

## Vision

### The Special Qualities of Rochford District

Rochford is a predominantly rural District situated in the south east corner of Essex, covering an area of 65 square miles between the Rivers Thames and Crouch. It is bounded to the east by the North Sea, which contributes to the important natural qualities of the local landscape. The District has land boundaries to the south and west with Basildon District, Castle Point and Southend-on-Sea Borough Councils, alongside northern marine boundaries with Maldon and Chelmsford Districts. It is located within south east Essex, benefiting from important road and rail linkages to London.

Whilst it is within easy reach of key economic hubs, the District retains its rural character, with the vast majority of it Greenfield, Green Belt land encompassing numerous local, national and international sites of nature conservation importance. As such the landscape of the District is rich in biodiversity, heritage and natural beauty, with many miles of unspoilt coastline and attractive countryside..

There are three main settlements within the District namely Rochford, Hockley and Rayleigh, located in an arc along the Southend Victoria to Liverpool Street railway line, and these provide a range of services and facilities for local communities. The space between these settlements and the urban boundary of Southend to the south is an important green area, with many protective designations, including an ancient woodland and country park; this is the district's green lung. Beyond the three main settlements, the character is of rural countryside with smaller village settlements and sporadic groups of dwellings. The District's settlements have distinct characteristics, which are diverse in reflecting their individual history, location and size, and residents have a strong sense of identity with their own settlement.

Preserving and enhancing the special natural and built characteristics of Rochford District is important and so developing a vision which reflects this aspiration whilst providing for the needs of existing and future communities is paramount.

### The Vision for Rochford District

The Council's corporate vision is shared with that of the Local Strategic Partnership:

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

To support this, the Council has four main corporate objectives. These are:

- Making a difference to our people
- Making a difference to our community
- Making a difference to our environment
- Making a difference to our local economy

Having regard to the Council's corporate vision and the Sustainable Community Strategy, a more detailed vision has been prepared for the Core Strategy which flows from the characteristics, issues and opportunities identified in the previous section of this document. The vision for the District is set out below.

### **In five years...**

The openness and character of the Rochford Green Belt continues to be protected, though small areas next to settlements have been released for development. Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park has been expanded to the east and west and access from Cherry Orchard link road, including improved footpath and cycle access has been implemented, enhancing Rochford District's role as the green part of the Thames Gateway South Essex, and reinforcing the importance of the green lung between the main settlements. Other parks and open spaces continue to be improved through a rolling programme of open space refurbishment, contributing to the needs of local areas and improving linkages to the countryside.

The Council's balanced strategy to the distribution of housing is beginning to take shape: housing development is focussed on the settlements with the greatest range of services and facilities, but directing a proportion to smaller settlements to ensure that rural communities are nurtured and sustained. At the same time, the distribution of housing is balanced ensuring that there is a fair and equal division of new development across the district, providing new sustainable, residential developments that are carefully planned well related to infrastructure, community facilities, and play spaces. These have begun to be implemented alongside the additional infrastructure, meeting the identified needs of local communities. A new single-form entry primary school with early years and childcare facilities has been built in Rochford, well related to residential development, and is serving the local community. Additional facilities for young people are being provided, with at least one new facility a year being developed. Additional leisure uses at Great Wakering and Rayleigh leisure centres have been implemented.

The character of the District continues to be enhanced. A Local List has been adopted which has afforded additional protection to locally significant buildings and items of street furniture. Work has begun on implementing the Conservation Area Management Plans which is having a positive impact on the character and appearance of the District's Conservation Areas. Redevelopment of buildings in the Battlesbridge Conservation Area that are unsympathetic to the location is taking place, enhancing the character and appearance of the Conservation Area whilst respecting the objectives of the Green Belt.

The Council has worked with Essex County Council to identify specific transport improvement schemes, such as online road improvements and the implementation of travel plans. These have been initiated and are helping to reduce congestion on the District's roads. Improvements to public transport, aided by the increase in demand resulting from new development, have led to a more frequent, reliable and comprehensive public transport system with better linkages between bus and rail.

The Council is using the findings of the Employment Land Study to ascertain future employment provision to meet the District's needs, and to assist in identifying alternative locations for old and poorly located employment sites which are no longer fit-for-purpose. The potential of London Southend Airport and its environs is beginning to take shape through the provision of a Joint Area Action Plan in partnership with Southend Borough Council. This provides a unique opportunity for employment development delivering jobs that reflect the requirements of aviation industries. On a smaller scale, the long term future of the Baltic Wharf as an employment area has been secured; this is a unique deep water facility, identified as a major built site within the green belt..

Area Action Plans for Rochford, Rayleigh and Hockley town centres have been produced and adopted. The plans provide a clear framework, developed having regard to the results of community involvement, to guide the regeneration of these centres and, in the case of Rochford and Rayleigh, taking into account their historic character and heritage. The first phase of enhancement opportunities is being implemented, making these areas more attractive to visitors and investors.

### **By 2017...**

The first phase of sustainable urban extensions to meet the District's housing needs over the plan period have been implemented. New residential developments continue to be implemented in accordance with the Council's balanced strategy, providing housing to serve local communities. These new residential developments, designed to reflect the principles of the Essex Design Guide and reflecting local design elements, contain a variety of house types and are well related to new and existing community facilities and services, ensuring sustainable communities. Dwellings are carbon-neutral, meeting Code level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. Other new non-residential developments are of a sustainable construction, meeting the BREEAM rating of 'Very Good' as a minimum. New healthcare facilities in accessible locations have been developed in the District, including a new primary care centre which provides hospital-type services such as day care procedures, outpatient clinics and diagnostic tests to the District's residents.

Sustainable, well used and strategically located industrial estates are being protected and enhanced, where appropriate. A small area of the District's Green Belt has been reallocated for employment, and development of these new sites has begun to be implemented facilitating the creation of new jobs which meet the population's needs and contribute towards the District's

economy. A new employment park in the west of the District with good links to the main access networks has been developed which caters for a range of employment types in a flexible manner that adapts to changes in the economy. The Eco-Enterprise Centre is a flagship, eco-friendly building creating an inward investment draw which is bringing new businesses into the area. New businesses at the Eco-Enterprise Centre are being supported at the most vulnerable points in their lifecycle, helping to sustain economic activity and promoting the District's entrepreneurial culture. Appropriate uses within the District's commercial centres are being supported, providing employment opportunities at the same time as enhancing important town centre areas.

The London Southend Airport and Environs Joint Area Action Plan supports and regulates the operations of London Southend Airport taking into consideration environmental and social effects, and residential amenity. This is an important sub-regional airport that is supporting new aviation related employment opportunities and including an Airport skills academy delivering training for aircraft engineers and other trades. A new airport terminal building and railway station complex has been completed and is operational following the implementation of an agreed surface access strategy.

Green tourism initiatives and rural diversification have provided sustainable opportunities for rural businesses whilst maintaining a high quality environment. These initiatives have encouraged small-scale tourism projects sensitive to the local environment which help to sustain the rural economy without contributing to climate change. Acceptance of greater flexibility towards rural diversification has resulted in the development of a number of bed and breakfasts and hotels, facilitating stays in the countryside for visitors to the area. The Wallasea Wetlands project is well on the way to completion and provides one of the largest managed retreat projects yet seen in Europe; the project has been designed to reflect the historic characteristics of the old Rochford coastline.

A walking cycling and bridleway network has been implemented across the District. There is improved public access to the District's rivers. Online highway infrastructure improvements have improved access to Baltic Wharf further securing its future as an employment area. The South Essex Rapid Transit System (SERT) has been implemented giving people a genuine sustainable alternative to the private car. The District's tourism offer has been further enhanced through the implementation of heritage initiatives.

The District's role as the green part of Thames Gateway South Essex has been further solidified. Conditions have been put into place which is enabling wildlife to thrive in the Roach Valley. The area's size and layout as a green lung within the arc of the main settlements, allows for people and wildlife to utilise the space with minimum conflict. Local, national and international sites of nature conservation importance are being increasingly protected and enhanced to improve their biodiversity and wildlife value. The Coastal

Protection Belt continues to be protected from unnecessary development and other potentially detrimental impacts.

**By 2025...**

The District's distinctive character and historical built environment has been protected and enhanced. The vast majority of the District's Green Belt remains open and undeveloped, and the District continues to perform the role as the green part of Thames Gateway South Essex. The role of the Upper Roach Valley as a green lung has been further reinforced providing a substantial informal area of recreation, with green links criss-crossing the valley and connecting Rochford with Rayleigh and linking the Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park with Hockley Woods.

New development has been implemented which contributes positively towards the District's character and ensures the District's communities continue to thrive. A range of high-quality, sustainable new dwellings with unique vernacular design characteristics that meet the needs of local people of all social groups are in place and integrated into communities and served by new infrastructure. A wide range of accessible community facilities and local services have been provided alongside new development which aids the integration and cohesion of communities. Such facilities include green open spaces, community halls, and play spaces, which cater for residents of all ages.

A new single-form entry primary school with early years and childcare facilities has been built in Rayleigh, well related to residential development, and is serving the local community. Primary schools in the District's rural settlements are well attended and remain important, viable community facilities. The District's secondary schools have been expanded and enhanced.

Initiatives to reduce carbon emissions from new and existing developments are being encouraged and the proportion of the District's energy supply from renewable and low carbon sources has been increased.

Local, national and international sites of nature conservation importance are protected. The protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest has resulted in improvements to the percentage of which, by area, are in 'favourable' or better condition.

Developer contributions have ensured that new developments are well integrated with public transport. Cycle and pedestrian networks have been developed linking important areas. Road infrastructure through the District has been secured and improved with easier access to the A127 and A130. Basildon, Chelmsford and Southend continue to be significant attractors - although the strength of their spheres of influence on the District has been reduced by enhancement of the District's town centres, employment areas, and development in and around London Southend airport. In addition to

public transport and highway improvements, new residential development has been directed to areas where the use of alternatives to the private car is viable and where, in the event that car journeys to these spheres of influence are taking place, traffic is directed along strategic routes as far as practicable, avoiding local roads and town centres.

Over 3000 net additional jobs have been provided which meet local employment needs. A balance has been struck between the local workforce and jobs through the aviation-centred skills training academy providing local workers with high-value, transferable skills. London Southend Airport's potential as an economic catalyst for the sub-region has been realised.

The employment park in the west of the District has been implemented and contains a range of employment uses providing local jobs. The new employment park is accompanied by a travel plan and is accessible to workers by a range of transport options. Old, poorly located, "bad neighbour" industrial estates have been relocated to fit-for-purpose sites in sustainable locations which meet the needs of businesses and benefits residential amenity.

The District's town centres are vibrant places containing a range of shops, services and facilities that meet local demand. The vast majority of new retail development has been directed to Rochford, Rayleigh and Hockley. Some additional retail has been provided within the District's smaller settlements and within residential areas outside of the designated centres which provides convenient, accessible top-up shopping for local communities and reduces the need to travel. The leakage of retail expenditure outside of the District has been significantly reduced, with shoppers attracted to the District's town centres not simply due to the provision of retail, but because of the range of activities and the quality of the environment.