



3. OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

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3.1 Southend as a place: the urban experience

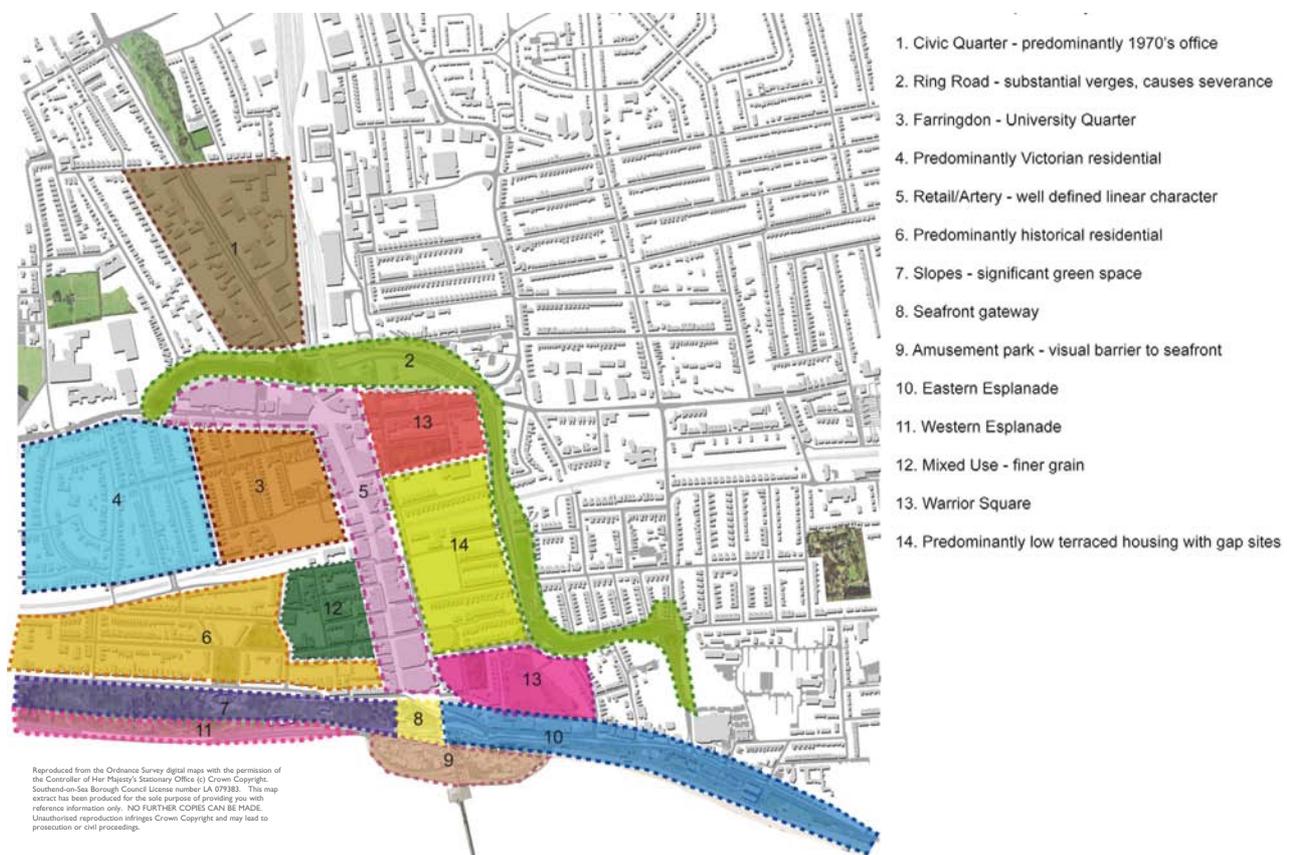
The 2001 Census recorded Southend's population to be 160,257 people. In the context of the Thames Gateway South Essex sub-region, Southend has a potential catchment of up to 350,000 people.

Southend performs a variety of functions and is defined by its diverse urban character. A good way of identifying opportunities and constraints is to conceptualise the way people understand the place as a series of different experiences - ranging from participation in core functions and activities such as the High Street retail experience, to finer grain elements such as the built heritage.

The purpose of chapter 3 is to provide a concise overview of the findings which emerged in the baseline research in the first stage of the project and the specific opportunities developed in stage 2. Key features and assets are set out as opportunities and constraints under the following sub-headings, with a summary of the findings in section 3.1.1.

- Southend as a retail centre;
- Southend as a place to work;
- Southend as a place to live;
- Southend as a visitor centre;
- Southend as an educational centre;
- Southend as a cultural hub;
- Southend as a hub for the natural and built heritage;
- Southend as a civic hub;
- Southend as a transport interchange; and
- Summary of opportunities and constraints.

- Southend as a place: the urban experience;
- Southend as a place: urban design, public realm and open space;



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Character Areas - The Masterplan builds on the different existing townscape character areas within Southend'

3.2 Southend as a place: urban design, public realm and open space

This section relates to the findings drawn from a detailed analysis of urban design and public realm.

Urban design

A number of key findings were identified:

In relation to urban morphology, there is an opportunity to promote a more permeable street layout between Victoria Avenue and London Road, and to define a more distinctive urban grain to the east of the High Street focusing on opportunities at Warrior Square, Tylers Avenue and Seaway car park.

Analysis of land use patterns illustrates that the Central Area has a strong zonal geography with offices and civic uses to the north, retail use focused on the High Street and leisure uses on the seafront. A finer grain mix of uses is developing to the west of the High Street in relation to educational, cultural and boutique-style food, drink and retail units. There is a definite opportunity to encourage a greater mix of uses across the centre, to enhance accessibility between the different 'zones' and to increase the physical breadth of the town centre, particularly in relation to the creation of a new retail circuit to the south-east of the High Street.

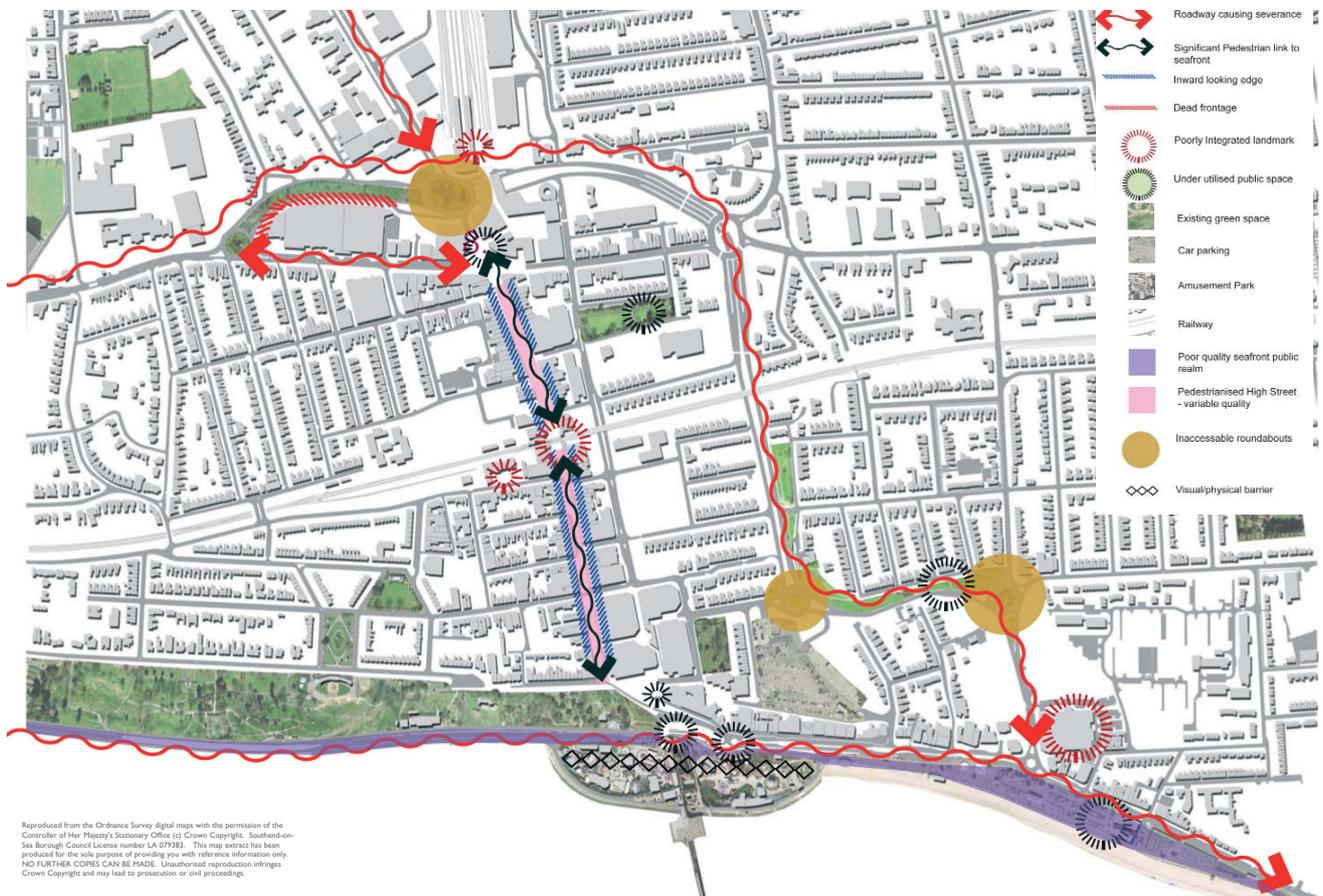
There is an opportunity to develop taller buildings in key areas in order to create landmarks and enhance Southend's architectural quality, as well as to take advantage of the excellent waterfront and estuary views. It is important that taller buildings do not compromise the special character of the historic environment including the Conservation Areas.

Public realm

Public realm, open space and landscape play a major role in shaping the experience of Southend and in knitting the town together. Southend's outdoor environment has wonderful natural and man-made assets, as well as some failings. The purpose of this section is to review the landscape constraints and opportunities which will inform both the overall Masterplan and the Public Realm Strategy:

Constraints:

- Queensway visually and physically severs the town core and wider area;
- The town centre is inward looking, with few outward looking frontages around the periphery, particularly along Queensway;
- There is poor integration between the different



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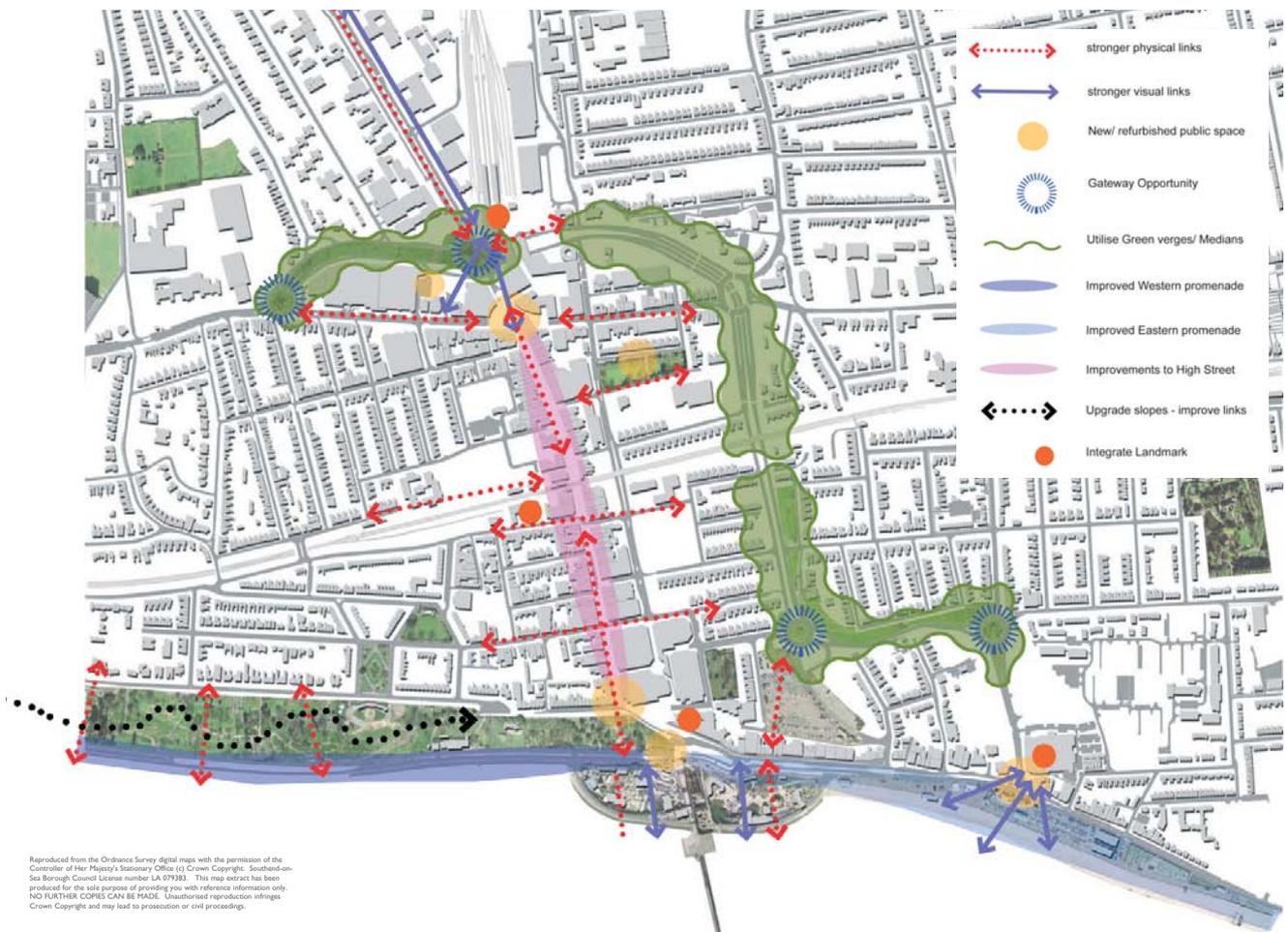
Public realm and open space constraints

- quarters - retail, civic zone and seafront;
- There is a lack of public green space - particularly in the retail core;
- The town centre lacks identity, with little reference to its coastal context;
- Both rail stations are both poorly integrated, with Victoria Station being significantly detached both visually and physically;
- There is inconsistent use of materials in the High Street resulting in a poor sense of identity;
- Public space, particularly Victoria Plaza is under-utilised and lacks identity;
- There are areas of significant visual and physical clutter, particularly around junctions;
- There is a lack of landmarks, or visual markers;
- Existing landmarks such as the Kursaal are poorly integrated and under-utilised;
- The most significant areas of green space are found on roundabouts and verges, which could be better utilised;

- There is substantial planting on the roundabouts which detract from potentially strong vistas and visual links, further adding to the sense of detachment;
- There are poor materials, planting and a lack of seating and facilities along the promenade; and
- There are poor links both from town to seafront, and within seafront.

Opportunities:

- Re-connect the different quarters of the town by utilising existing visual links, and introducing more 'gateways' and markers', particularly around Victoria station;
- Reconnect the town physically by reclaiming streets as public spaces using pedestrian-priority shared surfaces; redesign and downsize highway junctions; strengthen existing and open up new pedestrian connections;
- Upgrade existing public space (e.g. Victoria Plaza and Warrior Square) with high quality landscape design and integrating these spaces into existing fabric;
- Develop Queensway as a gateway, removing extensive

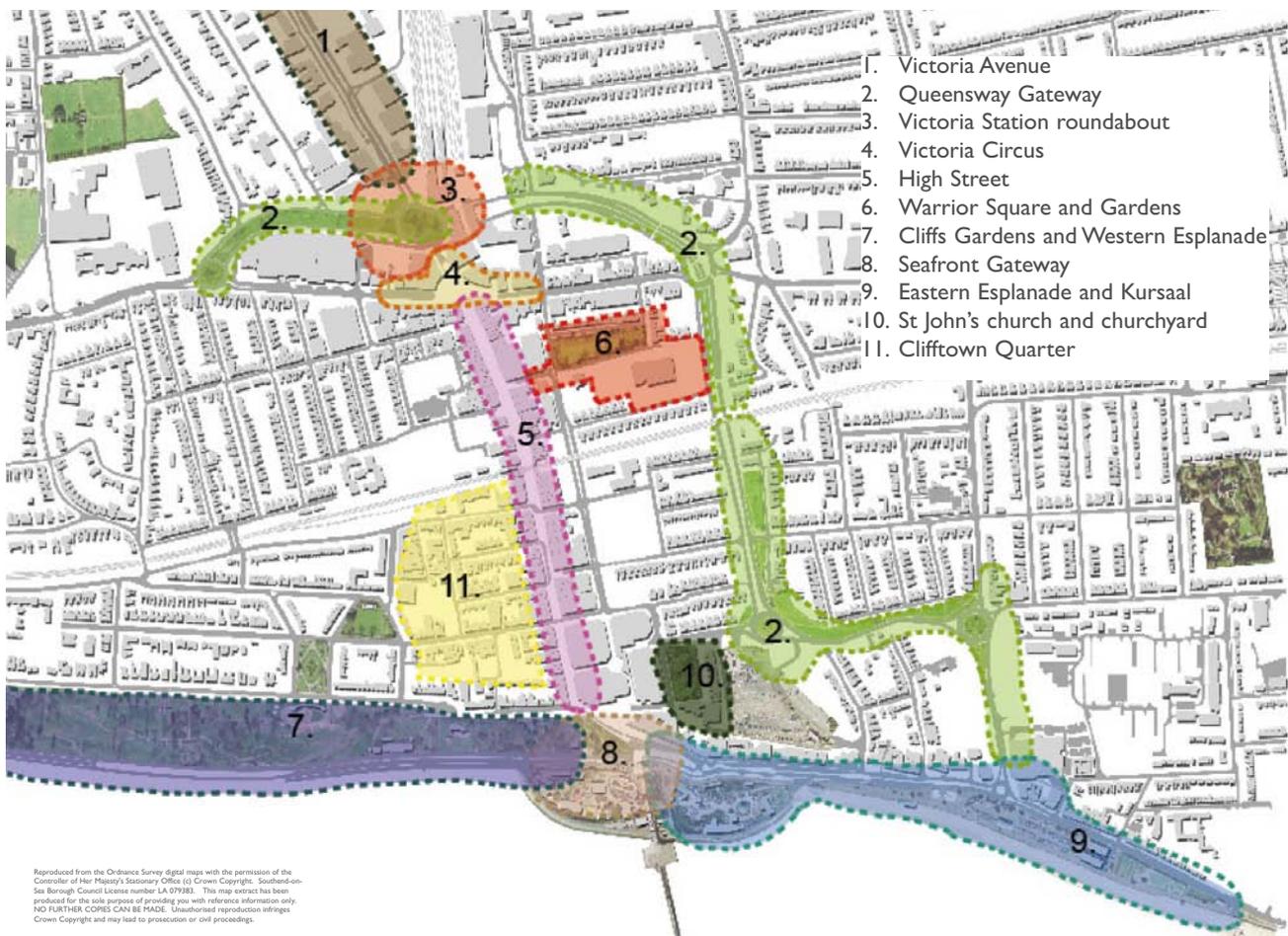


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- planting from the roundabouts thus opening visual links and vistas, and introducing more extensive planting on verges to offset the impact of the highway;
- Create a stronger visual identity and character through the introduction of a coherent public realm and public art focus building on the town's history, culture, strengths and seaside character, particularly along the High Street and promenades;
- Offset the impact of the confused High Street floorscape, by introducing stronger vertical elements - mature street trees, and kiosks;
- Remove visual clutter, and rationalise signs, traffic signals, particularly around Victoria Station, areas of the High Street and promenade;
- Improve the relationship between the promenade and the seafront, with greater pedestrian emphasis and an exciting and coherent palette of materials;
- Rationalise and fully utilise existing space along the seafront, creating a series of spaces and 'experiences';
- Integrate existing high quality buildings such as the Kursaal into the public realm with improved visual and physical links and possible new public space;
- Integrate Cliffs Gardens within a cultural trail encompassing art works, events and Southend's wonderful Victorian architecture; reinstate and reinterpret the Victorian character and features of the gardens; and
- Improve connections and the visual relationship between Cliff Gardens and the Western Esplanade.

Opportunity Areas:

The following plan sets out the landscape opportunity areas which are developed in the Masterplan.



1. Victoria Avenue
2. Queensway Gateway
3. Victoria Station roundabout
4. Victoria Circus
5. High Street
6. Warrior Square and Gardens
7. Cliffs Gardens and Western Esplanade
8. Seafront Gateway
9. Eastern Esplanade and Kursaal
10. St John's church and churchyard
11. Clifftown Quarter

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Landscape Opportunity Areas

3.3 Southend as a retail centre

Southend currently plays a major role as a retail centre but there are clear opportunities to improve its performance as identified in the Regeneration Framework (see chapter 2).

The focus for retail activity should continue to be the established town centre, but there is an opportunity to achieve critical mass by delivering a strong retail circuit and new units to the east of the High Street focusing on the Tylers Avenue site. This would add a major, fresh component to the retail offer. In order to reinforce the primacy of the High Street, it is important that The Victoria and the Royals are improved as anchors. This is already underway at The Victoria, but the Royals would benefit from some refurbishment, particularly in the context of the new critical mass of retailing prepared in the south eastern quadrant of the High Street, which has been defined as St John's in the Masterplan.

It is also necessary to encourage a greater breadth of retailing uses, and the Clifftown area and other secondary retail locations have very significant potential to capture niche markets.

The vitality of the retail experience is essential and as such the preferred option should also incorporate public realm enhancements, a greater mix of complementary uses and a user-friendly atmosphere. This will help to differentiate the town centre from other centres and create a unique, bespoke and in places boutique offer which would enhance the appeal of the town centre to the catchment population, and to visitors.

The need for a bulky food outlet is acknowledged and this has potential to play a key role as part of a wider expanded retailing offer in the central part of Southend.



Shoppers on the High Street

3.4 Southend as a place to work

As noted in the Regeneration Framework, there is major scope for Southend's performance as an employment centre to be improved. Opportunities to achieve this are underpinned by the need to maximise sustainability, inclusivity and town centre vitality by providing a mix of employment generating uses in the central area.

Retail and servicing has a strong role to play, and office employment should continue to be promoted as it supports a large number of workers from the Borough and South Essex.

It is recognised that the office stock on the western side of Victoria Avenue has a negative impact on the market and it is recommended that this area should take on a new role with a mix of uses including residential and civic uses.

There might be also scope for an agglomeration of University-related uses including accommodation, ancillary entertainment facilities, and alternative workspace uses in this area. Allied to this, there would be scope to replace the reservoir of office space in an alternative, more accessible location in the town centre, possibly at Warrior Square and other central locations.

The connection between the expanding educational sector and cultural industries should be promoted. SME space, workshops, research and development and other forms of innovative employment-generating uses should be encouraged as far as possible.

The visitor and leisure economy will continue to be an important sector, but further expansion is most likely to be a possibility as a result of the rejuvenation of the retail and office economies and general town centre environment.



Victoria Avenue

3.5 Southend as a place to live

A key objective for the Masterplan is to enhance the vitality of the central area. Providing residential uses as part of a mix is well-established as a means of achieving this aim. It is important that residential units are not over-supplied as this would have a detrimental effect.

A mix of unit types and sizes should be provided in order to create mixed and balanced communities. In addition to affordable and family units, the central area should also accommodate significant student dwellings. The overall objective in this respect is to create a balanced town centre community

Social infrastructure should be planned for and provided to meet the existing and future need of the resident population. The NHS LIFT model would be an appropriate means of delivering a contemporary holistic health facility in a central location. Additional educational facilities are also an important feature of the Masterplan.

3.6 Southend as a visitor centre

Southend has an established visitor economy but there is a clear aspiration to develop new markets for visitors. In the short term, there is an opportunity to consolidate existing visitor functions and attractions on the seafront.

The regeneration of the core town centre, particularly the retail sector and improvements in the urban environment could assist in generating different types of visitors. A balance between big-name High Street retailing and finer grain boutiques and specialist shops alongside a vibrant food and drink economy in areas such as Clifftown could lead to a regenerative effect similar to that experienced in Brighton.

Cultural attractions should be pursued as there is scope to make links with University initiatives, and to take advantage of attractive settings such as Cliffs Gardens which would be appropriate for cultural activity.

Larger scale leisure is likely to be market-led and would be a longer term aspiration for the Masterplan rather than a pre-requisite for realising the vision.

There may be scope for business tourism and conferencing in the longer term but again it is clearly reliant on the delivery of fundamental improvements in the town centre and remains an aspiration at this stage.



Clifftown



Southend seafront

3.7 Southend as an educational centre

The central area has a growing reputation as an educational hub for higher and further education. There are a number of opportunities to assist the future growth of this sector which are set out below.

The educational sector will play a major role in realising the potential of Southend in a sub-regional context. Both the University of Essex and South East Essex College have a strong presence in the town centre, and there is a strong case for the preferred option to support the development of a cultural and educational hub in the Farringdon area, adding to the critical mass of uses north of the station.

An important consideration is the long term success and sustainability of the University and College. In order to support the long-term growth of the educational sector, provision should be made for additional teaching facilities, space for graduate enterprise, ancillary student facilities, for example, a student union and student / key worker accommodation.

There is an opportunity to make provision for one or two core educational locations, and a dispersal of ancillary and associated functions across the central area.

As part of the implementation of the Masterplan it will be important to ensure that education provision meets the full needs of the community.



South East Essex College

3.8 Southend as a cultural hub

Southend has a major opportunity to realise the town's role as a cultural hub. The potential success of the cultural hub is likely to relate to a spectrum of interventions ranging from formal to informal, and public to private projects. These should include:

- Institutional projects (e.g. educational provision on the Farringdon site);
- Public cultural provision (e.g. new cultural centre possibly on the Bandstand slip or a new library);
- Private cultural provision such as theatres and music venues; and
- A general step change in the urban experience incorporating a vibrant mix of town centre activities.

The cultural status of Southend will be a key area of growth in the context of the town's role at the heart of the TGSE sub-region. There is scope for a new digital art gallery in the town centre, possibly as part of the overall mix of uses on St John's.



Cliffs Pavilion

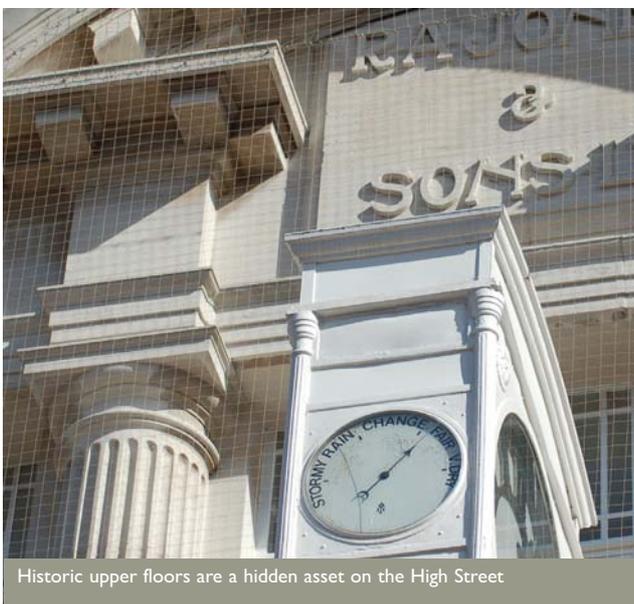
3.9 Southend as a hub for the natural and built heritage

Southend is defined by an attractive natural and built heritage and there are a number of opportunities and constraints relating to this theme. In relation to tall buildings, there is scope to make some provision for this type of development in appropriate central locations.

Open space and green space are vital to the experience of the central area. The preferred option will support the enhancement of existing green spaces, and also seek to rejuvenate public spaces such as the High Street and the seafront which are under-valued as open spaces.

The Masterplan will actively seek to celebrate heritage; particularly the role that the historic fabric of the town centre has in defining its unique character. In some cases, contemporary architecture will be appropriate, and it is vital that modern design responds to and accentuates the quality of heritage. The central Conservation Areas have significant intrinsic value and the Masterplan seeks to respect and augment their character.

The natural and built heritage of Southend is a major asset in the context of the development as a cultural and educational hub. Southend is also blessed with a fantastic seaside setting with memorable views over the Thames Estuary. In addition, the foreshore is a special natural environment which is reflected in the nature conservation designations for the area. As far as possible, the Masterplan will seek to minimise impact on the foreshore. However, there is scope to make better economic use of the Estuary, possibly through the provision of moorings or a marina at the end of the pier. Depending on feasibility and demand, it might also be appropriate to develop a series of short leisure piers spanning the walkway round Adventure Island. The creation of new habitats might be an appropriate technique for mitigating against any impacts associated with development in the seafront area.



Historic upper floors are a hidden asset on the High Street

3.10 Southend as a civic hub

The town centre will continue to play a role as a civic hub. There is an opportunity to retain civic functions on the eastern side of Victoria Avenue. There is scope for refurbishment of the existing building stock, but the location of civic uses seems appropriate in terms of the scale and boulevard character of Victoria Avenue. It is considered that the transformation of the western side of Victoria Avenue alongside landscape enhancements will provide a high quality setting for civic functions.



Civic Centre and Civic Suite, Victoria Avenue

3.11 Southend as a transport interchange

The central area of Southend is a major transport interchange and the quality and sustainability of connections is a cornerstone of the Masterplan. A number of opportunities are taken forward in the Masterplan.

Vehicular movement will be enhanced through a package of improvements including rationalisation of the one-way system, facilitation of a modal shift towards more sustainable transport modes and relocation of parking through a comprehensive car parking strategy.

Pedestrian connections will be enhanced through upgrades in the public realm, improved activity along key walking routes (particularly movement to and from the High Street via Chichester Road), and projects to improve key junctions and barriers to movement. There is a specific focus on better movement across Victoria Circus junction, at Pier Hill and routes across Queensway.

The car parking approach is to provide parking at key locations at the edge of the core town centre and along public transport corridors. This will enable sustainable movement patterns and also enable the selective redevelopment and re-provision of surface car park sites which do not represent the best use of scarce central land. Tylers Avenue, Warrior Square and Seaway car parks have a key role to play in the reinvigoration of Chichester Road and the central area as a whole.

In terms of public transport, the Masterplan seeks to maintain the existing approach as far as possible. The Masterplan advocates the return of one-way public transport to the High Street and some re-working of the public transport routes on Chichester Road to accommodate the redevelopment of adjacent sites. The Masterplan also makes provision for South Essex Rapid Transit in linking into the sub-regional movement network.

There is also scope for the re-branding of public transport with a view to transforming the perception of buses. There is also potential for the implementation of a C2C 'urban metro' service.



Southend Travel Centre

3.12 Summary of opportunities and constraints

The adjacent plan sets out a concise summary of the opportunities and constraints in the study area.

Victoria Avenue

Existing stock to the west is a constraint on the office market. Opportunity to provide alternative uses and refurbishment. Boulevard treatment and landscaping opportunities to fulfil gateway potential.



Queensway

Major barrier to movement. Opportunity to revitalise this route with landscaping and greenery. Possibility of improved crossings at key junctions.



Station enhancements

Southend Victoria and Southend Central underperform as gateways to the town and could be enhanced.



Cultural and educational hub

Major opportunity to facilitate growth in these linked sectors building on the strength of SEEC and UoE developments. The Farringdon site has a pivotal role to play.



Cliffdown Boutique Quarter

This area has momentum as a focus for independent retailing, restaurants, bars, offices and workshops. There are a number of infill development opportunities.



Opportunities for improved pedestrian links

Opportunities for better links at Victoria Circus, Pier Hill and from Seaway to the seafront.



Retail anchors

The performance of Southend as a retail destination is constrained by its anchors - the Royals and Victoria Centre which both present significant opportunities for improvement.



Conservation Areas

A series of Conservation Areas have a strong role in defining the unique and attractive character of Southend.



Central Seafront

Adventure Island is a key asset with future potential for expansion.



Future opportunities

A number of sites could come forward for refurbishment, expansion or development. Some of these are subject to existing consents and others are more aspirational.



High Street

The length of the High Street constrains the retail performance of Southend. There are opportunities to enhance the quality and performance of the High Street.



Widening the town centre

There is scope for the area to the east of Chichester Road to take on a new urban character. The surface car park sites (Warrior Square, Tylers Avenue and Seaway) have significant development potential in this respect. There is an opportunity to provide enhanced connectivity between the town centre and seafront via the Tylers and Seaway sites. Clearly there is a need for a clear parking and movement strategy given the importance of these sites for parking, and Chichester Road as a servicing/public transport corridor.



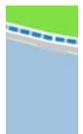
Severance caused by the railway

The LTS line causes major severance, restricting north-south movement.



Esplanade

The Esplanade is traffic dominated and constrains pedestrian movement. There are opportunities to reduce the impact of the road and parking as a barrier.



Cliffs Gardens

The formal character and tranquillity of the Gardens is an asset but the Gardens are constrained by the land slips. Opportunities exist to rectify the slips, enhance the landscape and introduce appropriate new uses.



Seafront East

The eastern side of the seafront has potential for landscape improvements and more active uses, possibly drawing on the 'urban beach' concept. This area has a different character to the western seafront.



Pier

The pier is a major landmark for Southend - there is a major opportunity to reinvent the pier as a destination.



Foreshore designations

Nature conservation designations (SSSI, RAMSAR and SPA) restrict development on the foreshore.





Summary opportunities and constraints plan

