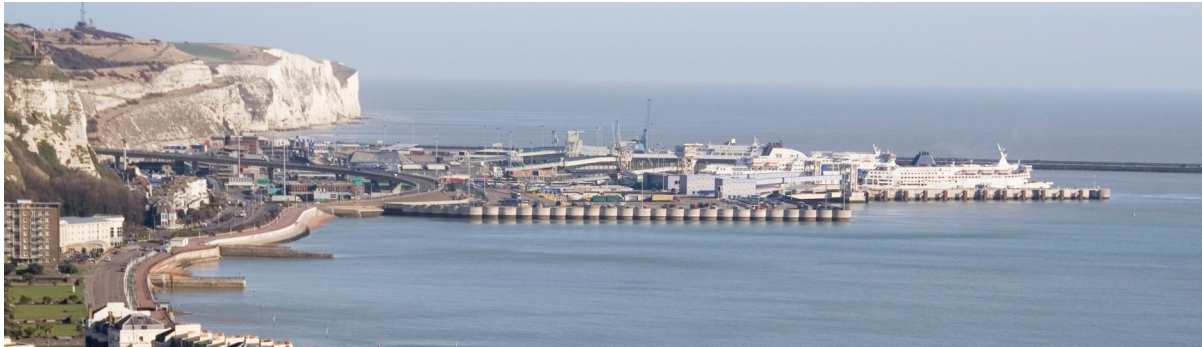




July 2026 Economic Development News

Welcome to the July edition of our Economic Development newsletter.

This edition reflects the continued focus across the **Economic Development and Special Projects portfolio** on delivering **practical support for businesses, targeted investment, and opportunities for residents** across Kent and Medway.

What stands out is the **range and consistency of delivery**. From **business funding and investment into new workspace**, to **skills programmes supporting people into employment**, and ongoing **engagement with partners shaping our Local Growth Plan**, the work underway continues to build momentum across the county.

You will also see progress in how we are promoting Kent externally, through the **Invest Kent platform**, the work of **Visit Kent**, and our involvement in national activity to attract **investment and visitors**. Alongside this, programmes such as **Connect to Work**, the **Growth Hub**, and **Made Smarter** continue to demonstrate the value of targeted support in helping businesses grow and residents access new opportunities.

This edition highlights that progress in action, grounded in delivery and partnership working, and focused on supporting a **resilient and inclusive economy** for Kent and Medway.

Thank you for your continued engagement, and I hope you find this update useful.

Warm regards,

David Wimble

Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects



P.S. You can use the navigation icon in the bottom right of your screen to move quickly between sections.

Economic Development & Special Projects (2026/27)



Our **Economic Development and Special Projects portfolio** supports **business growth, strategic planning and investment in places**. This combines **Council investment with income and external funding** to maximise impact.

For **2026 to 2027**, the **gross budget is £6.3m**, offset by **£2.2m of income**, resulting in a **net budget requirement of around £4.1m**. This means roughly **one third** of the portfolio's gross budget is funded through **income and external sources**.

Across the portfolio, funding supports a mix of **frontline delivery, commissioning and statutory functions**.

Income and external funding are generated in a number of ways.

Business Investment (Economy) provides **0% interest loans** through the [Kent and Medway Business Fund \(KMBF\)](#), including **Standard Loans (£100k to £750k)** and **Small Business Boost loans (£26k to £99k)**.

These are delivered through a **government-backed fund managed by KCC**, with repayments recycled to support future investment. The fund is **self-sustaining through loan repayments**, and since 2012 the **KMBF and its predecessors** have invested **more than £75 million** in loans, using both original and recycled funds from an initial allocation of **£55 million**, helping businesses across **Kent and Medway** to **grow, invest and create jobs**.

Planning Applications generate income through **fees and charges**, including **pre-application advice, development management and enforcement activity**. This includes determining **county matters** such as **waste and minerals**, as well as **Regulation 3 applications** including schools. Maintaining capacity ensures the Council can meet **government timescales** and **performance standards**, while supporting **timely delivery of development**.

Developer Contributions, including **Section 106** and the **Community Infrastructure Levy**, secure funding from new developments via **Local Planning Authorities**. In **2024 to 2025**, this secured **£31.7 million** in contributions across Kent, with **£24 million received** and **£17.2 million invested** into **local infrastructure**, including **education and transport**, helping to meet the demands of growth.

Broadband activity supports the delivery of industry-funded and **government-led programmes** to extend **gigabit capable networks**. While funding is led nationally, KCC plays a key role in **enabling and facilitating delivery in Kent**, helping to unlock continued **provider investment** and improve **connectivity for residents and businesses**. Government data shows nearly a quarter of Kent properties lack access to gigabit capable broadband. We are therefore continuing to advocate strongly for the county's connectivity needs, ensuring that homes and businesses are not left behind and can access the fast, reliable broadband they require.

This approach allows **income and external funding** to offset the cost of services while continuing to invest in **key programmes**. It ensures the Council can support **business growth, strategic planning and infrastructure** in a way that is **sustainable**, delivers **measurable impact**, and represents **clear value for money**.



Kent and Medway Economic Partnership



Over 200 stakeholders help shape the future of Kent and Medway



1 - Sector workshops provided a platform for partners to share insights and priorities for future growth.

More than **200 stakeholders** came together to help shape the **future of Kent and Medway's economy**, as the **Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP)** hosted a series of [Local Growth Plan workshops](#) between **11 and 15 May 2026**.

The team brought together **businesses, universities, councils, colleges, and voluntary and community sector organisations** to **share insights** and ensure the **Local Growth Plan** will reflect the **real priorities, challenges and opportunities** facing the region.

The programme included **sector-focused sessions** alongside a **cross-cutting workshop**, covering:

- **Digital and Technologies** (University of Kent)
- **Agri-food and Agri-tech** (East Malling)
- **Energy** (Medway Campus, Chatham)
- **Ports, Transport and Logistics** (Ashford)
- **Cross-cutting priorities** (Ashford)

Across these sessions, the focus was on **shared priorities**, including **skills and workforce development, infrastructure and connectivity**, and **innovation**, as well as how to strengthen **Kent and Medway's nationally significant assets in food, trade, energy and digital industries**.

The **level of participation and engagement** shows a clear **shared ambition** to deliver **sustainable, long-term economic growth** across Kent and Medway.

These insights will now **directly inform the Local Growth Plan**, shaping **future priorities, investment and partnership working**.



Kent County Council is calling on the Government to urgently get Project Gigabit back on track

On **26 May**, the Government announced it will **scale back parts of Project Gigabit** with **CityFibre**, meaning **fewer homes and businesses** will receive **publicly funded broadband connections**.

Project Gigabit is a **£5 billion national programme** aimed at delivering **gigabit capable broadband** to **hard to reach areas**, with a target of **near universal UK coverage by 2032**. As part of this, **Building Digital UK** awarded a **£112 million contract** to CityFibre to connect **over 50,000 rural homes and businesses** across **Kent and Medway**.

This work focused on areas unlikely to benefit from **commercial rollout alone**. However, despite the contract being awarded in **January 2024**, only **2,300 premises** have been connected to date. The programme is now expected to be **reduced to around 8,000 properties**.

This creates **significant uncertainty** for thousands of homes and businesses across Kent who were expecting improved connectivity, alongside the **80,000 premises** already outside any **planned government or industry upgrade**.

Reliable broadband is essential for **daily life, economic activity** and **public services**.

I have written to the Minister to request an **urgent meeting** to understand how the Government intends to **address the reduction in delivery, restore progress**, and ensure that **residents and businesses** across Kent can access the **connectivity they need**.

👉 [Read more here.](#)

Strengthening Cross-Channel Relationships





I recently joined Kent's Straits Committee partners in The Hague, the Netherlands, on 18 and 19 June. Among the items we discussed was **new funding available for partnerships in training, education, youth work and sport** through the Erasmus+ programme.

With the UK due to take part from **2027**, there is **strong interest across Europe in working with Kent**. The **British Council**, which will manage funding in the UK, recently invited **Lucy Druesne** from **Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce** and **Paul Sayers** from **East Kent College Group** to speak in **Brussels**, where they shared how **Erasmus+ could support skills pathways in Kent**. 🖱 [More from Lucy Druesne on Erasmus+](#)

Working closely with our **international partners** so our areas can **benefit together** remains **central to this work**.

I also welcomed recent comments from the **British Ambassador to Belgium**, who highlighted the **strength of cross-Channel cooperation** between **Kent and the Province of West Flanders**.

During a visit to **Bruges**, the Ambassador met with **Governor Carl Decaluwé** and reflected on the **shared interests between the UK and Belgium** at this **important point of connection**.

This recognition highlighted the importance of our partnership in supporting **coastal security, critical infrastructure resilience** and **efficient cross-Channel links**, all of which are **essential for trade and economic activity**.

It also underlined the value of **continued cooperation** in addressing **complex challenges such as migration**, where **joint working, information sharing and operational coordination** remain critical.

This reinforced the strength of the **long-standing relationship between Kent and West Flanders** and the role it plays in **delivering practical outcomes for both communities**.

👉 [The British Ambassador to Belgium's post](#)

Skills Bootcamp



Supporting Residents into work

The [Skills Bootcamps programme](#) continues to deliver **strong outcomes** for residents and businesses across **Kent and Medway**.

Of the **500 learners** who enrolled in **Wave 6** between **July 2025** and **March 2026**, **92% successfully completed** their training and achieved a qualification, **exceeding the national average**.

Encouragingly, **43% of learners** have already secured a **positive outcome**, including **new employment, career progression** or **additional work for those who are self employed**. Further outcomes are expected as more learners progress in the months ahead.

Most of the remaining **8%** withdrew after moving **directly into employment**, rather than disengaging from the programme. This reflects **strong demand from employers** across the area.

Find out more:

👉 **Skills Bootcamps and employment support**

👉 [Support to help you get into work](#)



Grow In Kent

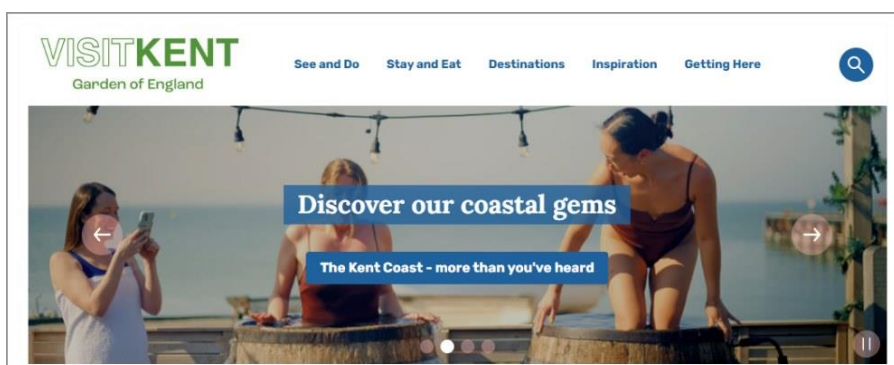


Visit Kent



May marked an important milestone for **Visit Kent**, as the team hosted their **first partner networking event since the relaunch**, bringing together **40 partner businesses** from across the county at **Leeds Castle**.

The event included a strong line-up of speakers. **David Edwards (Scattered Clouds)** shared insight into **domestic and international visitor trends**. **Claire Ford (VisitEngland)** set out a **national perspective** on the direction of the **visitor economy**, and **Helen Bonser-Wilton (Leeds Castle)** outlined **future plans** for one of Kent's **key attractions**.

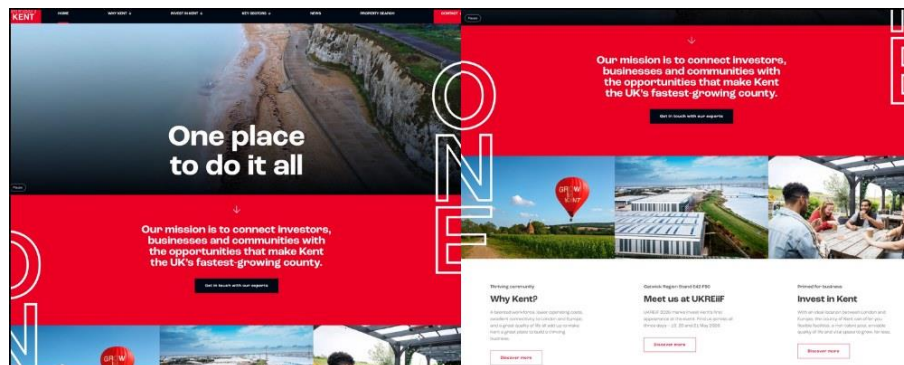


Alongside this, the team launched a major new coastal campaign, **The Kent Coast: More Than You've Heard**. Supported by **SELEP legacy funding**, the campaign is designed to **challenge outdated perceptions** of Kent's coastline and highlight its **landscape, heritage** and **modern visitor offer**.

The campaign is underpinned by **new video and photography**, captured across all coastal districts, and a **media campaign running through to early autumn**, including **social media, search engines, targeted online advertising, and outdoor advertising such as billboards and posters**.

Each coastal district is supported by a **dedicated landing page on visitkent.co.uk**, alongside a **robust measurement framework**, including a **YouGov study, analysis of online conversations and feedback about Kent on social media, and footfall tracking**, to assess both **visitor numbers and perception change**.

Invest Kent



2 - [Visit the new Invest Kent website](#)

April saw the launch of the new [Invest Kent website](#), marking a significant step forward in how **Kent and Medway** are presented to **investors and businesses**.

The site brings together **investment opportunities, priority sectors and commercial property availability** in one place, making it easier for businesses to understand what Kent has to offer and to progress investment decisions.

The focus is on connecting **investors, businesses and communities**, supporting projects from **initial interest through to delivery**, and strengthening Kent's position as a **leading location for growth**.

In May, this work was taken to a national stage at [UKREiF \(19 to 21 May, Leeds, Yorkshire\)](#), the UK's leading **real estate and infrastructure forum**, which brings together **investors, developers and partners** from across the sector.

As part of the **Gatwick Region Airport Economic Zone stand**, Invest Kent hosted a **dedicated Kent networking reception** and led a **stand takeover**, providing an opportunity to showcase the **scale and ambition of investment** across the county.

Connect to Work



Strong First-Year Results

The **Connect to Work programme** has made strong early progress since delivery began in **June 2025**, with **1,946 participants supported within the first eight months**.

Referrals have been received from a wide range of partners, including **Primary Care Networks, local authority care teams, justice services and education providers**, reflecting growing confidence in the programme and effective **cross-system working**.

Early employment outcomes are encouraging, with the conversion rate from **programme start to first earnings increasing**.

Delivery has expanded further in **2026**, with **Forward Trust** and **Shaw Trust** joining **The Education People** as delivery partners. Mobilisation has progressed well, alongside the introduction of a **new CRM system**, with all providers now fully operational.

Early performance in the new financial year is strong, with delivery already **ahead of the anticipated start profile**, supporting continued **growth in reach and impact**.

Participant insight continues to shape delivery. The most commonly identified barriers to employment are **mental health conditions, autism and learning disabilities**, underlining the need for **personalised and specialist employment support**.

Engagement remains strong, with ongoing activity involving **Primary Care Networks, the voluntary and community sector and employers**.

👉 [Find out more.](#)



3 - Connect to Work: Connor's Journey

Kent & Medway Growth Hub



The [Kent and Medway Growth Hub](#) continues to play an important role in supporting businesses across the county to **grow, adapt and succeed**.

During the **2025 to 2026 financial year**, the Hub supported **1,400 businesses** looking to progress. Of these, **746** received up to **one hour of targeted support**, **545** accessed **one to twelve hours**, and **109** received **more than twelve hours of in-depth guidance**, delivering a total of **3,748 hours of support**.

This **tiered approach** ensures businesses receive the **right level of support** for their needs, whether they are **starting out** or **scaling up**. The Hub connects businesses with a wide range of **free and part funded services** across Kent and the boroughs, helping them **navigate challenges** and **plan for growth**.

Two **mentoring programmes** were delivered: a **general programme supporting 30 businesses**, and a **high street programme supporting 40 businesses**, with each receiving **between one and twelve hours of tailored support**.

This was supported by a programme of **practical workshops**, covering:

- **Adapting to changing markets**

- Promotion and marketing techniques
- Customer service and retention
- Attracting and retaining customers
- Starting a business
- Search engine optimisation (SEO)
- Photography and storytelling
- Social media and digital marketing
- Using AI in business

Alongside this, the Hub delivered **13 district roadshows**, supporting **local networking activity** and strengthening links with businesses across the county.

Find out more:

👉 [Kent & Medway Growth Hub](#)

Investing in Kent Businesses



The [Kent and Medway Business Fund](#) continues to deliver **clear benefits to the local economy**, supporting **business growth**, **innovation** and **job creation** across the county.

Following its **relaunch in late 2023**, after successful negotiations with Government to retain the **rolling fund**, the programme has continued to demonstrate its **economic value**.

Between **20 February 2024 and 31 March 2026**, the fund recommended **80 loans**, totalling **£9.75 million**. Of these, **38 loans**, valued at **£4.94 million**, were recommended during the **2025 to 2026 financial year**.

Investment has been delivered across the county:

- **East Kent: £2.77 million**
- **Mid and North Kent: £1.02 million**

- **West Kent: £1.15 million**

The fund has supported a wide range of sectors, including **accommodation and food services, administrative and support services, arts, entertainment and recreation, construction, education, financial and insurance activities, human health and social work, information and communication, manufacturing, other service activities, professional, scientific and technical services, real estate, transport and storage, and wholesale and retail trade.**

This reflects the strength and diversity of businesses across Kent, with investment reaching firms that are **embedded in their local communities**, creating **employment opportunities** and supporting **local services**.

Find out more:

👉 [Kent & Medway Business Fund](#)

Investment Approved to Deliver New Business Workspace Across Kent



4 - Works underway at Manston Business Park

Following a decision by the **Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee** in **September 2025** to allocate **£6 million** for new **commercial workspace** across Kent, two projects have now progressed to delivery.

In **February 2026**, the **KMBF Investment Advisory Board** approved **£3.8 million of short-term loan funding** to support both schemes.

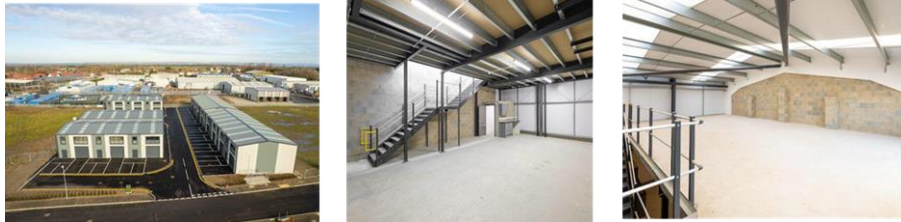
Contracts were completed in March 2026, and both projects are now underway, with **initial funding released** following legal completion.

Together, the projects will deliver **31 new business units**, including **18 units at Coronet Park (New Romney)** and **13 units at Manston Business Park (Thanet)**, increasing the supply of **high-quality workspace** across the county.

This investment supports the priorities set out in the **Kent and Medway Economic Framework**, particularly **enabling innovative, productive and creative businesses** and improving **access to workspace** to support growth.

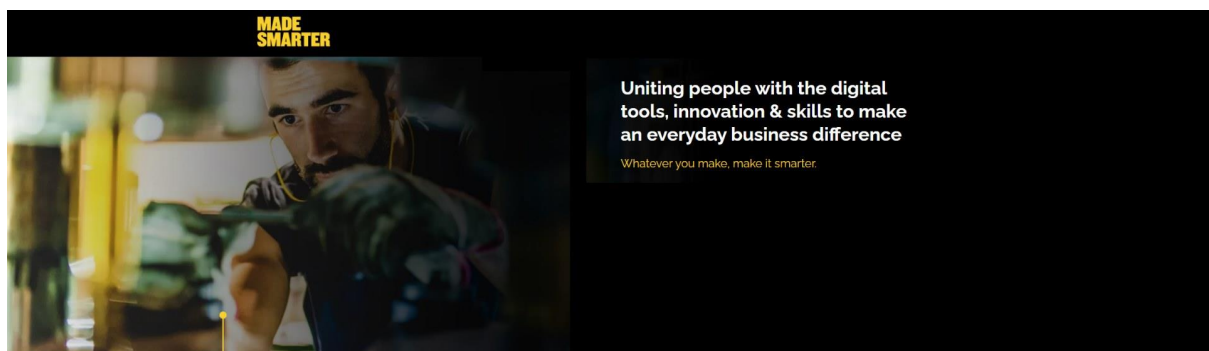
Find out more:

👉 [No Use Empty programme](#)



5 - Images of proposed site at Coronet Park

Made Smarter Programme



Supporting Kent-based business Art4Site

The [Made Smarter programme](#) continues to support local businesses to **adopt new technologies** and improve **productivity through digital innovation**.

A recent **case study**, featuring [Art4Site](#), a **Kent-based SME**, highlights how this support is being delivered in practice, showing how businesses are benefiting from **digital adoption** and **innovation**.

[The case study](#) demonstrates how businesses are engaging with the programme and the **practical impact** this is having on their **operations** and **growth**.

Sharing examples like this helps to show the **real impact** of the programme, and how it is supporting businesses across Kent to **innovate**, improve **productivity** and **drive growth**.

👉 [Read the full case study here](#)

Produced in Kent



[The Taste of Kent Awards](#) mark their **20th anniversary** this year, recognising the **strength, innovation** and **contribution** of Kent's food and drink sector.

The **Taste of Kent Awards 2026** were launched at the **University of Greenwich's Natural Resources Institute in Chatham Maritime** and will celebrate the **best of Kent's independent food, drink, hospitality and retail businesses**. Organised by **Produced in Kent**, the awards are the **South East's longest-running and most established programme** of their kind.

The awards highlight the important role these businesses play in supporting **jobs, tourism** and **investment**, while strengthening Kent's reputation for **high-quality produce** and **hospitality**.

This year includes **24 categories**, covering **food and drink products, dining experiences** and **independent retail**. In recognition of the challenges facing businesses, entry to **four public vote categories** will be **free**, helping to encourage wider participation.

Previous winners have reflected the value of the awards in raising their **profile**, attracting **new customers** and supporting **business growth**.

The awards are supported by a wide range of organisations, including **Kent County Council**, reflecting a shared commitment to **supporting local enterprise** and promoting the sector.

The awards ceremony will take place on **8 October 2026** at the **GlassBox Theatre in Medway**, the first time the event has been held in the area.





Alongside the awards, **Produced in Kent** has continued to promote the sector through wider activity, including a recent **Taste of Kent and Medway event at the Houses of Parliament**.

The event brought together a range of businesses to showcase Kent's **food and drink offer** to **MPs, members of the House of Lords** and **parliamentary staff**, helping to raise awareness of the sector's importance to the **national economy**.

Businesses represented included **The Wooden Spoon Preserving Company**, celebrating **50 years in business**, and **Orisons**, a new bakery supported through a **Kent and Medway Business Fund loan**, highlighting both **established success** and **new growth** within the sector.

This work demonstrates the continued importance of the **food and drink sector** to both the **local economy** and **communities**, and the value of promoting Kent's offer at a **national level**.

Find out more:

👉 [Taste of Kent Awards 2026](#)

Supporting Community Facilities Across Kent



KCC's [Village and Community Hall Grant Scheme](#), which has supported local projects for **almost 30 years**, continues to invest in **community facilities** across the county.

Recent awards include:

- **Borough Green Village Hall (Tonbridge and Malling): £8,000** for new **accessible toilet facilities**
- **Blue Bell Hill Village Hall (Tonbridge and Malling): £7,500** to create **additional off-road parking**, improving **safety for users**
- **Hamstreet Victory Hall (Ashford): £2,375** to improve **drainage in the outdoor play area**
- **Knockholt Village Centre (Sevenoaks): £10,000** to refurbish an **unused hall**, creating space for a **local pre-school**
- **Biddenden Village Hall (Ashford): £5,000** towards replacing an **inefficient boiler system**

These projects demonstrate the ongoing importance of **community spaces** in supporting **local services, activities** and **social connection** across Kent.

👉 For more information email: mark.reeves@kent.gov.uk

👉 Or visit: [Village and Community Hall Grant Scheme - Kent County Council](#)



Funding Opportunities for Businesses and Community Organisations



The latest edition of Kent County Council's [*Inside Track funding newsletter*](#) is now available, providing up-to-date information on **national, regional and local funding opportunities** for the **voluntary and community sector** and **businesses across Kent**.

This edition includes:

- **Queen Elizabeth Trust** – support for **community spaces**
- **UnLtd** – awards for **social entrepreneurs**
- **The Wildlife Trusts** – **Green Community Grants Programme**
- **Department for Work and Pensions** – **Youth Jobs Grant**
- Information on **over 70 grant and loan schemes**
- A **directory of organisations** offering **support and advice**

👉 To receive the newsletter directly, email: KCCInsideTrack@kent.gov.uk

👉 You can also sign up for free funding searches via [Kent4Community](#).

Kent Ambassadors





6 - *Linden Kemkaran speaking to the audience*



7 - Audience gathered at Maidstone Studios for a media-focused dinner briefing with guest speakers.

A recent **media dinner briefing** at **Maidstone Studios** brought together a range of perspectives on the **changing media landscape**.

Linden Kemkaran provided a **Leader's roundup**, alongside contributions from **Rob Smith (Wild Rover Media)** on the future of **TV news and the BBC**, **Neil Webster (Tindle News / Webster Comms)** on changes in **Kent's local media environment**, and **Becky Simms (Reflect Digital)** on the impact of **AI on news and information**. The session provided a useful opportunity to reflect on how information is **produced, shared and trusted**.

A visit to the **Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara in Gravesend** offered valuable insight into **Sikh values** and the role the Gurdwara plays in **supporting its community**, including its commitment to **inclusivity** through services open to all.

Members also visited **Lullingstone Castle and the World Garden**, where **Tom Hart-Dyke** shared the story behind the garden and its development, followed by a tour of the **house, church and grounds**.



8 - Kent Ambassadors visiting Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara in Gravesend during a guided tour.



9 - Tom Hart-Dyke sharing the story behind Lullingstone Castle garden



*Thank
You!*

As this edition shows, there is a strong focus on **delivery and partnership working** across programmes, ensuring **businesses and residents can access the support they need**.

This work contributes to a **resilient and inclusive economy** for **Kent and Medway**, supporting **long term growth and opportunity**.

I would encourage colleagues to share these programmes and opportunities with **partners and businesses** to maximise their impact.

As always, feedback and suggestions for future editions are welcome.

Warm regards,

David
