



**LEESIDE**  
CONSULTING LTD

# BRENTWOOD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STUDY

Prepared for



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 General

Brentwood Borough Council (“the Council”) has commissioned Leaside Consulting (“Leaside”) to produce a succinct study to advise on innovative solutions and best practice in line with a supplied brief – and also informed by background discussions with Council members and officers. In particular, Leaside was asked to offer practical advice on how to enable growth and point towards key priorities to be included within a new Economic Development Strategy.



Having regard for that brief – and a series of discussions with members and officers since being commissioned – Leaside is pleased to now submit the study (in the form of this report) for the Council's consideration. Our approach has very deliberately sought to avoid offering up more reams of statistics, micro-economic analysis and evidence-producing surveys. That work has been undertaken by a range of other bodies such as the Essex Employment and Skills Board, and indeed the Council itself through its initial preparation for a new Economic Development Strategy. There is no shortage of evidence to inform the Council's deliberations, and of course interpretation of such information can frequently be highly subjective.

Consequently, this report does not seek to provide recommendations based on a technical analysis of Brentwood's circumstances, but instead focus on offering a range of possible ways forward for the Council's consideration. In doing so, we very much stress that these proposals are exactly that: proposals which do not currently enjoy the benefit of any endorsement or acceptance by the Council. **We feel it is important to emphasise this to order to immediately quash any perception that the suggestions set out within this report could at all be interpreted as reflecting the emerging position of the local authority.** We fully accept that the Council could – and may – choose to reject some or all of the recommendations set out within this report, or at the very least use the ideas as a starting point for shaping future plans in a manner which is more responsive to the Borough's particular needs and requirements. But we hope that, at the very least, this report is thought-provoking and provides an invaluable starting point for accelerating towards an overall strategy for securing economic growth.

In this report we touch on some of the key facts about Brentwood, but we will not dwell on them. Such information will largely be well known to both members and officers of the Council. It is how that information is interpreted and used that will determine what the Council decides to do as it seeks to provide future leadership for Brentwood's economic aspirations.

Fundamental to our approach is an assumption that all those involved in making decisions about the Borough's future have the best interests of Brentwood at heart. Collaborative working must be key to success, and the Council should seek to avoid creating an impression of “petty politicking” that has so bedevilled many local authorities. In our experience, attracting inward investment has become a highly competitive marketplace, and where local authorities have developed a negative reputation, potential investors have regularly exercised their complete prerogative to look elsewhere.

Our thoughts are informed by what we have witnessed at first hand through working with local authorities, communities, investors and developers around the country – in a variety of spheres including residential, leisure, commercial and industrial projects. One of the key lessons we take from our work is that as the British economy constantly evolves – and a variety of factors mean this change may happen at a rapid pace – so economic development and evolution is subject to a host of influences and factors. And interpretation of facts (and the conclusions they then lead to) are also highly subjective.

In Brentwood's case, an obvious example of this is its size. In population terms, Brentwood is one of the smallest districts in England and Wales, ranked 294th out of 317. Is that a plus, or a minus? The Council has the fourth highest percentage of designated Green Belt land – in many ways that is one of its greatest plusses (in terms of having a large amount of formally recognised natural environment) – but what does it then mean in terms of providing locally based employment opportunities should there be a need to make significant changes to the landscape and local infrastructure?

Achieving the best possible outcomes for the residents of Brentwood has to be the overarching aim of its Council. Arriving at those outcomes needs to be addressed in that spirit. The key question is “*what do we want our Borough to be*”?

The answer to that question lies not with the authors of this report, but with the members of the Council. They are ultimately answerable to the people who matter most, the people who elect and re-elect them: the people of the Borough of Brentwood.

## 1.2 Summary of brief

The purpose of this report / study is to assist and inform the Council in order to develop a clear Economic Development Strategy to guide their work in the years ahead. The Council has produced a brief which sets out a list of objectives for consideration and implementation by the Council's Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee. Central to the brief is addressing of a number of core themes, described within that brief as “*The Need*”. These recognise fundamental contemporary issues such as:

- **Location** – what are the advantages and disadvantages of Brentwood's geographic position?
- **Changing economy** – how is Brentwood responding to the demands and implications of a fast-changing UK economic landscape?
- **Innovation** – what can Brentwood do to be different, and how can Brentwood harness innovative ideas and policies to best effect?
- **Skills** – does Brentwood have to hand the skills it needs to thrive in the aforementioned fast changing economic landscape, or are there specific changes it needs to affect that are both desirable and achievable?
- **Town Centre challenges** – High Streets and Town Centres across the UK are “*under threat and attack*” from a variety of social and economic factors. How does Brentwood respond?

- **Planning policy and decisions** – are there specific ways in which Brentwood can use planning policy to defend its most important qualities and characteristics, whilst best position itself to meet the challenges ahead?
- **Good Practice** – what can Brentwood learn from other communities, town and cities across the UK – both those that are directly comparable and those that offer perhaps so far unconsidered alternatives?
- **Support and partnership** – who can Brentwood best work with, locally, regionally, nationally and commercially to achieve its agreed and desired aims?

It is our view that fundamental to the Council's Economic Development approach is an "upscaling" of what they do. If the Council decides that it wants to attract significant interest in terms of jobs, development, relocation and inward investment, then what does it need to do and resource to achieve the best possible outcomes in an ever more competitive marketplace?

### 1.3 Context of study being prepared

By the time of this report's submission, the Council had adopted the aforementioned Corporate Plan that will guide its work for the next five years. Fundamental to the success of that work will be the rapid, but considered, agreement and execution of a clearly defined Economic Development Strategy. The Council exists to both represent and lead the local community, and to do so it needs a clearly defined route-map informed by an agreed set of priorities and a series of check points that will serve as both an aide-mémoire and a series of reference points as the implementation of the Plan progresses.

### 1.4 About Leaside

We offer an entirely bespoke perspective, based entirely on personal experience. Our work is based on practical and real-life working with a wide range of businesses of hugely varying scales – from small to multi-national, and with developers seeking to progress residential, industrial, leisure and commercial projects. Our advice and opinions are based on "lessons learned" in fiercely practical circumstances and is offered from the perspective of elected member, committee chairman and council leader, as well as the perspective of developer, investor and a purely commercial interest. There is no issue in local communities and therefore at the heart of local government that excites more interest and emotion than planning in a variety of guises – and quite rightly so, because successful planning lies at the heart of the creation and maintenance of successful, harmonious and progressive communities.



## 2. Executive summary

### 2.1 Conclusions reached

Brentwood has some fundamental decisions to make as to how it as a community sees its future. It is the job of the Council to lead this process.

The Borough is the “victim” of its own prosperity and success. House prices are high, as are educational attainment standards and average incomes. Affluence abounds. In economic terms it is more “stockbroker belt” than industrial and commercial East London or South Essex.

But Brentwood is a very small district – in population terms one of the smallest in England (294<sup>th</sup> out of 317). And the Borough has the fourth highest percentage of designated Green Belt in the country – just under 90% of the total area.

### 2.2 Key recommendations

Brentwood needs to develop a seriously focused Economic Development Strategy. The Council needs to work collaboratively to deliver the strategy. And it needs to properly resource the implementation of whatever strategy is agreed, including through the appointment of dedicated officers to key roles.

To complement the recent adoption of a new Corporate Plan (2020-2025), the Council should adopt a new Economic Development Strategy (EDS) as swiftly as possible, to provide an up-to-date focus and a set of key priorities for securing future growth in the Borough.

The Council should seek to constructively use its powers as a Local Planning Authority (LPA) to enable economic growth in the Borough, with the Local Development Plan (LDP) – once examined and adopted – providing an overall framework for such activity. However, the Council should recognise that the LDP provides just that: a framework, and it should not be used as an excuse for taking an inflexible approach to enabling economic growth and regeneration. On a related point, it is worth highlighting the analysis set out in a recent report by the Adam Smith Institute, calling on the Government to remove the requirement to set strict areas of shopping activity and to encourage mixed-use developments. The author of the report said:

*“We need a new approach to planning policy that gives our town centres the flexibility to react and adapt to rapidly changing economic conditions and consumer needs. We need to move away from the old idea of dedicated retail zones and embrace a more dynamic, mixed-use approach to make our town centres prosperous and create a safe and active environment for residents, workers and visitors.”*

We concur with this view, and would urge the Council to take a much more flexible approach, using the LDP as only an overall framework for future development (rather than a rigid plan).

The Borough’s distinctiveness, geographic position, connectivity and enabling approach to securing inward investment should be pro-actively marketed to the private sector, with a clear message that Brentwood is both open for business and is a good place to do business.

### 3. Existing economic profile

- 3.1 Brentwood is by any measure a very prosperous borough. Property prices are nearly double the national average and some 50% higher than for the Eastern Region, which in itself is the third highest value region in the UK. Regionally only Cambridge and Epping Forest have higher prices.
- 3.2 Prices in Brentwood are actually higher than in many boroughs within neighbouring Greater London. Brentwood is regularly amongst the fifteen highest house price local authority areas nationally outside Greater London. It sits alongside other areas that would, in common parlance, be described as “*stockbroker belt*”.



- 3.3 But of course, as becomes ever more obvious nationally, high house prices are a very double-edged sword. In simple terms, if you are on the ladder and your financing is affordable, then in overall terms it is a positive. But if you are a young person in Brentwood seeking to buy, or someone looking to move to the Borough, the challenge is daunting. And if you are an organisation looking for somewhere to locate, choosing somewhere that you know will be unaffordable to potential employees isn't an attractive option, particularly if there are others hugely more affordable venues nearby. The current East London revival is well documented.
- 3.4 Likewise, salaries in Brentwood far outstrip the national average. Reference to the most recent data in the House of Commons library shows that average weekly pay in the Brentwood and Ongar constituency (their analysis unit is parliamentary constituencies, rather than local authority areas) outstrips the national average by in excess of £10k p.a. Even in Regional terms it is nearly £9k p.a. higher.
- 3.5 As with house prices, the implications of this situation are far from straightforward. For those in well-paid and stable employment, high salaries may well be a plus BUT if the

advantages of such salaries are then eroded by the demands of funding soaring housing costs, the attraction is quickly eroded. And crucially, in economic development terms, what are the implications for businesses and other institutions that might consider Brentwood as an investment destination?

- 3.6 Potential employers will be faced with a scenario that suggests they will have to pay hugely inflated salaries, and potential employees will be left asking the question “*can I afford to live there*”. These are the circumstances that suggest Brentwood might be described as the “*victim*” of its own prosperity. And it further dictates that those who do decide to come and work in Brentwood may either elect, or be forced by necessity, to live elsewhere and commute – thus adding to traffic gridlock, negative environmental impact and the mutual disincentive for employee and employer of time lost to travelling to and from place of work.
- 3.7 The Essex Employment and Skills Board Evidence Base District Profile 2019 sets out in great detail how employment is divided by sector. It evidences the high ratio of jobs to population, the low rate of unemployment and the varying scale of major Brentwood employers. What it does not evidence is the concentration of particular sectors, such as the Thames Valley/ “*Silicon*” Valley, the Life Sciences “*Golden Triangle*”, the West Midlands automobile industry or the Bristol / South Gloucestershire aviation and defence industry concentration.
- 3.8 Brentwood faces an economic dilemma that goes to the heart of this report. That dilemma is not one of mass unemployment, deprivation, poverty and social breakdown. Far from it. Brentwood is prosperous, healthy, educated and attractive. Should Brentwood simply try to maintain itself as a small, well located, edge of London commuter town – or does Brentwood take heed of the Ford departure as a sign of changing economic times and ask itself what direction it seeks to head in next to ensure that its prosperity and sense of community is maintained?



## 4. Role of local government

- 4.1 Local government has an important role to play in shaping and enabling economic development at a local level. Whilst Westminster and Whitehall can set and shape the overall legislative framework – as well as the use of various powers (including tax-setting) to have a direct impact on economic growth (or otherwise) – the role of local-decision making is increasingly important in defining the relative success of a local area.
- 4.2 However, the structure of local government can provide as many challenges as it does opportunities on this front. With Brentwood being a district council (albeit with borough status) – as the second-tier authority within a two-tier structure – it faces the reality of sharing its local government decision-making with a larger council at a county level. Whilst it is not within our remit to comment on the merits of this two-tier approach, it is impossible to ignore the fact that such a model does result in some ambiguity in who provides the overall leadership for a largely discretionary function such as economic development. Certain responsibilities – such as planning and adult social care – clearly sit at district and county level respectively, but economic development is a function which straddles the two. Inevitably both district and county can aspire to provide leadership on this front, however we consider that ultimately Brentwood is much better placed to provide a Brentwood-focused approach – and use some of its specific powers around planning to prioritise and shape future growth accordingly. The county council, by its very nature (particularly on the scale of one covering Essex as a whole) is never going to be close to the detail of what is happening in a relatively small borough like Brentwood. It is therefore essential that the Council asserts itself, whilst maintaining an effective working relationship with the County Council to draw on their input (and functions) where needed and necessary.
- 4.3 Nevertheless, we can focus on how Brentwood – as a non-metropolitan district – can use the powers at its disposal to be a force for good in its area. It is already showing strong community leadership for the local area, with a new Corporate Plan, a new Local Development Plan submitted and a stated intention for a new Economic Development Strategy – amongst many other initiatives. Given the ambition set out on a number of fronts, it is right that we look at how it can take the most innovative approach possible to enabling economic development. The first step in doing so is to look at the powers available to local government.
- 4.4 Historically, local authorities were permitted only to do things that they had specific statutory powers to do, otherwise it would be deemed “*ultra vires*” – illegal, and hence void. The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a power for local authorities in England and Wales to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area. Evidence suggests that it was only used occasionally by local authorities, and eleven years later the Localism Act 2011 applied a general power of competence to local authorities in England, which replaced the aforementioned wellbeing power. This legislation states that “*a local authority has power to do anything that individuals generally may do*”, which includes commercial activities (but these must be done through a company). In reality, local authorities are still significantly restricted in what they

can do by various other obligations and requirements placed on them by central government, but there is still – in theory – the flexibility to do much more than they were previously able to do. This has been seen, in practice, in the decisions of councils to invest in commercial property and use a range of powers (including a more muscular approach to threatening compulsory purchase) to shape the future economic wellbeing of their local areas (and of course to generate the ongoing revenue streams for the local authorities, which have become increasingly important as funding from central government has reduced).

- 4.5 We have no doubt that the Council has looked at how existing legislation can be used to improve the Borough's economic prospects, and there are many examples of best practice which we touch on elsewhere in this report. What is perhaps more significant – and useful – at this time is where local government goes next: i.e. what the new majority Conservative Government is planning in terms of devolution, more growth boards, additional powers and possible structural reorganisation. The pre-Christmas Queen's Speech (soon after the election) gave a flavour of where the Government is looking to take this agenda, and we are looking to see further indications of next steps in both the forthcoming budget (11<sup>th</sup> March 2020) and the subsequent English Devolution White Paper (which is expected to be published soon after the local elections in May 2020). There is a lot of speculation as to what the latter will contain, but it is inevitable that it will push for more combined authorities (mayor-led) being created, and where this does not happen, "growth boards" are likely. The latter is the most likely prospect in the Essex (or South Essex area).
- 4.6 This then begs the question as to what role the Council can play in shaping economic development on a county or sub-county basis (the latter being through the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) for this time being), and how can it ensure that this is to the particular benefit of Brentwood. Joint working has many potential benefits, but inevitably it involves a significant degree of "pooling" where the spoils are spread across a wider base – which may include parts of a defined area with less financial and environmental constraints, thereby being potentially better placed to benefit more.
- 4.7 Nevertheless, we believe it is better to be involved than not be involved, and Brentwood has the opportunity to "punch above its weight" to ensure that its position as a well-connected, edge of London local authority area is exploited to the full. There is certainly a good prospect of using both the existing general power of competence and the emerging legislative and policy framework from central government to bolster Brentwood's attractiveness as a good place to do business. At this time of writing this report, the role of local government – and the potential under forthcoming devolution plans for it to become enhanced – is something which the Council should be looking creatively at all the time, particularly in the months ahead.

## 5. Westminster and Whitehall

- 5.1 As touched on in the preceding section, we can expect to see a flurry of initiatives and proposals coming out of central government that have the potential to impact on local areas such as Brentwood. For the first time over a decade, we have a government with a clear working majority that is able to put forward a radical policy agenda which it can have every confidence of securing support for in the House of Commons. We have already begun to see what form this might take, and we can expect a lot more “*flesh on the bones*” over the coming weeks and months.



- 5.2 Although the Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) will play a key role in enabling local growth (and the new Minister of State Simon Clarke is expected to play a key role in this) there is a clear signal from Downing Street that they see English devolution as a government-wide priority. This is evidenced by the appointment of Chloe Smith as the first ever Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution, based in the Cabinet Office. This means that the devolution agenda will be seen as something which all relevant government departments will be expected to play a role in, and the forthcoming English Devolution White Paper will have the stamp of the Cabinet Office on it (i.e. Government as a whole) as much as it will MHCLG as a specific department.
- 5.3 Prior to Christmas, the Government said that it is “*committed to levelling up powers and investment in the regions across England and allowing each part of the country to decide its own destiny*”, explaining that the White Paper would set out the Government’s strategy to unleash the potential of the country’s regions, including plans for spending and local growth funding. This would include full devolution across England. What the latter means in practice remains to be seen. How would full devolution in Essex work, for example? Would the Government expect it to be on an Essex-wide basis (including the unitary authorities, not just the county area), or would an Essex split (with ASELA being one half of the county) be more likely? Much of this will depend on what Brentwood and other local authorities want, and crucially what stance is taken by the MPs representing those different parts of the county.

- 5.4 Nevertheless, the Government's stance is clear. They point to evidence suggesting that a more integrated leadership across a functional economic area will lead to higher rates of economic growth and productivity. Assuming this is the case (and it is happening anyway) can Brentwood achieve a higher rate of economic growth and productivity as part of a sub-county or a county-wide model? This will have to be carefully considered, and we offer no particular recommendation on this, as clearly there are pros and cons – and ultimately a decision of this nature will not be one for Brentwood to unilaterally lead or determine. The bigger question is perhaps whether it can be achieved without a statutory combined authority (with a mayor) but instead with a Growth Board (pulling together a Growth Deal) across a functional economic area such as South Essex. The fact that this sub-county area is already working on a Joint Strategic Plan would appear to be the obvious starting point for taking this opportunity forward.
- 5.5 In terms of other opportunities presented by Westminster and Whitehall, we can expect to see initiatives from other government departments that Brentwood would be well placed to monitor and bid for. The Department for Transport (DfT) and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), amongst others – along with various agencies / quangos – are frequently announcing proposals, funding opportunities and invitations to apply which the Council (with its local partners, where appropriate) should look to take full advantage of. In line with the wider devolution agenda, the potential to be successful in bidding for these is likely to increase when done so on a multi-council basis. However, Brentwood should, wherever possible, seek to take a leading role which places its specific offer (and requirements) at the heart of any such proposals.



- 5.6 In doing so, the Council does need to be acutely aware that its prosperity and existing connectivity could well be a hindrance to taking advantage of such opportunities. When the Government talks of “levelling up”, it may consider that Brentwood (and similar such areas) are already at the required level, and this is instead about seeking to bring other parts of the country to a similar standard. Whilst that is understandable, Brentwood should look to creatively explore how it can still make its voice heard as an accessible, well-connected location which can still provide an attractive opportunity for the Government’s wider agenda to be advanced. However, this must be done with a dose of realism, seeking to ensure that Brentwood is not just seen as another relatively prosperous Home Counties local authority area which is not in need of wider government support.

## 6. Themes for consideration

- 6.1 The next part of this report looks at a series of themes – with suggestions of how the Council could look to address some of the challenges it faces and turn them into opportunities, where possible.

## 7. Theme: location

- 7.1 By any measure, Brentwood is well located. Adjacent to the M25, less than an hour from three international airports, and less than two hours from both Heathrow and Gatwick.
- 7.2 Dover and the Channel Tunnel are less than two hours' drive. Tilbury, Felixstowe and Harwich much nearer.
- 7.3 By rail, Central London is less than an hour, the City much closer.
- 7.4 So, in terms of straightforward geographical positioning, Brentwood is in a marvellous position. And of course, as Crossrail comes on stream so that connectivity improves even more, with direct journeys to central London, Heathrow Airport and indeed the Thames Valley a reality.



- 7.5 But there is a geo-political element to the location factor as well. At a time when there is unending talk of “levelling up” – redistributing wealth to the Midlands and the North of England, making the case for Government investment in a Borough such as Brentwood is challenging.
- 7.6 In years gone by central Government has invested massively in locating different agencies in the “provinces” – the DVLA in Swansea, the Meteorological Office in Exeter, the Hydrographic Office in Taunton and the largest of all, the MoD Procurement centre in Abbey Wood, North Bristol which employed 12,000 people when it was relocated. But would Brentwood want that sort of influx, would it allow the physical footprint required, and would there be any logic to moving such operations to an area of such high house prices?
- 7.7 Furthermore, and particularly within that “levelling up” context, what would be the incentive for the Government to make such moves? Brentwood salaries are well above the national average. Indeed, they are well above the regional average in one of the

country's most prosperous regions. So, making the case for inward investment from Government does not really look viable.

- 7.8 However, proximity to London, and in particular the City and the Canary Wharf financial centre might offer potential opportunity. Back-office support locations, IT facilities and other non-interpersonal activities might find a convenient and well located home, with a qualified and skilled workforce to hand, and a building and infrastructure demand that sat comfortably with Brentwood's Green Belt requirement.



- 7.9 However, as with industries such as logistics and distribution, mentioned elsewhere in this report, securing such investment by commercial partners is a hugely competitive and fast-moving process. For example, the UK's largest bank, HSBC, is moving out of London – and not just its back-office function but its entire UK HQ. But it is not just leaving London, it is moving north to Birmingham, emboldened by the (now confirmed) building of HS2.

- 7.10 Therein lies the scale of the challenge Brentwood faces.

## 8. Theme: changing economy

- 8.1 Brentwood has to embrace the changing economy. Standing still or harking back to bygone days are simply not options if the Borough wishes to “re-invent” itself in economic terms. The departure of Ford was of course a blow, but it was also a very clear reminder that “*nothing is forever*”. The centre of gravity of the car industry in Britain has moved – when Ford came to Britain many of the brands that dominate our national market today either did not exist or were unknown within the UK. Brentwood also needs to be realistic about where such companies will choose to relocate themselves as the sector undergoes the fundamental changes that will accompany the gradual demise of the internal combustion engine and the evolution of electric, hydrogen and indeed autonomous vehicles. And the automobile industry, hugely relevant to Brentwood historically, is but one example.
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- 8.2 Given Brentwood's current size as a Borough and the extent to which development opportunity seems to be determined by a desire to maintain existing Green Belt levels at all costs, the flexibility that Brentwood has to adapt to the demands of the changing economy are limited. Many of the implications for Brentwood in terms of the most obvious changes are surprisingly straightforward and immediate – but that very immediacy is in itself a challenge. The explosion in the logistics and distribution industry initiated by the fundamental change in shopping habits is perhaps the most obvious. But the decisions that accompany such change have been or are currently being made – Amazon's expansion is for example requiring the construction of new motorway junctions to service their mega warehouses and those of other such companies. Is this something Brentwood would want to play host to – and given the Borough's size how it would influence and lead major infrastructure change against that Green Belt backdrop and the wishes of the local community?
- 8.3 In their brief for this report the Council outlined areas of interest such as Innovation, Skills and Town Centre changes, all of which are commented on herein. But none of these can in any way be addressed in isolation and any notion that they can perhaps demonstrates a lack of understanding of the complexity of the challenge. Nowhere is this more readily recognisable than in how we see the future of our High Streets – challenge being faced by just about every town across the country.
- 8.4 Second guessing the speed and direction of changes to the economy is a challenge of immense proportions. Artificial Intelligence, robotization, the demise of the automobile as

we know it and fundamental changes to living patterns and life styles have huge implications which impact where we live, how we live, where and how we shop, where we eat and how we spend what may be an increasing leisure time. That in turn impacts the decisions to be made on planning, infrastructure, care and connectivity to name but a few. Global events and of course Brexit will also play a role – and again, second guessing what happens next is fraught with danger.

- 8.5 But against the ever-accelerating speed of change, and the overarching impact of globalization, Brentwood cannot bury its head in the sand in terms of economic change, but rather work out whether it wishes to embrace that change, and if so, how?

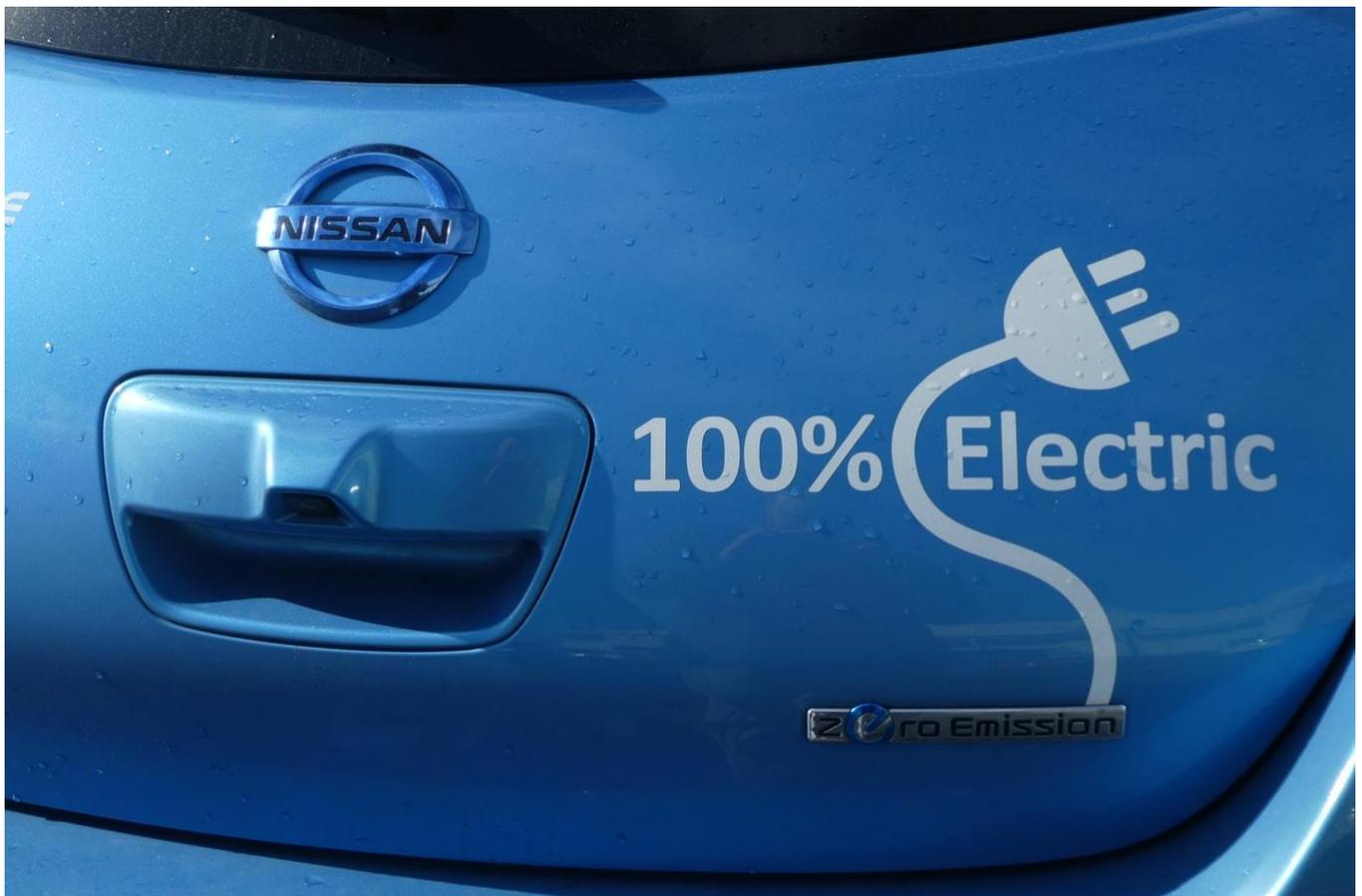


## 9. Theme: innovation

- 9.1 In pursuit of economic development, the ability to identify and even second guess the innovative is invaluable. And in a world that is ever more interested in the green agenda, sustainability and environmental awareness, identifying with the development of progressive agendas that are seen as being of value to society, is also of significant potential reputational benefit. And whilst Brentwood's near 90% of Green Belt creates challenges in terms of growth and development, there is a logic to considering whether it can be used as a magnet to attract investors from the fast growing "green economy" sector. Could Brentwood for example, set out its stall to be "home" to an array of eco-friendly industrial start-ups or something similar?
- 9.2 In a community that prides itself on that extensive Green Belt, and sees itself as a group of villages nestling just beyond the perimeter of one of the world's great cities, is there an opportunity for Brentwood to market itself as a lifestyle location seeking to attract businesses that sit comfortably with that chosen lifestyle.
- 9.3 But to attract innovative investment, does Brentwood need to be more innovative, imaginative and ambitious in its approach. That ambition means going beyond rejuvenating a massively challenged retail sector on the High Street and the redevelopment of some disused office and industrial accommodation to create yet more highly priced and for many unaffordable homes.



- 9.4 Instead could innovation mean Brentwood seeking to be something of a trailblazer, seeking to proactively work with developers to experiment with new kinds of town centre and suburban living? Perhaps there is a market for a return to High Street living, where unwanted and non-viable office and retail units are converted to residential and leisure outlets? Innovation in Brentwood could be seen as inventing and experimenting with the new rather than trying to rejuvenate and re-invent the old. Lifestyles and domestic units have changed and perhaps Brentwood could market itself as a “*place*” that recognises that and acknowledges it – all at the end of the Crossrail line that may have trains running every five minutes from Shenfield to Central London.
- 9.5 That in turn might mean a kind of Town Centre living that doesn’t have car-parking spaces with every dwelling but does have “*car club*” bays with electronic charging points available to all. Crossrail can open up the whole Greater London region to public transport access and Brentwood could seek to become a testing ground and role model for how that might develop. In a world that now abounds with electric scooters and bicycles, is there again a role for Brentwood to set out a stall as a UK leader? There would be a host of challenges, but it would certainly help establish a sense of identity.



- 9.6 It must surely be the case that simply seeking to return to a world that was the norm fifty, or even fifteen years ago falls far short of what Brentwood, and a host of other similarly challenged communities, need. Huge retail brands are failing right across the UK, and indeed across the world. Innovation has a huge role to play in determining what happens next, and Brentwood might care to reflect on how it plays its part.

## 10. Theme: skills

- 10.1 All across the UK the linkage between educational establishments, skills development and economic development is becoming ever more evident.
- 10.2 Just recently plans for a huge new film production unit were announced by American company Blackhall Studios, to be developed in conjunction with the Science Park owned by the University of Reading. A projected initial investment of £150 million is likely to lead to the creation of up to 3,000 jobs. Britain's burgeoning film and video gaming industry is centred on the Hertfordshire, Buckingham, Berkshire area.
- 10.3 In the world of Life Sciences, where research and development attract billions in inward investment, a "golden triangle" now exists drawn between Cambridge, Oxford and London. The linkage between these three locations and the world-renowned universities that carry their name, and by implication brand, is obvious.
- 10.4 In the automobile industry, the West Midlands has become the "home" of British car manufacturing. The Warwick Manufacturing Group, which is based at Warwick University, now brings together global brands such as Jaguar Land Rover, now owned by Indian company Tata, and other giants such as Bosch, the German component producer. The Research and Development function that goes along side this means that WMG has become a world-wide meeting place, bringing the eyes of the world to that part of the UK. The West Midlands Mayor Andy Street is fighting a crusading battle to have the UK's first battery giga factory located in the area, and his championing of HS2 is well documented.
- 10.5 And in north Bristol / South Gloucestershire, there is a significant linkage between the aviation and defence industries and the universities of Bristol and UWE, the University of the West of England. Companies such as Airbus, Bae Systems, Boeing and GKN are all clustered in this area – and their ambition has spilled out into projects such as Degree Apprenticeships at the local universities.
- 10.6 The lessons of this global, high-tech, highly skilled and hugely well-resourced sector, is that working hand in hand with secondary and in particularly tertiary education is a norm. And it leads to the creation of large numbers of highly paid employment opportunities. The questions for Brentwood are whether it is a route they would wish to follow, would they be prepared to accept the impact it might have on the local community, and if so, how would they go about identifying a sector, building the relationships, persuading investors and ultimately attracting them to come to Brentwood.

## 11. Theme: town centre challenges

- 11.1 There is no doubt the Brentwood – like so many other town centres – is facing significant challenges in retaining a vibrant retail core. There is no easy solution to addressing this, otherwise the decline of the traditional high street would not be continuing in the way that it is. A number of communities around the country have sought to tackle these problems with various forms of intervention, but even a pro-business approach with reduced business rates and intensified marketing cannot counter the irreversible trend to more online shopping and radically different habits of customers.



- 11.2 Consequently, the Council has to be realistic about what approach it seeks to take. Does it hark after the glory days of the high street, where almost every trade was represented in a diverse range of businesses, or does it accept that customers – i.e. their own electorate – have voted with their feet to undertake their shopping in different ways? There is no hiding away from the fact that the desire amongst shoppers for convenience and ease will take a great priority over the sentimentality of keeping lots of small shops. “Shop local” is a constant mantra but much of the public opts for the convenience of larger shopping centres and supermarkets where products and services are co-located and easily accessible. All local authorities have – to varying extents – played their part in enabling such change, which planning consents have been given for larger such retail developments. The growth of the internet – and improved broadband (another key priority) – has accelerated the shift to shopping from home, and many successful businesses (including some based locally) offer such services through a range of platforms.
- 11.3 So, with this seeming inevitably, what should Brentwood do? Quite simply, we consider that the Council should embrace this change which has happened (and will continue to occur) and look to enable a different type of town centre. With its prosperity and

connectivity, there is no reason why Brentwood cannot see its town centre transformed into a much more mixed use location – where high end office use, boutique shops (as part of a smaller retail core) and niche services (such as those which cannot just be purchased over the internet) sit alongside some high quality residential development. This can be achieved through a healthy mix of intervention, enablement and evolution.

- 11.4 The Council should seek to provide an overall framework in which the town centre could be developed, whilst not being too proscriptive of what it would be prepared to accept. If a landowner wishes to bring forward a mixed-use scheme which provides high quality residential development with start-up business units (and / or some Grade A office space), then why should this not be considered? Equally, should the Council consider encouraging and giving consent for a range of potential commercial uses for certain premises, so there is maximum flexibility of what space could be used for in the longer-term? This would allow businesses and premises to develop organically, rather than being in a straitjacket of what is and is not allowed in particular locations.
- 11.5 It is also important that the Council is prepared to be as bold as possible from a planning perspective, and this links into the next section. As already touched on, Brentwood has a very high percentage of Green Belt land, which restricts the local authority's scope in terms of how it makes land available for either residential or commercial development. Whilst some Green Belt release is inevitable (as touched on further below), the Council should cite the restrictions that it has on this front as justification for encouraging and approving a greater intensity of development in existing urban areas, such as the town centre. The Council should be prepared to be bold in enabling some landmark modern buildings that reach a (potentially significantly) greater height than those immediately around them. We appreciate that such construction would need to be carefully located so to not conflict from historic buildings, but there are many examples around the country where this has been achieved in a striking – if not slightly provocative – manner.
- 11.6 What we have outlined above may be on privately owned land, or on that owned by the Council – or a partnership of both. If it involves the latter, the Council may be in a position to “lead the way” in making such developments possible. This also provides a potential ongoing revenue stream for the Council which could be used to support other council services, including future economic development activity.
- 11.7 The Council may also wish to look at the future of parking in the town centre – as touched on further above. Although “clean air zones” are much more of a priority in large cities, the potential to reduce vehicular movements through Brentwood town centre has the potential to make it a much more attractive place for people to live, work and visit. Other forms of accessible transport / routes could be introduced to the town centre, and “car free” developments could be a key part of any mixed-use schemes. The whole feel of the town centre could be significantly changed if vehicles became a much less dominant part of daily life for those people in and around the town centre. The Council should be prepared to take a radical approach on this, including putting town centre car park spaces to alternative use – including building above and also the provision of electric charging points with generous incentives to use them.

## 12. Theme: planning policy and decisions

- 12.1 As a local planning authority (LPA), the Council is in a significantly influential position to shape the future direction of development in the Borough. It should be prepared to use these powers in a bold manner, with a strong presumption in favour of enabling economic growth. In fairness, the commitment to do so is clear in their submitted Local Development Plan (LDP), but the Council should not wait until its adoption to start fully harnessing some of the opportunities available to it, as its recent submission means that it already has some increasing weight and relevance in the planning process. Planning is an ever-evolving picture, and the scope for development does not stand still whilst waiting for policies to be approved, not least as “*time is money*”, i.e. waiting could mean missing out on potential investors. Brentwood should be seen as “*open for business*” now, and that does not need to wait for a new LDP to be adopted.
- 12.2 The potential for the planning system to be used as a force for good – and enabler – in the Borough is likely to intensify as the Government seeks to make improvements nationwide. The pre-Christmas Queen's Speech outlined the Government's intention to bring forward a Planning White Paper which will make the planning process clearer, more accessible and more certain for all users, including homeowners and small businesses. Although the details of what this will mean in practice remain to be seen, we can expect some meaningful liberalisation on development control – or at the very least enabling local liberalisation as the government seeks to hand more decision-making to a local level (with funding tied to decision-making for growth, as part of growth deals).
- 12.3 In the meantime, Brentwood may wish to consider how it could position itself as being more business-friendly in its approach to planning. That is not to say that it is not pro-business at the moment, but there is always more that can be done. For example, it may wish to consider taking a more pro-active approach to offering Planning Performance Agreements (PPA) in order to provide more definitive timescales for both the pre-application and the main application periods, as well as generating additional revenue to have a well-resourced planning department to respond to applicants in a timely manner. Similarly, it may wish to consider whether a message promoting Brentwood as a pro-development borough – with an enabling planning department which works with investors to help navigate schemes to a point of acceptability – is developed. Brentwood wants to be seen as a good place to do business, and sending



out the message that the planning department is here not just to manage development but to enable it could be very powerful.

- 12.4 This then brings us to the issue of the Green Belt versus brownfield development. In a location such as Brentwood, almost all land is either already built on or is undeveloped Green Belt. This presents a very stark choice which could act as a significant deterrent to would-be investors. So, the Council needs to be prepared to pro-actively counter this with some key messages:
- A) That schemes that seek to make use of previously developed land in an intensified manner (particularly mixed-use development) will be considered sympathetically; and
  - B) That the Council would be prepared to release Green Belt land for enabling economic growth where a persuasive Very Special Circumstances (VSC) case can be outlined. In particular, the Council would work with applicants to ensure that any VSC assessment is looked at with an open-mind, and if a decision is made to recommend approval (and if members choose to vote such proposals through) that the Council would robustly champion that decision in any subsequent referral to the Secretary of State, making clear that he should not call it in and leave it for local determination.
- 12.5 The Council should also be prepared to play a leading role in the development of the Joint Strategic Plan for South Essex and carve out a niche role for Brentwood as somewhere that can offer an attractive, accessible location for more professional-type services (with Grade A office space) to be located. As this is taken forward – possibly as part of an emerging Growth Deal for this part of the local area – the Council should not shy away from highlighting its distinctiveness and ensuring that its partner local authorities are prepared to see a discreet role for Brentwood to play in the wider prosperity of the sub-county.
- 12.6 In order to be able to make the right planning decisions for the future prosperity of the Borough, efforts should be made to avoid planning / development management being perceived as a partisan issue where decisions default into being made on party lines. This has the potential to increase cautiousness amongst politicians on all sides, which can lead to procrastination and delay when it could have a critical impact on the willingness of developers to invest in the Borough. Brentwood's prosperity will receive a boost if there is perceived to be a broad consensus on how the planning system can be used to enable sustainable economic growth.
- 12.7 Linked to the above, we believe that active consideration should be given to moving to all-out elections, every four years – on a cycle which is two years out from the county council elections. Inevitably, the annual ritual of elections brings with it a high degree of cautiousness amongst local politicians, as they look at the short-term impact of decisions and how these could be perceived at the ballot box. If this could be removed – so that the borough council has a four-year term (only interspliced with a county council election halfway through) then the potential to take a more strategic and forward-looking approach will increase considerably.

## 13. Theme: good practice

- 13.1 There is, in many respects, no need to “reinvent the wheel”. With local authorities across England facing often similar challenges to Brentwood, there is the opportunity to look at what others are doing (and have done) and seeing whether this can be either replicated or drawn on to inform Brentwood's approach. In this section we look at a few examples which, in turn, inform the recommendations set out at the end of this report. We have restricted our assessment to local authorities which have broadly similar characteristics to Brentwood (such as other shire districts), as our research showed that it was difficult to draw relevant parallels with other areas (such as metropolitan boroughs and counties).
- 13.2 Of course, in bringing forward these examples, we must recognise that every local authority is different – and Brentwood faces a particular set of challenges which others may not have endured. At the same time, many of these councils may not have had the same sense of resolve and commitment which Brentwood now has, so if there is the willingness to draw on the experiences of others, and learn from what has and has not worked, then Brentwood will be in a stronger position to move forward successfully.
- 13.3 **Worthing:** a south coast district council which has taken an innovative approach to revitalising its town centre. It has taken the view that they cannot rely on the private sector to regenerate their towns on their own, and need to take a leadership role themselves. In Worthing, this has seen the council purchase a prominent brownfield plot in the heart of the town, then signing a land-pooling deal with government-backed firm LCR to drive a mixed-use development with 250 homes forward. To compliment this, they have also signed a deal with HMRC to bring 900 public sector workers into a new office block in the town centre. This example is of relevant to Brentwood to two respects: (1) in terms of taking ownership of strategic land which the Council wishes to be at the heart of regeneration; and (2) securing the relocation of public sector jobs. These are two steps which Brentwood could be taking, as set out in the recommendations further below.
- 13.4 **Colchester:** a fellow Essex council, it has pitched itself as the best-connected place in the East of England, but arguably Brentwood could also compete for this title (depending on how you define “best connected”). Colchester has used its extensive CCTV infrastructure to deploy a fibre broadband network across its city centre for less than 10% of the cost of installing it from scratch. This is an example of a local authority that was able to identify a bespoke local solution to a particular challenge, but that is not to say that Brentwood may not be able to look to take a similarly creative approach. The Council is encouraged to consider what existing infrastructure it might have that could lend itself to additional uses – and this could extend to other areas than just digital connections. On the issue of connectivity, there is the opportunity to market Brentwood as being “best-connected” in terms of London proximity, transport accessibility (with Crossrail) and hopefully digital as well. We suggest this as connectivity is a multi-faceted issue – and Brentwood may be best placed to offer a strong pitch of multi-aspect connectivity as a borough.
- 13.5 **East Hampshire:** a Hampshire district, in the Home Counties commuter belt like Brentwood, with relative affluence. They are taking a pro-active role in shaping Whitehill and Bordon's

new town centre, with a multitude of new facilities already up-and-running in the town including an innovation centre (BASE), a Future Skills Centre and a new secondary school. The council is now considering building on these successes, by investing directly in the town centre to ensure it meets future trends, is delivered at pace and has the right mix of facilities for existing and new residents. We consider that this is a good example of best practice, as it shows a local authority being prepared to take a very hands-on approach to creating a vibrant town centre, and making clear that it is open-to-business. Placing an emphasis on innovation and skills (with dedicated resources to support growth in these areas) is something which Brentwood could certainly look to do.

- 13.6 **Welwyn Hatfield:** a district council in Hertfordshire which – like other examples above – sits on the edge of London and faces similar challenges to Brentwood. In 2015 it helped form the Hatfield Renewal Partnership to bring together a range of public and private sector partners. The defining of this as “renewal” sends out a clear message of what they were seeking to achieve – under the banner of “Hatfield 2030”, which led to the publication of the Hatfield New Town Renewal Framework and a new vision for Hatfield to become: “A well-connected, distinctive and multi-centred town with a renewed ‘New Town’ pioneering and entrepreneurial spirit”. In practice, this has seen the acquisition of key town centre assets to give the local authority greater control over redevelopment plans, and the refurbishment of a number of shop fronts and internal refits for new and existing retailers and businesses. It should be noted that there are a range of funding streams (offering match funding to local businesses) to do the latter, or the Council could look to pump-prime this themselves. The Hatfield Renewal Partnership has also managed to attract a varied mix of new retailers to the town, including national chains and independent shops. It is evident that all of this has been achieved by a relentless focus on accelerating the regeneration of the town centre (and getting all relevant stakeholders involved) and not leaving any aspect untouched. This has required the council (and others) to invest considerable resources (not least in managing the transformation) but evidently it has been worthwhile. This alone is a useful example of how a relentless determination to drive forward regeneration – in close partnership with others – is the best way to secure results. Finally, it is worth noting that Hatfield has also done some good work in respect of retail motor parks, such as Grange Jaguar which is also based in Brentwood, so there is the potential for growth in this area as well – and looking at how Hatfield has taken this forward.
- 13.7 **Stevenage:** another district council in Hertfordshire, which is bringing forward the creation of a new residential quarter on a 20ha site in central Stevenage. A new transport interchange is planned, combining the bus and train station, along with new retail and community facilities. ING / Stanhope has committed £177 million, with £834,500 coming from English Partnerships and Stevenage Borough Council. Whilst Brentwood may not be in a position to do similar, it could look to bring similar sites forward (either as redundant brownfield land and / or use of adjacent Green Belt land) to create such a mixed-use development. Brentwood is an attractive place to live, with good connectivity, and entering a partnership with a major developer would be the best way to take this forward, whilst managing the risk to the Council. Looking to local authorities like Stevenage – where they have established such a partnership – would be worth doing.

## 14. Theme: support and partnership

- 14.1 The Council already recognises that much of what it is seeking to achieve cannot be progressed without the input of partners and key local stakeholders. The evident commitment to partnership working – and taking an inclusive approach that seeks to involve a range of interested parties – is to be applauded. The Government's intensified push for Combined Authorities and Growth Boards means that the expectations of more such partnership working will only increase. It is inevitable that a local authority of modest size, like Brentwood, will be expected to undertake more and more partnership work.
- 14.2 Indeed, it is possible that Brentwood may be suggested as somewhere where a wider unitary authority could be established (beyond Brentwood's current boundaries). Given that the Council's focus is on making Brentwood – with its distinct identity – a success story in its own right, it should be prepared to show how it is leading the way in forging and shaping partnerships, and how it is possible to do this without full integration and the loss of borough-wide identity. Given the apparent flexibility in the Government's approach, a locally-led partnership approach is clearly the best way to (a) achieve the Council's ambitions and (b) ensure that a top-down structural reorganisation can be avoided.
- 14.3 ASELA is likely to have an increasingly important role as the Joint Strategic Plan is taken forward and this group considers how it might respond to any future Government-initiative on Combined Authorities, Growth Boards and English devolution. It would appear to be in Brentwood's strategic interests to remain heavily involved in these wider efforts, which provide a sub-county model which is probably better tuned to its local interests than a countywide effort would be. It would also be helpful to gauge the views of MPs for the wider area (ASELA) to seek some consensus on the way forward and how the identity and role of individual boroughs and districts can be preserved in any future government-backed arrangements.
- 14.4 One of the challenges of such partnership work is ensuring a fair (or at the very least, reasonable) distribution of spoils across the different local authorities. It is quite possible that Brentwood would be at risk of missing out on inward investment because of the considerable constraints it has in terms of land usability (because of the extent of the Green Belt). The Council must look to secure a commitment and understanding from its partners that Brentwood will not be overlooked because of this.
- 14.5 In terms of local partners, we note that the Council has a good working relationship with the Brentwood Chamber of Commerce and Brentwood Business Partnership, as typified in the current place-shaping piece of work with Savills. This is to be welcomed. Consideration could be given to how a local Economic Development Board could be established that brings together public and private sector partners from across the Borough to provide shared strategic leadership to how the growth agenda is taken forward. This would be useful for a number of reasons, not least in being able to draw on the private sector partners to offer support and input for initiatives which the Council is leading on – and also provide some fresh thinking to challenge the orthodoxy of how the local authority works.

## 15. Making the case for Brentwood

- 15.1 Economic development, and the realities that accompany it, is something that has changed beyond all recognition as the UK economy has evolved. And that evolution is now the subject of a host of competing factors that have to be balanced by both local authority and business, sometimes in conjunction with regional and national government. Attracting inward investment is a hugely competitive marketplace, and whilst Local Authorities have a variety of roles to perform, there needs to be a mutual understanding that potential investors can also exercise their right to take their business, and in particular the jobs that accompany those businesses, elsewhere.
- 15.2 A major conclusion of this report is that Brentwood must decide *“what it wants to be”*. That is a decision that must be reached openly, collaboratively and democratically. But if the answer is that the Borough resolves to make step change in shaping its future, then the Council must work with all the other partners within the Borough to deliver on that decision.
- 15.3 This may well require a significant upscaling of the Council's Economic Development activity, with the resultant resource implications that accompany that decision. But the Borough will also need to know what it is trying to *“sell”*, and what it would like its prospective *“buyers”* to bring to the Borough. For example, what sites within the Council's control are available for development, what parameters might accompany that development, what timescales need to be achieved for coherent development to take place, and what does the Council need to do to maximise its attractiveness to potential investors. Issues need to be resolved such as why is this prosperous, well located and highly educated constituency on the edge of London and adjacent to the M25 only rated 503rd ex 650 for broadband connectivity across the entire UK?
- 15.4 And some of this *“marketing”* exercise is attitudinal. The competition for inward investment is such that the messages a council sends out are hugely significant. In recent years there have been a plethora of examples where businesses seeking to relocate have been so discouraged by local communities that they have simply decided to go somewhere else. It is imperative, however, that it be clearly understood that the Council, on behalf of the people, have the right to say *“no”*. So, both parties to any deal making need to be willing partners.
- 15.5 Likewise, there needs to be a degree of coherent approach amongst the various and changing participants within the Council. Potential investors will not be comfortable with the idea of being used as political footballs by politicians who are intent on seeking short-term political advantage. Those tasked with selling Brentwood to the outside world need to feel confident that they are doing so on behalf of the Council and the community as a whole, with continuity and a consistency of message.
- 15.6 In essence, Brentwood needs to decide where it wants to go, and unite behind and support those tasked with getting there.

## 16. Key recommendations

- 16.1 In this report we have sought to offer a candid assessment of the challenges Brentwood faces as it focuses on its ambition to secure future economic development. We are keen to stress that there is no “*silver bullet*” solution to these challenges and no “*quick fix*” outcome. That said it is our view that Brentwood must firmly declare itself “*open for business*” and set out further below are some initial recommendations as to how this can be done. They will require investment and resource.
- 16.2 Brentwood has great potential. But is also faces more challenges, and could arguably be considered to be a “*victim*” of its own success – i.e. its prosperity and connectivity means that it is not, by default, on the radar of the government and the private sector as somewhere to invest. But there is no good reason why – with a proper marketing campaign which “*makes the case for Brentwood*” – it should not be.
- 16.3 We offer a series of key recommendations which are by no means exhaustive, and are certainly worthy of refinement, variation and possible combination. Many of them overlap and could be brought together as part of an overarching plan – i.e. the Economic Development Strategy, aligning with the Corporate Strategy.
- 16.4 Have regard for the above, and in no particular order, we recommend:
- A) Taking a more collaborative approach to decision-making within the council, i.e. less polarised between the parties. Looking at a move to all-out elections every four years (which we note is already been considered) could help achieve this.
- 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.
- C) Identifying additional land for economic development purposes, prioritising brownfield land but making use of a limited amount of Green Belt where needed. The Council must have an open and honest conversation about its willingness to use Green Belt land. There is no need to pre-judge anything but there has to be an idea of likely outcomes.
- D) Pro-actively seeking to acquire (including through the use of (or threat of) compulsory purchase powers where necessary) land which will allow the Council (and its partners) to provide strategic leadership to the regeneration of the town centre and / or other parts of the Borough. The Council should not rely on the private sector to get its act together and should seek to lead this from the front, using the resources at its disposal to undertake this key “*place-shaping*” role.

- E) The Council should continue the good work of its Joint Venture body, the Brentwood Development Partnership, to bring forward and implement plans for regeneration in key areas that are dependent on strong economic activity. Such schemes should reflect the interdependence of the community and the businesses that supply their needs i.e. mixed use. This collaborative JV approach follows the good practice of what has been achieved elsewhere and should continue to blend the respective strengths and skills of the public and private sectors to achieve high-quality regeneration in a timely manner.
- F) The Council's investment company, Seven Arches Investments Limited (SAIL), should continue to seek, where possible, "in Borough" investment that not only secures a return for the Council (and an ongoing revenue stream) but also boosts local growth and turnover, whilst protecting against – or at least providing an element of control over – the loss of employment space to residential use under permitted development (PD) rights. An Article 4 Direction to remove these PD rights should be considered as a possible step.
- G) Seeking to carve out a distinct role for Brentwood in any wider Growth Board model, that ensures that the area can be a focus of particular industries or professions that will not be easily replicated elsewhere in the sub-county or wider county, i.e. ensuring that Brentwood can be uniquely placed to host particular sectors within the Borough boundaries.
- H) *"Making the case for Brentwood"* – a marketing campaign for inward investment, promoting a distinct message about what the Borough has to offer. This should be coupled with outward looking, pro-active and commercial-facing economic development activity – and supported by a dedicated officer, tasked with seeking private sector partners, investors and government funding.
- 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.
- 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.
- K) The establishment of a "Renewal Partnership" (or similar) – on a similar model to what Welwyn Hatfield did (see example given in section 13 of this report) – with key public and private sector partners locally to work towards establishing a shared vision / consensus for the future regeneration of the Borough.
- L) The Council seeks to actively engage with those responsible for examples of implementation of successful good practice elsewhere (as set out in section 13 of this

report) and, where appropriate, look at engaging expert consultants to identify how such successes could be replicated / adapted for taking forward in Brentwood.

- M) Taking a flexible, ambitious approach for the future of the town centre that maximises land use with a range of mixed-use schemes, including a smaller, higher-quality retail core and residential and leisure elements.
- N) Promoting Brentwood's connectivity and accessibility ahead of Crossrail's opening in 2021.
- O) Noting that the Council's Chief Executive Officer has started a programme of reaching out to other chief executives in the Borough, the Council should consider progressing this further and formalising by way of a "Chief Executives Club". The focus of this should be to strengthen relationships with the private sector and also developing good practice and a shared understanding of how they can work with the Council to maximise growth in the local area, with the local authority attuned to the aspirations of ambitious local businesses.
- P) To respond to the issues highlighted in section 11 of this report – and a desire to promote "Shop Local" – the Council should consider introducing a loyalty card scheme that provides discounts and benefits to residents when making use of local businesses. There are a number of local authority examples from around the country of where this has worked well.