# Charter Place Planning Brief









Supplementary Planning Document Adopted March 2006



Planning for a Better Watford

# Adoption Statement: Charter Place Planning Brief

The Charter Place Planning Brief is a Supplementary Planning Document. It was adopted by Watford Borough Council on 20th March 2006.

Any person who is aggrieved by the adoption of this document as a Supplementary Planning Document may apply to the High Court for permission to apply for a judicial review of the decision to adopt it. Any such application for leave must be made promptly, and in any event not later than three months after the date of adoption.

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# Introduction by the Elected Mayor



Watford Town Centre is a vibrant and popular centre of regional significance for shopping, employment, leisure and cultural activities. It is highly accessible as a result of its excellent road and rail linkages. Watford virtually doubles its population each day as people visit the town. The Town Centre, which benefits from a very large catchment area population, is ranked one of the most successful Town Centres in England with positive prospects for improvement. <sup>1</sup>

From the Café Quarter at the top of the town to the retail parks at the southern end, the Town Centre is a vibrant mix, linked together by a recently refurbished High Street that has created a cosmopolitan feel to the town. It is also an historical centre with examples of high quality townscape and building design.

Whilst the Town Centre is clearly successful, we recognise that more needs to be done to improve its attractiveness to a wider range of visitors and for it to remain competitive with other centres. In response,

the Council has commissioned a major study of the Town Centre and the surrounding areas. This will assist the Council in forming a vision for the Town Centre encompassing the town's role and identity over the next 15 years, an urban design framework and ethos for future development, the need for additional retailing and improvements to accessibility and the ability to move in and around the town.

The redevelopment of Charter Place will form a key part of delivering a family friendly Town Centre. This will be a project of vision with high quality design including enhancing the existing Market Place, providing a central focus for the town. It will be a mixed-use development incorporating a revamped market and a cinema as well as improving the range and quality of the retail offer in the town. It is also hoped to include new residential development in order to increase life and activity within the Town Centre.

This brief sets out the planning framework and parameters for achieving our vision and aspirations. The Council is committed to working in partnership with the developers, residents and other stakeholders to achieve the best possible outcome for this site, and the Town Centre as a whole.

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Dorothy Thornhill Elected Mayor of Watford

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Source: Gerald Eve "Prime Retail"

#### 2. Need for the Brief

- 2.1. The Council owns and directly manages the Charter Place Shopping Centre, including the indoor market, which opened in 1976. A modest scheme of improvements, funded directly by the Council, was implemented in the early 1990s. Although the centre is nearly fully let it is in need of redevelopment and refurbishment to improve the quality of this key area of the Town Centre.
- 2.2. The aim is to increase the range and quality of retail in line with Watford's increased status in the emerging East of England Plan. The shopping facilities at Uxbridge have been enlarged with the opening of the Chimes. Milton Keynes has expanded with the opening of Midsummer Place and plans are in preparation to further enlarge Brent Cross and link it with Cricklewood Town Centre. Plans are also under way to improve shopping facilities at Aylesbury and Hemel Hempstead.
- 2.3. In addition, since both Charter Place and the Harlequin Centres have opened, the need to encourage travel other than by car has increased and there is now strong planning policy at all levels to reinforce and improve Town Centres rather than let growth go to the edge of towns or outside of them.

- 2.4. For all these reasons, the Watford District Plan 2000 (WDP2000) seeks to improve the offer and quality within the Town Centre. One means of doing this is to encourage development by producing planning briefs for key sites, including Charter Place.
- 2.5. This brief has been revised following comments received on earlier drafts published in Autumn 2004, and December 2005 and issues arising from the Council's Town Centre Study (see para 4.11 below). The brief has also been revised in line with changes to planning legislation and national and regional planning policy.

# 3. The Brief area and its surroundings

3.1. The WDP2000 designates the extent of the Charter Place Key Development Site (policy IMR1, site RA8). The area covered by this Brief extends slightly beyond the RA8 designation, as shown on Plan 1, to enable the proper and better integration of any new development with surrounding land uses that will remain.

#### Site description

- 3.2. The area currently contains a mix of uses in a number of buildings varying in size, height and appearance. The existing uses within the buildings are, with the exception of the flats in the YMCA building and on the upper floors of 6-10 Clarendon Road, non-residential.
- 3.3. The current land uses within the Brief site can be quantified as follows (gross internal floorspace areas where applicable):

Use	Quantity
Residential – YMCA	187 letting rooms
Residential – other	5 flats
Car Parking	812 spaces
Leisure	3000 sq m
A1 Retail (excluding Market)	28726 sq m
Watford Indoor Market	2553 sq m
A2 Financial & Professional	1897 sq m
A3/A4/A5 Food and drink	752 sq m
Offices	1941 sq m
Total	38869 sq m
(excl. residential and car parking)	

#### Access

- 3.4. The Charter Place car park stands on 4 levels with both access from and egress to Beechen Grove. All deliveries to the shops in Charter Place are at basement level with vehicles entering/leaving via the ramp at the back of the Palace Theatre, accessed from Beechen Grove. The basement is connected to that serving the Harlequin Centre but the two basements are currently kept separate, preventing the through movement of vehicles.
- 3.5. In and around Charter Place, circulation occurs at three levels: basement for deliveries, ground level for both vehicles and pedestrians and first floor level for pedestrians only. Surface level pedestrian access is from Beechen Grove (beneath the YMCA), from two accesses on Market Place (High Street), and via a number of shops that have entrances both on the High Street and in Charter Place. Pedestrians can also directly access both levels of Charter Place from the Harlequin Centre and the Charter Place car park.
- 3.6. The High Street adjoining Charter Place is generally closed to through traffic, but buses, taxis, delivery vehicles and vehicles of people with disabilities displaying a 'blue badge' are permitted to drive in this section.

# Urban design and conservation

3.7. Redevelopment in a Town Centre cannot be looked at in isolation from its surroundings: the edges of the new development and the spaces created between buildings are as important as any other aspect.

- 3.8. The site includes two statutorily listed buildings: 63-65 High Street and 73 High Street (HSBC Bank). There are also three other listed buildings that are in close proximity to the Brief area although outside it, and their setting will need to be taken into consideration; these are: the Palace Theatre (which adjoins the site), Beechen Grove Baptist Church and 58 High Street (Café Maximo).
- 3.9. In addition there are a number of locally listed buildings. Those within the site are: 2-18 Clarendon Road, 23-27 High Street and 37-41a High Street. Other locally listed buildings outside the site should also be considered, especially the run of buildings on the opposite side of the High Street.
- 3.10. The locations of listed and locally listed buildings are indicated on Plan 1. Copies of the listing descriptions are available from the Council if required.
- 3.11. The size and height of buildings in and around the site already have an impact not only to the immediate area but on the town's skyline when viewed from long distances.
- 3.12. There is a variety of building types in and around the site: from 4-storey offices and the Palace Theatre on Clarendon Road, to the YMCA and multi-storey car park on Beechen Grove, to the mixture of buildings styles in the shops and services on the High Street, and to the neighbouring Harlequin Centre. This will present a challenge in terms of a satisfactory urban design solution.
- 3.13. A desktop archaeological survey should accompany any planning application to establish whether there is a need for any further work.

# 4. Policy Context

#### **National Policy**

- 4.1. The key national planning policies relevant to the Charter Place redevelopment are set out in PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005), PPS6: Planning for Town Centres (2005) and PPG13: Transport (2001). The principle of redeveloping Charter Place to provide a mixed-use development including enhanced retail and leisure opportunities accords with national policy as follows:
  - making land available for development to improve people's quality of life;
  - contributing to development that enhances the economy;
  - reducing the need to travel due to the site's location in the Town Centre, which maximises opportunity for access by modes other than the private car;
  - making efficient use of land through higher density and a mix of uses;
  - providing opportunities for community involvement, through consultations on the Brief and later planning proposals;
  - focussing development in the Town Centre and promoting the regeneration of part of the Town Centre to help maintain and enhance its vitality and viability;
  - enhancing consumer choice, especially in terms of retail and leisure;
  - supporting efficient and competitive retail and leisure development; and

- providing the opportunity for residential development in the Town Centre.
- 4.2. This Brief seeks to ensure that the details of any proposals for the redevelopment of Charter Place will also accord with national planning policy by:
  - ensuring a high quality of development that takes advantage of opportunities to improve the character and quality of the area (with reference to the ODPM's Planning for Town Centres: Guidance on Design and Implementation Tools (2005) and CABE's Design Reviewed:Town Centre Retail (2004);
  - creating a safe environment for residents, workers, shoppers and other visitors to the area;
  - seeking a diversity of uses that maintain activity through the day and evening;
  - helping to integrate any proposals with the Council's wider aspirations for the Town Centre as expressed in the Community Plan and emerging Town Centre Study;
  - seeking improvements to public transport interchanges close to this major development; and
  - seeking environmental and road safety improvements near to the site.

#### Regional policy

- 4.3. The current regional spatial strategy (RSS) applicable to Watford is set out in RPG6:
  Regional Planning Guidance for East Anglia to 2016 and those parts of RPG9: Regional Planning Guidance for the South East that relate to Watford and Hertfordshire. However, apart from identifying Watford as a "major town", the guidance has little to say with relevance to Charter Place.
- 4.4. The current RSS is supplemented by the saved policies of the Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review 1991-2011. This does not add much to general national and regional policies with regard to Charter Place, but does identify Watford as a "major sub-regional retail centre", to which retail development will be directed and provision for retail development made through local plans.
- 4.5. The provisions of RPGs 6 & 9 and the Structure Plan will be replaced in due course by the emerging East of England Plan. The draft of this Plan identifies Watford as:
  - a 'Key Centre' where general development and change will be focussed;
  - a 'Regional Interchange Centre' where the range of public transport provision to, from and within, will be improved; and
  - a 'Major Regional Retail Centre' where new retail development will be located consistent with its role within the regional shopping hierarchy.
- 4.6. The draft Plan also contains a transport strategy for the region, whose objectives mirror those of PPG13, and specifically seeks to

- accompany the promotion of public transport, cycling and walking with the restraint of private car traffic. Other relevant policies also relate to environmental impact, safety and accessibility; the general theme being that significant improvements to the environment are needed to meet those objectives. The draft Plan's transport strategy does not, however, promote or support any specific proposals for transport improvements in Watford.
- 4.7. Broadly speaking, the general provisions of the current and emerging regional planning frameworks add little to the consideration of Charter Place over the national policy framework. However, Watford's emerging status as a 'Key Centre', 'Regional Interchange Centre' and 'Major Regional Retail Centre' all add weight to the proposals for Charter Place.

#### Local policy

- 4.8. The Watford District Plan 2000 (adopted December 2003) provides the local planning framework, standards and policies for the area. Key aspects of the Plan in relation to the Charter Place site are:
  - the identification of Charter Place as a Key Development Site and the need to prepare a planning brief to help bring this site forward within the timeframe of the Plan (up to 2011) (IMR 1, TC6);
  - the importance of this site within the context of the Retail Strategy in helping to meet the additional need for retail floorspace within the Town Centre identified by the Council's Retail Study (paras. 7.17-7.19);

- that any development will need to be sustainable (SE1), mixed-use (SE2, TC3,TC5), of high quality (U1,U2,U3) and considered against its transport implications (T4).
- 4.9. WDP2000 is also supported by a range of adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance documents which cover single issues such as Tall Buildings, Shop Front Design and Affordable Housing, as well as other planning standards.
- 4.10. The Council is now beginning the process of preparing a Local Development Framework (LDF) as required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. This will take forward the planning framework to 2021 and beyond; a key element of the Core Strategy will include a vision for the future development and role of the Town Centre.
- 4.11. As part of the process of gathering evidence for the LDF, the Council commissioned a major Town Centre Study in 2004 to provide base-line information and direction for the way LDF addresses the Town Centre, to help achieve urban design, retail capacity and transportation objectives. The Study and this Brief have been prepared in parallel, and each has sought to take account of the findings of the other. The Study has been published as a background paper to the LDF.
- 4.12. The current Local Transport Plan 2001-2006, the draft Local Transport Plan for 2006-2011 and the South-West Herts Transportation Strategy 1996 (SWHTS), all aim to tackle congestion, deliver accessibility, improve road safety, improve air quality and enhance quality

- of life. Particular elements of these of relevance to Charter Place and the wider Town Centre include:
- improvements to Watford Junction station and the interchange facilities between the station and the Town Centre;
- Colonial Way link and new access road to Watford Junction station, which will help to reduce traffic on Beechen Grove;
- · improvements to Clarendon Road;
- improvements to bus services;
- improvements to the Town Centre environment;
- enhanced Town Centre bus interchange facilities;
- turning the Ring Road two-way and demolishing the flyover.
- 4.13. SWHTS is currently under review.
- 4.14. The redevelopment of Charter Place is high on Watford Borough Council's corporate priorities, and those of the local strategic partnership (now called "One Watford"). These are expressed in Watford's Community Plan 2006 2026 and the Council's Performance Plan. Both plans emphasise the priority to achieve a family-friendly Town Centre which combines retail, leisure and cultural activities. Charter Place is explicitly recognised as being a major opportunity to deliver these objectives.

# 5. Planning and Development Principles

#### Mix of Land Uses

- 5.1. The land uses envisaged within the redevelopment are as follows:
  - YMCA hostel and other facilities as existing.
  - Multi-storey car park as existing.
  - Retail, including Market a range of shop unit sizes on lower floors of new or refurbished buildings, with units facing the High Street and Clarendon Road frontages as well as internal spaces, and including Watford Market, to be located close to its existing location.
  - Leisure, including cinema in new or refurbished buildings, including upper floors.
  - Residential (if appropriate) in new or refurbished buildings, mainly on upper floors.
  - Public spaces improved "town square" in Market Place (open – possibly with arcading), and other spaces internal to the main redevelopment that may be open or covered, where people can gather informally.

#### Retail Floorspace

- 5.2. Floorspace: The retail strategy in the current local plan (WDP2000) identifies that on the basis of forecast expenditure growth, an additional requirement of 20,391 sq.m. of net retail floorspace across all types of retailing (i.e. both comparison and convenience) should be planned for up to 2011. Although Charter Place is one of three Town Centre sites identified in the strategy to accommodate this net increase in floorspace, it represents the most suitable location and best opportunity for major retail expansion within the Town Centre over the plan period.
- 5.3. A new Retail Study has been completed (available from Watford Borough Council's Planning Policy team). This concludes that by 2011 there will be demand for 30,350 sq.m. of net retail floorspace (of which 26,300 sq.m. would be for comparison shopping and 4,050 sq.m. for convenience shopping).
- 5.4. The retail study demonstrates that there will be sufficient retail demand for the redevelopment of this site. The findings of the updated retail study will be a material consideration for determining any planning application for the redevelopment of Charter Place.
- 5.5. Within this context, the amount of retail floorspace and floorspace associated with the other uses specified in this Brief (leisure, residential, community) will be determined in the final analysis by the capacity of the site, the form of development, servicing, accessibility, transport and urban design.

# Car Parking

5.6. To prevent the redevelopment undermining the various transport strategies aimed at minimising the use of cars it is assumed that no additional parking provision be made for the nonresidential uses. This assumption will need to be examined as part of a Transport Assessment for any proposal. The opening hours of the existing car parks may need to be extended until after the leisure uses close for the day. In respect of new homes, parking provision should not exceed the standards in the WDP2000. Proposals may also explore the potential offered by having car-free elements in accordance with Policy T26 and/or by reducing the need for car parking spaces overall by sharing spaces between the retail/leisure element and the residential element.

#### **Development Framework**

- 5.7. The following section provides guidance on the form that the development should take and how it should work. This will be taken into account in assessing any planning application for the Brief area. The Council will also have regard to current design advice including the ODPM's Planning for Town Centres: Guidance on Design and Implementation Tools (2005) and CABE's Design Reviewed:Town Centre Retail (2004).
- 5.8. Plan 2 (Key Diagram) illustrates important urban design considerations for the redevelopment scheme.

#### Access to and from the development

- 5.9. People can and will travel to Watford Town Centre by foot, bicycle, motorcycle, bus, taxi, train and car.
- 5.10. It is proposed to improve accessibility to, from and within Charter Place for these modes by the introduction of the following measures:
  - Enhancing the strong links between bus stops, taxi ranks, car and cycle parking and seeking to minimise the walking distance from these points into the site.
  - For those coming to Charter Place from other parts of the town and car parks there is need for access into the new development to be visible, safe and easy to use.
  - Providing a means of pedestrian access from Clarendon Road into the site (also providing a convenient route from the Palace car park to the Theatre), thereby providing pedestrian access into and out of Charter Place from all four sides of the town.
  - Enhancing the entrance to the YMCA given the facilities it provides in the Town Centre.
  - Bicycle and motorcycle parking provision to be made in accord with Council standards.
  - In the interests of safe and efficient movement and circulation, all properties that form part of the redevelopment should be serviced from the rear or basement level, with the exception of banks and post offices, and that other such opportunities for access to properties not forming part of the development should be investigated.

- The two service basement areas should be connected wherever possible. This could entail all traffic entering at the south (Water Lane) end and leaving at the north end (into Beechen Grove).
- 5.11. Specific measures for transport and access will be determined by the final form and nature of the development and a detailed transport assessment. On-site measures are covered elsewhere in the Brief, but those that should be considered through planning obligations are:
  - Delivering or contributing to improved bus facilities, including provision of an enhanced bus facility on Beechen Grove, and services to, from and within the Town Centre;
  - Contributing to an Urban Traffic Control and Information system on the Ring Road to manage and direct traffic more effectively;
  - Contributing to modifications and/or environmental improvements to the Ring Road (in line with policy TC2 in the District Plan);
  - Promoting a Green Travel Plan with employers/employees of the new centre; and
  - Contributing to achieving medium- and long-term sustainable transport objectives as identified in the appropriate transport and planning strategies.

#### Changes in Level

5.12. In public areas these should either be sloped, with gradients restricted to those that meet building regulations for access by people with disabilities, or be achieved using a combination of stairs/escalators and lifts. Changes in level should be minimised by taking account of the small fall across the Brief area from the north west to the south east and the minimum headroom needed for commercial traffic (5.5m) entering the basement service area.

#### Operations and security

- 5.13. Charter Place currently contains a control room for CCTV cameras operating within the Town Centre. As part of the redevelopment scheme, provision should be made for a facility to enable the continued operation of CCTV. This will also include continued operation during demolition and other works to the existing Charter Place building.
- 5.14. The possibility of providing a combined facility covering all CCTV, security and delivery operations within Charter Place and the Harlequin Centre should also be considered as part of the design process for the redevelopment scheme.

#### Public Access

5.15. Currently, when the market and other shop units are closed it is still possible to move freely through Charter Place and across the Town Centre on foot. It should be an aim of the design of the redevelopment to maintain this free-flow of pedestrians, taking security and other considerations into account.

#### **Residential Amenity**

5.16. As previously noted there are residential properties within the Brief area. It will be important to maintain or enhance the amenity of these flats and ensure that appropriate amenities are provided for any new homes that are introduced.

#### **Public Areas**

5.17. The redevelopment will enhance and address Market Place as a civic space on the High Street to establish a new focus for the Town Centre. Public areas where people can meet and gather within the development, and where community events or exhibitions could be held, should be located at important nodal points and should be of a high quality.

#### **Public Toilets**

5.18. These are currently provided in Charter Place. If the existing public toilets are redeveloped then toilets should be provided elsewhere as part of the new development.

#### **Community Facilities**

5.19. Policy CS3 of the WDP2000 requires these facilities to be maintained or replaced when redevelopment takes place. In Charter Place this includes the Women's Centre and the creche. Opportunities to provide improved facilities for community/voluntary groups in the area and linkages to existing organisations such as the YMCA should also be considered as part of the redevelopment.

#### The Market

5.20. The Market must be retained within the redevelopment. However, as part of the redevelopment it may prove necessary to consider the relocation of the covered market within the confines of the Charter Place redevelopment to achieve the proper planning of the area. Subject to discussion with the market traders, the market should be a similar size, and at least as prominently located on the ground floor as it is now.

#### Design

- 5.21. The beginning of the design process is to undertake an appraisal of the area within which the development's design and form will be seen. The appraisal should take into account the urban design vision emerging from the Town Centre Study. The design appraisal will also need to consider the following issues:
- the successful integration of the scheme with its surroundings;
- the reinforcement and enhancement of local character:

- promoting a safe and inclusive environment- for all who want to use the Town Centre including those with special needs.
- the relationship between the high-rise elements of the site (the YMCA and car park) and the more human scale of buildings on the rest of the site and its surroundings;
- the impact of the redevelopment upon the statutory and locally listed buildings within the site and the appropriate consideration of their character;
- the remnants of the original mediaeval street patterns currently articulated by plot boundaries and access ways;
- the edges and boundaries between different elements of the proposed redevelopment, and between the proposal and the surrounding area;
- the use of an appropriate palette of external materials, textures, finishes and colours to reflect the character and diversity of the existing local streetscene;
- the appropriate use of external shop signage, and signage for other uses within the scheme, taking into account the Council's SPG16: Shopfront Design Guide;

- creating a coherent and co-ordinated internal signage and visual guidance scheme to help users of the development to easily orient themselves and create an identity for the new development;
- taking opportunities to increase the sustainability of buildings through measures such as solar gain.

# 6. Implementation

- 6.1. This will be carried out in a series of steps, starting with a planning application and all necessary accompanying information including an environmental impact assessment, a transport assessment and a retail statement.

  Once permission has been granted, it will be up to the developer to obtain all other necessary consents and serve appropriate notices.
- 6.2. In the event that the developer cannot secure all the land or third party rights needed to build the development the Borough Council will consider whether to make a compulsory purchase order to enable the proper planning of the area. The Council will require the developer to underwrite the costs of making the order and any compensation arising from its confirmation.
- 6.3. Prior to any work starting it will be necessary for the phasing of the construction to be agreed to ensure any firm remaining is able to trade and the free flow of vehicles and pedestrians around the Town Centre. A phasing programme will also be required to ensure that the development is not carried out in a piecemeal fashion or in a way that prejudices the objectives of comprehensive redevelopment embodied in the Brief.

# 7. Status and updating of the Brief

- 7.1. The brief has been adopted as a supplementary planning document as defined by PPS12 and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 7.2. It is based on key national planning policies, and on policies in the WDP2000 that are expected to either be "saved" or rolled forward into the Local Development Framework as it emerges.
- 7.3. It is therefore intended that this Brief will have sufficient longevity to support proposals for redevelopment of the site through to implementation. It will only be necessary to update the Brief in the unlikely event that development does not come forward for some years and national and local planning policy changes significantly in the meantime. The Council will monitor the situation and advise on the need for any revision through its Annual Monitoring Report and Local Development Scheme.
- 7.4. A sustainability appraisal of this Brief has been produced and is available separately.

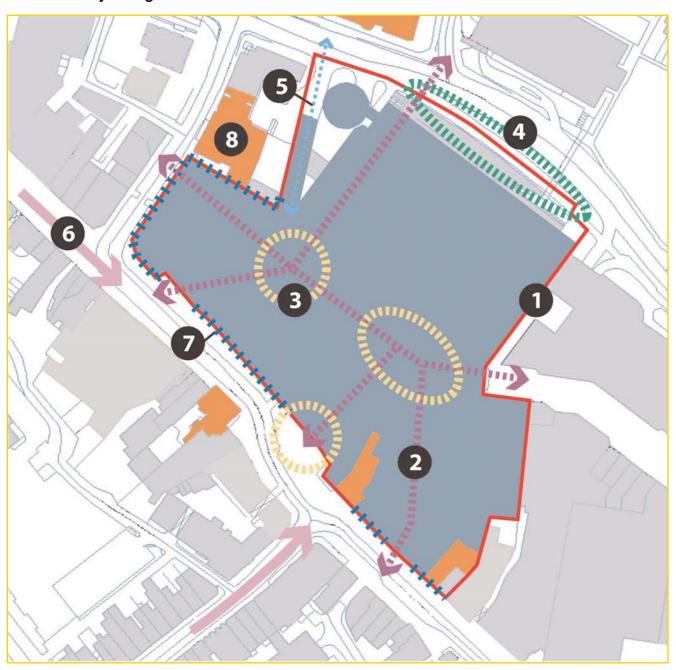
Plan 1: Site Location and Context



# Key:

- Site as allocated in local plan (WDP2000 site RA8)
- ☐ Planning Brief Site
- Statutory Listed Buildings
- Locally Listed Buildings

Plan 2: Key Diagram



- 1 Site Area
- 2 Pedestrian access ......
- 3 Focal spaces IIIIII
- 4 Environmental enhancement
- 5 Service access · · · · ·
- 6 Key views
- 7 Active external frontage IIIII
- 8 Listed buildings

If English is not your first language we can arrange for an interpreter. Please indicate which language you require.

#### Urdu

اگرانگریزی آپ کی بول چال کی زبان نہیں ہے، تو ہم آپ کے لیے ایک انٹر پریٹر (زبانی ترجمہ کار) کا اہتمام کر سکتے ہیں۔ برائے مہر بانی ہمیں یہ بتا کیں کہ آپ کی مطلوبہ زبان کون سی ہے۔

#### Hindi

यदि इंग्लिश आपकी मुख्य भाषा नहीं है तो हम एक इंटरप्रिटर (दुभाषिए) का प्रबंध कर सकते हैं। कृपया अपनी ज़रूरत की भाषा बताएँ।

#### Bengali

ইংরেজি আপনার মাতৃভাষা না হলে, আমরা আপনার জন্য একজন দোভাষী (ইণ্টারপ্রিটার) এর ব্যবস্থা করতে পারবো। দয়া করে বলে দিন, কোন্ ভাষার দোভাষী বা ইণ্টারপ্রিটার আপনার দরকার।

# Gujarati

જો ઈંગ્લિશ તમારી માતૃભાષા ન હોય તો અમે તમારા માટે દુભાષિયાની વ્યવસ્થા કરી શકીશું. તમે કઇ ભાષામાં વાત કરવા માંગશો તે ભાષાનું નામ દર્શાવવા વિનંતી.

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