



Economic Development Plan

Consultation

30th June 2011

Economic Development Plan Consultation

Foreword

Central Bedfordshire is a prosperous and attractive area. We want to ensure that we continue to be a place people want to live and work, and build on our leading education institutions and businesses to ensure our residents are able to benefit from the economic growth of the area. In changing economic conditions and new government policy, our Economic Development Plan sets out our commitment to supporting sustainable economic growth in Central Bedfordshire and provides an outline of the types of activities we will seek to undertake over the next few years with our partners to realise our economic growth potential.

In producing the Economic Development Plan we are embracing the critical role our partners and stakeholders will play in both shaping the economic vision for the area, delivering supporting activities and, ultimately, facilitating sustainable economic growth in Central Bedfordshire. Reflecting this, we want to maximise engagement with partners, businesses and residents at this early stage to ensure that the Economic Development Plan reflects real business and community needs and that through true partnership working our resources and those of our partners are deployed most effectively to meet local needs.

This plan builds on our Sustainable Communities Strategy and Local Economic Assessment evidence base and sets out our initial ideas on how we want to work with partners to prioritise and support local job growth and opportunity for all. The consultation document includes a number of questions on which we'd like to hear your views. We are keen to gain your opinions on the areas that will have the most impact in achieving our economic potential. Your views will allow us to prioritise activity over the coming years and will be used in the production of a final plan, which we aim to publish in November 2011.

I hope that you find the draft Economic Development Plan of interest and support the approach proposed. Please let us know what you think.

Cllr. Ken Matthews

Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development



30th June 2011

Central Bedfordshire's Economic Vision and Priorities

Our Sustainable Community Strategy sets out the vision for Central Bedfordshire as:

“Globally connected, delivering sustainable growth to ensure a green, prosperous and ambitious place for the benefit of all”

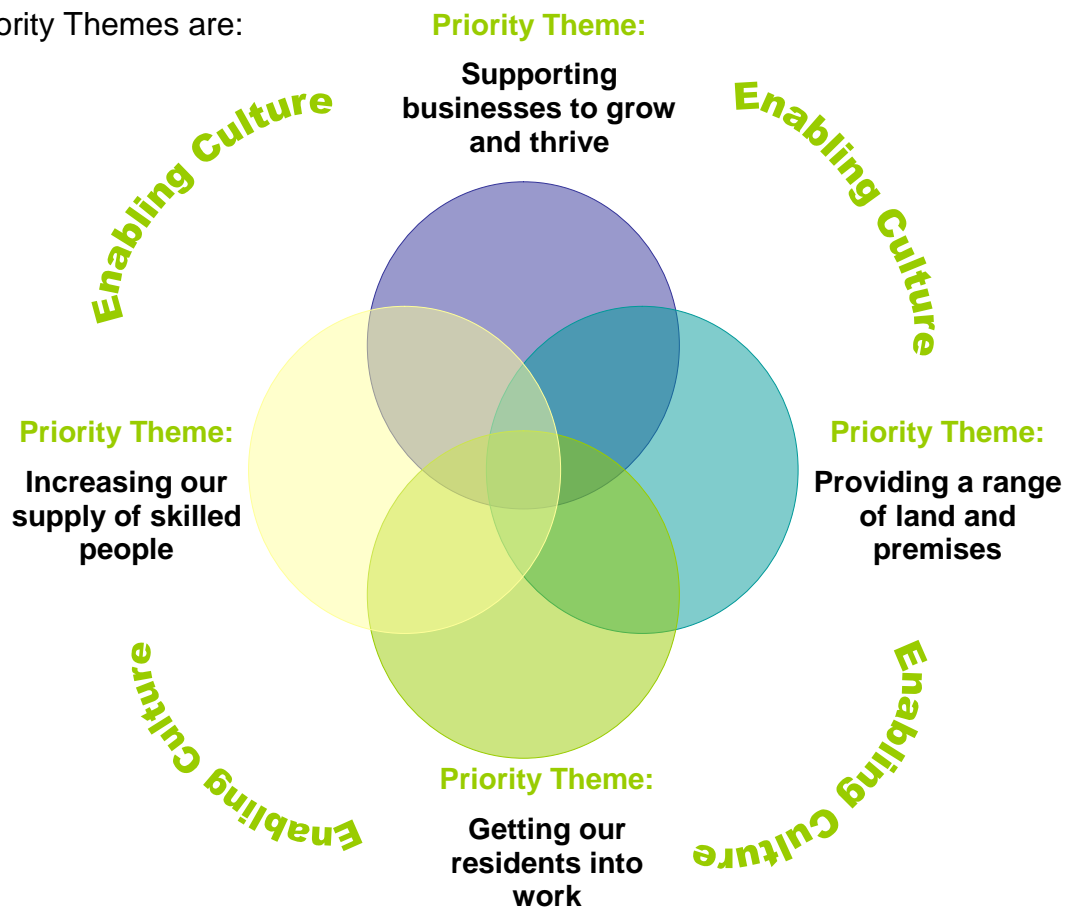
The Sustainable Community Strategy was developed through Central Bedfordshire Together, our Local Strategic Partnership, and sets out the type of place we want Central Bedfordshire to be.

Central Bedfordshire's strategic location and high quality environment have led to strong levels of economic and population growth, with the population growing by 18,900 (8.1%) in the 8 years to 2009. Central Bedfordshire is an increasingly desirable place to live. Evidence shows that long-term population expansion has not been matched with job creation and local jobs will need to be created to provide residents with the choice to live and work locally. In addressing this, local planning strategies set a target of 27,000 new jobs for the area between 2011 and 2026, providing for a better sustainable mix between employment opportunities and new homes. This is a job growth rate of approximately 1,800 per year and represents a significant increase from current levels of growth (1,300 per year). This target is stretching, but reflects the area's strengths as a location for business and perfectly highlights the economic potential of the area.

The Economic Development Plan is Central Bedfordshire Council's response to reaching our full economic potential and meeting the challenge of creating 27,000 new jobs by 2026 and sets out what we plan to do to achieve this. The Economic Development Plan outlines how we will work in the short to medium term (three years) to ensure Central Bedfordshire is recognised as a leading location for business investment – a place where existing companies thrive and new entrepreneurs are freely able to start up and grow. Our local people must be appropriately equipped to be able to benefit from new business growth, through having the skills to prosper and being fully able to access new employment opportunities. In an increasingly global economy, where investment and jobs are more mobile, Central Bedfordshire will need to differentiate itself from other locations by building a positive reputation as a place open for business.

The Economic Development Plan draws on a detailed evidence base contained within the recent Local Economic Assessment. The Local Economic Assessment highlights the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing Central Bedfordshire and concludes that to achieve our economic potential action is required in four interrelated priority themes to allow us to achieve our vision for Central Bedfordshire.

The four Priority Themes are:



These themes are all interconnected and provide the structure for the Economic Development Plan, focusing on creating the right conditions to attract, retain and grow business to create more employment opportunities. Activities within each of these themes will put in place the necessary physical infrastructure, business support systems, support for raising educational aspirations, attainment and skills levels and help for our residents in accessing employment opportunities. The four priority themes, are aligned to a cross cutting theme of an enabling 'can do' culture within the Council, moving from 'enforcer' to 'enabler'. Reflecting the interconnected nature of sustainable economic growth, the Economic Development Plan will align closely with other key Council strategies to ensure cross cutting impacts on our environment, communities and business are considered.

Consultation Questions

- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the need to prioritise jobs growth and create the conditions to stimulate economic growth?
- Which of the priority themes do you think is most important and why?
- Do you think there are any themes we have missed?

Please answer these questions via the questionnaire which can be found online at:
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/surveys/EDP/draft.htm

Priority Theme: Supporting Business

What difference are we seeking to make?

We aim to deliver a step change in jobs growth in Central Bedfordshire. Working in partnership with the public and private sectors we will enable businesses to grow by removing barriers, streamlining process and making it easy for them to release their potential.

What do we plan to focus on?

Business Engagement

In order to help businesses grow and create jobs, we need to know what barriers they face and whether there are any other constraints on their business. Regular engagement with key local businesses is essential. As a Council we will be proactive in building relationships with businesses, increasing and improving engagement with key employers. We will respond to their needs in a holistic and flexible way and use all of our business facing teams to gather intelligence and provide solutions. We will work hard to make all aspects of business growth much simpler by improving information both direct to businesses and through intermediaries and taking a 'whole Council' approach. The Council will also work with existing business networks and organisations, recognising their key role in representing business views and needs. This will avoid duplication of activity and make best use of available resources.

Business Support

Those businesses that seek support are many more times likely to succeed. Businesses access support from a variety of sources, from both the public and private sector, which helps them to grow and overcome obstacles. 89% of businesses in Central Bedfordshire accessed some form of support in 2010, most of which came from private sector advisors (intermediaries) such as accountants and banks. We aim to work with these intermediaries to ensure that they understand both Central Bedfordshire Council's offer to businesses and the wider public sector offer with the aim of them 'selling on' products and services to their clients, maximising the level of available support and the take up of it. We know that 97.7% of our businesses employ fewer than 50 people, showing the importance of small business support. In order to promote job growth it is essential to devise and support, in partnership with the private sector, the delivery of specific support packages for groups such as high-growth businesses, start-ups, exporters and social enterprises. Further types of support that could be offered include helping businesses adapt to a low carbon environment, supporting travel planning and promoting local procurement opportunities.

Innovation

Innovation and creativity drives productivity and successful enterprise. Business links with higher and further education can fuel innovation in new products and process, delivering improvements in business productivity and profitability and creating new jobs. Currently only 6% of businesses in Central Bedfordshire have links with universities or colleges. Working together, businesses and education can create innovative products and ways of working which help businesses to grow and increase productivity. We will work with our partners to foster such links and encourage collaboration, building on the area's existing world leading companies and education institutions and exploring new opportunities, through better engagement with appropriate bodies such as the Technology Strategy Board.

Inward Investment

Our commitment to an enabling, positive ‘can do’ culture (page 13) is a key factor in attracting new businesses and investment to Central Bedfordshire. We will use our knowledge and experience to work collaboratively with private sector partners to promote Central Bedfordshire as an ‘Open for Business’ location. Working with national bodies, such as UK Trade and Investment and Visit Britain, we will promote the area on a global scale as a location for business investment and will help to develop new commercial opportunities for existing businesses.

Start-Ups and Entrepreneurial Activity

The Coalition Government has made business and entrepreneurship in both social and private sectors central to the growth of the UK economy. We will encourage businesses to start up and make it easy for them to access both private and public sector support throughout their lifecycle. We will focus on developing wealth creating businesses that have the potential to grow and create jobs. Entrepreneurial activity will be celebrated as we attempt to build an entrepreneurial culture within the area.

Consultation Questions

- Within the Supporting Business theme which two areas of focus do you think are most important and why?
- Are there any other areas of focus not listed above that you consider to be important within this theme?

Please answer these questions via the questionnaire which can be found online at:
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/surveys/EDP/draft.htm

Priority Theme: Land and Premises

What difference are we seeking to make?

To create the environment to encourage business growth through the provision of a range of appropriate land and premises, efficient infrastructure and high quality environments.

What do we plan to focus on?

Delivery of Key Infrastructure

Local Development Frameworks, the Local Transport Plan and the Local Investment Plan set out a range of infrastructure needed to deliver the area's growth aspirations including: A5/M1 link road, new M1 Junction 11a, Woodside Connection, Green Infrastructure and Utilities and Energy. We will continue to work with government and private sector partners to identify and deliver such business critical infrastructure and will continue to investigate delivery methods to ensure that the transport and utility infrastructure critical to business operations is in place.

Supporting the roll out of Next Generation Broadband

Recognising the increasing demands from business and residents for access to high speed broadband, we will look to develop a Local Broadband Plan for Central Bedfordshire, setting out how the commercial and public sectors will work together to roll out next generation broadband infrastructure and services.

Land Use Policy

Under our planning policies much employment land use in Central Bedfordshire is classed as category B use – B1: office, B2: industrial, B8: warehousing. We are intending to safeguard these existing employment areas and seek ways in which to improve the environment and attractiveness of older sites. It is estimated that in the region of 54% of new jobs will be created in non-B space sectors, including retail, leisure, hotel, health, care, education and home working. A significant amount of new employment land has been allocated and further supply of land will be identified through Local Development Frameworks to ensure that a range of land uses are available for future growth that provides space for 27,000 jobs. We will continue working with the development industry to promote and bring forward high quality developments, flexible to business needs, and will seek to maximise the use of council and partner assets to facilitate economic growth. In addition to this, it will be important to continue to ensure that future policies and site allocations are flexible to business needs and, reflecting national policy, sustainable economic development is supported and communities engaged to benefit from growth.

Regenerating our Town Centres

Town Centres are at the heart of our communities, yet Central Bedfordshire residents tend to spend more each year in centres outside of the area (£528m) than people from outside the area spend in our town centres (£66m). The balance of retail trade is -£462m, with eight times as much money leaving Central Bedfordshire than coming into it. We will work with partners to regenerate our town centres, creating environments which attract local visitors and those from other areas. Masterplans and site specific development plans are in place or being developed in Dunstable, Flitwick, Leighton Buzzard, Biggleswade and Houghton Regis to encourage and guide private investment in our towns and to improve and retain the viability of these important centres for the benefit of our local communities. This positive approach is reflected in our existing and emerging Core Strategies and Development Plan Documents, which will identify specific new employment sites to meet Central Bedfordshire's growth requirements.

Bringing Forward Employment Land

In addition to longer term new land allocations, it is critical to provide a choice and range of existing sites and premises for business to start and grow. We will seek to build on the strength of existing strategic employment assets, such as Cranfield, Woodside Park, Millbrook Proving Grounds and Stratton Business Park. Further to this, we are actively working with partners to identify and overcome potential barriers and constraints that may be restricting the commercial development of existing employment sites or use of existing premises. To address this we are putting in place a Sites Acceleration programme targeting key sites that can support the short term availability of land and premises to deliver jobs growth. We will investigate the potential for Central Bedfordshire to pioneer emerging schemes, such as Tax Increment Financing and Local Development Orders, to bring forward sites where these will benefit the local economy. Furthermore we will work with local private sector partners to maximise the use of existing vacant business premises.

Business Incubation

New business start ups and early stage high growth businesses often require dedicated provision of flexible accommodation and support services to achieve their growth potential. A lack of such space has been highlighted in Central Bedfordshire, therefore we will work with public and private sector partners to bring forward a range of enterprise space, from dedicated innovation centres to private sector managed offices, ensuring that there is sufficient supply of incubation space and support services, to foster business start ups.

Supporting Rural Diversification

Rural businesses play a key role in Central Bedfordshire's economy. A key challenge facing rural businesses is the ability to respond to new market opportunities where this may require a move from agriculture to other sustainable commercial uses. In addition to targeted business support and the safeguarded of rural employment sites, we will support rural business diversification in a sustainable manner by supporting redevelopment and reuse of existing buildings and sites to provide for a suitable scale of development opportunities which strike a balance with the need to protect our countryside.

Consultation Questions

- Within the Land & Premises theme which two areas of focus do you think are most important and why?
- Are there any other areas of focus not listed above that you consider to be important within this theme?

*Please answer these questions via the questionnaire which can be found online at:
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/surveys/EDP/draft.htm*

Priority Theme: Into Work

What difference are we seeking to make?

To harness the time and skills of people not currently able to participate in the economy and allow it to reach its full potential. We have over 15,000 working age people on out of work benefits in Central Bedfordshire. Non-participation results in costs to the economy, such as benefit payments and can reduce the quality of life for our residents. Increasing participation raises the quality of life for individuals and communities by increasing household incomes and helping to lift families out of poverty.

What do we plan to focus on?

Tailoring welfare provision to local needs

Local authorities have traditionally been responsible for the delivery of certain welfare provision but new Government policies and the introduction of the Work Programme may mean that Councils will now take more of an influencing and performance management role. We will use this role to ensure those groups facing difficulty in entering and retaining employment receive targeted support from welfare providers to help them into the job market. Such groups include disabled people, people from ethnic minorities and people over 50. We will aim to work with Work Programme providers and the Get Britain Working schemes to maximise the support available in Central Bedfordshire. This will include supporting local work clubs and actively pursuing new opportunities and pilot opportunities to support those in most need of help to get into work.

Targeted support to tackle Youth Unemployment

Within Central Bedfordshire the unemployment rate for 16-24 year olds is 17.5%, compared to the average overall unemployment rate of 6.1%. Also, during the 12 months ending March 2010, the average rate of people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Central Bedfordshire was 6.4%, or 347 young people. As a priority we will continue to support young people to remain in education, employment and training at a time when young people have been significantly impacted by the recent recession.

Promoting Enterprise

Promoting enterprise in disadvantaged communities and poor families is a national and local policy priority. Enterprise creates employment opportunities and stimulates innovation and can be an effective route out of poverty. We will work with partners to support those in our most deprived areas with schemes including mentoring, enterprise coaching, enterprise grants and local enterprise clubs. This will align with and seek to support the Get Britain Working initiative, provided through the Job Centre Plus and our own Poverty to Prosperity Strategy.

Supporting targeted disadvantaged groups to get back into work

Around 4,600 people from Central Bedfordshire's working age population claim employment related benefits as a result of a work-limiting illness. Over half of these claim Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance for mental health conditions and musculoskeletal disorders. There is a clear need therefore to focus on these groups and provide a dedicated package of support to aid their transition from benefits into employment.

Getting to Work

Lack of transport can be a major barrier to accessing employment, particularly for young people and those in rural areas. In addition to physical access planning through the Local Transport Plan and working with employers to develop travel plans, the Council will look to continue to support schemes which help those most in need when accessing the labour market.

Volunteering as a route to employment

Volunteering has seen a marked increase in take up as a result of the recession and can be another route to the labour market as it builds individuals' self-confidence, improves job skills and provides work experience. We will work closely with our voluntary and community sector and social enterprise organisations, recognising the increasing role they have in delivering jobs growth and supporting those in most need. Utilising the knowledge and expertise of these groups and empowering them to support local growth will be a key feature, delivering support that is focused on generating local employment opportunities.

Advice and Guidance

The timely provision of quality career advice and guidance plays a key role in supporting people to progress through and into employment and the Government has indicated the change towards mechanisms which deliver all-age career guidance. Welfare and financial advice and guidance are also important in tackling poverty and financial exclusion. We will work with partners to provide such advice and guidance and will look to support individuals with financial planning and access to financial services.

Consultation Questions

- Within the Into Work theme which two areas of focus do you think are most important and why?
- Are there any other areas of focus not listed above that you consider to be important within this theme?

Please answer these questions via the questionnaire which can be found online at:
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/surveys/EDP/draft.htm

Priority Theme: Skills for Growth

What difference are we seeking to make?

We recognise that for Central Bedfordshire to fulfil its economic potential, the importance of skills cannot be over-estimated. Skills are critical to all employers in all sectors, public, private and the voluntary and community sectors. We know that around 80% of the people of the workforce in 2020 are already in employment. As such significant effort will need to be placed on supporting up-skilling the existing workforce in addition to supporting those in our schools system. A highly skilled workforce will facilitate the growth of existing businesses and increase the attractiveness of the area to inward investors, generating job creation and fuelling local economic growth.

Skills are also a key factor in helping individuals engage with the labour market and achieve their goals and aspirations. We are seeking to direct and influence skills and training provision to ensure that Central Bedfordshire is well placed to match employer and individual skills needs, stepping up to the various challenges and opportunities presented by changes to skills policy and funding, and ensuring that economic growth is not limited by lack of available local skills.

What are we going to focus on?

All Age Skills Strategy

Alongside the Economic Development Plan, we are developing an All Age Skills Strategy to highlight a number of detailed activities that will deliver against the need to raise skills attainment and aspiration within Central Bedfordshire. This will be developed through extensive consultation with providers, businesses and residents. The findings of this strategy will be aligned to the Economic Development Plan ensuring that we are focusing our activities and priorities in the right area, building on the strong partnerships already in existence to meet business and individual skills needs.

Developing the Workforce

Increase the proportion of the workforce with recognised qualifications and support those without recognised skills into vocational and academic opportunities.

Raising Individuals' Aspirations and Achievements

Promote and raise awareness of the support and opportunities available at all ages for skills development and the importance of skills in achieving ambitions within our communities.

Meeting the Skills Needs of Employers

Ensure that businesses are aware of the benefits of skills development, the supply of opportunities available to them and work with providers to deliver flexible and responsive training that meets the skills needs identified by business. We will seek to align young person and adult skills planning and activities with business needs to provide a seamless service allowing all to prosper.

Promoting Apprenticeships and Vocational Learning

Promote the benefits of vocational learning to employers and individuals, encouraging employers to take on apprentices, and work with providers on pre-apprenticeship support. We will look to develop an apprenticeship plan, which includes links to wider vocational opportunities.

Provision of Labour Market Intelligence

Establish a partnership based mechanism to improve awareness of the skills requirements of employers, the support available from providers, and the skills needs and aspirations of individuals to inform policy investment and delivery. Possible activities could include undertaking business and individual skills needs surveys and developing future skills needs information to enable individuals and providers to be responsive to existing and future market/sector needs and effectively target limited resources at these needs.

Consultation Questions

- Within the Skills for Growth theme which two areas of focus do you think are most important and why?
- Are there any other areas of focus not listed above that you consider to be important within this theme?

*Please answer these questions via the questionnaire which can be found online at:
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/surveys/EDP/draft.htm*

Making it Easy: From Enforcer to Enabler

In the changing context of Economic Development and Local Government, new ways of stimulating jobs growth and investment need to be explored. Achieving Central Bedfordshire's ambitious growth aspirations requires a new approach which recognises the importance of collaborative working to create employment opportunities. This enabling culture will be key to making Central Bedfordshire a place renowned as an area where it is easy to do business!

There are five strands to the new Pro-Business approach:

- **Changing our Culture**
- **Defining the Offer**
- **Improving Delivery**
- **Developing Partnership Working**
- **Spreading the Word**

Changing our Culture

Central Bedfordshire will become known as a place that champions business. We will develop a culture within the Council that takes business needs into account. Across all our services we will build our reputation as a 'Can Do' Council that is 'Open for Business'. This will be a whole council approach, encouraging everyone that interacts with businesses to understand their role in achieving our 27,000 jobs growth target. Our success will be visible to all our partners and our pro business approach will be a key factor in attracting new inward investment .

Defining the Offer

Businesses have told us that they are often confused by the plethora of services that the Council offers and there can be a lack of joined up solutions for our businesses. We will make things clear and simple and tell businesses what they can expect from us. Core elements of the offer will be:

- **Engagement:** We will take your business into account and look at things from your perspective
- **Understanding:** We will strive to understand your needs
- **Ease:** We make it easy to do business with us

Improving Delivery

Over the past year we have been working to understand all of the interactions that businesses have with the Council and how these can be improved. Business interaction with the Council will be managed in a proactive not reactive way and we will introduce joined up systems to allow us to do this better. We will aim to be much smarter at gathering intelligence using business facing teams to look for solutions and become enablers.

An example: A business calls the Business Rates Team to say that it cannot pay its rates bill. This situation is indicative of much wider business issues and a demand for payment is unlikely to remedy the situation. The Business Rates Team needs to understand that this business is facing challenging times and that there is business support available that can help the business through, so can signpost to the Business Investment Team to discuss all options to help keep the company in business.

Developing Partnership Working

Whilst the Council already works closely with a range of public and private partners, this must be developed further and strengthened to fully realise the potential for partnership working to deliver real improvements in the area. Some key groups that are essential to the delivery of jobs growth are private sector businesses, the voluntary sector, social enterprises, and education partners. The strength of this approach is that it can deliver satisfaction and value for money in an era of diminishing resources by moving the solving of problems from the local authority towards harnessing the innovation and skills of our partners, businesses and residents. Simply put we can do more with less resource only by working better together. Through this consultation we want to know how you and your organisation can help us to achieve smarter partnership working.

Spreading the word

As this new way of working develops it will be important to let external businesses, investors and public partners know that Central Bedfordshire's innovative and flexible approach to achieving our growth aspirations makes us very much 'Open for Business', and an area where doing business is easy! Changing the perception of the Council as an effective partner and increasingly working with partners and local ambassadors to utilise their networks to spread the word and lobby for Investment In Central Bedfordshire will be key outcomes of our enabling culture.

Consultation Questions

- What are your views on the enabling culture of the Economic Development Plan and what could we do better together to best deliver services focusing on jobs growth?
- How could you/your organisation play a role in the delivery of the Economic Development Plan for Central Bedfordshire?

Please answer these questions via the questionnaire which can be found online at: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/surveys/EDP/draft.htm

Monitoring the Plan

As we implement the plan, an effective monitoring system will be essential to show how we are moving forward towards meeting the vision for Central Bedfordshire and supporting 27,000 additional jobs to 2026. Aligned to the Sustainable Communities Strategy, the EDP will be monitored against four key performance indicators.

- **Number of people in employment**
- **Number of out of work benefit claimants**
- **Economic activity rate**
- **Number of people in apprenticeships**

These will be monitored on a quarterly basis, with the exception of apprenticeship data which will be monitored annually due to data availability. In addition to these, the following measures will be utilised to consider performance within each of the priority themes.

Supporting Business

To monitor the general level of business start up, growth and performance in Central Bedfordshire the following measures will be monitored annually:

- Number of businesses (registration and stock)
- 1-5 year business survival rate

Land and Premises

To monitor development activity in Central Bedfordshire with a particular focus on the performance of our town centres the following measures will be monitored annually:

- Change in commercial floor space stock
- High street vacancy levels

Into Work

To monitor the performance of the Central Bedfordshire Labour Market and people's ability to access employment, the following indicators will be monitored annually:

- Number of people who are unemployed or economically inactive accessing information advice and guidance on volunteering through volunteer centres
- The levels of youth unemployment

Skills for Growth

To monitor the level of individuals' skills, take up of training and business skill needs the following indicators will be monitored annually:

- % of working age people with level 2, 3, 4 qualifications
- % of people who have received job related training in Private Sector in the last four weeks

These indicators, as well as a wider overview of the performance of the Central Bedfordshire economy, will be published annually through an update to the Local Economic Assessment.

Consultation Questions

- What are your views on the indicators proposed to monitor the Economic Development Plan?
- Should any other key performance indicators be considered?

Please answer these questions via the questionnaire which can be found online at:
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/surveys/EDP/draft.htm

Next steps: Engaging with the plan

The framework for the Economic Development Plan was agreed by the Council Executive on the 31st May 2011, setting out the key priority areas of the plan and seeking views and wide engagement on its development from across all those with an interest in the economic development of Central Bedfordshire. Through the consultation process we are seeking to gain views on the things that will have the most impact in supporting jobs and business growth in Central Bedfordshire over the next three to five years. The consultation process will allow us to target resources at those areas which will make the biggest difference in achieving our economic potential.

As part of our efforts to maximise engagement with the plan you can have your say until the **30th September 2011** in the following ways:

- Via our online questionnaire:
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/surveys/EDP/draft.htm
- Via attending specific workshops
- Through face to face meetings
- Through our council offices

The Economic Development Plan is being produced in tandem with a new Skills for Growth strategy and feedback from this consultation will also be used to inform the plan.

If you would like more information on the Economic Development Plan please contact:

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