



Braintree District Council

Economic Growth Strategy

2023
-2028

www.braintree.gov.uk





Earls Colne Business Park

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Foreword



Welcome to our new Economic Growth Strategy – a strategy which summarises the changes happening within the macro-economic environment and sets out the opportunities open to the district over the next five years.

The way in which our district is developing is changing. We are seeing evidence of economic growth, but we're seeing it within the context of an ever-changing external environment. Already conscious of these changes, we are investing more than ever in projects and programmes which mitigate outside influences in a bid to support the growth and prospects of small and start-up businesses. Due to increases in competitive pressures, businesses need more of our support and the support of our partners in breaking down barriers and overcoming challenges which may have limited them in the past.

We are seeing new trends and changes within our business landscape - with sectors such as health and finance showing strong growth in place of traditional sectors such as manufacturing and construction. Interwoven with this shift is a growing awareness of the green economy and the need to work with residents, businesses and partners in opening up opportunities for greener skills, greener jobs and greener ways of delivering services.

We are a forward-thinking authority investing not only in the businesses of today, but also in the businesses of tomorrow. We are already building the foundations to a resilient economy by investing in the infrastructure needed in attracting new businesses, inward investment and future growth. This strategy builds on these ambitions – it outlines our core priorities and sets out ways in which we can deliver impactful programmes of support to achieve our overall vision of *“To lead in sustainability, inclusivity and competitiveness for a resilient local economy”*.

An ambitious and pragmatic approach is needed to support the foundations of a strong, sustainable and growing economy. Over the next five years, our focus will be two-fold - firstly, on generating higher skilled job opportunities and secondly, on increasing levels of attainment in education to mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

As suggested above, it will take a powerhouse of passionate and empowered authorities, businesses and residents to achieve this overarching vision, but I have no doubt that the outcome of this strategy will be something in which we can all be proud.

**Cllr Tom Cunningham,
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member
for Economic Growth**

Executive Summary

The global economy is consistently transforming with a demand to support positive and sustainable economic growth. Due to the macro-economic challenges that the district has faced at the time of writing this strategy, namely the exit from the European Union, COVID-19, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a cost-of-living crisis is now at the forefront of how previous economic priorities have been determined, moving forward to more proactive yet resilient socio-economic priorities.

This Economic Growth Strategy supersedes the Plan for Growth 2017-2022 and will deliver in alignment to revised local, regional and national policy with a refined set of core priorities based on new refreshed baseline of data and trend analysis. It is also important to reflect on partnership and funding opportunities that will strengthen the potential of the district and as such, this strategy will also work with residents, businesses, and visitors to shape the services and service delivery to meet the changing needs of all communities.

To ascertain what the core needs and focus are required for the district's changing economy, a refreshed evidence baseline was required. In 2022, SQW was commissioned by Braintree District Council (BDC) to research the current economic position in the district and to explore the steps that BDC can take to support economic growth.

Consequently, a refreshed evidence base was established, drawing on existing material and intelligence derived from stakeholder consultation via a series of workshops. In addition, over 400 responses from a business needs survey were also obtained to inform this strategy, and combined, has resulted in a nationally aligned set of core priorities, underpinned by locally led needs.

The evidence baseline highlighted a number of opportunities and challenges currently facing Braintree's economy, all of which require investment and focus in response to them. Braintree is currently home to 155,200 people, although population growth has been weak over the past decade relative to comparative geographies, and the district has an increasingly ageing population living within the district, which will require support in the future. The district also faces a productivity challenge, with a tight labour market (unemployment is currently low) coupled with low levels of higher skilled roles. The Council needs to do more to attract those of working age into the district to ensure our businesses can remain competitive and fulfil our ambitions to increase productivity.

Braintree plays an important role in the North Essex sub-region, producing £3.26 billion per annum and account for 28% of all economic production in North Essex and 9% of economic production across Essex. Braintree District Council

will build on this to continue to maintain and increase the new business survival rates, which are higher than the national average, to grow the economy. Trends are now showing evidence of growth in new sectors. These are not large employment sectors currently, but the trajectory is important. For example, the digital and creative sector appears to have grown more quickly in the district than across Essex as a whole. It is a sector that can gravitate to towns and can also play a key role in wider place-shaping.

The district's economy is – arguably – being transformed because of its evolving infrastructure and connectivity. The prospect of improving connectivity may itself be something of a game-changer in relation to key investment decisions. The district offers a relatively high quality of life and in an era in which 'anywhere jobs' are likely to be more important, it has some important advantages relative to elsewhere. There are challenges too – and ongoing limitations in relation to rail connectivity (other than perhaps from Witham) are one. The quality of digital connectivity will also be a key factor going forward.

With new strategic focus from Central Government as per the Levelling Up Agenda, deprivation is nonetheless, reported as being fairly low within the district, and the Council have secured £1.036 million of grant funding through

the Shared Prosperity Fund and a further £589,191 has been allocated to Braintree District Council through the Rural England Prosperity Fund, as an appendage to the Shared Prosperity Fund to tackle rural deprivation. However, there are pockets of deprivation within the district which require support. Housing needs within the district has shown a greater demand for affordable housing due to the national negative economic trajectory, due to unemployment, family breakdowns, food poverty, mortgage rate affordability, for example. Tackling deprivation to achieve an inclusive economy will require support for the district residents and workers, from all quality-of-life indicators.

The challenges that the district face are notably top-level including skills, succession and retention, low average salaries, declaration of a climate emergency, and national/global economic shocks, all detrimental to the priorities and services Braintree District Council offer residents and businesses within the district. Nonetheless, there is a major opportunity arising from three 'new' innovation assets in the district – I-Construct, Horizon 120 & Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult. All the building blocks are in place, and the Council need to ensure the potential of these sites are maximised and work with partners to develop clusters of activity around them.

This revised economic intelligence has highlighted the core themes that are evident in terms of aspirational delivery to be:

- Sustainability – Supporting growth that can continue to transition in line with the current and proposed future needs of the business community
- Inclusivity – Building a level playing field for entrepreneurship, new business start-ups and growth opportunities
- Competitiveness – Enabling local prosperity to establish the district as the place for businesses to start up, innovate and grow.



Aegon, Witham

The vision and core priorities are therefore:

To lead in sustainability, inclusivity, and competitiveness for a resilient local economy

1. Infrastructure and Connectivity	2. Resilient Business Support	3. Inclusive People and Skills	4. Sustainable Green Economy
The Council will partner with key stakeholders to provide future proofed integration and connectivity to support sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the Braintree district and wider North Essex. Through allocating employment land, encouraging inward investment and partnerships will result in a district and neighbouring areas that are market ready, desirable and fit to do business in.	The Council will facilitate a supported business community, regardless of size or sector that meets the needs and requirements to encourage strong and sustainable economic growth with high value measurable outcomes within the district. The Council will also deliver a bespoke programme of support to the key high-growth sectors to respond to the niche and technical requirements of these businesses to achieve specialist developments, supporting Essex County Council's Sector Development Strategy.	The Council will support residents where appropriate to mitigate the cost-of-living crisis and to meet their full potential, supporting progression in or into work and education to improve their health, living conditions, and quality of life. The Council will also develop skills provisions around the needs of the Braintree District economy and support creation of higher paid/skilled jobs in emerging sectors.	The Council will enable businesses and residents to grow green prosperity that will support present and future wellbeing, reducing the impact on the world's natural resources, with a focus on fair and sustainable consumption and production.

To deliver the priorities and goals of this Economic Growth Strategy, annual action plans will be developed, to provide an update on the progress made, with measurable outcomes at timely intervals, mitigating risks and adapting to the changes of needs and demands of the district economy.

Progress will be reported to the elected Members quarterly with performance indicators, to manage risk for successful project delivery with tangible outcomes.

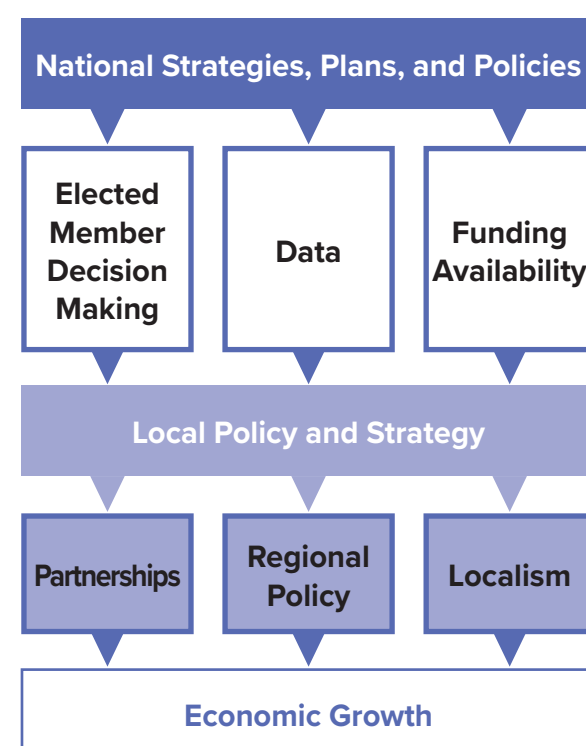
The evidence base used to inform this strategy can be found at www.braintree.gov.uk/homepage/282/economic-plan-research-project



The Plaza, Braintree

Links to Local, Regional and National Strategies

There has been a substantial change in the policy landscape around economic development at all levels of government since the Plan for Growth was published in 2017, moving increasingly towards a 'joined up government', where greater integration is sought between government departments and agencies outside of government.



National Strategies, Plans, and Policies

Central government policy has shifted nationally, precipitated by the UK's departure from the EU – but also by the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic – towards greater investment in infrastructure, skills, and innovation. From the previous focus on the Industrial Strategy (to boost productivity by backing businesses to create good jobs and increase the earning power of people throughout the UK with investment in skills, industries and infrastructure), through to the evolution of the Levelling Up White Paper (spreading opportunity more equally across the UK), the economic support demands from Central Government require local authorities to be resilient to fast change.

The Growth Plan 2022

The Growth Plan 2022 makes growth the government's central economic mission, setting a target of reaching a 2.5% trend rate. Sustainable growth will lead to higher wages, greater opportunities and provide sustainable funding for public services.

Levelling Up White Paper

The Levelling Up White Paper sets out how the government will spread opportunity more equally across the UK.

Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

A Bill to make provision for the setting of levelling-up missions and reporting on progress in delivering them; about local democracy; about town and country planning; about Community Infrastructure Levy; about the imposition of Infrastructure Levy; about environmental outcome reports for certain consents and plans; about regeneration; about the compulsory purchase of land; about information and records relating to land, the environment or heritage; for the provision for pavement licences to be permanent; about governance of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors; about vagrancy and begging; and for connected purposes.

Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener

This strategy sets out policies and proposals for decarbonising all sectors of the UK economy to meet the Net Zero target by 2050.

Regional Strategies, Plans and Policies

At a regional and sub-regional level, South Essex Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), Essex County Council (ECC) and the North Essex Economic Board's (NEEB) ambitions for innovation, cohesive communities and a better skilled workforce come through many policy documents.

The North Essex Economic Board is a partnership of local authorities in the area working together to drive economic growth. The partners are Braintree, Maldon, Tendring and Uttlesford district councils, Colchester Borough Council, Chelmsford City Council and Essex County Council. Each has committed funding specifically to support recovery from Covid-19, and projects include programmes to boost apprenticeships and job fairs. Longer-term, the North Essex Economic Board is committed to promoting wider economic growth and investment across the geographical region.

The North Essex Economic Board is proud to have been highly commended at the Government Opportunities (GO) UK National Excellence in Public Procurement Awards 2022, having been shortlisted in the Covid-19 Response and Recovery Award (Local Government) category for its work in procuring business and skills support programmes to help recovery from the pandemic.

North Essex Economic Strategy

This Strategy sets out shared ambitions for long-term, sustainable and inclusive prosperity – and outlines where partners must act in the next five years to help realise them.

ECC Sector Development Strategy

The Essex sector development strategy will support public sector partners, skills and learning providers and businesses to effectively plan together for the future economy of the county.

SELEP Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy

Outlines the clear opportunities and needs of the SELEP area and the actions that will be taken to drive the south east into new economic growth as the country recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic and establishes new ways of working internationally following the EU Transition.

SELEP Smarter Faster Together Strategy

Building on extensive consultation during 2018, SMARTER, FASTER, TOGETHER sets out an assessment of the opportunities and challenges that are faced, the ambitions for future of the economy and the priorities on which partners will focus to achieve them.

ECC Levelling up Essex White Paper

In focusing on levelling up, the interest is to spread opportunity, not to constrain it. No one benefits from putting a ceiling on ambition and all benefit when people have the chance to fulfil their potential. The County has identified rural Braintree district as one of the pilot areas of the Plan, and the District and County are working together to understand the challenges that particularly rural communities face and how they can be overcome.

Local Strategies, Plans and Policies

At a local level there has also been much change since the previous Plan for Growth, with the publication of the Braintree District Local Plan and Braintree District Council's Corporate Strategy which sets out the area's ambitions for the next four years. The declaration of a Climate Change Emergency within the district in 2019 provides ambitious net-zero targets for the Council.

Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan looks to a future where the Council will help connect people and places, enhance and protect the environment, support the communities to reach their potential, promote prosperity and, importantly, continue to deliver and innovate.

Climate Change Strategy

Braintree District Council declared a Climate Change Emergency in July 2019 and announced a target to be carbon neutral as a Council and as a District as far as practical by 2030. The Council is working through an action plan of projects to help business and communities achieve these goals.

Local Plan

The Local Plan 2013-2033 is a 2-part document which sets out the strategy for development of the district up to 2033. It includes allocations for where new homes, employment and infrastructure will be built in the district, and policies that businesses applying for planning permission will need to follow.

Digital Strategy

As the Council is looking to adopt digital technology, the strategy considers how the district can be supported to have the digital connectivity that it needs.

Business Engagement and Support Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan aims to create a district that is competitive to do business in whilst ensuring accountability of public money in delivering Economic Growth. It measures outputs that will create strong and sustainable economic growth.

Cycle Strategy

The vision is to make the district a leader in cycling provision, making it safer and encouraging more people from a range of backgrounds to cycle more frequently.

Healthy Housing Strategy

Braintree District Councils Housing Strategy is being published at a time of change both in the housing sector, the economic sector and the health and wellbeing sector. It is evident that the Council will need to respond to these changes and those ahead.

There have been simultaneous and substantial detrimental economic events, which have all had a profound impact on the district's economic performance and are therefore important to consider. The ongoing impact and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic will continue to shape the district's economy in the future and the way in which it functions. The UK's withdrawal from the European Union has changed the way in which the UK trades with the EU and the world. Finally, and more recently, the cost-of-living crisis is having a substantial impact on residents and businesses across the district, with inflation outstripping wage and benefit increases and the cost of fuel and materials rising substantially.

Our Evidence Base

- The Economic Profile

Research Methodology

In 2022, SQW was commissioned by Braintree District Council to research the current economic position in the district and to explore the steps that the Council can take to support economic growth. Consequently, a refreshed evidence base was established, drawing on existing material and intelligence derived from stakeholder consultation via a series of workshops. In addition, over 400 responses from a business needs survey were also obtained to inform this strategy, and combined, has resulted in a nationally aligned set of core priorities, underpinned by locally-led needs.

Current Economic Position

At the time of writing this strategy, national figures show that the general UK economy has performed meekly over the past three years due to the macroeconomic challenges all areas have faced. Overall economic output, the number of businesses, and employment, have not seen growth in the district since 2017.

Nonetheless, there are promising signs within the district's economy, which provide a platform from which to build; business survival rates in the district are generally strong, unemployment is the lowest in Essex, and the evidence suggests that the district's economy has not been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic any more than across the comparator areas.



Resident Demographics and Growth

There are 155,200 people living in the district as of 2021, which is 6% higher since last reported in 2011, a slightly slower growth rate than Essex (8%).

Nonetheless, the district has an aging population, with 41% of the population aged over 50. The growth of the working-age population has slowed over the past decade, although this is a national trend, not a localised one. Since 2009, there has been no growth in the working-age population and in fact there has been a decline in the working age population in the district – in contrast

to strong growth across all other local areas. The decline in the working-age population is important in relation to the district's economy and the Council must, therefore, ensure that there is a sufficient number and skilled local population to meet the employment needs of local firms.

Currently, unemployment levels are low due to the number of job opportunities exceeding the number of those of working-age. This is a majority constraint for businesses in the district looking to grow and expand their operations, limiting business growth and economic output.

Age Group	Braintree District		East of England		England	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
0-14	26,800	17%	1,114,800	18%	9,838,700	18%
15-64 (Working age Population)	96,800	62%	3,976,800	63%	36,249,800	64%
15-24	15,700	10%	685,300	11%	6,633,300	12%
25-49	48,800	31%	2,046,700	32%	18,646,400	33%
50-64	32,400	21%	1,244,800	20%	10,970,100	19%
65+	31,600	20%	1,243,000	19%	10,401,200	18%
ALL	155,200	100%	6,334,600	100%	56,489,700	100%

The district's main towns (Braintree, Witham and Halstead) are critical components of the district's overall economy, supporting 55% of employment across the district. Braintree and Witham are the two largest centres in the district (supporting 14,780 and 11,325 jobs respectively) and have a range of strengths in wholesale and retail, construction and manufacturing. The latest employment evidence suggests that both towns have experienced employment decline over the last five years, with much of this loss coming from the manufacturing sector, although anecdotal evidence suggests that both towns are performing well with strong business demand for commercial space. This indicates that although the number of unique businesses is declining, the size of existing businesses are growing.

Nonetheless, evidence is indicating that 45% of employment opportunities come from more rural areas within the district, showcasing that rural businesses play a significant part in the district economics and therefore, resources also need to be made available to support these employment opportunities. Halstead by contrast is a smaller town, supporting 4,125 jobs, but one which appears to have seen strong employment growth over the last five years – growing by 17%.

Looking forward the Local Plan anticipates significant housing growth up to 2033, with around 1000 being proposed to be built each year. This provides direct opportunities for the construction and infrastructure sectors but also links the service sectors to serve the new population. There are also significant major infrastructure and growth schemes inside and outside the district, which could lead to significant job opportunities for local residents. These include;

- Freeport East – At Felixstowe and Harwich, this new Freeport will deliver a secure customs zone for businesses importing and exporting. Plans to develop two green hubs that would create 13,500 jobs via £500m investment are expected within the next 10 years
- New overhead and underground powerline schemes and renewable energy generation
- New road building schemes such as the A12 in the district and the lower Thames crossing outside of the district

- Stansted Expansion – Investment of £600m to increase the airports capacity to 43 million passengers per year will be made, including a new arrivals terminal, check-in area and various upgrades including the development of its own business park on site
- Bradwell B and Sizewell C Nuclear Power Stations
- Significant housing growth outside of the district, including new Garden Communities at Harlow, Colchester borders, and Chelmsford

It is clear, therefore, from the demographic and growth data that growth will bring significant opportunities to the district businesses and residents. However, employment growth must also keep up with resident growth to ensure that the pattern of out commuting for roles, especially those in higher paid sectors, is not made worse.

The Council can do this by ensuring that there are the right allocations for new employment land, that high value jobs and businesses are attracted to the district and that the district's businesses can make the most of the opportunities offered by major infrastructure and building projects.

Output and Productivity

(Gross value added [GVA], is the value generated by any unit engaged in the production of goods and services.)

The district's economy produces £3.26 billion per annum (2020). Our economy is an important part of the North Essex and Essex economic story, with our economy accounting for 9% of economic production across Essex.

Data suggests that although the district's production (as measured by Gross Value Added [GVA]) has fluctuated in recent years, there was strong growth between 2015 and 2017 – above the growth rate experienced across the comparator areas. The overall pattern in the district has been similar to national figures and is ahead of productivity* against comparators across greater Essex.

*(*Productivity is a measure of economic or business performance that indicates how efficiently people, companies, industries and whole economies convert inputs, such as labour and capital, into outputs, such as goods or services.)*

Measures to improve productivity will be essential to the success of this strategy as with growth in productivity, an economy is able to produce—and consume—increasingly more goods and services for the same amount of work.

	2017	2020	Direction of Travel
Braintree District Output and Productivity			
Total GVA	£3.83bn	£3.26bn	▼ 14.9%
GVA per hour worked	£35	£38	▲ 8.6%
GVA per filled job	£55,987	£54,555	▼ 2.6%

Since a peak in 2017, GVA has declined over the past three years (for which data is available), whilst overall productivity has increased across Braintree's economy. This is because of a reduction in hours worked, possibly due to the COVID-19 restrictions enforced. Whilst the recent trajectory of productivity since 2017 (measured in terms of GVA per filled job) has been negative, Braintree's economy does not lag as far behind the national and regional productivity levels as it did

in 2010. Braintree's economic output has grown strongly over the past decade, with growth over 42% between 2011 and 2020, compared to only 33% nationally and GVA per filled job increased by 28% in Braintree compared to 20% nationally. In order to continue to grow ahead of average, the Council will need to consider the structure of the economy in the district and how to help businesses be more productive and attract and grow existing businesses to support growth.



Employment and Businesses

Around 89% of all businesses in the district are micro in size (employing between 0 and 9 employees).

In comparison to the predominately micro business community, the data suggests there are currently ten large businesses (employing over 250 people) operating in Braintree (accounting for 0.1% of all businesses). This is a lower proportion than experienced across comparator areas.

Whilst there are also structural issues with an economy that relies too heavily on a small number of large firms there are advantages of large firms acting as anchoring institutions, helping to form clusters, using local supply chains and providing visible job opportunities. Increasing the number of larger firms would therefore be welcome, and priority will be given for planned investment for

infrastructure and connectivity to host businesses of this size to relocate or grow within the district, through exploring opportunities to invest in employment land that priority is given to core sectors that show high growth.

Reflecting the slower growth in business stock that has been experienced in the district, business start-up rates are lower than the Essex and national levels, with around 100 new businesses started for every 1,000 active enterprises in 2020, a rate around 20% lower than the national one. By comparison, the business death rate has remained relatively stable over the same period. The decline in the number of district businesses in 2020 may have been the result of interventions linked to the pandemic (furlough scheme and the various business loan schemes) which kept many businesses afloat. Equally, the pandemic may explain the decline in business births in 2020.

	2017	2020	Direction of Travel
Employment and Businesses			
Number of Jobs	57,000	57,000	▬ 0%
Number of Businesses	6,680	6,675	▼ 0.07%
New Businesses per 1,000 active enterprises	122.6	98.6	▼ 19.6%

Business survival rates in the district are strong, with 45% of newly-established businesses surviving their first five years in business. This is above average for Essex (43%) and nationally (39%), suggesting that access to localised business support plays an important factor in supporting the survival of local businesses. As well as continuing to support existing businesses, the Council should also support those wishing to set up their own new business with advice and support, as well as providing the physical space at places like the Plaza and Braintree Enterprise Centre with small and grow on spaces with flexible terms.

Braintree district’s employment growth has been variable over the last five years, with relatively strong employment growth. Over the five-year period, the district saw employment growth of 2%. Examining employment over a longer trajectory shows that the district was on a relatively strong employment growth trajectory since 2013, following the recovery from the 2009-10 recession. Over this time period, the district has performed well in terms of job numbers remaining the same, despite a decline in the number of business stock.

The district has experienced a fall in the number of job adverts since a peak in 2018, and although this decline matches a similar trend to one that has occurred nationally, it has occurred faster locally. Nonetheless, since the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of job adverts has grown substantially and is now greater than before.

The district has an increasingly ageing population, with a high proportion of people aged between 50 and 60 who are set to retire over the next decade. There has been no growth in the number of working-age people living in the district over the last decade, with most of the recent population growth coming from those aged over 65. This, however, is not unique to the district, and is reflected regionally and nationally.

The district has low levels of unemployment, with 87% of the working-age population in employment, ahead of Essex (81%) and nationally (79%). In terms of benefits, only 2.5% of working aged people are claiming unemployment related benefits. This shows that largely those who are able can find work, however the Council should consider how to support those who have been out of employment for some time and businesses to offer opportunities for their local populations

People and Skills

The district’s working-age population has relatively low qualifications relative to sub-regional, regional and national levels. This partly reflects the nature of the district’s existing sectoral strengths, which are typically lower-skilled roles (e.g., in manufacturing and construction) and the lack of higher education presence within the district. Encouragingly, the district’s young people tend to be qualified to degree-level more than across the rest of Essex, suggesting that the district’s lower qualification levels may be reversing. However, this is not yet borne out in the figures where there has been a 6% decline in the % of working age people qualified to NVQ level 4 and before between 2017 and 2022, a very worrying trend.

The local working-age population is very economically active, with relatively low levels of unemployment and economic inactivity. The district has rebounded well from the Covid-19 pandemic, with the number of people claiming unemployment benefits in the district below Essex and national levels, consistently across the last 4 years.

For full-time employees, incomes earned by those working in the district have stagnated, in a similar manner to productivity growth, with no growth in workplace-based earnings in locally since 2016. Workplace-based earnings are 16% above resident-based earnings, suggesting people are out-commuting from the district in search of higher salaries. This suggests that there are higher skilled/paid opportunities outside of the district, such as Chelmsford, Colchester, and London, for example.

	Median weekly gross pay in Braintree, 2021 Full-time employees	
		All employees (inc part time)
Workplace-based	£517.5	£442.7
Residence-based	£601.2	£517.9

People and Skills

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Workplace-based	£517.5	£442.7
Residence-based	£601.2	£517.9

In terms of qualifications, 25% of the working age-population is qualified to degree level (NVQ L4+), which is lower than the Essex average (35%). This may be due to those moving out of the district for employment opportunities, or that there are no universities within the district. Given the sectoral composition of the local economy, it could be expected that a higher proportion of the workforce have practical-based qualifications, including apprenticeships (excluding higher level apprenticeships). Data from the Annual Population Survey shows that the district's population has a higher proportion people qualified with trade apprenticeships relative to the regional and national level.

	2017	2020	Direction of Travel
People and Skills			
Total Population	-	155,200	<div></div>
Working Age Popula- tion	-	96,900	<div></div>
Economic Activity Rate	87.8%	87.2%	<div></div> 0.6%
Employment Rate	85.1%	86.2%	<div></div> 1.1%
Claimant Count Rate	1.1%	2.6%	<div></div> 1.5%
Median weekly Gross Pay (Employee – Workplace Based)	£423	£443	<div></div> 4.7%
Median weekly Gross Pay (Employed – Resi- dence Based)	£510	£518	<div></div> 1.6%
% of Working Age Pop- ulation with NVQ4+ Qualifications	31%	25%	<div></div> 6%
% of Working Age Pop- ulation with No Qualifi- cations	7%	7%	<div></div> 0%

The level of qualifications in the district has been significantly below averages for a long time, and the significant fall between 2017 and 2022 is very worrying, indicating a further brain drain from the district's economy. The Council must work with Essex County Council, skills providers, schools, parents, and local employers to raise the aspirations of our school leavers and older working age population to ensure they reach their full potential. This could include a range of measures including:

- Working collaboratively with local employers to engage with schools and students to raise their job aspirations, including hosting or taking part in events or schemes such as employer assemblies, enterprise challenges or providing work experience.
- Working with local skills providers to influence courses and qualifications to aid in closing skills gaps.
- Working with schools and skills providers to provide raising aspirations materials and careers advice based on the growing job sectors within the district.

- Employer led CPD training for teachers and parents to understand how schools' subjects transfer into the differing roles across the district.
- Working with Essex County Council, skills providers, schools, and residents to raise awareness of initiatives such as Multiply, to up-skill residents in Maths.
- Information, advice, and guidance evenings aimed at student parents to understand a range of courses and qualifications both vocational and academic.
- Aiding and encouraging employers, residents, and local skills providers to upskill over a range of subjects, i.e., green skills, digital.

The low level of average income from District jobs may also indicate a structural issue in the economy which will be explored more in further sections of this report, but we must ensure that residents have the skills to take advantage of these new opportunities.

Deprivation

The English Indices of Deprivation were published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2019.

Deprivation is assessed through ranking indicators such as employment, income, health, education and skills, crime, housing and environment.

The new indices indicate that the Braintree district ranks 209th out of 317 local authority districts in England in terms of its average rank with 1 being the most deprived and 317 being the least. This shows that overall the district has below average levels of deprivation and there are no small neighbourhood areas in the 10% most deprived nationally and only two (2%) in the 20% most deprived. Nonetheless, pockets of deprivation remain in our towns and also in many of our rural areas, although because there are less absolute numbers these may be more hidden.

As a largely rural district there are also particular problems which provide challenges for residents, including in accessing the job market. These include distance to jobs and education opportunities, lack of public transport, digital connectivity, fuel poverty due to lack of mains gas and the number and types of jobs available locally.



Dickens House, Witham

Wider Determinants of Health

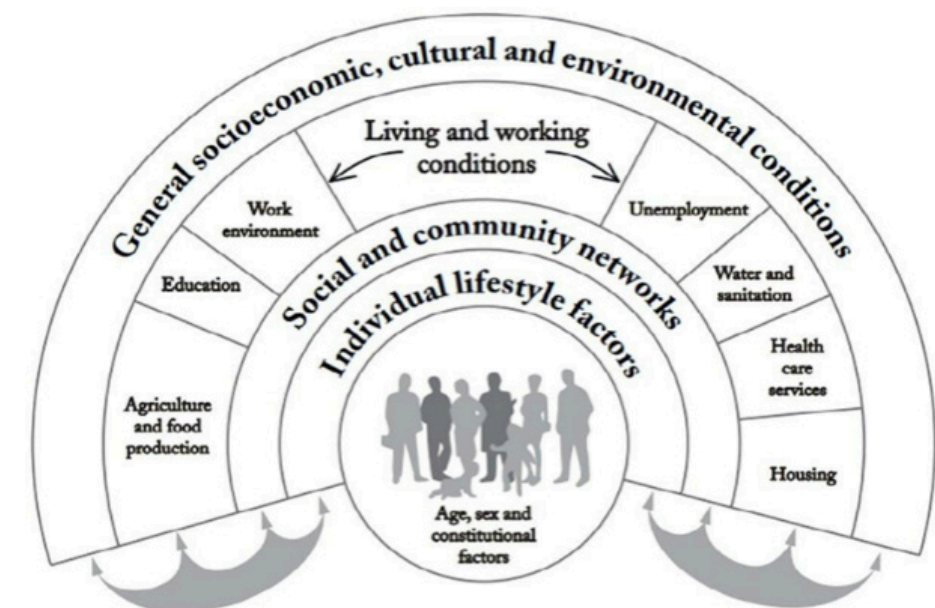
The Wider Determinants of Health are a diverse range of social, economic and environmental factors which influence people's mental and physical health.

There have been multiple studies which evidence that housing conditions have a direct impact on health. More vulnerable groups often face greater barriers to accessing high quality care.

1.6 million people living in properties in poor conditions, living in cold, damp, low quality homes in the private rented sector. Nearly one in three household (32%) are living in homes with multiple problems relating to overcrowding, affordability, and non-decent conditions have rated their health as less than good.

Homelessness and poor living conditions can have a detrimental effect on the working-age population. For people who are homeless, out of work and have other support needs, perhaps related to their health and wellbeing, it is particularly difficult to access suitable employment, although many people in this position want to work. As of August 2022, there were 2,093 applications on the Housing Register for re-housing of which 27% were single households due to unsuitable living conditions.

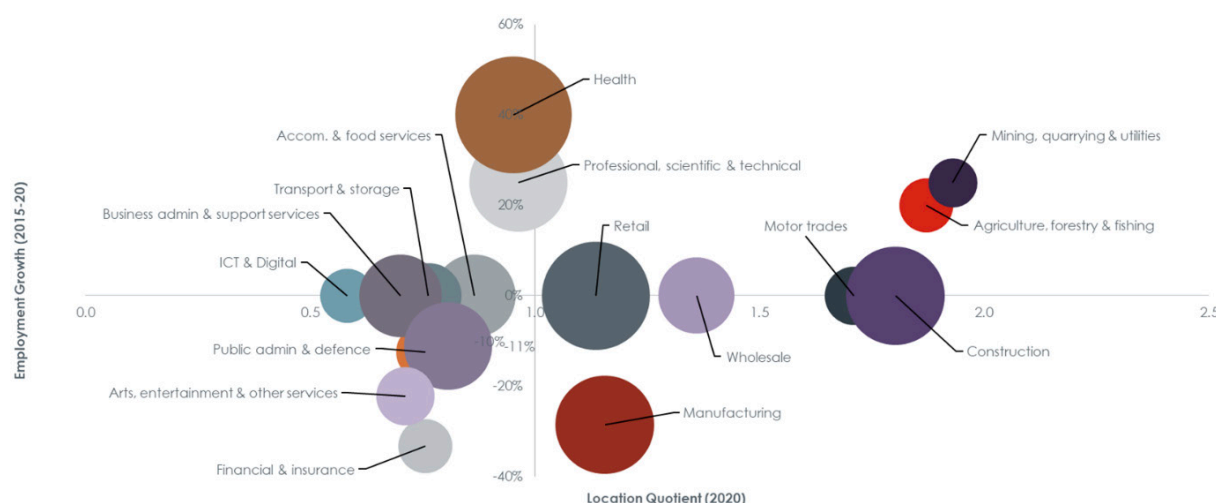
The Council will work with partners, including Essex County Council to address these issues.



Sectors

Braintree District Council is fortunate to have a mixed and diverse economy and as the local economy evolves, so do the core growth sectors. Previously strong within the manufacturing, construction and retail sectors, there has been a shift over the last 5 years in new emerging

core growth sectors, including the health and professional service sectors, mirroring national growth levels as seen in the diagram below. Emerging sectors that have not mirrored national growth levels are as per within the bottom left-hand quadrant, including Transport, Business Support, and ICT and Digital.



X-axis = employment location quotient (2020) relative to England

Y-axis = employment growth by sector (2015-20)

Size of bubble = employment (2020)

Historically, the district has had a significant industrial sector. Looking back over decades, major employers (e.g., Crittalls; a Braintree established business [1849]- global business whose name is synonymous with the best in steel windows, and Courtaulds; 18th century Braintree family who used their wealth from the textile industry to endow

the local infrastructure) played a major formative influence. Despite poor rail connections (other than from Witham in the southeast), the district has been well located in relation to the national road infrastructure. Together, these two factors have shaped elements of the district's underlying economic character.

The district's largest sectors are the health (7,000 jobs), retail (6,000), manufacturing, construction and professional, scientific and technical service (all 5,000) sectors, which in combination account for half of all employment in the district.

The district has a higher concentration of activity in the manufacturing, construction and wholesale/retail sectors relative to Essex. However, in all three sectors, the employment growth rate has either been stagnant (in the case of construction and wholesale/retail) or the level of employment has declined (in the case of manufacturing) over the past five years. However, this decline at only 7% is significantly less compared to the 19% average decline across Essex and shows that our manufacturing sector is still in a strong position and performing better than most of the rest of Essex.

Sectors which have grown strongly over the last five years include the professional services (25%), water supply and waste management (25%) and health sectors (40%), all of which have experienced growth above the Essex level.

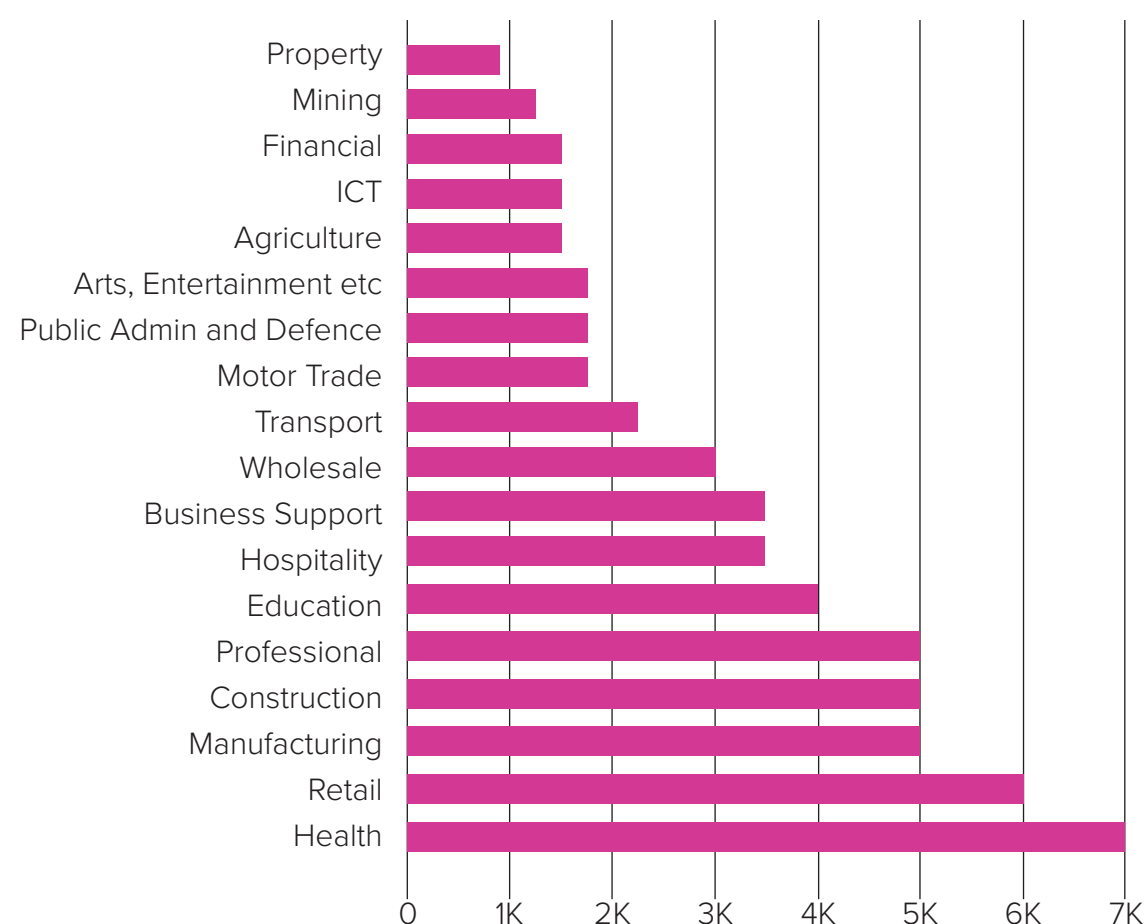
The local rural economy is an important component of the overall economy, with the agricultural sector having a relatively strong concentration of activity compared to the national level.

Water supply and waste management is a relatively small sector in absolute employment terms, but it has experienced strong growth over the past five years and has a relatively high concentration of activity compared to the national level.

People and Skills	Employment in Braintree District (2020)	Employment Growth in Braintree District (2015-20)	Employment Growth in Essex (2015-20)
Health & Social Care	6,780	+32%	+7%
Ports & Logistics	5,740	+4%	+11%
Construction	5,110	+3%	+15%
Cultural, Creative & Digital	2,325	+8%	-9%
Low Carbon (Primary)	2,040	+14%	+19%
Advanced Manufacturing	1,290	-7%	-18%
Life Services	125	-31%	-21%

The district's changing demography appears to be an important overarching factor in terms of how the local economy is evolving currently. The sectors which are growing in employment terms are typically those that are linked to an older population – so the district is seeing increasing employment in, for example, health and social care. However, growth is

also apparent where links to the district's transport arteries are especially important (and Braintree Village (formerly Freeport) continues to be an important employment hub). At the same time, some of the district's key sectors (in terms of GVA) have seen employment decline, such as manufacturing, albeit less than the Essex average.



Whilst some sectors such as ICT or financial might be relatively small in the district at the moment, there are some exciting firms working in these fields in the sector. The Council should work with these businesses to understand the advantages they feel they gain by being located in district and promote them as case studies to other similar firms.

In 2020 the Cell and Gene Therapy Advanced Manufacturing Catapult centre opened in district, bringing in £100M of national government investment to work in collaboration with the private sector to accelerate manufacturing innovation for therapy developers, technology companies and service providers bringing together technology, quality, operational, analytical and technology transfer expertise. This world leading facility will bring new companies to Braintree who we hope to locate locally and grow, forming a substantial life sciences cluster. The Council will work with the catapult centre and other partners to take advantage of this opportunity by ensuring that land and skills are available for those companies.

Horizon 120 – Horizon 120 is an exemplar business park for the region, capable of providing in excess of 750,000 sq. ft of hi-tech, industrial, office and logistics space, set in extensively landscaped grounds overlooking the countryside. Completion of Phase 1 in 2022 has secured leased premise space in office

units, light industrial sectors and R&D and Logistics enterprises. Occupations began in 2022 and the park has attracted a range of manufacturing and construction firms to the district. These could generate further clustering in these sectors and an increasing in jobs which is not yet reflected in the figures set out above. The opportunities for further development of high-class employment land should be continued to be taken forward by either the private or public sector and the Council will need to promote the benefits of living, locating and visiting the district to a wider audience.

The I-Construct Construction and Innovation Hub is a £2.3 million centre of excellence for construction innovation is based in Braintree, Essex. The hub's facilities are designed to be used to support individuals to start up a business in construction and construction-related sectors, nurture early-stage SMEs and facilitate the commercialisation of new ideas, technologies and research into construction markets. Whilst the formal ERDF support programme running from the building is concluded at the end of 2022, the Council will work with partners to deliver continued support for the construction sector in Braintree and beyond.

The Climate Emergency

In 2019, Braintree District Council declared a 'Climate Emergency' and set an ambitious target to make the Council's activities carbon-neutral where practical by 2030. The Council also committed to reducing district-wide energy consumption and emissions and to support the communities to adapt to climate change. Ultimately, the Council want a greener and environmentally sustainable community that is prepared for the future and that the Council can all be proud of, where people can enjoy cleaner air, cleaner streets and access to parks and green spaces. The built and natural environment significantly contributes towards people's quality of life and is key in making the district a more attractive place to live. The Council know the residents are proud to live here and together the Council have worked hard to keep the district clean and green. The Council want to keep up this momentum and encourage residents, businesses and other organisations to continue to work with us to further protect and enhance the district.

There are significant opportunities for district businesses to take advantage of the green economy, for example most homes will require retrofitting to enable Net Zero targets to be met.

There are also significant challenges for our district businesses in terms of skills. For example, those working in the motor trade or gas installation industry need to retrain to deal with electric cars and ground source heat pumps.

National/Global Economic Shocks

Economic shocks, otherwise known as macroeconomic events, have had a profound and continuous impact on the district economy, in particular, across the last 4 years and it is unknown how long the impacts will last for. At the time of writing this strategy, these include, although are not limited to;

COVID 19 pandemic

Lockdown restrictions imposed by government shut down many businesses and limited the way residents travelled to/from work and access services. Whilst government interventions were able to reduce some of these impacts, with Braintree District Council distributing over £55m of grant funding across over 20 different schemes, this has resulted in a reduction of income and disruptions to the hospitality/service, transportation, leisure, and travel industries. For example, whilst Stansted Airport is outside of the district, it is estimated that approximately 60% of the 1,600 jobs are delivered by district residents, increasing the number of residents on furlough, being made redundant and consequently, seeing their income fall.

Leaving the EU

With the introduction of additional statutory governance, checks and requirements, as with the UK, the district had seen a collapse in exportation, with export volumes falling approximately 20% in 2020. As of 2022, only 24 businesses in the district import/export, mainly within the food/drink, manufacturing, and construction sectors, indicating the district as a lesser trade intensive economy.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine

Braintree District Council stands in solidarity with the people of Ukraine, and all Ukrainian people in the district and across the world. The district is supportive of The Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, also known as Homes for Ukraine, allowing citizens to volunteer to house refugees fleeing the invasion of Russia in Ukraine. Sponsors offer accommodation for at least six months, with those receiving sponsorship allowed to live, work and study in the UK for up to three years. Home Office data from August 2022 shows 168 visas have been granted to stay with hosts in the district. Housing, healthcare, education and skills, benefits, and social cohesion services are experiencing added pressure and funding will need to be made available to support this community.

'Cost of living' crisis

The 'cost of living' crisis is having a substantial impact on residents and businesses across the district, with inflation outstripping wage and benefit increases. This means that there is a decline in disposable income for residents. Recent data has seen an average of a 9% price increase in common consumer goods and services, adding additional pressures to residents mainly due to increase in worldwide gas prices and the disruption to the global supply chain. Businesses are also being impacted by increasing energy bills, and the rising costs of products and services and as such, over 1/3 of businesses expect to seek additional finances.

These issues are much larger than the district and require action at national and international level. However, the Council will continue to work with businesses to lobby government as appropriate and respond to particular problems facing businesses in the district.

Vision and Key Priorities

National Strategies, Plans, and Policies

Taking all the evidence into account and considering the type of district that we are seeking to create through the range of Council strategies the overall vision for the district is;

To lead in sustainability, inclusivity, and competitiveness for a resilient local economy.

These reflect the golden strands which run throughout this strategy;

- Creating a sustainable economy which reacts and responds positively to the challenges of climate change, helping the district as a whole reduce our impact on the environment
- Ensure that economic growth in the district provides growth and opportunities for everyone in the district
- Delivers a competitive economy which provides jobs, markets and opportunities for a range of business sectors and companies to develop and grow

In order to achieve this the Council will undertake a range of actions which can be separated into the 4 categories below.

1. Infrastructure and Connectivity

The Council will partner with key stakeholders to provide future proofed integration and connectivity to support sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the Braintree district and wider North Essex. Through allocating employment land, encouraging inward investment and partnerships will result in a district and neighbouring areas that are market ready, desirable and fit to do business in.

This will be achieved by:

- Working with partners to reduce the transport connectivity issues that face rural areas
- Supporting and develop businesses working within rural areas to support and enhance their local communities
- Working with key partners to secure funding to improve public transport, walking and cycling in the District to enhance connectivity and convenience, making the district a leader in sustainable business travel
- Ensuring that land is available to support new employment growth in the right places
- Raising the profile of the district and its business community and as a place to live, invest and visit

- Providing effective grow on premise space by expanding on local networks, nurturing a culture of enterprise, creating a wider economic ecosystem for growth

2. Resilient Business Support

The Council will facilitate a supported business community, regardless of size or sector that meets the needs and requirements to encourage strong and sustainable economic growth with high value measurable outcomes within the district. The Council will also deliver a bespoke programme of support to the key high-growth sectors to respond to the niche and technical requirements of these businesses to achieve specialist developments, supporting Essex County Council's Sector Development Strategy.

This will be achieved by:

- Working with key partners to allow our businesses to take advantage of growth projects taking place inside and outside of the district
- Listening and responding to the issues that are affecting businesses in our area, lobby government or other statutory bodies as necessary to achieve change
- Supporting businesses to become market leaders through launching new products and services and outperforming competitors and boosting productivity
- Creating a sustainable environment for new business start-ups through incubation, early-stage support and collaborations
- Delivering projects which support key sector development opportunities, nurture emerging sectors, notably within the digital and creative sectors
- Supporting the growth of the rural economy recognising its wider value and supporting Levelling Up ambitions
- Exploring the scope to nurture the Cell and Gene Therapy cluster
- Supporting businesses to adopt energy and resource efficient practices, nurture local supply chains and improve the natural environment in which they operate

3. Inclusive People and Skills

The Council will support residents where appropriate to mitigate the cost-of-living crisis and to meet their full potential, supporting progression in or into work and education to improve their health, living conditions, and quality of life. The Council will also develop skills provisions around the needs of the Braintree District economy and support creation of higher paid/skilled jobs in emerging sectors.

This will be achieved by:

- Working with partners and stakeholders to deliver a programme of skills development which supports those businesses already in the district and those clusters and industries we are seeking to create
- Encouraging people to take up degree level or higher qualifications
- Target and support residents, particularly those who have been away from the job market to access employment locally
- Working with businesses to offer higher skilled/valued job opportunities to increase resident earnings
- Developing developing local workforce to be ready for changing landscapes including through the development of green skills and enhanced digital skills

- Promoting job and career opportunities.
- Supporting the Catapult Cell and Gene Therapy centre to provide seeding of skills within the life sciences sector.
- Supporting the digital skills sector development.
- Use the I-Construct centre as a centre for innovation in the Construction sector, supporting jobs growth and green skills innovation.
- Working with social housing providers and house builders to mitigate the impacts of housing need within a negative economic trajectory.



Catapult, Braintree

4. Sustainable Green Economy

The Council will enable businesses and residents to support low and zero carbon initiatives that will support present and future wellbeing, reducing the impact on the world's natural resources, with a focus on fair and sustainable consumption and production.

This will be achieved by:

- Supporting the local carbon and environmental goods and services sector
- Promoting waste to energy activity in waste management sectors
- Encouraging sustainable practices across all businesses
- Promote local supply chains, adopting where possible, the principles of a circular economy
- Supporting the construction sector in modern methods of construction including retrofitting
- Supporting the land-based sectors in adhering to The Agriculture Act 2020 to deliver environmental land management schemes
- Supporting the delivery of retrofit schemes to meet low carbon guidance and compliant standards



I-Construct building

Funding, Delivery and Monitoring

Funding

The past decade has seen a seismic change in the role of local government and the way it is funded. Expectations are rising but budgets are shrinking. Over the last decade, the Council have had to address both a reduction in Central Government Grant of £6.7million and an increase in the cost of providing services. The budget has been balanced by bringing in income - largely through careful financial management and investments including the buying of commercial buildings to rent out, and by reducing costs without impacting on the services received by residents.

Since the previous strategy, over £80 million has been invested into the district to tackle some of the big challenges faced. In many ways, the district face the same issues as districts up and down the country and these challenges have been approached head-on. As a result, more interest has been unlocked, excitement and investment into the district towns and villages.

Growing the economy with investment, opportunities and support for new and existing businesses is vital for the local economy. The more innovation that is encouraged, the better for the local economy and the better the life chances for the district residents.

The delivery of this strategy will primarily be funded through the following schemes:

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

This fund provides £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment by March 2025, with all areas of the UK receiving an allocation from the Fund via a funding formula rather than a competition. It will help places right across the country deliver enhanced outcomes and recognises that even the most affluent parts of the UK contain pockets of deprivation and need support.

Levelling Up Fund

Allocation of funds to deliver the Levelling Up White Paper Agenda.

Rural England Prosperity Fund

An addition to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocations to local authorities significantly rural.

Multiply

Funding available to improve adult numeracy skills

BDC Budget

A budget has been ringfenced for Economic Development activity and will be subsidised by partner resources, and future national/local funding opportunities.

Business-based investment

Businesses will be encouraged to take up match-funding schemes to support their business growth and development as well as research and development schemes (R&D).



Alec Hunter, Braintree

Delivery

This ambitious strategy is dependent on the support of key partners, access to funding, and the support of the district. As per the vision, in order to achieve sustainability and flexibility, the Council will be driven by the needs of the economy whilst reviewing annually, what data and trends are forecasting.

The Council are mindful of the local and national policies and therefore, the delivery of these objectives will be complimentary to the existing work that is being delivered to achieve the shared aims of the partners.

The Council will be proactive in exploring new opportunities in terms of investment and development.

The core partners are:

Business Support

- BEST Growth Hub
- COLBEA
- Let's do business group
- Haven Gateway Partnership
- FSB

Education

- ARU
- UoE
- Colchester Institute

Multi-Disciplinary

- NEEB
- Essex County Council
- Education and Skills Board
- Job Centre
- HMRC

Business Led Groups

- Witham Chamber of Commerce
- Braintree Town Partnership
- Witham Industrial Watch

Monitoring

This strategy will be reported on an annual basis, with annual plans being derived to deliver the core priorities across the next 5 years. This will include short term projects which can be delivered quickly but also work towards longer structural changes in our economy and workforce which will take place over many years including beyond the lifetime of this plan.



Bull Inn, Halstead

