

## **EKC Group consultation response to Canterbury City Council's draft vision for the district's future**

I am writing on behalf of EKC Group in response to Canterbury City Council's draft vision for the district's future.

EKC Group is a family of six Colleges and four business units which provide a range of educational provision that spans the whole of East Kent. Our Group includes Ashford College, Broadstairs College, Canterbury College, Dover Technical College, Folkestone College, Sheppey College, EKC WorkHigher, EKC IntoWork, EKC DigitalLearn and EKC Commercial Services.

As one of the largest providers of post 16 education in Kent and the south east, we are pleased to be invited to contribute to this important policy consultation. Our Canterbury College is the largest within our Group, with more than 3,000 students annually training with us.

Within the Draft Strategic Objectives section, we are supportive of the preferred option, but believe that further education should also be included. This is due to the significant skills training delivered through the College, with new T Levels in Health and Science being delivered which will provide a clear pathway into both higher education and key sectors in the locality. Following the pandemic, it has also become ever more important for adults to be able to access retraining and upskilling opportunities which we provide flexibly for many within the district. Our Apprenticeship and Higher Education provision also

### **Town centre strategies**

As a Group which has sustainability as one of our core priorities, we are strongly supportive of the draft objective around the provision of green infrastructure. Whilst we are broadly supportive of the draft objectives for Canterbury, we would like to see further education included within the facilitation of business growth. We would therefore suggest that the point is altered to read: *"Facilitate business growth and development in the city by supporting the growth and development of further and higher education providers to stimulate business start-ups and associated economic development."*

### **Housing and new communities**

Whilst student accommodation is a clear issue within Canterbury, this is not the case with regard to Canterbury College. This is because the vast majority of our students are drawn from the local communities where they have grown up, with many still residing with parents or carers. As a consequence, it would not be accurate to state that accommodation is required for College students. Within Issue HNC11, whilst we are supportive of the preferred option, it would likely be worth removing reference to further education provision due to the lack of need for student accommodation.

Within Delivering infrastructure to support growth, we are supportive of Option HNC14C. However, where any new secondary school is developed, we would expect there to be consideration taken of existing capacity within post-16 providers such as our own. We would be particularly concerned about any future proposals to expand school sixth form provision.

### **Employment and the local economy**

Within Issue EMP2, we are supportive of the preferred option (EMP2C). However, as a significant skills provider, and one which works in partnership with many employers in the area, we would suggest the inclusion of further education providers in this. We would therefore suggest that the preferred option's sentence is amended to read: "This might include providing activities related to further and higher education providers, or flexible and co-working space in accessible urban locations."

Within Issue EMP6, we would ask that further education receives more prominence. Given that Government is promoting further education as a key element of the nation's skills agenda, we would suggest that it plays greater prominence within this area of the draft vision. As we provide T Levels, Apprenticeships and HE which offer further progression into university pathways, we believe that Canterbury College should also be included within this section. As our students are drawn predominantly from the district, they are far more likely to stay following study. This means that the Council should have a vested interest in supporting local students' studies and their progression through the College. We would therefore suggest that Option EMP6B (the preferred option) should be reworded to include the college alongside its university partners.

