Introduction

This is the first step towards preparing a new Local Plan to guide development in the borough over the next 10-15 years. The new Local Plan will set out a vision, strategic priorities and a planning policy framework to guide and manage development in the borough for the next 10 to 15 years, in line with the planning policy requirements set out by national and regional government.

We want to find out what you think about our initial thoughts set out in this ‘engagement’ document – Our Borough, Our Plan.

Vision

A core element of a Local Plan is its ‘Vision’ – an aspirational and realistic impression of what the borough will be like. To develop the vision we need to understand current social, economic and environmental features and future trends. This highlights the challenges the borough faces, opportunities for development, and how best we can achieve our shared objectives.

Some of the key features of our borough are:

**Its places:** the major international business centre of Canary Wharf, historic Whitechapel, vibrant Shoreditch and residential areas with traditional East End character such as Bow and Stepney.

**Its people:** the population was estimated to be 284,000 as at June 2014, 49% are aged between 20 and 39; 69% are from a minority ethnic community and 43% were born outside of the UK.

**Its economy:** one of the most dynamic economies in the country with 11,440 local businesses providing approximately 251,000 jobs. Of these, the majority are micro businesses employing less than 10 people.

Infrastructure

The facilities and services needed to support our communities and to enable the local economy to thrive includes transportation, education facilities, community facilities, health care, open spaces, and telecommunications. Planning for infrastructure is at the heart of this Local Plan.

Sites

The new Local Plan will identify potential development sites and safeguard them for particular uses, such as the delivery of housing, schools, leisure centres or parks. The Council continues to welcome submission of sites.
Our policy aims

To help shape our vision, we have identified 8 key topics, which are the focus of this document.

**Town centres**  Vibrant and varied town centres which bring communities together, as places for retail, leisure and social enjoyment.

**Housing**  New homes, in particular affordable and family homes which meet the needs of existing and future residents.

**Economy and jobs**  Strong and diverse employment base, which delivers our regional role and with a focus on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), which provides employment opportunities for local residents.

**Community facilities**  Mixed community neighbourhoods supported by high quality and accessible education, health, leisure and community facilities, to help promote community cohesion.

**Design and historic environment**  Distinct and high quality built environment which protects and enhances the places and assets that make the borough unique and promotes high quality and safe public spaces.

**Transport and connectivity**  An improved and sustainable transport network to ensure people living, working and visiting the borough are able to get around easily.

**Open space and green grid**  Improved existing open spaces so they are better connected, more accessible and of higher quality. Provide more open spaces, to meet the needs of our growing population.

**Environmental sustainability**  Protecting, enhancing and promoting sustainable development to achieve wider social, economic and environmental benefits. Including waste management, reducing flood risk, enhancing biodiversity, improving air quality and decreasing carbon emissions.
Town centres
These form part of the borough’s distinct identity and character, acting as anchors for local areas with a mix of uses and activities that draw our borough’s diverse communities together. Our Town Centres are increasingly being used as hubs for leisure, social and community activities rather than just shopping.

Challenges
- Understanding what town centres might look like in the future and how they will be used, given changing shopping and leisure trends.
- Concentrations of uses, like betting shops and hot-food takeaways, have negative social impacts and reduce the attractiveness of town centres.
- There has been a loss of retail units in the borough because change of use does not now always require planning permission.

Opportunities
- The London Plan encourages cultural and leisure uses in town centres, as well as higher-density residential development.
- New legislation makes it easier to control new betting shops and payday loan shops opening.

Housing
Over the last 10 years Tower Hamlets has experienced the fastest housing growth in London and is expected to further contribute almost 40,000 new homes by 2025. Increasing land values and reducing land availability are creating denser developments and the Private Rented Sector is now the fastest growing tenure.

Challenges
- A shortage of housing which is affordable for local residents. The Council is concerned this will be made worse by recent government proposals.
- Providing sufficient social infrastructure, including school places and open space to support new housing in order to create sustainable communities.

Opportunities
- Designated Opportunity Areas provide the ability to deliver significant volumes of new housing including affordable housing.
- To meet the specialist housing needs of some groups, such as students, people with disabilities, older and vulnerable people, key workers, and gypsies and travellers.
Economy and jobs

Tower Hamlets has a thriving and diverse economy with increasing employment rates. The majority of businesses are microbusinesses employing less than 10 staff. Our economy and jobs are changing, with ‘tech’ and ‘creative’ roles replacing traditional industry.

Challenges

- High and persistent rates of unemployment amongst certain groups.
- High land values create challenges in accommodating affordable workspace and protecting employment land from loss to residential use.
- New legislative changes make it possible to convert office buildings to residential use without the need to apply for planning permission.

Opportunities

- Employment projections estimate the number of jobs in the borough will almost double to 379,000 by 2031.
- Increasing development and investment interest in East London will create job opportunities for local residents.

Community Facilities

Tower Hamlets has a range of health, leisure, social and community facilities providing valuable services to residents and visitors. Delivery of community facilities are changing, due to financial pressures and the emergence of new models.

Challenges

- The borough’s growing population needs to be supported by more community facilities, including school places, health facilities and community centres.
- Existing facilities have come under increasing pressure for development due to the competing demand for housing. For example, 132 pubs in the borough have closed since 2000, which is a 52% decrease.

Opportunities

- New development helps to fund, or deliver, new community facilities.
- To consider how to support new infrastructure needs, such as Early Years provision, to meet the council’s new legal duties to provide nursery places.
- To consider how to protect valued community facilities, such as local pubs.
Design and Historic Environment

The borough has a unique history and a rich character that has evolved over many years, with varied building types heritage assets. The built environment is changing; increasingly intensive levels of development are coming forward which is altering the skyline and potentially compromising the setting of our heritage assets.

Challenges

- The London Plan promotes higher density development in many parts of the borough. Tower Hamlets could become heavily developed, lacking variety of built form.
- National and regional policies allow higher development densities in exceptional circumstances. The council is concerned that these exceptions are becoming increasingly common.

Opportunities

- The Opportunity Areas in the borough provide an opportunity to bring development forward in a more comprehensive and co-ordinated way with a higher standard of design.
- To review our approach to density, sustainable place making and protecting our heritage to make higher quality places and housing.

Transport and Connectivity

Tower Hamlets is already well connected and provided for in terms of public transport. Transport will be further improved by the new Crossrail stations at Whitechapel and CanaryWharf and new segregated cycle lanes, but more capacity may be required.

Challenges

- The borough’s public transport and major transport routes suffer from congestion and over-capacity, particularly during peak hours.
- There is more demand than capacity for on-street car parking.
- Some parts of the borough suffer from poor connectivity, particularly along the A12 and River Lea and between the Isle of Dogs and South Poplar.

Opportunities

- Development will provide opportunities to increase connectivity
- To consider ways to better promote sustainable transport methods and enhance the public realm and street quality.
Open Space and Green Grid

Tower Hamlets has a number of valued open spaces and waterways. These offer many benefits for people, the environment, wildlife and the local economy. However, since the last Local Plan there has been a decrease in the amount of public open space per 1,000 people.

Challenges

- Increasing development pressure creates the need for more public open space while reducing land available for its provision.
- As the majority of housing stock in the borough is flats, with little private open and play space, accessibility to public open space and play space is even more important to support the health and wellbeing of residents.

Opportunities

- To improve housing amenity land to provide more attractive open spaces and encourage greater use and enjoyment.
- New developments provide opportunities for new open spaces and funding for improvements to existing parks.
- To consider how to enhance our waterways for leisure use.

Environmental Sustainability

The need to deliver growth sustainably across London is a pressing issue. This includes managing waste, reducing carbon emissions, mitigating flood risk and protecting biodiversity. Over the last 10 years the borough’s biodiversity has greatly improved. However increasing development and population puts pressure on other aspects of sustainability.

Challenges

- Increasing development will place additional strain on waste collection, storage and movement systems.
- Parts of the borough lie within high flood risk zones.
- Tower Hamlets produces the third highest level of total carbon dioxide emissions of all London boroughs.

Opportunities

- New developments can help meet carbon reduction targets, through the construction of energy efficient buildings, securing of finances for carbon offsetting and retrofitting of existing buildings.
- New development provides opportunities to improve waste management, storage, collection and management.
Have your say

Do you agree with our proposed approaches?

Is there anything not discussed that we should be considering?

We are consulting from 14 December 2015 to 8 February 2016

See the full engagement document and make your comments here:

www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/localplan

Hard copies are available in Tower Hamlets libraries and Idea Stores

Comments can also be made by contacting the Plan Making team:

planmaking@towerhamlets.gov.uk

(please enter “Our Borough, Our Plan consultation” in the subject)

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Twitter: @TowerHamletsNow

FREEPOST

Our Borough, Our Plan Consultation D&R Strategic Planning

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

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Consultation drop-ins

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<td>Idea Store, Bow, 1 Gladstone Place, Roman Road, E3 5ES</td>
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If you would like to be kept informed about the new Local Plan and other local planning policy updates, please sign up to our mailing list at www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/localplan