	Overview	Morning Session Businesses	Evening Session Parish Councils & communities
Table 1 **What should we do to support residents who want to start up in business and create a more entrepreneurial economy?** Facilitators: Morning Rob Jarman Evening Dawn Hudd	Broad agreement with proposed actions in the draft ED strategy. Both raised the need for full broadband coverage especially in rural areas.	Better communication of help and support is needed particularly: • In rural areas • Before people start in business and make mistakes, and • To young people including career guidance in schools.	Provide space for start-ups (particularly non office-based) in village and church halls, community centres and by working more closely with Parish Councils. Consider purpose built living?/work units. Business mentors for people working from home. Closure of banks in rural areas is a problem for small rural businesses.
Table 2 **What are our Unique Selling Points for retaining and attracting new businesses?** Facilitators: Morning John Foster Evening Angela Woodhouse	Both sessions cited these unique selling points: • quality of life • countryside • historic buildings • cultural heritage • River Medway • County Town • Mote Park • Access to motorways Businesses said:	• Work ethic • Inward investment brings higher paid higher skilled jobs • Turkey Mill • More flag waving – literally – making more of gateways • Maidstone doesn't function as the business/commercial hub of Kent as all traffic goes through town centre • Town centre sites need better transport connections	• Good leisure facilities and entertainment can attract big businesses: A concert Hall? • Consider discounts on rates for new business. • High Street improvements very good but Jubilee Square under used. • Training and Apprenticeships in farming agriculture and land management • Mismatch between housing and business growth.

	- We had good schools but they were over-subscribed. - Our commercial property was cheap but poor quality. - Residential prices were high because of shortage of homes. Discussion at the parishes and communities session included the local plan, junction 8, quality of building design and landscaping, better transport infrastructure, flexibility in public transport, re-thinking of park & ride to meet community needs and housing density. The parishes and communities agreed that more needed to be made of rural tourism assets; supporting and growing local and particularly home-based businesses.	especially for young people - Concern about conversion of floor space to low quality flats - Rail link poor, difficult to attract Londoners - Parking - Ugliness about the town - Should brand the town not the Council	Headcorn: 500 new homes; 33% of residents work within Headcorn. - High density of housing proposed will create smaller urban units impacting on villages as tourist destinations. - Feels like Council wants to create "city links" with 40% affordable housing creating social deprivation in rural areas - contrary to USP of strong rural communities. - Agriculture very important and rural areas could provide small high tech offices/units. - Manufacturing in the town: - Land values too high - Best place is next to the motorway - Need to keep existing businesses here that are expanding: lost Royal Mail Sorting Office as not big enough site here. - New development could lead to infrastructure upgrades Gateway to Maidstone / Leeds Castle development needs to be in keeping with the area.
Table 3 **How can we ensure local people have the right skills to find jobs locally?** Facilitators:	No mention of third/voluntary sector; a disconnect between Local plan and EDS. Both groups felt more needs to	- Lack of higher education provision. - Need a stronger education hub (image) with good balance of lower and higher	Balancing act between encouraging businesses and having the skills available. Career progression to be

Morning Dawn Hudd Evening Ellie Kershaw	be done to foster better connections and encourage more involvement of schools particularly regarding career choices/paths and available apprenticeships. Needs to be a greater connection between business and schools and colleges to design training. Teachers do not have industry knowledge. Young people need to be aware of opportunities for apprenticeships.	level skills. - Tax break incentives for apprenticeships - Care sector is growing – need to change view of care as a career - Promote range of jobs in construction sector. - Programme such as Stemnet with broader remit - Targets for schools for apprenticeships - Work with JCP remove stigma of unemployment - Separate approach to under and over 24s to skills and employment - Planning conditions to get builders to use local labour. - Problems getting young people to remote businesses for apprenticeships. Cost of transport. Subsidy for public transport? - What skills will our 'new' businesses need? - Business skills audit	made clearer so some industries are a more attractive proposition. - Courses that go where people want them rather than just central location. - More vocational courses needed. - Any experience is good experience: benefits of taking a job should be more clearly expressed e.g. social aspect, learning to talk to people. - Retired people to go into schools and talk to people - Maidstone Hospital – leading oncology centre but not mentioned in medical jobs. - Care Homes – use as a ladder to highly skilled medical jobs – offer training at hospitals etc. while working. - What assets does the borough have? How can jobs make the most of these? E.g. agriculture, forestry
Table 4 **What needs to be done to make the town centre a great place to shop, visit or work?** <u>Facilitators:</u> Morning Marcus Lawler Evening Marcus Lawler	Both sessions suggested that free parking and a focus on cultural activities would both be beneficial in the evening, boosting the twilight economy. Both also agreed that pay-to-use toilets would be a worthwhile addition, and that more should be made of the river.	**Royal Star Arcade:** What is the future? Better as a cultural centre than flats. **Derelict Buildings** Need incentives to bring back into use: Rents are less than rates across the town. **River** Make more of it, and	- More housing needed - Available offices are not attractive - Need decent hotels - Gateways - Buses and trains don't connect well enough - Pay to use toilets and open them – public design for toilet design

	Businesses also suggested incentives to bring derelict buildings back into use. Parish councils and communities raised concerns about public transport provision, and suggested that better office and hotels were needed, along with more housing.	River Festival is a must. • Any possibility of a marina? Could promote moorings – visit on your boat • Negotiate River Footpath in front of Power Hub **Public Conveniences** Essential for economy particularly twilight • Poor provision for disabled • Pay to use the toilets **Twilight Economy** • Regenerate Gabriel's Hill/Earls Street • Who is Town Centre Management? Needs to join up • Need to feel safe. **Transport & Parking** Strategy needed to facilitate business/night time economy (example – free parking) **Town** Nightlife putting off many sections of population – prefer more cultural activities	• Cost of buses too high • Park and Ride times are not enough before 11am. New Park and Ride site would be better at Langley, rather than Linton • Free parking in evening to encourage twilight economy – and endorse free parking for workers • Riverside/River: we don't do enough to make it accessible for pedestrians and to make the most of the heritage: make river a conservation area and have a design policy along river • Many would prefer walking along the river to going up Earl Street/Gabriel's Hill **Cultural/Arts centre. Concert/cultural Centre** • Nightlife putting off many sections of population – prefer more cultural activities • Would like to see trees in town centre and wooden seats - current marble seating can be cold and wet
Table 5 **What infrastructure improvements are needed to support a growing economy?** <u>Facilitators:</u> Morning Paul Riley	Six key themes emerged from both sessions 1. South East Maidstone Strategic Link (SEMSL) road seen as positive with very	The first round saw a significant focus on the SEMSL and development around J8 and spur roads. Most developers at the table believe that a SESL is affordable and could produce significant benefits. Some were	• View commuting to London as a good thing and lobby for better rail links and parking at stations • Don't concrete over Maidstone's rural areas, so that they remain attractive

Evening John Littlemore	little dissent.	of the view that the South Maidstone Extension should be revisited to fund the link road. Others felt that development along the link road would fund the construction of the road.	to higher earners
	2. J8 seen as logical with no dissent.		• Link to Gatwick Airport via public transport is impossible to achieve for early morning flights
	3. HS1 Connection seen as essential.	The group discussed the HS1 train and the benefit to Ashford and Shepway (Folkestone) from the reduced time of travel to London. Most observed that Maidstone is strategically placed but is not strategically provisioned. Again at J8 it was suggested that a HS1 station and parking should be provided. Without this most felt that the losses sustained over recent years (compared to other Kent districts) would not be recovered.	• Encourage more cycling and walking to school with safe cycle routes
	4. Maidstone town through routes should be improved and where possible re-routed.		• Current infrastructure cannot cope and it is unclear how improvements can be funded.
	5. All of Maidstone's business parks are now in the wrong locations. Bring them to the infrastructure don't bring the infrastructure to them.		• Difficulties with the A229 south of Maidstone and constraints to enable improvement and problems with accidents on the M20 and M2.
	6. Broadband – where possible find an alternative to BT and get it sorted.		• Issue of diverse traffic pattern, especially from south of Maidstone Town Centre
			• Bus station is in the wrong place.
		Discussion then moved to Gravesend (Ebbsfleet) and the Medway Towns' stations and the excellent service provided. One developer argued that Medway housing prices had out-grown Maidstone and it was now more expensive to buy in Medway.	• Concerns over cost of transport for low income households and affordable housing residents
			• Commuting patterns and how this relates to residential development
			• Town Centre as a residential area to enable better access to employment.
		Broadband was the third major theme and many were disgruntled with KCC & BT. The Maidstone Studio was mentioned in terms of what is possible although it was recognised that this was not a borough solution. It was clear that even broadband, once	• Where are the jobs going to families
			• Place new residential developments to meet the economic sites rather than the other way.

		available, offers a variable service with some business areas not as well supported as residential areas.
		
		There was one clear dissenter to some of the debate, who worked out of Turkey Mill. His views were that a SESL was not required but town not rural growth was necessary on a smaller scale that met the need to make the town centre viable. Changes to the urban/rural balance would be sufficient to persuade him to leave Maidstone.
		
		Other issues:
		• Rural should be special and urban should see growth.
		• Maidstone is 'broken' and 'not open for business' this centred on contradictory planning decisions and the number of developers who were now 'staying away from Maidstone'. No evidence just hearsay.
		• One person said an SESL will only make developers wealthy at a cost to all.
		• Maidstone puts its head in the sand while neighbouring boroughs plan and promote for growth.
		• Inertia in Maidstone is the biggest risk, not the type of development.
			• Importance of locating reasonable employment around proposed residential sites
			• Contradiction with investment in Town Centre and decisions to allow developments like Next. Council should be clearer about its priorities and then make decisions in line with those policies – Town Centre or out of town?
			• Numbers of houses in Local Plan proposal will negatively impact on attractiveness of Maidstone.
			• Detling aerodrome and how this can be developed further.
			    o Good links to roads, Medway and town centre
			    o Mini Kings Hill development of both residential and employment
			• Kings Hill model has not necessarily achieved what it set out to do with people living and working there
			• Local infrastructure problems
			    o enlarging schools
			    o Sewerage capacity (Headcorn has commissioned a study)
			    o Broadband connection
			    o Sustainability
			• Be realistic about areas for

			investment e.g. should we consider areas that are affected by flooding/school resources/health resources.