

Public Realm Strategy – Draft Consultants’ Brief

Introduction

Harrow Town Centre is one of 10 Metropolitan Centres in London, providing over 200,000m² of retail and office floorspace and serving a catchment population of over 400,000 people. There has been significant change over the last 20 years with a considerable increase in retail provision and, more recently, in the amount of housing. Major alterations have been made to the road network serving the town centre and the main shopping streets are either pedestrianised or have pedestrian priority. Despite these improvements, the town centre is not fulfilling its potential – it lacks distinctiveness, the range and quality of shops is limited, there is a lack of leisure, civic and cultural facilities, the evening economy caters for a narrow group of age or other interest groups and there is a general absence of green space.

In physical terms, the town centre environment lacks the quality of competing centres. The public realm is uninspiring and the streetscene is cluttered, dated and in poor condition. The overriding impression is of an ordinary town centre without a strong or distinctive identity, that fails to connect with nearby open spaces or reflect Harrow’s heritage.

In July 2005 the Council adopted a Town Centre Development Strategy with the overriding aim of “transforming Harrow town centre into a thriving, distinctive and adaptable centre, which meets the long term needs of the community” – in short, to turn it into the premier centre in north west London.

Five objectives are identified in the strategy to deliver this aim,

- to promote diverse activity in the centre that meets the needs of a modern economy and contributes to the overall aim of making Harrow special and distinctive
- to ensure effective transport and pedestrian access to and within the centre
- to make the centre look and feel attractive and safe
- to celebrate the history, diversity and greenery of Harrow in the centre
- to make the centre feel more alive with people

Improving the public realm is a critical part of the town centre strategy, embracing all five objectives described above. Meeting these aspirations will require a fundamental change to the public realm, not just in terms of the appearance of the street scene but the wider town centre identity and “brand” – creating a distinctive high quality physical environment that differentiates Harrow from other town centres. The Council is now seeking to appoint a consultant team to develop a public realm strategy that can deliver this important objective.

Background

An initial concept for a public realm strategy was developed in 2004 by Alsop architects, building on some of the design principles used in preparing a masterplan for a 5.8 hectare site around Harrow on the Hill station. The masterplan envisages a high density,

high quality, mixed use scheme and enhanced public transport interchange around the station, incorporating a series of new public spaces throughout the site, including the improvement and remodelling of Lowlands Recreation Ground, a 1ha site to the south of the railway. The station site is included in the Mayor's 100 Public Spaces Programme.

The principal aim of the Alsop concept was to green the town centre, drawing the verdant character of the area around Harrow on the Hill through the station site, to create a public realm that is as green and seasonal as the open spaces to the south, but in an urban context. Five radical landscape interventions were proposed in key parts of the centre, entailing the erection of bespoke structures that could carry a variety of different features – including planting, lighting, seating and bins. Simple surface materials and other street furniture would be used to provide an appropriate setting for the new structures.

Vision and Objectives

The Council's vision is to create a high quality public realm throughout Harrow Town Centre that provides a distinct sense of place and unique Harrow identity that is:

- distinctive, but with a lasting/timeless appeal
- free from clutter
- durable, easy to maintain, alter and cleanse
- well lit, safe, secure, and minimises opportunities for crime
- accessible to all
- permeable, legible, and better connected to the surrounding residential area

and which;

- offers scope for exhibitions, events, outdoor performance, trading activities and "café culture"
- improves weather protection for shoppers
- includes opportunities for public art
- provides good visibility to the main retail shop frontages
- represents good value for money

Area of Study

The principal area of study will focus on the three main shopping streets within the town centre – St Anns Road, College Road and that part of Station Road between Gayton Road and Sheepcote Road.

St Anns Road is fully pedestrianised, apart from a short stretch where it is crossed by Havelock Place, which provides service access to the St Anns Centre and other premises. Although mainly public highway, several discrete areas within St Anns Road have been "stopped up" and provide space for retail activity, including two purpose built kiosks, a small trading area for four barrows, and two areas designated for exhibitions/display and outdoor performance. Station Road, between College Road and Sheepcote Road is a one way (north bound) "bus precinct", with access for servicing and blue badge holders. Restricted access arrangements also apply in College Road.

The strategy should also consider those roads that form the town centre boundary– especially Greenhill Way, Lowlands Road, Sheepcote Road and other parts of Station Road - and consider opportunities to improve/soften their visual appearance and ways of

overcoming the barrier that these roads create with other parts of the town centre and connections to the adjacent residential area. Opportunities to improve the main entry points or “gateways” to the town centre should also be assessed.

Character of the Area

Harrow Town Centre is the largest shopping and office centre in the borough serving a catchment area that extends well beyond the borough boundary. It provides a wide range of comparison and convenience goods shopping, comprising some 95,000m² of retail floorspace. Retail provision is dominated by two managed shopping centres - the St Ann’s Centre, which was completed in 1987, and the St George’s Shopping and Leisure Centre which opened in 1996. These schemes, together with a long established Debenhams department store in Station Road, account for a large proportion of the total shopping floorspace in the town centre, and create a focus of town centre activity at the western end of St Ann’s Road.

Offices are concentrated in Lyon Road, Lowlands Road and College Road, offering approx 126,000m² of floorspace. The town centre also provides a number of leisure based activities and there is a relatively small, mainly drink based, evening economy. Over the last 3 or 4 years, there has been a significant growth in demand for housing, resulting in the construction of more than 500 new dwellings in and adjoining the town centre. However, unlike many other centres of similar status and role, Harrow Town Centre has few arts and cultural facilities and, with the exception of the Gayton Road library, lacks any form of civic presence.

Retail expansion in the 1980’s and 1990’s was accompanied by a significant change in the basic infrastructure and pattern of movement in and around the town centre. Construction of Greenhill Way to the north, Roxborough Bridge to the west, and the widening of Sheepecote Road to the east to allow two-way traffic, created a road network around the commercial core, which facilitated the pedestrianisation of St Ann’s Road, and enabled pedestrian priority measures to be introduced in College Road and parts of Station Road. However, although the town centre has the advantage of being compact, the road network has created a distinct physical barrier and led to an inward looking centre that is poorly connected to the residential area beyond. The Metropolitan railway creates a particular barrier to the south, divorcing much of the town centre from the green spaces and landmark buildings around historic Harrow on the Hill, as well as other significant facilities such as Harrow College. Despite its proximity, there are few references in the town centre to Harrow’s most important heritage asset.

Pedestrian movement around the town centre is limited by the relatively small number of streets that form the commercial core and the general absence and poor quality of footpath links between them. The closure of the St Anns Centre outside trading hours imposes a particular restriction on access between College Road and St Anns Road once the shops have closed. The town centre lacks a central space and, apart from the landscaped area around St Johns Church in Station Road, offers no green space within the commercial core.

Harrow Town Centre operates within a very competitive trading environment. Watford and Brent Cross draw heavily on the northern and eastern parts of the borough. Uxbridge now offers a further choice for many Harrow residents following the development of the Chimes Centre. Development at Wembley and White City will

significantly increase competition over the next few years, posing a major threat to Harrow's vitality and viability.

Related initiatives

- **Café Culture:** The Council has recently prepared guidelines for the siting, size and design of outdoor eating areas in the town centre, recognising the growth of the number of daytime cafes and bars and the potential of a café culture to create a more vibrant streetscene. Opportunities to promote such activities should form part of any future public realm strategy.
- **Access strategy:** Consultants have been appointed to prepare an access/movement strategy for the town centre. This will focus initially on the scope to introduce two way bus working in Station Road, to improve access to the central shopping area for bus users and reduce journey length and time for southbound buses, especially those routed around Greenhill Way, in order to access the bus station in College Road. Pedestrian and cycle movement within the town centre and links to adjacent residential areas and the surrounding cycle network will also be considered. Some 80% of visitors to the town centre arrive by public transport, cycle or on foot and catering adequately for their needs will have a significant impact on its future well being. It is therefore essential that the access and public realm strategies are properly co-ordinated and close liaison is maintained between the respective consultant teams.
- **Development Opportunities:** In addition to the area around Harrow on the Hill station, the Town Centre Development Strategy and the Harrow UDP identifies a number of other significant development sites, in particular the large surface car park in Greenhill Way, to the rear of Debenhams, and land in Havelock Place adjacent to the St Anns Centre. Both sites provide opportunities to create important additions to the public realm and better pedestrian linkages around the town centre.
- **Town Centre Management:** Harrow town has benefited from Town Centre Management since 1995, and the implementation of the Harrow Town Centre Management Strategy 2003 – 2005 is nearing completion. Reporting to the Harrow Town Centre Forum, a partnership of Harrow Council, businesses, residents, Police and other town centre stakeholders, the post of Town Centre Manager is funded through a Council Service Level Agreement, partner contributions, and income generated from the barrow sites and activity area in St Ann's Road. Any future public realm strategy should ensure the continuing sustainability of Town Centre Management through the maintenance of the latter income stream.

Scope of Services

The Council wish to appoint a multi-disciplinary consultant team, with a proven track record in public realm design and delivery, to prepare a strategy for the development and implementation of a distinctive, high quality public realm throughout Harrow Town Centre.

Professional services are required from urban design and landscape architects, with appropriate technical support from transport planners, highway designers, civil engineers and cost consultants.

A two stage approach is envisaged.

Stage 1 will establish an overall concept and initial design solutions for the whole of the town centre, with outline costs, and identify key spaces where specific interventions are recommended.

Stage 2 will entail the preparation of detailed, costed proposals for specified areas, to enable the adopted strategy to be rolled out on a phased basis, and the production of working drawings to enable the detailed designs to be constructed and implemented.

The Council reserve the right not to proceed to Stage 2.

The appointed consultant team will be expected to work on a collaborative basis with the Council, its partners, the GLA and TfL, residents and other stakeholders, during both stages and report regularly to a client steering group

Outputs

At the initial (Stage 1) phase the appointed consultant will submit:

- a public realm analysis including an assessment of the purpose and value of key spaces and land uses (both positive and negative); important views and landmarks; the existing street layout, existing and future gateways and nodes; the quality and distinctiveness of the street furniture, lighting and surface materials; the impact on utilities and underground services; existing street trees and planters; and, in liaison with the Access Strategy consultants, an overview of pedestrian, cycle and vehicle movement and links to the surrounding area.
- an appraisal of the pilot “Hanging Gardens” project in Clarendon Road and the potential to use the design principles inherent in this scheme over the rest of the town centre
- an outline concept for a public realm strategy, addressing the key issues arising from the public realm analysis, including baseline drawings, sketch proposals and a pallet of materials
- proposals for future management and maintenance
- indicative costs of implementing the strategy over the study area.
- proposals for consultation with the public and other stakeholders

Stage 2 outputs for areas agreed with the client group will involve submission of ;

- detailed designs and working drawings, including the design of any structural elements, comprising cross sections at 1:50, layouts at 1:200, showing detailed junction designs, the location of all furniture, lighting and materials. Typical and critical details at 1:10 and 1:20 for all streetscape components and assembly.
- A detailed cost plan

Selection Process

Selection will be carried out by a Client Group of Council officers, chaired by the Director of Strategic Planning, in conjunction with the GLA Architecture and Urbanism Unit.

Following an appraisal of initial submissions and pre-qualification information, a short list of up to 5 consultant teams will be selected, based on the cost and quality of the design, the approach taken to innovation, and demonstration of technical ability to implement the proposals. Each team will be paid a maximum of £5000 to cover the costs of preparing a

more detailed tender and outline design approach in response to this brief. Shortlisted teams will then be required to present their proposals to the Client Group for final selection. The Council intend to invite suitably qualified and experienced external advisers to assist in the final selection process.

Budget

The total budget for the design and implementation of a comprehensive public realm strategy is expected to be in the region of £3m, with the bulk of expenditure to take place on a phase by phase basis over 2006/7 and 2007/8.

Submission format and timetable

Consultant teams should submit the following material with their bid:

- details of consultant's proposals to fulfil the brief including initial thoughts on the Council's vision and objectives, and identified outputs. This should form not more than 5 sides of A4
- details of specific relevant experience/track record (including that of the individuals who would specifically be working on the project)
- method statement including details of stakeholder liaison and public engagement, and a proposed schedule of meetings
- details of project team members, including specialist sub-consultants if necessary, and their proposed roles within the project
- a lump sum fee to deliver the outputs identified in the brief, including details of hourly fee rates for all team members. The fee must include all disbursements, including draft and final documentation and presentation material for consultation purposes
- a draft programme for stage 1 which covers the tasks/outputs set out in the brief and the estimated lead in time from appointment date to start of work.