

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

### Executive Summary

At the beginning of the pandemic, in July 2020, a Framework for Recovery was published to assist businesses through the Covid crisis. Businesses are now in a position of post-pandemic recovery. The Economic Development Action Plan (see Appendix 1) will be an interim plan to take us to 2023 when a new or updated economic development strategy will be adopted. This Economic Development Action Plan will complement, not supersede, key strategies and plans we have already published including the Core Strategy, the Economic Development Strategy for Woking 2017-2022 and the 2021/2022 Corporate Plan.

The Action Plan will address key issues arising from the pandemic and it will also inform the forthcoming Woking Town Centre Masterplan, Five-Year Corporate Plan and Digital Strategy, all under development. The Woking Town Centre Masterplan will provide the overall vision for the Town Centre that will drive investment decisions in a coherent and sustainable manner and ensure that Woking continues to be a destination of choice.

The Economic Development Action Plan for Woking's recovery will be concise and focused on the main priorities that we need to take between now and 2023.

Priority 1	Focus on business
Priority 2	Build on our business advantages and skilled people
Priority 3	Future proofing the town and village centres
Priority 4	Making our place the place to be
Priority 5	Destination Woking
Priority 6	Living Woking – culture & events

The Economic Development Task Group (EDTG) met on 25 August to consider the Action Plan and provide comments and feedback to Officers. As a result it was recommended to merge priority 6 into priorities 4 and 5. The Action Plan is a living document and therefore these changes will be made and will be reported on at the next meeting of the EDTG.

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### **RESOLVE That**

the Economic Development Action Plan be approved.

### Reasons for Decision

Reason: To allow Officers to implement the Action Plan in order to assist and steer Woking's recovery for the present and medium term and resume our impressive, sustainable economic growth.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

## Economic Development Action Plan

**Background Papers:** None.

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### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In 2017, the Council produced a five year Economic Development Strategy setting out the vision for Woking - a dynamic and strong economy, successful people and a flourishing place with first class infrastructure.
- 1.2 Since then, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed radically the context in which this and our other key plans will be delivered. Many of the changes in the way we work, live, shop and enjoy our leisure time are likely to be here to stay and will all have a bearing on the way in which Woking Borough Council delivers services to our community.
- 1.3 During the pandemic, the focus was on directly impacted sectors: retail, hospitality and leisure. Under our Framework for Recovery we provided a wide range of business support through Woking Works. As we move forward, we need to broaden our focus to the economy as a whole.
- 1.4 The Economic Development Action Plan for Woking's recovery will be wider than just the directly impacted sectors, recognising that the economic effects of the pandemic have been felt across all industries.
- 1.5 Our economic priorities remain the same although we will need to do things differently. We are producing an Economic Development Action Plan for Woking's recovery to get back on course and make the most of the opportunities as we emerge from the pandemic.
- 1.6 This Plan will complement, not supersede, key strategies and plans including the Core Strategy, the Economic Development Strategy 2017-2021, the 2021/2022 Corporate Plan, it will also inform the forthcoming Digital Strategy, Woking Town Centre Masterplan and Five-Year Corporate Plan, which are currently under development. The Economic Development Action Plan for recovery will be concise and focused on the main actions that we need to take between now and 2023.
- 1.7 Our aim is for Woking to be recognised as a premier global business location, offering a connected, quality environment with a range of first class business, living, leisure and cultural amenities. Woking's location at the heart of one of the fastest growing economic areas outside London, its entrepreneurial businesses, highly qualified and skilled people, exceptional communications and business-friendly environment have driven outstanding economic performance in recent years.
- 1.8 Woking's business base grew by a record 25% between 2010 and 2017<sup>1</sup>. Woking's economy is remarkably innovative and technological; concentrations of Pharmaceuticals, Motor Vehicles, and Information Technology and Aerospace companies offer high quality jobs and are creating an increasingly knowledge-intensive economy<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.9 As we come through the pandemic, the national economic outlook is positive. Employers are increasingly confident; according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD)<sup>3</sup> many are expecting to increase recruitment and pay while forecasts for national economic growth are averaging 6.8% in 2021<sup>4</sup>. Increasingly, people are seeing the benefits of locating outside major cities. At the height of the pandemic, half of Londoners wanting to move home, wanted to relocate out of the city<sup>5</sup>.
- 1.10 The Economic Development Task Group met on 25 August to consider the Economic Development Action Plan and provide comments and feedback to Officers. The Action Plan is

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<sup>1</sup> [Woking Economic Development Strategy 2017-22](#)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> [Labour Market Outlook Spring 2021 CIPD](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Comparison of independent forecasts for the UK economy HM Treasury June 2021](#)

<sup>5</sup> [London Assembly Housing Committee report 2020](#)

attached at Appendix 1. Sections 2-7 outline of this report prove the rationale behind the setting of the priority areas which the action plan will focus on.

### 1.11 Woking Borough Council: listening & delivering

At the start of the pandemic we asked businesses what would be most useful in helping them get through it, so we carried out business surveys to find out. We produced a comprehensive Framework for Recovery<sup>8</sup> to help us plan and allocate resources.

We offered 1-2-1 business advice clinics to aid in strategy formulation, marketing and promotion, IT and financial planning.

We delivered a range of well-attended webinars on topics requested by businesses, including: re-engagement with customers after lockdown, digital skills, employment law, return to work advice, resilience of businesses, IT security, organisational well-being of staff, marketing and social media workshops

Woking Borough Council also:

- Gave 4,831 grants worth £26,366,340 to businesses during the pandemic.
- Had over 650 interactions with businesses including one-to-one support with business advisers and support for strategy, business plans and marketing as well as start-up support.
- Directly contacted business owners and business managers on the high streets and villages across Woking Borough with advice and support.
- Contacted individuals with specific needs, such as office space requirements and provided advice on grant applications or other government initiatives.
- Supported the #WeAreWoking campaign, to encourage customers back onto the high street and to 'shop local'.
- Invested in our High Streets and commercial areas with multiple Covid secure measures such as providing free sanitiser, public awareness signage and an enhanced cleaning regime.

During the pandemic, the focus was on directly impacted sectors: retail, hospitality and leisure. Under our Framework for Recovery we provided a wide range of business support through Woking Works.

As we move forward, we need to broaden our focus to the economy as a whole.

The Economic Development Action Plan for Woking's recovery will be wider than just the directly impacted sectors, recognising that the economic effects of the pandemic have been felt across all industries.

## 2.0 Priority 1: Focus on Business.

- 2.1 We can be cautiously optimistic about what the future holds however, there will be challenges along the way and not all businesses will come out unscathed. Small and micro businesses, particularly those with high borrowing, are at risk as the furlough scheme comes to an end and rates and rent arrears fall due.

- 2.2 Many medium and larger businesses are experiencing skills and labour shortages as well as difficulties with global supply chains. Changes to new work patterns such as home based and hybrid working will present challenges and opportunities to businesses, especially in relation to their current and future digital infrastructure, office and real estate needs.

Now that we are emerging from the crisis, we will do whatever we can to help Woking businesses recover and succeed in the post-pandemic environment. Although change is unsettling, it provides opportunities to do things differently. Some businesses do even better after an economic downturn than they did before and those that start up during a recession can be more resilient. We want to make sure as many Woking businesses as possible are primed for survival and future success.

### 2.3 Focus on business actions

#### 2.3.1 New Business starts

- Monitor rates of new business creation
- Continue to support Start up Woking's free advice and help
- Signpost new businesses to Start up Woking
- Support a new 'Green Tech' incubator accelerator for the tech sector

#### 2.3.2 Micros and SMEs

- Provide business events, "Adapt and survive" webinars and podcasts on business strategy, marketing, customer service and other topics with expert contributors
- Business advice & support clinics, one to one and one to many as above
- Referral to EM3 Growth Hub and other business support services
- Set up peer-to-peer online network to share experience of opening up
- Encourage membership of Woking Works
- Via the masterplan investigate local hubs and 'WeWork' type options to provide flexible work and meeting space

#### 2.3.3 Major Employers

- Continue to monitor major employers and engage with them to understand concerns and help to retain them in the Borough e.g. through business breakfasts
- Engage large and medium size businesses in "recruit local", "support local" and "buy local" procurement initiatives to embed them in the local economy
- Engage with and assist the Borough's medium and larger businesses with support for resilience planning and adaptation to change e.g. through the availability of flexible space within the Borough

#### 2.3.4 High value sectors and clusters.

- Research, map and monitor key sectors, clusters and supply chains where Woking has an advantage e.g. Technology, Automotive, Film & TV
- Investigate Woking's largest 10 sectors and/or those with a high location quotient, e.g. Technology, automotive, Film and TV and evaluate demand for business-led sector where there is need and demand
- Engage with FE & HE and other partners to support key sectors

#### 2.3.5 Export and internationalisation.

- Map and signpost to the business support for exporters that is available
- Promote export success stories, particularly companies finding new markets outside EU
- Set up new exporters' club working with Woking and Surrey Chambers and Woking Works

### 2.3.6 Business engagement

- Continue to survey businesses regularly to identify concerns and new challenges and gather feedback on our action plan
- Implement the Digital Strategy to create a progressive digital platform to transform Woking into a digitally smart borough and help businesses to get the most out of the opportunities around digital
- Engage with businesses in the sectors that were most affected by shutdown to identify concerns and help those struggling to reopen e.g. Accommodation & Food, Arts, Culture & Recreation, Retail

## 3.0 Priority 2: Build on our business advantages and skilled people

- 3.1 Woking's business base has impressive strengths. Many leading companies in high value sectors choose to locate in Woking with its superb connections, highly skilled workforce, range of affordable premises and quality of life. They include McLaren in Automotive and Applied Technologies, Cap Gemini in financial services, Nuvias in technology distribution, Cubica in artificial intelligence and robotics R&D and a range of petrochemical and pharmaceuticals organisations.
- 3.2 The IT sector comprises 850 businesses, 16% of the business base<sup>6</sup>, and is Woking's second largest industry (after professional, scientific and technical). It is crucial for the future development of high-value jobs in the knowledge economy. IT companies clustering in Woking include specialists such as Restorepoint in cybersecurity, 3di in technical software and Oracle Micros in cloud applications.
- 3.3 Exciting opportunities also exist in Film and TV production; according to ONS, there are now 85 Woking companies in this sector<sup>7</sup> linked to the rapid expansion of nearby Shepperton and Longcross studios, where Netflix and Pinewood are rapidly expanding their UK operations.
- 3.4 Skills are central to the success of high value, knowledge-intensive companies and often a key factor in their locational decisions. 60% of Woking's working age population is qualified to degree level or above compared to 53% in Surrey as a whole<sup>8</sup>, giving Woking a major competitive advantage.
- 3.5 The Economic Development Strategy 2017 to 2022<sup>9</sup> found that Woking had a notably higher percentage of its workers employed in the knowledge economy (41%), higher rates of self-employment (14%) and a younger working age population than Surrey as a whole. However, recruiting skilled workers was a challenge for employers even before the pandemic, as many highly skilled workers commute out of the Borough.
- 3.6 Notwithstanding, increased skills and labour shortages are emerging as we come out of the pandemic. Matching this demand with the available workforce will be a priority. Going forward, Woking's skilled and qualified people will need to keep their skills and qualifications up to date while those who lack higher level skills risk being left behind and may require retraining. Education and training providers will need to align their offer with the current and future needs of employers. The forthcoming Digital Strategy will recommend actions that will create a progressive digital platform to transform Woking into a digitally smart Borough. Woking will create a digital environment for businesses to be more competitive, driving prosperity and success. It will lead the way on smart, sustainable growth to create an even greater place for people to live, work, play and learn. It is essential that an environment that assists businesses to succeed is provided.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: ONS UK Business Counts 2020 2 digit sections

<sup>7</sup> Source: ONS UK Business Counts 2020 5 digit SIC

<sup>8</sup> Source: ONS Annual Population Survey 2020

<sup>9</sup> [Woking Economic Development Strategy 2017-22](#)

### 3.7 Build on our people and skills advantages actions

#### 3.7.1 Understand business's skills and employment needs:

- Engage with employers and feedback their concerns regarding skills gaps and shortages to DWP, EM3 and Surrey County Council highlighting hard to fill vacancies, skills gaps and shortages. Work with schools and colleges to highlight opportunities for young people.
- Consult with sector networks e.g. Woking Hospitality Alliance (see also FoB 4) and help to develop skills initiatives to enable rapid recovery. Feed into Fedcap across the board support for getting back into work.
- Jobs Board

#### 3.7.2 Support local employment for local people

- Continue to promote Woking Jobs Board to support local employment and help local people to access local jobs
- Develop a strategy to promote "recruit local", "work local" and "buy local" initiatives to employers and local workers (See also FoB 3) highlighting economic, social and environmental benefits
- Help employers with managing home working and flexible/hybrid working through providing online advice and webinars

#### 3.7.3 Support workforce and skills development for the knowledge economy

- Working with learning and training providers, develop digital skills support for local people so that they can take advantage of the opportunities created by the implementation of the Digital Strategy
- Promote and encourage careers and Apprenticeships in knowledge-based industries for young people e.g. working in the Technology automotive, film and TV sectors
- Encourage greater HE presence in the Borough to improve skills and learning offer. Create enhanced links with HE providers, local or further afield e.g. London, promote Borough to host an HE campus. Liaison with FE providers within Borough as to ability to expand into HE provision.

#### 3.7.4 Support new skills for local people to match demand

- Analyse local vacancy data and identify areas of emerging shortages e.g. customer service, marketing, social media management, and provide information on line as well as signposting to training
- Provide free webinars on subjects where there is a gap in local provision e.g. digital

#### 3.7.5 Support people who are at risk of unemployment/hardship, ending of SEISS/CJRS as a result of the pandemic

- Work with partners to identify additional support measures for newly unemployed e.g. help with local employment, podcasts and webinars
- Focus and signpost to business support for self-employed as SEISS comes to an end.

### 4.0 Priority 3: Future proofing the town & village centres

4.1 Woking Borough Council has invested over £1bn in the Borough. Its latest regeneration scheme, Victoria Place will provide 432 apartments in the new Marches, a 4-star Hilton Hotel and flexible, mixed use commercial space. In total around 1,000 new jobs will be created. The Council also focussed on creating a restaurant quarter around Commercial Way to offer residents, businesses and visitors great brands like Gordon Ramsey's Street Burger, Cotes Brasserie, Lounges and independent restaurants like Bacaro, Cellar Magnefique, Araceli's and Elia.

- 4.2 We recognised that even before the pandemic, high streets and town centres were changing as the switch to online retail, and digital services gathered pace. Our retail centres will still be important as we emerge from the pandemic and people want to use their town centres again.
- 4.3 Woking Borough's centres have an opportunity to redefine their offer to provide more of what local people want. The answer is clear. People want more independent shops, restaurants, bars and coffee shops, more green space and greater pedestrianisation, as well as fewer empty shops and charity shops.
- 4.4 The Council's significant capital investment in new multi-use developments such as Victoria Place and its freehold interests across Woking town centre put it in a strong position to respond to changes in demand, able to take a more flexible approach attuned to local need and emerging trends.
- 4.5 **Future proofing our Borough's town and village centres actions**
- 4.5.1 **Maintain and build on Woking town centre's position as a first class commercial, leisure, cultural and retail centre**
- Implementing the Masterplan to future-proof Woking town centre as a regionally important retail, commercial, leisure and cultural destination that offers what businesses and people want
  - Celebrating and supporting the opening of the Victoria Place development to provide an even stronger retail, hotel, leisure and living offer
  - Identifying further opportunities for encouraging town centre living
- 4.5.2 **Future-proof our village centres and support their unique identities as retail and service community hubs**
- Supporting the niche identities of the local village communities with their individual retail and service offers, for example Two Ducks in St John's, Noel's Farm Shop in Sutton Green and La Ficelle in West Byfleet
  - Supporting smaller village businesses to adapt to change through consultation and engagement, highlighting key trends and seeking their input into the Masterplan and other strategies
- 4.5.3 **Use our flexibilities to support a relevant, fit-for-purpose, post-pandemic Borough with the right mix of retail, living culture, leisure and commercial opportunities, including smaller businesses and independents.**
- Review the wider Borough as a fit-for-purpose, relevant, post-Covid multi-service destination and identify gaps. Identify whether there is enough flexible space and shared space to respond to future needs e.g. shared service units working with partners to fill gaps in services, health services in places that need them.
  - Monitoring what is available from retail, hospitality, food and drink, culture and leisure businesses across the Borough and encouraging new businesses and services to enhance the wider offer
  - Supporting the conversion of extra retail capacity to studios and maker spaces for artists, crafts and creative businesses e.g. film production
  - Supporting temporary or permanent community uses for underutilised retail space, within agreed affordability and viability parameters e.g. Bare + Fair in Peacocks.
  - Considering the relocation of local authority-funded services into the town centres and giving preference to local and community businesses to deliver them.
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- Implement the Digital Strategy so that technology is supporting small businesses in village centre e.g. through encouraging take up of gigabit connectivity and utilisation of smart technology
- Support local business digital online profile/ability to trade online via initiatives such as support for ‘mytown shops’<sup>10</sup>

### 5.0 Priority 4: Making our place the place to be

- 5.1 Woking must continue to evolve and develop so that our economy can grow and our people have access to high quality jobs. But it is not just about the economy; Woking has to be a desirable place for people to want to live, visit and work. The future is changing; more hybrid working, i.e. partly at home and partly in the office, a greater focus on leisure, health and well-being, the continued rise of on-line shopping, increased pressure to move to net zero carbon and forecast decline in the population, will all mean developing Woking differently.
- 5.2 Developing Woking’s identity as the place of the future with a strong sense of community and a unique quality of life is ongoing. Forward-looking plans are resulting in a range of exciting new developments.
- 5.3 Current and future plans include The Victoria Arch widening scheme which is an important part of our wider plans to provide enhanced access to an attractive and user friendly town centre. It will provide additional road capacity, reduced air pollution, safer access for pedestrian and cycle journeys, and more reliable bus journeys. Ultimately, it will significantly contribute to our long-term sustainable transport measures, strengthen our vibrant business economy and deliver our requirement to unlock town centre sites for much needed housing. It is not only the town centre and commercial hub of Woking that is changing; a multi-million pound regeneration project will transform the centre of Sheerwater into a thriving, sustainable community. We are also supporting and enabling the redevelopment of West Byfleet.
- 5.4 Woking was recently dubbed “Wondrous Woking” when it came top of the UK Vitality Index in 2021, scoring highly on the dynamism of its economy, wage growth and commercial investment. It was also particularly strong on health and environment with low levels of cardiovascular mortality and high scores for life satisfaction. It is a priority to retain this vitality and respond to the way we live and work in future.
- 5.5 **Woking, the place to be actions**

#### 5.5.1 Continuing the physical transformation of future-facing Woking.

- Develop, fund and implement the Masterplan for Woking town to provide a clear deliverable vision for the future
- In parallel with the above continue to develop plans for the future of the villages in consultation with their local communities.
- Continue to Invest in more green space and trees and a better public realm in terms of design, quality and ability to access by all
- Identify opportunities for more pedestrianisation and pedestrian prioritisation across the Borough
- Utilise the Council’s ownership of property, infrastructure and sites in the Borough to provide more of what people and businesses need

#### 5.5.2 Digital transformation to become a superbly well-connected Woking Borough

- Continue to support both the Council’s, Government and private investment in digital infrastructure (Full Fibre/5G) and to tackle ‘not-spots’ and areas of poor connectivity

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<sup>10</sup> [Mytown shops Woking](#)

- Finalise and implement the Digital Strategy to create a super-connected Woking Borough through Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) infrastructure and the Digital Centre of Excellence
- Monitor usage and encourage take-up and application of digital capacity by businesses and encourage the technology sector to locate in Woking to take advantage of the opportunity
- Support digital inclusion for all, including accessibility to Council and other public services
- Remain cognisant of potential digital poverty across geographic, age, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic groups, work with partners to address and mitigate digital poverty across the Borough

### 5.5.3 Green and healthy Woking

- Continue to monitor and implement the Woking 2050 strategy and related strategies, increasing the pace when necessary
- Identify creative opportunities for providing more green space in the Town Centre for example, on top of and between buildings, podium and pocket parks, to attract people in, reduce CO<sup>2</sup> and provide a more user-friendly urban environment
- Provide more business support to help businesses to move their operation to net zero more quickly
- Provide more support for residents & businesses move to net zero carbon more quickly through promoting government support for greener energy
- Identify more opportunities for active travel provision for cyclists and walkers to get around Woking, including accessible infrastructure and the provision of secure cycle parking facilities
- Accelerate the introduction of dedicated secure parking and charging points for e-vehicles and e-bikes within the Council's estate
- Liaise with external partners to maximise the provision of charging points for e-vehicles across the wider Borough, utilising Government funding, and commercial support when available
- Work with partners to protect and enhance our rich natural environment

## 6.0 Priority 5: Destination Woking

- 6.1 In an increasingly competitive market, Woking will need to work harder to continue to attract inward investment.
- 6.2 Woking offers excellent communications including rail to London journey times of 25 minutes, easy access to the national motorway network and the main airports and journey times of around an hour to the southern ports providing access to the continent.
- 6.3 An extensive range of commercial premises at competitive prices is on offer including town centre offices, modern business parks such as Genesis, Orchard and Woking Business Park, retail and warehousing stock. We have a relatively young and diverse, highly skilled local population, extensive cultural and leisure facilities and a high quality of life.
- 6.4 Our inward investment offer will be even more important following the pandemic. It is likely that there will be lower demand for commercial premises and increased competition for a lower number of inwardly investing companies.
- 6.5 Our forthcoming Woking Town Centre Masterplan, (a comprehensive document, to help provide development principles and standards, articulating a clear vision for the Town Centre) will take these trends into account and through its vision for Woking, create a town centre environment that would attract investment to respond to the post pandemic local economic, environmental and social conditions.

6.6 It is important that we sustain and increase our inward investment levels, to reduce the vacant office space, both in the Council's estate and other commercial spaces in the Borough. A detailed sales & marketing strategy, as part of the forthcoming masterplan project should be created adopted to aid in the letting of our estate and the promotion of Woking as a destination of choice for commercial organisations

### 6.7 Destination Woking actions include:

#### 6.7.1 Create a new identity and sense of place to match the vision for Woking

- Develop and promote Woking's distinctive identity as the most go-to, go-ahead Borough in Surrey with the best quality of life e.g. through communications and marketing campaigns, events, printed and social media, online presence and recruitment of Woking advocates/ambassadors.
- Local initiative such as art competitions and additional public art, physical place markers, celebration of Woking's heritage and identifiers.
- Focus on business advantages such as range of premises, quality of place, skills availability, excellent communications and connections to London & SE. Pricing differential against competing destinations in/nearer London.
- Focus on USPs for visitors such as range of retail, services, arts, culture, events, outdoor space, access to countryside, large public spaces and superior accessibility on foot and by cycle and rail
- Focus on what is good about living in Woking for residents, healthy lifestyles, sense of community, range education, choice of housing, green spaces

#### 6.7.2 Actively market Woking to inward investors

- Develop and produce a detailed sales and marketing plan with improved articulation of Woking's offer with up-to-date facts and figures, including our premises, workforce, support facilities, cultural and leisure offer and our gigabit capable IT infrastructure, potentially funded by the new Masterplan
- Utilise the above sales and marketing plan for the Borough, supported by a dedicated proactive sales and marketing function to effectively 'sell' Woking as a local, regional, national and international destination.
- Investigate innovative and cost effective routes to market to increase the profile of Woking to potential investors e.g. targeted advertising
- Work with the Department of International Trade and Invest in Surrey to make sure Woking is at the forefront of their teams' preferred destinations
- Establish and maintain a presence at domestic and international trade fairs for inward investors, once these open up again, such as MIPIM UK
- Set up a fast track service including a rapid response team to make sure any inward investment enquiries are dealt with immediately and efficiently
- Resource fast track inward investment service with additional officer capacity and marketing collateral funded by the Masterplan budget
- Utilise political contacts such as local MPs to help promote the Borough via events locally within Borough and in Parliament.

#### 6.7.3 Build commitment of existing businesses and retain in Woking

- Map medium and larger businesses and prioritise the ones that are most important to keep e.g. expansion potential, exporters, large employers, knowledge businesses etc. Potentially purchase datasets such as mnAI<sup>11</sup> to provide data and evidence to underpin Destination Woking service

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<sup>11</sup> [mnAI website](#)

- Actively engage and liaise with priority businesses and encourage dialogue to understand their needs and respond flexibly e.g. planning advice, recruitment help, challenges impacting on their ability to remain in Borough
- Liaise with commercial agents and landowners regularly and understand what is happening in the market, current trends and challenges. Monitor competitor location activity and initiatives to ensure Woking's offer is current and relevant to rapidly changing market dynamics.
- Promote available commercial space to contacts in companies with expansion potential, or need to reformat space to accommodate business development

### **7.0 Priority 6 Living Woking, culture and events**

- 7.1 On review by the Economic Development Task Group at its meeting on 25 August 2021, priority 6 will be merged into priorities 4 and 5. This will be completed after the Executive meets.
- 7.2 People have re-evaluated their priorities due to Covid. 77% of people in the UK say that the pandemic will change their behaviour permanently, with a new focus on enjoying simple pleasures (40%), friends and family (33%) and re-evaluating life priorities (28%) while 40% have used outside spaces more.<sup>12</sup> It points to a greater focus on quality of life, health and wellbeing for many.
- 7.3 The effects of the pandemic are likely to include more home working and hybrid home/office working which, along with the re-evaluation of people's priorities, will drive up demand for cultural and leisure facilities and services. Woking has an outstanding leisure and cultural offer including the renowned Lightbox, the Living Planet Centre and the New Victoria Theatre.
- 7.4 The restaurant quarter offers a range of eating and drinking experiences, while modern shopping will continue to provide a retail offer to draw people into the town centre.
- 7.5 Business events such as TEDxWoking and Woking Means Business also bring people into Woking and benefit the local economy, underpinning our credentials as a business event and conference location.
- 7.6 Greenspace in Woking includes walks along the canal and Woking Park while there are many nearby attractions including the Royal Horticultural Society at Wisley and the Surrey Hills Area of Natural Beauty.
- 7.7 Our priority actions will aim to improve our culture and events offer to reflect new post pandemic lifestyles.

### **7.8 Woking, centre of centre of leisure, sport and culture actions**

#### **7.8.1 Support Leisure, Arts and Culture in Woking**

- Continue to support the 'Celebrate Woking' initiative post hiatus to promote culture, arts and diversity across the wider Borough.
- Continue to support wider leisure arts and culture across the Borough through the initiatives identified within Leisure Strategy, Cultural Strategy and Action Plan, Public Art

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<sup>12</sup> [The National Lottery Community Fund December 2020](#)

Strategy, Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Facilities Strategy and forthcoming five-year plan.

### 7.8.2 Support the events programme in Woking

- Continue to support the organisers who develop and run the wide variety of cultural and arts events across the Borough. Assist in 'matchmaking' possible business sponsors and supporters with appropriate events. Maintain a 'watching brief' for events ability to drive footfall into the town and village centres.
- Once open support the key venues ability to attract new conferences, meeting and events to Woking such as awards ceremonies and product launches.
- Run business events such as Woking Means Business and Woking Careers Fair
- Encourage Arts & Culture organisations to take on running of events, attracting financial support such as sponsorship and local patronage.

### 7.8.3 Business engagement with Arts and Culture

- Encourage businesses to engage more with Arts and Cultural organisations e.g. through sponsorship, free events and awards, purchasing public art, artist in residence schemes etc.

## 8.0 Corporate Strategy

8.1 The main direction and aims for the Economic Development Plan Action Plan will inform Woking's 5 year Corporate Plan focussing on the priorities that will support businesses, assist in a business retention strategy and attract inward investment.

8.2 The Action Plan will complement, not supersede, key strategies and plans we have already published including the Core Strategy, the Economic Development Strategy for Woking 2017-2022 and the new 2021/2022 Corporate Plan and our Framework for Recovery published in July 2020.

## 9.0 Implications

### Finance and Risk

9.1 There is a risk that due to resource limitations, recommended actions will not be implemented.

9.2 Any recommended actions that requires funding outside of authorised revenue budgets will seek approval from the Director of Planning, the Director of Finance and/ or the Corporate Leadership Team.

### Equalities and Human Resources

9.3 No equalities implications have been identified at this time.

9.4 No Human Resource implications have been identified at this time.

### Legal

9.5 No legal implications have been identified at this time.

## 10.0 Engagement and Consultation

10.1 A consultation on the Economic Development Action plan was run via the Council's new Community Forum platform ([www.communityforum.woking.gov.uk](http://www.communityforum.woking.gov.uk)) with a survey to collect responses and comments from local businesses, employees and residents.

## **Economic Development Action Plan**

- 10.2 This was promoted to local businesses through the Business Liaison Team's Woking Works marketing channels including email newsletters and social media posts.
- 10.3 The EDTG will consider the Economic Development Action Plan on 25 August. All Members were invited to respond to the consultation.
- 10.4 The consultation was also shared to local business representative groups, such as the Woking Chamber of Commerce and Surrey Chambers of Commerce to share with their members and to provide feedback.
- 10.5 The Business Liaison Team are awaiting the outcome of the consultation, which will inform the final version of the Action Plan.

REPORT ENDS