

**REPORT TO:** CABINET

**DATE:** 27 FEBRUARY 2020

**TITLE:** TOWN CENTRE AREA ACTION PLAN –  
FINALISATION OF REGULATION 19  
CONSULTATION AND SUBMISSION TO THE  
PLANNING INSPECTORATE UNDER  
REGULATION 22

**PORTFOLIO HOLDERS:** COUNCILLOR DANNY PURTON , PORTFOLIO  
HOLDER FOR ENVIRONMENT

COUNCILLOR JOHN STRACHAN, PORTFOLIO  
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**This is a Key Decision**

**It is on the Forward Plan as Decision Number I007561**

**Call-in Procedures may apply**

**This decision will affect Little Parndon and Hare Street, Netteswell and Toddbrook Wards.**

**RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:**

- A** Approves that the revised draft Town Centre Area Action Plan (as set out at Appendix A to the report), is published for the purposes of consultation under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
- B** Delegates authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Environment and Regeneration, to make and approve any minor or inconsequential amendments to the Town Centre Area Action Plan arising from the completion of ensuing technical documents and any further legal advice prior to formal publication.
- C** Delegates authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Environment and Regeneration, following the consultation exercise,

to submit the Town Centre Area Action Plan to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination under Regulation 22.

## **REASON FOR DECISION**

- A** To enable the revised draft Area Action Plan (AAP) to be published for a six week period under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) prior to submission to the Secretary of State for consideration by the Inspector at the Examination.
- B** To meet the legal requirements of developing and adopting an AAP.

## **BACKGROUND**

1. AAP that sets out specific planning policies and proposals, can strengthen the vitality and viability of the Town Centre whilst presenting an opportunity to create the conditions for a resilient and successful centre. It will provide a spatial planning framework to guide development and secure the regeneration of Harlow Town Centre for the period to 2033.
2. The AAP has been developed and produced separately from the Local Development Plan (LDP) because of its complexities. It will, however, provide a spatial planning framework that will guide and support future development and regeneration in Harlow Town Centre based on the overarching strategic policies set out in the LDP. The policies in the AAP, in tandem with the LDP, will replace all policies relevant to the Town Centre as set out in the Adopted Replacement Harlow Local Plan (2006).
3. In January 2018, Cabinet approved the draft Issues and Options document and approved the Regulation 18 consultation. Since then, widespread engagement with partners has taken place as well as the public consultation exercise. The draft proposals have also been subject to scrutiny at two meetings of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Quality Review Panel. This culminated in the draft AAP being produced by the consultants Allies and Morrison. The draft was also discussed by the Local Development Plan Panel, the Town Centre Cross-Party Members Working Group and was being presented to the Harlow Enterprise Zone Board and the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Member Board.
4. In July 2019, Cabinet approved the draft AAP and the Regulation 19 consultation. Since then, the Council has carried out further work with Allies and Morrison to refine the Plan and strengthen the policies in order to ensure it will be found sound at the forthcoming Examination.
5. Most of this work has comprised minor or inconsequential amendments, but has also consisted of:
  - a) The consolidation of policies for clarity and ease of use of the Plan;

- b) The rewording of policies to ensure that supporting statements are contained in the Justification and Implementation sections rather than within the policy wording;
  - c) The introduction of a set of Town Centre Site Specific Policies, relating to the Sainsbury's Northern Gateway Site, Wych Elm, Town Centre North, Terminus Street, Crown Gate Island, the Harvey Centre, the Water Gardens, Harlow College and Leisurezone. These policies had previously been part of an appendix to the Plan.
6. As these amendments were considered to be consequential, the revised draft AAP is now being presented to Cabinet to approve the formal Regulation 19 Publication stage. After the completion of this stage the AAP will be submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for formal Examination by an independent Inspector. If substantive comments are received during the consultation which could necessitate significant change to the AAP, then a further report would be brought to Cabinet, probably in June, prior to submission for Examination.

## **ISSUES/PROPOSALS**

### **Key Issues**

7. Although it has experienced significant change over the past 65 years, many of the distinctive attributes of Sir Frederick Gibberd's original masterplan remain evident in the structure and character of Harlow Town Centre, as the heart of Harlow New Town. However, similar to many town and city centres across the UK, shifting economic trends have had, and continue to have a profound impact on the performance and prosperity of Harlow Town Centre. The Town Centre has experienced a decline in the retail ranking from 168 in 2012 to 185 in 2017.
8. Although policies already exist which establish the importance of the Town Centre and seek to protect and enhance its performance, the planning process has the potential to play a more proactive role in strengthening the vitality and viability of the Town Centre and enabling its regeneration. The preparation of a more specific set of planning policies presents an opportunity to create the conditions for a resilient, successful centre reflecting its important sub-regional role. The AAP, in combination with the LDP (and other policies and guidance) will enable the Council alongside wider stakeholder, landowner and developer partners to plan positively for managed change and a sustainable, coordinated approach to growth in the Town Centre.
9. The role and performance of the Town Centre requires broader consideration in the context of the proposed growth which is anticipated across the wider area and neighbouring districts. The Council, alongside Epping Forest District Council and East Hertfordshire District Council, has identified potential for 16,100 new homes at Harlow and Gilston Garden Town through their local plan processes (up to 2033), with an approximately 7,000 additional new homes identified in the Gilston area beyond this plan period. In addition to housing growth, there is also

significant economic momentum, with Public Health England relocating to the former Glaxo Smith Kline facility and other employment opportunities being realised through growth of the Harlow Enterprise Zone. The AAP will also set out an appropriate planning strategy to accommodate the additional retail, leisure and other associated uses, that will need to be accommodated in the town centre, arising from this growth and which will support its regeneration.

## **Consultation**

10. A summary of the consultation activities to date can be seen in the revised draft AAP document.
11. It is proposed that the Regulation 19 Publication stage on this document will be undertaken from early March 2020, following Cabinet approval and the completion of associated technical documents such as the Sustainability Appraisal, Habitats Regulations Assessment, the Equalities Impact Assessment and a Monitoring Framework.

## **Vision**

12. The AAP sets the vision for the Town Centre as:
  - a) In the future, Harlow Town Centre will be a successful, sustainable place which serves as the commercial centre for the existing town of Harlow and the planned Garden Town of Harlow and Gilston. The Town Centre will play an important part in helping Harlow and Gilston to step up to a more active economic role within the UK Innovation Corridor.
  - b) In order to do this, the Town Centre will have a strong mix of shops and services; offices and employment space; civic and leisure uses; and a thriving evening economy and cultural offer. The Town Centre will also have a decent range of homes that can support a mixed and balanced community.
  - c) The Town Centre will be accessible to all, by public transport, cycle, on foot and by car and will help the District to minimise reliance on private cars in the future. The Town Centre will be a healthy place for everyone, contributing to the well-being of the community and the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

## **Outcomes and Policies**

13. The AAP then seeks to define the following Strategic Objectives to help assess whether proposals and investments will deliver the vision of:
  - a) A unified Town Centre which re-balances the northern and southern areas;
  - b) A Town Centre which supports wider economic growth;

- c) A strong retail and leisure offer which appeals to Harlow's catchment;
  - d) A high quality public realm and environment with active public spaces;
  - e) An inclusive and accessible destination with excellent transport links;
  - f) A strong cultural offer which is supported by residents and visitors;
  - g) First class community facilities which support the town's population;
  - h) A cohesive place with design proposals which complement one another;
  - i) A commitment to retain the ethos of the Gibberd Masterplan; and
  - j) A Town Centre that is increasingly resilient to conditions resulting from climate change.
14. A series of spatial objectives to help deliver the outcomes and vision are set out in Chapter 4 of the draft AAP.
15. Detailed policies are then set out in Chapter 5 of the draft AAP, with Town Centre Site Specific Policies in Chapter 6.
16. Following adoption of the AAP, the Council will then seek to produce more detailed development briefs for individual sites utilising the principles as set out in the AAP.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)**

As set out in the report.

**Author: Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning**

### **Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)**

None specific.

**Author: Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Deputy to the Chief Executive**

### **Housing**

As outlined in the report.

**Author: Andrew Murray, Head of Housing**

### **Community Wellbeing (Includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)**

The Town Centre Area Action Plan will provide the framework for development in Harlow Town Centre. The successful development, regeneration and economic growth of this area is essential to provide a vibrant and successful town centre suitable for the needs of Harlow and the wider area.

**Author: Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing**

### **Governance (Includes HR)**

The Harlow Town Centre AAP will provide an important policy context for the future growth of Harlow Town Centre and the realisation of key investment opportunities. Approval of the recommendations set out in this report will ensure that the Council is complying with Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

**Author: Simon Hill, Head of Governance**

### **Appendices**

Appendix A – Draft Town Centre Area Action Plan (circulated separately as Supplementary Agenda 1)

### **Background Papers**

None.

### **Glossary of terms/abbreviations used**

AAP – Area Action Plan

LDP – Local Development Plan