

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Blackhorse Lane Area Action Plan

Adoption Statement



January 2015

Prepared for:
Waltham Forest
Borough Council

REVISION SCHEDULE					
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1 London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) adopted the Blackhorse Lane Area Action Plan (AAP) on 5th March 2015. Work to develop the AAP was undertaken by LBWF between 2011 and 2014. URS was commissioned to lead on a parallel process of Sustainability Appraisal (SA).
- 1.1.2 SA is a legally required¹ mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of a draft plan, and alternatives, in terms of sustainability issues, with a view to avoiding and mitigating adverse effects and maximising positives.
- 1.1.3 It is a requirement² that SA involves a series of procedural steps. The final step in the process involves preparing a 'statement' at the time of plan adoption with a view to explaining:
- 1 – The 'story' of plan-making / SA up to the point of adoption; and
 - 2 – Measures decided concerning the monitoring of plan implementation.
- 1.1.4 This Adoption Statement considers (1) and (2) in turn.

¹ Since provision was made through the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 it has been understood that local planning authorities must carry out a process of Sustainability Appraisal alongside plan-making. The centrality of SA to Local Plan-making is emphasised in the National Planning Policy Framework (2012).

² Procedures are prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, which were prepared in order to transpose into national law the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive.

2 THE PLAN-MAKING / SA ‘STORY’

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Essentially, SA fed-into and informed plan-making in two ways:

- 1 – Appraisal of alternatives informed preparation of the draft plan.
- 2 – Appraisal of the draft plan informed plan finalisation.

2.1.2 This Chapter considers each of the three plan-making / SA steps in turn.

2.1.3 In line with regulatory requirements, there is a focus on explaining the plan-makers’ reasons for choosing the preferred approach in-light of SA findings (and consultation responses), and hence the way in which plan-making involved the integration of environmental / sustainability considerations.³

2.2 Step 1 – Appraisal of alternatives (to inform preparation of the draft plan)

2.2.1 In autumn 2012, prior to finalisation of the draft (‘proposed submission’) plan, there was an appraisal of

- alternative approaches to addressing nine area-wide policy issues; and
- alternative aspirations for ten opportunity sites.

2.2.2 Appraisal findings were then published in the SA Report published alongside the proposed submission version of the plan, in December 2012. The SA Report also explained the Council’s reasons for selecting / developing the preferred approach subsequent to and in-light alternatives appraisal. This information was presented within ‘Part 2’ of the SA Report, which answered the question: *‘What has plan-making / SA involved up to this stage?’*

2.2.3 The following is a brief summary.

[Appraisal of alternative approaches to addressing area-wide policy issues](#)

2.2.4 Alternative approaches were appraised for the following nine area-wide policy issues: Housing density; Affordable housing; Employment; Neighbourhood centre; Design and local character; Public open space and nature conservation; Flood risk; Transport; Social infrastructure. In many instances, the Council agreed with the appraisal findings and ensured that they were reflected in the preferred policy approach. There were no instances of the Council’s preferred approach clearly conflicting with the SA findings.

[Appraisal of alternative aspirations for opportunity sites](#)

2.2.5 The draft plan (2012) identified aspirations for thirteen ‘opportunity sites’ within the AAP area. For each site, prior to preparing the draft plan, there was the need for the Council to determine an appropriate ‘aspiration’ for each site and, more specifically, develop policy with a view to helping to ensure that the aspiration is realised. Given the importance of these decisions, it was determined that for ten of the sites there was a need to appraise alternative approaches as an interim SA step. In many instances, the Council agreed with the appraisal findings and ensured that they were reflected in the preferred policy approach. There were no instances of the Council’s preferred approach clearly conflicting with the SA findings.

³ The information to be provided in the Adoption Statement is listed in Article 9 of the SEA Directive / Regulation 16 of the Regulations.

2.3 Step 2 – Appraisal of the draft plan (to inform plan finalisation)

2.3.1 Two versions of the draft plan were subjected to appraisal: a working draft version and then the draft ('proposed submission') version that was published for consultation in December 2012. Set out below is a summary of appraisal findings, and a discussion of ways in which appraisal findings fed-into plan-making.

Appraisal of the *working draft plan*

2.3.2 Key points raised included:

- Although there are clear benefits to promoting higher density development in the station area, there are also some question marks. In particular, it is important to note that this part of the AAP area is in close proximity to the wetlands and reservoirs to the west. It could be the case that higher density development in this location could lead to unacceptable recreational pressure on biodiversity. However, this effect is uncertain, and it is likely that any potential effects will be avoided or sufficiently mitigated (e.g. through careful management of access).
- It is also the case that the station area is relatively important (i.e. important in the local context) from a historical perspective. It could be the case that higher density development increases the chances that **historic character** is lost. However, again, this effect is uncertain. It is likely that impacts can be avoided through the careful integration of heritage features.
- It will be important to ensure that reducing the prominence of **traditional industries** does not impact significantly on sectors of the community that rely on these businesses.
 - It was **recommended** that the Council makes a clear statement regarding the employment prospects of those local residents employed in existing industries that will be not be supported as part of regeneration.
 - It was **recommended** that decisions on whether or not to incorporate existing businesses should be made on the basis of the importance of that business and the jobs it supports to the local area, rather than purely on the basis of current 'success'
- 'Creating a new character' could result in negative effects if it results in existing **character and links to the past** being entirely erased. It is not expected that this will be the case, given that the policy approach seeks to ensure that existing buildings in the area that make a positive contribution in this respect will be integrated as part of redevelopment. However, the emphasis on creating a new character for the area will mean that many buildings will not be retained.
- The only questionable effect of increasing access to Walthamstow Wetlands relates to the potential for increased **recreational disturbance to sensitive habitats** and wildlife (particularly wintering waterfowl). However, this effect is uncertain, particularly given that there will also be new open spaces created, which will themselves be used for recreational purposes. If there is any residual potential for impacts to the Walthamstow Wetlands, it is likely that effects can be avoided or sufficiently mitigated through careful management of access and other practical measures.
- The '**Station Hub and Waterfront**' site is associated with some uncertainty in terms of effects to biodiversity given proximity to the Walthamstow Wetlands. It was also recommended that a firmer commitment could be made regarding the future of the Royal Standard Pub.
- The '**Car Wash**' site is also associated with some uncertainty in terms of effects to biodiversity given proximity to the Walthamstow Wetlands.

- In relation to the **Blackhorse Rd / Hawarden Road** site, the appraisal noted that, because educational benefits will not be felt for some years (i.e. until the school is built), it is important to consider that benefits that might be derived in the shorter term from alternative uses of this site. It was recommended that a policy approach be developed that provides certainty in terms of temporary uses.
- In relation to the **Sutherland Road** site, the appraisal concluded the following:
 - As a result of proposals for this site, existing industrial uses that are less compatible with nearby residential would be lost. This would result in the loss of important local employment. It is noted that 'the primary employment function of the area' would remain, but the focus would be on creative industries. Given that existing residents that rely on current employment uses would not be expected to take up the newly available jobs, it may be that some negative impacts could be expected in terms of access to local employment opportunities. However, newly created employment opportunities would be well suited to the skills and aspirations of residents that move into the area in the future. Furthermore, it is important to note that maintenance of the status quo (i.e. the maintenance of existing industrial uses) would impede residential development at a key location, which in turn would hinder the achievement of regeneration for the wider area.
 - It was recommended that the policy approach for this site should specify the degree to which it will be possible to make use of existing buildings in the area.
- In relation to both the **Billet Works** and **Webb's Industrial Estate** sites, the appraisal noted that some existing industrial uses would be lost; but concluded that the scale of this effect would *not* be such that there would be impacts in terms of access to suitable employment for existing local residents.

2.3.3

The Council responded formally to the appraisal of the working draft plan – see **Box 1** – and this information was presented in the SA Report (December 2012).

Box 1: Responding to and taking into account the appraisal of the working draft plan

The following text was prepared by the Council, and presented within the SA Report:

- In terms of unacceptable recreational pressure on biodiversity, reference is made in the Proposed Submission version of the AAP for the need to mitigate such effects and incorporate measures to enhance biodiversity as part of development. Greater reference is also made to the Walthamstow Wetlands project, including references to managed access, screening sensitive areas, potentially closing pathways during breeding cycles, and habitat enhancement works.
- In terms of heritage features, reference has been made in the section on design and local character of what buildings are recognised of holding some value, and that where possible these should be retained and incorporated into new developments. Guidance on building heights also seeks to achieve a balance that allows for higher density development without over dominating the built heritage. This will help ensure existing character links to the past are not entirely erased.
- In terms of employment, reference has been made to the need to up-skill the local workforce and the important role new developments can play in terms of providing new training and education opportunities. In particular, where this is linked to the construction phase of development, there are opportunities for increasing skills in matters such as installation of renewable technologies and green roofs; which complements the Mayor's aspirations for the Upper Lee Valley to grow as a green industries hub. In addition, reference is also made to retaining valued local employers such as Dunhill's, and assisting displaced businesses to find alternative sites in the borough; such as in land designated as SIL. In terms of car free developments, reference is made to the opportunities that development sites around Blackhorse Road Station (particularly BHL1, BHL2 and BHL8) offer. It is made clear that such opportunities are linked to appropriate travel plans and developer contributions as schemes come forward so that an improved pedestrian and cyclist environment needs to be secured for this to be a viable option. The potential for car clubs to help reduce demand for car ownership is also cited.
- The Proposed Submission version of the AAP includes site plans illustrating key constraints and opportunities for key sites. In relation to Sutherland Road, this highlights where it is anticipated that existing problematic employment uses offer scope for conversion into units for creative businesses and light industry more compatible with surrounding and emerging residential.
- Guidance on sites for both Billet Works, and Webb's Industrial Estate make clear the need for new, fit for purpose employment space as part of mixed use developments to ensure a sustainable pattern of growth and ensure the areas employment function is not lost.
- Site guidance in the Proposed Submission document makes a firm commitment to the retention of the Royal Standard Pub (Tryst Public House and Standard Music Venue) into redevelopment. Reference is also made to the need to negotiate demolition and construction phases to minimise disturbance to biodiversity for both the Station Hub and Car Wash sites.
- Guidance on the Blackhorse Road/ Hawarden Road site includes references to opportunities for temporary storage uses in advance of the development of the new school; since such an approach would not preclude the longer term aspirations for the site.

Appraisal of the draft ('proposed submission') plan

- 2.3.4 The appraisal of the draft plan was presented within the SA Report under 23 headings; one for each of the sustainability objectives established through scoping. Set out below is a summary of appraisal findings and recommendations.

Targeted approach to growth

- 2.3.5 Some of the most deprived communities in London live in the Blackhorse Lane area. Pockets of under-used industrial and poor quality environmental land are recognised as reducing the quality of life for residents and for reducing the attractiveness of the area to potential investors. The AAP takes a targeted approach to growth in the area by seeking to prioritise development on these under-utilised and vacant brownfield sites in locations that are on the whole well connected to public transport. In doing so the approach seeks to deliver new housing, business and retail space as a key element of mixed-use schemes in the Opportunity Sites. This approach should contribute significantly to enhancing the attractiveness of the area to inward investors, strengthening the local economy and improving employment opportunities for those that live and work in the area through the delivery of new business and retail space.

- 2.3.6 In the longer term, the delivery of new housing should provide a positive contribution to the Borough's housing target and housing need. The AAP identifies the need to deliver a mix of unit types (including higher density development close to Blackhorse Lane Station to meet the housing needs of younger people and larger homes further away from the new Neighbourhood Centre to meet the needs of families) and tenure types (including quality affordable homes) that is consistent with housing policies outlined in the Adopted Core Strategy and the Emerging Development Management Policies DPD. This should contribute towards ensuring that a sufficient amount of affordable housing and family homes are delivered within the area.

- 2.3.7 The AAP identifies a need to diversify employment opportunities in the area by promoting a shift away from traditional industries towards the promotion of creative industries through provision of small/medium sized business units. While this approach is expected to have positive effects in terms of generating new employment opportunities it may also have some negative effects in terms of reducing employment opportunities for particular sectors of the community that rely on these businesses.

Protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment

- 2.3.8 The AAP sets out a number of policy measures that will enhance and protect the area's most precious existing biodiversity assets, including the Walthamstow Wetlands. Policy measures are also included that will increase provision of new green spaces and green infrastructure as part of new developments. This should have significant positive effects on the health and well-being of residents and workers whilst also enhancing the attractiveness of the area to people currently living out with the area.

- 2.3.9 The AAP also recognises the important contribution that a number of unprotected historic buildings make to the area. The AAP has therefore taken an approach which promotes heritage led regeneration which should ensure that such buildings will be incorporated into redevelopment schemes where it is viable to do so.

Opportunity sites

- 2.3.10 13 opportunity sites are identified within the AAP for a range of uses including housing, employment, business, retail, social infrastructure and green space. The delivery of these sites will contribute towards: meeting housing need, providing employment opportunities; increasing provision of business/commercial spaces; boosting retail provision; enhancing the vitality and viability of the new Neighbourhood Centre; increasing provision of education facilities; and reducing the need to travel. The preferred approach to many of the opportunity sites has been identified subsequent to a careful consideration (informed by SA) of alternative aspirations.

Plan finalisation

- 2.3.11 Subsequent to the draft plan / SA Report consultation the plan was finalised, which in practice involved preparing 'Main Modifications'. A consultation was held as part of the process of preparing 'modifications'. No further SA work was undertaken, however, as it was recognised that the issues that were a focus of modifications were minor from an SA perspective.
- 2.3.12 The Inspector's Report published in October 2014 explains that the Government appointed Inspector has found the AAP to be 'sound', subject to the incorporation of modifications. It is worthwhile highlighting some of the instances of the Inspector referring to issues raised within the SA Report – see **Box 2**.

Box 2: Issues considered by the Inspector within his report, which were also a focus of the SA Report

- In relation to **regeneration** objectives, the Inspector concluded that: *“The AAP has been developed in the wider strategic context of the Mayor’s Upper Lee Valley Opportunity Area Planning Framework, dated July 2013. On this basis alone it is clear that the regeneration of Blackhorse Lane has been co-ordinated with the redevelopment of other areas in the Upper Lee Valley, such as Tottenham Hale.”*
- In relation to **biodiversity** considerations, the plan has been modified so that the Key Diagram shows the proposed entrances to Walthamstow Wetlands.
- In response to a Greater London Authority (GLA) recommendation around the need for the AAP to be more ‘visionary’ and ‘ambitious’ (given the latest evidence of housing need in London) the plan has been modified to increase the **scale of growth** from 2,300 homes to 2,500.
- In relation to development **density**, the Inspector concluded that it would not be appropriate to set higher development densities given the limited extent of areas with high public transport access levels (**PTAL**); however, policy wording was modified to ensure careful consideration is given to maximising density at the planning application stage. Similarly, in relation to **building heights**, the Inspector concludes that: *“For these reasons I find that the policy is justified insofar as it relates to all of the Opportunity Sites apart from Site BHL1, Station Hub and Waterfront. This finding is consistent with the general thrust of the Plan that this area should be the focus of redevelopment. It accords with Policy BHL3, which seeks to concentrate higher density residential development around the station.”*
- In relation to **affordable housing**, the Inspector concluded that: *“I can see no rationale for adopting a different approach within the AAP area from that which operates across the remainder of the Borough. In reaching this view I note that paragraph 3.2.16 of the supporting text is clear that the headline target of 50 % is subject to viability considerations. Paragraph 3.2.17 envisages site specific circumstances where it might be possible to deviate from these standards, which reflects [national guidance].”*
- In relation to **employment land**, the Inspector references (amongst other things) the URS Report *Evaluation of Blackhorse Lane and Lea Bridge Gateway SILs* (January 2014), which found that the Strategic Industrial Land (SIL) – which had been promoted as a location for mixed-use development - is an active employment site. The Inspector concludes that: *“This... gives me a sound basis on which to reject criticism of the nature and geographical extent of the SIL designation at Blackhorse Lane.”* The Inspector also references London guidance, which states that: *“If the pan-London approach to industrial capacity is to be effective, it must be implemented and sustained by boroughs consistently. Departures from it will send confused messages to developers and tend to increase the ‘hope value’ of land making it uncompetitive for industry or even lead to it being kept vacant and out of productive, industrial use. [C]hanges to the SIL framework in the London Plan and individual SIL boundaries in DPDs should only be undertaken through a plan-led approach in the light of strategic and local reviews...”*
- In relation to **neighbourhood centres**, the Inspector responds to representations in relation to AAP Policy BHL7 that seek an additional clause in the policy to permit new retail and support services beyond the neighbourhood centre and retail parades to serve the everyday needs of a growing population. The Inspector concludes that: *“... the vicinity of Blackhorse Lane and Forest Road [is] a neighbourhood centre. In my view it is likely to be a convenient location for prospective occupiers of the new community that is planned for this area. It would directly adjoin the main public transport nodes, which would be a natural focal point. To permit additional individual convenience retail units outside these locations has the potential to undermine the Council’s strategy, particularly as no size threshold has been put forward. This could detract from the aim to create a... community hub in the neighbourhood centre...”*
- A more specific issue dealt with in the Inspector’s Report relates to the **Tryst Public House and Standard Music Venue**. English Heritage had taken exception to policy wording that laid the ground for possible demolition and redevelopment, suggesting that the building is an undesignated ‘heritage asset’. The Inspector agrees, that the building is an undesignated heritage asset, but does not feel that it should be given stringent protection through policy. Rather the Inspector concludes that it will be possible to take account of heritage considerations at the planning application stage, stating that: *“In the event that an application came forward... [it would be] for the Council to consider whether it would be appropriate to impose conditions that met the policy tests. It is conceivable... that a scheme for recording the building and its contents, and the provision of a permanent, public, historical record... should be agreed.”*

3 MEASURES DECIDED CONCERNING MONITORING

- 3.1.1 Chapter 6 of the AAP document deals with monitoring, stating that: *“Following a Plan-Monitor-Manage approach, the Council will have an effective monitoring framework in place to measure the effectiveness and delivery of the Blackhorse Lane Area Action Plan. This will include identifying any unintended and unforeseen consequences. We will explain why any objectives, policies and targets are not being met/delivered and where feasible will recommend action to rectify the situation. We will publish this work in an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) on the Council’s website every year for public scrutiny.”*
- 3.1.2 A list of monitoring indicators is proposed in order to ensure that monitoring captures the performance of the AAP in terms of each of the plan objectives. There is not a direct link to the SA objectives; however, it is clear that the list of monitoring indicators is broadly appropriate from an SA perspective, i.e. it is the case that the predicted draw-backs of the plan and uncertainties (as highlighted within the SA Report) will be a focus of monitoring.
- 3.1.3 The monitoring recommendations presented within the SA Report were as follows:
- *“The creation of cycle and pedestrian links and improvements to public transport provision are identified as key actions within the AAP. The Council might ideally wish to monitor the transport choices taken by new and existing residents.*
 - *The SA has identified a number of positive impacts in relation to residential development. The amount of new housing delivered within the centre could be a focus for monitoring going forward.*
 - *The SA has identified a number of positive impacts in relation to the local economy and employment. It will be important to monitor development with a view towards boosting the local economy and creating new job opportunities.*
 - *The importance of good design in order to avoid impacts to heritage assets has been identified through this SA. This could be a focus of monitoring going forward.”*