

Hockley Area Action Plan - Issues and Options

Summary of responses to the first round of community involvement

Rochford District Council is preparing an Area Action Plan for the centre of Hockley. The Area Action Plan will form part of the Council's Local Development Framework, the collection of planning policy documents that will set out how the District develops in the future. The Hockley Area Action Plan (HAAP) will set out a vision for how growth and change can be managed within Hockley and how regeneration of the area might be stimulated through this development.

Community involvement will play an important role in the production of the HAAP, and in January 2009 the Council published a document for public consultation on the evidence gathered and potential options for the centre. This Issues and Options document was subject to consultation between 13 February and 30 April 2009 and this report provides a summary of the issues raised through responses.

It should be noted that as a result of the consultation, it has been determined that further consultation should be carried out on a new version of the HAAP, but in the meantime, an analysis of the responses received to the first consultation is considered to be useful. This paper sets out a brief summary of the consultation responses, but provides no feedback for the moment, given there will be a new consultation launched later in 2010.

Overview

A clear message from the representations received to the Issues and Options consultation is that Hockley has a distinct village feel and that the existing character adds to this. Large scale redevelopment is not considered appropriate or necessary, as this would erode the cherished character of Hockley, although it is generally acknowledged that some improvements to the appearance of the centre and some highway enhancements may be usefully made, with particular reference to problems of parking and traffic congestion. There is concern regarding the impact of major redevelopment on existing businesses and the vitality of Hockley. The redevelopment of Eldon Way for residential development is generally not supported.

Vision and Objectives

It was proposed that the vision should be more specific to Hockley, and suggestions for amendment included making reference to retaining the identity / character of Hockley and that it should be referred to as a village. It was also suggested that the vision is contradicted by the option to relocate local employment opportunities and that it lacks clarity.

The objectives were suggested by some to be in need of improvement for example by including reference to economic and employment opportunities and linking this to the vision. It was suggested that the plan needs to identify how it will deliver the economic aspects of regional and local strategies (note: since the consultation, the regional spatial strategy has been revoked). It was also suggested that the objectives needed to be 'SMART' (specific; measurable; achievable; relevant; time-framed).

Highways and Traffic Flow

The amount of traffic and congestion through Hockley centre, and the potential for any development to worsen this, was a significant concern expressed in the representations. Concern was expressed with regard to a potential increase in the number of dwellings in the centre of Hockley if Eldon Way Industrial Estate were to be redeveloped, which would impact on the highway network, particularly at peak times. Concern was also expressed with regard to the proximity of a new, larger supermarket at the junction of Bramerton Road and Spa Road to the roundabout and the impact this may have on traffic flow, with particular reference to servicing. In general any development which may increase traffic directed towards the centre of Hockley was highlighted as a concern. It was emphasised that if development was needed then appropriate highway improvements would be required. The impact of pedestrian crossings on traffic flow was also highlighted.

The roundabout at the Spa Road/Southend Road/Main Road/Woodlands Road junction was generally recognised as in need of improvement, however, the general consensus was that traffic lights would not be an appropriate replacement for the existing roundabout. Concern was expressed regarding the impact on traffic flow and through traffic (between Rochford and Rayleigh), impact on the view of the Spa Pub, and the increase in street clutter. There was also a comment that traffic lights have been used at the junction in the past but the existing roundabout has improved traffic flow. Conversely there were some suggestions that traffic lights could improve traffic flow and also a suggestion that it would improve pedestrian crossings. Another comment suggested a slip road into Spa Road from Main Road to improve traffic flow from the west i.e. Rayleigh. It was suggested that more detailed research, modelling and options were needed in addition to a road count. It was commented that pedestrian and traffic movements need to be fully considered.

It was also commented that drivers need to be made more aware of the Woodlands Road turning at the Spa Road roundabout. Suggestions were made to improve signage, reduce road speeds approaching the junction and other traffic calming measures such as raising the whole junction or introducing humps.

The general consensus with regard to Woodlands Road was that it should not be closed off as this would move the problem to Hockley Rise. It was stressed that this would exacerbate the problems at the Hockley Rise/Southend Road junction which respondents felt has somewhat restricted visibility (as it is situated on the brow of a hill on a bend). It was suggested that it would create a hazardous junction which is already problematic at school times (Westerings Primary School is accessible from here). There was also a suggestion that the plan should refer to the opportunities for potential improvements to this junction.

The option referring to restrictions on the right turn or left turn only out from Woodlands Road was considered to be confusing, difficult to enforce and inappropriate. Although there was another comment that a signalised junction instead of the roundabout may be appropriate with restricted use at peak times and sensors.

It was felt that there are limited opportunities for traffic to bypass the centre of Hockley and relieve traffic flow which would make improving the Spa Road roundabout junction difficult. The current impact of deliveries to Somerfield supermarket and the Spa Pub were noted as impeding traffic flows and causing congestion along Spa Road at certain

times. It was emphasised that the B1013 is already under pressure and this is likely to increase from future development both in and around Hockley. There is a need to consider the impact of other developments in the area on traffic flow through Hockley, as concern was expressed that the wider highways impact has not been considered. It was also commented that many people commute from Hockley and that this needs to be recognised in the Plan. It was suggested that many travel by car.

A comment suggested that through traffic entering the centre of Hockley should be separated from customer traffic. There was a suggestion that a new road could be built from Waters and Stanton, Main Road to Eldon Way Industrial Estate behind the shops in Spa Road. It was also suggested that improvements to Lower Road could ease traffic in Hockley and that improvements to Plumberow Avenue could also be made. It was emphasised that a better bus service is needed.

There was a suggestion that the junctions to the north and south of the station need improving. It was commented that the roundabout along Station Approach is appropriate, however concern was expressed that moving back the stop lines from the junction of Station Approach and Spa Road would further restrict a driver's vision. With regard to this junction, which also relates to the nearby Station Road / Spa Road junction, a double mini roundabout was suggested. It was also highlighted that Spa Road can be accessed from Southend Road via Great Eastern Road / Station Road which increases traffic at this junction. Furthermore there was a comment that the railway bridge by Plumberow Avenue could be widened to allow widening of the road at this point and the pavements. It was also suggested that paragraph 2.6.2 should mention height restrictions due to the presence of the railway bridge along Spa Road.

It was suggested that with reference to paragraph 3.9.2 it states that buildings have been set back due to congestion, however, this may be due to planning restrictions to permit future junction improvements. It was suggested that buildings which are set back add to Hockley's character.

There was concern regarding the impact of the Airport development on Hockley with particular reference to implications for the road and rail network. It was suggested that more detail needs to be provided.

It was noted that paragraphs 2.6.3 and 2.9.1 should refer to Plumberow Avenue and not Mount Crescent. It was also suggested that contrary to Figure 4, Woodlands Road is not a distributor road but a local road. It was also commented that the District does not have a transport plan. A comment also expressed support for the option outlined in paragraph 3.9.10.

Parking

The suitability of existing parking was raised as an important concern during the consultation. The lack of free off street parking was highlighted as an issue, particularly along Spa Road which is generally considered to be the main retail area. On street parking along Spa Road was identified as a concern with reference made to improper parking in disabled bays and bus stops. Respondents stated that inappropriate parking was a hazard for pedestrians and drivers in Hockley centre.

Respondents suggested that inadequate parking provision was harmful to businesses in the centre. In particular, it was suggested that there is inadequate parking behind Somerfield. Concern was expressed at the potential loss of car parking for Potters identified as Site K. Concern was also expressed regarding the impact of proposals around the junction of Bramerton Road and Spa Road. There were also worries in respect of the impact of car parking and increased traffic on this junction and the nearby Spa Road roundabout.

It was commented that increasing car parking to the south side of the railway line as proposed in the Plan would cause more congestion problems at busy junctions, and it was considered to be too far away from centre of Hockley. Another respondent questioned that if the station car park is underused then why has it been proposed to be extended, and it was commented that the focus should be on improving public transport instead. However, another comment was made which suggested the provision of free parking on some of Eldon Way Industrial Estate. Furthermore it was suggested that the car park behind the library along Southend Road is inadequate and underused due to its distance from the main retail area along Spa Road – links between the main retail area and existing parking provision was considered poor. The vacant shops along Main Road were also highlighted as a concern, along with the lack of parking available in this area. A comment suggested that more central parking is needed. One idea put forward was that the vacant wood yard could be used for parking.

It was recognised that parking for proposed additional dwellings in the centre of Hockley needs to be addressed. Underground parking was suggested as a solution. There was also a suggestion that this may also be used to increase parking provision for customers.

It was noted that paragraph 2.6.4 does not include all off street parking along Spa Road for example behind Alldays, Somerfield and the Factory Shop, although it was recognised that whilst these are free, they are for use by customers only.

Public Transport

Public transport in Hockley is considered to be inadequate with regards to the bus service which is not frequent enough, although there was a suggestion that the buses are underutilised. A comment suggested that real time bus information would be useful. Concern was expressed regarding the siting of bus stops particularly on the north side of Spa Road which, it was highlighted, restricts drivers' view from the two nearby car parks. There was a suggestion that adequate space should be provided to allow buses to turn around so that they can avoid the Great Eastern Road / Station Road route. It was also highlighted that at paragraph 3.9.12 the improved bus facilities providing a central focus would coincide with the proposed square, which assumes that this proposal has been approved.

It was recognised that an improved interchange between bus and rail links are needed. A comment suggested that one ticket to use on both the bus and train would be useful. Improvements to the appearance of the train station were generally welcomed, although concern was expressed regarding investment, funding and maintenance and the need to avoid vandalism. The problem of overcrowded trains was also highlighted. With regard to paragraph 2.8.1 it was noted that although the trains run every 20 minutes off peak, this is increased during rush hour.

Cycling

The general consensus was that provision of a cycle network and racks are needed although there were some suggestions that dedicated cycle lanes are unnecessary, and that, in any case, the roads are too narrow.

Public Open Space, Pavements and Crossings

Concern was expressed regarding the implications of developing a central public open space particularly the potential to attract anti-social behaviour. Reiterating the predominant consensus that residents like the village feel of Hockley, there was general unease with the reference to the development of a *town* square. It was suggested that this was a contradiction. It was also questioned as to whether a square was needed and that it would be an inefficient use of space in the centre of Hockley. A comment was also made that Hockley had a village green in the past which was developed.

There was a comment which recognised that open space and preservation of the countryside are important. It was highlighted that allotments are needed, as well as more green spaces in general. The importance of Hockley Woods was also recognised.

There was concern regarding the proposed landscaped route through the church garden (which is included in all options) and implications for neighbouring properties. Comments suggested that it is unnecessary, there would be a loss of private green space, it would need to be linked with the pedestrian crossing on Southend Road, it would create problems in terms of safety and security, and the benefits for the church would be questionable.

A comment highlighted that the alleyways and pavements around the centre of Hockley are well used, although it was suggested that there is nothing wrong with the width of the pavement, or road, along Spa Road.

It was recognised that some improvements to the public realm may be made. Suggestions included more planting, bins and benches. However, other comments felt that recent improvements are adequate. Furthermore, concern was expressed that any public realm improvements would need to be funded by large-scale development. Landscaping is supported but there is concern regarding maintenance. A respondent felt that the legibility and adaptability of the built environment is irrelevant.

It was recognised that pedestrian and traffic movements need to be fully considered. There was concern around the Spa Road roundabout and the pedestrian crossing close to this junction which have an impact on traffic flow. It was suggested that the zebra crossing outside Potters should be moved a short distance to improve safety, although it was commented that it does have benefits for traffic flow at the roundabout. Another suggestion is that this crossing should be moved to past the Bramerton Road / Spa Road junction and that there should be another crossing closer to Station Approach and Station Road on Spa Road for commuters. The relocation of the crossing by the Factory Shop to a more central location was another idea put forward.

Another comment suggested providing an additional link over the railway line to connect the north of Hockley with the facilities at Eldon Way Industrial Estate.

Employment Land

The general consensus in the representations was that Eldon Way Industrial Estate is viable in its existing form. It was suggested that some refurbishment and improvements to the layout may be appropriate and implemented gradually, but more leisure facilities and a greater mix of employment uses should be encouraged. However it was noted that the Industrial Estate (light industrial uses) was meant to be separate from main retail environment but that it now includes leisure facilities. It was also suggested that Eldon Way contributes to the vision of the Plan.

Concern was expressed as to where existing businesses on Eldon Way would be relocated to. It was suggested that the relocation of the existing employment units at Eldon Way to the area around the Airport (as an option) would be expensive, and concern was expressed over a lack of public transport in this area. It was noted that the Foundry Industrial Estate had not been included in the Plan. There was a suggestion that the units on this Industrial Estate could be moved onto Eldon Way and this site used for housing. It was also suggested that if a larger supermarket than existing is necessary then this may be more appropriately sited on Eldon Way.

Concern was noted that promoting some residential uses in Eldon Way (options 1.1. and 1.2) would generate a loss of employment land, undermine employment vitality, undermine the customer base and vitality of the centre of Hockley, and increase commuting for workers to elsewhere for employment. Concern was expressed regarding a lack of full time employment opportunities in Hockley, other than those provided on Eldon Way and the impact on employment/job losses on the area. A suggestion was made that another low level option may be appropriate, for example focusing regeneration on the centre and promoting Eldon Way for additional employment uses.

There was, however, some support for the redevelopment of Eldon Way with a mix of uses but it was emphasised that it should not be just residential. The inclusion of a health care centre was proposed. In terms of the appropriate mass and scale of any development, it was suggested that where redevelopment is proposed for residential use, then it should not be above two storeys. Concern was expressed regarding the overlooking of proposals for residential use in Eldon Way (options 2.1. and 2.2) and the impact on traffic. There was also a suggestion to create a village square in Eldon Way, remove the existing industrial uses and replace these with community uses. Another comment suggested that some redevelopment of Eldon Way (Sites B and C) along the south side backing the shops along Spa Road may be appropriate but not the other options/sites identified.

A respondent questioned the height of the water table at Eldon Way and the implications of this.

EEDA suggested that consideration should be given to the guidance note on Employment Land Reviews produced by EERA/EEDA/Go East.

Retail Environment

There was a general consensus in the representations received that large scale redevelopment is inappropriate and unnecessary for the centre of Hockley.

It was suggested that Hockley cannot compete with other centres such as Southend, Basildon and Lakeside as these are easily accessible. It was further suggested that there are limited opportunities to enhance the retail offer within Hockley to enable it to compete. A large supermarket in the centre was felt to be inappropriate and unnecessary, as other such facilities are accessible to Hockley residents. There was unease about enabling multinational chains to locate in the centre of Hockley and the impact this would have on established local and independent businesses. There was general concern regarding the impact of proposals on existing businesses and dwellings.

It was emphasised that Hockley is perceived as a village with small shops, and that larger units are not needed. People want to retain the village feel and the existing fine grain of shops. There was concern regarding moving the centre away from its existing location and the impact this would have on character. As such large scale development of the centre is not supported. It was noted that local shops need more support. The vacant former Alldays unit was highlighted, and there was concern regarding existing vacant retail units and whether there was a demand for more. A comment suggested that Alldays may be used as the village centre or square. Additionally it was suggested that it may be used for parking and linked to Somerfield's car park.

It was suggested that gradual improvements to the centre may be appropriate. It was highlighted that the appearance of the centre needs some attention and there is potential for shop front improvements. Some respondents felt that the buildings at junction of Main Road / Woodlands Road may benefit from regeneration. Again it was emphasised that the focus should be on small independent shops. There was also concern regarding the impact of business rates on businesses – whether improvements would drive these up leading to the displacement of local businesses.

Comments highlighted that some areas have not been included in the Plan, for example the shops opposite the Baptist Church on Main Road including the former wood yard and the shops opposite Potters on Main Road. It was also noted that the Plan neglects other local shops in Hockley for example Broad Parade near Greensward Lane and it was questioned as to why some shops on the south side of Spa Road (Site J) have been included whereas the other shops have not (except in the higher options).

The existing low level buildings are preferred and it was emphasised that buildings should not be above two storeys. It was suggested that the low buildings on the south side of Spa Road ensure there is sunlight along the main retail area. Further to this concern was expressed regarding the impact on residential buildings fronting Southend Road if the height of buildings at Site J were to be increased above one storey. The building line was generally considered to be ok on the north and south sides of Spa Road and this was considered to add to the character of Hockley. Although there was a suggestion that the north side of Spa Road is better than the south side. However, a comment expressed concern that doing nothing is not an option.

Concern was expressed with regard to the implication of the proposals on existing businesses, the cost of renting redeveloped premises, the potential loss of local services with redevelopment (e.g. the bank), implications for the sorting office if forced to relocate and concern that this local facility may not remain in Hockley. Concern regarding the impact of any redevelopment on local service provision for the local community was expressed, in particular for the elderly and those without transport.

Concern was also expressed for a supermarket and car park proposed on corner of Bramerton Road, especially as it would be accessed from this road. Comments also referred to the impact on existing shops, the neighbouring church on Bramerton Road, pedestrian safety and the traffic impact particularly at the nearby Spa Road roundabout junction. Hockley should retain all the services which provide for the day to day needs of residents.

It was noted that there are vacant shops along Main Road and there is a lack of parking available to service the occupied premises. As noted earlier, there was a suggestion to redevelop the vacant wood yard for parking.

Whilst there was a comment that existing shops are doing well, it was also expressed that there is a need to attract shoppers and encourage people to shop locally. Indeed concern was expressed regarding decreases in footfall and the impact on local shops. There was also a suggestion of holding a farmers market.

Residential Development

There was concern expressed regarding the potential increase in housing within the centre of Hockley. It was commented that the numbers proposed in all options is too high, and there are existing empty dwellings. Concern was expressed regarding the impact this would have on local services such as schools, doctors and dentists. To reiterate, the general consensus was that large scale redevelopment is not required. Overcrowding is a concern. Infilling was commented as being inappropriate, as it is considered to affect the village feel and there is a need to retain Hockley's character.

Concern was expressed that the proposed housing does not seek to provide for the aging population, or provide an appropriate mix of housing, and that there is a need for single storey bungalows. As such the proposal of flats was raised as an issue and concern was expressed regarding the compatibility of leisure uses with residential above. Concern was raised with reference to three of four storey flats. There was also a suggestion that if new homes are needed then they should be affordable and environmentally friendly. Furthermore it was suggested that existing empty offices above shops and the vacant shops along Main Road could be converted into flats. There was a suggestion that additional residential development is preferable on brownfield land rather than on Green Belt but there was concern with regard to the infrastructure to support such proposals and the impact on traffic.

Infrastructure, Facilities and Services

There was concern relating to the provision of infrastructure to support any proposals.

It was suggested that more youth, leisure and community facilities are needed, although it was noted that there are already some located in Eldon Way. It was commented that better access from Spa Road to these facilities is needed. It was also suggested that youth facilities should not be sited close to the Spa Pub or residential uses, and concern was expressed regarding the congregation of youths around Woodlands Road and impact on residential amenity. The problem of youths gathering around the train station and shops was also highlighted. It was suggested that new youth facilities would be more appropriately located on Eldon Way along with other leisure and industrial uses. It was also suggested that the siting of youth facilities should have a separate option.

Consideration needs to be given to the running of youth facilities and encouraging the youth to use the facilities provided beyond the provision of a building.

It was commented that community facilities should be centrally located with adequate parking. Concern was expressed regarding the clustering of community uses around the Spa Road roundabout and the impact this may have on traffic and the associated parking provision which would be needed. However, a comment suggested that the community hub is a good idea. It was suggested that the health facility at Site H should remain. Another comment suggested that Hockley already has the facilities to meet its residents' needs; conversely others felt that there was a lack of doctors and dentists in the area and a new facility at Site L may be a good idea. There was concern regarding the compatibility of proposed health facilities and existing doctors surgeries, although improvements to existing facilities were welcomed. There was also concern regarding the accessibility of a central health facility for the elderly, and the removal of health care facilities from Hockley. Concern was also expressed regarding the implications for Hockley and Hawkwell Day Centre (situated within Site L) as there is no reference to it in the Plan.

It was suggested that future iterations of the document should be more specific regarding the type of community and leisure facilities proposed. There is a need to include reference to improving access to sports and recreational facilities and the revised Playing Pitch Strategy. It was commented that additional and enhanced provision should be funded through planning obligation contributions and Sport England active design guidance should be referred to.

Concern was expressed regarding the capacity of existing sewerage/drainage systems. In addition a comment from Anglian Water Services Ltd suggested that generally there is available capacity at the Sewage Treatment Works to treat the potential foul flows from these sites, but there is limited capacity within the foul network that will require further consideration - surface water can be accommodated.

There was a suggestion that public toilets proposed for the train station should be closer to the centre, and that the library and neighbouring restaurant on Southend Road should remain. It was suggested that more signposts and policing are needed. Concern was expressed regarding increased crime, and the responsiveness of the fire service to incidents.

Community and Character

It was suggested that the lack of uniformity of buildings adds to the character / identity of Hockley. There was concern regarding the impact on the existing linear structure and moving the centre away from its existing location on the character of Hockley. It was emphasised that there is a need to retain the community feel. Any redevelopment should be sensitive to the village atmosphere, incorporating small units and encouraging independent shops. Concern was expressed regarding the quality of any buildings / development proposed and impact on character.

Historic Environment

It was suggested by Essex County Council that the cultural heritage / historic environment needs to be further considered and any impacts should be mentioned.

There was a suggestion that Spa Road from the Spa Pub to old spa building (which is a Listed Building) is the centre of Hockley. It was highlighted that past redevelopment has resulted in the loss of some historic buildings, although an historic road sign remains by the roundabout, and it was emphasised that the existing historic / landmark buildings need to be preserved. A comment also stated that Hockley is unique and should be treated as such and reference was made to the Essex Design Guide.

Deliverability

Concern was expressed regarding deliverability, viability, how private investment could be attracted without large-scale development, the role of public funding, whether an Environmental Impact Assessment will be needed and whether the Council will lead the planning application process. There was also concern raised regarding compulsory purchase orders. A comment specifically referred to the long-timescale for the Plan and the potential for property blight for both residents and businesses. It was therefore stated that if compulsory purchase is needed then it should be used sooner rather than later.

General Comments

It was suggested that the 'Summary of Issues' table should include a theme to address future development. It was also suggested that it should include more reference to congestion, parking and public transport. A comment suggested that many would disagree that there is not a diverse range of shops. It was proposed that the roads should be enhanced to accommodate HGVs and that development should be focussed on the existing area only. Sport England suggested that opportunities to enhance sports / recreational provision as part of a mixed use development should be explored. There was concern regarding anti-social behaviour and that the summary of issues is not representative of the majority of opinions. It was also highlighted that there is a need to keep residents informed.

There was a suggestion that some of the phrases used in the document need to be in plain English and better justified, for example "enhancements to the public realm". There was concern regarding the lack of detail to explain the proposals with particular reference to the distinction / difference between the low and medium options concerning the development of Eldon Way, what is actually being proposed and lack of supporting evidence for statements made in the document. It was noted that identifying the sites as A to H is an appropriate way of identifying the different areas proposed. Concern was expressed in a comment that the proposals are not evidenced by a sustainability appraisal. Another comment suggested that the tables on page 41-45 should be accompanied by a table of existing floorspace to enable comparison with proposals. Some respondents felt the text and description needed to be clearer and more detailed.

The Environment Agency suggested that the 'Development Issues' section should provide advice for delivering high quality sustainable development covering sustainable development / construction, sustainable drainage and biodiversity / landscaping.

It was claimed that that the Retail and Leisure Study suggested that Hockley is not a town. There was concern that the Plan has not had regard to the Sustainable Community Strategy. There was also a comment which stated that the options go against the Employment Land Study. It was highlighted by Go East that the reference to

the East of England Plan on page 51 is out of date and page 57 should refer to Natural England. It was suggested that the Placecheck information and web-based evidence should be available. Concern was also expressed that a timescale is not included in the Plan.

It was noted that page 47 is titled Southend Road but the text below only refers to Spa Road.

A respondent also disagreed with the assertion that Site L and M are 'cluttered and uncoordinated'.

Comments on the consultation process

There was general concern expressed regarding the lack of notification and awareness of the consultation, and as such the consultation period was not considered to be long enough to provide residents with sufficient time to read the document and comment.

Particular reference was made to:

- the method of advertising which was not considered to be effective
- a suggestion that the SCI had not been complied with
- that residents were not on or aware of the Citizens Panel and that these views were not representative
- the HAAP presentation was not in Hockley but in Hullbridge
- residents were not given enough notice of the meeting held in Hockley
- there was not enough time to respond
- it was not clear how to access/obtain the consultation document
- there were problems experienced commenting online

It was suggested that more information was needed on the purpose of the document and what it is trying to achieve. There was also criticism by a resident that inclusion of some of the larger scale proposals were hidden in the emerging Core Strategy.

End