

Local Development Framework

Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan Submission Document (Post Pre-Submission Consultation)

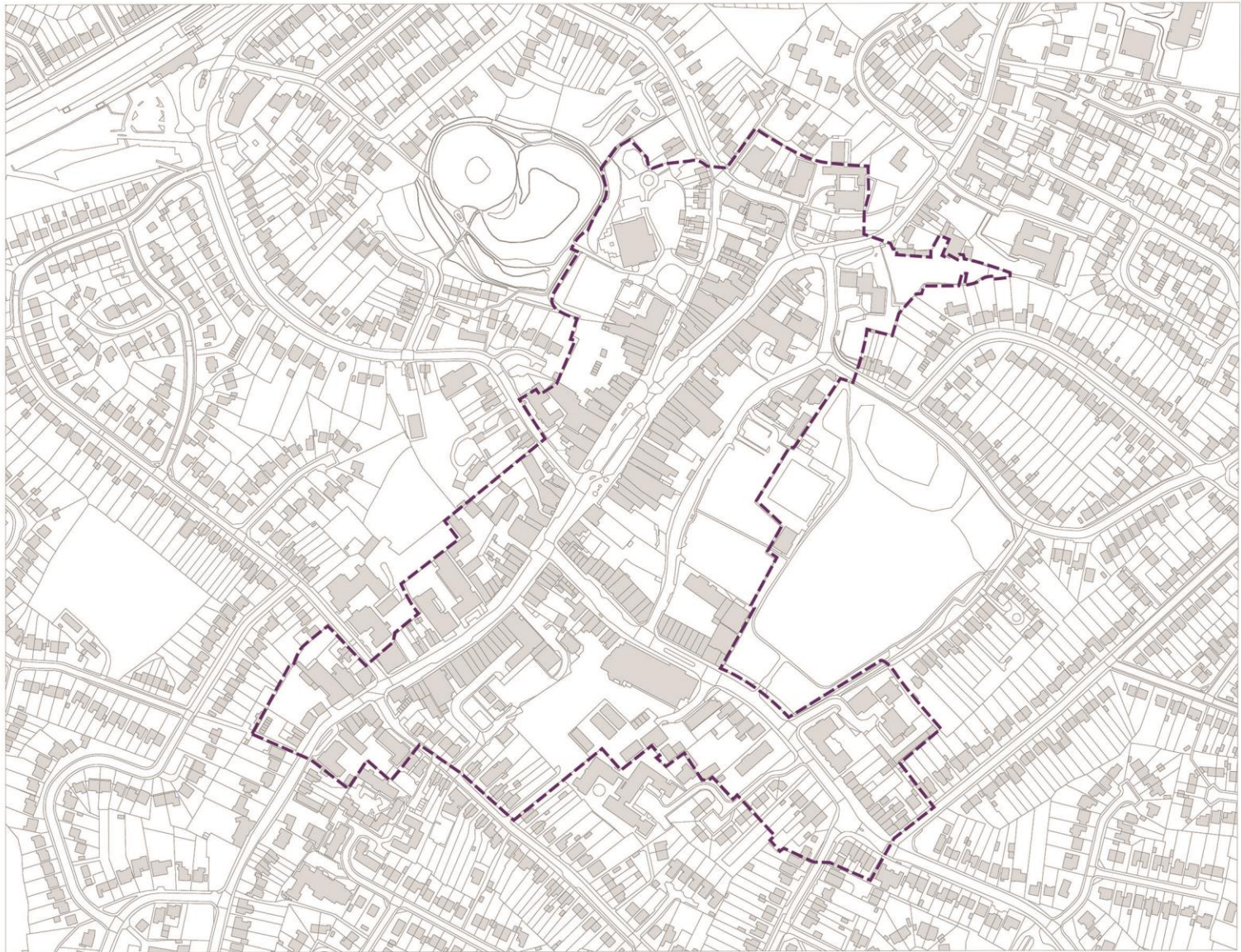


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Figure 1 – Rayleigh centre and AAP area

1. Introduction

1.1 The big picture

Rochford District Council is committed to preparing Area Action Plans (AAP) for its three main centres of Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley. The AAPs will form part of the statutory development plan for Rochford District. This document focuses on guiding the development of Rayleigh town centre, and also considers its immediate surrounds.

The Core Strategy recognises the existing successes of Rayleigh town centre, including its role as Rochford District's principal centre and strong retail sector, and high quality, historic environment. Although it is made clear that radical changes to the town centre are not necessary, the Core Strategy does set out the need for additional leisure uses and extra retail floorspace. It is important that the AAP provides a framework for development that will build on Rayleigh town centre's existing strengths and allow for development that will enhance its current offer.

The AAP will, if adopted, form a part of the District's Development Plan. Alongside the adopted Core Strategy and other key planning documents, the AAP will eventually replace the existing Replacement Local Plan (2006).

1.2 Next steps

This version of the AAP will be published and placed on deposit prior to an Examination in Public (EiP). If the AAP is found sound at the EiP, it will be adopted.

Once adopted, the AAP will be used as a framework for the development of Rayleigh and in the determination of planning applications. It will be subject to the normal processes of monitoring and review.

Any representations on this version of the Rayleigh AAP should be sent to Rochford District Council.

1.3 Working with our community

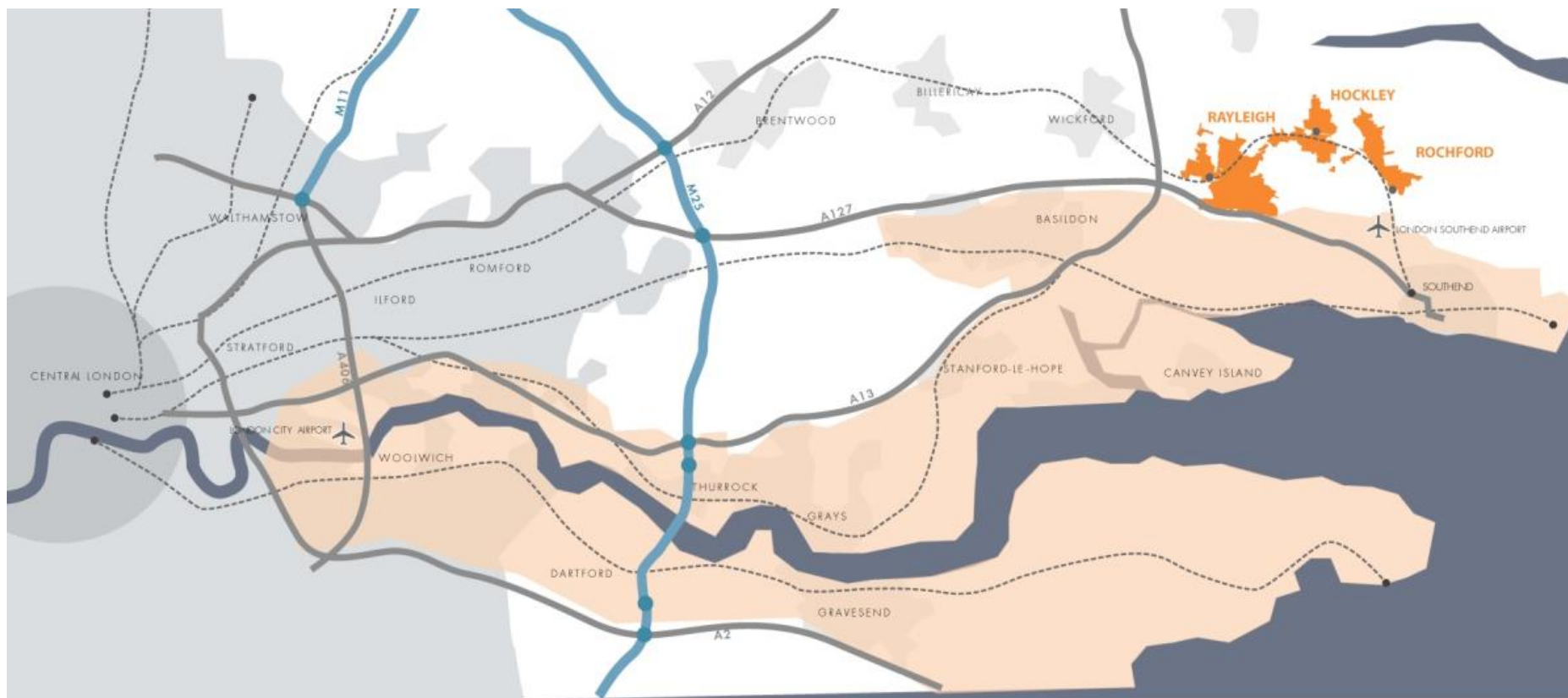
In recent years a series of community engagement and consultation exercises have been undertaken in relation to Rayleigh. These have been in support of the production of the Rayleigh AAP and the Core Strategy for the District. The AAP has been informed through its various stages by the responses received to these exercises, which have included:

- A Placecheck and letter drop, as well as additional meetings with Council Members, undertaken to inform the preparation of the Rayleigh AAP Issues and Options paper.
- Consultations on the proposals set out within the Issues and Options paper.
- A consultation on the District's Core Strategy Submission Document that

yielded feedback specifically related to Rayleigh.

Most recently a further stage of consultation was held on the planning policy framework for Rayleigh that had emerged following the Issues and Options report. This was a public exhibition, which was held between 15 and 29 January 2013. A total of 44 response questionnaires were received as a result of the consultation and the key messages were that:

- Most of those that responded agreed that the planning policy framework should seek to strengthen Rayleigh's role as the District's principal town centre, and that retail uses should be focussed on High Street.
- There was resistance to a retail-led redevelopment of Websters Way car park and the construction of a multi-storey car park, which was considered likely to cause visual harm, have a negative impact on openness and cause security problems.
- A number of those that responded suggested that any large-scale development, if it does take place, should be for a leisure use, such as a cinema, swimming pool or another sports facility.



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Figure 2 – Rochford's regional context

- It was highlighted that the Council's recent Retail and Leisure Study demonstrated that there is no need for additional convenience retail in Rayleigh and that any allocation should be for comparison retail only.
- There was support for measures that would encourage and support small, independent shops and more market traders.
- Some of those that responded expressed their concern over the impact that more economic activity in the evening might have on crime rates and the fear of crime.
- Although there was strong support for enhancements that would help to promote the town's strong group of historic assets, there was opposition to Rayleigh Mount being used as a through route between High Street and the rail station.
- There was some support for the reduction in size of the taxi rank on High Street and its potential relocation, although some felt that the taxi rank's current location is appropriate and that it may need to accommodate more taxis in the future.
- There were mixed views over whether High Street should be pedestrianised and if traffic calming should take place or not, though it was generally agreed that traffic flow should be improved if new development does take place.

- Many considered that there was a need to ensure that the town centre would have enough car parking to allow it to compete with other destinations, especially out-of-town shopping centres.
- It was suggested that the planning policy framework should promote bus travel as a way of increasing the number of shoppers whilst avoiding extra pressure on car parks.

1.4 Working with our partners

Rochford District Council is working closely with its partners to ensure that the strategic and cross-boundary implications of the Rayleigh AAP are being fully explored and that any discussions will feed into its positive preparation. The Localism Act 2011 sets out a 'duty to co-operate', which requires such a process.

The main partner in relation to the AAP is Essex County Council (ECC), in relation to its role as Highways Authority for Rochford District and much of the wider area. In particular, conversations with ECC officers have allowed for the project team to identify new or proposed developments with a significant highways impact.

1.5 The AAP area

The AAP area is the same as the existing town centre. It includes the main section of High Street, Bellingham Lane, Websters Way, and Eastwood Road, as far as Queens Road. It also includes some sections of adjoining streets and the town's largest car park on Websters Way.

Rayleigh is Rochford District's principal centre and the retail offer in the AAP area reflects this status. Most of the ground floor units on High Street between Eastwood Road and Hockley Road are shops; other sections of High Street, in addition to Bellingham Lane and Eastwood Road, accommodate supporting uses, such as cafés, restaurants, pubs, other leisure uses and professional services. Websters Way and, to a lesser extent, Bellingham Lane play an important role in helping to provide access, servicing and car parking for buildings located on High Street.

Rayleigh Mount immediately adjoins the AAP area and forms a group of important heritage assets at the north end of High Street, with Holy Trinity Church and Rayleigh Windmill, which are within the area. The Dutch Cottage is also just outside of the AAP area, on the south side of Crown Hill.

The rail station is situated a short journey from the town centre itself and the AAP area, and can be accessed most directly via Crown Hill. It has a closer relationship with surrounding residential development than the town centre itself.



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Figure 3 – Rochford's district context

2. Rayleigh in context

This chapter sets out the planning and policy context within which the Rayleigh AAP will operate, including a review of key sections of the local planning evidence base.

2.1 Strategic location and local setting

Rayleigh is located on a peninsula bounded by the River Thames to the south, the River Crouch to the north and the North Sea to the east. It is to the north-west of Southend-on-Sea and east of Wickford and Basildon.

The town is the largest in the District and has relatively large residential areas to its south-east and north-west. Although it is closely related to other nearby residential areas within the Borough of Southend-on-Sea, it is surrounded by Metropolitan Green Belt. Within the District, Hockley and Rochford are located to the east of Rayleigh.

The Great Eastern rail connection between Southend-on-Sea and London Liverpool Street has a stop at Rayleigh and supports commuting into central London. The A127, A13 and A130 roads meet to the west of Rayleigh and provide access to the wider region, the motorway network and local attractors, including Southend-on-Sea, Basildon and Chelmsford.

2.2 Historical evolution and Conservation Area

Rayleigh grew up as a settlement at the foot of the Mount, which was the castle of Swein of Essex and mentioned in the 1086 Domesday Book. It is likely that Rayleigh was deliberately planned within the castle's earthworks.

The town's market dates back to before 1181, when it was first recorded, and would have traded locally produced goods such as pottery. The local economy was founded on the market. This explains the width of High Street, which was laid out to accommodate stalls; the presence of Holy Trinity Church at one end of the marketplace is also a characteristic feature.

Despite the Mount losing its military significance before the end of the 13th Century, the town spread as far as Eastwood Road in the south and the start of Hockley Road in the north during the medieval period. During the 17th and 18th Centuries, however, Rayleigh failed to prosper in the same way as other similar nearby towns located on major roads, such as Billericay and Chelmsford, and growth was relatively slow. It was not until the arrival of the Railway from London Liverpool Street in 1889 that the town attracted commuters and began to expand dramatically up until the start of the First World War. This growth resulted in farms, estates and the grounds of large house being sub-divided for development.

Following the Second World War a large number of unsympathetic developments took place, in an attempt to replace the existing smaller shops with more commercially suitable modern buildings. There was local concern at this pace of change and Rayleigh Civic Society was founded in 1963 to oppose inappropriate proposals.

Rayleigh Conservation Area was first designated in 1969 and originally included the Mount, High Street and Bellingham Lane, as well as Websters Way and other adjoining roads. It has since been revised to exclude some outlying areas, most notably the Websters Way car park and King George V Playing Fields. It is likely that the formation of the Civic Society and designation of the Conservation Area acted to prevent the wholesale replacement of Rayleigh's historic fabric.

2.3 Policy context

The Rayleigh AAP has been produced taking into account national and local planning policy, in addition to the various studies that supplement and inform this framework. This is to ensure that the AAP provides a robust policy framework for the future development of Rayleigh.



Rayleigh character

1. Holy Trinity Church, parts of which date from the 12th century, is a prominent landmark in the town
2. High Street and its taxi rank
3. The lower end of High Street, from outside the Police offices
4. High Street has a wide range of architectural styles
5. The Old White Horse on High Street is grade II listed
6. The Dutch Cottage, a Grade II listed building, in Crown Hill (outside the conservation area) was restored in 1984

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012. The NPPF has a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which is expanded upon by a number of core planning principles and more detailed policies.

In particular it is noted that the NPPF (Section 2) emphasises the importance of ensuring that local planning policies support the vitality and viability of town centres, and their role at the heart of communities. Practically this means that local planning authorities should promote a diverse retail offer and adopt a town centres first approach, which requires retail, leisure and entertainment, office, and arts, culture and tourism uses to locate in centres ahead of other alternatives.

Rochford Core Strategy (2011)

Rochford District Council adopted its Core Strategy document in December 2011. This sets out the overall development strategy for the District until 2025.

The Core Strategy's approach to centres and retail development is set out in policies RTC1 and RTC2. Respectively, these seek to strengthen and improve the retail offer of the District's main centres, including Hockley, and direct new retail development and other main town centre uses towards these locations through a sequential, town centres first approach.

The key Core Strategy policy in relation to the AAP is Policy RTC 4. This states that Rochford District Council, with partner organisations and landowners, will produce an AAP for Rayleigh's town centre, which retains its role as the District's principal town centre and delivers the following:

- Improved accessibility to and within the town centre.
- A safe and high quality environment for residents and visitors.
- A predominance of retail uses, including intensification of existing retail uses, which cater for a variety of needs.
- A range of evening leisure uses.
- The promotion of the provision of community facilities, including exploration of potential locations for a healthcare centre and, if appropriate, the delivery of such a facility.

Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan Issues and Options report

An Issues and Options report was published for the Rayleigh Town Centre AAP in 2009. This provides an analysis of the town centre's strengths and weaknesses and discusses a number of possible improvements for various key sites and locations. The options discussed included:

- A package of potential smaller-scale interventions, such as improvements to the public realm, alterations to building façades, the creation of better quality bus stop environments, the enhancement of gateway sites and the relocation of the existing taxi rank.
- The potential development of six key sites, with a range of options for difference scales of change from low-level improvements to major redevelopment.
- More retail space, including a new supermarket and units suitable for smaller shops.
- The potential for new developments that would create an active frontage along Websters Way, through the redevelopment of existing parking and service areas.
- The redevelopment of the existing Websters Way surface car park to provide a mix of uses and a multi-storey facility.
- Changes to the local road network and traffic circulation, with a focus on options for High Street, such as the creation of a shared space, its partial or full pedestrianisation, or the reintroduction of two-way traffic.



1



2



3

Rayleigh character

1. The established plane trees along High Street contribute significantly to its townscape character
2. The Millennium Clock in Rayleigh
3. Holy Trinity Church

Emerging Allocations (2012) and Development Management (2011) documents

The Council is in the process of preparing its Allocations and Development Management documents. The Allocations document has been submitted for examination and the Development Management document, was last published as a preferred options document in December 2011 and will be updated again soon prior to submission for examination.

The Allocations document includes Policy TCB1, which defines Rayleigh's town centre boundary and primary and secondary shopping frontages. However, the supporting text makes clear that the AAP may amend these allocations.

The Development Management document includes draft policies that deal with the development of centres. These include policies that seek to control the mix of uses, as well as the conversion of upper floors to residential accommodation.

Rayleigh Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (2007)

An appraisal and management plan was produced for Rayleigh Conservation Area in 2007, to assess its character and identify any potential improvements.

The appraisal identified Rayleigh's special character as being that of a "traditional market town which was established at the gates of a Norman castle". It notes the exceptionally wide High Street, and the good condition of the Mount and Holy Trinity Church. However, it also highlights the negative impact of unsympathetic 20th Century development on High Street and areas of poor quality townscape on Websters Way and Bellingham Lane.

The management plan includes a number of recommendations that would improve the Conservation Area. These include enhancements to shopfronts, improvements to the streetscene and the sensitive use of architectural style where new development takes place.

2.4 Retail issues

A Retail and Leisure Study for Rochford District was produced in August 2008 to form part of the local planning policy evidence base. It identified Rayleigh as the District's strongest town centre and demonstrated a significant future requirement for additional comparison floorspace.

Indeed, its key recommendation was that the Council adopt a supportive approach towards intensification within Rayleigh's town centre boundaries. It was also recommended that the Council supports the development of a greater range of supporting leisure facilities, provided that these are of an appropriate scale.

2.5 Employment issues

An Employment Land Study was produced for Rochford District in September 2008. This considered the current supply and quality of, and future need and demand for, employment space within the District. It forms part of the evidence base for Rochford District Council's local planning policies.

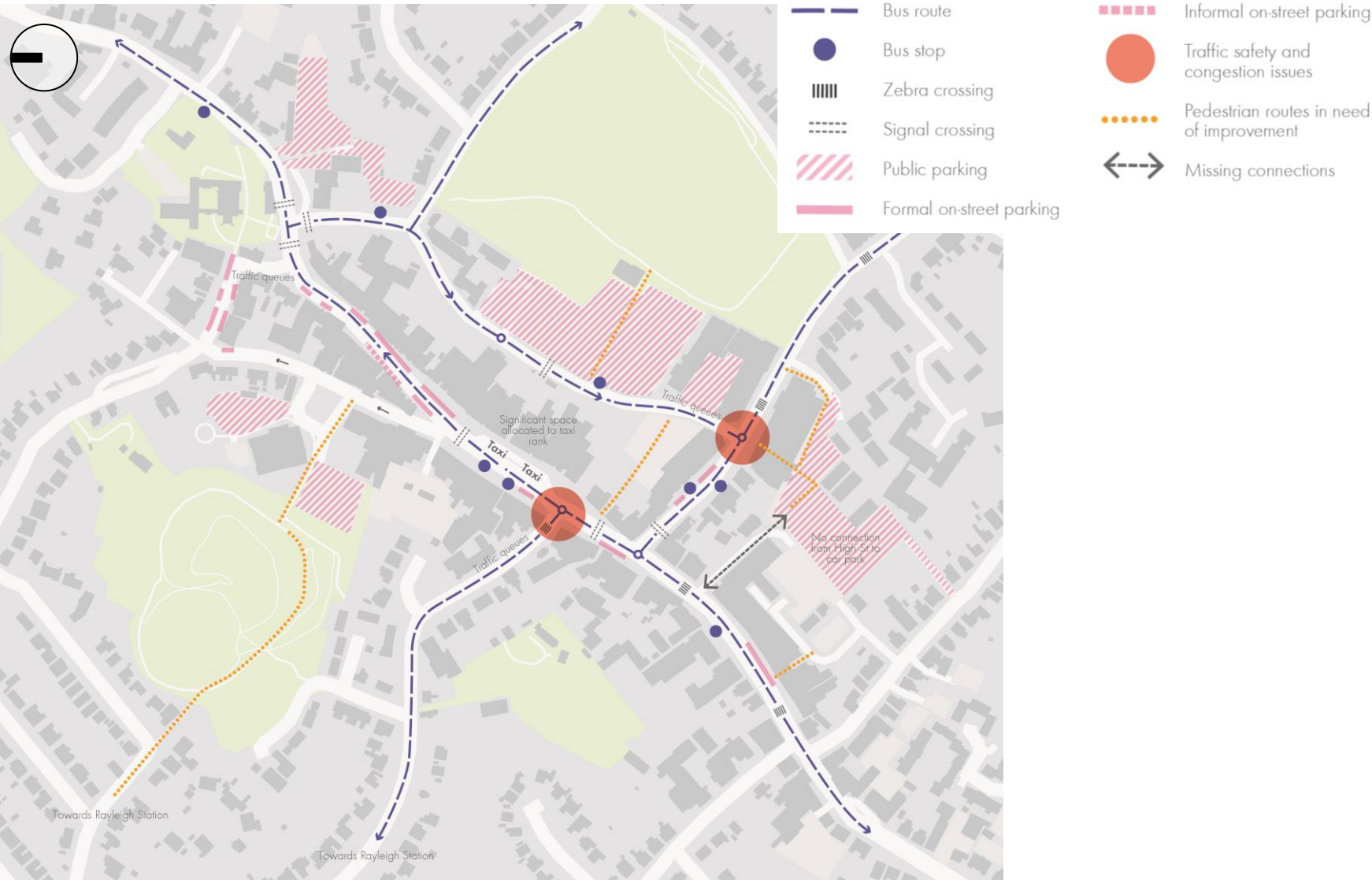
There are no allocated employment sites within the AAP area. However, the study considers the existing employment uses within the town centre and recommends that office uses should be encouraged given its strategic location.

2.6 Land ownership context

Freehold land ownership within the AAP area is highly fragmented. However, it is noted that the Council has control over Websters Way car park, which is a significant site on the edge of the town centre.

2.7 Property market overview

Despite general market uncertainty since the 2007 "credit crunch", there are certainly signs of increased activity – especially in London and the South-east, where developers and investors are beginning to re-enter the market place. A number of retailers have roll-out targets which they have been unable to meet due to the lack of development activity since 2007.



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Figure 4 – Movement issues in Rayleigh

However, such requirements are focussed on a select number of towns and both size and demographic profile of catchment populations are of paramount importance.

Rayleigh town centre is the largest shopping destination in Rochford District and qualitatively has a distinctive local identity and individuality with a good range of smaller independent and specialist retailers and national multiple retailers.

The headline findings from a comprehensive review of Rayleigh's property market were that:

- Rayleigh is successful as a town centre and appears to have withstood the recession relatively well.
- Improvements to the public realm would assist in attracting new investment and stimulating occupier demand.
- A number of the larger sites that were previously considered as development opportunities are either no longer available for development or would be prohibitively expensive to deliver in the current economic climate.
- There may be an opportunity for further infill development as buildings and properties come to the end of their economic life and such opportunities should be taken to reinforce the character of the town and add to the varied mix.

- There is a limited town centre office market, typified by low rental values and, as such, new office development is unlikely to come forward in the short term without cross subsidy from high value uses or public sector funding support.

2.8 Movement issues

Rayleigh town centre is located at the intersection of four main vehicle routes: the A129 London Road/Crown Hill in the west, the B1013 Hockley Road in the north, the A1015 Eastwood Road in the east, and the A129 High Street towards Hadleigh and A127 dual-carriageway in the south.

The town itself developed along High Street, where most of its retail frontage is currently concentrated. Websters Way was originally constructed as part of a one-way gyratory system around the town centre, but has since reverted back to two-way working. High Street remains one-way northbound, and much of the traffic uses Websters Way to access the main town centre car park and retail servicing areas. As a result, Websters Way and the junctions at either end are often congested and the conditions are decidedly poor, with the backs of retail premises forming the western edge of the street and surface parking forming a large portion of the eastern street edge.

There is also evidence of queuing into the Websters Way car park and at the junctions of the High Street with Eastwood Road and with Crown Hill. The latter being on the main route towards the station and heavily trafficked.

A range of short and long term parking is provided in and near to the town centre. The railway station has approximately 610 long-stay parking spaces spread over two connected car parking areas, and a 38 space short-stay car park adjacent to the station building. There are a number of short (less than four hours) and mixed-stay car parks spread around the town core, of which the most substantial and anecdotally well used is the Websters Way car park with 347 spaces. Castle Road Car Park (behind the Somerfield store) has 148 mixed-stay spaces. At the Windmill and The Mill Arts and Events Centre there is a 53 space short-stay car park and another 68 space mixed-stay car park. To the North east of the town adjacent to the Council Civic Suite is a 65 space mixed-stay car park.

An extensive bus network operates in Rayleigh with the wider sub-regional service structure gravitating to Southend-on-Sea. Many bus routes start and end at Rayleigh rail station, making this an important interchange point for the town, with rail services terminating at London Liverpool Street (42 minutes) and Southend Victoria (18 minutes). In addition, there are four key stops in the town core that provide access to all bus services passing through Rayleigh.



Movement in Rayleigh

1. Rayleigh train station, with its bus interchange, is a 5-10 minute walk from the town centre
2. The town centre is well served by taxis
3. Pedestrian crossing facilities and associated environmental improvements have been improved in recent years
4. The Websters Way car park is the largest in the town
5. Traffic congestion can occur, particularly at key junctions
6. Websters Way acts as the town's by-pass

Walking is provided for through the publicly accessible street network. At many of the junctions in the town centre and along High Street, guardrails and bollards create barriers to movement on foot and divert pedestrians away from direct crossings and desire lines, such as at the junction of the High Street and Crown Hill. In particular, High Street's bus stop and taxi rank dominate and require pedestrians to modify their routes accordingly.

The development of the AAP offers an excellent opportunity to enhance the accessibility of the town centre for the elderly and those with disabilities. Such improvements can be achieved by the removal of street clutter along main routes of pedestrian movement, the inclusion of appropriately designed crossing facilities and there is also potential to provide additional disabled only spaces. Dropped curbs can be designed sympathetically so as not to impede people with vision or mobility issues. Design and access statements provided as part of the planning applications stage will be required to demonstrate appropriate consideration for the movement issues affecting the elderly and those with disabilities.

Minor walking improvements could be delivered in the form of a redesigned taxi rank, the removal of pedestrian guard railings and general decluttering. The main walking route

from the station to the town core is via Crown Hill, although this is steep with narrow footways in places and accommodates high volumes of traffic, and should therefore be a focus for improvement. Websters Way also has a significant section without a footway that needs to be resolved.

There is no information on current signed or advisory cycle routes in the town and no national cycle routes pass through Rayleigh. There are also no notable on-road facilities. However, some cycle stands are provided on High Street. The best approach to improve cycling in the town would be to manage traffic speeds and focus on the provision of appropriately located cycle racks at the station and High Street.

2.9 The Sustainability Appraisal

The Rayleigh AAP has been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), as required by the European SEA Directive, UK planning legislation and the NPPF. SA seeks to promote sustainable development through the integration of environmental, social and economic considerations in the preparation of planning documents.

A Scoping Report was prepared and published in September 2012 to help ensure that the SA covered key sustainability issues relevant to

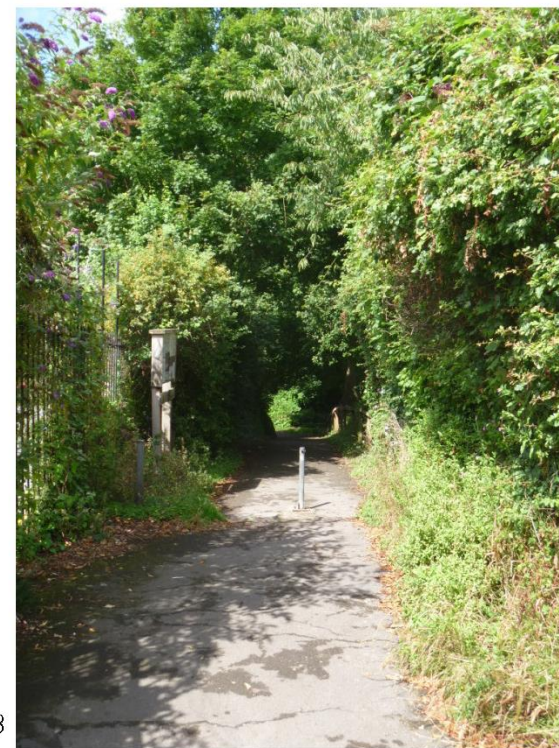
Rayleigh town centre. This information was sent to statutory consultees for comment. Options proposed in the Rayleigh AAP Issues and Options report, which included alternatives for a number of issues and different sites, were then subject to SA in February 2013. This was sent to statutory consultees and wider stakeholders for consultation from 27 February to 10 April 2013. The findings of the SA have been balanced against consultation feedback and helped to inform the policy options selected in this version of the AAP.

Generally the SA found that the higher the level of intervention proposed, the more positive the effects are likely to be against SA objectives relating to communities, housing, the economy and townscape. However, the redevelopment of unsympathetic buildings, particularly in large blocks, also adds an element of uncertainty. Although higher level intervention has the potential for negative effects on a number of SA objectives in the short-term during construction, it is considered that suitable mitigation measures are available at the project level to address adverse effects.

The movement of traffic through the town centre is a key sustainability issue. The SA found that options which sought the full or partial pedestrianisation of the High Street would only shift current transport issues elsewhere within the AAP area. The option that

sought to work within the existing network and provide improvements to pedestrian crossings at roundabouts and improved capacity at junctions was considered to have the potential for the greatest benefits compared to the others, as it will not shift transport issues elsewhere in the area and will not increase the levels of traffic along the High Street.

The Council will continue to assess the AAP, including any changes, through the SA and will document this process.



Pedestrian paths in Rayleigh

1. Ernie Lane
2. The path alongside the Spread Eagle Pub
3. Footpaths around the Mount

3. A framework for a better Rayleigh

3.1 What makes for a sustainable Rayleigh?

Rayleigh is an established town and a sustainable location for homes, shops, jobs, leisure and other services and facilities. The AAP seeks to ensure that a positive planning policy framework that protects this function is put in place. It recognises that sustainable development must be delivered in a joined-up fashion, with economic, social and environmental benefits being sought concurrently. In this context, the following factors are considered important:

Provision to meet shopping needs locally and within the District – Rayleigh is Rochford District's main town centre and has a successful mix of shops. Demand for additional retail floorspace and supporting leisure facilities, to help meet shopping needs locally and across the wider-District, should be addressed. Other supporting uses should also be encouraged to help increase the attractiveness of the town centre's offer and improve vitality.

Excellent public realm – There are a number of attractive places, spaces and buildings within Rayleigh's town centre. These should be further enhanced, with a particular focus on the main part of High Street, as well as weaker areas on Bellingham Lane and Websters Way.

Conservation of historic assets and local character – Rayleigh has a number of important heritage assets, including Rayleigh Mount, Holy Trinity Church, Rayleigh Windmill and the Dutch Cottage. All new development should respect and enhance these assets and their settings, as well as the positive aspects of the town's local character.

A high quality natural environment – Rayleigh benefits from being surrounded by the Metropolitan Green Belt, which prevents urban sprawl, but also allows local people access to significant areas of high quality, open space. This open space should be safeguarded through the efficient use of previously developed sites within the town's existing boundaries.

Good accessibility – Rayleigh is well connected to other centres within the District, south-east Essex and the wider-region through road, rail and bus links. Improvements should be made to local walking routes, bus stops and the road network to help increase the level of accessibility to, through and within the town centre.

The AAP is a planning policy document that, primarily, seeks to assist in the management of changes and developments in Rayleigh town centre. Therefore, whilst its remit is limited, its reach is wide. Alongside the Core Strategy and other key policy documents, the AAP will help to attract and encourage new investment and co-ordinate change.

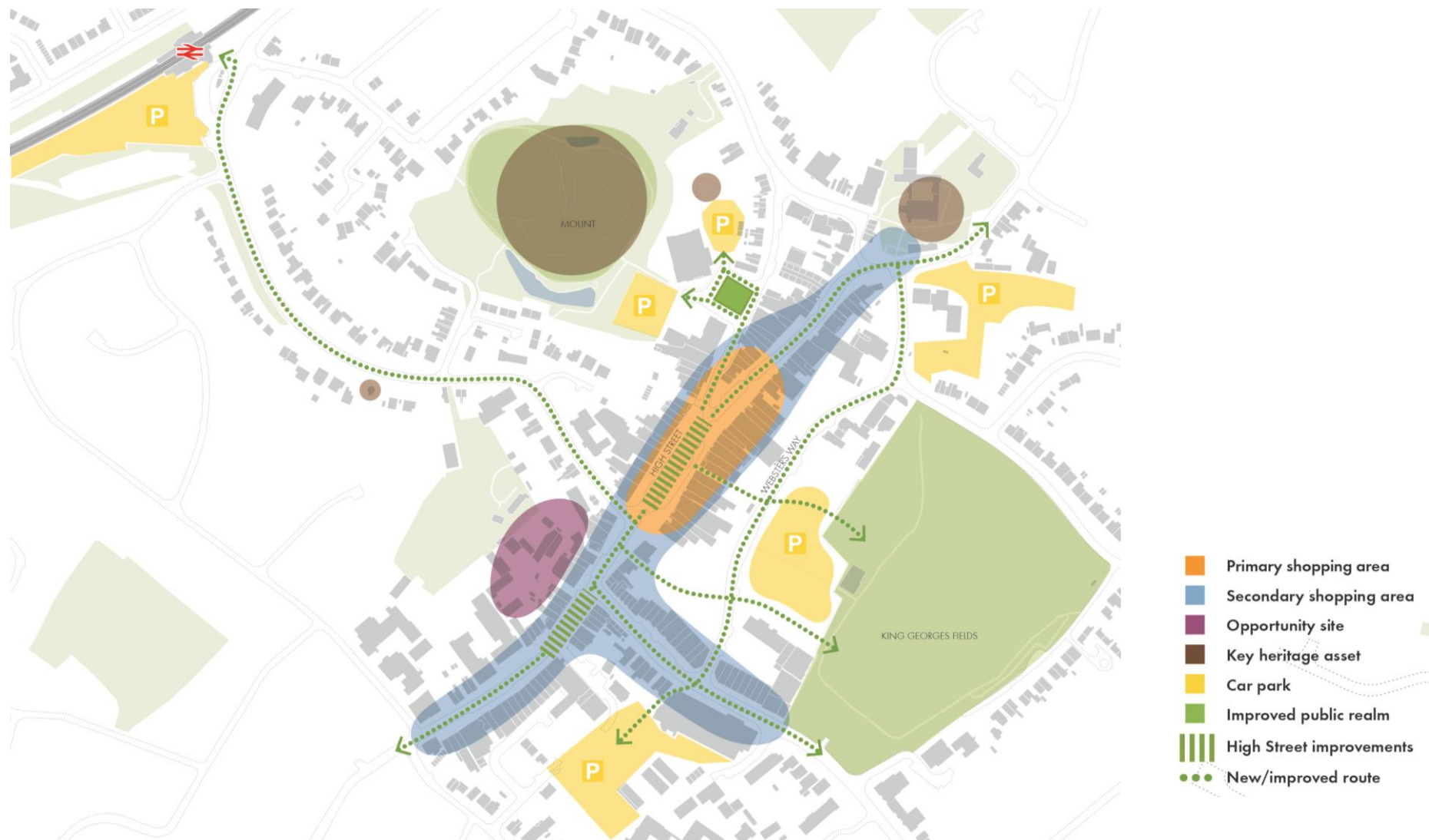
3.2 Vision and objectives

The future development of Rayleigh should strengthen the town's position as Rochford District's main centre, improve the environment and accessibility, and have a positive impact on the town's heritage assets.

The AAP sets a vision for the town's future based on an understanding of the unique context that drives change and development in Rayleigh. It translates this vision into implementation objectives, policies and guidance that will act as a robust framework for delivery.

The vision for Rayleigh is:

Rayleigh will continue to be recognised as the District's main centre. By 2025, the town centre's retail and leisure offer will be improved through the provision of additional retail floorspace, as well as accommodation for complementary uses, such as leisure facilities, offices and homes. Further environmental enhancements will create a high quality public realm, encourage investment and ensure that the town centre is highly accessible by foot, public transport and private motor vehicle. All new development will help to enhance the town centre's historic setting and respect its existing character, including that of nearby suburban, low-density neighbourhoods.



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Figure 5 – Rayleigh AAP framework plan

The four key objectives that support this vision and are vital in its delivery are:

1) Strengthening Rayleigh's role as Rochford District's principal town centre.

Rayleigh is the most important town centre in Rochford District for shopping. It is clear that this current position could be strengthened by the provision of new accommodation, which should be suitable for both large national retailers and small independent shops. A greater range of leisure facilities and other complementary uses, including dwellings and offices, on more peripheral sites would also increase Rayleigh's vitality.

2) Improving accessibility for all

The rail station is some distance from High Street, and walking routes from the main car parks to High Street and the main section of the shopping frontage could be improved. There are opportunities to strengthen the linkages between these areas, improve the arrival experience for visitors to the town and make some positive changes to the road network.

3) Making the most of historic assets

Rayleigh has a number of significant historic assets that are on the edge of or adjacent to the existing town centre. Principal among these is Rayleigh Mount, the site of a motte and bailey castle; Holy Trinity Church, Rayleigh Windmill and the Dutch Cottage are also important. Opportunities exist to create better connections between these assets and the town centre.

4) Delivering public realm improvements

The quality of the public realm within Rayleigh town centre is generally good. However, there are a number of opportunities to make small-scale improvements.

3.3 Arriving at a framework

Rayleigh's existing condition was analysed through the 2009 Issues and Options report, which was prepared to inform the AAP. Some contextual changes took place between 2009 and the January 2013 consultation on the Council's emerging preferred development framework. The most important changes were:

- A tougher economic climate – the current economic climate is significantly more challenging than it was at the beginning of the AAP process.
- The emergence of new priorities – a number of organisations, including Essex Police, have reviewed their property portfolios and informed the Council that land previously believed to be available for redevelopment is now included in their future plans.
- Healthcare reform – the government has changed the way in which the NHS's budget is managed and it is no longer clear that there is potential for a new healthcare centre in Rayleigh.

Following the January 2013 consultation the Council considered all of the feedback that was received to help refine the preferred development framework further. The AAP sets out a framework that responds to the contextual changes and previous stages of analysis and consultation.



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Figure 6 – Rayleigh AAP movement framework

POLICY 1 – RAYLEIGH CENTRE AREA ACTION PLAN FRAMEWORK

New opportunities for retail development or other town centre uses together, supported by or contributing to appropriate town centre environmental improvements, will help to strengthen the town's role as Rochford District's principal town centre.

Development within the Rayleigh AAP area should contribute towards the delivery of the spatial framework as shown in Figure 5. Key elements of this framework are:

- 1. A consolidated and strengthened primary retail core along High Street;**
- 2. Opportunities for new and intensified retail and other mixed-use development as sites become available;**
- 3. The promotion of appropriate proportions and concentrations of uses other than A1 including A2-5, leisure, cultural and community uses, particularly in locations outside the primary retail core, including Bellingham Lane and Eastwood Road;**
- 4. New and improved routes within the AAP area and linking the centre with the railway station and the surrounding area; and**

5. New and improved public realm and environmental improvements throughout the centre as identified on the spatial framework.

The spatial framework for Rayleigh is summarised in Figure 5 which provides a broad indication of where development and change could take place.

The Council's primary objective for Rayleigh is to protect and enhance its role as Rochford District's principal town centre. This will be dependent on the emergence of high quality proposals for new retail, leisure, cultural, community and mixed-use development, enhanced connections with nearby and adjoining areas, and an improved public realm.

The AAP sets out further policies that are intended to guide high quality development that is in accordance with its vision, objectives and framework. These policies are based around an understanding of the centre's character areas and seek to build on Rayleigh's existing local character.

3.4 The movement framework

The movement framework outlined in Figure 6 identifies a series of key junctions throughout Rayleigh which would benefit from investment and improvement. The Council will continue to work with Essex County Council to agree the priorities for these improvements and more fully assess the issues they present and opportunities available to address them.

Table 1 below provides an overview of these improvements and a headline estimate of the resources this might require.

In terms of delivering public realm improvements to the town centre, the Rayleigh Framework identifies the opportunity for improvements to the central section of High Street, which is currently dominated by the taxi rank. The Council recognises that the taxi services provide shoppers with a local service, but there is an opportunity to deliver greater pedestrian priority in this central and high profile location as well as recognising the role of the taxi rank. Figure 7 provides an overview of the existing conditions in this central area and Figure 8 Identifies sites that would benefit from potential rationalisation. The ideas put forward would, subject to funding being identified, need to be developed and refined with the Highway Authority, local traders and other stakeholders. However, they provide a framework for a major initial phase of environmental improvements – with the potential to continue further improvements of this type within adjacent areas.

In the same spirit, Figure 9 provides an artist's impression of the potential for environmental improvements to the High Street area outside the Library.



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Figure 7 – Central High Street – existing condition

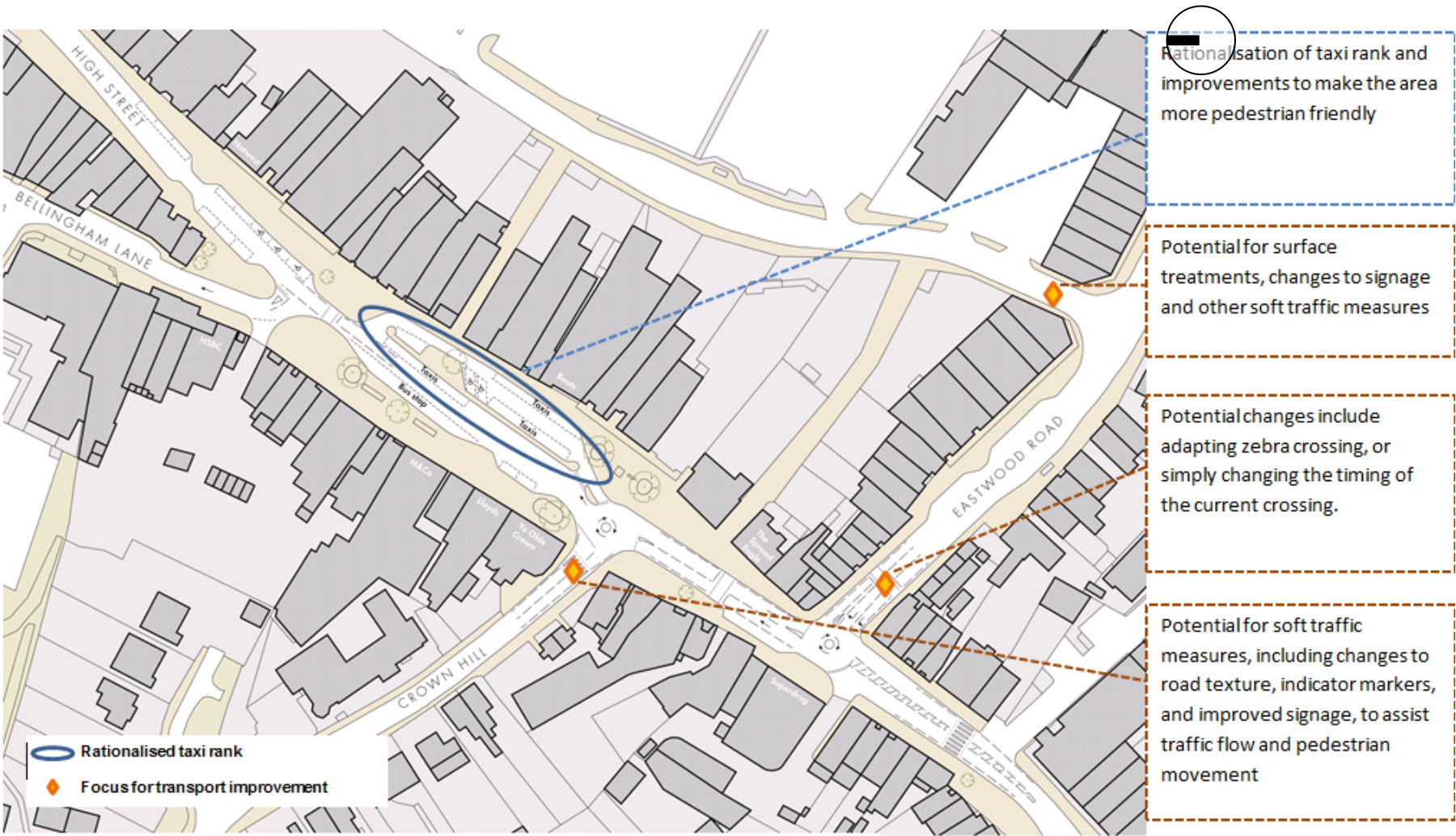


Figure 8 – Central High Street – potential improvement framework

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Figure 8 – Central High Street – potential improvement framework



Figure 9 –High Street south looking north from outside the Library – artist's impression illustrating the potential benefits of pavement widening, new street trees and shop front improvements

Environmental improvement / highways scheme	Lead partner	Other partners	Estimated cost	Potential funding stream(s)	Comments	Justification
High Street Taxi Rank & Market Area	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers	£300,000 - £1,250,000	Pooled financial contributions / ECC budget	<p>Rationalisation of taxi stand to allow improved pedestrian environment and to achieve a more versatile use of the taxi rank and market area</p> <p>Landscaping and lighting enhancement. Low impact measures at key junctions and crossing points aimed at improving existing functionality (including low impact surface treatments and signage improvements).</p> <p>Following identification of a range of options and their costs for Rayleigh centre through earlier iterations of the Plan, the Local Highways Panel has agreed to fund further transport modelling work. This will identify precise measures from the framework for improvements this Plan provides, along with the specific costs of such improvements from the range of costs identified here.</p>	<p>A significant proportion of public space in the core of town centre is allocated as carriageway for a taxi standing area. Space is required for occasional market use. Taxi parking and circulation space is not well integrated with the rest of the high street and at present it conflicts with the needs of the local market and pedestrian movement. While acknowledging the role played by the taxi services in the town centre there is the potential to rationalise the taxi parking with the market.</p> <p>At present the existing junctions do not function optimally. Traffic flow is often impeded at these points while pedestrian safety is a concern in some areas. The town centre functions as a major traffic thoroughfare in the District. Low impact enhancements can ensure that pedestrians are still able to use these crossings safely while also ensuring that traffic flow is not adversely affected.</p>

Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan

Zebra Crossing at the top of Crown Hill	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers	£500,000 – 3,000,000	Pooled financial contributions / ECC budget	<p>There is potential for the inclusion of soft measures to improve the effectiveness of key crossing points, subject to further investigation of traffic and pedestrian movements. Rochford District Council will work in conjunction with Essex County Council to assess appropriate measures to be taken.</p> <p>Following identification of a range of options and their costs for Rayleigh centre through earlier iterations of the Plan, the Local Highways Panel has agreed to fund further transport modelling work. This will identify precise measures from the framework for improvements this Plan provides, along with the specific costs of such improvements. Whilst the potential costs of these range of improvements have the potential to total up to £3,000,000, it could be that the most effective measures will cost considerably less.</p>	At present the existing junctions do not function optimally. Traffic flow is often impeded at these points while pedestrian safety is a concern in some areas. The town centre functions as a major traffic thoroughfare in the District. Low impact enhancements can ensure that pedestrians are still able to use these crossings safely while also ensuring that traffic flow is not adversely affected.

Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan

Pelican Crossing before the junction of Bellingham Lane and the High Street	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers		Pooled financial contributions / ECC budget	<p>There is potential for the inclusion of soft measures to improve the effectiveness of key crossing points, subject to further investigation of traffic and pedestrian movements. Rochford District Council will work in conjunction with Essex County Council to assess appropriate measures to be taken.</p> <p>Following identification of a range of options and their costs for Rayleigh centre through earlier iterations of the Plan, the Local Highways Panel has agreed to fund further transport modelling work. This will identify precise measures from the framework for improvements this Plan provides, along with the specific costs of such improvements. Whilst the potential costs of these range of improvements have the potential to total up to £3,000,000, it could be that the most effective measures will cost considerably less.</p>	At present the existing junctions do not function optimally. Traffic flow is often impeded at these points while pedestrian safety is a concern in some areas. The town centre functions as a major traffic thoroughfare in the District. Low impact enhancements can ensure that pedestrians are still able to use these crossings safely while also ensuring that traffic flow is not adversely affected.
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Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan

Pelican Crossing before the High Road and Eastwood Road roundabout	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers		Pooled financial contributions / ECC budget	<p>There is potential for the inclusion of soft measures to improve the effectiveness of key crossing points, subject to further investigation of traffic and pedestrian movements. Rochford District Council will work in conjunction with Essex County Council to assess appropriate measures to be taken.</p> <p>Following identification of a range of options and their costs for Rayleigh centre through earlier iterations of the Plan, the Local Highways Panel has agreed to fund further transport modelling work. This will identify precise measures from the framework for improvements this Plan provides, along with the specific costs of such improvements. Whilst the potential costs of these range of improvements have the potential to total up to £3,000,000, it could be that the most effective measures will cost considerably less.</p>	At present the existing junctions do not function optimally. Traffic flow is often impeded at these points while pedestrian safety is a concern in some areas. The town centre functions as a major traffic thoroughfare in the District. Low impact enhancements can ensure that pedestrians are still able to use these crossings safely while also ensuring that traffic flow is not adversely affected.
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Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan

Zebra Crossing to the North of the Police Station	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers		Pooled financial contributions / ECC budget	<p>There is potential for the inclusion of soft measures to improve the effectiveness of key crossing points, subject to further investigation of traffic and pedestrian movements. Rochford District Council will work in conjunction with Essex County Council to assess appropriate measures to be taken.</p> <p>Following identification of a range of options and their costs for Rayleigh centre through earlier iterations of the Plan, the Local Highways Panel has agreed to fund further transport modelling work. This will identify precise measures from the framework for improvements this Plan provides, along with the specific costs of such improvements. Whilst the potential costs of these range of improvements have the potential to total up to £3,000,000, it could be that the most effective measures will cost considerably less.</p>	At present the existing junctions do not function optimally. Traffic flow is often impeded at these points while pedestrian safety is a concern in some areas. The town centre functions as a major traffic thoroughfare in the District. Low impact enhancements can ensure that pedestrians are still able to use these crossings safely while also ensuring that traffic flow is not adversely affected.
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Zebra Crossing of Websters Way at Eastwood Road junction	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers		Pooled financial contributions / ECC budget	<p>The extension of the High Street improvement scheme along Eastwood Road, including the junction with Websters Way.</p> <p>There is potential for the inclusion of soft measures to improve the effectiveness of key crossing points, subject to further investigation of traffic and pedestrian movements. Rochford District Council will work in conjunction with Essex County Council to assess appropriate measures to be taken.</p> <p>Following identification of a range of options and their costs for Rayleigh centre through earlier iterations of the Plan, the Local Highways Panel has agreed to fund further transport modelling work. This will identify precise measures from the framework for improvements this Plan provides, along with the specific costs of such improvements. Whilst the potential costs of these range of improvements have the potential to total up to £3,000,000, it could be that the most effective measures will</p>	<p>At present the existing junctions do not function optimally. Traffic flow is often impeded at these points while pedestrian safety is a concern in some areas. The town centre functions as a major traffic thoroughfare in the District. Low impact enhancements can ensure that pedestrians are still able to use these crossings safely while also ensuring that traffic flow is not adversely affected.</p> <p>Soft measures involve significantly less material disruption to the structure of existing roads.</p> <p>The extent of the measures to be applied to the area will be determined in relation to further investigation of pedestrian and motorist behaviours and with the assistance of Essex County Council.</p>
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					cost considerably less.	
New and enhanced pedestrian / cycle links	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers	£150,000 - £200,000	Pooled financial contributions / ECC budget	The enhancement of pedestrian and cycle links across the town centre, for example improved mid-block links between High Street and Websters Way, between Eastwood Road and Castle Road car park, and to the station via Crown Hill and Rayleigh Mount.	To improve environmental quality and safety, and encourage walking and cycling for local journeys around the town.

Note: The broad budget estimates given are based on general experience of similar scheme costs rather than any professional cost advice related to specific proposals. For public realm improvement schemes a general rate of £300/m² has been applied to the scheme area, which would allow for resurfacing with high quality materials. These figures are indicative only

Table 1 – Major environmental improvements and highways schemes



Rayleigh Mount – owned by the National Trust and managed by the National Trust Rayleigh Mount Local Management Committee. The network of footpaths across the Mount are well used and the site has considerable amenity value, both for recreation and education. It is the only freely accessible motte and bailey castle in Essex.



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Figure 10 – Rayleigh AAP Proposals Map

4. Proposals plan, shopping frontages and sites

4.1 Rayleigh town centre boundary

Rayleigh town centre is centred on High Street. To the north, the centre extends up to the top end of London Hill. To the south, the centre extends to the Rayleigh Baptist Church site on High Street, south of Castle Road. Generally, to the west, the boundary is drawn at the rear of the commercial premises which address High Street – the centre also includes the Mill Arts and Events Centre on Bellingham Lane. On the eastern side, the centre includes both the Castle Road and Websters Way car parks. The centre extends along Eastwood Road beyond King George's Park although does not encompass the park itself. The town centre boundary is considered appropriate and has not been altered during the preparation of this AAP. The District-wide Retail and Leisure Study makes no recommendation to review the boundary.

POLICY 2 – RETAIL DEVELOPMENT IN RAYLEIGH

Rayleigh town centre is Rochford District's principal shopping centre. The Council will support development proposals that retain or strengthen Rayleigh's position in the local retail hierarchy.

New retail-led development within Rayleigh town centre will be permitted where it would:

- 1. Maintain the predominance of retail uses in the centre, at concentrations and proportions appropriate to the relevant designated shopping area defined under Policy 3;**
- 2. Contribute positively to the local retail character of the relevant area of the town centre, as identified under Policies 4-8; and**
- 3. Where possible, deliver improved physical linkages along key public routes and between the core High Street and the town's principal car parks.**

POLICY 3 – RAYLEIGH'S SHOPPING FRONTAGES

Within the town centre's primary and secondary shopping frontages, as defined on the Rayleigh AAP Proposals Map (Figure 10), proposals for A1 retail uses will be acceptable. A proposed change of use for non-retail (non-A1) purposes will be permitted where it would:

- 1. Not have a detrimental impact on, or undermine, the predominance of A1 uses within the centre, both within the centre as a whole and within the primary shopping frontage;**
- 2. Not create a cluster of non-A1 uses within the same use class in a locality that undermines the retail character of the centre; and**
- 3. Entail the provision of a non-A1 use which is considered to positively contribute to the overall offer and encourage people into the centre.**

The Council will generally seek to ensure 75% of Rayleigh's primary shopping frontage and 50% of its secondary shopping frontage is in retail (A1) use.



High Street looking north towards the Primary Shopping Area – this secondary area plays an important role in supporting the core town centre

4.2 Retail development

Rayleigh town centre is the town's principal shopping centre. Under Policy 2 and in line with Core Strategy Policy RTC 4 a positive stance on new retail development within the defined shopping frontages will be taken.

The proposals plan (Figure 10) defines the primary and secondary shopping frontages within Rayleigh town centre. An appropriate balance of uses is necessary to support the economic health of Rayleigh town centre, and it is essential that retail uses are supported by non-retail uses such as cafés, pubs, offices and banks.

The district-wide Retail and Leisure Study 2008 concluded that the planning strategy in place at that time in terms of the extent of primary and secondary frontages and the concentrations of A1 uses and non-A1 uses within them was appropriate and no changes were recommended. Since then, land use monitoring of the defined shopping frontages has been undertaken. This monitoring reveals that for the target proportions of A1 uses in the primary shopping frontage to be achieved, the extent of the primary frontage will need to be reviewed.

The primary shopping frontage is now consolidated around the central section of High Street between Crown Hill and Bellingham Lane. This more concentrated primary shopping area presents concentrations

of A1 retail uses at the proportion sought under the policy. This review helps to strengthen the primary shopping frontage policy and in doing so helps to protect the vitality and viability of the town centre economy. The secondary shopping frontage has been extended to incorporate those areas previously identified as part of the primary shopping frontage.

The target proportions of 75% and 50% of the primary and secondary frontages in A1 retail use respectively are considered appropriate for this principal town centre. These proportions have been carried forward from the Local Plan.

Notwithstanding the need to protect A1 uses in the identified shopping frontages, an appropriate balance of uses is necessary to support the health of Rayleigh town centre, and it is essential that retail uses are supported by non-retail uses such as cafés, pubs and banks.

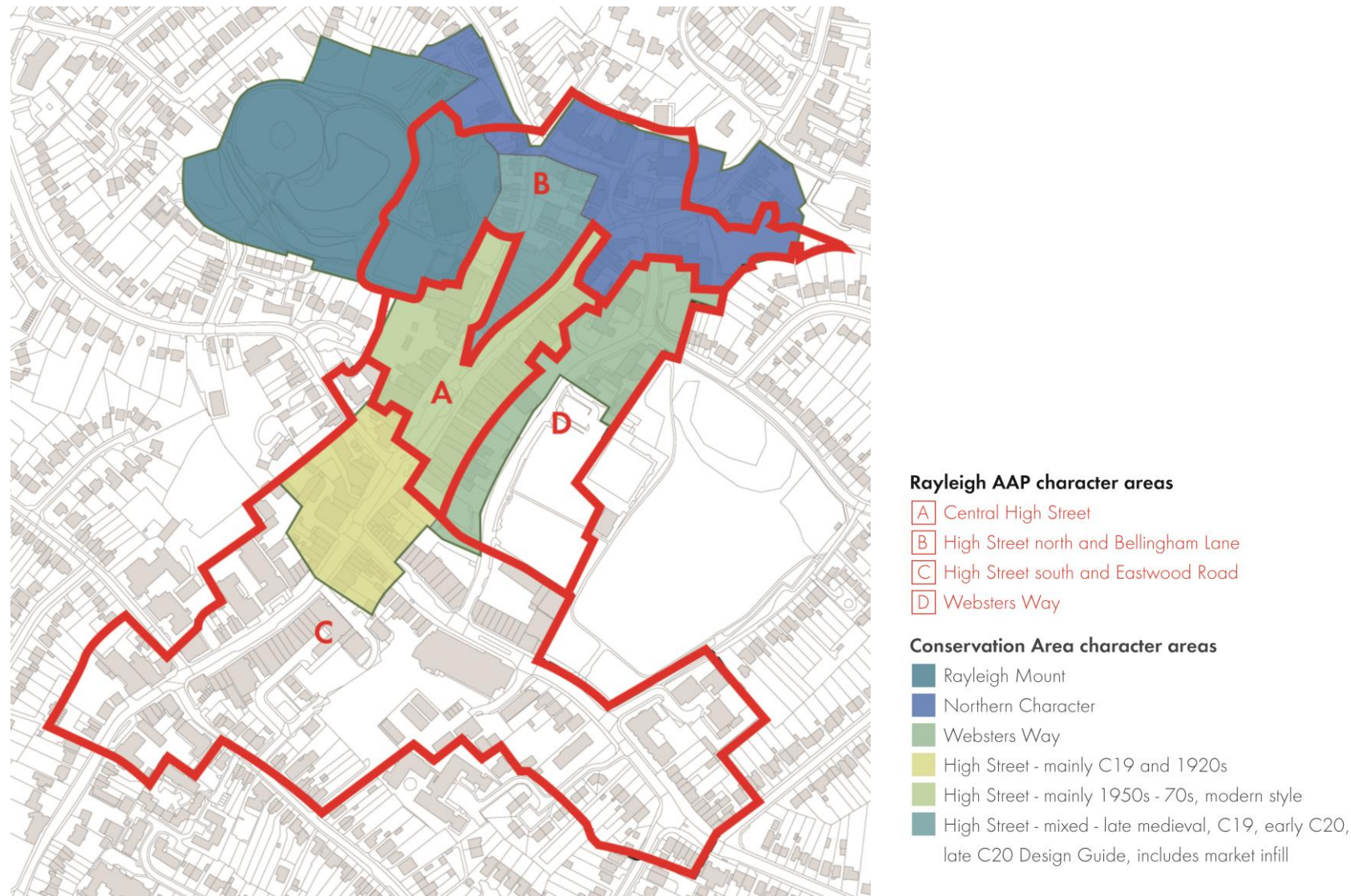
The Council recognises the dynamic nature of centres and the need for flexibility. The target proportions of A1 retail uses will be used as a guide and will be kept under review through town centre monitoring.

As was the case in the previous Local Plan, clusters of non A1 uses are considered to be more than two immediately adjacent non-A1 uses of the same use class. That said, a view will be taken on a case-by-case basis. The overriding objective will be to ensure the vitality and viability of the town centre is protected.

To ensure this balance the Council will not permit a cluster of any more than two immediately adjacent non-retail uses of the same use-class. More than two Sui Generis uses adjacent to one another may not necessarily be considered a cluster, provided they are distinct and different uses.

However there are uses of which the provision of additional units in Rayleigh centre would not be considered to positively contribute to the overall offer of the centre. Such uses include hot food takeaways (A5 uses), planning applications for which will not generally be supported.

Some land uses associated with town centre locations have the potential to raise amenity issues for nearby residents. Such uses might include, but are not necessarily limited to, those falling in Use Classes A3, A4 and A5 or other, Sui Generis uses such as night clubs. The impact of such non-retail uses on the amenity of those living within or nearby the centre will be an important consideration in determining relevant planning applications, and applicants will be expected to demonstrate how negative impacts arising from such proposals will be mitigated, if applications are to be permitted.



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Figure 11 – Character areas for Rayleigh AAP, based on those identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal (May 2007)*

*On 6th July 2009, Rochford District Council adopted the recommendation in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plans and amended the boundaries of five existing Conservation Areas: Rayleigh, Rochford, Canewdon High Street, Canewdon Church and Great Wakering.

5. Rayleigh's character areas

The central thrust of the AAP is to ensure that the historic character of the centre is protected and, where possible, enhanced. To help achieve this, and in support of the existing controls and guidance provided through the designation of the Rayleigh conservation area together with its associated appraisal and management plan, a character area approach has been developed.

For the purposes of this AAP, four character areas have been identified. These have been carefully drawn to take full account of the character areas identified in the conservation area appraisal and have been drawn to ensure comprehensive coverage of the AAP area. These do not replace the character areas set out in the conservation area character appraisal, where more detail can be found.

Policy 4 defines the four AAP character areas and provides overarching and town-wide policy guidance which will be relevant to all applications for development across the town. This is followed by a planning policy for each individual identified area.

POLICY 4 – RAYLEIGH'S CHARACTER AREAS

Development will have regard to Rayleigh town centre's identified character areas as defined in Figure 11 and the important role that each of these play in helping to make Rayleigh a successful place. Guiding principles for these areas are outlined under Policies 5, 6, 7 and 8. Where these policies contain principles that specify environmental enhancements, development should either incorporate or contribute towards these improvements.

There are principles that are important in respect of development in all four of the character areas; development should either incorporate or contribute towards the specified schemes. The principles are:

- 1. Public realm interventions should include the replacement of poor quality paving, the removal of street clutter, the improvement of the lighting for pedestrian routes, and the planting of native street trees;**
- 2. Enhanced cycle parking facilities should be provided at suitable locations throughout the centre;**
- 3. Bus facilities should be upgraded, with improvements including better shelters and increased seating provision; and**

- 4. New and improved pedestrian signage should be introduced for key destinations and attractions, including the rail station, the town centre, the Mount, the Windmill, Holy Trinity Church and the Dutch Cottage.**

The character areas identified in this AAP are informed directly by those defined in the Rayleigh Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan. However, taken together, the AAP character areas cover the entire AAP area, including the area to the south of the town centre not covered by the conservation area.

The appraisal and management plan provides detailed analysis of the town's heritage assets and an account of the evolution of the town and the major events in its development. Rayleigh's built character is one of its key assets and proposals for new development must ensure that the setting of heritage assets and, more generally, the character of the conservation area as a whole is conserved or enhanced.

Public realm, route and junction improvements as identified in Rayleigh's Strategic and Movement Frameworks (Figures 5 and 6 respectively) are a priority and the Council will seek to secure contributions to these improvements as relevant development proposals come forward.



Character area A – Central High Street

1. High Street plays host to buildings of contrasting styles
2. High Street east side, looking north – part of the primary shopping frontage
3. High Street west side, looking south – also part of the primary shopping frontage
4. High Street east side looking north – the access to the taxi rank is a prominent feature
5. The High Street memorial was built in 1908 and commemorates four local Protestant martyrs, who died in 1555 during Queen Mary's reign

The local bus network is a town-wide resource which plays an important role in ensuring local people have access to sustainable, accessible modes of public transport. The Council will continue to work with partners at Essex County Council and the bus operators to keep the bus network– its routes, timetables and supporting infrastructure – under review.

Town centre signage plays a key role in helping visitors with way-finding. This in turn helps to support local businesses. Fingerposts contribute to the quality of the arrival experience and new street furniture should respond positively to the historic townscape character.

POLICY 5 – CHARACTER AREA A: CENTRAL HIGH STREET

Development in the Central High Street area will help to protect and improve Rayleigh’s position as the District’s principal retail centre. Retail (A1) uses will be supported by a high quality public realm and excellent links to the rest of the town centre and the wider surrounding area.

The following principles are important:

- 1. Development will respond positively to local townscape character, key elements of which include:**
 - a. A strong building line at the back edge of pavement;**
 - b. Town centre, predominantly A1 retail, uses at ground floor level;**
 - c. Prevailing building heights of 3 storeys; and**
 - d. Principal points of access to ground and upper floors positioned to address the High Street directly.**
- 2. In accordance with Policy 3, shopping frontages should be predominately A1 in use;**
- 3. Development will be acceptable where it would lead to the creation of additional A1 use floorspace which would strengthen the retail function and character of the town centre;**

- 4. Public realm enhancements should be focused on the creation of a new public space at the centre of the High Street and include the rationalisation and reduction in size of the existing taxi rank; and**
- 5. Pedestrian links within the AAP area, including those between the central High Street area and the Websters Way car park, and across Rayleigh, including to the rail station, should be strengthened.**

The central High Street area is the core of the town centre and a location that has undergone significant redevelopment since the 1950s. Despite this period of growth and investment, the structure of the town – with the very wide High Street acting as an informal market square – has remained intact. Redevelopment has, however, underpinned the town’s retail growth with new developments catering more efficiently with modern day retail requirements. The Retail and Leisure Study identified demand for more comparison retail floorspace in the town centre. Improving the efficiency of floorspace and floorplates in this central, primary, area is likely to play a significant role in meeting any such demand.



Character area B – High Street north and Bellingham Lane

1. The public space at Bellingham Lane, which acts as the gateway to the Rayleigh Windmill and the Mill Centre
2. Independent traders in the upper end of High Street
3. The upper end of High Street has considerable townscape merit
4. Holy Trinity Church is a prominent landmark on the town
5. View towards Rayleigh Windmill, looking west, from the top of London Hill
6. Rayleigh Windmill, grade II-listed from the early 19th century. The building was restored in 2005 with the aid of a Thames Gateway grant

Whilst the individual buildings are generally not in themselves special, the central High Street area benefits from a good quality townscape, with buildings generally respecting the prevailing 3 storey scale.

The taxi rank arrangement dominates the southern side of the street and, whilst shoppers benefit from the convenience this provides – as is the case with the bus stops opposite – there is scope for rationalisation of this current arrangement to give greater priority and more space to pedestrians.

Pedestrian connections to the town's principal public car park are important. Access is currently provided by two pedestrian lanes between High Street and Websters Way – one adjacent to the Spread Eagle Pub, and Ernie Lane which is adjacent to Barclays Bank. Improving these connections is a priority for the town. In particular, there is scope to improve the lane adjacent to the Spread Eagle pub which would benefit from resurfacing and new lighting. This space has the potential to host temporary pop-up shops/market stalls.

The street's mature trees, mostly plane, contribute significantly to local townscape character.

POLICY 6 – CHARACTER AREA B: HIGH STREET NORTH AND BELLINGHAM LANE

Development in the High Street North and Bellingham Lane area will support the retail function of the central High Street area, primarily through the provision of complementary uses, including leisure, cultural and community facilities – many of which contribute positively to the evening and night time economy. The character of this area is underpinned by a number of important heritage and leisure/cultural assets and civic uses.

The Council will support development in the High Street North and Bellingham Lane area that would protect and enhance its existing character, with a particular emphasis on its role supporting the central High Street area and the need to respect the setting of its key heritage assets. The following principles are important:

- 1. Development will respond positively to local townscape character, key elements of which include:**
 - a. High quality historic townscape;**
 - b. Town centre uses at ground floor level;**
 - c. Prevailing building heights of 2 and 3 storeys – with taller prominent landmark buildings; and**

d. An urban morphology characterised by fine grain development benefitting from rich and varied traditional building detailing and materials.

- 2. In accordance with Policy 3, shopping frontages should be in a mix of retail (A1) and other appropriate town centre uses, including leisure, cultural, community facilities and uses that contribute to the evening and night time economy;**
- 3. Development will be acceptable where it would lead to the creation of additional floorspace for appropriate town centre uses that support the main retail function of the central High Street area;**
- 4. The development of building backs will be acceptable where this would not have an undue negative impact on the operation of units fronting the High Street;**
- 5. Development in the area should, where possible, seek to deliver improvements in the townscape and environmental quality of the Bellingham Lane area – including the opportunities to improve the public space in front of The Mill Arts and Events Centre; and**
- 6. Pedestrian links across Rayleigh, including to the Mount, should be strengthened.**



Character area C – High Street south and Eastwood Road

1. The junction between High Street and Crown Hill – guardrail is a prominent feature
2. View south east along Eastwood Road
3. The lower end of High Street – where the urban grain is generally more coarse – again, guardrail is a prominent feature
4. Mixed use property along Eastwood Road
5. King George V Playing Fields, which lie outside the town centre boundary, is the town's key open space and an important amenity
6. The Co-op is the largest food store in the town on Eastwood Road – with pedestrian access to Castle Street car park

Views north along High Street are terminated by the prominent Holy Trinity Church, part of which are thought to date from the 12th century although most of the fabric is 15th century. The Church and its grounds together with the northern part of High Street is the most historic part of the centre and benefits from a finer urban grain.

Complementing the setting of the church, the area is characterised by its civic and cultural uses: the Council offices, the Windmill and its sensory gardens, the Mill Arts and Events Centre and the National Trust's Rayleigh Mount. This cluster of town assets – both heritage and cultural – could anchor improvements in the provision of new leisure-based uses in the town centre, the need and opportunity for which was identified in the Retail and Leisure Study.

The northern part of High Street has developed a supporting role to the adjacent primary shopping frontage, with higher proportions of cafes and restaurants. This has informed the review of the shopping frontages during the preparation of this AAP.

Bellingham Lane is more varied in character and would benefit from sensitive redevelopment as sites become available.

There is a particular opportunity to improve the open space which acts as the entrance to The Mill. Whilst performing an important car parking function, the space and circulation around it is car dominated and would benefit from environmental improvements. The Conservation Area Appraisal noted that "The area around Mill Hall is poorly defined with an inadequate sense of enclosure".

POLICY 7 – CHARACTER AREA C: HIGH STREET SOUTH AND EASTWOOD ROAD

Development in the High Street south and Eastwood Road area will support the retail function of the central High Street area, with an emphasis on the provision of secondary retailing and complementary uses, including service and office uses and community facilities. The area is well served by public parking which supports nearby convenience retailing.

The Council will support development in the High Street south and Eastwood Road area that would protect and enhance its existing character, with an emphasis on its role supporting the central High Street area. The following principles are important:

- 1. Development will respond positively to local townscape character, key elements of which include:**
 - a. A more coarse grain of development – more suited to accommodating larger floor-plates;**
 - b. Town centre uses at ground floor level; and**
 - c. Prevailing building heights of 3 storeys.**
- 2. In accordance with Policy 3, shopping frontages should be in a mix of retail (A1) and other appropriate town centre uses, including leisure and community facilities;**
- 3. Development will be acceptable where it would lead to the creation of additional floorspace for appropriate town centre uses that support the main retail function of the central High Street area. The area is considered the most appropriate location for additional convenience retail floorspace;**
- 4. Pedestrian links within the AAP area, including those between the High Street south and Eastwood Road area and the Castle Road car park, should be strengthened; and**
- 5. Development should not result in an overall loss of public parking in this area which plays a critical role in supporting the vitality and viability of the businesses in the town centre.**



Character area D – Websters Way

1. The pedestrian route between Websters Way and High Street adjacent to the Spread Eagle pub presents opportunities for improvement
2. The Rayleigh Lanes shopping centre presents an active frontage to Websters Way
3. Ernie Lane is the key pedestrian connection to High Street from the Websters Way car park
4. The Websters Way car park is very well used
5. Websters Way, looking north east
6. Websters Way, looking south from the junction with Hockley Road and High Street

This lower part of the High Street and Eastwood Road play a secondary and supporting role to the core town centre. Shopping frontages have been reviewed and, generally, the areas previously identified as primary shopping frontage along High Street and along the northern end of Eastwood Road are now identified as secondary shopping frontage. This change has a number of benefits. Firstly, it will help make the town more resilient to the weak prevailing economic conditions by providing a more clearly defined and defensible primary shopping frontage. Secondly, the change should help to minimise the potential number of vacancies in this, more vulnerable, part of the town centre. Thirdly, the change helps respond to the Retail and Leisure Study's call for "a greater range of leisure service uses" by providing a more flexible planning framework for these key streets.

The Library provides a key community facility and will play an important role in generating footfall for this secondary location. There may be potential to deliver environmental improvements in this part of High Street which would improve the setting of the retail and other uses and would help to encourage more people to use the area. Figure 9 provides an artist's impression of improvements that could be delivered.

The area is particularly well served by public car parks. Castle Road car park serves the area directly and the Websters Way car park is only a short walk away. Improving the quality of the pedestrian links between these car parks and the surrounding shopping streets is a priority.

The town's largest food store is located along Eastwood Road, served by a limited dedicated car park but also benefitting from direct pedestrian access to Castle Road car park. Much of this wider area has been redeveloped for larger, more modern retail requirements. When compared with the central area and the upper High Street area, the quality of the townscape is not as high and the grain of development is less fine. For these reasons, the area is considered potentially appropriate for new larger format – including convenience – retail floorspace.

The Dairy Crest site on the corner of High Street and Crown Hill is a busy depot site and a going concern. The current occupiers have confirmed that they have no plans to relocate in the short to medium term. However, the current use is one not normally found in town centres and it is considered that in the longer term – potentially beyond this plan period – the site may have the potential for mixed use redevelopment.

POLICY 8 – CHARACTER AREA D: WEBSTERS WAY

Development in the Websters Way area will support the retail function of the central High Street area, foremost through the provision of car parking and servicing areas. The role of Websters Way itself, which takes service and through traffic away from High Street, will also be protected.

The Council will support improvements to Websters Way through development which introduces buildings which directly address this key route whilst not undermining the role that it plays in providing car parking and servicing for the central High Street area. The following principles are important:

- 1. Development will be acceptable where it would lead to the creation of additional floorspace for appropriate town centre uses that support the main retail function of the central High Street area;**
- 2. The development of building backs will be acceptable where this would not have an undue negative impact on the operation of units fronting the High Street, the safety and operation of Websters Way or the levels of town centre car parking;**

- 3. Opportunities to make better use of and deliver environmental improvements to the lanes between Websters Way and High Street will be supported. In particular, the lane alongside The Spread Eagle Pub has the potential to provide flexible space for temporary and pop-up retail stalls and events;**
- 4. Pedestrian links within the AAP area, including those between the central High Street area and the Websters Way car park, and across Rayleigh, including to King George V Playing Fields, should be strengthened; and**
- 5. Development should not result in an overall loss of public parking in this area which plays a critical role in supporting the vitality and viability of the businesses in the town centre.**

Websters Way performs a critical role for the town centre. It successfully takes through traffic out of the primary shopping area and diverts it around the town. This inevitably leads to Websters Way being a busy road.

Access and egress to and from the town's largest and most central public car park is also taken directly from Websters Way. The road therefore plays a critical role in supporting the economy of the town.

The north side of Websters Way presents a disjointed frontage and is primarily used as the service access to commercial High Street premises. Some units however, such as the Rayleigh Lanes shopping centre, successfully manage to present an active address to both the High Street and Websters Way. Development seeking to take advantage of creating active frontage on to Websters Way will be supported and encouraged by the Council so long as the principal parking and servicing functions of Websters Way are not undermined.

Pedestrian connections between the car park and High Street are critically important for the local economy. Ernie Lane and the route adjacent to the Spread Eagle pub are very important in this regard and opportunities to improve their environmental condition – through better lighting, associated crossing points, and surface treatment – will continue to be considered in ongoing dialogue with relevant partners and stakeholders. The route alongside the Spread Eagle Pub is seen as a particular opportunity for improvement as set out in the AAP's movement framework above. The pedestrian links across the car park towards the King George's Park and the Town Council facilities is also an important consideration if changes were to come forward which directly affected the car park.

6. Delivering a better Rayleigh

6.1 Working in partnership

The Council will continue to work closely with partners, landowners and other stakeholders to realise the successful implementation of the policies in the AAP.

The Council will also continue to engage with the community. Although future planning applications and the development management process will determine the details of any individual development schemes that come forward, the community will be given the opportunity to have further input into the design of developments.

6.2 Working with Essex County Council

A further key partner is ECC, the Highways Authority. In its role as highway network manager, ECC will consider the movement framework identified in this AAP and will take this forward as part of its strategic planning process. In doing so, they will take into consideration the AAP policies.

ECC will also be responsible for reviewing and approving Transport Assessments and Travel Plans submitted as part of any future planning

applications for significant development in the AAP area. They will need to be satisfied that any transport impacts identified have been appropriately mitigated and that the movement-related elements of any scheme are in accordance with the AAP policies.

The Council will continue to be proactive in its engagement with ECC through the Local Highways Panel, which is made up of members and officers from both authorities and decides on which highway and public realm improvements monies will be spent.

6.3 Financial viability

The Council has taken into account information regarding national and local trends in the property market, as well as high-level viability advice. This is to ensure that the guidance set out within this AAP is robust and based on commercial realism.

6.4 Community infrastructure

The Council, in line with Core Strategy Policy CLT1, requires that developers provide on-site infrastructure to mitigate specific issues relating to their development scheme. Developers will also be required to contribute towards off-site, strategic infrastructure, which would help to mitigate the cumulative impact of new development.

The Core Strategy sets out the types of strategic infrastructure that should be funded

by contributions arising from new development. These include highway and public transport improvements, alongside a number of other important types of infrastructure.

The AAP sets out priorities for delivering environmental improvements and highways schemes. The Council will expect that new developments within, and affecting, the AAP area contribute towards these identified priorities, in accordance with the Core Strategy.

Table 1 gives further detail in relation to major improvements and schemes. It should be noted that this is not exhaustive and development may be required to contribute towards other enhancements as identified in the AAP or through the development management process.

6.5 Monitoring change

The importance of monitoring is recognised in both legislation and local policy. The Localism Act 2011 requires that the Council produces regular monitoring reports to assess the delivery of its planning documents and implementation of its policies. The Core Strategy sets out the Council's commitment to the production of monitoring reports and explains how each of its policies will be monitored.

Whilst the AAP's progress can be tracked to some extent against the Core Strategy's monitoring framework, there are several instances where a monitoring framework specific to the Rayleigh AAP is required. Table 2 sets out how the AAP will be monitored.

The Council's monitoring report will document whether or not the AAP's objectives are being met and will set out the necessary actions to aid the delivery of the AAP.

Table 2 – Implementation, delivery and monitoring

Policy	Implementation and delivery	Potential risk	Risk mitigation	Monitoring
Policy 1 – Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan framework	Development within the Rayleigh AAP area will be guided by the framework.	The development set out within the Rayleigh AAP framework is not delivered or does not meet the needs of Rayleigh and its residents.	The Council has engaged with relevant stakeholders during the evolution of the AAP. The AAP has benefitted from a number of informal stages of consultation and an iterative process of sustainability appraisal. Amendments in the policies and proposals have been made in view of the informal responses and feedback received during the production process.	The Council will record development through monitoring reports, keeping track of commitments and completions.
Policy 2 – Retail development in Rayleigh, and; Policy 3 – Rayleigh's shopping frontages	The town centre boundary and primary and secondary retail frontage and A1 retail proportions/concentrations were endorsed by the Retail and Leisure Study of 2008. However, the more recent town centre land use monitoring undertaken by the Council revealed that the A1 retail proportions being targeted were unsustainable and unrealistic. A range of options for redrawn primary and secondary frontages were considered and a preferred option taken forward to strengthen the primary shopping frontage.	<p>The policy plays an important role in protecting the retail vitality and viability of the centre. By making the changes proposed and taking a more flexible stance on changes of uses in the centre there is a risk that the retail character of the centre will be harmed.</p> <p>The temporary changes to the permitted development rights for town centre uses are also a factor which may impact on the success of these policies – although it should be noted that the plan period for this AAP is longer than that associated with the temporary changes.</p>	<p>The extent of the primary shopping area and the policy approach taken within it have been carefully assessed to ensure the approach taken supports the objectives set out under Core Strategy Policy RTC 4. By concentrating the primary shopping area around a much tighter core the policy position for the primary shopping area has been strengthened significantly.</p> <p>The number of retail units in A1 uses within the primary area is currently below the target level of the policy. The policy was therefore considered in need of review.</p>	The Council's economic development team monitor retail uses across the identified shopping frontages on a regular basis.

Policy	Implementation and delivery	Potential risk	Risk mitigation	Monitoring
Policy 4 – Rayleigh’s character areas	With no major site allocations being made in the AAP, the central thrust of the Plan is the protection of the area’s character whilst recognising the important role played by the town as the District’s principal town centre.	New development being proposed and investment in the public realm coming forward that does not respond as positively to the town’s character and context as it might have done.	Four character areas have been identified which coordinate well with those identified in the conservation area appraisal. In taking a character area-based approach, the Plan strengthens the role played by the guidance contained in the Rayleigh Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.	The quality of new development will be monitored as planning decisions are made
Policies 5, 6, 7 and 8 – Rayleigh’s character areas A, B, C, D	More specific proposals and priorities are identified in the individual character areas.	The town’s varied characteristics are not seen as the basis for new development and investment in the town.	Area specific policies help to identify local priorities and opportunities which will help to protect and enhance the qualities of these identified areas and the town as a whole.	The quality of new development will be monitored as planning decisions are made.



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