Leytonstone Town Centre enjoys excellent transport links, thanks to the Central Line and Overground stations.

As noted above (see Regeneration), further improvements to cycle routes are coming as part of Waltham Forest’s Mini-Holland programme.

The town centre sits adjacent to the Green Man Roundabout, a key intersection between the A12, High Road and Whipps Cross Road. However, much of the car traffic in the town centre is associated with the Tesco Superstore.

These major transport arteries constitute both an opportunity and a challenge: while Leytonstone is well linked to central London and Essex, pedestrian and cycle routes to the west of the Borough are necessarily limited by the A12 and railway lines. However, cycle routes leading under the Green Man roundabout provide safe and easy access to Epping Forest.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Leytonstone’s ample car parking and excellent transport links make it a convenient place for shoppers and commuters from Essex to park and talong the Central Line to the Westfield Centre in Stratford and offices in Central London.
While only the yard of St. John’s Church suggests Leytonstone’s past as a leafy hamlet, nearby Bush Wood, Wanstead Flats and Epping Forest provide good access to open green areas.

However, the town centre does include generous areas of public realm, some of which has seen recent Council investment. Cafes and restaurants make good use of the broad pavements outside the Central Line station and on Kirkdale Road, as well as at several of the corners between the High Road and residential backstreets. However, a double-width bus turnaround obstructs pedestrian progress along the north side of Church Lane.

At the west exit of the Underground station, Memorial Square is a generous if under-animated swathe of pedestrian public realm. More, however, could be done to capitalise on the surrounds of Leytonstone’s key heritage assets, and particularly Leytonstone House. Here, green space is fractured and marginalised by car parking. To the west of the High Road, car parking predominates altogether, with a significant proportion of the district centre given over to a Tesco car park.
Leytonstone’s retail offer centres on the High Road and Church Lane. The High Road is lined with Victorian shopping parades in red brick with stuccowork ornamentation. Several prominent corners on the northern extent of the High Road are marked by grand public houses and banks featuring extensive stone detailing.

Moving south along the High Road, the Victorian parade is increasing interspersed with interwar terraces. These follow a broadly similar pattern to ground floor level, but tend to be treated as a single larger, symmetrical structure at upper levels. South of the junction between Church Lane and the High Road, a number of late 20th century buildings house pound shops, superstores and charity shops in larger retail premises.

The Tesco superstore in the north of the study area is a dominant presence in the town centre, as well as the Matalan adjacent to St. John’s Church. Both feature extensive car parks which take up a large proportion of land between the High Road and the A12.

LBWF’s Retail and Leisure Study notes a high proportion of non-retail uses in designated primary and secondary retail frontages (see Planning Policy, above), with many shops in prominent positions, including corners, given over to office space. The study also notes the prevalence of convenience retailers, such as Tesco, alongside smaller supermarkets.

High proportions of non-retail uses in primary and secondary frontages. High proportion of convenience retailers (e.g. Tesco). Relatively low proportion of comparison shops, according to Retail and Leisure Study 2009. However, there are also relatively few vacant shops along the high road, suggesting a continued demand for traditional retail spaces.
Analysis of footfall in the town centre suggests that Church Lane and the western side of the High Road, south of the Library, are well frequented. Footfall to the east of the High Road falls off significantly, while it is notable that few pedestrians make their way to the Art Deco terrace on Kirkdale Road. This map also suggests that few shoppers from Tesco are making their way to the High Road and its local and independent businesses.
Despite Leytonstone’s Victorian growth as a dormitory town, much of the land to the north of Church Lane and to the west of the High Road is given over to workspaces. Much of this is housed in late 20th century developments, and appears to be significantly underused - e.g. Kirkdale House, Robart House. In fact, Kirkdale House is the subject of a scheme to convert existing office space to residential accommodation under permitted development rights. There is also evidence of workshops tucked behind residential streets, accessed via alleyways, which have fallen into disuse.

To the south of the study area, railway arches are occupied by a builder’s merchant and a number of other businesses which do not appear to be making intensive use of this well-connected site.

At the same time, a significant proportion of primary retail frontage on the High Road and Church Lane has been given over to office use. A former residential terrace on Gainsborough Road, opposite the Tesco car park, has been wholly converted to offices and a nursery. This adaptation of ill-suited stock demonstrates a clear demand for workspace that is not being met by existing available buildings.
Leytonstone is perhaps best known for its fine terraces of two-storey Victorian houses, which predominate in the streets east of the High Road, south of Church Road, and outside of the study area to the west of the A12. The High Road itself, and Church Lane. These generally feature shallow front gardens and gable roofs. As discussed above (see Workspace), a Victorian yellow brick terrace on Gainsborough Road has been converted to office use.

The High Road itself is lined with three-storey Victorian and inter-war terraces, mostly in red brick, which feature flats above shops. Some of these residential units have been converted to office use.

As discussed above (see History) the bulk of this housing stock results from a boom in speculative development following the opening of Leytonstone rail station.

Further south along the High Road, retail parades give way to late 20th-century purpose built blocks of flats, which tend to be four storeys in height.

Two further idiosyncratic housing typologies have a strong influence on the character of the study area. Lemna Road features a row of two storey former policemen’s cottages. Set back behind a deep (and well-tended) green verge, this suburban typology sits in close proximity to the Underground station.

To the north of the study area, adjacent to the Tesco superstore and behind Leytonstone House, a former school has been converted to residential and commercial mixed use. Part of the former school complex is occupied by the Tesco, which butts up against two three-storey wings which have been respectively converted to rows of flats, with a row of shops to the ground floor of the southern wing.

Limited 21st century development is evident in the core of the study area. However, to the rear of the Matalan superstore, a 5-storey block of flats sets a precedent for denser residential patterns.

**Key**
- terraced housing
- flats above shops
- blocks of flats

**Burleigh Road - typical Victorian residential terrace**

**School converted to residential, Earlham Court**

**New build flats, Kirkdale Road**
CONSULTATION

EXERCISE no. 1: DROP-IN SESSION 03/10/15

From 10am-4pm, Jan Kattein and Gabriel Warshafsky of JKA conducted a public consultation event with the support of LBWF programme manager Sam Neal and neighbourhood officer Kelly Peck. As weather was fine, we stationed ourselves outside the Church Lane entrance of Leytonstone Library. This was a departure from the advertised location of the Customer Service Centre, but was felt to be a good opportunity to attract more passers-by. We were busy throughout, with a peak in visitor numbers in the early afternoon, and estimate that some 300 interested people stopped to speak to us.

Consultation did not concern specific proposals, but attempted to convey the overall scope of the Place-making Strategy. We explained that our strategy would consider short-, medium- and long-term proposals for improvements to the town centre’s transport, public space, workspace, retail and housing. In return, we sought to gauge the public’s key concerns, appetite for change & development, and enhance our understanding of the way that people use Leytonstone’s existing amenities.

TRANSPORT
• Many respondents cite the congestion of Leytonstone’s one-way traffic system as the most important defining characteristic about the town centre that could be improved.
• Pollutant levels caused by standing traffic, e.g. on Church Lane were a cause for concern.
• Key bottlenecks were pointed out on the High Road just south of Church Lane and just south of the Green Man roundabout.
• Several respondents suggested pedestrianising Church Lane, diverting car traffic via Kirkdale Road.
• Car parking proved a controversial topic, most respondents had arrived in the town centre on foot, and the majority were willing to lose car parking capacity in favour of residential development.
• However, a handful of respondents felt strongly that the existing parking provision is at capacity or overstretched, and should on no account be reduced.

RETAIL
• Respondents identified the retail environment as a priority for improvement.
• Long-term residents reported a decline in the retail offer from the 1970s onward, with the loss of Bearmans, Russell & Bromley.
• Many respondents feel that the town centre is overly dominat ed by superstores, charity shops, convenience stores and beauty salons.
• Recent pop-up shops have been well received, and respondents were keen to see further diversification of the retail offer.
• Respondents expressed an appetite for an expanded street market, but identified the lack of an appropriate outdoor public space as a hindrance.
• Overwhelmingly, respondents would like to see shop front improvements similar to the Council’s previous schemes in High Road Leyton.

PUBLIC SPACE
• Respondents would like to see more street planting and trees.
• St. John’s Churchyard should retain a peaceful aspect, but could be made more accessible.
• Green spaces on the fringes of the town centre e.g. Henry Reynolds Gardens are an important asset for locals, but access and way-finding could again be improved.
• Some respondents noted a lack of high quality outdoor public space, and a lack of security outside the Tube station and between Matadan and St. John’s Church.

WORKSPACE
• Few respondents worked directly in the local area; we have attempted to address this by individually interviewing key anchor businesses in the town centre.

• Many respondents feel that Leytonstone has a deficiency of workspace for start-up businesses, and expressed an increasing appetite for arts space or managed workspace.

HOUSING
• The vast majority of respondents were very receptive to the principle of an increase in residential density.
• Redevelopment of superstores to provide additional residences was well received, while many respondents were willing to accept increases in loss of parking space.
• Respondents expressed profound concerns over tenure of future developments, stipulating the need for affordable and family homes.

CONCLUSIONS
• Most respondents feel that Leytonstone has been improving over the last five years or so, but are concerned about rising property prices and gentrification.
• As Leytonstone has become a more pleasant place to live, an influx of new residents from more central boroughs has led to a concern that existing residents will be priced out.
• Respondents were well-informed, and regarded their town centre with great affection.
• We also noted a real eagerness for regeneration work, particularly with regard to shop fronts and the public realm, and considered receptive attitude to future residential development.
EXERCISE no. 2: DROP-IN SESSION 07/11/15

From 10am – 4pm, Jan Kartein and Gabriel Wardakzy carried out a drop-in consultation event in the ground floor of Leytonstone Library. After an initial quiet period from 10-11am, a steady stream of visitors came through, totalling ca. 80 respondents overall. While this is significantly fewer than the previous consultation exercise, we suspect that this can be attributed to poor weather, which prevented us from setting up outside, and may have deterred visitors from the town centre altogether.

Consultation material included proposals for short, medium and long-term interventions, together with an overall plan of opportunity sites across the town centre. In addition, consultation boards from 03/10/15 were presented again for the benefit of those who were unable to attend the first session.

GENERAL
• Again, many respondents wished to discuss the performance of the one-way traffic system, with pedestrianisation of Church Lane proposed as a potential solution.
• Respondents requested that consultation material be made available online, as some residents were unable to attend in person.
• A number of residents were from Forest Ward, and registered a feeling of disconnection and exclusion from the Town Centre on which they rely.

SHORT-TERM
• Further enthusiasm was expressed for introducing pop-up shops and markets, but respondents stressed the importance of ensuring that businesses could also find long-term premises.
• Expansion of existing markets would be welcomed, but offer should be diversified.
• Many respondents are currently unacquainted with the green space around Leytonstone House.
• The vast majority were supportive of giving over parking space around Leytonstone House to play and green space.
• Concern was registered regarding proximity of playspace to heavy traffic, lack of provision for older children.
• Gardening activity on the Church Lane car park was supported, although some expressed reservation at the loss of car parking.
• Use of Argos windows as an exhibition space was positively received.

MEDIUM-TERM
• Again, respondents expressed great enthusiasm for shop front and building facade improvements.
• Most respondents felt that this was most needed on the parades to the south of Church Lane. (South Leytonstone Link)
• Respondents expressed a need to ensure (or even enforce) proper maintenance of shop front works.
• Most respondents felt that access to the Churchyard could and should be improved, but were keen that it should retain its overgrown and secluded qualities.
• Provision of flexible/affordable workspace was enthusiastically received by respondents.
• Respondents agreed that a good mix of uses in the town centre is needed to ensure that future housing development does not over-strain existing infrastructure.

LONG-TERM
• Respondents agreed that redevelopment of the Matalan and Tesco sites would be desirable, but queried how this would be motivated or incentivised.
• Loss of car parking and car-free development were met with reservation by some respondents.
• However, the majority of respondents, including those who had driven to the town centre, felt that future housing and workspace provision was of greater importance than retaining car parking.
• Proposals for the Kirkdale Road bus turnaround and Matalan sites were warmly received, with some respondents expressing greater reservation over proposals for the Church Lane car park.
• While respondents were eager to see expanded pedestrian public realm on Kirkdale Road used for markets, they noted that the road currently suffers from significant congestion.
• Respondents felt that improved public realm toward St. John’s Church and active retail frontages to High Road and side elevations should be prioritised in redevelopment of the Matalan site.
• Few respondents queried loss of car parking to Matalan site.
• Several respondents expressed a desire that new residential units should be of a size and tenure to appeal to local and independent businesses.
• While some respondents were opposed to loss of car parking on Church Lane, many supported new live/work units on the site.

CONCLUSIONS
• Short- and medium-term proposals were met with broad approval, but respondents were keen to see assurances that these interventions would translate into long term change.
• Many expressed approval that the Council was pro-actively considering long term development in the town centre.
• We encountered widespread enthusiasm for addressing key central sites, i.e. Matalan, Tesco and McDonald’s, and a broad consensus that these sites were significantly under-performing, and letting down the town centre as a whole.
• Less interest was shown in backland sites, although most respondents seemed willing to at least consider building on existing car parks.
• A recurrent theme was the need to establish improved pedestrian connections, particularly with regard to green spaces.