
Meeting	Cabinet
Date	20th June 2012
Subject	Finchley Church End – Draft Final Town Centre Strategy for adoption
Report of	Cabinet Member for Planning
Summary	The Finchley Church End Town Centre Strategy will provide a framework for managing change and guiding future development to ensure that this supports the long term vitality and viability of the town centre and protects and enhances this part of the borough. Following a period of public consultation the draft strategy is being brought to Cabinet for formal adoption.

Officer Contributors	Lucy Shomali – Assistant Director – Strategic Planning and Regeneration
Status (public or exempt)	Public
Wards affected	Finchley Church End, West Finchley
Enclosures	Appendix A – Finchley Church End - Draft Final Town Centre Strategy
Reason for urgency / exemption from call-in	Not applicable
Key decision	No

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1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Note the outcome of the public consultation on the draft Town Centre Strategy for Finchley Church End as set out in Appendix 1, and**
- 2. Formally adopt the draft final Town Centre Strategy for Finchley Church End attached as Appendix 2**

2. RELEVANT PREVIOUS DECISIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet, 3 April 2008, Decision 10 (Vibrant and Viable Town Centres – A Suburban Town Centre Strategy for Barnet)
- 2.2 Cabinet, 3 February 2010, Decision 6 (Responding to the Recession – Suburban Town Centres)

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The three priority outcomes set out in the 2012/13 Corporate Plan are: –
 - Better services with less money
 - Sharing opportunities, sharing responsibilities
 - A successful London suburb
- 3.2 Through the preparation of Town Centre Strategies, the Council can deliver the Corporate Plan strategic objective of ensuring that our town centres are vibrant places where business can thrive.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 4.1 Failure to sustain and enhance Barnet's town centres will impair their key contribution to the social, economic and environmental well-being of the borough.

5. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 5.1 Pursuant to the Equality Act 2010 ("the Act"), the council has a legislative duty to have 'due regard' to eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality and fostering good relations in the contexts of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy, and maternity, religion or belief and sexual orientation.
- 5.2 Town centre strategies aim to create the right environment for vibrant and viable town centres in Barnet. Integral to this is the need to respect the diversity of the town centre network and to take into account the different requirements of each town centre, and the different needs and preferences of those who use them.
- 5.3 The individual Town Centre Strategies will identify opportunities to enhance the public realm and improve accessibility for all users and will seek to support the provision of a wide range of shops and services to meet the needs of diverse local populations.

6. USE OF RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (Finance, Procurement, Performance & Value for Money, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

6.1 The costs of approximately £45k for preparing the Finchley Church End Town Centre Strategy have been contained within the Strategic Planning Service budget which includes an element of revenue funding from the borough's Growth Area Fund allocation.

7. LEGAL ISSUES

7.1 The development of Town Centre Strategies is currently not a statutory requirement in the United Kingdom. However, the London Plan emphasises the strategic importance of town centres and contains a series of specific policies for London's town centres, which all local authorities must be in general conformity with. This includes maximising choice in town centres and promoting sustainable access to goods and services.

8. CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS

8.1 Decisions relating to the Town Centre Strategies are for the Executive as a whole. Responsibilities of the Executive are set out in Section 3 (Responsibility for Functions) of the Council's Constitution.

9. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

9.1 Finchley Church End is one of Barnet's 14 district town centres and is broadly comparable in size to North Finchley, Burnt Oak and Chipping Barnet. It is one of the most visited town centres in the borough and one of the most accessible.

9.2 The town centre is identified in Barnet's emerging Local Development Framework Core Strategy as a Priority Town Centre with potential for future growth. The draft final town centre strategy attached to this report is intended to provide a framework for managing anticipated change and guiding future development to ensure that this supports the long term vitality and viability of the town centre and protects and enhances this part of the borough. The strategy will be a material consideration in the determination of future planning applications within the town centre.

9.3 The strategy has four key objectives:

- To encourage positive change, renewal and investment;
- To foster enterprise;
- To protect the suburban character of the area; and
- To improve and enhance the quality of the public realm.

9.4 In February 2010 public consultation was undertaken on the key issues and opportunities for Finchley Church End Town Centre. The outcome of the consultation and specific issues that were raised have helped shape a number of priorities for the town centre strategy which are set out below.

9.5 **Priority 1 - Ensure an accessible and integrated town centre and maximise the potential of the existing transport hub**

Finchley Church End is a highly accessible centre due to the location of the tube station in the heart of the town centre and the proximity to the strategic road network. However, there are significant issues in relation to the quality of the environment around, and access to, the station. Through capturing the benefits of new development

there is a major opportunity to create a better, more integrated and more accessible transport hub for the Borough by working with Transport for London and other stakeholders.

9.6 Priority 2 - Enhance the character of the town centre

Finchley Church End has retained much of its historic character with the original Church End Village at the southern end of the town centre designated as a conservation area. However, the character of the buildings in much of the town centre is being progressively eroded by inappropriately sited advertising hoardings, street clutter, inappropriate signage and poor quality shop fronts. Future development and refurbishment opportunities must be carefully managed to ensure that these enhance the historic character of the town centre. Opportunities to declutter the public realm should also be progressed as and when funding becomes available.

9.7 Priority 3 – Develop Finchley Church End’s role as a sustainable, modern employment centre

Finchley Church End is already a successful employment centre. Office workers are key to supporting a range of town centre businesses, and an improved pedestrian environment would encourage them to make fuller use of the centre. A significant employment area exists at the southern end of the town centre on the east side of Regents Park Road. However, at present this is poorly integrated with the core retail area. There is scope to improve connections between employment areas and town centre facilities for the benefit of local employees and businesses.

9.8 Priority 4 - Protect, improve and strengthen the existing range of independent retail provision within the town centre

Finchley Church End has a large number of independent retail and service providers, including a number of good quality ethnic restaurants, which meet the needs of the diverse local population. There is an opportunity to build on this distinctive characteristic of the area by improving the quality of existing frontages but also to strengthen the retail core through attracting additional high street retail provision. There is also an opportunity to work with existing traders to encourage more collaboration and promotion of the town centre to enhance trade and capture the spending power of the surrounding residential community and the large number of office workers located at the southern end of the town centre.

9.9 Priority 5 - Improve and green the public realm throughout the town centre

Parts of the town centre benefit from mature street trees and other planting, and the quality of the environment in these areas is noticeably better than in areas where planting is absent. There are opportunities, particularly where pavements are wider, to plant mature trees which will also help to provide shade and some protection from the impacts of traffic.

9.10 A number of key sites have been identified where there are opportunities for future development and improvement. The draft strategy sets out a series of principles to inform and guide proposals for these sites as they come forward for development.

9.11 A number of opportunities to enhance the public realm in the town centre and address current problems are also identified. In many cases these could be brought forward incrementally in different parts of the town centre as opportunities and resources present themselves. To support future delivery a set of priorities for future Section 106 funding is also set out in the Strategy.

- 9.12 The Strategy underwent a final round of public consultation during November and December 2011 via a local exhibition and circulation of information to local resident and amenity groups and through local business networks. The outcome of the consultation is set out in Appendix 1
- 9.13 As a result of the consultation the following changes have been made to the final draft Strategy:
- a. Greater emphasis on the deliverability of the change proposed (following comments from various bodies and individuals).
 - b. Proposing the area of pavement in front of Tesco as a possible venue for a street market (following a suggestion from the Finchley Society).
 - c. The inclusion of a butchers and bakers as desirable new uses in the town centre (following comments from individuals).
 - d. Increased emphasis on providing parking for people using the town centres facilities and services while continuing to provide appropriate levels of parking for commuters.
 - e. Inclusion of the vents and associated barriers along the north side of Ballards Lane as specifically identified potential improvements to the public realm (following comments from various bodies and individuals).
 - f. Greater emphasis on the potential to relocate bus stops and enhance the public realm to improve links between bus and train and reduce (pedestrian) congestion (following comments from various bodies and individuals).
 - g. Updated explanation of the planning policy framework which is in place around the strategy, to reflect changes since the last iteration of the document.

10. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None.

Legal – TE

Finance – MC

Appendix One - Consultation Feedback

Responses received to the consultation

A total of 51 responses were received in response to the latest public consultation on the strategy. These comprised:

- 18 responses were submitted online through the portal Engage Space.
- 18 paper questionnaires were completed.
- 9 responses were emailed to the Council.
- 6 responses comprised notes made by officers while discussing the strategy with members of the public.

In addition to the above comments the Finchley Society and Dollis Park and District Residents Association both submitted responses to the consultation.

Of the public sector agencies consulted the Environment Agency, Metropolitan Police Service and Transport for London provided responses.

Responses provided on questionnaires

The responses provided on the questionnaires demonstrated a general agreement with the 'development principles' identified for the town centre. However, no clear ranking of the principles emerged from the responses beyond a slight emphasis on movement, transport and parking related matters as a whole. Taken as a whole the responses suggested a relatively significant emphasis on the importance of enhancements to the public realm.

There was strong agreement with the improvements to the area surrounding the station and the ranking of the importance of possible improvements in this area were more marked than for others. Of those identified improving pedestrian crossings at junctions, improving the railway bridge and providing broader footways along Chaville Way were the most supported proposals.

Responses to the strategy from public sector bodies

Transport for London raised a number of points in relation to the strategy and the sites they have in Finchley Church End. These mainly relate to seeking a greater emphasis in the strategy on commercial viability and deliverability when planning issues (including building height and layout, the provision of parking and the type of housing provided) are being evaluated. Where appropriate the Council has amended the strategy to make it clear that the deliverability of specific proposals will be taken into account when they are considered.

The response from the Environment Agency requested that further attention be given in the strategy to Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems and water efficiency measures. This requested is noted, however, it is considered that such matters are already adequately addressed in other planning documents, for example the London Plan. Their inclusion in the Strategy would therefore result in unnecessary duplication of policy.

The Metropolitan Police Service response requested that the Police Station in Finchley Church End be included within the identified secondary shopping frontage. While this request is acknowledged, the strategy is not the appropriate document within which to formally re-designate secondary shopping frontage. This type of land designation is dealt with in the Council's Development Management Policies document.

Additional responses to the Strategy

A number of additional matters can be drawn out of the responses that were received to the consultation. These can be summarised as follows.

Enhancements to the public realm featured fairly widely in responses to the consultation. Comments included the desirability of a reduction in the overall amount of street furniture, encouraging greening of the town centre and the use of good quality consistent materials in the public realm. The importance of retaining and increasing the wider areas of pavement in the town centre is a point which was made in a number of responses. Improvements to the bridge in the town centre were also identified in two responses.

The importance of providing suitable amounts of parking for users of the town centre is an issue which was raised in several of the responses. It was also suggested that bus stops in the town centre could be improved and re-sited to reduce congestion.

Two respondents identified the current vacant offices in the town centre as an issue and a number of responses also suggested that the inclusion of a post office in the area would be beneficial.

A number of responses provided raised questions about how the changes proposed would be funded and suggested that the strategy was unclear how change would be delivered. Both the Finchley Society and Dollis Park and District Residents associations identified that a Business Forum should be set up for Finchley Church End.

A number of the responses submitted fall outside the scope of a planning strategy for the town centre. These include:

- Reductions in business rates and rents. These are not matters over which the planning system has any remit. Business rates are presently set nationally and the rent for properties is a private matter between the owner and occupier of a property.
- Changes to charges for parking within the town centre. This is a matter which is covered by other (non-planning) legislation and strategies.