

Basildon Borough Local Development Framework

Topic Paper TP3 Economic Development

February 2012



Introduction

- 1 Basildon Borough is a key employment area in the Thames Gateway, and unique to the wider area in its status as a business hub, providing a vast range of employment opportunities from highly skilled research and development posts in the automotive industry to essential logistical distribution positions.
- 2 The key employment areas, which are already established within the borough, include the A127 Corridor Enterprise Parks and Ford Dunton area for automotive research and development. Significant business operations are also found in other employment areas throughout the borough such as Hurricane Way, Wickford, established in the late 1980's and Radford Way, Billericay which is currently not meeting its optimal potential. Each of our town centres also represent key employment functions where a range of jobs and services are provided.
- 3 This section sets out the Council's policy framework to ensure that the Borough continues to be a key focal point for employment and economic development over the next 20 years ensuring that the strategic objectives of the Core Strategy for sustainable growth, economic betterment and employment opportunities are sufficiently met.

Policy Context

National Policy Context

- 4 The Planning System is undergoing significant changes at all levels as a result of the emerging Localism Bill and associated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The consultation on the NPPF which commenced in July 2011 clearly demonstrates the central government steer to focus on the economic development of the Country and ensure its growth is embedded through the planning and development process. The draft document highlights the need to focus on town centres, to allocate strategic sites to cater for the local requirements of business and growth thus supporting economic betterment and to identify and address any barriers to investment that may exist and use the development process to overcome them. ⁽¹⁾

This approach does not depart from the existing national guidance in any fundamental way however the emphasis on economic development is a reinforced one despite there being a lack of consideration for tourism. In the interim however and until the Localism Bill and NPPF formally replace current planning documents the following will be considered:

- 5 Planning Policy Statement 1: *Delivering Sustainable Development* (2005) establishes the Government's commitment to promoting 'a strong, stable and productive economy that aims to bring jobs and prosperity for all'. This commitment is expanded upon in PPS4: *Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth* (2009) which sets out planning policies for economic development for both rural and urban areas with a focus on Use Class type 'B' developments primarily considering industrial units and research and development opportunities to engender wealth and/or generate an economic output or product.
- 6 Tourism is also a consideration for its role in the economy and is defined by the United Nation World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) as comprising the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes⁽²⁾. As the UK's sixth biggest industry and third largest export earner accounting for some £90 billion of direct spending each year. It comprises over 200,000 businesses and provides some 4.4% of the nation's total employment.⁽³⁾ This strong profile is set to increase further with the following upcoming opportunities each of which will have an impact upon related business:
 - The Olympic Games, Paralympic Games and Cultural Olympiad (2012)
 - Her Majesty The Queen's Diamond Jubilee (2012)
 - World Pride (2012)
 - Rugby League World Cup (2013)
 - Rugby Union World Cup (2015)
 - Cricket World Cup (2019)
- 7 *Government Tourism Policy*, (March 2011), has been prepared and focuses on the contribution of tourism to the British Economy

1 Draft National Planning Policy Framework July 2011

2 <http://unwto.org/en/about/unwto>

3 Government Tourism Policy, DCMS, March 2011

and aims to maximise on opportunities such as of the London 2012 Games which is anticipated to attract approximately 4 million visitors and create 50,000 extra jobs by 2015. The document also details the national desire to increase its offering in an effort to become one of the top 5 visitor economies in the world, to increase local approaches and partnership working dedicated to benefiting tourism via bodies such as the Local Enterprise Partnerships and by encouraging more people to stay in the UK for their holidays.

- 8 This rallying for tourism at the national and local levels is also championed through the Government's *Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism* (2006), which recognises that the planning system has a crucial role to play in facilitating tourism development and improving tourist offer in appropriate locations. The document highlights the role of tourism as bringing broader benefits to local communities and individuals through regeneration, providing catalysts for growth, raising the profile of areas, supporting businesses and services and underpinning the quality of the local environment and facilitate further enjoyment of it by residents and visitors. The guide expects Local Planning Authorities to decide how to deal with tourism issues within their respective LDFs.

Regional Policy Context

- 9 Basildon forms part of the Thames Gateway, identified as a Growth Area in the *Sustainable Communities Plan* (2003). The *East of England Regional Spatial Strategy* (RSS) 2001-2021 (to be revoked) supports this Growth Area Status and includes policies for the Borough to strengthen its economic role in the Region.
- 10 Specifically, Policy E1 sets a target of approximately 12,000 new jobs to be delivered in Basildon Borough between 2001 and 2021. To achieve this, the RSS includes Policies E2 (Provision of Land for Employment) and E3 (Strategic Employment Sites). Policy E2 requires an adequate range of sites/premises (including sites within mixed-use areas and town centres) to be allocated for employment use. Policy E3 states the need for strategic employment sites (as informed by the Regional Economic Strategy and local employment land reviews) to be identified.

- 11 Policies E6 (Tourism) and C1-C2 (Cultural Development) of the RSS continue the central government commitment to the role of tourism recognising its potential and benefits for the local area for communities and visitors alike. These policies champion the role played by cultural and environmental assets and how the planning system can assist this by protecting, allocating and helping to enhance valued facilities like historic areas, parks and open spaces and focusing on regeneration to promote a sense of place in areas.

- 12 The *Regional Economic Strategy* (RES) sits alongside the RSS and similarly sets a vision, objectives and targets for the East of England region with particular regard to the economic success of the area. This document identifies Basildon as a major employer with evidence of both a net inflow of non Borough residents travelling to work in the Basildon urban area as well as strong outflow of Borough residents commuting to London. The RES notes the predominant presence of engineering along the A127 'Enterprise Corridor' where the only UK based research and development facility for Ford Motors is located. The document also acknowledges the opportunity presented by the 2012 London Olympics and the proximity of the borough to their location as part of the Thames Gateway. The RES notes that such events provide *'the opportunity to capture business contracts and tourism investment'* which could extend beyond the life of the Olympics and thus contribute to prosperity for the future.

- 13 The RES aims *'to bring about sustainable prosperity and an economy that can adapt to global issues and competition'*. The localised contributions that can be made in helping to achieve this include:
 - a. To reinvent and revitalise Basildon town centre with thriving residential, retail and leisure offers;
 - b. To develop Basildon as a centre for investment in environmental technologies and services, including potential leadership in automotive energy efficiency; and
 - c. Recognise and enhance the relationships between the major urban areas (Basildon), market towns and their rural hinterlands as highly

interdependent economic systems which can both contribute to, and benefit from, the prosperity of regional centres.

- 14** Additionally, other smaller urban areas in the Borough such as Billericay, Pitsea, Laindon and Wickford should be acknowledged for the role they play in helping support the Borough's economy.
- 15** The *Business Tourism Strategic Action Plan (2008)* is clear in identifying the implications of where the strong business base of Essex directly overlaps with tourism and notes that nearly a quarter of all existing inbound trips to Essex are for business purposes. The Action Plan confirms that Essex currently offers businesses small to medium sized conference venues, some of which cater for corporate hospitality. It recognises that there is a wide range of existing accommodation types in the county however it concludes that there is a shortage of 4* and 5* character and boutique hotels⁽⁴⁾.
- 16** This work supports the findings of the *Exceeding Expectations: Tourism Growth Strategy for Essex report (2007)* undertaken by the Tourism Network which advises that whilst there is not an under-supply of hotel accommodation in Essex generally, there is an insufficient supply of higher quality establishments. It also states that should there be a County wide focus on business tourism then this demand for upper-end accommodations will increase.

Local Plans, Programmes and Policies

Basildon Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2033

- 17** Draft objectives of the emerging *Sustainable Communities Strategy*, which is currently being refreshed by the Council, and focus on employment and economic success, include:
1. *To improve employment prospects, education and skills of local people; and*
 2. *To support and promote the growth in local economies and businesses to benefit local people.*

Basildon Employment Capacity Study (June 2008)

- 18** The Council commissioned Roger Tym & Partner and Lambert Smith Hampton to undertake an *Employment Capacity Study*. The main findings of the Study include:
- Main employment area along the A127 Corridor can become congested and recommend creating employment in Basildon Town Centre as a sustainable alternative which can be reached by public transport;
 - As there are only limited infill opportunities along the A127 Corridor, maximising the use of land there should be a priority;
 - Shortage of office floorspace in Basildon Town Centre and the A127 Corridor, but recognise proposals to regenerate Basildon Town Centre should bring forward office space in the longer term;
 - With the exception of Gardiner's Lane South, no employment areas should be released for alternative uses;
 - Nethermayne Corridor provides scope to build on the opportunities presented by the Basildon and Thurrock University Hospital;
 - Opportunity for a quality business park in the Nethermayne Corridor adjacent to the Hospital, potentially on the site of Basildon College, if the latter was to relocate to the Town Centre;
 - Public transport to A127 Corridor and Ford Dunton needs to be improved;
 - Potential for more inward investment, particularly in the higher value sectors;
 - Potential to develop health technologies sector.
 - Potential to develop green technologies sector.

19 As a result of the economic shift that has taken place since this study was undertaken, the Council intend to undergo a review of employment provision and needs in the borough, prior to submission to the Secretary of State, to ensure that the Core Strategy has regard to the most up to date situation within the borough.

A127 Corridor Development Framework (2010)

20 In response to the *Employment Capacity Study* (2008) and the identification of a lack of quality office and industrial premises along the A127 Corridor, Basildon Renaissance Partnership in conjunction with Basildon Council appointed consultants CBRE alongside AECOM to prepare a Vision for the A127 Corridor. In preparing the Vision, a number of initiatives were identified for enhancement of the Corridor, including:

- Promoting the Corridor for Business Park, green technologies and automotive research and development uses.
- The need to expand into the Green Belt to accommodate growth and encourage business and employment.
- Providing higher education, further education and training opportunities to enhance the attainment level of the resident workforce.
- Public realm and signage improvements.

Basildon Economic Framework Summary 2008-2011

21 The Economic Framework sets out the joint local priorities for Basildon Renaissance Partnership and Basildon Borough Council. Amongst this is a focus on the improvement of the A127 and Cranes Farm Road corridors which is anticipated to contribute significantly to the creation of job opportunities for the local people over the next 15-20 years, from new office and health sector employment, to construction and leisure jobs. The framework also highlights that the attentions of the borough should be directed towards the up-skilling of residents with particular focus on raising educational achievements of young people; to promote the creation and business

through growth and enterprise across the borough and to encourage inward investment towards new high value employment.

Basildon Regeneration Framework 2007-2021

22 Basildon Renaissance Partnership (BRP) published a Regeneration Framework for the period 2007-2021. The Regeneration Framework aims to identify the plans and objectives that will drive the growth of the Borough over this period. Of most relevance to economic development for the borough is Priority 1: Regeneration of Town Centres which notes the Town Centre as the focus of future office development; Priority 3: The Basildon economy, as well as Priority 5: Health and Education which considers skill levels. Other issues set down in the strategy which impact upon the achievement of economic growth for the borough include:

- A low level of skills and aspirations;
- A vulnerable economy caused by a reliance on large multi nationals;
- Fragmented business support offer;
- Unemployment and poor value employment paying low wages etc; and
- A lack of availability of employment land.

Basildon Borough Local Investment Plan (LIP) 2010-2015

23 The *Basildon Borough Local Investment Plan 2010-2015* sets out the priorities for investment to achieve economic growth and sustainable communities in Basildon Borough, whilst considering the context and established strategy of the area.

24 The Local Investment Plan is the method by which the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) seeks to engage with local authorities to identify their physical, social and economic infrastructure needs. Some of the issues, opportunities and future investment plans identified in the LIP are set out below. The Council's LDF, amongst other local strategies, should consider these and make provision for overcoming issues, and maximising upon priorities and opportunities by setting necessary policy to encourage delivery.

25 Issues identified:

- Employers find it difficult to recruit locally due to lack of promotion of local opportunities and a deficiency in necessary skills in the local area;
- High levels of inward and outward commuting and migration for work;
- The dependency of large corporate companies to bolster employment figures comes with a risk of large scale redundancies; and
- Academic under performance is concentrated in already struggling areas of the borough and the location of new housing tends to be nearer better performing schools where there is an attraction to live. This makes it harder to improve the performance of schools with existing performance issues by attracting new residents and investment.
- The need to undertake estate renewal at places such as Fryens, Craylands and later Felmores;
- Relocation of Basildon College to town centre location;
- Support the development or redevelopment of an existing site that can be used as an innovation and enterprise centre for R&D and/or green technologies; and
- Investment to improve Burnt Mills Industrial Estate.

Review Exploring the Barriers Facing 16 -18 year olds who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and how these can be overcome

28 This was a report published in April 2010 by a Task and Finish group of Basildon Council Scrutiny function. It contains a series of recommendations for Essex County Council, Connexions, Basildon Action on Learning, Basildon Council, and External Agencies on ways to overcome barriers that help lead to young people becoming NEET. These recommendations have been turned into an action plan which is being implemented, with progress to be reviewed annually by the Council's Scrutiny Commission.

Basildon Mini Assessment of the Essex Local Economic Assessment

29 Published in 2010, this mini assessment noted the work being done in partnership between Basildon Council and private sector led working groups such as the Basildon Business Group (BBG) which has identified employment and skills as its number one issue.

30 Members of the BBG and other members of the business community have identified a number of issues which they feel are critical to strengthening the local economy including:

26 Opportunities for the Borough:

- The borough and its major employment areas are in accessible locations close to key and strategic transport corridors such as the M25, A13 and A127;
- There are strong manufacturing and finance sectors within the borough;
- Basildon Borough is an established employment area both within the Thames Gateway, Essex and beyond; and
- Businesses within the borough are predominantly proactive and keen to engage with the Council enabling officers and departments to maintain a dialogue to identify what businesses need and how improvements can be made.

27 Priorities for the Borough:

- Commitment remains to regenerate and redevelop the Borough's town centres, primarily Basildon, Wickford, and Pitsea;
- There is a focus on the enhancement of transport corridors/connections and necessary infrastructure to encourage movement for pedestrians;
- Raising the skills and qualifications of local residents, especially young people;
- Facilitating the recruitment and training of staff, especially young people, who are already at work;
- Marketing the strengths of the district to inward investors;

- Strengthening supply chains and business-to-business opportunities;
- Continuing to provide a good working environment, including an accessible road and transportation network, parking and access for staff, crime reduction and community safety, and clean, well-maintained roads and pavements.

31 Working with BBG, the Council has developed a number of sector specific working groups in areas such as logistics, security and Automotive, Aerospace and Defence (AADs) to help keep important economic growth sectors strong and ensure that any issues regarding lack of skills and/or opportunities are communicated. The BBG and its subgroups, including AADs group, help to inform the authority in where attentions need to be focused to ensure the success of these industries, to accommodate their growth, and retain their business within the Borough. The AADs group has identified employment and skills as its most important issue and identified an impending critical need in engineering and advanced engineering skills.

32 The Council, the BBG, schools and colleges in the Borough have also launched the Basildon Business Education Consortium (BBEC) to improve business-schools engagement and help the Borough's young people be more work ready.

Economic Profile

Economic Portrait

33 Basildon is the 31st most competitive business location in the UK, with 1/8 of the Essex County's GDP stemming from the Borough. There is approximately 1,210,000sqm of commercial floor space, 650 ha of industrial areas, 1 regional centre, 4 town centres and 220,000sqm of retail floor space.⁽⁵⁾ The Borough represents the second largest economy in the Thames Gateway Area outside of Canary Wharf employing over 77,000 people, 40,000 of which are located in the enterprise parks along the A127 corridor.⁽⁶⁾ Basildon is a recognised business hub within the Thames Gateway and beyond

and serves as a central economic driver for Essex and the sub region and is an identity that should be strengthened.

34 The key employment area of the borough runs along the A127 Corridor and accommodates over 8,000 businesses with multinational companies such as Ford Motor Company, Selex Galileo, First Data, MK Electric, Case New Holland and IFDS located here.⁽⁷⁾ There are also many outlying employment parks/areas across the Borough which make a significant contribution to the provision of jobs and business activity, including Radford Way in Billericay and Hurricane Way at Wickford both of which could increase their offering where appropriate through improvements to existing units and in accommodating more businesses in a range of sizes and nature.

35 Services represent the largest employment sector for the borough at 79% including jobs in health care, finance and retail. Over the past decade this sector has seen much growth and can be explained by various redevelopment opportunities which have occurred such as the expansion of Nethermayne Hospital Campus to include a cardiothoracic unit and the relocation of certain businesses into the Borough such as International Financial Data Services (IFDS) moving from Brentwood. This growth was, however, a result of rare and unique opportunities and is unlikely to be easily replicated. Therefore, consideration must be paid to how we can maximise on other potential opportunities by improving what the Borough possesses within its boundaries and by promoting our borough as a place for new business⁽⁸⁾.

36 Continuing its established history for the borough is manufacturing which is the second largest sector in the borough and despite suffering some decline along with the rest of the country, continues to be a significant employer at 14.6% with the closest local competitor to that figure being Rochford District (13.1%). The composition of manufacturing has also altered in Basildon and made a move towards quality over quantity with an increase in higher skilled engineering functions creating a platform upon

5 Basildon Renaissance Partnership, Draft A127 Development Framework - November 2009
 6 Essex Economic Assessment: Local Assessments(2010)
 7 Essex Economic Assessment: Local Assessments(2010)
 8 Essex Economic Assessment: Local Assessments(2010)

which to build a more specialised and higher value sector⁽⁹⁾. Whilst the service sector is distributed across numerous employers our manufacturing positions tend to be more concentrated in fewer, large multi-national corporations and as a result a single company closing can instantly create a situation where several hundred workers are seeking new employment. Although the value of these large companies and employee numbers are by no means a negative thing, it does provide the incentive to consider replacement measures in the event of loss/closure of all businesses and take steps to ensure there are a mix of employment opportunities across large and small businesses both local and multi-national. Without this, workers may look outside the area for employment, especially those that inwardly commute into the Borough⁽¹⁰⁾.

37 Work undertaken as part of the Basildon *Employment Capacity Study* (2008) found that 26 of the companies contacted through the study wanted to expand in the future demonstrating a potential need for additional employment provisions going forward. It should also be noted that despite the economic downturn Basildon has continued to be a successful place for business and whilst it has seen some losses to the unstable climate such as Visteon, where approximately 500 people lost their employment, the borough continues to perform in testament to its resilience and an argument which supports continued growth for our economic betterment. Whilst it is likely that the provision of physical space and land for growth will be necessary it is important to take account of the changing business practises of current times to ensure that those measures taken reflect Basildon and its future to ensure a balance is struck. One example of these changing business practises is the growing nationwide trend of home working and the growing number of workers, normally located in offices and in other desk based professions, that are choosing to avoid commuting and busy working environments and instead work remotely from their homes. With an increase in technology allowing people to connect remotely to shared systems from their own

mobile phones, personal computers and laptops; businesses are generally keen to encourage this at least part-time, which often saves on resources for the businesses themselves and is considered to be more environmentally sustainable in many ways. Although 'home-working' isn't likely to effect the needs of business premises dramatically, it could have a positive effect on roads and travel congestion to some extent and should be recognised for its benefit.

38 Overall employment statistics further illustrate the resilience of Basildon's economic standing rising by 11,200 people employed between 2001 (66,100) and 2008 (77,300)⁽¹¹⁾. This period covers the early part of the national economic downturn and despite the financial crisis the levels within the Borough have predominantly remained constant and even demonstrated continued growth, demonstrating its potential as a key employment hub. With a job density of 0.81⁽¹²⁾, Basildon has the most jobs per resident in the Thames Gateway South Essex sub region and closer study of the population estimates and employment figures for the Borough would indicate that there are 1.12 jobs per household⁽¹³⁾.

39 In 2009 the economic inactivity rate in the Borough was 23.9% with unemployment representing 6.7% for the same period. Unemployment has subsequently increased to 7.6% in 2011⁽¹⁴⁾ and it is argued that barriers to employment exist within the area which must be overcome if further increase in unemployment rates are to be curtailed.

40 Although low wages are stereotypically considered to be a reason for unemployment in an area, the average earnings for employees across the Borough are relatively good at £499.60 per week (gross), which is marginally higher than the East of England average (£479.10)⁽¹⁵⁾ and statistically speaking should not be an issue for the borough. However, this does not necessarily depict an accurate picture for the 'health' of resident employment and is skewed by the high levels of commuting, both inward and outward, which occurs across Basildon where

9 Essex Economic Assessment: Local Assessments(2010)

10 Roger Tym & Partners, Basildon Employment Capacity Study: Final Report, June 2008

11 Essex Economic Assessment: Local Assessments(2010)

12 Essex Economic Assessment: Local Assessments(2010)

13 CHELMER Data East of England, Summer 2009

14 NOMIS:<http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/2038431766/report.aspx#tabempunemp>

15 Essex Economic Assessment: Local Assessments(2010)

only 55% of the total number of employed borough residents stay within the boundaries for work. The remaining 45% of employed residents commute outside of the area for work.⁽¹⁶⁾ As a result of the proximity to London and good transport links there is a wealth of choice in employment options that extend beyond the Borough boundaries and often results in more highly skilled residents easily commuting to the capital attracted by its higher wages and greater diversity and it is through this loss of skill that the borough suffers.

- 41** The skills base of the borough is low with only 17% of resident workers of Basildon qualified to NVQ4 and above and an overwhelming 40% holding NVQ1 or no qualifications at all. The relatively high level of out commuting (45%) exacerbates this problem and despite continuing to develop a specialised manufacturing sector and skilled business base, those which are qualified are being lost to the competing offers of London (5% outward commute), Chelmsford (6% outward commute) and Thurrock (6% outward commute)⁽¹⁷⁾. This lack of skills is not assisted by our younger residents who should contribute to our economy and jobs growth going forward. Basildon Borough has the largest number of young people in the county who are NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) with some 626 Borough young people aged 16-19 estimated by Connexions to be NEET in May 2011.⁽¹⁸⁾ The skills gap is, for the most part, filled by non-residents with 26% of those employed within the Borough commuting inward for work from south and central Essex who are assisted by the good transport routes in and out of the area⁽¹⁹⁾. Therefore measures need to be put in place to curtail this unproductive trend and increase educational and skills levels within the Borough populous to ensure financial and economic longevity.
- 42** Over the next 20 years approximately £1 billion worth of regeneration works are anticipated to take place within the borough boundaries⁽²⁰⁾. There are also many opportunities which can help, both directly and indirectly, support and benefit the economic

growth across the area, these include town centre regeneration and the London Gateway shipping port at Thurrock as detailed below.

- 43** *Town Centre Regeneration* - Of most significance is Basildon Town Centre regeneration which is already being pursued with a preferred development partner and is considered to be the most significant town centre within the borough with regard to provision of services and employment. The Council have already adopted a Development Framework (2006) for the town centre project and has been used to prepare a Draft Masterplan for the regional town centre which will include a mix of uses including retail, commercial, leisure and residential; the consultation of which will be taking place in February and March 2012. The Masterplan identifies the potential scale and location of these uses and specifies how the town centre could be regenerated and guide development over the long term. With aspirations to enhance the retail offering and deliver a mix of employment opportunities, the town centre regeneration will have a fundamental impact on provision of jobs for the future and meeting the objectives of the Council and its LDF. The specific details of the regeneration will be set out in the completed Masterplan which the Council will seek to adopt as a SPD to ensure it forms part of the Local Development Plan. There are also aspirations to roll out a wider town centre programme to look at our other service centres, including Laindon and these projects and schemes will be subject to further study to ensure the Council take the best course of action and maximise the benefits of any regenerative activities.
- 44** *DP World, London Gateway* - The new London Gateway is a major new development currently being constructed on the north bank of the River Thames in Thurrock, Essex. Whilst this project may not be taking place within proximity to Basildon, the scale and nature of it provides an opportunity for the borough to provide space for back office functions and logistical sites which can support and benefit from the location of the port. Once completed, the gateway will comprise a large deep-water port capable of handling the biggest container ships in the

16 Roger Tym & Partners, Basildon Employment Capacity Study: Final Report, June 2008
 17 Roger Tym & Partners, Basildon Employment Capacity Study: Final Report, June 2008
 18 Connexions
 19 Roger Tym & Partners, Basildon Employment Capacity Study: Final Report, June 2008
 20 Essex Economic Assessment: Local Assessments(2010)

world. It will also house one of Europe's largest logistics parks maximising on the strategic road and rail corridors available. Basildon already serves as an economic hub and benefits from a good road network which has recently been improved at Cranes Farm Road and are undergoing works at Sadlers Farm. Through continued promotion and betterment of the borough Basildon could attract business related to the port and this could be explored as to what opportunities are possible.

- 45** *Tourism* - 23.5% of all existing inbound trips to Essex are for business purposes⁽²¹⁾. Tourism of this nature brings multiple benefits to the locality, not just through direct economic inputs into hotels and servicing businesses, but also by raising the profile of the Borough as a place to do business and encouraging further investment.
- 46** The Borough has natural and commercial assets which already attract thousands of visitors a year, including major recreational areas such as South Essex Marshes, Norsey Wood, Billericay and the Langdon Hills Country Park; commercial areas including the Borough Town Centres and Enterprise Parks and also leisure and cultural facilities such as Festival Leisure Park, Basildon Sporting Village, Towngate Theatre, Wat Tyler Heritage and Green Centres. There are also the more rural facilities of Barleylands in Billericay and Golf Clubs.
- 47** A review of the Borough's hotel offer had concluded that it has a good basic range of hotels, beds and ancillary facilities in order to promote and cater for local tourism⁽²²⁾. Budget hotels dominate the current supply with 97% of the rooms being of 3* or Budget Grade, which together with the ungraded hotels provide 8% of the Essex supply⁽²³⁾. There are, however, no 4* or 5* hotels in the Borough, and the closest 4* hotels are in the rural areas of Brentwood and Stock and the nearest 5* accommodations are located in London.
- 48** Basildon Borough has a strong business tourism base, supported by evidence that there are high occupancy rates during the week at budget hotels for most of the year. Local hoteliers confirm that these are largely met by bookings from local companies and outside contractors seeking accommodation. There has however been a noticeable decline in demand since 2009, which can be attributed to the recession and its effect on hotel expenditure, scale-backs in hiring contractors and quite specifically to South Essex, shutdowns at the nearby Thames oil refineries which periodically fluctuate demand⁽²⁴⁾.
- 49** The Borough's weekend demand is substantially different, catering for visitors from local leisure and entertainment venues. Major sporting and civic events, such as the European Paintball Championships in Basildon and the Southend Air Festival, have generated some extra business for local hotels, but people are not generally coming to the Borough for leisure breaks⁽²⁵⁾.
- 50** Growth in corporate demand for hotel accommodation is expected to be most significant in locations where employment is set to grow most strongly and where the new drivers of corporate demand are planned in terms of office or business park development. Basildon Borough is identified as being one of the seven areas in Essex where the strongest growth is likely to be⁽²⁶⁾ as a result of major construction projects and the growth of the financial and business services, ICT and telecommunications, medical research, research and development and advanced manufacturing sectors, which could result in an increase in demand for local, hotel accommodation.
- 51** Similar to limited high-end accommodation issues, conference facilities in the borough are also low in number and the Borough's largest conference and meeting facility is currently located in the Holiday Inn in Basildon, which has fourteen meeting rooms the largest of which is a 300 seat theatre.⁽²⁷⁾ Other smaller facilities can be found in

21 Business Tourism Strategic Action Plan, East of England Tourism, 2008

22 Leisure, Arts, Culture & Tourist Accommodation in Basildon District & Update of Prospects for Retail Sector Capacity, WYG Planning & Design Ltd, July 2010

23 Essex Hotel Futures, Hotel Solutions, December 2009

24 Essex Hotel Futures, Hotel Solutions, December 2009

25 Essex Hotel Futures, Hotel Solutions, December 2009

26 Essex Hotel Futures, Hotel Solutions, December 2009

27 Leisure, Arts, Culture & Tourist Accommodation in Basildon District & Update of Prospects for Retail Sector Capacity, WYG Planning & Design Ltd, July 2010

Basildon at The Towngate Theatre, The Sporting Village and Wat Tyler Centre, Barleylands Farm, Burstead Golf Club and The Wickford Centre.

52 Delegates of conferences and overnight business trips can generate between £128 and £201 of direct expenditure per person per day to a local area⁽²⁸⁾, attracting better quality facilities into town centres, rather than out of town, where the majority are currently located, should support the local economy through spin-off custom for town centre businesses, and diversifying the mix of uses in the town centre.

53 Alongside, Chelmsford, Braintree and Harlow, Basildon Borough is forecast to experience an increase in demand related to sports events, primarily as a result of the Sporting Village in Gloucester Park, Basildon. The venue has already hosted its first international competition and many more are expected to follow. As evening economy opportunities expand in a regenerated Basildon Town Centre, so too could the demand for hotel accommodation.

Drivers for Change

Drivers for Change

54 Using relevant evidence bases and with the current portrait of the economy in Basildon Borough in mind, the following sets out the key matters driving the need for change and action in the borough to help manage our economy and direct future growth to create the type of Borough that we aspire to.

Competition and pitfalls in the local economy

55 The borough, along with the rest of the country is in a state of economic unrest which threatens the employment levels in the borough and the success of businesses. Whilst Basildon has managed to retain its success as a key business area and, for the most part, buck the downward trend in the economy, growing competition from other areas within the Thames Gateway, including Thurrock with the DP World Port and Lakeside's shopping complex expansion; and London, can not be overlooked for their potential to impact upon the economic growth for the borough. Furthermore, whilst the

presence of large multi national companies such as New Holland and Ford Motors are a significant benefit to the local economy they also create a potential vulnerability to the borough leaving it at risk to changes in the global markets. However, whilst these each present their own challenge, they also provide opportunities for the borough to maximise and retain our position as a place to do business.

Enhancing the vibrancy and vitality of our town centres

56 As an established borough for business and enterprise the success of our town centres is a key element to establishing appeal for tourists, supporting existing businesses and enticing prospective investment from new employers and there is a need to ensure that we can offer attractive and thriving town centres and work to overcome the difficulties experienced in the retail sector across the country. Whilst work has already begun in Basildon Town Centre in establishing a Masterplan for regeneration, this commitment and desire to regenerate our town and local centres across the borough is needed to benefit long-term prosperity and provide for our communities and visitors.

Provision & Support for Economic Growth & Prosperity

57 Basildon borough is a recognised area of employment and commerce and expansion of existing businesses and the encouragement of new investment to the area must be provided for and supported for the future. Whilst the A127 corridor continues to house the majority of businesses, its land supply is dwindling and ensuring that there is sufficient land and premises to accommodate further growth for economic prosperity will be one of the challenges for the borough. The strategic road networks of the borough, despite recent improvements, continue to attract congestion and opportunities outside of the A127 corridor may need to be explored in an attempt to balance road traffic, encourage use of public transport, cater for those residents and employment areas in other settlements and complement housing growth which may take place outside of the main Basildon conurbation. A proactive approach to the promotion of the borough, continued

commitment to regeneration schemes and liaison with businesses, stakeholders, and investors will also be needed.

Unemployment and the need to increase skill levels

58 Unemployment and retaining workers in localised jobs are challenges for the borough and issues which can be hidden under the number of positions taken up by inward commuters which subsequently bolster the jobs figures for the area. Whilst some of this can be partially attributed to the economic downturn the problem remains but is unlikely to continue for the long term. Skills levels do not assist this problem and levels are low amongst the residents of the borough with those aged 16 - 19 having the highest level of not in training or employment (NEET) in the County.

Accommodating & Promoting Tourism

59 The role of the tourism sector in the economic development of the borough is currently understated and provides an opportunity to benefit both our communities and businesses not just financially but also by raising the perception and profile of the borough for residents, prospective employers and visitors. Business visits currently make up the backbone of the tourism industry within the area but the borough is not currently meeting an identified demand for conference facilities or catering for overnight guests where a demand for 4* and 5* accommodations exists. There is limited focus on a wider tourism offer within the borough where our cultural and environmental assets such as Barleylands, Wat Tyler Country Park and The Sporting Village should be promoted as a strength to the borough and can help to contribute to Basildon's profile and sense of place.

Tourism Opportunities

60 The borough is facing a range of opportunities that could have a positive effect on its tourism and enable the borough to establish itself as a place to visit and make investment for the longer term. Events such as the 2012 Olympics and related events; Queen's Diamond Jubilee 2012, Rugby World Cup 2015, and the World Athletics Championships 2017 all have scope to generate tourism for the borough and strengthening our tourism sector would enable the area to maximise on these opportunities. Business tourism is also

presented with opportunities through the development of the London Gateway, DP World Port which could bring new business to the borough encouraged by its good road access and established business base. If planned for correctly, Basildon Borough could diversify its overall economic offer and demonstrate its flexibility to adapt to changing markets and times for the benefit of all.

Sustainable Tourism

61 Basildon is a predominantly rural borough and whilst it is significantly urbanised in the southern half, the more northern towns, and settlements offer sweeping landscapes and open green vistas. However, this is currently under promoted and needs to secure better 'access to nature' through the strategic interventions of 'green corridors' which provide sustainable, non motorised links between settlements such as a network of cycle routes, bridle ways and footpaths. This not only accommodates the rich biodiversity found in the boroughs green belt and nature reserves, but also invites visitors to the borough who are enticed by the attractions of Barleylands, Norsey Woods and those natural assets in the surrounding districts.

An 'End Destination' Borough

62 One of the borough's strengths is its excellent transport connections both by road and rail into London. However, this can inevitably lead to Basildon being a place to travel through, or to park, as opposed to the end destination. To encourage people to visit the borough and to contribute to a dynamic and vibrant visitor economy, there is a need to develop a 'sense of place' encouraging people to visit and stay in the area for both business and leisure. Whilst it would be unrealistic to stem this commuting entirely, improvements and strategy to curtail this should be considered and the right tourism pull could lead to repeat visits and business interest.



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