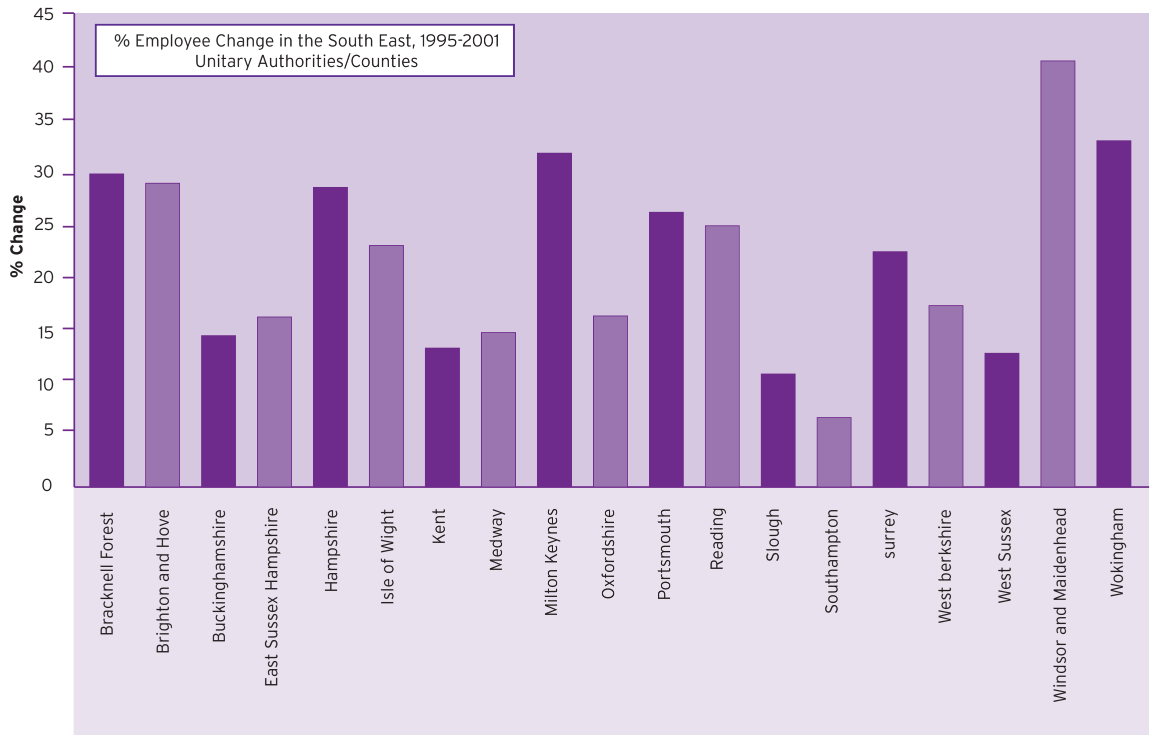
Chapter 6: **Fostering Prosperity**



Source: Annual Business Inquiry

Structural weaknesses in the Kent economy:

Although unemployment is below 3% (2003) there are still a number of weaknesses in the Kent economy:

- many jobs are in industries with lower average earnings than the new businesses that are concentrated in London and the west of the region. Only four Kent districts are among the top 25% in the UK for earnings, despite Kent's location in a high-cost region.
- there are still many people who are at a disadvantage because of ill health and low skills.
- certain areas, such as Thanet, have suffered from under investment in the economy in the past.
- there are significant variations between the east and west of the county in average income levels.
- there are about 80,000 more working people living in Kent than there are jobs in the county which demonstrates a high level of commuting to London and neighbouring counties, especially from North and West Kent.

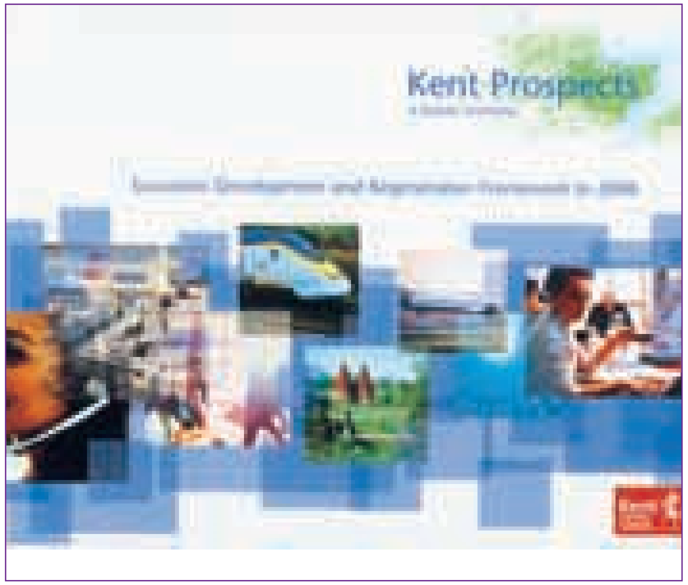
The Economy and Employment Land

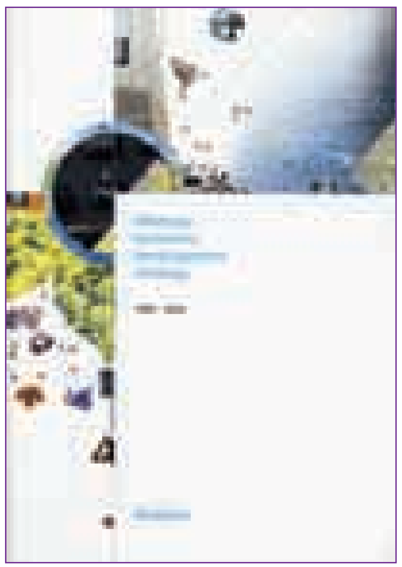
6.1 Securing sufficient well-rewarded employment for Kent's residents is fundamental to their quality of life and well being. Kent is, however, less prosperous than many of its neighbours in the South East.

Key Prosperity Issues for Kent:

- Improving the county's economic performance relative to the South East
- Reducing differences in prosperity across Kent
- Getting higher quality better paid jobs into Kent
- Encouraging knowledge and technology sectors within the economy
- Improving the local balance of jobs and housing to reduce commuting
- Capitalising upon the county's potential for tourism and as a gateway
- Ensuring a balanced and prosperous retail sector, focused upon town centres

6.2 The people of Kent will not enjoy greater prosperity unless strenuous efforts continue to be made to renew its economy and to make the most of its economic assets, including its leading businesses. However economic growth must be planned in such a way that the county's environment is protected and all areas benefit from better job opportunities.





Strategies for Economic Development

The priorities of Kent's key economic development strategies are well established in the Structure Plan and local plans.

Additionally **Kent Prospects** is the economic development strategy for the Kent County Council area. It seeks to support the most successful parts of Kent and to help less successful areas close the gap. It does not seek to maximise economic growth but to respect the quality of life in Kent and promote a diverse "mosaic" economy by:

- building on the existing key economic activities in Kent:

  tourism

  land-based industry and food processing

  distribution and logistics including ports

  health care

  printing and packaging

- and encouraging growth sectors in the "knowledge economy":

  pharmaceuticals and chemicals

  media and communications

  financial and business services

  higher education and research and development

  environmental industries

The Medway Economic Development Strategy parallels this approach by giving particular emphasis to financial and business services and tourism. It also aims to support high technology manufacturing in which Medway has important employers which provide the basis for a local cluster. The education and retail sectors are to be encouraged, and concentrated in Chatham.

The economic development partnership for the county, **the Kent and Medway Economic Board**, has set out its priorities for development as follows:

- to begin development at Ebbsfleet, using the International Passenger Station as the catalyst.
- to maximise the development of Manston Airport.
- to use Ashford's International Passenger Station as a catalyst for town centre development and for regeneration of the wider area.
- to continue development at the Port of Dover.
- to develop the Medway Waterfront.
- to develop employment land at Grain and defence land at Chattenden.
- to develop Folkestone harbour, the seafront and Old Town.
- to complete the Thanet Central Island and Sandwich Corridor Spatial Development Project.

The **Regional Economic Strategy for the South East** endorses the sectors identified in the above strategies as business concentrations and networks in Kent, together with advanced manufacturing within the engineering sector. Its Draft Action Plan acknowledges these development projects as priorities for Kent. Each of the priorities is well established in Kent's Structure and local plans.

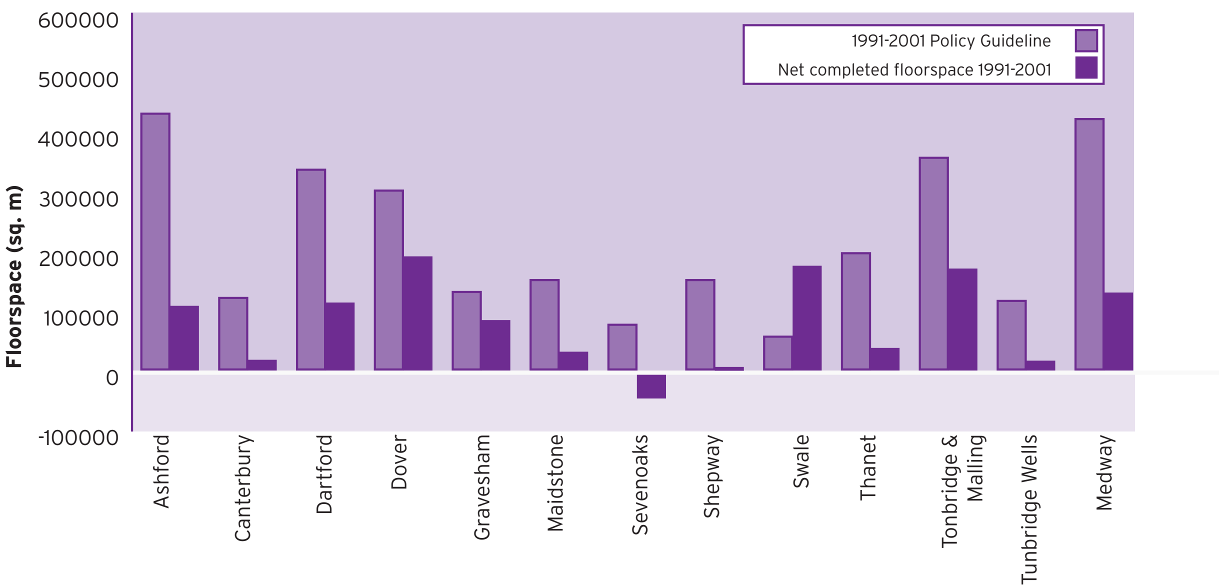


Table FP1: Planned Business Floorspace* 1991-2001/2011 (million square metres)

1996 Structure Plan Guidelines	1991-2001 2001-2011 1991- 2011	3.33 2.22 5.55
Gross take up of industrial and business floorspace	1991-2001	2.53
Net take up of industrial and business floorspace	1991-2001	1.01
Net take up of industrial and business floorspace 1991-2001 as a proportion of the 1996 Structure Plan guideline for 1991-2001		30%

* Based on Use Classes A2/B1/B2 and B8

The Plan's Approach to Business Development

The Impact of Previous Plans

6.3 The 1996 Structure Plan paid special attention to the regeneration of major sites in the industrial towns of North Kent and to diversifying the East Kent economy in response to colliery closures, a decline in port employment and weak tourism. As a result, the Plan gave Kent a leading role in the South East in terms of land supply for new business. Throughout the county a total of 3.33 million sq.m of business floorspace were to be provided between 1991 and 2001 and a further 2.2 million sq.m by 2011. There are now in excess of 30 sites of more than 10 hectares in Kent which are available for business investment or are planned, which together could provide 3.62 million sq.m of business space by 2021. Access improvements and incentives to encourage inward investment have supported the generous land provision.

6.4 Although ample land has been provided, development has fallen short of the 1996 Structure Plan guidelines. This has been exacerbated by the loss of industrial and business space to other uses (some 1.5 million sq. m between 1991 and 2001) as the 1996 Structure Plan guidelines are based on net additions to new business space from 1991. The chart (above) and Table FP1 show that in net terms only 30% of the Structure Plan guideline has been met across Kent.

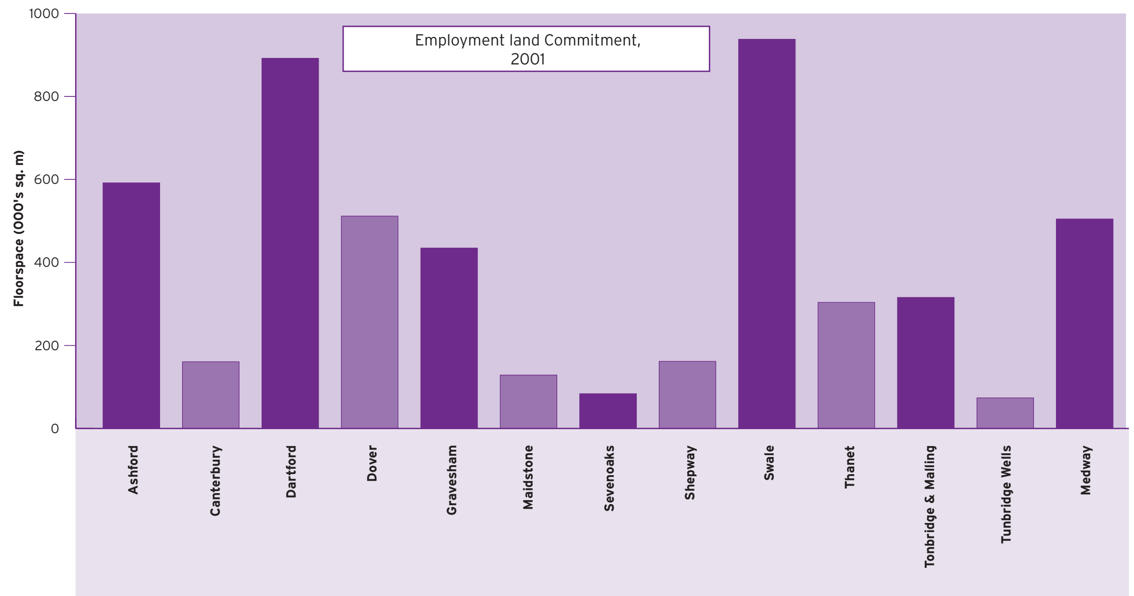
6.5 Based on past experience market demand will not match the supply of land for growth and regeneration in the County's priority areas and jobs from new development will be offset by the loss of existing sites and their employment. Only the larger development sites are likely to improve local employment prospects materially. Taken together, the major sites in Kent offer the potential to transform the economy of the County, but the precise impact is difficult to judge.

Table FP2: Planned Business Floorspace 2001*: (million square metres)

	Available by 2011	Available 2011-2021
All sites	**4.75**	**1.16**
Of which Major sites	**(2.46)**	**(1.16)**
Total	**5.91**	

* Based on gross commitment i.e. excludes any future losses to alternative uses

Source: KCC/Medway Employment Land Surveys 2001



Source: KCC/Medway Employment Land Survey

6.6 Sites in Kent larger than 10 ha. have the potential to support 110,000 jobs - assuming full take up. In practice there will always be some empty space, and some of the new buildings will be occupied by firms relocating from elsewhere in Kent. Other sites, taken out of employment use will offset the impact of new development. Taken together these factors mean that the net number of additional jobs might be between 40% and 60% of the site capacity, rising to perhaps 60-80% for very large developments such as Ebbsfleet. At the same time other proposals such as the expansion of Manston Airport will boost employment.

6.7 Consultants forecast that with no contribution from major new sites the growth of jobs in Kent would be modest - perhaps only an additional 16,000 jobs over 20 years.[4] Broadly an extra 50,000–80,000 jobs could be created by the successful development of the major sites in Kent.

6.8 The scale and distribution of new homes proposed in Policy HP1 of this Plan takes account of the future balance between the number of available jobs and the size of the workforce. There will be slower growth in the working age population, and with the 116,100 additional dwellings proposed by 2021 the workforce will increase by about 40,000. The CTRL will make commuting from many parts of Kent more attractive, particularly if the extent of the network of domestic services favoured by the local authorities is introduced. Forecasts are believed to suggest that most of the passengers will be diverted from existing rail services and the assumption made here is that they will not be replaced by new commuters using the existing rail services. If this were not the case, the growth in the Kent workforce employed in the County could be smaller.

6.9 The number of new jobs created on the sites already provided could therefore exceed the increase in workforce. This will provide an opportunity to reduce both commuting out of Kent and persistent unemployment. A 25% fall in the number of

[4] See KMSP Working Paper 2: Labour Supply, Workforce and Development Guidelines 2001-2021

commuters and improved access to jobs as a result of this Plan's policies could inject up to 55,000 more people in to Kent's workforce[5] . On this basis the growth in jobs and the workforce will be broadly in balance in Kent as a whole – (a) and (b) in Table FP3.

6.10 However the growth in jobs and in the workforce varies considerably throughout Kent. Some adjustment in journey to work patterns or to employment land supply will be needed to achieve a more sustainable relationship in each area:

- In Kent Thameside, if employment growth at a high level is achieved in the future there is likely to be a reduction in out commuting and some reverse commuting into the area from outer London;
- In Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, and Canterbury there is also the opportunity to reduce out commuting to support local employment;
- At Ashford and Medway the Structure Plan proposes additional employment land to help balance the labour market and reduce dependence on commuting;
- In Tonbridge and Malling the performance of the traditional industrial sectors of the local economy will influence the longer term relationship between local employment and the workforce;
- If there were high employment growth in the Manston-Richborough area, further housing provision could be needed in Dover/Thanet in the longer term but initially progress needs to be made to secure the employment developments already planned.

Table FP3: Job creation and workforce forecasts

	Job Change
Combined capacity of sites > 10 Ha	**110,000 jobs**
Assumed rate of jobs created which are additional to Kent	**40 - 60%**
...and at very large developments (e.g. Ebbsfleet)	**60 - 80%**
Total additional employment from major developments	**50,000 - 80,000 jobs**
Consultants' forecast of growth in jobs not including the effect of major sites (trend increase)	**16,000 jobs**
Total potential number of jobs created (a)	66,000- 96,000 jobs
	Workforce Change
Increase in resident workforce	**+40,000**
Reduction due to CTRL (increased commuting)	**-5,000**
Reserve of labour (25% reduction in commuting) and improved access to jobs	**+55,000**
Total workforce (b)	+90,000

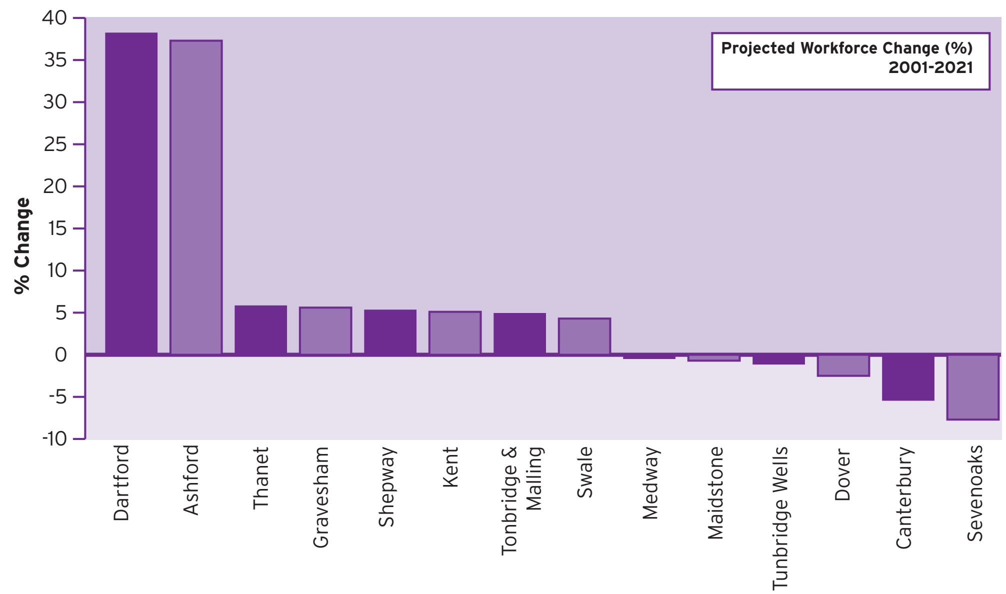
Strategic Principles

The Structure Plan seeks to improve the balance between housing and employment and pursues the following objectives:

The scale and character of economic growth should:

- improve the economic performance of Kent relative to the South East region;
- reduce dependence on working outside Kent;
- promote more varied and high quality employment in Kent;
- harness new technologies to underpin opportunities in the knowledge driven 'Information Economy';

[5] See KMSP Working Paper 2:



Source: KCC/Medway Strategy based Workforce Projections

- harness economic strength to improve the quality of life and the environment;
- make best use of the existing supply of employment land;

Kent's varied economy will be encouraged as a whole:

- all economic activities should contribute to a higher value economy;
- the Plan provides land for business uses and has positive policies for retail and leisure, ports and airports, community services, minerals and waste management;
- Kent will take advantage of its strengths (such as pharmaceuticals and defence) and work to regenerate vulnerable sectors (agriculture and tourism);
- new industries (including business services and technology) will be encouraged;
- links with higher education and research will be developed;
- support will be given to improving the 'digital economy' in order to sustain growth in all sectors;

The concentration of economic development:

- Improvements in East and North Kent will be given priority to reduce the wide differences in prosperity between different parts of the county;
- major economic development will be concentrated at 6 strategic locations: Kent Thameside, Medway, Sittingbourne/Sheppey, Ashford, Thanet/Richborough and Maidstone/Medway Gap.

Local balance

- sufficient development is provided in all urban areas to sustain full employment and reduce the need for travel;
- employment should suit the skills of the workforce, which will be improved to allow people to access new opportunities;
- planning policy will be supported by fiscal and other measures in order to reduce poverty in specific areas of deprivation;
- the rural economy will be diversified in a manner that respects the Kent countryside.

The balance of housing and employment land

6.11 Over a 20-year period the balance between workforce and jobs will be maintained by adjustments in the labour market and in the economy of the County. It is central to the Plan's strategy that this process should lead to greater employment choice, higher earnings and less need to travel long distances to work.

- Higher value employment uses will prompt increased investment and higher productivity;
- Average working hours may increase as part time working is replaced by more full time working;
- The proportion of working age people moving into Kent may increase;
- The road and rail network will allow short inward commuter journeys from outside Kent to Kent Thameside and West Kent.

6.12 This Plan supports the introduction of domestic rail services on the CTRL. They will reduce journey times to London from East Kent and improve access to a better range and choice of jobs for people living in the more disadvantaged and more distant urban areas. However there is not likely to be a great increase in London commuting from those areas, due to the number of rail services to be provided and the cost of travel.

6.13 The approach to commuting in this Plan is therefore:

- to support improved rail services using the CTRL and other routes to provide a better choice of workplace and better quality travel;
- to use the same improvements to encourage people to switch from car to rail travel;
- to reduce the amount of long distance travel out of Kent by increasing the number, range and quality of local jobs.

The release of new employment land

6.14 Employment land provided through the planning system is intended primarily for business uses (mainly office, manufacturing and wholesale distribution)[6] although in practice other uses may occupy that land. In Kent as a whole growth in retail, leisure and other services as well as new business space have contributed to recent job growth. Even so, it is important to set guidelines for the amount of new employment land to be released and this has involved consideration of a number of factors:

- *The strength of the local economy*

The Structure Plan seeks to ensure a generous supply of land in order to achieve a strong local economy throughout Kent. Some districts such as Thanet, Swale and Shepway have particular needs for new development because of unfavourable employment structure, slow growth, or low earnings.

- *Market Demand for new development*

In areas where demand is weaker the Structure Plan aims to stimulate demand by releasing land and by improving accessibility. Other than in West Kent and Canterbury, the take up of sites has lagged behind the availability of land. This has been particularly true of the coastal towns.

- *The scale and variety of new development already planned*

The Plan provides for a ready and varied supply of employment land, although some areas have a relatively small land supply (less than 200,000 sq.m). Sevenoaks, Canterbury, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells have been subject to varying degrees of restraint, but Shepway has also had limited amount and choice of development land.

- *The future labour supply and the balance with jobs*

Land supply must be sufficient to cope with future growth and the size of the labour market in each area. The largest increases in workforce, reflecting the housing quantities in Policy HP1, will be in Ashford and Kent Thameside (each in the order of 19,000). New employment land provisions in Ashford and Medway reflect the fact that the workforce in these areas is expected to grow significantly through population growth and changes in commuting which existing business land commitments alone will not match.

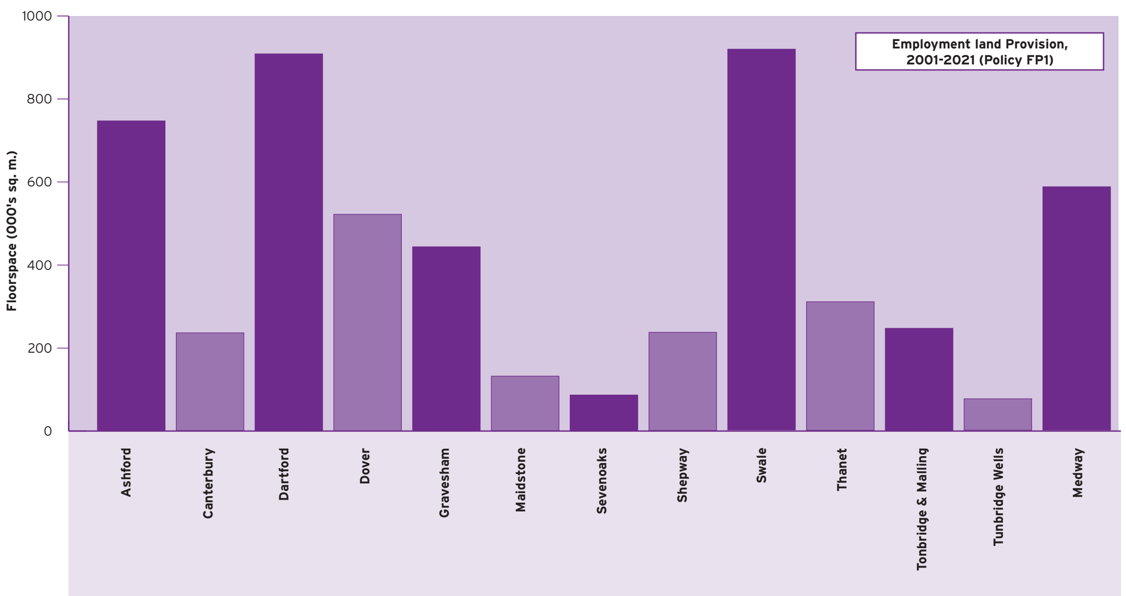
[6] Use Classes A2/B1/B2 and B8

JOURNEY TIMES TO LONDON BEFORE AND AFTER COMPLETION OF CHANNEL TUNNEL RAIL LINK

	Before (mins)	After (mins)
Ashford	75	40
Folkestone	94	57
Canterbury	90	63
Ramsgate	110	85
Gravesend	52	23
Chatham	46	39

(assumes Government adopts Kent and Medway's preferred option with direct services to Thanet, Medway and Folkestone).

Source: CTRL Domestic Services Consultation Document - SRA February 2003



6.15 Much of Kent already has enough employment land committed for the new plan period, and the priority is to develop those planned major sites. Policy FP1 confirms the existing land supply and proposes to supplement this where necessary to ensure that shortage of land does not hinder full employment. In implementing this policy, the objectives of the Plan regarding the reuse of previously developed land, and the requirement for mixed-use developments (Policies SS3 and QL6) should be rigorously pursued. In Kent Thameside, in particular, a full range of service, community and residential land uses will be encouraged on the major mixed use sites so that the land required to support the employment and population growth of the area can be largely met within those sites.

6.16 In addition to the considerations governing the scale and management of land supply set out in Policies FP1–FP3, the local planning authorities may need to reassess the quality and availability of existing employment land. This should include identifying replacement sites, and re-assessing the mix of land uses envisaged for existing employment allocations where this is compatible with the other policies and proposals within this Plan. Schemes should be prepared to improve the environment of existing sites which have proved unattractive to investors and occupiers. Local authorities should identify suitable sites for the relocation of businesses which cause pollution or other environmental problems in residential and mixed-use areas.

Policy FP1: **Employment Land Provision**

(a) Priority will be given to developing sites in Kent with planning consent or identified in local plans for financial and professional services, business, industrial and warehousing uses (Use Classes A2/B1-8) as at 2001.

(b) In addition new land should be identified as follows:

- **In Medway at least 20 hectares for a wide range of employment uses including the knowledge and technology sectors as part of mixed use development at Chattenden/Lodge Hill;**
- **At Canterbury City up to 10 hectares to provide specifically for knowledge and technology uses linked to the education sector in Canterbury;**
- **At Herne Bay-Whitstable up to 10 hectares to ensure a continuing supply of land for the relocation and expansion of local firms and to attract inward investment to the coastal towns;**
- **In Shepway provision of up to 20 hectares to improve choice and support inward investment;**
- **At Ashford further employment land up to 40 hectares will be provided to give support, for the longer term, to its role as a regional growth point based on balanced employment and housing growth;**

(c) Accordingly the total provision for net additional floorspace provision for financial and professional services, business, industrial and warehousing uses will be:

(d) At Sevenoaks, Swanley, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone and Faversham the existing supply of land and premises for business use should be carefully managed. Best use will be made of existing employment sites and previously developed land to sustain the provision of business space.

Local Authority Area	Net Commitment at 2001 (000's sq. m)	New Provision (000's sq. m)	Total 2001-21 (000's sq. m)
Ashford	592	140	732
Canterbury	161	70	231
Dartford	892		892
Dover	512**		512**
Gravesham	435		435
Maidstone	129		129
Sevenoaks	84		84
Shepway	162	70	232
Swale	938		900&
Thanet	304		304
Tonbridge & Malling	316		241#
Tunbridge Wells	74		74
KCCArea	4,599	280	4,766
Medway	505	70	575
Kent	5,104	350	5,341
North Kent	2,770	70	2,802&
East Kent Triangle	977**	70	1,047**
West Kent	474		399#
Channel Corridor	883	210	1,093

(e) Existing commitments may be reviewed through Local Development Documents. Sites, including constrained or poor quality sites, may be replaced by alternative, more marketable and better located allocations provided that this:

- **does not prejudice the scale and implementation of strategic locations for business development supported and safeguarded by this Plan (Policy FP3);**
- **does not conflict with other Structure Plan policies.**

Measures, including investment by the public and private sectors to provide serviced sites and/or land reclamation should be taken to bring forward sites that the market alone would not develop. Schemes will be encouraged to improve unattractive sites where this is a main reason for their lack of investment.

(f) Local Development Documents should identify land for the appropriate location of businesses likely to cause environmental disturbance to residential or mixed use areas.

(g) Employment uses other than those covered by Policy FP1 (but excluding retail) may be included on the major sites provided that this does not conflict with the policies of this Plan, notably in respect of the location of major generators of travel demand.

NOTES TO POLICY FP1:

*** Includes land at Richborough-Sandwich previously occupied by a variety of uses and now available for redevelopment.*

 # Figures for Tonbridge and Malling allow for revised mix of land uses at Kings Hill and reduced B1 content pursuant to Policies HP1 and WK3.

& Figures for Swale allow for some rationalisation of business floorspace at Faversham pursuant to Policy NK3

Net Commitments include local plan allocations, planning permissions and vacant plots within existing employment sites.

New provision based on 3,500 sq. m per hectare.

Policy FP2: Location of New or Replacement Employment Land

Proposals for employment and business development other than (a) those already identified in adopted local plans or (b) at the specific locations identified in Policy FP4 (b) or identified pursuant to Policy FP6, should be located in, or adjacent to, principal urban areas where they are easily accessible by a choice of transport. Such proposals should be attractive to the market place.

6.17 The success of this Plan, with the impacts on employment structure and growth that it seeks, depends on key strategic employment sites. These are identified and safeguarded under Policy FP3. Measures will be taken, particularly in those parts of the county where the investment market is weak, to bring these sites forward including seeking national or European funding to resolve problems with access or infrastructure, or to provide mitigation for environmental impacts.

6.18 There are other important areas in need of regeneration which have considerable potential for mixed use including employment notably Medway Waterfront, in Kent Thameside and at town centres and the central parts of the principal urban areas.

Policy FP3: Locations of Strategic Importance for Business, Industrial or Distribution Uses

In contributing to the provisions of Policy FP1 the safeguarding and implementation of the following strategic employment locations will have priority:

- **Ashford: Eureka Science Park**
- **Ashford: Orbital Park**
- **Ashford: Waterbrook(Sevington)**
- **Ashford: Cheeseman's Green**
- **Dartford: North Dartford (including Fresh Marshes)**
- **Dartford: Crossways Business Park**
- **Dartford: Eastern Quarry**
- **Dartford/Gravesham: Ebbsfleet Valley**
- **Dover: Land at Richborough**
- **Dover: White Cliffs Business Park**
- **Shepway: Shearway Business Park : Folkestone**
- **Shepway: Link Park: Lympne**
- **Swale: Neatscourt: Queenborough**
- **Swale: Lappel Bank : Sheerness**
- **Swale: Ridham Kemsley**
- **Swale: Eurolink: Sittingbourne**
- **Thanet: Eurokent**
- **Thanet: Manston Park**
- **Tonbridge and Malling: Kings Hill***
- **Medway: Kingsnorth and Grain**
- **Medway: Rochester Airfield**

* Subject to the provisions of Policy WK3

Other considerations for the release of employment land

6.19 Existing sites may not meet the needs of all businesses and so, not withstanding the guidelines in Policy FP1, selective new land provision may be needed to:

- Promote innovative sectors and encourage business 'clusters' that exploit links with one another and/or with science and research institutions;
- Allow key businesses to expand at their existing location or meet a very specific need to develop in a certain location;
- Replace sites which are unlikely to be developed by providing more attractive land with good access to a choice of transport.

Technology and knowledge "clusters" in Kent

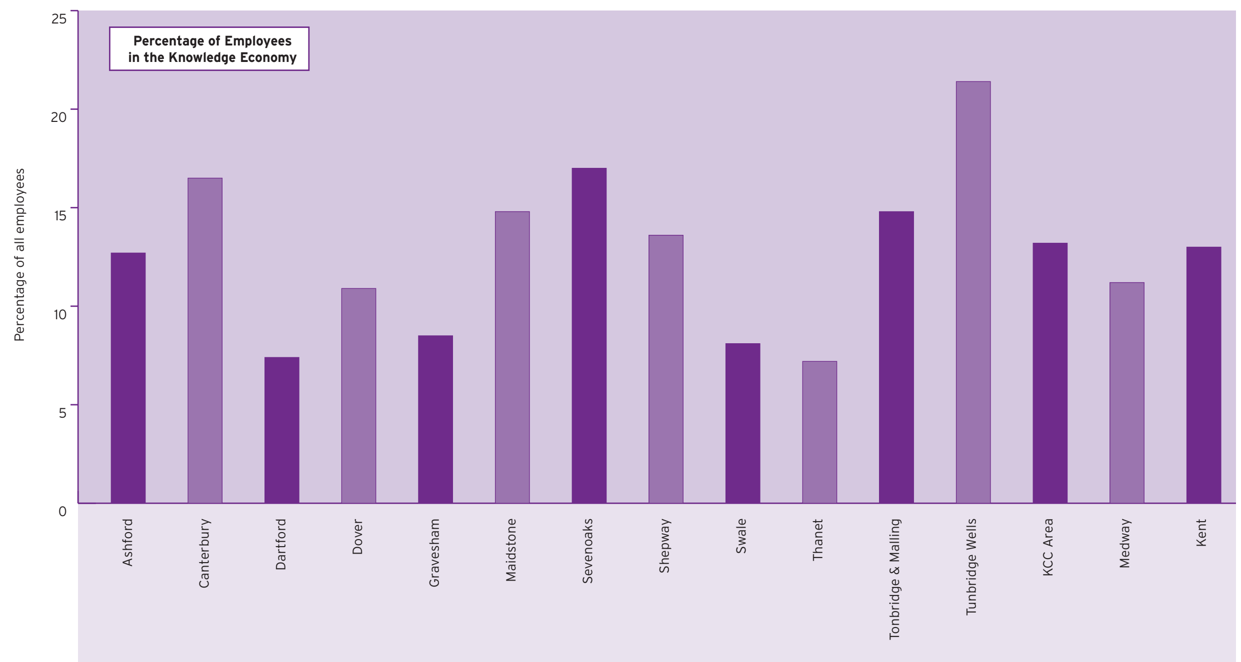
6.20 The technology and knowledge based businesses in Kent do not form a closely-knit cluster in the original sense. Kent has a number of major employers in electronics, pharmaceuticals and research spread throughout the County which have few linkages with one another. The higher education institutions are relatively small and the examples of linkage between research and industry are few.

What are clusters?

A "cluster" has been defined as "a geographical concentration of inter-connected companies, specialist suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries and associated institutions". "Technology" and "knowledge" industries include those which rely on new research, scientific, professional or technical understanding, and do not include everyday financial and business services.

The *UK Competitiveness White Paper* (DTI 1998) emphasised the importance of promoting the expansion and creation of "clusters" or networks of "knowledge driven" industries. This objective is found in national guidance and regional strategies.

Policy RE9 of RPG9 states that high value activities should be encouraged, including the provision of sites close to universities. Policy FP1 includes provision for such a new site at Canterbury for "*knowledge and technology uses linked to the education sector*" which is important in the City.



6.21 Nevertheless, the major employers have the potential individually to expand or to act as the core around which new businesses in linked activities could develop. Collectively there is particular scope to attract new investment around the strong presence in Kent of pharmaceuticals and agricultural research. The existing major technology and research institutions are considered to be very important to the future of the Kent economy. Their intensification, and, where appropriate, expansion in-situ is supported by this Plan. In some instances this may necessitate the use of greenfield land to achieve key economic and investment objectives. Proposals should seek to minimise the use of such land and be sympathetic to their surroundings with adequate measures to reduce and mitigate environmental impact through design and landscaping. Policy FP4 sets out the circumstances in which the release of employment land for these reasons will be supported. With the exception of land already identified at Canterbury, Richborough and Kings Hill, development of new land as a result of this Policy will be additional to the Policy FP1 guidelines.

Policy FP4: Land for technology and knowledge clusters

High quality proposals for the intensification or expansion of established key employers and/or institutions in the technology and knowledge sectors will be supported at the following locations unless there are exceptional and overriding environmental impacts which cannot be adequately mitigated:

(a) a new site at Canterbury linked to the University (pursuant to Policy FP1);

(b) expansion of technology and knowledge activities at:

- **Fort Halstead (Sevenoaks District);**
- **Horticultural Research Institute (HRI): East Malling;**
- **Kings Hill;**
- **Pfizer and land in the Sandwich Corridor at Richborough;**
- **Sittingbourne Research Centre;**
- **Rochester Airfield ;**
- **Chatham Maritime.**

(c) the expansion, in situ, of other key employers in the technology and knowledge sectors.

Premises for small firms

6.22 Encouraging small firms by providing them with suitable premises is an important part of economic strategy because of their growth potential,

Courtesy of Locate in Kent

particularly in new economic activities and because they contribute to 'home grown' employment growth. Support for them should include providing premises in inner urban areas which are accessible to the local population on foot and by public transport. Except where businesses are located inappropriately the loss of existing employment land in general should be resisted particularly where it fulfils an important role for local firms and sectors of the economy which are strong.

Policy FP5: Premises for small firms

Premises for small firms will be provided:

(a) within larger industrial estates;

(b) within new mixed-use developments;

(c) as part of clusters of similar economic activity (pursuant to Policy FP4);

(d) through the development of small infill sites; and

(e) through the conversion or alteration of suitable existing buildings.

(f) through the protection of existing employment land

Development at these locations should demonstrate good accessibility from the primary or secondary route network.

Skills Development

6.23 Kent will only be able to capitalise on the opportunities for economic prosperity if it can call on an appropriate range of skills. Similarly Kent residents can take advantage of greater prosperity only if they have the skills to access better paid jobs. Education and training are key activities that need to be pursued in tandem with the development strategy of this Plan. Both the public sector and employers have important roles to play – the former through the provision of education and further education facilities and the latter through the development of training plans, improved linkages with education establishments and provision of in-house training.

THE RURAL ECONOMY

New employment uses in rural areas

6.24 The main potential for future economic development in Kent lies in the regeneration of urban areas and strategic sites close to the centres of population (see Policies FP1 and 3). However the strategy recognises that not all investment should be directed to the towns and that rural communities also need new economic investment.

6.25 The Rural White Paper (2000) underlined the need for planning policy to do more to assist the diversification of farms and to support the wider rural economy. However this should not undermine the continued protection of the countryside. Structure Plan policy in Kent must judge what scale and character of new businesses should be permitted to encourage diversification of farms and the rural economy whilst preserving the character and environment of rural areas. It recognises the long standing importance of the land based economy in Kent and the need to support its adaptation to changing consumer demands and innovations in production, processing and marketing. Policy FP 6 accepts the development of suitable small-scale business uses at rural service centres and larger villages and sets criteria for business development elsewhere. The prospective contribution of enhancements to the Kent County Agricultural Showground at Detling, near Maidstone to the support and promotion of the land based sector in Kent and the wider region is acknowledged.

Policy FP6: Development of employment uses in rural areas

Provision for small scale business development (B1-B8) and service industries should be made within, or adjoining, the built up area of rural service centres (identified on the Key Diagram) or of larger villages that can provide a sustainable form of development. Development should be appropriate to the scale of the settlement and without detriment to its amenity, character or setting. In this context small scale live/work units may be acceptable.

No provision for business development will be made elsewhere in rural Kent except where:

i. it involves the re-use, adaptation or redevelopment of an existing building, as covered by Policy SS7(ii) ; or

ii. it is required for the expansion of an established business and/or for the processing, storage, distribution or promotion and research concerning produce from Kent agriculture, horticulture or forestry;

and

- **good access can be provided to the primary road network and bus or rail services; and**
- **there is no overriding environmental objection.**

In respect of these provisions the role of the Kent Agricultural Showground at Detling is recognised as important and as requiring enhancement so as to promote more widely the land based economy of Kent and the region.

All business development supported within the terms of this policy should have no unacceptably adverse impact on the local transport network and will be subject to the restriction of subsequent expansion if in conflict with the policies of this Plan.

Diversification of farm businesses

6.26 The problems facing agriculture have been well articulated in recent years. Further pressure for change will arise from EU proposals to switch funding for agriculture from support for production to grants for rural development and for protecting and enhancing the environment. It will be particularly difficult for small farms to survive on agricultural income alone. A study of the land based economy in Kent[7] has made recommendations regarding policy towards farm diversification and the rural economy and these have been taken into account in this Plan.

6.27 Diversification of farm businesses may include the introduction of new crops, including energy crops and other measures that do not require planning consent, but activities such as the processing and packaging of produce, may require conversion or the construction of new buildings. Larger projects may be put forward on behalf of a number of farms, for example if farms co-operate to achieve economies of scale from local distribution and processing activities.

[7] The Land Based Economy of Kent: Final Report December 2002. Land Use Consultants/Kernon Countryside Consultants for Kent County Council and SEEDA.

6.28 Many farms have surplus buildings and their re-use, if they are good quality, will usually be preferable to new buildings in the countryside. Existing buildings may be appropriate for activities not related to agriculture, such as small-scale offices, workshops or tourist accommodation. Policy FP7 sets out the circumstances in which conversion, alteration or re-use of existing farm buildings, and /or the construction of small new buildings, will be acceptable.

Policy FP7: **Farm Diversification**

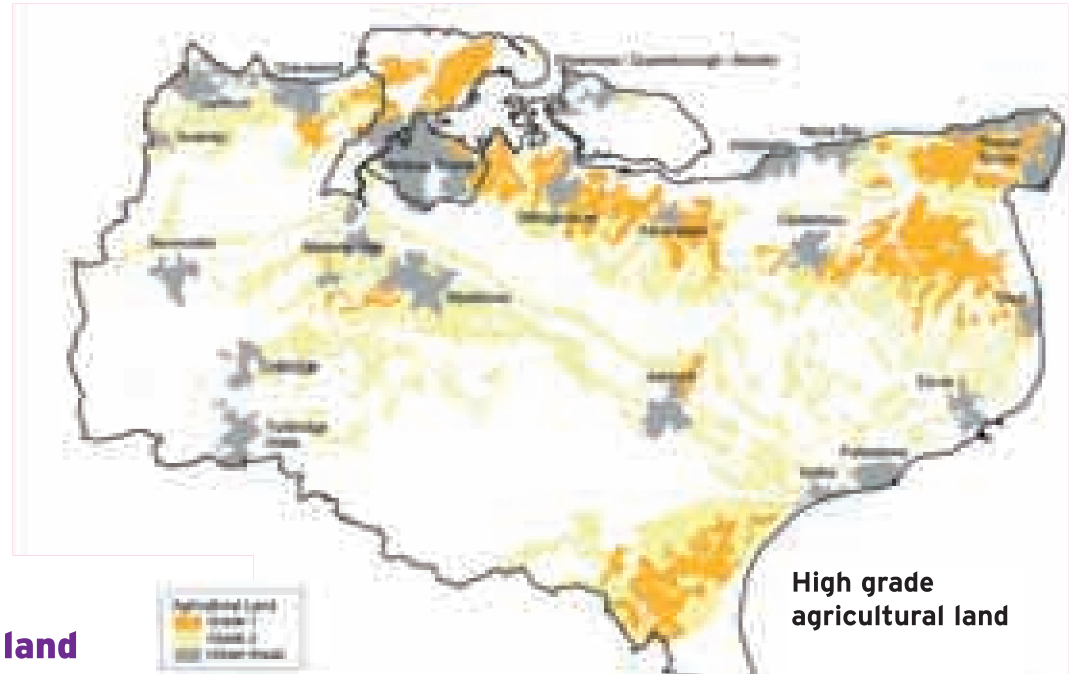
Conversion, alteration or re-use of existing farm buildings to support agriculture, horticulture and forestry based on Kent, or other locally sourced produce, will be permitted where the traffic and environmental impacts are acceptable and it is demonstrated that the proposal is:

(a) necessary for the efficiency or viability of an existing business or required for a new agriculture, horticulture or forestry business; or

(b) a suitable small-scale non-agricultural use which secures the viability of a farm.

New small-scale buildings for the above purposes may be permitted if no existing buildings exist which could be converted, and there are no overriding environmental constraints.

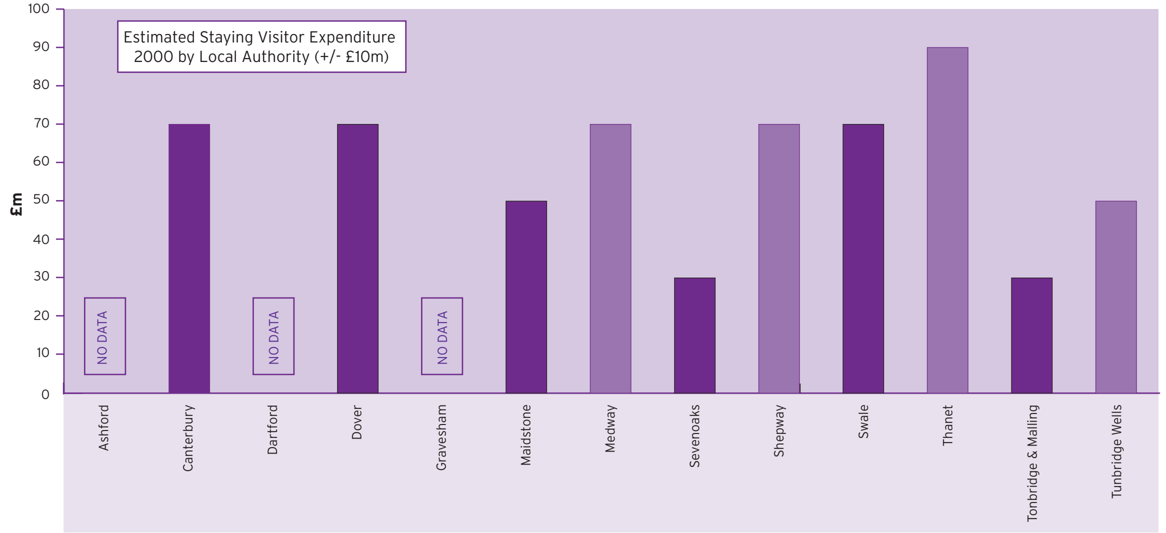
All such proposals should be supported by a business case or farm plan which demonstrates effective management of the farm in the long-term.



Agricultural land

Kent's agricultural industry

- Almost 60% of Kent is farmed with roughly one third of this managed as arable farmland and a further fifth as grassland;
- Kent has a high percentage of high grade soils suitable for agricultural production – 43% of its agricultural land is within DEFRA Agricultural Land Grades 1 and 2 compared to a national average of 20%;
- Kent's agriculture has long specialised in fruit and hop growing – 41% of the area in England devoted to top fruit is in Kent although the total land involved has declined by more than two thirds in the last 50 years. Fruit farming now accounts for some 5% of Kent's farmland;
- In 2000 there were almost 2000 full time farms in Kent – more farm businesses than any other county in the South East;
- The percentage of the workforce in agriculture, forestry and fishing in Kent (3.8%) is more than double the national average (1.7%) although the Kent agricultural workforce has declined by more than a half since 1951.



Source: Based on studies for the S.E England Tourist Board

6.29 A competitive and sustainable agricultural industry is vital to the economic, social and environmental well being of Kent's rural areas. Planning decisions affecting the future of the 'best and most versatile' agricultural land (DEFRA Grades 1, 2 and 3a) should take account of a wide range of planning considerations which determine the value of land to the community. Advice on the quality of land should, if necessary, be sought from DEFRA, English Nature and others. The quality and character of the landscape, biodiversity, recreational amenity, historic and cultural heritage and accessibility are among the important considerations that must be weighed in planning decisions. Policy FP8 protects the best agricultural land unless there are good planning reasons for its development. This could be because alternative sites have greater environmental value or are less accessible.

6.30 This policy will be applied to a range of circumstances across the county. Access to urban areas, including London, and pressures on housing and rural roads tend to be greater in the west of Kent where Metropolitan Green Belt policy applies a strong restraint upon development. The importance of agriculture as a source of local employment is relatively greater in East and South Kent, while the largest areas of best and most versatile agricultural land are in the north of the county.

Policy FP8: **Protection of agricultural land**

a) In order to protect the long term productive potential of agriculture, development of agricultural land will only take place when there is an overriding need identified in the Development Plan which cannot be accommodated within the major/principal urban areas, rural service centres or on other previously developed land;

b) Best and most versatile agricultural land (DEFRA Grades 1, 2 and 3a) will be protected from development unless:

- **there is no alternative site on land of poorer agricultural quality; or**
- **alternative sites have greater value for their landscape, biodiversity, amenity, heritage or natural resources; or**
- **the land proposed for development is more accessible to infrastructure, the workforce or markets than the alternatives.**

TOURISM

Economic impact of tourism in Kent

Tourism and leisure are important to Kent's economy.

In 1998 there were 5.5 million staying visitors and 32.8 million day-visitors, spending almost £1,200 million.

About 20,000 full-time jobs are supported directly by spending on tourism and leisure, rising to perhaps 30,000 jobs if the benefits to other businesses are taken into account.

6.31 Kent has much to offer tourists. Much of its coast and countryside are of national and international importance and there are outstanding historic towns and strong associations with famous writers and painters. Access from the rest of England and from mainland Europe has improved substantially and will continue to do so.

6.32 There is a wide variety of tourist destinations in coastal, urban and rural Kent. Making tourism sustainable in environmental, economic and social terms will mean reducing its environmental impact, moving towards higher value products and acknowledging that tourism development should contribute to alleviating social exclusion in the county's coastal towns and rural areas. In sensitive countryside and at heritage sites, such as the designated World Heritage Site at Canterbury Cathedral and that proposed at Chatham Historic Dockyard, the economic benefits of tourism have to be carefully balanced with the impact of visitors on the historic fabric.

6.33 The tourism policies in this Plan encourage developments which will increase the attraction of Kent as a tourist destination. Sustainable tourism seeks to ensure that the activity and development that is needed to support tourism proposals does not undermine environmental objectives. Kent's environment is a key tourism asset in itself which tourism related development should serve to sustain and enhance. The tourism policies of this Plan direct large projects to previously developed sites within urban areas in order to save greenfield land and maximise access by means other than the private car.

Policy FP9: **Sustainable Tourism Development**

Development of tourism facilities, such as accommodation and visitor attractions, will be supported if:

(a) they are designed to a high standard which enhances their setting and the attraction of Kent as a tourist destination; and

(b) there are clear economic advantages to Kent; and

(c) there are no adverse environmental impacts or such impacts are capable of being adequately mitigated; and

(d) they reduce dependence on the private car and access is possible by a choice of means of transport, particularly by public transport, cycling and walking; and

(e) equal access is provided for all social, economic and cultural groups and to people with disabilities.

Spatial priorities - selective development and regeneration

6.34 Investment in tourism and leisure will help to achieve the Structure Plan priorities of regeneration, economic change and growth. There is opportunity in the Kent part of the Thames Gateway to develop a market for business visitors as well as developing environmental and attraction based tourism. With good road and rail links via the M20 and the International Passenger Station, Ashford provides a key location for both a significant visitor attraction and a convention centre. The coastal resorts have a tradition of tourism but here the emphasis is on diversifying the economic base. The Plan supports proposals which promote higher value added activity, reduce seasonal fluctuations, upgrade the accommodation stock and improve the local environment.

6.35 Sports, shopping and other leisure activities can be a major component in the regeneration of our urban areas. There are existing or prospective examples in Kent at Chatham Maritime, the harbours of Dover, Folkestone and Ramsgate, and at Whitstable and other town centres. Developing these and other tourism uses within or near to town centres, and incorporating them in mixed use developments, is particularly valuable in creating a thriving and attractive urban core.

6.36 Heritage and the arts can also provide strong tourist attractions especially for higher spending visitors. They fit well in refurbished buildings and can stimulate regeneration of urban areas, especially where the area has a strong history and architectural character. Kent has a number of historic centres which would benefit from such investment. There is also a need in Kent for a small number of "green tourism" and interpretation centres, such as the proposal for a visitor centre at Pegwell Bay.

Policy FP10: **Tourism development and regeneration**

New tourist attractions and the upgrading of existing tourism facilities in, or near to, town centres at the major/principal urban areas will be supported where they assist regeneration and cause no harm to the environment or to the amenity of nearby residential areas.

Priority will be given to such development:

- **within the Kent part of the Thames Gateway;**
- **at the coastal resorts of the East Kent Triangle and Shepway;**
- **at Ashford.**

Proposals for new buildings or for the refurbishment of buildings of historic interest, particularly in "clusters", for arts or cultural use will be supported where they cause no environmental harm.

Environmentally related tourism initiatives will be encouraged.

Tourist Accommodation

6.37 New tourist accommodation has been supported by previous planning policies. Since the end of the 1980's 31 new hotels have been built in Kent. Of these 25 are located close to the main business and tourist routes through the county, and only five are at the traditional coastal resorts. Despite the new provision the number of bed-spaces in Kent has declined over the past decade, especially at the coastal resorts.

6.38 It is important for Kent to retain good quality accommodation especially where there has been decline. The conversion of historic pubs and inns to residential use should be resisted. To meet the growing demand for budget accommodation, and provide high quality business and conference hotels in Kent, suitable sites will be identified within urban areas and in town centres. Improvements in the range and quality of Kent's accommodation stock will be supported where possible.

Policy FP11: **Tourist accommodation**

(a) Sites will be identified in town centres and within urban areas for the development of high quality tourist, business and conference hotels and for budget hotels;

(b) Proposals which would result in the loss, without replacement, of good quality accommodation at the coastal towns will not be permitted unless there is overriding economic advantage to the area from the development;

(c) The conversion or extension of existing buildings to provide small hotels, bed and breakfast or self catering accommodation will be permitted provided this causes no harm to the local environment;

(d) the improvement of touring and static caravan and camping sites will be permitted if the development benefits the local environment.

Other tourism developments in rural areas

6.39 There is a presumption against development in the countryside, particularly when at a distance from settlements. However, small scale, high-quality development for tourism or recreation, which contributes to the diversification of a farm, may be acceptable under the terms of policy FP7.

Major Tourism/Visitor Developments

Major attractions

Kent lacks the kind of modern attractions which could draw visitors on a substantial scale from the UK and abroad. Such attractions include major exhibition and conference centres and 'flagship' arts, cultural or sports developments. The Eden Project in Cornwall, the Botanic Garden of Wales, and projects in Birmingham and Tyneside have changed the perception and prospects of the areas in which they are located.

6.40 New projects which bring exceptional benefits to Kent and could take advantage of the county's international transport links and good access to London will be encouraged. They should be designed to the highest architectural standards. Policies QL15 and QL16 encourage the development of high quality venues for sport and entertainment.

6.41 Priority locations for such development are - the urban areas of Thames Gateway, Ashford or the coastal towns of East Kent. Developments of this stature with an essential requirement for a large amount of land may mean considering a greenfield location. They would, though, need to meet strict criteria regarding accessibility, design and impact on their environs and demonstrate that environmental concerns were clearly outweighed by the economic and social benefits to the county.

Policy FP12: **Major Tourism/Visitor Attractions**

Proposals for major tourism/visitor attractions in Kent of national or regional significance will be encouraged. All such developments should be of an exceptionally high standard of design and landscaping.

The priority for the location of such development is within the urban areas of Thames Gateway, Ashford or the coastal towns of east Kent.

The location, and associated land take, of proposals outside the principal urban areas will require exceptional justification and should demonstrate that the development:

- **is capable of bringing major benefits to Kent's economy; and**
- **will make an important contribution to diversifying and upgrading the tourism and visitor attractions in the county; and**
- **is well related to the passenger rail and primary road networks; and**
- **is located so as to minimise its impact on the environment including landscape, wildlife, the best and most versatile agricultural land and areas of archaeological and historic importance; and**
- **incorporates satisfactory provision for mitigation of adverse impacts on the locality.**

ENSURING PROSPERITY IN TOWNS AND OTHER CENTRES

6.42 Town centres provide a broad range of community facilities including financial, tourism, culture, administration and public services. However, shopping and related consumer services remain the economic lynch pin in town and district centres although recent changes in retailing have reduced and changed their role.

Some of the significant recent changes in retailing include:

- the Bluewater regional shopping centre, first permitted in the late 1980s and which opened in 1999;
- development of some major town centre schemes anticipated in the 1996 Structure Plan e.g. at Canterbury although elsewhere there has been delay;
- smaller scale stores developed by some of the main food retailers and introduced into rural centres;
- three factory outlet centres developed outside town centres (at Ashford, Dover and Chatham Maritime;
- an expansion in the amount out of centre development for bulky goods* retailing;
- a drop in the number of proposals for large out of centre food stores due to stronger planning constraints although extensions to existing stores continue to be sought;
- proposals to diversify the range of goods sold from food superstores and retail warehouses which increasingly challenge the core retail functions traditionally associated with the High Street**;
- the development of new leisure uses predominantly outside town centres;
- retail and leisure development at Westwood Cross permitted as a new town centre for Thanet.

* Stores specialising in an aspect of comparison retailing such as DIY/home improvement products, major electrical items, motor accessories, furniture and carpets and garden products.

** Generally higher value non food products e.g. clothing and footwear, jewellery, books etc

6.43 Retail spending has continued to grow substantially. Along with demands for better quality shopping and changing consumer preferences increasing spending is a key influence behind the continuing pressure for new floorspace and the redevelopment or refurbishment of existing shops. Increased car usage and the general mobility of shoppers has increased competition between centres. Other forms of trading such as internet sales are making an impact on areas of both retail and leisure spending – internet retailers ('e-tailers') are not restricted by hours, size or the types of goods sold. In consequence if town centres are to remain competitive there is a constant need to upgrade the quality of their shops and their general environment.

6.44 These trends and influences require strong support for existing centres. The Government, in its guidance on development plans, requires that a hierarchy of retail centres be identified. Within this framework there is a need to:

- give priority to locating all categories of retailing, leisure and other major travel generating uses within these centres;
- require developers to pursue a form of development which suits these locations;
- apply the same planning criteria to all retail development including special forms of trading e.g. factory outlet centres.

The retail hierarchy in Kent

6.45 Town centres in Kent fulfil different roles according to the size and composition of their retail 'offer' and the other services which can be found there. The hierarchy identified by this Plan is set out below. It is closely related to the overall settlement hierarchy set out in Table SS1 (Chapter 2), but in this instance distinguishes the relative functions of centres within larger urban areas (e.g. the Thanet Towns).

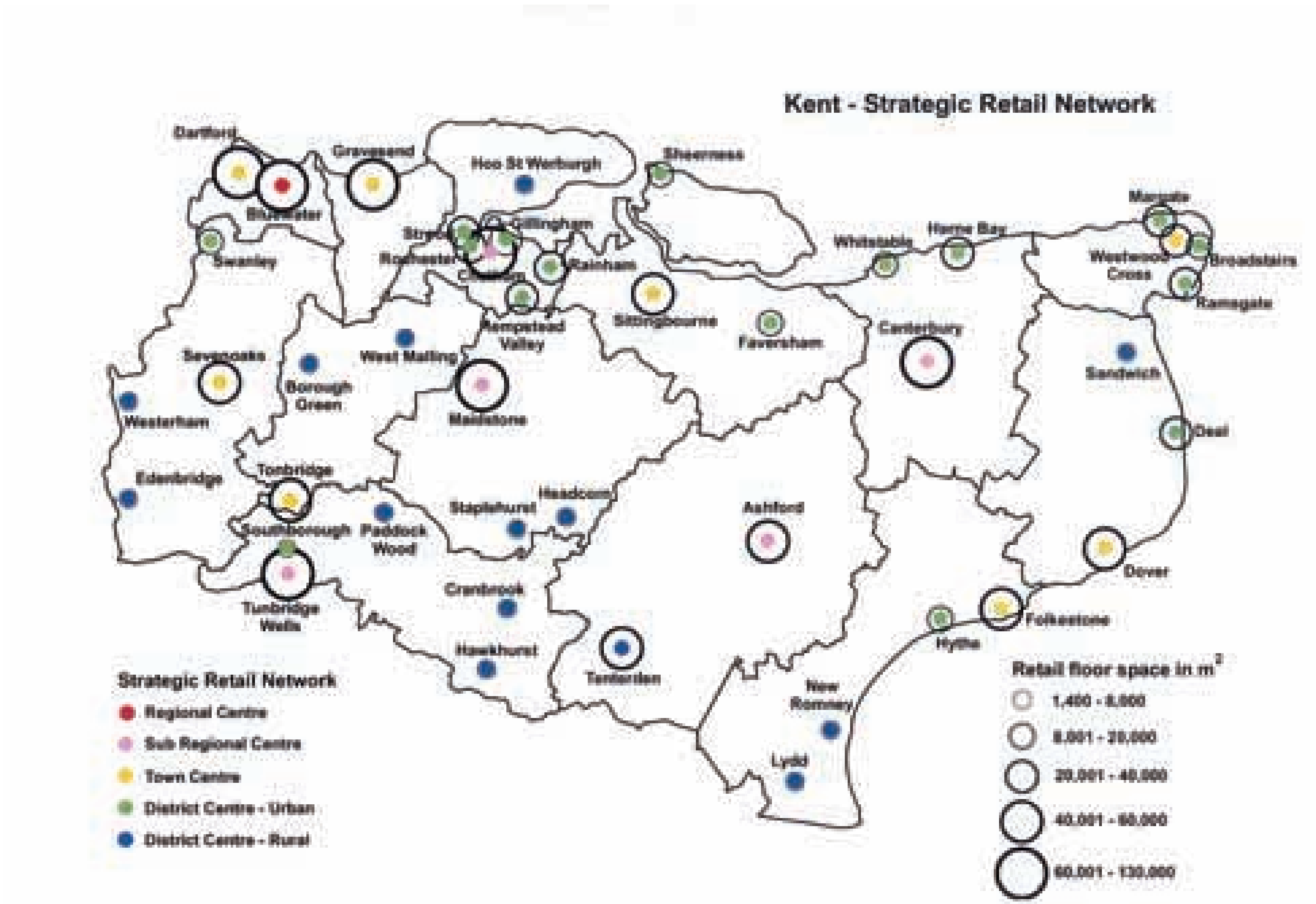
6.46 Bluewater is an established out-of-centre shopping development with a **regional** catchment extending across much of Kent and into London and Essex. Turnover and other measurements indicate that there are four sub-regional centres in Kent, which provide a wide range of comparison shopping and other services and have extensive catchment areas. They command higher rents and have greater potential for investment.

6.47 A distinction can be drawn between the **principal town centres** in each District, which provide shopping, local government and other services, and **district centres** which serve smaller urban areas, or parts of urban areas or are at the centre of rural catchments. The principal town centres offer greater physical capacity and investment potential. In terms of total retail turnover there is little difference between some of the middle ranking principal town centres and the larger district centres but the former offer a wider range of services.

6.48 This hierarchy of centres will generally be maintained. The county's sub regional centres will be

Table FP4: The Strategic Network of Retail Centres in Kent and Medway

REGIONAL CENTRE				
Bluewater				
SUB REGIONAL TOWN AND CITY CENTRES				
Ashford	Canterbury	Chatham	Maidstone	Tunbridge Wells
PRINCIPAL TOWN CENTRES				
Dartford	Folkestone	Sevenoaks	Sittingbourne	Westwood (Thanet)
Dover	Gravesend	Tonbridge		
DISTRICT CENTRES: (1) URBAN DISTRICT CENTRES/OTHER TOWN CENTRES				
Broadstairs	Hempstead Valley	Margate	Rochester	Southborough
Deal	Herne Bay	Rainham	Sheerness	Swanley
Faversham	Hythe	Ramsgate	Strood	Whitstable
Gillingham				
DISTRICT CENTRES: (2) RURAL SERVICE CENTRES				
Borough Green	Hawkhurst	Lydd	Staplehurst	Westerham
Cranbrook	Headcorn	New Romney	Sandwich	West Malling
Edenbridge	Hoo St Werburgh	Paddock Wood	Tenterden	
Local Centres: To be defined in Local Development Documents				


Kent - Strategic Retail Network
Dartford
Bluewater
Gravesend
Hoo St Werburgh
Sheerness
Swanley
Strood
Rochester
Gillingham
Rainham
Hempstead Valley
Sittingbourne
Whitstable
Herne Bay
Margate
Westwood Cross
Broadstairs
Ramsgate
Faversham
Canterbury
Sandwich
Deal
Sevenoaks
Borough Green
West Malling
Maidstone
Westerham
Edenbridge
Tonbridge
Southborough
Paddock Wood
Staplehurst
Headcorn
Ashford
Tunbridge Wells
Cranbrook
Hawkhurst
Tenterden
Dover
Folkestone
Hythe
New Romney
Lydd
Strategic Retail Network
Regional Centre
Sub Regional Centre
Town Centre
District Centre - Urban
District Centre - Rural
Retail floor space in m²
1,400 - 8,000
8,001 - 20,000
20,001 - 40,000
40,001 - 60,000
60,001 - 130,000

supported and strengthened, especially Maidstone and Chatham which require major new investment and which lie within the wider catchment of Bluewater. The principal town centres within North Kent need to strengthen their roles as retail and service centres for their expanding communities.

6.49 Accelerated growth at Ashford over an extended period will provide scope for the town centre to be enhanced and capitalise on its role as a public transport node. The Structure Plan provides for significant population growth in the town over the next 20 years and supports its evolution to fulfil a role as a sub regional centre within the strategic network of centres.

6.50 The planning and development strategy in North Kent will result in Bluewater becoming a major centre for retail, leisure and entertainment embedded within the new urban area of Kent Thameside. Over the next 20 years it will therefore mature as a central place. It will be well connected through road links and new public transport systems to the whole of Kent Thameside and, being in close proximity to the A2 and the new station at Ebbsfleet, will increasingly serve the wider region. The concept of Bluewater has evolved. It is not solely served by car and there is a good and developing bus system and in the near future it will be well served by Ebbsfleet and Greenhithe stations and 'Fastrack'.

6.51 Investing in the principal East Kent coastal town centres to retain existing retail spending and future growth will also support wider regeneration initiatives and a more sustainable pattern of development by reducing the need for longer journeys to sub regional centres, especially Canterbury, which are usually made by car. Further development which would intensify the attraction of retail spending to Canterbury from the coastal towns and Ashford and thereby prejudice regeneration of the coastal towns or the strengthening of Ashford's role will not be supported.

6.52 Thanet does not have a dominant town centre capable of stemming the substantial loss of comparison spending from this large urban area to other centres. Development opportunities in the existing town centres are very limited and their investment potential is limited by their relatively small coastal catchments and the competition between the different centres. Westwood, in central Thanet, is already a major focus of travel demand for bulky and convenience goods retailing, includes a strategically important location for new employment and is astride the principal transport corridor linking Margate and Ramsgate. The recent commitment for a new town centre at Westwood will provide comparison shopping, leisure and other services which will complement existing uses and allow for multi purpose trips to the area.

6.53 Medway, like Thanet, is a multi centred urban area. Over time five discrete towns (Strood, Rochester, Chatham, Rainham and Gillingham) have grown together to form Medway. The largest of the towns is Chatham which serves as a sub regional centre but has been performing below its significant potential. Medway needs a strong 'city' focus and Chatham already fulfils much of this role. The aim is for Chatham Centre and Waterfront to become a thriving city centre. The other four town centres have an important role as district centres. They will continue to be supported although the focus for retail and other suitable developments will be Chatham.

6.54 It will be essential to invest in the fabric of the principal centres to maintain or enhance their vitality and viability, in line with their established role as retail, service, leisure and business centres. Culture and education provision are also important roles for town centres. Projects to improve community facilities in town centres will encourage investment in shopping and other services. District centres provide convenience and limited comparison shopping along with local services for smaller urban areas, urban neighbourhoods and the larger rural centres. Small scale retail and service development appropriate to of the local needs of these centres' catchments will be supported to sustain their role and enhance local self sufficiency.

Policy FP13: Development at the strategic network of town and district centres

The role of regional, sub regional, principal and district centres forming the strategic hierarchy of retail and service centres in Kent, as identified on the Key Diagram, will be

safeguarded. Development proposals which enhance the quality, range and choice of shopping and/or expand or diversify service, business or leisure activities will be supported.

Development should achieve a high standard of design and enhance the visual quality, functioning and environment of a centre.

Local authorities will:

(a) include policies in Local Development Documents to support the retail function of these centres including the allocation of suitable sites or areas for retail and/or mixed use development to meet identified needs;

(b) identify measures to improve the environment and functioning of centres including pedestrian priority zones and networks and public transport access and interchange arrangements;

(c) pursue measures including, where necessary, compulsory purchase to make town centre sites available for planned development.

Criteria for new retail and leisure development

6.55 To encourage the viability of existing centres new proposals for retail and leisure development should be located within town and district centres. Proposals at edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations, must demonstrate a need for the development and meet the "sequential test", by demonstrating that alternative town centre or edge of centre sites do not exist. Need does not solely relate to the quantitative scope for additional floorspace but may embrace shortcomings in the quality of local retail and leisure provision. In considering the suitability of sites in town centres developers must be flexible about the design of shops. It is not sufficient to dismiss town centre sites because they are not suited to a particular building form, such as large single storey units.

6.56 The growth of retail spending over the life of the Structure Plan has been projected. Greater weight is given to the projections for the first 10 years of the plan period when there will be demand for new comparison shopping in addition to commitments already made. There are sites for new shopping in many of Kent's town centres, although opportunities are limited in some smaller centres.

6.57 There are three existing factory outlet centres at Ashford, Chatham and Dover. Such proposals and those for other special forms of trading such as discount clubs, are subject to the same policy considerations as conventional retail proposals.

Policy FP14: Sequential consideration of sites for retail and leisure development

New retail and leisure development should be located on sites within town and district centres. If there are no such sites then sites on the edge of these centres may be considered.

In the absence of edge of centre sites development of large food or bulky goods stores may be considered, exceptionally, at out of centre locations but within the confines of a major/principal urban area.

Development (including extensions to existing retail development) on the edge of, or outside, town and district centres must demonstrate that:

- **there is a need for the development; and**
- **more suitable sites do not exist within town or district centres, or on their edge; and**
- **Individually or cumulatively the development does not undermine the viability or vitality of existing town and district centres; and**
- **the development is accessible to a choice of public and private transport, and by walking and cycling; and**
- **the development will not prejudice readily available and accessible sites for business and industrial development.**

High Street, or "core comparison" shopping

6.58 "Core comparison" goods, notably clothing, are the mainstay of town centre shopping following the relocation of much bulky goods and food shopping to large out-of-centre stores. The strategy gives priority to current major town centre investments, and encourages all town centres to maintain their place in the hierarchy. Development should be on a scale that does not jeopardise nearby centres and should not prejudice the character of historic centres. Larger scale development will be concentrated at:

- the sub regional centres which provide the greatest choice and have the best prospect of competing with out of centre shopping; and
- at the town centres of the principal urban areas which are experiencing major growth or where development will benefit regeneration of the wider area.

6.59 Retail expenditure projections suggest that there will be demand for c.199,000 gross square metres of 'core comparison' retail space in Kent by 2011 - before allowance is made for outstanding planning permissions and schemes under construction. About half of the potential arises in the four sub-regional centres:

■ Canterbury	27,000 sq. m
■ Maidstone	22,000 sq. m
■ Medway	30,000 sq. m
■ Tunbridge Wells	17,000 sq. m

6.60 Other centres with larger catchments and/or faster population growth also have significant demand, notably:

■ Ashford	21,000 sq. m
■ Thanet	17,000 sq. m
■ Folkestone	12,000 sq. m

6.61 If growth in spending continues most districts have significant potential for new development in the longer term (to 2021) but the locations above emerge as having the strongest demand and are the strategic priorities for new town centre shopping.

Policy FP15: Development for core comparison goods shopping

a) Proposals for core comparison shopping should be accommodated at town or district centres in Kent.

b) Development of comparison goods shopping in the sub-regional and principal town centres will be supported, particularly at:

(i) Maidstone;

(ii) Chatham;

(iii) Ashford;

(iv) Folkestone.

c) The scale and character of development at Canterbury should not prejudice investment in, and strengthening of, the principal town centres in East Kent and development of Ashford as a sub regional centre.

d) Any development at Bluewater should not prejudice investment in, and strengthening of, the sub regional centres of Chatham and Maidstone nor conflict with the role of principal town centres in North Kent as the prime focus for local retail, service, cultural and leisure facilities.

e) Development of a new mixed use town centre for Thanet at Westwood, adjacent to and integrated with existing major retail provision, and incorporating up to 25,000 sq. m of gross retail floorspace will be supported.

Bulky Comparison Goods

6.62 Bulky goods shopping is also concentrated close to the sub-regional centres, although much of the turnover is captured by out of centre retail parks. There are commercial pressures to widen the range of goods sold at out of centre stores to include core (High Street) comparison goods, which increases competition between High Street and out of centre shopping.

6.63 Retail spending projections suggest that there will be demand for a further 148,000 gross metres of bulky comparison retail space in Kent by 2011, with about half of that in the four sub-regional centres. Currently committed developments will provide for almost half of the total demand. The remainder should be met wherever possible within town centres and could help to make smaller schemes viable. Developers and retailers must be flexible about the design and operation of stores to allow this to happen. Dartford, Dover and Gravesend are locations where the combined potential for core and bulky comparison shopping might support town centre based provision.

6.64 Where there are no suitable town centre sites new bulky goods shopping should be located at existing groups of similar units to provide scope for multi-purpose shopping trips. Better access by public transport to those sites and improvements to the wider shopping environment should be encouraged.

Policy FP16: Development of bulky comparison goods retailing

a) Where it is demonstrated that the need for bulky goods shopping cannot be met at town centres development should be located with existing major out of centre retail developments. Planning conditions restricting the character of retail sales to bulky goods will be applied.

b) At existing out of centre retail locations guidance will be provided to define the limits of retail use, improve pedestrian circulation and secure better access by public transport.

Food and convenience goods

6.65 Spending projections suggest there is potential for 21,000 gross sq. m of additional convenience retail space in Kent by 2011. This is more than matched by current commitments amounting to 60,000 sq. m. However, further proposals for new or extended food and convenience shopping can be expected in order to improve the quality and choice of outlets and through competition for market share. Such proposals should be supported when they:

- are located at town or urban/rural district centres within the hierarchy;
- make good a local deficiency in food shopping; or
- serve a new residential community.

Extensions to existing out of centre food and convenience goods stores will be subject to the provisions of Policy FP14.

Policy FP17: Development of large food stores

Proposals for large new food stores should be located at town or district centres.

Local Development Documents will identify where new or improved convenience shopping, which cannot be accommodated within town or district centres, is needed:

- **to make good deficiencies in existing provision; or**
- **to meet new requirements associated with major new residential communities including the Strategic Development Locations identified by this Plan.**

Urban and Rural District Centres and Local Centres

6.66 District centres in Kent are numerous and varied in their role and character. There are small historic town centres such as Faversham and Whitstable, rural service centres including Tenterden and Cranbrook, and secondary centres within larger urban areas such as Gillingham. There is also a modern district centre at Hempstead Valley. These centres provide convenient and accessible shopping and services, primarily for their immediate communities. Meeting everyday needs for convenience and comparison shopping are at the heart of their role. This should be supported by small-scale development and by local measures to improve pedestrian access and the environment. Alongside district centres within the strategic hierarchy local planning authorities will need to identify other local, neighbourhood and village centres together with what needs to be done to maintain or enhance their vitality, viability and character and respond to the retail and service needs of local communities.

Policy FP18: District and Local Centres

Small scale retail and service provision at the urban and rural district centres (as identified on the Key Diagram), and at local, neighbourhood and village centres identified within Local Development Documents, will be supported where it will underpin the role, vitality and viability of such centres.