

## A VISION FOR THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT

Agenda Item 5(c)

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**Background Papers:-** See Appendices  
**Financial Implications:-** None at this stage  
**Equalities Implications:-** Addressed through consultation  
**Legal Implications:-** None  
**Options:** Not applicable – Members’ comments are sought on the draft Vision  
**Risks:** The Vision for the District will inform the development of the Council’s next Corporate Strategy and the long term plans of our key partners. It will also inform the Braintree District contribution to the Essex Local Area Agreement and the Essex Strategy. It is essential therefore that Braintree District Council’s views are made known at this stage so that, with those of our partners, they can be considered collectively by the Braintree District Local Strategic Partnership (PACT – Partners and Communities Together). Future performance frameworks for local government will take this process, and our contribution to it, into account.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The draft Vision for the District which is attached to this report at Appendix 1 has been prepared by the Braintree District Local Strategic Partnership following wide-ranging and robust consultation which has been carried out alongside the District Council’s consultation work on the Local Development Framework. Both processes have been twin-tracked.

The views of all partners including Braintree District Council are now being sought.

This report outlines the background to the development of the draft Vision, its links to the new Community Strategy that is currently being developed - and how it will feed into the development of the new Essex LAA (due for sign-off in June 2008) and the Essex Strategy.

### DECISION REQUIRED

Members are asked to consider the draft Vision and give their comments and views as part of the Consultation process.

## A VISION FOR THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT

The draft Vision for the Braintree District is attached at **Appendix 1**.

It has been developed by the Braintree District Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) (PACT – ‘Partners and Communities Together’) following extensive consultation with key stakeholders and with the public. Details of the dates and types of consultation which were carried out are attached at **Appendix 2**. A summary of the results of the consultation is attached at **Appendix 3**.

The draft Vision aims to encapsulate the shared aspirations for the District of all the partners, including the District Council, who work within the LSP and to reflect the views of our residents.

It will inform the development of the new Braintree District Community Strategy and its associated priorities, targets and actions. It will also contribute to the development of the new Local Area Agreement for Essex which is due to be signed off in June 2008 and to the District’s contribution to the achievement of the LAA over the next four years.

The delivery of the priorities and targets in the new Community Strategy will be the responsibility of each of the partners on the LSP (including the District Council) both as separate organisations and through the partnership boards which make up the overall LSP. A copy of the current structure of the LSP is attached at **Appendix 4**. It is currently under review as a result of the development of the LAA, the proposed changes to the governance arrangements in Essex and the statutory status which each LSP is likely to be afforded under the terms of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill.

There are three main stages in the development of the Community Strategy for the Braintree District:

1. Agreement of the Vision
2. Agreement of priorities
3. Agreement of delivery plans

The delivery plans will be incorporated into a Braintree District Local Area Agreement and into each organisation’s own delivery plans where they are the accountable body. They will be included in BDC’s new Corporate Strategy for 2008-2012 and the Corporate Action Plan in future years. The Partnership Boards will develop the last two stages.

This process will take place over the next two to three months. It will be the main focus of a LSP (PACT) Assembly on the 16<sup>th</sup> January. The new Community Strategy for the Braintree District and its associated priorities and actions will be finalised by April 2008.

## **Appendix 1**

### **A Vision for the Braintree District**

To shape and develop the future of Braintree District with our partners, residents and neighbours as a place where people really matter.

#### **Democracy**

- Where local people are effectively involved in making policies and decisions affecting the future of their communities.

#### **Sustainability**

- Where communities respond positively to the challenges of climate change and energy use and seek new ways to provide services locally, reducing the need to travel.
- Where innovative design and construction is allied to the efficient/intelligent use of resources.
- That celebrates and secures its special cultural and environmental heritage for the benefit of future generations.
- That provides the means for people to travel about the District, when they need and want to, in the most sustainable way possible.
- That delivers high quality services, a choice of housing to meet everyone's needs, and innovative solutions to meet changing patterns of working and the promotion of sustainable development.

#### **Economy**

- Where ideas take shape through rising educational attainment and skills levels that create a strong and growing knowledge driven local economy.
- Where the special qualities of its natural and built environment are recognised, harnessed and developed to make a major contribution to a vibrant economic future in which culture, heritage and leisure play an important part.

#### **Community**

- With a strong sense of community in its towns and villages, and which encourages people to fulfill their potential.
- Where the best of its diversity and variety is recognised and harnessed to provide a safe, clean and high quality environment.

#### **Delivery**

- The Braintree District Local Strategic Partnership will work positively and creatively with its partner organisations and neighbours to deliver our Vision.

<b>Appendix 2</b> <b>Dates and types of consultation carried out</b>
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### Consultation Methods

The Statement of Community Involvement sets out how the community of Braintree District must be informed, involved and consulted on the preparation of the Local Development Framework documents. There is no equivalent document which sets out community involvement requirements for the Community Strategy although government guidance requires it to be based on community needs and aspirations.

The 'pre-production' consultation comprised a series of events and a questionnaire (sent to every household in the district). The timetable was as follows:

Activity	Date	Target Group
Members Seminar	01/06/06	District Councillors
Witham Area Seminar	08/06/06	Parish Councillors and Community / Voluntary / Special Interest Groups
Halstead Area Seminar	21/06/06	
Braintree Area Seminar	28/06/06	
Alec Hunter School	26/06/06	Special Interest Group (young people)
Tabor Science College	17/07/06	
Transport Partnership Board	29/06/06	Consultees (Partner Organisations)
Cultural Partnership Board	20/07/06	
Economic Development Partnership Board	10/07/06	Consultees (Partner Organisations), Businesses/ Developers and Agents
Agents & Developers Seminar	12/09/06	
Braintree Foyer workshop	11/09/06	Special Interest (disadvantaged)
Household Questionnaire	October	General Public
Local Strategic Partnership Executive meeting	08/11/06	Consultees (Partner Organisations)

A total of **1974** people responded to the 'pre-production' consultation; **1713** returned completed questionnaires and **263** attended the seminars and workshops. The timetable of events, target groups included, and the profile of participants demonstrate that the consultation methods have satisfied the requirements of the Statement of Community Involvement in respect of the Pre-Production stage (Stage A) of the Core Strategy.

An Issues and Options Document was produced in March 2007 and was available for comment between 19<sup>th</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> May 2007. This was followed by a PACT Assembly on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2007 to refine the vision for the district and explore spatial and community & social objectives.

<p><b>Appendix 3</b>  <b>Summary of the Results of Consultation for the</b>  <b>Community Strategy and the Local Development Framework</b></p>
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**Vision for the Future**

As part of the consultation exercises held between June and November 2006, participants were invited to vote for their top three priorities for the future of the District. The results were as follows:

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Votes</b>
Improve public transport	98
Increase energy efficiency	53
Improve leisure and recreation opportunities	49
Improve policing and community safety	46
Provide good quality affordable housing	42
Improve sports facilities	37
Improve training opportunities	34
Provide local employment opportunities	30
Provide services locally to reduce the need to travel	29
Improve educational facilities and skills levels	26
Support independent retailers and improve the variety of shops	23
Improve road infrastructure	21
Create an integrated, tolerant community	21
Preserve the landscape and green spaces	19
Create sustainable communities through sustainable design	18
Improve care for the elderly	17
Improve rail infrastructure	13
Provide a local hospital	12
Reduce waste and increase recycling	11
Build some small scale housing developments in smaller settlements	10
Provide car parking at stations and in town centres	9
Improve partnership working	9
Provide more varied employment opportunities	8
Provide an arts venue and more arts opportunities	7
Provide housing benefit for people 16-25 if in full time education	7
Preserve our heritage	7
Provide park and ride	7
Improve the cycle network	7
Create vibrant town and village centres	7
More autonomy/devolved responsibility/less govt legislation	7
Build more hotels	5
Legalised cannabis	5
Provide more jobs for under 14s	5
Provide support centres for young parents	5
Improve mobility for elderly around towns	5

The following is an extract from a report which was received and noted by the Local Development Framework Panel on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 2007. The full report can be accessed through the Council's website (Council and Democracy / Committees / Local Development Framework Panel / 25<sup>th</sup> July 2007 / Core Strategy Issues and Options Responses to Consultation whole report pdf).

## **'Background**

1. The Issues and Options Document was published for consultation on April 2007 for six-weeks, with the consultation period closing on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2007. Some 1174 representations were received, with 59.4% of responses being made electronically. A summary of the responses is attached at Appendix 1 to this report. The responses can be viewed in full on the Council's website via the following link: <http://consultation.limehouse.co.uk/braintree/drafts/5/index.html>

2. The main points emerging from the consultation are as follows:

### **Overall vision for the District**

Most support for "Where ideas take shape" mixed with "a focus on leisure, heritage and nature". Support for retaining elements of the current vision and for incorporating sustainable development, climate change, social, community and environmental issues

### **Settlement Strategy**

Most support for options 1 and 2 (existing commitments and urban concentration, also support for development in a the larger villages, some suggestions for development sites in smaller villages, mostly opposition to a new settlement although two major new settlement proposals suggested (to west of District on border with Uttlesford and to east of District on border with Colchester).

Generally a lack of support for new development to be located to assist with the provision of new infrastructure (e.g. Halstead By Pass).

For Braintree some support for development to the south-west and west of the town, in general a lack of support for development to the north-east of the town. For Halstead the majority of responses in favour of development within the existing built-up area with two responses suggesting urban extensions.

For Witham the views are evenly balanced on the different directions of growth for the town.

### **Affordable Housing**

A mixed response with some representations seeking stronger policies to ensure that affordable housing is maximised with others commenting that changes to policy such as lowering the site size threshold may not be realistic or viable.

Policies need to be based on an up to date strategic housing market assessment. Also a need to take account of individual circumstances of each site. Although there was a majority of responses in favour of not increasing the percentage requirement above 30% the East of England Plan has an aspiration to achieve 35%. Some support for a different threshold in rural areas. Also some support for commuted payments for affordable housing in certain circumstances.

Also support for retaining the current rural exceptions policy and for allocating specific sites for affordable housing.

Mainly opposition to allocating greenfield sites in urban areas with a much higher percentage of affordable housing.

### **Gypsies and Travellers**

Core Strategy should set out transitional/interim measures to make provision for immediate and urgent needs. It should set out the criteria for the location of sites to guide the allocation of sites.

There should be consultation with the gypsy and traveller community.

Criteria for sites should enable sites to be available, suitable and achievable.

### **Economic Development**

Support for identification of a new strategic employment area or business park. Support both for retention of existing employment areas and for the use of existing used or vacant employment sites for other uses.

The results of the employment land review should be used to assess the suitability of employment sites for other uses.

Support for Option 62 to encourage the use of suitable unused and underused farm buildings for employment subject to the capacity of local infrastructure. Also support for the allocation of additional land in rural areas for employment.

### **Transport**

The Core Strategy, Development Control and other DPD policies are important in promoting public transport, cycling and walking. Developers should promote sustainable transport through contributions and design.

Road improvements to the A12, A120, Galleys Corner and the construction of the Halstead by pass are considered as a priority in the District.

The bus and rail services from Braintree to surrounding rural areas and to places outside the District should be improved.

Support for Option 66 as there is a need for additional car parking in town centres and railway stations at Witham, Kelvedon and Hatfield Peverel.

The District should take measures to support inter-urban and rural bus services to Stansted Airport.

### **Town Centres and Retailing**

Support for Option 68 to contain Braintree town centre within its existing boundaries to promote investment and to preserve the historic centre.

An expansion of Braintree Freeport and Braintree Retail Park would need an assessment to determine the impact on the town centre vitality and viability.

Support for Option 72 to contain Halstead town centre within its existing boundaries with a retail policy to protect existing floorspace and core shopping areas. Halstead has limited capacity for convenience and comparison goods floorspace, however it is argued that Land East of High Street should be promoted for comparison goods.

Support for Option 76 to contain Witham town centre within its existing boundaries with the comprehensive redevelopment of Newland Precinct.

The importance of villages and local centres should have been considered in the Issues and Options.

### **Carbon Emissions and Renewable Energy**

Support for Option 79 to increase the proportion of buildings needs to be met by low carbon and renewable sources of energy to 15% as this would be consistent with Policy ENG1 of the Proposed Changes to the Draft East of England Regional Plan. However, the practicalities of any renewable energy options and the financial / cost implications of increasing them should be considered. The 'Code for Sustainable Homes' and building regulations can assist in achieving Carbon Neutrality

### **Social, Health and Community Issues**

Broad support was expressed for the continued provision of health care facilities within the District to reduce the need for people to travel.

Policing was also raised as an issue with people wanting to see more police especially in rural areas to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Also the provision of schooling, education and sports were highlighted as important

### **Implementation**

There is general support for the phasing of housing development to enable infrastructure improvements to keep pace, but this could be an issue as housing targets are now minimum rather than maximum.

Also there is support for standard charges to provide infrastructure as long as there is evidence of need.

Any policy on charges should be separate from the Core Strategy

### **Other matters**

Other issues and options suggested by respondents include development in rural areas to support service, the need for landscape protection, transport studies, environmental issues, the issue of development in neighbouring districts, protection of the historic environment and the need for an up to date housing needs survey.'

**APPENDIX 4 - THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (PACT)  
STRUCTURE - NOVEMBER 2007 (UNDER REVIEW)**



