

# Draft Economic Growth Strategy

## Introduction

This draft Economic Growth Strategy has been developed alongside the Corporate Plan 2019-2021 – *Delivering a Gravesham to be proud of*

Its core objective is Place: a dynamic borough defined by a vibrant and local economy taking advantage of growth in the area, supported by its strong and active community.

## Key economic growth commitments

### Enhance the vibrancy of the Gravesham economy

By delivering a programme of strategic regeneration schemes, supported by an effective Town Centre team.

### Raise Gravesham's economic profile

By developing business and transport infrastructure and improve local land usage through a diversified commercial premises portfolio.

### Promote a Borough 'Open for Business'

With a focus on retaining existing businesses and encouraging new start-ups, increase the level and range of business investment to drive economic growth

### Improve economic conditions

Working alongside key partner agencies, develop a package of measures that support local enterprises and deliver a workforce with the skills needed by modern business.

### Positively promoting sustainable development

Deliver a pro-active development management service, underpinned by a sound Local Plan that protects and enhances our historic natural and built environment.

## Recent Achievements

This economic growth strategy has been prepared against a backdrop of ongoing investment in Gravesham, creating the building blocks for further growth. These include:

- Investment in infrastructure, enhancing Gravesham's connectivity - Highspeed 1 train services from Gravesend Rail Station; investment in Gravesend's

Transport Quarter, Gravesend Rail Station improvements and the Rathmore Road scheme; trialling of fast river bus services between Gravesend and Central London; access to Superfast Broadband.

- Investment in commercial space - refurbishment of St George's Shopping Centre and Gravesend Borough Market in Gravesend Town Centre; new build business space at Northfleet Embankment.
- Investment by business, creating additional employment – Kent Space and PrepWorld at Springhead Enterprise Park, Berkley Homes at Northfleet Embankment; independent businesses in the Town Centre.
- Activity to support and strengthen the local business community – financial incentives for business growth, such as North West Kent Enterprise Zone status, Escalate Loan Programme and LEADER grants scheme; Gravesham Business Networking and other local networking in the tourism and creative sector; the Gravesham Business Awards raising the profile of local businesses; Go Trade Interreg Project in support of activity within the Market.
- Investment in education, skills and careers advice – refurbishment and expansion of North Kent College and local schools; local careers and jobs fairs.

This list is not comprehensive, but it illustrates the changes are taking place that will influence and support further investment and growth. This is especially the case in respect of the strategic investments that the Council is also making to regenerate Gravesend Town Centre, development of additional business space at North East Gravesend.

## Gravesham's Economy

Gravesham needs to capitalise on its economic strengths and address its economic challenges if the Council's ambition for *a vibrant and productive economy* is to be realised.

### *Gravesham's economic strengths:*

- Excellent rail, river and road connectivity to Central London and a wide range of other destinations.
- Good broadband infrastructure capabilities, with x% of properties being served by superfast broadband
- Over 4000 businesses, predominantly small businesses, in a diverse range of sectors. Strong business start-up and survival rates
- A diverse rural economy, within 78% of the Borough's area
- String of large scale internationally focused businesses in food, paper, refining and packaging
- River-related uses and head-quarters of the Port of London Authority
- High proportion of the population are economically active
- Good range of schooling and FE provision.

### *Gravesham's economic challenges:*

- Excellent transport links have yet to attract the businesses, jobs and better paid work that could be expected from Gravesham's location
- Low productivity levels and relatively small local economy with Gross Value Added (GVA) per head within the lowest 20% in the UK

- Fewer job opportunities in the Borough relative to other Kent Districts – low job density
- Lack of higher value/higher paid work in the Borough
- No dedicated Higher Education provision
- Around a third of Gravesham’s workforce leave the Borough each day for work
- Unemployment levels above Kent and South East averages, on a par with national levels, with pockets of higher levels of unemployment
- Community focused Town Centre, weakened by loss of major retailers and lack of investment
- Low levels of educational attainment, especially at Level 4+
- Yet to fully realise the potential of the Borough’s environmental and heritage assets to boost the visitor economy.

Gravesham has the potential to take full advantage of its economic opportunities and to address its challenges with targeted interventions.

### A Shared Vision for Gravesham’s Economy

Gravesham’s ambition to increase its productivity and fulfil its economic growth potential is entirely consistent with the delivery of economic ambitions at a wider strategic level - spatially and economically at local, county, regional and national levels.

The vision of the **Gravesham Local Plan Vision, 2011-2028**, is of a vibrant and attractive Borough where residents have access to quality jobs.

*“By 2028, Gravesham will be a place where residents have access to quality housing, jobs and services that allow them to meet their day-to-day needs in an environmentally safe, vibrant and attractive borough; a Gravesham to be proud of. Development and growth will be managed to ensure that local infrastructure impacts are mitigated. Whilst facilitating this growth, the borough’s protected landscapes and natural habitats will be safeguarded and the impact of growth on the environment minimised.” (Gravesham Local Plan)*

To this end, the Local Plan makes provision for the protection and expansion of employment opportunities in the Borough through:

- A regenerated Gravesend and Northfleet, from areas with a significant number of brownfield sites and redundant buildings to areas that offer a more diverse range of employment and housing.
- Economic growth and a matching skilled workforce, increasing the borough’s appeal and prosperity. Increased local opportunities for residents will also have reduced the need to travel outside the borough for employment.
- Transformation of Gravesend Town Centre into a community and cultural hub. This modern town centre, and its diverse offer, will provide both residents and visitors with a unique experience, supported by excellent public transport.

The [Government’s Industrial Strategy - ‘Building a Britain, fit for the future’](#) - aims to make the UK economy more competitive by improving its productivity. Five foundations are set out for changing this position: Ideas, People, Infrastructure, Business Environment and Places and it emphasises the enabling of business to grow, to become more enterprising and competitive in a global market:

“Local economies around the world tend to have some key attributes. They have a good supply of skilled labour; they are well connected and have land available for homes, offices and factories; and they have rich innovation ecosystems, often built around a university. They have an attractive cultural environment” (Government’s Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain fit for the future, 2017)

The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) published its **Local Industrial Strategy** in accordance with the productivity and competitiveness focus of the UK’s Industrial Strategy.

To inform SELEP’s strategy, Kent County Council, Medway Council, and the 12 Kent Districts within the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership have prepared a **Kent & Medway Enterprise and Productivity Strategy** to identify Kent and Medway’s contribution to achieving change in the South East. This focuses on addressing a disparity between Kent & Medway’s competitiveness and the rest of the South East.

These strategies are important in that they set the framework for future investments that can take place through the Government’s Local Growth Funding, allocated via SELEP, and they can ensure that the widest range of resources are directed to raising economic performance. If real economic change is to take place in the LEP area, then such a difference needs to be made in those areas, such as Gravesham, that are performing less well economically than others, but where investment opportunities exist to considerably raise productivity levels.

The drive for Gravesham to become a more dynamic and productive economy is reinforced by commitments that are also being made to:

- Deliver the economic potential of the Thames Gateway, within which Gravesham is centrally located. The *Thames Estuary 2050 Growth Commission* set out a vision of ‘a *tapestry of productive places along a global river*’ with the potential for generating an additional £190 billion GVA, 1.3 million new jobs and at least 1 million new homes in support of growth. This will make the most of key sectors such as sports and logistics, together with the Gateway’s natural advantages, including its proximity to London. Commitments include tackling barriers to economic growth such as the shortfall of skills, a low skill, low wage economy, entrenched deprivation and a lack of connectivity to employment centres; and, alongside these to promote the attractiveness of the Thames Gateway to employers, enhancing mobility and infrastructure, addressing a risk of tidal flooding and meeting technological changes.
- Specific funding has been made available to the *Thames Estuary Creative Production Corridor (Creative Estuary)* to realise an ambition for the Corridor - as a world-leader for cultural and creative industries. A Great Thames Park is planned to recognise the natural capital opportunities for the Estuary.
- A conduit to benefiting from investment in the Thames Gateway is Gravesham’s partnership in the public/private sector *Thames Gateway Kent Partnership* along with other North Kent local authorities.
- Delivery of *Ebbsfleet Garden City* and the significant potential for long-term business growth, especially around the Central Ebbsfleet/Ebbsfleet Station area, as outlined in the Inclusive Growth Strategy, prepared by the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation.
- Proposals for the *London Resort* on Swanscombe Peninsular.

Gravesham's economic future is intrinsically connected to these major opportunities for growth on its doorstep and engagement is taking place to ensure that these complement Gravesham's ambitions for growth and benefits accrue to Gravesham's business and resident communities.

It also goes without saying that as the strategy moves forward it will need to take account of the climate for investment in the light of current economic conditions and uncertainties.

## **Aim & Delivery of the Strategy**

The overall aim of this economic growth strategy is to achieve a vibrant and productive local economy. The Council will work with its partners across the public and private sectors to build on the Borough's economic strengths and to address the challenges that are faced.

The action plan in support of this strategy is developed around seven key themes:

### **Theme 1 - Place branding to promote Gravesham as a place 'open for business**

More can be done to promote the advantages of Gravesham's location and as a place where businesses can do well. Alongside this, actions to ensure that the council's vision for the local economy is shared with other partners. At the heart of this will be promoting the attractiveness of Gravesend Town Centre as a place to visit, shop, work and do business.

### **Theme 2 - Land and premises to enable businesses to grow**

The availability of a good quality supply of employment land and premises is a constraint on expansion of business, jobs and the attraction of inward investment, especially within higher value sectors. The Gravesham Local Plan sets the spatial framework for bringing forward good quality employment sites. The Council itself is taking a lead with its own property portfolio and working with other landowners to move forward sites.

### **Theme 3 - Investment and improvement in physical transport and digital infrastructure to reinforce Gravesham's connectivity advantages**

Efficient transport & digital communication networks support the vitality and competitiveness of the local economy. Gravesham's economic position ought to be far different from what it currently is given how well-connected it is, especially to Central London. Further investment in transport and digital infrastructure can only reinforce the Borough's location for business.

### **Theme 4 - Supporting enterprise to encourage business growth, especially within higher value sectors**

Gravesham's economy is predominantly made up of small and micro-businesses, with a high level of self-employment and home-based businesses across a wide range of sectors. Access to business support services, especially to start-up businesses remains important and efforts to co-ordinate this are made through the Kent & Medway Growth Hub, funded by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP). Business networking strengthens the local business community through collaboration and informal mentoring.

### **Theme 5 - Skills to ensure that the local workforce is equipped with appropriate skills to access employment opportunities**

Interventions are required to address Gravesham's relatively high unemployment, low skills and limited access to better paid work. Businesses speak of a gap in specific skills which have to be sourced from further afield. Whilst the Council does not have direct responsibility for skills and training, it can champion the needs of local businesses, set an example as a good employer and encourage co-ordination to address skills gaps.

### **Theme 6 - Valuing Gravesham's changing rural economy and the contribution to overall local economic growth**

78% of the Borough is rural with a diverse economy. The business and employment changes taking place within the rural area need to be better understood, together with their contribution to economic growth. 'Not-spots' in superfast broadband availability need to be addressed in the rural area.

### **Theme 7 - Supporting sustainable economic growth through delivering the Council's climate change commitments**

Key sectors within which to see growth – creative and digital, food preparation, construction, river-related businesses and the visitor economy.

## **Performance Monitoring**

Economic change of a scale required in Gravesham will only take place over the long term. Co-ordinated and targeted investment in physical and actions realistically happens over a number of years. Nevertheless, we will seek to measure the overall impact of the strategy and individual interventions.

Key to monitoring the overall effect of actions will be changes in the following:

- Employment floorspace
- Total stock of businesses, by sector and survival rates
- Productivity levels, e.g. GVA per head
- Employment and the number of jobs in key sectors
- Increase in average workplace earnings
- Overall unemployment figures – long term and youth unemployment
- Commuting out of the Borough for work

The opportunity to monitor the impact of individual projects will be taken, specifically, the number and type of jobs and the value of investment.

## **The Council's Role and Resources**

The Council itself has a unique role in using its resources, powers and assets to deliver this strategy, e.g. it has taken a lead to refurbish St George's, Gravesend's main shopping centre, and to bring forward regeneration proposals for sites in the Town Centre. However, its economic ambitions influence the delivery of all its services, enabling business investment and supporting a broadening the contribution of culture and tourism to the Borough's economy.

The economic development strategy has to be delivered within the context of the council's limited resources. It therefore needs to work closely with its partners to realise the opportunities for economic growth. Having said that the council's role is influential and significant in the following ways:

- Strong leadership in placing a dynamic and productive local economy at the heart of its Corporate Plan and making the case for investment through promoting Gravesham as a place open for business.
- Ensuring that the Gravesham Local Plan, as Gravesham's spatial plan, make provision for sufficient employment land and enables sustainable economic growth to take place.
- Preparation of complementary strategies for Gravesend Town Centre, tourism and cultural development.
- Takes a lead in demonstrating a significant commitment to through regeneration proposals for the Town Centre, use of existing landholdings and strategic acquisition of sites.
- Co-ordinating funding resources, including S.106 funding, grant funding from Central Government, SELEP and other sources, borrowing and its own financial resources, e.g. business rates pilot funding towards delivery of employment sites, infrastructure, finance and climate change initiatives.
- Working to engage the investment community in all its forms to invest in the Borough.
- Champion the cause for local enterprise, designing initiatives to enhance business support, especially for new and start-up businesses.
- Influence training providers and skills agencies to focus on raising attainment levels and addressing identified skill gaps.
- Commissioning evidence based studies into the local economy and regularly monitoring its performance.
- Seeking and acting on feedback from businesses and residents.
- Promoting success.

Year on year the council has been receiving less funding from Central Government and since 2019 there has been no further direct grant funding, with the expectation that the council will become self-sufficient in its' funding from local sources. A greater part of business rates (75% of growth in National Non-Domestic Rates) can be retained locally, placing an even greater incentive on the council to create the conditions for business growth. It is through the co-ordination of its economic development role across the council's services that it will demonstrate its leadership and facilitate such growth.

