

Strategic environmental assessment of the Altrincham Neighbourhood Business Plan

**Environmental Report (update) – non-technical summary
Submission (Regulation 16)**

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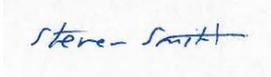
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Project Role	Name	Position	Actions Summary	Signature	Date
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Qualifying Body	Altrincham Town Centre Business Neighbourhood Forum		Reviewed draft		
Technical Specialist	Alex White	Associate Director	Integrated comments and further data on programme and site justification.		30 June 2016
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What is a strategic environmental assessment?

A strategic environmental assessment (SEA) has been undertaken on the Altrincham Neighbourhood Business Plan (ANBP) as required by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (the 'SEA Regulations'). Neighbourhood Groups use SEA to assess Neighbourhood Plans against a set of objectives developed in consultation with interested parties. The purpose of the assessment is to avoid adverse environmental and socio-economic effects and identify opportunities to improve the environmental quality of Altrincham Town Centre and the quality of life of residents through the Neighbourhood Plan.

What is the Altrincham Neighbourhood Business Plan?

The Altrincham Neighbourhood Business Plan sets out a plan for Altrincham Town Centre to 2030. The plan sets out a vision, objectives and a range of policies for the Altrincham Town Centre area. These relate to a range of topics, including, but not limited to, community services, employment, recreation and leisure, the environment, design, and housing.

The Vision for the plan is as follows:

"That Altrincham Town Centre evolves into an economically, environmentally and socially attractive and dynamic centre providing the widest possible range of high quality services and facilities to meet the needs of its catchment area population to 2030 and that in doing so it builds on its:

- *Strategic position in relation to the Airport, Manchester City Centre, the motorway and rail networks and tourist destinations*
- *History and architectural heritage*
- *Unique 1290 Charter Market*
- *Wide range of assets, particularly leisure based facilities, already established*

and develops its role as a modern market town, served by the effective application of the latest digital technologies, providing a safe and high quality environment in which all age groups can enjoy the widest possible range of quality cultural events and activities, leisure, retail, professional and business services, in which the community can engage and/or access."

It is currently anticipated that the plan will be formally submitted to Trafford Council Summer 2016.

Purpose of this Environmental Report

This Environmental Report, which accompanies the current consultation version of the ANBP, is the second document to be produced as part of the SEA process. The first document was the SEA Scoping Report, which includes information about the neighbourhood areas' environment and community.

The purpose of the Environmental Report is to:

- Identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant positive and negative effects of the ANBP and reasonable alternatives; and

- Provide an opportunity for consultation bodies, interested parties and the public to offer views on any aspect of the SEA process which has been carried out to date.

The Environmental Report contains:

- An outline of the contents and main objectives of the ANBP and its relationship with other relevant policies, plans and programmes;
- Relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and key sustainability issues;
- The SEA Framework of objectives and assessment questions against which the ANBP has been assessed;
- The assessment of alternative approaches for the ANBP;
- The likely significant effects of the ANBP in environmental terms;
- The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects as a result of the ANBP; and
- The next steps for the ANBP and accompanying SEA process.

The National Planning Practice Guidance (paragraph 41) sets out that “The Environmental Report will not necessarily have to be amended if the neighbourhood plan is modified following responses to consultation.” Only where the plan is substantially altered might an update be required. In the case of Altrincham, the Plan has not been substantially altered but nonetheless the Environmental Report has been updated to reflect comments received through the Regulation 14 consultation and changes made to the Plan prior to submission to the Town Council. These changes can be summarised as:

- Policy H 3 has been amended from 'car-free' to 'no off-street car parking'
- Policy H 4 has been removed and included as background text under 4.4.7 of the Plan
- CP 1 has been amended to support short term car parking rather than the development of an integrated car parking strategy
- CP 2 on short-stay town centre car parking has been removed
- DIG1 1 has been edited to support of proposals rather than specifying projects
- D 4 is a new policy on ginnels
- OF 1 and 2 on employment floorspace have been merged
- CF 1 new policy on community infrastructure

New text has been highlighted by being underlined.

SEA Framework

The SEA Framework, reflecting consultation comments, is presented in **Table 1** below:

Table 1: The SEA framework

SEA topic	SEA Objective, will the NDP...	Sub-criteria
Air quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and improve air quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise air pollution resulting

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the effect of traffic on the environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> from traffic congestion • Minimise air pollution from other sources
<p>Biodiversity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect, enhance and restore open space, biodiversity, flora and fauna, geological and geomorphological features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and enhance the integrity of the LWS present in the parish; • Protect and enhance semi-natural habitats; • Protect and enhance priority habitats, and the habitat of priority species; and • Achieve a net gain in biodiversity.
<p>Climate change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce contributions to climate change • Reduce impact of climate change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit the increase in the carbon footprint of the NP area as a result of population growth; • Support reduced car dependency and increased walking, cycling and public transport use; • Increase the number of new developments meeting sustainable design criteria; • Improve green infrastructure networks in the NP area to support adaptation to the potential effects of climate change; • Ensure that no development takes place in areas at higher risk of flooding, taking the likely effects of climate change into account; and • Sustainably manage water run-off, ensuring that the risk of flooding is not increased (either within the NP area or downstream) and where possible reduce flood risk.
<p>Historic environment and landscape</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and enhance the historic environment, heritage assets and their settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserve and enhance the setting of cultural heritage assets • Support the integrity of the various conservation areas within the NP area

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserve and enhance buildings and structures of architectural or historic interest • Conserve and enhance local diversity and distinctiveness • Protect and enhance landscape and townscape features
<p>Land, soil and water resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve land resources and reduce land contamination • Protect and improve water quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the use of previously developed land and minimise the loss of agricultural land • Minimise water consumption and effects on water quality
<p>Population and community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving a better balance and mix in the housing market • Improve accessibility for all to services and facilities • Reduce crime, disorder and the fear of crime • Reduce poverty and social exclusion • Encourage a sense of community identity and welfare and value diversity, improve equity and equality of opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage and promote social cohesion and encourage active involvement of local people in community activities; • Maintain or enhance the quality of life of existing local residents; • Promote the development of a range of high quality, accessible community, cultural and leisure facilities; • Provide an adequate supply of affordable housing and support the provision of a range of house types and sizes; • Achieve minimum housing requirements.
<p>Health and well-being</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the health and, inequalities in health of the population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote accessibility to a range of leisure, health and community facilities, for all age groups; • Encourage healthy lifestyles and reduce health inequalities; • Provide and enhance the provision of community access to green infrastructure, in accordance with national standards; and • Improve access to the surrounding countryside for recreation.

<p>Transport</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance transport infrastructure; improve accessibility and quality of life to all communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the need to travel through sustainable patterns of land use and development; • Encourage modal shift to more sustainable forms of travel; and • Enable transport infrastructure improvements.
<p>Economy and enterprise</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance Trafford’s high performance and sustainable economy to provide a powerful contribution to regional growth • Reducing disparities by releasing the potential of all residents particularly in areas of disadvantage • Enhance Trafford’s image as a business and tourism destination • Encourage the long term sustainability of Trafford’s Town Centres • Improve the social and environmental performance of the economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the economy of the NP area and provide access to employment opportunities

Assessment of alternative approaches for the ANBP

The SEA Regulations require that reasonable alternatives reflect the plan objectives. The objectives of the Plan are listed in paragraph 2.3.4 above. The objectives include one to *“...increase the town centre resident population both by appropriately located new build and the refurbishment of appropriate existing unused/underused space, particularly above ground floor level in the town centre, with associated development control policies aimed at encouraging such developments.”* A further objective is to *“Define a more focused retail core and provide wider areas of mixed uses including retail, residential and a wide range of other service outlets within a revised town centre boundary.”*

Given the above, AECOM have investigated the decision making behind the setting of the housing number, allocation of the ‘preferred sites’ and the definition of the retail core. This exercise was undertaken to determine if there are any reasonable alternatives. If there were alternatives then they would be subject to appraisal. If there were not then outline reasons are provided as to why this is the case.

Two sets of options were considered through the SEA process as ‘reasonable alternatives’. These are described below. No further reasonable alternatives were suggested through the consultation process and this section has not therefore been updated.

Housing number

The Plan has been 'allocated' 250 dwellings (minimum) through the Trafford Core Strategy (to 2025/26). Trafford Council may not meet its overall target for the Borough and is supportive of the Plan policy to increase the town centre residential population.

The Forum has proposed a minima figure of 550 in the plan period (for the Neighbourhood Plan) which, it should be noted, is longer than that of the Trafford Core Strategy (the Plan runs to 2030 so an extra five years or so of delivery). The Forum sees 550 as a realistic target given the position today but also makes it clear that a higher figure is possible and would be supported.

The higher figure has also been based on what the Forum believe is realistically achievable based on performance to date (completions and units with consent); the likely yield from 4 of the land allocations (A, B, C and E) using the density assumptions used by the Council in the SHLAA and the Core Strategy; the outcome of an appeal and 2 significant current applications along with a (conservative) assumption regarding additional conversions of underused/unused space above commercial/retail ground floor uses of between 4 and 7 units a year.

It has been concluded that there are effectively two alternatives available for the Plan and subsequent assessment:

1. 250 dwellings (the amount stipulated in the Trafford Core Strategy; and
2. 550 dwellings (the amount proposed in the Plan

Site allocations

The selection of sites was driven by the Working Group's consideration of two things. First, sites which presented a realistic (re)development opportunity and second, sites which represented specific opportunities to increase edge of town centre residential development that were within distance, and that would support the policy to increase the total town centre residential population. Underlying this was the consideration that the plan should address not just the pressing needs of the Town Centre but also those that would emerge over the 15 years of the Plan's timescale.

Taking redevelopment first, there were three sites that the Forum viewed as being suitable for allocation given the potential of the areas:

- **Site D – the Old Hospital:** at the time of the Stage 1 public consultation the site was still in use as a hospital while the new one was under construction. Its potential as a site was therefore tangible (the site would become vacant).
- **Site E Leisure Centre:** the site lies adjacent to the bus/rail interchange and presents the opportunity for three uses all of which are regarded as important to the future development of the town centre. First, housing along the Oakfield Road frontage, second, offices, and thirdly car parking (mainly short stay).
- **Site F –:** The site presents an opportunity to complete the commercial frontage to Regent Road/New Street corner; to make much more efficient use of the current surface car park for additional short stay car parking; to improve pedestrian access through Kings Court and to George Street and the opportunity to discuss with adjoining owners how their ownership might be embraced in a wider scheme.

Now, addressing the edge of town cites, three more were considered:

- **Site A and B – Builder's merchants:** In both cases it is considered that the existing uses and the traffic they generate for both deliveries and collections would be more appropriately located in primarily industrial areas rather than sitting adjacent to existing residential properties. Other uses compatible with

housing such as open space could be considered although the deliverability of such a use is not considered to be practical. The proposed allocation reflects the priority in the plan to increase the residential population in and adjacent to the town centre.

- **Site C – YWCA building:** the property has been vacant for some years so can be returned to productive residential use in the early years of the plan i.e. 2015 to 2020. The plan indicates that the town centre residential population be increased and as the demand for residential property within walking distance of the town centre remains high, this site offers an ideal opportunity to support that policy and is allocated accordingly for residential purposes.

The sites identified are illustrated in **Figure 1**.

Plan 6: Town Centre Boundary & Allocations

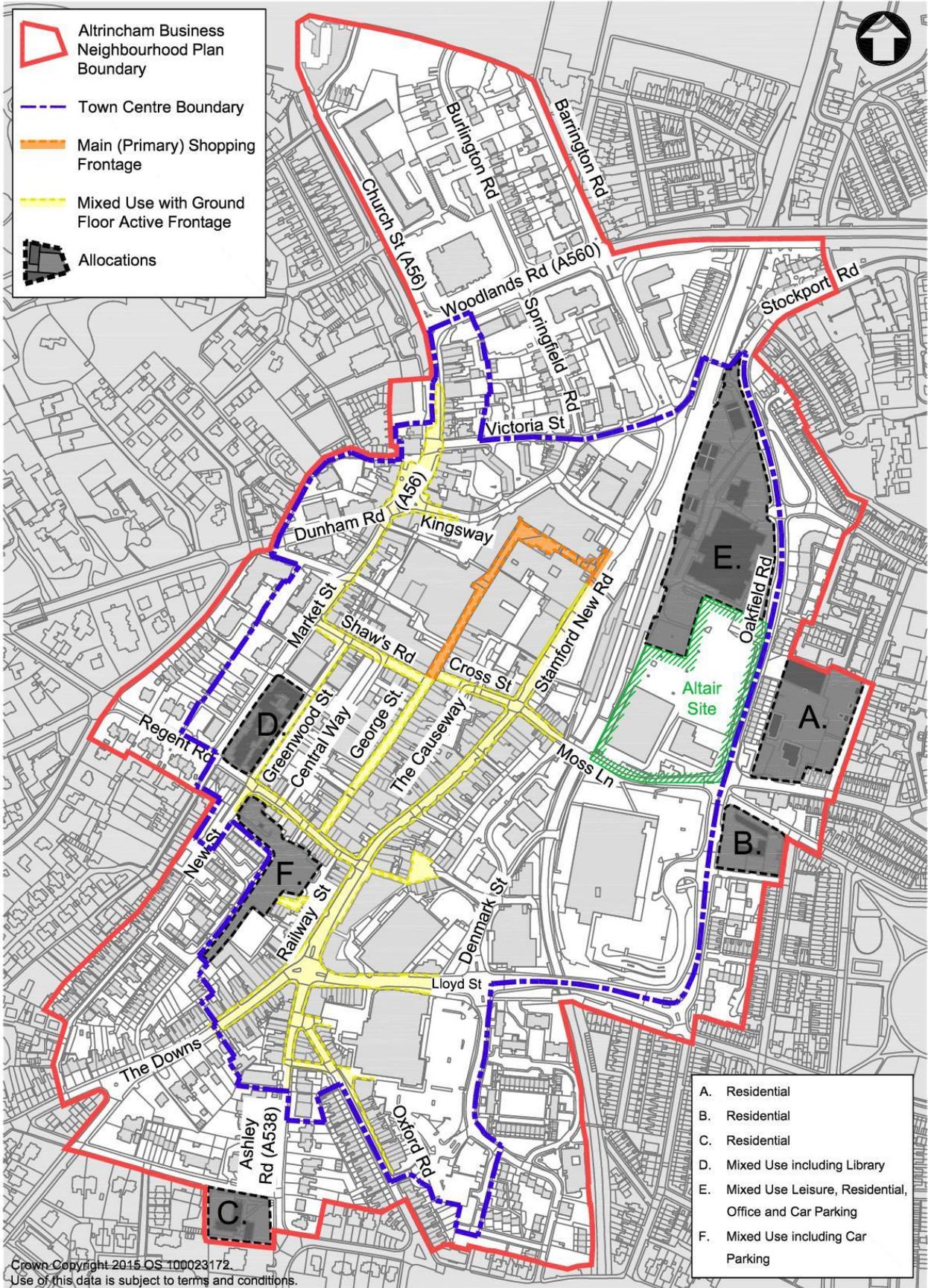


Figure 1: Proposed Town Center Boundary and Allocations

Conclusions

The outcome of the assessment is mixed. For the more socio-economic objectives it seems clear that Option 2 would be advantageous (i.e. have a more positive effect on the relevant areas of the baseline than Option 1). The 'negatives' centre on the potential effects on air quality and heritage assets in the area. Both of these effect predictions have a high level of uncertainty as so much is dependent on the details of the design of the developments.

The Forum has decided to include Option 2 in the draft plan and exclude Option 1. The Forum and Council have stated that the 250 units in the Core Strategy is a minimum. Trafford Council is likely to struggle to meet its overall target for the Borough and is therefore supportive of the Plan policy to increase the town centre residential population.

The figure of 550 (note that this includes the 250 from the Trafford Core Strategy) is a reflection of what the Forum believes is realistically achievable based on performance to date (completions and units with consent); the likely yield from four of the site allocations (A, B, C and E) using the density assumptions used by the Council in the SHLAA and the Core Strategy; the outcome of an appeal and two significant current applications along with a (conservative) assumption regarding additional conversions of underused/unused space above commercial/retail ground floor uses of between four and seven units a year.

The Forum sees 550 as a realistic target given the position today but also makes it clear that a higher figure is possible and would be supported. The car parking policy (only requiring car park spaces where it is practical to do so – see H3) is a clear indication of the priority the Plan gives to attracting further residential development.

It should also be borne in mind that the housing market in the Altrincham area (which includes Bowdon, Hale and Hale Barns) is, and has been consistently, one of the strongest in the country outside the SE of England.

It was considered by the Forum that to achieve a figure of 250, or a significantly lower number than 550, would not enable the Plan to achieve its economic objectives and the community's stated aim of increasing footfall and revitalising the town centre.

Sites

The sites evolved from the Forum Working Group's consideration of two things. First; those sites which presented a realistic (re)development opportunity and second: those sites which represent specific opportunities to increase edge of town centre residential, within walking distance, in support of the policy to increase the total town centre residential population.

The Plan also seeks to address a long-term (15 year) development plan and as such the site selection was informed by possible and promote proposals which may help to achieve the Vision and Objectives which emerged from the public consultation.

The above being the case, the preferred strategy for the draft plan (and bearing in mind the housing discussion in the previous section) is to take forward all six sites. Given this there are no 'site alternatives' as such as all are proposed to be delivered.

Assessment of the current version of the ANBP

Utilising the SEA Framework of objectives and assessment questions developed during the earlier scoping stage of the SEA, the SEA process has assessed the policies (including site policies) put forward through the current version of the ANBP. The Environmental Report has presented the findings of the assessment through nine sustainability themes, as follows:

- Air quality
- Biodiversity
- Climate change

- Historic environment and landscape
- Land, soil and water resources
- Population and community
- Health and well-being
- Transport
- Economy and enterprise

The outcome of the assessment is mixed. For the more socio-economic objectives it seems clear that the plan would result in a number of positive effects of which those on 'Land', 'Population and Community', 'Health', and the 'Economy' are likely to be significant. The 'negatives' centre on the potential effects on air quality and heritage assets in the area. Both of these effect predictions have a high level of uncertainty as so much is dependent on the details of the design of the developments.

Recommendations for the next stages of development for the ANBP

The Environmental Report presents one recommendation for improving the environmental performance of the current version of the ANBP:

- The next iteration of the ANBP **should include stronger policies on urban greening and green infrastructure.**

These recommendations should be considered through the next iteration of plan making for the ANBP.

Next steps

The ANBP and this [updated] Environmental Report will be submitted to Trafford Council for consideration. In particular Trafford Council will consider whether the plan is suitable to go forward to independent Examination in terms of the ANBP meeting the Basic Conditions and its compatibility with the Trafford Council Core Strategy.

If the subsequent Examination is favourable, the ANBP will be subject to a referendum, organised by Trafford Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the plan, then it will be passed Trafford Council with a request it is 'made'. Once made, the ANBP will become part of the Development Plan for Trafford Council.

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