

DRAFT



**ST JOHN'S ROAD EPPING
DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT BRIEF**

Draft report

August 2012

**Allies and Morrison
Urban Practitioners**





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Opposite page

St John the Baptist Church on the junction
of High Street and St John's Road



1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The St John's Road Design and Development Brief has been prepared to guide the future shape of the St John's Road area following the relocation of the Junior School to new premises. Along with significant plans being considered for the Parish Church, this presents a major opportunity for the town centre.

This development and design brief has been prepared by Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners on behalf of Epping Forest District Council and Essex County Council. The process of preparing the document has also included commercial property advice and highway design advice along with considerable consultation with key stakeholders and the wider public.

Purpose

The purpose of this development and design brief is to provide the urban context for the St John's Road area and set guidelines for appropriate development.

Once adopted by Epping Forest District Council, the development and design brief will also provide planning guidance for development management purposes. The brief will be taken as a material consideration in the determination of any planning applications for the development of the site. However, national and local planning policy may change and any applications will be determined in accordance with the adopted planning policies at the time a decision on the application is made.



2. SITE CONTEXT

Location

The development brief area is located in Epping Town Centre on the north west side of the High Street. It straddles St John's Road and is bordered by the High Street, the backs of residential properties on Crows Road and Bodley Close and the rear of offices facing Bakers Lane.

Epping has an historic town centre with an attractive linear High Street. The core of the shops and services is located to the north/east of the junction

of the High Street with St John's Road - the Parish Church and

The EFDC council offices essentially act as bookends to the centre. Commercial uses extend south/west of the Parish Church with a more secondary/specialist character and some large breaks in continuity.

The development brief area is located close to the existing town centre car parks and is 650m from Epping tube station which provides access to London via the Central Line.



Figure 1: Site location plan

Opposite page
Green area and mature trees on High Street

Key components of the site and land ownership

The ownership of the site is split between a number of different public and private bodies. Essex County Council has the largest land holding with the Junior School and the Library sites providing the most significant opportunity for change.

Epping Forest District Council and Epping Town Council both have land ownerships adjoining the school site, presenting the opportunity for larger coordinated development.

The Parish Church of St John owns both the church site and also the church hall building to the north of the library and is likely to be a key owner in the area given that there are plans for new development associated with the church which may involve land disposal.



Figure 2: Land ownership



Epping Hall (0.24ha)

Owned by the Town Council, this building is under-utilised in its current form and could potentially form part of any redevelopment.



Epping Junior School (0.83ha)

This vacated building and site provides the main development opportunity.



Epping Centre (0.22ha)

Also known locally as the Centrepoint building, this locally listed building is currently vacant and can be considered as part of the redevelopment site of the former junior school.



Council depot (0.22ha)

These existing depot and storage uses could potentially be relocated if required.



Library and Registry Office (0.23ha)

The existing building has a poor frontage to St John's Road with a significant level change. The garages to the rear of the building are not in use.



St John the Baptist

The Church is planning to build a new hall on the site of the current vicarage, to be adjoined to the main church building. The existing church hall will likely be sold as part of this process.

Land use

There is a high concentration of community uses within the site area as represented by the two churches, Epping Hall, Epping Library and the former Epping Junior School. However, it should now be borne in mind that the junior school was recently closed and the use relocated to new premises.

The site is bordered to the north and west by suburban housing, with only very limited elements of housing within the site at present. Retail/services and cafés/restaurants are concentrated along High Street.

The town centre presently has two food stores, the Marks & Spencer store in the centre of the High Street and the Tesco to the south west of the core town centre.

There is one relatively large office development to the north of the site on the corner of Bakers Lane and Cottis Lane. Other offices and professional services are found in small numbers around the town centre.

The existing leisure centre is located away from the town centre on Hemnall Street to the south.



Figure 3: Land use

Heights

The building heights in Epping Town Centre are generally two to three storeys high, with the High Street in particular characterised by a variation in scale between plots. A number of the more significant buildings such as the Police Station have a bold scale to them which is substantially larger than some of the more domestic buildings in the town centre.

Away from the High Street the areas of housing built during the twentieth century are much more consistent and homogenous in character and are almost exclusively two storey development.



Figure 4: Building heights

Built heritage

A substantial part of the site falls within the town centre conservation area, and there are a number of buildings which either have statutory listed status, locally listed status or are noted as having townscape merit for their contribution to the wider area.

The key listed buildings are the imposing St John the Baptist Church (Grade II*) on the corner of the High Street and St John's Road along with the row of charming weather-boarded cottages on St John's Road (Grade II).

The Centre Point building is a former schoolhouse and has a simple, solid charm whilst the former cookery school within the school campus is an attractive and more elaborate small building. Other buildings, including the Methodist Church, fronting the High Street make a significant contribution to the overall character of the area.

Further information on the built heritage of the area can be found in the Epping Conservation Area Appraisal.



Figure 5: Built heritage

Trees and green spaces

The mature trees and green space on the High Street are a key characteristic of the approach to Epping town centre from the south. The mature plane trees are of a substantial scale and make a significant contribution to the area, signalling the gradual change from an urban high street towards the edge of the town and the countryside beyond.

Within the study area there are some small pockets of green space and existing trees. The most substantial trees are along the south western boundary between the school site and the gardens of the houses on Crows Road.



Figure 6: Trees and green spaces

Site issues

There are a number of key issues relating to the development and design brief area as shown on Figure 7 (below). Commentary on these is provided on the following page, with each point numerically cross referenced to Figure 7.



Figure 7: Site issues

1. **Heritage buildings** - The brief area contains a number of key heritage buildings as shown previously on Figure 5. The retention and setting of these should be a key consideration of any development proposals.
2. **Weak townscape buildings** - These buildings fail to make a positive contribution to the townscape quality of Epping.
3. **Green space on High Street** - This green space and the mature trees within it form a key part of Epping's leafy character. However, it has potential to be more fully utilised as a public space for the town.
4. **High Street frontage** - The brief area includes some of Epping's core high street, meaning that there may be potential to expand the town's retail capacity with new development that has strong connections to existing shops.
5. **BT exchange** - The BT exchange is largely hidden from sight from the road. Whilst it is likely that this would be expensive to relocate, there may be potential to reduce the footprint of the existing building to create opportunity for new development.
6. **Main former school building** - The former school building has limited heritage value and presents the major redevelopment opportunity.
7. **Former cookery school building** - This freestanding building is attractive and should be retained.
8. **Centre Point** - This attractive building has a strong presence on St John's Road and should be retained.
9. **Existing church hall** - The church hall is in a poor quality building which the parish church intend to replace with a new hall built as an extension to the main St John's Church building.
10. **Epping hall** - Epping Hall is owned and operated by Epping Town Council. Whilst this is a relatively modern building, it is unusual in its configuration and not well suited to the needs of the local community.
11. **Library** - The library is owned and operated by Essex County Council and is also the location of the local Registry Office. Essex County Council is investigating ways to increase its role as a community hub, including utilising existing office space within the building which is currently vacant. The garages to the rear of the library are not in use.
12. **Lack of pedestrian connection** - The lack of buildings along this route offers opportunity to form a more direct connection to the Bakers Lane car park.
13. **Vehicular movement** - The High Street is heavily trafficked and the junctions with St John's Road and Station Road are particular locations for traffic congestion.
14. **Gradient across site** - There is significant change in level across the site, with the land sloping down away from St John's Road.



3. POLICY CONTEXT

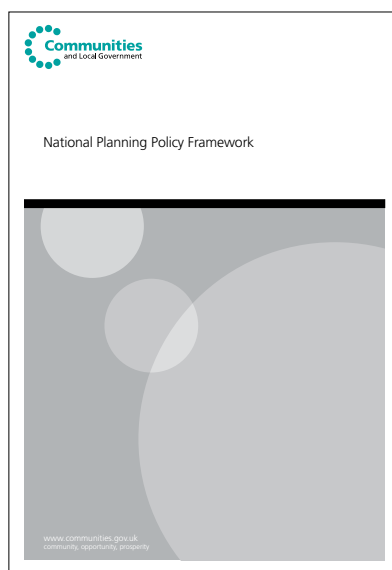
National Planning Policy Framework

The national planning context is provided by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which was published in March 2012. The NPPF condensed the previous Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance Notes into one document, with the intention of making the planning system less complex and more accessible.

The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It provides a framework for Local Authorities to produce their own distinctive local plans which reflect the needs of their communities.

The NPPF is published by the Department for Communities and Local Government and is available from:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/nppf>



National Planning Policy Framework

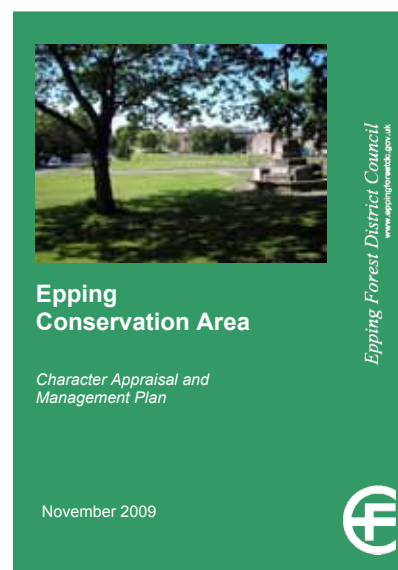
Epping Forest District Council Local Policy

Epping Forest District Council is currently updating its planning documents to create a new Local Plan as required by the NPPF. Planning policy for the local authority is currently provided by the Combined Policies of Epping Forest District Local Plan (1998) and Alterations (2006), available from:

http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/Council_Services/planning/forward_planning/local_plan_obtaining.asp

The development brief area is also within Epping Conservation Area. Any development proposals will need to respect the character of the Conservation Area, with guidance provided by the Epping Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan, available from:

http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/council_services/planning/conservation/conservation_areas.asp



Epping Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan

Opposite page

Epping's popular Monday market on High Street

4. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Public and stakeholder consultation

Consultation on the preparation of this brief commenced in early 2009 with stakeholder meetings and a stakeholder consultation event. Following the development of potential options for the site in consultation with key groups such as the Town Council and the Parish Church a major consultation process was undertaken.

A summary of the key consultation outcomes is presented here. A detailed set of comments and data for the consultation is presented as a separate appendix.

Public exhibition

A public exhibition was held in March and April 2012. For the first month it was held in St John's Parish Church and for the second month it was held in Epping Library whilst a duplicate exhibition was displayed throughout the period in the Epping Forest District Council offices. The exhibition outlined the main issues facing the development brief area and included four options for how change could be realised. These options and the text from the exhibition are displayed on the facing page.

The exhibition was supported by a questionnaire. This was also available on-line with an electronic version of the exhibition available for download. A total of 826 responses were received, of which 462 were submitted as paper questionnaires or letters and 354 were submitted on-line through the council website.



Opening of the exhibition in St John the Baptist Church



1 // Retail-led option

A comprehensive approach to the site which could deliver significant new retail development including a food store. It also has the potential to integrate well with the High Street and to improve existing community facilities such as the library.



Key features

1. Food store, with enclosed service yard to the north and decked parking at-grade with the store and below, taking advantage of the slope of the site
2. Retained former cookery school building providing opportunity for either commercial or community use, possibly as a new space for the Town Council
3. Centre Point building refurbished and opened up to create new arcade
4. Larger format retail with housing above
5. New high quality housing
6. Potential for future redevelopment of the telephone exchange site featuring new housing
7. New vehicle access from the High Street
8. New library building with commercial uses on the ground floor
9. Potential for future new office development
10. New link from the Baker's Lane car park, possibly including an element of parking
11. Potential for further new development, either commercial office space or residential
12. New commercial development suitable for cafes or boutique shopping and with residential development above fronting onto a new lane around the church
13. New church amenity building

Our evaluation of this option:

We think this is a really strong option which could enhance the town centre retail offer and could help to improve facilities such as the library. It would create a good mix of uses as well as attractive new routes and spaces which would improve the setting of the church. This option is financially viable.

2 // Leisure-led option

An option which would deliver new leisure facilities to replace those on Hemnall Street as well as delivering a substantial area of new housing and some improvements to the community facilities and pedestrian network.



Key features

1. New sports and leisure centre based around a refurbishment of the existing Epping Hall
2. Retained former cookery school building providing opportunity for either commercial or community use, possibly as a new space for the Town Council
3. Centre Point building refurbished and retained for community use
4. New high quality housing
5. Potential for future redevelopment of the telephone exchange site featuring new housing
6. New minor vehicle access from the High Street
7. Existing library building remodelled to create an entrance on the southeastern side where it can be visible from the High Street
8. New commercial development suitable for cafes or boutique shopping and with residential development above fronting onto a new lane around the church
9. New church amenity building

Our evaluation of this option:

This option would provide new leisure facilities and bring some improvements to other community facilities. However, it would not add significantly to retail capacity of the town centre and the leisure centre element of the project would require the District Council to contribute several million pounds to the project, making the option unviable.

3 // Retail & leisure option

A composite approach which includes the potential for a new food store but also includes a new leisure centre. It includes the same proposals to create new links and public space around the parish church and to improve the library as option 1.



Key features

1. Food store, with enclosed service yard to the north and decked parking at-grade with the store and below, taking advantage of the slope of the site
2. Retained former cookery school building providing opportunity for either commercial or community use, possibly as a new space for the Town Council
3. Centre Point building refurbished and opened up to create new arcade
4. New sports and leisure building with frontage onto the new square
5. Potential for future redevelopment of the telephone exchange site featuring new housing
6. New building creating frontage onto the High Street
7. New vehicle access from the High Street
8. New library building with commercial uses on the ground floor
9. Potential for future new office development
10. New link from the Baker's Lane car park, possibly including an element of parking
11. Potential for further new development, either commercial office space or residential
12. New commercial development suitable for cafes or boutique shopping and with residential development above fronting onto a new lane around the church
13. New church amenity building

Our evaluation of this option:

Option three represents the most comprehensive package for the town centre in terms of activity and mix of use. However, the leisure centre element of the project would require the District Council to contribute several million pounds to the project, making this option unviable.

4 // Residential option

An approach which would be focused on delivering residential development with minimal retail/community facilities. This could be delivered as phases of development, allowing for the Epping Hall to remain in situ if desired.



Key features

1. New high quality housing
2. Potential for a central space
3. Retention of the Centre Point building for community use
4. Establishment of a new pedestrian link into the site as a continuation of the existing lane

Our evaluation of this option:

This option is financially viable. It is mainly high-quality new housing, and, although it is not expected to contribute significantly to the strength and vitality of the town centre, its impact on traffic is likely to be minimal. The site can be designed to respect the local historic character but it would not include the improvements around the Parish Church or the library. It would be expected to provide some limited community facilities.

Display panel from the St John's Road Design and Development Brief exhibition

Questionnaire responses

Question 1

The first question asked respondents whether they agreed with the core project principles which had been set out in the consultation material as follows:

- The development needs to be strongly integrated with the High Street and the rest of the town centre;
- The area should include a sustainable mix of uses and create high quality public streets and spaces;
- Any development should respect and complement the historic character and scale of the town centre with buildings of the highest quality; and
- The ideas for development should make the most of this once-in-a-generation opportunity for the town but should be practical, deliverable and affordable.

The responses provide a very strong positive feedback on this question, with 477 people either supporting or strongly supporting the principles whilst 178 people disagreed or strongly disagreed with the principles. 91 people indicated a neutral response and a further 80 people did not complete the question.

It is instructive to read the written comments which accompany the scores. These indicate that people have tended to rate the illustrative schemes in the exhibition rather than the core principles as the questionnaire asked. Many of the comments mention issues which do not relate to the principles given and so people may not have answered the question accurately.

Question 2

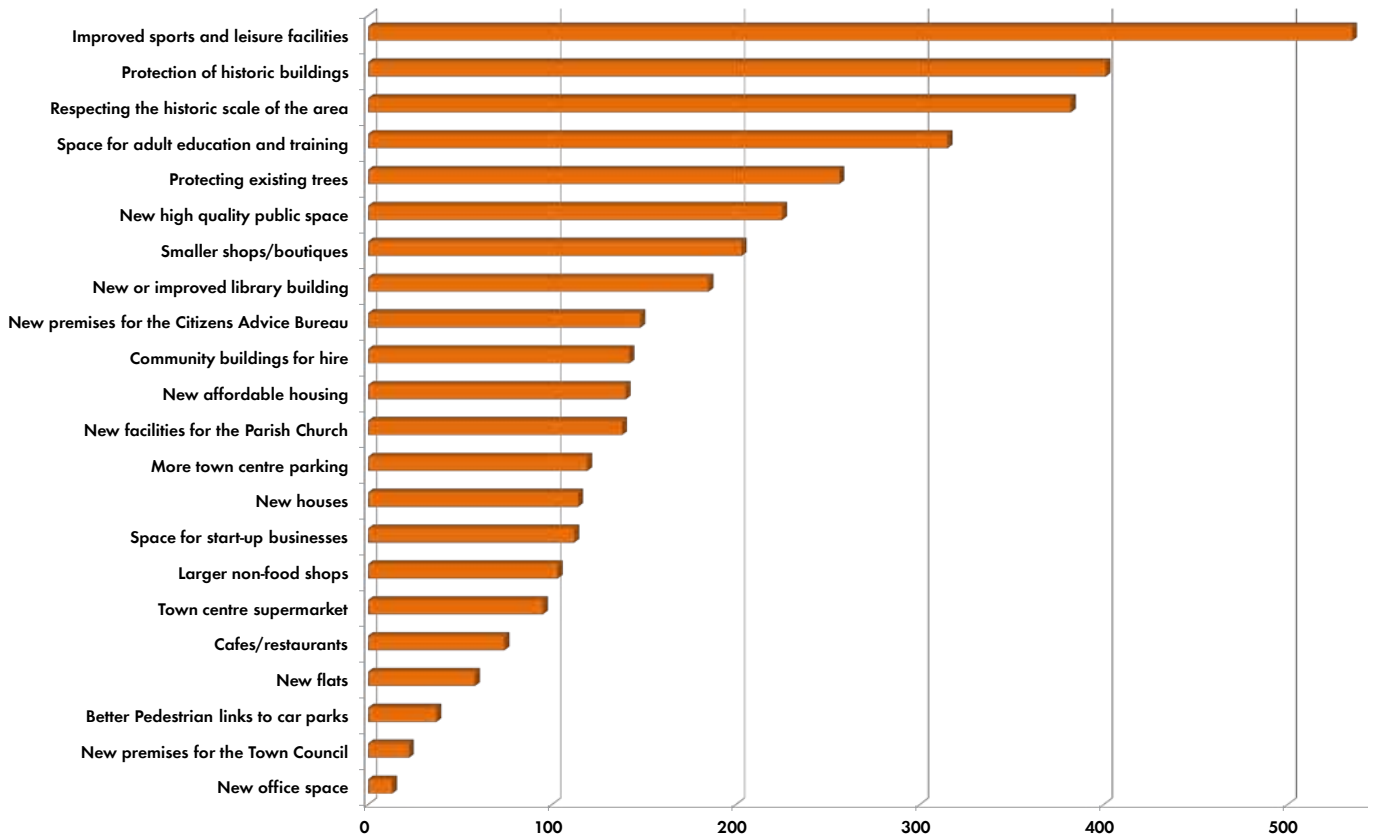
Question two asked people to tick five things from a long list to identify what they would consider the best for Epping town centre. The graph on the facing page shows how people responded to the question. The most common responses were:

- Provision of improved sport and leisure facilities in the town centre was the stand-out issue with 535 of all respondents ticking this option;
- Protection of historic buildings and respect for historic scale were the next two most selected issues with 401 and 382 votes respectively;
- Provision of space for adult education received a high response of 315 votes;
- Protecting existing trees and new high quality public space were the next two most selected issues with 256 and 225 votes respectively;
- Smaller shops / boutiques received 203 votes; and
- New or improved library received 185 votes.

Question 3

Question three provided people with space to make their own comments on the plans. Two key themes received by far the largest percentage of responses, these were the opposition to a new supermarket and the desire for a new or improved leisure centre.

26% of respondents stated their opposition to a new supermarket as part of question three, with traffic concerns and impact on the existing high street often included alongside. This was balanced by 3% of respondents stating that a new supermarket is needed, with Waitrose specifically mentioned.



Graph showing responses to the question 2 tick boxes

15% of respondents stated that a new or improved leisure centre was needed, with 8% making specific reference to a swimming pool.

Other responses which were received multiple times, but with less regularity than those above, include:

- That Centre Point should be converted into a community use and kept as a public building;
- That more community based facilities are needed, particularly youth orientated ones;
- The impact of any new development on traffic levels;
- That the character of Epping as a small historic market town should be protected; and
- That Epping already has enough cafés and restaurants.

Youth workshop

In addition to the exhibition a youth workshop was held in The Box on Epping High Street. This was held over two hours during the time that many young people use the facility after the school day.

Young people were asked what they would like to see on the Development Brief site. Responses include:

- A football pitch with astroturf and the facilities required for a football academy;
- A bigger and better skate park;
- National restaurant chains (McDonalds, Burger King and KFC);
- National high street retail outlets (JD Sports, HMV, Vans, Primark, etc.);
- A larger youth centre;
- A college;
- Housing;
- A swimming pool; and
- A bowling alley/cinema.

Conclusions

The public consultation identified a number of key themes:

- There are significant concerns about the provision of a new food store on the site, including concerns about scale and bulk, parking, traffic impact and impact on the High Street. Conversely, there would be a greater level of support for small shops or a department store.
- There is strong support for improved sport and leisure provision in the town centre, potentially as a replacement for the Hemnall Street leisure centre. Other leisure uses which have been suggested include a cinema.
- There is strong support for an approach which protects the historic character and scale of the area and which retains the green space and mature trees on the High Street.
- There is a desire expressed for improved community facilities in the town centre and particularly for the inclusion of facilities for adult education and an improved/redeveloped library.
- The proposals accommodate and facilitate the proposed developments being planned by the Parish Church;
- Clear guidance is given on the acceptable scale and massing of any new development, with particular reference to the historic character of the town centre; and
- The potential for housing development is noted, although it is clear that this should not be the predominant ground floor use on key frontages given the town centre location.

In response to this and the rest of the consultation responses the brief takes the following approach:

- There is provision for leisure uses to form a key part of any development proposals, both in terms of sports and leisure use and also in terms of commercial leisure such as a cinema;
- The policies note that retail uses could be included on the basis that they are well connected with the High Street and form a complementary rather than competing offer;
- The potential for community uses including adult education is noted, and potential options identified for the library building to either be redeveloped or remodelled to enhance links with the town centre;



5. DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

The St John's Road site represents the best current opportunity to accommodate growth in Epping town centre and would provide the first site of any notable scale for a generation. Opportunities such as this are needed if Epping is to maintain its place in the hierarchy of centres in the area and continue to support its local population. It is therefore important that any development proposals make the most of this opportunity and that a cohesive plan is developed for the site.

The key objectives for the site are as follows:

- The development needs to be strongly integrated with the High Street and the rest of the town centre;
- The area should include a sustainable mix of uses and create high quality public streets and spaces;
- Any development should respect and complement the historic character and scale of the town centre with buildings of the highest quality; and
- The ideas for development should make the most of this once-in-a-generation opportunity for the town but should be practical, deliverable and affordable.

Integration with the High Street

Any development on this site will change the High Street and Epping Town Centre in some way. The aim of this design and development brief is to promote an approach to development which will complement the High Street, increase footfall in the town centre and improve the overall vitality and economic resilience of the town centre. To maximise the benefit of any change it is vital that a clear and attractive links are made between new development and the core town centre with a range of active uses. Strong connections will help to promote linked trips between any anchor use and the town centre and will also help to sustain a range of smaller units which respond to the character of Epping.

Sustainable mix of uses

This site represents a unique opportunity to broaden the appeal of Epping High Street, meeting the need for a wider range of uses which could include community and civic functions, leisure uses, retail, other workspace and housing. A broad mix is necessary to establish an area which will feel like a vibrant part of the town centre both during the day but also into the evening. It may also present the opportunity to provide some larger retail units which would better suit modern retail requirements and so broaden the offer within the town centre, supporting existing retailers.

Opposite page

St John the Baptist Church on the junction of High Street and St John's Road

High quality public realm

Development in this site provides the opportunity to create new areas of public realm which include pedestrian spaces away from busy roads. This establishes a framework which will allow civic, community and commercial uses to spill out into public space in a way which is not possible in the High Street due to the dominance of cars.

Historic scale and character

Epping High Street is characterised by substantial two and three storey buildings whilst further away from the High Street the residential scale is predominantly two storey. This site area falls on the transition point between the town centre and the residential hinterland and so any development must mediate between the scales in a sensitive manner. Also of significance is the nature of the existing town centre development, which is broken into narrow plots with significant variation in scale, materials and detailing between buildings to give a pleasingly jumbled character rich in detail. Development on the site will be expected to reflect this historic character without resorting to pastiche design.

Deliverable development

The proposed development must be deliverable. However, as the core of the site area is owned by a combination of public sector bodies, it is also important that any development delivers best value for the wider town. In some cases this could take the form of a capital receipt whilst in other cases it could relate to using the assets to deliver community benefits.



Cars parked on High Street



Green space on Epping High Street



Epping library

CONSERVATION

The site area is located partly within the town centre conservation area and provides the setting for some significant listed buildings. It is therefore important that every effort is made to protect and enhance the existing character of the town centre, whilst also seeking to make improvements where possible.

Response to the existing buildings:

St John's Parish Church

The Grade II* listed parish church is a strong building and one of Epping's major landmarks. As such it would be inappropriate for any new buildings in the vicinity to challenge it in terms of scale or massing. The development framework establishes the potential for a new route to the north of the church. This would remove the existing single storey shop (existing carpet shop) fronting the High Street and the garages behind to improve the setting of the building.

The parish is also seeking to replace the 1960s church house to the north west of the church with a more appropriate building which would provide much needed ancillary spaces for the church. This relates well to the principle of the new public realm which this document proposes and will help to further integrate the church with the surrounding town.

Centre Point building

The former school building known as the Centre Point building has a strong presence, partly due to its striking double gable form, but also due to its position on the bend in St John's Road which ensures that it is visible from the High Street. As with the rest of the school campus this building is surplus to educational requirements. However, public consultation has highlighted that this building should ideally remain in public use. The building is locally listed and is also protected by conservation area designation.

5-17 St John's Road

This terrace of charming weather-boarded cottages is Grade II listed and forms one of the defining aspects of the southern part of St John's Road. It is important in this context as it sets a very domestic scale and provides a counterpoint to the muscularity of the church building.

Former cookery school building

Whilst the bulk of the school buildings are not considered suitable for adaptation or re-use, the former cookery school building could be an interesting exception. It is a relatively small stand-alone structure which could be retained as part of a scheme, perhaps framed as the centre-piece of a new public space in the manner of a traditional market building.

High Street grouping

A number of buildings on the High Street including the former council office and the Methodist church play a role in defining the character of the area. Whilst the buildings themselves may not be sufficiently distinguished to warrant listing, the conservation area appraisal identifies them as having an attractive group value which is worth protecting.

PUBLIC REALM

A project on this site has the potential to deliver new elements of public realm which both evoke the history of the town centre, but also establish new links to open up the town to further development opportunities.

A new public space can be created at the heart of the main site to the south/west of St John's Road. This could act as the focal point for public, commercial or leisure uses and could be designed to create a new pedestrian-only space.

A new link route is proposed which connects the heart of the development area with the High Street. This would be created through the removal of the existing carpet shop fronting the High Street and the redevelopment/remodelling of the library. This new lane would reflect the historic urban character of the High Street which has a series of similar small lanes leading to secondary areas away from the main street.

A new space created to the north/west of the church would provide a small square with the library, church and commercial uses fronting onto it. This space would also deliver strong visual linkage across St John's Road to the main body of the site. This could achieve a vibrant and exciting town centre space which could play a number of roles.

The green space along the High Street is an important part of the character of the town centre and should be protected. The line of mature plan trees is particularly impressive and forms an important part of the character of this area. At present, there are two pedestrian routes running parallel to one another. Firstly, there is the main shared surface lane which runs close to the buildings and appears to be widely used by most people walking through the area. The second is the footpath

against the road which appears to be used by a smaller number of people. Changes to the junctions

and the inclusion of a new access way may require the removal of the footpath which runs against the road. This project presents an opportunity to improve the shared surface route which passes in front of the buildings. Particular consideration should be given to the surface used and to the provision of street lighting which makes the area safer for pedestrians in the evening.

Public spaces and streets which are created through any development should be clearly defined by buildings with active frontages. The character of the town centre, most strikingly demonstrated along the High Street is for buildings to follow a consistent building line, regardless of height and detailed design. New development should expect to follow a similar terrace pattern, establishing a strong street frontage, regardless of the use in the building.

The predominant character of the area is expected to be urban, reflecting the town centre location and the potential for town centre land uses. However, opportunities to introduce areas of softer streetscape such as a pocket park and/or play area would be welcomed.

LAND USE

The area covered by this brief is located within Epping's town centre boundary. This is one of the three principal town centres in the District, and as such is regarded as a suitable location for a range of uses.

Epping Forest District Council's policies on town centres support the provision of uses that make the centres attractive and useful places to shop, work and visit throughout the day and evening. Whilst residential development might be included in this area, it is not expected to be the predominant ground floor use.

The following potential uses may feature as part of an overall mix of uses in any proposals:

Leisure

This site provides an opportunity to accommodate a range of leisure facilities. This could include new sport and leisure facilities such as a replacement to the Hemnall Street site or a commercial leisure use such as a cinema. Careful consideration should be given to the scale and massing of any new leisure facility given the historic urban context. It will also be important to consider the external form of the building and particularly to ensure that it does not compromise the need to maintain active ground floor frontages in more significant streets and spaces.

Retail

Retail development could form part of a mix of uses within the site, provided that a clear and direct sense of connection with the High Street can be established. Any retail development should aim to complement rather than compete with the High Street to support the overall vitality of the town centre. Any larger format retail will be expected to present an active shop front to key routes to establish an attractive town centre character.

Food and drink

There is some opportunity to provide new restaurants and cafes as part of a mixed scheme. However, this should be considered within the context that Epping is already well served with food and drink establishments and so any new proposals should be limited to key locations which are able to take advantage of new public spaces.

Community

This site already contains a range of public and community uses including the library and two churches. It is envisaged that this kind of use will continue to form an important aspect of the site's character and that development could support the delivery of some new or improved community facilities. This could include facilitating the planned development at the parish church, improving or replacing the library and delivering new public uses in the Centre Point former school building. The provision of suitable space for Adult Education in the town centre was identified through the consultation process and should be explored as part of any proposals, potentially as a use for the Centre Point building.

Employment

New employment uses would relate well to the requirement to deliver a mix of uses in a town centre location. There is an expectation that employment use could be suitable for upper floor uses. However, in locations away from the principal frontages it may also be suitable for ground floor use.

Residential

New housing should be included in development plans as part of a mix of uses. To be in conformity with the District's current planning policy, this should generally be at upper levels. However, recognising that the depth of the site may limit commercial

potential there may be scope for some elements of town house development in locations away from the High Street or St John's Road.

Hotel

A hotel use may be considered suitable for a town centre location, particularly as part of an overall mixed use scheme and could prove beneficial in maintaining a more vibrant character into the evening. There is potential for links with any leisure facilities and for overlap with any restaurants or cafes proposed but care would need to be taken to ensure that the scale and massing of the building and the likely servicing and parking do not have a significant negative impact on the area.

HEIGHT, SCALE AND MASSING

The scale of development within the planning brief area should reflect the prevailing low rise character of the surrounding context. As has been previously noted this area forms the transition between the town centre which features a mix of substantial two and three storey buildings and the residential hinterland which is formed of more domestic two storey buildings. Other factors which should be considered in the scale of new development include the setting of the existing listed buildings on St John's Road and particularly the need to provide a sensitive setting for St John's Parish Church.

The central area of Epping is characterised by buildings of a range of ages and styles. Whilst the buildings along the High Street adhere to a common building line they vary considerably in height. The overall effect is a pleasing mixture which has a strong rhythm formed by the individual plots. It is important that any new development in this area is designed to create a character which reflects this variation and fragmentation. Whilst this will work in a straightforward way for smaller scale uses such as residential development or small shops it will be important that any proposals for larger buildings also demonstrate how they respond to this character without resorting to pastiche.

New buildings should respect the amenity of neighbouring residential properties in terms of light, privacy and outlook. This is particularly significant for the buildings on Crows Road and Bodley Close which back onto the site area and may experience a change in context with new development. It should be demonstrated that any development proposals would not have a significant detrimental impact to the amenity of any neighbouring properties.

SUSTAINABILITY

Any new development will be expected to at least meet the national and local planning policy with regard to sustainable design and construction. However, as a town centre site there will be opportunities for more broad sustainability themes to be explored which can benefit the wider area.

Development which supports the health and vitality of the town centre and focuses appropriate uses in the centre of Epping will help to reduce trips made to other centres and will assist in resisting development on inappropriate out of town sites. Similarly, centrally located shops, leisure uses and community uses will help to maximise use of sustainable modes of transport.

Walking and cycling should be given priority within the design of streets and spaces. This will particularly relate to elements such as the links to the High Street and the provision of good quality cycle parking in visible locations.

A development of this scale is likely to provide the critical mass needed to make the provision of a Combined Heat and Power (CHP) possible, particularly if there is a large building such as a leisure centre which has a significant continuous requirement for heat and power.

Buildings and spaces should also be designed with a view to limiting the impact of any global climate change. This can take a number of forms, including:

- Considering the design of buildings to include provision of shading to reduce internal solar gain and also to use pale roof surfaces to limit heat absorption; and
- Using tree planting to provide a significant element of shade to public spaces at peak times in the summer to reduce heat absorption into the paving and buildings.
- Using SUDS (sustainable urban drainage systems) to reduce the impact of rapid water run-off from the paved areas and help to reduce flash flooding. This could include measures such as providing houses with water butts to store rain water, green roofs on buildings, water permeable hard surfaces and maximising the amount of land given to vegetation;

PLANTING AND LANDSCAPING

Trees play an important role in the character of Epping, both in terms of its wider setting, but also in the character of the immediate area with the row of mature plane trees along the High Street. This makes a significant contribution to the character of the area and should be given due consideration and protection.

Public spaces within any new development should be used as opportunities to establish new tree planting which reinforces the character of the area. As well as the benefits to the character and quality of the space this would bring, appropriate deciduous tree planting will also help by providing shade at warmer times of the year to mitigate against the impact of climate change to the reduce heat absorption in the urban area.

Where new homes are considered, the inclusion of private gardens creates opportunities for further planting, both to the rear of properties but also to the front where it can add to the streetscape.

Planting may also be considered for any larger areas of roofscape, using green roofs to enhance biodiversity, attenuate rainwater run-off and reduce the heat-sink effect of a large building.

ACCESS

There are two principle vehicular access opportunities into the larger site area to the west of St John's Road. These are from St John's Road itself, or from High Street through land currently used as the council depot.

The access from the High Street would involve the creation of a new junction. Initial testing work undertaken to support this study suggests that this will be possible, but that care will be required to ensure that the junction and the visibility splays do not affect the existing mature trees. A new junction in this location and improvements to the other two mini roundabouts could be eased by the removal of the footpath against the road which is duplicated by the more popular shared surface way at the back edge of the green space.

An access from St John's Road could be created within the space from the centre point building to the northern corner of the site and would most probably take the form of a T-junction.

The access from the High Street has a number of advantages over the St John's Road access. Firstly, computer modelling demonstrates that it limits the additional traffic load on St John's Road, helping to maintain the quality of environment for pedestrians. Secondly, it delivers vehicles to the lower part of the site, away from the more visible frontages, into locations where parking could be most suitably accommodated. The natural downward slope of the ground away from St John's Road suggests that some element of decked parking might also be incorporated. The access from St John's Road would retain a useful role in providing service access to any commercial uses.

Pedestrian access to the site from the town centre is currently along St John's Road. Although this has a number of public and community uses along it, the distinct change in character from the High Street makes it feel remote from the rest of the town centre and there is a risk that any development is seen in isolation. Given that this site presents a major opportunity to deliver new growth for the town centre, a strong link is an important aspect of the approach. There is an opportunity to achieve this through the removal of the existing single storey shop unit to the north of the church on the High Street to open up access to the land behind the church to create a new route. This pedestrian connection has the potential to establish a mix of new small units with active street frontage and create a new clear connection between the library, either in a remodelled form or in a new building.

PARKING

Good practice guidelines for parking design and quantum are provided in the Essex County Council's 2009 document - Parking Standards.

In applying the Essex-wide parking guidelines, consideration will be taken of the central location of the development and design brief area within Epping. The area is relatively well served by public transport and lower levels of parking could be accepted than would be the case in less central locations. It is expected that the level of car parking provided within any proposals will need to be rigorously justified as part of any planning application.

Parking for residential development

The parking requirement for any residential development will be considered on the basis that each dwelling will require at least one allocated space. More parking may be considered appropriate for larger dwellings, but there should not be an expectation that parking is required at suburban levels given the easy access to shops, services and public transport.

Parking for leisure and retail uses

Small scale leisure or retail facilities such as small individual shops would not be expected to provide new customer parking. However, any development which features a significant quantum of public uses would be expected to provide parking. Whilst this parking provision may be owned and managed privately, it would be expected to contribute to the overall provision of parking in the town centre.

KEY SITES - LAND OWNERSHIP AND PHASING

The land ownership across the area covered by the brief is split between several owners. Whilst elements of the site can successfully be developed on a stand-alone basis, it is important that the relationship between the sites is understood and that a cohesive vision exists to coordinate any development. The implications for the individual sites can be summarised as follows:

Main school site, owned by Essex County Council

The main school site would be capable of development as a stand-alone site. However, the presence of the Centre Point building on St John's Road and the lack of any alternative access would make it difficult to realise a scheme which could be said to deliver a significant town centre development without being integrated with surrounding sites. The Centre Point building and the former cookery school building are two elements which should be considered for retention.

Epping Hall site, owned by Epping Town Council

The Epping Hall site would be difficult to redevelop successfully in isolation as the terraced land form created for the current development makes the back part of the site difficult to access from the road. It could be successfully developed as part of a joint scheme with the former school site and might be necessary if any large development was to be considered.

Depot site, owned by Epping Forest District Council

The depot site offers limited development potential as a stand-alone site, but would be important to any major scheme planned on the school site as it would provide a better access way for vehicles.

Telecoms exchange building, owned by Telereal

The existing telephone exchange is buried in the heart of the block and is not visible from the street. The site offers the potential for redevelopment in the event that a new road is delivered through the depot site. This would offer the potential for a new, smaller exchange building with a terrace of development fronting the road. This scheme could be delivered as a stand-alone project following the implementation of the new road.

Epping Library, owned by Essex County Council

The Epping library building also contains a number of other public uses including the registrar's office. Potential exists to either remodel or redevelop this building as part of the project to establish a new pedestrian link to the north of the parish church. The process to redevelop the building would be closely tied to the future of the old church hall building to the north/west.

Church hall building, owned by the Parish Church

The old church hall building to the north/west of the Library was originally built as a temporary structure to provide church premises whilst the main church was being constructed. The Parish has expressed a desire to sell this site for redevelopment to raise capital for the construction of a new facilities building attached to the church itself. The site of this building would be required to deliver any option which considered major redevelopment of the library to establish new open space. In the event that the decision is taken not to redevelop the library site in this way the church-owned land would be suitable for a small residential development.

Former church house site, owned by the Parish Church

The site of the 1960s church house adjacent to the church has been identified as an opportunity to develop a new extension to the church building itself. This would provide meeting rooms, kitchen space and toilets which would enable the church to be used much more flexibly, supporting its use for worship, but also opening it up to a wider range of community uses. This project could be delivered as a stand-alone project, provided that the design takes due consideration of the existing and future context. As noted above, the sale of the old church hall site to deliver this development project is closely linked to the potential development of the library site.

Existing carpet shop, Epping High Street

The existing carpet shop facing onto the High Street is a small infill development between the larger neighbouring building and the church and does not feature on historic plans of the area. The site of the building has been identified as a suitable opportunity to create a link from the High Street to the Library and then on to the main body of the site across St John's Road. This would both create a new link but also go some way to improve the setting of the church. The new route would entail the removal of the carpet shop and the development of the area of car parking which currently sits behind the church and library to establish new frontage. A further link from this lane could also be created towards Cottis Lane and the main town centre car park.



