

Huntingdonshire

Local Economy Strategy

Medium Term Plan 2008 -2015

Building Sustainable Communities

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1. Introduction

1.1 This document sets out a vision and strategy for sustainable economic growth in Huntingdonshire to support the achievement of the Sustainable Community Strategy for Huntingdonshire. It provides a focus for investment, activities and interventions for a range of organisations working in the local economy for continued economic success.

1.2 Our economy continues to be healthy with a high rate of start up businesses, employment and productivity. Over the last few decades the district has experienced considerable growth with rapid and extensive new house building. This growth is set to continue. While the local economy has developed successfully, the number of jobs has not matched population growth. To address past deficiencies as well as future growth it is predicted that between 10,000 and 20,000 new jobs will be needed in Huntingdonshire over the period of the current Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021.

1.3 The local economy plays an important role in creating sustainable communities, and this strategy sets out Huntingdonshire's aspirations to provide local people with high value, local jobs.

1.4 The development of this strategy comes at an important time amid a number of government policy reviews. It coincides with the review of the East of England Regional Economic Strategy and the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration. There is a move for regional spatial policy to be brought together with regional economic policy. It is important therefore that Huntingdonshire has a clear, unified vision for its local economy and how it fits into the regional economy and the national picture.

1.5 The strategy identifies six strategic priorities, which will help partners focus future activities and help secure public and private investment. The strategy will be delivered through the development and implementation of an action plan which brings together partner organisations. The action plan will be monitored **by** the Huntingdonshire Economic Forum and reviewed on an annual basis.

1.6 This medium term strategy is the result of a comprehensive review of the local economy. It brings together environmental, spatial and economic considerations which meets regional, sub-regional and local priorities. It supports, and in turn is supported by, other Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership strategies which underpin sustainable communities, particularly the Local Development Framework, Environment Strategy, Culture and Leisure Strategy and Housing Strategy.

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2.0 Our Vision for Huntingdonshire

2.1. The Sustainable Community Strategy for Huntingdonshire sets out a shared, long term, vision for Huntingdonshire as a place where current and future generations have a good quality of life and can –

- make the most of opportunities that come from living in a growing and developing district;
- enjoy the benefits of continued economic success;
- access suitable homes, jobs, services, shops, and things to do;
- realise their full potential; and
- live in an environment that maintains the special character of our market towns, villages and countryside

2.2 To help make this vision a reality this strategy identifies the need **to maintain a strong and sustainable local economy**. If we are successful in achieving this outcome Huntingdonshire's economy will continue to provide the basis of sustainable communities and make a significant contribution to sub-regional and regional priorities.

2.3 To address past deficiencies and future growth it is predicted that between 10,000 and 20,000 new jobs will be needed in Huntingdonshire over the period of the current Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) to 2021. For the purposes of the Local Economy Strategy it is suggested that we adopt an ambitious target towards the higher end of the range. However the Employment Study's growth forecast and the RSS indicative growth figures are set at around 10,000 and 14,310 new jobs respectively for Huntingdonshire. The target needs to accommodate growth and also provide further employment to balance the current deficiency between number of jobs and number of economically active people in the district. The Employment Land study forecasts levels of growth for different employment sectors in the district. This strategy outlines interventions and activities which will help deliver this and also combat any potential decline in existing sectors. These jobs need to be located near to centres of growth throughout the district, however we need to ensure that smaller communities remain vibrant with an appropriate level of economic activity.

2.4 To ensure a strong and sustainable economy we need a number of successful sectors, supported by a diversity of other businesses and local supply chains. These sectors create high value jobs and demand a highly skilled workforce; they can be the drivers for improved quality of life, higher levels of local services and create an environment of entrepreneurial activity.

2.5 We strive for high rates of new business start ups, growth in productivity, innovations in products and services and export led growth, which are all indicators of an economy's health. Our economy needs coherent and tailored business support services, available space and premises, effective business networks and sub-regional cohesion and connectivity between businesses.

2.6 We want Huntingdonshire to attract high levels of inward investment, and engage with national and international markets, all of which help accelerate growth and sustainability. This growth needs to be delivered in a way that reduces our carbon footprint.

2.7 People are at the heart of the economy. It is from the different communities and cultures within our population that the district draws its strength. By removing barriers and helping all groups to access the opportunities available to them, the area's social and economic vitality will grow richer.

Text box: 'To maintain a strong and sustainable local economy, we will build on our strengths, capitalise on our distinctive opportunities and tackle the challenges together.'

3.0 Economic Context

3.1 Huntingdonshire is a large district of about 350 square miles with a current population of 166,000 people. It is characterised by four market towns – Huntingdon, Ramsey, St Ives and St Neots which act as service centres, for around 100 distinctive villages set in diverse countryside. A number of large villages – key settlements - act as local service centres for surrounding areas. The towns, villages and countryside provide attractive and exciting environments in which to live and work.

3.2 The district has experienced considerable growth. Since the 1960's there has been rapid and extensive new house building. The still emerging East of England Plan sets an allocation of 11,200 new homes to be built in Huntingdonshire for the period 2001 to 2021, 8,500 homes have already been built or permissions granted however 2700 homes are still required.

3.3 The local economy has developed successfully but the number of jobs has not matched housing or population growth. As a result there are a large number of people who commute out of the district for work. Similarly the development of facilities, services and local infrastructure has been outstripped by population growth.

3.4 Huntingdonshire lies within the London / Stansted / Cambridge / Peterborough Growth Area within the East of England region. It holds a strategic location with excellent road and rail networks that link to the rest of the UK. It forms part of the Greater Cambridge Economic Sub-region. However, economies straddle administrative boundaries and people living in the north of the district look to Peterborough as a service centre. Therefore the need to maintain a good relationship with the Greater Peterborough Economic Sub-region is acknowledged.

3.5 New development will generate additional demands on the district's physical and social infrastructure. A key challenge will be timely provision of adequate and appropriate new infrastructure to meet these demands. This is essential to create balanced sustainable communities.

3.6 A long period of growth has resulted in a generally prosperous area with a buoyant economy and low unemployment. The majority of residents experience a good quality of life. However there are disparities, imbalances and challenges evidenced across the district that impact on the economy. Nearby growth areas such as Cambridge have also resulted in a high level of out commuting from the district.

3.7 Since the publication of the last Economy Strategy, a wide range of research has been undertaken providing detailed information about the district's economy. These reports, analyses, projections and indicators of change have informed the consultation process with partners. This work, along with the strategic priorities of government and regional bodies and the needs identified through the Local Development Framework, has formed the evidence base for this strategy.

4.0 Strategic Priorities

The six strategic priorities identified in this document will be influential in delivering both the goals of the Regional Economic Strategy and the outcomes of the Sustainable Community Strategy. They are significant pillars to maintain the strength of the district's economy and promote economic prosperity.

- **Business Support**
- **Physical Infrastructure Development**
- **Skill Development**
- **Town Centre Support**
- **Visitor Development**
- **Sector Development**

4.1 BUSINESS SUPPORT

Outcome: A high level of Business Support

Objectives:

- Coordinate the delivery of advice and support for new businesses during their start up phase and their early establishment
- Ensure the availability of general business services and advice across the district
- Ensure specific business advice for key growth sectors, rural businesses, young people, migrant workers and businesses looking to re-locate here
- Enable the growth of small and medium sized businesses
- Encourage appropriate (de) regulation
- Promote strong business to business networks
- Develop appropriate services and support for business already in the district and those looking to locate within Huntingdonshire

4.1.1 Judged by growth in VAT registered businesses, Huntingdonshire's business dynamism is much greater than the national average. In recent years the district's business base grew by over 7 percent, while nationally, it was 3.8 percent. Huntingdonshire had a higher growth rate in almost every sector.

4.1.2 Research consistently identifies the need for basic start-up space for businesses in Huntingdonshire, this was reflected in the recent Employment Land Study undertaken to inform the Local Development Framework. Start-up space is important as it underpins new business growth in the high value sectors. Also there is an unmet demand for move-on space which is important for the second phase of a company's development.

4.1.3 There is a wide range of business support across the district. However, we need to ensure that all businesses are able to access this support, especially those in outlying rural areas. Better signposting, clearer support information, and mentoring (especially for new and young businesses) will ensure that more business benefit from the support on offer.

4.1.4 Encouraging supply chain networks will be key to ensuring that more companies in the district can prosper and grow. Supporting these developing and increasingly complex networks will ensure closer integration with existing networks and make certain they provide the necessary support.

4.1.5 A focus on inward investment will help attract more businesses to the district. Promoting the assets of the district, responding to enquiries by a fast-track procedure, targeting existing companies, and other activities will improve the district's business profile and add strength to existing and developing supply chain networks.

4.2 PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Outcome: Improved business infrastructure

Objectives:

- Improve public transport
- Improve transport network for business
- Ensure land and premises for economic growth
- Improve ICT broadband/capacity

4.2.1 The draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) incorporates the Regional Transport Strategy for the East of England. EEDA's Economic Strategy highlights those elements of the RSS which are of particular significance for the region's economy and underlines the importance of investment fundamental to the region's success. Huntingdonshire is strategically placed within the region, with the UK's major road and rail networks contributing to its wider infrastructure. This strategy supports the implementation of the RSS, Local Development Framework and the Local Transport Plan and will be used to guide investment decisions and to pursue the objectives outlined above.

4.2.2 Future development of the infrastructure will rely heavily on major improvements to the A14; a dual carriageway road carrying large volumes of freight traffic from the East coast ports and the Midlands and beyond, and often heavily congested. The completion of these improvements (expected in stages) will have a significant impact on our local economy.

4.2.3 This strategy acknowledges that while a modern and efficient transport network is essential for a growing economy, this must be reconciled with the environmental impacts. It will be necessary to ensure that every plan and proposal is assessed through the appropriate appraisal process against the sustainable development criteria.

4.2.4 Innovative transport solutions such as the Cambridge - St Ives - Huntingdon Guided Bus have been designed. Identifying and developing forward-thinking solutions, in particular reducing the need to travel, will be important factors in tackling the challenges of developing transport networks and improving the way people, especially workers, travel throughout the district.

4.2.5 A sustainable and thriving economy will be dependent on achieving a balance of housing, especially affordable housing, and jobs. Developing housing and employment sites that support business growth will ensure the economic viability of local communities. Home working is increasing in significance, it is a practice which can help address the sustainability of communities and also reduce travel congestion and carbon dioxide emissions. This strategy has been developed in line with the Employment Land Review to ensure spatial and economic policies complement each other.

4.2.6 Working with businesses and other partners will ensure land and premises that meets current and future needs. Developing public and private sector partnerships will drive activity which meets a clear business requirement.

Quote box : ‘.....development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. (The World Commission on Environment and Development).

4.3 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Outcome: To ensure that skills levels support economic prosperity

Objectives:

- Meet skill shortages
- Address skill development for the future, particularly in key growth sectors, and with attention to the higher-level skills that may be required
- Maximise opportunities for workplace learning and training
- Promote learning and training opportunities for people in deprived communities and those who are long term out-of-work.
- Seek investment opportunities for learning and skills development
- Increase retention of young people in learning and training
- Promote vocational opportunities for young people
- Ensure the readiness and transition of young people to work

4.3.1 Although Huntingdonshire's economy is strong, indicators show the local labour market is constrained and migrant workers are helping to meet the employment needs of local employers. Almost a quarter of people aged 16–74 in Huntingdonshire have no formal qualifications. However, this remains lower than the county and national average. The level of qualification attained by the people of Huntingdonshire is close to the national average.

4.3.2 The table below shows how Huntingdonshire attainment levels compare with the rest of Cambridgeshire.

	2005			2005		
	Level 2 and Above			Level 4 and Above		
	Numbers		%	Numbers		%
Cambs & Peterborough	282,336		64.5	135,578		31
Cambridgeshire	230,362		66.7	117,269		33.9
Huntingdonshire	67,195		68.2	27,888		28.3
Cambridge	47,860		66.6	34,908		48.5
East Cambridgeshire	26,269		58.4	12,255		27.3
Fenland	27,943		57.2	6,577		13.5
South Cambridgeshire	61,095		75.2	35,641		43.9
Peterborough	51,974		56.5	18,309		19.9

4.3.3 In Huntingdonshire there are six wards with a higher level of people with no qualifications than the national average. The two wards with the highest levels are Huntingdon North and Ramsey. There are eight wards with lower levels of people with qualifications at level 2 or higher (5+ A*-C grade GCSEs and above) than the national average, also including Ramsey and Huntingdon North wards.

4.3.4 The Leitch Report showed that achieving world-class skills in the UK will require a commitment to achieving certain targets by 2020. Skill development will depend upon:

- Identifying and acting upon current and future skills shortages
- Focusing on particular basic skill or high-level skill deficits
- Tailoring supply to better support employers
- Stimulating demand for skills and a learning culture from both employers and employees
- Attracting and retaining skilled people
- Tackling problems of deprivation and social exclusion

4.3.5 This strategy identifies four key growth sectors that will establish high value jobs and will demand higher level skills. It is vital, therefore, that skills training and investment be aligned to the needs of the industries within these growth sectors.

Quote box : “Increasing skill levels of workers and jobs in the long term is the key to developing more sustainable employment” (East of England Development Agency).

4.4 TOWN CENTRE SUPPORT

Outcome: Economical, viable and vibrant town centres

Objectives:

- Increase the number of people using town centres
- Encourage residents and businesses to buy local produce and services
- Increase the retail offer and mix
- Improve the evening economy
- Enhance town centre environments

4.4.1 Huntingdonshire has four market towns; Huntingdon, St Ives, St Neots and Ramsey. They are the service centres for the district, acting as hubs and links for their surrounding villages and smaller settlements. Within Cambridgeshire, St Neots is the largest town with a population of almost 30,000 people and, on a sub-regional level Huntingdon is an important administrative centre with the headquarters of the Fire Service, Police, Hinchingsbrooke Hospital and the District Council all located in the town.

4.4.2 The towns' distinctiveness lies in their individual characteristics, and the balance of elements for developing their local economies will vary from town to town. However, common to them all is need for sustainable growth, with vibrant town centres meeting the needs of their residents, businesses and visitors. Growth can be better guided by adopting a pro-active approach to marketing each of the towns, and a selective approach used when encouraging preferred new businesses to complement those already established in the town.

4.4.3 This strategy acknowledges the regional requirements not only for delivering the number of homes needed, but matching it with the transport, jobs, social and environmental infrastructure and services to make this growth sustainable. Delivery will rest with a number of agencies and businesses; developing and supporting the right partnerships will ensure engagement with all stakeholders and delivering local interventions for local needs.

4.4.4 Each town has its own natural and built heritage, including rivers, landscapes, architecture, public space and green corridors. The protection, conservation and enhancement of these assets are vital to maintaining their intrinsic value and increasing their sustainable economic contribution to the economy.

4.4.5 Developing facilities for business visitors and residents will be key to building our town centres' vibrancy and growth.

4.4.6 Greater community engagement will strengthen the sense of ownership and civic pride, and is the foundation of high quality sustainable development.

4.5 VISITOR DEVELOPMENT

Outcome: Increased investment in the local economy

Objectives:

- Encourage local people to visit local attractions
- Encourage business visitors
- Market Huntingdonshire to prospective businesses
- Improve the mix of attractions, facilities and leisure opportunities
- Develop attractions and services for visitors, specifically overnight stay visitors

4.5.1 Visitor development is an important economic driver in the sub-region. The planned rapid population growth in Cambridgeshire will require an expansion of job opportunities in the sub-region. An increase in service sector employment is seen to be of vital importance in achieving the desired balance between population growth and job growth. These jobs are not high value jobs but they do help to stimulate new investment in the area, increasing value added per visitor and using tourism as a tool in tackling economic inactivity by providing appropriate skills and employment opportunities.

4.5.2 Supporting, promoting and celebrating what is special about Huntingdonshire plays an important role in improving the quality of life of local people. At the same time it can underpin economic growth and inward investment across all sectors by contributing to the area's image, providing high quality business facilities and generally ensuring that the area is seen as an attractive place in which to invest.

4.5.3 Some parts of the Huntingdonshire are already highly visited, others are less so. The district has a wealth of natural and built heritage including the waterways, countryside, nature reserves, cycle ways and bridle paths, historical market towns and other visitor attractions. The way visitor development is promoted should seek to spread benefits over the district and throughout the year.

4.5.4 This strategy supports the sub-regional tourism strategy. A primary action is to develop partnership-working to deliver the objectives outlined above and raise the performance of the economy of the four market towns as visitor destinations.

4.6 SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Outcome: Well developed key growth sectors

Objectives:

To promote:

- Creative Industries
- Environmental Science and Technologies
- High Value Manufacturing
- High-Tech enterprises

4.6.1 Future job creation in all sectors will be important to the local economy however the identification and selection of these key sectors has emerged from sub-regional and district-wide studies, and they will be influential in realising the vision of this strategy.

4.6.2 The Regional Economic Strategy outlines a vision of “a leading economy founded on our world class knowledge base and the creativity and enterprise of our people”. Knowledge based industries are often defined as businesses that “use knowledge to produce economic benefits”. This includes: printing, publishing, electrical and optical technology, communications, business services, education and health. The knowledge based sector is forecast to grow over the period to 2021 and account for around 36% of all jobs in Cambridgeshire

4.6.3 These sectors will be important in achieving this vision by establishing high value jobs, maximising growth opportunities and embedding their dynamism into the local economy, particularly the local supply chains and networks that service and support them.

4.7 Creative Industries

Sector Objectives:

- improve business-to-business networks and information for creative industries
- promote the profile and strength of creative industries in Huntingdonshire
- develop business support and promote training for individuals and businesses within the creative industries
- encourage employment creation within the sector both in the market towns and rural areas of our district
- help develop collaboration, supply chains and new markets
- develop St Neots as a district centre for creative industries
- provide the physical infrastructure - ‘Spaces for Creativity’ - in St Neots and other appropriate locations.

4.7.1 Creative enterprise offers the potential to be a major key to sustained economic growth in the UK. Creative businesses depend on individual creativity and skill to generate prosperity. They extend from music through marketing and advertising, architecture, furniture making and software design. They are commonly defined as “...those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property”.

4.7.2 Nationally, around 2 million people are employed in creative industries, helping to transform many urban and rural areas. The government has set out clearly the links between creativity and business performance, stating that creativity is a key ingredient in the success of business across the UK economy. They are important in their own right and also support the development of existing and new businesses.

4.7.3 In the Eastern region there are currently around 17,000 creative businesses employing some 145,000 people (approximately 5.5 percent of the workforce). The East of England Creative Industries Strategy identifies three regional hubs:

- Cambridge - for new technology and innovation
- Norwich - for animation, TV production, writing, visual arts
- Hertfordshire – for film and media

4.7.4 In Huntingdonshire around 2,000 people are employed currently in creative industries (around 3.2 percent of the workforce). The development of a district based creative industries centre in St Neots will help to ensure that the economic benefits from the regional hubs can be linked with opportunities for job creation and economic regeneration throughout the Cambridge sub-region and Huntingdonshire specifically.

4.7.5 Businesses within the creative industries sector are often small and insular employing just a few people. The diversification of redundant buildings in rural parts of Huntingdonshire could help accommodate the growth of this sector and stimulate economic vitality in rural areas.

4.8 Environmental Science and Technologies

Sector Objectives:

- cultivate the world-class expertise of our companies in environmental technologies and promote the sector
- embed a culture of resource efficiency and environmental management within the business sector and other major organisations
- encourage construction and physical development to high environmental standards
- harness opportunities from the natural landscape to showcase environmental best practice

4.8.1 The Regional Economic Strategy identifies the need to deliver a transformational reduction in carbon dioxide and emissions and resource use. In this context, the scale of economic and housing growth forecast for the region has the potential for a rapid widespread adoption of low carbon technologies and standards.

4.8.2 EEDA acknowledge that the large-scale uptake of a range of clean power, heat and transport technologies required to make deep cuts in emissions demands leadership, commitment and radical action from the private, public and third sector. Huntingdonshire has a number of environmental businesses who are leaders in their field and are well placed to champion this technology.

4.8.3 Action on climate change also presents a major economic opportunity for the East of England. Predictions of a 45 percent growth in the global environmental technologies sector by 2015 coupled with a large proportion of the UK's environmental goods and services sector being based in the region means that the East of England and Huntingdonshire has the potential to become a centre of excellence for low carbon technologies.

4.8.4 Huntingdonshire contains a large number of sites of particular importance for biodiversity, such as the Ouse Washes, Paxton Pits Nature Reserve and Portholme Meadow. The Great Fen project is a major habitat restoration project which will create a 3700 hectare wetland by connecting Holme Fen and Woodwalton Fen, providing new opportunities for recreation, education and business. This project will be a flagship scheme of international importance and will provide opportunities to showcase environmental best practice.

4.9 High Value Manufacturing

Sector Objectives:

- harness the world-class expertise of our companies in high value manufacturing to promote the sector
- encourage the development of networks and collaboration and foster the growth of supply chains
- promote the development of a sub-regional high value manufacturing hub
- support local hi-tech product development and manufacturing
- develop a manufacturing campus for learning and business enterprise in Huntingdon
- provide appropriate space for manufacturing businesses to locate across the district

4.9.1 Manufacturing remains one of the most important sectors in terms of employment for Huntingdonshire and the sub-region as a whole. In the Greater Cambridge region it accounts for 60,000 jobs compared to the high tech industries which employ around 40,000 people. In Huntingdonshire it makes up the largest job sector with over 13,500 people, 20% of the workforce employed in this sector.

4.9.2 The majority of manufacturing activities are located in Huntingdon, St Ives and St Neots. There are a number of reasons behind the trend for manufacturing to cluster in these locations. These include the relative availability of land compared with Cambridge, the costs of land and rents, access to national strategic road networks (A1 and A14) and the availability of appropriately skilled labour.

4.9.3 The district has a cluster of businesses in the manufacturing sector which can be classed as 'advanced engineering', for example IT related products such as printers and display screens, audio equipment and high performance sports cars. Some of these companies benefit from research and development being undertaken in Cambridge and some have this function located in the district.

4.9.4 Investment and interventions for future growth in the sub-region and Huntingdonshire are forecast to continue to centre on high value manufacturing. Huntingdonshire is a prime location for the development of a sub-regional manufacturing campus. Such a facility would provide a spatial focus for developing prototype products emerging from research undertaken within the district and elsewhere within the region.

4.10 High Tech Enterprises

Sector Objectives:

- cultivate a dynamic cluster of high tech industries
- Promote commercialisation of product development
- Support the creation of a local hi-tech product development and manufacturing campus for learning and business enterprise
- work in partnership to co-ordinate business support and promote training for individuals and businesses within hi tech industries
- improve employment creation within the sector both in the market towns and rural areas of our district
- help develop collaboration, supply chains and new markets

4.10.1 The Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England identifies a job growth estimate of 70,500 jobs in the Greater Cambridge Partnership sub region to 2021. The high tech proportion of the forecast growth is expected to be 8,500 jobs (more than 10 percent of all jobs).

4.10.2 The standard industrial classification (SIC) definition of hi-tech industries includes:

- computer services
- information communication technology
- biotechnology and biomedicine
- research and development

4.10.3 Huntingdonshire is already home to world class hi-tech companies. Building links with these companies will foster the growth of supply chains and cultivate a dynamic cluster of knowledge development.

5.0 Delivery Mechanism

5.1 The Economic Forum along with partners will be responsible for delivering this strategy. The Forum will develop and implement an action plan which co-ordinates work being undertaken and outlines projects and targets under each of the priorities. Project progress will be monitored regularly by the Forum and the delivery plan will be reviewed annually to reflect changing needs and opportunities.

5.2 The action plan will be used to secure private and public funding for projects and attract further investment to the district.

5.3 The Economic Forum is made up of a number of organisations including:

- Business Link East
- Huntingdonshire and Cambridge Enterprise Services
- Huntingdonshire and Peterborough Chamber of Commerce
- Huntingdonshire Business Network
- Federation of Small Business
- Huntingdonshire Regional College
- Huntingdonshire District Council
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- ACRE - Action with Communities in Rural England
- National Farmers Union
- Large employers
- Small and medium sized companies
- Private and Public sector organisations.

5.4 The Forum will engage with other partners including:

- Greater Cambridge Economic Partnership
- Greater Peterborough Economic Partnership
- East of England International
- East of England Development Agency

6.0 Appendix One: Huntingdonshire in Perspective, an economic, social and demographic account of the district

6.1 Huntingdonshire has a population of around 166,000. Almost half of the population is concentrated in the four market towns of Huntingdon, St Ives, St Neots and Ramsey. The district covers an area of over 900 square kilometres (approximately 350 square miles). Huntingdonshire is predominantly rural with village settlements providing the main focus for community facilities outside the market towns

6.2. House prices in Huntingdonshire are 5.4 percent below the average for England and Wales and 8.9 percent below the county average. However, house prices in the district have risen by almost 9 percent during 2006/7 and in recent years cheaper homes have experienced some of the highest price rises, leading to a shortage of affordable housing across the area for lower paid workers in particular. The average cost of a property in the district has more than doubled since 1999, increasing from £91,488 to £200,040 (July-September 2006).

6.3 Median weekly earnings of Huntingdonshire residents in employment are more than 5 percent higher than the national average. Economic activity is particularly high, with all wards in the district having a higher level than the national average. The claimant count unemployment rate in the area remains low at 1.4 percent compared to the UK average of 2.5 percent. Only the Huntingdon North ward has a rate higher than this figure. The median household income in Huntingdonshire is £31,600 which is £1,600 above the county median.

6.4 The median weekly full time earnings in Huntingdonshire are nearly 5 percent below the national average and around 8 percent lower than the countywide average. The median figure for the district in 2006 was £432.20 per week, which is 2.6 percent lower than the 2005 figure. The national figure increased by 4.9 percent in this period. These figures all relate to workplace data – figures for Huntingdonshire residents are higher due to higher wages earned by people living in the district and commuting to better paid jobs outside the area.

6.5 Huntingdonshire has a low overall level of people claiming income support, job seekers allowance and pension credit. However, it should be noted that there are a few wards with high levels of claimants.

6.6 Huntingdonshire has a high level of out-commuting at 35.3 percent. The 2001 Census showed there has been a 4 percent increase in out-commuting since the 1991 Census. All of the districts in Cambridgeshire, with the exception of Cambridge City, have experienced an increase in out-commuting over the last 10 years. The average distance travelled to a fixed place of work for people living in Huntingdonshire is the seventh highest of all 48 local authority areas in the East of England. The East of England has the highest average distance travelled to a fixed place of work of all the regions in England.

6.7 Of those people who work in the district, 22.8 percent commute in. A significant level of people in employment in Huntingdonshire work from home (9.8 percent), the largest proportion of which are small employers and own account workers.

6.8 Almost a quarter of people aged 16–74 in Huntingdonshire have no formal qualifications. However, this remains lower than the county and national average. The level of qualification attained by the people of Huntingdonshire is close to the national average.

6.9 There are six wards with a higher level of people with no qualifications than the national average. The two wards with the highest levels are Huntingdon North and Ramsey. There are eight wards with lower levels of people with qualifications at level 2 or higher (5+ A*-C grade GCSEs and above) than the national average, also including Ramsey and Huntingdon North wards.

6.10 Life expectancy in Huntingdonshire is high compared to the national average. In the 2001 Census 73.37 percent of people described their health as 'good'. This is almost 5 percent higher than the national average. The district has a lower level of claimants for incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance than the national average and has a lower percentage of people with a limiting long-term illness.

6.11 Huntingdonshire's residents are predominantly white, with just 2.85 percent categorised as non-white in the 2001 Census. This is considerably lower than the national average of 9.08 percent. Since the 1991 Census, the percentage of non-white people in the district has increased slightly from 2.36 percent. However, the total number of non-white residents has increased by more than 30 percent to nearly 4,500 people.

6.12 The percentage of households in Huntingdonshire that have access to two or more cars or vans is significantly higher (+14 percent) than the national average. The district's rural areas generally have higher levels of vehicle ownership than urban wards.

6.13 The level of owner occupied housing in Huntingdonshire is higher than the national average and hence there are lower levels of both private and social rented households.

6.14 Of all crimes reported in Cambridgeshire, 24.9 percent were in Huntingdonshire. The rates of crime per 1,000 population in Huntingdonshire are below the average for England and Wales.

6.15 The business sectors with the largest number of VAT-registered businesses in the district are 'real estate, renting and business activities', 'wholesale, retail and repairs' and 'construction'. There has been an increase in the number of VAT-registered businesses in the district over the last five years, with a total of 6,080 businesses registered in 2005 – 10.6 percent more than in 2000. This is nearly twice the UK increase in VAT-

registrations during this period (5.7 percent) and more than 2 percent higher than the countywide increase.

6.16 The industrial sectors employing the largest numbers of Huntingdonshire's workforce are 'manufacturing', 'wholesale/retail and repair of motor vehicles', 'real estate, renting and business activities', public administration and defence' and 'health and social work'. The 'creative industries' sector employs 7.4 percent of all those employed in the Huntingdonshire workplace, which is around the same level as those employed in creative industries nationally.

6.17 The main occupations of Huntingdonshire's workforce are 'managers and senior officials', 'associate professional and technical occupations', 'administrative and secretarial occupations', 'skilled trades occupations' and 'elementary occupations'.

6.18 Huntingdonshire has experienced considerable growth. Since the 1960's there has been rapid and extensive new house building. The emerging East of England Plan sets an allocation of 11,200 new homes to be built in Huntingdonshire for the period 2001 to 2021, 8,500 homes have already been built or permissions granted however 2700 homes are still required.

6.19 The local economy has developed successfully but the number of jobs has not matched housing or population growth. As a result there are a large number of people who commute out of the district for work. Similarly the development of facilities, services and local infrastructure has been outstripped by population growth.

7.0 Appendix Two: Overview of the East of England and sub-regional context

7.1 EEDA's Regional Economic Strategy describes the East of England as diverse and, *'...though containing fewer cities or major conurbations than other parts of the country, the region is characterised by its proximity to London and its regional and sub-regional centres serving a hinterland of market towns, villages and rural populations'*.

7.2 It is acknowledged as a region of ideas, innovation and enterprise, with strong service sector and a significant number of internationally important businesses engaged in research and development, with one of the strongest and fastest growing economies in the UK, with output totalling £81 billion in 2002.

7.3 The region has a growing population of just under 5.5 million, which has grown by over 11 percent from 1982 to 2002. The population is forecast to increase by around half a million up to 2021, making it one of the fastest growing regions in the UK. (A Shared Vision: East of England Development Agency) and a significant concentration of internationally important businesses have brought prosperity, diversity and a world-stage presence,

7.4 Almost half the population lives in the region's rural areas where market towns act as service centres.

7.5 To achieve sustainable employment-led growth and regeneration in the region in the period to 2021 requires levels of jobs growth projected in the Regional Spatial Strategy .

7.6 Projected jobs growth 2001 - 2021

Cambridge Sub-region (part)	70,500
Greater Peterborough Sub-region	21,900
Rest of Cambridgeshire	500

7.7 Huntingdonshire - a sub-region

Huntingdonshire straddles the sub-regions of Greater Peterborough and Greater Cambridge. Working in partnership with both the Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership and the Greater Peterborough Partnership underpins our strategies and actions. In this way Huntingdonshire is, and will continue to be, key to sub-regional and regional growth. This ethic of partnership working will facilitate the way in which we will improve the district's economic performance and the quality of life of those who live and work here.

text box : 'Regional and sub-regional partnerships are agents for economic development and growth.'

8.0 Appendix Three: Consultation Process and Review of Local Economy

8.1 A range of methods has been employed to gather the qualitative and quantitative data that has informed this strategy. Information has been gathered from both published and specially commissioned research and analysis, and through a variety of consultation processes engaging with the business community, delivery bodies and partner organisations.

8.2 Firstly, a review of Huntingdonshire's economic role within the East of England region and the Cambridgeshire sub-region identified the priorities and mechanisms important to delivery. Secondly, grass-root consultation addressed the needs of people, organisations and businesses.

8.3 Employing this 'outward looking (regional and sub-regional) and 'inward looking' (market towns, villages and rural hinterlands) approach to identify the district's distinctive issues and priorities, formed the framework for the goals, priorities and actions identified in this strategy.

8.4 The review of the Local Economy Strategy commenced in September 2006 and was completed in Summer 2007. It involved a series of consultation events and studies as tabled below. The review was undertaken in conjunction with the review of employment land to ensure the two pieces of work were considered together.

Activity	Purpose
1. Regional and Sub-regional Study	Identify regional and sub-regional economic development priorities
2. Employment/ Business Sector Analysis	Establish GDP sector forecasts
3. Local Economy SWOT Analysis	Consultation with Economic Forum to identify business needs
4. Employment Land Review	Joint exercise with HDC Planning Dept. to establish spatial needs
5. Assessment of Local Skill Requirements	Skills need assessment undertaken as part of Huntingdonshire Learning Conference
6. Consultation with Business Community	Forum to canvass wider views on priority interventions required
7. Consolidation and Interpretation of research/ assessments/consultation	Identification of economic interventions and formulation of strategy
8. Consultation with Economic Forum	To gain endorsement of proposed economic interventions and strategy