

# Foreword

The challenges facing Kent and Medway over the next 20 years are substantial. The county is a special place with a distinctive identity and a high quality countryside and environment which needs to be protected and enhanced. There are the demands and opportunities arising from Kent's 'gateway' position between the UK and mainland Europe. At the same time there are threats and challenges from over development and from the Government's growth targets. Two of the four growth areas for the South East identified in the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan (2003) - Thames Gateway and Ashford - are within the Kent and Medway area.

We recognise that Government has made it clear that its targets for housing provision in the South East region must be met. The new Kent and Medway Structure Plan provides fully for Kent's contribution to this. But development must not be viewed in isolation from its consequences and requirements. The Deposit Structure Plan clearly establishes that if housing development is to go forward it must be accompanied by the provision of essential community facilities and infrastructure. This was strongly supported by the wide-ranging public consultation undertaken for the Structure Plan during Spring 2002 at a formative stage in its preparation. The need for housing to go hand in hand with job growth is another essential requirement for development - Kent and Medway's economic performance continues to lag behind that of other parts of the South East. We must press home the importance of these relationships to achieving balanced and sustainable growth.

Another key objective of the Structure Plan is for development to be of the highest quality creating really attractive communities with new housing clustered around high quality neighbourhood facilities and open space. Necessary development must be a positive force for change making the best use of land, reflecting a high quality of design and sensitivity to community needs.

We place great weight on protecting our distinctive countryside and heritage, supporting the regeneration of our towns and town centres and building on local strengths and opportunities within the economy of Kent and Medway. This Structure Plan provides an opportunity to put in place strong policies on these matters.

Kent and Medway have a strong track record in providing a sound and up to date strategic planning framework for the county. This must be maintained. The new draft Kent and Medway Structure Plan builds on the aims and objectives of our community strategies in setting out our proposed framework of policies and proposals for environmental protection, major transport priorities and the scale and broad pattern of new housing and economic development.

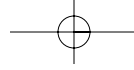
Taking forward the Plan requires wide partnership and support and we commend this draft Plan to you. When finally adopted following consultation, a public examination and any necessary amendments, the new Plan will replace the 1996 Kent Structure Plan.



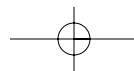
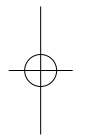
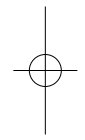
**Sandy Bruce-Lockhart**  
Leader  
Kent County Council



**Rodney Chambers**  
Leader  
Medway Council



## Kent & Medway Structure Plan



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# Chapter 1: Our Vision and Guiding Principles

1.1 The role of the Structure Plan is to provide the strategic planning framework which will guide decisions on development, transport and environmental matters in Kent and Medway over the next 20 years. This Plan covers the period 2001-2021. It will shape the scale, location and form of private and public investment in Kent over that period and in doing so must interpret national and regional policies as they apply to Kent and Medway. These are currently aimed at fostering sustainable communities, promoting an “urban renaissance” by regenerating our towns and their centres and revitalising rural communities. The Structure Plan’s role in shaping development will be particularly crucial since two of the Government’s four growth areas for the South East, identified in *Sustainable Communities: building for the future*<sup>1</sup>, -Thames Gateway and Ashford - are within Kent and Medway.

1.2 The need to accommodate major new growth in Kent and Medway of the highest quality and with all the requisite community services for health, education, recreation, transport and other functions, whilst protecting Kent’s environment, represents the greatest challenge to public services and government. Not only should the new communities be well balanced in terms of development and services but the investment they bring should help correct deficiencies of the past in existing towns and villages.

1.3 Under the Local Government Act 2000, Kent County Council and Medway Councils have the power



to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of their area. The Structure Plan is an important tool in furthering these objectives and in enabling the people of Kent and Medway to enjoy the healthy and high quality lifestyle to which they are entitled. This means bringing about healthier, safer, more prosperous communities with access to excellent education, jobs, transport, housing, health, leisure and cultural facilities. It also means ensuring that Kent’s environment is protected and enhanced for its own sake in the interests of this and future generations.

1.4 Kent’s distinctive character is one of the significant features that this Structure Plan seeks to retain and strengthen. Its distinctiveness is based on its size, peninsular position, heritage, and its long history as a single administrative unit which dates back at least to the Saxon Kingdom of Kent. Its long-standing role as a gateway between the UK and the European mainland has also helped to shape its character.

<sup>1</sup> ODPM: Sustainable communities: building for the future. February 2003

1.5 All places can of course claim to be unique but in the case of Kent and Medway this uniqueness is based on its popular reputation as "The Garden of England" - a character established through a combination of climate, geology and agricultural expertise. The coastal towns of East Kent, those along the Thames in North Kent, the rural Weald and the county's many historic centres, all share an important sense of 'Kentishness'. This Plan seeks to retain and strengthen the unique character of Kent's countryside, biodiversity, built environment and heritage both for their own sake and as a driver for inward investment, tourism and community pride.

### **Kent and Medway: A distinctive 'mosaic'**

1.6 Kent has no single dominant urban area but consists of a number of medium sized towns and smaller centres. Different communities across Kent and Medway show significant differences in their prosperity and in the quality of their built environment. There is a strong inter-relationship between rural and urban areas. The future planning strategy for the County needs to respond to these differing needs and circumstances, protect the best of what there is and to revitalise those communities and areas in greatest need.

1.7 Kent has an outstanding wealth of historic towns but the quality of the built environment is variable. Many of the larger towns which are home to 70% of Kent's population require environmental

improvements in inner residential areas and town centres. Many also need measures to encourage better public transport and to provide better routes for pedestrians. Some towns, especially in north and east Kent, have untapped potential to offer better employment and housing opportunities for the disadvantaged communities within them. There is a need to improve the quality of building design and public space and to make towns more attractive places in which to work and live.

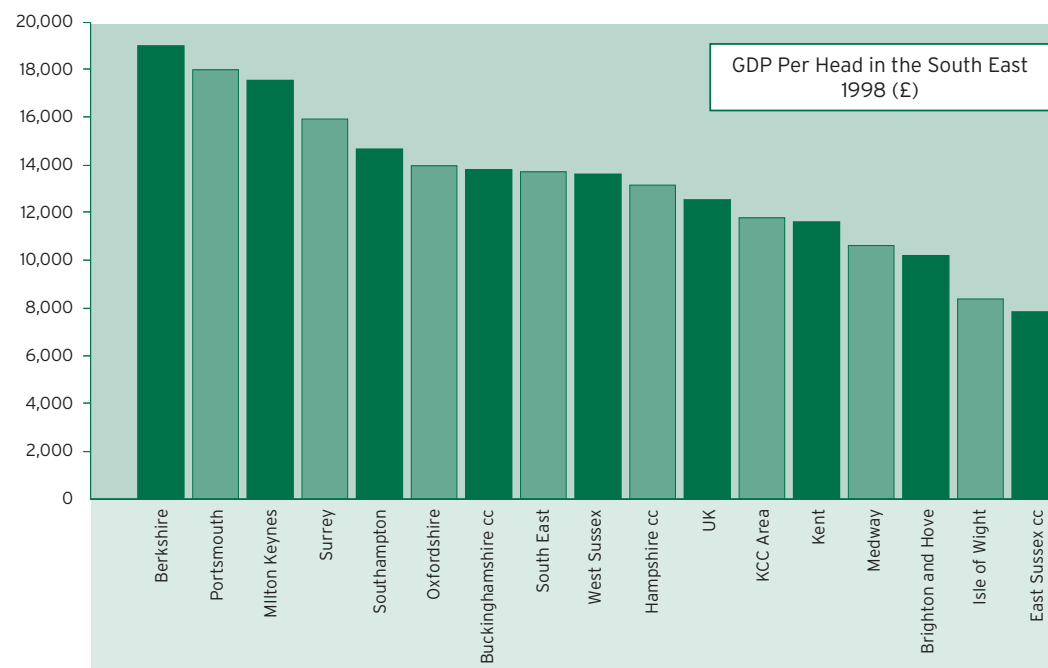
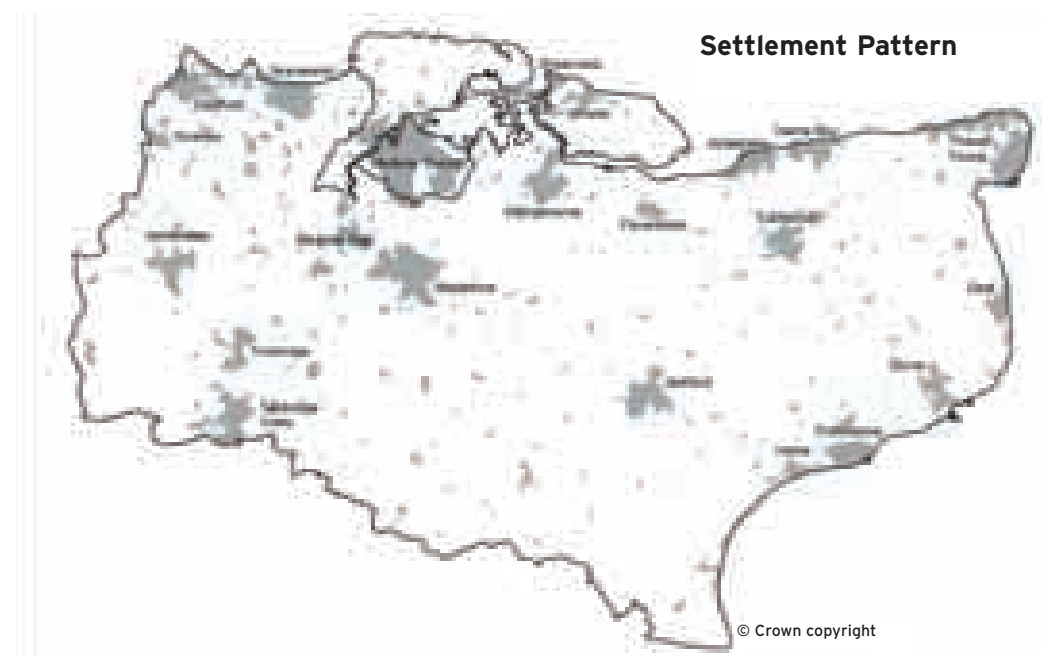
1.8 Kent's countryside is one of the county's most important but fragile assets. It helps make Kent special, it gives identity to its settlements and it is an important part of its sense of place. At the same time it is under intense pressure from changes in agricultural practice and from built development. It must be nurtured for the benefit of present and future generations and given strong protection. Sensitive farm diversification, however will, be encouraged as a way of managing the rural landscape and improving the vitality of the rural economy.

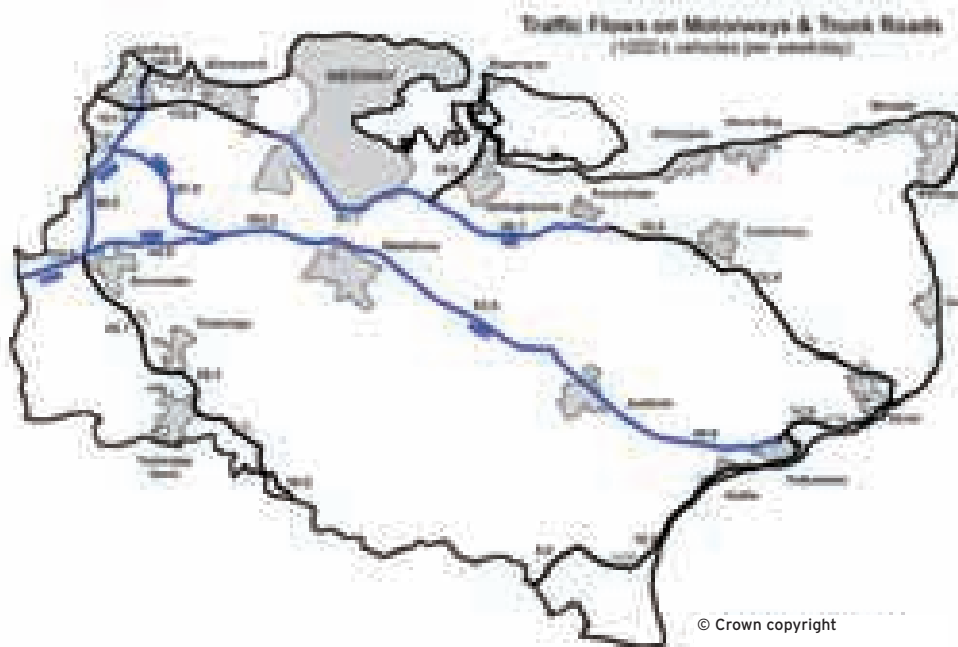


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1.9 30% of people live in Kent's smaller market towns and rural settlements or the wider countryside. The economic health and vitality of some of these settlements needs to be improved to respond to local needs. Some larger rural settlements provide local retail and community facilities and employment and fulfil the role of rural service centres. They justify greater recognition as focal points for necessary development, including small-scale residential and economic development and community facilities and services. Other rural settlements of a similar scale lack many basic services and this needs to be addressed. The emphasis for smaller villages and hamlets will be on maintaining their character and protecting them from inappropriate development.

1.10 The Kent economy has shown significant improvement over the past decade, highlighted by a fall in unemployment and greater diversification within the economy. However, there are still significant economic problems and disparities which need to be tackled and some areas still rely on poorly performing economic sectors. In terms of overall economic performance, employment growth and representation of key business sectors, the area does not compare well with the rest of the South East. This gap needs to be narrowed.

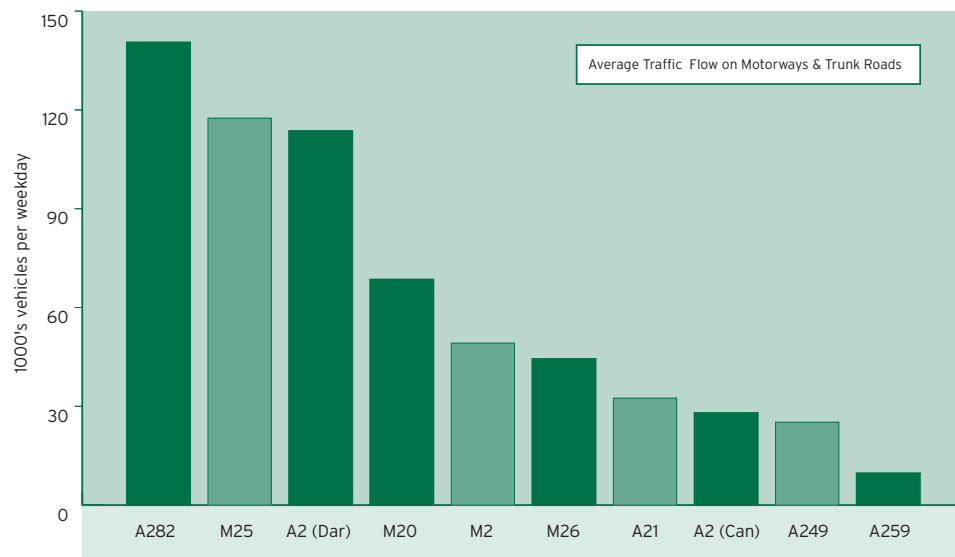




1.11 As the principal gateway to the rest of Europe, Kent has significant opportunities for economic development and tourism. This gateway role does, however, result in a high volume of road and rail traffic travelling through Kent to reach the ports and the Channel Tunnel. This impacts on the local environment and on the transport network that must also serve local needs. While Kent should play its full part in ensuring economic prosperity for the nation and for the South East region, local interests must also be addressed.

1.12 The tendency in recent decades to separate different land uses has resulted in relatively low development densities in suburban and commercial areas. This has led to longer journeys to work - and thus more air pollution - and a less 'local' pattern of services. The provision of community facilities and new job opportunities has also frequently lagged behind the construction of new housing.

1.13 New development should provide for a better balance of homes, jobs and services in places where they can be easily reached. It should support the role of town and district centres as focal points for local communities and make more effective use of urban land. Concentrating development at the principal urban areas offers the best chance of ensuring that homes, jobs and services are well related to each other and served by a choice of transport facilities.



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1.14 Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) (2001) confirmed the Thames Gateway (which includes most of North Kent) as a nationally and regionally important area for economic regeneration and for redeveloping previously used land. RPG also highlighted the growth potential of Ashford which Kent's planning strategy has long identified as a growth point for both housing and jobs. Its contribution will increase over the lifetime of this Plan and beyond. The Government's Sustainable Communities Plan will be an important factor in the way Kent will evolve especially in the Thames Gateway and Ashford growth areas.

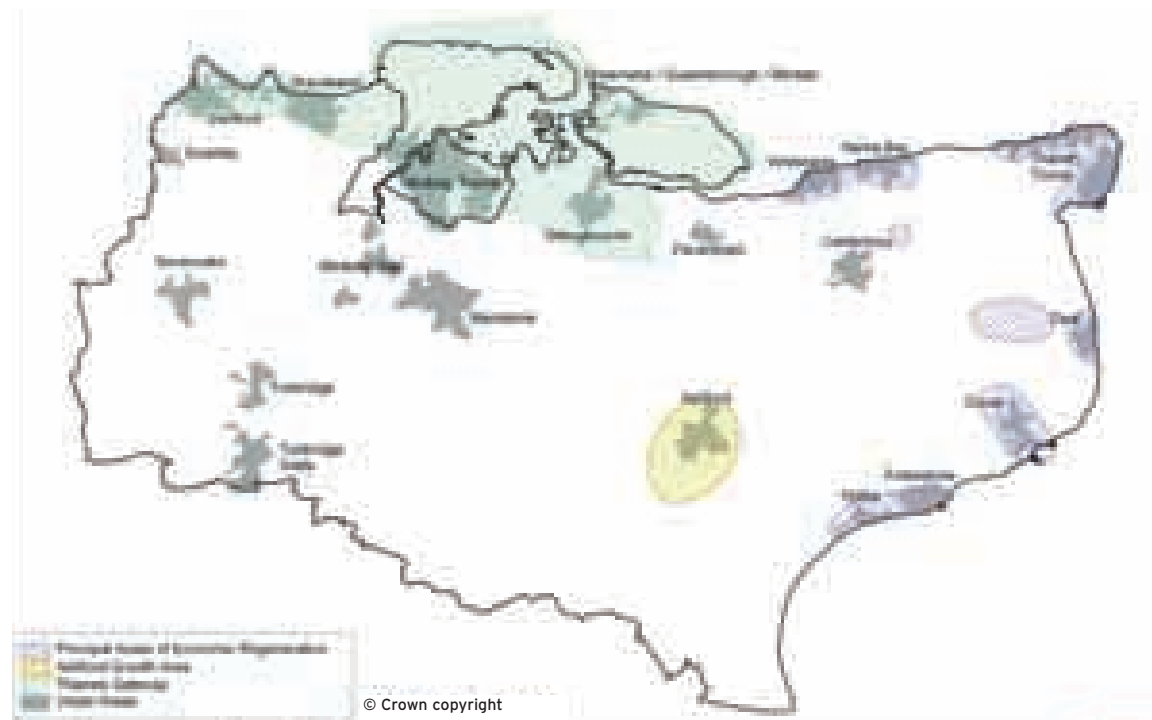
### Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future (2003)

"In partnership with local authorities and other stakeholders, to provide for major growth in the four growth areas identified in regional planning guidance for London and the rest of the South East in 2000 (RPG9):

- Thames Gateway
- Milton Keynes/South Midlands
- Ashford
- London- Stansted- Cambridge

"To bring together the best of design and planning to ensure that the built environment in new and expanded communities is of a high quality, and the surrounding countryside is protected and enhanced".

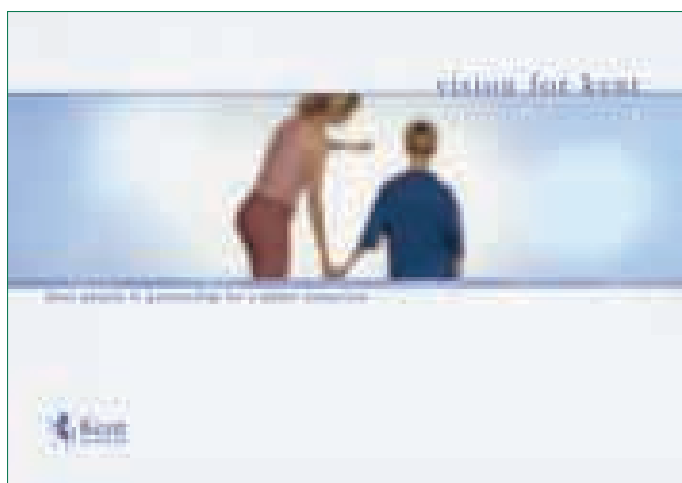
"To address public services and infrastructure needs to enable the new communities to function..."



1.15 The existing commitment to regeneration and economic diversification in the coastal towns of East Kent and the former East Kent coalfield is maintained in this Structure Plan. These areas are identified as a regionally significant Priority Area for Economic Regeneration (PAER). This Plan has also taken account of emerging regional strategies in relation to transport, tourism, energy and waste.

1.16 The way the population is changing, including an increase in the number of smaller households and a more mobile labour force, means that Kent will require significant new development to meet the needs of existing residents and to ensure that Kent maintains or improves its economic competitiveness.

1.17 Kent will be affected by climate change and the county will need to consider the impact of this change when planning the location of development, particularly in river corridors and coastal areas. Kent must also play its part in using natural resources, such as water, prudently and in promoting renewable energy and alternative forms of transport.



## Community Strategies

1.18 Both Kent and Medway Councils have worked closely with a wide range of partners to produce Community Strategies under the Local Government Act 2000. These set out shared objectives and priorities for Kent and have informed the themes and core principles within this Structure Plan. In turn the Structure Plan will be a key way in which the community strategies are taken forward.

**The Kent Partnership's "Vision for Kent" strategy (2002) endorsed a number of objectives for Kent. It set out a vision of Kent as "A County..**

- of strong cohesive communities, where local people, agencies and groups work together in partnership and individuals from all backgrounds can join in community life;
- displaying excellence in learning opportunities and in skills development;
- which is a centre of excellence for high quality leisure and tourism;
- where people enjoy healthy lives and have high standards of health and social care;
- where people are helped to be more independent and become less dependent;
- which is safe and where people live free from the fear of crime;
- where business growth builds on existing strengths and grasps the new opportunities arising from Kent's position as the Gateway to Europe;

- where the countryside and coast, heritage and environment are safeguarded and enhanced for everyone's enjoyment, now and in the future;
- where the difficulties of traffic and transport are tackled for the benefit of all.

**Source: Vision for Kent**

**The vision for the Medway Community Strategy envisages Medway as "a healthy, safe and exciting place with a good environment and major cultural attractions. Medway's communities will be recognised for their care, fairness and vibrancy, where people work together to realise their needs and ambitions"**

**Source: More to Medway**

## Key Themes and Core Principles for the Structure Plan

### KEY THEME:

#### Nurturing Kent and Medway's Environment and Resources

- Protecting the countryside, minimising greenfield development and making the most of opportunities for re-using previously developed land, especially within existing towns and other substantial communities.
- Anticipating and reducing the impact of future climate change including stronger protection and management of areas of potential flood risk, reducing demand for energy and moving towards renewable energy sources.

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- Protecting and enhancing Kent's land, air and water environments.
- Ensuring that development does not create unacceptable levels of pollution and that development that would be sensitive to pollution is protected from it.
- Protecting high quality agricultural land.
- Conserving and enhancing Kent's natural habitats and biodiversity.
- Promoting sensitive and comprehensive approaches to the assessment and protection of the countryside, that reflect its character and biodiversity as well as its natural beauty.
- Conserving and enhancing Kent's historic environment.
- Using and managing water and other natural resources wisely, including the safeguarding of viable mineral reserves from sterilisation.
- Reducing disposable waste to a minimum and disposing of it in a way that achieves maximum benefits from recycling and reduces harmful impacts on the environment.
- Taking care in the way the natural environment is used to provide leisure, recreational, cultural and educational opportunities for local communities.

### KEY THEME:

#### Fostering Prosperity and Well Being

- Increasing economic opportunity and reducing economic disparities within Kent, by working towards regeneration and improved economic

performance in North Kent, the coastal towns of East Kent and the former East Kent coalfield.

- Pursuing targeted economic development, including support for high value added activities and skills development, business clusters and knowledge based industries to boost the competitiveness of the Kent economy and existing businesses.
- Securing employment led growth and development, especially within the areas in North and East Kent which require regeneration.
- Helping existing businesses to grow and provide new jobs.
- Providing for sustainable growth in the economically successful parts of Kent, whilst addressing the pockets of deprivation which occur within them.
- Sustaining and improving the economic health and vitality of Kent's rural communities and helping the rural economy to diversify.
- Making the most of the role of Thames Gateway as a national and regional priority for economic growth, regeneration and infrastructure investment and recognising in this respect the pivotal role of the main urban areas of North Kent and Medway.
- Promoting Ashford as a regional growth point whilst ensuring that the economy of East Kent in particular also benefits.
- Promoting sustainable tourism which capitalises on Kent and Medway's assets.

### KEY THEME:

#### Securing Quality, Investment and Infrastructure for Regeneration and Development

- Providing attractive new communities which are safe, secure and convenient places for people in which to live and work and which encourage a sense of place and local distinctiveness.
- Regenerating and revitalising Kent's principal urban areas, through neighbourhood renewal, redevelopment and improving key inner urban locations.
- Balancing the provision of homes, jobs, infrastructure and community services and making sure they are provided at the right time. Ensuring development brings with it improvements in services and infrastructure.
- Promoting and investing in efficient transport that will serve future needs, tackle congestion, avoid unacceptable damage to the environment and make best use of the existing road and rail infrastructure.
- Insisting on high quality design that uses land, water, energy and other resources more efficiently and provides for changing lifestyles and preferences.
- Maintaining the character and separation of settlements through retention of the Green Belt and definition of strategic gaps.

## KEY THEME:

### Enhancing choice, opportunity and accessibility

- Ensuring that planning policies and practice in Kent and Medway promote social independence and take into account the needs of all sections of the community.
- Providing sufficient housing of a suitable range, quality and diversity for the people of Kent and Medway.
- Concentrating development at the principal urban areas that are the major focal points for jobs, public services and transport facilities.
- Promoting more mixed use developments of the right pattern and density that uses land efficiently, increases accessibility, reduces the need to travel, particularly by car, and is planned to meet social, cultural and economic needs.
- Ensuring that decisions on development and transport make it easy for people to reach local services and jobs and provide a choice of transport for people and goods.
- Ensuring that access to all buildings, transport and services is improved for everyone while avoiding undue impact on buildings of important heritage value.

## Achieving Sustainable Development

1.19 The Structure Plan's prime contribution to improving economic, social and environmental well being will be through promoting a more integrated, better-designed and more sustainable pattern and

form of development. Strategic Policy SP1 gives effect to this by defining the key elements that the local authorities, other public and private sector agencies, the development industry and others will need to address. In carrying out their roles in development control and development plan preparation and making decisions about the future pattern of development the local authorities and other regulatory agencies will need to assess proposals in the light of the criteria in Policy SP1. The expectation is that developers, landowners and other agencies in the private and public sectors will work to pursue the objectives of this policy.

### **Policy SP1: Conserving and enhancing Kent's environment and ensuring a sustainable pattern of development**

**The primary purpose of Kent's development and environmental strategy will be to protect and enhance the environment and achieve a sustainable pattern and form of development. This will be done principally by:**

- **Protecting the Kent countryside and its wildlife for future generations;**
- **Reducing reliance on greenfield sites to accommodate all forms of built development;**
- **Using and re-using land for development more efficiently;**
- **Protecting and enhancing features of importance in the natural and built environment;**

- **Reducing the need to travel, encouraging the availability of a choice of transport, reducing growth in dependence on the road network and fostering good accessibility to jobs and services for all sections of the community;**
- **Encouraging high quality development and innovative design that reflects Kent's identity and local distinctiveness and promoting healthy, safe and secure living and working environments;**
- **Fostering balanced and timely provision of housing, employment, infrastructure and community services to help maintain and develop well functioning settlements;**
- **Responding to the implications of long term climate change by:**
  - **advancing the conservation and prudent use of energy, water and other natural resources;**
  - **minimising pollution and assisting the control of greenhouse gas emissions;**
  - **safeguarding areas of potential flood risk from development.**