

WELCOME TO THE RAYLEIGH AREA ACTION PLAN EXHIBITION

15 -29 JANUARY 2013

Rochford District Council is in the process of preparing an Area Action Plan (AAP) for Rayleigh town centre. The AAP will form part of the statutory planning policy framework for the District.

It will set out a framework for the development of key sites and put in place planning policies for Rayleigh. The AAP will also help to coordinate other public policies and programmes, and guide public and private investment in the area.

Public consultation and engagement is at the heart of the approach to AAP preparation. There has already been a previous stage of consultation and we are now approaching a stage where, having considered a range of options, a framework for Rayleigh is emerging.

We look forward to hearing your views on this emerging framework.

1 The story so far

An Issues & Options report was published in November 2009 and received comments from a range of stakeholders. These comments have informed the production of the emerging framework.

The AAP will sit alongside the recently adopted Core Strategy, and the emerging Site Allocations and Development Management documents. The Core Strategy contains a number of policies which are of direct relevance to Rayleigh and the preparation of this AAP. Principal amongst these is Policy RTC4.

POLICY RTC4 – RAYLEIGH TOWN CENTRE

The Council will ensure that Rayleigh town centre's role as the District's principal town centre is retained through the production and implementation of an Area Action Plan which delivers the following:

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

The Council will work with landowners and its partners to deliver the Area Action Plan.

2 Key priorities

Rayleigh is Rochford District's principal town centre. It has a vibrant and healthy high street with a good retail offer. This means that, as well as providing shopping facilities for its residents, Rayleigh draws in a significant amount of trade from further afield.

The core aim of the Rayleigh AAP, then, should be to build upon this existing character and success.

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

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

2 Improving accessibility for all

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

3 Making the most of historic assets

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

4 Delivering public realm improvements

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



Rayleigh Town Centre: an emerging framework

The plan above shows the emerging planning strategy for Rayleigh town centre, with details of an indicative scheme for the Webster's Way car park site inset

3 What you have said

A range of comments were received in response to the 2009 Issues & Options report consultation. These can be summarised as follows:

- There was general support for enhancements to the public realm and aesthetic improvements.
- Some also wanted unattractive buildings to be demolished and their sites redeveloped.
- Proposals for new developments were, on the whole, supported, provided that these would be sympathetic to the existing character of the town centre.
- Those that responded were supportive of measures that would attract a range of uses into the town centre.
- The full pedestrianisation of the High Street and the introduction of a shared surface in this same location were opposed. However, there was some support for part-time pedestrianisation.
- Although the relocation of the taxi rank was not favoured, given its current central location, there was some agreement that the town centre might benefit from a reduction in its size.
- The new linkages that were promoted were seen positively, whilst other supporting enhancements such as better signage and the placement of town centre maps at key locations were also suggested.
- Overall, respondents felt that the town would benefit from small-scale, incremental improvements, rather than larger-scale improvements, which were considered both unnecessary and unrealistic.

4 Emerging development framework

Some contextual changes have taken place since the 2009 Issues & Options report was published. The most important changes are:

- 1 A tougher economic climate – the current economic climate is significantly more challenging than it was at the beginning of the AAP process.
- 2 The emergence of new priorities – a number of organisations, including Essex Police, have reviewed their property portfolios and informed the Council that land previously believed to be available for redevelopment is now included in their future plans.
- 3 Healthcare reform – the government has changed the way in which the NHS's budget is managed and it is no longer clear that there is potential for a new healthcare centre in Rayleigh.
- 4 A greater focus on food retail as an investment opportunity – it is recognised that a new food store now represents the clearest opportunity for investment in Rayleigh town centre and could anchor a mixed-use redevelopment that would bring other, wider benefits to the town.

Having carefully considered these changes, as well as the results of the Sustainability Appraisal, stakeholder feedback, and professional advice, a development framework for Rayleigh town centre is emerging.

The main components of this framework include

- A High Street retail focus** – retaining the town's retail focus around the High Street.
- B Promoting an enhanced evening economy** – allowing a greater mix of uses on town centre sites that are not located along the core High Street, including leisure uses, cafes, restaurants and bars.
- C Websters Way car park retail-led development opportunity** – promoting the redevelopment of Webster's Way car park and any suitable adjacent sites for a mix of uses, including a food store and the re-provision of existing car parking through a decked structure.
- D An improved pedestrian experience** – creating better links, including between the High Street and the Webster's Way car park site, Castle Road car park and rail station, and improving the north-south route along Webster's Way.
- E Enhanced public space on the High Street and Bellingham Lane** – explore the potential for fully or partially relocating the existing taxi rank to a Webster's Way location to allow for the creation of a new public space on the High Street, and expanding the existing public space on Bellingham Lane.

Other elements of the framework include

- Environmental improvements – enhancements to make the High Street more attractive and improve the setting of Rayleigh's heritage assets.
- Mixed-use development – promoting the redevelopment of available sites around the town centre, including for retail, leisure and housing uses.

LET US KNOW YOUR VIEWS

Please let us know your views on the exhibition and the emerging framework for Rayleigh. Please take a few minutes to complete the accompanying questionnaire and return it to Rayleigh Library or the following address:

Rayleigh AAP Exhibition 2013
Planning Policy
Council Offices
South Street
Rochford
Essex SS4 1BW

Once comments on these proposals have been received, considered, appraised and reviewed, the next formal stage of AAP production will involve the preparation and publication of the Pre-Submission draft of the Area Action Plan. This will be published for further public consultation later this year.

