

Rochford District Council

Adopted 21 April 2015

Local Development Framework

Rochford Town Centre Area Action Plan

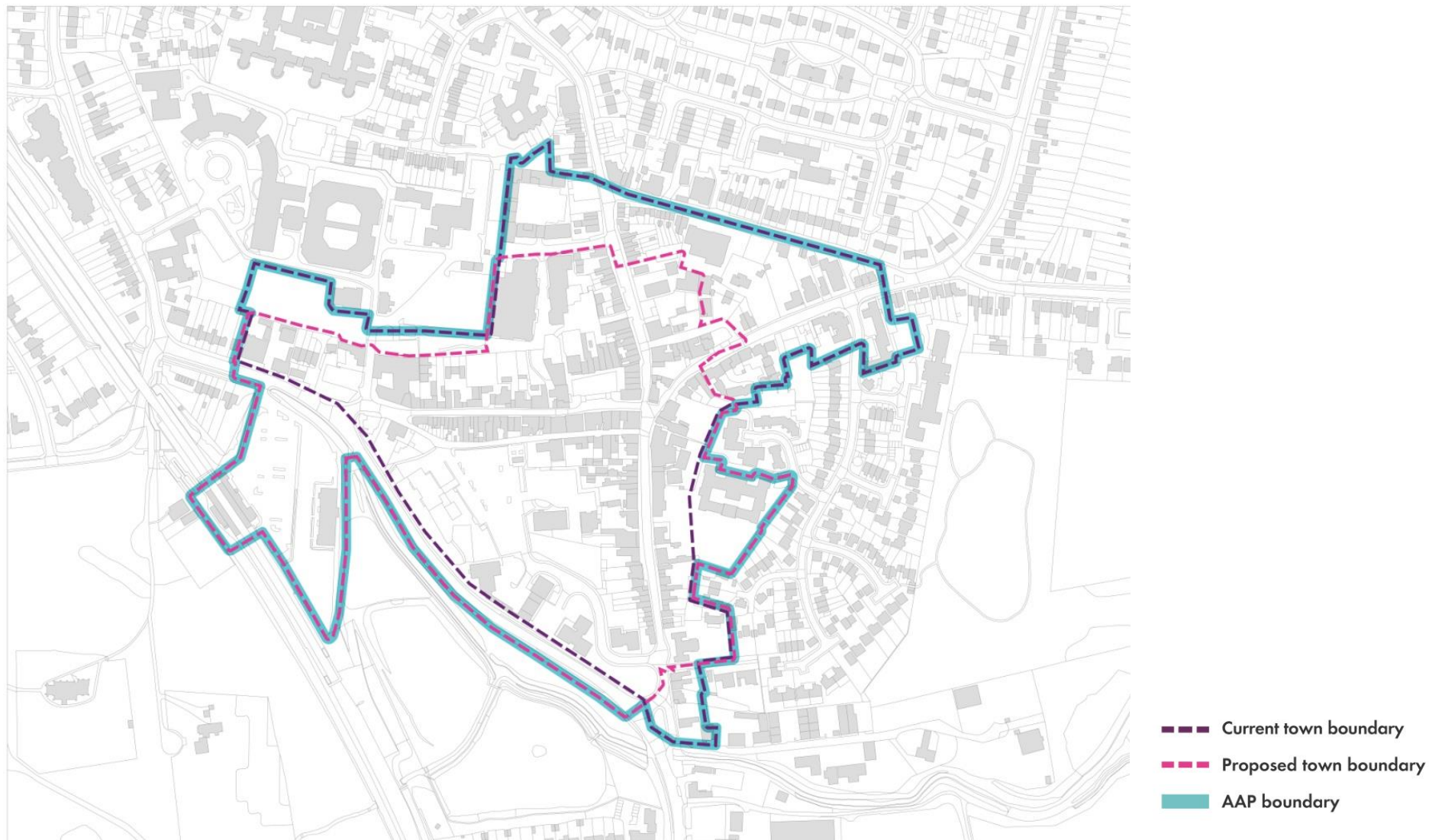


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Figure 1 – Rochford Town Centre AAP area

1. Introduction

1.1 The big picture

Rochford District Council is committed to preparing Area Action Plans (AAP) for its three main centres of Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley. The AAPs will form part of the statutory development plan for Rochford District. This document focuses on guiding the development of Rochford town centre during the plan period to 2025, and also considers its immediate surroundings.

The Core Strategy identifies the importance of Rochford's well preserved and unique historic character and layout, as well as the limitations that are imposed on its function as a town centre due to the small size of most retail units. It is envisaged that Rochford will build on its heritage assets and existing position as a small market town to attract visitors and provide for the retail needs of its local population. Opportunities are also identified for improvements to the Market Square, a revised and consolidated town centre boundary and a more permissive approach towards restaurants, cafés and bars. It is important that the AAP provides a framework for carefully managed, sensitive change that respects Rochford's historic fabric.

The AAP will form a part of the Rochford Local Plan. Alongside the adopted Core Strategy and other key planning documents, the AAP will replace the existing Replacement Local Plan (2006). The Local Plan is the new term for what was previously known as the Local Development Framework.

The next formal step is for the AAP to be published and placed on deposit for a six-week period, during which interested parties will be invited to make representations. It will then be submitted, alongside any representations received and other supporting documents, to the Secretary of State who will make arrangements for an Examination in Public by an independent Planning Inspector. The AAP will be measured against the established tests of soundness and the Planning Inspectorate will then issue a report with the inspector's findings and a decision. If it is found sound – with or without modifications – the AAP will then be adopted.

Once adopted, the AAP will be used as a framework for the development of Rochford town centre and during the determination of planning applications. It will be subject to the normal processes of monitoring and review.

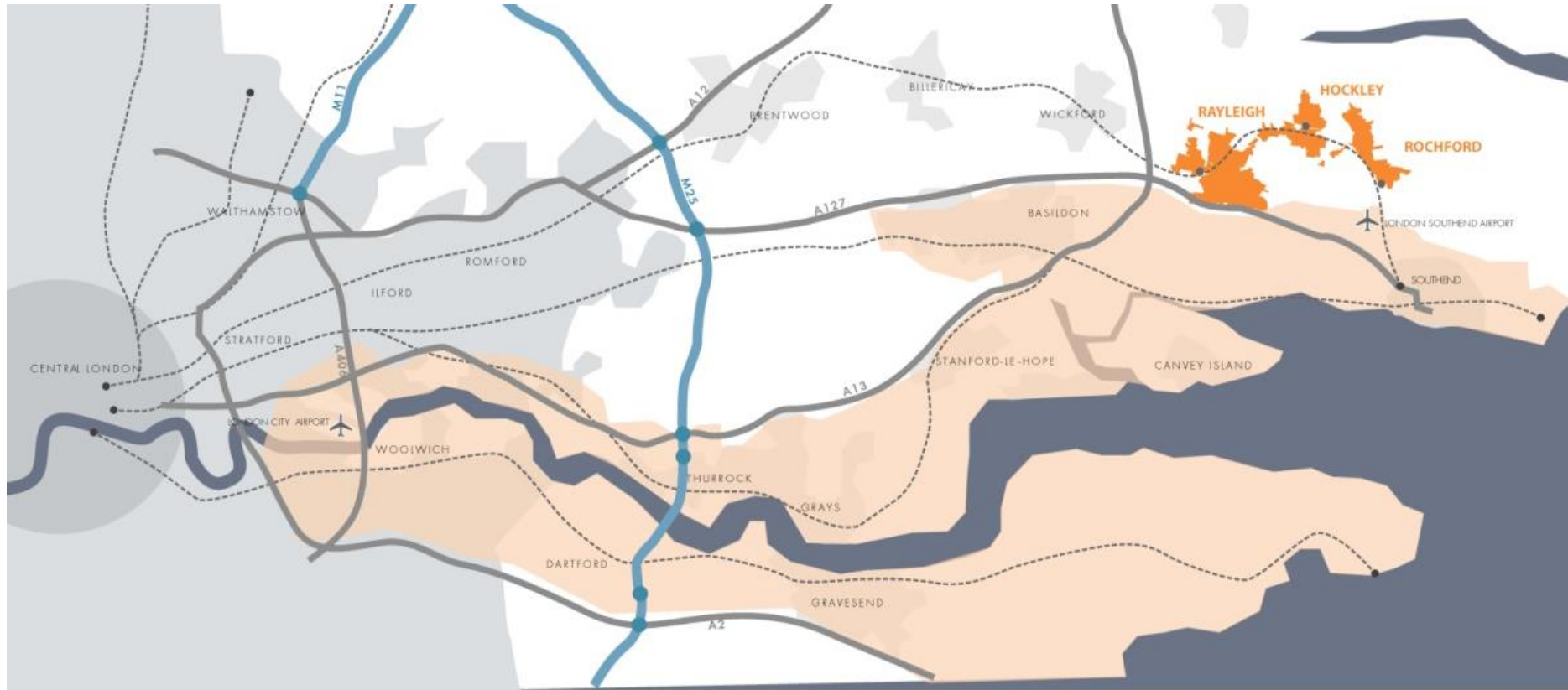
1.2 Working with our community

In recent years a series of community engagement and consultation exercises have been undertaken in Rochford which has informed the production of the Rochford Town Centre AAP and the Core Strategy for the District. These have included:

- A Placecheck and interactive web-based consultation, undertaken to inform the preparation of the Rochford Town Centre AAP Issues and Options paper.
- Consultations on the proposals set out within the Issues and Options paper.
- A consultation on the District's Core Strategy Submission Document that yielded feedback specifically related to Rochford.

Most recently a further stage of consultation was held on the planning policy framework for Rochford that had emerged following the Issues & Options paper. This was a public exhibition, which was held between 15 and 29 January 2013. Key messages that emerged can be summarised as follows:

- Providing a good range of uses, activities and facilities for local people should be the planning policy framework's main priority.
- There was strong support for the protection of the town centre's existing employment land.



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Figure 2 – Rochford's regional context

- The introduction of regular specialist markets and other temporary uses in the town centre was suggested.
- Improvements to Market Square were supported and measures such as the rerouting of buses, a decrease in the size of the taxi rank, a reduction in the number of cafés, pubs, restaurants and charity shops, and better lighting and signage on nearby pedestrian routes were promoted.
- Adequate customer car parking should be retained in the town centre.
- There were mixed views in relation to the effect that any increased economic activity in the evening might have on the town centre; one response stated that such an increase could result in the opening of more takeaway food outlets.
- The Highways Agency supported the emerging planning policy framework, although one response expressed concerns that the potential improvements to Bradley Way would result in traffic problems.
- There was support for the principle of mixed-use development, however some of those that responded expressed reservations about the cumulative impact of more development, especially housing, on infrastructure.

1.3 Working with our partners

Rochford District Council is working closely with its partners to ensure that the strategic and cross-boundary implications of the Rochford Town Centre AAP are fully explored and that any discussions will be taken into account in the preparation of the AAP. The Localism Act 2011 sets out a 'duty to co-operate' which requires such a process.

The main partner in relation to the AAP is Essex County Council (ECC), in relation to its role as Highways Authority for Rochford District and much of the wider area.

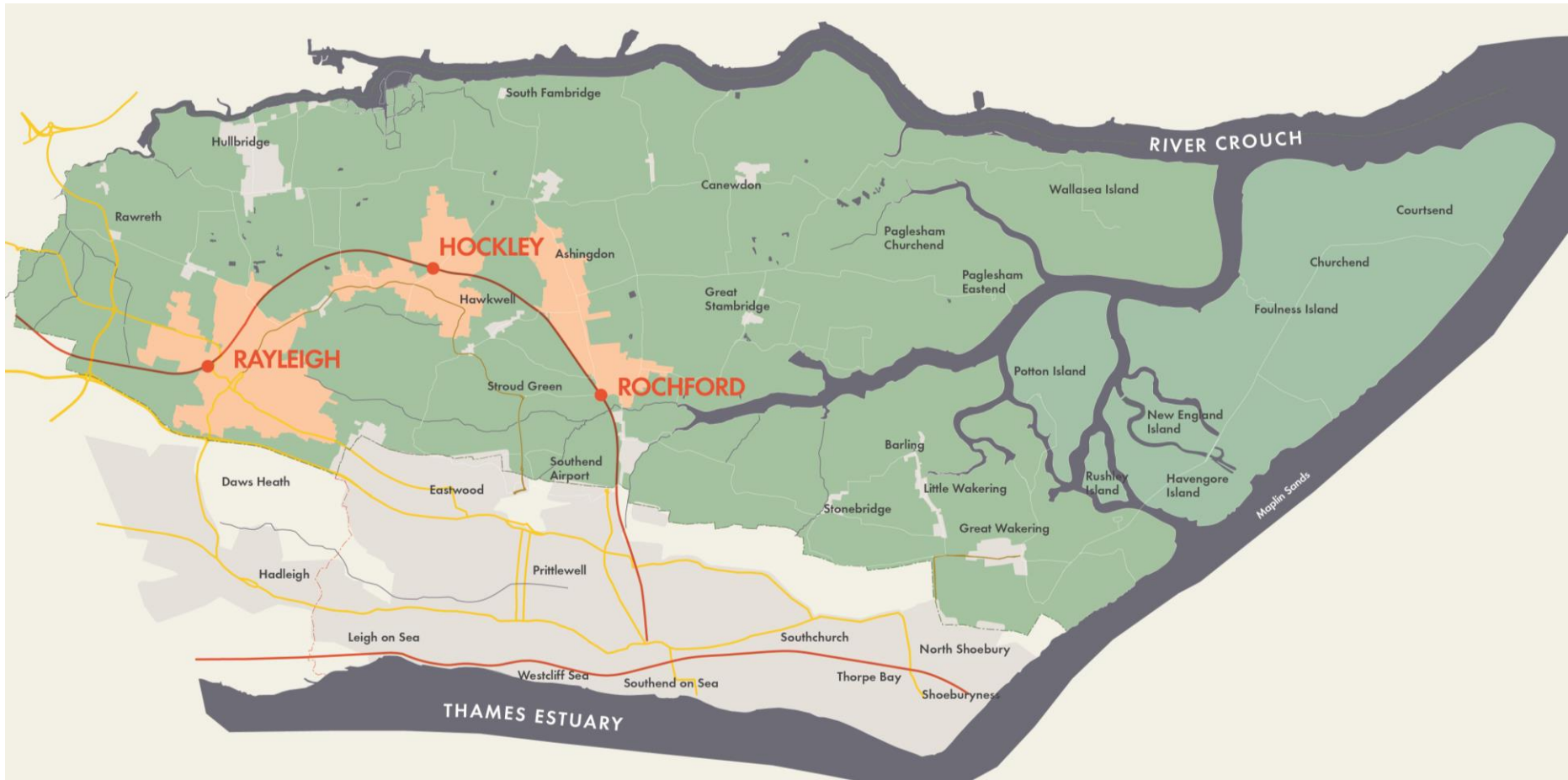
1.4 The AAP area

The AAP area comprises the existing town centre, which includes the central sections of North, East, South and West Streets, as well as the south side of Weir Pond Road, Roche Close, Back Lane and the north side of Bradley Way. The area also encompasses the rail station and Rochford District Council's offices. This area is considered to capture Rochford's key main town centre uses.

Most of the town centre's retail uses are located around the historic Market Square and, to a lesser extent, on West, North and South Streets. Additional retailing can be found to the north of Market Square on the ground floors of Roche Close.

Historic backlands exist to the south of Market Square and now provide the site of the main town centre car park. Other uses, including a health centre, a hotel and a group of office buildings, are also located in this area, which is bounded by Bradley Way. The Council's offices and the rail station are situated at the eastern and western extremities of the AAP area respectively.

Development towards the edges of the AAP area is largely residential and such development continues beyond the AAP boundary, with the Rochford Hospital site being the main exception. However, it should be noted that the area beyond Bradley Way is open space.



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Figure 3 – Rochford's district context

2. Rochford in context

This chapter sets out the planning and policy context within which the Rochford Town Centre AAP will operate, including a review of key sections of the local planning evidence base.

2.1 Strategic location and local setting

Rochford is located approximately 1 mile north of Southend-on-Sea, on a peninsula bounded by the River Thames to the south, the River Crouch to the north and the North Sea to the east. The River Roach, a tributary of the Crouch, runs through Rochford and dominates the character of the landscape to its east.

Although the town is adjoined by residential development in the parishes of Ashingdon and Hawkwell to the north, it is mostly surrounded by Green Belt and retains the feel of a small market town, despite its proximity to more built up areas in the south. Within the District, Hockley and Rayleigh are located to the west of Rochford.

Rochford is located on the Great Eastern rail connection between Southend-on-Sea and London Liverpool Street, which supports commuting into central London, approximately 30 miles away. The A127, A13 and A130 roads, which meet to the west of Rayleigh, can be accessed via the B1013. Local attractors for car journeys are Southend-on-Sea to the south

east, Basildon to the west and Chelmsford to the north-west.

London Southend Airport, which has domestic and international routes, is located to the immediate south west of the town. The proximity of the airport has an impact on both accessibility and amenity.

2.2 Historical evolution and Conservation Area

Much of Rochford's past can be read through its well preserved form, layout and buildings. Indeed, rather than having a high street, Rochford has an axial street pattern, comprising North, East, South and West Streets, with a central Market Square. This reflects its origins as a settlement that grew up around the market established in 1257, within the landholdings of Swein of Essex.

Archaeological deposits relating to the development of the medieval and post medieval town are likely to survive, in particular around the central Market square and its axial road system as described above. All new development should incorporate a mitigation strategy for the preservation and/or recording of such deposits.

Rochford grew slowly and is understood to have had a population of around 1,000 at the turn of the 18th Century. During the 18th and 19th Centuries the town prospered, being the principal town in the area prior to the rise of Southend and, unlike Rayleigh, having direct access to the coast. A range of trades and

industries took place within the town and gave it a stable economic base.

Although the coming of the railway from London Liverpool Street in 1889 did not lead to a rapid increase in the size of the town – as it did in some other locations – there was significant growth both before and after the Second World War, with residential development to the north. The major expansion of Rochford Hospital, principally in the 1930s and 1940s, has also had an important impact on the townscape, with the campus-style development interrupting Rochford's typical fine-grain urban form.

Rochford Conservation Area was first designated in 1969 and originally only covered the historic town centre. It has since been extended to include some outlying areas, including land to the south of Hall Road.

2.3 Policy context

The Rochford Town Centre AAP has been produced taking into account national and local planning policy, in addition to the various studies that supplement and inform this framework. This is to ensure that the AAP provides a robust policy framework for the future development of Rochford.

2.4 National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012. The NPPF has a presumption in favour of sustainable

development, which is expanded upon by a number of core planning principles and more detailed policies.



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Figure 4 – Movement context

In particular it is noted that the NPPF (Section 2) emphasises the importance of ensuring that local planning policies support the vitality and viability of town centres, and their role at the heart of communities. Practically this means that local planning authorities should promote a diverse retail offer and adopt a town centres first approach, which requires retail, leisure and entertainment, office, and arts, culture and tourism uses to locate in centres ahead of other alternatives.

2.5 Rochford Core Strategy (2011)

Rochford District Council adopted its Core Strategy document in December 2011. This sets out the overall development strategy for the District until 2025.

The Core Strategy's approach to centres and retail development is set out in policies RTC1 and RTC2. Respectively, these seek to strengthen and improve the retail offer of the District's main centres, including Rochford, and direct new retail development and other main town centre uses towards these locations through a sequential, town centres first approach.

The key Core Strategy policy in relation to the AAP is Policy RTC5. This states that Rochford District Council, with partner organisations and landowners, will produce an AAP for Rochford's town centre, which delivers the following:

- A safe and high quality environment for residents;

- A market square area that encourages visitors;
- An enhanced retail offer for Rochford;
- A range of evening leisure activities;
- Improved accessibility to and within the town centre; and
- The promotion of youth community facilities.

2.6 Rochford Area Action Plan Issues & Options paper

An Issues & Options paper for the Rochford Town Centre AAP was published in September 2009. This sets out that an AAP is needed to manage change in an area that is sensitive due to a high concentration of heritage assets. It identifies a number of perceived problems and key sites, and provides an analysis of potential choices for how they could be improved.

A total of ten sites were highlighted, including: Market Square and the Spar building to its east side, Back Lane, Rochford Hospital and the rail station car parks, and a number of potential infill sites towards the edge of the centre. A range of options were discussed in relation to each site. A number of these included the redevelopment of existing buildings or vacant plots for residential, retail or office development, or the reconfiguration of existing car parking arrangements to free up land for town centre development. The options put forward for the Market Square aimed to create a focal point for the town centre by improving its physical environment, making it more

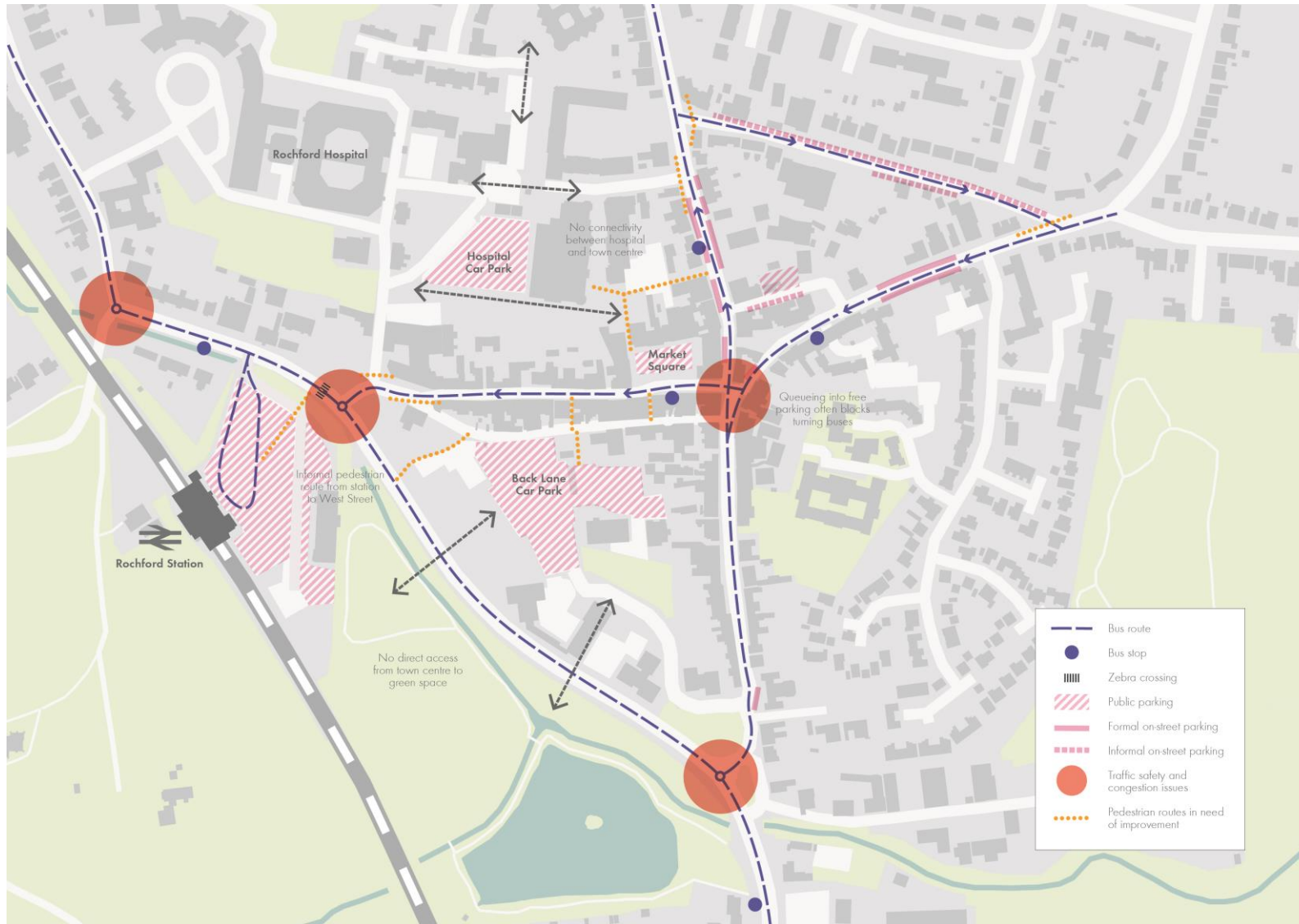
pedestrian-friendly and introducing uses that encourage a safe and attractive night-time economy.

The paper also considered transport issues within Rochford town centre generally and at specific locations including North and South Streets, Weir Pond Road, Bradley Way and West Street. The options included tighter parking controls; improved pedestrian links between the town centre, the railway station and other nearby areas; and, the provision of increased information relating to public transport. Other improvements that were looked at were the rerouting of existing one-way traffic to recreate two-way streets and improvements to the pedestrian environment, such as the widening of footways.

2.7 Emerging Allocations (2012) & Development Management (2011) documents

The Council is in the process of preparing its Allocations and Development Management documents. The Allocations document has been submitted for examination and the Development Management Submission document will be consulted on in June 2013.

The Allocations document includes Policy TCB2, which defines Rochford's town centre boundary and primary and secondary shopping frontages. However, the supporting text makes clear that the AAP may amend these allocations.



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Figure 5 – Movement issues

The Development Management document includes draft policies that deal with the development of centres. These include policies that seek to control the mix of uses, as well as the conversion of upper floors to residential accommodation.

2.8 Rochford Parish Council's 2004 Vision Statement

A Vision Statement was published by Rochford Parish Council in 2004 and has helped to influence the Council's policies, including the Core Strategy. This promotes Rochford as a centre for arts and crafts, as well as small specialist shops, businesses and offices. It is supportive of regeneration and development in the town centre, as well as proposals that would support the local economy and tourism.

2.9 Rochford Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (2007)

An appraisal and management plan was produced for Rochford Conservation Area in 2007, to assess its character and identify any potential improvements.

The appraisal identified Rochford's special character as "a modest but exceptionally well preserved market town centred on a cross roads". It also highlights the prevalence of rows of one-and-a-half storey cottages, which were a typical form of development in this part of Essex.

The management plan includes a number of proposals that would help to improve the Conservation Area, including some targeted public realm and landscaping improvements.

2.10 Retail issues

A Retail & Leisure Study for Rochford District was produced in August 2008 to form part of the local planning policy evidence base. It identified Rochford town centre as the second largest within the District, behind Rayleigh, and as having a strong convenience goods sector, with capacity for additional floorspace, despite considerable leakage of main food shopping expenditure to other areas.

It was also found that whilst Rochford's comparison goods market share is only 3.1%, there is scope for additional floorspace. The main constraint highlighted in relation to the town centre's retail offer was the narrow range of unit sizes. The study suggests that the development of larger units or the amalgamation of adjoining units could overcome this issue.

The report recommended that a number of other improvements could be made to strengthen Rochford's town centres position in the local economy. These were that:

- A more permissive approach should be taken towards non-A1 uses within the vacant units at Roche Close could help to enhance the local offer and improve vitality.

- The pedestrianisation of Market Square could provide a clearer focal point for the town centre and encourage a complementary "café culture".
- The town centre's boundaries should be redrawn to provide greater definition and focus, and exclude peripheral, mainly residential areas, which have little connection with the core town centre area.

2.11 Employment issues

An Employment Land Study was produced for Rochford District in September 2008. This considered the current supply and quality of, and future need and demand for, employment space within the District. It forms part of the evidence base for Rochford District Council's local planning policies.

Although there are no allocated employment sites within the AAP area, the Employment Land Study does consider the group of offices to the south of Back Lane at Locks Hill. Given the modest increase in long-term demand for office space forecast for the District as a whole, it recommends that the group of existing office buildings at Locks Hill are allocated as an employment site. Indeed, it is highlighted that Locks Hill is the District's main location for offices and that an allocation would help to highlight the importance of the site for local employment.



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1. Clay tiles roofs with red brick chimneys are common features
2. Residential properties along Back Lane, a short walk from Market Square
3. West Street looking east – Rochford benefits from a fine-grain historic townscape
4. Taxis have become a dominant feature in Market Square
5. The Hospital Extension Scheme Boiler House dating from the 1930s is now listed and has been converted into flats
6. A successful refurbishment of the Horners Corner complex

2.12 Land ownership context

Freehold land ownership within the AAP area is highly fragmented. However, it is noted that the Council has control over a number of car parking sites, including a large area of land at Back Lane, and its offices on South Street.

2.13 Property market overview

Despite general market uncertainty since the 2007 “credit crunch”, there are certainly signs of increased activity – especially in London and the South-east, where developers and investors are beginning to re-enter the market place. A number of retailers have targets which they have been unable to meet due to the lack of development activity since 2007. However, these are focussed on a very select number of towns and both size and demographic profile of catchment populations are of paramount importance.

The headline findings from a comprehensive review of Rochford’s property market were that:

- The town centre has an important local function, providing a range of services, but its historic core and layout places limitations on opportunities for new development.
- Rochford is an attractive place to live with a buoyant residential market and there are a number of opportunities for new residential-led development mainly located on infill sites at the fringe of the town centre.

- Any residential development coming forward in the town centre will have strong competition from the significant quantum of residential development planned on the fringes of Rochford.
- Despite not being a recognised office location, Rochford has a reasonable quantum of office floorspace relative to its size.
- Enhancements to the town centre’s physical environment, especially around the Market Square area, will help to encourage further investment and interest from potential occupiers.

2.14 Movement issues

Rochford’s strategic movement context is summarised in Figure 4. Figure 5 provides an overview of local movement issues specifically relevant to the town centre.

Rochford town centre is focused around Market Square, at the intersection of four historic routes: North, East, South and West Streets. Their narrowness means that all but South Street accommodate vehicular traffic in one direction only.

Southend Road, Bradley Way and part of West Street act as a town centre bypass and form the main highway route, which runs along Rochford’s western border. Strategically, this route connects with London Southend Airport and Southend-on-Sea to the south and Hockley to the north-west via Hall Road. Ashingdon Road links through to the north of Hockley. South and East Streets and Dalys

Road serve an important function as local collectors running along the eastern and northern boundaries of the town centre. Within the town centre itself, Back Lane, whilst narrow, plays a very important role through the provision of servicing and car park access.

There are two main car parks: one is at Back Lane (171 spaces) and the other at the rail station (202 spaces). Both of these operate on a pay-and-display basis and appear to have spare capacity. A smaller pay-and-display car park on Old Ship Lane, between East Street and North Street, provides additional car parking within the town centre, but does not appear to be particularly well-used. Additional pay-and-display spaces are available on Freight House site adjacent to the rail station.

The Market Square provides retail premises with 18 free car parking spaces, subject to a 30 minute time restriction. There is significant demand for parking in these spaces, with cars often queuing on West Street. The Market Square also accommodates a taxi rank with six spaces.

Rochford Station is served by rail services terminating at London Liverpool Street (50 minutes) and Southend Victoria (10 minutes). Trains run on a 20 minute headway during peak periods and a 30 minute headway during off-peak periods.



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1. View looking west along West Street – new housing development has been carefully integrated into its historic context
2. Typical weatherboarded house, North Street
3. The former Corn Exchange building, built in 1866 by Frederic Chancellor is now the Women's Institute building

There is a well-established network of bus routes servicing Rochford, although legibility of routes and services is poor due to the one-way system. Bus stops are scarce through the town centre and consist of signs only, with limited (if any) information provision. Given circulation issues, buses only pass by the train station in a northbound direction. The nearest southbound bus stop is located on East Street to the east of the study area. This is a significant walk and the interchange between the rail and bus networks is therefore less than ideal.

Pedestrian movement is concentrated around the Market Square and its shops, as well as on South, North and West Streets. Pedestrian connections have been provided to the north of the Market Square in association with new development. However, pedestrian permeability to the west is considered poor with limited connections to the station and through the hospital. There are some problematic junctions for pedestrians at either end of West Street, as well as at the roundabouts on Bradley Way, which act as barriers to pedestrian movement, resulting from traffic management solutions that have prioritised vehicle capacity and speeds. Bradley Way itself prevents easy walking between the centre and the park to the south and there is the opportunity for new crossings.

Cycling provision through Rochford is of a generally acceptable standard, with the exception of the lack of provision of facilities at junctions. Resolving speed issues through the town centre's narrow streets and slowing vehicles through improved junction treatments would have a marked impact on the cycling experience.

2.15 The Sustainability Appraisal

The Rochford Town Centre AAP has been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), as required by the European SEA Directive, UK planning legislation and the NPPF. SA seeks to promote sustainable development through the integration of environmental, social and economic considerations in the preparation of planning documents.

A Scoping Report was prepared and published in September 2012 to help ensure that the SA covered key sustainability issues relevant to Rochford town centre. This information was sent to statutory consultees for comment. Options proposed in the Rochford Town Centre AAP Issues & Options paper, which included alternatives for sites as well as transport issues, were then subject to SA in February 2013. This was sent to statutory consultees and wider stakeholders for consultation from 27 February to 10 April 2013. The findings of the SA have helped to inform the policy options selected in this submission version of the AAP. In summary the findings were that:

- Options proposing the redevelopment of buildings considered to have a negative impact on the Rochford Conservation Area would have a positive effect on heritage and townscape.
- Options that proposed mixed use developments coupled with public realm improvements performed well against SA objectives.

- The full or part pedestrianisation of Market Square and West Street could provide a number of positive benefits for communities, health and safety, economy and employment, cultural heritage, landscape and townscape and air quality.
- The proposed removal of the bus route and taxi rank from the Market Square and West Street would have the potential for a negative effect on elderly and disabled members of the community.
- Transport options that sought to slow vehicle speeds and improve pedestrian crossings and movement through the Town Centre performed well against SA objectives relating to communities, health, accessibility and the economy.

The SA of alternatives and reasons for their selection or rejection are presented in full through the SA report accompanying the AAP on consultation.

The policies and proposals set out in this submission version of the AAP have also been subject to SA. The findings have helped to inform the development of policies and proposals and are also presented in the SA report accompanying the AAP on consultation. The Council will continue to assess the AAP, including any changes, through the SA and will document this process.



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Public realm

1. Bradley Way acts as the town's by-pass
2. A culverted tributary of the River Roach passes houses along West Street
3. The pedestrian connection between Market Square and Roche Close is an important, though constrained, link
4. Market Square on market day – the treatment of the Square is orientated towards the car
5. Shared surface treatment along Roache Lane
6. The open space on the far side of Bradley Way is an untapped local amenity

3. A framework for a better Rochford

3.1 What makes for a sustainable Rochford?

Rochford is an established town and a sustainable location for homes, shops, jobs, leisure and other services and facilities. The AAP seeks to ensure that a positive planning policy framework that protects this function is put in place. It recognises that sustainable development must be delivered in a joined-up fashion, with economic, social and environmental benefits being sought concurrently. In this context, the following factors are considered important:

Provision of an attractive town centre for local people and visitors – Rochford has good local retail offer, in line with its position as a small market town. This should be enhanced through the encouragement of more supporting uses, including restaurants, cafés, and bars, and other leisure uses and community facilities, including those for young people. The presence of trees and green open space in and around the town centre also contributes to the quality of the local environment for local people and visitors.

Excellent public realm and historic fabric – Rochford town centre's historic fabric is very

well preserved and there are a number of attractive places, spaces and buildings. The existing strong character of the town should be further enhanced, with a focus on creating an environment in Market Square that attracts visitors.

Local employment opportunities – Rochford town centre has a relatively good stock of offices, which provide employment opportunities for the local population. The retention of these offices should be promoted.

A high quality natural environment – Rochford benefits from being surrounded by the Metropolitan Green Belt, which prevents urban sprawl, but also allows local people access to significant areas of high quality, open space. This open space should be safeguarded through the efficient use of previously developed sites within the settlement's existing boundaries.

Good accessibility – Rochford retains much of its historic street pattern and development in the town centre tends to be of a fine grain. However, there are some areas that are not very permeable, due to more recent developments and interventions. Improvements should be made to existing links, and new links created, to help make the town centre more accessible; in particular, access to the rail station should be improved. Traffic calming would help traffic flow, enhance bus services and encourage cycling.

Rochford, like many other Towns, will be vulnerable to unavoidable climate change and extreme weather events in the future, such as surface water flooding and exposure to extremely high and cold temperatures. To ensure the sustainability of Rochford's economy, continued preservation of the historic fabric and protection of green-spaces in the long-term development proposals will be required to take account of, and be adaptable to, the expected changes in local climate conditions, throughout the proposed lifetime of the development. All new developments should reduce predicted CO₂ emissions using a combination of building performance improvements, small scale on-site renewable energy and/or efficient supply of heat, cooling and power.

The AAP is a planning policy document that, primarily, seeks to assist in the management of changes and developments in Rochford town centre. Therefore, whilst its remit is limited, its reach is wide. Alongside the Core Strategy and other key policy documents, the AAP will help to attract and encourage new investment and co-ordinate change.

3.2 Vision and objectives

The AAP sets a vision for the town's future based on an understanding of the unique context that drives change and development in Rochford. It translates this vision into implementation objectives, policies and guidance that will act as a robust framework for delivery.

The vision for Rochford is:

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.

The five key objectives that support this vision and are vital in its delivery are to:

1) Provide a diverse range of uses, activities and facilities for local people

Rochford contains a good local retail offer, which is appropriate given its status as a small market town. The overall mix should be enhanced through a more flexible approach towards uses that would help to create a café culture and strengthen the evening economy, such as coffee shops, bars, restaurants and leisure uses.

2) Enhance the historic core

Rochford town centre benefits from an abundance of attractive and distinctive historic buildings and still retains some of its medieval street pattern. However, there are opportunities for carefully targeted improvements. The Market Square, in particular, could benefit from public realm enhancements and improvements to some of the surrounding buildings. This could help to attract visitors and strengthen the economic vitality of this primary retail area.

3) Improve accessibility for all

The Rochford Hospital estate and its proximity to the town centre has resulted in poor north-south or east-west links across the town centre. There are places where new routes could be opened up and footfall increased, which could bring new life to existing underused routes. There is also scope to create linkages across Bradley Way and improve accessibility between the rail station and town centre and the public open space beyond.

4) Protect local employment

Rochford town centre provides local employment through the provision of office space. The offices on Locks Hill should be retained in their current use.

5) Promote the redevelopment of unused, underused, infill or unattractive sites

There are a number of unused, underused, infill or unattractive sites within Rochford's existing town centre that may be available for redevelopment or reuse. These sites should be developed or converted for uses that support the function of the town centre; any new buildings should be of the highest standard of design.



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Figure 6 – Rochford Town Centre AAP framework plan

3.3 Arriving at a framework

Research to establish an appreciation of Rochford's context and conditions was undertaken during the preparation of the 2009 Issues & Options paper which was prepared to inform the AAP. Changes have however taken place which affect the town's current conditions. It is important for the AAP to take account of these changes, which include:

- A tougher economic climate – the current economic climate is significantly more challenging than it was at the beginning of the AAP process.
- New developments – some of the sites previously considered through the AAP process have either been recently developed or are currently being developed. These include the provision of a new Sainsbury's food store between the town centre and the railway station and the development of new employment floorspace on land adjacent to the town's main car park.

Following the January 2013 consultation, the Council considered all feedback received and refined the preferred development framework further. The AAP sets out a framework that responds to the contextual changes and previous stages of analysis and consultation.



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Figure 7 – Rochford Town Centre AAP movement framework plan

POLICY 1 – ROCHFORD AREA ACTION PLAN FRAMEWORK

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.

All new development within the Rochford Town Centre AAP area should contribute towards the delivery of the spatial framework as shown in Figure 6. The key elements of this framework are:

- 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.**

Four potential opportunity sites have been identified in Figure 6: the Spar building, the Police Station, the car park adjacent to freight House, and North Street (at the junction with Weir Pond Road). These sites offer the potential to contribute to a number of the key objectives of the Plan, including enhancing the historic core and promoting the redevelopment of unused, underused, infill or unattractive sites, particularly for residential and/or retail use. It is beneficial to establish uses that would be suitable for each site to provide certainty, as set out in Policies 6 to 9.

Figure 6 presents an overview of the framework for Rochford town centre and

provides a broad indication of where development and change should take place.

The creation of a sustainable Rochford, which maintains its role serving the retail and commercial needs of the local population, will be dependent on the emergence of high quality proposals for an improved Market Square, enhanced connections with nearby and adjoining areas, and an improved public realm. The development of new supporting uses and protection and extension of existing office uses will also be important.

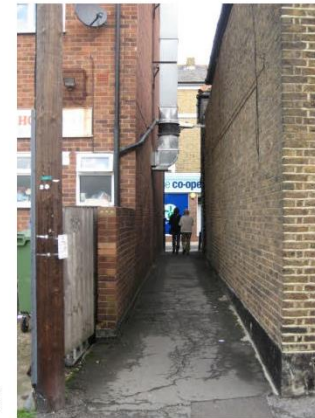
The AAP sets out further policies that provide guidance for new high quality development in accordance with this vision and objectives for Rochford and the AAP framework for the town centre. These policies are based around an understanding of the centre's character areas and seek to build on Rochford's existing local character. The AAP also identifies a potential opportunity site which has the capacity to accommodate 750 sq.m of A1 (retail) floorspace along North Street (at the junction with Weir Pond Road).

3.4 The movement framework

The movement framework outlined in Figure 7 identifies a series of key junctions throughout Rochford which would benefit from investment and improvement. The Council will continue to work with Essex County Council to agree the priorities for these improvements and more

fully assess the issues they present and opportunities available to address them.

Table 1 below provides an overview of these improvements and a headline estimate of the resources this might require.



Movement in Rochford

1. **Cycle facilities at Rochford Station**
2. **The town benefits from regular and frequent services to London Liverpool Street**
3. **Pedestrian connections between Back Lane car park and Market Square are important and could be improved**
4. **The station car park is very popular with commuters**
5. **North Street is an important local bus route**
6. **Pedestrian signage could be improved, particularly in the conservation area**

Table 1 – Major environmental improvements and highways schemes

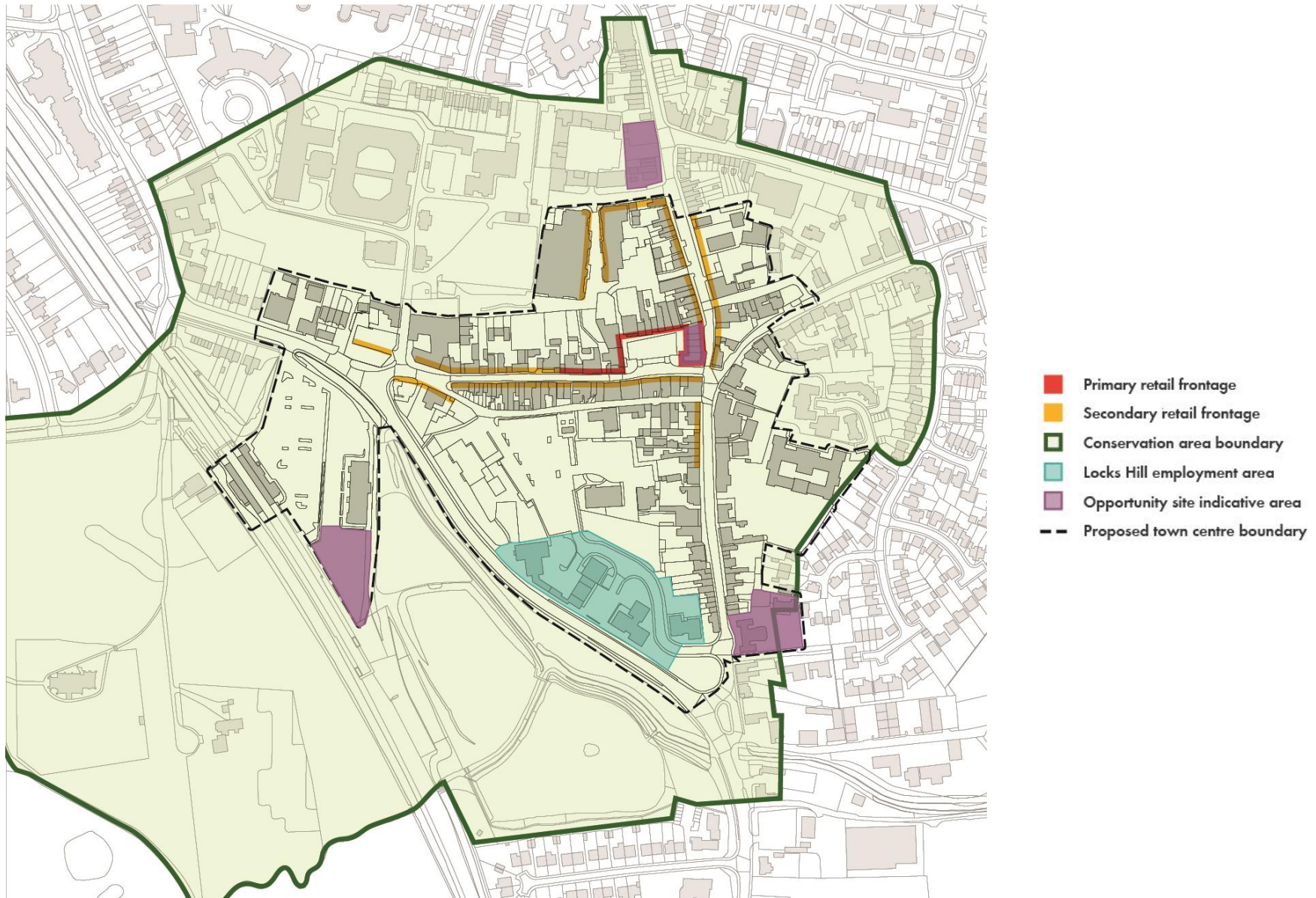
Environmental improvement / highways scheme	Lead partner	Other partners	Estimated cost	Potential funding stream(s)	Comments	Justification
Market Square public realm enhancements	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers	£20,000	ECC budget / Local Highways Panel	<i>Detailed comments are beyond the remit of the main modifications for the Plan.</i>	<i>Detailed comments are beyond the remit of the main modifications for the Plan.</i>
West Street / Bradley Way junction improvements	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers	£50,000 - £100,000	Pooled financial contributions / ECC budget	Improvements to informal pedestrian crossings and direct walking route to/from station	Poor pedestrian environment at key gateway to town centre. Evidence of informal use of adjacent embankment by pedestrians walking between station and town centre along desire lines.
Hall Road / Ashingdon Road / West Street Junction improvements	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers	TBC	S106	Conversion of mini-roundabout to signalised junction with formalised pedestrian crossing facilities.	Required to mitigate impact of development on Hall Road.
Southend Road / Bradley Way / South Street	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers	£100,000 - £150,000	Pooled financial contributions / ECC budget	Enhancement of informal pedestrian crossings. Landscaping works and public realm enhancement to adjacent service roads and forecourts.	Poor pedestrian and public realm environment at key gateway to town centre. Limited / indirect crossing opportunities from town centre towards green space.
North Street / Weir Pond Road junction	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers	£50,000 - £100,000	Pooled financial contributions / ECC budget	Junction tightening, footway widening and enhancement of informal pedestrian crossings. Landscaping enhancement to adjacent parking areas and open plots.	Poor pedestrian and public realm environment at key gateway to town centre. Limited / indirect crossing opportunities with fast moving traffic on one-way streets.

Note: The broad budget estimates given are based on our general experience of similar scheme costs rather than any professional cost advice related to specific proposals. For public realm improvement schemes a general rate of £300/m² has been applied to the scheme area, which would allow for resurfacing with high quality materials. These figures are indicative only



The Back Lane car park – the town’s principal public car park benefits from landscape features and mature trees

Environmental improvement / highways scheme	Lead partner	Other partners	Estimated cost	Potential funding stream(s)	Comments	Justification
East Street / Weir Pond Road / Stambridge Road / Rocheway junction	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers	£100,000 - £150,000	Pooled financial contributions / ECC budget	Junction tightening, footway widening, enhancement of informal pedestrian crossings and traffic calming measures.	Poor pedestrian and public realm environment at key gateway to town centre. Limited / indirect crossing opportunities with fast moving traffic on one-way streets.
New and enhanced pedestrian / cycle links	ECC	Rochford District Council / developers	£100,000 - £150,000	Pooled financial contributions / ECC budget	New and enhanced pedestrian and cycle links across town centre, e.g. new route to green space and crossing on Bradley Way, improved paving / lighting on existing links.	To improve environmental quality and safety, and encourage walking and cycling for local journeys around the town.



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Figure 8 – Rochford Town Centre AAP Proposals Map

4. Proposals plan, shopping frontages and sites

4.1 Rochford town centre boundary

In line with the spirit of Core Strategy Policy RTC5 and the guidance contained in the 2008 Retail and Leisure Study, the town centre boundary has been revised to help strengthen the centre. Key changes include the following:

- Inclusion of Rochford Railway Station area – Rochford Station is a key facility supporting the economic vitality of the town, located at the end of the West Street axis, which is the principal commercial spine in the centre;
- Inclusion of Rochford Council offices – located along and with direct access to South Street, the Council is a very significant local employer and employees perform an important role in supporting the town centre economy;
- Removal of East Street and Weir Pond Road – this predominantly residential area lies adjacent to the commercial uses in the centre and whilst the area acts as a gateway to the town, the residential character of the town suggest the area should be excluded from the town centre boundary;
- Roche Close as the boundary – this road is the axis between new mixed and commercial development to the south and new residential development to the north.

POLICY 2 – ROCHFORD'S PRIMARY SHOPPING FRONTAGE

Within Rochford's Primary Shopping Frontage, as defined on the Rochford Town Centre AAP Proposals Map (Figure 8), 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. Development for non-A1 uses will be permitted where it would:

- 1. Not have a detrimental impact on, or undermine, the vitality and viability of Rochford town centre;**
- 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

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:

- 1. Not have a detrimental impact on, or undermine, the vitality, viability and retail character of Rochford's 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.**

The proposals map (Figure 8) shows primary and secondary shopping frontages within Rochford town centre. An appropriate balance of uses is necessary to support the economic health of Rochford town centre, and it is essential that retail uses are supported by non-retail uses such as cafés, pubs, offices and banks.



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Retail in Rochford

1. Small independent shops prevail along the southern end of North Street
2. The Spar is the most prominent retail premises in Market Square, and occupies a building which detracts from the character of the conservation area
3. North Street independent retailers add activity and interest to the street scene
4. West Street looking east towards the primary retail area
5. Market Square is a public car park on non-market days
6. Rochford has a number of historic pubs in and around the centre which attract visitors from the local area and beyond

During the preparation of the Rochford Core Strategy, the extent of Rochford town centre was identified as an issue in need of review. Having analysed the distribution of land uses within the primary and secondary shopping areas, it is considered that there is a need to consolidate and strengthen the retail core of Rochford town centre to protect its retail character. This approach is consistent with the recommendations of the Rochford District Retail and Leisure Study 2008.

Consolidation of the primary shopping area, together with a widening of the secondary retail frontage area to incorporate new retail areas within the centre, will help to protect local jobs and ensure the centre continues to successfully meet the local shopping needs of the area and strengthen the policy protection given to appropriate uses within the core commercial area around Market Square.

The Council recognises the dynamic nature of centres and the need for flexibility. In line with Core Strategy Policy RTC5, a more positive approach towards A3 and A4 uses is taken within the primary shopping frontage. However, as a guide and whilst wishing to avoid being overly prescriptive, the Council will generally seek to retain at least 65% of Rochford's primary shopping frontage within A1 retail use in order to protect the vitality and viability of the town centre. The preferred uses for the up to 35% balance are A3 and A4 which will also strengthen the vitality and viability of the central part of the town centre.

This 65% A1 minimum target proportion represents a lowering of the previous target of 75% but is considered appropriate in view of the emphasis being given to the suitability of appropriate levels of A3 and A4 uses within the primary frontage. In the context of a consolidated primary shopping frontage, a lowering of the target proportion of A1 uses and a more facilitative stance on potential new A3 and A4 uses in the primary shopping frontage, new A5 uses in this area are not considered appropriate as they would harm its retail character.

Within the secondary shopping frontage, given the wide range of uses, proposals will be considered on their merits under Policy 3. In order to ensure the policy remains flexible throughout the plan period, the clustering of non-retail units is not formally defined within the policy. However, by way of a guide, a cluster could be considered to be more than two immediately adjacent non-A1 uses of the same use class. That said, a view will be taken on a case-by-case basis. The overriding objective will be to ensure the vitality and viability of the town centre is protected.

However, there are uses of which the provision of additional units in Rochford town centre would not be considered to positively contribute to the overall offer of the centre. Such uses include hot food takeaways (A5 uses), planning applications for which shall not be supported, particularly within the Primary Shopping Frontage area.

Some land uses associated with town centre locations have the potential to raise amenity (living conditions) issues for nearby residents. Such uses might include, but are not necessarily limited to, those falling in Use Classes A3, A4 and A5, or other, Sui Generis uses such as night clubs. The impact of such non-retail uses on the amenity of those living within or nearby the centre will be an important consideration in determining relevant planning applications, and applicants will be expected to demonstrate how negative impacts arising from such proposals will be mitigated, if applications are to be permitted. Town centre uses will continue to be regularly monitored and the proportions being sought under this policy will be kept under review accordingly.

POLICY 4 – LOCKS HILL EMPLOYMENT SITE

The Council will support new B1a (office) employment development within the Locks Hill employment site (Figure 8) and protect the area from uses that would undermine its role as an employment generator. Alternative uses will be considered having regard to:

- 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.**

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.

The Locks Hill employment site is an established and successful cluster of good quality office accommodation within the town centre. The location benefits from excellent accessibility, public transport, the local and regional road network and public parking.

The cluster of employment uses at Locks Hill contribute significantly to the town centre economy.

The Rochford Employment Land Study 2008 states that "The major office location within Rochford, at Locks Hill in the centre of Rochford itself, is not allocated as an employment site. Given the increasing future requirements for office stock set out in our base case and two scenarios we recommend that Rochford District Council should allocate the land at Locks Hill as employment land to emphasise the importance of the site for employment use. This will help to safeguard future office supply in the town centre."

The Government are currently introducing new permitted development rights that will allow change of use from offices to homes to provide new homes in existing buildings without the need for express planning permission. However, these changes are for a three year period only, a period considerably shorter than the plan period relevant to this AAP. This new designation is therefore considered appropriate notwithstanding these changes.



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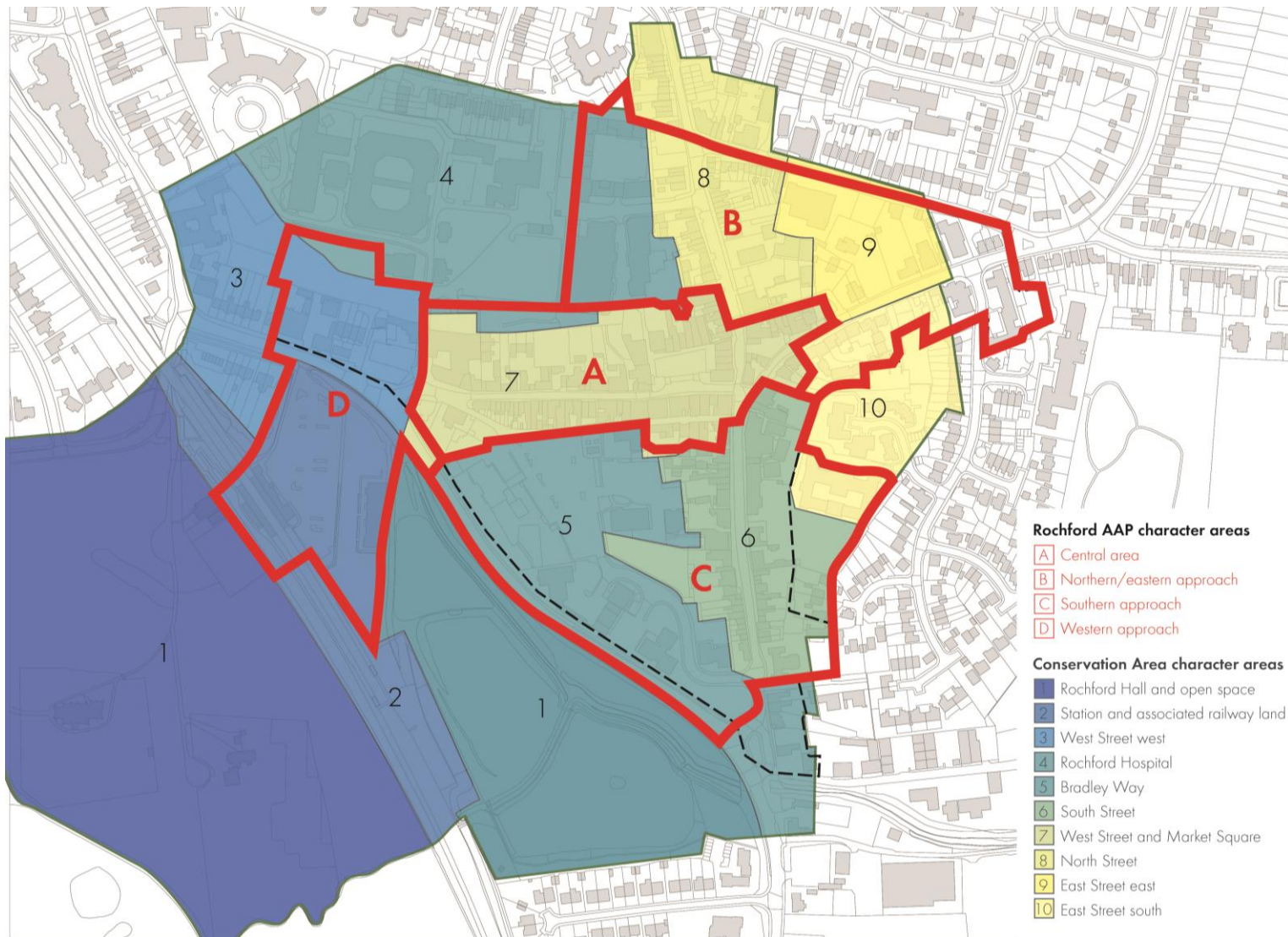
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Employment in Rochford

1. The Locks Hill employment site benefits from a number of purpose built office developments
2. Rochford District Council's main offices are located along South Street
3. Offices in Locks Hill
4. Freight House is well located for public transport services and also benefits from a good aspect onto the open space to the south. The area has potential for more intensive uses
5. The Police Station on South Street – unlisted but makes a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. The building is now vacant and represents an opportunity site
6. Housing development in the Locks Hill / Back Lane car park area



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Figure 9 – Character areas for Rochford Town Centre AAP, based on those identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal (May 2007)*

*On 6th July 2009, Rochford District Council adopted the recommendation in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plans and amended the boundaries of five existing Conservation Areas: Rayleigh, Rochford, Canewdon High Street, Canewdon Church and Great Wakering.

5. Rochford's character areas

5.1 A character area-led approach

The central thrust of the AAP is to ensure that the historic character of the town centre is protected and, where possible, enhanced. To help achieve this, and in support of the existing controls and guidance provided through the designation of the Rochford conservation area together with its associated appraisal and management plan, a character area approach has been developed.

For the purposes of this AAP, four character areas have been identified. These have been carefully drawn to take full account of the character areas identified in the conservation area appraisal and have been drawn to ensure comprehensive coverage of the AAP area. These do not replace the character areas set out in the conservation area character appraisal, where more detail can be found.

Policy 5 defines the four AAP character areas and provides overarching and town-wide policy guidance which will be relevant to all applications for development across the town. This is followed by a planning policy for each individual identified area.

POLICY 5 – ROCHFORD'S CHARACTER AREAS

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:

- 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.**

The character areas identified in this AAP are informed directly by those defined in the Rochford Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan. The appraisal and management plan provides detailed analysis of the town's heritage assets and an account of the evolution of the town and the major events in its development. Rochford's built character is one of its key assets and proposals for new development must ensure that the setting of heritage assets and, more generally, the character of the conservation area as a whole is conserved or enhanced.

Public realm, route and junction improvements as identified in Rochford's Strategic and Movement Frameworks (Figures 6 and 7 respectively) are a priority and the council will seek to secure contributions to these improvements as relevant development proposals come forward.



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Character area A – Central area

1. Market Square – with scope for improvements
2. West Street – the gateway to the town – looking east
3. Market Square – a popular parking location
4. East Street looking east
5. Horners Corner complex – revealed to be a 16th century timber framed building during refurbishments undertaken in the 1980's
6. West Street – fine urban grain with lots of variety and richness within tight building line and height parameters

The local bus network is a town-wide resource which plays an important role in ensuring local people have access to sustainable, accessible modes of public transport. The Council will continue to work with partners at Essex County Council and the bus operators to keep the bus network – its routes, timetables and supporting infrastructure – under review.

Town centre signage plays a key role in helping visitors with way-finding. This in turn helps to support local businesses. Fingerposts contribute to the quality of the arrival experience and new street furniture, should respond positively to the historic townscape character.

POLICY 6 – CHARACTER AREA A: CENTRAL AREA

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:

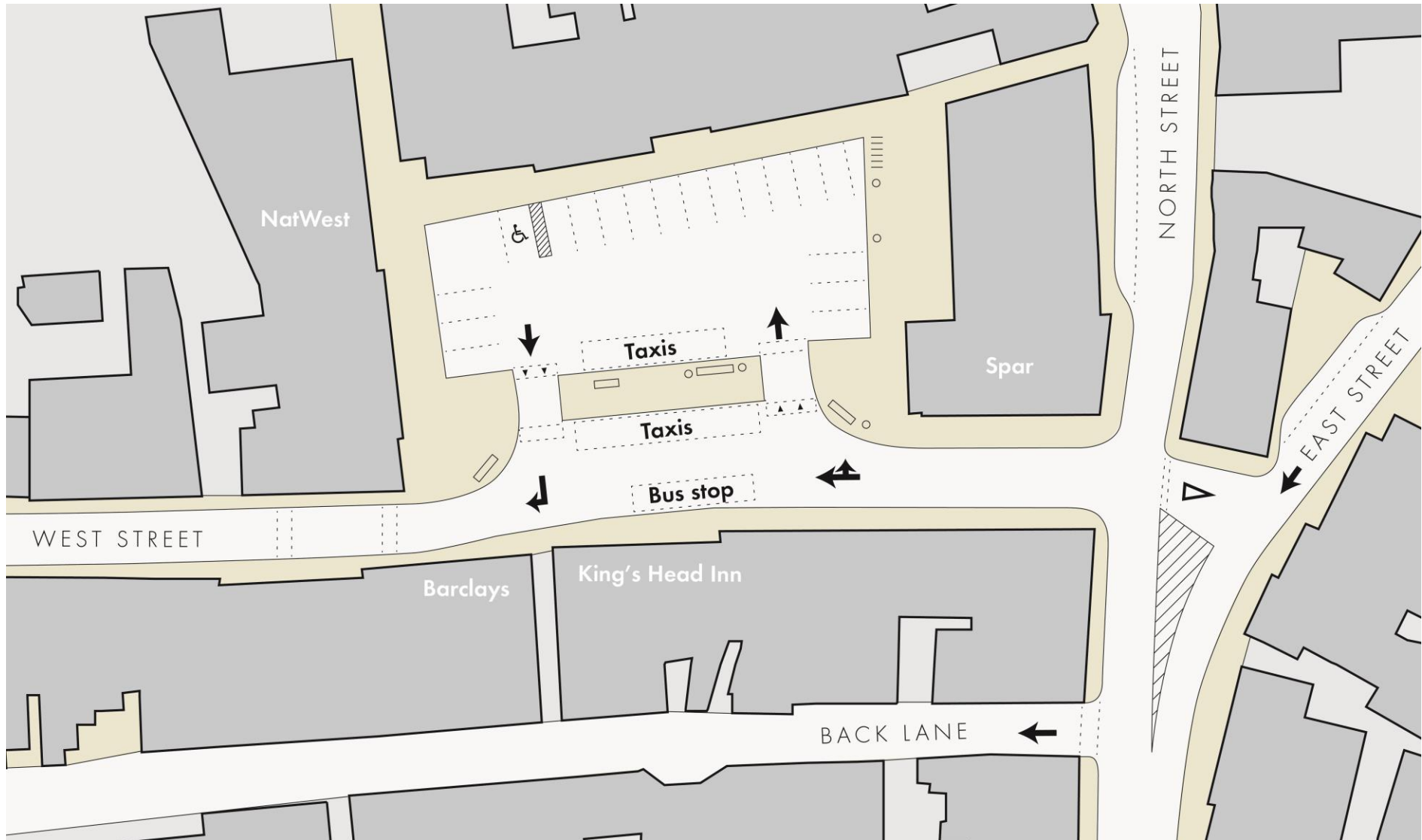
1. New development will respond positively to local townscape character and protect and enhance the character

of the Rochford conservation area. Key elements include:

- 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.**

The central character area is focussed around the historic Market Square and West Street. The appraisal report notes that “Market Square and West Street form the commercial heart of Rochford”. The appraisal goes on to state that “The most imposing building in the Square, Connaught House which dominates the view in the approach from the east, is exceptional, being a late 18th century house, now offices; it makes a significant contribution to giving the Square a dignified civic character. Barclays Bank and the former Corn Exchange, both of 1866, are imposing municipal buildings which are a reminder of the town’s longstanding role as an administrative and commercial centre for the area.”



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Figure 10 – Market Square existing – plan showing the existing traffic management arrangements within the Market Square with 18 car parking bays (one disabled), four taxi bays and one bus stop

5.2 Improvements to Market Square

The conservation area appraisal recommends that the parking arrangement in Market Square should be reviewed, with a view to giving pedestrians greater priority. This view is echoed by the Retail and Leisure Study.

The Council will work with its partners and local businesses to consider a range of options for delivering environmental improvements to the Market Square. Key stakeholders include taxi drivers, bus operators, Essex County Council as the highway authority and local businesses in and around the Square.

A number of options have been investigated during the preparation of this AAP, taking into consideration community and business feedback, Essex County Council's highway advice, funding opportunities and scheme deliverability. Figure 10 provides a summary of the existing conditions in the Square.

The key principles underpinning the improvements to Rochford Market Square include the following:

- Change the access arrangements into the Market Square so that the entrance and exit are reversed. This may require some additional remedial works, such as yellow box junctions, to facilitate the flow of traffic along West Street and turning into and out of the Square.

- Rationalise the taxi rank through removing the taxi spaces on the inside of the island. This would enable the creation of two additional public car parking spaces.
- Retain free car parking in this location and create an additional disabled parking bay.
- Designate an area for motorcycle parking.
- Enhance the aesthetics of the Market Square, which may include repaving the pedestrian areas.
- Retain the bus stop as existing.
- Review Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs).

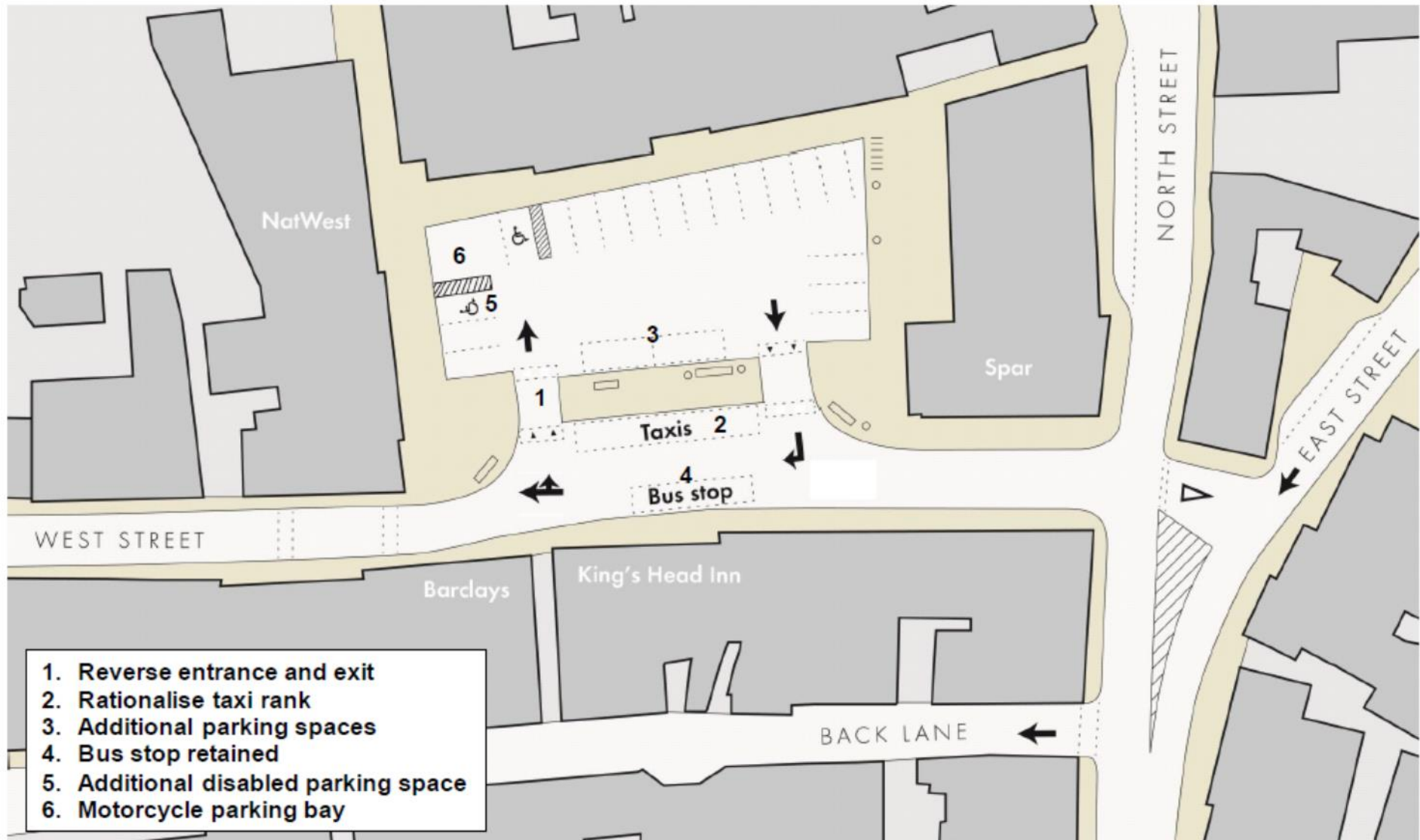
An indicative diagram of the modest amendments to the Market Square, which integrates these key planning principles, is set out in Figure 11. Other remedial works to complement these modest improvements, including the use and location of yellow box junctions, will be determined in further detail in conjunction with Essex County Council highways.

The Market Square has been identified in the Retail and Leisure Study as a place with scope to benefit from the introduction of a greater proportion and range of A3 and A4 uses. The review of primary and secondary frontages and the approach to non A1 uses outlined under Policies 2 and 3 of this AAP outline a positive

framework which seeks to respond to this opportunity.

The existing Spar building is highlighted in the conservation area appraisal as a building which has a negative impact on the character of the conservation area. Redevelopment of this site would be welcomed by the Council and there is considered to be some scope for redevelopment of the site to intensify the activities on the site. However, it is recognised that the store is trading and for redevelopment proposals to come forward they need to be viable.

There are a number of specific pedestrian routes which would benefit from improvement should resources be found. These include the quality of the pedestrian link between the Back Lane car park and the Market Square together with improvements in pedestrian and cycle connections with the space outside the Co-Op building.



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Figure 11 – Indicative diagram of Market Square improvements depicting modest alterations including rationalisation of the taxi rank and an increase in free, short term car parking spaces



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Character area B – Northern / eastern approach

- 1. The land between the Rochford Congregational Church and the Antica Roma restaurant has planning permission for residential development**
- 2. Looking north along North Street – the shops on the left are part of the secondary shopping frontage**
- 3. Looking south along North Street – the traditional terraces along North Street are in a variety of uses including A3, A1 and residential uses**
- 4. Weatherboarding is a particular characteristic of the area**
- 5. The site on North Street opposite the Rose and Crown pub, in part used as parking for the pub, has development potential**
- 6. North Street with 18th century weatherboarded dwelling house with clay tiled roof alongside later 19th century brick houses with slate tile – all are listed buildings**

POLICY 7 – CHARACTER AREA B: NORTHERN/EASTERN APPROACH

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:

- 1. New development will respond positively to local townscape character and protect and enhance the character of the Rochford conservation area. Key elements include:**
 - 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 6 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.**

The northern/eastern character area is a mixed area covering a number of character areas as defined in the conservation area appraisal. The area includes some of Rochford's best examples of weather-boarded housing along North Street. The appraisal report notes that rows of 18th or 19th century weather-boarded cottages are typical, as well as two notable terraces of 19th century stock brick terraces. The (secondary) commercial character of the southern part of the area gives way to more

contemporary housing developments focussed along Weir Pond Road.

The Rochford Town Centre AAP framework plan (see Figure 6) identifies a potential development opportunity on North Street at the junction with Weir Pond Road. The area includes a poor quality shopping parade with flats above, an adjacent vacant site and further piece of land currently utilised for parking for the pub. Should the site come forward for redevelopment, the Council would give its in-principle support for the redevelopment of the site for a mixed use, housing led development which helps to repair this break in the North Street frontage.

A number of public realm and pedestrian route improvements have been identified under the policy. The issue of pedestrian permeability is a local constraint in this part of the centre, as identified in the movement analysis plan (Figure 5). Improvements to existing routes in this location and the creation of new links, particularly in view of the impact of the hospital site on local permeability, will be sought as opportunities arise and in conjunction with dialogue with the hospital.



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Character area C – Southern approach

- 1. Looking north along South Street**
- 2. Freight House is an attractively restored former railway building**
- 3. South Street is the principal approach to the town from Southend, and an important bus route**
- 4. Former cottages now offices, the pargetted plastered gable end (a 20th century alteration to these 18th century former cottages) is a prominent feature on the corner between South Street and Locks Hill**
- 5. The Locks Hill employment site, with purposes built offices and dedicated parking**
- 6. Bradley Way – looking south from the junction with West Street – acts as the town's by-pass**

**POLICY 8 – CHARACTER AREA C:
SOUTHERN APPROACH**

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:

- 1. New development will respond positively to local townscape character and protect and enhance the character of the Rochford conservation area. Key elements include:**
 - 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.**

The southern approach area is the area defined by South Street and Bradley Way, each of which have their own discrete character areas as defined in the Rochford conservation area appraisal.

South Street benefits from many listed buildings and is perhaps the most intact part of the town in terms of the integrity of historic fabric. Red brick buildings of a domestic scale prevail with some notable exceptions in the French Baroque style Police Station built in 1914 and the Masonic Hall, formerly the County Court building at 24 South Street. The Police Station building is not listed but makes an important and positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area, and is included on the Council's Local List of important local buildings. The building presents an exciting conversion and reuse opportunity. If new uses are to be introduced, protecting the amenities of nearby residents will be a key consideration when assessing the impact and suitability of any proposal. New uses that would be supported by the Council include residential or community uses catering for young people.

Bradley Way acts as the town's by-pass and is an extension of Southend Road which is the main approach to the town from the south. The western Locks Hill side of the southern end of South Street is a particularly prominent gateway location and would benefit from a new commercial building to act as a landmark as one enters the town from Southend.

The green open space to the west of Bradley Way is an important but underused public amenity and connections between this space and the town centre should be improved.



Character area D – Western approach

1. West Street, looking east towards the town from the Hall Road roundabout
2. Lord Rich's Tudor Almshouses on the north side of West Street, built c. 1581-1617 are Grade II listed
3. Whittingham's garage is a long established local business
4. A mixed retail and housing development has been completed in recent times on the site opposite the station which now acts as a western anchor to West Street
5. The grassed bank provides the most direct pedestrian route to the station
6. The station car park is popular with commuters who benefit from good rail links to central London

**POLICY 9 – CHARACTER AREA D:
WESTERN APPROACH**

Development in the western approach area will help to enhance the approach into Rochford town centre, and in particular links between the central area and the rail station.

The Council will support development in the western approach area that would protect and enhance its existing character. The following principles are important:

- 1. New development will respond positively to local townscape character and protect and enhance the character of the Rochford conservation area. Key elements include:**
 - a. The small scale of the almshouses along West Street as you enter the town from the west; and**
 - b. The mixed commercial and residential character of the area where both long and recently established businesses sit comfortably adjacent to residential uses.**
- 2. New development in this location is considered particularly appropriate given the opportunities for new development taking advantage of the good quality public transport facilities;**

- 3. New development is acceptable where it would lead to the creation of more residential units, job opportunities or community facilities, in particular those catering for young people;**
- 4. Freight House is an attractive commercial building and should be retained. However, there is considered to be an opportunity to intensify the uses on this site, either through a new building or an extension to the existing building. C3, B1 and D2 uses would be appropriate, with a particular opportunity to take advantage of the excellent public transport accessibility and the proximity and relationship to the open space to the east;**
- 5. Pedestrian links within the AAP area, including those to the central area and Market Square, and across Rochford, including to the rail station and green open space south-west of Bradley Way, should be strengthened; and**
- 6. Improvements at the junctions of Ashingdon Road, Hall Road and West Street, and West Street and Bradley Way will be supported.**

The western approach character area is important as it serves as the principal approach to the town from the District's main towns to the west of Rochford including Rayleigh via Hall Road.

This area is centred on West Street west of Union Lane and the roundabout at the northern end of Bradley Way. The area has a mixed domestic character and scale, largely established by the almshouses on the north side of the western end of West Street. Any redevelopment proposals for sites in this area will need to respect the scale of these almshouses given the positive contribution they make to character of this part of the conservation area.

Freight House is an attractive former railway building. Land adjacent to the building is currently used as parking for up to 55 vehicles on approximately 0.2 hectares. It is, well located with excellent access to public transport facilities and a short walk to the town centre, has development potential for a mix of uses. Proposals for housing and/or employment uses would generally be supported on all or part of this site. An extension to Freight House itself would help to reinforce its existing commerce/leisure use.

The town centre boundary has been extended to include the railway station. The links between the railway station and the town centre are critical for the town's economic well being. The level changes across the station car park site have resulted in the creation of informal desire line paths up the steep bank. The Council will seek to work with partners to introduce improvements to the pedestrian routes between the station and the town centre in this area through the re-grading of the embankment and

a review of the provision given to pedestrians crossing the station car park.



Left: Restored buildings in North Street, part of the Horners Corner complex
Right: Traditional weather-boarded house along West Street

6. Delivering a better Rochford

6.1 Working in partnership

The Council will continue to work closely with partners, landowners and other stakeholders to realise the successful implementation of the policies in the AAP.

The Council will also continue to engage with the community. Although future planning applications and the development management process will determine the details of any individual development schemes that come forward, the community will be given the opportunity to have further input into the design of developments.

6.2 Working with Essex County Council

A further key partner is Essex County Council (ECC), the Highways Authority. In its role as highway network manager, ECC will consider the movement framework identified in this AAP and will take this forward as part of its strategic planning process. In doing so, they will take into consideration the AAP policies.

ECC will also be responsible for reviewing and approving Transport Assessments and Travel Plans submitted as part of any future planning applications for significant development in the AAP area. They will need to be satisfied that any transport impacts identified have been

appropriately mitigated and that the movement-related elements of any scheme are in accordance with the AAP policies.

The Council will continue to be proactive in its engagement with ECC through the Local Highways Panel, which is made up of members and officers from both authorities and decides on which highway and public realm improvements monies will be spent.

6.3 Financial viability

The Council has taken into account information regarding national and local trends in the property market, as well as high-level viability advice. This is to ensure that the guidance set out within this AAP is robust and based on commercial realism.

6.4 Community infrastructure

The Council, in line with Core Strategy Policy CLT1, requires that developers provide on-site infrastructure to mitigate specific issues relating to their development scheme. Developers will also be required to contribute towards off-site, strategic infrastructure, which would help to mitigate the cumulative impact of new development.

The Core Strategy sets out the types of strategic infrastructure that should be funded by contributions arising from new development. These include highway and public transport improvements, alongside a number of other important types of infrastructure.

The AAP sets out priorities for delivering environmental improvements and highways schemes. The Council will expect that new developments within, and affecting, the AAP area contribute towards these identified priorities either through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), Section 106 or Section 278 Agreements as appropriate, in accordance with the Core Strategy.

Table 1 in Section 3.4 above gives further detail in relation to major improvements and schemes. It should be noted that this is not exhaustive and development may be required to contribute towards other enhancements as identified in the AAP or through the development management process.

6.5 Monitoring change

The importance of monitoring is recognised in both legislation and local policy. The Localism Act 2011 requires that the Council produces regular monitoring reports to assess the delivery of its planning documents and implementation of its policies. The Core Strategy sets out the Council's commitment to the production of monitoring reports and explains how each of its policies will be monitored.

Whilst the AAP's progress can be tracked to some extent against the Core Strategy's monitoring framework, there are several instances where a monitoring framework specific to the Rochford Town Centre AAP is required. Table 2 sets out how the AAP will be monitored.

The Council's Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) will document whether or not the AAP's

objectives are being met and will set out the necessary actions to aid the delivery of the AAP.

Table 2 – Implementation, delivery and monitoring

Policy	Implementation and delivery	Potential risk	Risk mitigation	Monitoring
<p>Policy 1 – Rochford Area Action Plan framework</p>	<p>Development within the Rochford Town Centre AAP area will be guided by the framework.</p>	<p>The development set out within the Rochford Town Centre AAP framework is not delivered or does not meet the needs of Rochford and its residents.</p>	<p>The Council has engaged with relevant stakeholders during the evolution of the AAP. The AAP has benefitted from a number of informal stages of consultation and an iterative process of sustainability appraisal. Amendments in the policies and proposals have been made in view of the informal responses and feedback received during the production process.</p>	<p>The Council will record development through the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).</p>
<p>Policy 2 – Rochford’s Primary Shopping Frontage</p>	<p>In light of recommendations made in the district-wide Retail and Leisure Study and informed by town centre analysis and monitoring records, the primary shopping frontage has been comprehensively reviewed.</p>	<p>The policy plays an important role in protecting the retail vitality and viability of the centre. By making the changes proposed and taking a more flexible stance on changes of uses in the centre there is a risk that the retail character of the centre will be harmed.</p> <p>A5 uses in the primary shopping area are considered a risk.</p>	<p>The extent of the primary shopping area and the policy approach taken within it have been carefully assessed to ensure the approach taken supports the objectives set out under Core Strategy Policy RTC 5. By concentrating the primary shopping area around a much tighter core the policy position for the primary shopping area has been strengthened significantly.</p> <p>The policy confirms that no new A5 uses are considered acceptable in the primary shopping area.</p> <p>The number of retail units in A1 uses within the primary area is currently below the target level of the policy. The policy was therefore considered in need of review.</p>	<p>The Council’s economic development team monitor retail uses across the identified shopping frontages on a regular basis.</p>

Policy	Implementation and delivery	Potential risk	Risk mitigation	Monitoring
<p>Policy 4 – Locks Hill employment site</p>	<p>Employment and office uses are considered important for the town’s economy. The policy will help protect these uses.</p>	<p>There is a risk that office uses, in tough economic conditions where market demand for offices uses is low, are vulnerable to loss through change of use or redevelopment. This could results in the loss of employment generating uses in the town centre.</p> <p>In addition, there is a risk that changes of use to residential under new temporary permitted development rights may take place.</p>	<p>Designation of the Locks Hill employment site will help protect these commercial, employment generating uses. The plan period is longer than the 3 year period within which the permitted development rights are being relaxed in respect of change of use from offices to residential.</p>	<p>Office commitments and completions will be recorded as part of the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).</p>
<p>Policy 5 – Rochford’s character areas</p>	<p>With no major site allocations being made in the AAP, the central thrust of the Plan is the protection of the area’s character whilst recognising the important role played by the town as one of the District’s principal town centres.</p>	<p>New development being proposed and investment in the public realm coming forward that does not respond as positively to the town’s special character as it might have done.</p>	<p>Four character areas have been identified which coordinate well with those identified in the conservation area appraisal. In taking a character area based approach, the Plan strengthens the role played by the guidance contained in the Rochford conservation area appraisal and management plan.</p>	<p>The quality of new development will be monitored as planning decisions are made, and recorded in the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).</p>
<p>Policy 6, 7, 8 and 9 – Character areas</p>	<p>More specific proposals and priorities are identified in the individual character areas.</p>	<p>The town’s varied special and unique characteristics are not seen as the basis for new development and investment in the town.</p>	<p>Area specific policies help to identify local priorities and opportunities which will help to protect and enhance the qualities of these identified areas and the town as a whole.</p>	<p>The quality of new development will be monitored as planning decisions are made, and recorded in the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).</p>



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