

**REPORT TO:** PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR REGENERATION AND STRATEGIC GROWTH

**DATE:** 14 MARCH 2023

**TITLE:** HARLOW TOWN CENTRE NORTH DEVELOPMENT BRIEF – APPROVAL FOR CONSULTATION

**PORTFOLIO HOLDER:** COUNCILLOR MICHAEL HARDWARE, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR REGENERATION AND STRATEGIC GROWTH

**LEAD OFFICER:** TANUSHA WATERS, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & BUILDING CONTROL (01279) 446595

**CONTRIBUTING OFFICERS:** VICKY FORGIONE, PRINCIPAL PLANNING OFFICER (01279) 446878

**This is not a Key Decision  
Call In Procedures may apply  
This decision will affect the Toddbrook ward.**

**RECOMMENDED that** the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Strategic Growth:

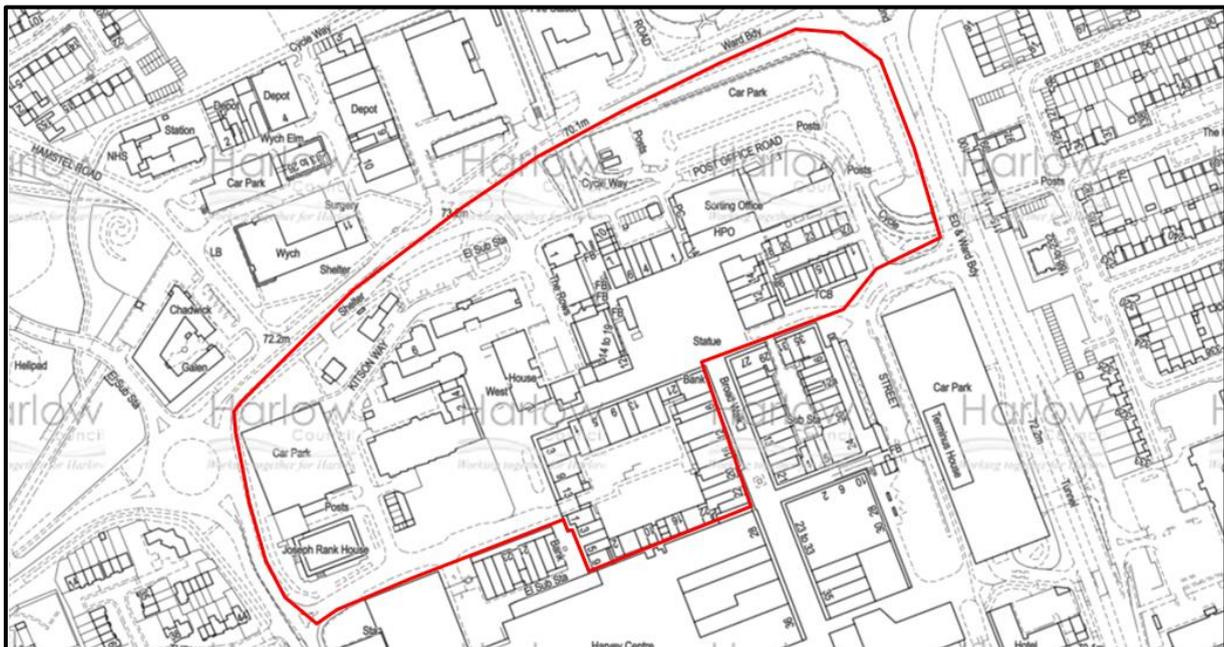
- A** Approves the Draft Town Centre North Development Brief (as set out at Appendix A to the report), to enable it to be published for the purposes of consultation.
- B** Delegates authority to the Assistant Director of Planning & Building Control to make and approve any minor or inconsequential amendments to the Draft Town Centre North Development Brief arising from the consultation.

#### **REASON FOR DECISION**

- A** To approve the Draft Town Centre North Development Brief for consultation for a period of four weeks in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement.
- B** To help officers shape the final version of the brief by understanding the views of statutory bodies, landowners and businesses and the public.

## BACKGROUND

1. The Harlow Town Centre Masterplan Framework Supplementary Planning Document (HTCMF SPD) was adopted in March 2022. The document includes masterplan drawings and frameworks for individual opportunity areas, guidance brought over from the Regulation 19 Area Action Plan (AAP) and detailed public realm strategies for the town centre. The HTCMF SPD identified eight separate opportunity areas where design principles were established. This included Town Centre North, or Opportunity Area 3.
2. Town Centre North includes land and buildings between Velizy Avenue and the bus station to the east, Fourth Avenue to the north, Haydens Road to the west and the top end of Broad Walk to the south. It includes several buildings and spaces, most notably Market House, the Royal Mail Depot, Stone Cross (or Market) Square, The Rows, Adams House, buildings around West Square and Joseph Rank House (see map below). It also includes the Strawberry Star scheme which has planning consent, subject to Section 106.



Town Centre North Development Brief area

3. The area was identified in the HTCMF SPD for approximately 350 homes, in addition to existing planning consents, 2,800sqm of workspace and 7,500sqm of flexible retail and business uses. New public realm opportunity areas at Stone Cross Square, Post Office Road Car Park and West Square were also identified.
4. The area benefits from several planning consents which will be a major catalyst for investment, development and regeneration. This includes the Strawberry Star proposals which will see significant change around West Square and East Gate and the bus station interchange project which will transform this arrival point. Further developer interest has already been made on some existing buildings in the area and there is significant opportunity through improvements to public owned land, particularly public realm areas.

5. A development brief for this area has been prepared to guide regeneration and redevelopment, informing developers/interested parties of development opportunities and the types of development that will be expected or encouraged by local planning policies. It will also ensure a coordinated approach is taken to the regeneration of the entire area in accordance with the HTCMTF SPD.

## PROPOSALS

6. The draft development brief sets out the following objectives for the Town Centre North area based around the principles in the HTCMTF SPD and issues identified in the area.
  - **Create an identity**, thereby securing its place in the town centre and providing a unique offering for visitors. This will address the current imbalance of shoppers and visitors drawing trade northwards, reducing vacancies and bringing the area 'back to life'.
  - **Improve the appearance** of the area through enhancements to the public realm, planting, buildings, spaces, tackling blank frontages and unattractive servicing areas and making the area more appealing to investors.
  - **Making better use of space** by re-purposing existing uses and land and transforming vacant and under-used spaces for other purposes particularly in and around Stone Cross Square.
  - **Protect the area's important architectural values** including, where appropriate, buildings, spaces, features and details so as to not to lose the area's New Town heritage.
  - **Improve the legibility and movement for pedestrians and cyclists** by creating safe, accessible, interesting and pleasant gateway entrances, removing cars wherever possible from the area and also promoting public and sustainable transport opportunities.
  - **Significantly 'green' the area** building on existing features such as pockets of green space, the Post Office Road car park trees, taking advantage of the abundance of space available. Opportunities for play space, community space, public art and other forms of formal and informal Green Infrastructure will be considered.
7. The draft development brief is presented as two separate papers:
  - A. **Introduction and background paper**  
This provides an overview of the area including any constraints, landownership, key buildings and spaces. It also sets out objectives for the area and a delivery strategy including potential infrastructure requirements.
  - B. **Individual site development briefs**  
These individual briefs detail specific design, layout and planning principles for buildings and sites identified for development potential.
8. The second paper identifies 12 buildings and sites which have the potential for some form of development or redevelopment. Some buildings have been grouped together or identified along with other buildings/sites that would support a wider comprehensive scheme where this would deliver more benefit. Some buildings were not identified in the HTCMTF SPD Opportunity Area for development as

circumstances have changed since the document was adopted. The 12 buildings and spaces are identified in the table below.

1	Market House
2	Royal Mail Delivery Office
3	Development Site A (east of Post Office Road)
4	Development Site B (north-east of Post Office Road)
5	Development Site C (east of Fourth Avenue underpass)
6	The Rows
7	Kitson Way Petrol Station
8	Kitson Way Multi-Storey Car Park
9	Joseph Rank House
10	Rothwell House, the Old Cinema and building rear of Cinema/east of Kitson Way
11	Aylmer House
12	Former Citizens Advice Centre

9. Each building/site above has its own site brief which sets out the following:

- An indicative site boundary and photos
- Issues and constraints identified for the site/building that will need addressing.
- Land uses the Council considers appropriate.
- Appropriate building heights considering the potential for new land uses and surrounding uses including any existing planning consents and the HTCMTF SPD.
- Specific layout and design principles for each site including, for example, any specific cycle/pedestrian connections, public realm improvements, specific positioning of buildings or the retention of particular architectural details.

10. Applicants will still need to consider more general design principles set out in the HTCMTF SPD including tall building design guidance, public realm projects and accessibility/movement objectives. The three key public realm projects for the Town Centre North area, which are detailed in the HTCMTF SPD, are set out below. The site briefs have been drafted to ensure that they support, contribute and do not impact upon these projects:

- A. **Stone Cross Square** which has been identified as a priority project and categorised as a Garden Square in the HTCMTF SPD. This space should be active with a functional hub of leisure and hospitality uses and event space set within landscaped areas and opportunities for play space.
- B. **Post Office Road Car Park** which is to be transformed into an urban park and gardens with large areas of soft planting, areas to sit, relax and play set in natural space incorporating sculpture, artwork and water features.
- C. **West Square** which should be a high-quality open space for play and recreation, particularly a place for 12 to 18 year-olds, providing exercise and

recreational opportunities for adults as well within a high quality landscaped setting.

## **NEXT STEPS**

11. Following Portfolio Holder endorsement to consult, the Draft Town Centre North Development Brief will be published for consultation. The document is neither a Development Plan nor Supplementary Planning Document and therefore it is not required to follow a statutory consultation or adoption process. However, it is considered good practice to follow a similar process to that which is undertaken for SPDs which includes:
  - a) Publishing the document for a minimum 4-week consultation period, specifying the date when responses should be received and identify the address to which responses should be sent
  - b) Make the document available at the principal office and other places within the area that the Council considers appropriate e.g., local libraries
  - c) Publish the document on the Council's website
  - d) Notify those on the Council's Planning Consultation database that the consultation has been published. Those with a specific interest in the redevelopment of Town Centre North will also be contacted including businesses and landowners who currently operate in that area.
12. Following the consultation period, the Council will consider all responses received and amend the draft development brief as appropriate, to produce a final version ready for adoption.
13. The finalised development brief will then be adopted either by the Council at a future Cabinet meeting or by the Assistant Director of Planning and Building Control where comments are considered minor and inconsequential. It will then become a material consideration in the determining of planning applications and will be hosted on the Council's website.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Planning and Strategic Growth**

As set out in the report

**Author: Tanusha Waters, Assistant Director of Planning and Building Control**

### **Finance**

None specific.

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

### **Housing**

As outlined in the report.

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

### **Communities and Environment**

As outlined in the report.

**Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment**

### **Governance and Corporate Services**

The Council is following the statutory process for this consultation under Section 12(b) of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 which has now been delegated to the Portfolio Holder.

**Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Support**

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Draft Town Centre North Development Brief

### **Background Papers**

[Harlow Local Development Plan](#): Adopted December 2020

[Harlow Town Plan Masterplan Framework SPD](#): Adopted March 2022

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

HTCMF SPD – Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document