
DRAFT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR ROCHFORD DISTRICT

March 2007



**Rochford District
Council**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Draft

Contents

	Page
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 ENGAGING WITH STAKEHOLDERS	2
3 KEY ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS.....	2
4 PHYSICAL OVERVIEW OF THE DISTRICT.....	3
5 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK.....	3
6 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS	4
Block 4: Economic Development	4
7 ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR	4
8 KEY ISSUES FOR THE AREA	6
9 THE STRATEGY – THE NEXT 5 YEARS	7
10 RESOURCING THE PLAN.....	8
11 FUNDING	9
12 DIRECT FUNDING TO BUSINESS OR BUSINESS SUPPORT AGENCIES.....	9
13 INDIRECT FUNDING OF BUSINESSES IN ROCHFORD DISTRICT PURCHASING POLICIES	9
14 WORKING WITH OTHER AGENCIES.....	9
15 SUPPORTING BIDS FOR FUNDING	9
Economic Development Action Plan 2007–2011	10
APPENDIX 1	16

Draft

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The 'Knowledge economy' expresses a trend in the UK economy towards higher value goods and services, recognising lower value activity is relocating to the Far East and Central Europe in particular. This Economic Development Strategy looks towards embedding higher-value activity within the District.
- 1.2 National and Regional Government have earmarked the Thames Gateway as the single largest regeneration project in Britain. This strategy links with the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnerships Delivering the Future document (2003) and draft Economic Development Strategy (2007) and takes into account the emerging and revised Regional Economic Strategy.
- 1.3 Thames Gateway South Essex sub region (TGSE) has a diverse and fragile economy. Whilst being on the edge of London and within the Thames Gateway, the baseline analysis shows that the sub region has underperformed in comparison with the East of England Region and the UK.
- 1.4 The industrial decline of the 1980's has resulted in a loss of business particularly in the manufacturing sector and general under investment. Whilst there is low unemployment the sub region has a below average skilled workforce.
- 1.5 The "Delivering TGSE's Economic Future" Report by KPMG, 2005, emphasised the important role of TGSE due to its strategic location within the wider Thames Gateway. Considerable change to its economy and social environment is planned over the next two decades: the draft Regional Spatial Strategy, produced by the East of England Regional Assembly, forecasts a growth of 55,000 net additional jobs by 2021. TGSE is well placed having good regional road, port and rail connections to London, the regions and Europe and existing strong business clusters focusing on the following sectors: Transport, Logistics and Distribution.
- 1.6 Further developing regeneration of the District's employment areas and town centres will seek to meet aspirations of the community and begin to sow the seeds for a more dynamic and sustainable employment locally. This in turn will assist in making Rochford District a location of choice for businesses and employees alike.



Map: Thames Gateway South Essex

2 ENGAGING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

- 2.1 This strategy will not be achieved by Rochford District alone and is dependent upon partnership working. The partnership approach is to build on the work and achievements of existing organisations, thereby widening ownership of economic development activity. Further information relating to the leading partnership organisations is available in appendix 1.

3 KEY ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

- 3.1 In 2004, the people in Rochford of 'working age' were, men between the age of 16-64 and women 16-59. 39,000 of the Districts residents are in employment whilst statistics supplied by the Rayleigh Job Centre in July 2004 state there is only 1% unemployment, compared to the national figure of 2.3% of the working population.
- 3.2 There are 21,000 jobs in the District, predominately in the retail, wholesale and Service sectors. Rochford has significantly more unfilled job vacancies relative to population than other areas locally in Essex. Businesses in the District confirm problems with finding staff to fill their vacancies due to limited labor supply.
- 3.3 There are few large businesses – only 5 employ more than 250 staff. There is some dependence on the largest employers in the District for high value jobs. Two of the largest employers in the District are in the manufacturing sector, they confirm a shortage of skilled engineers. The total number of VAT registered businesses in the area at the end of 2004 stood at 2575.
- 3.4 A high proportion of the Rochford workforce commutes out of the District. 30% travel to work in Southend, 14% to London, 9% to Basildon and about 15% travel elsewhere outside the District. 91.6% of young people aged 16 to 24 year olds are in full time education or employment. Youth unemployment is relatively high with 9% of 16-24 year olds unemployed in 2004. This varies widely in local areas from 14% in Rochford to 5% in Castle Point. Anecdotal evidence supports that; people prefer to commute to London where the salaries are higher.
- 3.5 67% of the resident population cannot afford private rental and home ownership is beyond the reach of 75% of concealed households, even though nearly 40% of them earn over £25,000 p.a. Local residents confirm the price of accommodation in the District is higher than the national average. Statistics from Land Registry (Oct-Dec 2006) confirm the average house price for Rochford District was £228,000, East Anglia £193,000, the South East £248,000 in comparison to the North West of £153,000. The national house price for England and Wales is £177,099.
- 3.6 55.4% of 15-year-old pupils in local authority schools are achieving five or more GCSE's at Grade A*-C or equivalent. 79.0% of the working age population were in employment between March 2003 and February 2004. This compares with an average of 75% for Great Britain. 1.1% of the working age population were claiming Job Seekers Allowance as of March 2005. 5.8% of all people

claiming Job Seekers Allowance had been out of work for more than a year, (March 2005).

- 3.7 The District of Rochford has less deprivation than the average for the Essex Districts, and the County as a whole. Only 1% of the population of Rochford District live in the most deprived 'super output' areas in the country. 7.5% of the population of working age claim key benefits. 10.3% of the population over 60 live in households that are income deprived.
- 3.8 Every three years the government publishes the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. This is a system that looks nationally at areas of deprivation. Rochford is ranked the third most affluent District in Essex and 316th least deprived nationally out of a total of 354. However, there are some pockets of deprivation in specific locations.

4 PHYSICAL OVERVIEW OF THE DISTRICT

- 4.1 Contained within 168.35 sq km (65 square miles), Rochford District covers an area that is predominantly rural in character, with miles of unspoilt coastline and attractive countryside. Located 14 miles from the M25, Rochford offers an enviable transport network, with easy access to Europe and beyond.
- 4.2 London Southend Airport, located adjacent to the boundary of neighbouring Southend-on-Sea, is planning a new passenger terminal, visitors centre and railway station to London Liverpool Street Station. Journey time to London by train is less than an hour. The main urban centres are the historic towns of Rochford and Rayleigh, well served with shops and amenities.
- 4.3 The outlying towns and villages offer semi-rural and rural living, combined with easy access to the main centres, and within comfortable reach of the mainline railway and bus services. Included in the District are the historic Hockley Woods (the remains of a royal forest), the island of Foulness, internationally famous as a haven for wildlife, and the Roach Valley Conservation Zone.

5 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

- 5.1 The Council adopted its current Local Plan in June 2006. This provides up to date guidance against which all planning applications are assessed. However, the Council also has to prepare a Local Development Framework (LDF), which will replace the Local Plan from 2009.
- 5.2 The LDF is made up of a number of documents, which will have the same essential features as the Local Plan. The Council has completed two major documents to date – the Local Development Scheme (a timetable as to how all the documents are going to be prepared) and the Statement of Community Involvement (setting out the public consultation arrangements for all future documents).

5.3 Work is currently underway on the Core Strategy, which sets out the sort of place the district will be in 15 years time and sets the planning policy framework to ensure that this is achieved. The Allocations document is also in its initial stages and this will set out the site specific locations for development in the district.

6 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

6.1 Essex's Local Area Agreement is a joint agreement between the county and central government. The County Council works with and is supported by the Borough and District Council's in the Essex County area, plus other public sector partners and the voluntary sector in delivering the targets in the agreement, which currently covers the period 2006 – 2009. The agreement identifies 14 priority areas for delivery over the period, one of which relates to Economic Development. Details on this are outlined below.

6.2 Economic Development Priorities

The three priorities covered by the LAA are as follows under 4 target blocks.

- Priority 5 – Generate inward investment and stimulate business development and innovation.
- Priority 6 – Increase the number of young people who take a job or stay on in education or in training.
- Priority 7 – Increase the number of economically active adults who have level 2 or higher qualifications.

6.3 The Council has set up a local Economic Development Sub Group consisting of private sector representation and key stakeholders Feeding into Rochford's Local Strategic Partnership to oversee local activity around the LAA.

7 ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR

7.1 The District Council provided funding (£3,400) via the Rochford Chamber of Trade and Commerce and Rochford Parish Council to help implement a Market Town Health check for Rochford town centre and its hinterlands.

7.2 Essex County Council has funded a further £7,000 funding for the Health Check. The 'Rochford Regeneration' report for the Health Check consultation was completed in March 2005. The findings of the report have been considered by the Council and other partners and will be fed into future strategies and actions as appropriate.

7.3 The Council has secured funding from the East of England Development Agency of £40,000 to undertake environmental enhancements for six industrial estates in the District. In addition funding from the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership of £70,000 for enhancements to car-parking and street lighting for Brook Road Industrial Estate and Star Lane has been secured.

- 7.4 £50,000 funding has been obtained via Essex County Council under its Market Town initiative for Rochford Town. This is being used to improve the street scene and the principal gateways into the town.
- 7.5 Initiated numerous breakfast events since 2003. Further events are planned in Partnership with Business Link for Essex with sponsorship from local businesses. Themes include topics such as 'How to Reduce Risk and Save Energy' and 'How to do Business with the Council'
- 7.6 The Council's Economic Development Officer has assisted 24 businesses during 2006.
- 7.7 In partnership with the Federation of Small Businesses the Council has facilitated two 'Unreported Crime' Surveys.
- 7.8 The Council has produced a Business Matters Newsletter produced twice a year, which is circulated to around 2000 businesses located in the District. This Newsletter gives an update on economic activities and events.
- 7.9 The Council has produced a Business Waste Directory for the promotion of commercial recycling and waste.
- 7.10 The Council has secured £13,000 funding has been achieved via the Local Strategic Partnership and Essex County Council for improved street lighting for Rochford Town Centre.
- 7.11 The Council has provided £15,000 funding to assist Rochford, Rayleigh and Hockley Chambers of Trade and Commerce for website development and branding to help raise awareness of their business support activities.
- 7.12 The Council has contributed £3000 sponsorship for the Echo Southend Business Awards 'Environmental Awareness' category. Several businesses located in the District have been finalists.

8 KEY ISSUES FOR THE AREA

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General affluence of residents in the area • Strong entrepreneurial business culture • Improvements to the town centres • Low rents when compared to the rest of the Thames Gateway South Essex area • 21,000 jobs in the District • Higher proportion than national average of construction and blue collar jobs in the District • Low unemployment rates – 1% • Less than the national average reduction in manufacturing sector • No wards are in the most deprived categories (IMD) • High attainment levels of year 11 • High adult learning population • High environmental quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some dependence on the airport related jobs (1500) • Some dependence on largest employers in the District for high value jobs • Out commuting to London • A lot of the workforce locally leave the District for jobs elsewhere • Access to parts of the area for businesses is difficult, and prone to congestion • Lack of investment by owners for the District's industrial estates leads to poor image and reduces their appeal • 61% of commercial premises built post war (1945-1980) • Decline in agricultural sector • 33% of workforce qualified below level 2 • 17% graduates employed locally • Higher than average job vacancy rate • Restrictions with access to coastal areas

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thames Gateway South Essex – providing access to funding, infrastructure and image improvements • Increase potential for green tourism activities and day visits • Potential for 500 new jobs related to the new Cherry Orchard Business Park • Expansion of London Southend Airport • Developing further green infrastructure through the Greengrid Strategy • Expansion of service sector to support the needs of the older population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Belt restrictions • Thames Gateway South Essex – perceived possible threats of additional development over and above the District’s capacity • Non expansion of London Southend Airport • Preferred location for business investment/location in the Thames Gateway South Essex sub region and Essex. • Ageing population • Lack of investment in transport and road infrastructure • Low value retail occupancy in town centres

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9 THE STRATEGY – THE NEXT 5 YEARS

9.1 The previous strategy commenced in 2003 and considerable progress has been made. This strategy seeks to build on what has been achieved so far and focus more on creating quality employment opportunities.

9.2 The key aim of this Economic Development Strategy is to:-

‘work with partners to maximise and encourage economic growth for the benefit of the community in the area, making the District the best place in the County to live, work and visit’

9.3 The aims of the Strategy are to work with partners to:

1. **Raise the profile of Rochford** – We will actively participate in county, sub-regional and regional initiatives to ensure maximum benefit for the District in attracting investment. We will also take advantage of any opportunities to lobby for improved infrastructure or other initiatives to benefit the economy of Rochford.
2. **Support the needs of the business community in the area** – We will ensure that existing or potential businesses have access to quality and effective support to meet their requirements. We will seek to develop the business community within the district to increase its capacity to contribute to the economic prosperity of the district.

3. **Develop the skills of the local workforce** – We will work with partners to ensure that skill levels meet the needs of businesses now and in the future, to maintain low levels of unemployment for the district and improve its attractiveness for new investment. We will seek to secure a better match between workforce skills and business requirements in order to maximise the opportunities for people to work locally.
4. **Develop tourism and heritage** – We will seek to develop initiatives, which provide new high value local employment and wealth generation opportunities. We will support existing and new visitor attractions and facilities that are appropriate to their locality, improve access to and the use of recreation facilities and preserve the districts' heritage for future generations.
5. **Seek to improve town centre vitality and support town centre and industrial estate enhancements** – We will support town centre retailers to enhance their offer and differentiate it from the major retail chains in order to maintain and improve town centre vitality. We will maximise opportunities to improve the environment of our town centres and industrial estates to ensure the area is economically prosperous and competitive.
6. **Support sustainable use of resources** – We will ensure that new investment is sustainable in economic, environmental and social terms and that new and existing businesses minimise their use of resources and creation of waste.

10 RESOURCING THE PLAN

- 10.1 Earlier in the strategy the Council recognised that partnership is an essential part of the Economic Development Strategy and its implementation. This is in part due to the resources available, in terms of staff, time and funding. In addition, as a District Council, the Authority works with the County Council and other County business development bodies to develop economic development. Close working relationships with other local authorities, the Thames Gateway South Essex and Essex Prosperity Forum are essential to secure funding and development opportunities, which would not be available to Rochford District alone.
- 10.2 The District has one dedicated Economic Development Officer in the Corporate Policy Unit. However, economic development activity is something which cuts across many aspects of the Council's work, and therefore involves staff from a range of functions such as Planning, Community Safety, Leisure, Environmental Health, Licensing, Recycling and Council Tax collection.
- 10.3 In addition significant Member, staffing and technical resources are provided as a partner of Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership. Council Officers attend meetings of the Thames Gateway South Essex working groups and the Leader of the Council attends the Board meeting.

11 FUNDING

- 11.1 Whilst the Council offers limited direct funding support to businesses there are a number of other ways in which the local authority provides support to the businesses of Rochford District.

12 DIRECT FUNDING TO BUSINESS OR BUSINESS SUPPORT AGENCIES

- 12.1 The Council currently provides funds to the following agencies:-

Chambers of Trade - £6,000 for projects to support local initiatives. Enterprise Agency - £2,100 Greater Essex Prosperity Forum - £3,500 and Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership - £15,000.

- 12.2 In addition the Council considers requests from businesses for National Non-Domestic Rate relief on a case-by-case basis in proven cases of hardship.

13 INDIRECT FUNDING OF BUSINESSES IN ROCHFORD DISTRICT PURCHASING POLICIES

- 13.1 It is the policy of the Council to try to purchase products and services locally wherever possible. 7% of products and services are purchased from businesses in the Rochford District area and 50% from the Essex area. Most of those for Essex are in neighbouring areas and are therefore relatively local.

14 WORKING WITH OTHER AGENCIES

- 14.1 By working with other agencies in the Council has been able to promote other services and projects in the area..

15 SUPPORTING BIDS FOR FUNDING

- 15.1 The Council can support bids for funding from business support agencies, which may in some cases be a condition of the application, or it may be that support from the Council is helpful.
- 15.2 Opportunities for support of initiatives to meet the objectives of the Economic Development Strategy and other Council strategies will be sought through partner agencies such as ECC, Thames Gateway South Essex, EEDA and other agencies.

Economic Development Action Plan 2007–2011

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility (Bold shows lead partner organisation)	Time-scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
Theme 1 – Raise the profile of Rochford District						
1.1 Work in partnership with other agencies and stakeholders whose remit is to support economic development in the area	All Rochford District Council Officers Rochford District Council Members	Rochford District Council All partners and stakeholders	2007-11	Number of Businesses assisted by Economic Development Officer and key stakeholders in the District.		
1.2 Work with rural businesses and partners to identify ways in which it can support the rural economy, such as in policies on the conversion of redundant buildings in the Local Plan and the emerging Local Development Framework.	Economic Development Officer Planning Officers <i>Draft</i>	Rochford District Council EEDA Writtle College DEFRA ADER	2007-08	Number of businesses supported in the rural economy.		

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility (Bold shows lead partner organisation)	Time-scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
Theme 2 – Support the needs of the business community in the area						
2.1 Consult with the business community and partners to ensure their views are taken into consideration in developing policies, plans and initiatives. A consultation protocol has been approved.	All Rochford District Council Officers Rochford District Council Members	Rochford District Council All partners and stakeholders	2007-08	Facilitate Economic Development Sub Group meetings to feed into the LSP process – consult with members of this group annually on outcomes and progress of this strategy action plan.		
Theme 3 – Develop the skills of the local workforce						
3.1 Encourage businesses to access training for their workforce, particularly using the Employer Training scheme 'Train to Gain'	Nil cost to Rochford District Council	Rochford District Council Business Link for Essex Learning and Skills Council for Essex	2007-08	Number of participants taking part in 'Train to Gain' scheme		

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility (Bold shows lead partner organisation)	Time-scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
3.2 Work closely with Business Link for Essex and the Learning and Skills Council Essex, to identify the gaps in skills for businesses in the Rochford area	Economic Development Officer in kind contribution	Rochford District Council Business Link for Essex Learning & Skills Council – Essex	2007-08	Number of businesses taking part in training programmes. Business Link Evaluation	% of businesses satisfied with programme	
3.3 Promote the use of graduate skills to small businesses through the Shell Technology Enterprise Programme managed by Essex County Council Liaison with London Southend Airport to ensure the skills of their workforce and related businesses are supported. Work with partners around the potential for a Learning Centre to be located at the airport.	Economic Development Officer referral <i>Draft</i> Economic Development Officer Community Planning Officer	Rochford District Council Essex County Council EEDA Learning & Skills Council SEEC Adult Community College	2007-08 2007-08	Number of graduates taking part in the Shell Technology Enterprise programme. Feasibility Study	Projects achieved.	

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility (Bold shows lead partner organisation)	Time-scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
Theme 4 – Develop Tourism & Heritage						
4.1	Work with Essex County Council, EEDA and TGSE to expand the green tourism offer and encourage the development of overnight accommodation in the district.	Economic Development Officer Leisure Contracts Officer.	Rochford District Council Thames Gateway South Essex East of England Development Agency East of England Tourist Board ExDra	2007-08	Volume Value Study (bi annually)	
4.2	Support the development and marketing of the District as a destination for the day visitor.	Economic Development Officer	Essex County Council Rochford District Council	2007-08	Produce a Visitors Guide and Walks leaflet	

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility (Bold shows lead partner organisation)	Time-scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
4.3 To work in partnership with the Local Planning Authority to develop planning policies through the Local Development Framework that provides increased opportunities for leisure and green tourism in the District.	Planning Policy Officer Economic Development Officer	Rochford District Council	2007-08	Influence the Leisure and Tourism Policies for the Local Development Framework		
Theme 5 – Seek to improve town centre vitality and support town centres and industrial estate enhancements						
5.1 Work with businesses and other agencies to identify opportunities for site and infrastructure improvements.	Planning Policy Officer Economic Development Officer <i>Draft</i>	Rochford District Council Essex County Council TGSE EEDA Chambers of Trade Federation of Small Businesses	2007-08			

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility (Bold shows lead partner organisation)	Time-scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
5.2 Support town centre retailers to enhance their offer and differentiate it from major retail chains.	Economic Development Officer	Rochford District Council Business Link Chambers of Commerce Federation of Small Businesses	2007-08			
5.3 Maintain Liaison with the Chambers of Trade in their respective locations to improve the quality and environment of the town centres.	Economic Development Officer	Rochford District Council Chambers of Trade	2007-08	Attendance of business reps. Quarterly meetings.	Attendance of business reps achieved	

Abbreviations:-

ADER Agricultural Development in the Eastern Region
DEFRA Dept of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
EEDA East of England Development Agency
SEEC South East Essex College
ExDra Essex Development & Regeneration Agency
TGSE Thames Gateway South Essex
WEEE Waste Electrical & Electronic Equipment

East of England Development Agency (EEDA) – responsible for the production of the regional economic strategy which is the framework for improving economic performance across six counties of Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk.

Thames Gateway South Essex – responsible for co-ordinating jobs lead regeneration in the sub-region. The extension of Thames Gateway into South Essex in March 2001 including Thurrock, Basildon Southend on Sea, Castle Point and part of Rochford.

Essex Development and Regeneration Agency (ExDra) is the agency born out of Essex County Councils Enterprise and Regeneration Division and the Local Economic Partnership for the East of England Development Agency. It provides a comprehensive Economic Development Service including Export Services, Lottery and European funding, promotion, marketing, tourism and inward investment.

Essex Prosperity Forum – a private and public sector partnership, is an integral part of Essex's economic development activities and represents the county represents Essex at a strategic level on Economic and Regeneration issues to EEDA (East of England Development Agency) and EEP (East of England Regional Assembly).

Greater Essex Prosperity Forum and Prosperity Forum Advisory Group – represents Essex County and the two sub-regions, (Thames Gateway South Essex and the Haven Gateway) at a strategic level. The countywide partnerships are linked to the local Crime and Disorder Partnerships and Children and Young People's Strategic Partnerships, which are associated with each LSP. Many borough and district LSP's also have local partnerships whose work focuses on economic development and enterprise.

Learning and Skills Council (LSC) – tackles local skill shortages by commissioning training to meeting the needs of students, trainees and employers.

Small Business Service (SBS) – provides business support in the County to small and medium sized companies.

Business Link – is part of the Governments campaign to promote enterprise and to start and grow your business. It is primarily funded by the Department of Trade and Industry.

Business Advice Centre – delivers a start up business support programme and mentoring initiative for small businesses in the District.

Essex Rural Partnership (ERP) – provides a forum for bringing together partnership interests in the rural areas of Essex and identifies policies, proposals and recommendations for action across a wide range of rural activities. The Essex Rural Strategy was launched July 2005.

Rochford Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) – the Council has established a Local Strategic Partnership including a steering group of key partners in the local area such as business representative organisations.

Chambers of Trade and Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses – these business representative organisations are the principal link between the local commercial and business community providing a voice at local and national levels.

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