

CHAPTER 9

Town & Village Centres, Retail & Community Facilities

INTRODUCTION

9.1 This Chapter is concerned with the planning issues relating to retailing and community facilities such as education, healthcare, social services and meeting places. The planning issues relating to recreational activities, including sport, leisure and the arts are closely related to this section and contained in Chapter 10. Both this section and Chapter 10 are underpinned by the Council's Community Strategy.

9.2 The availability, accessibility and quality of shops and community services and facilities are vital to the quality of life. They are also central to the concept of social inclusion and settlement self sufficiency and play an important role in ensuring a sense of community. These issues are especially important in rural areas where the delivery of community services and facilities is often difficult as highlighted in the Government's White Paper *'Our Countryside : The Future*. Part of the White Paper's vision is of *'a living countryside with thriving rural communities and access to high quality public services'*.

9.3 Although the Local Plan cannot directly provide retailing and community services, it can have a positive influence in both the retention of existing and the provision of new facilities.

9.4 Many services and facilities are required on a daily or frequent basis so it is important that they are located close to where people live. Facilities that are required less often may be better located close to each other to enable linked trips, especially by public transport. Whatever the usage, all facilities should be accessible to all sections of the community including the elderly, mobility impaired, young single people and any disadvantaged groups.

RETAILING

Context

9.5 The Government's objectives for town centres and retail developments are set out in PPG6 *'Town Centres and Retail Developments'* and are summarised below:-

- ◆ *To sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres;*
- ◆ *To focus development, especially retail development, in locations where the proximity of business facilitates competition from which all consumers are able to benefit and maximises the opportunity to use means of transport other than the car;*
- ◆ *To maintain an efficient, competitive and innovative retail sector; and*
- ◆ *To ensure the availability of a wide range of shops, employment, services and facilities to which people have easy access by choice of means of transport.*

9.6 The Government emphasises a Plan led approach to promoting development in town centres. It also advocates a sequential approach to the identification of sites for retail and other trip intensive developments. For the purpose of this Plan, retailing is defined as all uses within Classes A1 (Shops), A2 (Financial and Professional Services), A3 (Restaurants and Cafes), A4 (Drinking Establishments) and A5 (Hot Food Takeaway). A sequential approach means that in identifying sites for new retail developments, all potential town centre options are considered before selecting alternative less central locations. Proposals for major new retailing developments outside town centres will be required to demonstrate the need for such facilities. Government policy is also moving towards a *'bottom up approach'* by emphasising the importance of identifying needs and gaps in local shopping provision including the retention of shops in small settlements.

9.7 A retail study of North Devon has been produced in the context of Government advice and underpins the policies and proposals contained in the Plan. The study focuses on Barnstaple, Ilfracombe, South Molton and Braunton as these are the main shopping centres within North Devon. It concludes that there is no substantial qualitative need for additional convenience goods floorspace over the Plan period, although each of the four main centres would benefit from a modern supermarket with a net sales floorspace of up to 1,000 square metres. Conversely, the study also concludes that there will be substantial capacity for additional comparison goods and that these should mainly be focused in Barnstaple to reflect its sub regional role.

Convenience goods mainly refers to items that are essential and required on a daily or regular basis including food and drink, household cleaning, medicines and surgical goods, personal toiletries, tobacco and paper goods. Comparison goods are those speciality and leisure items where consumers spend more time and effort before purchasing and include clothes, home entertainment, household and electrical goods.

9.8 The main policy recommendations emanating from the retail study are summarised below:-

- ◆ *A strategy of dispersal should be adopted in order to cater for local shopping needs, reduce distances travelled and to bolster new investment within town and village centres;*
- ◆ *Within the town centres, primary and secondary shopping areas for both Barnstaple and Ilfracombe should be defined. No further non A1 retail uses should be permitted in the primary shopping areas, although they should continue to be permitted in the secondary shopping frontages;*
- ◆ *Within Braunton and South Molton further non A1 retail uses should be permitted provided they do not exceed 50% of the total number of units within each centre. If this threshold is reached then further non A1 retail uses should not be permitted unless the use proposed is not already represented in the centre or the level of vacancies exceeds 5% of the total number of units;*
- ◆ *Within other smaller shopping centres, existing levels of Use Class A1 retail provision should be protected;*
- ◆ *Specific sites within Barnstaple, Braunton, Ilfracombe and South Molton should be promoted for retail development;*
- ◆ *The evening economy should be promoted, especially in Barnstaple, by adopting a flexible approach to hours of use providing it does not harm residential amenities;*
- ◆ *Additional environmental improvements should be promoted within each of the centres of Barnstaple, Ilfracombe, Braunton and South Molton;*
- ◆ *A specific area(s) in Barnstaple should be identified for further retail warehousing.*

9.9 Most of the above policy recommendations are translated into more detailed policies and proposals contained in the chapters relating to specific settlements. In accordance with these recommendations and the advice in PPG6, policies and proposals aim to retain the competitive edge of each of the main centres by controlling out of centre retail developments and consolidating and reinforcing town centre activities. Outside the centres of Barnstaple and the other main settlements, new shopping will be directed to meeting the local requirements of North Devon's residents and visitors providing no sector of the community is disadvantaged and the vitality or viability of any existing centres or facilities is not harmed.

Town Centres

9.10 The defined centres of Barnstaple, Braunton, Ilfracombe and South Molton are identified on the Inset Maps for each of the settlements. The primary role of these centres is retailing although they also provide a variety of other functions. Although the shopping function of these centres should be strengthened, their vitality and viability also depends on retaining and developing a wide range of other activities including entertainment, offices and residential uses. Different but complementary activities during the day and in the evening can reinforce each other, making town centres more vibrant.

Vitality refers to the liveliness of a town centre; reflected in how busy the centre is at different times and in different parts. Viability refers to the ability of a centre to attract continuing investment, both to maintain its fabric and to allow for improvement and adaptation to changing needs.

9.11 To ensure that the vitality and viability of centres is supported and enhanced, proposals for town centre uses should follow a sequential approach in terms of site selection. Town Centre uses will include shopping, financial and professional services, restaurants and cafes, drinking establishments and hot food takeaways (currently all within Use Classes A1, A2, A3, A4 and A5 of the Use Classes Order (2005)). In addition, a sequential approach should also be applied to any other use appropriate to a central location which attract a significant number of people or that functions for many hours of the day including cinemas, bowling alleys or bingo halls. Proposals for such intensive leisure and entertainment uses will be assessed against Policy REC1. Applying a sequential approach will ensure that in selecting sites, all potential options within a defined town or village centre are considered for development before selecting an alternative less central location. In applying a sequential approach, an edge of centre site is defined as being no more than 300 metres from the identified central area, although this distance may be reduced for the smaller Area Centres. In applying Policy COM1, only the District centres of Newport and Pilton, which are both in Barnstaple, will be treated as falling within the term town or village centre. The extent of their defined centres is also shown on the Inset Maps.

9.12 In addition to carrying out the sequential approach to site selection, proposals outside a defined centre, including any extensions to an existing facility, will be required to address the following issues:-

- ◆ *The quantitative and qualitative need for the proposal having regard to the information contained in the retail study;*
- ◆ *The likely impacts on the vitality and viability of town and village centres and existing facilities including consideration of the cumulative effects of recently completed developments and outstanding planning permissions;*
- ◆ *Its accessibility to a choice of transport modes including an assessment of the proportion of customers that are likely to arrive by different means (see Travel, Transport and Communications Chapter);*
- ◆ *The likely changes in travel patterns over the catchment area; and*
- ◆ *Any significant environmental impacts (see Development Standards and Environment Chapters).*

9.13 In promoting retail developments, schemes should be tailored to fit within more centrally located sites or those specifically proposed for such uses. Applicants should therefore be flexible about the format, design and scale of the development proposed and the amount of car parking required. All proposals should also be well designed in accordance with Policy DVS1.

9.14 Where a change in the character of a development could impact on the vitality or viability of an existing centre, planning conditions will be used to ensure that this does not occur. For example, conditions can be used to prevent a development from being sub-divided into a larger number of smaller shops and to limit the range of goods sold.

POLICY COM1 (RETAILING PROPOSALS)

- 1. RETAIL DEVELOPMENT WILL BE PERMITTED WITHIN A DEFINED CENTRE OR ON SITES SPECIFICALLY PROPOSED FOR SUCH USES PROVIDING THE PROPOSAL COMPLIES WITH POLICIES BAR4 AND ILF5.**
- 2. OUTSIDE THE DEFINED CENTRES OR SITES SPECIFICALLY PROPOSED FOR RETAILING, A RETAIL PROPOSAL WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE:-**
 - A) THE PROPOSAL COMPLIES WITH POLICY COM2; OR**
 - B) THE PROPOSAL IS ON THE EDGE OF A DEFINED CENTRE AND NO SUITABLE CENTRAL OR PROPOSED SITE IS AVAILABLE; OR**
 - C) THE PROPOSAL IS ON AN OUT OF CENTRE SITE AND NO SUITABLE CENTRAL, EDGE OF CENTRE OR PROPOSED SITE IS AVAILABLE; AND**
 - D) THERE IS A PROVEN NEED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT; AND IN ALL CASES**
 - E) THE PROPOSAL, EITHER BY ITSELF OR CUMULATIVELY WITH OTHER RETAIL PROPOSALS WILL NOT UNDERMINE THE VITALITY AND VIABILITY OF A TOWN OR VILLAGE CENTRE OR LOCAL FACILITY; AND**
 - F) THE DEVELOPMENT IS ACCESSIBLE BY A CHOICE OF TRANSPORT MODES.**

Local Shops, Public Houses and Post Offices

9.15 Local shops, including petrol filling stations, public houses and post offices play an important role in meeting the day to day needs of local communities and can reduce unnecessary car trips. They are a vital element in the retail hierarchy and offer a particularly important and convenient service for rural communities and those who are less mobile. Increasingly local retail facilities have been under threat from the larger out of town foodstores which are generally cheaper, have greater choice, are more convenient and have longer trading hours. To address this imbalance, proposals for local shops, public houses or post offices within residential areas and villages, to which Policies HSG2 and HSG3 apply, will be supported providing they are of a size and scale that is related to the needs of the community. Facilities that are likely to attract customers from beyond the natural catchment area of a neighbourhood or village will not be permitted. For the purposes of Policy COM2, a local shop is defined as that selling predominantly convenience goods and having a maximum floorspace not exceeding 280 square metres gross.

9.16 Where appropriate, local shops, public houses or post offices should be located within the main built up area of a town or village and preferably sited near to a bus route or a footpath and cycleway system. Locations that encourage the use of the motor car will generally be discouraged in accordance with the policies contained in the Travel, Transport and Communications Chapter. The impact on the residential amenities of neighbouring properties will also be an important consideration in the siting and design of such facilities in accordance with Policy DVS3. All proposals should be well designed in accordance with Policy DVS1. Due to the shortage of financial services in villages including banks, such facilities will be encouraged to include cash dispensing machines (Automatic Teller Machines).

POLICY COM2 (LOCAL SHOPS, PUBLIC HOUSES AND POST OFFICES)

WITHIN THE MAIN BUILT UP AREA OF A TOWN OR VILLAGE, A PROPOSAL FOR A LOCAL SHOP, PUBLIC HOUSE OR POST OFFICE WILL BE PERMITTED WHERE IT IS OF A SCALE THAT SERVES THE NEEDS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY.

9.17 Restricting the growth of large stores in out of centre locations will help support the retention of local shops. More direct support is given to viable local shops, including petrol filling stations, in addition to the other key community facilities of post offices and public houses, by preventing their loss to more lucrative uses. This level of protection will not extend to those facilities that are no longer viable and where their loss would not harm the level of services provided locally. In order to test viability, an independent appraisal and valuation of the premises will need to be undertaken.

9.18 The Government stress the importance of safeguarding local facilities to help retain vital local communities and reduce the need to travel. Large retailers will also be encouraged to play a role in sustaining village shops through trading partnerships which allow stores to stock selected own brand produce or make such goods available via internet links.

9.19 Although it might be established that a shop, post office or public house is not currently viable, this situation may change in the future particularly as a result of new Government initiatives. Given the limited development opportunities for new shops, post offices and public houses, particularly in villages, it is important that the potential to use the premises for such purposes is not permanently lost. A proposal to change the use of a shop, public house or post office should avoid any physical changes that would prevent it from being reused for its former purpose. Proposals which allow for this reversal will be considered more favourably to those that do not.

POLICY COM3 (PROTECTING LOCAL SHOPS, PUBLIC HOUSES OR POST OFFICES)

THE CHANGE OF USE OF A LOCAL SHOP, PUBLIC HOUSE OR POST OFFICE WILL NOT BE PERMITTED WHERE:-

- A) ITS CURRENT USE IS VIABLE; AND**
- B) THERE IS INADEQUATE ALTERNATIVE PROVISION IN THE LOCALITY TO SERVE THE LOCAL COMMUNITY.**

COMMUNITY FACILITIES**Education, Health and Social Services**

9.20 Schools, higher education, health and social services are not directly controlled by the District Council. The role of providing these services largely rests with the public sector, although a variety of independent agencies, voluntary groups and community enterprises are becoming increasingly involved with particular emphasis in partnership working. The Local Plan can have a positive influence by directing growth to those settlements that already contain social and community facilities, ensuring they remain viable. It is also important that new housing does not over-stretch education, health and social services.

9.21 In association with the relevant service provider, the Local Plan can identify future education, health and social service needs and safeguard potential sites where these have been specifically identified for development. Where a development puts unacceptable demands on a community service, the Council will seek a planning obligation to secure all or part of the required provision to overcome any shortfall resulting from the development in accordance with the Devon Structure Plan. A Code of Practice has been produced as Supplementary Planning Guidance. This Code sets out in detail the contributions expected from new development and the circumstances when this will be required. For example, developer contributions will be sought from residential schemes of 5 or more dwellings and incorporating family type housing to help meet the costs of improving the capacity of an existing school or the construction of a new school within a particular designated area.

9.22 Improvements to education, health and social services will be encouraged where they are accessible to the community to which they are intended to serve and related to the growth strategy of the Plan. New facilities will also be encouraged to share a range of functions as part of 'healthy living' and 'life long learning' initiatives. In order to facilitate their provision, new facilities may be allowed outside but immediately abutting the main built up area of a town or village to which Policies HSG2 or HSG3 apply, providing they do not harm the character or setting of the settlement and the surrounding countryside. Where possible they should be closely related and integrated with existing community uses. Additionally, they should be accessible to a range of transport modes in accordance with Policy TRA1.

9.23 Devon County Council, as the Education Authority, determines its own proposals relating to the development of educational facilities. Where the Education Authority has identified a particular requirement for the extension or development of a new school to meet future needs, these are included in the relevant area sections of the Plan. New proposals for the extension, improvement or creation of a school may also arise due to an increase in demand resulting from development or as a consequence of other factors such as the unsuitability of an existing site or buildings. Of particular consequence is the review of primary schools being undertaken by Devon County Council. This review will take account of the new guidance on calculating school capacity being prepared by the Department of Education and Skills. As part of the review and a consequence of the new guidance, capacity in schools may be reduced and the designated areas applying to schools changed. In turn, these changes may lead to a shortage of places within a particular designated area.

9.24 There is considerable scope to improve the level of education, social and recreational facilities available to the whole community through the shared use of existing school facilities, particularly at weekends. Promoting the dual use of schools, subject to the agreement of the Education Authority and School Governors, is a means of increasing recreation and education opportunities for the whole community, whilst reducing pressures to develop or allocate additional land for such purposes. The New Opportunities Fund provides financial assistance to improve school facilities providing they are available for wider community use. The Spaces for Sports and the Arts Scheme provides funds aimed at improving facilities in primary schools for dual school and community sports, drama, dance and other activities. Further guidance on the issue of shared facilities is contained at paragraph 10.27.

Childcare Facilities

9.25 The National Childcare Strategy aims to provide good quality, affordable and accessible childcare in every community across the country. As part of this strategy, a Sure Start Programme has been established covering Ilfracombe, Berrynarbor and Combe Martin. This programme aims to improve the health and wellbeing of families and children before and from birth.

9.26 The availability of childcare facilities provides children with the chance for interaction. It also gives those with children the opportunity to take up employment, training or educational activities. The small scale use of homes for child minding may not require planning consent. More intensive forms of care facilities such as nursery schools, play groups and crèches will require planning permission. Such facilities should be accommodated within premises that are both suitable and adequate and situated in locations that do not harm the amenities of neighbouring residents in accordance with Policy DVS3. They should also be located where they are accessible to a variety of transport modes in accordance with the policies contained in the Travel and Transport Chapter.

Facilities for the Elderly

9.27 The proportion of elderly persons within North Devon is well above the national average and this is reflected in the demand for residential and nursing homes. Such developments place demands on social services including day care facilities. They should therefore be located in those larger settlements where these facilities are available. More specific guidance on proposals for residential and nursing homes and other forms of special needs housing is contained at paragraphs 7.49 and 7.50.

Other Community Facilities

9.28 Other community facilities such as churches, halls, meeting rooms and public buildings provide a venue for social, recreational and spiritual activities and play an important role in the quality of community life. They provide meeting space for a variety of functions including clubs and societies, voluntary groups and public services such as adult education and healthy living initiatives.

9.29 The Local Plan seeks to facilitate the provision of new community venues through the identification of new sites as part of a development scheme and by allowing such uses in existing rural buildings in accordance with Policy ECN5. In addition, housing schemes in certain villages will be expected to support the provision of new facilities required by the community in accordance with Policy HSG3. The provision of new facilities should be consistent with the Community Strategy. Where possible, new provision should be well related and integrated to existing community facilities including sport and recreation and public open space (see Policies REC2 and REC5).

9.30 Due to their importance, wherever possible, venues will be protected unless there is no longer a demand from the local community to such an extent as to make the facility economically unviable. Where the loss of a valued and well used community venue is unavoidable, equivalent facilities of at least the same standard and accessibility will be required to compensate for such a loss prior to its closure.

POLICY COM4 (COMMUNITY FACILITIES)

- 1. A DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL FOR A COMMUNITY FACILITY WILL BE PERMITTED WITHIN OR IMMEDIATELY ABUTTING THE MAIN BUILT UP AREA OF A TOWN, IDENTIFIED VILLAGE OR IDENTIFIED RURAL SETTLEMENT PROVIDING:-**
 - A) THE SCALE OF THE FACILITY IS RELATED TO THE NEEDS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY;**
 - B) IT DOES NOT HARM THE CHARACTER OF THE SETTLEMENT OR THE SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE; AND**
 - C) IT IS ACCESSIBLE TO A RANGE OF TRANSPORT MODES.**

- 2. A DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL INVOLVING THE LOSS OF A COMMUNITY FACILITY WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE:-**
 - A) THERE IS NO DEMAND FOR THE FACILITY FROM THE LOCAL COMMUNITY OR THE FACILITY IS UNVIABLE; OR**
 - B) THERE IS A REPLACEMENT OR ALTERNATIVE FACILITY AVAILABLE OF AT LEAST EQUIVALENT STANDARD AND ACCESSIBILITY TO THE COMMUNITY SERVED BY THE ORIGINAL FACILITY; OR**
 - C) ANY REPLACEMENT FACILITY OR RATIONALISATION OF AN EXISTING FACILITY PROVIDES BENEFITS TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY WHICH OUTWEIGH ANY HARM FROM LOSS OF THE ORIGINAL FACILITY.**