

**Report for: Planning Policy  
Advisory Panel**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> May 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Proposed Harrow Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) – scoping
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No – for information and comment only
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Dipti Patel, Corporate Director Place Viv Evans, Chief Planning Officer Kirstan Shiels, Head of Regeneration
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Cllr Marilyn Ashton Portfolio Holder for Planning & Regeneration
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Decision subject to Call-in:</b>	No
<b>Wards affected:</b>	Greenhill, Headstone, Marlborough (dependent on the final boundary of the Master Plan / SPD)
<b>Enclosures:</b>	None

## **Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations**

The Council has committed to preparing a Master Plan for Harrow Town Centre. It is proposed to adopt this as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) so that it is a material consideration in determining planning applications. The master plan seeks to define and describe the future of Harrow Town Centre. This report introduces the proposed master plan, why it is being prepared, its likely scope, the approach to its preparation and estimated timeframes. The Panel is requested to:

- 1) Note the content of the report (and accompanying presentation) and the proposed approach to bringing forward a Harrow Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document
- 2) Provide comments / feedback in relation to the information set out in this report and accompanying presentation at the meeting.
- 3) Agree to progress the preparation of the draft Harrow Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document.

**Reason: (for recommendations)**

To outline the approach to preparing the Harrow Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Seeking feedback on potential outcomes of the SPD.

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 This report sets out some of the initial findings from a scoping report on Harrow Town Centre. It lays out the changes since the establishment of the Area Action Plan, the challenges Harrow Town Centre is currently facing as a result of the spatial, social, and economic changes within the borough. In addition, it sets out why, in the face of these challenges, it is necessary to provide clear guidance on what the future of the Harrow town centre should be and how it will benefit the borough in the long term.
- 1.2 The Council is committed to prepare a Harrow Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in order to proactively respond to changes within the centre and the pressures it faces. This reflects the centre's role as the largest centre in the borough and the one that has been subject to the most change since the current Local Plan was adopted. Harrow Town Centre is one of only fourteen Metropolitan Town Centres in the London Plan<sup>1</sup> and the most important centre in the borough with respect to its function (mix of uses) and scale (floor space).

### **2.0 Options considered**

- 2.1 To do nothing and rely on the existing local policy framework (the most relevant being the Core Strategy and Harrow and Wealdstone Area Action Plan adopted in 2012 and 2013 respectively). The London Plan 2021 has been subsequently published and the new Harrow Local Plan will not be

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<sup>1</sup> The London Plan indicates metropolitan centres 'serve wide catchments which can extend over several boroughs and into parts of the Wider South East. Typically they contain at least 100,000 sqm of retail, leisure and service floorspace with a significant proportion of high-order comparison goods relative to convenience goods. These centres generally have very good accessibility and significant employment, service and leisure functions. Many have important clusters of civic, public and historic buildings.'

completed and adopted for at least two years meaning to do nothing would leave a significant period without contemporary guidance for the town centre that if adopted as an SPD, would be a material consideration in determining planning applications. This option has therefore been dismissed.

- 2.2 A second option is to prepare a master plan but not adopt it as a formal SPD. To do so would mean that very limited, if any, weight could be given to the document for planning purposes. This would limit the document's scope to influence development within the town centre; such development is likely to be a primary mechanism to achieve positive change in the centre. This option has therefore been dismissed.

### **3.0 Why a change is needed**

- 3.1 Harrow Council needs to take a proactive approach towards the future of the town centre, considering the rapid changes that have occurred in recent years. These changes include the increasing popularity of online shopping, the evolving role of the town centre and high street, the shift in consumer spending patterns due to e-commerce, and most recently, the changes in work and lifestyle patterns resulting from the pandemic.
- 3.2 There have been significant changes to Harrow Town Centre in recent years, including:
- (a) There has been a gradual loss of office space due to conversion to residential, resulting in a decrease in the number of daytime office workers.
  - (b) an increase in the resident population of the town centre due to conversion and new residential buildings in and around the town centre.
- 3.3 The local economy is changing due to the increased population in the town centre, as well as the new ways of working that have emerged after the pandemic.
- 3.4 Evidence<sup>2</sup> supporting the London Plan 2021 indicates the following with respect to Harrow's Metropolitan Town Centre:
- (a) below average level of floorspace (excluding offices) with the centre having some of the lowest floorspace levels of all the Metropolitan Centres.
  - (b) Significant loss of office floorspace (namely through office to residential permitted development rights)
  - (c) Low office rentals
  - (d) Mid-range night-time economy floorspace compared to other centres.

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<sup>2</sup> [London To Centre Health Check 2017](#)

- 3.5 Harrow's own monitoring indicates that 6.3% of floorspace in the Metropolitan Centre was vacant in July 2022. This compares to 3.6% in 2012 and 5.2% in 2019 (before the pandemic). In 2022, 49% of floorspace in Harrow was convenience retail and 10% comparison / durable goods retail, with a further 34% being service floorspace. Convenience floorspace has declined from 60% of floorspace in 2012, with comparison / durables floorspace being broadly static compared to 9% of total floorspace in 2012. Service floorspace has increased from 27% of all floorspace in 2012.
- 3.6 The impact of the conversion of office to residential (under permitted development rights) since 2013 has been significant. By the end of September 2022, prior approval had been granted for 58,462 sqm of floorspace in Harrow Town Centre, equating to 1,214 dwellings. If fully implemented, this would result in the loss of circa 5,000 jobs and £154m in disposable income.
- 3.7 To maintain Harrow Town Centre's Metropolitan Town Centre status, it is imperative to establish a new vision that outlines clear objectives for future developments and potential economic activities in the area.
- 3.8 There are several strategic land holdings, either within the ownership of Harrow Council or development sites that will have a major impact to Harrow Town Centre currently being considered for major redevelopment, they include,
- (a) Harrow on the Hill underground station
  - (b) Harrow Bus Station
  - (c) Kings House and Queens House
  - (d) Greenhill Way Car Park
  - (e) Major development sites adjacent to Harrow town centre under the HSDP partnership, such as Poets Corner, Peel Road, Milton Road and Byron Park. While they are not within the town centre, the close proximity and the scale of these developments will nevertheless have an impact to the town centre.
- 3.9 These developments will have a major impact on the future of the town centre and is imperative to establish the spatial relationship between them.
- 3.10 The Harrow & Wealdstone Area Action Plan was produced in 2013. While some of the policies are still applicable to Harrow Town Centre, the demographic, economic, social, and spatial conditions have changed in the past decade. Therefore, it is necessary to expand on the policies in the current AAP policies to address the challenges we face today and in the future.
- 3.11 Harrow Council is currently in the process of producing an updated Local Plan, which can take several years to develop before it becomes statutory local policies. There is a gap in terms of updated policies that can inform the future of Harrow Town Centre.

## 4.0 Why do we need a masterplan?

- 4.1 Currently, the town centre is facing numerous challenges compared to when the AAP was produced a decade ago. Harrow's own research indicated there has been a 60% increase in the resident population of the town centre because of new residential developments within the Town Centre, together with permitted development conversions from office space to residential units.
- 4.2 Key residential developments within Harrow Town Centre include Perceval Square, located next to Harrow on the Hill station, the former council-owned site in Gayton Road, as well as major developments in Lyon Road/St. John's Road. These are well-planned developments located in strategic location within the town centre, however the consequences of the increased population, including the long-term needs, support and services will have to be addressed.
- 4.3 Since the inception of the AAP, the way we use our high streets and town centres has changed dramatically. According to the Office for National Statistics, online shopping accounted for less than 10% of total retail sales in the UK in 2013. This trend has continued to increase and jumped to over 20% by the end of 2019. During the peak of the pandemic, from March 2020 to the end of 2021, internet shopping accounted for over 30% of total retail sales in the UK. This has a dramatic effect and reshapes high street retail not only in the UK, but across the globe. In common with retail trends nationally, there has been a shift away from the traditional retail model of maintaining a physical presence on the High Street towards warehouses located on the edge of town and online shopping
- 4.4 The consequence of these changing habits is the emergence of a fundamental shift in how the high street and town centre are perceived and used. Rather than engaging in purely transactional activities, consumers are now seeking an overall experience when visiting high streets and town centres.
- 4.5 The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we live, work, and use local facilities. Virtual meetings and hybrid working have become common practices.
- 4.6 Studies carried out by Office for National Statistics in 2022 indicated that the most common hybrid working pattern that worker planned to use (42%), was working mostly from home and sometimes from their usual place of work. This lifestyle shift has changed the way the population uses their town centre and what they are looking for.
- 4.7 To address the challenges facing Harrow Town Centre today and in the near future, specific guidance should be established to define a vision for what the town centre could become. This includes determining its physical appearance, identifying the types of uses and activities that should

be encouraged, and exploring how different types of developments and activities can work together cohesively.

## **5.0 What can a Town Centre masterplan do?**

- 5.1 Providing specific guidance for the future of Harrow Town Centre would offer greater clarity throughout the borough regarding the ambition, purpose, and function. The SPD will provide specific clarification on the types of businesses, uses, and activities that should be encouraged within the defined boundary.
- 5.2 The masterplan will establish a clear narrative for how Harrow Town Centre will operate and function within the borough, as well as how it will relate to and interact with,
  - (a) Other town centres within the borough.
  - (b) Key regeneration projects in the immediate surrounding area.
  - (c) Key streets and spaces within the masterplan area.
- 5.3 The vision will provide recommendations on the hierarchy and urban structure of the town centre, defining the hierarchy of key streets and spaces within it.
- 5.4 It will include recommendations for the types of uses and activities that should be encouraged in the town centre. These recommendations will provide guidance and instil confidence in the Council regarding the future of the Town Centre.
- 5.5 By providing clear recommendations and guidance, stakeholders can establish a clear direction for future development in Harrow Town Centre. This will encourage potential investors, employers, and businesses to invest in the area with confidence.

## **6.0 Harrow Local Plan policies the SPD will expand upon**

- 6.1 This will be confirmed when working with the Planning Policy Team to ensure a seamless integration, and to ensure there are no overlap or policy gaps being left behind. While the SPD cannot bring forward new policy, the guidance may impact upon existing policies included in,
  - (a) Harrow & Wealdstone Area Action Plan and,
  - (b) Core Strategy

### **Other relevant policies for the SPD**

- (a) The London Plan
- (b) NPPF

## 7.0 Extent of Harrow Town Centre Master Plan SPD

- 7.1 The proposed Master Plan is currently being scoped; this includes the extent of the area to be covered by the SPD. There are already several boundaries that cover the Town Centre, including:
- (a) the Business Improvement District (BID) boundary;
  - (b) the statutory town centre boundary (identified in the Local Plan); and
  - (c) ward boundaries.
- 7.2 As noted above, the master plan will cover a range of issues (i.e. land use / infrastructure) and regard will need to be given as to whether the boundary of the master plan / SPD goes beyond the administrative boundaries above to better reflect land use, character and functional relationships (i.e. with nearby open space, the impact of development in the vicinity of the town centre etc).
- 7.3 The draft SPD will set out the boundary of the SPD and the rationale for it.

## 8.0 Broad Outputs for the Harrow Town Centre Master Plan SPD:

- 8.1 The following outputs and outcomes are envisaged for the preparation of the Harrow Town Centre Masterplan SPD:
- **Understanding the past** – what are the significance of the development of Harrow Town Centre within in the London context
  - **The challenge of the present** – what are the recent issues and challenges (social, economic and spatial) that differ from the Area Action Plan
  - **Learning the Harrow Town Centre**
    - Understanding the Urban Structure – uses, heights, grains, plots, blocks, soft and hard sites
    - Key streets and spaces
    - Key Buildings and Sites
    - How does it compare with similar town centres – empirical analysis
  - **Peeking into the Future** – What can Harrow Town Centre be in the future
  - **Strategic Vision**
  - **Objectives**
  - **Key routes and spaces**
  - **Scale, height and massing**

- **Uses**
- **Movement**
- **Potential strategic projects** – short/medium/long term

## **9.0 Timeframes**

- 9.1 The proposed timeframes for the preparation of the SPD are being developed as part of the scoping exercise. Broadly speaking, formal consultation on the draft SPD is likely to occur towards the end of 2023 or early 2024.
- 9.2 The Master Plan SPD will set out the vision for Harrow Town Centre and provide guidance for the area. Given this, it is envisaged that a wide range of consultation will be undertaken during the document's preparation; this will be in addition to the formal six-week consultation on the draft SPD itself.
- 9.3 The Panel will receive reports on the progress of the SPD at key stages, including the draft document before it is presented to Cabinet.

## **Implications of the recommendation**

### **Considerations**

#### **Ward Councillors' comments**

Ward Councillors input will be sought during the preparation of the SPD and any formal consultation which is a statutory requirement.

**Performance Issues** – will be dealt with as the SPD is being developed, these will be considered by the Cabinet + Project Team

**Environmental Implication** – None

**Data Protection Implications** – None

**Risk Management Implications** - TBC

### **Finance Implications**

Costs of the preparation of the SPD will be met from within existing resources within the Regeneration and Planning Policy teams. Any additional support would only be procured if budget is available.



## **Legal Implications**

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) states that, if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 provide guidance on the preparation and adoption of supplementary planning documents.

Although the proposed SPD is not a development plan document it will, on adoption, be a material consideration in the determination of development proposals within Harrow Town Centre.

The Council is required by law to consult on the SPD and to take into account all consultation responses received before adopting the SPD. As soon as reasonably practicable after adopting an SPD, the Council must (i) make available the SPD and an adoption statement and (ii) send a copy of the adoption statement to any person who asked to be notified of the adoption of the SPD.

## **Equalities implications / Public Sector Equality Duty**

By definition, supplementary planning documents cannot introduce new policies nor modify adopted policies and do not form a part of the development plan. Rather, their role is to supplement a 'parent' policy in a development plan document. The proposed SPD the subject of this report will supplement adopted policies within the Harrow Core Strategy and subsequent Development Management Policies Local Plan. A full equalities impact assessment was carried out at each formal stage in the preparation of the Core Strategy. Similarly, the London Plan (including Policy D9: Tall Buildings) was subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment as part of the broader Integrated Impact Assessment of the Plan. This will be reviewed to determine whether there is a need to prepare a SPD specific EqIA.

## **Council Priorities**

### **Putting residents first.**

The progression of a Harrow Town Centre Masterplan is a commitment by the Council in the Corporate Plan that was adopted by Cabinet on 16 February 2023. This report and the proposed approach sets out the approach by the Council to deliver the Harrow Town Centre Masterplan SPD, which would reflect the priorities of the Council to Restore Pride in Harrow, Put Residents First and for a borough that is clean and safe. .

## **Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance**

Chief Planning Officer: Viv Evans



Date: 26 April 2023

## **Mandatory Checks**

Ward Councillors notified: Yes

EqIA carried out: No: for information only

EqIA cleared by: N/A

## **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

### **Contact:**

Ming Cheng, Masterplanner, [ming.cheng@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:ming.cheng@harrow.gov.uk)

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### **Background Papers:**

Harrow Core Strategy: <https://www.harrow.gov.uk/downloads/file/26426/local-plan-core-strategy.pdf>

Harrow and Wealdstone Area Action Plan: <https://www.harrow.gov.uk/planning-developments/harrow-wealdstone-area-action-plan>

London Plan: [The London Plan 2021 | London City Hall](#)