

London Thames Gateway Development Corporation

Planning Committee Meeting: 13 September 2007

Report of the Director of Planning

Barking Town Centre Area Action Plan: Issues and Options Report: Proposed Comments

- 1 The purpose of this report is for the Committee to agree the comments which LTGDC should make on the Barking Town Centre Area Action Plan Issues & Options Report.
- 2 Attached as Appendix A is the report which was considered by LTGDC Board at its meeting of 3 September. This provides the background to the Plan, the planning issues which Barking & Dagenham regard as important in the Town Centre and the options which they put forward for dealing with those issues. It also suggests the response which LTGDC should make to Barking & Dagenham.
- 3 It is for Planning Committee to finally determine the nature of the Corporation's comments and the report was put to Board so that the Committee could have the benefit of being aware of Board members views in doing so.
- 4 Board indicated that they supported all of the draft responses that were put forward in the report but considered that a further response should be added in respect of Issue 10a about the proposed level of off street car parking. The response they suggested was:

“LTGDC recognises the tensions between the need to reduce car parking as part of a sustainable transport policy and the wish to ensure that the vitality and viability of Barking Town Centre is not compromised. In the light of this, the Corporation considers that the choices between the options presented for the level of car parking provision should only be made in the light of an up to date assessment of parking need and any necessary reassessment of the town centre parking strategy.”

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Planning Committee:

- 5.1 formally endorses the “Suggested Response” sections of the Board Report attached as Appendix A to this report together with the additional response regarding off street car parking provision and the town centre parking strategy suggested by the LTGDC Board; and
- 5.2 authorises the Chief Planner to respond to the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham accordingly.

LONDON THAMES GATEWAY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Board Meeting: 3 September 2007

Report of the Director of Planning

BARKING TOWN CENTRE AREA ACTION PLAN: REQUEST BY LONDON BOROUGH OF BARKING & DAGENHAM FOR FORMAL COMMENTS ON THE ISSUES AND OPTIONS REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is for the Board to consider whether it wishes to forward any comments for the Planning Committee to consider when it meets on 13/9/07 on the Barking Town Centre Area Action Plan and, if so, the nature of those comments.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Barking Town Centre Area Action Plan forms part of the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham's Local Development Framework. Its production is being funded by LTGDC and undertaken by LTGDC staff seconded to Barking.
- 2.2 The Plan, which covers not only the Town Centre but also the residential areas and the industrial estates which surround it, has now reached the Issues and Options stage. As the name suggests, this involves the identification of the major planning issues facing the plan area and the alternative options for dealing with them. The London Borough of Barking & Dagenham is now undertaking public consultation on the report and, as part of that exercise, is seeking the views of LTGDC.
- 2.2 The formal consultation period closed on 10th August but as there were no Board meetings that would have allowed a response within that timetable, Barking & Dagenham have indicated that they are content to receive a late response and that they will still be able to reflect LTGDC views in the development of the subsequent Preferred Options Report.
- 2.3 This report gives a brief overview of the headlines of the Issues and Options Report and then focuses on those issues which are of most relevance to the attainment of LTGDC objectives and the delivery of LTGDC projects. Copies of the full Issues and Options Report have been made available to Board Members.
- 2.4 It should be stressed that Government regulations for producing Local Development Frameworks require this Issues and Options stage to explore alternative options and seek stakeholder and public views on them. Not to do so would run the risk of the Plan being deemed "unsound" by the Planning Inspector who will hold the Examination in Public at the end of the process.
- 2.5 Consequently, Members will see that, whilst the Report does present a number of options which positively support LTGDC objectives and projects, it also presents alternative options significantly less likely to do so. This does not imply

any commitment to these options by Barking and Dagenham but compliance with the Regulations.

- 2.6 It is considered that the LTGDC response should focus on those issues where the difference between the presented options makes a material difference to LTGDC and should consist of making clear to Barking and Dagenham which option LTGDC supports so that the Council can take that into account in producing its Preferred Options Report later this year

3 THE ISSUES AND OPTIONS REPORT

Vision and Objectives

- 3.1 The report sets out a regional planning context for the Plan, including the London Plan and the East London Sub-Regional Framework but also cites LTGDC's draft Development Framework for London Riverside as a policy context for the AAP. These have contributed to framing the Draft Vision for the Plan area which is given as:

By 2020, Barking Town Centre will become a vibrant, environmentally sustainable, prosperous and well designed destination with a distinctive character, high quality public realm and excellent transport accessibility. The health, educational attainment and training of the local population will have significantly improved and, in addition to providing significant levels of new homes for all sections of the community, the Town Centre will serve as the retail, leisure, commercial and training centre for the borough residents and grow in vitality and significance as it plays its full part in the expansion of the Thames Gateway.

- 3.2 The Plan then sets a number of objectives for the Plan area:

1. To enhance the strength of Barking Town Centre as a major retail, leisure, employment and training location so that it can both meet local needs and fulfil its strategic role within Thames Gateway.
2. To produce an efficient, integrated and sustainable transport system by improving public transport, providing appropriate levels of car parking, improving conditions for cyclists and pedestrians and reducing reliance on the car.
3. To maximise the provision of high quality housing, including affordable housing, whilst seeking to provide greater variety of housing tenure, size and type
4. To improve the health, educational attainment and training of local people and to ensure that all new development, including the provision of new health, education, training and community facilities, builds on local strengths, promotes a sense of pride and fosters community cohesion.
5. To ensure that new development and improvements to the Public Realm are of high quality design, promote public safety and protect local character and visual quality, including the protection and improvement of Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings
6. To protect and improve the accessibility and the quality of parks, open spaces and river corridors within the Plan area, including, where relevant, their biodiversity importance

- 7. To promote sustainable design and construction in new development including flood protection and low to zero carbon development**
8. To secure appropriate developer contributions to assist in meeting the key priorities of the Plan area.

Suggested Response

- 3.3 LTGDC welcomes the draft vision for the Plan area, noting that it envisages significant improvements in economic, environmental and social conditions. The Corporation particularly welcomes the acknowledgement in the Vision that, Barking Town Centre has, in addition to its important local role, a key part to play in the development of Thames Gateway. Similarly the objectives appear to be wide ranging and well set, reflecting the Vision and providing the context for the policy issues and options set within them.

Specific Issues

- 3.4 Within each of the objectives the Report identifies a number of Issues on which it presents background information and then puts forward alternative options for how the Plan should deal with them. 24 issues are identified in total but, as noted above this report deals only with those considered directly relevant to LTGDC interests.

Issue 3: Edge of Town Retailing

- 3.5 This issue is of importance since it deals with sites –Tesco and the Abbey Retail Park – which are set within the area for which LTGDC have commissioned the production of the River Roding Master Plan.

Suggested Response

- 3.6 Issue 3a Option 1 suggests allocating a site for a large food superstore whereas Option 2 suggest not specifically allocating a site but responding to proposals that may be brought forward in the light of other existing and developing planning policies. Option 1 is clearly more pro-active although less flexible but it is suggested that it is the one the Corporation should favour, given that there is a distinct possibility that a more central site can be found that would potentially release development land in the River Roding area if the existing edge of town Tesco store could be relocated.
- 3.7 Issue 3b relates to how the Abbey retail park could be reconfigured either for redevelopment/expansion including housing at upper levels (Option 1) or for replacement by an education or entirely housing scheme (Option 2) or through a site swap between the Abbey retail park and Tesco (Option 3). Option 1 is considered preferable subject to any expansion of retail floorspace having to be compliant with need, capacity and sequential location tests and subject to any need for relocation or expansion of St Margeret's and St Joseph's primary schools being satisfactorily dealt with on suitable sites elsewhere. Option 3 is considered to be the least acceptable because it prejudices the potential achievement of a more centrally located site for a foodstore in the London Road area and is likely to be less compliant with national retail location policy.

Issue 4: Office Development

- 3.8 The report puts forward the options of either accepting that Barking has no scope for further office development or, alternatively, of encouraging office growth in the Town Centre.

Suggested Response

- 3.9 LTGDC supports Option 2 for the encouragement of office development in the Town Centre. Whilst we acknowledge that the current demand for suburban centre commercial office space is low, we believe that Barking's proximity to, and excellent public transport links with, the City can foster some growth. Early indications from the Economic Development Strategy for Barking Town Centre and from the work on developing the Master Plan for the Barking Station area support this view.
- 3.10 Office development will provide local jobs, improve the image of Barking Town Centre and be the impetus for the provision of lunchtime and early evening informal leisure uses which will further assist the economic and environmental regeneration of the Town Centre.

Issue 5: Hotel Development

- 3.11 Two options are put forward – either to encourage hotel development within the Town Centre or alternatively not to do so but instead to rely on the existing cluster of hotels fronting on to the A406.

Suggested Response

- 3.12 LTGDC supports Option 1 since, as with offices, it regards hotel development as a potential driver for economic and environmental regeneration of the Town Centre and as a boost for the image of the town. There is an obvious synergy with the growth of commercial office floor space and also with the potential growth of heritage tourism which is explored elsewhere in the Report.
- 3.13 Despite this, LTGDC would not wish this to mean a restriction on the growth of the existing A406 hotels. They are successful and their wish to expand is reflected in the proposals of the River Roding Master Plan.

Issue 7: The Evening Economy

- 3.14 The options are divided into two groups, the first dealing with whether the evening economy should be expanded and, if so, the type of uses to be encouraged and the second dealing with whether the possible locations for such uses should be restricted to the Town Centre or also be encouraged within Town Quay and the River Roding Area.

Suggested Response

- 3.15 In terms of Issue 7a, LTGDC would be strongly opposed to Option 1 of making no provision for additional evening economy uses. Whilst we support Option 3 and the Council's desire to avoid the anti- social behaviour impacts that can come with a vibrant evening economy, the detailed planning and licensing regime needs to ensure some scope for further bars and entertainment venues.

- 3.16 In terms of Issue 7b, we strongly support option 2 to allow evening economy uses in the Town Quay and River Roding area as well as in the Town centre. We regard such uses as an essential component of the mixed use regeneration that will be undertaken within the area and a significant factor in achieving the objective of reuniting Barking Town Centre with the historic riverfront. Evening economy uses in the Town Quay/River Roding area are a component of the River Roding Master Plan

Issue 8: Employment Land

- 3.17 Under this issue there are a number of different matters of interest to the Corporation. The first relates to whether employment land should be protected or should be allowed to be used for other uses such as housing. In particular, one Option puts forward the release of part of the Freshwharf estate for a high quality mixed use development including housing.
- 3.18 The second and third relate to the area around the Malthouse and the Icehouse off Abbey Road. The second issue is whether it should be used for cultural and creative industries use or for an entirely housing scheme and the third is whether, if the cultural and creative industries option is taken forward, it should also include a Local Employment Growth Initiative Business Centre.

Suggested Response

- 3.19 LTGDC strongly supports Issue 8a Option 2 for the release of part of the Freshwharf estate for mixed use development. Indeed this approach is being reflected in the River Roding Master Plan. We agree that this will not have an adverse effect on employment levels across the site and believe that the approach will not only offer significant numbers of new homes but also provide for the environmental regeneration of a key site on the riverfront and the consequent boost to the image and perception of Barking.
- 3.20 We also strongly support Issue 8b Option 1. You will be aware that the Corporation has long wished to promote such a scheme because it has the potential, not only for significant environmental improvement of the area, but also to promote local distinctiveness and diversify the economic base of Barking.
- 3.21 We also strongly support Issue 8c Option 2. We do not think that there is the space within the site to successfully accommodate the LEGI Business Centre and we agree with your assessment that its presence could detract from the core creative/cultural function of the centre. We also agree that accessibility to Barking Station makes the Lintons a better site.

Issue 9: Sustainable Local Transport

- 3.22 The key aims of the Council in this issue is to achieve a modal shift from the private car to more sustainable modes of transport and accordingly a number of options to reduce car use and promote public transport, cycling and walking are put forward. All appear to have merit but the only 2 which it is considered LTGDC should comment on are East London Transit and the improvement of the transport interchange at Barking Station.

Suggested Response

- 3.23 LTGDC considers that all of the measures put forward have merit and can contribute to the objective of creating a more sustainable local transport system. We particularly and strongly support the options of supporting East London Transit and providing a more effective public transport interchange at Barking Station.
- 3.24 In respect of East London Transit, we would stress our support not only for Phase 1a through the Town Centre but also for Phase 2 which we regard as critical for linking Barking to the wider Thames Gateway area and also improving PTAL levels on the fringes of the Action Plan area.

Issue 11: Housing Supply

- 3.25 The options put forward are using the Borough's current estimates of housing capacity in setting a target of 7,150 new homes (gross) between 2007/08 and 2016/17 or setting an unspecified higher or an unspecified lower figure.

Suggested Response

- 3.26 LTGDC supports Issue11 Option 1 and recognises the significant contribution that such provision will make to not only meeting the Borough's housing targets set out in the London Plan but also to meeting the target of 40,000 new homes by 2016 which we have set ourselves in our 2007/08 Business Plan.
- 3.27 Whilst we support this option, we would not wish to see the 7,150 seen as a rigid collar and would urge that as windfall sites come forward, their appropriateness for housing is assessed even though this could lead to an excess of the housing target figure.
- 3.28 Whilst we welcome the overall housing target for the plan period as a whole and we recognise the difficulty of accurately predicting (particularly further into the plan period) when housing sites will be developed, we consider that the AAP should try to give some indication of a housing supply trajectory. This will be useful in not only indicating when housing will be come available but also to assist in identifying the timescales within which associated social infrastructure will need to be provided.

ISSUE 13: Affordable Housing

- 3.29 The options put forward are in 2 parts. The first set is whether the % of the additional housing to be affordable should be 50% in line with the London Plan or whether, in recognition of existing high levels of social housing in the area and the desire to give greater housing choice and create a more balanced community, this should be reduced to 35%
- 3.30 The second set relate to the tenure of that affordable housing. The options are a 70%/30% split between socially rented and intermediate tenures such as shared ownership in line with the London Plan or amending this for the same reasons given above to a 60%/40% split.

Suggested Response

- 3.31 Whilst LTGDC fully understand and sympathise with the Council's wish to give greater housing choice and create a more balanced community, it considers that the need for affordable housing as a key issue for East London. For this reason and because we are concerned about the potential London Plan compliance issues of a 35% target, the corporation supports the 50% target of Issue 13a Option 1.
- 3.32 We do consider, however, that the Council's housing aims can, to some extent, be attained through the type of affordable housing to be provided. Accordingly, in noting that the GLA recognise the need to be flexible in the application of this standard, we support the 60%/40% affordable housing tenure split set out in Issue 13b Option 2.

Issue 19: Access to Open Space

- 3.33 Whilst it is considered that the Corporation need not involve itself in the general issue, there is a specific pair of options relating to the informal open space alongside the River Roding. The options presented are whether or not to require developers of sites adjacent to the river to facilitate the use of the river bank as informal open space.

Suggested Response

- 3.34 You will be aware that the protection of informal open space, its biodiversity importance and the maintenance/enhancement of public access are key elements of the River Roding Master Plan which the Corporation has commissioned. Accordingly, we strongly support Issue 19a Option 1.

Issue 20: Abbey Green

- 3.35 Abbey Green is a key open space close to the Town Centre but an underused resource with an undistinguished environment and few facilities. It is a key space in linking the Town Centre with Barking's historic riverfront. The options presented are to retain it in its present form or to provide more facilities and undertake public realm improvements.

Suggested Response

- 3.36 With the significant regeneration activity which the Corporation and others are promoting in the Town Quay and the River Roding area, strong linkages with the Town Centre are essential. LTGDC regard Abbey Green as a key space and its improvement as a significant factor in achieving the objective of reuniting Barking Town Centre with the historic riverfront. For these reasons we support Issue 20 Option 2.

Issue 24: Community Benefits and Section 106 Agreements

- 3.37 Barking & Dagenham's LDF Core Strategy has a policy which sets out how the Council will operate its Section 106 processes and identifying the key community priorities for developer contributions. The options presented for the AAP area are to either using that same list of priorities or alternatively adding some locally specific priorities such as contributions to the riverside walk.

Suggested Response

- 3.38 LTGDC has already commented on the Council's LDF Core Strategy policy in the following terms:

“Need to include reference to LTGDC as the determining authority for many of the S106s and our proposed discounted ‘tariff’ of £6000 per residential units, as well as requirement for affordable housing, subject to financial appraisal.”

- 3.39 We have no comment to make on the options presented in this Issues and Options Report but would take the opportunity to reiterate that any Section 106 Policy within Barking & Dagenham's LDF should make the above reference

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 It is recommended that the Board:

4.1.1 **FORWARD** any comments it wishes to make in respect of the Issues and Options stage of the Barking Town Centre Action Area Plan to the Planning Committee for it to consider when agreeing the formal response of the Corporation;

4.1.2 **NOTE** that a further report on the Preferred Options Report will be brought to Board and Planning Committee in early 2008.

APPENDIX 1: SUGGESTED RESPONSE LETTER TO BARKING & DAGENHAM

I refer to your letter of 2 July enclosing a copy of the Barking Town Centre Area Action Plan Issues and Options Report and seeking LTGDC comments on it.

I am grateful for your agreement to accept a late response from the Corporation, necessitated by the lack of Board meetings during August.

LTGDC has confined its comments to those Issues and Options which it is considered have a strategic impact and/or impact on our policy objectives and project delivery. However, on those Issues on which no specific comment is made, we consider that among the options presented lies the basis for preparing an Area Action Plan which can stimulate the economic, environmental and social regeneration of Barking Town Centre.

LTGDC welcomes the draft vision for the Plan area, noting that it envisages significant improvements in economic, environmental and social conditions. The Corporation particularly welcomes the acknowledgement in the Vision that, Barking Town Centre has, in addition to its important local role, a key part to play in the development of Thames Gateway. Similarly the objectives appear to be wide ranging and well set, reflecting the Vision and providing the context for the policy issues and options set within them.

LTGDC supports Issue 3a option 1 to allocate a site for a large food superstore, particularly given that there is distinct possibility that a more central site can be found for such a store that could potentially release land in the Rover Roding area if the existing edge of town Tesco store could be relocated.

LTGDC supports issue 3b option 1 to allow the redevelopment and expansion of retail warehousing on the Abbey Retail park site but including some housing at upper levels subject to

- any expansion of retail space having to be compliant with need, capacity and sequential location tests
- any need for relocation or expansion of St Margaret's and St Joseph's primary schools being satisfactorily dealt with on suitable sites elsewhere

LTGDC does not support Issue 3b option 3 because it would prejudice the potential to achieve a more centrally located site for a foodstore in the London Road area and is less likely to be compliant with national retail location policy.

LTGDC supports Issue 4 Option 2 for the encouragement of office development in the Town Centre. Whilst we acknowledge that the current demand for suburban centre commercial office space is low, we believe that Barking's proximity to, and excellent public transport links with, the City can foster some growth. Early indications from the Economic Development Strategy for Barking Town Centre and from the early work on the Master Plan for the Barking Station area support this view.

Office development will provide local jobs, improve the image of Barking Town Centre and be the impetus for the provision of lunchtime and early evening informal leisure uses which will further assist economic and environmental regeneration.

LTGDC supports Issue 5 Option 1 since, as with offices, it regards hotel development as a potential driver for economic and environmental regeneration of the Town Centre and as a boost for the image of the town. There is an obvious synergy with the growth of commercial office floor space and also with the potential growth of heritage tourism which is explored elsewhere in the Report. Despite this, LTGDC would not wish this to

mean a restriction on the growth of the existing A406 hotels. They are successful and their wish to expand is reflected in the proposals of the River Roding Master Plan.

In terms of Issue 7a, LTGDC would be strongly opposed to Option 1 of making no provision for additional evening economy uses. Whilst we support Option 3 and the Council's desire to avoid the anti- social behaviour impacts that can come with a vibrant evening economy, the detailed planning and licensing regime needs to ensure some scope for further bars and entertainment venues.

In terms of Issue 7b, we strongly support option 2 to allow evening economy uses in the Town Quay and River Roding area as well as in the Town centre. We regard such uses as an essential component of the mixed use regeneration that will be undertaken within the area and a significant factor in achieving the objective of reuniting Barking Town Centre with the historic riverfront. Evening economy uses in the Town Quay/River Roding area are a component of the River Roding Master Plan

LTGDC strongly supports Issue 8a Option 2 for the release of part of the Freshwharf estate for mixed use development. Indeed this approach is being reflected in the River Roding Master Plan. We agree that this will not have an adverse effect on employment levels across the site and believe that the approach will not only offer significant numbers of new homes but also provide for the environmental regeneration of a key site on the riverfront and the consequent boost to the image and perception of Barking.

We also strongly support Issue 8b Option 1. You will be aware that the Corporation has long wished to promote such a scheme because it has the potential, not only for significant environmental improvement of the area, but also to promote local distinctiveness and diversify the economic base of Barking.

We also strongly support Issue 8c Option 2. We do not think that there is the space within the site to successfully accommodate the LEGI Business Centre and we agree with your assessment that its presence could detract from the core creative/cultural function of the centre. We also agree that accessibility to Barking Station makes the Lintons a better site.

LTGDC considers that all of the measures put forward as options under Issue 9 have merit and can contribute to the objective of creating a more sustainable local transport system. We particularly and strongly support the options of supporting East London Transit and providing a more effective public transport interchange at Barking Station.

In respect of East London Transit, we would stress our support not only for Phase 1a through the Town Centre but also for Phase 2 which we regard as critical for linking Barking to the wider Thames Gateway area and also improving PTAL levels on the fringes of the Action Plan area.

LTGDC supports Issue 11 Option 1 and recognises the significant contribution that such provision will make to not only meeting the Borough's housing targets set out in the London Plan but also to meeting the target of 40,000 new homes by 2016 which we have set ourselves in our 2007/08 Business Plan. Whilst we support this option, we would not wish to see the 7,150 seen as a rigid collar and would urge that as windfall sites come forward, their appropriateness for housing is assessed even though this could lead to an excess of the housing target figure.

Whilst we welcome the overall housing target for the plan period as a whole and we recognise the difficulty of accurately predicting (particularly further into the plan period) when housing sites will be developed, we consider that the AAP should try to give some

indication of a housing supply trajectory. This will be useful in not only indicating when housing will be come available but also to assist in identifying the timescales within which associated social infrastructure will need to be provided.

Whilst LTGDC fully understand and sympathise with the Council's wish to give greater housing choice and create a more balanced community, it considers that the need for affordable housing as a key issue for East London. For this reason and because we are concerned about the potential London Plan compliance issues of a 35% target, the Corporation supports the 50% target of Issue 13a Option 1.

We do consider, however, that the Council's housing aims can, to some extent, be attained through the type of affordable housing to be provided. Accordingly, in noting that the GLA recognise the need to be flexible in the application of this standard, we support the 60%/40% affordable housing tenure split set out in Issue 13b Option 2.

You will be aware that the protection of informal open space, its biodiversity importance and the maintenance/enhancement of public access are key elements of the River Roding Master Plan which the Corporation has commissioned. Accordingly, we strongly support Issue 19a Option 1.

With the significant regeneration activity which the Corporation and others are promoting in the Town Quay and the River Roding area, strong linkages with the Town Centre are essential. LTGDC regard Abbey Green as a key space and its improvement as a significant factor in achieving the objective of reuniting Barking Town Centre with the historic riverfront. For these reasons we support Issue 20 Option 2.

As you will be aware, LTGDC has already commented on the Core Strategy policy in the following terms:

“Need to include reference to LTGDC as the determining authority for many of the S106s and our proposed discounted ‘tariff’ of £6000 per residential units, as well as requirement for affordable housing, subject to financial appraisal.”

We have no comment to make on the options presented in this Issues and Options Report but would take the opportunity to reiterate that any Section 106 Policy within Barking & Dagenham's LDF should make the above reference.

I trust that you will find these comments useful in the process of refining the options into your Preferred Options Report later this year. We should be happy to discuss this response further, if you so wish,

Yours Sincerely

Director of Planning