

Appendix 1
A review of the Rhyl Going Forward Delivery Plan

Rhyl Going Forward

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Introduction

The Rhyl Going Forward Delivery Plan was written in June 2011 and adopted by the Council in November 2011 after wide-ranging and extensive consultation. At the heart of this strategy is the concept of:

Recreating Rhyl as a place where people choose to live and stay Rediscovering Rhyl as a place to visit

The Delivery Plan attempted to bring some structure, vision and direction to the various projects and activities that were being undertaken or planned for Rhyl under the banner of “regeneration”. To achieve this it “mapped” these existing projects and activities and arranged them under the following workstreams:

- **West Rhyl Regeneration Area**
- **Tourism & the Coastal Strip**
- **Retail & the Town Centre**
- **Housing & Neighbourhoods**

Whilst the Delivery plan has been a significant step in the right direction, it did not critically review the projects and activities in terms of their potential impact – it simply placed them in one of the “boxes” above. This led to the Plan listing over 50 projects, a number that has increased over the last 12 months as new ideas and opportunities come to the fore but no existing projects are discontinued.

There is also a tendency to react to and address the symptoms rather than addressing the fundamental causes of the decline. Thus we have a number of projects that are addressing issues such as environmental decline, but very few that will drive forward the diversification of the economy and facilitate significant private sector investment, create new jobs and new business opportunities.

This approach is not sustainable, and a year on, perhaps the time is right to cast a more critical eye on the strategy – revisiting the strategy and reviewing the projects to ensure that they are consistent with the strategy and will deliver the desired impact. If we are to be effective this will mean reducing the number of projects we are trying to deliver, whilst focussing more resource on those initiatives we believe will have the greatest impact.

This paper seeks to outline the overall aim of each workstream, details a rationale for why we think this is the right approach, and sets out some clear objectives against which we can gauge our success. Following this it will be necessary to review the projects we undertake, and take the opportunity to ensure that such projects are consistent with the strategy and will deliver measurable benefits.

In the West Rhyl Regeneration Area we are trying to create an attractive neighbourhood where working people will want to live

The West Rhyl Regeneration Area is characterised by closely packed, large houses – many of which were originally built as guest houses to accommodate tourists at the height of Rhyl's Victorian heyday. As tourism declined these houses were converted into small apartments and bedsits, now often referred to as HMO's – Houses in Multiple Occupation. As a result of this process we now have a housing market in the area which is dominated by one bed-roomed flats with very little residential property that is suitable for young professionals or families. In terms of tenure, the area is also dominated by the private rented sector and under-represented in terms of owner occupation.

This imbalance in the housing market has also created an imbalance in the community. For individuals who may find difficulty in finding accommodation in other areas – because they may have drug or alcohol problems, a poor credit history, mental health issues, a criminal record, etc – West Rhyl currently offers a housing solution because of the abundance of one-bed-roomed, privately rented accommodation. This over-supply of a particular housing type has fed off demand from across North Wales and further into the North West and Midlands of England, and created a concentration of individuals with a range of social and economic issues. This is evidenced by the fact that the two Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) covering the West Rhyl Regeneration Area are the 1st and 7th most deprived in the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)¹.

The area also suffers from a relatively high degree of transience, whereby people stay for a short while in the area and then move on. This is evidenced by statistics from the local schools², and creates some issues for the schools in terms of the disruption it can cause to the pupils themselves and the school in general.

Age and the intensive use of the properties has seen them deteriorate and created a neighbourhood with a poor image and reputation. There is also a lack of open space and general greenery - an issue consistently raised by the community in various consultation exercises over the years. Litter, dog fouling and fly-tipping are also common problems, particularly in the alleyways which characterise the area. All these factors have contributed to deter private sector investment in the area for decades - either by existing property owners or through new investors.

Creating a new green space in the heart of the neighbourhood will lower the housing density and provide a focal point and asset for the community, as well as fundamentally reshaping the area's appearance to help change people's current negative perceptions. It is critical that the planned refurbishment of existing properties and construction of new housing around the new green space attracts people who are economically active – people who previously would not have considered West Rhyl as an option for them to live. This is the key to creating a more balanced, stable community and will be critical in shifting the neighbourhood from its current poor position in the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. Such a shift in the demographics of the area, with more people with disposable income living there, will also help the regeneration of the town centre and support a more vibrant and sustainable leisure offer in the town.

¹ Reference WIMD

² Reference relevant document

To achieve our aim, we have identified the following key objectives:

- 1. To create a balanced housing market which is not dominated by one type of housing or by one type of tenure.**
- 2. To create a balanced, stable community with more economically active people living in the neighbourhood.**
- 3. To improve the appearance of the area**

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Along the coastal strip we are trying to create new business and job opportunities by increasing visitor numbers and visitor spend.

Tourism along the coast is generally downmarket, low value, and seasonal. It has shown significant decline over the years and although the decline has probably bottomed out, it is still fragile. Whilst those that do visit are loyal, show a high level of repeat business and seem generally quite happy with the place, this is a shrinking market.

Whilst there is a great deal of nostalgic affection for places such as Rhyl from childhood memories etc, the area still has a strong negative image – it is seen as shabby, depressing with little to do. It is not an aspirational place to visit and the focus groups research suggests that it will be an uphill struggle to attract new customers unless this image can be challenged and altered.

Turning the Tide A Visitor Economy Strategy for the SRA (November 2009)

Rhyl needs to attract more visitors if we are to create more business opportunities and jobs in the tourism sector. People will always want to go to the seaside and therefore Rhyl will continue to attract day visitors, especially on holidays or sunny days. But day visitors do not spend as much as staying visitors and their business alone will not be enough to sustain the economy. Therefore there needs to be a major change in perception within Rhyl. In effect, Rhyl needs to start thinking of itself not as a place where tourism dominates but as a place where tourism plays an *important role*.

Firstly we need to acknowledge that nationally it is the resorts that have broadened their appeal to a wider market that have had the most success. In these times no tourism resort can prosper without catering to middle class taste. We have identified the strength of Rhyl as a family resort, but perhaps need to think more carefully about how and what we can do to attract more middle class families who have more disposable income.

Secondly, when considering new attractions, we need to think how they can be sustained all year round, not just for the busy summer period. Therefore we need to think first and foremost about a leisure market which will serve the local market - which is considerable with 75,000 living within a half hour drive. We also need to think about attractions that will generate repeat visits rather than ones where one visit a year or more will meet the visitors needs and/or expectations.

In an era of financial austerity in the public sector, the approach of 100% publically funded improvements to the seafront promenade area is no longer viable (if, indeed, it ever was). Regeneration efforts must now focus on how we can provide confidence and facilitate the private sector to invest, and subsequently operate and maintain the leisure infrastructure in Rhyl.

All this is not to say that tourism is not currently important to Rhyl, and will not be important in the future. But Rhyl will need to change, and it is not simply a question of whether or not to bother. Changing Rhyl's product and image is just as vital for non-tourism regeneration as it is for tourism development. Thus tourism should not be neglected, but it should play an important role in achieving balanced regeneration.

To achieve our aim, we have identified the following key objectives:

- 1. To improve the visitor experience by ensuring a clean and well maintained environment, a welcoming atmosphere and by providing a range of activities and events.**
- 2. To create new visitor attractions that are consistent with the current appeal of Rhyl as a family orientated seaside resort, but that will attract visitors who currently do not visit.**
- 3. To market the resort more effectively to improve the public perception of Rhyl as a place to visit, live or invest**

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In the town centre we are trying to create new business and job opportunities by supporting investment in retail, but also by introducing new uses and diversifying the town centre economy.

The phenomenal growth of online retailing, the rise of mobile retailing, the speed and sophistication of the major national retailers, the epic and immersive experiences offered by today's new breed of shopping mall, combined with a crippling recession, have all conspired to change today's retail landscape. New benchmarks have been forged against which our high streets are now being judged. New expectations have been created in terms of value, service, entertainment and experience against which the average high street in many cases has simply failed to deliver. These reasons alone conspire to create a new shopper mindset which cannot and should not be reversed.

The only hope our high streets have of surviving in the future is to recognise what's happened and deliver something new.

***The Portas Review
An independent review into the future of our High Streets
(December 2011)***

The town centre has a potentially very attractive Victorian architecture and urban fabric, but many properties are in poor condition and present a poor image to users of the area. Whilst we accept that the Council's enforcement role has not been robust as perhaps it should have been and needs to be improved, we also need to recognise the significant economic pressures that create this problem. The properties are large, and currently it is generally only the ground floor that has any market value. Existing owners seem not to have the resources to address the scale of refurbishments required and even with grants offered – take up of very generous grants in the town centre has been poor. There is also a problem with property values, whereby the level of investment needed to provide a whole building solution to an acceptable quality standard is not reflected in the final value – a building may be valued at £100,000, have a further £100,000 spent on its refurbishment, but then only be worth £150,000 at the end of the process, an overall loss of £50,000. This has created a vicious cycle of decline and driven a “value” offer in the town centre.

The change to the nature of retailing also means there is much less demand for town centre retail units as the trade moves online and out of centre. This trend is predicted to continue and thus we are faced with an issue of an over-supply of units (evidenced by the increasing incidence of vacancy). Added to this, the Victorian buildings tend to offer small, narrow units, whereas modern retail desires larger, squarer units. With the exception of the Queen's Market area, large scale redevelopment is not going to be an option due to the costs involved and the Conservation Area status of the majority of the town centre, hence new uses will need to be found for units that previously would have been used for retail.

In the face of the fundamental restructuring of the retail industry, without intervention Rhyl town centre will continue to decline. The activity currently being undertaken tends to be addressing the symptoms of decline – untidy streets, unmaintained properties, etc – rather than the causes. Going forward we need to develop a new economic rationale for the town centre which includes retail, but is not entirely reliant on it.

To achieve our aim, we have identified the following key objectives:

- 1. To facilitate new investment in the High Street and other pedestrianised areas to retain and attract national retailers**
 - 2. To facilitate new investment in the secondary retail areas (Queen Street, Water Street, Bodfor Street, Wellington Road) to support and grow the independent retail sector, with a particular focus on promoting a stronger food orientated retail offer and introducing more arts and crafts.**
 - 3. In the secondary retail areas, on upper floors and on the fringes of the town centre, to create opportunities for new uses such as residential, offices and service provision which will generate footfall and compliment the retail function of the town centre.**
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We are trying to improve neighbourhoods within the whole of Rhyl so that they are attractive and desirable places to live

Whilst there is focussed regeneration activity in the West Rhyl Regeneration Area, we also need to consider and address issues across the whole town. There is quite a broad scope to this work. A key element will be improving the quality of existing homes through initiatives such as the Welsh Quality Homes Standard and the Housing Renewal Area. But neighbourhoods are more than just housing - the quality, location and connectivity of open spaces is important, as is the provision of good quality services such as schools and health facilities.

In terms of housing, the intention here is to improve the quality of new and existing homes in Rhyl so that the external fabric is sound and looks well, they have modern facilities such as central heating, they are energy efficient and opportunities to generate electricity are maximised. This will mean continuing the programme of stock improvement to both publically and privately owned stock, but also trying to influence the quality of new housing that is provided in the town.

We also need to improve the environment around these homes to create a sense of neighbourhood and community. To achieve this in a time of significant public sector financial constraints, we will need to promote community engagement in civic initiatives to improve local places and amenities, but there are already shining examples of good practice here such as the Brickfields Pond Nature Reserve. Opportunities exist to build a stronger, more coherent network of public open space which would not only provide “breathing spaces” for local residents but also could act as a local transport network for walking and cycling.

In terms of educational facilities, Post-16 and further education are well provided through Coleg Llandrillo Rhyl. However, there are major concerns about the quality and appropriateness of the buildings at Rhyl High School, and as such the main priority for Denbighshire’s Education Department is to secure funding to enable the construction of a new school building. The development of such a project in Rhyl would have major regeneration benefits for the town, most immediately in the opportunities it will create for construction jobs and local suppliers, but in the longer-term in terms of creating a more skilled workforce for the area as the improved facilities impact on the attainment and aspiration of students. The quality of schools is also a major influencing factor in people’s choice of location to live, so a modern building where students achieve good qualifications will be fundamental to the town’s regeneration.

Facilities in the health sector were boosted recently by the opening of the Healthy Living Centre in West Rhyl, but there remain concerns about the long-term future of the Royal Alexandra Hospital. Given some significant health issues that exist in Rhyl, continued and improved provision of appropriate health facilities will remain a key issue.

There are also issues that relate to specific neighbourhoods within Rhyl. The issues within West Rhyl are so severe that it has a dedicated workstream that has been detailed earlier. However, there are also significant problems of social and economic deprivation in Rhyl’s South West ward, and a growing concern about the growth of the older population, particularly within East Rhyl. There is also the prospect that the planned welfare reforms will drive up demand and development of one bed-roomed accommodation, which if unfettered could create an imbalance in the housing market. The strategy must continue to monitor and intervene in these areas to ensure that any issues are well managed and that these neighbourhoods are improved.

To achieve our aim, we have identified the following key objectives:

1. To improve the quality of housing in Rhyl
 2. To improve the quality and amenity value of open space in Rhyl
 3. To improve facilities in the area
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