

Shopping

Introduction

8.1 Shopping is a vital activity for the well-being of residents in the District, particularly with regard to essential goods and services. Furthermore, in employment terms, retailing is an important sector of Wealden's economy. The Local Plan provides the framework for meeting the shopping needs of a growing population whilst also having regard to the expected increase in different types of expenditure and the changing pattern of shopping. The latter is brought about by changes in consumer preference and increasing personal mobility which widens the catchment of major retail centres and widens the choice available to residents.

8.2 Within Wealden, the majority of shopping facilities are concentrated in the town centres of Crowborough, Uckfield, Heathfield, Hailsham and Polegate, which provide for their population and surrounding area as well as being important locations for employment. Neighbourhood centres, village centres and 'corner shops' principally meet important day to day needs for food and other convenience goods. Several retail warehouses provide mainly for the needs of car-borne shoppers often purchasing bulky goods, e.g. DIY. Outside the District, the sub-regional shopping centres of Tunbridge Wells and Eastbourne have a major influence on shopping patterns, particularly with regard to the provision of higher value comparison goods, e.g. furniture and clothes, and the provision of food in large 'edge of town' stores. Other types of retailing such as discount and club shopping, and factory outlet centres, which have emerged nationally are considered unlikely to establish in Wealden in view of the limited population catchment.

STRATEGY

8.3 The Plan's strategy, set out in Chapter 2, provides for the maintenance of the existing settlement pattern by giving priority to locating new housing, business and shopping development in the towns, which are the main centres of population served by public transport, in order to protect the countryside and minimise unnecessary vehicle trips.

8.4 In this regard, the Plan's strategy for shopping is to maintain and where possible improve the level and choice of shopping facilities in the District in order to meet the needs of all sections of the community whilst recognising the existing pattern of shopping provision, the demand for new forms of retailing, and the importance of protecting and enhancing the vitality and viability of the town centres.

8.5 As part of this strategy, the objectives of the Plan with regard to shopping are:

- (1) to promote the town centres as the principal shopping locations in the District through encouraging new development and improving the environment, infrastructure and services;*
- (2) to complement the town centres by supporting local shopping and service provision within the smaller centres, 'corner shops' and 'edge-of-town' facilities where appropriate;*
- (3) to maintain the provision of village shops and services;*
- (4) to carefully control new shopping development outside recognised centres and ensure it does not result in a significant loss of existing facilities;*
- (5) to promote high quality shopping environments.*

8.6 In formulating the strategy for shopping, the Council has had regard to Government guidance, particularly Planning Policy Guidance Note 6 'Town Centres and Retail Developments', and to the policies in the County Structure Plan. The County Structure Plan gives priority to maintaining and enhancing the quality, range and character of the main town centre shopping areas through shopping and other proposals (including traffic management). County Structure Plan policies would normally allow new shopping facilities within or contiguous with existing centres, and carefully control out of town development.

NEW SHOPPING DEVELOPMENT

8.7 In line with the shopping strategy and objectives, it is the Council's policy to direct the majority of new shopping development to the town centres as part of its firm commitment to maintaining and enhancing their vitality and viability, reducing reliance on the private car and encouraging alternative means of travel. Government guidance in PPG6 puts emphasis on a plan-led approach to promoting development in town centres, both through policies and the identification of locations and sites for development. The guidance also puts emphasis on the sequential approach to selecting sites for development and includes support for local centres.

8.8 The Council also recognises the important role of local neighbourhood centres, and small individual shops within the towns and villages in meeting mainly

local day to day needs, and will encourage further small scale provision where appropriate. In order to complement the role of the town centres, appropriate provision is made for non-food retail warehousing at Hailsham and Uckfield.

SH1 Within the District, new shopping facilities will be directed to the town centres of Crowborough, Uckfield, Heathfield, Hailsham and Polegate. Local shopping and service provision within neighbourhood centres and individual shops within towns and villages will be supported. Appropriate provision is made for non-food retail warehousing.

TOWN CENTRES

8.9 During the 1990's a number of new shopping developments have been completed in Wealden's town centres, principally based on large new supermarkets, with the most recent in Hailsham. Generally, there has been an increase in the number of service uses in the town centre e.g. building societies, estate agents.

8.10 The town centres are also important locations for a wide range of financial and professional services, business uses, leisure facilities and housing. A healthy and prosperous shopping centre is a key factor in attracting such investment, not only to the town centre itself but also to a much wider area. As well as being a focus of commercial and community activities, the town centres also provide an important source of employment.

8.11 The Council's commitment to maintaining and improving the vitality and viability of the town centres is based on a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach which includes a wide range of policies, proposals and initiatives. These include the following elements:-

- (1) encouraging the preparation of town centre strategies, action programmes and management plans;
- (2) encouraging a high quality of new shopping development within the main shopping areas and resisting the loss of retail floorspace;
- (3) encouraging new services, office development, community facilities and residential use, where appropriate;
- (4) promoting environmental improvements;
- (5) encouraging traffic management measures, including traffic calming and pedestrian schemes;
- (6) encouraging improved access and signing for cars and other motor vehicles, public transport, cyclists and

pedestrians, including the disabled and others with special access requirements;

(7) improving the level, quality and management of public car parking;

(8) maintaining a high standard of refuse collection and street cleaning.

8.12 The emphasis is placed on good management, which should relate to an agreed strategy and action plan for the centre. In pursuit of this the District Council will work closely with the Town Councils and Chambers of Commerce.

Main Shopping Area

8.13 Main shopping areas have been defined in order to provide an identifiable focus for shopping within which increased retail activity could take place by new development, redevelopment of existing floorspace and the more efficient use of existing floorspace and land. The main shopping areas have been carefully defined having regard to the extent of the existing shopping centre, the nature and character of land uses contiguous with it, and any future requirements for new shopping facilities. Where the Council is promoting new shopping development proposals, these have been included within the main shopping area together with any other areas contiguous with the existing shopping centre that are considered suitable for retail purposes.

8.14 On this basis, the main shopping areas represent a clear policy statement that further shopping proposals outside the defined area will normally be resisted. Whilst the main shopping areas as defined provide a focus for retail activity, they also serve to prevent inappropriate outward growth of the existing shopping centre, to protect the amenities of residential areas from encroachment by commercial activities and to resist the loss of housing and business land. The detailed considerations relating to the definition of each of the main shopping areas are contained in the relevant town chapter. The policies that apply within the main shopping areas are set out in the following paragraphs.

New Shopping Development

8.15 It is considered important to include a policy for encouraging new retail uses within the main shopping areas where the prime objective is to create a high quality shopping environment for residents, visitors and the business community itself. In addition to the general principles of layout and design in Policy EN27, particular emphasis will be placed on achieving a high standard of design and layout in new shopping development which should enhance the character and appearance of the town centre. For environmental and safety reasons, satisfactory rear service access should be provided where possible. Where necessary,

developers will be expected to contribute towards highway improvements.

SH2 Within the main shopping areas, as defined on the Proposals Map, new development and the redevelopment or conversion of existing properties for shopping uses will be encouraged and permitted when the following criteria are met:

- (1) the proposed development makes a positive contribution to enhancing the character and appearance of the town centre;**
- (2) for larger scale proposals, where appropriate, a comprehensive approach to development is taken;**
- (3) satisfactory rear service access is provided wherever possible;**
- (4) contributions are made by developers towards highway improvements should these become necessary because of the additional traffic generated.**

Service Uses

8.16 Within the main shopping areas, the prime consideration will be the continuity of the shopping frontage. However, the Council recognises that a variety of uses can help sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of the town centres. Financial and professional services provided direct to the visiting public (Use Class A2), often in shop type premises, are an established part of the shopping scene, e.g. building societies, estate agents, banks. Similarly premises providing food and drink (Use Class A3) are often located in shopping areas, e.g. restaurants, hot food takeaways and public houses.

8.17 Whilst the Council wishes to support a degree of diversification within the town centres, a careful balance needs to be struck between the occasional provision of service uses at ground floor level and the detrimental effects of a concentration resulting in areas of 'dead' frontage in terms of retail activity. Within the main shopping areas in Wealden, existing A2 uses are generally well dispersed, although there are some small groupings in certain locations. The incidence of A3 uses and other non-retail uses tends to be less frequent. However, a continuing concentration of service uses could undermine the retail function of the main shopping areas, and the Council will continue to resist proposals where this could result.

8.18 Where service uses at ground floor level are considered acceptable, it is important that visual amenity is maintained wherever possible by the

provision of a shop-type window display in keeping with the character of the shopping area. Whilst helping to improve the vitality of town centres, A3 uses are often available to the public outside normal shop hours, sometimes until late at night, which can bring associated environmental problems of smell, litter and noise. In considering A3 proposals, the Council will have full regard for the likely impact on the amenity of the area, particularly if there is residential property in the locality, and where necessary will require appropriate measures to be taken to ameliorate the effects.

SH3 Within the main shopping areas, as defined on the Proposals Map, proposals for the conversion of ground floor shops for financial and professional purposes within Use Class A2, food and drink purposes within Use Class A3 or other service uses will only be permitted where the following criteria are met:

- (1) there is no disruptive effect on the shopping frontage through a concentration of non-retail uses;**
- (2) provision is made for a window display appropriate to a shopping frontage which is in keeping with the character of the shopping area;**
- (3) there is no detrimental effect on the character or amenities of the area through smell, litter or noise.**

Amusement Centres

8.19 Proposals for amusement centres incorporating fruit machines, pin tables, video games, etc, within shopping areas, whilst adding to the vitality of a town centre, can often result in many objections being raised. In planning terms these normally relate to a loss of retail floorspace, the noise and disturbance that can result from both the activities carried on and the clientele using the centre. Those problems can be heightened by long opening hours and the external appearance of the premises, particularly where proposals include open fronted facades, outside display and use of machines, and illuminated signs. Open fronted facades and outside activities can add significantly to the noise and disturbance created. Other considerations of a more social or moral nature are the responsibility of the Council as a licensing authority under the Gaming Act 1968 and are not planning matters.

8.20 Although amusement centres are not frequently proposed in Wealden's main shopping areas, in considering such proposals the Council will pay full regard to protecting both their retail function and their

character and amenity. To this end, as with A2 and A3 uses, the Council will resist proposals which result in a concentration of non-retail uses which would result in areas of 'dead' frontage in terms of retail activity. In order to protect visual amenity and reduce noise and disturbance, a shop-type window display in keeping with the character of the main shopping area will be required and no open fronted facade with outside display and activity will be permitted. Where appropriate, the Council will require adequate noise attenuation measures to be undertaken such as sound-proofing and self closing doors, and will consider the use of conditions in any planning permission to limit opening hours.

SH4 Within the main shopping areas, as defined on the Proposals Map, proposals for the use of ground floor shops for amusement centres will only be permitted when:

(1) the criteria in Policy SH3 (1) and (2) are met;

(2) there is no display or activity outside the premises;

(3) there is no detrimental effect on the character or amenities of the area through noise and general disturbance.

Where appropriate, planning permission will be subject to conditions relating to noise attenuation, opening times and outside activities.

Offices

8.21 Other 'office' uses within the town centres that do not fall within Use Class A2 fall within Use Class B1. Conversion of existing premises above ground floor level within the main shopping area can provide valuable accommodation for local firms, provide additional job opportunities and generally broaden the base of the town centre without compromising the function of the main shopping area as a focus for retail activity. Such uses will normally be encouraged and permitted when the proposal conforms with the relevant policies in the Plan. However, the conversion of ground floor shops to B1 use would not normally be acceptable within the main shopping areas.

SH5 Within the main shopping areas, as defined on the Proposals Map, proposals for the use of existing premises above ground floor level for business purposes within Use Class B1 will be encouraged and permitted. The conversion of ground floor premises to business use within Use Class B1 will not be permitted.

Residential Uses

8.22 Within the town centres, there are often flats above existing shops and offices providing a valuable type of residential accommodation which helps to give a vitality to the area outside normal shopping hours as well as improving security of property. Government guidance emphasises the scope that may exist for bringing empty and under-used floorspace above shops back into use for housing purposes which, in certain cases, may be of an affordable nature. New residential uses above ground floor level would be acceptable subject to meeting normal planning criteria relating to parking and amenity. Although unlikely, the conversion of ground floor shops to residential use would not normally be acceptable.

SH6 Within the main shopping areas, as defined on the Proposals Map, proposals for the use of existing premises above ground floor level for residential purposes will be encouraged and permitted. The conversion of ground floor premises to residential use will not be permitted.

LOCAL SHOPPING

Neighbourhood Centres

8.23 Outside the town centres, neighbourhood centres such as Jarvis Brook and Whitehill Road, Crowborough; Framfield Road, Uckfield; and Hailsham Road, Heathfield, cater for the daily or casual needs of nearby residents and those passing by, as well as containing a number of more specialist shops. The important role of village centres is discussed later.

8.24 The Council recognises the importance of local shopping and service facilities for meeting the day to day needs of the community and has promoted small scale shopping proposals in association with major housing development at Stone Cross, Grovelands Farm, Hailsham, and Rocks Park, Uckfield. The Council wishes to support further provision within or contiguous with neighbourhood centres, but only when this is acceptable in terms of the scale of the proposal (including the impact on trade in the town centres), local need, and environmental, amenity and traffic considerations. Most neighbourhood centres include residential properties and are surrounded by residential areas.

8.25 Furthermore, some centres already suffer from traffic congestion and road safety problems, often resulting from a lack of off-street parking and servicing. Care will need to be taken to ensure that any new proposals would not be detrimental to the character and amenity of the neighbourhood centres, and in this regard the Council will ensure that proper

provision is made for access, car parking and servicing. Specific policies for the Jarvis Brook and Whitehill Road areas in Crowborough and Framfield Road, Uckfield, are contained in the relevant town chapter.

SH7 Outside the main shopping areas and the neighbourhood centre of Jarvis Brook, Crowborough, as defined on the Proposals Map, proposals for new shopping facilities within or contiguous with neighbourhood centres may be permitted when the following criteria are met:

(1) the need for the particular site and scale of proposal can be demonstrated to the Council's satisfaction;

(2) the proposals do not have a detrimental effect on the residential character and amenity of the area, particularly with regard to traffic congestion, access and parking.

'Corner Shops'

8.26 Outside the town and neighbourhood centres there are a large number of small individual 'corner shops' mainly serving important day to day needs in residential areas, particularly for the less mobile members of the community, as well as catering for occasional passing trade. Garage shops associated with petrol filling stations sometimes provide ancillary sales of food and other convenience goods. Whilst these are aimed principally at the travelling motorist, they can be of particular benefit to the community where provision in an area is lacking or where the shop remains open until late at night. The Council supports the provision of small convenience goods shops, when appropriate in their scale and location to serve local needs and where there is no detrimental impact on the residential character and amenity of an area, particularly with regard to car parking and traffic generation. The important role of village shops and services is discussed later.

SH8 Proposals for small individual shops which are not within the main shopping areas, as defined on the Proposals Map, nor within or contiguous with neighbourhood centres, may be permitted when the criteria at SH7 are met.

NEW RETAIL SITES – THE SEQUENTIAL TEST

8.27 Government guidance in PPG6 advises that in drawing up their development plans, local planning authorities should, after considering the need for new development, adopt a sequential approach to selecting sites for new retail development. A sequential

approach means that first preference should be for town centre sites, where suitable sites or buildings suitable for conversion are available, followed by edge-of-centre sites, district and local centres and only then out-of-centre sites in locations that are accessible by a choice of means of transport.

8.28 However, in view of the policies towards town centres, protecting the countryside and minimising vehicle trips, proposals for new retail facilities outside development boundaries will be resisted unless they conform with specific policies in the Plan.

8.29 In line with the sequential approach, the Council has made provision for new retail development in the town centres by the inclusion of development opportunities within the main shopping areas. As other sites will continue to come forward for retail development, a criteria based policy in line with the sequential test in PPG6 is considered appropriate. Priority is given to locating new retail development within the main shopping areas in the town centres which define the areas where new shopping development will be encouraged and permitted. Proposals within or contiguous with neighbourhood centres will also be considered in the light of Policy SH7 and the scale and function of the centre as set out in PPG6.

8.30 Whilst it is not the role of the Council to inhibit competition between retailers or methods of retailing, in line with County Structure Plan policy and Government guidance, the Council will wish to be satisfied that the impact of a proposal outside the main shopping areas on the viability and vitality of the town centre as a whole is acceptable, either individually or cumulatively with other proposals. The Council will require the submission of a retail impact study in appropriate cases.

8.31 The retention of an adequate supply of business land and premises in terms of amount, quality and distribution reflects County Structure Plan policy and is vital in relation to the aims of the Council's Economic Development Strategy. Similarly, the Council is required to maintain an adequate supply of housing land in relation to the County Structure Plan, in line with Government guidance. Therefore the Council would resist a significant loss of either housing or business land.

8.32 New shopping proposals, particularly large-scale schemes, can generate high amounts of traffic which can create or perpetuate problems of traffic congestion or road safety where the local road network is inadequate for the level of traffic involved. Such problems can also occur through inadequate car parking and substandard access which can often arise from the conversion of existing premises. In all cases provision should be appropriate for retail use.

8.33 In terms of accessibility, PPG6 advises that edge of centre locations will be determined by what is an easy walking distance for shoppers walking to, but more importantly away from, the store carrying shopping. The limits will be determined by local topography, including barriers to pedestrians, such as major roads and car parks, the strength of attraction of the town centre, and the attractiveness of the route to or from the town centre. However, most shoppers are unlikely to wish to walk more than 200 to 300 metres, especially when carrying shopping. The definition of edge of centre will vary between places, with large centres usually able to attract people to walk further than small centres.

8.34 In the case of out of centre locations, developments should be genuinely accessible by a variety of modes of transport, so that a significant proportion of customers and staff will be able to get to the development by means other than the car. The Council would seek to establish whether public transport would be sufficiently frequent, reliable, convenient and come directly into or past the development from a wide catchment area, although this may be less of a consideration with small developments to serve local needs. Development should be easily and safely accessible for pedestrians, cyclists and disabled people from the surrounding area.

SH9 Proposals for retail development should be located within main shopping areas, as defined on the Proposals Map. Where suitable sites within the main shopping areas are not available, proposals for sites on the edge of the main shopping areas or within or contiguous with neighbourhood centres will be permitted when criteria (1) to (5) below are met.

Proposals for out of centre development will not be permitted unless located within the development boundaries, as defined on the Proposals Map and suitable sites are not available either within or on the edge of the main shopping areas or within or contiguous with neighbourhood centres. Where such proposals are made they would be considered against criteria (1) to (5) below.

(1) either individually or cumulatively with other proposals or developments, there would be no serious effect on the vitality and viability of a town centre as a whole;

(2) there would be no significant net reduction in the amount, quality or distribution of land and premises available for business development;

(3) there would be no significant net reduction in the amount of land available for housing;

(4) the local highway network is adequate to accommodate the amount of additional traffic to be generated;

(5) proposals on the edge of main shopping areas should be within easy walking distance of the main shopping areas; out of centre proposals should be accessible by a choice of means of transport.

VILLAGE SHOPS

8.35 Several of the larger villages within the District provide a wide range of shopping facilities and services for both residents and passers-by as well as serving the needs of the surrounding rural areas. In many smaller villages, single shops, often with sub-Post Office facilities, play an important role in providing principally for food and other day to day needs. Generally, there has been a decline in village shopping provision as increased car ownership, personal mobility and customer choice has led to main food shopping at large supermarkets within the towns. This trend has clearly been to the detriment of the less mobile members of the community and has resulted in the need for longer car journeys.

8.36 In a number of cases village shops have been replaced by more specialist shops, such as antiques or furniture, particularly in areas attractive to tourists. However, such a change is outside the control of the Council. The conversion of village shops to residential use is difficult to resist when the continued commercial use has been demonstrated not to be economically viable. In these circumstances, the Council has limited control over the loss of village shops and Post Offices.

8.37 It is recognised that the retention of village shops and the provision of new shopping and service facilities in the villages will be based largely on commercial considerations and, in many cases, the personal commitment of the shopkeeper concerned. In a few smaller villages, following closure of a shop, Post Office facilities and newsagencies have been accommodated in alternative premises such as village halls or public houses, often with the encouragement of the Parish Council and the Sussex Rural Community Council. The Council undertakes a number of initiatives itself and in association with the Sussex Rural Community Council to encourage investment in village shops.

8.38 The Council wishes to see the current level and choice of village shops and services maintained and improved. New shopping facilities should be

appropriate to the village concerned and proposals will therefore be considered in the light of local need, scale and location, and the requirement for a particular site as set out in Policies SH7 and SH8.

8.39 Adequate and convenient parking is important in order to maintain the viability of village centres, and this needs careful examination when considering the provision of off-street car parks and traffic management measures.

SH10 Within the villages, the Council will seek to maintain and improve the level and choice of village shops and services by:

(1) supporting proposals for new shopping facilities when they conform with the criteria in Policies SH7 or SH8;

(2) considering the needs of shops and local services in planning the provision of off-street public car parks;

(3) considering the trading viability of shops and services in the future implementation of traffic regulations or traffic management measures.

SHOPPING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Farm Shops

8.40 The Council is anxious to prevent a proliferation of retail development in the countryside in view of the landscape and environmental impact, the possible effect on existing shopping centres, local and village shops, and the Plan's strategy to minimise unnecessary vehicle trips. However, a number of retail uses such as garden centres and farm shops do occur in the countryside, and it is recognised that the sale of produce derived wholly from the relevant holding or enterprise does not itself normally require planning permission. Whilst an element of imported produce is sometimes sold in farm shops, particularly in view of the seasonal nature of produce, this should not be of such a scale as to create a separate retail use, unrelated to the original farm holding or enterprise. Where permission is granted for the sale of produce not from the holding, planning conditions will be required to ensure that the sale of home grown produce remains the principal use. In these circumstances the Council will also take into account the advice in Paragraph 3.21 of PPG6. Proposals for garden centres will be considered in the light of Policy SH12.

SH11 Outside the development boundaries, as defined on the Proposals Map, proposals involving the sale of agricultural, horticultural and other produce which is not principally derived from the relevant holding or enterprise will not be permitted unless:-

(1) the sale of produce derived from the relevant holding or enterprise remains the principal use;

(2) the proposed development is not intrusive on the landscape nor detrimental to the rural character of the locality;

(3) the additional traffic generated does not have an adverse impact on local roads by reason of their inadequate capacity or rural character;

(4) the site has good accessibility to an existing settlement and is not in an isolated countryside location;

(5) the proposals would not reduce countryside gaps which are considered important to prevent the coalescence of settlements.

Garden Centres

8.41 In recent years, as leisure time has increased, garden centres have become increasingly popular with car-borne shoppers who are able to buy a wide range of goods, often in bulk, which can meet most of their gardening needs. Garden centres usually require large areas of land for open display of plants, garden buildings, furniture and ornaments and other goods, as well as large buildings providing additional sales areas and sometimes refreshment facilities. Furthermore, such development often includes exterior lighting, advertisements and signs, large areas of car parking and new access arrangements. These characteristics can be intrusive on the landscape and detrimental to the rural character although in some cases new planting can help mitigate their visual impact over time. In terms of their impact, garden centres contrast sharply with a nursery where glasshouses or polythene tunnels are normally the main features.

8.42 In view of the large areas of land required for garden centres, there has been pressure to locate in the countryside, with some having grown incrementally from a small nursery operation. Whilst a countryside location may be appropriate, particular care will be taken to ensure that development is acceptable in terms of its impact on the landscape and rural character of a locality, the associated traffic generation, accessibility considerations and protection of countryside gaps. For these reasons an isolated countryside location would not be favoured.

SH12 Proposals for new garden centres and the expansion of existing ones outside the development boundaries, as defined on the

Proposals Map, will be permitted when the following criteria are met:

- (1) the proposed development is not intrusive on the landscape nor detrimental to the rural character of the locality;**
- (2) the additional traffic generated does not have an adverse impact on local roads by reason of their inadequate capacity or rural character;**
- (3) the site has good accessibility to an existing settlement and is not in an isolated countryside location;**
- (4) the proposals would not reduce countryside gaps which are considered important to prevent the coalescence of settlements.**

Implementation

8.43 All the policies in the Shopping Chapter will be implemented by the Council, primarily through its development control function. Whilst a countryside location may be appropriate, particular care will be taken to ensure that development is acceptable in terms of its impact on the landscape and rural character of a locality, the associated traffic generation, accessibility considerations and protection of countryside gaps.

Monitoring

8.44 The key areas to be monitored include:-

- (1) new retail/service floorspace;*
- (2) loss of retail floorspace;*
- (3) ground floor changes of use in main shopping areas;*
- (4) non-food retail warehouse planning applications.*