

Maidstone Economic Development Strategy

Comments received on Public Consultation Draft (Summer 2021)

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

<p>the plan should be clearer how this impact on business will be remedied.</p>		<p><i>base transitions from 'restart' to 'recover' and 'renew'</i></p> <p><i>Signpost support and practical guidance for businesses on re-opening and resuming trading as a result of Covid-19</i></p>	
<p>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.</p>			<p>No specific amends made</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Reference to partnership working included on p.23</p>	<p>Agreed titled 'Working in Partnership'</p> <p>The action plans for each priority also highlight what partners will be required to assist the council deliver actions.</p>	<p>No specific amends made</p>
<p>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.</p>			<p>No specific amends made</p>
<p>There's very little about the industries of the future, and the creative and entertainment sector.</p>		<p>See previous comments on opportunities for the agricultural/tech sector</p>	<p>As above – specific reference added</p>

	<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>
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			<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>	
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