

Hastings Borough Council O&S Initial Response to East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan

The O&S Committee of Hastings Borough Council welcomes the discussion paper and the draft action plan and wish to thank the authors, Team East Sussex and the various other stakeholders who have contributed their time and expertise.

In this paper we will seek to briefly outline a set of initial points we will be keen to develop and monitor in partnership with a range of stakeholders including, we trust, O&S at East Sussex County Council.

- We presume the curtailed timeframe for consultation on these documents is itself recognition of the need for urgent action. It would be helpful therefore to agree a hierarchy of actions within these documents? Our citizens and businesses in Hastings and St. Leonards have economic problems (and opportunities) that need resolving and support right now, this summer. What is the economic transition strategy?
- The 'Ambitions' and the draft action plan have no timeline for action and no tangible outcomes for the end of the first period of post-covid transition. From the 'Ambitions' there is a requirement to identify those things that must be done immediately to secure the economic and social base on which to build the future 'Ambitions'. Is this work being done? Is it properly joined to the documents as presented? (an example being the quick win 'emergency' improvements to transport infrastructure in our town centres, a timeframe for that would be helpful).
- Economic recovery needs to be addressed as the motor for recovery on every other front. This needs to be given a sharper focus. The impact of the lockdown on people's health, relationships, housing, jobs, money, and general wellbeing will all effect the economy going forward as we will need to be resilient and be genuinely confident that we will come out the other side of Covid 19 stronger than when we went in. Hastings will need to give particular focus to anti-poverty, and so closing the gap between the better off and poorer residents needs to be central to economic recovery.
- The plan must therefore become sufficiently "people-centred"; the first ambition advances us in IT which, although useful, is not the panacea for all the problems that have been created. It has to be understood within the context of the other networks and good practice that has been a consequence of the crisis: the hub-working in Hastings a model for bringing stakeholders together; the networks and insight into our small business community through the allocation of grants. These are new structures that have grown from the crisis and present significant potential for future networks for economic and social regeneration and wider community participation. We should be asking if the 'old' structures are still relevant to deliver a more fleet of foot and local community focus to economic development.
- The Ambition 'Place' has to be more explicit in recognizing impact of the 'knowledge-based-economy' as part of the recovery plan county-wide, but especially in seaside urban areas like Hastings. The totality of arts and community organizations and the huge digital offer that has been created in a matter of days in some cases after lockdown, needs to be factored into the economic potential for the future.
- Considering the opportunity that the lockdown has presented in terms of reduced pollution, communities are more willing than ever, indeed keen, to help. Climate change measures will

become the new normal if fully integrated into economic recovery. Not just jobs, but transport, training and skills, social housing retro fit, planning policy documents. These things may need additional funding in some cases, but would make a huge difference to creating cohesive prosperity in the future.

- The discussion paper and draft plan is paradoxically both too generic and too detailed. On the one hand there is too much detail (even an unwitting sense of prescription) in some sections. Whilst, on the other, the paper is blandly lacking a genuine sense of place. The outcome for a Borough like Hastings is a plan that neither meets our specific needs nor gives us a tool for placing our planning into a wider-structure. We are sure that the concern from the perspective of the more urban parts of the county, and for us the unique situation of Hastings, is that using this document as a blueprint will make us wary that our needs will be marginalised. We would encourage ongoing consultation at a local level with the strong sectors in each area, knowing for instance that here the creative and digital sectors would welcome this and bring new economic thinking to the table.
- Of the eight "ambitions" outlined in the plan 7 & 8 are important to the sustained regeneration of Hastings, particularly 8. We need to make sure that these suggestions are taken up and fully explored because we need a break with the old ways of doing things asap or else the "path of least resistance" will reassert itself. We would like to see planning undertaken to be prepared for the vacation of many of our town centres larger retail buildings, and for this to include a new residential/vacation/cultural and retail mix tailored to each town's specific strengths.
- For our town to bounce back and have a post-covid multiplier of regeneration we need the 'digital connectivity' to translate into the economic structures providing for: commercial and creative hubs to be able to rapidly locate and grow; planning policy and housing grants enabling the construction of new professional communities with the facilities and amenities available to make it worthwhile to move from London. 'Tide and Turf' is not enough and what is the inward investment plan?
- How does the 'Business Boost' fit into this context? And can we dovetail decisions about the discretionary business grants so that they reach those key sectors who have struggled so far to gain any temporary relief, i.e. self-employed/creative and cultural/new start-ups?
- What is the immediate plan for capitalising on the expected choice of people to holiday by 'staycation'? Within the boundaries set by the lockdown and incremental relaxation of the restrictions, how is East Sussex going to attract visitors to reboot our local tourist trade? There is a potential cash boost waiting our local economies this and perhaps next summer. We feel the plan requires much more immediate action here. We would ask for East Sussex to celebrate, brand and advertise the distinct components from which the county is composed.
- Hastings is very reliant on the hospitality industry and within this the use of public transport is to be encouraged but having spent the past few months discouraging people from going on buses and trains it will take a lot of effort and a concerted campaign to convince people that they are safe to use. Concomitantly, the longer-term ambition regarding cycle routes and green-pathways are to be welcomed; does this mean finally proper investment in our local Hastings schemes over which we have been frustrated for so long? And can we also

bring forward new transport ideas in response to the decreased car use and increased work from home needs?

- Economic confidence and trust need to be immediately entrenched for the long-term. Again, we cite the following as examples of urgent actions, implied within the 'Ambitions', requiring focus, for any longer-term economic recovery plan to succeed: **a)** has the FE provider taken robust action on potential NEET and vulnerable students, will these students be securely brought back into the routine of study and of work? Re-establishing continuity of learning to guarantee our young people reach the require skill level for the ambition of 'relocation of business and employment from London' **b)** Where within Ambition 4 is the recognition that we need immediate support to those groups already identified by ESCC as in risk of disability and premature death as a result of problems around access to healthy lifestyle choices (were social housing providers consulted as stakeholders)? **c)** Economic recovery needs to be aligned with other aspects of recovery such as addressing mental health impact of lockdown, the rise in D.V and the importance of effective housing policies and practice **d)** initiatives to highlight equalities, not least to be cognisant of the disproportionate impact of CV19 on the poorest and people from BAME communities and ensure that initiatives and support are appropriate and appropriately promoted to them.
- So, as we stated already, these Ambitions, whilst all essential, require prioritising; a timeline from transition to recovery is required, and HBC O and S will be bringing forward further work on what it sees as priorities for this town.

The Hastings Overview and Scrutiny Committee appreciate the work that has been undertaken thus far, welcome this paper as the start of a live strategy and look forward to working with all stakeholders on the post-covid economic recovery of our Borough and the County.