

Project Initiation Document

Tower Hamlets Local Plan Review

11 January 2023

Contents

Contents.....	2
1.0 Introduction & background to the project	3
2.0 Objectives.....	6
3.0 Scope of the project.....	6
4.0 Approach.....	7
5.0 Deliverables.....	8
7.0 Project Governance.....	8
8.0 Stakeholders and engagement	9
9.0 Timescales.....	10
10.0 Interdependencies	10
11.0 Assumptions.....	11
12.0 Budget	11
13.0 Risks.....	12

1.0 Introduction & background to the project

1.1 Background Information

Planning law requires that every local planning authority identify their strategic priorities and to set out policies to address these in their development plan documents.

LBTH's development plan includes both the Local Plan and the London Plan, in addition to other development plan documents including Neighbourhood Plans.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets adopted its current Local Plan in January 2020. It was the culmination of a four-and-a-half-year process, with the first engagement sessions beginning in Spring 2015, after which two formal consultations were undertaken and then an examination in public.

At the heart of the Plan, it seeks to 'manage growth and share the benefits' of this growth. It includes 59 policies, of which 14 are strategic policies that present the overarching strategic priorities for each section of the plan, and the rest are development management policies that guide specific details of development. The Plan also includes 20 Site Allocations. These are sites identified within the borough that support the delivery of the plan's strategic priorities, including meeting the borough's housing target.

1.2 The need for a new Local Plan

While the current Local Plan was adopted relatively recently, there have been sufficient changes to justify the review the Plan. There have been significant changes to the national planning system through both changes to legislation and policy, as well as the new London Plan which was published in March 2021 and includes many significant strategic changes. There have also been several local challenges and opportunities which have presented themselves since the last Plan. With the implementation of the Local Plan, officers have highlighted areas of policy requiring update, due to higher level directions or local circumstances shifting, including social, economic and political changes resulting from the Covid 19 pandemic and the UK leaving the European Union.

a. Statutory Requirements

Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 sets out that each local planning authority must identify their strategic priorities and have policies to address these in their development plan documents.

There is a statutory requirement to review a Local Plan every five years. At that point the Local Authority should assess the existing policies and decide whether the Plan should be updated or fully revised. To meet this statutory deadline, LBTH will need to formally begin the process by winter 2022.

b. National Policy

In 2019 the Government published a White Paper on the future of planning in England. While the White Paper proposed many changes to the planning system, it was very high level, and it was unclear how those changes would be introduced and to what extent. In September 2021, a new Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities was appointed and subsequently a new White Paper, "Levelling Up" was published in February 2022.

The Government has published several national policy documents:

- a new NPPF,
- the National Design Guide, and
- the National Model Design Code.

The Government has also introduced significant changes to planning legislation, consolidating many different commercial and community uses in a new use class – Class E. The Government also amended the legislation to explicitly remove any planning controls on changes within Class E by deeming them not development. The Government also introduced new permitted development rights allowing changes from Class E uses to residential within certain limits and allowing upwards extensions to buildings that meet certain criteria.

Finally, the Government has introduced the First Homes programme, which requires at least 25% of affordable homes provided through planning obligations to be discount market sale.

c. London Plan/Regional Policy

The current London Plan was published in March 2021. It represents a significant change from the previous London Plan and introduces new policies which result in the Local Plan no longer aligning in certain areas.

- Policy H11 allows Build to Rent developments to provide all their affordable housing as Discount Market Rent (DMR). This conflicts with Local Plan policy D.H2, which expects all development to use the council's preferred tenure split of affordable housing products (70% low-cost rent + 30% intermediate).
- Policy SI7 Reducing Waste and Supporting the Circular Economy encourages Local Authorities to include policies supporting the circular economy in their Local Plans; LBTH does not have a policy supporting the circular economy.
- Policy G5 is a New London Plan policy relating to an Urban Greening Factor that encourages greening of development on site. Local Authorities are encouraged to set higher standards for the use of Urban Greening Factor requirements.
- Policy D9 relates to tall building development and requires LPAs to set-out appropriate locations and heights for tall buildings within development plans. The policy also requires LPAs to provide a clear definition of tall buildings within a local area rather than having a relative definition (i.e. more than double the height of prevailing context).
- Policy D12 relates to fire safety and incorporates such considerations into the planning application process. LPAs will need to consider policies related to the design and management of developments.
- Policy D3 provides new policies on optimising site capacity through a design-led approach. These policies require a considerably detailed process to be undertaken to assess the capacity for sites to deliver on housing, employment and community needs.
- Policy T6 further reiterates the expectations of car-free developments across well-connected areas. These policy requirements and overall narrative needs to be managed sensitively in light of wider political considerations.

Since the publication of the London Plan, a range of London Plan Guidance (LPG) documents have been released for consultation that provide more detail on the implementation of policies which so far have related to design and characterisation, large scale shared living and fire safety. The Local Plan Review will need to take this into account and consider details/policies/themes have been emphasised within these LPGs.

d. Local Policies

Issues arising in certain uses and the application of some existing Local Plan policies include:

- Tall buildings – managing heights, locations and design alongside considering fire safety matters.
- Housing land – policies generally expect non-residential development not to compromise the supply of land for new homes, but it is unclear how to assess this; there is no database of non-residential uses on sites suitable for residential uses.
- Hotels – applications for hotels / tourist accommodation have been increasing and while the policy refers to the potential for overconcentration it doesn't define where or how this might occur.
- Student accommodation – significant number of applications coming in with poor amenity, policies do not provide detailed guidance for assessing these applications including specificity regarding college/university connection and affordable accommodation in contrast to London Plan.
- HMOs – managing small and large-scale HMO in terms of need and quality of provision.
- Women's safety – existing policies support general public safety measures, but do not address specific issues faced by women in the public realm.
- Economy and employment – risk of large office development expanding into town centres in the city fringe which could impact the diverse economic character areas of the borough.
- Play space provision – ensuring that development is able to provide safe, outdoor spaces for children.
- Education – the projection of pupil numbers within the borough and resultant impacts on allocations for schools across the borough. Such an approach will need to be flexible to incorporate the fluctuating nature of pupil numbers and to provide safeguards for other important community land uses.
- Addressing the deficit of open space available to visitors, workers and residents within the borough and considering how the provision of more publicly accessible open space can be leveraged through development applications.

e. Social, economic and environmental changes

Wider changes in society have also impacted the planning system. Many gradual trends have been accelerated substantially over the last two years, such as,

- Working from home brought on by lockdowns during the pandemic, may have reduced the long-term demand for office floorspace, particularly in the City and Canary Wharf – though the evidence for this is inconclusive.
- The pandemic may also lead to a reduction in demand for new housing in inner London as working from home reduces the locational advantage of living close to employment centres, though this has yet to be demonstrated by evidence.
- Online shopping has had a major impact on high streets and the lockdowns have hit food and drink and other leisure businesses very hard.
- The UK's exit from the European Union may also have an impact on planning. Impacts on supply chains have reduced the utility of the just-in-time delivery model, necessitating increased warehousing. Exiting the European Union may also have longer-term impacts on London's competitiveness as a location for finance and other professional services, reducing demand for office space in high-value areas such as the City and Canary Wharf.
- The climate emergency and commitments to achieving carbon net zero. This is a significant and ambitious priority where planning can play a key role. In relation to 'buildings' which form a big part of the greenhouse gas emissions, key actions identified are, net zero carbon new buildings, major retrofit programmes with ambitious energy objectives, phasing out of gas boilers and gas-

fired CHP, reducing energy demands, as well as advance sustainable construction and the circular economy.

These changes are substantial enough to justify the review of a new Local Plan.

1.2 Links to corporate priorities

The new Local Plan will contribute to the Council's ability to meet the following objectives from the Strategic Plan 2021-24:

Priority 1: People are aspirational, independent and have equal access to Opportunities

- People access a range of education, training, and employment opportunities
- People access joined-up services when they need them and feel healthier and more independent
- Inequality is reduced and people feel that they fairly share the benefits from growth

Priority 2: A borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in

- People live in a borough that is clean and green
- People live in good quality homes and well-designed neighbourhoods
- People feel safer in their neighbourhoods and anti-social behaviour is tackled
- People feel they are part of a cohesive and vibrant community

Priority 3: A dynamic, outcomes-based council using digital innovation and partnership working to respond to the changing needs of our borough

- People say we are open and transparent putting residents at the heart of everything we do
- People say we work together across boundaries in a strong and effective partnership to achieve the best outcomes for our residents
- People say we continuously seek innovation and strive for excellence to embed a culture of sustainable improvement

2.0 Objectives

The key objective is the production of a new Local Plan to ensure that LBTH can meet its needs for housing and other uses over the next 10-15 years. It will support the borough's corporate priorities, providing residents increased access to opportunities, creating access to opportunities, services and environments that enhance their health and well-being as well as developing vibrant, cohesive and resilient communities.

As part of this, officers will commission robust evidence base studies, undertake meaningful consultation and engage members to ensure that the new Local Plan's policies are up to date, fully justified and deliverable.

3.0 Scope of the project

The new Local Plan is intended to guide development in the whole of borough for a minimum period of ten years from its adoption, with a review of its policies at five years.

Specifically, it will include,

- The strategic approach of the new Local Plan, including setting a strategic vision for the borough and identifying boundaries for the borough's 'places'

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- Strategic, spatial and detailed policies
 - Site allocations
 - Infrastructure requirements
 - A monitoring and delivery framework
 - Viability testing
 - Relevant assessments, namely an Integrated Impact Assessment
 - Consultation and engagement with stakeholders in accordance with the SCI
 - Presentation and design including digital format
 - Evidence base

It will not include:

- Policies sufficiently covered in the NPPF and London Plan

4.0 Approach

Work will be managed by the Plan Making Manager, with the Plan Making team leading on drafting policy and engaging with internal and external colleagues and stakeholders. Input from external contractors will also be necessary for developing updated and informed evidence base.

In previous Local Plan drafting, the service has benefited from having Development Management (DM) team members provide direct support and input into policy wording and evidencing. This has taken the form of officers sitting with the team for 2-3 days, or all-day workshops led by policy and DM managers with officer input.

As the Local Plan Review will seek to respond to Government directives in digitising the plan-making process and ensuring equitable access to all people, the project team will liaise with the Divisional Support & Digital and Commercial Innovation Unit. This collaboration will be important in spatially presenting the Local Plan Review work as well as responding to the shift in digital and accessible formats.

The London Plan's design-led emphasis will place a greater focus on the Council's Place Shaping team for support on the development of a range of policies and evidence. The Infrastructure Planning Team will provide essential support in delivering on infrastructure needs and ensuring such needs are incorporated into the Local Plan with viability considerations also taken into account.

Other teams within the planning service and other services across the council will provide input and support in developing the plan, drafting and testing policy, contributing to the important evidence base and defending the Plan through the examination process.

5.0 Deliverables

- Project Initiation Document (PID)
- Discussion papers relating to topics / issues
- Evidence base studies
- Reporting material (Full Council, Cabinet, MAB, CMT, DMT, Lead Member)
- Issues and Options (Reg 18) Consultation Draft
- Preferred Approach (Reg 19) Consultation Draft
- Examination Documents
- Consultation Statements
- Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment
- Strategic Equalities Impact Assessment
- Strategic Health Impact Assessment
- Strategic Viability Assessment
- Habitats Regulation Assessment
- Final Local Plan

These outputs relate to the project milestones identified in section 9.

6.0 Project Benefits / Success Measures (SMART)

- A review and revision of Local Plan policies is a statutory requirement every five years. A full new Local Plan would allow the council to address changes in policy as well as broader social and economic changes in the borough.
- With a new Local Plan, the Council will be better able to ensure that development supports its objectives and will be better able to defend policies at appeal.
- By tracking the effectiveness of existing Local Plan policies by adopting KPIs, officers will ensure that new policies enhance effectiveness.

Specific – policies and guidance addressing local spatial needs and aspirations

Measurable – key performance indicators set as part of monitoring

Achievable – evidence based and viability tested policies

Relevant – effective policies

Time bound – 5-year review

7.0 Project Governance

Project sponsor – Divisional Director

Deputy project sponsor – Deputy Divisional Director

Project manager – Head of Strategic Planning and Plan Making Manager

Political lead – Mayor of Tower Hamlets, Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning

Legal decision making – LBTH Legal team

Project team members – Plan Making, Strategic Planning officers / Place Shaping, Development Management officers

We will report with papers at key decision stages to DMT, CLT and Lead Member and Mayor (for example, confirming the scope of the document, a new policy direction, securing resources etc).

The approval of final documents will progress through the MAB and Cabinet reporting cycle, seeking recommendations from financial and legal colleagues. Adoption of the document will be by Full Council.

8.0 Stakeholders and engagement

As part of the detailed development stage of the project we will produce a Consultation Strategy – in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement – outlining the process for engaging stakeholders, Members and the public. This will ensure effective engagement at all stages.

Member engagement

Elected Members will be engaged in the project from an early stage. It will be important to involve members from all parties to raise awareness of the project and ensure buy-in to the need to implement Article 4 directions. Details of how Members will be engaged will be outlined in the Consultation Strategy.

Stakeholders

Internal Working Group (IWG)

It is proposed the IWG will meet every six weeks and will be a forum within which updates will be given and strategic direction will be sought. Its members and terms of reference will be set out as part of the Consultation Strategy.

External Working Group (EWG)

The EWG will be a forum where updates are provided, and strategic input is sought on strategic matters of mutual interest. Its members and terms of reference will be set out as part of the Consultation Strategy. Officers are considering the initiation of a stakeholder group focused on young people to ensure their voices are heard in the preparation of this important project.

Internal Stakeholders
Place – Development Management, Building Control, Infrastructure Planning, Place Shaping, Divisional Support, Divisional Digital & Commercial Innovation; Regeneration; Housing & Sustainability; Public Realm; Asset Management; Economic Development
Communications; Public Health; Strategy, Policy & Improvement
Corporate Finance & Legal, Corporate Strategy & Equality
Elected Members
External Stakeholders
Local community groups
Neighbourhood planning forums
Local business groups
Landowners
Neighbouring boroughs
Relevant statutory consultee organisations – including representatives for GLA, Transport for London, English Heritage, HSE, Environment Agency, LLDC, CLT, Thames Water

9.0 Timescales

Stage	Output	Timeframes
2022-23		
Stage 0: Initiation and programming	PID finalised (scope of project)	March 2022
	Internal consultation exercise	April-May 2022
	Identify evidence base requirements	April-May 2022
	Set up internal and external working groups	June-July 2022
Stage 1: Regulation 18 – Drafting and consultation on engagement document	Reporting progress to senior management, Lead Member and Mayor	August 2022
	Drafting and development of engagement documents (including commissioning of evidence base)	May 2022-January 2023
	Approval/reporting of draft engagement document by Cabinet to consult	February-April 2023
	Public consultation on engagement document	April-June 2023
Stage 2: Regulation 19 – Drafting and consultation on proposed submission documents	Reporting progress to senior management, Lead Member and Mayor	June 2023
	Document Development: Drafting and develop final policy / direction and identify need for further evidence	June-October 2023
	Approval/reporting submission document by Cabinet to consult	November-January 2023
2024-2025		
	Public consultation on submission document	February-April 2024
	Modifications to the Local Plan	May 2024
Stage 3 (Examination)	Sign-off for submission to Secretary of State	June 2024
	Submit document to Secretary of State	July 2024
	Examination in Public (process + hearing)	August-December 2024
	Final Modifications	January-February 2024
Stage 4: (Adoption)	Adoption	March 2025

10.0 Interdependencies

While the project itself has no interdependencies, the project will require extensive close working with other Council services. It will also require external production of reports.

11.0 Assumptions

- Significant staff resources will be committed to this project in a consistent manner within Planning and Building Control
- Joint working with internal partners will be essential to the effectiveness of the document
- The Mayor of Tower Hamlets and Cabinet Members will provide a clear political steer on the development of the Local Plan

12.0 Budget

Resourcing the Local Plan is a significant commitment and requires additional technical staff, a sustained and detailed period of evidence base gathering and extensive intervals of public consultation, document amendment, and formal challenge periods, including the examination in public by an Independent Inspector, taking the process through to adoption at Full Council. The process of preparing the Local Plan can take approximately 3-4 years and is needed every 5 years to remain up-to-date. In that time, we can expect spends of:

- Yr 1 – Reg 18(s) (x2) evidence + consultation + other (DTP) – approximately £400k
- Yr 2 – Reg 19 evidence + consultation + other (DTP, legal) – approximately £380k
- Yr 3 – EiP consultants / additional evidence + comms / printing + legal/QC – approximately £150k
- Yr 4 – Insp and Programme officer = £150k

It is not an option to fund the additional resources required with current budgets, and so a growth bid has been submitted and supported to fund key stages of the process to ensure that the Council's new Local Plan can be delivered to Adoption by Full Council by 2025.

The team has also requested that resources from any surplus / savings made by the service in the previous financial period are continued to be assigned as a contribution to the production of the Local Plan / towards future plan-making processes, this way prudently allotting resources over time to cover a known cost parameter in the future.

The team remain in close and regular discussion with finance colleagues.

13.0 Risks

Risk	Triggers	Consequences	Current Risk Score (4 is high and 1 is low)	Mitigation Method	Lead Officer
1. Programme delays or stalls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political change within the council leads to a change of direction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant revisions to proposed policies May require changes to or new evidence base studies after they have been completed 	Impact Score (1-4): 3 Likelihood (1-4): 2 Overall score: 5 Target score (following mitigation): 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with lead member, mayor and other members and ward councillors regularly throughout the process Time key milestones to accommodate local elections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Manager
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delays in internal procurement process Poor governance structure Poor project management (e.g. resources and time management) Political change and additional cost saving Resourcing and changes to personnel lead/ contributing and supporting teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delays to various stages Knock-on delays to the final production of the Local Plan Current Local Plan becomes out of date before new Plan is adopted 	Impact Score (1-4): 4 Likelihood (1-4): 2 Overall score: 6 Target score (following mitigation): 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close working with procurement During the project initiation stage, the project team needs to establish a clear governance structure and agree with the project sponsor Regular updates are provided to stakeholders to identify issues and try to find solutions throughout the project Setting realistic project timeframes and rigorous monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Manager

Risk	Triggers	Consequences	Current Risk Score (4 is high and 1 is low)	Mitigation Method	Lead Officer
Program delays or stalls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes to national policy or legislation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depends on the nature of changes Need to revise policies at any stage Need to reconsult Changes to process 	Impact Score: 4 Likelihood: 3 Overall score: 7 Target score: 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor national government proposals and policies Delay stages if changes look likely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project manager