



**Maldon District  
Rural Gap Analysis Report  
July 2010**



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**Writtle**   
**College**

A partner of the University of Essex

**Principal, Professor Dave Butcher**

## FOREWORD

The partnership between Writtle College and Maldon District Council has been based on a natural and obvious match between the College key areas of expertise and the main rural economic interests of the Maldon District; agriculture, conservation, leisure and tourism and business. Funding from Magnox South enabled this partnership to have mutual tangible benefits. A Writtle graduate was employed to carry out a needs analysis of the key economic areas within the district while providing support and advice, which she drew from the bank of knowledge and experience within the College. This varied considerably and included; the application for environmental schemes, marketing planning for a tourist attraction, advice on planning applications, mapping footpaths and the future directional strategy of agricultural businesses. A conference was held at the College March 2010 which drew together the different sectors identifying common concerns and issues while workshops enabled specific factors to be discussed. Many of these were followed up subsequently by the partnership.

This report is the culmination of this work and identifies areas of concern and potential development for rural communities within this unique part of the country. As if to illustrate the volatility of business performance in the district since the writing of this report the price of the main agricultural commodities produced, wheat and oilseed rape, has doubled. This clearly demonstrates the dynamic nature of agriculture and rural businesses and provides further evidence of the need to be proactive and understand the nature of rural businesses and the environment within which they operate.

# OVERVIEW

## PURPOSE

The report written by an independent author provides a snapshot of the rural economy in the Maldon District in 2010.

Maldon District is susceptible to the decline of traditional rural industries (such as farming, fishing and manufacturing), flooding, and animal disease. Current sub regional policies on economic growth leave the district with only a 'trickle out' from the identified growth area's, so the report seeks to underpin a way forward which will ensure that the district is treated as part of a wider 'networked' economy. In particular investment in enterprise, innovation, employment use and skills, particularly provision of relevant skills training and support for the development of young people (post 16) will ensure maintenance of a robust rural community.

The topics covered are wide and particular attention is given to the asset of the district which is its rich heritage, historic links with maritime and historic farm buildings, which are an important asset for modern farm businesses. Redundant building can be adapted to provide a high-quality environment for new businesses.

## OUTPUTS

**Consultancy:** Writtle College during this research has provided 148 hours of consultancy time to local businesses across 9 projects. The value of the consultancy provided by the College has a value of £46k, if commission privately.

**Project Opportunities:** A number of opportunities have been identified in consultation with local rural businesses. Any projects which management and members decide they wish to progress will require a feasibility studies to be produced. Each feasibility study will include the evidence base and will outline the economic potential, which will include: job creation, diversification activity and funding which can be levered into the district.

**Barriers:** When questioned businesses felt that the barriers to rural diversification were :

Planning policy, limited knowledge of rural issues, pertinent to the district; No Local Action Group; Limited internet access; Not all Businesses were in the business directory; Information on crop diversification; Joined up thinking; Transport Infrastructure; Bicycle Hire/ lack of bicycle paths schemes; Higher Level Stewardship Schemes; Lack of Farm Environment plans; Lack of evidence re benefits of schemes; Engagement with Natural England.

*Maldon District Council, Economic Development Officer, Jenny Lewsey*

# 1. Background

This report was written as a result of the new partnership formed between Economic Development at Maldon District Council and Writtle College with the placement of a Rural Coordinator positioned within Economic Development at the Council until 30 June 2010.

The partnership and this report aims to suggest a sustainable platform for the identification and development of future opportunities for the District. This report consulted local rural businesses in the District and departments within Maldon District Council namely: Leisure and Liveability Team, Conservation and Environment Services. The barriers raised in the report are the views of the attendees consulted at the rural business event held at Writtle College on 17 March 2010.



**Rural Business Event, Writtle College**

## 1.1 The District of Maldon

The District of Maldon is predominantly rural with over 70 miles of coastline and located approximately 60 miles from London. It covers an area of 36,000 hectares and wraps around the Blackwater Estuary with the North Sea providing the Eastern boundary and the River Crouch the southern.



**Maldon High Street**

## 1.2 Infrastructure

It has two urban centres Maldon and Burnham-On-Crouch. The district has direct links to the A12 trunk road; however the roads within the District comprise B and C class country roads. There is one rail branch line along the south of the District connecting Southminster, Burnham-On-Crouch, Althorne and North Fambridge to South Woodham Ferrers and to London. For the rest of the District the only other public transport options are buses and taxis and there are issues concerning the level and frequency of bus service provision. Footpaths and cycle routes are fragmented and currently there is no signage along the coastal footpath. Relatively poor accessibility across the District due to its rural character impacts on the ability of individuals without their own transport to access education, key services, work and social activities.

## 1.3 Economics

The District is located between the economic growth areas of the Chelmsford, Braintree, Haven Gateway in the north, which includes Colchester and Ipswich and the Thames Gateway in the south of Essex. These gateways are known as 'Engines of Growth' and key centres for development and investment. The Maldon District together with Chelmsford, Braintree and Brentwood sit within a functional economic area known as the 'Hearts of Essex'. The District, as is often true of rural districts, is defined by a large number of small firms (*Roger Tym & Partners, 2008*) and these are predominantly in property and business services (25%), construction (17%), production (11%) and agriculture (7%). Tourism makes a significant contribution to the local economy estimated in 2007 as £142m. (East of England Tourism, 2009).

## 1.4 Policy

**Existing policy is currently under review due to the new Government May 2010.** Currently national policy is governed by Planning Policy Statements, which provide guidance to Local Authorities. There are also regional policies, the Regional Spatial Strategy (which is to be abolished under the Decentralisation and Localism Bill 2010) and the Regional Economic Strategy. The policies are brought together at the local level in the Local Development Framework, which will set the strategic planning framework for the next 15 years. This strategic document is still under consultation.

The core objectives of the Maldon District Local Development Framework which was out for consultation in April 2009, with parts now amended, is that

***'All development will be planned in a sustainable way to ensure the quality of life for those living and working across the District is maintained and where possible enhanced'.***

This strategy has been refined to reflect the priorities of the Sustainable Community Strategy (Maldon District Local Strategic Partnership, 2008). Under Prosperity, tourism is supported by the Council, which will contribute to the growth of local tourism in a sustainable manner (Policy CS 17). The Council will also support the rural economy by encouraging appropriate rural diversification, such as local tourist accommodation, farm shops, small business development and small-scale recreation activities (Policy CS 18).

The Essex Rural Strategy (Essex Rural Partnership, 2009) highlights key rural issues across Essex, many of which affect the Maldon District.

Access to services is a key issue with the Governments Index of Deprivation showing much of rural Essex within the most deprived 10% category with regard to access to services and housing. Accessibility and connectivity have a major influence on an areas ability to attract business and investment.

The Maldon District scores in the bottom 40% of Districts nationally in terms of affordable housing (Local Futures, 2010). In terms of access to amenities (cinemas, theatres, libraries, cafes, retail floor space and employment in hotels and restaurants) the District is performing in the middle 20% of Districts nationally, which is around the national median. (Local Futures, 2010).

The Essex Rural Strategy notes that food production, arable, livestock, fishing by farming or capture and shellfish culture are a major essential asset of Essex and its coastline. They are activities that create a landscape suitable for tourism and visitors, health and recreation.

Maldon District currently supports many of these sectors and has the capacity to grow the tourism sector within the District due to its rich environmental and cultural assets. To promote tourism in the District that is truly sustainable requires consideration of how to ensure the long-term economic viability of these key sectors of the rural economy and how to protect the natural assets, which make tourism viable.

## 2. Agriculture

There is limited data available on agriculture at District level. However, within the District agriculture equates to 7% of the economic income (Maldon District Local Development Framework Regulation 25 Consultation, 2009).

Arable farming is by far the most important farming practiced in the District and this is reflected across Essex with 51.9% of farm holdings growing cereals (Defra,2008). This is because the climate is drier and the soils are deeper in the south of the UK. Wheat is the primary crop grown in Essex (Defra,2008). The most important crops grown in the District are wheat, oilseed rape, barley, peas, beans and potatoes.

The agricultural pattern in the District is very varied, with horticulture and fruit growing mostly found in the northern part of the District. Grazing livestock in the District is reportedly low (Personal Communication: NFU 2010). Livestock production across Essex accounts for the second highest use of farm holdings at 15.9% followed closely by horticulture at 14% (Defra,2008). Dairy farming is the lowest use of farm holdings across Essex (Defra,2008). In the Maldon District there are several successful meat, fruit and vegetable producers, oyster producers and vineyards.

**Springstep Dairy** is East Anglia's largest working goat dairy and produces cheese, yogurts, milk, cream and ice-cream.

**Steeple Gate Lamb and Beef** are located in Southminster and produce quality lamb and beef (see Case Study 1), which graze on the Blackwater marshes.

**Clayhill Vineyard** in Latchingdon was planted in 2006 and should be producing wine by ~2013, as the vines need seven years to mature.

**New Hall Vineyard** on the other hand is located in Purleigh and is one of the largest vineyards in the country where wine tasting and vineyard trails can be enjoyed.

**Dengie Crops** in Asheldham are the UK's leading manufacturer of fibre-based horse feeds and the largest producer of alfalfa in the UK. This company operates in the areas of grain trading, grain storage and buying products such as diesel and fertiliser for its members.

There are a wide range of agricultural businesses in the District, but more data on exactly what these businesses are producing is needed.

### CASE STUDY 1 Meat Production in the Maldon District

#### Steeple Gate Lamb and Beef

Steeple Gate Lamb and Beef is a long established, award-winning farm located in Southminster. It is a family run farm which produces quality Farm Assured British lamb and beef.

During the summer months the farm assured sheep and cattle are graze down to the banks of the River Blackwater on environmentally sensitive grass and marshland areas.

This rural business also has its own website with a product list and directions on how to find their farm.

Vineyards producing English wine in the District are an interesting asset. This may present an opportunity for the future with the changing climate. They also represent a tourism attraction especially where guided tours and wine tasting are involved (see Case Study 2).

### CASE STUDY 2 Vineyards in the Maldon District

#### New Hall Vineyards

New Hall Vineyards has been located in the village of Purleigh since 1969. The 194 acres of grape vines grown at New Hall Vineyards, have been carefully selected over the years from Europe for their ability to consistently produce top quality fruit in our English climate.

New Hall grape vines are grown on a well sheltered south facing slope of a shallow valley and this site has proved to be the almost ideal climatic site for the growing of vines in England.

New Hall Vineyards have their own Press House, Fermentation Room and Bottling Station.

## 2.1 Skills and Training

For the agricultural sector to adapt to increasing pressures of population growth, urbanisation, increasing energy demand and climate change it needs the skills to develop the best business practice. Lantra is working increasingly closely with the UK's environmental and land-based industries to give them the skills to adapt to and benefit from climate change (Lantra,2010). Lantra launched their Agriskills Strategy in February 2010, which aims to ensure the UK can equip itself with the right skills to ensure a profitable and sustainable agricultural industry for the future. Lantra provides access to courses in the environmental and land-based sector including agricultural crops and livestock,

environmental conservation, fisheries management and trees and timber. Many of these courses can be accessed at Writtle College and other institutions.

Writtle College have been providing land based courses since 1893 and today they provide many short courses as well as Further and Higher Education courses. Short courses include Agriculture, Engineering and Machinery where Lantra awards in hedge trimming, for example, can be obtained as well as pesticide application and tractor driving training. There are also short courses for arboriculture where qualifications include chainsaw felling. Horticultural short courses are also offered. Further Education and Higher Education courses in land based courses are also provided at Writtle College including Agriculture, Animal Science, Conservation and Horticulture.

Business Link East provides training through Train to Gain. This is the UK's biggest database of training courses and this provide details of many training providers supplying courses in pesticide application, accounting, business management, managing farm woodlands and many more. Distance learning and e-training is available from providers such as the Open University and this can be delivered more successfully with the Districts recently improved radio broadband service. Various Further Education and Higher Education institutions also provide training for people within the District and continuous professional development is also encouraged through training and refresher courses.

## **2.2 Local Food and Produce**

Food produced locally within the District is diverse from oysters and quality salt extracted from the Blackwater Estuary to award winning poultry and organically produced vegetables. This food, which is produced on the farm, is then sold in farmers markets, farm shops, through box schemes to the door or to consumers via the supermarket supply chain. Producers add value to their products through the marketing and promotion of the benefits of traceable and locally produced food with reduced impact on the environment as well as marketing tools such as a good webpage, attractive packaging, informative labelling and a story behind the product.

### CASE STUDY 3 Local Food Products

#### **Dengie Food and Leisure Trail**

Maldon District Council, Essex County Council and the Dengie Hundred Women's Food and Farming Union support the Dengie Food and Leisure Trail which is an annual event organised by farmers Samantha Lonergan, Mark Thorogood, Jo Partridge and Sarah Green.

The trail was launched in October 2008 and focuses on the best local food across the Dengie and Essex Coast. The event is helping to raise the profile of the Dengie and the quality local food products it has to offer.

The variety of local food products in the District enabled the successful Dengie Food and Leisure Trail of 2008 (see Case Study 3) and the Maldon Food and Produce Festival in Promenade Park in September 2009. Both events were well attended, with over 2,000 people attending the Maldon Food and Produce Festival in 2009. This demonstrates that there is an interest in quality local food, which can be traced back to a local farm. Combine this with an increase in the demand for allotments and community gardens and orchards and it is clear that there are opportunities for these quality local food products in the District.

Local food is also being supplied to local schools in Essex, such as Ashlyn's Farm near Ongar. There is no data on the number of farms supplying the Districts schools with fresh produce and this may represent an area where further research should be undertaken. This study could also include colleges, universities and hospitals in the District. Essex farmers also run a very successful Essex Food and Farming Day at Writtle College, sponsored by Essex County Council. This event improves children's knowledge of where food comes from and why farming is important to provide food but also to protect the countryside and its biodiversity.

## **2.3 Energy Crops**

Food and drink are not the only products of farming. Since 2002 energy crops have become increasingly important to rural economies and between 2004 and 2007 the area of oilseed rape grown in England under the Energy Aid Payment Scheme for conversion to bio-diesel increased twenty-fold from 10,862 Ha to 240,032 Ha. The Energy Aid Payment Scheme is now closed, however a new scheme is being rolled out across England. Funded by the European Union, through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), Natural England are rolling out the Energy Crops Scheme which offers a grant to farmers to grow biomass crops (Miscanthus and Short Rotation Coppice).

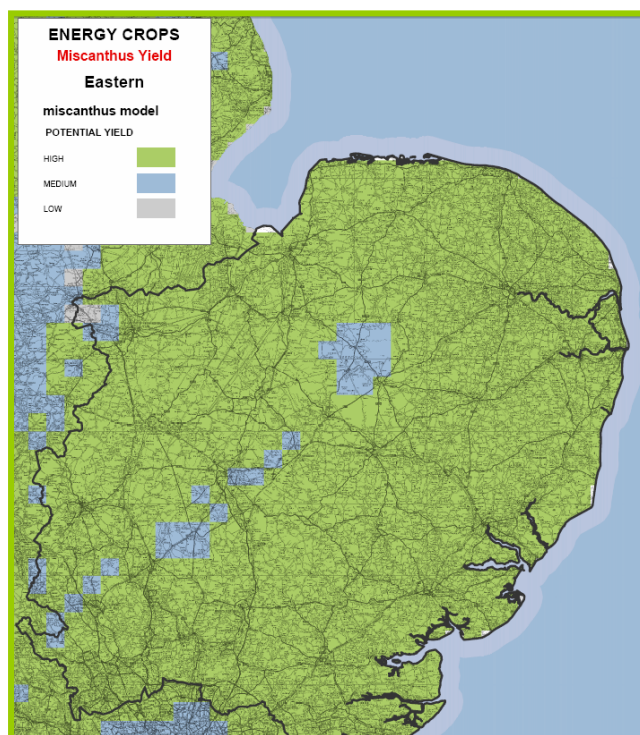


**Harvesting Miscanthus**

Under this scheme the grant has been increased from 40% to 50%, for all costs incurred after the 1st January 2010. To enter into this scheme the minimum land area to go under energy crop is 3 hectares and the agreement is fixed for 5 years. The District of Maldon is a viable area for growing Miscanthus, see Figure 1 below (Defra, 2006). This seems like an ideal option for agricultural businesses, however there are local problems with the growth of these crops. There are high capital costs involved in the production of these crops. For example Miscanthus is planted by rhizome division, as this is the preferred way, however this makes establishment expensive (Biomass Energy Centre, 2008). This crop is also harvested in early spring when the ground is wet, which makes harvesting difficult especially in clay-rich soils such as those found in the Dengie.

Another drawback is that the District does not have any straw burning power stations locally. The nearest and largest straw burning power station in Europe is located in Ely in Cambridgeshire. However, Tilbury power station in Essex can co-fire coal and biomass. Although, the biomass would have to be transported to this site using fossil-fueled vehicles. However one of the biggest assets of the District is its access to the estuary and this may provide a way to transport the biomass in the future. This access to the river is what is enabling the Wallasea Island project to go ahead, vast amounts of soil is being transported from the Crossrail development in London to Wallasea Island. This island is very low-lying and this additional soil with help to minimise the effects of managed realignment on the rest of the estuary as well as provide a mosaic of habitats and a green space for local people and tourists to enjoy. Ultimately, however, the uptake of the growing of energy crops is governed by economics, if it made good economic sense for farmers in the District to grow these crops, it can be assumed that they would already be doing it.

According to the White Paper on Energy (2007) biomass energy such as energy crops has the potential to make a significant contribution to renewable energy and climate change targets, including a target of 20% of electricity in the UK produced from renewables by 2020. It is also announced that bio-energy has the potential to create and sustain jobs in rural areas. However, this does not appear to be economically viable in the Maldon District at present. The high capital costs, lack of straw burning power stations in this region and the difficulty in getting grasses to establish in the District all prevent this from being a viable opportunity.



**Figure 1 Potential High Yield of Miscanthus in the Maldon District (Defra, 2006)**

There are other markets for non-food crops which include hemp and flax which are used in the textiles industry for paper making as well as being used in insulation materials. Starch derived from potatoes, cereals and maize is used as bioethanol as a transport fuel, renewable polymers, adhesives, paper and board. Crops such as wheat and sugarbeet are used to produce bioethanol (a transport fuel) and oilseed rape is used to produce biodiesel. Hemp and flax, for example, when used for insulation are more sustainable as they store more carbon during crop production than they release during processing and they are between 5% and 10% more thermally efficient than mineral fibre products which will reduce CO<sub>2</sub> production in houses. On a rotational system they are also proven to have a positive effect on biodiversity (Defra, 2004). The potential for the District to supply these markets could be investigated further.

## 2.4 Anaerobic Digestion

Aside from energy crops, anaerobic digestion is a proven renewable energy technology. It can reduce methane emissions, a potent greenhouse gas. This is captured from decomposing organic materials such as livestock manures and slurries, sewerage sludge and food wastes (Defra, 2010). Organic matter is broken down in a closed vessel; this enables the production of a biogas that can be used as a

renewable energy source for both heat and power. Alternatively, the carbon dioxide and other impurities can be removed to produce bio-methane, which is used as transport fuel or injected into the gas grid. Also, the treated liquid from the process can be used as a fertiliser or the fibre can be separated from the digestate and sold as a soil conditioner and low-grade fertiliser (Defra,2010).

A major barrier to the uptake of this technology across the District is a lack of livestock. This is the major inhibiting factor. Defra are currently trying to bridge gaps in knowledge about this renewable energy technology through development of an Anaerobic Digestion Task Group. This task group is set to provide information about the benefits of this technology and to encourage its uptake across the UK. A feasibility study will be needed to measure the viability of this technology in the District. Advisors at Writtle College suggest that this technology could be used on a small scale by individual farms but there is not the capacity at present for this to be a large-scale operation in the District.

## 2.5 Charcoal production

Charcoal production in England is far more sustainable than buying imported charcoal, which is the cause of deforestation abroad. In England the woodland is managed for wildlife through a coppice regime and the charcoal produced does not require fire lighters, reaches temperature in 15 minutes and burns for longer than imported charcoal, it also hasn't travelled across the world generating more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In the District, charcoal production occurs in Hazeleigh Wood (see Case Study 4).

### CASE STUDY 4 Forestry in the Maldon District

#### Hazeleigh Wood

A winner of the 2009 Maldon District Council Nature Conservation Award Hazeleigh Wood is a traditionally managed ancient woodland which offers guided walks to see the flora and fauna which includes nightingales and bluebells.

Traditional management techniques are also shown to visitors including coppicing, charcoal burning and pole-lathe.

The Forestry Commission administers a grant scheme that makes annual payments to farmers to compensate for the agricultural income forgone as a result of planting woodland. This is the English Woodland Grant Scheme and supports the establishment of new woodlands to deliver national and regional priorities such as biodiversity, public access and restoration of industrial land. The deadline for this grant scheme is September 2010. However these grant schemes encourage amenity access which is not viable on all farmland. However, Single Farm Payment can still be claimed on this same area of woodland.

## 2.6 Barriers to the Agricultural Sector

Rural economies make important contributions to national, regional and city economies. Much of the essentials of life are produced in, or distributed throughout rural England, this includes food, water, energy, building materials and the natural environment (Rural Commission for Rural Communities, 2008). Many rural businesses are directly at risk from weather-related factors on land and production as well as disease outbreak; these are all aspects that reduce the resilience of the rural economy. Beyond this the agricultural sector in the District has difficulty in accessing funds, this is especially true of tenant farmers, who lack the collateral to invest in diversification, and the income to repay debt, invest in pension schemes and cope with local problems such as flooding and disease outbreak.

However, the biggest influence on the viability and success of agricultural businesses are likely to be world prices and the Common Agricultural Policy. Price fluctuation in the value of wheat and oilseed rape represents the greatest threat to agricultural businesses in the District. There is little certainty and manoeuvrability to react to price drops or price increases for that matter. Since 2005 when support for farmers in the subsidising of production was redistributed to provide area support (decoupling), prices received by farmers have been influenced by world markets; this leaves UK markets vulnerable to the vagaries of global demand and supply.

Farmers are producing commodities and as such are price takers. During the decoupled period wheat prices, for example, have fluctuated markedly as Figure 2 indicates from the peak following the 2007 harvest to the low prices of late 2008. This makes budgeting and planning difficult and the viability of arable farming is questionable, as at current prices the costs of production are not being met. As wheat is the most profitable crop grown on farms in the District this pattern is likely to be reflected to a similar if not worse degree in other crops.

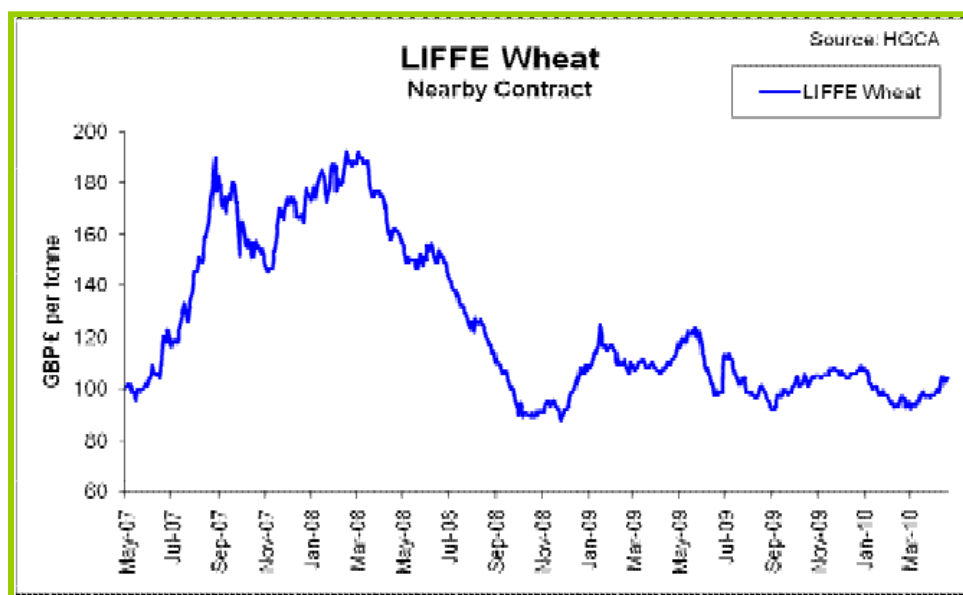


Figure 2 Wheat price fluctuations 2007-2010

The support agriculture now receives comes in the form of a Single Farm Payment which is based on the area farmed which is given in return for complying with environmental, legal, and husbandry requirements. This system is due for review and the nature of this change will have a big impact on farming businesses in the District. The pressure within the European Union to reduce expenditure on agriculture is likely to lead to a refocusing and targeting of support to ensure a constant supply of healthy local good quality food.

Climate change is a long term challenge that farmers and land managers in the District will need to respond to. The District will have to face the impacts of increasing demand due to a rising population, the effects of climate change, new pressures on land and high energy prices. Climate change is predicted to cause hotter, drier summers and warmer wetter winters. This will lead to longer growing seasons but with less water which could lead to a change in what is grown in the District and where. Climate Change is also predicted to lead to more extreme weather events which could impact on business continuity planning and infrastructure resilience, including agricultural land availability and use.

A further threat to agriculture in the future is that of 'peak oil'. This threat was illustrated during the 2008 fuel crisis. This crisis impacted on the agricultural sector because the costs of running a farm increased considerably. Animal feed, diesel for the tractors, agricultural contractor bills and fertiliser all incurred higher costs with the latter having the biggest price rise. According to Hosking (2009) businesses went bankrupt due to their reliance on chemical fertilisers. All farms, even organic farms, run on fossil fuel, particularly oil (Hosking, 2009). 33 out of 44 oil-producing countries are now in decline and Britain's own production has been falling since 1999 and Britain is now a net oil importer (Hosking, 2009).

More than 96 per cent of all food grown in Britain is reliant on synthetic fertiliser, which uses fossil fuels in its generation. Looking at the science behind permaculture might be an opportunity to react to this threat within the District. Permaculture involves letting the farm return to its natural state so that it can thrive as a woodland ecosystem. This allows the fertility of the land to return. Every plant within this regenerating landscape has a purpose, some deter pests, some encourage drainage, some attract bees for pollination, and others such as gorse fix nitrogen in the soil. Clearings are made to provide pasture for livestock and by encouraging birds onto this landscape enables the addition of phosphate into the soil. This cuts out the need for fossil-fuel derived nutrients. A permaculture farm has been estimated to feed ten people per acre, which is double the number that can currently be fed from an average acre of conventional arable farmland (Hosking, 2009). However, the viability of this in the District is questionable as some reports suggest that as many as 12 million growers would be needed to support this method of farming.

#### CASE STUDY 5 Support for Farmers in the District

##### **Farm Crisis Network**

The Farm Crisis Network (FCN) is a network of groups of volunteers drawn from the farming community and rural churches. FCN volunteers are there to help the farming community solve any problems they may face.

Farming has always involved a degree of stress but in recent years the pressures have snowballed. Finance and increased regulations are major issues bringing additional problems such as overwork, strained family relationships and health problems. The FCN confidential Helpline is 0845 367 9990 or visit [www.fcn.org.uk](http://www.fcn.org.uk).

FCN is a registered charity and relies on support from individuals, churches and organisations to fund its work.

The Farm Crisis Network (FCN) (see Case Study 5) advises us that they do a great deal of work within the Maldon District. The FCN cannot provide evidence of this due to their confidentiality agreement. The problems are not specific to the sector and are repeated across the country.

Perhaps another crucial aspect of these barriers to rural economic resilience is consumer choice. Where people chose to buy their food has a major impact on the rural economy. Buying food locally benefits the local economy and land management, reduces food miles, increases local pride and leads to a healthier population (Essex Rural Commission Report, 2009). However it is not just about local food, the District could also be looking at all services, building materials, contractors and anything else used are local to retain money within the local economy rather than outsourcing with its inherent loss of money from the District. However, this is driven by the commercial market.



## CASE STUDY 6 Rural Diversification in the Maldon District

### **Bouncers Farm**

Bouncers Farm is located in Wickham Bishops and covers 8.9 hectares. This farm has been converted into a camping experience with a strong environmental policy. The farm generates hot water by solar power, the food is sourced from the farm or within a four-mile radius and the farm also boasts an orchard, woodland, roaming free-range chickens, Kune Kune pigs and a flock of rare breed Shetland Soay sheep. This farm is approximately 5 miles from the Blackwater Estuary where a diverse range of birds and other wildlife can be explored.

The farm has diversified into a rural camping experience appealing to people overtaxed by work, including those in London at only 1 hour and a half away from the centre.

Rural tourism businesses similar to Bouncers Farm (see Case Study 6), which offer a unique holiday experience, are becoming more important for the economic growth of the District in view of the fact that domestic tourism increased by 17% between 2008 and 2009 (EET, 2010). Some of the many farm diversification projects that have been carried out in the Maldon District involve the conversion of redundant buildings into holiday lets, offices, idyllic wedding venues and even a chocolate factory.

This re-use for rural business diversification is preferred as it reduces the imbalance between employment opportunities and rural population and the increased pressure on rural services caused by a change of use to residential. It also provides rural employment and offers considerable scope for improving the economic viability of farm businesses.

### **3.1 Barriers to Rural Diversification**

Engagement with local rural businesses, farmers, tourist attractions and accommodation businesses has revealed potential barriers to rural diversification in the District. A major theme which came across were the likely constraints that planning puts on the ability for rural businesses in the District to diversify. As a District with impressive environmental assets, in the top 40% of Districts nationally (Local Futures, 2010), there is a responsibility to allow Planning to balance the protection and enhancement of the natural environment, with development that may impact on that natural environment.

However, this can be overcome by effective consultation management to allow the identification of any issues during the development of the Local Development Framework. Without this involvement, key issues that affect the rural sector may be overlooked. If a Local Action Group is formed, this may also provide a strategy for rural issues to be raised. A further barrier to rural diversification is the inability to access national and regional economic programmes.

### Other barriers that were raised:

1. Different Districts have a different view with regard to planning and it is felt that a more uniform approach to planning is required. Similarly, consulting early in the LDF and ensuring that local issues are raised can resolve this. Every local framework needs to have a different approach to each area because there will be different priorities in one District over another District.
2. Planners may have limited knowledge of rural issues, especially those issues pertinent to their Districts. The 'Planners Guide to Farming' was a useful document for planners to engage with these rural issues, however this is now out-of-date. A re-print may help to bridge these gaps in knowledge combined with training seminars that can address these issues as they change.
3. Broadband speed was highlighted as a problem for rural businesses. Essex County Council is currently addressing this issue in partnership with Maldon District Council.
4. The business directory on Maldon District Councils website does not include enough details on each business in the District. However, the amount of information shown on this directory is governed by the businesses using the service. This is not controlled by the Council.
5. More advice and information is needed for farmers to diversify into crops that can be established in this region especially as the climate changes.
6. More promotion of projects that are being achieved across the District.

### 3.2 Opportunities for Rural Diversification

1. Food and fuel security are high priorities for the Government in the 2030 Food Strategy and land-based industries in the District should be able to take advantage of this need. Revised policies and schemes should provide attractive options for farmers and landowners in the future.
2. The movement for small scale anaerobic digestion may prove to be an opportunity for the District to enable renewable energy production and waste reduction in the future. The Partnership have had discussions about the potential for this in the District and would look to carry out more work in this area.
3. Some rural businesses are using their renewable energy technology such as wind turbines as a draw for tourists. This is an innovative way to diversify a rural business and reduce waste of resources.
4. Updating the 'Planners Guide to Farming' should enable planners to be more aware of rural issues and be more engaged with rural business needs. The partnership has highlighted this as a need to Essex County Council.
5. Make more use of the Maldon District Council Business Directory so that all local businesses can receive more promotion through the Councils website.
6. Create a Local Action Group within the Maldon District Business Partnership under the sector Agriculture and Rural Business to highlight diversification issues as well as agricultural issues and work together in addressing them.

## 4. Leisure and Tourism

The latest economic impact study figures for Maldon estimates that in 2007 the Maldon District had 2.96 million visits which generated £142m in the District, providing over 2,300 jobs directly and even more employment indirectly supporting 2,741 jobs in total (East of England Tourism, 2009).

The main leisure activities undertaken whilst visiting the District, in order of preference, include eating out, visiting nature based attractions, shopping and visiting local markets (East of England Tourism, 2009). Prospective visitors are particularly interested in countryside, nature & outdoor activities, arts & culture, heritage & history, followed by general wellbeing, food and drink and shopping. The Maldon District has product strengths, which include the barges and the boats, the quay, the history and quaintness of Maldon town centre, the river, the estuary, coast and the marshes.



**Promenade Park, Maldon**

T

here is potential to be maximised in the District around museums, galleries, theatres, history and local events. This potential in some circumstances is unable to be maximised because of a lack of supporting facilities, such as public toilets and access to refreshments. According to the research day visitors represent the largest volume of visitors to the area (71% of all trips).

The pilgrimage to St Peters Chapel in Bradwell-On-Sea takes place on the first Saturday of July every year and is attended by people from all over the world. This was built by St Cedd from the ruins of an old deserted Roman fort. This historical interest could provide opportunities for tourism although this would also require supporting services such as available toilets and refreshments. The historical importance of the salt industry could also be exploited to attract visitors into the District.

Maldon is already famous worldwide for producing a high quality brand of salt, which is extracted from the Blackwater Estuary.

### CASE STUDY 7 Recreational Tourism in the District

#### Nomad Sea Kayaking

Nomad Sea Kayaking offers kayaking trips onto the Blackwater Estuary as well as other areas across Essex. The tours are offered for all ages and for all skill levels.

The launch site is Osea Leisure Park in Goldhanger and trips include 1 hr 30 minute family trips with children from the age of 10 years, a 3hr Osea Leisure Park to Maldon trip and safety and rescue programmes.

This company promotes a positive environmental philosophy, taking part in beach clearing every year, collecting refuse on each trip and supporting charities such as Sea Shepherd.

The research has shown that visitors to the District want escapism from regular activities, mental relaxation and to engage in some pampering and luxury. To achieve these goals visitors need to be able to access the countryside and take part in activities such as walking, cycling and kayaking. Access to arts, culture, heritage and history were also important for visitors to the District. Maldon is host to a variety of cultural events including the Heritage Open Days in September, guided walks of the historic Moot Hall, Maldon Art Trail, Maldon Festival of Arts and Braxted Park tours of the impressive 18<sup>th</sup> Century red brick house.

The Sustainable Tourism East project offered local businesses a listing in new local information guides, which they are in the process of producing for the District. This will complement the Councils new local information guide and should further promote the District as a place to visit; however the project will only promote tourism, which can be carried out in a sustainable way and that will also meet the aims of the Council. It should also be mentioned that some groups of Essex farms are actively contributing to the tourist footfall and the sale of local produce. This is an area of opportunity following the success of the Dengie Food and Leisure Trail.

#### 4.1 Barriers to the development of Leisure and Tourism

The East of England Plan recognises that tourism potential in the region is based upon the presence of specific local features or assets. The Maldon District has a unique quaintness and an interesting history, landscape and the draw of recreational water activities. However there are also identified natural weaknesses such as a relatively weak and low rated demand for guest accommodation in the District (Hotel Solutions, 2010), varying quality of existing attractions and limited transport links. Growth in demand for accommodation from business visitors is unlikely to be significant. However the demand for guest attending weddings in the Maldon District is likely to grow as is the demand for leisure breaks in the future; this will be primarily as a result of increasing population in the District and surrounding areas and more proactive marketing (Hotel Solutions, 2010).

Engagement with local rural businesses, farmers, tourist attractions and accommodation businesses has highlighted further barriers to the development of leisure and tourism in the District:

- It is thought that there is a lack of joined up thinking with regard to the 2012 Olympics and that there needs to be more clarity on what Maldon and Burnham-on-Crouch are doing in preparation for the Olympics to make the most of this opportunity. However, in response to this opportunity East of England Tourism has run several events with tourism providers and organisations to generate interest in the 2012 Games. Furthermore Business Link East has links to procurement contracts on Compete4 and launching opportunities following the games.
- Transport and transport infrastructure was raised as an issue in the District. It is felt that car is the easiest way to access the Districts major towns of Maldon and Burnham-on-Crouch and the surrounding villages which is unsustainable and reduces the capacity for tourism opportunities including the 2012 Olympics.
- There is a lack of bicycle hire schemes in the District and there are limited bicycle paths. The coastal footpaths are under utilised and therefore businesses close to these footpaths that can provide food and drink, recreational pursuits or accommodation are not meeting their full potential.

## 4.2 Opportunities for Collaborative Leisure and Tourism

The unique appeal of the market towns of Maldon and Burnham-On-Crouch combined with interesting coastal, woodland and arable landscapes makes this District well placed to offer cultural, historical, recreational and nature-based tourism. This is supported by a study, which put Maldon's environment in the top 40% of all Districts in the region (Local Futures, 2010).

The Blackwater Estuary, one of the most important estuaries in East Anglia, provides the opportunity to take part in water sports such as sea kayaking and sailing, as well as nature-based pursuits such as bird watching.

This is especially the case in the winter months, where the estuary is an important breeding ground for migrating birds including Brent Geese, which are amber list species because of the important numbers found at just a few sites.

Opportunities were identified in consultation with local rural businesses and through discussion with Officers of the Council:

- Develop tourism opportunities around the historic salt industry that was historically and is still currently important in the Maldon District. Develop events, such as a salt festival and support complementary infrastructure, such as a dedicated museum, to encourage tourism into the District. The District could link into projects such as the European Network of Salt Cities
- A Dengie linked bus route specifically for the Olympics, as well as a central list of accommodation providers to support tourism in the District. (Private sector sponsorship)

- A dedicated promotions group lead by Visit Essex that could generate a positive marketing campaign, which linked with the Maldon District to promote the District as a tourism destination, especially to those working and living in London. ( Visit Essex is private sector partnership)
- More Utilisation of online tourism information; this should be kept up-to-date with accommodation providers, events, markets, rural businesses and key rural events taking place in the District
- Enable more access to the coastal footpath by providing a map which clearly defines routes, distances and amenities along the route including places to eat and drink, car-parks and toilets. This will help to promote walking and other forms of physical recreation in the District. Coastal signage would also help to guide footpath users. The partnership has started to address this with the development of a coastal leaflet, which is still in progress
- Promote the use of existing walking routes in the District; the District has 285 miles of footpaths suitable for walking. The Maldon Millennium Way route was a very popular route that is no longer maintained which could be re-promoted to attract walkers once again. Walking holidays attracted £6.1 billion into the English countryside in 2003. Promotion of the gentle landscapes and scenery could attract walkers that enjoy a gentle and attractive walking experience
- Geocaching is a treasure hunting game where GPS is used to hide and seek containers with other participants in the activity. This technology encourages children and families to take part in walking activities. The Maldon District already has geocaches waiting to be found, these devices could be spread more widely throughout the District and promoted more widely to encourage more visitors. This could also be promoted by accommodation providers as an entertaining activity for their guests
- Develop and host an annual coastal walking competition in the District, which will require collaborative partnership working between the Council and landowners along the coastal footpath. This partnership working should seek to provide accommodation and facilities such as toilets and food and drink for the competitors. This event could ensure that the benefits of the visitors are shared among several rural businesses. This would promote the District nationally and provide an incentive for visitors to come and visit each year. A celebration could be organised at the end of the event where the competitors can purchase food and drinks and enjoy a local band to encourage more spending to be retained in the District and a further overnight stay
- Develop and promote a UK Wildlife Safari in the District. This would require a collaborative partnership working between the Council and local landowners to provide access to important species in an environmentally conscious way. This may present an opportunity for the landowners to sell produce and promote their businesses to customers taking part in the tours. It could be promoted using different accommodation providers across the District, which are pre-chosen by

the tour organiser, but which could be alternated between the best providers to enable shared benefits. The accommodation providers could also charge to provide the guests with other services such as breakfast, lunch and an evening meal. The providers could also think about engaging with local conservation organisations and ecologists to provide lectures or courses on species ecology while the visitors stay

- Develop a Visitor Centre at Burnham-On-Crouch to present to the public the important conservation and coastal management work being carried out at Wallasea Island. The Leisure and Liveability team within Maldon District Council have an area in mind, which could be developed just for this purpose. This could promote the conservation work of the RSPB as well as the importance of the project to reduce pressure on the surrounding coastal areas
- Community Art Events could be developed further to expand on the existing Maldon Art Trail and Maldon Festival of Arts. The encouragement of sculpture and large scale art projects could be used as a draw for tourists into the towns of Maldon and Burnham-On-Crouch, such as the well known sculptures found in Harlow, Essex
- Promotion of the historical interest of the District would provide huge opportunities for tourism, especially the importance of the Battle of Maldon in 991AD, when the Vikings raided the Essex coast. A historical route could be promoted which builds on the Heritage Open Days, which are already very successful. The East of England Tourism study has identified that many visitors to the District are looking to engage in history and culture and this should be exploited. In the summer especially there could be designated trails for children and their parents to explore the history of their local towns and villages
- The Stow Maries Aerodrome will offer a great draw for visitors in the future as the only World War I Aerodrome in the world. This aerodrome is being developed to provide a Museum (opened in June 2010), Tea Rooms, World War I re-enactments, conservation areas, birds of prey displays and more. This site is also being looked into to provide WWI themed accommodation and a wedding venue in the Officers Mess.

## 5. Conservation

Much of the District is of significant nature conservation importance, which is emphasised by the extent of international and national designations that apply particularly to the coast.

The internationally important habitats include saltmarsh and grazing marsh, mudflats and river channels. They are of particular importance because of their significance for migratory birds.

Saltmarsh is a rare and specialised habitat and is one of the most natural ecosystems remaining in Britain. The Blackwater, Crouch and Dengie Marshes represent around 4.5% of the total saltmarsh habitat in the UK, a resource of around 2000ha (Maldon District Council Adopted Replacement Local Plan, 2005).

It is however a declining habitat with an erosion rate of as high as 2% a year, caused by a combination of natural processes, sea level rise and constraints imposed by traditional sea defences.



**Juvenile Black-tailed  
Godwit, Blackwater**

### 5.1 Environmental Stewardship

A third of Green House Gas (GHG) emissions in the UK food chain are attributed to UK farming and fishing (Defra, 2009). However, farming land also contributes to the protection of environmental services and wildlife.

This has been encouraged through schemes such as the Campaign for the Farmed Environment where resource protection, farmland birds and farm wildlife are key priorities. The campaign is in place to retain and exceed the environmental benefits of set aside. This campaign often uses financial incentives through Entry Level Stewardship.

Environmental Stewardship Schemes are agreements based on payments to compensate for loss of income incurred by adopting less intensive, low input practices that offer potential benefits for biodiversity conservation within agricultural landscapes. They are managed by Natural England and

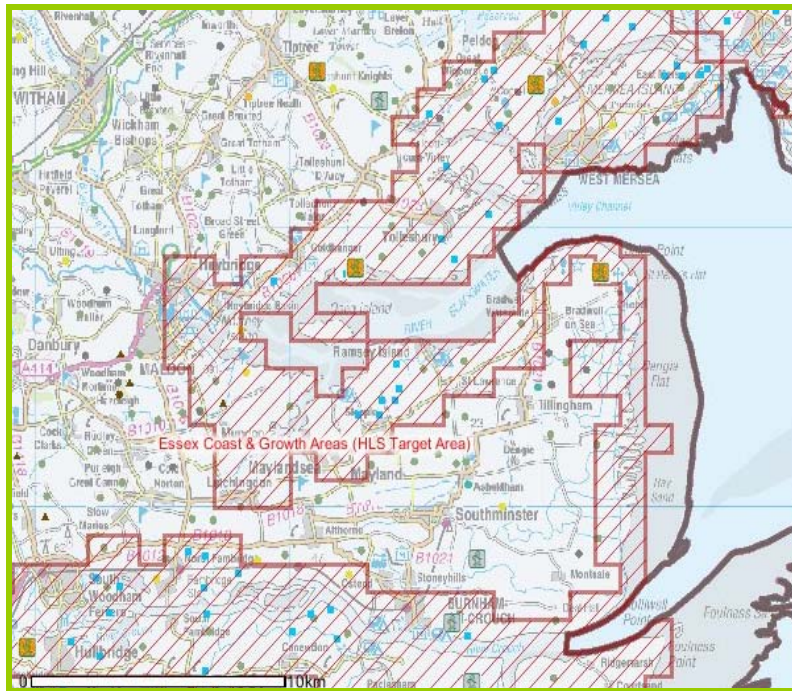
have a key role to play in conserving the environment and priority species in the District. There are Entry Level Stewardship Schemes (ELS); these are five-year agreements in which participants receive £30 per hectare each year. The average size farm in the District is around 300Ha, if all of this land were managed under this scheme it would equate to an additional farm income of approximately £9,000 per year. In return the land managers are required to deliver simple but effective management options on land within the scheme.

These cover all farming types and include activities such as hedgerow maintenance, low input grassland, buffer strips, and arable options. Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) on the other hand aims to deliver significant environmental benefits in high priority situations and areas. This scheme is for ten years and payments are made every six months and relate to the options that have been chosen. A wide range of management options are offered, which are targeted to support key features of the different areas of the English countryside.



**A Buffer Strip (ELS)**

Several studies support the benefits of agri-environment schemes in the UK, including a study by Taylor and Morecroft (2009) whose findings corroborate results from short-term comparison of contrasting farms and demonstrates measurable benefits to biodiversity from the implementation of these schemes. However it has also been noted that some management methods of these schemes such as beetle banks do not necessarily work to provide the optimum result for wildlife. In a study by French (2005) it was observed that beetle banks held the least number of species and the least number of individuals of beetles, whereas adjacent fields maintained a wide variety of species. It would be beneficial if more research were undertaken to show the benefits of these schemes for biodiversity. The coastal areas of the Maldon District are within the target area for Higher Level Stewardship Schemes under the 'Essex Coast and Growth Areas', see Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3 HLS Essex Coast and Growth Areas (Natural England, 2010)**

The Maldon District currently has approximately 307 farm holdings; of these there are around 98 in Environmental Stewardship schemes. This equates to thirty-two percent of the District taking up environmental stewardship schemes to date (Natural England, 2010).

The total agriculturally usable area of land in the District is 27,237.49 Ha and of this 13,733.25 Ha is under an Environmental Stewardship Scheme, which equates to around fifty percent of this agricultural land.

The majority of this land is under Entry Level Stewardship at forty-three percent. The smallest areas are under Organic stewardship at approximately one percent.

The more farms under these schemes in the District, the better it is for the conservation of the environment.

The environment provides us with essential environmental services such as food, fibre, air quality maintenance, flood risk reduction and climate regulation.

Everyone needs the farming industry to ensure food security and this is an ever-increasing challenge in the face of climate change and a growing world population. Sixty percent of nitrates, twenty-five percent of phosphates and seventy percent of sediments polluting our water bodies come from farms (Defra, 2010 b).

Therefore these environmental schemes are essential to maintain a healthy and productive farming environment that reduces its impact on wildlife.

## 5.2 Landscape Character and Ecology of the District

The different landscape character areas of the District define the ecological features of the District. For example, the Blackwater Estuary marsh landscape area is one which supports internationally and nationally important numbers of wildfowl, including Brent Geese, and a variety of internationally important habitats including estuarine, mudflats, sandflats, and Atlantic salt meadows (Landscape Character Network, 2006).

In comparison the Boreham Farmland Plateau is dominated by intensive and widespread arable agriculture with small pockets of woodland and narrow lanes. This area contains nine sites of nature conservation value including two with ancient and semi-natural woodland habitat. Ecological features also include ditches, reservoirs, streams and rivers and gravel and sand pits (Landscape Character Network, 2006).

There are also wooded landscapes in the District, for example the Little Baddow and Danbury farmland that is dominated by widespread arable agriculture with woodland areas surrounding the urban area of Danbury. The area contains twenty-three sites of nature conservation value. These include Blake's Wood & Lingwood Common, which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (90 hectares) comprising woodland and grassland habitats.

There are also twenty County Wildlife Sites comprising ancient and semi-natural woodland, wetland and grassland habitats.

The District has a rich diversity of habitat types and supports a wide variety of species, including those in the arable landscape.

## 5.3 Barriers to farmers entering Environmental Stewardship Schemes

During the consultation with local farmers many issues were raised with regard to entering into these schemes. One issue in particular was concern with being locked into an agreement for a minimum of five years. It was felt that if situations changed on the farm and the farmer wanted to make changes to the way they managed their land they would not be able to under this agreement. However Natural England will review a farmer's situation and make changes to the agreement where possible. Other areas of concern included:

1. It is considered difficult to get some farms into Higher Level Stewardship. However, if a farm is within the Essex Coast and Growth Areas or it has good environmental features and archaeology on the site this can help to get into Higher Level Stewardship.
2. The future funding for these schemes is uncertain, due to the economic climate, it is recommended that if landowners are thinking about entering a scheme it is better to do this sooner rather than later.
3. Completing the Farm Environment Plan is complicated and the forms are very laborious. Landowners should always ask for a Natural England advisor to come and talk through the options

available to them, as they are tailored specifically to each farm holding. They will help to do the Farm Environment Plan, which is a necessary component of both schemes. Through the partnership it could be that this service is offered to farmers to enable smooth access into the schemes.

4. It is felt that the schemes are not very flexible and often very prescriptive; this can also involve maintenance work out of season. It is best to get it right first time and continue with this during the schemes lifespan. Consultation with advisors at Natural England at the beginning of the scheme is therefore important.
5. More evidence is needed as to the benefits of these schemes for nature and this should be communicated more widely to farmers involved in these schemes to encourage a feeling of pride and achievement.
6. Natural England needs to engage directly with farmers so that they are considered approachable and have an understanding of the issues farmers face on a daily basis. This however, is outside the scope of the Council's influence. landowners and tourism businesses in the District. These include:

## 5.4 Opportunities for Conservation on Rural Managed Land

The District has a membership of 50% of the usable agricultural area under environmental stewardship schemes, which suggests there is an opportunity to expand the uptake of these schemes

1. Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) on land offer the opportunity for easier access into Higher Level Stewardship schemes where higher grants can be obtained. Furthermore the Essex Wildlife Trust has a Wildlife Sites Officer who can provide free advice to LWS owners and offer guidance where required to help secure sustainable management for a site. This Officer can also assist in the completion of applications for entry into Environmental Stewardship Schemes.
2. The Essex Wildlife Trust can also help with species and habitat records for land parcels which can help complete environmental stewardship applications.
3. Natural England can help with educational features of projects through the 'Special Projects' aspect of Higher Level Stewardship Schemes. This can include interpretation boards and bird hides, which may make rural businesses more attractive to tourists and local schools who may be willing to pay for educational visits.
4. Essex Wildlife Trust also have a team of Educational Outreach Officers who can help to tailor specific outdoor education packages for a site, this is likely to involve a fee and if interested, farmers would be advised to discuss this with an officer at an early stage. Through the partnership we have engaged with the Outreach Officers to ask them to work with a local business to develop their environmental education offering for their guests.
5. Management of woodland through coppicing regimes can provide habitat for wildlife while also producing charcoal, firewood, thatching materials, brushwood, chestnuts, forest honey, fibres and fruit. All of these products could be sold at various stages throughout the year to supplement the farm income. Woodland of just 2 hectares can provide opportunities to make a modest additional income, however to make a more substantial income the woodland would need to be at least 20 hectares. However, we have few woodlands of this size in the District.
6. Features of nature conservation importance and amenity value on farmland can actually increase the capital value of that land. This may benefit the farmer if they come to sell the farmland or wish to access finance against the value of this land.
7. Engage with Natural England and Writtle College to ensure farmers are accessing the right information about the different schemes on offer. For example through the partnership we have helped a local business carry out their Farm Environment Plan to aid their entry into Higher Level Stewardship.

(Natural England, 2010). This will provide environmental benefits as well as a supplementary income to farmers for meeting these objectives. Beyond this there are other opportunities for conservation on rural managed land in the District, which were identified during the consultations with local farmers,

## 6. Project Opportunities Private/Public

### 1. Rural Business Engagement

The partnership between Maldon District Council and Writtle College started in January 2010, and a graduate was seconded to Maldon District Council Economic Development to provide the link with the College and fulfil engagement with several rural businesses. The partnership has provided the Council with access to a wide and current knowledge of rural management issues and solutions.

### 2. Environmental Stewardship Schemes

The partnership has raised awareness of the potential sources of guidance and funding to businesses such as the benefits for some businesses of entering into an Environmental Stewardship agreement with Natural England. The partnership would enable this to continue and also help businesses with their Farm Environment Plans, a crucial requirement of entry into Higher Level Stewardship.

### 3. Disease control: Contingency Plan for Exotic Diseases of Animals

The partnership would enable the Council to promote and advise farmers on the benefits of having a disease contingency plan in place.

### 4. Rural Businesses Marketing Plan

The partnership has enabled the collaboration between Writtle College Higher Education students and local businesses to generate marketing plans to aid business development. The partnership will enable this beneficial work to continue and help other rural businesses in the District.

### 5. WW1 Aerodrome Project

The partnership has engaged with Natural England to investigate whether the aerodrome is eligible to enter into a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. After identifying that the aerodrome was eligible, the partnership is also carrying out the Farm Environment Plan for this business to aid its entry into the scheme. The conservation area includes the opportunity for pond creation, a wildflower meadow and interpretation and educational facilities. The partnership has helped the aerodrome by locating a Blacksmith for their vacant forge, who is willing to participate in demonstrations on their Open Days. The partnership is looking for volunteers to supply a work party to help with managing the conservation area and visitor centre which is being developed for the likes of the Hawk and Owl Trust and the Essex Wildlife Trust. The partnership would enable this tailored business engagement to continue in the future and to provide this service to other rural businesses in the District. The CADE department has also looked at paths and surfaces.

### 6. Conservation Management Plan

MSc Conservation Management students from Writtle College are working with a developing caravan park in the District on a Management Plan which will help the business to develop in a way which does not have a negative impact on the landscape, including a Special Site of Scientific Interest owned by

the business. The partnership enables the Council to continue to provide this specialist advice and support to rural businesses in the District.

#### **7. Traditional Skills**

Writtle College is working with Maldon District Council to develop opportunities to enable local people to learn traditional skills such as: hedge laying, historic building restoration, blacksmithing and coppicing. These skills are in danger of being lost, but they are vital for rural land management and historic building conservation. The partnership enables the continued work on the development of courses to address the need for training in traditional skills in the District. The partnership would may also encourage a publication exhibiting the traditional skills practiced in the District, similar to Dedham Vales 'Re-skilling the Valley' (Apricot Centre, 2010).

#### **8. Coastal Access Leaflet**

The partnership has worked to enable Design students to produce a coastal path leaflet which a map showing individual walking routes. This has been developed to address the lack of information in the Tourism Information Centre and to encourage wider use of the coastal paths and the surrounding businesses located there. The partnership would enable the Council to continue to use these links with the College and produce useful information such as leaflets to encourage recreational tourism in the District without having to use Council resources.

## 7. Summary

The District of Maldon has a great deal to offer in terms of already successful rural diversification projects, tourism potential, locally produced food, historical and cultural interest and a quaintness not found in many other towns in Essex.

Development of the District is its rural situation as its functional economic area is the 'Hearts of Essex', but it is located between the Haven and Thames Gateways. However, this will present opportunities for partnership working, which may enable funds to be leveraged into the District to deliver projects which can also benefit neighbouring areas.

Currently there is little opportunity for diversification into the energy crop market, as the supporting services required to make this economically viable are not currently provided in the District. Small-scale anaerobic digestion to provide heat on the other hand may prove to be a future opportunity for farms in the District. This can be achieved without relying solely on livestock waste. However, more information and communication is needed as to the viability of this technology by the DEFRA appointed Anaerobic Digestion Task Group.

There is also very little forestry in the District which diminishes the opportunities for income generation in this area. Charcoal production is a viable use of woodland if it is small-scale and can provide income through other avenues, such as tourism.

Growth in sustainable nature-based, recreational and historical tourism offers a huge opportunity for the District because of the inherent ecological quality and historical interest it possesses. However, this requires collaborative working between the Council, local landowners and tourism businesses as well as improvement in the transport and accommodation provision of the District and publicising existing walking routes.

Moreover, the formation of a Local Action Group (LAG) within the Maldon District Business Partnership to look at rural issues will enable local action and identification of local projects to benefit the rural community in the District. A key to improving the rural provision of the District is partnership working between local rural businesses and the Council. A LAG could enable these links to be formed.

The agricultural sector will undergo many changes over the coming year with the arrival of the review of Single Farm Payments. The outcome of which cannot be predicted. An area with further potential is to increase the land under Environmental Stewardship Schemes in the District to further enhance conservation of the local natural environment. The benefits of these schemes should be communicated directly to the very people managing the land so that they can make an informed decision. The benefits that land managers across the District afford to biodiversity conservation should be both acknowledged and communicated more widely. Of course, these schemes may not be suitable for all farm businesses in the District and this should also be recognised.

Through the partnership with Writtle College, Maldon District Council has already begun focussing on the needs of this rural District. Work has started on producing an informative coastal map, which highlights the coastal path routes, as well as the local amenities along the route.

This forms part of an overall strategy to encourage more sustainable recreational and nature-based tourism in the District.

This report was produced in response to a need for rural issues and opportunities in the District to be identified and to target future projects to start to address the issues and exploit the opportunities. It is hoped that many of the ideas and opportunities discussed in this report can be delivered with the help of this partnership approach.

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