

Draft framework for environmental sustainability in Barking Town Centre

1. This paper sets out a policy framework for an environmentally sustainable redevelopment of Barking Town Centre and identifies issues to consider in implementing the framework. If approved by the Executive it will form the basis for co-ordination of activity within the Council, advocacy with external partners, agreement of a fully costed strategy and action plan, and the formulation of individual policies and projects to achieve the objectives of the strategy.

2. The main recommendations are that the Council:

- adopts the framework attached to this report as the basis of further work to develop a strategy and fully costed action plan for an environmentally sustainable development of Barking Town Centre;
- welcomes the environmental targets set out in the London Mayor's Spatial Development Strategy and associated strategies for energy, waste, air quality, noise and biodiversity and commit itself to embedding these, or more challenging targets appropriate to the borough's circumstances, in policy relating to the town centre.
- reflects the strategy's objectives in the Interim Planning Guidance for the town centre, the new Local Development Framework and in planning briefs for town centre projects;
- uses its planning powers pro-actively to encourage developers to meet environmental targets and makes their implementation a priority for funding through Section 106 agreements with developers;
- develops a funding strategy to identify relevant grant and other funding streams and with our partners secure the resources needed to implement the actions set out in this report;
- contracts consultancy help where necessary to develop the actions needed to implement this strategy;
- takes action through the Council's network of partnerships and forums to enlist the support of the community for this strategy and to change environmentally unsustainable behaviours.

The redevelopment of Barking Town Centre

3. Barking and Dagenham will undergo huge changes in the next ten to fifteen years, as the tide of London's regeneration moves east through the Thames Gateway. These changes are likely to be seen first in Barking Town Centre. The Town Centre Framework Plan envisages a net gain of 4,000 new homes and a greater area and intensity of use than the current town centre.
4. The Council's vision for Barking Town Centre is for a vibrant, environmentally sustainable and well designed mixed-use centre, which will serve as the primary shopping and leisure activity centre for the residents of the borough and become a destination for visitors from other parts of East London. The new town centre will provide improved shopping, entertainment, cultural and learning facilities and play an important part in helping diversify the borough economy.

5. However, a busier and more crowded town centre will create the potential for greater stresses on the environment – more waste, more traffic and more noise and air pollution. An increase in housing will add to the borough's impact on the environment, since more than a quarter of all CO2 emissions in the UK originate from the construction and occupation of homes. An environmental strategy for the town centre is needed to address these potential stresses and to achieve the Council's ambitions for a development that is both a flagship programme and a shop window for the whole of the borough. It would enable us to:
- “design out” some of the additional environmental burden by making provision within new developments for cycling, waste recycling and use of renewable energy;
 - manage the environmental stresses created by a busier town centre;
 - help create a better quality of urban living for existing and new residents, visitors and businesses;
 - contribute to the economic regeneration of the town centre by creating an environment that can attract businesses and consumers;
 - and support better health for town centre residents by cutting down on pollution and promoting healthier lifestyles.

Statement of principles

6. To achieve high environmental standards in the town centre, the Council will use its powers as a planning authority, its ability to leverage government resources, its partnerships and consultative links with the local community and its role as a landowner and landlord. It will develop policies and projects to ensure that:
- resources such as energy and water are used more efficiently by town centre households and businesses;
 - a high proportion of energy needs in the town centre is met from renewable sources;
 - a greater proportion of household and business waste is recycled;
 - people are able to choose to walk, cycle, or use public transport to access facilities, in preference to travel by car;
 - air, noise and light pollution is minimised through high quality design standards and building techniques;
 - bio-diversity is maintained and where possible enhanced;
 - high quality public and green spaces will provide opportunities for meeting, entertainment and relaxation and act as a connecting grid for the town centre, linked in turn to other areas
7. We will develop policies and targets to achieve these aspirations from the proposals made by the London Mayor in his Spatial Development Strategy and associated strategies for energy, waste, air, noise, transport and biodiversity. These policies and targets should then be applied to new developments in the town centre as they come forward and to the renovation of existing council-owned properties.
8. In addition, as a practical and visible statement of intent and in line with the Mayor's London Plan we will seek to develop an innovative, flagship example of sustainable living, on the lines of the Beddington Zero Energy Development, or the Millennium Village in Greenwich.

Energy efficiency and renewable energy

9. The “energy hierarchy” set out in the Mayor’s Energy Strategy states that essential energy needs should be met by applying energy efficiently; applying renewable energy; and optimising the efficiency of energy supply. We should seek to apply this test to new developments and to the ongoing refurbishment of Council stock in the Town Centre.
10. In order to improve energy efficiency we will need to set high standards for insulation and the use of good quality building materials to high standards of design and construction. This will also help minimise noise pollution, particularly important given the planned higher density of housing in the town centre and its promotion as a centre for leisure pursuits, such as bars and clubs. We should also consider whether to set a design energy consumption figure lower than the minimum standards set by the Building Regulations and appropriate SAP ratings for different kinds of homes in the town centre.
11. In line with the Mayor’s Energy Strategy, we should encourage and prioritise proposals to incorporate renewable energy sources, such as photo-voltaic or solar heating, in developments. To do this we will need to provide information and support to developers to encourage the use of embedded photo-voltaic generation (including on how to draw down the 50% subsidy available from Government) and on how to build solar water heating into developments at the construction stage. The Mayor’s Energy Strategy recommends that all new residential developments should make provision for 10% of the site’s energy needs to come from renewable energy sources: we should consider whether this or a higher target would be appropriate for the town centre.
12. Combined Heat and Power (CHP) schemes have had mixed success in the past, including in Barking and Dagenham, due to problems of cost and controllability. However, the technology has moved on and CHP schemes are now one of the most cost-effective ways to reduce energy waste. Major regeneration projects, such as the Elephant and Castle, have made provision for CHP and secured European funding to pay for it. The London Mayor has called for a doubling of CHP schemes in the capital. We should assess the feasibility of siting a CHP scheme in the town centre.
13. The Mayor has proposed that all street appliances should run off renewable energy sources, most probably solar power or photo-voltaic cells. The possibility of applying this policy in Barking Town centre is being investigated as part of a Public Realm and Movement Strategy.

Waste management and recycling

14. Households in Barking and Dagenham produce about 1.7 tonnes of waste per year. This is the highest figure in London, but historically the borough has had one of the lowest recycling rates in the capital – 2.5% in 2000-01, compared to the London average of 7.7% (and rates as high as 22% in Sutton). This is now changing, with a new contract signed with Shanks that will enable the borough to meet the London Plan’s targets of recycling at least 25% of household waste by 2005, 30% by 2010 and 33% by 2015. This will be achieved primarily by a bag collection scheme, rolling out to all the borough’s houses, including the town centre, by 2005/6.

15. Achieving high levels of recycling in the town centre will impose more difficult challenges. More households and busier retailers are likely to produce greater quantities of waste that will need to be collected and recycled or otherwise disposed of, in accordance with the borough's waste management and recycling strategy. The town centre also has a street market, which produces significant quantities of rubbish. A busier and more built-up town centre may need more regular collection of rubbish if it is to be kept clean and tidy. We should also look at the techniques currently being applied in Woolwich Town Centre to "design out" litter and seek to apply them to the redevelopment of the public realm in Barking.
16. The nature of the town centre development - predominantly high rise and flatted accommodation – may make a bag collection service impractical. To ensure that the town centre achieves recycling levels in line with the Mayor's targets, we should investigate the feasibility of policies to provide space within new and refurbished dwellings for recycling facilities, for example by providing different chutes or bins for different kinds of rubbish. A less desirable alternative would be to provide "bring" recycling facilities in safe, accessible, communal areas on-site.
17. Where it is not possible to include recycling facilities within developments, we should establish a network of recycling banks at frequently visited places, such as supermarkets, shops, schools and sites near main roads. We will aim to provide at least one site per 500 households, collecting at least mixed paper, metal cans, plastic bottles and catalogues and directories. The design of these facilities should be as unobtrusive as possible. We are investigating the feasibility of siting underground recycling facilities in the borough and will look at possible sites in the town centre. We should also seek to establish a composting scheme for the organic waste produced by the street market. This could in time be extended to cover domestic households.

Movement and transport

18. The quality of life and control of air and noise pollution in a busier, more built up town centre will depend to a significant extent on the success of measures to reduce car use within its boundaries. Barking is already well served by public transport and proposed improvements, such as the East London Transit scheme, should help limit the growth of car use in the town centre.
19. The Framework Plan for the town centre sets out measures to create a well-connected, safe, convenient and attractive environment in the town centre that encourages people to walk or cycle, and enriches their experience of doing so. It proposes to:
 - Establish Home Zones in the residential areas to the south of the town centre, with low speed limits and use pedestrianised areas and traffic management measures to give priority to pedestrians in the town centre wherever practical.
 - Open up the River Roding frontage and Abbey Green, with a greater range of leisure activities accessible from the town centre. Green corridors will encourage movement from the town centre to the river, Abbey Green and Barking Park.

20. We could complement the measures set out in the Public Realm and Movement Strategy by the provision of the necessary infrastructure to discourage unnecessary car use and to support pedestrian movement and cycling. Possible measures could include:
- Improvements to the street environment, removing barriers and obstructions that make it difficult or unsafe for pedestrians to use the street
 - Maintaining and managing footpaths in the town centre to ensure that they are kept in good repair, that signing is clear and informative, that graffiti, rubbish and clutter are removed, that they are adequately illuminated and, where necessary, CCTV installed for safety reasons
 - Planning policies to make provision in all new developments for good cycle access to the development and to install secure cycle parking facilities, whether private or communal.
 - Establishing a network of cycle paths throughout the town centre, with secure cycle parking facilities at strategic locations, including Barking Station. The cycle path network will be linked with initiatives such as the Green Grid Network being prepared for the Thames Gateway area.
 - The Council could also investigate the use of car sharing and car clubs, with a view to discussing with developers incorporating such arrangements into new developments.
21. These and additional elements could be brought together in a travel plan for the town centre, which would enable residents to make best use of Barking's existing and planned public transport links and help develop a sustainable transport ethos in the area. The Council could:
- explore ways to supply information on local public transport to local residents through a variety of methods and central sites, including the Library, Town Hall and Barking Station.
 - investigate with public transport operators the possibility of offering specific promotions and discounts.
 - encourage larger businesses in the town centre to draw up travel plans for their staff and encourage new business developments to adopt travel plans through planning conditions.
 - explore ways to integrate the town centre plan with the travel plans of local schools and businesses.

Bio-diversity and green space

22. In Abbey Green, Barking Park, Greatfields Park and the Town Quay, the town centre has important adjacent areas of green space. We want to increase use and enjoyment of these community resources, by:
- increasing the bio-diversity of the sites by “habitat enhancements” - creating wildflower meadows and planting native trees and shrubs;
 - Improving access and encouraging movement to and between them by making key routes into “green walkways” for pedestrians, especially between the Abbey Gardens and Town Quay;
 - Securing lottery funding through the Public Parks Initiative Programme for improvements to Barking Park
 - Opening up the Roding riverside area to pedestrians and leisure activities. We will seek to apply the Mayor’s “Blue Ribbon” principles to the use of the river and to preserve or enhance its existing bio-diversity in any riverside development.
 - Making Abbey Green an integral part of a cultural quarter in Barking that will also include the Broadway Theatre and other developments.
23. Abbey Green, Barking Park, Town Quay and a new green route along the River Roding will act as the “lungs” of a more densely populated and intensively used town centre. In line with the Mayor’s Biodiversity Strategy we will look for opportunities to use planning obligations and agreements to “green” the built environment in the town centre and increase its stock of bio-diversity. We will encourage the incorporation of new or enhanced habitat or design, such as “green roofs”, in significant new developments and the inclusion of features such as plants in courtyards, climbers on walls and window boxes. We should also seek to ensure that all new developments provide an adequate level of private and public open space for each dwelling.

Working with the community

24. Implementing our vision will also need the understanding and active involvement of the different communities in the town centre. We should:
- highlight environmental issues in any consultations relevant to the Town Centre;
 - highlight distinctive environmental features of the regenerated town centre in our promotion and marketing – this will help attract and retain the new residents we hope to attract into the town centre;
 - explore ways to enlist the support of businesses in Barking Town Centre (including the market traders), to minimise waste and to improve rubbish collection, recycling and composting, including by sponsorship schemes;
 - work with the town centre communities, through community based organisations and partnerships to ensure the town centre remains clean and green, for example by “adopt a recycling bank” schemes;

- run awareness courses and initiatives, including through local schools, and pilot incentive funding schemes, to minimise waste and ensure that recycling schemes are properly implemented;
- highlight the town centre's distinctive environmental features in displays in public buildings, such as the Library and Barking Station;
- work with businesses to reduce their energy requirements, especially where a building is being refurbished.

Implementation of the strategy

25. Implementation will demand co-ordinated action from a range of Council departments, other public sector bodies, the private sector, voluntary and community groups, over a period of many years. To be successful we will need to:
- develop a clear vision for the environmentally sustainable development of Barking Town Centre, fully owned within the Council and communicated to partners;
 - build strong linkages and partnerships with key external players, steering activity in line with the aims of the strategy;
 - set high standards for energy efficiency, renewable energy, recycling and the provision of transport infrastructure in the town centre. Once adopted in legislation, the Mayor's Spatial Development Strategy will form the baseline for this work, but we should also investigate the possibility of developing higher, borough-specific targets from the Mayor's specific strategies, taking into account other environmental legislation and guidance that may be relevant.
 - embed standards and targets in planning policy, undertaking further policy work and consultation around the Interim Planning Guidance for the Town Centre, the new Local Development Framework and planning briefs for individual projects. These will apply to all projects, public, private, or partnership.
 - map the availability of government grants, EU funding and other sources of finance to help implement the strategy. We will need to work pro-actively both in bidding for EU funding and in assisting developers to make use of grants available to them;
 - develop clear and understood lines of accountability and decision making to ensure that action is properly co-ordinated across the range of Council departments and services involved in town centre regeneration. The Director Leisure and Environmental Services should act as an environmental "champion" in the Top Management Team to push this work forward.

Capacity building within the Council

26. The restructuring of the Council's regeneration activities, which is due to go to the Executive on 9 September, will create a new sustainable development team, with four new and additional posts. This will vastly increase the capacity of the Council to manage the environmental agenda. Capacity could be further reinforced by the development of practical tools to enable Council officers to steer individual projects in line with the strategy, the use of consultancies to bring in expertise where necessary, professional training for key officers and continuing contact with other boroughs that have experience or good practice to offer.
27. Work is already underway in the Housing and Planning departments to develop tools for the implementation of environmentally sustainable policies. A Pan-London Construction Guide will highlight best practice in sustainable construction from across London, set out regional, national and EU policy guidelines and explain how environmental sustainability can be integrated into new developments. A Sustainability Checklist will provide methods to assess the sustainability of development proposals and could be used to monitor the implementation of policy and strategy. An Information Matrix will set out for each policy relevant sources of information, examples of best practice in other London boroughs and set out available sources of grant funding.
28. These documents are intended for use by any Council officer undertaking town centre works. They will provide useful guidance but there may also be need to support them by appropriate professional training for key project officers, of the kind provided by many University faculties, as well as specialist environmental agencies. We should also continue to encourage contacts with other local authorities with relevant experience in this area.
29. As the Council has now strengthened its own capacity in this area, there should be no need for extensive involvement by consultants, particularly as consultancies do not necessarily strengthen a client's ownership of an agenda or ability to implement it. However, a limited and narrowly defined consultancy in the early stages of this work, could assist us in identifying technologies, actions or projects that can help achieve the objectives of the strategy. Preliminary discussions have already been held with two not-for-profit organisations, Bio-regional (the originators of the Beddington Zero-Energy Development and co-authors of *One Planet Living in the Thames Gateway*) and Sustainable Energy Action, who provide consultancy and installation services in renewable energy technologies. Both have a proven track record of working with local authorities.

Funding and financial resources

30. There are a wide range of schemes offering information, advice, or grant funding to support the uptake of renewable energy or energy efficiency technologies. Examples include the Energy Efficiency Best Practice Scheme, the enhanced Capital Allowances scheme (which encourages take-up of energy efficient technologies) and the Energy Saving Trust. The DTI "Clear Skies" scheme provides grants for photo-voltaic, wind and geothermal energy generation. We will need to map available provision, keep up to speed with schemes as they open or are closed down and ensure that this information is provided to developers working on Town Centre projects.
31. An expression of interest has been submitted to the Liveability Fund for resources to help improve the public realm in the town centre, by connecting up and enhancing the use of the area's existing green spaces. Very significant amounts of EU funding are also available for environmental improvements. Again, we will need to map what is available and be ready to make bids when opportunity presents itself.
32. *One Planet Living in the Thames Gateway* has calculated that building homes to the Eco-Homes "Very Good" standard would add about 2% to build costs. The Eco-Homes scheme does not cover as wide a range of measures as envisaged in this strategy and can only be used as a rough guide to possible costs. But the report did show that about half of the additional costs imposed by higher environmental standards could be offset by planning gain - allowing developers to increase development in exchange for meeting environmental targets. The rest of the extra cost would be passed on in higher prices for homes, but the report demonstrated that increased mortgage repayments could be more than compensated for by lower household expenditure on energy and water bills, transport and waste.
33. Higher environmental standards can be paid for by a combination of grant financing, developers' benefits and passing on costs to purchasers that will be offset by savings in other household expenditures. However, we will need to do further work to model the likely impact on land valuations of requiring developers to meet higher environmental standards. The Council may need to consider whether it is willing to accept lower land receipts in order to fund environmental enhancements and to make their provision a priority for Section 106 funding.

Monitoring and evaluation

34. Implementation of the strategy and action plan for environmental sustainability should be monitored by the Town Centre Strategy Group, as for other town centre projects. Appropriate indicators of achievement will be incorporated into the Balanced Scorecard for regeneration.