

Economic Development Strategy for Rochford District 2009-2014



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Introduction

The Council's vision for the Rochford District 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.

The Council cannot deliver all services and improvements without its partners. To that end we are involved in a range of partnerships. The over arching partnership for Rochford is the Rochford Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) which includes a range of partners. The LSP is responsible for delivering the Sustainable Community Strategy 2009 – 2021 which identifies shared priorities for the District.

To support its vision, the Council has four main corporate objectives for 2009 – 2013, 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

As with other local authorities within Thames Gateway South Essex area, the policy context for Rochford provides an agenda for regeneration and wealth creation. We will do this by enhancing and improving on what we already have, by playing on our strengths and mitigating our weaknesses. Our key tools for achieving this will be via this strategy and the emerging Local Development Framework and its supporting documents, and other documents such as the Local Transport Plan.

What is the Economic Development Strategy?

The Economic Development Strategy sets a framework to steer the activities and action of the Council and its partners over the next five years in achieving the Council's objective to make difference to the local economy. The Strategy:

- sets a forward plan for economic development which is in line with the Council's overall vision;
- sets a framework to co-ordinate the delivery of this plan in line with the Council's four corporate objectives;
- identifies priority actions and associated resource implications for delivery; and
- sets targets and a monitoring framework to measure ongoing progress.

This Strategy draws on a wide evidence base which has also been used in the formation of the Local Development Framework and Sustainable Community Strategy.

The economic overview contained in this Strategy identifies issues that need to be addressed and the strengths of the local economy that need to be built on.

Economic Development Strategy

Using this information the Council has agreed a series of objectives and action listed under three key themes:

- Theme 1 Business Support;
- Theme 2 People and Employment; and
- Theme 3 Employment Land and Economic Drivers

Each theme has been influenced by two overarching principles; the wider economic environment and the climate change agenda.

This is the 2010 refresh of the Strategy. Here the Council reports on what has been achieved since October 2009 when this strategy was adopted and reviews activity and priority actions for the period up to 2014; taking into account some of the substantial changes to our governance and policy environment since the Coalition came into power last year.

Reductions in government grants to local authorities will bring about some resource issues that need to be considered in depth, and the significant changes to regional policy and the formation of Local Enterprise Partnerships places a responsibility on Rochford to adapt or develop processes that ensure our business community can feed effectively into the new Local Enterprise Partnership for Kent, Greater Essex and East Sussex.

This refresh of the strategy will not fundamentally change our strategic direction but it will show how we intend to do things differently in order to move with the times.

What have we achieved?

Rochford Business Network

The Network has grown rapidly since last year and we have surpassed our targets having already reached a membership of 345 against a target of 288 by 2014.

As standard, we have continued to run our business breakfast programme with three events in 2010 as follows:

- March 2010: Going Green: Top Tips for Business
- June 2010: Skills for Business
- October 2010: Low cost, low carbon, marketing solutions

We have continued to deliver our quarterly newsletter, Business News, giving key support information to member business and we are now on our seventh issue as well as sending out our weekly emails to make sure we are helping to facilitate local business opportunities.

In October we also launched online forums to support the Rochford Business Network (RBN). To date we have 56 of our Network members register which is a very positive sign. However, the level of actual usage could be improved and some work needs to be done to strengthen the service and tackle any barriers business are facing using this new facility.

Shop at My Local was launched at the beginning of December 2009.

Economic Development Strategy

Whether through sponsorship or through effective promotion, Shop at My Local has supported a range of town centre events including Rayleigh Arts Festival, Rochford Art Trail, Bou Chic Fashion Show, most local Christmas light events and a number of farmer's markets across the District.

Since then 66 businesses have undergone training on a number of different topics at no cost, facilitated by Shop at My Local in partnership with Anglia Ruskin University.

Shop at My Local won the regional round of the prestigious Enterprising Britain Competition 2010. This is quite an achievement when the project was actually still in its start-up phase.

Young Entrepreneur 2010

In partnership with Enterprise in Education, the **Young Entrepreneur Programme 2010** was a success. As a new group of Apprentices aim to impress Lord Alan Sugar in October, Rochford's next generation of young entrepreneurs were at the Freight House on 4 October showing their business skills in front of a packed audience. Teams of students from The Fitzwimarc School, Greensward Academy, The Sweyne Park School and The King Edmund School all came together to compete for this year's title. The Mellow bar from King Edmund School won the title of Young Entrepreneurs 2010, after presenting a business case for their product to a panel of judges.

The competition started in July when 12 teams presented their concepts to a panel of judges including Kaycee Burnett of MULLU Chocolate, based in Rayleigh and Gary Nicholls of Swift Cleaning which operates from Rochford. The students were set a business challenge designed to help them understand the skills they need to develop to set up their own business successfully. This year, the challenge was to design a chocolate bar that could be sold to generate funds for Shop at My Local, a community social enterprise set up to support traders operating within the Rochford District.

Low Carbon Economy

Since the Low Carbon Business programme was launched in Rochford at the beginning of 2010, the project management team have engaged with 82 of our businesses. 50 of those businesses have received more detailed business support such as a green audit and two have successfully secured grants.

Local Development Framework

Progress to adoption of the Rochford Core Strategy has been slightly slower than anticipated, primarily as a result of the coalition government's decision to abolish regional strategies and the requirement for consideration to be given to the implications of this change. It is anticipated the Core Strategy will now be adopted in mid-2011.

JAAP

The London Southend Airport and Environs Joint Area Action Plan, being prepared jointly with Southend Borough Council, will deliver important opportunities for new employment development in the district. The submission version of the plan is being prepared and will be published later in 2011.

Town Centre Area Action Plans

Consultations on options and development opportunities have been completed for Rochford, Rayleigh and Hockley and it is anticipated preferred options versions of each plan will be published for further consultation in 2011.

UK Career Academy

The Council has worked with King Edmunds School supporting their Career Academy which provides Sixth Form students with the opportunity to work closely with business throughout their courses and develop business skills which are valued by future employers. In particular Council Officers have mentored students during the year, employed an intern in the Finance section and delivered Guru Lectures where students can hear about different business and career opportunities.

Prompt Payment of Invoices

The Council remains committed to paying invoices promptly particularly for local businesses. 98% of all invoices are paid within 30 days and 92% of invoices from businesses in the District are paid within 10 days.

About Rochford

Rochford is a small District located in south east Essex covering approximately 65 square miles. It is bounded by the River Crouch to the north and the urban areas of Southend and Castle Point to the south. Around 85% of the District is designated as metropolitan green belt and there are many miles of attractive coastline and nationally important areas of salt marsh. A large area around Foulness is under Ministry of Defence control.

Rochford has both urban and rural communities with three main towns Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley; all of which have good rail connections to London. There is access to the A127 London to Southend Arterial Road and to the A13 and M25.

London Southend Airport straddles the District's southern boundary with Southend and forms part of the Thames Gateway area. Baltic Wharf, a commercial port, stands on the south bank of the River Crouch at Wallasea Island which is also home to the RSPB's Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project which is a landmark conservation and engineering scheme for the 21st century on a scale never before attempted in the UK and the largest of its type in Europe.

Policy Context

Thames Gateway

For some time, the Thames Gateway South Essex sub-region has been a focus for development and regeneration of both regional and national importance. The significance of the regeneration of the sub-region to Essex, the East of England and the national economy is recognised within policy at strategic and local level.

The regeneration programme will change the economic landscape of the sub-region by strengthening and increasing the importance of sectors already present in the area but also introducing new economic drivers which provide the opportunity to broaden the sub-region's economic base.

Economic Development Strategy

The future economic success of the Thames Gateway South Essex sub-region will be linked to the delivery of a series of large physical development projects which are currently planned or under construction. These developments include large 'standalone' commercial developments (such as the expansion of London Southend Airport and the establishment of London Gateway Port), mixed use regeneration at key centre (including Southend, Basildon and Lakeside), and a range of significant scale residential developments.

The policy environment that directs and governs both planning and economic development of the District, and wider region, is undergoing significant restructuring as the Coalition reforms the legislative landscape, we believe that the core principles for economic growth in the sub-region are likely to remain relatively consistent.

Local Policy Context

The overall vision and four corporate objectives have already been outlined in the introduction demonstrating how this strategy contributes to the overarching corporate aims.

The Local Development Framework (LDF) is a portfolio of local development documents which together will provide a spatial planning framework for the District up to 2031. One key element of the portfolio is the Core Strategy which sets out the spatial planning policies required to deliver that vision.

Economic Development and spatial planning are linked in that spatial planning can hinder economic growth just as over ambitious economic growth can undermine local places and communities. There is a need to balance growth with the quality of life for our residents and maintain our natural heritage and green spaces. It is the Council's responsibility to ensure a unified approach to the management of strategic development and the physical and built environment.

Under the 3rd theme, this Strategy looks at the areas of work where the two remits meet whether that is through town centre regeneration, relocation of existing industrial estates or the expansion of London Southend Airport. The Council has to plan to ensure that the successful delivery of these projects reaps benefits for both the local economy and the local community.

The Core Strategy sets a vision for the District up to 2031. Whilst the EDS only relates to a five year period from 2009, it is important to understand the longer term aims of the Council and what the economic development role is so that work can be planned and the necessary preparation can take place.

Economic Overview

Population

In the 2001 Census Rochford District had approximately 79,000 people. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2009 mid-year population estimates showed Rochford District as having a population of 83,100. In 2008 compared to the national average Rochford (at 17.34%) had fewer residents aged 0-14, at 11.48% fewer residents aged 15-24 at 25.00% fewer residents aged 25-44. Rochford at 27.39% has more than the national average residents aged 45-64 and at 18.78% have a higher proportion of residents aged over 65.

Economic Development Strategy

The population is among the older local populations in Britain and this is likely to increase with the over 65 population predicted to grow by 4.50% by 2020. There are some local variations in this pattern, with wards around Rochford town centre and to the north of the District recording older average ages than those along the west border.

There are approximately 33,700 households of which 86% are owner occupied and 6% are privately rented and house prices are higher than in England and Wales. The area is relatively affluent, ranking 314 out of 354 authorities nationally, where one is the most deprived and 354 the least deprived. The most deprived ward, Foulness and Great Wakering East, ranks 2,680 out of 8,414.

The black and minority ethnic (BME) population is relatively evenly dispersed amongst the urban settlements. The estimated population by broad ethnic group, 2008 was White 95.74%, Mixed 1.10%, Asian or Asian British 1.46%, Black or Black British 1.10%, Chinese or Other 0.61%.

Productivity and economic activity

Rochford's economy produced an output, measured by Gross Value Added (GVA), in 2006 of £852 million, an increase of 44.9% since 1992. To put this into context GVA in Essex is £24,467 million and has experienced an increase of 64.3% since 1992. In the East of England Region GVA was £93.5 billion, an increase of 55.5% since 1992.

GVA per employee, a measure of the productivity of an economy, shows that Rochford and Essex have similar levels, although Rochford's figure (£34,577) is notably lower than the regional figure of £40,762.

These figures highlight the strength of the East of England's economy and its growing influence within the wider UK economy, given that GVA per employee has grown faster than its national equivalent. It also demonstrates that Rochford, within a regional context, has a comparatively healthy economy even though it is still falling behind the Region and UK.

The gap in productivity between Rochford and the County and Region narrowed between 1992 and 2006 with Rochford experiencing a higher increase in productivity (35%) than the County (30%) and Region 32%).

Economic activity within Rochford has been more volatile than the rest of Essex, the wider East of England and the UK as a whole, shifting away from an activity rate higher than the benchmarks in 2006 to significantly below in 2008. Between 2008 and 2009 economic activity levels recovered to the national average of 76.5%.

Similarly, economic inactivity levels within the working age population have shown fluctuations in the same periods with inactivity decreasing to its lowest in 2006 (where economic activity was at its highest) and peaking in 2008 when economic activity was at its lowest.

Combined economic activity and inactivity highlight the potential vulnerability of the labour force to shocks within the economy and to the wider external economic context, with economic activity highest at the peak of the boom and lowest as the recession took hold. Figures for 2009 suggest the recovery is being felt in Rochford with levels of economic activity increasing and inactivity falling at greater rates than Essex, the East of England and the UK.

Employment and economic activity trends are likely to be linked in the main to Rochford District's relationship with its neighbouring areas and, in particular London, given that at the time of the 2001 Census 60% of the resident population commuted out of the Rochford for work. Whilst other Essex areas formed the largest proportion there was also a high proportion of commuters working in London. The largest single destination was the City, reflecting the established direct rail links with London Liverpool Street station.

Business Stock

The largest single employment sector within the District is real estate and business activities, representing 19% of total employment; the retail sector is of a similar size, representing 17% of employment. Other large employment sectors include health and social work and manufacturing.

The proportion of business stock which is small has increased from 88% to 90% between 1998 and 2008, demonstrating their importance to the local economy. This 2% increase in the share of business stock is in line with the UK and the East of England but higher than that for Essex. The stock of larger businesses (i.e. those with over 200 employees) has shown the opposite trend, decreasing significantly between 1999 and 2008. Over the same period the stock of large businesses in the comparator regions have increased, albeit at a low rate.

The fact that the proportion of medium sized companies (i.e. 11 – 49 or 50 – 199 employees) has remained relatively static over the same period only further impresses the importance of small businesses to the future success of the local economy.

Considering new business births as a proportion of active stock, Rochford is generally performing at a lower rate than comparator areas, showing performance in a less positive light than Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) and VAT data. However, it should be noted that new-business formation rates have been consistently above 10% which is a healthy rate of new births.

But birth rates only provide one element of the small business equation, to understand the influence of small businesses on the Rochford District economy it is important to also understand how many businesses survive once they have started trading. Understanding the timing of business failure provides an insight into the potential causes and therefore the mechanisms which can be put in place to ensure businesses have a greater chance of survival.

Of businesses born in 2003, a higher proportion in Rochford District survived at each time period than the comparator areas (county, region and nationwide). 84% of businesses survived two years this is at least 4% higher than the comparators, a trend which persists across the five year period.

Whilst the performance of businesses started in 2003 has been strong compared with wider county, regional and national averages, the survival of businesses born later has not demonstrated such positive trends. Comparing one, two and three year survival rates from 2003 with those from 2005 shows that there has been a small reduction in the number of businesses within Rochford surviving beyond one year. The two year survival rate has only fallen by less than 2% but the three year survival rate shows a more significant 5% shift.

The stark difference in post two year survival rates is likely to be partly influenced by the impacts of the recession with "newer" businesses formed in 2005 likely to be more vulnerable than those born in 2003.

Evidentially, there is a strong history of start ups and small businesses play an important role within the Rochford District economy. Recent employment and economic activity trends have impacted on the potential scale, nature and timing of new business formation. In times of economic boom Rochford's employment levels are high suggesting there are limited drivers for start ups during these periods; however the sharp downturn in employment and economic activity during the recession may mean there is a latent supply of skilled and experienced workers who may seek to start a business rather than new employment.

As survival rates of businesses have fallen over the past two to three years and so a range of interventions will be required to ensure small businesses continue to provide the foundation for future economic growth and prosperity.

Employment, workforce and earnings

Total employment was recorded at approximately 19,500 (Source: Annual Business Inquiry, 2008). Between 2006 and 2008, the total number of employees in Rochford increased by 3.99%. Whilst this is likely to have been influenced by the recent recession the ONS annual population Survey (January 2009 – December 2009) the proportion of the resident working age population in employment is high at 76.7% with the area ranking in the top 40% of districts nationally.

In 2008, Rochford's job density was 0.50 (Source: Office for National Statistics 2008), meaning that there is only one job available for every two people of working age in the District.

Whilst Rochford has relatively low levels of deprivation it also has lower workplace earnings, and less knowledge intensive employment, than the County and Region. There is a significant gap between workplace-based and resident-based earnings within the District with gross resident earnings 15% higher than gross workplace earnings in 2009. The wage differential is likely to be primarily driven by the high proportion of residents who commute out of the District to work, principally to London, where average wages are higher.

Gross annual earnings for residents of the District are higher in Rochford than for comparator areas and workplace-based earnings are below the benchmarks. This creates a much higher differential between workplace and resident earnings than is experienced within the wider Essex and East of England economy, although this gap has narrowed in 2009. Again, this is reflective of the focus of employment in the District, where dominant sectors will have lower average wages than sectors which are more prevalent in the wider Essex and East of England area.

At the other end of the spectrum Rochford has a significantly lower proportion of employees engaged in low level elementary and process occupations, approximately 10% of the total employees compared to 15% for Essex, the East of England and the UK. The Rochford work force tends to be engaged in higher level occupations, with almost 50% of those employed being within technical, professional or management occupations. This is marginally higher than Essex, the East of England and the UK.

Whilst occupations are of a high level and are likely to involve higher skilled workers, engagement in "knowledge intensive" activities as a share of all employees is significantly lower than Essex, East of England and the UK.

The proportion of employment in knowledge intensive industries is reflective of the share of employment activities by broad sector, which demonstrated a dominance of employment within retail, health and social work, real estate and business activities, and manufacturing. Only a limited number of activities within manufacturing would be classified as "knowledge intensive", none of the activity in other dominant sectors would be considered so.

Economic Development Strategy

Efforts to improve employment prospects in the District would help to reduce the District's reliance on out-commuting and this could, in turn, could provide opportunities to increase the number of high value jobs and increase competitiveness, retain a greater proportion of residents spend and reduce the overall amount of car journeys.

Spend Leakage

The Retail and Leisure Study 2008 highlighted that the District was performing poorly in terms of retaining its residents' spend, losing significant expenditure to neighbouring areas including Southend and Basildon.

Given that there is only two major supermarkets located to the west of the District it may not be surprising that only 17.8% of residents' main food shop spend is retained within the Rochford boundary. However, it is of greater concern that the District retains only slightly more resident spend in top-up shopping (19.9%). Due to the nature of top up shopping there is no competition posed by the Internet and there is an opportunity to attract back some of the 35.5% of top up spend that is leaking out to Southend.

It is of paramount importance that a greater proportion of our residents' spend is kept within the District boundary; retaining locally-generated prosperity by encouraging local spending and a retail/consumer economy. This will also help to safeguard existing, and create new jobs, within the retail sector and associated supply chain businesses as well as helping to keep shops and services available locally.

Transport

Rochford has two strategic trunk routes in and around its boundary, namely the A130 and A127. The A127 provides a link to London, a main commuter and employment destination. There are also three main train stations located in the District which provide a direct service to London Liverpool Street. London Southend Airport is located on the boundary with Southend Borough and is predominantly within Rochford.

There is a high level of car-ownership in the District. However, the proportion of people travelling to work by public transport is greater than the national and regional averages, primarily due to the accessibility of rail links from the District's three main urban areas. Away from the three main settlements, car dependency is high. Congestion and environmental impacts will continue to worsen with population growth if this trend is not reversed.

The strength of the spheres of influence of the large neighbouring centres of Southend, Basildon and Chelmsford mean that traffic is drawn through Rochford District's own centres to them. This not only has an impact on traffic congestion in general, but also engenders concern with regards to air quality within the District's town centres.

This situation has the potential to be exacerbated if development is not directed to the appropriate locations around settlements. Particular locations where this is a concern include east of Rayleigh, where commuters to Basildon and Chelmsford are drawn through the centre of Rayleigh; west of Hockley, where those commuting by car to Southend or Chelmsford/Basildon are drawn through the centre of Hockley or Rayleigh, respectively; and east of Rochford, where vehicular movements would inevitably be directed through Rochford's historic centre.

Economic Development Strategy

Given such concerns the location of future development must be considered alongside opportunities to locate development in areas where alternatives to car use are more viable, alongside other sustainability issues.

The lack of public transport provision throughout most of the District is an obstacle to reducing car dependency. There is, however, some opportunity to utilise public transport, particularly within the three main settlements which contain rail links between each other, Southend and London.

Current cycle networks in the District are limited both in quantity and quality and do not encourage people to travel by bicycle. Through the new planning process, there is an opportunity to improve this situation and provide an integrated network of cycle paths across the District.

SWOT Analysis – The Rochford Economy

Strengths
Low levels of deprivation and a fairly affluent area.
Productivity levels, whilst lagging behind regional and national averages, show that Rochford has a relatively healthy economy.
There is a strong history of start-ups and small businesses (which now make up 90% of all business stock) are playing an important role in the economy and make Rochford unique to its sub-regional neighbours.
Strong retail sector providing opportunities to build on a consumer economy. This will help to retain a greater proportion of resident's spend and increase the number of jobs available locally. Owing to the effort of the Council and its partners in the formation and delivery of Shop at My Local, Rochford has won the regional round of the Enterprising Britain Competition 2010; making Rochford the most enterprising place in the Eastern region. This shows an active community ready to identify and work in partnership to address the area's social and economic weaknesses.
Weaknesses
Volatile economic activity and inactivity levels highlight the potential vulnerability of the economy to the wider, external economic context.
Rochford has a fairly healthy rate of business births but when considered as a proportion of active stock, the area generally performs less well than comparator areas.
Low job density – One job for every two people of working age.
Lower workplace earnings than the Country and Region. There is also a significant gap between workplace based and residence based earnings which exacerbates existing issues around out-commuting.
The two weaknesses listed above, and the pull for employees from London, results in approximately 60% of the working age population commuting out of the District to work. This will be contributing, in no small part, to issues around the amount of resident's spend seeping out to other areas.
Less knowledge intensive/high value employment than comparator areas.

Weaknesses

In terms of the qualification levels of Rochford residents, Rochford is performing favourably up to NVQ level 4 to the regional and national averages. At NVQ level 4, the District lags behind these averages by up to 5%.

Opportunities

Inclusion on the Thames Gateway South Essex area presents various opportunities for growth. Including the expansion of London Southend Airport.

A low carbon economy – work to Increase productivity levels by encouraging resource efficiency of Rochford businesses through the Low Carbon Business Programme.

Work to Increase productivity levels by encouraging the effective use of ICT and by encouraging and supporting innovative businesses.

90% of the businesses in Rochford are identified as “small”. This means that the business stock in Rochford is different to our neighbours and so there is an opportunity to support small, independent businesses and retain our uniqueness in this respect.

There is an opportunity to increase those types of employment through the implementation of the Joint Area Action Plan for the expansion of London Southend Airport.

By improving local employment prospects we can start to retain more highly skilled, higher earning residents and reduce reliance on out-commuting.

The Council is currently undertaking its Local Development Framework and that presents opportunities to resolve some of the ongoing policy issues that may inhibit business growth and inward investment for example:

- consider the location and condition of existing industrial estates and whether they are fit for purpose;
- consider the creation of new employment land in more sustainable locations;
- consider the impact of Green Belt restrictions on the rural economy and associated businesses and agree a vision that balances planning and economic development needs;
- support the regeneration of the District's town centres through the development of Area Action Plans.

Threats

85% of Rochford is Metropolitan Greenbelt which restricts the type and rate of business growth in the in certain parts of the District.

As a consequence of the recession, business survival rates have dropped, the most significant drop is 5% in three year survival rates. This has to be addressed to ensure that small businesses continue to provide the foundation for future economic growth and prosperity.

A large proportion of resident's spend is leaking out to other areas. When looking at the District as a whole, we only retain a maximum of around 20%; this will impact on a number of other issues, particularly the number of jobs available locally.

Threats

Rochford is now the least affordable place to live in the sub-region (when comparing workplace earnings with house prices). Coupled with issues around the significantly ageing population Rochford faces some serious issues around the availability of working age residents to take up future employment secured through successful business growth and inward investment.

Rochford's dominant employment sectors have lower average wages and don't lend themselves to the growth of knowledge intensive or higher value jobs.

Historically, there has been a lack of investment in transport and road infrastructure. This hinders business growth and inward investment – particularly in the more rural parts of the District and it is apparent that this is restricting business growth, particularly in the case of Baltic Wharf, a key asset to the Rochford District economy.

Guiding Principles

There are two ongoing and guiding principles to this Strategy; the influence of the wider economic environment and the climate change agenda. They have been identified as such because they bear influence on all our priorities, objectives and actions.

Climate Change Agenda

There is widespread scientific consensus that man made greenhouse gas emissions are driving climate change, the effects of which are potentially irreversible. Many high-profile reviews and documentaries have addressed the subject and many of our everyday behaviours have already changed for the better.

In the past, the Council's actions have been many and varied, yet were often taken independently from one another. The Council's Climate Change Strategy was adopted in 2008 and brought together all those previously unconnected activities.

With its partners, the Council wants to take a lead in forming a low carbon economy and will work with the community, businesses and public and private partners to make this happen.

According to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), in 2005 Rochford has the second lowest per capita CO₂ emissions in Essex at 5.6 tonnes. There is more work to be done to reduce this figure and Rochford has a target of 5.1 tonnes to be achieved by 2011.

Over the past year, the Economic Development Unit has worked hard to ensure the low carbon agenda is at the heart of the support services provided to the business community.

Through the formation and delivery of Shop at My Local, and indeed with the Rochford Business Network with the online forums we have launched, we are encouraging businesses to be "greener" and more resource efficient. These efforts are backed up with more detailed and practical support through the Low Carbon Business programme.

Low Carbon Business is part financed by the European Regional Development Fund which was secured through a bid compiled by Thames Gateway local authority partners. Our progress and success to date has been listed under "What have we achieved?"

Wider Economic Environment

Rochford has shown some small signs of recovery from the recession but there is still some uncertainty about the robustness of that recovery on a national scale, and whether we are still at risk of a “double-dip” recession.

There are also significant changes taking place relating to the change of government last year. The Coalition has made a commitment to reducing the Country’s national debt and that has involved some large scale changes in terms of policy and funding. The result of that is that local authorities have been told to achieve some significant savings and in Rochford’s case this amounts to about 12% of our next expenditure for 2011/2012.

It is recognised that these significant cuts will result in less resources and therefore are likely to impact on the service delivery our customers have come to expect. However, there are further consequences for business; significant cutbacks will also mean that there is less money to spend and so those supply chain businesses will also be negatively impacted.

As such, we have changed the term “recession” to “wider economic impact” as whilst the recession may be on its way out, we face a number of new, and in some cases, tougher challenges ahead.

We will work hard to support businesses through this by making best use of existing resources such as Shop at My Local, the Rochford Business Network and Low Carbon Business. The Economic Development Unit also offers 1-2-1 support for businesses managed through an enquiries process. Whilst the unit does not provide professional business advice, staff work alongside businesses researching relevant support services and referring to relevant and practical support from our partners.

Theme 1: Business Support

In the previous version of this Strategy we made a firm commitment to improving our basic business support service, and indeed the level of engagement we have with the business community. We have successfully achieved that and winning the Enterprising Britain regional award is external recognition of that.

The District is entrepreneurial in its character, and small businesses contribute significantly to the area’s employment and economy. The Council supports the protection and enhancement of small and medium sized businesses, both within existing industrial estates and town centres and also those existing enterprise in rural locations. The Council also recognises the important role that home-working can play in retaining employment opportunities within the District.

The policy landscape for business support, and indeed economic development delivery as a whole, is going through significant change. One of the most visible changes for eastern business will be the closure of Business Link East in November 2011. The Government have stated that the new business support service will be leaner and to some extent, more generic in that there will be a website and telephone service not unlike the services delivered to date but trimming back all the additional services such as free training sessions, local advisers and so on.

We are proud of our achievements and don’t want the change in economic climate or policy context to put those valued services at risk, especially when we know that the national portal for business support is being scaled back to such a large extent.

The cutbacks mean that we will have to look at delivering our services in new and different ways. But it's not that simple. Another factor to consider is that the Government is putting a significant focus on communities leading themselves; this concept is encapsulated as the "Big Society".

So what is the Big Society?

People have interpreted the ideas and vision in different ways, but there are three key principles:

- Empowering individuals and communities: Decentralising and redistributing power not just from Whitehall to local government, but also directly to communities, neighbourhoods and individuals.
- Encouraging social responsibility: Encouraging organisations and individuals to get involved in social action, whether small neighbourly activities like hosting a Big Lunch to large collective actions like saving the local post office.
- Creating and enabling an accountable state: Transforming government action from top-down micromanagement and one-size-fits-all solutions to a flexible approach defined by transparency, payment by results, and support for social enterprise and cooperatives.

The Government state this is a bottom-up vision, not a government programme dictated from the state to citizens. The Big Society is about a cultural change where people "don't always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities."

In order to effectively contribute towards central government's new agenda the Council is considering how it can empower and enable its community to do what is stated in the aims of the Big Society. To some extent, this is a process of handover and government are right to state that it is a big cultural shift.

There are also changes to regional development and direction. The East of England Regional Development Agency (EEDA) will no longer exist and whilst the detail hasn't yet been pinned down it is likely that a range of targets and performance indicators, which were set by EEDA as the regional development body, will also come to an end.

The Government wants regional development that is business led and based on areas that have real economic relationships. To this end they have announced the formation of a series of Local Enterprise Partnerships which should be business led.

So what are we going to do?

The first thing we need to do is start a process of dialogue with the business community. In January 2011 the Council kick-started a consultation process to examine what all these factors actually mean for Rochford.

We hope to achieve a number of things through that process:

- find out what local businesses want and what their priority areas are
- empower them to tackle those areas;

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- see where existing support projects can be adapted to be business led, (building on our success this past year or so rather than starting over again); and
- ensure that our businesses are heard by creating systems that effectively cascade up to the Local Enterprise Partnership for consideration. (This last point is expected to be considered through the sub-regional systems operated by the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership and so it is key that nothing is lost in translation and that the Rochford business voice isn't drowned out).

At this stage it is impossible to anticipate the outcomes of the consultation, but it is expected there will be increased roles and responsibilities for local businesses. There is little point looking at the Council's business support services in isolation when there are a number of business representative groups and networks operating in Rochford.

Funding cuts and reduced spend could have a knock on affect to each of those groups services. Through this consultation the business community needs to pin down what services are currently being provided by each key partner, which services are at risk, are these organisations and groups still economically viable, where are the gaps in service provision in terms of demand?

Only when we have listened to key stakeholders and mapped out the range of support services will we know what we need to address and then we will need to look at how that can be delivered in the most efficient and sustainable way.

We maintain our commitment to provide high quality business support services and so our new aim is to manage the process of empowerment and support the business community to map the future for business support in Rochford.

For the next year and whilst we undertake consultation, the aim will be to protect the business support services we have built over the past year.

Objective 1: Continue to progress consultation with the business community and, in parallel, work to ensure that valued business support services can continue in the new policy environment.

Objective 2: Work with businesses to reduce their carbon emissions and to increase resource efficiency through the Low Carbon Business programme.

Action	Task	Target Date
1.1	Continue to progress the consultation process and, with time, agree a clear and joined up direction of travel.	December 2011
1.2	Continue to run and improve the Rochford Business Network service including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quarterly newsletter; • three business breakfast events; • Rochford Business Forums. 	March 2012
2.1	Continue to deliver and achieve stated targets of the Low Carbon Business Project.	March 2012

Objective 3: Establish the feasibility of establishing an eco-enterprise centre in the District

In the previous version of this Strategy we stated we would commission a feasibility study to ascertain the demand for an enterprise centre in Rochford.

Enterprise centres, also known as business incubation centres, provide an ideal, structured environment in which new businesses can grow. They differ from other types of business support because they offer comprehensive, responsive and customised services to early stage businesses at the most vulnerable point in their lifecycle. The most obvious benefits are usually inclusive rents, short term tenancies and on site business support. The Council believes that the establishment of an eco-friendly enterprise centre would help generate more consistent levels of business creation, reduce the number of business closures and help to educate new businesses about their environmental responsibilities. The Centre, which would be a flag ship, eco-friendly build will also act as a much needed inward investment draw, attracting new businesses to the area. It would become a central point for businesses seeking any kind of business support in the District.

If the centre is established, then the Council will work with landlords to develop appropriate grow on space for businesses moving on from the Centre. The Council will seek to implement service level agreements with local landlords who are prepared to meet the necessary criteria, which will include operating business friendly leases and meeting certain environmental standards. In return, their premises will be added to a list of recommended grow-on space for businesses moving on from the Centre. This influence will help to make best use of vacant stock and encourage landlords to consider their own environmental responsibilities. Developing grow on space will be integral to retaining businesses in the District.

The study was commissioned in 2010 and it is expected to be finalised and signed off by March 2011. The Council will then determine the best means and timeframe through which to take the project forward.

Action	Task	Target Date
3.1	Commission a feasibility Study for the establishment of an eco-enterprise centre in the District.	March 2011

Objective 4: Develop a greater understanding of the rural economy and rural business support needs

In the 2009 version of this Strategy, the economic overview highlighted that the three sectors Agriculture, Mining and Utilities account for 5% of all employment in the District and for 8% of total output. While this is not very high in relative terms, employment is over 3.5 times higher than the UK average and output is over 2.5 times. This indicates the relative strength of rural employment within the District.

Typically Gross Value Added (GVA) (one of the basic indicators of economic prosperity), appears considerably lower in the more remote and rural areas of the country than the national average. It is generally recognised that this impacts on the local economy as the scope to develop high skilled, high value enterprise is more constrained.

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It seems that the key issues which affect rural areas arise from the fact that they can lack physical and social economic facilities such as good quality sites and premises, a good transport network, an adequate pool of skilled workers and effective higher and further education provision. Due to some of the economic factors referred to above it can be easy for a low wage, low skill equilibrium to evolve.

Remoteness may be a factor driving down GVA in mixed urban and rural areas. The Council wants to understand more about how the rural economy may be affecting the overall economic productivity of the District and depending on the outcomes of that research decide whether intervention is required. Information gained through this process will determine what support services are needed and how they might be provided and implemented into the existing business support offer.

The Economic Development Unit has been able to progress this area of work and over the past two years a number of informal meetings with key business and groups have taken place, concerns looked at through other consultations and themes from our business enquiry system have been used to gain a better picture of business needs in the more rural parts of Rochford.

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

The Economic Development Unit has processed around 180 business enquires (that excludes enquiries relating to our key business support projects like Shop at My Local) and around a quarter of those have been in some way to do with planning.

The issue here is that a balance between the two has to be found because national Green Belt policy exists to stop the coalescence of settlements and protect the essentially rural character of the District. It is that characteristic which attracts people to come and live in Rochford.

The outcome of this ongoing piece of work is that it would be beneficial to develop a strategic vision for business support and development for the areas where those difficulties exist. Through that process we hope to be able to provide a policy environment that serves to protect the character whilst also providing an environment that is conducive to business survival.

Action	Task	Target Date
4.1	Work with planning colleagues and members to develop and agree a strategic vision for business support and development in Metropolitan Green Belt areas.	March 2012

Theme 2: People and Employment

Objective 5: Work with partners to address declining skills levels and rising unemployment

The last Strategy highlighted a decline in the skills levels of its working age population and due to the recession, a rise in unemployment. The situation has improved since 2009, with increases in the attainment of NVQs from level 1 up to level 4, and a reduction of 0.2% in the number of residents with no qualifications.

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Further to the last Strategy, it was decided not to pursue a Skills and Employment group. The Council continues to work alongside partners like JobCentre Plus, Connexions and education providers. One example of this was to sponsor Connexions “Get Sorted” event in early 2010, which support a range of young people to get in to education, employment or training.

Young Entrepreneur 2010 was very successful. All four local secondary schools engaged and 75 students ultimately took part. We tied this in to the Shop at My Local scheme to raise awareness. The business challenge set was to design a chocolate bar that could be used to generate income, and that reflected the aims and values of the campaign.

Although we weren’t able to secure a sub-group to the Local Strategic Partnership to look at and address issues around declining qualification levels and local employment opportunities, another opportunity has arisen through Shop at My Local.

As part of the business plan, which is currently being written, the partnership has made a commitment to adding a recruitment feature to the website. This should help match local people to local employment and is in line with the 2008 Futures report which recommended that the Council stimulate a retail-consumer society that would form the backbone of the local economy.

Discussions are yet to take place and be agreed but an opportunity exists to set up a work experience programme with the Shop at My Local team. Those individuals that sign up would gain experience and a greater understanding of retail, particularly in respect of small, independent retail businesses that are facing a number of challenges at present. This scheme could mean that individuals are better placed to get local retail work and also that businesses get a good “skills match”.

Action	Task	Target Date
5.1	Continue to deliver the Young Entrepreneur Programme on an annual basis.	Programmed delivered and completed by end of October 2011
5.2	Investigate the feasibility of running work experience and volunteer programmes through Shop at My Local.	May 2012

Objective 6: Support key employment sectors to help safeguard jobs

Some of Rochford’s largest employment sectors are the hardest hit in the recession and with low job density, the Council recognises that Rochford cannot afford to lose jobs.

In the main, the key employment sectors remain the same:

- real estate and other business services;
- retail;
- manufacturing;
- construction.

Economic Development Strategy

Since the last Strategy, a significant amount of work has been done in order to support the retail sector and more detailed information can be found in the third theme under Shop at My Local.

We have continued to work with partners across all of these sectors and this has included sponsorship of a Constructing Excellence event and partnership working with Prospects College on the formation of a vocational training academy to address workforce issues highlighted by the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul sector businesses operating at the Airport.

The Rochford Business Network and Low Carbon Business Programme are of use to most of the businesses operating in these key sectors and so a large amount of support has been delivered in that way as well.

The change in policy environment has changed our aims around this piece of work. Consultation with our business community around making our support service more business-led has thrown up a want for specific, and continued, support to both retail and manufacturing sectors. It is most likely that, whatever the outcome of these changes, the Rochford business community will lead on this piece of work by highlighting their own priorities and stating where they think limited resources should be deployed.

The aim now, is to ensure that the business consultation process highlights the need/opportunity to look at supporting key employment sectors. It will be for the business-leads to ascertain the priorities and identify the necessary resources to move forward.

Objective 7: Work to generate more high value jobs in the District.

It is fair to say that the nature of Rochford's business stock and the majority of our key employment sectors don't lend themselves easily to creating sizeable numbers of high value jobs. This means that we need to make best use of opportunities that materialise.

The airport site is already home to a significant number of Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) companies, which together support over 1,000 jobs. Many of these jobs are highly skilled, high value jobs unique to the aviation sector. Now that the Joint Area Action Plan (JAAP) is at the "preferred option" stage there is opportunity to grow the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) cluster alongside the expansion of London Southend Airport (detailed further in Theme 3),

In the last Strategy we reported that the MRO sector was experiencing skill gaps and hard to fill vacancies. It is crucial to address the needs of the MRO sector to enable growth in order to reach our objective to increase higher value jobs and safeguard existing jobs.

Through the efforts of our partners, both of our previous objectives have been achieved and we hope to see the benefits of the training academy and aviation related apprenticeship provision in the near future.

The development of Saxon Business Park could provide modern, sustainable, spacious office accommodation. It is envisaged that the new estate will provide space for a range of high-tech businesses, but with an emphasis on environmental technologies, and include space for new start-up businesses.

This will assist the Council in its efforts to provide quality jobs for local people.

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These developments provide a unique opportunity to make a significant change to the local economy. They will generate interest from businesses operating outside the District and it is essential that the Council works to raise awareness of the new, high profile developments, and attract relevant and suitable businesses to the area.

Action	Task	Target Date
7.1	Through the development and implementation of the Joint Area Action Plan work to increase the number of high value jobs.	Ongoing

Objective 8: Improve Rochford's inward investment offer

There are a number of opportunities arising in the future as a result of a number of spatial developments which are detailed in Theme 3 of this Strategy but they include:

- Town/village centre regeneration.
- Relocation and improvement of poor industrial estates.
- Expansion of London Southend Airport and its environs.
- Establishment of an eco-enterprise centre.

As and when each of these projects is delivered, Rochford has a significantly improved offer in terms of employment land. A relevant and proper inward investment service should be developed for each according to the aims of the Council. For example the Council aims for the new Saxon business park to attract high tech businesses, with particular focus on new environmental technologies and "green industries", to create higher value jobs in the District. A tailored inward investment service would show how Rochford is best placed to house such businesses; how the Council will ensure that the right type of workforce is available and that additional support services are in place to encourage businesses to locate in the District. The same formula applies to retail in the town centres and manufacturing and construction businesses on industrial estates.

Essentially, such services are about effective and focussed marketing activities. As such, time and resources need to be allocated to research, gather data and to build relationships with local commercial agents and landlords.

Action	Task	Target Date
8.1	Make recommendations to the Council about how best to develop the inward investment offer and include any resource implications.	December 2011
	The report should also include a timeline and forward plan which accounts for forthcoming developments such as the Saxon Business Park.	
8.2	Depending on the outcome of the recommendations made to the Council update the objectives and actions contained in the Strategy to adequately reflect the new work Programme.	Update 2012

Theme 3: Employment Land and Economic Drivers

This theme differs slightly from the previous two themes as it has spatial implications and, for the most part, the projects detailed here are currently being led by the Council's Planning Department rather than the Economic Development Unit. It is important to identify what the economic development role is in each of the key areas when we are nearing implementation and delivery.

The Core Strategy contains an Economic Development Chapter and the vision is as follows:

In five years

- The Council are 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 long term future of the wharfage at Baltic Wharf as an employment area has been secured.
- Area Action Plans for Rochford, Rayleigh and Hockley have been finalised and the first phase of enhancement opportunities are being implemented.
- 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. The Joint Area Action Plan seeks to realise the airport's potential as a driver for the sub regional economy, providing significant employment opportunities and ensuring the quality of life for its residents and workers.

By 2017

- Sustainable, well used and strategically located industrial estates are being protected and enhanced, where appropriate.
- New businesses are being supported at the most vulnerable points in their lifecycle through the development of an Eco-Enterprise Centre and it is acting as an inward investment draw.
- Appropriate uses within the District's commercial centres are being supported.
- London Southend Airport and its environs has become a driver for the sub-regional economy, providing a range of aviation and non aviation related employment opportunities for the local population.
- A skills training academy within the vicinity of London Southend Airport and its environs has been established to provide high-skilled training in aviation related industries.
- The Joint Area Action Plan supports and regulates the operations of London Southend Airport taking into consideration environmental and social effects, and residential amenity.

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- A new airport terminal building at London Southend Airport has been completed and is operational following the implementation of an agreed surface access strategy.
- 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.

By 2025

- 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.
- 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.

Given the number of developments forthcoming this chapter of the Strategy has been broken down into the following sections for simplicity:

- Town and village centres.
- Industrial estates and office space.
- London Southend Airport.

It is worth noting that the Council is in the early stages with most of these plans and projects. As these processes have not yet reached an outcome it is difficult to define the exact role and resource implications for the Economic Development Unit in the future. This will change as the projects move forward and detail will be added when the Strategy is updated annually to reflect progress up until the full re-write in 2014.

Town and Village Centres

Town and village centres have an important role to play in the District’s economic development. Town centres that are attractive, well-designed, and well managed, with a range of shops, arts and cultural uses, entertainment, good amenities, and good transport connections are engines for economic growth, providing a focal point for business and social interactions. Vibrant town centres are good for business: they create jobs, attract investment and generate income. At their best, they create a local buzz and define the wider area, attracting people from near and far.

It is clear that the downturn is giving rise to challenges but turbulent economic times can also herald a period of remarkable innovation, energy and creativity. It important to manage town centres well, building on a strong partnership between local people, local businesses, and local service providers. Town centres need a clear sense of their identity, a vision for their future, and strategies for achieving that vision.

Objective 9: Work with partners to create thriving, experience led town centres that residents and businesses can enjoy and be proud of

The Council has an important role to play in enhancing the District's town centres, ensuring they are vibrant places. The 2008 Retail and Leisure Study indicated that there is significant leakage of retail spending to areas outside of the District.

Shopping patterns vary across the District and by the type of goods bought. With regards to convenience shopping (e.g. food), 17.8% of main food shopping is retained within the District compared to 54.4% of top-up shopping. This pattern is not replicated consistently across the District. Rayleigh retains the most convenience shopping, retaining 37.8% and 75.9% of main food shopping and top up shopping respectively. Other areas of the District leak considerably more.

Retail spending is projected to grow and it is important that the District ensures it at least maintains its current market share of spending – and continues to provide for the people who shop within the District – by ensuring there is adequate retail space allocated. The Council recognises that a proportion of spend will be attracted to regional centres such as Southend but there remains an opportunity to reduce the amount of leakage by making town centres more attractive to shoppers, enhancing their vitality and vibrancy, and concentrating retail development within the District's centres.

The Council is looking at the form and function of Hockley, Rochford and Rayleigh town centres through Area Action Plans and scoping the possibility for regeneration. The Core Strategy has set a separate vision and list of objectives to bring them to their full potential as follows:

In five years ...

- 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.

By 2025 ...

- 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.

Objectives

- (1) To direct retail development to the District's town centres of Rochford, Rayleigh and Hockley.
- (2) To enhance the centres of Rochford, Rayleigh and Hockley ensuring they are vital and vibrant places containing a range of uses and activities for all.
- (3) To reduce the leakage of retail expenditure out of the District.
- (4) To ensure that village and neighbourhood shops provide a service for local communities, particularly for those with limited access to transport.

There are a number of roles for the economic development team within this programme of work including ensuring that the business community are fully consulted and inform the production of the final regeneration plans.

Initial consultation with the business community around the area action plans has shown that businesses are concerned about the implications and consequences for them when actual development works start to take place.

The Economic Development Unit will be responsible for liaising and supporting the business community at this time ensuring that any negative affects on existing businesses are mitigated as much as possible. Recently, the Council has worked with a range of partners to launch Shop at My Local, an initiative designed to encourage residents to use and sustain local town and village centres. It is acknowledged that the successful delivery of this project will help to achieve a more co-ordinated approach to town centre management with key stakeholders and partners.

It is of paramount importance that a greater proportion of our residents' spend is kept within the District boundary; retaining locally-generated prosperity by encouraging local spending and a retail/consumer economy. This will also help to safeguard existing and create new jobs within the retail sector and associated supply chain businesses as well as helping to keep shops and services available locally.

Alongside the formation of appropriate planning policy and regeneration plans, the Council has led the formation and delivery of Shop at My Local (SAML). Shop at My Local is a support project designed to help the District's shopping areas meet their full potential as thriving community hubs.

The SAML partnership, which includes all three local Chambers of Trade and the Federation for Small Business, deliver a range of projects and assistance to encourage people to shop locally; retaining spend, access to services, safeguarding local jobs and building a strong community.

The intention is to counteract competition for resident's spending by:

- encouraging and facilitating events and initiatives that attract people to the District and create thriving community hubs;
- raising the profile of the District's shopping areas and businesses – helping residents find the services they need locally;

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- promoting and providing one access point for rewards and incentives including the main voucher scheme;
- facilitating access to funding, training and resources to improve businesses and services where relevant; and
- helping to deliver cleaner, greener and more attractive shopping areas.

At present, 388 local businesses are participating with over 500 residents pledging their support for local traders and shopping areas. The website is now receiving up 2500 hits per month, between 30 and 50 people a day mid-week and between 80 and 100 visitors on Saturdays.

Importantly, the project is working toward social enterprise status with two existing income streams. The success of Shop at My Local has generated a lot of interest from other areas seeking to set up their own keep trade local campaigns. As a result of this demonstrated demand, future developments including setting up a franchise to sell to other areas but activity around this is subject to change.

The Mission Statement for the Shop at My Local partnership (SAML) is:

- The Shop at My Local Partnership will deliver a range of projects and assistance that will encourage residents and businesses to buy locally and that will facilitate local supply chains.
- The campaign will work to ensure that the District's shopping areas meet their full potential by creating thriving community centres that offer a unique and enjoyable shopping and social experience.

The aims are to:

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

Although the initiative is embryonic, the partnership has worked to establish two income generators; the sale of advertising on the website and the sale of SAML produce. The partnership would like to move towards achieving social enterprise status and become fully self sufficient. Any surpluses that are generated through SAML will be re-invested to deliver the aims as laid out above for example funding town centre events or street furniture to enhance their attractiveness.

Action	Task	Target Date
9.1	Continue to work with partners to deliver Shop at My Local and to ensure that the project generates income to be self-sustaining	2009 onwards
9.2	Assess the Council's existing town centre management role, how it could be improved and better co-ordinated in the future and also looking at resource implications.	May 2011

Industrial Estates and Office Space (excluding JAAP area)

The Employment Land Study has identified the economic characteristics and opportunities for the District as a whole (excluding the area around London Southend Airport which has been looked at in detail as part of the London Southend Airport and Environs Joint Area Action Plan evidence base).

The study notes that the supply of employment land within the District is tight, with little available land. Rochford District is currently a stronger industrial, rather than office location. The Study identified that generally there is a sufficient supply of employment land for industrial use, but that any de-allocation would have to be compensated for. The study also identified a need for an additional 2.2 hectares of office space. Land to the west of Rayleigh is the most suitable strategic location for additional employment land provision and the Employment Land Study recommends that land in this location comes forward for office development.

Objective 10: Work to ensure that adequate industrial and office space is available in the District in line with the recommendations made in the Employment Land Study

The Council wants to enable existing businesses to diversify, modernise and grow and so will protect employment land from alternative development that would reduce the quantity and/or quality of jobs in the District. Employment policies will maintain a degree of flexibility in order to ensure that sites can respond and adapt to changes in the economy.

The District contains several industrial estates which are looking tired and in need of investment. Some are also close to housing and have a negative impact on residential amenity. The Council will consider the location and condition of existing industrial estates and will promote the creation of new employment areas in more sustainable locations. The Council will encourage the relocation of existing "bad neighbour" uses to more appropriate locations.

The Council will protect appropriately located industrial estates which are well used and sustainable with the potential for continued economic and employment vitality, and support the improvements recommended in the Employment Land Study, where appropriate. The Economic Development Unit will work with planning colleagues to ensure that the relocation of industrial estates is economically viable and deliverable, to ensure that any intentions in this respect are effectively communicated to the business community so that they can plan for change and also to ensure that those businesses are adequately supported. The Employment Land Study has identified that there is generally a sufficient supply of employment land for industrial use within the District, but that any de-allocation would have to be compensated for. The study also identified a need for an additional 2.2 hectares of office space.

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For detailed information on which industrial estates are being considered for redevelopment or relocation, and with regard to new office space please refer to the Core Strategy. As and when these ambitious plans are being delivered the Economic Development Unit will need to work with businesses residing on the estates to ensure that they are adequately relocated and supported through the change.

Action	Task	Target Date
10.1	The Council will work to ensure that adequate industrial and office space is available in the District in line with the recommendations made in the Employment Land Study	Ongoing – up to 2014

London Southend Airport

Located within the boundary of Rochford but on land owned by Southend-on-sea Council, London Southend Airport is a crucial asset for the sub regional economy.

The Joint Area Action Plan (JAAP) is being prepared by Rochford District Council and Southend Borough Council in response to the challenges and opportunities offered by London Southend Airport together with an airport related employment cluster. The JAAP will provide the basis for coordinating a range of partners with an interest in the airport and its environs and establish planning policy to 2021 and beyond.

The Airport is a key driver for regeneration across the sub-region. To move beyond its current operational model, it is recognised that further investment is needed to increase the airport's passenger catchment into the London market and make the airport more attractive to potential operators. The proposed Southend Airport railway station will also enhance this link with London and the sub regional market.

Objective 11: Continue to work with partners to support the development of London Southend Airport and its environs

In February 2009, Rochford District Council and Southend Borough Council published the JAAP Preferred Options document which includes Policy ED1, which supports the development of the airport and environs.

The Airport provides significant economic development opportunities for the Rochford District. If expansion goes ahead at the high-growth option, the potential will exist to create a step change in the local economy. There the JAAP objectives are to:

- create sustainable and high value employment and other and uses with the study area;
- maximise the economic benefits of a thriving airport and related activity;
- ensure appropriate improvements in sustainable transport accessibility and facilities;
- ensure a high quality environment for residents whether expressed through noise pollution management or the protection of green space;
- maximise return on public investment through attracting inward investment; and
- efficient use of existing employment land resources.

There is an economic development role now and in the future, after planning policy has been established, to achieve the aims of the JAAP and to maximise the economic benefits of the development. This has already been alluded to in Theme 2 where the Council recognises the importance of the growth of the MRO sector and also the need to generate a tailored inward investment service for the new Saxon business park. This will include skills development programmes, delivery of sector specific business support, the establishment of an appropriate inward investment service, lobbying for infrastructure needs and the establishment of an eco-enterprise centre. The Council will work closely with partners to make sure that this is planned and delivered effectively ensuring that the Airport reaches its full potential and regional significance.

Tourism

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

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

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

The Council will continue promote the development of green tourism projects and the conversion of appropriate rural buildings to bed and breakfasts/hotels which do not adversely impact upon character of place or biodiversity. Whilst priority will be given to areas which are accessible by alternative means to the car, schemes that are in locations with limited public transport links will also be supported if such proposals are able to make a positive contribution to rural regeneration or the well-being of rural communities.

The Council recognises that extensive work needs to be done to bring Rochford to its full tourism potential. Historically, Rochford's offer in terms of "attractions", hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation and transport infrastructure has been limited. With the development of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park and the Royal Society for Birds' (RSPB) Wallasea Island Wetlands Project Rochford's tourism offer will become far more significant and tourism will become a growing issue.

Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park

The need for more informal recreational space in South East Essex has been identified on numerous occasions over a number of years, including in the 1982 and 2001 Structure Plans and the 2005 Thames Gateway South Essex Greengrid Strategy.

Economic Development Strategy

We have sought to help address this need through the establishment of Cherry Orchard Jubilee Country Park. Work began on the Country Park in 2002 and the park has been gradually expanded. Our approach to the Country Park is centred on ensuring the right conditions are in place in order for fauna and flora to flourish, and utilising the existing features of the landscape, all with the minimum of human interference. We are carrying out works to improve access to the Country Park and are currently looking at providing car parking facilities in a manner that minimises the impact on the landscape. Preparation for this phase is being planned through the Local Development Framework.

Wallasea Island

The RSPB's proposed Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project has potential for tourism and leisure, as well as ecological, benefits. This project is adjacent to the recently realigned coast of Wallasea Island and involves the RSPB working in partnership with the Environment Agency to turn a vast area of arable land into an area comprising a plethora of wildlife habitats comprising 320 ha of mudflats, 160 ha of salt marsh, 96 ha shallow saline lagoons, 64 ha of brackish grazing marsh and 129 ha of pasture. The project also aims to incorporate improved access into the new landscape which will allow visitors to appreciate the area without adversely affecting wildlife.

At the same time, Essex Marina is located on Wallasea Island and the Council believe there potential to further develop waterfront recreation on the Crouch through the provision of additional marina facilities in this area. Opportunities are somewhat constrained by the lack of accessibility to Wallasea Island, in addition to the need to ensure that any increased levels of human activity are not detrimental to ecological and environmental interests, particularly given that the area is part of the Natura 2000 network.

At present the emerging Core Strategy's preferred option with respect to Wallasea Island is:

The Council will support the RSPB in delivering the Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project with the aim of enhancing the biodiversity value of the area. We will also promote recreational use and additional marina facilities in the area, along with access improvements. Such development will be supported provided there are no adverse impacts on ecological interests.

There is a need to set aside additional resources to put together a longer term strategy to develop the District's tourism potential. This programme of work should look at new and potential tourism developments in the area and look at timelines to see how and when all the relevant projects and developments come together. Only at that stage should the Council look at how it will promote itself as a tourism destination.

Monitoring Framework

The Council will update this Strategy annually and delivery will be monitored under the Council's Performance Management Framework. By the end of March 2011 a detailed action plan will be created to sit alongside the strategy and which will detail how, when and with what resources the Council intend to achieve the objectives of this Strategy.



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