

## GEDCCC District Visits Programme

### Highlights of the visit to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and the key economic development and regeneration issues and priorities:

A map and information pack were provided to all Members attending the visit.

Information refers to the Borough unless stated

RTW - Royal Tunbridge Wells

### Outline of Local Economy

- Population 188,000 increasing by 4.69% 2009 – 17
- High employment rate (32,600 FT and 18,600 PT)
- Unemployment 1.2% compared to Kent 2.5% and UK 2.7%
- Highest unemployment in Sherwood (2%) and Broadwater (2%) wards
- Largest employment sector is wholesale/retail at 11% also knowledge economy/creative industries and tourism
- Visitor spend £223m in 2017
- Highest creative industry enterprise sector in Kent at 15.4% of all sectors
- Growth sectors: professional and technical, finance and insurance
- The House, a work space collaboration: 50 desk spaces and 20 hot desks and shared space by TWBC/KCC/Local creative sector businesses
- Declining sectors, construction, utility supply, defence
- 7000 VAT registered business in 2017 with 265 start ups in Jan-Mar 2019
- The three year business survival rate is 62% compared to Kent at 63.3%
- GVA per head £30,679 compared to Kent at 23,149
- Average house price £357,000
- Average weekly resident earnings is £667 compared to Kent £598
- Low overall deprivation level
- Higher than average education levels (NVQ4+ at 49% compared to Kent 35.4%)
- High levels of rail commuting

### Challenges

- Employment space - 200,000 square feet has been lost.
- Threat to High Street retail - vacancies in RTW is 17.4% compared to SE at 8.5%
- Broadband coverage
- Delivering growth with Zero Revenue Support Grant / Business Rates Retention Scheme

### Opportunities

- Retail: currently lower occupation by chain stores compared to Independents (51% independents compared to UK average of 36% )
  - Business Improvement District (BID)
  - 1.25% levy to cover business support/events/marketing/accessibility
  - £2.3m total investment over 5 years
- Business rate retention at 75%
- Geography and demography - large area/population catchment around RTW

### Ambitions

Five Year Plan Vision: 'To encourage investment and sustainable growth, and to enhance quality of life for all.'

Emphasis on 'Place Leadership '

Eight Big Projects:

- New cultural and learning hub RTW
- Explore delivery for a new theatre in RTW
- New Civic Centre and office space in RTW
- Additional off-street carparking in RTW
- New Local Plan for the Borough
- New sports facilities across the Borough
- Development of Community Centres in eg Southborough/Cranbrook/Sissinghurst/Paddock Wood
- Enhance public realm in the Brough

Plus working with partners on other priorities:

- Alleviating congestion
- Neighbourhood plans
- New education facilities (KCC/FE/HE)
- Improved recycling
- Active travel
- Improving social and health inequalities
- Devolution

List of Projects

- The Amelia Scott
- Calverley Square
- Southborough Hub
- RTW public realm Phase 1 (completed)
- RTW public realm Phase 2
- Housing at Royal Wells, Sherwood, Knights Wood, Hollyfields
- Union House / 1887 The Pantiles
- Royal Victoria Shopping Centre purchased by British Land
- Cinema site

Local Plan

Timescales: Issues an Options June 2017 and Adoption expected December 2102

Allocations:

- Retail – 32,000 square metres
- Economic 11/15 hectares of new business space
- Office and warehousing (86,00 square metres) at Kingstanding Way
- Housing 13,560 homes by 2021 with emphasis around Paddock Wood, Cranbrook, Hawkhurst and a new garden settlement at Tudeley (2,800 homes).

Transport Study informing the Plan

Schools:

- Plan includes new schools on a site between Tonbridge and a new garden village at Tudeley village and also at Spratsbrook Farm south of Royal Tunbridge Wells, on the boundary with Wealden/East Sussex.
- Schools to be significantly extended: Mascalls at Paddock Wood and Weald Academy, Cranbrook which already has planning permission.

Key asks of KCC:

### Highways and Transportation

- To work proactively with TWBC to ensure that proposals for housing and economic growth set out in the new Local Plan are accompanied by the necessary improvements in transport infrastructure, including delivery of a relief scheme for the A228 at Colt's Hill (a pre-strategic outline business case recently submitted to Major Roads Network Programme by KCC).
- KCC to partner TWBC in lobbying Transport for the South East/Highways England/DfT for the dualling of the A21 from Kippings Cross to Lamberhurst.
- To deliver infrastructure that will facilitate travel by sustainable alternatives to the car, particularly specialist design of high quality cycle routes, both urban and inter-urban, and also 20mph schemes in residential areas and town/village centres, as supported by local people (and as set out in the Borough's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)).
- To help support the high street by improving the maintenance of the public realm: improving the quality of patching work, keeping highway signage and other assets clean and in good repair, and dealing with overhanging branches and hedges.
- Attendance of senior KCC Officers at Joint Transportation Board for relevant agenda items, so that matters (often brought to the Committee by local residents) can be resolved more satisfactorily at the meetings.

### Parking

- Make updates to the KCC website so that it is more customer friendly and properly reflects parking roles and responsibilities, particularly where requests for parking controls are concerned.
- KCC to work with TWBC to provide improved car park signage, in particular variable messaging signs regarding number of car park spaces available, as soon as possible (this work has been delayed for some time).
- KCC to support TWBC to properly enforce parking restrictions in all bus lanes.

### Economic Development

- To continue KCC's support for 'The Amelia' Cultural and Learning Hub and to ensure that KCC services are integrated into the new service offering.
- To provide political and financial support for the Calverley Square Project which will deliver £30m per annum economic benefit for the Kent economy and provide KCC with improved retained Business Rates. Cllr David Scott to discuss proposals with KCC Economic Development and Property departments as soon as possible.
- To support future bids within Tunbridge Wells for LEP funding (we have not received anything apart from an allocation for the A26 junction improvements and the West Kent Sustainable Transport Fund) despite being enormously important to the Kent economy.
- To consider co-investing in the redevelopment of the Civic Complex to provide flexible office space recognising the strength of the local creative economy, as recommended in the recent Tunbridge Wells Cultural & Creative Industries Study (that was co-commissioned by TWBC and KCC).
- To support future bids for national funding (including any funds for the high street).
- Continued partnership working to improve broadband speeds across the borough, including in the most rural areas. In addition, future work on digital infrastructure e.g. 5G to facilitate smarter transport corridors.

Environmental

- Following the recent Full Council motion declaring TWBC's recognition of global climate and biodiversity emergencies, we are seeking support from KCC for actions to meet the goal of making the borough carbon neutral by 2030.
- Provide a household waste recycling centre to serve residents in the east of the Borough and those in neighbouring areas.
- To work together to identify opportunities for TWBC maintained street lighting to be adopted and come under KCC's maintenance contract and provide an opportunity to access the KCC contract maintenance framework to maintain TWBC's residual lighting.
- To assist TWBC in the collection of good quality data and more critically, the analysis to be able to make informed decisions in supporting environmental improvements. (health data, local greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy installations).
- Give support to TWBC in procuring renewable energy projects i.e. provision of technical specifications and tender documents to enable for instance, the procurement of solar PV.
- Develop a standard policy on EV charging across the county including on street charging, and the possible provision of charging hubs and provide procurement support i.e. possible framework to procure EV charging points and technical specifications.
- Continue to provide advice to the TWBC on transport innovations and low emission transport options i.e. hydrogen and alternative charging such as solar roads.
- Continue to support the TWBC in assisting the move to a low emission public transport bus fleet.
- TWBC and KCC to lobby government together, to permit the localised setting of planning and licensing fees (which are effectively subsidised by local taxpayers).

**Further details can be found in the presentations by TWBC which is available from Rob Hancock.**