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Kent: a Virtual City Region

Authors: Donna McDonald, Alison St.Clair Baker & Robert Hardy

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KENT: A VIRTUAL CITY-REGION

(by Donna McDonald, Alison St.Clair Baker & Robert Hardy ¹)

This paper tells the unfinished story of growth and regeneration in the county of Kent in south east England and how Kent County Council is responding to the needs of its residents in aiming to create connected and sustainable communities – communities with a heart.

Kent County Council's priorities, the National Shared Priorities for Local Government and the current growth agenda in Kent coincide on a wide range of policy areas. This provides fertile ground for local partners and Government to develop genuinely innovative responses to the issues facing what is rapidly becoming a world-class virtual city-region.

This paper illustrates how key service priorities and the growth and regeneration agenda complement each other.

In telling our story then, we reveal:

- *Some of the changes and challenges* facing Kent - both as a part of south east England confronted by significant global and national pressures, and as a county with significant social, economic and cultural differences within its boundaries; and
- *What Kent and its partners are doing to meet these challenges* – by forging partnerships and alliances across sectors eg: national government, community agencies, businesses, research institutions, and across all fields of expertise eg:, education, health, social care, employment, housing, arts and culture, commerce.

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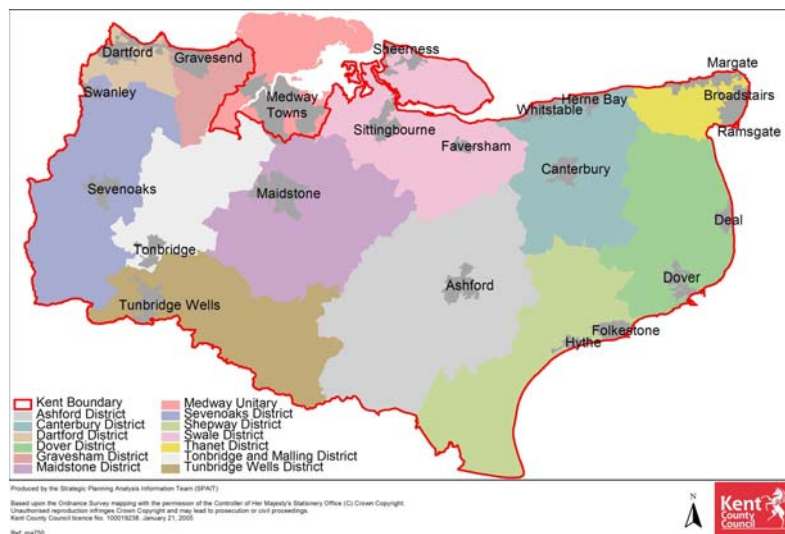
KENT: CHANGE & GROWTH

Kent is an exciting place full of opportunities. Strategically located between London and mainland Europe, Kent is a frontier county. It draws on its heritage to pioneer new responses to the demanding claims on its resources - massive new housing development, the Channel Tunnel Rail Link to France, asylum seekers and refugees, and the extremes of poverty and wealth within its boundaries.

Night view from space Kent connecting Europe



Kent – Administrative Boundaries²



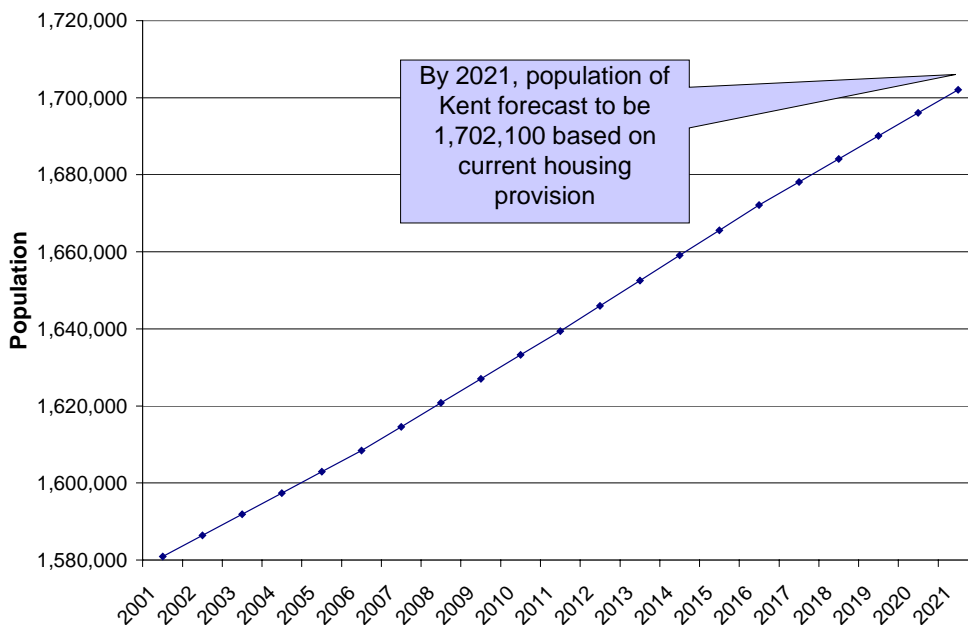
² Kent operates a two-tier local government system with County and District Councils. Kent County Council has been under Conservative administration since 1997 under the leadership of Sir Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, who is also Chair of the UK Local Government Association.

With just over 1.3 million people – and experiencing a population growth of nearly 3% in the ten years between 1993-2003 - Kent covers 2% of the population of England; is half the size of Wales, bigger than Northern Ireland and bigger than 12 US states. Three-quarters of Kent residents have lived in the county for more than fifteen years. In some ways, it is a microcosm of England as a whole, with much the same full range of social conditions. An overwhelming majority are here because their roots are here³. Their levels of satisfaction with Kent as a place to live are exceptional.⁴

Nevertheless, Kent faces certain pressures:

- *increasing population* - based on the current planned housing provision as outlined in the Kent and Medway Structure Plan, by 2021 it is forecast that the population of Kent will be just over 1.7 million, an increase of 121,100 people (7.7%) between 2001 and 2021, equivalent to the current size of Swale Borough in the north of the county;

Population Forecast Kent and Medway⁵



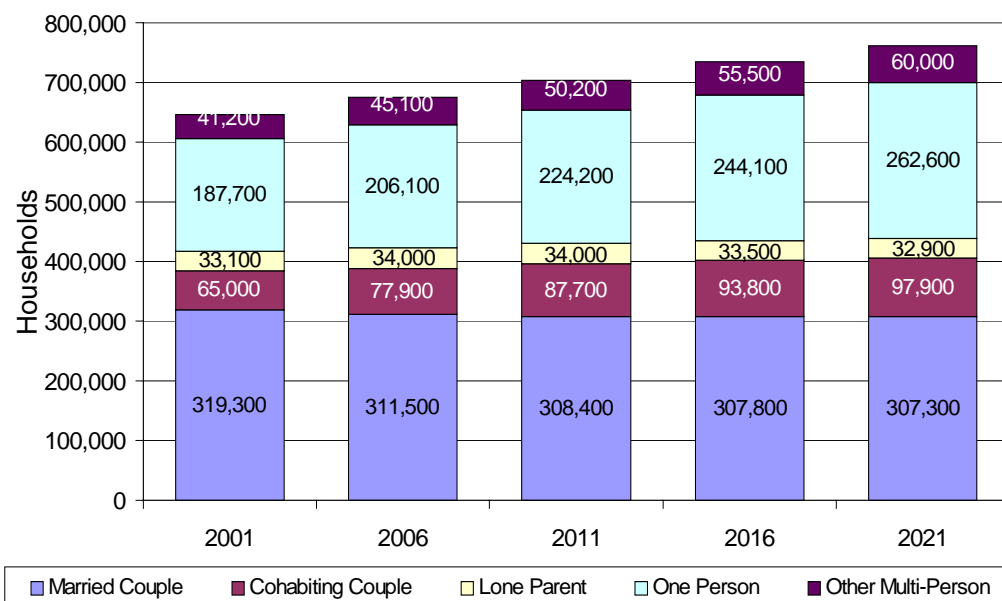
³ KENT COUNTY COUNCIL - Best Value Performance Indicators, BMG, December 2002

⁴ KENT COUNTY COUNCIL - Best Value Performance Indicators, BMG, December 2002

⁵ Medway Unitary was created as a single tier local authority by the national Labour government in 1997. Nevertheless, most residents still consider themselves to come from Kent.

- *the changing demographics of Kent's population*, with implications for increased demands for infrastructure (e.g., housing, transport and education) and services (e.g., family and child support, disability services, aged care support);

Kent household change



- *increased pressures on individual, family and community wellbeing* arising from the continuing and widening gap between rich and poor; and the slow pace of intervention that tackles poverty, unemployment and violence and environmental degradation;
- *increased demands on the tax base* combined with competing priorities and growing public expectations of government's role and capacity to intervene quickly and appropriately to safeguard the quality of people's lives; and
- *the changing role of local government* arising from a range of factors including national government demands for public sector reform together with the recognition that local, community based responses are more desirable and effective than centralised service delivery mechanisms.

Local Area Agreements & Public Service Boards ⁶

Ministers and Government Spending Departments have acknowledged that the conventional machinery of national controls, targets, ring fenced funding, inspection, audit and direct management from Whitehall are failing to deliver the improvements in public services that the public expect. Also, the difficulties of joining up government nationally have been recognised and there is a growing realisation that a new framework for local decision making and collaboration is needed.

The launch of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) has received widespread support from Ministers and civil servants. The parameters of LAAs have yet to be fully defined. The new Public Service Boards (PSBs) are being encouraged by Government to be ambitious in extending their role across the governance of all public services. The new policies are being pursued as an act of faith as part of a growing belief that local partners are best placed to sort out many of the highly complex problems that confront modern society. Devolving to the locality and joint working between local agencies are viewed as the most effective means for making progress.

Kent is fortunate to have been chosen as an LAA pilot and we are all being encouraged to be bold in defining the role, functions and funding for the PSB. We have begun an exciting period of learning, experimentation and risk taking to see if together we can bring about a step change in the quality and effectiveness of all public services delivered to the people of Kent.

The scale of housing and land development being sought by the national government is affecting the whole of Kent and presents a range of major environmental, educational, social, employment and economic challenges for the county. More is happening in Kent than in any other county with plans for 116,000 new houses and some 80,000 new jobs by 2021 and three major development “growth areas” in Ashford, Swale and Kent-Thameside.

Kent County Council’s response has been to create a vision – shared by our partners - of a prosperous and exciting future for Kent, a place where people want to live, work and

⁶ In 2004, the Local Government Association first introduced the concept of Public Service Boards (PSBs) and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister launched Local Area Agreements (LAAs). Kent County Council has established the first PSB and is one of only 21 councils piloting a LAA in the UK.

enjoy themselves. *Kent – The Next Four Years* and *Kent – What Price Growth?* set out how this vision is to be achieved in the short and long term.

The Kent Partnership brings together key members of the public, private and voluntary sectors. Working through partnership has led to a “joining up” in delivery. The commitment of all partners to deliver projects and programmes, which raise standards in Kent, has been impressive. Working together has, as expected, proved more effective than working alone. The Kent Partnership is widely recognised as one of the most successful and dynamic local strategic partnerships in England. Key to that success has been the active contribution of its members in lobbying, influencing and responding positively to promote opportunities. The guiding principles are:

- **Jobs:** securing investment in new jobs, growing existing companies and developing a skilled workforce. With this last point in mind, the partnership encourages better links between employers and the education sector.
- **Infrastructure Funding:** supporting the work to secure long term infrastructure funding; identifying the county-wide funding requirement for infrastructure and public services; working together to raise funding from development land values, private finance initiatives, public/private programmes, venture capital and innovative funding streams.
- **Quality:** ensuring that developments are sustainable and of the highest quality in their design.
- **Lobbying:** presenting a unified voice for Kent in lobbying for improved rail services in Kent for example.

Kent County Council promotes alliances across all the sectors – government, private, community - into education, employment, industry, science, health, and social services.

These alliances support the development of:

- **People** to improve their quality of life;
- **Communities** to build their capacity and promote renewal;

- **Places** to provide a sense of identity and belonging, respect for our cultural, natural and creative heritage, establish better public places and provide infrastructure and services informed by aesthetics, excellent design and daring effectiveness; and
- **Enterprises** to develop fresh and enduring businesses across all fields of knowledge, services and products.



TRANSFORMING THE PUBLIC SECTOR

“I’m from the Government and I’m here to help you” (Ronald Reagan said this was the scariest 10 word sentence in the English language).

A quiet revolution is taking place in Kent’s public sector – one which is not yet complete, but which is certainly well in train. In pursuit of the noble goal - “Supporting Independence: promoting opportunity, achievement, and participation for all” - this revolution is centred on renegotiating the relationships across the public sector (at national and local levels) and with the private and community sectors. Public goods are created, provided or delivered in a way that seeks to reduce people’s reliance on government and increases their capacity to shape the course of their lives.

While the public policy goal of increasing people’s life chances is not new, the means by which that goal is now being pursued in Kent are:

- A greater willingness to debate the “ownership” of traditional roles and responsibilities, with a view to either transferring them or sharing them within and across all sectors;

- A growing daringness to be flexible and to exercise ingenuity in problem solving and resource sharing eg., by moving away from conventional linear and hierarchical structures in delivering programmes to “virus-like” ways of transporting solutions into one area and onto another; and
- An increased energy in finding ways to involve local people in local decision making on matters which affect their community and their families.

SUPPORTING INDEPENDENCE

The Supporting Independence Programme aims to help people to lift themselves out of dependency and into independence and more fulfilled lives. At the same time it aims to recycle part of any benefits saving back into preventative work through education, community and social programmes. The programme is based on the assumption that the quality of life for everyone is improved by being in work.

Employment is clearly important for economic reasons. However, it also has other positive effects on well being. Relationships, family life and health in general all tend to be better when people are able to do fulfilling work. The challenge of Supporting Independence is to create ‘joined-up’ systems, which enable families and individuals, sometimes in the poorest parts of Kent, to access worthwhile training and fulfilling jobs.

Deprivation, unemployment and general low esteem put families at serious risk of a range of problems including child care issues, domestic violence, crime and mental health; problems to which the answers are generally reactive. This programme aims instead to break the ‘spiral of deprivation’ by bringing partner agencies together to target local communities where there is a clear need.

Access for all to lifelong learning is pivotal to supporting independence and regeneration. At the centre of how Kent County Council sees schools responding to the growth agenda is the idea of the school at the heart of its community, and the active participation in children’s learning by their parents.

FROM PARTNERSHIPS TO NETWORKS

Partnerships have been the name of the game in recent years. We know that our stakeholders and clients are both our greatest supporters and our greatest critics. We learn much from them. We have come to value the advantages of developing shared opportunities and generating goodwill through partnerships and collaboration.

Swale Forward

Partnership working – Too often in recent times regeneration partnerships have been built on a basis of mutual loathing for the single reason of accessing resources and have often proved to be “paper partnerships” that break down at the first sign of conflict or the loss of external resources. This approach to partnership is no longer viable or sensible if the long term strategies and ambitions are to be achieved and sustained.

Swale Forward Partnership is an unincorporated structure where most decisions are based on the consensus of members, a consensus that isn't dogged by resentment and infighting but enriched with discussion and differences of opinion. This has enabled the relatively new partnership to hit the ground running and, where necessary, vary pace to respond to an ever-changing external environment. The advantage that Swale Forward had was that there was little history of major regeneration activity (and associated layers of partnerships) and there was a strong commitment to deliver projects which had been regarded as priorities, but without available resources, for a number of years.

Therefore the challenge we all face is to build robust partnerships that can allow and withstand internal conflict and differences of opinion and along with the heat, provide light that illuminates the way ahead.

However, “networks are the language of our times”⁷. These relationships or alliances are more complex than the familiar simple, linear-like partnerships. From Al-Qaeda to VISA; from internet to rail-networks; from the mobile phone and SMS to email and

⁷ “Network Logic: Who governs in an interconnected world?” Edited by Helen McCarthy, Paul Miller, Paul Skidmore, published by Demos (collection 20) 2004, www.demos.co.uk

word of mouth and six degrees of separation: networks are all around us. We have networks of friends and colleagues. We are part of them. We rely on them. Networks shape our world.

We need to understand what this means for the way we work together to share, develop and implement ideas.

Kent Public Service Board

The Kent Public Service Board was established on 29 September 2004 and brings together the key public sector decision-makers in the county. It is a non-statutory body which can be characterised as the "Group Board" for Kent's public services, each of which continues to operate independently but spending a combined annual budget of about £7 billion. It exists within and is accountable to the Kent Partnership.

The purpose of the Board is to support the work of the Kent Partnership in realising *the Vision for Kent* and to join together the totality of public services in Kent. It will establish a shared agenda of priorities and seek greater freedoms and flexibilities from central government. The Board will reconcile competing interests and combine resources where necessary to deliver joint outcomes and transformational change.

The Board will address:

- The major strategic issues confronting the county and an agreed Agenda to improve the quality of life for the people of Kent;
- The development of a successful Local Area Agreement and Local Public Service Agreement 2 achieved through a new form of partnership between Kent and Central Government;
- Better co-ordinated direction of public services in the county with the potential to produce 'cutting edge' improvements in service delivery for users and better Value For Money.
- The need for freedom from regulations and central control.

ADAPTATION AND RENEWAL

Just as constant change and adaptation are key features of cultural, social and economic renewal, so must governments' role in shaping a dynamic, creative, inventive society also change.

The first responsibility of any government is to demonstrate leadership based on principles of good governance, such as openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and responsiveness. At the same time, government also has a responsibility to encourage and support experimentation, risk taking and inventiveness.

These tensions need to be balanced somehow within the complexities of our hyper-connected, network-age. The old fashioned linear and hierarchical approach to developing and implementing ideas, policies and programmes on a large-scale is giving way to more interactive and adaptable approaches, custom-designed for smaller localities and even personalised for single individuals.

The Kent Agreement: Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA)

The Kent Agreement has proved to be a promising vehicle for radical innovation and improvement in local services.

This is a contract between Kent County Council and the national government to deliver 12 jointly selected outcomes – measurable improvements to the quality of public services in Kent – in return for financial reward and specific freedoms and flexibilities. Some of these outcomes are County Council services, some are the main responsibility of partners. Kent County Council takes on the role of prime contractor on behalf of all those agencies who have a part to play in delivering the LPSA targets. PSA targets must be “stretching”, which is to say set to a higher standard and rate of improvement than would otherwise be the case. Targets are set around three years ahead. LPSAs are voluntary arrangements. If PSA targets fall short, no-one is any the worse off, but if the PSA is successful, the Government pays a reward grant which can be reinvested into services. Bringing together Kent County Council, partners and Government with a single focus delivers and secures improved public services for the residents of Kent.

March 2004 marked the end of Kent's three-year Local Public Service Agreement with the national government. Ten of the twelve targets have been fully delivered triggering a Performance Reward Grant of £21.5m. According to Office of the Deputy Prime Minister officials, Kent's result is the best of any council so far, which they described as 'outstanding'. But most importantly, Kent's LPSA has changed people's lives for the better; services have been transformed and the level of stretch achieved has exceeded expectations. Some targets include:

- Adoptions: Kent now has the highest rate of adoptions in the country, having trebled the number over the three year period.
- Looked After Children: The enormous reduction in the number of children in care (over 20%) is even more remarkable in the interest of a strong upward national trend.
- Hospital Discharges and Residential Care: By working with Health and introducing a range of innovative programmes, substantially more elderly people were provided with services enabling them to stay in their own homes.
- Young Offenders: The prevention of reconviction of a large number of the 'hardest to read' young people involved using a radical programme of diversionary activities and largely intensive support.
- Public Disorder: Incidents of public disorder have been reduced by almost 30%, though working with the Police and other partners and by focussing on known problem areas.

International strategic alliances and knowledge networks are important to Kent County Council. It is essential for Kent as a learning city region that these links are maintained over time. The neighbouring French region of Nord Pas de Calais has collaborated with Kent County Council on European projects for more than a quarter of a century and our ties with the Hungarian county of Bacs-Kiskun are more than a decade old. A renewed memorandum of cooperation between our two counties was signed in the presence of the President of Hungary in October 2004. The Kent County Council office in Brussels is particularly active in exploring and building new relationships across Europe, particularly amongst recent accession states.

Even older are the ties with the American State of Virginia though their potential contribution to Kent has only recently been explored. The year 2007 marks the quad-centennial anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers at Jamestown after their long transatlantic sea voyage from Deal in Kent. Historic connections with Virginia are

consequently numerous and in parallel with public awareness raising of the forthcoming 2007 Anglo-American celebrations, new trade and learning links are being built.

PASCAL Observatory

PASCAL International Observatory, launched on 31 March 2004, is an international research and policy development alliance which aims to develop, communicate and explain new and emerging ideas about place management, social capital and learning. PASCAL is chaired by the former head of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) at the OECD, with the Scottish Executive and Kent County Council as the two government partners, while the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia and the University of Stirling in Scotland are the two major partnering research institutions.

In its global scope together with its reliance on web-based technology to disseminate ideas and generate debate, PASCAL exemplifies the network of alliances approach to innovation and information. Kent County Council's participation in this project is unique. As the only local authority in England invited to be a partner, it will use the PASCAL web-site to showcase its more innovative projects to an international audience. Kent County Council's banner will be *Promoting Community Wellbeing . . . Connecting people: Transforming places: Leading with ideas*. This branding will both promote the local Kent image and transform it by exposing its innovations to international critique.

New links with the Australian State of Victoria, forged through the PASCAL International Observatory will permit sharing of information on community strengthening and will inform the parallel development of Kent's "growth areas" and Victoria's own similarly designated "transit towns".

BUILDING COMMUNITIES WITH HEART – THE GROWTH & REGENERATION CHALLENGE

The UK government has announced a series of policies, strategies and initiatives during the last two years on housing, communities, planning, urban development, public health and homelessness⁸.

These are intended to respond to the demands of an estimated population growth of two million people per decade, much of which will be in the south east of England. The number of first-time homebuyers is at an all-time low and they are finding it harder to take the first step onto the property ladder⁹. There are also the challenges of social change: the growth in family breakdown, later marriage, an ageing population and longer life expectancy means more single occupation households, resulting in an ever-upwards curve of demand for property. All this is happening at a time when the average number of new homes being built is also at an all-time low, according to the Government's own figures.

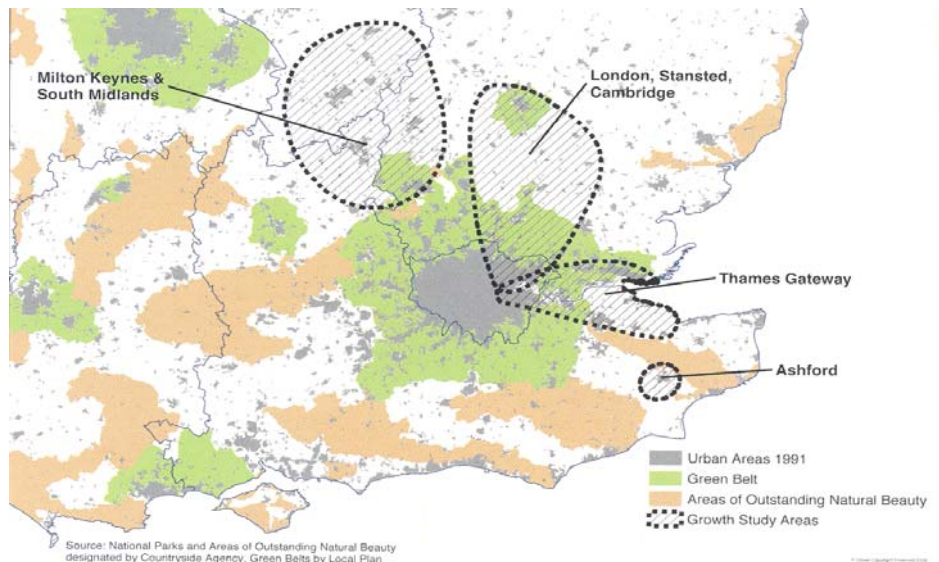
In 2002, the national government released its Housing Green Paper – “Quality and Choice: a Decent Home for All” - which was the first comprehensive review of housing for 23 years. The Government’s aim is that everyone should have the opportunity of a decent home, and that people should have a much greater involvement in, and control over, their housing choices.

Then in early 2003, through its Sustainable Communities Plan, the national government announced that housing in England would receive a significant boost of £22bn package over three years. The Government’s document, “Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future” (2003), stated: “We are committed to thriving, vibrant, sustainable communities . . . Providing homes for our key workers, regenerating our towns and cities.”

In July 2003 the Deputy Prime Minister announced proposals for funding to support and accelerate sustainable growth and housing supply in the wider South East over the next

⁹ The housing shortage in the South East of England has forced up house prices by an estimated 70% between 1999 and 2003, according to the recent *South East Regional Housing Strategy*, which calls for significant investment to tackle the shortage of high-quality, affordable homes.

15 years. For Kent, this translated in the Kent Thames Gateway area to £54m funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, £28m approved and £21m amber light funding for Ashford, and £23m funding for Swale for the period to 2006.



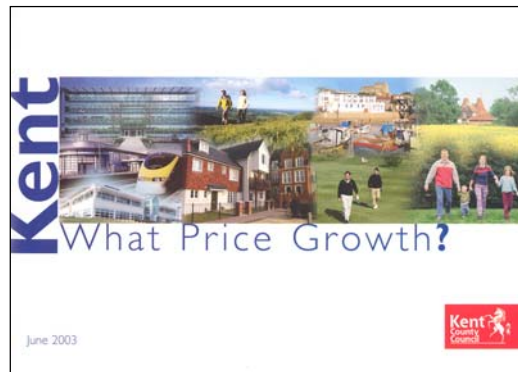
Map showing government designated Growth Areas in South East England

This is development on an unprecedented scale, providing opportunities to invent a new future. It is also a development fraught with risk, especially if we are unclear about what we are shooting for.

Kent County Council *is* clear. It wants Kent residents to have access to homes of excellent quality, in the right place, at the right time, and at the right cost. To achieve this, it understands the need to be creative and inventive in its approach to increasing the supply of housing which is “affordable” to ensure that it does not simply build low-construction-cost, low-quality products that degrade our communities and degrade the quality of life for our future generations.

Consequently, it has estimated that a total investment of almost £10 billion¹⁰ is needed across the county for Government's housing growth plans to go forward in a way that will protect and enhance Kent's:

- traditional village, rural and environmental heritage;
- commitment to excellence in design, architecture and construction to create attractive new communities
- transport and community infrastructure; and
- employment and business sectors, with a particular focus on investing in high skills, supporting entrepreneurship, and expanding business opportunities in the knowledge-economy.



These four “Kent tests” detailed in Kent County Council's June 2003 response to government underpin policies and activities not only in the growth areas, but also across the county as a whole. The following pages set out how we are approaching the challenge we have set ourselves.

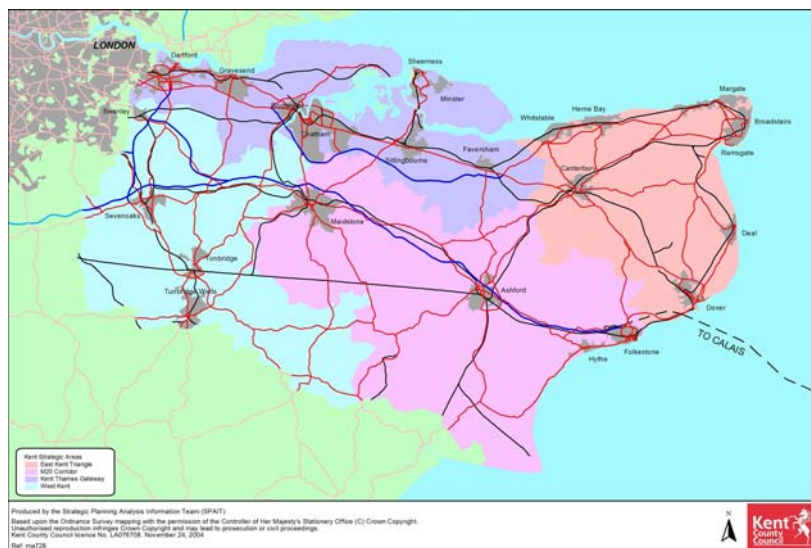
NURTURING CREATIVITY

Economic and social innovations are not necessarily shaped by our national systems of governance, even though we remain fixed on measuring economic performance at a national level. If, as some believe, city-regions are going to drive growth and renewal, we must refashion governance to reflect their needs on everything from universities to

¹⁰ Source: *What Price Growth?* published in June 2003.

connectivity, financial incentives to planning. Deeper and faster learning between these national and international networks of city-regions is also essential.¹¹

While Kent is not immediately identifiable as a “city-region”, local government in Kent is wrestling with questions about the nature of Kent in the 21st Century. Kent values its rural heritage, but its proximity to both London and mainland Europe also marks it out as a key element in urban inter-connectivity in the North-West Europe metropolitan area. In some ways, Kent is more a “virtual city”, constructed at present as a loose mosaic of twenty small to medium-sized towns and their rural hinterlands.



Kent's rich and diverse heritage can act as a springboard for energy rather than as a barricade against progress. While Kent's local context is shaped by many external influences, Kent remains uniquely different from other counties and countries. Kent's castles, cathedrals and churches, historic town centres and villages, and exceptional countryside and its long coastline, dotted with attractive seaside villages, unique shingle beaches, marshes and bird life all contribute to this uniqueness. The landscape is both scientifically significant and the source of aesthetic and cultural inspiration, having been home to generations of writers¹² and artists¹³, and more recently, film makers¹⁴. This

¹¹ Tom Bentley in Foreword to *Europe in the Creative Age*, by Richard Florida and Irene Tinagli, published by Demos 2004, www.demos.co.uk

¹² eg: Charles Dickens, HG Wells, TS Elliot, John Forsythe (born Ashford, Kent)

¹³ eg: WM Turner, Tracy Emin

¹⁴ eg: Derek Jarman, Tom Connolly

too is a reflection of the vitality of Kent, not a picture of a sleepy rural idyll. Kent has always been a working county - even its most famous strapline “The Garden of England” reflects its role as a thriving rural economy with the land used for successful food production.



The creative potential of the people of Kent, whether in the personal sphere, the community life of villages and towns, or in the world of work, will be a vital resource in ensuring that growth has a positive impact on the county.

There is also an important commercial dimension to nurturing and supporting creativity. Creative industries experienced rapid growth in the OECD economies during the 1990s, twice the rate of service industries overall and four times that of manufacturing. A new breed of independent entrepreneurs is running micro-businesses or are self-employed

freelancers. It is important that we know more about what their needs are, so that we can provide new approaches to education, business support and financing that will help them to thrive and prosper.

The close links between cultural, social and economic regeneration are widely accepted. High levels of growth offer an exceptional opportunity to expand and diversify the range of cultural resources available across the county: the increased population has the potential to create the “critical mass” required to sustain cultural resources such as large theatres, which have previously not been viable.

Kent County Council recognises its responsibility to encourage and support this creative potential. Creative thinkers, in every profession from science, industry, business and marketing, to the public and voluntary sectors, emerge from an environment that is characterised by a creative culture.

Key to making this real is widening participation. Promoting mixed-use buildings and developments, which include space for arts and other cultural activity, is one potential means of addressing this. Any aspiration to raise the level of cultural and creative activity in Kent needs to be accompanied by an understanding of potential “consumers”, who will be drawn from among both residents and visitors.

Encouraging an appetite for cultural and creative activity, and the confidence to participate, is central. Too often, places where cultural products are displayed, performed or sold are perceived as forbidding and unwelcoming.

The importance of a vibrant cultural life to attracting investors and individuals to move to Kent means that such problems must be overcome. However, this must not be the sole province of newly formed communities - the existing population has to benefit from a transformation in the cultural life of Kent.

The investment in Turner Contemporary and its link to the regeneration of the east Kent coastal town of Margate, the expansion of the Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury are reflections of this opportunity, as is the commitment to a ‘Creative Quarter’ as a key to the regeneration of the seaside town of Folkestone.

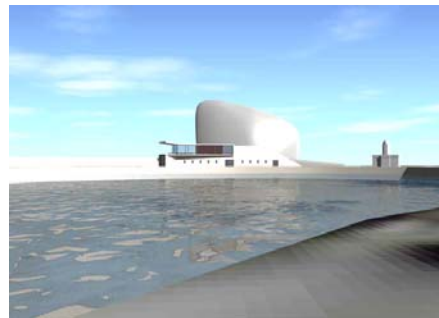
A thriving cultural life is also reflected by the ways in which we engage with and empower local communities to contribute to and develop civic society through social and leisure activities.

Culture-Led Regeneration - Turner Contemporary

Turner Contemporary will be a new and exciting international venue providing a stimulating and diverse cultural environment. The project has two principal objectives – (i) to provide a major visual arts venue, which will (ii) provide a catalyst for the regeneration of Margate and East Kent. The project arose from within the community – Margate Civic Society – and has firm local roots. The community wanted to find a way to celebrate the town's very strong associations with Britain's best loved painter. JMW Turner first visited Margate as a young boy, and later became a resident of the town that he loved for the sea and the skies.



The Turner Contemporary as it will look as it is towed along the Thames to Margate & then in its final position in Margate harbour.



The essential leadership for this £25m capital project in Margate has been provided by the County Council, although it will be funded by a broad partnership and the gallery will be operated by an independent charitable Trust. It's a bold and exciting concept being brought to reality. The main 'shell' will be constructed of steel in a dockyard and floated around the coast for final positioning in Margate harbour.

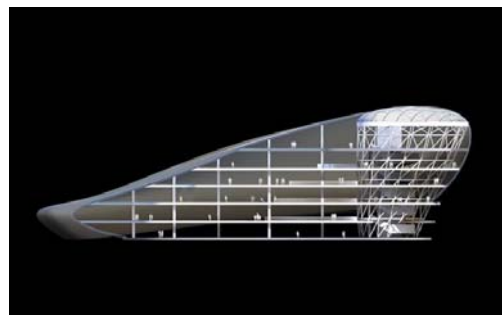
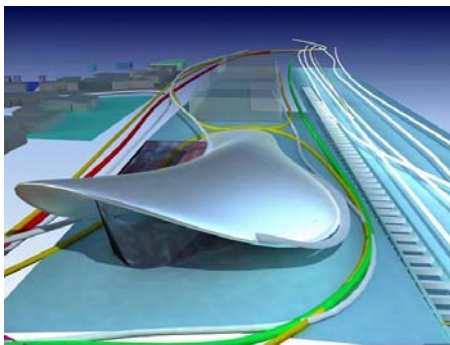
Transforming existing public services such as libraries also has a role to play in promoting creativity and stimulating learning. The concept of 'Discovery Centres' provides the physical infrastructure within which this transformation can take place and central Government support for Kent County Council's Ashford Discovery Centre needs to be replicated for the programme as a whole across Kent.

Ashford Discovery Centre

The predicted expansion of Ashford over the next 20 years presents a rare opportunity to deliver sustainable communities in new and exciting ways. By harnessing technology and working in innovative ways we can serve the needs of both the existing and the growing population of Ashford. One of these exciting proposals is to introduce the concept of the **Discovery Centre**.

The Ashford Discovery Centre will be a landmark building situated in a prime town centre location. It will act as a hub for the newly emergent town centre, bringing together high quality materials and cutting edge technology to create a magnet both for the community and for inward investment. The Discovery Centre will make a major contribution to Ashford's growth area agenda by becoming an exemplar of quality and innovation, thus setting the standard for future development. The provision, in the short term, of such a building will be instrumental to the unlocking of development potential in the town centre.

Every aspect from the design of the building to the purpose that it will serve is in line with the aspirations for the growth area as a whole. The project will bring together, under one roof, the widest range of services yet proposed for a Discovery Centre, conforming well to the ideals of supporting independence and sustainable communities.



By drawing on its historic characteristics of responsiveness and adaptability, Kent is nurturing a new tradition, encouraging a spirit of enquiry, curiosity and speculation. It can build communities with a heart, in a society which:

- *enjoys* an enduring sense of identity because it embraces change;
- *flourishes* by taking the best of the new to build on its history, its traditions, and its heritage;

- *generates* a sense of immediacy and motivation for fixing problems so that all people can enjoy a decent life; and
- *excels* through its energy and excitement about life.

PROMOTING DESIGN EXCELLENCE

The criteria for success will not only be about numbers of houses built or jobs secured. They will be about the quality of the places created. Development on this scale brings with it an opportunity for a step-change in the quality of houses we build in the county, the attractiveness of the communities we create and the vitality of our towns and villages. The new Kent Design Guide places high quality design at the heart of the decision-making process.

Kent Design is a unique initiative, bringing together the public and private sector in the push for better planning and design. The new Guide is a thorough overhaul of *Kent Design – a guide to sustainable development*. This latter document was highly praised for its groundbreaking approach, and since its publication in 2000, many new buildings in Kent have met the very highest standards. The 2005 Guide is being adopted by the Local Planning Authorities as a Supplementary Planning Document, so can be a “material consideration” in determining planning applications and thereby play a key role in determining the nature of future development.

In order to champion good design and produce memorable buildings that are relevant to the county, Kent County Council has given the role of Kent Design Champion to Piers Gough, one of Britain's leading architects. The Guardian national newspaper reported this as: *a bold move, given Gough's outspoken views and his unshakeable enthusiasm for uncompromising modern architecture typified by his controversial futuristic plan for Hove's seafront, designed in partnership with architectural superstar Frank Gehry, designer of Bilbao's Guggenheim museum.*

In Kent, though, Gough will be championing careful urban planning rather than showy icons. It is his daunting task to encourage sustainable, attractive high quality developments in the Thames Gateway, the principal site of the government's massive

house building plan for the south-east (about which his council employers are distinctly nervous) (The Guardian, 24 November 2004).

Also part of the Kent Design initiative, Kent's Building Design Awards are held annually to reward excellence in the field of building, public space, community design and regeneration in Kent.

Kent Building Design Awards 2004 – Winners and Short-listed Schemes



Winners: Town / Village Renaissance Category - Horsebridge & Brownings Yard (above left); Public Buildings Category & judged Project of the Year – St. Augustine's School (above right)



Short-listed schemes: Town / Village Renaissance Category – Lacuna Zone B, Kings Hill (above left); Public Buildings Category - Discovery School, Kings Hill (above right)

CREATING KENT COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Schools are the most valuable concentration of expertise and facilities in our local neighbourhoods. Kent County Council's aim is to enable schools to make the most of their position and support them to take responsibility for the aspirations of the whole community, working with their local communities and families for the benefit of all.

A Kent Community School should be a focal point for a range of educational, cultural, sport, family and community services. The aim is to make a range of services more accessible, better co-ordinated, and more driven by the needs of those they serve. There may be opportunities for new, integrated approaches to childcare, family learning and support services, adult education linked to the 16-19 curriculum, and business-based vocational training. It is about involving the community more in the life of the school, and the school in the life of the community, in order to enrich both.

Creating schools that can play this role requires additional investment and greater flexibility in funding streams compared to the current approach. Improving facilities, building in flexibility of use and improving access to existing schools to enable them to play this role needs to take place in parallel with the building of new 'learning campuses'.

DEVELOPING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR 14-19 YEAR-OLDS

Kent has developed a dynamic and visionary 14-19 Strategy, drawn up in partnership by KCC, the local Learning and Skills Council and Connexions. At the heart of this strategy and the Action Plan that accompanies it is a determination for these three partners to collaborate to raise achievement and provide an excellent curriculum tailored to the needs of each individual. Vocational education is central to making this happen.

Kent's unique contribution to advancing the vocational agenda is to commit £6,000,000 in a three year capital programme to build the first phase of a series of state of the art applied vocational centres for 14-16 year old school students. Located on or near school sites, these centres offer a varied and complementary vocational programme which should appeal to young people of all abilities. Centres within a given area are open to young people of all neighbouring schools. All students are working towards recognised and valued vocational qualifications. Links with local employers are being developed. Students will progress from these centres to apprenticeships, further education, foundation degrees and employment. External funding has already been found to take this work forward and further funds are being sought to continue the expansion of vocational centres.

As part of our vision of community schools, we also welcome start-up companies on school sites, to promote the enterprise culture, engage employers and bring business into the classroom – and the classroom into business.

Kent County Council intends to provide high quality vocational and pre-vocational programmes to 14-16 year olds on school campuses across Kent in order to raise the skills levels and achievement of young people. New vocational centres (23 in all) will

operate on collaborative principles between clusters of secondary schools, working with their local FE colleges. The curriculum will be planned strategically to offer a wide choice of learning across the county.

Kent County Council & Microsoft: transforming education

Kent County Council wants to put pupils and their families in control of their own learning. This project includes the UK's largest deployment of Tablet PCs into the education system. Kent County Council is partnered with Microsoft, transforming the teaching process and dramatically improving productivity. Each tablet is wireless, the size of a book and can be used in the classroom, home or anywhere. It is capable of storing all source material and student work for an entire academic year and beyond.

"I was in a school recently where a Year 10 student told me that her whole way of thinking, organising her learning, the whole way she organises her work, had been radically changed by the fact that she has a tablet pc."

David Bell, HM Chief Inspector of Schools.



A demonstration of the new whiteboard technology

SAFEGUARDING ENVIRONMENTAL HERITAGE

Kent's environmental heritage is a key element of what makes Kent an attractive location for businesses and is central to residents' perceptions of their quality of life. Developing urban green space, links to public rights of way and other 'green infrastructure' are all-important elements of the environmental quality that we are seeking.

The Kent Environment Strategy commits us to -

- Recognising the importance of the environment "on the doorstep" to communities' health and sense of well being;

- Sustaining the countryside as a prosperous rural economy, with vibrant and well-served communities, for the benefit of Kent’s rural and urban dwellers alike;
- Increasing access to, and understanding of, Kent’s historic heritage, and safeguarding this so that existing and new residents of Kent may benefit;
- Managing the waste produced by an enlarged population, and maximising opportunities for recycling and composting in new residential developments.

IMPROVING ENVIRONMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Environmental infrastructure has suffered from decades of under-investment and this applies across the range of energy, water, waste and flooding measures. To achieve real progress requires a step-change in infrastructure provision.

The housing growth figures in Kent represent a significant increase in the demand for certain resources, notably water and energy. In the case of water, Kent is one of the driest counties in the country and already has some areas where water is over-abstracted. Despite recent progress in reducing leakage from water supply infrastructure, water consumption per capita continues to rise and the UK performs poorly in terms of water use efficiency.

Significant reductions in water use are possible with existing, proven technology and the new housing growth areas represent an opportunity to incorporate such measures, deferring the need for more expensive investments on the supply side.

In a recent Kent County Council study of the ‘whole life’ costing of a number of schools, we identified that investment in the environmental performance of the building represented good value for money over the longer term. Government support has been requested to ensure that this forms the basis of an Invest to Save approach in the future commissioning and funding of new school buildings.

Renewing and improving public buildings, in order to improve energy-efficiency, is an important in terms of reducing the negative environmental impact of the public sector, and can provide financial savings in the long term. However, in terms of the impact on overall

resource use, their contribution will be slight. To have a significant impact on this issue it will be necessary to reduce domestic water and energy consumption. Some of this can be achieved by design standards that insist on water and energy efficient construction, fittings and appliances with no detrimental impact to peoples' lifestyle choices.

INVESTING IN TRANSPORT CAPACITY

The transport system in Kent requires significant development of the capacity of current transport infrastructure, substantial investment in additional road and rail infrastructure and other measures that widen travel choice and improve journey safety and efficiency.

To accommodate the planned growth it is imperative that the necessary transport infrastructure is in place early in the process and this requires a sustained programme of road and rail investment. To pay for these improvements requires the private and public sectors to work together.

The proposed growth is concentrated in North Kent and Ashford, but other areas of Kent will grow significantly and these will also require infrastructure improvements. Key connections to the trunk road network have to be improved and the capacity of the A2/M2 and M20 motorway needs to be increased.

Investment in rolling stock, signalling, tunnels and bridges, and the alleviation of capacity 'bottlenecks' such as Rochester Bridge in the adjoining unitary authority of Medway are all critical elements of increasing rail capacity.

Rail services also need to be improved so that links to and from London and between towns in Kent are faster and of better frequency and quality. The introduction of the Integrated Kent Franchise represents a unique opportunity to provide faster journeys on new trains via the Channel Tunnel Rail Link whilst maintaining an appropriate level of services to the existing London termini.

It is essential to reduce the burden on the roads to the ports and Channel Tunnel by encouraging a shift from road to rail. There is real concern that rail services through the

Tunnel will become even less competitive when the Minimum Usage Agreement ends in November 2006. Kent County Council has urged the Treasury to maintain support for international passenger and freight services to avoid more traffic on the country's main link to mainland Europe.

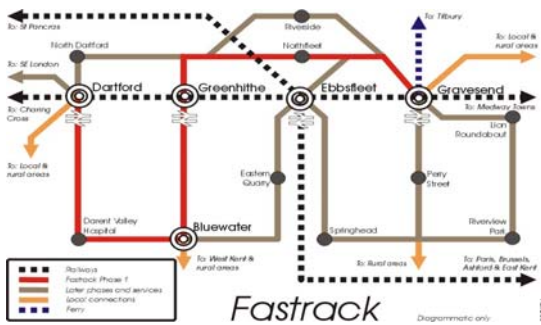


Eurostar trains on Kent high-speed rail link



Local spending on transport also needs to be enhanced to support the growth agenda with public transport schemes as well as road improvements to access development areas and to improve the environment of the town centres. Sustained funding to eliminate the maintenance backlog and improve public transport and safety is needed, and revenue support is also required to enable local authorities to keep bus services running – vital for social inclusion.

Finally, London represents a serious blockage for transport between mainland Europe and the rest of the UK, both on road and rail. Kent County Council has urgently requested the Government to commission studies of the need for, and location of, a road and/or rail crossing of the Thames to the east of London.



Public Transport Oriented Development - Kent Thameside's *Fastrack* system

PROMOTING ECONOMIC GROWTH

There are over 55,000 businesses registered in Kent & Medway. Small businesses (up to 250 employees) account for 99% of the total number of firms and create 85% of new jobs. Having the right environment, support and skills to enable a dynamic small business economy is vital to the future prosperity of Kent.

Kent already has a large number of strategic employment sites across the whole of the county, including the growth areas.

The 'Locate in Kent' agency works to attract investment to the County. Support in this effort from central Government would recognise that whilst the wider south east continues to attract such investment without public intervention, Kent differs from that wider picture. This is partly due to perceptions (and reality) of poor transport infrastructure, and to an unattractive skills mix within the Kent workforce. Both of these can be tackled by public sector intervention.

Kent Thameside Construction Initiatives

The regeneration of the Kent Thameside area will create over 50,000 new job opportunities over the next 20 years. The Kent Thameside Delivery Board is committed to:

- Securing quality jobs for local residents; and,
- Developing a skilled local workforce that contributes to a successful economy.

Kent Thameside Delivery Board has developed a unique strategy to support these twin aims. Crucially the strategy will be 'employer led' and tailored to the training and development needs of the local workforce.

Kent Thameside presents an enormous opportunity for construction industry specific, best practice training and employment programmes to be developed. The scale of the proposed developments, both in the amount of construction activity and the length of time construction employers will be active in the area, will mean that considerable numbers of beneficiaries can be helped to develop and sustain careers in construction. The Developing Partners to the Kent Thameside Delivery Board will drive this through their principal contractors through:

- **Kent Thameside Charter** - a general statement on all training and employment initiatives rather than being limited exclusively to construction.
- **Contract preliminaries** - contracts for construction work to contain preliminaries relating to the training and employment.
- **Job brokerage and first steps training** - existing or new outreach, training placement and other community based workers can be attached to the 'job shop', which in turn will help to develop links between communities and opportunities and avoid duplication of effort.

This opportunity to establish and support a range of employment initiatives has been made possible due to the commitment of local people, developers investing in the area, major local employers and key public sector organisations.

Through the Kent & Medway Economic Board, Kent is working hard to develop 'an enterprise economy' where –

- many more people, regardless of their background, have the desire, skills and opportunity to start a successful business;
 - everyone with the ambition to grow a business is helped and supported
- and

- there is an environment that supports business start-up and growth.

The Board also proposes to develop an International Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Ashford.

Kent County Council's Economic Development Group leads the Council's activities for the encouragement of investment and the creation and promotion of jobs in Kent. Working in partnership with other organisations, the Economic Development Group provides quality services to the county's business community.

It assists with the development of strategic industrial and business sites and funds Locate in Kent (the county's inward investment agency). It supports innovation and new technological advancement and promotes and develops tourism in Kent. It also funds the Kent Tourism Alliance (the county's tourism marketing agency).

KCC is actively promoting the 'go-to' culture - people and organisations who will tackle and succeed in any challenge to get the job done while maintaining their commitment to excellence.



KCC is proud to sponsor categories of the annual Kent Business Awards

SUPPORTING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

The role of enabling people to maintain and protect their health has too often been regarded as predominantly the remit of the National Health Service with the role of local

authorities undervalued. In the context of managing the growth agenda transport, regeneration and housing can each have a far greater impact upon public health than the usual activities that are funded under a “public health” label.

As recent research into health inequalities has shown, many health problems are caused by the unforeseen, or at least unconsidered, consequences of other activity. Examples of this include:

- Badly planned house building, which may limit access to green spaces, decreasing opportunities for physical activity and recreation, which can in turn lead to increased incidence of illnesses such as coronary heart disease, obesity and diabetes;
- Housing developments where a lack of local food shops is combined with inadequate transport links to shopping facilities further afield, limiting people’s consumption of fresh and healthy food, a risk factor for many health problems, notably coronary heart disease and cancer.

Successful management of the growth agenda demands that Kent County Council and its local partners meet the challenge of ensuring that rapid growth impacts positively on the health of the people of Kent. New communities must be planned, and existing communities invested in, in order that residents’ opportunities to walk and cycle, to access leisure facilities, to buy healthy food and to keep warm in winter are maximised. The scale of new development offers an unprecedented opportunity to “design in” health to the new communities which are being planned, thereby claiming a significant health dividend for Kent residents.

The needs of existing communities must not be neglected. In some areas, new developments are planned adjacent to existing communities that are already experiencing significant levels of deprivation and where current health services fall short of meeting the needs of the present population. Investment in increased health service capacity to meet the needs of growth should be in addition to investment to improve capacity to meet present needs.

This approach is consistent with the “fully engaged” public health scenario set out in Wanless 2002. However, if local government is to be encouraged to take on a responsibility for preventing downstream health problems, then this must be reflected in national assessment regimes and local governance arrangements.

Cost-effective action on preventative health also requires local bodies to be allowed greater freedom to work together. There are many instances where the costs of an intervention are borne by one body and the benefits by another. The amounts are known, and yet restrictions (such as hypothecation) on the flow of resources between organisations and activities can prevent the cost-effective route from being taken. An example of this could be the impact of relatively small-scale expenditure by the Local Authority on road safety in saving the National Health Service large amounts in treatment and rehabilitation costs of road accident victims.

DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES

People draw strength from their sense of purpose and connectedness. An important contributor to this sense of wellbeing and belonging is the enjoyment of being part of a community which has pride in itself – be it a bustling urban community stimulated by its innovative, contemporary architecture or a rural community which draws its confidence from its quiet calm.

Successful communities have a strong local economy and benefit from the vibrancy generated by having different generations living side by side. Indeed, the long-term lives of communities depend on this: communities which do not stimulate or develop innovative, contemporary local education, employment or recreation opportunities for their young people and for their young families run the risk of being left behind. Village schools need village children; village shops need families and local workers to support their livelihood; village parks and community centres need the activities, events and ideas that sustain the cultural and social cohesion of communities.

Consequently, Kent County Council wants to strike a better balance between housing availability, the demand for housing, and the provision of contemporary skilled work for

young people across the county while protecting valuable countryside around our towns and villages.

Through the Kent and Medway Structure Plan, it champions the county's economic and social well-being by shaping the directions, priorities and quality objectives for decisions on planning and development, and the future pattern of housing supply. It promotes the regeneration of our towns and nurtures our villages, working with local councils and other partners to make our towns, villages and countryside vibrant, safe and accessible.

Kent County Council also wants to ensure that planning for new housing developments includes the provision of infrastructure such as schools, transport, shopping facilities, family care and health services that support and nurture the communities in those housing developments. To achieve this, Kent County Council is keen to work more closely and more effectively with developers and house builders to deliver innovation and inspire local communities.

Kent SMART Village

The Smart Village concept is a micro-community of 500-1000 people that celebrates the best in 21st century living and working. It is unique in combining innovative technology and first rate contemporary design with the friendly culture and traditions of the Kent village.

It will be:

- *Supportive* – a safe, democratic community, home to people from all walks of life who have the confidence, capacity and skills to shape not only the wellbeing of their own community but also to influence others across Britain and beyond.
- *Healthy and fun* – close to great countryside and leisure/cultural activities to ensure individual and community well-being across all age groups.
- *Environmentally responsible* – developing innovative technologies in design, construction and maintenance to ensure minimal use of energy and resources.
- *Economically vibrant* – home to the 21st century bioscience, creative and digital industries, linked into education and training provision, and an energetic participant in local and global economic networks.

Kent County Council aims to be responsive, flexible and resourceful in making Kent a socially and economically dynamic county. It aims to be an innovative and responsible employer to attract and retain the best people who work across a broad range of services. We also want to create a mix of contemporary skills and creative talents as public sector workers, entrepreneurs, private sector businesses, and community workers, to name just a few fields to enhance our ‘Mosaic Economy’.

In short, we want Kent to be a balanced community that grows as a whole – without excluding sections of society – and which creates opportunities for all.

Consequently, the choice of housing options in Kent must be significantly increased to attract these people. Housing – either newly constructed or existing stock – must also, logically, be priced within the financial means of Kent residents. We want to increase the range of excellent housing that Kent residents are able to afford.

The role of the private sector in the housing market, then, is critical to achieving our aims of creating and sustaining the supply of excellent housing in Kent. We want to encourage enterprise and support risk in the private market, for example, by identifying joint investment opportunities. We want to enhance the private sector’s capacity to develop the extensive supply of land already allocated for housing.

Kent County Council wants the people of Kent to live safely and independently in their local communities. This goal applies even to those public services most likely to be characterised as ‘interfering’ with that independence. Promoting independence is at the heart of “Active Lives” – Kent County Council’s ambitious ten year strategy for social services – which envisages a Kent where people and communities are helped to help themselves.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

The support and help that families need differs from family to family: it is therefore crucial that new and existing communities have a wide range of support services available to them. If families are helped and supported the effects of poverty and family breakdown can be tackled.

Providing support and promoting ‘prevention’, earlier rather than later, when the difficulties have become ingrained, is the most effective response with the greatest impact and chance of success. Ideally this will be delivered within the community where the child is based.

We will achieve this in response to the growth agenda by:

- establishing more community-based family support services, focused on communities in need, which harness the strengths within family networks and the community. This would take place within the context of the newly developed Preventative Strategy for Children and would include:
 - extending schemes such as Play Link, Home Start, High Scope, the Link Family Scheme, and Sure Start across Kent
 - extending family group conferencing
 - supporting the voluntary sector to access external funding for family support schemes
- ensuring a co-ordinated programme of support for children in need by developing a closer relationship with pre-school services, early years education, and the voluntary sector, ensuring early help is identified and available.

Thanet Community Development Trust

The aim of the Thanet Community Development Trust (TCDT) is simple: to improve the lives of Thanet residents who would otherwise have little chance of doing so themselves. TCDT is a charity and consists of twelve local volunteers whose role is to represent what local people want and to advise on how it might be done. A separate company, Thanet Community Development Company (TCDC) delivers the community development projects and raises the money to support them. Although there is no legal framework forcing them to do so, these separate companies work so closely together that many people see them as one. They even jointly operate under the name of the Trust to show publicly that they are inextricably linked.

TCDC employs 26 people to either deliver community projects or work in one of their social enterprises. (A social enterprise is an “ordinary” business whose profits do not go to owners or shareholders but back into the business or into a charity: in this case TCDT).

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF OLDER PEOPLE

Many older people lead active, full lives and make an enormous (yet often unrecognised) contribution to society. Many older people are carers, or heavily involved in voluntary community activities. To develop their full potential they need more easily accessible leisure activity, employment and volunteering opportunities.

Housing has a huge impact on an older person's quality of life. People who, in the past, would almost certainly have been in residential care are increasingly able to retain a large degree of independence if they live in well-designed and appropriately supported accommodation. For example, people who become more frail as they get older can stay at home much longer if that home has no stairs (or can take a stair-lift), has a bathroom big enough for a wheelchair to turn in, wide doors and appropriate equipment to live at home safely.

Most older people want to remain in their own homes. They want to remain healthy and lead independent, fulfilling lives. We will work closely with our partners to enable older people to live safely and independently in their home, in their own community. Supported and/or sheltered housing provision, both for rent and for owner-occupation, has to be part of the mix of development we are seeking if we are to respond to the needs and aspirations of older people.

Assistive Technology: Lifetime Homes

Active Living Technology (also known as Assistive Technology, or Telecare) is a term which is used to refer to a range of equipment with the potential to transform the lives of older and disabled people who wish to continue to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible.

This is the **new generation of equipment** following on from the more familiar lifeline pendants and alarms which many older and disabled people are using in their homes already.

When an alarm is triggered, whether by a smoke or flood detector, a bogus caller alarm, or a falls detector, for example, a call goes through to a monitoring centre.

Call operators try to speak to the service user, and **alert the appropriate response**. This may involve calling on any of a range of people, from the carer of the service user, a neighbour, or, if necessary, the emergency services.

Strong evidence from elsewhere suggests that, if complemented by the right infrastructure and support services, **this technology can be used as a tool to help reduce pressure on scarce staff**, reduce admissions to hospital and residential care, and contribute towards the reduction of delayed discharges from hospital.

Most importantly, it can increase choice and control for vulnerable people and their carers, increase the dignity of vulnerable people, and thus reduce their fear of being a burden.

In Kent, Active Living Technology is a powerful tool with the potential to help us deliver our Active Lives Strategy, with its **aim to promote the independence and quality of life of all Kent citizens**.

Nationally, **promoting independence has become central to public policy**, reflected in the National Service Framework for Older People, and the Valuing People White Paper in reference to people with learning disabilities.

A recent Audit Commission report identifies active living technology as offering **a tantalising possibility for public policy to meet more people's desire to remain independent for longer**, while at the same time saving money overall.'

In Kent, we have embarked on a 6-month pilot scheme (From July 2004), in three Districts - Swale, Maidstone and Tonbridge and Malling, involving 50 households in each District. The new technology is in place now. The pilot will involve three different technology packages (see www.obs-pascal.com for more information on this initiative).

“THERE ARE MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS”

What this paper sets out is very much ‘the story so far’. We feel that we have begun to create a clear, shared and widely acknowledged account of the challenges. We have found or created new ways of working and new products that we are confident will contribute to achieving our ambitions. Much of this is untested, in some cases we are still getting to grips with the scale and nature of these challenges. There is much to be done in working with those partners on whom we will rely for delivery and we have not reached the point where we are certain of the way ahead.

For example –

- How can we move from being the regulator of growth to a genuine partner of the development industry?
- What tools can we use not only to bridge the skills gap for future generations, but also to act on the needs of employers from the workforce of today?
- How do we work with local communities to overcome their reluctance to accept change and recognise the benefits that growth and regeneration can bring?
- Is the emphasis we put on high quality design and place making justified?

Kent is a great place to live, work and visit. Our challenge is to make a great place even better, and we would welcome ideas, suggestions and contributions from anywhere else in the world to help us create a better Kent.