

AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR ROCHFORD DISTRICT

DRAFT

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document sets out a medium term Economic Development Strategy for Rochford District to 2007. It outlines the role Rochford District Council has in developing the local economy and how the Council will work with partners to improve local economic competitiveness. The economic development strategy needs to be read in conjunction with the emerging Local Plan and the Draft Community Strategy. Both documents are out for consultation and in turn will impact on this strategy. The intention is to review the strategy on an annual basis to keep pace with the changing policy framework and opportunities across the District.
- 1.2 The Strategy links predominantly with Economic Strategies for Essex and South East Essex produced by Essex Economic Partnership (EEP) and South East Essex Economic Strategy (SEEEES), and also ties in with the emerging Thames Gateway South Essex Economic Development Strategy.
- 1.3 The District Council plays a major part in the local economy and every day provides services to residents of Rochford or encourages others to do so, either through an enabling role, or lobbying on behalf of the community.
- 1.4 The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 places a statutory requirement on local authorities to produce an Economic Development Strategy. The Local Government Act 2000 has added a requirement on local authorities to safeguard the economic, environmental and social well being of their districts.
- 1.5 “Our Heritage – Our Future” is Rochford District Council's motto and essentially describes the Council's mission. Rochford has retained its identity, with green fields and salt marshes, ancient woodlands and open riverbanks. With its main towns of Rayleigh and Rochford, and many smaller town and village communities, including Hockley and Great Wakering, the modern Rochford

District Council takes its heritage seriously, yet continually reviews and develops its plans for the future.

1.6 The Council's Corporate Plan and Best Value Performance Plan, effectively the business plan for the Authority, identifies six key objectives for the Council.

1. Quality Cost Effective Services
2. A Safer and Caring Community
3. Promote a Green and Sustainable Environment
4. Encouraging a Thriving Local Economy
5. Improving Quality of Life for Residents
6. Maintaining and Enhancing Local Heritage and Culture

1.7 Clearly the Economic Development Strategy is consistent with Strategic Priority Four, Encouraging a Thriving Local Economy, but it also links to the other objectives.

2. **AIMS OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

2.1 Local Authorities have a long history of involvement in economic development, with some of the first initiatives being set up in 1899 in Luton. Before the Second World War, most welfare provision was funded through local rates. However, as economic development has risen through the national political agenda, and the number of agencies and policies have multiplied there is a question of the role of local authorities in economic development, particularly in small Districts where the County Council takes the lead. There are two main aspects to the role of local government in economic development as described by the Audit Commission.¹

1. **Delivering economic development services** – using discretionary powers (Local Government and Housing Act 1989) to deliver a range of services to help employers grow and helping local people benefit from the employment opportunities development can offer.

2. ¹ **Working across departments and agencies** – many councils lead partnership activity generating a vision of their area in order to ensure that the response to local economic change is coherent and based on good evidence, and that services are delivered effectively. This approach tries to ensure that all the Councils' activities such as planning and development control support the development of a thriving economy.

2.2 The aims of the Rochford District Council Economic Development Strategy link to the Corporate Objectives of the Council and incorporate the two aspects identified by the Audit Commission.

¹ Audit Commission – 'A life's Work', 1999

2.3 The aim of the Council's Economic Development Strategy is 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 below:

1. Work in partnership to support the needs of the business community in the area, to enable it to develop and grow and thus contribute to the economic prosperity of the District.
2. Working with partners, develop the skills of the local workforce to meet the needs of businesses now and in the future, to maintain low levels of unemployment in the District and encourage jobs that add value to the local economy.
3. Support town centre and industrial estate enhancement initiatives aimed at improving the environment ensuring the area is economically prosperous and competitive.
4. Work with partners to ensure that businesses, including rural businesses have access to quality and effective business support initiatives locally.
5. Facilitate appropriate local transport and infrastructure developments which balance businesses needs whilst respecting local environmental constraints.

6. 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.
7. Taking advantage of inward investment opportunities to secure the future economic prosperity of the District.

3. ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

3.1 There are five features which characterise the economic structure of the UK in recent years:

1. Decline in manufacturing activity
2. Increasing levels of participation of women in the workforce
3. Changing geography of employment
4. Increased labour productivity
5. Greater open market competition

3.2 These have had an impact on the national and local economy. One key feature which has an impact is the decentralisation of some businesses from larger cities such as Greater London to smaller towns and rural areas. Matched with an increase in households moving from cities there is an increased pressure on land use and the price of labour and property.

Rochford Economic Profile

3.3 Rochford is a relatively small District with a total resident population of 78,489 (2001 Census). 60% of the population are in the working age groups and 20% are retired. The majority of jobs in the District are in utilities, construction and communications.

3.4 Rochford, like other parts of South East Essex has a higher proportion of small companies than the national average. Only 2% of Rochford companies employ greater than 50 staff, compared with 2.7% of Essex Companies. Small businesses dominate the local employment profile. Many of the larger employers have businesses related to the Southend Airport, which is considered a major asset to the local economy. There are some 1,500 jobs related to the airport site mainly in the engineering sector.

- 3.5 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 (Rochford Economic Profile). In the past five years there has been a steady increase of out commuting from the District. Statistics provided by First Great Eastern show that using 1998 as the base year, out commuting by train from Rayleigh has increased by 10%, Rochford 24% and Hockley 7% (1998-2002).
- 3.6 Rochford's unemployment rate (2002) stands at 2.4%, lower than its neighbouring authorities of Castle Point, Southend, and Basildon and below that for Essex. Statistics provided by Rayleigh Job Centre (2002) shows Rochford to have significantly more unfulfilled job vacancies relative to population than other areas locally in Essex.
- 3.7 The District is the fourth most affluent District in Essex (there are twelve in all). The Indices of multiple deprivation is a system that provides a calculation of under privileged areas of population by Ward. Rochford is ranked amongst the least deprived Districts in England, but has some low scores in the area of education, skills and training. There are four wards in the District in the most deprived 40% of English wards.

Thames Gateway South Essex

- 3.8 Thames Gateway is the Government's top priority for economic and social regeneration. It is a focus for public and private investment in regeneration and growth, of which transport infrastructure is a vital component. It is the largest regeneration project in Europe.
- 3.9 Thames Gateway South Essex is an extension of the original Thames Gateway, which was designated by the Government in 1995. New Regional Planning Guidance for the South East, which was published by the Government in March 2001, confirmed the extension into South Essex to include more of Thurrock, part

of Basildon (including Basildon New Town), the boroughs of Castle Point and Southend on Sea, and a small part of Rochford including London Southend Airport.

3.10 Approximately 640,000 people live within South Essex. Many more work in the area, thus forming the largest built-up area in the East of England Region. It contains one tenth of the Region's population. Thames Gateway South Essex has identified priorities in its strategic framework launched in July 2003. This will regard to:-

- its position in relationship with London
- the commonality of need for regeneration along the River Thames and its estuary
- the shared past of declining industries
- similar problems associated with structural economic change.

3.11 To deliver this agenda, the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership has agreed to focus its efforts around 3 'regeneration hubs' which together include those communities suffering from deprivation, along with key new sites for potential development. The focus is provided through the identification of key sectors within each hub. These are:-

- Southend/Rochford – creative/cultural, leisure/tourism and higher education.
- Basildon/Castle Point – manufacturing/engineering, business systems and services.
- Thurrock – transport/logistics, community enterprise.

- 3.12 Within the context provided by these, certain areas (Southend, Thurrock Riverside, Shellhaven, Basildon) have been defined as Zones of Change and are establishing vehicles for delivery of change. Rochford and Castle Point, have been defined as Zones of Influence.

Rochford Zone of Influence

- 3.13 In the context of Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership, the District of Rochford has a small but significant contribution to make. The Thames Gateway South Essex boundary includes London Southend Airport, potentially providing a regional airport facility for the area, the majority of which lies within the District.
- 3.14 Of particular interest to Rochford is the potential to develop those themes, which link to the Zones of Change in Southend, in particular, in developing the area for leisure, recreation and tourism activity. The District has a high socio-economic profile, high value housing and quality environment which balances the communities of South Essex, and provides an attractive inward investment proposition for business, particularly the developing service sector. The characteristics and aims identified contribute to the wider and balanced sub regional offer for Thames Gateway South Essex.
- 3.15 In the context of the Thames Gateway South Essex, the key priorities include:
- 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.
- Enhancing rail/bus interchange facilities across the District.
- Securing high value-added employment.

3.16 The District Council has already been successful in seeking funding via the Thames Gateway for the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park, and is attempting to secure funding for other specific projects within the District.

4. WHAT BUSINESSES HAVE TOLD TO US

- 4.1 In the past two years the Council has undertaken three surveys with businesses in the area. The first identified the range and nature of business in the area, whether they were planning to stay in the area, and the problems they experienced in the previous 12 months.
- 4.2 The majority of those businesses who responded (323) employed less than 50 staff (95%). The majority rent or lease their premises, although a high percentage (41%) owned the property they worked from. Given the high proportion of micro businesses (those employing less than 10), this may relate to businesses working from home.
- 4.3 The majority (73%) had been in business for more than 5 years. This is a positive response as many small businesses fail within the first 1-2 years. Whilst only a small percentage planned to move premises (17%) 12% of these said this would be within the next 5 years.
- 4.4 The key issues facing the businesses surveyed were, in order of priority:
1. Traffic Congestion
 2. Car Parking
 3. Staff recruitment
 4. Availability of public transport
 5. Finding suitable sites and premises
 6. Sourcing suppliers and services locally
- 4.5 Four out of the six identified relate to the transport and infrastructure available in the area.

4.6 The second piece of research aimed at seeking the views of businesses on how they would like to be consulted by the council. In addition, it asked firms to identify the topics they felt most important to the area. The topics that were identified as most important were:

1. Transport
2. Regeneration
3. Environmental Health
4. Housing
5. Community Development

4.7 The transport issues relate to congestion, the importance of the airport, access to Brook Road Industrial Estate, and the need for improved cycle routes to schools, businesses and the station.

4.8 More recently (January 2003) businesses were asked for their views in relation to business crime. They identified a number of issues felt to be important. These included theft from vehicles and from property, arson, difficulty in getting police response, insurance problems, and illegal fly tipping.

4.9 The views expressed by businesses have been taken into account in the actions identified in this Economic Development Strategy.

SWOT

4.10 To help identify the economic strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the District a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat) analysis has been produced as Appendix A.

Summary

- 4.11 The District has few of the economic or social problems experienced in other areas of the Country. It has low levels of unemployment and deprivation. The contribution required by the District Council reflects this. The world of business is competitive and it would be complacent for the Council to ignore the needs of business, which have an impact on the competitiveness and wellbeing of the local economy and can not be taken for granted. Some 1500 jobs are dependent on the future of the London Southend Airport. There are numerous people employed in supplying and supporting businesses and industry related to London Southend Airport.
- 4.12 In addition large businesses work in global environment where the pressure to reduce overheads, including premises and staff costs, has led to businesses relocating to other, cheaper areas of the country and in some cases even countries.

5. **WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP**

5.1 In its first objective the Council recognises that the success of the Rochford District Council Economic Development Strategy will be dependent upon partnership working. The Councils' partnership approach is to build on the work and achievements of existing organisations, thereby widening ownership of economic development activity. Leading organisational partners include:

- **South East Essex Economic Partnership (SEEEES)** – this public – private partnership covers the South East Essex area, involving Castle Point, Southend and Rochford.
- **Thames Gateway South Essex** – The extension of Thames Gateway into South Essex in March 2001 including Thurrock, Basildon Southend on Sea, Castle Point and part of Rochford.
- **Essex Economic Partnership (EEP)** – a private and public sector partnership, is an integral part of Essex's economic development activities and represents the county on EEDA's working groups.
- **East of England Development Agency (EEDA)** – responsible for the production of the regional economic strategy which is the framework for improving economic performance across six counties of Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk.
- **Small Business Service (SBS)** – provides business support in the County to small and medium sized companies.
- **Learning and Skills Council (LSC)** – tackles local skill shortages by commissioning training to meeting the needs of students, trainees and employers.

- **Chambers of Trade and Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses** – these business representative organisations are the principal link between the local commercial and business community providing a voice at local and national levels.
- **Essex Rural Partnership (ERP)** – provides a forum for bringing together partnership interests in the rural areas of Essex and identifies policies, proposals and recommendations for action across a wide range of rural activities.
- **Business Enterprise Agency South East Essex (BEASEE)** - delivers a start up business support programme and mentoring initiative for small businesses in the District.
- **Essex County Council (ECC)** – provides a comprehensive Economic Development Service including Export Services, Lottery and European funding, promotion and marketing and inward investment. The County supports the District in maintaining a property database for business relocation purposes.
- **Rochford Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)** – the Council has established a Local Strategic Partnership including a steering group of key partners in the local area such as business representative organisations.

Consultation with Partners and Businesses

- 5.2 In addition the Council is involved in developing policies and plans and reviewing services which may have an impact on businesses. The Council will consult with the business community and their partners to ensure their views are taken into consideration. A protocol for this consultation has now been approved.

6. LOCAL ECONOMIC INITIATIVES – WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED SO FAR?

- 6.1 There are a number of initiatives which the Council is involved in which support the objectives of the Economic Development Strategy.
- 6.2 The Council has worked with Partners to make improvements to its shopping centres such as: Rayleigh, Hockley, Rochford and Hullbridge.
- 6.3 In response to requests by the Chambers of Trade to encourage residents to use of town centres, the Council has made its car parks free on Saturday afternoons.
- 6.4 Improvements in lighting and provision of CCTV to the Council's car parks such as Station Approach, Rayleigh to improve the safety.
- 6.5 A farmers market has been established in Rochford by the Council, which is now run by StAR, a voluntary community association in Rochford.
- 6.6 Provided funding support to Business Enterprise Agency South Essex to provide advice to new and micro businesses in the area.
- 6.7 As part of the South East Essex Economic Partnership the Council has contributed to the Business Champions programme with 10 members being from Rochford District.
- 6.8 The Council has published a Rochford Business Directory with funding from Business Link for Essex providing businesses in the area with contacts of key business advice agencies.
- 6.9 The Council has contributed to the South East Essex Economic Strategy and the development of the emerging Thames Gateway South Essex Economic Strategy.

- 6.10 It provides advice on planning applications and advises businesses to resolve disputes with the Planning Authority.
- 6.11 Planning applications which create more than 10 jobs are subject to a fast track planning process.
- 6.12 The District Council is a partner in the Property Pilot led by Essex County Council.
- 6.13 50 % of the Councils contractors for goods and services are local businesses, including 7% based in the District.

7. LOCAL ECONOMIC INITIATIVES – WHAT WE PLAN UP TO 2008

- 7.1 There are a number of areas of work and initiatives which the Council is planning to support the objectives of the Economic Development Strategy as identified in Section 2. Each are underpinned by the first objective – working in partnership.

These include:

- **Skills and employability for business**
- **Town centre and industrial estate enhancement**
- **Business Support initiatives**
- **Transport and infrastructure development**
- **Tourism and heritage initiatives**
- **Inward investment**

Skills and employability for business

Objective 2 – ‘Working with partners develop the skills of the local workforce to meet the needs of businesses now and in the future, to maintain low levels of unemployment in the District and encourage jobs that add value to the local economy.’

- 7.2 The Council has a role in developing the skills of the community, and the workforce through its partners such as the Learning and Skills Council, Business Link for Essex and Learning Partnerships.
- 7.3 The skills of the workforce, and ensuring this matches the needs of businesses is paramount in a local economy. Whilst the District has a large commuting population leaving the area on a daily basis, there are 25,000 people who work in businesses in the District.
- 7.4 Maintaining a balance in the economy is vital to avoid the town centres being under utilised and valuable local services being lost.

- 7.5 One of the surveys undertaken by Rochford District Council, found that many businesses had a problem recruiting staff with the right skills. This is an issue common to South Essex.
- 7.6 The Council will work with partners to ensure that the District maximises the support available in skill development from its partners. The Learning and Skills Council is represented on the Local Strategic Partnership, which is overseeing the development of the Community Strategy for the District. This document includes developing learning opportunities as a key theme.

Actions

- 7.7 The Council will encourage business to access training for their workforce, particularly using the Employer Training Pilot, 'Profit for Learning' (2002/04).
- 7.8 Continue to encourage businesses to take up opportunities of mentoring through the Business Champions Programme established through the South East Essex Economic Partnership.
- 7.9 With partners identify potential future funding for Business Champions Programme established through the South East Essex Economic Partnership to meet any shortfall identified.
- 7.10 Work closely with Business Link for Essex and the Learning and Skills Council, Essex to identify the gaps in skills for businesses in the Rochford area, and develop initiatives to meet those needs.
- 7.11 With Business Link for Essex, target businesses in the District to achieve the Investors in People Award, recognising the need to train and develop their staff.
- 7.12 Ensure Rochford District Council staff are fully trained to meet the skills needs of the local authority.

- 7.13 Promote the use of graduate skills to small businesses through the promotion to businesses of the Shell Technology Enterprise Programme managed by Essex County Council.

Town Centre and Industrial Estate Enhancement

Objective 3 – ‘Support town centre and industrial estate enhancement initiatives aimed at improving the environment ensuring the area is economically prosperous and competitive’

- 7.14 The Council recognises its role in ensuring that the town centres in the District are improved and maintained in a way which retains the character of the area, retains shoppers and attracts new visitors. Local shops and town centres play an important part in the local economy and provide valued local services for those with limited transport. Investment in Rayleigh, Rochford, Hullbridge and Hockley have all been upgraded funded by the District Council with contribution from Essex County Council and the local Parish Councils where appropriate.
- 7.15 Associated community safety initiatives such as CCTV have also been included where appropriate. The Council has also part funded a Market Town Health Check for Rochford which is being implemented by Rochford Parish Council, Rochford Chamber of Trade and Essex County Council amongst others.
- 7.16 The Council will continue to look for opportunities to support its Town Centres, through mechanisms such as the Market Towns Initiative, Thames Gateway South Essex and EEDA.

Actions

- 7.17 The Council will maintain regular liaison with the Chambers of Trade in their respective areas.

- 7.18 The Council will promote clear sign posting for visitor information and tourism in town centres.
- 7.19 The Council will Link information about Rochford District to the Essex County Council Tourism website and Thames Gateway South Essex website.
- 7.20 The Council will develop recycling initiatives in partnership with the business community for the industrial estates in the District, to improve the cost effectiveness of waste disposal, improve the environment and to hopefully reduce fly-tipping throughout the District.
- 7.21 The Council will with partners, develop a Business Watch Scheme in District's Town Centres and Industrial Estates.

Business Support Initiatives

Objective 4 – “Work with partners to ensure that businesses, including rural businesses have access to quality and effective business support initiatives locally.”

- 7.22 Business competitiveness is about a culture of constant improvement and developing new markets and new opportunities. Identifying companies with growth potential and ensuring they are given the most appropriate advice and support is essential to ensure their potential is fully realised. The Council will work with its partners to maintain key areas of business support activity.

These have included:

- Industrial Estate Enhancements
- Property Pilot Database - locating commercial premises
- Commercial Waste/Recycling Initiatives
- LSC Profit from Learning - skills and training for business

- 7.23 Whilst business support initiatives are delivered in the main by the Council's partners, such as Business Link for Essex, the local Enterprise Agencies and Chambers of Commerce, there are a number of strands to business support which the Council can contribute.
- 7.24 However the premises available for new businesses are limited. The Council is concerned both about the high level of new business failures and the lack of premises in the area. The Council will work with SEEEP to identify opportunities for small managed workspace facilities in South East Essex.
- 7.25 There are a high number of business start-ups in the area and a high rate of business failures. To reduce this the Council is working with its partners to identify opportunities to deliver business advice locally if possible, for example through local awareness sessions.
- 7.26 In addition the Council will continue to support the Business Champions project set up by South East Essex Economic Partnership, to provide practical support and mentoring to local businesses by local business people in order to avoid business failure and enlarge business growth.
- 7.27 For existing businesses the Council contributes to a property database to match property needs of businesses in the area, particularly those wishing to expand, in the hope of retaining them in the District. This facility also helps the Council attract businesses to the area. It is unrealistic for Rochford to try to attract major inward investors, as there are few large sites available in the area, however information is available should it be required.
- 7.28 Rural business makes up 4% of local employment, higher than average. Rural businesses have experienced a number of setbacks in the past few years. Diversification of these rural businesses is increasing and will require support from the local authority. The emerging Local Plan covers the conversion of

redundant farm buildings (Policy No. R9 and 10) and may support the re-use of farm buildings for enterprise provided it does not effect the character of the Green Belt.

Actions

- 7.29 The Council will work with Business Link for Essex, Enterprise Agencies and The Chambers of Trade and Commerce, SEEEP and other agencies, to promote the range of advice and support that is available to businesses in the area, in order to reduce the number of business failures and increase opportunities for business growth.
- 7.30 Every three years the Council will produce a Business Directory to help promote business to business contact in the area, and promote business advisory services.
- 7.31 The Council will produce an annual newsletter for businesses informing them of business support activities in the area, what Rochford District Council can do to help them and any funding opportunities available.
- 7.32 The Council will identify funding opportunities for businesses and business development in the area, and submit bids where appropriate.
- 7.33 The Council will work with rural businesses and partners to identify ways in which it can support the rural economy, such as in policies on the conversion of redundant buildings in the Local Plan and specialist business support via partners.
- 7.34 The Council will work with the 'Waymark Project' sponsored by EEDA, and delivered locally through Writtle College to promote rural enterprise.

Transport and Infrastructure Development

Objective 5 – “Facilitate appropriate local transport and infrastructure developments which balance businesses needs whilst respecting local environmental constraints.”

- 7.35 Although the District has access to a high level of infrastructure via road and rail, enabling the high level of commuting, there is the growing problem of traffic congestion during peak periods.
- 7.36 The District has areas of low density population where public transport is limited and residents are dependent on private transport arrangements. This has the potential to reduce access to employment in some of the less accessible areas of the District.
- 7.37 The Council in association with Essex County Council Highways Authority has developed a Local Transport Plan. In addition, with the County Council and RAVS, we are launching a Community Transport scheme in September 2003 to support those with limited access. We are also working with Partners and Thames Gateway South Essex on numerous infrastructure studies e.g. The London to Southend Traffic Study (LOTS).
- 7.38 There is growth in commuting by rail from the area with some limited potential to develop the capacity of existing rail stations (Great Eastern Railway).
- 7.39 The future of London Southend Airport in the District is of concern to the authority as many local firms, including high value manufacturing companies, rely on the airport for their business. The future of the airport is dependent on meeting the requirements of its Civil Aviation Authority licence. In the Council's emerging Local Plan (see policy TP12) there is support for the London Southend Airport as a regional air transport and aircraft maintenance facility.

- 7.40 The Council has a role in the development of sites within the District to ensure they maximise employment potential and use of local skills. There are a number of sites with the potential for development for further business use, such as at Cherry Orchard Link, and Purdeys Industrial Estate.
- 7.41 Research undertaken in 1999 on behalf of the Council found that there was a need for smaller business units in the area, reflecting the nature of the business profile in the District. The Federation of Small Businesses has supported this view.
- 7.42 The quality of building development and design locally is important in maintaining the image of the area. The Council is keen to ensure that development is in keeping with the local environment, is of good design, and reflects the changing demands of businesses. This is a difficult balance to achieve, but the quality of the applications for the annual design awards, sponsored by the Council, show that this balance can be achieved.
- 7.43 Through the planning division, the Council will work with developers to bring new sites into economic use, and encourage the development of smaller industrial units in the area. The Council will also work with EEDA to gain support any potential investment.

7.44 The development of Broadband infrastructure in the economy is potentially an opportunity and a threat to the area. It is not clear at the moment the likely extent of broadband availability in the District. The Council will help promote the development of Broadband throughout the area to ensure the District is not disadvantaged. Any lack of Broadband in rural areas may preclude the development of some high tech rural businesses, which otherwise might be attracted to the area. All commercial and industrial sites have been put forward for Broadband by the Council through Thames Gateway South Essex for consideration by BT.

Actions

- 7.45 Through the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership lobby to secure comprehensive broadband provision across South East Essex
- 7.46 Through involvement in the IDEA Market Place initiative relating to electronic procurement, attempt to ensure that local suppliers are included on the e-procurement list.
- 7.47 Continue to work with Southend Borough Council, who own the airport, and Regional Airports Limited who run the airport to sustain and develop airport related employment in the District.
- 7.48 Work with Partners to facilitate small industrial premises for businesses in the area.

Tourism and Heritage

Objective 6 – “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”

- 7.49 The Council is proud of its heritage, with Rochford and Rayleigh having historical interest and the potential for tourism. There are major Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) such as the woodland areas in Hockley. Foulness Island has a wide range of species not found elsewhere. The Rivers Crouch and Roach provide opportunities for sailing and leisure activities which could be developed further. The development of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park, is a major recreational development expected to attract visitors from the locality and south Essex when it is opened in late summer 2003.
- 7.50 The lack of hotel accommodation in the area is a barrier to the development of overnight visitors to the area. Research is being undertaken by EEDA into conference and Hotel facilities in Thames Gateway South Essex to establish a baseline and make recommendations for future development. The emerging Local Plan includes a policy aimed at new hotel provision in the District (see policy LT21).
- 7.51 There may be opportunities to develop visitor packages with neighbouring Southend, developing a mixed offer of seaside and countryside.
- 7.52 The Council provides information on the area through its website and through its ‘Official Guide’. Leaflets are available on woodland and heritage walks throughout the area and the council holds regular heritage events. The Council is working with partners Thames Gateway South Essex to develop the 'Green Grid' for South Essex. In association with this, the Council has received Grant Funding

via Thames Gateway South Essex to assist with the development of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park.

Actions

- 7.53 The Council will work with Essex County Council, EEDA and Thames Gateway South Essex to encourage the development of a wider choice of overnight accommodation in the District to encourage tourism in the area.

Inward Investment

Objective 7 – “Taking advantage of Inward Investment opportunities to secure the future economic prosperity of the District”

- 7.54 As firms in the area expand there is a concern they may move out of the District to areas in South Essex or further afield. The Council recognises that it needs to be conscious of the needs of local businesses and its objectives to develop business support initiatives for local firms reflects this. Opportunities to attract new businesses to the area can have major impact benefits to the local economy. These include providing a range of jobs locally for residents, generating trade in local shopping centres and reducing the need to commute long distances.

Actions

- 7.55 The Council will ensure closer working between the Economic Development Officer and the Planning Section to help provide advice to businesses on planning issues, with specific action around the Development Team approach to facilitate the planning process.
- 7.56 The Council will work with businesses to identify opportunities for site improvement, where required to meet business need, e.g. environmental improvement in Brook Road Industrial Estate.

7.57 The Council will work with Partners and Thames Gateway South Essex to secure investment and infrastructure to the benefit of workers and residents across South Essex.

8. RESOURCES

- 8.1 Earlier in the strategy the Council recognised that partnership is an essential part of the Economic Development Strategy and its implementation. This is in part due to the resources available, in terms of staff, time and funding. In addition as a second tier authority, the Council works with the County Council and other County business development bodies to develop economic development. Close working relationships with other local authorities, notably those involved in the South East Essex Economic Partnership, Thames Gateway South Essex and Essex Economic Partnership are essential to secure funding and development opportunities which would not be available to Rochford District alone.
- 8.2 The District has one dedicated Economic Development Officer in the Corporate Policy Unit. However economic development activity is something which cuts across many aspects of the Council's work, and therefore involves staff from a range of functions such as Planning, Community Safety, Leisure, Environmental Health, Licensing, recycling and tax collection.
- 8.3 In addition significant Member, staffing and technical resources are provided as a partner of Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership. Whilst the District has only a small area in the boundary of the Gateway, it is a full partner and acts as such in the development and delivery of its plans and initiatives. Council Officers attend meetings of the Thames Gateway South Essex working groups and the Leader of the Council attends the Board meeting.

Funding

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

Direct Funding to business or business support agencies

8.5 The Council currently provides funds to the following agencies:

Chambers of Trade for projects to support the local town centre initiatives, Enterprise Agency, EEP, Thames Gateway South Essex and SEEEP.

8.6 In addition the Council considers requests from businesses for National Non-Domestic Rate relief on a case by case basis in proven cases of hardship such as where Foot and Mouth disease had a detrimental effect on the business.

Indirect funding of businesses in Rochford District Purchasing policies

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

Working with other agencies

8.8 By working with other agencies in the area the Council has been able to ensure that their services are provided in the area.

Supporting bids for funding

8.9 The Council can support bids for funding from business support agencies, which may in some cases be a condition of the application, or it may be that support from the Council is helpful.

8.10 Opportunities for support of initiatives to meet the objectives of the Economic Development Strategy and other Council strategies will be sought through partner agencies such as ECC, Thames Gateway South Essex, EEDA and other agencies.

Appendix A

SWOT

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General affluence of residents in the area • Strong entrepreneurial business culture • Improvements to the town centres will improve their image • 25,000 jobs in the District • Higher proportion than national average of construction and blue collar jobs in the District • Low unemployment rates – 3.5% • less than the national average reduction in manufacturing sector • No wards are in the most deprived categories (IMD) • 92% of year 11 pupils stay in structured learning • high attainment levels of year 11 • high adult learning population • high environmental quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Andrews and Roach Wards are the most deprived in the area (in the top 30%) nationally • Some dependence on the airport related jobs (1500) • Some dependence on largest employers in the District for high value jobs • A lot of the workforce locally leave the District for jobs elsewhere • Access to parts of the area for businesses is difficult, and prone to congestion • Lack of investment by owners of some industrial estates such as Brook Road leads to poor image and reduces the appeal of the area • Education and skills are the most important source of deprivation in Rochford – 3 wards in the top 20% • Literacy and numeracy is better than average, but there are still over 5000 with low literacy and 8000 with low numeracy skills
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thames Gateway South Essex – providing access to funding, infrastructure and image improvements to South Essex • Many local agencies are keen to develop local strategies and strategies within Thames Gateway South Essex i.e. LSC, SBS • Foulness Island has some high value business uses on site which could be expanded • There may be opportunities in the District for the development of rural high value businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thames Gateway South Essex – perceived possible threats of additional development over and above the District's capacity • If the airports fails to retain its licence its reduction in capacity may have an impact on the manufacturing and related jobs in the area • There may be greater competition for business location within the Thames Gateway South Essex, with Basildon, Canvey and Thurrock. • There is likely to be a reduction in the numbers in the workforce due to an increase in the age of the population, and a decrease in those of 'middle age'

Economic Development Action Plan 2003-2008

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Timescale
Objective 1 - Work in Partnership			
1.1 Work in partnership with other agencies whose remit is to support economic development in the area	All Rochford District Council Officers Rochford District Council Members	Rochford District Council All partners	2003/07
1.2 Consult with the business community and partners to ensure their views are taken into consideration in developing policies, plans and initiatives. A consultation protocol has been approved.	All Rochford District Council Officers Rochford District Council Members	Rochford District Council All partners	2003/07
Objective 2 - Skills and employability for business			
2.1 Encourage business to access training for their workforce, particularly using the Employer Training Pilot (2002/04)	Nil cost to Rochford District Council	Rochford District Council Business Link for Essex Learning and Skills Council for Essex	2003/04

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Timescale
2.2 Encourage businesses to take up opportunities of mentoring through the Business Champions Programme established through the South East Essex Economic Partnership	In kind cost Rochford District Council Project funded via European Social Fund 2001/03	Rochford District Council Southend Borough Council Castle Point Borough Council SEEEP	2003/04
2.3 With partners, identify potential future funding for the Business Champions Programme established through the South East Essex Economic Partnership	In kind contribution of Economic Development Officer/Rochford District Council	Rochford District Council Southend Borough Council Castle Point Borough Council SEEEP	2003/07
2.4 Work closely with Business Link for Essex and the Learning and Skills Council Essex, to identify the gaps in skills for businesses in the Rochford area	Economic Development Officer in kind contribution	Rochford District Council Business Link for Essex Learning & Skills Council – Essex	2003/04
2.5 With Business Link for Essex target businesses in the district to achieve the Investors in People Award, recognising the need to train and develop staff	Economic Development Officer referrals	Rochford District Council Business Link for Essex	2003/07
2.6 Ensure Rochford District Council staff are fully trained to meet the skill needs of the local authority	Within existing training and development budgets	Managers in Rochford District Council	2003/07
2.7 Promote the use of graduate skills to small businesses of the Shell Technology Enterprise Programme managed by Essex County Council	Economic Development Officer referral	Rochford District Council Essex County Council	2003/07

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Timescale
Objective 3 - Town centre and industrial estate enhancement			
3.2 Maintain liaison with the Chambers of Trade in their respective areas to maintain the quality and environment of the town centres.	Economic Development Officer	Rochford District Council Chambers of Trade	2003/07
3.4 Obtain clear sign posting for visitor information and tourism in town centres for Rochford 2004 and Rayleigh 2005	Leisure Officer Property Maintenance and Highways Manager	Rochford District Council Essex County Council	2003/07
3.5 Link information about Rochford district to the Essex County Council Tourism web site and Thames Gateway South Essex web site.	Leisure and Tourism Officer Leisure and Contracts Manager	Rochford District Council Essex County Council	2003/04
3.6 Developing recycling initiatives with the business community for industrial estates in the district to improve the cost effectiveness of waste disposal and improve the environment	Economic Development Officer Recycling Officer and assistant Bids being investigated	Rochford District Council Essex County Council EEP Essex Investment Office EEDA Chambers of Commerce and Trade Federation of Small Businesses	2003/07

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Timescale
3.7 With partners develop a Business Watch Scheme in town centres and industrial estates	Home Office funding of £4200 bid 2003/04 Community Safety Officer	Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Federation of Small Businesses Chambers of Trade and Commerce	2003/04
Objective 4 - Business support initiatives			
4.1 Work with Business Link for Essex, Enterprise Agencies and Chambers of Trade and Commerce, SEEEP and other agencies, to promote the range of advice and support that is available to businesses in the area, in order to reduce the number of business failures and increase opportunities for business growth	Economic Development Officer	Rochford District Council Business Link for Essex Enterprise Agencies Chamber of Trade & Commerce	2003/07
4.2 Every three years produce a Business Directory to help promote business to business contact in the area, and promote business advisory services	Economic Development Officer £1,000 completed 2002 £1000 to be requested 2005	Rochford District Council Business Support Agencies	2005

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Timescale
4.3 Produce an annual newsletter for businesses informing them of business support activities in the area, what Rochford District Council can do to help them and any funding opportunities available	Economic Development Officer £100 from existing budgets pa	Rochford District Council	2003 2004 2005 2006 2007
4.4 Identify funding opportunities for businesses and business development in the area, and submit bids where appropriate	Economic Development Officer Corporate Policy Unit	Rochford District Council Essex County Council Thames Gateway South Essex Essex Economic Partnership	2003/07
4.5 Work with rural businesses and partners to identify ways in which it can support the rural economy, such as in policies on the conversion of redundant buildings in the Local Plan and specialist business support via partners	Economic Development Officer Planning Officers	Rochford District Council EEDA Writtle College DEFRA	2003/07
4.6 Work with the 'Waymark Project' sponsored by EEDA and delivered locally through Writtle College, to promote rural enterprise	Economic Development Officer	Rochford District Council East of England Development Agency Writtle College	2003/07

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Timescale
Objective 5 - Transport and Infrastructure			
5.2 Through Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership Secure Comprehensive Broadband provision across the South East Essex area	Economic Development Officer	Rochford District Council Chambers of Commerce and Trade Thames Gateway South Essex	2003/07
5.3 Through Rochford District's Council involvement improve and attempt to ensure that local suppliers are included amongst e-procurement list	Economic Development Officer Head of Admin and Member Services	Rochford District Council Essex County Council Federation of Small Businesses Chambers of Commerce and Trade Thames Gateway South Essex EEP EEDA	2003/05
5.4 Liaison with London Southend Airport to preserve airport related employment in the district	Economic Development Officer	Rochford District Council London Southend Airport	2003/07
5.5 Work with partners to facilitate the development of small industrial premises for businesses in the area	Economic Development Officer to investigate funding opportunities	Rochford District Council Essex County Council SEEEP Federation of Small Businesses Thames Gateway South Essex EEDA	2007

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Timescale
Objective 6 - Tourism and heritage			
6.1 Work with Essex County Council, EEDA and Thames Gateway South Essex to encourage the development of a wider choice of overnight accommodation in the district to encourage tourism in the area	Economic Development Officer Leisure and Tourism Officer	Rochford District Council Thames Gateway South Essex East of England Development Agency	2003/07
Objective 7 - Inward Investment			
7.2 The Economic Development Officer will work closely with the Planning Section to help provide advice to businesses in the area on planning issues with specific action around the development team approach to facilitate the planning process.	Economic Development Officer Planning Department	Rochford District Council	2003/05
7.3 Work with businesses to identify opportunities for site and infrastructure improvement, e.g. environmental improvements to Brook Road Industrial Estates and identify funding sources	Economic Development Officer Chambers Initiative Fund (RDC) Industrial Estate Improvement Scheme (ECC)	Essex County Council Rochford District Council Chambers of Trade	2003/05