

**Rochford New Local Plan:
Spatial Options Consultation 2021**

Topic Paper 12: Town Centres and Retail

Temporary Cover

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Advisory Note

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was subject to a formal revision in July 2021, just before these papers were published. As a consequence, paragraph numbers and other references to the 2019 NPPF made in this document may no longer relate exactly to the latest version of the NPPF.

The principles set out in referenced paragraphs have not been subject to extensive change and references made are therefore still considered to be accurate reflections of national policy.

1 What is this topic paper about?

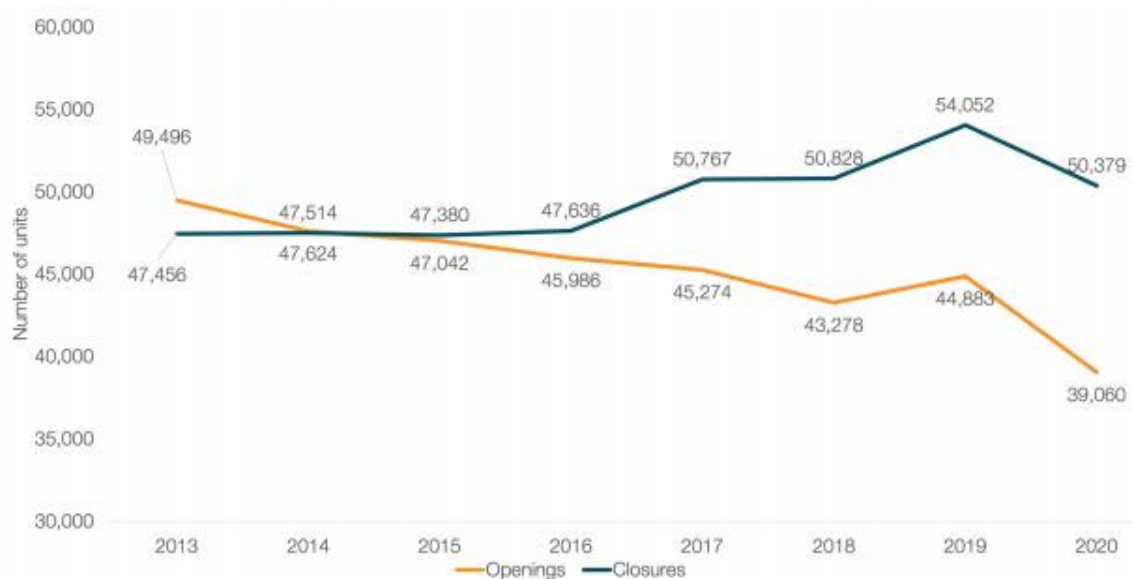
- 1.1 Rochford District Council is preparing a new Local Plan that will cover the period up to 2040. As a comprehensive and up to date evidence base is essential for plan preparation, the Council has prepared a range of technical studies, both in house and through external consultants, to support this process.
- 1.2 To help summarise the key topics that the new Local Plan will need to address, a series of 'topic papers' have been prepared to explain the national policy and legislative context for key topics and to set out how those key topics relate to local challenges and opportunities. These topic papers will be published alongside the Spatial Options consultation paper, allowing interested parties to understand these key topics in greater detail than what is contained in the consultation paper alone.
- 1.3 This topic paper has been prepared to consider how the New Local Plan can best enable Rochford District's town centres, village centres, neighbourhood parades and other shopping areas to retain their status as thriving, vibrant hubs of retail, business, leisure and community over the next 20 years. At a time when the traditional high street is under more pressure than ever from a range of factors, it is critical to ensure the right policies are in place to enable centres to respond strongly to current and future trends. This paper summarises the current national and local planning policy context, the implications of upcoming changes, and the most recent evidence base, to consider options for how the District can support a prosperous and resilient economy that provides high-quality employment opportunities into the future.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 The District's town centres of Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley, along with local and village centres, are fundamental to everyday life for most residents and businesses, and are important contributors to local economy, community and identity. 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). In addition, the Airport Retail Park, on the boundary with Southend-on-Sea Borough, is the District's only major out of town retail park, containing a range of national multiple retailers.
- 2.2 Town centres and local centres play an important role in supporting vibrant and prosperous local communities. Town centres need to be multi-functional offering the right balance of comparison and convenience shopping, hospitality and leisure, community and civic facilities and residential. It must be recognised that retail-dominant town centres are struggling in light of ongoing structural changes happening in high streets and town centres across the country. As a result, a key determinant of 'successful planning for our local town centres will be their ability to adapt to new trends, technologies and practices, maintaining vibrancy in the face of change.

- 2.3 Retail, leisure, hospitality and other uses usually found in town centres are an important employer in the District. As of 2020¹, 3,500 worked in the Wholesale & Retail Trade; Repair of Motor Vehicles sectors, whilst 1,750 were employed in Accommodation & Food Service Activities and a further 800 in Arts, Entertainment & Recreation. Collectively, these sectors accounted for 27.5% of all jobs in the District.
- 2.4 The Coronavirus pandemic has had a catastrophic effect on the UK retail and leisure industries, with a series of restrictions resulting in enforced closures for most retail and leisure businesses, along with additional costs and capacity restrictions as and when businesses have been permitted to operate. At the same time and, as a consequence, demand for online retail has jumped considerably. Analysis from the Local Data Company² indicates that during 2020 a record low in terms of new store openings and record high in terms of closures led to a net loss of 11,319 retail units, the highest on record (see Figure 1). In turn this has led to a vacancy rate across retail and leisure categories of 13.7%, again the highest on record (see Figure 2). When discounting leisure units, this was even higher, at 14.9%. In total, 109,407 jobs were lost as a result, whilst the figure of 5,214 stores closing was the highest since the recession of 2008. The report notes, however, that robust government support through a series of business grants and the furlough scheme was successful in mitigating the full impact of the pandemic on retail and leisure businesses, keeping many afloat.

Figure 1: Number of openings and closures across GB 2013-2020



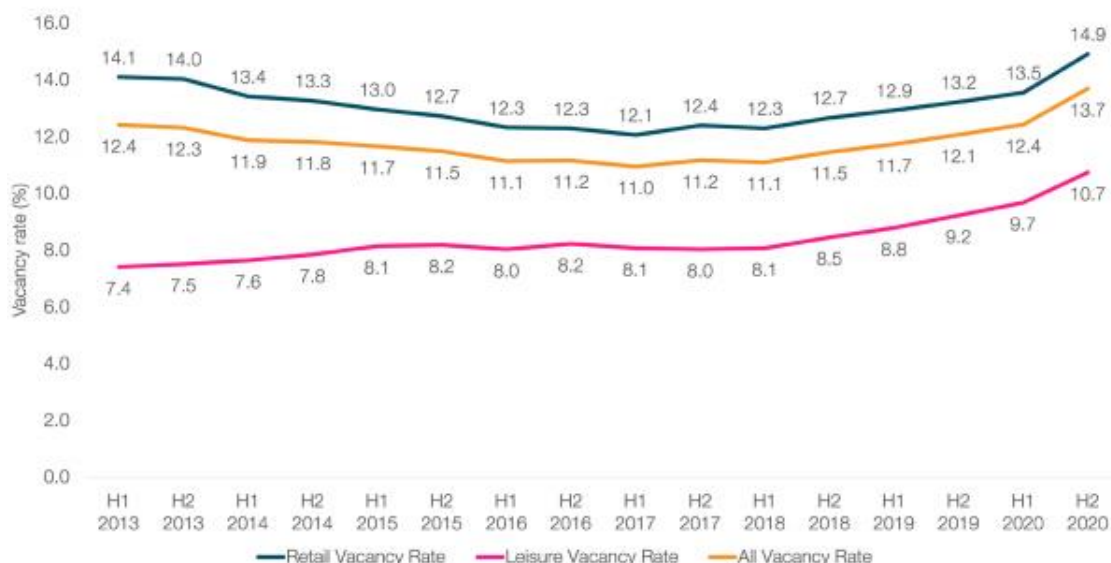
¹ ONS NOMIS Rochford Labour Market Statistics:

<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157219/report.aspx?town=rochford>

² Local Data Company GB Retail and Leisure Market Analysis, Full Year 2020

<https://www.localdatacompany.com/download-report-fy-2020>

Figure 2: Historical vacancy rates by type 2013-2020



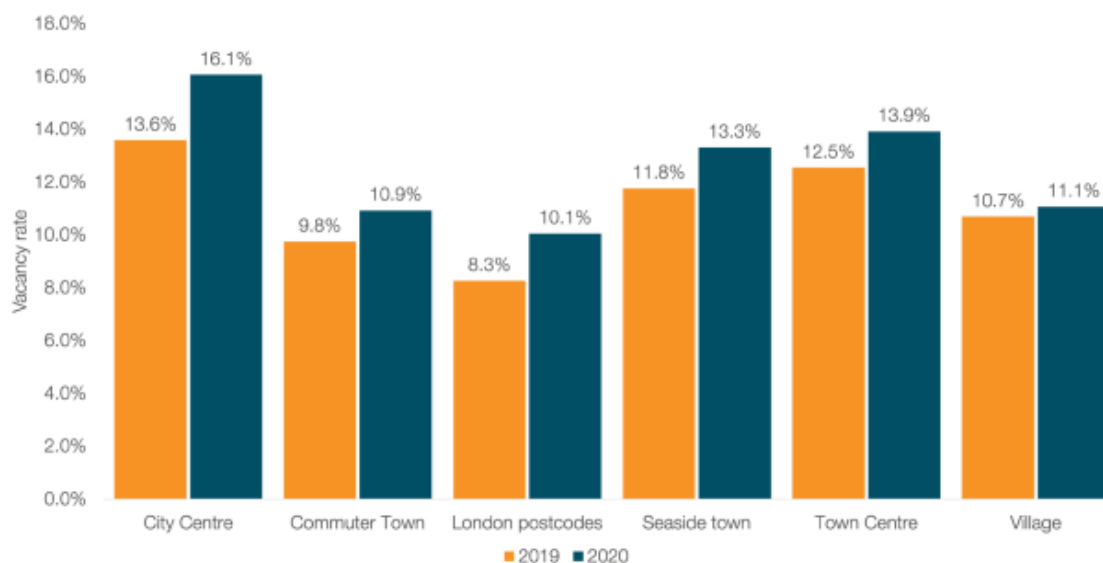
2.5 Certain retail location types were more resilient than others to the effects of the pandemic, with vacancy rates at retail parks remaining far lower than high streets at 10% compared to 13.7%, reflecting many of these sites were able to adopt enhanced click & collect facilities, whilst their larger scale and accessibility by car instilled consumer confidence (see Figure 3). By comparison, shopping centres were particularly hard-hit, reflecting the greater number of restrictions they faced as under cover locations which found it harder to adopt contingency measures (e.g. outdoor seating for food and drink outlets), whilst their indoor location presented particular challenges with crowd management and social distancing.

Figure 3: Historical vacancy rate across GB by location type 2013-2020



- 2.6 The pandemic is expected to accelerate ongoing trends of certain traditional town centre uses moving to online services, including banks and comparison retail. There is, however, some evidence that local town centres such as those in the District have seen 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 (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Vacancy rate by town centre profile 2019-2021



- 2.7 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. 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.
- 2.8 The New Local Plan needs to ensure Rochford District's town centres, and village/neighbourhood shopping parades, continue to remain thriving commercial and social hubs for their communities in the coming decades as both national and local-level changes bring challenges and opportunities for high streets and the retail & leisure industries. As future options for housing, employment and infrastructure development are considered, it is imperative from a sustainable development perspective that such decisions consider the potential of the District's town and village centres in both supporting and benefiting from key strategic decisions.

- 2.9 This Topic Paper considers the national and local planning policy context surrounding town centres and retail, including recent and upcoming changes that are likely to significantly affect the future availability and provision of different uses in town centres. It also analyses the evidence base relating to the District's centres and assesses how demand for retail and leisure space is likely to change in future, before considering how the New Local Plan could respond to the challenges presented.

3 National and Local Planning Policy Context

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 3.1 The NPPF commits the planning system to the achievement of **sustainable development**, which runs through the document as a 'golden thread'³. As set out in paragraph 11, there is a presumption in favour of development proposals which are considered to constitute sustainable development, and local plans are required to both positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change.
- 3.2 The NPPF 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)	
<i>Planning policies should:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">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 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	

³ National planning Policy Framework 2019: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

<p>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;</p> <p>f) recognise that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and encourage residential development on appropriate sites (paragraph 85).</p>
<p><i>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 86).</i></p>
<p><i>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 87).</i></p>
<p><i>This sequential approach should not be applied to applications for small scale rural offices or other small scale rural development (paragraph 88).</i></p>
<p><i>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:</i></p> <p><i>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</i></p> <p><i>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).</i></p> <p><i>(paragraph 89).</i></p>
<p>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 89, it should be refused (paragraph 90).</p>

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

- 3.3 The NPPG⁴ 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 Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Encourage a wide range of complimentary uses 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).
<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 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 deliver regeneration schemes (paragraph 002).
Fully involve a wide range of stakeholders to create a town centre vision that meets economic and community needs. These include local authorities, local enterprise partnerships, landowners, businesses and their representatives, community groups, town centre managers, business improvement districts and the general public (paragraph 003).
<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The centre’s realistic role, function and in position in hierarchies (to be reviewed regularly).

⁴ National Planning Practice Guidance, 2021: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

- 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 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).

Existing Local Planning Policies – Retail & Town Centres

- 3.4 A number of existing documents form the basis of relevant planning policies relating to retail and town centres, namely the *Rochford District Core Strategy*⁵ (adopted 2011), *Allocations Plan*⁶ (adopted 2014), *Development Management Plan*⁷ (adopted 2014), *Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan*⁸, *Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan*, and

⁵ RDC Core Strategy 2011: <https://www.rochford.gov.uk/core-strategy-0>

⁶ RDC Allocations Plan 2014: https://www.rochford.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/files/planning_all_allplan.pdf

⁷ RDC Development Management Plan 2014: <https://www.rochford.gov.uk/development-management-document-examination/development-management-plan>

⁸ Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan: <https://www.rochford.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/adopted-plans/rayleigh-centre-area-action-plan>

Hockley Area Action Plan (all adopted in 2014). Appendix A 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 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.

- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 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:

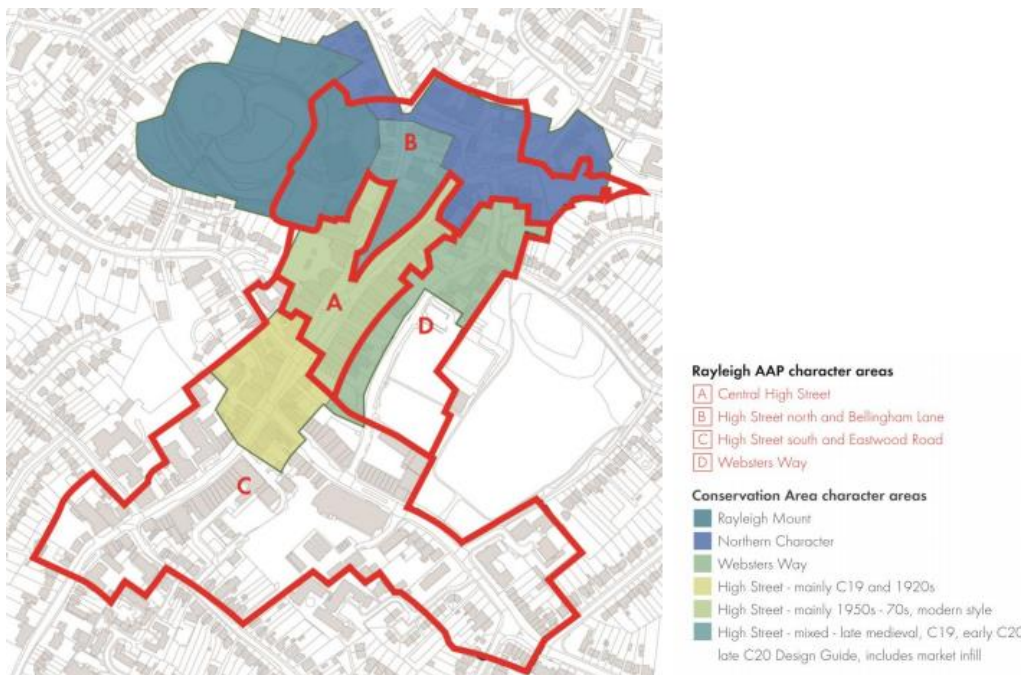
Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan

- 3.7 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
- 3.8 The RCAAP sets out a series of 8 policies to help deliver this vision and objectives, as shown in Appendix 2, 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 Figures 5 and 6 respectively.

Figure 5: Rayleigh Centre AAP Spatial Framework



Figure 6: Rayleigh Centre AAP Character Areas



Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan (RTCAAP)

- 3.9 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*

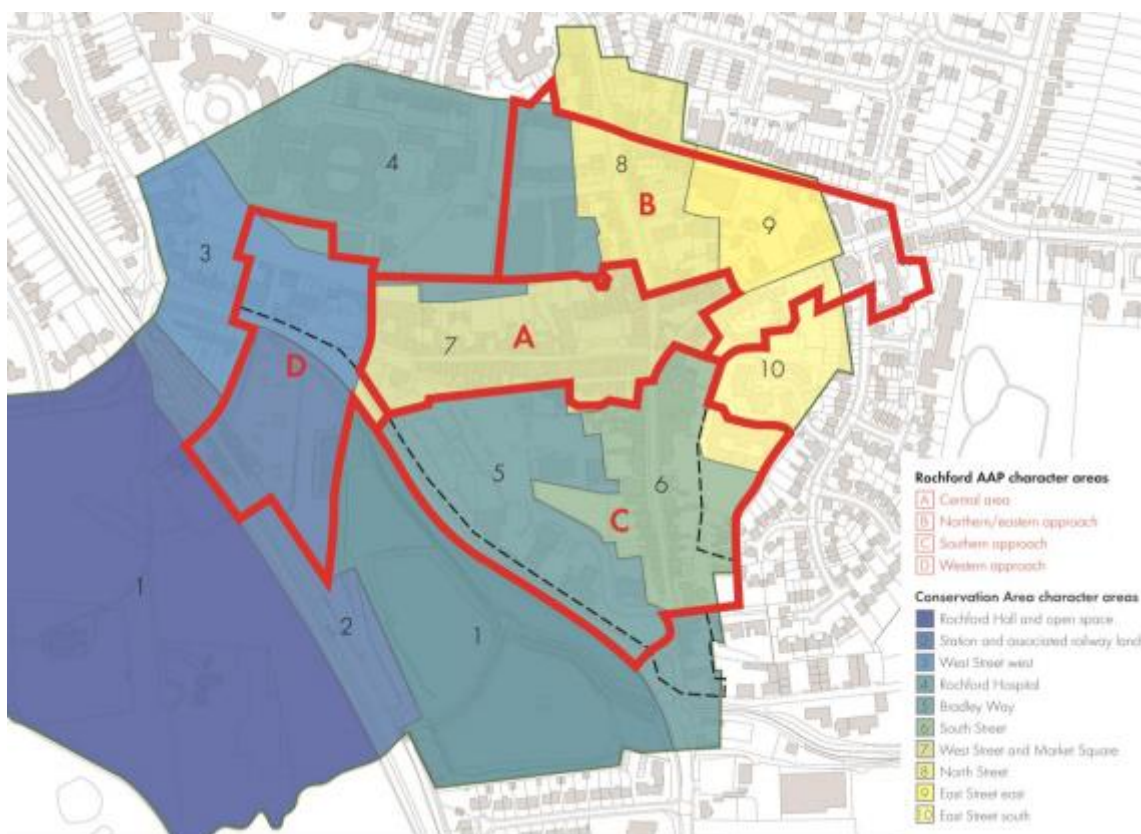
unattractive sites. Improvements to existing routes and the addition of new links will make the town more permeable and make travel by all modes of transport easier. This is underpinned by 5 key objectives:

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.
- 3.10 The RTCAAP sets out a series of 9 policies to help deliver this vision and objectives, as shown in Appendix 2, 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 Figures 7 and 8 respectively.

Figure 7: Rochford Town Centre AAP Spatial Framework



Figure 8: Rochford Town Centre AAP Character Areas



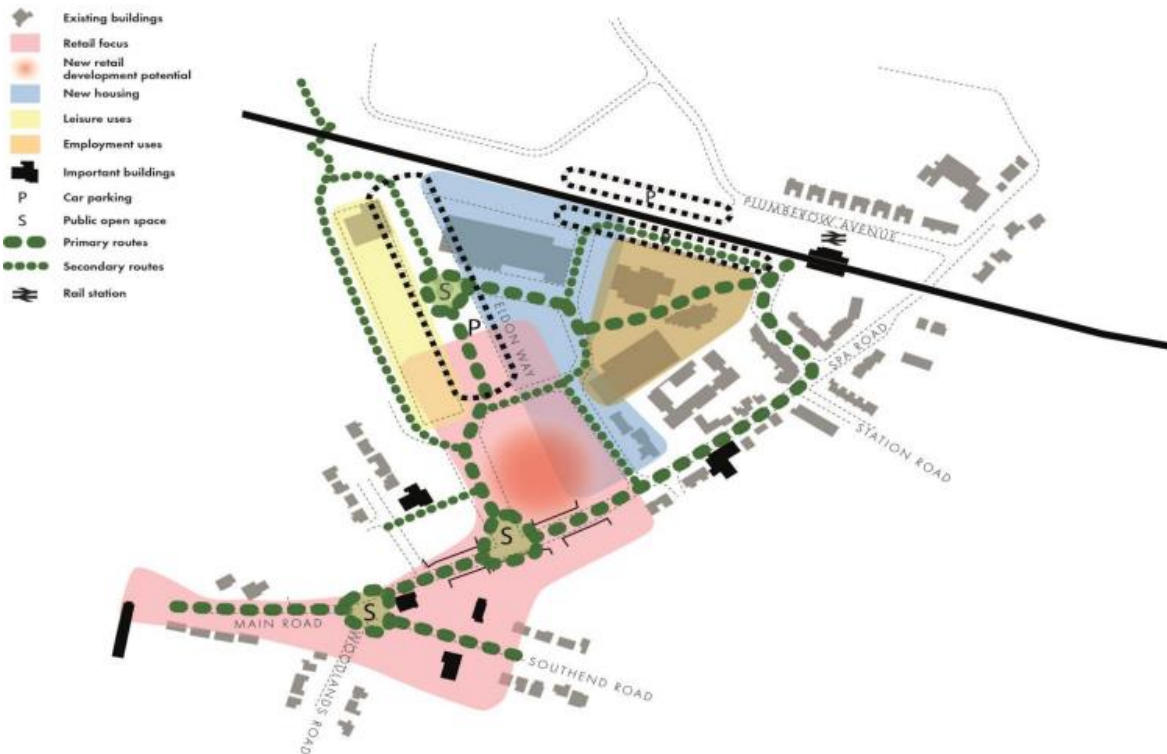
Hockley Area Action Plan (HAAP)

3.11 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).

- 3.12 The AAP sets out a series of 8 policies to help deliver this vision and objectives, as shown in Appendix 2, within Rochford Town Centre. These are delivered through reference to the AAP Spatial Framework, shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Hockley AAP Spatial Framework



Economic Growth Strategy

- 3.13 The Rochford District *Economic Growth Strategy*⁹ (2017) acknowledges the District's historic town centres as one of the District's economic strengths, highlighting their potential to host thriving businesses. At the same time, one of the main challenges was identified as being the encroachment of many retail and leisure businesses, traditionally thought of as town centre uses, on the District's industrial estates and employment sites. The District's many economic advantages, including its entrepreneurial business base, strong transport links, high quality of life and opportunities for new employment space around the Airport also provide potential for town centres to thrive, with the hitherto untapped potential of the rural and coastal areas for tourism opportunities representing a particular opportunity to increase visitor numbers and footfall to both the towns and smaller villages. The strategy seeks to grow and develop the District's economy through a combination of encouraging new inward investment, making it easier to start and grow local businesses and supporting initiatives to improve the workforce's skills and employability, all aspects which will support the vitality of town centres for a range of businesses.

⁹ RDC Economic Growth Strategy 2017: https://www.rochford.gov.uk/sites/default/files/business_growthstrat.pdf

4 Recent and Upcoming Policy Changes

- 4.1 A series of forthcoming changes to national planning policy have the potential to impact on existing and future policies to allocate land for economic use, and it is important that the new Local Plan acknowledges any opportunities or challenges these present.

Changes to Permitted Development Rights (Classes E and F)

- 4.2 From 1st September 2020, changes to the Planning Use Classes Order meant that a whole range of previously separate planning use classes focused on retail, commercial, employment and community uses, many of which are commonplace in town centres and retail areas, were amalgamated into the new **Class E – Commercial, Business and Service**¹⁰. These comprise the following:

Class A1 (Retail); Class A2 (Financial & Professional Services); Class A3 (Food & Drink – mainly on the premises); Class B1 (Business (office, research and development and light industrial process)). In addition, Classes D1 and D2 have been revoked, with the following uses merged into Class E: Indoor sport, recreation or fitness; Provision of medical or health services; Creche, day nursery or day centre (non-residential).

- 4.3 In addition, a new **Class F- Local Community & Learning** was created, comprising elements from the former Class D1 and D2, along with a series of newly-defined local community uses. This new class comprises the following uses:

Class F1 – Learning and non-residential institutions: Provision of education; display of works of art; museums; public libraries and reading rooms; public halls or exhibition halls; public worship or religious instruction; law courts.

Class F2 – Local community: Shops (mostly) selling essential goods, including food, where the shop's premises do not exceed 280 square metres and there is no other such facility within 1000 metres; halls or meeting places for the principal use of the local community; areas or places for outdoor sport or recreation (not involving motorised vehicles or firearms); indoor or outdoor swimming pools or skating rinks.

- 4.4 Note that Classes A4 (drinking establishments) and A5 (hot food takeaways) do not come under Class E, and instead are to be treated as 'Sui Generis' categories in their own right. This category has been expanded and, since 1st September 2020, includes a range of other uses that are often found in town centres. Along with former Classes A4 and A5, new uses under this category include live music venues; cinemas; concert halls; bingo halls; and dance halls. Inclusion of such uses as Sui Generis means there is greater scope for protecting them from measures such as permitted development.
- 4.5 These changes mean change of use planning permission is no longer required to move between such uses, which has a number of major implications for high streets and town centres. On the one hand, the ease of which uses can change makes it far easier for vacant units to find occupiers, and consequently means centres can be

¹⁰ Planning Portal – Change of Use:

https://www.planningportal.co.uk/info/200130/common_projects/9/change_of_use

flexible enough to accommodate new trends (e.g., using vacant retail units for leisure uses such as indoor mini golf). It also makes it easier for a more diverse mix of retail, leisure, employment and community uses to accumulate, allowing centres to attract and retain footfall and be far more resilient to threats such as online retail. However, increased flexibility makes it far more difficult for local authorities and other stakeholders to plan for, manage and curate long-term plans and visions for town centres. As a result, a significant body of National Planning Practice Guidance and local policies (e.g., Area Action Plans) is now more difficult to uphold policies from (e.g. around Primary Retail Frontages). This is further compounded by the forthcoming Permitted Development rights relating to Class E and residential uses (see paragraph 4.6). As a consequence, the new Local Plan is likely to have less influence over town centre policies and ensuring these remain effective and achievable.

- 4.6 In addition, the merging of use classes means there is a greater likelihood of retail and leisure activities proliferating on employment sites, where large floorplate office/light industrial units can now become shops or leisure uses (e.g. gyms or dance studios) without the need for planning permission. Given a number of sites in the District have already experienced such encroachment in recent years (e.g. Purdey's and Brook Road Industrial Estates), this situation needs to be carefully monitored alongside provision of employment land.

Changes to Permitted Development Rights (Class E to Residential)

- 4.7 Expanding on Class E, new legislation¹¹ from 1st August 2021 ('Class MA') means the Permitted Development (PD) rights will allow properties in the expanded Class E category to change to C3 (residential) use, with no full planning permission required. This is subject to a small number of prior approval conditions, as follows:

- a) transport impacts of the development, particularly to ensure safe site access;
- b) contamination risks in relation to the building;
- c) flooding risks in relation to the building;
- d) impacts of noise from commercial premises on the intended occupiers of the development;
- e) where –
 - i) the building is located in a conservation area, and
 - ii). the development involves a change of use of the whole or part of the ground floor,

the impact of that change of use on the character or sustainability of the conservation area;

¹¹ Insertion of Class MA in Part 3, Schedule 2 of the GDPO:
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2021/428/made/data.xht?view=snippet&wrap=true>

- f) the provision of adequate natural light in all habitable rooms of the dwellinghouses;
- g) the impact on intended occupiers of the development of the introduction of residential use in an area the authority considers to be important for general or heavy industry, waste management, storage and distribution, or a mix of such uses; and
- h) where the development involves the loss of services provided by—
 - i). a registered nursery, or
 - ii). a health centre maintained under section 2 or 3 of the National Health Service Act 2006,

the impact on the local provision of the type of services lost.

- 4.8 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. The right applies in conservation areas (subject to an impact assessment at ground floor level) and impact of the loss of commercial space is not a consideration the local planning authority can assess against. This new right could have considerable implications for town centres and retail parades, with the short vacancy period requirement and broad size category putting most premises at risk of conversion with little justification required on the part of developers.
- 4.9 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 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’¹².
- 4.10 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. Consideration could be given to whether Article 4 directions are appropriate in certain circumstances, whilst options for the use of the District’s Conservation Areas (covering much of Rochford and Rayleigh town centres,

¹² <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/7661/final-rtpi-response-supporting-housing-delivery-and-public-service-infrastructure.pdf>

and Great Wakering and Canewdon village centres) as a tool to protect and enhance ground floor commercial activities could also be explored.

Proposed NPPF Changes on Article 4 Directions

- 4.11 Proposed changes to the NPPF¹³ are also likely to impact local measures to prevent permitted development from taking place, with revised text in Chapter 4 restricting the use of Article 4 directions to remove such permitted development rights where a change of use to residential is involved, particularly in terms of limiting their geographical scope. This further limits the ability of plan-making authorities to protect and plan sites for strategic employment. This consultation closed on 27th March 2021.

Planning White Paper

- 4.12 The proposals outlined in the Government's *Planning for the Future*¹⁴ White Paper, published in August 2020, could have significant implications for planning for town centres. If the proposals were introduced, it is likely that most town centres (with the exception of those in conservation areas) would be designated as 'Renewal' areas, with development proposals that are plan-compliant benefiting from a stronger presumption in favour of permission. This potentially makes it easier to bring new investment and regeneration into town centres and could help to revitalise key sites which have outlived their usefulness. In particular, it is likely that the reforms will facilitate more residential development in centres, something which could help boost footfall and revive their roles as hubs for a wide range of activities. However, the proposals also represent a considerable deregulation of planning controls that would make it harder for local planning authorities to plan for town centres in a holistic way. Combined with the extension of permitted development rights and facilitation of Class E to residential conversions, it is likely that the reforms will contribute to significant housing growth in town centres, likely to be at the cost of existing retail, commercial and leisure uses. The forthcoming Government response to the consultation feedback may deliver additional clarification.

Covid 19 Pandemic – Temporary Legislation

- 4.13 The pandemic has had significant impacts, both at a national level and in Rochford District, with these varying significantly depending on the economic sector. In order to help businesses adapt to the varying restrictions as a result of COVID-19, the Government introduced a number of changes to the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO), a number of which are likely to provide greater flexibility to retail, leisure and hospitality businesses. These include the following:
- a) Class BA: Allows the change of use of any open land, including land within the curtilage of a building, provided it is not a listed building. This expands on the existing permitted development rights which allow a temporary change of use of land for up to 28 days, meaning uses such as markets, fairs, car boot sales and

¹³ National Planning Policy Framework and National Model Design Code: consultation proposals: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-and-national-model-design-code-consultation-proposals>

¹⁴ Consultation on *Planning for the Future*: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>

pop-up activities can take place. This provision is currently in place until 31st December 2021.

- b) Class BB: Coming into effect on 16th April 2021, this right enables the provision of moveable structures within the curtilage licensed premises, buildings used for consumption of food and drink on the premises, or historic attractions in listed buildings. It allows structures such as marquees or shelters, and is set to expire on 1st January 2022.

- 4.14 These sit alongside streamlined changes to licensing rules to enable businesses to make greater use of outdoor seating. Such measures have enabled businesses to continue to trade in a greater number of ways through the pandemic. Where successful, there is potential to explore whether encouraging outdoor dining, pavement seating and new events could support initiatives to encourage footfall and regeneration in towns such as Rochford and Rayleigh, encouraging pedestrianisation and fostering a more diverse evening economy.

5 What does our evidence base say about planning for town centres and retail?

- 5.1 The following documents are considered key evidence in informing the preparation of the New Local Plan, and their findings have been incorporated into the Regulation 18 Spatial Options consultation for considerations relating to Town Centres and Retail.

South Essex Retail Study

- 5.2 The *South Essex Retail Study 2018* (SERS)¹⁵, carried out by PBA, is a key piece of evidence that assesses current retail and leisure provision across the District, and calculates, based on expenditure and housing growth projections, how much additional space may need to be developed to provide the local population with a full range of shops and services they require. It builds upon an existing evidence base of documents from across the South Essex local authorities, including the *Rochford Retail & Leisure Update 2014*¹⁶ and supplements this with a quantitative analysis of retail and leisure needs for the sub-region, based on population growth projections from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and Experian data. The report provided a high-level context for the retail and leisure industry, noting the following key trends:

- **Polarisation:** challenges presented by reduced consumer expenditure, changing customer requirements and the growth of online/multi-channel retail have seen retailers increasingly concentrate trading activities in larger retail centres and out of town retail parks. This reduction in property portfolios has occurred particularly within the top 100 largest retailers, and has come at the

¹⁵ South Essex Retail Study:

<https://www.rochford.gov.uk/sites/default/files/SouthEssexRetailStudyVolume%201.pdf>

¹⁶ Rochford Retail & Leisure Study Update

https://www.rochford.gov.uk/sites/default/files/planning_evibase_eb69_0.pdf

expense of smaller centres, which have seen increased vacancy rates compared to larger centres and retail parks.

- **Restructuring of the convenience sector:** structural changes within the convenience retail sector have seen the position of the 'Big Four' supermarket operators challenged by the rise of discount retailers and online deliveries. A past focus on large-format stores (2,300 sq. m+) has given way to more smaller format stores from the major operators and South Essex has seen plans for a number of large new supermarkets shelved.
- **Growth of the commercial leisure sector:** a reduction in demand for traditional retail space has seen a corresponding growth in demand for uses such as restaurants, health & fitness, cinemas and class D2 leisure (e.g. children's play, trampolining or laser combat) as household disposable income has increased. Such uses are expected to account for an increasing proportion of town centre floorspace.
- **Effects of digital technology:** the rapid uptake of digital technology in retail has seen many retailers focus increasingly on online retail and multi-channel offerings that incorporate digital and physical stores (e.g. click & collect), along with a focus on larger stores in major town centres and out of town retail parks and a consequent rationalisation of smaller stores in secondary locations.

5.3 Within South Essex, the retail geography is increasingly dominated by larger centres both within (e.g. Lakeside) and outside the SERS study area (e.g. Chelmsford and Bluewater), whilst polarisation has seen pressure on the portfolios of national comparison retailers in traditional centres such as Southend and Basildon.

5.4 Rochford District is not self-sufficient in terms of retail and sits within the context of wider South Essex retail area, with residents travelling to other local and regional centres for shopping and services, whilst the District's centres in turn attracts residents from other areas to visit and shop. The SERS categorises South Essex centres by importance, from Regional (e.g. Lakeside Shopping Centre), through to 'Major' (e.g. Basildon and Southend), 'Town' and 'Local' centres, with the map below plotting these. Rochford, Rayleigh and Hockley are all identified as 'town centres', however the absence of major or regional centres underlines Rochford's relatively minor role in relation to retail provision across the wider South Essex sub-region.

Figure 10: South Essex Network of Centres



- 5.5 Up to 2037, Rochford District is estimated to need an additional 11,457m² of comparison retail space, and 1,077m² of convenience retail space as population and annual retail expenditure in the District grows, as set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Projected floorspace needs and expenditure growth for Rochford District, 2016-2037

	Convenience Retail	Comparison Retail	Leisure			
			A3-A5	Cinema & Theatre	Recreation	Games of Chance
Baseline floorspace needs (2016-2037) (sq. m)	880	10,792	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Housing-led floorspace needs (2016-2037) (sq. m)	1,077	11,457	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Baseline expenditure growth by sector (2016-2037) (£m)	£16.19	£284.98	£33.93	£2.17	£5.28	£6.40
Housing-led expenditure growth by sector (2016-2037) (£m)	£21.17	£299.05	£36.58	£2.34	£5.92	£6.89

- 5.6 This equates to an additional £21.17m of convenience retail growth and £299.05m of comparison retail growth by 2037. In addition, there is potential for an additional £36.58m of food and drink expenditure to be provided for, along with over £15m of other leisure expenditure, meaning a sizeable potential requirement for further leisure space.

- 5.7 The figures above indicate a longstanding trend within the District in which development of retail and leisure space has not kept up with population growth which has led to only more basic needs being accommodated locally, whilst the need for more complex uses (e.g. larger supermarkets, premium restaurants or cinemas) has been met by residents travelling elsewhere. Whilst much of this could be provided for outside the district, or in the case of retail, online, there is an opportunity for a significant amount of retail and leisure space within the District, and this should be considered both when planning for town centres and overall retail/leisure floorspace provision associated with new residential development.
- 5.8 As set out in the Study, Rochford District has one of the highest 'leakage' rates for residents travelling elsewhere for retail needs across South Essex, with 68% of residents going elsewhere for comparison shopping and 57% for convenience. Similarly, for food & drink and leisure, the leakage figure is 33%. This is unsurprising, given the proximity of major centres such as Basildon and Southend, but does indicate additional potential for retail and leisure space within the District and a retention of a greater amount of retail and leisure spend. The study also indicates the potential for a niche cinema offer and further food & beverage provision alongside future housing growth.

Table 2: Expenditure retention and leakage across South Essex local authorities for comparison retail

Local authority	Available LPA resident expenditure		Proportion of expenditure made within the LPA	
	Retained	Leakage	Residents	Inflow
Basildon	76%	24%	59%	41%
Castle Point	14%	86%	92%	8%
Rochford	32%	68%	55%	45%
Southend-on-Sea	79%	21%	65%	35%
Thurrock	73%	27%	20%	76%

Table 3: Expenditure retention and leakage across South Essex local authorities for convenience retail

Local authority	Available LPA resident expenditure		Proportion of expenditure made within the LPA	
	Retained	Leakage	Residents	Inflow
Basildon	89%	11%	72%	28%
Castle Point	74%	26%	75%	25%
Rochford	43%	57%	79%	21%
Southend-on-Sea	78%	22%	67%	33%

Table 4: Expenditure retention and leakage across South Essex local authorities for food & drink

Food and drink	Expenditure retained	Expenditure inflow	Expenditure leakage
Basildon	71%	29%	29%
Castle Point	94%	6%	60%
Rochford	72%	28%	33%
Southend-on-Sea	62%	38%	13%
Thurrock	29%	71%	55%
South Essex	75%	25%	21%

Rochford Town Centre Health Check¹⁷








- 5.9 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 Guidance¹⁸, 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.
- 5.10 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.
- 5.11 As Table 5 shows, Rochford had an above-average vacancy rate, whilst the proportion of Class A1 comparison and convenience goods units is 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

¹⁷ Rochford Town Centre Health Check 2019 (internal document)

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-the-vitality-of-town-centres>

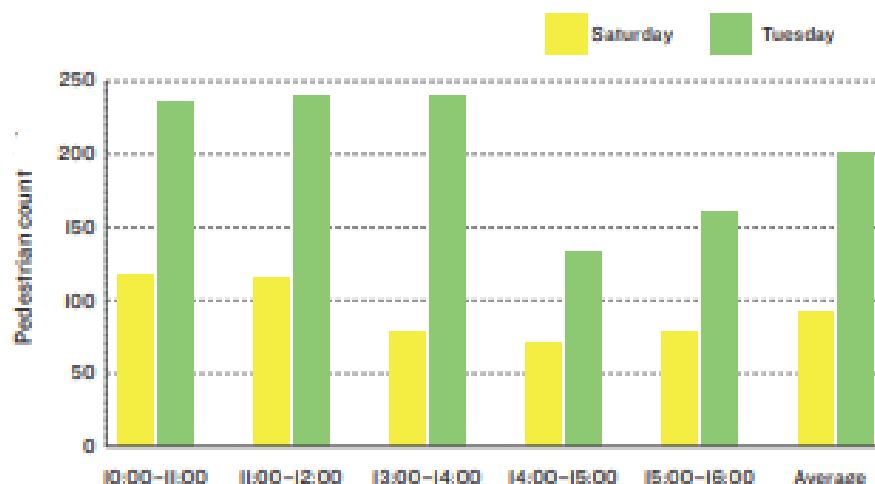
needs. The centre was found to have a reasonable proportion of food and beverage uses.

Table 5: Mix of A-class Uses – Rochford Town Centre Health Check 2019

Use Class	Number of Units	Percentage of Units	% UK Average
 A1 – Comparison Retail	21	25.3	33.0
 A1 – Convenience Retail	6	7.2	9.0
 A1 – Service Non-Retail	15	18.1	13.9
 A2 – Financial & Professional Services *	11	13.2	11.9
 A3 / A5 – Restaurants & Takeaways	14	16.9	15.8
 A4 – Pubs & Bars	4	4.8	4.6
 Vacant (Class A1-A5)	12	14.5	11.8
Total	83	100.0	100.0

- 5.12 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 (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Pedestrian Flows by Hour Range



- 5.13 The study identified the following strengths and weaknesses of the centre.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Independent shops and services - The market on Tuesdays - Linked trips generated by offices, the hospital, community uses and commuters - A loyal local customer base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cluster of prominent vacant buildings - Poor linkages to under-utilised Roche Close - Breaks in the retail frontages - Low demand for retail space - No large food supermarket

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accessible public car parking - Compact and legible shopping area - Historic character providing a strong local identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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
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5.14 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.

Individual centre overviews

5.15 The following overviews present a concise snapshot of the state of retail, leisure and other town centre activities in each settlement, based on available research and anecdotal evidence. National policy encourages plans to identify town centre hierarchies, with those centres at the top of the hierarchy those that are the most important for retail and leisure provision. The table below illustrates a local hierarchy for Rochford.

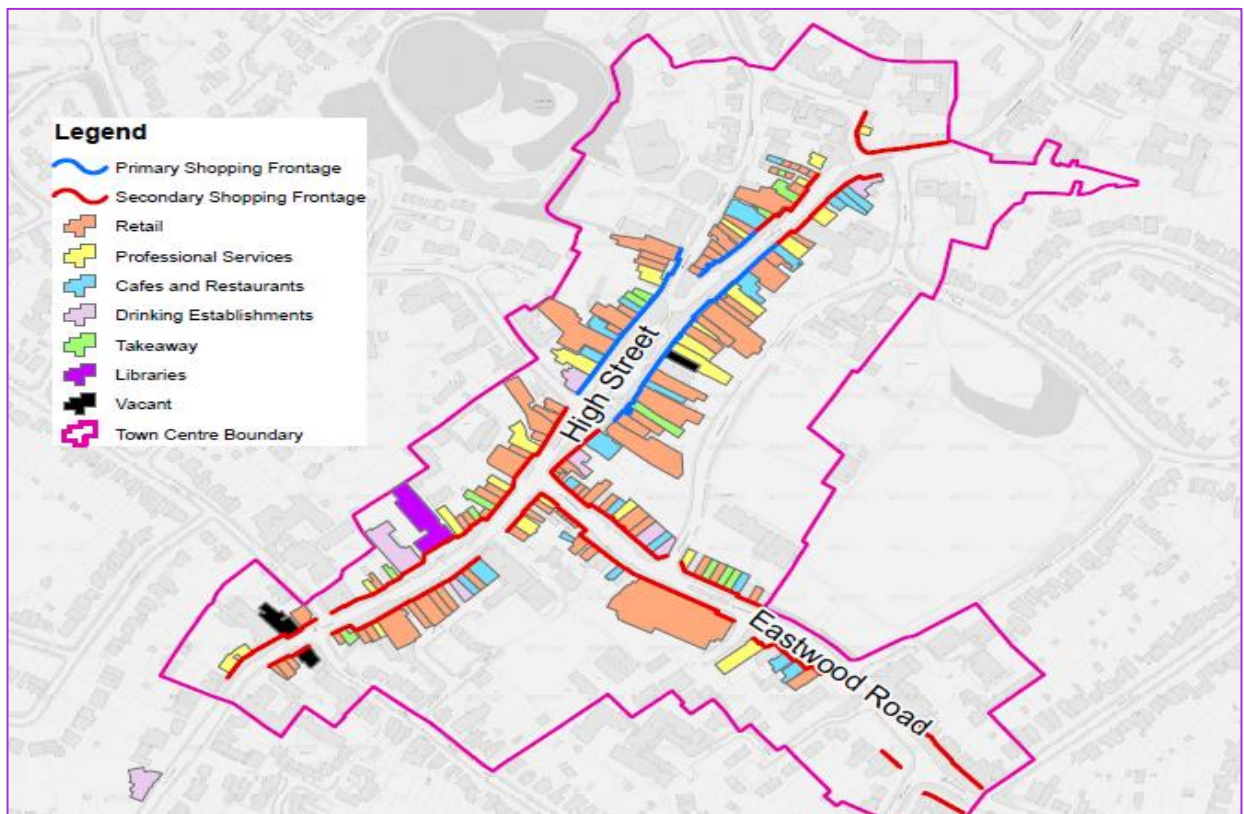
Hierarchy	Centres
Town Centres (Protected)	There are 3 town centres in Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley which house over 30 businesses

Local Centres (Unprotected)	There are a small number of local centres, including Hullbridge, Great Wakering and Golden Cross which serve local populations
Local Parades (Unprotected)	There are large number of local parades throughout the District, generally located in suburban areas

Rayleigh

- 5.16 Rayleigh is a market town and the District's principal shopping destination. The SERS noted its wide comparison and convenience offer, which serves the town and the surrounding villages. It is ranked 716th nationally, according to the Javelin Research *VENUESCORE* system of ranking retail centres in terms of their offer. Rayleigh's AAP sought to strengthen the town's role as the District's primary retail centre, promoting the consolidation of retail along the High Street, along with promotion of town centre-appropriate uses (i.e. A2-5, leisure and cultural/community) in the surrounding streets. It also prioritised intensification of key sites for mixed-use development and a series of public realm, highways and cycle/pedestrian improvements, to ease access around the town and tackle longstanding congestion issues.
- 5.17 In 2021, Rayleigh continues to be the District's main retail hub, with a February 2020 assessment of ground floor uses along Government-approved 'health check' principles indicating the town centre continues to be well-occupied, with a good proportion of A1 retail uses (both comparison and convenience), strong mix of supporting A2-5 uses and low vacancy rate (see map below). It is recognised that the Coronavirus pandemic has led to a small increase in vacancies since this mapping was prepared, including the prominent former Dorothy Perkins store.
- 5.18 Since the publication of the Rayleigh Town Centre AAP, many of the recommendations have not yet been realised, e.g. for relocation of the taxi rank, partial pedestrianisation of the high street and improved linkages from Websters Way through to the High Street through enhancement of the existing alleyway access, or better links to the Railway Station. However, the identified opportunity site at the former Dairy Crest depot has attracted applications for mixed-use development, whilst engagement with local stakeholders through 2019 to 2021 indicates a strong desire among the local community to continue to improve Rayleigh's retail and leisure offer. Ongoing proposals for the redevelopment of a number of Council sites, including the Mill Arts Centre and Civic Suite, present opportunities to redevelop brownfield sites and deliver a range of residential, commercial and community uses that integrate with and enhance the existing public realm.

Figure 12: Rayleigh Town Centre Health Check Survey, Feb 2021

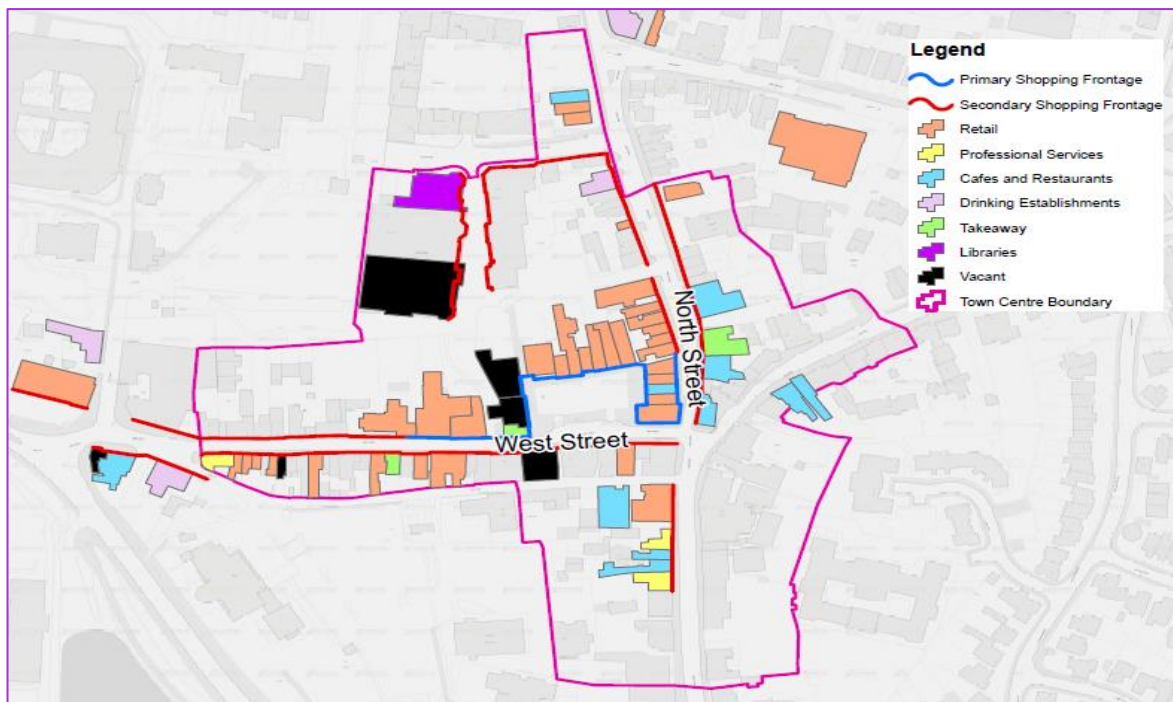


Rochford

- 5.19 Rochford is a small market town with relatively high proportion of convenience floorspace reflecting its position in the retail hierarchy, Rochford has a localised catchment that includes the surrounding rural villages. Its national VENUESCORE ranking of 2,577 reflects it is considerably smaller than Rayleigh. The Rochford AAP prioritises the concentration of retail and supporting uses around the historic market square, West Street and North Street, whilst proposing a range of public realm, highways and connectivity enhancements to support the historic core and attract visitors, including pedestrianisation of the market square. It also supports a stronger evening economy through encouraging appropriate uses, and intervention on key underused/unattractive sites to improve the overall built environment and support town centre vitality. Since the AAP's publication, there has been progress in some areas, including proposals to develop the former police station, completion of a historically-sensitive residential scheme on East Street and proposals to redevelop the key arrival point on the junction of West Street and Union Lane into a mixed-use development. The Council's own Asset Development Programme proposes the relocation of Council offices and chamber to an enlarged Freight House site, redeveloping the South Street offices into a series of residential schemes. There has been more limited progress in other areas, with a 2019 Health Check carried out by Lichfields finding high vacancy rates of 14.5%, higher than previous surveys undertaken in 2008 and 2014, and above the national average of 11.8%.

- 5.20 Although work has commenced since the health check on some prominent vacant buildings (e.g. the conversion of the former Barclays Bank at 15 West Street into a pharmacy, and the former NatWest Bank at 32 West Street into office suites), the issue of vacant units remains considerable, typified by a longstanding empty former supermarket unit. In addition, the closure of 2 public houses since 2017 suggests that efforts to enhance the town's leisure role and expand the evening economy have not advanced either. The map below indicates the prevalence of vacant units in Rochford Town Centre in early 2021. Similarly, proposals to enhance the public realm of the market square and introduce connectivity improvements are yet to proceed, despite these being flagged in the 2014 AAP and remaining the principal opportunity for public realm enhancements and part pedestrianisation to facilitate increased pavement seating and events. As with Rayleigh, the impending redevelopment of a number of Council assets may enable regeneration objectives to be met, but may necessitate a revisiting of policies to create a more sustainable long-term mix of uses in light of the structural issues covered in this section.

Figure 13: Rochford Town Centre Health Check Survey, Feb 2021

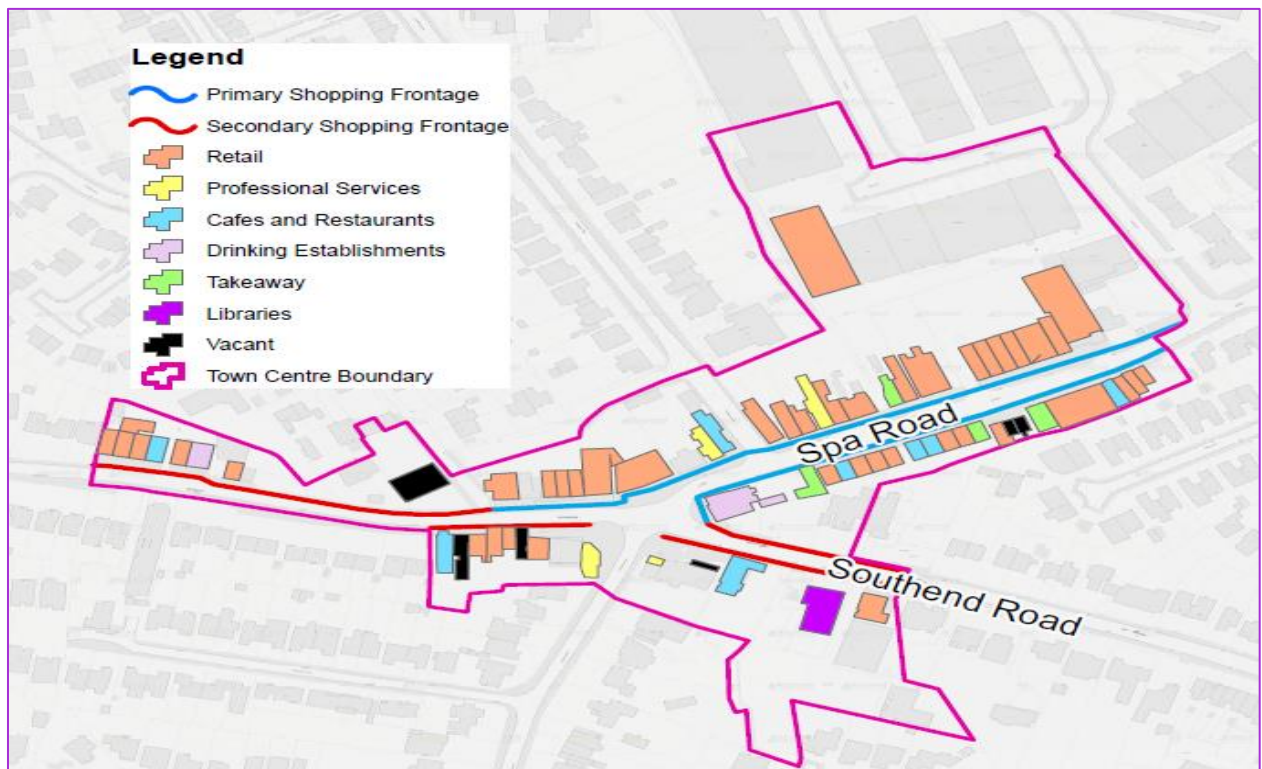


Hockley

- 5.21 Hockley provides a smaller centre, described by the SERS as serving a largely localised catchment area, and as such does not have a VENUESCORE rank. Hockley hosts a number of important convenience retail, service and food & drink/leisure uses, and Hockley AAP identifies its adjacent Eldon Way Industrial Estate as being an opportunity site, due to its potential for mixed-use development. Combined with a location close to a railway station, Hockley Town Centre has considerable potential to support new residential, business, retail and leisure uses. The AAP envisages a Hockley combining enhanced retail for the local community, the mixed-use redevelopment of Eldon Way to deliver housing, town centre uses and public realm on previously developed land, and the retention of some employment uses. Some progress has been made through the opening of an additional convenience retail store

(Sainsburys) to complement the existing Co-Op and Costcutter supermarkets, and vacancy rates are healthy. A recent planning permission for residential redevelopment of the former Waters & Stanton retail unit on Southend Road indicates the potential for housing to support the centre's continued vitality, but care must be taken not to break up active frontages in this linear shopping area and reduce overall footfall. Overall, the key component of Hockley's transformation remains unachieved, with Eldon Way remaining as an industrial estate with a high proportion of leisure uses, and poor connectivity with the wider town centre persisting.

Figure 14: Hockley Town Centre Health Check Survey, Feb 2021



Other Retail Centres

- 5.22 Outside the three main town centres, it is important to acknowledge the District's other retail centres, each of which will require careful planning to ensure they support a long-term sustainable and balanced mix of uses.
- 5.23 **Southend Airport Retail Park:** the District's main out of town retail centre, with a range of comparison retailers, e.g. homeware, furniture, pet supplies. It has a VENUESCORE rank of 1,709, and is a significant draw, despite only being accessible from Southend Borough. The site typically has a low vacancy rate and is immediately adjacent to the boundary with Southend-on-Sea.
- 5.24 **Village centres and neighbourhood shopping parades:** such as Great Wakering; Hullbridge; Canewdon; Golden Cross; Eastwood Road; Southend Road; Grove Road; London Road; and Hullbridge Road. These centres fulfil important local roles, primarily for convenience retail, services (e.g. hairdressing) and food & drink. New housing development has the potential to benefit businesses in such centres, and settlements

which have seen significant recent development and further current housing allocations (e.g. Hullbridge or Great Wakering) may benefit from additional retail, leisure and provision to reflect their expanding populations.

- 5.25 **Industrial estates, garden centres and farm sites:** although not formally allocated, the District's industrial estates host a number of retail and leisure uses, whilst garden centres and former nurseries within the Green Belt house others, having expanded considerably over time. Typical locations include Purdey's Industrial Estate, Rochford, and London Road, Rayleigh. Such sites fulfil a demand, but require careful planning to avoid exacerbating existing issues around traffic congestion, parking and environmental impact.

6 Key Considerations for the New Local Plan

- 6.1 In planning for the future of Rochford District's town centres and village/neighbourhood parades, it is important to consider the significant social, economic and technological change reshaping the roles of retail (as highlighted in Sections 2 and 5), along with upcoming/proposed changes to national planning policy which are likely to increase flexibility in centres, whilst also reducing the ability for local planning authorities to manage and curate the types of uses and activities taking place in centres. The new Local Plan will need to be both positive and pragmatic, driving forward improvements to town centres without seeking to stifle inevitable change driven by changing consumer demands.
- 6.2 Future policies should be mindful of the evidence base outlined above, which highlights the need to ensure provision of retail and leisure floorspace is delivered alongside housing growth. Enhancing existing centres and designating new retail/leisure provision in instances where substantial housing allocations are designated should be considered a fundamental component of creating 'complete communities', in which a full range of amenities and services are situated within walking distance of neighbourhoods, thereby reducing the need for travel and supporting sustainable development.
- 6.3 It is necessary to carefully examine both the recommendations of the Area Action Plans and of other pieces of evidence (e.g. town centre health checks), along with future stakeholder engagement, to determine which measures should continue to be pursued, and whether new approaches are required. Given a less prescriptive national approach to use mixes, one of the key roles of planning in supporting thriving town and local centres is likely to be in promoting high-quality placemaking and ensuring the public realm, physical environment, key development sites and accessibility options are pursued in a coordinated way that encourages visitors to stay longer at a wide range of activities, and for businesses to want to locate and invest within the District.
- 6.4 The new Local Plan's town centre policies will need to have flexibility and adaptability built in, and be mindful of working in partnership with other Council departments (e.g. Economic Development, Asset Management and Licensing) alongside other stakeholders (e.g. parish/town councils, Essex County Council and local business/community groups) to develop achievable visions and objectives.

Options for Retail & Town Centres

- 6.5 In light of the various issues identified through this topic paper, a number of non-exclusive options have been identified for addressing town centres and retail through the plan. These are:

Option	Explanation
<p>Producing new dedicated masterplans or area action plans for Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley, updating these to reflect local and national changes and providing a new positive vision for uses within these centres</p>	<p>This option would build on previous Area Action Plans, new evidence and stakeholder engagement to develop updated documents that seek to promote high quality placemaking and accessibility within Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley to help them remain popular, vibrant centres. Where appropriate, AAP policies could be retained/adapted to promote key development opportunities (e.g. Eldon Way, Hockley) and major transport improvements.</p> <p>In order to maximise the effectiveness of this option, it would need to be implemented holistically through a partnership of various Council teams and external partners, and have regard to a dedicated staff resource to coordinate it. It should also use this network to bid for and leverage funding from a range of sources, including local/County resources, developer contributions, and Central Government and voluntary sector funding pots.</p> <p>In order to ensure a specific use within Class E is created/retained (e.g. a market hall, start-up business workspace or small shop units), it may be necessary for policymakers/stakeholders to acquire property themselves, something beyond the scope of planning policy.</p>
<p>Incorporating specific town centre policies for Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley within the new Local Plan, reflecting local and national changes and providing a new positive vision for uses within these centres</p>	<p>This option would seek to replicate many of the placemaking/accessibility improvements outlined above and prioritise achieving these through the planning system. This would be less resource-intensive than new masterplans or area action plans, but</p>

	<p>may have more limited effects without a body to deliver non-planning objectives, It would, however, be an effective way to guide the development of larger schemes and key opportunity sites that are beyond the scope of permitted development rights.</p> <p>Given the conservation area status of much of central Rayleigh and Rochford, an option could include setting out which ground floor commercial frontages within the conservation area are deemed critical to the 'character or sustainability' of the area (e.g. due to the settlement's historic role as a market town), and therefore not appropriate for residential development. It could also set out areas which would, for conservation purposes, be appropriate to convert to housing (e.g. if that was the original use of the structure).</p> <p>Consideration could be to frontage policy designation given in areas where permitted development would not meet the necessary prior approval (e.g. where environmental factors such as flooding risk, transport/highways impacts and likely noise would render residential uses inappropriate. Such locations could be flagged on a map as guidance for developers.</p>
<p>Continuing to define boundaries, primary and secondary retail frontages for each centre and developing a policy approach that restrict appropriate uses within each type of frontage</p>	<p>Continued frontage policies could be used as guidance for developers as to the most appropriate uses for certain areas of town centres, although permitted development legislation means they would not be always be legally enforceable. In the case of larger buildings, such frontage policies could ensure the retention of key town centre uses, whilst such policies could also designate the non-Class E uses which would be permissible (e.g. Sui Generis uses such as pubs/bars/music venues, F1/F2 uses such as museums/libraries, community shops/halls or appropriate B2 – General Industrial uses such as motor</p>

	<p>garages or microbreweries. These could be used alongside other wider placemaking initiatives to encourage certain uses to cluster, however (e.g. pedestrianisation of a street to encourage food and drink activities).</p> <p>Given the conservation area status of much of central Rayleigh and Rochford, an option could include setting out which ground floor commercial frontages within the conservation area are deemed critical to the 'character or sustainability' of the area (e.g. due to the settlement's historic role as a market town), and therefore not appropriate for residential development. Within such a policy, expanded detail could be provided on which areas are deemed to be primary or secondary frontages.</p> <p>Consideration could be to frontage policy designation given in areas where permitted development would not meet the necessary prior approval (e.g. where environmental factors such as flooding risk, transport/highways impacts and likely noise would render residential uses inappropriate. Such locations could be flagged on a map as guidance for developers.</p> <p>Associated with this, a specific policy for rural centres and local parades could be adopted to designate uses which fall under the definition of Class F2 and which are essential community retail and meeting facilities (e.g. in villages such as Canewdon).</p>
<p>Continuing to define primary and secondary retail frontages for each centre but allow the market to determine the most appropriate uses for those frontages within Class E</p>	<p>As above, this policy could be used as guidance for developers, but with policies being less prescriptive over the exact uses that particular areas or frontages can contain. These uses would then be determined by the market (e.g. landlords and occupiers) based on their understanding of consumer demands. This approach would give the Council less influence over the exact uses</p>

	<p>contained within town centres, but may also reduce vacancies in the long-term by giving the market flexibility to fill buildings.</p>
<p>Encouraging a greater quantity of housing within centres in support of Strategy Option 1: Urban Intensification (including using the brownfield register to define sites in town centres that are considered generally appropriate for residential development)</p>	<p>Policies encouraging housing in centres would help the Council fill its housing needs with less pressure on greenfield sites. This would also provide more housing in sustainable locations with a range of amenities, potentially reducing the need for car travel. In providing town centre residential policies, this could also give greater reassurance to developers and encourage them to submit policy-compliant schemes that are more likely to incorporate quality design and sustainability features than schemes achieved by permitted development. Development briefs could help guide key development/regeneration opportunities in town centres and give an indication of expected infrastructure contributions.</p>
<p>Ensuring any large-scale new housing or employment developments create new neighbourhood centres to serve them, or alternatively provide for sustainable connections to existing centres</p>	<p>This would support the new Local Plan's objective of achieving 'complete communities', improving quality of life for residents and reducing the amount of unnecessary car travel to access everyday amenities. It would also ensure existing businesses and amenities benefit from increased custom through accessibility improvements and reduce the risk of congestion at such sites.</p>
<p>Allocating land with town centres or other appropriate locations for new retail and leisure developments</p>	<p>This would enable the Council to designate key sites as regeneration opportunities to encourage flexible retail and leisure use, something that could be developed alongside town centre vision/masterplan partners. This could be supported by development briefs to guide aspects such as design, accessibility, and infrastructure. Where appropriate for specific sites, new Article 4 Directions could limit the loss of these key schemes to residential through future permitted development.</p>

APPENDIX A: Existing Retail & Town Centres Local Planning Policies

Policy Issues	Existing Local Policy				
	Core Strategy	Development Management Document	Rayleigh AAP	Rochford AAP	Hockley AAP
Define a network and hierarchy of town centres	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
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			
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
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		

APPENDIX B: AREA ACTION PLAN POLICIES

Rayleigh Centre Area Action Plan

Policy	Key components
Policy 1 – Rayleigh Area Action Plan Framework	<p>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)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. <p>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.</p> <p>Funding reliant on ECC budget and pooled financial contributions from developers.</p>
Policy 2 – Retail Development in Rayleigh	<p>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</p> <p>New retail-led development within Rayleigh town centre will be permitted where it would:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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; 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	<p>Within the town centre's primary and secondary shopping frontages, proposals for A1 retail uses will be acceptable.</p> <p>A proposed change of use for non-retail (non-A1) purposes will be permitted where it would:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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,

	<p>including A2-5, leisure, cultural and community uses. The Council will encourage such uses outside of the primary shopping frontage in particular; and</p> <p>4. Not have a negative effect on the amenity and character of Rayleigh or have adverse consequences for Rayleigh centre</p>
Policy 4 – Rayleigh’s Character Areas	<p>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.</p> <p>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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 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	<p>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</p> <p>The following principles are important:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development will respond positively to local townscape character, key elements of which include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 B: High Street North & Bellingham Lane	<p>Development in the High Street North and Bellingham Lane area will support the retail function of the central High Street 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</p> <p>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:</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development will respond positively to local townscape character, key elements of which include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 C: High Street South and Eastwood Road	<p>Development in the High Street south and Eastwood Road area will support the retail function of the central High Street area, 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.</p> <p>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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development will respond positively to local townscape character, key elements of which include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<p>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.</p>

	<p>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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
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Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan

Policy	Key components
<p>Policy 1 – Rochford Area Action Plan Framework</p> <p>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 supported in the centre and at key gateways to the town.</p>	<p>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</p> <p>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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The focus of retail uses in the centre, with the highest concentration of A1 uses in the Market Square area, with 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. <p>Note: The proposed highways and public realm enhancements would require a combination of financial contributions from developers and ECC's budget.</p>

Policy 2 – Rochford's Primary Shopping Frontage	<p>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</p> <p>Development for non-A1 uses will be permitted where it would:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Shopping Frontage	<p>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. Development involving the loss of town centre uses will be permitted where it would:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<p>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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. <p>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.</p>
Policy 5 – Rochford's Character Areas	<p>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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 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.

<p>Policy 6 – Character Area A: Central Area</p>	<p>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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New development will respond positively to local townscape character and protect and enhance the character of the Rochford conservation area. Key elements include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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; 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.
<p>Policy 7 – Character Area B: Northern/Eastern Approach</p>	<p>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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New development will respond positively to local townscape character and protect and enhance the character of the Rochford conservation area. Key elements include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 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	<p>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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New development will respond positively to local townscape character and protect and enhance the character of the Rochford conservation area. Key elements include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 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.

Hockley Area Action Plan

Policy	Key components
Policy 1 – Hockley Area Action Plan Framework	<p>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.</p> <p>All new development within the Hockley AAP area should contribute towards the delivery of the spatial framework. The key elements of this framework are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. 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. b. 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 rest of Hockley centre.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Enhanced car parking that will serve the centre as a whole. d. Opportunities for new housing as part of the Eldon Way Opportunity Site redevelopment. e. 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 appropriate locations for these uses are shown in Figure 5. f. 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	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 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	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 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	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.