



Retailing and Town Centres Topic Paper

Topic Paper No 11 – Summary

Introduction

Town Centres are dynamic constantly evolving centres of economic activity. These centres are usually located in the heart of our largest towns and play an important role in serving community needs in the town and the wider catchment areas. Our Town Centres are employment centres that provide access to shopping, food and drink, and health facilities and they provide the opportunity to access important public transport services to travel sustainably. Although retail uses underpin town centres, it is the diversity of uses which make our town centres special.

Flintshire has a wealth and variety of towns, each of these with their own individual character and history and each one supported by proud communities. Flintshire communities take pride in their towns and town centres and this is fundamental to maintaining healthy and attractive town centres, and is key to how Flintshire promotes the County as a place to live, work, visit and invest.

There are also a number of district shopping centres within the County as well as smaller local or village shopping centres. Both these and local shops perform an important role for top up shopping especially for those without a car. Pubs can also perform an economic and social role as a hub of community life.

Context

The Local Development Plan (LDP) will play an important role in protecting town centres and in

promoting these centres as future centres for economic growth, job creation, and as locally important cultural centres at the heart of each of our strategic towns.

The objectives of the Welsh Government in respect of retailing and town centres, as set out in Planning Policy Wales, are to:

- Secure accessible, efficient, competitive and innovative retail provision for all communities
- Promote established town, district and local centres as the most appropriate locations for retailing, leisure and other complementary functions
- Promote access to these centres by public transport, walking and cycling

The Role of the Plan

The LDP will promote town centres as the principal location for new retail, office, leisure, health and other related development, based on a sequential approach to the selection of sites. The LDP will focus development into existing town centres to generate greater activity and create more reasons why people should visit these centres. This process is a self perpetuating one which will ultimately draw more people to these centres to create thriving hubs of social and economic activity.

The LDP will also seek to reinforce the historic function of these centres as key public transport gateways to other destinations be they shopping centres or regionally important employment

centres such as Deeside Industrial Park.

At the core of the LDP approach is the recognition that town centres need flexible land use policies so that they can adapt to changing economic conditions. This policy flexibility will ensure the health of town centres and those communities reliant on town centres for years to come.

Supporting Documentation

- Flintshire Community Strategy 2009-2019 (2009)
- Flintshire Economic Development Strategy (2009) FCC
- Planning Policy Wales, (Edition 6) February (2014) Welsh Government
- Technical Advice Note 4: Retailing and Town Centres 1996 (Welsh Government)
- Technical Advice Note 23: Economic Development (2014) Welsh Government
- Flintshire Town Centre Health Checks (2003)
- Flintshire Town Centre Health Checks (2008)
- Flintshire Retail Capacity Assessment (2010)
- Buckley Masterplan (2011)
- Connahs Quay & Shotton Masterplan (2010)
- Flint Strategy and Masterplan (2012)
- Holywell Town Centre Assessment (2010)
- Queensferry Streetscape Environmental Improvements and Design Guidelines (2010)
- Mold Sense of Place Study (2010)
- Mold Strategic Sites Assessment (2014)
- Annual Town Centre Benchmarking Reports (2011-Present) FCC

Issues to be addressed by the LDP

The current available evidence presents a number of key messages as follows:

- Identifying the role of town centres within a retail hierarchy (Flintshire Town Centres are not all the same and there are differences in role and function i.e. one strategy does not fit all);
- Flintshire Town Centres are all locally important centres of employment and investment which require protection from out of centre and out of

town retail competition;

- Reviewing whether the policy of 'core retail areas' is an effective means of ensuring that a focus of retail uses is retained in key parts of our town centres
- Identifying whether there is a need for further retail development over the Plan period and how this can be provided for within town and district centres through allocations
- Recognising that allowing town centre development outside of town centres can have a range of detrimental impacts including the health of people having to travel to these facilities;
- Identifying how our town centres need to change, whether in terms of their size, layout, function or environment, in order to meet the service expectations of our communities;
- Ensuring that local shopping facilities are retained and provided in suburban and rural locations
- Identifying whether and how transportation connections to and from town centres should be provided / enhanced in terms of walking, cycling and public transport routes and facilities.
- Utilising existing town centre masterplans which have already been the subject of public consultation and which propose considerable detailed changes to our town centres;
- Assessing the impact of new centres such as at Northern Gateway and its contribution to local service provision.
- Addressing the loss of public houses and the role of initiatives such as 'the Pub is the Hub'.

Potential Land Use Policies / Proposals

The Shopping Centres and Commercial Development Chapter in the UDP contains 12 policies. It is considered that given the availability of national guidance, and the fact that certain policies are rarely used, that the policy framework in the LDP be simplified. The key policies are therefore likely to include:

- Identification of town, district and local centres as part of a retail hierarchy in policy and on proposals maps;
- Site specific retail proposals / allocations
- Directing new retail and complimentary development to Town, District and Local Centres to reflect the retail hierarchy (if different to and not repeating PPW);
- LDP policies should provide a positive development framework which supports Masterplan proposals.
- Safeguarding retail uses in town centres through 'core retail area' or other policy approach
- Safeguarding the retention of local facilities and encouraging innovative ways of delivering such facilities

Need for Further Evidence

In the review of the evidence available certain shortcomings in the evidence base have been identified and further study will be required as follows:

- Update existing evidence to assess the quantitative and qualitative need for further retail development
- Review and Update of the County Health Checks Assessment
- Consider the need for further Masterplans for centres such as Saltney.
- Study of the effectiveness of Core Retail Areas policy approach