

WELCOME TO THE ROCHFORD AREA ACTION PLAN EXHIBITION

15 -29 JANUARY 2013

Rochford District Council is in the process of preparing an Area Action Plan (AAP) for Rochford 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 Rochford town centre. 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 Rochford town centre is emerging.

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

1 The story so far

An Issues & Options discussion and consultation document was published in September 2009 and received a number of 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 Rochford town centre and the preparation of this AAP. Principal amongst these is Policy RTC5.

POLICY RTC5 – ROCHFORD TOWN CENTRE

The Council will produce an Area Action Plan for Rochford town centre which delivers the following:

- a safe and high quality environment for residents
- a market square area that encourages visitors
- enhanced retail offer for Rochford
- a range of evening leisure activities
- improves accessibility to and within the town centre
- promotes youth community facilities

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

2 Key priorities

Rochford's character is that of a small market town, serving the retail needs of its local population. Indeed, the town's Market Square, at the core of its well-preserved historic fabric, still hosts a regular market every Tuesday. However, the town has also seen a significant amount of new development in recent years. In particular, the mixed use scheme north of the Market Square has delivered a new food store, other new retail and business space and a significant amount of new residential development. These recent developments will make a significant contribution to meeting the AAP's objectives for the town.

In that context, the central purpose of the Rochford AAP, then, should be to strengthen the character of the town and improve its economic vitality. This could be achieved by:

1 Providing a diverse range of uses, activities and facilities for local people

Rochford contains a good local retail offer, which is appropriate, given its status as a small market town. The overall mix could be enhanced through a more flexible approach towards uses that would help to create a café culture and strengthen the evening economy, such as coffee shops, bars, restaurants and leisure uses. The town centre might also be stronger if its boundaries were drawn more tightly around the main concentration of shops.

2 Enhancing the historic core

Rochford town centre benefits from an abundance of attractive and distinctive historic buildings and still retains some of its medieval street pattern. However, there are opportunities for carefully targeted improvements. The Market Square, in particular, could benefit from public realm enhancements and improvements to some of the surrounding buildings.

3 Improving accessibility for all

The existence of Rochford Hospital at the centre of the town's urban area means that there are few north-south or east-west links across the town centre. There are places where new routes could be opened up and footfall increased, which could bring new life to existing underused routes. There is also scope to create linkages across Bradley Way and improve accessibility between the rail station and town centre.

4 Releasing land for mixed-use and housing development

Rochford town centre has car parking facilities in a number of locations. There may be the possibility of releasing some highly accessible land for development through the identification of underused areas of car parking and the relocation of existing spaces to on-street locations.



Rochford Town Centre: an emerging framework

The plan above shows the emerging planning strategy for Rochford town centre, with an indicative public realm scheme for Bradley Way inset

3 What you have said

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

- There was support for improvements to the Market Square, including the redevelopment of the existing building on its eastern side and full or partial pedestrianisation. There are concerns, however, related to the impact that any changes might have on existing business, especially on account of lost car parking.
- The stimulation of the evening economy was seen as positive, provided that care is taken to ensure that this does not result in a rise in anti-social behaviour.
- Many of those that responded were keen to see the redevelopment of vacant, underused and unattractive sites.
- There was resistance to proposals for the redevelopment of WH Whittingham and Sons Ltd. building, with respondents pointing out that this is an attractive and historically significant building.
- The redevelopment of green land along Bradley Way was also seen as an unfavourable suggestion. Alternative ideas were put forward, instead promoting green linkages through to the reservoir and adjoining area of open space.
- Generally those commenting agreed that improved linkages across the town should be encouraged.
- Overall the comments received tended to state that there should be no net loss of car parking provision across the town as a whole.
- In respect of the road network, most of those that responded thought that no major changes should be made to the road network, including the existing one-way system. Instead, small scale interventions, such as traffic calming, were preferred.

4 Emerging development framework

Some contextual changes have taken place since the 2009 Issues & Options document 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 New developments – some of the sites previously considered through the AAP process have either been recently developed or are currently being developed. These include the provision of a new Sainsbury's food store between the town centre and the railway station and the development of new employment floorspace on land adjacent to the town's main car park.

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

The main components of this framework include

- A Market Square improvements** – enhancing the appearance and functionality of the Market Square, including giving greater priority to pedestrians and the potential relocation of the taxi rank to improve parking access. This may involve a reduction in the number of parking spaces.
- B Primary shopping area focus** – strengthening the town centre through a clear focus on retail at its core.
- C Protecting existing employment land** – protecting the employment uses in the Locks Hill area.
- D Improved pedestrian links** – improving north-south and east-west routes through the centre of the town and the hospital site, to improve links between the town centre, car parks, the rail station and nearby open space.
- E Enhancing Bradley Way** – making better use of the Bradley Way road corridor through junction improvements, the creation of an active frontage and the introduction of one or more new pedestrian crossing points to improve access from the town centre to the recreation ground, river and station. The potential for introducing some on-street car parking along Bradley Way should be explored to support possible development in the town centre and near the station.

Other elements of the framework include

- Environmental enhancements – securing a better setting for the town centre's historic fabric.
- Promoting an enhanced evening economy – encouraging leisure uses, cafes, restaurants and bars into the Market Square.
- Mixed-use development – promoting the redevelopment of available sites around the town centre, including opportunities for housing and a potential new facility for young people.

LET US KNOW YOUR VIEWS

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

Rochford 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.

