

RESPONSE TO ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL ON THE CORE STRATEGY.

GENERAL BACKGROUND:

Members of Hawkwell Parish Council have had some opportunity to consider the Core Strategy Document issued by Rochford District Council. Whilst we are grateful to the District for providing 6 copies, this is a very large document needing considerable time to read and digest. Limitation of our access to 6 copies means that each document has had to be studied by up to 3 Members thus creating time constraints that should not be suffered with such an important document.

We note that the objective of this exercise is, primarily, to allow residents to respond to the options that have been identified as preferred. However we wish to make a number of observations to assertions made in the introductory remarks.

We are concerned that we are being asked to respond before we have had a chance to consider the Allocations Development Plan Document that is to be issued shortly. Whilst many sites have been the subject of speculation we cannot respond specifically until we have had the benefit of the formal statement identifying the actual sites and numbers of property to be built thereon. We therefore require the Planning Authority to provide good opportunity for residents to consider specific sites prior to their approval.

LISTENING TO YOUR VIEWS.

1. **Page 3:** In response to the comment that there is too much residential development proposed in our village/town. You have said you have reconsidered the matter but have given no indication of your conclusions. Do you accept the assertion or do you reject it, and if so on what basis.
2. **Page 4 Intensification:** We are concerned that you have inserted the phrase as 'far as is practicable' yet in H1 you state that you will resist intensification on smaller sites. Is this comment also subject to the aforementioned caveat, if not what powers will you rely on to achieve this and why can you not resist intensification currently.
3. **Page 8 Priority 5:** You state that walking and cycling are to be encouraged. With the greatest of respect, with an ageing population (Core Strategy Document penultimate paragraph page 14) is it realistic to brush aside the opportunity to ease an already almost gridlocked transport system and ignore the additional pressure to be imposed by an additional 3.5K houses by expecting elderly people to walk or cycle everywhere? Though much of the transport congestion experienced in the district is from the district much of it is also traffic travelling from outside Rochford to Southend.
4. **Page 8 Priority 6:** You say you are committed to improving access to sporting facilities yet we understand you recently rejected a central government initiative to give free swimming to the older people in Rochford. This decision is set against an acknowledgement that the population of over 65's is increasing and is expected to outnumber the under 20s by 2015! This aspiration does not sit well with the insistence on franchising the public sporting facilities out to the private sector that charge high entrance/membership fees thus reducing the ability of fixed income people to make use of these facilities.

CHARACTERISTICS, ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

Page 20 Settlements: We are incensed by the failure to recognise Hawkwell as a settlement in its own right. As the biggest Parish (based on population) and second only to Rayleigh Town we have, in this report, apparently been subsumed into Hockley. Whilst you may argue that, at the recent Central Area Committee, residents expressions of concern about the number and locations of new houses was premature, we cannot help but feel that, as a settlement that is ignored in the Core Strategy, we are having little say in the allocations of housing to our parish.

HOUSING:

We now wish to make the following observations in response to the chapter on Housing:

General Observation:

It is stated on page 23 (penultimate paragraph) that a balance of 2489 units have to be delivered before 2021 and the total to be delivered by 2025 is 3489, this figure after allowing for the 1301 units identified by the urban capacity study. This represents a 10% in housing and whilst we fully endorse the need to re-use land (brown-field sites) and allow small infill developments where the impact on the local infrastructure can reasonably be accommodated, we cannot agree that finding locations for almost three and a half thousand new homes (or a 10% increase) should be addressed on the basis of cramming them into existing settlements. We suggest that this requires a much more strategic view and the piecemeal approach based on a 'call for sites' is totally inadequate. In our policy document sent to the Planning Authority in December 2007/January 2008, we supported the view that a new settlement should be developed where the infrastructure needs can be properly developed and accommodated and where the additional housing will have the minimum impact of existing overdeveloped settlements. We believe there is strong argument that a new settlement would be far greener and thus, in the longer term, more sustainable than a myriad of smaller infill sites. This option must not be rejected out of hand as is currently the case

H1 Distribution - Preferred Option

We are concerned that whilst our Planning Authority has adopted a policy against the intensification under this preferred option, this is contrary to what is currently happening with the increase in the number of flats being approved and the number of plots being turned from single dwelling sites to multiple dwelling sites. We are currently told that such intensification cannot be resisted, how then will the new policy be enforced? That said we would support the limitation on intensification and require that new lower levels agreed be adhered to.

In the penultimate paragraph on page 26 (General Locations) it is asserted that you have adopted a balanced strategy in respect of the location of housing development, we cannot see how the emerging proposals for Hawkwell are, in anyway, balanced allocations.

H2 General Locations & Phasing – Preferred Option:

Members hold the view that our policy developed and forwarded to the Head of Planning and Transportation in January 2008 still holds good. A copy of our policy is attached. Our view is that the Core Strategy appears to distribute new housing development on an uneven basis. We hold the view, as clearly stated in our policy,

that if additional housing has to be distributed amongst existing towns and villages then it must be done on a sensible and defensible base such as existing population or geographical size and not on the ad hoc base that the call for sites appears to have produced. We strongly object to being subsumed into a settlement called Hockley/Hawkwell and then being expected to take the lions share of new houses that the Core Strategy allocates to this pseudo-settlement. (as indicated by the table in H2)

We do not believe that the argument against Rayleigh taking more of the allocation as given in H2 Alternatives (top of page 29) gives any sensible basis for rejection of this option, if the comment 'best access to services' still holds good then it must be properly considered and not thrown out as a result of clamour from the Rayleigh lobbyists on the District Council.

Transport

The diagram provided on the last page of the document shows a heavy concentration of development within Hawkwell and Rochford. This will inevitably have an impact on Rectory Road, Ashingdon Road, Main Road, Hawkwell and Hall Road ensuring a triangle of congestion on all routes to and from our village.

We cannot help but feel that the options in this section are pious hopes with little real substance. Seeking contributions from developers for public transport provision is laudable but transport companies and developers are ephemeral, housing estates are less so. We have experienced the way the private sector has progressively withdrawn service from our village, what safeguards are offered to sustain this transport when the provider decides it is not profitable and withdraws the service?

T7 Parking Standards:

We are concerned by the decision to apply minimum parking standards in residential developments. The District has insufficient resources to manage the consequential bad parking that occurs with cars parked over pavements causing obstruction to pedestrians and traffic alike. It is not sensible to adopt such a policy without also properly evaluating the consequence and then resourcing the appropriate methods of enforcement.

RTC 4 & 5 – Preferred Options:

We understand from the various consultations that the Hockley and Rochford Town Centre Studies have not yet been completed and we would require that these are completed and properly considered before any decisions are taken.

Economic Development Preferred Options: ED1 to ED 4

Contrary to what is stated in the Core Strategy there is too much reliance on the development of the airport and its environs involving the release of green belt land to provide jobs, it appears to be assumed that the new residents of Hawkwell will work there thus justifying the large proportion of housing in or adjacent to our parish.

We feel the Core Strategy and the JAAP in respect of Southend Airport should be properly integrated so that recommendations are consistent.

Character of Place:

Hawkwell Parish Council welcomes the re-introduction of the local list.

Community Infrastructure, Leisure and Tourism:

CLT 1 Planning Obligations and Standard Charges – Preferred Option

We are concerned that the interpretation of sustainability has been insufficiently addressed and we request that any proposal for a specific site be accompanied by a clear and unequivocal statement of the results of the test of sustainability and that only developments where the assessment shows a clear positive result in respect of sustainability are approved. Furthermore we would request that each site is tested against the sustainability test developed for a ‘new’ settlement to allow a fair comparison of advantages and disadvantages.

We note that government policy is that 60% of the development should be on brown field sites and the balance on green field, the indications emerging from the Core Strategy document seem to have reversed the policy with the higher percentage on green field sites and the balance on brown field.