

Southend Local Plan Consultation - March 2019

Comments on behalf of Milton Conservation Society and Hamlet Court Conservation Forum

What would you like Southend to be like in the future?

1.1 Is there anything missing from the key messages (Figure 8), and why should it be included?

Yes, massively missing. The messages are simply aspirations that could be written about any town. This is not what Southend is.

For too long marketeers and planners have wanted to define Southend, give it a clear label. This seems to us misplaced and constricting. Southend is many things, many different things, so rather than an out moded definition of what the town is we would suggest an approach which social media has given us - that of tagging. This would allow the town to be defined in multiple, flexible ways, the ways that people already define our town and will define it in future. These should be both ordinary and special, exactly what a town is. These would tap into the history, geography and social place that the town is. They are short, evocative, unpretentious and meaningful - in short, authentic. In this way they link to the tangible and intangible heritage we speak about elsewhere.

For example Southend is (in no particular order):

a walk on the pier
a plate of cockles
sunset over the estuary
sand castles and mud pies
fairground shrieks and laughter
keeping fit on the promenade
an ice cream on the front
seeing a band at the Cliffs
a Saxon hoard unearthed
a hassle free airport
sunken ships and a lost port
estuary birds flocking
the ebb and flow of the Thames
breakfast at the archway cafes
the dress circle at the Palace

Many other tags could be written and this idea allows the town to continue to be defined by its people, not a time limited marketing strap line.

Summary: Southend needs a new type of definition, messages that are not those of any town but of our town.

How best do we ensure healthy communities and development is appropriate and of a quality design, whilst ensuring we enhance our built heritage assets?

7.1 Continue to promote improved and new areas of public realm. Do you think priorities should be established as to where this should take place?

The Council should develop a wider perspective on place development springing from our heritage. Even the way that these questions are asked is indicative of traditional thinking where conservation is seen as the separated parts of our towns, the bits to be preserved whilst development focuses on new and modern ways forward to the exclusion of our past. This is what has led us to our present town centre, now out-moded and hugely problematic.

New buildings must respect context and fit in rather than seeking to stand out. Of course exceptions at prominent sites can be valid but too often this occurs in planning applications with little care for context. The student housing complex in London Road is our clearest example of this.

Conservation areas are established within and subject to the law and clearly this cannot change for all practical purposes. But this perspective is limited to the built environment so we would like to see a wider perspective develop along the lines of the Historic Urban Landscape approach promoted by UNESCO where both tangible and intangible heritage attributes are valued and used as a springboard for new, modern, complementary and contextual development. This would then tap into the wider special attributes that makes the places of our town special. This is a large subject area we cannot take further here.

That said the Council must have a higher regard for built heritage, too much of which has been lost in our town.

Summary: Improve the public realm by better contextual reference to our historic past

7.2 Require high quality landscape design and tree planting in new developments. Do you think priorities should be established as to which areas of the borough should be subject to streetscape upgrading first?

There needs to be a major re-think of the design of the London Road, our most important road in the borough. It has not been designed and so we just see random development with no clear policy. This will lead to further fracturing of the built environment, setting a very poor example in front of the whole town, for residents and visitors alike.

7.3 Should we seek to limit the proliferation of new fast food outlets close to locations where children congregate such as schools, community centres and playgrounds or

where there is an over-concentration of existing premises? Are there other ways of tackling this issue?

Yes, most definitely. It is difficult to see how else a local plan can tackle this as the problem is societal with many other factors involved requiring central government intervention.

7.4 Do you believe there are additional areas that should be protected as Conservation Areas?

Yes, most definitely. Hamlet Court Road is a road with most evident heritage, both tangible and intangible. This is unusual in our town and it must be protected. However, as we have said elsewhere, conservation should not be seen as a separated part of town planning.

11.1 What do you think are the key issues facing the neighbourhoods in the Borough?

These are simple, geographic definitions of our neighbourhoods. Our local plan should identify other definitions of place such as seafront, historic area, gathering places, residential places, business places, recreational places. We know that this does happen in the detail of the local planning but it might help at a wider conceptual level. For example rather than thinking about the town as Leigh, Westcliff, Southend etc., why not, seafront, high streets, parks, residence. This changes the emphasis to what a place is rather than what it is called.