

Consultation Draft

November 2006

An Economic Strategy for the Mendip area 2006–2011



MENDIP
DISTRICT COUNCIL



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Foreword

This is the Mendip area's draft Economic Strategy. It has been developed with the business community to set the directions and priorities for the growth of the Mendip economy over the next five years.

The District Council, whilst taking a lead role in developing this vision, has worked in partnership with the Mendip Strategic Partnership, the business community and the Mendip Business Exchange. Most importantly, input from the business leaders group, key stakeholders from the business community, has helped to form, develop and steer the direction of this document. The positive contributions and time from the many organisations and individuals has been appreciated.

The Economic Strategy is an ambitious vision for the economy of the Mendip area. Working together we can help to maximise the economic strengths of the Mendip area and achieve the aim of creating a more enterprising and business friendly culture in Mendip. The action plan aims to establish the mechanisms required to make a significant contribution to the strategic objectives, importantly it provides a common implementation framework for all key partners and stakeholders.

We look forward to hearing your comments and views on this draft strategy.



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Executive Summary

The strategy is based upon an analysis of the economic characteristics of the Mendip area, its strengths and weaknesses and the unique selling points of the area. The significant themes of the policy framework have been drawn upon. The business communities' needs and aspirations have been taken into account.

The role of market towns as “hubs” for the development of the rural economy combined with recognition that, many such towns are vulnerable to future change are critical factors. It will be important to focus resources on regenerating market towns and promoting their role as drivers of a wider rural economy.

The complex economic inter-relationships between the market towns, their surrounding rural areas and the growth of a number of key economic centres in Somerset is an important factor. It is important that the future Local Development Framework reflects the land use and accessibility needs that these inter-relationships create.

Within Mendip, there are strong economic “pulls” to centres beyond Somerset. In some instances, these cross-boundary relationships are stronger than those with other centres within the county.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out a sustainable path to securing economic growth, social progress and environmental protection and enhancement in Mendip over the next few years. The outcome is designed to meet the fundamental objectives of national government policies and priorities aimed at delivering sustainable communities.

The strategy has to have a vision as to where the business community wants to go. Through working with the business community and leaders a strategic aim was derived:

“to create a more enterprising and business friendly culture in the Mendip area”

From consultation with the business community, drawing upon the policy framework and identifying the opportunities of the local economy, 6 strategic objectives were drawn up. These are:

- Promoting Mendip as an attractive, sustainable location for business
- Ensuring that businesses are effectively supported
- Improving skills
- Improving prosperity and vibrancy in the towns, villages and the countryside
- Developing the tourism sector in a sustainable way
- Proactively addressing transport and infrastructure

Delivering the economic action plan requires a long term commitment from all partners. The action plan provides a framework for co-ordinated partnership action for the next 5 years

An Economic strategy for the Mendip area 2006 – 2011

Foreword

Organisations represented on the Business Leaders Group

Executive Summary

1 Why have an Economic Strategy for the Mendip area?	7
1.1 Background	7
1.2 Structure of the strategy	8
1.3 How the strategy was developed?	9
1.4 What the strategy aims to achieve?	9
Summary	10
2 What is the economic profile of the Mendip area?	11
2.1 Character of the Mendip area	11
2.2 Profiles of the main settlements	11
2.2.1 Frome	11
2.2.2 Street	11
2.2.3 Wells	12
2.2.4 Shepton Mallet	12
2.2.5 Glastonbury	13
2.2.6 The rural area	14
2.3 The nature of employment	14
2.4 Employment sectors	14
2.5 The Spatial Patterns of the economy in Mendip	15
2.6 Unemployment in the Mendip area	16
2.7 Economic analysis observations	17
2.8 The strengths and weaknesses of the Mendip economy	18
Summary	18
3 Issues highlighted by the business community	19
3.1 Unique selling points and aspirations for the Mendip area	19
3.2 Strengths and weaknesses of the Mendip area	19
3.3 Establishing the objectives	20
3.4 Developing the objectives	21
Summary	22
4 The Policy context for Mendip's Economy	23
4.1 Key policies influencing a Mendip based economic strategy	23
4.2 Main influences of the strategy	23
4.3 Community strategy and Mendip Strategic Partnership	23
4.4 The District Council's corporate plan	24
4.5 Local economic initiatives	24
4.5.1 Shepton Mallet and Surrounding Areas Community Strategic Plan 2006–2021	24
4.5.2 Forward Strategy of the Glastonbury Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)	24
4.5.3 Shepton Mallet Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS)	25
Summary: The main influences of the strategy	25
4.6 Guiding principles	26

An Economic strategy for the Mendip area 2006 – 2011

4.7	Local context	26
4.7.1	Local Development Framework	26
	Summary: Key local policy issues	26
4.8	South West Regional context	26
4.8.1	Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS)	26
4.8.2	Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)	26
4.8.3	Regional Economic Strategy 2006–2015	27
4.8.4	Somerset Economic Strategy	28
4.8.5	Towards 2015 South West Tourism Strategy	28
4.8.6	Market Towns and Rural Centres Sub-Economy	29
4.8.7	Somerset Learning and Skills Strategic Plan	30
	Summary: Key South West regional policy issues	30
4.9	National context	31
4.9.1	Local Area Agreements	31
4.9.2	Rural Strategy (2004)	31
4.9.3	Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy (2002)	31
	Summary: Key national policy issues	32
5	Key themes relevant to Mendip	33
	Summary	34
6	Implementation and the next steps	35
6.1	Implementation	35
	References	37
	Appendices	39
	Appendix A: Representatives on the Business Leaders Group “Mendip Means Business”	39
	Appendix B: Actions from the Mendip Business Exchange Event and how they are being carried forward	40
	Action Plan – separate document	

1 Why have an Economic Strategy for the Mendip area?

1.1 Background

The local economy of Mendip is undergoing a period of fundamental change. The area is experiencing the impact of the globalisation of markets and the cost of labour, with the outcome that many traditional industries have closed or moved much of their production abroad. An area formerly dominated by a small number of major employers, it is now characterised by businesses employing less than 20 people. The Mendip area lies within the wider hinterland of Bristol, Bath and Swindon, to which it relates as much as it does to rural, 'historic' Somerset. The availability of jobs, commuting patterns and the increasing impact of its urban neighbours on the local housing market and the capacity of the local area to meet the aspirations of local people who wish to live and work locally is becoming increasingly challenging.

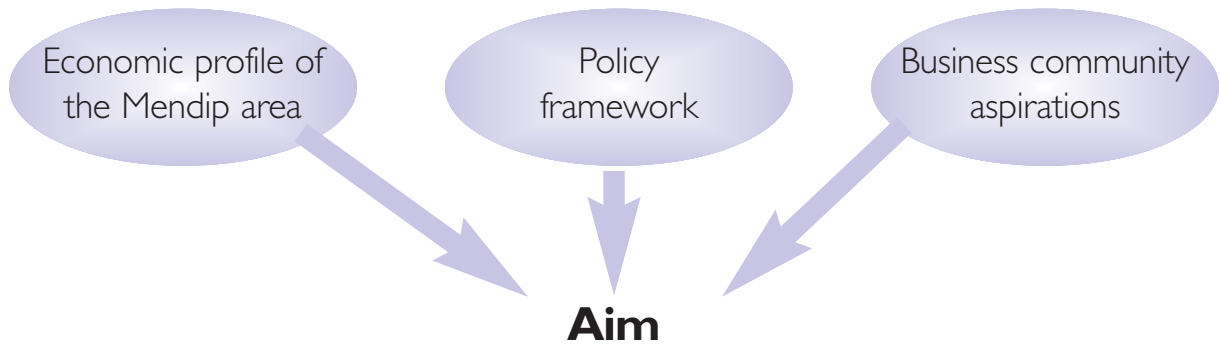
Against this background of change and competing pressures, the economic strategy seeks to embrace this change and determine a future direction. This has to be viewed in the context of the emerging regional and sub regional framework and define how the economic strategy fits in with this regional picture, and to chart what it wants to achieve.

The economic strategy whilst recognising the current economic profile of the area and future trends needs also to recognise the policy framework and the aspirations and desires of the business community.

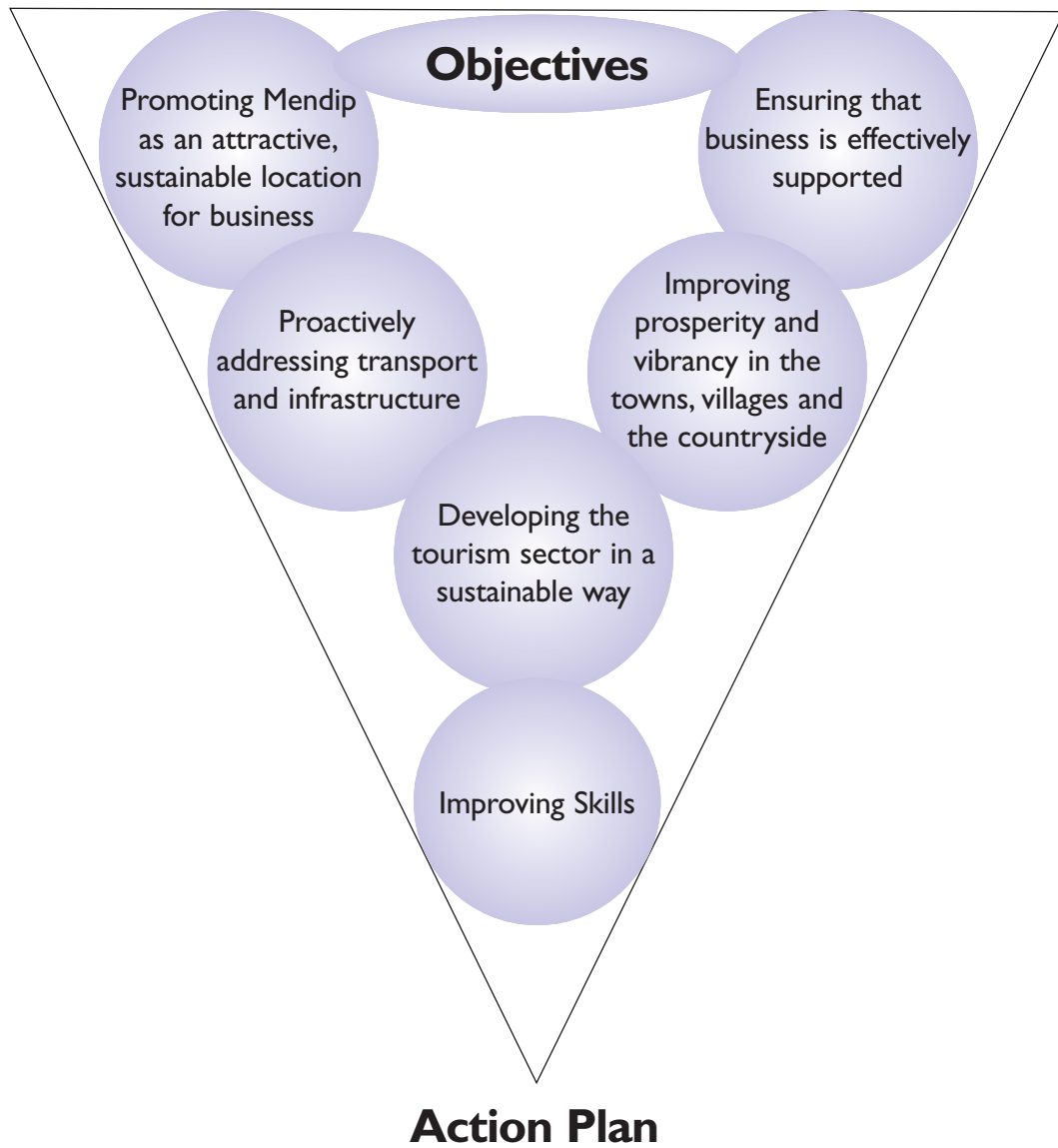


1 Why have an Economic Strategy for the Mendip area?

1.2 Structure of the Strategy



“to create a more enterprising and business friendly culture in the Mendip Area”



1 Why have an Economic Strategy for the Mendip area?

1.3 How the strategy was developed?

To ensure that it is both robust and cross cutting, this document has been developed by Mendip District Council in partnership with the Mendip Strategic Partnership and the business community of the Mendip area. A Business Leaders group involving a wide group of stakeholders from the business community has been set up. This group has been instrumental in helping to form, develop, monitor and oversee the process. The Business Leaders group comprises of primarily the Mendip Association of the Chamber of Commerce (MACoC), the Federation for Small Businesses (FSB) and business leaders from each of the main five settlements in the Mendip area.

The business community has been directly involved in the process through the Mendip Business Exchange. This is a tri-partnership between Mendip District Council, Federation of Small Businesses and the Mendip Association of the Chambers of Commerce.

1.4 What the strategy aims to achieve?

The development of an economic strategy will help to identify and show the visibility of the Mendip area's economic needs. There is a considerable breadth of economy work currently underway. Some of it is well recognised such as the physical regeneration in town centres. However, there is no context for this current intuitive approach for addressing change in the local economy. The Strategy will assist Mendip District Council and other partner organisations to provide a focus for this work and amplify the longer term goals it expects to achieve. In understanding the direction of travel and aligning work programmes accordingly, the strategy will provide an effective use of resources including staff and value for money.



The purpose of the strategy is to:

- develop an informed vision for the future of the local economy,
- analyse local patterns of economic change and economic disadvantage,
- identify opportunities and threats that lie ahead,
- identify areas of economic activity where intervention may be needed,
- set clear targets and;
- evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of economic development and regeneration activity.

The vision for the Mendip area is complemented by an action framework for the period 2006 – 2011. Whilst the action plan aims to establish the mechanisms required to make a significant contribution to the strategic objectives, importantly it provides a common implementation framework for all key partners.

1 Why have an Economic Strategy for the Mendip area?

Summary

- The local economy is undergoing fundamental change. The strategy has to be viewed within the context of the emerging regional policy framework and meet the aspirations of the business community.
- The main purposes of the strategy are to:
 - adopt a more localised strategy which would help to advocate the needs of the Mendip area;
 - help to identify partners to deliver the outcomes;
 - assist in achieving best value by thinking in the longer term, setting clear objectives and having a clear rationale for activity;
 - develop an informed vision for the future of the local economy.
- The strategy has been developed by Mendip District Council in partnership with the Mendip Strategic Partnership and the business community.
- The business leaders and the involvement of the business community through the Mendip Business Exchange has made a significant contribution to the overseeing of this strategy and helps to reflect the aspirations and needs of the business community.

2 What is the economic profile of the Mendip area?

2.1 Character of the Mendip area

The Mendip area lies within the county of Somerset. Mendip's character is predominately rural, characterised by its network of market towns. These towns form an important employment and service role for their surrounding rural hinterlands. The extent of the economic activity within the market towns is illustrated by the fact that 77% of Somerset's businesses are based outside the major towns of Bridgwater, Taunton and Yeovil (ABI 2003). The future competitiveness of market towns is important to the surrounding rural areas where economic activity and employment opportunities are more limited. However, in many of the market towns economic prospects are finely balanced. A number of Somerset's towns are heavily dependent on a particular industrial sector, large employers or a narrow range of key firms. Often these are in sectors where future decline is predicted.

The market towns in Mendip share a high quality built environment and have a strong historic and cultural heritage. The value of this is highlighted in the importance of tourism to the Mendip economy. Nevertheless their future viability is constrained by low levels of knowledge-based economic activity, limited infrastructure and accessibility and, in some cases, a lack of available employment land.

2.2 Profiles of the main settlements

2.2.1 Frome

Frome is the largest settlement in Mendip with a population of 24,500 people. It contains the greatest number of shops. However, the retention rates in Frome are low with only 26% of Frome residents shopping in Frome for non food items. Given the proximity of Bath most people living in Frome go to Bath for their non-food shopping. It is also within 10kms of a number of other significant towns such as Warminster, Westbury and Trowbridge.

Frome also contains the greatest range of

leisure and cultural facilities. There are several art galleries, two theatres, a music venue, a leisure centre and a cinema.

Frome contains the greatest number of jobs of all the Mendip towns. There were 7700 jobs in 2004. The economic projections for Frome consider there to be potential for an additional 2000 jobs by 2026. There will also be increases in the number of self employed. About 6100 people currently commute out of Frome for work. Some of these trips are fairly short for instance 500 of out commuting is to the neighbouring ward of Mells but more significantly 650 are to Bath and 1100 to various locations in West Wiltshire. There are 2700 people who commute into Frome for work.

2.2.2 Street

Street has a population of 11,000 people. It contains the best range of clothing and footwear shops in the district at Clarks Village which functions like a sub regional shopping centre. The town experiences relatively high retention rates for shopping (49%) only exceeded by Wells (60%). It also enjoys good cultural and leisure facilities including Strode swimming pool, an outdoor pool, Strode theatre (400 seat venue). Millfield School holds major contemporary exhibitions. Strode College provides an excellent further education facility for Street and beyond.

Over the period 1998 to 2004, Street experienced the highest economic growth of all the five main centres (23% or 3.8% per year). During these six years, an additional 1000 jobs were created in Street. 60% of these new jobs were in the wholesale and retail trade. But there have been other gains too across all sectors except manufacturing, mainly in other services (eg social and personal services activities), hotels and restaurants, public administration and education

Future economic projections for Street project economic growth to continue albeit at much lower rates (0.78% per year). This predicts continued small increases across most sectors

2 What is the economic profile of the Mendip area?

and a total increase of 900 jobs between 2004 and 2026.

In 2001, there were 5290 economically active persons, compared with 4950 jobs in Street. This difference will have widened as a considerably high number of additional jobs (1000) have been created since 2001. The high number of jobs relative to the number of economically active is reflected in very high commuting rates of 4000 people (net commuting is 1400). Movements from Glastonbury and Street account for 600 of these incoming trips for work.

2.2.3 Wells

The city of Wells is the third largest of the five main centres, with a population of 10,400 people. The city has by far the highest proportion of people aged over 65. This makes up 25% of the population compared with 16% nationally. Wells also has the lowest proportion of working age persons of all the Mendip towns.

The economy of Wells grew by 9% between 1998 and 2004 (1.5% per year). Most of this growth has been in business services and health followed by education and wholesale and retail. There have been small amounts of increases in other sectors too, except in manufacturing, financial services and other services. Losses in manufacturing mirror the trends of the other towns.

Economic projections project an increase of 650 jobs in this period up to 2026. In 2001, there were more jobs (5450) than there were economically active in the town (4500). This is reflected in high in-commuting to the town (2900) which is only exceeded by Street. 2170 people commute out for work. The loss of employment land in Wells has been a particular issue recently. Although, there is an undeveloped employment allocation at Gate Lane. This is expected to come forward in the near future.

Wells is a city with a good range of shops and leisure facilities and is particularly well served by bus services. The city centre is relatively healthy with a large number of shops (175

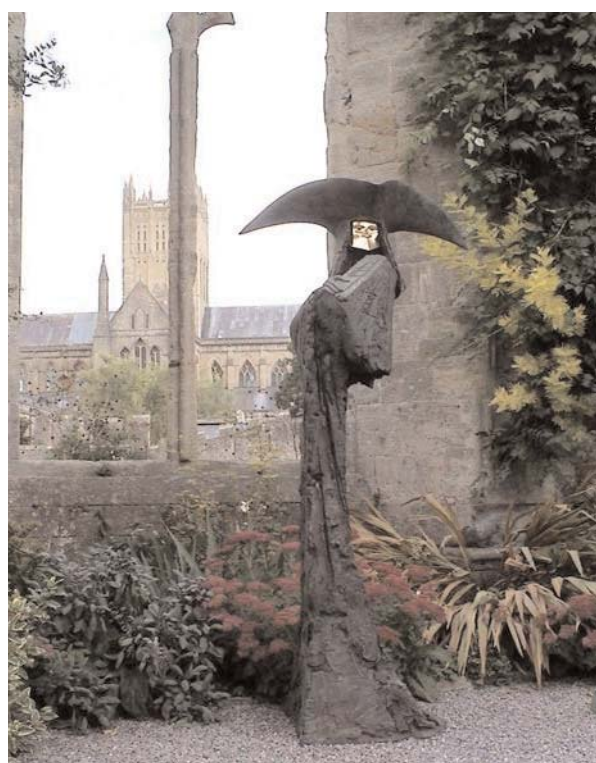
compared with Frome's 198). There is a mix of local and national retailers and 60% of residents shop in Wells for non food items. Wells Cathedral is a strong pull for tourism which brings additional expenditure into the city.

2.2.4 Shepton Mallet

Shepton Mallet has a population of 9000 people which makes it the fourth largest of the five main centres. It has the smallest retail centre of the five main settlements and high shop vacancy rates that are twice the national average. Its limited retail offer is demonstrated by high retail leakage to other settlements, with just 15% of residents shopping in the town for non food items.

The town centre has suffered from major decline, but there are two major town centre schemes that have recently obtained planning consent, the development of Tesco's and the redevelopment of the Haskins store. It is hoped that these will act as a catalyst to the wider regeneration of the shopping centre.

Shepton Mallet is recognised as a town with a history of dependence on manufacturing. In 1998, 1100 people (25% of the town's jobs)



2 What is the economic profile of the Mendip area?

were employed in manufacturing, but this was not as high as the number of manufacturing jobs in Frome (2365 jobs or 33% of Frome's employment)

Despite job losses between 1998 and 2004, most notably in manufacturing, the total number of jobs in Shepton Mallet grew by 15% (2.5% per year). This is higher than the District average of 12% and second only to Street which experienced increases of 23%. Between 1998 and 2004, whilst there was a loss of 350 manufacturing jobs in Shepton Mallet, there were significant increases in jobs in distribution, business services and public administration, as well as small increases in health, education, mining, quarrying and construction.

It is projected that a further 1300 jobs will be created in Shepton Mallet by 2026. This is equal to a growth rate of 1.2% per annum which is lower than past rates of job growth (2.5%). Commuting patterns are currently fairly balanced, with a small net gain of people commuting into the town for work. Unemployment is very low (269 persons) and there are 420 more jobs than there are economically active persons to fill those jobs.

The Shepton 21 community group has prepared a Community Strategic Plan which seeks to create a vibrant town centre with good links to surrounding rural areas, stimulating job growth and providing housing that people can afford. An important component is the need to improve the skills of the population particularly young people.

2.2.5 Glastonbury

Glastonbury is the smallest of the five main centres (8800 people). In the past, Glastonbury has experienced high unemployment. In 2001, the number of jobs in the town (3900) was slightly less than the number of economically active (4150). Unemployment in 2001 was 4% which is higher than the national average. In the future, it is estimated that there will be an additional 600 jobs created in Glastonbury as well as continued increases in the number of

self employed. Additional job opportunities may help to reduce unemployment further and reduce the need for commuting out of the town for work. If Morlands is successful in attracting the types of employment it seeks, this will provide the high quality jobs that are needed.

As with most of the towns there is significant in commuting (1886) and out commuting (2044) for work, but on the whole they balance each other out.

The town centre appears relatively healthy with low vacancy rates. Retention rates for shopping are the worst in the District with just 9% of residents in the town visiting the shopping centre for non food items.

There are levels of deprivation in the town that are amongst the worse 25% nationally (worst 10% nationally for employment). The Glastonbury Town Plan funded by the Single Regeneration Budget has identified key issues. These include unskilled low paid jobs, high self employment which highlights the entrepreneurial nature of the population and the tourism potential of the Tor, the Abbey and the Rural Life Museum and the difficulties in attracting people for long enough period for them to spend money.

2.2.6 The rural area

The rural economy is vulnerable, facing change and uncertainty. Low productivity, concentration of economic activity in declining sectors (low value added manufacturing, agriculture and extractive industries) and a limited range of employers are key issues. The rural economy is characterised by low wages and insecure employment. Wider changes are affecting the rural economy too. The decline in agriculture has significant implications for the land-based economy. Farm businesses increasingly need to develop multiple income streams to survive and diversification of the rural economy is needed to offset the changes in agriculture. A key to enabling diversification to take place is a flexible and responsive planning system.

2 What is the economic profile of the Mendip area?

Certain groups face particular difficulties in rural Somerset. Many young people have problems accessing training and employment because of high transport costs and lack of public transport. Low income households face the particular problems of low wages and high rural housing costs which reduce their opportunities and contribute to a drift of workers away from the rural areas.

The infrastructure in the Mendip area is comparatively poor compared to other parts of Somerset. There are no motorways within the District and only one main line railway station at Frome. However, with the increasing coverage of Broadband, accessibility is rising and this makes the Mendip area well suited to a knowledge based economy.

2.3 The nature of employment

The economy of Mendip is made up predominantly of micro and small companies. Approximately 72% of businesses in Mendip employ less than 10 employees; accounting for 30.4% of all jobs in the district, while companies that employ 11–49 people account for a further 29.2% of all jobs, 25.4% are in medium size companies and 14.8% are in larger companies employing 50–199 and 200 plus employees respectively (Annual Business Inquiry Dec 2004). It is clear, therefore, that businesses employing less than 50 people are the core of the local economy. Such companies are more likely to have been established and developed within the area, and as such are less likely to move outside the district because of premises or labour market constraints.

From an analysis of the economic profile for Mendip, undertaken by the Langdon Partnership in March 2005, it shows a robust and active small business sector with some encouraging signs of growth in emerging sectors. This however is overshadowed, in employment terms, by the continuing decline of the traditional sectors illustrated by the levels of job losses suffered in Mendip within the last 3 years. Total employment in the workplace within Mendip grew by 0.96% between 1999 and 2002.

2.4 Employment sectors

Essentially, Mendip's economy is a service one. The sectors that provide the greatest number of jobs are distribution, hotels and restaurants (accounting for 11,526 employees), public administration, education and health (accounting for 10,090 employees), banking, finance and insurance (accounting for 6,378 employees) whereas manufacturing accounts for 5,281 employees (Annual Business Inquiry Dec 2004).

Employment in the service sector, both public and private, has grown, with employment in the private education sector strongly represented. There is evidence of the emergence of specialist high tech and ICT sector businesses, such as data management, electronics, and internet applications. These are either spin-offs from large company restructuring or relocation to the district.

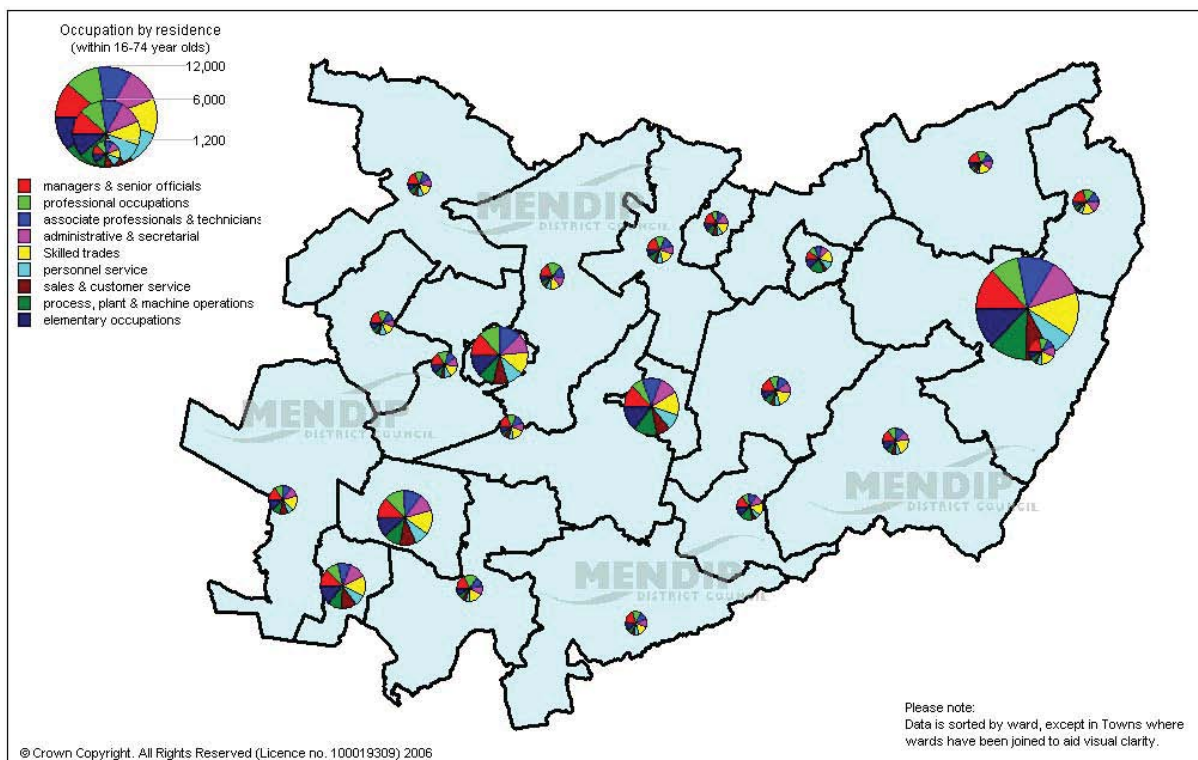
Tourism makes a significant contribution to Mendip's economy particularly for short breaks and in the more affluent third age market. Visitors spend an estimated £170 million a year in Mendip and there are 5667 jobs in Mendip related to Tourism spending (South West Tourism – Economic Value of Tourism in the South West 2003).

There are around 600 tourism businesses in Mendip of which 400 are accommodation providers there are some renowned country house hotels, and a broad range of quality inspected accommodation in guesthouses, bed and breakfasts, and small hotels. The Bath and West Showground draws visitors year-round for events ranging from antiques and craft fairs, agricultural and country shows, and trade events. In addition, the district is unique in being the venue for Europe's largest outdoor music festival, Glastonbury Festival. The Festival more than doubles the population of the district for almost a week of the year and it plays a considerable part in supporting the local economy.

Mendip has seen a progressive decline in employment in traditional manufacturing activity, including engineering, chemicals, leather

2 What is the economic profile of the Mendip area?

2.5 The spatial patterns of the economy in Mendip



Extract from *Mendip Spatial Patterns "An Analysis of Spatial variances in Social, Economic and Environmental factors in Mendip District Version 1 – an overview of the District"*

and shoe manufacture; due in part to globalisation and demand for some products has diminished. Technological advances and up skilling of workforces have also contributed to loss of employment in manufacturing. Although the number of major employers is declining, those that remain continue to be significant to the local economy.

This map shows the job mix within Mendip by industrial sector: Unsurprisingly, the five towns provide the largest employment base. Shepton Mallet's employment base is notably large given its size, whilst Glastonbury has a relatively small employment base for its size. Some of the rural wards like Mells and St Cuthbert Out North and West provide around 2,000 jobs. It is vital that this is sustained to provide local jobs for the rural population in Mendip. The break-down by sector shows a big reliance in retail and public admin, education and health, in particular in Street and Glastonbury, this indicates a need to diversify the employment base. The map also shows changes in the

breakdowns across the rural wards, for example Creech and Chilcompton have over 40% in manufacturing. Beacon has a relatively large quarrying sector, whilst Ashwick and Ston Easton have a large sector in transport, storage and communications.

In the current economic climate, the manufacturing sector is at greatest risk. In Mendip this is underpinned by a handful of large employers. It is vital that these sites are protected from development pressures.

To help the economy withstand the effects of the decline in these traditional sectors it will be crucial for district planning policies to provide every opportunity for thriving businesses to stay in Mendip and to grow. According to the ODPM 'Planning authorities should have regard to the importance of encouraging industrial, commercial and retail development if the economy is to prosper and provide for improved productivity, choice and competition, particularly when requirements of modern businesses are changing rapidly.' (*Employment Land Reviews –*

2 What is the economic profile of the Mendip area?

Guidance Note. ODPM 2004) A major part of that support must be to ensure provision of relevant employment space of the right size and quality, built in the right location and becoming available at the right time.

Many people feel that Mendip is becoming increasingly more associated with dormitory status – as an outlier of Bristol, Bath, Wiltshire and even London. There are increasing signs of people trading from home and more unorthodox locations, something that has been made possible by the use of e-commerce. It is also an indication of people engaging in businesses to suit their lifestyle. This is reflected in the number of employees in micro and small companies.

2.6 Unemployment in the Mendip area

Mendip as a district is enjoying full employment. There are pockets of long term unemployment, notably in parts of Glastonbury, which also has higher levels of overall unemployment. In July 2005, Glastonbury had the highest unemployment rate in Mendip at 2.4%, compared to the rate for the whole of Mendip which was 1.1% (MDC Strategy and Research). The extent of

employment varies by gender: 81% of males in work in Mendip are full time, compared with 40% of females. Female employment is more likely in retail, services or the care sector; whereas males are more likely to be employed in manufacturing, distribution, repair and public services sectors

Anecdotally, there are indications of a growing influx of migrant workers in to the Mendip area who appear to be engaged in manufacturing, care and catering. This trend is extremely difficult to identify in government statistics. However, indications of a growing community can be identified by new business ventures such as the Portuguese café opening in Shepton Mallet.

The low wage economy is however a serious issue in certain industries, including important sectors like food and drink production.

A complacent attitude towards training and staff development exists in certain industries and there are skill shortages in some industries. However, there is considerable potential for developing businesses and training opportunities especially in the sectors identified at a regional level.



2 What is the economic profile of the Mendip area?

2.7 Economic Analysis Observations

Current Picture:

- Mendip population stands at 103,869 (2001 Census) and has grown by 13.39% since 1991. This is substantially higher than the national population growth rate of 9.34% and significantly higher than the South West growth rate of 12.21%
- A large proportion of employment in the Mendip economy is based on declining sectors (Manufacturing – 24.4%) and sectors of lower value to local employment (Retailing & Distribution – 21.5%).
- Relatively low value employment available in the towns and low skill jobs leading to relatively low GVA per capita of Mendip compared with regional and national averages.
- Majority of businesses (72%) in Mendip employ less than 10 people. These same businesses employ 62% of the total workforce.
- Employer surveys have identified a shortage of skilled workers.
- 52% of the workspace population work in a different town to the one they live in.

Trends

- **THE STOCK OF VAT REGISTERED BUSINESSES IN MENDIP GREW BY 4.39% DURING 1999 – 2002. SUBSTANTIALLY HIGHER THAN SOMERSET GROWTH OF 2.77%.**
- Buoyant Mendip business activity – most sectors showing more growth than neighbours as measured by the stock VAT registered businesses.
- Overall employment numbers in Mendip showed low growth of 0.96% during the period 1999 – 2002 when compared to Somerset's growth rate of 7/04% and the South West growth of 7.0%.
- Mendip is doing relatively well in the knowledge sector with a 10% growth in employment compared to the decline shown in most districts.
- Working age population for Mendip is expected to increase by only 0.25% per year to 2026.

Extract from Mendip Employment Land and Premises Demand and Supply Study The Langdon Partnership March 2005



2 What is the economic profile of the Mendip area?

2.8 The strengths and weaknesses of the Mendip economy

In the Mendip Employment Land and Premises

Demand and Supply Study (2005) a SWOT analysis of the Mendip Economy was undertaken. The diagram on below illustrates this.

Strengths

- ✔ Strong & healthy small business sector.
- ✔ Growth of employment in emerging sectors.
- ✔ Mendip District performing better than its neighbours in the proportion of management occupations.
- ✔ Full employment for resident population.

Opportunities

- Provide for needs of SWRDA target sectors to capture economic benefits of these growing sectors
- Inward investment strategies targeted to attract high value businesses
- Through local employment land provision to improve sustainability of travel to work commuting.
- Target district support at the firms employing between 11–49 people. This is where return on policy investment will pay dividends.

Weaknesses

- ✗ Much of employment in declining sectors
- ✗ Emerging sectors although growing employ few people
- ✗ Significant growth in employment is often for part time work and of low value.
- ✗ Full employment means growing businesses find it hard to attract skilled workforce

Threats

- Very low increases in population of working age will present problems for businesses needing skilled workforce.
- High value of housing development puts pressures on employment space
- Inward migration will increase travel to work pressures

Extract from Mendip Employment Land and Premises Demand and Supply Study The Langdon Partnership March 2005

Summary

- The market towns are key employment and service centres for their surrounding rural areas and their future competitiveness is key to the development of the rural economy. Each of the five main settlements is unique and face different issues.
- Mendip's economy is essentially a service one
- Tourism is a vital part of the district's economy.
- A high quality landscape and heritage is vital for tourism
- The rural economy is characterised by low productivity activities and is subject to sectoral decline including fundamental agricultural change. There is a need to diversify and add value to the rural economy.
- The Mendip economy is characterised by a predominance of small to medium sized enterprises (many employing less than 10 people) which is robust and active.
- Growth in the local economy has mostly been generated from within the district.
- Mendip has seen a progressive decline in traditional manufacturing activity. To help the economy withstand the effects of this decline, it is crucial that the planning policies provide opportunities for businesses to thrive and grow. Part of that support is ensuring a supply of diverse employment space.

3 Issues highlighted by the business community

In order to develop an economic strategy which had the support of the business community and met their aspirations, a business leaders group was set up. Representatives included members of the Mendip Association of the Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, agencies and businesses from the five main towns. A full list of the representatives is included in Appendix A. This business leaders group helped to form and develop the strategy.

The initial stages of the development of this strategy began with a “Mendip Means Business” workshop session with the business leaders. The purpose was to identify what were the unique selling points of the Mendip area and what were the aspirations, together with the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the Mendip area were highlighted. The tables below sets out the key points that were discussed.

3.1 Unique Selling Points

- o Gateway/geography
- o Desirable place to live & work
- o Moorlands
- o History and heritage
- o Theme for Mendip
- o Higher paid jobs in Mendip
- o Potential for working from home (internet)
- o Royal Bath and West showground
- o Strong education base
- o Glastonbury festival
- o Establishment of the only Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in Business and Management Skills in the SW

Aspirations for Mendip area

- o Theme for Mendip
- o Higher paid jobs in Mendip
- o Potential for working from home (internet)

3.2 Strengths of the Mendip area

- o Family businesses
- o Innovation
- o Stable workforce/ Low staff turnover
- o Five small towns – business development opportunities
- o Morlands
- o Enough space to develop new business
- o Small independent businesses
- o Tourist attractions
- o Strong history and heritage
- o Relatively inexpensive place to live – compared to SE
- o Good place to raise families and prepare young people for future careers

*Extract from Mendip Means Business meeting
7th December 2005*

Weaknesses of the Mendip area

- o Transport – no main trunk routes or rail lines
- o Broadband not coming fast enough
- o National “perception of yokel”
- o Seen as a through route to far SW
- o Low basic skills levels – nationwide
- o No strong “centre” or large town
- o Morlands
- o Insufficient small office space and large warehouses
- o Need to find more creative ways of inspiring businesses to engage in leadership and developmental planning.
- o Need to adapt to changing rural economy
- o Tendency for young people to leave for Higher Education elsewhere. This talent does not always return.

3 Issues highlighted by the business community

3.3 Establishing the objectives

The business leaders group identified key themes which were pertinent for the Mendip area. The main issues are summarised below:

Market towns

- Free car parking – More car parks!
- “Market the market towns to their own markets”
- Encourage business people to work together to lift the town and to take responsibility for their own businesses
- Develop niche markets for local retailers
- Encourage High Street “names” as this brings increased footfall
- Live and work in same place

Rural issues

- Increase use of technology in rural areas
- Recognise agriculture is under extreme pressure and adapt

Tourism

- Tourism is a principle growth area although very difficult to identify the “hidden dollar” because many tourist businesses are small independents in this area. This offers growth opportunities in a low key sustainable way.

Commercial Land use – Covered by the following 3 sections

Retention of large employer businesses

- Concern about loss of large employers which also affects the local supply chain.

Development of small business

- Need to support growing businesses (not just start-ups)
- Signposting to improve accessibility to agencies and business related information
- Leadership and development of businesses to encourage them to plan future

Inward investment

- Provide an attractive environment for higher value jobs and businesses from Bristol and Bath
- Improve infrastructure to make Mendip more attractive to inward investors

- Great place to live – safe, clean, happy environment
- Draw of good public schools encourages affluent people many of whom have businesses to relocate in the Mendip area

Promotion of Mendip as a place to do business

- A feeling that Mendip is not marketed enough

Other issues discussed

- Need for affordability in housing – young people can't afford to live in area (mention was made of the 22% social housing allocation on large sites)
- Recruit and retain staff through skills development
- Skills level influences staff turnover – perception is that higher skilled, lower staff turnover and vice versa.
- Low unemployment
- General increase in migrant workers – particularly at the lower skill and salary levels

*Extract from Mendip Means Business meeting
7th December 2005*

There were several discussions by the business leaders group about what is meant by “Greater Prosperity”. There was some debate, as in many companies locally, employees are retained for long periods and it was considered that this was indicative of prosperity. The question was also raised – is there a requirement for “greater” prosperity? It was concluded that there is a need for “greater prosperity as it is important to level out areas of deprivation and to maintain a healthy economy. Furthermore, there is a need to be responsive and sustainable.

It was considered that the key to economic prosperity is to have vibrant businesses which equates to a vibrant community which equates to quality of life. The overriding conclusion was that a strong business community is important and a key aspect to this was a need to support growing businesses and not just start ups.

3 Issues highlighted by the business community

A number of key objectives were drawn out based upon the key themes identified by the business leaders group in December 2005 and using emerging themes identified from the policy background. These eight objectives were:

- *To ensure business is effectively supported*
- *Deliver a supply of sustainable sites and premises for business growth and new businesses*
- *Improve skills of the workforce*
- *Maximise the take up and exploitation of ICT for business*
- *Improve prosperity and vibrancy in the towns, villages and the countryside*
- *Promoting Mendip as an attractive, sustainable location for business*
- *Develop the Tourism sector in a sustainable way*
- *Be proactive in addressing transport and infrastructure*

3.4 Developing the objectives

To develop the objectives identified by the business leaders group, the wider business community were consulted on their aspirations for the economic strategy at a Mendip Business Exchange (MBE) event in January 2006. The MBE is a partnership organisation between Mendip District Council, Mendip Association of the Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses which hosts quarterly events. The programme of events is open to any business and there is a wide circulation.

At the Mendip Business Exchange Event, at which over 70 businesses were represented, eight working groups were set up to explore and discuss each objective with a facilitator. The facilitators were members of the Business Leaders Group. These groups were able to look in depth at a number of objectives. The



3 Issues highlighted by the business community

groups were tasked with devising actions as to how the objective could be achieved. At the end of the event, each delegate had three votes that they could use for any individual action for any objective to identify what they considered to be the most important actions. This helped to prioritise what actions were viewed as the most important from the delegates present. The table showing the actions and the votes received is in Appendix B together with a short notation of how the action has been taken forward.

The refined objectives are:

- *Promoting Mendip as an attractive, sustainable location for business*
- *Ensuring that business is effectively supported*
- *Improving skills*
- *Improving prosperity and vibrancy in the towns, villages and the countryside*
- *Developing the tourism sector in a sustainable way*
- *Proactively addressing transport and infrastructure*

The business leaders have subsequently reviewed the objectives and the actions to help to inform the action plan.

Summary

- The involvement of the Business Leaders Group and the business community has been fundamental in the development of this strategy.
- The business leaders group identified what they perceived as the unique selling points of the Mendip area, aspirations, strengths and weaknesses and key themes.
- These were developed further into key themes pertinent for the Mendip area and addressed issues such as market towns and inward investment.
- These key themes were developed into objectives in the context of the local economy and the wider policy background.
- The wider business community was consulted on their aspirations for the economic strategy at a Mendip Business Exchange event. The business community identified prioritised actions for each of the objectives. This has helped to inform the action plan.

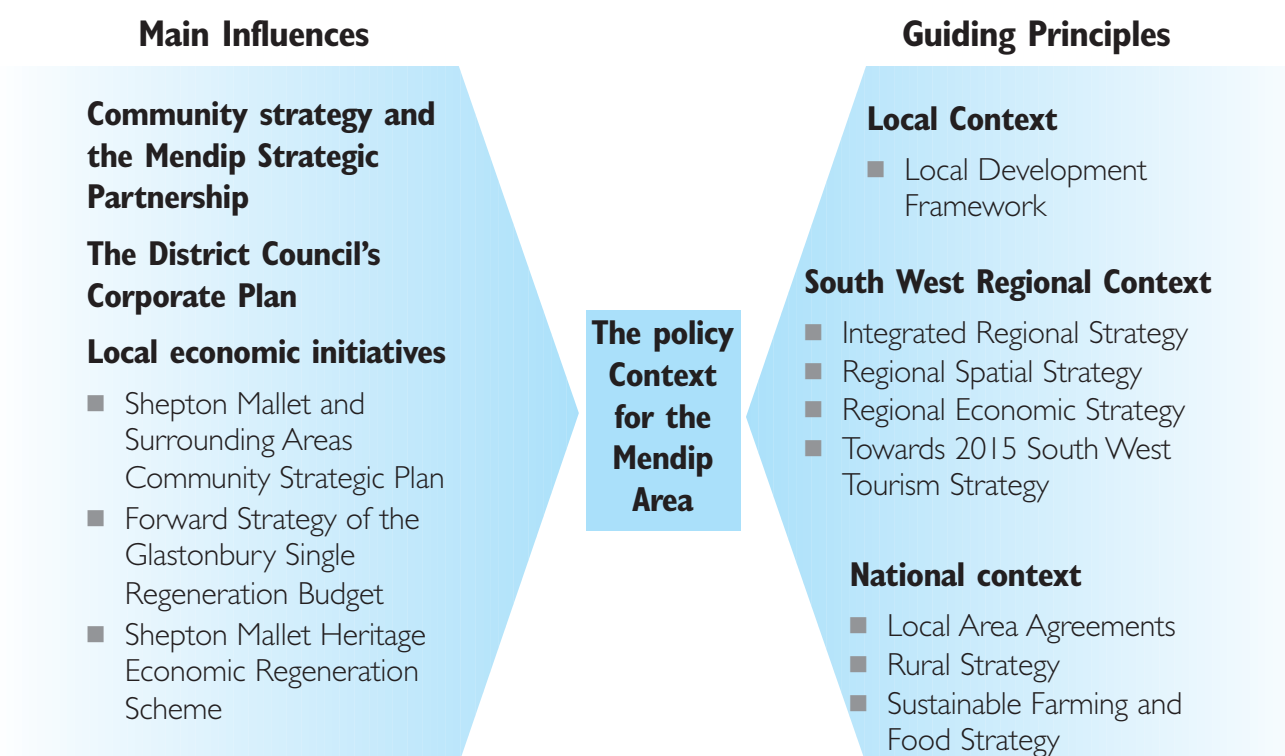


4 The Policy Context for Mendip's Economy

The economic strategy does not work in isolation. Mendip's future economic prospects are heavily influenced by other strategies and policies that exist at local, regional, national and European level. The strategy has to be consistent with this wider policy context but reflect the distinctiveness of the Mendip area. This section looks at the key policies that influence a Mendip based economic strategy. 4.3

The key policies have been divided into the principle drivers for the strategy which are the Mendip Strategic Partnership (MSP), Mendip District Council's corporate objective of "greater prosperity" and local economic initiatives. These are referred to as the main influences. The second element is the wider policy context at all levels which help to set the context for a Mendip based strategy. These have been defined as guiding principles.

4.1 Key policies influencing a Mendip based economic strategy



4.2 Main influences of the strategy

4.3 Community strategy and Mendip Strategic Partnership (MSP)

The Community Strategy for Mendip has been prepared by the Mendip Strategic Partnership (MSP). The main purpose of this Community Strategy is to set out a long term vision which is:

“By 2026, Mendip will be a thriving, just and sustainable place to live in, work in and visit”

The Mendip Strategic Partnership (MSP) aims to improve the quality of life for those visiting, living and working in the district by encouraging cross-agency working for the benefit of the local community. It is a local strategic partnership which brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors to share resources and focus on agreed objectives.

The MSP has identified long term aims for “A Job To Do”. These include ensuring that

4 The Policy Context for Mendip's Economy

Mendip continues to be a “working district”, providing diverse job opportunities for local people, supporting local entrepreneurial talent to assist it to thrive and supporting the retention of key local employers

In developing these long term aims, the MSP is engaged in five initial shorter term priority areas to 2008, one of which is “Regenerating the Mendip Economy”. Sub groups for each of the Priorities have been developed, either by drawing together those agencies that are best placed to address them, or by making links with groups that already exist. Each of these sub groups has developed actions for their Priority. Mendip District Council (MDC) is taking the lead role in this objective. One aspect of this is to develop an economic strategy for the Mendip area which will involve other organisations and reflect the business community needs.

The aims and objectives identified by the MSP have a close synergy with the work programme being pursued by the District Council.

4.4 The District Council's Corporate Plan

The driving force behind the Council's work on the local economy is the three adopted corporate priorities, ‘Safer, Cleaner Streets’, ‘Better Financial Management’ and in particular ‘Greater Prosperity’. The priority for greater prosperity aims “to encourage businesses to come to Mendip, stay in Mendip and grow in Mendip”. Key objectives include developing tourism in a sustainable way, providing a business environment which encourages new and existing small to medium enterprises into the district and improving prosperity and vibrancy in our towns, villages and countryside.

A strategic review of the local economy was undertaken which has led to a much more detailed set of objectives to which the Council is now working. These form the basis of the current 2005 – 06 Business Plan and future plans.

The District Council currently has an ambitious

work programme on the local economy which links in with the priorities of the Mendip Strategic Partnership. The Council is in the best position to lead and co-ordinate across the business interests, business support and skills agencies. Additionally, its role in leading the LDF and determining planning applications means that it is in a unique position to assess employment land interests within an overall strategy.

It has been identified that an economic development strategy is essential not only to give a sense of direction for the plethora of work currently undertaken but also to provide a context.

4.5 Local economic initiatives

The role of local initiatives, community led plans and funding is very important and make a significant contribution to the local economy. The following illustrate examples of these:

4.5.1 Shepton Mallet and Surrounding Areas Community Strategic Plan 2006–2021

In 2003, a group of interested members of the community supported by Mendip District Council obtained grant funding from the South West Regional Development Agency for the Shepton Mallet and surrounding Parishes Market and Coastal Towns Initiative (MCTI). This group became known as “Shepton 21”. A scoping study of the needs and opportunities of the area was carried out together with community consultations. This led to prioritising projects and actions that are set out in “*At the Crossroads – Shepton Mallet and Surrounding Areas Community Strategic Plan 2006 – 2021*”. These objectives are currently being worked upon. In order to deliver the plan, the intention is that Shepton 21 will set up a Development Trust to champion the vision for Shepton Mallet and the surrounding area over the next fifteen years.

4.5.2 Forward Strategy of the Glastonbury Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)

The SRB programme was created to “Bring

4 The Policy Context for Mendip's Economy

Glastonbury Together" socially and economically especially focusing on improving quality of life in two of the highest deprivation wards. The SRB programme was built on five strategic areas in order to formulate activities and projects through joint partnership working across all sectors of the community. This enabled the programme to leverage in additional private and public funds to achieve the desired outcomes of the programme. With the cessation of the SRB programme, a forward strategy in the form of a town plan has been established in order to sustain the achievements created by projects and to ensure the continuation of improving quality of life by creating a regeneration framework with the local community and partners in order to

act as a "tool" to any future developments that would aid the regeneration of Glastonbury.

4.5.3 Shepton Mallet Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS)

The scheme is a funding partnership for building repairs between English Heritage, Shepton Mallet Town Council, Mendip District Council and Somerset County Council which commenced in May 2004. The objective is to promote conservation led regeneration focussing on principally businesses in the retail centre of Shepton Mallet. The grant is for a total of £355,000 to be spent over three years on repair to the structure and external historic fabric of traditional properties and on public realm improvements.

Summary

The main influences of the strategy

- The policy context comprises of two component parts. These are:
 - (a) the main influences which encompasses the MSP's community strategy, the district council's corporate plan and local economic initiatives,
 - (b) guiding principles. This is the wider policy context which helps to inform and provide a framework for a Mendip based strategy.
- The Mendip Strategic Partnership has identified "Regenerating the Mendip Economy" as a priority area.
- There is a close synergy between the long term aims of the Mendip Strategic Partnership for regenerating the local economy and the District Council's commitment to greater prosperity.
- The District Council has taken a lead role in regenerating the local economy partly due to the current ambitious work programmes and its commitment to delivery through existing partnerships.
- Local economic initiatives make a significant contribution to the local economy.

4 The Policy Context for Mendip's Economy

4.6 Guiding principles

These set the wider policy context which helps to inform and provide a framework for a Mendip based strategy. This has been divided into the local context, the south west regional context and the national context.

4.7 Local context

4.7.1 Local Development Framework

Mendip District Council is working on the Local Development Framework, the replacement for the local plan. The Council's work programme, called a Local Development Scheme (LDS), is a 3-year project plan for the preparation of Mendip's Local Development Framework. It took effect in March 2006. The scheme briefly describes all the new documents the Council will produce, and outlines the timetable for their preparation. Initially the work is focusing on:

a) Core Strategy. The core strategy includes:

- A vision and objectives to guide change in the District over the next 20 years
- A strategy for the city, towns, villages and countryside, including decisions about where new development will go
- Core policies on key issues such as housing, transport, business, industry and retail that will help to achieve the vision and the overall strategy for Mendip

b) Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). This sets out the approach to the way that communities including the business community get involved in the preparation of planning policy and assessment of planning applications.

The Mendip Local Development Framework is being developed from an information base concerning key aspects of the social, economic and environmental characteristics of the District. As part of the information base, a sustainability appraisal baseline report has been used to help select sustainability appraisal indicators for the Local Development Framework. The baseline information, together with the indicators, provides a basis for predicting and monitoring effects and helps to

identify sustainability problems and ways of dealing with them.

The Mendip Local Development Framework will be prepared through community involvement achieving local ownership, and working towards the vision of the Community Strategy. The LDF will have regard to the future needs of local communities and the environment of the district, and as a result, the documents will be assessed to determine whether they contribute to the principles of sustainable development through a "Sustainability Appraisal".

Summary

Key local policy issues

- The Local Development Framework will have a fundamental role in allocating employment land and meeting future growth needs of Mendip's economy

4.8 South West Regional context

4.8.1 Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS)

The South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) has developed the Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS) as an overarching strategy for policy making by organisations for the region. It has five key aims relating to benefiting from growth and change, environment and culture, economic prosperity and employment, deprivation and inequality and to ensuring people's fair treatment and full society participation. The principles of the IRS are developed through other strategies such as the Regional Spatial Strategy.

4.8.2 Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)

The RSS is a key document because it will determine the future geographical pattern of growth in the region. The South West Regional Assembly is developing the first South West RSS for formal submission to the Government during 2006. This will include an updated Regional Transport Strategy (RTS). Settlements identified in the RSS for a large proportion of

4 The Policy Context for Mendip's Economy

future growth will, as a result, become the focus of future transportation and wider infrastructure investment by Government bodies, regional agencies and local authorities. The policies of the RSS will have considerable implications for future growth in Somerset.

The emerging RSS proposes concentrating the majority of future growth in fourteen towns, or groups of towns, in the South West. These areas are the region's main urban centres and are classified into three groups. Bristol, Plymouth, Swindon and Exeter are identified as key centres which will see the highest rates of growth. Taunton is in a second group, which will make a significant contribution to regional growth but at rates below the key centres. Yeovil is one of seven areas in a third group which will continue to develop as important sub regional centres. Outside of these main urban centres, market towns are seen as the focus for meeting local development needs, but at a significantly lower scale of growth. The RSS will identify market towns highlighted in regional research and provide criteria to enable local planning authorities to classify further market towns in their Local Development Frameworks (LDF). Given both the significant economic role of market towns and their economic vulnerability, this aspect of the RSS presents challenges to the Mendip area because of its network of smaller towns.

The RSS reduces the housing numbers for Mendip to an annualised average rate of 360 dwellings. This presents opportunities but also it could restrict labour supply and potentially regional funding allocations for infrastructure will be diverted away from Mendip. At the same time it is important for the district to capitalise on the economic growth that will occur in Bristol and Bath without becoming a dormitory area.

4.8.3 Regional Economic Strategy 2006–2015 (Final draft – February 2006)

The Regional Economic Strategy (RES) is the key regional economic policy framework

document for the south west. It is a statutory plan designed to focus the investment of the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) and other key stakeholders on addressing the future economic priorities of the region.

In 2000, the Government's Rural White Paper called for local and regional partners to work together to help rural businesses. The Regional Economic Strategy for the South West, which sets the scene for the South West RDA's activity to improve the region's economy, builds on this. It includes encouragement of new businesses, support for speciality food and tourism, more use of ICT like broadband and the regeneration of market towns.

The strategy aims to give a framework in which public, private and community bodies can plan and work towards common objectives.

Three strategic objectives have been identified in order to deliver the vision. These are:

- Successful and competitive businesses
- Strong and inclusive communities
- An effective and confident region

These objectives have been developed into key themes for instance supporting business productivity, encouraging new enterprise, delivering skills and promoting innovation are all component parts of the successful and competitive businesses priority.

The RES has adopted a sectoral approach which provides a clear focus for a range of interventions in parts of the economy which have growth potential or need support to adapt. In order to raise business productivity, the priority sectors identified are:

- Advanced engineering especially aerospace and defence related,
- Food and drink,
- Creative industries especially digital media,
- Tourism,
- Marine,
- Bio medical and health care,

4 The Policy Context for Mendip's Economy

- ICT especially semi-conductor design and wireless networks and;
- Environmental technologies especially renewable energy and waste.

In addition, sectors are identified as a focus for specific activity to improve skills and the operation of an efficient labour market whilst supporting overall regional economic growth. These are retail, health, social care, construction and engineering.

4.8.4 Somerset Economic Strategy

The Somerset Economic Strategy (SES) builds on the Somerset Strategic Partnership's 25 year Vision for Somerset which is the means to take forward key elements of the South West Regional Economic Strategy. The overall strategic aim is to achieve "a dynamic, high value and leading edge economy for Somerset and the wider South West region". There are six strategic objectives set out within the Economic Strategy:

- to develop the effectiveness of Somerset's economic voice, partnerships and strategic delivery capacity;
- to maximise the long term investment attractiveness and dynamism of Somerset's economy;
- to increase the competitiveness and productivity of Somerset businesses;
- to realise the potential of Taunton, Yeovil and Bridgwater as economic growth centres for Somerset and the South West region;
- to revitalise the economy of Somerset's market towns and rural communities; and
- to increase access to economic opportunities for all Somerset residents.

The document provides a profile of Somerset including information on population; settlement patterns, infrastructure; deprivation and quality of life; environmental capital, and leadership and influence, before detailing the key issues, trends and opportunities the county's economy faces and the economic diversity

The following table (overpage) which is the Somerset Economic Strategy analysis of the

key characteristics of market towns and rural centres sub-economy is reflective of the situation in the Mendip area.

4.8.5 Towards 2015 – South West Tourism Strategy

This strategy was published in 2004 by South West Tourism (SWT) and the South West Regional Development Agency. The three key strategic aims are intended to form the focus of actions by SWT, and all public and private sector partners:

- Driving up Quality
- Delivering sustainable tourism
- Creating better Destination Management arrangements for tourism

South West Tourism recognises the importance of tourism to the regional economy; £8 billion is spent in the region annually (10% of total GDP), by 26 million visitors, where the industry employs over 300,000 people. The challenge of the new Strategy is to help the tourism sector to prosper, whilst not threatening the long-term stability of the industry. The forecasts are that tourism expenditure could grow by £1.2 billion by 2015

Key objectives of the Strategy are to:

- Protect the environment
- Improve the quality of life of local people (including those working in tourism)
- Build on the region's existing strengths
- Create a long-term and sustainable tourism industry

A major element of the regional approach is the development of a series of regional "destination brands" for the South West. Each will be underpinned by a "destination management organisation" designed to integrate visitor marketing and brand management by all the public and private sector stakeholders. Significantly Somerset is one of these "destination brands". "Towards 2015" also proposes a major change of emphasis, prioritising quality and a move away from destination to experience marketing.

4 The Policy Context for Mendip's Economy

4.8.6 Market Towns and Rural Centres Sub-Economy

KEY CHARACTERISTICS	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS	KEY BUSINESS SECTORS	PRIORITIES FOR THIS SUB ECONOMY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Somerset's dispersed geography means its market towns and rural centres account for a high proportion of the County's GVA Their economic development has been driven mainly by indigenous growth (limited past inward investment) Many of Somerset's market towns are currently dependent on a limited range of employers and traditional, sometimes declining, business sectors. Corresponding relatively narrow skills base Strong inter-relationships with larger centres outside of Somerset (particularly for towns in Mendip) Limited accessibility to national road and rail communication routes (examples including the accessibility of central and the "coastal strip" of Western Somerset) <p>Strong character; environmental quality and heritage of historic town centres but declining retail role and capacity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing accessibility via ICT technologies and e-adoption A "ripple effect" of growth driven by over-heating in adjoining larger regional centres Identifying and targeting local growth sectors; particularly "niche" and higher value added activities. Broaden and improve local skills including basic skills and knowledge base while retaining existing specialisms Small scale but high value inward investment, linked to "niches" within opportunity sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk of RSS concentrating growth and infrastructure improvement in larger regional centres Increasing retail concentration undermining town centre viability Most towns vulnerable to continuing manufacturing decline and low knowledge base of activity Constraints on future competitiveness (employment land supply, limited speculative development and transport accessibility) Key company closures and the difficulties of securing replacement investment and jobs of comparable quality) 	<p>Current key sectors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engineering Food and drink Other manufacturing Public Services <p>Opportunity Sectors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICT Environmental Technologies Creative Industries Tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Widening the economic base of Somerset's market towns through sectoral diversification Targeted intervention and effective LDF policies so that through section 106 agreements and limited available public funding connections to national transport links are improved (including the A39, A358 and A361) Define future role of town centres and promote their regeneration Improving and broadening local skills, including basic skills and increase levels of knowledge workers Ensuring suitable future employment land supply and work space Providing opportunities for business incubation, particularly linked to targeted local growth sectors. Targeted approach to attracting small scale high value inward investment (In identified opportunity sectors)

4 The Policy Context for Mendip's Economy

The challenge for the Mendip area is to be a recognised component of the Somerset brand.

4.8.7 The Somerset Learning and Skills Strategic Plan 2002–05

This plan addresses the needs and priorities for Somerset in the context of national and regional strategy for learning and skills. It identifies three priorities:

- Skills strategy. Developing a flexible and effective Somerset workforce responsive to future employer needs and the economy;
- Participation strategy. Creating a learning culture for all in Somerset; and
- Learning strategy. Achieving broad access to high quality learning opportunities.

Summary

Key South West regional policy issues:

- There is a strong regional framework
- The Regional Spatial Strategy presents a challenge to Mendip's market towns because of their economic vulnerability and significant role. Furthermore, with the reduction of housing numbers for Mendip to an annualised average rate of 360 this presents opportunities but could also restrict the labour supply and potential funding allocations for infrastructure could be diverted away. It will be important to capitalise on the economic growth in Bristol and Bath without becoming a dormitory area.
- The Regional Economic Strategy has identified particular themes to developing successful and competitive businesses and adopted a sectoral approach to the economy for assisting growth and adapting the economy
- There is a close fit between the Somerset Economic Strategy priority sectors and the key regional sectors identified in the Regional Economic Strategy.
- The Somerset Economic Strategy analysis of the market towns and rural sub economy is applicable to the situation within the Mendip area. A strategic objective of the strategy is to revitalise the economy of Somerset's market towns and rural communities; and
- Strategic marketing opportunities arising from Somerset's identification as one of the South West's key destination brands for tourism development. The implication for the Mendip area is to be a recognised component of the Somerset brand.
- There is a changing emphasis within tourism, prioritising quality and moving towards experience marketing.

4 The Policy Context for Mendip's Economy

4.9 National context

4.9.1 Local Area Agreements

Local area agreements (LAA) are made between central and local government in a local area. Their aim is to achieve local solutions that meet local needs, whilst also contributing to national priorities and the achievement of standards set by central government. Local Area Agreements will deliver national outcomes in a way that reflects local priorities identified in the (local) Community Strategy

Presently, the Government provides funding through a wide range of separate programmes to public sector organisations who are often working towards common goals. LAA's allow Local Authorities (at all levels) and their partners to agree a core of set outcomes which brings together funding to achieve them, reducing bureaucracy and increasing efficiency.

Somerset County Council on behalf of the Somerset Strategic Partnership (SSP) submitted the successful bid to be a pilot for round two of the Government's Local Area Agreement roll-out. Somerset County Council is the accountable body. Each LAA has a three year life span. Engaging partners fully in the LAA process is a prerequisite to a functioning agreement.

The LAA is negotiated with the Regional Government Office. Once the LAA outcomes are agreed, the Local Authorities and their partners will be able to negotiate freedoms to prioritise spending within each block to meet the outcomes agreed in the LAA and decide which funding streams to use to achieve their proposed outcomes. Funding for the LAA will go to the County Council to be used by all the partners.

There will be a set of Performance Indicators for each block and each area will also agree on their own Performance Indicators. Areas will develop performance management arrangements to gauge their progress against the LAA.

LAA's are structured around four blocks, one of which is called "Economic Development and Enterprise". Within this block, a draft list of LAA outcomes are centred on the following themes:

- Increase investment levels and business competitiveness
- Increase growth and sustainability of small businesses in Somerset
- More sustainable Somerset rural economy
- Reduce worklessness and increase skills levels across Somerset's population

4.9.2 Rural Strategy (2004)

The Government's Rural Strategy sets out its future policy agenda for rural England. Economic and social regeneration is one of the Strategy's three priorities. The Government will achieve this by building on the economic success of the majority of rural areas and tackling structural economic weaknesses in the remaining parts of rural England. Priorities across rural England include increasing access and take-up of learning opportunities, improving the quality and accessibility of services and making rural planning policies more flexible.

Additional targeted support for economically lagging rural areas is available to stimulate enterprise and increase productivity. Accompanying these plans are additional resources from DEFRA for RDAs and Government Offices to manage rural economic and social programmes. Greater responsibility for their delivery will be devolved to local authorities, Community Councils and the voluntary sector for local delivery of funding programmes.

4.9.3 Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy (2002)

The Rural Strategy emphasises the importance of the Government's Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy (2002). This Strategy sets out a holistic vision of industry, government and consumers working together for a sustainable future for farming and food. The Strategy

4 The Policy Context for Mendip's Economy

highlights the importance of reconnecting farm businesses and food producers with their consumers, the promotion of higher added value produce, quality assurance schemes, support for farm diversification and advisory

services to help businesses adapt to change. £500 million was committed by DEFRA for the Strategy's implementation and stakeholders in each region have been asked to identify their priorities.

Summary

Key national policy issues

- There are emerging opportunities for greater local integration and devolved delivery of national funding streams and locally set regeneration priorities through Local Area Agreements
- The themes developed in the Economic Development and Enterprise Block of the LAA are relevant to the Mendip area
- The Government's Rural Strategy emphasises improving the quality and accessibility of rural business support services and creating greater added value in the rural economy



5 Key themes relevant to Mendip

The Mendip area is characterised by five market towns of varying sizes from Frome (population 24,500 Census 2001) to the smallest Shepton Mallet (population 8,800 Census 2001). These settlements are all unique with a rich heritage set within a diverse landscape. The market towns are important local service centres serving the rural hinterland.

The principal factors that characterise the Mendip economy are a predominance of small to medium sized enterprises which is healthy and robust with some growth in emerging sectors. Growth in the local economy has been from largely within the District. There has been a progressive decline in traditional manufacturing. The market towns have tended to have a few large employers. Tourism makes a significant contribution to the local economy.

The policy context shows that there is a well defined regional framework within which the Mendip area sits. This will determine to a large extent where and the extent of future economic growth. The market towns have an important function but at the same time are vulnerable.

Some of the key themes drawn from the policy framework are:

- Increase investment levels by promoting and enhancing what is best about the region, maximising the long term investment attractiveness and dynamism of Somerset's economy
- Increase growth and sustainability of small businesses
- Support business productivity, business competitiveness and retain existing businesses
- Encourage new enterprise and promote new innovation
- Increase skill levels and reduce worklessness by inspiring people to improve their employability skills and to increase access to economic opportunities for all residents
- A sectoral approach in parts of the economy which have growth potential or

need support to adapt such as tourism, food and drink, creative industries, ICT and environmental technologies

- Focus on market towns for meeting local development needs and to revitalise the economy of market towns and rural communities.
- More efficient and responsive rural delivery, increase diversity of rural economy. A more sustainable rural economy
- To develop an effective and confident region by improving transport networks,
- Protect the environment and improve the quality of life of local people
- Build upon the area's existing strengths
- Create a long-term and sustainable tourism industry; and
- Develop tourism in Mendip as part of a Somerset wide partnership or organisation

The District Council and the Mendip Strategic Partnership are committed to putting the local economy on to a sustainable footing and are working in partnership to achieve this. There is a plethora of economic regeneration work currently underway which is presently uncoordinated with no long term vision.

From an analysis of the economic profile of the Mendip area, the context of the policy framework and the work carried out with the business leaders and business community, an over arching aim was identified. The aim is:

“To create a more enterprising and business friendly culture in the Mendip area”

With the following objectives:

- Promoting Mendip as an attractive, sustainable location for business
- Ensuring that businesses are effectively supported
- Improving skills
- Improving prosperity and vibrancy in the towns, villages and the countryside
- Developing the tourism sector in a sustainable way
- Proactively addressing transport and infrastructure

5 Key themes relevant to Mendip

Summary

- The Mendip area is characterised by market towns which are unique with a rich heritage set within a diverse landscape. They are important service centres to the surrounding rural areas.
- The economy has a predominance of small to medium sized businesses which are robust and healthy
- There are strategic themes within the policy context which are directly relevant to the Mendip economy
- The aspirations and needs of the business community have been recognised and have inputted into developing an overarching aim and key objectives



6 Implementation and the next steps

The key objectives have been developed into a draft action plan which is for a five year period. It provides a first impression of the sorts of actions needed to address the issues outlined in the main part of the economic strategy. This is set out in a separate document.

6.1 Implementation

In most instances, taking the steps outlined in the action framework will require an integrated and partnership approach. The action plan builds upon a range of key initiatives some of which are already defined by other key partners.

The delivery of the action plan is dependent upon the ability of key partners to agree collective priorities and to commit to the long term implementation of these priorities. Clearly, a strong culture of co-operation and partnership is already established in the Mendip area and this provides the foundation for a greater degree of joint working.

Good progress has already been made on partnerships such as the 'Mendip Business Exchange' programme, which involves close working with the Mendip Association of the Chambers of Commerce, the individual Chambers and the Federation of Small Businesses. It is a good model for working with and supporting the business community. There are possibilities that this arrangement could be developed further in order to maintain its impetus.

It is essential that focus is given to priorities which warrant collective action either in avoiding duplication or where planning and or delivery of initiatives adds significant value.

In taking the strategy forward, it will be important to build in a regular review process and to ensure that strategic objectives and associated actions continue to be justified. Furthermore, implementation of the actions will involve a more complex and involved process of partnership working which will include commitment of time, knowledge,

expertise and financial resources.

The key objectives and the action plan have been developed with the business leaders and have been supported by the business community. The action plan contains a lot of activities to be fulfilled over the next 5 years and perhaps beyond which clearly one organisation can not achieve. It is intended that Mendip District Council will draw up its own delivery plan as to how the organisation will meet the aspirations of the action plan. The local authority is just one influence on the economy but it is one that can that the district authority itself can control. There are aspects of the action plan that the local authority by its very nature can only exercise minimal involvement such as improving skills whereas the District Council can play a significant role in promoting tourism in a sustainable way and ensuring that business is effectively supported and that there is a supply of sustainable sites for employment uses. The other Mendip Strategic Partnership partners will need to decide how they wish to interpret the action plan and what resources they are able to commit to it. The key message is that the action plan has been endorsed by the business community and provides a framework for reaching common goals for the economy of the Mendip area.

Whilst it is the intention that Mendip District Council would seek to deliver its own delivery plan for the implementation of the actions. This doesn't preclude partnership working. Neither is the action plan static. It will continue to evolve as situations and circumstances alter. A good example of how the action plan is already being implemented is through the business leaders group who are already working on one of the actions identified. This is the development of a web site to promote business investment. This is being led by the Mendip Association of the Chambers of Commerce and being supported and assisted by the Mendip Strategic Partnership and Mendip District Council.

Once a delivery plan and mechanism has been

6 Implementation and the next steps

established for the draft action plan, it will be possible to set timeframes for achievements and for monitoring progress. Performance indicators such as the increase of VAT registered businesses per 10,000 population compared to the UK or the percentage of Area Regeneration Actions Plans implemented may be used.

This economic strategy provides a vision for

the next five years to create a more enterprising and business friendly culture in the Mendip area. Through the six key objectives, an action plan has been drawn up which would form the basis of delivery plans for Mendip District Council and the other partners within the Mendip Strategic Partnership and provides a common and co-ordinated framework for further partnership working.



References

Documents

- Somerset Local Area Agreement Final draft Feb 2006
- A Community Strategy for Mendip Strategic Partnership December 2005
- Somerset Economic Strategy by Somerset Strategic Partnership 2006
- Regional Economic Strategy for the South West of England 2006–2015 Final draft February 2006
- “Mendip Means Business” seminar held in December 2005 with representatives of the business community.
- Economic regeneration performance indicators Audit Commission November 2005
- Mendip Employment Land and Premises Demand and Supply Study by The Langdon Partnership March 2005
- Mendip District Monitoring Report 2004/2005 – Mendip District Council
- Mendip Spatial Patterns “ An Analysis of Spatial variances in Social, Economic and Environmental factors in Mendip District Version 1 – an overview of the District” – Mendip District Council
- Employment land reviews – Guidance Note ODPM 2004
- South West Tourism Strategy – “Towards 2015”
- “At the Crossroads” – Shepton Mallet and Surrounding Areas Community Strategic Plan 2006 – 2021 – Shepton 21
- The Glastonbury Town Plan

Websites

- Mendip District Council: www.mendip.gov.uk
- Somerset County Council: www.somerset.gov.uk
- South West Regional Development Agency: www.southwestrda.org.uk
- South West Tourism: www.swtourism.co.uk
- National Statistics: www.statistics.gov.uk



Representatives on the Business Leaders Group

“Mendip Means Business“

Cllr Ken Maddock – Leader MDC

Cllr Harvey Siggs – Deputy Leader MDC

Stephanie Little – MACOC/ Butler and Tanner (Frome)

Penny Baker – MACOC/ MSP

Mary Parker – Glastonbury Chamber of Commerce

Paul Knight/ Philip Eavis – Street Chamber of Trade

Jo Christoforides – Shepton Chamber of Commerce

Sally Robertson – Wells Chamber of Commerce

Roger Dollins – FSB (Wells)

Ian Burt – Burcott Mill and Mendip Tourism Advisory Panel (Wells)

Phillip Tincknell – R J Tincknell & Son (Wells)

Zena Pollard – Barclays Bank (Shepton)

Paul Hooper/Jill Cross – Bath & West Society (Shepton)

Chris Eden – Cooper & Tanner (Frome)

Jenny Rowe – Dreweatt and Neate (Frome)

Mike Craig – Deputy Bursar, Millfield School (Street)

Derek Groves – Business Link Somerset (Agency)

Alan Madge – Jobcentre Plus (Agency)

Beatrice Beer – Learning Skills Council/ Training Station (Agency)

Tony Martin – Strode College

Malcolm Williams, Sara Skirton, Georgina Dickens, Alison Herbert & Rupert Cox – (MDC in support)

Actions from Mendip Business Exchange event 26 January 2006

The following tables identify the key actions that were identified at the Mendip business exchange event for each of the objective areas. Each action has been prioritised by the voting cast on the night by the 70 business people present. Alongside each action a short explanation has been provided to say how that action has been taken forward. In some instances there is a direct link to the action plan in the economic strategy, others there is a direct link but under a different objective and some where it may be inappropriate to include within an economic strategy. Many of the suggestions as to how the actions are to be taken forward are from a Mendip District Council perspective or highlight something that Mendip District Council is currently doing simply because unable to commit other organisations without their agreement

Objective: To ensure business is effectively supported

Action	How taken forward
Parking- flexible- staff and customers (12 votes)	No change to the price of season tickets this year. MDC will be undertaking a strategic review of car parking prices next year. The business community will be consulted upon this.
Signage and cleanliness in towns and trading estates (11 votes)	Improved signage on industrial estates included in economic strategy. MDC and other organisations can help to facilitate businesses improve their marketing and promotion. As regards cleanliness in towns, MDC has a new contract with Connaught. Work is under way to make improvements into signage such as improving signage into Glastonbury from the relief road.
Communication needs improving for all businesses and all agencies (10 votes)	Included in economic strategy. Also, useful Business Link newsletter
Better and more effective business network for Mendip businesses (10 votes)	Included in economic strategy. Chambers involvement.
Business Information Pack- attract business, support local business and info on support groups (9 votes)	Included in economic strategy. Mendip Business Exchange could produce a pack of information specifically aimed at businesses. Similarly, a tourism pack could be put together.

Appendix B

Action	How taken forward
Business rates – lobby govt for a fairer system – better value for money (9 votes)	More of a role for a political advocate. Also, a communications issue in terms of making people aware of where the money goes. MDC are the collectors but not the total recipients. MDC mail out to eligible businesses the possibility of “Small Business Rate Relief”. The availability of Small Business Rate Relief would be included within the business information pack. A new scheme called the Local Authority Business Growth Incentives (LABGI) means that a proportion of any growth in receipts of non domestic rates over a baseline figure may be retained by MDC and SCC
Promote doing business in Mendip (9 votes)	Addressed in ES under “promoting Mendip as an attractive, sustainable location for business”

Objective: Deliver a supply of sustainable sites and premises for business growth and new businesses

Action	How taken forward
Fast track business related planning applications to prevent delay (20 votes)	This is currently operational and forms part of the Business Ambassador Service provided by MDC. Continued support and development of this is recommended in the economic strategy in “promoting Mendip as an attractive, sustainable location for business”. Also, cascade developing good practice in “ensuring business is effectively supported”
Provide diverse business accommodation (larger, small, cheap, quality) (14 votes)	ES. Important to review what currently have and to protect existing sites. MDC proactively works on larger sites to facilitate them coming forward on to the market. There is also a role for the Local Development Framework (LDF) in bringing new sites forward
Adopt more flexible approach to dealing with rural buildings (12 votes)	ES. There is a role for the LDF in terms of a more dynamic policy for the re-use of rural buildings to ensure a consistent approach.
Make it easier to trade from home and ‘non-business’ locations (e.g. farms) (10 votes)	Links in with above.
Pro active discussions with big business before they threaten to move out (9 votes)	Addressed in ES through continual development of the business ambassador service and developing dialogue.

Appendix B

Action	How taken forward
Protect existing employment sites (land and premises) (9 votes)	Addressed in ES under “promoting Mendip as an attractive, sustainable location for business”

Objective: Improve skills of the workforce

Action	How taken forward
Knowing how to access business support (20 votes)	Addressed in ES under “to ensure business is effectively supported”. Improve communication and sign posting of businesses
Closer links between schools and businesses (18 votes)	ES such as Young Enterprise Scheme
Understanding local available training (13 votes)	ES
Bringing training to the business (12 votes)	ES
Understanding current skills qualifications	Perhaps should be addressed through MSP and its partners

Objective: Maximise the take up and exploitation of ICT for business

Note: this group merged with the improving skills of the workforce group

Objective: Improve prosperity and vibrancy in the towns, villages and the countryside

Action	How taken forward
Positive action to keep young people in area – housing/ employment (16 votes)	Affordable housing issues addressed in MDC Housing Strategy. Employment skills mismatch addressed in ES under “Improve skills of the workforce”. Promotion of SWRDA key sectors important. Especially to orientate marketing to perceived sectors of growth
Support local enterprises – Markets/ Village Fairer parking policy (12 votes)	ES MDC undertaking a strategic car parking review next year
Roads/Public transport/signage (10 votes)	Local problems can and are dealt with by the Area Regeneration Officers. Somerset County Council are the arbiters of implementation. “Welcome to Mendip” signs on major gateway roads reinforce the identity of Mendip. Industrial signage improvements could be made.

Appendix B

Assistance for start up/small businesses (7 votes)	Addressed in ES under “to ensure business is effectively supported”. There is some assistance such as the Small Business Rates Relief. MDC do inform those applicable with a letter. There is also the possibility of Hardship Relief. MDC fund Business Link start up courses, workshops and grants in Mendip area.
Higher profile community policing and safety (7 votes)	ES. Jointly run Police and MDC Community Safety Partnership. Business initiatives such as Radiolink. Business Crime Reduction. Glastonbury achieved several awards at the 2006 Partnership Excellence Awards for Community Watch.
Increased use of technology e.g. broadband &	Addressed in ES under “maximise the take up and exploitation of ICT for business”

Objective: Promoting Mendip as an attractive, sustainable location for business

Action	How taken forward
Promote what Mendip has (17 votes)	ES. Marketing and promotional strategy/ inward investment strategy
Small businesses are the future (15 votes)	Addressed under “to ensure business is effectively supported”
Identify a brand for Mendip (11 votes)	ES. Promote Mendip as a place to be and a place to do business. Badging Mendip as a “Gateway to Somerset and/ or to the South West”
Technology IT/WEB/Broadband very important (10 votes)	Addressed in ES under “maximise the take up and exploitation of ICT for business”
Good educational base and a place for ‘lifestyle’ living (10 votes)	ES – unique selling points for Mendip. Part of a marketing and promotional strategy.
Enhance current business sites (8 votes)	Addressed under “to ensure business is effectively supported” and “deliver a supply of sustainable sites and premises for business growth and new businesses”. Tidy them up high design quality
Encouraging entrepreneurialism in a ‘stress free’ environment (7 votes)	ES – unique selling points for Mendip. Part of a marketing and promotional strategy.
Pool of employees to save commuting (2 votes)	Provide diverse employment opportunities/ sites and housing. However, freedom of choice. Sustainability is an issue that will be addressed in the LDF.

Appendix B

Objective: Develop the Tourism sector in a sustainable way

Action	How taken forward
First impressions – car parks, toilets, sign drink festivals) (11 votes)	MDC are developing a car parking strategy and looking at the enhancement of a visitor/ premier car park per town. Improving facilities.
Promote/Create more festivals (food and drink festivals) (11 votes)	ES. Lots of existing festivals that could be developed further such as the inclusion of Street in the Tor Dance Festival. The creation of other festivals such as one centred on walking in the Shepton area.
Promote Mendip as part of Somerset (stronger image) (10 votes)	ES. Destination Management.
More press + PR visits – more coverage (10 votes)	Addressed in ES under “promoting Mendip as an attractive, sustainable location for business“. In house PR – capitalise Building upon Somerset Tourism Partnership promoting towns, themes. Destination Wells. Encourage travel writers
Capitalise on Bath & West Showground as a major draw for events (9 votes)	ES. Promotion of events to encourage visitors Dialogue with Bath and West for better promotion.
TICs good resource – more effective joint working (6 votes)	ES. Review of TIC’s currently on going
Promote events (and off season) (4 votes)	ES. Premier events do we promote them enough? Publications and web sites. Marketing the market towns. History and heritage and themes eg walking
Improve ‘quality’- accommodation accreditations (4 votes)	ES. “Quality in Tourism“ new national accreditation system. Accommodation providers need to keep up to date with new legislation such as changes to fire regulations.

Objective: Be proactive in addressing transport and infrastructure

Action	How taken forward
Out of town parking (free) (14 votes)	MDC undertaking a strategic review of car parking prices next year
Links to motorway/A303 (12 votes)	MDC advocacy role – strategic intervention and forums
Better bus/rail links (12 votes)	ES. Maintain and support the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership

Appendix B

Improve signage (e.g. business locations) (11 votes)	Addressed under “to ensure business is effectively supported”
Joined up thinking- 5 Districts and County Council (8 votes)	MDC involved in strategic forum events. Continue dialogue with MSP. Political role for advocacy and lobbying.
Designated lorry routes (3 votes)	LTP and Somerset Strategic Partnership working with quarry producers and quarry user groups. Political role for advocacy.
Car sharing- co-ordinate- via web (3 votes)	Car parking. MDC has a requirement for the submission of travel assessment plans in planning applications and encourage green travel plans
Home/virtual working (3 votes)	Support ICT – broadband. Included in ES under “maximise the take up and exploitation of ICT”. Flexibility in determining planning applications
Locate jobs near houses (2 votes)	A role for the Local Development Framework

Abbreviations used

ES – Economic Strategy

MDC – Mendip District Council

SCC – Somerset County Council

