

The Ripon City Plan – A local approach to Planning for the future of the City

Over the last month we have continued working on all the documents needed to allow us to publish our draft Ripon City Plan in readiness to consult with you again early next year.

Whilst we've been doing this, the Harrogate District Local Plan: Draft Development Management Policies consultation has commenced. These are the detailed policies that Harrogate Borough Council would propose to use in deciding planning applications. Some of them carry forward from the 2001 Harrogate District Local Plan; others are new.

It has been important for us to understand what is being proposed because the Ripon City Plan has to be in general conformity with the Local Plan and whilst we shouldn't duplicate what's in the Local Plan, nor should we be forced to leave out policies which are important to provide a comprehensive plan for our city simply because a version of them would be relevant to the whole district.

Many of our policies have been drafted for some time now because you supported much of what we suggested in the Preliminary draft Plan last year. So it has been important to go back over these and check them against the new information. Whilst reviewing the Harrogate policies we noted that whilst there are a significant number that are appropriate to Ripon, there are a small number where we feel that Ripon's needs are not met. Of course we can and will be responding to the consultation to ensure our concerns are recognised, but through the Ripon City Plan we can propose a different approach; policies which better meet Ripon's needs.

Let's use some practical examples. The Harrogate Consultation identifies a number of existing employment areas for protection and enhancement, including sites at Boroughbridge Road, Harrogate Road and Dallamires Lane. Our approach in the Ripon City Plan is to suggest that Phoenix Business Centre, Highfield Business Park and Ure Bank should also be protected and enhanced as they are important for the city's businesses. We also include the Econ and Wolseley sites, curiously excluded from Local Plan attention.

There is also a proposed policy for Town and Local Centre Management. This is an issue where we think a more flexible approach is needed. You agreed with the Plan's vision for the city centre to be "the meeting place of choice". We believe that service and hospitality businesses can attract footfall to the City Centre just as much as retail businesses can and that, within reason, seeing a premises used for an alternative purpose is better than seeing a vacant retail building. Of course, we want to see our shops thrive but we must all recognise the changes that are taking place in shopping, so we'll be taking a different approach to this issue.

The Harrogate Consultation also suggests: "Proposals involving the change of use of hotels in the district with 20 or more lettable bedrooms will not be permitted unless clear evidence is provided to demonstrate that they are no longer viable." In Ripon this would mean that two hotels would be protected. We've been told that Ripon does not have enough hotel bedrooms to support our visitor economy. We need to think twice before losing the ones we've got so in the Ripon City Plan we believe that this policy should be implemented with a threshold of 10 or more lettable bedrooms .

There is also a draft Harrogate Local Plan policy for the World Heritage Site at Studley Royal and Fountains Abbey and additional requirements for any development proposals within a buffer zone. We believe that there are some difficulties with implementation of this so our approach within the Ripon City Plan has been to propose a skyline policy which will protect the views and vistas not only between the World Heritage Site and the City but of Ripon's skyline itself.

Finally, the draft Harrogate Consultation contains a proposed approach for unstable and contaminated land including dealing with the parts of Ripon susceptible to gypsum dissolution subsidence. This has been in place since the 2001 Local Plan and is an area of concern for the City Plan team because there has been no apparent review of the policy in practice. So our approach is to seek specific updated procedures drawn up in conjunction with the British Geological Survey.

So, as can be seen, the Ripon City Plan is proposing a different, and we believe better, approach to tackling some of the key issues – a locally led approach, appropriate to the needs of our City.