



## HOCKLEY PARISH COUNCIL

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Planning Department  
Rochford District Council  
Council Offices  
South Street  
Rochford  
SS4 1BW

22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021

Dear Sir/madam,

### **Local Plan Spatial Options Consultation**

Please find below the comments from Hockley parish Council regarding the Spatial Options consultation.

The need for housing is understood but many of the proposals in the Local Plan Consultation and the impact of over-development in Hockley are a major cause for concern, especially without evidence of supporting infrastructure. This initial consultation informs residents of landowners who have put forward sites for future development so there is a personal gain aspect here. Rochford District Council has a duty to actively support **residents** needs in all communities and influence Government policies.

**Consultation Process** -The volume of information contained in the consultation was difficult to access and view online. Some links did not work properly. RDC are not reaching residents who have no internet.

**Spatial Themes not included** - Cultural and Accessibility.

**Vibrant Town Centres:** Work actively with premises owners to assist in the re-letting of any empty shops. Maybe offer a reduced rent to new businesses as a start-up scheme for "local" business only – allowing the entrepreneurs in the Rochford District a chance to showcase their businesses. Discuss with owners of empty shops how they can best strive to fill these premises and if not, then have some visual displays in the windows, perhaps photos of the old towns or useful information, to make them more attractive.

**Employment** – District is lacking in Environmental services - woodland conservation and management. Work with local schools and colleges, as well as businesses and the job centre, to see what sustainable employment is needed in the district. Incorporate ways to assist in schemes/apprenticeships to train all ages get back into work or upskill (with jobs at the end of training.) Developers should be encouraged to use local labour. The current employment site allocations on Figure 30 do not provide enough space to meet the district's employment needs through to 2040. There are eighty-seven thousand people in the district. There is no data on the form to suggest how many of these are in employment and how many are looking for work, but the council need to reassess its future needs to future-proof our residents' opportunities.

**Improve Long-term Economic growth** - Better road networks, gigabit broadband and Wi-Fi. The council should stop developing existing commercial land into housing.

**Planned Forms of Housing:** Young people/couples do indeed find it difficult to purchase property in Hockley. It is hoped that the new developments proposed will cater for their needs with more semi-detached properties than is now the case. The growing elderly population requiring specialist/suitable accommodation need assistance. Many elderly single people are living in family-sized homes when they would prefer more suitable accommodation such as bungalows or purpose-built flats. Mix of housing for “affordable” properties with higher standards for gardens and recreational space. Consideration should be given to the provision of house for life, Adapted homes for the disabled, bungalows and other potential buildings for downsizing families. Housing for the hidden homeless – those “sofa surfing” & Emergency housing. The plan makes no reference to social housing quotas which should be included in all new developments. By working closely with planners and developers, as well as different charities and communities, residents, and businesses. You will then get a better understanding as to what you need and what will be achievable.

From 1<sup>st</sup> August it was announced that **empty buildings and brownfield sites** should be converted rather than build new. This alternative should be evaluated first.

Many development proposals would also mean a further reduction in **air quality, light pollution and the loss of trees, farming, and arable land** at a time when food production and supply is becoming a cause for concern.

Care needs to be taken to maintain the integrity of the existing settlements with respect to green boundary between Hockley and its neighbours. Essential **green belt** is being allowed to erode further (suggested land at north of Merryfields Avenue, Turret Farm, Church Road, land north east of Folly Lane, a number of sites on Greensward Lane, Lower Road and High Road) which will be impossible to replace.

**Enforcement** on unauthorised development is not adequately managed.

**Local generation of low-carbon and renewable energy** – It is encouraging to learn of Rochford District Council’s intention to provide housing to meet the needs of both young and old that are carbon neutral and energy efficient. New developments should be able to source some or all their energy from renewable sources. Solar in all new development as standard. Incentives to encourage existing developments to install solar onto their properties as well as any commercial buildings to be fitted with solar to their roofs; there are many flat roofed buildings all over the district that could accommodate solar panels without damaging the landscape. Explore tidal energy and seek out suitable locations to ascertain whether it is viable. Retrofitting existing housing and commercial buildings.

**Infrastructure** - The Council cannot comment on the suitability of sites in the plan without completion of Infrastructure Delivery & Funding Plan, Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan.

This is a continuing concern to residents due to the volume of recent and proposed development causing additional pressure on roads, education, social services, health facilities and local employment opportunities all of which gives a **sustainable balance for our communities**. The Infrastructure Funding Statement states all financial and non-financial developer contributions relating to **Section 106 conditions** should be completed but this is not the case when larger sites are split up. If developers do not honour the conditions the money reverts to ECC and RDC who should use this to improve our existing facilities, especially on our roads and cycle paths which are in a pitiful state of repair and will only worsen with further development if funding is not used where

it was intended. The **volume of traffic** has increased to an unacceptable level on the **B1013 causing noise, air pollution and disturbance**; Is the traffic survey up to date?. The main access to Hockley and on to Southend is via the B1013; one of the busiest 'B' roads in the country. It is difficult to understand how this already congested road could cope with the vehicles from another 1,000 houses in Hockley, let alone those from adjacent villages and towns. Rochford District is on a peninsular: traffic can go no further than Southend especially with limited access to the north of the county via Battlesbridge. It is suggested the Council undertake a **road traffic survey** before continuing with the District Plan.

Good public transport links are crucial for our villages, neighbourhoods, and town centres. Hockley benefits from being on the main Southend Victoria/Liverpool Street train line. Unfortunately its **bus service** is not so efficient with the nos 7 and 8 services passing through the village from Southend to Rayleigh and vice versa twice an hour. Services to other parts of the district/county have to be accessed from these two termini. The council needs to follow the rule "No development before infrastructure". Houses are being built without adequate road, pedestrian, and cycle networks in place. New developments should be planned with cycle paths and walkways that link up with existing paths. Designated cycling paths that are separated from existing roads and pavements, but adjacent to our road networks would help improve traffic flow. Ensure the cycle network links with public transport as part of a complete review of sustainable transport. Cycling infrastructure and other sustainable transport methods should be prioritised over a car-centric highway use.

Balancing access against increased congestion will be the issue for a lot of the promoted sites in Hockley. If RDC keep adding small developments to the boundaries of the town, it will overcrowd existing houses and add to urban sprawl.

Ensuring that public rights of way are not blocked by landowners and are kept free from debris. Assess paths to make them accessible to the disabled so that all is inclusive. There are some green areas that do not have public facilities and it would be advantageous to look at offering this in the larger spaces. For example, a small toilet block and hand washing facilities in a car park.

**Community infrastructure** - Community infrastructure should be preserved and extended. Access to town centres and secondary shopping by bicycle and foot should be made easier and safer. Hockley has a road network no longer fit for purpose, some schools are near to capacity, it is difficult to obtain a GP or dental appointment. Hockley is served by two **GP practices**, as has been the case for 50 years or more. Hockley's **health clinic** closed in the last few years and young mothers and the elderly have to travel to Rayleigh for medical attention. What are the plans for additional health services in line with the vastly increased population should the plan be enforced?. There is little to no disabled play areas or play equipment. There are always issues with waste collections, drain and road cleaning and verge trimming. The District Council does not have the staff to deal with all these issues. The current recycling site at Castle Road, Rayleigh is no longer capable of expanding to meet the needs of an ever-growing population. The plan should also identify a site to accommodate commercial waste facilities to stop fly tipping.

**Open Spaces** - The value of our open spaces and the issues with climate change has become a priority. People will continue to reduce travel and split time working from home. Our open spaces are essential for wellbeing, exercise and relaxation. We are on an overpopulated peninsular surrounded by water with one way in and one way out and there is a proven risk of flooding. Open space is at a premium. Unfortunately for the youth of Hockley, there is no **sports field** they can use in the village. The District Plan does mention the use of the Greensward Playfield and it is to be hoped this will be progressed. The District Plan places great emphasis on **health and well-being**. Fortunately Hockley is well served with a network of **footpaths**. It is important that they are maintained and not encroached upon by development.

All green spaces, no matter how small, hold some significance, especially to those who use them for recreation. They are of community value and should not be developed. It is reasonable for RDC to encourage the development of a garden village away from existing communities to accommodate the Governments home building targets. RDC must protect all recreational spaces and improve them, where necessary.

Conservation areas, Green Belt & sites subject to the exclusion criteria (i.e. Sites of Special Scientific Interest) on the call for sites **must** be protected from Development.

**Local Wildlife Sites review:** RDC policies for protecting wildlife areas need to be updated. Designating initial sites is a step in the right direction but more must be done. It is proven that mental health issues can be relieved by nature and keeping the sites sacred is more important now than it ever was. Keeping a biodiverse environment, with wildlife and the environment in which it relies is paramount. The plan should create new wildlife meadows to encourage the pollinators to future proof our own existence.

RDC to focus on concerns and consideration to wildlife, birds, animals, and insects. Alongside plants and endangered species.

Surrounded by Green Belt, Hockley is lucky in having access to a number of **open spaces**. It is noted that the Marylands Nature Reserve is included in The District Plan but not Plumberow Mount Open Space or St Peter's Road Open Space – all maintained by the Parish Council. Marylands Woods, Plumberow Woods, Crabtree Woods, Hockley Hall Woods and nearby Beckney Woods are all ancient woodland but in private hands. It would be of great benefit to the community if they were included in the Local Plan and protected for the future. Betts Wood and, of course, Hockley Woods are in the care of the RDC.

With so much development, it is obvious that flora and fauna will suffer. Consideration should be given to identifying further **green spaces** (not just play areas) for public use. Efforts should be made to ensure **wild-life corridors** are incorporated into developments near to woods and open countryside.

### **Heritage**

The District Plan contains a list of **conservation** areas. It is disappointing to note that St Peter and Pauls' Church, Church Road and adjacent buildings (the old school house, Hockley Hall, Mill House and the former rectory) does not appear. In the surrounding green belt, it is constantly under threat and it would be a tremendous loss to the community should this historic part of the village be developed.

Plumberow Mount (a Romano/British tumulus) does not appear in the document as an **ancient monument**.

### **Promoted Sites (Hockley)**

The plan proposes around 1000 additional houses in Hockley with other developments on land bordering the parish. This density will have a major detrimental impact on the quality of life for the settlements.

- **CFS105 (Land North of Hambro Hill)** would negatively impact the openness of the Green Belt between Rayleigh & Hockley. Rochford Green belt study states this parcel of greenbelt has a 'Moderate' rating for Purpose 1, and a 'Strong' rating for 2 & 3. It checks the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, prevents Rayleigh & Hockley merging into one another, and assists in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
- The **Merryfields Avenue** (green belt) proposal has been previously rejected by residents due to access issues as the land borders on the **Nature Reserve** and **footpath 13**. Consideration should be given to incorporating it into the Reserve rather than releasing it for development.

The owner of the tract of land has made a few unsuccessful planning applications in the past on account of the threat to local wildlife, impact on ancient woodland, lack of access, the danger of flooding from the nearby stream and run off from the road. The cost effectiveness of providing access and services could prove to be exorbitant along with any damage incurred on the nearby Nature Reserve, better that the land become part of the Reserve.

- Proposals for **Folly Chase and Church Road** will increase density and give further traffic problems on a busy county access road which has light industry and equestrian centres but does not have footways for pedestrian safety; vehicles are also subject to dangerous line of sight restrictions. **The Folly Chase** proposal was previously rejected by residents and supposedly dismissed by RDC but still appears in the Local Plan for development. The land to the north east of Folly Chase is adjacent to ancient woodland with protected trees (Betts Wood). To the west of the site there is a green lane bordered with ancient trees which should be protected if development takes place. There is no public access to the site and there is concern that the adjacent community centre could be sacrificed for this purpose. What are the plans for the **Community Centre** and **public footpaths** which must be retained?
- **Sheltered accommodation** is in danger of being lost at **Lime Court and Poplar Court**.
- The proposal for development on land at **Belchamps** is particularly contentious due to the lack of open space for activities available to youngsters and community groups in the Rochford District. Any considered development would be a detrimental impact to the Historical woodlands. This site has been a very valuable well used resource and it is important this is retained for our future generations.
- As Hockley Woods is the largest remaining wild woodland in the country RDC should be doing EVERYTHING it can to save it from development, either adjacent to or close by. RDC should also actively be adding to it by planting more trees to future proof its existence and status. RDC must protect any thoroughfares that access Hockley Wood.

These comments will be publicised on the Parish Council website, I would be grateful if you could do the same on the Rochford District Council website.

Yours faithfully,

*K M Holland*

Mrs Kelly Holland  
Clerk to Hockley Parish Council