

1 A SPATIAL PORTRAIT OF THE ROCHFORD DISTRICT

- 1.1 The District of Rochford is situated within a peninsula between the Rivers Thames and Crouch, and is bounded to the east by the North Sea. The District has land boundaries with Basildon and Castle Point District and Southend-on-Sea Borough Councils. It also has marine boundaries with Maldon and Chelmsford Districts. It is ideally located within south Essex, with linkages to the M25 via the A127 and the A13 and direct rail links to London.
- 1.2 The Rochford District covers an area of 65 square miles. It is rich in heritage and natural beauty, with many miles of unspoilt coastline and attractive countryside. There are more than 200 sites of archaeological interest, 14 ancient woodlands and several nature reserves across the District.
- 1.3 Rochford District is predominantly rural with three larger urban areas and a number of smaller settlements. The District's towns and villages are diverse in character reflecting their history, location and size. The character, layout and form of groups of buildings, streets and spaces make a significant contribution to providing a sense of place and adding to the quality of life in town and country. Residents have a strong sense of identity with their own settlement.
- 1.4 Home to around 78,500 people, the District is one with an ever increasing percentage of older residents. The District is considered to be reasonably affluent, except for a few small pockets of deprivation and has a low rate of recorded crime compared to the rest of the country. Unemployment is low at 1%¹. The district has a workforce of 39,000, but only 21,000 jobs. Over two thirds of the district's workforce travel to work outside the district boundaries.
- 1.5 The Council communicates with the local community via a quarterly council-sponsored newsletter to every household and business. In September 2004, the Council was rated as a 'weak' authority following a Comprehensive Performance Assessment. It has subsequently been inspected and the Audit Commission state that "Rochford District Council is progressing well in priority areas." Building and Development Control was the subject of Best Value Inspection, which reported in July 2001. This report stated that the Council was "...providing a '**good**', two star service that has '**promising**' prospects for improvement."
- 1.6 The Council has made a good start on its Local Development Framework after discussions with the Government Office for the East of England and the submission of its Local Development Scheme and Statement of Community Involvement. It has also met the requirements for producing and submitting Annual Monitoring Reports. As part of developing the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy and other Local Development Documents, the Council's planning team had regard to a number of local strategies and initiatives, including the following:

¹ Rochford District Draft Economic Development Strategy (2007)

- *City Regions Initiative* Department for Communities and Local Government
- *Community Strategy* (2004) Rochford District Council
- *Crouch & Roach Estuary Management Plan* (2005) Crouch & Roach Estuary Project
- *Delivering the Future* (2003) Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership
- *Economic Development Strategy for Rochford District* (2005) Rochford District Council
- *Essex Local Transport Plan 2006-2011* (2005) Essex County Council
- *Draft East of England Plan (Regional Spatial Strategy 14)* (2005) – EERA
- *East of England Plan – Examination in Public – Report of the Panel* (2006) EIP Panel
- *Green Grid Strategy* (2005) Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership
- *Health & Opportunity for the People of Essex – Essex’s Local Area Agreement* (2006)
- *Housing Needs Survey* (2004) Rochford District Council
- *Housing Strategy 2004-2007 Fit for Purpose* (2004) Rochford District Council
- *Putting Patients at the Heart of Everything We Do* (2004) Castle Point & Rochford PCT
- *Rochford District Replacement Local Plan* (2006) Rochford District Council
- *School Organisation Plan 2005-2010* (2006) Essex County Council
- *Three Year Strategy Plan 2006 – 2009* (2006) Essex Police Authority & Essex Police
- *Tourism Strategy* (2005) Rochford District Council
- *Vision for the Future* (2001) Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership

- 1.7 There are no remaining major new developments planned for the district in the Rochford District Replacement Local Plan. The Park School site, on the western edge of Rayleigh, is currently being developed. This is a mixed use development incorporating a primary school, , leisure centre and residential uses. A supermarket is under construction in Rochford, together with a number of residential units.
- 1.8 As a partner in the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership, the Council has undertaken the role of providing the arts and culture opportunities for the area. This has been coupled to the provision of green tourism and leisure opportunities for the gateway. Such opportunities have to be considered against the green belt policies that apply within the district.
- 1.9 Within the district road infrastructure is poor. There are no designated Heavy Lorry Routes in the district and many routes are unfit for their current level of use. Away from the two principal roads (the A130 and A127), roads are often narrow and twisting. This creates problems particularly for remote businesses, such as those near Wallasea.
- 1.10 Public transport is poor in residential areas and very poor or non-existent elsewhere, particularly in rural areas. The level of service to certain parts of the district means they are inaccessible in the early morning, evenings or at weekends. This restricts the possibility of using public transport to travel to and from work in some settlements. The district has a railway line serving Rochford, Hockley and Rayleigh. A new station has planning permission to serve London Southend Airport.

- 1.11 London Southend Airport lies in the southern edge of the district. The Council has granted planning permission for a new terminal and associated facilities. The airport operator is looking to increase passenger flights from the airport, which had previously been restricted due to runway length issues. Today the airport is busy for freight and for aircraft maintenance, as well as private flying. Surface transport access issues will need to be carefully considered as the airport grows, but the provision of a rail station closely linked to the new terminal will have positive benefits for traffic congestion and sustainability
- 1.12 Close to the airport work is underway on the construction of the first part of the Cherry Orchard Way Business Park. This site is being developed as a specialist area for car dealerships and repair and servicing facilities and there will be opportunities for further business development, including high technology businesses, on the balance of the site still available for development. It is likely that further employment land will be required to satisfy the needs of aviation related business.

2 SPATIAL VISION FOR THE DISTRICT

2.1 The Council's Community Strategy Plan set out a vision for the future. This Core Strategy takes account of the Community Strategy and proposes a spatial vision for the next 5, 10 and 15 years to 2021. The Council has the following vision for the district:

“The Council's vision is to make Rochford the place of choice in the county to live, work and visit.”

2.2 The Council has also adopted the following principal aims:

- Provide quality, cost effective services
- Work towards a safer and more caring community
- Promote a green and sustainable environment
- Encourage a thriving local economy
- Improve the quality of life for people in our District
- Maintain and enhance our local heritage

2.3 The following sets out the spatial vision for the district:

IN 5 YEARS...

...WHERE WILL WE BE?

2.4 The Rochford District is one of the safest places in the country to live and work. A number of agencies and individuals are committed to working together, as partners of the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, to maintain and where possible improve this standard, whilst also working to reduce the fear of crime that exists.

2.5 Residents will be able to enjoy the early development of the Thames Gateway Green Grid. This will lead to improvements in the provision and upgrade of green space, resulting in increased usage of these spaces which in turn results in healthier lifestyles. Enhancement of heritage sites and local facilities will improve opportunities for leisure and free time activities, improving the quality of life for many residents.

2.6 Residents will see new development schemes incorporating a mix of housing and required local facilities being constructed on several large sites around the district. There will have been improvements to roads, public transport and other facilities in the vicinity of these sites. The new homes will offer high quality design, and include rainwater retention measures and renewable energy features. A percentage of the new homes will be delivered as affordable housing. These development sites will be landscaped and connected to the Green Grid and public open space.

2.7 Following its expansion and completion of a new car park entrance at the eastern end of the site, together with improved footpath and cycle links, residents will be able to take full advantage of the resource offered by the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park. The environmentally sympathetic Wallasea Wetlands Project will

have improved accessibility and be a popular destination for bird watchers and others, particularly during the winter months.

- 2.8 New jobs have become available as part of the automotive development on the Rochford Business Park, offering skilled and semi-skilled positions. Allied to this, passenger flights are increasing from London Southend Airport and some new jobs will be available from this early growth. The new terminal and railway station at the airport will be complete and a plan for improving surface access agreed.
- 2.9 In Rochford the redevelopment of the hospital site has been completed and high class, modern healthcare facilities are available for the treatment of mental health. Elsewhere in the district a new recycling centre complements the existing kerbside scheme available for residents. The primary school in the new Park School building is proving popular with parents and has been graded well by Ofsted.
- 2.10 A new satellite health care facility on a site in Rayleigh will be nearing completion associated with one of the new mixed development sites.
- 2.11 We will be working with our partners to tackle the problems of traffic congestion, both within the District, and on routes in and out of the District. Improvements in an integrated public transport system, as part of the Thames Gateway regeneration, will also offer residents a real alternative to travelling by car.

IN 10 YEARS...**...WHERE WILL WE BE?**

- 2.12 The regeneration of the Thames Gateway is a national priority for the Government. The Thames Gateway area includes east London, north Kent and south Essex (Southend Borough, Thurrock, Castle Point, Basildon New Town and a very small part of the Rochford District). Government ministers are leading this 25 year project, aiming to build the prosperity of the whole area so that it can compete more effectively in the global market and provide a better quality of life for all its residents.
- 2.13 The Thames Gateway South Essex Strategic Framework document states "Of particular interest to Rochford is the potential to develop those themes which link to the vision in Southend, in particular developing the area for leisure, recreation and tourism activity. The area 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. " It continues by identifying key priorities including the promotion and enhancement of Rochford Town as a centre of "Arts and Crafts", and the development of walking and cycling initiatives. Leisure and tourism are sectors we plan to develop. Informal countryside recreation, in particular such pursuits as birdwatching, are potentially key to increasing visitor numbers.
- 2.14 Rochford District therefore has the opportunity to position itself to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the regeneration of the Thames Gateway area and ensure that residents benefit from the many future planned initiatives.

-
- 2.15 London Southend Airport is thriving. It has retained its high quality maintenance and servicing facilities and developed business and low cost aviation. An extension to the new terminal has been completed and the visitor centre has been opened to cater for the increased passenger levels. More jobs have been created directly as a result of this, and there is an expanding provision of specialist education provision in airport and aircraft related engineering.
- 2.16 The new healthcare centre in Rayleigh is running well and is more than able to cope with the demands of existing residents and those proposed within its hinterland. This centre is well positioned so that it is accessible and it is being served by modern, clean public transport.
- 2.17 The Roach Valley has been opened up by the Council with the creation of new footpaths and bridlepaths linking Hockley Woods and the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park together and to the wider countryside.
- 2.18 Housing sites are being developed in association with public open space, and the deficit of playing pitch provision in parts of the district has been rectified.
- 2.19 A number of new green tourism projects and initiatives related to the district's historic heritage have begun offering recreational opportunities for the Thames Gateway. Although many visitors only come to the district for the day, there are increasing numbers of hotels and bed and breakfast establishments, many of which enable stays in the countryside.

IN 15 YEARS...**...WHERE WILL WE BE?**

- 2.20 The regeneration of the Thames Gateway South Essex area will provide significant opportunities for the Rochford District. The identification of the District as "the green part of the Gateway", and the development of a Green Grid enables the District to take advantage of the regeneration by building on these strengths.
- 2.21 Residents will also be able to benefit from a wider range of training, development and employment opportunities throughout the Thames Gateway area. The potential increase of visitors to the District, to enjoy the local heritage or the unspoiled coastal areas will generate further opportunities for the growing tourism sector of the local economy. Small businesses from a range of sectors will find opportunities for development and growth within the thriving local economy.
- 2.22 Residents of all ages, throughout the District, will have a wider range of choices for their further and higher education, free time and leisure activities, both within the District and from the opportunities and facilities offered in surrounding areas. Healthier lifestyles leading to a fitter and healthier community will reduce the demands on local health services. It is intended to provide high quality integrated health services through a network of health facilities offering treatment, advice, guidance and support.

-
- 2.23 At the same time a growing number of the community will be older residents. Services will need to adapt to their changing needs, and there will need to be a variety of housing options, with different levels of care and support. Older residents will be supported to remain independent for as long as possible, with improved accessibility to support services and information.
- 2.24 It will be important to meet the housing needs of other groups within the community. Housing that is affordable for the children and families of existing residents will be available. Supported housing and a range of accommodation for people with disabilities, including mental health will also need to be developed, so that all the District's residents are able to live as independently as possible.
- 2.25 Pressure on existing infrastructure in the district has been eased with funding secured from new development and Government support. Road improvements around Rochford town centre have protected its historic core. Western Rayleigh has a high quality road network, with easy access to the A127 and A130. At Wallasea, the Essex Marina and Baltic Wharf have benefited from on-line road improvements, which has improved safety. Public transport is well used and has been enhanced by the completion of the South Essex Rapid Transit (SERT), which serves most of the population of the district.
- 2.26 The Council has reviewed various employment land options and has negotiated with landowners to relocate bad neighbour uses away from residential areas. As part of this process a new state of the art employment park has opened, which is accessible and well located to the South Essex Rapid Transit system.
- 2.27 High technology business has flourished in a new accessible employment area. Much of this growth has been underpinned by the availability of London Southend Airport and is related to aviation. Despite travel times to and from the airport increasing, the transit times through the airport make it an increasingly attractive departure point for low cost passenger flights.
- 2.28 Major housing in the district has been completed and these sites assimilate well with their surroundings. They are designed to a high standard and have maturing landscapes. They have become desirable areas in their own right.
- 2.29 Rochford District remains an attractive, mainly rural historic area, full of character and is popular with residents and visitors .

3 THE RELATIONSHIP OF DOCUMENTS IN THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

- 3.1 The *Local Development Framework* (LDF) for the Rochford district is a ‘folder’ containing a collection of *Local Development Documents* (LDDs) that set out the spatial plan for the Rochford district up to the year 2021. Individual LDDs will be reviewed and amended on a regular basis.
- 3.2 The *Local Development Scheme* (LDS) provides an up-to-date explanation of which LDDs the Council intends to produce and review, and when they will be available. The policies in the existing adopted Local Plan will remain in force for three years or until they are replaced by policies in Local Development Documents. Initially, these LDDs will cover the period from 2006 until 2021 (in line with the 2021 end date for the draft *East of England Plan (RSS14)*).
- 3.3 The Council will encourage full participation by the local community and other stakeholders in the creation of Local Development Documents. This commitment to community participation is set out in the Council’s *Statement of Community Involvement* (SCI). The Council will monitor the implementation and production of Local Development Documents through an *Annual Monitoring Report* (AMR).
- 3.4 Copies of all the current documents are available on the Council’s website <http://www.rochford.gov.uk> and in local libraries or from the Civic Suite in Rayleigh or the Council’s Planning Offices in Rochford.

WHAT IS A DEVELOPMENT PLAN?

- 3.5 Some of the Local Development Documents in the LDF are known as “Development Plan Documents” because they are part of the statutory Development Plan. The statutory Development Plan for the Rochford district consists of:

- **Draft East of England Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS14) [called the East of England Plan]** – prepared by the East of England Assembly, it sets the strategic aims for spatial development across the whole region, including how much housing each authority must provide. This document has been the subject of an Examination in Public and is under consideration by the relevant Secretary of State;
- **Development Plan Documents (DPDs)** – prepared by Rochford District Council. These are required to be in conformity with *RSS14*; and
- **Minerals and Waste DPDs** – prepared by Essex County Council. They should also conform to *RSS14*.

ROLE OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

3.6 The national planning system is described as being 'plan-led' because Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires development control decisions to be made in accordance with particular policies in the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The material considerations could include national planning policy or significant local issues that have arisen since the Development Plan was prepared.

RELATIONSHIP TO REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY AND COMMUNITY STRATEGY

3.7 This Development Plan is in general conformity with the draft *East of England Plan RSS14*. It also has regard to the recently reviewed Community Strategy Plan approved by the Council in 2004. The following six sustainability principles in the Community Strategy Plan have been a major influence on the plan:

- *To reduce both the level and the fear of crime and to make the District an even safer place for people to live in, work in or visit.*
- *To protect and enhance the natural and built environment for present and future generations.*
- *To enable all residents of the District to access high quality education, training and skills development opportunities to ensure a thriving local economy now and in the future.*
- *To improve and promote the social, physical and mental health of everyone in the District by providing a variety of choices for leisure and free time pursuits and first class healthcare.*
- *To improve people's ability to get across and around the District, not necessarily by private car.*
- *To promote active and responsible citizenship, creating a community inclusive of all groups, and enabling everyone to have the opportunity to fully participate in activities that improve their quality of life.*

3.8 Taking the lead from the Community Strategy Plan, the principal aim of the plan is to promote sustainable development. This plan has been written to facilitate monitoring of its policies and proposals, with the intention of reviewing its outputs against agreed sustainability criteria.

USING THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR THE ROCHFORD DISTRICT

3.9 The set of Development Plan Documents include:

Core Strategy

Sets out the spatial vision for the area over a fifteen-year period from 2006, together with key spatial objectives and strategic policies. This document will help readers to understand the Council's long-term spatial planning intentions. A Key Diagram illustrates the main principles underlying the Core Strategy;

Proposals Map with Inset Maps

Shows site-specific allocations, area action plans and other designations and constraints. Users should use the maps to check what proposals, designations or constraints are operating and proposed in particular areas of the district;

Allocations

Contains area and site-specific proposals for new development relating to the Core Strategy. These allocations are shown on the Proposals Map;

Development Control policies

A set of development control policies that apply across the whole authority area;

Area Action Plans

Show the areas of the district where significant development (including regeneration or conservation) are planned to occur. A Joint Area Action Plan covering land to the west of Rochford is programmed in the current draft Local Development Scheme. A further Area Action Plan for *Foulness and Surrounding MoD Land* is listed for preparation post 2010. These areas will be shown on the Proposals Map;

Supplementary Planning Documents

Contain policies, proposals and other details that amplify the content of the documents mentioned above. These documents are statutory but are not part of the Development Plan.

AVOIDING DUPLICATION

- 3.10 One of the primary reasons for changing the planning system was to reduce the size of the documents involved by avoiding duplication between local and national standards. This Core Strategy follows this premise. As sustainable development, general green belt policy and development in flood risk areas, for example, are covered by central government guidance, there is no need for the Council to repeat these policies in its own part of the development plan.
- 3.11 Instead, the Core Strategy concentrates on areas where there is a need to reflect national guidance on a particular local characteristic or issue, or where there is no applicable national or regional steer. The Core Strategy is also to be regarded as the most strategic document in the LDF and it therefore is not intended to be site specific.

Notes:

- 3.12 *The District Council will use the relevant policies in all of the above Local Development Documents and the Rochford District Replacement Local Plan (until it is replaced) when offering advice and considering planning proposals. Thus, a suggestion for the use or development of land may be consistent with one policy in one particular Development Plan Document, but it may also be affected by other policies in the Local Development Framework.*
- 3.13 *Anyone wishing to submit or comment upon planning applications is strongly advised to consult the general policies in the LDF on matters such as design, access, parking, and landscaping as well as specific policies and proposals. Wherever possible, the policies and proposals in the Development Plan Documents are worded in a positive manner to accord with Government advice.*