

20.1 SWDP 29: Protection and Promotion of Shopping Choice

Reasoned Justification

20.1 Satisfying the shopping and leisure needs of South Worcestershire residents close to their home or workplace will contribute to sustainable development and growth by retaining more expenditure locally. Local shops and other services must be enhanced and past trends that have eroded local facilities reversed if this Development Plan's objectives of: reducing the causes of modelled climate change; minimising the need to travel; and protecting the environment are to be achieved.

20.2 This key objective will be achieved by focusing retail development on existing centres in order to strengthen and where necessary regenerate them. Wherever possible, growth should be accommodated by more efficient use of land and buildings within existing centres. This approach will help to maintain the historic character of town centres and provides opportunities to minimise the consumption of non renewable resources by reusing existing buildings and reducing the need to travel to out of centre retail parks. Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth, requires Local Planning Authorities to:

- plan positively on the basis of evidence for new floor space to secure economic growth and provide for people's retail and leisure needs in the most appropriate and accessible centre;
- define the extent of centres and primary and secondary shopping frontages;
- consider setting local thresholds for impact assessments and specific local impacts that should be addressed by impact assessments;
- and identify sites suitable for town centre uses.

20.3 To support the sustainable development of town and local centres it is important that full use is made of existing buildings. Residential, office or leisure use of upper floors above retail premises increases footfall, provides passive surveillance and encourages investment that avoids the decline in the condition of premises.

20.4 Responses to previous Local Development Framework consultations have included:

- there should be stronger support for non-chain retailers;
- shopping needs should be satisfied close to resident's homes and workplaces;
- to compete centres need to extend opening hours into the evening;
- edge of town shopping should be discouraged;
- too many superstores and there should be greater shopping choice;
- protect local shopping centres;
- better access and parking is important;
- need to boost the retail offer for visitors and tourists;
- should be open to alternative uses for retail premises in unviable locations;
- village shops are a vital part of communities and they should be protected while allowing them to diversify and grow organically.

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Retail development that is appropriate in scale, helps to retain an existing centre's market share and enhances the shopping experience will be supported. Retail development that undermines the vitality/viability of a centre or compromises the retail hierarchy will not be supported. Any retail development proposal over 1,000 square metres located outside the defined town centres must be accompanied by an Impact Assessment.

Planning permission for retail development outside of the centres as shown on the Proposals Map will not be granted unless the applicant has demonstrated that:

- the scale of development is appropriate to the location and host community;
- the development would not adversely affect the vitality and viability of a centre;
- access by all travel modes and particularly bus, cycle and walking is convenient/safe and will be improved;
- the development provides other benefits that include regeneration, employment and social inclusion; and
- the development enhances the cultural heritage of the proposed location.

Within the Primary Shopping Frontages, as shown on the Proposals Map change of use from retail (use class A1) or the extension of existing non A1 uses into adjoining premises at ground floor level will not be permitted.

Within the Secondary Shopping Frontages as shown on the Proposals Map change of use from retail (use class A1) to non-retail uses in classes A2, A3, A4, A5, D1, D2 will normally be permitted provided:

- the proposed use will not result in a continuous frontage of two or more non A1 retail units. (Units are defined as a shop front width of about 6 metres; larger units will be assessed in terms of unit length);
- a minimum of 50% of units in each defined Secondary Shopping Frontage are retained in A1 retail use⁽¹⁾;
- the proposed use will not result in the proportion of units, in the street or part of the street defined as a secondary shopping frontage, in A3, A4 and A5 use to exceed 30%
- a shop window will be retained at all times;
- the proposal would not preclude the full use of the premises avoiding vacant floors over ground floor uses and providing a separate entrance for office, leisure or residential use of upper floors;
- ground floor residential uses do not form part of the proposal.

¹ The intention is to retain at least 50% of each street frontage in A1 use, i.e. where both sides of the same street are designated as Secondary Shopping Frontages each side would be considered separately.

The following District, Local & Neighbourhood Shopping Centres are shown on the Proposals Map:

District Centres:

- Barnards Green, Malvern
- Malvern Link, Malvern
- Broadway
- St John's District Centre, Worcester
- Tenbury Wells
- Upton-Upon-Severn

Local Centres:

- Davies Road, Evesham
- Fairfield, Evesham
- Westlands, Droitwich Spa
- Witton, Droitwich Spa
- Fulbert Road, Pershore
- Ankerage Green, Worcester
- Barbourne, Worcester
- Bath Road, Worcester
- Northwick, Worcester
- Cranham Drive, Worcester
- St Peters, Worcester

Neighbourhood Centres:

- Hampton, Evesham
- Cheltenham Road, Evesham
- Shrubbery Road, Drakes Broughton
- Ambleside Drive, Worcester
- Bath Road, Worcester
- Brickfields, Worcester
- Brindley Road, Worcester
- Canada Way, Worcester
- Derwent Close, Worcester
- Dines Green, Worcester
- Kilbury Drive, Worcester
- London Road, Worcester
- Monarch Drive, Worcester
- Northwick, Worcester
- Rainbow Hill, Worcester
- Rose Avenue, Worcester
- Ronkswood, Worcester

- Link Top, Malvern
- Pickersleigh Road, Malvern

The conversion of retail floor space within these centres to alternative uses not providing a retail or commercial service will not normally be supported unless the equivalent replacement floorspace is provided as part of the development proposal.

Proposals for new local retailing or other public facilities and services will be expected to consider suitable sites in existing District & Local Centres before promoting development in more isolated locations.

In order to preserve the variety and vitality of local shopping opportunities planning permission for the change of use from A1 retailing to A2, A3, A5, D1 or D2 uses will not be permitted within district and local shopping centres:

1. Where it would result in two or more non A1 retail units in a row; or
2. Where it would result in less than 50% of all units within the centre being in A1 use.

The loss of village, neighbourhood and corner shops to non-retailing uses will only be considered if there is an alternative equivalent facility within safe walking distance⁽²⁾ and evidence is presented that the premises are no longer viable⁽³⁾ for any retail or community use.

Planning permission for new village and neighbourhood shops will be granted provided they are of an appropriate scale and it can be demonstrated that they will not undermine the vitality, viability or variety of existing village facilities or local centres, and that there are no adverse impacts on residential amenity and road safety.

New or expanded farm shops, garden centres or petrol filling stations will be permitted provided:

- They would not undermine the viability or vitality of nearby town or district shopping centres or other local shopping facilities;
- they would serve a demonstrable local need;
- the proposal would make use of redundant or under used buildings;
- the site is accessible by walking, cycling and public transport;
- in the case of farm shops, the range of goods to be sold is restricted to foodstuffs, plants and rural craft products, produced locally.

² Walking distance is generally considered to be 800m or less.

³ Where premises have been offered for lease and freehold sale, at realistic rents or prices as freehold, with a local property agent for more than two years without securing a new tenant it will be accepted that it has been demonstrated that there is no alternative viable retailing use.

The creation of new or extensions to existing garden centres or farm shops in the open countryside and unrelated to a settlement will only be acceptable if it is clearly ancillary to and on the site of an existing horticultural business or existing farming operation.

To control the over concentration and proliferation of food and drink outlets within particular locations a Supplementary Planning Document will be prepared setting out appropriate criteria to control the potential adverse impacts of these retail uses.

Links to the Objectives

20.5 The Preferred Option policy for the protection and Promotion of Shopping Choice supports the following objectives:

- Economic Prosperity that is Shared by All objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4;
- Stronger Communities objective 4;
- Improving Health and Wellbeing objective 1.

Shoppers on Pershore High Street



Alternative Options Considered

Different policies for each of the three Local Planning Authorities.

20.6 This is an attractive option as it would allow the three districts to retain policies that more closely reflect existing Local Plan policies. This option however does not support the development of a joint planning approach for the three districts, is not supported by any specific evidence of need and would result in an unnecessary proliferation of policies without sufficient justification.

A suite of policies that replicate existing Local Plan policies.

20.7 Previous Local Plans have contained a number of retail policies that often repeat requirements which seek to retain retail premises in a retail use. The planning system since 2004 has sought to simplify and reduce the amount of planning policy therefore if it is possible to achieve the same planning outcome with a single policy

this option should be favoured. The designation of primary and secondary shopping frontages with clear criteria when a change of use away from A1 retail is appropriate can be accomplished with a single policy.

Rely on National Planning Policy.

20.8 This would not support local distinctiveness or the established hierarchy of town, district and neighbourhood centres. Without a local policy some communities will lose local shopping opportunities and have to travel further to satisfy convenience shopping needs.

Only defining town and local centres.

20.9 This would be a lighter touch option but like the option of relying on National Planning Policy it would mean that many small Neighbourhood Centres and shops could be more easily converted to other uses without first demonstrating that a retail use is no longer viable and thereby deprive communities of local retail services.

Re-defining the boundary of the Worcester City Central Shopping Area.

20.10 The existing Central Shopping Area boundary is already defined fairly generously taking in areas such as the Cornmarket car park which are not currently in retail use. The current boundary in most places does however follow physical divides such as roads. Alternative Shopping Area boundaries would either be overly complicated, exclusively following individual property boundaries or enclose such a larger area that the dilution and subsequent fragmentation of the shopping area would be possible.