

REPORT TO: CABINET

DATE: 14 OCTOBER 2021

TITLE: MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK SPD – APPROVAL FOR CONSULTATION

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS: COUNCILLOR MICHAEL HARDWARE,
PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR STRATEGIC GROWTH

COUNCILLOR DAN SWORDS, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR REGENERATION

LEAD OFFICER: ANDREW BRAMIDGE, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC GROWTH AND REGENERATION (01279) 446410

CONTRIBUTING OFFICERS: TANUSHA WATERS, PLANNING & BUILDING CONTROL MANAGER (01279) 446595

JAMES GARDNER, REGENERATION PROGRAMME MANAGER (01279) 446449

This is a Key Decision

It is on the Forward Plan as Decision Number I012707

Call-in Procedures may apply

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

RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:

- A** Approves the Draft Masterplan Framework Supplementary Planning Document (as set out at Appendix A to the report), to enable it to be published for the purposes of consultation under Section 12(b) of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
- B** Delegates authority to the Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration, to make and approve any minor or inconsequential amendments to the Draft Masterplan Framework Supplementary Planning Document arising from the statutory consultation

REASON FOR DECISION

- A** To approve the Draft Masterplan Framework Supplementary Planning Document for publication for a six week consultation period under Regulation 12 of the

Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

- B** To meet the legal requirements of developing and adopting a Supplementary Planning Document.

BACKGROUND

1. The Council commenced production of a Harlow Town Centre Area Action Plan (HTCAAP) for the town centre in 2017. The draft HTCAAP went through several stages of production between 2017 and 2020, receiving positive buy-in from stakeholders and the community:
 - a) Evidence base and background research including consultation;
 - b) Synthesis of evidence and initial consultation;
 - c) Preparation of Issues and Options report and Sustainability Appraisal;
 - d) Regulation 18 consultation on Issues and Options Report; and
 - e) Preparation of draft Area Action Plan which was informed by the iterative development of the Sustainability Appraisal.

The production of the HTCAAP was paused in 2020 to allow the Local Plan (the Council's primary planning policy document) to complete its process of Examination and Adoption. The HTCAAP was also paused in light of significant changes in commercial trends taking place, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. It was also paused in light of shifting changes to national planning policy including amendments to permitted development rights, the Use Class Order and the methods in which development plan documents are published and consulted.

2. The town centre continues to experience significant pressure for development including a large volume of proposals for high density and/or tall buildings. Growth and transformation are welcome in the town centre, but it is important that this process of change is coordinated. Although the adopted Local Plan provides a clear framework for determination, it is clear that further design and place-making guidance is required to help shape proposals and planning decisions in the interim.
3. In order to respond to this context in a timely fashion, the Council has elected to prepare a Masterplan Framework Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the town centre as a transitional statement of direction to be read alongside the adopted policy framework.
4. Policy RS2 of the Harlow Local Development Plan (HLDP) sets out the intention to prepare a HTCAAP. It is still the intention for the Council to prepare a formal Development Plan Document for the town centre, either through an AAP process or through an update to the Local Plan. The Masterplan Framework SPD has been prepared as an interim approach in order to give further guidance in respect of Policy RS2 and Policy PR5. Policy PR5 sets out the sequential approach for Main Town Centre Uses in the HLDP and refers to further information on Main Town Centre Uses being set out in an SPD.

5. The Masterplan Framework SPD, set out in Appendix A to this report, represents a natural progression of the draft HTCAAP, which received strong support through previous stages of engagement. The document should be read in conjunction with the adopted HLDP, particularly in respect of the Policies set out above, the National Planning Policy Framework and other key local guidance documents as set out in this report.
6. In addition, Harlow Council is currently preparing a Town Plan for the District which will establish a clear corporate position on the overarching vision for Harlow and key priorities for the area. The Town Plan should ultimately be referenced in parallel with the Masterplan Framework SPD and HLDP.
7. The Council has continued to progress masterplanning and public realm proposals as part of recent funding bids including the Playhouse Quarter and Stone Cross. The Masterplan Framework consolidates this thinking with the direction of the draft HTCAAP, alongside recent planning decisions. This has been supplemented by further masterplanning work by the consultant team.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

8. The Masterplan Framework SPD has distilled the key principles and thinking from the draft policies in the HTCAAP into more focused guidance which has been re-cast in a format which is suitable for endorsement as supplementary planning guidance. Specifically, it does not define policies or new allocations as it is not a policy document.
9. The Masterplan Framework SPD includes the following contents:
 - a) Summary analysis of the Harlow Town Centre
 - b) Overview of planning policy context
 - c) Vision and spatial objectives
 - d) Guidance across a series of headings including overarching principles, movement, urban design and land use. These principles are supported by diagrammatic framework drawings, which layer up to inform an indicative masterplan framework for reference purposes.
 - e) Public realm strategy;
 - f) Building heights strategy;
 - g) Guidance for the key opportunity areas; and
 - h) Summary of key next steps in relation to delivery.
10. The document continues to highlight the importance of the town centre as a retail destination, but allows flexibility for the introduction of alternative uses, alongside the delivery of new homes across a number of key sites.
11. Guidance on building heights identifies the importance of responding to the existing context including landscape setting and key townscape views. The document provides a framework to assess applications in the town centre, highlighting potential zones for taller elements, and the particular criteria which

need to be met to justify buildings above 6 storeys in the town centre. The guidance encourages high quality contemporary design proposals which are appropriate in a Harlow context, with exemplary sustainability and environmental credentials.

12. The Masterplan Framework SPD supports the definition of guidance for a range of key spaces in the town centre which tallies with thinking in the emerging Town Plan. These include:

- a) **Terminus Street (Towns Fund):** Creation of a northern transport hub and gateway, providing first-class transport options in and out of the town centre that supports both the town centre and Harlow and Gilston Garden Town.
- b) **Stone Cross Square:** A hub of leisure and hospitality activity with the infrastructure to support a range of events and activities; and high quality landscaped spaces to encourage outdoor dining/trading.
- c) **West Square:** Creation of a northern, town centre garden complementing the Water Gardens in the south and providing high-quality green spaces for the existing and new town centre communities, employees and visitors.
- d) **Playhouse Quarter:** A hub of arts and cultural activity to support and diversify the offer of Harlow Playhouse, providing a high quality environment for the indoor and outdoor arts and cultural events and activities.
- e) **Broad Walk (Towns Fund):** A hub of retail and commercial activity with the infrastructure to support traditional outdoor markets and street trading; and high quality public realm that encourages private sector and commercial inward investment to improve the quality of the retail offer.

13. Public realm guidance is also identified for key streets including the creation of a more welcoming boulevard / avenue character on Fourth Avenue and Velizy Avenue.

14. The Masterplan Framework SPD zooms into eight Opportunity Areas providing illustrative guidance which is briefly summarised below:

- a) **OA1 - Northern Gateway:** Sainsbury's Northern Gateway Opportunity Area has been identified for residential development and the provision of a retail convenience store.
- b) **OA2 - Wych Elm:** Residential development with community and civic uses supported at ground floor in order to provide active frontages along Fourth Avenue.
- c) **OA3 - TC North:** Mix of uses with a focus on residential development fronting Velizy Avenue to the east; modern, flexible office space fronting

Fourth Avenue and at Post Office Walk; and a mix of retail and active uses at ground floor with residential above across the south and west of the area.

- d) **OA4 - Bus Station:** Mix of uses led by an enhanced bus interchange with a focus on retail, community and leisure uses to the west of Terminus Street and residential to the east fronting Velizy Avenue.
- e) **OA5 – Crown Gate Island:** Mixed-use civic quarter which should be delivered in a comprehensive way with consolidation or relocation of existing uses to suitable and viable sites.
- f) **Education and leisure core:** Continued focus on education and leisure with opportunities for enhancing Velizy Avenue and connections to the core town centre.
- g) **Retail Core 1 – Harvey Centre:** Protected for the continued operation of retail and commercial leisure uses. Leisure, community, office and residential uses will be supported on upper floors, particularly where these enhance the overall vitality and viability of the town centre.
- h) **Retail Core 2 - Water Gardens:** Protected for the continued operation of retail and commercial leisure uses, with longer term opportunities to enhance setting, landscape connections and parking.

NEXT STEPS

15. Following Cabinet endorsement, the Masterplan Framework SPD will follow the statutory process to adoption. The regulation cited above requires the Council to:
 - a) Produce a consultation statement before adoption of the SPD, this must set out who was consulted, a summary of the issues raised, and how these issues were incorporated in to the SPD;
 - b) Publish the documents for a minimum 4 week consultation, specify the date when responses should be received and identify the address to which responses should be sent;
 - c) Make documents available by taking the following steps;
 - i) Make the document available at the principal office and other places within the area that the Council considers appropriate;
 - ii) Publish the document on the Council's website.
16. The consultation will follow the Council's Adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). Planning Services will use its consultation database to inform consultees of the SPD.

17. Following the consultation period, the Council will consider all responses received and amend the draft SPD as appropriate, to produce a final version ready for adoption. The consultation statement, mentioned above, will be produced and will detail how responses received were taken into account.
18. The finalised Masterplan Framework SPD will then be adopted by the Council at a future Cabinet meeting, at which point it will become a material consideration in the determining of planning applications. The SPD will be hosted on the Council's website, with a number of hard copies also being made available.
19. In addition elements of the tall buildings and public realm guidance will feed into the final version of the Council's addendum to the Design Guide SPD which is currently being finalised following completion of the consultation period

IMPLICATIONS

Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)

The development of a masterplan is an important step towards creating a strong planning framework for the Town Centre. This will help the Council to shape development in the Town Centre in line with its vision and ensure that developers have regard to this.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration

Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)

None specific.

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

Housing

As contained in the report.

Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Community Wellbeing

The Masterplan Framework SPD will provide guidance for town centre developers and others, and will support and underpin Town Centre regeneration proposals.

Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment

Governance (Includes HR)

Harlow Town Centre AAP and this Masterplan Framework 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 12b of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Support

Appendices

Appendix A - Harlow Town Centre Masterplan Framework

Background Papers

Harlow Local Development Plan: Adopted December 2020
Harlow Design Guide: Adopted October 2011
HGGT Sustainability Guidance and Checklist
Draft Harlow Town Centre AAP

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

HLDP – Harlow Local Development Plan
HGGT – Harlow and Gilston Garden Town
HTCAAP – Harlow Town Centre Area Action Plan
SCI – Statement of Community Involvement
SPD – Supplementary Planning Document