

Halton Lea Town Centre Strategy

Draft Supplementary Planning Document
Public Consultation
January 2007



Halton Borough Council

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This guidance note should be read in conjunction with the relevant policies of the Development Plan.

I Purpose

Introduction

1.1 Halton Lea is one of three town centres within Halton Borough. This Town Centre Strategy has been prepared to update and build upon the previous Strategies adopted by the Council in 1997, and deals with land use planning matters for the centre. It provides additional guidance to that contained in the now saved policies adopted in the Halton Unitary Development Plan. This document is being prepared under the provisions of the 2004 Planning and Compensation Act and will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which will form part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) for Halton.

1.2 The Council has also prepared an updated Strategy for Runcorn Old Town at this time. Widnes Town Centre will be the subject of a later Area Action Plan (Development Plan Document). This is due to the more complex land use issues that need to be addressed in Widnes.

1.3 These documents will not deal explicitly with non-land use planning matters such as marketing and visitor information, promotion of business, day to day town centre management, car parking management, crime and anti-social behaviour and the like.

1.4 This document is the draft SPD relating to **Halton Lea town centre**.

Purpose

1.5 The purpose of this SPD is to complement the Halton UDP, to provide additional practical guidance and support for those involved in the planning of new development within Halton Borough to:

- a Enable the town centres to prosper without adversely affecting the health of any other;
- b Safeguard and strengthen the individual role of each town centre as a safe and accessible place to shop, work and enjoy;
- c Co-ordinate public and private investment decisions;
- d Improve the economic prosperity of the Borough through the creation of employment opportunities; and
- e Ensure the highest standard of design and architecture within each town centre.

1.6 By stating this purpose, the Council will seek to improve through its function as a Local Planning Authority any development proposal that does not provide for, or meet the principles encouraged and required by this SPD and the Halton UDP or as replaced by the Halton LDF.

1.7 This SPD is also intended to encourage all of those who have, or will have, an interest in the vitality and viability of the town centre to follow the practical guidance it contains wherever opportunities arise. This will apply whether or not planning permission or other consents are required.

Structure of the document

1.8 In the following sections this document will set Halton Lea in the context of national planning policy and national trends in town centre type uses, before locally specific factors are considered for

each centre, such as historical circumstances and recent and future planned developments. SWOT analysis (Appendix B) identifies current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the future of the centre, and an assessment of progress regarding recommendations from the original 1997 Town Centre Strategies (Appendix C) completes the evidence and contextual base. From this the strategy identifies:

- Strategic policies and proposals which will be applied across the town centre; and
- Sub area policies and proposals which will apply within each of the identified sub areas.

2 Policy Background

2.1 There are a number of other Supplementary Planning Documents (either adopted or emerging) that will be of relevance to developments within Halton Lea Town centre. Key amongst these are;

- Shop Fronts, Signage and Advertising.
- Designing for Community Safety.
- Design of New Industrial and Commercial Development.
- Design of New Residential Development.
- Transport and Accessibility

2.2 This SPD revises and updates the previous Halton Lea Town Centre Strategy. It has been produced to ensure that through its function as a Local Planning Authority, the Council is in accordance with national and regional guidance and advice and contributes, wherever possible, to meeting the priorities of the community its serves.

National Policy

2.3 Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1): Delivering Sustainable Development, states that planning policies should promote high quality inclusive design in the layout of new developments and individual buildings in terms of function and impact, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development. It also highlights the need to focus developments that attract a large number of people, especially retail, leisure and office development, in existing centres to promote their vitality and viability, social inclusion and more sustainable patterns of development.



Planning shapes the places where people live and work, and the country we live in. It plays a key role in supporting the Government's wider social, environmental and economic objectives and for sustainable communities.



2.4 PPS 6: Planning for Town Centres, states that the Government's key objective for town centres is to promote their vitality and viability by:

- planning for the growth and development of existing centres; and
- promoting and enhancing existing centres, by focusing development in such centres and encouraging a wide range of services in a good environment, accessible to all.

2.5 It affirms that it is essential that town centres provide a high-quality and safe environment if they are to remain attractive and competitive. Policies for the design of development for main town centre uses, regardless of location, and for development in town centres, should promote high quality and inclusive design, in order to improve the character, quality and function of areas.

2.6 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) imposes a duty of the Local Authority to exercise its functions with due regard to the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area. The SPD deals with this matter in relation to land use planning considerations only.

Regional Policy

- 2.7 The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the North West is currently in the process of being updated. Adopted RSS Policy SD2 Other Settlements within the North West Metropolitan Area, highlights Runcorn and Widnes as areas where wide-ranging regeneration and environmental enhancement should be secured.
- 2.8 Policy EC8 Town Centres – Retail, Leisure and Office Development states that Development Plans, town centre management initiatives and other strategies should recognise the continued need to protect, sustain and improve all of the town and city centres in the Region.

Local Policy



- 2.9 The Halton UDP currently provides the Development Plan Framework for Halton. However, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced major changes to the way the planning system operates, with each Local Authority now required to prepare a Local Development Framework. As part of the transitional arrangement for the new planning system the Halton UDP will be automatically saved for a period of three years from the date of adoption. This allows SPDs to be linked to existing 'saved' UDP policies.
- 2.10 The UDP contains a number of strategic aims and objectives, which are set out in its Part 1. In relation to Halton's town centres they include the aim to increase their vitality and viability and the need to ensure that no retail development is allowed in one town centre that would seriously harm another.
- 2.11 Part 2 UDP policies seek to implement the broad aims and objectives contained within Part 1. Those that are directly relevant to the Halton Lea Town Centre SPD are:
- Policy TC1: Retail & Leisure Allocations, provides a list of sites that are allocated for specific uses, on the basis of both an assessment of need for new retail and leisure facilities in the Borough and a sequential approach to site selection.
 - Policy TC2: Retail Development to the Edge Of Designated Shopping Centres, introduces criteria for assessing when development will be permitted on edge of centre locations.
 - Policy TC4: Retail development within designated shopping centres, allows for retail development that contributes to the centre's vitality and viability.
 - Policy TC5: Design of Retail Development, provides the design criteria for considering new retail development and extensions.
 - Policy TC6: Out of Centre Retail Development, provides the criteria to assess out of centre retail proposals including small scale retail developments to meet local needs.
 - Policies LTC1, LTC2 and LTC3 in the Leisure, Tourism and Community Facilities chapter provide the criteria to assess major leisure and community facilities that

are located in town centre, edge of town centre and out of centre locations respectively.

- It is also of note that the enclosed Halton Lea shopping centre plus Asda and the Trident Retail Park are shown as being within the Primary Shopping Area of the centre.
- Policy TPI6: Green Travel Plans, indicates the circumstances when a green travel plan will be required as part of a new development. This may include major development proposals and smaller developments that would generate significant amounts of travel where there are particular local traffic problems.

Community Strategy

- 2.12 This SPD is intended to contribute to the implementation of the Halton Community Strategy 2006. This strategy coordinates the resources of the local public, private and voluntary organisations towards common purposes. The vision of the Strategy is that *“Halton will be a thriving and vibrant Borough where people enjoy a good quality of life with good health; a high quality, modern urban environment; the opportunity for all to fulfil their potential; greater wealth and equality sustained by a thriving business community; and safe and attractive neighbourhoods.”*
- 2.13 Within the ‘Halton’s urban renewal’ priority of the Community Strategy there is an objective “to revitalise the town centres to create dynamic, well designed high quality commercial areas that can contribute to meet the needs of local people, investors, businesses and visitors.”
- 2.14 Halton Borough Council is committed to contributing to achieving the priorities of the Community Strategy.

The Council's priorities are set out in the Corporate Plan. This plan also has five priorities, including ‘urban renewal’.

- 2.15 The priorities in the Community Strategy and the Corporate Plan are based on the priorities set by the people of Halton. These were identified through community involvement via area panels, focus groups, and a telephone survey. The Corporate Plan was based on the same community involvement and statistical information compiled for the State Of Borough Report, 2005.

Local Transport Plan

- 2.16 The Halton Local Transport Plan 2006/7 to 2010/11 (LTP2) states that the ability of local people to access work, learning, health care, shopping, leisure and exercise can significantly impact on their quality of life and life chances.
- 2.17 Helping to ensure that people can access the services they need and want, is not just a matter of improving local transport, but also of improving the provision of other services and developments in more accessible places and ways, and at more accessible times. Good access is identified as a critical element in attracting new businesses to relocate to the area or to establish themselves. It includes a Bus, Cycling Parking and Walking Strategy as well as a draft Access Plan.
- 2.18 The LTP is aimed at meeting the targets in the Community Strategy, clearly this means that both this SPD and the LTP are ultimately trying to achieve the same goals and each will benefit the other.

3 Guiding Principles

Introduction

3.1 In addition to formal policy, Government has produced a number of documents that provide additional relevant guidance. Some of these are detailed below.

Vital and Viable Town Centres

3.2 'Vital and Viable town centres: meeting the challenge' (DOE, 1994) provides, through the use of a town centre health check, a method for evaluating town centre vitality and viability. It suggests collating a whole host of indicators, and analysing them using a variety of different techniques such as 4 'A's (attractions, accessibility, amenity and action) approach and swot (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis.

Planning for Town Centres

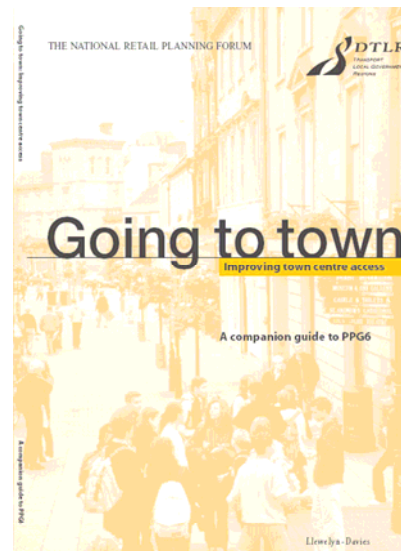
3.3 Planning for Town Centres: Guidance on Design and Implementation tools (ODPM, 2005) provides further detailed design guidance stating that the issues which should be considered for inclusion in local development documents, include:

- identifying the capacity of each centre to accommodate growth and making provision for this;
- providing a comprehensive plan for any area of renewal or development;
- addressing the location and layout of new development;
- developing an urban design strategy, which establishes a comprehensive urban design vision and is supported by specific urban design policies, guidelines or proposals for specific sites;
- addressing the spatial implications of strategies for parking, traffic

management and improvement of the pedestrian environment; and

- setting out a detailed implementation programme for bringing forward development on key sites, including, where appropriate, proposals for addressing issues such as land assembly through compulsory purchase orders.

Going to Town

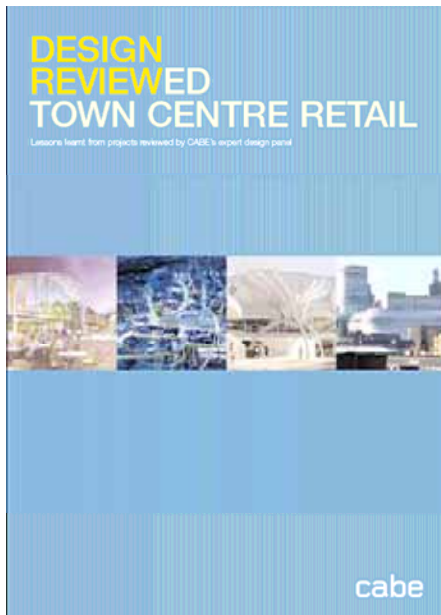


3.4 Going to town – Improving town centre access is a good practice guide and was published in 2002. It highlights what can be done to improve the key routes from the arrival points to the main attractions and provides the principles of route quality these are:

- **Connected:** good pedestrian routes which link the places where people want to go, and form a network
- **Convenient:** direct routes following desire lines, with easy-to-use crossings
- **Comfortable:** good quality footways, with adequate widths and without obstructions

- **Convivial:** attractive well lit and safe, and with variety along the route
- **Conspicuous:** legible routes easy to find and follow, with surface treatments and signs to guide pedestrians

Design Reviewed –Town Centre Retail



3.5 Design Reviewed states that when translated to town centre retail development, we can judge proposed designs against a number of key principles:

- Good urban design – the principles of which are set out in ‘By Design’, and include the importance of character, legibility, ease of movement, adaptability and a mix of uses.
- Good architecture – buildings with civic quality that enhance their internal and external environments through their scale, massing, proportions and detailing.
- Good for retail – the development must work for retail and leisure providers in their core business, selling products to customers.

- Good for everyone – the development must minimise any negative impacts on the environment and promote a safe and inclusive environment for all who want to use the town centre, including those with special access needs.

Planning and Access for Disabled People

3.6 It contains several good practice points of relevance to this document. This includes the fact that all parties involved in the planning and development process should recognise the benefits of, and endeavour to bring about inclusive design.

Building in Context



3.7 The belief underlying ‘Building in context’ (English Heritage & CABE, 2002) is that the right approach is to be found in examining the context for any proposed development in great detail and relating the new building to its surroundings through an informed character appraisal. It suggests that a successful project will:

- relate well to the geography and history of the place and the lie of the land;

- sit happily in the pattern of existing development and routes through and around it;
- respect important views;
- respect the scale of neighbouring buildings;
- use materials and building methods which are as high in quality as those used in existing buildings; and
- create new views and juxtapositions which add to the variety and texture of the setting.

4 Understanding the Issues

History and context within the Borough

4.1 Halton Borough has three town centres at Widnes, Runcorn Old Town and Halton Lea, and the quality and image of these shopping centres play an important role in securing economic growth and providing wider community services.

4.2 Halton Lea is the second largest (behind Widnes) of the three town centres and includes a custom built elevated covered shopping mall with 4 dedicated multi storey car parks in each corner (offering 1,950 free spaces). The enclosed centre contains approximately 51,000 square metres of floorspace on two levels, comprising a main shopping level and a balconied floor.

4.3 It is distinctive because it segregates the pedestrian, private and service vehicles and public transport (bus). This segregation is achieved vertically i.e. circulation of private and service vehicles at ground level, pedestrians at the raised shopping mall level above and public transport interchanges being at a further raised level above the shopping mall at its northern and southern ends, connecting to the busway. Passengers link directly to the shopping level via stairs, escalators and lifts. There is an upper level of vacant and underused floorspace above the shopping mall.

4.4 The wider Halton Lea area comprises:

- a freestanding Asda superstore to the west;
- Trident Park adjoining the centre to the south. This comprises a

further 17,000 sq.m of shopping and leisure development;

- To the north (and linked by an enclosed pedestrian walkway) are the library and an office block (Rutland House) with the police station, law courts and a further multi-storey office block (Grosvenor House) beyond;
- There are also other buildings outside the main access roads to the centre, including vacant and occupied Government Offices.

4.5 Runcorn New Town was designated in 1964 with a master plan aiming to provide homes and jobs for 45,000 people, which was envisaged to increase to an ultimate population of 100,000. Halton Lea (then called Shopping City) was purpose built to be the main shopping and commercial centre for the New Town as well as providing a wider sub-regional role.

4.6 Shops opened in November 1971, which pre-dated the development of several surrounding New Town residential areas. The centre was to be developed in further phases as the New Town population grew but this growth has been slower than anticipated, so that the role of Halton Lea has not developed into what was originally envisaged. Halton Lea has therefore never fulfilled the role of a traditional town centre, with a diverse range of uses. Nevertheless, it has improved since declining to a low point in the mid 1990's and a platform for further success has therefore been established.

Town Centre Strategy 1997

4.7 In 1997 Halton Borough Council adopted the Town Centre Strategy for

Halton Lea as Supplementary Planning Guidance. The strategy aimed to consolidate the refurbishment of Halton Lea shopping centre and the development of the Southern Loop site so that it fulfilled the role as the main centre of attraction for Runcorn and surrounding villages.

- 4.8 The Town Centre Strategy contained 39 proposals based around the headings of integration, enhancement, efficiency, promotion and development.

National issues

- 4.9 There are several national trends regarding town centres that put Halton Lea in context. These include:

- **Increased competition** for customers both between individual retailers and between shopping centres. This means that if a centre does not improve its offer, environment and attraction it will decline relative to other centres;
- Increased competition for town centres from **edge or out of centre retail parks** which have an advantage in terms of abundant free surface level car parking;
- A **smaller number of large national operators** having a **greater market share**. This means that centres become more alike with a reduction in the number of independents;
- **Superstores** selling an **increased range of non-food goods** to increase their market share;
- **Growth in the size of units** to meet the requirements of modern occupiers;
- Growth in the **leisure shopping trip**. Customers are becoming more discerning about the shopping experience they expect. Centres that can provide shopping as a leisure 'event', with a

distinctive experience, for example combining the likes of eating out or a visit to the cinema, will be more attractive than those that provide a standard experience.

- Leisure shopping trips also increase **dwell times** in centres, which is desirable in terms of increasing the footfall in a centre.

Local issues

- 4.10 Three different sources of information have been used to collate the local issues:

- the Review of UDP Retail and Leisure Issues Report by Chestertons (2002)
- SWOT Analysis 2005
- Town Centre Baseline report (2004) supplemented by an 'in house' Halton Lea Town Centre Survey (summer 2005)

- 4.11 The existing Town Centre Strategy has also been reviewed, a progress update of recommendations contained in the existing Town Centre Strategy (1997) is at Appendix C. There has been a good level of success with many of these proposals being achieved or partially achieved.

- 4.12 Identified local issues are:

- The catchment area of the centre is less affluent than the national average. There is potential to increase the number of customers to Halton Lea by improving the centre's offer;
- The Chesterton Report (2002) considered that the centre was under performing. A new strategic direction was needed to stabilise and improve its trading position.
- There are several planned future developments in and around the centre which are detailed when considering the sub-areas.

- Vacancies at mall level increased significantly to a peak in the late 1990's but this situation has since improved. Meadow Walk has been closed off to facilitate reconfiguration of the existing units and mall to create unit sizes that are more attractive to modern retailers.
- There has been an improvement in the number of non-food retail multiples in the centre and diversification of the leisure offer. Trident Park has played a notable role in this turn around.
- A town centre user survey indicated that perceptions of safety in the centre were better than for the other town centres in the Borough.
- Rental yields indicate that investor confidence is not particularly high.
- There is competition for occupiers of the larger office buildings from more modern and attractive offices, such as Daresbury Park, Preston Brook and other locations outside the Borough.

4.13 Strategic policies that have been drawn out of these national and local issues are highlighted in section 5.

SWOT analysis

4.14 SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) of Halton Lea has been undertaken and is reproduced at Appendix B. The main findings from this are:

Strengths

4.15 The centre has a large catchment population of potential shoppers. There is the potential for walk in shopping trips from surrounding employment and residential areas. There is a large amount of free car parking and the centre is accessible by bus. Malls provide protection from the

weather and are clean and safe. Trident Park successfully links with the main shopping centre and has diversified the range of activities.

Weaknesses

4.16 Halton Lea shopping centre has an impenetrable appearance from the outside. There is poor pedestrian linkage from surrounding ground level uses. Some buildings are showing their age.

4.17 The segregation of vehicles and pedestrians has created a 'concrete collar' of roads around the centre. Footbridges do not always appear to be the easiest means of access nor are they well maintained.

4.18 The one-way busway loop around Halton Lea results in there being two main public transport gateways into the centre (Halton Lea North and South) both of which require investment. There is a reasonable distance between the two, which does not aid effective integration in the evening when the shopping mall is closed. At these times pedestrians must walk at ground level to connect between the two.

4.19 There is a lack of retail variety, including the absence of a mall anchor. There is a large amount of void floorspace at the balcony level, which has never developed a successful role. Some vacancies at mall level do not meet the requirements of modern operators.

Opportunities

4.20 The development of the proposed Mersey Gateway Bridge (MGB) would significantly increase traffic (and therefore potential custom) passing Halton Lea on the Central Expressway, thus making the centre a more attractive commercial location. The provision of an anchor store in

connection with the implementation of the planned extension to Halton Lea across East Lane would reduce leakage of shopping spending to other centres. Reconfiguration of vacant mall units would assist in meeting modern operator requirements.

- 4.21 Reorganising and investing in public transport facilities should be investigated. The operational need for service and access roads around and underneath the centre should be reviewed, which could assist pedestrians at ground level. The evening economy could be expanded, based around Cineworld. Pedestrian and vehicular signage around the centre could be improved.

Threats

- 4.22 If Halton Lea does not improve, it will decline relative to other centres. There is competition from other towns in the area and from more modern offices. Cineworld must remain open to anchor the evening economy. There is an apparent lack of co-ordination of management activities between owners in and around Halton Lea including in relation to car parking.

Halton Lea Town Centre Survey 2005

- 4.23 The Council undertook a survey of the three main town centres within the borough in summer 2005. The purpose of this survey was to update previous work done by consultancies in 1999 and 1994. The results of this latest work also supplemented the town centre baseline study, undertaken in 2004.
- 4.24 In the years since 1999, Halton Lea has seen pronounced increases in floor space in a number of goods categories with the food and convenience goods category growing by 3400 sq.m floorspace. By far the largest increase has been in the toys / sports / video

category which has grown from 251 sq.m in 1999 to 7250 sq.m in 2005. This goods category now occupies 13% of Halton Lea floorspace as opposed to less than 1% six years previously.

- 4.25 In a marked difference to current retail market trends both nationally and regionally, the amount of floorspace devoted to the clothes / shoes goods category has actually decreased by around 1500 sq.m. The percentage in overall floorspace is now less than half of what it used to be, dropping from 14% in 1999, to 6% in 2005. There have also been increases in financial and professional services, leisure uses and food and drink categories, all of which have doubled in floorspace since 1999. However, there is no dedicated bookstore, which in some cases can compliment other associated uses, such as coffee shops.
- 4.26 After an initial decrease in vacant floorspace between 1994 and 1999, there has been an increase in vacancies leading up to the most recent survey. In summer 2005, there was 6,245 sq.m of vacant floorspace as opposed to 4,396 sq.m in 1999. This means that 20% of Halton Lea floorspace, is currently vacant. However, it must be noted that this figure includes vacancies at Trident Park, the development of which has added to the town centre's attraction, and above the mall level within the covered shopping centre. The level of vacancy is therefore a little misleading and unquestionably the town centre has improved in recent years.

5 Strategic Policies

Vision for Halton Lea

To enhance the retail, leisure and commercial function of Halton Lea so that it fulfils the role as the main centre of attraction for Runcorn and surrounding villages, whilst complementing the role of Runcorn Old Town.

- 5.1 Sections 5 and 7 to 12 contain policies and proposals that will be applied to Halton Lea Town Centre. They are not presented in any particular order either in terms of importance, timetable or deliverability.
- 5.2 Section 5 below contains strategic policies that apply to the town centre as a whole whereas policies in following sections 7-12 apply to specific sub areas in the centre. There are occasions when the two are linked, for example, there is an overarching policy in section 5 which deals with directional signage (SP9) which has a daughter policy in the Central Area (CAP2) that complements it and highlights a more specific location within the town centre where such an improvement should be promoted. Where this occurs there are clear cross references between the overarching strategic policy and the more specific sub area policy.
- 5.3 It is also of note that there are several policies, both strategic and specific to the sub areas, which promote the use of planning obligations to assist in the improvement of the town centre. These improvements fall into four categories, which are in relation to transport accessibility, linkages, the local environment and functional improvement of the town centre. For ease of reference, Appendix D contains details of all policies that have reference to planning obligations and

therefore indicates the type of activities for which obligations could be used. This document cannot prescribe the exact nature of obligations being sought as this must be done on a case by case basis in compliance with Circular 05/05. However, as a generality prioritisation will initially be given to schemes directed towards the improvement of accessibility and linkage to the centre.

- 5.4 As a Supplementary Planning Document, this Town Centre Strategy is unable to formally designate sites for development. However, it is able to identify development principles for existing opportunities (such as UDP allocations and planning permissions). Sites that are identified as new opportunities can, if necessary, be taken forward as designations through the New Retail and Leisure Development DPD.

STRATEGIC POLICY I

Improve retail and leisure choice at Halton Lea.



Photo 1: Activities in Town Square

Implementation:

5.5 This will be the responsibility of the centre's owners, Fordgate, and would be assisted by Central Area Policy I, Trident Park Policy I and East Lane Policy I in particular.

STRATEGIC POLICY 2

Review the Halton Lea Primary Shopping Area (PSA) boundary as part of a future Development Plan Document (DPD).

5.6 The covered shopping centre, multi-storey car parks, the southern bus terminus, Asda and Trident Park all fall entirely within the Primary Shopping Area for Halton Lea in the Unitary Development Plan. This covers a wide area and it is appropriate to consider whether all these areas function as 'in centre' in policy terms and therefore if the current PSA boundary is appropriate.

Implementation:

5.7 A SPD can only identify this issue. Any review of the PSA boundary shown on the Proposals Map of the saved Plan (i.e. the UDP) must be done by Halton Borough Council, in conjunction with interested parties, as part of the forthcoming New Retail and Leisure Development Plan Document (DPD).

STRATEGIC POLICY 3

Improve linkages to the shopping centre from surrounding areas by:

- the enhancement of existing footbridges; and
- continued active management and enhancement of footpaths around the shopping centre, including from surrounding residential areas.

The Council will seek contributions for this from all new developments at Halton Lea through planning obligations.

5.8 Halton Lea was designed to meet the shopping and commercial needs of the New Town. As well as car borne visitors, this was also to include residents on foot from the surrounding areas of Palacefields and Hallwood Park (formerly Southgate). Footbridges and footpaths were constructed to assist this, some of which now require improvement and upgrading.



Photo 2: Footbridge towards Asda

Implementation:

5.9 The Council will seek planning obligations from all major new developments within the town centre (areas 1-6a inclusive as shown on Plan 2) to provide contributions towards the creation of a safe and attractive environment. This will include the improvement of linkages to surrounding areas by the enhancement of footpaths and footbridges, including resurfacing and exploring the potential for canopies.

STRATEGIC POLICY 4

Development of sites incorporating or adjoining greenways should be in accordance with UDP Policy TP9.

5.10 The greenway network is made up of proposed and potential off road routes for walking, cycling and, where appropriate, horseriding. These

connect people to facilities and greenspaces.

Implementation:

- 5.11 Development of sites that incorporate a greenway will be expected to enhance the condition and appearance of proposed routes and implement potential routes. Where proposed development adjoins a greenway, extensions and improvements to the network will be sought through negotiation.

STRATEGIC POLICY 5

Develop a Parking Partnership with all private car park operators that will review and monitor the impact of the emerging regeneration of Halton Lea on the demand for and provision of car parking.

- 5.12 Local Transport Plan 2 indicates that the Council will seek to develop a Parking Partnership with all private car parking operators. This is important in and around town centres where much of the car parking provision is in private rather than Council ownership, particularly at Halton Lea. It would facilitate a consistent approach to be taken towards parking management in and around the town centre.
- 5.13 Currently, there is not a parking capacity problem at Halton Lea, with upper levels of multi-storeys being underused, particularly at weekends. However, the planned extension to the centre (see East Lane Policy 1) could have implications in the future if, as desired, the development contributes towards a 'step change' in offer and consequently attracts significant numbers of new shoppers to Halton Lea.

Implementation:

- 5.14 A Parking Partnership would need to be developed between the owners of the shopping centre (Fordgate) the Council and other owners in the area such as Asda.

STRATEGIC POLICY 6

Develop a strategy for ground level pedestrian circulation around the shopping centre in the evening, when malls are closed.

- 5.15 The Halton Lea shopping centre closes at 6pm on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday, between 8.30 to 9pm on Thursday and Friday and at 5.30pm on Sundays. Shopping malls are not adopted highway and are privately owned. They are closed to pedestrians around these times as part of the management of the centre, which is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Access from footbridges into the car parks is also gated off in the evening, usually about an hour after the shopping malls are closed off. Safe evening pedestrian circulation at ground level is therefore an issue as is circulation during the day, for example between multi-storey car parks and office developments surrounding the covered shopping centre.



Photo 3: Pedestrian crossing road at ground level

- 5.16 It is also of note that there are issues regarding pedestrian circulation at

ground level during the daytime. Whilst access from multi-storeys to the surrounding areas is easiest in an east west direction via footbridges, some pedestrian movements do occur at ground level to the office and civic area to the north, which can create conflicts with vehicles.

Implementation:

5.17 Halton Borough Council, Fordgate and other site owners. The implementation of East Lane Policy I would give a major impetus to this work.

STRATEGIC POLICY 7

Increase in quality and quantity of public art within Halton Lea Town Centre.

5.18 Halton UDP policy BE2 states that development should take account of the provision of public art and the integration of art and craft work into the design of the development scheme. Supporting text to the policy explains that the Council will actively encourage developers to spend a percentage of the total development cost or a fixed amount of money on providing art and craftwork and on seeking the influence of artists and craft skills alongside architects and building professionals, to ensure integration of art and craftwork features as an essential part of the design.

5.19 Public art is particularly important within town centres as it contributes to improving the quality of the environment. Good public art helps create a sense of place, identity and community, it also adds to the cultural capital of a locality, all vital to making a town centre an attractive and vibrant place to visit. Public art embraces many aspects of the public realm including sculptures, murals, water features and lighting. It can stand alone or be incorporated into the design of

buildings and spaces around them, such as through use of decorative boundary treatments or patterned floorscapes.

Implementation:

5.20 In accordance with UDP policy BE2, the Council will seek all new development (including change of use), within areas 1-6a inclusive as shown on Plan 2, to allocate 1% of the total development costs (defined as construction costs) towards the enhancement of public art within Halton Lea. The one percent approach is a standard national and international recognised figure. This will be required to be either directly provided on or off site; or via a commuted sum towards the provision of public art in the defined area. All public art must be demonstrated to be provided within a publicly accessible or visible locality. Where appropriate, maintenance and other revenue implications will be taken into account when provision relates to a specific work of public art.

5.21 The Council is currently developing a public art strategy, this will provide further information on the provision of public art in Halton. This will identify key locations, such as gateways to the town centre, where commuted sums will be directed, and if necessary accumulated to ensure high quality public art is achieved.

STRATEGIC POLICY 8

Provide a co-ordinated approach to the future provision of street furniture and ensure that it is usable by all members of the public, is well located and does not cause a safety issue.

5.22 The provision of street furniture needs to be well managed and coordinated. It will also need to be durable, easy to maintain and fit for purpose, and placed with consideration to ensure that it

will contribute to the aesthetic and functional qualities of public spaces.

Implementation:

5.23 The Council can assist in the provision of a co-ordinated approach to the provision of high quality street furniture within and around Halton Lea.

5.24 The Council will seek planning obligations from all new developments within the town centre (areas 1-6a inclusive as shown on Plan 2) to provide monies towards the creation of a safe and attractive environment, including the provision of high quality and co-ordinated street furniture.

STRATEGIC POLICY 9

All new developments should make suitable provision for safe and convenient cycle access linked to existing or proposed routes (where opportunities exist) and provide for convenient, safe, secure and covered cycle parking that is likely to be attractive to potential users in line with UDP Policy TP6.

5.25 This will encourage the greater use of this more sustainable form of transport and should ensure that any bicycles are safe from theft and are not causing a hazard to other road/footpath users.

5.26 Where provision of cycle lockers is not practicable, for reasons of security, 'Sheffield' style bicycle racks will be required and not the less secure 'butterfly' design.



Photo 4: Cycle racks in multi-storeys

Implementation:

5.27 Where the development proposed requires off-site access improvements or the development is incapable or unsuitable for the on-site provision of cycle parking either due to site constraints or highway safety issues, payment in lieu of on-site provision as part of a planning obligation may be acceptable. See also Central Area Policy 4 and Civic Quarter Policy 3.

5.28 Further information with regard to cycle storage, facilities and networks will be provided in the forthcoming Transport and Accessibility SPD.

STRATEGIC POLICY 10

Introduce more soft landscaping for screening and decoration, particularly in connection with development and redevelopment opportunities.

5.29 Halton Lea has been developed with a large amount of hard landscaping. Whilst this has given the town centre a distinctive appearance, some hard landscaping has either dated over time or presents a featureless environment. More recent built additions to the town centre have seen the introduction of soft landscaping (such as Asda or newer offices) which has added diversity and improved the visual appearance.

Implementation:

5.30 The introduction of further quality soft landscaping should be encouraged during future development and redevelopment of Halton Lea town centre. This would have visual benefits as well as environmental ones in terms of reducing surface run off of rainfall. This would primarily be the responsibility of Halton Borough Council, as the Local Planning Authority, when determining planning applications and imposing conditions on planning permissions as well as Fordgate, as the majority property holder. Where appropriate, Edinburgh House and other major occupiers of the town centre should be encouraged to introduce more soft landscaping, where this would be compliant with planning, highways and other legislation.

STRATEGIC POLICY 11

Improve directional signage to and within the town centre.

All signage should be co-ordinated to ensure a consistent approach is taken to design, location and naming across the town centre.

5.31 The unconventional and, in certain locations, impenetrable appearance of the town centre can make it difficult for visitors to have a sense of where they are in relation to other parts of the centre or where to gain the most appropriate access. Whilst some improvements have taken place already to improve permeability, better directional signage would be beneficial both in terms of updating and further additions.

5.32 There are three particular locations where there would be benefits from improved signage. The first would be to enhance directions for motor vehicle users regarding which would be

the best car park to locate in relation to various attractions of the centre (shops, Council offices etc). The second would be enhanced directions at the bus termini.

5.33 Thirdly, the development of the Mersey Gateway Bridge (MGB) will increase traffic on the Central Expressway adjoining Halton Lea. Although the town centre adjoins this road it is somewhat screened by virtue of topography and landscaping. As such, there may be potential in the future to open up views to the town centre from the Expressway. Improving the attraction of the centre through the planned commercial developments detailed elsewhere in this SPD, coupled with increased passing trade, represents a significant opportunity to improve patronage of the centre.

Implementation:

5.34 Halton Borough Council will seek planning obligations from all new developments within the town centre to provide monies towards the creation of a safe and attractive environment, including the provision of appropriate signage. Fordgate, as owners of the shopping centre, also have a significant role to play in the improvement of signage. A consistency in style would generate a sense of place, so must be encouraged. Strategic Policy 14 provides an arena to enable this.

STRATEGIC POLICY 12

All developments should comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Acts (DDAs).

5.35 There are Disability Discrimination Acts (DDAs) of 1995 and 2005. The need to comply with the DDA should be considered as inherent within all policies that promote development

within the centre where there is access to buildings and public areas. There is also a need to comply with the DDA for improvements that are outwith of the planning system, for example in relation to existing buildings. Consideration should be given to the requirements of DDA in the early stages of drawing up a proposal, alongside access requirements identified by UDP policies BE18-20.

Halton Borough Council, Asda, Edinburgh House and Savills. Halton Borough Council and Fordgate would logically act as the lead.

Implementation:

5.36 Initial contact regarding DDA should be with the Council's Building Control Service, details of which are given at Appendix A.

STRATEGIC POLICY 13

Recycling facilities should be rationalised and improved.

5.37 Existing public recycling facilities for the town centre are located at the Asda car park in the West Lane area and it would be desirable to improve these. This policy does not preclude the development of additional recycling facilities, as appropriate, in connection with further developments.

Implementation:

5.38 This will be the responsibility of the site owner, potentially in conjunction with Halton Borough Council, where appropriate.

STRATEGIC POLICY 14

Co-ordinate future action and improvements for Halton Lea and disseminate relevant information by setting up a town centre group, to meet periodically.

Implementation:

5.39 This group would consist of owners and other major interested parties in the town centre, such as Fordgate,

6 Sub Area Analysis

6.1 Halton Lea comprises a number of distinct areas as follows:

- **Halton Lea shopping centre** – this forms the core area of the centre and is enclosed by access roads to and around the centre;
- **Trident Park** – area to the south of Southway and west of West Lane consisting of large space retail and leisure users;
- **West Lane Area** – area to the west of West Lane including Asda and Vestric House;
- **Civic Quarter** - to the north of Second Avenue and south of Northway;
- **East Lane area** – to the east of East Lane and West of Palacefields.
- **Halton Hospital, Palacefields and Hallwood Park** – including the medical quarter to the south of Hospital Way and east of East Lane and the Hallwood Link Road and residential areas to the south (Hallwood Park) and east (Palacefields).

6.2 These areas are shown on Plan 2 in the Appendices and the function of each is considered in the ensuing sections 7-12.

6.3 Particular planning issues are linkages between sub areas, providing adequate car parking and where to focus new developments of adequate size to bolster town centre performance.

6.4 Each of the sub areas have been considered in more detail in the next section. They have all been set out in a similar format. This entails explaining the current situation in terms of details of the present condition of the sub-area and existing planning policy. From

the issues for the centre that have been identified, Policy Proposals and their implementation strategies are promoted to overcome these issues.

6.5 As indicated at paragraph 5.4, as a Supplementary Planning Document, this Town Centre Strategy is unable to formally designate sites for development.

7 Central Area - Covered Halton Lea Shopping Centre

7.1 This area comprises the covered shopping mall, four multi-storey car parks at each corner and two bus termini. The covered shopping centre segregates the pedestrian from vehicles vertically. Servicing and private vehicle access is beneath and surrounding the centre at ground level.



Photo 5: Service roads underneath mall

7.2 The enclosed nature of the centre means that there are limitations regarding planning controls compared to the other town centres in Halton. Within the centre, shop fronts are exempt from requiring advertisement consent and planning permission is not required for change of use or internal alterations. However, the single overall ownership and management of the centre results in consistency in the quality of frontages and the general shopping environment, which is clean, albeit somewhat dated.

7.3 The focal point for the Central Area is Town Square, which has developed more active uses and interest over recent years. Events take place, particularly in school holidays and kiosks have been introduced to offer the first step on the ladder to obtain commercial representation. The

presence of street furniture gives variety and additional customer facilities have been added, such as toilets a short distance away on Town Walk.

CENTRAL AREA POLICY I

Reconfigure smaller vacant units in the shopping centre to create new premises that are attractive to modern retailers.

7.4 There has been significant progress in tidying up unsightly and underused hinterland areas between the shopping mall and bus termini. The northern area has been converted to Halton Direct Link (a one stop shop for Council services) and the southern end has seen the development of Job Centre Plus and a food takeaway.

7.5 Similarly, vacant mall floorspace also detracts from the vitality and viability of the centre. There are opportunities to improve attraction by accommodating modern retailer requirements through the amalgamation of smaller vacant units to create larger premises. It is understood that this is already taking place in the former Meadow Walk area, which has been closed off to enable redevelopment.



Photo 6: Meadow Walk prior to closure

Implementation:

7.6 This is the responsibility of the shopping centre owner, Fordgate and would assist progressing Strategic Policy I.

CENTRAL AREA POLICY 2

Improve directional signage in multi-storey car parks to reduce pedestrian/ motor vehicle conflicts by guiding pedestrians towards the refurbished stairwells.

7.7 Car parks are named Meadow, Orchard, Bridge and River. They are managed by Strata Security and Combined Services Ltd and have been awarded the Park Mark Safer Parking Award. Car parking is free, and the only restriction is that level D (the main shopping deck) is specifically for shopper usage with a maximum 3 hours stay. Currently, the Meadow car park is largely closed off due to works in connection with Strategic Policy I and potential action in relation to East Lane Policy I.

Implementation:

7.8 Despite the presence of existing signage, and partly due to the unattractive nature of some stairwells, a notable proportion of visitors to the town centre walk along vehicle ramps in the multi storey car parks to access different levels. This is a safety hazard, accentuated in wet conditions. Improved directional signage, in conjunction with Central Area Policy 3 would reduce this problem. The emphasis should be on quality rather than quantity. It is the responsibility of the shopping centre owner, Fordgate and would assist progressing Strategic Policy II.

CENTRAL AREA POLICY 3

Investigate opening up and refurbishing stairwells in multi-

storey car parks to enable access via them to the highest deck levels.

7.9 There are four stairwells at the corner of each multi-storey, allowing access between all car park levels and the mall. One stairwell has been refurbished in each car park adjoining the pedestrian walkway (feeding from footbridges) with the remaining three being in a comparatively poor standard of maintenance.

7.10 If the highest levels of the multi-storeys become more heavily used as a consequence of improvements in the patronage of the shopping centre, there will be a need to consider reopening the upper levels of stairwells. This would allow access via them to all levels of the multi-storey car parks (currently they are boarded off at level F and therefore access to higher levels must, by necessity, be via the vehicle ramps).



Photo 7: Non-refurbished stairwells at multi storeys

Implementation:

7.11 This is the responsibility of the shopping centre owner, Fordgate, in conjunction with advice from Halton Borough Council. It would be assisted through Strategic Policy 5 and would assist the successful implementation of East Lane Policy I.

CENTRAL AREA POLICY 4

Investigate the potential for secure parking for motorcycles in multi-storey car parks, involving the provision of dedicated spaces with bollards or hoops.

- 7.12 There is no dedicated parking for motorcycles in the multi-storey car parks, although dedicated cycle racks are provided (on level D only). The provision of secure, dedicated motorcycle parking for customers should be investigated. This would involve considering the ground level in multi-storeys as the first option.

Implementation:

- 7.13 This is the responsibility of the shopping centre owner, Fordgate, in conjunction with advice from Halton Borough Council. It would be assisted through Strategic Policies 5 and 14.
- 7.14 Multi-storey car parks are also a suitable location for additional or replacement cycle racks which should be provided in accordance with Strategic Policy 9.

CENTRAL AREA POLICY 5

Refurbish and improve the existing bus termini.

- 7.15 The northern and southern bus termini are important gateways into the town centre. Their attractiveness can influence individual decisions regarding the use of public transport to visit the centre. The northern bus terminus and associated access is owned by Halton Borough Council whilst, although the southern terminus is also owned by HBC, the link building containing stairs, lifts and escalators belongs to Fordgate. Both are in need of improvement, including better signage and information. The northern terminus particularly is an unattractive entrance point and is in need of some remedial

measures such as the insertion of new benches and flooring.



Photo 8: Northern Bus Terminus



Photo 9: Surface leading from Northern Bus Terminus

Implementation:

- 7.16 This is the responsibility of Fordgate and Halton Borough Council. An improvement project for the northern terminus is planned to begin in spring 2007 and will include enclosing the platform, the provision of additional seating and installation of CCTV. The Council will seek planning obligations from all new developments within the town centre (areas 1-6a inclusive as shown on Plan 2) to provide monies towards the creation of a safe and attractive environment, including public transport infrastructure. Strategic policies 8 and 11 could assist.

8 Trident Park

- 8.1 Trident Park is a retail and leisure park to the south of the Halton Lea shopping centre. It comprises approximately 17,000 sq.m of floorspace and 322 parking spaces and was developed during the late 1990s. It has introduced a variety of new national operators to the town centre and has therefore been a significant success. It is also conveniently located to encourage linked trips with the covered shopping centre.
- 8.2 Trident is the major location of night time activity at Halton Lea, as it includes Cineworld. However, presently the town centre is not a vibrant and established evening destination. Consequently, Halton Lea and Runcorn Old Town have a complementary relationship with the former being the main retail destination for Runcorn and the Old Town being the main evening destination.
- 8.3 The area is well served by public transport from the southern bus terminus and taxi ranks. The Runcorn cycleway also passes through the car park in front of Fitness First and Carpertright.
- 8.4 Both Trident and Asda to the north west (see next section) are shown wholly within the Primary Shopping Area (PSA) in the UDP.

TRIDENT PARK POLICY 1

Develop additional small scale retail or leisure uses in the area of under used car parking space to the south of Cineworld.

- 8.5 The bulk of surface level car parking is well used. However, patronage is lower on the western side of Trident,

adjoining Carpertright and Fitness First and to the south of Cineworld. The underused car parking area to the south of Cineworld represents a development opportunity and planning permissions exists here for 3 relatively small additional retail units. This forms part of wider proposals to reorganise and improve the offer of Trident Park.



Photo 10: Under used car parking adjoining Cineworld

Implementation:

- 8.6 Implementation of these planning permissions is the responsibility of the site owner, Fordgate.

TRIDENT PARK POLICY 2

Develop a new vehicular access and an improved pedestrian access into Trident Park from Hallwood Park Road

- 8.7 As part of the planning permissions mentioned at 8.5 above, a new vehicular access into the retail park from the Hallwood Link Road and improved pedestrian access are planned. It would improve the accessibility of Trident Park and is shown locationally on Plan 5.

Implementation:

- 8.8 This is the responsibility of the site owner, Fordgate, in co-ordination

with Halton Borough Council regarding works encroaching onto the public highway. Contributions to funding works to the public highway could be achieved through planning obligations in relation to selected associated developments within the town centre (areas 1-6a inclusive as shown on Plan 2).

either reduced rents or more flexible leases.

Implementation:

8.11 This would be the responsibility of the owner, Fordgate, and would assist in the implementation of Strategic Policy 1.

TRIDENT PARK POLICY 3

Seek active uses for remaining vacant units at Trident Park, if necessary by the use of attractive letting terms, such as reduced rents or shorter letting periods.



Photo 11: Civic Square, note vacant units on right

8.9 There are two larger vacant properties on the western side of the Park (1,115 sq.m and 929 sq.m) It is understood that these could be occupied as part of wider proposals to reorganise and improve the offer of Trident Park.

8.10 The civic square outside Cineworld provides a good quality, external public space with street furniture and public art, which adds to aesthetic quality. However, the presence of small, longstanding, vacant units at the eastern edge of the Park close to Cineworld detracts. In order to diversify uses and increase activity, consideration should be given to attractive terms of occupation for these units, such as in the form of

9 West Lane Area

- 9.1 The West Lane area largely functions as a successful stand alone destination. It comprises an Asda superstore of 6,652 sq.m, petrol filling station and drive through McDonalds. There are 516 associated car parking spaces. Stand alone offices (Vestric House) are located in this area, to the north.
- 9.2 Soft landscaping provides a pleasant alternative to the hard landscaping found in several other areas of Halton Lea. Planning permission exists to extend Asda by 1,568 sq.m.



Photo 12: Asda site

WEST LANE POLICY 1

Improvements to public transport accessibility will be sought in the West Lane area, adjoining the busway.

- 9.3 Asda is less well located in relation to public transport and predominantly serves car borne shoppers. As part of the planning permission for the extension, a financial contribution has been agreed towards improving accessibility to public transport.
- 9.4 Whilst Asda trades well, there are only a modest number of linked trips between it and the rest of the town centre. Two pedestrian footbridges connecting it to the covered shopping centre require maintenance and

upgrading. Funding for this could be sought in part from developer contributions in the form of planning obligations, facilitated by Strategic Policy 3. Pedestrian and cycle linkages to Trident could also be reinforced to encourage more linked trips.



Photo 13: Pedestrian links between Trident Park and Asda

Implementation:

- 9.5 This is likely to be the responsibility of Halton Borough Council, but would depend upon the precise location of improvements and corresponding site ownership. Planning obligations would facilitate such improvements.

WEST LANE POLICY 2

Should the Vestric House site become available for redevelopment, first preference should be for reuse for employment purposes.

If the site does not prove to be attractive for such uses within a reasonable period of time, next preference should be for other uses that would contribute towards the vitality and viability of Halton Lea town centre.

- 9.6 The Vestric House site is located to the north of Asda and is shown hatched on Plan 2. It is segregated from

the rest of the West Lane area by the busway. It falls within a Primarily Employment Area on the Halton Unitary Development Plan proposals map. Policy E3 (Primarily Employment Area) is relevant in the first instance, with potential for additional consideration against Policy E4 (Complementary Services and Facilities within Primarily Employment Areas).

Implementation:

- 9.7 It would be for any potential developer of the site to prove to Halton Borough Council, in its role as Local Planning Authority, that a particular proposal is suitable when considered in relation to development plan policies and any other material considerations.

10 Civic Quarter

- 10.1 This area contains a mix of civic and office uses, including Rutland House and Grosvenor House (office blocks), a library, Halton Direct Link (Council one stop shop), police station and law courts. More recently developed offices are located on the edge of this area.
- 10.2 The majority of uses were developed at the same time as the shopping centre. Grosvenor House and surrounding hard landscaping is showing its age, creating an unattractive and uncompromising environment. Newer offices are surrounded by more visually appealing soft landscaping. Competition from more desirable and modern locations, including business parks, such as Daresbury Park has made this area a less attractive location for major office users than when it was developed in the '70s.
- 10.3 The location falls within a Primarily Employment Area in the adopted UDP and employment (B Use Class) development is considered appropriate, subject to compliance with other plan policies. It lies outside the Primary Shopping Area (PSA) boundary, which follows the southern side of East Lane.



Photo 14: Hard landscaping at Grosvenor House

CIVIC QUARTER POLICY I

Should the Grosvenor House site become available for redevelopment, first preference should be for reuse for employment purposes.

If the site does not prove to be attractive for such uses within a reasonable period of time, next preference should be for other uses that would contribute towards the vitality and viability of Halton Lea town centre.

- 10.4 Relevant UDP policies to consider any future major proposals for Grosvenor House against are E3 (Primarily Employment Area) in the first instance, with potential for additional consideration against E4 (Complementary Services and Facilities within Primarily Employment Areas).
- 10.5 On a smaller scale, there is potential to redevelop the hard landscaped areas adjoining Grosvenor House to improve attraction and security. As indicated at paragraph 10.2, this area is showing its age. This could involve the development of glazed atriums for a combination of lettable office space and/ or internal public space. Any such development would need to maintain a clearly defined pedestrian link to Wingate House and cycle access towards the west.

Implementation:

- 10.6 It would be for any potential developer of the site to prove to Halton Borough Council, in its role as Local Planning Authority, that a particular proposal is suitable when considered in relation to development plan policies and any other material considerations.

10.7 Smaller scale proposals are likely to be the responsibility of the major landowner and site manager in this area, Edinburgh House and Savills. It would need to be done in conjunction with Halton Borough Council to ensure compliance with planning, highways and other legislation and could be assisted in part by Strategic Policy 10.

CIVIC QUARTER POLICY 2

Review and rationalise existing uses at ground level (underneath Rutland House and Halton Direct Link). This will involve:

- reviewing existing car parking arrangements;
- reducing the length of the taxi rank; and
- removing all outdated signage and road markings, replacing with new, as appropriate.

10.8 The development of Halton Lea, in the context of local topography, created a ground level below the law courts, police station, Rutland House and northern bus terminus. Ancillary uses are situated here, including an under used taxi rank, car parking, remnants of the disused regional bus station and associated outdated signage and road markings. This ground level no longer functions as originally designed and has fallen into disrepair.



Photo 15: Disused former Regional bus station



Photo 16: Parking at the disused taxi rank. Note cycle chained to railings.

10.9 The area could be improved by reorganisation and updating to increase operational efficiency.

Implementation:

10.10 As this area is not in single ownership, improvements would need to be co-ordinated through Strategic Policies 5 and 14. Halton Borough Council's Property Services Department and Legal Services could act as the lead.

CIVIC QUARTER POLICY 3

Investigate the expansion of usage of secure cycle parking to include other Halton Lea employees.

10.11 A secure cycle cage for use by Council employees has been developed in the area to the north of Rutland House where there is natural surveillance. A shower room and lockers have also been added in part of the former regional bus station. There would be benefits from making this scheme more widely available to other employees at Halton Lea.



Photo 17: Existing secure cycle parking

Implementation:

10.12 Halton Borough Council could act as the lead on any further developments, in connection with Strategic Policy 14. Any scheme will need to respect existing servicing and access arrangements.

CIVIC QUARTER POLICY 4

Improve the attraction of Town Park as a resource to be enjoyed by office workers and shoppers alike.

10.13 Town Park is the northern entrance point to Halton Lea but is a major under utilised resource. An underpass below Northway provides the link but is not an attractive entry point and may have issues of perceived safety.



Photo 18: Underpass below Northway

Implementation:

10.14 The Council will seek planning obligations for contributions towards improvements to Town Park, including linkages, from all major new developments within the town centre (areas 1-6a inclusive as shown on Plan 2).

11 East Lane Area

11.1 This is a strategically important area, sitting between the Halton Lea shopping centre to the west and residential (Palacefields) and medical areas (Halton Hospital) to the south and east. Two large buildings dominate; East Lane House, and Castle View House, the former being a vacant 28,000 sq.m Government Office block that was built at the same time as the shopping centre. Castle View House is a modern development which is occupied by Government Departments (Education and Skills and Work and Pensions).



Photo 19: East Lane House

11.2 Other uses include a Territorial Army Centre, a nursery, two small stand alone offices and a Post Office sorting office. A cemetery is located along the northern fringe of this area.

11.3 With the exception of the cemetery, which is greenspace, the area is shown as being in primarily employment use in the adopted Unitary Development Plan. Employment (B Use Class) development is considered appropriate, subject to compliance with other plan policies. It lies outside the Primary Shopping Area (PSA) boundary, which follows the western side of East Lane.

EAST LANE POLICY 1

The East Lane development site (as shown on Plan 3) is suitable for retail use as an extension to the Halton Lea shopping centre. Any redevelopment should:

- be of an appropriate scale;
- create a gateway entrance into the Halton Lea Shopping Centre;
- integrate into the existing shopping centre;
- use quality materials which respect the existing built form;
- enhance vertical linkages from ground level to the mall level of Halton Lea shopping centre;
- respect and enhance existing pedestrian and cycle linkages in east-west and north-south directions in accordance with UDP Policies TP6 and TP7; and
- review and redesign the road network around the town centre including the potential closure of East Lane to through traffic.

11.4 Outline planning permission has been granted, subject to the signing of a legal agreement, for a 13,006 sq.m extension to the Halton Lea shopping centre, involving the demolition of East Lane House and Meadow car park and relocation of the TA Centre. East Lane would be closed as a through route, although it would remain as an access to the new development.

11.5 This development is a major opportunity to expand the covered shopping centre. It would help to balance the existing draw of Trident Park and Asda to the south and west respectively and break up the 'concrete

collar' of roads around the town centre to facilitate easier pedestrian movement. As indicated by the policy, it would need to consider widespread implications in terms of accessibility.

- 11.6 These would include considering whether Northway should remain one way in the wider context of reassessing the overall vehicular circulation strategy for the town centre. Additionally, pedestrian access from the east via raised footbridges above East Lane can beneficially be addressed. The northern footbridge would be removed during redevelopment but the southern footbridge will be retained and therefore requires improvement and upgrading.



Photo 20: Surface of footbridge from East Lane House.



Photo 21: View of East Lane, looking towards East Lane House

Implementation:

- 11.7 This will predominantly be the responsibility of the developer of the

East Lane development site, in conjunction with the necessary approvals from Halton Borough Council. Additional developer contributions in the form of planning obligations from related major new developments within the town centre (areas 1-6a inclusive as shown on Plan 2) will be sought where appropriate for matters in connection with bullet point 5. Like all area based policies, this also needs to be read in conjunction with the Strategic Policies contained in section 5, particularly no.3.

12 Halton Hospital, Palacefields and Hallwood Park

12.1 This area surrounds Halton Lea to the south and east. Both Hallwood Park (to the south) and Palacefields (to the east) are residential areas that were under construction in the early 1970s, with the former being redeveloped in the late 1980s. The original town centre master plan envisaged these residential areas having potential to generate walk in trips to Halton Lea for shopping, leisure or work.

12.2 The area to the east of the Hallwood Link Road contains the Hallwood health centre and Halton Hospital, which opened in 1976 and has subsequently been expanded.

12.3 Both Palacefields and Hallwood Park are shown as being in primarily residential use in the Halton UDP, with an area of greenspace between Hallwood Park and Trident Park. Halton Hospital is shown as undesignated (white) land, with the health centre being within a primarily employment area. There are two proposed greenways through this area. One is located to the west of Hallwood Park and the other to the west of Halton Hospital. Development of sites incorporating or adjoining the two proposed greenways is dealt with by Strategic Policy 4.

12.4 Footways from Palacefields connect with footbridges above East Lane and into the centre. In order to maintain and improve perceptions of safety and security vegetation along footways will need to be trimmed back, and in some cases be removed and replanted, and lighting enhanced.

12.5 The Hallwood Park redevelopment and construction of Trident Park reduced direct pedestrian links to Halton Lea. A pedestrian link has been constructed between the western end of Roehampton Drive and Trident Park by the side of Aldi. Linkage would be improved further by the implementation of Trident Park Policy 2. There is a cycletrack from Hallwood Park that needs to be rededicated and Strategic Policy 9 could assist this.



Photo 22: Vacant site of former Southgate district heating station

HALLWOOD PARK POLICY I

The former Southgate power generation site should be redeveloped for uses that would complement the Hallwood Park residential estate and not compete with uses in the Halton Lea shopping centre.

12.6 The former Southgate district heating station (shown on Plan 3) was demolished and is currently a vacant site. It is shown in the UDP as being within a primarily residential area. Whilst housing may be the predominant land use in the area, local community facilities may also be appropriate as long as they accord with the above policy and the UDP.

Implementation:

12.7 This may depend upon a private developer. However, Halton Borough Council can exercise significant influence over any development as both site owner and Local Planning Authority.

Appendix A: Contacts and Useful Information

General information

Further information relating to the purpose of the intended SPD:

To access a downloadable copy of the Planning Policy Guidance notes or Planning Policy Statements detailed in Section 2, or for further general planning information visit the Department of Communities and Local Government website at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/> or for a hard copy contact the Department of Communities and Local Government by phone on 0870 1226 236.

To access a downloadable copy of 'By Design, Urban Design in the planning system: Towards Better Practice' and 'Safer Places', documents relating to urban renewal, urban design and creating sustainable communities, and general planning information visit the Department of Communities and Local Government website at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/> 'Places, Streets & Movement'. A companion guide to Design Bulletin 32' can be purchased from the ODPM for a cost of £20.00, quoting ISBN 1 85112 113 7.

Investing in the High Street can be purchased from the Civic Trust for £25.00. The Civic Trust, Winchester House, 259-269 Old Marylebone Road, London NW1 5RA.

Going to Town: Improving Town Centre Access can be downloaded free of charge from the National Retail Planning Forum (NRPf) at www.nrpf.org. A hard copy can also be purchased online at the same website address.

Vital and Viable Town Centres: Meeting the Challenge, is out of print. However, a photocopy of the original document can be purchased from The Stationery Office online at www.tso.co.uk or by phone: 0870 600

5522, Fax: 0870 600 5533 or email: customer.services@tso.co.uk.

Further information on the Secured By Design initiative, including details relating to the standards required for a development to receive Secured By Design accreditation may be found at www.securedbydesign.com

For further information regarding any development which may affect a historic building or conservation area 'Building In Context' will be able to provide advice. It is available from English Heritage and the Commission of Architecture and the Built Environment and can be downloaded free of charge from <http://www.cabe.org.uk> or for a hard copy contact English Heritage at: Customer Services Department, PO Box 569, Swindon, Wiltshire, SN2 2YP, Tel: 0870 333 1181, Fax: 01793 414 926

Further information on the Halton UDP can be found online at www.halton.gov.uk or by phone on 0151 424 2061, email at forward.planning@halton.gov.uk or by post to Planning and Policy, Environment Directorate, Halton Borough Council, Rutland House, Halton Lea, Runcorn, WA7 2GW.

You can find out about the planning system and how it works at www.planningportal.gov.uk.

Local information

For advice relating to submitting a planning application, for pre-application discussion or to purchase a copy of this SPD or any other SPD contact:

Planning and Policy
Environment Directorate
Halton Borough Council
Rutland House
Halton Lea
Runcorn
WA7 2GW

Tel: 0151 907 8300

Fax: 0151 471 7314

Email: forward.planning@halton.gov.uk

Website: www.halton.gov.uk

If further highways or transport information is required, please contact either the Highways Division (for general transport enquiries) or Transport Co-ordination (for public transport matters) at the following address:

Environment Directorate
Halton Borough Council
Rutland House
Halton Lea
Runcorn
WA7 2GW

Tel: 0151 907 8300

Fax: 0151 471 7521

Website: www.halton.gov.uk

If further access information is required, or information relating to building control please contact the;

Building Control Consultancy
Environment Directorate
Halton Borough Council
Rutland House
Halton Lea
Runcorn
WA7 2GW

Tel: 0151 907 8300

Email: building.control@halton.gov.uk

Website: www.halton.gov.uk

Appendix B: SWOT Analysis

SWOT ANALYSIS HALTON LEA JULY 2005

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p><u>Attraction</u></p> <p>1) Large surrounding catchment population</p> <p>2) Sizable surrounding workforce</p> <p>3) Centre has some diverse uses – library, cinema, leisure public house, law courts, police and various offices</p> <p>4) Proximity to other uses: nursery, hospital, health centre</p> <p>5) Large amount of car parking: multi storey and surface level at Trident (and to a lesser extent Asda) which is free</p> <p>6) Trident retail park well linked to main body of Halton Lea</p> <p>7) Presence of national retail multiples</p> <p>8) Presence of kiosks in Town Square adds some diversity and provides ‘starter’ retail units</p> <p><u>Accessibility</u></p> <p>9) Accessible by a variety of transport modes</p> <p>10) Good accessibility to centre from bus interchanges, including presence of customer lifts and escalators (latter, south side only)</p> <p><u>Amenity</u></p> <p>11) Enclosed mall: protection from the elements and no traffic</p> <p>12) Clean malls, litter bins and street furniture provided</p> <p>13) Presence of a customer information point</p> <p>14) Clear naming of malls gives a sense of where you are</p>	<p><u>Attraction</u></p> <p>1) Lack of an anchor store to the centre which provides a real attraction</p> <p>2) Relatively high vacancy rates, including underused floorspace at first floor, Meadow Walk and southern access at Trident RP</p> <p>3) Some monolithic, vacant, unsightly and under used office buildings, some of which do not appear to meet modern requirements.</p> <p>4) Some vacant units are small and unlikely to be attractive to modern retail requirements</p> <p>5) Relatively narrow range of service related uses.</p> <p><u>Accessibility</u></p> <p>6) The one way busway loop around Halton Lea results in there being two main public transport gateways to the centre (Halton Lea North and South) – both of which require investment to improve the passenger environment and waiting facilities. There is a reasonable distance between the two, which does not aid effective integration in the evening when the shopping malls are closed.</p> <p>7) The concrete collar to the centre (i.e. the roads around and service roads underneath) – the segregation of cars/ buses and pedestrians creates problems of pedestrian permeability from one side of the centre to the other. This is a particular problem in the evening when the centre is closed and passengers that need to connect between bus stations must do so via ground level, which has poorer pedestrian linkages. Not a pedestrian friendly environment at some locations outside the centre.</p> <p>8) Weak pedestrian linkage to Asda superstore. Poor level of linked trips from major anchor</p> <p>9) Poor maintenance of footbridges – including blistering and uneven surfaces</p> <p>10) Inadequacy of directional signage</p>

outside the centre – **vehicular** for non-retail facilities e.g. Council offices, Law Courts and **pedestrian** from bus interchange, Asda etc

11) **Inconsistency of signage in car parks** in terms of centre opening hours when pedestrian links will be closed e.g. between Bridge and River

12) Each stairwell (4 per car park) is sign posted as a fire exit. There is no guiding of pedestrians to the refurbished stairwell

13) Occasionally intimidating underpass as main pedestrian access from Halton Village [Amenity](#)

14) Monolithic, **unwelcoming appearance** of shopping centre. Centre's principle of segregating private vehicles, pedestrians, public transport and servicing means that there is a lot of concrete relative to the amount of retail and other commercial floorspace provided

15) Occasional intimidating environment for users of Grosvenor House

16) **Centre's evening closure** means night time uses (adding diversity) must be located outside the shopping centre

17) Presence of **outdated signage** adds to confusion e.g. Job centre sign adjoining Rutland House, incorrect Council departments etc. Re-branding of car parks – on stairwells Meadow still referred to as no.4, Orchard as no.3 etc.

18) **Unightly trolley bays** on levels C & E – are they really practical propositions to use?

19) Whilst each multi storey car park has one pleasant, refurbished stairwell, there are 3 others which have not been refurbished and offer an **unwelcoming environment**. This causes pedestrians to use ramps for cars between levels, creating conflicts with vehicles

20) Underused areas of car parking at Trident (to side of Cineworld and behind Fitness First/ Carpetright)

21) **Car parking and taxi rank underneath** centre (latter no longer main rank) disorganised and unsightly

Other

22) Limited role that the Council can play due

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<p>Attraction</p> <p>1) A step change in offer of the centre - improve the comparison goods retention rate into the surrounding catchment area by providing additional complementary floorspace. The development of the proposed Mersey Gateway Bridge (MGB) would significantly increase traffic passing Halton Lea on the Central Expressway which creates the potential for increased custom to the centre. This would make Halton Lea a more attractive location for new retail and other commercial operators.</p> <p>2) Presence of vacant office buildings surrounding main shopping centre presents redevelopment opportunities</p> <p>3) Presence of vacant units within the centre presents opportunities for reconfiguration to create properties more suitable to modern retailer requirements</p> <p>4) Diversify the evening economy, most obviously in the area surrounding Cineworld</p> <p>Accessibility</p> <p>5) Break up the concrete collar of roads around the covered shopping centre to make a more pedestrian friendly environment at ground level. Doing this on the eastern side would make the centre more accessible to employees in the Govt office building and Halton Hospital. Proposal would need good pedestrian links.</p> <p>6) Consider enhancements to the northern and southern bus termini, as these are gateways into the centre.</p> <p>6) Improved directional signing to public buildings e.g. Council offices. Direct visitors to Meadow and Orchard car parks</p> <p>7) Maintain and enhance pedestrian routes. Lighting, trimming back of vegetation, resurfacing where necessary to maintain and improve perception of security on footpaths from residential areas into the centre</p> <p>8) Reduce pedestrian/ vehicle conflicts in multi storey car parks by better signage directing pedestrians to the refurbished stairwells.</p>	<p>to most areas being in private ownership</p> <p>Attraction</p> <p>1) If the centre stands still (i.e. does not improve its retail offer or environment) it will decline relative to other centres because they will improve</p> <p>2) Lack of quality anchor store</p> <p>3) Competition from other centres in the area, most notably Warrington</p> <p>4) Not enough co-ordination between different owners at Halton Lea</p> <p>5) Limited increase in spending potential of catchment population</p> <p>6) Fail to build upon the diversification of uses, both retail offer and other uses e.g. leisure</p> <p>7) Will Cineworld remain open?</p> <p>Accessibility</p> <p>8) Asda and its expansion considering the lack of linkage</p> <p>Amenity</p> <p>9) Centre fails to realise its potential due to evening closure of malls. Needs to be balanced with security concerns</p>

Amenity

9) Continued utilisation of **town square for events**

10) Need for redesigning of car parking and reduce size of taxi rank underneath the Civic Area to **improve layout** in this area. Space here to be used more efficiently and effectively.

Appendix C: Update of existing Town Centre Strategy

The 1997 Town Centre Strategy contained proposals and a number of actions. The following table summarises those proposals and groups them according to the level of success in their implementation over the period 1997 to date.

1997 Halton Lea Town Centre Strategy; Summary of Proposals

ACHIEVED	PARTIALLY ACHIEVED	NOT ACHIEVED
<p>Proposal 3 Improve toilet and baby changing</p> <p>Proposal 4 Prepare enhancement scheme for Town Square</p> <p>Proposal 5 Improve car parking environment</p> <p>Proposal 8 Improve signage and enhance spaces around bus stops</p> <p>Proposal 10 Open up walkways and make less intimidating by reducing fire escape effect</p> <p>Proposal 14 find uses for empty hinterland areas (HDL, Job Centre)</p> <p>Proposal 16 Agree consistent pricing policy for car parks</p> <p>Proposal 17 Make special arrangements for worker parking by allocating spaces and agreeing special rates (DONE as a consequence of allocating level D for shoppers)</p> <p>Proposal 20 facilitate transfer of goods from trolleys to vehicles through</p>	<p>Proposal 1 Improve retail choice</p> <p>Proposal 2 Encourage other facilities to locate</p> <p>Proposal 6 Improve directional signs to shops in car parks</p> <p>Proposal 9 Improve directional signs on external walkways</p> <p>Proposal 12 prepare scheme for ground level pedestrian access</p> <p>Prop 13 Facilitate vertical pedestrian movement</p> <p>Proposal 18 Provide clear directions to car drivers on the best car park for a particular facility (done for shops only)</p> <p>Proposal 19 Rationalise identification of multi storey car parks (nos 3-6) and revamp overhead signs</p> <p>Proposal 29 Provide pedestrian links</p> <p>Proposal 32 Provide new leisure and entertainment uses</p> <p>Proposal 35 Employ quality materials (ongoing)</p>	<p>Proposal 7 Improve evening access to facilities including. ATMs and emergency chemist</p> <p>Proposal 11 Improve evening access to facilities</p> <p>Proposal 15 encourage other employment uses and community uses in vacant non central units and office blocks</p> <p>Proposal 21 Provide safe and convenient spaces for cycle park (2nd avenue)</p>

ACHIEVED	PARTIALLY ACHIEVED	NOT ACHIEVED
<p>provision of lifts and trolley parks</p> <p>Proposal 22 Give greater prominence to directional signs to Halton Lea</p> <p>Proposal 23 use of bold exterior adverts to signal the centre's function</p> <p>Proposal 24 create a prestigious entrance on west or south side</p> <p>Proposal 25 open up entrances</p> <p>Proposal 26 improve quality of information given to visitors plan, directory etc.</p> <p>Proposal 27 Hold promotional events</p> <p>Proposal 28 Prepare marketing strategy</p> <p>Proposal 30 Create ground level square in front of the stitching platform</p> <p>Proposal 31 Make a feature of Halton Lea entrance</p> <p>Proposal 33 Provide retail units for mainly non-food goods</p> <p>Proposal 34 link design and materials for new development to existing</p> <p>Proposal 36 retain and protect significant planting on west and southern parts of Southern Loop site</p>	<p>Proposal 37 provide other soft landscaping for screening and decoration</p> <p>Proposal 39 design hard landscaping in a common theme as contribution to public art</p>	

ACHIEVED	PARTIALLY ACHIEVED	NOT ACHIEVED
Proposal 38 use high quality durable hard landscaping to add visual interest (TRIDENT)		

Appendix D: Summary of Policies in Connection with Planning Obligations

Policy Number	Policy Content
Transport Accessibility	
Strategic Policy 9	Cycle access
Central Area Policy 5	Improve bus termini
Trident Park Policy 2	New vehicular access into Trident Park
West Lane Policy 1	Public transport improvements adjoining busway
Linkages	
Strategic Policy 3	Improve linkages
Strategic Policy 4	Greenways
East Lane Policy 1	East Lane Development site
Local Environment	
Strategic Policy 7	Provision of Public Art
Civic Quarter Policy 4	Improve Town Park
Functionality	
Strategic Policy 8	Provision of Street Furniture
Strategic Policy 9	Provision of Signage

NB. The above table acts as a checklist that illustrates specific policies within this SPD that refer to the use of planning obligations. However, it must be recognised that, as such, it is not exhaustive in terms of geographical location within the identified town centre areas 1-6a or uses for which obligations may be sought by Halton Borough Council.

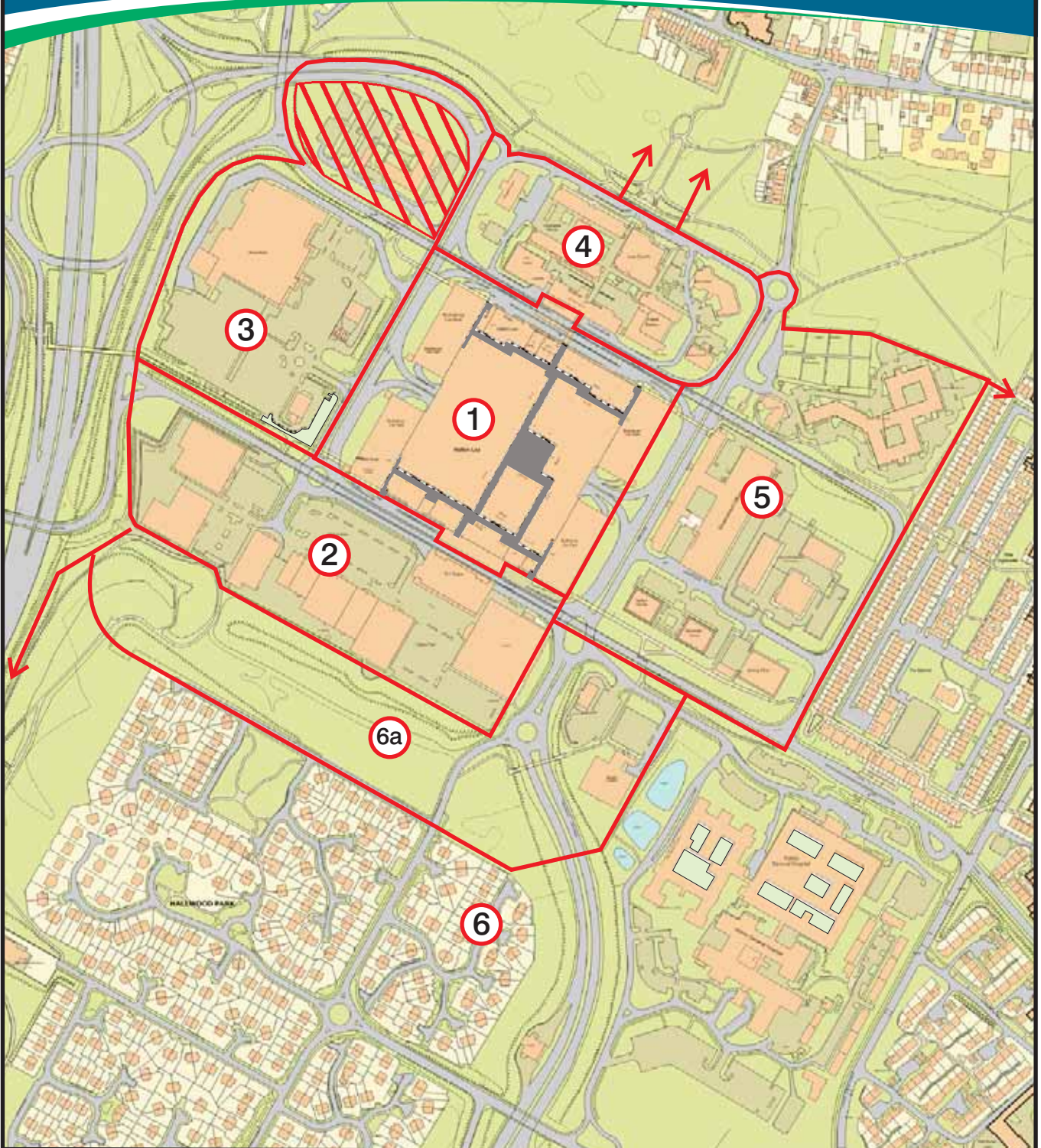
PLANS




Plan I Halton Unitary Development Plan Proposals Map Extract

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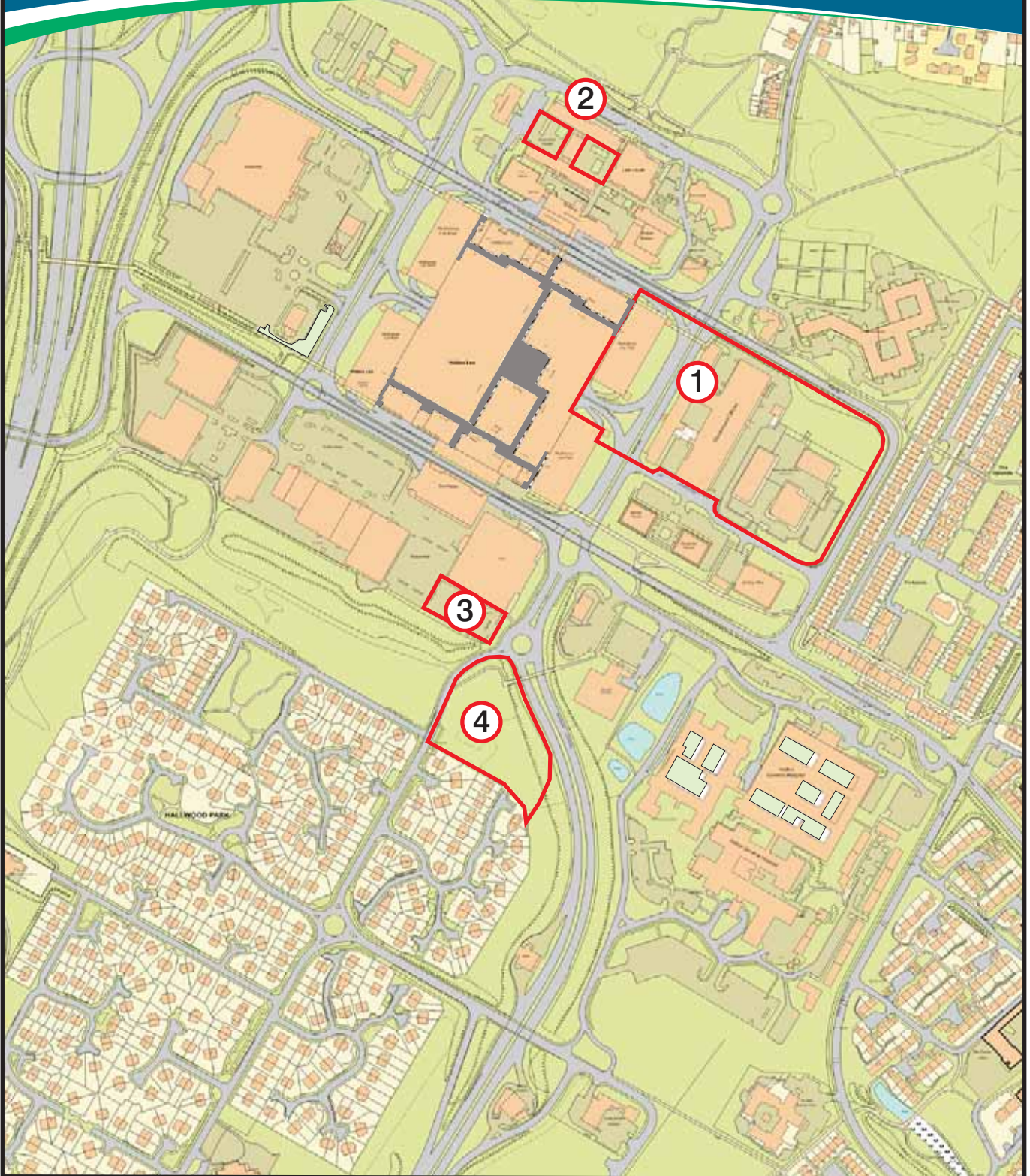
Plan 2 Sub Areas of Halton Lea

- ① Central Area - Covered Halton Lea Shopping Centre
- ② Trident Park
- ③ West Lane Area
- ④ Civic Quarter
- ⑤ East Lane Area
- ⑥ Halton Hospital, Palacefields and Hallwood Park
-  Vestric House

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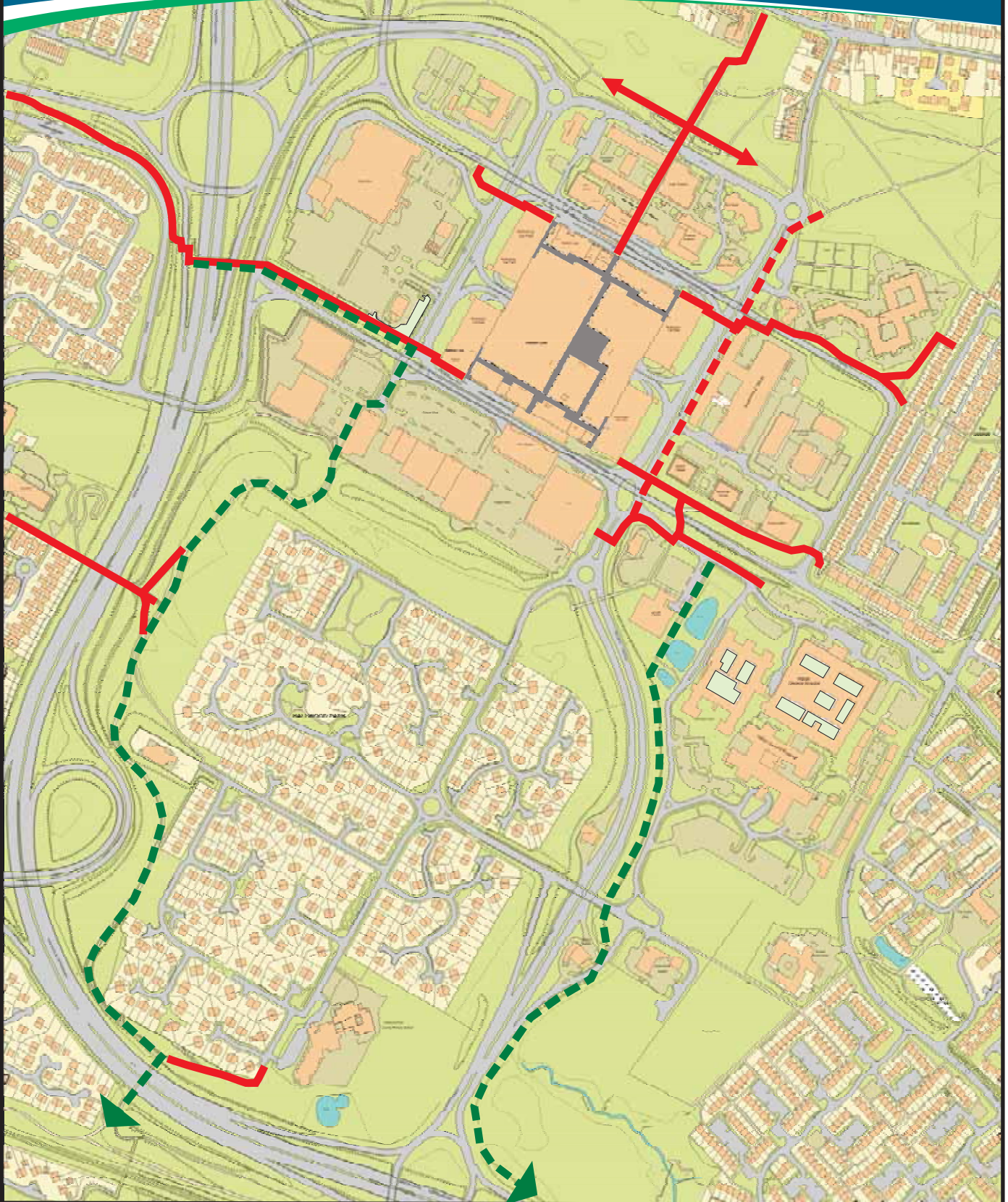


Plan 3 Potential Development Opportunities




- ① East Lane (East Lane Policy I)
- ② Adjoining Grosvenor House (Civic Quarter Policy I)
- ③ Car Park to the South of Cineworld (Trident Park Policy I)
- ④ Former Southgate District heating station (Hallwood Park Policy I)

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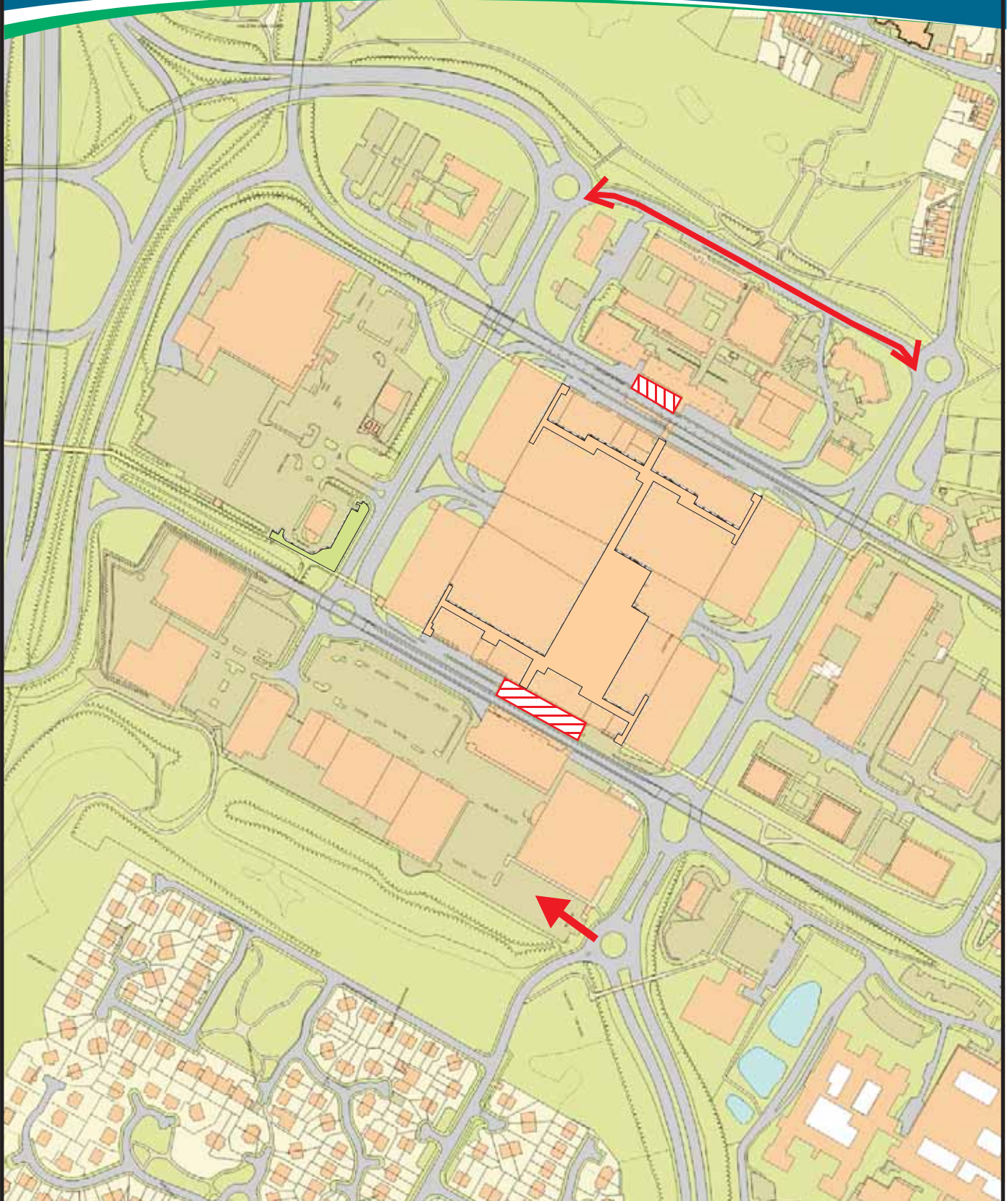


Plan 4 Pedestrian and Cycle Accessibility





-  Major Footpaths/Footways or Cycleways
-  Proposed Greenways
-  Proposed cycleways

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Plan 5 Potential Transport Improvements

-  Potential additional Vehicular Access
-  Investigate Potential for 2 way use
-  Northern Bus Terminus
-  Southern Bus Terminus

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