

ROSS TOWN PLAN



Working together for Ross-on-Wye

Tuesday 9th march 2010

A Response from the Ross Town Plan Steering Group to the “Place Shaping Paper Consultation” January 2010

In drafting this response the officers of The Ross Town Plan Steering Group (RTPSG) have examined the proposals put forward by Herefordshire Council (HC) in the “Place Shaping Paper,” and compared them to the findings expressed in the Ross Town Plan (RTP), which is approaching completion. A draft copy of the RTP is currently being circulated to service providers, including Herefordshire Council, for comment.

The views the RTP reflects are based on a 3 year consultation process with the residents and users of Ross-on-Wye from which a sound body of evidence has been collected. These consultations have included written submissions, focus groups, Planning for Real events and questionnaires. The main questionnaire, which was circulated to 4,500 homes in the town, provoked a 36% response rate. It can be confidently stated, therefore, that this response is based on local knowledge and opinion.

New Homes

It is not within the RTPSG’s remit to comment on the two options for new housing developments that are being proposed as they were not part of the RTP consultation process.

There is clear support in the RTP for both more social and affordable housing in Ross. There is significant support (58% of questionnaire respondents) for more council rented housing. Opinion is evenly split on where the new housing should go with 36% of respondents in favour of small scale development/infill in their part of the town but a similar number opposed to it.

The most popular types of accommodation to be provided are low-cost starter homes and mid-range family homes. The RTPSG is, therefore, pleased to support the proposed increases in housing provision as identified in the “Place Shaping Consultation.”

New Infrastructure

The RTPSG notes that there is no provision in the consultation document for a long term strategy to alleviate traffic travelling through the centre of Ross. The RTP identifies a clear desire (56% of respondents to the questionnaire) for the completion of the Ross Relief Road, which currently terminates at Hildersley. Traffic travelling through Ross, to or from the Forest of Dean via Walford, is forced through a “pinch point” in Copse Cross Street where the road narrows to a single lane and queues regularly build up bringing the town to a standstill. Both large commercial and heavy agricultural vehicles have to use this unsuitable route. The RTP recommends that a southern bypass from Hildersley to Tudorville be built to complete the existing route around the town and that this be included in the LDF.

It is noted that no mention of parking provision is made in the “Place Shaping Paper.” Questionnaire results suggest that this is currently felt to be adequate (73% of questionnaire respondents) but with the proposed increase to the population this may no longer be the case towards the end of the plan period.

Proposals for improved and extended sustainable transport routes in the consultation are welcomed. A need for better cycle and walking routes was identified by the RTP for the use of both residents and tourists who visit the area.

New Community Facilities

The “Place Shaping Paper,” speaks, in general terms, about providing additional community facilities associated only with option 2. It does not address the current need for new/improved community facilities as identified by the RTP, particularly for the young. These are specifically to do with the inadequate sports and leisure provision in Ross.

The RTP questionnaire identifies that a high percentage of respondents, with an opinion, rated the existing sports facilities in Ross as poor (under 10’s 48%, 11-19yrs 59%, 20-34yrs 54%, 35-44yrs 51%, 45-59yrs 47%, 60+ 38%).

In contrast very few people rated them as good (under 10’s 10%, 11-19yrs 6%, 20-34yrs 6%, 35-44yrs 6%, 45-59yrs 8%, 60+ 15%).

Overwhelmingly the most called for new leisure facility is a cinema to put us on a par with other market towns such as Monmouth, Cinderford and Coleford.

The RTPSG recommends that future S106 money be spent on improving the sports and leisure facilities in Ross and that Herefordshire Council address the current poor standard of existing provision and that this be built into the LDF.

New Jobs

The RTPSG is pleased to support the development of Model Farm to bring more jobs to the area and would welcome any further initiatives to boost employment. It supports the identification of tourism as a major component of the local economy.

New Shops

The RTPSG welcomes the recognition the “Place Shaping Paper,” gives to Ross’s historic and important town centre.

The RTP consultations identified early on that empty shops are a constant and ongoing problem for Ross and not simply a symptom of the current economic situation which the Retail Study implies. Given the above average number of empty retail premises in Ross and RTP recommendations that planning applications to convert shops into residential accommodation be supported in principle the RTPSG cannot endorse suggestions that more comparison floorspace (3,500m²) will be required towards the end of the plan period.

The number of charity and discount shops was also flagged up as detrimental to the look of the shopping streets. While the RTPSG welcomes recognition of these issues in HC’s consultation document it would be interested to know how these weaknesses are to be addressed.

We believe, based on the evidence gathered, that there would be a stronger case for reducing the number of shops to allow for increased homes rather than increasing the retail space as advocated.

Officers of the Ross Town Plan Steering Group:

Chair - Rob Brain
Treasurer - Cllr John Edwards
Secretary - Caroline Utting