

WKP Comments on Unlocking the Potential: Going For Growth

The following specific transport schemes have been identified in the West Kent Priorities document should now be included in UTP:

Improvements to Bat and Ball Railway Station
Congestion alleviation measures – Swanley Town Centre
M20 Junction 5 improvements
Hermitage Lane/ and A26/A20 junction improvements
A227/A25 Borough Green and Platt Bypass
Enhancement of Tonbridge to Hastings services
Enhancements to Medway Valley line services

Other comments on UTP:

1. Supporting entrepreneurship is a major priority for West Kent as set out at page 19 of the West Kent Priorities document. UTP gives insufficient attention to this objective and this does not adequately reflect the aims of Priority 2 (para 4.35) of the SEP. More needs to be said in UTP about support for business start-ups, provision of business hubs and the importance of helping start-ups progress to stability and growth. The West Kent Business Support Programme, currently funded by the Kent Regeneration Fund for 2013/14, should be a specific initiative highlighted in UTP and one where future funding from SELEP will be required.
2. Whilst there are numerous references to areas of deprivation in the Kent's coastal towns, there needs to be similar references included to tackling smaller pockets of deprivation in more affluent places including West Kent and a similar commitment made to attract funding to these areas to address a range of deprivation issues.
3. Whilst there is a focus on the delivery of housing generally, there is insufficient emphasis given to the need to address local skills deficiencies and staff retention issues faced by local businesses due to the lack of affordable housing. This situation is particularly relevant to West Kent. UTP should therefore indicate that, working with the HCA, additional models of housing delivery are required, including share equity schemes, directly aimed at supporting local people in employment on lower levels of pay but who are key employees of local businesses.
4. The Opportunities section on page 11 of UKP appears to suggest that West Kent (alone) has no appetite/capacity for growth. The West Kent Priorities document indicates a number of locations for growth where targeted investment is required to unlock development. This should be acknowledged in UTP.
5. Additional emphasis needs to be included in the Places for Growth/Rural Kent section at page 23 of UTP. West Kent's economy is largely rural in

nature. References should be included to the future continuation of Kent's two highly successful Leader programmes and the need to support the viability of rural market towns and other rural service centres. A specific reference to East Malling Research's ambitions for its M9 research facility should also be included here.

6. Places for Growth/West Kent (page 21 of UTP) does not adequately reflect the issues and priorities set out in the West Kent Priorities document. The following revisions are suggested:
 - § the Challenges section should include references to local skills shortages, capacity pressures on the local rail network, the need for better access to the motorway network and existence of pockets of deprivation.
 - § The Solutions section should refer to the need for 'targeted investment in infrastructure to unlock sites with support from the Kent and Medway Development Fund' rather than 'unlikely to require significant public sector intervention'; the 'New solutions to unlock housing' could also refer to the need for housing models to help address local skills issues.
7. The Skills for Growth section (page 47) could better reflect the ambitions for West Kent set out at page 22 of the West Kent Priorities document regarding the need to deliver vocational learning options from age 14 and above which could potentially be delivered by studio schools.
8. Places for Growth/Transport. It is suggested that the final paragraph should be worded as follows. 'Where funding is required to unlock a specific development site, we will only invest public money... etc'. There is a need to differentiate between funding needed to unlock specific sites and funding required to unlock congestion.
9. Solution 4 The Kent and Medway Development Fund. The West Kent Partnership seeks an assurance that such funding will be distributed across the County on a fair and consistent basis.
10. Solution 12 Reducing concentrated deprivation. This is not just an issue for coastal areas and we suggest a reference being included to the use of such powers being applicable to other parts of Kent where deprivation is a problem.
11. Solution 14 Kent and Medway Business Hub. This needs to indicate that the proposed business 'hub' is a means by which the current level of business support services currently available to business can be further funded and extended.
12. Solution 16 Employer-led careers advice. There should be an added commitment to ensuring adequate and timely careers advice to all young people is made available and the primary means of delivery should be within schools.

Comments on the SE LEP Strategic Economic Plan

The above changes suggested to UTP should be reflected by similar changes made to the SEP.

There is a concern that the SEP does not adequately reflect the degree of ambition and scale of growth for West Kent that is set out in the West Kent Priorities document.

The summary for West Kent set out at page 85 of the SEP should be revised as follows:

Opportunities

Add: a strong rural economy and a long history of horticultural research and innovation; high level of entrepreneurship and sustained, indigenous business growth.

Challenges

Add: High levels of congestion especially at town centres and motorway junctions; limited local rail capacity; high house prices and issues of affordability for younger people in employment.

Solutions

Add: funded business support measures to encourage innovation, entrepreneurship and business growth; new solutions to unlock housing building on the Keir Kent initiative and to develop housing with a mix of tenures accessible to local key workers.