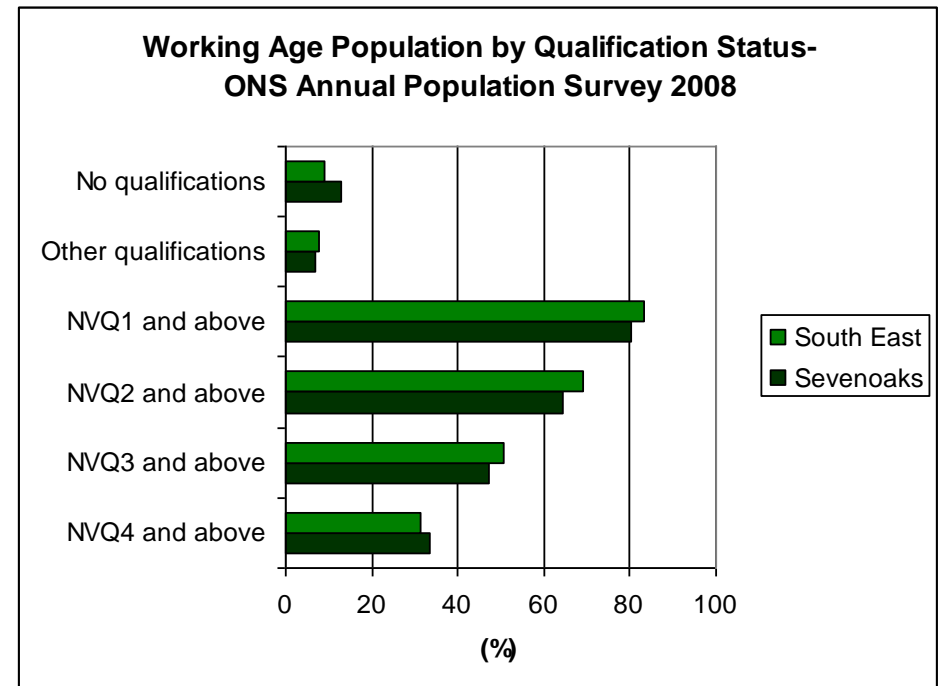
4. High Quality Education

Will be delivered through Sustainable Community Action Plan priorities 3- A better start for our children, and 12- A thriving economy

There are no grammar schools in Sevenoaks District and consequently large numbers of students have to travel to grammar schools outside the District. The presence of high-performing private schools in the District exacerbates the disparity in educational attainment and thus life opportunities between high-income and low-income families in the District.

Variations in education can be an obstacle to creating balanced communities. Whilst parents may well be happy to live in mixed areas they are often not prepared to settle for local standards of education, particularly at secondary level. This can create distortions in property markets, with increased

demand for housing near high performing state schools. This can lead to the best state schools becoming inaccessible to those unable to locate near the schools, consequently hindering social mobility.



The 2008 ONS Annual Population Survey suggests that the District has a higher proportion of individuals who are highly qualified, with NVQ4 and above equivalent qualifications, compared to the South East (33.4% in Sevenoaks District compared to 31.5% in the South East and 29% in Great Britain).

The survey suggests that there are a high number of individuals with no qualifications. The proportion of individuals with no qualifications is higher than for Great Britain as a whole (12.8% in Sevenoaks District compared to 8.9% in the South East and 12.4% in Great Britain). GCSE achievement in Local Authority maintained schools appears poor compared to England in Sevenoaks District. An average of 35.75% of students attending Local Authority secondary schools in the District achieved 5 GCSE's at grades A*-C in 2006, much lower than the Kent average of 61.4%.

To help ensure quality education is available for all young people, the District Council will continue to work with Local

Children's Trust Partnerships to continually improve the quality of schools in the District and to ensure appropriate learning opportunities and courses are offered to all young people. Sevenoaks District Council will continue to support the Knole Academy, which will provide an education for up to 1,550 students aged 11-18. It opened in existing buildings on the Bradbourne and Wildernesse school sites in September 2010.

To improve the skills and qualifications of adults in the District, the Council will continue to investigate opportunities for joint and partnership working, including training and skills development- for example, by providing work experience and internship opportunities.

The HERO Project (Housing Energy Retraining Options see <http://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/hero>) is a 2 year initiative which began in August 2009. The Project provides advice on a wide range of subjects which include, finding a job, applying for a job, CV writing and interview techniques as well as identifying

opportunities for work experience/volunteering/training in areas that residents are interested in. Advice is also available on housing problems and homelessness, debt advice, benefit maximisation, energy efficiency measures (including grants) and on starting a business.

5. Good Health Outcomes for All

Will be delivered through Sustainable Community Action Plan priority 7- Improve health and wellbeing

There are disparities in life expectancy across wards in the District. According to ONS estimates of life expectancy at birth, whilst a resident in Ash ward can expect to live 85.1 years, a resident of Swanley St. Mary's can only expect to live 77.6 years.

At the same time access to major hospitals and primary care centres (e.g. GP surgeries) vary considerably throughout the District. It is vital that everyone in the District has good access to healthcare facilities, including dentistry.

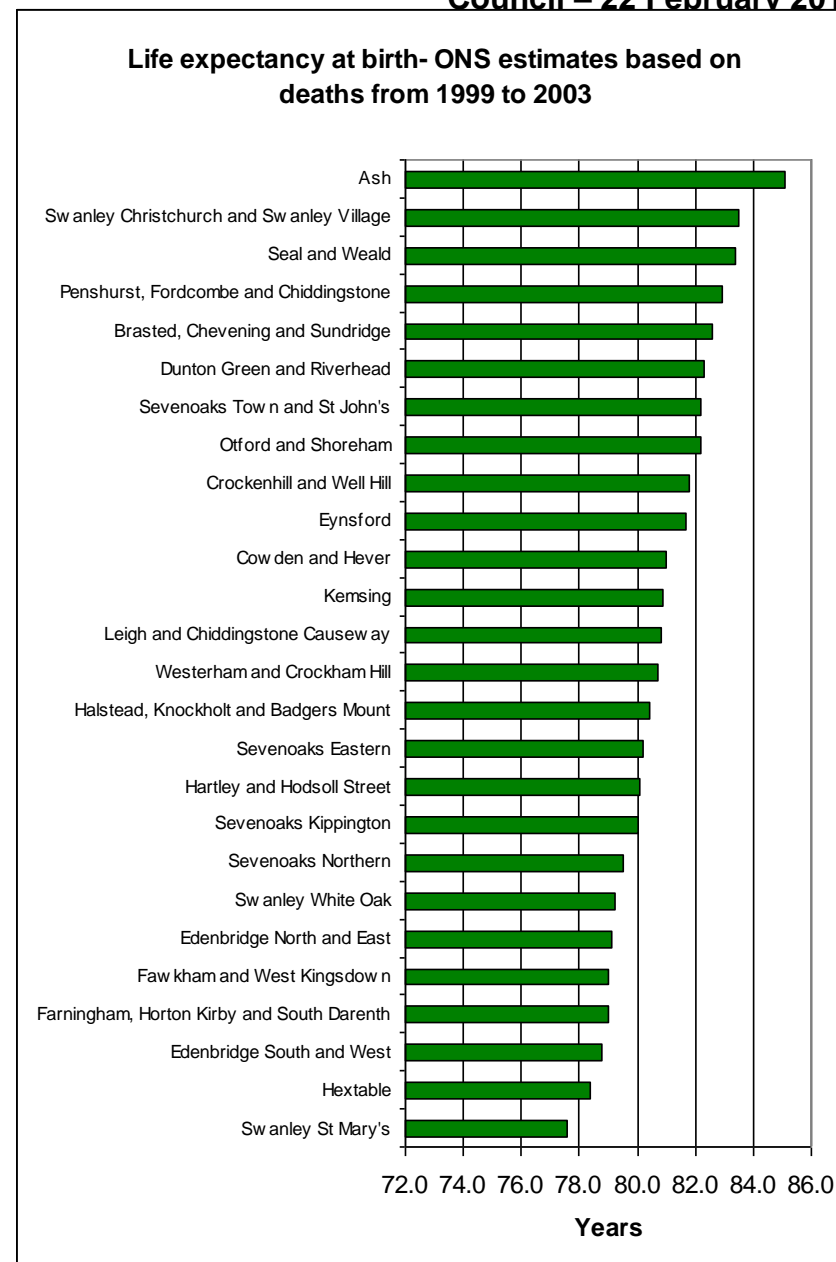
The Council's Community Development Team delivers community based healthy living projects delivered in partnership with NHS West Kent, Sencio Community Leisure,

other agencies and communities. The delivery of holistic health prevention projects in identified areas of need enables key agencies proactively to work together to reduce health inequalities and improve the health and wellbeing of people living and working in the Sevenoaks District. Healthy living projects being co-ordinated by this Council include:

- Healthy Weight programmes for adults and families to support targeted groups regarding sustained exercise and maintenance of a healthier weight. Targeted projects offer support and activities relating to healthy eating and physical activity;
- Mental Wellbeing projects aimed at supporting and preventing mental health related conditions;
- Smoking Cessation Services offering group and individual interventions to support people to stop smoking and improve life expectancies by reducing smoking related diseases;

- Improving access for young people to sexual health services to reduce teenage conception through targeted community outreach services;
- Alcohol misuse initiatives to reduce alcohol consumption among targeted groups to reduce alcohol related crime and hospital admissions;
- Falls prevention projects to support independent living among older people and extend years of healthy life to support the ageing well agenda.

For a list of the current Healthy Lifestyles initiatives, go to http://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/education_health_and_social_care/health/.

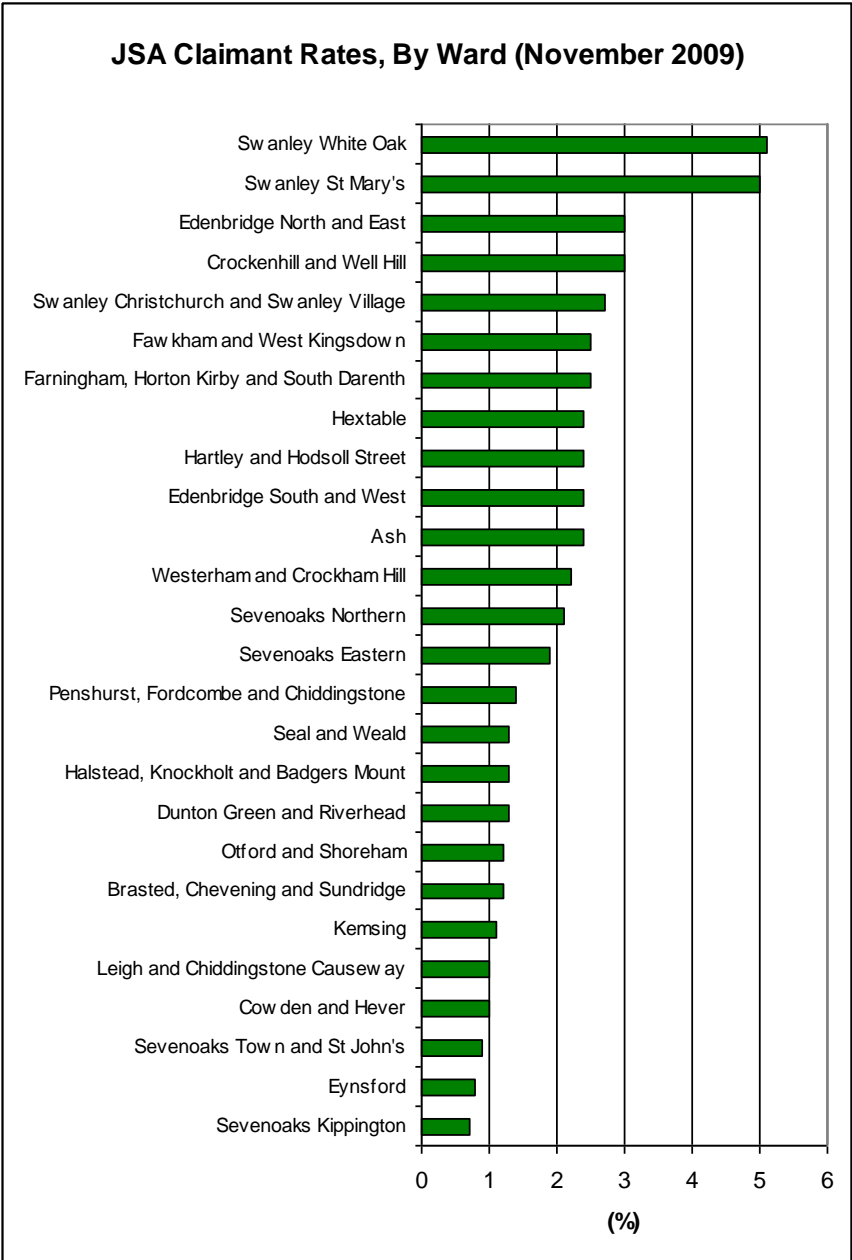


6. Job Opportunities for All

Will be delivered through Sustainable Community Action Plan priority 12- A thriving economy, and through the HERO Project

The recession has led to a large increase in unemployment in the District, posing new challenges for the area. Between November 2008 and November 2009, Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) claimants increased from 790 individuals to 1,449 individuals- almost doubling.

At the same time, unemployment rates are not uniform across the District and the disparities are quite wide, further illustrating how merely looking at the affluence of the District as a whole can mask pockets of deprivation. JSA claimant rates in Swanley in November 2009 exceeded 5%, above the Great Britain average of 4.1%.



To cope with the new challenges arising, Sevenoaks District Council is implementing new initiatives to respond to the impacts of the downturn and help reduce the gap between the most affluent and the most deprived in the District.

The HERO Project will continue to provide advice on getting back into work, with outreach services in Hartley, Edenbridge, Swanley and Sevenoaks- see www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/hero.

The Council is working in partnership with KCC to create eight jobs at our offices for long-term unemployed young people, for a period of six months. During this time, the Council will provide employability advice and training for these individuals to help ensure they remain in employment in the long-term.

The Council will continue to work in partnership with Jobcentre Plus to explore ways of extending outreach services across the District. Moreover, the Council will continue to provide signposting to training and retraining opportunities for the unemployed.

Where deprivation can be attributed to low income or incapacity rather than unemployment, benefits can provide additional support. The Council's benefit service is committed to paying the right benefit, to the right person, at the right time. The District Council will continue to promote the take-up of state benefits where eligible. We are continuing to provide benefits surgeries in Sevenoaks, Edenbridge, Hartley and Swanley, which provide face-to-face advice for individuals.

The LDF Core Strategy provides for land for employment development and supports initiatives to improve skills and support the development of small businesses.

Recognising that enterprise is the primary cause of job creation, the Council will continue to work closely with Business Link South East and other business support providers to ensure good provision of business support across the District. The Council will also work closely with Locate in Kent to ensure that the District is marketed as an attractive location to those looking to start or expand a business.

To help support the rural economy, the West Kent Leader Program provides £1.8 million in grant funding to help farmers, growers, foresters and other rural businesses secure a sustainable future for rural West Kent.

7. A Clean and Green Environment.

Will be delivered through Sustainable Community Action Plan priority 6- Energy, Resources and Climate Change.

It is important that our communities remain clean, sustainable and environmentally friendly if posterity is to find the District an equally pleasant place to live.

A revised Kent Environment Strategy is being produced, recognising that action must be taken to tackle these challenges in a way that we can convert them into opportunities for economic and social gain. Sevenoaks District Council will help progress the renewal of the environment strategy and, where appropriate, will act so as to progress the environmental agenda.

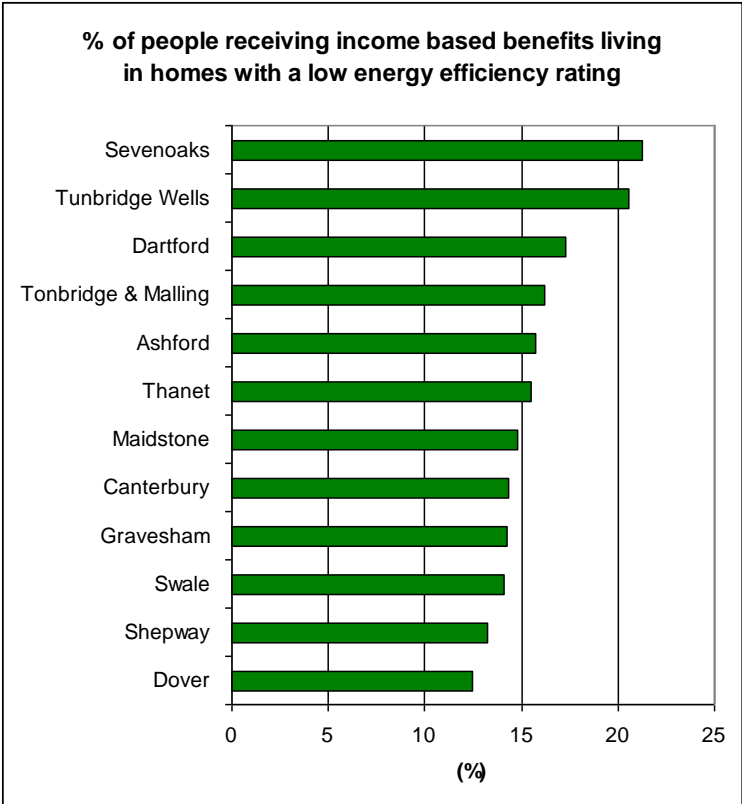
The LDF Core Strategy includes policies to ensure sustainability principles are incorporated into the location and design of new development.

The Council is currently achieving a recycling rate of just under 33%. A review of the Joint Household Waste Strategy for Kent, adopted in April 2007 is currently underway. The refreshed Strategy will seek to better the requirements to divert household waste from landfill, identify alternative options from landfill to treat residual waste with targets for recovery, set challenging recycling targets for Kent, and promote effective measures to control household waste growth per capita and encourage and support waste minimisation.

The Council continues to promote, measures to improve energy efficiency in homes for two reasons. Firstly, there are environmental consequences of excessive energy use. Secondly, high fuel bills can lead to fuel poverty for those on low incomes.

In excess of 21.3% of individuals receiving income based benefits in Sevenoaks District live in homes with low energy efficiency ratings. A district comparison reveals that this is the highest proportion in Kent, and suggests that this is an area for justified government influence. Dealing with fuel poverty is an effective action as it deals with both environmental issues and issues of poverty.

To help tackle the problem, Sevenoaks District Council has teamed up with 'HeatSeekers' which, through the use of state-of-the-art thermal imaging technology, can show homeowners exactly where energy is being lost in their property. The Heatseekers vehicle, fitted with the thermal imaging equipment, scans homes in the District during the winter months to identify properties with the greatest energy loss so they can be targeted for home insulation. During the summer months HeatSeekers representatives visit appropriate homeowners moving street by street within identified geographical areas. At this stage the thermal images are used to show homeowners where the heat loss is occurring in their homes. They are then offered advice about how to tackle the identified heat loss. Interested householders can then ask for a free no obligation survey for home insulation including a quote, with Installation arranged at a convenient time and appropriate guarantees issued.



The HERO Project provides guidance on energy efficiency and fuel poverty related issues. See www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/hero

The Environmental Health Team has a duty to enforce statutory legislation relating to public health and safety. Their work impacts on all sectors of society and relates to all people who live, work and visit the Sevenoaks District. A balance between proactive and reactive work is maintained. There is a strong focus on preventive, advisory and educative measures as well as those used to control public health risks.

The Environmental Health Team's work touches on many aspects within the Balanced Communities remit. Officers are responsible for issues relating to nuisance that can be caused by noise, smoke, drainage, rubbish, pests, odour and light pollution. The animal welfare and dog control service is also within the team.

The team regularly reviews and assesses air quality and has developed an Air Quality Action Plan (see www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/documents/air_quality_action_plan_2009.pdf) which contains a number of actions to improve air quality in specific locations and across the District generally. The team is also responsible for industrial air pollution control, the regulation of contaminated land and is consulted by Planning Authorities (SDC and KCC), the Environment Agency and Licensing about applications for developments or licenses that may have an impact on the local community or the environment.

The Council will produce a Climate Change Strategy, outlining the Council's plans to work towards a low-carbon future for Sevenoaks District.

8. Engaging Everyone in the Community

Will be delivered through Sustainable Community Action Plan priorities 2-Meeting the needs of an aging population, 4- Improve the lives of young people in the District and 9- Strong, active and involved communities

Sevenoaks District Council officially adopted the Sustainable Community Action Plan 2007-2010 in April 2007. The plan was produced by the Sevenoaks District Local Strategic Partnership and sets out the priorities for many local services, both public and voluntary, across the District for the next three years. A new three year action plan (2010-2013) has been developed as a result of consultations.

The Sustainable Community Plan is the result of direct consultation with residents, town and parish councils, voluntary and statutory sectors, Council Officers and Members. This ensures full community engagement in the

identification and delivery of the priorities in the Sustainable Community Plan, and ensures that the Council's priorities align themselves with the community's priorities. Ongoing engagement will be maintained through the Local Strategy Partnership's monitoring of the Sustainable Community Action Plan.

However, further consideration needs to be given to ways of identifying and assisting groups of individuals who need extra support to engage with the community, for example, the young, older people and ethnic minorities.

The Council's new Young People's Action Plan 2009-12 has recently been launched following an extensive consultation with over 3060 children and young people aged 9 – 18. The Plan is delivered in partnership with other agencies and identifies 12 key outcomes:

- Successful transition to secondary school for vulnerable children.
- Young people better informed about health issues.

- More young people have increased self esteem and a positive body image.
- More children and young people achieving the recommended daily physical activity level.
- Young people feel safer in the community.
- Better support for victims of bullying and effective prevention models in place.
- More young people accessing affordable, local activities with an emphasis on excitement and challenge.
- Young people more aware of the consequences of anti-social behaviour and crime.
- Parents better equipped to prevent their children becoming involved in crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Children, young people and parents understand how to use the internet safely.
- Young people feel supported in their transition to independence.
- More young people involved in their community and their achievements recognised.

The Council works in partnership with West Kent Extra to provide recreational, educational and diversionary activities for children aged 8-12 years with an emphasis on building confidence, challenging unacceptable behaviour and increasing aspirations. The original 8-12s project in Swanley has now been rolled out to Sevenoaks, New Ash Green and West Kingsdown, supporting some of the most vulnerable children in these areas.

Supporting People helps vulnerable people to have a better quality of life by providing housing-related support services in their own homes or in specialist housing. The programme helps pay for the services that allow people to live independently in the community. It aims to prevent the problems that can cause people to become homeless, build up debts and rent arrears, need hospital treatment, or move into care. The vision for the service is detailed in the Kent Supporting People Strategy.

The Council works in partnership with the *In Touch* Home Improvement Agency (HIA), managed by Hyde Housing Group and funded through Supporting People. The HIA operates a Handyperson service, designed to tackle a range of minor jobs for the benefit of their client group (those aged 60 years or above and/or disabled persons, irrespective of the age). This service helps to enable older people to retain their independence and stay in their own homes.

This Council has always valued the contribution of older people to the community and welcomed the significant support older volunteers regularly provide to local charities, their own communities and neighbours. However, with the progress of time and the projected increase in the population of older people, it was considered appropriate to provide a more co-ordinated approach to meet the needs and recognise the contribution and role of older people across the district. Consequently, the Council has produced an Older People's Strategy and Action Plan which outlines how the Council, and partners, can support the economic and social contributions

of older people, and encourage the contributions of older people in community life.

The Council's Comprehensive Equality Scheme shows how we will eliminate discrimination and promote equality. The Scheme covers specific equality themes which also include detailed action plans showing how we will take steps to ensure people are treated fairly, and are able to engage with the community. See

http://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/community_living/equality/default.asp

A Community Plan priority is to increase the number of Parish Plans in the District. The LDF Core Strategy also gives support to Parish Plans. Parish Plans are an excellent way of increasing individual participation in public life and for parish councils to consult communities about the delivery of services. The evidence base for Parish Plans will be aided by the fact that the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey 2010 and local

housing needs surveys will be conducted at the individual parish level rather than an artificial zoning of the District.

Achieving our Vision

In order to achieve the Council's vision of Balanced Communities, actions that contribute to our vision will need to be regularly monitored and any significant gaps in provision, problems or issues reviewed to establish what additional actions need to be taken. Through the LSP, the Sustainable Communities Action Plan and its Balanced Communities components, are already monitored and reported against on a quarterly basis.

The following additional procedures are suggested:

- That the notion of a “balanced community”, clearly defined, is incorporated and considered in all future strategies which impact upon the community.
- An annual report to Cabinet to update Members on progress.

Appendix I- Strategies which support Balanced Communities objectives

Balanced Community objectives	Community Plan priorities that contribute to achieving the objective	Other strategies that support the objective
A Balanced Housing Mix	11- Housing to meet residents' needs	<p><u>Sevenoaks District Council Housing Strategy</u></p> <p>Strategic housing action plan 2010-2013</p> <p>Local Development Framework Core Strategy</p> <p>Empty Homes Action Plan 2009</p> <p>Fuel Poverty Strategy 2005 (Kent Health and Affordable Warmth Strategy)</p> <p>Sub-regional Homelessness Strategy 2006 and being updated in 2010</p> <p>Domestic Abuse Strategy 2005</p> <p>Private Sector Housing Strategy - adopted 2007</p> <p>BME Housing Strategy - updated 2007</p> <p>Younger Persons' Strategy - to be developed</p> <p>Gypsy/Traveller Strategy - to be developed</p>

Sustainable Transport	10- Keep Sevenoaks District moving	Sevenoaks District Transport Strategy 2010)
Low Crime	1- Help Communities to feel safe and be safe	<u>Community Safety Strategy & Action Plan 2008-2011</u> Domestic Abuse Action Plan
High Quality Education	3- A better start for our children, 12- A thriving economy	Economic Development Action Plan <u>Young People’s Action Plan</u>
Good Health Outcomes for All	7- Improve health and wellbeing	Health Needs Assessments Sevenoaks District Health Action Team Action Plan.
Job Opportunities for All	12- A thriving economy	Sevenoaks District Economic Development Action Plan Local Development Framework Core Strategy
A Clean and Green Environment	5- A Clean and Healthy Environment 6 – Energy Resources & Climate Change	<u>Kent Environment Strategy</u> Local Development Framework Core Strategy Fuel Poverty Strategy 2005 (Kent Health and Affordable Warmth Strategy) Carbon Reduction Plan Joint Household Waste Strategy for Kent Air Quality Action Plan 2009
Engaging Everyone in the Community	2- Meeting the needs of an aging population, 4- Improve the lives of young people in the District 9- Strong, active and involved communities	Older People’s Strategy <u>Young People’s Action Plan</u> <u>Comprehensive Equality Scheme</u> Social Inclusion FrameworkKent Supporting People Strategy

