

Swale a great place
to visit | invest | work | earn | learn



A draft economic regeneration
framework for Swale
2018 – 2021



Foreword



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Cabinet Member for
Regeneration

Over the last five years Swale has seen a significant increase in commercial activity with considerable inward investment. Making Swale a great place to work, earn and learn new skills is at the centre of our ambition. Over the next three years we will see considerable change as we push through our bold ideas for regenerating Sittingbourne Town Centre, help further expand Eurolink and Kent Science Park, with much emphasis on new infrastructure and much improved connectivity to the M2 and beyond.

Across all of our borough, we will need to recalibrate our efforts to compete in a global society in which Swale's diverse and thriving business sector can continue to successfully play its part in innovation, life sciences, export, tourism and engineering.

The regeneration of the Borough is a far-reaching agenda and involves a broad range of activity with which the Council is involved. Economic regeneration has a vital role to play as part of this wider picture and this document provides a framework to which both the Council and others can refer in making their contribution. The Council's activity will seek to

- promote the borough
- lever in external funding and investment
- Support business
- improve local skills and choice
- offer help where needed
- work constructively with partners

With a further tightening of slim resources this is not without challenge as competition intensifies, but our aim is "to make a difference where it matters most". This requires agility and grip. Whilst there is always more to achieve, across Swale you can see the improvement, and this is what we intend to continue.



Introduction

Swale is located on the North Kent Coast, only 40 miles from Central London and within easy reach of the UK's major airports and access routes to Europe. By virtue of its location on the Thames Estuary the Borough is an important part of what is a national priority area for growth; and good transport links via the M2/A2 corridor and the A249, alongside high speed rail services to London have been key to consolidating Swale's position as an investment location of choice.

Swale is comprised of three distinct areas, Sittingbourne, Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey, each with a mix of town, coast and a wide rural hinterland. This diversity is reflected in the local economy.

Sittingbourne has been the focus for much investment with a major industrial presence, complimented by a growing technical and scientific base. Sites at Eurolink, Kemsley Fields and Kent Science Park have attracted major inward investment as well as supporting the growth of small and medium enterprises (SME's).

Faversham is a historic market town, with a strengthening visitor economy based on its heritage and the surrounding countryside and coast. Brewing, distribution and manufacturing are also significant employers, with more incremental growth, at smaller employment sites through local SME's.

The **Isle of Sheppey** has seen significant investments associated with the major Port at Sheerness and at Queenborough, including those by Aesica at its pharmaceutical manufacturing facility and by ALDI, in a new Regional Distribution Centre. The Isle of Sheppey also has an important visitor economy, based on both its traditional resorts and unique landscapes and heritage.

Rural Swale is also an important economic driver in its own right. The mix of landscapes includes the North Kent Downs and internationally important wetlands, both key assets attracting many visitors. Agriculture and horticulture are key employers and continue to play a defining role in shaping the local area.



Our Economy

Over the past decade the local economy has shown resilience in the face of the global economic crisis, and over the past five years, growth. This reflects the generous provision made for employment land, delivery of key infrastructure improvements and the support offered to investors and local businesses. The economy has also seen further diversification, with growth in emerging sectors such as technical and scientific activities, as well as re-enforcing existing strengths in distribution and manufacturing. The headline data demonstrates the scale of the investment and change that has been secured - more detailed information can be found at www.swalemeansbusiness.co.uk

Challenges remain, some longstanding, others presented by the levels of growth achieved. In particular, we recognise the need to:-

- push for infrastructure that keeps pace with growth and improves, to provide connectivity that supports our ambitions, rather than constrains them.
- ensure a continued supply of well-located employment land, as demand absorbs the current supply
- address the lack of local technical and vocational learning opportunities, in particular for young people, helping create a stronger, more adaptable workforce.
- expand the range of leisure and retail opportunities for the growing number of residents, workers and visitors.
- stay in touch with our businesses to understand their needs and help them compete in an environment of changing technology and habits, continued globalisation as we leave the EU, each with far reaching implications on international trade, the movement of labour and local economic success.



4,610
Businesses



An economy providing
49,000 jobs,
a growth of 6,000 in the past 5 years



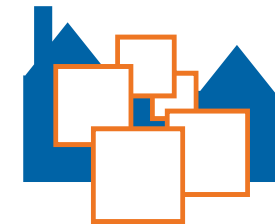
89% of all businesses have less than **10** employees
Only **15** business employ more than **250** staff



56% increase in new business starts in the five years to 2016
67% business survival rate in the last 3 years, the highest in Kent



14,000
New homes planned up to 2031

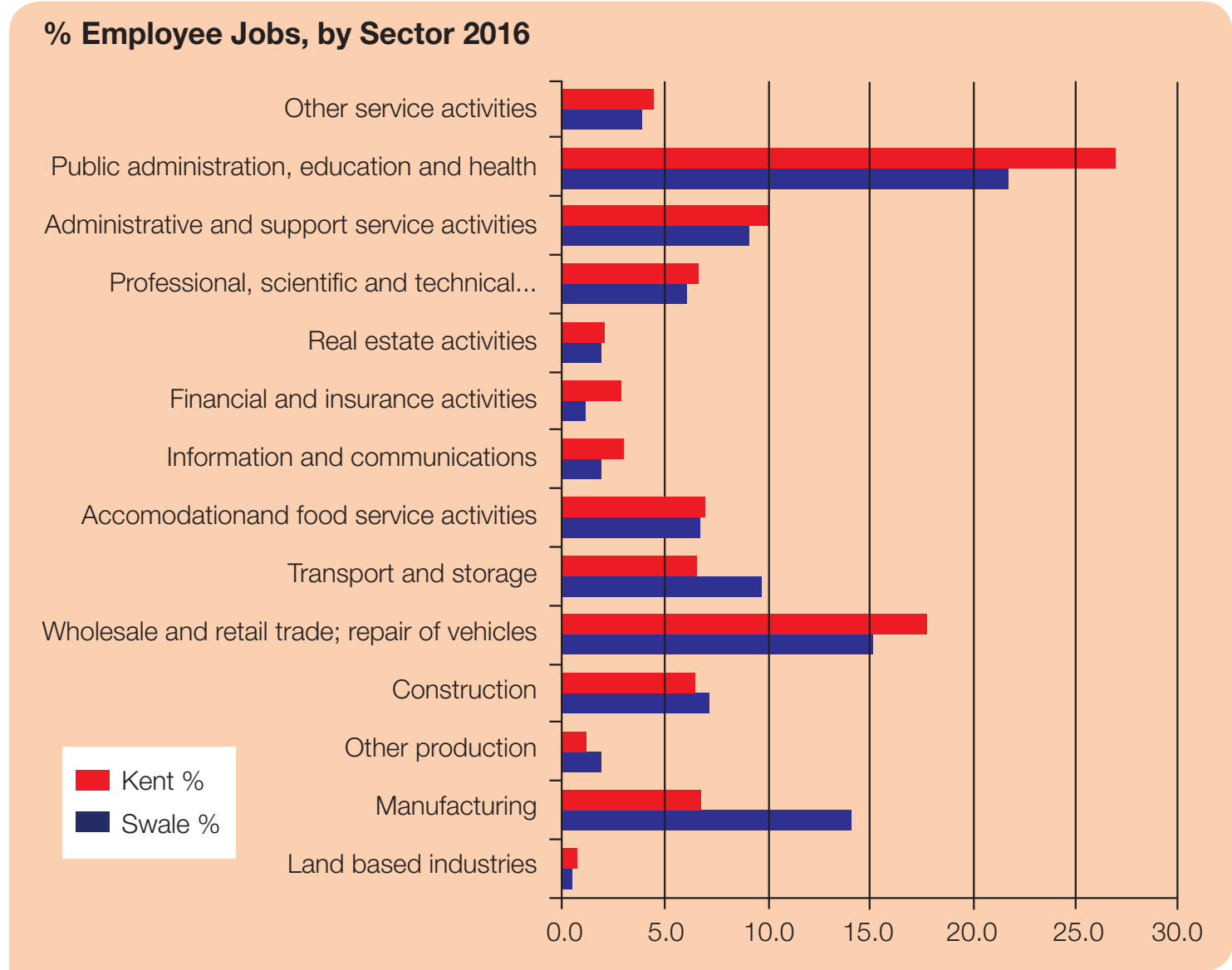


3 million square feet
of commercial development, the highest level in Kent over the past decade

Sectors

Swale has particular concentrations in the manufacturing, transport and storage sectors, relative not only to Kent but also the rest of the Country. Providing 7,000 and 5,000 jobs respectively, they are also the second and third largest sectors in absolute terms, with retail and wholesale the largest, providing 8,000 jobs.

90% of the employment growth in the last five years has been seen in five sectors: manufacturing; construction; transportation and storage; professional, scientific and technical activities and business administration. Manufacturing employment has grown to be the fifth largest and most concentrated cluster in South East England, outside of London.



data excludes farm based agricultural jobs

Growth highlights

Queenborough & Rushenden, a major regeneration project providing 1100 homes and new commercial space. Phase 1 housing started and 1,000 jobs have been supported to date.



ALDI are investing in new £50m distribution centre at Queenborough to join two other major national distribution centres in Borough - Morrisons in Sittingbourne and GIST, serving Marks and Spencer, in Faversham.



Kent Science Park is one of the principal clusters of life science businesses in Kent.

AbBaltis, supplies blood plasma to disease-testing firms, has grown rapidly since forming in 2010 and in 2015 received the Queens Award for export.



Swale's Industrial Hub, the biggest concentration of manufacturing in Kent, centred around Eurolink, is home to 300+ companies.

Cook Kitchen is a growing national brand, cooking and selling frozen ready meals that are made like you would at home. Based on Eurolink it has seen remarkable growth since starting in 1997.



The Port of Sheerness, one of the UK's largest bulk handling Ports handling 1.4m tonnes of goods. Peel Port's Masterplan is driving significant new investment and increasing land available for port use.

There is outstanding **maritime and naval heritage** associated with the Port. This is becoming part of a wider, diverse offer contributing to the Visitor Economy.



A growing Visitor Economy shows £193m spent by visitors and supporting 4,561 jobs. There are diverse destinations including beaches,

historic towns, the North Kent Downs and Coastal Marshes.

Shepherd Neame, Britain's oldest brewer, with a visitor centre that has become an important part of the local visitor economy and is currently being expanded.



Aims and priorities

Our aim is to continue to develop the right conditions to support and stimulate growth so that Swale is recognised as one of the most enterprising locations along the Thames Estuary - a great place to visit, invest, work, earn and learn. To deliver change over the next three years, our contribution is set out under four broad priorities.

1. Promote Swale
2. Secure investment
3. Support Business
4. Enhance skills

To deliver the outcomes required, support and investment from our partners is vital. We have proved adept at making the case for investment in the Borough but the funding landscape is fragmented, uncertain and competition for funds high. We must be able to respond quickly to opportunities and show a level of ambition that sets us apart from others. Given the scale of change we are seeking, this document is a call to action at the sub-regional and national levels, with KCC, Government and its agencies and the South East LEP, all required to play their part. This requires clarity and consistency about our priorities and having the support from local partners.

We will work with local organisations, including our business partnership, and look at cross-cutting issues for Swale, whilst also recognising how different parts of the Borough present different challenges and opportunities. This includes our outstanding rural areas, which make a substantial contribution to our visitor economy and are seeing a growth in a broad range of SME's including a strengthening local food and drink sector.

Whilst these priorities, and our areas of focus under each, will guide the Council's efforts we will also remain responsive to issues and opportunities as they arise. Again, these will be both local, as partner organisations, residents and businesses bring forward issues and ideas and on a broader stage, including working with the priorities that come forward from the Thames Estuary Commission.





Promote Swale

Promoting Swale's assets is critical to delivering our regeneration priorities. Appreciation of the Borough's assets and creating positive perceptions will enhance our ability to attract investment and expand the visitor economy. This will involve marketing the Borough, showcasing our improving infrastructure and economy; major assets such as Eurolink, Kent Science Park and Sheerness Port; the evolution of the town centres and visitor offer; the areas fantastic natural environment and the many advantages of living in Swale.

Over time, changing perceptions will also boost development values, helping drive up quality and enable the private sector to contribute more substantively to the delivery of critical infrastructure.

Areas of Focus

- Take advantage of the unique attributes of each area of Swale to promote the Borough as a great place to visit, invest, work, earn and learn.
- Continue to develop and enhance the Swale Means Business web presence, using social and other media to develop new audiences.
- Work with partners to develop and promote shared stories about Swale as a great place in which to invest and do business.
- Build the area's reputation through the work of key bodies on the national and international stage including the Department for Trade and Investment, the Thames Estuary Commission, Visit England and the South East LEP.
- Promote local 'success stories' to reinforce the Swale Means Business branding.
- Work with partners to provide networking opportunities that help raise the profile of the Borough.

Secure investment

In recent years Swale has successfully levered in substantial public and private sector investment, including £250m of government funding in local roads and the highest level of commercial development in Kent. Nonetheless, there is a need to increase our efforts and extend our ‘investment reach’ by creating the right conditions for growth. Creating an ongoing supply of land to meet continued demand for space from both inward investors and local businesses, business incubator space, evolving our town centres and developing the borough’s connectivity will be priorities, to further improve our offer.

Areas of Focus

- Continue the review of the Local Plan, adopting a balanced approach which can deliver the required jobs and homes, with supporting transport, education, health and cultural and community infrastructure.
- Secure improvements to the strategic road network, particularly the Lower Thames Crossing and appropriate solutions at Junctions 5 and 7 of the M2 and at key junctions along the A249.
- Push for completion of the Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road and a new A2-M2 link, to help address issues on the A2 and create the capacity for future growth.
- Lobby and support public transport providers to optimise and integrate local services and enhance access to London.
- Promote the delivery of improved broadband and mobile services where we can, in particular to support the rural economy.
- Provide a ‘team around the investor’ approach, utilising experience and knowledge to grasp investment opportunities
- Create town centre environments which enable businesses to trade and create a mixed offer, improve resilience and help meet the needs of our residents.



Support Business

Whether starting or growing, small businesses are a major source of new investment and employment for Swale. There is a demand for services that will support them and provide opportunities that allow local businesses to network and influence. We already directly provide support, advice and deliver a range of workshops and seminars with partners and will continuously develop this offer so that it remains relevant and responsive to business needs.

As we embrace the global economy, a focus for our support will be to provide access to expertise on developing export markets; supporting ideas and innovation and developing a more skilled and technical workforce.

Areas of Focus

- Continue to develop our support service and provide networking opportunities, for existing and start-up businesses that help them take forward ideas, develop their workforce, improve productivity and grow sustainably.
- Work with partners to provide information and workshops that will help businesses internationalise and export.
- Improve the supply of workshops, studios and office space for micro and start-up businesses.
- Support a pipeline of available commercial sites and premises across Swale, to serve expansion as well as new investment.
- Encourage opportunities for small businesses to trade in our town centres, through the markets.
- Support the diversification and evolution of the tourism and leisure sector, with a particular focus upon local heritage and unique landscapes across the Borough.
- Provide encouragement for local universities to assist business, with access to their facilities and expertise.



Enhance skills

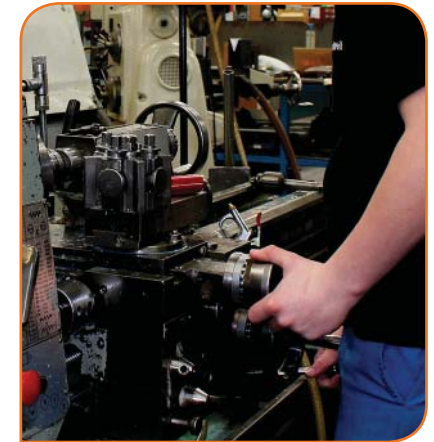
Overall Swale has enjoyed good performance in the majority of its schools, but improving access to a wider range of technical skills provision is fundamental to developing key sectors of our economy. At present 1,500 Swale students make lengthy journeys to pursue technical routes at Further Education Colleges but they are part of a much larger population of local young people for whom local opportunities are focused mostly around schools.

Alongside work based learning, we believe a Further Education facility in Sittingbourne will create more accessible opportunities for young people. This will provide choice and should be focused on meeting employer needs and provide clear progression routes into local industry. This will also be well placed to help meet employer demand for skills, within the existing workforce.

There also remains the need to address the deep-rooted functional skills issues, which are limiting opportunities for some residents. The Council will look to influence funders and providers, so that those supported can secure progression to employment and training, rather than be trapped in a cycle of low attainment.

Areas of Focus

- Work with Canterbury and Mid-Kent Colleges to establish the business case for new, relevant FE provision in Sittingbourne. We will establish the appropriate scale and type of provision and the best site, around which we will build a consensus and put together a funding package.
- Promote work based learning and apprenticeships to employers and local young people, working with schools and other providers to provide good quality information, advice and guidance.
- Encourage employers to become more involved with local schools, to build greater understanding of employer need and partnership working.
- Secure local labour and apprenticeship outcomes from new developments in the Borough, which offer appropriate opportunities.
- Work with KCC and other key partners to identify how we can support efforts to provide more positive progression routes for local people facing skills challenges.



Measuring outcomes and change

The outcome of many ‘Areas of Focus’ will be judged by their delivery and the benefits that they bring to our local economy and communities. Given the external support we often require and the long-term nature of economic regeneration, not all of the priorities identified will be delivered within the timeframe of the Framework. We do, however, intend to make good progress against which we will report regularly over the life of this Framework. This will include progress on projects and outputs and outcomes from service delivery.

Local economic and growth indicators will also be used as a barometer, to measure change and to benchmark economic performance against Kent and the country as whole, where possible. We will also stay in touch with and be responsive to changing local business needs, through dialogue and gathering our own information on business concerns and issues.

Whilst not an exhaustive list, some of the barometer indicators will include:

Indicator	Swale	Kent & Medway	National	Target direction	
Total number of businesses 2016	4610			↑	
No of Employee Jobs 2016	49,500			↑	
Business formation p.a. 2016	695 p.a.			↑	
Business survival rates 2016	3 year	67.0%	62.4%	60.9%	→
	5 year	45.3%	43.9%	44.1%	
Unemployment 2017	2.3%	1.7%	1.9%	↓	
Average wage by workplace 2017	£491 pw	£522 pw	£552 pw	↑	
Average wage by residence 2017	£566 pw	£574 pw	£552 pw	↑	
Qualifications levels 16-64 2016	Level 1	80.7%	87.3%	85.4%	↑
	Level 2	68.7%	72.8%	74.7%	
	Level 3	44.5%	53.8%	57.2%	
	Level 4/5	22.6%	33.6%	38.6%	

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If you would like alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request.

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