

ESSEX AND SOUTHEND REPLACEMENT STRUCTURE PLAN REVIEW - CONSULATION ON OPTIONS

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides details of an options consultation document on a replacement for the Essex and Southend Structure Plan, looking ahead to 2021.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The current Structure Plan has an end date of 2011 and the intention of this consultation document is to look ahead to 2021 and to consider the longer-term needs for homes and jobs.
- 2.2 The consultation document has been published with a detailed technical report and a sustainability appraisal. The technical report examines four possible future growth scenarios in some detail and the spatial patterns of development that would result.

3 FUTURE OF THE STRUCTURE PLAN

- 3.1 The one fundamental aspect on which the consultation document makes no comment is its relationship to Regional Planning Guidance and the provisions of the emerging Planning & Compulsory Purchase Bill. The document assumes a timetable that would see a draft Plan published in July/August 2003, an examination in public in mid-2004, with final adoption in 2005.
- 3.2 The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Bill intends to abolish Structure Plans completely (Local Plans will be replaced with Local Development Documents - LDD's). There is then a question mark over the justification/value in significant resources being directed towards the preparation of a further Structure Plan, particularly over the long-term to 2021.
- 3.3 Looking at the ambitious timetable proposed by the County Council and Southend, it is possible that a final Structure Plan can be prepared under the emerging regulations. However, the LDD's will require to be in general conformity with Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS), the replacement for Regional Planning Guidance and not with any 'saved' Structure Plan. Therefore, there are important questions to ask about the use of resources to prepare a new plan.

- 3.4 At this stage, it is suggested that it would be appropriate to request the Joint Structure Plan Authorities (JPS) for a view on these matters.
- 3.5 On a more positive note, given that the new RSS will be the key document in respect of development in the future, one option would be for the County and Southend to make use of their strategic planning resource to ensure the best outcomes for Essex.

4 CONTEXT - REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE

- 4.1 An option on new Regional Planning Guidance was published by the East of England Local Government Conference in September 2002. (Min. 569/02). The timetable for the preparation of the new Guidance envisaged a submission to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in mid-2003.
- 4.2 It is understood that this ambitious timetable is unlikely to be achieved, particularly given a request from Government that details of housing figures to district level should be included in the document. As soon as further information is available on this matter, it will be brought to Members' attention.

5 STRUCTURE PLAN OPTIONS

- 5.1 The options consultation paper proposes four spatial scenarios for Essex based on population and economic growth.

Growth Future 1 : Locally-based growth

- 5.2 This scenario assumes population and economic growth to be slightly less than current rates. New housing, economic development and transport improvements are restrained and there is a strong emphasis on environmental protection.
- 5.3 Two possible spatial patterns are suggested for Growth Future 1:
- **Spatial Pattern 1A** - This distributes growth proportionately between the sub-regional centres located within the four sub-regions of South Essex/Thames Gateway, Haven Gateway, M11/WAGN (West Anglia Great Northern) corridor, and the A12/GE (Great Eastern) corridor. This aims to support the continued development of the Plan Area in conditions of relatively low growth for the Plan Area overall.
 - **Spatial Pattern 1B** - This maintains the pattern in 1A above, but gives much more emphasis to economic regeneration at Braintree, Harlow, Clacton, Walton and Harwich. However, the growth in South Essex/Thames Gateway South is the same for 1A above.

- 5.4 In terms of the provision of new homes, extra households and extra jobs, the indicative figures provided for Rochford over the 2001-2021 period are:

1A and 1B (same figures for both)

Settlement	New Homes	Extra Households	Extra Jobs
Rayleigh	1,000	1,000	600
HAR Arc	1,500	1,500	900
Other Areas	100	100	100
TOTALS	2,600	2,600	1,600

Note: HAR refers to the Hockley, Ashingdon, and Rochford Arc of settlements

Growth Future 2: Regional Planning Growth Rates

- 5.5 This scenario assumes that the economic performance of Essex and Southend is slightly better than that achieved recently. The housebuilding rate would be above the recent rate. There is some relaxation of current restraint policies in order to accommodate the scale of growth.
- 5.6 Again, two different spatial patterns are suggested:
- **Spatial Pattern 2A** - This distributes growth proportionately between the sub-regional clusters located within the four sub-regions of South Essex/Thames Gateway, Haven Gateway, M11/WAGN corridor, and the A12/GE corridor. Most part of the Plan Area receive higher growth as part of the spatial distribution, to reflect the higher scale of growth assumed under Growth Future 2 for the entire Plan Area. In particular, the distribution includes further significant growth in South Essex/Thames Gateway, A12/GE corridor, and Haven Gateway.
 - **Spatial Pattern 2B** - This switches the spatial distribution of growth internally within the Plan Area. Compared to Spatial Pattern 2A, it reduces the scale of growth in South Essex/Thames Gateway, A12/GE corridor, and Haven Gateway. Correspondingly, the amount of growth is increased in the arc of settlements extending from the M11/WAGN corridor across to Braintree. This recognises that the London-Stansted-Cambridge sub-region is a potential growth area in RPG9 and that the East-West axis/A120 route is a developing sub-region. However, the growth pressures are not considered to be strong enough in Growth Future 2 to support substantial development along the A120 axis.

- 5.7 The possible implications for homes, households and jobs are shown in the tables below:

2A

Settlement	New Homes	Extra Households	Extra Jobs
Rayleigh	2,000	2,000	900
HAR Arc	3,000	3,000	1,400
Other Areas	100	100	0
TOTALS	5,100	5,100	2,400

2B

Settlement	New Homes	Extra Households	Extra Jobs
Rayleigh	1,200	1,200	800
HAR Arc	2,200	2,200	1,500
Other Areas	100	100	100
TOTALS	3,500	3,500	2,400

- 5.8 The supporting technical document discusses the sub-regional clusters and under a heading of Southend states, "The surrounding settlements in Castle Point, Rayleigh, Hockley, Hawkwell, Ashingdon and Rochford would be considered as 'satellites' for accommodating further urban growth related to Southend".
- 5.9 In considering strategic improvements to the existing transport network, that might be required under this scenario the technical document states, "Satellite' growth in the arc of settlements in Rochford District might provide the basis for an improved western approach to Southend as well as generally supporting the Southend cluster of growth".

Growth Future 3 : Regional Regeneration and Growth Areas

- 5.10 This scenario assumes that South Essex and the M11/West Anglia Great Northern corridors will form two new 'Regional Growth Areas'. Building rates will be much higher and significant numbers of people will move into the Plan area to live. The scale of growth will inevitably involve major development on the edge of existing Towns.
- 5.11 Two different spatial patterns are again suggested:
- **Spatial Pattern 3A** - This distributes growth proportionately between the sub-regional centres located within the four sub-regions of South Essex/Thames Gateway, Haven Gateway, M11/WAGN corridor, and the A12/GE corridor. Major growth is

suggested in South Essex, at Harlow (up to 18%), and within Haven Gateway.

- **Spatial Pattern 3B** - This maintains the pattern in 3A above, but gives much more emphasis to growth in the Harlow, Stansted, Braintree and Colchester "arc" of settlements. There is major expansion at Harlow (up to 31%), in the Stansted area, at Braintree and Colchester. However, growth in South Essex/Thames Gateway, Maldon, and parts of Tending district has been correspondingly reduced.

5.12 The possible homes, households and jobs implications for Rochford are shown in the tables below:

3A

Settlement	New Homes	Extra Households	Extra Jobs
Rayleigh	5,000	4,900	1,400
HAR Arc	10,000	9,800	2,800
Other Areas	100	100	0
TOTALS	15,100	14,800	4,300

3B

Settlement	New Homes	Extra Households	Extra Jobs
Rayleigh	3,000	3,000	2,200
HAR Arc	3,000	3,000	2,200
Other Areas	100	100	100
TOTALS	6,100	6,100	4,500

5.13 This is a high growth scenario, and the technical document accepts that at this level of development South Essex would be approaching its total capacity in policy, environmental and physical terms. The technical documents then states, "If the sub-region ultimately has capacity limits, then growth might have to be accommodated in nearby growth points".

5.14 The document continues, "There are two areas that might have strategic potential...the arc of settlements located in Rochford district comprising Rayleigh, Hockley, Hawkwell, Ashingdon and Rochford. These are located on a passenger transport spine namely the Great Eastern rail line. It might be possible to use the further urban growth as a means to restructure this dormitory area to provide for an improved urban structure providing for a much better range of shopping, education, cultural, leisure and community facilities. A new

route to provide better access to these areas and into Southend might be considered as part of the growth package...”.

Growth Future 4: Major Economic and Infrastructure Growth

- 5.15 The fourth Growth Future is not clearly articulated in the consultation document, but assumes that major infrastructure projects (Airport development, Lower Thames Crossing, etc.) will all take place by 2021.
- 5.16 It is clear that a series of large projects would have a major impact on the economy of Essex and Southend and growth rates for new homes and jobs are assumed to be 2.5 times the growth rate during the 1990's. No spatial patterns are proposed, but the options paper does warn that there is likely to be a significant impact on the countryside, the Green Belt and nationally and internationally protected areas.

6 DISCUSSION

- 6.1 The four Growth Futures outlined in the consultation document have some close parallels to the four spatial scenarios outlined in the recent consultation on Regional Planning Guidance.
- 6.2 There is no doubt that Futures 2, 3 and 4 would have a very significant impact on South Essex in terms of new jobs and the homes to accommodate the increased population. The extracts from the technical report published with the consultation document indicate an additional number of houses in Rochford District of between 2,600 and 15,100. However, the housing allocation between 1996-2011 is 3,050 dwellings and the technical document estimates that the residual dwelling provision in Rochford at 2001 is 1,200 units. Therefore, the total additional units over the period 2001-2021 would be in the range of 1,400 to 13,900 units.
- 6.3 To further assist Members, the rate of projected housing growth over the 2001-2021 period can be compared to that over the current Structure Plan from 1996-2011. The anticipated rate from 1996 to 2011 is just over 200 dwellings p.a. This compares with the range proposed for 2001-2021 of between 130 and 755 units p.a.
- 6.4 It is then on the basis of this simple comparison apparent that the rate of growth suggested by Future 1 is significantly below the anticipated rate from the current Structure Plan. Only a small part of Rochford District is within the Thames Gateway regeneration area but, for the purposes of spatial planning, the consultation document looks more broadly at South Essex as a planning building block.

- 6.5 That being the case, is it then realistic to conclude that future growth will be no more than locally based, as suggested under Future 1? Certainly, locally generated housing requirements would be accommodated, but the scenario assumes that 'Regional scale growth' will be avoided. Leaving aside any discussion about the relationship of Rochford to Thames Gateway, it is apparent that such a low growth scenario does not take into account the desire for growth in jobs in Thames Gateway and is unlikely to be the favoured option. The County and Southend state as much in their technical document.
- 6.6 More realistic perhaps would be the options proposed in Future 2 and 3. Future 2 assumes that economic performance will be slightly better than achieved in recent decades and Future 3 assumes the development of two new growth areas, Thames Gateway South Essex and London-Stansted-Cambridge sub-region.
- 6.7 The presence of new growth areas would mean that the Plan Area accommodates a higher regional share and rate of new housing compared to existing Regional Planning Guidance and recent house-building rates. The housing provision figure for Rochford under Future 3 option 3A seems to assume that a significant proportion of this new growth for Thames Gateway be accommodated in Rochford. If true, this is certainly not acceptable.
- 6.8 The remaining options Future 2 options 2A and 2B and Future 3 option 3B, provide for a range for new homes of between 3,500 and 6,100 units. However, the information supporting these options is limited and it is considered inappropriate to provide any indication that figures in this range would be acceptable, and certainly not on the basis outlined in the technical report.
- 6.9 Rather, it is proposed that the Council's response should be to make clear that there are significant environmental limits to the ability of the District to accommodate new housing beyond that generated by local demand. The development of arguments that Rochford district should be providing for the growth of Southend (paragraphs 5.8/9 and 5.13/14 above) must be firmly refuted at this early stage in the preparation of the Plan. It is not acceptable to identify Rochford District as a repository from homes to accommodate development in Southend.
- 6.10 If the economic vitality of South Essex is to be developed, there is no doubt that Thames Gateway will play a key role. However, Thames Gateway South Essex was set up as a regeneration vehicle to improve skill levels, develop new jobs, etc., and not as a mechanism to promote new housing development, although there must inevitably be some relationship between jobs and housing.

- 6.11 The majority of Rochford is not within the Thames Gateway, but the environmental assets of the District can play a part in the regeneration package by contributing to the 'Green grid' for South Essex. It is this emphasis that should be the key to future decisions about new housing and jobs within the District, as reflected in the sustainability appraisal report accompanying the consultation, and not an emphasis on providing land for Southend's housing.
- 6.12 Furthermore, the technical document accompanying the consultation talks about the possibility of providing new road infrastructure to improve the western approach to Southend. These words are clearly referring to the construction of a relief road/bypass through Rochford district and again, this is not acceptable, albeit that the document does not talk in absolutes and only in possibilities..
- 6.13 Given the timescales mentioned earlier in the report in respect of new Regional Planning Guidance and the Government's ambition to see district housing figures included in the document. It is far from clear what role a new Structure Plan will play at this stage in the planning framework. It is essential that detailed consideration is given to the preparation of new housing allocations and the sense of urgency being promoted by the Government to finish this important task quickly is not likely to be conducive to achieving the right results. It is particularly worrying that a discussion has been included in the technical document proposing that Rochford district might be used to provide housing for Southend, since such general statements have a habit of becoming truths. It is all the more important for Rochford to strongly refute these proposals.
- 6.14 Regardless of the level of future housing and jobs in the District, it is clear that the consultation document gives only limited attention to the requirements for new infrastructure in order to support even modest new development. There is no doubt whatsoever that new housing allocations cannot be contemplated, even at locally generated levels, without the provision of new infrastructure, including roads, Schools, Doctors' Surgeries and so on. There should be no repeat of the situation over the next twenty years where the provision of the required infrastructure lags behind housing development. Infrastructure must be considered at the outset.

7 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 It is proposed that the County and Southend be informed that Rochford cannot, at this stage, support Futures 2, 3 and 4. The environmental impact of these on the District would be very significant indeed. Furthermore, any argument that Rochford district should be the repository for housing for Southend is unacceptable.

- 7.2 Realistically, development to accommodate locally generated growth is the minimum that will need to be provided for in the District. Even at the levels proposed though, new infrastructure will be crucial if the impact on the quality of life of the district's residents is to be maintained and enhanced in the future.

8 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The environmental implications of the growth options beyond locally generated growth will be very significant for the district.

9 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that, subject to comments from Members, that this report forms the basis of the Council's response to the consultation document on the replacement Essex and Southend Structure Plan 2001-2021.
(HPS)

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Background Papers:

Shaping the future of Essex and Southend – Tell us what you think – January 2003.

Shaping the future of Essex and Southend – Technical Report – January 2003

Shaping the future of Essex and Southend – Sustainability Appraisal – January 2003

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