PROJECT: SOUTH WOODHAM FERRERS NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

SUBJECT: SUMMARY PROGRESS AND IDEAS REPORT

DATE: 12 APRIL 2019   **PROJECT REF**.: THP457

TO: K HAWKES, SOUTH WOODHAM FERRERS TOWN COUNCIL

FROM: J HERBERT, TROY PLANNING + DESIGN

Overview

A series of papers and reports have been prepared and submitted to the Town Council, showing progress on the Plan and emerging ideas for consideration. The papers include:

- Summary of consultation undertaken in March 2019, including analysis of feedback.
- Character Area Analysis.
- Landscape Analysis.
- Town Comparators / example case studies.
- What if ideas: Town centre
- What if ideas: Access and movement
- What if ideas: Greenery
- What if ideas: Northern growth area.

This note highlights the key messages / headlines from these, and areas for discussion before further developing the Plan. Copies of report front covers are included within this summary paper as appropriate to help assist with cross referencing. Together they form background documents that will eventually be submitted in support of the Neighbourhood Plan.

A set of next steps are presented, along with an appendix that considers the relationship of emerging ideas with the policy framework established through the new Chelmsford Local Plan.

Consultation

The responses to consultation broadly ratify and confirm the four main areas of focus for the Plan, with support given to all emerging ideas from this. There were some areas of disagreement:

- Some respondents remain 'anti-growth'. Although that view is recognised, progress on the Local Plan means that the Neighbourhood Plan now needs to work within that framework and instead look to how it might help shape and influence that growth. Equally though, some respondents also expressed support for growth.

- Whilst many support the need to integrate with and improve connections with green space around the town, some disagree that connections across the 'ring road' (Ferrers Road) should be provided. It is difficult to achieve one without the other.

- Most agreed that development to the north of Burnham Road needs to be integrated with the town, with some suggesting that a new northern 'ring-road' should be provided. Such a solution is not provided for in the Local Plan Policy, which instead promotes improved connections across Burnham Road as well as incorporation of sustainable travel measures. An appropriate solution will need resolving with the design team for the site promoters, which balances the movement needs and functions of the street network with the wider place-making agenda and consideration of future travel demands.

Improvements to the quality of the town centre were recognised as being very important. Although a set of initial ideas have been prepared for discussion (see below) we believe it important to now liaise with businesses / owners of town centre properties to develop these further. We have ownership details (via a land registry search) and, with agreement of the Town Council, propose to write to individual owners and invite them to a briefing session to explore the future of the centre in more detail.

Following this, review of the material submitted to the Town Council and comments on this, and discussions with the City Council and Northern Growth Area team, we then suggest developing these further as policy headlines and projects for consultation feedback.

Character Area Analysis

This document looks at the growth of South Woodham Ferrers and seeks to draw out the key defining features of the place in terms of the built form. It identifies key positive features that future development should reflect, those which it shouldn't, and areas of opportunity for intervention.

It is clear from this, and from consultation responses, that the legacy of the original Essex Design Guide lends the town a unique history and character, and that future growth and change should be true to this, whilst also acknowledging that there are some aspects that might be designed differently.

The scale of development, the original intentions of a riverside country town, and palette of materials used should be reflected in policies influencing the growth area. However, issues in terms of a lack of greenery in the urban environment, the dominance of the road network and the inward looking nature of the town centre are key areas for intervention.

Landscape Analysis
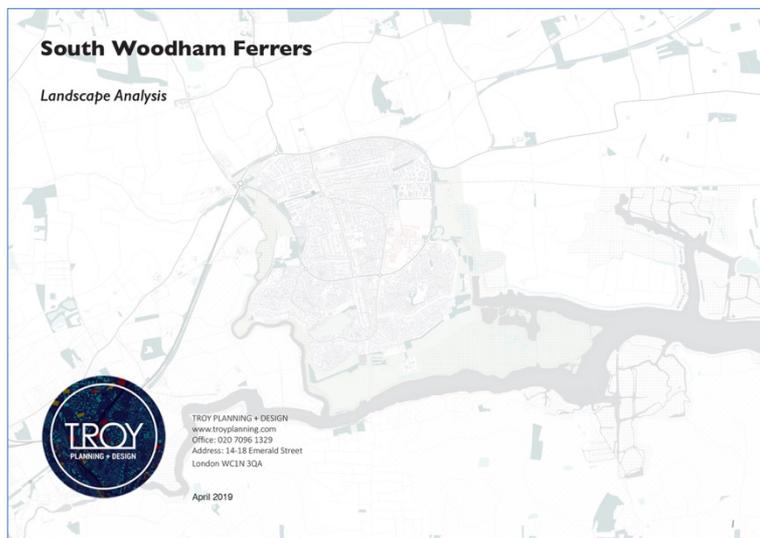
This document sits alongside the Character Area Analysis and investigates the network of green and blue infrastructure in and around South Woodham Ferrers. It maps the different green space types in town and access to these, as well as issues such as surface and fluvial flood risk.

The document provides a set of case studies exploring how green infrastructure might be better integrated into the urban fabric, including the landscape function of the northern growth area, which can help complete the green 'necklace' around the town, providing access to play, amenity and natural green space for the benefit of all.

Town Comparators
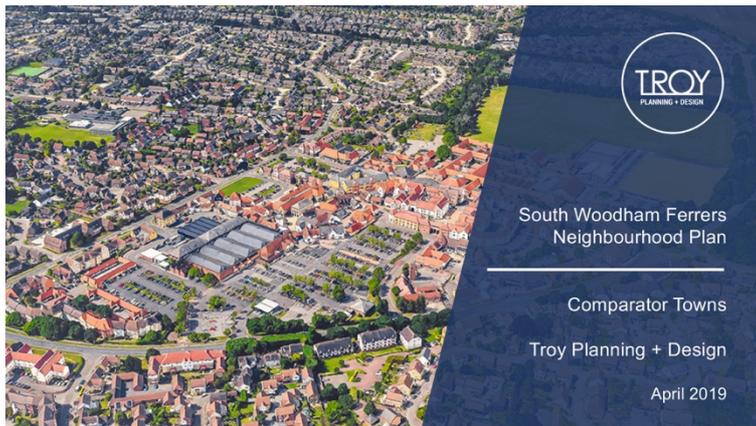
A set of case studies of similar sized places has been prepared, drawing out key lessons for consideration in South Woodham Ferrers. Some of these relate to development, others to accessibility, place, culture and identity. This draws out the importance of future growth responding to character and setting, and integrating this within other initiatives or place-branding strategies that might be considered as a means of maximising inward investment and community cohesion.

Key messages are:

- Maximise local character, culture and identity to create sense of place.

- Integrating green and blue infrastructure into the urban fabric is good for the environment, health and wellbeing

- Providing safe and attractive walking and cycling routes makes a more accessible and equitable place for all.

- Mixture of densities and housing types provides a range of choice and can deliver design diversity and interest.

- Clear, connected routes support movement and strengthen the town centre.

- Streets can be space too, balancing traffic and place functions.

What if ideas: Town Centre
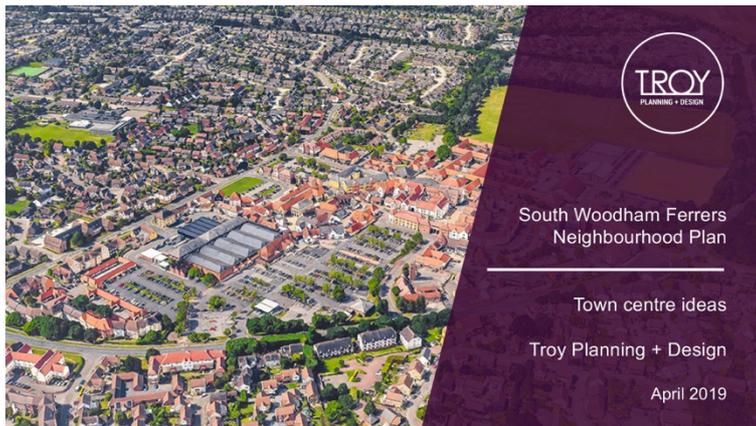
This document presents a set of options for intervention in the town centre. These are presented across a range of scales and levels of intervention. The options are not mutually exclusive, and combinations of approaches could come together to present a phased approach to change.

The options seek to work within the constraints of ownership arrangements, though some suggest changes that will impact upon existing owners, either through structural change (eg: redevelopment), or through policy change (eg: allowing change of use), or through setting (eg: public realm interventions).

Alongside ownership (and thus delivery) questions, are those of just how much change should be promoted, and what for: should the town centre have a greater diversity and mix of uses that look beyond retail for example? Should the centre of gravity change, with remodeled arrival points and clearer links through to the retail core?

A set of non-planning options are also presented, which might be initiatives that the Town Council wish to explore with local businesses, including introduction of a local town currency, a place-branding strategy, and regular programme of local activities and events.

What if ideas: Access and movement
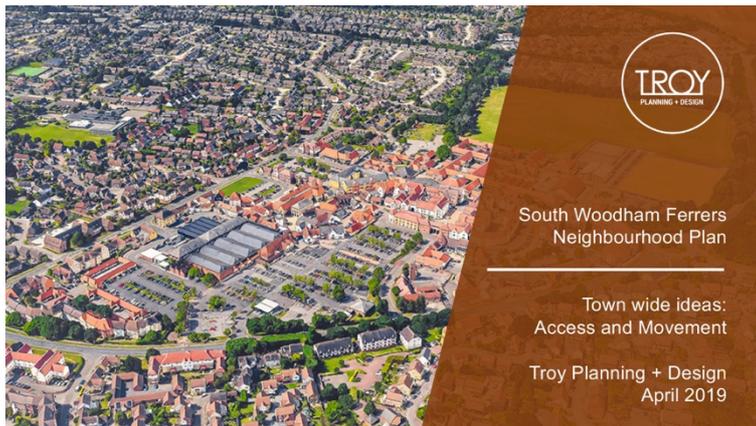
This paper focusses on a range of travel and environmental measures that seek to improve access for all. Whilst recognising that the private car will remain the mode of choice for many, alternative options should be explored and put in place that provide opportunities for people to move differently. These include:

Redesigning roads (eg: Ferrers Road) as streets: retaining the single lane nature of the road in each direction for motorised vehicles, but narrowing and rebalancing the road space, to cater for other users (cycling), introducing landscaping, and, where opportunities arise, to allow development to front onto the street in the future. The intention here is to create more people friendly spaces and places, incorporating safe crossing points for all, such that alternative means of travel become more attractive.

Potential for encouraging and promoting cycle infrastructure is investigated. The town is relatively compact, with everyday facilities within relatively close proximity to the home. Creating a linked network of safe cycle routes responds to health and well-being agendas, social cohesion and environmental quality.

Consideration is given to the network of alleyways through the town, and how these might be made more attractive for users at all times of the day. Where opportunities exist to open these up, through removal of walls and fencings, provision of new lighting, and promotion of new frontages onto the network, then this could help remove perceptions of safety and facilitate use by all.

Consideration is also given to public transport, which should be explored further with transport operators.

Many of the ideas summarised are 'projects', as opposed to land use and development projects – though, where scope allows, for example in relation to the northern growth area, or through establishment of good design principles, these can be woven in as policy. We also suggest looking at use of emerging technology and mobility solutions, potentially commencing with the northern growth area, to trial new ways of travel and mode shift away from single person car trips, including integration of shared mobility hubs.

What if ideas: Greenery

This paper should be read alongside the others as some these, such as the greening of streets, link with access ideas and transforming roads into streets.

The paper looks at how the northern growth area might be influenced to complete the green 'necklace' around the town, and how links to this might be improved, both in terms of street greening but also in terms of junction remodeling to improve access for all.

Consideration is given to the importance of introducing greenery into the town centre – acting as a means of softening the landscape, of connecting with the surrounding green infrastructure, but also as a way to manage surface water run-off and wider flood risk. Short term, temporary options are shown alongside opportunities for longer-term intervention.

The nature of many residential streets is looked at. It is questioned whether these could be softened through an approach to creating homezones and playstreets, integrating greenery into the residential neighbourhoods, reducing the dominance of the car, and making these more attractive, greenery, child friendly places. It is suggested that such an approach is explored through the northern growth area, potentially as a demonstration project for what might be achieved across the town. Equally, a pilot scheme could be identified in the town, though would likely require support of residents on any identified street.

And, linked with opportunities in the access paper relating to the alleyways, this paper questions whether currently under-used and under-utilised space might be reimagined as community gardens. We understand there is a waiting list for allotments in the town: could some of this space be repurposed, with the community taking ownership of this? Linked with the concept of the 'riverside country town', could such spaces be used for local food production?

What if ideas: Northern Growth area
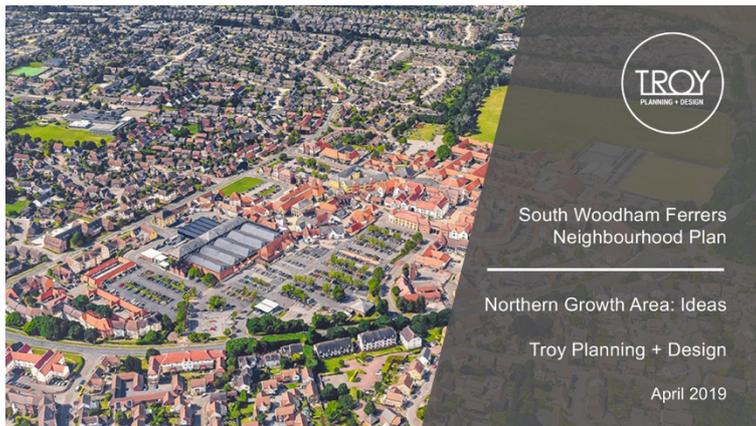
The emerging Local Plan establishes a fairly extensive policy framework within which the emerging masterplan for the area needs to respond to, the question for the Neighbourhood Plan is how and where influence can be exerted, particularly given delays to the masterplan for the area. Areas of opportunity are considered to relate to:

The role of Burnham Road. Three options appear to exist and all have merits, though we believe it is only the third (transforming this into a street) that most effectively balances the place and movement functions of the street and development area.

In terms of design, it is clear that growth and development should respond to the defining characteristics of South Woodham Ferrers, though with some flexibility within this to allow for innovative new housing types to come forward – this responds to the forward thinking nature of the original Essex Design Guide as well as the need to consider changing demographics.

A mix of housing types and tenures should be provided, as set out in the Local Plan. However, consideration might need to be given to promotion of housing typologies that can be adapted over time to allow for changing circumstances of the household at different life stages.

Integration of development within the landscape is important, and, as set out in the landscape study and greening paper, opportunities such as provision of permeable surfaces within the street pattern are important. The prominence of Radar hill is also key, with views across the town to this respected.

Consideration also needs to be given to the infrastructure package delivered as part of the growth area. If existing schools can be used instead of providing a new school (particularly given proximity of Woodville and status of Chetwood), then could the funding from that be used elsewhere. Some ideas are provided, and need to be set within the context of the infrastructure need for the town as a whole (from which CIL funding can be directed).

Next steps

Subject to feedback on the emerging ideas we suggest:

- Inviting town centre landowners to a briefing session to explore options for change in the centre.

    - Linked to the opportunities for the town centre is a need to understand how the town centre parking is being used, and who by. As the major land use in the centre, and the first impression of the centre for visitors, it is important to know whether the space occupied by parking can be remodeled – either through rationalization of parking provision, and or through encouragement of other modes of travel that reduce car use. Unless existing data exists, it would be helpful to commission a short survey of parking use.

- Requesting a meeting with the Northern Growth Area masterplan team to input into that and thus give 'weight' to the Neighbourhood Plan.

- Review ideas with Chelmsford City Council for initial feedback.

- Refine ideas based on above and present as a series of emerging policy headlines / options and project ideas for consultation.

- Prepare plans and visualisations of options to help communicate and convey the opportunities.

Appendix: Relationship with Local Plan

This short note looks at the Chelmsford Local Plan (as at Submission) and the relationship of emerging Neighbourhood plan policies to this. This is to identify where the Neighbourhood plan is adding to existing policy, making it more locally specific, or creating new policy (as opposed to duplicating it).

- **Policy S11:** Suggests requirement for a 'multi-user bridge' across Burnham Road. This needs exploring further through the masterplan process with the developers as other solutions might help deliver wider benefits, including slowing of traffic, encouraging modal shift, and introducing at-grade crossings. Other active travel and flood management requirements as set out in this policy are incorporated in emerging ideas for the Neighbourhood Plan. Issues with regard to flooding and SUDs are also addressed in **Policy NE3**. The emerging Neighbourhood Plan ideas align with this and indeed take this further by suggesting an increase in greenery and permeable surfaces within the urban environment.

- **Policy S14**: this seeks to retain the Town Centre as the focus of retail, business, education and leisure needs. The Neighbourhood Plan aligns with this, although explores whether the layout of the centre, and thus location of primary and secondary frontages, should change, to help strengthen the centre. This is further elaborated upon in **Policy EM2** and requires discussion with the City Council. Inclusion of other non-retail uses at ground floor level might help diversify and thus strengthen the centre.

- **Strategic Growth Site 7**: This establishes the quantum and mix of new development north of SWF, and the infrastructure and general design principles associated with this. These should be explored further with the masterplan team working for the developers. The Character Area work, and landscape work, informs design principles that should be reflected in the growth area and thus add to the existing policy. This can be illustrated through a concept plan to better communicate the layout, connections and street types within the proposed development. Further consideration also needs to be given to the proposed infrastructure package discussion with the City and ECC: we consider that making better use of existing schools might be more effective than providing a new one, with those finances then better directed elsewhere to other town wide infrastructure improvements.

- **Policy HO1** requires affordable and self-build provision. The Neighbourhood Plan can direct where self-build might be located, and require a regulating plan and set of plot passports to be prepared to help establish the development parameters for such units. We also suggest taking this policy further and recommend that consideration is given to housing types that can change and adapt over time to lifestyle choices.

- **Policy NE1**: this seeks to protect ecological assets and biodiversity. The emerging ideas take this further and seek to integrate more greenery, biodiversity and natural habitats within the urban area.

- **Policies MP1 and MP2** establish design principles for new development. The Neighbourhood Plan, which will draw upon the characteristics of the area and legacy of the Essex Design guide in South Woodham Ferrers, will develop these policies further.

The emerging ideas suggest conformity with the strategic objectives of the new Chelmsford Local Plan for the purpose of satisfying the Basic Conditions. They also seek to further develop Local plan policy by making it more specific to South Woodham Ferrers. There remain areas for discussion however, particularly in regard to the northern growth area, access to it and infrastructure to be provided.