

# DRAFT – FOR CONSULTATION



## Setting the Direction for Economic Growth in Thanet

Phase 1 of Thanet's approach to  
Economic Growth

Draft for Consultation

## Setting the Direction for Economic Growth in Thanet

Growing a prosperous economy through an effective public and private sector partnership ***to accelerate economic growth to achieve greater productivity and profit for our businesses, more jobs, and increased prosperity for our residents***

### Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Our Vision and Aims.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Thanet’s Economy .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Heritage, Culture and the Visitor Economy .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The Green Economy .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Supporting a Diverse Business Base.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Skills for Employment and Growth.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Investing in Our Assets .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Moving to Phase 2.....</b>	<b>23</b>

## Introduction

Thanet District Council is committed to driving growth across the district by promoting investment, skills, employment, efficiency and innovation to provide a sustainable, balanced economy. This will build on a strong track record and tradition of partnership working. This tradition will be continued through the Thanet Regeneration Board, bringing together partners in the public and private sectors to develop stronger working arrangements and consider opportunities for greater coordination and collaboration.

This document is the first phase of a new approach to promoting economic growth in Thanet. It sets out the areas where action needs to be focused to achieve balanced sustainable growth that will deliver jobs and prosperity.

Our approach to economic growth will be phased to ensure that we achieve an intelligent methodology to economic growth that makes best use of the resources available to us and maximises the impact of our activities.

**Phase One: Setting the Direction** this initial document. Recognising the key issues facing our economy this document proposes a vision and strategic direction

that could realise our full potential. It summarises the economic context of Thanet, identifies the sectors of the economy that are important to Thanet or have the potential to deliver growth and outlines the areas where support is required to help business of any size and in any sector prosper.

**Phase Two: Understanding the opportunities** – this document will help shape the dialogue between all those engaged in economic growth. Not only do all the public sector partners need to agree the strategic direction and align their activity but we must engage with business. This engagement has already started, by opening up the Thanet Regeneration Board to private sector members, we will hear first hand what business think and what they need from us.

**Phase Three: Action and Policy** Reactions to the priorities put forward here, and feedback from those directly involved in industry will be used to inform the development of actions and policies that will unlock growth and prosperity.

Together these three Phases will form our Strategy for Growth.

We have developed this first document by undertaking substantial research and engagement with key stakeholders. Whilst we do not anticipate the direction of travel to change, we recognise that we will need to be flexible to react and respond to the opportunities that arise.

The district council's engagement with key stakeholder has already started and will continue to build. We are engaging with the Thanet Business Forum and strengthening our relationship with the Chambers of Commerce.

Similarly, the development of projects and policies is already underway. Work on a new masterplan for the Ramsgate Royal Harbour and Port has started, the development of a new Local Plan which will set planning policies is underway, and the Expansion East Kent loan programme has been launched.

'Setting the Direction' will provide the framework for projects and define a role for the public and private sectors in creating the conditions that make Thanet the first choice destination to live, work, visit and invest in.

This document has been structured around seven key sections:

- First setting out our vision and overall aims
- This is followed by a summary of the economic conditions of Thanet
- The third sections outlines the role of heritage, culture and the visitor economy arguably the bedrock of the Thanet economy
- The fourth section introduces the potential importance of new strand to Thanet Economy the green agenda
- Thanet is also a very diverse economy and this is recognised in section five
- Section six identifies the importance of equipping people with the right skills
- Section seven indentifies the importance of the physical assets and infrastructure required to allow business to grow.

## Our Vision and Aims

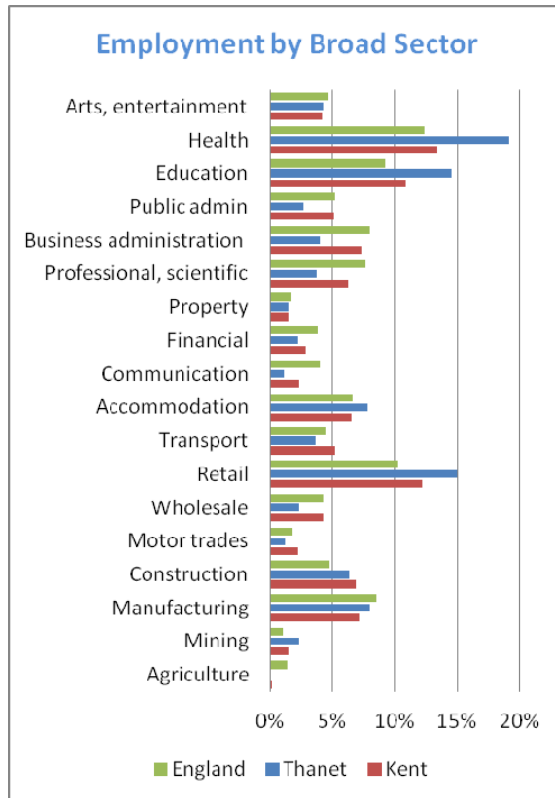
Our aims are based on the shared vision of the private and public sector in Thanet which is to:

***accelerate economic growth to achieve greater productivity and profit for our businesses, more jobs, and increased prosperity for our residents.***

The underlying aims are to:

- Develop the right environment and conditions to deliver real economic growth and prosperity
- Place businesses at the forefront to give an enterprise-led focus to activities and programmes of the public sector
- Capitalise on our natural advantages, the assets, heritage and culture that are our unique selling points, to encourage private sector investment and support the visitor economy
- Capture potential opportunities from moving to a low-carbon future

- Encourage the business community to exploit the opportunities of new technologies to improve productivity and resilience
- Work with education and training providers to develop a skilled and ambitious workforce, in current and future generations.



### Thanet’s Economy

Thanet is a creative, innovative and inspiring place. Its environment has shaped the economy over centuries. Its rich soil supported a thriving agriculture sector. Natural harbours sparked an age of maritime discovery and traditions, and the beauty of its coast created an irresistible visitor destination. The influence of Thanet’s beauty has inspired famous authors and artists such as Dickens and JMW Turner.

In 2010, Thanet’s population was estimated to be 132,000 people. Of these, around 79,000 are aged 16-64 (a proxy for the working age population) – around 77% are economically active (those working or actively seeking work). Some 41,000 people work in around 2,800 VAT-registered business and a further 10,000 are self-employed creating around £1,700 million of Gross Value Added (a measure of the wealth of the economy). These numbers confirm that Thanet is a significant economic unit.

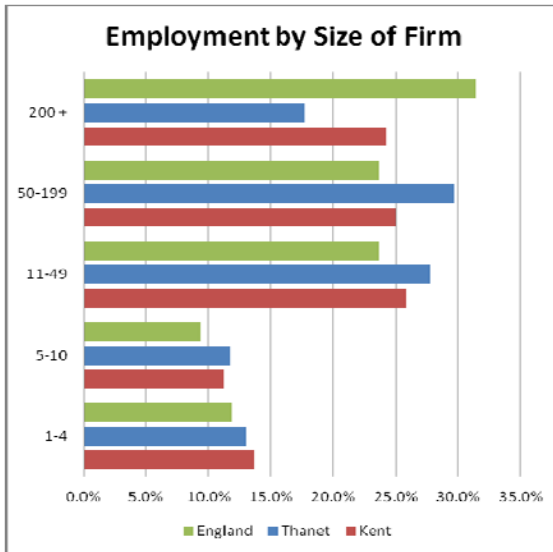
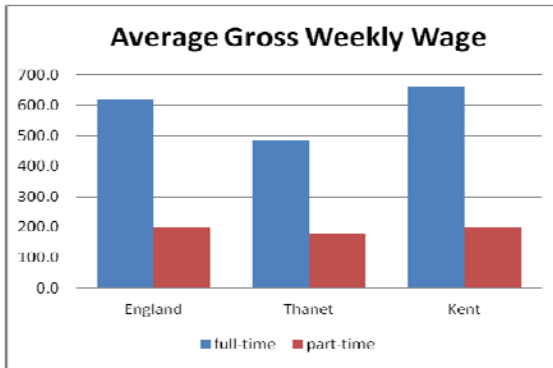
It is not just its relative size that defines the economy of Thanet: its definition comes more from its diversity. Thanet is a coastal district but it is also predominantly rural. Whilst there are three significant coastal towns – Broadstairs, Margate and Ramsgate

– the population density across Thanet is still relatively low. Consequently the density

of economic activity is lower than the national average: there are fewer workers, consumers and subsequently business in any given area. This limits the efficiency of labour markets and there is limited opportunity for businesses to find specialist suppliers. The provision of specialist financial, technical and business support services are predominately located outside the district.

Thanet also suffers from its peripherality – the economic catchment area is limited; bounded by coastline along its eastern, northern and southern edges. Although Thanet has a significant population it is still a small market and to bring wealth in, goods must be sold to customers outside the area. Distance to major population areas increases the costs of reaching these markets. This has an impact on the competitive position of our firms and has an impact on final product prices, wages, profitability and productivity.

Low productivity levels feed into low profitability for local firms, limiting their ability to invest and expand and providing low wage levels. Earnings are significantly below the English average and amongst the lowest in England.



In part, the low wages are a result of the trading conditions that our businesses face. The sectors that are more prominent in Thanet and have greater levels of employment tend to pay lower wages, where ever they are located. This is further compounded by the occupation mix within the industries. Thanet has fewer workers in the relatively higher paid, professional, technical and managerial occupations.

Even in sectors where productivity is high, there are structural weaknesses that limit further growth. The majority of these are micro or small-sized enterprises. Some are 'lifestyle business' with no ambition for growth and innovation; others are family businesses struggling with the trade-off between growth and control.

Around a quarter of all enterprises in the area have turnover below the VAT threshold – this includes a significant number of self-employed people. Nationally over 30% of employees work for a business that employs 200 or more workers. In our area it is less than 20%. By contrast, over a quarter of people work in a firm employing less then 10 people, nationally it is one fifth.

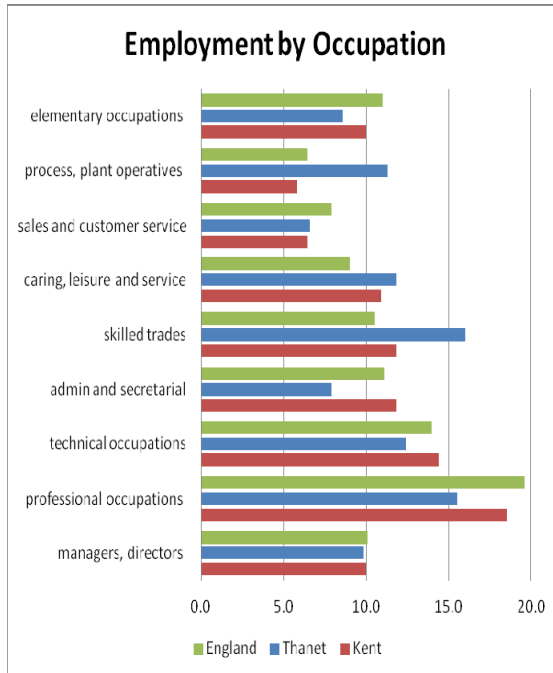
Linked to the occupation and industrial structures is a weak skills structure in the workforce. There is a significantly lower

proportion of the population with higher level qualifications (NVQ 3 or above) in the areas compared to either the regional or national average, and a higher concentration of people with no qualifications.

There is also a dominance of employment in the public sector and whilst this has an important role to play in any economy, it is not a strong driver of growth and wealth creation. With over a third of employees working in the public sector there is a need to balance this to ensure that there is scope for our economy to grow.

There is a pressing need to diversify and grow both our productivity and employment base. And this, can only in the current economic circumstances, come from the private sector.

The peninsula nature of Thanet that contributes to its peripherality also provides a unique natural environment that, for a long time has supported a significant tourism industry. Whilst direct employment may only be around 10% of the total workforce, the secondary impacts of the tourism industry are also significant. The level of spend during the holiday season is critical to supporting the retail sector and local supply chains.



The structural weaknesses in Thanet’s economy are not recent developments. Unemployment levels have consistently been above regional and national averages. During the growth period between 1995 and 2007 the unemployment numbers fell – and at a slightly faster rate than national rates. Increased economic buoyancy raised the levels of business start-ups and survival rates and increased wealth and incomes which reduced issues of social exclusion. During this time economic performance across Thanet also improved. Levels of unemployment were above the national averages but progress towards closing the gap was being made. By 2007 the gap between the unemployment rate in Thanet and that in Kent (and England) was the smallest it had been for a decade.

Since late 2007 the UK economy has been gripped by a severe and persistent ‘credit crunch’. Consequently, economic growth slowed during 2008 as the effect of modest real disposable income growth, tighter credit conditions, a weakening housing market and depressed confidence levels fed through from the financial sector into the real economy. In the second half of 2008, output levels fell and the economy began to shrink. By the end of 2008 the national economy was officially in recession and, despite a

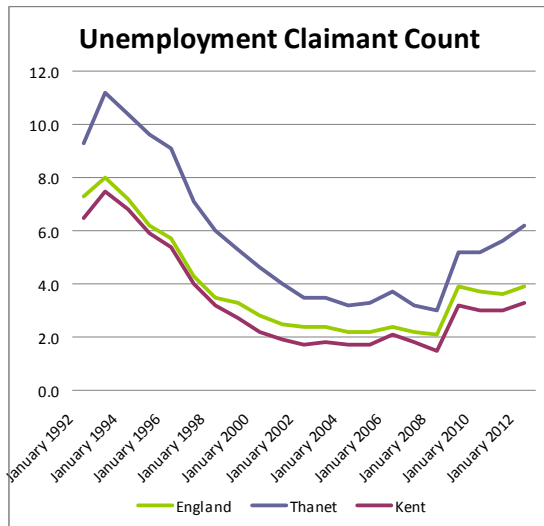
slight return to growth late in 2009 has remained so.

The national economy has struggled and Thanet has been hit particularly hard; unemployment has increased faster than the regional and national rates. The progress made in closing the gap with national economic performance achieved over the previous decade has been reversed. The recession has emphasised some of the inherent weaknesses in our economic structure. The low productivity, low wage businesses that characterise Thanet’s economy will continue to face a number of challenges when the national economy emerges from recession.

Whilst there is no doubt that Thanet faces some economic challenges, these are balanced by a range of opportunities.

Inland connections have improved significantly. The East Kent Access Road provides dual carriageway from the M25. The Access Road links Thanet and major economic assets such as Manston, Kent’s International Airport, the Port of Ramsgate and Discovery Park to the UK’s main arterial road network in less than 60 minutes. The introduction of High Speed 1





rail services has reduced commuting from central London to Ramsgate to 76 minutes and Margate to 88 minutes.

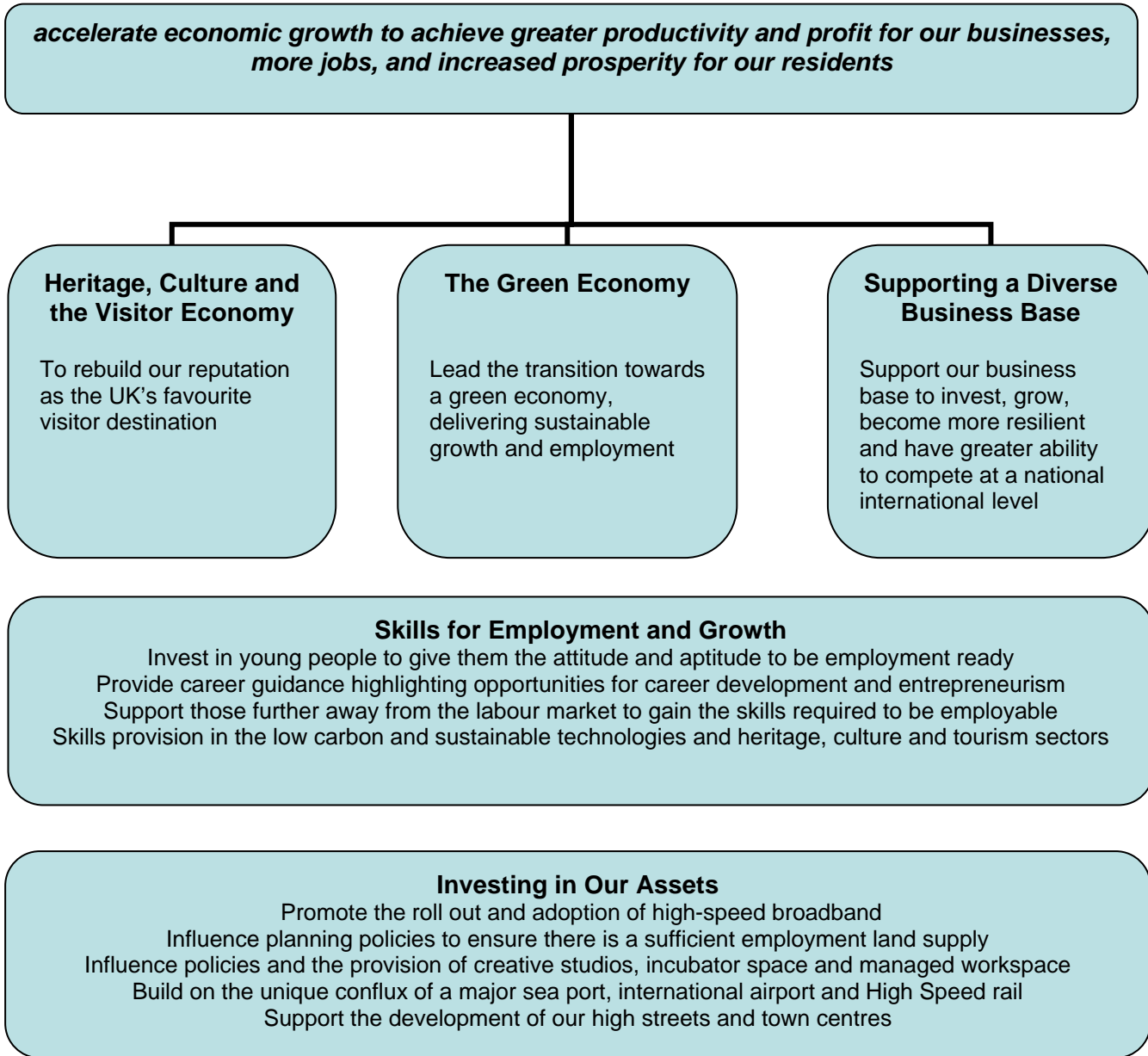
Our area benefits from a strong knowledge and science base. The facilities at Discovery Park in Sandwich provide research and development infrastructure that is second to none. This provides the perfect base for any sized knowledge based business, in particular those relating to the life sciences.

As the economy modernises infrastructure still holds back productivity growth. The use of ICT and prominence of knowledge driven businesses will be boosted as broadband connectivity is improved.

The housing supply in Thanet must also reflect the needs and aspirations of a more inclusive community, having regard to prospective and economic growth. The housing offer in Thanet can play an important role in encouraging economic growth. As well as re-building our reputation as a visitor destination we need to have a wide range of housing assets within our rich heritage assets to encourage people to relocate here. Having the right product in the right place will support the local community and the types of jobs needed to deliver a more balanced economy.

**We will achieve this by:**

- Talking to business to understand their needs and the opportunities Thanet can offer
- Working with further and higher education to develop an education presence on the high streets
- Attract new industry and new investment to the district
- Work towards ensuring the supply of housing responds to the needs of our residents
- Improve wage levels which are amongst the lowest in the UK, and employment opportunities to reduce the dependence on the informal economy
- Build on the transport and communications infrastructure improving the flows of goods and people between our key markets
- Maximise opportunities to provide financing for business investment and growth e.g. Expansion East Kent
- Work with businesses to understand regulatory activities which inhibit growth.



**To build our reputation as the UK’s favourite visitor destination, a concerted and collaborative effort is required to:**

- Create a positive image to create pride and influence
- Improve the quality of service and value for money for the visitor economy as a whole
- Establish a real sense of enjoyment whilst being a safe destination for everyone who visits, lives and works here
- Improve the current tourism offer, building on our heritage assets, and service delivery via a better skilled workforce. Working with local businesses to promote the area.

## Heritage, Culture and the Visitor Economy

With its unique heritage, landscape features and coastlines Thanet is a major tourist destination attracting over 2.5 million visitors per year. The scale of this activity is reflected in the contribution tourism related industries make. The tourism industries account for around 10% of all employment as much as the manufacturing industries and twice as much as the construction industry.

Globally, tourism is a growing industry and it is an incredibly competitive market place. Booking patterns have shifted with a rise in late bookings and an increasing use of the internet to research and book holidays. With high competition, consumers are demanding more from their holiday experience and are constantly seeking value for money. These changes are making it increasingly challenging for destinations and businesses to differentiate their product and position themselves in a crowded market place.

The nature of tourism in the UK is changing. Whilst the main product of the industry is still the traditional family holiday, the emphasis is shifting. The average length of stay of holidaymakers has fallen

and more second holidays, short breaks and activity holidays are taking place. Cultural activities such as food and drink and heritage are increasingly important elements of the visitor experience.

Investment in the new Turner Contemporary is helping build a new niche for Margate with benefits that could spread across the whole of Thanet. Ambitions for the restoration of Dreamland will build on the traditional values and reputation but in a way that attracts a new modern audience to build Thanet into a year-round destination. Broadstairs is a typical traditional seaside resort with a reputation as a charming historic town with a variety of festivals that play a key part in its success as a tourist destination. Ramsgate is a bustling town centred on its spectacular Royal Harbour. The historic architecture and marina have helped support a lively visitor industry, with a café culture and stylish shops. There is a nautical theme with oyster bars, seafood restaurants and chandlers; all established parts of the local economy.

Adding value through new services and products and offering quality of service are critical to encouraging customer loyalty. Creating links and routes between

attractions across Thanet will build the offer the visitor and capture greater levels of tourist activity.

Maintaining our heritage assets, walking and cycling routes, the quality of public spaces and beaches and our housing stock will be important to deliver high quality visitor offer and resident experience. Equally investment in the skills of the staff working in the sector to provide the best welcome and service to visitors will be required.

There is some evidence that seasonality is reducing, with events and other initiatives successfully extending the main season into shoulder months, improving job opportunities. To fully capture the benefits of our heritage we must promote and develop our assets to make Thanet a first choice location for 52 weeks of the year.

For the visitor economy to succeed, the whole district must be committed to delivering a quality experience for visitors and residents alike – the quality of place as a whole is as important as the nature of individual attractions. The quality of the toilets, street-cleaning, public realm, shopping, signage, information, transportation, entertainment, restaurants and service need to work together to provide a quality experience.

**We will achieve this by:**

- Developing a new Destination Management Plan to steer and align our tourism support activity
- Work with attractions operators and owners to build the links between different attractions and areas of Thanet.
- Work with transport providers to develop public transport links between visitor attractions
- Improve signage between key points in each of our towns
- Work across council departments to improve the public realm.

**To lead the transition towards a green economy, delivering sustainable growth and employment we must:**

- Work with industry to capitalise on our role as the support base for England’s largest offshore wind farms
- Build low carbon supply chains
- Develop opportunities for businesses to share best practice to improve productivity.
- Maximise the potential of Government policies and programmes to create growth.
- Prepare for the future development and deployment of offshore technologies that build on the infrastructure that is already here.

**The Green Economy**

Thanet is surrounded by offshore wind farms: Thanet Offshore, London Array and the nearby Kentish Flats are now established features of the seascape around Thanet. Whilst there has been some success in capturing the economic benefits of this new technology there is potential for more. The hosting of operational and maintenance facilities for the offshore arrays at Ramsgate Port is a significant achievement. The challenge now is to capture any ‘spin off’ business and skills issues which may arise from this achievement.

Wind has been the world’s fastest growing renewable energy source for the last eight years. As the cost of generation falls and the urgent international need to tackle CO<sup>2</sup> emissions and prevent climate change grows, it’s a trend that is set to continue. As the windiest country in Europe and world leader in off-shore technology, the potential exists to meet the UK’s energy needs several times over. A single project requires the contribution of many different people employed in many different jobs, from research and development through to construction and maintenance. This means people from a range of backgrounds and with a range of skills are always needed.

Our opportunities do not just come from wind energy. Our reputation for offshore work with the wind farms places us in a strong position to capture the benefits of the next technological developments. Wave and tidal energy technologies are still in there infancy and we need to act now to position ourselves as a prime location for business involved in developing, testing and deploying these technologies.

Whilst central government has a headline target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions there are a number of real benefits for residents and business that flow from this. The Green Deal will help households introduce energy efficiency measures to reduce energy usage and fuel bills. Not only does this help the household but it also provides local supply chain opportunities.

Developing a green economy also needs to promote sustainable patterns of production and consumption that are resource and energy efficient, low-carbon and low waste, non-polluting and safe, and which produce products that are responsibly managed throughout their lifecycle. The green agenda covers the greening of processes, under which all industries continuously improve their resource productivity and environmental performance and become

more efficient and competitive.

In building a green economy there will be a focus on those industries that deliver environmental goods and services in an industrial manner, including, for example, waste management and recycling services, renewable energy technologies, and environmental analytical and advisory services.

**We will achieve this by:**

- Making links across the industry to consolidate opportunities for growth including research and development.
- Work with existing renewable energy businesses to publicise supply chain opportunities and work with local firms to meet the opportunities.
- Where needed work with partners outside of Thanet to help people get the skills they need to work in the green industries
- Deliver a demonstration project showing how homes in conservation areas can adopt energy saving technologies.

**To support our business base to invest, grow, become more resilient and have greater ability to compete at a national and international level we must:**

- Work with the Chambers of Commerce to help businesses become successful
- Encourage and enable networking opportunities through existing organisations across Thanet.
- Promote investment by existing businesses and attracting new inward investment. Utilise available land and premises, funding opportunities and growth of supply chains
- Align our image and brand campaigns to attract investment, people, skills and knowledge in to the area
- Use local planning policies to promote a sustainable and balanced economy

## Supporting a Diverse Business Base

Thanet’s economy has been in transition throughout the later stages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some of the district’s traditional sectors have been under pressure, with some decline, imposing a need for diversification to enable economic growth.

The composition of the economy has significant variations from the national average. This is to be expected. Over time the unique natural and cultural assets have tended to steer the economy towards certain activities. For example, the fertile lands have naturally tended towards agricultural uses whilst the beaches and coast have supported tourism.

The continuing importance of agriculture to Thanet’s economy has been underlined with significant private sector investment over recent years. For example, Thanet Earth is a highly efficient production facility adopting the latest technologies and production techniques where the core staff are some of the highest skilled in the sector. It is a clear demonstration of the competitive advantages of Thanet as a location. With an abundance of fertile soil, coastline and

sunshine Thanet has much more to offer at the high knowledge end of research and production in agriculture and aquaculture.

The public sector is one of the sectors that dominate Thanet’s economy. Over the last decade Thanet has confounded regional and national growth trends. Sectors which have grown nationally have shrunk here. Similarly, sectors that have shown significant growth in employment on Thanet have fallen nationally. Even in the sectors which have shown strong growth their total employment is still a small proportion of all jobs.

The factors that influence an industries location are becoming less of a constraint as knowledge and a skilled workforce become relatively more important. Those businesses that have located here have done well. Although there are only a few of them, the manufacturing and processing companies that are in Thanet are first class. The Fujifilm Speciality Ink Systems factory, won the Best Process Plant Award at the 2011 Best Factory Awards.

Transport and Infrastructure links are the lifeblood for our area and vital for enterprises to reach customers, suppliers and exchange knowledge and information. Whilst physical access to Thanet with new road and rail investment has improved digital connectivity is still weak. ICT infrastructure is critical for

improving productivity and increasing employment and will be a particular priority

It is not just the economic structure in Thanet which presents opportunities. The designation of an Enterprise Zone at Discovery Park in the neighbouring district of Dover is a major opportunity for the workforce and supply chain business in Thanet. A unique response to the downsizing of Pfizer the Enterprise Zone offers the potential for east Kent to maintain its position as a global leader in life science and pharmaceutical production.

Whilst there is some strength and resilience in having broad industrial base, there is also some weakness. The lack of specialism prevents agglomeration benefits accruing – where training providers and specialist suppliers can develop alongside key industries to build a competitive advantage unique to the place. To strengthen Thanet's economic base it will be essential to bring new investment that enhances the businesses that are already here.

**We will achieve this by:**

- Delivering a marketing campaign to attract business and investors to the area.
- Developing a new Local Plan that supports the growth of our economy.
- Releasing council-owned assets for economic development where this is appropriate
- Developing a closer working relationship with the Chamber of Commerce and other business representative groups.



**Skills development is one of the key drivers of economic growth. To maximize the growth potential of we must:**

- Ensure our partners invest in young people to give them the skills needed to access jobs
- Provide career guidance to highlight opportunities for career development and entrepreneurship in Thanet
- Support the long term unemployed to get the skills required to get back into work
- Target skills provision at those sectors which give us the greatest chance of providing enterprise-led employment and growth.

## Skills for Employment and Growth

People provide the impetus for economic growth and an enterprising and aspirational workforce will address a number of structural economic weaknesses. A skilled workforce is one of the essential aspects that stimulate inward and indigenous investment. There are significant benefits from increasing both enterprise and aspirations in the district.

Investment in skills provides the opportunity for people to use the full range of their talents, increasing their own prosperity. In work progression creates gaps in the workforce for others to take up – this is an important part of increasing employment opportunities for those not in employment.

We face significant challenges in relation to skills levels in the labour force with a high proportion of our working age population with no qualifications. There is a strong link between skills and qualifications, employment rates and income levels. Increasing the employment rate is now accepted as one of the key elements in reducing high concentrations of deprivation in disadvantaged communities.

In order to ensure work becomes the route out of deprivation, a number of inter-

generational barriers need to be overcome. While multi agency delivery over an extended timescale will be required to remove some of the physical barriers, one of the underlying barriers is much harder to remove.

Low ambition can pass from one generation to another and it is imperative that this is addressed so that a more enterprising and entrepreneurial culture underpins the labour force and supports growth. These issues are not common across Thanet but where they do occur the deprivation symptoms are severe and specific interventions – such as the Margate Task Force have been established to address them.

Continued investment by East Kent College and the proximity to both the Canterbury Christ Church University (particularly with its presence in Broadstairs) and the University of Kent have the potential to boost skills development in our area.

The role of skills development is not just about getting people into work. Whilst this is

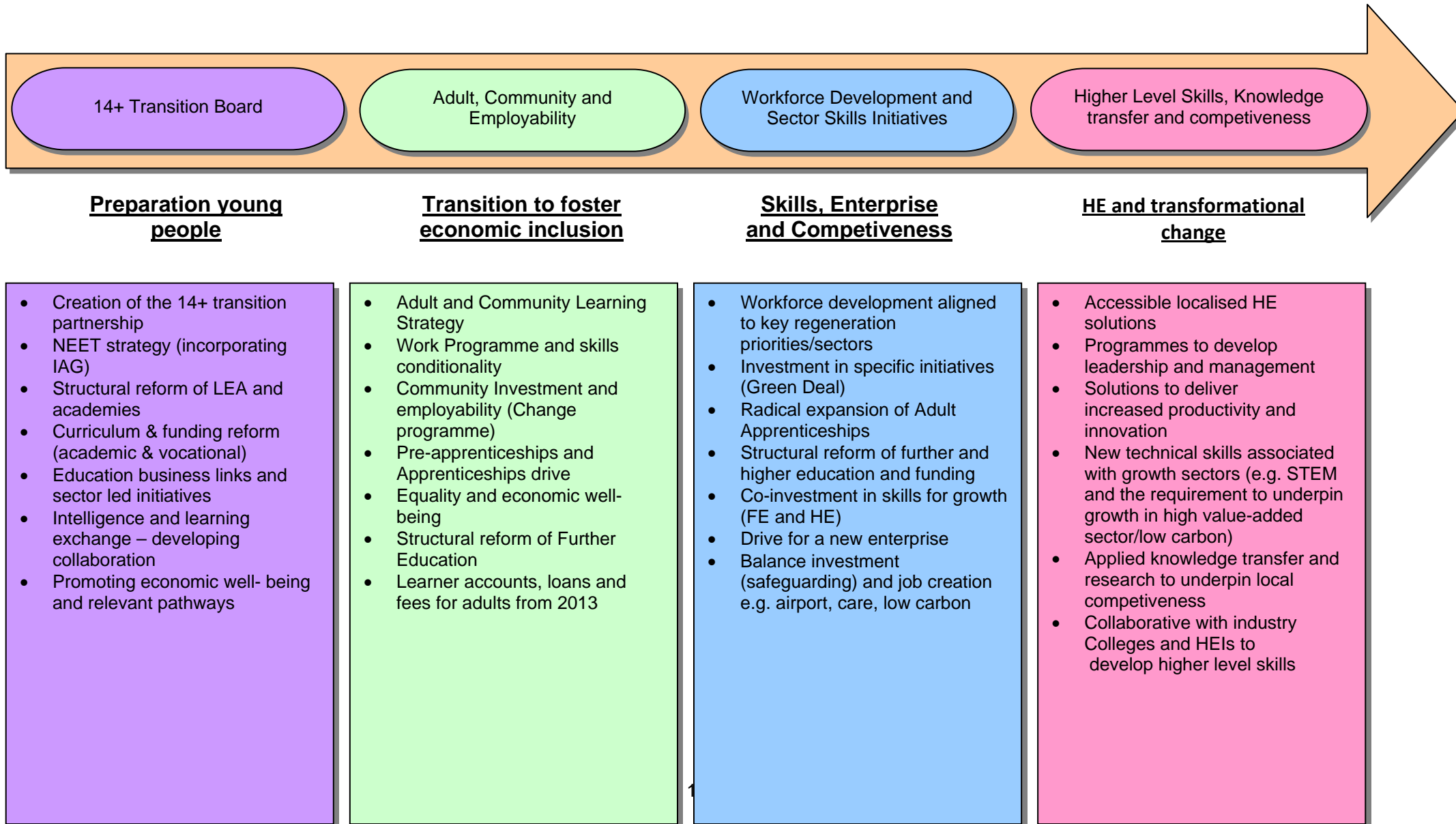
a vital step in realising the economic potential of our area we also need to pay attention to the development needs of those in work. Continued investment in training and staff development is a key mechanism to improve productivity and business performance. With many of our business affected by seasonal and transient employment patterns there is sometimes limited incentive to invest in workforce development.

Enhancing the skill levels of our residents and reducing high levels of worklessness are critical issues for Thanet if we are to tackle our productivity gap.

**We will achieve this by:**

- Working with further and higher education to ensure training opportunities match business needs
- Assist Further and higher education providers establish a presence in the town centres to help people understand what learning opportunities are available and make it easier for people to take up learning.
- Encouraging business to invest in the skills of their workforce

## Employment and Skills: Strategic ‘Framework’



**Building the desire, ambition and aspiration for business to invest in and grow in Thanet must be backed up the provision of infrastructure which is critical to business success. To ensure business and people flourish we will:**

- Promote the roll out and adoption of high speed broadband
- Influence planning policies to ensure there is a sufficient supply land allocations for new premises
- promoting policies and the provision of space that meets the specific needs of business in certain sectors or at certain points in the growth (particularly creative studios, incubator space and managed workspace)
- Build on the unique conflux of a major sea port, international airport and High Speed rail connection – especially enhanced rail infrastructure
- Support the development of our high streets and town centres.

## Investing in Our Assets

The economy is changing. There will always be a role to move people and goods. But increasingly growth and prosperity is coming from moving ideas and knowledge. A lack of ICT connectivity is acting as a constraint on business growth. In addition there are a number of businesses who are simply not aware of the potential of ICT to increase sales and productivity.

There is a well-established relationship between ICT adoption, its exploitation and productivity at the business level. High speed broadband and internet connectivity is regarded as an essential enabling infrastructure, without which many of the value-adding benefits of ICT (the ability to trade, research, communicate and market online) are unachievable. Without high speed internet access the ability to share large files and use technologies that demand reliable, high bandwidth services such as video streaming (used in the media and creative sectors as well as in engineering in applications such as multi-site rapid prototyping and 3-D modelling, VOIP/VTC and mobile working applications) can not be realised.

Innovation is regarded as one of the most powerful of productivity drivers within all economies and, in addition to the creativity

and flair necessary to successfully exploit new ideas, ICT are viewed as a critical enabling tool for innovation (across all sectors). There are significant areas of Kent – including the rural parts of Thanet that do not achieve the Government’s Universal Commitment of connection speeds above 2Mbs. As a result a large number of people and business do not have satisfactory access to Broadband connectivity placing them at considerable disadvantage

Manston, Kent’s International Airport is established itself as a major cargo base for the UK and has the potential to develop significant airport-related activities. Not only does the airport act as an economic entity in its own right – employing people to run its business and spending in the local supply chains – it can also play a wider role in promoting economic growth. This role can include the tangible effects such as spin out of airport related activity, development of the logistics industry and improving access. But it can also include less tangible effects linked to the image and reputation of an area.

The challenge, as with any major development, is to maximize the positive economic contribution whilst minimising any negative impact on the quality of life which is

one of the key features of Thanet.

The airport is only one element of a comprehensive transport system that adds to our competitive position. The Port of Ramsgate gives easy access to the North Sea, the English Channel and into mainlined Europe, providing a perfect base for supplying key European markets. The road access is excellent with a dedicated access road and it is only 60 minutes from London's arterial hub the M25. The port represents a niche UK facility, The Royal Harbour provides one of the South East's finest marinas.

A new Transport strategy for Thanet will be developed alongside the new Local plan. This will identify how the transport infrastructure works, identify any weaknesses and priorities for improvements.

A strong retail and leisure economy is of fundamental importance to both the sustainability of the local economy and the local community. It is also a key mechanism in attracting and retaining people and expenditure to the district – both as residents and as visitors. Until recently the provision of the main retail and leisure offer was spread thinly across the two main towns of Margate and Ramsgate and to a lesser extent Broadstairs. However the

development of a 'town centre' at Westwood Cross with new department stores and a range of other national retail brands has focused 'high street retailing' in one location and developed a critical mass which is sustainable and ensures a greater proportion of retail spend is retained on Thanet.

Success at Westwood Cross has inevitably presented a further challenge to the coastal towns. The challenge now is for the traditional high streets to define their own unique characteristics and offer services that compliment Westwood Cross fulfilling a High Street function which is more than just retail.

Margate's old town is beginning to demonstrate how this can be achieved, with niche, bespoke shops that dovetail the wider heritage and creative offering developing in Margate. Broadstairs and Ramsgate have their own niche positions which will continue to develop and complement the offering across Thanet.

Significant investments have been made to unlock land for industrial and commercial development. Some £35 million has been invested to ensure that serviced sites are available for private sector investment in the strategic employment sites at EuroKent and the Manston Business Park.

Many smaller and start up business require ready made space with the flexibility to adapt and respond to their needs. It is important that private sector developers are encouraged to provide flexible accommodation that meets the needs of our businesses.

Not all the assets that promote our economy are located within the district. The development of the High Speed rail link from London St Pancras has vastly improved connectivity. Continued improvements in the rail infrastructure will see journey times from Ramsgate to London fall to below one hour. The completion of the East Kent Access Road is a huge boost to the connectivity and accessibility of Thanet as a destination. The port, airport, road and rail links will work alongside better internet speeds to ensure that Thanet is recognised as a first choice location. We must be careful to protect and enhance our key access routes.

Our almost unique natural and built environment creates a quality of life that is almost unrivalled. To realise our ambitions we must also have a housing market that responds to and supports our economic aspirations. There will be a new Housing Strategy to sit along side our Economic Strategy to help ensure people get the most out of living and working here. Our strategic

approach to housing is key in taking advantage of the quality of housing that exists in the district and provide houses that are fit for the future. We will require the right kind of housing to continue to encourage investment and new people to live in the area.

**We will achieve this by:**

- Developing a new masterplan for the Port of Ramsgate
- Supporting the roll out of the BDUK programme to deliver high speed broadband across Kent.
- Working with the town teams to rejuvenate their high streets.

## Moving to Phase 2

This document is the first Phase in our approach to economic development in Thanet. Whilst it is based on robust research and has been subject to a degree of informal ‘sense checking’ with key stakeholders it is appropriate that formal consultation is undertaken.

It is recognised that a wide range of stakeholder have an interest in economic development, but there is a need to effectively manage the consultation process. The document will be available on the Thanet District Council website for general comment. But consultation will aim to get responses from targeted organisations including:

- HCA
- Canterbury Christ Church University
- East Kent College
- NHS
- English Heritage
- Kent County Council
- Job Centre Plus
- Turner Contemporary

- Connexions
- MP for Thanet South
- MP for North North
- The Thanet Business Forum (and its members)
- Thanet and East Kent Chamber of Commerce (and its members)
- Kent Channel Chamber of Commerce (and its members)
- Thanet Business Network (and its members)
- Thanet Trade Fair
- Business Networking International
- Federation of Small Business (FSB) (and its members)
- 4 Networking Thanet
- Visit Kent
- Locate in Kent
- Kent Institute of Directors
- Broadstairs Town council
- Ramsgate Town Council
- Local Authorities: Ashford, Dover, Shepway and Canterbury

To translate the strategic direction into detailed actions and policies we need to fully understand the requirements of businesses, the opportunities that exist and what we need to do to capture them. The responses to the consultation will help this but we will also need to undertake specific engagement with business to develop detail actions to will unlock growth.



