

# Economic Development Strategy 2023–2026

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council



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The Amelia Scott



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## Foreword

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's aim is to support sustainable economic development and create an environment in which existing businesses can flourish and new investment is attracted.

The health of the local economy is key to our communities in Tunbridge Wells, providing jobs and wages, as well as the services that support everyday life. The protection and enhancement of the borough's heritage is also important, in order to preserve the quality of life and reputation of Tunbridge Wells as an excellent place in which to live, work and visit.

We know our residents value living in communities that are active and flourishing. In TWBC's budget consultation of 2022-23, residents were asked to weight the Council's five priorities, and 'Vibrant and safer towns and villages' was the most popular choice.

Over the past few years, the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit and the cost-of-living crisis have collectively had a significant impact on the local economy. As a result, some businesses have closed; some have opened; and some have had to change the way they operate. In addition, many businesses are making adaptations to achieve net zero targets. And all the while, the traditional High Street is in flux.

Working with a wide range of partner organisations, the Council is seeking to focus its available resources to support local businesses - existing and new - as they recover from recent events and build their resilience for the future.

This Strategy will communicate the myriad ways in which the Economic Development team is doing this.

### **Cllr Justine Rutland**

Cabinet Member for Economic Development  
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council





# 1. National & Local Context for Strategy

## National Picture

Since the last Economic Development Strategy was adopted in 2018, there have been considerable changes within the UK economy. The section below briefly highlights some of these, both those that are temporary and others that are longer term in their nature.

### Net Zero

In June 2019, the UK government passed legislation committing the country to achieving 'net zero' greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Achieving net zero will require changes that are unprecedented in their scale and scope, including the way electricity is generated, how people travel, how land is used and how buildings are heated. Businesses will need to play their part in addressing this challenge and many are already leading the way in making changes.

### Covid

The Covid-19 restrictions, put in place to protect public health, seriously disrupted trading during 2020 and 2021. Post-pandemic, a number of businesses were left weaker, carrying more debt, smaller reserves, and having to adapt to a markedly different business environment. This was especially the case for retailers, leisure and hospitality venues and their suppliers. Some did not survive but many are now on the road to recovery.

### Brexit

The United Kingdom officially left the European Union on 31 January 2020. This has required businesses that trade with Europe to adapt their operations and has also led to difficulties with the recruitment of staff. There is some evidence that suggests that there may

have been a negative impact on the visitor economy, at least in the short term (although to date the effect is difficult to separate from the Covid impact).

### Inflation and the Cost of Living Crisis

Since late 2021 the UK has experienced a period of high inflation, peaking at 11.1% in October 2022. This has primarily focused on energy prices and essential household items including food, but has also increased costs for businesses, especially in relation to services and supply chains.

### Levelling Up Agenda

In March 2021, the Government published its Levelling Up White Paper, setting out a series of missions and targeted support to parts of the UK that have historically suffered from under-investment. As part of the Levelling Up agenda, the Government announced the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund to provide devolved funding to local authorities across the country for a three year period (2022-25). TWBC submitted an Investment Plan for both funds, which have subsequently been approved, and local projects are now underway. A table of these projects is included in Appendix A.

### Artificial Intelligence (AI)

There have been exponential developments in Digital and AI infrastructure and use in the economy since the last Strategy was released. The UK Government has sought to address the opportunities and threats posed by these rapid developments in a number of recent strategies and work on this is ongoing.



## Tunbridge Wells Local Economy

The borough of Tunbridge Wells is located in West Kent and borders the local authorities of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone and Ashford in Kent as well as Rother and Wealden in East Sussex. The borough is part of a distinctive West Kent economic area (covering Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, and Tunbridge Wells local authority areas) with close links between the main settlements.

West Kent has the highest proportion of business start-ups in Kent, a stronger representation of higher value, knowledge-based industries than anywhere else in the county and also boasts the strongest business survival rates. The area provides significant employment to both local residents and those living elsewhere in Kent and further afield, including many high-skilled, well-paid jobs.

Tunbridge Wells is an attractive business location. The local economy is largely characterised by micro and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). However, there are a number of larger employers that contribute significantly to the economic health and prosperity of the borough. There is strong sectoral representation in: finance and insurance; scientific and technical; wholesale and retail; human health and social work; hospitality (visitor economy); creative; and education. In addition, there is a small, well-skilled manufacturing sector, and an extensive agricultural vector that accounts for over 90% of land we use in the borough.

Royal Tunbridge Wells is the primary urban centre of the borough and a significant employment, retail, education, service and transport hub. It is a historic and vibrant town drawing trade, business connections and visitors from London, the wider South East and further afield.

The landscape of Tunbridge Wells is dominated by the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which covers almost two thirds of the borough. This rural area includes a number of towns and villages with distinct independent high streets and local services, including Cranbrook, Hawkhurst and Paddock Wood.

Tunbridge Wells first became a destination for leisure, culture and tourism in the 1600s and it continues to be a high-quality visitor destination today, with attractions including historic National Trust properties, outdoor activities, theatres and museums. The borough is home to an increasing number of hospitality businesses including accommodation and food and beverage outlets.



**Figure 1: Satellite map of Tunbridge Wells Borough**



**Figure 2: Tunbridge Wells Local Economy Indicators**

<b>115,300 residents</b> in Tunbridge Wells borough	<b>6,300 PAYE enterprises</b> in Tunbridge Wells	<b>Highest first year survival rate (91.9%)</b> for businesses in Kent
<b>90%</b> of businesses are micro (1-9 employees), <b>8%</b> small (10-49), <b>1%</b> medium (50-249) and <b>0.2%</b> large (250+)	<b>Largest Sectors:</b> Professional, Scientific & Technical (23.3%) Construction (11.8%) ICT (9.9%)	<b>Fastest Growing Sectors:</b> Real Estate Activities (£208m GVA increase) Professional, Scientific & Technical (£194m)
<b>FTE earnings for residents:</b> £38,730 p/a <b>FTE earnings for those working in the borough:</b> £29,180	<b>50% of residents out commute for work, including:</b> 20% in Kent 19% in London 11% elsewhere	<b>3.6 million visitors</b> to the borough each year
<b>Tunbridge Wells 83rd out of 360</b> national locations on the UK Competitiveness Index	<b>GVA (Gross Value Added) of £3.580bn</b> for the borough	<b>GVA of £59,333</b> per worker
<b>Unemployment rate is at 2.3%</b> , down from 4.6% in March 2021.	<b>24.5% of employees are employed in the Knowledge Economy</b> (technical & scientific innovation) – <b>the highest level in Kent</b>	<b>63.1%</b> of residents 16–64 are at National Vocational Qualification Level 4+



Sissinghurst Castle

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, TWBC commissioned work to support the preparation of this Strategy and Action Plan. This included a survey of 200 local businesses to identify both the barriers to growth and the sort of support that would be welcomed. Using the findings from the business survey and other available evidence, a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis) has been undertaken to provide an overview of the local economy and present areas for intervention by the Council and its partners. This SWOT is set out in Figure 3 below:

Sources: ONS, KCC, HJA Evidence Base, LGA, Nottingham Business School, and Cardiff University

**Figure 3: SWOT Analysis of the Tunbridge Wells Economy**



## Key Partnerships

The Council is engaged in a number of important economic partnerships as set out below:

### Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP)

The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership is a federated economic partnership for Kent and Medway which aims to drive forward economic growth and prosperity throughout the region. KMEP is governed by a Board and chaired by the private sector, with membership drawn from business, local government, further and higher education. KMEP has recently assumed greater responsibility for regional funding decisions and has been instructed to work closely with local authorities to deliver targeted support at a local level.

### Kent County Council

TWBC works with Kent County Council (KCC) on issues including transport, employment and skills, the cultural and creative economy, and the environment. KCC has prepared a Council Strategy (2022) detailing its priorities for 2022-26. The priorities are focused around levelling up the county, building infrastructure for communities and protecting the environment. The Strategy sets out a clear pathway to net zero by 2050, which includes the development of a carbon footprint calculator for Kent and Medway, green infrastructure and large-scale retrofitting initiatives.

KCC's levelling up agenda is focused on addressing the issues that are barriers to economic growth and prosperity in Kent. This includes developing skills in line with evolving business needs, supporting schools to deliver accessible high-quality education, improving outcomes in deprived communities and reducing health inequalities across the county.

This Council Strategy is supplemented by a Kent and Medway Economic Strategy, which aims to develop a Kent economy by 2030 that is productive, sustainable and inclusive. Partners in business, learning institutions and government have a crucial role to play in making this happen, and KCC is well-placed to convene and lead this activity, creating the conditions for prosperity across the county.

### Invest West Kent

Formerly known as the West Kent Partnership, TWBC works particularly closely with the neighbouring authorities of Sevenoaks District Council and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council as Invest West Kent (IWK). The three authorities share many local economic characteristics and pool resources to add value to initiatives across the three districts, promoting business growth, connections, inward investment and resilience.

### Visit Kent

TWBC has an ongoing partnership with Visit Kent, the Destination Management Organisation for the County. The partnership helps support visitor economy businesses in the borough by extending the reach of marketing activities to national and international audiences and commissioning research to help shape our messaging.

### Royal Tunbridge Wells Together (RTWT)

RTWT is the Business Improvement District (BID) established following a successful ballot of local businesses in 2019. Since then, the Council has worked in partnership with the BID on projects to support the town centre through a challenging period (see Section 3).

## Town and Parish Councils

In addition, the Council works with the Town and Parish Councils across the borough, many of which have prepared a Neighbourhood Plans for their area. It is recognised that there are many businesses located in the rural areas of the borough and in the smaller town centres.

Appendix B sets out a full list of the partners that the Council works with to deliver initiatives to support Economic Development.





# Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Plans & Strategies

This Strategy aligns with other plans and strategies that have been or are being prepared by TWBC and other partners and that support economic development.

The *Building a Better Borough*: Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Plan 2022-24 sets out the priorities for the Council for 2022-24. It is formulated around a single objective: doing the best for our residents, our businesses and our Borough. Creating Safe and Vibrant town and village centres is a key priority in the Plan.

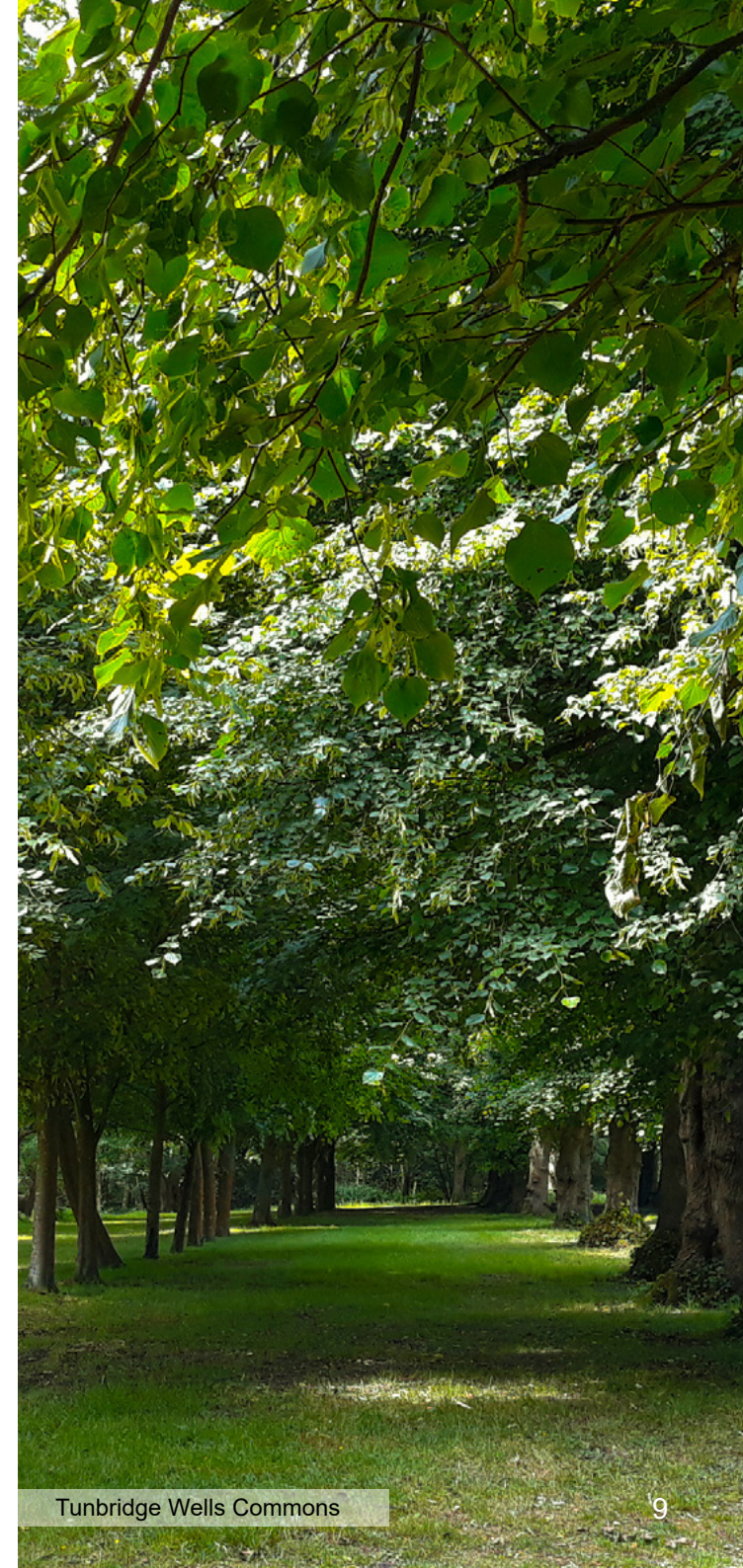
TWBC is also preparing a number of other relevant plans and strategies as follows:

- **A Climate Strategy and Action Plan for Tunbridge Wells.**
- **The new Tunbridge Wells Local Plan (Submission Local Plan 2021):** The Council is producing a new Local Plan which is in its final stages of preparation and currently subject to Examination. It sets out a vision, objectives and strategic policies for future growth in the borough and identified sites for housing, employment and other uses. The Submission Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for examination by an independent Inspector in November 2021 and was then subject to a number of Examination in Public hearings which took place between 1 March and 15 July 2022. The Council then received a letter setting out the Inspector's findings

following these hearing sessions, in early November 2022. The work to consider and respond to the initial findings of the Inspector is currently in progress.

- **A Town Centre Plan for Royal Tunbridge Wells:** The Council is currently working on the preparation of the Town Centre Plan which will provide a long-term strategy up to 2040 to help create and sustain a more prosperous town centre. The plan will provide a vision, objectives and a planning framework for the future of the town centre.
- **Neighbourhood Development Plans:** Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) were introduced under the Localism Act 2011, to allow planning and decision making to be carried out a more local level. NDPs need to conform with national policy, local adopted plans and other legal requirements. These plans can be used to develop a shared vision. TWBC has been working with the Parish and Town Councils to progress their NDPs. A number of these NDPs contain economic policies relating to employment and retail/local services.

Appendix C provides a list of relevant plans and strategies, prepared by the Council and other partners.





## 2. Current Activity and Key Issues

This section provides an overview of current activity that is being undertaken by the Council and its partners and the key issues that are shaping the local economy which this Strategy aims to address.

### Net Zero Target

In 2019, a borough-wide recognition of climate change and its impacts resulted in the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency. To act on this commitment, an ambition has been set to reach carbon neutrality for the Council's own activities by 2030 and also to support carbon neutrality for the wider borough by the same date. In order to reach these ambitions, a Climate Strategy and Action Plan is being prepared with the following aims:

- To support borough-wide mitigation efforts to reduce emissions and reach net-zero by 2030
- To collaborate with stakeholders to facilitate climate action across sectors and service areas outside of TWBC's control
- Ensure the actions in this strategy complement other council-led strategies, such as the Borough-partnership Strategy and the new Tunbridge Wells Local Plan
- To raise awareness of, and engagement in, climate action and the need for a just transition to net zero across the borough.
- Ensure actions facilitate climate justice across all demographics in the community
- Recognise the needs of the community, and ensure that stakeholders are consulted to allow for inclusive decision-making.

From an economic development perspective, the borough's path to net zero will require a rapid decarbonisation of the local economy. To support

this, the Council will look to provide signposting to resources that will assist businesses in decarbonising their premises, supply chains, deliveries and business travel.

### Employment sites and premises

The limited number of appropriate employment sites and premises has been a constraint to enterprise in the borough over recent years, acting as a barrier to inward investment and wider development. This shortage has been exacerbated due to the conversion of floorspace from office to residential use under Permitted Development Rights (PDR) legislation, particularly in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre. The town centre has an ageing stock of employment floorspace, which will require renovation or redevelopment to ensure that it is fit for modern ways of working.

**Key Employment Areas** - The new Tunbridge Wells Local Plan (Submission Local Plan 2021) identifies a number of Key Employment Areas (KEAs) and provides land allocations for the development of new employment space, based on evidence from an Economic Needs Assessment. The KEAs are set out below:

- Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre
- Royal Tunbridge Wells North Farm/Longfield Road area
- Southborough High Brooms Industrial Area
- Paddock Wood Eldon Way and West of Maidstone Road
- Paddock Wood Transfesa Road East and West
- Gill's Green Business Park
- Capel Brook Farm





The new Tunbridge Wells Local Plan (Submission Local Plan 2021) also sets out criteria-based protection policies requiring robust evidence that an existing employment site or premise is no longer viable for employment with a minimum of 18 months marketing activity before alternative development can be explored.

**Article 4 Directions** - In response to concerns about the extent of conversions from office space to residential under Permitted Development Rights, a detailed Town Centre Office Study (Durlings, 2018) was commissioned for Royal Tunbridge Wells, and then updated in 2021 (Retail, Commercial Leisure and Town Centre Uses Study). The study recommended the use of Article 4 Directions to be placed on key remaining office spaces in the town centre. Although an Article 4 Direction does not prevent planning applications for change of use, it does allow a full consideration of the impact of such applications by the Council (as the Local Planning Authority).

**Co-working Space** - The Council is also taking proactive steps to deliver employment workspace itself. A partnership with Town Square Ltd has been agreed to provide 29,000 square feet of flexible coworking space for local businesses at the refurbished Town Hall in Royal Tunbridge Wells. Previously, the Council has worked with private and public sector partners to open The House in Monson Road, which provides flexible space for the creative sector. There are now a number of other flexible workspaces in Royal Tunbridge Wells and the wider borough including: Office Tribe, Regus and the Hive (in Cranbrook and Royal Tunbridge Wells).

### **Enterprise & Employment**

Enterprise – Tunbridge Wells is a highly entrepreneurial borough, with an average of over 600 new businesses established each year. The local economy is dominated by small and micro-businesses (90% employ less than





10 people), with high levels of self-employment (13%) as well as many home-based businesses.

The borough economy is sustained by the relationships between its diverse array of entrepreneurs and small enterprises, where individuals and micro enterprises work together to provide services that would otherwise be provided in house (financial, HR, property, legal etc.). This model has proved successful, and Tunbridge Wells has risen to 83rd out of 360 national locations on the UK Competitiveness Index.

However, there is a limit to the growth potential of this model, as viable enterprises with high growth potential can struggle to 'lift-off' and transition into medium or large firms that would generate further investment and development opportunities in the borough. As already indicated, the new Tunbridge Wells Local Plan (Submission Local Plan 2021) seeks to address development constraints, but there is also a need for targeted support to help business grow as well as to attract inward investment into the borough.

The Tunbridge Wells Business Survey (2021) prepared as part of the evidence for this Strategy identified a number of the key barriers limiting the growth of business and also a list of support needs as shown in Figures 4 and 5.

The Council already offers a number of support services to local businesses. This includes the provision of information and resources via a new Business Portal, a monthly business newsletter, social media platforms, as well as a calendar of business networking events at locations across the borough.

**Business Portal** - The online Business Portal is a one-stop shop linking businesses to relevant Council services including Rates, Planning, Environmental Health, and Licensing. A Welcome Pack for new businesses in the area has been prepared and both online and paper versions will

### What are the main barriers limiting the growth of your business?

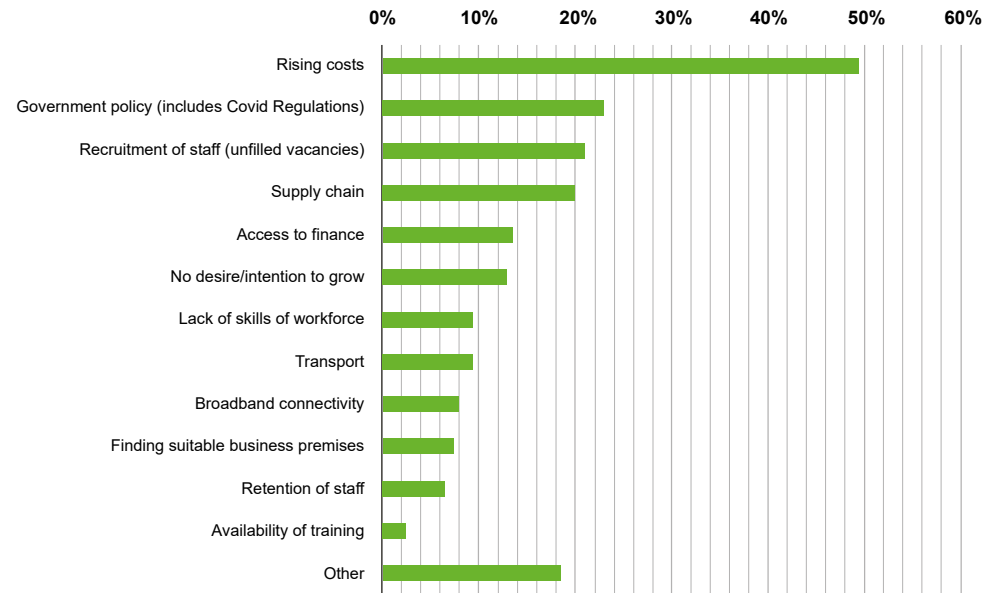


Figure 4: Barriers to business growth

### Which of these support services would you be interested in if they were readily accessible to you?

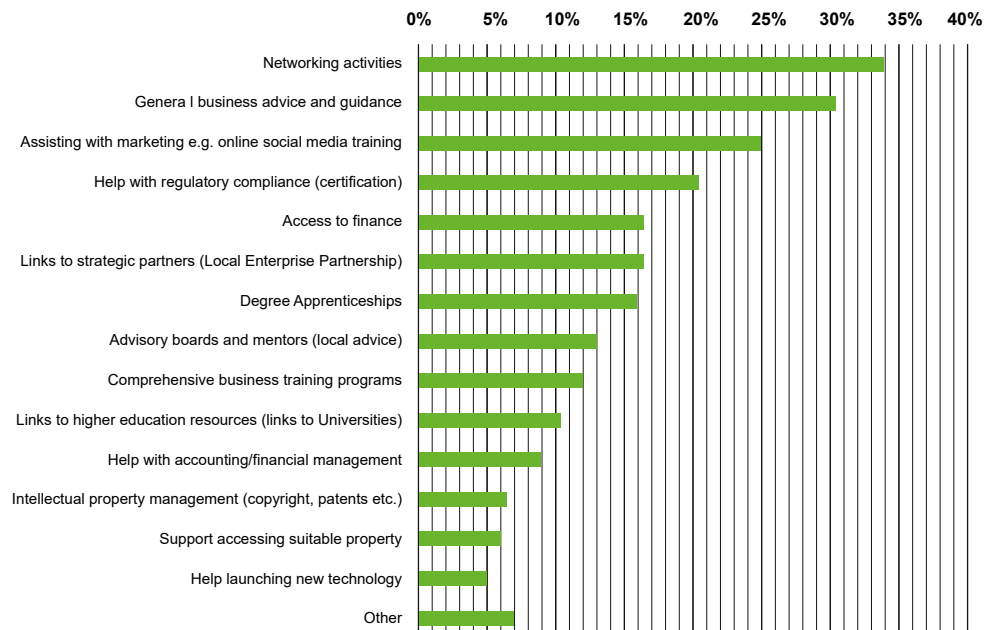


Figure 5: Business Support Needs



be available. The Business Portal also provides signposting to programmes of business support provided by government agencies and other partner organisations. There is a wide range of support offered at a county level, which has been brought together within the Kent and Medway Growth Hub website. This includes details of grants, loans and support initiatives offered by the Government, South East Local Enterprise Partnership, Kent County Council, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and other support organisations.

**Invest West Kent** – (formerly known as the West Kent Partnership) is an economic partnership of the three West Kent local authorities: Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, and Tunbridge Wells). Invest West Kent is very well placed to deliver larger-scale business support programmes, through the pooling of resources (both staff and funding). Over the duration of this strategy IWK will deliver a number of key programmes, including the joint West Kent Business Support Programme, West Kent Rural Grants Scheme, and People and Skills projects delivered as part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). In addition, the organisation has rebranded, delivered a new inward investment platform, hosts regular events across the region, and looks to add value to the work of partner organisations across the region.

**Networking** - Within the borough there are a number of active networking groups, providing online and in-person events, where local businesses can seek advice and meet new clients and partners. The health of these groups is important to the development of micro and small businesses and the Council will seek to support their activities where possible.





**Education & Training** – Tunbridge Wells has a strong employment and skills base. Unemployment currently sits at 2.4%, higher than it was before Covid, but a considerable decrease from 2020-21 levels. As was the case pre-Covid, unemployment is much lower than that of Kent as a whole (3.3%) and the UK (4.2%).

National Vocational Qualification levels remain high with 49.4% of 16 – 64-year-old residents holding qualifications at level 4 (degree level) and above. This is higher than the rest of Kent (38.5%) and the UK (43.6%).

Figure 4 shows that difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff is often cited as a key barrier to business growth in the borough, especially in sectors such as Health and Social Care, Hospitality, Logistics and Retail. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council along with its West Kent neighbours has been working with Jobcentre Plus (DWP) and other organisations to develop employability initiatives across the area. These have included annual jobs and training events in Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells. In Tunbridge Wells events have also been held to target specific areas of the borough and groups of residents that have found accessing the jobs market more difficult.

The borough is well served with primary and secondary schools. Further Education (FE) is available at the North Kent College Campus in Tonbridge town centre (which also offers some Higher Education (HE) courses). In addition, Canterbury Christ Church University has a facility in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre, although the course provision is currently limited to the Clinical Psychology Faculty. The Council is seeking to engage with both FE and HE providers to bring greater provision and more opportunities to the borough. The Council recognises the need to support careers education and local opportunities for school leavers in Tunbridge Wells and therefore



Gusta, Royal Tunbridge Wells



seeks to support the Kent & Medway Careers Hub and Enterprise Advisor Network that have been established to build connections between local schools and the business community.

To identify demand for skills at a regional level, the Government commissioned a set of Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). LSIPs aim to bring employers and key stakeholders together to ensure that local provision is reflective of emerging skills demand. The Kent and Medway Local Skills Improvement Plan was delivered by Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce (KICC). KICC has worked with local authorities, employers and employer representative groups to publish a plan that identifies local needs and solutions to address them in our local sectors. It is hoped that the publication of the LSIP can be used to guide the provision offered by local universities, colleges and independent providers to align with gaps identified in the report.

The Council recognises the role that apprenticeships can play in boosting skills meeting the requirements of local businesses. However, it is recognised that SMEs find it more difficult to take on apprentices. The Council will continue to work with partners to promote apprenticeships as a way to recruit and train employees.

Targeting support from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Council is developing proposals for employment and skills initiatives in Tunbridge Wells for delivery in the financial year 2024/25. Gaps in current provision are being identified and detailed plans will be presented to local stakeholders later in 2023.

## Town centres and local high streets

Town centres and local high streets are experiencing a period of rapid change. An evolution in usage, demand and identity is underway that has been exacerbated by the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic. These trends mean that centres and high streets previously dominated by retail, will need to diversify away from traditional models towards a mix of uses, with an emphasis on creating destinations to visit, live and work in.

There are a number of town centres and village high streets across the borough, including: Royal Tunbridge Wells, Cranbrook, Hawkhurst, Paddock Wood, Rusthall and Southborough; each with their own identifiable character. The recently prepared Retail, Commercial, Leisure and Town Centre Study (updated in 2021) was commissioned in support of the new Tunbridge Wells Local Plan (Submission Local Plan 2021) and has provided recommendations to guide development within these areas.

The Study recognises the importance of Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre as a regional centre serving a wide catchment area (489,762 people), well beyond the borough boundary. The town has a varied retail offer with well-known brands in the northern part of the town (in and around the Royal Victoria Place shopping centre) and a high concentration of independent retailers in the High Street, the Pantiles and also on Camden Road. The Study recommends a flexible approach to changes of use to enliven the town with leisure, culture and community uses, as well as retail. New planning rules, including changes to permitted development rights and the creation of a new Class E – Commercial Uses Order of use is already accelerating change, providing both opportunities and threats to our urban centres.





**Town Centre Plan** – In the light of the above, the Council is now preparing a Town Centre Plan for Royal Tunbridge Wells to set out a vision and masterplan for the period up to 2040 and to allocate sites for future development. A series of early engagement events took place in October and November 2022 to discuss the future of the town centre with local people, businesses and other stakeholders and a Town Centre Study was subsequently prepared to support the preparation of the final Plan. While the Town Centre Plan is a longer-term, strategic document, the Town Centre Study recognises that it is essential to also deliver shorter-term visible changes in the town centre to keep momentum going and to maintain support for the overall vision. The Study states that ‘quick win’ projects can help to generate a sense of progress and interest in the town centre, and can be implemented by a variety of stakeholders to revitalise the area and create a more vibrant, active environment. Examples of these quick wins could include:

- Meanwhile uses/pop-up shops
- Markets
- Art installations
- Events & festivals

The first draft of the Town Centre Plan will be in the form of an Issues and Options consultation document that will be published late in 2023. for a minimum period of six weeks. A Call for Sites has just concluded.

**Royal Tunbridge Wells Together BID** - Following the initial formation of a Town Centre Partnership for Royal Tunbridge Wells in 2016, a ballot was held in 2018 on a proposed Business Improvement District. This led to the establishment of Royal Tunbridge Wells Together Business Improvement District (BID) and since then, businesses have paid a levy based on the rateable value of their premises to the BID to be used

for projects and initiatives to grow footfall and provide business support. RTWT has a voluntary Board of Directors from across the town that represents the various sectors located in Royal Tunbridge Wells. The BID’s office is currently located in a former retail unit on the High Street.

Recent projects delivered by RTWT BID include:

- Promotion and marketing programmes (at London termini and on bus backs) in collaboration with Visit Tunbridge Wells
- Installation of footfall counters across the town
- Improvements to the streetscene
- Provision of Christmas lighting
- Creation of new events to increase footfall including Art Week and Coronation
- Grants for town centre events and cultural venues
- Free training (e.g. first aid and social media) portal for levy-paying businesses
- Engagement with/lobbying the Council on town centre issues of concern to businesses

The BID is now approaching the end of its first five-year term and a renewal ballot will be held in early 2024. RTWT is preparing a new business plan for the proposed second term and will be consulting with levy-payers on this plan in Autumn 2023, prior to the ballot. The Council is represented on the BID Board and works closely in partnership with the BID on the many projects of common interest. The BID is also a key stakeholder in the preparation of the Town Centre Plan as described above.





## The Creative Economy

Tunbridge Wells has very strong representation in the cultural and creative sector and the Council is keen to see the sector grow further. Work commissioned by TWBC and KCC in 2012 (and updated in 2019) provided a number of recommendations as to how the sector should be supported. As a result of this work, in 2016, The House opened with flexible workspace for creative businesses. More recently the redevelopment of the existing Museum, Art Gallery, Tourist Information Centre, Library and Adult Education facilities into the Amelia Scott Cultural Centre has added a significant cultural venue and attraction to the borough. As a consequence of these initiatives, in 2019 the Council secured funding from Arts Council England to set up a strategic partnership for the creative economy (known as a Cultural Compact). Creative Tunbridge Wells has recently been established and will be working with partners (including RTWT BID and the Amelia Scott Team) to seek to increase the social and economic benefits of the creative economy for the borough. Further funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will support the development of this partnership.

The Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Study recognises the benefits of a strong creative economy for the town (and wider borough) and sets out the following aim: Royal Tunbridge Wells is well known as a creative place in which to live, work and visit. Culture and creativity is embedded in the town, contributing to both social and economic well-being. Events across the year bring footfall to the town supporting the day and evening economy.

## Visitor Economy

Tunbridge Wells is a beautiful borough, with a rich natural and built heritage, including many tourist attractions and hospitality businesses. The Visitor Economy continues to be integral to the overall vitality of the borough, both within our town centres and across our rural areas.

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in serious harm to hospitality and leisure businesses, as trade almost ceased entirely. Without government Covid grants, it is likely that many of these businesses would have faced permanent closure. However, recent research has signalled a recovery in the visitor economy since the end of the pandemic. The 2021 Economic Impact of Tourism Report (derived from the Cambridge Model) calculated that the value of the visitor economy in the borough was £191m, supporting 4,505 local jobs. There were 3.6m visitors to the borough in 2021, which was a 44.4% increase on 2020.

The value of the local visitor economy, local job opportunities and overall visitor numbers is set to increase towards and beyond pre-Covid levels. This is supported by projections and analysis from Visit Britain and Kent County Council, which both anticipate annual increases over the timeframe of this Strategy.

Visit Tunbridge Wells (VTW) - is the official tourist information and acting destination management organisation for the Tunbridge Wells Borough, working in collaboration with Visit Kent, Visit Britain and other key partners. A new VTW Marketing Plan has been prepared recently and set out six key objectives in order to promote the borough and attract new and repeat visitors:

- Market Royal Tunbridge Wells as a unique shopping and foodie destination and as a base for exploration of the whole borough

Visit  
tunbridgewells





- Attract a younger audience of travellers, increasing footfall to leisure and hospitality businesses around the borough as well as cultural venues and events/festivals
- Uphold our Garden of England reputation, promoting our green spaces and encouraging walking and cycling
- Put Tunbridge Wells on the map to international travellers as a high-quality destination
- Cherish and promote our architectural heritage, including the many historic homes and gardens in the area

In order to achieve these objectives, the Council is focusing on a range of initiatives including: a refresh of the Visit Tunbridge Wells website, the printing and distribution of information leaflets and establishment of tourist information points at key locations across the borough, campaigns aimed at both UK and international audiences, building our VTW social media following and sector-specific business support through the new West Kent Business Hub.

Partnership working will be key to the recovery of the visitor economy and in realising our objectives. In this respect, real progress has been made since the preparation of the last strategy and the Council is part of a number of partnerships to drive visitor numbers to the borough. This includes an increase in both internal and external connections and provision, with the opening of the new Amelia Scott cultural centre, deepened ties with Visit Kent, Visit England, Invest West Kent, RTWT BID, the National Trust and attractions and destinations across the borough.

### **Rural Economy**

Tunbridge Wells is a largely rural borough, with a significant proportion of agricultural and forestry land. Much of the rural area is located within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which is



Biddenden Vinyard



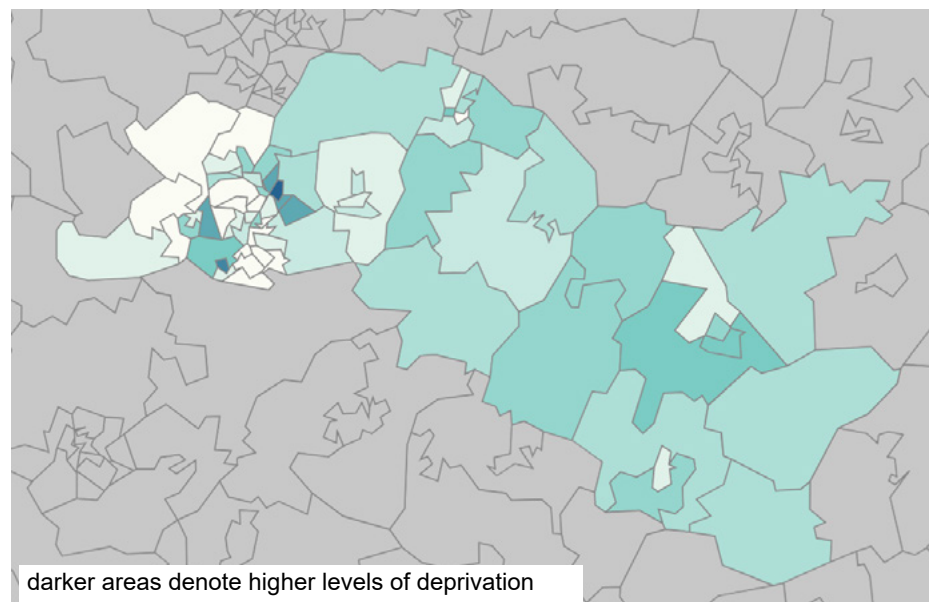
home to a diverse array of agricultural, horticultural, artisanal, manufacturing and tourism (including accommodation and hospitality) businesses.

Some rural enterprises in the borough have faced severe disruption as a result of the Covid pandemic and there have also been changes as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. Challenges facing rural businesses identified in the Tunbridge Wells Business Survey include increased costs, access to finance and labour shortages.

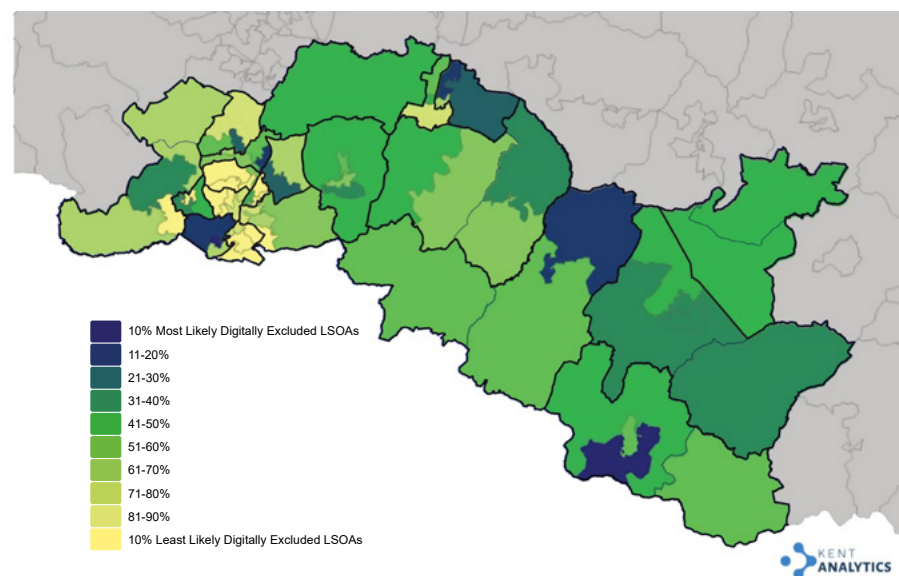
The Council recognises the importance of rural businesses to the borough and seeks to ensure that businesses outside the main urban areas have equal access to the support services available (as set out above).

**Rural Grants** - The Council is seeking to support businesses in rural areas of the borough to increase productivity and diversify where appropriate. Between 2006 and 2020, the Council worked with neighbouring councils Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling to deliver the successful West Kent LEADER programmes, with funding of over £1m awarded to rural businesses in the borough. LEADER funding is no longer available so now the Council is working with West Kent partners to deliver a Rural Grants Programme with its Rural England Prosperity Fund allocation. Building on the success of LEADER, this new Programme will deliver £332,703 to rural businesses and communities in Tunbridge Wells (in the financial year 2024-25), with capital grants of up to £25,000.

**Education, Skills and Innovation** - The Council is committed to supporting skills provision and innovation activities to help rural businesses diversify, grow and invest in their future. To facilitate these activities the Council will hold discussions with a range of local and national stakeholders, including DEFRA, further education colleges, rural support organisations and



**Figure 6. Geographic spread of deprivation in Tunbridge Wells – Multiple indicies of deprivation (2019)**



Source: Kent Analytics and other data sources<sup>3,6,8,9,10</sup> (see 4.3)

**Figure 7: Broadband connectivity across the borough**



agricultural businesses and workers themselves. The Council will also hold talks with Town and Parish Councils and local schools to ensure that rural communities can access skills, training and career opportunities in the rural economy.

**Broadband** - The 'Digital Exclusion in Tunbridge Wells' report (2021) analysed the state of digital connectivity across the borough. The report identified a number of challenges facing communities across Tunbridge Wells. There is a clear urban/rural divide between Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs), with urban LSOAs receiving an average broadband speed of 70.66Mbps and rural LSOAs receiving an average broadband speed of 40.10Mbps (the average broadband speed in the UK at the time of the report was 64 Mbps) as shown in Figure 7. These speeds are considerably lower than in the other West Kent districts. This has a considerable negative impact on rural businesses, with 50% reporting that they are having to use unsuitable and unreliable broadband according to a recent Federation of Small Businesses Study (2022).

To address these issues, Kent County Council is delivering the Government's Project Gigabit scheme, which aims to deliver superfast and 5G coverage to the whole of the County. Works are due to start in 2023 and will take place alongside free skills training and outreach from Digital Kent and the Government's Digital Skills Hub.

### **Transport & Access**

The following are the key concerns that businesses raise about transport and access in the borough: transport congestion, reductions in public transport services (particularly infrequent in rural areas), the lack of safe cycling and walking infrastructure, and the provision of appropriate parking provision for businesses and customers. The need to decarbonise the transport network is a key priority in the Council's



Bowl Water



emerging Climate Change Strategy & Action Plan.

**Highways** – Kent County Council (KCC) is the local highway authority for Tunbridge Wells borough, including the Town Centre. Therefore, all projects that have an impact on the highway (including footways) are either led by or delivered in agreement with Kent County Council. TWBC works in partnership with KCC at both a strategic level (e.g. in the preparation of the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan) and also on local schemes, for example the High Street parklets and planters schemes in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre. KCC (with the support of TWBC) has also recently implemented a number of 20mph schemes in the town centre and surrounding residential areas, which have been widely supported by local residents.

**Buses** - Bus services in the borough are provided by a mix of large national companies and some much smaller local bus operators. Most bus services operate on a commercial basis with the remainder requiring local authority support (from Kent County Council). Commercial services tend to operate six or seven days a week, whilst supported services mostly operate on weekdays only. The largest local bus provider in the borough is Arriva Kent & Surrey. Vehicles used on the local network now include minibuses, full sized single-deck and double-deck vehicles.

Kent County Council's Public Transport Team works closely with local bus operators to seek to provide a good level of service for those living and working in the borough and in 2021 submitted its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to the Department for Transport, bidding for funding to deliver better services across the county. Whilst an award of funding was made, it is at a level that may assist in stabilising the current network but will not lead to a step-change in service improvements. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is represented at the West Kent Enhanced Partnership Group and the borough also organises the more focused



Tunbridge Wells Station



Tunbridge Wells Local Bus Partnership Group as well as the Tunbridge Wells Public Transport Forum (attended by rail and bus operators). A key issue identified at the Local Bus Partnership Group is the lack of layover (waiting) space for buses in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre.

**Rail** – The borough has a number of railway stations that are critical to the local economy. These are at Royal Tunbridge Wells and High Brooms on the London-Hastings line, Paddock Wood on the London-Ashford-Folkestone/Dover line and the Medway Valley Line and Ashurst on the London-Uckfield line. Key issues that the Council works with the rail operators on include improved access to stations on foot or bike and improved bus-rail interchange, as well as improve station facilities. At present services on the lines through the borough remain high frequency despite a fall in daily patronage since the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Walking and Cycling** – In 2018 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council commissioned the preparation

of a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), that was subsequently published as part of the evidence base for the new Tunbridge Wells Local Plan. The LCWIP sets out a network of priority routes for pedestrians and cyclists into and around Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre (as well as in the wider borough). The Council works with KCC to bid for funding from Active Travel England’s Capability Fund and Active Travel Fund to design and deliver improved infrastructure. Developer contributions are also negotiated to provide new infrastructure where appropriate.

**Parking** – Tunbridge Wells Borough Council owns 13 car parks in the town centre and manages their operations. Work is underway to install electric vehicle charging in many of these car parks. TWBC also undertakes on-street parking enforcement in the town centre. TWBC has partnered with Co-Wheels to establish a very successful car club in the town centre, with a recent expansion to 8 vehicles across Royal Tunbridge Wells. A new Parking Strategy is being prepared at present.

**Transport Projects** - The table in Appendix D sets out a number of projects that are either being explored or are planned (depending on availability of funding) over the next 10 years. Immediate priorities are investigating cycle route links between Rusthall and Royal Tunbridge Wells and consulting on local street improvements in the St Johns/St James area of Tunbridge Wells.





## 3. Economic Development Aims and Objectives

The aims of this Economic Development Strategy are to:

- Support the development of a sustainable and inclusive net zero local economy - that delivers for local businesses and communities, respecting the natural environment and the architectural heritage in the borough.
- Work with partners to create a business support offer that provides the best opportunities to start, grow, and invest in businesses and destinations across the borough.
- Work with partners including Town & Parish Councils to create safe and vibrant towns and villages in the borough, where businesses and communities will thrive.

These aims will be delivered through the 5 focus areas relating to the issues set out in the previous section:

### **Aiming for Net Zero**

Help businesses to decarbonise their operations and undertake adaptation and mitigation measures to become resilient to climate change.

### **Creating Destinations**

Work with partners to create town centres and high streets that are mixed use destinations for employment leisure, culture, retail and community use.

### **Encouraging Enterprise & Employment**

Support enterprise and business growth in the borough to provide employment opportunities to enable residents to live well in the borough.

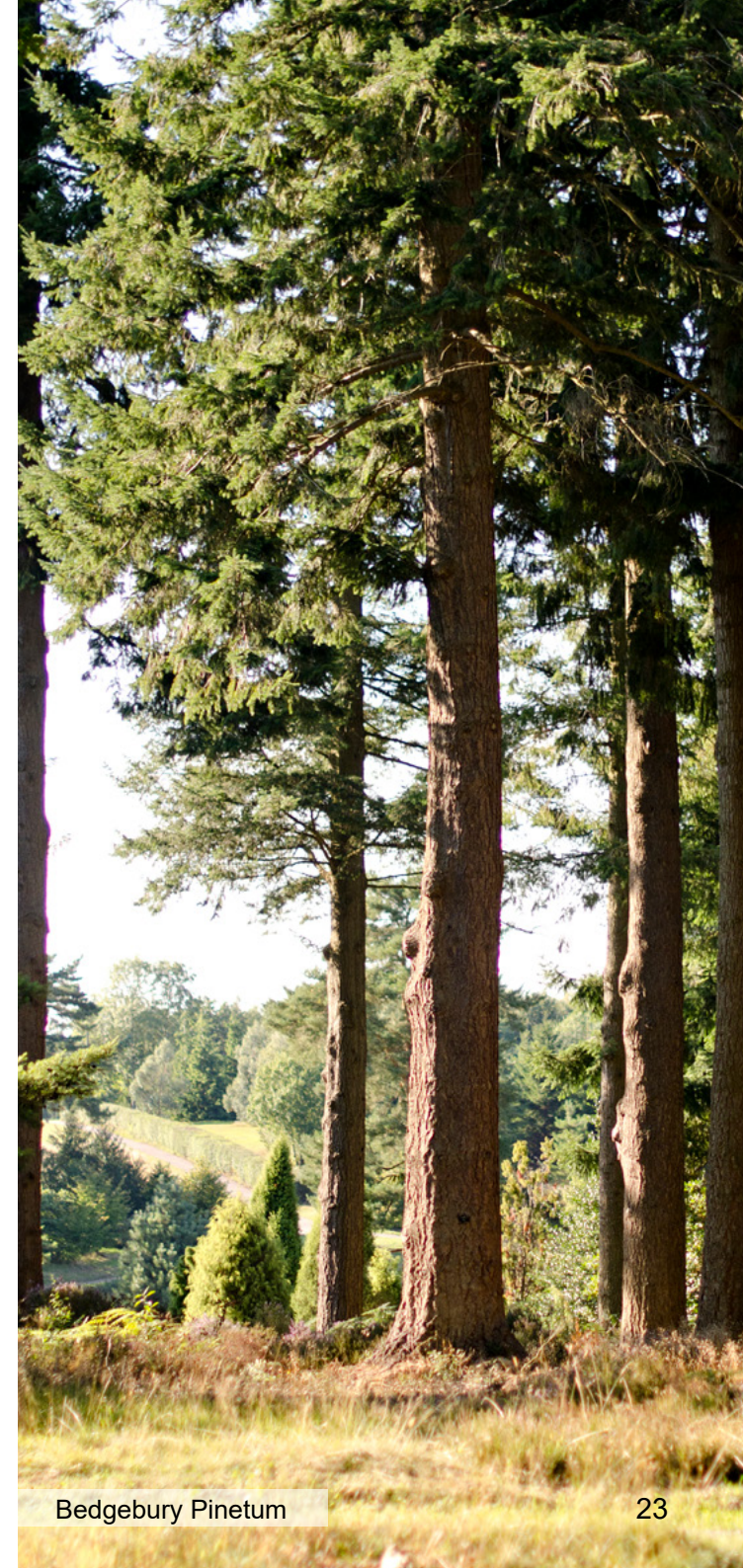
### **Supporting Rural Businesses & Communities**

Develop and diversify our rural economy and build strong communities across the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

### **Improving Sustainable Access & Connectivity**

Develop sustainable transport & digital networks to support the vitality and competitiveness of the local economy, recognising the need to meet net-zero ambitions and targets.

The Action Plan sets out projects and initiatives for each focus area.





## 4. Economic Development Action Plan

Project/Service	Timescale	Delivery Partners	How we measure success
<b>Aiming for Net Zero</b>			
Create and share resources with local businesses and stakeholders via the TWBC Climate website and business communication channels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retrofitting energy efficiencies for business premises</li> <li>• Renewable energy for business operations</li> <li>• Business travel planning</li> <li>• Supporting customers to adopt sustainable practices</li> <li>• Circular economy ideas</li> </ul>	Commenced and ongoing 2023 – 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RTW Sustainability Forum</li> <li>• RTW BID</li> <li>• Invest West Kent</li> <li>• Kent County Council</li> <li>• Town and Parish Councils</li> </ul>	Visits to Climate Website Number of businesses accessing guidance Number of businesses accessing green grants/undertaking decarbonisation actions
Signposting to green grants and/or retrofit programmes to support SMEs	Commenced and ongoing 2023 – 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth Hub</li> <li>• Kent County Council</li> <li>• Central government</li> <li>• Low Carbon Kent</li> </ul>	Number of grants awarded or participation in programmes
Support Amplifi (network to promote sustainability and community objectives within businesses)	Commenced and ongoing 2023 – 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Borough businesses</li> <li>• RTWT BID</li> </ul>	Number of businesses engaged
Trial options for last-mile delivery for goods in Royal Tunbridge Wells (E-bike deliveries)	2024 – 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RTWT BID</li> <li>• Town Centre businesses</li> <li>• UKSPF</li> </ul>	Delivery of trial scheme and report on outcomes



Project/Service	Timescale	Delivery Partners	How we measure success
<b>Creating Destinations</b>			
Visit Tunbridge Wells Marketing Plan - including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for provision of tourism information at the Amelia Scott</li> <li>• Rebuild of Visit Tunbridge Wells website</li> <li>• Promotion and marketing using Visit Tunbridge Wells branding via VTW website and social media</li> <li>• Working to establish and develop marketing partnerships with Visit Kent, RTW BID and others</li> <li>• Campaigns targeting both local, UK and international audiences</li> <li>• Distribution of miniguide to key locations in Kent, Surrey, Sussex and London</li> </ul>	Commenced and ongoing to 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>• Town &amp; Parish Councils</li> <li>• Royal Tunbridge Wells Together</li> <li>• Local businesses</li> </ul>	Adoption of Local Plan
Prepare Town Centre Plan for RTW <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement with stakeholders</li> <li>• Preparation of Town Centre Study</li> <li>• Call for Sites</li> <li>• Preparation of Town Centre Plan</li> </ul>	Commenced and ongoing to 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RTWT BID</li> <li>• RTW Town Forum</li> <li>• Town centre businesses</li> <li>• KCC</li> <li>• Creative Tunbridge Wells</li> </ul>	Adoption of Town Centre Plan
Inward Investment Marketing Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commission Invest West Kent portal</li> <li>• Develop Invest West Kent Marketing Plan</li> <li>• Ongoing work with Locate in Kent</li> <li>• Contribute to annual Kent Property Market Review</li> </ul>	Commenced and ongoing to 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>• West Kent Partners (TMBC and SDC)</li> <li>• Locate in Kent</li> <li>• Developers</li> <li>• Local Commercial Agents</li> <li>• One Media</li> </ul>	Number of new businesses locating in the Borough
Town Centre redevelopment/regeneration projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Royal Victoria Place redevelopment</li> <li>• Former Cinema site development</li> <li>• Bring BHS unit back into use</li> <li>• Farmers Market in town centre</li> </ul>	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>• Kent County Council</li> <li>• Private developers</li> </ul>	Delivery of major projects
ED issues considered in planning applications submitted to the Council	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>• Private Developers</li> <li>• Parish &amp; Town Councils</li> </ul>	ED responses to DM Team on applications



<b>Project/Service</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Delivery Partners</b>	<b>How we measure success</b>
Visit Tunbridge Wells Marketing Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for provision of tourism information at the Amelia Scott</li> <li>• Rebuild of Visit Tunbridge Wells website</li> <li>• Promotion and marketing using Visit Tunbridge Wells branding via VTW website and social media</li> <li>• Working to establish and develop marketing partnerships with Visit Kent, RTW BID and others</li> <li>• Campaigns targeting both local, UK and international audiences</li> <li>• Distribution of miniguide to key locations in Kent, Surrey, Sussex and London</li> </ul>	Commenced and ongoing to 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>• RTWT BID</li> <li>• Visit Kent</li> <li>• Visit Britain</li> <li>• Local tourism businesses</li> </ul>	Website visits Social media followers Increased engagement Attendees at networking events
Royal Tunbridge Wells Together Business Improvement District (RTWT BID) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support preparation for renewal ballot in 2024</li> <li>• Deliver Streetscene projects (e.g. High Street improvements)</li> <li>• Creative Tunbridge Wells initiatives</li> </ul>	Commenced and ongoing to 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RTWT Board</li> <li>• RTWT Levy Payers</li> <li>• Other partners</li> <li>• Creative Tunbridge Wells</li> </ul>	Successful renewal ballot in 2024 Delivery of initiatives in Business Plan Increased footfall in RTW
Support for the Creative Economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up Creative Tunbridge Wells Partnership</li> <li>• Set up Festivals Group</li> <li>• Increase usage of Southborough Civic Centre facility for cultural uses</li> <li>• Submit bid for ACE Place-Partnership Funding in 2024</li> </ul>	Commenced and on-going to 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>• Kent County Council</li> <li>• Applause Rural Touring NPO</li> <li>• Tunbridge Wells Cultural Consortium</li> <li>• Amelia Scott</li> <li>• Local creative businesses</li> <li>• The House</li> </ul>	Establishment of Creative Tunbridge Wells Steering Group Recruitment of Project Manager Establishment of Working Groups Submission of Place Partnership Funding bid



Project/Service	Timescale	Delivery Partners	How we measure success
<b>Enterprise &amp; Employment</b>			
Council Business Portal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signposting to TWBC Services</li> <li>• Signposting to Growth Hub</li> <li>• Events</li> <li>• Newsletter sign up</li> <li>• Digital and paper Welcome Pack</li> </ul>	Launched 2022, ongoing updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>• Business support organisations (e.g. FSB, Growth Hub)</li> </ul>	Feedback from local businesses on Council services Number of visits to Portal
Business Communications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly business e-newsletter</li> <li>• Social media comms – Twitter and Instagram</li> <li>• Resident's newsletter items</li> <li>• Local Magazine items</li> </ul>	Commenced 2022 and ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>• Local businesses</li> <li>• Other partners</li> </ul>	Number of businesses receiving newsletter Number of social media followers Number of employer visits Attendees at business events
Develop Business Welcome Pack <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare information</li> <li>• Collate partner information</li> </ul>	Launched in 2023 and ongoing updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RTWT BID</li> <li>• Other TWBC Departments</li> <li>• Amelia Scott</li> </ul>	Number of packs distributed and visits to website for information?
West Kent Business Support Programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hub portal</li> <li>• Business advice/mentoring</li> <li>• Small grants</li> <li>• Training/networking events</li> </ul>	Launched in 2023, ongoing to 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>• West Kent Partners</li> <li>• Smarter Society (Contractor)</li> </ul>	Number of businesses supported Number of businesses increasing revenue
Develop People and Skills projects funded by Year 3 UKSPF	2024 – 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• West Kent Partners (SDC and TMBC)</li> <li>• Jobcentre Plus</li> <li>• Local support providers</li> </ul>	To be confirmed
Annual Jobs & Training Fairs across West Kent Local Jobs Fairs in borough	Commenced and ongoing annual events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DWP</li> <li>• Invest West Kent (SDC, TMBC, TWBC)</li> </ul>	Number of events Job seekers attending Businesses attending Jobs/training secured
Making links between businesses and schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership with Kent &amp; Medway Careers Hub/Enterprise Adviser network</li> <li>• Promoting apprenticeships etc.</li> </ul>	Commenced and ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest West Kent (TWBC, TMBC, SDC)</li> </ul>	
Working with Further Education and Higher Education providers to improve offer for borough residents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canterbury Christ Church University</li> <li>• North Kent College (Tonbridge/Hadlow Campus)</li> </ul>	Commenced and ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>• North Kent College</li> <li>• Canterbury Christ Church University</li> <li>• University of Kent</li> </ul>	FE and HE courses being offered within the Borough/West Kent



Project/Service	Timescale	Delivery Partners	How we measure success
<b>Rural Economy</b>			
Visit Tunbridge Wells Marketing Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop Tourist Information Points across Borough</li> <li>• Miniguide distribution to accommodation and pubs</li> <li>• Review and improve VTW website with additional info for rural areas</li> <li>• VE Networking Events outside RTW</li> <li>• Social media promotion for rural businesses</li> <li>• Commission map of borough for website and other use</li> </ul>	Commenced 2022, ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>• Visit Kent</li> <li>• Local attractions</li> <li>• Local accommodation providers</li> <li>• Kent High Weald Partnership</li> <li>• High Weald AONB</li> <li>• Parish &amp; Town Councils</li> <li>• Explore Kent</li> </ul>	Visitors to the borough (Cambridge Model) Visits to the Visit Tunbridge Wells website
Rural Heritage Place-making UKSPF project focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hawkhurst</li> <li>• Sandhurst</li> </ul>	2023 – 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amelia Scott</li> <li>• Parish Councils</li> </ul>	Number of community-based heritage programmes delivered
Delivery of Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) Grants	2024 – 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest West Kent (TWBC, TMBC, SDC)</li> <li>• Parish &amp; Town Councils</li> <li>• Local Partnership Group (formerly ELAG)</li> </ul>	Number of local businesses experiencing growth and increased turnover Number of community-led programmes as a result of support Increased visitor numbers and footfall Number of community energy projects funded
Delivery of UKSPF Community Grants Fund	Commenced in 2022, ongoing to 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parish &amp; Town Councils</li> </ul>	Number of Parish/Town Councils projects delivered through grants
Neighbourhood Plans in place	Commenced and ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parish &amp; Town Councils</li> </ul>	Number of adopted Neighbourhood Plans
Delivery of high-speed broadband	Commenced and ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kent County Council</li> <li>• Broadband suppliers</li> <li>• Parish &amp; Town Councils</li> </ul>	Improved speeds across borough
Assets of Community Value List (Community Right to Bid)	Commenced in 2012 and ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parish &amp; Town Councils</li> <li>• Community groups</li> <li>• Local residents (on electoral role)</li> </ul>	Meeting targets for Community Right to bid legislation



Project/Service	Timescale	Delivery Partners	How we measure success
<b>Improving Sustainable Access &amp; Connectivity</b>			
Support work on the new Tunbridge Wells Local Plan (Submission Local Plan 2021) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transport evidence base prepared to support the plan including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Cycling &amp; Walking Infrastructure Plan</li> <li>Tunbridge Wells Bus Study</li> </ul> </li> <li>Ongoing partnership work with KCC on Local Transport Plan 5</li> <li>Engage with Transport for the South East on regional Strategy</li> </ul>	Commenced and ongoing to 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kent County Council</li> <li>National Highways</li> <li>Transport for the South East</li> <li>Active Travel England</li> </ul>	New Tunbridge Wells Local Plan adopted Infrastructure Delivery Plan prepared Bids for funding submitted
Active Travel Projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Liveable Streets pilot</li> <li>Design work for cycle route from Rusthall – RTW Town Centre across Commons</li> <li>Promote A26 active travel corridor</li> <li>Promote A264 active travel corridor</li> <li>Partnership with RTWT BID and KCC to upgrade the High Street scheme</li> <li>RTWT Streetscene projects</li> </ul>	2022 – 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>Kent County Council</li> <li>Active Travel England</li> <li>National Highways</li> <li>Bus operators</li> <li>Southeastern</li> <li>Network Rail</li> <li>RTW Town Forum</li> <li>RTWT BID</li> <li>Town and Parish Councils</li> </ul>	Delivery of projects via Capability Fund and Active Travel Fund Tranche 4 Improved streetscene in RTWT and other high streets
Develop sustainable transport project pipeline in readiness for bid opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify pipeline of schemes</li> <li>Commission survey/design work</li> <li>Prepare and submit bids</li> </ul>	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>Kent County Council</li> <li>KMEP</li> <li>Active Travel England</li> <li>Tonbrige &amp; Tunbridge Wells Bicycle Users Group</li> </ul>	Successful bids to DfT/Active Travel England and others
Work with public transport operators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitation of Public Transport Forum</li> <li>Continuing involvement in Bus Service Improvement Plan Groups including West Kent Enhanced Partnership and Local Bus Focus Group</li> <li>Joint working with Southeastern and Network Rail on improving stations, including Access for All scheme at High Brooms</li> <li>Respond to consultations by transport operators to lobby for improvements</li> </ul>	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>Arriva/Other Bus Operators</li> <li>Network Rail</li> <li>Southeastern</li> <li>Kent County Council</li> <li>Borough Public Transport Forum</li> <li>JC Decaux</li> </ul>	Improvements to and retention of existing bus services in the borough Negotiation of s106 funding for public transport as appropriate
Parking facilities and services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparation of Borough Parking Strategy</li> <li>Improve signage in RTW to car and coach parking</li> <li>Explore options for bus layover/waiting spaces in RTW</li> </ul>	Commenced and ongoing to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</li> <li>Kent County Council</li> <li>Royal Tunbridge Wells Together BID</li> </ul>	Town centre performance – vacant retail units etc. Provision of information about parking

## 5. Role of the Council

This Strategy is set in the context of limited local authority resources and therefore the Council will work closely with its many partners to deliver the actions set out above and maximise opportunities for continued sustainable economic development.

The role of the Council includes:

- Acting as a key information point for borough businesses
- Engaging with local businesses to understand their issues and concerns
- Championing and promoting local businesses
- Developing economic development projects as resources permit (for example with UK Shared Prosperity Funding)
- Building effective economic development partnerships
- Commissioning evidence base studies as required
- Preparing and submitting funding bids when opportunities arise
- Reviewing and updating the Action Plan and reporting on success

A full list of partner organisations is set out in Appendix B.



**TWBC**  
Business  
Information | News | Events





## Appendix A: Tunbridge Wells UKSPF Projects

UKSPF Interventions	Project Name	Allocated Budget	Match Funding	UKSPF Outputs	UKSPF Outcomes
E1: Improvements to town centres & high streets	Royal Tunbridge Wells Streetscene Improvements Project Lead: TWBC	<b>Total: £100,000</b> (Y1) £15,000 (Y2) £35,000 (Y3) £50,000	<b>Total £15,000 – RTWT BID</b> (Y1) £15,000 (Y2) Possible BID match (Y3) Possible BID match	Amount of public realm created or improved = <b>3853 (m2)</b>	Increased footfall = <b>5%</b>
E3: Creation of and improvements to local green spaces	Sherwood Lakes Improvement Scheme Project Lead: Kent High Weald Partnership	<b>Total: £20,000</b> (Y1) £20,000	No Match Funding	Amount of green or blue space created or improved = <b>9000 (m2)</b>	Increased users of facilities/amenities = <b>10%</b>
E6: Local arts, cultural, heritage & creative activities	Creative Tunbridge Wells Project Lead: TWBC	<b>Total: £85,000</b> (Y1) £15,000 (Y2) £35,000 (Y3) £35,000	<b>Total £23,800 from Art Council England</b> (Y1) £9000 (Y2) £14,800	Number of organisations receiving non-financial support = <b>20</b>  Number of local events or activities supported = <b>25</b>	Number of community-led arts, cultural, heritage and creative programmes as a result of support = <b>2</b>
	Rural Heritage Placemaking Project Lead: The Amelia Scott	<b>Total: £70,000</b> (Y2) £35,000 (Y3) £35,000	TBC		
E9: Impactful volunteering and/or social action projects	Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Community Kitchen Project Lead: Cranbrook & Sissinghurst PC	<b>Total: £17,000</b> (Y1) £17,000	<b>Total £3600</b> (Y1) £3600	Number of volunteering opportunities supported = <b>10</b>  Number of projects = <b>1</b>	Volunteering numbers as a result of support <b>10</b>

UKSPF Interventions	Project Name	Allocated Budget	Match Funding	UKSPF Outputs	UKSPF Outcomes
E10: Local sports facilities, tournaments, teams & leagues	Southborough Football Pitch Drainage  Project Lead: Southborough Town Council	<b>Total: £70,000</b> (Y3) £70,000	TBC	Number of facilities supported/created = <b>1</b>	Increased users of facilities/amenities = <b>5%</b>
E11: Capacity building & infrastructure support local groups	Community Grants Programme  Project Lead: TWBC	<b>Total: £58,500</b> (Y1) £19,420 (Y2) £23,000 (Y3) £16,080	Total – not known but project contributions likely from Parish & Town Councils	Number of organisations receiving grants = <b>10</b> Number of facilities supported/created = <b>3</b>	Number of new or improved community facilities as a result of support = <b>3</b>
E16: Open markets & town centre retail & service sector	Royal Tunbridge Wells Farmers Market  Project Lead: TWBC	<b>Total: £10,000</b> (Y2) £10,000	No match funding	Number of local markets supported = <b>1</b>	Increased footfall = <b>10%</b>
E17: Development & promotion of visitor economy	Visit Tunbridge Wells Marketing Programme  Project Lead: TWBC	<b>Total: £35,000</b> (Y1) £5,000 (Y2) £15,000 (Y3) £15,000	<b>Total £33,000 from TWBC Economic Development</b> (Y1) £11,000 (Y2) £11,000 (Y3) £11,000	Number of businesses receiving non-financial support = <b>525</b> Number of people reached = <b>325,000</b>	Increased visitor numbers = <b>15%</b>
E22: Enterprise infrastructure & employment / innovation sites	Vacant Commercial/Retail Unit Support  Project Lead: TWBC	<b>Total: £260,000</b> (Y3) £260,000	TBC	Number of commercial buildings developed or improved = <b>1</b> M2 of commercial buildings developed or improved = <b>4000m2</b>	Jobs created = <b>20</b>



UKSPF Interventions	Project Name	Allocated Budget	Match Funding	UKSPF Outputs	UKSPF Outcomes
E24: Training hubs, business support offers, incubators & accelerators	West Kent Business Support Scheme  Project Lead: Invest West Kent (IWK)	<b>Total: £54,500</b> (Y1) £4,500 (Y2) £25,000 (Y3) £25,000	<b>Total £109,000 from SDC and TMBC (Invest West Kent)</b> (Y1) £9000 (Y2) £50,000 (Y3) £50,000	Number of businesses receiving non-financial support = <b>20</b>  Number of businesses receiving grants = <b>20</b>	Number of early-stage firms which increase their revenue following support = <b>10</b>
E29: Supporting decarbonisation & improving natural environment	Commercial E-Bike/E-Cargo Bike Scheme  Project Lead: TWBC	<b>Total: 25,000</b> (Y3) £25,000	TBC	Number of businesses receiving non-financial support = <b>10</b>	Number of businesses adopting new to the firm technologies or processes = <b>10</b>
E33: Employment support for economically inactive people	TBC	<b>Total: £80,000</b> (Y3) £80,000	TBC	Number of socially excluded people accessing support = <b>25</b>	Number of people engaged in job-searching following support = <b>200</b>
E35: Enrichment & volunteering activities	TBC	<b>Total: £75,000</b> (Y3) £75,000	TBC	Number of volunteering opportunities supported = <b>10</b>	Number of people experiencing reduced structural barriers into employment and into skills provision = <b>50</b>

## Appendix B: Tunbridge Wells REPF Projects

REPF Interventions	Project Name	Allocated Budget	Match Funding	REPF Outcomes
2.2 Capital grant funding for investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups	Decarbonisation of the Weald Sports Centre	<b>Total: £110,901</b> (Y2) £110,901	Funding from the Borough Council and SALIX Fund.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased perception of facilities or amenities (2.2)</li> <li>• Number of community energy projects funded (2.2)</li> </ul>
1.1 Capital Grant Funding for Small Scale Investment in Micro and Small Enterprises in Rural Areas  1.3 Capital Grant Funding for Developing and Promoting the Visitor Economy  2.3 Capital Grant Funding for Creation and Improvements to Local Rural Green Spaces  2.4 Capital Grant Funding for Existing Cultural, Historic and Heritage Institutions that make up the Local Cultural Heritage Offer  2.6 Capital Grant Funding for Active Travel Enhancements in the Local Area.  2.7 Capital Grant Funding for Rural Circular Economy Projects	West Kent Rural Grants Scheme	<b>Total: £ 332,703</b> (Y3) £332,703	50% match from applicants, reducing to 20% in extraordinary circumstances.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of businesses experiencing growth (1.1)</li> <li>• Number of businesses increasing their turnover (1.3)</li> <li>• Increased footfall (2.3)</li> <li>• Increased visitor numbers (2.4)</li> <li>• Increased perception of facilities or amenities (2.6)</li> <li>• Number of community-led programmes as a result of support (2.7)</li> </ul>



## Appendix C: List of partner organisations

Active Travel England	Kent and Medway Growth Hub	Seven Wonders of the Weald
Amplifi	Kent Apprenticeships	Sevenoaks Chamber of Commerce
Arts Council England	Kent County Council (KCC)	Southeastern Rail
Assembly Hall Theatre	Kent High Weald Partnership (KHWP)	The Amelia Scott Cultural Centre
Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU)	Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce	The Education People
Cultural Consortium	Kent District/Borough Councils	The Forum (cultural venue)
Creative Tunbridge Wells	Local Bus Operators	Town and Country Housing (TCH)
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)	Local Businesses	Town and Parish Councils
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)	Local Schools	Transport for the South East
Explore Kent	Locate in Kent (LIK)	Trinity Theatre
Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)	National Highways	Tonbridge & Tunbridge Wells Bicycle Users Group (TWBUG)
High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit	Network Rail	Tunbridge Wells in Bloom
IMAGO	North Kent College (Tonbridge/Hadlow)	University of Kent
JC Decaux	Private Sector Developers	Visit England
Jobcentre Plus (DWP)	Produced in Kent	Visit Kent
Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP)	Royal Tunbridge Wells Together (RTWT) Business Improvement District	Invest West Kent
	Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum (residents)	West Kent Mind
	Safe Town Partnership (STP)	

## Appendix D: Relevant Plans and Strategies

There are a number of plans and strategies emerging or already published that establish the context for this new Strategy. We are not seeking to duplicate these, but to make sure that there is alignment with the issues and actions set out in this Strategy.

- Building a Better Borough: Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Plan 2022-24 - TWBC
- Borough Climate Strategy 2023 – 2028 - TWBC
- Borough Cultural Strategy 2014 - 2024 – TWBC
- Borough Parking Strategy 2015 - 2026 – TWBC
- Borough Transport Strategy 2015 - 2026 – TWBC
- New Local Plan Submission/Site Allocations Development Plan Document: including
  - Settlement Role and Function Study 2017 and update in 2021
  - Economic Development Topic Paper 2021
  - Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Economic Needs Study 2016
  - Tunbridge Wells Retail and Leisure Study (updated in 2022)
- Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Office Study (updated in 2022)
- Hotel Capacity Study 2017
- Retail, Commercial Leisure and Town Centre Use Study (updated in 2021)
- Tunbridge Wells Cultural and Creative Framework (2012 and 2019)
- HJA Evidence Base for TWBC Recovery Strategy (2022)
- Case for West Kent (2022) - IWK
- West Kent Priorities for Growth (2022) - IWK
- Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy (2021) - SELEP
- Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy (2021) - KMEP
- Council Strategy 2022-26 - KCC
- Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth Without Gridlock 2016-2031 – KCC
- KCC Business Intelligence Reports
- Active Travel Strategy (2018 refresh) – KCC
- Economic Impact of Tourism, Tunbridge Wells 2021 – Visit Kent
- Local Skills Improvement Plan (2022) – KICC
- Transport Strategy for South East (2022) – TfSE
- Levelling Up White Paper (2021) – Government
- Skills for Jobs (2021) – Government
- Build Back Greener (2021) – Government
- Powering Up Britain: The Net Zero Growth Plan (2023) - Government
- UK Innovation Strategy (2021) -Government
- UK Digital Strategy (2022) - Government
- National AI Strategy (2021) - Government
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2023) - Government
- National Disability Strategy (2021) – Government
- Alison Rose Review (2023) – NatWest
- Build Back Better (2021) – Government
- Spring Budget (2023) – Government
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund Prospectus (2022) – Government
- Rural England Prosperity Fund Prospectus (2022) – Government



## Appendix E: Transport Projects

Project Summary	Timescale	Delivery
New cycle route between Langton Green/Rusthall and RTW town centre via the Commons (LCWIP Phase 1)	Design 2023 Delivery 2024-25	Funding for design work received as part of Capability Fund.
Improved A26 Cycle Route between RTW and Tonbridge Town Centre (LCWIP Phase 2)	Not known	Future Active Travel Fund Tranche S106 funding
A264 Pembury Road Cycle Route (LCWIP Phase 1)	Not known	Future Active Travel Fund Tranche s106 funding
Walking Route improvements into RTW town centre (LCWIP Phase 1)	Ongoing	KCC Maintenance Budget Future Active Travel Fund Tranche
Hawkenbury to Town Centre Cycle Route (LCWIP Phase 1)	Not known	Future Active Travel Fund Tranche s106 Funding
Expansion of Co-Wheels Car Club – increased number of vehicles	2023	s106 Funding
Increased number of EV Charging Points in Town Centre Car Parks	2023 – 2024	TWBC
Explore options for additional bus layover spaces in town centre	2023	TWBC KCC
Trial cargo bike scheme for business deliveries in town centre	2024 – 2025	UKSPF
Other Bus Service Improvement Plan Projects including: Exploration of options to provide Demand Responsive Transport services Lower fares and more flexible ticketing, electronic and smart card ticketing Better integration with other modes of transport including rail and active travel Modern comfortable vehicles with a move to zerocarbon vehicles Traffic management measures that will aid reliability of buses on the network Improvements to bus stop facilities including passenger information Improved information for passengers planning journeys	From 2023 – 2040	KCC Bus Service Improvement Plan
Improved pedestrian and cycle infrastructure on Mount Ephraim between Royal Chase and Grosvenor Road/A26 mini-roundabout	2023 – 2025	S106 Funding
Explore options for e-bike and/or e-scooter rental schemes in town centre	2023 – 2025	To be confirmed

## Appendix F: Employment and Land Allocations

Defined Key Employment Area	Mix of Uses Appropriate
Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre	Class E – including retail, financial, professional services and other business uses, food and drink, non-residential institutions, assembly and leisure, education and health  Class F – appropriate leisure uses Class C – hotels, dwelling houses and residential institutions and other sui generis uses of an appropriate type and scale, including drinking establishments and hot food takeaways
Royal Tunbridge Wells North Farm/ Longfield Road area	Class B – general industry and storage and distribution Class E – financial, professional and other business uses, retail, food and drink, and leisure Class F – appropriate leisure uses and other sui generis uses of an appropriate type and scale
Southborough High Brooms Industrial Area	Class E – financial, professional and other business uses, and appropriate leisure uses Class F – appropriate leisure uses Class B8 - storage and distribution and other sui generis uses of an appropriate type and scale
Paddock Wood Eldon Way and West of Maidstone Road	Class E – financial, professional and other business uses Class B2 – general industry Class B8 - storage and distribution
Paddock Wood Transfesa Road East and West	Class E – financial, professional and other business uses Class B2 – general industry Class B8 - storage and distribution
Gill's Green Business Park	Class E – financial, professional and other business uses Class B2 – general industry Class B8 - storage and distribution
Capel Brook Farm	Class E – financial, professional and other business uses Class B2 – general industry Class B8 - storage and distribution



Table: Land allocations in the new Tunbridge Wells Local Plan (Submission Local Plan 2021)

Site	Settlement/ Parish	Policy Number	Net developable area (ha)
Land adjacent to Longfield Road	Royal Tunbridge Wells	AL/RTW 17	13.4
Land east of Maidstone Road	Paddock Wood	STR/SS 1	6.6
Land east of Transfesa Road	Paddock Wood	STR/SS 1	4.6
Hawkhurst Station Business Park	Gill's Green	AL/HA 7	1.2

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