

BLUE SAIL ▶

VISITORS PLACES DESTINATIONS

ROCHFORD DISTRICT CULTURE AND VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY

REPORT FOR ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

NOVEMBER 2024

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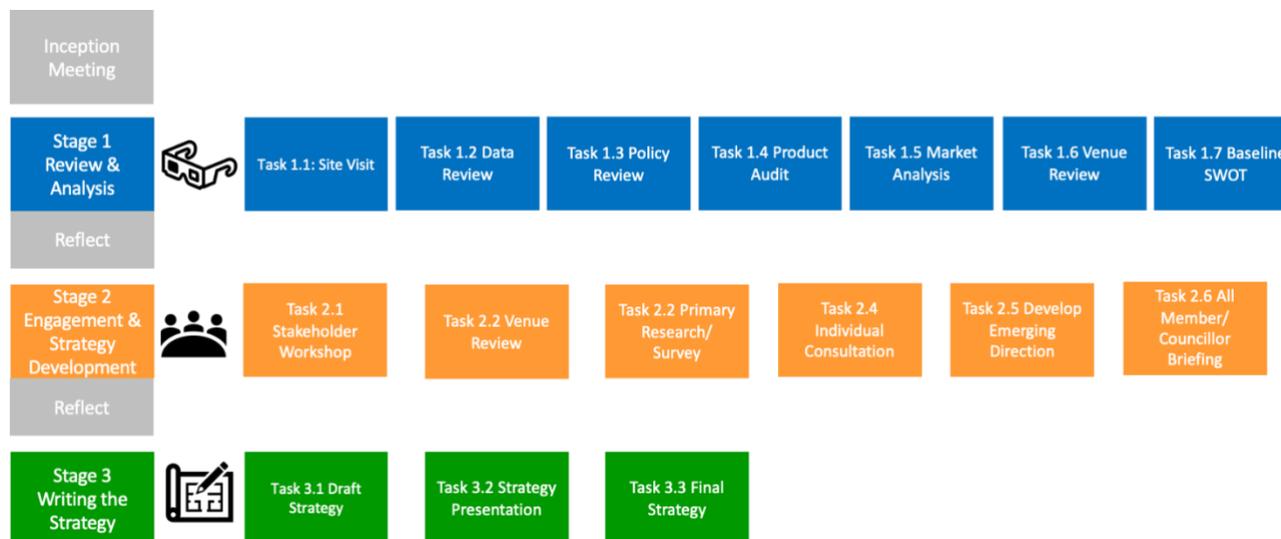
1. INTRODUCTION

Rochford District is located on the south east of the County of Essex. It is a district of 65 square miles with a population of 86,000 bounded by the River Crouch to the North and by Southend and the Thames estuary to the South. The River Roach flows through the centre of the District and passes islands, mudflats and wetlands before entering into the North Sea.

The Visitor Economy in the district is relatively modest in comparison to neighbouring and similar sized areas and it could be argued that there are other more pressing priorities for the economic growth of the district. However the culture and visitor economy matter because of the contribution they make to the image, profile and reputation of the place in addition to the direct benefits of economic and social impacts and jobs.

This strategy is intended to move the cultural and visitor economy forward over the next 5 years. It is a strategy for Rochford District which requires the support of partners, stakeholders, businesses and the local community with the District Council playing an important role coordinating and enabling activity. It draws on robust evidence and on the views of stakeholders, businesses and residents to provide a vision for the future and lays out a number of key actions to be taken to drive the district toward this vision. A Baseline Report has been produced which summarises the detailed findings and analysis.

The process to develop the strategy is illustrated here:



2. ROCHFORD DISTRICT NOW

The Great Britain Tourism Survey (GBTS) estimates the number of annual overnight trips to Rochford District as 19,000¹. Whilst this is likely to be an underestimate (analysis of available bed stock and the impacts from visits to friends and relatives supports an estimate closer to 100,000 annual overnight trips), the district has the lowest share of overnight trips amongst Essex local authorities.

It is estimated that the district attracts approximately 2 million tourism day trips annually². This places Rochford District at the mid-point among Essex local authorities, however the predominance of lower value day visits constrains the value to the local economy from tourism trips.

For comparison, out of the 326 English local authorities, Rochford District is positioned 254th for combined trip numbers (day and overnight).

In line with national trends, Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) accounts for the largest share of tourism day trips to Rochford District and is also likely to be a key driver of overnight visits; with 64% of residents reporting that they host at least one overnight visit from friends or family in the past year.³

The absence of more detailed district level data regarding the culture and visitor economy should be addressed as part of the implementation of this strategy.

¹ Source: Great Britain Tourism Survey, 3-year average, 2017-19

² Source: Great Britain Day Visitor Survey average 2017-2019

³ Resident Survey 2024, Blue Sail

THE VISITOR OFFER

Rochford District benefits from being easily accessible; with good transport links by road and rail providing access to a dense catchment area. Analysis of drivetime to the district indicates almost 2.2m households and 5.5m people within 60 minutes of the destination. Southend Airport also sits largely within the boundary of Rochford District and plans for the development of routes and airlines could have a very positive benefit in terms of visitors choosing to stay before or following a flight.

The strategy identifies four thematic strengths within the existing visitor offer, as illustrated below (note: these are not exhaustive).

Landscape and Nature	Heritage and Culture	Walking and Active	Family Fun
 <p>A wealth of green spaces, waterways and coastal paths, opportunities to see wildlife; including RSPB Wallasea and seal spotting trips.</p>	 <p>Cultural venues including The Mill Arts and Events Centre, Rayleigh Mount, Rochford Old House and Rayleigh Windmill and Rayleigh Museum as well as a rich tapestry of more intangible stories; Anne Boleyn and HMS Beagle and events such as the Trinity Fair. Heritage town trails.</p>	 <p>Opportunities for outdoor recreation including walking e.g. Roach Valley Way, the coastal path, the Rochford Circular Walk, Rayleigh Ramble plus equestrian, golf and on-water activities including fishing.</p>	 <p>Family friendly attractions including Rollacity, the Megacentre, Oxygen Rayleigh and Monkey Bizness.</p>

There are of course other experiences that do not easily fit under one of these headings but which add to the breadth and distinctiveness of the district's offer. However the headings are helpful in thinking about the relative strengths of the district.

The destination offer is currently geared more toward local audiences who value the green spaces, scenic and historic landscape and local pubs and restaurants and cultural venues. The number of visitor attractions is low and, aside from RSPB Wallasea, none have a visible profile in the market and unlikely to be motivators of visits from further afield. As a whole, the visitor offer does not currently stand out in a marketplace in which there is a lot of competition. Accommodation supply within the district is also extremely limited, constraining development of the staying visitor market.

SWOT ANALYSIS

A summary of key findings from the research and consultation is shown here and these have informed the development of the strategy. The strength and opportunities shown indicate a strong basis for growth, and targeted interventions to address the weaknesses and threats have potential to reap reward for the visitor economy.

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage stories (Vikings, Normans & maritime) • Landscape (Wallasea/RSPB/coast/rivers) • Proximity to large markets (Essex, London, Europe) • Easy to get to the District • Large numbers of day visitors • Events (e.g. Christmas Lights switch-ons) • Proximity to London Southend Airport and airport growth plans 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little visitor accommodation/ low impact • No single compelling reason to visit • Lack of a distinctive sense of place • Getting around rural areas by public transport • Heritage (not joined up, capacity, interpretation) • Exodus of younger population/ ageing demographic • Gaps in visitor and audience data and insights • Cultural programming at The Mill Arts & Events Centre • Lack of presence in destination marketplace
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing population (VFR) • Benefit from Southend visitor markets • Linking up the assets/ offer • Hidden stories (Assandun, Vikings, smuggling etc) • Walking & cycling potential • Regenerative potential of The Freight House • Untapped potential at The Mill Arts & Events Centre • Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) alignment • Watersports potential (River Crouch) • Distinctive food and drink offer 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough reasons to visit • Gravitational pull of Southend

CONSULTATION

Consultation through one-to-one conversations have helped us understand the views and perspectives of stakeholders and local communities. Contributors include representatives from tourism businesses, cultural and community organisations from across the district and beyond, transport providers, officers, councillors and the LVEP.

We also conducted a survey which garnered over 1,100 responses with over 1,050 from residents and almost 50 businesses. The survey highlighted the importance of local markets in supporting development of the visitor economy with ‘visits to friends and relatives’ an area of growth. Views on the potential from Southend Airport were more mixed with some viewing traffic through the airport as transiting without any opportunity to increase dwell times in the District. Others felt the opposite assuming the accommodation was developed. Themes emerging from the consultation and the survey results are summarised below:

STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON

- Historic environment – including 70 listed buildings, villages
- Make more of the green space, landscapes, ancient woodlands and rivers including as events spaces
- Geography – great connectivity from London. Easy to get to for a lot of people seeking green spaces and a change from urban living.

AREAS TO FIX

- Clarity on direction for the cultural and visitor economy
- Enhanced visitor infrastructure – paths, car parking, access to water activity
- Limited cultural network in the district

FACTORS TO SUPPORT GROWTH

- Linkage to a wider cultural network
- Improved collaboration within and beyond the district
- Local Authority support for the visitor economy, including events
- Making more of VFR – 26% of residents reported receiving visitors 1-2 times per year whilst 40% hosted visitors three or more times.

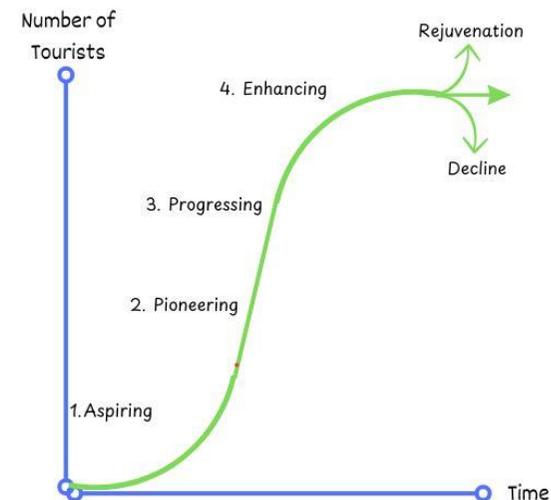
3. LOOKING FORWARD

MAKING THE CASE FOR THE VISITOR ECONOMY

Beyond direct economic impact, tourism and cultural development has the ability to contribute to wider place making. The things which attract visitors; a thriving and distinctive place with a wealth of things to do and experience, also benefit the local community, contributing to the district being a good place to live and work. Supporting a vibrant tourism industry therefore supports the place making and inward investment agendas and builds pride amongst local communities.

VISION

The figure on the right illustrates the typical phases of visitor destination maturity. Rochford District is an ‘aspiring destination’ in an early stage of development. Visitor numbers are relatively low but there is room for development and growth. To unlock this will require investment in the visitor offer and strengthening the capacity of the tourism network, with all stakeholders working toward a clear vision. A suggested vision is shown below.



A Vision for Tourism in Rochford District

Rochford District will become a coherent and connected visitor destination. It will build on its strengths of landscape, heritage, waterways, historic towns and villages to make it easy for visitors to discover and explore the district. These assets will be animated to delight both visitors and residents, with a year-round programme of engaging cultural events bringing to life the distinctive heritage of our place.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives in the next five years are focused and straightforward:

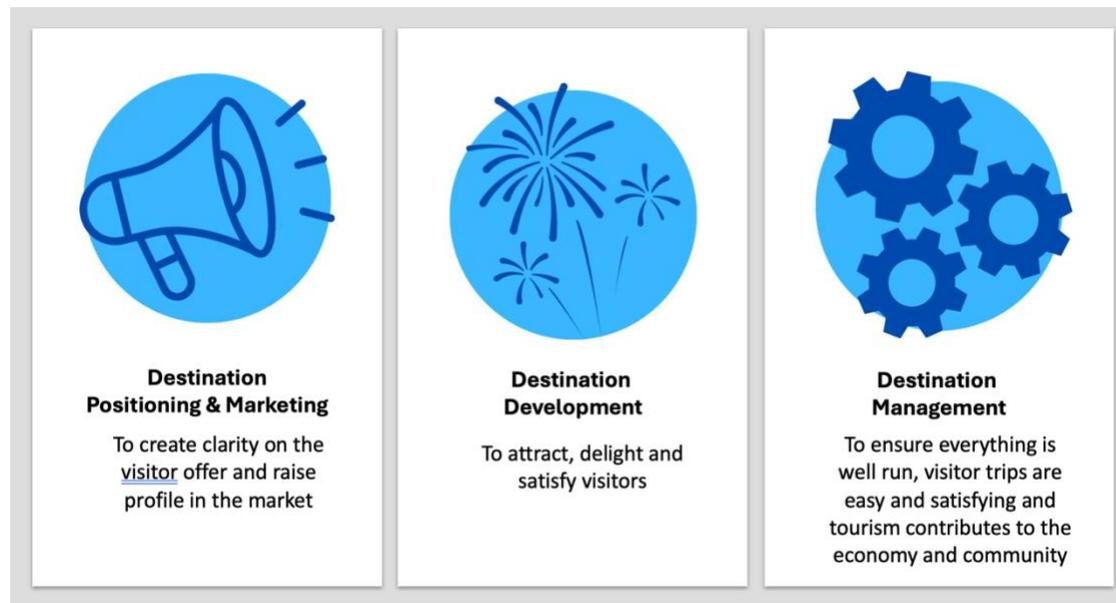
- ▶ **Objective 1** - Capitalise on existing assets; improving and joining them up to form high quality experiences for visitors and for local people.
- ▶ **Objective 2** - Increase the economic benefits of tourism through increasing spend from day and VFR visitors; encouraging them to do more in the destination and developing capacity for higher value staying visitors.
- ▶ **Objective 3** - Develop creative collaboration and partnership – working closely with relevant tourism and cultural networks to grow capacity in the sector.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Strengthening Rochford District as a destination will require focused action around three key pillars; destination management, destination development and destination marketing.

The approach focuses on a number of carefully chosen interventions, which take into account the likely resources available and which are designed to build on the district’s strengths and the opportunities to utilise landscape, heritage and culture as levers to maximise returns from existing visitors and create a compelling proposition to attract new visitors.

The selection of specific visitor segments to target within the strategy provides a focus. It ensures that rather than trying to be ‘everything for everyone’, visitor and cultural experiences can be developed to closely align with what individual segments, those that offer the most potential contribution to the sustainable growth of the visitor economy over the short and medium term, are looking for.



4. MARKET FOCUS

TARGET MARKETS

The objective is to focus on those markets most likely to generate more visits, explore more widely across the district, and spend more in the local economy in the process.

Of course, these will not be the only visitors who will visit and be welcomed in Rochford District, and it's important to note that the local resident population is an important market to look after and maintain. But narrowing the focus onto best prospect segments will allow for targeted activity and maximum impact.

Given the current lack of visitor and accommodation infrastructure in Rochford District, the focus should be on domestic day visitors for growth over the lifetime of the strategy.

Maximising returns from the existing VFR (visiting friends and relatives) market and developing the day visit market from the district's sizeable catchment areas, including visitors transiting via Southend Airport as well as those staying in neighbouring districts, has the potential to drive growth. Whilst VFR visitors are lower value overall, due to free accommodation, they will spend money on activities, retail and eating out.

Based on the current offer and relevant market trends, and drawing on Visit England visitor segmentation research and Audience Agency's Audience Spectrum segmentation insights, two priority target segment profiles have been created. These are active and engaged day visitors whose preferences match with the existing and visitor offer as well as with the opportunities for development.

Key Market Trends for Rochford District

- Activity, health and wellbeing – making the most of the outdoors for physical and mental wellbeing
- Experience as a driver – visitors seek out unique and immersive experiences
- Sustainable tourism - expectation from visitors of good environmental practice
- Multi-generational travel – family groups enjoying travel experiences together

SEGMENT	WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY WANT
<p data-bbox="286 347 488 379">Engaged Explorers</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid affluence retirees and older families willing to travel for cultural experiences • Frequently take day trips from home • Seeking opportunities to relax, socialise with friends in pleasant surroundings • Drawn to a whole experience rather than a specific interest in an attraction or event • Interested in heritage, cultural events and exploring scenic landscapes • Seek value quality and distinctive experiences • Interested in local food, arts and crafts • Less interested in contemporary cultural offerings • Active short break takers with potential to extend stays as the visitor offer develops • Accessibility is important
<p data-bbox="286 689 488 721">Family Adventurers</p>  <p data-bbox="232 1043 542 1062">Photo by Josue Michel on Unsplash</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasonably comfortably off homeowners with younger families • Take frequent family outings • Enjoy heritage museums mainstream arts and outdoor activity • Trips led by children's interests and strongly influenced by friends and family • Attracted to and willing to participate in engaging events • Activities for their educational potential value high levels of customer service guaranteed fun – Potential to be repeat visitors

5. DESTINATION POSITIONING & MARKETING



The priority is to develop a clear, compelling and competitive positioning for the district; articulated as a consistent narrative which encapsulates the visitor offer; summing up the reason why visitors should visit.

The positioning narrative outlined below has been developed as a start point of a development process, to be undertaken in collaboration with tourism businesses and stakeholders. It builds on the destination's core assets of rural landscape, historic environment and waterways, and is informed by target segment motivations and stakeholder input.

Implementation of the recommendations made elsewhere in this report will enhance and integrate the offering, creating a coherent and experience-led destination offer which is more than the sum of its parts.

Rochford District's narrative should align with the emerging Essex wide narrative, whilst highlighting what is distinctive about the destination amongst its neighbours.

POSITIONING

Just beyond the boundaries of London, Rochford District is a place where ancient woodlands whisper stories of old, and windswept coastlines invite you to explore their mysteries. Steeped in history, the landscape bears the marks of England's past—tales of smugglers and highwaymen, of curious whispering courts and battles that shaped the nation's destiny.

Whether walking or cycling, every path promises discovery, and your explorations are rewarded by the warmth of traditional pubs, and the taste of local food and drink.

Easily accessible yet worlds apart, Rochford District is a sanctuary for those seeking to reconnect with nature. The area thrives with diverse wildlife, from waders and wildfowl to seals and birds of prey, all flourishing within protected landscapes like the remarkable RSPB Wallasea Island and the tranquil estuaries of the Crouch and Roach rivers. Here is sustainable and regenerative tourism in practice.

And with vibrant events celebrating its rich heritage, diverse wildlife, and local culture, Rochford District is a place to experience, to explore and to enjoy with friends and family all year round.

DESTINATION PROPOSITION

This positioning translates into a core proposition which is *'Explore: Rochford District is a place for gentle exploration with family and friends; for walking, cycling, for enjoying nature in a landscape that rewards visitors with secret stories, vibrant events and welcoming hospitality'*.

ROUTE TO MARKET

Rochford District will establish its own marketing channels and work in partnership with Visit Essex, partners and stakeholders (within and outside the district) to provide compelling content to raise the destination's profile and reach.

DESTINATION MARKETING

Priority action areas for Rochford District are shown below:

POSITIONING AND MARKETING PRIORITIES	ACTION	TIMESCALE	LEAD/PARTNERS	RESOURCES ⁴
PRIORITY 1: DESTINATION POSITIONING AND PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT Develop an experience driven destination narrative to capture what is special and different about Rochford District. Developed to appeal to Engaged Explorers and Family Adventurers	Work with stakeholders to develop and agree a positioning narrative based on the concept positioning.	2025-2026	RDC/ Businesses/ Visit Essex	££
	Create a toolkit of resources to support the positioning and visitor proposition including key messaging, visitor experiences, imagery and experiential day-long thematic visitor itineraries linking the visitor experiences across the district.	2025	RDC	££
PRIORITY 2: INCREASE PRODUCTIVE MARKETING COLLABORATION Ensure that the district can maximise opportunities to reach target markets via the regional LVEP and support the tourism sector to promote the destination positioning and proposition to target markets.	Work in partnership with Visit Essex, neighbouring authorities, partners and stakeholders (within and outside the district) to provide compelling content to raise the destination's profile and reach.	Ongoing	Visit Essex/ RDC	£
	Establish a tourism network and disseminate the positioning toolkit, information , data & insights on target markets and new marketing strategy.	2025	RDC/ Businesses	££
PRIORITY 3: LOCAL MARKETING Communicate the offer to residents to increase their participation and to ensure they can become enthusiastic ambassadors; encouraging visiting friends and relatives to explore more in the district.	Create a local marketing plan to raise the profile of the visitor offer to stakeholders and local people. Including working with local media partners, using social media channels (Facebook and Instagram) to promote the propositions to local residents, promoting and sharing local events and visitor experiences.	2025	RDC/ Businesses/ Visit Essex	££

⁴ £ = 0-5,000; ££ = 5,000-10,000; £££ = 10,000+

6. DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT



The focus for destination development in Rochford District will be to build upon and make most of the district's strengths and existing assets.

Currently the attractions and activities are geared toward a local audience and these assets must be brought together and made more compelling for visitors. RSPB Wallasea is an experience which resonates more widely than the immediate area and has scope for growth in reach and impact.

Active outdoor experiences can be a strong driver of day visits as the trend toward wellbeing continues to grow. More can be done to develop visitor experiences which utilise the natural landscapes and green and blue spaces, and make it easy for visitors to access and enjoy including enhancing access to on-water experiences on the River Crouch. Development of walking trails and cycling routes to encourage exploration will be important and, whilst there are challenges in developing water-based activities and access, these should also be developed where practical as the rivers and coast are distinctive elements of the offer.

Attention must be paid to the development of the full range of experiences sought by visitors on day visits – these add to the overall experience and increase potential for spend – towns, retail and food and drink, as well as evening economy.

Unlocking the potential of events and culture to animate the landscape across different times of the year and day, and to tell the hidden stories of Rochford District's heritage has the potential to attract visitors and transform their experience. Innovative approaches can be developed in partnership with arts and cultural organisations. Events and culture provide reasons to visit and can help change the perception of a destination whilst providing increased access to culture for residents. The events programme should be developed with visitors in mind, taking into account the needs and interests of the target segments identified.

It is clear that The Mills Arts and Events Centre and, despite being closed for some time, Freight House are valued by the local community. Both venues have the potential to help improve the quality and range of cultural experiences in the district; however, the financial pressure faced by the District Council impact on the venues realising their potential. Improvements to the offer and programming at The Mill Arts & Events Centre could help it to become a focus for visitors to Rayleigh and help unlock the potential from nearby attractions such as Rayleigh Windmill and Rayleigh Mount. At the

Freight House there is a need to develop and test options for the site to ensure it meets the needs of local communities whilst at the same time contributing to the regeneration of the town.

To make it easier for visitors arriving by public transport to explore more of the district’s offer, improvements to rural bus services and active travel options should be encouraged.

And in the longer term, attracting more higher value staying visitors will require an expansion of accommodation options. Where mixed use developments are taken forward, consideration should be given to the potential for serviced accommodation as part of plans. Planning policy should also consider whether sites are suitable for the development of new visitor accommodation.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES	ACTION	TIMESCALE	LEAD/PARTNERS	RESOURCES
PRIORITY 1: JOIN UP AND IMPROVE VISITOR EXPERIENCES Strengthen Rochford District’s visitor offer with enhancement of existing experiences and development of new experiences that meet visitor needs and build on thematic strengths	1. Review visitor wayfinding and improve existing assets making them easier and more attractive for visitors.	2025 - 2026	RDC	££
	2. Where possible encourage improvements to walking and cycling trails and link together existing trails. Identify thematic itineraries which can be used in marketing and promotion.	2026 – 2030	RDC/ Essex County Council	£££
	3. In partnership with RSPB, review and cost options for enhancing the visitor experience at RSPB Wallasea .	2025-2026	RDC / RSPB	£
	4. Explore opportunities to expand heritage interpretation in the District.	2025 - 2027	RDC	£
PRIORITY 2: USE ARTS AND CULTURE TO ANIMATE THE LANDSCAPE AND HERITAGE Improve performance of the Mill Arts & Events Centre and start a detailed options appraisal for the Freight House. Integrate with the wider Essex cultural community to maximise opportunities for Rochford	1. Prepare a viable business case for the Mill Arts and Events Centre , focussing on strengthening the quality of the offer and expanding programming to respond to consultation findings.	2025 - 2030	RDC/ Cultural Partners/ Town Council	£££
	2. Establish a Task and Finish Group to lead an options appraisal and Business Case for The Freight House as a cultural venue and regeneration opportunity for the town. Explore the feasibility of a partial re-opening as an interim measure while the options appraisal takes place.	2026 - 2030	RDC/ Cultural Partners/ Parish Council	£££

District and look at ways in which public art can enhance the network of trails	3. Explore commissioning a programme of public art to animate key trails and routes; in collaboration with local artists from within the district and across Essex.	2026 - 2030	RDC/ Cultural Partners	£££
	4. Seek opportunities to participate in Essex wide events and ‘moments’ in collaboration with Essex cultural networks.	2025 - 2030	RDC/ Cultural Partners	£££
PRIORITY 3: STRENGTHEN DISTRICT EVENTS Strengthen and build the range and quality of events in the district by creating a year round programme which makes the most of local facilities and reaches audiences from farther afield	1. Develop an events calendar that appeals to visitors and local communities throughout the year.	2025 - 2026	RDC/ Cultural Partners	£
	2. Create the necessary infrastructure and facilities to develop Cherry Orchard Park into a year-round major events space.	2025 - 2023	RDC/ Cultural Partners & Commercial Event Organisers	£££
	3. Establish an events grant programme to enhance the events offer.	2025	RDC	££
PRIORITY 4: DEVELOP ACCOMMODATION Increase the range and quality of accommodation to maximise the economic benefits from visitors	1. Identify suitable sites for accommodation development and promote and engage with prospective developers.	2026 - 2030	RDC/ Developers	££
	2. Create a positive environment for rural diversification to support creation of new serviced and self-catering accommodation and glamping.	2026 - 2030	RDC	£
	3. Explore options for developing a roadside ‘aire’ to offer specialist facilities in an appropriate location to cater for the increasing mobile home / campervan market.	2026	RDC	£

7. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT



Good destination management ensures the conditions for a successful visitor economy with a balanced approach to address the needs of visitors, communities, businesses and the environment. Visitors won't come because of these activities but failure to manage them is likely to result in lower levels of visitor satisfaction and a negative impact on reputation.

DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES	ACTION	TIMESCALE	LEAD/PARTNERS	RESOURCES
PRIORITY 1: DATA AND INSIGHTS Create a clear baseline and mechanism for monitoring impact and performance and increase understanding of visitors.	1. Establish baseline and mechanism for monitoring the impact of the strategy. Commission tourism economic assessment studies (e.g. STEAM/ economic impact analysis) for the district.	2026 - ongoing	RDC/ Visit Essex	££
	2. Work in collaboration with Visit Essex to share insights into the visitor markets with businesses and stakeholders.	Ongoing	RDC/ Visit Essex	£
PRIORITY 2: ALIGNMENT WITH VISIT ESSEX ON DESTINATION MANAGEMENT Work closely as a strategic partner with Visit Essex to benefit from initiatives to support sustainable tourism development, accessibility and skills.	1. Align with Visit Essex on sustainable development and accessibility initiatives and encourage the district's tourism industry to take advantage of tourism skills training offered by the Essex LVEP and Visit England.	2025 - 2027	RDC/ Visit Essex	£
PRIORITY 3: DEVELOP NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIP Great destinations are built on the experiences provided by businesses. Providing them with tools and insights which can help them plan and align their own activity to the wider destination strategy is critical as is expanding collaboration with partner organisations within and beyond the district.	1. Encourage and establish a tourism network within the district; to share opportunities unique to the sector and to facilitate data & knowledge sharing, good practice & encourage partnership activity.	2025	RDC	£
	2. Develop links with cultural organisations within the district and to neighbouring cultural networks and consider support of a Rochford District Cultural Network, to develop cultural events capacity and animation of the visitor experience.	2025 – 2026	RDC/ Cultural Partners	£
	3. Establish links and explore collaborative opportunities with other Essex cultural, tourism and heritage venues and	2025 - ongoing	RDC/ Partners	£

	networks, neighbouring councils, Arts Council England and other partners to support the programming and development of the district's cultural venues.			
PRIORITY 4: TRANSPORT AND FINAL MILE Ensure that visitors can access the offer using public transport and active travel modes.	1. Identify priorities for residents and visitors and engage with the County and operators on improvements to the rural bus network. Identify opportunities for improving the active travel network.	2027 - 2030	RDC/ Essex County Council/ Operators	£££
PRIORITY 5: VISITOR TOWNS Ensure that the towns in the district function as attractive hubs for visitors, bringing forward their distinctive characters within regeneration programmes.	2. Consider visitor needs in the redevelopment of Rochford Station and Freight House and continue safeguarding the historic environment and night time economy.	2025 - ongoing	RDC/ Town Council	££
	3. Ensure that the historic attractions in Rayleigh are well managed for visitors, animating the offer and increasing linkages across the town centre.	2025 – ongoing	RDC / Town Council	££

8. MAKING IT HAPPEN

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

A successful Culture and Visitor Economy in Rochford District is the responsibility of a variety of public, private and community organisations and to achieve the objectives of this strategy requires all of them to work collaboratively.

The District Council has an important role binding together the different partners and workstreams; connecting the local businesses with wider opportunities through Visit Essex for example; and ensuring the views of visitors are represented in wider policy decisions. They are also critical in helping monitor and evaluate progress against the strategy

There is a need to engage with partners from inside and outside the district. In particular finding ways to attract support from organisations such as Visit Essex, Essex County Council and the wider cultural network can help the district address opportunities and challenges collaboratively.

RESOURCING

Unlocking new resources to support the delivery of this strategy is a tough ask in the current climate. Public sector organisations have many competing pressures and those pressures extend to business and community organisations. Rochford District Council has been successful in securing support including from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) until 2026 and allocating future grants towards the priorities in this strategy is one avenue to pursue.

The recent appointment of a fixed term tourism officer (funded by UKSPF) is critical as many of the opportunities are about unlocking the support and help from others to deliver on Rochford District's behalf. So for example, providing Visit Essex and other partners with the content, stories and materials

Delivery Principles for Rochford District Culture & Visitor Economy Strategy:

- Alignment and close collaboration with Essex LVEP and VisitEngland priorities
- Clear roles for all partners and stakeholders
- Focused on increasing return from existing assets
- Improved collaboration with the cultural sector
- Animating the visitor offer with cultural events

which will ensure Rochford District increases its visibility in their marketing outputs. Finding ways to continue funding for the tourism officer beyond 2026 is therefore vital.

With short term funding available through UKSPF a number of quick wins and related actions could include:

2024/2025 Short Term Actions	Suggested Allocation £
Develop a robust and coherent destination narrative. This can be used to underpin all marketing communications and social media, and will support joint campaigns with Visit Essex	8,000
Commission photography to produce a suite of new images and video for the destination highlighting key assets and audiences	12,000
Prepare a suite of itineraries (24, 48, 72 hours) of each of the target markets and promote these via campaigns and press activity	2,000
Activate a PR campaign to drive media coverage in 2025. Commission a PR agency with short term targets to deliver online and print media coverage in 2025	8,000
Support joint campaigns with Visit Essex	5,000
Business support for the visitor economy	5,000
Issue a call for event development grants and put out a call for new events or events which can grow with support from the fund	20,000
TOTAL:	£60,000

MONITORING

It can be hard to relate specific interventions to improvements in the visitor economy in Rochford District. This strategy advocates a number of different interventions which individually and collectively will result in a stronger visitor economy for Rochford District. The main measures for monitoring progress over the lifetime of the Strategy are listed in the table below.

Target Measure	Rationale	How to Measure	Target by 2030
1. Economic Impact	Economic impact derived from visitor spend will lead to increased prosperity, profitable businesses and jobs.	Annual Economic Impact Study	10% over rate of inflation vs baseline (2025)
2. Visitor Sentiment	Tracking progress around perceptions, attitudes and propensity to visit from actual and potential visitors will help understand	Omnibus Survey	5% uplift across key measures vs baseline

	visibility as a destination as well as informing marketing planning and experience development.		
3. High value (overnight) visitors	An increase in the proportion of people staying overnight means more higher value visitors.	Annual Economic Impact Study	5 percentage point increase vs the baseline (2025)
4. Trip Volume (Rank)	Improve rank position for holiday trips among domestic overnight visitors and maintain position for Business Visits	GB Tourism Survey (VisitBritain)	Target 225/326 in rank of English local authorities for visits (currently 254)

CONCLUSION

Richford District is a destination at an early stage of development and that is okay. It is clear there are opportunities to develop and grow the Culture and Visitor Economy and this will take time.

The availability of resources will dictate the speed with which change is implemented. But this strategy provides a clear roadmap for strengthening the destination to become more appealing to visitors, to bring greater benefits to local business and communities and to positively impact the reputation of the district as a place to live, work and invest.

For Rochford District to be successful, the whole destination must work together. Visitors do not care about administrative boundaries and increasing numbers of those who visit the destination may well be doing so as part of a wider visit to Southend or Maldon. Helping keep visitors ‘sticky’ in the district means that businesses and towns should be highlighting their own offer and experiences but also those of their neighbours. In this way, visitors will be more likely to spend more time and more money here and local communities will benefit.

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