

Note to Rochford District Council Rochford Area Action Plan (AAP)

Inspector's Initial Comments

From my initial reading of the Submitted AAP, I have a few questions upon which I am seeking clarification.

The plan period

On the starting and end points of the plan period, I note that paragraph 2.5 of the AAP refers to the *Core Strategy* plan period extending to 2025. Does the AAP have the same plan period? I think it would be helpful if the AAP explicitly stated the exact plan period somewhere in the document (many plans, for example, include in their title or elsewhere on the cover of the document).

Housing provision

I note that policies 6-9 make reference to residential units, although there is no mention of any targets for the amount of new housing, or which types of residential accommodation are considered appropriate for the town centre. *The Framework*, which came into force since the adoption of the Council's *Core Strategy*, seeks to boost significantly the supply of housing (paragraph 47). In view of the Government's heightened emphasis on new housing, and *the Framework's* additional requirement that local plans should set out clear policies on what will or will not be permitted and where (paragraph 154), it is important that the AAP gives a steer to the type and quantity of housing development that policies 6-9 would be likely to deliver over the plan period.

Retail provision

Firstly, the WYG report (Ref EB12) is dated 2008. Is this the latest retail evidence available to the Council, and if so, is the Council satisfied that it is still sufficiently robust to deal with the whole of the plan period? The *Core Strategy* (paragraph 12.28) refers to the identified capacity for additional convenience and comparison retail floor space in Rochford town centre. Paragraph 12.27 mentions the desirability of an 'anchor' store to draw in additional shoppers and retailers. Paragraph 12.34 states that these issues will be explored in detail through the development of the AAP for Rochford Centre.

Whilst I am sure that these issues have been explored in detail, this is not currently reflected in the AAP. Again with regard to paragraph 154 of *the Framework*, there is no mention of the amount or the broad/specific location of new retail development; there is also no mention of a food store (although I accept that this could be located outside the AAP elsewhere in Rochford). The retail study points to capacity for 4,330m² (net) for comparison retail floorspace within Rochford, which I assume would be located within the town centre. A range of 885-2,120m² (gross) for convenience retailing floorspace is also mentioned, alongside

(in addition to?) a 1,500m² (gross) foodstore. These amounts of floorspace are not insubstantial and a policy steer in the AAP on where the most appropriate site(s) is/are for locating this new retail provision, is a critical aspect.

In a town centre which is classified as a local centre, and in particular one with such important conservation (and access/traffic) considerations as Rochford, it is important that the enhanced retail offer of *Core Strategy* policy RTC5 is articulated in some detail in the AAP.

Next steps

I would be grateful for a reply to these queries, at least in the form of a holding reply, within two weeks.

Mike Fox

Inspector

