



WALTHAM FOREST LOCAL PLAN
WALTHAMSTOW TOWN CENTRE AREA ACTION PLAN

Hearing Statement

**Inspector's Matters and Issues – Matter 3 –
Vision, Objectives and Area Wide Policies**

Hearing Session – 17th December 2013

1. Is the AAP consistent with the policy contents of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)?

Relevant Representations

1.1 No relevant representations

Council Response

1.2 It is the Council's view that the AAP is consistent with the NPPF. The PAS Toolkit – Soundness (WSD11) sets out and evidences how the AAP is in conformity with the NPPF.

1.3 Within the AAP, is a 'model' policy WTC1 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development clearly reflects the NPPF central themes of 'taking a positive approach', a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development', 'working proactively' and securing 'development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area'. In addition, paragraphs 7.1 – 7.8 set the national policy context within which the AAP sits. In accordance with the NPPF, it is the Council's view that the AAP:

- Supports the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development';
- Ensures that the sites and scale of development identified in the Plan is not subject to such a scale of obligations, standards as policy burdens that cumulatively threatens the AAP ability to be delivered viably (Evidenced by KE156);
- Meets objectively assessed needs for the area and is deliverable, realistic and flexible;
- Plans positively to support local development, shaping and directing development in the area and encourages economic activity;
- Seeks to support the existing business sectors and identify and plans for new and emerging sectors;
- Seeks to promote a competitive town centre, providing customer choice, diverse retail offer and a range of other opportunities such as leisure, cultural and the 'night-time economy';
- Seeks to improve the town centres vitality and viability;
- Retains and enhances the existing market to ensure it remains attractive and competitive;
- Encourages significant residential development (through mixed uses schemes) in a town centre location;

- Locates uses (e.g. supermarkets, cinemas and retail) with significant movements in the town centre location and maximises opportunities for sustainable transport;
- Encourages development the 'functions well', 'adds' to the overall quality of the town centre and which also creates safe and accessible environments;
- Encourages new development that establishes a 'strong sense of place' and creates 'attractive and comfortable' places.
- Responds to local character and history, whilst also encouraging 'innovation'.
- Optimises site potential;
- Plans positively for the provision of shared space, community facilities and other local services; and
- Seeks a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment.

2. Are there outstanding issues in relation to the conformity of the AAP with the London Plan especially in relation to housing and transport matters?

Relevant Representation

2.1 wtcps27, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55 (GLA) – The AAP is not considered to be in general conformity with the London Plan in respect of housing density and parking.

2.2 Additional Representation Received from the GLA on 29/11/2013 - Agreement that density and transport matters would no longer be an issue of non-general conformity with the London Plan. However, states that Waltham Forest Council's approach to dealing with density, particularly in relation to the need to address housing needs and population growth, should be more ambitious.

Council Response

2.3 Further to representation wtcps48 and wtcps54 as it can be seen from the additional representation from the GLA (received 29/11/13), following a series of meetings GLA and Waltham Forest officers the GLA came to the agreement that density and parking would no longer be an issue of non-general conformity with the London Plan and that the "Walthamstow Town Centre draft AAP is therefore in general conformity with the London Plan".

2.4 The Council will propose to modify the AAP to ensure that TFL are included as a delivery partner in the creation of a link between

Walthamstow Queens Road Station and the High Street in the Infrastructure Plan (section 35).

2.5 The Council welcomes the GLA's broad agreement on this issue and the acceptance of the definition of Walthamstow Town Centre as an "urban" location in relation to achieving appropriate housing densities (in accordance with Table 3.2, page 85, of the London Plan). The Council is of the view that the definition of "urban" as set out in the London Plan is appropriate for Walthamstow both in terms of its physical characteristics and in the indicative density ranges of between 200-700 hr/ha.

2.6 The Council does not however accept the implication made by the GLA that it is lacking ambition in seeking to optimise higher housing densities as part of achieving mixed use development of high quality in terms of design and placemaking. The Council would point to a number of new, mixed-use residential schemes within the town centre recently granted planning permission, all of which have been significantly greater in both scale and density than the prevailing characteristics within the town centre area. These include the new Arcade (Opportunity Site 7) development on Hoe Street, a 5-storey development of 121 new homes, cinema, restaurant and retail uses, the Solum scheme adjacent to Walthamstow Central station comprising 69 residential units across two 7/8-storey blocks, a 12/13-storey Travelodge hotel and smaller retail uses, and the recently granted 7-11 storey development at South Grove (Opportunity Site 15) for 245 residential units, a Morrisons superstore and smaller retail/commercial uses. These developments are within a density range of around 450-470 hr/ha and therefore fall comfortably within the "urban" density definition of between 200-700 hr/ha. In addition, all of these major schemes have enjoyed positive support from the GLA/Design for London.

2.7 Notwithstanding the challenging nature of some of these developments, there is therefore sufficient scope for increased densities to come forward on future schemes, subject to a high quality of design and proposals addressing other important key policy criteria such as context and local character, as set out in London Plan policy and the Mayor's Housing SPG. Indeed, the Council would not be averse to considering schemes above the "urban" density range subject to careful consideration of the site's location, impact, quality of design, response to context and other relevant policy factors.

2.8 Finally, the Council would also point to other identified "opportunity sites" set out in the AAP which cumulatively aim to provide up to 2,000 new residential units within the town centre area. The Council is therefore firmly committed to achieving its regeneration objectives in an ambitious, positive and design-led way, whilst taking full account of the need to consider the wider policy context as set out in relevant national and regional planning documentation.

3. Is the AAP consistent with relevant policies in the Core Strategy and the Development Management Policies Local Plan?

Relevant Representations

3.1 wtcps22 – Barclays Bank – The policy wording in WTCAAP should make it clear that financial services retailers such as the Bank are appropriate in all designated shopping frontages, without restriction (particularly the primary shopping frontage).

3.2 wtcps32, 33 34 (Thames Water) – Reference to Development Management Policy DM35 (water) would be helpful to make it clear that development at the key sites will be expected to consider water and waste water infrastructure capacity issues.

Council Response

3.3 It is the Council's view that the AAP is consistent with the relevant policies in the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD. Where appropriate the justification refers to relevant Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD policies. In addition, paragraph 7.16 – 7.19 summarise the relevant Core Strategy Policies which are relevant to the AAP. Appendix 2 – Related Policy Reference relates/links the relevant London Plan, Core Strategy, Development Management Policies and other documents (e.g. SPD) to the relevant topic area in the AAP. The Council could propose to change the topic column to 'AAP Policy' and reference the relevant AAP policies if this were to make the appendix clearer?

3.4 In relation to wtcps22, the Council considers that the suggested change is outside the scope of the WTC AAP. The Council's shopping frontages policy is contained in the Development Management Policies Document (Policy DM25). It is generally applicable throughout the borough and applies to Walthamstow Town Centre. In implementing this policy, the WTC AAP document further clarifies how the policy would apply to specific areas of the town centre including Selbourne Walk shopping centre (the Retail Precinct), the Leisure and Entertainment Hub and St James Quarter.

3.5 At the examination stage on the Development Management Policies document, the Bank submitted a representation on this same matter and modifications were made to the policy granting exceptions for qualifying uses such as banks and building societies to be considered. Policy DM25 as currently adopted (Appendix 1) fully reflects the Inspector's recommendations.

3.6 The Council considers that it is not necessary to include a further policy in the WTC AAP as suggested. This would be an unnecessary repetition of Policy DM25.

3.7 In relation to wtcp32, 33, 34 the Council has taken on board the comments received from Thames water and paragraph 13.17 of the document includes a reference to DM35.

- 4. Will the policies and objectives in the AAP contribute towards the strategic aims of the CS, in particular the delivery of up to 2,000 dwellings in the town centre area?**

Relevant Representations

4.1 No relevant representation

Council Response

4.2 It is the Council's view that the aims and objectives of the AAP will contribute to all the strategic aims of the Core Strategy. As stated in the answer to question 3, appendix 2 demonstrates how policies and the proposal in the plan relates and support the other policies in the Council's Local Plan (including the Core Strategy). Note the proposed amendment to this table in answer to question 3 above.

4.3 In line with the Core Strategy (KE165), it is the Council's view that the policies and objectives of the AAP set a positive 'pro-growth' planning policy framework for the town centre, promoting sustainable housing and economic growth and focussing regeneration activities.

4.4 It is the Council's view that the AAP will be a key document which will facilitate and assist in the delivery of up to 2,000 new homes as set out in policy CS2. It is the Council's view that the AAP identifies all the sites within the town centre with 'significant' housing capacity which has a 'reasonable' chance of being delivered within the Plan period. The AAP proposes appropriate levels of housing on these sites having considered factors including density (see response to question 2), appropriate building heights (see response to wtcp4 below), context and character of the town centres and public transport accessibility. It provides developers with 'certainty' and 'security' and thus confidence to bring identified sites forward for development.

4.5 Table 1 below demonstrates that the town centre has sufficient capacity to provide 2,000 new homes and the ability to deliver those units by the end of the Plan period.

Table 1 – Housing delivery in WTC AAP

Site Type	Net Capacity (No. of proposed units less demolished units)				
	Total	Financial Year			
		2011 - 2014	2015 - 2019	2020 - 2024	2025 onwards
Sites designated in WTC AAP (large sites)	1599	121	504	674	300
Sites designated in WTC AAP (small sites)	113	0	113	0	0
Large sites not designated in the AAP but with its boundary	69	69	0	0	0
Small sites not designated in the AAP but with its boundary	274	148	31	47	48
Total	2055	338	648	721	348

4.6 A site is considered to be ‘large’ if it is larger than 0.25ha in size.

4.7 ‘Large sites which are not designated but within the boundary of the AAP’ include sites which have either been completed (since 2011) or have started construction (e.g. Station Car Park Phase 1) and thus not been designated in the AAP.

4.8 ‘Small sites which are not designated but within the boundary of the AAP’ include sites which have either been completed (since 2011), have approval or have started construction (e.g. dwelling conversions, new units above shops etc.) which were too small to designate in the AAP.

4.9 Units in phase 2011 – 2014 includes homes completed (since 2011), approved and under construction (e.g. Arcade Site (121 units) and Station Car park phase 1 (69 units)).

4.10 The Council has projected completions in later phases based on the most up-to-date planning information. For example, the Council are currently considering a planning application on the South Grove site (Opportunity Site 15) for 252 units and is having pre-application discussions with applicants on the Brunner Road Industrial Units site (Opportunity Site 16) for approximately 350 units, Buxton Road Bingo Hall site (Opportunity Site 13) for approximately 90 units and Station Road car park phase two site (Opportunity Site 10) for approximately 100 units. These sites have been projected to be completed in the second phase. Small site projections are based on data contained in the Waltham Forest Housing Land Availability Study (resubmitted as evidence).

4.11 This demonstrates how the AAP has already attracted significant investment and developer interest in the town centre even before its adoption. This also supports the Council position that it can deliver approximately 900 homes (45% of the 2,000 homes) within the first five years of the plan. The Council will continue to proactively work with developers in to encourage and facilitate the development of Opportunity Sites in town centre.

5. What alternative options have been considered? How were these evaluated and are the choices made properly justified?

Relevant Representations

5.1 No relevant representations

Council Response

5.2 Alternative options have been considered throughout the development of the AAP. Policy options and site designations were considered through the development of the Walthamstow Masterplan (2007) (KE162), Walthamstow Town Centre Interim Planning Policy Framework (2008) (KE161) and East End of Walthamstow Masterplan (2011) (KE164). The development of these documents each involved significant public consultation. The AAP built on this work (and consultation). The Council undertook an initial 'Issues and Options' consultation to seek to establish a range of possible policy options in the AAP area. In addition the Council undertook a thorough analysis of the 'evidence base' in order to guide and justify proposed options. Options were also assessed against conformity with the NPPF (KE157), London Plan (KE90), Core Strategy (KE165) and Development Management DPD (KE166). This initial stage informed the development of the Walthamstow Town Centre Area Action Plan – Preferred Options (2011) (WSD16) which clearly set out a range of policy options (and preferred approach). This document states the justification of the preferred option (both in terms of area wide policies and site

designations) and explained why other options were discounted. The Walthamstow Town Centre Sustainability Appraisal – Preferred Option (WSD16) and Walthamstow Town Centre Sustainability Appraisal – Proposed Submission (WSD8) were also key documents in evaluating the various policy options. These documents supported the Council preferred approach and proposals carried forward in the Proposed Submission AAP. Options were also informed (and amended) in response to representations received during the consultation periods. Tables 1 and 2 of Statement of Consultations Regulations 22(1)(c) (WSD4) outline how the plan has been amended in response to representation on various options.

6. Are the proposals for retailing appropriate given changes in retailing and the rise in internet shopping?

Relevant Representations

6.1 wtcps5 (Sean Hexter) – The plan is lacking in encouraging the change of retail shops to alternative uses (when vacant).

6.2 wtcps8 (Sean Hexter) – The plan does not consider the changing nature of the retail world e.g. the growth in online retailing. The AAP should plan for a reduction in retail floorspace. The planned lack of parking (free parking) is a serious threat to the ‘success’ of the town centre.

Council Response

6.3 It is the Council view that they have appropriately considered the changes in retailing and rise of internet shopping.

6.4 The Waltham Forest Retail and Leisure study 2009 (KE64) assessed the quantitative and qualitative need for new retail floor space in Waltham Forest from the period 2009-2026. In paragraphs 3.4-3.6 and 18.12- 18.20 of the document, the growth of internet shopping and its likely effects on retailing is carefully considered. The study noted that the implications of the growth of internet shopping on the demand for retail space were uncertain. Therefore in predicting future floorspace, the study applied relatively cautious growth projections. The study notes that the growth in on-line sales may not always mean there would be a reduction in the need for retail floorspace. Apart from the fact some retailers operate on-line sales from their traditional retail outlets e.g. food store operators, most major retailers are now resolutely multi-channel businesses and offer customers a range of options, including buying online and ‘click and collect’ services, whereby products can be purchased online but picked up from stores or hubs.

6.5 The Council recognises that projections are subject to uncertainty. Accordingly in accordance with the recommendations of the study, the Council intends to review the retail floorspace projections during 2014. Clearly, these forecasts will need to be amended to reflect emerging

changes (including technological developments and trends as may be associated with the growth of internet shopping).

6.6 In addition, the Waltham Forest Retail and Leisure Study (2009) (KE64) demonstrates that there is significant capacity in the town centre for additional retail. With regard to the retail proposals included in the AAP document, as demonstrated by the recent planning applications submitted for the both the Arcade site (Opportunity Site 7) and South Grove (Opportunity Site 15), there continues to be strong interest and demand from retail developers in Walthamstow town centre. This is further demonstrated in the fact that the town centre has a 'low' vacancy rate which according to the Waltham Forest Retail Frontage review 2011/2012 (KE124) is currently 8% (the national average is 11.4%).

6.7 Whilst the AAP plans for an increase in retail floorspace the AAP so seeks to broad the role of the town centre and further diversify the uses within it. This approach is most obvious with the creation of the 'Leisure and Entertainment Zone' and the 'St James Street Quarter' (or redesigning the secondary shopping frontage) which are seeking to encourage leisure, entertainment, restaurant and cultural uses (and business floorspace) within the town centre. Specifically in relation to reference to 'internet shopping', the Council has proposed Main Modifications MM24. The Council recognise that this is a changing situation and will endeavour to monitor such trends through the plan-monitor-manage approach as set out in section 36 of the AAP.

7. Additional responses

7.1 wtcps4 (Poldrvaart) – Concern that increased building heights will have a negative impact of the urban context of the town centre. One of the 'charms' of the town centre is its human scale and fine views.

7.2 In response to wtcps4, the Council recognise that buildings that are out of character with an area can lead to potential adverse impacts. The Council have a robust 'plan led' policy approach to 'tall buildings' which is set out in Core Strategy policy CS15 and Development Management Policy DM32. As stated in CS15 part C, "tall buildings may only be appropriate on specific sites within the key growth areas..", of which Walthamstow Town Centre is one. It also states that appropriate sites (for tall buildings) will be identified as part of the development of AAPs. In addition, DM32 sets out a range of criteria which should be considered when assessing proposals for tall buildings. Each site Opportunity Site in the AAP has had a design appraisal undertaken, considering appropriate building heights for each site. Proposed building heights (a range) are proposed for each site. It is the Council's view that this approach ensures that the character and context of the town centre is enhanced and protected whilst also balancing the need to accommodate growth and encourage regeneration in the town centre.

7.3 wtcps10 (Simon Monk) – WTC3 should provide clear planning protection and guidance to the market and ‘small’ independent shops. Amend policy WTC3 part h to, “promote, support and enhance the development of Walthamstow Market and its independent shops”. The AAP should not only protect smaller units but also enhance and encourage ‘better’ use of these smaller units.

7.4 wtcps35 (Robert Lindsay-Smith) – Larger retail units would compete with smaller shops/market and put them out of business.

7.5 In response to wtcps10 and wtcps35, Policy WTC3 (h) mentions that the Council will promote, support and enhance the development of the market. Over the years, the Council has implemented a number of promotional interventions. A new look market has recently been implemented. The policy commits the Council to using its best endeavours to continue to apply a range of interventions as may be necessary to secure the long term survival of the High Street Market. The policy is particularly relevant in resisting proposals for the establishment of new open market operations elsewhere in the borough where this would impact on the vitality and viability of the Walthamstow High Street market. The Council considers that the policy as currently drafted provides sufficient protection.

7.6 With regard to the need to protect small independent shops, this is also supported on policy grounds. Walthamstow town centre already has many small shops – those with average frontage width of 5.5m and about 15m depth. The Council’s retail protection policy (Policy DM25) seeks to protect existing retail units, which captures all of these units. However, the Council has also identified the need to improve the range and quality of shop types – in particular, those of medium/larger size so as to attract some multiple and specialist retailers as well. It is in this context that Policy WTC3 (g) seeks to resist the sub-division of larger units only within the designated primary shopping frontage. It should also be noted the support and encouragement the AAP gives to ‘small business’ in the St James Street Quarter. Further support is also demonstrated through Council schemes such as shop front improvements.

7.7 With regard to ensuring the better use of small shops, there are limits to what the WTC AAP can deliver. Planning regulation curtails local authority powers with regard who occupies a retail property and the range/quality of goods sold in retail shops. Furthermore, the operation of the use classes order means that the Council cannot prevent some changes of use from taking place. While acknowledging the operation of these controls, the Council’s strategic objectives for this town centre seek to create a successful and ‘better’ town centre environment to attract new retail businesses and improve the range and quality of shopping provision.

7.8 wtcps12 (Simon Monk) – Designating a small proportion of shop fronts for ‘protection’ is a token effort to preserve and promote identity.

7.9 In response to wtcps12, the Council has proposed MM38, which are a set of principles which would be applied to all shop fronts (widening its impact) in the town centre with the aim of seeking to 'raise the standards' generally to shop fronts and achieving significant improvements to the public realm and street scene in the town centre. The shop fronts designated for 'protection' provide a positive and constructive example of what can be achieved and thus a standard which could be emulated. The example of Leyton Town Centre demonstrates how good shop front design can bring significant improvements and benefits to a town centre, which is something that the Council is also in the process of achieving in Walthamstow. The Council will actively work with shop keepers in order to achieve good quality shop design.

7.10 wtcps45 – 46 (British Sign and Graphics Association) – The whole section on shopfronts should be re-written with a far more realistic aim that the Council will advise and work with all those involved to achieve attractive shopfronts which are well designed particularly in relation to their host building and surroundings.

7.11 In response to the British Sign and Graphic Association additional response the Council has proposed to amend MM38 as follows:

i. ~~Avoid boxed fascia signs and keep fascia signage within the original shop framework (usually between the cornice and top of the pilasters~~

Fascia signage should not be overly high or prominent and respect the overall proportions of the building and adjoining shop front. Boxed fascia signs should generally be avoided. However, where they are sufficiently slim so as not to project forward of the corbels and pilasters they may be acceptable.