



# **Rochford District Council Local Development Plan**

## **Rochford Area Action Plan**

### **SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL/ STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF PRE-SUBMISSION AAP**

#### **NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY**

**June 2013**



# Rochford District Council Local Development Framework

## Rochford Area Action Plan

### SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL/ STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF PRE- SUBMISSION AAP

### NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

*for and on behalf of Enfusion Ltd:*

<i>date:</i>	June 2013	
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## NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

- 0.1 This is the summary of the Sustainability Appraisal Report for Rochford District Council's Rochford Area Action Plan (AAP) Development Plan Document (DPD): Pre-submission Document. It describes how the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process was used to assist in the preparation of the Area Action Plan, as required by planning legislation and Government guidance.

### SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL & STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

- 0.2 The purpose of Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is to promote sustainable development through the integration of environmental, social and economic considerations in the preparation of Local Development Documents (LDDs). This requirement is set out in Section 39 (2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004 and the National Planning Policy Framework. Sustainability Appraisal incorporates the requirements of Strategic Environmental Assessment<sup>12</sup> (SEA), a requirement of European and UK Legislation. Government guidance advises a number of stages of SA work that need to be carried out as a Local Development Document is being prepared:

- Stage A: Setting Context & Scope
- Stage B: Developing Options & Assessing Effects
- Stage C: Preparing the SA Report
- Stage D: Consulting on the Plan & the SA
- Stage E: Monitoring Implementation of the Plan

- 0.3 The SA/SEA of the Rochford Area Action Plan has been prepared in accordance with these requirements for SA/SEA.

### THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND ROCHFORD AAP

- 0.4 The Council is in the process of preparing its Local Development Plan (LDP) (previously known as the Local Development Framework), which will set out how the District will develop in the future. The LDP will gradually replace the Rochford District Replacement Local Plan which was adopted in 2006. The Rochford Local Development Plan comprises the following Local Development Documents:

- Core Strategy DPD (also known as the Local Plan)
- Development Management DPD
- Site Allocations DPD
- Area Action Plans (DPDs) for Rochford Town Centre, Hockley Town Centre, Rayleigh Town Centre and London Southend Airport (with Southend-on-Sea Borough Council).

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<sup>1</sup> EU Directive 2001/42/EC

<sup>2</sup> Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

- 0.5 The Rochford Area Action Plan (AAP) creates the framework for development sites and planning policies in Rochford. It will act as the focal point for the coordination of other public policies and programmes and will guide public and private investment in the area. The AAP sets out a vision for how growth and change can be managed within Rochford and how regeneration of the area might be stimulated through this development.

### THE CHARACTER OF ROCHFORD

- 0.6 Rochford Town Centre is the second largest within the District and is classified as a local centre. It is situated to the east of Rayleigh and Hockley, is 3 miles north-west of Southend-on-Sea and is also within 1 km of London Southend Airport. Immediately bounding the town centre to the north is the Rochford Primary School and Rochford Hospital.
- 0.7 It is a designated Conservation Area and has a number of listed buildings. The town follows a traditional cruciform street pattern, providing links to the railway station to the west and to residential areas elsewhere. The town centre comprises a good mix of uses, including retail, residential, civic and community uses within a relatively small catchment area.

### SA SCOPING & ISSUES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

- 0.8 A SA scoping process was undertaken to help ensure that the SA covers the key sustainability issues that are relevant to Rochford Town Centre. This included the development of an SA Framework of objectives to comprise the basis for appraisal. An SA Scoping Report was prepared to summarise the findings of the scoping process and was sent to statutory consultees for consultation in September 2012. As part of the scoping process plans and programmes were reviewed and information was collated relating to the current and predicted social, environmental and economic characteristics of Rayleigh.
- 0.9 From these studies, the key sustainability issues and opportunities for the AAP and the SA were identified, as follows:

Key Sustainability Issues for Rochford AAP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The provision of quality and affordable housing to meet housing needs in Rochford.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Direct, safe and convenient links between the health and community activities to the north west of the town centre and other uses are essential to the pattern of movement in the town centre.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Taking account of environmental and physical constraints when accommodating new development.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Opportunity to improve the public realm by enhancing pedestrian crossing facilities and reducing the speed of traffic through the town centre.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The protection of the Rochford Conservation Area and listed buildings.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High levels of car ownership and travelling to work using a private vehicle.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A watching brief should be maintained for air quality concerns and traffic congestion in Rochford Town Centre.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Opportunity to improve retail and stimulate the local economy.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Climate change is a significant issue facing all communities and the AAP will need to consider issues around energy efficiency, renewables and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.</li> </ul>

### SA FRAMEWORK

0.10 An SA Framework was compiled and included SA Objectives that aim to resolve the issues and problems identified; these are used to test the draft plan as it is being prepared. The SA Framework for the Rochford AAP is based on that developed for the Rochford Core Strategy. A list of the SA objective headings follows:

SA Objective headings	
1. Balanced Communities	8. Landscape & Townscape
2. Healthy & Safe Communities	9. Climate Change & Energy
3. Housing	10. Water
4. Economy & Employment	11. Land & Soil
5. Accessibility	12. Air Quality
6. Biodiversity	13. Sustainable Design & Construction
7. Cultural Heritage	

### SA OF THE ROCHFORD AAP

0.11 Each stage of the preparation of the AAP was appraised using the SA Objectives. Where significant negative effects, including environmental effects, were predicted, the SA sought where possible to identify means of offsetting these effects. Where it was considered that there were opportunities to enhance the sustainability of the proposals, recommendations were made. The appraisal recognised 6 categories of predicted effects, as illustrated in the following key.

Categories of sustainability effects	
Colour	Impact
<b>++</b>	Major Positive
<b>+</b>	Positive
<b>0</b>	No Impact
<b>?</b>	Uncertain
<b>-</b>	Negative
<b>--</b>	Major Negative

## CONSIDERATION AND APPRAISAL OF ALTERNATIVES

- 0.12 The SA of the options (alternatives) was undertaken in February 2013. The purpose and key objectives of the AAP have been set at a higher level; therefore it was considered that the alternatives available to the plan-maker in preparing the AAP were limited to the level and type of intervention/development that should be accommodated in the Town Centre. A do-nothing approach is not considered appropriate in this instance as it would not be in accordance with Policy RTC5 - Rochford Town Centre from the Adopted Core Strategy, which requires a certain level of intervention in Rochford to achieve regeneration objectives.
- 0.13 The Issues and Options Document (Sept 2009) identified a number of sites where opportunities may exist for redevelopment as well as a range of opportunities related to transport and movement and the public realm. A total of ten sites were identified, including: Market Square and the Spar building to its east side, Back Lane, Rochford Hospital and the rail station car parks, and a number of potential infill sites towards the edge of the centre. A range of options were proposed in relation to each site, which included the redevelopment of existing buildings or vacant plots for residential, retail or office development, or the reconfiguration of existing car parking arrangements to free up land for town centre development.
- 0.14 The options for transport include tighter parking controls and provision of increased information relating to public transport across the AAP area. Transport options for specific areas were also proposed; these included the rerouting of existing one-way traffic to recreate two-way streets and improvements to the pedestrian environment, such as the widening of footways.
- 0.15 The SA found that options which proposed mixed use developments coupled with public realm improvements performed well against SA objectives. Options proposing the redevelopment of buildings considered to have a negative impact on the Rochford Conservation Area were assessed as having the potential for a positive effect on heritage and townscape. Transport options that sought to slow vehicle speeds and improve pedestrian crossings and movement through the Town Centre performed well against SA objectives relating to communities, health, accessibility and the economy.
- 0.16 A number of options were proposed for Market Square and West Street that involved the full or part pedestrianisation of the area. The SA considered that this could provide a number of positive benefits for communities, health and safety, economy and employment, cultural heritage, landscape and townscape and air quality. The SA found that a mix of options could be used in combination to maximise potential long term benefits and potentially bypass the negative effects that could result from the other Options. Two options proposed the removal of the bus route and taxi rank from the Market Square and West Street, which was assessed as having the potential for a negative effect on elderly and disabled members of the community.



Transport options that sought to slow vehicle speeds and improve pedestrian crossings and movement through the Town Centre performed well against SA objectives relating to communities, health, accessibility and the economy.

- 0.17 Alongside consultation responses, the Council considered the SA findings in its decision making. The reasons for the selection or rejection of options in plan-making are set out in Section 4 of the SA Report.

### APPRAISAL OF THE AAP VISION AND POLICIES

- 0.18 A compatibility analysis of the Pre-Submission AAP Vision and Objectives was carried out using the SA framework in May/June 2013. Overall the vision and objectives were found to be compatible with the majority of SA objectives.
- 0.19 The Pre-Submission policies were subject to detailed SA in May/June 2013. On the whole, the findings of the SA suggest that the emerging AAP policies will make significant contributions to the progression of SA objectives. Throughout the development of the AAP and the Sustainability Appraisal process, data gaps and uncertainties were uncovered and these have been acknowledged in the appraisal matrices, where applicable.

### SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS IDENTIFIED

- 0.20 The majority of policies were found to have significant positive sustainability benefits. The following table summarises the key positive effects identified:

<b>Significant positive effects of the emerging Rochford AAP</b>	
<b>Key relevant SA Objective:</b>	<b>Positive effects identified:</b>
1. Balanced communities	The AAP has the potential for a significant positive effect on communities through supporting the development of a mix of uses in the town centre, including housing, retail, employment and community facilities (particularly those catering for young people).
4. Economy & Employment	A significant positive effect on the local economy is likely through the regeneration of the Town Centre. The AAP will encourage diversity of employment and retail choice to meet the needs of consumers (local and visitors) whilst protecting the function of the Town Centre. Improvements to the public realm and connectivity will make the Town Centre a more attractive and enjoyable place for people to shop, visit and live.
5. Accessibility	Significant positive effects for accessibility are likely through a range of improvements to junctions, the public realm, signage and pedestrian links. Supporting the development of new housing, employment and community facilities also has the potential for long term positive effects on accessibility.

- 0.21 Alongside the many positive effects of the plan, potential negative sustainability effects were also identified, although the effect is uncertain at

this stage of the assessment and it is considered likely that these effects can be mitigated at a more detailed planning stage. These are summarised below:

<b>Potentially significant effects of the emerging Rochford AAP</b>	
<b>Key relevant SA Objective:</b>	<b>Negative Effects identified:</b>
2. Healthy & Safe Communities	There is the potential for temporary negative effects in the short term during demolition/ construction as waste, noise and dust nuisances may be created. However, it is considered that this can be mitigated at the project level.
7. Cultural Heritage	Any development could have the potential to affect heritage within the area particularly during construction as a result of the movement of heavy vehicles and effects on setting through improvements to the public realm and frontages. These short term effects could be resolved by requiring that a construction management plan is developed or by incorporating phasing at the project level. Policies contained within the Core Strategy and Development Management DPDs will help to ensure that proposed development does not adversely affect any important local heritage.
12. Air quality	In the short term there is the potential for a negative effect on air quality as a result of localised air quality pollution during construction/redevelopment. However, it is considered that this can be mitigated through development controls.

## **MITIGATION, ENHANCEMENT AND MONITORING**

- 0.22 An important role of the SA process is to provide recommendations for the mitigation of negative effects and enhancement of the positive effects identified in the appraisal process. In preparing the AAP, Rochford District Council has already sought to address many of the sustainability problems in Rochford, and consequently the majority of the SA findings were positive. A small number of recommendations have been made and these will be considered by the Council in finalising the plan.
- 0.23 Local planning authorities are required to produce Annual Monitoring Reports to monitor the progress of the Local Development Plan. There is also a requirement to monitor the predictions made in the SA. Rochford District Council prepares an Annual Monitoring report each year, and in preparing the report, considers any recommendations made through the SA process. The indicators and targets suggested for the SA monitoring of the Core Strategy are considered appropriate for the monitoring of the Rochford AAP, with additional specific suggestions made during the preparation of the Rochford AAP. This SA has also made further suggestions, which are detailed in the main SA report.

## CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- 0.24 The SA of the Rochford Area Action Plan has appraised the effects of individual policies, as well as the overall effect of the plan, including cumulative and incremental effects. It has also considered and appraised reasonable alternatives to the plan itself; and this information has been made available to the Council to help in the selection of the preferred plan. Overall the SA has found that the AAP will help to resolve a number of key sustainability issues in Rochford Town Centre and will also play a role in improving sustainability in the wider District.
- 0.25 The AAP has the potential for significant long term positive effects on communities, the economy and accessibility through supporting the development of new housing, retail, employment and community services. It also seeks a range of improvements to junctions, the public realm (including signage) and pedestrian links. Greater retail choice and improved pedestrian environments will make the Town Centre a more attractive and enjoyable place for people to shop, work and live. The regeneration of the Town Centre, which includes improved accessibility to housing, employment and facilities along with an enhanced public realm, has the potential for indirect long term positive effects on health, townscape, climate change, the efficient use of land and sustainable design.
- 0.26 There is the potential for negative effects on health, heritage and air quality in the short term during the construction of new development or redevelopment of existing buildings. However, it considered that suitable mitigation is available at the project level to address any adverse effects and suitable protection is provided through Core Strategy and Development Management policies. New development and the redevelopment of existing buildings will need to be carefully and sympathetically designed to ensure that there are no long term negative effects on heritage, particularly on the Rochford Conservation Area.
- 0.27 The Council has considered the recommendations made throughout the Sustainability Appraisal process, and amended the plan where appropriate. This has contributed to further enhancing the positive sustainability effects of the AAP.
- 0.28 This SA Report will accompany the AAP on pre-submission consultation for a minimum of 6 weeks, during which time interested parties are invited to make representations on the AAP or the SA. The SA will form part of the evidence base during the Examination of the AAP and if any further significant changes are made to the plan the SA Report will be updated accordingly. A finalised report will accompany the adopted DPD when it is published.