

Ambitions for Swale

Swale's Sustainable Community
Strategy 2009 - 2026

Consultation Draft



Contents

Foreword	2
Part 1: Introducing our Ambitions for Swale	
1. Introduction and Summary	6
2. What is the Sustainable Community Strategy?	9
3. Swale Today	13
Part 2: Articulating our Ambitions for Swale	
4. Ambitions for Learning	22
5. Ambitions for Prosperity	26
6. Ambitions for Inclusion and Safety	30
7. Ambitions for Health	34
8. Ambitions for our Environment	37
9. Ambitions for Culture	41
10. Ambitions for Transport	44
11. Ambitions for Homes and Communities	49
Part 4: Delivering our Ambitions for Swale	
12. Monitoring progress and delivery	53
Part 5: Appendices	
Appendix 1: Distribution of deprivation in Swale	56
Appendix 2: Relevant strategies	58

Foreword

Cllr Andrew Bowles
Chairman, Swale Local Strategic Partnership



Welcome to the consultation draft of *Ambitions for Swale*, Swale's new Sustainable Community Strategy.

Ambitions for Swale sets out our vision for the kind of place that we would like Swale to be in the future. It describes our priorities over the next twenty years, and sets out shorter term targets to set us in the right direction.

The challenges for Swale over the next few years are considerable. As this draft Strategy demonstrates, skills levels in the Borough fall substantially below the national average, holding back the potential of our citizens and businesses. We also have concentrations of deprivation which are among the worst in the country, and which must be tackled if we are to achieve the quality of life that all our residents deserve. Along with this, we must ensure that in all our activities and policies we combat the causes and manage the effects of climate change and protect and enhance our natural environment. And, in the short term at least, we will need to work within a more challenging economic climate.

Yet in many ways, Swale's opportunities for regeneration and improvement have never been greater. Connections are much improved with the new Sheppey Crossing, and the forthcoming Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road and faster rail connections to London. Major new investment will transform Queenborough and Rushenden and Sittingbourne Town Centre. And perhaps most importantly, the organisations involved in providing services and representing the community in Swale have a new commitment through the Swale Local Strategic Partnership to work more closely together.

Ambitions for Swale will provide local partners with a shared vision to help them deliver better services to the community. But to be successful, it needs to reflect the views and ambitions of the people of Swale. This is why we welcome your comments on this draft Strategy. Please let us know your thoughts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. Bowles'.

Responding to the Consultation Draft

Your comments on this Consultation Draft of *Ambitions for Swale* are much appreciated.

There are several ways in which you can let us know your views:

By post ...

Please write to:

Ambitions for Swale Consultation
Room 310
Swale Borough Council
Swale House
East Street
Sittingbourne
Kent ME10 3HT

By email ...

Please email your comments to:

ambitionsforswale@swale.gov.uk

By coming to an information workshop ...

There are six information and consultation events organised. To book a place, please email ambitionsforswale@swale.gov.uk, or call 01795 417456.

- Tuesday 28 October, 12-2pm at Central House, Central Avenue, Sittingbourne
- Wednesday 29 October, 6.30-8.30pm at 34 High Street, Sittingbourne
- Wednesday 5 November, 6.30-8.30pm at the Hope Street Centre, Sheerness
- Thursday 6 November, 12-2pm at The Gateway, Rushenden Road, Queenborough
- Wednesday 12 November, 12-2pm at the Alexander Centre, Preston Street, Faversham
- Thursday 13 November, 6.30-8.30pm at the Abbey School, London Road, Faversham

More information?

If you would like to discuss any aspect of *Ambitions for Swale* or the consultation process, please contact Ross Gill on 01795 417399 or email ambitionsforswale@swale.gov.uk

If you would like this document in an alternative format or translation, or if you would like more copies, please contact us on 01795 417456 or email ambitionsforswale@swale.gov.uk, and we will do our best to help.

Part One: Introducing our Ambitions for Swale

1. Introduction and Summary

1.1. Our goal is...

“To achieve a transformation in Swale’s economic, social and environmental profile, so that it is one of the best places in Britain in which to live, work, learn and invest”.

This goal is both ambitious and broad in scope. The evidence presented in *Ambitions for Swale* shows that at present, the Borough has some distance to travel before it can deliver the overall quality of life enjoyed elsewhere in the South East – and in many cases, we will need to sustain improvements above regional and national averages. However, continuing regeneration investment and a shared agenda between partners working in Swale give us the opportunity to capitalise on the Borough’s potential and to achieve the step change that our overall goal demands.

1.2. Swale: An overview

Partly located within the Thames Gateway growth area, Swale has a prime location, within 40 miles of London and the Channel ports, but set in the Kentish countryside. It is a diverse Borough, containing three distinct areas in the form of Sittingbourne, Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey, as well as an extensive rural hinterland.



Swale: At a glance	
Area	364 sq km
Population	128,500 ¹
Main urban areas	
• Sittingbourne	41,600
• Faversham	18,200
• Minster-on-Sea	16,600
• Sheerness	11,600
Main industries: Manufacturing, transport and logistics, tourism, land-based industries.	

Economic transition has seen many challenges for Swale. These have contributed to a loss of traditional employment and skills, poor educational attainment and the deepening of pockets of severe deprivation. Overall, Swale has the second highest level of deprivation of all the twelve districts in Kent.

Swale is still undergoing this economic transition, and the strategy promoted in *Ambitions for Swale* focuses on the continuing need to address some of the challenges that it presents. Yet the Borough has been resilient in the face of economic change, and has been successful in identifying new opportunities for growth.

Swale has a growing population, with increasing demand for new homes, jobs and services. This is positive, as it shows that Swale is a place in which people want to live and bring up their families – but it also poses a challenge in ensuring that growth is accompanied by new amenities and services and is environmentally sustainable. Growth and regeneration must also benefit the whole community and help to overcome the inequalities that exist across the Borough.

Within the Thames Gateway, Swale is unique in the diversity and quality of its natural environment. The Borough contains internationally protected wetlands on Sheppey, part of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and an extensive coastline linked with a rich maritime heritage. However, Swale has many environmental challenges to overcome, particularly as a result of its industrial legacy and especially in its urban areas.

1.3. Our priorities

Taking into account the current state of the Borough and our long term overall goal, *Ambitions for Swale* identifies a series of eight priority themes:

- Ambitions for Learning, with choice and quality in education and training opportunities;
- Ambitions for Prosperity, so that businesses and employment thrive;
- Ambitions for Inclusion and Safety, to ensure that our where communities are safe, cohesive and well-run;
- Ambitions for Health, where people enjoy healthy lifestyles and have access to quality health services;
- Ambitions for our Environment, which values and protects Swale’s superb natural and built assets
- Ambitions for Culture, with diverse sporting, leisure and cultural opportunities for all
- Ambitions for Transport, with high-quality and sustainable links;
- Ambitions for Homes and Communities, with a choice of quality, affordable, well-designed homes

Of course, these themes are all closely interlinked, and it is only by considering them together that we can truly create a sustainable community. *Ambitions for Swale* also recognises the Borough’s diversity: in particular, the need to narrow the gap between Swale’s most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the rest of the Borough and county and regional averages, and the need to adapt services to the needs of different communities.

1.4. How this document is structured

This section has provided an introduction to our overall goals for Swale, and a flavour of the Borough’s priorities. The next section sets out in more detail why we need a Sustainable Community Strategy and what *Ambitions for Swale* seeks to achieve.

Chapter 3 provides a more comprehensive analysis of the economic, social and environmental state of Swale and a summary of the strategic and policy environment in which we are working. This provides an evidence base for the priorities that we have identified.

Chapters 4-11 explain our priorities in greater detail, setting out some long term strategic goals and shorter term targets

Finally, Chapter 12 outlines how we will monitor this Sustainable Community Strategy, and how we will deliver the *Ambitions for Swale* to which we are committed.

Targets and data: A note for the Consultation Draft

In each thematic chapter (Chapters 4-11), we have set out a series of key targets linked with those adopted as part of Kent Agreement 2. In many cases, the specific targets themselves have not yet been fully identified, as in several cases, accurate baseline data and district-level forecasts are still being established. However, in parallel with public consultation on this draft, we will continue to gather improved data over the coming months, so that the targets set out in the draft Strategy will be continually updated and set out in the final version.

Questions for consultation

Q1. Do you agree with the overall goal that we have identified? If not, what is missing, or how could it be improved?

Q2. Do you broadly agree with the priority themes that we have identified?

Q3. Which of the priority themes do you consider to be the most important for Swale? Are there additional themes that we should identify?

2. What is the Sustainable Community Strategy?

2.1. What is the Strategy?

Ambitions for Swale, Swale's Sustainable Community Strategy sets out a statement of the kind of place that we want Swale to be in the future, and provides a basis for local organisations to work together to improve the social, economic and environmental prospects for the Borough.

The Strategy is not intended to be a detailed description of all the projects that will take place in Swale over the coming years, nor is it a comprehensive action plan. Instead, it provides an evidence base so that we understand the challenges and opportunities facing the Borough, and then sets out our key strategic priorities, in order to inform more detailed and focused action planning by those organisations responsible for delivery.

Ambitions for Swale is prepared by Swale Borough Council and is jointly owned by Swale Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and Swale Forward, the Borough's Local Regeneration Partnership. This reflects the duty placed on local authorities by the Government to prepare Sustainable Community Strategies with local partnerships. Combined, Swale LSP and Swale Forward bring together key organisations in the community, voluntary, public and private sectors to champion local needs and co-ordinate the delivery of local priorities.

Together, Swale LSP and Swale Forward include:

- AmicusHorizon Group
- Eastern and Coastal Kent Primary Care Trust
- Department for Communities and Local Government
- Kent County Council
- Kent Fire and Rescue Service
- Kent Police
- SEEDA
- Swale Borough Council
- Swale Council for Voluntary Service
- Swale Private Sector Liaison Group
- Swale Voluntary Sector Forum
- Thames Gateway Kent Partnership

"The role of the Sustainable Community Strategy is to set out the strategic vision for a place. It provides a vehicle for considering and deciding how to address difficult cross-cutting issues such as the economic future of an area, social exclusion and climate change. Building these issues into the community's vision in an integrated way is at the heart of creating sustainable development at local level"

Local Government White Paper, 2006

Ambitions for Swale will also support the Kent Agreement. This is a negotiated compact between public sector partners in Kent and central government, within which local agencies sign up collectively to meeting key targets, securing new freedoms and flexibilities in order to achieve them. *Ambitions for Swale* reflects the Kent Agreement targets at local level, and explains how we will make them a reality to meet our priorities. More information on the Kent Agreement is set out in the next chapter.

2.2. What makes a sustainable community?

We all want to ensure that Swale is a place where all people want to live, work, learn, invest and play. We also need to make sure that in meeting our immediate needs, we do not compromise the opportunities and quality of life of future generations.

Sustainable communities should be:

- Well run, with effective and inclusive participation and accountable representation and leadership;
- Well connected, with good transport services and communications linking people to jobs, health and other services;
- Well served by public, private, community and voluntary services accessible to all;
- Places where people live in an environmentally sensitive way;
- Fair for everyone, now and in the future;
- Economically thriving and vibrant;
- Well designed and built, with a high quality natural and built environment;
- Active, inclusive, tolerant and safe with a strong local culture and other shared community activities.

Fig 1: The eight components of sustainable communities¹



¹ Academy for Sustainable Communities (www.ascskills.org.uk)

2.3. The important issues for Swale

Although the eight components could apply to any part of the country, how we achieve them in Swale and the relative priority that we attach to each depends on our local circumstances.

During the consultation period, we will also be seeking residents', businesses' and other partners' views on what makes Swale a good place to live, and how it can be improved in the future, and a survey of residents in districts across Kent will take place over the coming year. However, recent community survey work by Swale Borough Council found that residents considered the five most important factors in making somewhere a good place to live were:

- The quality of health services
- A low level of crime
- Affordable and decent housing
- The quality of education provision
- Clean streets

The areas that residents considered to be in most need of improvement were health services, levels of crime, clean streets, shopping facilities and the level of traffic congestion.

These priorities are taken into account in the priority themes that we have set out in the chapters that follow, and will be tested in further survey work.

2.4. Keeping *Ambitions for Swale* up to date

This Strategy covers the period 2009-2026. This enables it to take a long-term view of the future of Swale, and to fit in with other strategic plans at national, regional and local level. However, the economic, social and environmental context in which we have to work will change substantially over this period, and it is important that our strategy is grounded in reality while keeping a long-term vision.

Ambitions for Swale will therefore be reviewed by the Local Strategic Partnership every two years. Along with this, we will assess progress against the shorter-term targets that we have set out under each priority theme, and we will refresh them where necessary to ensure that they continue to be relevant to our aspirations.

Questions for consultation

Q4. What do you think helps to create a good community in which to live? Are there any aspects that we haven't taken into consideration?

Q5. Do you think that Swale (or the part of Swale in which you live or work) is a good community in which to live? What would improve it?

Q6. Do you consider a review of *Ambitions for Swale* every two years to be an appropriate way of ensuring that the Strategy remains relevant while retaining long-term goals? If not, how would you suggest that we ensure that the Strategy remains up to date?

3. Swale Today

3.1. Introduction

This section sets out the social, economic, environmental and strategic context for the priorities promoted in *Ambitions for Swale*.

It includes:

- A summary of the economic, social and environmental state of the Borough
- The opportunities for regeneration and improvement that Swale will be able to grasp over the coming years
- The challenges that Swale faces, and that will need to be addressed through this Sustainable Community Strategy
- The current partnership, policy and strategy environment that will influence how *Ambitions for Swale* is implemented.

3.2. Baseline: The Borough today

To accompany *Ambitions for Swale*, we have produced *Swale in 2008*, an analysis of key data relating to the Borough. This builds on similar reports prepared in 2004 and 2006, and enables us to assess Swale's current economic, social and environmental condition compared with the rest of the South East and the country as a whole, and to understand the direction in which the Borough is heading. In turn, this helps us to identify where our efforts should be focused to ensure that we improve overall quality of life across Swale.

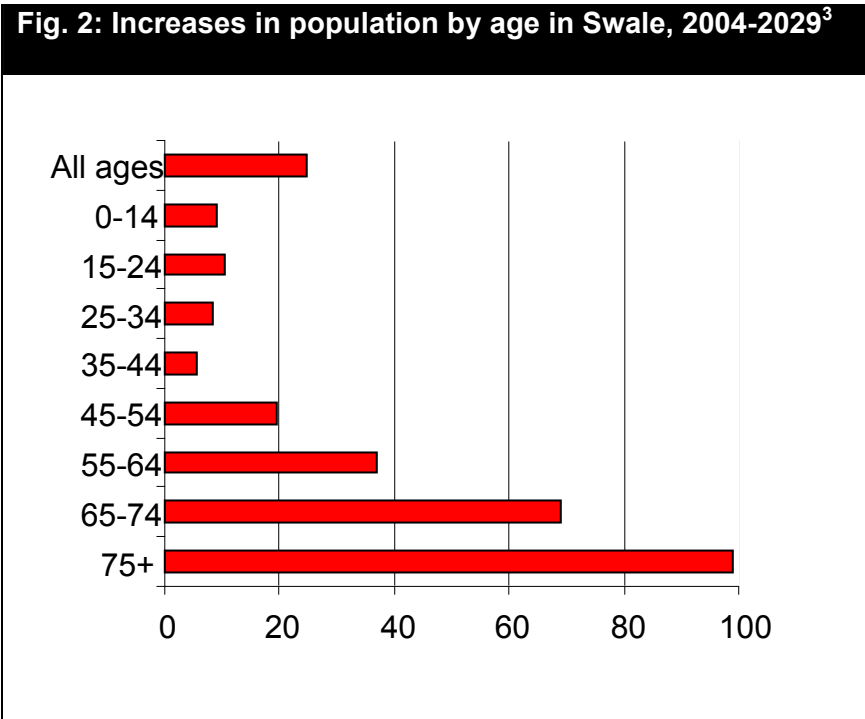
The following paragraphs summarise the key findings. More detailed information is set out under each priority theme in the sections that follow, or you can find out more in *Swale in 2008*².

Population

Swale's population is growing fast – an increase of almost 17% between 1981 and 2006 (compared with an increase of just over 7% nationally). This reflects the opportunities that are available in much of the Borough, and Swale has seen net inflows of residents from other parts of the country and from abroad in recent years.

Population growth is forecast to continue over the coming years, with an overall increase between 2004 and 2029 of just under 25%. Although the population is forecast to rise in all age groups, the greatest increase will be among older residents, as the graph below shows:

² If you would like a copy of *Swale in 2008*, please visit www.swale.gov.uk, or call 01795 417456.



The ageing of Swale’s population reflects a national trend. Over the coming decades, changes in the Borough’s age structure will have significant implications for community priorities, the way in which we pay for and deliver public services and working patterns.

Ethnically, Swale is less diverse than the country as a whole, with ethnic minorities making up less than 4% of the population in 2001. However, the Borough is becoming more diverse as a result of migration and a growing population.

Economy and skills

Over the past few years, Swale has seen impressive growth, with high levels of productivity and business survival. This highlights the success of the Borough over the past decade in diversifying away from its earlier reliance on a small number of traditionally large employers. Swale also has good prospects for growth in areas such as environmental technologies and science-based industries.

However, these sectors are held back by the Borough’s skills profile, which is a particular challenge. Levels of skills and qualifications fall way below the national average, and this poor performance has the potential to hold back the rest of the economy, especially given the need to attract higher value jobs.

³ ONS Sub-national population projections

Environment and quality of life

Swale performs well in respect of many environmental indicators, and indeed, part of Swale's attractiveness as a place in which to live, work and invest is the high quality of its natural environment.

The Borough also emerges as a relatively affordable place in which to buy a house. Average house prices for Swale in the first quarter of 2008 were £188,815, comparable with the UK average (£194,893), but significantly below that of the South East (£258,529)⁴. While this is in part a function of relatively low wages, on a comparison of wages to prices, the Borough also emerges as relatively affordable.

However, Swale performs more poorly in the quality of its public services and amenities. In particular, the Borough's range of cultural amenities is well below the national average (although the strength of the local voluntary and community sector implies a relatively high degree of 'social capital').

Deprivation

Levels of deprivation vary substantially across Swale. Overall, based on the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation, Swale is the second most deprived district in Kent (after Thanet). Beneath this, there are high concentrations of deprivation: 15 neighbourhoods in Swale fall into the 20% most deprived nationally; 11 of these are located on the Isle of Sheppey. Fig. 3 in Appendix 1 shows a stylised map of the Borough, which highlights the extent of these concentrations of deprivation.

Reflecting the Borough's particular shortfalls in educational attainment, the local deprivation figures relating to skills and training are particularly poor: the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation shows that 32 neighbourhoods in Swale are in the 20% most skills deprived in England, the majority concentrated on Sheppey and in Sittingbourne.

The overall state of Swale

Overall, *Swale in 2008* shows that there are few areas in which the Borough is performing exceptionally well relative to other districts, or to the regional average. Most strikingly, education and skills levels emerge as particularly poor, with the potential to hold back economic and social development.

Swale: A diverse Borough

Swale is one of Kent's most varied districts, exhibiting considerable variety between its component parts.

The western part of Swale, including Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey, forms part of the Thames Gateway, the UK's largest major regeneration programme. **Sittingbourne**, the Borough's largest town and employment centre, offers significant opportunities for regeneration, with the expansion of the town centre northwards towards Milton Creek.

The **Isle of Sheppey** contains some of the country's most important natural assets and concentrations of maritime heritage. Despite significant concentrations of deprivation, regeneration at Queenborough and Rushenden is well advanced and there is a strong partnership commitment to greater investment at Sheerness.

Faversham will see less growth, but is pursuing a strategy based on developing its existing strengths as a creekside market town.

Beyond the main urban centres, the majority of Swale's land area is **rural**. In itself, rural Swale exhibits considerable diversity, including both peripheral and isolated communities and vibrant local service centres.

In general, a review of the current evidence provides a strong justification for the Local Strategic Partnership's goal of achieving a transformation in the Borough's economic, social and environmental position. However, moving Swale to a position where it performs better than the national average on most measures will require concerted effort over the long-term; incremental change will not be sufficient to bridge the gap, and the economic climate is likely to be particularly challenging, at least in the short to medium term.

3.3. Opportunities

Despite some of the poor indicators outlined above, there are a number of opportunities that will help us to realise our ambitions for Swale. These include:

- The Borough's location, only 40 miles from Central London
- Good (and improving) transport links, including the arrival of domestic services on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link in 2009, and easy road access to the motorway network, international rail services and major ports
- The environmental quality of much of the Borough, and increasing recognition of the quality of Swale's environment as an asset for the area
- Increasing opportunities for the Borough in developing knowledge economy sectors, such as technology-based businesses
- Population growth among economically active age groups
- A strong tradition of entrepreneurialism and relatively high rates of business formation
- The fruition of major regeneration proposals, especially in Sittingbourne town centre and Queenborough and Rushenden.

This list of opportunities is very positive. Overall, it suggests that Swale has the potential for step-change that our overall goal requires.

3.4. Challenges

However, for *Ambitions for Swale* to be a success, we also need to address some of the challenges and constraints that the Borough currently faces:

These include:

- Swale's poor performance in education and skills, which hampers the ability of local residents to access higher-value jobs and limits the attractiveness of the Borough to employers demanding higher skills. This is the greatest regeneration challenge facing the Borough
- The existence of pockets of social and economic deprivation, some of which are among the worst in the region, and which limit the ability of the Borough to fully benefit from new investment

- Significant changes in the national and international economy, including current financial instability, fluctuations in housing and consumer demand and inflation, and the relative competitiveness of the UK as an investment location
- Associated with this, structural changes in the local economy, and the need to manage the transition from dependence on sectors requiring a low skills base to higher-value, knowledge-based employment
- Ensuring that population and housing growth is environmentally sustainable and is accompanied by high quality public services, infrastructure provision and job opportunities
- The changes in our population base, including accommodating the needs of a population that is living longer, and building on the opportunities and potential of an ageing workforce
- The existence of poor quality environments at local level in some parts of the Borough
- Wider environmental challenges associated with rising traffic levels and deteriorating biodiversity and landscape quality, and the need to reverse this decline and maintain the quality of the natural environment, ecology and countryside.
- The diversity of the Borough, and the need to recognise that approaches to regeneration and priorities at local level vary between communities across Swale
- As a coastal Borough, managing, adapting and developing solutions to climate change
- Reversing the negative perceptions of the Borough that frequently exist both within and outside Swale

3.5. The strategic context

As a plan that is jointly owned by all the strategic partners in Swale, *Ambitions for Swale* must both take account of other agreed strategies and help to inform partners' own organisational plans.

The Kent Partnership and *Vision for Kent*

Swale is a district within a two-tier local government system, and in 2007, the Kent Commitment was signed between district authorities (including Swale) and Kent County Council to enhance the effectiveness of the existing two-tier system.

To support joint working between the organisations responsible for leading strategy and delivering services in Kent, the Kent Partnership has been established as the countywide local strategic partnership. The Kent Partnership's long-term aspirations are set out in *Vision for Kent*, which focuses on the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of Kent's communities over a 20 year period. *Vision for Kent* was first produced in 2002, and updated in 2006.

Vision for Kent is important for Swale because it informs the priorities and activities of a range of organisations which are frequently structured on a countywide, rather than a district or local level. *Ambitions for Swale* links with *Vision for Kent* by providing specific local knowledge, priorities and targets to ensure that initiatives developed at a county level benefit local people and have local involvement.

We have attempted to closely align the strategic themes of *Vision for Kent* with those of *Ambitions for Swale* without losing sight of the issues that are important to our local communities, and this is reflected in subsequent chapters.

The Kent Agreement and North Kent Agreement

The Kent Agreement supports the priorities set out in *Vision for Kent*, by identifying a series of targets agreed between Kent partners and the Government. Achievement of the targets is linked with the opportunity for local partners to negotiate increased flexibilities from the Government, so that future services and priorities can be best tailored to local needs, and success in achieving the agreed targets will lead to more direct financial reward.

The second Kent Agreement (KA2) was negotiated in 2007/08, with targets intended to be challenging, but achievable. Given the greater extent of the challenges facing Swale than Kent as a whole, there will need to be even greater effort locally to 'close the gap' with the rest of the county.

Within this document, we have linked the KA2 targets with each of the priority themes. We have also identified targets for Swale based on the countywide targets at two Levels:

- **Level 1:** The Swale equivalent of the Kent target where the proportionate improvement countywide is delivered in Swale. Achievement of this target means improvement at the same rate as the county as a whole, but does not necessarily mean a 'closing of the gap' where there is a differential in performance at the baseline;
- **Level 2:** The target that Swale will need to reach if it is to catch up with the countywide target.

Where there is little difference in baseline performance between Swale and Kent as a whole, the Level 1 and Level 2 targets will be the same. However, where Swale's performance is significantly below the county average, the Level 2 targets will pose a greater challenge to partners to achieve.

Within North Kent (covering the districts of Dartford, Gravesham and Swale, plus the Medway unitary authority), the local authorities, together with SEEDA (the regional development agency) and other partners are exploring the potential for further joint working. This may lead to a new multi-area agreement focused initially around skills, economic development and transport, the local priorities for which are identified in *Ambitions for Swale*.

Improving data and developing targets

Partners involved in Kent Agreement 2 are still developing targets, especially at district level, and the proposed Multi Area Agreement for North Kent is still at the early stages of development. Alongside the consultation on this draft Strategy, we will continue to develop the targets set out in each of the thematic chapters to support more complete information in the final draft.

The Thames Gateway

The Thames Gateway is Europe's largest programme of physical, social and economic regeneration, stretching from central London to North Kent and South Essex. Within Swale, Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey are incorporated within the Thames Gateway's boundaries, reflecting the scale of housing and employment growth that these areas will see over the coming years, and their regeneration needs. Associated with this, Government funding linked with the Thames Gateway agenda is contributing to the provision of major infrastructure, especially at Sittingbourne and Queenborough and Rushenden. Less directly, the expansion of employment in neighbouring areas, such as Medway and Kent Thameside, will increase the range of opportunities available to Swale residents, and the priorities in *Ambitions for Swale* aim to capitalise on this.

Strategic links

There are many other key strategies to which *Ambitions for Swale* relates. Where relevant, these are referred to under each theme in the chapters which follow. A more comprehensive glossary of strategies and other key documents is set out in Appendix 1.

Questions for consultation

Q4. Does this section provide a fair overview of the opportunities and challenges facing Swale? Is there anything that is missing?

Q5. Do you agree with the proposed mechanism for linking this Sustainable Community Strategy with Vision for Kent and the Kent Agreement?

Q6. In addition to the Kent Agreement (and future Multi-Area Agreement) targets set out in this draft, would you propose any additional targets that we should use to measure our progress?

Q7. Does *Ambitions for Swale* sufficiently reflect Swale's diversity? If not, what do you think should be added?

Part Two: Articulating our Ambitions for Swale

Questions for consultation

Q8. Do you agree with the strategic objectives set out in relation to each priority theme in Chapters 4-11?

Q9. Do you agree with the proposed partnership priorities set out in relation to each priority theme?

Q11. Are there any key areas of intervention that would help partners to address more than one priority theme?

4. Ambitions for Learning

Our strategic objective:

To deliver a step change in Swale’s learning and skills performance to ensure a high quality skills base sufficient and to enable people in Swale to realise their full potential

4.1. Introduction

Increasing participation and achievement in learning will be the most important factor in achieving *Ambitions for Swale’s* overall strategic goal. Without substantially raising the Borough’s performance in learning and skills, it will not be possible to achieve the economic transformation needed to ensure a real improvement in the quality and range of local employment opportunities. Yet there is now an opportunity, at a time of improving performance and substantial public investment, to achieve the transformation that the vision requires.

4.2. Baseline: Learning in Swale

Qualification levels among Swale’s working age population are significantly worse than both the national and regional averages. In 2007, over 19% of working age people within the Borough had no qualifications, compared with less than 10% across the South East, and the proportion with qualifications at NVQ4 and above was a over a third lower than elsewhere in the region.

Qualification	Swale (%)	South East (%)	Great Britain (%)
NVQ4 and above	18.6	30.8	28.6
NVQ3 and above	37.9	49.6	46.4
NVQ2 and above	58.8	68.2	64.5
NVQ1 and above	73.2	82.3	78.1
Other qualifications	7.5	8.1	8.8
No qualification	19.2	9.6	13.1

Source: ONS annual population survey

This poor skills profile is a cause for concern in Swale. Firstly, across the country as a whole, the proportion of jobs requiring higher qualifications is likely to increase, and there is a higher proportion of employment in knowledge-intensive occupations in the South East than in most of the rest of the country. Poor qualifications levels will act as a limit on the ability of local people to access these new employment opportunities.

Secondly, part of the reason for Swale’s poor skills profile relates to historic employer demand, which has not tended to require the higher skills levels that are increasingly in demand nationally. In other words, the presence of jobs that require poor skills provide little

incentive to gain new ones, and the presence of a relatively low skilled workforce deters higher-value investors. This in turn acts as a limit on the aspirations of many local learners.

There is mixed evidence of improvements in the Borough’s skills profile. The distribution of workforce qualifications showed a decline relative to the rest of the South East in 2007, although there has been a longer term trend of improvement. However, improvements in school attainment have been impressive, and significantly ahead of the county and national averages:

Table 2: % of 15 year olds achieving 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C (and equivalent)

	Year					% improvement, 2003-07
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	
Swale average	45	48	52	52	57	27
Kent average	56	56	60	61	65	16
England average	53	54	56	59	61	15

Combined with substantial investment in education in Swale, including in the reorganisation of education on the Isle of Sheppey, prospects for long-term improvement in the Borough’s skills profile look strong.

Yet despite this positive outlook, many of the Borough’s skills shortfalls relate to those who are already in the labour market. Indeed, around 70% of the workforce of 2020 are currently in work. Improving the skills of the Borough’s existing workforce and developing opportunities for adult learning will be critical to raising Swale’s overall attainment levels.

Finally, Swale contains several areas of localised low attainment, which generally correspond with the distribution of income and other forms of deprivation, especially on Sheppey and within urban Sittingbourne and Faversham. If local residents are to be able to benefit the most from the opportunities that regeneration will bring, there will be a need to particularly concentrate activities aimed at improving access to education and skills in these localities.

4.3. Partnership priorities

Over the period of *Ambitions for Swale*, we want to see Swale’s workforce skills levels, school attainment and participation in learning rise to the South East average.

Our priorities for Swale to 2026 are:

Priority LR1: Expanding vocational learning opportunities for young people and adults through increased choice of provision, work-based learning options and better information, advice and guidance

Priority LR2: Improving participation in further and higher education, by exploring opportunities to bring higher education provision to Swale, and by providing new routes into existing higher education institutions for school leavers and other potential students

Priority LR3: Creating a learning culture, raising aspirations particularly in Swale’s most disadvantaged communities through community learning, jobs and skills brokerage and investment in community development activity as a route into education

Priority LR4: Improving services to children, ensuring that we deliver the *Every Child Matters* agenda by improving the education and care of the most vulnerable children and by increasing school attendance

Priority LR5: Ensuring the right provision, making sure that new developments have the learning facilities they need, and that our main centres are well-served with a choice of schools, colleges and other provision

4.4. The next three years: Targets for improvement

The Kent Agreement sets out a series of clear targets to improve learning and skills, to which *Ambitions for Swale* will contribute⁵:

	Baseline	Target		
		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
NI 161: Learners achieving Level 1 qualification in Literacy				
Kent target	4168	4376	4595	4825
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 162: Learners achieving Entry Level 3 qualification in Numeracy				
Kent target	46	48	51	53
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 117: 16-18 year olds not in employment, education or training (NEET)				
Kent target	5.27%	**	**	4.7%
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 178: Achievement of 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent, including English and Maths				
Kent target	31 schools	20 schools	10 schools	0 schools
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
Swale 1: Adults with at least a Level 4 qualification				
Kent target	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	19.8%	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	19.8%	**	**	**

4.5. Contributing to our wider ambitions

If we get our priorities for the Learning Borough right, we will help to achieve improvements across all the strategic themes in *Ambitions for Swale*:

⁵ The majority of these (indicated by **) are to be determined.

AMBITIONS FOR LEARNING	
Ambitions for Prosperity	By providing businesses with the qualified staff that they need By developing a skills base that will attract new investment By enabling local residents to access new employment opportunities
Ambitions for Inclusion and Safety	By providing people with the skills they need to secure employment By offering learning opportunities as part of a package of community activities
Ambitions for Health	By promoting activity and engagement
Ambitions for our Environment	By supporting training in environmentally relevant vocational activities
Ambitions for Culture	By expanding learning for leisure
Ambitions for Transport	By providing learning opportunities within the community, reducing the need to travel
Ambitions for Homes and Communities	By investing in provision within and alongside new communities

5. Ambitions for Prosperity

Our strategic objective:

To achieve a dynamic and sustainable local economy increasingly focused on knowledge-intensive industries to maximise Swale’s opportunities, embrace global change and support indigenous entrepreneurship

5.1. Introduction

Swale has the potential to create up to 12,000 new job opportunities by 2016, building on substantial employment growth in the Borough over the past decade. Generating higher value employment is key to *Ambitions for Swale*, and while the Borough is faced with significant challenges to economic growth, it has considerable potential and is already showing positive signs of change.

5.2. Baseline: Swale’s economy today

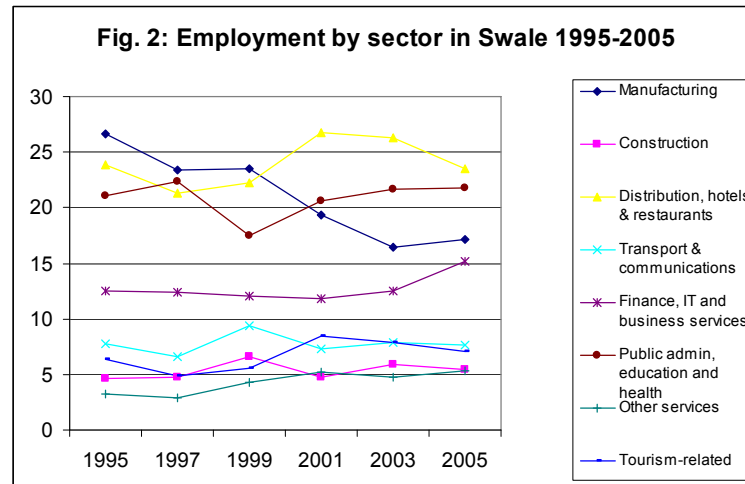
Swale’s economy has shown impressive levels of growth and job creation over the past few years, evidence of its success in diversifying away from traditional employers, but within the Borough’s dominant logistics, transport and manufacturing sectors⁶. Productivity is also relatively high, and business survival rates are good. However, economic inactivity remains higher than the regional and national averages.

Table 3: Key economic indicators

Indicator	Swale	Kent	South East	Great Britain
Jobs density (jobs ratio to working age population, 2005)	0.69	0.81	0.88	0.84
Average full-time weekly earnings (by workplace, 2007)	£479	£451	£482	£459
Jobseekers Allowance claimant count (2008)	2.0%	1.6%	1.4%	2.2%
Economic inactivity rate (2007)	22.0%	19.3%	18.0%	21.4%
Business registrations (% of total stock, 2006)	11.3%	9.8%	9.3%	9.4%

However, as reflected in Chapter 4, the Borough is held back by its poor learning and skills performance. This hampers the ability of the Borough to attract higher skilled and higher value employment. It also threatens the long-term sustainability of Swale’s current high employment rates, given the increasing competition in lower added value industry from emerging economies. These competitive pressures are already having a noticeable effect on Swale’s economy, with employment in manufacturing declining by xx% between 1995 and 2005:

⁶ Between 1998 and 2004, Swale saw a total jobs increase of 14.5% (an average of 2.4% per year).



However, Swale has considerable potential for economic growth. Firstly, Kent Science Park near Sittingbourne is providing a growing base for a cluster of knowledge-driven businesses, predominantly in the biosciences sector. KSP is a unique facility within the Thames Gateway, and provides the one of the most important opportunities within the Borough for supporting long-term structural change in the economy towards higher value sectors demanding higher skilled, better-paid employment.

Secondly, there continue to be opportunities for Swale to build on its traditional strengths by encouraging the development of higher value manufacturing, and supporting the development and improvement of employment locations across the Borough. The development of the Neatscourt business park within the Queenborough and Rushenden regeneration area, regeneration associated with the Port at Sheerness and the expansion of employment land within North Sittingbourne all provide significant opportunities.

Swale continues to benefit from its advantageous location, within the Thames Gateway and with easy access to the road network, and with a key strength in the UK’s fourth largest freight port at Sheerness. These support the importance of transport and logistics within the local economy, a sector that will particularly benefit from the improvements to connectivity set out in Chapter 10.

Tourism continues to be a key sector in Swale, with an 80% growth in tourism related employment between 1998 and 2003. There are major opportunities for developing tourism further, particularly given the quality of the Borough’s countryside and coastline, and promoting tourism in Swale will be closely associated with the development of Swale’s cultural sector and with the Borough’s wider environmental enhancement and cultural development set out in Chapters 8 and 9.

Swale’s town centres also offer the potential for significant growth and enhancement. In particular, the regeneration of Sittingbourne town centre will offer an expansion of employment opportunities associated with retail and other services, while Faversham is developing as a local tourism and cultural centre. Sheerness, the Borough’s third major town centre, is in need of further regeneration investment, both in the town centre and associated with the Port. As with the other strategic themes in this document, there are considerable divergences in the

economic performance of different parts of the Borough, with high levels of economic inactivity especially in the most disadvantaged localities.

5.3. Partnership priorities

Our priorities for Swale to 2026 are:

Priority PR1: Supporting the development of enterprise and entrepreneurship, including social enterprise, by ensuring access to business support and premises

Priority PR2: Increasing the value of the Borough's economic base, through the provision and promotion of employment sites for growing sectors and by attracting new investment

Priority PR3: Regenerating Swale's town centres as major centres for employment, learning, culture and services

Priority PR4: Increasing access to employment opportunities, especially in the most disadvantaged parts of the Borough and among the most disadvantaged communities

5.4. The next three years: Targets for improvement

The Kent Agreement sets out a limited number targets to improve the local economic base, to which *Ambitions for Swale* will contribute, with an additional target for Swale⁷:

	Baseline	Target		
		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
NI 171: New business registration rate (per 10,000 adults)				
Kent target	40.6	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	42.6	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	42.6	**	**	**
NI 152: Working age people on out of work benefits				
Kent target	9.5%	**	**	9.0%
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
Swale 2: Economic inactivity rate				
Kent target	19.3%	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	22.0%	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	22.0%	**	**	**

Over the longer term, we also seek to contribute to the Regional Economic Strategy's target of increasing regional GVA by 3% per annum.

⁷ The majority of these (indicated by **) are to be determined.

5.5. Contributing to our wider ambitions

If we get our Ambitions for Prosperity right, we will help to achieve improvements across all the strategic themes in *Ambitions for Swale*:

Ambitions for Learning	By increasing employment opportunities and incentives to learning
AMBITIONS FOR PROSPERITY	
Ambitions for Inclusion and Safety	By increasing opportunities for employment throughout the Borough By reducing poverty and inequality
Ambitions for Health	By reducing poverty and inequality By enabling more people to participate in the labour market
Ambitions for our Environment	By improving efficiency and reducing waste
Ambitions for Culture	By increasing opportunities to take up cultural and leisure opportunities
Ambitions for Transport	By expanding local employment opportunities
Ambitions for Homes and Communities	By expanding employment alongside housing growth

6. Ambitions for Inclusion and Safety

Our strategic objective:

To build communities in which people are proud to live and where they feel safe and confident

6.1. Introduction

This theme focuses on:

- The need to reduce deprivation and increase individual opportunity, particularly within the Borough's most disadvantaged areas. Given that the areas of housing and employment growth in Swale broadly correlate with those areas suffering the greatest deprivation, there is both a need and an opportunity for regeneration to benefit the most disadvantaged parts of the Borough.
- Support for the development of social capital across Swale. This is associated with increasing levels of involvement in community, voluntary and civic activity, and is often positively associated with increased educational and employment outcomes and higher levels of capacity in local non-statutory organisations⁸.
- Making sure that for sustainable communities to be delivered, the right public services need to be in place. In many cases, step change in the most deprived neighbourhoods will require investment over and above that provided through mainstream sources
- Reducing crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour, and promoting community safety

6.2. Baseline: Community development and safety in Swale today

Spatial inequality is relatively high in Swale. This is borne out by the large disparities between the least and most deprived parts of the Borough, with particular concentrations of deprivation found on the Isle of Sheppey and Sittingbourne. Generally, the areas of greatest deprivation correlate with those of greatest regeneration potential, particularly in the A249 corridor.

Significant efforts to combat local deprivation have been made and are starting to yield results; for example through the investment in new children's centres in Sheerness and more recently across the Borough. Yet the deprivation statistics frequently remain persistently poor, reflecting the fact that combating deprivation requires long term, sustained investment, and recognition that transformation will be a gradual process.

Where local regeneration programmes have been accompanied by extensive community consultation and engagement and by substantial investment in community development resources, they have been particularly successful, as at Queenborough and Rushenden, and

⁸ *Social Capital: A Review of the Literature*, Office for National Statistics, 2001.

increasing community involvement in decision-making can both improve the quality of the decisions themselves and bring about a greater sense of participation and identity. Building on the success of the engagement process at Queenborough, we hope to achieve similar levels of community involvement in future planning and regeneration initiatives, such as in Sittingbourne town centre.

As Swale's population grows, it will become an increasingly diverse Borough. The scale of transformation will be greater than some communities have experienced for several decades, although other parts of the Borough will experience more gradual change. As they evolve, communities will need to value the contributions of all their members and to develop mechanisms to encourage people of all backgrounds to participate in community life.

Average crime figures for Swale were slightly higher than for Kent as a whole in 2007/08, with around 90 crimes per 1,000 population. Crime fell slightly between 2006/07 and 2007/08, although by a lesser amount than for the county as a whole. However, surveys for the Borough Council indicate that crime is one of the top two factors cited by residents in determining whether or not somewhere is a good place to live, and is a critical factor in overall quality of life.

6.3. Partnership priorities

Our priorities for Swale to 2016 are:

Priority SI1: Developing targeted responses to the needs of individual communities to combat localised concentrations of deprivation, and/ or to work with neighbourhoods to support processes of change and regeneration

Priority SI2: Encouraging community engagement and participation in community and civic life

Priority SI3: Promoting community safety through the Swale Community Safety Partnership, to reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and drug and alcohol misuse and to support young people

6.4. The next three years: Targets for improvement

The Kent Agreement sets out a series of targets to support a safe and inclusive county, to which *Ambitions for Swale* will contribute⁹:

	Baseline	Target		
		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
NI 15: Serious violent crime rate				
Kent target	0.31 per 1,000	0.28 per 1,000	**	**
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 21: Dealing with local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime				
Kent target	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 117: First time entrants to youth justice system aged 10-17				
Kent target	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 32: Repeat incidents of domestic abuse				
Kent target	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 3: Civic participation in the local area				
Kent target	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 6: Participation in regular volunteering				
Kent target	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**

⁹ The majority of these (indicated by **) are to be determined.

6.5. Contributing to our wider ambitions

If we get our Ambitions for Inclusion and Safety right, we will help to achieve improvements across all the strategic themes in *Ambitions for Swale*:

Ambitions for Learning	By providing community-based learning opportunities
Ambitions for Prosperity	By providing specific localised services to enable people to access work By reducing crime and anti-social behaviour
AMBITIONS FOR INCLUSION AND SAFETY	
Ambitions for Health	By reducing deprivation By targeting services at the most disadvantaged groups By reducing crime and the fear of crime
Ambitions for our Environment	By increasing volunteering and participation in civic life By reducing criminal damage and vandalism
Ambitions for Culture	By increasing volunteering and participation in civic life
Ambitions for Transport	By improving opportunities for people to access services locally
Ambitions for Homes & Communities	By reducing crime and the fear of crime By providing ways in which people can get involved in community life

7. Ambitions for Health

Our strategic objective:

To achieve a Borough in which people live healthier lives and have access to high quality services that meet their needs

7.1. Introduction

Swale exhibits significant health inequalities, reflecting the economic divergences that exist between the most disadvantaged wards (on the Isle of Sheppey and in Sittingbourne) and the more affluent parts of the Borough. *Ambitions for Swale* seeks to reduce these inequalities, improving the health outcomes for those in the Borough's most deprived communities.

7.2. Baseline: Health in Swale

Overall, Swale's health outcomes are somewhat worse than elsewhere in the South East, as the table below indicates:

Indicator	Swale	Kent	South East	Great Britain
Average male life expectancy	76.9	-	78.5	77.3
Average female life expectancy	80.4	-	82.3	81.5
% adults who are smokers	28.6	24.6	-	25.8
% adults who are obese	25.4	24.4	-	-
Working age, on incapacity benefit (%) ¹¹	6.8	5.8	4.7	7.2

Some of these indicators are among the worst in Kent: for instance, the proportion of adults who are obese is the highest of any district in Kent; the proportion who smoke is the second highest.

However, these figures mask significant divergences, which correlate with wider inequalities in other spheres. Life expectancy is for instance eight years higher in West Downs than it is in Sheerness West. Poor health is also a consequence of deprivation and a cause of it: while the proportion of people in Swale on incapacity benefit is significantly above the regional average, the figure rises to over 12% in Sheerness East and over 13% in Leysdown and Warden. Reducing health, and other, inequalities, is a major challenge for local partners.

Over the coming years, Swale will also need to deal with the challenge of an ageing population (although not yet to the same extent as some other parts of the region), and increased funding for and provision of social care, and efforts to support independent living, will need to be further pursued.

¹⁰ All figures (except incapacity benefit) from Annual Report by Director of Public Health for Kent, 2006

¹¹ NOMIS

7.3. Partnership priorities

Our priorities for Swale to 2016 are:

Priority HE1: Reducing the gap in health outcomes by improving the performance of the worst performing wards (Sheerness East, Sheerness West, Leysdown & Warden) to the levels of the rest of the Borough

Priority HE2: Promoting healthy lifestyles, and reducing levels of smoking and obesity

Priority HE3: Improving access to health facilities, especially in the Borough's most disadvantaged areas

7.4. The next three years: Targets for improvement

The Kent Agreement sets out a series of targets to support a Healthy Borough, to which *Ambitions for Swale* will contribute¹²:

	Baseline	Target		
		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
NI 120: All age, all cause mortality rate				
Kent target	565	535	523	512
Swale Level 1	635	**	**	556
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 55: Obesity in primary school age children in Reception (%)				
Kent target	9.4	9.6	9.7	9.7
Swale Level 1	9.1	**	**	9.1
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 39: Rate of hospital admissions per 100,000 for alcohol related harm				
Kent target	1,097	1,279	1,334	1,383
Swale Level 1	1,161	**	**	1,405
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 40: Number of drug users recorded as being in effective treatment				
Kent target	2,032	2,134	2,155	2,177
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 125: Achieving independence for older people through rehabilitation/ intermediate care				
Kent target	74%	**	**	80%
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 51: Effectiveness of Child & Adolescent Mental Health services				
Kent target	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**

¹² The majority of these (indicated by **) are to be determined.

7.5. Contributing to our wider ambitions

If we get our Ambitions for Health right, we will help to achieve improvements across all the strategic themes in *Ambitions for Swale*:

Ambitions for Learning	By reducing health barriers to learning
Ambitions for Prosperity	By reducing health barriers to employment By recognising the link between health and income inequality
Ambitions for Inclusion and Safety	By reducing social exclusion through health By increasing community involvement
AMBITIONS FOR HEALTH	
Ambitions for our Environment	By promoting access to green and open space through healthier lifestyles
Ambitions for Culture	By promoting access to recreation through healthier lifestyles
Ambitions for Transport	By promoting access to local services
Ambitions for Homes & Communities	By providing services within or adjacent to new communities

8. Ambitions for our Environment

Our strategic objective:

To ensure that Swale enjoys an excellent quality of life by protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment and ensuring that all regeneration in Swale is environmentally sustainable

8.1. Introduction

Ambitions for Swale aims to create a cleaner and greener Swale, in which people choose to live and work. Swale is an area of both housing and economic growth, and an area of outstanding environmental quality and diversity. Our strategy therefore aims to ensure that growth is not only environmentally sustainable, but delivers positive improvements in the quality of life for local people.

Our ambitions for our environment focus on:

- Responding to the challenges of climate change;
- The quality of the built environment;
- The quantity and quality of green and other public open space;
- The continued protection and enhancement of areas of national and international environmental significance;
- Minimisation of waste;
- Minimisation of use of natural resources, including water, energy and minerals;
- The protection and enhancement of biodiversity in both urban and rural areas;
- The preservation and promotion of local heritage and unique local characteristics.
- Continued awareness of, and planning for the flood risks affecting much of the Borough

All of the above impact strongly on people's quality of life. They also have significant economic benefits, both in improving perceptions of Swale as a high quality place in which to live and work and in underpinning tourism development.

8.2. Baseline: Environmental quality in Swale today

Swale has a number of environmental strengths. Compared with the rest of the Thames Gateway, Swale offers a high degree of accessibility to areas of natural beauty, and has significantly lower 'environmental deprivation' scores than other parts of North Kent¹³.

This is borne out by Swale's unique and varied landscape, which contains 42 distinct landscape character areas¹⁴. A significant proportion of this is designated for its high biodiversity and landscape interest, including the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the south of the Borough and the internationally protected marshes on Sheppey and

¹³ *The State of the Borough Report*, Local Futures Group/ Swale Forward, 2005.

¹⁴ Swale Borough Landscape Character Assessment, Swale Borough Council, 2002.

along the Swale. Indeed, Swale contains the most extensive areas of unspoilt land within the Thames Gateway.

There is a clear link between the quality of the natural environment and the development of Swale's economy. Green infrastructure can help to minimise the impacts of flooding, and environmental quality is an important tourism asset (and in turn can help to drive up demand for higher quality). At Thames Gateway level, *Greening the Gateway* sets out an overarching, long-term, green space strategy, which provides context for Swale's own Green Grid strategy, published in 2007¹⁵. This aims to fully integrate the enhancement of the local environment with the regeneration process, and in particular to promote:

- The value of the landscape in providing a range of benefits, including healthy recreation, wildlife protection and enhancement and flood risk management
- A network of green and open space throughout the Thames Gateway, consistent with local characteristics and priorities
- The value of the Thames Estuary at the centre of the wider Thames Gateway

However, environmental quality is not distributed evenly across the Borough, and for many communities, access to natural green and open space is limited. Provision of good quality natural green space can have positive impacts on health and wellbeing, but unfortunately parts of the Borough, especially in urban Sittingbourne and Sheerness, lack access to such provision. More broadly, as traffic levels continue to rise and biodiversity in some areas deteriorates, Swale is faced with a challenge of reversing threatened decline, as well as taking advantage of new opportunities.

Making Swale a Green Borough will also involve reducing waste and minimising the use of resources. Swale's recycling record is much improved, and given the Borough's position within the Thames Gateway and in an area likely to be greatly affected by the consequences of climate change, there are opportunities over the coming years for Swale to take a lead in developing new approaches to managing our changing natural environment.

8.3. Partnership priorities

Our priorities for Swale to 2026 are:

Priority GR1: Managing climate change, recognising both the opportunities and challenges for the Borough in adapting to environmental change

Priority GR2: Investing in strategic green space, to maximise the ecological value of Swale's key landscape assets and realising their tourism and recreational potential

Priority GR3: Supporting the development of Swale's Green Grid, connecting urban communities with parks and open spaces and with the surrounding countryside

Priority GR4: Reducing waste and improving recycling, looking for new opportunities to minimise the amount of waste the Borough produces

¹⁵ *Creating Sustainable Communities: Greening the Gateway – A Greenspace Strategy for the Thames Gateway*, ODPM/ DEFRA, 2004.

Priority GR5: Keeping Swale clean, by maintaining the highest standards along our transport corridors and in our neighbourhoods, town centres and countryside

8.4. The next three years: Targets for improvement

The Kent Agreement sets out a limited number targets to improve the local economic base, to which *Ambitions for Swale* will contribute, with an additional target for Swale¹⁶:

	Baseline	Target		
		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
NI 195: Improved street and environmental cleanliness				
Kent target	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 189: Flood and coastal erosion risk management				
Kent target	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 186: Per capita CO2 emissions				
Kent target	7.8 tonnes	-	-	11.2% reduction
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 191: Residual household waste per household				
Kent target	860 kg	762 kg	733 kg	704 kg
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 197: Improved biodiversity: % of local sites where positive conservation management has been or is being implemented				
Kent target	231	+5%	+5%	+5%
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**

Over the longer term, we also seek to contribute to the Regional Economic Strategy’s target to reduce the rate of growth in the regional carbon footprint (currently increasing at 1.1% per year), and to reduce it by 2016.

¹⁶ The majority of these (indicated by **) are to be determined.

8.5. Contributing to our wider ambitions

If we get the Ambitions for our Environment right, they will help to achieve improvements across all the strategic themes in *Ambitions for Swale*:

Ambitions for Learning	By recognising the potential within Swale’s environmental assets to develop skills in environmental management and technologies
Ambitions for Prosperity	By building on Swale’s existing environmental technologies sector By reducing costs associated with energy and waste By maximising the value of the natural environment as a tourism asset
Ambitions for Inclusion and Safety	By improving neighbourhood access to open and green space By increasing opportunities for volunteering in the environmental sector By increasing safe recreational opportunities By increasing pride in the local environment
Ambitions for Health	By increasing safe recreational opportunities By reducing pollution By increasing opportunities for walking and cycling to access services
AMBITIONS FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT	
Ambitions for Culture	By increasing the value of green and open space as a cultural and heritage asset
Ambitions for Transport	By increasing demand for and use of sustainable forms of transport
Ambitions for Homes and Communities	By reducing waste in new developments By improving neighbourhood access to open and green space

9. Ambitions for Culture

Our strategic objective:

To achieve a vibrant Borough, where cultural vitality contributes to Swale's distinctive communities and their health and wellbeing

9.1. Introduction

Culture helps to promote a sense of place and to celebrate the identity of Swale's diverse communities. It also helps to stimulate ambition and raise standards and pride in the area. Cultural organisations and initiatives often act as focal points for social activity, helping to develop community networks and promote understanding. In addition, the cultural and creative industries are important (and growing) employers, and make significant contributions to the local economy.

For these reasons, developing culture in the Borough is an important strand of our *Ambitions for Swale*. Our definition of culture is a broad one: encompassing recreational, sporting and artistic opportunities and the protection and promotion of the Borough's heritage, our strategic objective aims to ensure that culture is accessible to, and enjoyed by, all of Swale's communities.

9.2. Baseline: Culture in Swale today

Swale has a diverse cultural offer, based around the distinctive identities of its three component parts.

Faversham is a classic Kentish market town, with a wealth of distinctive heritage assets, including the historic brewery and an attractive town centre. The Isle of Sheppey offers a coastal identity, with coastal marshes of international wildlife importance – and increasing significance as part of the Borough's tourism offer. The Island's maritime heritage is also of great significance both to Sheppey's local history and its current built environment. Sittingbourne has a less distinct cultural identity, but the forthcoming regeneration of the town centre and the area around Milton Creek offers an opportunity to develop it further.

However, the presence of larger adjacent centres, with greater provision of leisure, sporting and cultural amenities, reduces the concentration of cultural resources in Swale itself, and the Borough at present suffers from a lack of amenities. Increasing cultural and recreational provision is an important goal as the population expands and will be important in enabling the Borough and its communities to build their identity and sense of place. Indeed, achieving greater provision of recreational opportunities as part of the regeneration of Sittingbourne will both support and be supported by the town's increased retail and residential development.

The number of cultural organisations and venues operating within the voluntary and community sector is a strength of the Borough's current cultural landscape. In particular, services such as cinemas and heritage centres are sustainably provided by voluntary groups,

and enjoy high levels of local support. The local arts sector is developing, and the Borough's schools are also major centres of cultural and sporting activity, for the wider community as well as for their own students. And of course culture and leisure is not just about organised entertainment, but is also about informal recreation, which Swale's parks, open spaces and countryside help to support.

Looking to the future, the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and their associated Cultural Olympiad, provide opportunities to increase participation in sporting and cultural activities, and to increase volunteering in the cultural sector. Given Swale's position in the Thames Gateway just 40 miles from the central Olympics venue, the Borough has great potential to ensure that local residents benefit from the opportunities that the Games present.

9.3. Partnership priorities

Our priorities for Swale to 2026 are:

Priority CL1: Increasing participation in cultural, leisure and sporting activities by promoting activities near where people live, especially in rural areas and in harder to reach communities

Priority CL2: Making the most of London 2012 and the Cultural Olympiad to promote volunteering and participation, and to link cultural development with access to learning and health

Priority CL3: Shaping local identity, recognising and promoting the distinctive characteristics of Swale's three component areas (and more local communities) and ensuring that they are promoted in a coherent, high quality and inclusive way

Priority CL4: Improving the cultural capital stock by ensuring that provision is made in regeneration schemes for new cultural, sporting and leisure provision, and by ensuring that such provision meets local demand

Priority CL5: Recognising the value of culture both for residents and as part of the local offer to investors and visitors to Swale

9.4. The next three years: Targets for improvement

The Kent Agreement sets out three targets to support cultural development, to which *Ambitions for Swale* will contribute.¹⁷

	Baseline	Target		
		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
NI 11: Engagement in the Arts				
Kent target	**	**	**	**

¹⁷ The majority of these (indicated by **) are to be determined. NI 11 and NI 110 will be measured via the place based survey, which will take place across Kent in autumn 2008.

Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 110: Young people's participation in positive activities				
Kent target	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 8: Adult participation in sport and active recreation				
Kent target	19.5%	-	-	22.5%
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**

9.5. Contributing to our wider ambitions

If we get our Ambitions for Culture right will help to achieve improvements across all the strategic themes in *Ambitions for Swale*:

Ambitions for Learning	By developing culture and sport as routes to lifelong learning By capitalising on the cultural facilities offered by schools and colleges
Ambitions for Prosperity	By encouraging the development of cultural and creative industries and making Swale a place in which they want to locate By supporting the identity of the Borough as a place to invest By adding to Swale's tourism offer
Ambitions for Inclusion and Safety	By promoting volunteering and participation in community activity By increasing the range of activities available to young people By increasing awareness of and pride in community identity
Ambitions for Health	By promoting healthier lifestyles
Ambitions for our Environment	By recognising the natural environment as a key part of Swale's cultural and heritage offer
AMBITIONS FOR CULTURE	
Ambitions for Transport	By promoting through sport cycling and walking as forms of transport
Ambitions for Homes and Communities	By building cultural provision in as part of new developments By recognising the value of local identity and culture in building design

10. Ambitions for Transport

Our strategic objective:

To deliver an efficient, integrated, sustainable and multi-modal transport network capable of supporting a growing population and increased economic opportunity

10.1. Introduction

Improved transport links have been of critical importance to Swale for many years. Recent years have seen major improvements with the opening of the Sheppey Crossing in 2006, and the development of the Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road is now under way.

Continued investment in the Borough's transport infrastructure remains a high priority. New highways infrastructure is a crucial enabler of regeneration, but we also need to invest in public transport and in providing opportunities for travellers to switch between modes of transport, especially in the Borough's urban centres.

10.2. Baseline: Connectivity in Swale today

Swale is a well-located Borough, and performs relatively well against indicators of accessibility and mobility. Recent years have also seen major investment in Swale's transport infrastructure. Most strikingly, 2006 saw the opening of the new Sheppey Crossing, which has greatly increased connectivity between the Isle of Sheppey and the rest of Kent, and fulfils a long-required transport need. This new link is also essential in opening up major new regeneration opportunities, most significantly the development of Queenborough and Rushenden and Sheerness. Further improvements will follow over the next few years with the development of the Rushenden Link Road and, crucially, the Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road, essential for the town's regeneration.

However, despite these major improvements, Swale continues to face a number of key transport shortfalls including congestion at Junctions 5 and 7 of the M2. As well as a potentially limiting factor in a number of major regeneration initiatives, capacity constraints on the road network also have economic consequences for the Borough's existing businesses.

Maintaining and expanding the highways network must however be balanced with the need to protect the environment and to conserve natural resources. In 2006, road users in Swale consumed 93,600 tonnes of fuel¹⁸, and at present, use of public transport is less common in Swale than in other parts of the country: in 2001, only 9% of people used public transport to get to work, compared with 15% in Britain as a whole. This is not surprising given the Borough's semi-rural nature and its complex travel patterns (which are less linear and London-centric than other parts of North Kent). However, public transport use has the potential to increase for journeys to London, given the planned domestic services using the Channel Tunnel Rail Link serving Sittingbourne and Faversham. These will help to increase

¹⁸ BERR Regional and Local Authority road transport consumption statistics, 2008.

accessibility to employment opportunities at Medway, Kent Thameside, London Docklands and the City. The Borough's existing rail connections to London will remain important however, as will the Sheerness-Sittingbourne branch line.

Access from Swale's rural hinterland to the towns is often poor, as a result of the geographical isolation of parts of the Borough, especially in eastern Sheppey and in the North Downs. At present, rural public transport is limited, although alternative, community-based transport initiatives have been successfully introduced. There are also strong social inclusion grounds for improving public transport in Swale: in 2001, over 22% of households had no access to private transport, compared with 19% in the South East as a whole, and lack of access to transport was particularly high in the Borough's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

10.3. Partnership priorities

Our priorities for Swale to 2026 are:

Priority CT1: Delivering sustainable transport in new developments, ensuring that the Borough's major regeneration schemes at Sittingbourne and Queenborough and Rushenden have access to high quality alternatives to car transport

Priority CT2: Promoting access to sustainable transport, to enable people to access to school, work, training and leisure facilities, especially in rural areas and the more disadvantaged parts of the Borough

Priority CT3: Investing in major transport infrastructure where required, especially in the completion of Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road and the expansion of capacity at M2 Junction 5

Priority CT4: Maintaining and improving the highways network, making improvements where needed to secondary routes such as the A2, A251 and B2231

Priority CT5: Improving road safety, making Swale's transport systems safe and reliable for all users

Priority CT6: Developing alternative access to services, through increases in the provision of broadband connectivity and by increasing the amount of public and commercial services that can be accessed remotely

10.4. The next three years: targets for improvement

The Kent Agreement sets out three targets to improve Swale’s transport systems and connectivity, to which *Ambitions for Swale* will contribute¹⁹:

	Baseline	Target		
		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
NI 198: Children travelling to school by car				
Kent target	35.6%	33.1%	31.8%	30.6%
Swale Level 1	37.8%	35.3%	34.4%	32.5%
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 175: Access to GP surgeries by public transport, walking and cycling				
Kent target	82.0%	82.5%	83.0%	83.5%
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 47: People killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents				
Kent target	742	723	699	674
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**

10.5. Contributing to our wider ambitions

If we get our Ambitions for Transport right, we will help to achieve improvements across all the strategic themes in *Ambitions for Swale*:

¹⁹ The majority of these (indicated by **) are to be determined.

Ambitions for Learning	By ensuring safe, sustainable access to schools and other centres of learning
Ambitions for Prosperity	By providing the transport infrastructure that businesses need By enabling local people to access employment and training By reducing the costs of congestion and delay By improving the quality of the environment in our town centres
Ambitions for Inclusion and Safety	By increasing road safety By reducing the negative impacts of transport schemes on local communities
Ambitions for Health	By increasing walking and cycling By reducing traffic pollution and noise
Ambitions for our Environment	By reducing fuel consumption By reducing the negative impacts of transport schemes on the environment
Ambitions for Culture	By improving the quality of the environment in our town centres
AMBITIONS FOR TRANSPORT	
Ambitions for Homes and Communities	By ensuring that the right transport solutions are in place to support new developments

11. Ambitions for Homes and Communities

11.1. Introduction

With population and housing expansion, ensuring that new homes are well designed and maintained and that new developments are integrated with existing communities is of critical importance. This theme considers:

- Design quality
- Housing standards
- Housing affordability
- Environmental sustainability
- Community integration

11.2. Baseline: New homes and communities in Swale

In the period between 2006 and 2016, Swale is expected to deliver some 9,100 new homes, the majority within the Thames Gateway part of the Borough. Most of this new housing will be on brownfield land, with the two largest developments due to come forward at Queenborough and Rushenden on the Isle of Sheppey and at Sittingbourne town centre/ Milton Creek.

Despite recent increases in the Borough's housing stock, affordability remains a key concern in the Borough. Swale is somewhat more affordable than the national average (based on a ratio of house prices to average earnings), but the average house price in 2008 is still over seven and a half times the average annual salary. Ensuring that there is sufficient affordable housing provision suitable for local needs is therefore a high priority for the Borough. Making sure that the Borough's existing housing stock (both public and private) is of sufficient quality is also an important priority: in 2005, over 6% of Swale's housing stock was classified as 'unfit', compared with under 4.5% in the country as a whole.

The need to raise design and sustainability standards in new residential developments has been emphasised at Thames Gateway level, and efforts are being made in the planning of major new schemes such as that at Queenborough and Rushenden to set high standards for design quality and waste minimisation. As important, if not more so, is the need to integrate new developments with existing communities. Swale has had mixed success in achieving this, and ensuring better integration with in new schemes will be a high priority.

11.3. Partnership priorities

Our priorities for Swale to 2026 are:

Priority HC1: Ensuring sufficient affordable housing to meet identified local needs

Priority HC2: Improving the environment of existing communities both in housing stock and the surrounding community, especially within the Borough's most deprived communities

Priority HC3: Increasing integration between new and existing communities in areas of major new housing development

Priority HC4: Ensuring standards of design and sustainability in all new developments

Priority HC5: Improving the quality of existing accommodation, particularly in the Borough's most deprived communities

Priority HC6: Ensuring effective provision of services, whether public, commercial or voluntary as new developments come forward

Priority HC7: Reducing fuel poverty and increasing fuel efficiency, especially for those on low incomes

11.4. The next three years: targets for improvement

The Kent Agreement sets out several targets to improve ensure that we deliver high quality, sustainable new communities, to which *Ambitions for Swale* will contribute²⁰:

	Baseline	Target		
		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
NI 159: Supply of ready to develop housing sites				
Kent target	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 187% on income based benefits in homes with low energy efficiency rating				
Kent target	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 154: Net additional homes provided				
Kent target	5,360	5,765	5,765	5,765
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 155: Number of affordable homes delivered (gross)				
Kent target	1,168	1,356	1,503	1,425
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**
NI 141: % of vulnerable people achieving independent living				
Kent target	65.7	66.7	68.2	71.0
Swale Level 1	**	**	**	**
Swale Level 2	**	**	**	**

²⁰ The majority of these (indicated by **) are to be determined.

11.4. Contributing to our wider ambitions

If we get our Ambitions for Homes and Communities right, we will help to achieve improvements across all the strategic themes in *Ambitions for Swale*:

Ambitions for Learning	By integrating the development process with training opportunities (for instance in the construction sector) By improving access to community facilities
Ambitions for Prosperity	By developing homes near to job opportunities
Ambitions for Inclusion and Safety	By enabling more people to live independently By integrating existing and new communities By improving access to community facilities
Ambitions for Health	By enabling more people to live independently
Ambitions for our Environment	By improving the environment in residential areas
Ambitions for Culture	By improving design quality
Ambitions for Transport	By improving access to local jobs and services
AMBITIONS FOR HOMES AND COMMUNITIES	

Part 4: Delivering our Ambitions for Swale

12. Monitoring progress and delivery

12.1. Keeping *Ambitions for Swale* up to date

Although *Ambitions for Swale* has been written as a medium-to-long term strategy running to 2016, there will always be changes to strategy at a national, regional or local level that we will need to incorporate into our plans, or external circumstances that we will need to take into consideration.

We will therefore refresh this Sustainable Community Strategy after no more than two years to ensure that it is still relevant, and to ensure that the key partner organisations in Swale still agree on its content.

12.2. Owing *Ambitions for Swale*

Ambitions for Swale belongs to the Swale Local Strategic Partnership, which brings together all the key public and voluntary sector organisations in Swale. It is also approved by Swale Forward Board, the local regeneration partnership for Swale, which although constituted as a sub-group of the LSP, brings together partners from the private sector, and from regional and sub-regional economic development bodies, that are not directly represented on the LSP itself.

As *Ambitions for Swale* is updated, the LSP – and Swale Forward Board if appropriate – will approve changes and sign off the agreed document.

12.3. Monitoring progress

The LSP will be responsible for tracking progress against the targets in this Strategy, using data collected by the Kent Partnership as the monitoring body for the Kent Agreement. We have deliberately chosen to link the targets in this Strategy with those adopted for KA2 so that they can be monitored in conjunction with those for Kent as a whole, and so they measure real change in service delivery, rather than the achievement of isolated milestones.

Swale LSP meets quarterly on average, and will receive reports on progress against *Ambitions for Swale* at each meeting. We will also produce an annual report setting out our progress and explaining any variances to the targets we have set out.

Question for consultation

Q12. Should the LSP have this monitoring role? If not, which other organisation or partnership should be responsible?

Part 5: Appendices

Appendix 1: Distribution of deprivation across Swale (IMD 2007)

Sheerness East	Sheerness East	Sheerness West	Sheerness West	Minster Cliffs							
Sheerness East	Sheerness East	Sheerness West	Minster Cliffs	Minster Cliffs	Sheppey Central	Sheppey Central	Leysdown & Warden				
Queenboro & Halfway	Queenboro & Halfway	Sheerness West	Minster Cliffs	Minster Cliffs	Sheppey Central	Sheppey Central	Leysdown & Warden				
Queenboro & Halfway	Queenboro & Halfway	Queenboro & Halfway		Sheppey Central							
Hartlip, Newington & Upchurch	Iwade & Lower Halstow	Iwade & Lower Halstow	Grove	Kemsley	Kemsley	Murston					
Hartlip, Newington & Upchurch	Hartlip, Newington & Upchurch	Grove	Milton Regis	Kemsley	Kemsley	Murston	Murston	Teynham & Lynsted	Watling		Abbey
Hartlip, Newington & Upchurch	Chalkwell	Grove	Milton Regis	Milton Regis	St Michaels	Murston	Teynham & Lynsted	Teynham & Lynsted	Watling	Davington	Abbey
	Chalkwell	Chalkwell	Chalkwell	St Michaels	St Michaels	Roman	Roman		Watling	Davington	Abbey
		Borden	Woodstock	Woodstock	Woodstock	Roman			St Anns	St Anns	Boughton
			West Downs	West Downs					St Anns	St Anns	Boughton
							East Downs	East Downs	Boughton	Boughton	

Key to Appendix 1	
	10% most deprived in England
	20% most deprived in England
	30% most deprived in England
	40% most deprived in England
	50% most deprived in England
	50% least deprived in England
	25% least deprived in England

Appendix 2: Relevant strategies

Strategy	Location
THE LEARNING BOROUGH	
Swale Learning Strategy	Forthcoming
North Kent Skills Plan	www.gatewayknowledge.org.uk
Kent Children & Young Persons Plan	www.kent.gov.uk
LSC Strategic Area Review	www.lsc.gov.uk/kentandmedway
Kent Primary Strategy	www.kent.gov.uk
Kent Secondary Strategy	www.kent.gov.uk
Swale 14-19 Strategic Plan	Forthcoming
THE PROSPEROUS BOROUGH	
Regional Economic Strategy	www.seeda.co.uk
Kent Prospects	www.kent.gov.uk
Kent Regeneration Strategy	Forthcoming
Swale Regeneration Strategy	Forthcoming
Thames Gateway Delivery Plan	www.thamesgateway.gov.uk
THE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE BOROUGH	
Swale Compact	www.swale.gov.uk
Swale Community Safety Strategy	www.swale.gov.uk
Kent Policing Plan	www.kent.police.uk
THE HEALTHY BOROUGH	
Annual Report of the Director of Public Health	www.eastkentcoastpct.nhs.uk
THE GREEN BOROUGH	
Swale Green Grid Strategy	www.swale.gov.uk
Swale Open Spaces Strategy	Forthcoming
Swale Biodiversity Action Plan	www.swale.gov.uk
THE CULTURAL BOROUGH	
Swale Cultural Strategy	www.swale.gov.uk
THE CONNECTED BOROUGH	
Kent Local Transport Plan	www.kent.gov.uk
Swale Transport Strategy	www.swale.gov.uk
QUALITY HOMES & COMMUNITIES	
Swale Housing Strategy	www.swale.gov.uk
Swale Local Plan	www.swale.gov.uk



Contacting Swale Borough Council

The **Customer Service Centre** deals with all enquiries across the Council; it should be your first stop when contacting us.

Copies of this plan are available on the Council website www.swale.gov.uk
If you would like further hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact the Council at:

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Published by Swale Borough Council on
behalf of Swale Local Strategic Partnership 2008