

## **Abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies Implications for the Core Strategy Recommendation from Hockley Residents Association**

Hockley Residents Association (HRA) recognises that a well thought-out, sustainable strategic plan is essential to positive development of the District.

It also believes that the abolition of regional spatial strategies will provide Rochford District Council (RDC) with the opportunity to replace the existing, proposed Core Strategy (CS) with a plan that is more:

- Appropriate and sustainable in terms of numbers and locations
- feasible in terms of infrastructure and properly costed
- transparent to both residents and businesses
- resident friendly with reference to retaining the greenbelt and countryside that makes the district a highly desirable place to live.

However, the HRA is concerned that RDC may simply proceed with a cut-down version of the existing proposed CS and implement proposals that are not balanced across the District and will further adversely affect the existing inadequate infrastructure.

The existing CS proposals are founded, according to RDC, on the basis of "catering for the needs of all communities". If a cut-down version of the existing proposals were to be adopted, it could result in:

- an imbalance of greenfield sites over brownfield sites (as brownfield sites cannot be vacated and delivered in the short term)
- an imbalance in the geographical spread of housing (e.g. the vast majority of the housing identified for the first 5 years of the existing plan is centred on greenbelt sites clustered in a small area on the Rochford/ Hawkwell/ Ashingdon borders). A focus on this small area would not achieve RDC's stated aim of providing sustainable housing development across the whole District.
- Distorted levels of Standard Charges across the District meaning that essential infrastructure improvements will not be affordable or that developments in latter stages of the plan will bear disproportionate level of the total costs, thus skewing house prices.

Accordingly, the HRA strongly believes that a further revision of the CS proposals are essential and should be completed as a matter of urgency to set-out a revised vision and phasing.

### **Infrastructure**

The majority of houses proposed in the Core Strategy are to the north and east of Rayleigh. It is essential that a feasible plan for highways and traffic to the east of Rayleigh is established by Rochford District Council and Essex County Council, and in place before any major housing developments.

The main arteries throughout Hockley, Hawkwell and Rochford (B1013, Spa Road, Southend Road, Rectory Road and Hall Road) are highly utilised, especially during peak hours. They are not only used by local residents but as a through route for people living to the east of Rochford as a short cut and to avoid the A127. These roads were constructed when the districts were villages, and are single lane in each

direction with minimal overtaking opportunities that are required to avoid the chaos created by a mix of traffic including delivery trucks, waste collection vehicles, vans, cars, bicycles and horses. There is restricted pavement space for pedestrians and no space for cycle paths.

In addition, the six railway bridges in Rayleigh, Hambro Hill, Hockley (Church Road and Spa Road), Rectory Road, Hawkwell and Rochford (Hall Road) were constructed when the districts were villages and traffic was negligible. They are all very narrow with little or no opportunity for widening. The bridge in Rectory Road is so narrow that it is controlled by traffic lights, allowing traffic to pass in one direction at a time. The pavements under the bridges are very narrow and dangerous for pedestrians, especially for prams, children and mobility vehicles.

Other infrastructure concerns that must be considered include:

- Doctor/Dentist to patient ratios that are already the worst in South East Essex
- Provision of additional school places
- Provision of drainage and sewage facilities
- Provision of utilities e.g. gas, water, electricity
- Provision of services e.g. waste removal, highway maintenance, street cleaning
- Provision of adequate parking facilities.

Realistic costings need to be developed in order to identify the level of Standard Charges that need to be applied across the whole District over the life of the CS.

### **Transparency**

The current version of the CS uses a numbers of misleading descriptions (e.g. Rayleigh is really Rawreth; Ashingdon is really Rochford; South Hawkwell is really West Hawkwell). There is no good reason for this and the locations should be made clear.

The method used for assessing the need for extra housing plus the method used to establish the allocation of locations and sites within locations must be logical and clearly defined.

The number of houses per location must be shown in total with more detail for residents and not 'hidden' in appendices. There are two clear examples of this in the Core Strategy.

The majority of residents in Hockley have been led to believe that only 50 additional houses are planned, all to the west of the town. In reality there are 200 houses planned for Hockley, i.e. four times the number shown in the tables. The 50 houses shown in the tables do not include the 150 proposed for Eldon Way/Foundry Industrial Estates which are shown in an appendix.

A similar situation exists with the Rayleigh numbers. The numbers shown in the table do not include 230 houses planned for Rawreth Industrial Estate, i.e. about 40% higher than the number recognised by the majority of Rayleigh/Rawreth residents.

Both these scenarios lead to the loss of considerable greenbelt in other areas to provide new Industrial Estates.

The CS needs to be redrafted to make the implications clear.

## **Countryside**

The central locations of Rochford District are highly desirable residential areas due to the lovely countryside which includes woods, footpaths, bridleways, nature reserves, farmland and other open spaces.

Whereas the individual locations used to be villages in a rural setting, they have grown into small towns in a semi-rural setting.

Further housing development consistent with the numbers shown in the Core Strategy will destroy the habitat and lead to urbanisation of the district. This has been overlooked by the planning department and no reason given..

Rochford District has many more appropriate locations that would not destroy natural countryside to the same degree, and these must be considered, especially if the total quantum of housing is reduced.

Brian Guyett  
Chairman, Hockley Residents Association