

The Hullbridge Village Plan 2012-2014

The Hullbridge Village Community Group would like to thank Hullbridge Residents, Hullbridge Parish Council & HCA Ripples in assisting us with the Village Plan.



The Willows Children's Centre - St. Thomas of Canterbury Church - Hullbridge Freechurch - Christian Spiritualist Church - Hullbridge Library - Hullbridge Gardens Association - Astronomy - Hullbridge Fellowship - Hullbridge Philatelic Society - HYC Tea Room - The Hullbridge Centre - Riverside Ladies Club - Riverside Medical Centre - Friends of Kendal Park - Youth Club - T.P.R.A. - The Hullbridge Business Network - The Hullbridge Residents Action Group - The Patient's Participation Group - Coffee Tots



Hullbridge Village
Community Group



Hullbridge Community Centre



HULLBRIDGE PARISH COUNCIL



Girl Guides



Dear
Villager



The Hullbridge
Pre-school

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The Hullbridge Village Plan was developed to be a guidance document for the benefit of the Parish Council and all that live in this parish, evidencing the wants and needs of our community. The Plan is the result of analysed data from a questionnaire delivered throughout the village.

On behalf of the Hullbridge Village Community Group, I would like to thank Andrew Abrahams for his excellent work analysing the data, John Goulding for allowing us to use the picture on the front cover (visual360media.com), The Hullbridge Parish Council and the HCA for their support in the production of this document.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Hullbridge Village Community Group and the volunteers that delivered the questionnaire, all of whom, worked extremely hard. The production of this document evidences the spirit that is available in abundance in this community and also identifies the activities and amenities that are available to all.

*Hullbridge is a great place to live, so let's work together to keep it that way.
Kindest regards to all.*

Danny Gatehouse

Chairman – Hullbridge Village Community Group

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Hullbridge Village Plan! Developed over a period of more than two years, this document represents the culmination of much hard work to find out exactly what our residents think of our village, and how they think it can be made even better.

What is a Plan?

Put simply, a Village Plan is supposed to provide a blueprint for making our community even better than it is already. The work involved in producing it helps the community in a number of ways:

- it gives residents a chance to put forward their views on a variety of issues that affect Hullbridge
- in doing so, it forces them to focus on what matters to the village, what aspects of village life are important and how they can be made even better; and
- it seeks to prioritize those projects or initiatives that residents feel are necessary.

Just as importantly, when the Parish Council and others are speaking to bodies whose decisions impact on Hullbridge (e.g., the District Council or the Highways Authority) or are applying for grant aid funding for projects, they can prove beyond doubt that what they are asking for really does represent the desires of people who live here.

With the benefit of all the information provided by residents, this Plan sets out a series of actions that are necessary to meet the community's own aspirations for the future of Hullbridge; the formal list of all those actions can be found in the attached appendix.

What next?

Completing the Plan is, of course, only the beginning of the story. The acid test is how it influences village life, what projects start to come to fruition and how it involves local people. As will be clear from the Action plan, achieving all that residents say they want will need the support of national, regional and local agencies, not just in the coming weeks but over a number of years.

Now that the Plan has been adopted by the Parish Council, the HVCG's work on it has come to an end, and Parish Council will take on the role of champion for us all in turning the community-led vision set out in the Plan into reality.

Over the past few years, a number of people have worked on creating the Plan. However, none of it would have been possible without the generous financial and administrative support of the Parish Council, and the guidance, financial and other assistance provided by the Rural Community Council for Essex (RCCE).

And the final thank you must go to all of those residents of Hullbridge who were prepared to provide us with their detailed (and unvarnished!) opinions about our village and how it could be made even better.

HULLBRIDGE TODAY

Where we are

Hullbridge sits in the middle of a triangle formed by three of Essex's largest towns: Basildon to the west, Southend to the east and Chelmsford to the north. It is bounded to the north by the River Crouch, which is an important feature in the overall beauty of the area.

In reality, there is only one road that provides access to Hullbridge. Hullbridge Road approaches the village from the south, coming from the nearest town, Rayleigh, which is three miles away. Seven miles beyond Rayleigh lies Basildon. As Hullbridge Road reaches Hullbridge, it turns through 90° to the east and becomes Lower Road, which leads out of the village after about a mile in the direction of the district's administrative centre of Rochford, and onwards to Southend.

Two other roads are important to Hullbridge. Firstly, where these two roads meet, a third - and much smaller road – called Watery Lane provides access via the next village of Battlesbridge up to the A130, which leads to Chelmsford. Secondly, a few hundred yards to the east of the Hullbridge Road/Lower Road junction, Ferry Road travels north for about a mile, ending at the River Crouch. Ferry Road and its environs represent the main settlement.

Hullbridge officially covers an area of 784 hectares (nearly 2,000 acres) shaped around Hullbridge Road and Lower Road. It includes all of the land to the north of Lower Road for a distance of about two miles, out past the Dome Village, a mobile home park that is one of five in Hullbridge. On the eastern side of Hullbridge Road, it extends south past the golf club and east to Blountswood Road. Its western boundary is a line running north from the junction of these two roads up to the river.

Who we are

One hundred years ago, Hullbridge was a sleepy village involved only in agriculture. At that time, there were only 50 homes located around Hullbridge Road, Lower Road, Ferry Road and Pooles Lane, with a population of 250. In the 1920's, the land that makes up the currently developed part of the village, was sold off as plotland on which mainly small properties were built. Broadly speaking, there was little growth in Hullbridge until after the Second World War, with major expansions in residential development coming in spurts, starting in the 1960s. The results of this expansion can be seen today around 75 roads that have grown up on either side of Ferry Road.

According to the 2011 census, Hullbridge's current population is 6,527 (only 82 higher than ten years ago). This works out at 8.3 persons per hectare, but this figure is very misleading since well over 90% of Hullbridge's residents live within a small area around Ferry Road representing less than 10% of the overall size.

The population breakdown is shown in the chart. One in six residents is under the age of 18, while rather more than one-third are 60 years of age or older. This elderly population is very high when compared to the average for Essex (one-quarter) and for England as a whole (where, overall, only one in eight is aged 60 or over).

Altogether, these residents live in around 2,850 homes of various types; one in six of these are a mobile home.

Where we work

Determining the active working population is difficult from official statistics since the potential "economically active" population is considered to be anyone between the ages of 16 and 75. However, within that grouping, nearly 3,000 describe themselves as working, and one-fifth of that 3,000 are self-employed. Only 150 people in the 16-75 brackets officially consider themselves as unemployed. However, there is very little employment in the village itself (there are less than 200 jobs, including in our shops).

What's here

Hullbridge offers a great deal to people who live here. Like all villages, there have been shop closures over the years. Some result from changes to how we all live (i.e., closure of bank branches); others are more specifically local changes (i.e., the opening of an Asda supermarket a little more than two miles away).

However, there are still around 20 shops in the village, including three good-sized supermarkets (Budgens, Co-op and OneStop). Among other shops, we have a pharmacy, a bakery, butcher and vets, plus hairdressers and beauty salons. We also have a launderette.

Our health centre is very highly regarded, and our library remains open four half days per week. On the educational front, we have a combined infant and primary school with a roll of a little over 350. We also have nursery groups.

There are two main centres for organised activities: Hullbridge Community Association is located at the north of the village, and Hullbridge Sports & Social Club is situated to the south. Both offer a number of leisure activities to residents and to others. In addition, the Hullbridge Centre provides additional activities to the over 55's. Senior citizens are also able to take advantage of a thriving U3A in Hullbridge. There are a number of clubs and societies active in the village, including the Ladies Club and WI, plus other groups such as the Hullbridge Philatelic Society. A golf course is located at the Rayleigh Club, along Hullbridge Road.

In addition, the Parish Council is responsible for running well over 100 allotments in a single location in the village, and there is a voluntarily-run Hullbridge Gardens Association, which allows its members to benefit from bulk-buying of gardening materials and plants.

Along the riverside can be found the Kendal Nature Reserve, and there are three yacht clubs in Hullbridge further to the east (Upriver, Hullbridge and Brandy Hole).

At the eastern end of the Riverside, Brandy Hole Yacht Club has a successful restaurant, as does the Anchor bar/restaurant, located at the western end between Upriver Yacht Club and the Kendal Nature Reserve. There is also a bar called the Smuggler's Den between the Anchor and the Nature Reserve. In addition, there is a good-quality Indian restaurant that has been established for more than 25 years, together with two Chinese takeaways and a Turkish restaurant.

Between the Upriver and Hullbridge yacht clubs can be found the recreation ground, which has a children's playground, a BMX course, skateboard ramps and a basketball court. Two football pitches are also available there. A range of sporting and social activities are also available at the Hullbridge Sports Club. They include Football, Table Tennis, Live Music and Bingo.

There are Anglican and Congregational churches in Hullbridge, and the Spiritualist church also has a presence in the village.

CREATING A VILLAGE PLAN

Hullbridge considers itself to be a close-knit community. It is still a place where people say good morning to each other, and there is a strong sense of community spirit. Certainly, everyone refers to Hullbridge as “the village”, whether that term is strictly speaking accurate or not. While there had been an erosion of services over time (for example, the bank and the police station were closed some years ago), there had been very little new development that might alter dramatically the number of inhabitants.

In 2006, Rochford District Council started work on its development plans for the area for the period up until 2026. However, it was only in 2009 that it became clear to most residents that the District Council's ideas included another 500 houses in Hullbridge, by which time their plans were far advanced.

A small number of residents believed that it might be possible, even at that late stage, to influence how the changes might be brought into effect in Hullbridge. However, to take any proposals seriously, they knew it was very important to show that (i) they had the endorsement of our local administrative body, the Parish Council; i.e. it was a Village Plan.

The first meeting called to judge the appetite for a Village Plan was held at the Hullbridge Community Association in July 2010. This meeting identified some support, as did another subsequent meeting and a community workshop, which was organised with the support of the Rural Community Council of Essex. Finally, a group of volunteers came together to form what is now known as the Hullbridge Village Community Group in March 2011.

Over the following year, the group worked on developing a detailed questionnaire to be sent to all residents, asking for opinions on a complete range of issues that the group believed were relevant to Hullbridge. Although the majority of the questions posed sought a single multiple-choice answer, a significant number also provided opportunities for respondents to give detailed written comments.

The questionnaire was issued to all 2,850 homes in April 2012. Recipients were given a number of weeks to reply, and were able to return completed questionnaires to a number of locations around the village. Responses were received from 1,060 properties, representing a return from well over 35% of all possible respondents. This is a very high response from such a large community, and getting on for twice the response rate experienced in the neighbouring villages of Hawkwell and Hockley when they worked on their own plans.

As expected, respondents were not shy in making detailed comments when they thought it appropriate and, in all, nearly 10,000 individual comments were received.

During the summer of 2012, all the responses were input into the SurveyMonkey computer package, which provided a numerical summary of the responses to each question. With the benefit of this, a detailed independent analysis was carried out, and a full report was issued in September 2012.

That report considered a number of different aspects of life in Hullbridge that the Group decided should be addressed in the questionnaire. For the purposes of this document, those elements have been grouped into seven sections, as follows:

1. Development of new housing
2. Road usage (parking, traffic, public transport)
3. Community concerns (communication, crime, volunteering)
4. Well-being (health, adult leisure)
5. Environment (environment/maintenance, the Riverside)
6. Youth (school, youth leisure)
7. Business (shops, business)

Over the following months, the group worked hard to develop solutions to the issues identified in the report as being important to residents. These solutions are presented in this document as an action plan that sets out what actions are necessary, tries to prioritise them and provides a full list of which agencies should lead the work necessary to bring them to fruition.

After some time discussing the contents of the draft Village Plan with the Parish Council , the Village Plan was finally adopted by the Parish Council in January 2014.

DEVELOPMENT

Where we are

Today, there are around 2,850 homes in Hullbridge. The main settlement is very highly developed, with very little new construction in recent times. In fact, between 1997 and 2011, planning permission was granted for only 129 new dwellings (59 of which were flats), and these new developments required the demolition of 38 existing properties on those sites.

The District Council's proposals for future housing in Hullbridge, which was the catalyst for the development of the Village Plan, calls for 500 new homes to be built in Hullbridge in the period up until 2026, a 17.5% increase from the current level.

What we asked

Questions to residents addressed:

- what existing demand there might be for additional homes in Hullbridge over time
- how people felt about the District Council's proposal in terms of size, location and practicability, and
- what independent ideas they might have to improve and extend housing in the village.

What we found

This section produced the most detailed responses, with 1,023 respondents specifically commenting on this. Only 5.2% actually said that they were happy with the proposal, and 84.4% of respondents explicitly said they were unhappy. Nevertheless, 170 respondents (or one in six) indicated that one or more of their family would be looking to purchase or rent in Hullbridge in the future.

Many respondents felt that there were better locations for new housing if it was absolutely necessary. Overriding this however was a real fear that the scale of such new development would destroy the sense of community spirit that exists in Hullbridge; more

than 70% of the respondents in this section referred to that sense, using the terms “community spirit”, “village feel”, “sense of community” or “village atmosphere”.

Beyond the threat to that sense of community, a great many respondents were worried about the impact on the current infrastructure and, in particular, the road network, sewage and drainage. With so few alternative methods of transport, residents feared up to 1,000 more cars on the already stretched local roads, plus up to 2,000 more people (a population increase of 30%) using the limited facilities.

However, there was a sense that most residents would be supportive of a large number of new homes in Hullbridge if these infrastructure weaknesses could be adequately addressed before any substantial development began, and if this new population could be assimilated into the village in a positive and embracing way.

Any developer will be required to make a financial contribution to the community by way of a Community Infrastructure Levy. While it is evident that the local authority will expect a real contribution to road improvements at the accesses to the new developments (wherever they may be), the strong desire that the community should remain whole dictates that financial and other contributions should be dedicated to:

- improving and expanding the existing wide range of community facilities, and
- ensuring that any open spaces in the new development are located close to existing properties so that the existing community can feel that it is made available for them as well.

Priorities

- working to ensure that any new development acknowledges and appreciates the concerns of the existing community, so that future residents regard themselves as a part of Hullbridge,
- working with the authorities to improve the infrastructure for the village as a whole.

ROAD USAGE

Where we are

After development, the greatest number, and most vociferous concerns were voiced about traffic issues, both in terms of traffic speed and parking.

Since there is little or no employment in Hullbridge itself, almost all those who do work need to travel outside the village. We have no railway station (the nearest station is at Rayleigh, on the line between London and Southend), and only a single bus service. As a result, almost all people needing to go anywhere have no alternative but to drive (the official figures are that, in 2011, 90% of all trips were made by car).

The bus service goes to Southend via Rayleigh. It is supplemented during term time with additional buses going to the local secondary school in Rayleigh. At present, however, there is no bus service that provides access to Hockley (the next large village), Hawkwell (with the Council's leisure centre with swimming pool), Rochford (the main base for the District Council) or Southend Airport (which is likely to have increasing employment).

With only one main road accessing the village, this leads to congestion at various times of the day. With considerable additional residential development, not just in Hullbridge but also in the surrounding area, this access is of huge concern to residents. The Highway

Authority's medium-to-long term plans call for road improvements at each end of Rawreth Lane, which could help to alleviate some of the pressure on our roads. However there are no planned improvements to Watery Lane (indeed, current thinking is that traffic should be discouraged from using it). In reality the lane is seen by residents and visitors alike as a cut through, and will always see significant traffic flows.

Hullbridge enjoys the benefit of a large free car park at the north end of Ferry Road. The Parish Council took over responsibility for this many years ago to prevent the District Council from introducing parking fees. The car park was completely resurfaced in 2013. Elsewhere in Ferry Road, there are a number of designated parking locations, either on the road or on private land owned by the supermarkets.

What we asked

Residents were asked about :

- traffic congestion,
- traffic speeds in the village, and whether traffic calming measures were called for,
- the current bus service, whether or not it was reliable, and whether a second route would be considered valuable,
- the possible introduction of a community bus to provide access around the village and outside of it, and
- parking more generally within Hullbridge.

What we found

A. Roads

With only one road providing access to the village, it was hardly surprising that people were frustrated by the difficulties of getting in and out of the village, particularly at peak times.

Along Lower Road, there are concerns about excessive speed around blind bends, coupled with difficulties caused by drivers turning off Lower Road into the side roads. A further problem reported at these junctions is the level of (legal and illegal) parking very close to the Lower Road junctions. One specific concern raised was the difficulty faced by children on their way to school trying to cross Lower Road in the mornings to get to the bus stop.

Respondents were very outspoken about traffic speed. Although a number of respondents did raise concerns along the four residential roads running parallel to Ferry Road that they claim are being used more and more as “rat-runs”, concerns were broadly limited to following three locations:

- Lower Road (between Pevensey Gardens up to Coventry Hill Garage),
- Ferry Road (not just outside the school, but also more generally), and;
- Pooles Lane (both on the blind bend at the main entrance to Tower Park, and on the straight stretch of road that passes the recreation ground).

Nearly two-thirds (61.9%) felt that traffic calming measures should be introduced in the village, and that figure rose to nearly three-quarters (73.9%) for the area around the school. The dangers are judged to be made worse by poor parking facilities in the middle of the village, and irresponsible parking, particularly by parents dropping off children for school. However, a great many of those saying this were strongly opposed to “sleeping policemen” as the way to enforce speed limits.

There is also specific concern about the Ferry Road / Lower Road junction, particularly

when turning into Ferry Road. Respondents are unimpressed with the location of the zebra crossing, sited right by the Budgens car park. This is exacerbated when delivery lorries are reversing into the Budgens car park, backing up traffic to the roundabout and beyond.

B. The bus service

About 1,000 respondents answered the questions on bus travel; only 19.6% claimed never to have used the number 20 bus, and almost one-third (32.4%) said that they used the bus more than once a week. Exactly three-quarters thought that the bus service was sufficient for their needs, while almost two-thirds (63.5%) thought it reliable.

Despite these positive box-ticking answers, the written responses were rather more negative. While people used it, there were a number of complaints about the service not matching the timetable – as the day progressed, the buses arrived more and more overdue.

More than 700 respondents (72.1%) thought that a second bus route to Southend via Hockley would be useful, and only 6.1% said specifically that they would not use it.

C. Community bus

It was evident from the written responses that there was some confusion about what was meant by a community bus. Some thought of it as a personal bus service to the front door as opposed to only going to the nearest bus stop. As a result, the numbers suggested muted enthusiasm for a Community Bus Service, with 35% in favour, 28% against and 37% of “don't knows”.

Having said that, there was real interest in the provision of a community bus for the following purposes:

- more regular access to the village for residents who do not live in the central part of Hullbridge (e.g., the Dome),
- taking advantage of a number of educational, sporting and other leisure facilities in the vicinity that are not readily accessible except by private car,
- trips to other more distant shopping centres (ranging from Chelmsford and Rochford on market days, to Colchester, Basildon, Lakeside and Bluewater),
- more reliable transport for local groups (e.g., Scouts).

D. Parking

Residents are very keen that the car park at the Pooles Lane end of Ferry Road should remain free. More generally, there were a large number of gripes about parking, in terms of both (i) irresponsible parking by residents, and (ii) the difficulty in finding somewhere to park at certain popular locations in the village.

Respondents would like to see firm action taken against irresponsible parking, with a number specifically asking for more traffic wardens in the village and a “no tolerance” approach. Three specific issues were mentioned:

- residents parking outside their own properties, rather than on their driveways or in their garages;
- parents parking at and around the school to drop off and collect their children, when there is a free public car park 200 yards away; and;
- residents parking too close to road junctions, not on yellow lines but still at locations that make coming in and out of these roads difficult.

Shopping is spread across three “parades” along the length of Ferry Road (Budgens, Co-op to One-Stop and the shops by the school) and, in those areas, parking can be a problem.

Respondents complain that the car parking at Budgens is inadequate and disorganised, made worse by its proximity to the junction with Lower Road and the zebra crossing there. Similarly, the layout is very poor outside the Co-op, and access is potentially very dangerous. Residents also object to residents parking across the pavement outside One-Stop, particularly when the shop offers customer parking at the rear. While all need to be made better, any such improvements would be on private land.

The “school parade” parking (which is less than 200 yards from the free large public car park) also elicited a lot of comment from respondents. The parking bay is too shallow for cars to park head-on, which means that vehicles are parked on a slant, intruding partly into the roadway. This means that passing traffic (which is often travelling at speed) does not have a clear view along the road.

Separately, respondents also expressed concern about parking round by the doctors and chemist. There is limited parking at the surgery itself (again on private land), but residents would also like to restrict parking on Windermere Avenue by the surgery, since it makes it hard for drivers turning into that road to see clearly along it when traffic is parked.

Priorities:

- finding an acceptable way (other than “sleeping policemen”) to reduce traffic speed in the village, particularly along Ferry Road and Pooles Lane,
- working to find a better road layout at the junction of Lower Road and Ferry Road,
- improving safe road crossing at the top of Lower Road,
- pressing for installation of electronic signage at bus stops,
- working towards a second bus service,
- developing a plan to determine feasibility of a Community bus service,
- encouraging more parking in the Ferry Road car park, and working with private owners to improve parking around supermarkets

COMMUNITY

Where we are

This section addressed the following:

- ways in which both individuals and the community as a whole communicate,
- levels of crime in the village, and
- options for volunteering.

The Parish Council currently comprises thirteen volunteer councillors, plus a paid Parish Clerk and a maintenance man, who spends a considerable amount of his time working on footpaths, hedges, etc. It owns its offices in the middle of the village, and this is open to the public on four days per week.

The Parish Council holds monthly public meetings, to which all residents are invited. In addition, information is disseminated via notice boards dotted around the village. It also has a website, but this has been used in the main to publicise meeting agendas and minutes.

Independently, and for many years, a 32-page community magazine called Ripples has been published each quarter, and this is delivered free of charge to every household. Much of the work on its production and distribution is managed by the Hullbridge Community Association, and the running costs are covered through income from advertising in the newsletter. It includes reports from churches and societies, but is largely focused on what has happened, rather than what will be happening.

Broadband is available in the village, but its speed is relatively low because fibre-optic cable has not been laid. The government's intention is that high-speed Broadband should be available to all by 2015, well within the period of the Plan. However, this may not be possible without upgrades to equipment at the local exchange.

Fortunately, crime rates in Hullbridge are extremely low, and have been for some years. This is despite the fact that the police station in the village was closed about 15 years ago. In 2011, total reported crime in the village amounted to 153 incidents, of which all but 11 were made up of theft and handling (46), criminal damage (41), violence against the person (33) and burglary (22). To put this into perspective, in the year to April 2013, Hullbridge had a significantly lower crime rate than any of the ten other neighbourhoods within 5 miles of it.

In a village that regards community spirit as so important, it is not a surprise that there is a good level of volunteering already. There are already a significant number of people who perform a number of activities, ranging from sports coaches to the PTA and the Scouts. As we are some miles from both an ambulance station and a hospital, the volunteer First Responder service potentially plays a specially important role in the village.

What we asked

The questionnaire asked residents about the following:

- Communication – to what extent did the Parish Council keep residents informed,
- what role did Ripples play in the village, what interest there was for broadband access to be improved
- Crime – do residents feel safe. Had residents been the subject of anti-social behaviour, would a more visible police presence be welcome
- Volunteering – respondents were asked to indicate whether they would be willing to volunteer for projects that might arise in one of the following areas: environment, youth, senior citizens, local amenities and community activities.

What we found

Communication:

1,048 residents responded to the question about Ripples, with 96% of them (just over 1,000) agreeing that it provided an informative platform for the community. However, in the text responses, a number of respondents felt that the magazine had become rather staid, and was in need of a major overhaul. There were concerns raised about the lack of content on local issues, as well as the large number of advertisements.

Unlike Ripples, the Parish Council did not receive such strong support; only half the respondents felt that it kept the village well-informed about its activities.

A number of respondents felt that an alternative method of informing residents would be a well-managed informative Hullbridge website, which would provide residents with both general and specific information about facilities available in the village, special events and important external matters that might impact on Hullbridge. One respondent also suggested that this might be a contributory website that could be updated by anyone (and could include blogs).

70% of the respondents recognised the critical importance of high capacity Broadband to the future of our lives, even those who did not use a computer. Reasons listed included: businesses run from home, working from home rather than the office, homework for children, education for all, and communication with friends and family. Others pointed out that there would be also better (and potentially cheaper) cable facilities available with high-speed Broadband.

Crime

With very low crime levels in mind, it was not surprising that, of 1062 respondents to the question, 93.8% of them said that they did feel safe and, of the rest, only 4% explicitly said that they did not feel safe. Two or three respondents said that they did not feel safe at night.

Although one in six said that they had been victims of crime or anti-social behaviour, 25% of those giving details referred to events well over two years ago (with some dating from 20 years ago), or to matters affecting someone else in the village. A further 25% related to what the respondents thought of as anti-social behaviour.

Overall, we conclude that (i) people feel very safe, (ii) there is very little crime to speak of and (iii) broadly speaking, the police (including PCSOs) are responsive to crime (but less so to anti-social behaviour).

Volunteering

The final part of the questionnaire sought information on those who said that they will willing to volunteer for specific projects.

A surprising number of households indicated that one or more people living there *would* be interested to take part in voluntary activities; a great many others indicated that they *might* be willing to do so (those keen to volunteer often did so for a number of the groups, so the numbers are not additive). The results are shown in the Table. Others declined to do so because they were already involved in voluntary work in the village.

Activity	Yes	Maybe
Environment	88	174
Youth	42	116
Senior citizens	64	155
Local amenities	50	172
Community activities	75	211

Priorities

- improving communication between the Parish Council and the community,
- working with the police on the potential impact of new development on crime and safety in Hullbridge,
- putting together a register of volunteers that can be used by groups throughout the village to provide additional help and services to the community as a whole.

WELL-BEING

Where we are

This section of the Village Plan deals with how well Hullbridge residents are looked after when they are unwell, and how they enjoy their leisure facilities when they are able to do so.

Hullbridge has a large GP surgery (the Riverside Medical Centre) located in the middle of the village. This is headed by three long-established and very experienced GPs. It is likely that the surgery will have dealt with a number of generations within the same family, and this continuity adds to the sense of community that exists throughout the village. As a training practice, there are always a number of other qualified doctors working there. For residents, this translates into being assured of seeing a doctor quickly if necessary, often on the same day.

In addition, there are a number of clinics operating each week in one part of the surgery, as well as the ability to have blood tests there twice a week with specialist nurses. A clinic offering other services in another building closed in 2012, with services being transferred to other NHS clinics in the area. As for private services, there are at least three chiropodists, either acting from their homes in the village or from surgeries held at two locations in Hullbridge. There is no dentist in the village, NHS or private, but we do have a family run optician.

There is a very broad range of leisure activities available to residents. Many of these for more mature residents are channelled through the Hullbridge Community Association, the Hullbridge Centre and the Hullbridge Sports Club. A very active U3A branch also caters for 250 of the significant number of retired folk in the village, with a waiting list of those wishing to join; there are currently 36 groups that U3A members can join. We even have a golf club.

For adults of all ages, there are already a significant number of sporting activities in the village, primarily run by the Hullbridge Sports Club, although there are also some sporting activities carried out at both the Day Centre and the Community Association, and football training and matches take place at the recreation ground. A fitness training centre has now opened in Ferry Road.

There are also a number of sports and fitness classes, held mainly outside of Hullbridge. Virgin Active and Clements Hall are facilities provided by the district council, and there is a local gym and swimming pool at Lubbards Farm (only the last of these is currently directly accessible by bus).

What we asked

A series of questions on matters covered in this section were asked of our residents.

On the health side, residents were asked about the health services in general, potential interest in a dentist and for their ideas on how the health and well-being could be improved.

Leisure – use of the Hullbridge centre, what use was made of daytime and evening classes in Hullbridge, and elsewhere, what additional educational facilities would be welcomed, comments on sports facilities in general, and in particular, play areas for children.

What we found

A. Health

Broadly speaking, there is great satisfaction with the service offered by the Riverside Medical Centre (“RMC”) - of more than 1,000 respondents, 98.1% were very satisfied or satisfied. Respondents raised three issues in relation to the RMC:

- it was increasingly difficult to see their doctor of choice quickly,
- working outside the village made visiting the doctor problematic; some respondents asked about evening surgeries and Saturday morning surgeries (even if only by prior appointment), and
- there are a number of trainee GPs in the practice, and this increases the likelihood that successive appointments are with different doctors.

There was extremely high interest in a dental practice being established in Hullbridge. Only 36 respondents (3.5% of the total answering the question) said specifically that they would not use a dentist here (presumably because they are happy with their current dentist). Of the 1,062 respondents, 950 answered this question, and of those, almost three-quarters would sign up for an NHS service, with a further 25% interested in both this and private dental work.

B. Adult leisure

Leisure

In terms of longer term sporting development, respondents indicated that they would like to see tennis courts in Hullbridge, some have mentioned outdoor bowls and there has been talk about improving the skateboard facilities in the recreation ground. There is some demand for a swimming pool; however, there is a children’s outdoor swimming pool at the school, a swimming pool at Lubbards Farm and an indoor pool at Clements Hall.

The Hullbridge Centre is enjoyed by those who attend it, although it is aimed at older retired people.

A number of middle-aged respondents expressed interest in a wide variety of courses, including conversational languages (for pleasure or before holidays), how to run a home, problems associated with bringing up children etc. There are many activities available for what might be termed “middle-aged people and young parents”, but there is no obvious base for such activities.

There were two other issues that respondents mentioned in their responses which may be appropriately placed in this section. The first relates to allotments. It is not easy to

determine from the figures whether they are a satisfactory facility; 21.3% said that the facilities were satisfactory, while 7.2% thought them unsatisfactory – an enormous 71.5% had no view (and some respondents commented that they did not know that there were any allotments at all).

The other issue was use of the library. The number of opening hours halved in July 2011; broadly speaking, respondents used the library a little less, and were using Rayleigh and Hockley instead, but the biggest complaint was that residents could never remember exactly when it was open, and when it was closed.

In summary, therefore, the following can be read into the results of the questionnaire:

- retired people appear to have more than enough to do in the village (should they wish to do so), although it is not always well advertised.
- the facilities available to young and middle-aged adults are more limited, and these too are sometimes poorly advertised.

It is evident that, very often, one age group is unable to satisfy its interest in an activity which is well-covered for those of another age group. For example, respondents have indicated that a number of the courses available to U3A members would be of interest to a younger age group.

Similarly, some sporting activities appear to be rather haphazard. Such activities are available at the Hullbridge Sports Club, the recreation ground, the Community Centre and the Day Centre. In some cases, the same facilities are offered at more than one location.

In addition, for activities that require meeting rooms or classes, residents are keen to see the school used for this, while rooms are also available at the Sports Club, Community Association, Parish Council offices, Ferry Crafts and even the library (which can be rented for functions when closed).

Priorities

- working with Riverside Medical Centre to see how evening and Saturday morning surgeries could be made viable,
- pressing the authorities for a new dental surgery in Hullbridge,
- arranging better co-ordination of leisure facilities across the village, with the Parish Council leading this process,
- working to ensure that existing facilities can be made available to a wider range of age groups,
- carrying out an exercise to balance the interest to bring new activities to Hullbridge against the cost of providing better transport to existing facilities in nearby villages and towns, and produce a leisure strategy for Hullbridge.

ENVIRONMENT

Where we are

This section of the Village Plan deals with a number of issues affecting the environment and its maintenance, as well as the village's frontage onto the River Crouch, and how that could be improved for the community's benefit.

Rochford District Council enjoys the highest levels of recycling in the country). Households are provided with three bins (green waste, recyclable and non-recyclable); green waste is

collected weekly, with the others every fortnight. The nearest tip is three miles away in Rayleigh. Waste water and sewage is dealt with at a treatment plant in Watery Lane run by Anglian Water, which has a statutory obligation to provide adequate services.

Hullbridge is unusual in having a large number of unadopted residential roads; these are the responsibility of the residents living on them. Many residents on unadopted roads prefer the fact that other traffic is discouraged from using them. While residents on unadopted roads get no discount on their council tax bills, where street lighting is available on such roads, the cost is met by the Parish Council.

Verges, hedges and footpaths are the responsibility of the Parish Council, with the work being carried out very satisfactorily by a full-time employee with many years' experience. In a village with a high level of dog ownership, dog waste bins are available in a number of locations. Whilst the provision of bins is a parish matter, collection is outsourced to District Council subcontractors.

There are two sets of public toilets in the village, in the Pooles Lane car park and the recreation ground. The former is used year-round, and is considered to be an important asset for both residents and the many visitors to Hullbridge riverside throughout the year. The other toilets were only open from April to October, and were used extensively by recreation ground users, particularly children. Unfortunately, they are the subject of vandalism from time to time and the District council currently considers them unsuitable for public use.

Hullbridge's northern boundary is on the River Crouch, stretching from the end of the Esplanade in the west to the far side of Brandy Hole Marsh to the east. The Kendal Park Nature Reserve was granted Local Nature Reserve status in 1995; a path wanders through meadowland and woods, with a small pond in the middle. A number of seats offer good views across the Crouch.

A river path extends from the end of the Nature Reserve for over a mile to the east. It is less than a minute's walk from the free car park down to the water's edge, where dozens of swans can be seen for most of the years. The path allows residents and visitors alike to walk along the side of the river, and enjoy the views.

What we asked

A series of questions on matters covered in this section were asked of our residents.

In terms of the provision of services and maintenance in the village as a whole, we asked about the following:

- street and gulley cleaning
- refuse and recycling
- dog waste bins
- verges, hedges and footpaths
- adopted roads
- gritting
- public toilets

As for the Riverside, we asked about nature reserve and how the riverside walk could be improved.

What we found

A. Environment/maintenance

While more than 97% of respondents were happy with the level of refuse and recycling collections, less than half agreed that street and drain gulley cleaning took place regularly, and less than 25% thought that the adopted road surfaces were maintained regularly. A few complained about the quality of the work when their roads had last been maintained. There was also concern about the level of gritting during severe weather with only 40% content, and almost half unhappy. The pavements along (i) Pooles Lane, (i) outside the shops and particularly (iii) outside the doctors and chemist came in for special criticism.

As for the more rural aspects of the village, nearly 60% were satisfied with the maintenance of verges and hedges, with less than 20% specifically dissatisfied. However, there was rather more concern about maintenance of the footpaths (which many respondents felt were an important part of Hullbridge); only 27% felt that they were regularly repaired, while nearly 50% felt their maintenance was inadequate.

In a village with a large number of dogs, dog waste is considered by many to be a major problem in Hullbridge. Less than 25% of respondents felt that there were sufficient dog waste bins. Kendal Nature Reserve, the river frontage along to Brandy Hole, the Keswick Avenue/Pooles Lane footpath and Ferry Road itself were all identified as places where more bins were required.

The public toilets are regarded by a great many residents as an important facility in the village; there was broad consensus that it was important that they should remain open. One or two respondents did ask whether it would be possible to have a third public toilet in the middle of the village. However, the toilets in the recreation ground came in for a great deal of criticism, which many respondents never found open. Even though they have been closed for long periods because of vandalism, this constant closure was not at all appreciated, particularly with the children's play area being so popular.

The number and quality of the unadopted roads in the village produced a number of comments from respondents. While some respondents found them unsightly, the fact remains that upgrading of these roads is a private matter for those living in those roads.

A large number of respondents commented on the sewage treatment plant in Watery Lane. Generally, this was in relation to the need for the facility to be improved to deal with the waste from any new houses built in Hullbridge. However, a number of respondents (particularly those living in the north-west of the village) directly commented on the smell from that facility at certain times.

B. Riverside

The "Riverside" is an important frontage that is a special feature of Hullbridge; an astonishing 97.8% of respondents regarded the River Crouch as "a valuable economic attraction worthy of protection and improvement".

A surprising number felt that the Riverside could be better maintained (for example, less than 60% agreed that the Kendal Nature Reserve was satisfactorily maintained). There was particular concern about the amount of dog faeces to be found throughout, and the lack of dog waste bins along the entire stretch. A number of respondents want to have more benches along the entire path (as well as more generally in the village).

At the Nature Reserve, one respondent suggested that a family picnic area could be established to take advantage of its attractions. Another felt that the pond should be better cordoned off – or removed – to reduce the potential risk to children. Also, a few respondents felt that better educational use could be made of the Nature Reserve by young children.

More generally, there appears to be very limited use of the river for social and sporting activities, and particularly by the young – some respondents felt that not taking advantage of this was a mistake. One respondent suggested that it might be possible to create a small paddling pool for young children by the Upriver Yacht Club slipway that would be filled by river water at high tide.

Priorities

- providing additional manpower to ensure that hedges, footpaths and verges meet everyone's standards,
- adding more dog waste bins, including along the Riverside, and taking steps to ensure that they are emptied regularly,
- finding a solution to the problems with the public toilets in the recreation ground,
- exploring ways to attract more visitors to the riverside in general, and the Nature Reserve in particular, in a way that is of benefit to the community as a whole.

YOUTH

Where we are

This section looks at the schooling and leisure facilities for young people living in Hullbridge.

Riverside Primary School provides educational facilities for children between the ages of 5 and 11. The secondary school closed some years ago because of falling rolls, and secondary education is normally provided in Rayleigh. Free travel is provided to most secondary school children, but this is a continuing issue with the local authority. There are also two pre-schools in Hullbridge.

There has been a youth club in Hullbridge on and off for many years. The current incarnation of it is in the old school building at the entrance to Riverside school.

The main play area for younger children is in the recreation ground in Pooles Lane, which hosts a closed playground for young children, with swings, climbing and other equipment. This provides good opportunities for parents to interact with their children. The recreation ground also has a BMX track, which was used extensively in the past, and a series of metal skateboarding ramps, which are more popular today.

Other sporting activities are available at the Sports Club, primarily football and table tennis. The club provides facilities for 20 football teams starting from the age of 3 yrs to veterans. Table Tennis currently has ten teams of all age groups.

More organised activities are available through the Cubs and Scouts, and the Boy's/Girls Brigade. In addition, the library is a popular venue with many younger children, and there is a weekly session there for children under the age of three.

Other facilities are available in neighbouring areas (e.g., Council leisure centres in Rawreth and Hawkwell, roller skating in Rochford, a broad range of facilities at MegaZone at Rayleigh Weir), but public transport is not made available to permit youngsters to attend these late into the evening.

What we asked

For the school, we asked about satisfaction with the school and, in particular, its services and facilities. We also asked whether the school could do more to make its facilities available outside of school hours.

In respect of facilities for our youth, we asked about play areas for young children, and more generally about leisure activities. We also asked if an athletic track for our young people and a purpose-built building for a youth club would be welcomed. We also asked what additional facilities should be offered to our youth.

What we found

School

The school was the recipient of a poor Ofsted report in 2011, although this appears to have been the result of a lack of experience in managing a school as opposed to any evidence of poor teaching. In any event, enormous strides have been made since then to turn the school around, and there is a lot of evidence that this has been successful. A couple of respondents admitted to removing their children as a direct result of the Ofsted report, and a few parents were already sending their children to local faith schools; apart from this, parents seem to have retained confidence in what is now a rapidly improving school.

There was a strong feeling among residents (87.3% of those who specifically responded to the question on this) that the school should make its facilities available outside normal school hours. A significant number of respondents mentioned the advantage of much greater family use of the swimming pool in the evenings and at weekends.

Youth activities

Since the questionnaire was aimed at those over the age of 13, the views of young people themselves are largely unexplored. Nevertheless, it is clear that respondents are particularly interested in improving such facilities for young people in Hullbridge. In general, what respondents wanted to avoid at all costs was young people “hanging around” in small groups in one or more places in the village.

Even though there has been a youth club for older children and teenagers in Hullbridge for decades, there is little that is widely known about its activities today: where it is, who it caters for, when it is open, etc. However, respondents wanted any activities to be properly supervised, and many expected that facilities for “young teenagers and “older teenagers” would be different.

A few respondents suggested that a valuable function of the youth club would be to educate young people on issues affecting those their age. It was also thought that some sort of drop-in or appointment-driven advice centre would be useful for those who wished to discuss confidential matters with people from outside the village.

Around 1,000 respondents replied to the questions asking about special youth club accommodation and an athletics track for young people, with two-thirds being supportive.

A number of respondents wanted a “healthier” set of activities for young people, which might include sailing, canoeing, boxing and other sports. A few respondents felt that there were a lot of skills that some of the more mature members of the community could pass on to youngsters, and that doing this might be a useful way of enhancing community cohesion.

BUSINESS

This section considers the shops in the village, plus existing business and business opportunities.

What we have

There are around 20 shops along Ferry Road, the main shopping area. These include three supermarkets, a pharmacy, hair and beauty salons, butcher, baker, launderette, takeaway establishments, etc. Over time, some shops have closed, some as a result of an Asda supermarket opening in Rawreth, just a few miles away. In addition, beyond Ferry Road, we have a garage, builder's merchants, cake supplies shop and a specialist butcher.

Beyond the shops, there are no real employment opportunities in Hullbridge, and no obvious site for an industrial estate or business park. This is a problem that has led most employed people to travel outside the village. However, there are a sizeable number of self-employed people in Hullbridge; the exact number is unknown.

The fact that there were no few businesses and so many self-employed people made detailed questions in a limited questionnaire a poor use of space. However, there was in intention to carry out a business survey in due course, and to see how local residents could become better aware of self-employed services available in the village.

What we asked

We asked residents what shops in the village they used, why those who shopped outside of Hullbridge did so, and what other shops residents would like to see.

What we found

Broadly speaking, residents are content with the variety of shops available in the village. Significantly, most admitted using more than one of the three supermarkets in Hullbridge, suggesting that all three offer reasonable value to residents.

Not surprisingly, those shopping outside the village did so because of greater selection and because of lower prices. Usage appeared to be (in decreasing order) Asda, Sainsbury's and Tesco, suggesting that distance is a factor in bulk shopping (home delivery was only mentioned by a very few respondents). Apart from large supermarkets, the most sought-after goods not available in Hullbridge were clothes and shoes. In addition, residents were keen on other discount shops in the area such as Factory Shop, Card Factory and Savers.

As for the shops that residents would like to see in the village, most appear to be shops that had been in the village at some time in the past. Top of the list were a greengrocer, a charity shop, bank and fishmonger. A number of respondents were also keen to have a coffee shop or café (although others said that they did not want any more takeaway outlets), and some have asked for a florist.

One important issue that is not addressed by residents is exactly where the additional shops they seek might be located. The greengrocer was using the forecourt outside the butcher and, conceivably, it might be possible to find a space for a fish company to provide a mobile wet fish stall, say, once a week (in the same way as is done in Hockley). In a similar way, the charity shop could open in an empty shop that was used in the same way in the past.

Priorities

- working to ensure that the remaining shops remain open,
- trying to attract additional vendors (such as the fishmonger) to visit Hullbridge, even if only once a week.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Creating a Village Plan late in 2013 that is based solely on the results of a community questionnaire that was completed in mid 2012 raises the issue of whether the findings of that questionnaire still hold good. However, the vast majority of issues that were identified by residents as important were long-standing, underlying concerns, many of which had been around for years but for one reason or another had not been addressed.

Additionally, even though the Village Plan has only recently been adopted by the Parish Council, it was provided with the analysis of returned questionnaires late in 2012. The Parish Council has therefore had the opportunity to seek solutions to some of the identified problems even before the Village Plan became the formal statement of residents' desires for Hullbridge.

The following actions have been taken already by the Parish Council:

- formed a Community Engagement Strategy committee to look at how much closer links with the community can be ensured,
- Youth Centre to be opened on the 20th of January 2014 to cater for a wider age group
- Support Hullbridge venue's events through advertising in Parish supplied notice boards in bus stops
- Providing Christmas and summer events that support and promote the community and all who work hard to keep clubs and groups available.

The appendix to this document set out a full list of actions that need to be dealt with in order to meet residents' aspirations. A timetable is provided so that the most urgent issues can be tackled with the right priority. The action plan also tries to identify which agencies should be involved in each action, and sets out which agency should take the lead.

Annex 1

List of actions necessary to implement the Village Plan Development

Take a more direct involvement in development issues affecting Hullbridge, pressing the District Councillors to champion the village at District Council level, by

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Putting in place an improved system for directly interacting between the Parish Council and Rochford District Council on development plans affecting Hullbridge, with an open and accurate disclosure to residents about future plans affecting the village	Immediately and ongoing
2	Ensuring that the Parish Council is actively involved in all discussions regarding improvements to infrastructure that may be deemed necessary before further development takes place in the village	Immediately and ongoing
3	Deciding whether development of a Neighbourhood Plan will assist in meeting the aspirations of Hullbridge residents, not on the basis of the necessary commitment of time and money, but on the basis of views set out in the Report	Immediately and ongoing
4	If a Neighbourhood Plan is to proceed, develop one in conjunction with other interested parties within the village	Immediately and ongoing

Identity: Respond to the overarching principle that Hullbridge should retain its sense of community by

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Considering how best to retain and enhance community identity in the village, both through community events and by ensuring that future development ensures that Hullbridge retains its own identity	Immediately and ongoing
2	Developing much closer links with the outlying areas of Hullbridge to encourage residents there to truly feel part of the village	Immediately and ongoing
3	Ensuring that, in creating future plans for the village, the needs of residents outside the centre of the village can also be met	Immediately and ongoing

Parking: Liaise with Essex County Council and Rochford District Council as appropriate to produce a 3-5 year timetabled plan that will result in safer and improved parking in Hullbridge, including

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Creating greater restrictions on parking outside of One-Stop, and improving signage to encourage parking in the One-Stop car park behind	Immediately and ongoing
2	Improving parking at and around the Riverside Medical Centre	Immediately and ongoing
3	Ensuring clearer and safer parking at the shopping parade by the school	Immediately and ongoing
4	Restricting parking at the ends of specific roads off of Ferry Road and Lower Road where visibility is impaired as a result	Immediately and ongoing
5	Discouraging other unnecessary or potentially dangerous parking in Hullbridge	Immediately and ongoing
6	Determining whether it would be possible for the Parish Council to impose penalties for parking infringements	Immediately and ongoing
7	Exploring possible other locations for parking in the village, including library car park, etc	Immediately and ongoing

Traffic: Liaise with Essex County Council and Rochford District Council as appropriate to produce a 3-5 year timetabled plan that will result in improved vehicle flows in and through Hullbridge, including

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Making improvements to traffic layout at the junction of Ferry Road and Lower Road to improve flows through the village, ease pedestrian crossing ability, and take into account flows in and out of Budgen's car park	Ongoing
2	Making improvements to road layouts at the brow of the hill on Ferry Road, including improved parking outside Co-op, slowed and safer traffic flows along Ferry Road at that point	Ongoing
3	Considering ways to limit speeds along "cut-through" roads such as Burnham Road	Ongoing
4	Discussing ways to introduce traffic calming measures at locations considered to be dangerous, with a view to introducing the same in Ferry Road and Pooles Lane	Immediately and ongoing

Public transport: In the absence of a train service, and with a strong desire to limit the already excessive traffic congestion in, out and through Hullbridge,

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Pressing for the introduction of information signs at bus stops to advise customers of timing for next buses	Ongoing
2	Discussing with Arriva the possibility of providing a direct link from Hullbridge to Clements Hall, Hockley, Rochford and Southend Airport	Ongoing

3	Evaluating the viability of introducing a community bus service in Hullbridge, and create if necessary	Ongoing
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Communication: Develop an enhanced role for the Parish Council as a “hub” for the provision of information about all matters impacting on Hullbridge residents and increase the ability of residents to take advantage of better internet access, by

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Making better use of how “Ripples” might be used as a more effective communication tool for all matters affecting Hullbridge	Immediately
2	Developing a new village website to inform residents of activities, and to allow better interaction between the Parish Council and the community	Immediately
3	Discussing with BT and others how best and how quickly improved internet links can be installed throughout the village	Immediate and ongoing
4	Determining how any improvements in internet speed can be made available	2014 and beyond

Leisure: Make existing services more widely available to all in the village, and organise further activities by

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Identifying at how best to coordinate facilities across the various locations in Hullbridge with a view to creating a more sustainable and broader range of activities for all groups of residents	Ongoing
2	Taking steps to provide more community events for residents, and better advertising of them	Ongoing
3	Agreeing with the Seniors Centre how it can provide a broader range of facilities for the age groups it was set up to cater for	Ongoing
4	Looking at possible improvements to the playground in the recreation ground and considering the viability of a second playground at the southern end of the village	Ongoing
5	Finding an effective way to coordinate sporting activities at the various locations within Hullbridge	Ongoing
6	Discussing with the appropriate parties with a view to arranging that the swimming pool at the school is available more often for children and families	Immediately and ongoing

Volunteering: With a view to encouraging resident participation in a broad range of community-enhancing activities, and to providing more cost-effective services to residents,

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Creating a volunteer register for Hullbridge with the intention of making the best use of volunteers for the benefit of the village as a whole	Ongoing
2	Setting up a framework that ensures that voluntary contribution is a primary source in developing new projects in the community	Ongoing

Crime: Irrespective of the low crime levels and relatively safe environment,

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Maintaining regular discussions with Essex Police on limiting crime in Hullbridge	Ongoing
2	Discussing how PCSOs might be better utilised in the village	Ongoing

Health: Despite the fact that residents are, broadly speaking, very happy with health provision in Hullbridge,

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Discussing with Riverside Medical Centre staff options to open the surgery one evening per week or on Saturday morning, to allow working residents better access to medical facilities	Immediately and ongoing
2	Discussing with the appropriate authorities options to bring a dentist to Hullbridge, including what financial support may be available for this, and accommodation requirements	Immediately and ongoing
3	Agreeing with the appropriate authorities ways in which it may be practical in due course for some of the clinic facilities no longer available in Hullbridge to be reinstated	Immediately and ongoing

Environment and maintenance: In order to make the community an even more pleasant place to live,

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Providing better signage and longer opening times for the public toilets in recreation ground	Immediately and ongoing
2	Considering whether it might be possible to maintain the public toilets more cost-effectively	Ongoing

3	Improving the collection of dog faeces throughout the village, including the riverside, by determining (i) the cost of providing more bins to residents, (ii) use of volunteers and (iii) whether it might be possible to introduce a penalty system for offenders	Ongoing
4	Making improvements to, and maintaining, footpaths and hedges, ensuring always that a high standard is achieved	Ongoing
5	Agreeing a strategy for unadopted roads in the village, in consultation with interested parties	2014
6	Discussing with the County Council how winter gritting can be improved	Ongoing
7	Discussing with appropriate parties how odours from the sewage treatment plant in Watery Lane can be reduced, and considering what changes will be necessary to support any future development	Ongoing

Riverside: As part of the anticipated environmental improvements, take advantage of this special feature of Hullbridge

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Developing a broad strategy for developing the riverside for the benefit of Hullbridge and its residents	Immediately and ongoing
2	Looking at how the riverside can be made more attractive for visitors in general	Immediately and ongoing
3	Identifying how the Kendal Nature Reserve can be made more attractive to visitors	Ongoing
4	Investigating how such development could add economically to Hullbridge's benefit	Ongoing

Youth: Take steps as a community to improve facilities for our young people and improve their chances for success in the future, by

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Driving forward and supporting the early re-opening of the Youth Centre on a permanent and enduring basis in a way that properly meets the needs of our youth	Ongoing
2	Setting up a Youth Council (made up of local young people) that can inform and assist the Parish Council in future development of youth activities	Ongoing
3	Establishing a system under which personal, health, school and career issues can be addressed in a sensitive and constructive way	Ongoing

School: Moving on from the past difficulties at the school (which is now recovering rapidly) by

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Evaluating how interaction between the school and the community can be improved, so that the school can make a more direct impact on the community as a whole	Immediately and ongoing
2	Agreeing with the local education authority and others how better access to school facilities can be made available to the entire community	Immediately and ongoing

Business: Seek ways to improve the business environment, attract new businesses and encourage job creation

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Distributing and analysing a questionnaire to all businesses in Hullbridge (particularly to self-employed and others working from home) to establish how many businesses there are and what can be done to assist them	Ongoing
2	Creating a register of businesses that can be made available to residents as part of a "use a local tradesman" programme	Ongoing
3	Considering how new businesses can be attracted to Hullbridge, and how jobs can be created, especially for our school leavers	Immediately and ongoing

Shops: Help to keep the remaining shops open and provide access to more local shops, and

Item	Description	Timescale
1	Agreeing a strategy on how the additional shops sought by residents can best be brought to the village	Ongoing
2	Taking steps to ensure that fundamental facilities such as the Post Office can continue to be available in the long-term	Ongoing
3	Determining whether it would be possible for the charity shop to be re-utilised to the benefit of residents	Immediately and ongoing
4	Examining whether there might be scope for additional shop space to be found and, if so, where	Ongoing

For the attention of Kerry Freeman, Information Coordinator

Dear Sirs,

Examination of the Allocation Submissions Document (“ASD”) prepared by Rochford District Council (the “Council”)

We write to you further to the above process and, in particular, the initial officer comments on representations made by both ourselves and others in relation to policy SER6 (the “Policy”), which concerns future development in Hullbridge.

Our group is charged with developing a Village Plan for Hullbridge based upon the views of our residents. Although we are less than ten people, the views expressed in our representation letter (the “Submission”)¹ were prepared with the benefit of the opinions expressed in a detailed questionnaire completed by up to 40% of the households in the village.

While we support much that has been submitted by other respondents, we have limited the content of this letter to the comments made by the Council that relate to our own submission (which are in the main dealt with on pages 259-265 of the ASD).

Background

1.1 The broad thrust of the Submission was as follows:

- the Policy was not legally compliant because there had not been the close consultation that the Council itself had said was necessary,
- it was not sound because it was contrary to both the Council's and government policy on community cohesion, and
- additionally, it was not sound because (i) the current infrastructure was unable to address existing traffic, flooding and waste problems in Hullbridge, (ii) further development would only exacerbate those deficiencies, and (iii) the necessary improvements to address the deficiencies could not be effectively implemented in time for the first date set out in the Policy for new development to commence.

1.2 To tackle these issues in a constructive manner, we proposed an amendment to the Policy that would have had the effect of deferring any development on the proposed site until 2021 at the earliest, unless the identified deficiencies had been addressed and a clear need for use of the site could be demonstrated. This would have had the dual benefits of (i) allaying the fears of residents and (ii) giving the authorities sufficient time to deal with these long-standing infrastructural issues.

Legal compliance

2.1 If further evidence was needed that Hullbridge residents felt that consultation had been inadequate, we note that the consultation on the Policy appears to have elicited a greater response than for any other policy², with the printed list of comments and responses covering some 53 pages³.

2.2 While it may be gratifying that we and others have now been able to make our case, the Council's response to its poor efforts at consultation⁴ is weak; excusing its failure to seek the views of known community groups on the basis that (i) a single meeting had been held in the village (which was actually organised by a local councillor), (ii) a member of the Hullbridge Action Group submitted a personal representation and (iii) this group made its own representation anyway, is actually no excuse at all.

Community cohesion

3.1 The Submission expressed concern that the Council had approached the proposed development in Hullbridge as a stand-alone development adjacent to the rest of the community, rather than as an integrated development sitting within the community as a whole. We acknowledge that this may have been a consequence of a strategy that a relatively small number of very large developments would have less impact on Green Belt than a large number of small ones.

3.2 Nevertheless, the officer's response⁵ fails to address the issue. If new houses are to be built in Hullbridge, then community cohesion can only be enhanced if new residents are encouraged to feel part of the village by using existing facilities (which may well need to be enhanced and improved). Given that the area covered by the Policy is small compared to the residential part of Hullbridge, it would be better if anyone reading the Policy was left in no doubt about where “*open space, youth and community facilities*” should be focused.

3.3 There is one further issue to comment upon. We (as did the Parish Council) pointed out that part of the development land allocated in policy SER6 (b) would technically be in Rawreth. The Council is insistent that “*the proposed development will form part of the village of Hullbridge*”⁶ (our emphasis added). We agree that this should be the case, but it is perhaps indicative that the consultation may have no constructive purpose if, even on trivial matters, the Council just insists it is right when it plainly is not.

Roads

4.1 The concerns that we raised in the Submission can be summarised as follows:

- significant improvements are already well overdue (too much local and through traffic, only one bus service, no viable Sustrans, intermittent closures along Watery Lane),
- the traffic flow problem would be worsened by proposed additional developments in Hullbridge and in other areas close by,
- as such, limiting road improvements solely in the location covered by the Policy would be insufficient and ineffective,
- what is required to improve traffic flows is an integrated road traffic solution along Lower Road, Hullbridge Road and the entire length of Rawreth Lane (which we shall refer to in this letter as the “Corridor”).

In response, the officer's comments can be set out as follows:

1 Dated 23rd January 2013, receipt of the Submission was acknowledged by the Council on 8th April 2013, under reference 32010.

2 891, as per Table 2 on page 6.

3 Pages 213-265.

4 Page 259.

5 At the bottom of Page 258.

6 Page 154.

8. “public transport infrastructure improvements and service enhancements would be required to accompany development of this site”⁷
9. the Sustrans route is only “an aspiration”⁸, and
10. despite the fact that the Highway Authority wishes to discourage the use of Watery Lane (because it is not part of the strategic highway network), the Council still believes that it is “of local importance” and that improvements are necessary there.⁹

4.2 To justify its position that a review that takes into account development along the Corridor as a whole is unnecessary, the Council says that a cumulative traffic impact assessment for development across the district has been carried out. Specifically, the officer's response¹⁰ states “Essex County Council as the highways authority have been closely consulted throughout the process of the Core Strategy and the allocations DPD and as such have considered the cumulative, and individual, impact of the developments across District on the highway network. The consideration of potential sites has included views from the Highways Authority. This was done on an individual location and on a cumulative basis which assessed the impact of the cumulative development”.

4.3 On 2nd June 2013, requests were made to both the Highway Authority and the Council¹¹, referring to the above statement, and asking for “copies of all documents after 1st January 2007 relating to any assessment of the impact of the cumulative development, whether or not they have been included in the final submission to the Planning Inspectorate”. The responses are set out in Annexes 1 and 2 hereto.

4.4 The Highway Authority confirmed that it had undertaken Traffic Assessments for each development site on a standalone basis. However, in the course of its initial response and a secondary clarification (both of which are shown in Annexe 1), The Highway Authority indicated that any assessments were based solely upon proposed development where planning permission had already been granted (i.e., apparently, no assessment was made that took into account the new development contemplated in terms of the Policy).

Moreover, in the clarification response, it went on to make a statement, which we interpret as meaning that no cumulative analysis was undertaken to determine the impact of development along the Corridor as a whole; this statement reads,

“It was the view of the Highway Authority that a transport model was not the appropriate tool for assessing impact in Rochford District. This is because of the dispersed distribution and relatively low quantum of proposed development throughout the borough over the plan period to 2025. A strategic transport model would not accurately represent the changes on the local network. Therefore, the Highway Authority has focused on strategic development in the District; i.e., the Southend JAAP and the A127 corridor”.

4.5 The Council's own disclosure reveals more. During preparation of the Core Strategy, there is a specific reference to the proposed development in Hullbridge in the minutes of a meeting in September 2008, where it was stated that

“South West Hullbridge was seen as potentially having an impact on the highway network in terms of increased traffic on Watery Lane and the use of Rawreth Lane. Mitigation measures suggested for this location were to discourage the use of Beeches Road/Chelmsford Road [Watery Lane], promote highways improvements at Hullbridge Lane, Rawreth Lane and Beeches Road/Chelmsford Road and to promote public transport service enhancements”.

Two other extracts from the minutes are relevant to the need to consider traffic flows along the Corridor as a whole. The first relates to a statement in respect of another development at a location known as “North of London Road” (a major development of well over 500 new homes along Rawreth Lane), which reads “ECC noted that the Hullbridge Road/Rawreth Lane roundabout could be improved using additional land”¹². This information was later updated when it was revealed that “There is a lack of capacity at the Hullbridge Road/Rawreth Lane junction as the utilities present in the adjacent field to the north makes improvements challenging. Contributions could be pooled from neighbouring developments to fund this improvement”¹³.

4.6 We infer from this disclosure that:

- contrary to the Council's declaration, there is nothing to suggest that any assessment has been undertaken on the cumulative impact on Hullbridge arising from the other major developments Corridor, and
- nevertheless, the authorities have already acknowledged to each other that the Hullbridge and Rawreth Lane developments are likely to have a negative traffic flow impact on each other, and that pooled financial contributions may be required from all the developers in order to produce a complete solution to the overall problem.

That is, our call for an overall solution is in fact consistent with what the Council believes is necessary, even though this is not currently included in either the ASD or the Core Strategy.

Facing up to the problems

5.1 In reviewing all of the officer's comments, what is evident is the different approaches taken by the Council and residents. The Council is required to go through a rather theoretical process to create a framework for community growth for the district as a whole over an extended period. Actually, residents are interested only in the real and practical consequences of what is set down in that framework, to the extent that they affect our own community.

5.2 We set out below three examples of the conflict between these two approaches.

- The response to concerns about increased traffic flow from the east along Lower Road from the east for motorists wishing to use Watery Lane as a route to Chelmsford is that the Council “seeks to discourage non-local traffic on local routes for non-local reasons”¹⁴. While this may be a theoretical desire, the reality is that motorists will take what they consider to be the best route; i.e., residents of Ashingdon, Hockley and Rochford heading for Chelmsford are likely to use Lower Road and Watery Lane, whatever the Council may prefer.
- Other respondents have commented on the possible impact of new housing on local property values, and on the potential difficulty in new purchasers obtaining property insurance in areas with inadequate water and sewage drainage systems¹⁵. Again, while the Council's response is to say that “these are not planning issues” (which, of course, is correct), they do impact on deliverability. If these are real risks, then it will be more difficult to find buyers for properties on the policy site, and so developers will not be inclined to build.
- Questions raised about precisely what infrastructure improvements the Council believes may be necessary for this future development are deflected with the comment that “the precise details will be determined at the planning application stage”¹⁶. We believe that this is far too late. Local infrastructure upgrades will require significant financial contributions from developers, and the level of those contributions will be an important factor in determining whether or not a proposed development is

7 Page 233.

8 Page 258.

9 Page 155.

10 Pages 183, 218, 219 and 220.

11 In terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

12 From a meeting on 22nd February 2012.

13 From a meeting on 30th August 2012.

14 e.g., page 223.

15 E.g., page 251

16 E.g., page 219

feasible. Not addressing exactly what improvements are necessary until the planning application stage increases the risk that the Council will then find itself under pressure in any negotiations to give greater weight to the developer's profitability than to the needs of the community as a whole.

- 5.3 In the Submission, we developed powerful arguments to build a case that (i) the infrastructure problems in Hullbridge needed to be addressed before any new development took place, and (ii) this could not be done in any effective way before 2015, the earliest date when development could commence. In doing so, there are two important points that need to be taken on board:
- We are not discussing conceptual infrastructure issues that might arise if some new houses are built – we are talking about existing infrastructure problems that have blighted the village for years, and which will become more acute when additional houses are built.
 - The community questionnaire demonstrated that there is real demand for additional housing in Hullbridge. However, in reality, Hullbridge is accessed by a single road so, from a practical viewpoint, exactly where any additional housing is located within Hullbridge is immaterial – wherever it is located, it must add very substantially to traffic flows and to the strain on water and drainage systems.

Drainage and sewage

- 6.1 Much of this letter focuses on traffic flow issues because of the later disclosure that is referred to above. However, a number of people made submissions during the consultation about drainage and sewage issues. We do not wish to add much to what was set out in the Submission, beyond saying that the same issues that are raised in section 5 of this letter apply equally to this matter. These are major infrastructural problems that are faced by both the proposed developments in Hullbridge and in Rawreth Lane.
- 6.2 However, it must be said that, while the Council has indicated that “*proposed development in Rayleigh and Hullbridge have not been considered in isolation*”¹⁷, similar statements in respect of traffic flows unfortunately do not appear to match later evidence. As set out in the Submission, Anglian Water appears to take a reactive role in the process, even though the Council has made it clear that it is Anglian Water that is responsible for ensuring that the wastewater and sewage systems are sufficient¹⁸. We believe that Anglian Water should be ahead of the curve, not behind it.

Our proposal

- 7.1 In the Submission, we proposed that the Policy should be amended to restrict any development before 2021, subject to certain releases added to provide the Council with necessary flexibility. The Council's response to this proposal is simply to say that it is inconsistent with the Core Strategy, albeit that there is a suggestion that “*an early review of Core Strategy is expected to take place later in the year*”¹⁹.
- 7.2 To our mind, then, the Council has raised no substantive objection to the proposed wording, which we believe has a number of significant advantages:
- it restricts substantial additional development from being undertaken while these issues remain unaddressed (wherever in Hullbridge it goes),
 - as it is, The Council now believes that hidden in a response on page 262 is the fact that “*the first dwellings are expected to be built on site in 2019/2020*”²⁰, or only a year or so before we are ourselves proposing,
 - in the meantime, it allows all the relevant parties (the Council, the Highway Authority, central government, both Hullbridge and Rawreth Parish Councils, local community groups etc.) sufficient time to work together to agree on – and implement - what infrastructural changes they decide are required, and
 - overall, in the period up until 2021, our proposal would create a general presumption against development (consistent with its current status as Green Belt land), while maintaining the Council's flexibility to amend that status and press ahead with development if it can be demonstrated that it is really necessary, and that the infrastructure can accommodate it.

Conclusion

- 8.1 As part of the examination of the ASD, the Inspector is required to consider its soundness, and this in turn involves determining whether the Council's proposals are deliverable. That is, the Inspector is testing the broadly theoretical development framework against the realistic prospect that the Council's policies can be implemented within the timescales set out in it.
- 8.2 To address the objections that we raised in the Submission, we proposed that development should be deferred until such time as clearly identified infrastructural problems were addressed, which we thought could be achieved by 2021 if all interested parties worked together to achieve it.
None of the Council's responses has led us to withdraw our objections or amend our proposal in any way.
- 8.3 What may not be fully appreciated is that residents (who, on average, have lived in Hullbridge for decades) love their village the way it is, appreciate the special sense of community that they believe exists there. While they acknowledge that additional housing is required - and will be built – in the future, they wish to ensure that the village is able to cope with the consequences of it. These matters weigh heavily on residents, not helped by the sense that the council has a broader agenda in which the views of Hullbridge residents carry little or no weight. If the Council truly believes that no building will take place until 2019/2020, then it has nothing to lose by (i) accepting the proposed amendments to the Policy, and (ii) putting in the time and effort to ensure that the infrastructural improvements to protect Hullbridge are put in place. This would come as a very important and welcome relief to its residents.

We trust that the contents of this letter are clear, and we look forward to learning how you intend to respond to both our comments and those of other Hullbridge residents at the hearings in September.

Yours faithfully,

Zoe Moore (Secretary) on behalf of the Hullbridge Village Community Group

17 Page 225.

18 e.g., page 225.

19 Page 265.

20 Page 262.