

District Visits Programme

Highlights of the visit to Swale Borough Council

Swale's key economic development and regeneration priorities:

1. **Kent Science Park** – focus on life sciences and growing SMEs. There is unmet demand for space generally and especially laboratories. Access by road is a constraint - new link to the nearby M2 is a priority. The site has some potential for housing.
2. **M2 Brenley Corner** junction improvements –priority for Road Investment Strategy 2 Department of Transport Plan 2021 – 26. Highways England have been positive about the scheme. A priority for KCC Highways plan a £75m scheme. It is important to realising the longer term benefits of the Lower Thames Crossing.
3. **Sittingbourne Town Centre** regeneration. Received planning consent in 2015. A £56m (Gross Development Value) project of mixed use development bringing £330m of inward investment and 400+ jobs.

There is also scope for establishing FE provision at Sittingbourne, particularly as many local jobs are technically based with strengths in advanced manufacturing, logistics and science related activity at KSP. The Borough Council has made a submission to the Kent FE Area Review making this point. There are daily student movements to and from Swale to Mid-Kent and Canterbury Colleges presenting a significant travel to learn journey for local young people.

4. **Eurolink, Sittingbourne** – major business park with significant manufacturing presence. Within it, St George's Business Park provides small business space and is 90% full. Speculative commercial development also occurring and rare in Kent. The completion of road links to the A249 would add significantly to the site's attractiveness to inward investment.

Eurolink East 5 now under construction and has received lots of interest from potential occupiers and a number are being translated into deals.

The challenge: accommodating new enquiries having gone from substantial provision to limited in the past 8-10 years with over 3m sq. ft. of space built since 2008. Local Plan Review to identify new sites.

5. **Peel Ports, Sheerness**. Sheerness port is at confluence of Medway and Thames and with no restrictions. Operations include:
 - Recent 15 year deal with Sims Metal management to take scrap to Turkey.
 - Marine services business.
 - Steel cargo business.
 - UK No 1 port for bananas (Chiquita UK), timber (Södra Timber Company) and newsprint.
 - Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) from non-recyclable bin waste - 150,000 tonnes to Sweden per annum.

- Importation of Ground Granulated Blast furnace Slag (GGBS) is a cement substitute, manufactured from a by-product of the iron-making industry. GGBS is imported for material cement block products as no longer available in UK.
- Grain -120,000 tonnes imported annually.
- Vehicles: 400,000 vehicles imported per annum via 2 vessels daily and requiring 230 acres for on-site storage. The 12m depth allows very large ships to come in. Direct employment of 150 plus 200 operatives when imports arrive.

The challenge is to:

- Develop modest port operations in older port infrastructure.
- Explore the potential to use rail facilities to move freight.
- Deliver their 20 Year Plan to include the 50 acres of Wellmarsh (former ThamesSteel), land at Rushenden (200 acres) and north of port (mix of port/industry, leisure and marina).

6. **Faversham:** The visit concluded in the market town of Faversham. It was noted on route that there are air quality issues at Newington and Ospringle on A2. The Borough Council are looking at this in their Local Plan review.

Jonathan Neame outlined Shepherd Neame's ambitious proposals for their town centre brewery site. Plans being prepared which will be funded by the company include:

- To create a major visit experience and improve access to Faversham Creek for all.
- To become the No. 1 brewery experience in UK.
- Shepherd Neame to be the 'Go To' place for beer information.