

Town Centre Area Action Plan: Background

The [Harlow Local Development Plan \(HLDP\)](#) was adopted in December 2020. It sets out the development plan for the District to 2033 in the form of a suite of policies and development allocations, as well as setting out a requirement for future retail provision in Harlow. Alongside the HLDP the Council, with its consultants Allies and Morrison were preparing a specific Area Action Plan for Harlow Town Centre (HTCAAP). The HTCAAP was published for a Regulation 18 consultation in June 2018 and a working draft of the [Regulation 19 HTCAAP](#) was presented to Cabinet in February 2020. Members subsequently approved the document for publication subject to officers making further minor changes.

Current status of the Regulation 19 HTCAAP

The nature of planning and retailing has changed considerably over the last 12 months. The long term impact of Covid-19 on retailing remains to be seen but in the short term it has significantly altered the way in which we shop and use the High Street. It has accelerated trends that were already emerging; home working, online retailing, click and collect and drive through grocery shopping. Consumer behaviour could also change to more conscious consumption choices, safer ways of shopping and a focus on more locally sourced products. Coupled with the potential effects of a challenging economic climate the Council needs to carefully consider these potentially longer lasting changes and the impact on retail planning.

Furthermore the Government has, through changes to the [Town and Country Planning \(Use Classes\) Regulations](#), enabled buildings to be used far more flexibly without the need for planning permission. This would enable a lot more flexibility in the way the town centre operates providing adaptability to reflect market changes, however, careful consideration needs to be given to its effect on land-use planning and masterplanning. The Government's publication of the [Planning for the Future White Paper](#) in 2020 will change the ways in which we will prepare and consult on documents such as the HTCAAP. Furthermore, amendments to the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) may require the need for further technical work to support the HTCAAP before it can be published and submitted for Examination.

As a result of the matters outlined above it has been agreed to pause publication of the HTCAAP.

How will Town Centre applications be determined?

The HLDP will continue to provide the overarching policy basis for which town centre applications should be considered. The Strategic Policies, Development Management Policies and the Policies Map which outlines the new boundary for Harlow Town Centre should be read together as a whole; however, the following strategic policies are of most relevance for town centre related proposals:

- Policy SD1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- Policy RS1 Retail Hierarchy

- Policy RS2 Future Retail Floorspace
- Policy RS3 Protecting and Enhancing Existing Retail Centres
- Policy WE1 Strategic Green Infrastructure
- Policy SIR1 Infrastructure Requirements
- Policy SIR2 Enhancing Key Gateway Locations

Alongside the HLDP, applications for the town centre should also have regard to the Regulation 18 HTCAAP and Regulation 19 HTCAAP working documents. They will be given material weight in the determination of planning applications as they have been endorsed by the Council for the purposes of public consultation. Applicants should also have regard to the Harlow Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document.

Town Centre Masterplan and Supplementary Planning Document

In the interim the Council is preparing a Masterplan to help guide applications coming forward in the town centre. As well as masterplan drawings, it will also include elements of the Regulation 19 HTCAAP such as the Opportunity Area Frameworks, public realm and landscape strategies and principles for places and spaces in the town centre. This will then be published for consultation with the intention that it becomes a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).