

Business and the Economy



Current initiatives

Partners already working in the borough include Business Link Surrey, Guildford Borough Council (GBC), Guildford Business Forum, Guildford College, South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), Surrey Business Enterprise, Surrey Chambers, Surrey County Council (SCC), Surrey Economic Partnership, Surrey Learning and Skills Council, and the University of Surrey.

Existing projects include:

- Surrey Enterprise Hub which provides incubator space, university links and business support for high-tech companies.
- Rural economy support through farmers' markets,

local produce guide, farm diversification assistance, Surrey Hills initiative and Surrey Farm Study.

- Investor Development Programme: working with Surrey's major employers to help overcome barriers to growth in relation to skills and labour, planning, transport and property issues, and maintaining Surrey's position as a prime international business location.
- Helping to reduce dependency on the road network through promoting Heathrow Airport rail links, company travel plans.
- Business advice for start-ups and small to medium sized businesses.
- Business and affordable housing project designed to enable businesses to contribute towards the provision of affordable housing.
- Gaining the economic benefits that derive from promoting Guildford as a centre of excellence for cultural activities of all kinds.
- Recruitment initiatives: matching up people with jobs - a new initiative that targets parts of the borough with higher unemployment and businesses needing staff. Training is a key element of the project, which aims to address social deprivation issues as well as some of the staffing problems experienced by business. Further initiatives include guidance for businesses on flexible working, childcare provision, Investors in People, key worker housing initiatives and recruitment of people from disadvantaged groups.
- Information - a range of information has been produced for businesses including: *Guildford Business Directory* (web-based and hard copy formats); on-line commercial property information; economic information; business advice leaflets; and business newsletters.

The way forward

The debate is just beginning and a lot of work needs to be done. Topics include:

- Should business get more involved in helping solve problems like traffic congestion?
- Would raising general awareness of the positive community benefits of a strong economy and successful local business be helpful?
- Would European models show how economic success can support and enhance the environment, rather than damage it?
- Guildford has become a regional centre but how do we achieve a level of economic development that is right for Guildford, retaining its heritage and character?
- How do we ensure that we retain the right amount of land for commercial use in the right location?
- How do we balance the need to provide land for housing with the need to provide land to maintain local jobs and the economy?
- The University of Surrey has been particularly successful at turning research into commercial ventures. Is the value of this appreciated by the community?
- Should the University promote public awareness of its academic, business, community and environmental activities?
- GBC has set up a number of initiatives to support farmers and horticulturists, such as farmers' markets and a local produce guide. Could more be done?
- Should the town permit new development in order to encourage more independent retailers or should GBC provide council property for them?
- Should a food store and small, low cost units be included in the Friary extension planning brief?
- Should GBC do more to help businesses with recycling, energy efficiency, green travel plans, etc?
- How do we develop Guildford as a quality tourist destination, while minimising any adverse effects on local people?
- What further action can be taken to protect rural shops and services, and to promote rural employment?

What now?

Guildford Business Action Group is the partnership of local business, GBC, SCC, Surrey Economic Partnership, the University of Surrey, a local residents' group and environmental groups that will be addressing the issues raised.

It will be undertaking:

- A stock-take of where Guildford's economy is, using the Local Futures State of the District report and involvement in Local Futures European Regions in the Knowledge Economy research programme.
- An action plan addressing the needs of the economy in the context of environmental and social issues.
- Establishment of a vision for Guildford's economy that everyone feels comfortable with and that can be fed into the wider vision of the Local Strategic Partnership.