

Runnymede Economic Strategy

Introduction

What is the Economic Strategy?

The Runnymede Economic Strategy will guide the Council's economic development and business support activities and policies. It is responsive to the needs of local businesses and other organisations through their involvement in its development and ongoing review.

The Strategy sets out a number of key targets with timescales for their achievement. It also identifies where other organisations will be involved in their achievement acting in partnership with the Council.

What is its Aim?

The aim of the Strategy is to set out actions that will help maintain the vitality of the local economy and encourage its growth in a sustainable manner.

How was it Prepared?

The issues affecting the local economy have been examined and the options for tackling them explored in the Issues and Options Paper produced in January 2003. This paper was widely consulted on. Copies of it were sent to a number of organisations including economic development organisations, local Chambers of Commerce and a selection of major local employers. They were invited to comment on the paper and identify any other issues of concern that the Strategy should address.

A questionnaire was circulated to around 1,500 local businesses and other employers seeking views on the factors affecting the business community.

The results of these consultations are available on request from the Policy and Implementation Section at Runnymede Borough Council.

How Does it Link to Other Strategies and Plans?

The Runnymede Economic Strategy complements a number of other strategies and plans at Borough, County and Regional level.

The regional level strategies are the Regional Economic Strategy for South East England (December 2002) produced by the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) and the Regional Planning Guidance for the South East produced jointly by the Government Offices for the South East, East of England and London.

The County level strategies and plans are the Economic Development Plan for Surrey prepared by Surrey County Council (SCC) and Surrey Economic Partnership the Surrey Structure Plan and Local Transport Plan, both prepared by SCC.

At Borough level the Economic Strategy supports the Community Strategy, the Housing Strategy, the Cultural Strategy and the Borough Local Plan.

The Runnymede Economy

The Runnymede economy was described in the Issues and Options Paper published in January 2003. The following is a summary of the main points:-

Runnymede's economy is characterised by:-

Low unemployment – consistently below 1%

High wages – average weekly earnings in 2001 of £594 compared to a national average of £347 (and higher than all our neighbouring districts)

High housing costs – 13th highest average house price out of 376 local authority areas in the country according to the Land Registry record of actual sales

High proportion of 'knowledge' sector workers – the third highest local authority area in the country for its percentage of 'knowledge' sector employees.

High proportion of small companies – over 70% of local employers have 10 or fewer employees

High level of business start-ups – over 50 VAT registrations per 10,000 adult residents in 2001

A dominant service sector – employing some 62% of the workforce

Small retail centres – the Borough has three small town centres with limited representation of national chains and a number of smaller village centres

High levels of road use – the Borough includes the country's busiest motorway and its other roads are used at a level well above the national average

The General Strategy

Main Themes

The issues identified fall into two main themes. The first includes those related to maintaining a vibrant local economy. This is important because even though at present unemployment is low and the local economy is generally buoyant there are some particular areas where improvements could be made.

- ▶ Maintain the vibrant local economy
- ▶ Tackle issues associated with prosperous local economy

Maintaining a Vibrant Local Economy

1. Services for business

Context

As described elsewhere in this strategy, the local economy is generally buoyant and well represented by high-tech, high value-adding and 'knowledge sector' businesses. There are, however, a number of local initiatives to support local businesses that can be usefully addressed by the Council, often in partnership with other organisations. Local business organisations include the three local Chambers of Commerce, based in Addlestone, Chertsey and Egham; and the Runnymede Business Partnership. The Business Partnership comprises representatives of local businesses, the Borough Council, Chambers of Commerce and other organisations such as Surrey Police and local schools and colleges. The Partnership was established in September 1997 to promote business interests across the Borough. Its activities range from organising sponsored business breakfast forums to providing American style yellow buses for local schools.

Key Priorities

To improve the economic well being of the Borough through increased economic prosperity, opportunities and employment for all.

To maintain effective communications between the Council and the local business community.

To encourage Runnymede businesses to purchase goods and services locally.

To publicise the Borough's businesses to as wide an audience as possible.

To facilitate discussion and action to tackle issues of concern to local businesses and other employers.

Targets

The targets in this section of the strategy strongly reflect and build upon the key targets of the Economic Prosperity Section in the Community Strategy.

To Produce a Fourth Edition of the Business Directory - The aim is to publish and distribute an updated edition every eighteen months, with production costs covered by sponsorship. The Directory provides a valuable source of local suppliers of goods and services and is sent to over 1500 businesses in the Borough, providing an excellent opportunity to promote local services, and to reach a wider audience via the Business Partnership web site.

Target Date – September 2003

Produce Three Business Newsletters Per Year. A full colour, four page newsletter will be issued three times per year, to publicise the Breakfast Forums. Sponsorship will be sought to cover production costs.

Target Date – Ongoing

Hold Four Business Breakfast Forums per year. The breakfast forums will be for up to 90 delegates at venues in the Borough. Funding for all forums will be sought from local sponsors. One of the forums will be a Budget event timed to follow shortly after the government's Spring Budget is announced.

Target Date - Ongoing

Maintain and strengthen the Council's participation in the Runnymede Business Partnership. To continue the Council's support, and to develop the Runnymede Business Partnership's excellent working relationship with the local business community and other organisations.

Target Date - Ongoing

Key Challenges

To maintain business interest in the Runnymede Business Partnership and the level of outside sponsorship for its activities and initiatives.

To ensure that we are aware of, and respond to, the needs of the local business community.

Key Current Partners

Chambers of Commerce
Runnymede Business Partnership
South-East England Development Agency (SEEDA)
South East Regional Assembly (SEERA)

Other institutions such as Royal Holloway, University of London and Brunel University, Strodes College, Ashford & St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Surrey Police and Surrey County Council

2. Planning Policies

Context

The context for the Borough's planning policies is that of a local economy which is, in many respects, very dynamic yet operates in an area of significant planning restraint, particularly on green-field development. This is exemplified by the fact that some 68% of the Borough lies within the metropolitan green belt where there is a presumption against any development except for a very limited range of defined purposes.

The priority, reflected in planning policy at all levels, is to make the most efficient use of urban land to help achieve the creation of sustainable communities.

There is at present no economic imperative to create jobs in the area since we are effectively at full employment, but there is a need to ensure that the Borough remains an attractive business location. There is also a need to tackle specific local issues such as key town centre sites and continuing to improve the Borough's shopping centres.

Key Priorities

One key issue is striking the right balance between promoting economic vitality and safeguarding the environment. Planning policies have an important role to play in ensuring that the pattern of land uses and the policies used to determine planning applications support the local economy. They must also ensure that this is achieved in a sustainable and equitable way. This means that new development should be directed to locations that are sustainable. In particular, intensive forms of development that generate high levels movement should be located where they are accessible by a variety of means other than the car.

The planning process can positively promote the redevelopment of important sites, particularly in town centres, through the preparation and adoption of planning briefs (such as those adopted for the former Co-Op and Marconi sites in Addlestone; now Tesco and Aviator Park respectively). The Council's Policy and Implementation Section monitor a range of local indicators and trends including the availability of commercial premises and socio-economic indices which help to inform policy formulation.

Targets

Conduct a survey of Commercial Estate Agents – to establish baseline information on current demand for different types of business premises and where possible other commercial property information on rental levels, yields etc. This information would be used to help devise appropriate policies to ensure a supply of suitable premises to support local business needs.

Target Date – Autumn 2003

Review employment policies to promote the efficient use of suitably located employment land through the Local Plan (or Local Development Framework) review process.

Target Date – Consultation Draft Autumn 2003

Promote the redevelopment of key town centre sites through the production of planning briefs. This would help to regenerate and improve the environment of the town centres and identify at an early stage what contribution developers of these sites would be expected to make to local transport and other plans.

Target Date – Ongoing

Key Challenges

Updating planning policies to better reflect local economic needs while reflecting current and emerging government guidance.

Realising the potential of the urban area to meet the Borough's development needs.

Partners

Local Strategic Partnership
Runnymede Business Partnership
Chambers of Commerce

3. Town & Village Centres

Context

There is a perception that our town centres and smaller local centres are declining, this is fuelled by a particular concern about the loss of traditional retailers and their replacement by restaurants, take-aways and financial services providers. The concern is that below a certain threshold of retail provision the town centres will become unattractive to shoppers and fall into decline.

Concerns have been expressed (for example during the initial consultations on the Action Addlestone initiative) about the numbers of charity shops and vacant premises in some centres. There is also a fear that smaller centres could become non-viable and lose locally important shopping facilities. These smaller centres perform an important function in reducing the need to travel and providing services for the less mobile members of society.

Key Priorities

To sustain vibrant and viable centres that provide an attractive range of facilities in a pleasant and safe environment.

To continue prominent regeneration projects, such as the Chertsey Revitalisation and Action Addlestone.

Encourage economic development of retail areas in villages and parades such as Englefield Green, Ottershaw, and Pooley Green.

Targets

The production of a set of Town Guides for Addlestone, Chertsey and Egham. In conjunction with the Chambers of Commerce, who provide the local information and seek sponsors for the printing costs, the Partnership will review the guides and re-issue at annual intervals.

Target date – to be reviewed and re-issued annually

Promote and extend the Loyalty Card scheme to include smaller centres. Further promotion of the scheme is required, to increase usage by the shoppers, and to increase the number of businesses which participate in the scheme. Funding will be sought to produce and distribute a newsletter to all the cardholders to encourage them to use their cards, and to promote the participating businesses.

Target date – Autumn 2003

Run Workshops for retailers on shoplifting and credit card fraud. The Runnymede Business Partnership will organise workshops for local retailers, at convenient times for them, to help them to prevent shoplifting and credit card fraud. Speakers who are experts in this field will present the workshops.

Target Date – Autumn 2003

Continue to provide financial support for town centre Christmas lights.

Target Date – ongoing annually

Provide information on premises. Town Centre health checks will continue to be carried out, including the monitoring of upper floor use. Information on vacant commercial premises will also be continuously monitored and made available upon request. The Commercial Vacancy Report, on all commercial premises in the Borough, will be produced annually, and be available on the Council website.

Target Date – Summer 2003 and ongoing annually

Key Challenges

To engage retailers and property owners and encourage them to be more proactive in improving local centres.

To publicise the facilities and attractions of the Borough's town and villages as widely as possible.

Partners

Chambers of Commerce
Runnymede Business Partnership
Small Business Service

4. Training & Skills

Context

The difficulty of finding suitably qualified staff is an issue identified by the Runnymede Business Partnership and confirmed by the findings of the questionnaire survey for this Strategy.

The Business Partnership proposes to examine the development and acquisition of skills by students that will be of use in the workplace. It will seek the views of local schools and colleges to establish a baseline study of current practice. Discussions will take place with the local Education Business Partnership. This will be used to identify any trends and to consider the opportunities for future action. The issues set out below will act as the focus for discussion with school/college representatives. The findings will then be consid-

ered by the RBP who can relate them to the needs of businesses.

The Partnership will liaise with other organisations dealing with training and skills issues (such as the 'Connexions' initiative) to ensure that the strategy complements their work and avoids duplication of efforts.

Key Priorities

Establishing what direct links exist between schools / colleges and local businesses.

Identifying existing how schools/colleges organise work experience (i.e. how they match students' needs to companies' needs)

Identifying how 'work experience' can be improved.

Ensuring that schools/colleges are aware of the key skills that employers are seeking from students.

Encouraging teachers to develop links with local businesses as part of 'continuing professional development'

Identifying and promoting any mentoring schemes operating in conjunction with local businesses?

Identifying and publicising what businesses can do to improve;-

- i) work experience,
- ii) links between schools and businesses, and
- iii) awareness of business needs.

Targets

To undertake a survey of the secondary schools and colleges in the borough to provide a baseline of information on skills acquisition

Target Date - summer 2003

To establish the nature of current links between schools and businesses and to identify good practise

Target Date - summer 2003

To prepare and distribute a qualifications guide for both employees and employers.

Target Date - summer 2003

To prepare a report to identify whether there is a desire by both the business community and the schools colleges to review current practises

Target Date - winter 2003

Key Challenges

To facilitate meaningful and effective dialogue between businesses and schools / colleges.

Partners

Runnymede Business Partnership
 Secondary Schools / Colleges
 Spelthorne & Runnymede Education Business Partnership

5. Tourism

Context

Runnymede has a number of sites of historic significance including the sites of Chertsey Abbey and the sealing of Magna Carta, the John F Kennedy and airforces memorials. Thorpe Park and Savill Garden attract many day visitors to the Borough. The Caravanning and Camping Club site in Chertsey is consistently voted the best in the country. The Thames Path National Trail and the Sustrans national cycle route also pass through the Borough.

Between them, Thorpe Park, Savill Garden and Wentworth Golf Club events attracted over 1.5 million visitors in 2002. It is estimated that the Borough attracts up to 2.6 million people each year, taking into account visitors to attractions such as Virginia Water, the Magna Carta memorial and Runnymede Meadow, the airforces memorials, Runnymede Pleasure Grounds, Egham and Chertsey Museums and local lakes and waterways.

There are five hotels and a small number of bed & breakfast establishments in the Borough. The Borough is situated on the stretch of the River Thames between Hampton Court and Windsor. Heathrow airport is very close and within easy reach by road, both for visitors and employees.

Key Priorities

Provide more accommodation at the lower-cost end of the market, to meet a demand from day-trippers and local businesses.

To realise the tourism potential of the Runnymede stretch of the River Thames

Encourage projects that broaden the appreciation of the area's natural environment and heritage, including reviewing options for a visitor centre and guided walks.

How to improve interpretation at the site of the sealing of Magna Carta.

Targets

Use the review of the Borough Local Plan to encourage the provision of (and possibly identify suitable sites for) low-cost hotel accommodation.

Target Date – Autumn 2003

Continue to provide up-to-date information on local attractions, accommodation and transport through a variety of media including use of the Runnymede website and provision of links to facilities run by other organisations.

Target Date – Ongoing

Consider and publicise the findings of research into the local economic impact of tourism.

Target Date – Spring 2003

Key Challenges

To improve the Borough's attractions and visitor facilities.

To find innovative ways of promoting natural resources, existing attractions without duplicating the efforts of others (e.g. by promoting waterways and other bodies of water as recreational resources)

Partners

Runnymede Business Partnership
British Tourist Authority
Surrey Tourism
Environment Agency

Issues Associated With a Prosperous Local Economy

1. Traffic Congestion

Context

Within Surrey, and in particular the northern parts such as Runnymede, traffic congestion is a significant problem for a major part of the working day. Congestion is restricting the potential for economic growth and if action is not taken to contain the current rate of traffic growth then serious problems will arise for both the road network and the local economy.

Surrey is one of the most densely populated counties. It has two major international airports on its doorstep and the most heavily used motorway in the UK. Average daily traffic flows on motorways and A roads in Surrey are around twice the national average and flows on B roads are more typical of A roads elsewhere. Unsurprisingly traffic and transport related problems consistently come near the top of the list of concerns for Surrey businesses and residents.

It has been recognised by successive UK governments that transport problems can no longer be solved by merely providing additional road space. The environmental and economic costs of this demand led approach were too high and it was found to generate even greater traffic growth, which exacerbated the problems.

The Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Surrey seeks to tackle some of the main causes of traffic growth. The key objective is to widen the choice of travel while managing and restraining the demand for travel. A target of the LTP is to increase the percentage of all journeys, and in particular school journeys, by non-car modes.

These concerns include the cost of delay to the economy through congestion; almost £600 million out of the estimated £15 billion nationally and the cost of accidents to the community; nearly £250 million in 1998.

Key Priorities

To increase awareness of the costs and causes of congestion and of the options for reducing it.

To promote the development of transport plans for local businesses and other organisations.

To ensure that public transport operators are aware of the transport needs and aspirations of the local business community and of the opportunities presented by the presence of major new employers.

Targets

To promote the development of Travel Plans amongst schools, colleges and local businesses

Target Date - Ongoing

To examine ways to improve the local public transport infrastructure

Target Date – Ongoing

To meet with the providers of local public transport providers to discuss their future plans and identify opportunities for joint working

Target Date - April 2003

To support the 'Airtrack' initiative

Target Date - Ongoing

To hold a public transport conference at Runnymede Business Partnership Breakfast Forum

Target Date June 2003

To promote travel awareness in conjunction with the promotion of Travel Plans

Target Date – Ongoing

To work with the County Council to promote cycleways within the Borough and links with public transport and local places of interest.

Target Date – Ongoing

Introduction of decriminalised parking enforcement.

Target Date – November 2004

Key Challenges:

In each of the issues, success cannot be achieved by just one agency working alone.

It is not going to be possible to transform the infrastructure of the transport system at this level and the Council has a limited statutory role in relation to transport. The challenge for the Strategy is to achieve these aims on the micro-level. The Runnymede Business Partnership's work on the Travel Initiative has already started the process. By working with a range of stakeholders, it is hoped that the voice and expertise of the Partnership can contribute to achieving a better transport system.

Partners

Surrey County Council, Runnymede Business Partnership, Transport providers

2. Affordable Housing

Context

Runnymede is ranked 13th of all local authority areas in the country for the cost of housing including London Boroughs (source; Land Registry). This may be somewhat distorted by the cost of housing in Wentworth as according to the Halifax Building Society Virginia Water is one of the four most expensive wards in the County. However the Land Registry figures are based on actual sales and the relatively low numbers of sales of very expensive properties will reduce any distortion.

There are a number of reasons for the high cost of housing in the area. The trend for people to move out of London, the increasing numbers of smaller households and the high student population in parts of the Borough are all contributory factors.

Key Priorities

For businesses and other employers it is important that the cost of housing does not rise to a level at which their staff cannot afford reasonable accommodation.

High housing costs in the district can force people to live further away and travel greater distances to work which in turn will increase congestion.

In order to maintain the public services and infrastructure relied on by business it is important that key workers can afford to live in the area.

Targets

The Runnymede Council Housing Strategy has set a target to provide 750 Affordable Housing units over 5 years (2001 – 2006). A number of schemes are already underway. The Community Strategy sets out a number of targets under the heading affordable housing and it would not be appropriate to repeat them all in this Strategy. Attention here will be focused on those targets that are particularly relevant to local business or involve commercial developments.

To consider the opportunities for commercial development contributions to affordable housing. (This is dependent upon new government guidance)

Target Date – Spring 2004

To identify and research other mechanisms for providing affordable housing through the planning system e.g. by having dual use schemes or airspace developments

Target Date – Spring 2004

To research the number of offices that are vacant, and to consider the possibility of bringing them into use as housing, by encouraging private sector involvement.

Target Date – April 2005

To work with employers and empty home owners to develop opportunities to make empty homes available to key workers

Target Date – Ongoing

To increase the housing provision for key workers in the Borough by working in partnership with employers and statutory authorities.

Target Date - Ongoing

Key Challenges

To ensure that the local economy is not stifled by the inability to attract staff due to the cost of housing.

To find innovative ways of providing affordable housing in the Borough.

To ensure adequate funding is available for the provision of affordable housing.

Partners

Housing Associations
Major Employers

3. Minimising the Environmental Impact of Economic Activity

Context

Nationally, government economic policy focuses on the provision of, “A better quality of life for all”...”met in ways which deliver overall sustainable development objectives on social progress, the environment, resource use, and economic growth and employment”.

Regionally, Surrey County Council work with SEEDA and the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) on the development of Regional Economic Strategy. SEEDA state in their Regional Economic Strategy for South East England 2002 – 2012, that “economic growth will only be sustainable if it goes hand in hand with maintaining or enhancing environmental quality”. It states that the South East has a striking concentration of key environmental assets which include the following:

one third of the region is designated as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) - nearly one third of the AONBs in England;

another 15% land is designated as the Green Belt (68% of the area of Runnymede);

there are 700 Sites of Special Scientific Interest;

there are some 93,000 designated historic buildings, sites and areas.

Locally, Runnymede has a considerable share of these assets, which go to make a key contribution to the area's prosperity. They form part of the Borough's attractiveness to business investors, which is confirmed by the Business Questionnaire 2003.

It is acknowledged within the Community Strategy that there are a number of key issues that need to be addressed, such as:

transportation, its provision and its effects on the environment will continue to be a major concern within the borough;

water, its supply, use and control are becoming development constraints in some parts of the borough;

waste generation increases year on year, partly due to the 8.7% increase in population between 1991 and 2001, but also because actual waste generation per head has increased, reflecting improvements in economic wealth and life style changes coupled by no real reduction in packaging and recycling;

energy consumption needs within the borough are and will continue to be largely met by fossil fuels, their use generates greenhouse gases and contributes to global warming; and,

resource use, the increasing use of natural non-renewable resources within the production of products and service for industry continues to cause concern.

Key Priorities

Improving the quality of life at the local level, mindful of the needs of future communities.

Ensuring that strategies identify the importance of sound environmental management of local, regional and international natural resources, will help continue to support sustained economic growth within the borough without placing undue stress on the environment from which it is sustained, thus, preventing future development from being undermined through the less than prudent use of natural resources.

To achieve sustainable management of water, waste, energy and resources – to reduce the impact of economic growth and environmental degradation.

To invest in the environment – to maximise its contribution to a sustainable economy

To secure sustainable land management – to provide the basis for a more prosperous future for the land-based sector

To acquire robust environmental data that will allow us to better understand and monitor the state of the Borough's environment.

Targets

Calculate the effects the economic transport fleet & transportation system has on the environment of Runnymede and produce a baseline, while encouraging more sustainable travel habits by increasing the number of companies within the borough who have adopted a travel plan.

Target Date - Baseline - July 2004

Assess the capacity of our water supply system, user profile and means of control.

Target Date – April 2004

Reduce waste to landfill by recycling 18% of waste produced in the Borough.

Target Date - April 2004

Assess the energy consumption profile of the borough and investigate the feasibility of providing 14% of the boroughs energy needs from renewable sources by 2026 in line with South East England Regional Assembly Strategy for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

Target Date – September 2004

Establish and monitor in conjunction with partners the minimisation of non-renewable resource use through the promotion of responsible purchasing.

Target Date -long-term date to be agreed.

Key Challenges

To obtain robust baseline environmental data on which to assess the current state of the Borough's environment and measure future performance.

Work with businesses to achieve greater resource efficiency.

Develop a set of local indicators for energy efficiency, resource efficiency etc. to tie in with Government indicators and include them in future strategies.

Partners

SEEDA

SCC

SITA

Environment Agency

LSP

Cheshire Recycling

Monitoring and Review

Regular monitoring of progress on Economic Strategy targets will be undertaken and reported to the Council's Economic Development Committee.

The Economic Strategy will be subject to annual review. This will tie in with the review of other Strategies, particularly the review of the Community Strategy. This will provide the opportunity to update the targets by deleting those that are completed, amending any that are affected by changed circumstances and adding any appropriate new targets to reflect the changing needs of the local economy.