Minutes
Economic Development and Transportation Partnership Board
27th April 2009

Present
Jim Addison                              Colchester Institute
Brenda Baker                               Braintree Chamber of Trade
Lyndsay Baxter                             Adult Community Learning
Robert Bucknell (until 6.50pm)            W P Bucknell & Son
Sally Carpenter  (from 6.08pm)            Client Act
Ian Cass                                    FSB & Witham Chamber of Trade
Councillor John Collar                     Braintree District Council
Tony Comber                                Braintree Enterprise Centre
Richard Cook                               P C D L Task Group Chairman
Neil Coulton                               Green Cartridges Ltd
Brian Cutmore (Chairman)                  Business Council
Paul Evans                                  FSB & Peke Services Ltd
Russell Everard                            Braintree District Council
Councillor Michael Gage                    Braintree District Council
Dave Gronland                              Micromech
Liz Hand                                    Jobcentre Plus
Councillor Nigel Harley (from 6.47pm)     Braintree District Council
Tony Hayward (until 7.05pm)               Braintree Association of Local Councils
Keith Hughes                               Business Link
Stephen Kirby                              Halstead Chamber of Trade
Councillor David Mann (until 7.18pm)      Braintree District Council
Councillor Nigel McCrea (from 6.47-7.45pm) Braintree District Council
Paul Munson                                 Braintree District Council
Linda Riley                                 Voluntary Sector Training
Mark Sexton                                Essex Education Business Partnership
Chris Trim                                  Braintree District Council
Councillor Tim Wilkinson (from 6.47pm)    Braintree District Council

Apologies for absence were received from Peter Crofts (BDC), Chris Hayward (BDS), Robbie Jamieson (Mid Essex Highways, Essex County Council), John O’Shea (Freeport), and Liz Parkin (Essex County Council).

Action by
1  APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

DECISION: That Mr B A Cutmore be appointed Chairman of the Economic Development & Transportation Partnership Board for the 2009/10 Civic Year.

2  APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

DECISION: That Councillor N R H O Harley be appointed Vice Chairman of the Economic Development & Transportation Partnership Board for the 2009/10 Civic Year.

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MINUTES

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development and Transportation Partnership Board held on 9th February 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to Minute 19 Terms of Reference being amended to record that Linda Riley would represent the Partnership Board on the Third Sector Partnership Board.

MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman stated that, with regard to Minute 21 the Minister had approved the Proposed Merger of Braintree College and Colchester Institute and is proceeding to the consultation (‘due diligence’) stage.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Declarations of Interest were made:-

- Brian Cutmore and Dave Gronland both declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 16 - Proposed Merger of Braintree College and Colchester Institute, as being a Governor of Braintree College.
- Jim Addison declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 16 – Proposed Merger of Braintree College and Colchester Institute, as being a Senior Manager at Colchester Institute.
- Brenda Baker declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 9 – Retail Subsidy Proposal, as being the Centre Manager of George Yard, the proposer of the scheme. Mrs Baker remained in the meeting for the presentation of this item to provide further details and to answer questions. Mrs Baker withdrew from the meeting to allow final discussion by Members and for the decision to be taken.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct all the above Members left the meeting when their item was discussed (unless stated otherwise) and did not take part in the decision thereon.

CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

INFORMATION: The Chairman reported that at the Business Forum on 25th February 2009 (arranged by the Business Council) the attendance level was low. At the Business Council meeting on 23rd March 2009 it was agreed that the format of the Business Forum is to be looked at and refreshed to attract participation. They had also made comment on the Economic Development Strategy (an agenda item later in this meeting).

TERMS OF REFERENCE

INFORMATION: Mr R Everard, Head of Enterprise, Culture & Leisure, stated that minor adjustments to the proposed Terms of Reference had been made, regarding the addition of Braintree Enterprise Acorn Units (BEAU), the removal of SEETEC, and the retention of the Sub Regional Partnership.

Members had no further comments to the Terms of Reference for the Partnership Board, and it was agreed to formally approve the Terms of Reference at the next meeting on 13th July 2009.

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DECISION: That the draft Terms of Reference of the Economic Development and Transportation Partnership Board be endorsed.

RETAIL SUBSIDY PROPOSAL

INFORMATION: Mr C Trim, District Promotions Manager, stated that the Council had received a proposal for financial support for new and growing businesses. The proposal from the Centre Manager of George Yard Shopping Precinct, Braintree and the Newlands Shopping Centre in Witham was as commercial landlord and requested financial support to enable new small retailers to reoccupy empty retail units in the town centres of the district, as part of an introductory scheme, and a financial contribution equivalent to National Domestic Rates (NDR) was requested. This could be up to a potential £5,000 per unit.

The businesses would receive training in setting up at minimum cost, and the arrangement is conditional upon the businesses undertaking structured training and business guidance through Business Development Services (BDS). The initiative, entitled Small Traders Encouragement Project (STEP) was further explained, including the aspect of business rates.

During the discussion the following was raised and noted:
- that Brenda Baker (Centre Manager) and Chris Hayward (BDS) will decide which applications are accepted
- the conflict of interest and competition
- that new business will extend the range of options to shoppers
- the District Council will need to determine how many units in Braintree and Witham can be used for this initiative
- the chance to use the STEP method for manufacturing companies on industrial estates, and extend support to the commercial sector
- a few other Local Authorities are considering the STEP initiative
- minimum of a six month licence, and the licence issue and security of tenure
- offers of advice, i.e. on shop fitting
- other landlords may have a different opinion, unless the scheme is district wide
- the views of this Board, Local Committees and local landlords and businesses to be taken into account
- this model providing a competitive edge by being in a prime location
- the perception to other parties, i.e. the local tax payer

It was clarified that this is a pilot proposal for the George Yard precinct and the Newlands Centre and comprise of a maximum of 3 -4 units, and that the landlord will not benefit directly from this – with help focused on business start up.

Mrs Baker withdrew from the meeting at this stage (6.35pm) to allow Members to further consider the options.

Members took into further consideration
- the ‘holiday’ periods already offered by the Council to businesses on paying their NDR, and to renegotiate other terms of payment
- the view and involvement of BDS, and if the pilot scheme is successful the potential to roll-out across the district
- the opportunity to open to other sectors, apart from retail
- that the District Council determines the potential cost
- the introduction of a ‘ramp’ mechanism to help on rent and start up costs

In conclusion, Members stated that the proposal is not fundamentally different to previous ideas, and provides another type of approach for the Council support to start up businesses. With the involvement of BDS as a condition of entry, and the opportunity of specialist advice there, the pilot project was supported.
DECISION: That the above views of the Partnership Board be noted.

Mrs Baker returned to the meeting, and as three Councillors had recently arrived, introductions were made of all members.

9 GROWTH AREA FUNDING

INFORMATION: Paul Munson, Head of District Development, provided a verbal update on the projects being funded through Growth Area funding. An update was provided on those with a transport element

- Foot/cycle bridge at Freeport, Braintree. The funding package is in place and Network Rail and Essex County Council (ECC) are leading on this. Detailed design work is currently being undertaken and a planning application awaited. Work is due to commence this year.
- The extension to the footbridge at Witham Station. A funding package of £2m has been agreed, and Network Rail and ECC are leading on this. Work is anticipated to start in 2010.
- The Braintree Rail Study (improvements to Braintree branchline). A meeting had been held between Network Rail and National Express (East Anglia), and signs are positive with improvements and previous work being looked at. Network Rail are producing a Stage 1 report, comprising of a feasibility study, and once these are available Network Rail will be invited to a Partnership Board meeting.

DECISION: That the verbal report be noted.

10 TEN-T – a Policy Review – Towards a better integrated Trans European Transport Network at the Service of the Common Transport Policy

INFORMATION: Mr Munson stated that the European Commission had published a green paper on the above topic and the District Council had been contacted by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) to support their comments on the Policy. The A120 trunk road is currently part of the Network, and it was requested that the European Commission recognise this, and supply appropriate funding. It was noted that EERA’s comments do reflect those of the District Council on the importance of the A120.

Members were advised that EERA are requesting a list of major priorities – gateways to ports and airports, and their interland connections.

DECISION: That the response of EERA be endorsed.

11 SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO EMPLOYERS AND LEARNERS IN THE FE SECTOR

INFORMATION: Jim Addison, Director of Development & Operations at Colchester Institute, gave a presentation on understanding the package of support available in the Further Education (FE) sector, and stated the FE works in partnership and refers to the post compulsory sector of education, i.e. post secondary school, and not university. The Institute can provide support to employers and to individual learners that is ‘means tested, both locally and nationally. The availability of financial support was advised, and the resources for learners and employers, including learning in the workplace. Other areas comprise of a skills audit of staff, the element of funding to support employers in training initiatives, and the offer of ‘bespoke’ courses.

Members were requested to contact Mr Addison for further information.
WITHAM INDUSTRIAL WATCH BIDS PROPOSAL

INFORMATION: Sally Carpenter of Witham Industrial Watch (WIW), advised that the recent grant had assisted the launch of the vote for Business Improvement District (BID) status. Information is being collated for the proposal document and this will soon be delivered to each business on the industrial estates in readiness for the vote between 1st and 30th July. The BIDs proposal will raise the reputation of the industrial estates, bring better security, and help to attract new business to empty sites.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Board wished the WIW good luck with the vote.

BRAINTREE DISTRICT SKILLS PARTNERSHIP TASK GROUP

INFORMATION: Richard Cook, Chairman of the Braintree District Skills Partnership Task & Finish Group, referred to the Action Plan and meeting notes received at the last meeting (Minute 25 refers), and presented the recommendations contained in the report. Thanks were extended to the Task & Finish Group members, and other persons involved in providing background material, including support from Essex County Council and the adult learning centre.

Lyndsay Baxter of Adult Community Learning, advised that they are looking to publish a directory of all learning providers in the district that would be beneficial to the recommendations.

Members were advised of the poor ‘take-up’ to the amount of learning opportunities or lack of provision and it was noted that Jobcentre plus hold links to the adult career service and advice line to courses nationally; and that all new claimants are referred to career guidance/guidance line. Furthermore, it was reported that Braintree, Colchester and Tendring local authorities have established a consortium to provide a ‘one stop shop’ to avoid duplication of material, although this may be focused towards the employer, and apprenticeships and ‘train to gain’ schemes.

DECISION: That the five recommendations contained in the report be endorsed, and are received at the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2009-2011

INFORMATION: Councillor Nigel Harley, Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Culture & Leisure, presented the Strategy and stated that measures had been introduced to help the community in the short term and current economic climate. The Strategy spans 2009-2011 and comprise of five Strategic Priorities; and with the accompanying Action Plan will be received at the Cabinet meeting on 11th May 2009, and at Council in June.

Members were informed that progress on the Action Plan will be reported to the Partnership Board, and Essex County Council had provided an additional staff resource on three days at Braintree and two days at ECC basis to implement the Plan.


PROPOSED MERGER OF BRAINTREE COLLEGE AND COLCHESTER INSTITUTE

INFORMATION: Brian Cutmore introduced the consultation document on the proposed merger and provided some background information, and drew Members attention to the Response Proforma on Pages 22-24 of the report. Mr Addison stated that Colchester Institute focuses on local education and this will be enhanced and

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maintained, including involvement with the Sixth Form at Notley High School to provide a clear, educational, academic route.

At this point, Messrs Addison, Cutmore and Gronland withdrew from the meeting to allow Members to deliberate the proposals.

Members referred to the enhanced learning prospects, the positive stance of the Merger document and queried where the management of the joint initiative would be and its composition, whether all courses would be available on both campuses and the travel implications for students. The overall response of Members was positive, and the preferred name for the local facility was Braintree District College.

Messrs Addison, Cutmore and Gronland were invited to rejoin the meeting.

Mr Cutmore (current Chairman of the Governors at Braintree College) advised on the composition of the Joint Board comprising five Members and one staff member transferring to the Institute Corporation Board (with Tendring) and that Colchester Institute welcomes local people with knowledge. The other concerns were addressed.

Members noted that consultation with the three Local Committees will be part of the District Council’s response, and Councillor Harley will provide a decision on the feedback on the proposed merger and respond by 26th May 2009.

16 LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

INFORMATION: The Chairman, as representative on the Steering Group of the LSP, reported that the LSP’s are experiencing a change of format with the Executive taking a more strategic emphasis. The involvement of outside organisations is being reviewed and the role of partnership working. Mr Cutmore advised a further report would be made to the next Partnership Board meeting.

17 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

INFORMATION: It was noted that the next meeting of the Economic Development and Transportation Partnership Board would be held on 13th July 2009 at Causeway House, Braintree starting at 6.00pm. Future meetings will be held on 19th October 2009 and 25th January 2010 at Causeway House, Braintree starting at 6.00pm.

The next meeting of the Business Council is on Monday 18th May 2009 at 6.00pm, at The Corner House, Braintree.

18 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Unemployment figures. Liz Hand of Jobcentre plus circulated data on claimants on Jobseekers Allowance, Benefit Claimants, Total Claimant Count for Braintree and the Claimant Count by occupation, plus the Vacancies – notified by occupation. Additional verbal information was presented with each data sheet.

The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and closed at 8.15pm.

B A CUTMORE
(Chairman)

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