

Southend Borough Council

**Southend Central Area Action Plan (SCAAP)
Hearing Statement - Matter 3: The local
economy, employment, retailing, business
and tourism**

May 2017

Southend Borough Council – Southend Central Area Action Plan Examination
Hearing Statement – Matter 3: The local economy, employment, retailing,
business and tourism

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References

Topic Paper 3	http://www.southend.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/4555/local_development_scheme_update_february_2017.pdf www.southend.gov.uk/downloads/file/4724/sd16_topic_paper_3_-_employment_business_and_investment
Retail Study	http://www.southend.gov.uk/downloads/file/1674/southend_retail_and_town_centre_study.pdf
Borough Local Plan Proposals Map	http://www.southend.gov.uk/info/200449/saved_planning_policies/495/southend-on-sea_borough_local_plan/11
Technical Report – Management of Designated Town Centre Shopping Frontages	http://www.southend.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/4590/technical_report_%E2%80%93_management_of_town_centre_shopping_frontage_2016.pdf
AMR 2016	http://www.southend.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/4711/annual_monitoring_report_2016_ldf.pdf
LEA 2013	http://www.southend.gov.uk/downloads/download/397/southend_local_economic_assessment
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Matter 3: The local economy, employment, retailing, business and tourism

3.1 *Is the SCAAP strategy, to seek opportunities for additional retail floorspace through incremental increases as opposed to specific allocations, the appropriate way forward for the Borough during the plan period?*

3.1.1 The SCAAP strategy to seek opportunities for additional retail floorspace through incremental increases as opposed to specific allocations is considered the most appropriate way forward during the plan period of the SCAAP as set out in Topic Paper 3: Employment, Business and Investment.

3.1.2 As no sites for major retail development have been promoted during preparation of the SCAAP, the plan takes a pragmatic approach towards retail growth through incremental increases and consideration of the large amount of existing vacant floorspace in the town centre.

3.1.3 The SCAAP does identify the following Policy Areas and Opportunity Sites as being located/partly located within the primary shopping area and having the potential to deliver additional retail floorspace where opportunities arise:

- PA1 High Street;
- PA2 London Road;
- PA4 Queensway and Opportunity Site PA4.1 (along Southchurch Road);
- PA6 Clifftown (for small scale niche retail);
- PA7 Tylers, including Opportunity Site PA7.1.

3.1.4 The SCAAP seeks to ensure that the town centre is attractive, accessible, well-designed, with a good mix of uses for shoppers, visitors and residents. This is a matter that was highlighted by the Portas Review (2011)¹, which emphasised that shopping should be just one part of a rich mix of activities within Town Centres.

3.1.5 On this basis and in response to the higher than average vacancy rate and diminishing retail rents² in the town centre, the SCAAP seeks to complement its retail offer by allowing a greater mix of uses along primary

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-portas-review-the-future-of-our-high-streets>

² Costar UK Ltd reported that average annual asking rents in Southend Town Centre have reduced over the last 5 years, being around £25 per SF in 2012 dropping to £20 per SF by 2017.

frontages and by allocating a number of Opportunity Sites for leisure, cultural and tourism uses that, combined with a greater central area population through the delivery of additional homes, enhanced public realm and access improvements, contributes to an enhanced town centre experience, which would be expected to increase footfall and help to consolidate and enhance the existing retail offer and assist with the letting of vacant floorspace.

3.2 *Is policy DS1: A prosperous retail centre justified and realistic, especially in relation to the proposed location of the primary shopping area; the identification of the primary and secondary shopping frontages; the 'enhancement' of the street market; and the reasoning behind the requirement for at least 60% retail use within the town centre primary shopping frontage?*

Primary Shopping Area

- 3.2.1 The Retail Study (2011) concluded that the existing Town Centre Shopping Area, as defined by the Borough Local Plan Proposal Map (1994), is appropriate and therefore does not require alteration. This area is referred to as the Town Centre Primary Shopping Area (PSA) within the SCAAP and is focused around a long linear High Street anchored by The Victoria shopping centre to the north and The Royals shopping centre to the south.

Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages

- 3.2.2 A Technical Report - The Management of Designated Shopping Frontages in Southend-on-Sea (Nov 2016) - presenting the findings of a use class survey, suggested amendments to individual frontages based on these findings. These are reflected in the SCAAP which proposes alterations to the existing Borough Local Plan primary frontage designations, replacing all those primary designations that are not located on the High Street and the ground floor of the two shopping centres (The Victoria and The Royals) with secondary shopping frontage.
- 3.2.3 The SCAAP also proposes to replace the existing Borough Local Plan ground floor primary frontage on the western edge of the southern stretch of the High Street, between Heygate Avenue and Pier Hill, with secondary frontage. The majority of this length of frontage is occupied by non-A1 uses, the units are generally small in nature and it is considered that this section has the potential to provide a vibrant and diverse transition between the High Street and the Central Seafront.

'Enhancement' of the street market

- 3.2.4 The Market Viability Assessment as reported by the Retail Study (2011) points toward Southend Town Centre having the right characteristics to

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sustain a market. It has an adequate sized population, limited geographical competition as well as demand from market operators. The Study went on to suggest that the most suitable location for a street market would be the High Street and London Road areas.

- 3.2.5 The study outlined that an attractive market could help to diversify Southend town centre's retail offer, bring additional street activity and add to the general shopping experience Southend town centre has to offer.
- 3.2.6 The High Street now currently hosts a weekly and by-weekly street market with the Borough Council acting as contract manager. It is considered that there is scope to further enhance 'street market' provision in the town centre and the Borough Council is currently tendering to out-source the market contracts to an experienced market operator to achieve improved management and provide growth.
- 3.2.7 The SCAAP in Policy DS1 seeks to maintain and enhance 'street market' provision within the primary shopping area, and through Policy PA2 promotes the provision of a street market on a new pedestrianised length of the London Road, which connects well with the High Street.

60% retail use within the town centre primary shopping frontage

- 3.2.8 The rationale for requiring at least 60% retail use within the town centre primary shopping frontage is provided in the Technical Report - The Management of Designated Shopping Frontages in Southend-on-Sea (Nov 2016). The report highlights that an over-concentration of non-retail uses within the primary frontage can detract from its shopping function and may prejudice its vitality and viability, create extensive lengths of "dead" frontage and a lack of proper shop window displays. Maintaining a high concentration of retail uses ensures the attractiveness of the centre as an accessible, diverse shopping area; which is paramount to the vitality and viability of the local economy and in conformity with the NPPF.
- 3.2.9 The Technical Report outlines that the Borough Local Plan has been successful in ensuring that primary frontages within the town centre maintain a high proportion of retail uses. However, the current proportion of retail uses is below the 80% Borough Local Plan target and the number of vacant units in the town centre is above the national average, with a higher proportion of vacant units within designated primary frontage as compared to secondary frontage.
- 3.2.10 The Technical Report concluded that in order to maintain retail primacy whilst allowing for a diversification of current uses, which is likely to assist with the letting of vacant units, a 60% policy target for A1 retail is appropriate.

3.3 *Topic Paper 3 (Employment, Business and Investment) draws attention to the large amount of vacant shop floor space in the town centre. Should the SCAAP address this issue in more detail and provide more guidance?*

- 3.3.1 It is considered that the SCAAP provides a positive and realistic approach to managing the town centre, which includes sufficient detail and guidance to address the large amount of vacant shop floor space in the area.
- 3.3.2 As highlighted in the Technical Report - The Management of Designated Shopping Frontages in Southend-on-Sea (Nov 2016), the SCAAP through the designation of primary shopping frontage and the 60% retail target allows for considerable diversification of uses within the Town Centre. This approach ensures the primacy of retail uses within primary frontages to facilitate an attractive shopping destination, but allows for a greater range of complimentary uses, particularly restaurants and cafes.
- 3.3.3 It is considered that allowing for the diversification of uses in the town centre will increase the scope and range of potential tenants and thereby assist in the letting of vacant units, particularly within areas of existing primary frontage.
- 3.3.4 The SCAAP also makes provision for a range of public realm and access improvements, which would be expected to increase footfall and assist with the letting of the vacant units, especially within areas that have existing poor quality environments.
- 3.3.5 The SCAAP also includes guidance on permitted development rights and temporary uses and there are sufficient caveats within Policy DS1 – A Prosperous Retail Centre to allow for managed change over time, including through a marketing exercise if necessary, in response to future High Street trends. All of which assists with addressing the issue of existing vacant units over the plan period.

3.4 *Should the evening economy be specifically addressed in a policy?*

- 3.4.1 The SCAAP seeks to bring about a change in the function and transformation in the quality of the town centre, encouraging a greater critical mass, which will generate a more diverse, vibrant and viable town centre through the day and into the evening.
- 3.4.2 The importance of the evening economy to a diverse, vibrant and viable town centre is highlighted within the aims of the High Street Policy Area and the Borough Council does not consider that further reference to the evening economy within a policy is necessary. However, should the Inspector be minded that further emphasis is needed within the plan, the Borough Council is open to including further reference within Policy DS1. A

suggested form of wording to follow bullet point 2 in the policy (as a new bullet point) is set out below:

The Council will promote appropriate town centre uses within the Primary Shopping Area that contribute to extending the economy throughout the day and into the evening. Proposals must not be detrimental to those living or working nearby, for example by causing undue noise or disturbance.

Subsequent bullet points in the policy would need to be renumbered.

3.5 *How realistic is the employment target of 7,250 jobs to be delivered in the Town Centre and Central Area? How much progress has been achieved so far? How would the Council describe or explain the 'sustainable balance' between jobs and housing which is referred to in paragraph 59?*

- 3.5.1 Employment data (See Topic Paper 3, Employment, Business and Investment) suggests that the amount of jobs within the Central Area have broadly remained neutral or declined over the plan period. This is likely due to the impact of the global downturn and recession, which coincided with the departure of a number of large employers from Southend Central Area, including HSBC. In this context it is considered that the delivery of 7,250 jobs in the Town Centre and Central Area is challenging, however, more recently, since 2012, job numbers have increased year on year in the Central Area and the SCAAP seeks to build upon this and act as an important catalyst and driver for inward investment.
- 3.5.2 The SCAAP promotes the establishment and expansion of businesses in the central area by encouraging and supporting economic development within defined Policy Areas and by identifying, promoting and actively bringing forward suitable sites for development to meet modern user and investor requirements. Further, increasing the town centre and central area's population, through the allocation of additional housing, will increase 'critical mass' and thereby create additional demand for jobs and services that is likely to facilitate delivery of additional jobs throughout the plan period. As outlined above, the SCAAP provides the necessary mechanisms to guide such development.
- 3.5.3 In respect to providing a 'sustainable balance' between jobs and housing it is important to recognise that although delivery of 7,250 jobs in the central area is challenging, the SCAAP seeks to maximise employment opportunities within the Central Area. Furthermore, annual monitoring (see Southend AMR 2016) suggests that the Core Strategy phased dwelling and employment targets (Topic Paper 3) are broadly being met in the Borough as a whole. As the Central Area is located at the heart of a

well-connected Borough, which has extensive sustainable transport links, including 9 railway stations, access to employment opportunities will enable a sustainable balance between jobs and housing to be achieved.

3.6 Does the SCAAP provide a sound framework for the development of key employment sectors in the Central Area, such as business and financial services, the creative industries, the university and civic and Government administration?

Business and financial services

- 3.6.1 Analysis of the office sector within Southend as part of the Retail and Town Centre Study (2011) indicates that the market for office space within Southend Central is oversupplied with outdated office stock, particularly within The Victoria Gateway Neighbourhood Policy Area. Much of this stock is too large and unlikely to meet the requirements of small to medium sized occupiers; the focus of demand for Southend office space.
- 3.6.2 Allied to the above, a mixed use approach to new office developments, as promoted within the SCAAP, will help to create viable proposals and a better balance of space currently on offer. Providing attractive new business space could strengthen the diversity of uses in the Town Centre and generally bolster its health. There may also be opportunities to capitalise further on business links with the University to generate demand for office stock.
- 3.6.3 The SCAAP therefore seeks to promote office development as part of mixed-use development through Policy PA2.1.a (offices), PA5.1.a (offices), PA6.1.a (small studio style workshops), PA6.2.b (offices), PA8.1.b (small scale business units), PA8.4(i) – Opportunity Site PA8.1 (small scale flexible office space), and Policy PA9.1.a seeks to maintain and promote Grainger Road and Short Street Employment Growth Areas as locations for increased employment floorspace, in line with Policy DM11.

Creative industries

- 3.6.4 The Southend Local Economic Assessment (LEA 2013) identifies Southend Central as the main cultural centre within the South Essex sub-region and the best location in which to develop this industry. The SCAAP seeks to embrace this opportunity to expand economic diversity and the local skills base and proposes further expansion of the University complex (PA3.1).

The University

- 3.6.5 The Core Strategy Policy KP1, promotes Southend Town Centre and Central Area as the primary focus of regeneration and growth within Southend, promoting the regeneration of the town centre as a fully

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competitive regional centre, led by the development of the University Campus. The SCAAP aims to secure Elmer Square Policy Area as the educational hub of Southend. Policy PA3: Elmer Square Policy Area Development Principles supports this by promoting educational and supporting uses and Opportunity Site 3.1 seeks to allocate land for these purposes.

- 3.6.6 Policy PA2: London Road Policy Area Development Principles, located directly north of Elmer Square also supports the provision of additional education facilities based on an assessment of the expansion needs of the University.

Civic and Government administration

- 3.6.7 The eastern side of Opportunity Site PA8.1 is home to the Civic Centre, Court building and Police Station. All of these buildings have been refurbished during the plan period. It is, therefore, not considered likely that further expansion will occur during the remainder of the SCAAP plan period. Although it is considered that the SCAAP, in combination with other development plan documents, provides a sound framework for guiding any future development proposals that may arise.

3.7 *Does the SCAAP provide a sound framework for the development of tourism? In particular, how realistic is the aim in the SCAAP to improve and diversify the tourism offer to increase overnight and longer stays, as set out in paragraph 80 (and also set out in Topic Paper 3 under Tourism)? Does this aim complement or conflict with what is widely seen to be the principal tourism sector of serving the day visitor market?*

- 3.7.1 Tourism has and will continue to be an important economic driver to the town centre and wider Borough. It gives the town its distinct identity centred on the iconic Pier. The SCAAP seeks to embrace this asset and build on its provisions (see also Topic Paper 3, Employment, Business and Investment – Tourism).
- 3.7.2 The SCAAP's policy provisions, particularly Policy CS1, aim to promote the development of a diverse range of tourism facilities complemented by a regenerated retail/leisure offer in the town centre. The Plan recognises that the town's tourism has been built upon a significant day visitor market with some 6million day visitors coming to the town each year. The SCAAP aims to complement this day visitor market by increasing opportunities for overnight and longer stays whilst harnessing the spending power of day visitors to add value to the tourism offer. The Southend Local Economic Assessment (2013) highlights the increased value to the local economy of encouraging more visitors to stay.

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- 3.7.3 The Plan's aim to diversify and extend the tourism offer to increase overnight and longer stays is considered to be realistic given the success of the town in recent years in achieving new and upgraded hotel developments, notably in high end accommodation such as the Park Inn and the Roslin Beach Hotel on the seafront and Holiday Inn at Southend Airport. Over the plan period 535 new hotel rooms have been provided in the Borough, 202 of which are located in the central area. The majority of this development has been since 2010. Currently there is outstanding planning consent for a further 185 bedrooms, 159 of which are located in the central area.
- 3.7.4 Policy KP1: Spatial Strategy of the Core Strategy outlines that regeneration and growth will be focussed to enhance the Seafront's role as a successful leisure and tourist attraction and Policy CP1: Employment Generating Development in promoting economic growth supports the town's potential to develop as a Hotel and Conference Resort with high quality hotels, casinos and broad-based leisure and tourism facilities.
- 3.7.5 DMD Policy DM12 sets out a Borough wide policy for managing visitor accommodation and establishes three key areas where such accommodation will be focused: Southend Central Area, Southend Airport Area and locations with a strong relationship with the Seafront. Building upon this the SCAAP promotes the provision of hotels and visitor accommodation in Policy CS1: Central Seafront Policy Area Development Principles and Opportunity Site CS1.2 allocates Seaways for mixed use development, including hotel provision.
- 3.7.6 The planned future development of Southend-on-Sea together with the successful regeneration of London Southend Airport, with some one million passengers per annum and planned growth to two million in the next few years, suggests good prospects for growth in demand for hotel accommodation (see Hotel Futures 2010). The SCAAP seeks to embrace this opportunity and promotes the development of further tourist accommodation.