



Economic Development Strategy 2023-2033



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our vision for the Wealden Economy is...

Wealden has a thriving and vibrant economy, where our businesses, town centres and people are well placed to benefit from future growth opportunities and we are delivering against our net zero ambitions.

A changing economic, policy and delivery context

Wealden has a diverse economy characterised by a high number of SMEs and highly qualified workforce, but GVA and jobs growth has been below the national average over the past decade. The economic impacts of Covid-19 have been less harsh in Wealden compared to other local authority areas, although businesses are now facing the challenges of workforce and skills availability, supply chain disruption and rising costs. During the pandemic, digital transformation accelerated massively – and this, plus technology adoption is an ongoing challenge for local enterprises. Although town centres and high streets have shown resilience, there remain continuing challenges in terms of the increased cost of doing business, cost of materials, goods and energy, maintaining vibrancy, attracting visitors and retaining commercial floorspace.

Wealden is currently within the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) area. Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPS) are going to be restructured in the future, the future mode of operation of SELEP is uncertain. Districts in East Sussex have been allocated UK Shared Prosperity Funds, and have submitted Local Investment Plans which detail how these funds will be spent, including collaborative arrangements. Between now and December 2023, projects with European funding will cease to operate.

This strategy sets out five priority themes

The five priority themes and main opportunities and challenges reflect Wealden's unique characteristics as a place. These five themes are summarised as follows.

1. For Wealden's towns centres to adapt to residents and visitor's needs, providing places to work, socialise and enjoy, whilst optimising dwell time and spend.

Opportunities: Quality of place is a fundamental strength of Wealden and its town centres which can be built on;

Challenges: Preserving and enhancing towns' function as service centres with a vibrant cultural and community offer, whilst being forward thinking to meet the needs of local residents and visitors.

2. Enterprising Wealden: to maintain a resilient and growing business base to ensure business and employment opportunities for all.

Opportunities: High rates of entrepreneurship and a highly qualified workplace;

Challenges: Constraints on availability of workforce, skills, premises and the increased cost of doing business are affecting business performance and growth.

3. Skills and employment: to support the existing and future workforce, whilst helping to enable partners and employers to develop robust working practices to success.

Opportunities: Highly qualified jobs and a workforce with low rates of unemployment;

Challenges: Workforce and skills supply deficiencies means that businesses must evolve HR practices, working methods and digital skills training and development and transformation to keep ahead.

4. Support the tourism sector by increasing overnight stays and visitor spend, whilst promoting Wealden as an attractive place to visit.

Opportunities: Working with partners and stakeholders to continue to build on the Explore Wealden brand and a unique selling point (USP) for Wealden;

Challenges: The need to align Explore Wealden with wider pan-Sussex aspirations to ensure Wealden is part of a wider joined up partnership delivering complimentary activity.

5. Net Zero Wealden: to support the development of, and opportunities arising from the transition to net zero, and ensure our businesses are ready for the impacts of climate change.

Opportunities: Tackling the Climate Emergency will create a number of opportunities including creating new jobs and training opportunities.

Challenges: Business, particularly SME's, need support to access and build the skills, knowledge and capacity to reach net zero, as well as to minimise the costs involved, Many workers will need direct support to help them retool and reskill into newer, greener jobs as businesses change.

1. INTRODUCTION

A vision for Wealden

Our vision for the Wealden Economy

Wealden has a thriving and vibrant economy, where our businesses, town centres and people are well placed to benefit from future growth opportunities and we are delivering against our net zero ambitions.

This document details Wealden's economic development strategy

This document presents the economic development strategy for Wealden. It has been formulated by an analysis of available economic and social evidence, an analysis of employment land provision and demand, and by consultation with business organisations and local stakeholders.

The strategy aligns to the work of the local plan which identifies areas for growth and considers transport, infrastructure and housing matters. The strategy also reflects the 2023-2027 Corporate Plan and its priorities including supporting a thriving economy.

Wealden has a diverse economy characterised by a high number of SMEs and highly qualified workforce

Wealden is a diverse district that supports a range of manufacturing industries, professional services activities, construction, land based industries including viticulture and tourism and the visitor economy.

Although Wealden's workforce has high qualification attainments, many residents work outside of the district, and local GVA and employment growth has been below the national average.

In addition, Wealden has an ageing population and workforce, and recruitment, retention and skills shortages are pressing issues for the district's employers.

Going forward the ambition is to ensure that the economy is successful and provides skilled job opportunities and progression, but is also balanced in terms of achieving climate change objectives, sustainably revitalising and maintaining town centres, and protecting the unique built heritage and natural environment that makes Wealden an attractive place to live and visit.

With the resilience and adaptability to meet the economic challenges facing the UK

The UK economy, like many other countries, is facing the challenge of recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic along with the need to ensure rapid digital transformation and technology adoption, as well as the additional impacts of the Ukraine war, disruption of supply chain opportunities and rise in costs and prices.

A key challenge for Wealden is to support its businesses, communities and residents through these times of change, and to build resilience and adaptability.

This document sets out the context and main priorities and actions for the Wealden economy in a ten-year strategy

We set out the strategy according to five priority themes: Vibrant Places, Enterprise, Skills and employment, the Visitor Economy and Culture, and Net Zero Wealden.

2. WEALDEN AS A PLACE AND ECONOMY

Wealden – the place

Wealden is the largest (by land area) of five districts in East Sussex, with the other districts comprising of Lewes, Rother, Eastbourne and Hastings. Wealden District covers two main upland areas: a section of the High Weald within East Sussex; and covers the eastern end of the South Downs, and the majority of the Pevensey Levels. The River Ouse, some of the tributaries of which originate in the district, provides the border with Lewes District; and the River Cuckmere is located wholly in Wealden. The English Channel lies to the south of Wealden beyond Eastbourne. The River Rother rises on the Weald and flows easterly to the east of Rye Bay.

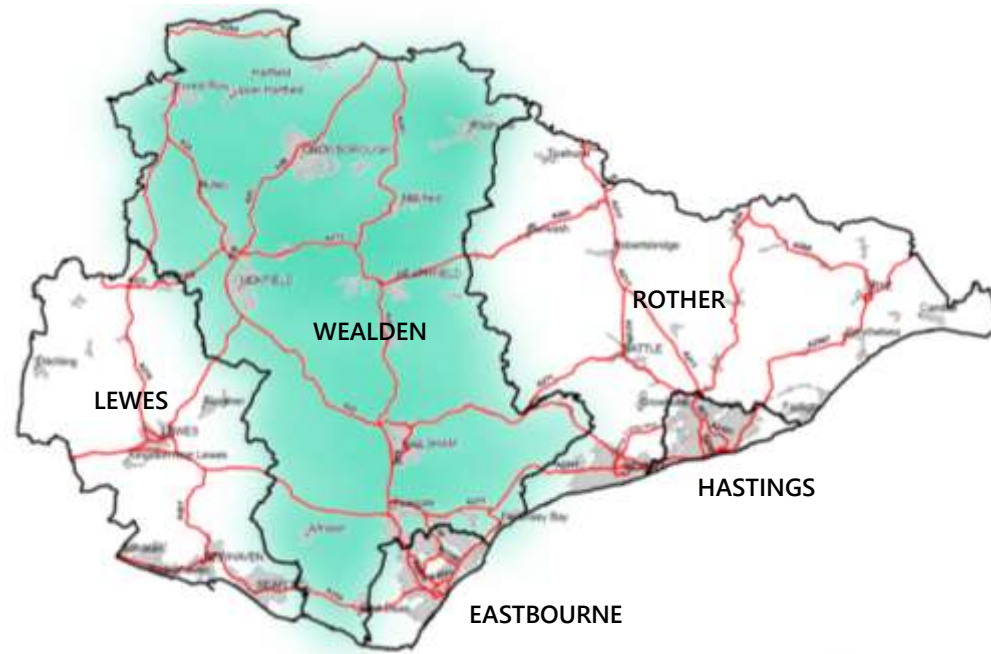
The major trunk road is the A22, London to Eastbourne; it is crossed by the A26 Maidstone–Lewes road at Uckfield; and the A267 Tunbridge Wells to Eastbourne road. There are also three west–east roads: the A259 coastal route; next inland is the A27 Pevensey–Whiteparish trunk road; and further to the north the A272 cross-country route to Winchester. The East Coastway Railway Line serves Eastbourne and Hastings from Brighton and Ashford, and has two stations (Berwick and Polegate) serving different sides of Pevensey in the district. The South Eastern railway line serves Wadhurst and Frant to the north of the District. The other railway line is the Oxted Railway Line which services Uckfield Railway Station from London Bridge.

Major landmarks include the Seven Sisters and Cuckmere Haven along the coast; the Long Man of Wilmington; the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; and parts of the South Downs National Park. Roman fortified hills can be found in the north of the area. Wealden has 33 conservation areas, with a further 8 conservation areas in the South Downs National Park part of Wealden District. The district also has Herstmonceux Castle, Pevensey Castle, and Ashdown Forest which is the home of Winnie the Pooh.

Major settlements

Wealden's largest town (according to 2020 Population Estimates) in terms of population is Hailsham (population: 22,890) followed by Crowborough (21,820), Uckfield (19,680), Polegate (11,000) and Heathfield (8,940).

MAP OF WEALDEN DISTRICT



Industrial estates

Wealden is served by over 20 industrial estates, offering workspace for both traditional and modern industries. Major new commercial premises are being planned for at Knights Farm near Hailsham, Ridgewood in Uckfield and Ashdown Business Park near Maresfield.

Wealden – the economy

Wealden has a diverse economy characterised by a high number of SMEs and highly qualified workforce

Wealden's economy is characterised by high levels of entrepreneurship, and a growing business base. Wealden has a strong manufacturing and engineering presence and specialisms, with major employment growth in business and professional services. Residents have high levels of qualifications attainment and there are historically low levels of unemployment.

Wealden's high quality natural environment, heritage, rural settlements, villages and market towns make the district an attractive place to live, work and visit. In 2019, the total value of tourism was £368 million. This included nearly half a million overnight stays and just under six million day trips. The visitor economy is clearly important and is developing.

Recently, Wealden has experienced less of an economic impact due to Covid-19 compared to the national average, although it is not clear whether levels of business indebtedness and the repayment of Covid loans will be an issue in the future.

Low rates of growth in the past decade

Wealden experienced high rates of growth between 2000 and 2010, but this has tailed off in recent years to lower than the national average growth rates. Overall, this has resulted in the low Gross Value Added (GVA) growth figures over the last 20 years which can be seen in the table to the right.

Latest data (2020, which can be seen in the table to the right) shows that Wealden has low levels GVA per head. This is driven by the prevalence of low value sectors and businesses. However, this is offset somewhat by high earning commuters (which is not reflected in the GVA per head figure).

GVA PER RESIDENT 2020 ¹	WEALDEN: £40,324 SOUTH EAST REGION: £61,980 ENGLAND: £58,995
GVA GROWTH 2002-2020 ²	Wealden: 4% South East region: 30% England: 29%
WEEKLY MEDIAN FULL-TIME WORKPLACE EARNINGS 2021 ³	Wealden: £531.30 South East region: £635.00 England: £613.30
EMPLOYMENT GROWTH 2000-2021 ⁴	Wealden: +9,700 jobs (18%)

The business base is larger (on a per capita basis) but has grown more slowly than the national average recently

There are 8,585 active businesses in Wealden. The district has a high business density – with 94 businesses per 1,000 working-age residents, higher than the national average (England = 67). There is a higher presence of microbusinesses compared to nationally. The business stock has grown by 16% over the last ten years – a lower rate of growth than England (31%) and South East England (22%). Survival rates are very similar to the national average.

ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE – KEY FACTS

¹ National Statistics Regional Accounts and ONS Population Estimates

² National Statistics Regional Accounts

³ Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

⁴ Business Register and Employment Survey

BUSINESS PERFORMANCE – KEY FACTS

NUMBER OF ACTIVE BUSINESSES 2022 ⁵	WEALDEN: 8,585
NUMBER OF BUSINESSES PER 1,000 WORKING-AGE RESIDENTS 2022 ⁶	Wealden: 94 South East region: 71 England: 67
RATE OF GROWTH OF BUSINESS STOCK 2010-2022 ⁷	Wealden: 16% South East region: 22% England: 31%

Manufacturing maintains a strong presence, but other sectors are far larger in terms of employment

We're mostly talking about 15% retail and the remaining part of the economy is a mixture of manufacturing and service industries and other non-retail outlets.” (Quote from local chamber of commerce)

Manufacturing has maintained a presence in Wealden, and in particular, has had a recent high demand for premises. Although the general trend is towards higher capital intensity and lower employment – it must be acknowledged that the manufacturing sector has almost halved in size since 2000. Wealden's

manufacturing sector lost 3,400 jobs between 2000 and 2021 – with a total of 4,100 jobs remaining in 2021. Manufacturing employment is strongest in food, wood products, printing and reproduction of recorded media, fabricated metal products, computer, electronic and optical products and machinery and equipment.

In absolute terms (total employment), the largest sector in Wealden is Wholesale and Retail Trade (8,700 employees) and Construction (8,300 employees) followed by Health and Social Care (8,000 employees).

Agriculture remains a significant employment specialism

Relative to England, the largest employment specialism in Wealden is by far agriculture, forestry and fishing. However, in absolute terms this sector is one of Wealden's moderately sized sectors (1,700 employees). Viticulture and wine

tourism has often been referred to by stakeholders as a growth opportunity, as identified in a 2018 study (Wealden Viticulture Feasibility Study) – with Sussex becoming one of the UK's largest wine producing regions. The Wine Standards Board 2016 report lists 26 vineyards, 24 vineyard owners and 5 wineries in Wealden although the sector is dominated by two wine estates – Rathfinny and Bluebell – who between them own two thirds of the planted area. Although the sector is in its early development, there is much commitment to developing wine tourism and its role in promoting Wealden as a visitor destination.

The major source of jobs growth has been in business support services, professional services and other services

In Wealden, between 2000 and 2021, the Health and Social Care and Professional, Scientific and Tech sectors saw the greatest employment growth (+3,100 and 3,000 employees, reaching a total of 8,000 and 15,800 employees in 2021 respectively) followed by Administrative and Support (+1,900 employees, reaching a total of 4,000 employees in 2021), other service activities (+1,300 employees, reaching a total of 3,200 employees in 2021), Education and Transport and Storage (both with +1,200 employees, reaching a total of 5,700 and 2,300 employees respectively in 2021), Accommodation and Food Services (+1,100 employees, reaching a total of 4,800 employees in 2021), and Arts and Entertainment (+900 employees, reaching a total of 2,700 employees in 2021).

It is business and professional services that are more likely to create value and well-paid jobs compared to other sectors. It will be important for the strategy to consider what can be done to encourage retention and growth of this sector.

Wealden's businesses have demonstrated resilience during the events of recent years

Our high street has been resilient during the Covid-19 pandemic. We've had a small turnover of businesses but in the main they seem to have weathered the storm.” (Quote from a town council)

Wealden is considered to have a diverse and resilient economy, largely based on SMEs. Covid-19 has had relatively little impact on existing village and town centres.

⁵ Inter Departmental Business Register

⁶ Inter Departmental Business Register and ONS Population Estimates

⁷ Inter Departmental Business Register

Labour and skills shortages are a real risk

Wealden is near other large employment centres that already provide jobs for a significant number of commuters. Labour shortages may impact the current social care sector as well as aspirations for hospitality and viticulture. Higher paid workers commute outside the district for jobs.

Unemployment is comparatively low

The claimant rate was 2.2% in October 2022 (compared to 2.8% in October 2021) (UK=3.6% in October 2022). There were 2,015 claimant unemployed in Wealden in October 2022 – 560 lower than the total in October 2021 – although it is acknowledged that claimant unemployment rose significantly from a very low base of 1,230 in October 2019 (pre-covid).

Businesses continue to be in recovery phase

Businesses are experiencing ongoing challenges following a period of uncertainty. There is a lack of labour supply, particularly for hospitality and tourism businesses with businesses having problems replacing EU staff who have left. The increased cost of doing business with the rising costs of goods and materials coupled with the rise in energy prices is proving challenging for all sectors.

Trade is being made more challenging due to the complexities, cost and documentation requirements, with further problems for agriculture and viticulture now that full customs and export checks and licencing have been introduced. Businesses also face difficulties adapting to the new rules for trading services, shortages of goods and services and difficulties obtaining visas for staff. .

Adequate supply of digital skills is a concern

In Wealden, there is much agreement that more intervention is needed in digital skills, especially in retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. Some support may be required to encourage business owners to generate sales online. Supporting start-ups with digital business advice and implementation may also be needed.

⁸ Annual Population Survey

⁹ Annual Population Survey

¹⁰ Annual Population Survey

EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS – KEY FACTS

WORKFORCE QUALIFICATIONS 2021 - % OF WORKING AGE RESIDENTS WITH NVQ4+ QUALIFICATIONS ⁸	Wealden: 39% South East region: 45.2% England: 43.2%
WORKFORCE QUALIFICATIONS 2021 - % OF WORKING AGE RESIDENTS WITH NO QUALIFICATIONS ⁹	Wealden: 1.8% South East region: 5% England: 6.4%
ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION RATE - % OF WORKING AGE RESIDENTS IN WORK OR ACTIVELY SEEKING WORK IN 2022 ¹⁰	Wealden: 83.3% South East region: 80.9% England: 78.8%
RATE OF GROWTH OF RESIDENT WORKFORCE (WORKING AGE POPULATION) 2008 to 2022 ¹¹	Wealden: 8% South East region: 17% England: 8%
NUMBER OF CLAIMANT UNEMPLOYED, October 2022 ¹²	Wealden: 2,015 South East region: 161,125 England: 1,303,055
CLAIMANT UNEMPLOYMENT RATE October 2022 ¹³	Wealden: 2.2% South East region: 2.9% England: 3.7%

¹¹ ONS Population Estimates

¹² ONS Claimant Count

¹³ ONS Claimant Count

Wealden – the national and local policy context

National Challenges and Policy Response

Economic challenges facing the UK

The emergence of the UK economy from the Covid-19 pandemic, the impacts of Brexit and the latest crisis in the Ukraine highlight a number of major economic challenges.

Risk, uncertainty, labour and material shortages and rising energy costs will be important factors in business investment and location decisions going forward. Additional costs for businesses and consumers and the operating environment will become more challenging due to business indebtedness, the changes to overseas market access, increasing energy costs and exporting and custom rules, and the need to adjust salaries to retain and attract labour.

Additional tax burden on workers and businesses, as tax rates rise to cover the additional costs the Covid crisis has brought to the NHS, the Adult Care System, and UK government. Real estate market uncertainties. There is general uncertainty about the level of activity amongst office workers, consumers, and tourists/visitors, and what the post-covid-19 future looks like.

Supply chain and labour uncertainties: securing access to supply chain and labour needs will be major factors for investment and locational decisions in the next few years.

Brexit may bring new trade and market opportunities, and perhaps opportunities to 'onshore' market activities that were previously supplied from overseas. Businesses may need assistance and help in realising the Brexit benefits.

The climate change challenge will mean there will have to be some radical changes to how markets, businesses and consumers make decisions and operate. How we produce goods and services, transport them and consume them will have to change significantly – whether this is through renewable energy, circular economies, electric vehicles, or recycling.

There is a need for innovation in order to respond to the economic challenges. This innovation should be inclusive meaning enables as many people as possible to contribute to and participate in innovation and its spill overs.

Inclusivity is often inherent in locally led innovation and therefore this strategy supports inclusive innovation. This strategy seeks to maximise locally led and inclusive innovation through its objectives and actions.

UK policy response

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) post-Brexit successor to the European regional funds. Up until implementing Brexit and until they expire in 2023, ESIF have been the largest single source of local economic development funding in the UK for several areas of intervention. These include business support, enterprise promotion and green economy schemes and incentives. Significantly for Wealden, the UKSPF will be allocated to local government at the district and unitary level.

The recent Levelling Up White Paper also cast uncertainty over existing initiatives but recent clarifications have confirmed that LEPs can continue if local partners wish to do this, and that the primary source of capital grant funding will be the Levelling Up Fund.

Wealden District Council has been allocated £1,172,127 in UKSPF over the three years 2022/23 to 2024/25. Other allocations in East Sussex are: Eastbourne (£1m), Hastings (£1m), Rother (£1m) and Lewes (£1m). East Sussex County receives a £2,523,442 in UKSPF – allocated as expenditure for the Multiply Adult Numeracy Programme, but receives no other UKSPF allocation. UKSPF funded initiatives at the county-level will have to be jointly funded by the Districts and Boroughs. Guidance specifies a minimum level of capital funding in each year (10% to 20%), but with the flexibility to utilise revenue funding for further capital project uses if desired.

Wealden District Council have submitted a local Investment Plan for the UKSPF allocation having consulted with local stakeholders and MPs, and to seek approval from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). [An interventions list](#) has been published which supports many initiatives and services for economic development and regeneration without the need for a detailed business case.

The DLHUC have announced further allocations of funding to identified rural authorities who have submitted a UKSPF investment plan. The Rural England Prosperity Fund is a £110million, two year fund from the Department for Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to address the extra needs of rural areas. Wealden's allocation is £838,120 over a 2 year period of 2023/24

and 2024/25. The Council has submitted an addendum to the SPF Investment Plan to the DLUHC outlining the proposals for delivery. Confirmation of this funding is expected early in 2023. The REPF links to the Shared Prosperity Fund and replaces the EU funding from LEADER and the Growth Programme.

Local Policy and Partnerships

Wealden District Corporate Plan 2023-2027

This economic development strategy has been developed within the framework for the Wealden District Corporate Plan (2023-2027), which sets out three key priorities

- Engaged Communities
- Sustainable Environment
- Thriving Economy

The thriving economy priority focuses on supporting a local economy which is vibrant and diverse, ensuring business and employment opportunities for all and helping to make Wealden an attractive place to live, work and visit.

South East Local Enterprise Partnership

The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) is one of 38 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in England, established to provide the clear vision and strategic leadership to drive sustainable private sector-led growth and job creation in their area. Strategic priorities include Business resilience and growth, UK'S global gateway, Communities for the future, and Coastal catalyst

East Sussex Growth Strategy and Team East Sussex

Over recent years, The County (East Sussex) Growth Strategy has influenced economic thinking in Wealden. More recently, East Sussex County Council produced an economic recovery plan, and in 2021 'East Sussex Reset' – which identified six missions: Thinking local, acting local; Building skills, creating jobs; Fast-forwarding business; Better places, fuller lives; Cleaner energy, greener transport; and The future is digital.

Team East Sussex (TES) is the local federated board for the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP Ltd). Membership of Team East Sussex is made up of business, local authority, social enterprise and education representatives from across the county. Four of the TES members also hold the position of Company Director of SELEP Ltd.

Local business representative organisations

The membership organisations operating across Wealden include the Sussex Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, Crowborough Chamber of Commerce, Hailsham Chamber of Commerce, Heathfield Chamber of Commerce, and Uckfield Chamber of Commerce.

Local recovery plans

Developed by Team East Sussex (TES) in direct response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Economy Recovery Plan focuses on businesses, skills and employment in a post Covid-19 landscape. The plan also supports other activities being progressed at a local level, including climate change and health and wellbeing initiatives. More recently in 2021, Team East Sussex produced 'East Sussex Reset' – which identified six missions: Thinking local, acting local; Building skills, creating jobs; Fast-forwarding business; Better places, fuller lives; Cleaner energy, greener transport; and The future is digital.

3. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Summary

This section sets out five priority themes for the strategy, outlined below, with the main opportunities and challenges summarised.

<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Challenges</i>
Vibrant places: Quality of place is a fundamental strength of Wealden and its town centres which can be built on.	Vibrant places: Preserving and enhancing towns' function as service centres with a vibrant cultural and community offer, whilst being forward thinking to meet the needs of local residents and visitors.
Enterprising Wealden: High rates of entrepreneurship and a highly qualified workplace.	Enterprising Wealden: Constraints on availability of workforce, skills and premises are affecting business performance and growth.
Skills and employment: Highly qualified jobs and workforce with low rates of unemployment.	Skills and employment: Shortage of supply of workforce and skills means that businesses must evolve HR practices, methods of working and digital transformation to keep ahead.
Visitor economy and culture: Working with partners and stakeholders to continue to build on the Explore Wealden brand and a unique selling point (USP) for Wealden.	Visitor economy and culture: The need to align Explore Wealden with wider pan-Sussex aspirations to ensure Wealden is part of a wider joined up partnership delivering complimentary activity
Net Zero Wealden: Tackling the Climate Emergency will create a number of opportunities including creating new jobs and training opportunities.	Net Zero Wealden: Business, particularly SME's, need support to access and build the skills, knowledge and capacity to reach net zero, as well as to minimise the costs involved, Many workers will need direct support to help them retool and reskill into newer, greener jobs as businesses change

Vibrant places

Unique and diverse offer

“We have wonderfully preserved villages and rural areas, which are quite vibrant, with restaurants, attractions, and that's quite a sought after USP for visitors - to visit somewhere that's really lovely and unspoilt with a lot of heritage.” (Quote from local town council)

Wealden has an incredibly diverse range of towns and villages – from the high quality retail and food offer of some towns, to visually stunning villages. Many of these towns and villages have successfully navigated through the Covid-19 pandemic and have survived and thrived.

A unique strength of Wealden District is both the vibrancy of town and village life,

and the knowledge, energy and commitment of town and parish councils and local chambers of commerce. There is an opportunity to harness and work together to enhance and develop the district's towns and villages.

A backdrop of uncertainty

Town and village centres across the UK are struggling to understand their futures, and to put in place plans in the face of this uncertainty. Due to the rise of online retailing and other such forces, the part retail has to play is likely to continue to change if town centres are to remain relevant. Overall, the amount of retail floorspace is likely to continue to contract. However, high-quality, independent shops may come to the forefront, something which can already be seen in many of Wealden's towns. Furthermore, some centres in Wealden have benefited from an increase in commuters using local shops and services when they work from.

There is also likely to continue to be a greater emphasis on creating an experience and providing more than just retail. This could be through more leisure and cultural attractions, high quality events and pop ups, and provision for children and young people. Towns should be a place to enjoy spending time and socialising.

There is very little vacant office space in Wealden's town centres and a considerable amount has been converted to residential. Whilst residential can play an important role in the vitality of the modern town centre, a core of commercial space should be retained.

Communities, organisations, and town centres will have to remain agile in terms of responding to the new economic environment as it becomes clearer what

kinds of activities and demands are relevant to the town centre. A toolkit of approaches, initiatives and support – that can be flexed as needed – would seem a sensible approach. However, the fundamentals of quality of place will continue to attract residents, businesses, and expenditure in town centres.

Need to balance the needs of car users and pedestrians

Towns in Wealden tend to experience high volumes of traffic (especially at peak times). Whilst there is good support for free parking and vehicular access, there is also demand for traffic calming measures and a greater focus on pedestrians. To support 'liveable town centres' greater emphasis will need to be placed on prioritising space for people to move around safely whilst balancing the needs for access by people using public transport or driving, where the town provides their local service centre.

Vibrant places - opportunities

Quality of place is a fundamental strength in Wealden that along with the right town centre offer will attract footfall and spending.

Creation of a diverse offer in town centres complementing the strong retail offer and heritage assets of towns

Growth of the night-time economy for both residents and visitors

Integration of the town centre and visitor economy agenda to maximise value for money through the creation of town identities and strong connections with other towns, attractions and accommodation.

Vibrant places - challenges

Preserving and enhancing towns' function as service centres with a vibrant cultural and community offer, whilst being forward thinking to meet the needs of the local residents and visitors.

A lack of commercial premises which has been made worse by conversion to residential.

Balancing the needs of people walking, cycling and wheeling, using public transport and driving in order to maximise enjoyment of and spend in town centres.

Enterprising Wealden

8,585 enterprises in Wealden in 2022

Wealden is a district of SMEs and high rates of business ownership. There were 8,585 enterprises in Wealden in 2022 – the equivalent of 94 enterprises per 1,000 residents, higher than the Southeast regional average (71) and average for England (67). Wealden businesses experience lower closure rates, and higher survival rates.¹⁴

Focus on business retention and expansion

Wealden has some distinctive inward investment strengths – including an established manufacturing presence and growth in business and professional services; a highly qualified workforce; and high-quality residential locations. There has been some recent employment development with the provision of high quality, new employment sites (such as Connect 27). However demand is high for employment space, and there is currently a lack of available sites and premises to accommodate medium to large new investors (e.g. 50+ jobs).

Given the constraints on providing sites and workforce skills to accommodate large Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) projects, an appropriate focus would be on assisting and retaining existing businesses in the district – helping with their growth needs, and business transformation issues – including digital transformation; and also in enabling business relocation from London. This includes helping them to access commercial premises within the new sites coming forward, such as those at Ashdown Business Park near Maresfield.

The future is digital

There is a significant opportunity for Wealden to capitalise on its good digital connectivity and make further improvements which allow all residents and businesses to benefit from innovation. The whole district is covered by 4G by at least one provider and 82% of the district is covered by all four providers compared to just 69% across the UK¹⁵. Whilst current 5G coverage in Wealden is limited, two providers have committed to reaching nationwide coverage by 2028. In terms of fixed broadband, access to full-fibre broadband is better than on average across the UK for both residential and commercial properties. Digital and technological transformation continues apace in many sectors, and this will increase the demand for IT, digital and STEM skills even more. This transition

has accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic and is reshaping industries, value chains, business models, customer experience and service operations.

Transition to new funding priorities and mechanisms

There are significant funding uncertainties in enterprise support. European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) ends in June 2023. Growth Hub Funding from Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) for 2022/23 is 50% of the value of 2021/22 funding and will cease completely in March 2023. There is an urgent need to consider priorities, continuity plans and funding sources from April 2023. Continued, or new county-level services will likely have to be jointly funded by East Sussex Districts and Boroughs, as the county has no UKSPF allocation.

Enterprise opportunities

Continued high rates of entrepreneurship provide the turnover, critical mass and potential for peer support and supply chain development
Changes to business location decisions mean that Wealden has the opportunity of making potential gains from businesses relocating from London

Cementing Wealden as a leading area in the provision of digital infrastructure building on strong existing provision

Supporting businesses to maximise the use of strong digital connectivity, boosting productivity

Enterprise challenges

Awareness of support continues to be a challenge, with many businesses unaware of existing support services or who to contact

Lack of workers and skills are hitting service industries and the visitor economy in particular

Increasing the provision of commercial premises to assist with business growth needs

Digital transformation is a key requirement to allow businesses to compete in the market now and in the future

¹⁴ ONS Business Demography

¹⁵ Ofcom Connected Nations 2021

Skills and employment

Highly qualified workforce

Wealden working age residents are highly qualified, with 39% of residents, with NVQ, 4 plus qualifications or equivalent in 2022, similar to the national average. 63.4% of working-age residents have an NVQ 3 or equivalent as the highest level of qualification, which is again similar to the UK average of 61.5%. Only 1.8% of working age residents have no qualifications, compared to the UK average of 6.6%.¹⁶ Many residents out commute to jobs, but there may be opportunities through encouraging business growth, recruitment and retention within the district to reduce out-commuting..

Highly skilled jobs

Jobs that are based within Wealden are more highly skilled than average as there is a larger share of manager, director and senior officials jobs based here.

Skills & labour shortages – particularly for visitor economy

“We've got very, very low unemployment. So actually recruiting staff is quite, quite difficult.” (Quote from local chambers of commerce)

Many employers are facing staff shortages in Wealden. Factors such as low unemployment rate (signalling low levels of untapped labour), poor transport connectivity, and high house prices constrain labour supply. These are

all acting as a barrier to recruitment. It is unlikely that these labour supply factors will change, and solutions are more likely to be found by adapting recruitment and HR practises, and implementing investment in equipment, automation, IT and digital transformation, and finding solutions to transport and accessibility, particularly for young people taking up entry level jobs and apprenticeships.

Digital, STEM & Green Skills for All

Digital and technological transformation continues apace in many sectors, and this will increase the demand for IT, digital and STEM skills – both widely within the workforce and in terms of specialist skills. Wealden, along with the rest of the UK, faces a ‘green skills gap’. This refers not only to skills for specialist sustainability related jobs but also, and arguably more importantly, for all jobs

where everyone will need to be able to work through a green lens in order to transform business-as-usual.

Employer recruitment & HR practice

There is a need to work more closely with employers to ensure that they are deploying HR policies and procedures that will help to attract and retain talent, such as engaging with apprenticeships, leadership development; digitalisation; salary and workplace benefit programmes, work-life balance, flexible working practices, support with travel to work and commuting and change management.

Local Skills Improvement Plan

The Sussex Chamber of Commerce have been chosen as a trailblazer by the Department of Education as one of eight Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). The LSIP aims to build partnerships between employers and education providers to ensure learning and skills are more responsive to the needs of local employers. Deep dives into specific sectors are being undertaken to build up a picture of the skills challenges in the area.

Skills & employment opportunities

Highly qualified workforce that could be available to deploy in growth opportunities

Highly skilled jobs mean that the Wealden economy can support high value added activities and wealth creation

Digital transformation is a game changer for skills and employment – from the provision of remote learning to the ability to implement flexible and remote working

Skills & employment challenges

Skills and labour shortages: continue to be a challenge

Keeping ahead with HR practice to attract and retain workers and key staff

Digital and STEM: ensuring that the provision of skills keeps pace with demand and the transition in the economy

Closing the ‘green skills’ gap will be crucial in supporting the transition to Net Zero.

¹⁶ Annual Population Survey

Visitor economy and culture

An established visitor destination

Wealden is a high-quality visitor destination with a diverse offer. The visitor economy is underpinned by the district's natural assets which include the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the South Downs National Park and Birling Gap. Wealden also has a range of special places and cultural attractions including those based around the arts and wine. Wealden is the second largest contributor to East Sussex's Visitor Economy and tourism related expenditure supports 18% of jobs in the District¹⁷. This reflects the high rating of the District's accommodation and attractions.

Established target markets and branding

Visit England developed a new visitor segmentation in 2016, based on a combination of what matters to visitors, their holiday behaviour, and demographics.

Through this Wealden have established target markets to which tourism marketing and development should primarily be focussed towards. These are 'Country Loving Traditionalists' and 'Aspirational Family Fun'. These markets compliment the Sussex wide priority markets identified in 2021. These markets, are higher spending markets and as such offer some balance in terms of seasonal spread of visits, of which Wealden has an established offer.

Based on these target markets, Wealden District Council has established a strong brand called Explore Wealden, which is centred around Nature, Places and Culture.

"Wealden has some real opportunities in terms of exploiting eco or green tourism, food and gastronomy and local vineyards. We could explore more of these opportunities – such as wild camping, woodland activities, and sustainable forestry activities." (Quote from local town council)

Scope for a stronger cross-authority approach

It is rare for visitors to consider themselves as visiting Wealden¹⁸ and many potential visitors have not even heard of Wealden. They are much more likely to visit and think of themselves as visiting Sussex, 1066 Country (of which Wealden is an active partner) or the South Downs or towns such as Hastings or Eastbourne. Across Sussex, local authorities have shown themselves to be broadly supportive of tourism development. However, the approaches of the various authorities and tourism organisations have been fragmented. Wealden work closely with 1066 Country, which include Hastings and Rother authorities, but 1066 Country could cover more of Wealden's attractions and there is a need to work closely with other neighbouring authorities across Sussex in order to ensure cohesion in the promotion of the wider area and hence Wealden.

The development of the area's tourism offer would also benefit from being co-ordinated across a wider area in order to distribute the impacts of tourism and avoid over competition between attractions.

Potential for an increase in overnight stays

Around half of visitors to Wealden come from the local area and the number of overnight stays in the district is limited. Just 8% of all visits are by overnight visitors but these make up 30% of spend¹⁹. Day visitors spend less but have a disproportionately higher impact.

Furthermore, when visitors stay overnight, 66% stay with friends or relatives with only 29-34% in paid accommodation, which again limits local spend²⁰.

"I would say it's an established visitor destination - but mainly for people from in and around East Sussex. People don't tend to travel far to visit Wealden." (Quote from local chamber of commerce)

¹⁷ Based on latest (2019) data.

¹⁸ 1066 Visitor Study

¹⁹ Blue Sail

²⁰ Blue Sail

A lack of accommodation

Wealden's emerging Visitor Accommodation Futures' Study 2023 suggests, much of the existing visitor accommodation in Wealden is performing at very high occupancies or full during the peak summer months and school holidays, requiring additional visitor accommodation development to grow the market. Furthermore, visitor accommodation, such as caravan and camping sites, can be constrained from operating during shoulder seasons/winter months through historical planning conditions, albeit this is in limited circumstances.

In addition, alternative types of accommodation will be needed to attract new markets that will travel for different reasons and at different times, including innovative and emerging accommodation offers such as glamping and treehouses, and products linked to activities and experiences such as walking and cycling focused lifestyle hotels, with scope to generate new demand.

There is strong developer and operator interest in bringing forward new visitor accommodation in Wealden if the main barriers of site availability, funding and planning can be overcome.

Culture

The cultural and creative sector contribute to the economy in many and varied ways; by attracting visitors to a destination and its town centres, building civic pride and capacity, enhancing learning and opening up opportunities for young people and skills development. In 2021 the sector supported 2,250 jobs within Wealden, the highest number of jobs in this sector across all of East Sussex²¹. Working in partnership with key regional and local partners, Wealden District Council has a role to play in supporting this sector.

²¹ East Sussex in Figures (2021)

Visitor economy and culture opportunities

A strong visitor offer in terms of nature, places and attractions which can be better utilised through effective marketing and management

Potential to drive the development of cross authority (1066 and/or Sussex) branding and offer development for the mutual benefit of Wealden and Sussex's visitor economy.

Potential to develop a USP for Wealden which complements Explore Wealden, 1066 and Sussex level branding and simultaneously capitalises on but protects the built and natural heritage of the area

Visitor economy and culture challenges

A lack of accommodation including accommodation with green tourism accreditation limits the scope of the tourist market. There is also difficulty engaging with and promoting accommodation businesses.

A lack of awareness of Wealden as a place and what it has to offer amongst potential visitors

Lack of clarity over the offer that Wealden has and where it lies within a wider context amongst those seeking to promote Wealden.

Branding - developing an understanding of when to use Explore Wealden branding and when it is more appropriate to use 1066 or Sussex level branding

Ensuring Wealden's target markets are reflected in 1066 and Sussex marketing and projects

Poor public transport coverage inhibits the linking of destinations and attractions.

Preventing over-tourism, given the need to protect natural assets and heritage, and managing resident perceptions of over-tourism.

Labour shortages continue to be a challenge given the affluent resident population and low paid nature of work.

Net Zero Wealden

The transition to the Net Zero economy will accelerate over the next 10 years

The Council has set a target of being net zero and climate-resilient by 2050 or sooner. This target is ambitious and its achievement is reliant in harnessing the full potential of all sectors in our local economy to help deliver this essential transformation, as well as working with our strategic partners and local communities. Within the next 10 years we will see a rapid decarbonisation of our local economy, working towards our net zero goals.

Success will ensure existing businesses and supply chains maximise the opportunity and competitive advantage of taking action now, preparing for a future green economy. This action creates opportunities for new jobs, goods and services that will support the development of Wealden's economy into the future.

Although challenging, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) tells us this is necessary as global emissions must halve by 2030 to have any real chance of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees. At the same time, we must adapt to the climate change already locked in.

A holistic approach is needed

All interventions to promote economic growth/success should contribute to achieving Net Zero ambitions. Furthermore, when planning and implementing interventions which contribute to net emissions reductions, other environmental benefits should be recognised and maximised (i.e. protecting and enhancing natural capital).

Businesses will need to transition to Net Zero models and markets...

Non-domestic buildings currently account for 10.3% of Wealden's CO₂e emissions²². In this sector, electricity accounts for around 39% of fuel consumption but petroleum products and gas account for around 37 and 20% respectively²³. A small amount of coal is also used.

²² Scope 1 and 2. Based on 2020 data.

²³ Based on 2017 data.

Overall, around half of emissions reductions since 2005 have been due to reduced fuel consumption²⁴. This will need to be much greater in the future.

There is currently very little guidance or support regarding how Wealden's businesses can work to becoming Net Zero. This strategy will focus on actions which will help businesses in their transition.

... and this makes commercial sense

Reducing CO₂e emissions and generally becoming a greener business can often make commercial sense – energy efficiency can lead to reduced costs and good environmental credentials and can increase sales. Green investment may attract subsidies and grants. However, more needs to be done to make green investment make more commercial sense.

It is recognised that the initial investment required to go green can be costly, presenting a barrier to businesses. The Council can do this by supporting businesses to access funding.

The reliance on car transport means that a transition to Electric Vehicles, alternative fuels and a greater number of people walking, cycling and wheeling will need to take place over the next 10 years

Nearly half of Wealden's CO₂e emissions²⁵ are related to transport. Whilst many areas of transport provision are out of the direct control of Wealden District Council, the council can influence East Sussex County Council and the national government. More directly, the council, working with local businesses, can support the use of No or Low Emission Vehicles and associated infrastructure, including EV charging points (which can support the visitor economy and rural resilience). The council can also encourage behavioural change.

²⁴ Based on 2005 – 2017 data.

²⁵ Scope 1 and 2.

Net Zero opportunities

Wealden is a rural district which is heavily wooded meaning that types of land based activities such as sustainable land use and, forestry activities can contribute to offsetting emissions. There is significant scope to reduce fuel consumption and transition towards a greater proportion of electric fuel consumption (including through the implementation of renewable energy generation) in non-domestic buildings.

Whilst the climate impact of Wealden's businesses is relatively small, it has a **responsibility to be a Net Zero leader by setting more aspirational targets and providing high quality support for local businesses**, as well as influencing other local authorities and national government to do the same

Net Zero challenges

If 'Business As Usual' continues, the CO₂e emissions of local businesses are likely to increase due to growth. If historic rates of emissions reductions continue this is likely to be too slow.

Balancing economic development with the imperative to reduce CO₂e emissions and protect and enhance natural assets and ensuring residents share equally in the benefits which stem from natural capital.

Supporting businesses to make green investment in the context of rising inflation and the increasing cost of finance.

An ageing agricultural workforce leading to the loss of the skills and knowledge required to develop sustainable land use practices, and poor economic conditions (wages, housing affordability, workspace availability, rural services) limiting the recruitment and retention of agricultural workers.

Lack of economic **value in land-based products** (including higher value locally sourced wood products), **increasing costs of land management and uncertainty in agri-environmental funding**. This constrains innovation towards better sustainability.

4. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The headline priorities and aims are outlined below. The rest of this section details specific short-term and long-term actions.

Vibrant places: For Wealden's town's centres to adapt to residents and visitor's needs, providing places to work, socialise and enjoy, whilst optimising dwell time and spend.

Enterprising Wealden: To maintain a resilient and growing business base to ensure business and employment opportunities for all.

Skills and employment: To support the existing and future workforce, whilst helping to enable partners and employers to develop robust working practices to succeed.

Visitor economy and culture: To Support the tourism sector by increasing overnight stays and visitor spend, whilst promoting Wealden as an attractive place to visit.

Net Zero Wealden: To support the development of, and opportunities arising from the transition to net zero, and ensure our businesses are ready for the impacts of climate change.

PRIORITY 1: VIBRANT PLACES

Aim: For Wealden's town's centres to adapt to residents and visitor's needs, providing places to work, socialise and enjoy, whilst optimising dwell time and spend.

Objectives	Actions
1.1 Increase time and money spent in town centres This will reflect the value residents and visitors get from town centres in terms of enjoyment and access to goods and services. This will be achieved by taking the opportunities and overcoming the challenges identified above. KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) (i) Percentage of occupied retail units (ii) Number of stalls at local markets	<i>Short-term 2022-25</i> 1.1 (a) Produce and implement town centre / place shaping initiatives where appropriate: - These should build on existing strategies and plans where available. This should focus on towns where there are opportunities to prioritise space for people walking, cycling and wheeling and look to address key challenges and opportunities, including access for all. This work could extend to consideration of public realm including shop front design/improvements and signage linked to heritage. Identify opportunities to bid for external funding to support delivery (including from the Levelling Up Fund Round 2, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Brownfield Land Release fund). Who? In partnership with town councils, Chambers of Commerce, East Sussex County Council and other key partners <u>Examples of practice</u> Cornwall Toolkit https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/pt10xbv1/place-shaping-toolkit-final-2.pdf 1.1 (b) Repurpose large un-used and under-used town centre units: - Work with property owners to identify opportunities to re-purpose large un-used and under-used town centre units as small units and/or affordable units which are suitable for local, independent businesses and community organisations (particularly for provision for young people). Consideration should be given to the provision of flexible shared workspace (rent a desk/office) for those who now work from home following the Covid pandemic. A few examples of these can be seen across the District. To enable the above the Council should consider the possibility of buying/leasing space for these uses themselves or in partnership with the private sector. Planning policy should also support the redevelopment of larger units to smaller units (where no net loss of space will occur). Who? In partnership with town councils, property owners, local businesses, and community organisations

Objectives	Actions
	<i>Long-term 2022-32</i> 1.1 (c) Develop town centres toolkit: Work with partners to create a one-stop-shop for high streets comprising guidance, good practice and case studies, and a guide to available funding or financial vehicles for high street regeneration. The concept would provide a platform of tools and resources to allow towns and high streets to customise solutions. Where possible research and adapt existing tool kits to work within the local setting. The toolkit should consider the changing way in which residents and visitors access their town centres and their changing requirements. For example a knock on impact from the Covid pandemic has seen an increase in the number of people working from home, which will in turn impact on the use of their local town centres. Residents and visitors also expect more information and services to be available digitally which needs to be considered in the guidance. Who? In partnership with ESCC, town councils, property owners, local businesses, and community organisations <u>Examples of practice</u> Cornwall Council provides a £4m Town Centres Revitalisation Fund to support towns in Cornwall to develop investment proposals. It was in response to the Vitality of Towns Inquiry which concluded in September 2019. The fund supports feasibility work, reducing car dependency, options appraisals, sustainable and active travel, workspace opportunities, new community greens and event spaces, and town centre vitality action plans. Transport for London provides a design toolkit to help planners, engineers, designers and other practitioners create high quality streets and public spaces. Includes guidance on streetscape, cycle infrastructure and accessible bus stops. 1.1 (d) Introduce regular monitoring - Monitor the number of vacant units, number of events hosted and number of stalls at local markets. Where resources are available monitor footfall, dwell-time in and the amount money spent in key town centres on a regular basis. Survey to understand the drivers behind these metrics i.e. why people visit the town centre. Who? In partnership with Town Councils and data collectors/analysts if required. See https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/support-directory/ for information of data collection. 1.1 (e) Develop and implement initiatives to make the most of culture, history and heritage within town centres: through supporting local organisations, developing heritage trails, related festivals and events, place branding, heritage skills development including Heritage Lottery Fund project development and applications.

Objectives	Actions
	Build community resilience and capacity within the towns of Wealden to ensure activity is locally driven and sustainable. Who? In partnership with town councils, property owners, local businesses, and community organisations <u>Examples of practice</u> High Street Heritage Action Zone projects which are designed to ‘unlock the potential of high streets across England, fuelling economic, social and cultural recovery and breathe new life into it for future generations.’ For example, the Plymouth high street project aims to enhance awareness of 20th Century architecture through public engagement, and a programme of cultural activities to celebrate the area’s cultural heritage. 1.1 (f) Support the provision and connection of improved walking and cycling links and measures integrated with public transport: - Prioritise and support the provision of walking and cycling links and particularly links between the Cuckoo Trail and the National Cycle Network and towns and villages (supporting the joining up of attractions and places as part of the Visitor Economy priority and the Net Zero priority). This should include: - Actively inputting into East Sussex County Council walking and cycling Infrastructure Plan – ensuring measures are developed and delivered with alignment to current government active travel design guidance - Provide policies in the Local Plan to support walking and cycling and work with developers to ensure that any new developments provide safe walking/cycle access to town centres as relevant. Who? In partnership with town councils, local businesses (including those in the visitor economy), East Sussex County Council and developers. 1.1 (g) Support the implementation of electric vehicle charging points: There is strong demand for EV charging points in Wealden and there are a number of planned schemes. There are currently 10 charging units in Uckfield and Wealden District Council are currently working closely with providers to add additional EVCP’s in Uckfield and throughout the district. EV charging points will be vital in allowing for continued mobility in a car reliant area and reducing emissions, supporting the Net Zero and Visitor Economy priorities of this strategy. This should include:

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>
	- Support for implementation of EV charging points in planning policy. - Identify enterprises (including public sector) in the district with large fleets and / or car parks and work with them to support investment in EVs and charging points where appropriate. A strategy for supporting each enterprise should be produced and actions for both the enterprise and council should be set and agreed upon - consideration of enabling alternative forms of sustainable charging/refuelling points as dictated by market demand, to include hydrogen fuel Who? In partnership with town councils, local businesses (including those in the visitor economy), developers and East Sussex SPACES (Strategic Property Asset Collaboration in East Sussex) group.

PRIORITY 2: ENTERPRISING WEALDEN

Aim: To maintain a resilient and growing business base to ensure business and employment opportunities for all.

Objectives	Actions
2.1 Maintain and enhance the provision of enterprise support and increase awareness within Wealden Enterprise support is currently provided under the umbrella of Business East Sussex (The East Sussex Growth Hub), which provides an information, diagnostic and brokerage service to businesses. Businesses can be referred to gain specialised support, advice and sources of grants and loans, many of which are provided by EDEAL Enterprise Agency. These support services are at risk, as the majority of ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) funded business support projects have either ended or are closing at the end of April 2023. Growth Hub funding has been cut by 50% for 2022/23 and there is, as yet (January 2023) no indication of further funding from 2023/24. The current level of resource that the East Sussex Growth Hub has is £54,000 for 2022/23. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund may provide some opportunities to retain some business growth and advisor services. It is essential that Wealden District Council reviews current provision with partners in East Sussex, and produces a recommendation on what needs to be retained for Wealden businesses in order to inform the future allocation of UK Shared Prosperity Funds, and local authority funds.	<i>Short-term 2022-25</i> 2.1 (a) Continue to support existing enterprise support agencies and initiatives: The Eastbourne and District Enterprise Agency (EDEAL) is contracted until 2025 to continue providing services and grants to Wealden's businesses and residents. Businesses should continue to be referred to these sources of support and advice. The monthly e-newsletter to businesses should continue to be supported in terms of growing the readership and reach amongst Wealden's businesses and communities and keeping them informed about the changing enterprise support landscape and provision. Support to other initiatives as appropriate, which could include Business Improvement Districts Who? In partnership with East Sussex County Council, local authorities and business representative organisations. 2.1 (b) Explore and implement plans for business support from 2022 and plans for enhanced provision of start-up support: undertake a review of what to continue and enhance once European Funding ends and Growth Hub funding is reduced (with funding likely to completely end by April 2023) – including aspects of business support services, start-up and growth information and advice, grants and loans. Emphasis on start-up support is particularly important to Wealden, given the potential to encourage this amongst skilled residents who commute out to work in other areas. This work should be delivered in partnership with East Sussex County Council and the Districts and Boroughs for economies of scale. Any business support should complement and build upon the existing support provided through agencies and initiatives (see 2.1a) Who? In partnership with East Sussex County Council, local authorities and business representative organisations. <u>Examples of practice</u> Hull and East Yorkshire Growth Hub has recently conducted a large scale survey and focus groups with local businesses and enterprise support providers to identify key priorities for enterprise support from 2022 onwards, that will be used to inform the post- EU funding landscape.

Objectives	Actions
This could also take into account alternative provision of enterprise information, support and advice – such as that provided by the British Library – which is also reliant on European Funding and a central BEIS grant and is looking for new partners and operating models. KPIs (Indicative KPI's subject to funding being secured) (i) Number of available funds / business support programmes (ii) Value of funds available (iii) Number of Wealden businesses accessing funds and using business support (iv) Total amount of funding awarded to Wealden businesses	Stoke and Staffordshire LEP have considered future risks, continuities and options for their Growth Hub. In particular, there are contractual commitments due to renew in 2022 and risks associated with maintaining service levels. <i>Long-term 2022-32</i> 2.1 (c) Participate in developing successor programmes to Growth Hub and ERDF funded enterprise support services and resources. Currently one of the main routes to enterprise support is the Business East Sussex Growth Hub, which is a source of information on existing business support services and grants. Growth Hub funding was reduced in 2022 and ends in March 2023, and many sources of support and grants were resourced by ERDF (European) funds. So there is a need to develop a successor service to the Growth Hub, and the support that it highlights and refers businesses to. Who? In partnership with East Sussex County Council, local authorities and business organisations.
2.2 Focus on the existing business base and business retention The prospects of landing large-scale inward investment and jobs from multinational companies is unlikely. Wealden does not have the workforce, large sites or infrastructure. What Wealden does have is a vibrant business base, and range of SMEs and microbusinesses which are agile and are successful, as well as a pipeline of commercial premises coming forward. Another key factor is the rural nature of Wealden, and that this influences the types of businesses present in the district, and what kind of assistance they require. There is an opportunity to create a tailored offer to existing businesses to help retain and grow the business base. In particular, research on rural business growth suggests that rural businesses have more support and advice needs in exporting, regulatory issues, workforce skills, improving	<i>Long-term 2022-32</i> 2.2 (a) Review business growth and retention and explore opportunities to support delivery. This should include collecting relevant and appropriate evidence to inform any future service, looking at the quantity, quality and locational needs of business sectors and current market requirements. Who? In partnership with East Sussex County Council, local authorities and business organisations. <u>Examples of practice</u> This could utilise insights and lessons from The University of Newcastle's Centre for the Rural Economy and The Centre for Rural Innovation. In particular: • rural firms are more likely to be exporters than urban firms • regulatory issues are more of a concern for rural businesses • rural firms are just as likely as urban firms to be planning increase in workforce skills • rural firms are less likely to be considering instituting new working practices or improving leadership skills • rural firms are more than twice as likely to seek advice to improve business efficiency or productivity • more rural firms seek larger funds for capital investments in machinery and buildings

Objectives	Actions
working practices and leadership skills, improving efficiency and productivity and capital investment. KPIs (i) Business density (businesses per working age resident) (iii) Business start-ups / closures (iii) Business count by ward (urban vs rural) (iv) Employment by ward (urban vs rural)	Invest in Dorset has a suite of promotional brochures and marketing messages which are based on quality of place – including the themes of Smart (sites with digital infrastructure and business clusters), Wellbeing, Natural, and Living.
2.3 Assist businesses with addressing workforce and skills supply issues, including developing technological solutions Wealden District has high levels of workforce skills and low unemployment, and is part of a wider functional economy and labour market area. Out-commuting is high. In terms of employers – they will need to develop skilled job roles to attract and retain Wealden residents. For the local workforce, the district must enhance the existing skills, and ensure that local employers have access to local residents that wish to work locally. It also means that businesses will need to continue to adapt to cope with labour shortages, via the implementation of new technologies, business models and capital investment. Technological and digital transformation is key, and will also enhance business resilience and performance, contributing to further economic growth. Through supporting employment for local residents through the use of technology, this objective constitutes inclusive innovation. KPIs (i) Number of enterprises accessing skills training support	<i>Short-term 2022-25</i> 2.3 (a) Employer workforce development initiative Who? In partnership with East Sussex County Council, Skills East Sussex, local authorities, education providers and business organisations. <u>Examples of practice</u> Wealden is a member of Skills East Sussex, the County's employment and skills board. Skills East Sussex have set their six priorities for 2021 – 2030, including improving digital skills. These priorities are being addressed via the Skills East Sussex sector based task groups and projects. The Skills East Sussex backed project Transform provides support to East Sussex SME's to access skills training (including digital skills training), apprenticeships and levy transfer funding. The European Social Fund (ESF) programme 'Transform' will end in December 2023, however part of the project legacy will be to create a toolkit for East Sussex employers on accessing skills training and apprenticeships. Wealden District Council should promote the toolkit and work with partners to identify future funding to deliver similar support to SMEs to access skills training. <i>Long-term 2022-32</i> 2.3 (b) Business productivity and digital improvement initiative which applies digital technologies to improve productivity and to address challenges of labour and skills shortages. Who? In partnership with East Sussex County Council, local authorities and business organisations. <u>Examples of practice</u> The Eastern Agri-Tech Growth Initiative was established in 2013 to support the development of new and innovative ideas within the Agri-Tech sector. It offers the Agri-Tech Growth Fund, grant funding of between £10,000 and £150,000 to support product development and improve agricultural productivity; and a Research, Development and Prototyping Fund which helps to support the research and development of new products or processes with grants of between £10,000 and £60,000. The Eastern

Objectives	Actions
(iv) Number of businesses implementing technology enhancements to improve performance and productivity as a result of council initiatives	Agri-Tech initiative has supported a wide range of businesses, including food and drink producers and growers, bespoke equipment and chemical manufacturers and innovative IT companies who supply to the agricultural sector. Norfolk County Council's Go Digital initiative offers support for small and medium sized businesses in Norfolk. Businesses can learn how to better use digital tools to identify business opportunities and help their business grow. Plumpton College's Green technology for land management and food production has worked with local industries and employers to promote local employment opportunities. Also included is major investment in a training centre, in the re-purposing of glasshouse estate and the commissioning of specialist expertise and learning material for all colleges.
2.4 Employment sites and premises There is no doubt that the current supply of employment land and premises is constrained in Wealden, however there are large development sites in the pipeline, some of which have been recently delivered. However, the lack of supply and turnover in premises in recent years means that business expansion and site consolidation is also constrained. However, Wealden faces some significant barriers to establishing more employment land and premises – including a lack of sites, national landscape protections (High Weald AONB and South Downs National Park), infrastructure constraints, and developer interest. KPIs (i) Employment floorspace delivered as a percentage of need (ii) Commercial vacancy rates (optimum 5-10% or agents reporting sufficient supply) (iii) Number of allocations within the emerging Local Plan	<i>Short-term 2022-25</i> 2.4 (a) Explore the case for an employment sites and premises marketing document or strategy. This would involve the business- and investor- friendly presentation of Local Plan policies in relation to employment land, and would consider the potential from A22 Growth Corridor Infrastructure Improvements and Employment Space Who? Wealden District Council, working with East Sussex County Council and local partners. <u>Examples of practice</u> The Opportunity Mid Sussex website is a good example of how to present opportunities for growth alongside promotion of the area as a place to live and visit. The online resource is easy to update and is engaging for businesses Invest in Dorset have combined their strategic employment growth sites with digital infrastructure and growth opportunities in an interesting way. 2.4 (b) Conduct a rural enterprise premises study that helps to increase the understanding of current rural property use, enterprise needs and demands, and the barriers to refurbishment and conversion of existing buildings for enterprise use. This would involve a small-scale review of rural enterprise accommodation needs (demand) and provision (supply). Who? Wealden District Council, working with East Sussex County Council and local partners. 2.4 (c) Develop employment sites within the District and enhance the existing industrial estates, this should include: - Development of Knights Farm employment site in central Wealden, providing start up and expansion opportunities for businesses

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>
	Who? Wealden District Council, development partner - Develop Council owned site on Farningham Road industrial estate in Crowborough Who? Wealden District Council - Improvements to existing industrial estates, take forward the recommendations from the 2019 industrial estate review; improvements included signage, access, reducing congestion and improving safety, creating sense of place, sustainable travel provision including facilities onsite to enable this (i.e secure bike parking) Who? Wealden District Council, business organisations, business owners

PRIORITY 3: SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT

Aim: To support the existing and future workforce, whilst helping to enable partners and employers to develop robust working practices to succeed.

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>
3.1 Helping employers improve recruitment, HR practice and skills Wealden faces constraints to accessing workers and skills due to low unemployment rates, high property prices, rurality and poor transport infrastructure. Many of the solutions to these constraints are in improving the HR and recruitment practices of employers, increasing agile and flexible working, and in developing new business models and implementing new technologies. Wealden also particularly needs to focus on green skills including green construction as recognised through Objective 5.4 (b) under Priority 5: Net Zero Wealden. KPI (i) Reduction in reported hard-to-fill vacancies, skills shortage vacancies and skills gaps	<i>Short-term 2022-25</i> 3.1 (a) Workforce Development Wealden faces labour supply and skills supply constraints, with employers experiencing recruitment shortages and skills difficulties. One solution lies in working with employers to develop the job roles and skills of the existing workforce. Who? In partnership with East Sussex County Council via Skills East Sussex, local authorities, education and training providers and business organisations.. <u>Examples of practice</u> Cumbria LEP has developed a suite of initiatives to support workforce attraction and retention, such as incorporating career and job opportunities into place marketing campaigns, strengthening inclusive growth across education and training curriculums, and developing a more effective careers strategy and service. And as referenced in previous section (2.3a) Skills East Sussex sector based task groups work with businesses in priority sectors to deliver actions plans which focus on supporting industries to recruit in the short – long term. The transform programme previously mentioned supports SMEs to access skills training and apprenticeships
3.2 Continue to support apprenticeships Supporting employers to create apprenticeships for young people and adults, and supporting access and participation will help to resolve some of the labour needs of Wealden employers, and help to address workforce retention. Apprenticeships supported should include those providing green skills including green construction.	<i>Short-term 2022-25</i> 3.2 (a) Continued support of apprenticeships. Continue to work with Skills East Sussex through the Apprenticeship East Sussex (AES) sub group to promote apprenticeships and support employers and young people. AES coordinates communications between stakeholders to promote apprenticeships to businesses, young people and adult job seekers. Who? In partnership with East Sussex County Council via Skills East Sussex, local authorities, education and training providers and business organisations. Engaging with Sussex-level initiatives such as Department for Education’s local Strategic Development Fund.

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>
KPIs (i) Apprenticeship / NVQ starts (ii) NVQ skills levels by ward (urban vs rural) (iii) Apprenticeship starts / completions at the Council	3.2 (b) Continue to run an established locally based Apprenticeship scheme for the Council, as an employer the Council has a role to play in supporting apprenticeship opportunities each year. The locally based scheme should continue with targets set at the public sector apprenticeship target (between 2017 – 2021 this was 2.3% of the workforce). Recruitment to the apprenticeships roles can be undertaken in partnership with other organisations Who? In partnership with ESCC
3.3 Continue to support careers and youth entry into jobs In line with statutory guidance, all young people require high quality careers advice to understand the full range of vocational and academic opportunities and assistance with accessing work, and progressing into employment. Particular areas of support include mobility and access to employment, as well as careers education and work placements. KPIs (i) Claimant count for under 25s	<i>Short-term 2022-25</i> 3.3 (a) Continued involvement with County youth support programme. Engage with and promote the East Sussex Careers Hub to schools, families and young people in Wealden. The Careers Hub brings together employer Enterprise Advisers and Industry Champions to support schools and colleges to offer Work Experience, Open Doors workplace visits and Employability Passports. Ensure young people aged 16 – 18 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are referred to the County's Youth Employability Service (YES) to receive 1:1 support and guidance. Who? In partnership with East Sussex County Council via Skills East Sussex, local authorities, education and training providers, Department for Works and Pensions (DWP), business organisations and the Careers Enterprise Company. <u>Examples of practice</u> Hertfordshire Enterprise Advisor Network provides Enterprise Advisors that are matched to specific schools. Supported by a team of Enterprise Coordinators, Enterprise Advisers meet with the Careers Leader at their matched school at least three times a year to discuss how the school can develop its careers education programme in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks (the national framework used to assess the quality of a school's careers education programme) and the skills needs of local employers. Hertfordshire Careers Hub enables greater collaboration between clusters of schools by linking Careers Leaders, Enterprise Advisers and our Cornerstone Employer Group (a network of local businesses). Since joining the Hertfordshire Careers Hub, Cluster 1 schools have made excellent progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks – the national framework used to assess the quality of a school's careers education programme. The East Sussex Careers Hub is working with all schools and colleges in the County to help learners to develop their employability skills and better understand the labour market. Schools and colleges are provided with support from an Enterprise Coordinator and are matched with an Enterprise Adviser (volunteer from a business) to work strategically on improving the quality of careers provision.

Objectives	Actions
3.4 Local Skills Improvement Plans Improved communication between education providers, employers and training providers is essential to identify skills priorities and solutions and inform the skills improvement provision. This can be achieved through the Future Skills Sussex Improvement Plan. The Council has a role to play to support this work led by the Sussex Chamber of Commerce. KPIs (i) No of deep dive workshops, roadshows and meetings attended by WDC to support LSIP work	<i>Short-term 2022-25</i> 3.4 (a) Support the development and roll out of the LSIP; to include signposting and encouraging Wealden businesses to participate in the work Who? Sussex Chamber of Commerce, business organisations 3.4 (b) Work in partnership to help develop the LSIP across the targeted sectors. Targeted sectors include; Digital Sector, Engineering and Manufacturing, Construction, Visitor and Cultural Industries, Lane based, Health and Care. Support the sectoral deep dives being undertaken to understand where there are gaps and challenges to be addressed and opportunities for further collaboration. Who? Sussex Chamber of Commerce

PRIORITY 4: VISITOR ECONOMY AND CULTURE

Aim: To Support the tourism sector by increasing overnight stays and visitor spend, whilst promoting Wealden as an attractive place to visit.

Objectives	Actions
4.1 Develop Wealden's marketing to reach a larger but targeted audience and draw more heavily on the marketing and visitors of the surrounding area <u>Cross Authority Working</u> Wealden sits within an area of huge cultural/historical and environmental importance; its location within this area has resulted in a very rich tourism offer. Wealden should use the draw of this wider area to support its visitor economy. It is important that Wealden collaborate with neighbouring authorities and destination areas to create an integrated visitor and cultural economy offer. Wealden have a strong offer with its new branding Explore Wealden and should look to align this with the marketing of 1066 Country (and increase the breadth of places and attractions, that have a meaningful connection with 1066, in Wealden which are marketed under this brand) and/or the Sussex Visitor Economy Initiative. These brands have or can be developed to have an international reach. The key will be to ensure that Wealden and its businesses and attractions are adequately promoted within this wider marketing. <u>Utilisation of Explore Wealden</u>	<i>Short Term 2022-25</i> 4.1 (a) Develop the Explore Wealden brand to include a focus on 'eco-tourism'. See 4.3 (c). Include in branding and marketing materials. Who? In partnership with a marketing consultant/designer and local visitor businesses and attractions <i>Long Term 2022-30</i> 4.1 (b) Engage with stakeholders to assess the potential to expand the marketing (and general work) of the Sussex Visitor Economy Initiative to market Sussex and hence Wealden. From here, Wealden should: - Support in building and implementing a well evidenced visitor marketing strategy (and wider visitor strategy) for the area; - Ensure Wealden's, businesses, USPs and target markets are well represented; - Help businesses to contribute to and make the most of the strategy and resources provided (i.e. they should be encouraged to align with the strategy this way in order to benefit from the area's branding); - Include businesses and attractions on appropriate Steering Groups; - Particularly promote more overnight stays within Wealden; - Promote events within Wealden; - Promote overall investment within the visitor economy; - Recognise that successes and investment elsewhere can contribute to Wealden's success and spread the negative impacts of tourism across a wider area. Who? In partnership with East Sussex County Council, Team East Sussex, West Sussex County Council, neighbouring local authorities, Sussex Modern, 1066 Country and Brighton and Hove City Council 4.1 (c) In addition to social media promotion done at a 1066/Sussex level invest in social media marketing of Wealden and the Explore Wealden website using the Explore Wealden brand. This should:

Objectives	Actions
Survey findings suggest that only 8% of visitors are using websites to find things to do²⁶. Furthermore, websites are useful for existing visitors but there is a need to drive people to the website and attract new visitors. There is a need for innovative marketing towards Wealden's target markets. This should be through the use of social media – particularly Facebook (aimed at 'Country Loving Traditionalists') and Instagram (aimed at 'Aspirational Family Fun'). It will be important to ensure that this does not replicate or undermine any social media marketing undertaken at a 1066 County/Sussex level. KPIs (i) Day / overnight visitor ratio (ii) Visitor spend and visitor numbers (aim to maximise spend whilst increasing and then holding numbers to a sustainable levels) (iv) Explore Wealden website views (v) Number of businesses featured on the Explore Wealden website (vi) Number of businesses adopting Explore Wealden brand/logo (vii) Social media followers (viii) Likes/Comments per social media post (viv) Mentions of Wealden and its attractions in 1066/wider Sussex marketing	- Provide timely information on events; - Be something which businesses and attractions within Wealden can promote themselves through; - Include mechanisms for visitors to advertise Wealden themselves (e.g. use of visitor photography/videos and stories and by encouraging visitors to share); - Particularly promote more overnight stays within Wealden. This should complement and not replicate or undermine marketing undertaken at a 1066/Sussex level, which should be given primacy. For example, itineraries to better link places and attractions should be marketed at a 1066/Sussex level to promote cross authority fertilisation of the sector and prevent over-tourism. Who? In partnership with local visitor businesses and attractions. <u>Example of practice</u> Jersey is "probably the best and most strategic approach to PR and social media of any UK destination. Recognising that they not only need to 'tell a story' but they also need to give a 'story to tell'. A recognition that there is greater mileage in getting others to advocate on your behalf and help them do it well." (Blue Sale) Facebook - https://en-gb.facebook.com/VisitJersey/ Instagram - https://www.instagram.com/visitjerseyci/?hl=en 4.1 (d) Regularly update the Explore Wealden website to ensure that the information it provides is up to date and accurate. This should also: - Provide timely information on events; - Provide a stream of 'journalistic style articles' to inspire key markets; - Use visitor videos and photography and encourage businesses and attractions to contribute; - Suggest itineraries to better link places and attractions; - Particularly promote more overnight stays within Wealden. Who? Wealden DC and Wealden's visitor businesses and attractions 4.1 (e) Continue to update and publish a visitor guide. This should be done bi-annually as opposed to annually and print should be doubled. Who? In partnership with Wealden's visitor businesses and attractions

²⁶ Acorn and NGI Solutions. Research and Analysis to inform Wealden District Council's Destination Management Plan, January 2017.

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>
	4.1 (f) Introduce 'years of' in which marketing (and events and research [outlined below]) is focussed on a specific theme (e.g. The Year of...Wine, History, Nature). Who? In partnership with local visitor businesses and attractions
4.2 Strengthen partnership working to benefit from funding and cross boundary campaigns and projects	<i>Short Term 2022 – 2025</i> 4.2 (a) Continue to support the 1066 Country Destination Marketing Partnership (DMP) as a strategic tourism partner and look to maximise impact for our tourism businesses, and thus more greatly contributing to and benefitting from their strong brand and offer. From here Wealden should: - Ensure Wealden's businesses, USPs and target markets are well represented by 1066 Country; - Help businesses to contribute to and make the most of 1066 Country resources (i.e they should be encouraged to align with 1066 branding; - Include businesses and attractions on the Steering Group. Who? In partnership with 1066 Country 4.2 (b) Continue to support Sussex Modern and look to maximise impact for Wealden and its businesses. - Continue to support marketing campaigns to help raise the profile of Wealden/Sussex - Support funding bids where appropriate in order to seek maximum benefit Who? Sussex Modern, East Sussex County Council 4.2 (c) Seek to be represented at the Sussex Visitor Economy Initiative - Understand how to best work and resource tourism at County Level - Align Explore Wealden with Sussex based campaigns and initiatives Who? Sussex Visitor Economy Initiative (current membership includes East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Brighton & Hove City Council, , 1066, Visit Eastbourne)
4.3 Develop Wealden's visitor offer and USPs to align with its target markets, opportunities, challenges and wider strategies	<i>Short Term 2022-2025</i> 4.3 (a) Explore options with partners for sustainable travel across the District to link visitor attractions with towns and transport hubs and allow people to bring bikes on board. Could link with bike hire destinations. Who? Wealden District Council, Sussex Visitor Economy Initiative, 1066 Country and a private provider.

Objectives	Actions
There is a lack of overnight stays in Wealden. One reason for this is likely to be the lack of accommodation (particularly hotels) in Wealden, limiting the visitor market. There is demand for further accommodation to deal with capacity constraints as well as the provision of accommodation to meet demand from off-peak (e.g. winter) visitors. There is also an opportunity to provide new, innovative forms of accommodation such as glamp sites and tree houses. In general, visitors are likely to experience a quality, boutique and personal yet affordable stay in Wealden. However, there is a lack of accommodation with a sustainability accreditation (such as the Green Tourism accreditation) when compared to other destinations. Eco-tourism would be a good USP for Wealden to develop. Wealden's visitor economy is underpinned by its natural assets (which may include the Ashdown Forest, the coast and other hotspots) which need to be protected, including for the sustainability of the visitor economy, but which can be further capitalised on in a sustainable manner. People with an interest in nature are likely to be interested in protecting it and eco-tourism is generally a high-end product which attracts higher spending visitors such as those in Wealden's target markets. Furthermore, surveying suggests that around half of residents wanted to see more attractions in the area but that they wanted them to be in keeping with the current offer. Another clear USP for Wealden is wine. Wealden's warm climate and lime chalk soil has made the District key to England's viticulture sector and it now has over 20 vineyards including the Rathfinny Estate. As well as developing individual places and attractions, it is important to provide better links between them. This should be done both in terms of physical connectivity (i.e.	<i>Example of practice</i> The Mountain Goat's 525 Cross Lakes Experience provides a minibus service which links with other attractions and other transport services offering a car-free day out in the Lake District. This example highlights the potential for this action to provide a commercial opportunity. 4.3 (b) Help to facilitate event delivery within the District : Engage with organisations (businesses, groups of businesses, community organisations, town/parish councils) who may be able to provide events focussing on organisations which use local suppliers and workers. Support the provider where appropriate and where resources allow. Who? In partnership with businesses, groups of businesses, community organisations, town/parish councils <i>Long Term 2022-30</i> 4.3 (c) Support the development of a range of types of non-serviced accommodation and serviced accommodation (in line with the emerging Visitor Accommodation Study 2023) where this may be suitable (subject to planning) within the district, particularly low-carbon, eco-friendly accommodation. This should include considering the suitability of adding accommodation to existing attractions and agricultural diversification. This support should be delivered by following the recommendations of the emerging Visitor Accommodation Study regarding planning and inward investment. Visit Britain / Visit England also provide tourism planning guidance. Who? Wealden District Council 4.3 (d) Consider the need to link visitor attractions and locations when planning public transport and right of way improvements. This should be done in consultation with visitor businesses and organisations and should be considered as part of the East Sussex Local Cycling and Waling Infrastructure Plan. Who? Wealden District Council/wider area tourism organisation, a private provider, East Sussex County Council. 4.3 (e) Ensure plans to implement EV charging points consider the needs of the visitor economy (i.e. by placing at/near to key attractions and towns) Who? Wealden District Council, landowners 4.3 (f) Support accommodation providers and attractions in providing EV charging points. This action should be reflected in planning policy, through the provision of funding application support (for example to the Workplace Charging Scheme and the EV charge point grant and the general provision of advice.

Objectives	Actions
more and improved public footpaths and cycle routes, public transport and electric vehicle charging infrastructure) and information provision (itineraries [see actions under 5.1], mapping and building business/attraction networks. Events do and should contribute significantly to Wealden's visitor offer. There is a key role for Wealden DC to provide a framework in which for events to take place. Cross Authority Working will also be important in the development of Wealden's visitor offer. The offer developed should build on and complement Wealden and the wider area's existing offer, preventing over tourism in certain hotspots, spreading benefits and preventing over competition. KPIs (i) Increase in serviced accommodation bedspaces (ii) Increase in accommodation with green tourism accreditation (iii) Number of new tourism businesses (also consider quality and alignment with target markets) (vi) Number of improvement schemes to footpaths/cycle ways (vii) Number of EV charging points	Who? In partnership with visitor attractions, businesses and accommodation providers 4.3 (g) Establish Polegate as a gateway town for sustainable access by walking, cycling, public and community transport into the South Downs National Park. This action supports the visitor economy strategy and reflects a similar strategy for Lewes town. This should include: - The provision of bus/minibus services (potentially hop-on-hop-off) to key attractions within the national park. - The provision/improvement of walking and cycling routes between Polegate and the national park. These should link to key attractions and be well signposted and marketed. - Include more walks/cycles on the South Downs attraction map within Wealden (link these to Polegate). Who? In partnership with ESCC, the South Downs National Park, Polegate Town Council and local businesses/attractions. 4.3 (h) Support a sustainable visitor economy by providing support, training and if possible, finance for visitor businesses, attractions and accommodation to gain a sustainable and/or green tourism certification. Examples include the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and the Green Tourism Certificate. Who? In partnership with visitor attractions, businesses and accommodation providers 4.3 (i) Support accommodation providers to adopt sustainable practices and products, visitors are now more than ever conscious about their impact on the environment whilst on holiday, the advancement of new technologies has made it easier for visitors to obtain the information they need to make a more conscious decision about their holiday. There are opportunities therefore to: - focus Explore Wealden brand on more eco-tourism (see 4.1a) - explore the adoption of a national green accreditation scheme for accommodation providers or additional promotion for eco-tourism within the District - explore options for sustainable travel across the District (linked to 4.3a and 4.3e) - encourage the use of local produce to reduce food miles Who? Wealden District Council, South Downs National Park, Tourism South East, 1066 Country, Sussex DMP, High Weald AONB

Objectives	Actions
4.4 Continuously manage and monitor Wealden's visitor economy to help maintain a quality offer Once Wealden's marketing and visitor offer has been refined it will be important to maintain a quality offer and retain visitors. This will include maintaining basic services such as toilets, parking, signage, rights of way and ensuring Wealden is clean and tidy. To do this it will be important to understand what visitors, businesses, attractions and residents think. In order to continue to develop Wealden's marketing approach and visitor offer in the future, up to date information is required regarding the visitor economy and accommodation provision. KPIs (i) Frequency of website updates (ii) Number of social media updates and information on events (also consider quality and timing) (iii) Number of visitor economy business network members (iv) Number of visitor economy businesses accessing business support	<i>Short Term 2022-2025</i> 4.4 (a) Explore the business interest in establishing a 'business network'. This should encourage more joined up working between businesses and facilitate shared learning and knowledge. This could be focused on sectors or themes depending on business feedback e.g accommodation, attractions, vineyards, Who? Local businesses, Chambers of Commerce and local partnerships <i>Long Term 2022-2025</i> 4.4 (b) Undertake regular monitoring of the District's visitor economy and accommodation provision. This should: - Monitor progress towards the Aim, Objectives and Actions set out in this strategy; - Include data on supply of accommodation and attractions; - Include data on occupancy levels which should be used to inform planning applications; - Include business, resident and visitor engagement and feedback; - consider use of a suitable data collection tool such as (T-Stats which is used by Visit Cornwall amongst others) which allows monthly monitoring and provides inputs for a robust economic model. Who? Wealden District Council, or Sussex Visitor Economy Initiative/1066 Country and a private sector provider 4.4 (c) Provide visitor economy specific business (including recruitment and employment, planning, growth and start up, demand analysis, branding and social media marketing) support as part of the actions identified in the Enterprise and Skills and Employment sections above. This should be in alignment with Explore Wealden, 1066 Country and/or Sussex level branding, target markets and strategy. Who? In partnership with ESCC 4.4 (d) Work to ensure all council services (e.g. toilets, parking, cycle provision, signage, rights of way) are well maintained. Who? In partnership with ESCC

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>
<i>4.5 Engage and participate in partnerships that support and develop the cultural and creative sector.</i> There is to date little specific data on the cultural and creative sector in Wealden and wider East Sussex, it is important to continue to support the mapping of this sector moving forward.	4.5 (a) Review the current level of support given to the cultural and creative sector (both financial and in-kind); this should look at a review of the current provision to East Sussex Arts Partnership – an East Sussex cultural network supporting arts and cultural organisations Who? In partnership with East Sussex County Council, Culture East Sussex 4.5 (b) Prioritise evidence gathering and mapping of this sector to inform future delivery; to be undertaken with key partners across East Sussex. Evidence should also review the requirement for exhibition and performance space improvements within Wealden. Who? In partnership with East Sussex County Council, Culture East Sussex, Sussex Modern 4.5 (c) Continue to work with and support partnerships to ensure Wealden’s cultural offer is represented, these to include Culture East Sussex, Sussex Modern, 1066 Country and East Sussex County Council Continue to participate in Culture East Sussex meetings Who? Culture East Sussex, Sussex Modern, East Sussex County Council, 1066 Country 4.5 (d) Ensure adequate representation for the cultural and creative sector on any steering groups or business networks, see action 4.4(a) Who? Business networks / associations, businesses 4.5 (e) Review the promotion of the cultural and creative sector through existing channels, to include Explore Wealden promotions, 1066 Country, Sussex Modern and other partner promotional channels Who? Sussex Modern, 1066 Country

PRIORITY 5: NET ZERO WEALDEN

Aim: To support the development of, and opportunities arising from the transition to net zero, and ensure our businesses are ready for the impacts of climate change.

Objectives	Actions
5.1 Support the Districts businesses to become Net Zero in any business support delivery This should emphasise the benefits both to the environment and the businesses (including reducing costs, attracting custom, keeping up with regulations). Standalone Net Zero business support could be provided if necessary or this could be the basis for further business support. The idea is to provide business support in one place and help business understand the linkages between business, society and the environment. Training provision should make the most of existing programmes and funds (e.g. Carbon Trust Green Business Fund, Energy Efficiency Grants for East Sussex Businesses, Rural Community Energy Fund) and should provide support in applying for such programmes and funds. Educate businesses in and encourage the use of financing models such as Energy Performance Contracting, Power Purchase Agreements, Leasing of Roof Space and Co-operative models. Guidance and business support should particularly look to help businesses to achieve sustainability certifications and in particular certifications regarding carbon neutrality. KPIs	<i>Long-term 2022-32</i> 5.1 (a) Develop and implement a programme of business engagement and support which offers practical tools and advice on working towards becoming a Net Zero business. This should: - Refer businesses to Clean Growth UKs Net Zero 360 programme which provides training, tools and support to measure their CO₂e emissions baseline and set a carbon reduction plan. - Make the most of existing programmes (e.g. Wealden could build a relationship with organisations such as the Carbon Trust and refer businesses) and fill in any gaps in training provision. Promote out the services of East Sussex College Green Training Hub in partnership with OHM Energy; courses designed to upskill and provide the resources to support a more sustainable future. - Refer businesses to subsidised energy audits where available, support the continuation of this at County level - Support businesses to become Carbon Neutral certified (See https://carbonneutral.com/how or https://www.carbontrust.com/what-we-do/assurance-and-certification/carbon-neutral-certification) - Support businesses in accessing external grant funding for implementing carbon reduction plans through the provision of information and guidance. Explore the possibility of providing grants and/or loans for businesses where external funding is not possible. Who? In partnership with external providers of support and local businesses 5.1 (b) Identify enterprises (including public sector) in the District with large fleets and / or car parks and work with them to support investment in EVs and charging points where appropriate. Help identify and unlock sources of funding. Who? In partnership with East Sussex Strategic Property Asset Collaboration in East Sussex (SPACES), local businesses and organisations 5.1 (c) Build on lessons learnt from the Unlocking Diplocks project – a project to accelerate the uptake of renewable energy and low carbon technology in a multi-tenure industrial estate. This should: - Further development and roll out of the project within the Diplocks industrial estate

Objectives	Actions
(i) % of industrial and business properties which take up renewable energy and/or increase their Energy Performance certificate rating. (ii) CO₂e emissions from non-domestic properties	- Roll project out to the older industrial estates across the District Who? Wealden District Council
5.2 Support the district's transport sector to reach net zero targets KPIs (i) Number of EV charging points installed on Council owned land (ii) CO₂e emissions from the transport sector.	5.2 (a) Improve access to sustainable travel options from town centre locations, this could include improving access and signposting to the cuckoo trail from nearby town centre locations Who? Wealden District Council, East Sussex County Council, Sustrans, Chambers of Commerce, Town Councils 5.2 (b) Support development of walking and cycling routes across the District. Feed into the East Sussex County Council Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan with further schemes for inclusion, particularly focused on strengthening the walking element of the plan and including schemes which provide for people cycling and walking within key centres. Who? Wealden District Council, East Sussex County Council 5.2 (c) EV charging points delivered in town centre locations, work towards meeting the targets set for EV charging points within town centre locations Who? Wealden District Council
5.3 Increase levels of local spending by the public sector and businesses Increasing the proportion of spending at local businesses is likely to decrease CO₂e emissions and other negative environmental impacts whilst keeping more money in Wealden's economy Furthermore, if through this strategy and the Climate Emergency Action Plan, Wealden's businesses can reduce there CO₂e emissions and other environmental impacts this will further increase the sustainability of supply chain spending. KPIs	Short-term 2022-25 5.3 (a) Enabling a greater awareness of local supply chain procurement. This could include working with our partners to disseminate information around the benefits of utilising a local supply chain. To be considered: - working with Chambers of Commerce and Town Councils to encourage more local procurement and supply chains within the local and District network - utilising existing channels to increase awareness amongst the business community Who? Wealden District Council, Chambers of Commerce, Town Councils, business organisations including Hailsham and District Business Improvement District (BID)

Objectives	Actions
(i) Proportion of public sector spend within Wealden / East Sussex	
5.4 Support Net Zero contributing businesses Encourage net zero contributing businesses to locate in Wealden and support start-ups and existing business with these aspirations. Such businesses could be ‘normal’ businesses whose operations are Carbon Neutral and/or business who provide products/services which contribute to a net zero economy (e.g. Manufacturers of wind turbines). To do this Wealden needs to create the conditions which such businesses need to be successful including the provision of sustainable premises, green skills and high-quality digital connectivity. This is an important action as attracting net zero contributing businesses to Wealden will help develop green local supply chains thus helping to building a green business eco-system. KPIs (i) Number of businesses which receive vouchers for gigabit/fibre infrastructure. (ii) Amount of CO₂e which is sequestered through land use practices. (iii) Proportion of new build commercial space which has a sustainability rating (e.g. BREEAM rated very good or higher)	<i>Short-term 2022-25</i> 5.4 (a) Support to eligible businesses in applying for the Project Gigabit vouchers in order to support economic growth with less need for travel and to support Smart energy technology - Identify eligible business, support businesses (and residents if necessary) to form groups and apply for vouchers. This could be included/advertised as part of business support programmes. Who? In partnership with local businesses 5.4 (b) Explore working with ESCC to top up voucher funding for gigabit capable and fibre broadband in order support economic growth with less need for travel and to support Smart energy technology. Top up vouchers would be provided where it is otherwise unviable to do so and would not be a blanket approach. Who? In partnership with ESCC <i>Long-term 2022-32</i> 5.4 (c) Encourage businesses to work with training providers and educational institutions providing technical and commercial training in Net Zero skills. For example, this could include supporting construction companies to develop retrofit skills. This can include the promotion of East Sussex College and OHM Energy Training Hub partnership Who? In partnership with local colleges, Skills East Sussex, sector based task groups, colleges and businesses 5.4 (d) Work with farmers and foresters to reduce CO₂e emissions, sequester more carbon, and protect and enhance natural assets whilst developing and diversifying their businesses - The aim should be to find solutions which benefit the environment whilst being profitable, through a combination of farming, payment for the provision of public goods and/or diversification (e.g. into the visitor economy or the processing of food). This is likely to work best identifying clusters of farms with similar characteristics. Testing could then take place on one farm within a cluster – this should include: benchmarking of net carbon emissions and natural capital, developing an understanding of real market opportunities; business planning and implementation to test the market. These lessons can then be filtered down to farms within the cluster or other clusters. This work should also encourage environmental responsibility outside of what is being paid for.

Objectives	Actions
	Who? In partnership with South Downs National Park, High Weald AONB, agricultural and forestry businesses and associations <u>Example of practice</u> Similar projects to this are being undertaken by the South Downs National Park (Also see detail on the farm cluster approach and the origins of the scheme) 5.4 (e) Investigate the possibility to provide a financial incentive to businesses to improve their energy efficiency - Undertake study to determine the best way to implement such an incentive and implement findings. This should consider the potential to link business rates to EPC/DEC ratings. <u>Example of practice</u> Stroud District Council undertook a feasibility study of linking business rates with energy efficiency and hence carbon emissions. Who? In partnership with local businesses 5.4 (f) Encourage targeting of improved sustainability standards on a certain percentage of new build commercial space, subject to financial viability. For example by using the BREEAM certification. The targets should increase over time as adapting such building methods becomes more widely viable. Who? In partnership with developers 5.5 (g) Identify clusters of Net Zero contributing businesses in Wealden (i.e. in what sub-sectors are existing Net Zero contributing businesses in Wealden concentrated?) and market these businesses in order to attract inward investment, including through the employment sites and premises marketing document/strategy recommended in action 2.4(a). This draws upon the fact that businesses are attracted to locations where similar businesses are located due to the potential to benefit from agglomeration and spill over effects. Who? Wealden District Council, working with East Sussex County Council and local partners.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

DMP – Destination Marketing Partnership – a stakeholder partnership that takes a role of destination management and marketing

ERDF – **European Regional Development Funding** – one of the European Structural and Investment Funds allocated by the European Union. It aims to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion in the European Union by correcting imbalances between its regions.

ESIF – **European Structural and Investment Funds** : Over half of EU funding is channelled through the 5 European structural and investment funds (ESIF). They are jointly managed by the European Commission and the EU countries and focus on the 5 areas of research and innovation, digital technologies, supporting the low-carbon economy, sustainable management of natural resources, and small businesses. Since the UK formally left the EU on 30 December 2020, ESIF is available for projects until June 2023, then this source of funding will expire. The purpose of these funds is to invest in job creation and a sustainable and healthy European economy and environment.

EV – Electric Vehicle

Growth Hubs – are local public/private sector partnerships led by the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). They join up national and local business support so it is easy for businesses to find the help they need. SELEP funds three local Growth Hubs (one of which is Business East Sussex) which operate under the banner of the South East Business Hub..

GVA – Gross Value Added

KPI's – Key Performance Indicators

LEPs – **Local Enterprise Partnerships** : are locally-owned partnerships between local authorities and businesses. Between 2011 and 2020 LEPs were HM Government's preferred strategic and delivery body for local economic development and regeneration initiatives in England. In early 2022, HM Government notified partners that LEPs would be integrated into devolved institutions, and in the absence of these would continue to be supported

LSIP – Local Skills Improvement Plans – will provide an agreed set of actionable priorities that employers, providers and stakeholders in a local area can get behind to drive change

NVQ – National Vocational Qualification

SME's – Small and medium-sized enterprises

SELEP – **South East Local Enterprise Partnership** is the Local Enterprise Partnership covering the area of East Sussex, Essex, Kent, Medway, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock.

SPD – Supplementary Planning Document – expands or adds details to policies included within a Local Plan

STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

UKSPF - **UK Shared Prosperity Fund** : This is the UK Government's intended replacement for ESIF funds. Initial guidance was released in February 2022, with detailed guidance on the role, use and amount of funds issued in April 2022

USP – Unique Selling Point