



# Draft Economic Development Strategy

2018 – 2021







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Sevenoaks

southeastern.

sevenoaks



## Foreword

Sevenoaks District offers the best of both worlds, excellent connectivity to London and further afield, whilst situated in picturesque countryside. This presents opportunities and challenges for the economic growth of the District, which this strategy seeks to address.

We want to continue to build on its strong economic performance, whilst acknowledging the pace of change in innovation and technology, which is shaping future patterns of employment and growth. Our District is home to many smaller enterprises, particularly in the rural and visitor economies, and the District Council will continue to work with partners to maintain and improve digital and physical connectivity.

The District is attractive to residents, employers and visitors and our ambition is to leave a positive legacy from our growth. We want to do this through encouraging a sustainable approach, whether through new technologies, careful use of natural resources or enabling local growth to underpin the continuing vitality of our towns and smaller settlements.

Over the next four years, we will continue to work with local businesses and give them the support they need to prosper. We will also be working closely with employers and partners to ensure our residents have the skills they need to gain employment opportunities in the District.

Our strategy complements the objectives in our Corporate Plan, Community Plan and new Local Plan for 2015-2035 and seeks to support our vision 'to sustain and develop a fair, safe and thriving local economy'.

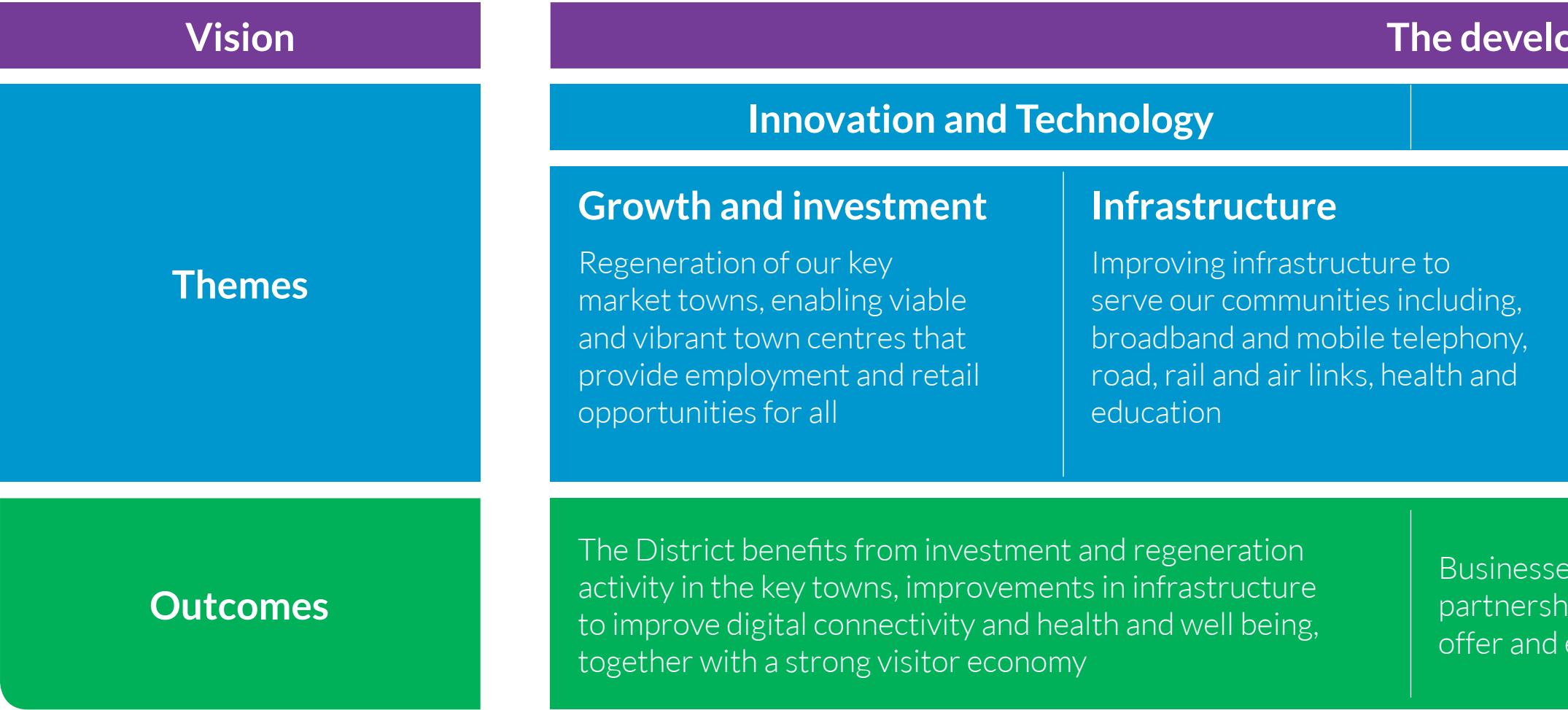
Councillor Roddy Hogarth

**Portfolio Holder for Economic & Community Development**



# Introduction

The strategy sets out five themes for economic development in the District over the next four years from 2018-2021. Those themes will reflect three areas of common interest; Innovation and Technology, the Rural Economy and Sustainability and are shown in the diagram below:



## Economic Development Strategy 2018-2021

### Development of a fair, safe and thriving economy

Rural Economy		Sustainability
<b>Visitor Economy</b> Engaging with and supporting the Visitor Economy sector, local food producers and arts and culture venues, to maintain Sevenoaks District as a key destination for visitors	<b>Skills</b> Ensuring residents and businesses can gain the skills they require to sustain a prosperous District, including supporting young people into employment and life-long learning and training	<b>Enterprise</b> Working with businesses to ensure Sevenoaks District continues to be a place where businesses can prosper and grow
Businesses and residents benefit, through effective partnership working, from an improved skills and training enhanced access to lifelong learning		The expansion of businesses is underpinned through the provision of support services for business, continuing the Team Around Your Business model

## About Sevenoaks District

Sevenoaks District is located in West Kent, with the edge of Greater London to the north-west, Surrey to the west and East Sussex to the south. The District covers almost 143 square miles and 93% is designated Green Belt. The main towns are Sevenoaks, Swanley, Edenbridge and Westerham, where a significant proportion of the 119,160 residents in the District live. There are over 30 villages and smaller settlements, of which the largest is New Ash Green.

The District is a popular place to live, partly because of its proximity to London and the continent. Major transport links are provided by the M25, M26, M20, A21, A20 and A25. Stations throughout the District provide rail access to London in under an hour, with travel from Sevenoaks and Swanley around half an hour. The District is also well located for Gatwick, Heathrow and Biggin Hill airports, as well as the Channel Ports, Ashford and Ebbsfleet International stations.

The District has the lowest level of unemployment in Kent. The residents of the District are generally well qualified with only 8% of the population having no qualifications. There are a number of employment areas within the District. The majority of residents work in the West Kent area but more than 40% work within Greater London. The District also has a strong rural economy, but issues of poor connectivity and slow or limited broadband are common.

The District has vibrant town centres with many independent shops and a good retail offering. There is strong competition from nearby areas including Bluewater and Tunbridge Wells. Some areas are in need of regeneration, including Swanley town centre and New Ash Green village centre. Areas outside towns are served by local facilities within

villages. These services are of great value to local communities and contribute to the District's rural economy.

The District has a high quality landscape with a mostly rural character. 60% of the District lies within the Kent Downs or High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are many areas of woodland, much of which is designated as Ancient Woodland, two Country Parks and a large network of public rights of way. Parts of the District afford impressive views over Kent and the South East, particularly from the North Downs and the Greensand Ridge.











There are many historic settlements in the District, reflected in the high number of conservation areas and listed buildings. The District also boasts many nationally recognised heritage assets, including the historic estates of Knole, Chartwell, Hever Castle, Penshurst Place and Lullingstone Castle. Other places of interest include the National Trust village at Chiddingstone, Eynsford Castle, Lullingstone Roman Villa, Otford Palace and Toys Hill (the birthplace of the National Trust). There are many visitor attractions within the District and it is particularly popular with day visitors.







## The Sevenoaks District economy in numbers

Population 119,160 projected to rise to 142,400 by 2031		47,020 households	
32% with qualifications to level 4 or equivalent and above		71.4% of 16-64 year olds are in employment	
6,640 enterprises registered for VAT		£3,204 million GVA	
From 28 minutes to London 2hrs to Europe		Gatwick within 45 minutes Heathrow within 75 minutes Biggin Hill within 30 minutes	
52.5% of those in employment drive to work		3.9 m visitors generated £230m and 5,032 jobs in the Visitor Economy	

60,400 economically  
active residents projected  
to rise to 71,000 by 2031



Median weekly earnings:  
£613.20 for District residents  
£542.80 for employees in  
District businesses



90.6% of businesses have  
fewer than 10 employees



Dover within 75 minutes



93% of the District is  
designated as Green Belt and  
60% in an Area of Outstanding  
Natural Beauty







ONE 60  
LONDON RD

Self-Service Only

## Context

Following the referendum on membership of the European Union in 2016, and the triggering of Article 50 in March 2017, the impact and implications of that decision on the economy are still to be fully understood. The District Council is assessing the impact on the local economy, including engaging with national and local partners who are undertaking similar assessments at a national and regional level.

The Government published its Industrial Strategy 'Building a Britain fit for the future' in November 2017, seeking to enable all parts of the country to succeed in delivering a high-skilled, competitive economy. The Industrial Strategy will underpin any future investment and growth funding that will be put in place by Government, including any funding packages, as part of the Shared Prosperity Fund, to replace existing EU funded programmes beyond March 2019.

Funding to support economic growth is currently channelled through national agencies and, at a regional level, Local Enterprise Partnerships. The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) which covers Kent, East Sussex and Essex includes Sevenoaks District within its geography. At a sub-regional level the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP), on which the District Council is represented, is the interface between SELEP and businesses, partners and local authorities in Kent and Medway. The Industrial Strategy sees a continuing place for Local Enterprise Partnerships in delivering its outcomes, but their role, structure and geographical boundaries may alter.

Both SELEP and KMEP have Strategic Economic and Growth Plans which set out the strategic economic investment priorities. These provide the framework for bidding, allocation and governance of

funding such as the Local Growth Fund, current European Structural and Investment Funds and other public funding sources.

Locally the West Kent Partnership, comprising the Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge & Malling Councils, is delivering skills and business support projects with local partners, together with the LEADER programme which provides opportunities for funding for rural enterprises. The Partnership's vision is to sustain a dynamic and well connected economy and seeks to promote West Kent as a place to do business.

## Economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

### Opportunities:

- Diversification of the rural economy and new live/work units in rural areas
- Growth of sectors including creative and digital, tech start-ups, logistics and tourism
- Regeneration in Swanley and New Ash Green
- The longer term redevelopment of Fort Halstead

### Threats:

- Pressure on employment sites for housing development and extension of permitted development rights to allow conversion of offices to housing
- Demographic factors including an ageing population and failure to retain younger workforce
- Changes in retail sector impacting on high streets
- Employment changes in the rural economy arising from technology and workforce availability

### Strengths:

- Strategic location of the District with access to London and further afield by road, rail and air
- A highly skilled population and labour force
- A very strong reputation as an attractive and desirable place to live and work
- Significant number of micro businesses with higher than average 'survival rates for start ups'

### Weaknesses:

- Shortage of commercial development sites and premises, including low cost workspace, and an ageing existing stock
- Poor public transport links to employment, education and tourism destinations
- Varying quality of broadband and mobile telephony coverage
- Affordability of housing affecting demographic spread and recruitment of workforce





## Theme 1: Growth and investment

Whilst the District continues to maintain the growth of new businesses and its attractiveness as a location, to live work and visit, there are a number of challenges to address. The District Council will not be able to solve those challenges on its own and will continue to work closely with partners to achieve the necessary outcomes.

As housing growth continues, it creates additional demand for businesses, services and new infrastructure and will require our existing towns and larger settlements to adapt to those changes. The District Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan for the period to 2035. This Strategy is one of a number of tools to support the emerging growth proposals in the Local Plan.

Swanley, Sevenoaks, Westerham and Edenbridge are the main town centres in the District. Other larger settlements include New Ash Green, Otford and Hartley. Areas of future growth in the District are likely to be Swanley, the northern fringe of Sevenoaks, Westerham, Edenbridge and Fort Halstead.

In Swanley, work is continuing on regeneration proposals for individual sites in the town centre. Additionally, the District Council continues to lead work on a wider Master Vision for the town. Sevenoaks Town Council has prepared a Northern Sevenoaks Masterplan. This is promoting growth around Bat and Ball station and making use of quarries on the urban fringe for new housing development and additional commercial and employment space. In the centre of Sevenoaks, the District Council will use its land ownerships and work with partners to promote or undertake further development to maintain the vitality of the town centre. A major landowner with

interests around Westerham is promoting the potential for future growth, primarily residential, to enable the construction of a bypass around the town. In Edenbridge there are key retail sites in the High Street and to the north of the town centre to be brought into use, as well as sustaining the current stock of employment land and buildings. The regeneration of the commercial centre in New Ash Green continues to be a local priority.

Fort Halstead, through the approved employment led redevelopment scheme, is the main site for longer term growth in the District in the early 2020s. This location, when combined with the growth of avionics and aviation support businesses at Biggin Hill and development opportunities in Croydon and Swanley, can provide the foundations for a technology and engineering cluster along the North Downs.

Whilst growth is predominantly housing led, the loss of existing employment sites through permitted development rights is eroding our supply of employment land and space. We will seek to encourage, either through direct investment or promoting Inward Investment, the retention, refurbishment or new provision of employment and retail sites and buildings in the District. To support this we will continue our collaboration with the Planning Policy and Development Management teams to maximise development opportunities.





Growth and investment



## Theme 2: Infrastructure

The continuing growth of the District has to be matched, where possible, by additional infrastructure to support our communities. The Council will continue to work closely with utility and transport providers, government departments and agencies or other local authorities to enable the provision of our infrastructure needs. Through new growth, additional Council Tax, Business Rates and section 106 Agreement and Community Infrastructure Levy, contributions will be realised to provide funding towards projects or schemes mitigating the impact of new development.

Good road, rail and air transport infrastructure underpins the economic vitality of the District. Our strategy, in conjunction with the emerging Local Plan, will take account of the Lower Thames Crossing, the Southeastern railway franchise transfer in April 2019 and Transport for London's future aspirations for Metro rail services, together with the growth of Heathrow, Gatwick and Biggin Hill airports.

Bus services and community transport schemes provide important links between our hamlets and villages and our larger centres. We will work with partners to seek to maintain or develop alternative services for the benefit of the District's residents, employers and visitors.

As the pace of change to electric vehicles and autonomous driving technology increases, the Council will seek to promote these technologies and encourage provision of vehicle charging infrastructure to support the use of commercial and private electric or hybrid vehicles.

There are areas of poor broadband and mobile telephony connectivity and these have a particular impact on new and existing businesses in the rural parts of the District. A particular focus will be finding solutions for those areas where the 'Making Kent Quicker' broadband delivery programme is unable to reach. Those solutions may either come through independent providers, enabling provision of fibre to the premises or cabinet, using local networks serving clusters of properties, or through use of wireless or satellite solutions. 5G technology will offer future options for improving connectivity. We will continue to work closely with the County Council, independent providers and partners to maximise future funding opportunities, including 'Voucher' schemes, to improve digital connectivity.

The Kent and Medway NHS Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) is aiming to provide the necessary healthcare services and infrastructure for the future and we continue to work with the two NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups to enable opportunities for new medical facilities within future developments.

Life-long learning infrastructure (schools, further, higher or adult education and skills training) and libraries is also key to the economic vitality of our communities and we will continue to work with partners to enable opportunities for new facilities, particularly for post 16 education within future developments.



Infrastructure

### Theme 3: Visitor Economy

The Visitor Economy sector is a cornerstone of our rural economy and a major contributor to the District's strong economic performance. There are strong relationships between with local food and drink producers and arts and cultural venues, and both this strategy and the emerging Local Plan recognise the significant importance of this sector.

Our local food and drink producers form part of our diverse rural economy which help sustain our smaller settlements and also underpin the very high levels of self-employment and home-based working within the District. The management of our landscapes by our rural enterprises maintains the attractiveness of our District to both visitors and residents.

We will continue to work with Visit Kent and Produced in Kent, as well as other national and local bodies, to maintain the profile of the District and its attractions and suppliers. The availability of funding programmes remains important for rural enterprises and they help to underpin the provision of basic services such as village shops and enable diversification and expansion of farming and forestry businesses. The West Kent LEADER programme currently provides those funding opportunities, together with any future schemes brought in after March 2019, and the District Council will continue to actively promote those programmes.

High demand continues for a diverse range of accommodation for visitors to the District, whether Bed and Breakfast, mid-range or luxury hotel accommodation. We have built a new 83 bed Premier Inn hotel, which opened in Sevenoaks in summer 2018, and further accommodation opportunities will be sought and encouraged to be developed in the District to serve different market segments.

A sector led study of our Visitor Economy has highlighted the challenge of maintaining visitor numbers and diversifying their activities without saturating, changing or damaging our historic landscape and properties. Visitors are seeking more of an 'experience' at the venues they visit, including direct participation or understanding the provenance of the food and drink being purchased or served to them. We will support and encourage the sector to innovate. Examples of innovation include providing charging points for electric or hybrid vehicles, hiring electric bicycles, or developing smart 'apps' for walking, cycling and ticketing and marketing. We will also encourage links with local food and drink producers and collaboration with the train operating companies to increase access for visitors by rail to the Eden and Darent Vallys.

Our major landowners in the District are at the forefront of sustaining our rural economy and maintaining and managing our rural landscapes. We will continue to work with them to support their diversification and innovation they bring in terms of renewable energy supplies, conversion of redundant buildings into small business units and improving local broadband and mobile telephone connectivity.



*“LEADER funding enabled us to purchase our tracked wood chipper, a machine we previously hired multiple times a month. Since owning our own machine, we have experienced an upsurge in the acceptance of jobs relating to woodland works. This is primarily because we no longer need to include the hire charge of a machine within our quote package. Our focus is now on developing our growth strategy with conversion and margins leading the process.”*

Navin Sehmi – Down to Earth

*“We feel incredibly lucky to be located in such a beautiful area. Shoreham, voted the second best village in England last spring by The Times newspaper, lies in the Green Belt and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and also benefits from a wonderfully welcoming and thriving community. We are proud to be close neighbours of Sevenoaks with all its amenities and are lucky to have great public transport access to both the town and London via the trainline. There is a good spirit of collaboration between local, independent businesses which is so important too.*

*We have received wonderful support from the Council with regards to understanding collaborative opportunities in the area and support in business development and look forward to a continued good relationship with them as we grow and evolve.”*

Lizzie Buxton – The Mount Vineyard



## Theme 4: Skills

The projected growth in the District is estimated to generate 9,358 additional jobs in the period to 2035 (source: Employment Needs Study for SDC Turley 2016) and our residents will need to be fully equipped with the skills to enable them to benefit from these new job opportunities. The projected areas of growth for employment over this period include professional services, computing and telecoms and real estate.

Whilst the District has a very low unemployment rate, and a high proportion of residents with NVQ level 4 or above, this masks difficulties that employers have in recruiting employees with the appropriate skillsets as well as, particularly for younger people, a lack of preparedness for work and knowledge of the many career opportunities available to them. The District does not have direct Further or Higher Education provision, with students travelling to colleges or universities elsewhere in Kent or further afield.

The Council, through its membership of the West Kent Partnership, including Further and Higher Education providers, the County Council and JobCentre Plus on a number of initiatives. These include the promotion of careers to young people still at school and building and maintaining relationships with business. The West Kent Partnership launched a Careers and Enterprise Adviser network in September 2017 and this is already opening up opportunities in schools across the District. Besides the existing Job Fairs in the Partnership area, we are working with the Local Strategic Partnership on a project to bring careers advice and support to harder to reach young people in the District.

We will also work with employers and training providers across specific sectors to enable the design and delivery of relevant skills training and support that will meet the needs of businesses. This is particularly relevant to the take up of Apprenticeships and Degree Apprenticeships.

As higher education institutions seek to expand their research and development activities, we will seek opportunities to collaborate on the use of 'Big Data' to inform planning for the future economic growth of the District.

Improving the skills of our workforce also has an influence on the wider health and wellbeing of the District. As our population ages, there will be increased demand on health and social care and this will provide a range of employment opportunities arising from new business activity and innovation in the sector.





## Theme 5: Enterprise

The projected employment growth in the District, together with high rates of retention of existing businesses, places a clear emphasis on supporting existing businesses and nurturing new ones. Our economy is dominated by small businesses, with over 90.6% having less than 10 employees and 79.9% having less than five employees. The survival rate for businesses is 64.3% after three years and 44.3% after five years, which is higher than the Kent average.

In order to strengthen and sustain the numbers of businesses, through working with partners, we are able to signpost businesses to advice and support on starting up or expansion, funding opportunities or specific guidance for exporters. The Kent and Medway Growth Hub, funded through SELEP, provides web based support for business start up and expansion. Whilst future funding opportunities will vary, and may be sector or category specific, current examples of available funding have included packages for start ups as well as expansion of businesses and the employment of apprentices. The West Kent Partnership has a Business Support Programme which enables local businesses to access free 1:1 support.

Additionally there is a diverse range of business in the District including Chambers of Commerce in Sevenoaks, incorporating Westerham and Swanley and Edenbridge, together with other formal and informal groups. These can provide advice, mentoring and marketing opportunities for new and existing businesses.

The provision of low cost employment space for business start ups or micro-businesses, particularly in the creative and digital and tech sectors, is going to be a key element of future growth. We will

encourage and support the provision of this type of workspace in the District.

We undertake a number of statutory roles including planning and building control, environmental health, licencing and administering business rates that are relevant to new and existing businesses. Our 'Team Around Your Business' model provides assistance for businesses using those services with the aim to simplify access and points of contact with the Council.

As part of our communications plan, we provide a regular e-newsletter, realBusiness, and use Twitter to publicise events, such as Global Entrepreneurship Week and Small Business Saturday, and funding opportunities for businesses in the District.

As further advances in technology occur (green energy, carbon reduction, electric vehicles, artificial intelligence and robotics) together with the associated risks including cyber crime and fraud, we will continue to promote events and workshops, in conjunction with partners, to provide advice to businesses on these topics.

***"We started our business in Sevenoaks 7 years ago introducing local businesses to part time and flexible professionals and have seen the town thrive in that period. Our client base has grown considerably and 2017 was our most successful year yet."***

Andrea Starbuck - Ten2Two





Enterprise

## Economic Development strategy framework

The table summarises the challenges and actions arising from the Strategy's themes and provides a framework to develop specific action plans and targets to monitor and measure success.

Theme	Challenges	Actions
1: Growth and investment	Loss of employment sites through Permitted Development Rights Changes in retail sector Quality of employment and retail space	Encourage diversification of uses in town centres Secure investment and regeneration in towns and large villages
2: Infrastructure	Funding Planning	Mapping need and priority Securing funding
3: Visitor Economy	Limited visitor accommodation Capacity of individual destinations Increasing visitor 'stay' or 'dwell' time	Supporting sector led initiatives Working with Visit Kent, Produced in Kent and others to maximise promotion
4: Skills	Qualifications Low wages	Partnership working with education and training providers West Kent Enterprise Advisor Network Links to employer guilds
5: Enterprise	New technologies Networks Workspace	Communication Advocacy and networks Low cost workspace



Measures	Benefits
Retail and business premises vacancy rates Business satisfaction	More space for business Improved retail offer Retaining spend within the District
Broadband speed and access	Better places to live and work Improved efficiency for business
Visitor numbers Visitor spend Visitor 'stay' and 'dwell' time	Wider accommodation choice Increased local spend on goods and services
Unemployment and JSA rates KS4 attainment	Improved labour market to support businesses Increased personal income supports demand and local business
Number of businesses Business survival rates	Jobs for local people Diversity of businesses and services for local communities

## Economic Development strategy framework – monitoring and measuring

Theme	Indicator	Source
Growth and investment	Retail vacancy rates	Goad
Growth and investment	% of available employment space in District	SDC Annual Monitoring Report
Growth and investment	Loss of office accommodation under permitted development rights	SDC Annual Monitoring Report
Infrastructure	Average Broadband download and upload speeds	ThinkBroadband.com
Infrastructure	% properties with UK superfast broadband access	ThinkBroadband.com
Visitor Economy	Visitor numbers	Visit Kent
Visitor Economy	Visitor spend	Visit Kent
Visitor Economy	Visitor dwell time	Visit Kent
Skills	Estimate of unemployment	ONS
Skills	Number and % of residents claiming JSA	Department for Work & Pensions
Skills	KS4 attainment	Department for Education/KCC (Kelsi)
Enterprise	Number of businesses in the Sevenoaks District	ONS Business Demography
Enterprise	Size of businesses and numbers of employees in the Sevenoaks District	ONS Business Demography
Enterprise	Business survival rates (three and five year)	ONS Business Demography



	Frequency
	Annually
	Annually
	Annually
	Quarterly
	Quarterly
	Annually
	Annually
	Annually
	Quarterly
	Monthly
	Annually
	Annually
	Annually
	Annually















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