Update on progress towards an Integrated County Strategy for Greater Essex

Corporate Priority: Business is encouraged and the local economy prospers
Housing and transport meet local needs

Portfolio area: Enterprise

Report presented by: Zoe Myddelton, Regeneration and Economic Development Officer

Report prepared by: Zoe Myddelton, Regeneration and Economic Development Officer

Background Papers:

Public Report

Options:
To note progress towards developing an Integrated Spatial Planning and Investment Strategy for Essex

Key Decision: NO

Executive Summary:

The Integrated County Strategy (ICS) is a Spatial planning and Investment strategy for Essex. It has been prepared on behalf of the Essex Chief Executives Association.

The ICS provides the connection between national, regional and local policy, it identifies existing strengths and potential, and considers how investment in the County can be used to improve the area for residents and make the area a more attractive location for businesses.

The Integrated County Strategy will be used at District, Sub-Regional and County level as a marketing tool to attract funding and investment into the area. It has been noted that this is an important tool for investment into Essex, in terms of the LEP and other available funding.

This ICS document forms the basis of future work in Essex, it will be used to inform other strategies in the County and sub-regions and the development of the LEP for Essex, Kent and East Sussex.

Phase 1 of the ICS has been completed, The Strategic Focus, Priority Themes and Priority Investments for Essex (3 levels) are articulated in one document. The Strategic Focus covers three areas that will bring about the maximum return on investment and greatest benefits for Essex:

- Key towns;
- Low carbon energy; and
• Thames Gateway South Essex.

The ICS then provides a range of Priority Themes and investments that are to be considered within the Strategic Focus of the document.

Phase 2 of the ICS will begin in April, this will bring together the sub-regional dimension and focus on identifying the investment required, delivery, implementation, resources and timeframes. This will be lead by Haven Gateway from a Braintree perspective.

The majority of authorities in Essex have accepted the Phase 1 document and it has been adopted by ECC, despite this, Braintree has outlined areas of concern to ECC on the content as the strategy has a strong focus on activity to the south of the County.

There are still major benefits and outputs that can be achieved through the ICS and it is important for Braintree to engage fully in phase 2, where key funding opportunities and details of delivery will be established for this wider investment and spatial plan for Greater Essex.

In the interest of Braintree benefitting from the next phase of the ICS and in helping to prepare this document, it is recommended that Braintree DC agree with the ICS document with the caveat that the comments prepared and sent to ECC be noted and incorporated where possible.

This decision will be taken by members at the next Cabinet meeting on 28th March 2011. Notes and comments have been prepared for ECC to consider and these will be sent following the cabinet meeting.

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Background to the ICS

The Integrated County Strategy is a document that has been prepared on behalf of the Essex Chief Executives Association. The ECEA identified in December 2009 a need to articulate economic, spatial and regeneration priorities across the County in one document as a result of increasingly challenging local government circumstances. It was thought that:

- It was to Greater Essex’s material disadvantage not to have such a body of work in place; and
- Political and legislative changes signalled that an ICS (or such an approach) would equip the County to best take advantage of a new operating environment.

The ICS provides the connection between national and local policy, it identifies existing strengths, potential, and considers how key assets in the County can be used to improve the area for residents and make the area a more attractive location for businesses.

Within the context of public spending cuts and reduced public intervention, the ICS aims to identify the key strategic projects which will provide the maximum return on investment and greatest economic benefits.

Throughout 2010 a series of officer workshops have taken place attended by all local authorities in Greater Essex (including unitary authorities) to discuss and shape future investment priorities. From a Braintree perspective these were attended by senior officers who engaged in discussions and influenced the debate from a Heart of Essex perspective.

Since the workshop events the ECEA sub-group further refined the priorities and a team at ECC drafted the ICS documentation in liaison with the ECEA sub-group.

The ICS summary document outlines the Strategic Focus, Priority Themes and Priority Investments for Essex (3 levels) The Strategic Focus is articulated in three areas that will bring about the maximum return on investment and greatest benefits for Essex:

- Key towns;  
- Low carbon energy; and  
- Thames Gateway South Essex.

The ICS then provides a range of Priority Themes and investments that should be considered within the Strategic Focus of the document.

As this strategy is operating at a unique level between national and local policy it is focused on those investments which can generate the best return for Greater Essex, it is recognised that this will inevitably lead to some priorities which are key for specific geographical areas of Greater Essex, not being represented as a key strategic focus for the ICS. The nature of the ICS is to identify the priority investments and not to distribute investment based on geographical equality, in times of austerity it is vital to focus on key themes to drive forward investment into the County rather than try and levy priority to all areas.
The ICS provides a strategy for more localised delivery through the ‘Priority Themes and Investments’ which will apply to many areas, they are specific enough to guide investment but general enough to have wide applicability across the County.

From a Braintree perspective, these would include:

**Town Centres**
Deliver Regeneration of town centres in large urban areas and important towns

**Sustainable Growth**
Create a balanced pattern of development which promotes housing choice, provides affordable housing, and ensures housing is matched with jobs and services with appropriate transport provision to create prosperous places.

**Sustainable Connectivity**
Improve Connectivity within and between our main towns to support economic growth (this includes broadband provision).

The next steps for the ICS is Stage 2, this will see an investment programme being established and will identify key asks of Government. Stage 2 looks to bring together the sub-regional dimension and focus on identifying the investment required, delivery, implementation, resources and timeframes. This will be lead by Haven Gateway from a Braintree perspective.

As this document has been through the cabinet approval process at ECC and accepted by the ECEA group it would not be feasible to make significant changes to key elements of the document, the Strategic Focus and Priority Themes.

In the interest of Braintree benefitting from the next phase of the ICS and in helping to prepare this document which will be used as a basis for future activity and to attract funding into the county, it is recommended that Braintree DC agree with the ICS document with the caveat that the comments prepared and sent to ECC be noted and incorporated where possible.

Zoe Myddelton
Regeneration and Economic Development Officer
24th March 2011