

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Tuesday 14 September 2021
Time: 6.30 pm
Venue: Town Hall, High Street, Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors Cannon, Cox, Forecast, Harper, Hinder, Naghi, Newton, Round
(Chairman) and S Webb (Vice-Chairman)

The Chairman will assume that all Members will read the reports before attending the meeting. Officers are asked to assume the same when introducing reports.

<u>AGENDA</u>	<u>Page No.</u>
1. Apologies for Absence	
2. Notification of Substitute Members	
3. Urgent Items	
4. Notification of Visiting Members	
5. Disclosures by Members and Officers	
6. Disclosures of Lobbying	
7. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.	
8. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 13 July 2021	1 - 3
9. Presentation of Petitions	
10. Question and Answer Session for Members of the Public	
11. Questions from Members to the Chairman (if any)	
12. Committee Work Programme	4 - 5
13. Reports of Outside Bodies	
14. Economic Development Strategy Consultation Review	6 - 54
15. Recovery and Renewal Actions	55 - 70
16. Spend of further allocation of Additional Restrictions Grant	71 - 89

Issued on Monday 6 September 2021

Continued Over/:

Alison Broom

Alison Broom, Chief Executive

17. Appointment to Maidstone Area Arts Partnership

90 - 93

18. Appointment to Maidstone Twinning Association

INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC

In order to ask a question at this meeting in person or by remote means, please call **01622 602899** or email committee@maidstone.gov.uk by 5 p.m. one clear working day before the meeting (i.e. by 5 p.m. on Friday 10 September 2021). You will need to provide the full text in writing.

If your question is accepted, you will be provided with instructions as to how you can access the meeting.

In order to make a statement in relation to an item on the agenda, please call **01622 602899** or email committee@maidstone.gov.uk by 5 p.m. one clear working day before the meeting (i.e. by 5 p.m. on Friday 10 September 2021). You will need to tell us which agenda item you wish to speak on.

If you require this information in an alternative format please contact us, call **01622 602899** or email committee@maidstone.gov.uk.

To find out more about the work of the Committee, please visit www.maidstone.gov.uk.

Should you wish to refer any decisions contained in these minutes to the **Policy and Resources Committee**, please submit a Decision Referral Form, signed by **three** Councillors, to the **Head of Policy, Communications and Governance** by: **Tuesday 10 August 2021**

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 13 JULY 2021

Present: Councillors Burton, Cannon, Harper, Hinder, Naghi, Newton, Perry, Round (Chairman) and R Webb

17. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cox, Forecast and S Webb.

18. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

The following Substitute Members were present:

Councillor Burton for Councillor S Webb;
Councillor Perry for Councillor Forecast; and
Councillor R Webb for Councillor Cox.

19. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

20. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

There were no Visiting Members.

21. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

22. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

23. **EXEMPT ITEMS**

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

24. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 JUNE 2021**

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

25. **PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS**

There were no petitions.

26. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

27. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

28. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

An update on the cultural forum was to be added to the Committee Work Programme, in addition to an update of the work ongoing at the Innovation Centre and Business Terrace.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development highlighted that there were three large pieces of work for the Committee for this year, which were the leisure centre proposals; the Economic Development Strategy; and work around the regeneration of the Town Centre. In response to questions, it was confirmed that there was a full programme of events scheduled at Mote Park, and Parkwood Leisure were in a position to deliver their agreed contract.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

29. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

30. PRESENTATION FROM MAIDSTONE AREA ARTS PARTNERSHIP - KEN SCOTT

The Chair of Maidstone Area Arts Partnership (MAAP) delivered a presentation which explored the impact and importance of arts and culture on the community, the role of the voluntary sector and how the Council can support the maintenance of arts and culture in the Borough.

In response to questions, the Chair of MAAP explained the barriers facing voluntary organisations in subscribing to the social prescribing register, and the preference for some organisations to have an informal agreement in place with health providers.

The use of vacant commercial premises in the town centre for exhibition and workshop venues was discussed, and how barriers around event planning could be overcome. It was acknowledged that arts and cultural events could be targeted at either increasing footfall in the town centre or maintaining and improving the wellbeing of residents within the Borough, depending on the need identified.

There were two vacancies for Council representatives on MAAP and the length of term, currently one year, could be amended by the Committee.

This would be reviewed at the next meeting of the Committee when nominations to the vacant positions had been received.

31. 4TH QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2020/21

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the report, which reviewed the previous year's financial performance. Although the pandemic severely impacted the Council's finances, the receipt of government grants and mitigation measures taken by the Council had resulted in an overall underspend of £1.2 million.

The Committee's revenue position showed an adverse variance, with a significant overspend incurred on the Leisure Centre due to the contractual obligation for the Council to compensate Circo for their losses during the pandemic. The capital position showed some slippage on the Mall bus station redevelopment, and the dam works had been completed and endorsed by the Environment Agency.

The Senior Business Analyst outlined the key performance indicators (KPIs) reportable to the Committee, and explained that four of the six KPIs for the fourth quarter missed their targets by more than 10% which was attributable to the national lockdown during this period. Unemployment within the working age population had increased to 5.3% however it was noted that the figure for May 2021 had dropped to 4.9%. The number of visits per month to Visit-Maidstone.com had achieved more than double its target.

This mirrored the annual performance figures, for which the same four KPIs had missed their annual targets, and the number of visits to Visit-Maidstone.com had overperformed.

In response to questions, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement confirmed that learning had taken place during the pandemic with regards to the financial impact of contractual obligations which would be reflected when entering into future contracts.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 4 for 2020/21, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted;
2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 4 be noted; and
3. The Performance position as at Quarter 4 for 2020/21, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted.

32. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30pm to 8.15pm.

2021/22 WORK PROGRAMME

	Committee	Month	Origin	CLT to clear	Lead	Report Author
Q1 Budget and Performance Monitoring 2021/22	ERL	19-Oct-21	Officer Update	No	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet
Maidstone Town Centre Strategy Scoping and Consultation Paper	ERL	19-Oct-21	Officer Update	Yes	John Foster	Chris Inwood
Review of Histori Plaques Scheme	ERL	19-Oct-21	Officer Update		John Foster	Victoria Barlow
Application for a Historic Plaque - Wrens Corner	ERL	19-Oct-21	Officer Update		John Foster	Victoria Barlow
Progress on Museum Savings and Organisational Restructure	ERL	19-Oct-21	Officer Update		John Foster	Victoria Barlow
Feasibility Modelling for Future Leisure Options (MMMA)	ERL	19-Oct-21	Officer Update	Yes	John Foster	Mike Evans
Capital Expenditure Proposals - Maidstone Museum (for noting)	ERL	16-Nov-21	Officer Update	Yes	John Foster	Victoria Barlow
Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23-2026/27	ERL	14-Dec-21	Officer Update	No	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet
Fees and Charges 2021/22	ERL	14-Dec-21	Governance	No	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet
Leisure Stakeholder and Consultation Interim Update (MMMA)	ERL	18-Jan-22	Officer Update		John Foster	Mike Evans
Medium Term Financial Strategy & Budget Proposals 2022/23	ERL	18-Jan-22	Governance	Yes	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet
Q3 Budget and Performance Monitoring 2021/22	ERL	15-Feb-22	Officer Update	No	Mark Green	Ellie Dunnet
Review of Revised Museum Opening Hours and Working Arrangements	ERL	TBC	Cllr Request		John Foster	Victoria Barlow
Reopening the Town Centre - Arts and Cultural Activities	ERL	TBC	Cllr Request		John Foster	

2021/22 WORK PROGRAMME

	Committee	Month	Origin	CLT to clear	Lead	Report Author
Pump Track Development	ERL	TBC	Officer Update	Yes	John Foster	Mike Evans

Agenda Item 14

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

**14 September
2021**

Economic Development Strategy Consultation Review

Final Decision-Maker	Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee
Lead Head of Service	<i>John Foster</i> – Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	<i>Chris Inwood</i> , Regeneration and Economic Development Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

To provide a summary of responses to the draft Economic Development Strategy following the Strategy's public consultation over the summer, and consider the proposed amendments to it to enable the committee to adopt the Economic Development Strategy and five-year action plan.

Purpose of Report

Decision – to approve the Economic Development Strategy and five-year action plan for full adoption.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

That approval is given to adopt the Economic Development Strategy and five-year action plan.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee	14 September 2021

Economic Development Strategy Consultation Review

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The relevant Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • A Thriving Place 	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation is reduced and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>An adopted EDS supports the following cross cutting objectives: 'Heritage is Respected' the brief includes a section on building on our current rich assets. Health Inequalities are addressed and reduced: The economy is one of if not the biggest determining factor in reducing health inequalities 'Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved' the brief includes a section on Skills and progression in work and our consultants will liaise with the councils Inclusion Board as part of the consultation process. 'Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected' the brief includes encouraging businesses to reduce their carbon footprint, waste, and energy consumption.</p>	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Risk Management	Without an adopted EDS the Council is at risk of not reaching its targets on Inclusive growth and post COVID 19 Economic Recovery.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Financial	The Kent Business Rates Pool and the Capital Programme will be the main sources of funding to deliver the Strategy. Funding will be sought from external sources, partnerships and COVID 19 Grant.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team

Staffing	We will deliver the recommendation with our current staffing	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The objectives and actions outlined in the State of the Nation report are matters which the Council is permitted to undertake under the Functions Regulations and section 111(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, which empowers the Council to do anything (whether or not involving the expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or the acquisition or disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions. • Under Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 local authorities have a duty to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness". • The review of the Economic Development Strategy demonstrates compliance with the statutory duty. It is a function of the Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee to oversee the development, review and implementation of the Council's Economic Development Strategy and, therefore, it falls to this Committee to consider the recommendations in this report. 	Legal Team
Privacy and Data Protection	The data will be held and processed in accordance with the data protection principles contained in the Data Protection Act 2018.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	An equalities impact assessment should be completed as part of the development of the strategy.	Senior Policy and Engagement Officer
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	A vibrant economy, high employment rates, and well planned and designed towns with a strong	Head of Regeneration

	sense of place can help to reduce incidences of crime and disorder	and Economic Development
Procurement	<i>On accepting the recommendations, the Council will then follow procurement exercises where required. We will complete those exercises in line with financial procedure rules.</i>	Head of Service & Section 151 Officer

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 The Economic Development Strategy is designed to be high-level, acting as a positioning document to bid for future external funding support and shape the direction of the Economic Development teams focus over the next five-year period.

2.2 Following ERL committee on the 20 April 2021, it was resolved that:

- The comments on the draft Economic Development Strategy be noted and the five priorities endorsed;
- The public consultation programme for the revision of the draft Economic Development Strategy following the local elections in May 2021 be approved;
- The draft Economic Development Strategy be reviewed to reflect feedback from the public consultation;
- The completed Economic Development Strategy and five-year action plan be presented to the Committee in September 2021 for full adoption.

2.3 ERL's comments were included in the consultation draft that went to public consultation.

3. CONSULTATION DRAFT ECONOMIC VISION AND FIVE PRIORITIES

3.1 The council consulted on the following economic vision and five priorities. As a reminder these are set out below.

3.2 **Economic Vision:** By 2030 Maidstone will excel as the 'Business Capital of Kent', defined by a strong entrepreneurial spirit, an unrivalled urban-rural economic offer, and which offers opportunities for all of our communities.

3.3 Five Priorities:

Priority 1: Open for Business:

Maximising our economic role at the heart of Kent to create a positive and entrepreneurial environment in which businesses can grow and thrive.

Priority 2: A greener, more productive economic base:

Diversifying our economic base and boosting productivity by growing high value activity, building on existing strengths and growth opportunities.

Priority 3: A thriving rural economy:

Realising the potential of our rural assets and overcoming barriers to growth through enhanced infrastructure and connectivity.

Priority 4: Inclusive Growth:

Taking an inclusive approach to growth to ensure that all of our communities can benefit from economic success and prosperity.

Priority 5: Destination Maidstone town centre:

Reimagining Maidstone's town centre as a vibrant, mixed use destination modern county town.

4. PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROGRAMME:

- 4.1 Following the May Local Elections, the Economic Development Strategy Public Consultation ran for an eight-week period ending on the 7th July. Due to Covid 19 restrictions at the time we were unable to undertake any face-to-face activity.
 - 4.2 The Economic Development Team worked closely with the Councils Communications Team to promote the consultation programme. A press release was published on the 12th May which was circulated to all Members and published on the Councils consultation webpage.
 - 4.3 The Economic Development Team promoted the consultation to all businesses on the Councils e-business newsletter data base (3,234) and used their social media accounts to encourage wider participation from local businesses, residents, and interest groups.
 - 4.4 The Regeneration and Economic Development Manager made direct contact with our key stakeholders involved in the original consultation workshops and 121 interviews.
 - 4.5 These stakeholders included Kent County Council's Director for Economic Development, The Greater North Kent Partnership (formerly the Thamesgateway Kent Partnership), South East Local Enterprise Partnership, Kent and Medway Growth Hub, Locate In Kent, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, Kent and Medway Federation of Small Business, Maidstone Economic Business Partnership and Mid Kent College.
-

5. CONSULTATION RESPONSES AND REVIEW:

- 5.1 The council received five responses from key stakeholders, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, Kent and Medway Federation of Small Business, Mid Kent College, The Education People (Member of Maidstone Economic Business Partnership), and Kent County Council's Director for Economic Development. One special interest group Maidstone Museum Foundation, and two residents.

- 5.2 In the main responders believed that the Council had identified the correct Economic Vision, Priorities and Actions for the strategy. They highlighted a number of suggested amendments where the Council could put further emphasis to realise the strategy's goals and future partnership working.
- 5.3 Litchfield's have provided a summary report of responses with suggested actions for the Council to review for potential inclusion in the final Economic Development Strategy for adoption.
- 5.4 The summary report was reviewed by Regeneration and Economic Development Manager with a briefing held for the Chair of ERL comments and views on the 18th August, and Corporate Leadership Team on the 17th August.
- 5.5 The Regeneration and Economic Development Manager collated these views and shared with Litchfield's to be included in the final recommended Economic Development Strategy. The full summary of responses and review comments can be found in appendix two.

6. PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 In February 2019 Full Council, in response to a motion, noted the considerable progress made in Economic Development over the previous 5 years including projects at Maidstone East, Brunswick Street, Union Street, the Business Terrace and the Kent Medical Campus and agreed that looking forward to the update of the Economic Development Strategy in the future, the Council should promote a positive role in Economic Development which can be achieved through encouraging and directly investing in the arts, parks and open spaces improvements, the destination management plan, the visitor and leisure economy , promoting low or carbon neutral growth and building on our current rich assets. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 17.5, the motion, was referred to the Policy and Resources Committee for consideration. Subsequently, at its meeting on 27 March 2019, the Policy and Resources Committee referred the motion to ERL Committee. ERL debated the motion on the 4th July 2019 and finally approved that: This Council notes the considerable progress made in economic development over the last 5 years including:

- Maidstone East
- The Business Terrace
- Kent Medical Campus Innovation Centre
- Public Realm improvements
- Investment in infrastructure e.g., Bridge Gyrotory, Cycle Path etc...

In the review of the Council's Economic Development Strategy, planned for later this year, the Council resolves to ensure that, through encouraging and enabling direct investment, the positive role that the following can offer in supporting the local economy is recognised:

- Place making initiatives such as improvements to parks and open spaces, arts and cultural developments, public realm.
- The visitor and leisure economy, events and festivals.
- Protecting well located and attractive employment space and bringing forward new employment space.

- Encouraging businesses to reduce their carbon footprint, waste and energy consumption.

Following ERL on the 20th April 2021 it was resolved that:

- The public consultation programme for the revision of the draft Economic Development Strategy following the local elections in May 2021 be approved;
- The comments on the draft Economic Development Strategy be noted and the five priorities endorsed.
- The draft Economic Development Strategy be reviewed to reflect feedback from the public consultation;
- The completed Economic Development Strategy and five-year action plan be presented to the Committee in September 2021 for full adoption

7. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

7.1 Approve the Economic Development Strategy and five- year action plan for full adoption.

7.2 Do nothing, without an adopted Economic Development Strategy the Council is a risk of not reaching its targets on Inclusive Growth and post COVID 19 economic recovery.

8. PREFERRED OPTION

- Approve the Economic Development Strategy and five- year action plan for full adoption.

9. RISK

- Without an adopted Economic Development Strategy, the Council is at risk of not reaching its targets on Inclusive Growth and post COVID 19 economic recovery.

10. APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 Final Economic Development Strategy and five-year action plan.
- Appendix 2 Consultation response and review actions summary.

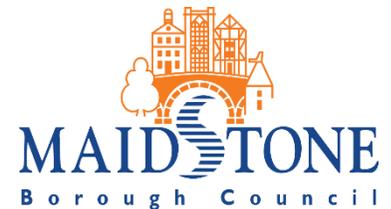
LICHFIELDS

13

Maidstone Economic Development Strategy

Maidstone Borough Council

September 2021



This report has been prepared by Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners (“Lichfields”) on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council under the terms of engagement dated 29 April 2020. The report is intended for use by Maidstone Borough Council and may not be relied upon by any other party. Lichfields accepts no duty of care or liability for any loss occasioned to any person acting or refraining from acting as a result of any material within this report.

This report has been prepared based on publicly-available information and information supplied by third parties. The analysis and interpretation of information and conclusions are based on current conditions and views which may be subject to change. Lichfields has relied upon the accuracy of data and other information supplied without independent verification. The analysis in this report draws upon and applies Lichfields proprietary methodologies. Estimates of economic impacts and the underlying assumptions are illustrative and do not constitute forecasts.

© Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners Ltd 2021. Trading as Lichfields.
All Rights Reserved.
Registered Office:
The Minster Building
21 Mincing Lane
London EC3R 7AG

All plans within this document produced by Lichfields are based upon Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of Her Majesty’s Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright reserved. Licence number AL50684A

61739/CGJ/LBa

Formatted for double-sided printing.

Structure

15

1	Introduction	4
2	Strategic Context	6
3	State of the Local Economy	11
4	Our Economic Vision and Strategy	15
5	Delivery and Action Plan	23

Annex 1: State of the Nation Report

1. Introduction

This Economic Development Strategy sets out a vision and plan of activity to enable Maidstone to achieve its economic growth potential over the period to 2030.

Introduction

This Economic Development Strategy has been prepared by Lichfields on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council ('MBC') to set out the Council's vision and ambition for the future growth and development of Maidstone Borough's economy.

Embracing a proactive and strategic approach to enabling local growth represents the golden thread running through the Council's Corporate Plan, Local Plan and relevant service areas, and the Councils' number one corporate priority.

A great deal has changed since the Council adopted its previous Economic Development Strategy in 2014 and going forward the Council needs to reposition its growth strategy to take advantage of changing economic circumstances and to ensure that the Borough is in the best possible position to capture and realise economic growth, prosperity and productivity improvements over the course of the coming months and years to 2030.

In this context, key requirements of the brief are to:

- Review and 'sense check' current economic vision for the Borough;
- Provide set of new interventions for the Council to clearly articulate and execute its strategy to grow the local economy and increase productivity;
- Set a five-year action plan against these interventions to support the vision;
- Consider local economic impacts and opportunities from Brexit, changes to the national and local growth agenda and the Local Plan Review/emerging policies; and
- Align policy development and actions with wider strategic growth opportunities at the Kent and Medway, sub-regional and national level.

Consultation

The Council has adopted an inclusive approach to developing this Strategy, engaging with a wide range of organisations and encouraging new ideas to come forward and collaboration to take place. This has involved a series of workshops with key stakeholders, elected members and local businesses to gain a better understanding of business needs, economic issues and growth opportunities. These have been convened virtually due to operational restrictions posed by Covid-19.

Covid-19

This Economic Development Strategy has been prepared during a period of significant economic uncertainty associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, and it is difficult to anticipate the full extent of the economic shock at the time of writing. It therefore considers both the support that Maidstone's economy will need through recovery in the short and medium term, as well as how the area's potential can be enhanced over the longer-term.

The remainder of this document sets out:

- The strategic context that this Economic Development Strategy has been prepared within (section 2.0);
- An overview of the local economy, key growth challenges and opportunities that the Borough faces, and our understanding of local economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic as they continue to evolve (section 3.0);
- Our strategic priorities for guiding local economic growth (section 4.0); and
- Our collective approach to delivering this Strategy through a package of future actions to guide short, medium and longer term programmes of activity over the next five years (section 5.0).

Structure

1 Introduction

2 Strategic Context

3 State of the Local Economy

4 Our Economic Vision and Strategy

5 Delivery and Action Plan

2. Strategic Context

This EDS has been prepared against an important strategic backdrop of policy initiatives, strategies and plans at the national, regional and local level.

18



2. Strategic Context

The economic development funding landscape has evolved rapidly over recent months in line with the government's economic recovery response to Covid-19.

Strategic Funding Opportunities

The national policy and funding landscape for economic development has evolved rapidly over recent months in line with the government's economic recovery response to Covid-19, and this provides an important strategic backdrop for Maidstone's Economic Development Strategy and, crucially, its implementation over the months and years ahead.

A summary of potential funding options and opportunities is presented to the right, based on key policy and funding announcements made in the Budget 2021 and Spending Review 2020 which prioritise funding to support the government's response to Covid-19 and invest in the UK's recovery.

This is not an exhaustive list of funding sources that may be available to support delivery of the strategic growth priorities identified in this Economic Development Strategy; there will be additional scheme and sector specific sources of potential funding that the Council and its partners may also need to explore, and the nature of funds available will change over time in line with national and local priorities or as future rounds are launched.

Access to funding is typically on the basis of competitive bidding processes either directly to government or through the LEP depending on the nature of the fund. These processes usually have defined criteria (e.g. scale of funding, defined outputs) and conditions (e.g. timescale for delivery, private sector leverage) and may be subject to business cases developed in line with national guidance.

Budget 2021 and Spending Review 2020: Key Funding Priorities

- £4 billion **Levelling Up Fund** to upgrade local infrastructure and support economic recovery. It will be open to all local areas in England and will prioritise bids to drive growth and regeneration in places in need, those facing particular challenges, and areas that have received less government investment in recent years.
- Total investment of £12 billion to support a **Green Industrial Revolution** and recovery from Covid-19. This includes £1.9 billion for charging infrastructure, £1.1 billion to make homes and buildings net zero-ready, £1 billion for a Carbon Capture and Storage Infrastructure Fund, and additional investment in renewable energy generation.
- SR20 provided an initial indication for what the **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)** will invest in and how it will be targeted. The UKSPF will operate UK-wide, with total domestic UK-wide funding at least matching current EU receipts, on average reaching around £1.5 billion a year. A portion of the UKSPF will target places most in need across the UK, such as ex-industrial areas, deprived towns and rural and coastal communities.
- In the Budget 2021, the government announced the introduction of the **UK Community Renewal Fund**; an additional £220 million of investment being provided for 2021-22 to help support local areas to pilot imaginative new approaches and programmes and prepare them to take full advantage of the UKSPF when it launches in 2022. Projects are expected to align with a series of investment priorities including investment in skills, investment for local business, investment in communities and place, and supporting people into employment.
- Government has launched a new **National Infrastructure Strategy** setting out its plans to transform the UK's economic infrastructure. This is based around three central objectives: economic recovery, levelling up and unleashing the potential of the Union, and meeting the UK's net zero emissions target by 2050. These objectives will be supported by the creation of a new infrastructure bank to catalyse private investment in projects across the UK, as well as through a comprehensive set of reforms to the way infrastructure is delivered.
- The government intend to publish further details on how these key funding opportunities will operate during the course of 2021.

2. Strategic Context

Emerging strategic plans at the local and sub-regional scale provide a timely opportunity to align key economic growth policy development and actions.

South East Local Industrial Strategy

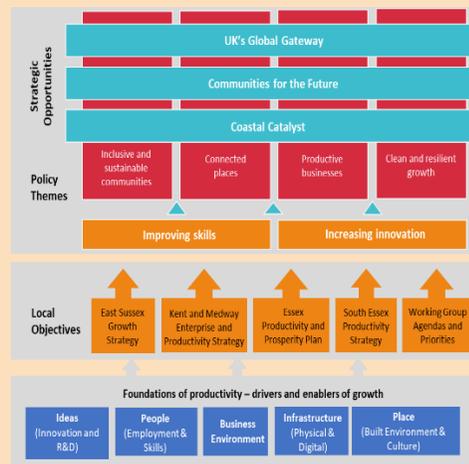
Following publication of the government’s national Industrial Strategy in 2017, the South East LEP (SELEP) has produced a Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) which identifies the following overall vision:

“Through targeted investment in our people and places and progressing our partnership with London, we will enhance the economic vitality of UK plc by increasing productivity across the SELEP area, delivering £28 billion additional Gross Value Added by 2030.”

At the heart of the strategy are three distinctive strategic opportunities that the South East will harness to position the region as the UK’s global gateway, delivering investment in communities across the region to drive innovation, productivity and sustainable growth (see Figure below).

This provides Maidstone Borough with particular opportunities to contribute towards the ‘communities for the future’ priority, given the scale of development planned over the coming years, in particular within a number of new garden settlement locations.

The publication and implementation of the South East LIS is currently on hold while the unprecedented economic challenges arising from Covid-19 are being considered by the LEP.



2050 Kent and Medway Enterprise and Productivity Strategy

Aligned with the LIS, the emerging Kent and Medway Enterprise and Productivity Strategy identifies a number of major opportunities across Kent and Medway which have the potential to transform productivity and prosperity.

The draft ambition for 2050 is *“to fully realise our economic potential by making more of our strategic geographic location and maintaining, and enhancing our attractive living and business environment, ensuring a more reciprocal relationship with London.”*

It focuses on enabling three key objectives; super connecting the places of Kent and Medway; upskilling the workforce; and supporting well led business to grow and innovate.

Specific ambitions linked to these objectives include being a smart international gateway to Europe, to be recognised as the ‘Clean Garden of England’ and as an international destination for investment and tourism.

The Enterprise and Productivity Strategy provides particular opportunities for Maidstone to align its own local growth objectives around key priorities such as settlements of the future, as well as tapping into wider growth initiatives such as the Kent Science and Innovation Corridor, the Thames Estuary and the Thames Estuary Production Corridor.



2. Strategic Context

Emerging strategic plans at the local and sub-regional scale provide a timely opportunity to align key economic growth policy development and actions.

Maidstone Borough Council Strategic Plan 2019-2045

This sets out the Council's aspiration for Maidstone through to 2045, and a plan to achieve this aspiration. It identifies four underpinning priorities to shape Council activity and partnership working in support of a vision for a vibrant, prosperous, urban and rural community at the heart of Kent where everyone can realise their potential:

1. **Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure:** a Borough where there is a variety of jobs, housing need is met and infrastructure is in place to meet the growing needs of our residents and economy.
2. **Safe, Clean and Green:** an attractive and clean place for all, a safe place to live, protecting and where possible enhancing our environment.
3. **Homes and Communities:** a good balance of different types of homes that enable good health and wellbeing for our communities.
4. **A Thriving Place:** a Borough that is open for business, attractive for visitors and is an enjoyable and prosperous place to live.

Maidstone's Economic Development Strategy has an important role to play in facilitating these Corporate growth priorities for the Borough, all of which are reflected within the updated economic vision and accompanying strategic framework presented in this document.



Maidstone Local Plan Review

The Council is currently preparing a review of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan to provide an up-to-date framework for development across the Borough over the period to 2037. Consultation recently took place on a Regulation 18 'Preferred Approach' which includes an allowance for an additional 18,210 new homes, over 100,000sq.m of business floorspace and a number of strategic development opportunities within the Borough.

The Local Plan Review recognises the uncertainties that exist post Covid-19 and post Brexit, but also that the areas which fare best in difficult economic times are those which offer the maximum choice and flexibility to those wishing to invest or to reinvest in employment creating activities. It also acknowledges the vital role that Maidstone town centre plays at the heart of the Borough and community, and the need to ensure that it is equipped properly for its ongoing role as the County Town of Kent. A forthcoming Town Centre Action Plan will look at how, over the period up to 2050, it can be transformed through a programme of new investment in high added value jobs, an improved retail, leisure and cultural offer, new community, health and education infrastructure and new and enhanced green spaces.

It also seeks to allocate new garden settlements to concentrate the Borough's future growth needs within sustainable locations. These offer potential to accommodate new homes as well as significant employment and business growth opportunities.



Structure

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Strategic Context
- 3 State of the Local Economy**
- 4 Our Economic Vision and Strategy
- 5 Delivery and Action Plan

3. Maidstone Economic Profile

As Kent's County Town, Maidstone and surrounding Borough play an important sub-regional role, accommodating a critical mass of businesses, jobs and residents.

Spatial Profile

The Borough of Maidstone covers an area of approximately 40,000 hectares and is situated in the heart of Kent. Maidstone is the County Town of Kent and approximately 75% of its 171,800 population live in the urban area.

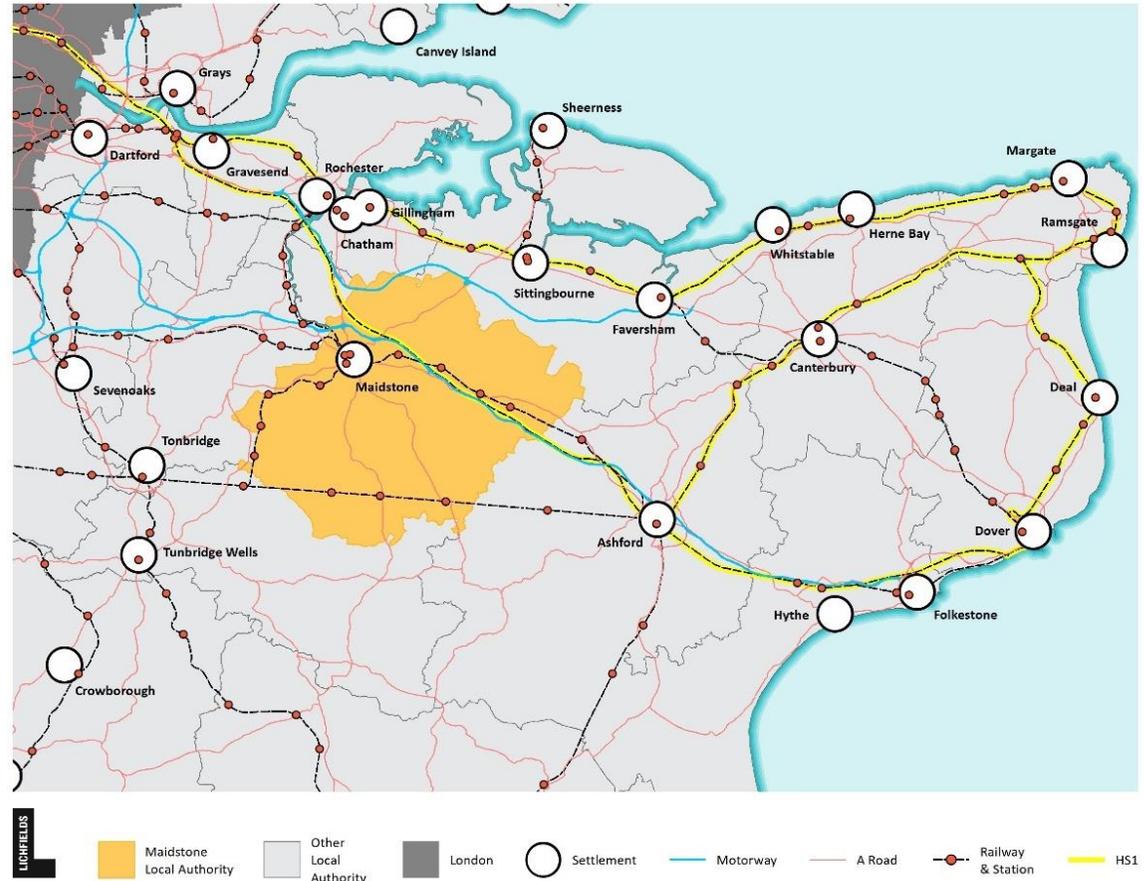
The Maidstone urban area, located in the north west of the Borough, has a strong commercial and retail town centre, with Maidstone comprising one of the largest retail centres in the South East.

A substantial rural hinterland surrounds the urban area, part of which enjoys designation due to its high landscape and environmental quality. The Borough encompasses a small section of the metropolitan green belt (1.3%), and 27% of the borough forms part of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The borough is strategically located between the Channel Tunnel and London with direct connections to both via the M20 and M2 motorways. Three central railway stations in the town connect to London, Ashford, Tonbridge and to the Medway Towns.

Whilst the Borough is relatively self-contained from a labour, housing and commercial market point of view, it's location at the heart of Kent means that it shares strong economic relationships with its neighbouring areas, in particular the 'Malling' part of Tonbridge and Malling and parts of Medway and Swale.

Figure 1: Maidstone in Context



Source: Lichfields analysis

3. State of the Local Economy

The Borough benefits from some inherent economic strengths but also faces some key constraints to growth that are likely to be exacerbated by Covid-19 impacts.

Summary SWOT Analysis

Our analysis of recent economic trends within the Borough identifies a ‘patchwork’ of varied economic characteristics and performance, with significant scope to boost the Borough’s contribution to Kent’s wider growth over the coming years. Maidstone has seen its jobs base grow and diversify, has accommodated significant enterprise growth and healthy rates of business survival as well as consistently strong population growth in recent years, suggesting that Maidstone remains an attractive place to live as well as work. But it must also address a series of underlying economic weaknesses and challenges to boost workplace productivity in line with regional and national averages, and this includes upskilling the local resident base to more effectively capture high value growth opportunities and job growth in future.

This EDS has been informed by a refreshed evidence base that establishes the economic baseline for the Borough in terms of current economic performance and recent trends. Key findings from this are summarised in the **‘State of the Nation’ report** included at Annex 1.

Strengths

- Strong employment growth (exceeding Local Plan creation target)
- Significant growth in enterprises in recent years, coupled with healthy levels of business survival
- High levels of economic activity
- Proximity to key infrastructure assets incl High Speed One and M20
- County town central location and business capital of Kent
- Strong population growth and attractiveness as a place to live

24

Weaknesses

- Declining working age population in recent years
- Relatively low local workforce productivity
- Less highly qualified workforce than the South East, particularly at NVQ level 4 and above
- Lower than average earnings (workplace and resident-based)
- Pockets of deprivation continue to persist in urban areas
- Relatively poor connectivity in town centre and southern area of Borough

Opportunities

- Above average levels of workers employed in higher paid occupations
- Strong levels of self-employment and business start-up present opportunities for increasing entrepreneurial activity locally
- Significant scale of planned housing/population growth across Kent
- Enhanced connectivity through Thameslink services
- Significant regeneration opportunities within Maidstone town

Threats

- Covid-19 impacts including risk of increasing unemployment
- Uncertainty around recovery profile for Borough’s key sectors
- Resident skills may not be sufficient to take advantage of higher value job opportunities
- Decreasing high street and retail trade activity
- Competition from ambitious growth plans across wider sub-region

Source: Lichfields analysis

3. Covid-19 Economic Effects

This Strategy presents a timely opportunity to bridge short term Covid-19 related responses with longer term aspirations to transform Maidstone's economy.

Implications of Covid-19

The outbreak of Covid-19 has had a significant effect on the Borough's economy, with impacts still unfolding as the economic disruption continues:

- Many of the Borough's businesses continue to experience severe disruption to day-to-day operations, and a negative impact from the pandemic on sales/revenues and future orders.
- Across the local economy overall, over a quarter of Maidstone's working residents had been furloughed through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, and while local unemployment has risen sharply, the full effects are likely to be masked by the extension of government support schemes.
- Visits to retail, recreation and workplace venues are still significantly lower than 'normal', posing economic challenges for the town centre in particular.
- The impact on individual sectors has varied significantly reflecting the extent to which lockdown measures and ongoing restrictions have forced some industries to temporarily 'shut down'. Around one quarter of Maidstone's local employment, output and business base fall within sectors at highest risk from short term economic harm from Covid-19; hospitality, recreation and retail have been amongst those sectors hardest hit, but have also driven much of the job growth recorded in the Borough over recent years and remain locally significant.
- Covid-19 forecasts from Experian (prepared in Summer 2020) imply a short term economic impact equivalent to £575 million and 4,000 jobs across the Borough during 2020, taking at least two years for the local economy to recover to pre Covid-19 levels of economic activity.

The 'real time' nature of the evolving economic situation emphasises the need to review new data and intelligence as it emerges, to monitor impacts as they unfold, and use this to review the Economic Development Strategy response on a timely basis.

Adapting to a 'New Normal'

Although it is still too early to understand fully how the pandemic and resulting structural changes may affect the longer term economic growth prospects for the Borough, it is likely that the Covid-19 pandemic will induce and accelerate some key structural economic changes that will influence patterns of local economic growth and development, some of which are summarised below:

- Covid-19 has brought about asymmetrical impacts across different communities, reinforcing the logic for **place-based and people-centred approaches** to help ensure a balanced and inclusive recovery.
- The distribution of the economic and social consequences of the health emergency have been strongly influenced by factors such as sector composition, labour market profile and trading relationships; these will require **renewed focus in recovery planning**, and the way in which we aim to support productivity growth in Maidstone.
- The **rediscovery of "proximity" and the "local"** during the course of the pandemic has accelerated focus on enhancing accessibility and connectivity across new and existing communities, for example with regard to access to green space, local services, and maintaining work-life balance.
- The pandemic has been a major game changer for the **pace of digitalisation**, and will remain a key component of the "new normal"; this has major implications, for example, on the way in which businesses operate and use space, and commuting patterns for workers, but also heightens challenges such as digital exclusion for some groups.
- **Environmental awareness** has been significantly raised, and with government policy now focused on "green recovery". These factors give the opportunity to accelerate Maidstone's ambitions in terms of clean growth, sustainable travel and natural capital.

Structure

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Strategic Context
- 3 State of the Local Economy
- 4 Our Economic Vision and Strategy**
- 5 Delivery and Action Plan

4. Our Economic Vision

Our Strategy is guided by an overarching vision for the Borough's economy in 2030 to articulate its economic potential and unique growth opportunities.

Our Economic Vision for Maidstone

Our new economic vision builds upon existing strengths and unique assets where the Borough already has competitive advantage but also where there is significant scope to use these assets to drive prosperity amongst Maidstone's residents and businesses in the future. We want to maximise our economic credentials to 'lead the way' within a competitive environment, secure the infrastructure investment we need to realise our potential, and deliver a step change in economic performance and prosperity that reaches and benefits all parts of our community in a genuinely inclusive way so that no-one is left behind.

It focuses on the success of Maidstone as a business location, but sets a bolder ambition about the role it can play in future as the 'the' business capital of Kent. This is supported by a palpable spirit of enterprise evident across the whole economy and a complementary mix of both urban and rural economic opportunity that is genuinely unrivalled across Kent and the wider region.

Our vision also responds to identified weaknesses and challenges to growth such as relatively low workforce productivity locally and pockets of persistent socio-economic deprivation amongst some communities in the Borough.

Reflecting the 'local growth' golden thread running through all aspects of Council activity and service delivery, our overall economic ambition complements the wider vision for a 'Borough that works for everyone' set out in Maidstone Borough Council's Strategic Plan.

This is underpinned by five strategic priorities that are explored on the following pages where we identify the rationale for each priority and a series of enabling factors – where the Council is likely to have greatest influence – to overcome key challenges to economic prosperity and set a path to achieving our vision for Maidstone in 2030.



By 2030 Maidstone will excel as the 'Business Capital of Kent', defined by a strong entrepreneurial spirit, an unrivalled urban-rural economic offer, and which offers opportunities for all of our communities.

4. Strategic Priorities

Underpinning this overall vision are five key priorities around which our plan for future activities to realise Maidstone's economic potential is framed.

Economic Vision:

By 2030 Maidstone will excel as the 'Business Capital of Kent', defined by a strong entrepreneurial spirit, an unrivalled urban-rural economic offer, and which offers opportunities for all of our communities.

Five strategic priorities for realising our vision:



Open for business

Maximising our economic role at the heart of Kent and a strong public sector base to create a positive and entrepreneurial environment in which businesses can grow and thrive



A greener, more productive economy

Diversifying our economic base and boosting productivity by growing high value activity, including existing strengths in life sciences and new opportunities for clean growth



A thriving rural economy

Realising the potential of our rural assets (such as sector strengths in viticulture and tourism) and overcoming barriers to growth through enhanced infrastructure and connectivity



Inclusive growth

Taking an inclusive approach to growth to ensure that all of our communities can benefit from economic success and prosperity



Destination Maidstone town centre

Re-imagining Maidstone's town centre as a vibrant, mixed-use destination with a welcoming economy befitting a modern county town



Priority 1: Open for Business

Maximising our economic role at the heart of Kent to create a positive and entrepreneurial environment in which businesses can grow and thrive.

Rationale

Home to more than 7,000 businesses and nearly 172,000 residents, Maidstone already represents a powerhouse for growth and a popular business location. It has a high business start up rate (at 77 business starts per 10,000 residents aged 16 to 64) indicating that the Borough plays an important role as an incubator of new businesses and innovation; and those businesses that do start in Maidstone have a strong chance of survival.

The pace of business growth has, however, been lagging behind Kent, South East and UK averages over recent years; between 2009 and 2018 the Borough’s business base increased by 18%, representing a lower level of growth than recorded across Kent (20%), the South East (20%) and UK (26%) during this period. We also know from our business surveys that many are suffering significant disruption as a result of Covid-19, with ongoing restrictions effectively forcing key industries such as hospitality, recreation and retail to temporarily ‘shut down’. The short term focus of our strategy must therefore be on business survival and resilience as they gradually adapt to the ‘new normal’, recasting and evolving the local business support offer as Maidstone’s business base transitions from ‘restart’ to ‘recovery’ and eventual growth. Local intelligence suggests that businesses are seeking support around ongoing changes to Covid-19 operational restrictions, EU Transition and help to start-up a new business in response to the growing redundancy situation.

We want to offer a welcoming environment to entrepreneurs by providing the required facilities and floorspace, together with the opportunities to integrate in wider business networks and supply chains and take advantage of the agglomeration economies that already exist in Maidstone to thrive. Recent years have seen the Borough’s stock of business space gradually decline, for instance with local office space reducing by 17% between 2001 and 2019, driven more recently by Permitted Development Rights which has impacted Maidstone town centre’s office role in particular. We need to reverse this trend through a proactive strategy that enforces our credentials as an attractive central business location, providing flexibility to cater for increasingly agile working practices.

The public sector has traditionally provided a strong source of local economic activity reflecting Maidstone’s role as Kent’s county town. Organisations such as Kent County Council and the Borough Council are significant employers in their own right, and in turn support a range of direct and indirect benefits including local spending and procurement opportunities for local businesses. Looking ahead, we want to see a strong public sector at the heart of an open, collaborative and thriving business culture here in Maidstone.

Through the Economic Development Strategy, we want to build on the success of The Business Terrace – the Council’s Growth Accelerator – by continuing to provide state-of-the-art flexible workspace to business start-ups, but also encourage our existing business base to scale-up and attract new business investment through our role as the Business Capital of Kent.



Economic Drivers & Opportunities

- **North Kent Enterprise Zone:** this provides key business incentives including business rate discounts, fast-track planning applications and affordable commercial rates
- **Covid-19 induced shift towards more localised working:** opportunities to capture business growth locally as commuting to larger economic centres reduces and businesses place greater value on proximity to their workforce and quality of life
- **South East LIS ‘Communities for the Future’ strategic opportunity:** maximising the role of Maidstone’s new garden communities to accommodate vibrant business districts and hubs
- **Thames Estuary Production Corridor:** drawing on existing film and TV production strengths at Maidstone Studios to expand creative sectors locally
- **Maidstone Borough Council’s Strategic Plan 2019-2045:** realising the vision for ‘a thriving place’ that is open to business



Enabling Factors

- Provision of business premises and land
- Infrastructure and connectivity
- Skills and talent
- Business networks, support and advice
- Placemaking and business environment
- Influencing the public sector to consolidate activity here in the Borough



Priority 2: A greener, more productive economy

Diversifying our economic base and boosting productivity by growing high value activity, building on existing sector strengths and growth opportunities.

Rationale

Maidstone needs to broaden its economic foundations to not only support business resilience over the short term as the economy recovers from Covid-19, but to also position itself for future growth opportunities over the coming years. Despite some strong indicators of economic performance, the Borough faces a series of underlying economic weaknesses and challenges to boost workplace productivity in line with regional and national averages, driven in part by strong representation of lower value activities such as hospitality, recreation and social care. Our analysis shows that average economic output (GVA) generated by Maidstone's workforce is 21% lower than the equivalent for the South East, 18% lower than the UK and also falls significantly behind many of our neighbours.

We need to diversify the local economy through private sector growth and with it, high quality employment opportunities for our residents. This is reinforced through the National Industrial Strategy and at sub-regional level by the South East LIS, with their emphasis upon driving economic productivity and responding to the global Grand Challenges of ageing society, future of mobility, clean growth and artificial intelligence.

Through this Strategy, we want to harness key growth and innovation opportunities accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic for instance around digital transformation and green recovery, using these to accelerate existing business clusters, development proposals and local business ecosystems, particularly where these align with government economic recovery funding initiatives.

Linked to this and Priority 1, we need to position the Borough to realise distinctive sector growth and innovation opportunities associated with its strategic location within the Kent Science and Innovation and Thames Estuary Production Corridors. Medical technology (and life sciences more generally) represents a key opportunity in this sense, by maximising economic impact from the Maidstone Innovation Centre currently being constructed at the site of the Kent Medical Campus. The Borough's burgeoning viticulture industry could also offer high value growth opportunities around agricultural technology.

As part of the government's plans to 'build back better', we also want to consider emerging productivity opportunities presented by the green recovery agenda which also aligns strongly with the Council's corporate growth priorities around climate emergency and biodiversity and its recently published Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan. This could include developing local expertise in low carbon technology, and trialing this as we design and build new developments and communities. This has major implications for the skills our local residents and businesses will need in future to respond to the Net Zero agenda and underpin growth in the green economy, for instance with a key focus on scientific, engineering and technician skills.

Economic Drivers & Opportunities



- **Kent Medical Campus and Maidstone Innovation Centre:** immediate opportunity to capture high value sector activity within the Borough and provide the innovation ecosystems to enable this activity to thrive
- **National Industrial Strategy and South East LIS:** imperative to boost productivity and prosperity, with key LIS initiatives such as 'Communities for the Future' providing particular opportunities for Maidstone through the forthcoming development of new garden settlements in the Borough
- **Kent Science and Innovation Corridor:** sub-regional growth initiative for Maidstone Borough to capitalise upon as it seeks to grow and expand innovation clusters locally
- **Government's Ten Point Plan for green economic recovery:** opportunity for Maidstone to play an active role in the 'Green Industrial Revolution' with funding opportunities totaling c.£12 billion announced in Spending Review 2020
- **Maidstone Local Plan Review:** the emerging planning framework and spatial plan for the Borough seeks to allocate new garden settlements which could offer opportunities to diversify our local economic base through innovative design, construction, and through curating high quality business clusters

Enabling Factors



- Provision of high quality 'innovation space'
- Skills brokerage and training opportunities
- Facilitating business networks and clusters
- Provision of land for inward investment



Priority 3: A thriving rural economy

Realising the potential of our rural assets and overcoming barriers to growth through enhanced infrastructure and connectivity.

Rationale

Maidstone accommodates a successful rural economy that provides a vital source of employment for many of the Borough's residents and is home to a network of smaller towns and villages that are important commercial centres in their own right. For instance, the settlements of Lenham, Staplehurst, Marden and Headcorn all accommodate sizeable employment bases and provide critical service functions for their surrounding rural economies.

It is already home to a vibrant mix of industries including manufacturing, agriculture and tourism and an unrivalled portfolio of heritage and visitor assets including Leeds Castle, Stoneacre, Kent Life and Headcorn Aerodrome. Whilst many of our rural businesses have successfully diversified their economic offer over recent years, others offer significant potential for further growth and development over the coming years, in turn helping to diversify the Borough's economic base and boost local productivity.

Particular growth opportunities have been identified around the Borough's burgeoning viticulture industry where Maidstone plays home to some of the UK's leading winemakers including Hush Heath Winery. UK wine has been recognised as a serious business, is one of the fastest growing areas of the UK economy and offers a flexible way for landowners to diversify. For instance, WineGB predicts that the UK's wine growing industry could support 24,000 jobs by 2040, up from 2,100 today, with the 'Wine Garden of England' (in and around Kent) required to play an important role in supporting and enabling this growth. There are opportunities to use vineyard experiences as a central pillar from which other local businesses in tourism and leisure can benefit, creating a self-supporting economic ecosystem, driving up the economic value and contribution made by the Borough's rural tourism sector, and strengthening the Borough's credentials as a tourist destination.

Linked to this, Visit Kent's recent Accommodation Study identifies the increasing trend for experience-based offers; the desire for 'easily accessible rural locations' could be capitalised upon by the Borough's rural locations with higher quality smaller establishments which match the high end offer of attractions such as Leeds Castle and the vineyards. We want to maximise opportunities associated with our central location as a base or gateway to explore the impressive tourism assets that Kent has to offer.

We also know that rural parts of the Borough face particular challenges and barriers to growth and prosperity, so our strategy focuses on enhanced infrastructure provision and connectivity to unlock these opportunities and enable a thriving rural economy. This includes improved road infrastructure within rural areas to enhance business efficiency, for instance through a new Leeds-Langley bypass.



Economic Drivers & Opportunities

- **The 'Garden of England' brand:** opportunities for Maidstone's rural businesses to capitalise on a thriving food and drink manufacturing sector in Kent and benefit from the agglomeration effects of a growing cluster. This could include opportunities around agricultural technology, capitalising on the presence of nearby assets such as the East Malling Research Centre
- **Covid-19 induced shift towards more localised working:** with fewer people travelling to larger centres for employment, this presents opportunities to develop networks of sustainable rural business hubs across the Borough
- **Increasing demand for 'staycations' over the short term:** as international travel restrictions continue, the Borough's visitor and hospitality sector stands to benefit from more localised trips and holidays. Opportunities exist to develop a stronger experiential place-based visitor economy offer
- **2050 Kent and Medway Enterprise and Productivity Strategy:** identifies an ambition to be recognised as the 'Clean Garden of England'; this provides a key opportunity for the Borough's rural economy to contribute to a broader focus on clean growth and green recovery as we 'build back better'
- **New National Infrastructure Strategy:** launched as part of Spending Review 2020, this sets out plans to transform the UK's economic infrastructure, supported by the creation of a new infrastructure bank. This provides a timely opportunity to raise the profile of the Borough's rural connectivity constraints and make the case for infrastructure investment

Enabling Factors

- Infrastructure, transport and connectivity
- Provision of start-up and grow-on business space
- Supportive local planning policy for rural diversification
- Sector clusters and support networks
- Place promotion and targeted campaigns





Priority 4: Inclusive growth

Taking an inclusive approach to growth to ensure that all of our communities can benefit from economic success and prosperity.

Rationale

Inclusive growth lies at the heart of the Council’s corporate agenda, and is reflected within this Economic Development Strategy through an overarching emphasis on economic opportunity for all; a Borough where everyone can realise their potential.

Whilst the Borough ranks within the least 50% deprived local authorities in England in terms of overall deprivation, some entrenched pockets of socio-economic inequality persist within the urban areas of Maidstone town (for instance within the urban wards of Park Wood, Shepway South, Fant and High Street) with key segments of the Borough’s population particularly vulnerable to the ongoing economic effects of Covid-19 such as unemployment and reduced earnings.

The local Claimant Count – a key indicator of unemployment – has increased sharply following the outbreak of Covid-19, from 2.2% in March 2020 to 5.3% by September 2020, and we need to support those residents most susceptible to economic inactivity and labour market exclusion through targeted skills development, employability support, and over the longer term, by raising aspirations amongst people of all ages, inspiring them to access the labour market and realise their potential.

Issues of social mobility are also prevalent amongst some groups of the local population (such as young people and adults) and this acts as a constraint to economic growth that this strategy seeks to address. The Borough has seen little change in socio-economic inequality over recent years, indicating that an alternative approach is needed to tackle often deep seated, inter-generational challenges and better connect the opportunities associated with a growing economy to our communities. The increased focus on health and wellbeing following the Covid-19 pandemic also has implications for the actions we need to take to ensure our local economy and communities remain resilient.

Skills represents a key determinant of the success of people and places, and our analysis suggests that more of our residents hold no formal qualifications (8.8%) than the equivalent for Kent (7.8%), the South East (5.8%) and the rest of the UK (7.9%). The share of Borough residents holding higher level skills (i.e. NVQ4 and above) also falls behind regional and national averages, indicating scope for much improvement. Through this Strategy we want to work with partners to facilitate a dynamic and agile local skills ecosystem, to ensure that our communities – in particular young people - can access skills and employability support including specific opportunities for re-training, business start-up, and developing digital/e-commerce competencies, working in partnership with key programmes such as the Kent Supported Employment Service. Improved skills and earnings prospects will also have wider knock-on community wellbeing and prosperity benefits, for instance by enabling local residents to enter the housing market.



Economic Drivers & Opportunities

- **National ‘levelling up’ agenda:** seeks to reduce socio-economic inequality across all parts of the UK, supported by a £4 billion Levelling Up Fund open to all local areas in England. The provides a timely opportunity for Maidstone to make the case for targeted investment to overcome long term deprivation challenges in key pockets of the Borough
- **National Industrial Strategy and South East LIS:** imperative to boost prosperity for all, including by equipping people with the skills and competencies they need to contribute to a more productive economy
- **2050 Kent and Medway Enterprise and Productivity Strategy:** identifies a key priority area to deliver a step change in our future skills base, moving from a level 2-3 economy to a level 3-4 economy
- **Maidstone Borough Council Strategic Plan 2019-2045:** identifies a vision for a vibrant, prosperous, urban and rural community at the heart of Kent where everyone can realise their potential
- **Digital transformation (accelerated by Covid-19):** this poses major implications for future delivery of learning and ways of working, and heightens existing challenges such as digital exclusion for some groups

Enabling Factors

- Targeted employability and skills support
- Digital infrastructure and connectivity
- Key focus on economic inclusion within all future Council strategies
- School skills and employability programmes
- Job brokerage





Priority 5: Destination Maidstone town centre

Re-imagining Maidstone’s town centre as a vibrant, mixed-use destination with a welcoming economy befitting a modern county town.

Rationale

Like many other parts of the country, Maidstone’s town centre has undergone unprecedented change over recent years in response to major structural shifts in the wider retail, leisure and office markets; a process that has been rapidly accelerated more recently by Covid-19. Visits to retail, recreation and workplace venues in the town centre are still significantly lower than ‘normal’, and it is unlikely that pre-pandemic patterns of activity will return in the same way. Yet it remains an important economic centre, the Borough’s largest employment location and a significant focus for future investment; the scale of the town centre’s existing economic contribution and catalytic potential makes its renaissance a critical underpinning component of this strategy, given the opportunities it provides to facilitate business growth, innovation and a more diversified, inclusive economic base.

To remain relevant and well-loved by the communities it serves, the town centre is in need of rejuvenation, future oriented thinking and support to respond to evolving consumer habits and emerging opportunities to repurpose the built environment. In particular, it will need to diversify its existing offer to include a broader range of leisure and ‘experienced-focused’ uses, commensurate with its county town role and status. The portfolio of Opportunity Areas provide significant spatial capacity in this regard, supported by a forthcoming Area Action Plan and ambitious town centre regeneration strategy. Key sites such as Maidstone East offer real potential to strengthen our position as the public sector capital of Kent through the development of high quality shared co-working space. A forthcoming review of the benefits of the twilight and night time economy will be undertaken by the Council as part of work on the Town Centre Area Action Plan.

Our town centre has a rich history and impressive heritage assets, alongside a substantial number of active arts and cultural groups, and a thriving music scene. As set out in the Borough’s Arts & Culture Strategy, to capitalise on the potential of the town centre sector, and to compete with successful creative hubs in Medway, Canterbury and Folkestone, we need to support our existing businesses and arts/cultural groups, while continuing to attract and retain new talent. We have a strong base with the Maidstone Studios and an opportunity to benefit from the Thames Estuary Production Corridor, and the Strategy identifies a number of opportunities to more actively embed arts and culture within the town centre’s economic transformation, for instance by creating a cultural hub around Archbishops’ Palace, Stables, All Saints Church and Len House, making more active use of the River Medway, and redeveloping Powerhub/Granada House/Len House for use as messy workshops, exhibitions, rehearsal and performance space. Hazlitt Theatre already provides a platform for local amateur dramatics, and alongside Maidstone’s three museums, could play an anchor role in driving a more vibrant creative and cultural economy within the town centre.

Over the shorter term, we want to boost local consumer demand and confidence by attracting workers, visitors and spending back to the town centre through promotional activity, local purchasing campaigns and a series of events and activities delivered by the Council to bring local people together and help to re-establish community ownership of our town centre public space.



Economic Drivers & Opportunities

- **Forthcoming Town Centre Action Plan:** provides a timely opportunity to develop a transformational programme of investment to deliver an improved retail, leisure and cultural offer, focused around Key Opportunity Areas and regeneration sites in Maidstone town centre
- **Planning reform:** to include increased planning flexibility for town centre uses through a new ‘Class E’ and extended Permitted Development Rights
- **One Maidstone Business Improvement District:** working on behalf of town centre traders to promote the town centre and visitor experience, the BID has a key role to play in curating a thriving mixed-use destination
- **Maidstone Arts & Culture Strategy 2019 – 2024:** underlines the strong appreciation by Maidstone Borough Council that revitalising arts and culture can help us all achieve a sense of place and pride in the town centre
- **Rediscovery of the ‘local’ as a result of Covid-19:** a renewed focus on local economic participation provides immediate opportunities for Maidstone town centre to capitalise on more localised patterns of spending, working, and in due course, socialising



Enabling Factors

- Placemaking and public realm
- Proactive planning policy (inc. forthcoming town centre AAP)
- Provision of start-up and grow-on business space
- Connectivity and accessibility
- Town centre working group

Structure

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Strategic Context
- 3 State of the Local Economy
- 4 Our Economic Vision and Strategy
- 5 Delivery and Action Plan**

5. Delivering our Strategy

We look forward to working together with local partners as we set out to deliver this Economic Development Strategy for Maidstone.

Working in Partnership

This Economic Development Strategy sets out our economic vision for the Borough of Maidstone through to 2030 and how we are going to build on our economic potential and unique growth opportunities to achieve it.

We recognise that our vision is ambitious and the outcomes we are seeking to achieve will require us to work in close collaboration with our partners and key stakeholders in the Borough and further afield. We have a key role in the Borough through our direct service delivery as well as the services we commission. We are keen to take an active role in shaping the Borough through investing our resources in regeneration as well as leading the development of new communities. We will do all this whilst engaging and listening to our communities.

The Council's approach to delivering this Economic Development Strategy over the next few years will focus on:

- Taking a proactive role in creating sustainable communities and leading master planning, guided by a new Local Plan for the Borough to 2037;
- Working with partners to get infrastructure planned, funded and delivered;
- Promoting inward investment in the Borough, for example by building a new innovation centre for Maidstone at the Kent Medical Campus;
- Working with partners to redevelop and deliver plans for key development sites, including a series of Opportunity Areas in Maidstone town centre; and
- Intervening where necessary in the market, to deliver key employment sites.

On the following pages we explore each of our strategic priorities in turn, and detail future actions that we will start to take to achieve our vision. This broadly follows a three-stage approach to reflect short, medium and longer term programmes of activity over the next five years.



5. Action Plan

For each strategic priority, we have identified a five year action plan to shape activity as we start to deliver our Economic Development Strategy.

Strategic Priority	Action	Milestones	Resources	Lead	Broad Timescale
 Priority 1: Open for Business 36	Recast and evolve the local business support offer as Maidstone's business base transitions from 'restart' to 'recover' and 'renew'	To include a locally responsive business resilience programme with targeted support to enable firms to adapt to new technologies (such as enhancing digital and e-commerce capabilities), diversify or access new markets (including exporting opportunities) and supporting business start-ups amongst residents re-entering the labour market as a result of Covid-19	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and funding	MBC in partnership with Kent & Medway Growth Hub, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and via groups such as Maidstone Economic Business Partnership and venues such as The Business Terrace	Short Term
	Signpost support and practical guidance for businesses on re-opening and resuming trading as a result of Covid-19	Continue to signpost support and practical guidance from government to help businesses re-open/re-start, implement social distancing measures as these change and enable businesses to respond to, and take advantage of, new trading relationships with Europe as the UK's transition period comes to an end this year	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and intelligence	MBC in partnership with key business support providers/organisations	Short-Medium Term
	Develop an investment prospectus to promote the Borough regionally and nationally as an excellent location for inward investment, business expansion and quality of life	Revisit the existing 'Invest in Maidstone' website and refresh to create a new brand identity, working with partners to capture up-to-date information on the business credentials of the Borough. This provides a timely opportunity to promote the Borough's business strengths as the economy adjusts to a 'new normal' post Covid-19	Existing MBC resources	MBC Economic Development Team	Medium Term
	Consider investing in industrial and warehouse premises to help de-risk new employment sites coming forward	Any such future activity would be required to meet the minimum targets and parameters set out in the Council's Capital Programme Medium Term Financial Strategy Report to Policy and Committee (January 2021)	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and funding	MBC in partnership with potential workspace providers/operators, drawing on LEP funding opportunities where available	Medium-Long Term

Timescale: Short Term: Over the next 12 months; Medium Term: Next 1-3 years; Long Term: Next 3-5 years.

5. Action Plan

For each strategic priority, we have identified a five year action plan to shape activity as we start to deliver our Economic Development Strategy.

Strategic Priority	Action	Milestones	Resources	Lead	Broad Timescale
 <p>Priority 2: A greener, more productive economy</p> <p>37</p>	Explore specific opportunities for Maidstone to contribute to and help deliver broader initiatives to transform productivity and prosperity across Kent & Medway and the wider South East	Work with regional partners to explore specific opportunities including the South East LIS 'Communities for the future' strategic opportunity and Kent Science and Innovation and Thames Estuary Production Corridors, building on the Borough's strategic location and existing assets (such as Maidstone Studios, Kent Medical Campus/Maidstone Innovation Centre)	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and intelligence	MBC in partnership with KCC, SELEP, SE Creative Economy Network	Medium Term
	Develop a clear growth and investment proposition for key high value sector growth opportunities locally	This should seek to harness key growth and innovation opportunities generated by the pandemic (such as medical technology linked to Kent Medical Campus and clean growth), using these to accelerate existing business clusters, development proposals and local business ecosystems, particularly where these align with government economic recovery funding initiatives	Existing MBC resources	MBC Economic Development Team	Medium-Long Term
	Develop a package of sustainable infrastructure and low carbon capital projects to encourage a Borough-wide shift to a net zero carbon economy	This could include projects to both support existing businesses reduce their carbon footprint and operate more sustainably and to attract new 'green' inward investment to the Borough, for instance by developing and trialing low carbon construction technology as we design and build new communities. This should tap into government green recovery funding opportunities such as the Green Recovery Challenge Fund	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and funding	MBC with key partners such as Low Carbon Kent, SELEP and Kent Wildlife Trust	Medium-Long Term
	Develop a portfolio of 'shovel ready' infrastructure projects to kick start investment, unlock and stimulate economic activity within the Borough	Engaging with key partners such as the LEP to leverage funding opportunities from government funding packages as they emerge, such as the forthcoming £4bn Levelling Up Fund and associated with the National Infrastructure Strategy. Keep this package of projects updated on an ongoing basis	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and funding	MBC working in partnership with SELEP, KCC	Short-Medium-Long Term

Timescale: Short Term: Over the next 12 months; Medium Term: Next 1-3 years; Long Term: Next 3-5 years.

5. Action Plan

For each strategic priority, we have identified a five year action plan to shape activity as we start to deliver our Economic Development Strategy.

Strategic Priority	Action	Milestones	Resources	Lead	Broad Timescale
 <p>Priority 3: A thriving rural economy</p> <p>38</p>	Ensure that Council policy recognises the Borough's emerging reputation for its food and drink based economic offer and explicitly supports rural economic growth and diversification	Through forthcoming strategic policy, reference growing sub sectors, and those that offer particular development opportunities such as viticulture, to ensure that any specific requirements and growth needs are reflected and supported as far as possible	Existing MBC resources	MBC Economic Development and planning teams	Short-Medium Term
	Support the roll out of high-quality digital connectivity across the Borough's rural communities	Work with Kent County Council to ensure the roll out of high-quality digital connectivity across the Borough's rural communities to facilitate access to home working, e-commerce and learning opportunities, particularly as virtual working and learning becomes part of the 'new normal' following Covid-19	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and funding	MBC in partnership with KCC	Short-Medium Term
	Develop a new, integrated tourism strategy for the Borough to grow and maximise Maidstone's visitor economy in a sustainable way which respects our unique environment	This should include a single destination management offer for the Borough to ensure that we promote our collective heritage, cultural and environmental assets and create opportunities for linked trips and encourage visitors to stay longer. In the short term, this should include targeted support for the Borough's hospitality businesses to safely reopen in 2021 and capitalise on increased demand for UK 'staycations'	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and funding	MBC in partnership with tourism providers, Visit Maidstone, Visit Kent	Medium-Long Term
	Coordinate efforts with other Kent local authorities and relevant sector umbrella organisations to help promote and support the growth of key rurally based sectors with particular growth potential, such as winemaking	There are recognised benefits from undertaking this sector development activity at a 'larger-than-local-level', particularly when it comes to supply chain development and building on the already strong 'Wine Garden of England' brand to maximise the economic value and contribution of wine tourism to the area	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and funding	MBC working with partners such as Produced in Kent, Locate in Kent, Wine Garden of England, KCC	Medium-Long Term

Timescale: Short Term: Over the next 12 months; Medium Term: Next 1-3 years; Long Term: Next 3-5 years.

5. Action Plan

For each strategic priority, we have identified a five year action plan to shape activity as we start to deliver our Economic Development Strategy.

Strategic Priority	Action	Milestones	Resources	Lead	Broad Timescale
 <p>Priority 4: Inclusive growth</p> <p>39</p>	Develop an economic inclusion strategy for the Borough to set out how the Council, working with partners, will seek to shape a more inclusive economy in Maidstone	The strategy should examine how MBC will work with communities to shape local places, value and support local businesses and bring quality and fair employment opportunities to residents and tackle disadvantage in the labour market. Over the first 12 months, this should focus on those communities that have been disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic to understand their short term needs, with a key initial focus on health and wellbeing	Existing MBC resources plus additional resources/funding likely to be needed	MBC (via Inclusion Board)	Short-Medium-Long Term
	Ensure that local residents – in particular young people - can access skills and employability support including specific opportunities for re-training, business start-up, and developing digital/e-commerce competencies	Ensuring responsive skills provision by working with local education and training providers, the Maidstone Economic Business Partnership, SELEP, Kent and Medway Economic Partnership and others, and continuing to leverage government support through the Plan for Jobs	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and funding	MBC in partnership with local education and training providers, Maidstone Economic Business Partnership, SELEP, Kent & Medway Economic Partnership	Short-Medium Term
	Capitalise upon local development projects as opportunities for skills development and training	This could include promoting the use of government programmes such as the Kickstart Scheme as well as apprenticeships and local labour initiatives including modern methods of construction within the housing sector, supported by the Council's emerging Local Labour Policy within the Local Plan review	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and funding	MBC Economic Development, planning and development management teams	Short-Medium-Long Term
	Engage people with community-based learning	Pilot a digital inclusion programme in Maidstone to engage people with community-based learning, offering digital skills as part of a package of support based on an individual's need	Existing MBC resources plus additional resources/funding likely to be needed	MBC in partnership with local Colleges and potentially a digital inclusion organisation such as Good Things Foundation	Medium-Long Term

Timescale: Short Term: Over the next 12 months; Medium Term: Next 1-3 years; Long Term: Next 3-5 years.

5. Action Plan

For each strategic priority, we have identified a five year action plan to shape activity as we start to deliver our Economic Development Strategy.

Strategic Priority	Action	Milestones	Resources	Lead	Broad Timescale
 <p>Priority 5: Destination Maidstone town centre</p> <p>40</p>	Boost local consumer demand and confidence by attracting footfall, tourists and spending back to the town centre	This could involve promotional activity, local purchasing campaigns and community projects; an 'open for business' campaign to publicise businesses, offers and events as town centre businesses reopen as Covid-19 lockdown restrictions ease. To include a series of Council delivered events and activities in the town centre (including live music, children's trail and artisan market)	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and funding	MBC in partnership with One Maidstone Business Improvement District	Short-Medium Term
	Support a thriving creative and cultural business base and visitor economy offer in Maidstone town	Work with local partners through targeted business support, skills development opportunities and by reducing barriers to market entry for smaller scale enterprises, for instance through facilitating pop-up 'makers markets' in vacant high street spaces	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and funding	MBC in partnership with key sector representatives, Maidstone Economic Business Partnership, South East Creative Economy Network and key town centre organisations such as Maidstone Museums	Short-Medium Term
	Repurpose the town centre as a cultural and leisure hub befitting a modern county town	Promote key opportunity sites identified in the Local Plan Review and forthcoming town centre regeneration strategy to achieve our vision	Existing MBC resources	MBC Economic Development and planning teams	Short-Medium-Long Term
	Explore how Covid-19 has impacted and accelerated trends already underway pre-pandemic and coordinate a package of support and investment to re-imagine our town centre as a thriving economic hub	Establish a high streets working group to oversee this work, feeding into the forthcoming Town Centre Action Plan and drawing on a growing resource library being coordinated by the national High Streets Task Force	Existing MBC resources plus partner resources and funding	MBC with representatives from key town centre sector groups and organisations such as One Maidstone, KCC	Medium-Long Term

Timescale: Short Term: Over the next 12 months; Medium Term: Next 1-3 years; Long Term: Next 3-5 years.

Annex 1

State of the Nation Report

Birmingham

0121 713 1530

birmingham@lichfields.uk

Edinburgh

0131 285 0670

edinburgh@lichfields.uk

Manchester

0161 837 6130

manchester@lichfields.uk

Bristol

0117 403 1980

bristol@lichfields.uk

Leeds

0113 397 1397

leeds@lichfields.uk

Newcastle

0191 261 5685

newcastle@lichfields.uk

Cardiff

029 2043 5880

cardiff@lichfields.uk

London

020 7837 4477

london@lichfields.uk

Thames Valley

0118 334 1920

thamesvalley@lichfields.uk

Maidstone Economic Development Strategy

Comments received on Public Consultation Draft (Summer 2021)

43

Consultee	Comments	Lichfields suggested response/action (if applicable)	MBC review (Chair of ERL, CLT and RED)	Lichfields response – amends made to final EDS document
Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce	Does Maidstone actually have an over-riding USP which can be built on to achieve the Council’s aspiration? Assuming the Council really believe the Maidstone possessing such USP, the document does not highlight this in a way that is very clear and unambiguous. This will be key to attracting new investment both in terms of infrastructure funding and private enterprise. The draft does not highlight this as the key to unlocking the many strands hinted at in this draft	Draft strategy does highlight the Borough’s USPs throughout – if helpful we can more clearly emphasise the importance of this to securing infra funding etc	Agreed, please emphasise the importance in relation to securing infrastructure, and include the county town our central location within the county and business capital of Kent to the SWOT on page 12 under strengths.	Added ref to infra investment on p.15 Added to SWOT table on p.12
	Maidstone still suffers from poor road system – this remains a key issue for businesses	Can emphasise this in SWOT table	Agreed, this relates in the main to the town centre and approaches from the southern part of the borough.	Added to SWOT table on p.12
	Key investment in infrastructure, something that has been absent to any meaningful extent within Maidstone Borough in recent decades, must be the cornerstone to a realistic aspiration for Maidstone to emerge as the true ‘Business Capital of Kent’. This needs to be clearly emphasised in the draft strategy so that it becomes a key underpin to all other policies of the Council	This is already reflected (e.g. p19), but can look at highlighting more clearly	Agreed, can we add reference to road infrastructure and the integral part this will play to economic performance of the rural area, for example a Leeds/Langley by -pass on page19 <i>We also know that rural parts of the Borough face particular challenges and barriers to growth and prosperity, so our strategy focuses on enhanced infrastructure provision and connectivity to unlock these opportunities and enable a thriving rural economy.</i>	Added reference to p.19

			Also highlighted on page 17 under enabling factors page 20 Digital infrastructure and connectivity under enabling factors and page 21 Connectivity and accessibility under enabling factors.	
	We urge that the overall thrust of the draft must start with a very strong emphasis on securing into the Borough possible the necessary underpinning financial investment in infrastructure, and at the earliest opportunity	As above	Agreed	As per above amendments
Kent and Medway FSB	<p>Parking remains a huge issue for local businesses, most of whom rely on the car for customers, staff and supplies to reach them. The high level of parking charges and fines raise billions for local councils but put FSB members and independent retailers in town centres at a disadvantage. Customers who would otherwise choose to use independent shops are more likely to take their business elsewhere.</p> <p>High parking charges to add to local authority revenue is a short-term strategy that has immediate and negative impact on the high street and more fundamentally, is something authorities should not be doing.</p> <p>Parking management strategies need to be long-term and inclusive, with a view to promoting local economic growth. No two high streets are the same, so the starting point for parking policy and management strategy must be local knowledge. As shops and services are often the reason why people travel to an area, it makes sense to include business owners in shaping current and future parking policy.</p> <p>We want to see organisations and local authorities come together to discuss parking provision to make it work, not just for business, but for customers too.</p>	Suggest the Economic Development Strategy is not the relevant place to pick up/address these comments	<p>No evidence provided for the parking comments, appears to be national FSB response to High Street survival on behalf their membership.</p> <p>However, the emphasis here is where the council has already identified and highlighted actions to support High Street revival within the EDS under priority 5 and priority 1 and the wider balancing act of improving transport links as a whole.</p>	No specific amends made

	Put in place measures to safeguard access to cash and banking services.		Access to cash and banking services could potentially affect the communities within our rural economy in the future so digital connectivity already picked up under priority 3 is key here.	
Mid Kent College	Generally, the strategy focuses on the key themes and priorities that match the ambition of the council and the area. It is also key that the local priorities are aligned to the sub-regional activities and in particular the focus on decarbonisation, productivity, and workforce skills.			Noted
	The economic vision is bold and articulates the intent that we've seen previously. It would be useful to explore how achievement will be measured (in addition to GVA) and to whether a resulting communications plan will be implemented to demonstrate milestone achievements. Can the actions of the strategy create a "place to be" for business in the area?	Is a Communications Plan (or similar) something MBC would commit to? If so, we can add a reference to this on p.23	A specific communication plan is not required, or specific milestones not required, the council will use action point 3 of the action plan to start to communicate bolder key milestones and achievements and provide regular updates in the Borough Insight magazine to ensure our residents are also aware.	No specific amends made
	Priority 1 – The action plan broadly picks up the activities to focus on. Creating an environment for business to prosper is vital but making Maidstone a destination of choice for business is perhaps more important. What is the "hook" for Maidstone through the eyes of business?	Suggest this is covered under point 3 of the action plan (i.e. investment prospectus)	Agreed <i>Develop an investment prospectus to promote the Borough regionally and nationally as an excellent location for inward investment, business expansion and quality of life</i>	No specific amends made
	Priority 2 – Decarbonisation within industries across the borough remains instrumental in the future sustainability of our locality. There is very little reference to the predicted change in occupations resulting from decarbonisation for certain industries. The Workforce	Add brief reference to skills/occupation requirements associated with decarbonisation under priority 2	Please high light what skills requirements will be specifically required to underpin growth in the Green economy, suggest page 18.	Added additional commentary to p.18

	<p>Skills Evidence Base recently published by KMEP provides a great source of insight to the changing needs of business in terms of skills and occupational shift resulting from decarbonisation. It would be good to see reference to how we articulate the future jobs landscape resulting from decarbonisation to young people and those adults looking to transition to new emerging occupations.</p>		<p>Please make reference on page 27 action point 3 to the councils emerging Local Labour Policy of the Local Plan review.</p> <p>In terms of priority 2 can reference be made to the councils Bio Diversity and Climate Emergency Plan Some actions are specifically aimed to support businesses https://maidstone.gov.uk/home/other-services/campaigns-and-projects/tier-2-primary-areas/biodiversity-and-climate-emergency</p>	<p>Added</p> <p>Added reference to p.18</p>
	<p>Priority 3 - It's great to see a USP emerging from the plan in this area. Similar to what is noted above, creating a reason for residents and tourists to visit Maidstone. The link between viticulture and the visitor/tourism economy for the borough is strong here.</p>	<p>Noted</p>	<p>Going further are their opportunities for agricultural/tech sector growth here capitalising on the fruit growing sector such as https://www.berryworld.com/en-gb and East Malling Research Centre https://www.emr.ac.uk/</p>	<p>Reference added to p.19</p>
	<p>Priority 4 – It's really good to see some equality in reaching out to all elements of society and their inclusion in the future workforce needs of business in the borough. It would have been good to see reference to Kent Supported Employment and how Supported Internships can create and drive inclusive cultures within business and demonstrate social value. There should be some linkage to the skills accelerator which resulted from the Skills White Paper published earlier this year and the role LSIPs (Local Skills Improvement Plans) in defining the skills needs of business. Education provider will be mandated to demonstrate that their curriculum offer matches the needs of the local economy, articulated through a local ERB (Employer Representative Body), and in our case Kent Invicta</p>	<p>Happy to add some additional detail to priority 4 (e.g. ref to Kent Supported Employment) but suggest this is kept relatively high-level given scope of EDS</p> <p>Add ref to 'local Colleges' under this final action on priority 4 if Council is happy with this?</p>	<p>Agreed at high level.</p> <p>Could we also refer to the Kick Start Programme to action point 3 page 27.</p> <p>Agreed – can you also put a stronger emphasis to the creation and access to the job market under this priority.</p>	<p>Added ref to p.20</p> <p>Added</p> <p>Added ref to local Colleges</p> <p>Added ref to accessing the labour market on p.20</p>

	<p>Chamber of Commerce. Apprenticeships are mentioned but due consideration should be given to how these will be funded, especially for employers that do not have access their LEVY through their digital account. Perhaps there should be consideration for establishing a LEVY transfer partnership for employers who have unallocated LEVY to transfer this to smaller employers. In addition, what could the council do to incentivise employers taking on an Apprenticeship – a small grant to encourage employers to invest in new talent to stimulate growth locally. With reference to the final action on priority 4, it is disappointing not to see the College featured here. We see this activity as ADULT people community learning, and this is very much aligned to the college priorities. It would be good to work with the council to develop initiatives to increase adult engagement in learning activities, which will in turn, reignite and raise aspirations, and attainment levels for the borough.</p>		<p>Please put a stronger emphasis to the link between health and the local economy under priority 4 and I would like your thoughts whether this need's including under action point 1 on page 27.</p>	<p>Added reference to p.20 and also to action point 1 on p.27 as suggested</p>
	<p>Priority 5 – this area of the plan is crucial, and tourism didn't jump out at me? As previously mentioned, how do we make Maidstone town centre a destination of choice and for what reason? We may need consider the needs of different elements of society and their perception of the town centre and why they would visit.</p>	<p>Tourism is featured, so suggest this is emphasised in wording on p.28</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>Emphasised tourism/visitor economy in action plan on p.28</p>
Maidstone Museum Foundation	<p>The Board of MMF has had an opportunity to view the current draft E.D. strategy, and wishes me to convey these views. They represent the views of all Trustees. I don't believe I need to spend time explaining what we are here for nor what we do, as you know MMF very well. Suffice to say they are observations based upon our support for all the town's Museums.</p>			<p>Noted</p>
	<p>We welcome this strategy and support its general thrust, based upon the matters you expand upon in Section 2 'Strategic Context' (and Section 3 dealing with 'Covid-19</p>			<p>Noted</p>

	Economic Effects'). We believe the 5 strategic priorities listed in Section 4 'Our Economic Vision & Strategy' are the right ones. So, overall you have our support and endorsement for the principles set out here.			
	But, we are concerned by the lack of any reference in the report to the town's 3 Museums. There may be oblique 'nods in their direction', but no specific mention. Indeed, there is an inconsistency in the report in its mention (or non mention) of specific important locations/places. For example, on page 19 on 'A Thriving Rural Economy' heritage and visitor assets are mentioned by name "Leeds Castle, Stoneacre, Kent Life and Headcorn Aerodrome". In which case why not mention the Museums by name on page 21 on 'Destination Maidstone Town Centre'. As you well know this is one of the largest group of Museums in the South East, it holds the largest collection in Kent (at 600,000 artefacts), and has 3 national class collections – Japanese, Carriages, and the South Sea artefacts of Julian Brenchley, plus notable exhibits like the mummies, archaeological finds, costumes – we could go on. Why are we hiding their light under a bushel when it is very important to the town centre.	Suggest specific reference to the 3 museums is added to p.21	Agreed	Added specific reference to p.21
	In addition to being a destination in its own right the Museums are important: * in helping to address "investing in communities & place" – a key aspect of the UK Renewal Fund (you refer to on page 6); * in helping to make Maidstone a "thriving place" a key aspect of MBC Strategic Plan (mentioned on page 9); * in helping to address most of the matters in "adapting to a 'New Normal'" (you mention on page 13).	As above	Agreed	As above
	We recognise that in Section 4 under 'Strategic Priorities' page 21 there is mention of "... the Strategy identifies a number of opportunities to more actively embed arts			As above

	<p>and culture within the town centre’s economic transformation, for instance by creating a cultural hub around Archbishops’ Palace, Stables, All Saints Church and Len House, making more active use of the River Medway...” We do not disagree with this statement, indeed we welcome it – especially the opening statement here regarding embedding arts & culture in the town centre’s economic transformation. However, what about the <u>existing</u> cultural and heritage hub which is the main Museum ? Surely, capitalising on existing hubs is as important as creating new ones? We accept that earlier in this section on page 21 the text mentions “...we need to support our existing businesses and arts/cultural groups ..”. Absolutely, but mention the Museums surely as visitor and local destinations of some repute and standing?</p>			
	<p>In that vein we are very disappointed to see no mention of the Museums at all in the Action Plan (page 28), which appears to us a fundamental error.</p>	<p>Is there scope for the museums to be added somewhere within p.28?</p>	<p>Add to action point 2?</p>	<p>Added specific reference to Maidstone Museums to action point 2 p.28</p>
	<p>All in all, lack of mention of the Museums in the strategy and action plan implies the Council has no ambition for these services, collections, or their educational contribution to the area and beyond. This is not to overlook its importance as a visitor destination</p>			<p>As above</p>
	<p>We hope that you will reflect on these points and give more prominence to the place of the Museums in assisting in driving the strategy forward.</p>			<p>As above</p>
	<p>One final matter. In the Introduction on page 4 reference is made to Consultation. At no time did your ED section or the Museum service approach us regarding this work seeking our comments and input. Instead we found out about this work through a local magazine.</p> <p>In future could we be included on the Council’s consultation list please?</p>			<p>For MBC to pick up</p>

<p>The Education People (Munya Badze)</p>	<p>The document is well drawn. Good work.</p> <p>I firmly believe one of your key partners must be education leaders in Maidstone taking into account FE, secondary, HE and primary. That responsibility should be clear in the intro and subsequent paragraphs with clear mandate in the actions.</p> <p>By engaging with education do you understand and have the ability to engage with future workforce in delivering all 5 objectives. Young people will also become consultants and foot soldiers in shaping and sharing your messages.</p> <p>Education can therefore work on curriculum that is based on actual LMI intelligence not what students think they want to study.</p>	<p>Suggest 'education partners' or similar is added to the bubble diagram on p.23</p>	<p>Please add 'education and training partners' to the bubble diagram on page 23</p>	<p>Added</p>
<p>Maidstone resident 1.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declining working age population in recent years • Relatively low local workforce productivity • Less highly qualified workforce than the South East, particularly at NVQ level 4 and above • Lower than average earnings (workplace and resident-based) • Pockets of deprivation continue to persist in urban areas <p>Little wonder when MBC continues to allow London Boroughs to export their troublesome population to Maidstone. Take a walk around the town—particularly Jubilee Square—and see what this town has become.</p>	<p>Suggest the Economic Development Strategy is not the relevant place to pick up/address these comments</p>	<p>Agreed that EDS is not the relevant place to pick up and address London Borough's exporting residents into the Borough.</p> <p>The important element here is that the EDS picks up these points in the state of nation report, forms part of the SWOT on page 12 and that actions are already put in place to in the EDS to address these points.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declining working age population in recent years • Relatively low local workforce productivity • Less highly qualified workforce than the South East, particularly at NVQ level 4 and above 	<p>No specific amends made</p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower than average earnings (workplace and resident-based) • Pockets of deprivation continue to persist in urban areas 	
Maidstone resident 2.	<p>Considering that the High Street has taken such a beating during the pandemic and so much more emphasis is placed on online shopping, giving more opportunities to diversify the high street of Maidstone is crucial.</p> <p>As such, I believe it would be worth offering Business Rate reductions for businesses starting up and potentially scrapping Business Rates entirely for businesses which focus on the Experiences Market. Small businesses like Escape Rooms, Dog Trainers and Art Studios. These types of businesses keep people on the High Street longer and would then lead them to make impulse purchases at other outlets to and from their destination. Encouraging these types of businesses which might struggle to afford a space on the high street could help lift the local economy.</p>	Suggest the Economic Development Strategy is not the relevant place to pick up/address these comments	<p>Agree that the EDS is not the place to address business rates which is not currently in the council's gift.</p> <p>The emphasis here is where the council has already identified and highlighted actions to support High Street revival and local businesses within the EDS under priority 5 and priority 1</p>	No specific amends made
Director of Economic Development at KCC	There's a theme that is expressed as aspiring to be "best" in Kent. In those terms, you have competition: Ashford for example. And in the eyes of business, that's just local authority speak. And it implies a zero sum game. And in economic terms the competition is not just local but international.		This is picked up under action point 3 page 24 <i>Develop an investment prospectus to promote the Borough regionally and nationally as an excellent location for inward investment, business expansion and quality of life.</i>	No specific amends made
	I would also suggest a more dynamic presentation: Maidstone has strengths and weaknesses, and the plan should build on those strengths and address the weaknesses.		SWOT on page 12 covers this.	No specific amends made
	And because Maidstone has lots of businesses, many of which have been hit hard by Covid and the consequential lock downs and rules on social isolation,	This is considered in the action plan (p.24)	Agreed, action points 1 and 2. <i>Recast and evolve the local business support offer as Maidstone's business</i>	No specific amends made

	the plan should be clearer how this impact on business will be remedied.		<i>base transitions from 'restart' to 'recover' and 'renew'</i> <i>Signpost support and practical guidance for businesses on re-opening and resuming trading as a result of Covid-19</i>	
	One of Maidstone's weaknesses has been a series of historic decisions that had long term unfortunate consequences. For example, HS1 could have had a station in Maidstone. M&S would not be removing some of its business from the town centre if planning approval had been refused for an out of town store. And permitting the sheds along the River have had long lasting consequences. The economic strategy would be more powerful if it set out some principles to guide future decisions.			No specific amends made
	The way the document is drafted does not make clear where Maidstone is in charge of its own destiny and where it is the recipient of the policy of others, which therefore need to be strategically managed. I am thinking of KCC Highways policy.	Reference to partnership working included on p.23	Agreed titled 'Working in Partnership' The action plans for each priority also highlight what partners will be required to assist the council deliver actions.	No specific amends made
	In drafting terms, I suggest you therefore try to make clearer what Maidstone will aim to achieve with its own policies and where you need the alignment of other organisations' policies. Yes: I am suggesting you spell out aspirations: for example, to have a new centre of gravity around Maidstone East, and how this needs railway and other public transport policies to help; and another example would be how you aim to deal with the opportunities and challenges arising from extra house building.			No specific amends made
	There's very little about the industries of the future, and the creative and entertainment sector.		See previous comments on opportunities for the agricultural/tech sector	As above – specific reference added

	<p>A friend of mine who is a Chief Constable from another part of England came on a visit to Maidstone to have lunch with me. It was mid-day and sunny but he said “I see Maidstone has promoted its night time economy and I bet it did not foresee the bad consequences”. I asked him how he knew: he replied that he had deduced that from the street furniture in the town centre.</p>	<p>Reference to be added that the council should undertake a review of the benefits of the Night Time and Twill light Economy and commission a further piece of work as part of the councils Town Centre Action Plan.</p>	<p>Already instructed Litchfield’s to include.</p> <p>The current strapline for Priority 5 states Priority 5: Destination Maidstone town centre strapline</p> <p>Re-imagining Maidstone’s town centre as a vibrant, mixed-use destination with a thriving day and night time economy befitting a modern county town.</p> <p>Could you relook at this strapline reflecting on the lines of a welcoming thriving safe destination benefitting a modern county town.</p> <p>The council is delivering a number of town centre events and other activities in the coming months under the Welcome Back Fund. These include.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music in Brenchley Gardens • Acoustic pop-up entertainment around town including Jubilee Square, Week Street, Fremlin Walk, etc. • Deck chairs in Brenchley Gardens • Workshops and/or productions at amphitheatre – • Installation of children’s trail to encourage pedestrian journey to support businesses at Lockmeadow 	<p>Added reference to p.21</p> <p>Amended strapline as discussed</p> <p>Added reference to p.21 and also to action plan point 1 p.28</p>
--	--	---	--	--

			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Artisan Market at Lockmeadow <p>Can we highlight any correlation that such events can assist the community to take ownership of town centre public space and make a safer environment?</p>	
--	--	--	--	--

ECONOMIC LEISURE AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

**14 SEPTEMBER
2021**

Recovery and Renewal Actions

Final Decision-Maker	Economic Leisure and Regeneration Committee
Lead Head of Service	Chief Executive
Lead Officer and Report Author	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications and Governance John Foster Head of Regeneration and Economic Development Stephen McGinnes Director of Mid Kent Services Anna Collier, Policy and Information Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

This report details proposed actions for recovery and renewal from the COVID-19 public health emergency that relate to the Economic, Regeneration and Leisure Committee's terms of reference. The actions at **Appendix A** have been developed following Councillor and Officer input, including briefings, workshops and formal debate at Policy and Resources Committee.

Purpose of Report

Discussion and Recommendation: For the Committee to provide feedback to the Policy and Resources Committee.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. Consider the actions at Appendix A and agree feedback to the Policy and Resources Committee for consideration on 20 October 2021.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee	14 September 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	15 September 2021
Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee	21 September 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	20 October 2021 and 6-monthly until October 2023

Recovery and Renewal Actions

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<p>Impact on Corporate Priorities</p>	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>The actions recommended align with the Council’s ambitions set out in our strategic plan including the areas of focus agreed by Full Council in February 2021 for 2021-26.</p>	<p>Head of Policy, Communications and Governance</p>
<p>Cross Cutting Objectives</p>	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The action plan is cross-cutting and will have a positive impact on the Council’s cross cutting objectives and in particular that deprivation and social mobility are improved.</p>	<p>Head of Policy, Communications and Governance</p>
<p>Risk Management</p>	<p>The action plan has been put in place to mitigate the risks to our economy and communities and the council.</p>	<p>Head of Policy, Communications and Governance</p>
<p>Financial</p>	<p>In addition to the un-ringfenced grant, the Government has announced the £56 million ‘Welcome Back Fund’, Maidstone’s allocation from this fund is £153,551.</p> <p>Several ringfenced and other grants will</p>	<p>Section 151 Officer & Finance Team</p>

	<p>continue support specific activities related to the Council’s COVID-19 response. These include the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), from which Maidstone has been allocated £222,043 for 2021-22, in addition to £371,103 devolved from Kent County Council during 2020/21, Test and Trace Grants and New Burdens funding.</p> <p>The Council also has access to other funding streams which may be used to support certain activities linked to recovery planning. These include s106 funding for town centre planning, and income retained through the Kent Business Rates Pool which can be used for activities which support economic development more widely.</p>	
Staffing	Staffing implications have been set out in the action plan where additional staffing resources are needed to deliver the projects.	Head of Policy Communications and Governance
Legal	<p>The Council has a general power of competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything an individual can do provided it is not prohibited by other legislation.</p> <p>The Local Government Act 1972, section 111(1) also empowers a local authority to do anything (whether or not involving the expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or the acquisition or disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions. The recommendation and the proposals in this report regarding recovery and renewal from the COVID-19 pandemic are arrangements that can be undertaken under the above legislation.</p> <p>The Council will also be obliged to comply with relevant legislation, such as the Coronavirus Act 2020, related regulations,</p>	Legal Team

	the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 and such other updated legislation required to address the continuing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the recovery proposals being considered by the Council as part of the "Build Back Better" agenda.	
Privacy and Data Protection	Some of the projects may require data protection impact assessments if they involve new activities and/or personal data. These will be completed prior to activities commencing.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	Some projects may need an EqIA, these will be completed prior to activities commencing.	Policy & Information Manager
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	The report includes actions that may have a positive impact in terms of crime and disorder with actions on community responsibility, resilience and levelling up.	Head of Policy Communications and Governance
Procurement	On accepting the recommendations, the Council will then follow procurement exercises in line with financial procedure rules.	Head of Policy Communications and Governance
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The Committee has identified that the green agenda is important in its approval of the build back better principles, the actions will support the Council's Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy, particularly those set out within the way we work theme.	Head of Policy Communications and Governance

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council's consideration of its approach to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic commenced in June 2020. A framework of objectives and themes was agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 24 June 2020 following consultation with a politically balanced member group. It was agreed that this group would, amongst other things, provide feedback and suggestions for proposed actions for recovery ahead of these being sent to the relevant committees for decision making where this was required.
- 2.2 The Council's initial consideration of recovery was undertaken in the context of significant budgetary constraints and uncertainties. However, as part of the local government financial settlement for 2021/22 councils across the country received additional resources for addressing COVID-19 and its effects. This was reported to the Policy and Resources Committee on 10 February 2021 where it was noted that Maidstone's share of the un-ringfenced grant was £860,000. In line with government guidance, the first call on this grant was identified as for the immediate COVID-19 response in 2021/22. It was later recognised that it would be appropriate to deploy this funding to support the recovery from COVID-19 and that a further report would be brought to Policy and Resources Committee setting out the recovery strategy and likely funding requirements. As this is a one-off grant, it would not be prudent to use it to offset underlying budget pressures and it is was not therefore included within the Strategic Revenue Projection. The revenue outturn for 2020/21 was better than had been feared at times during the year for the reasons set out in the 4th Quarter Finance, Performance and Risk report presented to the Policy and Resources Committee on 23rd June 2021. Given this context consideration could be given to applying the £860,000 grant to projects which would help deliver the recovery objectives, KPIs and updated areas of focus already in place.
- 2.3 Further Councillor engagement took place through a briefing held on 9 June 2021. The briefing covered:
- Updated position on the impact and effect of the pandemic
 - Themes previously agreed by Policy and Resources Committee
 - Project ideas reflecting the objectives and KPIs previously agreed

Following this, a discussion paper was presented to and debated at Policy and Resources Committee on 23 June and a follow up meeting was then held with Service Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs to continue to work on the Council's approach to recovery and renewal including a distilled list of projects.

- 2.4 From the discussions with Councillors, Build Back Better principles for Maidstone have been agreed and an Action Plan developed which meets the cross-cutting principles.
- 2.5 It was identified by Councillors at the workshops and at committee that whilst funding was from a one-off source, it should be put to use in ways to ensure legacy and longevity where possible. Actions have been identified that will ensure we maximise the one-off spend to leave a legacy.

2.6 An Action Plan has been developed for Recovery and Renewal with the following themes:

- Vibrant Economy
- Community Resilience
- The Way we Work
- Responding to Increased Demands

The plan has been considered by Policy and Resources Committee and this Committee is now asked to consider those actions that fall within its terms of reference and provide comment to Policy and Resources Committee.

2.7 Policy and Resources Committee have strategic oversight for recovery and renewal and progress on the final plan will be reported to the Committee on a six-monthly basis.

2.8 It should be noted that the Council has existing responsibilities in relation to responding the Pandemic and if the current surge continues this may result in an increased demand in support for those affected by COVID-19. The Action Plan is such that not all work will commence at the same time, nor will it require the total resource to be allocated and spent immediately as such if further resources were required to respond to the pandemic, actions and spending could be paused and adjusted and reported to this Committee to ensure the Council remains in a state of readiness to respond.

2.9 The Council is currently undertaking a number of initiatives in response to the pandemic including:

- Maintaining a community hub and helpline,
- Identifying and supporting financially vulnerable people
- Initiatives to re-open the high street safely including digital campaigns and promotions to encourage visitors
- Delivery of an additional £1.3m discretionary business grant scheme
- Making the best use of the Homelessness Prevention Grant to enable households to remain in their homes.
- COVID-19 compliance checks
- Agile working

2.10 We have previously reported on our response to the pandemic and these reports are listed as background documents.

2.11 Details on each project or action proposed which falls within the Committee's remit has been provided in **Appendix A**.

2.12 Several actions are identified in the Action Plan under the Vibrant Economy are summarised below:

- i. Mid Kent College is proposing a town centre venue to provide accessible training, careers advice, and employability support for all residents, but particularly young people in an informal environment in partnership with others such as DWP, and the Youth Steering Group,

see Appendix B. It would be a pilot and its design and implementation would be monitored as part of a proposed new Anchor Institution Partnership linking job opportunities with local people through a collaborative approach to skills, training, education and employment.

- ii. The second project aims to support the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors return to a more sustainable business by boosting the Council's capacity through digital marketing/social media to attract consumers to attend events, visit our towns and villages and, attractions and stay in the Borough. Competition to capture the staycation market will be intense over the next 12 months
- iii. Having business ready premises. This is identified as an action under the priority "Open for Business" within the new Economic Development Strategy and also has synergy with the actions in the Strategic Plan. It's proposed that this is delivered through the capital programme. Overarching responsibility sits with Policy and Resources however, it crosses over with this Committee's terms of reference and has been included for completeness
- iv. Lastly it has been identified that the Council needs to increase the capacity to develop projects and bid for funding to ensure we maximise any opportunities for external funding and support.

2.13 The remaining actions cover support that we have already funded as part of our approach to recovery from the pandemic to ensure businesses can access grants and the revenues and benefits team are assisting the most vulnerable. The aim of this action is to increase capacity through additional technical expertise being brought in as and when needed.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 The Committee is asked to consider the actions for recovery and renewal that are outlined in Appendix A for comment. The Committee is asked to comment on the proposals and make recommendations as appropriate.

4. RISK

4.1 The Coronavirus Pandemic has had a severe and long-lasting impact on the lives of Maidstone communities and businesses, not responding and effectively planning for recovery and renewal will increase the risk to our communities and businesses as well as the Council. The Council's corporate risk register contains risks relating to the pandemic the actions proposed will mitigate the risks.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

5.1 As well as consultation with Councillors through the Member COVID-19 recovery consultative forum, reports were received on a regular basis by Policy and Resources in 2020 and 2021:

24 June 2020: Response to Covid19 Public Health Emergency Approach to recovery from the Covid19 Pandemic

16 September 2020: Strategic Plan Review – Update on Priority Milestones

20 January 2021: Strategic Plan – Proposed Areas for Focus 2021-2026 and Key Performance Indicators for Covid-19 Recovery

10 February 2021: Strategic Plan Refresh

5.2 On the 9 June 2021 a virtual member briefing was held for Members where information was provided on the impact to date of the pandemic, and stimulated discussion on what to 'Build Back Better' would mean for Maidstone, this was followed by a discussion paper on 23 June 2021 and a workshop with the Service Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs. All of this feedback has been taken into account in the development of the actions for recovery and renewal.

5.3 A report was taken to Policy and Resources on the 21 July where the projects and actions for recovery and renewal were agreed for the purpose of engagement with the service committees.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

6.1 Proposals will be considered by all four Service Committees before being considered by Policy and Resources in October. Work will then commence on the actions when approved, including communication.

7. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Recovery and Renewal Actions for ERL
 - Appendix B: Community and Skills Hub Proposal – MidKent College
-

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

24 June 2020: Response to Covid19 Public Health Emergency

<http://app07:9080/documents/s71373/Maidstone%20Councils%20Response%20to%20Covid19%20Pandemic.pdf>

24 June 2020: Approach to recovery from the Covid19 Pandemic

<http://app07:9080/documents/s71374/Maidstone%20Councils%20approach%20to%20Recovery%20from%20the%20Covid19%20Pandemic.pdf>

16 September 2020: Strategic Plan Review – Update on Priority Milestones

<http://app07:9080/documents/s72419/Strategic%20Plan%20Review%20-%20Update%20on%20Priority%20Milestones.pdf>

20 January 2021: Strategic Plan – Proposed Areas for Focus 2021-2026 and Key Performance Indicators for Covid-19 Recovery

<http://app07:9080/documents/s74258/Strategic%20Plan%20-%20Proposed%20Areas%20for%20Focus%202021-2026%20and%20KPIs%20for%20Covid19%20Recovery.pdf>

10 February 2021: Strategic Plan Refresh

<http://app07:9080/documents/s75590/Strategic%20Plan%20Refresh.pdf>

23 June 2021: Recovery and Renewal Discussion Paper

<http://app07:9080/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=577&MIId=4624&Ver=4>

21 July 2021: Recovery and Renewal Actions Report to Policy and Resources

<http://10.201.64.164/documents/s77897/Recovery%20and%20Renewal%20Actions.pdf>

Appendix A – Actions for ERL

A Vibrant Economy

Action	Resources	Target start and end	Committee and Senior Responsible Officer	Principles
<p>Establish an Anchor Institution Partnership, the Council acting as a facilitator to lead projects, such as the– Youth Hub focussed on skills and employability for young people with Mid Kent College and increasing spend in the local economy to support businesses in the borough.</p> <p>Anchor Institutions are large, usually non-profit organisations “tethered” to their communities, like local government, education establishments and medical facilities e.g. hospitals. A partnership working on linking job opportunities with local people through a collaborative approach to skills, training, education and employment would respond well to our Build Back Local aspiration and Strategic Plan actions and recognise the council’s vital role in place based leadership. Preliminary soundings have been positive</p> <p>The pandemic has seen unemployment levels rise in all age groups but particularly the 18-24 years old. Unemployment is also higher in our deprived wards. The College is proposing a town centre venue to provide accessible training, careers advice, and employability support for all residents, but particularly young people</p>	<p align="center">£30,000</p>	<p align="center">September 2021 - (project planning with MKC to identify end)</p>	<p align="center">ERL/AB/ JF</p>	<p align="center">Maidstone Open for Business</p>

<p>in an informal environment in partnership with others such as DWP, and the Youth Steering Group. MBC's funding would support the staff costs involved in operating the centre. This is an action in the draft Economic Development Strategy under Inclusive Growth.</p>				
<p>Vibrant Visitor Economy – diversify and respond to health and well-being needs through e.g. enhancing arts and culture offer; promotion of destination Maidstone borough to encourage visitors to return and spend.</p> <p>A new area of focus was agreed for 2021/26 by Council in February 2021 to “deliver a sustainable and vibrant leisure and cultural offer for the Borough”</p> <p>The Visitor Economy is worth over £300m to the local economy and directly employs over 5000 people. Retail, Hospitality and Leisure sectors have been hardest hit by COVID-19, lockdowns and social restrictions. Current staff are managing the Welcome Back Fund and Reopening High Street Fund and updating Visit Maidstone and engaging with the visitor attractions, accommodation providers and event organisers. Competition to capture the staycation market this year will be intense. Critically important to our hotel industry in Maidstone is the return to business travel, conferences, and exhibitions. Funding to support a resource for 1 to increase our digital marketing/social media capacity is requested until business as usual can be resumed.</p>	<p>£32,000 From Business Rates Pool</p>	<p>November 2021 to November 2022</p>	<p>ERL/JF</p>	<p>Maidstone's Open for Business/ Levelling Up/ Community resilience</p>

<p>Having business ready premises – move in ready kick start/pump prime linked to the Economic Development Strategy</p> <p>This is set out in Priority 1 Open for Business in the draft Economic Development Strategy. “Consider investing in industrial and warehouse premises to help de risk new employment sites coming forward” and the Strategic Plan areas of focus for 2021/26 “Intervening where necessary in the market, to deliver key employment sites”</p> <p>In addition, any such future activity would be required to meet the minimum targets and parameters set out in the Council’s Capital Programme Medium Term Financial Strategy Report to Policy and Committee (January 2021). This could extend to further investment opportunities on Kent Medical Campus or at Loc8 Maidstone at Junction 8 M20 or the rural employment sites.</p>	Capital programme	September 2021 and going	P&R/JF	Maidstone's Open for business
<p>Capacity to develop projects and bids for bidding e.g. Levelling Up Fund, Future Towns Fund</p> <p>Large capital and revenue bids often require specialised knowledge to support the business case within the application. This fund would enable us to buy in this technical support at the appropriate time and at the speed needed to respond to short deadlines.</p>	£45,000	September 2021 to September 2025	P&R/JF	Cross Cutting
Total	£107,000			

Responding to Increased Demands Arising from COVID-19

Action	Resources	Target start and end	Committee and Senior Responsible Officer	Principles
Business Grant Distribution	From COMF £30,000	Ongoing	ERL/SMcG	MBC service resilience
Revenues and Benefits – post funded with Citizens Advice	From COMF £18,000	Ongoing	ERL/SMcG	MBC service resilience
Total (needed from recovery and renewal fund)	£xxxx			

Community and Skills Hub Proposal – MidKent College

Purpose – Youth unemployment (18-24) in Kent is slightly higher than the national average: 7.5% in Kent, 7.2% UK and claimants represent 7.2% of all unemployed people in the town (840 people). The aim of the Community and Skills Hub would be to engage with NEETS (not in employment, education, or training), or people at risk of becoming NEET, unemployed adults, and school leavers to secure positive progression for these groups into either full-time education, apprenticeships, or employment. Currently there is not a 'one stop shop' where vulnerable people can easily access information and advice regarding finances, housing, benefits, education, or health so we seek to address this by working collaboratively with partners in the area to bring a range of support together under one roof for these groups of people.

MidKent College are ideally placed to support young people in the community as we can offer career advisor appointments, further education options and apprenticeships, along with the ability to offer short training courses to support the move into employment. We do have gaps in our provision, hence our desire to engage with other referral partners in the community to offer a variety of provision under one roof. Currently one of the barriers to MidKent College engaging effectively in the community is our location, being out of the town centre. A central hub would address this. We would look to pilot this scheme for six months, enabled by the grant. If successful we would hope to extend this for as long as a need was demonstrated by the community.

Partners –

Maidstone's Community Protection Team is working with DWP and Infozone (KCC) on taking a unit in the Mall to offer services to young people from October. We will liaise with them to ensure that each hub offers a different service to support and engage with the local community.

We have spoken to the following partners:

- CXK (National Careers Service Advisors offering careers advice and guidance)
- Open Road (Drug and alcohol recovery service)
- Porchlight (Housing Support)
- Bemix (Support for people with autism or learning difficulties)
- DWP
- Golding Homes (Housing Association)
- Oasis DA Service (Supporting victims of domestic abuse)

These partners would be able to advertise their regular slot in the hub and offer pre-booked or drop-in sessions for people who are not currently able to access the service, and people for whom the location is easier to get to.

We would look to involve our own students to integrate into the community, particularly Early Years and Catering students to engage with young parents. This could potentially lead to adults being able to attend training for short periods with their children, removing a barrier to training and increasing integration into the community and helping potential loneliness that can be faced by young parents, particularly if lone parenting.

We would also hope to engage local employees with vacancies to offer Sector Based Work Academy Programmes and recruitment days to improve employment in the local areas. These programmes are designed to offer targeted pre-employment training which is tailored to a specific vacancy, with the offer of work experience and an interview or the position tied in.

Delivery – We have a broad range of courses we would be able to offer, and the selection below is not exhaustive. We would develop our offering according to need and demand. Examples of potential training options are below.

Bookkeeping and computerised accounting (in conjunction with SAGE) – From Level 1 to Level 3 these are ideal for adults wishing to go self-employed and work particularly well for parents who want to find flexible work. Locally the DWP have indicated a demand for this provision.

Skills Development Online Courses – A variety of Level 2 qualifications targeted towards various sectors including Customer Service, Health Care, Childcare and Digital Skills, can be offered with PC’s available for people for whom digital poverty is a barrier to learning. These would be aimed at adults who are wishing to upskill to enter employment or to retrain.

Essential Digital Skills – Beginners, and Intermediate level courses to support essential digital skill development for employability and day to day living. Covers computer basics, keeping safe, making purchases, researching information, word and excel.

Certificated Work Skills Programmes

Aimed at young people who are not in employment to develop skills for seeking employment and keeping safe. Qualifications cover Alcohol and Drug Misuse Awareness, Citizenship, Developing Skills for Gaining Employment, Managing Money, Understanding Self and Others and Confidence and Self-Esteem amongst other things. These courses are designed to be flexible in content according to the needs of the delegates.

Food Hygiene –

A one-day course at L2 which will support people entering the Hospitality industry as part of sector-based work academies which will seek to address the lack of hospitality applications for the current vacancies.

Employability –

We would work with the NCS to offer regular career workshops with CV, job searching and interview support.

Funding –

Where possible we will draw down funding from our AEB (Adult Education Budget) budget allocation. Additional funding will be required for staffing the hub and for non-eligible participants as below. In order to make best use of the budget, where possible we will endeavour to source equipment that can be lent to the project, shown as In Kind costs.

Activity	Requested Funding	In Kind - Covered by college	In Kind - Covered by council
Project Officer - 6 months FTC @ 25k FTE plus on costs	16000		
Laptops x 10	3000	7000	
Furnishing - 14 x desks			2000
Projector and screen plus whiteboard	2500		

Advertising (including external signage)	7000		
Costs for training courses for those who are not eligible @ £300 per person	6000		
Stationery		2000	
Total	34500	9000	2000

Key Assumptions –

The shop is available for a period of 6 continuous months.

The venue is suitable for a training course for 10 x delegates with a reception area / separate area for appointments with partners

The space is fully serviced with business rates, heating, electricity included

The area can be secured

We can access the free Wi-Fi offered by The Mall.

**ECONOMIC REGENERATION
AND LEISURE COMMITTEE**

**14 September
2021**

Covid 19 - Additional Restrictions Grant

Final Decision-Maker	Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee
Lead Head of Service	John Foster, Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Rachael Bennett, Economic Development Officer
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

After successful allocation of discretionary business grant funding (Additional Restrictions Grant) previously received from government a further £1,355,082 has been allocated to the Council to further support the borough's businesses.

This report looks at how to target and allocate this funding to businesses in line with government guidance, Maidstone Borough Council's Strategic Plan and draft Economic Development Strategy.

Purpose of Report

The report provides background and methodology to the proposed policy (attached as appendix one), which needs ERL approval to commence.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

That the proposed Additional Restrictions Grant Top Up Policy provided at appendix 1 is approved.

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee	14 September 2021

Covid 19 - Additional Restrictions Grant

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure. • Safe, Clean and Green. • Homes and Communities. • A Thriving Place. <p>The report considers these objectives and aligns with them.</p>	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected. • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced. • Deprivation is reduced and Social Mobility is Improved. • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected. <p>The report considers these objectives and aligns with them.</p>	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development
Risk Management	See Section 5 of this report.	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development
Financial	<p>Additional funding of £1,355,082 has been provided by government for the purpose of discretionary business grants with the funding to be spent by 31 March 2022.</p> <p>It has been confirmed that additional resource can be funded by the new burdens funding allocated by government to cover additional expenses incurred by the council in relation to the administration of the grant scheme.</p>	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team

Staffing	<p>Current staffing levels will not allow for the full proposed project to be undertaken. The new burdens funding referred to above will enable recruitment of 4 x 6-month FTC (or equivalent e.g., 2 x 12-month positions) this will give the necessary support to the team to enable the project to be managed effectively, achieving the goals of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Identifying eligible businesses of strategic importance to the borough in need of support 2) Increasing business engagement with the council and awareness of the financial and non-financial support available 	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development
Legal	<p>Payment of grant by Government to a Local Authority is established under s31 of the Local Government Act 2003. This also enables control over the amount and manner of payments.</p> <p>Criteria are set out within Additional Restrictions Grant Guidance for Local Authorities updated 16/06/21.</p>	Principal Solicitor Contentious and Corporate Governance
Privacy and Data Protection	The data will be held and processed in accordance with the data protection principles contained in the Data Protection Act 2018.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	No impact identified.	Policy and Information Team
Public Health	No impact identified.	Director of Mid Kent Services
Crime and Disorder	No impact identified.	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development
Procurement	No impact identified.	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development and Section 151 Officer

Biodiversity & Climate Change	The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and it is noted that business development/growth may impact on increased energy consumption and increased emissions from additional transportation. Future business development should be aligned with the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy and seek low carbon transportation options and alternative energy solutions.	Biodiversity & Climate Change Manager
--	---	---------------------------------------

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 Awards, timescales and policy to date

2.1.1 Since March 2020, 9,910 awards have been made to businesses within the borough, a total of £54,653,245 in financial support being distributed.

2.1.2 88% was given to businesses occupying property registered for business rates through the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSB). The remaining 12% being distributed to businesses under a discretionary scheme, Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG).

2.1.3 ARG was opened for applications in line with government restrictions:

- March 2020 (Lockdown 1, also known as Discretionary grant).
- November 2020 (Lockdown 2).
- December 2020 (Tier 3 restrictions).
- December 2020 (Tier 4 restrictions & subsequent Lockdown 3).
- March 2021 (aligned with Restart awards).

2.1.4 ARG applications from November 2020 were assessed under one of the following categories:

- Businesses must be operating in the sector (retail, hospitality, or leisure) that has been legally required to close; occupy a commercial workspace within the borough and be unable to claim financial support through the LRSB as they are not the business ratepayer for the premises which they occupy.
- Businesses must receive their primary source of income (over 50%) through the supply of goods or services to the sector (retail, hospitality, or leisure), occupy a commercial workspace within the borough and are unable to claim financial support through the LRSB.
- Businesses that are essential retail, occupy commercial workspace within the Borough and whilst not legally required to close have decided to close and temporarily cease trading due to it not being possible to trade in a Covid secure way due to the nature of premises occupied.

- Businesses which are classified as either a small or micro business (less than 50 employees), that have seen a significant reduction in income and have been unable to claim support through either the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme or any other mandatory Business Grant Schemes provided by the Government and delivered by Maidstone Borough Council. For the avoidance of doubt, this includes limited companies working from home with no commercial property.

In the December 2020 (Tier 4) round an additional Category was included in the policy to capture larger businesses excluded from the first round of awards (March 20) because their rated value was excess of £51,000:

- Businesses in the sector (retail, hospitality, or leisure) that have been legally required to close; have a rateable value of exactly £51,000 or above and are in receipt of a Local Restrictions Support Grant.

In the March 2021 for Additional Restrictions Grant round 4, two additional categories were included in the policy in response to feedback to capture sectors that had thus far been ineligible for grants having remained open and providing flexibility to award larger grants:

- Hardship fund, businesses in any sector that have been able to remain open and can evidence a significant reduction in income and trade due to reduced footfall in our town centre and other retail destinations. Are registered for business rates and have been unable to claim support through the LRSG or RG.
- In exceptional circumstances authority is delegated to the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration, in consultation with the Director of Finance and Business Improvement to consider and make individual awards up to a value of £100,000 for:
 - Awards to businesses in difficulty that are of importance to the borough given their impact on the quantum and or quality of employment, or services to residents or the visitor economy.
 - Business support including activity to aid the reopening and recovery of the High Street.

2.1.5 Promotion

Campaigns to drive awareness were undertaken – direct mainlining, outbound calling, radio, social media, engagement of third parties e.g., Kent and Medway Growth Hub and communications to our own database via newsletter.

2.1.6 Uptake

Payment period	Successful applications	Total awarded £
Discretionary (Mar - Sept 20)	252	1,425,250
ARG 1 (Nov - Dec 20)	125	155,630
ARG 2 (Dec - Dec 20)	230	250,314
ARG 3 (Dec - Feb 21)	422	1,739,643
ARG 4 (Feb 21 final payment)	403	2,817,272
TOTALS	1,432	6,388,109

2.2 Future Spend

2.2.1 Following the full allocation of the Additional Restrictions Grant the Government awarded MBC a further £1,355,082 'top up' allocation to further support businesses in the borough.

2.2.2 Full Additional Restrictions Grant guidance for Local Authorities (updated 16 June 2021) is provided as a background document to this report. Key points on awards given:

- Must be direct support to businesses.
- Can be used for wider business support activities.
- Targeted businesses could include those not eligible for restart grant scheme, sectors that were unable to reopen prior to 19 July, Travel & Tourism, Wedding, Nightclubs, Theatres, Events, Wholesalers, English Language Schools, Breweries, Freelance & Mobile businesses.
- Awards should be issued; based on economic needs, fixed costs, employees, online, 'scale of Coronavirus losses.'
- Cannot be used as wage support mechanism, capital projects not providing direct business support or received by LA.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 Option One: Do nothing

If nothing is done the £1.3m that has been made available to further support businesses will be revoked by government 31st March 2022. To reject and not embrace utilising this money to benefit the borough's business and local economy is commercially and ethically inappropriate. For this reason, it is not recommended.

3.2 Option Two: Application process (repeat historic approach)

The application process approach that was previously implemented ensured an efficient allocation of funds to the business community in a time precious and sensitive environment. Although there is still a need to work at pace, the deadline for funds to be spent is March 2022. This means a more strategic than blanket approach can be adopted and gives the opportunity of reaching a wider audience.

In addition, the historic rounds have in the main had standardised awards based on business criteria and rent/rateable value without assessing individual need. Feedback from organisations such as Kent and Medway Growth Hub has suggested that larger businesses or businesses in critically affected areas need larger awards to achieve a worthwhile impact.

This approach is resource heavy in planning and preparation stage with assessments of businesses against the newly developed criteria and policy taking place before launch. As defined above, the current Economic Development team resource is at capacity and where this role was absorbed in the team before, that option is not available now so an alternative would have to be found. For the reasons of wanting to help those businesses who are still in dire need and resource, this option is not recommended.

3.3 Option Three: Targeted, proactive approach (preferred option)

Two main issues were identified from the approach of the previous rounds of grant awards:

- 1) The engagement with local businesses and subsequent awareness of schemes both financial and non-financial could be improved.
- 2) Fewer but higher awards would be more impactful for businesses that are still really struggling.

To address this, option three looks to proactively approach businesses to increase engagement and identify those that could benefit from the Additional Restrictions Grant top up fund under one of three criteria:

- 1) Diversification and Growth of Maidstone Based Businesses
- 2) Strategic Importance
- 3) Resilience

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

After undertaking research, it has been concluded that a targeted approach of identifying and contacting businesses should be undertaken to achieve the most valuable outcome in the distribution of the top up grant for the borough. (Option 3).

4.1 Research and feedback examples captured in the policy

- Capacity has significantly impacted venues, an extreme example being a venue that needed more than 700 covers to achieve breakeven but was limited to 80 during restrictions.
- Exceptional circumstances – a business caught in lockdown whilst re-locating incurred costs for both sites, loss of orders, and delayed sales heavily impacting what is normally a healthy cashflow.

- Confidence – rather than investing in future growth initiatives, companies have low confidence so are operating on skeleton staff and holding reserves high in case of a third wave in winter 2021.
- Diversification – to survive pandemic effects some businesses have been forced to reassess business models and adapt to survive.
- Seasonal businesses are fearful of not being able to achieve reserves necessary - post 19 July restrictions being lifted before the season ends - to survive quieter winter months.
- Vacancy rate in Maidstone town centre has risen from 11% to 18%.
- Events and International travel remain affected post 19 July, furlough being reduced but still unable to open.
- Trends expected to settle mid-autumn which will highlight further intervention/support needs.
- Maidstone has highest furlough rate in Kent.

4.2 MBC Strategic Goals and Economic Development Strategy outcomes

4.2.1 In considering the policy for the top up grant, alignment with MBC strategic goals and the Economic Development Strategy was considered, particularly:

- Maidstone a vibrant, prosperous, urban and rural community.
- ¼ of local employment/output & business base fall within sectors at high risk.
- 'Open for business' – start-ups and EU transition.
- Greener, more productive – innovation opportunities, accelerate business clusters.
- Rural – diversification, circular economy, develop tourist destinations, targeted campaigns.
- Inclusive growth – destination Maidstone Town Centre, Night-time economy, rejuvenation into leisure.

4.2.2 Policy areas confirmed need to be defensible, fair, equitable, and achievable. The following conclusions have been drawn comparing government guidance and alignment of potential top up grant spend vs MBC Strategic and Economic Development Strategy objectives:

- 1) Capacity as a criterion is too broad to award on.
- 2) Seasonal/Hospitality/Leisure is important to the borough's local economy.
- 3) High furlough rates could lead to high unemployment rates therefore continuing to encourage and support start-ups and entrepreneurial spirit is critical as the furlough scheme reduces and closes.
- 4) EU transition support is available through third parties and specialist in nature.
- 5) Green initiatives, such as build back better is not akin to the ethos of the Additional Restrictions Grant which stipulates in point 20 of the

guidance dated 16 June that the funding is for business support activities. Any business wanting to invest in their green credentials should be directed to LoCASE, an EU funded scheme with grants of up to £10k available.

- 6) Innovation opportunities & accelerating business clusters, International travel and the development of tourist destinations have been identified as mid/long term initiatives in the Economic Development strategy and therefore discounted as unachievable in the short-term timescale covered by the top up grant.
- 7) Diversification & circular economy alongside Inclusive growth – destination Maidstone Town Centre and rejuvenation into leisure are areas that the top up grant could be utilised to encourage.
- 8) Additional research needs to be undertaken to assess the value of the borough’s night-time economy.

4.3 Concluded project aims

- 1) Provide direct support to businesses to further establish Maidstone as the Business Capital of Kent by approaching them under a wider business support banner.
- 2) Identify focus areas to stimulate the local economy and encourage a circular economy.
- 3) Encourage business survival rates by supporting diversification and growth.

4.4 Policy areas

Policy Area	Target Market	Estimated spend
Diversification & Growth of Maidstone based businesses	Businesses taking on ground floor premises within a town or rural centre as a start-up, part of a viable expansion plan or shift in business model in response to the coronavirus pandemic.	300,000
Strategic importance	Event companies, Larger businesses/employers, specialist nature.	400,000
Resilience Fund	Hospitality & Leisure seasonal businesses.	600,000

The Top Up policy is attached as appendix one. It is proposed approximately 50 awards be made ranging in value across the three categories.

It is anticipated that most awards will be to businesses who have diversified from, for example, mobile catering units into premises and to new or growing businesses encouraged to take on a unit in the town centre or other commercial centres. The award made is suggested as being based on rateable value; £5,000 to businesses <£15k and £10,000 to >£15,001.

It is anticipated that the awards made to companies of strategic importance or under the resilience fund will be assessed individually considering losses, size of business, fixed costs, and employees in line with government guidance.

4.5 Proposed approach

4.5.1 Resource

To enable the project to be completed funding for four, six-month fixed term contracts (or equivalent), has been confirmed from the new burdens fund. This will allow the proactive diagnostic work to identify eligible businesses to be completed.

4.5.2 Approach

The four new members of staff will approach and engage businesses offering an insight into the wider business support programmes available (appendix three details a summary) and signpost accordingly. They will complete a diagnostic assessment and sign them up to receive future newsletters and social media updates.

If the business is believed to be eligible for the top up grant their diagnostic assessment will be reviewed internally. If deemed eligible the business will then be given top up grant information. If the business would like to accept and confirms they are eligible in line with government guidance, then the award will be paid.

A business with expansion plans that could potentially increase transportation and energy usage they will be advised and follow DEFRA guidance for small business. Impacts on biodiversity reduction due to additional land requirements for expansion/storage will also be addressed.

4.5.3 Rationale

- Approaching businesses proactively will engage new businesses.
- Awareness of support (financial & non-financial) will increase.
- Take up of support (financial & non-financial) will improve.
- Value of MBC 'support' leveraged.
- Database for future communications enhanced.
- Expectations of receiving additional funding managed correctly.
- Strategic approach to delivering the Top Up grant to achieve maximum impact from the available funding for the benefit of the local economy.

5 RISK

- 5.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.

6 CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 To help inform the policy various organisations and internal teams were contacted for feedback:

- Kent and Medway Growth Hub
 - One Maidstone
 - Let's Do Business Group (Contracted business support provider to MBC)
 - Licensing
 - Tourism
 - Biodiversity and Climate Change
 - Lockmeadow
 - A cross-section of local businesses
 - Chair of ERL feedback incorporated ahead of wider member briefing
-

7 NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 ED officer to progress and complete the recruitment of the four additional posts.

7.2 ED Team to compile lists of businesses to be proactively contacted once additional resource in place.

7.3 Once in place, the four new roles will commence business engagement and assessment for award.

7.4 31 March 2022 All awards to be made & project close.

8 REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- *Appendix 1: Additional Restrictions Grant Top Up policy.*
 - *Appendix 2: Summary of available Business Support.*
-

9 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- *Additional Restrictions Grant Government Guidance 16 June 2021.*
Government Guidance

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/994386/additional-restrictions-grant-la-guidance.pdf

- *Maidstone Borough Council Strategic Plan*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lw42S_GmDWk

- *Maidstone Borough Council Draft Economic Development Strategy*

See appendix 1 of Item 14 - Draft Economic Development Strategy within the agenda pack.

- *DEFRA guidance for small business*
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69494/pb13310-ghg-small-business-guide.pdf

**Covid-19
Additional
Restriction Grant
(Top Up)
for Businesses
(Discretionary Grant)**

September 2021

www.maidstone.gov.uk



1. Introduction and Purpose

Under the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG), local authorities can develop discretionary grant schemes to help those businesses which are severely impacted by the restrictions put in place to control the spread of Covid-19 but do not meet the eligibility criteria applicable to the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSRG) or one-off grant funding under the Restart Grant (RG).

Full eligibility criteria for the Maidstone Borough Council scheme covering the further 'Top Up' allocation running until March 2022 are detailed below.

This additional funding aims to provide support to:

- 1) Businesses that have had to diversify to survive developing trends because of the pandemic, or to minimise risk and encourage growth of viable businesses within a town or rural centre,
- 2) businesses of strategic importance to the borough that are in hardship due to the pandemic,
- 3) businesses affected by seasonal trading e.g., hospitality and leisure.

Businesses will be targeted and proactively contacted to investigate what support is available to them generally before specifically being considered for a Top Up Grant award. Any business that would like to receive information on the support available or to request a meeting to identify general support available should contact ARG@maidstone.gov.uk.

If a grant is awarded Businesses must notify the Council of any changes affecting their entitlement to receive a grant. If the application is found to be fraudulent the council will look to recover any award made.

2. Which businesses will be eligible for the grant?

The basic idea of the Additional Restrictions Grant is simple – financial support for businesses severely impacted by coronavirus restrictions when most needed.

Businesses based in the Maidstone Borough which meet one of the following criteria will be considered:

Category A – Diversification & Growth of Maidstone based businesses – Includes businesses that take on new ground floor premises within a town or rural centre as a start-up, part of a viable expansion plan, or have had to shift their business model in response to new trends brought about by the coronavirus pandemic.

Category B – Strategic importance – If a business has significant impact to the local or circular economy and is suffering hardship. This can be assessed considering losses on factors such as size of the business, fixed costs, number of employees.

Category C – Resilience Fund – Targeted at hospitality and leisure businesses who have been significantly impacted by the pandemic either due to seasonality of the business, or capacity issues caused by lack of consumer confidence/footfall or government-imposed restrictions and can be assessed considering losses on factors such as size of business, fixed costs, number of employees.

3. How much funding will be provided to businesses?

The amount of the payment to be made to a business is at the discretion of the Council and will be subject to demand on the scheme and available funding. All payments will be made by 31st March 2022.

Award levels will vary according to business size, losses incurred, fixed costs, and number of employees.

Category A

The Council will aim to make awards to businesses based on the rateable value or commercial rent of the retail property taken on.

Businesses with a rateable value or otherwise pay a commercial rent of £15,000 or under will receive a one-off payment of £5,000

Businesses with a rateable value or otherwise pay a commercial rent over £15,001 will receive a one-off payment of £10,000.

Category B

The council will determine the awards made by considering the potential revenue generation for the local or circular economy, i.e. bring money into the borough or a significant spender within the borough.

This will be expected to be evidenced by demonstrating local spend or local income generation on previous events or robust plans for future events.

Category C

The council will determine the awards made by considering the seasonality of the business, ongoing costs and expected income, capacity issues caused by lack of consumer confidence/footfall or government-imposed restrictions.

This will be expected to be evidenced by submission of accounts pre, during and post covid and the award made will contribute to either the projected losses from July 2021 to July 2022, or loss of income March 2020 – July 2021, whichever is deemed to be the greater factor contributing to the hardship and lack of resilience to survive until July 2022.

4. Application process

In the first instance a diagnostic meeting will take place to gather information and to review the business support available, both financial and non-financial.

If the business is believed to be eligible for the top up grant their diagnostic assessment will be reviewed internally. If deemed eligible the business will then be given top up grant information. If the business would like to accept and confirms they are eligible in line with government guidance, then the award will be paid following collection of additional evidence and fraud and security checks.

If you would like to arrange for an initial diagnostic meeting please contact arg@maidstone.co.uk in the first instance.

5. State Aid Subsidy Allowances / Businesses in Difficulty

The EU State aid rules no longer apply to subsidies granted in the UK. From the 4th March, the EU-UK Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) has set new limits to how much subsidy can be given to a business under the law and in what circumstances.

There are three subsidy allowances for this scheme set out below:

1. Small Amounts of Financial Assistance Allowance

A business (or single economic actor defined by the TCA) can receive up to a maximum level of subsidy equivalent to £335,000 over any period of three fiscal years.

2. The COVID-19 Business Grant Allowance

Where the Small Amounts of Financial Assistance Allowance has been reached, grants may be paid under the COVID-19 Business Grant Allowance. For the purposes of these scheme rules, this allowance is £1,600,000 per single economic actor. This allowance includes any grants previously received under the COVID-19 business grant schemes and any State aid previously received under Section 3.1 of the European Commission's Temporary Framework across any other UK scheme. This may be combined with the Small Amounts of Financial Assistance Allowance to equal £1,935,000 (subject to the exact amount applicable under the Small Amounts of Financial Assistance Allowance using the Special Drawing Right calculator.

Grants provided in excess of the Small Amounts of Financial Assistance Allowance may not be granted to applicants that were defined as an 'undertaking in difficulty' (see definition) on 31 December 2019. However, grants can be granted to micro or small enterprises that were already in difficulty on 31

December 2019 provided that they are not subject to collective insolvency proceedings.

3. COVID-19 Business Grant Special Allowance

Where an applicant has reached its limit under the Small Amounts of Financial Assistance Allowance and COVID-19 Business Grant Allowance, it may be able to access a further allowance of funding under these scheme rules of up to £9,000,000 per single economic actor, provided certain conditions are met.

Please contact the Council for further advice if you believe that either state aid Subsidy Allowance limitations or the undertaking in difficulty may apply to your business.

6. Decision making and review of decisions

In the interests of efficiency, the authority to consider and award applications is delegated to the Economic Development Additional Restrictions Support Team who will ensure that a decision is notified by email as soon as is reasonably practical after the initial diagnostics interview has taken place and the suggested financial or non-financial support to help the business has been identified.

Any request to appeal a decision to award or not award a grant or against the level of grant must be made within 7 days of notification of the decision by email to ARG@maidstone.gov.uk.

Authority to consider an appeal is delegated to the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration, in consultation with the Director of Finance and Business Improvement who will notify the applicant of the final decision in writing within 7 days with a full explanation of the reasons for the decision.

Financial Support Channels

South East Business Boost	Fund up to 30% of a project with grants between £1,000 - £10,000
LoCASE	Fund up to 40% of a green project with grants between £1,000 & £10,000
i-Construct	30% grant funding between £1,000 - £20,000 to develop & launch a new product/service
Innovation funding	Commercial viable R&D from Innovate UK
Manufacturing Growth Programme	Consultancy project with grants between £3,000 - £6,000
Start Up Loan	£500-£25,000 for business less than 24 months old
Recovery Loan Scheme	£25,001 to £150,000
Kent Community Foundation	£10,000 - £100,000 for Charities and CICs
SE Internationalisation Fund	Grants between £1,000 -£9,000 to SMEs with high growth potential

Non Financial Support Channels

Maidstone Borough Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General advice for existing businesses and signposting to business partners /stakeholders. • General advice for start up's -including business planning, cash flow forecasting, signposting to business partners/stakeholders. • HerBiz workshops for female start-ups
Kent & Medway Growth Hub	General business support and information
Kent REV's	free trial of electric van for 2 months
Locate in Kent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Support in locating your business to Kent or moving within Kent • Future Forward business growth programme
Further Education & Skills	www.gov.uk
Work from your local	A community driven campaign to get people working from their local on the local's terms
Business Success Programme	Training courses aimed at pre-start and start up with follow up grants in Oct/Nov
Adapting with Digital	Digital skills training with grants between £500-£2000 in Oct/Nov

Agenda Item 17

NOMINATION FORM TO OUTSIDE BODY

Date 21/07/2021.....

NAME:	Margaret Rose
ADDRESS:	19 Newlyn Court, Tufton Street, Maidstone, ME14 1EZ
TELEPHONE NO:	
NAME OF ORGANISATION APPLYING FOR:	MAAP
ROLE APPLYING FOR:	As MBC Cllr trustee/rep/observer as detailed in the job spec
REASON FOR APPLYING:	
WHAT SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE COULD YOU BRING TO THE ORGANISATION?:	I have been a MBC rep on this organisation since I was elected in 2019 and hope to continue to help carry out the vision and mission of MAAP.

NOMINATION FORM TO OUTSIDE BODY

Date ...23/07/21.....

NAME:	Paul Harper
ADDRESS:	Little Oaks, 68 Oakwood Road, Maidstone, Kent, ME16 8AL
TELEPHONE NO:	07834845154
NAME OF ORGANISATION APPLYING FOR:	Maidstone Area Arts Partnership (MAAP)
ROLE APPLYING FOR:	Borough Council Representative
REASON FOR APPLYING:	<p>I was the chair of MBC's Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee for 3 years from 2018 to 2021.</p> <p>I have previously been a Council Representative to MAAP.</p> <p>During my time as ERL Chair I set up the processes to create the post of Arts and Cultural Officer and also the Maidstone Council Arts and Cultural Policy.</p> <p>I also set in train the process leading to the first meeting of the Cultural Forum</p> <p>I have been interested in the Arts and Cultural Activities all my life and especially since gaining public office in 1986. Prior to living in Maidstone I lived in Merton (London) where I was a councillor from 1986 to 2002. From 1990 to 1999 I was the Chair of Leisure and Libraries Committee which included responsibility for Arts. I was the driving force in the renaissance of Merton's Art's in the 1990's plus the regeneration of Wimbledon Theatre. In Maidstone I use to work at UCA as the Pro Rector Corporate Resources.</p>

WHAT SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE COULD YOU BRING TO THE ORGANISATION?:

The skills I bring are business skills from my professional career, I am a qualified Accountant, and have been a Director of Resources since 2006. More importantly a very in-depth knowledge of the Arts, their funding and management.

I also bring Arts management skills

In addition to my collaborative working skills which have been demonstrated at Maidstone Council in particular since being Chair of ERL, previous relevant experience includes:

In 1990 as Chair of Leisure and Libraries Services (including Arts and Cultural Services) I was a member of the Merton Art Council. I conducted a full review of Arts Provision in the borough and subsequently redirected our budget into an arts regeneration budget. This included appointing an Arts Development Officer, setting up an Arts Development Fund and stabling a yearly Merton Arts Festival to celebrate the boroughs multi-cultural diversity and let everyone experience each other's culture to en-richen their own life experiences.

I was the Chair of Wimbledon Theatre for over 12 years to 2004 overseeing a complete refurbishment of the theatre (1600 seat auditorium + 100 seat studio). Setting up the studio to be able to showcase developing arts and alternative arts. I also helped established the youth theatre group.

I was instrumental at the Theatre is establishing the successful Canizario Park open air summer theatre season which overlapped with the Wimbledon fortnight.

I also established a series of Arts work studios in a disused building to provide incubation space for striving artists.

In Merton we have the Wimbledon School of Arts and I established an annual programme to commission pieces of sculpture to be placed in our parts as a method of encouraging greater access to sculpture. In a community park which I was involved with we sponsored the creation of four pieces of sculpture in wood to bring the park alive.

	<p>At UCA Maidstone I again had the opportunity to help promote the arts in Maidstone.</p> <p>I am clearly a full and committed champion of the arts and have a complete belief that arts and a thriving cultural sector can be a key to help regenerating local economies in a sustainable model and that Maidstone needs to make more of the opportunities and infrastructure that it has.</p>
--	--