

ROCHFORD DISTRICT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2004-2007

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks Members agreement to a revised and updated version of the Council's Economic Development Strategy 2004/07.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Members may recall that the strategy was agreed last October (min 487/03). The strategy was seen as a 'live' document with linkages to the Community Strategy, the Local Plan and the Thames Gateway South Essex Strategic Framework and, consequently, it was agreed that it should be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

3 REVISED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

- 3.1 A revised Strategy is to be circulated in the next Member drop. The changes made will reflect the latest position relating to progress and implementation. The key changes will be highlighted in the text.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Strategic Risk

The Economic Development Strategy provides a framework against which the Council can make decisions likely to affect the economic wellbeing of the District.

4.2 Resource Risk

The resource implications of the Strategy are mainly in terms of officer time and Member time. In respect of specific initiatives promoted and achieved by the Council, where appropriate funding has been included in the budget strategy and where new themes are proposed, these will need to be considered within the budget process.

4.3 Regulatory Risk

An Economic Development Strategy is a requirement of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

5 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Crime and disorder implications are reflected in the strategy.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Environmental considerations affecting businesses and the economy are reflected in the strategy.

7 RECOMMENDATION

7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

To approve the Economic Development Strategy as revised.

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Background Papers:-

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR ROCHFORD DISTRICT



UPDATED VERSION

OCTOBER 2004

9.3

**Rochford District
Council**

Contents

	Page
1. INTRODUCTION.....	6
2. AIMS OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY.....	7
3. ECONOMIC BACKGROUND	10
Rochford Economic Profile	10
Thames Gateway South Essex.....	11
Rochford Zone of Influence	13
4. WHAT BUSINESSES HAVE TOLD TO US	15
5. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP	17
6. LOCAL ECONOMIC INITIATIVES – WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED SO FAR?... 19	
7. LOCAL ECONOMIC INITIATIVES – WHAT WE PLAN UP TO 2007.....	22
Skills and employability for business.....	22
Actions.....	18
Town Centre and Industrial Estate Enhancement	19
Act24ions	25
Business Support Initiatives	25
Actions.....	27
Transport and Infrastructure Development	28
Actions	25
Tourism and Heritage	30
30Actions 32	
InwardInvestment.....	27
Actions 	27
8. RESOURCES 34	
Funding	34
Direct Funding to business or business support agencies	35
Indirect funding of businesses in Rochford District Purchasing policies.....	

Working with other agencies	35
Supporting bids for funding	36
.....	31
Appendix B - Economic Development Action Plan 2003-2007	32

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Strategy has now been updated following its approval in October 2003. At the time it was agreed, Members approved that the strategy be reviewed and updated on an annual basis. This document represents the outcome of the first review. The revised strategy sets out the Council's medium term commitment to economic development in the District until 2007.
- 1.2 The revised strategy links with the Thames Gateway South Essex Strategic Framework and also takes into account the emerging and revised Regional Economic Strategy. It also takes account of the emerging Regional Planning Guidance (RPG14), which will be published for public consultation in December 2004.
- 1.3 Other key documents the strategy links to are the Council's Performance Plan 2004, which looks at the Council's performance over the past year, outlines our key tasks for 2004/05 and the period till 2009, and the Rochford District Community Strategy. The Community Strategy's Action Plan identifies 'Good Education, good skills and good jobs' as a priority.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 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.

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 Council's activities such as planning and development control support the development of a thriving economy.

2.2 The aims of this Strategy link to the vision of the Council which is **to make Rochford the place of choice in the County to live, work and visit.**

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

2.3 To help realise this vision, the Council itself has adopted 6 principal aims, some of which can be delivered directly, others of which can only be delivered through working with others.

2.4 The aim of this particular 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’

2.5 This builds on the Council's vision and picks up 3 of the 6 principal aims of the Council relating to thriving local economy, quality of life and green and sustainable environment.

2.6 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.

3.4 39,000 of the Districts residents are in employment whilst statistics supplied by the Rayleigh Job centre in July 2004 state there is only 1% unemployment, compared to the national figure of 2.3% of the working population.

3.5 There are 21,000 jobs in the District, predominately in the retail, wholesale and service sectors. Rochford has significantly more unfilled job vacancies relative to population than other areas locally in Essex.

- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 Given the imbalance between the number of residents in employment and the number of jobs available, 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 in 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).
- 3.8 Every three years the government publishes the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. This is a system that looks nationally at areas of deprivation. Rochford is ranked the third most affluent District in Essex and 313th least deprived nationally out of a total of 354. However, there are some pockets of deprivation in specific locations.

Thames Gateway South Essex

- 3.9 Whilst only a small part of the District, (London Southend Airport and the employment area around it), sits within the Thames Gateway South Essex, Rochford District is a full partner on the Partnership.
- 3.10 The Gateway is the Government's top priority for economic and social regeneration. The original Thames Gateway covering London and Kent was designated by the government in 1995. It was extended to cover South Essex in 2001.

3.11 Approximately 640,000 people live within Thames Gateway 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.

3.12 Thames Gateway South Essex has identified the priorities for the sub -region in its strategic framework launched in July 2003. These take into account:-

- 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.

3.13 To deliver its 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.

3.14 Within the context provided by these, certain areas (Southend, Thurrock and , Basildon) have been defined as Zones of Change and have established specific bodies to oversee the delivery of change. In Thurrock, an Urban Development Corporation has been established. In Southend and Basildon, Renaissance Partnerships have been set up. Castle Point and Rochford have been identified as Zones of Influence and whilst there are issues to address, activity is less concentrated. Consequently, no specific bodies have been formally established

to deliver change, although working parties are in place to coordinate develop opportunities in both Districts.

Rochford Zone of Influence

3.15 In the context of the 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.

3.16 Of particular interest to Rochford is the potential to develop those themes, which link to the Zone of Change in Southend. In particular, in developing the area for leisure, recreation and tourism activity. The District has identified itself as the 'green' part of the Gateway. In the context of the Thames Gateway South Essex, the Council's 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.

3.17 The District Council has already been successful in seeking funding via the Thames Gateway for the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park. To date,

£100,000 funding has been secured via the Gateway for this project. The construction of a lake, signage/information boards and education materials have been provided. A further £120,000 has been secured from the Forestry Commission for the establishment of 25 acres of woodland - some 28,000 trees have been planted.

- 3.18 Further funding opportunities via the Gateway are being sought for projects in both Rochford and Rayleigh to help the District achieve the priorities outlined above.

4. WHAT BUSINESSES HAVE TOLD TO US

4.1 Last year a Business Protocol was formalised to enable the Council and Business Representative organisations to actively seek the views of the business community and to facilitate business engagement as much as possible in the decision making process of the Council.

4.2 Over a period, the Council has surveyed the business community in the District. The first survey identified the range and nature of businesses in the area. The majority of the businesses who responded employed less than 50 staff. Their business premises were either rented or leased, although 41% said they owned the property they worked from. Almost three quarters of the businesses had been trading for more than 5 years. This is a positive response as many small businesses fail within the first year or two of trading. The key issues facing the businesses 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

4.3 The survey also asked businesses to identify the topics they felt most important to the area. The topics that were identified were:

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

- 4.4 The transport issues related 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 stations.
- 4.5 More recently businesses have been asked for their views in the relation to business crime. Theft from vehicles and property, arson, difficulty getting a police response, insurance problems and illegal fly tipping were identified.
- 4.6 The most recent piece of work relates to a survey of businesses covering Unreported Crime. This survey is being led by the Federation of Small Businesses. The findings of that survey have yet to be published.

5. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

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

- **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 Prosperity Forum** – 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 Advice Centre** - delivers a start up business support programme and mentoring initiative for small businesses in the District.
- **Essex Development and Regeneration Agency** is the delivery agency for the Essex Prosperity Forum and 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.

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 the Business Advice Centre to provide advice to new and micro businesses in the area.
- 6.7 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.
- 6.8 The Council has contributed to the South East Essex Economic Strategy and the development of the emerging Thames Gateway South Essex Strategic Framework document

- 6.9 The Council provides advice on planning applications. A development team approach has been implemented aimed at providing an integrated and co-ordinated service. This combines Building Control, Planning, Economic Development and Environmental Health. It pulls together various sections of the authority to respond to specific issues a business may have. In addition, planning applications which create more than 10 jobs are subject to a fast track planning process.
- 6.10 The Council has facilitated research that has been undertaken by Rayleigh Chamber of Trade into the future development of Brook Road Industrial Estate, Rayleigh.
- 6.11 The Council has also secured funding from the East of England Development Agency of £11,000 to undertake environmental enhancements on the Brook Road Industrial Estate, Rayleigh.
- 6.12 The Council has provided funding (£3400) via the Rochford Chamber of Trade and Commerce and Rochford Parish Council to help implement a Market Town Health check for Rochford and its hinterlands. Essex County Council has funded a further £7000 for the Health Check. The 'Rochford Regeneration' report on the Health Check consultation is due for completion by late 2004. The findings of the report will be considered by the Council and other partners as appropriate in the review and development of future strategies and actions.
- 6.13 The Council is a partner in the Property Pilot led by Essex Development and Regeneration Agency (ExDra) for the development of a web browser based version which will be available by the end of 2004.
- 6.14 Through its purchasing and contracting, the Council contributes to the local economy. Some 50% of the Council's contractors for goods and services are local businesses, including 7% based in the District.

- 6.15 The Council in partnership with the Federation of Small Businesses has facilitated an Unreported Crime Survey. Further work around business crime initiatives will take place in the forthcoming year.
- 6.16 Through its work around economic development during 2004, 17 businesses have been assisted by the Council. Some of the issues addressed include planning, skills and training, inward investment and new start up businesses.
- 6.17 The Council, in partnership with Castle Point Borough Council, is promoting E-asy Business breakfast events. One has been held and a further business event is planned for March 2005. These events raise awareness of how businesses can benefit from on-line trading and the IDEA Marketplace initiative.
- 6.18 A 'Road Show' event initiative is now underway targeted at the District's main employment estates. These events represent a partnership with Essex County Council Road Safety Unit, Essex County Fire & Rescue Service, Federation of Small Businesses and Essex Police Crime Prevention Officer. The purpose of these events is to raise the awareness of business support and partnership working available to businesses in the District.

7. LOCAL ECONOMIC INITIATIVES – WHAT WE PLAN UP TO 2007

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

Theme 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 and Business Link for Essex.
- 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 21,000 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 and implementation of the Community Strategy for the District. The Community Strategy identifies three key areas to promote skills development for the District. These are:
- Increase the opportunities for people of all ages to have a good education and gain new skills.
 - Work together to identify and address local learning needs
 - Increase the prosperity and facilities in the Rochford District

Actions

- 7.7 The Council will continue to encourage businesses to access training for their workforce, particularly using the Employer Training , 'Profit for Learning' and continue to encourage businesses to take up opportunities of mentoring through the Business Champions Programme in Partnership with Essex Chambers of Commerce.
- 7.8 The Council will continue to work closely with Business Link for Essex, the Learning and Skills Council and the Rochford & Castle Point Adult Community College, to identify the gaps in skills for businesses in the Rochford area, and

develop initiatives to meet those needs. The Learning and Skills Council, with its Partners, will carry out a skills audit within the Thames Gateway to establish with employers which skills are lacking.

- 7.9 The Council with Business Link for Essex will continue to target businesses in the District to achieve the Investors in People Award, recognising the need to train and develop their staff.
- 7.10 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

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

- 7.11 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. Rayleigh, Rochford, Hullbridge and Hockley have all been upgraded, funded by the District Council with contributions from Essex County Council and the local Parish Councils where appropriate.
- 7.12 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.

- 7.13 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

- 7.14 The Council will maintain regular liaison with the Chambers of Trade in their respective areas.
- 7.15 The Council will promote clear sign posting for visitor information and tourism in town centres.
- 7.16 The Council will link information about Rochford District to the Essex County Council Tourism website and Thames Gateway South Essex website.
- 7.17 The Council will develop initiatives for the promotion of commercial recycling. These will include waste audits, information fact sheets, the promotion of a Green Business Club and other activities such as recruitment meetings and working lunches.
- 7.18 The Council will, with partners, develop a Business Watch Scheme in the District's Town Centres and Industrial Estates.

Business Support Initiatives

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

- 7.19 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

7.20 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.

7.21 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 Partners to identify opportunities for small managed workspace facilities in South East Essex.

7.22 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.

7.23 In addition the Council will continue to support the Business Champions project to provide practical support and mentoring to local businesses by local business people in order to avoid business failure and enlarge business growth.

7.24 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.

- 7.25 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 2nd Deposit covers the conversion of redundant farm buildings (Policy No. R9) and may support the re-use of farm buildings for enterprise provided it does not effect the character of the Green Belt.

Actions

- 7.26 The Council will work with Business Link for Essex, Enterprise Agencies and The Chambers of Trade and Commerce 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.
- 7.27 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. The next Business Directory is schedule for production by March 2005.
- 7.28 The Council will produce a newsletter twice a year 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.
- 7.29 The Council will identify funding opportunities for businesses and business development in the area, and submit bids where appropriate.
- 7.30 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 emerging Local Plan and specialist business support via partners.

- 7.31 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

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

- 7.32 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.
- 7.33 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.
- 7.34 The Council in association with Essex County Council Highways Authority has developed a Local Transport Plan. In addition with Essex County Council and RRAVS, we now support a Community Transport scheme. We are also working with Partners and Thames Gateway South Essex on numerous infrastructure studies e.g. the London to Southend Traffic Study (LOTS). The study, carried out over the last year, looked at the current and future transport issues facing infrastructure in south Essex and outlined a number of potential solutions. The Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership is now seeking funding via Government for further work to progress those schemes seen as key to the regeneration of South Essex.

- 7.35 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).
- 7.36 London Southend Airport is a key employment focus in the District as many local firms, including high value manufacturing companies, rely on the airport for their business. In the Council's emerging Local Plan (see policy TP10) there is support for the London Southend Airport as a regional air transport and aircraft maintenance facility. At present the airport is primarily used for maintenance and parking of airliners, business aircraft, recreational flying and pilot training in both light aircraft and helicopters. The revival of its status as a passenger airport is important for its future development.
- 7.37 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.
- 7.38 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.
- 7.39 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.
- 7.40 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.

- 7.41 Rochford District is now covered by ADSL Broadband. Along with other Authorities, including the County Council, the Authority has recently participated in the launch of the Essex Broadband Partnership to encourage the take up of broadband across the County.

Actions

- 7.42 Through the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership lobby to secure comprehensive broadband provision across South East Essex
- 7.43 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. The Business breakfast events outlined under paragraph 6.17 are one of the means of achieving this.
- 7.44 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.
- 7.45 Work with Partners to facilitate small industrial premises for businesses in the area.

Tourism and Heritage

Theme 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”

- 7.46 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. Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park is a major, long term recreational development which will attract visitors from the locality and south Essex when it is fully developed and operational.
- 7.47 The lack of hotel accommodation in the area is a barrier to the development of overnight visitors to the area. Research has been undertaken by EEDA into conference and Hotel facilities in Thames Gateway South Essex to establish a baseline and make recommendations for future development. The conclusion of the report is that there is no major conference hotels in the area; however there is potential to develop demand for a range of mid-luxury conference hotels. The emerging Local Plan 2nd Draft includes a policy aimed at new hotel provision in the District (see policy LT19).
- 7.48 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. This will include creating high quality new green space across the Gateway. In association with this initiative, the Council has already received £100,000 Grant Funding via Thames Gateway South Essex to assist with the development of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park.

Actions

- 7.49 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.

- 7.50 The Council has allocated funding to produce a tourism study for the District. This will look at key areas of tourist potential and will take into account aspirations to be the 'green' part of the Thames Gateway South Essex. A brief has been produced and it is anticipated that the study, together with an action plan outlining the key priorities, will be completed early next year.

Inward Investment

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

- 7.51 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 a major beneficial impact on the local economy through providing a range of jobs locally for residents, generating trade in local shopping centres and reducing the need to commute long distances.

Actions

- 7.52 The Council will continue to promote 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.
- 7.53 The Council will work with businesses to identify opportunities for site improvement, where required to meet business needs, e.g. environmental improvement in Brook Road Industrial Estate.

- 7.54 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, the Thames Gateway South Essex and Essex Prosperity Forum are essential to secure funding and development opportunities which would not be available to Rochford District alone.
- 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, Essex Prosperity Forum and Thames Gateway South Essex.

- 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. The Government are also proposing to introduce a raft of rate reliefs to help small businesses and “sole businesses” located in specific rural areas. The Council is committed to ensuring that information and guidance on these complex issues is freely available to the business community.

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.

Economic Development Action Plan 2003-2007

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Time - scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
Theme 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	Number of Businesses assisted by Economic Development Officer. Evaluation Survey – Questionnaire	% of businesses satisfied	During 2004 17 businesses assisted by Economic Development officer

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Time - scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
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	Review protocol bi-annually. Consult with business community and partners. Implement Consultation	Revisit Protocol	Review of protocol due 2005
Theme 2 - Skills and employability for business						
2.1 Encourage business to access training for their workforce, particularly using the Employer Training) scheme 'Profit for Learning'	Nil cost to Rochford District Council	Rochford District Council Business Link for Essex Learning and Skills Council for Essex	2003/04	Number of participants taking part in 'Profit for Learning' initiative.	646 learners Participating in training. 662 NVQ's qualifications obtained	119 businesses participating in scheme.

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Time - scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
2.2 Work closely with Business Link for Essex and the Learning and Skills Council Essex, to identify the gaps in skills for businesses in the Rochford area	Economic Development Officer in kind contribution	Rochford District Council Business Link for Essex Learning & Skills Council – Essex	April 2003/04	Number of businesses taking part in training programmes. Business Link Evaluation	% of businesses satisfied with programme	Business Link Customer Base of 2575 – 761 are active clients = market penetration of 29.6%
2.3 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	Number of businesses with IIP accreditation. Business Link Evaluation	% of businesses accredited with IIP	2003/4 1 business accredited with Investors In People
2.4 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	Number of graduates taking part in the Shell Technology Enterprise programme.	Projects achieved.	No projects initiated in 2003/04

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Time - scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
Theme 3 - Town centre and industrial estate enhancement						
3.1 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	<p>Survey of town centre businesses to monitor satisfaction of quality and environment annually.</p> <p>Attendance of business reps. quarterly meetings.</p>	<p>Implement-ation of Survey</p> <p>Attendance by Business reps achieved</p>	<p>Survey to be carried out March 2005</p> <p>All recognised reps regularly attend</p>

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Time - scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
3.2 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	Number of businesses on industrial estates where recycling initiatives are in place. Number of Waste Audits carried out. Evaluation survey/ questionnaire	% of businesses taking part in recycling Initiatives.	£5000 funding being considered for the promotion of commercial recycling as part of the 2005/2006 Budget.
3.3 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	Number of businesses participating in Business Watch initiatives. Evaluation survey/ questionnaire		Unreported crime survey findings yet to be published

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Time - scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
Theme 4 - Business support initiatives						
4.1 Work with Business Link for Essex, Enterprise Agencies and Chambers of Trade and Commerce, 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	Number of business support enquiries for advice and information received per annum via Enterprise Agencies. Business Link Evaluation	4118 in Thames Gateway South Essex overall. .	509 enquiries in Rochford District 2003/04

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Time - scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
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.	Rochford District Council Business Support Agencies	2005	Increase number of business listings in directory. Mail-shot existing database for NNDR.	50% increase in business listings	Business Directory scheduled for production March 2005
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. Included within existing budget provision	Rochford District Council	2004 2005 2006 2007	Produce one newsletter per year.	Newsletter	News letter end 2004

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Time - scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
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	One bid per annum.	Amount of funding secured	Bids submitted to ODPM under the auspices of the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership. Decision awaited.
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	Number of businesses supported in the rural economy. Evaluation survey/ questionnaire		8 rural businesses/ farmer supported by ADER/ Writtle College ADER (Agricultural Development in the Eastern Region)

Action		RDC Resources	Responsibility	Time - scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
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	Number of business supported by the 'Waymark Project' Evaluation survey/ Questionnaire by Writtle College	% of businesses to have found valued support through the Waymark Project	
Theme 5 - Transport and Infrastructure							
5.1	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 TGSE EEP EEDA	2003/07	Number of businesses included on the e-procurement list. Survey current suppliers	% of business successful with e bidding process.	Event held June 2004-60 businesses attended. Further event scheduled March 05

Action		RDC Resources	Responsibility	Time - scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
5.2	Liaison with London Southend Airport to preserve airport related employment in the district.	Economic Development Officer	Rochford District Council London Southend Airport	2003/07	Number of businesses located around Airport parameter participating in airport related employment. Evaluation survey/ questionnaire	% of businesses related to airport activity.	.
5.3	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 Federation of Small Businesses TGSE EEDA	2007	Number of Planning applications for small business units.		
Objective 6 – Tourism and heritage							

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Time - scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
6.1 Work with Essex County Council, EEDA and TGSE to encourage the development of a wider choice of overnight accommodation in the district to encourage tourism in the area.	Economic Development Officer. Funding in 2004/2005 to facilitate a Tourism Study of the District.	Rochford District Council Thames Gateway South Essex East of England Development Agency	2003/07			Study to be completed
Theme 7 - Inward Investment						

Action	RDC Resources	Responsibility	Time - scale	Performance Indicators	Outcome	Comments on Progress
7.1 The Economic Development Officer will work closely with the Planning Department 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	No of development team applications via planning section Satisfaction survey To developer.	% of successful applications	Economic Development Officer assisted 8 businesses with Planning Applications through the Development Team Approach in the past 10 months
7.2 Work with businesses to identify opportunities for site and infrastructure improvement.	Economic Development Officer Chambers Initiative Fund (RDC) Industrial Estate Improvement Scheme (ECC)	Essex County Council Rochford District Council Chambers of Trade	2003/05	Number of businesses engaged with environmental industrial estate improvements.	% of businesses who have benefited from improvements	Small Environment Improvement project now completed on Brook Road Industrial Estate