The future of the local economy: facing up to our challenges.

A shared vision for the economic development of Braintree District
Contents

Introduction

Our Ambitions, by Nigel Harley, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Enterprise, Culture & Leisure, Braintree District Council

Our Shared Vision, by Brian Cutmore, Chairman of the Braintree District Economic Development & Transportation Partnership Board

National, Regional and Local Context

Challenges and Opportunities

Strategic Priorities

Objectives and Key Tasks

Delivering the Vision

Monitoring and Review

Appendices


Appendix 2: Economic Development Strategy Evidence Base

Appendix 3: Analysis of Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats

Appendix 4: Stakeholder and Community Engagement Process.

Appendix 5: Glossary of Terms
Introduction

This economic development strategy and action plan has been developed to achieve a co-ordinated approach between existing regional and county economic strategies and the needs of Braintree District. The outcome of this strategy is a set of interventions together with the required resources which will drive the work of Braintree District Council and the Braintree District Economic Development and Transportation Partnership Board.

The strategy was commissioned by the District Council and endorsed by the Economic Development and Transportation Partnership Board in October 2008. It is the product of the efforts of over sixty organisations and individuals who have contributed their considerable energy and unique insights to create a picture of how the local economy functions currently and how it could be made more successful by more targeted and co-ordinated public interventions. Local businesses have grasped the opportunity to shape the strategy despite having other preoccupations during the current economic downturn and will continue to be encouraged to participate in reviewing the performance of the action plan.

The production of the economic development strategy has coincided with the public consultation period for the Braintree District ‘One District, One Voice’ draft strategy. This comprises two elements: the ‘Sustainable Community Strategy’ which sets out the social, economic and environmental priorities for people and communities in the District for the time between now and 2025; and, the ‘Core Strategy’ which shows locations where housing, employment and other types of development could take place in the District and the policies which will underpin development within the District and make sure that it takes place in the best possible and most sustainable way. Delivery of the economic priorities in ‘One District, One Vision’ will be carried out through this Economic Development Strategy and action plan.

Since the commissioning of the strategy, 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. The economic development strategy has been coloured by these events and includes both short-term measures initiated by the District Council and other public agencies to help businesses and communities to thrive through the recession and longer-term aspirations for managing economic growth, post recession.

The District Council is proposing to hold an economic summit in the summer 2009 to consider the impact of the recession upon businesses and the local economy and has put in place a package of actions to support businesses and communities. These are included in the economic development strategy action plan (see Appendix 4).
Our Ambitions, by Nigel Harley, Deputy Leader, Braintree District Council

Recent dramatic shifts in the global financial landscape have forced us all to reconsider the way that we create and distribute wealth whilst maintaining a good quality of life for everyone. It is important not to feel paralysed by the enormity of this challenge. Every body needs to play their part in responding positively to the opportunities that this break with the accepted way of managing our economy could bring about. In the Autumn of 2008, Braintree District Council, in conjunction with the LSP, commissioned the production of an economic development strategy to encourage local businesses and the wider community to have their say on how public resources should be used to nurture new businesses, support existing companies to survive and prosper and equip our residents with the education and skills needed to compete for jobs.

Also at the end of last year, the ‘One District – One Vision’ strategy for people and places in Braintree District in 2025 was produced for public consultation by the Council and the LSP. Although this strategy covers a longer time period, it will be informed by the priorities identified in the economic development strategy whilst at the same time it will provide a development framework for the delivery of the economic development action plans.

The economy of the District is characterised by a high proportion of small and micro businesses, a traditionally strong manufacturing base, large modern agricultural holdings, a high proportion of residents who commute out of the District, for service sector jobs, particularly in the financial services sector and several small/medium sized towns that require investment to develop their retail and commercial potential. More information on the District’s economy can be found in the ‘Economic Facts & Figures’ section of the Evidence Base in Appendix 2.

Clearly the area administered by the District Council is not an island; the District is at cross-roads geographically, surrounded by designated and potential economic growth areas associated with Cambridge, Harlow, Stansted Airport, Chelmsford and Colchester. The local government boundaries that established the District Council in 1974 do not necessarily reflect or influence the way that people decide to establish businesses, find work, live, shop or seek training. It is therefore essential that the District Council develops good working relationships with surrounding Districts and Essex County Council and increasingly, with emerging and established sub-regional economic partnerships, such as the Haven Gateway Partnership which focuses on the expanding international ports at Harwich, Felixstowe and Ipswich and securing improvements to the transport corridors that serve them and the London Arc which encompasses the growth centres of Harlow and Chelmsford.

Braintree District Council recognises that it has an important role to play in orchestrating economic development initiatives and is committed to “raising its game” by focusing on the needs of employers and their workforces and capitalising on the major economic drivers such as the expanding international gateways at Stansted and Harwich/Felixstowe. The Council’s own Corporate Strategy (2008-2012) is based on what local people have told us are their priorities. In relation to economic development these include regenerating our town centres, improving skills levels, providing opportunities for long-term inward investment and lobbying to secure key infrastructure improvements in the District.

To achieve our new shared vision it is imperative to decide on the positioning of the District in relation to the surrounding growth areas to ensure that we are not marginalised. Other prerequisites to effect a step change are the introduction of measures to make demonstrable improvements in skills attainment; the allocation of appropriate employment sites; more intensive one to one help to small businesses to ensure their survival; encouragement of further farm diversification and rural businesses; support for the expansion of tourist accommodation to service visitors to London 2012 and major attractions such as Great Leights Racecourse and Unex Towerlands; more effective town centre management; congestion busting initiatives and increased use of public transport for travel to work journeys.
Our Shared Vision, by Brian Cutmore, Chairman of the Braintree District Economic Development & Transportation Partnership Board

Achieving a shared vision for the way that local government and other public and voluntary organisations can support potential entrepreneurs, employers and those employed or seeking jobs to succeed is challenging. The Braintree District Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), which represents a wide slice of the community, has given its Economic Development & Transportation Partnership Board a strategic role in engaging business people and others with a stake in the success of the local economy to agree how they would wish the District’s economy to develop by drawing up an Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan.

As a starting point to shape this new strategy, the LSP have an agreed overall Vision for the District for the period 2008 – 2025 as follows:

‘To improve, promote and support the well-being of people and communities in the Braintree District – ensuring that local needs are met and are balanced against our duty to protect the District’s special environmental qualities – now and for future generations’.

The associated Aims/Themes are to:
* To create a clean and green environment
* To achieve a prosperous local economy
* To enable everyone to enjoy a safe and healthy lifestyle.

The ‘One District – One Vision’ strategy for people and places in Braintree District in 2025 produced for consultation by the LSP and District Council at the end of 2008, is proposing an associated vision for future planning and development in the District. This is called the ‘spatial vision’:

‘To shape and develop the future of the Braintree District, with our partners and residents, by maintaining, improving and protecting our historic towns, villages and attractive countryside, and by harnessing economic innovation to create self-supporting, sustainable communities which are accessible, safe, healthy, prosperous and desirable places in which to live and work’.

One of the key objectives to achieving this spatial vision is:

‘To support and provide for the required growth and diversity of the District’s economy both at the main towns and in rural areas, in ways which are compatible with environmental objectives, deliver increased prosperity for the whole community, and encourage people to live and work locally’.

The ‘One District, One Vision’ proposes two Community Priorities for the theme “to achieve a prosperous local economy” as follows:
* To increase basic skills levels and vocational training opportunities in the District;
* To increase opportunities for long-term inward business investment in the District.

These Community Priorities were selected based on the results of the ‘evidence base’ for the theme – particularly in relation to the skills base in the District, out-commuting and the lack of high-skilled employment opportunities. This was reinforced by the results of the “Issues and Options” consultation; improving training opportunities (7th), providing local employment opportunities (8th) and improving educational facilities and skills levels (10th) all featured in the top ten priorities for the District.

In 2006, Cambridge Econometrics produced “Braintree District Futures” for the District Council which recommended three alternative visions:

Vision One, “Business as usual”, leading to Braintree becoming more of a ‘dormitory’ District;
Vision Two, “Providing a focus on leisure heritage and nature”, improving the retail and recreational offer of the District;
Vision Three, “Where ideas take shape”, leading to the District being regarded as a key part of the region’s knowledge and innovation economy.
“Business as usual” would not achieve the challenging jobs target set out in the East of England Plan and would not fit the ambitions for change expressed by the LSP and the District Council. A combination of Visions 2 and 3 have found more favour locally and have informed the ‘One District – One Vision’ strategy. The implications of these visions were tested during November 2008 – January 2009 in a series of workshop and group sessions involving local employers and representatives from the public, education and voluntary sectors.

An emerging consensus view from partners and stakeholders, influenced greatly by business people is that the District Council needs to provide strong leadership and give a clear message that it 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. We all need to be committed to working collaboratively towards an economy which is dynamic, internationally competitive and inclusive.

**A Shared Vision for the Local Economy**

An environment within which community leadership and collaboration with partners and stakeholders generates and supports employment growth and creates conditions for economic prosperity.

The economic development strategy sets out our priorities and how they will be delivered and monitored through the action plan to make a real difference to Braintree District’s future prosperity. *The action plan is printed in full in Appendix 1.*
National, Regional and Local Context

An economic development strategy for Braintree District has to fit with, and contribute to, the achievement of national and regional policies and priorities, the delivery of the economic targets in the Local Area Agreement for Essex (2008-2011) and the ‘One District, One Vision’ strategy prepared jointly by Braintree District Council and the Braintree District LSP.

National context

The Government’s key policies for economic development aim to:

- raise the productivity of the UK economy;
- maximise job opportunities for all;
- improve the economic performance of all English Regions and reduce the gap in economic growth rates between regions;
- deliver sustainable development;
- build prosperous communities by improving the economic performance of cities, regions and local areas.

Through its Business Support Simplification Programme, the Government is streamlining thousands of public funded support products into a package of 30 products and services with a common look and feel that can be accessed via Business Link. Products will help businesses with common problems such as starting, growing, innovation, finance, skills and the environment. They are expected to be in place by March 2009 so it is important that this national approach to rationalising business support services and their delivery through a regionally based Business Link gives due acknowledgement to local aspirations to provide one to one tailored solutions for entrepreneurs and small businesses through Braintree District’s Business Development Services.

This appetite for streamlining national services is also extending to the integration of skills and employment initiatives. The Learning & Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus are introducing joint commissioning of services for employers wishing to upskill their workforce and take on apprentices and for individuals seeking work, training or work based learning. At the same time, there will also be a shift to local commissioning to improve understanding of employers’ needs.

Representatives from the regionally based Business Link East, Learning & Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus are members of the Braintree District Economic Development & Transportation Partnership Board so there should be potential for partners in the District to influence the delivery of these national services to suit local needs.

Regional context

‘The Regional Economic Strategy 2008 – 31’ (RES) sets out the vision for the economic development of the East of England and a series of priorities and actions to enable the region to realise that vision. Linked to the strategy are the Regional Spatial Strategy: ‘East of England Plan’, which establishes land use, and the Regional Transport Plan. Following the publication of the Government’s ‘Sub National Review of Economic Development’ the three plans will in the future be incorporated into one Regional Strategy.

The RES acknowledges that the prosperity of the East of England and even more so, Essex and Braintree District is closely tied to the success of London, the world’s leading financial centre. This is most obvious in the high levels of people commuting into London and the increase in the number of people moving from London to live in the East of England. Despite the urbanising influence of the Capital, around 31 per cent of the region’s population live in rural areas and the East of England accounts for a fifth of the UK’s market towns. The region’s businesses and research community are well known as leaders in agriculture, food processing, bioenergy and non-food crops. However, the RES recognises that the economy of rural areas has changed significantly, with the service sector now playing a dominant role and predicts that the future will be driven by improvements in innovation, skills and access to markets, much as with the wider economy. The challenge for the RES is to tailor actions to meet the needs of rural communities,
particularly in more remote rural places. This includes tackling barriers to growth, such as a lack of affordable housing and high-quality business space.

The vision set out in the RES is for the region to be:

- internationally competitive with a global reputation for innovation and business growth
- a region that harnesses and develops the talents and creativity of all
- at the forefront of the low-carbon and resource-efficient economy.

And known for:

- exceptional landscapes, vibrant places and quality of life
- being a confident, outward-looking region with strong leadership and where communities actively shape their future.

The RES identifies seven ‘engines of growth’, built on existing cross-boundary partnerships that will be encouraged to set out bold investment plans for these places through Integrated Development Programmes. The aim is to help cities and their surrounding areas to increase their competitiveness and grow sustainably.

Braintree District has links with two of the ‘engines of growth’: the Haven Gateway Partnership that covers Colchester and Tendring Districts and parts of south Suffolk; and, Chelmsford and Harlow which are both designated as Key Centres for Development and Change in the ‘East of England Plan’ and are included in the London Arc ‘engine of growth’ by virtue of their economic associations with London. The District is also bordered in the north and west by the Greater Cambridge Partnership ‘engine of growth’.

There are eight goals in the RES that need to be considered in drawing up the economic development strategy for Braintree District:

1. **Enterprise**, improving business performance and a stronger culture of entrepreneurship;
2. **Innovation**, realising the value of innovation by bringing ideas to market;
3. **Digital Economy**, accelerating the use of digital technologies in public services, society and commerce;
4. **Resource Efficiency**, benefiting from a low-carbon, low-resource economy;
5. **Skills for Productivity**, developing skills for the changing economy;
6. **Economic Participation**, opportunity for all in the sustainable economy;
7. **Transport**, a transport system that fully supports sustainable economic growth;
8. **The Spatial Economy**, sustainable places that attract and retain the people and investment necessary for a world-class economy.

‘The East of England Plan’ sets out the overall planning strategies for the whole of the eastern region of England up to 2021. It says that the Braintree District must contribute towards the 56,000 jobs to be delivered in the “Rest of Essex”, (which is defined in the Plan as Braintree, Chelmsford, Uttlesford and Maldon Districts). The Braintree ‘One District, One Vision’ draft strategy aims to translate this regional requirement by providing for up to 14,000 new jobs, planning for a total of 66 hectares of employment land up to 2025 and making sure that there is enough land for seven years development at any one time.

An independent study by consultants Arup was published in January 2009 to feed into a Review of the East of England Plan. It considers the potential for major new developments that could help supply some of the thousands of additional new homes needed in the East of England region by 2031. Three different types of major new development were considered by the study including extensions to existing urban areas, expansion of smaller settlements and the creation of new settlements. The report recommends that the East of England Assembly and its member councils give further consideration to:

- **Large scale growth at Cambridge, Norwich and Chelmsford (cities with strong economies and the potential capacity for growth)**;
- **Expansion in Ipswich, Colchester and Bury St Edmunds**;
- **New regional-scale settlements (20,000 + dwellings) at Huntingdon/Alconbury; the A5120/Midland Mainline Corridor; East Bedfordshire Strategic Corridor; Marston Vale; Braintree area; and South of the A120, east of Stansted**.
Publication of this list of potential locations for new development does not mean that the Regional Assembly, or local authorities such as Braintree District Council, are supportive of the study's proposals. In developing future plans for the region, the advice of Councils is the primary source of evidence but expert studies are seen as useful additions. A key aim is to ensure that new homes are linked to new jobs and also infrastructure such as transport and other public services. Later in 2009 the views of the public will be sought on future plans for the region in a formal 12-week public consultation.

The Arup study makes it clear that new settlements of this scale would require upfront and regional commitment and infrastructure. They could be made attractive to newer low carbon related businesses and other leading edge sectors.

Clearly, the economic development strategy for Braintree District would need to be reviewed in the event of firm proposals being accepted to develop a new settlement of the scale envisaged in the Arup study.

Local context

The Greater Essex Economic Framework was endorsed by the Greater Essex Prosperity Forum in November 2007 to provide strategic direction and ambitions for local authorities, business support agencies and the Essex Business Consortium to improve the County’s productivity and quality of life. This Framework which covers the period 2007 – 2021, reflects the RES goals and has guided the selection of economic targets in the Essex Local Area Agreement. The five strategic priorities included in the Greater Essex Economic Framework are:

Priority One: We want to make a difference to the improvement of low skills attainment in Essex.
Priority Two: We want a competitive economy which is an international leader rather than a follower.
Priority Three: We want to create the right conditions in which businesses and people can flourish.
Priority Four: We want to be a leader in environmental technology and in helping our businesses to reduce their carbon footprint.
Priority Five: We want to build on the Essex entrepreneurial spirit by helping companies to start-up, innovate and grow.

The Greater Essex Economic Framework will be updated in Spring 2009 to reflect changes over the last two years in economic development statistics and in Government policy. The most relevant in relation to national policy is the publication of 'Prosperous Places: taking forward the review of sub-national economic development and regeneration' published in November 2008. Here the Government aims to support its economic growth objectives and tackle deprivation at every level, by giving powers to local authorities to promote economic development through the production of an assessment of the economic conditions of their area. In two tier local government areas such as Essex, the economic assessment duty would fall upon the upper tier local authority, i.e., Essex County Council. "It is, however, the Government’s intention to place a duty on those upper tier authorities to work closely with District Councils in their area in completing their assessment. There will be a corresponding duty on District Councils to co-operate with the upper tier. This will ensure that Counties and District Councils work closely together in the preparation of the assessments and that both tiers are able to work from a consistent economic evidence base". The economic development strategy for Braintree District and the monitoring of its delivery will be used to inform an economic assessment for Essex as a whole carried out by the County Council. There are well established county-wide vehicles for facilitating this technical cooperation through the Essex Economic Development Officers Group and Essex Chief Executives’ Association.

Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are three year programmes (2008-2011) that set out how local authorities and other major local delivery partners will deliver the best solutions for their areas. Central Government agrees targets with local authorities and their partners on outcomes delivered by local government on its own and in partnership with others. Essex's Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a joint project between the county's thirteen Local Strategic Partnerships, including Braintree District LSP and is designed to bring better value for money by channelling funds from different public organisations towards shared priorities and targets. Achieving a strong and competitive Essex economy will involve the Essex LAA partners in:

- ensuring people have the skills for higher value-added jobs in a knowledge based economy;
• improving employability and the attainment of lower level skills where this is a local issue;
• a dynamic business sector with higher levels of inward investment and international trade;
• business innovation and expansion.

Braintree LSP has agreed to deliver specific economic targets in the Essex LAA by 2011 as follows:

**National Indicator 163:** Increase the proportion of population aged 19-64 for males and 19-59 for females qualified to at least National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 2 or higher, (County target 6%, equates to 3,000 people attaining Level 2 in Braintree District). The County action plan includes proposals for increasing take up of apprenticeships through a central support service, working with local employers across Essex to address skills needs, staging events across the country to raise awareness and enhancing links between schools and business. Braintree District LSP has an agreed action plan which will help focus investment of resources into low levels of community and workplace qualifications and vocational skills and supports the Learning & Skills Council’s (LSC) project, ‘Test the Town’, which will assess Skills for Life (basic literacy and numeracy) and NVQ Levels 2 and 3 qualifications. It will also support the LSC apprenticeships project.

**National Indicator 166:** Increase the median earnings of employees in the area, (County target 3.8%, no District targets set). The County action plan includes proposals for supporting the growth and competitiveness of the manufacturing and engineering sector in Essex. This action will also help improve performance against LI8.1 (international trade assistance) and LI8.2 (inward investment), which in turn will help competitiveness and earnings.

**National Indicator 171:** Increase the new Business registration rate (County and District targets to be confirmed by mid February 2009);

The County action plan includes proposals for closer working with LSPs and Districts to help promote support services. Braintree District LSP has an agreed action plan with proposals for local business support packages which should generate more start ups such as:

• identifying opportunities to support new and emerging enterprises, existing businesses, and vulnerable businesses and business sectors;
• part funding provision of business start up advice and guidance in the Braintree District;
• providing funded one-to-one business advice and mentoring to young and small existing businesses in the Braintree District.

**Local Indicator 8.1:** Increase the number of jobs saved and created as a result of foreign direct investment by 100%, (no District targets because work is carried out on a Greater Essex basis). The County action plan includes proposals for promoting the Essex inward investment offer directly to UK and international audiences, especially India, USA, China.

**Local Indicator 8.2:** Help to 450 companies to trade internationally, (no District targets because work is carried out on a Greater Essex basis). The County action plan includes proposals for supporting the growth and competitiveness of the manufacturing and engineering sector in Essex, (see action plan for NI166 above).
Challenges and Opportunities

In pursuing the ambitious vision for our local economy, Braintree District will be in competition with several other locations in Essex and the rest of the East of England. It has already been argued that the District will need to develop relationships with areas beyond its boundaries; particularly Chelmsford and Colchester which are better resourced and are recognised growth locations. In defining these relationships, it will be necessary to identify and promote the key strengths or selling points of the District that could complement the attributes of these engines of growth and give it a competitive advantage such as:

- the proximity and easy access that businesses in Braintree enjoy to Stansted Airport and the M11;
- Witham's location on the A12 and East Coast mainline;
- improved road links to Chelmsford;
- a strong manufacturing base;
- a major specialist retail centre at Freeport;
- major equestrian attractions at Towerlands and Great Leighs Racecourse;
- lower land prices relative to Chelmsford, Colchester and Bishop's Stortford;
- and, an extensive rural hinterland with very attractive small towns and villages.

The ‘One District, One Vision’ draft strategy suggests some key economic issues for the District:

- To make sure that delivering job growth is balanced with protecting the environment and is sustainable.
- How to maintain our low unemployment rate but also reduce the growth in unsustainable out-commuting. There is a need to broaden the opportunities for a range of businesses, especially in the “knowledge based” and tourism sectors, and develop new land for employment. This may include the development of a new business / innovation and enterprise park adjacent to the A120 near Braintree.
- To secure the regeneration of major sites in the Main Town centres and in some of the Key Service Villages as a key element of the Economic Development Strategy
- To retain and improve most of our existing employment areas but recognise that a small number may be more suitable for other uses. It is anticipated that the current review of the District’s Economic Development Strategy will identify key challenges in terms of sustainable job growth, skills training, workforce development, and also confirm that some employment sites are no longer “fit for purpose”.
- Braintree is a very rural district and there is a need to provide more local job opportunities for those living in the small towns and villages if there is to be a move towards more sustainable employment.
- How to recognise and accommodate the growing trend for businesses to be started as “working from home”, especially in the rural areas.
- How to maximise the potential for redevelopment and regeneration of the town centres and some key service villages.

To focus attention on developing a competitive advantage for the District, an analysis was carried out of its internal Strengths and Weakness and the external Opportunities and Threats that it faces. This SWOT is reproduced in some detail in Appendix 3.

The SWOT analysis and the economic issues identified above in the ‘One District, One Voice’ strategy were debated by over 30 private and public sector representatives from the District, the County and the Region at a workshop on 7th November 2008 and a list of key economic challenges emerged. These are summarised below:

Workforce Development and Employment
1. The District has a major skills challenge in relation to people with no skills and poor levels of attainment at all NVQ levels. The relatively high levels of smoking, obesity combined with low levels of physical activity are barriers to economic activity.
2. The flow of well qualified young people into the workforce needs to be increased. Some young people do not appear to appreciate that they need to be skilled and both they and their parents appear to have
low aspirations. The 'more you learn, the more you earn' perception seems to have gone. The status of vocational qualifications does not appear to be valued by young people. Changing the physical environment of learning institutions is needed to contribute to raising aspirations.

3. The performance of local secondary schools and Braintree College relative to other areas of Essex is of concern. Levels of literacy and numeracy are poor even amongst those with NVQ2 or 3. This needs to be a priority for schools.

4. There is a lack of employer engagement in schools, particularly in the curriculum. Braintree College has not taken a strategic view on how it engages with employers and has not invested in infrastructure to respond to employers needs.

5. There appears to be confusion about the apprenticeship offer amongst both employers and potential apprentices. The large proportion of small businesses and self-employers affects the take-up of apprentices.

6. Employers are not taking up opportunities for free training for their employees through Train to Gain.

7. There is a proven business support model in Braintree District which can make a difference to survival rates in the first 3 years. There is a need to be entrepreneurial about combining public funding to support businesses.

8. Businesses which may be struggling to survive could tap into expertise in large and small companies, (plus early retirees) to provide mentoring and non-Executives on Boards.

**Location, Infrastructure and Land**

1. Transport infrastructure deficiencies are a barrier to growth aspirations.
2. A120 improvement from Braintree to Marks Tey is not be recognised as a national priority.
3. Traffic congestion hotspots and poor travel reliability are adding to business costs.
4. Twin tracking of the Braintree – Witham branch rail line (Cressing Loop) is a requirement for further economic growth.
5. Lack of a rail link to Stansted Airport reduces the potential to attract tourists.
6. Town centre regeneration in Braintree, Witham and Halstead is required by 2012 to unlock their economic potential as catalysts to stimulate new development.
7. Braintree District’s alignment with surrounding sub-regional partnerships needs to be clarified to avoid it “falling through the cracks” in accessing economic growth funds from county, regional and national sources.
8. Employment sites are no longer fit for purpose

**Business Creation and Survival**

1. The continuing decline in manufacturing jobs is of concern.
2. There is an increase in the service sector with a preponderance of low skilled and low-paid jobs.
3. There is an over-reliance on Financial Services jobs outside the District.
4. More one to one sustained support is needed for small businesses to start up, survive and grow.

**Inward Investment and International Trade**

1. Braintree District could derive more economic benefits from its proximity to Stansted Airport and consideration should be given to supporting the 2nd runway if economic growth is really wanted.
2. The London 2012 and its legacy may be limited to the training camps and accommodation venues at Unex Towerlands, Felsted School, Great Leighs Racecourse and the Essex Golf & Country Club. There is opportunity to develop tourism but accommodation is a real issue.
3. Why is there an apparent lack of interest by businesses in exporting and finding new markets overseas? What are the barriers? Opportunities to meet the buyers are needed.
4. More employment sites are needed to cater for future growth but further intervention is required to ensure that they are occupied. This could include land assembly, pump-priming the required services for the land and robust marketing.
5. Braintree District needs to have a “welcome mat” to attract and retain business investors by having a co-ordinated “can do” response”.
6. Need to keep skilled people in the area and increase skill levels in the district.
7. Improvements to infrastructure are needed to unlock economic potential, for example, the Skyline industrial site only took off once the A120 was dualled to the M11.

**Business Growth and Innovation**
1. Nearly half the working population commute out of the District putting a strain on road and rail infrastructure and reducing opportunities to use the skills and talents of the commuters to start new enterprises in the District. Why are jobs more attractive in Chelmsford?
2. New business development opportunities are focussed on the urban areas although 96% of the District is rural and 57% of businesses consider themselves to be based in a rural area.
3. A new Enterprise and Innovation Business Park is required to attract high value jobs to the District.
4. Braintree should be proactive in deriving benefits from the Regional Growth Agenda that is focussing resources on Chelmsford and the Haven Gateway.
5. Braintree District businesses are not seeking support to innovate.
6. Access to ICT Infrastructure is not uniform, particularly in the rural parts of the District.
7. Are we doing enough to promote the resources of the district?

In the next stage of the process to produce a five year economic development strategy, these issues were prioritised by the workshop participants and distilled into five strategic priorities.

**Strategic Priorities**

**Priority 1: Workforce Development and Employment**
- We need to support the improvement of performance in the District’s secondary schools, particularly in literacy and numeracy, to provide a local workforce with higher level skills.
- We need to address the unacceptably high numbers of adults with no qualifications/skills and the poor levels of attainment at all NVQ levels.

**Priority 2: Location, Infrastructure and Land**
- We need to secure investment to overcome the transport infrastructure deficiencies that are a barrier to the District’s growth aspirations.
- We need to reduce the economic costs of congestion and travel reliability.
- We need to clarify the District’s alignment with surrounding sub-regional growth areas/partnerships to ensure that it can benefit from economic investment and funding opportunities.

**Priority 3: Business Creation and Survival**
- We need more one to one sustained support for small businesses to start up, grow and survive beyond the first three years.

**Priority 4: Inward Investment and International Trade**
- We need to derive more economic benefits from the District’s proximity to Stansted Airport.
- We need to have a co-ordinated “can do” approach and clear offer to attract and retain business investors.

**Priority 5: Business Growth and Innovation**
- We need to promote the uniqueness of the District’s physical location, high quality environment and its businesses.
- We need to attract high value jobs to the District to increase local earnings levels and to reduce the dependence on commuting.

**Objectives and Key Tasks**

At the economic development strategy workshop last November, it was agreed that small Task & Finish Groups would be set up each focussing on one of the five strategic priorities. These groups were led by a prominent business person and met twice in December and January to generate ideas on what needs to be done to turn the priorities into concrete, practical actions. See Appendix 4 for the membership of the Task & Finish Groups.
Delivering the Vision

This section will set out arrangements for delivering the detailed action plan set out in Appendix 1, including:

- identifying organisations which will have responsibility for leading on the delivery of the actions and those which will have a contributory role;
- setting out Braintree District Council’s business planning model and project management process;
- demonstrating links with the delivery and performance management processes being established for the Essex Local Area Agreement;
- securing political commitment and financial resources to deliver the action plan;
- ensuring that delivery is in line with Braintree District Council’s Statements on Equalities and Sustainability;
- assessing any risks that might affect the delivery the proposed action plan and suggesting mitigating measures to reduce the impact of any adverse conditions.

Managing Performance

This section will set out the respective roles of the Economic Development & Transportation Partnership Board, the Business Council and the District Council in monitoring and reviewing the effective performance of the action plan on a bi-monthly basis. This process will dovetail with reporting arrangements for the economic targets in Essex Local Area Agreement which will be carried out by Essex County Council and whatever body replaces the Greater Essex Prosperity Forum post April 2009.

Given the current and foreseeable uncertainty about future economic conditions nationally and internationally, it is proposed that the economic development strategy and action plan be re-visited in two years time (2011) to coincide with the completion of the three year period of the Essex Local Area Agreement.