

An aerial photograph of Tenterden, Kent, showing a mix of residential buildings, a prominent church with a tall spire, and a main road with traffic. The text is overlaid on the image.

Tenterden

Healthcheck and Action Plan

Tenterden Town and Rural Partnership

November 2005

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1. Introduction and summary

- 1.1 In 2004, a Partnership was formed in Tenterden and the surrounding area, to act as a representative steering group to undertake a town healthcheck, which would lead to the development of a local Action Plan for the town. The Tenterden Town and Rural Partnership currently has a Steering Group of ten, representing the Weald of Kent Preservation Society, the Chamber of Commerce, Ashford Borough Council, Tenterden Town Council, Wittersham Parish Council, Tenterden and District Residents Association, the Leisure Centre Trust and local business.
 - *The built and natural environment,*
 - *The local economy,*
 - *Transport and Accessibility, and*
 - *Social and Community*
- 1.2 With the help of grants from the Channel Corridor Partnership and Kent County Council, the Tenterden Town and Rural Partnership used the Market Towns Healthcheck process developed by the Countryside Agency to provide a recognised route towards developing an Action Plan, and a structure for the work, which would take stock and then look to the future.
- 1.3 The Partnership employed a coordinator experienced in the healthcheck process, to assist the community to undertake the healthcheck and to guide them through the process, to build up a fresh picture of all aspects of life in and around Tenterden, how it is changing, and how well the town serves its community. Importantly, however, the work was done largely by the members of the partnership, and reflects hundreds of hours of work by groups and individuals from the whole community.
- 1.4 This report provides a summary of the process as well as a detailed Action Plan. It is of necessity a summary report. More details of the background information used are contained the appendices, and in a companion volume containing the healthcheck worksheets which comprise a checklist of available information covering the four main areas of the healthcheck, and cover aspects of:
 - 1.5 Tenterden is an outstandingly attractive small Kentish market town, in the heart of the Weald. [Section 2](#) of this document is a “Snapshot” of the town, and its colourful history.
 - 1.6 Described as the “Jewel of the Weald”, Tenterden has long been recognised for its architectural and townscape qualities. It is also a thriving community, but one that faces all of the challenges common to small towns throughout the country - and the additional ones of being an outstanding historic town in a fast-changing region.
 - 1.7 The town had a population at the 2001 census of 7,600. and a similar number lived in the wards that comprise its immediate hinterland. Around it are a number of villages and smaller communities which look to Tenterden as a ' Rural Service Centre '. For shopping and other services, the town almost certainly serves a still wider area and is a popular visitor destination.
 - 1.8 For the purposes of this healthcheck, and for the collection of background data, the hinterland of Tenterden is regarded as the area, with a population of around 14,500, that broadly looks towards the town for local health services.
 - 1.9 The healthcheck has taken a fresh look at how the town and its surroundings look and work today, but has also looked at past pieces of work, and at the wider context such as local and regional planning policies. Important background documents, summarised in [Section 3](#) include the Community Appraisal, carried out in 1995, the publication “Tenterden Explored”, dating from 1967 and the current Ashford Local Plan.

What is an Action Plan?

- 1.10 A Town Action Plan is a document that itemises agreed actions that the community has identified as important and requiring local action. The Action Plan is a statement of how the community sees itself developing over the next few years and it identifies specific actions and policies that reflect the views of the town as a whole.
- 1.11 The Action Plan is based on sound research, data collection and community surveys and participation. This analysis has been translated into issues, priorities and actions for the community to work together to achieve.

- 1.12 The healthcheck process has helped to identify the issues and priorities from the town's point of view. Using the systematic approach of the "worksheets" on the four topic areas of environment, economy, social and community and transport and accessibility, working groups from the partnership identified key issues facing the town, that were the main focus of public consultation and debate; these issues are summarised in [Section 4](#).
- 1.13 The specific actions in this plan are based on a "vision" for the future of the community, identified during a process of public engagement and consultation, which is outlined in [Section 5](#) - including who was involved and what people said.



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“Vision”

- 1.14 The Action Plan is built around some clear priorities expressed during the consultation process, in particular the responses to the simple question *“What kind of town and community do you want Tenterden to be in the future?”*
- 1.15 There was a lot of emphasis on what people already much valued and identified with. In Summary, the “Vision” for the future of Tenterden is as:

A Town and Community which:

.... Takes pride in its individuality and charm as a unique small market town and the “Jewel of the Weald” and is taking active steps to safeguard the quality of its historic urban and rural environment

.... Is working together to improve opportunities for all and is trying hard to do more for the young, encouraging them to take an active part as its future citizens.

.... Is lively and successful, building on the strengths not only of the town but also the surrounding villages as a tourist destination and as an attractive place to do business with a vibrant economy

.... Provides a comprehensive range of facilities and services for people in the town and from the surrounding area for shopping, health, education and leisure

.... Makes it easy for all to get around and is improving accessibility for all

.... Is looking to the future and is able to assume responsibility for its own destiny

.... Is - and feels - safe and well cared for

The Action Plan

- 1.16 The Action Plan is intended to be a means to secure this vision, identifying existing and potential projects that work together to this end. It also identifies the need to go on developing the Tenterden Town and Rural Partnership itself, to work with others, to help develop projects and to monitor progress, to make sure that the whole package is delivered over time.
- 1.17 It is a document that will need to be kept under review and updated regularly, and it will also influence the future policies and actions of more strategic bodies from the grassroots. It has an important two-way relationship with the District-Wide Community Plan, and the Core Strategy for the revised Local Development Framework. [Section 6](#) relates the action plan to other strategies and the work of lead agencies.
- 1.18 Village and Town Action Plans have been encouraged in recent years by the Government as a means whereby towns and villages can articulate their needs and wishes. It is current Government policy to increase active community participation and to develop a role for local action plans to help to influence local authority and other public sector strategies and policies. Bids for support from the Regional Development Agency, SEEDA, need to be underpinned by this expression of needs and aspirations.



The Market Towns Healthcheck

1.19 The Market Towns Healthcheck provides a structure and process whereby town partnerships can develop a local action plan. It was developed and promoted by the Countryside Agency. The healthcheck process is divided into a number of key stages, all of which are intended to establish and reinforce local interest and ownership, and all of which have been followed here:

1.20 The main stages of the Healthcheck are:

- Set up Market Town Partnership
- Gain community involvement
- Complete a Healthcheck
- Create a vision
- Plan for Action
- Action the Plan

1.21 The healthcheck leads the town through a process, comprising worksheets and data analysis, that help to identify issues, priorities, and a vision for the future leading to the agreed Action Plan. At the heart of the process is the fact that it is guided and led by the local partnership itself, contributing both expert and local knowledge, and leading to a series of community consulta-

tions that help to identify the priorities and actions but also importantly help to establish local interest and ownership.

Strategic Objectives

1.22 The action plan is intended to be an action plan for Tenterden, arising out of the priorities identified in the Healthcheck and through wide consultation. It is also an action plan for the Partnership itself. To this end, a long list of possible actions have been identified, and these are explained in more detail in Section 7.

1.23 Then in Section 8 specific actions and priorities are identified, which between them aim to build on the undoubted strengths of the town, and tackle its weaknesses. The priorities are based on what the healthcheck and the public consultation indicated were the most pressing issues and main concerns:

The Environment -

Safeguarding and looking after the precious heritage of the town, its character and countryside setting.

The Local Economy -

Keeping tourism, retailing and services strong - promoting the unique mix and vitality that make up the town's essential character, and building on its strengths.

Social and Community -

The effects of population growth, the need for a balanced community, maintaining the culture and identity of the town, and doing more for younger people.

Transport and Accessibility -

Parking, getting around the town, improving public transport and walking links both inside and beyond the town, including the villages.

1.24 Appendix 1 to the document records with grateful thanks those who were involved in the healthcheck working groups and workshops, who put in a tremendous amount of work. There were many others who contributed comments, time and resources, including Members and Officers from the Town, Borough and County Councils, and special thanks go to the Tenterden Town Council, for use of meeting rooms at the Town Hall.

1.25 Appendix 2 includes the publicity leaflet and questionnaire used during consultation, and Appendix 3 is the exhibition material used for the Community Day in May 2005, and at the Open meeting in November 2005 when the Action Plan was approved and launched.

