

Meeting:	Town Centre Project Panel
Date:	14 th July 2005
Subject:	Town Centre Development Strategy
Responsible Officer:	Director of Strategic Planning
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Portfolio Holder:	Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development & Housing Portfolio Holder for Environment & Transport
Key Decision:	No
Status:	Part 1

Section 1: Summary

Decision Required

To recommend Cabinet to adopt the Harrow Town Centre Development Strategy for Development Control purposes, subject to the revisions set out in the report, and to advise the Development Control Committee of its decision

Reason for report

To finalise the Harrow Town Centre Development Strategy, in response to public consultation, and enable it to be used for development control purposes.

Benefits

Approval of the Development Strategy will improve service delivery by establishing a planning framework to guide and promote development in Harrow Town Centre

Cost of Proposals

None

Risks

Opportunities for co-ordinated action to increase the range of facilities in Harrow Town Centre, create a distinctive identity, attract investment, boost business confidence, reduce trade draw to other centres and improve its competitive position would be lost.

Implications if recommendations rejected

Actions to transform Harrow Town Centre would be taken on an ad hoc basis, limiting their effectiveness, and future development proposals would have to be considered against general UDP policies rather than specific guidance

Section 2: Report

2.1 Brief History

2.1.1 On 15th July 2003, following a series of Member presentations, Cabinet approved a draft Town Centre Development Strategy for public consultation. This took the form of interactive workshops with different stakeholder groups, and an on-line survey on the Council's web site. A high degree of consensus was obtained, with broad public support for the Council's objectives for the town centre. A number of additional actions were also identified. A revised strategy was considered by the Panel at its meeting in July 2004 and Members agreed that it should be subject to a further period of formal public consultation to enable it to be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance. An 11 week period of consultation followed, in conjunction with the masterplan for the Harrow on the Hill station site, and preliminary results were considered at the Panel meeting in November 2004.

2.2 Options considered

2.2.1 The 2004 consultation elicited very few additional comments on the development strategy, with the response focussing primarily on the Harrow on the Hill Station masterplan. However, a number of important issues were raised, and these are considered below:

1. **CABE** welcomes the preparation of the document and the clear objectives it sets out to maximise the long term potential of the town centre, and considers that the identification of key sites will help to focus development potential and provide certainty within the area. An additional action is recommended to those listed in the summary to the strategy:- "Promoting development of the highest architectural and urban design quality" as supported by PPS1 and "By Design".

Comment: The promotion of high quality development and the creation of a distinctive identity for the town centre are key aims the strategy. The CABE suggestion would be a welcome addition, strengthening the commitment to these aims.

2. **English Heritage** offers three suggestions:

- cross reference UDP policies with the strategy
- use annotated illustrations and images to improve the message
- an additional action, "to enhance key individual or groups of buildings which could provide a positive contribution to the character and sense of place", under Objective 4 (to celebrate the history, diversity and greenery of Harrow in the town centre)

Comment: These are sensible additions that will reinforce the principle that the strategy supplements the UDP, and the use of better graphics will enable the strategy document to be promoted more effectively. An illustrated version will be prepared for a future Panel meeting, should Cabinet accept the Panel's recommendation. Individual buildings clearly have a major role in defining the character of the town centre and a commitment to identify opportunities for improvement will add weight to this element of the strategy.

3. **The Hatch End Association** supports many of the proposals in the strategy but doubts that planning obligations through S106 agreements will pay for such an ambitious ten year plan. They suggest that the strategy include an outline budget, at the least an indication of cost. The immediate action being taken to enhance the environment and improve security and safety is welcomed, but the Association hope that consideration will

also be given to reducing the amount of unnecessary signage, which currently clutters the town centre.

Comment: Many of the key actions set out in the strategy, such as the preparation of a public spaces plan, a town centre access plan, or the implementation of an environmental improvements programme, are at an early stage of development and their financial implications are not yet known. Similarly, the timing of development of key sites, and with it opportunities of S106 contributions or capital receipts, is uncertain. It would be more appropriate to consider budget issues as and when individual initiatives come forward, and detailed costs are known, rather than include estimates at this stage, based on inadequate information. Opportunities to remove clutter will form an important part of the proposed Public Realm strategy.

4. Harrow Council for Racial Equality recommend that each objective consider “Race Equality Implications”.

Comment: The principal aim of the development strategy is to transform Harrow Town Centre into a centre that meets the long term needs of the community. Objective 4 acknowledges the need for the town centre to better reflect its historical associations and cultural diversity and Objective 5 highlights the promotion of events that reinforce the multi cultural nature of the borough. This strong community emphasis should ensure that consideration of Harrow’s diverse ethnic mix is central to all the actions set out in the strategy. Accordingly, inclusion of a separate assessment of race equality implications under each objective is considered unnecessary. However, a suitable reference in the first objective would reinforce the Council’s commitment to promote change that meets the needs of an increasingly diverse community.

5. West London Business (WLB) is in full agreement with the findings of the town centre evaluation and assessment of Harrow’s potential. It considers that the mix of mall, traditional and specialist retailing is likely to appeal to customers, stresses the need for Harrow to be actively and aggressively marketed as a shopping destination, and supports the focus on better public transport to help reinforce Harrow’s competitiveness and attractiveness. An offer is made to work with the Council to promote Harrow as a key business location in West London and to assist in attracting investors and national retailers to the town.

Comment: Although WLB’s comments do not require any amendments to the strategy, its support for the overall findings, and offer to work with the Council to promote inward investment, is to be welcomed.

2.2.2 In addition to the specific written responses to the strategy itself, a large number of general comments about the town centre were included on the Harrow on the Hill station questionnaire. Issues raised by residents, and the facilities and services they would like to see provided, can be grouped under the following themes:

- additional leisure and entertainment facilities, especially for young people (eg new library complex, European café culture, place for performing arts)
- a more cosmopolitan centre
- improved open space
- a market or arcade with specialist shops to make Harrow a special shopping experience
- better parking provision

- enhanced education facilities
- cycle access and cycle parking
- child friendly facilities including a shoppers crèche
- a large "big name" hotel
- quality shops
- improved safety, especially late night travel, and reduced opportunities for crime

These additional comments provide a valuable insight into the priorities of local residents. Like the original stakeholder workshops, they largely endorse the Council's assessment of the issues facing Harrow Town Centre and demonstrate broad public support for the actions set out in the strategy to address them. All the points raised are already included in the strategy to a greater or lesser degree and further changes are therefore considered unnecessary.

2.3 Consultation

Details of the consultation programme have been considered in previous reports to the Panel.

2.4 Financial Implications

None

2.5 Legal Implications

None

2.6 Equalities Impact

The consultation programme ensured direct engagement with all borough residents and with groups representing a variety of minority interests. Preparation of the Development Strategy provides the opportunity to promote a more diverse town centre better equipped to meet the needs of the local community.

Section 3: Supporting Information/ Background Documents

Appendices:

Revised Town Centre Development Strategy. July 2005

Background papers:

1. Harrow on the Hill Station Draft SPG July 2004
2. Draft Town Centre Development Strategy. July 2004.