
CASTLE POINT - LOCAL PLAN ISSUES REPORT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks Members' views on a Local Plan issues report prepared by Castle Point Borough Council.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 A Local Plan issues report is the first stage of work towards preparing a new Local Plan. Castle Point is seeking this Authority's views on the issues that will influence their next Local Plan. Appendix One attached to this report lists the questions on which the Borough Council is seeking views.
- 2.2 Many of these questions require complex and very detailed answers, but this report seeks to make some positive suggestions about issues that should be considered.

3 RESPONSE TO ISSUES

Issue 1 - The Environment

- 3.1 Q.(i) and (ii) The Local Plan must play a key role in influencing the quality of the environment in the District. Policies relating to the Green Belt and protection of sensitive areas are essential. In addition, the opportunity should not be lost to link planning consents with landscape improvement where applicable. The development of brown field sites can have a positive benefit and contribute at the same time to housing and business requirements. Detailed policies to deal with areas of flood threat are required.
- 3.2 Q.(iii) - The Local Plan should include policies designed to prevent development of valuable areas of open space and areas of important wildlife habitat. It may be more practicable to tie criteria based policies and the requirement for environmental appraisal to applications for development, rather than to produce a District-wide survey of valuable wildlife habitats which will inevitably be out of date before the plan is adopted.
- 3.3 Q.(iv) A range of policies will be required to deal with conservation issues : protection of listed buildings, enhancement of conservation, change of use of listed buildings and archaeology. Policies dealing with valuable hedgerows and woodlands might also be justifiably contemplated.

Issue 2 - Housing

- 3.4 Q.(i) - The Structure Plan allocation for the period to 20/1, notwithstanding the fact that this level of provision (2400 units) will not meet locally generated demand for housing.
- 3.5 Q. (ii) - Subject to a housing needs study, the provision of affordable housing is likely to be a key requirement.
- 3.6 Q.(iii) - Policies allocating specific sites for development will need to ensure that a mix of housing types and tenures are provided to reflect the creation of a balanced community. Detailed development briefs should also be considered.
- 3.7 Q.(iv) - No, a balanced approach is required.

Issue 3 - The Economy

- 3.8 Q.(i) - The key is to ensure that a detailed brief for each employment site is prepared that takes account of the employment requirements in the Borough. An economic audit of the District will be required to enable policies and development briefs to be properly targeted. In addition, the Borough needs to be clear about transport infrastructure improvements that are required, so that prospective developers' contributions can be accurately assessed.
- 3.9 Q.(ii) - Linking specific allocations to an understanding of the employment requirements in the Borough. The Local Plan must also be prepared in parallel with an economic strategy for the Borough so that land use planning issues can be tied into a broader strategy for economic development.
- 3.10 Q.(v) - A balanced approach is required to these and other issues.

Issue 4 - Shopping

- 3.11 Q.(ii) - Rochford Council would be very concerned about the implications arising from employment land at Rayleigh Weir being converted for shopping purposes. Town Centres such as Rayleigh should be the first priority for new or enhanced shopping facilities and further shopping development at Rayleigh Weir could have a significant impact on Rayleigh Town Centre.

Issue 5 - Transport

- 3.12 Q.(i) - There is a limit to what a land use plan can achieve. However, there is no doubt that support should be forthcoming for improved road

infrastructure, particularly an extension of the new A130 onto Canvey Island. The Borough Council will need to assess the implications of the Local Transport Plan and Thames Gateway South Essex to identify specific issues that should justifiably be addressed in the plan.

Issue 8 - Green Belt

- 3.13 Q.(i) - Whilst a balance needs to be struck between different forms of development, protection of the Green Belt must continue as a policy priority. If some release of Green Belt land is required in the future to accommodate new development, then this should be assessed against a comprehensive review of the existing boundary and the creation of a site assessment framework. The assessment framework will need to consider Green Belt principles, sustainability, education, infrastructure and so on.

4 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That, subject to comments from Members, this report forms the basis for a response to the Castle Point Borough Council Local Plan Issues Paper. (HPS)

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Background Papers:

Castle Point Borough Council Local Plan Issues Paper

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APPENDIX 1***The Issues***

The identified themes above are expressed in land use terms through the principal demands placed on land. Within Castle Point there is a need to provide housing, employment and shopping opportunities as well as an appropriate transport system and adequate recreational and community facilities and highway infrastructure, to meet the needs of local residents. These needs must be met in a manner that accords with the themes of sustainability, integration, urban renaissance and economic regeneration.

In other words, the development of the Borough over the next ten years should:

- (i) provide an opportunity for us to meet all of our current needs without prejudicing the ability of our grandchildren to meet all of their needs;
- (ii) look at the whole picture and consider the wider implications of any action taken, for the rest of the Borough and beyond; and
- (iii) make Castle Point a better place in which to live, work and play.

1 Issue 1 - The Environment

Sustainability and Urban Renaissance find their strongest expression in the protection of the environment.

Castle Point contains a rich diversity of both built and natural environment. However, in the past it has suffered as a result of development pressure, under-investment and congestion. Unless carefully controlled, future competing pressures for housing, employment and other forms of development will have the potential to reduce the quality of the environment through over-development and the reduction of open space and by adversely affecting important historical and wildlife features.

Questions:

- (i) How can the Local Plan create and maintain a high quality of environment whilst still meeting the identified needs of local residents and businesses?
- (ii) What policies and proposals could be incorporated into the Local Plan to achieve improvements in the urban and natural environment?
- (iii) How should the Local Plan seek to protect areas of open space and important wildlife habitats?
- (iv) What measures should be included in the Local Plan to preserve the important historical features of the Borough?

Issue 2– Housing

Housing is provided in a variety of forms and consideration of ways in which to meet the accommodation needs of the residents of the Borough should not be restricted to consideration of the traditional two storey, brick dwelling. Other forms of accommodation are available and can make a significant contribution towards meeting the needs of the Borough.

Essex County Council has forecast that between 1996 and 2011 the existing residents of Castle Point will generate a need for an additional 4,700 dwellings in the Borough. However, because of the limited amount of land available for residential development, limited local employment opportunities and the high levels of commuting from the Borough, the provision of such a level of housing would be environmentally unsustainable. The joint Structure Plan Authority has therefore imposed a requirement of an additional 2,400 dwellings only on the Local Authority for the period 1996 – 2011. As a result the Borough will not be able to meet all of its locally generated needs. This is likely to have the following implications:

- (i) The population of Castle Point will decrease. In 1991, the census recorded a population level in Castle Point of 84,560. The Office of National Statistics has forecast that by 2004, resident population levels will fall to approximately 82,200. By 2011, the population levels are expected to fall to about 80,000. This fall is primarily due to declining household size which maintains the demand for increasing numbers of houses, whilst population continues to fall, and by people leaving the Borough to find housing elsewhere. The loss of population has implications for the availability of services in the Borough.
- (ii) House and residential land prices are expected to rise as a result of the limited number of dwellings provided and the increased scarcity of land allocated for residential purposes. This is likely to make it more difficult for some sectors of the population, particularly the young and those on low incomes, to enter the housing market. It is also likely to lead to pressure for increased densities of residential development in the Borough.
- (iii) As younger people have moved out of the Borough, so the population has aged. This has implications for the character and vitality of the area and the achievement of urban renaissance and economic regeneration. It is also likely to place new demands on housing provision in the future. An older, and possibly less active, population may require the provision of smaller and/or specialist needs housing such as flats or dwellings constructed to mobility and wheelchair standards. There may also be an increased demand for sheltered and nursing home accommodation. The increasing age of the population will have increasing implications for the type of services provided.

Questions:

- (i) What housing needs should the Local Plan seek to address?
- (ii) Are there any special housing needs which the Local Plan should seek to address?
- (iii) How can the Local Plan positively encourage the provision of housing to meet the needs of all sections of the community?
- (iv) Should the satisfaction of housing needs within the Borough take precedence over other policy objectives such as the need to improve shopping facilities, provide employment opportunities or protect the Green Belt?

Issue 3 - The Economy

The theme of economic regeneration is particularly important to the Borough. At national and sub-regional level the poor economic health and economic development opportunities of this part of the County have been recognised and as a result the urban areas of Castle Point have been identified as a Priority Area for Economic Regeneration in the adopted Structure Plan. The Borough has also recently been included within the newly extended Thames Gateway. (See Map on Page 10). It is the objective of the Thames Gateway Project and the Structure Plan to create a strong and economically diverse sub-region with a comprehensive transport system, a skilled workforce and a quality environment. This needs to be reflected in the Local Plan.

Economic activity

At the present time the economy of Castle Point is significantly influenced by its proximity to London, Southend, Basildon and Chelmsford. As a result of this proximity, and the limited availability of local jobs, approximately 75% of the economically active commute out of the Borough every day.¹

This has implications for the Borough in terms of traffic congestion and the loss of local spending which has in turn a direct impact on the availability of local services, entertainment and shopping facilities.

In addition to high levels of commuting, the Borough has higher than average levels of unemployment.² Of those unemployed, 56% reside on Canvey Island, with particular concentrations in Winter Gardens, North and Central wards. Lesser concentrations of unemployment are found on the mainland in Appleton, St. George and St. Mary wards.

The allocation of land

It is an objective of the Structure Plan to try and redress the imbalance between resident workers and employment opportunities. To achieve this 21 hectares of land was allocated for employment purposes on land to the south

¹ Essex Skills Audit and Household Survey, 2000. Castle Point Data Report. BMG 2000.

² In March 2001 local unemployment levels of 3.2% were recorded, compared to the national average of 3.4%. Source: Nomis.

of Northwick Road, Canvey Island in the adopted Local Plan. In addition a further 10 hectares was allocated to accommodate long term employment needs to the south of the Charfleets Industrial estate. Access to this site relies on the extension of Roscommon Way.

Despite these allocations, and the locally high levels of unemployment, interest in the use of land on Canvey Island for employment purposes has been limited and commuting levels remain high.

The pattern of employment provision

In the past local employment opportunities have tended to be found in the construction and manufacturing industries. However, in the future these industries are expected to decline and distribution, hotels and catering, insurance and business services are forecast to show the greatest employment growth. Working from home is also expected to become more important. The resultant change in the pattern of employment type will have implications for land use, skills availability, travel patterns and the provision of services.

Questions:

- (i) How should the objective of creating a strong and economically diverse sub-region with a comprehensive transport system, skilled workforce and quality environment be accommodated in the Local Plan?
- (ii) How can the Local Plan encourage the provision of greater employment opportunities in the Borough?
- (iii) Where should the Local Plan seek to meet the employment needs of the Borough?
- (iv) How can the Local Plan attempt to accommodate the changing pattern of employment?
- (v) Should the desire to provide employment opportunities within the Borough take precedence over other policy objectives such as the need to improve shopping facilities, provide housing or protect the Green Belt?

2 Issue 4 - Shopping

Vibrant and attractive shopping areas, which meet the needs of residents, visitors and businesses, are a key element of Urban Renaissance. The Government encourages the concentration of shopping and similar activities in identified centres in order to provide focal points for this type of activity, to make the best use of available urban resources and to reduce the level of traffic movement associated with shopping trips.

Castle Point has major shopping areas at Canvey, Hadleigh, South Benfleet, Tarpots and at Rayleigh Weir. A large number of smaller shopping parades, district centres and individual shops also exist, each of which has the potential

to be a significant element in the creation and maintenance of a high quality of life.

There are indications, however, that some centres and parades are suffering from a lack of investment in retail activity as shopping habits change and as a consequence are beginning to lose their diversity and attractiveness. This has implications not only for the provision of local shopping facilities as retailers close or relocate to more vibrant areas, but also implications for traffic movement and congestion, as people may be forced to travel further, or even beyond the Borough boundaries to satisfy their shopping needs.

Questions:

- (i) What measures can be incorporated into the Local Plan to maintain and improve local shopping facilities?
- (ii) What benefits would arise from the reallocation of land currently allocated for employment purposes at Rayleigh Weir to land allocated for shopping purposes?
- (iii) Should the desire to improve shopping facilities within the Borough take precedence over other policy objectives such as the need to provide employment opportunities or housing, or the protection of the Green Belt?

Issue 5 - Transport

Historically, a lack of recognition of the traffic and transport implications of development has resulted in Castle Point suffering from a high volume of through traffic on the A13 and the A127, particularly during peak hours, limited accessibility to Canvey Island and a poor public transport service. This has led to congestion, pollution and public transport delays throughout the Borough. These features are detrimental to the achievement of the objectives of Urban Renaissance, Economic Regeneration and Sustainability.

Congestion is believed to be a significant factor in deterring investment in the Borough, thus perpetuating the need to commute to jobs in other areas. Congestion has also been responsible, in part, for the poor quality of public transport in the Borough. This can limit accessibility to local employment opportunities, particularly for those who do not have access to a car. Unfortunately, the past poor performance of the public transport system has deterred many from using it resulting in increased numbers of private vehicles and further congestion.

The Government is encouraging Local Authorities to take a more holistic approach towards development that takes account of transport implications and to introduce measures that will encourage greater use of public transport and thus reduce congestion. The suggested measures include limiting the availability of both public and private car parking, encouraging higher densities of development along major transport routes and encouraging mixed

forms of development which bring homes and job opportunities into closer proximity.

Questions:

- (i) What measures should the Local Plan adopt in seeking to reduce the levels of congestion?
- (ii) Should the desire to improve transport within the Borough take precedence over other policy objectives such as the need to provide and maintain a healthy and attractive urban area and protect the amenity of local residents and business people?

Issue 6 – Leisure, Sport and Recreation

In recent years there has been growing recognition of the importance of recreation in the achievement of a healthy community and a satisfactory quality of life. Rising expectations are placing increasing demands on the quantity and quality of recreational facilities available and there is a need to ensure that appropriate leisure and recreation facilities are maintained. Where possible other identified needs should be met.

Castle Point currently offers a wide range of recreational facilities, both formally, in halls, sports centres, leisure centres and independent leisure facilities such as the cinema and local specialist sports Clubs, and informally in the open areas, parks, playing fields and beaches.

Within Castle Point a significant opportunity for leisure and recreation exists within the area allocated in the adopted Local Plan as the Seafront Entertainment Area on Canvey Island. Whilst there has been considerable investment to develop the area as a focus for leisure activities, a large area of the site remains undeveloped. In the interests of the maintenance of a satisfactory environment, it is important to determine an appropriate use for this site.

Canvey Island is host to a thriving League Football team. The home ground is located within a densely developed residential area at the eastern end of the Island. The location of the ground creates problems of congestion and disturbance to nearby residents during the football season and particularly on match days. Consideration should be given to the possibility of persuading the Directors of the Football Club to relocate to a less environmentally sensitive location.

Recreation is also becoming an important feature of shopping areas. Not only are some forms of shopping now recognised as leisure activities, but the opportunities provided by town centres for other forms of leisure activity such as eating out, socialising, public entertainment and art appreciation are also recognised. All of these activities can be vital to town centre revitalisation and Urban Renaissance.

Questions:

- (i) What measures should the Local Plan adopt in seeking to ensure that appropriate leisure and recreation facilities are maintained?
- (ii) What measures should the Local Plan introduce to encourage greater use of the town centres for recreation and leisure purposes?
- (iii) What measures should the Local Plan introduce to encourage greater investment in the Seafront Entertainment Area?
- (iv) How could the Local Plan seek to encourage the relocation of the Canvey Island Football Club to a less environmentally sensitive location?
- (v) What leisure and recreational needs are not being met within the Borough and what measures can be introduced into the Local Plan to achieve their provision?
- (vi) Should the desire to improve recreation and leisure facilities within the Borough take precedence over other policy objectives such as the need to provide employment opportunities, housing or the protection of the Green Belt?

Issue 7 - Community Facilities

Community facilities include all healthcare, social, education, religious, emergency service, community safety, highway, drainage and waste facilities and other support services, which are essential to the well being of the residents of Castle Point. The provision of such facilities will often rely on the changing plans and objectives of other organisations and the Local Plan will need to ensure that its policies allow for the changing requirements of these services to be met by ensuring that identified land requirements are accommodated.

Questions:

- (i) What measures can be introduced into the local Plan to ensure that the well-being of the residents of Castle Point is improved?
- (ii) Are there any particular needs that the Local Planning Authority should try to meet through the provisions of the Local Plan?
- (iii) Should the desire to improve community facilities within the Borough take precedence over other policy objectives such as the need to provide employment opportunities, housing or the protection of the Green Belt?

Issue 8 - Green Belt

The Green Belt was originally introduced to contain the outward sprawl of London. In more recent years, the rapid development of settlements in south east Essex has led to the extension of the Green Belt so that development within south east Essex could also be contained, thus avoiding the area becoming a single urban mass.

The Green Belt has five purposes:-

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas
- to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
- to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Whilst the primary purpose of the Green Belt is strategic, within Castle Point it also has an important role to play in providing a recreational asset. Land use within the Green Belt is affected by the limited agricultural value of the land which has resulted in a local decline in the farming industry and the growth of demands for the use of the land as "leisure plots" and for "horsiculture" with attendant demands for stables, caravans and other associated structures.

The proximity of the Borough to London with its relatively good rail links also places the land under pressure from developers. As a result the Green Belt in Castle Point is under constant pressure for development.

The protection of the Green Belt from development, in order to maintain its strategic and recreational roles, has become one of the most well supported planning policies, both nationally and locally.

The Green Belt, however, is not sacrosanct. Some forms of development may be permitted within it and not all of it may be required to meet the stated strategic functions.

Government advice in respect of sustainable development requires the Planning Authority to adopt a "sequential approach" when seeking to identify sites for development. This means that the Authority must first look at sites within the urban area, then on the edge of the urban area, before looking at sites beyond the urban envelope.

The Planning Authority will adopt this practice when looking for sites for development and will seek to protect the Green Belt as far as possible. However, it is possible that not all of the Borough's needs will be able to be accommodated within the urban area. Some releases from the Green Belt may therefore be necessary to meet the needs of the Borough.

Questions:

- (i) Should the protection of the Green Belt take precedence over other policy objectives such as the need to provide employment opportunities, housing or recreational or community facilities?
- (ii) How can the Green Belt contribute towards meeting the needs of the Borough?