

Chapter 10

Shopping

Context

10.1 Shopping is a vital activity for the well-being of Wealden's residents, 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 a framework for meeting the shopping needs of the local population, whilst having regard to the expected increase in different types of expenditure and the changing pattern of shopping brought about by increasing personal mobility.

10.2 Within Wealden, the majority of shopping floorspace is concentrated in the town centres of Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Polegate and Uckfield. The remainder is found in the larger village centres, local 'neighbourhood' centres and retail warehouses within or on the edges of the towns. In some smaller villages, single shops also have an important role, particularly for the less mobile members of the community.

10.3 Outside the District, Tunbridge Wells and Eastbourne are popular shopping destinations, offering both greater choice for comparison shopping and large 'out-of-centre' convenience (i.e. food and other day-to-day purchases) stores. These shopping centres serve wide catchment areas and their continued expansion is likely to limit the growth potential of town centres in Wealden, particularly with regard to the provision of higher value comparison goods, such as furniture and clothes.

10.4 Until recently PPG6, *Town Centres and Retail Development*, set out the Government's approach to retail development. It stated that one of the fundamental objectives of government planning policy is to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres, and advocated a "sequential approach" to the location of new development. This means that the 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.

10.5 Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 6, *Planning for Town Centres*, has recently replaced

PPG6. Many of the policies in PPS6 reproduce, or are closely based on, the old policies in PPG6. The need to promote vital and viable town centres remains a key Government objective and the "sequential approach" continues to be used as a means of achieving this aim.

10.6 The retail policies of the Structure Plan reflect the sequential approach set out in PPG6 and aim to safeguard existing shopping centres whilst making provision for new forms of retailing which increase the range and quality of shopping opportunities for consumers. Changes in the retail sector and patterns of consumer demand are leading to a demand for new and larger store formats within Wealden, principally in the convenience sector, but otherwise it is expected that the demand for new retail development in the District will be relatively modest.

10.7 The Council is committed to maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of its town centres and is actively working with the town revitalisation partnerships in the preparation and implementation of town centre strategies, action programmes and projects.

Strategy

10.8 The Plan's strategy for shopping is to maintain and, where possible, improve the level and choice of retail facilities in Wealden in order to meet the needs of all sections of the community, recognising the existing pattern of shopping provision, the demand for new forms of retailing, and the importance of sustaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of the town centres. The key objectives are:-

(1) *to meet the need for new shopping facilities within the District in locations which minimise the need to travel and are readily accessible by a choice of means of transport, including walking, cycling and public transport;*

(2) *to maintain and enhance the role of the town centres and larger village centres in providing a focus for shopping, service facilities and employment opportunities for the local community;*

(3) *to resist proposals which would adversely affect the vitality and viability of existing shopping centres;*

(4) *to support the provision of shops and services which meet the day-to-day needs of local communities, particularly outside of the towns;*

(5) *to safeguard the provision of rural shops and services.*

Towns

10.9 In accordance with the shopping strategy and objectives, it is the Council's policy to direct the majority of new retail development to the town centres as part of its firm commitment to sustaining and enhancing their vitality and viability, reducing reliance on the car, and encouraging alternative means of travel. An assessment of retail capacity in the town centres over the plan period was carried out by consultants in 2001, and a site has been identified for further new shopping development in Hailsham, as described in Chapter 15. The assessment indicates that Uckfield could also support additional retail floorspace but it has not been possible to find a suitable site for development, as explained in Chapter 18.

10.10 The town centres are important to the economic, social and cultural life of the District and provide a range of financial and professional services, business uses, community and leisure facilities, as well as shops. However, a healthy and prosperous shopping centre is a key factor in attracting such investment, not only to the town centres themselves, but also to a much wider area. For the purposes of applying both the sequential test set out in PPS6 and local shopping policies, Wealden's town centres are defined as 'main shopping centres' in the Local Plan. This also conforms with the approach taken in the Structure Plan.

Main shopping centres

10.11 The Council will generally support and encourage proposals that would improve the quality and, where appropriate, the quantity of retail facilities within the main shopping centres. All proposals will be expected to achieve a high standard of design, in accordance with the relevant policies in Chapter 5 of the Local Plan. Large-scale developments should increase the potential for shoppers to use public transport and

to walk or cycle with convenience and safety. Adequate, appropriately located and well-signed servicing and parking will also be required, together with appropriate highway measures to ensure that effective traffic management is achieved where necessary.

Policy SH1

Within the main shopping centres of Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Polegate and Uckfield, as defined on the Proposals Map, proposals for retail development will be permitted if the following criteria are met:

- (1) the proposed development will make a positive contribution to enhancing the character and appearance of the town centre;**
- (2) satisfactory rear service access is provided wherever possible;**
- (3) the proposed development is easily accessible by a choice of means of transport, including public transport, walking and cycling;**
- (4) in the case of larger scale proposals, where appropriate, a comprehensive approach to development is taken.**

Primary shopping frontages

10.12 The vitality and viability of town centres depends, amongst other things, on developing a wide range of attractions and amenities and the Council wishes to encourage a mix and diversity of uses within them. Different but complementary uses during the day and in the evening can reinforce each other, enhancing the attractiveness of the town centre to residents and visitors, extending shopping visits and encouraging dual trips. A variety of different uses also assists in providing increased activity and natural surveillance.

10.13 The Council is therefore keen to promote mixed-use developments in the town centres. Class A2 uses, such as banks and building societies, and Class A3 uses, such as cafes and restaurants, generate pedestrian activity and can enhance the attractiveness of the main shopping centres. There is also considered to be scope for increasing the amount of housing, offices, and

leisure facilities. In line with Government advice in PPS6, a number of town centre sites are allocated for a mix of uses, as set out in the individual town chapters.

10.14 Nevertheless, a careful balance needs to be struck between the occasional provision of service or other non-retail uses at ground floor level and the potentially adverse impact of a concentration of such uses in locations where they could undermine the retail function of the main shopping centre. Primary shopping frontages, which should predominantly remain in retail use at ground floor level, have therefore been defined in the main shopping centres of Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Polegate and Uckfield.

10.15 Where a change of use from retail to Class A2 or A3 use is considered acceptable in a primary shopping frontage, it is important that visual interest for passers-by is maintained at street level. This may be achieved by the provision of a window display or by providing views into the building to make its function apparent. At the very least, windows can put 'eyes on the street' and contribute to safety as well as interest. In the case of proposals for A3 uses and amusement centres, full regard will also be had to the potential impact of smells, litter, parking, noise and other disturbance on the amenities of the area. Where appropriate, the Council will impose conditions to control noise, opening hours and outside activities.

Policy SH2

Within the primary shopping frontages, as defined on the Proposals Map, changes of use of ground floor shops to Class A2 financial and professional services, to Class A3 food and drink use, or to other service uses will be permitted if the following criteria are met:

- (1) there is no disruptive effect on the frontage through a concentration of non-retail uses;**
- (2) provision is made for views into the building or for a window display in keeping with the character of the frontage;**
- (3) the development would not create an unacceptable impact on the character and amenities of the locality through smell, litter, noise or other disturbance.**

Changes of use to B1 offices or residential use at ground floor level will not be permitted.

10.16 Outside of the primary shopping frontages, and within the main shopping centres, a diversification of uses will be encouraged, in accordance with Government advice in PPS6. To this end, the loss of retail premises will not be resisted. However, Policy BS5 of the Plan would generally prevent the conversion of offices, or other business premises falling within Use Classes B1-B8, to other uses.

Edge of centre locations

10.17 Only if it can be demonstrated that no suitable site is available within the main shopping centre, will retail proposals on edge-of-centre sites be considered. This follows the sequential approach set out in PPS6. In accordance with Government guidance and Structure Plan Policies, it will also be necessary to demonstrate that the impact of the proposal on the vitality and viability of the town centre would be acceptable. The Council will require the submission of a retail impact study in appropriate cases.

10.18 The definition of edge-of-centre will depend on the specific circumstances of each town. It is important not to risk diluting the retailing focus of the town centres and potentially diminishing their attractiveness. The primary consideration will be the ease with which shoppers can walk between the proposed store and the main shopping centre. This will be determined by a range of factors including distance, the overall quality and convenience of the physical linkages, barriers to movement such as busy roads or car parks, and local topography.

Policy SH3

On the edges of the main shopping centres and within the development boundaries of Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Polegate and Uckfield, proposals for retail development will be permitted if the following criteria are met:

- (1) a need for the development has been demonstrated;**
- (2) no sites that are suitable, viable and likely to become available within a reasonable period of time can be**

identified in the adjacent main shopping centre;

(3) there would be no adverse effect on the vitality and viability of the town centre;

(4) the proposal is within easy walking distance of the main shopping centre;

(5) there would be no detrimental impact on the amenities of residential properties in the immediate locality;

(6) the proposal meets criteria (3) and (4) of Policy SH1.

Out of centre locations

10.19 Outside of the main shopping centres, there is a wide range of retail facilities, including smaller local centres, individual shops or parades serving the needs of their immediate neighbourhoods, and large retail warehouses, usually located on the edge of the built-up area. The Council recognises the importance of neighbourhood shopping and service facilities, particularly in helping to reduce the need to travel.

10.20 It is also recognised that sites for retail development may come forward in out-of-centre locations during the Plan period, in order to meet changing consumer and retailer demands. Accordingly, Policy SH4 sets out the criteria for considering the provision of new shopping facilities which would meet a local need that cannot be provided within or on the edge of the main shopping centres. It addresses both small-scale individual shops and larger developments, such as retail warehouses.

10.21 Further retail provision within or on the edge of existing neighbourhood centres will be supported, provided that there is no unacceptable impact on the residential amenities of the surrounding area. Outside of neighbourhood centres, the Council will also encourage proposals for small-scale convenience shops which provide for the day-to-day shopping needs of local communities. For the purposes of Policy SH4, and consistent with the approach taken in the Structure Plan, small-scale is defined as 500 square metres (gross) floorspace or less.

10.22 Proposals for larger shops would only be supported where there is a clearly demonstrated need for the development, and a lack of suitable

sites available in or on the edge of the main shopping area. A sequential approach will be applied in assessing the suitability of alternative sites, taking account of the level of need for the proposed development, with the relevant area of search depending on the nature and scale of the proposal and the catchment area it would serve.

10.23 In all cases, it will be essential to ensure that the proposed development would not adversely effect the vitality and viability of existing shopping centres, nor result in unacceptable traffic or other environmental impacts. The Council is required to maintain an adequate supply of housing land in relation to Structure Plan requirements, and the retention of an adequate supply of business land and premises, in terms of amount, quality and distribution, is also important. The significant loss of either housing or business land to retail development will therefore be resisted.

Policy SH4

Outside of the main shopping centres, edge-of-centre locations, and allocated neighbourhood centres, but within the development boundaries for Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Polegate and Willingdon, and Uckfield, proposals for retail development will be permitted where one of the following criteria are met:

- (1) the proposal is within or on the edge of an existing neighbourhood shopping centre; or**
- (2) the proposal comprises a small-scale convenience shop which would provide for the daily shopping needs of a local residential neighbourhood; or**
- (3) no sites that are suitable, viable and likely to become available within a reasonable period of time can be identified within or on the edge of the main shopping centre.**

In addition, proposals should meet all of the following criteria:

- (a) a need for the development has been demonstrated;**
- (b) the proposal in itself, or cumulatively with other similar developments, would not have an adverse effect on the vitality or viability of existing shopping centres;**

- (c) there would be no significant net reduction in the amount, quality or distribution of land and premises available for business development;
- (d) there would be no significant net reduction in the amount of land available for housing;
- (e) the proposal is accessible by a choice of means of transport, including public transport, walking and cycling;
- (f) the proposal would not give rise to unsatisfactory traffic impacts, in terms of highway congestion, access and parking;
- (g) the proposal would not be detrimental to the character or amenities of the surrounding area.

- (3) the proposal's accessibility by a choice of means of transport, including an assessment of the number or proportion of customers likely to arrive by different means of transport, and how the proposal will contribute to the objective of reducing the need to travel, particularly by car;
- (4) the likely changes in travel patterns over the catchment area;
- (5) any significant environmental impacts, including those on existing main shopping centres.

Criteria (1), (2) and (5) will not be applied to proposals on sites allocated for retail development in this Local Plan.

Large-scale shopping proposals

10.24 In line with Government guidance and Structure Plan policy, all large shopping proposals (defined by the Structure Plan as 2,500 square metres or more gross floorspace) will be required to demonstrate that their shopping, transport and environmental impacts are acceptable. In such circumstances, applicants will be expected to submit supporting information which should include a detailed assessment of both the quantitative and qualitative impacts of the proposed development.

Policy SH5

Proposals for retail development of 2,500 square metres (gross) floorspace or above will be permitted if the following requirements can be demonstrated:

- (1) the proposal, by itself or cumulatively with other recently completed or planned developments, will not seriously affect the vitality and viability of existing main shopping centres;
- (2) the applicant's sequential approach to site selection and the availability of suitable alternative sites;

Villages

10.25 Outside of the towns, there are a number of village centres which provide a range of shopping, service and community facilities. These centres perform an important role in terms of providing the day-to-day needs of local residents, particularly the less mobile, enabling different needs to be met in a single trip, and providing a focal point for rural communities.

10.26 The Council wishes to encourage further investment in retail and service facilities, particularly new food and day to day provision, within the larger village centres. Main shopping centres have therefore been defined in accordance with Structure Plan policy (i.e. village centres with over 30 retail and service premises) within the following settlements:

Alfriston
Forest Row
Mayfield
Pevensey Bay
Wadhurst

10.27 Within or on edges of the main shopping centres, new retail proposals will be supported provided that the vitality and viability of the centre or other shopping centres would not be damaged. The scale of provision should allow sensitive integration into the character of the shopping centre, and avoid creating an unsatisfactory impact on residential amenities or highway conditions. Where a proposal is made for a site on the edge of the main shopping

centre, it will need to be demonstrated that there is a need for the development and that no suitable sites are available within the centre itself.

Policy SH6

Within the main shopping centres of Alfriston, Forest Row, Mayfield, Pevensey Bay and Wadhurst, as defined on the Proposals Map, proposals for retail development will be permitted if the following criteria are met:

- (1) the proposal, in itself or cumulatively with other similar developments, would not have an adverse effect on the vitality and viability of existing shopping centres;**
- (2) the proposal is of a scale appropriate to the character and function of the main shopping centre;**
- (3) the proposal would not give rise to unsatisfactory traffic impacts, in terms of highway congestion, access and parking;**
- (4) there would be no detrimental impact on the amenities of residential properties in the immediate locality;**
- (5) the proposal is accessible by a choice of means of transport, including public transport, walking and cycling.**

Policy SH7

On the edges of the main shopping centres and within the development boundaries of Alfriston, Forest Row, Mayfield, Pevensey Bay and Wadhurst, proposals for retail development will be permitted if the following criteria are met:

- (1) a need for the development has been demonstrated;**
- (2) no sites that are suitable, viable and likely to become available within a reasonable period of time can be identified in the adjacent main shopping centre;**
- (3) the proposal meets the criteria set out in Policy SH6.**

10.28 Outside the main village shopping centres, individual shops and other services, such as public houses, can play a crucial role in maintaining villages as viable communities, supporting the rural economy and helping to reduce the need to travel. The Council wishes to see the level and choice of village shops and services maintained and enhanced wherever possible. Small-scale shopping proposals (defined by the Structure Plan as 500 square metres gross floorspace or less) will therefore be supported where they meet the criteria set out in Policy SH8, relating to considerations of need, scale and location.

Policy SH8

Outside of the main village shopping centres and edge of centre locations, proposals for convenience shops or specialist retail outlets within villages will be permitted if the following criteria are met:

- (1) the proposal does not exceed 500 square metres (gross) floorspace;**
- (2) a need for the particular site has been demonstrated;**
- (3) the proposal is easily accessible by walking and cycling;**
- (4) there would be no detrimental effect on the character or amenities of the locality, particularly by reason of traffic congestion, access and parking.**

10.29 It is recognised that the retention of village shops is largely determined by commercial considerations and, in many instances, the personal commitment of the shopkeeper concerned. Nevertheless, the loss of village shops and services, particularly convenience shops and public houses, will be resisted unless there is sound evidence that the current use is not viable. In the latter respect, the Council may ask for applications or change of use or redevelopment to be supported by financial information, including any relevant details of investment into the promotion/improvement of the business, and any marketing strategy employed.

Policy SH9

Outside of the town development boundaries, as defined on the Proposals Map, proposals for a change of use or redevelopment which would result in the loss of a shop, public house or other local service use important to a village will only be permitted where either:

- (1) there is an existing alternative facility within the village or located within easy walking or cycling distance; or
- (2) it can be demonstrated that the existing use is no longer viable.

Countryside

10.30 The Council seeks to prevent inappropriate retail development in the countryside in view of the landscape and environmental impact, the possible effect on existing shopping centres and village shops, and the Plan's strategy to minimise unnecessary vehicle trips. Planning permission is not required for a farm shop, ancillary to the main agricultural use, providing it sells produce derived from the farm itself. Such shops can provide a valuable local facility, an additional source of income for the farm and can help to sustain the rural economy. However, the sale of produce or goods produced elsewhere does require permission and such proposals will be carefully controlled by conditions to ensure that the sale of home-grown produce remains the principal use.

Policy SH10

Outside of 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 be permitted if the following criteria are met:

- (1) the proposal does not exceed 500 square metres (gross) floorspace;
- (2) the sale of produce derived from the relevant holding or enterprise remains the principal use;

(3) the proposal is not intrusive in the landscape, nor detrimental to the rural character of the locality;

(4) the additional traffic generated does not have an adverse impact of local roads due to their inadequate capacity or existing rural character.

10.31 In recent years, garden centres have become increasingly popular with car-borne shoppers who are able to buy a wide range of goods, often in bulk, to meet most of their gardening needs. These centres usually require an extensive area of land for the display of plants, garden buildings and garden furniture, together with a large building for additional sales. Furthermore, they often incorporate restaurant facilities and require exterior lighting, advertisement, large areas for car parking and new access arrangements. Such characteristics can make them intrusive in the landscape and detrimental to the rural character of the countryside.

10.32 The large areas of land required for garden centres, together with the fact that they often develop out of an existing nursery operation, make it inevitable that many seek a rural location. New proposals will be carefully considered in the light of the Council's objectives to minimise car journeys associated with retail development, to protect the vitality and viability of existing shopping centres and to protect the landscape and rural character of the countryside. Particular care will be taken to ensure that such development is acceptable, and conditions may be imposed, or a legal agreement sought, to restrict the type of goods sold. Garden centres in isolated rural locations or which would reduce important gaps of countryside between settlements are unlikely to be considered acceptable.

Policy SH11

Outside of the development boundaries, as defined on the Proposals Map, proposals for new or expanded garden centres will only be permitted if the following criteria are met:

- (1) the proposal is not intrusive in 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 due to their inadequate capacity or existing rural character;**
- (3) the site has good accessibility to an existing settlement and is not in an isolated location.**