

## **Report to the Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Report reference: LDF-021-2010/11**

**Date of meeting: 15 March 2011**

**Portfolio: Leader**

**Subject: Endorsement of the "Opportunity Essex - Integrated County Strategy"**

**Responsible Officer: John Preston (01992 564111)**

**Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)**

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

(1) That the Cabinet be recommended to make a recommendation to the full Council that the Opportunity Essex Integrated County Strategy (ICS) (which is attached as an Appendix) be endorsed.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

At the suggestion of the Essex Chief Executives' Association (ECEA), an Integrated County Strategy has been formulated. This Council, together with all other constituent Borough District and Unitary Authorities within Greater Essex, is asked to endorse the Strategy.

### **Other Options for Action:**

- Not to endorse the Integrated County Strategy.
- To seek amendments to the Integrated County Strategy.

### **Report:**

1. Essex County Council, via the Essex Chief Executive's Association, has been working on this strategy for much of 2010. Essentially the prime purpose of the document is to make the case for economic investment to be made in Greater Essex, on the basis that such investment will give a good rate of return, particularly during a tough economic climate.

2. The main document runs to some 55 sides, whilst a summary document runs to some 10 sides, they are supported by a 99 page Sustainability Report, which, in turn, is based upon many other detailed reports. Those three documents are available on the Essex County Council website.

<http://www.essex.gov.uk/Your-Council/Strategies-Policies/Integrated-County-Strategy/Pages/ICS-priorities-and-documents.aspx>

3. The ICS has not been prepared with, or been the subject of consultation with, the public, albeit that many of the 'daughter' documents have been. Accordingly, it is an important distillation of key legislation, and other evidence, concerning strengths and weaknesses of the area. In an era of Localism, that lack of direct public involvement is a weakness, perhaps tempered by what is seen as economic necessity.

4. The document largely started with discussions at an Economic Summit in February

2010 attended by key representatives from across Greater Essex, and quickly resulted in more detailed discussions involving the three West Essex local authorities, at a meeting held in Harlow using a matrix to analyse issues. This has been at a similar time to the work on the Joint Local Investment Plan for West Essex. There were subsequent discussions at Shire Hall and at Harlow.

5. This approach is also in keeping with the recent Memorandum of Understanding between the West Essex Councils.

6. The Strategy has been produced at a time of change, and also at a time when work has continued on existing processes, and where new processes are heralded. A request was made for a document to be produced that would show how an Integrated County Strategy would fit with these other processes, such as the Development Plan, Sustainable Community Strategies, Economic Assessment and Strategies, the Local Investment Plan, the Local Enterprise Partnership and so on. As indicated at the last meeting of this Committee in respect of the Joint LIP, one of the difficulties has been to set out a vision for West Essex, at a time when there is currently a hiatus in each local authority's thinking on its own development objectives, following the revocation of the East of England Plan (even though this was subsequently re-instated following a legal challenge) and the need for each local authority to now determine, locally, the amount of growth that it considers appropriate for its district, and in which location(s). This view is being progressed through each council's Local Development Framework (LDF). As members will be aware, this Council has recently undertaken a public consultation on this issue, in order to inform its approach to the Issues and Options stage of the LDF. Therefore, there is currently no clear view from any of the three local authorities on future development in each of the districts, let alone West Essex as a whole.

7. The Strategy has three points of strategic focus; Low Carbon energy, Key Towns, and Thames Gateway South Essex. Unsurprisingly, Harlow is named as one of the key towns. The broad vision for the West Essex sub-region is; "To create a sustainable and employment-led major growth point focused on the renaissance, revitalization and transformation of Harlow as a leading regional centre, served by a world class international airport at Stansted Airport and improved transport links, and where there is a pattern of market towns and villages set within attractive undeveloped countryside containing high quality environmental assets, heritage and prosperous rural enterprises.."

8. Seven transformational changes are listed to deliver this broad vision for West Essex, listed briefly these are;

- Major renaissance of Harlow.
- Major development and regeneration of Harlow town centre.
- Choice and diversity in housing stock in Harlow.
- Raise employment rates and labour force qualifications in Harlow.
- Expand and diversify Harlow's local employment base.
- Upgrade Harlow's transport and other infrastructure.
- Provision of affordable housing within Epping Forest and Uttlesford districts.

9. Important as the renaissance of Harlow might be, for parts of this District which are much more London centric, or which have their own similar issues, or which have their own issues (for example the very high figures within the District for business start ups and the fairly high survival rate of those businesses, but limits on broadband and mobile phone connectivity being very variable; particularly in rural areas) those transformations may be seen as putting many eggs in one basket.

10. The most appropriate member body to consider the ICS in the first instance is this

Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee, but that the documents should be endorsed by the full Council on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2011, on the recommendation of the Cabinet (which meets on 7 March 2011).

**Resource Implications:**

There are no financial commitments given within the ICS.

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

The ICS has no legal status. Since the ICS is a strategic document, and having regard to the Council's Constitution, it would be appropriate for it to be endorsed by the full Council.

**Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

The strategic proposals within the ICS and its low carbon energy focus would result in developments that improve the safety, cleanliness and environment of those parts of the district where development takes place.

**Consultation Undertaken:**

The ICS has been produced following consultation between officers of the three West Essex local authorities, Essex County Council and others.

**Background Papers:**

None.

**Impact Assessments:**

Risk Management

Apart from the perceived benefits of having an agreed Integrated County Strategy, in particular covering the three local authority areas in West Essex, there are some risks to the Council and its partners if any of the partners, including this Council, do not sign up to the ICS in that important development might be encouraged elsewhere, rather than at a location within the District or at a location which benefits the District.

Equality and Diversity:

*Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications?* No

*Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken?* N/A

*What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?*  
N/A

*How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?*  
N/A