LBTH Fish Island Area Action Plan (AAP) Examination in Public

Fish Island – Primary School Site Selection

1. Introduction

1.1. FI AAP Policy FI 4.6 Part 3 states that London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) intends to work with landowners to safeguard a site for the provision of a 3 form of entry (3FE) primary school as part of the comprehensive development of site(s) adjacent to the Hertford Union Canal (specifically Neptune Wharf, designated as Opportunity Site 3 in Chapter 7). This is following the identification of Fish Island as an area of search for a new primary school in Policy SP07 of the adopted Core Strategy (2010). The justification for this allocation was provided in paragraphs 4.42 – 4.48 of the AAP Submission Version, supplemented by the evidence base which includes the Site Selection methodology Note and the IDP 2011 Update.

1.2. In response to representations received through the Call for Representations process and subsequent discussions, we provide here further information about the site selection process which was applied in preparing the FI AAP and more detail on the deliverability and viability issues which were also considered. This includes evidence which emerged following the engagement period in May 2011 which was used in the preparation of the Proposed-Submission and Submission versions of the FI AAP.

1.3. One factor not present in the early preparation of the FI AAP was the adopted NPPF. Paragraph 72 of the NPPF states that:

“The Government attaches great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should:
- give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools; and:
- work with schools promoters to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted.”

1.4. Evidence states that 2FE (subject to the amount of development) of primary provision needs to be identified within Fish Island Mid and Fish Island North, to meet the demand arising from potential residential development.
1.5. The Fish Island AAP has sought to allocate a site for a 3FE primary school, in addition to that provided as part of the Olympic Legacy application. The level of new residential development on Fish Island Mid and Fish Island North will generate the need for a new primary school of a minimum size of 2 forms of entry. There is an existing deficiency in primary school places to the west of the A12 whilst demand arising from new development on Fish Island East is intended to be met through a new primary school provided as part of the Olympic Legacy application. Proposals within the Legacy Communities Scheme (LCS) Application includes the provision of 6FE of primary school provision, provided in two 3FE primary schools, which meets all the demand for places arising from the LCS development. Therefore, subject to admissions criteria and catchments, that education provision in the LCS area (including Fish Island East) will be met by the proposed schools within the development. Should Fish Island East provide a new secondary school, as opposed to primary, then additional primary school places will need to be provided.

2. Developing the FI AAP

2.1. The Adopted Core Strategy (2010) identifies Fish Island as an area of search for a primary school and a new secondary school. Fish Island is also identified as an area of search for a new local park and a new waste management facility.

2.2. The Engagement Version of the FI AAP (May 2011) proposed one primary school to be located on Fish Island East, and one primary school to be located in Fish Island North (para. 4.56). A new secondary school was also proposed within Fish Island (para 4.57). A new local park (minimum 1ha) was also proposed for Fish Island East and Fish Island North. Fish Island South was also retained as an area of search for a new waste to energy facility.

2.3. Following the Engagement period and the emergence of new evidence in summer 2011, a number of changes were made prior to the Proposed-Submission version of the FI AAP (December 2011). The new evidence included:

- clarification from the GLA regarding the need for the Council to retain the waste function of the McGrath site in order to meet its London Plan waste apportionment target (which may delay the delivery of development and therefore a primary school in the necessary timescale);
- updated school place projections showing increased need for both primary and secondary school provision;
- that the area of search for a secondary school on Fish Island should be restricted to Fish Island East, as there is no single site on Fish Island North or Mid large enough to deliver a secondary school, and that the comprehensive development of Fish Island East under the single ownership of the OPLC provides on opportunity to deliver a secondary school;
• refinement of the new Local Industrial Location (LIL) designation with more land within Fish Island mid coming forward for mixed use and residential led mixed use development; and

• progress in discussions with the Olympic Park Legacy Company and Olympic Delivery Authority regarding the Olympic Legacy area.

3. Site Selection Process – The Site Selection Methodology Note (November 2011)

3.1. As part of the evidence base for the FI AAP and the Managing Development DPD, a ‘Site Selection Methodology Note’ was produced which set out a series of criteria against which sites were tested to assess their suitability for allocating infrastructure uses.

3.2. Specific criteria which were used to select sites for primary schools were:

• identified within a Core Strategy Area of Search for new primary school
• location being in the centre / east of borough
• requirement for school site size of 0.4Ha
• good levels of public transport accessibility

4. Site Selection and Further Assessment in Fish Island

4.1. Applying the criteria within the Site Selection Methodology Note identified a number of sites capable of accommodating a primary school. In order to determine the most appropriate allocation for this infrastructure use, further assessment of sites against additional criteria was undertaken for sites specifically within Fish Island. This took place in the period between the publication of the Engagement document and the Proposed Submission version.

5. Further Assessment

5.1. Sites within the retained Strategic Industrial Land (SIL) were discounted from this site selection for a primary school. This was because sites within the SIL would not be compliant with AAP Policy FI 4.1: Strategic Industrial Location, which safeguards the SIL area for employment and industrial uses. Sites within the Local Industrial Location were also discounted, as there are no sites which could comply with both AAP Policy FI 4.2: Local Industrial Location and DM17: Local Industrial Location within the Managing Development DPD which state that development resulting in the net loss of industrial B Use Class floorspace will not be supported, and the redevelopment of sites with industrial floorspace will only be supported if the existing industrial floorspace is reprovided on site. This is because there are no sites which could re-provide the industrial floorspace, provide a separate access and servicing to land for a primary school, and not jeopardise the function and viability of the on-site employment space.
5.2. As part of the further assessment of sites within Fish Island, further consideration was given to the viability and deliverability associated with development sites, with particular attention to the complex pattern of land ownership. This was in line with the principles current at that time and which are now contained in paragraph 173 of the NPPF which states that:

“Pursuing sustainable development requires careful attention to viability and costs in plan-making and decision-taking. Plans should be deliverable. Therefore, the sites and the scale of development identified in the plan should not be subject to such a scale of obligations and policy burdens that their ability to be developed viably is threatened.”

5.3. Tower Hamlets Council does not own any land within Fish Island, and due to the lack of financial resources and the considerable risks attached to the financial viability and deliverability of assembling a site through the CPO process, only sites in single ownership which met the other criteria were considered when selecting a site.

5.4. Whilst the Council is not able to purchase the land for a school it would be able to identify funding to build the school and is flexible with regard to layout and design to ensure the new school will not unduly compromise a developer’s overall aspirations for the redevelopment of their site. The Council is also committed to ensuring viability issues are fully considered as part of the development management process and if necessary will prioritise infrastructure objectives to ensure the development is not overburdened and it is the school which is delivered. This has been recognised in response to the NPPF as well as representations received, and it is proposed that additional wording will be provided to Section 7, ‘Delivering the AAP’ to provide clarification regarding funding and delivering infrastructure. “The Council will take a proactive approach toward development when delivering the AAP through the development management process, that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. The Council will seek to balance the need for encouraging and promoting redevelopment in Fish Island, with the requirement for contributions towards priorities, as defined by the policies in the AAP and the Implementation Plan in Appendix 2”.

5.5. It is therefore important that any allocation should be capable of bringing forward the land for a primary school in association with other mixed use development. The ability for sites to accommodate other forms of development on-site as part of an overall and viable mixed use scheme which could bear the “cost” of allocating land to a primary school was considered as part of the assessment. It was important to consider the degree to which the allocation of a primary school on a site might threaten development. If the allocation was on a site that did not have the capacity to bring forward the land for a primary school as part of overall mixed development then the allocation would be unlikely to realistic and deliverable.
5.6. During the policy development process BNP Paribas were commissioned to test the viability of development sites which had been proposed for the allocation of strategic infrastructure uses. This Study concluded that

“The least viable sites are located in Fish Island, where values are considerably lower than most other parts of the Borough. However, these sites are currently predominantly industrial in nature, with very little residential accommodation. As is commensurate with their industrial nature, the public realm is relatively unattractive which has a significant impact on potential sales values. As the redevelopment of the area gathers pace and the area develops into a new urban quarter, there is likely to be a step-change in values. Evidence from other sites in London indicates that expectations for such a step-change can be regarded as realistic. Consequently, the current viability position should not preclude the allocation of infrastructure to these sites. Indeed, this infrastructure would be essential in attracting potential residents into the area”. (Tower Hamlets Sites and Place Making Development Plan Document – Site Viability Testing, published Feb. 2012)"

5.7. The viability testing made clear that on Fish Island it would only be new development on relatively large sites which would be able to bring forward major infrastructure such as land for a new school or a local park.

5.8. Therefore even though a primary school could be fitted onto a smaller area, the Council considers that there would be no realistic prospect of the school being delivered because it could not come forward as part of a comprehensive redevelopment

5.9. To meet the need for primary school places it is essential for the new primary school to be delivered within an early phase of the FI AAP. There is no capacity within existing primary schools in reasonable walking distance of Fish Island to accommodate the additional pupils. The Council also considers a primary school to be an essential component of the initial creation of a new residential community in Fish Island Mid and North and sustaining it thereafter. This factor adds additional weight to the need for an allocation that is robust in terms of likely delivery.

5.10. It is estimated that the land take for a 3FE primary school would be 0.5ha. Available evidence shows that outside of SIL and LIL, only 10 out of 51 sites in a single ownership would exceed 0.5Ha.

6. Applying this approach

6.1. In preparing the FI APP, the two sites which demonstrated the strongest ability to accommodate a primary school within Fish Island when assessed against:

1) the criteria in the Site Selection Methodology Note, and
2) plus the additional criteria for Fish Island, are the McGrath site to the north of the Hertford Union Canal and the Neptune Wharf site to the south of the Hertford Union.

6.2. This is primarily due to the significant difference in the size of these two sites in comparison with other sites which meet the other criteria. It was considered that the scale of these sites would allow the allocation of infrastructure uses, specifically a new local park and/or a primary school to be accommodated alongside other forms of development, subject to further testing through the development management process, would not unduly threaten the viability of the overall development of these sites.

6.3. The importance of delivering a primary school in a timely fashion to meet need was determined as being a priority over the delivery of a new local park. Development of the Neptune Wharf site presents less risk of not coming forward for development in the necessary timescale, as the site owner is keen to bring forward the site for redevelopment and pre-application discussions have already been held with a number of stakeholders in the area. In addition, development cannot come forward on the McGrath site until policies that safeguard waste sites in the London Plan, the Core Strategy and the Managing Development DPD can be satisfied. It is not certain when these policies, which sit within a matrix of policy considerations for a wider area, will be satisfied.

6.4. The Council also considers that in terms of enabling additional development, the McGrath site is larger than the Neptune Wharf site, so has more potential to accommodate the local park (1.1ha) as part of a wider mixed use development as opposed to the primary school (circa 0.5ha).

6.5. Placemaking and urban design principles were also considered, however neither site demonstrated a significantly stronger case for locating either a primary school or a local open space than the other. Both sites offer comparable accessibility to future residential communities in Fish Island Mid and North, both are canalside sites and both are of sufficient size and orientation to provide a range of options in terms of school layout, design and precise location.

7. Conclusion

7.1. These considerations led to Neptune Wharf being allocated in the submission version of the FI AAP (May 2012) for the safeguarding of a site for a primary school, and the McGrath site allocated for the location of a new local open space. A summary of this process is described in Appendix 1.

7.2. No material or evidence has come forward since the Submission of the FI AAP for consideration at the EIP which would lead the council to alter
its conclusion that there should be an allocation in the FI AAP in relation to identifying Neptune Wharf as an opportunity site including:

Opportunity to safeguard land for a future primary school (c0.5ha).
## Appendix 1: Primary School Site Selection Process – summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. Ref</th>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>Site size</th>
<th>Within Core Strategy Area of Search for new primary school (In the centre/east of the borough)</th>
<th>Good level of public accessibility (PTAL)</th>
<th>Enable Development</th>
<th>Fish Island AAP considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Neptune Wharf</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>McGrath</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Cheyne</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>BT PLC</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Unit</td>
<td>Limit</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Alami International Ltf</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Palmlane Estate Ltd</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1b</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1b</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Datelink</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>2/1b</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>