



urban shape
PLANNING CONSULTANTS

APPENDIX 5

LONDON BOROUGH OF NEWHAM

RETAIL & LEISURE STUDY 2022

TOPIC PAPER: MANAGING VACANCIES THROUGH MEANWHILE USE STRATEGIES

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INTRODUCTION

Policy aims

Long-term adaptability of units to support low vacancies as well as innovation/business ideas testing.

Relevant RLS recommendations

LBN17: Policy should support flexibility and the temporary or 'meanwhile' uses of vacant properties. The term 'meanwhile use' refers to the short-term use of temporarily empty buildings, including shops until they can be brought back into commercial use. Such innovative action provides an opportunity to help keep a town centre vibrant, whilst the landlord is able to continue to look for a new commercial occupant for the space during the meanwhile use. Meanwhile uses are generally for the benefit of the local community, for example; meeting spaces, informal training and learning spaces, temporary rehearsal spaces, pop-up shops and exhibitions, and so on. They can offer a breeding ground for innovative ideas and empower the local community, lasting just a few days or several years. Policy should continue to encourage this mechanism within the LB Newham town centres.

Reg. 18 policy draft: HS2.7 Within Town and Local Centres (existing or new), Applicants proposing 800 sqm or more GIA floorspace in any main town centre uses should submit an effective Meanwhile Use Strategy outlining how vacancies will be managed long term, including provision for affordable or turnover-based rents.

Summary of challenge comments received

Consultees raised that flexibility should be added at the implementation to reflect economic uncertainties around market demand and the changing economic climate. It was also raised that the requirement to provide affordable retail space should instead be done on a case-by-case basis outside of policy in a more flexible approach for town and local centres, instead of placing an additional technical burden on developers at application stage.

POLICY CONTEXT

The London Plan (2021) supports flexibility for meanwhile uses across the following policy areas:

- Use of vacant properties in the context of town centres (Policy SD7 – Town Centres: development principles and Development Plan Documents)
- Opportunities for meanwhile uses in early phases of development to create attractive public realm (Policy D8 – Public realm)
- Use of vacant properties and land for pop-ups or meanwhile uses for cultural and creative activities during the day and at night-time to stimulate vibrancy and viability and promote diversity in town centres, Cultural Quarters and other areas (Policy HC5 – Supporting London's culture and creative industries)

CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1: LB BRENT

Brent Council has developed a Meanwhile Uses Strategy which sets out the Council's approach to supporting small businesses, diversifying the high street and engaging local communities. This provides guidance on Meanwhile Use Providers (as an approved provider list), more collaboration with landlords, work by Town Centre Managers and meanwhile use feasibility studies for phased major developments.

CASE STUDY 2: LB HARINGEY

Introduced discretionary business rates relief for businesses that occupy either new and converted office or workspace or meanwhile use spaces in new developments or identified sites in 2016.

The new development or site would be in a development framework or an area action plan, have received planning permission, or identified by local traders forums and Haringey Council as suitable for meanwhile activities.

Haringey Council assess the social value contribution the meanwhile activity will have for the local area, for example – if the initiative would contribute to improve local high streets or economic regeneration.

Policy DM42 considers granting temporary permissions for meanwhile uses within primary and secondary shopping frontages where it can be demonstrated it will positively support retail function of town centre. Temporary use of a vacant shop will be supported while it is being marketed.

CASE STUDY 3: WALTHAM FOREST

Since 2018, Waltham Forest Council have offered 'Targeted Relief' for workspace providers who are not-for-profit, reinvest surpluses into affordable workspace within the borough, and can prove that they will achieve 'local social, economic and cultural benefits'. On successful application, a workspace provider will receive rates relief until 2023.

CASE STUDY 4: OLD OAK AND PARK ROYAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Policy TCC9 explicitly relates to Meanwhile Uses. It supports proposals for such uses where they contribute to activation and character and reinforce longer-term use. All major development proposals are required to submit a Meanwhile Feasibility Study which should:

- Clearly set out the proposed phasing of the site and the points at which land and/or buildings are likely to be vacant
- Identify other opportunities and constraints to the provision of the meanwhile facilities
- Make clear recommendations on the appropriateness of land and/or buildings on the site for different meanwhile uses, including but not limited to business space, retail, eating and drinking establishments, leisure, culture and sports space, public art and open space

If appropriate, the OPDC will then secure a Meanwhile Strategy through a planning condition or section 106 agreement.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

- There is evidence of long-term vacant retail spaces being a problem in Newham, and particularly on large new developments expanding existing centres or creating new ones. For established centres, the Retail and Leisure Study also identified wider retail market structural changes, with national brands typically operating on large floorplates seeking more compact units or a reduced property portfolio, and some going into administration. Therefore, there is a need to proactively manage vacancies over potentially long sections of Newham's centre frontages through planning. Newham should maintain their policy trigger of 800 sqm as evidence demonstrates it is larger developments with vacant issues that affect placemaking and local centre vitality.
- Drawing on the case study of OPDC, the policy should specify the requirement for major developments to submit a meanwhile use strategy, and outline the contents of this document including:
 - Phasing of the site and parts of the site likely to be vacant at any point in time
 - Identification of the constraints and opportunities to delivering meanwhile space
 - Clear recommendations on the appropriateness of land and/or buildings to host different meanwhile uses, including but not limited to business space, retail, eating and drinking establishments, leisure, culture and sports space, public art and open space
- The policy should also state that the meanwhile strategy will be secured through S106 Agreement.