

CABINET

20 October 2020

Title: Barking Town Centre Regeneration Strategy 2020-2030	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Social Housing	
Open Report	For Decision
Wards Affected: Abbey and Gascoigne	Key Decision: Yes
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Accountable Strategic Leadership Director Graeme Cooke, Director of Inclusive Growth	
Summary	
<p>Barking Town Centre is one of the Borough's key growth areas and the main town centre for the Borough. Town centres/High Streets were facing unprecedented challenges even before Covid-19 and the virus has impacted the very reason for town centres' existence - where people gather for a wide range of activities. A vibrant, successful Barking town centre is essential for the wider borough regeneration plans and it is clear that adaptability and resilience are key to achieving this.</p>	
<p>Be First was tasked with producing a new Barking Town Centre (BTC) Regeneration Strategy (Appendix 1) which sets out a clear vision for the town centre and a delivery plan highlighting the tools and interventions different partners would take to deliver the vision.</p>	
<p>The Strategy includes a delivery plan and a strong governance arrangement to ensure its delivery. The work on the strategy follows on from both a series of masterplans for specific parts of the town centre and a short independent panel investigation into the future of BTC which set out various recommendations. The strategy co-ordinates different workstreams alongside the development of the Local plan into a comprehensive approach. The Strategy identifies three strategic priority interventions to deliver transformational change although recognising they are not the easiest or quickest schemes to deliver. The three priority strategic interventions are:</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) A unique and transformational Food hub linked to the City of London Wholesale markets returning Barking to its historic prominence for food and trading;2) Improving the poor first impression the station gives of Barking into a welcoming gateway to the town centre; and3) Intervening to take forward the first phase of the Vicarage Field redevelopment as a key catalyst for high quality change.	
<p>Alongside the three priority projects, the Strategy summarises a programme of crosscutting interventions and links to the Gascoigne Place-making Strategy. The</p>	

crosscutting programme will complement the three priority projects and deliver a holistic regeneration for BTC.

Recommendation(s)

Cabinet is recommended to:

- (i) Approve the Barking Town Centre Regeneration Strategy 2020-2030 as set out at Appendix 1 to the report;
- (ii) Delegate authority to the Director of Inclusive Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Social Housing, to agree any relevant updates and minor amendments to the 10-year Strategy; and
- (iii) Agree the new governance / partnership working structure to support the delivery of the Strategy, as detailed in paragraph 3.1 of the report.

Reasons

- To support the regeneration of the Borough's main town centre delivering a range of Borough manifesto objectives.
- To support the delivery of those objectives linked to the regeneration of the Town Centre in the Council's emerging Inclusive Growth strategy, and particularly those objectives linked to the overall aspirational and resilient neighbourhoods theme.

1. Introduction

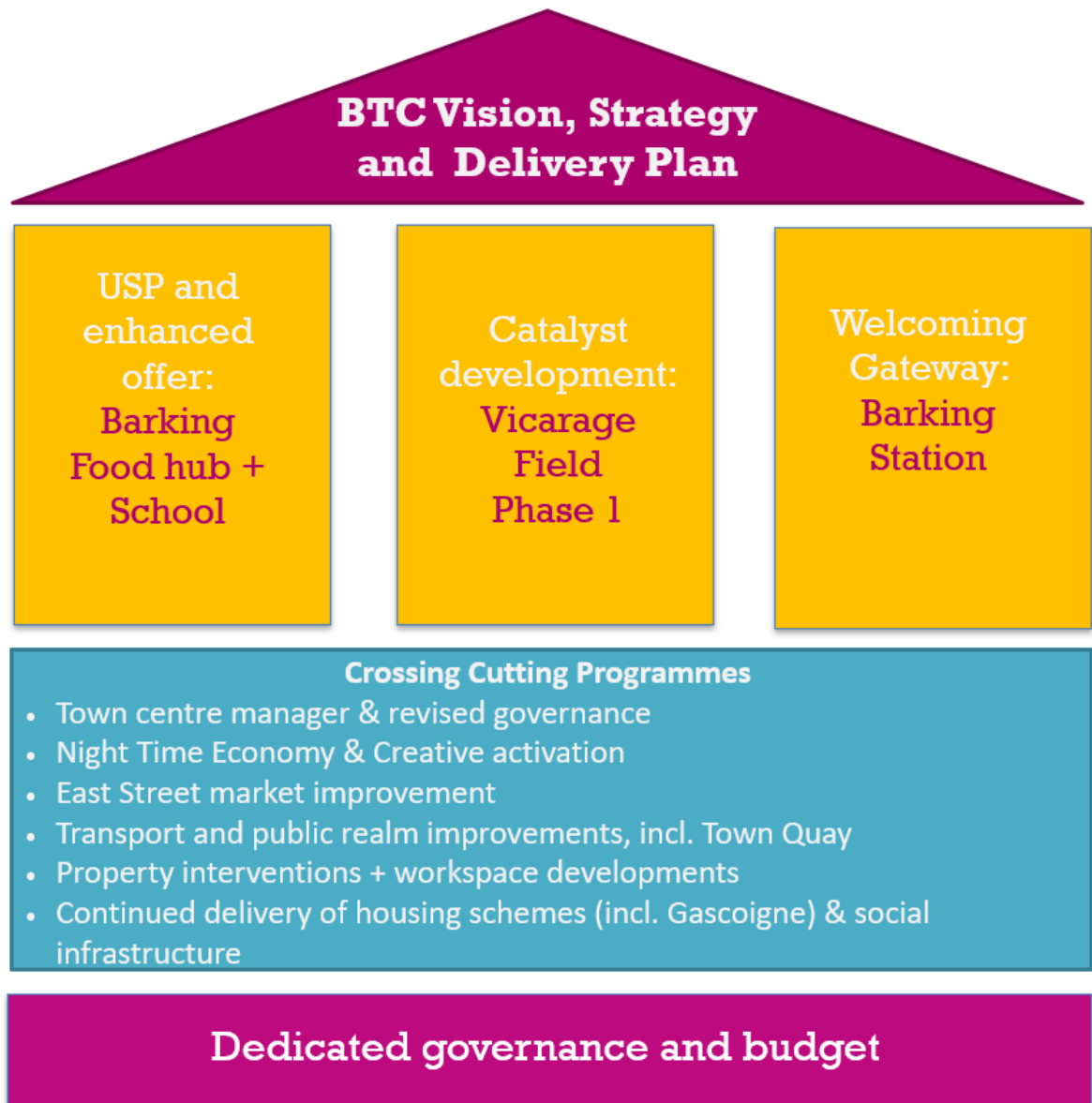
- 1.1. The future of town centres/High Streets is a key national talking point with many agreeing that Covid-19 has intensified the challenges that town centres were already facing. Barking town centre is central to the Borough's whole inclusive growth and regeneration agenda. Whilst many town centres are struggling nationally, Barking Town centre has significant strengths and opportunities which can be harnessed. Particularly as we emerge from covid-19, the time is right to establish a strong, clear vision for the next 10 years and to produce a strategy and associated governance structure to deliver it.
- 1.2. Last year a panel of independent experts on town centres gave their thoughts on the future of Barking Town centre. They were impressed by the range of activity underway and the strong opportunities available. They produced recommendations which have fed into the development of a new BTC strategy.
- 1.3. The Barking Town Centre Regeneration Strategy and Delivery Plan (the Strategy), forms part of the Council's Inclusive Growth Strategy, providing a framework to enable everyone invested in Barking & Dagenham to work with us to establish a productive mixed community that will thrive today and for years to come.
- 1.4. Following London Councils' 'Restore' 'Retain' 'Reinvent' focus for Town centres and Covid 19, a strategy and action plan (including media campaign) is in place for the first two elements whilst the BTC Regeneration Strategy as set out in this report addresses the third and aims to inspire confidence in Barking's future at a time when morale may be low.

- 1.5. The Strategy draws on substantial research and analysis, such as the Barking Civic Centre Masterplan, and was developed through intensive engagement with various internal departments. Feedback from local residents through the Borough&me consultation, held in early 2020, also informed the strategy. It aligns with the forthcoming Inclusive Growth Strategy. While people are generally positive towards the Barking Town Centre especially the market, they have expressed desire to see more cultural offering, youth provision and a variety of retail offer, in addition to the safety and cleanliness concerns.
- 1.6. Whilst the future of town centres and High Streets is uncertain there is a strong consensus that future successful high streets will be more compact, with a stronger and broader range of uses, including living, working, shopping, leisure, eating and drinking, culture, learning and local services in an environment and sense of place that makes people want to spend time there. Adaptability and resilience are seen as key to the future of town centres.
- 1.7. Barking Town Centre is seeing significant new home building by the private sector (notably Ecoworld, Countryside, Weston Homes and Aberdeen Standard) but also major Be First schemes including Crown House and the transformation of the Gascoigne. Continuing to deliver new homes is a key part of the strategy and with an additional c 5,000 new homes to be delivered it is essential the town centre itself reflects this investment as the means of ensuring inclusive growth. The strategy sets out the tools and interventions to achieve this.
- 1.8. We would like to see Barking Town Centre reinvigorated as a thriving 21st Century Town Centre, with an intensified range of activities and uses to support existing and new communities. It will draw on its rich history and heritage especially in food and making and reveal and restore existing positive characteristics. Through building on these strong elements of culture we will make Barking more distinct and encourage engagement and pride by the community. The proposed vision for Barking Town Centre is:

“A Town Centre where inclusive growth unlocks a new lease of life - a healthy, safe and sustainable place to live, work, learn, socialise, eat, shop and relax with great places to visit. A real destination, day and night with a strong sense of place and identity harnessing its physical assets and rich heritage. Markets, merchants, makers and more. Roding Riverside will restore the river’s importance to Barking, being the creative and cultural heart of Barking Town Centre, with new homes and jobs for local people.”
- 1.9. The Strategy is underpinned by 6 objectives which set out a framework of interventions and to encourage experimentation and collaborations, with the long-term goal to create a more self-sustaining and resilient place. The six objectives are Creative & Active, Food destination, Place making, Sustainability, Economy and Opportunity sites.
- 1.10. There are a number of elements of work underway critical to the strategy. This includes Arup’s work on Transport Strategy set out below, the Town Quay vision and the Gascoigne Placemaking strategy. Although outside the town centre area, there will be alignment with Barking Riverside’s Place-making strategy over issues such as food.

2. Priority Interventions

- 2.1 It is clear that whilst a detailed comprehensive strategy setting out a wide range of interventions is necessary, there are three specific priority interventions which are central to delivering the transformational impact.



2.2 Barking Food Hub/destination

- 2.2.1 Food plays an important role in many people's economic and social lives and is a critical part of the London economy. Indeed, in the Mayor of London's 'London Food Strategy' published in December 2018, it recognises that "the food sector is a great route to work and skills development. There are more and more ways for entrepreneurs to enter the sector – from street food through to community growing." However, there are some acute and specific challenges faced by the industry, such as the shortage of skilled staff and lack of suitable work and serviced kitchen space leading to high start-up cost. The Food sector in the Borough will be transformed with the proposed relocation of the famous City of London wholesale markets (Billingsgate, Smithfield and New Spitalfields) to Dagenham Dock.

- 2.2.2 In Barking and Dagenham, food offers many opportunities from the improvement to residents' health, establishing pathways for residents to gain skills and employment, to playing a key role in bringing the diverse communities in LBBDD together. In Barking Town Centre (BTC), there is a clear need to improve food and drink offer (including the night-time economy) as part of the growth as well as commercial space to support local SMEs. Through the Every One Every Day programme, a significant numbers of food and retail focussed SMEs have, emerged with potential for further growth and in need for suitable retail and workspace. In addition, there are emerging local sustainable food activities and movements, such as the Good Food Collective led by Company Drinks (a local food social enterprise).
- 2.2.3 The proposed Food Hub presents a great regeneration opportunity for the borough to develop a best-in-class food offer to local residents and visitors complementing the new wholesale market, providing access to affordable healthy food, and provide new jobs to people from all backgrounds, as the food sector is one of the most inclusive and accessible sector. The Food Hub would consist of individual trading units for food businesses (F&B offer but also offering deli style counters for market traders wanting a retail presence). There would be a shared dining area plus kitchen and office space for hire for food-based SMEs, which will be critical in supporting the growth and incubation of local food businesses. The business incubation programme delivered by Every One Every Day programme in the last 3 years, there were strong focus in food and retail driven by local residents' interests, and these local start-ups and businesses wishing to grow will be looking for such working and retail space.
- 2.2.4 In addition to the proposed Barking Food Hub, Barking Market plays an integral part for BTC to become a food destination. We will see the evolution of the market through the cultivation of healthy, independent, international food identity. This is a clear successor to the borough's rich history in fishing and making, but transcends to meet the modern and shared economy, as well as attuned to the needs and aspirations of the borough's young people.
- 2.2.5 East Street will be redeveloped as a centre for independent retailers with a focus on food and creative outlets, to complement the delivery of the Barking Food Hub. Public realm and infrastructure improvement are required with a special focus for a new food quarter at Short Blue Place/in front of former Magistrates Court, as well as place marketing tied to the development of the Barking Food Hub and promoting local sustainable food sector.

2.3 Vicarage Field

- 2.3.1 Vicarage Field is the highest profile development opportunity in the Town Centre. It has secured outline approval for a scheme which is well known locally and regionally. A successful scheme would contribute substantially towards delivering the vision. Similarly, any failure for the scheme to progress would have a negative impact on the town centre. The phasing of the scheme is critical along with ensuring there are strong active meanwhile uses on undeveloped phases once the centre has been demolished. Whilst the Council is the freehold owner of the centre the key organisation that can enable delivery is the leaseholder owner Lagmar (Barking) Ltd – an entity of Benson Elliot (BE). The first stage of progressing the scheme is moving forward with the Compulsory Purchase Order – it has Cabinet

approval but has not started as the Indemnity agreement covering the funding will only be signed once the development agreement is in place.

- 2.3.2 Be First has been working with BE on establishing a structure where phases are drawn down making it more deliverable (including enabling other organisations to bring forward phases). It also includes long stop dates to give some level of control however ultimately the timetable for moving forward would be determined by market conditions. Heads of Terms of the Development Agreement have been agreed and detailed drafting has commenced.
- 2.3.3 Phase 1 is only a relatively small part of the scheme (26 homes out of 850) however it is the high-profile plot facing the station which should catalyse change and encourage further investment. Phase 1 requires the use of CPO powers to acquire the necessary interests. Phase 1 can be delivered leaving the shopping centre in place. However, Phase 2 would require the complete demolition of the centre. The emerging Strategy recognises that this will leave large plots of vacant land in the town centre for a number of years – this could be very negative but if considered well it can provide opportunities for interesting meanwhile uses. This forms a key part of the BTC strategy.

2.4 **Barking Station**

- 2.4.1 Barking station is the key gateway into Barking Town Centre and it is widely acknowledged to give a poor first impression. Numerous surveys have shown many people feel the environment is threatening, particularly in the evening. This is despite a number of factors which usually contribute to a feeling of safety - busy, well lit, large pavements - being in place. The poor first impression is made up of three different elements. This includes the station itself which, although a Listed Building, its architectural merit has been diminished by poor quality internal additions, bad signage and limited maintenance. Secondly, the public realm outside the station with dominance of buses and bus queues and thirdly, the parade of shops opposite the station – both a number of the uses and the appearance.
- 2.4.2 The solution will require a number of steps. The first priority is getting C2C to implement the internal station works which they have secured planning approval for. This will address a number of practical issues (more ticket barriers, more circulation space etc) but also improve the look and feel of the station. Covid-19 has obviously seriously impacted on rail companies' viability (and of course TfL's) and there will be a need to reassess the position in due course. Improvements to Barking station are not just critical to Barking Town Centre but to other developments in the Borough (such as Barking Riverside and Beam Park) as well as developments further east along the C2C lines due to Barking station's nature as an interchange. Potentially funding to cover the improvements needed for capacity may support broader physical improvements.
- 2.4.3 Later this year it is proposed to restart the Station Masterplan work looking at the wider station area and the opportunities available. Be First is specifically working on schemes exploring the potential of bringing forward the Trocoll House and Roding House schemes either side of the station.
- 2.4.4 A particular challenge is that Station Parade in front of the station is a bridge over the railway lines and in the short term cannot accommodate additional weight

including trees. The bridge will need significant investment within the term of the strategy.

3. Crosscutting Programme

3.1 Governance/Partnership Working

- 3.1.1 For the vision to be successfully delivered it needs the active support of town centre stakeholders and a clear governance structure in place to ensure the required actions are implemented. This requires strong leadership at strategic level but also given the clear importance of issues like safety and cleanliness to a successful town centre, there needs to be a strong day-to-day operational focus. A number of town centres address this through Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) where stakeholders come together to provide strategic oversight and the views of businesses and appoint specific staff such as a town centre manager. It is recognised a formal BID in Barking is unlikely at the moment due to lack of private sector interest and the limited funding it would secure. However the proposed Governance structure aims to replicate the best elements of a BID.
- 3.1.2 It is proposed to engage and involve stakeholders with a strong interest in town centre. This includes private housebuilders/PRS providers who often have a strong interest in vibrant successful town centres for their residents. A quarterly Town Centre Stakeholder meeting is proposed to keep stakeholders engaged and encouraged to deliver their actions and contribute resources. The aim being to at least secure the annual funding for a new Town Centre manager role from these stakeholders.
- 3.1.3 A new Town Centre manager will assist with the co-ordination of Council activities (waste/cleansing, enforcement, the market, Highways, trading standards etc) and be the interface with businesses. As such, the role will address the day to day issues and feed in the views of businesses to the strategic approach recognising that, over time, the nature of businesses and the key issues will change. The scope to utilise the first six months of this role as a Covid-19 recovery role utilising Government grant is being explored. In the past it has always proved extremely challenging to engage town centre businesses in a regular meeting due to their shortage of time. The Town Centre manager would enable greater face to face contact with businesses understanding the key issues, concerns and opportunities and feeding this back to the strategic groups.
- 3.1.4 The Town Centre manager would sit within Be First and report to the Head of Regeneration who would take the senior-level role engaging with stakeholders and driving delivery of the strategy.
- 3.1.5 The Strategy sets out proposals to support local placemaking champions and it will be important to ensure this group feels supported but not necessarily requiring them to be involved in the governance structure unless they wanted to be.
- 3.1.6 Alongside the quarterly Stakeholder meeting, there would be a small focussed monthly Barking Town Centre Strategy group which provides the strategic direction and monitors progress. This would involve key people at Be First and the Council and the Portfolio holder. This Group would provide updates to Members briefing, Corporate Strategy Group, Be First Board etc as requested.

3.1.7 In addressing day to day issues there is already a fortnightly meeting of key Council officers and the Police. The new Town Centre manager would attend this meeting ensuring greater co-ordination and that the group's work aligns with taking forward the strategy.

Barking Town Centre Strategy group (new)

- Monthly
- Strategic steering group
- Senior reps from Be First, LBBD and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Social Housing

Barking Town Centre Stakeholder meeting (new)

- Quarterly
- Promoting collaboration and contributions, information sharing
- Support funding for an ongoing TC manager role

Barking Town Centre team meeting (existing)

- Monthly
- Discuss operational issues and feedback from businesses
- Attended by officers from operational teams, Police and TC manager

3.2 Funding Streams

3.2.1 The Strategy is rightly ambitious however a key challenge to implementation is funding. A key part of the governance structure and Town Centre team's work will be seeking to ensure a watching brief over funding opportunities and having draft bids ready which can be developed as required to meet the funding criteria. There are various existing funding streams however it is recognised in the current climate and high-profile nature of High Streets that there may be additional funding streams coming forward from national and regional government.

3.2.2 In nationwide competitive funding streams, Barking Town Centre's relatively low vacancy rate and strong footfall mean it is challenging to deliver projects which can improve those key metrics. Similarly, the Government's emphasis on the Midlands and North of England make London bids more difficult. As such the focus of any bid should be ambitious and unique showing how we can 'reinvent' the High Street. The opportunities around food and our unique position are therefore likely to be the key focus of any such bid.

3.3 Transport Improvements (including parking)

3.3.1 ARUP have been appointed to produce a BTC Transport Strategy (to inform Be First and the Council's work/strategies rather than being a public document itself). Whilst looking at the whole town centre, nine focus areas are identified for specific work to propose solutions to the existing challenges. The work also includes a Town Centre Parking strategy.

3.4 Property Interventions

- 3.4.1 The Council has some land ownership in the town centre however the main retail and commercial areas of Barking town centre are in diverse and fragmented ownership. It is recognised that fragmented ownership and ownership by landlords with limited interest in town centre prevents town centres thriving and that the most successful town centres/High Streets are where there is a dominant landlord or landlords with clear vision. Indeed, across UK, Towns slow to adapt, especially with a lack of a strong local economy, often see detrimental impact and decline. The Covid-19 crisis may present new opportunities and strengthen the case for investment. We may see more property owners wanting to sell assets, presenting acquisition opportunities, there are predicted shift towards local town centres due to the lock down and the long-term impact from changes in working pattern.
- 3.4.2 There are two elements to property interventions proposed for the strategy – new acquisitions and use of existing Council assets.
- 3.4.3 Regarding the former, the strategic interventions will follow principles governing the Council’s investment in commercial property. Clearly any purchases will go through Investment Panel and Cabinet in the usual way.
- 3.4.4 Regarding the latter, an asset management strategy is required enabling active curation and value enhancing initiatives. These will require participation across key Council departments, especially in developing adaptive relationship between the Council’s My Place team, Inclusive Growth team and Be First. This model will allow the Council to share the benefits generated by successful place-making - the generation of social-economic value and the likely land value uplift, in addition to the influence over place-making decisions. The Council can also look at how best it utilises its own property assets and in some cases not necessarily go for the highest immediate rent generating use but something that has broader long term benefits for the town centre in terms of improving the overall offer. This is exactly what dominant landlords do to improve areas and their long term prosperity. This also aligns to social value lease work being progressed, in line with the adopted social value policy in May. As such the Town Centre Strategy Group (with My Place represented) will have a custody role and be informed of any Council property in the Town Centre becoming vacant and make the decision on its best use in terms of delivering the strategy.

4. Financial Implications

Implications completed by David Dickinson, Investment Fund Manager.

- 4.1 Appendix 1 contains a draft Regeneration Strategy for Barking Town Centre. It sets out a vision and delivery plan to achieve it. The strategy recognises not every project is funded and that additional funding would need to be secured to deliver the full vision. Any new projects would need to secure relevant approvals where the Financial implications will be set out. The strategy itself has been produced by Be First within existing staff resources.

5. Legal Implications

Implications completed by Dr Paul Feild Senior Governance Solicitor

- 5.1 The Barking Town Centre Regeneration Strategy is led by the Council's regeneration Company Be First and sets out a plan to regenerate the Town Centre by taking on three specific interventions relating to food, transport links and the Vicarage Field covered shopping precinct. The Council has the powers to set and implement the vision as a local authority and a local planning authority, including the general competence power under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011.
- 5.2 The Report at paragraph 3.1 explains the governance process. It takes the approach of a Business Improvement District but attenuated to take account of local factors to ensure both accountability but also stakeholders and community interests. As explained in the report a vibrant town centre requires commitment by partnership working and not least with the Police and transport hub operators. This is re-enforced by timed quarterly, monthly and fortnightly liaison meetings to ensure the delivery of the strategy is on track and concerns are nipped in the bud.
- 5.3 In the development and application of the strategy due regard will be made to ensure that human rights are respected and full commitment to the public sector equality duty as required by the Equality Act 2010.

6. Other Implications

- 6.1 **Risk Management** - The key risk is that the Strategy is not successfully implemented and that the vision is not achieved. The risk will be mitigated by the governance structure proposed which will monitor progress. Additional funding is required to deliver the full vision

Individual projects within the strategy will have their own risk register.

- 6.2 **Contractual Issues** - This report is not requiring any contractual relationships. Individual interventions will require these but will be subject to their own approval processes.
- 6.3 **Staffing Issues** - The Strategy has been produced and will largely be delivered by Be First on behalf of the Council.
- 6.4 **Corporate Policy and Equality Impact** - The Strategy aligns to LBBD Corporate Policy, the Borough Manifesto and the forthcoming Inclusive Growth Strategy.

The Strategy recognises the diversity of Barking Town Centre and the objective of 'No-one left behind.' An Equality Impact Assessment has been conducted on the strategy as a whole with positive impacts upon the protected characteristic groups outlined in the Equality Act 2010. It will be monitored via the new Strategy group. Individual projects where relevant will be subject to their own EIA.

- 6.5 **Safeguarding Adults and Children** - The Strategy aims to reduce inequalities.
- 6.6 **Health Issues** - The vision includes reference to creating a healthy place with a strong focus on healthy food, supporting walking and cycling and quality green

spaces. There are a number of specific projects which will support improving health outcomes.

- 6.7 **Crime and Disorder Issues** - The strategy recognises the importance of addressing crime and ASB in creating a town centre where people want to spend time.
- 6.8 **Property / Asset Issues** - The strategy recognises the role that property ownership plays in delivering the vision. It sets a framework for intervention however any specific property/asset purchases would be subject to individual Investment Panel and Cabinet approval.

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report: None

List of appendices:

- **Appendix 1:** Barking Town Centre Regeneration Strategy 2020-2030