



Cranleigh & District Chamber of Commerce
c/o Sundial House
20 High Street
Cranleigh
Surrey
GU6 8AE

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Response to Consultation Questions on the Waverley Borough Council Economic Strategy Refresh

Introduction

Cranleigh Chamber of Commerce and the group of residents who developed the Neighbourhood Plan have a shared aim to grow the economy of the area:

- To enable established and incoming new residents to live and work locally, avoiding the need to commute long distances.
- To enable businesses to start up and grow, trading locally, regionally and internationally
- To attract skilled staff
- To attract transport infrastructure investment
- To maintain a vibrant High Street

Communities that can trade have always thrived and prospered. Communities that lose their trade, decline. Communities that have no economic output are side-lined and stagnate.

What are Waverley's main economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?

Past. Past economic activity has helped to give Cranleigh its character and raison d'être, from the rearing of cranes and basket weaving through clay extraction and brickworks to precision engineering, aeronautical support and market gardening. After BAE's closure of Harrier production in 2000, Cranleigh's precision engineering businesses have declined. The market gardeners' glasshouses are derelict and successful supportive firms like Cranleigh Freight Services and P&P Glass have had to move out in order to expand.

Present. Although the High Street is still vibrant, the symptoms of an economic decline in Cranleigh are perceptible. It is now gathering pace and showing in the proliferation of charity shops, empty Thursday market stall sites, boarded up shops and Bank closures. The loss of 5 acres of employment space from the Hewitts Industrial Estate, the difficulties experienced by businesses in Littlemead

Industrial Estate, the lack of suitable commercial premises and the conversion of above shop office space to apartments are all adding to the economic decline. Manfield Park is a successful but constricted little industrial park containing a few businesses with the potential to expand. The local customer base, who know and trust the local businesses, together with a stable local workforce and local employers who have an interest in and are supportive of Cranleigh, remains firm. However, this mix which adds to the social cohesion of the area is in already drifting away.

Despite financial support from Waverley BC, Cranleigh Parish Council removed their Events Coordinator role, which has contributed to the decline in festivals and events in the village. A few festival events have survived through the sole organisational and financial responsibility of the Chamber of Commerce and other voluntary organisations. Godalming and Farnham Town Councils both have significant funded events coordination.

Future. An active and vibrant economy contributes to residents' health and well-being, and supports the retail shops and cafes of High Street. Although many retailers are thriving, it is important to attract inward investment to prevent the creeping threat of decline if the general economy is allowed to wither away. This would help to prevent Cranleigh becoming a commuting dormitory town and counter against the natural inclination to preserving a pretty but static village where only the elderly remain. To attract and retain businesses, the conditions to enable them to flourish need to be in place. These include good modern facilities, housing and infrastructure.

Cranleigh will have a new hospital and the PCT plans for the old hospital's role for clinics and outpatient services increasing with investment to match. Because of the recent planning approval for the Knowle Park settlement, there will now be a significant investment in the leisure centre. There is a new primary school being built. All this with no planning for an expanded commercial role.

What would you consider to be Waverley's competitive advantages /unique selling points?

Undoubtedly, the physical attractiveness of the area, being equidistant between two international airports and its proximity to London are competitive advantages. The Surrey Hills are a major tourist attraction especially for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. The area has substantial unspoilt countryside and wooded areas.

Proximity to London should be an advantage but it is only true in terms of mileage not time. Commuter and leisure travel is a nightmare in the rush hours which are now 6.30 to 10.00 and 16.00 to 19.00. In the case of Cranleigh the journey to Guildford takes twice as long as scheduled. For example, an 8am bus from Cranleigh arrives in Guildford at 9am instead of 8.35. All rush hour trains are standing only and there are very poor public transport links to the airports; none to Heathrow and an unreliable journey to Gatwick by bus and train which takes 2 ½ hours to cover only 17 miles!

Are any of these under risk, or how can they be protected or enhanced?

However, these are no longer unique selling points due to globalisation in a digital age changing the way we work and the average cost of houses in Waverley and indeed Surrey. There are many areas of the UK and indeed abroad which are just as attractive and far cheaper to live in. For example, Ashford and Ebbsfleet in Kent are both attractively located in similar Downsland settings with far cheaper homes. The new rail and road infrastructure expenditure in Kent means it is now faster to

reach London and Europe despite, in the case of Ashford, being almost twice the distance geographically than Waverley.

Similarly, the HS2 infrastructure expenditure will bring villages and towns in attractive areas closer to London and Heathrow with more affordable housing developments. A further threat is the Northern Powerhouse which the government has outlined in its recent Industrial Strategy Green Paper. Investment is set to go north and the real risk is that young families with the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) skills that Waverley needs will move north to excellent jobs and cheaper homes leaving Waverley to stagnate.

Waverley Borough Council is at risk of becoming complacent about its need to provide an economic environment to attract inward investment and attract skills due to the lack of transport infrastructure and the cost of living here.

Which sectors are likely grow or decline over the coming years?

Grow

- E Commerce – Cranleigh already has a strong digital creative sector which will continue to grow.
- Financial and Professional services – a growth sector for London and the South East, this sector continues to grow in the Cranleigh area.
- Ecologically green technologies – more recently the continuing growth of green technology businesses in Cranleigh has become evident. A current example of a six year old company which has already grown to 11 employees and is now looking for 4,000 sq. feet of office space is Pure Tech Environmental. This space is required not for manufacturing or warehousing but for office support and R&D. Similarly, Dunsfold Business Park has a growing green technology sector. An example is AFC Energy which is currently raising £8.1 million to help fund the continued development and commercialisation of its fuel cell technology.
- Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Research and Development – Examples are Puretech and Excell Power Solutions both of which base their research and development in Cranleigh but manufacture and warehouse in Lancashire and Norfolk respectively.
- Food and Drink – the Cranleigh area has developed a strong specialist food and drink sector in the past 10 years.
- Home Based Businesses – The way people work is changing rapidly. There is a move from short term contracts to the Gig economy, where people get paid as freelance workers for the individual job that they perform. Home, as a base from which to work, and from which to start a business will grow even faster with the arrival of the new housing developments but without adequate space in the smaller homes that are currently being built.

Decline

- Warehousing and storage is already declining due to the cost and availability of premises. It is unlikely to show any growth while land prices stay high.
- Agricultural – while the specialist food and drink sector has grown, the mass-produced vegetable sector, once so strong in Cranleigh, has already declined with the loss of greenhouse space to housing developments.

There are three types of business enterprises, which Cranleigh can support to improve its economic strength.

- Cranleigh currently lacks an attractive **fit-for-purpose business park** with modern adaptable units. Commercial businesses that need workshop space, equipment, vehicle and stock storage space are hard to find. Businesses also need the facilities to expand and develop. There are many examples of expanding successful businesses moving out of the Borough due to lack of appropriate premises, the most recent being due to the loss of five acres of employment space at Hewitts.
- The second type of enterprise caters for the increase in either **businesses run from home** or people who work from home for big businesses. Waverley's Economic Strategy 2015-2020²⁹ shows that the average business size in the Borough is 3 employees with 91% of businesses classed as micro businesses defined as employing fewer than 10 people. The NPPF⁵ supports a strong competitive economy (para 18-22) with the advice to '*plan positively for the location, promotion and expansion of clusters or networks of knowledge driven, creative or high technology industries.* Waverley's Economic Strategy²⁹ also showed that it has a highly qualified resident population, 40% in Waverley compared to 36% in Surrey and 27% in England. Cranleigh is in a good position to develop a **commercial business hub** where isolated people working from home and early stage businesses can access services and meeting rooms, and network with others on a regular basis. The setting up, the management and the maintenance of a hub itself represents both an entrepreneurial opportunity and an opportunity for Waverley to create an income stream.

What are your views on the visitor economy and links with the University for the Creative Arts?

Cranleigh is already a weekend shopping and leisure destination due to its attractive High Street and location.

High Street – the very independent shops that attract those visitors are at risk because of the very high rental charges, exacerbated by multiple retailers prepared to pay unreasonably high sums to distant landlords.

Arts Centre - The Arts Centre's offering of theatre, music, cinema and comedy, including many nationally renowned artists regularly attracts mainly night time visitors from as far as Reading, Southampton, and well into Sussex and Kent. This audience also drinks and eats in local pubs and restaurants. There is currently no link between the University of the Creative Arts and the Arts Centre despite there being opportunities for apprenticeships and work experience. The Arts Centre does have a strong history of working closely with Farnham Maltings.

Walkers and Cyclists – The Downs Link, the Surrey Hills and the Olympics Box Hill/ Leith Hill/ Pitch Hill

Cycle route have encouraged cyclists and walkers to visit Cranleigh and use its facilities. However, a lot more can be done to improve signposting on the Downs Link and the quality of its surface to attract a wider range of family day trippers. Recently Cranleigh Chamber of Commerce has commissioned Sustrans to carry out a corridor assessment of the Downs Link between Cranleigh and Guildford, paid for by local businesses and the Chamber.

What should be Waverley's economic and strategic priorities from your view point?

1. **Identifying employment land for**

(a) A Business Park

To encourage some land use for new and growing commercial business enterprises, with units that are fit for purpose, can be adapted, have good facilities, are well-landscaped and attractive to staff and customers.

The shortage of the B class type of business premises in Cranleigh and the difficulty experienced by the commercial businesses, which need to find alternative premises, has highlighted the acute shortage of light industrial units. The difficulties are compounded by a lack of security of tenure, higher rents, poor transport links and little affordable housing. The Units on the Littlemead Industrial site have the added difficulty of a lack of parking for staff and customers and continual flooding issues due to lack of investment in infrastructure by the water authorities. A plan to promote the development of suitable land to be used for commercial business enterprises is required.

The development must be 'Fit for Purpose' and pleasantly landscaped. Fit for purpose ensures that the needs for which the buildings are constructed, have been addressed and provide safe working condition. The actual facilities will depend on the position and the proposed usage of the building. Examples include but are not restricted to, adequate ventilation, dust or fume extraction, sufficient electrical outlets, good lighting levels, safe storage, sound-proofing and acoustic qualities, odour control, fire safety, flood resilience, safe drainage and waste disposal and full telecommunication networks.

The visual impact that a, business park or enterprise zone makes on the community should not be underestimated. A well-designed landscaped site not only attracts staff and customers but also must work well, accommodate the external needs of the businesses, and look good. The quality of the buildings should complement or add positively to the quality of the rest of Cranleigh and provide a good safe working environment. Innovative functional designs should be actively encouraged.

(b) A Business Hub

Waverley should work with a business hub company to build a business incubator and hub, to enable home workers to move out as they grow and to attract start-ups. This hub could offer small serviced offices, shared space for home workers, conference room hiring, and a networking café, for example. Waverley could invest and take a rental income. A similar example can be found in Haywards Heath where Mid Sussex District Council has collaborated financially with the charity Basepoint to build a small business hub for 50 businesses which generates a useful income for the Council but is run by Basepoint.

2. Lobbying for significant improved road, rail, public and sustainable transport infrastructure

While it is accepted that Waverley does not have responsibility, nor funding, for transport infrastructure, it should play a far bigger role in lobbying and influencing those that do – Surrey County Council, Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership, MP's and the Department for Transport. Waverley needs to actively be seen to be lobbying to bring infrastructure investment to the area especially when the Local Plan will bring over 9,000 homes to the area. Without that transport infrastructure, the Waverley Borough will simply grind to a halt for commuters and the transport of goods.

The A281 is already insufficient for current traffic levels and will become intolerable with the addition of another 1,500 homes in Cranleigh and 2,500 in Dunsfold Park with the obvious impact

upon private and public transport. One ideal solution to the A281 and Dunsfold Park is to adopt the proposal for a guided busway serving both Cranleigh and Dunsfold Park. This will guarantee travel from Guildford and its rail station in just 40 minutes regardless of time of day.

The value of new housing at Dunsfold Park will be in the region of £1,250,000,000. At £25 million, the guided busway represents just 2% of that figure.

3. Supporting the High Street

High Street retailing is declining with the arrival of online shopping. Therefore, the ability for a High Street to generate atmosphere, regular activities and festivals to attract visitors and retain resident shoppers is critical. Waverley Council could financially help small communities like Cranleigh without the financial resources of a Town Council to stage festivals and fairs in its High Street in collaboration with local partners.

4. Downs Link

The Downs Link is a hugely under resourced asset. There are countless examples throughout the UK of expired rail routes which have been developed into tourist magnets and sustainable commuter routes. The Downs Link should be raised on Waverley's economic priorities.

5. Collaboration with neighbouring Councils

Many of the economic issues are not restricted to Waverley, in particular transport issues. Within its Economic Strategy, Waverley should collaborate closely with Horsham and Guildford Councils to achieve its ambition for a vibrant economy.

How effective is Waverley BC in supporting local businesses? how could this be improved?

Waverley BC effectively works with local businesses on Planning, Environmental Health and licensing. However, unlike other council areas there is no economic development department which could provide business support to new, growing and established businesses.

Waverley BC could improve its support to businesses by:

- Creating an economic development function
- Working with Horsham DC and Guildford BC on the Downs Link
- Providing adequate parking space and keeping parking prices down
- Working with the Cranleigh & District Chamber of Commerce
- Recognise that Cranleigh is not a sleepy village but an area of economic growth and potential

How should progress be measured?

- Number of new businesses created
- Number of businesses surviving one year, three and five years
- Number of new jobs created

- Number of apprenticeships
- GVA
- Number of inward investments
- Value of international trade
- £ Value of investment in transport infrastructure

What are your views on job numbers and apprenticeships?

Many Cranleigh businesses already work with local training providers and Guildford and Godalming Colleges to recruit apprentices. The will is evident but the ability to recruit is severely hampered by the lack of public transport for any apprentice not living within walking or cycling distance of the business. Waverley's role as a public-sector employer is also key showing the way to others by recruiting apprentices. The Reigate & Banstead Borough Council's track record in recruiting and training apprentices is an example to follow.

Your thoughts on high street vitality and health?

Retail and service businesses need a vibrant economy to continue to flourish. A welcoming High Street environment that is orientated to pedestrians with easy car parking are key ingredients for thriving shops, cafes and high street services.

It is important that adequate parking be provided, not only to cope with the additional needs from the new developments, but also to encourage those who live outside Cranleigh to use its market, retail and commercial businesses. The increasing numbers of people from outlying developments and villages using Cranleigh's facilities and services will add to the parking pressures. The two main public car parks at Stockland Square and Village Way are a great asset to the village but can be close to capacity at peak times. The threat to this asset needs to be addressed **before** chronic parking problems occur. This could be achieved through multi-level and/or underground parking in current car parks at Stockland Square and Village Way for example.

Your thoughts on start-up and survival rates for local businesses?

There are many women owned start-ups because commuting outside of the village is no longer an option when children arrive. We expect to see far more of these in the new resident population. These businesses need support at start up and during early stage growth to enable their success beyond a lifestyle business stage.

Any comments on visitor numbers & visitor expenditure?

Accommodation - There is a lack of accommodation for overnight stays. There are only two Hotels, the Richard Onslow and the White Hart and one B & B establishment with around 15 quality rooms in total and the Cranley hotel with a few poor quality rooms in need of refurbishment. A small Air BnB economy has sprung up as visitors want to stay overnight to visit children at the local private schools, elderly relatives at Elmbridge village, weddings and family celebrations. At peak times, many overnight visitors are forced to stay in Guildford, particularly business travellers who usually book at short notice.

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