

Committee: Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee	Date: 18 March 2020
Subject: Economic Development Study	Wards Affected: All
Report of: Phil Drane, Director of Planning and Economy	Public
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Summary

The Council has commissioned an Economic Development Study. Updates have been provided to previous meetings of the Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee.

The completed study is presented to Members in Appendix A. It provides 16 recommendations (listed A-P in the study).

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- R1. Approve that officers consider all recommendations and advise members at the next Policy Resources and Economic Development Committee as to which they consider most viable and how to achieve them.**
- R2. Approve that officers specifically prepare reports on how to implement recommendations B, I, J and N, and to advise on any legal requirements or impediment to their implementation.**

Main Report

Introduction and Background

1. The Council's new Corporate Plan "Brentwood 2025" identifies 'Growing the Economy' as one of five key priorities. This follows from the creation of the Policy, Resources and Economic Development (PRED) Committee and its resolutions to provide clear baseline information on the local economy and recommend ways to achieve economic growth.

2. Updates on preparation of the Economic Development Study have been reported to PRED Committees in January and February 2020. The study was commissioned to present options to PRED Committee in March, which this report provides.
3. To provide more detail about how the Corporate Plan objective to grow the economy will be achieved, a new Economic Development Strategy is to be prepared. This is to replace the Council's current Economic Strategy 2017-2020. The new strategy is to be informed by recommendations of the Economic Development Study presented in this report (Appendix A).
4. The Economic Development Study provides an analysis of what steps could be taken by the Council (and its partners) to maximise economic growth and future prosperity. Research has been undertaken to supply ideas and answers focused on case studies and the experiences of other local authorities. The study considers how powers of competence for local authorities and initiatives for growth can be harnessed for the benefit of Brentwood Borough. This includes advice on how the Council can amplify Brentwood's many advantages (such as geography, transport links, prosperity, education and skills), and navigate various challenges that the borough faces (such as size).
5. A focus of the study is on how the Council might seek to develop a "can do" reputation in planning and implementation to economic development, with a strong presumption in favour of growth and flexibility. The study also considers the how locally based, highly qualified and contemporary skilled employment can be maintained and improved.

Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

6. The Economic Development Study provides 16 'key recommendations' (listed A-P). It is proposed that officers consider these recommendations and advise members at the next PRED Committee those that are considered viable and options to achieve them. Four of the key recommendations (B, I, J and N) are specified in order that officers can prepare further reports on how to implement these and their implications. These four key recommendations are as follows:
7. Key Recommendation B: "Using its powers as a Local Planning Authority (LPA) to establish a more pro-business approach that seeks to provide clarity, flexibility and speed in the decision-making process – including:
 - i. The use of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) where needed, to enable applicants to be able to secure timely progress through the planning system, with certainty and pro-activeness on the Council's part.

- ii. Using the new LDP as the overall broad framework for future decision-making (rather than a rigid, binary (yes / no) set of policies / allocations), and seeking to apply the greatest degree of flexibility to enable future growth and regeneration. This could be done by ensuring that there is both the scope and willingness to interpret (and apply) policies and allocations in an open-minded and creative manner which seeks to aligns with the Council's wider objectives. The Council could go further, and – where needed – consider and approve formal “departures” from the LDP, and set out clear reasons for doing so. It is perfectly acceptable for an LPA to take such an approach where it can justify – for wider economic and social benefits for example – doing so.
- iii. Introducing a points-based planning application assessment process to encourage and assist potential investors, so they have a clear steer at the pre-app stage (without prejudice) as to the likely prospects of their proposals being approved in due course. This could, for instance, apply points to what “weight” (in planning terms) should be applied to various benefits that arise from a scheme as part of a Very Special Circumstances (VSC) case for building on Green Belt land, with additional points given for benefits which are considered to be substantial, significant and moderate (on a sliding scale from 3 to 1, for instance) respectively.

Such “benefits” could include looking at issues such as: proposed location; projected value to the local economy; investment value; projected turnover; rateable (business rates) income to council; inclusion of apprenticeship and skills opportunities; projected number of jobs (and recruitment strategy, i.e. providing local opportunities); the likely potential for growth and expansion; and alignment with Brentwood's Economic Development Strategy (once adopted). The Council's approach is offering such an approach could be clearly set out in a “prospectus” to potential applicants, so they know how to pitch their proposals and how the LPA might then look to secure such benefits through a Section 106 agreement to accompany any planning permission.

The Council should also look to ensure that any report to the Planning Committee clearly sets out these benefits in the “Economic Implications” section of the report, that sets out the points assessment as part of the assessment – including (where relevant) the “weight” that is applied to such benefits as part of a VSC case balanced against the technical harm to the Green Belt.

- iv. Fully update the schedule of available development and redevelopment sites (including both brownfield and other opportunities) which can then

be marketed as part of an “invest in Brentwood” prospectus, inviting ambitious – and where relevant, mixed-use – schemes for these locations.

- v. The assignment of a dedicated Planning Officer to be the sole / principal point of contact for advising business applicants, and offering them the option for an enhanced service (as per (i) above), which could help fund such a post.”
8. Key Recommendation I: “A senior officer is given specific responsibility for liaison with Westminster and Whitehall – and the newly formed Government Property Agency – with a view to clarifying, and hopefully actioning, the relocation of public sector offices to Brentwood.”
 9. Key Recommendation J: “The appointment of an officer with responsibility for monitoring government funding announcements and opportunities, and co-ordinating the Council’s response and application for these. Other councils in the Essex area (including Braintree) have been successful in drawing down government funding and Brentwood should be looking to maximise the opportunities available to it in doing the same (positioning itself as an exemplar and enabler of best practice) – and drawing on the support of other stakeholders (including the local MP) in making such applications.”
 10. Key Recommendation N: “Promoting Brentwood’s connectivity and accessibility ahead of Crossrail’s opening in 2021.”

Reasons for Recommendation

11. Members are presented with outputs from the Economic Development Study in order to inform recommendations that aim to enable economic growth. The study is provided in Appendix A to inform the context of how recommendations have been made. The study, and other work such as the Place Audits, will inform priorities to be set in a new Economic Development Strategy.
12. A member’s discussion is to be arranged after the pre-election period to cover the key recommendations of the Economic Development Study.

Consultation

13. There has been no public consultation on the study. Engagement with stakeholders and members will take place regarding the key recommendations and priorities to be set in the Council’s new Economic Development Strategy.

References to Corporate Plan

14. Economic Development is a key priority in the Council's 'Vision for Brentwood' Corporate Plan 2016-2019. Consideration of outputs and recommendations in the study will help inform preparation of a new Economic Development Strategy for the Council to replace the current Economic Strategy 2017-2020 (June 2017).

Implications

Financial Implications

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15. Financial implications of the key recommendations listed in the Economic Development Strategy will be considered and reported to members at the next PRED Committee.

Legal Implications

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16. Legal implications of the key recommendations listed in the Economic Development Strategy will be considered and reported to members at the next PRED Committee.

Economic Implications

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17. The economic implications are contained within this report and the Economic Development Study (Appendix A).

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

18. None.

Background Papers

None

Appendices to this report

Appendix A: Brentwood Economic Development Study, March 2020