



# Magnetic Maidstone thriving on economic challenges



Many businesses in Maidstone are flourishing and creating new opportunities in spite of the grim trading conditions prevailing throughout the country. So why are so many firms being drawn to Kent's county town and able to buck the economic trend?

REGIONAL

Maidstone is the administrative and commercial centre of Kent. Recognised as a natural growth point, with a planned £320m investment programme supporting 11,000 new homes and 6,500 new jobs by 2026, Maidstone has the largest economy in the county. Businesses in the town - there are 7,000 of all sizes with access to a 790,000 strong workforce - are thriving in this challenging climate and creating new opportunities. Since April 2007, Locate in Kent, the investment and promotion agency for Kent, has helped 18 companies move to or expand in Maidstone. Sectors attracted to the area include business services, engineering and a growing number from the creative industry.

Maidstone is an ambitious and entrepreneurial town on the move. In partnership with the Royal Institute of British Architects, Maidstone Borough Council is launching a £4m international design competition to re-model the High Street. The outcome will further enhance Maidstone's economic development, increase footfall and generally improve the appeal of the area.

#### LOCATION IS INSURED FOR SUCCESS

Maidstone's great location and excellent communications links are highly significant in helping to shape a business's decision to locate in the area, evidenced by the Towergate Partnership's commitment to Maidstone. Their new eco-friendly,

purpose-built headquarters at Eclipse Park, Maidstone will house over 100 staff. The building totals 38,000 sq ft of high-quality, modern office space over four floors and occupies a prime position at the gateway to Kent.

Paul Dyer, co-founder of Towergate commented: "The new Headquarters has excellent transport links with London via the M25 and M2. Eclipse Park was a natural choice." He continued: "The new building is spacious and will meet our growth demands perfectly. Plus, Maidstone has a ready supply of skilled employees. This will be vital when we recruit new members of staff." Towergate moved to Maidstone in 1998 and has remained committed to the county ever since.

#### FIRM FOUNDATIONS IN MAIDSTONE

Building contractor and developer, GML Construction, has relocated to new self-built headquarters near Maidstone. Having searched for suitable premises around the county through Locate in Kent, the company selected land in Coxheath to build an impressive timber, glass and steel-framed 8,000 sq ft office overlooking the Weald. GML Construction now occupies three of the six suites spread over two storeys. The company continues to recruit locally and has grown by 45 percent over the last year. Paul Wookey, Chief Executive of Locate in Kent, said: "It's a testament to the county that a company managing construction projects all



Centre: Maidstone's high street is in for a makeover thanks to support from the Royal Institute of British Architects: Above: The Orchard House, Coxheath



Above Left: County Gate is an example of good quality town centre office accommodation which compliments attractive retail development;  
Above Right: Gabriels Hill and Fremlin Walk in the heart of Maidstone are popular retail and leisure hotspots

over the country has committed to this location. Not only is GML Construction expanding its own operations in Kent, it is also bringing another quality commercial building to the market."

#### LOCAL NEEDS FIRST

Maidstone-based office refurbishment business, RAP Office Contracts, believes that their continuing success is based on keeping in tune with office refurbishment and furniture trends and offering a personal service. Loyal to the Maidstone business community, they aim to employ local staff and support them with ongoing training. Julie Anderson, Business Development Manager said: "We endeavour to develop existing links with the local community demonstrated by our recent membership of the Maidstone Town Centre Partnership. For us, Maidstone is an attractive business location and even though we have a UK-wide client base we take particular care of our local businesses."

#### GREEN, THE NEW GOLD

Kent is known as the "Garden of England" so it should come as no surprise to learn that green businesses are flourishing in Maidstone. Set up in 2004, Ridge Crest Cleaning has quickly delivered sales growth of more than 2,200 percent. This phenomenal growth is due to their commitment to delivering a quality personal service

in an eco-friendly manner. They achieved their breakthrough in 2005 through the launch of the UK's first green cleaning contract in partnership with Maidstone Borough Council.

Ian Beach, Managing Director, explains the secret of his success: "Use of fewer, but more effective, green products offers up to a 20 percent cost saving, so many of our clients can see an immediate return on investment early on in the contract." Ridge Crest recently won cleaning contracts for Homewood School and Sixth Form Centre, the largest school in Kent and The Bradbourne School, a visual arts college of 900 in Sevenoaks.

#### IN THE BAG WITH IMAGINATIVE WORKFORCE

Dempson Crooke Limited has taken the lead in producing "green" paper carriers and packaging consumables for over 50 years. With design and production facilities at their Maidstone base, backed up by engineering in Bosnia, Dempson Crooke has developed design credentials to match their environmental products. They carefully select materials to ensure all paper is recycled or manufactured from sustainable forests and use their innovations to reduce the materials used by customers. Jon Katzauer, Managing Director said: "We are fortunate in having a committed and imaginative workforce at our head office in Maidstone. Our employees

fully support and develop our eco-friendly initiatives."

#### FLEXIBILITY FROM FIRM ROOTS

Specialist process engineering contractor, RB Plant Construction Limited, has steadily built a reputation for delivering major projects within financial and time constraints. RB Plant has a respected name for its high quality, responsive approach to project engineering and management. Success stems from their flexible approach to meeting customer needs and the management of project costs. With firmly established roots in Maidstone, the business is well placed to sustain its growth. Jeffrey Davies, Managing Director said: "Our Maidstone location continues to give us a competitive advantage; with the town's excellent transport links we're able to meet local, national and international needs on time and on budget."

#### BARCELONA MEETS MAIDSTONE?

Thanks to a £4m initiative with the Royal Institute of British Architects, Maidstone's High Street is in for a major makeover. Cabinet Minister for Regeneration, Councillor Malcolm Greer wants the High Street to mirror places such as Vienna, Paris and Barcelona. He said: "I have high hopes that we can make the High Street a focal

point of the town." Continuing, he commented: "Through creative and innovative design and public art, we are seeking ideas and approaches for a £4m public realm improvement project." The winning proposal will need to revitalise the High Street, enhance Maidstone's distinctiveness as the county town of Kent, improve its connectivity with the River Medway and further act as a magnet for new businesses to locate in the town".

Maidstone is a town with a clear sense of purpose, aware of its heritage and confident about the future. Its location, communications and transport links, skilled workforce and entrepreneurial culture are already proving that even when economic times are hard, there are opportunities to grow and succeed. 🏠

#### MAIDSTONE KEY FACTS:

- £320 million investment programme
- 500,000 sq ft planned office space
- 60% lower than London (office rents)
- 6,500 new jobs by 2026

#### For more information please contact:

John Foster  
Economic Development Manager  
Maidstone Borough Council  
01622 602394  
johnfoster@maidstone.gov.uk  
locateinmaidstone.com