

REP- 655

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Southend Central Area Action Plan

Matter 4 – Transport, Access and Public Realm

4.1 Topic Paper 2 (Strategic Highway Network) notes that: “Current forecasts suggest that, with the planned development in Southend, congestion will increase” (second paragraph under Transport Context). With this in mind, can the development proposals in the SCAAP be implemented without causing unacceptable congestion and inconvenience to residents, workers and visitors to the central Area? Does the SCAAP relate well to the Southend Local Transport Plan (LTP) 3?

Southend is an area with limited road and rail networks in and out of the town, in fact it is literally at the end of the line for both means of transport. Whilst the Borough Council’s aspiration to effect a modal shift is worthy we do not believe it will be easy to achieve, especially for visitors coming to Southend to enjoy the Borough’s recreational and leisure attractions.

We know that despite efforts to encourage visitors use “sustainable transport” the Stockvale Group who are a major leisure operator in the Borough have found that 85% of their customers prefer to use the car to travel to their Adventure Island attraction on Southend’s seafront and only 9% use rail as their preferred choice. With regular reports in the media of problems with the rail networks, Southend is served by two operators c2c and Greater Anglia, we do not see these percentages changing in the near future.

The type of visitors to the central area, including the sea front, also needs to be borne in mind with many of them likely to be families, especially in the peak summer season, whether going to enjoy Southend’s leisure offerings or to shop. They will want convenience above all else whether it is accessing the sea front or returning from shopping with purchases.

It is the view of Essex Chambers of Commerce, therefore, that the Borough Council’s proposals in the SCAAP will of necessity cause unacceptable congestion and inconvenience to residents, workers and visitors to not just the central area but to the town as a whole unless there is adequate car parking provision to accommodate the planned growth envisaged.

4.3 Several representations to the submitted SCAAP point to significant concerns in relation to car parking provision.

4.3 (ii)

If the Borough Council is successful in developing the Borough as envisaged we believe that it is not sufficient just to maintain existing parking provision but to increase it and we would not oppose any schemes brought forward to achieve the 25% increase that has been mooted.

We remain to be convinced about the potential success of a park and ride scheme based around Leigh on Sea station and are uncertain as to its availability at certain times, including Bank Holidays, when it would be of most benefit.

4.3 (iii)

We believe that the SCAAP should clearly define which are regarded as “key visitor car parks” and the capacity of these. We are not convinced that the policy as proposed would ensure that there is no net loss in car parking spaces within the key visitor car parks to the south of the Central Area and that it should explicitly state that future plans would not permit the loss of existing car parking provision until an equivalent amount of new car parking is provided within a reasonable walking distance of the parking spaces that have been lost. Ideally we would like to see this policy expanded to see an increase in parking provision over and above existing levels but realise that this might not be easy to achieve. It is our view that ten minutes walking time could be construed as reasonable in this context.

4.3 (iv)

Although we believe that the car parking requirements of the sea front area are essential to secure the success of the various businesses in that area, we believe that there is a strong case for maximising parking provision across the area as a whole. Southend is a growing economy and the Borough Council have set out ambitious plans to continue this growth, the retail sector remains important and faces competition from locations such as Lakeside in Thurrock and Chelmsford so adequate parking provision to support this sector is equally essential.

4.3 (vii)

Just as the retail sector in Southend has its competitors elsewhere so does the tourism and leisure sector and we believe that the Council should work with these sectors to see how parking provision can be increased to meet demand during peak summer periods.

4.3 (ix)

Please see 4.3 (iii) above

4.5

We referred in 4.1 above to the fact that Southend is to some extent constrained in future development by the limited road and rail networks feeding into it. Some measures to improve the A127 have come from a combination of resources from the Borough Council and Essex County Council, including using funding obtained through the South East Local Enterprise Partnership.

Whilst there may well be changes to potential funding streams in the future we believe that both councils need to continue to make the case to the Government and local MPs for continued investment in the A127 and A13 to improve road access to the Borough.