



ROCHFORD

STAGE ONE REPORT

(DRAFT)

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1 INTRODUCTION

In March 2005, The Tourism Company was commissioned by Rochford District Council to prepare a sustainable tourism strategy and action plan for the District of Rochford. The aim of the study, as set out in the brief (track changes), was to enable the Council to effectively consider the key decisions that need to be taken if the tourism potential of the District is to be developed.

At the outset of this study it was agreed to conduct the study in two stages. This report is the culmination of Stage 1 an assessment of the tourism potential of the district. If it is decided to proceed, stage 2 will work up initiatives and proposals in some detail and also present an action plan.

Our findings and conclusions are based on:

- A number of fact-finding visits to the District and the surrounding areas:
- Discussions with Council Officers
- Open meetings with Council Members and Chambers of Commerce
- Discussions with other interested parties and relevant agencies including Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership and Real Essex tourism campaign
- Face to face and/or telephone interviews with those involved in tourism and marketing promotion in the area and those responsible for assets with tourism potential (e.g. Essex Marina)

A list of the main consultees is included as Appendix 1

1.1 Structure of the report

Following on from this introductory chapter, the report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** looks at the policy context and in particular how this study relates to the other policies, strategies and initiatives drawn up by the District Council as well as a number of local and regional bodies
- **Chapter 3** offers an assessment of the District's tourism assets and concludes by summarising the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT)
- **Chapter 4** examines market trends and future prospects for a range of tourism markets and looks at the current extent of tourism at a regional, county and district level.
- **Chapter 5** offers a view on the extent and nature of tourism potential within the District and presents a number of options as to the way forward for tourism development in the District.

1.2 Definitions

It is useful to define what we mean by tourism. We have applied the Tourism Society's definition of tourism, i.e:

"The temporary short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work and the activities during their stay at these destinations; it includes movement for all purposes, as well as day visits or excursions".

Tourism, therefore, includes holiday tourism trips staying away from home overnight, overnight business tourism trips made during the course of work including attending conferences, meetings and exhibitions and non-routine day trips.

Tourism is differentiated from leisure activity by regularity of use. Leisure activities include, for example, sports and arts participation, shopping and eating out, done on a regular, sometimes spontaneous, basis from home, as part of an individual's day-to-day life while tourism activities are special, generally planned, non routine or longer trips including, but not limited to, overnight trips.

2 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

This section provides a review of the existing strategic policies that have relevance to this study. The main aims of each is examined along with key recommendations that link to tourism development.

2.1 Regional and sub regional strategies

Thames Gateway South Essex

The regeneration of the Thames Gateway is a national priority for the Government. The Thames Gateway area includes east London, north Kent and south Essex. The area includes small part of District around London Southend Airport.

Thames Gateway is a 25-year, £6 billion project, aiming to build the prosperity of the whole area so that it can compete more effectively in the global market and provide a better quality of life for all its residents. As part of the Thames Gateway Project, a Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership has been set up to implement the project within south Essex. The Partnership has a regional allocation of approximately £123m from the total Project budget, although this figure is further boosted by funding from the East of England Development Agency and other sources.

Priorities for the sub-region are identified in *Delivering the Future*, the Partnership's strategic framework document launched in July 2003. Efforts are focused around 3 'regeneration hubs' with key development sectors identified within each hub. One of these is:

- Southend/Rochford – creative/cultural, leisure/tourism and higher education

Within these 'hubs', certain areas (eg Southend) have been defined as 'Zones of Change' and have established specific bodies to oversee the delivery of change. Rochford has been identified as a 'Zone of Influence' and the document calls for Rochford to develop those themes which link to Southend. These are:

- With Southend Borough Council; resolving the future of London Southend Airport and its environs
- Developing and extending the Green Grid concept across the District and, in particular, in association with the development and expansion of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park
- Promoting the leisure and tourism potential of the District and securing new hotel provision in the area
- Promoting the enhancement of Rochford Town as a centre for 'Arts and Crafts'
- Conserving and enhancing the District's heritage, particularly in the centres of Rochford and Rayleigh

Rochford District Council has recently set up a Rochford Delivery Steering Group in order to deliver a range of renewal projects in Rochford including those connected with the Thames Gateway.

In terms of action, the Council has been successful in securing Thames Gateway funding for a number of schemes. These include £340K for the restoration of Rayleigh Windmill, around £700K for street enhancements in Websters Way in Rayleigh and £100K for Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park.

South Essex Green Grid Strategy

Part of Thames Gateway project, the South Essex Green Grid Strategy was published in March 2005 and is a 25 to 30 year plan that aims to link every resident with townscapes, landscapes and riverscapes by a variety of open spaces. The strategy is promoted by a number of stakeholders including the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership, of which Rochford District Council is part. Over £5m has already been earmarked for the project over the next 3 years, but the total allocation over the life of the project is expected to run into many millions.

The strategy focuses on the development or enhancement of four types of corridor:

- Parkways and urban green roadways – major highways that will be upgraded using a design-led approach
- Riverways – as corridors and sequences of spaces
- Railways – as a window onto the landscape
- Greenways- national, regional and sub-regional footpaths / cycle paths

Within the strategy, the Area Framework for Southend and Rochford identifies a number of key issues. Key amongst these are improving physical links between Southend and Rochford countryside and improving connection with the area's rivers. The strategy presents a number of specific initiatives to meet these opportunities.

These include promotion of leisure industry of Southend and Rochford; enhancement of heritage features of parks and creation of four new interconnected country parks on the northern edge of Southend. The strategy also contains a number of specific initiatives. These include:

a) Improving north-south links between the Districts of Southend and Rochford by:

- Creation of four greenways (Leigh on Sea to Hockley Woods in Rayleigh; Central Southend to Rochford; Shoeburyness to the Barling area; Southchurch to the area south of Sutton Hall; Rayleigh to Bournes Green linking two new parks in Southend District (Bourne Park and Shoebury Park))
- Creating distinctive bridges/crossings across A127 Parkway and A1159 Urban Green Road to reconnect urban areas to the Rayleigh and Roach valley countryside

b) Creating two new riverways linking:

- Rochford with the Leigh to Rayleigh greenway, passing en-route Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park
- Rayleigh to the River Roach

c) Providing segregated cycle paths on the A127 and A130

The strategy also opens up the possibility of promoting leisure ferry links from Southend Pier to places within the Roach and Crouch estuaries as part of wider plans to link Southend with the rest of the estuary and the East Coast

Hotel And Conference Market Development Appraisal For Thames Gateway South Essex

This study was commissioned by Thames Gateway South Essex (TGSE) Partnership and East of England Development Agency in 2003 and sought to look at the current and future demand, and possible sites, for four star-plus hotels in the TGSE region.¹ The study also identified recent trends in the hotel and conference markets and the extent of current supply.

The study found that the area had the potential to develop demand for a range of complementary, mid-luxury conference hotels. However, it added important caveats surrounding the need for proposed and planned improvements to the local business, tourism and leisure infrastructure to take place. Perceptions of the region were negative and these too needed to change.

In terms of specific proposals the plan envisaged a 100-120 bedroom full service business hotel in central Basildon, a 100-150 bedroom business and leisure destination hotel on Southend seafront and two smaller mid to luxury hotels – a golf/spa hotel in the countryside and a specialist designer/boutique hotel in Southend or Basildon. There was also thought to be strong potential for hotel development at the airport, although this was dependent upon its expansion.

Crouch Harbour Authority Harbour Management Plan

The Crouch Harbour Authority's area of jurisdiction covers the rivers Crouch and Roach. The area extends through the districts of Maldon on the north bank and Rochford on the south bank and into the borough of Chelmsford. The river Roach is located exclusively in the district of Rochford. The Crouch Harbour Authority controls most activities on the river. The Authority also has development control functions and owns or leases considerable portions of the riverbed.

The Management Plan, produced in 1996, aims to strike a balance between enjoyment of the countryside and open-air recreation on the one hand and nature

¹ It should be noted that study applied the official geographical boundary of TGSE and as such the study only covered the southern part of the District. As such, it is wise to exercise caution with regard to interpreting the results for the whole of the Rochford District.

conservation on the other. The Plan contains a number of policies that have relevance to tourism policy. These include:

- New built development associated with sport of leisure will not normally be permitted
- The construction of marina will normally be permitted only in urban areas
- Increases in moorings will only be accommodated by shore-based dinghy parks, additional marina berths or intensification in the use of existing mooring areas
- Waterskiing and the use of Personal Water Craft (PWC) is to be restricted to certain specified areas of the river
- Public landing sites will be limited to the Old Ford on Ferry Road Crossing between Hullbridge and South Woodham Ferriers

Crouch and Roach Estuary Management Plan

The Plan is the product of the Crouch and Roach Estuary Project and builds on the Crouch Harbour Authority's Management Plan, by broadening out the area to include the riverbanks and local communities.

The Plan identifies a number of tourism issues including a lack of cohesive promotion of the area and the need for more tourist accommodation, especially bed and breakfast and camping sites, which tend to be favoured by visitors wishing to explore the natural environment.

A number of tourism proposals are contained in the Plan. The main tourism aim is to promote a sustainable tourism package for the area. The document further states that the package should encourage the following:

- Improved and expanded riverside walks with "sympathetic" benches and information boards to deliver education on the natural environment and its indigenous inhabitants, and linked riverside walks and coastal trails
- the development of cottage industry visitor attractions, e.g. working boatyards viewing areas
- a Darwin heritage centre (if appropriate)
- a swimming pool in Burnham-on-Crouch
- an arts and craft centre in Rochford
- a replenished beach in Burnham and possibly a sandy play area in Rochford
- Improved facilities/infrastructure for visiting and local yachtsmen with more information literature in French and Dutch
- More tourist accommodation facilities
- Proper promotion and packaging of locally produced foods

- The establishment of a Steering Group comprising organisations and individuals on both sides of the estuary, with an interest in developing a better local tourist industry

Throughout the Plan, a cautious approach to development is advocated, with the sensitivity of the site's habitat being emphasised as being of paramount importance. The Plan also highlights the potential impact that the Environment Agency's strategy for sea defences will have on the area.

The Project has recently helped instigate a grouping of coastal market towns in Essex to jointly promote the towns for tourism. The grouping includes Walton-on-the-Naze, Harwich, Brightlingsea, Maldon, Burnham-on-Crouch and Rochford. Amongst plans being discussed are increasing the profile of members' accommodation in campaigns run by ExDRA and exploring the possibility of siting a family hotel in the area covered by its members.

Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the East of England & Regional Tourism Marketing Strategy for the East of England

These documents provide the strategic framework and tactical action plan for tourism development at a regional level. The Tourism Strategy, published in March 2004, sets out eight broad objectives covering issues such as improving competitiveness; quality and value for money; encouraging action-orientated partnership and increasing impact for tourism on the economy. The strategy also proposes communication based on destination brands and themes relevant to consumers; using tourism to improve quality of life of residents and removal of barriers and widening access for all kinds of visitors.

The Tourism Marketing Strategy is a more tactical, action-orientated document that sets a target of increasing the value of domestic and inbound overseas tourism to the East of England by an annual figure of 4%. This figure does not include day visits. The Marketing Strategy also puts forward the following brand essence for the region.

"A place with big skies and lots of space, where the "good life" is still enjoyed, where local distinctiveness and independent spirit haven't been suppressed by big brands. It's an English haven away from the bustle and hassles of the major conurbations – a place to come to, to slow down, to feel inspired and refreshed."

Whilst stating that re-enforcement of this brand essence by all those involved in tourism in the region will be an important part of any campaign, the Strategy acknowledges that urban areas on the fringe of the East of England will need different selling points. The Strategy then goes on to offer some pointers as to how this might be achieved.

2.2 County Strategies

There is currently no tourism strategy for Essex. Part of the reason for this is that the County's tourism function, previously part of the County Council, transferred to a new body, Essex Development and Regeneration Agency (ExDRA) in the autumn of 2004. Since its establishment, ExDRA has continued the County Council's *Real*

Essex campaign and plans to develop a strategic document in the near future. Current activity consists of promoting the County through a series of product-oriented themes, including gardens, churches, seaside, art, design and architecture. The selected themes aim to counter common misperceptions held by visitors about Essex.

2.3 District strategies and plans

Rochford Community Strategy & Action Plan

The requirement to produce a Community Strategy was introduced by the Local Government Act 2000 in order to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their areas and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK. It includes long, medium and short-term visions for the District for the next 20 years.

Action within the Strategy and Action Plan is organised under six main themes. Amongst those with tourism impacts are:

- Produce a Green Grid Strategy to maximise the potential of the Green Grid and Greenways concept contained in the Thames Gateway South Essex Strategy
- Complete creation and development of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park
- Work with the Environment Agency to produce the Estuary Flood Management Strategy for the Rivers Crouch and Roach
- Encourage walking and cycling as healthy activities by using funding opportunities in the Local Transport Plan to improve the cycling and walking network
- Investigate options for links between Public Rights of Way and the new Quiet Lane Council Strategy, which will benefit the very rural areas of the District

Economic Development Strategy for Rochford

The original Economic Development Strategy was formally adopted in October 2003 with the scheduled yearly update appearing in October 2004. The aim of the strategy is stated as to “work with partners to maximise the economic wellbeing of businesses in the area, making the District a better place to live and work”.

There are seven key themes for Economic Development, identified in the document, one of which refers to tourism as follows:

“Develop tourism and heritage initiatives which provide new local employment and wealth generation opportunities, and visitor attractions aimed at improving access to recreation facilities and preserving the Districts’ heritage for future generations”

The plan proposes several initiatives that relate to tourism. The commissioning of this tourism study forms a central plank, as does aspirations to be the 'green' part of the Thames Gateway in South Essex. Other areas for development identified in the Plan include clear signposting for visitors in town centres. The lack of hotel accommodation in the area is identified as a barrier to the development of overnight visitors to the area and action is recommended on improving the choice of available.

Local Plan

The District's Local Plan provides the basis for all planning decisions within the District. Rochford's current version is a Replacement Local Plan (2nd deposit). There are a number of policies which have direct relevance to tourism and have implications for the type of tourism development that the Council wants to encourage within the District. A summary of the relevant policies is listed below.

- **General approach to tourism:** The approach to tourism development within the documents is positive with safeguards put in place particularly in relation to ensuring tourism development outside urban areas doesn't damage the rural landscape or character of an area (Policy LT1)
- **Visitor attractions:** The Plan (Policy LT19) seeks to encourage the provision of tourist attractions for visitors to the district subject to the satisfying of a number of criteria
- **Development of tourism accommodation.** The policies in this area vary according to the type of accommodation. New hotel development is actively encouraged within urban areas of Rayleigh, Rochford, Rawreth and adjacent to Southend Airport (Policy LT 21) whilst farm diversification into tourism (including holiday accommodation) is also explicitly supported (Policies LT 20 & R10). The policy on touring caravans and tent sites is far stricter and suggests that increases in pitches within existing site footprints might be permissible, but expansion and new sites are out of the question. More rigid still is the policy on caravan parks where both extensions and new developments will not be permitted.
- **Policies affecting activity tourist attractions** There are a number of policies relevant here.
 - **Water recreational facilities.** It is clear from policy in this area (LT17) and comments made on the policy in consultation documentation² by the Council themselves that the policy is to avoid further waterfront development. Instead the Council states that it will look inland for additional facilities, even though the District has few such facilities and no wet pits³ - identified by National Sports body Sport England as the main opportunity for growth in inland recreational water activities in Essex.
 - **Golf courses.** The Local Plan (Policy LT15) leaves open the potential for the development of new golf facilities, although their impact on the landscape is also acknowledged. Any new applications would need to satisfy rigorous environmental conditions set out in the Plan.

² comments derived from comments included in report *Representations received to the Rochford District Replacement Local Plan (Part 3)*, discussed at the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 17 Dec 2003 (Source, Rochford DC website)

³ 'wet pits' are former mineral workings that are allowed to fill with water

- **Horse riding facilities.** There is support for development at existing facilities but less backing for new developments (LT16). Support is likely to be most forthcoming in rural areas for proposals utilising existing redundant farm/agricultural buildings
- **Extreme sports.** The Plan highlights potential for specialised sports such as BMX, motorcross, grass boarding and abseiling at former mineral extraction sites (Dry Pits) (LT18), however another policy (LT23) stresses that developments involving noisy sports within Dry Pits and elsewhere will be refused planning permission unless it can be proven that there will be no adverse environmental effects.
- **Development within protected landscapes.** In addition to these tourism related policies there are also policies providing tight control of development within a range of special sites including Archaeological Sites, Special Landscape Areas and Coastal Protection Belt

2.4 Key points from this section

- Thames Gateway is both a threat and an opportunity for the District. It potentially brings more resources and development interest. However, development pressures may also damage the rural feel of the District.
- The overall tone and policy adopted towards tourism development is positive. However, the actual potential for development within the District is severely constrained, both by the planning policies that apply to the Green Belt but also by those covering the estuary habitats and landscape. There is a strong presumption against more development in the countryside.
- The strategic priorities of the regional tourism strategy do not chime that well with the product in Rochford. The East of England Strategy's focus on the brand essence of "big open skies" is much less applicable to urban South Essex and means Rochford, along with other destinations in a similar position, might do well to develop more appropriate propositions. As such, the Real Essex campaign and the grouping of coastal market towns mentioned in the chapter might offer better avenues
- There is not a lot of scope for expanding water recreation activity on the Crouch and Roach due to capacity constraints and environmental concerns.
- There is a considerable enthusiasm and interest for developing low key countryside access initiatives such as walking, cycling, improved 'green links', and the new country park
- Many of initiatives outlined/proposed for the District do not appear to have been market-tested or based on extensive research and background study. Initiatives tend to be aspirational and it is not always clear how these will be turned from ideas into reality. This is particularly true for the initiatives highlighted in the Thames Gateway documents.

3 TOURISM AUDIT

This chapter reviews the assets and resources Rochford has to offer potential visitors. It is based on interviews with a range of stakeholders, desk research and our professional judgement.

3.1 Destination overview

The District of Rochford is situated in southeast Essex within a peninsula between the Rivers Thames and Crouch, and is bounded to the east by the North Sea. The District shares boundaries with Basildon and Castle Point Districts and Southend-on-Sea Borough. It also has marine boundaries with Maldon and Chelmsford Districts. It has good communications within South Essex, with linkages to the M25 via the A127 and the A13 and direct rail links to London.

The District covers an area of 65 square miles. has 39.5km of rivers, a remote-feeling coastline and attractive, if unremarkable, countryside. There are more than 200 sites of archaeological interest, 14 ancient woodlands 3 Special Landscape Areas and 2 Special Protection Areas. In addition, the coast and estuaries are protected under international statutes.

Rochford is predominantly rural with three larger urban areas and a number of smaller settlements. The District's towns and villages are diverse in character reflecting their history, location and size. Residents have a strong sense of identity with their own settlement.

Home to around 78,500 people, the District is one with an ever increasing percentage of older residents⁴. It is considered to be reasonably affluent⁵, except for a few small pockets of deprivation and has a low rate of recorded crime compared to the rest of the country.

In terms of employment, there are few large businesses – only 5 employ more than 250 staff. The majority of these are engineering firms. Many of the bigger employers have businesses related to London Southend Airport where there are some 1500 jobs mainly in the engineering sector. 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.⁶

3.2 Communications and location

Rochford has relatively good transport links but due to its location, on a peninsula on the far-eastern side of the country, it is considered “at the end of the line as far as road and rail connections are concerned.”⁷

⁴ Approximately 9% of the District's population is over 75 years old and the number is expected to increase to 17% by 2011.

⁵ Rochford is ranked the third most affluent District in Essex and 313th least deprived nationally out of a total of 354 (Rochford Community Strategy, Rochford District Council, 2004)

⁶ Rochford Economic Profile, *quoted in Economic Development Strategy for Rochford*, Rochford District Council, October 2003.

⁷ Comment taken from Essex Local Transport Plan – Appendices, ECC, July 2000

The A127 runs east to west, offering good links between Southend, Rochford and the M25 and the Dartford Bridge. The A130 runs through the western part of the District and provides a north-south route between Canvey Island, Chelmsford and on to Cambridge. There are no road crossings over the River Crouch within the District. The nearest crossing is at Battlesbridge.

High levels of out-commuting, high car ownership coupled with tourist traffic heading for Southend means that traffic congestion can be bad on some roads. Away from the main urban areas, roads in the District are relatively quiet. In recent years, traffic levels in Rochford town centre have been reduced by the completion of a new link (Cherry Orchard Way) avoiding the town which connects the B1013 and the A127.

There is a fast and frequent rail service that connects the three stations in the District to London Liverpool Street in less than an hour. The rail services are heavily used by those commuting to London and Southend. Bus services are patchy. In urban areas there is a good level of service with the most frequent services covering routes to and from Southend. However, in the extensive rural hinterland where there is low population density, public transport is limited.

Potentially very significant to the economic prospects of the District is London Southend Airport. The airport is located mainly within Rochford and currently specialises in maintenance of aircraft although it does carry about 5,000 passenger movements a year and houses a number of flying clubs. The airport has plans to expand into a major regional with a new terminal, hotel/ conference and visitor centre. As part of the airport's plans, there are proposals to build a new rail terminal to connect to the London Liverpool Street line. It is claimed that the terminal would offer journey times to the centre of the capital better than from most of the other airports in the London area, and provide the shortest and fastest `plane-to-train` time in the country.

Forecasts commissioned by the airport predict that the airport could be catering for 800K passengers by as early as 2006 and 2.5m by 2030⁸. The Council is supportive of expansion and has already granted planning permission for the new terminal building to handle up to 300,000 passengers and railway station. Public consultation on an airport masterplan commenced in April 2005 with the Airport company proposing to start work on the new airport terminal building to ensure its completion by the end of 2006.

Expansion at the airport could significantly increase the amount of business tourism in the District over time, with knock-on effects for demand for accommodation, particularly in terms of hotels. There may also be some demand for accommodation for leisure passengers wishing to stay overnight prior to departure or after arrival, but it is unclear to what extent any planned hotel at the airport will absorb most of this demand.

In terms of water-borne access, the Rivers Roach and Crouch both have port facilities and also attract a modest amount of leisure vessels.

Aside from possible airport expansion, there are a number of significant developments which could have an impact on tourism in the District:

⁸ London Southend Airport, Draft Masterplan for Consultation, April 2005,

- Rochford's inclusion within the Thames Gateway has led to the commissioning of a number of studies looking at various aspects of transport infrastructure, employment and the waterfront across the South Essex part of the Gateway. Whilst some action has already been earmarked, further developments may also occur on the back of this work. This may, in part, be a response to increased pressures placed on the infrastructure by the 4,200 or so new homes allocated to be built in the District in the period to 2021 and 3000 jobs to be accommodated.
- A new Euroterminal at Stratford would improve the District's accessibility via the rail network

3.3 Natural resources

Rochford District has some attractive, although not outstanding, countryside. In much of the District, the land is low lying and typified by farmland interspersed with sparse settlement patterns of hamlets and villages. . The landscape in the north and east of the District, along the river estuaries and coast, is more distinctive. Here, wide and remote expanses of salt marshes, wet pasture and open beaches dominate. The presence of numerous streams and creeks means that the maritime influence extends far inland⁹.

Much of the District has an isolated feel. In part, this is attributable to the fact that the District is on the far eastern side of the country, and as such, is a destination rather than a through route. Although this creates its own challenges for attracting visitors, it does lend the area a certain atmosphere. The following quote from the Good Britain Guide captures this essence:

"The Blackwater/Crouch coast has a surprisingly remote feel, given the closeness of densely urban South Essex. " 2005 Good Britain Guide

The District has a range of landscapes protected by various designations. There are three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

- **Hockley Woods** cover 260 acres and are the largest ancient woodland in Essex. The Woods are a popular dog walking spot and are the venue for a number of guided walks and special events run by the Council's Woodlands Section.
- **Foulness Island**, linked to the mainland by a bridge, is coastal marsh, flat with occasional scrub and low-lying trees. There are two villages with a total of 83 dwellings. Access to the Island is possible but restricted due to the fact that the land is owned by MoD and used for testing munitions. A number of rights of way run around the Island and are accessible when the MoD's red flags are not flying. This tends to be evenings and weekends
- **The Crouch and Roach Estuary** is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) as well as a Special Protection Area (SPA) and a Ramsar (wetland) site. It is internationally important for wildlife and particularly

⁹ The Countryside Agency's description of the character of the landscape is included as Appendix 2

water birds. The tidal flats, saltmarsh and adjacent coastal grassland and ditch systems also support thirteen species of nationally scarce plant and important populations of rare invertebrates. An important breeding population of grey seal can be found at the mouth of the Crouch estuary.

As well as the sites mentioned above, the District also has a series of open spaces and local nature reserves. These include Magnolia Nature Reserve on the Ashingdon/ Hawkwell Border, Rochford Reservoir, Swayne Park, Millview Meadows, Brooklands Gardens, Hullbridge Foreshore, Plumberow Mount. There are also areas run as reserves managed by the Essex Wildlife Trust and The Woodland Trust.

In addition to the current landscape resource, there are a number of new developments.

In September 2001, Essex County Council handed over ownership of Blatches Farm to Rochford District Council in order to establish a 100-acre Country Park. Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park, as the place has now been named, is set within the Roach Valley and is to be used as a recreational resource and as a wildlife habitat. The Council is provisionally looking to purchase additional land which will provide vehicular access to the park. The two areas are Edwards Hall Park in the west and land adjacent to Cherry Orchard Way (B1013) in the east. The early stage of the planting and landscaping of the country park and the current lack of car parking has meant that the Park has not yet been actively promoted.

The Country Park is also an important part of the second development – the Thames Gateway South Essex Green Grid Strategy. Chapter 2 provided details of the strategy in Rochford and in neighbouring Southend. The development of greenways – routes for cyclists, walkers and horse-riders linking the area's rivers, open and green spaces, will provide better access to the District's countryside and open spaces for both residents and visitors alike.

Another proposal is the creation of a beach within Rochford District. Rochford was once called Rochford-on-Sea and also had a beach area near Stambridge Mills. One of the results of the Crouch and Roach Estuary Strategy has been the restoration of the beach at Burnham on Crouch. The strategy also supports the proposal to create a sandy beach or a large children's sandpit if a suitable location in the District can be found. It is also worth noting that the River Crouch is currently not classed as suitable for swimming.

The extent of waterfront or coastline in Rochford may not be immediately apparent to the visitor. This is due to a number of factors – few public roads run along the waterfront, there is limited access in some areas to marshy terrain and access is very difficult to the MOD-owned Foulness Island. The best access to the estuaries is by the rights of way network.

It is possible to cross between Rochford and Maldon District via a passenger ferry at Essex Marina on Wallasea Island. The ferry runs between the Marina and Burnham on Crouch every weekend between Whitsun and late summer, and every day in the school summer holidays. The ferry, which can also accommodate cycles, currently carries more people from Rochford to Burnham than it does the other way. Part of the issue is thought to be the lack of attractions on the Rochford side, the lack of short and easy walks and the lack of transport links to other parts of the District.

Ideas have been mooted for a second pedestrian crossing of the river between Hullbridge and South Woodham Ferriers although this is not a definite proposal as yet.¹⁰

3.4 Built environment

The District has two main urban centres – Rochford and Rayleigh. The remainder of the District is typified by a few towns and a considerable number of small and large village settlements.

Rochford is an attractive market town with an historic townscape and surviving medieval street pattern. It has a modest range of local shops although there are plans to develop a new supermarket which may increase its draw for shoppers. There has been a significant amount of sympathetic residential infill in recent years. However, the town lacks other features that would act as a hook to visitors – e.g. specialist shopping, arts galleries, museums or visitor attractions. The head of the river Roach lies just to the south east of the town although the town's link with the river is not apparent at first glance. One of the town's features is the Market Square, although more could be made of it by extending the range of markets held there.¹¹ There have been discussions about pedestrianising this area once car parking at the new supermarket is in place.

Rayleigh is a bustling commercial centre with a good range of shops typical of most High Streets. The town has recently benefited from considerable street enhancements and these will continue with the works planned for Websters Way. Rayleigh has less of a historic feel than Rochford, although it does boast several of the District's key historic features – Rayleigh Mount, Rayleigh Windmill and the Dutch Cottage.

Like Rochford, Rayleigh has a market. This has historical roots dating back to the 12th century and takes place near to the Church at the top of the High Street. Despite its long history, there is some concern that it is suffering from dwindling numbers of traders and shoppers.

Aside from Rochford and Rayleigh, the settlements of Hockley, Ashingdon and Hullbridge are amongst the most sizeable. Hockley is the leafiest, characterised by the extensive woodlands of Hockley Woods. Ashingdon is a ribbon-style settlement with a mix of residential properties and local shops whilst Hullbridge very much looks to the River Crouch, with a large car park catering for the large numbers of people who come to launch vessels at what is the District's only public launch onto the River.

Elsewhere in the District, there are smaller villages and parishes such as Paglesham, Barling Magna, Canewdon, Great Wakering, Stambridge. Many of these boast fine churches and although not unattractive, these settlements are not sufficiently picturesque or distinctive to act as a major draw for visitors.

¹⁰ see ref 31

¹¹ Rochford's market is held every Tuesday in the carparking area of Market Square and appears to be popular. The market has a mixed range of stalls - ranging from fruit and vegetables, clothes and garden items. Rochford also hosts a Farmers Market that currently takes place in the WI building opposite the Market Square. Consideration could be given to moving this to the Market Square. There may also be scope for adding art and craft fairs to the range of events held in the Market Square.

3.5 Accommodation

Overnight accommodation within the District is very limited.

- There are only four hotels which between them offer less than 200 beds¹².
- None of the hotels are members of Tourist Board quality assurance schemes. Some additional capacity is provided just outside the District by a PremierTravel Inn located near to Southend Airport.
- B&B and guest house accommodation appears even more limited with just one guest house and two B&Bs.¹³
- There are nine caravan holiday home parks within the district but all bar one of these are primarily residential sites.^{14 15} The exception is the Riverside Village in Canewdon, which has pitches for up to 60 touring caravans.
- There is little or no farm-based accommodation although Lower Wyburns Farm in Rayleigh offers the only public camping in the District. Group camping for scout, guide and youth groups is provided at 30-acre Belchamps Scout Centre in Hawkwell.
- There is no youth hostel, although in the past there was a short-lived hostel at Redcroft House in Great Stambridge.

The relative dearth of accommodation is made up in part by the relatively large accommodation stock available in coastal resort of Southend.¹⁶ However, even here, the high incidence of day rather than staying visitors means that the accommodation stock is not as large as other, similar sized coastal resorts with more of a tradition of staying visits.

By way of comparison, across the river Crouch to the north, the similarly rural Maldon District has a far more extensive range of accommodation than Rochford. The official guide¹⁷ to the District lists 28 hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs, 10 self-catering establishments and five caravanning and camping sites. To the west, Basildon District has twice as many hotels (8) which have a total of 498 rooms.

Both the District Council and the Crouch and Roach Estuary Project have highlighted a lack of overnight accommodation as a restraint to the development of tourism¹⁸ and are wishing to see increases in the available stock.

Planning restrictions on caravan parks mean that any potential for expansion of accommodation stock is likely to come in the hotel and B&B sectors. The Council's Local Plan actively encourages the development of new hotels whilst the Crouch and Roach Estuary Strategy highlights the need for more B&B and camping sites to attract "visitors wishing to explore the natural environment."

¹² The *Holiday Inn Express* in Rayleigh has 49 bedrooms whilst *Hotel Renoufin* in Rochford town centre has 23 bedrooms. The *Essex County Hotel*, located near Southend Airport has 72 bedrooms. The *Chichester Hotel* in Rawreth has 33 bedrooms

¹³ The 8-bedroomed guest-house *The Dome* is located just east of Hullbridge. *The George and Dragon* on Foulness Island has 3 bedrooms available as B&B accommodation. *The Anchor* at Great Wakering has recently recommenced offering B&B accommodation after closing down and reopening under new management.

¹⁴ figures taken from the Local Plan

¹⁵ Dome Caravan Park, Hockley; Hockley Mobile Homes, Hockley, Lansdowne Caravan Park, Shoeburyness; Riverside Village, Canewdon

¹⁶ Southend has 19 hotels offering 476 bedspaces (Hotel And Conference Market Development Appraisal, Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership, July 2003)

¹⁷ Maldon District Accommodation Guide 2005, Maldon District Council

¹⁸ comments included in Rochford District Council's Local Plan and the Crouch and Roach Estuary Project's Management Plan (Draft 3).

A new hotel and conference centre is envisaged as part of expansion plans at Southend Airport and there is also thought to be scope for other hotel facilities in the vicinity. New accommodation may also emerge from farms that are being encouraged by the Council and other bodies to diversify into a range of activities including B&B accommodation. It is unclear how many, if any, farms are likely to move into providing accommodation.

3.6 Visitor attractions

There are no major attractions in the District and none of regional or national appeal. The table below provides more detail.

Table 1 Visitor attractions in Rochford District

Attraction	Description	Visitors
Rayleigh Windmill	Built around 1809, the tower mill houses an interesting collection of bygones mostly used in and around Rayleigh. Currently being refurbished. Refreshments available from the Mill coffee shop adjacent. (Admission charges £2(£1)).	2-3,000
Rayleigh Mount, Raleigh (National Trust)	Motte and bailey mound remains of the castle erected by Sweyn of Essex, dating from the period following the Norman invasion of 1066. Display boards explain the main points of interest. The Southend Shakespeare Company also holds annual performances on the site.	N/a
The Old House, Rochford	Guided tours are conducted every Wednesday afternoon of this 13 th century house which now houses offices of Rochford District Council. The Old House is also one of the venues for the <i>Unlock! Rochford's History</i> event in September. The building is said to be haunted.	1,300*
The Dutch Cottage, Rayleigh	An 18 th century ¹⁹ octagonal Dutch cottage, believed to have been built by Dutch refugees from the Netherlands who settled in small numbers in South Essex as a replica of the Dutch Cottages on Canvey Island.	5-600
Foulness Heritage Centre, Foulness	Small local history collection housed in former schoolhouse on this MOD-owned island. Visiting is by prior appointment only on the first Sunday in the month from early April to early Oct. Group packages to the heritage centre, church with a pub lunch are organised by a local coach firm	Not known
Rayleigh Megazone	Family-orientated indoor laser venue. Part of the national Megazone franchise, the centre is run by a charity Active Christian Trust, with all proceeds going to the Warehouse youth project.	150,000
Rayleigh Karting	Indoor karting track, situated near to the Rayleigh Megazone	Not known
Sutton Hall Light Railway, Rochford	Miniature railway with an end-to-end run of around 700 yards. It runs along the side of some fields near Rochford Reservoir. A number of public open days are held during the Summer with Santa Specials running at Xmas. The line is owned by Charles Tabor and is operated by the Shoebury Railway Society.	Not known

¹⁹ Although the inscription above the door says 1621, it is now thought that this is inaccurate and infact relates to the fact that the building is a replica of a building on Canvey Island which carries the same date. (taken from *The Dutch Cottage Leaflet*, compiled by J. English)

*Source; various sources. * visitor figure includes 1,000 who attended during Unlock! Rochford's History event*

It is clear from the table above that only one attraction, Rayleigh Megazone, is pulling in significant numbers of visitors from outside the District. There are a few small-scale attractions that attract a largely local audience. It is unclear at present whether the renovation and enhancement of Rayleigh Windmill will impact on the number of visitors it attracts, although figures from other windmills around the country suggest that overall visitor numbers will remain modest.²⁰

3.7 Events and festivals

As is the case with visitor attractions, the District has a wealth of locally attractive events and festivals but with one or two exceptions, none are attracting significant numbers of visitors from outside of the District.

- **Southend Airshow:** Although technically outside the District, uses Southend Airport most of which is located within the District. The event takes place over the May Bank Holiday and attracts around ½ million people. Most spectators view the show from Southend's seafront. Although the event is economically important to Southend, the knock-on positive economic effects for Rochford are currently very limited.
- **Southend to London Bike Ride:** Takes place in July in aid of charity. The event, which attracts hundreds of riders, runs through Hullbridge on its way to Southend.
- **Unlock! Rochford's History:** During September 2004, Rochford held this successful history day. The event, funded by the Local Heritage Initiative, attracted 1000 people to a range of events and tours of Rochford buildings including The Old House and St Andrews Church. There are hopes that further buildings, such as Rochford Hall, with its connections to Anne Boleyn, can be included in future years²¹
- **Foulness Island events:** The Island holds a number of events. However, sensitivity surrounding the MoD site means that publicity is often low key. There is an annual "Open Day" which includes stalls, guided tours of the church and food at the island's only pub. A local farmer also provides tractor-trailer tours, pulling visitors around the island
- **Agricultural events:** There is a monthly Farmers Market held in Rochford at the Womens' Institute Hall. Farmers also hold an Autumn show in Rochford each year and there is a ploughing match open to the public which is held at different locations each year

²⁰ figures taken from 2003 Visitor Attraction Trends Report, VisitBritain, Sept 2004

²¹ Market Town Initiative, Rochford Regeneration Project, 2004.

- **Rochford Real Ale Festival:** Held at the Freighthouse in Rochford in November each year
- **Woodland events:** These range from the *Wild Woods!* event at Hockley Woods to guided walks programme and ‘walk-for- health’ events

The Council's specific budget for events is modest. Within the contracted-out leisure contract, operator Holmes Place has £25,000 earmarked for staging events around the District²². This fund is used to support a variety of events which have included Wild Wood days as well as leisure-orientated events attracting a largely local audience. The Council is able to make suggestions for events to be funded.

There is also talk of new events being staged. The District's Woodland Strategy proposes establishing a “Living Land” event which would be a week-long event held either in summer or autumn, to promote the rural heritage of the District and educate residents and visitors as to the leisure benefits of having the countryside on their doorstep.

3.8 Arts, crafts and culture

The main cultural entertainment is provided by the Mill Theatre and Arts complex in Rayleigh. This venue, which has recently been refurbished, plays host to a varied programme of theatre, music, cinema and arts events. As part of the refurbishment, a new gallery space has been created, acting as a venue for temporary exhibitions featuring local artists' work.

Despite suggestions that Rochford could develop as a centre for arts and crafts²³, there are, as yet, insufficient numbers of art, antique and crafts-related shops and venues in the town to make this a reality. This is especially so given the strong competition in this area that comes from places just outside the District. For instance, Battlesbridge Antique Centre based at the Old Granary in Battlesbridge houses over 80 antique dealers and is well-known as an “antiques destination”. Leigh-on-Sea, within Southend-on-Sea District, has also has strong associations with arts and crafts, thanks in part to a strong resident artist community.

A number of initiatives are underway which are, in part, a response to the current shortcomings in this area. A Cultural Officer has been appointed within the District Council and a permanent sculpture trail is being actively considered for Hockley Woods.

3.9 History and heritage

Rochford District has a rich and varied past with a number of surviving historic buildings but, with one or two exceptions, these are not of sufficient number or weight to draw in visitors.

Rochford is important as an example of a small medieval/post-medieval market town which still retains much of its historic character. Rochford Hall, the Old House, church

²² Woodlands Strategy, Rochford District Council, March 2003

²³ *Delivering the Future* Thames Gateway South Essex, July 2003.

and the hospital are of particular architectural interest. The town has around 70 listed buildings.²⁴

Rayleigh's history is less visible due to the large-scale redevelopment that took place in the historic core in the 1960 – 1980's. However, Rayleigh is home to a number of important historic sites including Rayleigh Windmill, Rayleigh Mount and the Dutch Cottage.

The District has a number of examples of Essex vernacular weatherboarded properties, but not in sufficient numbers or concentrations to make them amongst the most noteworthy in Essex.

The District has some small historic churches (e.g. Great Wakering's Church of St Nicolas dates from 12th century whilst Hawkwell has a 14th century Parish church), although none appear in amongst the UK's 1,000 best churches.²⁵

There are connections with a number of historical figures including Anne Boleyn, Canute²⁶, Oliver Cromwell²⁷, but these are unlikely to represent a major visitor draw. The problem is two-fold. Some of those connected with the District are not sufficiently important or well-known to be of general interest. or, where the figure is of sufficient stature, as in the case of Cromwell for instance, the link is tentative with little to see on the ground. .

One area where historical connections may show tourism promise is in connection with HMS Beagle, which ended its days at Paglesham. However, it is very unclear what, if anything, remains of the ship and there are significant hurdles to recovering it and displaying it. Even if this could be done it is worth pointing out that Darwin's House at Downe (Kent) where he wrote the *Origin of Species* attracts a mere 20,000 visitors a year.

Other possible historical / heritage themes include:

- Smuggling (Foulness Island was a notorious smuggling area for which the deserted coast and innumerable creeks offered ideal conditions)
- Ghosts and witches: a number of properties (including Rochford Hall) are said to be haunted; Canewdon is associated with witches
- Brickworks. There have been suggestions that the disused site at Cherry Orchard Lane could form a heritage centre.
- Oyster fishing, once a very significant industry at Paglesham and other places. Boatbuilding, similarly in the creeks around the east of the district.

None of these themes are unique however.

²⁴ One building is Listed as Grade I, 2 as Grade II* and the remainder are Grade II.

²⁵ List from *England's Thousand Best Churches*, Jenkins, S (2000)

²⁶ Canewdon was the site of Canute's camp before his victorious battle over Edmund Ironside and thus gave his name to the village

²⁷ Oliver Cromwell is said to have met his wife whilst walking in the District

3.10 Food, drink and entertainment

Facilities in these areas within the District reflect the demands and tastes of the local market rather than catering for large numbers of visitors. Consequently, the range on offer is adequate but largely unremarkable.

Eating out

There are around 20 restaurants within Rochford District²⁸. Not surprisingly, these tend to be located around the two main towns of Rochford and Raleigh. The restaurants generally offer oriental and Indian food to a local clientele. The restaurants are, in the main, of average quality. The leading guide to restaurants, the *Which? Good Food Guide* lists 761 establishments for the whole of England of which 15 are in Essex but with none in the District. The closest one is located in Leigh on Sea²⁹.

In line with national trends, the majority of the District's eating out opportunities are offered by pubs serving food. The Council lists 42 pubs serving food of one sort or another.³⁰ Cafes and tearooms provide further day-time eating out opportunities.

Pubs

There is a good range of pubs in the District but few currently have the potential to attract significant clientele from outside the area. For instance, the 2005 Good Pub Guide lists some 105 pubs in Essex, of which only 2 are located in the District (The Golden Lion in Rochford and the Punchbowl in Paglesham).

Aside from those listed in the Good Pub Guide, there are around ten pubs listed in the South East Essex directory published by the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA). One of these, the *Shepherd and Dog* at Stambridge was awarded 2004 CAMRA regional Pub of the Year.

There are one or two pubs that have 'quirky' or unique aspects that might be of interest to visitors. One such pub is the 17th century George and Dragon, which is located on MOD land on Foulness Island and can only be visited by prior arrangement with the landlord. Organised coach parties from outside the District are already visiting the pub as part of a tour of the island a number of times during the year, as are members of the real ale society CAMRA.

Nightlife and entertainment

The wide range of entertainment available in the coastal resort of Southend means that people have traditionally travelled to neighbouring Southend for their night-time entertainment. This means that Rochford District has little in the way of night-time venues. The Mill Theatre and Arts complex in Rayleigh (mentioned in the previous section) provides a programme which includes evening theatre, music and cinema.

²⁸ Statistics compiled from list of licensed food premises supplied by Housing Health and Community Care, Rochford District Council

²⁹ *The Which? Good Food Guide 2004*, Which Ltd, 2003

³⁰ see Ref 28

3.11 Outdoor recreational activities

Water-based activities

A distinctive part of the District's appeal (and one which is potentially of significant interest to visitors) is the extent of its water frontage

Sailing

Sailing is the most popular form of water recreation on the estuary, with around 20 sailing clubs situated along its banks³¹. The Crouch Harbour Authority controls most of the access points to the river where slipways and moorings are situated.

Most sailing access to the river is through membership of one or more of the sailing clubs. Members of the public wishing to sail can launch vessels at Hullbridge, the one public slipway located within the District³².

Moorings for sailing vessels within Rochford District are centred around Essex Marina at Wallasea Island, Paglesham and Hullbridge.

Recent public consultation³³ revealed a desire to increase the number of public slipways, not least to avoid the congestion which can occur at peak times. However there are no plans to provide additional slipways due to the need to safeguard preserve the area's natural environment. However, it is acknowledged that the issue is likely to surface again.

The Crouch Harbour Authority's Management Plan states that no extensions to current moorings will be allowed, nor will new moorings. A recent application for 30 pontoons just up the river from North Fambridge were refused planning permission, largely because it was in a water ski-ing area, but also because it would constitute an increase in moorings at an existing site.³⁴

Waterskiing

Waterskiing on the river Crouch is allowed but access to parts of it are restricted to members of the two waterski clubs that use the River. South Woodham Ferriers Waterski Club's 350 members have exclusive waterski access to an area of the River Crouch between Spitty's Reach to just down-river from South Woodham Ferriers. Hayes Farm Waterski club has access to a section of the River between the eastern boundary of the South Woodham Ferriers moorings area to the western boundary of the North Fambridge Moorings area.

Members of the public wishing to waterski can do so outside the private water-ski areas but within the main designated area on the River Crouch. The public water ski area stretches from the eastern boundary of the North Fambridge Moorings Area to the eastern end of where the river meets Althorne Creek.

³¹ Crouch and Roach Estuary Management Plan (3rd Draft), Crouch and Roach Estuary Project, 2004

³² Another public slipway is located directly opposite Hullbridge at South Woodham Ferrers

³³ comments on public consultations, see Ref 31

³⁴ telephone conversation with Captain Ian Bell, Harbour Master, Crouch Harbour Authority

The capacity for members of the public to undertake waterskiing without belonging to a club and without equipment of their own is limited. This is because neither club offers any facilities for casual waterskiing.

There is no water-skiing or jet ski-ing allowed on the Rover Roach.

Canoeing and dinghy sailing

Canoeing takes place on the upper reaches of the river Crouch and on the river Roach, and is more popular during the winter months.

The Wallasea Wetlands site³⁵ will provide further opportunity for canoeing or for the use of a dinghy. As part of the project a new creek on the eastern end of the new wetland is to be created with navigation over the entire area by small craft possible at high tide. There will also be a number of new islands within the site, and although some of these will be designated as bird nest areas, it is intended that some can be used as picnic sites for those able to access them in canoes and dinghies.

Fishing

There is both saltwater and freshwater fishing available within the District but public access to both is somewhat limited.

The estuaries of the Roach and Crouch are home to many species of fish. During the spring and Summer eels, flounders, plaice, bass, thornback rays, smoothounds, stingray, dogfish, mackerel, garfish and others can be caught. In the autumn, the whiting and cod move in and these are the mainstay of the fishing through to about March. There are a small number of charter boats that run day and night-time fishing trips out of Essex Marina, which has no tide restrictions.

As already mentioned, there are just one public launch for small boats on the river, located at Hullbridge and South Woodham Ferriers. Local riverbank anglers have highlighted the problem they have in finding suitable places on the estuary to fish.

Freshwater angling takes place across the District. Hockley Angling Club has 300 members and owns 3 lakes, one of which is open to the public on an open basis during the week and by appointment at weekends. Rochford Angling Club has a number of private waters but also offers day tickets for the public to fish at Rochford Reservoir during daylight hours.

Other Recreational Activities

Cycling

The rural nature of much of the District makes cycling as a leisure pursuit an attractive proposition. However, the lack of any specific off or on-road cycle routes and the high speeds and increased traffic that typifies many rural roads, may be limiting the current take-up of this activity.

³⁵ Defra are creating 110 hectares of new wetland on the north-eastern bank of Wallasea Island

There are no cycle hire facilities in the District although cycles can be hired at Burnham on Crouch and brought over on the Burnham- Wallasea ferry. At present there are no way-marked on-road cycle routes marked from the ferry, although the potential to develop these and off-road routes has been identified.³⁶

The area does not have any routes designated part of the National Cycle Network, the nearest sections of which are in Basildon and Southend. On the plus side, the area's profile for cycling is raised each year by the London to Southend charity bike ride which passes through the District

In terms of developments, the Green Grid Strategy proposals to provide segregated cycle lanes on busy roads such as the A127 together with a series of "greenways" that will link Southend area with Rochford may offer tourism potential³⁷. Plans at a County level also identify the need to develop both urban and rural cycle routes for commuting and recreational purposes³⁸.

Golf

There are three 18-hole golf courses in the District (Ballards Gore Golf and Country Club in Canewdon, Rochford Hundred Golf Club and Hanover Golf Club in Rayleigh). All three courses operate largely on a membership basis although there is limited public 'pay and play' access available. Hanover Golf Club has unrestricted access to its Regency course whilst a Georgian handicap is required for weekday access to its Georgian course. Weekend and bank holiday access to the course is only possible with a Member. Ballards Gore allows visitors during the week, whilst the Rochford Hundred Club offers the facility to ladies on Tuesday mornings.

Horse-riding

The District is a popular area for the private stabling of horses. There are also five establishments that offer facilities for on-site tuition but only one or two of these offer supervised hacks where riders leave the riding centre under supervision to explore the surrounding countryside – the most frequently requested equestrian activity amongst visitors.

Part of the issue is the available resource - the bridleway network in the District is patchy with some areas adequately provided for whilst many others have facilities which local riding representatives describe as "poor".³⁹ Where bridleways exist they rarely meet with others to create a viable network. The current review of the Definitive Map⁴⁰ is likely to result in the creation of some small new stretches of bridleways. There have also been a number of permissive routes added to the local network (e.g. around Gusted Hall near Hockley Woods) due to access arrangements under Defra's Stewardship scheme. There may be scope to add further routes in the future under this scheme, however, it is likely that the road network will continue to be the main resource used by riders. As such, initiatives highlighted by Essex County

³⁶ see ref 31

³⁷ Thames Gateway South Essex Green Grid Strategy, Thames Gateway South Essex, March 2005

³⁸ Essex & Southend-on-Sea Replacement Structure Plan, 1996 – 2011, April 2001, Essex County Council

³⁹ comments made during consultation with local riding establishments

⁴⁰ Public Rights of Way are recorded on a legal document known as The Definitive Map. This map gives conclusive evidence in law that a Public Right of Way exists. The Definitive Map is accompanied by a Statement which is a written description of the route.

Council to make roads friendlier to a range of users including horses riders could make an important contribution to improving facilities.⁴¹

Although rights of way fall under the jurisdiction of the County Council, the District Council has been involved with bridleway creation. Hockley Woods has a way-marked bridleway whilst the new Cherry Orchard Country Park also has a number of bridleways. One or two farms have also diversified by developing riding track networks on their land. This involves people paying an annual subscription and in return being able to ride across the farm's green tracks. The large average size of farms in the area means networks can be extensive. On one farm, the network is some 15 miles. There appears to be interest in the farming community in further developments in this area.⁴²

Walking and countryside access

Walking has been identified as one of the most popular ways in which people access the region's countryside⁴³. Within Essex there are about 7,500 km (4,600 miles) of statutory routes, incorporating byways, bridleways and footpaths. Within Rochford there the network is relatively extensive, with 282 rights of way (RoW's) marked on the District's Definitive Map.

Rochford District's RoW's offer one of the best ways to experience the District's extensive rural areas. The relative dearth of roads running along or to the District's frontage with the Rivers Crouch and Roach means that they also represent a good way to view parts of the District that would otherwise not be accessible except from a boat. The RoW's also offer the best opportunities to view the District's wildlife, particularly the regionally and nationally important bird sites located in the District.

Walking opportunities in the District can be split into four main types – woodland, countryside, marshes/coastal walks, recreational routes.

- **Woodland.** There are a number of woodland walks in the District. Amongst the most popular are those in Hockley Woods where two way-marked routes have been created. A 5km boundary walk is supplemented by a shorter 1km walk leading down the main valley formed by a tributary of the river Roach. These walks are popular with dog walkers and local people. There are also woodland walks that take in Kingley Wood, Hockley Hall Wood, Marylands Wood, Bett's Wood and Plumberow Wood
- **Countryside landscapes.** The rural nature of much of the District offers considerable scope for walking in a tranquil setting. The landscape is attractive if unremarkable. It is relatively flat and typified by small and attractive settlements interspersed with land given over to a variety of farming uses

⁴¹ Essex & Southend-on-Sea Replacement Structure Plan 1996 - 2011 Part 4 - Providing for Future Development & Transport, Essex County Council, April 2001

⁴² Comments made in consultation interview with local farmer

⁴³ See ref 38

- Marsh / coast.** Perhaps the most distinctive walking to be had within the area features the District's large areas of marsh wetlands. The north-eastern and eastern fringes of the District are the main areas for this type of walk. Popular starting points are Canewdon, Paglesham, Little Wakering and on Wallasea Island.⁴⁴ Walking is also possible on the MoD-owned Foulness Island although access restrictions make this difficult for the uninitiated visitor. There is a continuous, though not specifically waymarked, route which enables you to walk along the entire length of the Crouch estuary from Hullbridge to Wallasea Island. From there access to the rest of the coast on Foulness Island is difficult due to the lack of a permanent crossing across the river at Branfleet and the restricted access available to Foulness Island. However it is possible continue a waterside walk, by following a route down to the river Roach and then walking back to Rochford following the course of the River.
- Recreational routes.** The main way-marked route is the Roach Valley Way. Originally devised by Rochford District Council 1986, this 23 miles circular walk leads through a variety of landscapes from the ancient woodlands of Hockley in the west to the costal margins of the Roach and Crouch estuaries in the south and north. The footpath was restored in 1994 and is now way-marked with its own logo. In addition to the Roach Valley Way, there are a good number of circular and linear walks that are included on locally distributed walks leaflets produced by a range of bodies including parish councils, rambling and wildlife groups. There are no long distance trails in the District. The two main long distance walks in the County (The Essex Way and St Peters Way) are to the north and west of the District.

There has been no research undertaken into usage of the rights of way but feedback from those managing the RoW network⁴⁵ suggests that that resource attracts use by locals rather than attracting significant numbers of visitors from outside the District.

There are a number of developments planned in the District with regard to ROW's. The District's Woodland Strategy expresses a desire to link Hockley Woods and Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park using the footpath network⁴⁶. Proposals contained in the Thames Gateway South Essex's Green Grid Strategy for a series of greenways linking Southend with Rochford also has visitor potential.

Wildlife watching

The coastal margins of the District provide some of the country's best estuaries and saltings for birds in the UK. Particularly fine is the area around the islands of Wallasea and Foulness. Essex Wildlife Trust manages two reserves in the area, both of which are accessible from the Canewdon to Wallasea Island road. *Lower Raypits* consists of saltings, permanent pasture and seawalls in the Crouch estuary SSSI

⁴⁴ Walking opportunities on Wallsea Island have recently been improved through the creation of circular routes across farm land which link up with the existing coastal route. The route offers opportunities to access the coastal route from Grapnells Farm . On the route you see wildlife typical of this open landscape, such as skylark, corn bunting, reed bunting, barn owl and brown hare. The network of grassy ditches and borrow dykes across the farm provide nesting and feeding habitat for these species along with many small mammals and invertebrates such as field voles and butterflies.

⁴⁵ Consultation with Essex County Council's PROW team and the Local District Officer for Rochford District

⁴⁶ The proposal is to enable them to become a regional resource for the South East of the county. This would hinge on the linking of the two areas by way of the footpath network but also with the expansion of Cherry Orchard from the B1013 to abutting Edwards Hall Wood.

near to Canewdon⁴⁷. *Lion Creek* is a former creek now cut off from the estuary by a new sea wall, and rough grassland with scrub. The creek is a good habitat for wading birds and birds of prey (hen harrier and short-eared owl) and also contains a good range of saltmarsh plants and insects. The reserves are open to the public and have bird hides. There is also a board with Essex Wildlife Trust and pedestrian signposting from the road. There is little car parking.

The habitat for birds as well as for mammal and insect species will be further enhanced by Defra's proposal to create of 110 hectares of new wetland on the north-eastern bank of Wallasea Island.

There are a small number of boat operators offering seal and bird watching trips. The majority of these cruises launch from the north side of the River (in Maldon District) but there is at least one company running bird watching, seal and porpoise trips from Essex Marina. There is also the occasional bird watching boat trip to Foulness Island.

Aside from the coastal areas, the broad swaithes of Green Belt provide habitats for a range of species, many of which can be viewed from the rights of way network.

3.12 Information, interpretation and marketing

District

Little visitor information is available, and where it does exist, it is often dated with severely limited distribution. Difficulties for visitors are compounded by a relative lack of brown tourist signs, no visitor-orientated web presence and by the lack of on-site interpretation of key assets such as the District's extensive river and coastal frontages and bird habitats.

In terms of printed information provision, the main set of leaflets produced at a District level relate to woodlands and opportunities for walking and riding in them. Although informative, the series of ten leaflets appear to be over 10 years old and distribution seems confined to a few council outlets. Various parish councils also produce maps of public rights of way, although these tend to be hard to get hold of. The County Council also produces or promotes a range of charged-for leaflets and publications about the District's rights of way. Amongst these are a detailed 15-page guide to the Roach Valley Way (£2.50), walks in Essex Country Parks (£2.50) and a walks guide produced by the Essex Wildlife Trust (£2.50).

On-site interpretation is generally poor. There is virtually no on-site information available on rights of way that run alongside river estuaries, meaning visitors and residents alike may not be aware of the importance of the area for wildlife and as a protected landscape. Individual amenities such as woodland and nature reserves do have some information, although these are often in need of repair and maintenance.



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Many visitors to the area are likely to seek ideas for things to do from two main sources – tourist information centres (TICs) and leaflet racks. The District has no tourist information centres, the nearest ones are located in Basildon, Burnham on Crouch and Southend. A visit to Burnham's TIC undertaken as part of the tourist audit, found virtually no information on Rochford District and little knowledge of Rochford amongst its staff. Libraries in the District do hold regional tourist brochures and what's on information, but a visitor would struggle to gain information on rights of way, recreational activities or historic features.

An analysis of the racks in neighbouring Southend found no promotional material relating to any attraction in Rochford District.

One area where there is some current activity is in the area of walks. The Council's woodland section runs a number of events and guided walks in the District's woodlands. Many of these take place at Hockley Woods. Walks are conducted for school and public groups and there are also 'Walk for Health' events.

County

Real Essex

The main tourism campaign run at a County level is co-ordinated by the Essex Development and Regeneration Agency (ExDRA). The campaign aims to attract out-of-county visitors to Essex. Main markets targeted include day visitors and short break takers from the London and South East. The campaign also undertakes targeted overseas promotion but does not actively target business tourism or the VFR market. The campaign strapline, *Real Essex*, and the content of the campaign aim to counter common misperceptions held by visitors about Essex.

The campaign operates a policy of only promoting quality-assessed accommodation. The absence of such accommodation in Rochford means that the District receives no promotion of its accommodation.

There are a number of elements to the current campaigns:

Advertising

The main aim of advertising is to generate requests for further information and to develop the customer database for on-going communication (the database currently stands at 9,800 names and addresses).

- **Postcards:** Full colour postcards distributed via a variety of means including neighbourhood drops to 200,000 properties in NE London
- **Media Advertising:** A number of media titles are used. These include *Heritage* and *In Britain* magazines

Online presence

- The Real Essex website (www.realessex.co.uk) includes lists of attractions, places to visit, restaurants and events. The website also enables visitors to book accommodation on-line and to request an area brochure (see below for details). Coverage of Rochford District in these listings is very poor, a fact which ExDRA puts down to the need for Rochford to supply more information⁴⁸

Fulfilment pieces

The following information is only sent out to those requesting information as a result of publicity or advertising campaigns, through the call centre or via the website.

- A 72-page, full colour A5 brochure containing map, places to visit, accommodation, eating places and events
- Three itineraries that split the county into three areas - Maritime Essex, Essex Heartland and South Essex. Although two of the leaflets have routes which pass through Rochford District, neither includes any stopping points in Rochford.
- A series of 8 touring itineraries centred around the themes of churches, gardens, museums, architectural sites of interest, culture, houses and gardens, National Trust properties, artists and galleries, mysteries and ghosts

The stable of fulfilment pieces is shortly to be added to by a bi-monthly magazine-type publication. The magazine will launch in Summer 2005 and have feature-type articles written or featuring high profile celebrities. The magazine will also see ExDRA experiment with presenting its own short break package. Distribution for the magazine is likely to include customer members of the database, press contacts and members of the Essex tourism trade.

Regional

East of England Tourist Board (EETB) undertakes regional marketing. There are six main elements to the campaign – domestic staying visitors, overseas marketing, day visits, travel trade, coastal resorts and cycling. More detail on each is provided below: are a number of elements which make up the campaign.

- **Domestic staying visitors:** The main vehicle is the regional website (www.visiteastofengland.com). This contains information on places to visit, eating out, events and accommodation. The site also has district/borough level detail including mini-sites on a number of Essex districts including Maldon, Southend, Colchester, Chelmsford. However Rochford, along with Basildon, has no information listed in this section.

⁴⁸ Comments made during consultation meeting with representatives of ExDRA

- **Days Out:** The main vehicle is *Great Days Out* - a 220-page, A5 guide listing 1,500 ideas for days out in the region. 20,000 copies are sold through bookshops, TICs etc. The publication costs £4.50. The campaign is also supported via content on main EETB website
- **East Coast Seaside campaign:** Promotes 7 resorts along the East Coast. Essex resorts include Southend and the Sunshine Coast (a consortium of Clacton, Frinton and Walton). The campaign is promoted via a direct mailed leaflet (100, 0000 copies), a 12 page electronic brochure and dedicated website (www.eastcoastseaside.co.uk)
- **Travel trade:** EETB produces a comprehensive travel trade directory
- **Cycling:** Promoted under the banner, England's Cycling Country, the campaign is aimed at the UK and Northern Europe. The campaign highlights 31 cycle routes in the region. The routes are promoted in a free brochure and in a range of detailed (paid-for) maps. There are two types of map - *Cycling Discovery Touring Maps* detail 3 longer circular routes of between 30-100 miles designed for a short break or weekend ride. *Cycling Cycling Discovery Maps* highlight a range of 28 circular routes of 13-30 miles. Essex is included in two routes, with the closest to Rochford being the Two Rivers Way, which starts at Burnham on Crouch
- **Overseas marketing:** Work aimed at overseas markets is undertaken through a partnership called PROMPT (Promoting the Region in Overseas Markets in Partnership Together). Set up in 2000, the partnership includes private and public sector members including 19 district/borough/ city councils and 4 county councils. The annual budget is £200K from membership fees and a further £100K support in kind from EETB. Target countries include three long haul (US/Canada and Australia) and 7 European / short haul countries (Germany, France, Ireland, Belgium, France, Scandinavia and the Netherlands). Promotional activity includes:
 - Print: East of England Overseas Guide, 900,000 copies produced in 4 languages; Visit East of England leaflet
 - Exhibitions: Attendance at key events in Germany Belgium and The Netherlands
 - Translation of pages on the regional tourism website
 - E - marketing initiatives

3.13 Key points from this section

- There are no big hooks, attractions or associations to attract visitors, stimulate interest and put the District on the map
- District has some attractive, if not outstanding, countryside. The landscape in the north and east of the District, along the river estuaries and coast, is the most distinctive on offer in the District
- In terms of wildlife watching opportunities, the District has a relatively strong offer. Bird watching sites are considered amongst the best in the UK for certain species of water birds.

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- The need to protect the sensitive land and waterscapes of the Roach and Crouch means that room for expansion in water activities appears limited
 - The District is not making the most of what it has. There is little by way of information and interpretation that would help guide and inform visitors of what the District can offer
 - Many of the recreational opportunities available in the District (golf, water-skiing, riding) reflect a predominance of local usage. As such access by visitors to such resources is difficult
 - The infrastructure required to support key outdoor recreational activities is patchy. The rights of way network is good in places but coastal routes are not continuous and lack interpretation. The facilities for horse-riding and cycling are less good. The bridleway network is very patchy and cyclists do not have access to signed on- or off-road routes
 - Lack of overnight accommodation is a real issue for Rochford. However, focusing on accommodation stock at the expense of the overall tourism product is not likely to be a successful policy to stimulate tourism revenue
 - Rochford attracts a very low profile in existing tourism campaigns. The reasons appear to be three-fold. Firstly, Rochford's low visitor base means that it is unlikely to benefit from joining existing tourism partnerships such as PROMPT. Secondly, Rochford doesn't currently have anyone supplying information to the various tourism campaign bodies. Thirdly, Rochford has no quality-assessed accommodation – meaning it cannot be promoted in the majority of campaigns that run a quality –assured only policy.
 - Rochford has seen little benefit from its close proximity to the major tourist destinations of Southend and, to a lesser extent, Maldon District
 - More needs to be done to see if the aspiration of Rochford town as a centre of arts and crafts is to become a reality

3.14 Strengths and weaknesses

A useful way to distil down the analysis of the area's resources, visitor patterns and responses provided during our consultations is to present them in the form of a summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis). This is laid out below.

Table 2 SWOT analysis for Rochford District

Strengths	
Very good road access from East and South	The unknown/unexplored nature of Foulness Island
Mainline rail link with London and other major catchment areas	Good range of water-based outdoor activities
Extensive Green Belt areas within District	Councillors supportive of tourism development
XXkm of waterfront	Airport expansion and associated hotel development
International reputation for wetland bird species, marsh insect and plant species	River and tributary corridors provide good physical links for walking, cycling and for ecology
Good rights of way network	Historic churches
Tranquil atmosphere offers escape for urban dwellers	Large areas of District are protected landscapes (e.g. SSSIs)
Large populations within easy reach	Rochford a well preserved historic town
Proximity to London	

Weaknesses	
Peninsula surrounded by water on two sides cuts down catchment	Lack of tourism market research and statistics
Very limited overnight accommodation	No experience of tourism development within Council. No track record of tourism promotion or involvement. No distinct tourism association or industry. No tradition of tourism in district
Limited appeal and attractions for families	Outdoor activity facilities geared up for local rather than visitor use (e.g. access restricted to members etc)
No major events	Southend visitors not necessarily interested in what District has to offer. Major roads act as barrier to N-S movement
Little or no information provision about the District's leisure and visitor amenities or special qualities. No visitor information centres, information dated, poor distribution	Rayleigh, Rochford and villages are not particularly interesting or inviting or picturesque. Lack of visitor interest or atmosphere
Landscape is typical of other parts of Essex rather than unique. Flat landscape seen as boring by some people	Suffers from being in the shadow of Southend
District has low profile in tourism terms – not know for anything in particular	Few public launching places onto the River Crouch
No earmarked budget available for tourism development	No links to long distance cycle or walking trails in district
Owners of sailing vessels tend to be local rather than from outside area	No history of joint working/ formal mechanisms for working with possible partners (e.g. Southend, Maldon District)
Access to Foulness Island is difficult due to MOD restrictions. Access restrictions cut off access to coast	Low levels of coverage in County-wide tourism marketing campaigns (e.g. Real Essex campaign)
	Sensitivity of landscape limits opportunities for major tourism developments

Opportunities	
Growth in short break and multiple holiday taking	Green Grid Strategy

Thames Gateway offers a significant potential funding stream	CAP reforms and farm diversification
Increase in interest in natural environment	Proximity to established visitor destination of Southend
Possibility of improved recreational access to Foulness Island following national strategic review of MoD assets	Partnership working with Real Essex campaign
Increase in internet use	Ferry from Burnham to Essex Marina
Growth in activity and wildlife tourism	Redevelopment of Essex Marina
	Enhancement of public rights of way as part of Crouch and Roach Project

Threats

Increase in competitiveness and appeal of overseas holidays	Competition from other destinations (e.g. London, Burnham, Suffolk, Maldon, Southend)
Airport expansion easing access to overseas destinations	Southend's dominance as a tourist destination
Possible pressure on greenbelt from future development	Increasing competition for eco/ wildlife holidays from other UK and international destinations
	Maldon District's active tourism development
Further restrictions on access to Foulness Island following national strategic review of MoD assets	

4 MARKETS AND TRENDS

This chapter looks at the broader market context for Rochford District. It provides a brief overview of relevant markets and looks at the changes likely to occur in these markets and the implications for Rochford.

4.1 Tourism context

The tourism market can be broken down into a number of discrete elements or segments. Key trends are summarised below.

Domestic long holidays

People are taking less and less long holidays in the UK and many more overseas. In 1985, the British took about 33 million long holidays in England, and less than 16 million, abroad. By 1998, the number of long holidays taken at home had decreased by a quarter to 27 million, and the number taken abroad had increased by 80% to 29 million.⁴⁹ Forecasts for the segment are continued decline.

This market is important for parts of the East of England such as Norfolk, but it is less important for Essex, where average length of stay is under 3 nights. The long stay market used to be very important for Southend but its importance has declined in favour of the day visits market.

This segment is dominated by self-catering and includes families with children. Again, within the segment, markets that engage in outdoor activities and enjoying nature are important.

Short breaks

Despite increased holidays abroad, growing numbers of people are taking short breaks in England. Between 1990 and 1999, short breaks grew by 60%.⁵⁰ This trend has continued in more recent years with domestic short breaks rising 7% between 1999 and 2004 to reach 69.3m nights.⁵¹ Future prospects also look good. For instance, VisitBritain forecast that breaks of 1-3 nights represents the largest area of growth in tourism trips⁵².

Perhaps because of the positive trends in this market, short breaks are a highly competitive market with many UK destinations competing for a share. The growth in low cost air flights has also seen a number of overseas destinations become powerful players in the short break market.

In terms of those likely to take short breaks, the segment is dominated by ABC1's and younger age groups. Those visiting friends and relatives are an important part of

⁴⁹ see ref 50

⁵⁰ UKTS/Mintel, figures quoted in *East of England Tourism Compendium*, EEDA, November 2003

⁵¹ City breaks in the UK, Mintel, April 2004

⁵² *enjoyengland Strategy, England Domestic Tourism Marketing Strategy 2003 – 2006*, VisitBritain

this segment, with almost half of short break takers resident in friends or relatives' homes.

The countryside is an important draw, with over half of those regularly taking short breaks, doing so to explore the country.⁵³

Activity holidays and activities on holiday

This includes trips whose primary purpose is to undertake activities as well as more general holidays where activities are part of the holiday. Both types of activity holiday have grown, although holidays with activities of their primary purpose is a much smaller market.

Activity-centred holidays appeal to a minority of consumers drawn from certain lifecycle groups (such as young people without children) and account for around 13% of domestic holidays.⁵⁴

The most popular activities for more general holidays include walking, swimming and visiting heritage attractions. Top destinations in the UK for this type of holiday are the Lake District, South West, Wales and the Scottish Highlands. The East of England and Essex is not considered a major player in this market although watersports, walking, wildlife watching and cycling may offer some potential.

Walking

The most significant activity that people enjoy on holiday is walking. Four out of five holiday-makers have engaged in holiday walking in the last three years. Short walks are by far the most popular followed by walks of more than 2 miles. Short, low level walks tend to be popular amongst older people with no children. More challenging terrain attracts younger walkers.

Watersports & Coastal Pursuits

This segment covers a range of activities including 'traditional' watersports such as water-skiing, fishing, windsurfing, diving, sailing. Watersports holidays have been taken by 9% of the UK population, with a further 10% interested. 47% of 20-24 year olds would like to go on one or other of the watersports holidays. Coastal resorts such as Southend already has a well-established range of watersports with Rochford having some but more limited provision. It should be noted that there are challenges associated with the development of these tourism activities in a way that is compatible with the conservation requirements of the protected landscapes in the District.

Wildlife-orientated tourism

Wildlife tourism covers visits to natural wildlife habitats or watching wildlife on land and/or sea. Bird watching is the primary activity of this market and is fast growing. The important wetland bird sites in the District are likely to be of interest to this market.

⁵³ see ref 50

⁵⁴ Ibid

Evidence suggests that wildlife watchers tend to be relatively affluent, well-educated, mature and environmentally focused.

Cycling

People taking cycling holiday as a main purpose constitute a small but important and growing market, from the UK and overseas. There is a much larger market for what is termed *holiday cycling*, where people hire or use their own bikes whilst on holiday.

The flat landscape of Rochford offers some potential but there are very few on or off-road routes in place. More provision, including trails and information, could be made for this market.

Business tourism

Business tourism is a broad sector encompassing general business or corporate travel by individuals, as well as incentive travel (“trips of a life-time” offered to key personnel as an incentive or reward), exhibitions and trade fairs and meetings and conferences.

The easiest area to influence is discretionary business tourism i.e. meetings, conferences, exhibitions etc and this explains why it is often the focus of business tourism strategies. Business tourism makes up 11% of tourism trips to the East of England. Despite this, business tourism has not been earmarked as a major tourism priority for action at a regional level in the East of England. Instead strategic documents see sub-regions and individual destinations as best placed to promote to this sector through such things as ‘conference desk services’.

In the absence of large venues, the main markets in the East of England are seen as small to medium sized events in places with good access. Rochford’s good rail links and adequate road links, together with its proximity to London Southend airport, means it is in a good position to capitalise on this market if the airport expands as planned

Visiting friends and relatives (VFR)

Visits to friends and relatives are an important sector of tourism and is relevant to Rochford because of its sizeable population. We’ve already seen that those visiting friends and relatives are partly responsible for the national upward trend in short breaks. The driving force behind this increase has been the growing propensity of 15-24 year olds to visit friends and relatives. They alone accounted for nearly a quarter of all domestic staying trips in 1999.⁵⁵

December is the most popular month for visiting friends or relatives. The school holiday months of August and October are also popular.

VFR tourists spend much less than lower than other tourists. They do not pay for accommodation, and are less likely to eat out and visit attractions. In 2000, spend per trip for holidaymakers (£155) was nearly double that of VFR’s (£78).

⁵⁵ Ibid

At a regional level, VFR is an important market, both because of the high resident population and the fact that increasing numbers of people are moving into the region from other parts of the country. Statistics show that over half (53%) of visitors are either visiting friends and relatives or staying with friends and relatives whilst on holiday.⁵⁶

Day visitors / resident population

National estimates of the day visits market are derived from the UK Day Visits Survey (UKDVS)⁵⁷. The latest available figures relate to 2002-3 and show that there were some 5.2 billion leisure day trips made in the UK with an associated spend of £71bn. In its *enjoyEngland* strategy⁵⁸, VisitBritain estimates that day visits represent 60% of total visitor spend in England.

Essex, situated as it is close to London and the urbanised area of north Kent and Hertfordshire and with a population of over 1.5 million (including Southend and Thurrock), is an important day visitor destination. Southend is a major day visit destination, attracting 6.1m trips annually.

The most popular destinations for leisure day visits in region are in, or to, towns and cities (57%). The next most popular destination is the countryside (24%). The seaside/coast, woods/forest, water with boats and water without boat are all equally popular, attracting 5% of visits

Eating out is the most popular main activity for day trips in the region (16%), a figure that rises to 21% if included as an activity and not just the main activity. Walking and participation in active sports are the next most popular (15% and 13%). It is interesting to note that the East of England has a higher than average percentage of trips which have active sports as their main activity (13% as compared with 9% for England).

4.2 Changing patterns of tourism

The market for tourism in the region and country is likely to undergo some important changes. These, in turn, will have implications for the Rochford District and its aspirations in the field of tourism. The following information summarises some of the major demographic, social and holiday-taking trends that have been identified at a regional level and which are likely to impact to a greater or lesser degree on tourism in Rochford.^{59 60}

- The ABC1 socio-economic group will represent an increasing share of the population. There will be more households without children and more single person households and single travellers and demand for product that satisfies their needs. More active empty nesters and lesser numbers in the young age group and more in the middle and upper age groups leading to less youth-dominance;

⁵⁶ East of England Tourism Compendium, Locum Destination Consulting, November 2003

⁵⁷ *Leisure Day Visits, Report of the 2002-3 Great Britain Day Visits Survey*, various agencies, 2004

⁵⁸ *enjoyEngland: The Strategy*, England Domestic Tourism Marketing 2003/4 to 2005/6, England Marketing Advisory Board, Sept 2003

⁵⁹ *Regional Tourism Marketing Strategy for the East of England*, EETB/EEDA, 2004

⁶⁰ see ref 65

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- It will be easier to get abroad and to other parts of the UK, especially by air –this will create both challenges (domestic customers will find it easier to go elsewhere) and opportunities (people will find it easier to get to the East of England, especially from overseas)
 - People will take more holidays, albeit increasingly abroad with short breaks taken in the UK
 - Long holidays taken in the UK will decrease
 - Day trips will continue to increase, driven by increasing prosperity and mobility. However, road congestion will be an increasing deterrent, given the importance of the car. In consequence, people will be more selective about where they will go
 - Visits to friends and relatives, especially by young people, will increase
 - Business tourism will increase, especially in the associations and public sectors
 - The number of domestic short breaks we take is on the increase, frequently booked at the last minute and especially as a getaway escape
 - Value for time is now as important as value for money. Visitors want guarantees that their time will be well spent and that they will feel enriched as a result of a visit
 - Quality of life is important. Consumers increasingly set themselves targets to increase their sense of wellbeing. They want more time to relax, spend with their families and achieve better work-life balance.
 - There is an increase in independent travel with DIY packaging of products, research on the Internet and travelling off the beaten track
 - There is strong interest in “experiences” such as opportunities to learn or participate in new hobbies, search for authentic products and more in-depth experiences
 - The fitness market is booming. Increased interest in spa holidays and opportunities to feel fitter and healthier
 - The Henley Centre found that the biggest potential opportunities lie in satisfying consumers' more intangible desires - for more time, space and energy, and a greater sense of wellbeing.

4.3 Tourism in the East of England⁶¹

Tourism is worth over £5 billion to the region's economy – constituting around 6% of GDP.

In 2001, the region received about 14.5 million trips, equating to about 53 million nights and a spend of £2.3 billion. Day trips are estimated at around 130 million, bringing the total spend to about £5.1 billion.

⁶¹ This section draws heavily on the East of England Tourism Compendium, (2003). This was drawn up as part of the process of developing a regional tourism strategy

The vast majority of visits are domestic and from nearby. In 2002, domestic tourists made 14.5 million trips to the East of England and stayed for about 44.3 million nights. Their expenditure was about £1.7 billion. In contrast, there were about 1.6 million visits from overseas to the East of England in 2003 (7% of UK total), representing 13.5 million nights (also 7% of the UK total) and expenditure of £629 million (5% of UK total).

Almost 33% of visits in the East of England originate from within the East of England with 68% coming from the region or London, South East and East Midlands.

The importance of day trips to the region is shown by the fact that across the English Government regions, the East of England has the third largest number of tourism day trips taken (120 m). This places the region behind the South East (194m) and London (130m).

The region attracts a lower percentage of affluent ABC1 visitors than many regions, a fact which, in part, explains the relatively low value nature of much tourism in the region. Also contributing to this is the high incidence of VFR and day visits.

4.4 Tourism in Essex

Visitor figures show that in 2003, Essex attracted 2.6 million visits generating approximately £2.4 billion of spend⁶². As the table below shows, the trend at a county and region level since 2000 has been downwards, although part of the drop may be attributable to changes in the methodology used to collect the data.

Table 3 Volume of tourists in Essex 2000 – 2003

County / Area	2000	2001	2002	2003
	(m)	(m)	(m)	(m)
Essex	3.1	2.7	2.9	2.6
East of England	13.2	13.0	14.5	11.8

Source: UKTS 2003, figures from Star UK website (<http://www.staruk.org.uk>)

In terms of its position within the East of England region, the table below shows the strength of Essex relative to other areas.⁶³

Table 4 Essex's share of tourism within East of England region

County / Area	% of total trips in East of England	% of total spending
Norfolk	28	33
Essex	22	15
Suffolk	15	19
Cambridgeshire	13	11
Hertfordshire	13	12
Bedfordshire	9	11
East of England	100%	100%

⁶² UKTS figures taken from Star UK website,

⁶³ SW England is the regional market leader in holiday tourism; it receives 19% of all domestic holiday trips, 25% of nights and 23% of spend

Source: UKTS 2003, figures from Star UK website (<http://www.staruk.org.uk>)

As the tables show, Essex is the 2nd most important visitor market in the region, accounting for 22% of visitor trips. However, the County ranks behind Norfolk and Suffolk in terms of the share of spending

Some key characteristics of tourism in Essex are⁶⁴:

- **Accommodation:** Half of staying UK visitors stay with friends or relatives. This is higher than for England as a whole (50% compared with 44%) and illustrates the importance of this market in the County. There are lower numbers using hotels & guest houses (21% as compared with 29% for England)
- **Visitor profile:** 65% of staying UK visitors are in ABC1 socio-economic groups. This is on a par with the national figure of 68%. Although there is a wide spread of ages overall, there is an emphasis on older visitors with 66% of respondents being aged over 35 years. This is in line with travel trends at a national level
- **Location for holidays:** High numbers of holidays taken in small towns (26% compared with 19% average for England). Low levels of holidays taken at the seaside (20% as compared with 27% average for England)
- **Origin of visitors.** Not surprisingly, the main markets for the East of England are those located close by. The main visitor market is visitors from within the region (24%), with other important markets being London and the South East (both at 16%)
- **Overseas visitors.** The United States, Germany and France are the biggest sources of overseas visitors to the region, but the United States is by far the highest contributor to spend⁶⁵

Perceptions and the reasons for visit

In order to understand more fully some of the underlying reasons that contribute to the existing visitor profile, it is useful to look at the perceptions of Essex and the motives behind why people visit the area.

Reasons for visits to Essex largely follow national trends with pretty equal numbers either on holiday (45%) or visiting friends or relatives (42%). Business tourism accounts for around 13%

Research commissioned by East of England Tourist Board looked at British Holidaymakers perceptions of the East of England⁶⁶. Results for Essex found that:

- Essex had more negative perceptions associated with than the other East of England counties

⁶⁴ information taken from UKTS figures contained on the Star UK website

⁶⁵ see ref 56

⁶⁶ *British Holidaymakers' Perceptions of the East of England* MEW Research for EETB, 1997, quoted in *Regional Tourism Marketing Strategy for the East of England*, EEDA/EETB, 2004.

- Immediate associations included Essex Girl in her white stilettos, a crowded, busy extension of east London, industrial towns, massive shopping centres, large, noisy, seaside resorts with their funfairs and amusement arcades
- Nonetheless, there was a minority who recognised that Essex was not all built-up areas and traffic congestion. Positive comments were made about the countryside, rivers, villages, and towns

4.5 Tourism within Rochford District

There is very little by way of information on the number of visitors attracted to the District. Some neighbouring authorities have commissioned the Regional Tourist Board to produce estimates detailing the value and volume of tourism but this sort of data has not been commissioned for Rochford.

In the absence of substantive research, it is possible to give only a very rough indication of the magnitude of tourism of tourism within Rochford. This can be done by careful reference to the tourism performance of neighbouring authorities. The table below presents data on neighbouring areas:

Table 5 Estimates of tourism value and volume for selected areas in Essex

Area / District	Trips	Spend	day trips as % of total trips
Chelmsford	.3.3*	£120m	90%
Southend	6.4	£170m	96%
Tendring District	3.8	£185m	66%

*Sources: Tendring District – Tendring Tourism Strategy 2001- 2006, Tendring District Council; *Chelmsford – estimated number of visitors (not trips), taken from Chelmsford Borough Council Visitor and Tourism Strategy 200-2005, Chelmsford BC, Sept 1999; Southend – figures obtained during meeting with Southend Borough Council tourism staff.*

As the table shows, the value and volume of tourism in the County varies considerably. Chelmsford, which like Rochford is not well-known as a visitor destination, estimates that 2.4 million visitors a year visit the Borough. Spending is estimated at £60m. Tendring District, which includes the coastal resorts of Clacton and Walton on the Naze, estimates it received 3.8m trips per year. At the other end of the spectrum, the major resort of Southend attracts 6.4million visitor a year and tourism spending of £170m. For all three areas, day visits are extremely important, accounting for between 85% and 96%.

Given that Chelmsford has far more overnight accommodation and is a city, it is likely that the size of the visitor economy in Rochford is considerably less than this.

Although we believe this low level of visitor activity in Rochford to be correct, there are one or two examples where visitor usage can be identified. One such area is in relation to vessels. Although the vast majority of 1900 owners with boats moored in the Crouch and Roach are from Essex, only 11% come from inside the District. This leaves 89% of vessel owners as being visitors.

Catchment area analysis

Most of the visitors to the district are likely to be generated from South Essex and any visitor attractions in the district will draw the bulk of their audience from a local catchment. To explore this in more detail we have commissioned a catchment analysis looking at the population within a 30-minute and 60-minute drive time of the town of Rochford. Full details are available in a separate report, key features are summarised below.

- 420,000 people live within a 30 minute drive of Rochford and 1.3m within 60 minutes. As you move east, the catchment area increases significantly
- 97% of the local (30minute) catchment is white, compared with 92% for GB as a whole. The age structure and proportion of families with children are both similar to GB
- There is a higher level of home ownership than the national average (76% compared with 68%). Car ownership is also higher. These are both indicators of affluence
- In terms of ACORN groups the local catchment area has relatively high proportions of flourishing families (13%), settled suburbia (17%), secure families (15%), prudent pensioners (7%), post industrial families (6%). These are all comfortably off. There are low proportions of deprived groups
- Patterns of leisure activity in the local catchment area are not dissimilar to that of the population as a whole. Propensity to undertake various relevant recreation activities is shown in the table below

Table 6 *Participate in selected recreation activities*

Activity	Local catchment %
Walking /rambling	27.3
Cycling	13.0
Golf	9.9
Fishing	6.1
Horse riding	2.9
Sailing /yachting	1.6
Visit beauty spots/gardens*	23.5
Visit museum*	21.0
Visit stately homes/castles*	20.9
Visit places of natural interest*	16.7

Source: Catchment analysis. * visit in past 12 months

Local market characteristics

In terms of characteristics of the local visitor markets, our consultations have yielded the following observations⁶⁷:

- The District is not known as a visitor destination. This applies to both staying and day visits
- Knowledge of what Rochford has to offer is poor
- The District has a range of strong competitor destinations nearby which fare better in tourism terms. These include the major coastal resort of Southend, the historic city of Colchester, London as well as destinations such as Burnham on Crouch and Battlesbridge
- What visitors there are in the District are likely to fall into three main types - day visits, business tourists and owners /hirers of caravan holiday homes (static caravans)
- Day visitors appear to be drawn from two main groups at present. Both reflect the District's extensive water resource. The first consists of owners of sailing vessels moored along the rivers. The second group are non-local members of watersport clubs such as those involved in waterskiing
- Despite the District's proximity to Southend, it appears that Rochford is attracting few day visits from people staying on holiday in the resort
- Business tourists are often on business connected with the airport. They are the main user of overnight accommodation in the area and in particular the hotel accommodation present in the District
- As the tourism audit Chapter pointed out, the District has a number of holiday home parks. Whilst it is not clear how many are used as residential sites rather than as holiday accommodation, it is likely that modest numbers are using the parks as holiday accommodation
- There are also likely to be a small number of visitors coming for the bird watching opportunities offered in the District and visitors on the eastern edge of Basildon visiting Hockley Woods
- Aside from business tourists, the overseas visitor market is likely to be very small for Rochford

4.6 Tourism in neighbouring districts

When compared with neighbouring districts, Rochford has a very low level of tourism activity and visits.

Southend

Most dominant in tourism terms is the coastal resort of Southend, located south of Rochford District. The resort is a very popular day visit destination but also has a sizeable, but declining staying market. Key facts include:

⁶⁷ These observations should only be seen as indicative. Detailed market research is required in order to test the veracity of the statements

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- In 2002 there were 282,400 overnight visitors and 6.1m day visitors to the resort. Most staying visitors were domestic with 14% from overseas. Spend from overnight visitors is put at £170m.
 - VFR is important, only 30% of nights were spent in commercial accommodation. 17% of visitors are on business.
 - The main attractions are the resorts seven miles of coastline and beaches (three beaches have blue flag awards), Southend Pier, (the longest in the world at 1.3 miles) and a number of family-orientated visitor attractions.
 - The town also has over 300 restaurants, cafes and pubs and two casinos. Historic areas with appeal to tourists include the village Leigh on Sea and the Georgian conservation area above Cliff Gardens. The most important event is the Air show which attracts over half a million visitors over the May bank holiday.

Through its involvement with the Thames Gateway, Southend is seeking to promote itself as a cultural tourism destination and has set itself the goal of becoming the cultural capital of East Anglia within 10 years. Initiatives in this area so far have included the establishing of *designfront*, a new, annual, three-day contemporary design event selling the work of young British designers working in furniture, jewellery, lighting, ceramics, glassware, textiles and fashion accessories. Another development likely to have a significant impact on tourism if it goes ahead is that Southend is touted as a possible location for a regional casino development if the first prototype introduced under the Government's Gambling Bill are success.

Maldon

Maldon District, lying to the north of Rochford across the river Crouch, has become increasingly active in rural tourism development in recent years. Key facts include:

- The tourism product focus is very much on the District's countryside and on opportunities to engage in outdoor recreational activities such as walking, cycling, bird watching and water-based activities. There have been recent initiatives to improve RoWs in the District and in particular ensure that sea walls leading out of Burnham on Crouch are in good condition. Cycle hire has recently been introduced near Burnham.
- There are no large-scale visitor attractions, but the district does have some attractive destinations, in particular the waterfront town of Burnham on Crouch and the port of Maldon.
- The District also has considerably more accommodation stock than Rochford.
- Events also bring in visitors. Maldon Mud Race, held annually around Christmas or New Year attracts competitors, visitors and media coverage

from around the world. Burnham-on-Crouch hosts a regatta in August and a carnival in September.

The District Council is active in tourism promotion. It produces a range of visitor information including an accommodation guide, extensive visitor information on its website (www.maldon.gov.uk). The Council also runs a TIC in Maldon and offers support for a community-based TIC based on the Quay at Burnham. The Council is also a member of the overseas tourism consortium PROMPT and is one of the founding members of a consortium looking to promote coastal towns in Essex.

Recent tourism product developments have included the restoration of the beach at Burnham on Crouch.

Chelmsford

Chelmsford Borough shares a river border with Rochford. Like Rochford, Chelmsford is not considered a traditional visitor destination. Key facts:

- Estimates put tourism worth in the borough at £120m, generating 3 million day visitors and 300,000 staying visitors
- The Borough promotes a broad range of city and rural based tourism product and also uses the strapline “birthplace of radio” – a reference to the fact that radio pioneer Marconi transmitted the first radio waves from the city
- Events also play an important part, particularly the borough’s August music festivals which bring up to 60,000 people a day to the venue in Hylands Park. Business tourism is also actively courted.
- The Borough is part of a Mid-Essex consortium which promotes business tourism through such methods as a conference and meetings guide.

Chelmsford Borough Council produces a range of visitor information. This includes a Chelmsford mini guide, accommodation guide, events and restaurant guides.

4.7 Key points from this section

- Rochford is starting from a very low base in tourism terms. It has few day visitors and virtually no overnight staying visitors or overseas visitors. Only VFR, business tourists and those engaged in watersports provide modest levels of visitor numbers
- Rochford has a large and affluent catchment from which it can draw day visitors
- There is a lot of competition, not least from other parts of Essex. Rochford struggles to benefit from its close proximity to the major coastal resort of Southend and other neighbouring areas with more tourism activity

-
- It is unlikely that Rochford can generate tourism (other than day visits) on its own. Its fortunes are tied up with those of the County and the wider region
 - Rochford needs to align local target markets and product offerings with those at a regional and county level (VFR, day visitors, business tourism)
 - The strategy will need to look carefully at the viability and desirability of seeking to gain benefit from visitor markets already attracted by neighbouring districts

5 ASSESSMENT OF TOURISM POTENTIAL AND STRATEGY

Previous chapters have assessed the potential tourism product in Rochford and looked at current tourism trends and markets. In this chapter we bring together these two elements, examining the potential for developing tourism in the District and highlighting some opportunities.

5.1 Tourism evaluation

Tourism activity is very limited at present in Rochford. There is a small amount of business tourism and very modest numbers engaged in water-based activities, some recreational day trips and some VFR.

We are therefore starting from a very low base. Having reviewed the tourism product available and looked at a range of possible markets, the initial prospects do not appear particularly promising. Rochford District has:

- No profile as a place to visit
- Hardly any overnight accommodation
- No significant visitor attractions or draws
- Towns and villages are fairly ordinary and aren't draws in their own right. Villages, with one or two exceptions, are not good examples of vernacular Essex architecture. They also lack "buzz" and a reason to visit
- There are no striking associations with famous people or literary associations of note
- There is limited heritage appeal, only minor sites and weak associations
- The countryside is relatively attractive but not particularly usual or outstanding
- Opportunities do exist for watersports development but expansion is constrained
- There are also other development pressures and constraints

This is not a case of Rochford having a poor image - it simply isn't on the visitor map. This is both a negative and a positive. It means that you can start with a blank sheet of paper and build interest without having to counter old or misperceptions.

Rochford does have some things going for it:

- A strong catchment area with good road and rail access to a substantial and growing population
- Part of Thames Gateway and an acknowledgement that area is a strategic recreation resource. Resources are available for projects which support Thames Gateway aspirations

- Rochford is a well preserved old town with a characterful, if a somewhat under-developed, historic centre
- Some interesting landscapes, Hockley Woods, marshes and wetlands. undiscovered Foulness Island. Particularly interesting are river frontages and creeks, natural history etc with new opportunities arising from rising sea levels
- Expansion at the airport is looking increasingly possible, bringing positive knock-on effects for stimulating business tourism and kick-starting hotel and conference facility development
- Opportunities for expanding water recreation and outdoor activity. A relatively good network of footpaths and some quiet roads suitable for horseriding and particularly cycling
- In terms of wildlife watching opportunities, the District has a relatively strong offer. Bird watching sites are considered amongst the best in the UK for certain species of water birds. There is also some further scope in relation to viewing seals and porpoises that lie off the coast

5.2 Options for moving forward

In the light of our analysis, we put forward three options for discussion regarding the approach to be taken to tourism in the district. These are:

1. Focussing just on the needs of residents – *Residents first*
2. Becoming more visitor friendly – *Open House*
3. Actively encouraging more visitors by providing a reason to visit – *Destination Rochford*

Option 1 – Residents first

This option accepts that the District's first priority is to develop services and improve the quality of life for its residents. Whilst not turning its back on visitors, the option looks for engagement with tourism only where activity can be justified in terms of benefit to residents. Although this option means little by way of financial commitment, it has the danger of sending out the wrong signal to Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership and is somewhat inward looking and parochial. Clearly, there is no possibility of exploiting any wider economic or social benefits to the District under this option.

Even though this option recommends no new initiatives, there are a number of plans that relate to Thames Gateway that will need to be seen through to conclusion. These include the restoration of Rayleigh Windmill and development of the Green Grid strategy

Option 2 – Open House

This option takes a more pro-active stance towards encouraging and providing for visitors. It is primarily about building on what the District already has to offer but seeking to make it more accessible, publicising it better and undertaking minor

improvements to make it work more satisfactorily. It is working with what you have got rather than embarking on major new projects.

It primarily focuses on raising the profile of recreational activities and opportunities, wildlife, heritage and landscape. The message needs to be that Rochford is on your doorstep and is a pleasant place to visit, particularly for informal recreation activity.

These initiatives will benefit local residents as well as visitors and are very much in line with the thrust of Thames Gateway, with Rochford providing a green lung for the built-up areas of South Essex.

Initiatives might include:

- Production of a succinct piece of print communicating main facets of interest to visitors, distributed via leaflet rack outlets within the District and in neighbouring areas
- Information print and website setting out walks, cycling and other opportunities
- Development of on-site interpretation at all major natural sites, including river estuaries
- Taking forward opportunities connected with bird watching. These might include better signposting of and interpretation at reserves with good bird watching sites, development of a visitor/orientation centre, and working with accommodation operators and RSPB to develop weekend packages. Foulness could offer opportunities here in the longer term.
- Establishing libraries as formal visitor information points carrying a range of visitor information
- Encourage accommodation providers to participate in quality assessment schemes, thus opening up possibility of promotion in Real Essex and other campaigns run by EETB / VisitBritain
- A Rolling programme of upgrading interpretative signs located at key sites (e.g. Hockley Woods, nature reserves etc)
- Simple improvements to RoWs and bridleway route network. Filling gaps, improving access etc
- Signage of an on-road leisure-orientated cycle route linking with ferry at Essex Marina
- Improving highway and pedestrian signing
- Working with the airport on the stimulation of business tourism
- Ensure that the delivery of the South Essex Green Grid Strategy matches the vision through allocation of increased and dedicated officer time to the project

- Creation of a heritage trail through district for cars and cyclists to help people find and enjoy the Districts history.
- Opening up a dialogue with the surrounding districts and county to look for potential for collaboration on tourism initiatives.
- Working with operators to improve casual access and opportunities for water recreation (novice training, weekend courses), horse riding (off-road hacks), golf (pay and play) etc.
- Making residents aware of what is on offer on their doorstep to encourage activity with friends and relatives.

The main markets for this are likely to be:

- Day visitors: primarily people living within 30 minutes drive of the area. Also includes those interested in water-based, activity orientated day-visitors drawn to the District for its water-ski and sailing opportunities
- VFR
- Staying visitors from Southend and Maldon etc

The impacts of this initiative are likely to be quite modest. It will encourage more activity primarily in the countryside. Some local enterprises, such as pubs, cafes, shops may benefit from increased spending and there may be opportunities for some small operators to provide services to visitors e.g. bike hire, boat trips, horse riding, guided walks etc

Option 3 – Destination Rochford

This option involves promoting a 'sea change' in Rochford's attractiveness to visitors. Underlying this option is a recognition that people won't come to Rochford unless you provide compelling reasons for them to do so. The product offer is not strong enough to do this at present but the catchment area is positive and the District's inclusion in Thames Gateway provides some important opportunities.

Starting from the District's current low base, this option will require investment and sustained effort. It envisages sizeable increases in visitor numbers in the longer term by providing some "hooks" which will raise the profile of the District and draw people in. We see opportunities in two main areas - recreational / outdoor activity and accommodation development linked to business tourism and airport plans.

Action on this scale is higher risk and longer term and will require investment from either public or private sector and possibly both. There will be a need to undertake more detailed work in order to assess the feasibility of initiatives. Areas to explore include:

- **Regional wetlands country park.** This would be a major project based around the Wallasea Island and, if viable, Potton and Foulness islands. It would consist of a visitor centre, adventure activity, watersports, wildlife watching, youth and group accommodation. Essex Marina could be

developed as a major gateway to the site. The country park would act as sustainable tourism demonstration project for this end of Thames Gateway and an ambitious realisation and extension of the Green Grid Strategy. It would also help to preserve and open up access to typical Essex wetlands. This is an opportunity to really put the district in the map.

- **Woodland adventure / exploration:** Two main options here. *Woodland adventure* would seek to develop a woodland adventure park with walkways, runways and climbing in the tree canopy. *Go Ape* have five sites around the country (www.goape.co.uk) and might be interested in developing a new facility in the District at Hockley Woods or one of the other woodland areas. *Woodland exploration* would involve the development of a canopy level walkway through Hockley Woods. The aim would be to enable visitors to get a treetop view of the woods. The emphasis would be on nature and wildlife rather than adventure
- **Developing the tourism appeal of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park.** The country park is one of the few sizeable assets under the direct control of the District Council but has little to attract a wider audience at present. One possibility is to introduce a facility here that makes the park stand out as a sub-regional attraction. The downside is that the park is currently quite small (100 acres) and this may not be possible. We have no clear idea as to what this might be but one option might be to make more of the horse- offer and build on the existing bridleway provision. A sculpture park might also be considered.
- **Revitalising Rochford town as a visitor destination:** This would be a long-term project. There are two main proposals:
 - **Arts, antiques and crafts.** It would centre on realising ambitions for the town to be a centre for arts, crafts and antiques. The success of this proposal is dependent upon finding some space in Rochford for low rent activity (antique sales, crafts people, designers) which can be nurtured and grown over time and will eventually create spin-off activities. In the shorter term there may be some scope for developing art-themed markets using Rochford's Market Square. We like this idea and think it has some potential but the main drawback is the lack of suitable empty buildings or spaces within the town centre that might be used as a seed-bed for this type of activity. There is a collection of disused barns at Stroud Green on the B1013 (Hall Road/ Cherry Orchard Lane) which could form the nucleus of a craft/arts centre.
 - **Bringing the river Roach back to Rochford.** At present Rochford's connection with the river is not obviously apparent. Stambridge Mills has potential as a mixed use residential/ leisure development which would reconnect the town with the river. We could see potential here for a high quality marina environment with associated housing and leisure uses. This would be far superior to the existing marina facilities at Wallasea Island. Issues of boat access would need to be explored. The idea of the Rochford beach could also be considered in this context.
- **Children's attraction/farm attraction.** Farm diversification inducements could be used to create a large-scale children's attraction. In other parts of

the country Pick Your Own, farm shops and farm parks have proved popular family attractions. This would be dependent on finding a farmer interested in diversification.

- **Hotel site identification.** Expansion at Southend airport will create increased demand for hotel accommodation. Whilst some of this demand will be catered for by on-site facilities planned at the airport, there should be more aggressive marketing of sites for hotel accommodation in the District. However, demand for hotels is primarily driven by business activity and there is little point doing this unless the underlying demand is there.
- **New touring caravan site.** The District currently has one touring caravan site (Riverside Village near Canewdon). Tourism sites are in demand and are less intrusive on the landscape than static sites and holiday parks. Amending planning policy to allow for a well-designed touring caravan and camping site with minimal on-site facilities would enable the District to better cater for visitors seeking to enjoy the peace and quiet that the rural parts of the District afford
- **HMS Beagle Interpretation centre.** If the remains of HMS Beagle are confirmed as being located in the District, there may be an opportunity to develop a heritage attraction to interpret the remains and the importance of Darwin's voyages on the ship to his scientific theories. However, we think this is a remote possibility and not really a starter.

The main markets and target audiences for this options are:

- Day visitors: as in Option 2, but with children's attraction and the woodland adventure concept pulling in more family groups. Development of Rochford as centre for arts and antiques will put the town on the antiques / art touring map. Rochford could expect visits from those also visiting Battlesbrige and Old Leigh
- Business tourists: dependent on airport expansion
- Staying visitors: The caravan and camping site would attract those seeking to enjoy the District's peace and quiet, as well as take advantage of good bird watching and wetland and coastal walking. Some of these will be staying visitors. Any commencement of low-cost flights from the airport is also likely to generate some demand for overnight stays prior to departure from or after arrival at the airport

The impacts of this option are likely to be greater. It stands a chance of pulling in larger numbers of people, generating some overnight stays and employment and generally a greater spin-off. We don't think visitor numbers are likely to be so great as to cause a significant nuisance. On the other hand there is more risk and is likely to require investment and a commitment by the Council

5.3 What next?

As the opening chapter pointed out, this Stage 1 report has sought to assess the potential of tourism in Rochford District. The three options presented above represent a variety of responses to the assessments and judgements laid out in the previous chapters. It is important to note that the options should be considered the basis for discussion rather than definite statements of action.

We need to discuss this with you and for you to decide whether you want to terminate the study at this point or do some more work in developing some of the proposals described above.

APPENDIX 1 - LIST OF CONSULTEES

Carol Starkey	Crouch and Roach Estuary Project
Phil Clow	Environment Agency
Mary Falconer Spence	Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership
Jeremy Squire	Essex Wildlife Trust, Southend and Rochford Branch
Capt Ian Bell	Crouch Harbour Authority
Lyn Harvey	Highways and Transportation Department, Engineer, Essex County Council
Christine Allman	Rights of Way Team, Essex County Council
Fred Farindon	George and Dragon public house, Foulness Island
Elli Constantatou	Essex Development and Regeneration Agency (ExDRA)
Deidre McGonagal	ExDRA
Councillor M Starke	Hawkwell North Ward, Rochford District Council
Councillor R Amner	Barling and Sutton Ward, Rochford District Council
Councillor K Gordon	Rochford Ward, Rochford District Council
Councillor M Vince	Rochford Ward, Rochford District Council
Councillor P Webster	Whitehouse Ward, Rochford District Council
Councillor H Glynn	Hawkwell South Ward, Rochford District Council
Lisa Driscoll	Tourism, Marketing & Special Events Department, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Diane Defontaine	Community and Tourist Information Centre, Burnham on Crouch
	Housing Health and Community Care, Rochford District Council
Jeff Stanton	Hockley Chamber of Trade
Ken Wickham	Federation of Small Businesses
Ed Byford	Rayleigh Chamber of Trade
Humphrey Squier	Rochford Chamber of Trade
Robert Croshaw	Baltic Wharf
The Manager	Rayleigh Megazone
Kim Hughes	Riverside Village Caravan Park
Lisa Dixon	Essex Marina

APPENDIX 2 – LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT OF ROCHFORD DISTRICT

A useful way to look at what makes the area's landscape distinctive is to refer to the Countryside Agency's Landscape Character Assessments. These divide England into 159 different Character Areas and describe how each gives a locality its own sense of place and what makes it different from its neighbouring area. Rochford District falls into two Character Areas – Greater Thames Estuary and Northern Thames Basin.

The Greater Thames Estuary includes the majority of the District except an inland area bounded by Hullbridge in the north and Rayleigh and Rochford in the south. This is covered by the Northern Thames Basin. The Character Areas are summarised in the table below:

Landscape Character Areas for the Rochford District

Great Thames Estuary	Northern Thames Basin
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive open spaces dominated by the sky within a predominantly flat, low-lying landscape. The pervasive presence of water and numerous coastal estuaries extend the maritime influence far inland. • Strong feeling of remoteness and wilderness persists on the open beaches and salt marshes, on the reclaimed farmed marshland and also on the mudflats populated by a large and varied bird population. • Traditional unimproved wet pasture grazed with sheep and cattle. Extensive drained and ploughed productive arable land protected from floods by sea walls, with some areas of more mixed agriculture on higher ground. • Open grazing pastures patterned by a network of ancient and modern reed-fringed drainage ditches and dykes, numerous creeks and few vertical boundaries such as hedges or fences. • Distinctive military heritage on coastline such as Napoleonic military defences and 20th century pillboxes. • Numerous small villages and hamlets related to the coastal economy of fishing, boatbuilding and yachting. • Modern day pattern of local parishes reflects the historical layout of settlements, surrounded by farmland on the higher ground inland, giving way to marsh down to the waterfront. • Pressure on edges, particularly around major estuaries, from urban, industrial and recreational developments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flat, extensive tract of traditionally unproductive farmland on heavy clay soils. • Very sparse settlement pattern of hamlets and a few villages. • Ancient planned landscape of long hedgerow boundaries and rectangular fields of mainly pasture – a contrast to the more evolved landscape of the adjacent boulder clays, wooded hills and ridges, and coast. • Historical dominance of elm in the shrub and tree content of hedgerows. • The overall landscape pattern reflects the simple rectilinear character of the fields and hedgerows. • The south-east Essex Hills around Langdon, Hockley and Rayleigh comprise the only pronounced rise in topography within these lowlands • The generally flat and typically gently undulating lowlands are drained by numerous streams such as the Roach and Crouch which merge before widening out into the flat marshes to the east.

Source: Countryside Agency website (<http://www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/index.asp>)

