



ROMSEY & DISTRICT SOCIETY Reg. Charity 269308

Planning Committee: Chris Amery, Chairman
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Mr S Lees
Planning Policy Manager
Test Valley Borough Council
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Dear Steve

Romsey Town Access Plan (TAP)

I write on behalf of the Romsey & District Society to respond to your consultation on the above document.

We are happy to see this draft. We approve of its general format, but we are concerned that the long list of issues in the Action Plan (section 5) is unwieldy and in danger of giving the impression of a rather 'ad hoc' approach. We would like to see a more strategic view of the overall priorities. In particular we want a clearer statement that the overriding priority is the maintenance and enhancement of the town's success as a thriving commercial and retail centre. With such an overall aim it should then be possible to allocate priorities to the individual elements of the action plan and to avoid opportunism. It would also help if the TAP could indicate cost ranges, even if only very approximate ones, for the action plan items.

What follows are more detailed comments put forward on the Society's behalf by the Planning Committee, Public Services Committee and Market Place Working Group, as well as the Executive Committee.

First, the Market Place. More radical possibilities are emerging than were considered in 2002. The Society would like to see a determined effort to study these possibilities, and to see how pedestrians, cyclists, shoppers and retailers can be accommodated within a single framework along with a realistic regard for traffic. We are aware that data from several pioneering projects is becoming available to inform such a study.

We are also aware, of course, of the funding constraints. But our view is that we should do the work now to establish an agreed vision of the sort of place we want the centre of Romsey to be, even though we do not know when there might be the capability to implement it.

We suggest that the TAP should endorse such a study and include it as a project to be undertaken in the shorter term, without prejudice to implementation timescales or priorities.

Second, public transport. The main requirements are for improvements to the railway station and its surroundings, and to the bus station. It would be desirable to include an action plan item for a thorough review of bus needs for the town. The current bus route provision does not serve the town well.

We turn next to specific comments, mainly on issues and projects already identified in the Action Plan in section 5 of the draft TAP.

There is a junction improvement that should be added: Malmesbury Road / Duttons Road / Princes Road. Layout changes or a roundabout are needed from the point of view of both traffic flow and pedestrian safety,

1.3, 1.5 and 1.22: In general our preferred option for junctions such as these is a roundabout or mini-roundabout rather than traffic lights, provided (particularly in the case of the Winchester Road / Cupernham Lane junction) that the needs of pedestrians are properly catered for. In the case of 1.22 (Plaza roundabout) we are far from convinced that there is anything other than a very occasional problem.

1.15: Turning right from the Crosfield Hall car park into Broadwater Road is also hazardous. Perhaps only a left turn should be allowed.

1.28: We are sorry to see that even a review of sign clutter and street furniture clutter is relegated to the longer term. In our view this is a current blight and at the very least requires a review within a year.

2.5: Access to Alma Road public car park is at times difficult because of queues for the Waitrose car park. Provision of a third lane/slip road should be considered.

3.4: This should include the state of the pavement in Middlebridge Street.

3.20: Similarly, to improve safety for school children there is a need for a footpath to be provided throughout the length of the school side of Halterworth Lane.

3.23: We do not support a path across Botley Road recreation ground. It will adversely affect the facility and is not needed.

3.30: In the specific case of the cycle route north along the Canal from the Plaza (also referred to in section 3.32 of the TAP) we believe that improvements to the Barge Canal must be taken as a 'package' such that improved access is developed in combination with positive wildlife management. Clearly, developing a cycleway will have to be done sensitively in terms of width, surface etc to avoid damaging the SSSI and to enable both walkers and cyclists to share it. But more than this, we want to see it combined with improvements to the wildlife management. We are positive about a proposed footpath/cycleway provided this is part of the overall improvement package.

3.32: We strongly support the action plan to open up the gate between Millstream Rise and Rivermead Close. Doing so would enable a circular walk largely by the riverside – the sort of thing which is so characteristic of Romsey. Similarly, the footpath from Mill Lane to Squabb Wood should be resurrected.

4.1 and 4.2: As a matter of principle, we think that provision of adequate facilities for the disabled should be paid for by local or central government funding in the normal way. We do not believe that developers' contributions should be used for this purpose.

4.9: We agree that more bus shelter seating is needed, but would add that the existing seating is too high for a significant number of people.

Yours sincerely

Chris Amery