
ROCHFORD DISTRICT REPLACEMENT LOCAL PLAN (Min 26/03)

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks Members approval to the inclusion of additional lower case text in the Replacement Local Plan in respect of Rawreth Primary School and Rochford Town Centre.

2 RAWRETH PRIMARY SCHOOL

- 2.1 The County Council's proposal to provide a new primary school with additional capacity on the Park School site as a replacement for the existing school means that in due course, the existing school site will become redundant.
- 2.2 The site, adjacent to St. Nicholas Church on Church Road, Rawreth, is in the Metropolitan Green Belt, where there is a limitation on new development. However, the policy relating to the re-use of buildings in rural areas indicates that alternative uses may be acceptable, subject to a series of criteria, including the fact that the intensity of the new use should not be greater than the old. In addition, residential conversion may be acceptable where an alternative business use cannot be found.
- 2.3 Given the location of the School next to the Church, there is clearly some justification to hope that an appropriate community use might be found for the site when it is vacated. Therefore, conversion to residential should be considered as a last course of action, rather than an initial priority. If residential conversion is eventually proposed, one option would be to seek some rural exceptions affordable housing on the site.
- 2.4 At this stage though, it is recommended that lower case text be included in the Replacement Local Plan to explain that a new community use for the site is the Council's preferred option, with housing use being very much a last resort and only to be considered where evidence has been presented that no other suitable use is available. (See appendix A to this report)

3 ROCHFORD TOWN CENTRE

- 3.1 The future of Rochford town centre, as with any town centre, naturally depends on the viability of existing businesses. There is no doubt that Rochford town centre is suffering as a trading location, in much the same way as many other small Market Towns. The impact and competition from large retail food stores nearby is significant, although

there is still a steady throughput of people wanting access to basic services, including Banks.

- 3.2 The future of the land North of the Market Square, which is allocated for a mixed development scheme including a retail foodstore is crucial, since there is no doubt that a new retail foodstore would have a marked effect on the number of people visiting the town centre.
- 3.3 Some smaller towns have overcome their retail problems by focusing on niche/specialist areas of trading. This might very well be an option for Rochford, particularly given its important historic character. Retail re-positioning in this way would be no easy task, but one option would certainly be to use the momentum from the Thames Gateway Partnership to seek to re-brand the Town as an 'Arts & Crafts' Centre.
- 3.4 It is proposed that additional lower case text be added to the Replacement Local Plan to start the process of promoting an 'Arts and Crafts' focus for the town. (See appendix A to this report).

4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Rawreth Primary School site is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt and any development there must be considered within the context of green belt policy.
- 4.2 The regeneration of Rochford as a thriving shopping centre will have significant environmental benefits.

5 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Rochford Parish Council has a role to play in the regeneration of Rochford town centre.

9 RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

To approve the wording of text to be included in the Rochford District Replacement Local Plan in respect of Rochford Town Centre and Rawreth Primary School as outlined in the report. (HPS)

Shaun Scrutton
Head of Planning Services

Background Papers: None

For further information please contact Shaun Scrutton on:-

Tel:- 01702 318100
E-Mail:- shaun.scrutton@rochford.gov.uk

FROM CHAPTER 10 - UTILITIES, HEALTHCARE & SOCIAL SERVICES

1 EDUCATION

2

10.36 *Essex County Council have proposed to erect a new primary school on part of the Park School site, but no need is foreseen for other new sites during the plan period. The redevelopment of the Park School site for a mixed use development incorporating a new primary school, means that Rawreth Primary School will become redundant at some stage. The current school lies in the Metropolitan Green Belt where there would be restrictions on the types of use and development that may be appropriate.*

10.37 *Ideally the school would remain in continued educational use, perhaps for special needs or other non-mainstream usage. Following this type of use, some form of community use would be the preferred option. The redevelopment of the site for residential purposes is regarded as a last resort, only to be explored once all other options have been investigated.*

10.38 *The expansion of existing schools is likely as housing numbers increase. As development proposals come forward, the local planning authority will seek that where classrooms are to be provided, they are permanent. The local planning authority will also seek the replacement of temporary classrooms - many of which provide poor quality learning environments - with permanent facilities, by the imposition of appropriate conditions.*

FROM CHAPTER 9 - SHOPPING, ADVERTISEMENTS AND TOWN CENTRES

SHOPPING AND TOWN CENTRES

9.1 There are three Town Centres in the District: Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley. Rayleigh provides the most comprehensive range of facilities and is defined in the Replacement Structure Plan as a Principal Town Centre, however neither it nor Rochford or Hockley provides a major food superstore.

9.2 The Council commissioned a retail study in 1999, which identified a significant leakage of expenditure from the District. This is not surprising given the proximity of the Sub-Regional Town Centres of Southend-on-Sea, Basildon, Chelmsford and Lakeside for comparison goods, and the existence of a number of food superstores just outside the District's boundaries for convenience goods.

- 9.3 The Council is committed to maintaining the viability and vitality of the District's town centres and reducing the amount of expenditure leakage where possible. To this end, the Local Planning Authority will expect any new retail development (other than local facilities to meet day-to-day needs) to be within the designated town centre boundaries, and meet the criteria of Policy SAT1, below. A specific site has been identified for a large food store in Rochford town centre. This is the subject of an additional policy, SAT2.

- 9.4 The Thames Gateway South East Partnership, in which the local authority is an active player, was launched in September 2001. It then issued a Vision Statement¹, which broke the partnership area into three distinct local authority areas. Southend and Rochford were joined to provide a focus on culture and education. The Vision states:

A VISION FOR SOUTHEND AND ROCHFORD

- **To transform Southend into a thriving cultural hub for South Essex, by developing its cultural strategy, beach facilities, resort and tourism facilities and leisure attractions, and the overall environmental quality of Southend and its environs;**
- **to develop university facilities, expanding upon the new Southend town centre campus to provide a sustainable and accessible facility for South Essex; and**
- **to improve the accessibility of Southend and Rochford by improving surface access, by road and rail, and upgrading London Southend Airport to support stronger business links with Europe.**

- 9.5 Having taken on board the proposals put forward, there is scope for Rochford to re-brand itself as an *Arts and Crafts* centre. The local planning authority has taken this Vision Statement on board and therefore will support applications that seek to strengthen the role of the town as an arts and craft centre, where this is compatible and concordant with other plan policies.
- 9.6 Clearly to be attractive to shoppers, town centres need not only to offer an enticing range of shops but also a pleasant environment in which to shop. The Council is committed to maintaining the character and attractiveness of its town centres and, indeed, has carried out significant enhancements in Rayleigh, Rochford, Hockley and Hullbridge. Besides Council initiatives, the Local Planning Authority needs to control the provision of advertisements and street furniture that can, if left unchecked, seriously affect the character of an area. Policies covering these issues can be found later in this chapter.

¹ *A Vision for the Future* (2001) Thames Gateway South East