Unitary Development Plan

Introduction
1. **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This document is the Adopted Unitary Development Plan for the Borough resulting from the Local Government Act 1985. In August 1989 the Council received an order requiring it to commence the production of its UDP. It has been prepared under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and in accordance with the procedures laid down in the Town and Country Planning (Development Plan) Regulations 1991 and the advice in PPG 12.

1.2 The Local Government Act 1985 introduced a new unitary system of planning for London following the abolition of the Greater London Council (GLC) and thus its functions as a strategic planning authority. It is called a unitary system because it combines the functions of the Greater London Development Plan (a development Plan for the whole of London) and the Tower Hamlets Local Plan (1986) which provided detailed policies for guiding the physical development of the Borough.

1.3 The 1990 Act requires that every London Borough should produce a Plan in two parts - Part 1 containing ‘strategic policies’ which place Tower Hamlets in the broader planning context of London and Part 2 which develops these strategic policies into more detailed local policies. Now that the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) has been adopted it replaces both the GLDP and the Borough Plan (1986) to become the only statutory Plan for the physical development of Tower Hamlets, and any major departures from this Plan must be referred to the Department of the Environment.

1.4 The function of the UDP is to:

- set out a co-ordinated framework for the development and use of land in the Borough for the next 10 years;
- set out the Council’s detailed policies for the control of development in the Borough;
- make proposals for the development and use of land and to allocate land for specific purposes.

1.5 In addition the 1990 Act requires that UDPs contain policies in respect of:

- the conservation of the natural beauty and amenity of the land;
- the improvement of the physical environment;
- the management of traffic

2. **FORMAT OF THE UDP**

Part 1

2.1 Part 1 of this Plan contains broad strategic policies of importance to the development and use of land in the Borough, taking account of national and London-wide policy Guidance. Strategic is taken to mean:

- policies having a direct effect on areas outside the Borough, either adjacent Boroughs or London as a whole. Examples here would include the road and rail proposals supported by the Council, the Council’s target for housing in the Borough or the Council’s proposed boundaries to Metropolitan Open Land in the Borough;
- policies applying across the Borough which act as guiding principles, to be implemented by the application of more detailed policies developed in Part 2. Examples here would include the Council’s strategy for the development of the local economy or its commitment to reducing the impact of road traffic in and through the Borough.

2.2 Part 1 also contains a Strategic Diagram for the Borough showing a number of structural elements within Tower Hamlets which have London wide implications; detailed boundaries are shown on the Proposals Map.
Part 2

2.3 Part 2 consists of:

- detailed policies for the development and use of land in the Borough together with a reasoned justification for this policy approach. These policies are detailed, where appropriate, on the Proposals Map;
- proposals to allocate land for specific purposes, again these are detailed on the Proposals Map;
- standards and guidelines which will be applied by the Council when determining planning applications; and
- diagrams and illustrative maps to assist in the understanding of the Plan.

2.4 Part 2 of the Plan is divided into: broad topic chapters with the Council’s priorities and policies; an implementation Chapter highlighting the mechanisms that will be used to implement the Plan strategies and proposals and indicate the resources available for this; and schedules containing the Council’s development proposals.

3. THE UDP PROCESS

3.1 This Plan is the UDP, adopted on 2nd December 1998. The first version of the Plan, the Consultation Draft, was published on 5th August 1991 and was open for comment until the end of September 1991. Further details of this process can be found in the Report of Consultation (July 1992). The Deposit Draft was then published after additional consultation on the Consultation Draft in October 1992.

3.2 Before this UDP was adopted, the Deposit Draft had been revised to take account of reviews by Planning Committees, the comments received during the consultation phase together with recent changes in planning legislation and guidance from Central Government. The UDP was then placed ‘on deposit’ for six weeks. During this time, the Plan was available for inspection and comments in all local libraries, Bethnal Green Town Hall, One-Stop shops and community bases. During this deposit process representations in support of the Plan or objections to its policies and proposals were lodged with the Council.

3.3 After the deposit period, Council officers attempted to meet all objectors to the Plan to clarify the nature of their objection and to see if it was possible to negotiate appropriate changes to overcome these objections. Where revisions could overcome any objections, they were published for further comments. Where objections could not be overcome through revision they were heard at a Public Local Inquiry held on behalf of the Council by the Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State, Anthony Dixon. The date for the Inquiry was set by the Department of the Environment and commenced on 5th October 1993.

3.4 Following the Public Local Inquiry the Inspector issued his report to the Council in November 1995. The Council then published the modifications it intended to make to the UDP in light of these comments. These were made available for further comments before the Council gave notice of its intention to adopt the Plan in its revised form on 2nd December 1998.
4. DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND THE PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

4.1 In 1991 the Government underlined the role of development Plans by amending the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act to require planning decisions to be in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Development Plans set out the main considerations on which planning applications are decided. However, the weight accorded to the Development Plan is dependent upon it being both up to date and consistent with national policy.

Central Government Policy for London

4.2 The Government issues national planning guidance from time to time, which has to be taken into account when preparing development Plans and in determining planning applications. Since 1988, the Government has been issuing Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs), replacing earlier guidance in the form of circulars which are now used primarily for legislative and procedural matters. The Development Plan for Tower Hamlets is required to be consistent with this national guidance.

4.3 In addition to national guidance the Government's Regional Planning Guidance sets broad strategic policies for land use and development where issues apply across the region. In the case of Tower Hamlets, RPG 9 'Regional Planning Guidance for the South East' applies.

4.4 The Government issued further policy guidance for planning authorities in London in 1996 - Strategic Planning Guidance for London (Guidance) - the UDP regulations require that Part 1 of the UDP should have regard to any Strategic Guidance issued by the Government. Generally, however, Guidance will assume less importance now the UDP has been adopted because the UDP was formulated having regard to it.

4.5 The Government's Guidance for London sets out ten objectives which must be reflected in UDPs:

- promote London as a world city;
- maintain and enhance the competitiveness of business;
- encourage a pattern of land use and provision of transport consistent with the principles of sustainable development;
- promote urban regeneration, particularly in areas requiring physical improvement or employment opportunities;
- enhance the vitality, viability and character of local and town centres;
- maximise housing provision and maintain environmental quality;
- maintain and improve the natural and open environment;
- improve the quality and attractiveness of London’s urban environment;
- facilitate the development of safe, efficient and environment-friendly transport systems;
- seek to improve air quality, to reduce waste, pollution and the use of energy, and to encourage recycling.

Further Strategic Planning Policy for London

4.6 In addition to Government Guidance, the UDP takes account of the London Planning Advisory Committee's (LPAC) 'Strategic Planning Advice for London' (October 1989) and the London and South East Regional Planning Conference's (SERPLAN) 'A New Strategy for the South East' (September 1990).

4.7 LPAC is a statutory body set up in November 1986 as a consequence of the abolition of the GLC. One of its tasks is to advise the Government on strategic planning issues in London. In October 1988 Strategic Planning Advice for London (Advice) was published, the result of studies and wide consultation into the planning needs of London. This document was agreed unanimously by the 32 London Boroughs and the City of London.

When preparing Guidance the Government took account of this Advice. This Advice sets out over 100 specific policies for local
authorities to act upon in their UDPs, however, it also draws a vision of London which has four key themes:

- London as a civilised city;
- London as a world centre of international trade;
- London as a city of opportunities for all;
- London as a city of stable communities.

4.8 The London and South East Regional Planning Conference (SERPLAN) is a non statutory advisory body on regional planning in the South East. SERPLAN’s member authorities are the planning authorities of South East England including London. SERPLAN’s role is to provide policy advice to the Government on regional planning issues.

4.9 Regional guidance from the Government follows and responds to advice from SERPLAN. Current planning strategy for the South East is expressed in Regional Policy Guidance Note 9 issued by the Secretary of State for the Environment. The principal objectives of RPG9 are:

- to ensure an enhanced quality of life is available to residents of the South East by seeking to create and conserve an ecologically sound, aesthetically pleasing and pollution-free environment in town and country; to improve the quality and preserve the integrity of the regions residential neighbourhoods and communities; and to make sure that all can share in the attractions, quality and wealth of the region;
- to maintain the region’s economic buoyancy as a source of wealth and jobs;
- to enable the region to restructure in accordance with evolving working and living patterns and to meet new requirements; continuing to pay primary regard to the older urban areas; and to guide new development to these ends.

5. TOWN PLANNING IN TOWER HAMLETS

History

5.1 The Council carries out the function of local planning authority for the whole of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets from a centralised structure.

5.2 In 1986 the Borough’s administration was devolved (decentralised) to seven largely autonomous Neighbourhoods in order to provide a more accessible and accountable service to local residents and businesses. The town planning service was decentralised in 1987. The policies, proposals and standards of the UDP will be applied and implemented at the local level. With a new administration in 1994 the Neighbourhood structure was abolished for a centralised and coordinated community-relevant approach.

The London Docklands Development Corporation

5.3 The London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) was established in July 1981 to administer the London Docklands Urban Development Area (UDA) as designated by the 1980 Local Government Planning and Land Act. The UDA covered all of the Isle of Dogs and part of Wapping, (South of the Highway and East of the Tower of London). It was established in order to secure the regeneration of its area by:

- bringing land and buildings into use;
- encouraging industry and commerce;
- creating an attractive environment;
- assisting the provision of housing and social facilities to encourage people to live and work in the area.

The LDDC’s corporate goal was:

“To secure the lasting physical, economic and social regeneration of the Urban Development Area.” (LDDC 1991 Corporate Plan)

5.4 The LDDC was made the Local Planning
Authority for the control of development within its area, and was responsible for general development control decisions; matters relating to listed buildings and Conservation Areas; and enforcement. As a land owner it had responsibility for the implementation of development proposals. Its powers included acquiring, managing and disposing of land and carrying out building works and other operations.

5.5 However, the powers conferred on the LDDC did not include the power to prepare a local Plan or subsequently a UDP. This power remained vested with the Council, and the LDDC was required to have regard to the provisions of the Development Plan when determining planning applications. As the Local Planning Authority the LDDC was expected to seek the achievement of the general objectives of the Development Plan in force in the UDA and advertise, as a departure, any development proposal which would conflict with this Plan. For its part the Council was required to take account of the policies and proposals of the LDDC when preparing the UDP.

5.6 The LDDC withdrew from the Borough according in a phased programme of de-designating areas within the Docklands UDA. Upon withdrawal, the LDDC’s development control functions returned to the Council.

6. TOWER HAMLETS IN THE LONDON CONTEXT

6.1 Tower Hamlets occupies a key position within London, with the City to the west and the opportunities offered by an area defined as the East Thames Corridor (stretching from Tower Bridge on both sides of the Thames into Essex and Kent), to the east. The development of Docklands in particular has placed Tower Hamlets at the centre of London’s future, providing new homes and entertainment but perhaps most dramatically of all, a new business centre for the Capital. Tower Hamlets occupies a position at the centre of improvements to the infrastructure of the capital (covering road and rail). This combined with the continuance of major development opportunities places Tower Hamlets in a key position to shift the direction of development in the capital to the east.

6.2 In recent years there has been a massive amount of investment in commercial development in the Borough, targeted at City functions, with more planned in the future. This is matched by an equally significant investment programme in road and rail infrastructure to service this growth. These processes will link the Borough physically and functionally to the City and the West End. With these changes the character of parts of the Borough will change to resemble more closely that of the Central Area. The Plan has been formulated to recognise the growing importance of Tower Hamlets to the national and international functions of the capital.

6.3 Tower Hamlets is also located at the gateway to the East Thames Corridor, an area identified by SERPLAN and the Government as an under-used asset which needs to be developed to its full potential. The area has a number of natural strengths: access to Central London and east coast ports, an abundance of land for development and its proximity to the Channel and through this, to Europe. The area contains a series of development sites terminating at Docklands, together with proposals for major infrastructure improvements. Realising the area’s potential will take a number of years but Central Government has committed itself to assessing this potential and is preparing proposals on the future of the area. The implications of these proposals for Tower Hamlets will be incorporated into future revisions to the Plan.

6.4 Tower Hamlets is at the centre of London’s transport improvements. It lies within easy reach of London’s newest international airports: at Stanstead, and London City Airport at the Royal Docks in Newham. Major transport infrastructure investment in road and rail (including the fast rail link to the Channel Tunnel) is taking place or planned for, or adjacent to, the Borough.

6.5 Tower Hamlets, therefore, enjoys a singularly
good location at a pivotal point between existing growth in the west and future growth to the east, which will enable it to benefit from new investment in London and the South East in terms of improved employment, shopping, leisure and cultural activities. The Plan sets a context to enable these changes to be accommodated satisfactorily using the existing resources of the Borough, in terms of land, and physical and social infrastructure.

6.6 The policies of the Plan must also enable the Borough to take advantage of these opportunities while ensuring that residents enjoy the benefits of these changes, and that the amenity and environment of the Borough generally are protected and enhanced.

6.7 One of the means of ensuring that the amenity of residents and the environment are protected is to ensure that economic growth takes place in a balanced way. Tower Hamlets cannot achieve this on its own. It has therefore co-operated with other boroughs and through LPAC and others, to agree a common approach to the development of London's Central Area. This approach includes the location of growth areas for particular Central London functions; such as policies for transport, parking and for the environment. This approach is fully reflected in this Plan.

7. THE COUNCIL'S PLANNING STRATEGY

7.1 The planning strategy in the Tower Hamlets’ Unitary Development Plan is based on a local response to the major land use and transport issues that will face the Borough in the coming years. Broadly the strategy of the Council is to regenerate the Borough, to stimulate growth and facilitate the long term physical, social and economic development of the Borough, foremost for the benefit of local residents and businesses, while at the same time recognising that Tower Hamlets is part of a wider urban area and has a key role to play in addressing the needs of London as a whole. In achieving this objective the Council will apply four guiding principles. These are, to plan:
- locally;
- responsively, recognising the diversity of communities in Tower Hamlets;
- in partnership with the private, public and voluntary sectors; and,
- with respect for the environment.

Planning for Equality of Opportunity

7.2 The issue of equality of opportunity for all is central to the Tower Hamlets UDP. In a borough with such a multi-racial and multi-cultural population as Tower Hamlets, it is important to ensure that all members of our communities are treated fairly and equally. This includes people with disabilities, women, people from cultural and religious minorities and elderly people. Equality of opportunity is essential for the maintenance and further development of sustainable communities, in line with the Council's Local Agenda 21 objectives.

The Environment

7.3 All UDPs are concerned with the environment, both in a general sense of environmental matters, and in the particular sense of proposing measures to improve surroundings to ensure good standards of new developments. In Tower Hamlets this particularly important, and forms a vital part of the Council's planning strategy. The Council is acutely aware that the poor physical environment of the Borough makes the task of regeneration that much more difficult. Some parts of the Borough are so scarred by the past, or badly laid out, or dirty and noisy, that improvements to the environment for residents and workers are considered to be paramount in the aims of the Unitary Development Plan.

Central Area Zones

7.4 Tower Hamlets already suffers from wide ranging and severe transport problems due to its location on a main through route for the rest of London. Local roads suffer extensive
“rat running” and overall traffic levels have risen significantly in the last year. Motor vehicles are probably the largest source of air and noise pollution in Tower Hamlets. The activities defined as Central London Activities are generally those which draw customers and users from a wide catchment area and often generated intensive use. For these reasons, the Central Area Zones in Tower Hamlets have been drawn close to public transport focal points, capable of accommodating the level of trips generated by such uses.

Economy and Employment

7.5 The unemployment rate in Tower Hamlets is currently the second highest in London and is one of the highest in the country. It is therefore important to ensure that existing jobs are protected whenever possible. New jobs also need to be created. Depending on the nature of the new jobs coming into the Borough, training initiatives will be encouraged so that local people can have access to new opportunities. The Council will continue to promote the Borough as an investment opportunity on a local, Regional and European scale in order to ensure that new jobs are created locally for local people.

Housing

7.6 Tower Hamlets is one of the few London Boroughs which has experienced a significant increase in its population since the 1981 Census. Unemployment in the Borough is at one of the highest levels in London and overcrowding levels are the worst in London. The Council's housing policies therefore seek to increase the number, quality and variety of homes in the Tower Hamlets to meet local needs. There is a desperate need for more affordable housing in the Borough. Consequently, one of the Plan's main objectives is to increase the number of good quality affordable homes in the Borough. Policies also aim to increase the number of homes for families, especially 3-6 bedroom properties homes to meet local needs.

Transport

7.7 The Council’s transport strategy has been developed over several years and has been influenced by several factors. The most overriding of these is the need to provide a safe, efficient and sustainable transport service for all people who live and work in Tower Hamlets. Whilst the Borough's geographical position adjacent to the City of London results in many through trips, many areas close to the City fringe are isolated from nearby employment opportunities due to a lack of access to public transport. The Council recognises the importance of catering for essential through traffic but considers it is vital that the transport system necessary to cater for these trips, and indeed more local journeys, does not compromise the health of the Borough's population and is not detrimental to the environment.

Shopping

7.8 Tower Hamlets has a large number of shops and street markets, including the world famous Petticoat Lane Market. However, the range of choice and quality of shopping is relatively limited. By comparison, neighbouring boroughs have major stores that are part of retail chains, as well as smaller shops which offer more choice. The shopping hierarchy in Tower Hamlets consists of District Centres, Local Shopping Parades and individual local shops. In addition, there are a number of street markets which, in some cases, form an integral part of existing shopping centres. The Council considers these existing shopping areas should form the focus for any new town centre activities in the Borough as these are well served by public transport. The shopping policies therefore aim to concentrate new shopping and town centre development to the existing shopping centres and to resist development on out-of-centre sites.

Open Space, Leisure and Recreation

7.9 A wide range of factors influence the ability of the Borough's residents and those visiting or working in the Borough to have access to
open space, leisure and recreational facilities. These include the range and proximity of facilities; level of disposable income; the associated costs of participation. The level of economic activity and accessibility to public transport and personal transport also influence the levels of participation in leisure and recreational activities. The levels of deprivation provide an indication of local residents’ ability to participate. The Borough continues to be severely deficient in indoor sports facilities and local people still travel long distances to participate in certain sports.

7.10 Policies are also aimed at protecting valuable open space, and ensuring an adequate provision of leisure and recreational facilities which are critical elements of the Council's strategy. Around 85% of the Borough's housing stock is flatted. With the continued growth in the Borough's under five population, the Council considers it a prime policy objective to maintain the existing level of provision and to seek to achieve an increase in open space as opportunities arise.

Education and Training

7.11 Education provision in the Borough includes schools and colleges run by the Council as the Local Education Authority (LEA) and those run by private, independent or voluntary bodies. There are also higher education institutions such as Queen Mary and Westfield College London University and London Guildhall University who, like the LEA have major expansion proposals to accommodate educational activities and fulfill their responsibilities. School roll projections show that pupil numbers are likely to grow. The pressure for nursery and primary school places across the Borough continues because of population growth and the completion and occupation of housing developments. Policies therefore seek to ensure that Tower Hamlets can provide local people with a range of high quality educational facilities to meet their needs.

Social and Community Facilities

7.12 Social and Community Facilities covers a wide range of statutory and non-statutory facilities provided by the Council, the voluntary sector, the National Health Service and the private sector. Social and Community Facilities cater for many functions and activities and for people of all ages and from different social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The facilities reflect not only the population characteristics of Tower Hamlets but are available for the needs of different groups such as people with disabilities, elderly people, women, young people and other individuals of the various communities. The UDP therefore seeks to ensure that there is sufficient land and buildings to meet local needs and to set out the criteria appropriate for the granting of planning permission.

Public Utilities and Flood Defences

7.13 The provision of an effective framework of public utilities and services is essential to the maintenance of the residential character of Tower Hamlets and the continuing support of the employment, amenity and other functions of the Borough. Some parts of the Borough have experienced large developments. The implications of such development on the existing sewage system must be taken into account. Emergency services and other utilities and public services need land and buildings in order to provide services for new major developments and cope with the demands of increases in population.

The Needs of Different Groups

7.14 Tower Hamlets is a pluralistic borough and different groups within the population may have certain needs, some of which may require land or buildings for their satisfaction, others of which may require particular standards to be applied. The UDP does not include distinct and separate policies for these needs. Instead it is intended that an understanding of the needs of people with disabilities, the elderly, racial minorities or other groups, should run through the implementation of every policy, so that the needs of different groups and the diverse aspects of the Plan can be taken into account.
7.15 In preparing these policies, the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy has served as a guide to the issues that should be addressed. The policies of the Plan seek to oppose all forms of discrimination on the grounds of colour, creed, ethnic or national origin, disability, age, sex, sexual orientation or marital status in the proposals, policies and implementation of this Plan.

Planning for a Better Environment

7.16 The Plan making process and development control can make a positive contribution to safeguarding and improving the environment. Local Planning Authorities, for the first time, are required to have regard to environmental considerations in preparing their Development Plans. However, through its statutory process and other informal means, town planning has always played a key role in shaping and conserving the environment and has its origins in the need to balance demand for development against wider environmental and amenity considerations.

7.17 The UDP offers a means to protect and improve the environmental quality of the Borough when changes are proposed and to ensure that new developments add to, rather than detract from, the surrounding area. Equally, policies contained in the Plan can provide a framework for the conservation of natural resources and reductions in local and cumulatively with other authorities, global pollution.

7.18 The protection and improvement of the environment will be themes that run through all of the policies of this Plan. However, Chapter 2: The Environment, sets out a broad range of policies to ensure that the urban environment is improved or conserved; that the amenity of residents is protected; that pollution is kept under control; that the open environment is attractive and natural areas are protected; and that the Borough moves towards a more sustainable form of development.