
ESSEX AND SOUTHEND REPLACEMENT STRUCTURE PLAN - PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS

SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report provides details of the modifications proposed to the draft Essex and Southend Replacement Structure Plan following receipt of the EIP Panel Report, and considers the land-use implications for Rochford.
- 1.2. The Structure Plan is a statutory document prepared by the County Council and Southend Borough Council, which provides the strategic planning framework for the preparation of the Rochford District Local Plan.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The EIP Panel report into the Essex and Southend Replacement Structure Plan was published in December last year. The County Council and Southend Borough Council have now given detailed consideration to the Panel's recommendations and have agreed a series of modifications to the Plan's policies and proposals.
- 2.2 The Proposed Modifications have been placed on deposit for public consultation from 17 March to 28 April 2000. It is understood that no late objections will be entertained by the joint structure plan making authorities (JSPA).

3 SUMMARY OF KEY MODIFICATIONS

3.1 Core Policies

- 3.1.1 The original draft of the Plan included a series of ten core policies, which were designed to provide a broad strategic framework for the Plan.
- 3.1.2 The EIP Panel recommended some simplification to these policies and as result, the JSPAs propose to reduce the number of core policies as follows:
 - CS1 - Achieving Urban regeneration
 - CS2 - Protecting the Natural and Built Environment
 - CS3 - Encouraging Economic Success
 - CS4 - Sustainable New Development
 - CS5 - Sustainable Transport

The full text of the new and revised policies is provided in Appendix 1 to this report.

3.2 Countryside

- 3.2.1 In the Countryside section of the Plan, no major changes are proposed to the policies dealing with appropriate development in the green belt. However, the JSPAs are proposing to accept the EIP Panel recommendation for the inclusion of a new policy CS4 requiring local planning authorities, in consultation with the JSPAs, to undertake a comprehensive and co-ordinated review of inner green belt boundaries, including safeguarded land.
- 3.2.2 The JSPAs consider that an inner green belt boundary review may be required to accommodate development provision up to 2011 (the end date of the replacement Plan) and, in addition, to identify safeguarded land in relation to long term development needs beyond 2011.

3.3 Natural Resources

- 3.3.1 The Natural Resources section of the Plan introduces a new policy requiring the preparation of Landscape Character Assessments for districts as an eventual replacement for the existing Special Landscape Areas (SLA). The justification for this change is that character assessment provides a much more accurate method of gauging the worth of rural areas. However, given the lead-time required for the preparation of character assessments, it has been concluded that SLAs should be retained until the work is complete.

3.4 Housing Provision

- 3.4.1 In the section of the Plan dealing with Housing Provision, the JSPAs have decided not to accept the EIP Panel recommendation in respect of revised housing numbers. The Panel recommended an increase in housing provision of 6,400 units above the JSPAs original proposals (76,000 as opposed to 69,600). As a result of reconsidering vacancy rates and the contribution that should be made by Thurrock to housing provision in 'old Essex', the JSPAs have concluded that the housing provision figure should be increased by 2,650 units. The detailed explanation for this conclusion is provided in Appendix 2 to this report.
- 3.4.2 In proposing an increase in the housing provision for the County, the JSPAs have accepted the Panel's conclusions about the way that any additional housing provision should be distributed between the districts. Therefore, the housing allocation for Rochford has been increased by 250 units to a total of 3,050 dwelling units in the period to 2011.

3.5 Business, Industry and Warehousing

- 3.5.1 In the Business, Industry and Warehousing section of the Plan, no change is proposed to the proposed Rochford employment land allocation of 35 hectares.
- 3.5.2 Policy BIW4 - Safeguarding Employment Land, has been modified to require local planning authorities to undertake regular audits of all employment sites to ensure these are truly available for development. In cases where it is apparent that land cannot be developed, alternative allocations must be identified and/or the existing land allocated for alternative uses.

3.6 Town Centres and Retailing

- 3.6.1 Within the section dealing with Town Centres and Retailing, the JSPAs agree with the EIP Panel that a review of the hierarchy of town centres should be undertaken, but propose this should wait until the next review of the Plan.

3.7 The Rural Economy

- 3.7.1 The Panel proposed amendments to Policy RE3 - Development Sites in the Countryside. However, the JSPAs, whilst accepting the Panel recommendation, were concerned about the approach suggested in respect of major sites which arise unexpectedly, and hence are not identified in an adopted local plan. Accordingly, the JSPAs propose to reword Policy RE3 to reflect this concern. The revised policy is shown in Appendix 3 to this report.

3.8 Waste Management

- 3.8.1 The EIP Panel proposed a new policy dealing with development control matters be added to the section of the Plan dealing with Waste Management. The Panel proposed wording for the policy, but in accepting the need for such a policy, the JSPAs have concluded that alternative wording is required. Proposed Policy WM3 is reproduced in Appendix 4 to this report.

4 DISCUSSION - IMPLICATIONS FOR ROCHFORD

- 4.1 Whilst the JSPAs propose a long list of detailed changes to policies in response to the EIP Panel's recommendations, in principle, the majority of these changes are not controversial and can be accepted.
- 4.2 However, the proposals relating to housing, the green belt, development sites in the countryside and waste management raise important issues for the district.

4.3 Housing

- 4.3.1 The draft Structure Plan indicated that existing housing commitments and urban intensification within existing built-up areas could provide about 2,800 additional units. Therefore, taking account of the significant land-use constraints in the district, the Plan proposed that the housing allocation for the district to 2011 should be 2800 units.
- 4.3.2 Therefore, it is clear that any addition to this figure will require new sites to be identified for development in the emerging local plan. The JSPAs propose an additional figure of 250 units to raise the district housing allocation to 3,050 for the period to 2011. If sites can be identified within the urban area, then clearly there would be no impact in the short term on the green belt boundary. The preparation of an urban capacity study as recommended by the EIP Panel and accepted by the JSPAs, would be a key element of the process to identify suitable land. On balance, it is considered that it may be possible to identify sites that would contribute the required number of units. This would need to be considered during the review of the Local Plan.
- 4.3.3 However, whilst it may be possible to identify sites, it is also considered that the district should make representations to the JSPAs to alter the housing allocation back to the original 2800 figure. In making such representations, two points should be borne in mind. First, a reduction in the allocation for Rochford would mean an increase elsewhere. Second, the House Builders Federation will no doubt be making representations to the County to the effect that the 6,400 additional units proposed by the EIP Panel should be accepted by the JSPAs given the implications of the 1992 and emerging 1996 household based projections.

4.4 The Green Belt

- 4.4.1 The acceptance of the EIP Panel's recommendation for the inclusion of a policy requiring the review of the inner green belt boundaries is inevitably closely tied to the housing issue. In principle, a detailed review of the inner green belt boundaries, subject to appropriate criteria, is a project that should be supported and is in any event a requirement for the review of the local plan.
- 4.4.2 The publication of the results of the Secretary of State for Transport, the Environment and the Region's deliberations on Regional Planning Guidance will provide a clear indication of the level of additional housing that will need to be accommodated in Essex up to 2016. The draft Structure Plan makes it very clear that in the forthcoming reviews of local plans, districts will need to identify land for future long-term housing needs. A review of the inner green belt boundaries will inevitably contribute to that process.

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- 4.4.3 It is suggested that the County be informed that a review of the inner green belt boundaries is supported, but that the criteria for assessment must be very carefully considered in discussion with the district council.

4.5 Development Sites in the Countryside

- 4.5.1 The revised policy RE3 (appendix 3) deals with the future status of major developed sites within the countryside. This policy is particularly relevant to Rochford since there are many sites within the rural parts of the district which could be brought forward by the owners for alternative uses.
- 4.5.2 The proposed policy makes it very clear that only those sites that have been identified in local plans will be considered for complete or partial redevelopment, subject to the preparation of a detailed design brief. It is considered that this policy, as modified, should be supported.

4.6 Waste Management

- 4.6.1 The proposed new Policy WM3 gives reason for significant concerns about the way in which proposals for waste management facilities would be treated in the green belt. There is absolutely no doubt that the proposed policy attempts to legitimise any application for such uses as a special exception to green belt policy.

- 4.6.2 It is relevant to quote the words used in the EIP Panel's suggested version of this new policy. The Panel's wording was:

"Planning applications for waste management operations and related development will be considered in light of the following:

9. in the Metropolitan Green Belt, the effect of the development on the purposes of the Green Belt as set out in policies C1 and given effect in C2."

- 4.6.3 There is no doubt there is a significant difference between the EIP Panel's proposed wording of this policy and that being advocated by the JSPAs. The Panel's policy makes it clear that proposals will need to be assessed against the normal green belt policies, whereas, the JSPAs are seeking to introduce a change to the Government's advice on green belt policy by proposing that waste management facilities are a special exception.
- 4.6.4 Given the Council's opposition to the proposals in the draft Waste Local Plan, it is considered that the County should be informed that this Council strenuously objects to the County's proposed wording for this policy since it is clearly designed to undermine the current Government advice on green belt policy.

5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Structure Plan includes numerous policies and proposals that are designed to ensure high quality of design for new development areas, to protect historic towns and the countryside.

6 RESOURCES

- 6.1 The preparation of an urban capacity study for the district may have financial implications for the authority. Several authorities in Essex have already appointed consultants to undertake such studies at considerable cost. However, it is important that a standard methodology is adopted for capacity studies and the County and Southend are currently considering this matter. It may be that the JSPAs will seek to appoint consultants to undertake capacity studies across the County and make a request of the districts for a financial contribution to this work.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES:**

That, subject to additional comments by Members, that this report form the basis of the Council's response to the County Council and Southend Borough Council in respect of the proposed modifications to the Essex and Southend Replacement Structure Plan.

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Background Papers:

Essex and Southend Replacement Structure Plan - Statement of Decisions on EIP Panel's Recommendations and Proposed Modifications

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