

Understanding the Local Plan and Inspectors' report

All Local Planning Authorities are required to have an up to date Local Plan. Waltham Forest is finalising a new Local Plan for the Borough, through which we can plan for the new homes, jobs and infrastructure the borough needs, whilst also addressing the climate emergency, protecting and enhancing our existing green spaces, creating new green and open spaces, improving air quality, reducing surface water flood risk, making sure our communities are safe and ensuring all new development meets our Exemplar Design standards.

The Local Plan sets out our planning policy and it is used to shape developments and guide planning decisions on where, how much, and what kind of development is needed to meet the needs of residents, visitors and businesses.

What's happened so far?

All Local Plans are required to go through an 'Examination' process, led by independent Planning Inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State. Throughout the Examination process for the new Waltham Forest Local Plan, the Council and the Inspectors agreed 'Main Modifications' to the Plan as it was drafted when it was first submitted for this examination in 2021. These modifications ensure we the Plan is based on the most up-to-date evidence available and strengthen our commitments to priorities like air quality and the delivery of new and improved green spaces. We ran a 'Main Modifications' consultation from July to September 2023.

'Main Modifications' are very common in a process like this. Most Local Plans go through modifications before they are adopted.

On 8th January 2024 we received the Inspectors' final report on the independent Examination of Local Plan Part 1 (LP1). This concludes that, subject to the Main Modifications, the Plan is sound, legally compliant, and capable of adoption. The report and final schedule of Main Modifications can be found on our website.

The Council will now consider adoption of the Local Plan, in line with the Inspectors' conclusion, at a meeting of the full Council on Thursday 29 February 2024.

How to Read the Inspectors' Report

The Inspectors' report takes the Plan, as it was submitted for Examination in April 2021, as its starting point. This is the same version of the Plan as was published for public consultation in October 2020.

Main Modifications in the report are referred to with a 'MM' reference number and are highlighted in bold (**MMXX**). The reference numbers used relate to the full schedule of modifications that was appended to the Inspectors' report and is available to view on our website.

The report has a particular writing style that is common to all such reports and reflects the Inspectors' key considerations about certain policies. The Main Modifications have been agreed to fully respond to all of their considerations. For example, their report says:

"Policy 26 (Safeguarding and Managing Strategic Industrial Land) does not include the full range of industrial uses which would be supported by London Plan Policy E4 and, for effectiveness and general conformity, **MM50** is necessary."

This means that, *as submitted* in April 2021 the policy did not include the full range of industrial uses which would be supported by the London Plan (which was adopted after we submitted the Waltham Forest Local Plan for Examination), but that they are now included as a result of Main Modification 50.

Throughout their report, the Inspectors reference policies and supporting text in this way. They start with the wording from the Plan as submitted, and highlight why it is not sound, and then go on to identify the modification(s) agreed to address the issue.

Details of the report

Based on all representations, written evidence and discussions that took place at the examination hearings, the Inspectors identified eight main issues which their report addresses. The report does not respond to every point or issue raised by representors or refer to every policy or policy criterion in the Plan.

1. Vision, Strategic Objectives and Effective Management of Housing and Employment Growth

Subject to modifications, the Inspectors conclude that “the Plan’s vision and strategic objectives are appropriate and that the policies to manage future housing and employment growth will be effective.”

The Inspectors also conclude that the Plan’s targets to deliver 27,000 new homes and 52,000 sqm of employment floorspace, “are justified by the evidence”, but should not be interpreted as a “ceiling or a limit on development”.

2. Locations for Growth and the Distribution of Housing, Employment and Other Development

Subject to modifications, the Inspectors conclude that “the locations for growth and the distribution of the housing, employment and other development proposed in the Plan are soundly based and in general conformity with the London Plan.”

They consider that the spatial strategy set out in the Plan “would be the most effective in delivering the Plan’s vision and objectives, in particular by locating development where the proximity of employment opportunities, shopping and other facilities and services, and their accessibility by sustainable modes of transport will support the establishment of 15-minute neighbourhoods. It will also maximise opportunities for the regeneration of brownfield and under used sites.”

3. Housing Requirement and Strategy for Housing Delivery

Subject to modifications, the Inspectors conclude that “the Plan’s housing requirement is soundly based and the Plan sets out a positively prepared strategy for housing that is justified, consistent with national policy, and in general conformity with the London Plan.”

The report says: “The Plan is positively prepared in relation to its housing requirement, in a way that is aspirational but deliverable, and is consistent with the NPPF’s aims for meeting the housing needs of present and future generations and significantly boosting the supply of homes.”

The Inspectors accept the evidence that shows we need to deliver 1,810 dwellings per year from 2014 to 2039 to meet local housing need and that the Plan’s housing requirement of 27,000 dwellings between 2020 and 2035 (averaging 1,800 per year) is informed by this evidence.

4. Economy, Employment Land and Town/Local Centres

Subject to modifications, the Inspectors conclude that “the Plan sets out a positively prepared strategy for the economy and employment land that is justified by the evidence and that it will make a positive contribution to the vitality and viability of Walthamstow town centre and other local centres.”

The report states: “The Plan seeks to continue to grow, promote and diversify the borough’s economy to meet the employment needs of its residents and to build on its locational advantages.”

One key issue addressed by Main Modifications is the conformity of our Strategic Industrial Land (SIL) policies with the London Plan. The Inspectors conclude that modifications proposed to planning designations at Blackhorse Lane and Cork Tree Retail Park represent a Plan-led approach and therefore conform with the London Plan.

5. Climate Change and the Natural Environment

Subject to modifications, the Inspectors conclude that “the Plan sets out a soundly based strategy to address, mitigate and adapt to climate change and to safeguard and enhance the natural environment.”

The report says: “the Plan takes a proactive approach to climate change, compliant with paragraph 153 of the NPPF, and includes policies designed to secure that the development and use of land in the borough will contribute to mitigating and adapting to climate change and the uncertainties of climate risks.”

The protection of Epping Forest has been a key consideration through the Examination process, particularly in relation to air quality impacts and the anticipated additional “recreational pressure” that could result from increases to the borough’s population.

As a result of our bespoke Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) strategy for Waltham Forest, and the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy that we have agreed with Natural England, the Conservators of Epping Forest and other neighbouring partner boroughs, the Inspectors are able to conclude that “beyond reasonable scientific doubt that the Plan will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Epping Forest SAC [Special Area of Conservation] arising from ... recreation pressure”. They note support for the approach from “relevant partners including Natural England, the City of London Corporation (Conservators of Epping Forest) and the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority.”

Similarly, as a result of evidence presented in Air Quality Study 2, which demonstrates the reduction in traffic numbers across the borough that would result from the redevelopment of sites in line with the policies of the Plan, they conclude that any emissions of Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x), ammonia, nitrogen deposition and acid deposition levels resulting from the Plan’s spatial strategy, would be “too small to be of consequence in terms of the SAC’s qualifying features.”

6. Built Environment, Tall Buildings, Heritage Assets and Design

Subject to modifications, the Inspectors conclude that “the Plan’s approach to the built environment including tall buildings, heritage assets, and the design of new development is positively prepared, justified, effective, consistent with national policy, and in general conformity with the London Plan.”

The report states: “Policy 56 (Delivering High Quality Design) sets an ambitious but appropriate approach to securing high quality and inclusive design informed by local character and distinctiveness, consistent with the aims of the NPPF.”

One of the key modifications that required to the submitted Plan is in relation to tall buildings, to ensure our policy position is in conformity with the London Plan. The Inspectors agree that the Main Modifications proposed can address this issue.

They identify that “the Plan recognises that tall buildings will not be appropriate in all parts of the borough, including because of the varied character areas and levels of accessibility, whilst recognising the potential benefits of tall buildings and aligning with the strategic expectations of the London Plan” and that “No potentially suitable locations for tall buildings have been identified in the Plan in North Waltham Forest, which generally reflects the Plan’s character-led approach, the available evidence ... A separate restrictive policy for tall buildings specific to North Waltham Forest is therefore not necessary.”

7. Infrastructure

Subject to modifications, the inspectors conclude that “the Plan is justified, effective, consistent with national policy and in general conformity with the London Plan in making adequate provision for infrastructure, including transport and community facilities to support new development and healthy communities, and ... it will support a modal shift towards active and sustainable modes of transport.”

The Inspectors note that the Plan is supported by the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, “which covers a wide range of infrastructure that will support growth and its accompanying Schedule will be updated annually.”

8. Viability, Implementation and Monitoring

Subject to modifications, the Inspectors conclude that “the Plan will be viable having regard to policy requirements and the arrangements for Plan monitoring and delivery are robust.”

The Inspectors note that the Plan has been informed by a Whole Plan Viability Study that provides a “robust assessment of the Plan’s viability based on the type and scale of development likely to come forward over the Plan period, and the various policy requirements including for affordable housing, contributions to infrastructure, accessible housing, carbon reduction and SANG.”