

Report to Council

Braintree District Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan

Item 7(i)

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Background Papers: Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan.

Financial Implications: Existing BDC staff and resources, primarily the Enterprise and the Local Development Framework teams, plus external funding: Essex LAA Performance Reward Grant (2009 – 2011): £95,000 to meet new business registrations target and £50,000 to contribute to improving basic skills and take up of Apprenticeships in the District; and utilising Growth Area Funding to allow the Council to purchase land for employment purposes.

Equalities Implications: Equalities issues are addressed in the body of the Economic Development Strategy document.

Legal Implications: None.

Options: None.

Risks:

1. The recession could be a disincentive for new business creation and inward investment.
2. Lack of partner engagement could prevent the ambitions of the Action Plan being delivered.
3. Partners could lack resource to deliver against the Action Plan.
4. The proposal for upper tier authorities to produce economic assessments and the pooling across Essex of Local Authority Business Growth Incentive (LABGI) awards could affect the delivery of the District's own economic strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

1. The economic well being of the District is now a major priority for the District Council. Members have already taken positive steps to support local businesses to help address the current economic crisis. Previous Cabinet reports have highlighted the extensive programme of work which has already been undertaken and further reports will be presented to Council as projects progress. A schedule of actions and initiatives which partners and stakeholders are now working on will support the Council in achieving its long term economic ambitions for the District.
2. Members have already agreed and actioned a number of short term measures to support businesses during the current economic recession. These include enabling business rates to be paid over 12 months and not 10 months as present, providing business rates 'holiday period' opportunities for businesses experiencing short term cash flow difficulties, and additional financial support for Business Development Services Ltd., to provide help and advice to businesses in the district and to support new business registrations.
3. An emerging consensus view from partners and stakeholders, influenced greatly by local business leaders is that the District Council needs to provide strong leadership and give a clear message that the Council has an appetite for change and is prepared to put out the "welcome mat" to new investors and to support existing and start-up businesses.
4. This Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan will enable the Council to play a key role in addressing significant challenges being presented by the current economic downturn.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the District's Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan be adopted.

Background:

1. Since October 2008, when work on the new Economic Development Strategy commenced, the economic downturn has turned into a full-blown recession and challenging housing growth targets up to 2031 have been suggested for the District in studies that are contributing to the Review of the East of England Plan. Work on the Strategy has been coloured by these events and the Strategy presented for endorsement clearly identifies both short-term measures recently initiated by the Council and other public agencies to support businesses and communities through the recession, and longer-term aspirations for managing economic growth in the Braintree District. The Council held an economic summit in June 2009 which gave business leaders and stakeholders the opportunity to consider and comment on the impact of the recession on businesses and the local economy.
6. Other measures being developed which will address the downturn in trade, include working more closely with our Town Centre Strategy Groups to identify ways of promoting our town centres to improve retail confidence and footfall, environmental improvements to our town centres, improving signage and publicity for local events, and promoting the District by supporting regional and national film and broadcast opportunities. Officers are also investigating the potential for a dedicated business related web microsite, with descriptions/video clips of employment land with commercial development potential and video testimonials from local business leaders. Further reports will be presented to Members for consideration.
2. The Economic Development Strategy sets out a shared vision for the way that local government and other public and voluntary organisations will support potential entrepreneurs, employers and those employed or seeking jobs: *“An environment within which community leadership and collaboration with partners and stakeholders generates and supports employment growth and creates conditions for economic prosperity”*.
3. The Strategy represents the views and ideas of over sixty organisations and individuals and will also deliver the economic priorities in *‘One District, One Vision*. The Strategy and associated Action Plan have strong linkages with targets associated with the Council’s Corporate Action Plan and the Local Area Agreement 2, and will be a key delivery mechanism for the Council.
4. The economic development strategy has five strategic priorities which are detailed in the Strategy document:
 - Priority 1: Location, Infrastructure and Land**
 - Priority 2: Business Creation and Survival**
 - Priority 3: Business Growth and Innovation**
 - Priority 4: Inward Investment and International Trade**
 - Priority 5: Workforce Development and Employment**
5. Five Task & Finish Groups, led by prominent business people and stakeholders met twice in December 2008 and January 2009 to generate ideas on what needed to be done to turn each of the priorities into concrete, practical actions. These ideas have formed the basis of a detailed Action Plan.
7. The Economic Development and Transportation Partnership Board considered the draft economic development strategy and action plan in February 2009 and all Local Committees were consulted in March 2009. (Braintree 10th March 2009, Halstead 18th March 2009 and Witham 24th March 2009). Copies of the document, along with invitations to comment, were also sent to EERA, EEDA, ECC and all neighbouring local authorities.
8. Comments and observations from those Committees and organisations, along with those offered by other consultees and stakeholders have been considered by Cllr Nigel Harley, Cabinet Member for Enterprise & Culture, and addressed in the revised document which is now being presented for approval.