

REPORT TO: CABINET

DATE: 24 MARCH 2022

TITLE: HARLOW TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN
FRAMEWORK SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING
DOCUMENTS (SPD) – FINAL DOCUMENT FOR
ADOPTION

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, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR,
PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL (01279)
446595

JAMES GARDNER, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR,
REGENERATION (01279) 446449

PAUL MACBRIDE, FORWARD PLANNING
MANAGER (01279) 446258

This is a Key Decision

It is on the Forward Plan as Decision Number I0012873

Call-in Procedures may apply

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

RECOMMENDED that:

- A** Cabinet notes the responses received to the consultation and agrees the non-consequential amendments proposed to the Harlow Town Centre Masterplan Framework Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (as set out at Appendix B to this report).
- B** Cabinet formally adopts the SPD as set out in Appendix A to this report and delegates authority to the Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holders to make and agree any minor or inconsequential amendments to the Masterplan Framework Supplementary Planning Document arising from any matters discussed and agreed at Cabinet.

- C Cabinet notes the three-staged plan to deliver the major town centre regeneration vision as set out in Paragraph 12 below.

REASON FOR DECISION

- A To enable the SPD to be formally adopted in accordance with Regulation 14 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
- B To meet the legal requirements relating to the development and adoption of an SPD.

BACKGROUND

1. The Council has prepared a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), in conjunction with the consultants Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners and McBains, in order to provide a masterplan framework to provide interim planning guidance to shape and guide development in Harlow Town Centre. It is intended that this document should be read in conjunction with the Harlow Local Development Plan (HLDP), which was formally adopted by the Council in 2020, particularly in respect of policies RS2 and PR5, together with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other key local guidance documents that may be appropriate.
2. In addition, the Council is currently developing a Town Plan for the district which will establish a clear corporate position within which a future overarching vision for Harlow, setting out key priorities, can be developed. This looks beyond the adopted HLDP, and the Harlow Town Centre Masterplan Framework Supplementary Planning Document, embodies an ambition for the town centre that will evolve over time.
3. The Council's new Corporate Strategy 2021-23 set out a strategic outcome in which "Harlow town centre will be thriving as one of the best places in the country to enjoy high-end retail, leisure, hospitality, arts and culture including a night-time economy and an excellent quality of environment and public realm with people travelling to the town centre from other areas in the region to enjoy its offerings." The SPD will, therefore, provide a framework to secure major regeneration to the town centre, through the identification of eight Opportunity Areas that reflect contextual themes, as well as providing additional guidance to assist in the consideration of planning applications.
4. The document also 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. In addition, it provides guidance on building heights and identifies the importance of responding to the existing context including landscape setting and key townscape views. The document, therefore, 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 height.

5. Following consideration of the draft document, the Cabinet meeting of the 14th October 2021 gave approval for public consultation on the SPD to commence, subject to any minor or inconsequential amendments that needed to be made.

CONSULTATION

6. Public Consultation commenced on the document on the 6th December 2021 and, following an extension of time to take into account the Christmas period and the impact of COVID restrictions, concluded on the 11th February 2022. This was for a period of 10 weeks which exceeded the normal public consultation period of 4 weeks stipulated for Supplementary Planning Documents in the recently update Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).
7. The consultation involved:
 - notifications being sent to people, organisations and businesses who have either recorded an interest in SPDs or are statutory consultees;
 - a notice being published in the local newspaper;
 - posts being made on the Council's social media channels to advertise the consultation;
 - hard copies of the SPD being available at the Civic Centre, Latton Bush Centre and libraries in Harlow; and
 - an online version being made available on the Council's website.
8. In response to the consultation some 23 representations were received from organisations and individuals who made over 100 comments in respect of the document. This included Essex County Council (ECC), Sport England, the Theatres Trust, Environment Agency, Historic England, Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) Board members, Harlow Civic Society, the Canals and Rivers Trust together with developers and members of the public. These comments are summarised in the schedule set out in Appendix B that accompanies this report.
9. Overall, there was general support from a range of organisations, including developers, who responded to the consultation in respect of the vision, objectives and guidance for the town centre as set out in the SPD. This included noting the exciting opportunity afforded by the document to deliver a sustainable and healthy town centre, with a mix of housing types and tenures, linked to the range of other land uses and enhanced green infrastructure and sustainable transport options, via the Sustainable Transport Corridors (STC's).
10. There were also several positive suggestions made by various parties in order to provide clarity to the document, and to ensure it referenced best practice in other relevant strategies and guidance. These have been included in the updated version of the SPD attached in Appendix A and are referenced in the summary

of the representations schedule in Appendix B, examples of which are outlined in the table below:

Comment	Amendment
Reference should be made to the need to maintain a health care presence in town centre.	The importance of health facilities and well-being is a key element of the ambitions for the town centre and this has been referenced in the SPD, especially with regard to the Wych Elm area and within the Opportunity Areas.
Reference should be made to ancillary infrastructure to support walking and cycling such as the provision of seating for the elderly and those with impairments coupled with good natural surveillance.	This is acknowledged and the SPD has been amended accordingly.
Public realm design principles should be amended to seek the provision of green space that is multi-functional	This is acknowledged and the SPD has been amended accordingly.
With regard to tall buildings the guidance could include references to the need to encourage physical activity via the use of roof gardens, cycle storage, well designed stair wells etc.	The SPD has been amended to include reference to design features that encourage physical activity.
The SPD should acknowledge that some of the sculptures in the town centre are listed.	This is acknowledged and the SPD has been amended accordingly.
There may be a need to acknowledge that high quality higher density development will be the expectation in the town centre.	The SPD provides commentary on the expectations of density in the town centre area.
The SPD could include references to creating better links to the rail station.	The SPD has been amended to reflect this.

11. Some representations, however, sought changes to the document, including deletions and changes to text, or referred to matters that were outside the scope of the masterplan or which are addressed by other Council documents and strategies. A number of these changes were not, however, considered appropriate or acceptable. This was because it was considered that if accepted, they would undermine the vision and objectives expressed in the SPD and the principles and guidance set out therein, and which could hinder the delivery of the wider Councils ambition to secure the comprehensive regeneration of the town centre in a positive manner. Examples of some of these are highlighted below.

Comment	Amendment
The proposals for the town centre will probably give rise to additional traffic in rural villages. If the aim is to reduce parking in the town centre, it is unclear how Nazeing residents will access its facilities.	Traffic matters are already being addressed through the Harlow and Gilston Transport Strategy and related measures including those being brought forward through the Sustainable Transport Corridors as set out in the HLDP.
The reference to defined retail frontages is dated and a more flexible approach should be used.	The definition of retail frontages is set out in the recently adopted HLDP and the importance of these are acknowledged in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
The expectation that 80% of flats in tall buildings should be dual aspect should be replaced with the wording that dual aspect should be encouraged and maximised.	This would not be appropriate as this would be contrary to the guidance in the recently adopted Harlow Design Guide Addendum SPD.
The expectation that open space should be provided in front of buildings could prohibit development and should be more flexible.	The desire to green the town centre is an important principle that needs to be maintained in order to enhance character and support biodiversity.
The document should emphasise the town centre's key role in the wider area.	This is already addressed in the Adopted HLDP and within the SPD.
Concern is raised about the aim to rebalance the focus of the town centre northwards.	This has been a long-standing aim in order to regenerate and bring life and vitality to this part of the town centre and this will be underpinned and supported by the growth being brought across the wider HGGT

NEXT STEPS

12. Harlow Council is committed to using the development of a strong planning framework for the Town Centre as the launchpad for the facilitation of a process of regeneration and transformation of the Town Centre. This will take the form of a three-step plan for regeneration: -
- (i) Adoption of the Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document – March 2022.
 - (ii) Production of a development brief to attract a joint venture partner to work with the Council to ensure progression from vision to reality – Autumn 2022.

- (iii) Procurement and engagement of a joint venture partner to deliver an agreed development programme for Harlow Town Centre – Spring 2023.

CONCLUSION

13. Following public consultation on the Harlow Town Centre Masterplan Framework Supplementary Planning Document, and the consideration of the responses received, the document has, where appropriate, been revised and updated (Appendix A). It is considered therefore, that the SPD provides a robust Masterplan Framework to shape and guide development in the town centre. In conjunction with the HLDP and other related documents, it will help secure the Council's wider regeneration ambitions and provide a catalyst for positive change for residents and businesses alike.

IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Growth and Regeneration

The adoption of the Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document will enable the Council to have greater influence on the future development of the town centre by providing a robust planning framework, but also in shaping the Council's own development activity.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration

Finance

None specific.

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

Housing

As outlined in the report.

Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Communities and Environment

As contained in the report.

Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment

Governance and Corporate Services

Adoption of the report meets the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Services

Appendices

Appendix A - Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document

Appendix B - Consultation Report

Appendix B (i) – Schedule of Representations

Background Papers

None

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

HGGT	- Harlow & Gilston Garden Town
HLDP	- Harlow Local Development Plan
NPPF	- National Planning Policy Framework
SCI	- Statement of Community Involvement
SPD	- Supplementary Planning Document