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# **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR ROCHFORD DISTRICT**

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**UPDATED VERSION**

**OCTOBER 2005**

**Rochford District  
Council**

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## 1. **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This Strategy **is updated on an annual basis** following its approval in October 2003. This document represents the outcome of the **second** review. The revised strategy sets out the Council's medium term commitment to economic development in the District until 2007.
- 1.2 The **updated** 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 is currently the subject of an examination in public. This examination of the emerging Regional Planning Guidance has just started and will run to March 06.**
- 1.3 Other key documents the strategy links to are the Council's Performance Plan **2005**, which looks at the Council's performance over the past year, outlines our key tasks for 2005/06 and the period till **2010**, 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

2.2 The aims of 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 Statistics provided by One Railway show that during 2002 to 2004 there has been an increase of approximately 1% in out commuting passengers from Rayleigh, Hockley and Rochford.**

**Rayleigh – 2002 - 950,000 out journeys - 960,000 during 2004**

**Hockley – 2002 - 2.033m out journeys - 1.985m during 2004**

**Rochford – 2002 - 663,000 out journeys - 684,000 during 2004**

3.9 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 313<sup>th</sup> least deprived nationally out of a total of 354. However, there are some pockets of deprivation in specific locations.



## Thames Gateway South Essex

- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 There are 258,500 jobs within the **Thames Gateway South Essex's** economy against which employment is forecast to grow by an additional 55,000 jobs by 2021 (a growth of 21%). **Thames Gateway South Essex** has high levels of **both** in and out-commuting.
- 3.14 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.
- 3.15 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.

3.16 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.

### **Rochford Zone of Influence**

3.17 In the context of Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership, the District of Rochford has a small but significant contribution to make. The Thames Gateway South Essex boundary includes London Southend Airport, potentially providing a regional airport facility for the area, the majority of which lies within the District.

3.18 **In December 2003 the Government published its white paper ‘The Future of Air Transport’ in which airport operators were asked to prepare master plans. London Southend Airport has recently published its Master Plan around serving the Thames Gateway and meeting local demand. A Socio-Economic Impact Analysis of Activities at Southend Airport is underway which will:**

- **Review the national, regional, sub-regional and local level economic background**
- **Establish a baseline around the current business activity at Southend Airport**
- **Review how the airport should develop its aviation market**
- **Consider a skills profile necessary to support the nature and scale of employment growth anticipated**

3.19 Of particular interest to Rochford is the potential to develop those themes, which link to the Zones of Change in Southend. In particular, in developing the area for leisure, recreation and tourism activity. The District recognises itself as the 'green' part of the Gateway. In the context of the Thames Gateway South Essex, the key priorities include:

- With Southend Borough Council; resolving the future of London Southend Airport and its environs.
- Developing and extending the green grid concept across the District and, in particular, in association with the development and expansion of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park.
- Promoting the leisure and tourism potential of the District and securing new hotel provision in the area.
- Promoting the enhancement of Rochford Town as a centre for 'Arts and Crafts'.
- Conserving and enhancing the District's heritage, particularly in the centres of Rochford and Rayleigh.
- Enhancing rail/bus interchange facilities across the District.
- Securing high value-added employment.

- 3.20 The District Council has already been successful in seeking funding via the Thames Gateway for the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park. To date, **£160,000** 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.
- 3.21 **In 2004/2005, £700,000 funding was secured via the Gateway for improvements to Websters Way in Rayleigh.** The work aims to improve the appearance of **this** major route through the town **centre** of Rayleigh, and enhance the link between the car park and the high street, creating a much more attractive environment for pedestrians. **Some £340,000 has been secured via the Gateway to refurbish Rayleigh Windmill and a further £40,000 from the Gateway has been obtained to proceed with a programme of small scale industrial improvements.**
- 3.22 Further funding opportunities via the Gateway **continue to be** sought for projects in the District **to help the District achieve its aims and aspirations.**

## **WHAT BUSINESSES HAVE TOLD TO US**

4.1 In 2003 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 A survey of businesses relating to Unreported Crime **was carried out last year**. This survey **was** led by the Federation of Small Businesses. The findings of **the** survey **were that 47% had been victims of crime , which included burglary, robbery, assault, theft, arson and criminal damage.**
- 4.7 **The Federation of Small Businesses also led the most recent piece of work (May-June 2005) a survey relating to Fly Tipping and Waste Dumping on Commercial Properties. Over 2000 businesses were surveyed, 9.55% replied. 38% of businesses had been directly affected by the act of fly tipping in the last 12 months. In response to this, during 2005/6 the Council will be promoting Waste Audits for businesses in an attempt to address some of the problems identified**

## 5. **WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP**

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

- **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 represents Essex at a strategic level on Economic and Regeneration issues to EEDA (East of England Development Agency) and EERA (East of England Regional Assembly).**
- **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. **The Essex Rural Strategy was launched July 2005.**
- **Business Advice Centre** - delivers a start up business support programme and mentoring initiative for small businesses in the District.
- **Essex Development and Regeneration Agency (ExDra)** is the agency born out of Essex County Councils Enterprise and Regeneration Division and the Local Economic Partnership for the East of England Development Agency. It provides a comprehensive Economic Development Service including Export Services, Lottery and European funding, promotion, marketing, tourism and inward investment..
- **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 **its 2<sup>nd</sup>** Rochford Business Directory **for 2005/6** with **1500 business listings** and contacts of key business advice agencies.
- 6.8 The Council has contributed to the Thames Gateway South Essex strategic framework document **and the various studies commissioned within the Gateway in relation to the Economic Framework, the Waterfront and the Green Grid.**

- 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 During 2005 the Council has secured funding from the East of England Development Agency via the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership of £40,000 to undertake further environmental enhancements for six industrial estates in the District. These **enhancements include** new highway and industrial estates signs, clearing and making footpaths more accessible, replacement and upgrade of kerbs and design out parking problems.
- 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 **town** and its hinterlands. Essex County Council has funded a further £7000 for the Health Check. The 'Rochford Regeneration' report for the Health Check consultation **was completed** in March 2005. The findings of the report **have been** considered by the Council and other partners **and will be fed into** future strategies and actions **as appropriate**.
- 6.13 **As a result of the work of the Rochford Regeneration Partnership, already some** £50,000 funding has been obtained via Essex County Council **under its** Market Town initiative **for Rochford Town. This will be used** to improve the street scene and the **principal** gateways **into the town**.

- 6.14 The Council is a partner in **Inward Pilot**, the **Inward Investment web browser based system** led by (ExDra) Essex Development and Regeneration Agency. **‘Evolutive’ is the system which can search for commercial premises throughout Essex and produce reports to meet the businesses specific premises requirements.**
- 6.15 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.
- 6.16 The Council in partnership with the Federation of Small Businesses has facilitated an Unreported Crime Survey.
- 6.17 Through its work around economic development during **2005, 18** businesses have been assisted by the Council. Some of the issues addressed include planning, skills and training, inward investment and new start up businesses.
- 6.18 The Council **has held three breakfast events (one** in partnership with Castle Point Borough Council). These events raise awareness of how businesses can benefit from on-line trading and the IDEA Marketplace initiative. **Further events are planned in Partnership with Business Link for Essex with sponsorship from local businesses themed around workforce development and marketing for small businesses.**
- 6.20 **The Council has sponsored the Echo Southend Business Awards ‘Environmental Awareness’ category. Several businesses located in the District were finalists in this category and one of the three overall winners is located in the District.**
- 6.21 **The Council has also helped sponsor the Shell Technology Enterprise Programme (STEP) led by ExDra. 44 students were placed into companies throughout Essex on this programme.**

- 6.22 The Council also now produces a Business Matters Newsletter twice a year which is circulated to over 2000 businesses located in the District. The Newsletter gives an update on economic activities and events.**
- 6.23 In response to the issues raised by businesses in connection with waste, the Council has committed £5000 in 2005/2006 for the promotion of commercial recycling and waste audits.**

## **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 **plans** to support **under** 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 **continues to** 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 area 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 of the Rochford District

**The LSC Essex Annual Statement of Priorities (December 2004) states they will develop better training provision to meet employers requirements and increase employer engagement. The Knowledge Economy Audit for the Thames Gateway (March 2005) states that Rochford District has very low average earnings and a high employment rate, it has a stronger knowledge economy than its neighbour Castle Point. 33% of the workforce are qualified below level 2 and 17% are graduates.**

## **Actions**

- 7.7 The Council will continue to encourage businesses to access training for their workforce, particularly using the Employer Training , 'Profit for Learning'.

- 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 **The Economic Baseline Study commission by TGSEP identified that 61% of commercial premises surveyed located on Industrial Estates in the TGSE area were built post war (1945-1980). 64% was characterised as small**

**(under 5000 sq ft) and 91% of commercial property is in close proximity to residential neighbourhoods.**

- 7.13 Associated community safety initiatives such as CCTV have been included where appropriate. The Council also part funded a Market Town Health Check for Rochford which **has been** implemented by Rochford Parish Council, Rochford Chamber of Trade and Essex County Council amongst others.
- 7.14 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**

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

7.20 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
- 'Evolutive' a web based system locating commercial premises
- Commercial Waste/Recycling Initiatives
- LSC Profit from Learning - skills and training for business

7.21 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.

7.22 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.

7.23 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.

- 7.24 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 **replacement** Local Plan 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 **two years** the Council will produce a Business Directory to help promote business to business contact in the area, and promote business advisory services. The **new** Business Directory **was launched in August 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.

- 7.30 The Council will identify funding opportunities for businesses and business development in the area, and submit bids where appropriate.
- 7.31 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 **replacement** Local Plan and specialist business support via partners.

## **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 **have also worked** with Partners and Thames Gateway South Essex on numerous infrastructure studies e.g. the London to Southend Traffic Study (LOTS). The study, carried out during 2003 , 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 **replacement** 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 **Replacement** Local Plan 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.

- 7.49 The **emerging** Waterfront Study commissioned by **Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership** considers the District as the 'green lung' of the sub region. The Study states 'to the east and north of the TGSE waterfront area, in Rochford in particular, the environment rapidly transforms into one of "big skies and lots of space" and this is also a significant visitor asset for the area'.

## **Actions**

- 7.50 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.
- 7.51 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. **The Council commissioned consultants to produce a Stage 1 report as an assessment of the tourism potential for the District. It was completed in June, it was agreed by Members that the Stage 2 report would look at developing specific proposals with an action plan to attract visitors to the District. This has now been finalised for the Council to consider.**

## **Inward Investment**

### **Theme 7 – "Taking advantage of Inward Investment opportunities to secure the future economic prosperity of the District"**

- 7.52 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.

- 7.53 A Consultant has been appointed by ExDra to carry out an in-depth study relating to inward investment for the Essex area. It will address the need for a strengthened inward investment service across Essex.**

### **Actions**

- 7.54 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.
- 7.55 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.
- 7.56 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.



## **RESOURCES**

- 7.57 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.
- 7.58 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.
- 7.59 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**

- 7.60 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**

7.61 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.

7.62 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.

### **Indirect funding of businesses in Rochford District Purchasing policies**

7.63 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**

7.64 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**

7.65 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.

7.66 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  |
|--|---|---|--------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Theme 1 - Work in Partnership</b>   |   |   |              |   |   |   |
| 1.1 Work in partnership with other agencies whose remit is to support economic development in the area | All Rochford District Council Officers<br>Rochford District Council Members | Rochford District Council<br>All partners | 2003/07      | Number of Businesses assisted by Economic Development Officer.<br><br>Evaluation Survey – Questionnaire | <b>26.3% of businesses replied to survey of businesses assisted during 2004</b> | <b>During 2005 18 businesses assisted by Economic Development officer</b> |

| 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<br>Rochford District Council Members | Rochford District Council<br>All partners   | 2003/07      | Review protocol bi-annually. Consult with business community and partners.<br><br>Implement Consultation | Revisit Protocol   | Review of protocol due 2005<br><br><b>Protocol Reviewed – no change</b> |
| <b>Theme 2 - Skills and employability for business</b> |   |   |   |              |  |  |   |
| 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 | 2005         | Number of participants taking part in 'Profit for Learning' initiative.                                  | <b>82</b> learners Participating in training.<br><br><b>21 NVQ's</b> qualifications obtained | <b>28</b> 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 | 2005         | Number of businesses taking part in training programmes.<br><br>Business Link Evaluation | % of businesses satisfied with programme | Business Link Customer Base of <b>2613</b> – <b>771</b> are active clients = market penetration of <b>29.5%</b> |
| 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.<br><br>Business Link Evaluation             | % of businesses accredited with IIP      | <b>2005</b><br>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.                       | <b>2</b> projects initiated in 2005   |

| Action   | RDC Resources                | Responsibility                              | Time - scale | Performance Indicators                                    | Outcome  | Comments on Progress   |
|--|------------------------------|---|--------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Theme 3 - Town centre and industrial estate enhancement</b>   |                              |   |              |   |  |  |
| 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      | .<br><br>Attendance of business reps. quarterly meetings. | <br><br><br><br><br><br><br>Attendance by Business reps achieved | <br><br><br><br><br><br><br>All recognised reps regularly attend |

| 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<br>Recycling Officer and assistant<br>Bids being investigated | Rochford District Council<br>Essex County Council<br>EEP<br>Essex Investment Office<br>EEDA<br>Chambers of Commerce and Trade<br>Federation of Small Businesses | 2003/07      | Number of businesses on industrial estates where recycling initiatives are in place.<br><br>Number of Waste Audits carried out.<br><br>Evaluation survey/questionnaire | % of businesses taking part in recycling Initiatives. | £5000 funding for the promotion of commercial recycling as part of the 2005/2006 Budget.<br><b>5000 flyers produced to inform benefits for waste audits.</b><br><b>RDC to commission consultant to carry out pilot scheme 2006</b> |

| Action   | RDC Resources   | Responsibility   | Time - scale | Performance Indicators  | Outcome | Comments on Progress  |
|--|---|--|--------------|---|---------|---|
| 3.3 With partners develop a Business Watch Scheme in town centres and industrial estates | Home Office funding of £ 10002005<br>Community Safety Officer | Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership<br>Federation of Small Businesses<br>Chambers of Trade and Commerce | 4<br>2005    | Number of businesses participating in Business Watch initiatives.<br><br>Evaluation survey/ questionnaire |         | <p><b>Crime Survey reported that 47% had been victims of crime. November 04</b></p> <p><b>Fly tipping and waste dumping survey carried out May-June 05</b></p> <p><b>9.55% replied – 2000 businesses surveyed. 38% of businesses directly affected.</b></p> |



| Action   | RDC Resources                | Responsibility  | Time - scale | Performance Indicators  | Outcome | Comments on Progress   |
|--|------------------------------|---|--------------|---|---------|--|
| <b>Theme 4 - Business support initiatives</b>  |                              |   |              |   |         |  |
| 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.<br><br>Business Link Evaluation | I.<br>. | <b>1078 enquiries in Rochford District 2004/5</b><br><br><b>251 pre start up</b><br><br><b>56 start up</b> |

| 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<br><br><b>1500 businesses listed</b> | <b>Business Directory August 2005</b>             |
| 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<br>2005<br>2006<br>2007 | Produce one newsletter per year.   | Newsletter   | News letter<br><br><b>January And August 2005</b> |

| 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<br>Corporate Policy Unit | Rochford District Council,<br>Essex County Council,<br>Thames Gateway South Essex<br>Essex Economic Partnership | 2003/07      | One bid per annum.  | Amount of funding secured<br><br><b>£40K - 2005</b> | .<br><b>Industrial Estate Enhancement</b> |
| 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<br>Planning Officers     | Rochford District Council<br>EEDA<br>Writtle College<br>DEFRA   | 2003/07      | Number of businesses supported in the rural economy.<br><br>Evaluation survey/<br>questionnaire |   | TBA                                       |

| Action   | RDC Resources   | Responsibility   | Time - scale | Performance Indicators   | Outcome  | Comments on Progress   |
|--|---|--|--------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Theme 5 - Transport and Infrastructure</b>  |   |  |              |  |  |  |
| 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<br>Head of Admin and Member Services | Rochford District Council<br>Essex County Council<br>Federation of Small Businesses<br>Chambers of Commerce and Trade<br>TGSE<br>EEP<br>EEDA | 2003/07      | Number of businesses included on the e-procurement list.<br><br>Survey current suppliers   | % of business successful with e bidding process. | <b>Event held March 05<br/>73 Business Attended</b>  |
| 5.2 Liaison with London Southend Airport to preserve airport related employment in the district.   | Economic Development Officer                                      | Rochford District Council<br>London Southend Airport   | 2003/07      | Number of businesses located around Airport parameter participating in airport related employment.<br><br>Evaluation survey/ questionnaire | % of businesses related to airport activity.     | <b>.EEDA commissioned employer survey report September 2005 – outcome anticipated Dec 05</b> |

| Action  | RDC Resources   | Responsibility  | Time - scale | Performance Indicators                                    | Outcome | Comments on Progress   |
|---|---|---|--------------|---|---------|--|
| 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<br>Essex County Council<br>Federation of Small Businesses<br>TGSE<br>EEDA | 2007         | Number of Planning applications for small business units. |         |  |
| <b>Objective 6 – Tourism and heritage</b>   |   |   |              |   |         |  |
| 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<br>Thames Gateway South Essex<br>East of England Development Agency       | 2003/07      |   |         | <b>Stage 1 report completed June 05</b><br><br><b>Stage 2 completed October 05</b> |
| <b>Theme 7 - Inward Investment</b>  |   |   |              |   |         |  |

| 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<br>Planning Department  | Rochford District Council  | 2003/05      | No of development team applications via planning section<br><br>Satisfaction survey To developer. | % of successful applications                         | Economic Development Officer assisted <b>9</b> 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<br>Chambers Initiative Fund (RDC)<br>Industrial Estate Improvement Scheme (ECC) | Essex County Council<br>Rochford District Council<br>Chambers of Trade | 2003/05      | Number of businesses engaged with environmental industrial estate improvements.                   | % of businesses who have benefited from improvements | <b>£40k funding achieved for Ind Est Enhancements 2005</b>   |