

6 OBJECTIVE 1: A NEW CENTRE AROUND THE STATION

The area around Blackhorse Road Station is currently run down and unattractive, offers few facilities for users of the station and a poor entrance to the area.

Encouragement of well designed mixed use developments combining homes, shops, services and business premises at high density around transport nodes is a strong feature of both National planning policy and the London Plan. Waltham Forest's UDP sets out policies to encourage such developments as part of an 'urban renaissance'.¹¹

In line with these policies and the expressed wishes of local residents and businesses¹², the council will support the creation of a new centre for the Blackhorse Lane area around the station, incorporating homes, new public spaces and a small number of shops, cafes/bars/restaurants and leisure facilities. The new centre will provide an attractive gateway to Waltham Forest and a focal point for the neighbourhood offering improved retail and leisure facilities for existing and new residents of the Blackhorse Lane area, workers in local firms and users of Blackhorse Road Station.

A vision and key design and development issues for the new centre are outlined in Section 12.2 of this plan and in the Station Hub and Waterfront Planning and Design Brief published separately.

6.1 The need for a new Neighbourhood Centre

In line with national planning policies, the council seeks to protect a hierarchy of town centres across the borough as designated in the UDP, comprising one Major Centre (Walthamstow Town Centre), 5 District Centres, 9 Neighbourhood Centres and 19 local retail parades. The area covered by this plan contains three designated local retail parades of varying quality (Higham Hill, Billet Road and Blackhorse Lane). Just to the south of the area lies Forest Road Neighbourhood Centre, which offers a small range of convenience shops and services catering mainly to very local residents. There are also a number of pubs, cafes and corner shops outside of the designated centres.

Proposals for new retail or leisure facilities outside of the designated centres will usually be resisted unless it can be shown that no suitable premises can be identified in one of the centres.¹³ National planning guidance however does state that "In areas of significant growth or where deficiencies are identified in the existing network of centres, new centres may be designated through the plan-making process, with priority given to deprived areas." In making decisions to change the status of centres (upgrading them or downgrading them) "consideration should be given to the relevant transport policies and strategies"¹⁴.

6.1.1 Ability of existing centres to meet demand

The Council commissioned a borough wide retail study in 2002¹⁵ which forecast the need for substantial additional convenience floorspace to 2012 in the Walthamstow and North Chingford areas. The study mainly looked at the potential for larger supermarkets and superstores but also notes that most people in Waltham Forest undertake 'top up' food shopping locally (in addition to a weekly shop, usually at a supermarket or superstore) which should be made possible within 'easy walking distance', defined as the maximum distance customers would wish to walk with heavy shopping bags. The report also noted that employees' needs are different, being focussed on lunchtime purchases, food and convenience products, sandwich shops, gifts and speciality purchases plus cafes, restaurants and bars and that these needs should "be catered for in the main employment areas and the town centre".

Consultation with residents and businesses in the Blackhorse Lane area suggests substantial demand for more (and a wider range of) shops, cafes, bars and restaurants within walking distance and conveniently located on the way to Blackhorse Road Station.¹⁶ The demand appears particularly strong for:

- An evening economy of cafes, bars and restaurants.
- Shops selling higher quality convenience goods.

This planning framework proposes encouraging development of up to 2000

new residential units plus new higher value commercial premises. The resulting change in the size and profile of the local resident and working population is likely to create significant additional demand for higher value convenience goods and eating and drinking places.

The potential of existing centres to improve or expand to meet this demand appears limited. The local retail parades are intended to only serve a very small area and cannot be expected to support a wider range of higher quality shops and services, particularly as they are not well placed in relation to public transport (with the exception of the Blackhorse Lane parade). The Forest Road Neighbourhood Centre is unlikely to be able to fulfil this demand as it is not within easy walking distance (with bags of shopping) of most of the Blackhorse Lane area, is particularly poorly located in relation to the main business areas and is far from central to the main development sites.

In conclusion, there is a deficiency in the network of local centres, particularly in relation to the business areas and in the context of the level of planned housing growth.

6.1.2. Deprivation

The Blackhorse Lane area is relatively deprived and in particular has a low level of car ownership¹⁷, suggesting that improvement of local shopping facilities should be a priority, in line with national guidance.

6.1.3. Meeting transport planning objectives

Transport policies at national, regional and local level seek to encourage walking, cycling and use of public transport. There is a clear opportunity to support these policies by expanding the existing centre opposite Blackhorse Road Station (the Blackhorse Lane local retail parade) rather than attempting to meet demand by expanding the other centres in or near the area, which are fairly poorly located in relation to public transport.

It is envisaged that many of the visits to shops in an expanded centre at the station would be made by people returning home via the station. By allowing people to combine convenience shopping with an

existing journey somewhere by tube or train, the new centre has the potential to reduce car trips in line with transport policy.

6.2 The Blackhorse Lane Neighbourhood Centre

Based on the analysis of demand and supply above, the Council has decided to upgrade and extend the existing Blackhorse Lane local parade into a Neighbourhood Centre, incorporating the shops and services created by the new development on site BHL1 opposite Blackhorse Road Station.

According to the UDP, Neighbourhood Centres are "important for everyday shopping for mainly food and grocery items and often have essential services such as post offices and chemists. [...] The cluster of shops and other commercial/ leisure activities serve as a focus for the community within the immediate walking distance."¹⁸

Policy BHLP2 The area marked on Figure 10 is designated as the Blackhorse Lane Neighbourhood Centre. Those units on the Eastern side of Blackhorse Lane designated in the UDP as the Blackhorse Lane Local Retail Parade (LRP6) are designated as the core area within the Neighbourhood Centre. Any new retail units created within the Neighbourhood Centre area in the period of this plan will also be considered to be designated as the core area. The new centre will be covered by UDP Policy TRL8 that seeks to protect and enhance the retail and leisure offer of such areas.

The Council will support the development of a range of facilities within the Blackhorse Lane Neighbourhood Centre of an appropriate scale to provide a focus for the local community and meet the day to day needs of local residents, businesses and users of the transport hub. Facilities could include convenience shopping, local services, small scale leisure, arts, cultural or entertainment uses and/or eating and drinking establishments.

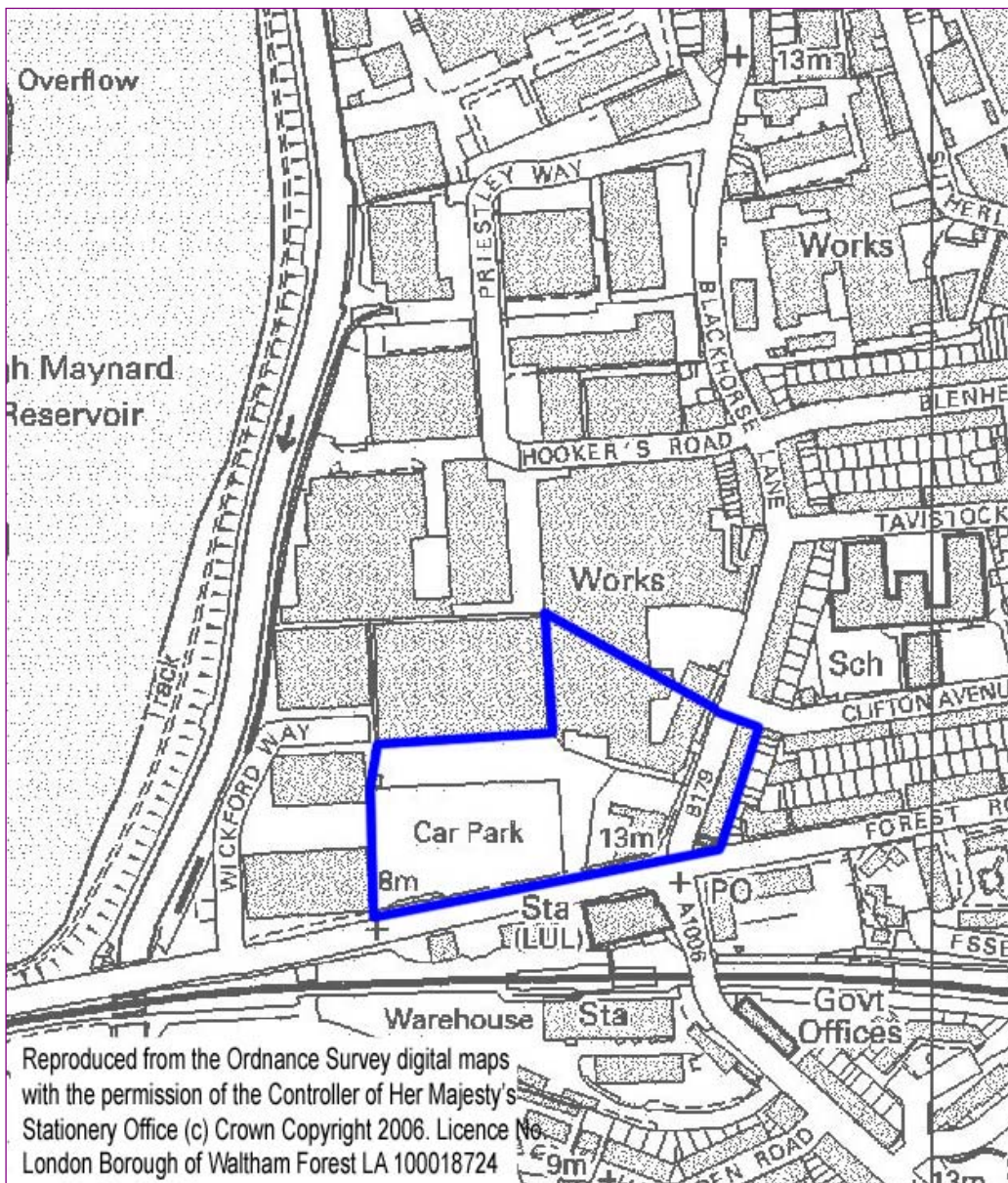
When developing retail and leisure facilities in the new Neighbourhood Centre, developers are encouraged to consider the priorities expressed by local residents through consultations¹⁹. In particular:

- There appears to be substantial demand for the development of bars, cafes and restaurants that are family friendly and open in the evening as well as during the day.
- Local people want higher quality shops. Some want national retailers but others would prefer independent shops.
- A post office, bank and/or cash machine and public toilets would all be popular features of the new development.

- Some residents have suggested a regular farmers' market in the proposed public square. In line with UDP Policy TRL18, this would be permitted "if no adverse environmental problems are presented and it can be demonstrated that the existing market in Walthamstow Town Centre will not be adversely affected."

The existing Standard Music Venue is the only live music venue in the area and popular with some local residents as well as attracting visitors to the area. The Council would therefore like to see a music venue re-provided within the new Neighbourhood Centre.

Figure 10. Blackhorse Lane Neighbourhood Centre



In line with UDP Policy TRL15, developers will be encouraged to provide public toilets (including for disabled people); baby changing and feeding facilities, cycle parking and recycling facilities. Developers will also be expected to work with the police and the Council in order to consider and address potential community safety issues arising from developing the evening economy (e.g. alcohol related disorder, safe travel and noise).

Note that the new Neighbourhood Centre is mainly on site BHL1 but also incorporates the existing Blackhorse Road Local Retail Parade (LRP6). This will ensure that these shops and cafes continue to be supported by planning policy. Recent investment in a number of these units provides a strong platform from which to build a successful new neighbourhood centre. The Council will seek to encourage visual, physical and design links between new retail developments on site BHL1 and the existing units on the other side of Blackhorse Lane.

6.2.1. Impact on existing centres

In deciding to create a new Neighbourhood Centre, the likely impact on existing centres has been considered. The only local shopping centres close enough for the proposed new centre to impact on are Forest Road Neighbourhood Centre, which lies approximately 850 metres to the East along Forest Road and Higham Hill Local Retail Parade which lies around 1 km to the North East on Higham Hill Road.

It is expected that there will only be a small negative impact on these existing centres because:

- The expected customer base of convenience shops within the new centre will be very different from the existing centres. Shops in the existing centres cater for a mixture of very local residents who walk to the centres and drivers from a wide catchment area who take advantage of lack of parking restrictions to drive to these shops or stop at them en route to other destinations. Shoppers using the new centre will largely be users of the transport hub and workers in local companies. For example, over 7,500 people exit Blackhorse Road station on a weekday, only a very few of whom will be existing users of Higham Hill Parade or Forest Road Centre.
- The new centre is expected to offer different goods and services to existing centres, in particular higher quality cafes, bars and restaurants, including an evening economy.

Furthermore it is estimated that any negative impact on existing centres will be offset by the increased resident and worker population and increased spending power in the area.

The likely impact on existing centres will be kept under review as proposals for the new Neighbourhood Centre come forward from developers and as the new shops and services open.