



Swale
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Open for Business

Economic Development Strategy 2013-16





*Councillor Mike Cosgrove,
Cabinet Member for
Regeneration*

Foreword

Welcome to “Open for Business”, Swale Borough Council’s Economic Development Strategy for 2013-16. We are keen to ensure that Swale Borough Council plays its full part in supporting and encouraging economic growth. “Open for Business” sets out our approach to improve the support we give and shows some of the ways in which companies and residents can benefit.

Swale has some significant businesses and skilled staff that we would like to see more widely recognised as leaders in their fields, both within the UK and globally. Kent Science Park is the County’s biggest concentration of life science businesses; Sheerness is identified by Government as one of only five Centres for Offshore Renewable Engineering, the Eurolink employment zone in Sittingbourne is the hidden jewel and is home to over 250 companies, employing more than 6500 people. Across the Borough, in Faversham, Queenborough, and in our rural hinterland, we have a wide range of businesses; scientific, brewing, engineering, and maritime as well as a host of service industries. Our road, rail, and airport connections make Swale a good location within easy reach of Europe.

Please do read through, consider what more you would like us to do. If you feel you are able to help us achieve our ambitions please get in touch.

Cllr Mike Cosgrove

Introduction

This Economic Development Strategy sets out a course for Swale Borough Council and its partners to stimulate local growth, and sets out a series of priorities and actions for the next three years. It has been informed by views from the business community. Despite the challenging environment, successes over the past three years have included:

- helping secure major new roads at Queenborough and North Sittingbourne, creating and improving access to new and existing business parks;
- launching a business support service to encourage start-ups and help local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs);
- helping bid for £20 million from the Regional Growth Fund to establish the TIGER fund offering 0% interest business loans;
- successfully promoting apprenticeships to local employers, helping to increase the number of placements to 1,200 for the year to September 2011 and
- successfully working with local traders and groups to develop programmes to improve our town centres.

10% growth in jobs in the knowledge economy since 2008 - the third highest in Kent

Nonetheless, there remains substantial need and opportunity for change. This Strategy takes its cues from the prevailing economic conditions and links to Swale's existing Community

Plan, the Council's Corporate Plan, and the Local Plan. Being 'Open for Business' is the Council's number one priority and the development of this strategy will help shape the Council's future corporate plan when it is refreshed. It shows how the Council will set out its priorities and galvanise support on the wider stage - at County, South East LEP, and national level.

Swale's economic journey - the story so far...

The changing global economy has affected many of our traditional industries, often giving rise to an undeserved negative perception of the borough and its economy. In fact, the past decade has seen an 8% increase in employment, higher than both the national and regional figures, and significant strategic investment as part of the Thames Gateway. Much of the local growth has consolidated on existing strengths in logistics, transport and manufacturing, epitomised by the growth of the Eurolink estate in Sittingbourne, now home to over 250 companies employing an estimated 6,500 employees.

Swale can maximise on the opportunities it has including:

- New road access at Sittingbourne supporting continued growth at Kemsley Fields and at Eurolink, with a new phase capable of accommodating a further 1,000 jobs;
- the completed Rushenden Relief Road facilitating major new employment led development at Queenborough;
- continuing investment and growth at Kent Science Park
- working with our development partner to create a revitalised Sittingbourne Town Centre, to provide a better retail and leisure offer;
- the Port of Sheerness is a key asset for Kent, as a Centre for Offshore Renewable Engineering, having developed a compelling offer for wind turbine manufacturers and through its potential as a major port, helping capitalise on our excellent strategic position to encourage logistics and distribution and;
- the recognition, protection and promotion of the area's considerable and diverse natural and built assets for the visitor economy, which can also help promote a more positive image for the Borough.



Eurolink Business Park

6,500 jobs
estimated in the Eurolink
commercial area

However, there are challenges, which include:

- Tackling key infrastructure constraints, not least capacity issues at junctions 5 and 7 of the M2, pressing the case for a new junction and the creation of a link between the M2 and A2 east of Sittingbourne, to be delivered alongside the final section of the Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road;
- a need to sell Swale's attributes as a location from which to operate a business;



£10.5 million
commitment from
Kent Science Park to
develop space onsite
over the next
18 months

- an on-going need to provide greater diversity in the local employment market, and improve representation of 'higher value' business sectors which generate more skilled and more highly paid employment;
- increasing not only the diversity but also the volume of employment in the Borough to help tackle unemployment and reduce the need for to travel beyond the Borough for work;
- the need to build on the range of learning provision available locally and broaden the skill base within the resident workforce, helping local people to compete in a changing labour market, and further improving the investment potential of the borough;
- supporting local small and medium enterprises in a challenging environment. Companies employing fewer than 10 people represent over 80% of local businesses and helping improve their opportunities to survive and grow will be key to the future of the local economy; and
- The socio-economic inequalities in Swale.

More information about Swale's challenges can be found at www.swale.gov.uk/open-for-business

The Vision

To ensure that the borough is 'Open for Business' so that Swale is one of the best places in Britain in which to live, work and invest.

The Aim

To create the right conditions to help stimulate economic growth and ensure that the benefits of this are experienced by residents and businesses.

The Priorities

Based on the analysis of key opportunities, challenges and the drivers for change, four priorities have been identified.



Priority 1: Creating an 'Open for Business' environment

Creating an 'Open for Business' environment is critical, and we will focus upon addressing largely infrastructure concerns whilst helping to deliver an on-going supply of new development opportunities capable of attracting investment and supporting growth. Effective transport infrastructure is a key ingredient. Whilst the financial environment makes it challenging, the Council will keep strategic issues such as at junctions 5 and 7 of the M2 in the foreground. This will include pressing the case for the creation of a new link between the M2 and A2 east of Sittingbourne, including a new Junction 5A on the M2. This would be necessarily delivered alongside the final section of the Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road, relieving pressure on both junction 5 and central Sittingbourne. We will lobby Government and its agencies to make the case for future investment, both directly and working through the South East Local Enterprise and Thames Gateway Partnerships.



M2 Junction, Sittingbourne

£144 million
investment in new road
infrastructure since 2007

Public transport must also provide a credible service to businesses and local residents. The formation of a Quality Bus Partnership for Swale has been

a useful step towards improving bus services, and whilst there will now be no change to the rail franchise for Kent until 2018, the Council will be working with local authority, business and Thames Gateway partners to seek improved services in the future.

Through the development of its Local Plan the Council has expressed its long-term commitment to employment-led growth and so we will generate a supply of development opportunities that provide flexibility and choice to investors and occupiers, capable of meeting both indigenous growth and attracting major new investment. There must also be continued delivery at existing key employment sites. We will place a focus on the major regeneration plans for Sittingbourne Town Centre; on Kent Science Park, to generate new, high quality employment; further development at Eurolink, Kemsley Fields and Neatscourt and at Sheerness, by seeking to enhance the environment in the Town Centre and to capitalise upon the opportunity for the Port to be a centre for offshore wind-turbine manufacture and a logistic hub. In collaboration with local partners we will also seek to strengthen the existing vitality of Faversham.

In our digital age connectivity to the internet has a major influence on economic success. Parts of the borough already enjoy good connectivity and as Kent County Council rolls out the 'Make Kent Quicker' project, bringing superfast broadband to most rural communities, we will lobby for early inclusion of Swale communities.

Priority 1: Creating an 'Open for Business' environment

What we need	What we will do
The ability to meet current and future transport infrastructure needs, and address barriers to growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● With partners and the private sector, we will continue to press the case for a solution to the capacity issues at junctions 5 and 7 of the M2. ● Work with the Quality Bus Partnership to review and improve service provision, particularly in light of new development, and employment opportunities. ● Work alongside local partners to seek rail service improvements with both Southeastern and through the re-franchising process.
Sittingbourne Town Centre to improve its offer so as to be able to attract new occupiers, improve its retail and leisure offer, and encourage increased use and spend.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work to deliver major regeneration proposals, with the Council's development partner. This will include delivery of an improved cultural offer and new retail development. ● Work with our town centre partners to deliver programmes that encourage greater use of our the town centre.
Sheerness Town Centre to provide an improved environment for its traders and users alike.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seek funding for and deliver environmental improvements in Sheerness Town Centre to improve its attractiveness for occupiers and shoppers. ● Work with our town centre partners, to deliver programmes that encourage greater use of our the town centre.
Help strengthen Faversham's vitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with partners to enhance Faversham's market town offer. ● Work with the Town Council on the successful completion of the Faversham Creek Neighbourhood Plan. ● Support the Town Council in implementing and operating the programme of activities that celebrate Magna Carta 2015 and beyond.
Landowners and investors, whether local, national or global, to feel confident in the Council's commitment to bringing forward development proposals to create new employment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Planning for growth through the development of a Local Plan that provides sites capable of not only meeting local demand, but also attracting major new investment. ● Provide clear guidance and support for the owners of key sites, and help address barriers and promote opportunities to the market.
Broadband capable of meeting business needs across as wide an area of the Borough as is possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with KCC and providers to minimise the number of communities suffering from poor broadband coverage.

Priority 2: Understanding and Supporting Local Business

Local business growth has been a key building block in the diversification of the borough's economy to date. However, since the 2008 a downturn in the rate of business 'births' relative to failures has meant a slow erosion of the borough's business stock.

In 2012 the Council introduced a pilot business support service for start-ups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and with positive feedback from customers about this direct and practical support the Council will continue to provide the service. We will also be working hard to ensure local SMEs are sign-posted to the TIGER 0% business loan programme, and encourage take-up of other forms of assistance available, including opportunities to improve competitiveness through improved environmental performance.

To enhance our ability to provide direct financial support to business, we are making the case for parts of the borough to

be classified as having Assisted Area status, through the 2013/14 review of the Assisted Area map for the UK. This will increase the level to which eligible local businesses and potential inward investors can be financially supported through current and any future funding regimes.



Shepherd Neame Brewery, Faversham

It is important that the Council values and builds its relationship with business. We need to create opportunities for a broader cross-section of the business community to get involved. We also need to establish a more robust mechanism through which we can capture their views, perceptions and concerns. Through this we can further sharpen our understanding of how we can help to meet their needs.

82% of all
businesses in Swale
employ less than
10 people

Priority 2: Understanding and Supporting Local Business

What we need	What we will do
To encourage local growth from existing and new businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide a business support service, promote its availability to increase its use, and adapt delivery to meet changes in demand. ● Promote and signpost to other services delivered by partner organisations. ● Encourage and support the development of business start-up space, both as work-hubs and incubator space. ● Work with KCC as lead body to deliver the RECREATE project in Sittingbourne to provide space for creative businesses.
Make the best use of support that is available to support growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote the availability of funding, including the TIGER loan programme and apprenticeship grant, and signpost to support available to help secure these opportunities. ● Lobby for the inclusion of parts of Swale in the new Assisted Area Map for England, which will enable higher levels of aid to local SMEs and larger companies. ● Encourage the adoption of renewable technologies and promote and signpost to sources of advice and support to improve environmental performance.
Building our relationship with business.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meet with business groups in order to understand issues and collaboratively tailor improvements and solutions. ● Provide consistent and regular opportunities for local business to meet with the Council and its partner organisations and engage in the 'Open for Business' agenda. ● Extend our reach and make smarter use of internet-based communication channels to reach the local business community. ● Survey local businesses regularly regarding their views and concerns.

Priority 3: Promoting Swale

Our promotion of the Swale offer, as an investment location and visitor destination, has been focused on working with key, strategic partner organisations such as Locate in Kent, Thames Gateway Kent Partnership and Visit Kent. Whilst this remains significant, the Council is committed to more direct actions, with a view to generating new investment, business and jobs, and also to helping to create awareness and a better perception of the borough more generally. Whilst much of this work will be externally focused, it is important that greater confidence in the area can be generated locally, both with residents and businesses.

3,400 tourism
employees in Swale

What we need	What we will do
A cohesive story for the Swale economy which demonstrates how we are Open for Business.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Involving business and local partners, research and develop proposals to promote a positive image for Swale, that embraces local diversity and strengths. ● Develop and build upon a suite of 'Invest in Swale' materials, including an effective web presence and regular communications with key contacts. ● Develop Visit Swale microsite, to be an integral part of the Visit Kent website and marketing platform.
A pro-active promotional campaign that pulls together the jigsaw of opportunities and addresses a wide audience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with partners, to communicate improvements to local infrastructure and other 'good news' stories more effectively and widely, making use of local and national media. ● Build a database of key contacts with the potential to bring investment interest to the Borough, and use this to communicate regularly to a broader audience, beyond the Borough. ● Hold a regeneration conference to celebrate success and set out future plans to engage a wide audience both from within and outside of the Borough. ● Celebrate success, by capturing and promoting good news. ● Invest in opportunities to create an awareness of Swale to those visiting and passing using signage. ● Identify and support a group of business representatives willing to play an ambassadorial role on behalf of Swale.

Priority 4: Retaining Local Benefit

Where possible local jobs should go to local people. As well as supporting access to employment for those with lower skill levels, we must also seek to create more opportunities to encourage those with higher skills to live and work locally. We also need to retain Swale's graduates within the borough.

Young people have been facing particular difficulties in the job market, so the Council will re-enforce its commitment to using links with schools, training providers, and employers to promote apprenticeships. Shaping and extending learning provision in the Borough, so that it is linked more closely to local employer needs, is also important, and with appropriate employer links this can help create clearer pathways for young people.

In our role as Local Planning Authority we will encourage the use of local labour and the provision of apprenticeships directly, be that through the construction or the occupation of new developments.

The Council has adopted a Local First Policy to show it is committed through its commissioning and procurement activities to maximise the proportion of spend that is retained locally. The Council will also be expecting social value contributions to be evidenced as part of the specification and as part of the assessment criteria when we commission and procure services to ensure we secure social benefits locally.

1,200 apprenticeships
provided by Swale employers
in 2011/12

What we need	What we will do
New employment opportunities to be available to the local community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use the planning process to encourage local labour and the take-up of apprenticeships.
More opportunities for young people to enter employment with learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As an employer, lead by example and provide apprenticeship placements within the Council. ● Encourage and promote the creation of new apprenticeship opportunities, and help employers and young people access the right information and support.
Local learning provision that makes sense for and has a relationship with key sectors of the Borough's economy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Look for opportunities to build an extended vocational offer, including the exploration of opportunities for the inclusion of a new FE provision as part of the regeneration of Sittingbourne Town Centre. ● Encourage employers to link with schools to support an employment focused approach.

Key principles

Swale is 'Open for Business', and the aims of this strategy are to create and capitalise upon the opportunities for economic growth and optimise local benefit from investment and jobs secured. As a result, the guiding principles underpinning this strategy are to:

- **focus on where we can make a difference:** economic growth is largely derived from the private sector, and many of the influences upon the success of individual businesses and our local economy are beyond the scope or influence of the Council. We will therefore focus on embracing opportunities and addressing issues, where the Council can make a difference.

4,350 active businesses
in Swale

- **be guided by evidence:** ensuring action is based on robust information and analysis and up to date monitoring of change, so that we are ready to adapt as our external environment changes.

- **work in partnership:** whilst focusing on interventions that make a difference, the Council must also work in partnership, not least with the business community.

The Swale Economy and Regeneration Partnership (SERP) provides a vehicle through which we will seek to achieve this, whilst also linking with other, existing business led groups. We will also work with strategic partners, for instance the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership and the South East LEP, to ensure we take advantage of cross-boundary opportunities.

- **recognise variety:** the Borough and its businesses and residents are diverse. Our approach to encouraging local growth will recognise this variety as a strength on which to build.



Measuring success

By 2016, the borough will capitalise upon its opportunities, including:

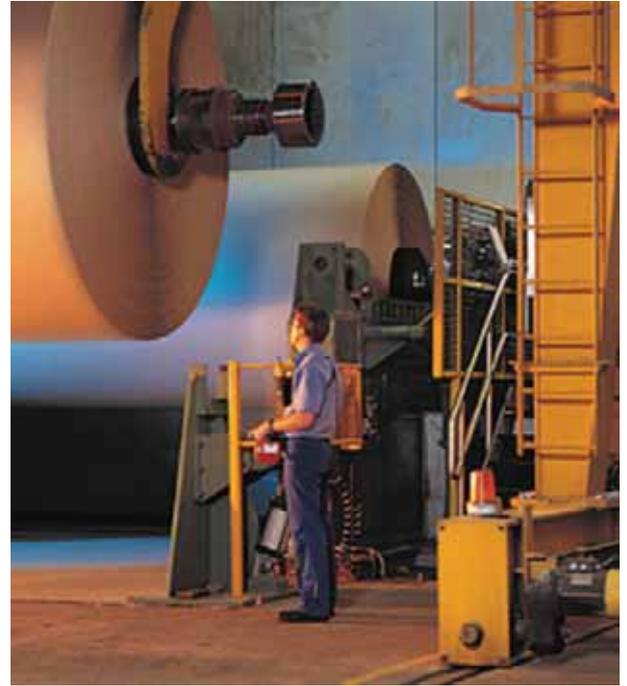
- a greater than proportionate share of investment from the TIGER loan fund is supporting growth in Swale companies;
- an increasing flow of new businesses are being formed with the help of the business support on offer, and a growing stock of successful SMEs;
- perceptions of the borough as a business and investment location have improved;
- Interest in and activity at our key employment sites is buoyant, with improved investor confidence and the attraction of new businesses into the borough;
- take-up of apprenticeships in Swale is amongst the most positive in Kent; and
- development of Phase 1 of Sittingbourne Town Centre regeneration has begun, to include a multi-screen cinema, restaurants and bars and new retail development;
- development on the 4ha expansion land at Kent Science Park has commenced;
- investment in environmental improvements in Sheerness is underway.
- major investment and growth in the renewables sector, particularly at Sheerness



To realise most of this agenda will be an achievement for Swale, and would help the Borough close the economic and prosperity gap between itself and rest of Kent and the South East.

Our aim to stimulate local growth is subject to many, often national and global influences. We will continue to monitor how the local economy is performing against Kent and the South East, and review our activity to check whether it is making a difference to positive outcomes.

We will also need to be responsive to our changing environment and new opportunities that arise, and to this end this Strategy and associated action plan will be reviewed on annual basis.



Copies of this Swale Borough Council strategy are available on the Council website www.swale.gov.uk
If you would like further hard copies or alternative versions (e.g. large print, audio, different language)
we will do our best to accommodate your request. Please contact the Council at:

Swale Borough Council,
Swale House,
East Street,
Sittingbourne
Kent, ME10 3HT

Customer Service Centre 01795 417850