

GEDCCC District Visits Programme

Highlights of the visit to Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council on 25 March 2022.

These were also outlined in a slide presentation which is available from the author of the report to GEDCC if requested.

1. Introduction

Overview

- Population: 132,600 forecast to grow to 155,700 by 2040 with BME population 4.1% (2020).
- Households – 54,590
- Key Settlements - Tonbridge, West Malling, Snodland, Borough Green and Aylesford
- Key Attractions –Ightham Mote, The Hop Farm and Tonbridge Castle
- Green Belt - 71% of the borough is covered by Metropolitan Green Belt

Local Economy and Business Demography

- 6,055 VAT and/or PAYE based businesses (2020).
- Largest sectors: Professional, Scientific, and Technical (1,235 businesses), Construction (1,065), Business Administration and Support Services (640)
- 3 Year Survival Rate – 61% compared to 56% across Kent (2019)

Local Economy - Workforce

- Working age population – 80,200
- Average Earning by Place of Residence - £690 gross weekly pay (£607 average in Kent)
- Average Earning by Place of Work - £565 gross weekly pay (£545 average in Kent)
- 6.8% of working age population have no qualifications
- Unemployment rate 3.8% (August 2021) compared to 4.8% for Kent as a whole

2. Key issues for the Borough

- Flood Defence - Leigh Expansion and Hildenborough Embankment Scheme
- Flooding in the Borough is nationally significant
- Road Capacity - Blue Bell Hill (M2 Jct 3), potential for localised issues arising from Lower Thames Crossing, pressure on A20 and A25.
- Sustainable Transport Measures – A20 improvements to footways and cycling infrastructure and additional/improved cycling routes around Tonbridge.
- Education – additional primary provision in the Borough Green/Wrotham and Aylesford/Ditton needed, with further required due to housing growth.
- Lack of skills and training provision in the borough and west Kent
- Health – existing pressure on GP surgeries and projected growth will mean requirement for expanded premises and in some cases, new facilities
- Adult Social Services – need for greater C3 accommodation and C2 for mental health and older people.
- Sports Recreation and Open Space – whilst provision has increased overall in recent years (mostly in Kings Hill), amenity green space has decreased by around 6%.

- Biodiversity – opportunities for strengthening the Green Infrastructure and Ecological Network.
- Utilities – power network is under stress in terms of the resilience of the network and the amount of generation capacity.
- Potential to review the buildings and site containing KCC Library, Adult Education and Youth Service provision on, and adjacent to, Tonbridge High Street.

3. The main projects in the Borough

Tonbridge Town Centre

- Strong food and drink offering over the past 5 years.
- Loss of key stores – Peacocks, Beales but a strong independent retail base.
- Recent developments – Memorial Gardens (2014/15); High Street Improvements (2015/16), Town Lock (2016/17) Medical Centre (2019/20)
- Key current initiatives – Welcome Back Fund (including Railway Approach)
- Shopfront Improvement Scheme
- Undertaking Asset Review
- Significant number of new homes in the town centre around the Lock area.

Peters Village

- Key Strategic Site in the Borough.
- Developer is Trenport with over 1,000 new homes in Wouldam
- Work commenced in 2013, new bridge across the River Medway opened in 2016, new school completed in 2018
- New village centre being constructed (and near completion).

Panattoni Park Aylesford

- A £180m development creating 1.9million sq.ft of distribution and logistics space.
- Works currently taking place on site with completion in 2023
- Construction phase creating 250 jobs and 3,000 jobs directly/indirectly
- Using local contractors and suppliers – Gallaghers and RBLI.
- Fitting out and occupation of the first unit (DHL) will be completed by July 2022.

Centenary Village (RBLI)

- Centenary Village – a flagship project for the RBLI supporting military veterans.
- Comprises purpose-built homes, assisted living accommodation and family homes
- State-of-the-art community centre.

East Malling Research / National Institute of Agricultural Botany

- Green Tech Hub for Advanced Horticulture.
- NIAB acquired East Malling Research in 2016.
- Site synonymous with world-leading soft and top fruit research.
- Funding secured from Strength in Places Fund, Growing Places Fund, Local Growth Fund, and East Malling Trust.
- Green Tech– Phase 1: new greenhouses, energy centre, and wine innovation centre. Phase 2: new laboratories and science buildings.

Borough Green Gardens

- Potential urban extension of 3000 homes (not yet in our Local Plan).
- Part of the government's garden communities programme.
- TMBC preparing a development brief to ensure a high standard of place making.

- Site currently situated in the Green Belt and partly in Kent Downs AONB
- Infrastructure required to unlock the site: relief road linking the A25, A227 and A20.

Bushey Wood - land at Eccles

- Identified as an 'area of opportunity' in the current Core Strategy.
- Planning application submitted for up to 950 homes, new local centre, primary school, and the replacement of existing sports facilities.
- Open space provision covering around 50% of the site.
- New access route on to New Court Road