

REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 2 APRIL 2014

**PORTFOLIO: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, REGENERATION,
BUSINESS LIAISON AND TOURISM**

REPORT FROM HEAD OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION

SUBJECT: ROCHFORD GROWTH STRATEGY 2014-2017

1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 That, subject to any comments by the Executive, the Rochford Growth Strategy 2014-2017 (RGS17) be agreed as the framework for promoting economic development in the district, and that updates and amendments, as required, be agreed by the Portfolio Holder of Economic Development, Regeneration, Business Liaison and Tourism to ensure the document is kept up to date. (A copy of RGS17 is attached as appendix 1 to this report).
- 1.2 That, subject to the approval of RGS17, a detailed action plan be prepared and reported back to The Executive in July 2014.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The current economic development strategy (EDS) for the district covered the period 2009-2014, and is now due for a refresh.
- 2.2 Since the EDS 2009-2014 was approved there have been many changes to the arrangements and opportunities for delivering economic development, and the draft Rochford Growth Strategy seeks to reflect those changes in setting out a framework of work to achieve growth and development in the district.
- 2.3 The government's decision in 2010 to create a number of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP), with Essex being part of the South East LEP, is a key consideration for the RGS17 to take into account along with Rochford's continued participation in the Thames Gateway South Essex.
- 2.4 The draft RGS17 provides a strategic framework to show how we will deal with the opportunities flowing from the SELEP as well as identifying a number of more local schemes, including the development of the JAAP business park.
- 2.5 There is currently much activity around the preparation of a SELEP Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), and in parallel, the preparation of a Thames Gateway South Essex growth plan. That being the case, there will be a need to look again at the draft RGS17 to ensure that it fully reflects the opportunities identified for the LEP and the Thames Gateway partnership, and thereafter to prepare a detailed action plan for consideration by The Executive. It is proposed any revisions and the action plan be reported to The Executive in July 2014.

- 2.6 The July update will also reflect any changes that have been agreed to the Council's overall vision and objectives for the district, and include actions that emerge from the Business summit later this month.
- 2.7 It is also important to bear in mind that the RGS17 is intended to be a flexible, live document which will be amended and updated on a regular basis. This is considered to be a better arrangement than agreeing a static, unchanging document for the next three years.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1 In this instance, no alternative options have been considered. It is essential for the district to have a growth strategy in place to ensure that all opportunities for delivering economic development, support for existing business, etc. are realised.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There is a risk that without a clear growth strategy, opportunities for investment and development in the district will be lost. RGS17 will be closely monitored in conjunction with the portfolio holder with regular reports back to the Council on progress.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no immediate resource implications arising from the approval of RGS17. Any initiatives or schemes linked to RGS17 which require resources which cannot be met from the existing economic development budget will be brought to the Council for a decision.

I confirm that the above recommendation does not depart from Council policy and that appropriate consideration has been given to any budgetary and legal implications.

SMT Lead Officer Signature: _____

Head of Planning & Transportation

Background Papers:-

None.

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Rochford Growth Strategy 2014-17

Executive Summary

The Rochford Growth Strategy sets out a number of practical actions that are intended to assist local businesses to grow and develop, to promote new business start-ups, and to encourage existing businesses to relocate to Rochford.

To be completed...

Rochford Growth Strategy

The Rochford Growth Strategy sets out how we intend to strengthen and build upon the entrepreneurial character of the District. It sets out how we will help and support existing businesses in the area, as well as how we intend to encourage new and relocating businesses to locate here in order to help deliver the Rochford District Council vision of:

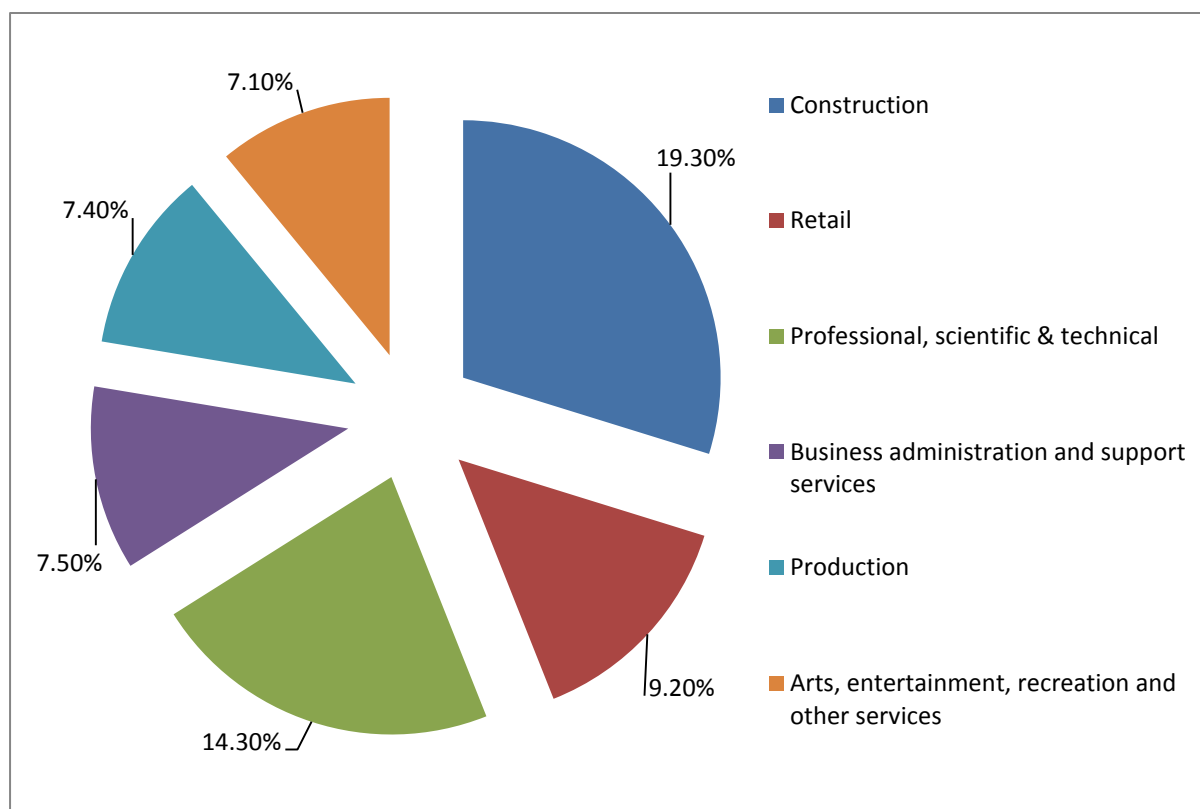
To make Rochford District a place which provides opportunities for the best possible quality of life for all who work, live and visit here.

The Rochford Growth Strategy does not sit in isolation but operates within a wider policy framework locally, regionally and nationally. The Rochford District Council Core Strategy, adopted in December 2011, works in conjunction with this strategy in particular the Economic Development policies, and together they help to deliver the aim of ensuring the growth of local employment opportunities and the delivery of an additional 3,000 jobs by 2021.

Rochford Economic Snapshot

Business

Figure 1: Employment Sectors in Rochford (2012)



Rochford District is host to 3,320 businesses (2012) that provide a diverse range of jobs over an equally diverse range of sectors. The 6 largest sectors are as shown in Figure 1.

The business base in Rochford District is strongly focussed on the smaller business with 79% of the 2,995 VAT or PAYE registered businesses in the District employing between 1 and 4 people; only 5 companies in the District employ more than 500 employees.

TABLE

No. of employees	Total businesses	Percentage of total
0-4	2,375	79.3
5-49	585	19.5
50-499	30	1.0
500+	5	0.2 (so it adds to 100%)

Birth Rates, Longevity and Death Rates

Of all businesses registered in the District, 41% have existed for more than 10 years and a further 30% for between 4 and 9 years, demonstrating positively the strength of the economy in Rochford. Given the recent recession and economic outlook this is a remarkable statistic and demonstrates that Rochford is an ideal location for business.

Nevertheless, there is no room for complacency and more work needs to be done to attract larger businesses, in particular, to locate to and stay in Rochford.

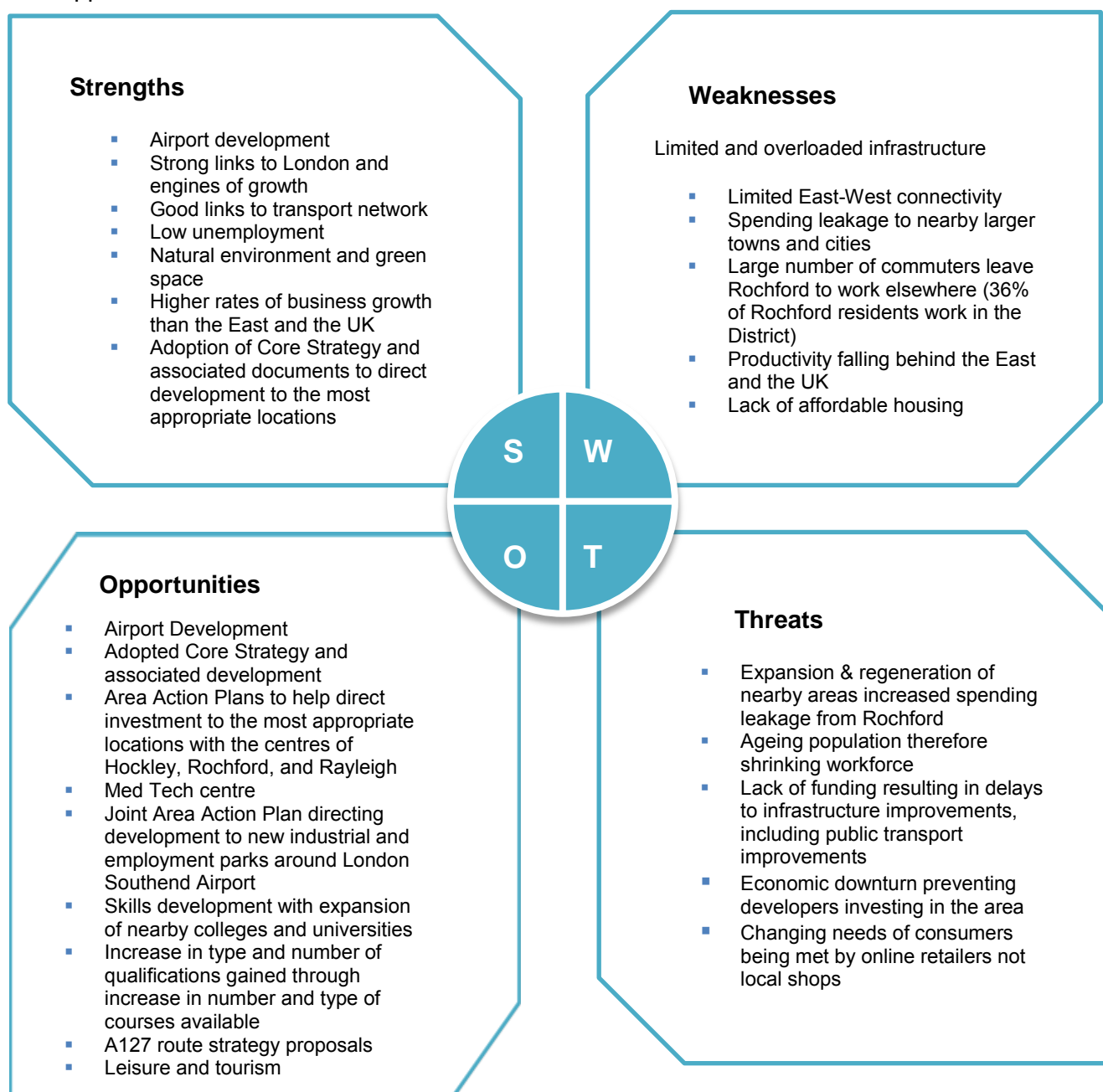
Employees

There are approximately 29,000 jobs available in the Rochford District, which gives a job density of 0.56 (ONS jobs density, 2011) and means there are only 0.56 jobs available to each person of working age living in the district. This highlights the need to provide more jobs within Rochford to meet the needs of our residents and also to act as a counter to the high levels of out-commuting, accepting that out-commuting will always be important given Rochford's close proximity to the London jobs market.

The number of residents of working age in Rochford that are claiming Job Seekers Allowance is among the lowest in Essex at 1.7%. This has decreased steadily over the past 2 years, with the highest level being 2.2%. The average figure for Job Seekers Allowance across Great Britain is approximately 3.5%.

SWOT Analysis

Rochford District is ideally located geographically with access to London, London Southend Airport, nearby ports, and access to the motorway network. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are outlined below.



The SWOT sets out some very real strengths and opportunities for economic growth in the district and the growth strategy set out below is intended to provide a framework of actions for how these opportunities might be realised.

Vision

To Make Rochford District a place which provides opportunities for the best possible quality of life for all who live, work and visit.

The Council is pro-economic growth, though not at the expense of the environment. The Rochford Growth Strategy is divided into themes that provide a clear link with strategic perspectives, particularly countywide and the Thames Gateway South Essex quadrant, whilst still maintaining a strong focus on the particular characteristics unique to Rochford. Details under each theme set out what we intend to do, how we intend to do it, when we intend to do it by, and what we aim to achieve for the district by doing it.

Rochford is an ideal location for business as indicated by the SWOT analysis. Home to London Southend Airport with international flights, and also within proximity of London via the A127, M25 and A13, as well as a direct train line, with four stations, to London Liverpool Street, Rochford has excellent regional and international connections. Rochford is also home to Baltic Wharf on Wallasea Island, and there is a ferry link across the Crouch to Burnham.

Highlighting that the Council is pro-economic growth, the Rochford District Council Core Strategy allocates additional employment land across the District with new strategic industrial parks being located within proximity to London Southend Airport.

There are four excellent secondary schools in the district and higher education facilities nearby with the University of Essex campus in Southend and Anglia Ruskin University in Chelmsford, alongside a number of excellent colleges.

There are significant opportunities to develop leisure and tourism in the district. There is a substantial built-heritage – Rayleigh is mentioned in the Domesday Book, for example – and it is important that we capitalise on this through initiatives set out in the strategy. Outside of the urban areas the district comprises attractive countryside, which includes a number of designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Areas, Ramsar Sites, and Special Areas of Conservation offering tremendous recreational opportunities, including bike riding, walking, horse riding and sailing. The RSPB is developing Wallasea Wetlands, the largest coastal managed retreat project in Europe.

To this end the District is an ideal location to base a business. The Council also prides itself on its Customer Service, and an Economic Development Unit has been set up to deal with all aspects of business and economic development, from answering queries, to signposting, to working with schools to ensure students are equipped for the workplace.

Enterprise and Innovation

What does success look like?

Vision: Rochford is the location of choice for new, relocating and expanding businesses, and existing businesses are given opportunities to expand and have access to excellent on-going business support.

The Council see a wide range of opportunities to showcase Rochford as a location of choice for new and relocating businesses,

What are we going to do?

Priorities

1 South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) and Thames Gateway South Essex (TGSE)

The South East Local Enterprise Partnership is a business led regional body, with a single goal to create the most enterprising economy in the UK by exploring opportunities for enterprise whilst addressing barriers to growth.. The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) brings together key leaders from business, local government, further and higher education.

The SELEP is one of 39 partnerships across the country set up by the government to be the key body determining strategic economic priorities while making investments and delivering activities to drive growth and create local jobs.

What does this mean for you?

We will be assessing the options for accessing funding from SELEP, and will also continue to, and increase involvement in work streams filtering down from SELEP. We will ensure that the needs of Rochford businesses are accounted for within any SELEP policy documents, particularly the SELEP growth strategy, and **that Rochford businesses are made fully aware of any funding opportunities available to them.**

It is essential that Rochford is included within the SELEP Growth Strategy and any arising action plans produced by SELEP. We will also work closely with partners in the Thames Gateway area, and Essex County Council to ensure that Rochford is well represented in SELEP documents and subdocuments. The SELEP Growth Strategy will set out a programme for investment over the next six years.

Additional Actions

Importing and Exporting

We will continue to work with UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) and Invest Essex to ensure that Rochford and the opportunities it can offer are being well publicised to companies utilising UKTI and Invest Essex. We will also continue to work with UKTI to promote overseas opportunities to businesses located in Rochford, in order to extend their export markets. We will make arrangements for a workshop, in partnership with UKTI and neighbouring authorities, to enable local businesses to speak to a UKTI representative and discuss exporting options and the best way forward for the company's export stream. The Council will work to ensure that benefits arising from the delivery of the Med Tech campus can be seen and opportunities taken by the businesses based within Rochford District.

Essex Chambers of Commerce

Essex Chambers of Commerce is an independent body offering a full range of business services. The Chambers represent businesses at local, regional and national level by engaging with and influencing policy development forums and as such are frequently

involved in the regions planning and regeneration processes. Alongside this the Chambers also provide business support on a broad range of issues.

Essex Chambers of Commerce host several large and successful networking events across Essex and we are considering arrangements for similar events working in partnership with the Essex Chambers. We are also keen to offer events such as jobs fairs, Meet the Buyer events, and increase the focus on promoting Rochford outside of the District, including internationally. Working with, and as a member of the Essex Chambers of Commerce we can provide access to a range of opportunities and contacts, and to a wealth of knowledge and experience in the business community. .

Med Tech

The Anglia Ruskin Med Tech Campus will provide one of the world's largest health innovation spaces for companies of all sizes - from start-ups and micro SMEs to large corporates - with the aim of establishing the UK as a global force in a sector worth £170 billion per year.

Specialising in near-market solutions for products and services, this cluster of expertise will be of enormous benefit to healthcare providers and commissioners, and the Anglia Ruskin MedTech Campus has already secured support from a number of key stakeholders in industry, local and central government and the NHS.

The project, which is a partnership between Chelmsford City Council, Harlow District Council, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and Anglia Ruskin University, is predicted to grow the UK medical technology sector by £1.2bn and generate approximately 12,500 jobs.

As well as delivering a major economic boost for the UK, and Essex in particular, the Anglia Ruskin Med Tech Campus will lead to community and patient benefits through the adoption of improved health products and services.

We will work with Southend Borough Council and Med Tech to ensure that the opportunities offered by the location of Med Tech in the District will be available to Rochford based businesses. Opportunities to hold Meet the Buyer events will be investigated and we'll continue to work on increasing business to business opportunities and strengthening the supply chain within the District. We will aim to arrange procurement training for businesses to further enhance their business and the business opportunities available to them.

Start Up Units

The Council will continue to investigate and support the implementation of Start Up Units in the form of an Eco-Enterprise Centre as outlined in Policy ED1 of the Rochford District Council Core Strategy. We will continue to work with a range of partners to assess the viability and deliverability of these units, and will also determine the most favourable location for the units.

Low Carbon Business

We will continue to promote the Low Carbon Business Initiative to local businesses and highlight the benefits that using low carbon energy can mean for their business including reduced waste and lower energy bills. The Low Carbon Programme began back in 2009 and since then has reached 235 Rochford SMEs and secured £264,959.08 of ERDF grant funding for these local businesses. To date, £250,573 of this has been

successfully allocated to 44 different companies, enabling 31 to proceed with environmental projects and a further 13 towards employing an apprentice. In addition to these 13 apprentices, a further 81 Rochford jobs have been created and 71 confirmed positions safeguarded through the intervention of the Programme. The Programme has been extended until December 2014 and we will continue to actively promote the scheme and involve and support Rochford businesses.

Southend Airport Joint Area Action Plan (JAAP)

The Council, through the London Southend Airport and Environs Joint Area Action Plan (JAAP) will work with the airport to ensure that opportunities offered by the airport itself, and by the surrounding businesses are made available to local businesses. The airport site is already home to a number of Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) companies, which together support over 1,000 jobs. Many of these jobs are highly skilled, high value jobs unique to the aviation sector. As the JAAP progresses there is opportunity to grow the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) cluster alongside the expansion of London Southend Airport. This will become more apparent as the JAAP goes through the final stages, and once adopted, through the implementation of the new business parks.

The development of Saxon Business Park is intended to provide modern, sustainable, spacious office accommodation. It is envisaged that the new estate will deliver space for a range of high-tech businesses, but with an emphasis on environmental technologies, and include space for new start-up businesses. There is also the opportunity to locate the Eco Enterprise Centre in the JAAP area. Combined with the opportunities for new and relocating businesses, we will also ensure that existing businesses benefit from the new development through hosting events in order to publicise and strengthen business to business networking, and will also look to offer training courses on a variety of business focused topics to strengthen the skills base.

Online Shopping

The Centre for Retail Research has published an analysis of the predicted changes likely to be seen in retail in the UK by 2018. (Retail Futures 2018). Forecasts predict that around 41% of town centres will lose 27,638 stores in the next five years, and total store numbers will decrease by 22%, from 281,930 today to 220,000 in 2018. This will have an impact on employment with predicted job losses being around 316,000 compared to today. The UK currently has the highest proportion of online retail sales, and the share of online retail sales is expected to increase to 21.5% by 2018. This links to the predicted fall in store numbers by 22%, from 281,930 today to 220,000 in 2018. Given this analysis there may very well be some impact on the high streets and town centres within the District; it is crucial that this is monitored and measures identified and implemented that can help local shops flourish and to mitigate the predicted decline in stores over the next few years. The Town Team initiative provides a real opportunity to counter the growth of online shopping and promote the merits of town centres as a place to do business.

We will continue to be proactive and research and build upon local economic intelligence, to ensure that services are provided as and when they are needed in order to meet the needs of businesses. We will continually engage with local business representatives to ensure that the views of the local business community are communicated to both Officers and Councillors. We will also continue to use all methods of communication in order to engage

with businesses, and will continue to promote any social media communication channels used by the Council, not just to inform the local business community about our initiatives but as a vehicle for them to communicate with us freely.

Education, Employment and Skills

What does success look like?

Vision: A well educated and appropriately skilled workforce is crucial for business growth, as a pre-condition for new businesses, and to strengthen the economy within Rochford.

Schools, education providers and employers in Rochford are strongly linked with school leavers being equipped with the skills and qualifications that employers require.

Unemployment and NEET levels in Rochford are steadily decreasing and are below the national and regional average.

What are we going to do?

Priorities

1. Produce an Employment Skills and Business Group Action Plan:

We will work with partners in the Employment Skills and Business Group, part of the Local Strategic Partnership, which is jointly hosted by Castle Point Borough Council and Rochford District Council to agree an action plan to identify the strategic issues that the group can be held accountable for, and therefore work to address. Stakeholders at the partnership cover a wide spectrum from local authority officers to business owners and representatives, to education and training providers and the Job Centre Plus. Work to date includes employer showcase events and business engagement events. The work undertaken by this group and its respective partners will help to meet the needs of:

- Young people in education, and about to leave education;
- The employed workforce; and
- Employers.

2. Whole Essex Community Budget

We will continue to be involved in the progress of the Whole Essex Community Budget (WECB), an initiative which plans to reform skills provision in Essex, enabling young people to secure jobs in sectors driving economic growth. At the heart of the proposition is the fact that young people in Essex are not choosing vocational education and skills courses that give them the best chance of a high value, sustainable and progressive career in Essex nor delivers Essex employers with the people they need to drive up local economic growth. The WECB will enable businesses to attract the right employees by increasing employer participation in training, and through increasing apprenticeship¹ numbers across the County. We will ensure that opportunities offered both to schools and businesses are communicated to those located within the District. We'll also continue our involvement with the

¹ Rochford District Council is operating a successful apprenticeship programme, as one example.

implementation of Southend's City Deal², and where appropriate, ensure that opportunities arising from this can be fully communicated to businesses and residents of Rochford District.

Additional Actions

Young Entrepreneur and working with students

We will work closely with local schools in hosting the Young Entrepreneur event, and together with Enterprise in Education, will investigate ways this can be taken further and enhanced in future years. This could be running a similar programme in primary schools, or hosting an evening awards event. We will also look at other ways we can work with schools, and businesses to ensure that students have the skills that businesses are looking for when employing young people, or apprentices, and that students have direct access to local businesses for mentoring, advice, work experience and opportunities. This could range from students being mentored by businesses or Council officers, to arranging for students to host a market stall at one of the market days in the town centres of the District as part of the Young Entrepreneur event, or through something similar run by schools.

Business Breakfasts and Networking Events

We will also encourage schools to attend the Business Breakfast events hosted by the Council, or other seminars or business events that we host throughout the year, thus giving students an opportunity to experience a business event. Together with partners including Castle Point Borough Council and education providers, we will investigate the feasibility and viability of hosting an event aimed at both employers and students/school leavers. This will serve two purposes; enable students to meet potential employers/training and education providers and assess various options available to them when leaving education, and also allow employers/education/training providers to meet students as potential employees or learners to provide them with information concerning what is on offer.

Skills Gap

We will continue to work with Local Authorities and businesses across the Thames Gateway area on work focussing on the skills gap; the gap between the skills employers are looking for, and the skills and qualifications that school and education leavers are obtaining. To date, a skills summit with attendees from education providers, key local businesses and local authorities has been held to identify the issues and begin outlining actions that can be taken to help close the gap. We will continue to be involved with this and will help to implement any actions or action plan that is an outcome of the Skills Summit.

Job Centre Plus

² The government's approach to City Deals is led by a set of principles that will:

- put cities in control of the economic opportunities and challenges they face as a city
- work with a city's wider metro area – encouraging deals across the wider economic area will increase the 'scale of deal'
- work across local enterprise and local authority boundaries, sectors, and professions
- give real power to city authorities so they can create economic growth

Through closer working with Job Centre Plus we will ensure that the work undertaken by Job Centre Plus is communicated to all businesses throughout the area. Job Centre Plus offers a variety of services³ that can assist businesses, through helping with recruitment, to finding and placing apprentices⁴. Through the work of the Employment Skills and Group we will ensure that the work carried out by the Council, and the work carried out by the Job Centre Plus compliment each other, and achieve a mutual aim; to increase the numbers of Rochford residents in employment and drive forward economic growth in the District.

Business Growth and Infrastructure

What does success look like?

London Southend Airport and the surrounding high tech business parks are thriving, bustling centres of excellence that are drivers for the sub-regional economy and have provided 3000 additional jobs for the local area. London Southend Airport is providing businesses with excellent access to European markets. Skills training academies have been established to provide high-skilled training to meet the needs of the growing number of employers within the District. Area Action Plans have been adopted for the centres in Rochford District, enabling them to meet their potential. Communication between local businesses and the Council are very strong.

What are we going to do?

Priorities

1. Town Centres - Empty Shops Strategy

One of the key statements emerging from the Portas Review was about the mix of uses within the High Street and the presence of empty shops. This is something we are keen to minimise within the District, to ensure that centres are serving their function, and also to keep the centres looking attractive. To that end we will monitor the vacancies of shops within the centres of Rochford on a quarterly basis, and make the results available to other Council departments, and the Chamber of Trade and Commerce. We will also investigate potential ways to either utilise empty shops productively until they are leased, and also will work with local Chambers of Trade and Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses, as well as commercial agents to ensure that any empty shops can be leased as soon as possible. We will prepare an Empty Shops Strategy to outline our proposals in detail.

We will also continue to work with Estate Agents in the area to promote empty shops, and direct business enquiries regarding units towards the available units that we are aware of. Through the vacancy surveys that are currently undertaken, we will also monitor those units that remain empty, or those units that see a high turnover of businesses. Using this information we will work closely with estate agents and landlords to ascertain the reasons behind this and investigate potential mitigation measures.

³ The Portas Review - An independent review into the future of our high streets, 2011, and also note the Grimsey Review, An Alternative Future for the High Street, 2013.

⁴ Jobcentre Plus is an executive agency of the Department for Work and Pensions which provides services primarily to those attempting to find employment and to those requiring the issuing of a financial provision due to lack of employment (and other reasons).

2. Town Centres - Town Team

Another key component arising from both the Localism Act and the Portas Review was the importance of community. As such, town teams have been set-up at various places across the country. The aim of the Town Team is for it to be business led, and as an authority we are keen to support and facilitate this.

The Council is working with stakeholders to develop a town team for Rayleigh, with agreed objectives and actions; the intention will be to introduce town teams for Rochford and Hockley thereafter. Research is currently being undertaken to look at the mechanics and logistics of setting up a town team and who this would involve, how it would be constituted, what the terms of reference would be, and what sort of aims and objectives the town team would have. These could be anything from arranging events within the town, hosting markets, to organising themed days/events/evenings amongst traders.

3. Town Centres – Other Initiatives

Our town centres are no longer places dominated by shops, but have become multi-use places with retail sitting alongside services, food and entertainment outlets, arts and education. Working with planning and finance, we have set an objective to repopulate high streets and town centres as community hubs encompassing: more housing, education, arts, entertainment, business/office space, health and leisure - and some shops.

4. Tourism

In recent years the Council has been exploring the possibility of enhancing the District's economy through the promotion of tourism. The District has been identified as the 'green' part of the Thames Gateway and as having the potential to be the arts and cultural opportunities area for the sub region. We have begun to actively promote the area as a tourism destination, having produced and circulated a District District Visitors Guide guide⁵.

The District's tourism opportunities are focussed primarily on the themes of heritage, countryside and coastline. The Council believes it will be possible to promote rural tourism in a sustainable manner which respects biodiversity and the character of the Green Belt (The issue of tourism in relation to the Green Belt specifically is discussed in Green Belt chapter of the Core Strategy). The Council is also working with the Parishes to develop a series of green walks.

Government guidance on this issue contained within Good Practice Guide on Planning Tourism (DCLG, 2007) notes the potential for tourism to deliver economic benefits. The guide states that transport and accessibility is inherent to tourism. However, it also notes that public transport is often limited within areas with rural tourism potential and that other factors, such as the need for rural regeneration, need to be given weight.

As mentioned the District is home to a number of ecologically important sites including a number of designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Areas, Ramsar Sites, and Special Areas of Conservation offering tremendous recreational opportunities.

⁵ Rochford District Visitors Guide

http://fs-drupal-rochford.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/leis_tour_visitors_guide.pdf

The RSPB is developing Wallasea Wetlands, the largest coastal managed retreat project in Europe. Our Core Strategy highlights the opportunity for the development of bed and breakfast facilities.

This offers the perfect opportunity to build on the Green Tourism attractions that exists within the District. The RSPB has over a million members, nearly 200,000 of which are youth members. This offers an ideal opportunity to work with the RSPB to promote Wallasea Wetlands, and encourage visitors to come to the District. This will have a knock on effect on other business in the area, particularly hotels, campsites and bed and breakfasts. The Council will support these businesses and ensure they are aware of the opportunities that are available to them.

We will continue to work on promoting Rochford as a Tourist destination and will involve businesses in the work that we do. Rochford has a unique offering and it is essential that we make the most of it, publicise it well and encourage businesses to get involved. The Council will produce a Tourism Strategy which will outline how the tourist information availability and quality will be improved, and how the distribution of this will be increased across the District. Town/Parish Councils currently produce varying levels of tourist information and we will work with them to ensure a wider distribution of this information, and will investigate ways in which the District Council can assist with various aspects of this work.

5. Shop At My Local

The award winning Shop At My Local continues to go from strength to strength. The Council are continually assessing the scheme to ensure that both residents and businesses are getting the best opportunities from it. To help assess this, surveys have recently been sent out to assess what shoppers and traders think of the scheme, and how the users of the scheme think it can be improved. Once the survey results have been analysed, the Shop At My Local steering group will devise an action plan to take the scheme forward and to ensure that the original objectives are still being met;

- Deliver initiatives and events that attract people to the districts main shopping areas
- Become a forum to engage local stake holders in discussion and collaboration
- Shape and influence organisational agendas to develop a shared strategic approach to main shopping area and development
- Facilitate access to funding and resource opportunities to enhance shopping areas
- Help to deliver cleaner, greener and more attractive shopping areas.

Additional Actions

The Integrated County Strategy (ICS) provides a shared vision for Essex, Southend, and Thurrock, to identify the priorities needed to achieve increased economic growth. The ICS will ensure that available funding is invested towards priorities which are most likely to generate long-term economic growth.

By producing the ICS and prioritising aspirations for growth, the area is taking a clear lead in responding to the current economic climate. The ICS will be used by decision makers to guide the use of funding towards priorities that can achieve the greatest possible benefit for the area. We will ensure that Rochford's needs are noted and accounted for within the ICS, and any actions that arise from the ICS are to the benefit of Rochford based businesses.

Deal for Growth

Public sector partners across Essex, Southend and Thurrock including Rochford District Council share Government's commitment to the pursuit of economic growth. We believe the shared 'Deal for Growth' provides the foundation for future prosperity. The success of City Deals has been noted and as such a partnership of Essex Councils is taking the opportunity to affect change on a spatial level using the City Deal package as a model; in Southend the focus is on providing assistance (training, advice and grants for example) to small and medium sized businesses. Aspects of the Deal for Growth proposals that have been presented to government include:

- A £1bn infrastructure fund, leveraging private sector investment into major enabling infrastructure. This supported by a single 'Infrastructure Gateway' which will incorporate an investor panel and the support of a shared infrastructure team
- To accelerate the increase of employment levels in key growth locations, seeking to halve the projected recovery time of those areas by returning to 2008 employment levels within 10 years
- Secure the dividends of growth for reinvestment into future growth, including the local reinvestment of a proportion of NNDR growth across Essex, and the retention and reinvestment of 100% NNDR growth in key locations
- Provide certainty on transport funding over 15 years, enabling better coordination and strategic planning for key infrastructure
- Unleash the demand for housing through a toolkit of interventions, including local support of mortgage deposits; equity investment stakes and support to the private rented market
- Redesign 16-24 skills provision, making it employer driven and inclusive of a payment by results model. An employer-led Employment and Skills Board will ensure that courses are attuned to employer need.

Rochford District Council will ensure that the needs of the community within the District are fully accounted for and opportunities to enhance the economy of the District will be sought.

City Deal

In July 2012, HM Government announced a series of deals negotiated with each of England's core cities. These deals are designed to devolve powers and support projects that will "boost growth and jobs for the long term."

"Cities are the engines of economic growth and they will be critical to our economic recovery. However, to create the new businesses, jobs and development that the country needs, local leaders need a step change in the way in which they support economic growth on the ground. The Government will be working with different cities over the coming months to make a series of deals that will transform the way in which local leaders drive economic development." (Unlocking Growth In Cities, HM Government 2012).

Rochford District Council will work with Southend to ensure the needs of the District are accounted for, and the District can make the most of the opportunities that have been offered.

Superfast Broadband

Essex County Council launched the Superfast Broadband initiative in June 2012 and secured £6.46 million of national government investment for broadband infrastructure in Essex. The lack of effective broadband in rural areas is a barrier to economic growth and social development in Essex. Essex County Council, with its project partners, is committed to bridging the digital divide, delivering economic growth and social wellbeing by making NGA or much improved broadband available to all and encouraging Essex's citizens and businesses to make more effective use of the internet. Rochford District Council will continue to be involved with this project, and will continue to ensure that the needs of the rural businesses and residents are being accounted for and met by the project.

Area Action Plans

The Council has produced three action plans for the three main centres in Rochford District; Hockley, Rochford, and Rayleigh. These outline planning policies that will be put in place to make sure that the centres retain their unique character whilst still enabling economic growth and enabling them to meet their potential. The Council has submitted the Area Action Plan for Hockley to the Secretary of State and are planning on submitting the Area Action Plans for Rochford and Rayleigh to the Secretary of State by the end of 2013. The Economic Development Unit will work closely with the Planning Policy Team to ensure that the needs of businesses within the District are accounted for within the plans.

Highways Improvements

The Council have also committed to preparing a Transportation Supplementary Planning Document (TSPD). This will outline the framework that the Council would like the transport infrastructure within the District to meet – including enhancements and changes to the transport network where appropriate. Whilst the Council is not the Highways Authority and so is not in a position to implement any of the infrastructural changes, the TSPD will form a guide to the improvements supported by the Council. Improved strategic highway infrastructure is key to business, and business growth, and something that the Council is keen to work with relevant partners on. We will ensure businesses are consulted and involved in the production of any policies related to improved highway infrastructure.

Eco-Enterprise Centre

A key component of previous Economic Development Strategies was to promote the provision of an eco-enterprise centre through the production of the London Southend Airport and Environs Joint Area Action Plan or within the west of the District. At the time, several options for this were considered and were ruled out due to the size of the potential site, or potential issues with viability. However, with progress anticipated on the JAAP, and new investment opportunities, the time is right to reconsider the feasibility and location of an eco enterprise centre for the district.

Business Directory

To enable the Council to ensure that we have a firm understanding of the business base within the District, we will investigate the feasibility of commissioning a Business Directory. A Business Directory would be of use to many departments within the Council, and would also provide valuable information to allow us to tailor schemes and initiatives to better fit the businesses within the Rochford District.

Rural Business

It is important to ensure that we are assisting the businesses of the District in the best and most suitable ways to enable the needs of the economy of the District to be met. As at March 2011, 23% of Rochford District based businesses were classified as being rural businesses showing the strength of the rural business within the District. However rural businesses may face a host of issues including a lack of physical and social economic facilities such as good quality sites and premises, a good transport network, an adequate pool of skilled workers and effective accessible higher and further education provision.

Feedback from the rural business community centres, in the main, on what they perceive to be restrictive local planning policies (and indeed the importance of our emerging planning policy) and the way in which these can inhibit business growth. With other businesses there are significant constraints around road and transport infrastructure.

The Council will continue to progress work to ensure the needs of the rural community are being met, and will assess the feasibility of hosting a Rural Networking Group to ensure that communication channels are opened and well used, and that more rural businesses have access to the same level of information and opportunity as those based in more central areas. The viability of implementing a rural database of businesses to enable and open communication channels will be investigated; the key to providing the most effective support is in understanding in detail the needs of rural businesses in the district.

Planning

The Economic Development Unit will also continue to work in partnership with the Planning Policy Team, with particular emphasis on consulting the business community on the production of policy documents to ensure that the views of businesses are accounted for.

Business Networking

The Council will also continue to host and organise three Business Breakfasts per year, ensuring that topics being discussed are relevant and useful to businesses. Alongside this the Council will also continue to take opportunities to host workshops and seminars for local businesses, such as those we have jointly hosted with Pro Actions. In particular we will look to provide information at these events that has been indicated as being useful by the local community in order to help meet the needs of the local business.

The Council will continue to promote and enhance Rochford Business Network; a key database of local businesses. The Council have in the past worked with partners to provide free training for Rochford Business Network and Shop At My Local members, and will investigate opportunities to replicate this in the future.

Rochford District Council, together with partners run an Art Trail each year in the centre of Rochford. This allows local artists to display their work in shops and businesses through the centre of Rochford. The Art Trail brings visitors to the centre of Rochford, boosts trade and also encourages visitors to other areas of the District. Colleagues across the Council will work to ensure that businesses have access to all the opportunities offered to them as a result of this initiative.

Business Summit

It is crucial that the services and opportunities that we provide are those that local businesses need and find useful. To find out which services and opportunities the business community are keen to see the Council deliver and provide the Council will host a Business Summit, giving business the opportunity to highlight areas they would like support, training, advice or expertise. Results of this will then shape the work that the Council carries out with regard to businesses.

Business Awards

Rochford District currently sponsors the Environmental Awareness Award at the Southend Business Awards annually. This event sees a large number of businesses from across Southend and Rochford participate and Rochford businesses generally perform very well, collecting a large number of awards each year in a variety of categories. The event is well established and has been running for 18 years, with a huge amount of publicity generated online, from participating businesses and in local media. The aim of the awards is to raise company awareness, and improve company image and customer confidence. The awards recognise the efforts of local companies, who have one thing in common, the dedication to achieve excellence.

The awards are open to small, medium and large companies that have shown a dedication to hard work and commitment. A company can be nominated by an owner, employee.

We will continue to consider the benefits of sponsorship against the costs, and if it is found that it is not viable to continue supporting this award, hosting a Rochford District Council Business Award competition will be considered against feasibility, and viability, and also success of hosting such an award. The potential of hosting a Rochford District Council Business Award competition as well as supporting the Southend Business Awards will also be considered.

How are we going to monitor our progress?

Individual projects will be monitored in terms of their progress, but in addition there are a number of indicators which provide a view of the economic performance of the district.

• Vacant shops and business premises in town centres	Quarterly
• Number of new business start-ups in the district	Annual
• Employment statistics	Monthly
• Grants	Annual
• Job seekers allowance claimants	Monthly
• Low carbon grants awarded	Monthly
• Vacant premises on industrial estates	Quarterly
• Participants in Rochford Business Network	Quarterly
• Number of members of Shop at my Local	Quarterly
• New business floorspace in the district	Quarterly

What next?

This document should be considered a living document, which will be regularly updated. All updates will reflect the changing economic climate, changing technology and other factors fuelling our economy and needs of our business community.