Town Centre Health Checks (TCHC) 2023/24

Rochford District Council

TWO COUNCILS ONE TEAM
BRENTWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL
Rochford District Council

Table of Contents

1. **Introduction and Scope of the Study 3**
   - Introduction to Town Centre Health Checks 3
   - Rochford's 2023 Town Centre Health Check...........................3
   - Structure of the Report 4
2. **Background and Policy Context 5**
   - Introduction 5
   - National Policy Context 10
   - Local Policy Context..16
   - Local Evidence Base..25
3. **Methodology 32**
   - Planning Practice Guidance 32
   - Town Centre Assessment Approach 32
4. **Findings 41**
   - Introduction 41
   - Retail Audit..41
   - Qualitative Scored Assessment...62
   - Assessment of Town Centre Change 69
5. **Data Analysis & Recommendations.................................... 84**
   - Introduction 84
   - Town Centre Boundaries and Shopping Frontages. 84
   - Review of Area Action Plan Targets and Goals......................91
   - Opportunity Sites..106
6. **Conclusions and Policy Recommendations. 114**
   - General Policy and Strategy Recommendations 114
   - Recommendations for Individual Town Centres 119
   - Future Research Recommendations...................................124
7. **Appendix... 125**

1. Introduction and Scope of the Study

Introduction to Town Centre Health Checks

1.1. Town Centre Health Checks (TCHC) are assessments conducted by Local Authorities to analyse and determine the overall health and wellbeing of a town centre. These evaluations typically consider various aspects including economic, social, environmental, and cultural factors to provide a comprehensive understanding of a town centre's health and functionality.

1.2. The vitality and viability of a town centre is a good measurement of the economic characteristics of an area. Beyond offering local employment and opportunities for new businesses, successful town centres and shopping areas play a pivotal role in boosting investment and the overall quality of life in the town. A strong, vital, and viable town centre helps to attract new businesses, employees, and residents and contributes significantly to raising investment confidence and positive perceptions of the town.

1.3. Regular town centre health assessments function as a continuous evaluation tool, allowing for the monitoring of changes in town centres over time and the identification of emerging trends. These assessments are strategically designed to provide valuable insights into the enduring strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing town centres, offering a nuanced understanding of their ongoing vitality, resilience, and overall performance.

1.4. The finding from these assessments can then be used to make well-informed decisions aimed at ensuring that a town centre remains vibrant, economically viable, and responsive to the evolving needs of the community.

Rochford's 2023 Town Centre Health Check

1.5. In 2023, a comprehensive assessment was conducted to evaluate the strength and vitality of town centres situated in the district of Rochford. Data was collected in October 2023, via on-site assessment of Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley Town Centre. The assessment process involved a systematic survey and analysis and, a qualitative assessment of town centre health indicators to provide a comprehensive understand of the town's overall wellbeing.

1.6. The information gathered through this evaluation will be utilised by the Council to support town centre monitoring efforts, local development and regeneration initiatives and the formulation of policy. And, the data collected, and its analysis will form a part of the new Rochford Local Plan evidence base that will be used to inform and support the Council's updated policies.

1.7. This report presents a quantitative and qualitative assessment of Rochford's town centres. Collective summaries have been produced for Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley Town Centre to allow for a quick and easy overview of statistical results for each location. Each of these highlight vacancy rates, qualitative ratings, use classifications, year-on-year change and physical condition assessment.

1.8. Based on the analysis of this data, several recommendations have been formulated, addressing potential adjustments to town centre boundaries and shopping frontages; amendments to town centre targets, objectives, and goals (including those outlined in adopted Area Action Plans); opportunity area designations; and other enhancements to town centres. In its final section, this report puts forward a series of recommendations to guide the Council's updated policies.

Structure of the Report

1.9. This report is divided into six different sections:

- **Section 1** introduces town centre health checks and details the 2023-24 Rochford Town Centre Health Check.
- **Section 2** sets out the planning policy framework for the production of Rochford's Town Centre Health Check Report 2023-24.
- **Section 3** explains the methodology that has been followed to carry out the analysis.
- **Section 4** presents the key findings from retail audit, qualitative assessment and the assessment of short and long-term town centre change undertaken for Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley Town Centres in October 2023.
- **Section 5** evaluates and examines the need for amendments to Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley's town centre boundaries and/or the primary shopping frontages (PFS) and/or secondary shopping frontages (SSF), It also assesses the progress in implementing targets, goals, and actions outlined in each town centre's Area Action Plan (AAP), including the delivery of designated the opportunity areas specified in AAPs.
- **Section 6** includes a summary of conclusions and sets out a series of policy recommendations.

2. Background and Policy Context

Introduction

2.1. Rochford District is characterised by its three town centres of Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley, each of which have their own distinctive identity and differing range of shops and services. Across the wider District, a series of neighbourhood and village shopping parades also fulfil an important role at the heart of their communities. These centres are key to everyday life for most residents and businesses, and are important contributors to local economies, communities and identities. They provide a wide range of both everyday (convenience) and specialist (comparison) retailers, in addition to food & drink, leisure, entertainment and service business, office accommodation; and key public facilities (e.g., healthcare, libraries and council services).

2.2. Retail, leisure, hospitality and other uses usually found in town centres are an important employer in the District. As of 2022[1], 4,000 worked in the Wholesale & Retail Trade; Repair of Motor Vehicles sectors, whilst 2,000 were employed in Accommodation & Food Service Activities and a further 600 in Arts, Entertainment & Recreation. Collectively, these sectors accounted for 28.7% of all jobs in the District.

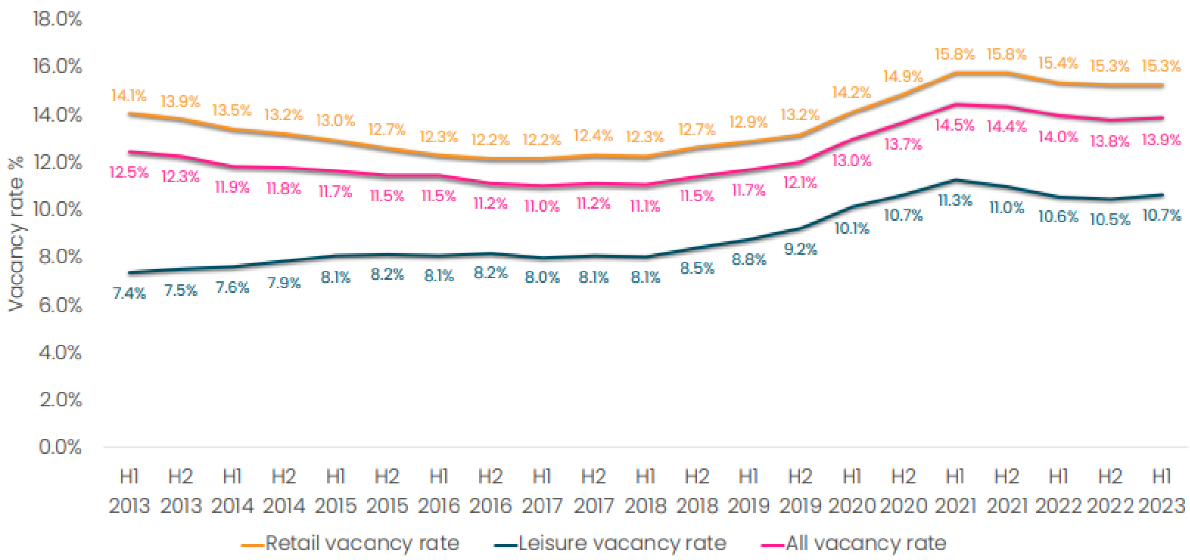
2.3. Town centres and traditional models of retail have faced considerable challenges in recent years, as a revolution in digital technology has made it easier to shop and access services online, something which was accelerated by the COVID-19 Pandemic. As a result, there has been a significant impact on traditional town centre uses, with banks and comparison retail in particular having reduced their physical presence in town centres. Whilst there is evidence that sectors such as leisure, food & beverage are driving a recovery on many high streets[2], ongoing volatility caused by the rising cost of living means the situation in many town centres is likely to be fragile. As a result, planning policies need to ensure town centres and high streets are resilient, diversified, attractive and able to respond quickly to changing trends, whilst protecting space for core retail and services.

[1] https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157219/report.aspx?town=rochford#tabearn
[2] https://www.localdatacompany.com/insights/reports/ldc-h1-2022-report-out-now

National Trends

2.4. The first half of 2023 saw an increase in the GB vacancy rate from 13.8% to 13.9% (see Figure 1), the first increase in vacancy rates since H2 2020, when the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic saw a significant increase in both retail and leisure vacancies. Whilst a significant growth in leisure occupancy has helped reduce overall retail centre vacancies since the pandemic, the effects of the 'cost of living crisis' from 2022, associated with events such as the war in Ukraine, significant hikes in the cost of food, fuel, rising interest rates and the resultant squeeze on consumer spending and upward pressure on wages, has pushed up leisure vacancies by 0.2% over the last monitoring period. The retail sector itself was slightly more resilient than leisure, with many of the major national operators having already cut costs pre/post-pandemic. This was accompanied by a slowdown in the growth of online sales, which were a 26% share of overall retail sales in Q2 2023, an increase of +0.2% since Q2 2022, compared to an average year-on-year increase of +1.4% since 2019.

Figure 1: Historical vacancy rate, H1 2013 to H1 2023 (source: Local Data Company[3])

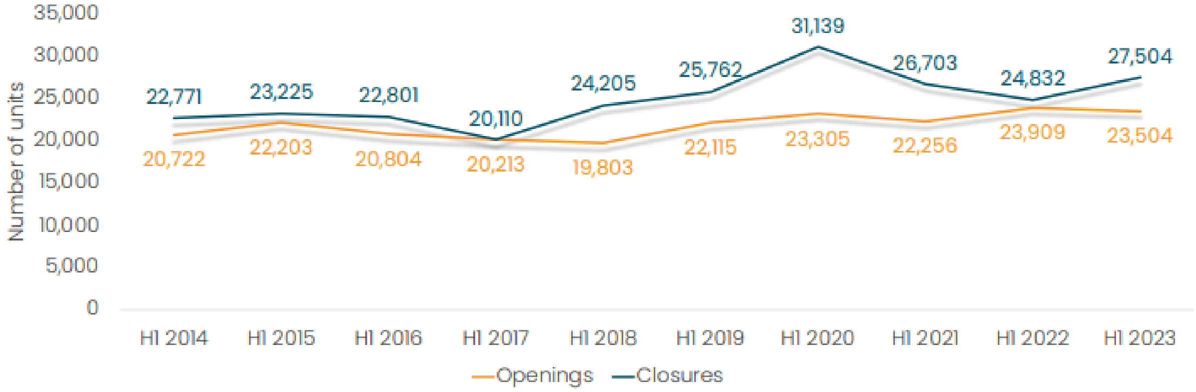


Source: Local Data Company (2023).

2.5. This increase in vacancies was also accompanied by a significant rise in closures, with the difference between store closures and openings being the highest since H1 2020 (see Figure 2). This was driven in particular by a decline in independent retail, which saw a strong performance in H1 2022 (net increase of +1,335 units), but a net decline of -1,915 units in H1 2023, indicating this sub-sector's particular vulnerability to falling consumer spending.

[3] https://www.localdatacompany.com/h1-2023-report-download

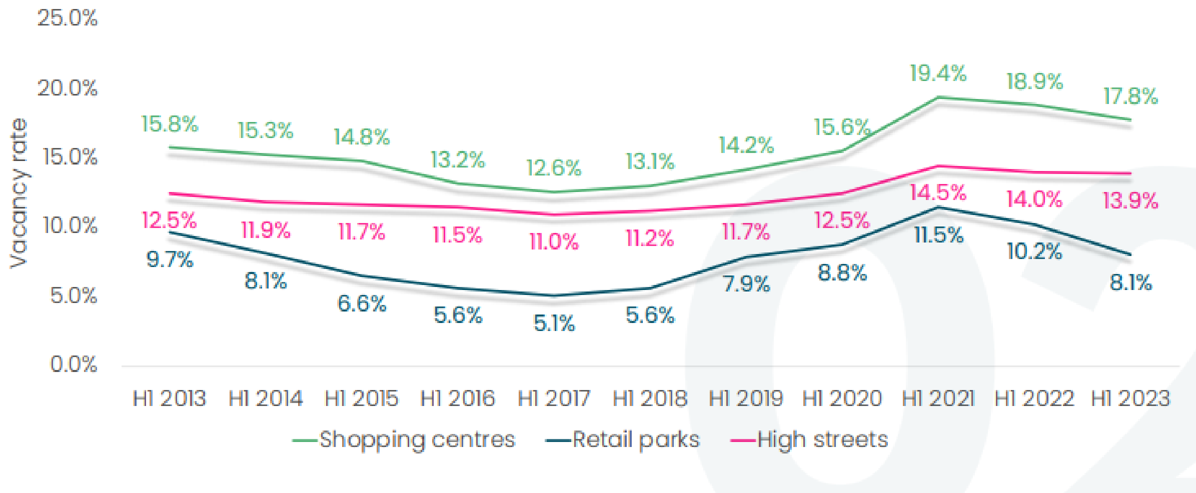
Figure 2: Historical number of openings and closures, H1 2014 to H1 2023 (source: Local Data Company)



Source: Local Data Company (2023).

2.6. As indicated in Figure 3, retail parks have proven particularly resilient in comparison to high streets and shopping centres, with an overall vacancy rate of just 8.1%, its lowest vacancy rate since H1 2019. These trends reflect a historical continuation, with retail parks always having had a significantly lower vacancy rate than high streets and shopping centres. This resilience continued through the COVID-19 pandemic (reflecting many of these sites were able to adopt enhanced click & collect facilities, whilst their larger scale and accessibility by car instilled consumer confidence). Whilst shopping centres were particularly hard-hit by the pandemic, a growth in demand from leisure operators seeking larger spaces has seen a steady decline in vacancy rates post-pandemic. Whilst the vacancy rate for retail parks fell by 2.1% since H1 2022 and that for shopping centres fell by 1.1%, the vacancy rate for high streets dropped by just 0.1%.

Figure 3: Vacancy rate by location type, H1 2013- H1 2023 (source: Local Data Company)

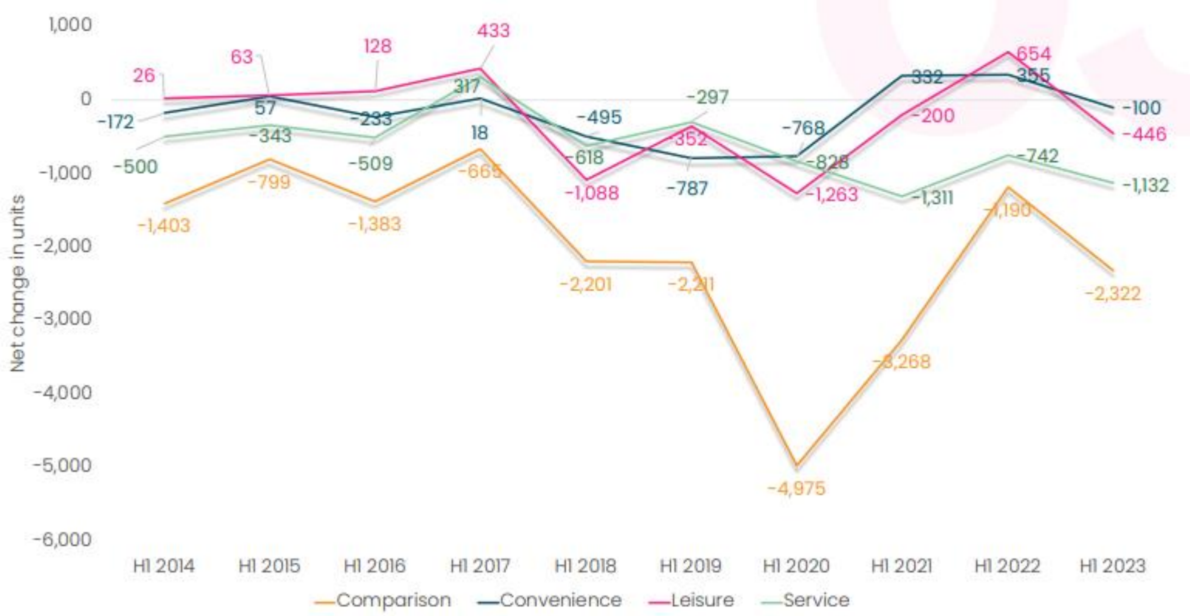


Source: Local Data Company (2023).

2.7. As touched upon in paragraph 2.5, H1 2023 saw a net decline of -1,915 independent units, the largest drop in 7 years and a particular issue given the increasing reliance of many town centres on independent retailers as national chains have cut back on their store presence in smaller centres. Multiples also saw a net decline of -2,085 units, although this was the best result for the sector since H1 2017 and represents them being generally better placed to offset rising costs.

2.8. Figure 4 demonstrates that the negative net change in units seen in H1 2023 was driven primarily by a significant drop in comparison retail. Sectors such as leisure and services, generally seen as being more resilient to the impacts of changing trends such as online retail, also experienced net declines, likely as a result of the aforementioned squeezes on disposable income due to the rising cost of living. This was noted to have particularly slowed the opening of new bars, pubs, clubs, cafes and restaurants.

Figure 4: Historical net change in occupied units by classification type, H1 2014 to H1 2023 (source: Local Data Company)



Source: Local Data Company (2023).

2.9. Table 1 provides an overview of the 10 largest categories in terms of both openings and closures. Services such as barbers and nail salons, along with convenience retailers, coffee shops and take away food dominated, with such uses more resilient to competition from online retail and typically part of established daily routines. There was also a notable rise in stores selling vaping and electronic cigarette products, echoing strong national growth in the habit as users move from traditional tobacco, something forecast to continue[4].

[4] https://grocerytrader.co.uk/expanding-category-the-vape-market-is-expected-to-reach-1-4bn-in-the-next-three-years/

Table 1: Fastest growth and decline in retail and leisure subcategories – H1 2023 (source: Local Data Company)

Top 10 fastest-growing categories (net change in nationwide units)	Top 10 fastest-declining subcategories (net change in nationwide units)
Barbers (+304)	Hairdressers (-414)
Nail salons (+142)	Chemists/toiletries (-310)
Beauty salons (+130)	Fashion shops (-262)
Fast food take away (+101)	Public houses and inns (-221)
Supermarkets (+98)	Estate agents (-221)
Vaping stores & tobacconists (+86)	Bookmakers (-215)
Take away food shops (+85)	Hair and beauty salons (-165)
Bakers shops (+67)	Newsagents (-138)
Convenience stores (+62)	Hotels – 3 stars (-98)
Coffee shops (+53)	Car dealers (-97)

Source: Local Data Company (2023).

2.10. In terms of the future, the Local Data Company forecast vacancy rates to continue to rise through the second half of 2023, although economic headwinds driven by rising interest rates and price rises are expected to ease, leading to a gradual decline in vacancy rates into 2024, and more stability after that. This is forecast to be accompanied by an initial increase in net closures of retail units, although greater stability and consumer confidence from 2024 onwards is expected to then see a reduction in closures as retailers look to growth again.

2.11. The impacts of the pandemic continue to have some relevance, with there being some evidence that local town centres such as those in the District saw less of an impact in terms of footfall and vacancies than larger cities and shopping centres, reflecting both a preference to shop locally and the trend away from commuting towards home-working. This is borne out in the Local Data Company Report, which saw dramatic increases in city centre vacancy rates between 2019- 2020, but much smaller increases for commuter towns and villages, as people remained closer to home during pandemic lockdown restrictions in a process termed hyper-localisation.

2.12. It is important, however, to recognise that town centres were under considerable pressure prior to the pandemic, due to both growth in online retail and competition from out of town retail parks, shopping centres and supermarkets, with retail parks in particular having experienced lower vacancy rates in recent years. These trends have continued post-pandemic. Town centres across the country are therefore being re- imagined away from retail-led approaches towards more mixed-use approaches that see a greater proportion of food & drink, leisure, residential and community uses. These 'experiential' uses, along with services such as hairdressing and beauty, are more resilient to online shopping trends and can help drive wider footfall. Such initiatives have been recognised by Central Government, through the Grimsey Reviews and establishment of a High Streets Task Force to promote best practice.

2.13. The picture painted by the H1 2023 statistics is directly relevant to Rochford District, where the three town centres are dominated by independent retail, leisure and service providers, particularly in the smaller centres of Rochford and Hockley. In addition, whilst vacancy rates are generally low, much of this is as a result of the growth in services and food & drink, meaning any slow-down or decline in these sectors could start to be reflected on local high streets. This is touched upon further in Section 4, where analysis of the use make-up and vacancy rates of the respective town centres within Rochford District is available. In addition, Section 2.38 presents relevant findings from the recently published *Rochford Retail Study*, which considers how some of these macro-level trends are likely to impact in the demand for different types of retail and leisure space within the District.

National Policy Context

2.14. The NPPF[5] states in Chapter 7 that planning policies should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation. References to town centres and retail in the NPPF are summarised below:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
Planning policies should: a. define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a

[5] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1182995/NPPF_Sept_23.pdf

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters; b. define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, and make clear the range of uses permitted in such locations, as part of a positive strategy for the future of each centre; c. retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones; d. allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of development likely to be needed, looking at least ten years ahead. Meeting anticipated needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses over this period should not be compromised by limited site availability, so town centre boundaries should be kept under review where necessary; e. where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available for main town centre uses, allocate appropriate edge of centre sites that are well connected to the town centre. If sufficient edge of centre sites cannot be identified, policies should explain how identified needs can be met in other accessible locations that are well connected to the town centre; and f. recognise that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and encourage residential development on appropriate sites.(paragraph 86)
Local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses which are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date plan. Main town centre uses should be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations; and only if suitable sites are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out of centre sites be considered. (paragraph 87)
When considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites which are well connected to the town centre. Applicants and local planning authorities should demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale, so that opportunities to utilise suitable town centre or edge of centre sites are fully explored. (paragraph 88)
This sequential approach should not be applied to applications for small scale rural offices or other small scale rural development. (paragraph 89)
When assessing applications for retail and leisure development outside town centres, which are not in accordance with an up-to-date plan, local planning authorities should require an impact assessment if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold (if there is no locally set threshold, the default threshold is 2,500m2 of gross floorspace). This should include assessment of:

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
a. the impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal; and b. the impact of the proposal on town centre vitality and viability, including local consumer choice and trade in the town centre and the wider retail catchment (as applicable to the scale and nature of the scheme). (paragraph 90)
Where an application fails to satisfy the sequential test or is likely to have significant adverse impact on one or more of the considerations in paragraph 90, it should be refused. (paragraph 91)

Source: National Planning Policy Framework (2023).

2.15. In addition, the NPPG states that local planning authorities (LPAs) can take a leading role in promoting a positive vision for these areas, bringing together stakeholders, and supporting sustainable economic and employment growth, whilst considering how to use available planning tools to respond positively to structural changes in the economy. It highlights the following as ways in which LPAs can plan for vibrant, viable and resilient town centres:

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)
Encourage a wide range of complementary uses (beyond retail) to support town centre vitality, including residential, employment, office, commercial, healthcare and leisure/entertainment, along with 'pop-up' temporary activities. Consider the encouragement of evening and night-time activities, as well as the placement of specialist accommodation (e.g. for older people) within or on the edge of town centre locations (paragraph 001).
Make use of available planning tools to support and shape town centres – primarily through the development plan and supplementary planning documents, in particular through the designation of primary and secondary retail frontages. Other tools to support town centres include: • Local Development Orders – to provide additional planning certainty and help to bring forward development as part of a wider strategy to regenerate a town centre. • Neighbourhood Development Orders – gives communities the opportunity to bring forward types of development they wish to see in their neighbourhood areas. • Brownfield registers – identify land around town centres suitable for homes. • Compulsory purchase powers – consider use to help tackle empty properties and deliver regeneration schemes (paragraph 002).

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)
Fully involve a wide range of stakeholders to create a town centre vision that meets economic and community needs. These include local authorities (including economic development teams), local enterprise partnerships, landowners, businesses and their representatives, community groups, town centre managers, business improvement districts and the general public (paragraph 003).
Town centre strategies should use evidence to reflect the current state of the centre and fully consider how development opportunities could support their vitality and viability. This could include: • The centre's realistic role, function and in position in hierarchies (to be reviewed regularly). • The most appropriate use mixes to achieve a vision that supports viability and vitality. • How to accommodate assessed need for main town centre uses and their expansion, alongside consideration of how restructuring/new development or redevelopment of underutilised space can support this. Evaluating different policy options to consider how infrastructure deliver or economic and demographic change can be incorporated into visions. • More effective use of existing land (e.g. grouping uses and utilising upper floors and airspace). • Improving accessibility, public realm and transport links to enhance town centres. • Considering complementary strategies for town centres and how these help deliver the vision (e.g. parking). • Considering the role of different stakeholders in delivering the vision. • Appropriate environmental and heritage policies for town centres (paragraph 004).
In circumstances where it is not possible to accommodate all forecast needs in the town centre, planning authorities should plan positively to accommodate town centre uses through the most appropriate alternative strategy, considering the sequential and impact tests to minimise adverse impacts and support continued town centre vitality. The sequential test required a thorough assessment of all suitable town centre locations for town centre uses before non-town centre locations can be considered. The impact test relates to larger proposals of over 2,500 sq. m [as a default] proposed outside of town centre locations and requires local planning authorities to consider a range of potential impacts from such developments on existing town centres (paragraphs 005, 009-018).
A range of indicators should be used to assess the vitality of town centres over time, including diversity of uses, street level vacancy rates, commercial rents, pedestrian flows, environmental quality, accessibility, perception of safety, and opening hours (paragraph 006).

Source: National Planning Practice Guidance (2023)

Changes to Use Class Orders

2.16. There have been significant changes to the planning use class order as Government has sought to help town centres respond flexibly to changing trends in retail, leisure, and other services as the rise in popularity of online and omni-channel retail models continues, challenging the traditional dominance of high street 'bricks and mortar' stores. The new use class order was introduced on 1st September 2020, with the table below setting out the merging of several different retail, leisure, food & drink and community uses across A1-3 and D1 & 2 into the simplified Class E, F1 and F2 means planning permission is no longer required on a wide range of changes of use within retail centres. This makes it simpler for new businesses and activities to open in high streets, potentially leading to fewer units being vacant, for a shorter period of time. However, it does present a challenge for local planning authorities, as there are fewer policy tools to guide and curate a healthy mix of different uses.

Table 2 Use class classifications (pre and post September 2020).

Premise Use	Use class (pre-1st September 2020)	Use class (post 1st September 2020)
Shops	A1	E
Financial & professional services	A2	E
Food & drink (mainly on the premises)	A3	E
Business (office, research and development and light industrial process)	B1	E
Non-residential institutions (medical or health services, crèches, day nurseries and centres)	D1	E
Assembly and leisure (indoor sport, recreation or fitness, gyms)	D2	E
Non-residential institutions (education, art gallery, museum, public library, public exhibition hall, places of worship, law courts)	D1	F1

Premise Use	Use class (pre-1st September 2020)	Use class (post 1st September 2020)
Shop no larger that 280sqm (selling mostly essential goods and at least 1km from another similar shop); community hall, outdoor sport/recreation area, indoor or outdoor swimming pool, skating rink	A1	F2
Public house, wine bar, drinking establishment	A4	Sui generis
Hot food takeaway	A5	Sui generis
Cinema, concert hall, bingo hall, dance hall, live music venue	D2	Sui generis

Permitted Development Rights

2.17. In addition, the relaxation of Permitted Development rights through Class MA[6], introduced in August 2021, has simplified the process for converting Class E units to residential with a shortened list of prior approvals, something which could drastically change town centres within a short period of time. Class MA requires properties to have been vacant for a minimum of 3 months, and to be under 1,500 sq. m in floor area. Changes of use through this process are not required to consider the impacts to the local economy or community from the loss of the commercial unit, except where this involves the loss of services provided by a registered nursery or health centre. It should also be noted that the right does not apply to listed buildings, although it does apply in conservation areas (subject to an impact assessment at ground level). These heritage considerations are likely to be relevant in parts of Rochford District, most notably the Rayleigh, Rochford and Great Wakering Conservation Areas.

2.18. Whilst the busiest primary retail areas (e.g., Rayleigh High Street) are likely to remain predominantly in town centre uses, it is likely that peripheral areas of town centres, along with smaller village and neighbourhood centres, may see an increase in residential conversions at ground floor level. In addition, upper floors in town centres, many of which contain offices and other services, could potentially see an increase in prior approval notices to exercise this right. An increased residential population in retail centres could see increased custom and footfall to existing businesses from a larger long-term resident population which is within a short walk of a wide range of

[6] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2021/428/article/6/made?view=plain

goods and services. However, the loss of a potentially significant number of retail, leisure and service businesses could reduce the appeal of centres in providing a wide choice of goods and services, and undermine its attractiveness. The creation of ground floor residential in the middle of established shopping parades also has the effect of discouraging footfall from continuing past this point to other businesses, a practice the Royal Town Planning Institute has termed 'dead frontage[7]'.

2.19. Traditionally, a power available to local planning authorities to help control the scope of permitted development through the removal of national permitted development rights was through the use of Article 4 directions. However, a Written Ministerial Statement from the Secretary of State in 2021 amended the NPPF and introduced Paragraph 53. This restricts the scope to which they can be applied, particularly in the case of non-residential to residential conversions, for example:

- To prevent the loss of the essential core of a primary shopping area which would seriously undermine its vitality and viability (however, it would not be appropriate for an Article 4 direction to apply to the entire town centre).
- In other cases, be limited to situations where an Article 4 direction is necessary to protect local amenity or the well-being of the area.
- In all cases, be based on robust evidence, and apply to the smallest geographical area possible.

2.20. As a result, any consideration of whether to apply such measures in Rochford District will require robust evidence and a targeted intervention. Given the potential the introduction of the right has to considerably alter the makeup of town and local centres, including those covered by policies intended to protect and enhance such areas through the Core Strategy and Area Action Plans, the Council will need to carefully monitor the situation regarding frequency of prior approval applications under Class MA.

Local Policy Context

2.21. A number of existing documents form the basis of relevant planning policies relating to retail and town centres, namely the *Rochford District Core Strategy* (adopted 2011), *Allocations Plan* (adopted 2014), *Development Management Plan* (adopted 2014), *Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan*, *Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan*, and *Hockley Area Action Plan* (all adopted in 2014). 1.1.1.1.1.1.1.1.1Appendix A: sets out sets out how various policies within these documents comply with the principles set out in national planning policy. These include the principle of directing retail uses towards

[7] https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/7661/final-rtpi-response-supporting-housing-delivery-and-public-service-infrastructure.pdf

the District’s town centres, applying the sequential test to the location of new retail developments, and both protecting existing and supporting new retail development in established locations in smaller villages and residential neighbourhood parades.

2.22. Updating these policies, where appropriate, will be key to ensure the Council has the appropriate and flexible planning policies to ensure the District’s town and village centres, neighbourhood parades and retail areas remain vibrant hubs for retail, commerce and community services through the lifetime of the new Local Plan.

2.23. Key to the implementation of the Council’s policies on Retail and Town Centres have been the three Area Action Plans, each of which contains a detailed set of policies to support vitality, a diverse use mix and regeneration in their respective centres. The new Local Plan will need to ensure the key principles established by these documents, including primary and secondary shopping frontages and any policy objectives to improve key aspects of the town centres to make them more vibrant and sustainable, are taken forward and adapted to the latest context. The Health Checks set out in this paper are intended to gather the necessary evidence to help ensure the new Local Plan has a set of up to date, relevant and locally-tailored policies to support the development of the respective town centres. Section 5, later in the document, reviews the AAPs in the light of the Health Check surveys, identifying which objectives have/have not been achieved. It then identifies which elements of the AAPs and their policies should be carried forward within the new Local Plan.

Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan

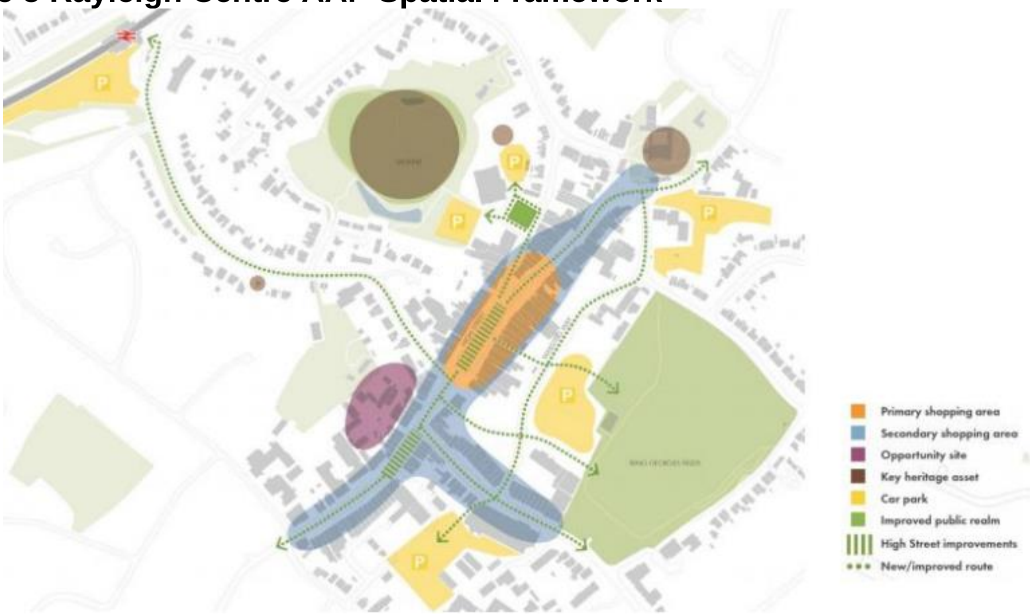
2.24. The Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan (RCAAP) sets out a vision for Rayleigh as the District’s main centre. It states: By 2025, the town centre’s retail and leisure offer will be improved through the provision of additional retail floorspace, as well as accommodation for complementary uses, such as leisure facilities, offices and homes. Further environmental enhancements will create a high quality public realm, encourage investment and ensure that the town centre is highly accessible by foot, public transport and private motor vehicle. All new development will help to enhance the town centre’s historic setting and respect its existing character, including that of nearby suburban, low-density neighbourhoods. It aims to achieve this through four objectives:

1. Strengthening Rayleigh’s role as Rochford District’s principal town centre (including provision of new retail accommodation and a greater range of complementary uses, including dwellings and offices, on peripheral sites)
2. Improving accessibility for all (including from rail station and parking areas to the high street, and improving the overall arrival experience for visitors)

3. Making the most of historic assets (better connections between the town centre and assets such as Rayleigh Mount, Holy Trinity Church, Rayleigh Windmill and the Dutch Cottage).
4. Delivering public realm improvements.

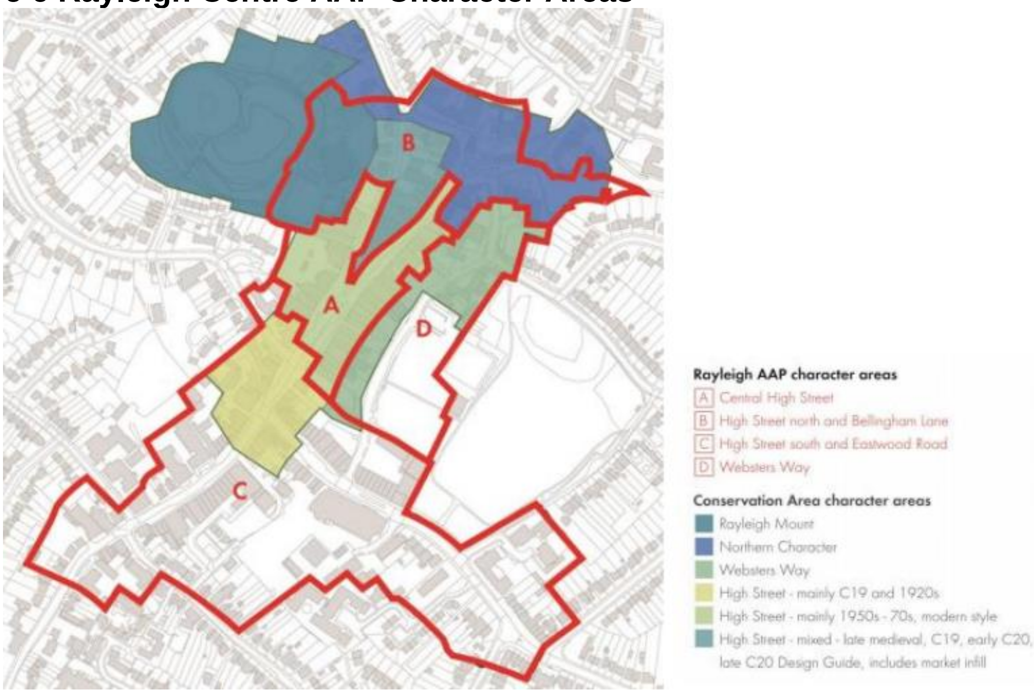
2.25. The RCAAP sets out a series of 8 policies to help deliver this vision and objectives, as shown in Appendix A:, including policies specific to the various character areas found within Rayleigh Town Centre. These are delivered through reference to the AAP Spatial Framework and Character Areas Map, shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6 respectively.

Figure 5 Rayleigh Centre AAP Spatial Framework



Source: Rayleigh Area Action Plan (2015)

Figure 6 Rayleigh Centre AAP Character Areas



Source: Rayleigh Area Action Plan (2015)

Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan (RTCAAP)

2.26. The Rochford Town Centre AAP seeks to implement a vision for Rochford, based on its context as a historic small market town. The RTCAAP's vision states: Rochford will develop its existing strengths as a small and attractive historic market town serving the needs of its local population and visitors. By 2025, the town centre offer will be more mixed, and will include a greater diversity of town centre uses, such as restaurants, cafés, and bars, leisure uses and community facilities, whilst retaining its existing office stock. Environmental enhancements and new development will improve key spaces, build on the town's historic character and make better use of unused or unattractive sites. Improvements to existing routes and the addition of new links will make the town more permeable and make travel by all modes of transport easier. This is underpinned by 5 key objectives:

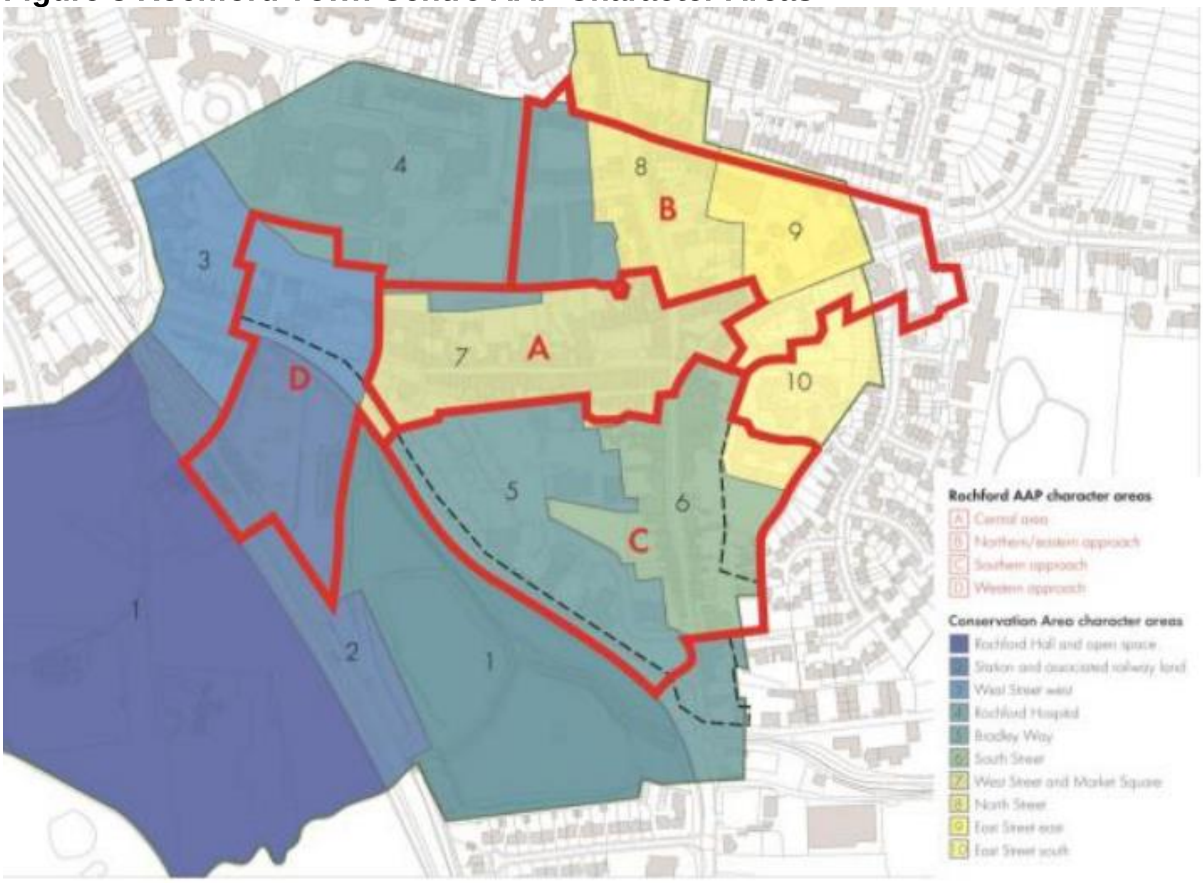
1. Provide a diverse range of uses, activities and facilities for local people (enhance the overall mix through a more flexible approach to uses to encourage café culture and the evening economy).
2. Enhance the historic core (particularly public realm enhancements for the Market Square and improvements to surrounding buildings).
3. Improve accessibility for all (better linkages between key areas in and around the town centre, such as the hospital and train station).
4. Protect local employment (retaining existing employment allocations).
5. Promote the redevelopment of unused, underused, infill or unattractive sites.

2.27. The RTCAAP sets out a series of 9 policies to help deliver this vision and objectives, as shown in Existing Retail & Town Centres Local Planning PoliciesAppendix A:, including policies specific to the various character areas found within Rochford Town Centre. These are delivered through reference to the AAP Spatial Framework and Character Areas Map, shown in Figure 7 and Figure 8 respectively.

Figure 7 Rochford Town Centre AAP Spatial Framework

Source: Rochford Area Action Plan (2015).

Figure 8 Rochford Town Centre AAP Character Areas



Source: Rochford Area Action Plan (2015).

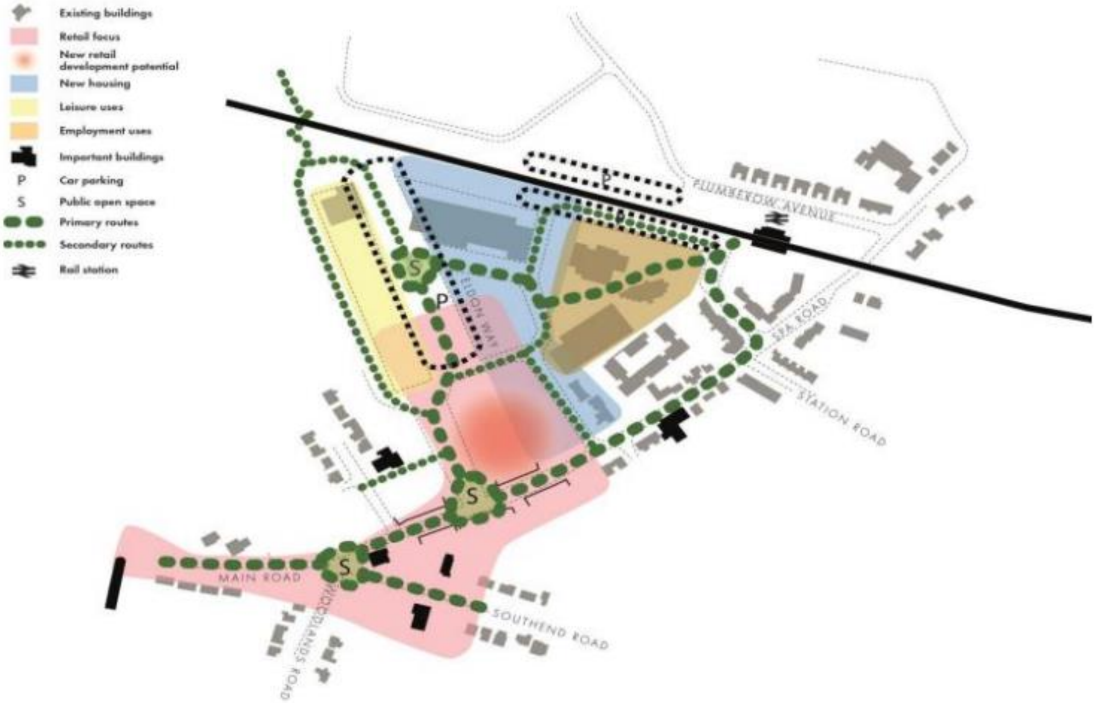
Hockley Area Action Plan (HAAP)

2.28. Hockley's AAP sets out a vision for the future development of the town which seeks to improve its offer and environment to local residents through significant mixed-use regeneration of parts of the existing urban fabric. The vision states that, by 2025, *Hockley will have a centre that is defined by the high quality of its public realm and the opportunities on offer for local people to access homes, shops, jobs, leisure and other services without having to travel far afield. These changes will be delivered in a manner that makes the most of land that has been previously developed, and all new development will respect and enhance the existing suburban, low-density character of the settlement.* The 4 objectives supporting this are as follows:

1. Provide greater shopping choice for local people (particularly in terms of food retail).
2. Identify and deliver environmental improvements (redeveloping industrial sites to help deliver enhanced public realm).
3. Recycle previously developed land for housing (redeveloping brownfield sites to provide more housing in a sustainable location).
4. Protect local employment (retaining much of the existing employment areas alongside new mixed-use investments to strengthen the vitality of the centre).

2.29. The AAP sets out a series of 8 policies to help deliver this vision and objectives, as shown in Appendix x, within Hockley Town Centre. These are delivered through reference to the AAP Spatial Framework, shown in .

Figure 9 Hockley AAP Spatial Framework



Source: Hockley Area Action Plan (2014).

Economic Growth Strategy 2022-2025

2.30. The Council's current Economic Growth Strategy sets out a 'Vision for Rochford', which seeks to achieve a more prosperous and diverse economy through 3 main ambitions, many elements of which are relevant to the District's town centres and their businesses:

- **Grow the economy:** Supporting local businesses to expand; adapt; and innovate. This includes delivering business networking events; delivering a high streets conference to better understand challenges and opportunities within centres; developing and promoting an online business and town centre directory; supporting local business networks to grow and broaden their offer (including Rochford Environmental Business Alliance); supporting businesses to grow their online presence; supporting the roll out of full fibre broadband across the District; and distributing support and advice.
- **Attract investment:** Attracting new businesses and raising the District's economic profile, which includes promote and support the marketing of land and building opportunities across the District; supporting the delivery of new business spaces which targets known areas of unmet demand; connecting potential occupiers of vacant premises with low-interest finance through the South Essex No Use Empty Scheme; supporting the delivery of new innovative and flexible business spaces in the District's centres and employment estates; developing and launching a new place-based brand for the District to promote economic opportunities to investors; championing/enabling local investment opportunities; and supporting the delivery of green tourism initiatives including to better capture the economic potential of London Southend Airport within the local area.
- **Support entrepreneurship:** This is focused on improving skills and creating new economic opportunities for residents through measures including investing in town centres and other opportunity sites to create jobs, reduce deprivation and attract new businesses; Work with the owners and operators of strategic employment sites to improve their attractiveness, competitiveness and accessibility to a wide range of potential users and employers; investing in Council assets to provide new revenue sources, create jobs and provide greater opportunities for leisure and well-being; and identifying local skills gaps and work with local businesses to fill these skills gaps over time.

2.31. The strategy recognises the District as an entrepreneurial place where its historic town centres are key assets, surrounded by attractive countryside and coastline, with strategic connections through London Southend Airport. The town centres are recognised as having particular opportunities to capitalise on the thriving local start-up and small business base by providing flexible workspace, as well as in supporting growth opportunities in the visitor economy. Both these priorities have the potential to diversify the existing centres and provide new sources of footfall and income streams to supplement traditional retail.

Rochford Town Centre Health Check (2019)

2.32. Carried out by Lichfields in 2019, this study was commissioned in response to the town's high vacancy rate, which included some of the most prominent buildings on and around the Market Square. The study undertook the 'health check' measures outlined in the National Planning Practice Guidance, e.g., assessing the use mix, vacancy rate, environmental quality, customer views and pedestrian views, supplementing this with stakeholder consultations, business and visitor surveys and footfall counts.

2.33. The study set Rochford within the national context, with Lichfields attributing many of Rochford's 'symptoms' (e.g. vacant premises, low commercial property values and poor occupier demand) to a combination of structural/national and local causes, namely:

- The increase in on-line and multi-channel shopping
- The polarisation of retail investment in large centres and out-of-centre retail parks.
- The ageing population.
- Inflexible historic converted shop premises.
- Availability of affordable car parking
- Limited accessibility by public transport.
- Narrow streets and pavements.

2.34. The study found Rochford had an above-average vacancy rate, whilst the proportion of Class A1 comparison and convenience goods units was lower than the UK average, something typified by the lack of a large supermarket. The proportion of non-retail services (Classes A1 and A2) is higher than the UK average, a feature characteristic of small town centres that predominantly serve local shopping/service needs. The centre was found to have a reasonable proportion of food and beverage uses.

2.35. The study found that the weekly market was a major attraction, with larger pedestrian flows seen during Tuesday mornings compared to the afternoon. This suggests the enhanced range of convenience and comparison goods available on market days extends the town's catchment beyond the most local. In contrast, Saturdays were considerably quieter, indicating the need to bolster the existing use mix with additional retail/leisure uses, along with exploring the possibility for more events.

2.36. The study identified the following strengths and weaknesses of the centre.

Table 3: Strengths and weaknesses – Rochford Town Centre Health Check 2019.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Independent shops and services • The market on Tuesdays • Linked trips generated by offices, the hospital, community uses and commuters • A loyal local customer base • Accessible public car parking • Compact and legible shopping area • Historic character providing a strong local identity	• Cluster of prominent vacant buildings • Poor linkages to underutilised Roche Close • Breaks in the retail frontages • Low demand for retail space • No large food supermarket Limited range and choice of shops and few national multiples • Variable quality building fabric, signs, shop windows, street furniture and landscaping • No covered shopping areas and limited shelter • No banks / building societies • Limited evening economy • Low commercial property values • Perception of crime and anti-social behaviour • Narrow pavements and pedestrian / vehicular conflict

Source: Rochford Town Centre Health Check (2019)

2.37. As recommendations, the study advocated the following potential interventions to enhance the vitality of Rochford:

- Production of an agreed town centre vision and reconsideration of development plan priorities (e.g. frontages policy) to encourage a diverse use mix.
- Supporting key development opportunity sites (e.g. former Police Station, vacant plot on North Street, rear of Freight House and no.2-12 Market Square).
- The implementation of public realm and environmental improvements (particularly the Market Square, key junctions and improvements to shop fronts and street furniture.
- Accessibility improvement (e.g. improving pedestrian links to Back Lane Car Park) and improving bus usage.

- Promotional activities (both information and events for visitors and support for potential occupiers/investors).
- Addressing perceived safety/crime issues, e.g. through introduction of CCTV

Local Evidence Base

Rochford District Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment Update 2022

2.38. The 2022 Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment (RLNA), carried out by Lichfields, provided an updated assessment of the District's retail and leisure needs, with the previous assessment being the 20177 South Essex Retail Study (SERS).

2.39. The RLNA provides a robust update of the SERS which includes refreshed quantitative assessments of the need for retail, food & beverage and commercial leisure floorspace in the District over the new Local Plan period to 2040, based on the latest available population and expenditure projections, along with potential implications for policies in the Plan to accommodate the floorspace required, as well as to safeguard space at risk of being lost.

2.40. Whilst the NPPF requires local planning authorities to plan at least 10 years ahead in town centres (i.e., to 2035), it is prudent to consider the full length of the Plan period (i.e., to 2040) to take into account the full impact that future development and growth may have on the need for different types of retail and town centre floorspace across the District. The update also reflects the latest (September 2020) changes to the Use Class Order, most notably the introduction of Class E.

2.41. The report provided a high-level context for the retail and leisure industry, noting the following key trends:

2.42. Expenditure predictions: Experian analysis shows that consumer expenditure (and, consequently, demand for retail space) has slowed since the last recession in 2009, particularly comparison goods floorspace. The latest Experian forecasts suggest continuing slow expenditure growth, reflecting the impacts of Brexit, Covid-19, cost of living and energy crisis. In the short term, operators have faced elevated risks to cash flow and increased costs arising from a slump in consumer demand and disruption to supply chains. Non-essential products, hospitality and leisure services were the hardest hit during the Covid-19 crisis. Short-term supply chain disruption has led to inflationary pressure, which will have an impact on consumer demand. The RLNA suggests a 2% reduction in expenditure per capita for convenience goods through 2022 and limited growth thereafter, much of which will be non-store sales. Any need for new floorspace should be related to population growth or addressing known areas of under-provision. Comparison goods expenditure is forecast to grow between 2.8-2.9% per annum, however much of this will be via new forms of retailing.

2.43. Bricks and mortar vs online retail: During the Covid lockdowns, online sales increased significantly, with ONS data suggesting on-line retail sales (seasonally adjusted) peaked at over 73% higher in May 2020 compared with February 2020. Online non-food sales in particular grew particularly significantly. It is difficult to predict the longer term implications for retail sales and the amount of online sales. Nevertheless, ONS's post lockdown data suggests retail sales have recovered to previous levels of growth, but the proportion of retail sales spent on-line is a higher proportion of total sales, which will have an impact of traditional bricks and mortar retailing. The potential impact of high inflation, the cost of living and energy crisis and predicted recession are unclear at this stage but suggest a cautious approach to short-term growth is required. Experian's latest forecasts suggest slower expenditure growth and home shopping/internet spending is expected to grow at a much faster rate than traditional bricks and mortar shopping. Retailers with infrastructure to fulfil on-line orders/home delivery have benefitted at least in the short term. There is likely to be a longer-term structural shift towards multi-channel shopping (home, TV and internet shopping), reducing the demand for physical space within town centres.

2.44. Demand for town centre floorspace: considering the pressures outlined above, there is likely to be a spike in town centre vacancies with some businesses failing, particularly non-food retail operators, restaurants and leisure uses. Lower expenditure growth and deflationary pressures (i.e. price cutting) have led to rising vacancy rates over the last 20 years. Whilst UK shop vacancy rates had decreased to 11.8% in 2018 (from 14 in 2012), they increased sharply again to 14.7% in 2022, due to the impacts of Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis. Such impacts have led to increasing numbers of occupiers seeking to renegotiate terms through company voluntary agreements (CVAs) or to reduce their portfolios through store closures. This has created difficulties for landlords and impacted on rental income and the capital value of retail/leisure property assets, however it has also created new opportunities in newly-vacated space, some of which has been taken up by food & beverage operators or leisure occupiers (e.g. indoor gold, climbing walls or escape rooms).

2.45. Floorspace requirements: Modelling low- and high-growth scenarios, the RLNA considers the amount of surplus expenditure that may be available for future new development, based on population growth. The high growth scenario assumes that the District grows at an average rate of 360 homes per year as suggested by the Government’s standard method. The low growth scenario instead uses the Experian model to consider growth.

2.46. This suggests that, by 2030, there is likely to be a deficit in convenience goods expenditure, as retailers seek to increase the sales densities of their existing stores. However, by 2035, there may be a surplus of convenience retail expenditure for low-growth and high-growth scenarios of +£1.47m and +£2.75m respectively. For 2040, these figures are +£4.46m and +£6.47m. For comparison retail, for the low- and high-growth scenarios there is likely to be a deficit in expenditure by 2030, however by 2035 the high-growth scenario is likely to see a surplus expenditure of +£2.9m, whilst by 2030 both scenarios see surpluses of +£4.45m and +£12.7m respectively.

2.47. When these figures are translated into floorspace requirements, as shown in Table 4 (Page 29) and Table 5 (Page 30), the Study forecasts a general contraction in floorspace requirements in the short-medium term (particularly prior to 2030), with this then levelling out and forecast to increase in the second half of the Plan period, as population increases. As a result, whilst floorspace requirements are modest, or sometimes negative, up to 2035, by 2040 additional net space will be required across all categories and in all parts of the District.

2.48. In summary, the RLNA found:

- • A need for an additional 654 to 1,864m2 of comparison retail floorspace by 2040, which is projected to be negative (i.e. over supplied) until 2030 under either scenario
- • A need for an additional 506 to 734m2 of convenience retail floorspace by 2040, which is projected to be negative (i.e. over supplied) until 2030 under either scenario
- • A need for an additional 5,284 to 5,999 m2 of food and beverage retail floorspace by 2040
- • A need for an additional 3,270 to 3,960m2 of commercial leisure floorspace by 2040

2.49. Given the negative need for much of the retail floorspace up to 2030, the RLNA recognises that an existing pipeline of retail and leisure space may well help to support the achievement of some of this floorspace. However, in the same vein, it may be that further losses to retail and leisure floorspace in coming years creates a larger deficit that will need to be met. These losses and gains will be monitored through the Authority Monitoring Report to allow an ongoing comparison to identified long-term needs.

2.50. The study confirms there is a need for town centres to maintain their primary retail function, whilst increasing their diversity with a range of complementary uses, with leisure, food and drink set to become a more important. A broader mix of uses should extend activity throughout the daytime and into the evenings and as the District’s population grows there are opportunities to support new leisure space which could include a small theatre; a museum/gallery; and 1 or 2 medium sized health and fitness centres. New space could be accommodated by repurposing existing space in centres, developing new space in or on the edge of centres, or identifying new sites which could be brought forward in conjunction with identified housing growth locations or new communities. Consideration will be given to the sequential test, as set out in the NPPF, in identifying new locations.

Implications for plan-making and strategic allocation

2.51. Recent changes to national planning policy and wider legislation have made it challenging for local authorities to exercise close control on traditional “town centre uses”, meaning that many changes of use no longer require planning permission. This in turn makes it harder for local plans to ensure that long-term retail and leisure needs can be met, as it may be that the Council can often not avoid the loss of existing floorspace where its conversion away from a retail or leisure use does not require permission. Furthermore, any new space created or allocated through the new Local Plan for retail or leisure could be lost in subsequent years to an alternative use without requiring permission.

2.52. The new Local Plan’s policies need to ensure the District’s town centres, villages and retail parades to meet the needs of those who live in, work in and visit the District, whilst ensuring that floorspace is flexible enough to respond to new opportunities in future which may be presented by new development, changing consumer habits and technological trends. Whilst it is important to fully maximise the flexibility provided by recent changes in national planning policy, protecting established centres to meet both present and future needs is critical.

2.53. However, the RLNA concludes that the updated projections confirm there is a need for town centres to maintain their primary retail function, whilst increasing their diversity with a range of complementary uses. The importance of a mix of retail and other town centre activity has increased in recent years and town centres increasingly need to compete with on-line shopping. Town centres need a better mix of uses that extend activity throughout the daytime and into the evenings.

2.54. Furthermore, the projections suggest there is no pressing need to bring forward major new allocations for retail and food/beverage development before 2030. The short term projections to 2030 suggest there is likely to be limited demand to reoccupy vacant retail floorspace from traditional convenience/comparison uses. However, demand for food and beverage is likely to be strong and drive a growth in demand , although demand for this by settlement is likely to include suburban and rural locations in addition to town centres. The need to retain and grow retail floorspace in the longer term (up to 2035 and 2040) also needs to be considered. In the longer term development opportunities will need to be identified to accommodate residual capacity for retail, food/beverage and leisure uses within town centres.

2.55. Table 4 and Table 5 show how demand for different types of floorspace is likely to change across the District during the Plan period, considering the main towns and villages. They do not account for commercial leisure requirements, which are referenced above, in paragraph x. As demonstrated, the amount of floorspace required is likely to vary across the District's main towns and villages, something which will ultimately also be influenced by the identified growth allocations, which will bring the potential for further floorspace needs to existing communities, dependent on where new housing growth is focused. It may also be sensible to allocate new retail/leisure floorspace alongside any new communities or significant urban extensions. This will support greater sustainability in new communities by reducing reliance on private car travel to access day-to-day shopping and services.

Table 4: Change in floorspace required by retail unit type until 2035 and 2040 under low growth scenario (sq. m)

	Convenience			Comparison			Food/Beverage			Total		
	2030	2035	2040	2030	2035	2040	2030	2035	2040	2030	2035	2040
Rochford	-8	29	71	-148	-20	172	446	688	951	290	697	1194
Rayleigh	-50	11	67	-805	-329	365	1207	1841	2469	642	1523	2901
Hockley	-2	3	7	-34	-3	38	493	748	995	457	748	1040
Great Wakering	-1	3	8	-4	3	14	188	293	408	183	299	430
Hullbridge	-1	2	4	N/A	0	0	39	61	82	38	63	86
Other Rochford District	-120	117	348	-30	10	66	180	274	379	30	401	793
Total	-182	166	506	-1021	-339	654	2553	3904	5284	1640	3731	6444

Source: Rochford District Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment Update (2022)

Table 5: Change in floorspace required by retail unit type until 2035 and 2040 under high growth scenario (sq. m)

	Convenience			Comparison			Food/Beverage			Total		
	2030	2035	2040	2030	2035	2040	2030	2035	2040	2030	2035	2040
Rochford	-8	27	65	-114	36	252	452	696	953	330	759	1270
Rayleigh	-30	46	127	-357	418	1459	1389	2149	2947	1002	2613	4533
Hockley	-1	4	10	-26	12	65	564	870	1195	537	886	1270
Great Wakering	-1	3	7	-4	2	11	201	310	426	196	315	444
Hullbridge	0	2	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	44	68	93	44	70	73
Other Rochford District	-53	229	521	-26	17	77	183	281	386	104	527	984
Total	-95	312	734	-527	485	1864	2833	4373	5999	2211	5170	8597

Source: Rochford District Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment Update (2022)

2.56. Notwithstanding the challenges local authorities face in exercising close control on “town centre uses”, the Local Plan could utilise specific allocations for new retail or leisure floorspace where required, e.g. a new convenience store or supermarket, and then utilise conditions or planning obligations to safeguard it in perpetuity. In this context, having an up-to-date source of evidence on the scale and distribution of retail and leisure need remains useful to ensure that strategy decisions within the Local Plan, and specific decisions in relation to planning applications, are well informed by an understanding of both short-term and long-term need.

2.57. Within town centres, it is clear that the new Local Plan will need to strike the right balance between safeguarding the most important retail and leisure uses, whilst acknowledging that some degree of change to alternative uses is likely to be required. Residential development within town centres, whilst previously considered unfavourable, may now have an important role in increasing footfall and the viability of businesses within the centres. The Council may be able to use Article 4 directions, conditions and planning policies (e.g. protecting primary shopping frontages) to enact degree of control.

2.58. Whilst the RLNA has been prepared as a predominantly quantitative assessment of future retail and leisure needs, it is recognised that a complementary qualitative assessment of the performance and future outlook for local town centres will be required to inform the Local Plan as it progresses. The Town Centre Health Checks, set out below in Section 4, fulfil this role.

Further Policy Implications

2.59. The NPPF (paragraph 91) states that local planning authorities, when assessing applications for retail and leisure development outside of town centres, which are not in accordance with an up to-date Local Plan, should require an impact assessment if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold (if there is no locally set threshold, the default threshold is 2,500 sq.m). The RLNA suggests the NPPF minimum threshold of 2,500 sq. m gross may be inappropriate for Rochford District, as this scale of development would represent a significant proportion of the overall retail and food/beverage projections for the authority area. A lower impact threshold of 400 sq. m gross, consistent with the Sunday trading threshold, could be considered.

2.60. The RLNA recommends new Local Plan should continue to define town centre boundaries on the proposals map to assist the application of the sequential test. Current and future market trends, the relatively low retail floorspace short term capacity projections, changes to the NPPF and the UCO, indicate a more flexible approach to shop frontage policies and the mix of uses within centre should be considered. The RLNA does not advocate a restrictive approach to shop frontages or the use of Article 4 widespread directions, however it does acknowledge that previous policy approaches seeking to protect retail frontages could be undermines by the changes to the Use Class Order and Permitted Development rights. It advocates the use of criteria-based and designated frontage policies to control non-Class E uses in town centres (e.g. sui generis uses), whilst it notes that planning conditions or legal agreements can be used to control the mix of uses within Class E where planning permission is required. These can be used to control and protect new retail space allocations or key town centre regeneration opportunity sites in future.

2.61. More widely, the RLNA suggests the new Local Plan still contains primary and secondary shopping frontage policies to manage the mix of uses and protect the vitality and viability of the centre. Within primary shopping frontages the retail offer could be maintained and uses within Class E could be retained whilst maintaining an active frontage. Within secondary frontages, a wider range of main town centre uses including Class E, Sui Generis and Class F could be protected.

3. Methodology

Planning Practice Guidance

3.1. The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) - Town Centres and Retail presents a series of indicators to determine the health of town centres. The methodology applied in this study is guided by this guidance and indicators, integrates best practice recommendations, and complies with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023).

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)
The following indicators, and their changes over time, may be relevant in assessing the health of town centres, and planning for their future: • diversity of uses • proportion of vacant street level property • commercial yields on non-domestic property • customers' experience and behaviour • retailer representation and intentions to change representation • commercial rents • pedestrian flows • accessibility – this includes transport accessibility and accessibility for people with different impairments or health conditions, as well as older people with mobility requirements. • perception of safety and occurrence of crime • state of town centre environmental quality • balance between independent and multiple stores • extent to which there is evidence of barriers to new businesses opening and existing businesses expanding • opening hours/availability/extent to which there is an evening and night time economy offer

Source: National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG), Paragraph 006

Town Centre Assessment Approach

Site Identification

3.2. As outlined in Policy RTC1 of the Council's Local Development Framework Core Strategy (2011)[8] there are three town centres in the District: Rayleigh (Figure 10), Rochford (Figure 11) and Hockley (Figure 12). The area

[8] Rochford District Council 'Local Development Framework Core Strategy (2011)' < Core Strategy Adopted Version (rochford.gov.uk)>

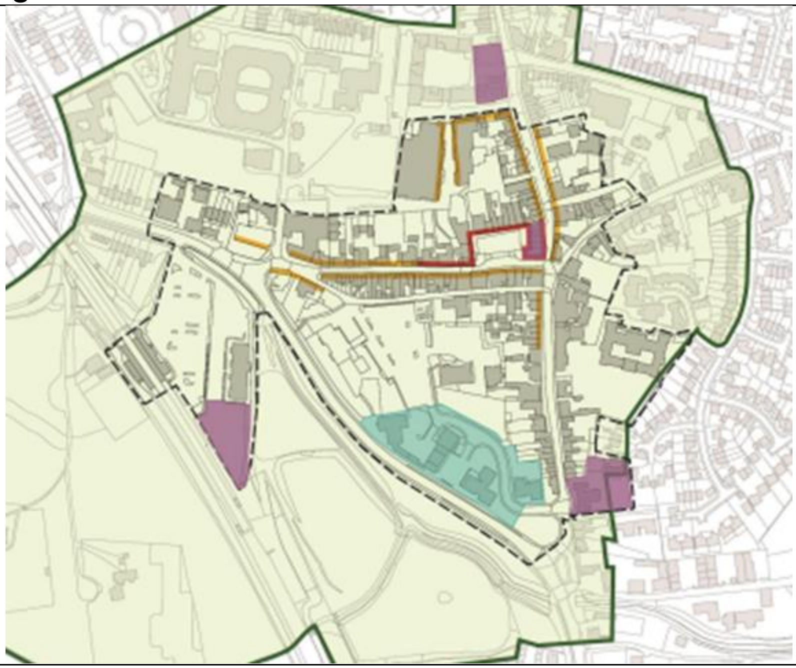
designated for visit and analysis within town centre boundaries was determined based on the boundaries set out in the Area Action Plans adopted for each respective town centre.

Figure 10: Rayleigh Town Centre 2015 Area Action Plan Proposals Map[9].

Legend	
	Existing Residential Development
	Conservation Area Boundary
	Primary Shopping Frontage
	Secondary Shopping Frontage
	Town Centre Boundary

Source: Rochford District Council (2015)

Figure 11 Rochford Town Centre 2015 Area Action Plan Proposal Map[10].



Legend	
	Existing Residential Development
	Conservation Area Boundary
	Primary Shopping Frontage
	Secondary Shopping Frontage
	Town Centre Boundary
	Opportunity Area
	Locks Hill

Source: Rochford District Council (2015)

[9] Rochford District Council 'Rayleigh Area Action Plan (Adopted 20th October 2015)' < Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan | Rochford Council>

[10] Rochford District Council 'Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan (Adopted 21st April 2015)' < Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan | Rochford Council>

Figure 12 Hockley Town Centre 2014 Area Action Plan Proposals Map[11].

Legend	
	Existing Residential Development
	Eldon Way Opportunity Area
	Primary Shopping Frontage
	Secondary Shopping Frontage
	Town Centre Boundary
	Employment Land

Source: Rochford District Council (2014)

3.3. The existing employment site (pre-2014 Allocations Plan) of Locks Hill Industrial Estate is situated within the Rochford Town Centre boundary (Figure 11). Additionally, the employment sites of Eldon Way Industrial Estate and Foundry Business Park are partially included and/or adjacent to the Hockley Town Centre boundary (Figure 12). As these sites were recently examined as a part of the Council's 2024~~3~~ Employment Land Study, they were not visited or evaluated as a part of the 2023/24 Town Centre Health Checks. Cross-cutting policy implications relating to these sites will be explored further in the findings and recommendations of this report.

Site Visits

3.4. Each town centre was physically visited by member(s) of the strategic planning team, who took notes/photographs and filled in site visit forms considering the various data fields and indicators outlined for assessment.

3.5. Site visits were carried out between 2nd October 2023 and 11th October 2023.

3.6. Following the site visit, site proformas were completed based on the notes and photographs, with a retail audit undertaken (see, paragraph 3.8) and a criteria-based scoring of sites (see, paragraph 3.9) determined and recorded.

3.7. Any outstanding questions (for example, the nature of a site's use or occupiers) were resolved using the Council's planning records and use of

[11] Rochford District Council 'Hockley Area Action Plan (Adopted 25th February 2014)' < [Hockley Area Action Plan | Rochford Council]>

Google search and Google Maps to supplement details recorded during visits.

Retail Audit

3.8. A comprehensive examination of town centre premises, covering a range of aspects, was undertaken to provide a nuanced understand of each town centres' streetscape, health, and character. This assessment included the collection of data regarding:

- **Use Class Order**: The Council's Local Development Framework Core Strategy (2011) and the three AAPs seek to maintain retail uses within identified primary and secondary shopping frontage areas, in alignment with their existing characteristics. To evaluate the prevalence of retail and commercial use in the town centres, the use of each premises was determined through a Use Class Order survey.

- **Vacancy rates**: The occupancy status of each unit was established through an on-site visual assessment, considering its appearance (i.e., whether it looked to be in use) and the presence of 'for sale' or 'to let' signage. Any unoccupied unit during the visit was designated as 'vacant', irrespective of potential historical or future use.

- **The physical condition of units**: The on-site evaluation included an assessment of the physical condition of each unit. Scores were determined using the following assessment criteria: -

    - Very Good (5): The highest rating, "Very Good," signified units that were in perfect condition, displaying no noticeable flaws. These units were well-maintained and showcased a level of care and upkeep that exceeded the expectations of the assessment.

    - Good (4): Units in the "Good" category showed signs of relatively recent maintenance, with some minor issues like occasional weeds in gutters or paving and faded or chipped paintwork. This category suggested that the units were generally in satisfactory condition but could still benefit from regular upkeep.

    - Fair (3): The "Fair" category encompassed units with observable imperfections, such as weeds growing in gutters or amidst paving, as well as peeling or chipped paintwork. It reflected a state of modest deterioration that could benefit from attention but may not be considered urgent.

    - Poor (2): Units falling into this category displayed noticeable signs of deterioration, including broken windows, damaged tiles, evidence of water damage, and blocked gutters. While not as dire as the "Very Poor" category, it indicated significant maintenance needs.

  - Very Poor (1): This category represented the most severe state of disrepair, where units exhibited substantial issues such as partial or total collapse, boarded-up windows, or even being used for the purpose of dumping waste materials. Units in this condition required immediate attention and extensive rehabilitation.

- **Occupier nature**: whether occupiers were local, regional, or national organisations was noted for each premises.

- **Presence of residential development**: The identification of residential development and residential development above commercial units was determined through a visual assessment on-site, considering its outward appearance and the existence of 'For Sale' or 'To Let' signage.

Qualitative Scored Assessment

3.9. To add a further dimension of detail to the information gathered on site visits, a qualitative assessment of eleven specific town centre health indicators was undertaken. These indicators were: -

- **Heritage and the historic environment** (presence of historic buildings and features; their occupancy/condition; preservation of conservation areas).

- **Open space and green infrastructure** (provision and quality of features).

- **Public realm** (its provision and condition)

- **Pavements and streets** (clutter; cracks; potholes; littering etc.)

- **Safety and security** (lighting; CCTV; passive surveillance etc.)

- **Pedestrian friendliness and legibility** (ease of movement/navigation; crossing points; traffic speeds; signage etc.).

- **Cycling facilities** (shared use paths; signage; storage etc.)

- **Sustainable transport** (available modes, routes, main connections, service frequency; infrastructure and facilities etc.)

- **Parking** (availability; proximity to facilities; number of spaces; disabled space access/availability; electric vehicle charging points etc.).

- **Local attractions and tourism** (number & quality of attractions; tourist information; availability of accommodation etc.)

- **Evening economy** (Sense of nightlife; pubs; restaurants etc.)

3.10. The 11 indicators were assessed on a scale of 5 (‘Very Good’) to 1 (‘Very Poor’), based on observations and assessments made during on-site visits. For details regarding the specific qualitative scored assessment for each indicator, please see **Error! Reference source not found.**

Assessment of Town Centre Change

3.11. After conducting the retail audit and qualitative scored assessment, a comparative analysis between the 2023 town centre health checks for Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley and earlier studies (see, **Error! Reference source not found.** for details) was undertaken to evaluate change in the short and long term.

Short-Term Change (Impact of Covid-19)

3.12. Town centre usage was thoroughly surveyed in March 2020 prior to the implementation of COVID-19 lockdown measures. A detailed comparative review of town centre premises uses between March 2020 and October 2023 was undertaken to assess the pandemic’s impact on these urban centres. The comparison involved assessing units across the premise categories specified in Table 6.

Table 6: Summary of the premise use categories established to compare short term town centre change.

Premise Use		Use Class	
Category	**Definition**	**Pre- 1st September 2020**	**Post- 1st September 2020**
Business Use	Incorporates a multitude of business functions, spanning office setups, research and development hubs, industrial zones, and storage and/or distribution facilities, including warehousing and logistical operations and activities.	Class B	Class B, Class E(g)
Residential Development	Residential development including (but not limited to) dwellinghouses, residential care homes and residential colleges and training centres.	Class C	Class C
Retail	Display or retail sale of goods other than hot food.	Class A	Class E(a)

Premise Use		Use Class	
Category	**Definition**	**Pre- 1st September 2020**	**Post- 1st September 2020**
Restaurants & Cafes	Sale of food and drink for consumption on the premise.	Class A	Class E(b)
Commercial & Professional Services	Provision of financial, professional and/or other appropriate service in commercial, business or service locality (including health and beauty services).	Class A	Class E(c)
Indoor Sports & Recreation	Indoor sport, recreation, or fitness (not involving motroised vehicles or firearms or use as a swimming pool or skating rink).	Class D2	Class E(d)
Medical and/or Health Services	Provision of medical or health services (except the use of premises attached to the residence of the consultant or practitioner)	Class D1	Class E(e)
Creche, Day Nursery or Day Centre	Crehce, day nursery or day centre.	Class D1	Class E(f)
Non-resdiential, community & learning	Incorporates premises for a multitube of non-residential, community and learning functions, including (but not limited to) public libraries, halls and meeting places for community uses and religious institutions.	Class D	Class F
Sui Generis (SG)	Other uses which fall outside the defined limits of any other use class.	Sui Generis (SG)	Sui Generis (SG)
Vacant (V)	Any unoccupied unit.	Vacant (V)	Vacant (V)

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Long-Term Change (2008 to 2023).

3.13. To gain an understand of trends in Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley town centre, an examination comparing primary and secondary shopping frontage studies and/or town centre surveys from May 2008, September 2010, July 2015, March 2020, and October 2023 has been conducted.

3.14. However, over the period from May 2008 to October 2023, the town centre boundaries, primary shopping frontages and areas and secondary shopping frontages and areas for Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley town centre have changed. These designations have evolved from those established in the 2006 Rochford District Replacement Local Plan to the specifications outline in the 2014/15 Area Action Plans. These changes, alongside recent changes to use class order (see, Section 2), present challenges when seeking to make like-for like comparison across studies. Hence, analysis evaluates the portion of each premises use (as defined in Table 7) along the primary and secondary shopping frontages as established at commencement of each survey.

Table 7: Premises use types established to compare year on year town centre use class change.

Premise Use	Definition	Use Class	
		Pre- 1st September 2020	Post-1st September 2020
Business Use	Incorporates a multitude of business functions, spanning office setups, research and development hubs, industrial zones, and storage and/or distribution facilities, including warehousing and logistical operations and activities.	B1, B2, B8	B2, B8 and E(g)
Commercial and Retail Use	Commercial and retail premises including (but not limited to) shops, restaurants and cafes, and. commercial and professional services.	A1, A2, & A3	E(a), E(b), E(c), E(d), E(e), E(f)

Premise Use	Definition	Use Class	
		Pre- 1st September 2020	Post-1st September 2020
Non-Residential, Community & Leisure	Incorporates premises for a multitube of non-residential, community and learning functions, including (but not limited to) public libraries, halls and meeting places for community uses and religious institutions.	D1 and D2	F1 and F2
Residential Use	Residential development including (but not limited to) dwellinghouses, residential care homes and residential colleges and training centers.	C2, C2A, C3 and C4	C2, C2A C3 and C4
Sui Generis	Other uses which fall outside the defined limits of any other use class.	A4, A5 & Sui Generis (SG)	Sui Generis (SG)
Vacant	Any unoccupied unit.	Vacant (V)	Vacant (V)

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

4. Findings

Introduction

4.1. In this section, the findings of the town centre health check evaluations are presented. A comprehensive collective summary has been produced to allow for a quick and easy overview of results. This summary covers the results of the retail audit, qualitative scored assessment, and the evaluation of year-on-year town centre change for Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley.

Retail Audit

Introduction

4.2. There are three Town Centres in the District: Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley. The size of these town centres and, the number of premises located within their town centre boundaries (as of October 2023) is detailed in Table 8.

Table 8: The dimensions of the town centre boundaries for Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley and, the number of premises they encompass (as of October 2023).

Town Centre	Size of Town Centre Boundary (ha)	Number of Premises
Rayleigh	17.92ha	258
Rochford	9.76ha	157
Hockley	3.40ha	75

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

4.3. Rayleigh, serving as the principal centre in the district, boasts a large town centre boundary, spanning 17.92ha and accommodating 258 premises. In comparison, Rochford, with a similar boundary area of 9.76ha, contains 101 fewer premises than Rayleigh, totalling 157 premises. And, with the smallest town centre boundary of 3.40ha, Hockley contains 183 fewer premises than Rayleigh and 82 fewer units than Rochford, comprising of 75 premises.

Spatial Distribution of Units

4.4. In all three town centres, premises are located on Primary Shopping Frontages (PSF), Secondary Shopping Frontages (SFS) or outside of these designated areas. Table provides data on the length, number of units and the percentage of total units situated on a primary shopping frontage (PSF) or a secondary shopping frontages (SSF) in the town centres of Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley.

Table 9: Summary of shopping frontages in Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centre (correct as of October 2023).

Town Centre	Primary Shopping Frontage			Secondary Shopping Frontage		
	Length (m)	Number of Units	Percentage of total units	Length (m)	Number of Units	Percentage of total units
Rayleigh	410	45	17%	1,356	135	52%
Rochford	211	19	12%	820	83	53%
Hockley	476	47	63%	377	26	35%

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

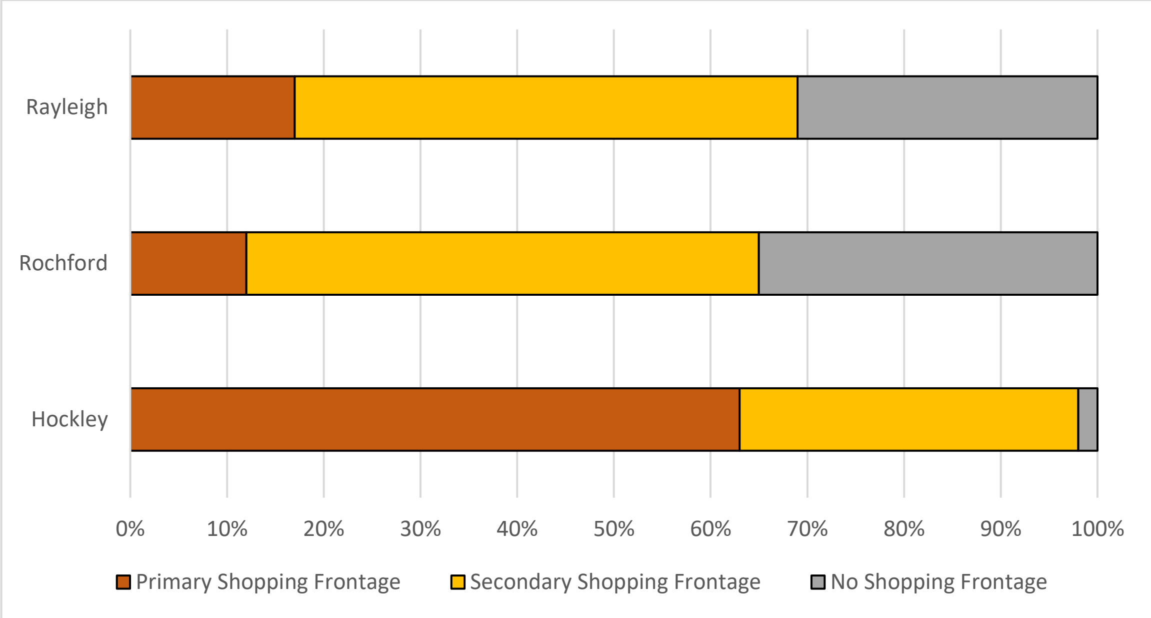
4.5. Despite being the smallest town centre, Hockley accommodates the largest proportion of premises on a PSF, totalling 47 premises, which accounts for 63% of all town centre units. Comparatively, only 17% (45 units) of Rayleigh's total town centre premises and 12% (19 units) of Rochford's total town centre premises are positioned on a PSF.

4.6. Approximately half of the establishments in Rayleigh and Rochford are located on secondary shopping frontages. Specifically, Rayleigh has 135 units (constituting 52% of all town centre premises), while Rochford has 83 premises (accounting for 53% of all town centre premises) situated on secondary shopping frontages. In contrast Hockley only has 26 units situated on an SSF, representing 35% of all town centre premises.

4.7. Rayleigh's town centre includes 78 units, equivalent to 30% of all town centre units, that do not fall within designated PSF or SSF. Similarly, in Rochford, 35% of all units (55 premises) are positioned outside of a PSF or SSF. In contrast, Hockley has only 2 units (3% of premises) outside of PSF or SSF.

4.8. Figure 13 provides a visual breakdown of the spatial distribution of units across PSF and SSF in Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centre.

Figure 13: Proportion of premises on primary shopping frontages (PSF) and secondary shopping frontages (SSF) in Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centre.



Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

<u>Use Class Classification</u>

4.9. In October 2023, a use class survey was conducted to determine the use of all 490 premises across the town centres of Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley.

Table 10: Use Class Order classification of premises in Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley (October 2023)

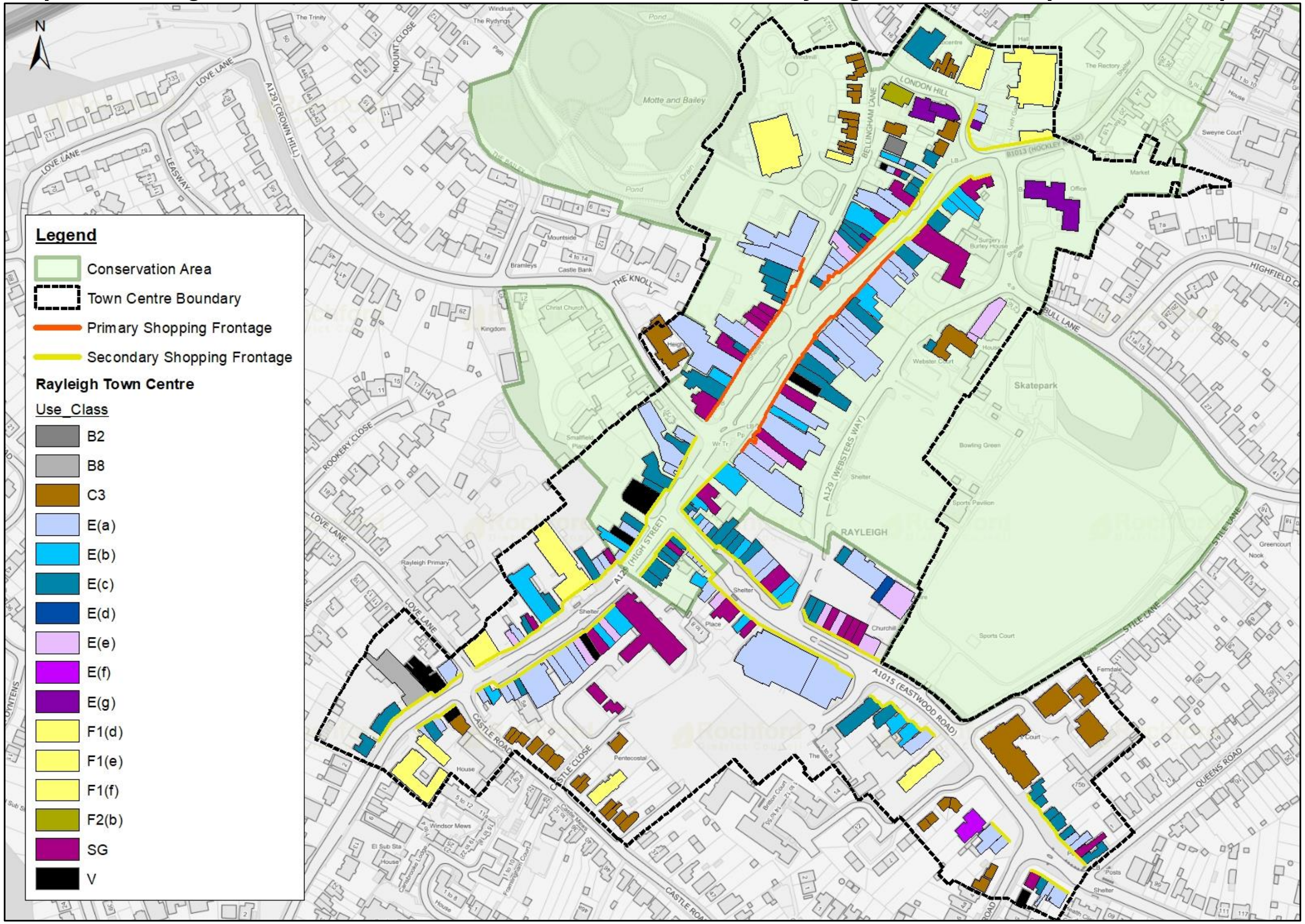
Use Class	Definition	Percentage of all premises in		
		Rayleigh	Rochford	Hockley
Class B2 – General Industrial	Used for industrial process.	0.39%	0.64%	0.00%
Class B8 – Storage or Distribution	Used for storage and/or distribution including open air storage.	0.39%	0.00%	1.33%
Class C1 - Hotels	Hotel, boarding or guest house.	0.00%	0.64%	0.00%
Class C3 - Dwellinghouses	Residential dwellings.	15.12%	39.49%	4.00%

Use Class		Definition	Percentage of all premises in		
			Rayleigh	Rochford	Hockley
Class E – Commercial, Business and Services	E(a)	Display or retail sale of goods, other than hot food.	25.19%	8.92%	22.67%
	E(b)	Sale of food and drink for consumption (mostly) on the premises.	8.91%	6.37%	9.33%
	E(c)	Provision of financial services, professional services or other appropriate services.	22.48%	13.39%	28.00%
	E(d)	Indoor sport, recreation, or fitness	0.39%	0.00%	1.33%
	E(e)	Provision of medical or health services	5.04%	3.82%	6.67%
	E(f)	Creche, day nursery or day center	0.39%	0.64%	1.33%
	E(g)	Offices, research, and development facilities and industrial processes	2.71%	3.82%	2.67%
Class F1 – Learning and Non-Residential Institutions		• F1(a) Provision of education • F1(b) Display of works of art (otherwise than for sale or hire) • F1(c) Museums • F1(d) Public libraries or public reading rooms • F1(e) Public halls or exhibition halls	4.26%	3.82%	2.67%

Use Class	Definition	Percentage of all premises in		
		Rayleigh	Rochford	Hockley
	• F1(f) Public worship or religious instruction • F1(g) Law courts			
Class F2 – Local Community	• F2(a) Shops where the shop's premises do not exceed 280 square metres and there is no other such facility within 1000 metres • F2(b) Halls or meeting places for the principal use of the local community • F2(c) Areas or places for outdoor sport or recreation (not involving motorized vehicles or firearms) • F2(d) Indoor or outdoor swimming pools or skating rinks	0.39%	0.00%	0.00%
Sui Generis (SG)	Other uses which fall outside the defined limits of any other use class.	11.24%	7.64%	16.00%
Vacant (V)	Any unoccupied unit.	3.10%	10.83%	4.00%
TOTAL		**100.00%**	**100.00%**	**100.00%**

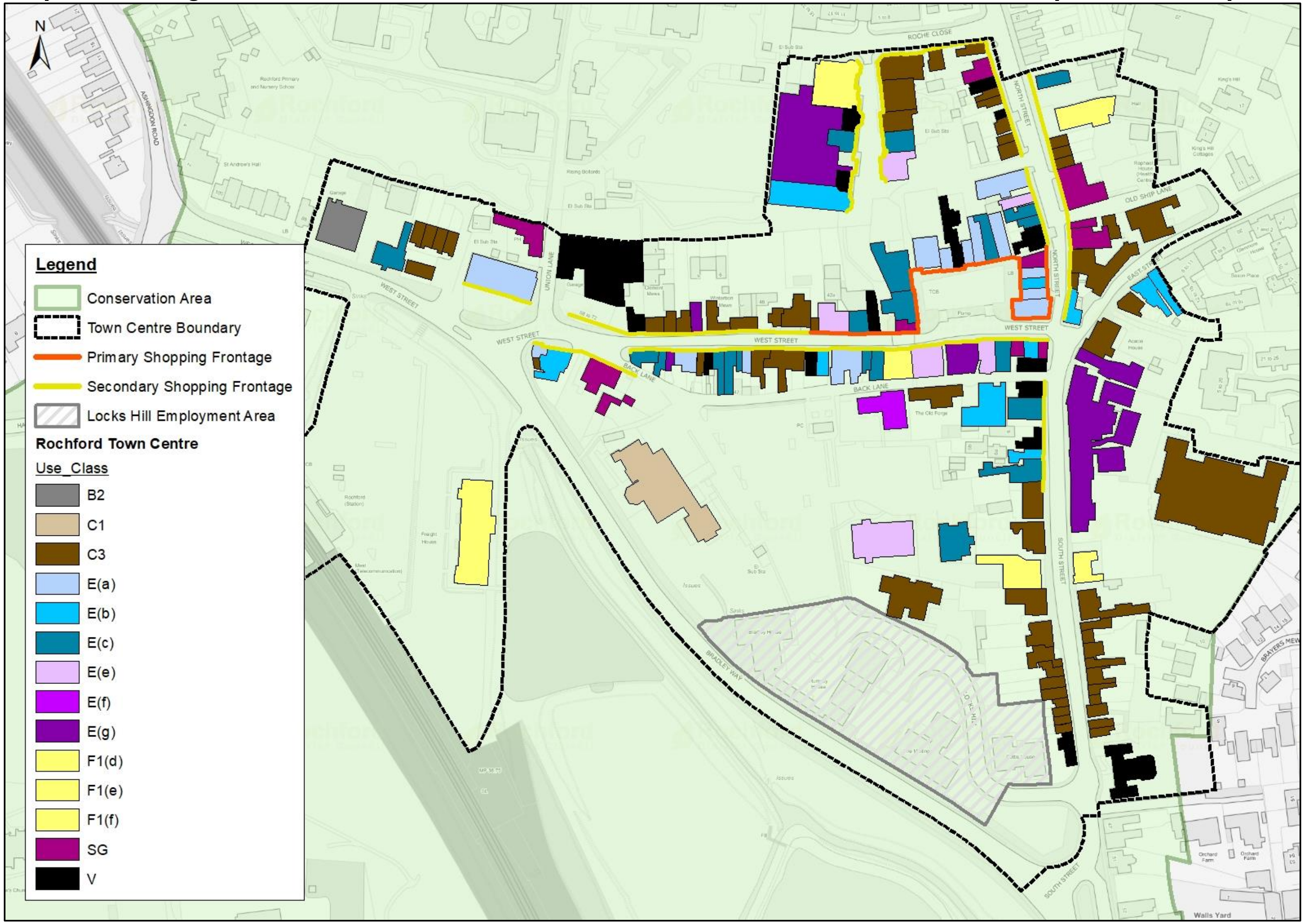
Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 14 Map illustrating the use class order classification of units in Rayleigh town centre (October 2023).



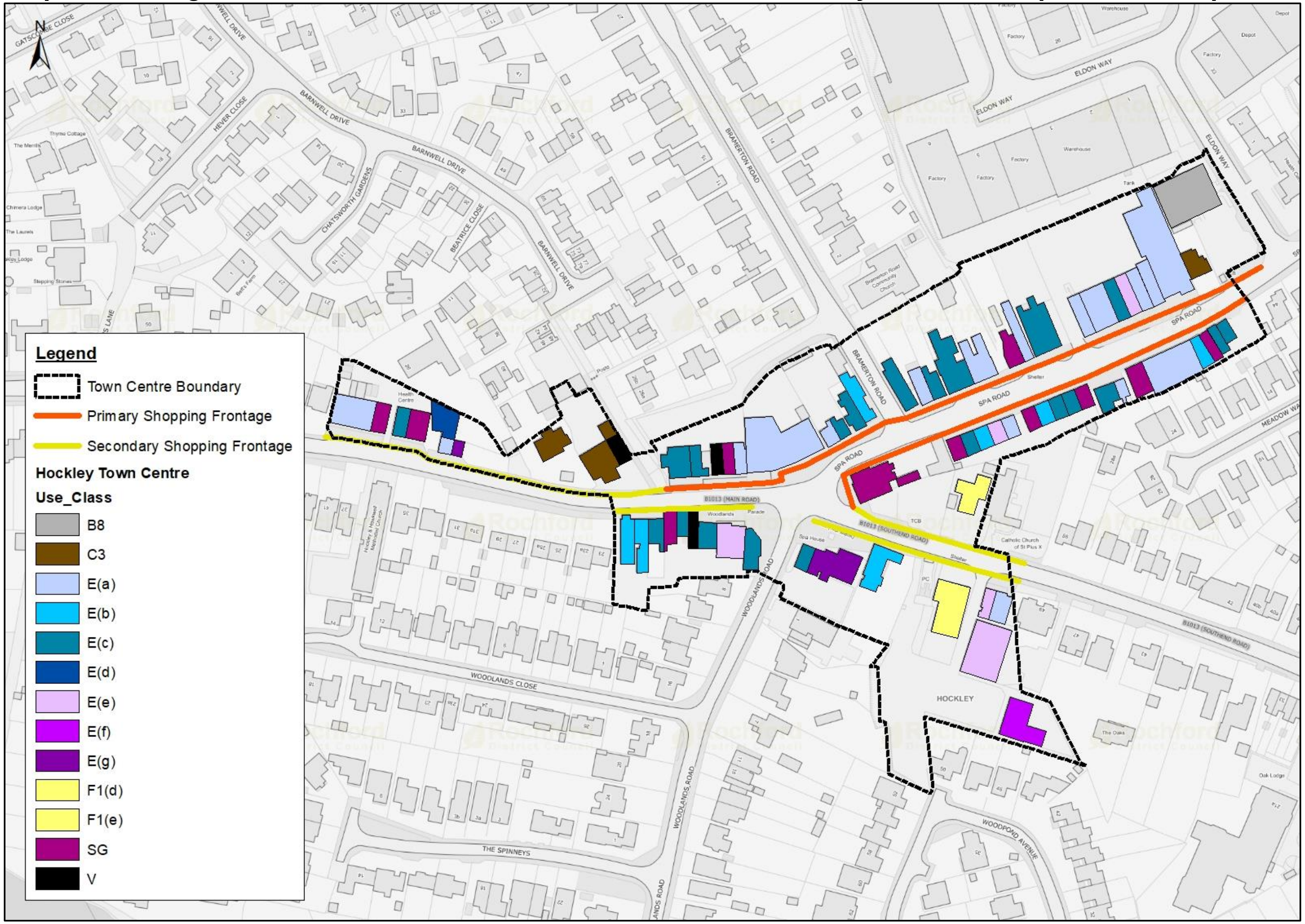
Source: Rochford District Council (2023)

Figure 15 Map illustrating the use class order classification of units in Rochford town centre (October 2023).



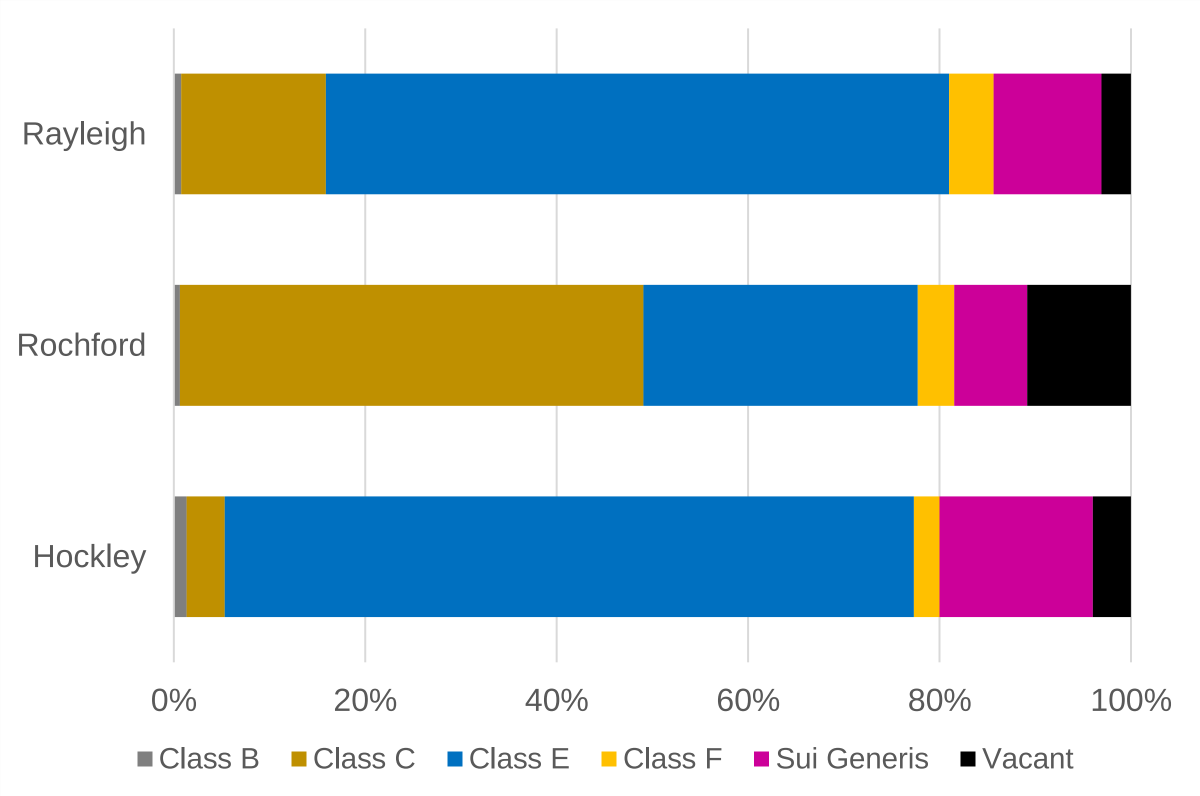
Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 16 Map illustrating the use class order classification of units in Hockley town centre (October 2023).



Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 17:Use Class Classification for Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley (October 2023)



Source: Rochford District Council (2024

4.10. The below provides a comparative summary of the proportion of each use class in Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley.

- Class B2 - General Industrial: Rayleigh has 0.39% of premises dedicated to this class, while Rochford has 0.64%. Hockley doesn't have any premises in this class.
- Class B8 - Storage or Distribution: Rayleigh and Rochford both have 0.39% of premises in this class, while Hockley has 1.33%.
- Class C1 - Hotels: Rochford has 0.64% of premises in this class, while Rayleigh and Hockley don't have any.
- Class C3 - Dwellinghouses: Rochford leads significantly with 39.49% of premises, followed by Rayleigh with 15.12% and Hockley with 4.00%.
- Class E(a) - Display or Retail Sale of Goods: Rayleigh leads with 25.19%, followed by Hockley with 22.67% and Rochford with 8.92%.
- Class E(b) - Sale of Food and Drink for Consumption on Premises: Rayleigh has 8.91%, Rochford has 6.37%, and Hockley has 9.33%.

- Class E(c) - Provision of Financial or Professional Services: Hockley leads with 28.00%, followed by Rayleigh with 22.48% and Rochford with 13.39%.
- Class E(d) - Indoor Sport, Recreation, or Fitness: Rayleigh has 0.39% and Hockley has 1.33%, while Rochford doesn't have any premises in this class.
- Class E(e) - Provision of Medical or Health Services: Rayleigh has 5.04%, Rochford has 3.82%, and Hockley has 6.67%.
- Class E(f) - Creche, Day Nursery, or Day Centre: Rochford has 0.64% of premises in this class, while Rayleigh and Hockley each have 0.39%.
- Class E(g) - Offices, Research and Development Facilities, and Industrial Processes: Rayleigh leads with 2.71%, followed by Rochford with 3.82% and Hockley with 2.67%.
- Class F1 - Learning and Non-Residential Institutions: Rayleigh has 4.26%, Rochford has 3.82%, and Hockley has 2.67%.
- Class F2 - Local Community: Rayleigh has 0.39%, while Rochford and Hockley don't have any premises in this class.
- Sui Generis (SG): Rayleigh has 11.24%, Rochford has 7.64%, and Hockley has 16.00%.
- Vacant (V): Rochford has the highest proportion of vacant premises at 10.83%, followed by Rayleigh with 3.10% and Hockley with 4.00%

<u>Vacancy Rates</u>

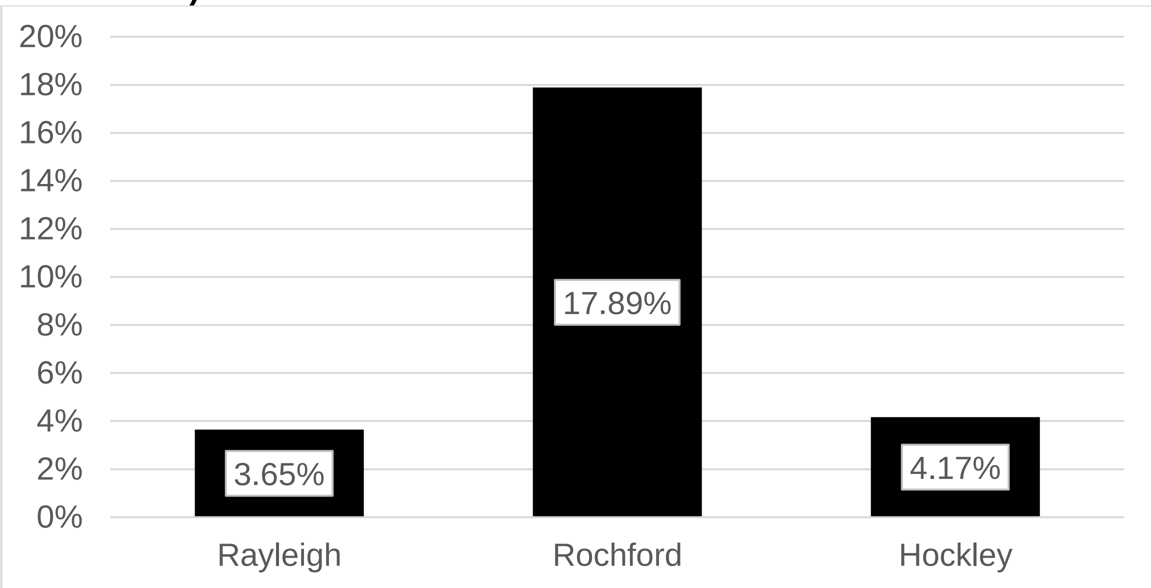
4.11. Table 11 and Figure 18 detail the number of vacant premises and the vacancy rate for Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley town centre in October 2023.

Table 11: Vacancy Rates for Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centre (October 2023)

Town Centre	Number of Vacant Premises	Porportion of Commercial Units
Rayleigh	8	3.65%
Rochford	17	17.89%
Hockley	3	4.17%

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 18: Vacancy rates for Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centre (October 2023).



Source: Rochford District Council (2024)

4.12. Table 11 and Figure 18 present the vacancy rates for commercial units in Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley as of October 2023. Rayleigh exhibited the lowest vacancy rate, with 8 vacant premises, accounting for 3.65% of all commercial units. In contrast, Rochford experienced a significantly higher vacancy rate, with 17 vacant premises representing 17.89% of its commercial units. Hockley fell between the two, with 3 vacant premises equating to a vacancy rate of 4.17%. This data highlights Rochford as having the highest vacancy rate among the three town centres, while Rayleigh had the lowest. Hockley's vacancy rate stood closer to Rayleigh's than to Rochford’s.

<u>Physical condition of units</u>

4.13. Using the criteria outline in Section 3, and evaluation of the physical condition of each commercial unit in Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley town centre was undertaken (see, Table 12 and Figure 19). The spatial distribution of unit quality across the town centre’s is illustrated in Figure 20, Figure 21 and Figure 22.

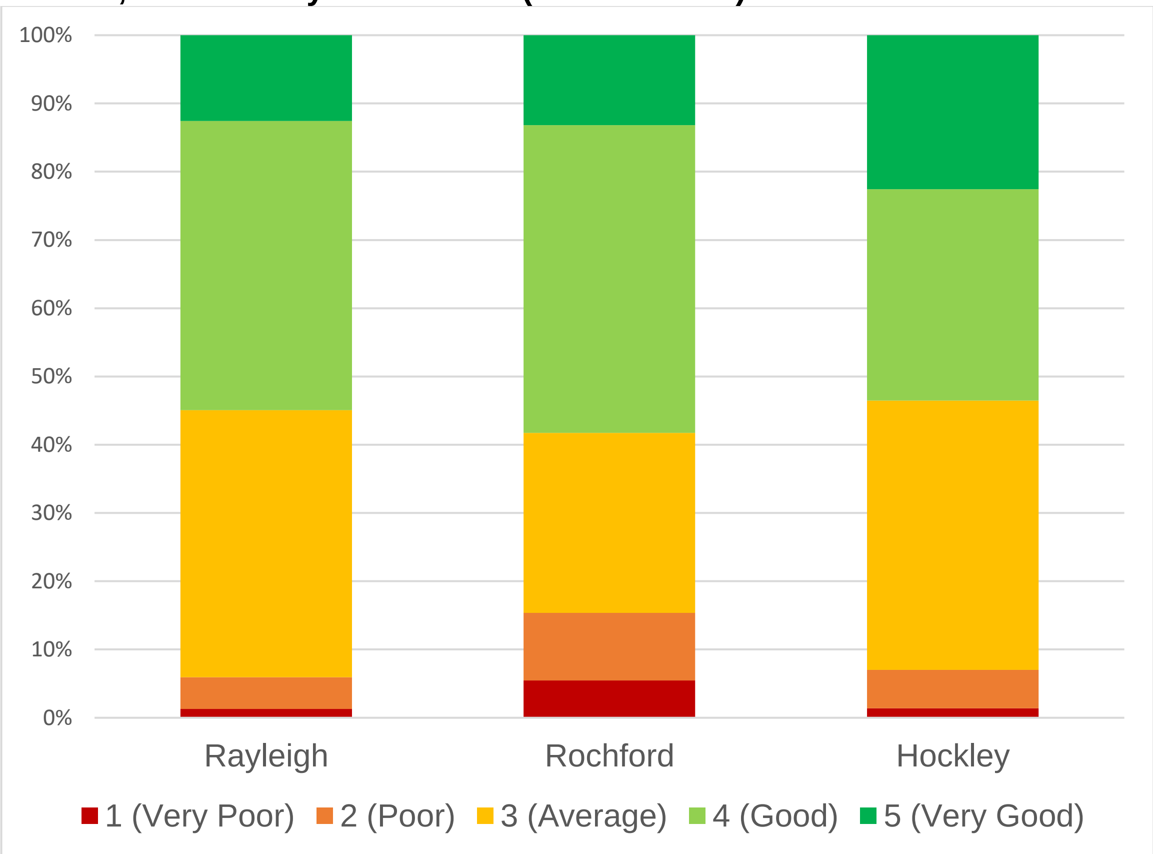
Table 12: Classification of the physical conditions of units in Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centre (October 2023).

Classification of the Physical Condition of Units	Rayleigh	Rochford	Hockley
5 (Very Good)	12.56%	13.19%	22.54%
4 (Good)	42.33%	45.05%	30.99%

Classification of the Physical Condition of Units	Rayleigh	Rochford	Hockley
3 (Fair)	39.07%	26.37%	39.44%
2 (Poor)	4.65%	9,89%	5.63%
1 (Very Poor)	1,30%	5.49%	1.41%
TOTAL	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

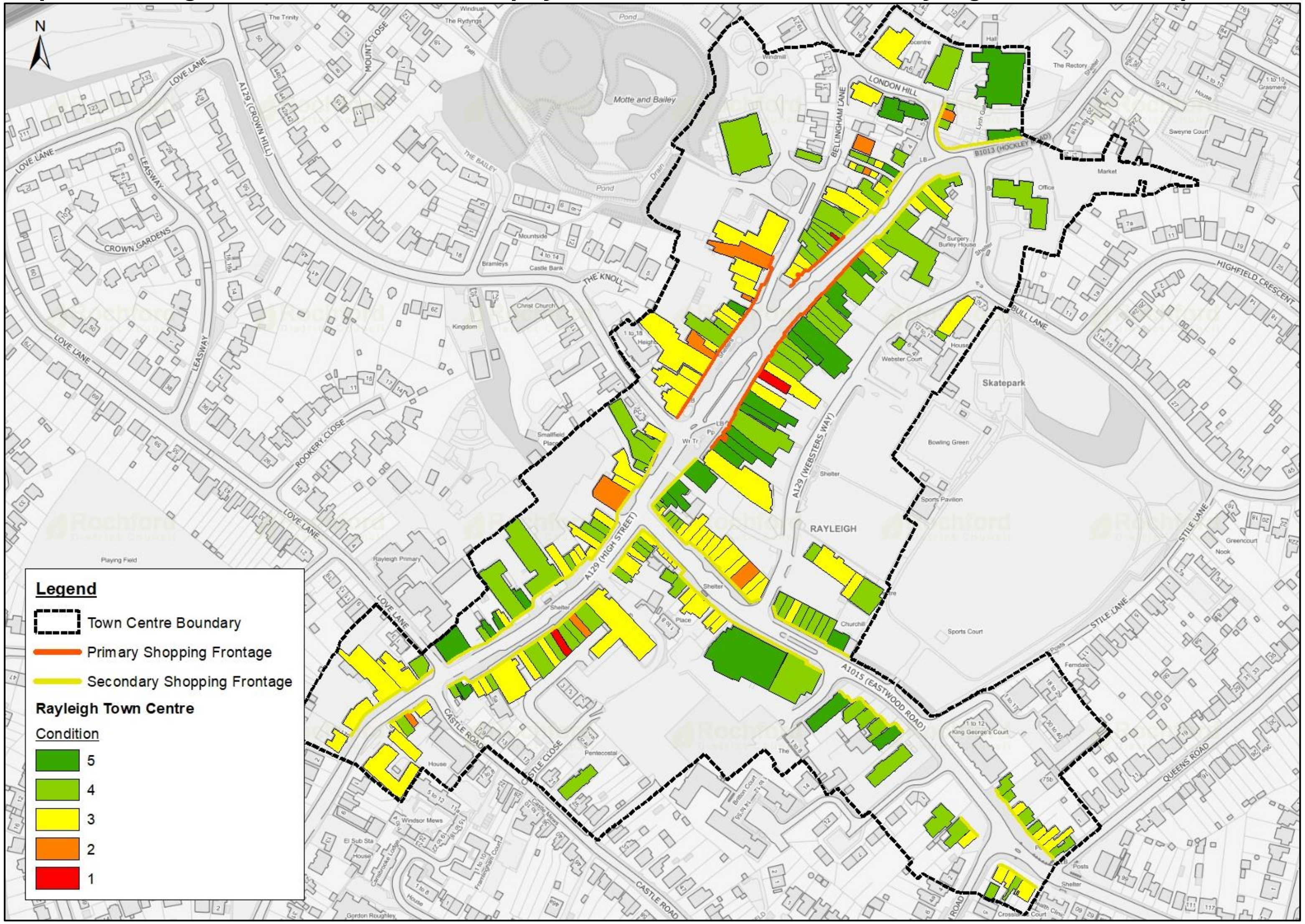
Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 19: Classification of the physical conditions of units in Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centre (October 2023).



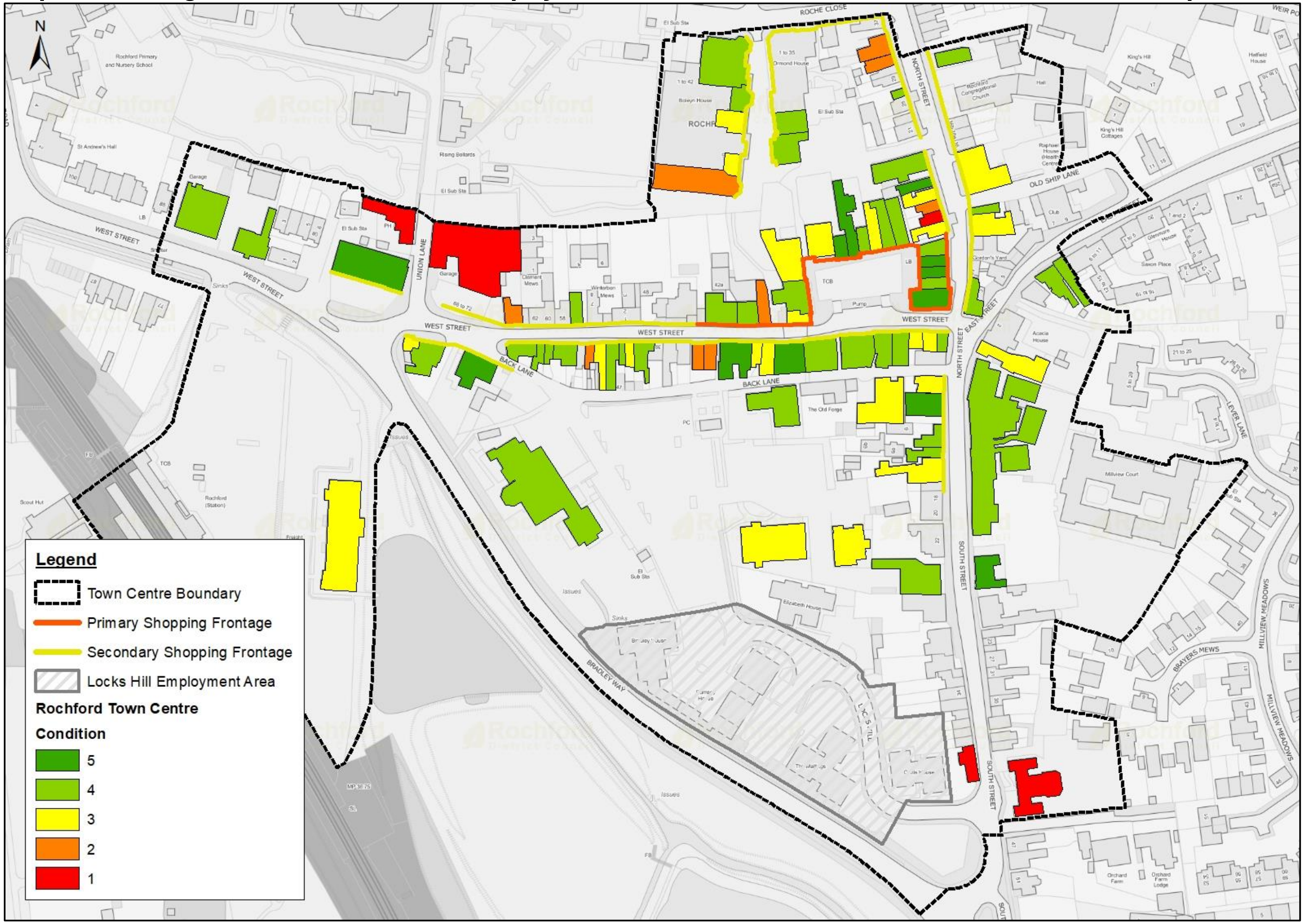
Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 20 Map illustrating the classification of the physical condition of units in Rayleigh Town Centre (October 2023).



Source: Rochford District Council (2023)

Figure 21 Map illustrating the classification of the physical condition of units in Rochford Town Centre (October 2023).



Source: Rochford District Council (2024)

Figure 22 Map illustrating the classification of the physical condition of units in Hockley Town Centre (October 2023).

Source: Rochford District Council (2024)

4.14. The classification of the physical condition of commercial units in Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley reveals varying proportions across different condition categories. In Rayleigh, a significant portion of units, 42.33%, are classified as "Good," followed closely by "Fair" units at 39.07%. Meanwhile, Rochford exhibits a similar trend, with 45.05% of units classified as "Good" and 26.37% classified as "Fair." Interestingly, Hockley stands out with the highest proportion of units classified as "Very Good," at 22.54%, indicating a relatively higher standard of physical condition compared to Rayleigh and Rochford. However, it also has a notable proportion classified as "Fair" at 39.44%. Additionally, Rochford has the highest proportion of units categorized as "Poor" at 9.89%, followed by Rayleigh at 4.65%, while Hockley has the lowest proportion at 5.63%. Overall, while all three town centres have a considerable proportion of units classified as "Good" or "Fair," Hockley presents a higher proportion of units in "Very Good" condition compared to Rayleigh and Rochford

Occupier nature

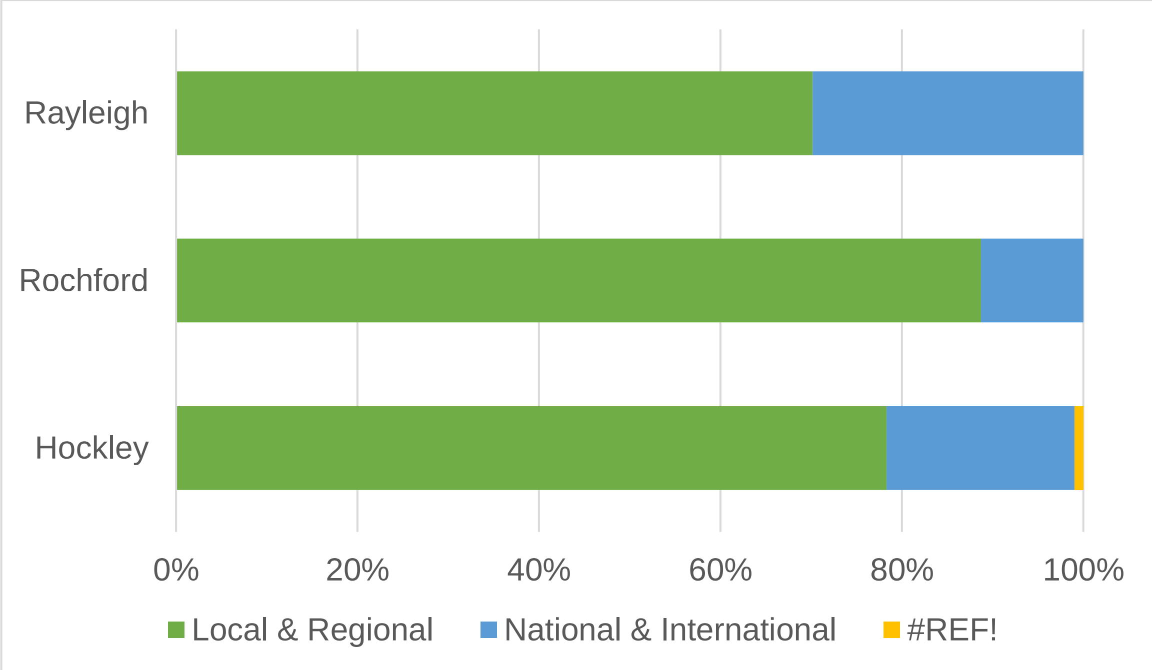
4.15. The composition of a particular retail landscape can be a way to evaluate town centre health. The presence of a greater number of independent, local retailers is typically seen as a positive sign for the overall health of a town centre, as the profits generated by these shops tends to benefit the local economy. Alternately, a significant number of national retailers may also indicate that a town centre is perceived as an attractive business environment with strong footfall. As such, the occupier nature was noted for each premises (see, Table 13 and Figure 23).

Table 13: Occupier nature in Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centre (October 2023).

Occupier Nature	Rayleigh	Rochford	Hockley
Local & Regional	70.16%	88.73%	79.10%
National & International	29.84%	11.27%	20.90%
TOTAL	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 23 Occupier Nature in Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley (October 2023).



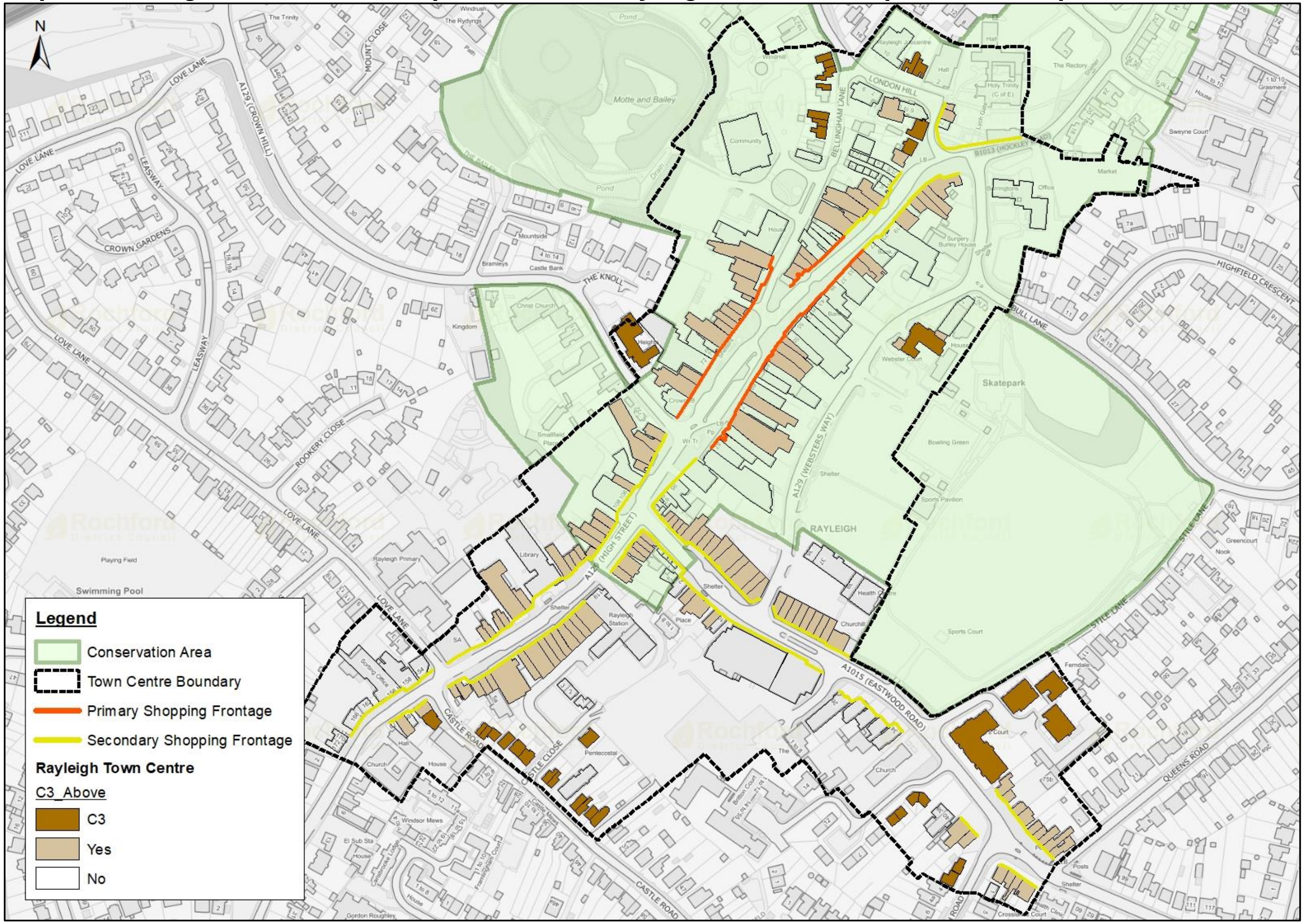
Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

4.16. The nature of occupiers for commercial premises in Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley demonstrates significant disparities in the types of businesses operating within each town centre. Rochford stands out with a predominant presence of local and regional businesses, accounting for 88.73% of occupiers, whereas Rayleigh and Hockley have lower proportions at 70.16% and 79.10%, respectively. Conversely, Rayleigh and Hockley show higher percentages of national and international occupiers, with 29.84% and 20.90%, respectively, compared to Rochford's 11.27%. These figures suggest that Rochford's commercial landscape is predominantly occupied by local and regional businesses, while Rayleigh and Hockley have a more diverse mix, including a significant presence of national and international occupiers.

Residential development

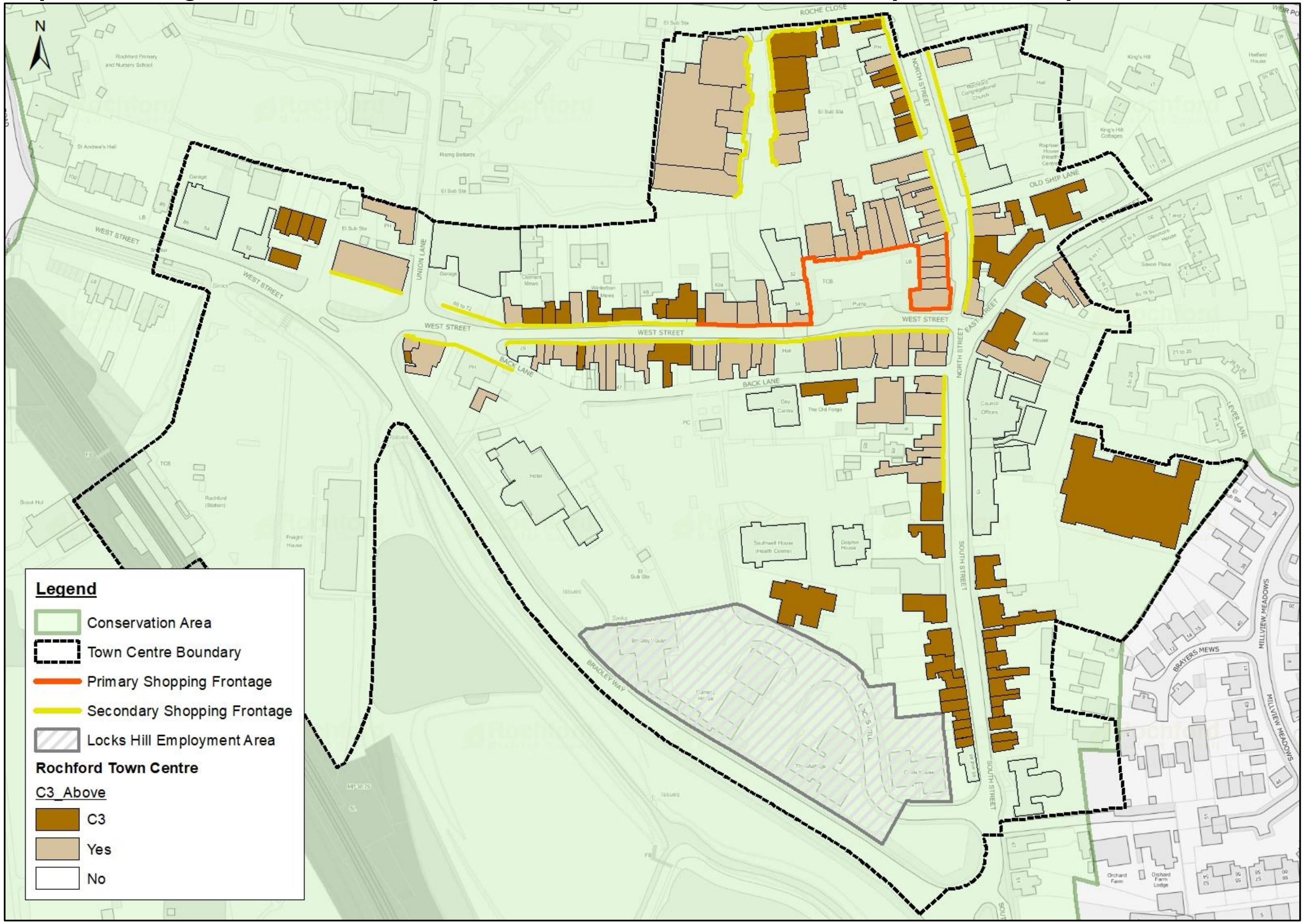
4.17. The perception of town centres in recent decades is primary one in which they are hubs for retail and commercial activities, although historically they have always been places of residence and wider social gathering. Whilst in inclusion of residential development in these spaces can bring certain benefits (such as increased footfall), achieving a balance is crucial for maintaining the vitality and functionality of town centres as vibrant hubs. If residential development dominates, it may lead to the displacement of commercial and employment spaces, reducing both consumer choice and spaces for businesses to occupy.

Figure 24 Map illustrating residential development within Rayleigh town centre (October 2023).



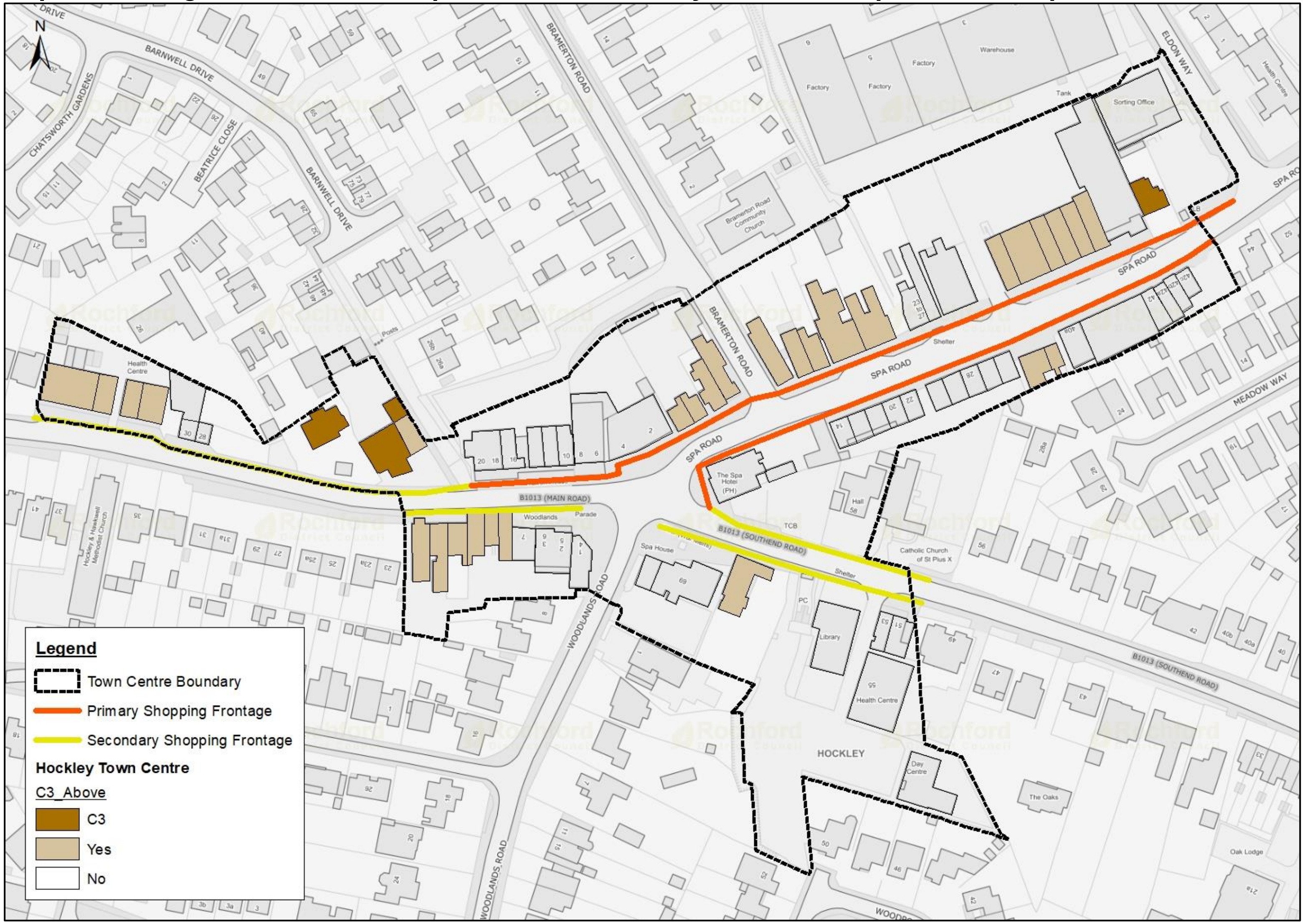
Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 25 Map illustrating residential development within Rochford town centre (October 2023).



Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 26 Map illustrating residential development within Hockley town centre (October 2023).



Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Table 14: Presence of residential development in Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley town centre (October 2023).

Town Centre	Residential Dwellings (Use Class C3)		Residential dwellings situated above commerical units	
	Number of residential dwellings	Proportion of all town centre use	Number of units with residential above	Proportion of all commerical dwellings
Rayleigh	39	15.12%	121	55%
Rochford	62	39.49%	74	78%
Hockley	3	4%	32	44%

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

4.18. A comparison of residential dwellings within the town centres of Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley reveals notable differences in both absolute numbers and proportions. Rochford leads significantly with 62 residential dwellings, comprising 39.49% of all town centre use, indicating a considerable residential presence within its commercial area. In contrast, Rayleigh and Hockley have fewer residential dwellings, with 39 and 3 units respectively. Rayleigh's residential dwellings account for 15.12% of its town centre use, reflecting a moderate residential presence. Hockley has the fewest residential dwellings, constituting only 4% of its town centre use, indicating a predominantly commercial focus.

4.19. A comparison of residential dwellings situated above commercial units in Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley reveals varying degrees of integration between residential and commercial spaces within these town centres. Rochford emerges as the town centre with the highest proportion of such integrated units, with 74 units accounting for 78% of all commercial dwellings, indicating a strong trend towards mixed-use development. Rayleigh follows with 121 units, constituting 55% of all commercial dwellings, showcasing a significant presence of residential spaces above commercial establishments. Hockley trails behind with 32 units, making up 44% of all commercial dwellings, suggesting a relatively lower integration of residential units within its commercial landscape compared to Rayleigh and Rochford. These findings highlight Rochford as a town centre where residential spaces above commercial units are particularly prevalent, while Rayleigh and Hockley also demonstrate notable instances of mixed-use development, albeit to a lesser extent.

Qualitative Scored Assessment

4.20. A qualitative scored assessment of Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centre was undertaken alongside the retail audit in October 2023, with 11 health indicators assessed by strategic planning officers. Table 15 outlines the score for each town centre.

Table 15: Qualitative scored assessment for Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centre (October 2023).

	Rayleigh	Rochford	Hockley
Qualitative Scored Assessment	42/55 (76%)	32/55 (58%)	32/50 (58%)

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

4.21. Table 16 and Figure 27 provide a comprehensive breakdown of the scores assigned to each indicator for Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centre.

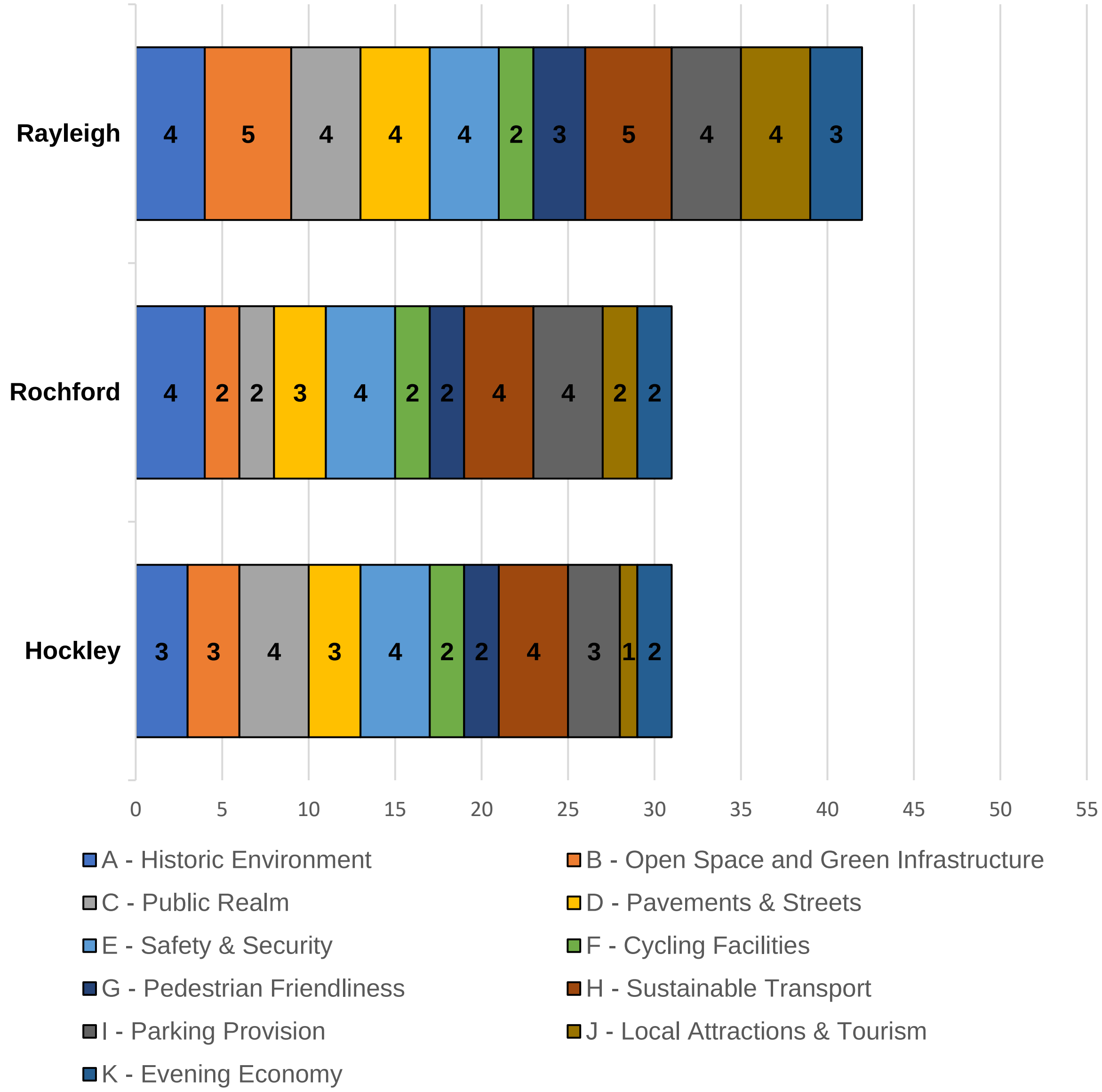
Table 16 Comparison of the 11 health indicator scores for Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centre (October 2023).

Indicator	Rayleigh	Rochford	Hockley
A. Historic Environment	4	4	3
B. Open Space & Green Infrastructure	5	2	3
C. Public Realm	4	2	4
D. Pavements & Streets	4	3	3
E. Safety & Security	4	4	4
F. Cycling Facilities	2	2	2
G. Pedestrian Friendliness	3	2	2
H. Sustainable Transport	5	4	4
I. Parking	4	4	3

Indicator	Rayleigh	Rochford	Hockley
J. Tourism and Local Attractions	3	2	1
K. Evening Economy	4	3	2
TOTAL	**42**	**32**	**32**

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 27 Comparison of the Qualitative Scored Assessments for Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley (October 2023).



Source: Rochford District Council (2024)

Heritage and the historic environment

4.22. Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley each possess distinct characteristics in terms of their heritage and historic environment. Rayleigh boasts a significant number of Listed Buildings within its town centre boundary, showcasing a strong commitment to preserving its historical fabric. With 22 Listed Buildings, including the notable Grade II* Holy Trinity Church, Rayleigh's heritage is well-preserved, albeit with some deviations from its historical setting. Contemporary projects generally align with the town's historic environment. However, Rayleigh lacks historical signage and suffers from inadequately designed modern signage, detracting from its overall streetscape.

4.23. Similarly, Rochford's town centre is rich in heritage, with over 40 Grade II* and Grade II listed buildings. While many of these structures are well-maintained, some suffer from decay, and certain commercial units and signage fail to complement Rochford's historic streetscape.

4.24. In contrast, Hockley's heritage is less pronounced, with only three locally listed structures and no conservation area designation. However, the presence of listed buildings, particularly the former Spa, underscores a potential for heritage preservation in the town. Despite this, Hockley's historic environment lacks the cohesive preservation efforts seen in Rayleigh and Rochford, with fewer initiatives to maintain architectural integrity and historical authenticity in commercial signage and development projects.

Open Space and Green Infrastructure

4.25. Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley each present unique landscapes in terms of open space and green infrastructure. Rayleigh has well-distributed green features such as street trees, flower beds, and planters throughout its town centre. The presence of expansive public spaces like Rayleigh Mount and King George V Playing Fields, along with smaller green areas like Holy Trinity Churchyard and Windmill Gardens, underscores Rayleigh's commitment to providing accessible and well-maintained green spaces for its residents and visitors.

4.26. In contrast, Rochford struggles with limited green infrastructure, particularly along its primary retail areas and within the town centre boundary. Although the Rochford Reservoir area serves as a notable green space, its accessibility is hindered by busy roads.

4.27. Similarly, while Hockley showcases an abundance of green infrastructure within its town centre, including well-managed street trees and flower beds, it also suffers from a lack of public open space within its boundary. Hockley Woods, located half a mile away, serves as the nearest option for green recreation.

4.28. Overall, while all three towns prioritise green elements to varying extents, Rayleigh emerges as the leader in providing accessible and well-maintained green spaces within its urban core.

Public realm

4.29. In Rayleigh, the public realm is rated highly. The town boasts various public features, such as statues and memorials like the Millennium Clock and Martyrs Memorial, along with ample public spaces, including landscaped areas and wide paved spaces accommodating the weekly market. Furthermore, Rayleigh demonstrates sufficient provision of well-maintained street furniture.

4.30. Contrastingly, Rochford's public realm receives a lower qualitative assessment score. The town centre is characterized by a lack of cohesive public spaces, with disjointed core areas and notable vehicular congestion. Additionally, there is limited seating and minimal public realm features, with empty community notice boards observed during site visits.

4.31. In Hockley, the public realm is rated similarly to Rayleigh. Here, the town centre showcases well-designed and maintained public spaces, featuring wide paved areas, quality street furniture, and informative community notice boards. However, slight disconnection within the public spaces due to the presence of the road network is noted.

4.32. Overall, while Rayleigh and Hockley demonstrate favourable public realm conditions, with well-designed spaces and amenities, Rochford faces challenges such as limited connectivity and congestion, impacting the overall quality and accessibility of its public realm.

Pavements and streets

4.33. In Rayleigh Town Centre, the pavements and streets generally maintain a commendable standard. While predominantly clean and well-maintained, some hazards such as small cracks and uneven surfaces were noted, potentially posing risks to pedestrians, especially those with mobility challenges.

4.34. Contrarily, Rochford's streets present more significant challenges, reflected in a lower qualitative assessment score. Narrow streets, uneven pavements, and a lack of pedestrian infrastructure contribute to a less favourable pedestrian experience. Moreover, litter and weeds are prevalent, particularly in certain areas like Roche Close.

4.35. In Hockley, the condition of pavements and streets falls in between Rayleigh and Rochford. While generally clear of clutter and rubbish, the presence of uneven paving stones, cracked tiles, and potholes poses some hazards, especially near main road intersections. However, the overall maintenance appears better than in Rochford.

4.36. Overall, while Rayleigh demonstrates the highest standard of maintenance and cleanliness in its pavements and streets, both Hockley and Rochford exhibit areas in need of improvement, with uneven surfaces and litter affecting pedestrian safety and accessibility.

<u>Cycling facilities</u>

4.37. Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley each present limited cycling facilities within their town centres, reflecting similar qualitative assessment scores. In Rayleigh, no dedicated cycle lanes or signage for cycle routes were observed during assessment, with only one storage facility in the form of bike racks available. Similarly, Rochford and Hockley lack dedicated cycle lanes or signage highlighting cycle routes, with minimal infrastructure consisting of cycle parking in Rochford's Market Square and only two bike storage racks in Hockley. The absence of designated cycling infrastructure in all three towns suggests a lack of emphasis on promoting cycling as a viable mode of transportation within their urban centres. This deficiency in cycling facilities may discourage residents and visitors from using bicycles for commuting or leisure activities and underscores the need for investment in improving cycling infrastructure to encourage sustainable and active transportation options in these communities.

<u>Pedestrian friendliness</u>

4.38. Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley exhibit varying degrees of pedestrian friendliness within their town centres. Rayleigh, scoring 3/5, provides multiple signposts for navigation, contributing to ease of movement. However, despite well-equipped crossings and expansive pathways facilitating accessibility, pedestrian mobility faces challenges due to congestion along High Street Road and reduced friendliness along the heavily trafficked A1015, where light-controlled crossings are limited. In Rochford, with a score of 2/5, pedestrian mobility is hindered by congestion along West Street and limited visibility on North Street and South Street. Moreover, inadequately placed crossings, lacking light control, pose safety concerns, particularly for vulnerable pedestrians. Similarly, Hockley, also scoring 2/5, faces disruptions to pedestrian flow due to major roads, with crossing points not optimally placed, and high traffic speeds making crossings difficult. Additionally, pedestrian connectivity between the town center, railway station, and business park requires improvement.

4.39. Overall, while all three towns provide some pedestrian-friendly features, challenges such as congestion, inadequate crossings, and disruptions from major roads highlight areas for improvement in enhancing pedestrian mobility and safety within their town centres.

<u>Sustainable transport</u>

4.40. Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley each demonstrate a commitment to sustainable transport, albeit with varying degrees of connectivity. Rayleigh emerges as a leader with a perfect score of 5/5, boasting excellent connectivity through its railway station, situated just a short distance from the town centre, and a network of main bus routes providing regular services to neighbouring areas. Rochford follows closely with a score of 4/5, benefiting from a railway station and regular bus services that connect the town centre to nearby destinations. While Rochford's sustainable transport infrastructure is slightly more limited than Rayleigh's, it is well maintained and functional. Similarly, Hockley also receives a score of 4/5, with its railway station within walking distance of the town centre and regular bus services providing connectivity to surrounding areas.

4.41. Overall, all three towns demonstrate a strong commitment to sustainable transport, with well-maintained infrastructure facilitating easy access to public transit options, contributing to the reduction of carbon emissions and promoting eco-friendly travel alternatives.

Parking provision

4.42. Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley offer varying degrees of parking provision within their town centres. Rayleigh and Rochford both score well with a rating of 4/5 for parking options. In Rayleigh, ample parking is available across the town centre, with three designated car parks and additional on-street parking spots on the High Street, albeit with some time restrictions and charges in the designated car parks. Similarly, Rochford boasts numerous parking options with four designated car parks and time-limited free parking in Market Square, although congestion issues may arise due to limited spaces at the main car park. In contrast, Hockley's parking provision receives a rating of 3/5, with a single compact public car park located behind Hockley Library. However, alternative parking options such as on-street parking are very limited in Hockley.

4.43. While all three towns offer parking solutions for visitors, Rayleigh and Rochford stand out for their more extensive and varied parking options compared to Hockley, which may face challenges in accommodating parking needs within its town centre.

Tourism and local attractions

4.44. Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley each offer differing levels of local attractions and tourism appeal. Rayleigh boasts three notable heritage attractions including Rayleigh Mount, Rayleigh Windmill, and the Dutch Cottage, along with a small museum dedicated to local heritage. Additionally, the Mill Arts & Events Centre adds to Rayleigh's tourism appeal by offering a variety of entertainment and events for visitors to enjoy.

4.45. In Rochford, tourism offerings are more modest, centred around the 17th Century 'Old House' which functions as a wedding venue and a self-guided heritage trail organized by the Rochford Town Team. While these attractions provide some insight into Rochford's history and charm, they are limited in number compared to Rayleigh. Hockley, on the other hand, struggles in this aspect, lacking significant local attractions beyond its retail and commercial premises. This dearth of tourist sites may limit Hockley's appeal to visitors seeking cultural or historical experiences.

4.46. Overall, while Rayleigh stands out as a destination rich in heritage and entertainment options, Rochford offers a modest selection of attractions, and Hockley lags behind with minimal tourism offerings within its town centre.

Evening economy

4.47. Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley present varying degrees of vibrancy in their evening economies. Rayleigh stands out with a diverse array of dining and entertainment options scattered throughout its town centre. With clusters of restaurants, pubs, bars, and even a nightclub like the Pink Toothbrush, Rayleigh exudes a lively nightlife scene, particularly on weekends, ensuring bustling streets well into the evening.

4.48. In contrast, Rochford, and Hockley exhibit less vibrant evening economies. Rochford offers some options with pubs, restaurants, and takeaways and the Rochford Hotel but lacks a distinct focal point for evening activities, experiencing closures of several establishments in recent years. Hockley also has limited evening attractions beyond its few pubs and eateries, resulting in a less significant evening economy within its town centre boundary.

4.49. Overall, while Rayleigh thrives with its bustling evening scene and diverse offerings, Rochford and Hockley struggle to establish a cohesive and vibrant nightlife, facing challenges such as closures and a lack of prominent evening attractions

Assessment of Town Centre Change

Short-Term Change (Impact of Covid-19)

4.50. In March 2020, a comprehensive survey of town centre use in Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley was undertaken before the implementation of Covid-19 lockdown measures. The following assesses town centre change between March 2020 and October 2023.

Rayleigh Town Centre

4.1. In March 2020, a comprehensive survey of town centre use in Rayleigh was conducted before the implementation of covid-19 lockdown measures. Table 17 provides a comparative overview of town centre premise use between March 2020 and October 2023, offering insights into the impact of the pandemic on the town centre.

Table 17 Comparison of Rayleigh Town Centre premise use between March 2020 and October 2023

Premises Use	Percentage of Premises		Change in Premise Use
	March 2020	October 2023	
Business Use	3.49%	3.49%	No Change
Residential Development	15.12%	15.12%	No Change
Retail	25.97%	25.19%	-0.78%
Restaurants & Cafes	8.15%	8.93%	+0.78%
Commercial & Professional Services	22.48%	22.48%	No Change
Indoor Sport & Recreation	0.39%	0.39%	No Change
Medical or Health Services	5.04%	5.04%	No Change
Creche, Day Nursery or Day Centre	0.39%	0.39%	No Change
Local Community & Learning	4.65%	4.65%	No Change
Sui Generis	12.41%	11.24%	-1.17%

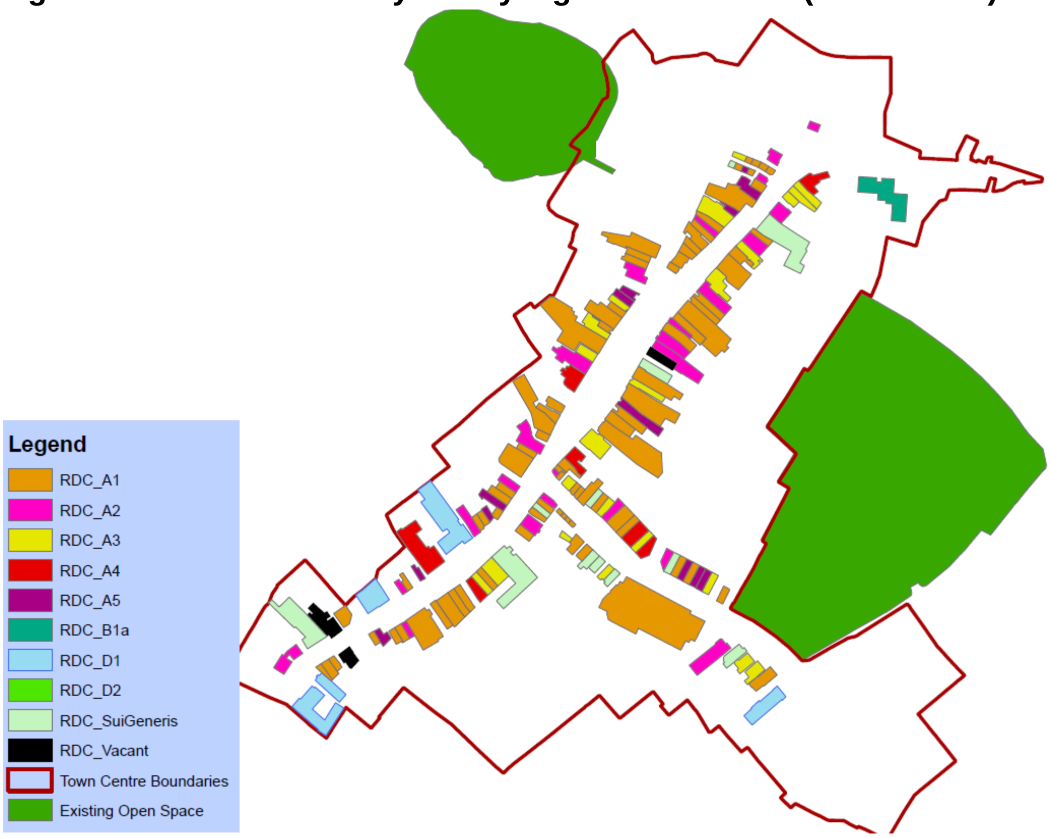
Premises Use	Percentage of Premises		Change in Premise Use
	March 2020	October 2023	
Vacant	1.93%	3.10%	+1.17

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

4.2. There are four important changes to premises use in Rayleigh town centre between March 2020 and October 2023. Noteworthy alterations include:

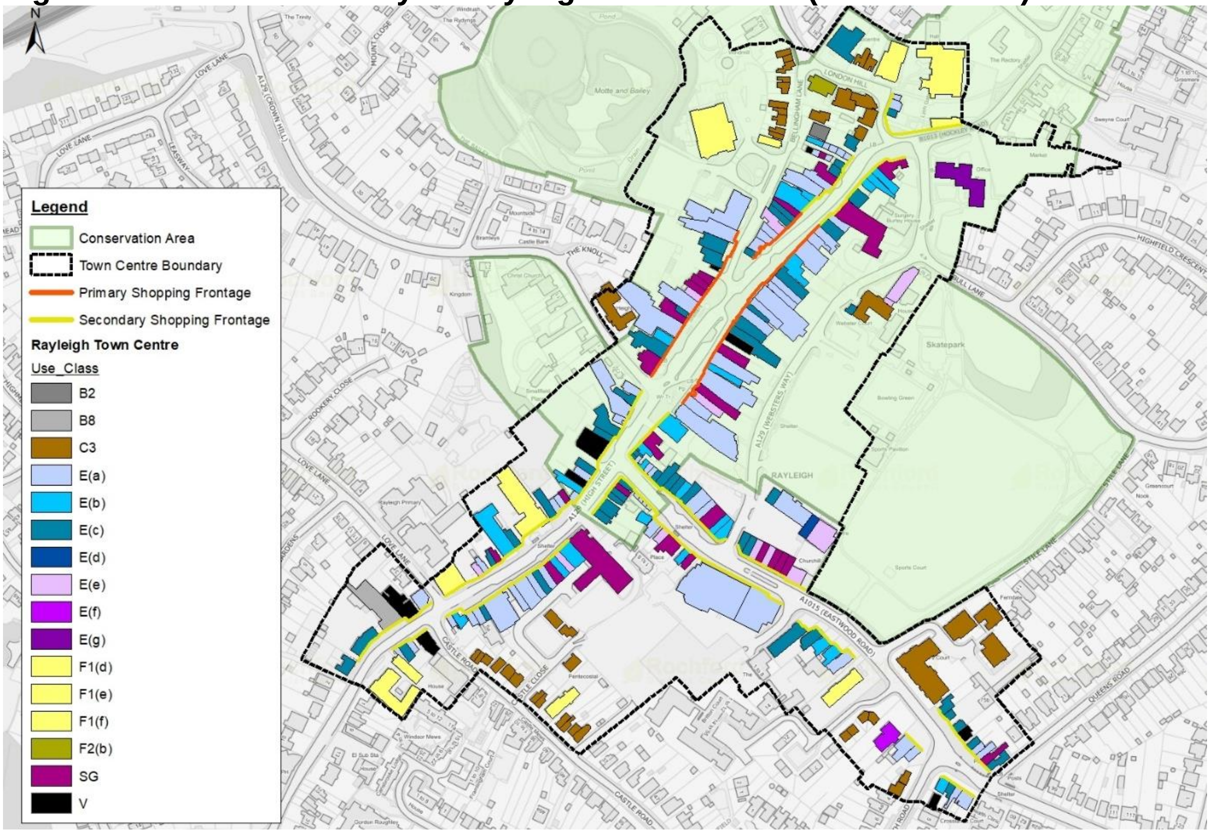
- Retail: The percentage of retail premises use experienced a notable decrease of 0.78%, declining from 25.97% in 2020 to 25.19% in 2023.This decline is linked to the closure of one retail premises on the A129 (Superdrug) and one premise within Berry's Arcade.
- Restaurants & cafes: This category saw an increase of 0.78%, moving from 8.15% in 2020 to 8.93% in 2023.
- Sui Generis use: The percentage of Sui Generis premises use decreased by 1.17% in 2020, from 12.41% to 11.24% in 2023.
- Vacant premises: There was a notable increase in vacant premises, rising from 1.93% in 2020 to 3.10% in 2023.

Figure 28 Use class survey of Rayleigh Town Centre (March 2020)



Source: Rochford District Council (2024)

Figure 29 Use class survey of Rayleigh Town Centre (October 2023).



Source: Rochford District Council (2023).

Rochford Town Centre

4.3. Table 18 and

4.4. Figure 30 and Figure 31 provide a comparative overview of the change in Rochford town centre premise use between March 2020 and October 2023, offering insights into the impact of the pandemic on Rochford.

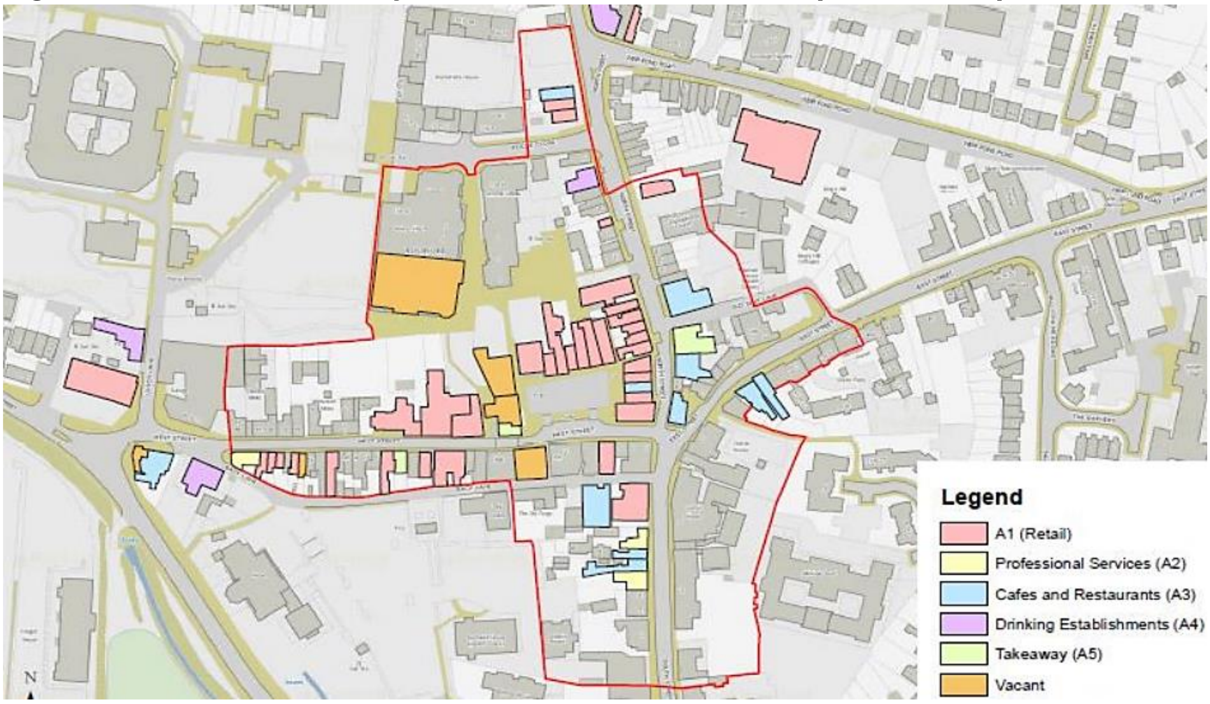
Table 18 Comparison of Rochford Town Centre premise use between March 2020 and October 2023

Premises Use	Percentage of Premises		Change in Premise Use
	March 2020	October 2023	
Business Use	3.9%	4.5%	+0.6%
Residential Development	38.8%	39.6%	+0.6%
Retail	12.8%	8.9%	-3.9%

Premises Use	Percentage of Premises		Change in Premise Use
	March 2020	October 2023	
Restaurants & Cafes	7.0%	6.4%	-0.6%
Commercial & Professional Services	12.7%	14.0%	+1.3%
Indoor Sport & Recreation	0.0%	0.0%	No Change
Medical or Health Services	3.8%	3.8%	No Change
Creche, Day Nursery or Day Centre	0.6%	0.6%	No Change
Local Community & Learning	3.8%	3.8%	No Change
Sui Generis	7.0%	7.6%	-0.6%
Vacant	6.4%	10.8%	+4.4%
No Data	3.2%	-	-

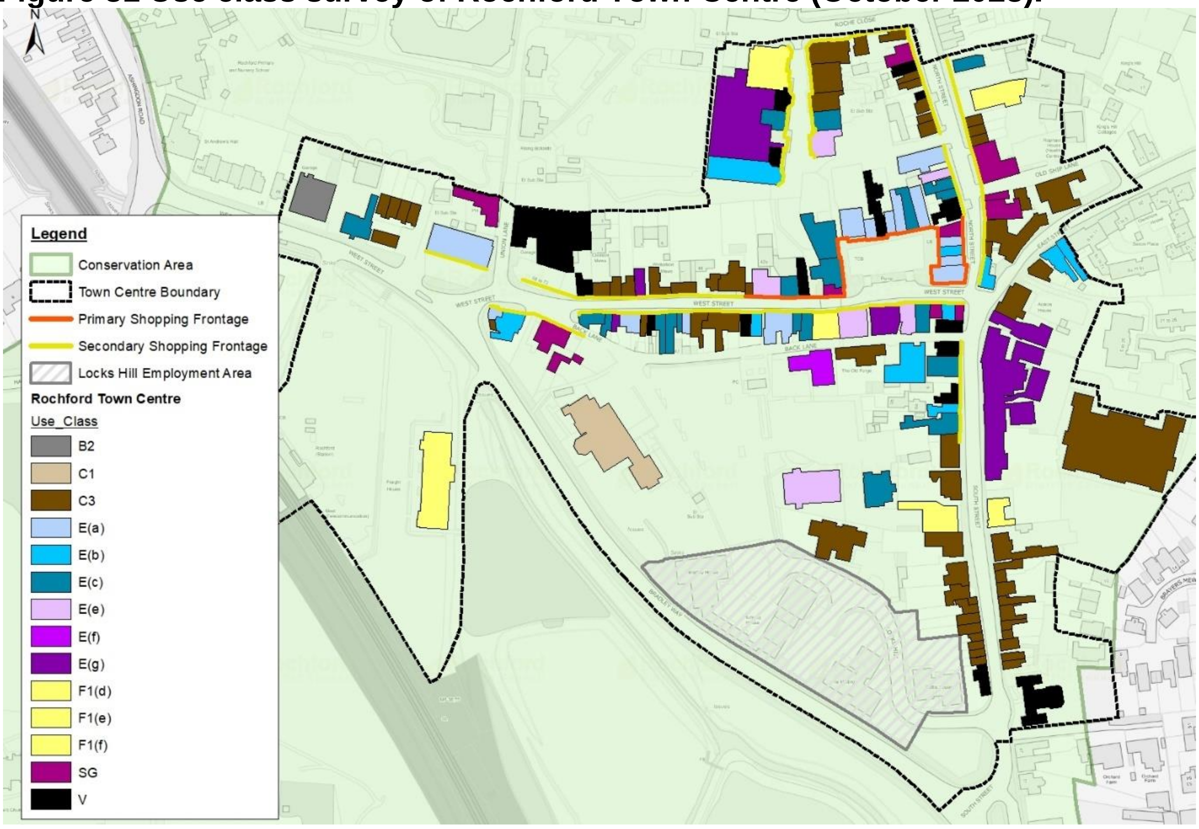
Source: Rochford District Council ().

Figure 30 Use class survey of Rochford Town Centre (March 2020)



Source: Rochford District Council (2024)

Figure 31 Use class survey of Rochford Town Centre (October 2023).



Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

4.5. There are seven important changes to premises use in Rochford Town Centre between March 2020 and October. Noteworthy alterations include:

- Business use: There was a positive change of 0.6%, with the percentage of use increasing from 3.9% in 2020 to 4.5% in October 2023. This increase is linked to the occupation of vacant premises with office space in Roche Close and on West Street.

- Residential development: There was an increase from 38.8% in 2020 to 39.6% in 2023, reflecting a change of 0.6%.

- Retail: The percentage of retail premises use experienced a notable decrease of 3.9%, declining from 12.8% in 2020 to 8.9% in 2023.

- Restaurants & cafes: This category saw a decrease from of 0.6%, moving from 7.0% in 2020 to 6.4% in 2023. This shift can be attributed to the closure of one restaurant in West Street.

- Commercial and professional services: There was an increase of 1.3%, from 12.7% in 2020 to 14.0% in 2023.

- Sui Generis use: The percentage of Sui Generis premises use decreased by 0.6%, from 7.0% to 7.6%.

- Vacant premises: There was a notable increase in vacant premises, rising from 6.4% in 2020 to 10.8% in 2023. This increase is a consequence of the closure of several retail units throughout the town centre from 2020 to 2023.

<u>Hockley Town Centre</u>

4.6. Table 19 provides a comparative overview of town centre premise use between March 2020 and October 2023, offering insights into the impact of the pandemic on the town centre.

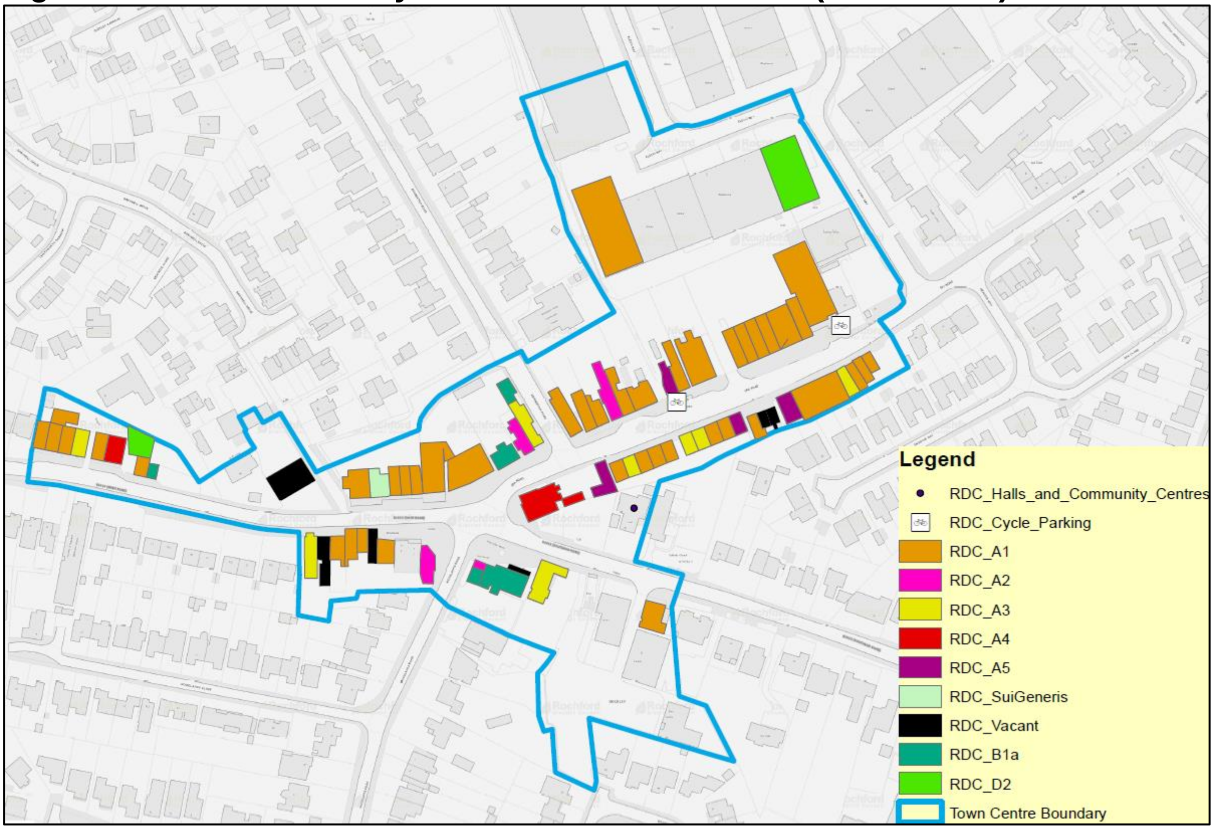
Table 19 Comparison of Hockley Town Centre premise use between March 2020 and October 2023

Premises Use	Percentage of Premises		Change in Premise Use
	March 2020	October 2023	
Business Use	4.0%	4.0%	No Change
Residential Development	2.7%	4.0%	+1.3%
Retail	22.7%	22.7%	No Change
Restaurants & Cafes	9.3%	9.3%	No Change

Commercial & Professional Services	28.0%	28.0%	No Change
Indoor Sport & Recreation	1.3%	1.3%	No Change
Medical or Health Services	6.7%	6.7%	No Change
Creche, Day Nursery or Day Centre	1.3%	1.3%	No Change
Local Community & Learning	2.7%	2.7%	No Change
Sui Generis	14.7%	16.0%	+1.3%
Vacant	6.6%	4.0%	-2.6%

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 32 Use class survey of Rochford Town Centre (March 2020)



Source: Rochford District Council (2024)

Figure 33 Use class survey of Rochford Town Centre (October 2023).

Source: Rochford District Council (2023).

4.7. There are three noteworthy changes to premises use in Hockley Town Centre between March 2020 and October. These include:

- Residential development: There was an increase from 2.7% in 2020 to 4.0% in 2023, reflecting a change of 1.3%. This shift can be attributed to the redevelopment of a previously vacant commercial unit into a new development that encompasses both commercial and residential spaces.
- Sui Generis use: This category also experienced a rise from 14.7% in 2020 to 16.0% in 2023, an increase of 1.3%. This increase is linked to the occupation of a vacant premises by a hot food takeaway retailer.
- Vacant premises: There was a notable decrease in vacant premises, declining from 6.6% in 2020 to 4.0% in 2023. This decline can be attributed to the presence of a new hot food takeaway retailer and the redevelopment of a building that now accommodates two retail and commercial businesses, filling a previously vacant unit.

Long-Term Change (2008 to 2023)

4.8. To gain an understand of trends in Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley town centre, an examination comparing primary and secondary shopping frontage studies and/or town centre surveys from May 2008, September 2010, July 2015, March 2020, and October 2023 was conducted.

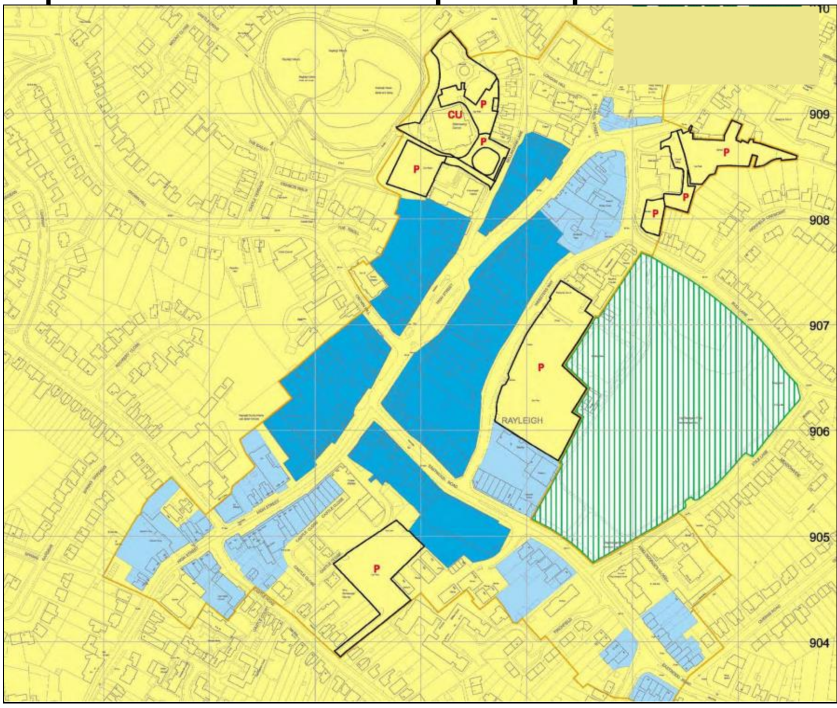
Rayleigh Town Centre

4.1. Surveys of the primary shopping frontages and secondary shopping frontages of Rayleigh Town Centre occurred in May 2008, September 2010, July 2015, March 2020, November 2022, and October 2023.

4.2. Between May 2008 and October 2023, Rayleigh Town Centre experienced modifications to its town centre boundary, primary shopping frontages and secondary shopping frontages. These have transitioned from the areas established in 2006 Rochford District Replacement Local Plan (Figure 38) to the parameters outlined in the 2015 Rayleigh Area Action Plan[12] (Figure 39).

[12] Rochford District Council 'Rayleigh Area Action Plan (Adopted 20th October 2015)' < Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan | Rochford Council>

Figure 34 Map of Rayleigh Town Centre taken from the 2006 Rochford District Replacement Local Plan Proposal Map.



Legend	
	Existing Residential Development
	Local Nature Reserve
	Primary Shopping Frontage
	Secondary Shopping Frontage
P	Parking
CU	Community Use

Source: Rochford District Council (2006).

Figure 35 Map of Rayleigh Town Centre taken from the 2015 Rayleigh Area Action Plan.

Legend	
	Existing Residential Development
	Conservation Area Boundary
	Primary Shopping Frontage
	Secondary Shopping Frontage
	Town Centre Boundary

Source: Rochford District Council (2015).

4.3. These changes, alongside recent changes to the use class order (see, Section 2, for further details) present challenges when seeking to make like-for-like comparison across surveys. Therefore, the analysis presented below assesses the percentage of premises used along both primary shopping frontages and secondary shopping frontages, as per the definitions established at the initiation of each town centre survey.

4.4. Table 20 provides a comparison of the proportion of primary shopping frontage and secondary shopping frontage use in 2008 and 2023. The data reflects changes in all categories of premise use over the specific period.

Table 20 Comparison of the primary shopping frontage and secondary shopping frontage premises use in 2008 and 2023.

Premise Use	2008	2023	Change in proportion of premise use
Business Use	2.63%	1.67%	-0.96%
Residential Use	0.00%	0.00%	No Change
Commercial and Retail Use	77.37%	79.44%	+2.07%
Sui Generis	12.11%	13.89%	+1.78%
Vacant	5.26%	3.33%	-1.93%
Non-Residential, Community & Leisure	2.63%	1.67%	-0.96%

Source: Rochford District Council (2008, 2023).

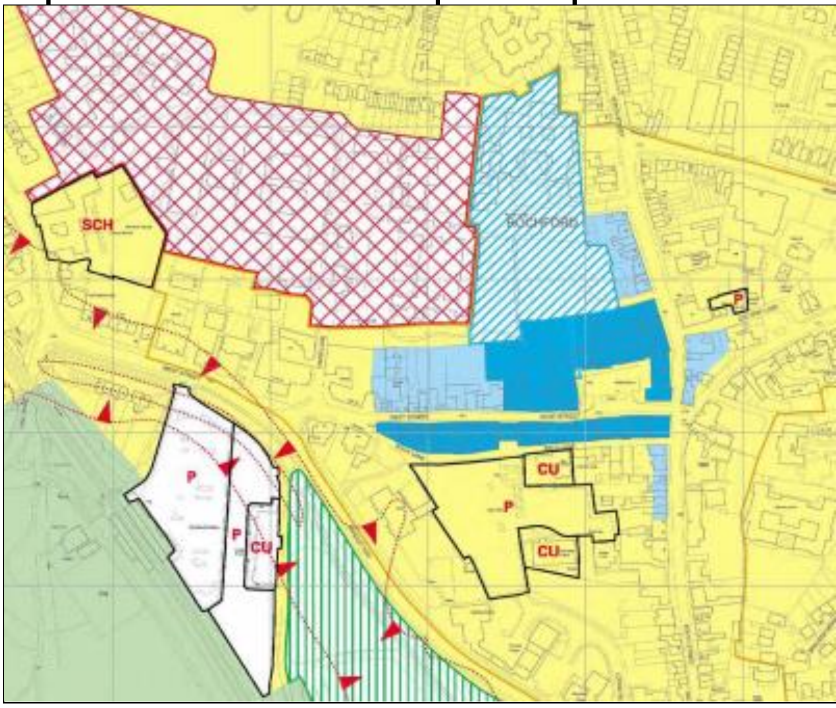
Rochford Town Centre

4.5. Surveys of the primary shopping frontages and secondary shopping frontages of Rochford Town Centre occurred in May 2008, September 2010, July 2015, March 2020, November 2022, and October 2023.

4.6. Between May 2008 and October 2023, Rochford Town Centre experienced modifications to its town centre boundary, primary shopping frontages and secondary shopping frontages. These have transitioned from the areas established in 2006 Rochford District Replacement Local Plan (Figure 36) to the parameters outlined in the 2015 Rochford Area Action Plan[13] (Figure 37).

[13] Rochford District Council 'Rochford Area Action Plan (Adopted 21st April 2015)' <Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan | Rochford Council>

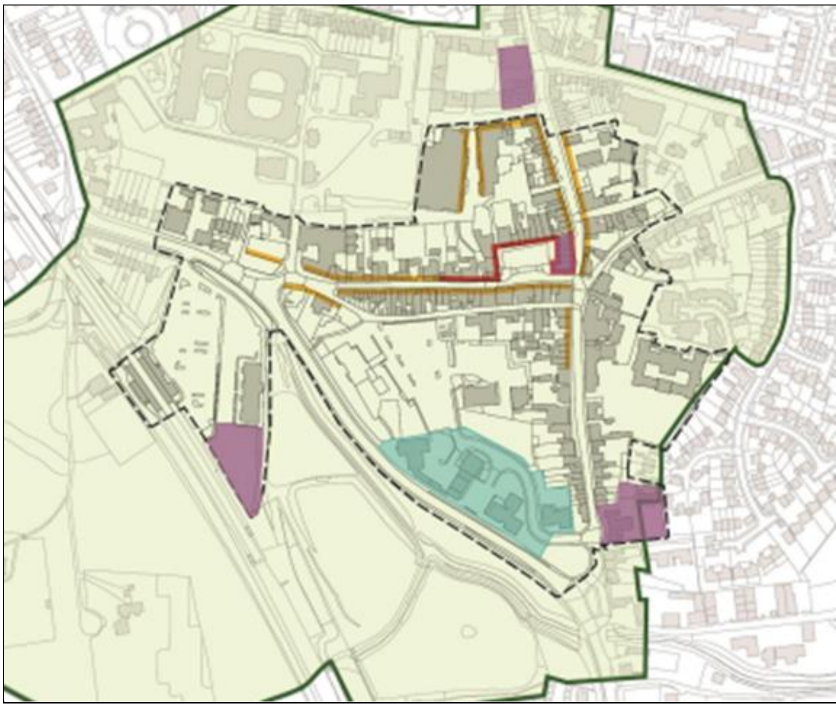
Figure 36 Map of Rochford Town Centre taken from the 2006 Rochford District Replacement Local Plan Proposal Map.



Legend	
	Existing Residential Development
	Rochford Food Store
	Primary Shopping Frontage
	Secondary Shopping Frontage
P	Parking
CU	Community Use
SCH	Schools

Source: Rochford District Council (2006).

Figure 37 Map of Rochford Town Centre taken from the 2015 Rochford Area Action Plan.



Legend	
	Existing Residential Development
	Conservation Area Boundary
	Primary Shopping Frontage
	Secondary Shopping Frontage
	Town Centre Boundary
	Opportunity Area
	Locks Hill

Source: Rochford District Council (2015).

4.7. These changes, alongside recent changes to the use class order (see, Section 2) for further details) present challenges when seeking to make like-for-like comparison across surveys. Therefore, the analysis presented below assesses the percentage of premises used along both primary shopping frontages and secondary shopping frontages, as per the definitions established at the initiation of each town centre survey.

4.8. Table 21 provides a comparison of the proportion of primary shopping frontage and secondary shopping frontage use in 2008 and 2023. The data reflects changes in all categories of premise use over the specific period.

Table 21 Comparison of the primary shopping frontage and secondary shopping frontage premises use in 2008 and 2023.

Premise Use	2008	2023	Change in proportion of premise use
Business Use	3.5%	2.9%	-0.6%
Residential Use	20.0%	26.5%	+6.5%
Commercial and Retail Use	52.9%	39.2%	-13.7%
Sui Generis	11.8%	10.8%	-1.0%
Non-Residential, Community & Leisure	4.7%	6.9%	+2.2%
Vacant	7.1%	13.7%	+6.6%

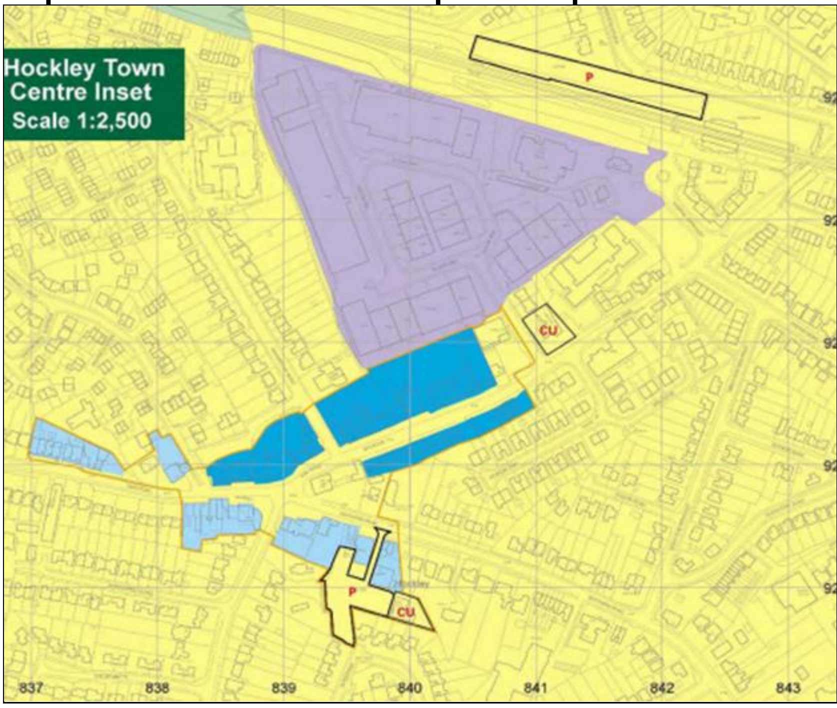
Source: Rochford District Council (2008, 2023).

Hockley Town Centre

4.9. Evaluation of the primary shopping frontages and secondary shopping frontages of Hockley Town Centre occurred in May 2008, September 2010, July 2015, March 2020, November 2022, and October 2023.

4.10. Between May 2008 and October 2023, Hockley Town Centre experienced modifications to its town centre boundary, primary shopping frontages and secondary shopping frontages. These have transitioned from the areas established in 2006 Rochford District Replacement Local Plan (Figure 38) to the parameters outlined in the 2014 Hockley Area Action Plan (Figure 39).

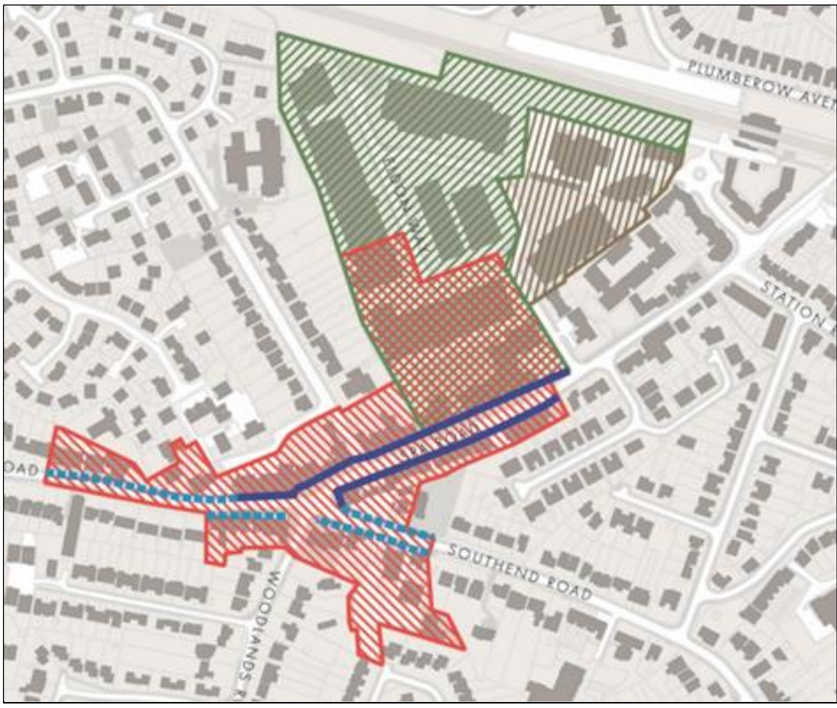
Figure 38 Map of Hockley Town Centre taken from the 2006 Rochford District Replacement Local Plan Proposal Map.



Legend	
	Existing Residential Development
	Employment Land
	Primary Shopping Frontage
	Secondary Shopping Frontage
P	Parking
CU	Community Use

Source: Rochford District Council (2006).

Figure 39 Map of Hockley Town Centre taken from the 2014 Hockley Area Action Plan.



Legend	
	Existing Residential Development
	Eldon Way Opportunity Area
	Primary Shopping Frontage
	Secondary Shopping Frontage
	Town Centre Boundary
	Employment Land

Source: Rochford District Council (2014).

4.11. These changes, alongside recent changes to the use class order (see, Section 2,) for further details) present challenges when seeking to make like-for-like comparison with survey data from earlier years. Therefore, the analysis presented below assesses the percentage of premises used along both primary shopping frontages and secondary shopping frontages, as per the definition and location established at the initiation of each town centre survey.

4.12. Table 22 provides a comparison of the proportion of primary shopping frontage and secondary shopping frontage use in 2008 and 2023. The data reflects changes in all categories of premise use over the specific period.

Table 22 Comparison of the proportion of primary shopping frontage and secondary shopping frontage use in 2008 and 2023.

Premise Use	2008	2023	Change in proportion of premise use
Business Use	3.0%	4.1%	+1.1%
Residential Use	0.0%	4.1%	+4.1%
Commercial and Retail Use	77.6%	61.7%	-15.9%
Sui Generis	10.4%	16.4%	+6.0%
Non-Residential, Community and Leisure	4.5%	9.6%	+5.1%
Vacant	4.5%	4.1%	-0.4%

Source: Rochford District Council (2008, 2023).

5. Data Analysis & Recommendations

Introduction

5.1. Section 4 introduced the retail audit, qualitative assessment and assessment of short and long-term town centre change undertaken for Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley Town Centres in October 2023. Through review and analysis of this data, this chapter examines:

- The need for potential amendments to Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley's town centre boundaries and/or the primary shopping frontages (PFS) and/or secondary shopping frontages (SSF).
- The progress in implementing the targets, goals and actions outlined in each town centre's respective Area Action Plan, considering whether there is a need to amend and introduce new objectives to align with contemporary policy, needs of the community and socio-economic dynamics.
- The delivery of designated opportunity areas specified in Area Action Plans, considering whether to retain them if undelivered, and examining the possibility of identifying new opportunity areas or broader recommendations to enhance the wider area.

5.2. The identified amendments and recommendations will adhere to national policy (see, Section 2) and will guide the formulation of town centre policy in the forthcoming Rochford Local Plan (2025-2040).

Town Centre Boundaries and Shopping Frontages.

5.3. Through a comprehensive review and analysis of the retail audit undertaken for Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley in October 2023, this section outlines the proposed future town centre boundary and shopping frontages for each settlement.

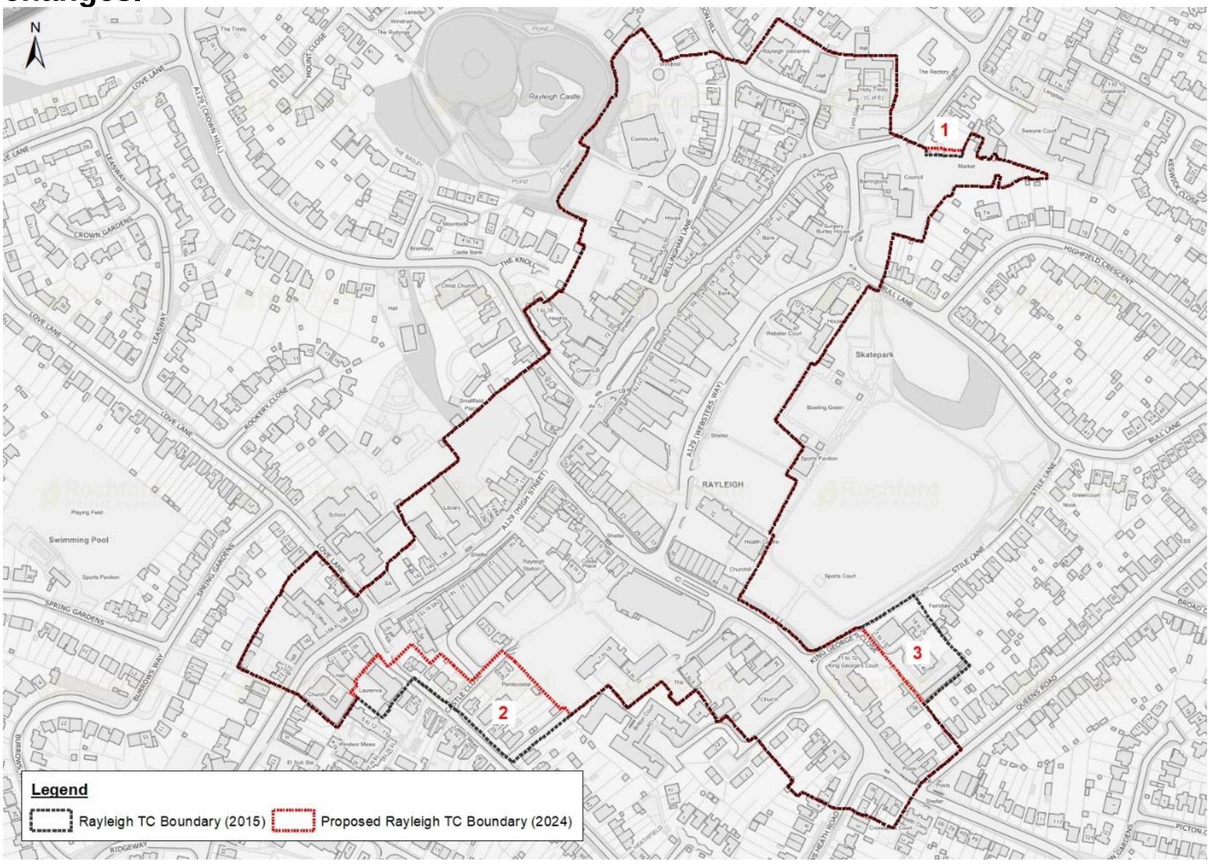
5.4. Recommendations for changes to the existing town centre boundaries in the district and, for primary and secondary frontages in Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley have been made in line with the national policy as outlined in Section 2.

Rayleigh Town Centre

Town Centre Boundary

5.5. There are three proposed amendments to the Rayleigh Town Centre boundary. Within Figure 40, the proposed changes to the Rayleigh Town Centre boundary are illustrated, while Table 23 offers a comprehensive summary of these proposed boundary amendments and offers a justification for each proposal.

Figure 40 The current Rayleigh Town Centre (TC) boundary and the proposed changes.



Source: Rochford District Council (2024)

Table 23 Scheduled of proposed amendments to the current Rayleigh Town Centre boundary.

Current Town Centre Boundary	Number on Map (Figure 40)	Schedule of proposed amendments	
		Address of	Justification for
Rayleigh Area Action	1	Hockley Road (B1013), Rayleigh	It is proposed to extend the town centre boundary to include the retail and commercial unit adjoining the Market Car Park.

Current Town Centre Boundary	Number on Map (Figure 40)	Schedule of proposed amendments	
		Address of	Justification for
Plan (2015)	2	Castle Road & Castle Close, Rayleigh	This area is comprised primarily of residential development. It is proposed to amend the town centre boundary to remove this area as it is not a logical part of the town centre.
	3	King George's Close, Rayleigh	This area is comprised primarily of residential development. It is proposed to amend the town centre boundary to remove this area as it is not a logical part of the town centre.

Source: Rochford District Council (2024)

Primary Retail Shopping Frontage

5.6. There are no proposed amendments to the primary shopping frontages in Rayleigh Town Centre.

Secondary Retail Shopping Frontage

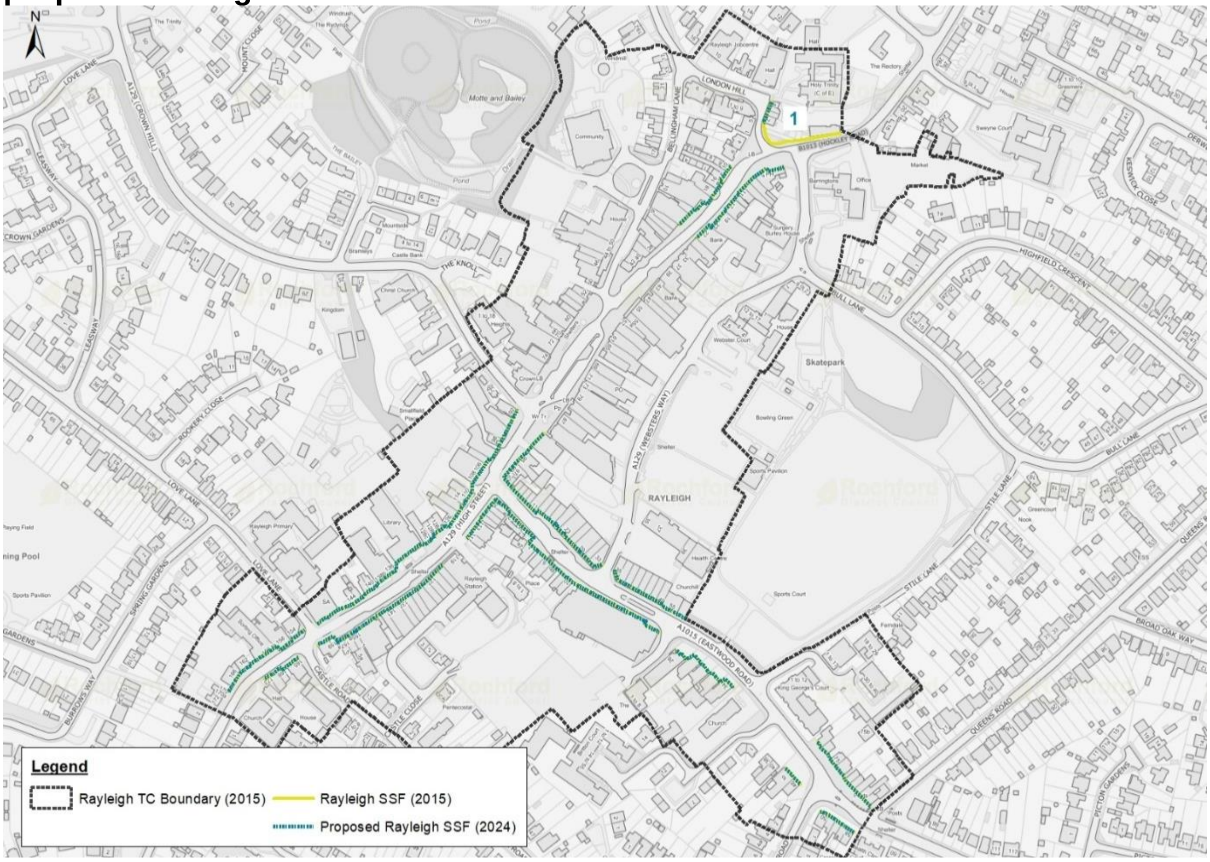
5.7. There is one proposed change to the secondary shopping frontage in Rayleigh Town Centre. Figure 65 visually presents the suggested modifications to the secondary shopping frontage while Table 33 provides an overview of the changes along with a rationale for the amendment.

Table 24 Scheduled of proposed amendments to the current secondary shopping frontages in Rayleigh Town Centre.

Current Secondary Shopping Frontage	Number on Map (Figure 41)	Schedule of proposed amendments	
		Address of	Justification for
Rayleigh Area Action Plan (2015)	1	Hockley Road (B1013), Rayleigh	The current northern secondary shopping frontage includes the Old Parish Rooms (F1) and Holy Trinity Church (F1). It is proposed to amend the boundary to exclude this area from the secondary shopping frontage as it is not in commercial and/or retail use.

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 41 The current Rayleigh secondary shopping frontage (SSF) and the proposed change.



Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Rochford Town Centre

Town Centre Boundary

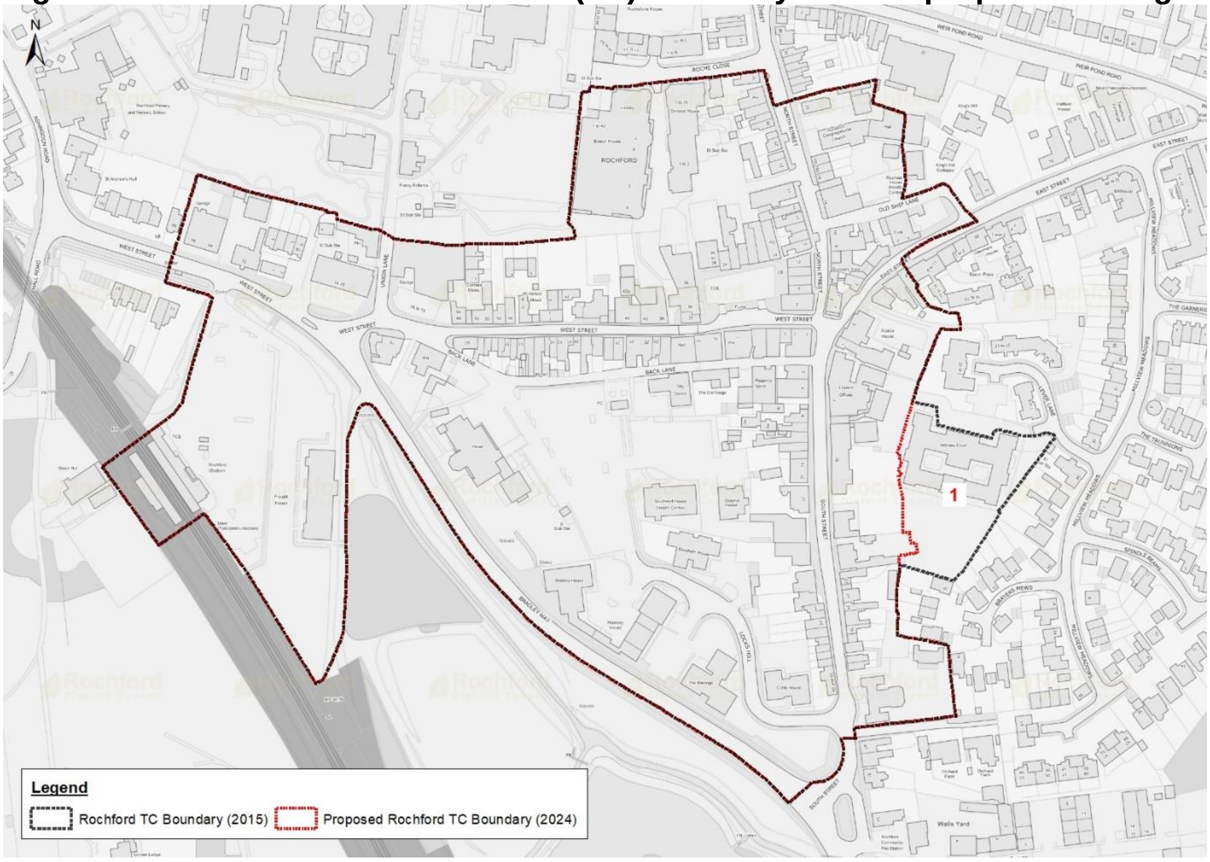
5.8. There is one proposed amendment to the Rochford Town Centre boundary. Table 25 offers a comprehensive summary of the proposed Rochford boundary amendments and offers a justification for this.

Table 25 Scheduled of proposed amendment to the current Rochford Town Centre boundary.

Current Town Centre Boundary	Number on Map (Figure 42	Schedule of proposed amendments	
		Address of	Justification for
Rochford Area Action Plan (2015)	1	Millview Court, Lever Lane, Rochford	The current town centre boundary includes residential properties in Millview Court. It is proposed to amend the existing town centre boundary to exclude these units as they have more relation to the adjoining residential development.

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 42 The Rochford Town Centre (TC) boundary and the proposed change.



Source: Rochford District Council (2024)

<u>Primary Shopping Frontage</u>

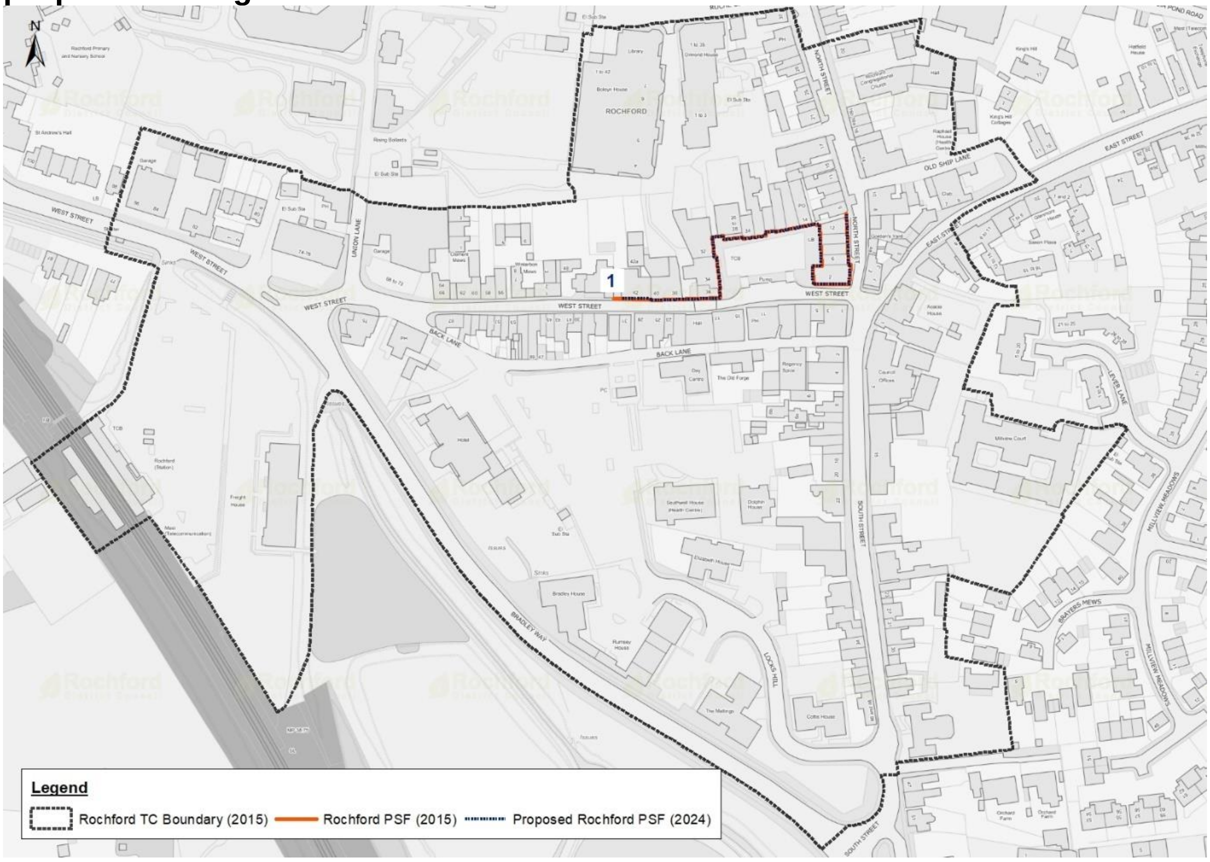
5.9. There is one proposed amendment to the primary shopping frontage in Rochford Town Centre. Table 26 provides an overview of the changes along with a rationale for the amendment and Figure 67 visually presents the suggested modifications to the secondary shopping frontage.

Table 26 Schedule of proposed amendments to the current Rochford Town Centre primary shopping frontage.

Current Town Centre Boundary	Number on Map (Figure 43)	Schedule of proposed amendments	
		Address of	Justification for
Rochford Area Action Plan (2015)	1	West Street, Rochford	It is proposed to amend the boundary to reassign a residential dwelling to the adjoining secondary shopping frontage as opposed to the current primary shopping frontage.

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 43 The current Rochford primary shopping frontage (PSF) and the proposed changes.



Source: Rochford District Council (2023).

<u>Secondary Shopping Frontage</u>

5.10. There are two proposed changes to the secondary shopping frontage in Rochford Town Centre (Figure 44).Table 27 offers a comprehensive summary of the proposed boundary amendments and offers a justification for this.

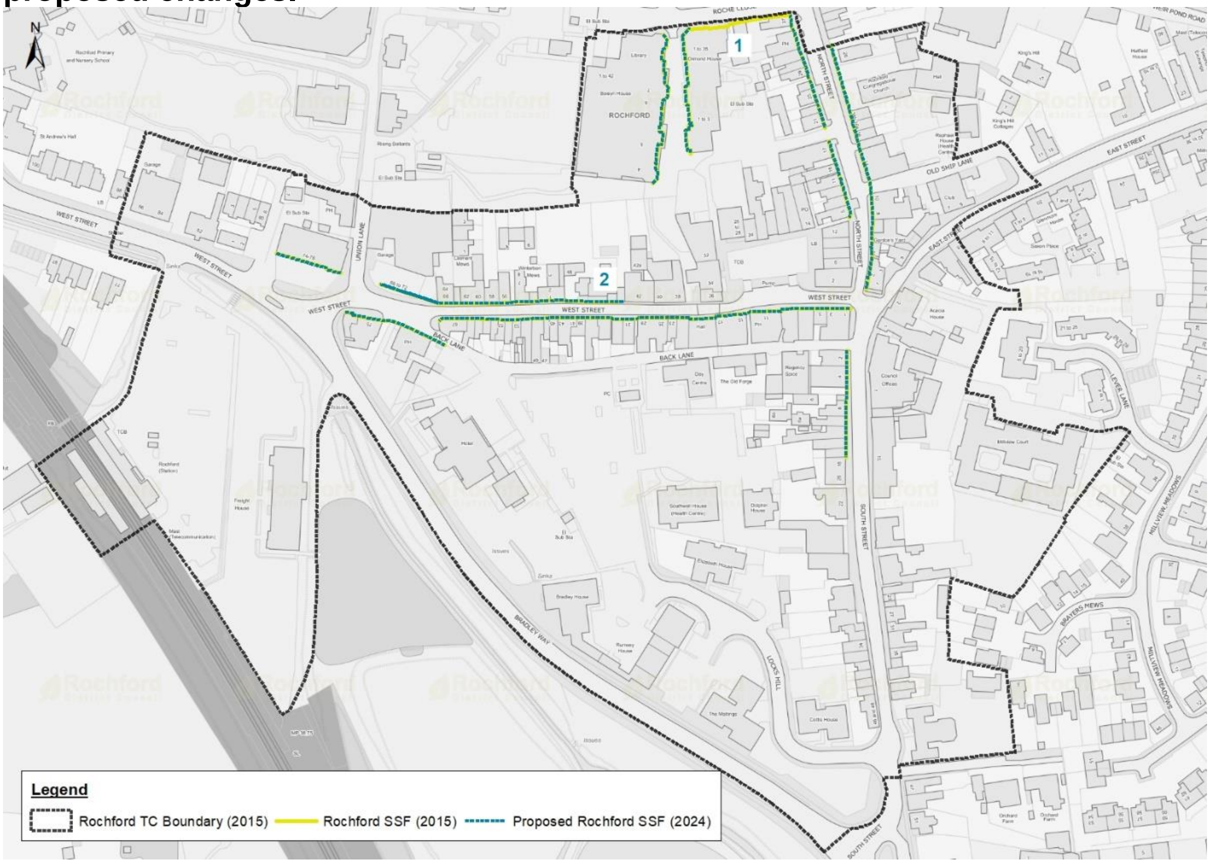
Table 27 Scheduled of proposed amendments to the current secondary shopping frontages in Rochford Town Centre.

Current Secondary Shopping Frontage	Number on Map (Figure 44)	Schedule of proposed amendments	
		Address of	Justification for
Rochford Area Action Plan (2015)	1	Roche Close, Rochford	It is proposed to amend the boundary to exclude this area from the secondary shopping frontage as it is not in commercial and/or retail use consisting primarily of residential development.

Current Secondary Shopping Frontage	Number on Map (Figure 44)	Schedule of proposed amendments	
		Address of	Justification for
	2	West Street, Rochford	It is proposed to extend the secondary shopping frontage to include a residential dwelling on West Street currently in the primary shopping frontage.

Source: Rochford District Council (2024)

Figure 44 The current Rochford secondary shopping frontage (SSF) and the proposed changes.



Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Hockley Town Centre

Town Centre Boundary

5.11. There are no proposed amendments to the town centre boundary in Hockley Town Centre.

Primary Shopping Frontage

5.12. There are no proposed amendments to the primary shopping frontages in Hockley Town Centre.

Secondary Shopping Frontage

5.13. There are no proposed amendments to the secondary shopping frontages in Hockley Town Centre.

Review of Area Action Plan Targets and Goals

Rayleigh Town Centre

5.14. The Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) set out a vision that, *by 2025, the town centre's retail and leisure offer will be improved through the provision of additional retail floorspace, as well as accommodation for complementary uses, such as leisure facilities, offices and homes. Further environmental enhancements will create a high-quality public realm, encourage investment and ensure that the town centre is highly accessible by foot, public transport and private motor vehicle. All new development will help to enhance the town centre's historic setting and respect its existing character, including that of nearby suburban, low-density neighbourhoods.* To achieve this, it set out four policy objectives, namely:

1. **Strengthening Rayleigh's role as Rochford District's principal town centre** – i.e. providing new accommodation for national retailers and smaller independents, as well as a greater range of leisure facilities and complementary uses, including residential and offices, on peripheral sites.

2. **Improving accessibility for all** – by improving walking links between the High Street and rail station/car parks, making positive changes to the road network and improving the arrival experience for visitors.

3. **Making the most of historic assets** – creating better connections between Rayleigh's significant historic assets and the town centre.

4. **Delivering public realm improvements** – through a series of small-scale interventions.

5.15. The Rayleigh AAP sets out a series of eight policies to help deliver this vision and objectives, as shown in Appendix A, including policies specific to the various character areas found within Rayleigh Town Centre. Table 28: provides a summary of the delivery of the AAP policies based upon the observations and data collected for the October 2023 Rayleigh town centre health check.

Table 28: Update on the delivery of policies in the 2015 Rayleigh Area Action Plan.

Policy	Context	2023 Delivery Update
Policy 1 – Rayleigh Area Action Plan Framework	This policy outlines strategies to enhance Rayleigh's town center, reinforcing its status as the primary hub within the Rochford District. It emphasizes the importance of retail development and other town center amenities, supported by environmental improvements. Key components include strengthening the primary retail core, facilitating new retail and mixed-use developments, promoting diverse uses beyond retail, enhancing pedestrian and cycle routes, and improving public realm and environmental features.	Based on the 2023 retail audit, it appears that the framework outlined to enhance Rayleigh's town center, with a focus on retail development and other amenities, has been largely delivered upon. The assessment highlights a steadfast focus on retail development since the adoption of the AAP in 2015, with retail establishments comprising a significant portion of total premise use across both Primary Shopping Frontages (PSF) and Secondary Shopping Frontages (SSF). This emphasis on retail, along with the presence of local and regional retailers, contributes to Rayleigh's distinctive and vibrant retail environment. In addition, the conclusions of the qualitative scored assessment support the assessment that the framework outlined to enhance Rayleigh's town center has been largely delivered upon, with several aspects showing positive results. The qualitative assessment scores for heritage and the historic environment, open space and green infrastructure, public realm, safety and security, parking provision, local attractions and tourism, and evening economy all indicate favorable conditions within the town center. There are notable mentions of well-maintained historic buildings, abundant green infrastructure, sufficient provision of public realm features, a sense of safety and security, ample parking options, attractive local attractions, and a vibrant evening economy. Additionally, the provision of sustainable transport options is well-noted, contributing to the overall accessibility and connectivity of the town center.

Policy	Context	2023 Delivery Update
		However, there are also areas identified for improvement, such as cycling facilities, pedestrian friendliness, and the disjointed nature of the public realm due to road infrastructure. These aspects suggest that while the framework has been delivered to a large extent, there are still areas that could benefit from further attention and enhancement to fully realize the vision for Rayleigh's town center.
Policy 2 – Retail Development in Rayleigh	The policy underscores Rayleigh town center's significance as the primary shopping hub within Rochford District. It permits new retail-focused developments within the town center provided they maintain the predominance of retail uses, contribute positively to the local retail character, and aim to improve physical linkages within the area. These criteria ensure that any new development aligns with the designated shopping area guidelines, enhances the town center's unique retail atmosphere, and promotes improved accessibility and connectivity for residents and visitors alike.	Since the adoption of the AAP in 2015, Rayleigh town center has remained steadfast in its focus on retail development, with retail establishments comprising an average of 79% of total premise use across both Primary Shopping Frontages (PSF) and Secondary Shopping Frontages (SSF). This emphasis on retail, coupled with the significant presence of local and regional retailers, contributes substantially to Rayleigh's distinctive and vibrant retail environment. However, the introduction of new retail units has sometimes diverged from the historic design and character of the area, particularly noticeable in the design of shop signage. Additionally, there has been a notable surge in residential development on the outskirts of the center, occasionally deviating from the town's cherished historic character. Nevertheless, concerted efforts have been made to preserve and safeguard historic features and listed buildings within the town center, reflecting a commitment to maintaining Rayleigh's unique heritage.

Policy	Context	2023 Delivery Update
Policy 3 – Rayleigh's Shopping Frontages	This policy outlines the conditions under which proposals for A1 retail uses are acceptable within the primary and secondary shopping frontages of Rayleigh town center. It permits a change of use for non-retail (non-A1) purposes provided certain criteria are met:	In Rayleigh, the primary shopping frontage (PSF) and secondary shopping frontage (SSF) maintain a robust retail presence, indicative of the town's commercial vitality. As of the latest town center health check conducted in 2023, 80% of premises along the PSF, totaling 36 units, are actively utilized for commercial and retail purposes, with only one vacant unit noted. Similarly, on the SSF, 79.3% of premises, comprising 107 units, were observed to be engaged in retail or commercial activities, with just five vacancies recorded. These figures mirror those recorded in 2015, underscoring the enduring stability of Rayleigh's retail landscape. In 2015, an identical proportion of units on both the PSF and SSF, totaling 79%, were occupied by retail and commercial enterprises. This consistency over the years highlights the resilience and attractiveness of Rayleigh as a destination for businesses and shoppers alike, with sustained occupancy rates indicating a favorable environment for commerce within the town center.
Policies 4 to 8– Rayleigh's Character Areas	This policy emphasizes the importance of respecting Rayleigh town centre's identified character areas and their roles in fostering its success. It outlines guiding principles for development across these areas (under Policies 5, 6, 7, and 8), emphasizing environmental enhancements. Development within these areas should either incorporate or	Based on the 2023 Rayleigh town centre health check, it can be concluded that progress has been made towards delivering public realm improvements. The Qualitive Scored Assessment highlighted several positive aspects, such as the generally well-maintained and clean pavements and streets in Rayleigh town centre. The presence of public realm features, including statues and memorial structures, as well as the provision of street furniture in good condition, aligns with the goal of enhancing the public realm. However, some challenges and areas of improvement are identified in the update.

Policy	Context	2023 Delivery Update
	contribute to specified improvements. Key principles include upgrading public realm interventions (such as paving, lighting, and street tree planting), providing enhanced cycle parking facilities, upgrading bus facilities (including shelters and seating), and introducing new pedestrian signage for key destinations and attractions.	The existence of small cracks, potholes, and uneven surfaces poses hazards, particularly for disabled or elderly pedestrians, indicating that not all aspects of poor-quality paving have been completely addressed. The objectives aimed at improving cycle parking and bus facilities within Rayleigh town center have seen minimal progress in implementation. Only one cycle storage facility, in the form for bike rakes was observed indicates that there have been no significant improvements in cycling provisions (as of October 2023). Similarly, based on the 2023 Rayleigh town center health check, it can be observed that there have been limited improvements to bus facilities. The introduction of live bus time information however represents a positive step, indicating some efforts to enhance the quality of bus service facilities. While there is limited improvement to bus shelters, the Qualitive Scored Assessment highlights that Rayleigh is well connected in terms of sustainable transport. The town has a railway station with regular services, and numerous main bus routes pass through the town center. The sustainable transport service infrastructure is noted to be well maintained and in good condition throughout, suggesting that, overall, the town has a solid foundation for sustainable transportation.

Rochford Town Centre

5.16. The Rochford Town Centre AAP seeks to implement a vision for Rochford, based on its context as a historic small market town. The Rochford AAP's vision states: Rochford will develop its existing strengths as a small and attractive historic market town serving the needs of its local population and visitors. By 2025, the town centre offer will be more mixed, and will include a greater diversity of town centre uses, such as restaurants, cafés, and bars, leisure uses and community facilities, whilst retaining its existing office stock. Environmental enhancements and new development will improve key spaces, build on the town's historic character and make better use of unused or unattractive sites. Improvements to existing routes and the addition of new links will make the town more permeable and make travel by all modes of transport easier. This is underpinned by 5 key objectives:

1. **Provide a diverse range of uses, activities and facilities** for local people (enhance the overall mix through a more flexible approach to uses to encourage café culture and the evening economy).
2. **Enhance the historic core** (particularly public realm enhancements for the Market Square and improvements to surrounding buildings).
3. **Improve accessibility for all** (better linkages between key areas in and around the town centre, such as the hospital and train station).
4. **Protect local employment** (retaining existing employment allocations).
5. **Promote the redevelopment of unused, underused, infill or unattractive sites.**

5.17. The Rochford AAP sets out a series of nine policies to help deliver this vision and objectives, as shown in Existing Retail & Town Centres Local Planning Policies. Appendix A:, including policies specific to the various character areas found within Rochford Town Centre. Table 29 provides a summary of the delivery of the AAP policies based upon the observations and data collected for the October 2023 Rochford town centre health check.

Table 29: Update on the delivery of policies in the 2015 Rochford Area Action Plan.

Policy	Context	2023 Delivery Update
Policy 1 – Rochford Area Action Plan Framework.	This policy aims to uphold and enhance Rochford's existing local character while strengthening its role as a retail hub for the local population. It outlines strategies to achieve this, including the establishment of a more compact town center with a focus on Market Square as the primary retail frontage. Additionally, it emphasizes the extension of secondary shopping areas and the protection of employment sites at Locks Hill.	Based on the provided assessment, it seems that the framework aimed at upholding and enhancing Rochford's existing local character and strengthening its role as a retail hub has faced challenges in its delivery. The breakdown of use class classification indicates a diverse mix of premises within Rochford Town Centre, with a significant percentage dedicated to residential dwellings (40.8%) and commercial, business, and services (E) (36.3%). However, there are only a few premises dedicated to general industrial (B2) and learning/non-residential institutions (F1). The vacancy rate of 17% for commercial and business premises suggests some challenges in maintaining a vibrant retail environment. While the framework emphasizes the establishment of a more compact town center with a focus on Market Square as the primary retail frontage, the vacancy rate indicates potential issues with occupancy and vitality in certain areas.
Policy 2 – Rochford's Primary Shopping Frontage	This policy outlines guidelines for development within Rochford's Primary Shopping Frontage (PSF), primarily focusing on acceptable uses and maintaining the predominance of A1 retail establishments. It permits proposals for A1 retail uses within the	Based on data from the 2023 Rochford town centre health check, the primary shopping frontage in Rochford continues to be predominantly comprised of commercial and retail establishments, accounting for approximately 73.7% of the total premises. There is also a notable presence of residential use, representing around 5.3% of the premises. Additionally, there are two premises categorized as "Sui Generis" and two premises recorded as vacant, each constituting

Policy	Context	2023 Delivery Update
	PSF, while also considering proposals for A3 and A4 uses if they maintain A1 retail presence at 65% of the defined PSF.	approximately 10.5% of the total. Overall, the primary shopping frontage demonstrates a significant concentration of commercial and retail activities, denoting the successful delivery of this policy.
Policy 3 – Rochford's Secondary Shopping Frontage	This policy pertains to development within Rochford's Secondary Shopping Frontages, as outlined on the Rochford Town Centre AAP Proposals Map (Figure 8). It permits new development for Class A and D uses, as well as other uses deemed appropriate for town centers. Development leading to the loss of town center uses is allowed under specific conditions.	The secondary shopping frontage in Rochford exhibits a diverse mix of uses. The majority of premises are categorized under commercial and retail establishments, comprising approximately 37.3% of the total. Residential use also accounts for a significant portion, representing around 31.3% of the premises. Additionally, there are notable numbers of premises categorized as "Sui Generis" and vacant, constituting approximately 10.8% and 14.5% of the total respectively. Business use and all other uses collectively make up a smaller proportion of the premises, each representing less than 5% of the total. Overall, the secondary shopping frontage reflects a varied landscape with a mix of commercial, residential, and other uses, alongside a notable presence of vacant premises.
Policy 4 – Locks Hill Employment Site	This policy outlines the Council's support for new B1a (office) employment development within the Locks Hill employment site while ensuring the area's protection from uses that could undermine its role as an employment generator. Alternative uses will be considered, taking into account factors such as the number of jobs likely to be	In 2023, Locks Hill remains an established site primarily comprising three-storey office premises built from the 1980s onwards. Units are well-maintained and have undergone modernisation efforts since the adoption of the 2014 AAP. The site provides good quality employment space that attracts a range of knowledge-intensive occupiers and in turn supports the wider Rochford Town Centre. For further details regarding Locks Hill, please refer to the 2024 Employment Land Study.

Policy	Context	2023 Delivery Update
	generated, compatibility with existing B1(a) uses, impact on the vitality and viability of Rochford town center, and wider sustainability issues including traffic generation and travel by sustainable modes.	
Policy 5 to 8 – Rochford's Character Areas	This policy emphasizes the importance of aligning new development in Rochford town centre with the identified character areas and their unique contributions to the town's success. Guiding principles outlined in Policies 6, 7, 8, and 9 stress the need for development to positively respond to these character areas, including incorporating or contributing towards route enhancements or junction improvements where specified. Key principles applicable to development across all character areas include integrating public realm interventions such as improved paving and lighting, enhanced cycle parking facilities, upgraded bus facilities with potential route alterations, introduction of new pedestrian signage suitable for a conservation area, and ensuring	Based on the 2023 Rochford town centre health checks, it appears that the framework outlined to enhance Rochford town center has faced challenges in its delivery. While some aspects of the framework have been realized to a certain extent, there are notable areas where improvements are needed. Pedestrian friendliness and legibility continue to pose significant challenges, with congestion along main streets, (such and West Street) and inadequate pedestrian crossings impacting safety and accessibility. While sustainable transport options are relatively well-connected, there is room for improvement in terms of infrastructure. Cycling facilities are also lacking, with no dedicated cycle lanes noted and minimal signage for cycle routes. Parking provision is generally adequate but can lead to congestion in certain areas, affecting circulation within the town center. In terms of heritage and the historic environment, the town center boasts numerous Grade II* and Grade II listed buildings, with many well-maintained structures contributing positively to the townscape.

Policy	Context	2023 Delivery Update
	consideration of heritage assets and archaeological deposits.	However, there are concerns regarding commercial units and signage that detract from the historic streetscape. Overall, while the framework emphasizes the importance of aligning new development with the town's character areas and addressing various aspects such as public realm interventions, cycle parking facilities, and pedestrian signage, the assessment suggests that there are areas where the framework has not been fully delivered. Continued efforts and improvements are needed to address these challenges and enhance Rochford town center in line with the outlined framework.

Hockley Town Centre

5.18. Hockley's AAP sets out a vision for the future development of the town which seeks to improve its offer and environment to local residents through significant mixed-use regeneration of parts of the existing urban fabric. The vision states that, by 2025, *Hockley will have a centre that is defined by the high quality of its public realm and the opportunities on offer for local people to access homes, shops, jobs, leisure and other services without having to travel far afield. These changes will be delivered in a manner that makes the most of land that has been previously developed, and all new development will respect and enhance the existing suburban, low-density character of the settlement.* The 4 objectives supporting this are as follows:

1. Provide greater shopping choice for local people (particularly in terms of food retail).
2. Identify and deliver environmental improvements (redeveloping industrial sites to help deliver enhanced public realm).
3. Recycle previously developed land for housing (redeveloping brownfield sites to provide more housing in a sustainable location).
4. Protect local employment (retaining much of the existing employment areas alongside new mixed-use investments to strengthen the vitality of the centre).

5.19. The AAP sets out a series of 8 policies to help deliver this vision and objectives, as shown in Appendix A. Table 30 provides a summary of the delivery of the AAP policies based upon the observations and data collected for the October 2023 Hockley town centre health check.

Table 30: Update on the delivery of policies in the 2014 Hockley Area Action Plan.

Policy	Context	2023 Delivery Update
Policy 1 – Hockley Area Action Plan Framework	This policy outlines the vision for Hockley's transformation into a vibrant community with an enhanced public realm and improved access to essential amenities for its residents. Key elements of this framework include the creation of new public spaces, improved pedestrian routes linking the center with the rail station and surrounding areas, enhanced car parking facilities, opportunities for new housing, focus on retail within the center, and protection of existing employment and leisure uses within the Eldon Way Opportunity Site and Foundry Business Park.	Based on the 2023 Hockley town centre health check, it can be concluded that progress has been made towards delivering the Hockley Area Action Plan Framework. Despite the vision outlined, as of October 2023, no physical progress has been made towards the creation of new public spaces, enhancement and creation of new of pedestrian routes connecting the center with the rail station and surrounding areas, or the provision of improved car parking facilities.
Policy 2 – Delivering Environmental Improvements	This policy proposes environmental enhancements within Hockley center and the broader AAP area. Development proposals are required to integrate or contribute to schemes outlined in the AAP, which include the creation of a new public space as part of the mixed-use redevelopment of the Eldon Way Opportunity Site, raised entry treatments, the installation of new and improved pedestrian signage for key destinations, and various physical	Based on the qualitative scored assessment conducted as of October 2023, Hockley Town Centre demonstrates a good environmental condition. The presence of abundant green infrastructure, including well-managed street trees, flowerbeds, and planters, contributes positively to the town's aesthetic appeal and overall environmental health. Moreover, the public realm within the town center is well-designed and maintained, including wide paved areas, high-quality street furniture, and informative community notice boards.Despite this, no physical progress has been made towards the creation of new public spaces. And, as

Policy	Context	2023 Delivery Update
	interventions aimed at enhancing the overall environmental quality.	of October 2023, there is limited evidence of pedestrian signage improvements or raised entry treatment in Hockley town centre.
Policy 3 – Promoting Better Movement	This policy highlights a commitment to implementing transportation improvements aimed at enhancing movement within and around the AAP area while strengthening connections with other parts of Hockley and its surroundings. Development proposals within the area are required to integrate or contribute to schemes outlined in the AAP, which include various initiatives such as enhancing pedestrian links within the AAP area, creating new pedestrian pathways across Hockley, improving accessibility and visibility of Hockley train station, providing enhanced cycle parking facilities, upgrading bus facilities, consolidating car parking	Hockley town centre benefits from excellent public transport services, including regular train services from Hockley Railway Station to Southend-on-Sea and London Liverpool Street. Additionally, the presence of Arriva bus services, such as the Number 7 and 8 routes, further enhances accessibility by providing consistent connections from Rayleigh to Shoeburyness/Great Wakering. However, car parking has not been consolidated in Hockley town centre and capacity is limited at the compact public car park is available behind Hockley Library, In addition, the absence of dedicated cycle lanes, the lack of signage for cycle routes, and the observation of only two storage facilities in the form of bike racks indicates that there have been no significant improvements in cycling provisions (as of October 2023).
Policy 4 – Increasing the Availability of Housing	This policy outlines the council's endorsement of development proposals for additional homes on previously developed land within the AAP area. Specifically targeting the Eldon Way Opportunity Site,	As of October 2023, the Eldon Way Opportunity Site has not undergone redevelopment to a mixed-use complex (comprising of residential development, retail outlets, leisure amenities, office spaces, parking facilities, and additional public areas). Over the period spanning 2015 to 2023, there has been a rise in the percentage of residential dwellings within the town center

Policy	Context	2023 Delivery Update
	residential (C3) development will be permitted under certain conditions.	boundary, primarily due to the conversion of a commercial unit on Spar Road into a mixed-use project incorporating both residential and commercial units.
Policy 5 – Protecting Jobs	This policy outlines the council's backing for the introduction of office (B1a) uses within the Eldon Way Opportunity Site, contingent upon their positive contribution to the site's overall redevelopment.	As of October 2023, the Eldon Way Opportunity Site has not undergone redevelopment to a mixed-use complex (comprising of residential development, retail outlets, leisure amenities, office spaces, parking facilities, and additional public areas). The estate is predominantly comprises warehouses utalised for industrial and/or commercial purposes. Occupancy rates are high as the estate accommodates a range of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) alongside national businesses.
Policy 6 – Improving Retail Choice for Local People	This policy emphasizes the council's commitment to supporting development initiatives aimed at enhancing Hockley's retail offerings and reinforcing its status as a preferred shopping destination for local residents. Specifically focusing on the Eldon Way Opportunity Site, as illustrated in Figure 5, the policy permits new retail (A1) developments provided they adhere to certain criteria. These criteria include offering a variety of unit sizes, ensuring the additional retail capacity does not exceed 3,000 sq m (gross), integrating seamlessly with Spa Road, and facilitating direct pedestrian	As of October 2023, the Eldon Way Opportunity Site has not undergone redevelopment to a mixed-use complex (comprising of residential development, retail outlets, leisure amenities, office spaces, parking facilities, and additional public areas). Between 2015 and October 2023, there was an 8.7% decline in the proportion of commercial and retail space within Hockley town center, decreasing from 70.4% in 2015 to 61.7% in 2023. No highways and transportation improvements to Spa Road have occurred and, and no additional pedestrian pathways have been established to link Hockley Town Centre, Hockley Railway Station, Eldon Way, and Foundry Business Park.

Policy	Context	2023 Delivery Update
	connections to the redeveloped Eldon Way Opportunity Site and the rail station/	
Policy 7 – Ensuring a Healthy Centre	This policy outlines the council's intention to foster development within Hockley center that supports its vibrancy and commercial sustainability. Specifically targeting the primary and secondary shopping areas designated on the Hockley APP Proposals Map, the policy permits proposed changes of use for non-retail (non-A1) purposes under certain conditions.	Based on the 2023 retail audit of the Hockley primary and secondary shopping frontages, it appears that the policy aimed at fostering development to support vibrancy and commercial sustainability has been partially delivered. The majority of premises (68.9%) are dedicated to commercial and retail use, aligning with the policy's objective to maintain the shopping areas' commercial vitality. However, the presence of 16.2% of premises classified as Sui Generis suggests a notable proportion of non-standard commercial activities, which may warrant further examination regarding their compatibility with the overall retail character of the area. Overall, while the policy has contributed to maintaining a predominantly commercial and retail-focused environment in Hockley center, there may be opportunities to further enhance its effectiveness in promoting vibrancy and sustainability.
Policy 8 – Encouraging Leisure Opportunities	This policy extends support for incorporating leisure (D2) uses within the Eldon Way Opportunity Site, provided that such uses contribute positively towards its redevelopment for a mix of uses, including residential, retail, leisure and office	As of October 2023, the Eldon Way Opportunity Site has not undergone redevelopment to a mixed-use complex (comprising of residential development, retail outlets, leisure amenities, office spaces, parking facilities, and additional public areas). While leisure facilities such as CJ's Bowling are present, the site's primary usage remains oriented towards employment activities.

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Opportunity Sites

5.20. Through a comprehensive review and analysis of the town centre health checks undertaken for Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley in October 2023, this section outlines the proposed future opportunity sites for each settlement.

Rayleigh Town Centre

5.21. The Rayleigh Area Action Plan (2015) sets out proposed policies to oversee and direct development in Rayleigh town centre. Within these policies, there are outlined opportunity areas designed for the enhancement of the town centre, as depicted in Figure 68.

Figure 45 Rayleigh Area Action Plan map of opportunity sites and opportunities for wider town centre improvements.

Source: Rochford District Council (2015).

<u>2015 Opportunity Sites</u>

5.22. As illustrated above, one opportunity site was identified for potential development or redevelopment in the Rayleigh Area Action Plan (2015). Table 31 summaries the goals and objectives set for the site in 2015, along with an assessment of their delivery status as of October 2023.

Table 31 Update on opportunity sites identified in the 2015 Rochford Area Action Plan.

Site Name	2015 RayAAP Context	2023 Update
The Dairy Crest	Positioned at the intersection of High Street and Crown Hill, the Dairy Crest site, as of 2015, functioned as a busy depot site. At that time, the occupants conveyed that they had no immediate intentions of relocating in the short to medium term. The Rayleigh Area Action Plan observed that the site may have the potential for mixed redevelopment.	Renovation efforts are in progress to transform the former Dairy Crest site into a mixed-use development, comprising both commercial premises and residential units.

Source: Rochford District Council (2015, 2023).

Proposed 2024 Opportunity Sites

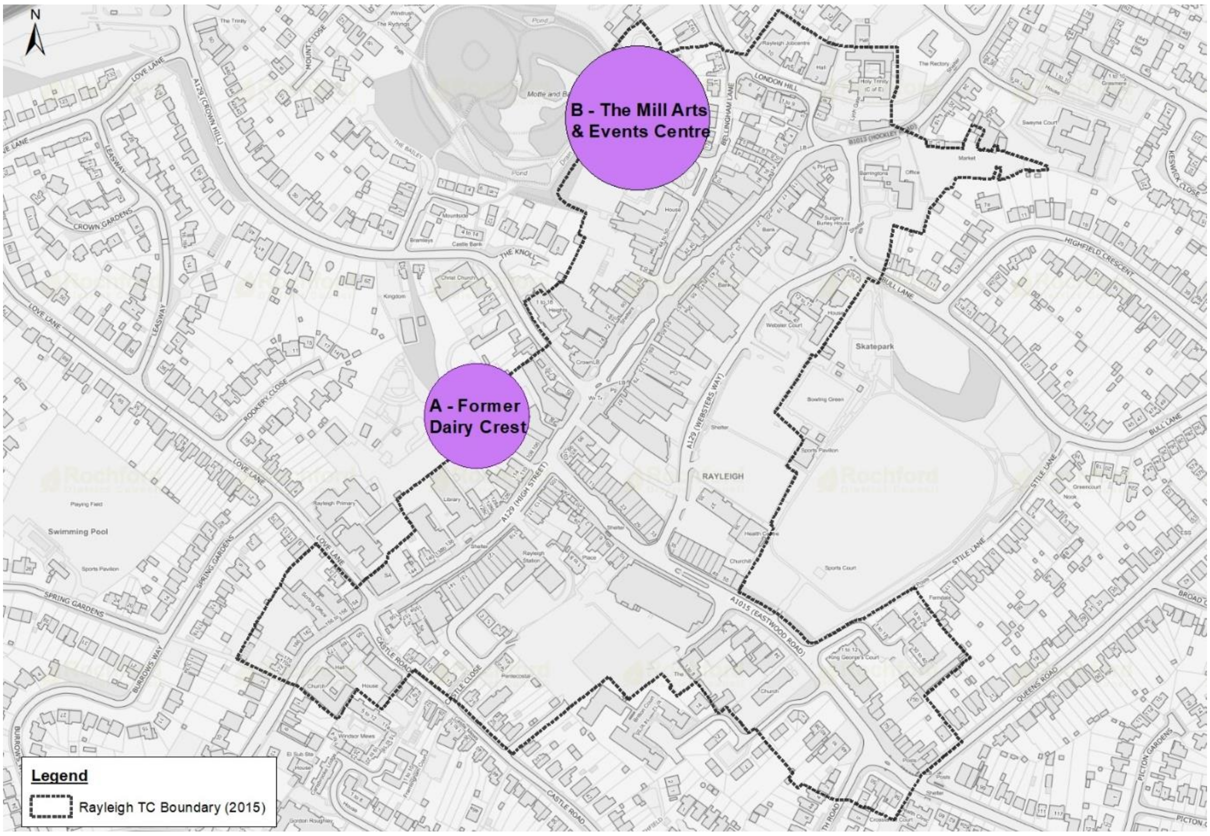
5.23. Following the town centre health check conducted in October 2023, two potential opportunity sites have been identified for Rayleigh. Figure 46 and Table 32 Proposed new and retained opportunity sites for Rayleigh town centre. provides a summary of the proposed new and retained opportunity sites for Rayleigh.

Table 32 Proposed new and retained opportunity sites for Rayleigh town centre.

Site Name	New or Existing	Recommendation
A – The Former Dairy Crest	Existing	Retain 2015 opportunity site and support the redevelopment of the former Dairy Crest as a mixed-use site.
B – The Mill Arts and Events Centre	New	While the 2015 APP proposes enhancements to public spaces and connectivity in this specific area, it is recommended that this is extended. The Mill Arts and Events Centre should be designated as an opportunity site for Rayleigh, where proposals to induce and expand existing leisure and community based facilities are supported.

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 46 Map of existing and proposed new opportunity sites in Rayleigh town centre.



Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Rochford Town Centre

Figure 47 Rochford Area Action Plan map of opportunity sites and opportunities for wider town centre improvements.

Source: Rochford District Council (2015).

5.24. The Rochford Area Action Plan (2015) sets out proposed policies to oversee and direct development in Rochford town centre. Within these policies, there are outlined opportunity areas designed for the enhancement of the town centre, as depicted in Figure 47.

Opportunity Sites

5.25. As illustrated above, four opportunity sites were identified for potential development or redevelopment in the Rochford Area Action Plan (2015). summaries the goals and objectives set for the site in 2015, along with an assessment of their delivery status as of October 2023.

Table 33 Update on opportunity sites identified in the 2015 Rochford Area Action Plan.

Site Name	AAP Context	2023 Delivery Update
The Spar Building	Policy 6: 3. The redevelopment of the two-storey building on the eastern side of Market Square (the Spar building) would be supported provided that it is redeveloped in a style and form that contributes positively to the character of the area with A1, 3 or 4 uses addressing Market Square. Upper floors could be occupied by a range of uses including offices and residential	As of October 2023, no redevelopment to the Spar building on the Easten site of Market Square has occurred.
The Police Station on South Street.	Policy 8: 3. The Police Station building and site on South Street represents an important opportunity for reuse or conversion, which would be supported if proposals are for C3 or Sui Generis uses providing community facilities, particularly those catering for young people.	As of October 2023, no redevelopment of the police station on South Street has occurred.
The Car Park adjacent to the Freight House.	Policy 9: 4. Freight House is an attractive commercial building and should be retained. However, there is considered to be an opportunity to intensify the uses on this site, either	As of October 2023, no redevelopment to the car park adjacent to the Freight House has occurred.

Site Name	AAP Context	2023 Delivery Update
	through a new building or an extension to the existing building. C3, B1 and D2 uses would be appropriate, with a particular opportunity to take advantage of the excellent public transport accessibility and the proximity and relationship to the open space to the east.	
North Street at the junction with Weir Pond Road	Policy 7: 2. Proposals for the opportunity site along North Street (at the junction with Weir Pond Road) would be supported where a predominance of A1 uses is proposed, and where proposals would deliver, or contribute towards the delivery of, in the region of 750sq.m of retail floorspace at the opportunity site	As of October 2023, no redevelopment to the North Street at the junction with Wier pond site has occurred.

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

5.26. Following the town centre health check conducted in October 2023, two potential opportunity sites have been identified for Rayleigh. Figure 48: Map of existing and proposed new opportunity sites in Rochford town centre. and Table 34 provides a summary of the proposed new and retained opportunity sites for Rochford.

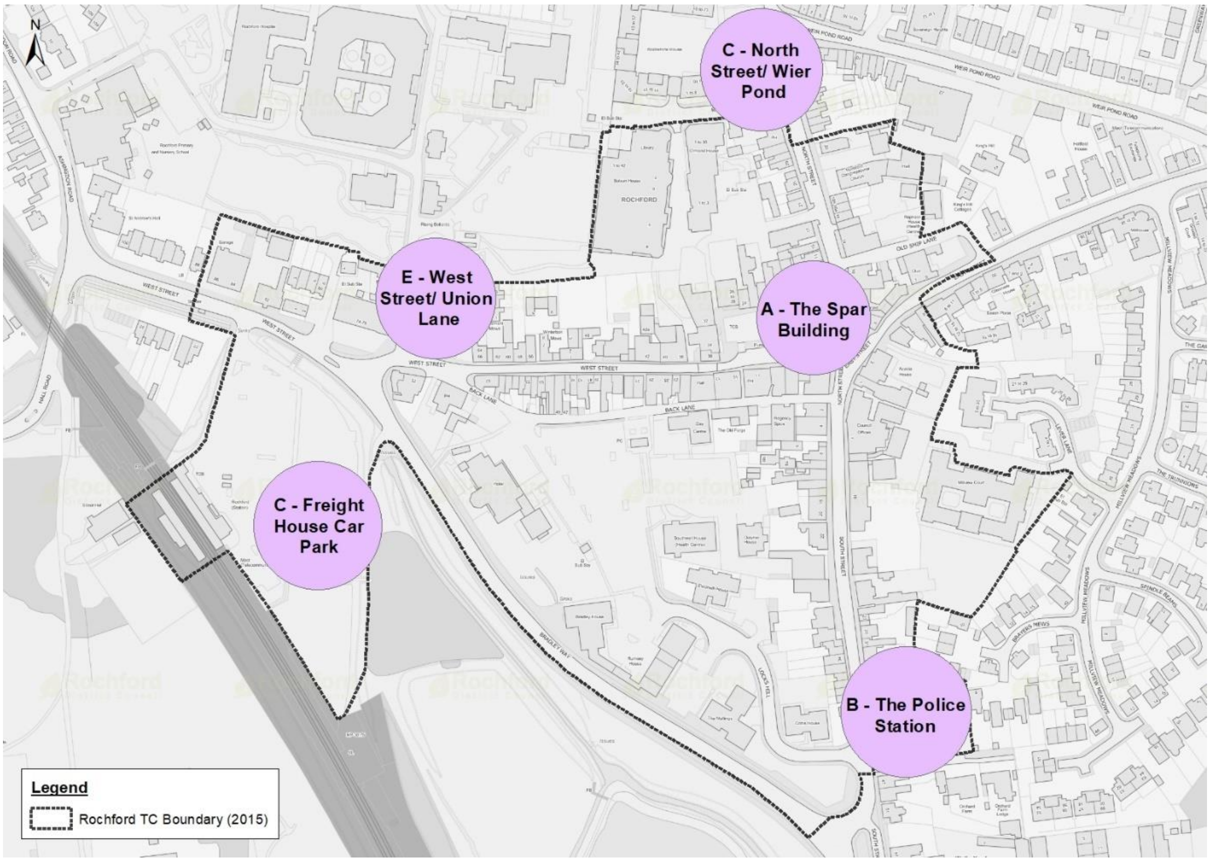
Table 34 Proposed opportunity sites for Rochford Town Centre

Site Name	New or Existing	Recommendation
A – The Spar Building	Existing	Retain 2014 Recommendation:
B – The Police Station on South Street	Existing	Retain 2014 Recommendation:

Site Name	New or Existing	Recommendation
C – The Car Park adjacent to the Freight House	Existing	Retain 2014 Recommendation:
D – North Street at the junction with Weir Pond Road	Existing	Retain 2014 Recommendation:
E – West Street/ Union Lane Junction	New	Proposals for the redevelopment of the land at West Street/Union should be supported where a predominance of Class E uses is proposed, . Upper floors could be occupied by a range of uses including offices and residential

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Figure 48: Map of existing and proposed new opportunity sites in Rochford town centre.

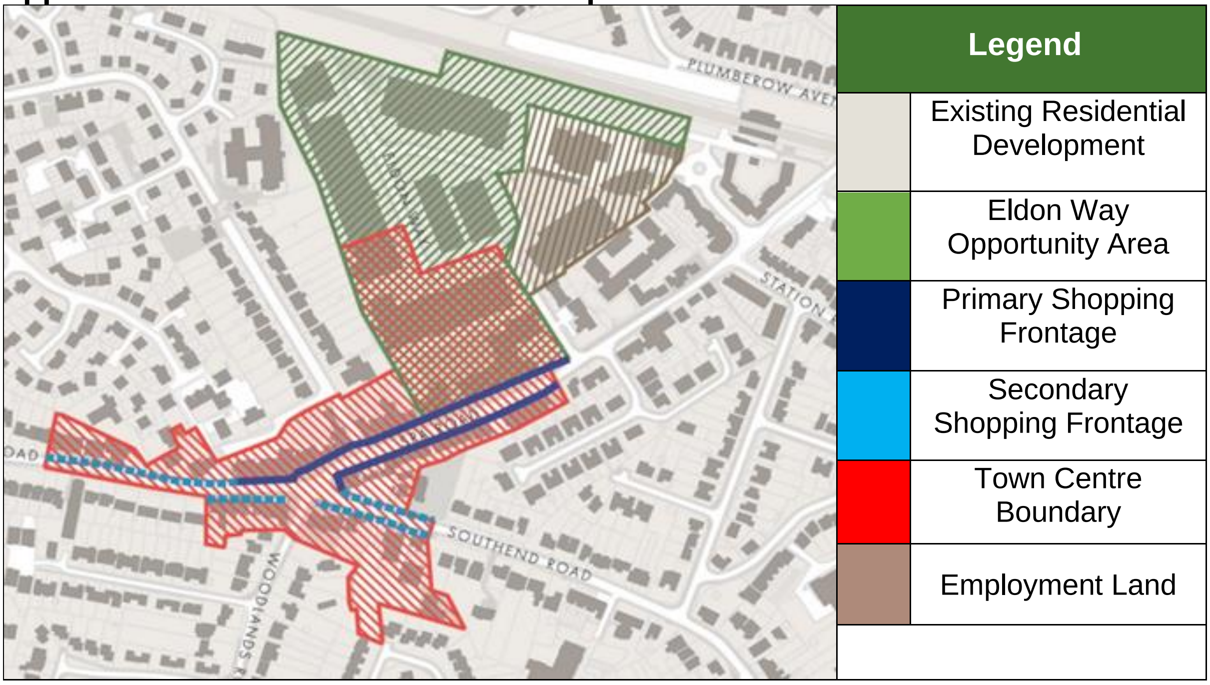


Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Hockley Town Centre

5.27. The Hockley Area Action Plan (2015) sets out proposed policies to oversee and direct development in Hockley town centre. Within these policies, there are outlined opportunity areas designed for the enhancement of the town centre, as depicted in Figure 47.

Figure 49 2014 Hockley Area Action Plan map of opportunity sites and opportunities for wider town centre improvements.



Source: Rochford District Council (2015).

<u>Opportunity Sites</u>

5.28. As illustrated above, two opportunity sites were identified for potential development or redevelopment in the Hockley Area Action Plan (2014). Table 35 summaries the goals and objectives set for the site in 2014, along with an assessment of their delivery status as of October 2023.

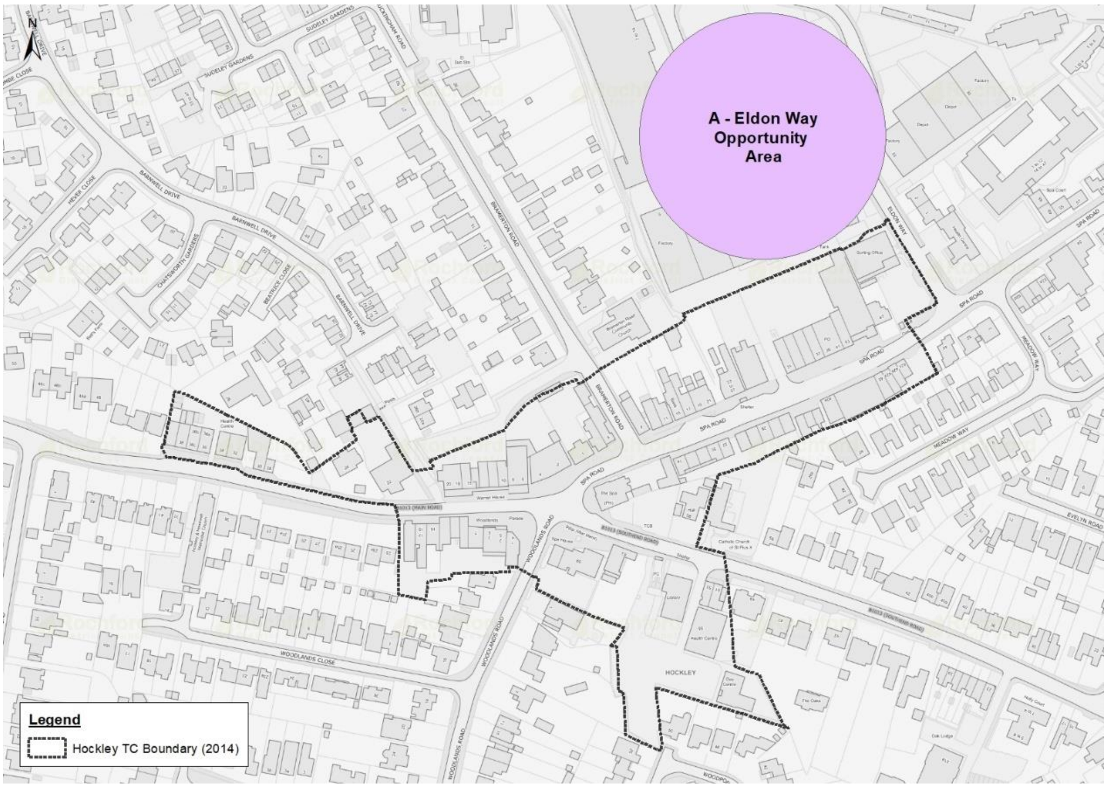
Table 35 Update on Opportunity Sites identified in the 2014 Hockley Area Action Plan (HAAP).

Site Name	2014 HAAP Context	2023 Delivery Update
Eldon Way Opportunity Site	Policy 1: The Eldon Way Opportunity Site will deliver a mixed-use development, which will include homes, shops, leisure facilities, offices, car parking and new public spaces.	As of October 2023, no redevelopment as occurred at Eldon Way. The majority of the estate remains in use for employment purposes, with a minority of space in use for leisure purposes

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

5.29. Following the town centre health check conducted in October 2023, two potential opportunity sites have been identified for Hockley. Figure 50 and Table 36 provides a summary of the proposed new and retained opportunity sites for Hockley.

Figure 50 Map of existing and proposed new opportunity sites in Hockley town centre.



Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Table 36 Proposed opportunity sites for Hockley Town Centre

Site Name	New or Existing	Recommendation
A - Eldon Way Opportunity Area	Existing	The general principles for protecting the 'Eldon Way Opportunity Area, should be retained, recognising the potential in the medium-long term for mixed-use development, improved public realm and enhanced pedestrian linkages to support additional employment, retail and leisure opportunities alongside homes in a brownfield location. Any proposals should be sensitive to the employment-focused nature of much of the area and avoid conflicts between ongoing employment activities and residential amenity. The New Local Plan should consider whether a specific proportion of the site should be retained for employment use.

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

6. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations.

6.1. Following the cumulative and individual analysis of Rochford's town centres, a series of policy recommendations for the emerging Rochford Local Plan (2025-2040) have been developed. These are listed below.

General Policy and Strategy Recommendations

6.2. **Maintain the current network and retail hierarchy of town centres for Rochford District** as outlined in Table 37 and ensure that the Local Plan's policies enable town centres, villages and retail parades to meet the needs of residents, businesses, employees and visitors to the district.

Table 37: Proposed Retail centre hierarchy for the Rochford District.

Hierarchy	Centers	Description
Town Centres	Rayleigh; Rochford; Hockley	The District's three town centres, with a significant number of businesses are considered to provide a wide range of retail (including comparison goods), food & beverage, employment, leisure, community and cultural facilities, as well as public transport interchanges and sizeable residential populations within walking distance. They are generally considered appropriate locations for retail, leisure and main town centre uses (including commercial), and are likely to have an evening economy role.
Local Centres	Great Wakering; Hullbridge; Golden Cross; Priory Chase (West Rayleigh)	Existing local centres serving their communities – larger villages or suburban areas, along with larger designated centres as part of newer housing allocations. These centres have a largely local catchment and may include a range of convenience retail (including small/medium supermarkets and services such as hairdressers), a very limited comparison retail offer (e.g. charity shop), a number of food & drink

Hierarchy	Centers	Description
		options (e.g. bakeries, cafes and takeaways) and local amenities (e.g. community centres or libraries). They are appropriate for more localised retail, leisure and service uses, commercial, flexible work space and community facilities that reduce the need to travel and contribute towards more sustainable and neighbourhood-scale living, supporting the concept of 'Complete Communities'
Neighbourhood Parades	Ashingdon Road (Ashingdon); Ashingdon Road (Rochford); Broad Parade (Hockley); Dalys Road (Rochford); Eastwood Road (Rayleigh); London Road (Rayleigh); Hambro Parade (Rayleigh); Main Road (Hawkwell); Rawreth Lane (Rayleigh); The Drive (Rayleigh)	Local parades consist of small shopping parades that largely serve their immediate local area. They are likely to comprise a limited number of small convenience retail facilities, e.g., small supermarket or newsagents, services (e.g., hairdressers or bookmakers) and food and drink options such as a takeaway. They are appropriate for localised retail, leisure and service uses, along with some community and commercial uses.
Smaller Villages	Includes Battlesbridge; Canewdon; Little Wakering; Rawreth	Smaller villages with a limited provision of retail and leisure uses, e.g., convenience store and/or pub.

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

6.3. **Omit reference to 'shopping' from primary and secondary frontage designations and wider policy terminology** to reflect the wider commercial, social roles of the centres. It is recommended that the various designations are renamed as outlined in Table 38.

Table 38:Recommended updates to town centre classifications

Current classification	Recommended classification
Primary Retail Shopping Frontage	Primary Retail & Commercial Frontages
Primary Shopping Frontage Area	

Current classification	Recommended classification
Secondary Retail Shopping Frontage	Secondary Retail & Commercial Frontages
Secondary Shopping Frontage Area	

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

6.4. **Maintain the relevance of Area Action Plans (AAPs) adopted in 2014-15, incorporating their detailed area-specific policies and key development opportunities, where these continue to be relevant**. The AAPs were produced following significant consultation and engagement exercises, resulting in proposals and policies that encapsulate the community input and highlight local needs. The successful implementation of select AAP policies, which has led to notable milestones such as planning approvals for redevelopment projects or protection of important retail frontages, underscores their efficacy. It is crucial to leverage the aspects of AAPs which remain relevant as guiding principles for the emerging Local Plan's town centre policies to ensure consistency and alignment with established objectives.

6.5. **Reference the Area Action Plans (AAPs) in supporting text alongside designated town centre policies** to further emphasise the importance of using AAPs as guidance and context, ensuring continuity and alignment with established objectives.

6.6. **Consider of developing additional Supplementary Planning Documents** to provide an update to the AAPs and further support and enable the delivery of town centre objectives, including more granular detail and focus on specific areas and opportunities within each respective centre.

6.7. **Promote a town centre-first approach,** in line with the NPPF, recognising the role of town centres in fostering economic development and delivering healthy communities. Individual policies for each of the three town centres should provide direction to new development within Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley, and promote their uniqueness and individuality. Adhering to the sequential test outlined in National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), retail development should continue to be directed towards Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centres. Pairing this strategy with the safeguarding of established centres through their respective frontages policies supports the fulfilment of current and future needs (including a need for retail floorspace weighted towards the latter half of the emerging Plan) while conserving the distinct character and identity of these town centres. This approach encourages a diverse mix of retail outlets, enhancing the economic vitality of these centres. New development should be spatially located so that it supports and enhances existing town, neighbourhood and village centres wherever possible, preferably through sustainable travel links.

6.8. **Maintain and enhance the primary retail and commercial function of town centres, with Class E floorspace protected and its loss prevented wherever possible**. Reflecting the simplification of many town centre and commercial uses into Class E, primary and secondary frontage policies should be developed which seek to retain the majority of uses within both the primary and secondary retail commercial frontages in Use Class E, whilst setting sensible proportions for uses which are likely to complement the town centre's role (e.g. uses in F1, such as learning & non-residential institutions; F2, such as community facilities; and sui generis, such as drinking establishments, hot food takeaways or performance venues). Such complementary uses should be managed to ensure they play an important supporting role to the town centres, whilst not dominating in a way which may undermine the primary function or character of a retail frontage (e.g. with betting shops or takeaways).

6.9. **Support the diversification of town centre offerings to include more supporting uses, such as leisure, food, and drink.** Expanding the range of activities within town centres improves their capacity to adapt to evolving consumer tastes and economic trends, providing more experiences not replicated through online shopping and improving their resilience. Additionally, a diversified town centre can enhance the quality of life for residents by offering a wider range of amenities and services, from entertainment venues and green spaces to healthcare facilities and educational institutions, fostering a sense of community well-being and satisfaction. Diversity in town centres can also encourage social engagement and inclusiveness, fostering unity and a sense of community cohesion among residents.

6.10. **Policies should ensure markets are protected, enhanced and promoted.** Markets complement a town centre's commercial and retail offer, adding to the centre's vibrancy and contributing towards the creation of a local economy and identity. They offer opportunities to local entrepreneurs in the form of lower costs than conventional retail units and are therefore ideal for those looking to start a new business or test a concept. Market can also help reduce isolation and improve wellbeing by enabling social interaction. Opportunities for new or specialist markets in town centres should be explored, where these can complement the existing offer and contribute to the vitality of the centre.

6.11. **Monitor the effect of permitted development rights on Rochford's retail hierarchy**. It is recommended that a balance of uses across the centres is kept under review through updates to Town Centre Health Checks and through the Authority Monitoring Report. The council should also consider the use of its powers to make Article 4 Directions to require the submission of planning applications for changes of use from Class E to residential in important areas in the primary/secondary retail/commercial frontages, should monitoring deem this to be appropriate.

6.12. **Extend activity within town centres into the evenings by promoting a broader mix of uses and proposals which enhance the entertainment offer of town centres.** Alongside expanded food and beverage offerings, this includes encouraging the provision of new cultural and leisure spaces such as small theatres, museums/galleries and fitness centres, which the Retail & Leisure Needs Assessment identified potential demand for. Encouraging town centre use in the evenings can stimulate economic growth by providing additional opportunities for businesses to generate revenue, provide opportunities for community engagement and increase town centre safety and security.

6.13. **Local pubs should be protected**. Pubs can contribute to the vibrancy of town centres thanks to their social function as places for communities to gather and contribute to the evening and night time economy.

6.14. **Policies should support the role of offices in town centres, including shared working facilities**. By accommodating offices and shared working spaces, town centres can enhance their attractiveness, competitiveness, and functionality as dynamic hubs for business, social interaction, and community engagement. In addition, the inclusion of employment space into town centres can enhance their economic health, as the presence of workers often leads to increased foot traffic at nearby shops, restaurants, and services.

6.15. **Policies should promote enhanced pedestrian and cycle accessibility, and an inclusive and high-quality public realm throughout Rayleigh, Rochford, and Hockley town centre**. Improvements to public realm quality as well as walkability and cyclability contribute to enhancing the centre's attractiveness and encourage people to stay in the area for longer, which supports the economic function of the centre.

6.16. **Town centre development proposals should embody urban designs that are inclusive and accessible to all, while also capturing the unique character and cultural heritage of each town centre**. This ensures that town centres remain welcoming and accommodating environments for all individuals, regardless of their physical abilities or mobility constraints, thereby promoting social equity and inclusivity. Also, by authentically capturing the unique character and cultural heritage of each town centre, these designs help to preserve the distinct identity and sense of place that makes each centre special.

6.17. **Residential development on the ground floor in town centres should not generally be supported**. Ground floor residential units can disrupt the commercial vibrancy and vitality of town centres by reducing footfall along frontages and reducing the availability of prime retail and commercial spaces for prospective occupiers, thereby diminishing economic activity. Whilst having residential communities in close proximity to town centres is important, e.g. above/behind commercial units units, immediately surrounding the centre or in peripheral (non-commercial frontages) within the centre, and contributes to footfall and vibrancy, this should not be at the expensive of coherent and diverse primary and secondary retail and commercial frontages.

6.18. **Policy should recognise the role of residential intensification in supporting smaller town centres**. Additional and higher density housing can contribute to vitality and viability, particularly in smaller centres with low footfall and a local function. Care should be taken to avoid compromising the operational requirements of existing businesses; in particular, the impact of proposed large-scale developments on the mix of uses within centres should be assessed. Residential proposals should ensure the amenity of prospective residents is not adversely impacted by the operational requirements of existing town centre uses (e.g. early morning retail deliveries, refuse collections or the nighttime economy).

Recommendations for Individual Town Centres

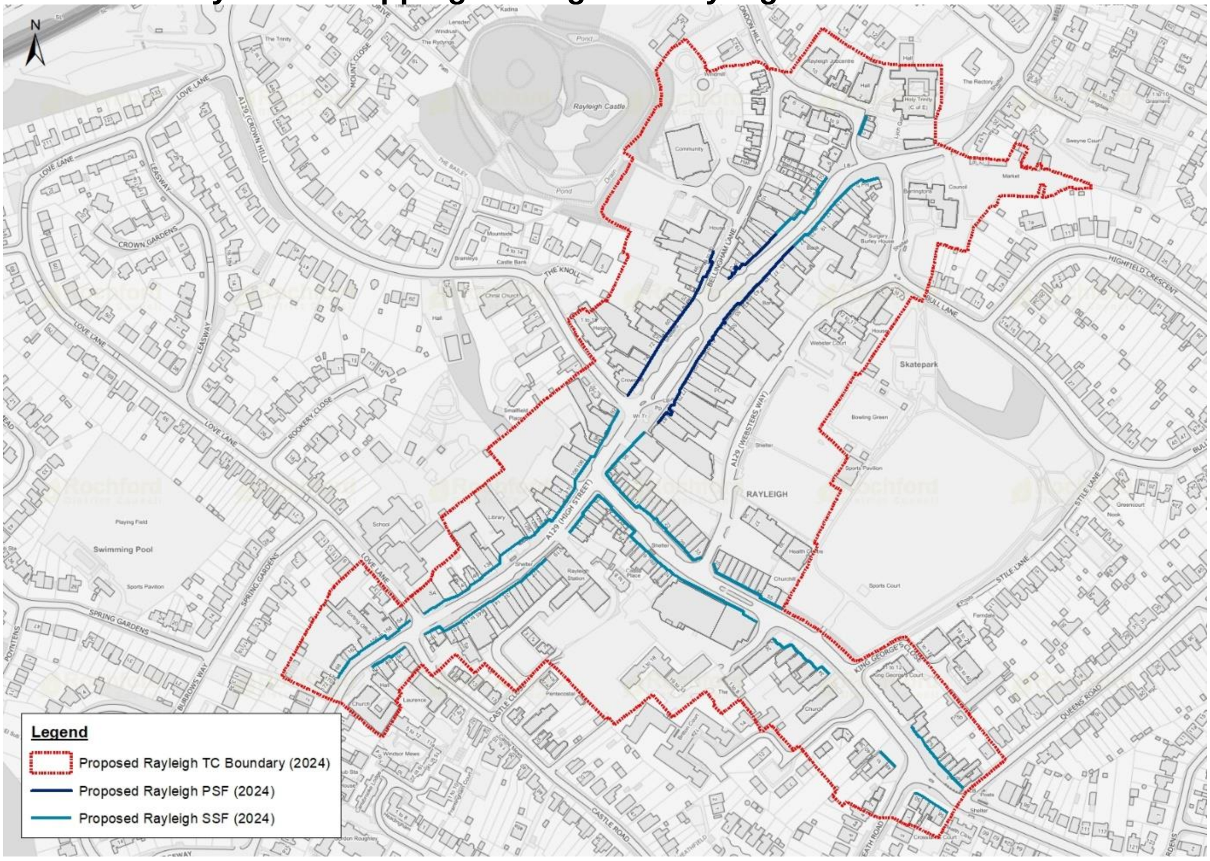
Rayleigh

6.19. **Continue to conserve historic assets and local character**. Rayleigh is home to numerous valuable heritage features, including Rayleigh Mount, Holy Trinity Church, Rayleigh Windmill, and the Dutch Cottage. All new development should respect and enhance these assets and their settings, with urban design reflecting the town's historic character. This builds upon the policy established in the AAP. This should be in keeping with the principles of the Conservation Area.

6.20. **Explore opportunities for new and improved town centre pedestrian routes which enhance town centre accessibility**, continuing the recommendation from the AAP. In addition, opportunities should be explored to extend or enhance existing and new cycling and pedestrian routes to connect the centre to surrounding residential and employment areas, in conjunction with the emerging Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).

6.21. **Amend the Rayleigh town centre boundary, Rayleigh secondary shopping frontage and retain the Area Action Plan (2015) Rayleigh primary shopping frontage** as outlined in Figure 51. Section 5 provides detail into the reasoning behind the alterations made to the town centre boundary and secondary shopping frontage.

Figure 51 Proposed town centre boundary, primary retail shopping frontage and secondary retail shopping frontage for Rayleigh.



Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

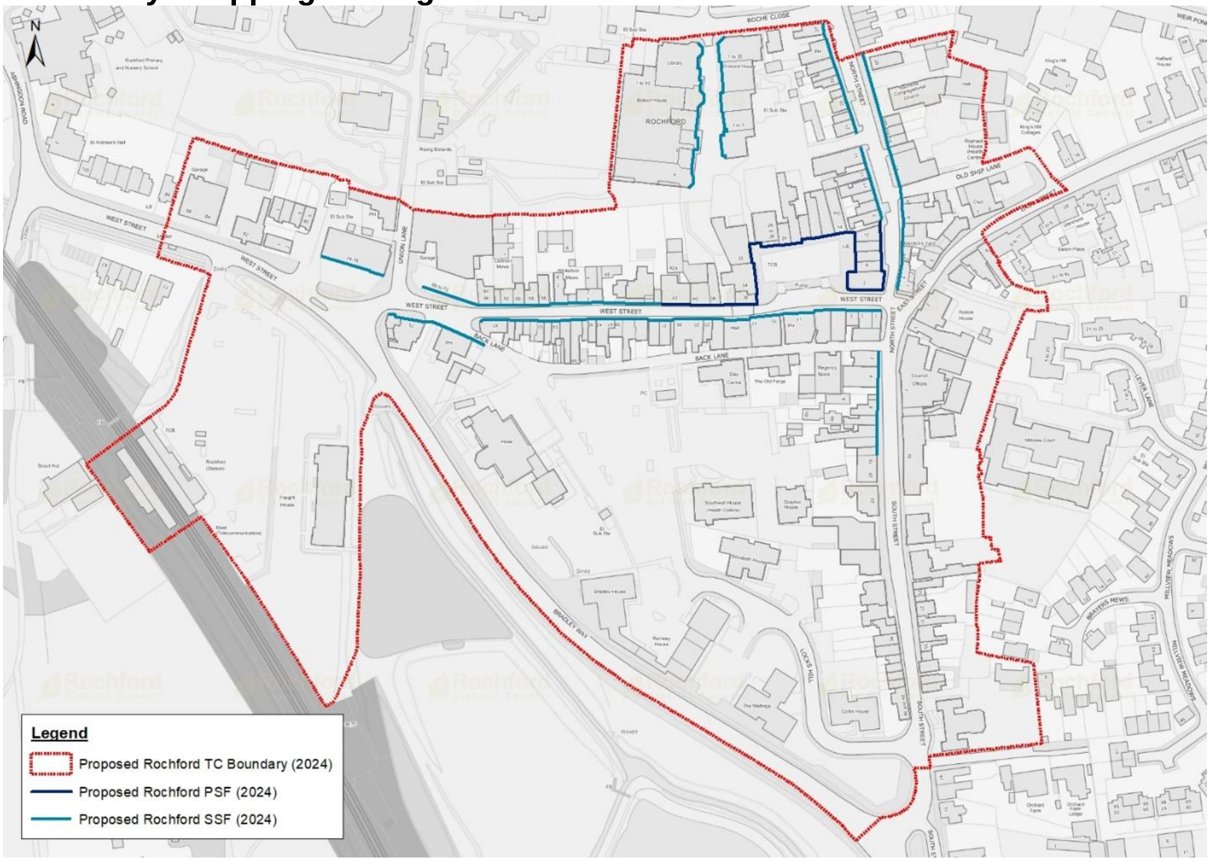
6.22. **Support proposals which advance the development of identified opportunity sites in Rayleigh Town Centre**. This includes:

- **The Dairy Crest:** The redevelopment of the former Dairy Crest site for mixed-use is supported.
- **The Mill Arts and Events Centre (Bellingham Lane)**: Opportunities to introduce complementary leisure-centric uses at the Mill Arts and Events Centre should be encouraged and supported, particularly where these improve or enhance the existing built environment/facilities and protect the important amenity for current and future generations.

Rochford

6.23. **Amend the Rochford town centre boundary, Rochford primary shopping frontage and Rochford secondary shopping frontage** as outlined in Figure 52. Section 5 provides detail into the reasoning behind the alterations made to the town centre boundary and secondary shopping frontage.

Figure 52 Proposed town centre boundary, primary shopping frontage and secondary shopping frontage for Rochford.



Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

6.24. **Support proposals which address vacant premises and improve the appearance of storefronts that are in need of improvement**. Prominent vacant premises need to be brought back into use, ideally securing an active commercial frontage at ground floor level. This should be in keeping with the principles of the Conservation Area.

6.25. **Continue to recommend the creation of a more vibrant and attractive Market Square**, with public realm improvements and the encouragement of additional restaurant and café uses. This builds upon the recommendations in the AAP and could include considerations of whether a full or partial pedestrianisation and/or relocation of parking would support this.

6.26. **Continue to recommend explore opportunities for new and improved town centre pedestrian routes**. This includes links to and from the railway station, from car parks to West Street and Market Square, to and from Roche Close and Rochford Reservoir. The Reservoir is Rochford Town Centre's sole green space, yet is underutilised and poorly linked to the town centre by safe pedestrian crossings, whilst poor signposting and connectivity between Roche Close and surrounding areas has contributed to low footfall and high vacancy rates. This builds upon the recommendations in the AAP.

6.27. **Continue to recommend new and improved public realm, environmental improvements, and junction improvements throughout the town centre**. This builds upon the recommendations in the AAP and places particular importance on additional safe crossing points, street trees and new planting/greenery to enhance and soften the town centre. In addition, opportunities should be explored to extend or enhance existing and new cycling and pedestrian routes to connect the centre to surrounding residential and employment areas, in conjunction with the emerging Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).

6.28. **Continue to recommend the protection of office-based employment uses in the Locks Hill area**. This builds upon the recommendations in the AAP and the 2024 Employment Land Study.

6.29. **Support proposals which advance the development of opportunity sites in Rochford Town Centre**. This includes:

- **The Spar Building:** The redevelopment or enhancement of the two-storey building on the eastern side of Market Square (the Spar building) would be supported provided that it is redeveloped in a style and form that contributes positively to the character of the Conservation Area, with Class E uses adjoining Market Square. Upper floors could be occupied by a range of uses including offices and residential.

- **Former Police Station on South Street**: Opportunities for the reuse or conversion of the Police Station building and its South Street premises are considered important. Proposals focusing on C3, Sui Generis and/or community facilities (particularly for young people) should receive support.

- **The Car Park adjacent to the Freight House**: where opportunities to explore intensification of use is encouraged.

- **North Street/ Weir Pond Road Junction**: which presents opportunities for commercial development.

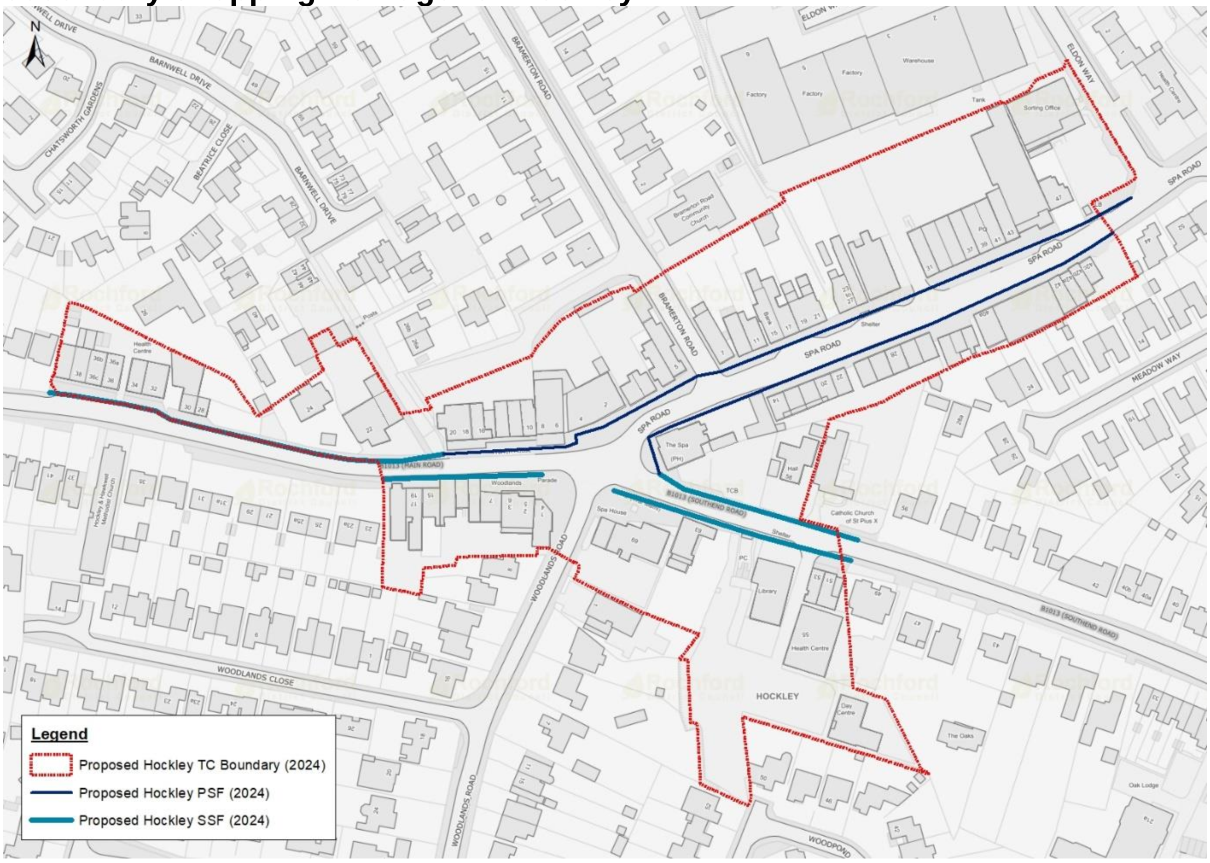
- **West Street/ Union Lane Junction**: where mixed-use redevelopment will be supported.

- **Consideration of other key sites**: Future policies could explore ways in which the redevelopment, reuse or repurposing of parts of the Council estate could support wider town centre regeneration. They could also support proposals which improve the linkages between Roche Close, the Market Square and surrounding areas, making this a welcoming space which supports footfall, interest and commercial/community activity.

Hockley

6.30. **Retain the Hockley town centre boundary, primary shopping frontage and secondary shopping frontage** as outlined in Figure 53.

Figure 53: Proposed town centre boundary, primary shopping frontage and secondary shopping frontage for Hockley.



6.31. Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

6.32. **Continue to recommend new and improved public realm and junction improvements throughout the town centre**. Expanding on the AAP recommendations, this approach highlights the importance of introducing additional safe crossing points and exploring opportunities to enhance the pedestrian friendliness and expand the public realm of the town centre. It also promotes the exploration of opportunities to expand or enhance current pedestrian and cycling pathways, establishing connections between the centre and neighbouring residential and employment areas, in collaboration with the evolving Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).

6.33. **Continue to recommend explore opportunities for new and improved town centre pedestrian routes** this includes the creation and enhance of routes linking Hockley Railway Station, Eldon Way Industrial Estate, Foundry Business Park and Hockley Town Centre. This builds upon the recommendations in the AAP.

6.34. **Support proposals which advance the development of opportunity sites in Hockley Town Centre**. This includes:

- **Eldon Way Opportunity Area**: the general principles for protecting the 'Eldon Way Opportunity Area' ,designated in the AAP, should be retained, recognising the potential in the medium-long term for mixed-use development, improved public realm and enhanced pedestrian linkages to support additional employment, retail and leisure opportunities alongside homes in a brownfield location. Any proposals should be sensitive to the employment-focused nature of much of the area and avoid conflicts between ongoing employment activities and residential amenity. The New Local Plan should consider whether a specific proportion of the site should be retained for employment use.

Future Research Recommendations

6.35. Subject to resource availability, it is recommended that future Town Centre Health Checks:

- Are carried out regularly to monitor the performance of Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley town centre;
- Explore the possibility to include more information, such as commercial rental levels in different centres;
- Incorporate footfall analysis where it is made available by partner organisations.

7. Appendix

APPENDIX A: Existing Retail & Town Centres Local Planning Policies126

APPENDIX A: Existing Retail & Town Centres Local Planning Policies

Table 39 Summary how existing retail and town centre policies in within the Rochford District Core Strategy (adopted 2011), Allocations Plan (adopted 2014), Development Management Plan (adopted 2014), Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan (adopted 2015), Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan (adopted 2015), and Hockley Area Action Plan (2014) comply with national planning policy.

Policy Issues	Existing Local Policy				
	Core Strategy	Development Management	Rayleigh AAP	Rochford AAP	Hockley AAP
Define a network and hierarchy of town centers	Issues & Opportunities; RTC1	Vision			
Promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes	Vision;	DM34	Vision and Strategic Objectives; 1	Vision and Strategic Objectives; 1	Vision and Strategic Objectives; 1; 4; 5; 6; 7
Allow a suitable mix of uses including housing	RTC1	DM32; DM34; DM35	1; 2; 3; 4	1; 2; 3; 4	1; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8

Policy Issues	Existing Local Policy				
	Core Strategy	Development Management	Rayleigh AAP	Rochford AAP	Hockley AAP
Define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, and make clear the range of uses permitted in such locations, as part of a positive strategy	RTC1	DM34;	1; 2; 3; 4	1; 2; 3; 4	1; 7
Retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones	RTC5		1; 5	1; 6	
Allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of development likely to be needed, looking at least ten years ahead	Vision;	DM34	1; 4	1; 5	1; 4; 5; 6
Apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not proposed in an existing centre	RTC2; RTC3				
Allocate edge of centre sites and other appropriate sites for main town centre uses where town centre sites are not available	RTC2; RTC3	DM36			

Policy Issues	Existing Local Policy				
	Core Strategy	Development Management	Rayleigh AAP	Rochford AAP	Hockley AAP
Recognise that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres		DM35		1; 3; 6	1; 4
Provide a positive vision or strategy for town centres	Vision; RTC4; RTC5; RTC6	Vision;	Vision and Strategic Objectives; 1	Vision and Strategic Objectives; 1	Vision and Strategic Objectives; 1
Strategies should be based on evidence of the current state of town centres and take full account of relevant market signals and identify relevant sites, actions and timescales. Strategies should be prepared where a town is in decline to manage this positively to encourage economic activity and achieve an appropriate mix of uses.	Based on evidence at time of plan preparation				
Improvements to the public realm, transport (including parking) and accessibility should be provided	RTC4; RTC5; RTC6		Vision and Strategic Objectives; 1; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8	1; 5	1; 2; 3

Policy Issues	Existing Local Policy				
	Core Strategy	Development Management	Rayleigh AAP	Rochford AAP	Hockley AAP
The strategy should take full account of relevant market signals when planning for town centres and should keep their retail land allocations under regular review. These market signals should be identified and analysed in terms of their impacts on town centres. This information should be used to inform policies that are responsive to changes in the market as well as the changing needs of business.	Implementation, Delivery and Monitoring		Based on evidence at time of plan preparation		
The health of town centres should be assessed against defined indicators.	Implementation, Delivery and Monitoring		Implementation, delivery and monitoring		

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Table 40: Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan Policies

Policy	Key components
Policy 1 – Rayleigh Area Action Plan Framework	New opportunities for retail development or other town centre uses together, supported by or contributing to appropriate town centre environmental improvements, will help to strengthen the town's role as Rochford District's principal town centre. Development within the Rayleigh AAP area should contribute towards the delivery of the spatial framework (see Figure 1) 1. A consolidated and strengthened primary retail core along High Street; 2. Opportunities for new and intensified retail and other mixed-use development as sites become available; 3. The promotion of appropriate proportions and concentrations of uses other than A1 including A2-5, leisure, cultural and community uses, particularly in locations outside the primary retail core, including Bellingham Lane and Eastwood Road; 4. New and improved pedestrian and cycle routes within the AAP area and linking the centre with the railway station and the surrounding area; and 5. New and improved public realm and environmental improvements throughout the centre as identified on the spatial framework. It is expected that significant retail development within Rayleigh centre will contribute financially to these schemes. Note - Involves close work with Essex County Council to agree a movement framework to invest in and improve a series of key junctions, along with a relocation/rationalisation of the existing taxi rank to make a key area of the High Street more pedestrian-friendly. Funding reliant on ECC budget and pooled financial contributions from developers.
Policy 2 – Retail Development in Rayleigh	Rayleigh town centre is Rochford District's principal shopping centre. The Council will support development proposals that retain or strengthen Rayleigh's position in the local retail hierarchy New retail-led development within Rayleigh town centre will be permitted where it would: 1. Maintain the predominance of retail uses in the centre, at concentrations and proportions appropriate to the relevant designated shopping area defined under Policy 3;

Policy	Key components
	2. Contribute positively to the local retail character of the relevant area of the town centre, as identified under Policies 4-8; and 3. Where possible, deliver improved physical linkages along key public routes and between the core High Street and the town's principal car parks.
Policy 3 – Rayleigh's Shopping Frontages	Within the town centre's primary and secondary shopping frontages, proposals for A1 retail uses will be acceptable. A proposed change of use for non-retail (non-A1) purposes will be permitted where it would: 1. Not have a detrimental impact on, or undermine, the predominance of A1 uses within the centre, both within the centre as a whole and within the primary shopping frontage; 2. Not create a cluster of non-A1 uses within the same use class in a locality that undermines the retail character of the centre; 3. Entail the provision of a non-A1 use which is considered to positively contribute to the overall offer and encourage people into the centre. These may take the form of those non-A1 uses set out in criterion 3 of Policy 1, including A2-5, leisure, cultural and community uses. The Council will encourage such uses outside of the primary shopping frontage in particular; and 4. Not have a negative effect on the amenity and character of Rayleigh or have adverse consequences for Rayleigh centre
Policy 4 – Rayleigh's Character Areas	Development will have regard to Rayleigh town centre's identified character areas and the important role that each of these play in helping to make Rayleigh a successful place. Guiding principles for these areas are outlined under Policies 5, 6, 7 and 8. Where these policies contain principles that specify environmental enhancements, development should either incorporate or contribute towards these improvements. There are principles that are important in respect of development in all four of the character areas; development should either incorporate or contribute towards the specified schemes. The principles are: 1. Public realm interventions should include the replacement of poor quality paving, the removal of street clutter, the improvement of the lighting for pedestrian routes, and the planting of native street trees

Policy	Key components
	2. Enhanced cycle parking facilities should be provided at suitable locations throughout the centre; 3. Bus facilities should be upgraded, with improvements including better shelters and increased seating provision; and 4. New and improved pedestrian signage should be introduced for key destinations and attractions, including the rail station, the town centre, the Mount, the Windmill, Holy Trinity Church and the Dutch Cottage.
Policy 5 – Character Area A: Central High Street	Development in the Central High Street area will help to protect and improve Rayleigh's position as the District's principal retail centre. Retail (A1) uses will be supported by a high quality public realm and excellent links to the rest of the town centre and the wider surrounding area. The following principles are important: 1. Development will respond positively to local townscape character, key elements of which include: a. A strong building line at the back edge of pavement; b. Town centre, predominantly A1 retail, uses at ground floor level; c. Prevailing building heights of 3 storeys; and d. Principal points of access to ground and upper floors positioned to address the High Street directly 2. In accordance with Policy 3, shopping frontages should be predominately A1 in use; 3. Development will be acceptable where it would lead to the creation of additional A1 use floorspace which would strengthen the retail function and character of the town centre; 4. Public realm enhancements should be focused on the creation of a new public space at the centre of the High Street and include the potential rationalisation of the existing taxi rank; and 5. Pedestrian links within the AAP area, including those between the central High Street area and the Websters Way car park, and across Rayleigh, including to the rail station, should be strengthened.
Policy 6 – Character Area	Development in the High Street North and Bellingham Lane area will support the retail function of the central High Street

Policy	Key components
B: High Street North & Bellingham Lane	area, primarily through the provision of complementary uses, including leisure, cultural and community facilities – many of which contribute positively to the evening and night time economy. The character of this area is underpinned by a number of important heritage and leisure/cultural assets and civic uses The Council will support development in the High Street North and Bellingham Lane area that would protect and enhance its existing character, with a particular emphasis on its role supporting the central High Street area and the need to respect the setting of its key heritage assets. The following principles are important: 1. Development will respond positively to local townscape character, key elements of which include: a. High quality historic townscape; b. Town centre uses at ground floor level; c. Prevailing building heights of 2 and 3 storeys – with taller prominent landmark buildings; and d. An urban morphology characterised by fine grain development benefitting from rich and varied traditional building detailing and materials. 2. In accordance with Policy 3, shopping frontages should be in a mix of retail (A1) and other appropriate town centre uses, including leisure, cultural, community facilities and uses that contribute to the evening and night time economy; 3. Development will be acceptable where it would lead to the creation of additional floorspace for appropriate town centre uses that support the main retail function of the central High Street area; 4. Development at the rear of existing properties will be acceptable where this would not have an undue negative impact on the operation of units fronting the High Street; 5. Development in the area should, where possible, seek to deliver improvements in the townscape and environmental quality of the Bellingham Lane area – including the opportunities to improve the public space in front of The Mill Arts and Events Centre; and 6. Pedestrian links across Rayleigh, including to the Mount, should be strengthened.
Policy 7 – Character Area	Development in the High Street south and Eastwood Road area will support the retail function of the central High Street area,

Policy	Key components
C: High Street South and Eastwood Road	with an emphasis on the provision of secondary retailing and complementary uses, including service and office uses and community facilities. The area is well served by public parking which supports nearby convenience retailing. The Council will support development in the High Street south and Eastwood Road area that would protect and enhance its existing character, with an emphasis on its role supporting the central High Street area. The following principles are important: 1. Development will respond positively to local townscape character, key elements of which include: a. A more coarse grain of development – more suited to accommodating larger floor-plates; b. Town centre uses at ground floor level; and c. Prevailing building heights of 3 storeys. 2. In accordance with Policy 3, shopping frontages should be in a mix of retail (A1) and other appropriate town centre uses, including leisure and community facilities; 3. Development will be acceptable where it would lead to the creation of additional floorspace for appropriate town centre uses that support the main retail function of the central High Street area. The area is considered the most appropriate location for additional convenience retail floorspace; 4. Pedestrian links within the AAP area, including those between the High Street south and Eastwood Road area and the Castle Road car park, should be strengthened; and 5. Development should not result in an overall loss of public parking in this area which plays a critical role in supporting the vitality and viability of the businesses in the town centre.
Policy 8 – Character Area D: Websters Way	Development in the Websters Way area will support the retail function of the central High Street area, foremost through the provision of car parking and servicing areas. The role of Websters Way itself, which takes service and through traffic away from High Street, will also be protected. The Council will support improvements to Websters Way through development which introduces buildings which directly address this key route whilst not undermining the role that it plays in providing car parking and servicing for the central High Street area. The following principles are important:

Policy	Key components
	1. Development will be acceptable where it would lead to the creation of additional floorspace for appropriate town centre uses that support the main retail function of the central High Street area; 2. Development at the rear of existing properties will be acceptable where this would not have an undue negative impact on the operation of units fronting the High Street, the safety and operation of Websters Way or the levels of town centre car parking; 3. Opportunities to make better use of and deliver environmental improvements to the lanes between Websters Way and High Street will be supported. In particular, the lane alongside The Spread Eagle Pub has the potential to provide flexible space for temporary and pop-up retail stalls and events; 4. Pedestrian links within the AAP area, including those between the central High Street area and the Websters Way car park, and across Rayleigh, including to King George V Playing Fields, should be strengthened; and 5. Development should not result in an overall loss of public parking in this area which plays a critical role in supporting the vitality and viability of the businesses in the town centre.

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).

Table 41: Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan

Policy	Key components
Policy 1 – Rochford Area Action Plan Framework.	Development will respect and, where possible, enhance Rochford's existing local character and strengthen its role serving the retail needs of the local population. This will be managed through a more compact defined town centre, a strengthened primary retail frontage centred on Market Square, an extended secondary shopping frontage and the designated Locks Hill employment site. Public realm enhancements and improved connections will be All new development within the Rochford Town Centre AAP area should contribute towards the delivery of the spatial framework as shown in Figure 3. The key elements of this framework are: 1. The focus of retail uses in the centre, with the highest concentration of A1 uses in the Market Square area, with

Policy	Key components
	an additional 750 sq.m of retail (A1) floorspace to be delivered within the AAP area; 2. The creation of a more vibrant and attractive Market Square, with public realm improvements and the encouragement of additional restaurant and café uses; 3. The protection of office-based employment uses in the Locks Hill area; 4. Opportunities for new mixed-use development as sites become available (see Policies 6 to 9); 5. New and enhanced routes and key junctions within the AAP area and linking the centre with the rail station and the surrounding area; 6. New and improved public realm and environmental improvements throughout the centre; and 7. Any new proposals must also ensure appropriate consideration of above ground heritage assets and below ground archaeological deposits. Note: The proposed highways and public realm enhancements would require a combination of financial contributions from developers and ECC's budget.
Policy 2 – Rochford's Primary Shopping Frontage	Within Rochford's Primary Shopping Frontage ,proposals for A1 retail uses will be acceptable. Proposals for A3 and A4 uses will also be considered acceptable where they would maintain A1 retail uses at 65% of defined primary shopping frontage. New A5 uses are not considered appropriate in the primary shopping frontage Development for non-A1 uses will be permitted where it would: 1. Not have a detrimental impact on, or undermine, the predominance of A1 uses within the centre, both within the centre as a whole and within the primary shopping frontage; 2. Not create a cluster of uses within the same use class in a locality that undermines the character of the centre; and; 3. Entail the provision of a non-A1 use which is considered to positively contribute to the overall offer and encourage people into the centre.
Policy 3 – Rochford's Secondary	Within Rochford's Secondary Shopping Frontages, as defined on the Rochford Town Centre AAP Proposals Map (Figure 8), new development for Class A and D uses and other uses considered appropriate in town centres will be acceptable.

Policy	Key components
Shopping Frontage	Development involving the loss of town centre uses will be permitted where it would: 1. Not have a detrimental impact on, or undermine, the predominance of A1 uses within the centre, both within the centre as a whole and within the primary shopping frontage; 2. Not create a cluster of uses within the same use class in a locality that undermines the character of the centre; and; 3. Entail the provision of a non-A1 use which is considered to positively contribute to the overall offer and encourage people into the centre.
Policy 4 – Locks Hill Employment Site	The Council will support new B1a (office) employment development within the Locks Hill employment site and protect the area from uses that would undermine its role as an employment generator. Alternative uses will be considered having regard to: 1. The number of jobs likely to be generated; 2. The compatibility with and impact on existing B1(a) uses; 3. The impact on the vitality and viability of Rochford town centre; and 4. Wider sustainability issues such as traffic generation considered against travel by sustainable modes. Any new development at the Locks Hill employment site should be of a quality befitting this gateway location, safe and inclusive design which acts as a landmark and responds positively to its local context.
Policy 5 – Rochford's Character Areas	Development will respond positively to Rochford town centre's identified character areas as defined in Figure 9, and the unique roles that each of these play in helping to make Rochford a successful place. Guiding principles for these areas are outlined under Policies 6, 7, 8 and 9. Where these policies contain principles that specify route enhancements or junction improvements, new development should either incorporate or contribute towards these schemes where possible. Principles important in respect of development in all four of the character areas include: 1. Public realm interventions should where possible be incorporated with proposals for new development, including the replacement of poor quality paving, the removal of street clutter, the improvement of lighting for

Policy	Key components
	pedestrian routes, and the planting of appropriate street trees; 2. Enhanced cycle parking facilities should be provided at suitable locations throughout the centre; 3. Bus facilities should be upgraded, with improvements including possible route alterations to enhance the pedestrian experience along West Street, better shelters and increased seating provision; 4. New and improved pedestrian signage, appropriate for a conservation area, should be introduced for key destinations and attractors, including the rail station, the town centre and Market Square, the Council's offices, the hospital and the Locks Hill employment site; and 5. Any new proposals must also ensure appropriate consideration of above ground heritage assets and below ground archaeological deposits.
Policy 6 – Character Area A: Central Area	Development in the central area will support and strengthen the retail function and character of the area. The Council will support environmental and traffic management improvements to the Market Square area which respond positively to the area's heritage assets, give greater priority for pedestrians and help relieve traffic problems in the town centre. The following principles are important: 1. New development will respond positively to local townscape character and protect and enhance the character of the Rochford conservation area. Key elements include: a. Development which provides an active edge of town centre uses around Market Square and along key streets in the area b. A tight knit and organic urban grain with a varied roof line; c. Buildings typically between two and three storeys in height; and d. West Street presenting the public 'front' of buildings with Back Lane providing service access. 2. In accordance with Policy 2, primary shopping frontages should be in predominately retail uses supported by a limited number of restaurants and cafés and public houses/wine bars (A1, A3 and A4). Secondary shopping frontages should be in a mix of retail and other appropriate town centre uses;

Policy	Key components
	3. The redevelopment of the two storey building on the eastern side of Market Square (the Spar building) would be supported provided that it is redeveloped in a style and form that contributes positively to the character of the area with A1, 3 or 4 uses addressing Market Square. Upper floors could be occupied by a range of uses including offices and residential; 4. Public realm enhancements should be focused on the creation of an improved Market Square and include the rationalisation in the size of the taxi rank; and 5. Pedestrian links within the AAP area, including those to Back Lane car park and Roche Close, and across Rochford, including to the rail station and open space on the opposite side of Bradley Way, should be improved.
Policy 7 – Character Area B: Northern/ Eastern Approach	Development in the northern/eastern approach area will help to enhance the approach into Rochford town centre, in particular through redevelopment of underused sites and the creation of new routes from the north into the central area. The Council will support development in the northern/eastern approach area that would protect and enhance its existing character. The following principles are important: 1. New development will respond positively to local townscape character and protect and enhance the character of the Rochford conservation area. Key elements include: a. The mixed housing character of the area, with a predominance of traditional, weather-boarded housing along North Street and Weir Pond Road and more substantial, typically Victorian properties, along the East Street approach; b. Building heights being typically two storeys with some higher density modern housing types; and c. A varied building line that adds character and variety to the street but that becomes stronger along the back edge of the pavement as one approaches the town centre. 2. New development will be acceptable on sites as they become available for development where they would lead to the creation of more residential units. Proposals for the opportunity site along North Street (at the junction with Weir Pond Road) identified in Figure 3 would be supported where a predominance of A1 uses is proposed, and where proposals would deliver, or

Policy	Key components
	contribute towards the delivery of, in the region of 750sq.m of retail floorspace at the opportunity site; 3. Pedestrian links within the AAP area, including those to the central area and Market Square, should be strengthened. If possible, a new pedestrian link from Pollards Close to Roche Close should be created; and 4. Improvements at the junction of Weir Pond Road and East Street will be supported.
Policy 8 – Character Area C: Southern Approach	Development in the southern approach area enhance this important and prominent approach into Rochford town centre and support the existing office uses in the Locks Hill employment site. The Council will support development in the southern approach area that would protect and enhance its existing character. The following principles are important: 1. New development will respond positively to local townscape character and protect and enhance the character of the Rochford conservation area. Key elements include: a. The high quality historic townscape along South Street, characterised by brick built two storey buildings with clay tiled roofs with varied building lines and roof forms which adds interest and character to the street; and b. The landscape setting of Bradley Way which benefits from some prominent trees along its route, particularly at its southern end. 2. New development will be acceptable where it would lead to the creation of more residential units or community facilities, in particular those catering for young people, except at the Locks Hill employment site, where only B1a uses will be acceptable, in accordance with Policy 4; 3. The Police Station building and site on South Street represents an important opportunity for reuse or conversion, which would be supported if proposals are for C3 or Sui Generis uses providing community facilities, particularly those catering for young people; 4. Pedestrian links within the AAP area, including those to the central area and Market Square, and across Rochford, including to the open space on the opposite side of Bradley Way, should be strengthened; and 5. Improvements at the junction of Bradley Way, South Street and Southend Road will be supported. This location acts as a gateway to the town from the south but

Policy	Key components
	currently lacks definition and, combined with a reworking of the junction, there may be an opportunity for a new landmark development to strengthen this gateway.

Table 42: Hockley Area Action Plan Policies

Policy	Key components
Policy 1 – Hockley Area Action Plan Framework	Hockley will have an enhanced public realm and its residents will have improved access to nearby homes, shops, jobs, leisure facilities and other services. Development will take place in a manner that makes efficient use of previously developed land and that will respect the settlement's character. The Eldon Way Opportunity Site will deliver a mixed-use development, which will include homes, shops, leisure facilities, offices, car parking and new public spaces. Figure 5 provides a general overview of the framework for development in Hockley. It sets out the individual elements of the AAP and provides a spatial perspective on what kind of development the Council would like to see coming forward. In particular Figure 5 shows the extent to which the Council wishes to integrate the Eldon Way Opportunity Site into the wider centre of Hockley. a. All new development within the Hockley AAP area should contribute towards the delivery of the spatial framework. The key elements of this framework are: b. New and improved public spaces throughout the centre, in accordance with Policy 2, including a public open space associated with the redevelopment of the Eldon Way Opportunity Site and improvements to Spa Road miniroundabout. c. New and enhanced routes linking the centre with the rail station and the surrounding area. These routes are shown in Figure 5. They show how the Council wishes to see the Eldon Way Opportunity Site become more accessible and integrated into the restof Hockley centre. d. Enhanced car parking that will serve the centre as a whole. e. Opportunities for new housing as part of the Eldon Way Opportunity Site redevelopment. f. The focus of retail uses in the centre, with an opportunity for a new retail development within the Eldon Way Opportunity Site, in accordance with Policy 6. The

Policy	Key components
	appropriate locations for these uses are shown in Figure 5. g. The protection of some existing employment and leisure uses within the Eldon Way Opportunity Site and on the Foundry Business Park.
Policy 2 – Delivering Environmental Improvements	The Council will seek to deliver environmental improvements to Hockley centre and the wider AAP area. All development proposals should either incorporate or contribute towards the schemes identified in the AAP, which are: a. A new public space as part of the mixed-use redevelopment of the Eldon Way Opportunity Site, which should be fully integrated with Spa Road and any new retail floorspace delivered as part of this scheme. b. Raised entry treatments on the Woodlands Road arm of the Spa Road mini-roundabout and the side roads along Spa Road. c. New and improved pedestrian signage for key destinations and attractors, including the rail station, the centre's primary shopping frontage, the library, the health centre and Hockley Woods. d. Other physical interventions, including the replacement of poor quality paving, the removal of street clutter, the improvement of the lighting for pedestrian routes, and the planting of native street trees.
Policy 3 – Promoting Better Movement	The Council will seek to deliver transport improvements that promote improved movement through and within the AAP area and enhanced linkages with other parts of Hockley and its surrounds. All development proposals should either incorporate or contribute towards the schemes identified in the AAP, which are: a. Strengthening pedestrian links within the AAP area, particularly between the rail station and the Eldon Way Opportunity Site; the rail station and the centre; and Spa Road and the Eldon Way Opportunity Site. b. Creating new and enhancing existing pedestrian links across Hockley, including the existing route linking Spa Road to the surrounding countryside, which runs adjacent to Eldon Way; and potential routes from the centre to Hockley Woods. c. Improving the profile and accessibility of Hockley train station through enhancements to make the rail station entrance more legible.

Policy	Key components
	d. The provision of enhanced cycle parking facilities at the rail station and suitable locations throughout the centre and the Eldon Way Opportunity Site. e. Improvements to bus facilities, including improved shelters and seating provision at key locations, such as the rail station and at stops in the centre; and real-time bus information. f. Consolidated car parking located on the Eldon Way Opportunity Site, which should serve the centre; new mixed-use development, including residential, retail, leisure and office uses; and the rail station. g. Increasing the capacity of the Spa Road mini-roundabout junction, without detriment to existing pedestrian amenity or local character.
Policy 4 – Increasing the Availability of Housing	The Council will support development proposals for additional homes on previously developed land within the AAP area. Residential (C3) development will be permitted within the Eldon Way Opportunity Site where it would: a. Not lead to the development of more than 50% of the total area of the Eldon Way Opportunity Site for new dwellings (see Figure 5). b. Achieve a density of approximately 50 dwellings per hectare. c. Contribute positively towards the redevelopment of the Eldon Way Opportunity Site for a mix of uses, including residential, retail, leisure and office.
Policy 5 – Protecting Jobs	The Council will support the development of office (B1a) uses within the Eldon Way Opportunity Site, provided that such uses contribute positively towards its redevelopment for a mix of uses, including residential, retail, leisure and office.
Policy 6 – Improving Retail Choice for Local People	The Council will support development proposals that seek to improve Hockley's retail offer and strengthen the role of its centre as a shopping destination for local residents. New retail (A1) development within the Eldon Way Opportunity Site (see Figure 5) will be permitted where it would: a. Provide a range of unit sizes, including smaller units. b. Not exceed a maximum overall additional retail capacity for the centre of 3,000 sq m (gross). c. Fully integrate with Spa Road, and allow for direct pedestrian links through the site to the redeveloped Eldon

Policy	Key components
	Way Opportunity Site, rail station and other areas of Hockley. d. Contribute positively towards the redevelopment of the Eldon Way Opportunity Site for a mix of uses, including residential, retail, leisure and office.
Policy 7 – Ensuring a Healthy Centre	The Council will encourage development within Hockley centre that supports its vitality and viability. Within the centre's primary and secondary shopping frontages, as defined on the Hockley APP Proposals Map, a proposed change of use for nonretail (non-A1) purposes will be permitted where it would: a. Not have a detrimental impact on, or undermine, the predominance of A1 uses, both within the centre as a whole and within the primary shopping frontage. b. not create a cluster of similar non-A1 uses of the same use class within a locality that undermines the retail character of the centre. c. entail the provision of a non-A1 use which is considered to positively contribute to the overall offer and encourage people into the centre.
Policy 8 – Encouraging Leisure Opportunities	The Council will support the location of leisure (D2) uses within the Eldon Way Opportunity Site (see Figure 5), provided that such uses contribute positively towards its redevelopment for a mix of uses, including residential, retail, leisure and office.

Source: Rochford District Council (2024).