

CHELMSFORD TOMORROW

Chelmsford Town Centre Area Action Plan

Topic Paper I The Strategy for Chelmsford Town Centre

March 2008

Chelmsford Town Centre Area Action Plan Examination Hearings 22.04.08 to 01.05.08

Topic Paper I – The Strategy for Chelmsford Town Centre

I Purpose and Scope of the Topic Paper

- 1.1 This Topic Paper is one of six produced by Chelmsford Borough Council to provide context and baseline information to assist the Council's evidence into the Independent Examination of the Chelmsford Town Centre Area Action Plan (CTCAAP) [CD/CFD/021], which will commence on 22nd April, 2008.
- 1.2 This Topic Paper is structured to provide a detailed statement on the development of the Borough Council's Strategy for Chelmsford Town Centre and its key components. It seeks to anticipate the main matters that the Inspector is likely to examine, and address the representations that have been received at the Submission stage of preparing the DPD. The evidence the Council has or is in the process of preparing for the Examination will include:-
- the Council's *Self Assessment of Soundness* [CD/CFD/035] which sets out the reasons why it is the Council's belief that the submitted Chelmsford Town Centre Area Action Plan is 'sound' in relation to each of the nine tests of soundness set out at Paragraph 4.24 of PPS12 [BD/NAT017].
 - Five interrelated Topic Papers; *Topic Paper 1: The Strategy for Chelmsford Town Centre*, *Topic Paper 2: Delivering Infrastructure*, *Topic Paper 3 Transportation Strategy*, *Topic Paper 4 Retail Strategy*, *Topic Paper 5 Managing Flood Risk*, and *Topic Paper 6 Other Matters*.
 - Written Statement of Evidence related to the matters and issues identified by the Inspector for debate at the Examination.
- 1.3 Each of the Topic Papers provides the context and broad basis for the Council's evidence in relation to the topics identified. They should be treated as an inter-related suite of papers, which should be read together to give a strategic overview. Throughout the Topic Papers, references are made in square brackets [XXXXX] to documents referenced in the Related Documents List and held in the Independent Examination Public Library.
- 1.4 In essence, the Topic Papers identify the relevant evidence base work, which has supported the evolution of the policy or issues, assess the main issues that arose from consultation responses and examine the information and guidance provided by the Strategic Environmental and Sustainability Assessments (SEA/SA). The Topic Papers, where appropriate, include succinct responses to the issues raised within representations made at the Submission stage. They also address the main issues that have been raised in the Inspector's Matters and Issues for Examination and provide the Council's initial and general responses to those matters.
- 1.5 This Topic Paper (No. 1 – The Strategy for Chelmsford Town Centre) specifically covers the development of the Spatial Strategy, as it affects Chelmsford Town Centre, in relation to Government and Regional guidance, its evolution and testing through the production of the Core Strategy and its component elements.

2 National and Regional Context

- 2.1 Planning Policy Statement 12 (PPS12), at paragraph 2.4, states that: "The local development framework should include the following documents:
- i) core strategy
 - ii) site specific allocations of land, and
 - iii) area action plans (where needed).

- 2.2 Paragraphs 2.17 – 2.19 of PPS12 address the more specific requirements of Area Action Plans.
- 2.3 The Borough Council has followed closely the principles set out in national policy guidance in preparing its Local Development Framework, firstly with the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies DPD, and then with the Chelmsford Town Centre Area Action Plan, and more recently with the emerging Site Allocations Document and the North Chelmsford Area Action Plan.
- 2.4 The Core Strategy document contains the Borough Council’s Spatial Strategy and accompanying strategic spatial planning objectives (c.f. paragraphs 3.9 – 3.15) which also now provides a key element of the Council’s *Chelmsford Tomorrow* vision [BD/CFD/001]. *Chelmsford Tomorrow* is the corporate long-term vision for Chelmsford to become the economic, cultural, leisure and shopping capital of Essex and a leading regional centre in the East of England. That vision is now being translated into specific strategy documents for a number of Council services and functions and has become the key driver for the Borough Council’s Corporate Plan.

Draft East of England Plan (RSS 14)

- 2.5 The Borough-wide Spatial Strategy takes as its starting point the policy guidance and objectives contained in the Draft East of England Plan (RSS 14) [CD/REG/01] and more recently the Secretary of State’s Proposed Changes to the East of England Plan [CD/REG/03]. In summary form, the key aspects of that guidance and the Proposed Changes are as follows:-

- Policy CHI: Chelmsford Key Centre for Development and Change (contained within [CD/REG/03])

“The strategy for Chelmsford should:

- provide for substantial growth of housing within an allocation of 16,000 for the District as a whole;
- seek to strengthen the town’s role as County Town and further increase and diversity its employment base;
- maximise the re-use of previously developed land and also provide for sustainable urban extensions; and
- assist the development of more sustainable transport systems within the town and capitalise on and improve its strategic links to London and other regional centres.”

Note:

Policy CHI is a proposed new policy for Chelmsford set out in the Proposed Changes. The allocation of 16,000 new dwellings is a proposed increase from the allocation of 14,000 dwellings contained in the Draft East of England Plan.

Paragraph 13.60 of the Secretary of State’s Proposed Changes specifically addresses the strategy for Chelmsford, and is as follows:-

“13.60 Chelmsford has substantial potential to develop further as an important economic development and growth focus for central Essex, reflecting its roles as a county and university town and its diverse economy with strengths in retailing, administration, manufacturing, and finance and its strategic location on the A12 and Great Eastern railway line. The strategy will further enhance these roles, move the town towards sustainable transport with high quality public transport, cycling and walking and provide the potential for further growth in the longer term.”

- Policy SS3: Key Centres for Development and Change (contained within [CD/REG/03])

To achieve sustainable development, new development should be concentrated at KCDC's including Chelmsford.

- Policy SS6: City and Town Centres (contained within [CD/REG/03])

This policy states that “thriving, vibrant and attractive city and town centres are fundamental to the sustainable development of the East of England and should continue to be the focus for investment, environmental enhancement and regeneration”. It also notes that local development documents should include a strategy to manage change, promote a healthy mix of uses and ensure that land is allocated or can be made available to meet the full range of the city or town centre’s identified needs.

- Policy E1: Job Growth 2001 – 2021 (contained within [CD/REG/03])

The following target for net growth in jobs for the period 2001 – 2021 is adopted as a reference value for monitoring purposes and guidance for regional and local authorities, EEDA and other delivery agencies in their policy and decision making on employment matters.

| | | |
|--|---|-------------|
| Central and North Essex (Harlow / Uttlesford / Chelmsford / Braintree / Maldon) | - | 42,000 Jobs |
|--|---|-------------|

- Policy E3: Regionally Strategic Employment Locations (contained within [CD/REG/03])

Local development documents should identify readily serviceable regionally strategic employment sites of the quality and quantity required to meet the needs of business as identified through employment land reviews. Such sites should be provided at, inter alia:

- other Key Centres of Development and Change, including Chelmsford, to meet needs as may be identified in Local Development documents.

- Policy E5: Regional Structure of Town Centres (contained within [CD/REG/03])

The cities and towns of strategic importance for retail and other town centre purposes are:

- Regional centres includes Chelmsford

- Policy T5: Inter Urban Public Transport (contained within [CD/REG/03])

Improvements to inter-urban public transport should be focused on the Regional Transport Nodes – including Chelmsford

- Policy T15: Transport Investment Priorities (contained within [CD/REG/03])

Investment in transport should be prioritised according to its contribution to the RTS objectives and outcomes in Policy T1, the priorities and objectives in Policies T2 to T14, and the transport priorities in the policies for the sub-areas and Key Centres for Development and Change. Areas are identified where further work should be focused to identify the interventions required – including the London to Ipswich Corridor, including Chelmsford and Colchester urban areas.

- 2.6 The above summary of key issues is drawn from the Secretary of State's Proposed changes to the Draft East of England Plan, which were published in December 2006. These Proposed Changes post-dated the Submission of the Chelmsford Town Centre Area Action Plan (and the Core Strategy). As at March 2008, the East of England Plan has not yet been approved by the Secretary of State, although this is now expected to occur in April/May 2008.
- 2.7 It is the Borough Council's contention that the Chelmsford Town Centre Area Action Plan is fully in conformity with the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy, and with the Adopted Core Strategy and Development Control Policies DPD (which itself is in conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy).

3 Developing the Strategy

- 3.1 Following the withdrawal of the Revised Deposit Draft Chelmsford Borough Local Plan 2001 – 2011 by the Borough Council in July 2003, work then commenced immediately on preparing the Chelmsford Borough Local Development Framework in order to meet the requirements of the then emerging legislation reforming the development plan system.
- 3.2 In identifying the key requirements for statutory Development Plan Documents for the Borough up to 2021, the Borough Council recognised that Chelmsford Town Centre would play a very significant role in helping to meet the Borough's growth requirements, as contained in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy. The Borough Council therefore identified the requirement for a Chelmsford Town Centre Area Action Plan in its first Local Development Scheme (LDS), which was approved in April 2005.
- 3.3 At the outset, the Borough Council anticipated that the Town Centre would play a pivotal role in achieving sustainable patterns of development, linked to the emerging regional recognition of Chelmsford as a focus for economic, retail and housing growth, and as a major transportation node. The decision to prepare an Area Action Plan for the Town Centre therefore sought to create the correct statutory planning framework to accommodate that growth.
- 3.4 In 2003, the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) published its 'Towns and Cities Strategy and Action Plan', which made a number of recommendations to achieve an urban renaissance in the region:-

Section 3.3.1 "In partnership with local authorities, Local Strategic Partnerships or regeneration agencies, national and regional agencies will facilitate the production of masterplans or similar for selected town centres and neighbourhoods" (page 43).

- 3.5 EEDA's strategy suggested that a new round of masterplans should be commissioned for a selection of towns and town centres in the region facing particular urban renaissance issues.

In 2004, EEDA part-funded four masterplans in the region:

- Chelmsford, a growth area
- Felixstowe, a seaside town
- King's Lynn, a historic market town
- Gunnels Wood in Stevenage, an employment area in a new town.

- 3.6 The respective local authorities worked with EEDA and English Partnerships to appoint consultants to undertake a masterplanning exercise for their areas. Chelmsford, Felixstowe, King's Lynn and Gunnels Wood in Stevenage were chosen for their comparative differences. Whilst the masterplans were to lead to practical solutions for the places concerned, the Towns and Cities Strategy recommended that they should also be used as models for other towns.

- 3.7 The Borough Council, in partnership with EEDA and English Partnerships, therefore commissioned consultants Buro Happold and Fluid, to prepare a masterplan for the Town Centre as the first stage in preparing the Area Action Plan. The main purpose of the masterplan was “to set out a land use and urban design framework to direct development and public realm activity in the town centre”, and to promote initial consideration of the main development opportunities.
- 3.8 Buro Happold and Fluid were closely involved in the preparation of both the Issues and Options (Spring 2005) and the Preferred Options (November 2005) documents for the CTCAAP, with the development of the Vision and Objectives for the Plan, being informed by the outcome of the consultation undertaken at the Issues and Options stage.
- 3.9 The vision for the Town Centre was developed through extensive consultation, during which two scenarios were suggested: Contemporary Market Town – emphasising Chelmsford’s historic role as a market town, embracing change through smaller and sensitively-integrated mixed-use development; and Aspiring City – suggesting a progressive identity with larger-scale business, denser, taller buildings and larger-scale cultural activity.
- 3.10 The options were not opposites, rather different approaches towards managing growth based on strengthened retail, business and residential objectives and were put forward as a method to identify the community’s views on key aspects of the potential strategy for the Town Centre. In the light of public and stakeholder responses, the vision for the Town Centre combines aspects of both scenarios. It embraces the following elements:
- the welcoming of measured growth as an opportunity to strengthen the town’s competitive standing in the London and the East of England regions.
 - the opportunity to establish the central area as a positive choice of location to live in and/or work in because of its unique setting, excellent facilities and green living.
 - the town’s continuing business excellence with major employers and an environment for new enterprise to flourish.
 - the Town Centre’s importance as a focus for everyone living and working in the town and surrounding countryside.
 - the familiarity and value of Chelmsford’s history and its rivers and green spaces.
- 3.11 The Borough Council’s vision for Chelmsford Town Centre is:-

The dynamic capital of Essex, anchored upon the Chelmsford’s historic identity as a market town, cathedral city and technological powerhouse, embracing compact urban living, superb shops, leisure and culture, built around neighbourhoods of distinctive character.

- 3.12 This vision can be described as follows:

Sustainable vision – A compact, busy and inclusive town centre meeting the principles of urban renaissance as a main plank of sustainable development and quality of life.

Regional vision – The welcoming of measured growth as an opportunity to strengthen the town’s competitive standing in the East of England region.

Excellence vision – The opportunity to establish the central area as a positive choice of location to live in and/or work in because of its rivers and green setting, excellent public facilities and as a centre of excellence in education and health.

Economic vision – The town’s continuing business excellence with major employers and as an environment for new enterprise to flourish.

People vision – The town centre serving everyone living and working in the town and surrounding countryside; a busy, lively, friendly place.

- 3.13 In pursuit of this vision, the Borough Council's strategy for the Town Centre is to deliver urban regeneration and renaissance through a framework of co-ordinated, programmed, partnership action with intensive use of previously developed land, investment in travel networks, conservation and public space enhancement. At the heart of the Plan's strategy is the identification of key Opportunity Sites which represent land that is suitable and available for town centre uses (see paragraph 4.3 below).

Strategic Objectives

- 3.14 The Strategic Objectives for Chelmsford Borough are also the foundation for planning the Town Centre. Grouped under the five themes of the Core Strategy, these are supplemented by objectives focusing particular action in the Town Centre.

Managing Growth

- 3.15 This group of Strategic Objectives seek to manage growth and promote the advantages of urban living. The objectives for the Town Centre are to:

- accommodate significant growth of residential population in the Town Centre as a key part of managing Borough-wide growth.
- provide housing appropriate for households in the local market area so far as it is complemented and supported by essential amenities and community facilities.
- accommodate a significant increase in employment so far as it is supported by essential transport services and amenities.
- enable a substantial growth and improvement of comparison shopping floorspace including at least one new department store and a growth of convenience (food) shopping floorspace.
- make an exciting, compact and lively town centre where intensive, mixed residential and commercial uses, leisure and cultural activities attract people to live and work.
- identify opportunity areas across the town centre within which significant change and development will be directed, to make the best and most efficient use of brownfield land, ensuring that future growth opportunities in the Town Centre demonstrate innovation and sustainable development.
- protect and strengthen Chelmsford's retail specialisms – Chelmsford Market, the local centres of Moulsham Street and West End.

Environmental Protection and Enhancement

- 3.16 This group of Strategic Objectives seek to enhance natural and built resources, and promote development that has a net beneficial effect on the environment. The objectives for the town centre are to:

- protect the Borough's natural and built resources and enhance biodiversity.
- ensure that all decisions about land use and circulation in the Town Centre are driven by the imperative of environmental sustainability including environmental integrity, land and resource efficiency and energy efficiency.
- bring the green network and watercourses through the Town Centre, emphasising the strong green links into the countryside, respecting their ecological value and maximising their potential as public parkland for recreation, amenity, and tourism and as car-free green corridors for pedestrians and cyclists.
- create distinctive places within the Town Centre, by positively conserving existing character areas, reinforcing the structure provided by the historic environment, promoting architecture that maintains variety and distinctive townscape qualities, by making clear visual links between the rivers and landmarks and creating a network of public spaces.

Balanced Communities

3.17 This group of Strategic Objectives seek to ensure development meets the needs of the whole community. The objectives for the Town Centre are to:

- meet the housing needs of the whole community through the provision of types and tenures of housing, including affordable and special needs housing, and create balanced communities through a mixture of housing for different household type.
- promote social inclusion through equality of opportunity and equality of access to social, educational, health, employment, recreational, green space and cultural facilities for all in the Borough.

Quality of Life

3.18 This group of Strategic Objectives seek to ensure excellent facilities, high quality places and good local transport and accessibility. The objectives for the Town Centre are:

- promote sport, leisure and cultural activity within the town centre and improve recreational use of public parks and rivers, thereby enhancing the quality of life for residents and contributing towards an increase in inward business investment and tourism into the town.
- improve the attractiveness of bus and train as means of travel into the town centre, improve public transport viability and promote park and ride as an attractive way of getting to the Town Centre.
- manage parking demand by planned provision and control of public car parking and promotion of town centre employers' green travel plans.
- provide and improve vehicle access where needed to enable the development of brownfield sites and the optimum use of existing developed areas.
- improve pedestrian and cycling circulation within the Town Centre by making new links with the surrounding urban area, completing gaps in the networks.
- achieve a walkable town centre by providing direct and convenient walking routes overcoming severances, a safe and high quality public realm with increased pedestrian priority areas, improving accessibility and ease of navigation around the Town Centre for all people with varying mobility ability.
- provide facilities for cyclists, bus users and pedestrians that ensure an excellent town centre experience.
- ensure new and existing neighbourhoods, are places where people enjoy living and working and are safe, secure and attractive.
- secure the best built environment design for present and future use and visual character. Enhance the utility of existing buildings through adaptation and improvement.

Economic Prosperity

3.19 This group of strategic objectives seek to build the economy and reinforce Chelmsford's regional role. The objectives for the Town Centre are:

- strengthen Chelmsford Town Centre as a regional centre and its perception as capital of Essex to maintain its competitiveness for investment within the region.
- maintain a balanced economy that supports a range of business activity and sectors. Promote development of the retail sector, encourage new investment in other business sectors within the town centre, including both large office and small scale business premises in a sustainable way that does not compromise the existing economic strengths of the town centre or its character.
- provide excellent passenger facilities and a high standard of public realm in the environs of the rail and bus stations to assert the town's regional significance and importance to the economy of the Town Centre.

3.20 This strategy is elaborated by means of a framework covering activity, movement, public realm, townscape and opportunity areas, within which significant development and change will take place. It provides the basis for allocating land for different types of development.

4 The Planning Framework

4.1 The planning framework for Chelmsford Town Centre is intended to exploit the opportunities to increase and improve town centre uses, to identify and nurture localities with existing diverse uses, to make an exciting and prosperous town centre through intensive development and to ensure that residential development complements, rather than compromises, town centre uses. The promotion of mixed-use development is a cornerstone of the planning framework. In Chelmsford Town Centre, mixed-use development goes hand in hand with an economically dynamic and sociable town based on its accessible location for a large number of people who live or work in the Borough, or who visit Chelmsford for leisure or business.

4.2 In summary, the planning framework comprises the following components:

- protecting existing mixed-use areas.
- securing mixed-use in major new developments.
- increasing residential use in the commercial centre.
- extending the Primary Shopping Area to secure major retail growth – up to 100,000 square metres of net sales floorspace.
- identifying locations for new convenience (food) shopping floorspace.
- providing opportunities for new business and economic investment, with a variety of opportunities for large medium and small sized businesses particularly in the office sector.
- protecting existing industrial and warehouse employment with Policy Area designations.
- promoting sport, leisure and cultural activity within the town centre to enrich quality of life, with redevelopment of the Riverside Ice and Leisure Centre, and improved facilities at Essex County Cricket Club being two major schemes to be implemented.
- securing new residential development on sites already identified through the Urban Capacity Study, and promoting such development where it complements other town centre uses.
- creating well designed, high quality, safe residential environments, compatible with adjacent commercial town centre uses.
- providing health and education facilities to support the needs of the Town Centre's resident and working population.
- improving the public transport interchange facilities in the town centre, notably the railway station.
- managing parking demand by planned provision of public car parking and control of private parking.
- extending Park and Ride services.
- providing and improving road access to land in need of regeneration, including the proposed Eastern Gateway Access Route.
- improving pedestrian and cycling circulation within the Town Centre.
- enhancing the green spaces within the town centre, notably Central Park.
- designating the rivers and their associated green spaces as part of the strategic 'Green Wedge' policy.
- creating new urban spaces, and enhancing existing spaces.
- securing high quality urban design.
- preserving and enhancing the Conservation Areas.

- 4.3 The planning framework summarised above will be implemented and secured by the Plan's designation of 37 Opportunity Sites within eight character areas. The character areas, as shown on Figure 13 of the Submission Plan [CD/CFD/021] have been identified where existing differences in land use, townscape and activity will be developed to create a distinctive sense of place. The Opportunity Sites represent land that is suitable and available for town centre uses, including sites where there is a significant regeneration objective to remove dereliction, secure the re-use of previously developed land and deliver necessary major infrastructure improvement.
- 4.4 Part Three of the Submission Plan [CD/CFD/021] identifies the Opportunity Sites, and for each site sets out the planning objectives for that site, a commentary on the opportunity that is available during the Plan period, together with guidance on leading land uses, supporting land uses, the location of development and other options that may exist and relevant urban design considerations.
- 4.5 The Borough Council acknowledges that development proposals may arise at any time for non-allocated land as part of a normal process of change. In particular the Borough Council will engage with the owners of the County Hall precinct and Riverside Retail Park when proposals are being formulated. Such sites are in beneficial existing use where there are no specific promotional objectives for the AAP. Therefore the boundaries of allocated land suit the areas where planning objectives will actively be pursued.
- 4.6 Policy DC10 of the adopted Core Strategy and Development Control Policies DPD gives protection to Green Wedges containing river valley landscape, in order to nurture bio-diversity and encourage recreation activity. The Town Centre AAP designates the Green Wedge area within the Town Centre. Two sites allocated in the AAP coincide with the proposed Green Wedge designation:
- Site no 14 - County Cricket Ground
 - Site no 25 - former Jewsons, former Bolingbroke and Wenley and Moulsham Mill.
- 4.7 These two key Area Action Plan site allocations are based on strategic land use objectives that take precedence over the Green Wedge policy on the specified land. If development is proposed that does not accord with the AAP site allocation, the Green Wedge policy will enable appropriate planning control.
- 4.8 Part Four of the Submission Plan sets out the Implementation and Delivery programmes which will be necessary to ensure that the Plan's objectives and proposals are taken forward systematically and effectively. Many of the arrangements and partnerships described in this part of the Plan are already in place, and working effectively towards achieving the Plan's objectives. For example, the recently established Chelmsford Tomorrow LDM is the local delivery vehicle (LDV) which will progress the delivery of strategic infrastructure for the Town Centre. Another example is the partnership established between the Environment Agency and the Borough Council to promote flood risk reduction measures in Chelmsford Town Centre, which it is understood represents a model that the Environment Agency considers appropriate for other parts of the country.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 The Borough Council believes that it has put in place an Area Action Plan which will secure the necessary change and growth in Chelmsford Town Centre through to 2021 and which will fulfil the objectives and guidance set out for Chelmsford in the Draft East of England Plan (RSS 14). The Chelmsford Town Centre Area Action Plan is a strategy for both short-term and long-term change. It is intended that the Plan will deliver that change, and confirm Chelmsford's position as the Capital of Essex at the heart of the Mid-Essex sub-region.

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Planning and Building Control Services
Chelmsford Borough Council
Civic Centre
Duke Street
Chelmsford
Essex
CMI IJE

Telephone: 01245 606458

Fax: 01245 606642

email: ldf@chelmsford.gov.uk

Web: www.chelmsford.gov.uk/ldf

www.chelmsford.gov.uk/chelmsfordtomorrow



2003-2004
Quality of the Built Environment

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