



Maidstone's model for success

CAN YOU BELIEVE IT:
IT HITS ALL THE
RIGHT BUTTONS

In 2006, Maidstone achieved Growth Point status. Over the next 20 years a £320 million investment programme will lead to the creation of 11,000 new homes and up to 10,000 new jobs. Maidstone has the largest economy in Kent, of which it is also the county town. Businesses in the town - there are 7,000 of all sizes with access to a 790,000 strong workforce in Kent - are facing up to the economic challenges and many are creating new opportunities. Since April 2007, Locate in Kent, the investment promotion agency for Kent and Medway, has helped 18 companies move to or expand in Maidstone.

Paul Wookey, Chief Executive of Locate in Kent, said: "Popular sectors in the area include business services, engineering and a growing number from the creative industries. Most of the investments in

Maidstone are from the UK, but it has attracted interest from overseas, with two German companies relocating to the town since last year." Already home to 142,800 people, Maidstone is ideally located between London and the Channel ports. It is well served by the M20 and M2 motorways and benefits from excellent rail connections to the capital and beyond.

Good design is the key

With big money available, Maidstone's growth will be led by high quality design and good planning to ensure that distinctive and sustainable developments result from the massive investment due to take place in the Borough over the next 20 years. Maidstone Borough Council and its key partners have created economic development and growth strategies and are master planning new communities.

Strengthening the town centre

Creating a higher quality retail and leisure offer aimed at attracting and retaining more expenditure is a major part of this strategy. The pace of progress in meeting this objective has been brisk. Fremlin Walk, which opened in 2005, is ranked in the top ten retail centres in the region, and top 50 in the UK. With more than 1.5m sq ft of floor space in Maidstone, it equates to Bluewater in size.

In addition, thanks to a multi million pound initiative with the Royal Institute of British Architects, Maidstone's High Street is in for a major makeover. Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Councillor Malcolm Greer wants the High Street to mirror



MALCOLM GREER

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." By ensuring that the town centre offers the most beneficial trading environment will mean that Maidstone is well placed to attract new private sector investment coming out of the recession.

Knowledge based businesses

Another key objective is to attract more knowledge intensive companies from the service sector. Maidstone's great location and excellent communications links are highly significant in helping to shape a company's decision to locate in the area, evidenced by the Towergate Partnership's commitment to the area. Their recently opened £12m eco friendly, purpose built headquarters at Eclipse Park houses 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. Peter Cullum, co founder of Towergate commented: "We have quite a big presence in Kent, and Maidstone is where we really started to get traction in the business." Facing up to the challenging times, he continued: "Our aim is still growth... and if you've got cash, now is a great time to be investing".

Creatives industries

Maidstone is also proving to be highly attractive to media companies. Helping to drive this growth is MediaTree, a Maidstone based Kent wide networking organisation for the creative industries. It's working with leading media businesses in Maidstone to support talent and make the most of opportunities that exist in the area, with a strong emphasis on benefiting the industry locally. Geoff Miles, Maidstone Studios enthused:



MAIDSTONE'S GREAT LOCATION AND EXCELLENT COMMUNICATIONS LINKS ARE HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT IN HELPING TO SHAPE A COMPANY'S DECISION TO LOCATE IN THE AREA

"Maidstone benefits from an attractive blend of hi tech facilities, heritage and experienced professionals. MediaTree (<http://www.mediatree.org.uk>) is doing a great job in putting together a network based around the 790 media and creative businesses already here." And with more than 600 students at The University for the Creative Arts in Maidstone, the town is set to continue to attract new media businesses to the area.

Space to grow

Maidstone has more to offer than an enhanced town centre. Eclipse Park is the town's prestige business park and is already home to a wide range of businesses including Towergate, asb Law, DHA Planning and Software of Excellence. When complete it will total more than 16 acres of Grade A commercial development and deliver more than 400,000 sq ft of floor space and a quality hotel. Nick Yandle, chief executive of developer Gallagher Properties, said: "The excellent road and transport links from Eclipse Park provide fast access to the rest of Kent, to London and indeed Europe". Much lauded for its sustainability, the buildings feature green roofs, sustainable urban drainage systems and rain water harvesting.

Space to enjoy

It's not all hustle and bustle in Maidstone. The town is on a river, close to some beautiful Weald countryside and charming Kentish villages. Brenchley

Gardens, Mote Park and the Maidstone Millennium River Park (featuring landscaped open space and public art plus luxury riverside apartments) are all close to the town centre. 40% of new residential properties will be affordable whilst sustained investment in public transport means that quality urban living is becoming a reality for many Maidstone residents.

Too good to be true?

Maidstone has several key advantages over many of its competitor locations. Its proximity to London and the Continent, excellent transport links, lower housing costs, ready supply of skilled labour and availability of quality commercial properties all make for a highly attractive proposition. Throw in its Growth Point Status, £320 million and the promise of a great place to live and relax, and that proposition becomes almost irresistible. Of course no location is immune from the effects of the recession and many businesses undoubtedly have to adapt to survive. But Maidstone is ideally placed to weather the economic storm and emerge as an even better location in which to invest. JOHN FOSTER

For more information about locating your business in Maidstone contact John Foster, Economic Development Manager, 01622 602394, email: johnfooster@maidstone.gov.uk or visit www.locateinmaidstone.co.uk