

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Report Title The adoption of the Residential Alterations and Retrofit Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

Meeting / Date Cabinet, 2nd June 2026

Cabinet portfolio Councillor Eva Tabbasam, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Lead Member for Housing and Regeneration

Signature 

Report author/
Contact details Conor Keappock, Acting Head of Strategic Planning & Design

Conor.keappock@walthamforest.gov.uk

Wards affected All

Public access Open

Appendices [Appendix 1 – Residential Alterations and Retrofit SPD](#)

Appendix 2 – Residential Alterations and Retrofit SPD Consultation Report

Appendix 3 - Residential Alterations and Retrofit SPD Equalities Impact assessment.

Appendix 4 - Residential Alterations and Retrofit SPD Sustainability Appraisal

[Appendix 5 – Residential Extensions and Alterations SPD \(2010\).](#)

Summary

- 1.1 A decision to adopt a borough-wide Residential Alterations and Retrofit Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is sought from Cabinet.
- 1.2 Following the adoption of the Local Plan (Part 1) in 2024, the Council identified priority SPDs that provide detailed guidance on the implementation of policies contained within the Local Plan.
- 1.3 The Residential Alterations and Retrofit SPD is one of these priority SPDs and aligns with the Local Plan policy of character-led intensification. It is also key to achieving exemplar design in the borough, which is defined as development that delivers human, social, environmental and financial value. This SPD is designed to support residents and small developers in delivering high-quality, sustainable home improvements, extensions and alterations in a way that enhances local character. The document also picks up on addressing the climate emergency by incorporating carbon reducing measures.

- 1.4 The document has been drafted and gone through statutory consultation and is now at the adoption stage which would allow it to be a material consideration in planning decisions.
- 1.5 Adoption of the SPD is required by cabinet. Upon adoption, the existing Residential Extensions and Alterations SPD, which was adopted in 2010, will be revoked.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:
 - 2.1.1 Adopt the Residential Alterations and Retrofit Supplementary Planning Document (Appendix 1).
 - 2.1.2 Authorise the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Planning & Strategic Property to make any further typographical or graphic amendments necessary to the Residential Alterations and Retrofit Supplementary Planning Document prior to its publication.
 - 2.1.3 Revoke the Residential Extensions and Alterations Supplementary Planning Document (Appendix 5) upon the adoption of the Residential Alterations and Retrofit Supplementary Planning Document.

3. Proposals

Residential Alterations and Retrofit Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

- 3.1 The Residential Alterations and Retrofit SPD provides planning guidance for residents on how to alter their homes in line with policies within the adopted Local Plan relating to Character-led Intensification, Sustainable Design and Construction and in accordance with the principles of Exemplar Design; achieving human, social, environmental and financial value.
- 3.2 The SPD, once adopted, will supersede the current 'Residential Extensions and Alterations SPD' published in 2010 thereby providing guidance that is better aligned to the Council's Missions and Inclusive Growth ambitions.
- 3.3 The SPD also aligns with the Waltham Forest Climate Emergency Declaration 2019, the Nature Emergency Declaration 2025, the Climate Action Plan as well as Local Plan objectives to meet the Climate Emergency head on by going further than just guidance on alterations, but also advice on how retrofit measures can be incorporated as part extensions and alterations undertaken.
- 3.4 "Retrofit" refers to the addition or alteration of an existing building principally to improve the building's energy efficiency and reduce energy costs for the occupants.
- 3.5 Homes are the single biggest contributor to carbon emissions in the UK. Therefore, retrofit of the borough's existing housing stock to a high

standard is key in tackling the Climate Emergency by reducing carbon emissions, limiting global heating and reaching net zero. The SPD provides clarity about what retrofit measures are possible when making alterations to the home and what changes will require planning permission.

- 3.6 The SPD contributes to the Council's Borough Missions by setting out clear expectations for high-quality, sustainable residential alterations that collectively support net-zero ambitions and the creation of safe, well-designed neighbourhoods where people can thrive.

SPD Development

- 3.7 The SPD is an update to the existing Residential Extensions and Alterations SPD, which is used regularly by applicants and officers, since it was adopted in February 2010. The existing document performs well at appeal, but it lacks guidance on some key areas such as retrofit measures, outbuildings and garden design. Feedback from officers describe the document as lacking in diagrams, with some guidance being open to interpretation.
- 3.8 The SPD has been developed as a 'Design Code' as established by the [National Model Design Code \(NMDC\)](#) which is a key supporting document to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 3.9 As set out in the NMDC design codes should provide clear, visual design and planning requirements for development proposals, with the aim of securing higher quality development and more predictable planning decision making.
- 3.10 In 2024, following a successful bid led by the Place and Design team, Waltham Forest was selected by the Office for Place and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as one of the national Design Code Pathfinder areas for a 15-month programme. The Pathfinder programme was created to test how design codes can be delivered in practice, supporting the Government's wider ambition to raise design quality and offer greater certainty to applicants.
- 3.11 Through the programme, the Council received £80,000.00 of grant funding, specialist advice and access to national expertise, helping us develop a robust, locally relevant design code that will guide future development in the borough. We received specialist feedback from award-winning built environment professionals, who worked with officers to refine the content, quality and accessibility of the document.
- 3.12 The new SPD builds on the existing SPD where relevant, whilst also incorporating clear visual design and planning requirements that will make it easier for residents and officers, whilst offering greater planning certainty. The SPD features high quality examples of local development that has been delivered in the borough recently, to provide inspiration for residents and help set expectations around design quality.
- 3.13 Internal consultation occurred throughout the drafting of the document. We held several workshops with Development Management, Regeneration, Climate and Building Control colleagues to ensure the

guidance will deliver on design quality. Officers also reviewed recent appeal decisions, including those related to retrofit measures, in order to ensure we are giving greater planning certainty to applicants and reducing the risk of decisions being overturned. Additional information on the wider consultation programme, including public consultation, is provided in section 5 of the report.

- 3.14 Once adopted the final version of the Residential Alterations and Retrofit SPD will be made available online as an interactive digital PDF via the Council's website. Key summarised advice from the SPD will also be accessible on a separate dedicated Let's Talk website with its own URL address or accessed via the Council website. This will ensure that the planning guidance provided by the document is as accessible and easy-to-navigate as possible for residents.

Changes to Supplementary Planning Documents

- 3.15 In November 2025, the Government announced changes to the national plan-making system meaning that 30 June 2026 will be the last date on which a Local Planning Authority may adopt a Supplementary Planning Document before SPDs are replaced by the new "Supplementary Plans" framework.
- 3.16 This means that if the Residential Alterations and Retrofit SPD is not adopted by this date, it would not hold planning weight. Given that householder applications make up the majority of all planning applications in Waltham Forest, the absence of up-to-date guidance would limit the Council's ability to secure exemplar design quality, sustainability and biodiversity enhancements across this significant proportion of development activity.
- 3.17 As a result, officers have programmed the passage of the document through internal governance, in order to ensure adoption is possible before 30 June 2026.

4. Options & Alternatives Considered

- 4.1 The alternative option would be to do nothing (i.e. not to adopt the SPD). Under this scenario, planning applications for home extensions and alterations would continue to be determined against Local Plan policies alone and the existing out of date SPD, without the benefit of the detailed design guidance, retrofit advice and household scale clarity provided by the new SPD. This would reduce certainty for applicants and decisionmakers, particularly in relation to topics not addressed within the existing 2010 SPD—such as low carbon retrofit measures, guidance on air source heat pumps, outbuildings, water efficiency improvements, biodiversity and garden design.

5. Council Strategic Priorities (and other National or Local Policies or Strategies)

- 5.1 If adopted, the Residential Alterations and Retrofit SPD will ensure that the principles underpinning Waltham Forest's Borough Missions—particularly 'Leading the way to a net-zero borough' and 'Creating safe, green neighbourhoods where everyone can thrive'—are embedded

directly into the assessment of planning applications for residential alterations. By setting clear standards for sustainability, energy efficiency, retrofit, biodiversity and neighbour amenity, the SPD translates these Missions into practical, day-to-day decision-making across the borough.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 The SPD has been developed through a collaborative approach, drawing on engagement with residents, stakeholders and Council teams to strengthen its clarity, relevance and usability.
- 6.2 Throughout the drafting period the document benefited from input from internal Council teams including Development Management, Building Control, Climate, Housing Strategy, Public Health, Occupational Health and Comms. External stakeholders include a range of architects including architects based in the borough, retrofit specialists such as Kanopiworks, Design South East, Design Council, Stow Brothers, the E17 Architects Group, and participants of the 2023 Retrofit Roundtable workshop.
- 6.3 An early informal public consultation on the SPD was undertaken 12th June to 6 August 2023 as part of engagement on the Council's suite of emerging priority SPDs connected to the Local Plan. At this stage the document had not yet been drafted and so the consultation asked questions about the proposed themes and content. The engagement:
 - Comprised of drop-in sessions across the borough
 - Resulted in over 1,000 conversations with residents and businesses.
 - Included focused engagement with traditionally 'less heard from' groups, including young people via the Waltham Forest Young Advisors.
- 6.4 Comments from the informal public consultation which informed the drafting of Residential Alterations and Retrofit SPD included:
 - Providing more detail on the maintenance of any alterations to the home
 - Providing additional guidance on enhancing front gardens
 - Clarifying what alterations are permissible under Permitted Development Rights.
- 6.5 Once the document was drafted, another round of internal consultation and updates took place. We then undertook statutory consultation on the document for 6 weeks, which aligns with national planning regulations and our Statement of Community Involvement.
- 6.6 The consultation ran between 2 February 2026 and 16 March 2026. A public notice was placed in a local newspaper, and copies of the document were made available in the borough's libraries and at the Fellowship Square reception. The statutory consultation was also promoted through social media, newsletters and in Waltham Forest News and interested parties on the SPD Database were notified. Individual emails were also sent to key stakeholders.

- 6.7 A virtual Members briefing explaining the SPD and the proposed consultation plan took place in February 2026, which was largely positive and encouraged ideas for further consultation opportunities – for example an additional evening consultation event was arranged at Leytonstone Library.
- 6.8 The programme of events was informed by the team’s Community Engagement Toolkit. Again, additional work was undertaken to focus on reaching traditionally ‘less heard from’ groups, including promotion to private renters through local estate agents such as ‘Stow Brothers’, who circulated details of the consultation to those on their tenant and homeowner databases.
- 6.9 Full details of the consultation, including events and supporting documentation were available on a dedicated ‘Let’s Talk’ web page during the consultation period.
- 6.10 In-person engagement events organised and attended by officers were held at;
- Chingford Library,
 - Lea Bridge Library
 - Leytonstone Library
 - Walthamstow Library.

These events resulted in conversations with approximately 40 people.

- 6.11 Officers also arranged an ‘Ask an Architect’ event in a shop in Leyton whereby residents considering alterations or energy efficient improvements to their home were able to consult with a local architect for a free and informal consultation. Feedback on the draft document was gathered at the events from both resident and the architects.
- 6.12 In total, approximately 31 respondents submitted approximately 90 responses. The statutory consultation generated a wide range of comments from residents, architects, community members and statutory organisations. Comments from the statutory consultation included support for the:
- Overall approach of the SPD, highlighting its clarity, practical value, strong visual layout, and usefulness in helping residents understand retrofit and home alteration options.
 - Emphasis on passive cooling, external solar shading.
 - Measures to discourage woodburning while supporting heat pumps and mechanical ventilation.
 - Accessibility of the document, describing it as well written, comprehensive and easy to navigate.

The consultation feedback requested:

- Clearer explanations of permitted development rights, particularly for flat owners.
- More typical and affordable extension examples.
- More guidance on glazing upgrades, water-efficiency measures, cycle and bin storage.

- Additional guidance on material choices, that help balance quality with maintenance demands.
- Guidance on making homes accessible and more mention of disability.

The consultation also highlighted some concerns from respondents. These included:

- Concern that although the document is informative - it is also long.
- Requests for more clarity, notably where guidance felt aspirational.

Overall, the consultation demonstrated broad interest in the SPDs themes, with a mixture of positive feedback and constructive recommendations focused on improving usability, clarity and relevance to local housing types.

6.13 Responses were also received from key stakeholders, such as Historic England, TfL, E17 Architects, Waltham Forest Swifts and the Environment Agency. Some of these groups raised detailed points which recommended additional clarity and guidance on:

- alignment with London Plan transport policies,
- SuDS and water efficiency
- river corridor protection
- heritage considerations
- support for building dependent species, such as swifts.

6.14 Further detail of the consultation, including a schedule of consultation responses and the subsequent amendments can be found in the SPD consultation report at Appendix 2.

6.15 A number of the comments provided during the consultation resulted in amendments to the document, these include;

- Providing a new section on accessibility and making adaptations to homes in order to live and age well.
- Updating guidance on solar shading, buildings maintenance, material selection, water efficiency and protected species.
- Enhancing the 'Quick Retrofit Wins' section with additional measures people can employ.
- Providing clarification on Permitted Development Rights has also been included, especially where these apply to flats.
- Amending precedent images to provide a greater range of projects in terms of cost and character.

7. Implications

7.1 Finance, Value for Money and Risk

7.1.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the development of the SPD and co-ordination will be resourced by staff in the Regeneration Planning and Strategic Property service.

7.1.2 The production of clear guidance will both reduce risk and cost to applicants, helping them to benefit from potential reductions in energy

costs. The guidance will also reduce officer time spent on decision-making.

7.1.3 The SPD has been produced in-house, providing value for money rather than being produced by an external consultant team and the development of the document has been aided by external grant funding, through the MHCLG Pathfinders Programme.

7.2 Legal

Residential Alterations and Retrofit Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

7.2.1 The SPD was prepared in accordance with the provisions set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (“the Regulations”) as discussed in the paragraphs below. These Regulations were revoked on 25 March 2026, however paragraph 6 of Schedule 1 to The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (Commencement No. 11 and Saving and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2026 states that a proposed SPD can continue to be prepared and adopted using the 2012 Regulations provided that adoption takes place no later than 30 June 2026.

7.2.2 The Government’s Planning Practice Guidance provides that SPDs should “build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted local plan. As they do not form part of the development plan, they cannot introduce new planning policies into the development plan”. It also goes on to state that SPDs “should not add unnecessarily to the financial burdens on development”.

7.2.3 SPDs are not subject to independent examination and do not have Development Plan status; they therefore do not need to be approved by Full Council.

7.2.4 Regulation 8(3) of the Regulations provides that the contents of a SPD must not conflict with the adopted development plan.

7.2.5 Regulations 11 to 16 of the Regulations set out the requirements for producing SPDs.

7.2.6 Prior to the adoption of a SPD, Regulation 12(a) requires a statement to be prepared setting out:

- i. the persons the local planning authority consulted when preparing the supplementary planning document;
- ii. a summary of the main issues raised by those persons; and
- iii. how those issues have been addressed in the supplementary planning document;

7.2.7 Regulation 12(b) provides that there must be a minimum consultation period of 4 weeks and that the statement referred to in paragraph 7.2.6 above has to be made available together with the SPD online, at the Council’s principal office, and at such other places within the borough as considered appropriate (during normal office hours).

- 7.2.8 The statutory consultation process outlined in section 6 of this report complied with legal requirements. It was undertaken at a formative stage, provided adequate information for an intelligent response and adequate time for a response. To complete this process, Members must conscientiously take into account the views expressed by those who have taken part in the consultation when making their decision. Consultation responses are not binding on members but need to be taken into account.
- 7.2.9 The Council must also as soon as reasonably practicable after adoption: (i) make the SPD and adoption statement available for inspection online, at its principal office, and at such other places within the borough as considered appropriate (during normal office hours), and (ii) send a copy of the adoption statement to anyone who has asked to be notified of the adoption of the SPD (Regulation 14).
- 7.2.10 Subject to Cabinet approval, once the Residential Alterations and Retrofit SPD is adopted, it will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications borough-wide. The existing Residential Extensions and Alterations SPD will be revoked. Regulation 15(3) provides that where an SPD is revoked the Council must as soon as reasonably practicable— (a) cease to make any documents relating to the revoked supplementary planning document available; and (b) take such other steps as it considers necessary to draw the revocation of the supplementary planning document to the attention of persons living or working in the area.
- 7.3 Equalities and Diversity
- 7.3.1 The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The Council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The Council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.
- 7.3.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment for the Residential Alterations and Retrofit SPD was completed in January 2026 (Appendix 3).
- 7.4 The EqIA concludes that the SPD has a positive impact overall, particularly for older residents, disabled people, private renters and socio-economically disadvantaged groups through improved energy efficiency, lower running costs, healthier homes, and an entire section on incorporating accessible design. There is a section on small wins, tailored to those with a limited budget.
- 7.5 Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)
- 7.5.1 Climate emergency policies are embedded in the Waltham Forest Local Plan Part 1 & Part 2, which have been found sound by the Planning Inspectorate. Examples include policies that seek to reduce

emissions by promoting sustainable transport, encourage sustainable design and construction, address the risk of flooding and overheating and protect the natural and open environment.

- 7.5.2 The Residential Alterations and Retrofit SPD provides further supplementary detail to these policies, particularly under the theme encouraging sustainable design and construction.
- 7.5.3 Any planning applications proposed that relate to the themes of the SPD will be subject to climate change policy and supplementary guidance. The SPD is supported by Sustainability Appraisal at Appendix 4.
- 7.5.4 The Sustainability Appraisal assesses the significant environmental, social and economic effects of the SPD. It also incorporates a process called Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in England is mandated by the SEA Directive (Directive 2001/42/ EC: Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment) and is regulated by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 Statutory Instrument No.1633 ('the SEA Regulations'). The SEA Directive aims at a high level of protection of the environment, and to integrate the consideration of the environment into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes, with a view to promoting sustainable development.
- 7.5.5 A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and SEA Screening Report were prepared (Appendix). The SEA Screening determines that a full SEA is not required because the SPD supplements Local Plan policies and does not introduce new policy or allocate land. The SA confirms that the SPD results in predominantly minor positive environmental, social and economic effects.
- 7.5.6 Energy inefficient and poorly designed housing are a driver of fuel poverty and overheating, which can have serious health impacts, and were identified as priorities for local action in the Fairer & Healthier Waltham Forest response. The Residential Alterations & Retrofit SPD will help address this by encouraging sustainable design & construction.
- 7.6 Council Infrastructure
 - 7.6.1 Once adopted, the SPD will be implemented within the existing Council infrastructure and resources.

Background Information (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

None