

Highlights of the visit to Gravesham Borough Council and the key economic development and regeneration issues and priorities:

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

Introduction

- The Borough covers 99.02 km² with Thames river frontage of 11km including all tide deep wharfage
- Traditional gateway to the Port of London
- Gravesend, Northfleet in the urban area and Higham, Shorne, Cobham, Meopham and Vigo in the rural area with AONB and North Kent Marshes
- Heart of the Thames Gateway a national priority regeneration area
- Gravesend is just 25 miles from Central London

Community profile

- Population 106,100 with 79% urban 21% in rural area (2017 ONS)
- Diverse community 17.2% BME

Business profile

- 3,830 VAT/PAYE based enterprises (2018 ONS)
- 3,500 employ less than 10 members of staff
- Largest business sectors by employee not including Education:
 - Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles 15.5%
 - Human health and social work activities 13.3%
 - Administrative and support service activities 9.2%
- Largest employers after the Council, Education providers and supermarkets: PLA, Britannia Refined Metal, Kimberley Clark and Comma Oil

Improving connectivity

- Quick access to M25 / M20 / M26 / A2/M2
- Fastrack very successful
- High Speed One services since December 2009 BUT pricing high!
- New landing facilities for Tilbury. A real opportunity for Gravesend foot passenger ferry to access jobs at Tilbury Port (£2.5 million investment and also KCC subsidy)
- Lower Thames Crossing – GBC to look to minimise impact and make best of any opportunities
- Thames Clipper Trial September 2017
- Cross Rail – Abbey Wood – Autumn 2019
- Potential for Cross Rail extension to Ebbsfleet International Station Eurostar services Ebbsfleet International opened 2007
- City Airport, Southend Airport, Stanstead, Gatwick, Heathrow
- Ports – Tilbury, London Gateway
- Tilbury Cruise Terminal

Housing

- Council Housing stock 5850 but 30 per year lost to private sector
- Affordable target is 30%
- Targets:

- 6170 in Core Strategy
- 165 homes completed last year
- Short of space to deliver houses due to Greenbelt to the south of A2

Economic Performance

- Unemployment 2.2% (Sept 18)
- Youth Unemployment 3.8% (Sept18)
- NEETS 2.99% (June 18)
- Bit smallest economy in the south east
- Gravesham has the lowest GVA in Kent in 2016
- GVA per head 2016:
- Gravesham £17,068 (Dartford £30,073, Kent £21,933, South East £28,683)

Challenges

Employment Space

- Availability of employment space is a key issue for the borough and it is increasingly difficult to meet demand for business space locally, for companies looking to start up, grow or move into this area.
- This is partly down to long term planning issues around Ebbsfleet, complex brown field regeneration sites and green belt land allocations.
- Geographical restrictions:
 - North of the Borough/Town is the River Thames
 - South of A2 Greenbelt
 - West of the District is Dartford – Garden City.
 - East of the District sensitive wildlife habitat – North Kent Marshes and ancient woodland
- Low skill levels in local community despite proximity to London
- Lack of space to create Innovation Hub(s)

Why new employment space is required:

- No new significant commercial development in 10 years.
- Help provide a greater number, variety and quality of jobs for local residents.
- Grow the local economy by accommodating business start up's and allowing established businesses to grow in the Borough.
- Loss of 90% of Town Centre office space to permitted development rights to residential.
- Increase business rate income – 75% retained business rates post RSG
- Only one major employment allocation outside of complex brown field sites - Land South of Coldharbour Road. When on out on the open market early 2018– sold at 20% above market value – allocated with outline pp for 5,500m2 Enterprise Space, bought by Kier Development 2018 pre-application for Lidl store and retail – trade counters.
- Receiving up-to 8 industrial and office enquiries per month that the borough is unable to accommodate.

Opportunities:

North Kent Enterprise Zone

- Multi-site Zone comprises three schemes:
 - Ebbsfleet Garden City (Lead: Ebbsfleet DC with Gravesham BC)
 - Kent Medical Campus (Lead: Maidstone BC)

- Rochester Airport Technology Park (Lead: Medway Council)
- Total 64 hectares
- 230,000m² new development floorspace for start-ups and
- SME expansion
- Building on existing specialisms – life-sciences, medtech, advanced manufacturing and engineering, digital technologies
- Up to 9,900 jobs by 2025/26
- Strengthening the Kent Innovation Corridor

Benefits of the NKEZ

- Part of a national programme and brand
 - Government priority – national and international recognition
 - No specific support programmes but assistance offered where needed to overcome barriers
 - Department for International Trade involvement on inward investment opportunities
- Benefits for occupiers
 - Business rates discount up to £55,000 annually for 5 years (max £275,000)
 - Or 1st year Enhanced Capital Allowances (in Assisted Areas)
- For NKEZ we have chosen business rates discounts
 - Available to businesses taking up occupation before 31 March 2022 (for whom discounts last up to March 2027)
 - Incentive fully-funded by Government
- For local authorities (by agreement with SELEP)
 - Retain 100% of the uplift in business rates on EZ sites for 25 years for investment in EZ sites and into enterprise and growth in the LA's area
 - Ring-fenced from NNDR reforms

Lower Thames Crossing

Question asked if the spoil from the working could be used to create new employment spaces?

Tourism & Culture

- Culture to play a big part in Gravesend town centre regeneration
- The Diamond area: Theatre/Market building/River and arts venue on board Lightship LV21
- Successful regeneration Market Buildings in 2016
- Link to Old Town Hall owned by KCC
- Proposed transformation in Queen Street and High Street
- Woodville Halls theatre – keeps footfall in town centre

Town Centre

- Challenging national high street picture and Gravesend also competes with Bluewater, Westfield Stratford and Lakeside
- However, Vacancy rates below national average 8.6% - nationally stands at around 13%!
- Strong independent retailer sector and new leisure offers such as the Panic Room which is bringing significant visitors to the town centre.
- The Borough Council continues to invest in the town
- Borough Market – £1.8m HLF bid – open 6 days a week – focus of an Interreg project 'Go Trade' to make traditional markets a hub to attract more visitors to town centres and increase town centre spend.

- There are ambitious plans to regenerate the Heritage Quarter around leisure rather than retail

St Georges Shopping Centre

Major refurbishment of existing shopping centre

Heritage Quarter development

Major new development east and west of the Old High St mainly on land currently car park Reef Estates to deliver mixed use development

Timescales: Planning permission in 2019 with 2021/22 opening

Walking Tour of the Town Centre - highlighting issues raised in the morning's presentation including:

- Transport Quarter
- Borough Market building / Old Town Hall
- Heritage Quarter
- Riverside / Ferry / Pontoon / LV21 art venue
- Port of London Authority control centre

Working Lunch

Short presentation by the Port of London Authority: The Thames Vision – PLA

Information around the presentation was provided on in a folder to all attendees

Afternoon Tour

- North Kent Enterprise Zone sites
- Coldharbour Road South and North
- North East Gravesend – Red Lion Business Park
- Canal Basin

Key Asks of KCC:

KCC were asked to consider support for:

- Need for more High Speed One rolling stock which is an issue at peak times when it's standing room only.
- Gravesend-Tilbury ferry - important because it provides access to employment and tourism opportunities at London Gateway, Amazon and Tilbury cruise terminal. However, the downside is that ferry services don't operate on Sundays.
- Crossrail extension to Ebbsfleet seen as crucial to opening up links to City Airport and Canary Wharf.
- Gravesham has the second lowest GVA in Kent, which GBC thinks is due primarily to the lack of quality commercial space and associated employment opportunities.

- Gravesham has significant housing pressures because of the lack of available sites. Many existing sites are small which means that it's difficult to secure funding for additional school spaces.
- GBC keen to work with KCC and other stakeholders on getting the best for the county from Lower Thames Crossing and associated infrastructure.
- Port of London Authority seemed keen to support development of maritime related skills, as evidenced by the skills academy involving local schools.
- KCC happy for NUE to be involved more - keen to build on what KCC can offer to support getting commercial units back into use / or mixed residentials