

11. TOWN CENTRES AND SHOPPING

National Policy

- 11.1. The Government's objective is to achieve sustainable economic growth, and an important contribution to this is promoting the vitality and viability of town and other centres. New economic growth is to be focused in existing centres, where there are a wide range of high quality and accessible services.
- 11.2. To achieve this, national policy looks to town centres to provide a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community services and residential development. Identified retail and leisure needs are expected to be met in full and an expansion of town centres may be needed to ensure a sufficient supply of suitable sites.
- 11.3. A diverse range of complementary evening and night-time uses are encouraged but account town centres are the first locations to be considered for new retail development and other town centre uses. Planning applications for town centre uses will be considered using the sequential approach. This will focus main town centre uses firstly within or where appropriate on the edge of existing town centres, and only then will consideration be given to out of centre locations. Flexibility in format may be required to take account of the limitations within town centres due to designated Conservation Areas and historic buildings. Potential sites should be assessed for their availability, suitability and viability and for their ability to meet the full extent of assessed quantitative and qualitative needs.
- 11.4. For out of centre developments, an impact assessment will be required if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold which is by default 2,500 sq m unless specifically adjusted by the Council.
- 11.5. These detailed issues will be addressed in Part 2 of the Local Plan (Non-Strategic Policies and Sites), Planning Briefs and any Neighbourhood Plans.
- 11.6. Leisure, recreation and culture, both in and out of town centres are examined in more detail in Chapter 12 Leisure, Recreation and Culture, while tourism and business uses are included within Chapter 10 Employment and the Economy.

The Waverley Retail Hierarchy

- 11.7. Town and local centres are key places where people shop, socialise and access a range of services and facilities. Many in Waverley have historic environments which should be carefully protected and enhanced where appropriate. They are also rapidly changing through the rise of internet shopping and are subject to significant competition from nearby centres outside the Borough. Given the rural nature of much of Waverley, the town centres are relatively small and few in number. Each centre performs different functions in meeting the needs of the Borough.

11.8. Town centre areas have been defined in Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere and Cranleigh. These are the centres in the Borough where retail activity is concentrated, along with leisure, business, and other typical town centre uses. There are also a number of local centres serving the smaller settlements and these have been identified in Farncombe, Bramley and Milford. The remaining retail facilities in Waverley are very local in nature and consist of neighbourhood and individual village shops serving immediate local needs. To reflect this, the following hierarchy of centres has been defined:-

- Town Centres: Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere High Street and Wey Hill and Cranleigh village centre,
- Local Centres: Bramley, Farncombe, and Milford.
- Neighbourhood and village shops
- In addition to the existing centres, a new local centre will be provided as part of any new settlement permitted at the Dunsfold Aerodrome site.

Waverley's Town Centres

11.9. Waverley has three market towns, Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere and the large village of Cranleigh. All four settlements contain a range of shops, businesses and leisure facilities, as well as a range of cultural, social and entertainment facilities for both day and evening use to serve the people living in the surrounding area. Each centre has a unique, attractive character and a conservation area around its historic core and these characteristics encourage residents and visitors alike to use the variety of services on offer. They all compete with nearby centres including Guildford and out of town facilities at Farnborough Gate and the Meadows at Blackwater Valley.

11.10. Retail is a key sector of Waverley's economy and important to the continued vibrancy of its town centres. Waverley's high streets face the challenge of the continued growth of internet shopping.

11.11. Like the rest of the UK, retailing is going through a structural change with an increasing profile of internet and virtual shopping and `click and collect` and `brick and click` purchase options. Where retailers have adopted features like click and collect, sales and profitability have improved. This may lead over time, to changes in town centres through for example, a reduction in the amount of physical retail space on offer. The general trend of shoppers visiting high streets is in decline, although, physical shopping still remains important. For this reason, maintaining the attractiveness of the town centres remains a key objective.

11.12. There is an increasing demand for other town centre uses such as leisure, restaurants, residential and community facilities. These are the type of uses that encourage people to visit and stay in town centre and increase

expenditure in physical shopping. This aspect of town centre use cannot be replicated or competed with by virtual sales.¹

- 11.13. The amount and type of floor space needed to ensure the continued vitality of Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere and Cranleigh has been considered in an update to the Town Centre study in 2013. This has identified deficiencies in convenience and comparison floorspace for each town but recognises that growth is limited to reusing existing sites and/ or identified Key Sites. The Council will give consideration to allocating other sites within Part 2 of the Local Plan, in order to meet the scale and type of retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community and residential development needed for each of the four centres.
- 11.14. Each of the main centres has an existing Town Centre policy boundary area and a designated Central Shopping Area within it, which encompasses its primary frontages. The Town Centre Retail Study Update recommends extending the Central Shopping Area in Farnham to include the East Street Area of Opportunity. Further work will be carried out to define primary and secondary frontages as part of Local Plan Part 2.

Farnham Town Centre

- 11.15. Farnham is the largest retailing centre in Waverley. It has an attractive, historic town centre with a good range of shops, including a high proportion of independent and specialist traders. It also offers a good range of cafés, restaurants and leisure facilities which help the evening economy of the town. Vacancy rates in 2015 were at 8%, lower than the national average of 14%.
- 11.16. It currently has major anchor stores at either end of the shopping area, namely Waitrose and Sainsbury and the footfall between these two areas supports the smaller units in between along West Street and The Borough. There are areas of good environmental quality in the town, particularly the Lion and Lamb Yard. However, the pedestrian enjoyment of the rest of the town centre is diminished by the constant flow of traffic. Areas of The Borough, South Street, East Street, West Street and the Woolmead have been designated as the Farnham Air Quality Management Area, and this is regularly monitored. The Town Centre Retail Study Update identifies that despite this, the quality of Farnham's shopping environment draws custom from larger centres such as Aldershot and Farnborough.
- 11.17. The Town Centre Retail Study Update concludes that Farnham is performing 'extremely well', with excellent convenience store provision and, although limited, the most extensive comparison goods offered in Waverley. This would be further enhanced by a new scheme permitted at Brightwells which would satisfy need for the majority of demand over the Local Plan period. The East Street end of the town centre is recognised as being the weakest.

¹ Internet Sales in the UK and General Impact on Physical Retailing and the Retail Property Market: Chase and Partners 14th December 2015.

Further retail development at this location has the potential to lift the vitality of the eastern end of the town.

- 11.18. The Town Centre Retail Study Update identified that there is a potential need for some 1,517 sq. m of convenience floorspace (net) in Farnham, and 10,665 sq. m of comparison floorspace (net) up to 2028. These figures address the overtrading in the town as well as providing for potential future floorspace.
- 11.19. The Farnham Design Statement was adopted by the Borough Council in July 2010 and contains guidelines for any new developments within the town centre area. Farnham Town Council is in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan which may contain additional policies for its town centre

Godalming Town Centre

- 11.20. Godalming is an attractive, historic market town. The Town Centre Retail Study Update finds it a successful town centre benefitting from a high quality environment and quality retailers. The core retailing area along the High Street has a variety of multiples and independent traders as well as a full complement of banks and building societies. Vacancy rates in 2015 were at 4%, substantially lower than the national average.
- 11.21. Godalming's convenience and service goods offer is excellent but its comparison goods offer is more limited and other nearby centres and retail parks take some of this expenditure. While the town would benefit from an expanded comparison goods offer, the retail update study concludes that the town is still vital and viable without this. The environmental quality of the town is assessed to be 'outstanding' in places, particularly around the Pepperpot and Church Street, and as such shoppers are encouraged to visit Godalming for more than the retail and service offer alone. There are many restaurants and several public houses and bars in the town, which boost the evening economy.
- 11.22. The updated study identified that there is a potential need for some 946 sq. m convenience floorspace (net) in Godalming and 2,128 sq. m comparison floorspace (net) within the period up to 2028. Plan period to 2028. Since the study was updated, the Sainsbury edge of centre store has built an extension which has increased the net sales area of the store by some 2,000 sq. m, and as such, the requirement for some convenience and comparison goods space has been met. The study points out that Godalming lacks sufficient town centre sites to accommodate further retail development, due in part to the restrictive nature of designations around the area, and partly due to the compact nature of the centre. The Godalming key site (the former Godalming Police Station and its surrounding area) is currently being developed. There are some other sites which could be considered but the study indicates that the viability of these sites is questionable.
- 11.23. The last Godalming Healthcheck was carried out in 2009 and identified a community desire for more events in the town centre and improved parking.

There was concern from many about the number of charity shops in the town. Local retailers continue to show enthusiasm for providing more tourist and visitor information in order to increase the footfall in the shopping streets. Godalming Town Council is preparing a Neighbourhood Plan which may contain additional policies for its town centre.

Haslemere High Street and Wey Hill

- 11.24. Haslemere has two closely related shopping centres. The main centre of Haslemere is located around the High Street and West Street, extending along Petworth Road and Lower Street. The other is Wey Hill to the west, which extends as far as Lion Green. Between the High Street and Wey Hill are employment sites, residential development and Haslemere railway station. The High Street is characterised by its centrally located Town Hall, a range of historic buildings and the Conservation Area, all set against a backdrop of wooded hillsides.
- 11.25. Haslemere's shopping centres provide for their surrounding area's convenience and service needs. Most comparison expenditure is attracted to larger neighbouring towns, but the town has a good number of small independent shops providing comparison goods. It has no significant edge or out- of- centre floorspace to compete with the town centre. Vacancy rates were low at 7% in 2015.
- 11.26. The Retail Study Update identified that there is a potential need for some 945 sq. m of convenience floorspace (net) in Haslemere's two shopping centres, and 1,342 sq. m of comparison floorspace (net) within the period to 2028. It concluded that Wey Hill has the more significant convenience goods provision, with Tesco and the Co-op.(which was replaced in 2016 by M & S Simply Food. The provision of a Waitrose store in West Street in 2009 has gone some way towards redressing the balance between Wey Hill and Haslemere.
- 11.27. The High Street centre is stronger for services than Wey Hill. A double centre such as this is unusual and will require careful monitoring of the relative strengths of each part of the town in order to ensure that one part does not impact on the vitality and viability of the other part - both have equal status in policy.
- 11.28. The Haslemere Design Statement was adopted by the Council in 2012 as a material planning consideration and contains guidelines for new developments in both the High Street town centre and Wey Hill. The Haslemere Vision is working with the Town Council to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan which may contain additional policies for its town centre.

Cranleigh Village Centre

- 11.29. The Retail Study Update states that Cranleigh has 'exceptional' convenience and service provision for a centre of its size. There are three supermarkets (Sainsbury's, Co-op and M & S Simply Food), but visitors are also attracted to its good range of small independent shops and unique department store which provide comparison goods. It does not have significant edge or out-of- centre retailing. While demand from major retailers has been limited, reflecting the modest size of the centre, the nature of the type of store looking to locate there indicates that Cranleigh is viewed as a viable retailing destination, and new branches of some High Street multiples have recently located in the village. In 2015 the vacancy rate in Cranleigh was very low at just 2%.
- 11.30. The study identified that there is a potential need for some 696 sq. m of convenience floorspace (net) in Cranleigh, and 1,353 sq. m of comparison floorspace (net) to 2028. However, the environmental quality of the centre makes it difficult to identify new sites. Cranleigh Common stretches into the village centre, and much of the centre is within the conservation area which extends along both sides of the High Street. The fact that it is also bordered by residential areas, Areas of Strategic Visual Importance and other established uses means that expansion of the retail offer or other town centre uses is therefore likely to come from re-development or extension to existing sites.
- 11.31. Cranleigh Parish Council is in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan which may contain additional policies for its village centre.

A Vision for Waverley's Town Centres

- 11.32. The focus for each town centre (including Cranleigh) is to ensure each is a vibrant, economically healthy and attractive centre, which provides a range of facilities and services for living, working and recreation appropriate to its scale, to meet the needs of its residents, surrounding communities and visitors.
- 11.33. The Council's strategy for delivering this vision includes:
- Continuing to maintain and enhance the towns as vital and viable centres.
 - Supporting a diverse range of uses which appeal to a wide range of age and social groups throughout the centre.
 - Supporting proposals for the provision of retail floorspace for comparison and/or convenience goods which is in keeping with the scale, character and appearance of the centre.
 - Ensuring that the amount of retail floorspace is maintained at a level which sustains the status of the centre's core shopping area.
 - Strengthen retail and leisure offer to contribute to the centres' quality of life offer and also to provide an important source of local jobs.

- Retention of a mix of units in terms of size and use to ensure that the unique quality and vibrancy of the character of the centre is retained and enhanced.
- Giving support to local initiatives contained in the various health checks and future Neighbourhood Plan policies designed to promote the centres and to improve the footfall in the shopping areas, such as enhanced signage and the improvement of tourist and visitor information.

Town specific aspects

Farnham

- Continue to support Farnham's role as a centre providing an extensive range of convenience and comparison shopping.
- Recognise the important role that Farnham has, not only to serve local needs but also the link between its retail offer and those of neighbouring centres in the Blackwater Valley and beyond.
- Support measures to improve air quality and the environment for pedestrians.

Godalming

- Continue to support Godalming's role as a convenience and service centre which meets local needs.
- Provide for future floorspace needs through appropriate redevelopment/extension of existing stores

Haslemere

- Continue to support Haslemere's role as a convenience and service centre which meets local needs.
- Continue to ensure that a balance is maintained between Wey Hill and the High Street, to ensure that one part does not impact on the vitality and viability of the other.

Cranleigh

- Continue to support Cranleigh's role as a convenience and service centre which meets local needs.
- Provide for future floorspace needs through appropriate redevelopment/extension of existing stores.

11.34. Overall, the principal focus of new retail development will be directed towards the four main centres. The Council will seek to ensure that the nature and amount of new development in each centre is appropriate to its scale and character and role in the hierarchy.

Policy TCS1: Town Centres

New development will be located in accordance with a sequential assessment. Applications for main town centre uses should be located in town centres. Edge of centre sites may then be considered, and only then if suitable sites are not available, will the development of out of centre sites be given consideration.

In assessing edge of centre or out of centre sites, preference will be given to those that are most accessible and well connected to the town centre, preferably within walking distance. Potential sites should be assessed for their availability, suitability and viability and for their ability to meet the full extent of assessed quantitative and qualitative needs.

Development likely to lead to significant adverse impacts on existing centres will be refused.

The Primary Shopping Areas will be the main focus, particularly at ground level, for A1 retail uses. Where planning permission or prior approval is required, these will be protected unless it can be determined that a change of use would not have significant harmful effects on the frontage and the vitality and viability of the town centre or result in an over-concentration of non-retail uses.

Outside of the Primary Shopping Area but within the wider town centres, a variety of town centre uses will be encouraged, including food and drink, leisure, and cultural uses that add to the liveliness, attractiveness, and vitality and viability of the centre.

The Primary and Secondary frontages in the town centres will be defined in Local Plan Part 2 (Non Strategic Policies and Sites). Pending this, the Central Shopping Areas defined in the saved policies of the Waverley Borough Local Plan 2002 will be regarded as the primary frontages in each town centre.

Measures to improve the town centres and Cranleigh village centre, including appropriate development, will be encouraged provided that this helps them to adapt and reinforce their role in meeting needs, act as the focus for a range of activities, including retailing, leisure, cultural, business and residential uses, and do not cause unacceptable levels of disturbance to the local community or damage the townscape character.

The Council will encourage the promotion of town centre sites by promoting them through Part 2 of the Local Plan and by producing planning briefs when appropriate to give further encouragement to the development of particular sites and give additional guidance on the appropriate form development should take.

Local Centres

- 11.35. The local centres are those which include a range of small shops of a local nature, serving a small catchment. Typically they might include amongst other shops, a small supermarket, newsagent, sub-post office and pharmacy. In some rural areas, some of the larger villages perform the role of a local centre. Local centres provide an essential service to local communities, particularly for those who prefer to shop locally or who are dependent on the services or facilities they offer perhaps because they do not have a car or experience mobility problems. These centres also provide a limited range of community and leisure facilities including public houses, churches and other services, as well as employment opportunities and can help reduce the need to travel. They can offer a sustainable alternative to supermarket shopping in the main towns in the Borough as well as a facility for topping up weekly shopping trips that are undertaken in larger stores elsewhere. They also provide a chance to purchase locally produced goods.
- 11.36. In rural areas such as Waverley, some of the larger villages perform the role of a local centre. Within the Borough's retail hierarchy, Farncombe, Bramley and Milford are considered to be within this definition. At the time of survey, they all had more than one convenience shop, a range of other comparison shops and a sub post office.

Vision for the Local Centres

- 11.37. These are the local centres that cater for the day-to-day needs of the local community.
- 11.38. The Council's strategy for delivering this includes:
- Maintaining the vitality and viability of the centre,
 - Supporting shops, services and other small economic uses (including post offices, petrol stations, village halls and public houses),
 - Safeguarding the existing provision of shopping floorspace,
 - Make provision for an increase in convenience shopping floorspace that is appropriate to the scale, nature and function of the centre and complements its existing provision.

Policy TCS2: Local Centres

The retail role and function of the local centres of Farncombe, Bramley and Milford will be safeguarded and consolidated. Where planning permission or prior approval is required, proposals which would harm or undermine the retail function of the centre by reducing its ability to meet its daily needs and/ or detract from its vitality and viability will not be permitted.

² Waverley Settlement Hierarchy 2012

Proposals for the provision of new small scale facilities will be supported, provided that they would support the vitality and viability of these centres and are appropriate to the role and function of the centre in the hierarchy.

Neighbourhood and Village Shops

- 11.39. Neighbourhood and village shops are vitally important within Waverley. Outside the town centres, Farnham, Godalming and Haslemere each have one or more local parades of shops within their parish area, some of which include a post office and convenience store, and are important in serving the needs of local people who want to avoid going into the towns or using a car.
- 11.40. Waverley also has many rural villages, some of which have only one village shop and/or post office. These shops are often a focus for community life for residents who need or want to shop locally and also help maintain villages as sustainable communities. Village, local shops, public houses and particularly post offices are increasingly coming under pressure to change from retail uses, and while the Council cannot prevent the closure of uneconomic premises, it is necessary to make sure that all reasonable efforts are made to retain a valued retail use in the villages in order to help support the rural economy. In Waverley, several rural village shops and a public house have been threatened with closure and have been bought and successfully run by the community. Some of the villages also have farm shops, which meet the demand for fresh local produce, while also contributing to the local economy.
- 11.41. Some of the largest villages such as Witley, Elstead and Chiddingfold have a small number of shops but these are not all located together. Alfold, Churt, Dunsfold, Ewhurst, Frensham, Hambledon, Rushmoor, Shamley Green, Tilford, Wonersh and Wormley all have one convenience store, and some include a sub-post office. Blackheath, Bowlhead Green, Brook, Busbridge, Dockenfield, Ellen's Green, Grafham, Grayswood, Hascombe, Hydestile, Palmers Cross, Peperharow, Rushett Common, Sandhills, Thorncombe Street and Thursley have no convenience shops and residents need to travel to neighbouring villages or towns for day- to- day shopping. Most of Waverley's villages have at least one public house, as well as other community and leisure facilities including schools, village halls, churches and recreation grounds. Several have small office complexes which have been converted from farm or other redundant buildings. Policy ICS1 seeks to resist the loss of key services and community facilities, while the policies in this chapter refer more specifically to the retention, protection and provision of local, neighbourhood and village shops.
- 11.42. The decline in village shops is part of a national trend and may well continue as economic and lifestyle patterns change. The Council cannot prevent the closure of rural facilities, but it can discourage inappropriate alternative uses. It will resist the loss of valued services and facilities unless there is robust evidence that the shop cannot continue as a viable retail business.

Vision for Neighbourhood and Village Shops

11.43. These provide facilities and services to meet the day-to-day needs of neighbourhood and village communities.

11.44. The Council's strategy for delivering this includes:

- Supporting the provision of small - scale local facilities to meet local community needs.
- Taking into account the importance of shops and services to the local community in assessing proposals that would result in their loss or change of use.
- Supporting proposals that would improve the viability, accessibility or community value of existing services and facilities that play an important role in sustaining village communities.

Policy TCS3: Neighbourhood and Village Shops

Where planning permission or prior approval is required, the Council will resist the loss of shops and services which are deemed to be important to the community. Proposals for the loss of shops will need to demonstrate that continuing in this use is unviable. The Council will respond positively to proposals for alterations to or the extension of shops which are designed to improve their viability but do not result in their loss or change of use.

Delivery

The policies will be delivered by:

- Decisions made on relevant planning applications.
- Local Plan Part 2 (Non Strategic Policies and Sites).
- Partnership working with retail and business membership organisations such as the Waverley Business Forum and any Town Centre Initiatives and Chambers of Commerce, infrastructure providers.
- The development control process. Applications will be assessed against criteria based policies in the Local Plan Part 2 which will focus on maintaining the appropriate mix and range of uses.

Evidence

- Waverley Borough Council Town Centres Retail Study Update- Chase and Partners February 2013
- Internet Sales in the UK and General Impact on Physical Retailing and the Retail Property Market: Chase and Partners: December 2015
- Farnham Healthcheck 2005
- Steps Towards a Vision for Farnham/ Local Futures Group 2007
- Haslemere Healthcheck 2003
- Your Haslemere - Haslemere Healthcheck Review 2008
- Godalming Healthcheck Report 2009

- Action for Cranleigh: Report of the Cranleigh Healthcheck 2002/2003. Reviewed 2008/9 but not published
- Waverley Settlement Hierarchy Update 2012

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