

Shopfront Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) – Approval for Adoption



Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	10 December 2024
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Alastair Gunn, Portfolio Holder for HGGT and Planning
Lead Officer:	Tanusha Waters, Assistant Director – Planning and Environment (01279) 446595
Contributing Officer:	Caroline Hardy, Planning Officer (01279) 446562
Key Decision:	Yes
Forward Plan:	Forward Plan number I016542
Call In:	This item is subject to call in procedures
Corporate Missions:	Rebuild our Town
Wards Affected:	All Wards

Executive Summary

- A** Protecting and enhancing Harlow’s retail centres is an important element of the Harlow Local Development Plan (HLDP). Promoting good design is also reflected in HLDP Policy PL1. The 2011 Design Guide provides some limited guidance on shopfronts. However, this only applies to Neighbourhood Centres and Hatches and does not provide principles for the town centre or reflect the design considerations of more historic retail areas of Harlow such as Old Harlow.
- B** This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) therefore sets out a series of principles to be followed when designing or altering shopfronts. It now covers all retail areas including the Town Centre and future retail areas such as those that may be provided through new development sites. It also provides guidance for historic and modern shop front design and considers issues such as security and advertisement.
- C** The SPD is primarily aimed at developers (including the Regeneration Team) and planning agents involved in submitting a planning application and planning officers involved in the determination and enforcement of planning applications.

- D** The SPD was published for consultation in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and amendments have been made following feedback. The report seeks adoption of the SPD so it can become a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and inform pre-application discussions.

Recommended that Cabinet:

- A** Notes the responses received to the consultation (as set out in Appendix B to this report) and agrees the consequential amendments made to the Shopfront Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)
- B** Adopts the SPD (as set out in Appendix A to this report) and delegates authority to the Assistant Director – Planning and Environment, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for HGGT and Planning, to make and agree any minor or inconsequential amendments to the Shopfront Design SPD arising from any matters discussed and agreed at Cabinet.

Reason for decision

- A** To enable the SPD to be formally adopted under Regulation 14 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended), to put in place planning guidance to support the regeneration of the town centre and protect the heritage of retail areas with historic frontages.
- B** To meet the legal requirements of developing and adopting an SPD.

Other Options

- A** Do not adopt the SPD for Shopfront Design. This would result in a reliance on the 2011 Design Guide which only covers shopfronts for Neighbourhood Centres and Hatches with a 'gap' in guidance for the Town Centre, new retail areas and guidance on historic shopfronts. This would continue to negatively impact the character of the town's retail areas, specifically those areas with historic frontages as well as the appearance and attractiveness of the public realm.
- B** Given the low response rate to the consultation, publish the document for a further round of consultation. This will delay the publication of the SPD and risk the submission of applications, particularly in the town centre, that have no guidance for shop front design. There is also a risk that the consultation will require additional officer resource which may not yield any further comments. Officers consider the SPD principles to reflect best practice and be flexible enough to not impact significantly on retailers.

Background

1. The Harlow Local Development Plan (HLDP) was adopted by the Council on 10 December 2020. The Local Plan sets out a long-term vision for Harlow, identifying land where development will be acceptable and where it will be unacceptable.

2. It contains policies which ensure future development is sustainable by meeting the needs of residents, businesses and visitors, while providing the required infrastructure. These policies are material considerations in the determination of planning applications.
3. Whilst the policies in the plan themselves give significant detail of the Council's requirements, the additional information contained in an SPD will expand on the adopted plan, to give additional guidance to developers when making planning applications, to officers when making recommendations, and councillors when making decisions. It will also provide a catalyst for positive change linked to the regeneration objectives of the Council, as well as providing a framework within which the environmental character of an area can be enhanced and improved.
4. It should be noted that an SPD cannot introduce new policy over and above that contained in the adopted local plan, although it will have regard to the other adopted SPDs and related guidance of the Council.

Issues/Proposals

5. The SPD has been produced to provide further design guidance on shopfronts within Harlow. The 2011 Design Guide refers to Neighbourhood Centres and Hatches only and is not applicable to the town centre. To address this 'gap' in the guidance and to take into account changes in planning policy and national guidance a Shopfronts Design SPD has been prepared. To ensure consistency of approach important elements of the Design Guide are included in the SPD.
6. The SPD will also be beneficial in supporting place making objectives and enhance the attractiveness of developments that come forward in the town centre. It is primarily aimed at developers and planning agents involved in submitting a planning application, as well as supporting members and planning officers involved in the determination and enforcement of planning applications. The SPD will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and inform pre-application discussions on relevant applications.
7. This SPD will apply, therefore, to shopfronts located in Harlow Town Centre as well as Neighbourhood Centres and Hatches including those that may be newly-built such as at the East of Harlow strategic housing site. This includes frontages for shops, and other uses such as cafes, restaurants, banks, travel agents, bookmakers and launderettes.
8. The aim of the SPD is to set out principles to be followed when designing or altering shopfronts, ensuring they contribute to the public realm and character of the area.
9. The SPD sets out the policy context and the documents related to retail and shopfront design. Harlow's historic context in terms of its retail past is also set out and the general design of retail areas in the town are explained. The design principles set out in the SPD focus on the following components:

- a) Physical elements of a shopfront, which include:
 - i) Pilasters, plinths and consoles
 - ii) Fascias and cornices
 - iii) Stallrisers
 - iv) Windows
 - v) Doors and entrances
- b) Advertisements and signage
- c) Canopies
- d) Security
- e) Outdoor seating, structures and goods
- f) Other considerations

Consultation

- 10. In September 2024, the Portfolio Holder approved the draft Shopfront Design SPD to enable it to be published for the purposes of public consultation.
- 11. The consultation period commenced on 11 October 2024 and closed on 8 November 2024.
- 12. The Council complied with the legislative requirements for consulting on an SPD, as well as the requirements set out in the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).
- 13. This included:
 - a) Notifications being sent to people, organisations and businesses who have either recorded an interest in SPDs or are statutory consultees;
 - b) A notice being published in the local newspaper;
 - c) Posts about the consultation being made on the Council's social media channels;
 - d) Hard copy of the SPD being available at the Civic Centre;

- e) An online version being available on the Council's website and an online consultation platform.
14. In total, eight people, organisations or companies responded to the consultation. From these responses, six were made by statutory bodies who had no particular comment to make. One representation required no changes to the SPD, and one requires the SPD to be amended regarding the use of latticed or perforated shutters should be considered first rather than solid shutters for shopfront security measures. Detailed information can be found in Appendix B.
 15. For information, officers are looking at updating the Council's SCI to look at how engagement can be improved with the public and which future methods are suitable. The SCI must continue to meet planning regulations around consultation. This includes the potential use of online platforms, in addition to the more standard and legislative methods Planning Policy uses to consult such as emails, letters, hard copies and the Council's website. It will also ensure all members of the community including hard to reach groups are targeted equally.
 16. Following public consultation, 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 guidance on shopfront design.
 17. The Shopfront Design SPD will, therefore, be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and will also inform pre-application discussions on relevant developments. The adopted SPD will be hosted on the Council's website with a copy made available at the Civic Centre. To avoid the use of unnecessary printing and in consideration of the Council's Climate Change Strategy, additional hard copies will be made available upon request.

Implications

Equalities and Diversity

An Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix C) has been completed for the SPD.

Climate Change

The SPD sets out principles to be followed when designing or altering shopfronts. Although these do not directly contribute to mitigating against climate change, it is stated that new materials used should be sustainably sourced.

Finance

No direct financial implications included within the report. Resources are included within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Author: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Assistant Director – Finance and Section 151 Officer

Governance

The SPD will not form part of the statutory development plan but will be an important material consideration in determining planning applications. SPDs cannot create new policy but provide more detailed guidance on how to apply the policies in the Local Plan. There is a statutory process for preparing an SPD. Regulations 11 to 16 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) set out these requirements. The process includes the requirement for consulting on a draft SPD, which has taken place.

The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations) also require the Council to consider whether or not Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the SPD should be undertaken, and Lead Officers are satisfied that this requirement has been met.

All such considerations have been given, and due process has been followed.
Author: Julie Galvin, Legal Services Manager and Monitoring Officer

Appendices

Appendix A – Shopfront Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

Appendix B – Shopfront Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) Consultation Statement

Appendix C – Shopfront Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) Equality Impact Assessment

Background Papers

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

[Harlow Design Guide](#): Adopted October 2011

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

HLDP – Harlow Local Development Plan

SCI – Statement of Community Involvement

SPD – Supplementary Planning Document