

West Kent Partnership

West Kent Investment Strategy and Action Plan 2010-2015

27 July 2010

West Kent's Economic Position

West Kent provides a very attractive area in which to live and work and measured in terms of GVA per capita is generally more prosperous than other parts of Kent. Traditionally, the area's economic strengths and locational advantages close to London and the M25 has led the area to be regarded as the 'powerhouse' of the Kent economy.

There are a number of strong clusters of economic activity with growth potential and an entrepreneurial culture which has led to the creation of many successful new Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Business and financial services are a strong employment sector for residents both within the West Kent economy and those working in the City of London bringing a boost to local incomes and spending. Tourism is a very important part of the West Kent economy with a combination of exceptional attractions - historic buildings, the North Downs and other impressive rural areas and landscapes, several market towns and many picturesque villages. Healthcare, distribution and logistics, print and publishing are also key sectors for the local economy.

In the past, business growth rates have been positive and the area has also benefited from relatively high levels of inward investment. West Kent has enjoyed low levels of worklessness, high levels of affluence, a high quality environment attractive to new business investment and a skilled and well-educated local labour force,

Economic Profiling, Evidence Base and Consultation

The West Kent Partnership commissioned CSES to produce a profile of the West Kent Economy to inform preparation of an Investment Strategy for the area. CSES conducted desktop research by reference to existing relevant strategies and available economic data, conducted a survey of local businesses, held interviews with key stakeholders and partners and held a workshop in July 2009 and conference and consultation workshop in October 2009.

Its key conclusion is that the economy of West Kent has reached a crossroads and West Kent's traditional economic strengths are under threat. Overall economic growth in West Kent lags behind many other areas in the South East and West Kent's GVA per capita is only 74% of the South East average. Without positive and urgent intervention, the research concluded that West Kent's position will decline relative to other parts of Kent and to the South East Region as a whole

The study also highlighted some key areas of weakness for the West Kent Economy:

- Apparent affluence masks pockets of deprivation and whilst skills levels are generally high there is an increasing and substantial minority (20%) who don't possess even basic qualifications (NVQ level 1)
- Graduate retention is falling and more higher level skills are being lost to London through out-commuting
- Local businesses are reporting recruitment problems and a lack of skills within the labour force exacerbated by high local house prices which are driving younger employees to jobs in other areas where home ownership is more affordable
- Unemployment levels are rising more steeply than elsewhere in Kent, Medway or the UK, in response to the high proportion of West Kent's workforce employed in sectors that have been particularly hard-hit by the recession
- Economic activity rates in West Kent have fallen and are now lower than in Kent as a whole and the wider South East.
- A population which is ageing more rapidly than in the wider South East and UK with little prospect of a growing workforce in next 20 years and skills shortages
- A relative shortage of good quality sites and premises which potentially constrains West Kent's capacity to promote start-ups and existing local businesses
- Poor transport connectivity, particularly, north-south links and transport congestion at peak times on local routes such as the A21 and access to M25/M26 which could increasingly impact on both West Kent and the coastal area to the south of the A21
- The traditional rail connectivity advantage to London is being diminished by the introduction of the HS1 service from North Kent, Ashford and East Kent whereby commuter journey times are becoming comparable with those from West Kent. In addition the introduction of this new service has reduced the frequency of existing West Kent services to London.
- New planned investment taking place in the rest of Kent and the South East could threaten the area's natural attractions for businesses relocating to West Kent. Higher levels of infrastructure investment improving East Kent and North Thames Gateway connectivity to London and Europe are adding to the attractiveness of these areas for inward investment.
- An increasingly competitive property offer in many areas close to West Kent, especially for knowledge-based start-ups and high-profile industrial parks

Future Scenarios for West Kent

CSES were also commissioned to provide an assessment of future scenarios for West Kent and how well placed existing strategies are to tackle them.

The three scenarios defined by the West Kent Partnership were:

- Scenario 1 – no long term strategic economic development investment
- Scenario 2 – strategy to maintain West Kent's position relative to the rest of the South East and to other areas of Kent
- Scenario 3 – strategy to move West Kent forward and improve its position relative to the rest of the South East

The West Kent Partnership at a workshop in July 2009 endorsed Scenario 3 as the preferred option for West Kent. The consequences of adopting scenarios 1 or 2 were deemed unacceptable as it was agreed that the identified negative trends urgently need to be checked. The delivery of actions to achieve the objectives set out in Scenario 3 is dependent, however, on attracting support and external investment necessary to deliver economic improvement and increase local competitiveness. The West Kent Investment Strategy therefore sets out what investment will be needed to achieve such aims.

West Kent's Investment Strategy and Action Plan

It is recognised that historically, limited financial resources have been available to West Kent to invest in its local economy. The area has not been regarded as a priority by those agencies and bodies at national and regional level who have control over public resources available for investment in regeneration and infrastructure development. It is fully recognised that the future investment needs in West Kent are unlikely to be as extensive as other areas with more structural economic problems, for example, the East Kent coastal towns. However, the key message from the research undertaken is that West Kent should now be regarded as an area where some highly targeted economic and infrastructure investment is both justified and needed, for example to improve the environmental quality and appeal of our town centres to exploit future new retail and commercial development opportunities. The successful Rural Development Programme for England Leader Programme in West Kent has demonstrated that West Kent can competently manage external investment in our own economy to achieve significant economic improvement in one of its key sectors.

The West Kent Investment Strategy aims to set out a proactive and strategic approach to the future investment needed to support the West Kent economy now and in the future.

Informed by the profiling study commissioned by The West Kent Partnership this Investment Strategy and Action Plan sets out what needs to be done locally to strengthen the economy and work towards the target suggested by the profiling work to achieve parity with the South East region on GVA per capita over a 10-15 year period. It is intended that this Strategy will underpin future discussions with funding agencies and will set out a case for future bids for external funding streams. Without such targeted investment, the ongoing health of the West Kent economy and local quality of life is at serious risk.

An action plan for the period 2010-2015 has been developed under 3 priority headings:

- **Develop entrepreneurship and businesses** - More active promotion of entrepreneurship and help for existing local businesses to maximise their competitiveness and growth and, in the medium-term, a drive to seek to attract appropriate inward investment
- **Develop labour force and skills base** - Greater intervention in the labour market to address skills shortages and other constraints on the capacity of the West Kent economy to develop involving a focus on developing and expanding the FE/HE provision which already exists in West Kent to meet both current and emerging skills demand
- **Develop connectivity** - Investment to improve connectivity within West Kent, in terms of road and rail transport, broadband, innovative and sector networking and support.

These priorities and the themes developed within them have been derived from the analysis of the situation and trends in West Kent and a review of existing strategies and scenarios. These priorities are not ranked. Each of the key targets within the priorities have equal status and are designed to:

- Build on West Kent's strengths and take advantage of new opportunities
- Address the weaknesses and possible future threats that West Kent faces

In order for the West Kent Partnership to intervene effectively through innovative and dedicated partnership working and affect some positive change, the capacity of the Partnership needs to be developed and links to the West Kent business community strengthened as a mechanism for mobilising support for key initiatives.

A key message from the research is that the main driver of economic development in West Kent is likely to be the area's indigenous potential for growth, underpinned by an effort to promote entrepreneurship, a major effort to strengthen West Kent's skills base and a need for investment in business infrastructure. Many of the identified themes and actions follow on from those economic development issues identified by the West Kent Partnership in its adopted Area Investment Framework which covered the period 2006-2009.

It needs to be recognised that there are very limited financial resources available to the West Kent Partnership to deliver priorities and a key to successful implementation of the strategy will therefore be to lever funding from other public and private sector sources. The global recession and escalating levels of public debt will constrain such public sector investment in the early years of this plan period but the opportunity must be taken to strongly engage with the private sector and ensure that West Kent is prepared and well placed to access such public sector funding as it becomes available.

If successfully pursued, the priorities and themes should contribute to improving West Kent's economic position by:

- Helping to create new businesses engaged in high added value activities (eg, through the network of specialized business incubators)
- Strengthening and improving the performance of the key sectors, particularly, rural and tourism, whose prospects will largely determine the outlook for the West Kent economy as a whole (eg, through new inward investment, improved connectivity and other measures)
- Linked to this, boosting productivity through the strengthening of the skills base and other measures (eg, promoting innovation, stronger FE/HE provision and developing high quality sites and premises)

ACTION PLAN – 2010-2015

- An annual monitoring report will be produced
- An Economic Development Group will be established to lead on the delivery of the WKIS. A skills group will have responsibility for key targets 4, 5 and 6 and a Transport group for target 10.
- This Action Plan will be regularly reviewed to reflect emerging statutory local authority duties and responsibilities in respect of economic development and regeneration

Priority 1. Develop entrepreneurship and businesses

KEY TARGETS – Economic Development Group to lead

- 1 Network of business incubators and/or effective business support services to target local needs in place as a basis for developing a wider system of support for entrepreneurs
- 2 Promote West Kent, champion key issues and effectively engage with industry and business in order to improve innovation
- 3 Business sites and premises opportunities identified/developed to accommodate key inward investment projects. Employment land identified for retention through the Local Development Frameworks to be retained in employment use.

Ref	Key Action - Deliverable	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
1.1	Work with business support partners to map and promote available services to West Kent businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplified offer • Good signposting • Easier access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ED group 	Post spending review Partners – BLSE, BSK, IGT, KICC
Ref	Key Action - Deliverable	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
1.2	Promote public sector and WKP support for business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt payment code adopted by Partner organisations • Close working with business support organisations • Support of Leader programme and help facilitate exit strategy • Ongoing opportunities identified and actioned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopted • Good relationships • Ongoing support, exit strategy implemented • Opportunities exploited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 2011 • Ongoing • Exit 2013 • Ongoing 	ED group	

Ref	Key Action – Funding Required	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
1.3	Promote entrepreneurship in deprived communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope project • Identify delivery partners and produce costed programme • Lobby/influence – seek public/private sector funding • Delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project scoped • Costed programme • Funding obtained • Programme underway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jun 2010 • Oct 2010 • Mar 2011 • Apr 2011 	ED group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners • External funding 	Scoping document produced
Ref	Key Action – Funding Required	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
1.4	Develop physical business incubator proposition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit graduate researcher under 6.1 • Research Project • Lobby/influence – seek public/private sector funding • Delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource recruited • Research completed • Funding obtained • Programme underway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 2011 • Oct 2011 • 2012 • 2013 	ED group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate project • Partners • External funding 	Link to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDF allocations • KCC Economic Assessment
Ref	Key Action – Funding Required	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
1.5	Develop a digital information hub <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit graduate researcher under 6.1 • Research Project • Lobby/influence – seek public/private sector funding • Deliver 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource recruited • Research completed • Funding obtained • Programme underway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 2011 • Oct 2011 • 2012 • 2013 	ED group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate project • Partners • External funding 	Link to: Maidstone – Media Tree Digital Forum
Ref	Key Action – Deliverable	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
2.1	Promote West Kent, champion key issues and effectively engage with industry and business in order to improve innovation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Locate in Kent in marketing WK offer • Network WKP website and WKP itself to all other business networks/business support agencies operating in WK • Issues and challenges for area represented • Business Champion networking on WK business issues • Support promotion of innovation in WK through 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance WKP website • Relationships in place • Engage at all levels • Champion in place • Sponsorship in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jun 2010 • Ongoing • Ongoing • Oct 2010 • Apr 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • co-ordinator • co-ordinator • Partners • Champion • Co-ordinator 	

	sponsorship of innovation category of WK Business Awards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise county wide sector strategies and the emerging opportunities they present to West Kent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alignment of new business opportunities and sector specific support 			
Ref	Key Action – Deliverable	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
3.1	Review availability/opportunities for sites/premises on WK basis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguard existing employment land by adoption policies Identify a list of potential sites for inward investment Adopt proactive approach with developers to bring forward schemes for key allocated employment sites across WK that meet the needs of local business Seek investment to improve the environmental quality and appeal of our town centres Work with developers/farmers and local authorities to develop more rural business sites and increase redundant farm buildings for commercial use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working group in place WK approach adopted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2010 2011 ongoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WK Planners WK Planners WK Planners 	Link to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LA core strategies LA allocations and DPDs
Ref	Key Action – Deliverable	Outcome	Timescale	Funding Required	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
3.2	Work with partners on developing Local Investment Plan linked to HCA single conversation area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek to ensure suitable affordable housing provision Seek to capitalise on TW/Tonbridge hub designation for both economic growth and transport links Explore opportunities related to Maidstone’s designation as a growth area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working group in place WK stance adopted Local Investment Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2010 2011 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ED group HCA funding 	Link to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Strategies Previous LA/HCA history

2. Develop labour force and skills base

KEY TARGETS – Skills Group to lead

4. Strengthen the Skills base in West Kent by increasing those with level 2+ and improving the workforce employability skills
5. Strengthen Higher Education presence and number of people studying for/achieving level 4/5 qualifications
6. Increase graduate progression into employment

Ref	Key Action – Deliverable	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
4.1	Address ‘trade skills’ deficiencies – Support delivery bodies to promote take up of apprenticeships and work experience schemes and simplify offer to employers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research baseline across WK on what on offer • Link to South East Apprenticeship Company • Develop project – on line resource to remove duplication on Nebosh h&s assessments and employer/provider contact • Seek funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline established • Promote all schemes • Programme designed • Funding obtained • Programme underway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jun 2011 • Jun 2011 • 2012 • 2013 	Skills Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research • Research • External funding • External funding 	Lead Partner WKC Link to Kent initiative as part of SEAC
Ref	Key Action – Funding Required	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
4.2	Address core skill deficiencies – Support Project for young teens at risk of becoming disengaged/NEETS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project scoped • Lead partner identified • Programme designed • Funding obtained • Programme underway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jun 2010 • Mar 2011 • Jun 2011 • 2012 • 2012 	Skills Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research • External funding • External funding 	Possible ESF project Police, Fire, Youth Justice Board all possible partners Scoping document produced

Ref	Key Action – Deliverable	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
4.3	Address core skill deficiencies – Work with new employer Board at WKC to respond to needs of local employers for ‘work ready’ employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer needs identified • ‘work readiness’ skills improved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2011 • Ongoing 	Skills group	New employer Board at WKC Potential to link to timebank Link to KCC worklessness assessment
Ref	Key Action – Deliverable	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
5.1	Support development of stronger higher education offer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Pembury Hospital team to maximise opportunities to develop as a teaching hospital • Develop West Kent Business School Programme • Maintain and develop relationships with HE providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good relationships • Ongoing liaison • Lobbying as required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ongoing 	Skills group	
Ref	Key Action – Deliverable	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
6.1	Nurture graduates into WK economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit post graduates to research WKIS projects • Maintain and develop relationships with HE providers • Promote Young Chamber concept for West Kent • Support development of Kent graduate portal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research undertaken • Good relationships • Chamber in place • Ongoing liaison 	ongoing	Skills group	Young Chamber model elsewhere in Kent Canterbury Christ Church lead

3. Develop Connectivity

KEY TARGETS

- 7. Provide support/added value to existing sector clusters
- 8. Strengthen economic development function in West Kent
- 9. Improve Broadband capability
- 10. Transport infrastructure enhanced to support economic growth and sustainable transport promoted

Ref	Key Action – Deliverable	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
7.1	Add value to existing sector networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ongoing 	ED group	
Ref	Key Action – Deliverable	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
7.2	Develop the value of the rural economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on the existing rural economy by encouraging higher added value farm activity through innovation and diversification through the WK Leader programme. • Support the creation and growth of both new knowledge and tourism based business located in the rural areas and to encourage adaptation to Climate Change • Develop initiatives arising from low carbon economy opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support WK Leader Exit and sustainability strategy developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ongoing 	ED group	WK Leader DEFRA/EU funded

Ref	Key Action – Deliverable	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
7.3	<p>Develop the value of the leisure and tourism sectors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate the development of more higher value added businesses Increase the number of quality of quality graded tourism businesses to attract repeat and higher spending visitors Work with the Heart of Kent and use existing Hotel Needs Surveys for the WK area to support a funding quest for further hotel development Via the Heart of Kent and its links with regional and national tourism organisations ensure that the view of tourism businesses in the WK area are represented at a strategic level. Develop relationship with Visit Kent to maximise value of tourism marketing 	<p>Closer working with Heart of Kent as WK delivery vehicle and Visit Kent to support, develop and market businesses within the tourism sector</p> <p>Establish links to Leisure sector</p>	ongoing	ED group	
Ref	Key Action – Deliverable	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
8.1	<p>Strengthen Economic Development function</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ED group in place to deliver WKIS ED group overseeing skills and transport group and any task groups ED group proactive in use of resources Engagement with WK businesses and business groups to identify issues and involvement with strategic approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WK ED strengthened WKIS delivering Groups delivering New practices evidenced 	ongoing	ED group	
Ref	Key Action – Funding Required	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
9.1	<p>Improve broadband capability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map existing provision to establish a base line and establish if way to make better use of existing broadband access Work proactively with the next Generation Fund to ensure that WK is at the forefront of new investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KCC data supplied Pilot project secured High speed upload connectivity available to 95% of WK urban and rural businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oct 10 Apr 11 Jul 13 	<p>ED group</p> <p>External Funding</p>	<p>High concentration of media businesses underpins argument for improved upload speeds in particular</p> <p>Public funding funding available for rural broadband projects</p>

Ref	Key Action – Funding Required	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
10.1	Enhance sustainable transport connections between West Kent and Ebbsfleet to connect with HS1 service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project scoped • Partners secured • Funding sought • Project underway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dec 2010 • Dec 2010 • Mar 2011 • Sep 2011 	Transport group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External funding 	Avion in Northern France potential European partner –[possible ERDF or interreg
Ref	Key Action – Funding Required	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
10.2	Enhance key bus routes and services in West Kent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop project and bid for Supported Bus Funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project scoped • Funding secured • Project underway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2010 • 2011 • 2012 	Transport Group External funding	
Ref	Key Action – Funding Required	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
10.3	Sustainable and Community Transport Issues - Provide half yearly reports to WKP with recommendations on (mainly lobbying) action required <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of traffic on Air quality management areas (AQMAs) • Road network congestion • Community and voluntary transport options • Rural accessibility to key services • Urban congestion • Commercial bus services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WK commuter services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in number • Hotspots reduced • Services maintained • Rural bus subsidy/grant • Bus priority, park & ride • Quality bus p/ships • Integrated bus network • Through ticketing • 'Fastrack' principles • Improved rolling stock • Services to suit needs • High quality service 	ongoing	Transport Group	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WK commuter parking • Rail service to Gatwick • Highway maintenance • Sustainable transport & accessibility to Pembury Hospital <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for transport interchange at stations 	during Lon Bri reconstrn <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate provision • Service in place • Good standard • Improvements to A228 • Integrated public transport plan in place • Car parking allocations at acceptable levels • good interchanges 			
Ref	Key Action – Funding Required	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
10.4	Transport Infrastructure Issues – Provide half yearly reports to WKP with recommendations on (mainly lobbying) action required <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential East facing slips junction 5 M25/M26 - feasibility • Improvements to A228 corridor Kent Street and Colts Hill • Borough Green bypass • Dualling A21 between Tonbridge and Pembury • Tonbridge Wells/Tonbridge Transport hub • Kent Route Utilisation Strategy • Where aligned ensure WK transport strategy is complementary to KCC's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study delivered by HA • Scheduled • Planning consent • Scheme confirmed • Benefits demonstrated and plan in place • WK view reflected • Strengthens WK lobbying voice 	ongoing	Transport Group	Regional Transport Board's London-Dover Corridor Study – possible route to identifying priorities and securing funding for WK transport infrastructure improvements under Delivering a Sustainable Transport System Programme – KCC are leading on Kent issues - ongoing
Ref	Key Action – Funding Required	Outcome	Timescale	Resource	Notes/Lead Partner/Model
10.5	Improve amenity of identified West Kent stations as part of National Station Improvement Programme (Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells, Swanley and Sevenoaks)	Identified stations benefit from programme	ongoing	Transport Group	