

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

06 September 2017

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 SOUTH EAST LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC ECONOMIC PLAN - CONSULTATION

This report sets out some initial views and comments regarding the proposed refresh of the Strategic Economic Plan.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The first SELEP Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) was published in March 2014. This document was produced at the time as a direct response to the launch of the Local Growth Fund, and set out a range of priorities for investment across the SELEP area that would create new jobs and homes and help further stimulate the local economy.

1.1.2 However, since 2014, the policy landscape has changed in the following areas:

- Triggering of Article 50 and the likely resultant changes to funding arrangements
- Slowing growth in the local economy and rising consumer borrowing
- Tighter public finances and pressure on public services
- Emergence of an Industrial Strategy and Challenge Fund aimed at addressing the UK's productivity challenge and strengthen trade activities.

1.1.3 As such, the SELEP are now looking to renew the SEP to ensure it delivers a strategy that addresses the complexities of the environment in which we now find ourselves.

1.2 Consultation

1.2.1 The process of producing the new SEP commenced in July 2017, with the production of the final document scheduled to be completed by January 2018. An initial meeting of officers across west Kent took place in early August 2017 with consultants, who sought early views on three high level strategic questions:

- What would we love the economy to become?

- How will we cope with the changes/challenges we face?
- What is our core proposition for attracting more funds to deliver better productivity/prosperity outcomes?

1.2.2 Initial views on these specific questions included:

What would we love the economy to become?

- More skilled workforce – be it via apprenticeships/universities/colleges.
- Above matched by well paid, high skilled employment opportunities locally.
- Healthy mixture of SMEs and larger companies in order to give the economy resilience and strength.
- Positive symbiotic relationship with London that creates local spin-off opportunities.
- Build on existing sectoral strengths – such as financial services, creative industries, horticulture, tourism and hospitality.

How will we cope with the changes/challenges we face?

- Skills development that is aligned with the needs of the local economy
- Investment in infrastructure in order to support growth and addressing the funding gaps
- Need for greater prominence to be given to the commercial property crisis as well as the housing crisis
- Innovation in business practices
- Greater investment in R&D

What is our core proposition for attracting more funds to deliver better productivity/prosperity outcomes?

- Evidence of a strong track record of delivery in West Kent
- There is often a greater return on investment in West Kent in comparison to other area, as such money spent in West Kent is likely to lead to greater outcomes.

1.2.3 The formal consultation is scheduled to take place after both the SELEP Board and the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership Board have met at the end of September 2017 and will run through October 2017. In advance of this consultation exercise, some upfront work has been undertaken to narrow down the key points that we should be making.

1.3 Proposed Response

1.3.1 As the Strategic Economic Plan will need to align with the Government's Industrial Strategy, it makes sense that a number of the points made in responding to the Industrial Strategy Green Paper are also made here. As such, whilst it is not

entirely clear at this stage what questions will be asked as part of the consultation exercise, it is proposed that the following points be made in the formal consultation response:

- Strong emphasis on the excellent strategic location of Tonbridge and Malling (and Kent), but the **need for greater investment in infrastructure to support growth**.
- Highlight the role played by **sector clusters** in the borough in strengthening the wider economy, such as transport and logistics in the Medway Gap and professional services in Kings Hill.
- Consideration needs to be given to **greater protection of commercial premises and land, and greater incentives to build modern commercial premises** to ensure local businesses and inward investors have the supply and range of available accommodation in order to enable local economic growth.
- Recognition of the **role that R&D plays in economic growth** and the potential of places like East Malling Research Station to stimulate innovation and growth.
- The need for further **investment in broadband and mobile phone services** to support rural economic growth.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 These are no financial implications arising from this report.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 Not applicable.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.8 Recommendations

1.8.1 That the key points to be included in the consultation response for the refresh of the SEP, as set out under section 1.3.1, **BE AGREED**.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and the Chief Executive confirm that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Jeremy Whittaker,

None

Economic Regeneration
Officer

Julie Beilby
Chief Executive