Policy 12 – Retail, Leisure and Other Commercial Developments

National Policy

6.41  The NPPF states that planning policies should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out policies for the management and growth of centres159. Local planning authorities should also apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with an up-to-date local plan160.

The District Council’s Approach

6.42  The Council recognises that town centres are at the heart of local communities and Policy 12 aims to support their viability and vitality. It:

• defines the hierarchy and network of centres in the District;

• sets out the Council’s approach to the definition of town centres, primary shopping areas, and primary and secondary shopping frontages;

• makes clear the different uses that may be permitted in these locations, seeking to concentrate main town centre uses in town centres and retail and other A Class uses in shopping areas and frontages;

• outlines the sites in existing town centres and edge-of-centre sites that will be developed to support town centres and meet future needs;

• sets out how the Council will manage proposals for main town centre uses outside town centres by applying the sequential test in national policy to planning applications for such uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with the development plan;

• sets out that the Council will seek to retain and enhance existing markets; and

• sets out that the Council will encourage high quality shop front design in accordance with its guidance.

6.43  The retention (where viable) of existing local shops, village shops and other commercial community facilities, such as public house, is sought by Policy 27 – Retention of Community Facilities. In the countryside, new commercial community facilities may be permitted where an existing building is re-used under Policy 29 – The Re-Use of Existing Buildings in the Countryside. Alternatively, sites for new commercial community facilities may be allocated by local communities in neighbourhood plans.

159 How planning policies should ensure the vitality of town centres when local plans are drawn up is set out in full in Paragraph 23 of the National Planning Policy Framework, DCLG (March 2012).

160 Paragraph 24, National Planning Policy Framework, DCLG (March 2012).

Hierarchy and Network of Centres

6.44  The Council has worked with other local authorities in the eastern half of Dorset to define a hierarchy and network of centres. Studies confirm that in North Dorset, Blandford Forum, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton all merit classification as town centres161.

6.45  Blandford Forum, Gillingham and Shaftesbury each have over 90 commercial outlets (Classes A1 to A5)162, including a range of convenience, comparison and service uses. Sturminster Newton has fewer (55) commercial outlets, but has many other facilities, such as a medical centre, a library and a community centre.

6.46  The four main towns all primarily serve their own local catchment area and have a limited draw beyond their respective boundaries.163 Figure 6.2 below shows that in terms of wider retail catchments, particularly for non-food shopping, the towns in the north of the District mainly look towards Salisbury and Yeovil whereas Blandford looks south-east towards Poole.

Figure 6.2: North Dorset Town Centres and Wider Retail Catchments

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Town Centre | Other Centres with a Major Influence | Other Centres with a Minor Influence |
| Blandford Forum | Poole | - |
| Gillingham | Salisbury Yeovil | Shaftesbury |
| Shaftesbury | Salisbury Yeovil | Gillingham |
| Sturminster Newton | Yeovil | Shaftesbury |

161 Paragraph 3.10 (Page 17), Joint Retail Assessment: Christchurch Borough Council and East, North and Purbeck District Councils: Volume 1 Capacity Analysis, Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (March 2008).

162 A Class uses are: A1 - Shops; A2 - Financial and Professional Services; A3 - Food and Drink; A4 - Drinking Establishments; and A5 - Hot Food Takeaways.

163 Paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4 (page 45), Joint Retail Assessment: Christchurch Borough Council and East, North and Purbeck District Councils: Volume 1 Capacity Analysis, Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (March 2008).

Defining Town Centres, Primary Shopping Areas and Shopping Frontages

Defining Town Centre Boundaries

6.47  Town centres are the sequentially preferred location for main town centre uses164 including: retail development, leisure, entertainment facilities, certain intensive sport and recreation uses, offices, and arts, cultural and tourism uses. The North Dorset District-Wide Local Plan 2003 does not show any town centre boundaries for Blandford Forum, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton. These will be defined as part of the site allocations in the Local Plan Part 2 unless a local community decide to define a boundary for their town centre in a neighbourhood plan. A town centre boundary should be drawn to include the town’s primary shopping area and other areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area.

6.48  In the interim, the Council will use available evidence to make judgements for development management purposes about whether a particular site falls within a town centre, including:

• the draft town centre boundaries identified in the Council’s 2005 Annual Monitoring Report;

• locally produced evidence base studies, such as the Gillingham and Sturminster Newton Town Design Statements165; and

• evidence in earlier planning applications for main town centre uses where the sequential test in national policy has been applied.

Defining Primary Shopping Areas

6.49  The North Dorset District - Wide Local Plan 2003 does not show any primary shopping areas for Blandford Forum, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton. These will be defined as part of Local Plan Part 2 unless a local community define a boundary for their primary shopping area in a neighbourhood plan. Primary shopping area boundaries should be drawn to define the area of the town centre where retail development is concentrated. In the interim, the Council will have regard to the recommended primary

164 The full definition of main town centre uses is set out in Annex 2: Glossary of the National Planning Policy Framework, DCLG (March 2012).

165 Gillingham Town Design Statement, Gillingham Town Design Statement Steering Group (June 2012) and Sturminster Newton Town Design Statement, The Matrix Partnership for SturQuest (July 2008).

shopping areas, as identified in the Joint Retail Study166, for development management purposes.

Defining Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages

6.50  The North Dorset District-Wide Local Plan 2003 defines primary and secondary shopping frontages within Blandford Forum, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton and these frontages will continue to be used for development management purposes, until reviewed by the Local Plan Part 2 or in a neighbourhood plan. In the interim, in making judgements about whether a site should be considered to fall within a primary or secondary shopping frontage, the Council will also have regard to the recommended primary and secondary shopping frontages, as identified in the Joint Retail Study167.

Uses in Town Centres

6.51  The Council will seek to focus main town centre uses in the town centres of North Dorset. Within the town centres, development involving any of the main town centre uses should be of a type and scale that will support their market town role and function as the focal point for the catchments they serve.

6.52  Proposals for town centre uses within the town centres should be designed to respect their historic character. The need to respect historic character limits the scope for new development, although there is some scope to meet the need for additional town centre uses through redevelopment, change of use, the upgrading of existing facilities and, in the case of retail floorspace, reducing the level of shop vacancies.

6.53  Proposals for non-retail town centre uses within the town centres should not undermine the focus on retailing within primary shopping areas, or the Council’s approach to ground floor uses in shopping frontages, which seeks to focus A1 - Shop uses within primary shopping frontages and A1 - Shop and other A Class uses within secondary shopping frontages. In accordance with national policy the Council recognises that residential development can play an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and encourages residential development of space over commercial property.

166 Recommended Primary Shopping Areas for the four main towns in North Dorset are shown in Appendix C of the Joint Retail Assessment: Christchurch Borough Council and East, North and Purbeck District Councils: Volume 1 Capacity Analysis, Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (March 2008).

167 Recommended Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages for the four main towns in North Dorset are also shown in Appendix C of Volume 2 of the Joint Retail Assessment: Christchurch Borough Council and East, North and Purbeck District Councils, Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (March 2008).

Uses in Primary Shopping Areas

In the four main towns of North Dorset it is unlikely that a defined town centre will extend significantly beyond the primary shopping area and consequently the Council has not sought to adopt a more restrictive approach to retail development (as opposed to other main town centre uses) in parts of the town centre that lie outside a primary shopping area. On that basis the Council will apply the sequential test for retail (and all other main town centre uses) to town centre boundaries, rather than to primary shopping area boundaries.

6.55  This approach will be kept under review and may be subject to change through the preparation of the Local Plan Part 2 and neighbourhood plans.

Uses in Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages

6.56  Within primary and secondary shopping frontages, the Council will seek to retain, and resist the loss of, retail and other A Class168 units even when they become vacant, as explained in more detail below.

Uses in Primary Shopping Frontages

6.57  In the heart of existing town centres (basically, in identified primary shopping frontages), it is particularly important that the overall level of retail provision is maintained and enhanced. In these areas, the retail offer should not be undermined by the loss of existing shops (and other A1 Class uses169). The Council will also seek to retain vacant units, as bringing such units back into use has a role to play in meeting future needs.

6.58  Within the primary shopping frontages, existing shops on the ground floor will be retained in order to maintain the attractiveness of these areas to shoppers. The Council will resist proposals that would result in their loss to other uses, including their loss to other A Class uses.

6.59  The Council will seek to retain the total extent of the retail sales area within a primary shopping frontage, in order to maintain the retail offer. The Council will also seek to retain the total extent of retail uses on streets or pedestrian thoroughfares within the frontage, in order to maintain active frontages which contribute to the vitality of town centres. In primary shopping frontages, the Council will also seek to bring vacant shops back into A1 Class use.

168 References to the different A Class uses and non-A Class uses are to those identified in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended) or any replacement or re-enactment of that order with or without modification.

169 Class A1 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended) includes shops, retail warehouses, hairdressers, undertakers, travel and ticket agencies, post offices, dry cleaners and internet cafes etc.

Uses in Secondary Shopping Frontages

6.60  It remains important to maintain a strong retail presence in secondary shopping frontages, but since the uses in such areas tend to be more mixed a wider range of uses may be permitted. A mix of shops, financial and professional services and food and drink outlets will be encouraged on the ground floor within secondary shopping frontages.

6.61  Within secondary shopping frontages the Council will also seek to bring vacant shops, financial and professional services and food and drink outlets back into use.

Enhancing and Expanding Existing Town Centres

Future Retail, Leisure, Office and Community Needs

6.62  The Joint Retail Assessment170 identified District-wide needs for additional retail sales floorspace in the period 2007 to 2026, but the assessment pre-dated the global economic downturn and the identified needs were derived from population projections that have now been superseded. Nevertheless, the assessment highlighted a key issue for North Dorset, which is the lack of comparison goods expenditure.

6.63  North Dorset is well served by food stores, which reflects the comparatively high level of convenience goods (largely food) expenditure identified in the Joint Retail Assessment. However, the lack of comparison retail stores and floorspace means that there is a relatively low level of comparison goods (largely non-food) expenditure in the District. An emphasis in future provision on additional comparison retail floorspace would both provide a better balance of uses in town centres and reduce the need to travel outside the District.

1. 6.64  The Gillingham Study171 also evaluated the retail requirements for the town against a number of different scenarios. In the context of the proposed growth of the town, it identified the potential for a significant increase in retail provision, with a strong focus on comparison goods.
2. 6.65  Much of the baseline need for B Class uses in North Dorset is predicted to be for offices172, which have the potential to be accommodated on employment sites

170 Floorspace projections are discussed in Section 9 of the Joint Retail Assessment for Christchurch Borough and East, North and Purbeck Districts: Volume 2 - North Dorset, Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners (March 2008).

171 Retail needs are discussed in Section 7 of Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham, Dorset, Atkins (December 2009).

172 The Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Workspace Study Employment Land Projections 2012 Update – Extract for North Dorset identified a baseline need for 8.7 hectares of office use for the period 2011 to 2031.

(for which sufficient provision has been made under Policy 11 – The Economy) as well as in town centre locations.

6.66  The Joint Retail Assessment examined the potential for additional commercial leisure uses in North Dorset’s towns, but found that it was limited. However, it suggested that there could be scope for small-scale facilities, such as health and fitness clubs, a small cinema, restaurants and bars.

6.67  There are also needs for additional cultural, recreation and community facilities, as set out in Policy 14 – Social Infrastructure. Some of these proposals, such as new community halls, would be appropriate in a town centre (or edge of centre) location and some are also being taken forward as community-based projects.

Approach to Meeting the Identified Needs

6.68  The overall approach to accommodate these needs is:

• to seek to reduce vacancy rates in town centre shops and encourage their occupancy, particularly by comparison good retailers;

• to encourage the implementation of existing planning permissions for additional retail floorspace, particularly in Blandford and Gillingham;

• to identify locations in existing town centres and sites for mixed-use regeneration on the edge of centres to meet future needs; and

• to work with local communities to take forward proposals for town centre enhancement and growth through neighbourhood planning or other local, community-based initiatives.

6.69  The Joint Retail Assessment identified that a reduction in the vacancy rate to 5% across North Dorset could provide scope to accommodate an additional 1,900 square metres (gross) of retail floorspace. At the time the assessment was undertaken (2008), the Safeway store in Blandford was closed. This has since re-opened (as Morrisons) and the former bus station on Salisbury Road has been redeveloped to provide about 3,000 square metres of additional retail floorspace in the town.

6.70  In Blandford there are currently planning permissions for an extension of Tesco at Stour Park and a new Asda supermarket and petrol filling station on land off Shaftesbury Lane. In Gillingham there is planning permission for new retail units off Station Road/Le Neubourg Way. The implementation of these schemes will increase significantly the amount of retail floorspace in the District.

6.71  Given the historic nature of the four main towns in North Dorset, there is limited scope for additional development within the town centres. The only town centre site identified in the Joint Retail Assessment (other than the closed Safeway store – now Morrisons) was on the southern side of East Street in

Blandford Forum173. However, there is potential for the extension to the rear of a wider range of premises on the southern side of Market Place/East Street, including land around the existing Co-operative store, as outlined in Policy 16 – Blandford.

6.72  There are more significant opportunities for mixed-use regeneration in edge-of- centre locations (as outlined in Policy 11 – The Economy), which could include a significant element of retail development. The main sites are:

• the Station Road area in Gillingham, which has the potential to provide about 7,500 gross square metres of retail floorspace174;

• the land between the town centre and Christy’s Lane in Shaftesbury (including the livestock market and the postal sorting office on Angel Square); and

• the Station Road area in Sturminster Newton which has the potential to provide about 1,250 gross square metres of retail floorspace175.

6.73  The Brewery site at Blandford St. Mary will also be regenerated, but since this site is separated from Blandford Forum town centre by the floodplain of the River Stour, the main focus will be on meeting employment needs rather than accommodating main town centre uses.

6.74  Policies 16 to 19 discuss the opportunities outlined above in more detail on a town-by-town basis.

6.75  Neighbourhood plans are being prepared by local communities in all four of the Districts main towns and these are likely to tackle town centre issues. In Sturminster Newton proposals for the regeneration of the edge-of-centre Station Road area are set out in a community-led design and development brief.

6.76  The Council will work with local communities in the towns to take forward proposals for the enhancement of town centres, either in neighbourhood plans or through other community based initiatives. In the event that a local community decided not to tackle town centre issues in a neighbourhood plan, then the Council would consider allocating appropriate town centre or edge-of- centre sites in the Local Plan Part 2.

6.77  To maintain the vitality of town centres and to reflect the Planning Practice Guidance further retail and town centre studies will be undertaken to inform

173 Land to the rear of Stour House, 41 East Street, as described in Appendix A of Joint Retail Assessment for Christchurch Borough and East, North and Purbeck Districts: Volume 2 - North Dorset, Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners (March 2008).

174 Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham, Dorset, Atkins (December 2009).  
175 The Station Road Area Design and Development Brief, Matrix Partnership for SturQuest (April 2008).

Part 2 of the Local Plan and/or the neighbourhood plans for the four main towns.

Town Centre Uses Outside Town Centres

6.78  The Council will apply the sequential test in national policy to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with the development plan, unless the application is for small-scale rural offices, or other small-scale rural development176.

6.79  Applicants will need to demonstrate that such proposals can satisfy the sequential test and will not have a significant adverse impact on any town centres.

6.80  The Council will require applications for main town centre uses to be located:

• in town centres;

• then in edge of centre locations; and

• only if suitable sites are not available should out of centre sites be considered177.

6.81  When considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference will be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre. The Council will expect applicants to demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale.

6.82  The Council will require a developer to produce an impact assessment for a retail, leisure or office development of 2,500 square metres or more, which is proposed outside a town centre and which is not in accordance with the development plan. This should include assessment of:

• the impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal; and

• the impact of the proposal on town centre vitality and viability, including local consumer choice and trade in the town centre and wider area, up to five years from the time the application is made. For major schemes where the full impact will not be realised in five years, the impact should be assessed up to ten years from the time the application is made.

6.83  Where an application fails to satisfy the sequential test or is likely to have significant adverse impact on one or more of the above factors, it will be refused.

176 The sequential test in national policy is set out in paragraphs 24 to 27 of the National Planning Policy Framework, DCLG (March 2012).

177 The full definitions of edge of centre and out of centre are set out in Annex 2: Glossary of the National Planning Policy Framework, DCLG (March 2012).

6.84  Access to services is a key issue in North Dorset, especially in rural areas outside the four main towns. The Council wishes to ensure that existing community facilities, which may include retail, leisure or commercial developments, are retained where possible. Policy 27 – Retention of Community Facilities sets out the specific circumstances when the Council may permit the loss of a community facility and lists the factors that will be taken into consideration the decision-making process.

Markets

6.85  All four main towns in North Dorset are market towns and three of them still retain their outdoor weekly markets, as set out in Figure 6.3 below.

Figure 6.3: Outdoor Weekly Markets in North Dorset

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Town Centre | Location of Market | When Held |
| Blandford Forum | Market Place | Thursday and Saturday |
| Shaftesbury | High Street | Thursday |
| Sturminster Newton | Market Square and Station Road | Monday |

6.86  In addition, all four main towns support other markets, such as farmers’ or country (formerly Women’s Institute) markets.

6.87  The Council supports the retention and, where possible, enhancement of the existing outdoor weekly markets in North Dorset and will seek to ensure that any proposals (for example town centre enhancements) for the sites where the outdoor weekly markets take place do not prejudice the future operation of these markets.

6.88  The design and development brief for the Station Road area in Sturminster Newton proposes a new square at the Station Road, Barnes Close, Market Place junction, which should provide more space for the outdoor weekly market178.

Shop Front Design

6.89  The retail industry needs to adapt to changing markets and consumer preferences. However, shop fronts need to be sensitively designed both to retain the architectural integrity of individual buildings (including listed buildings) and to maintain the character of the District’s towns and villages (and their conservation areas). The alteration or replacement of shop fronts generally requires planning permission and advertisements may require

178 Station Road Area Design and Development Brief, prepared for SturQuest by The Matrix Partnership Ltd (April 2008).

separate advertisement consent. However, routine maintenance works such as redecoration or straightforward repairs, are permitted development and do not require planning permission.

6.90 The Council has produced a draft guide to shop front design179, which also covers the issues of shop signage and security shutters. When considering proposals for the replacement, alteration or restoration of a shop front, the Council will expect applicants to be able to demonstrate that they have had due regard to the Council’s advice, such as the advice in the draft shop front design guide.

179 North Dorset Guide to Shop Front Design (Draft), NDDC (June 2007).

POLICY 12: RETAIL, LEISURE AND OTHER COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENTS

Hierarchy of Centres

For the purposes of considering any proposal for retail and other main town centre uses in North Dorset Blandford Forum, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton are designated as town centres.

Defining Town Centres, Primary Shopping Areas and Shopping Frontages

The boundaries of town centres and primary shopping areas in the four main towns will be defined as part of Local Plan Part 2, unless previously defined in a neighbourhood plan.

The primary and secondary shopping frontages in the North Dorset District- Wide Local Plan 2003 will continue to be used for development management purposes until reviewed through Local Plan Part 2 or a neighbourhood plan.

Uses in Town Centres

Development for retail and other main town centre uses, including mixed- use schemes that may include an element of residential element, will be supported within a town centre provided that:

a  it is of a type and scale that will maintain or enhance the role and function of the town in the catchment it serves; and

b  it is designed to respect the historic character of the town centre; and

c  in the case of non-retail main town centre uses, the proposal does not undermine the focus on retailing in primary shopping areas.

Uses in Primary Shopping Frontages

Within the primary shopping frontages of town centres, development resulting in the change of use from an existing ground floor A1 Class use within a unit fronting a street or pedestrian thoroughfare will not be permitted where this would result in any loss of retail frontage or ground floor net retail floorspace.

Uses in Secondary Shopping Frontages

Within secondary shopping frontages, development resulting in the change of use of an existing ground floor A Class use within a unit fronting a street or pedestrian thoroughfare will not be permitted. Change of use from A1 Class use to financial and professional services (Use Class A2), restaurants and cafes (Use Class A3), drinking establishments (Use Class A4) and hot food takeaways (Use Class A5) will be permitted.

Enhancing and Expanding Existing Town Centres

The Council will seek to meet the identified needs for main town centre uses by:

d  working to reduce vacancy rates in town centre shops;

e  encouraging the implementation of extant planning permissions for additional retail floorspace;

f  permitting retail and other main town centre uses in town centres and on sites identified for mixed-use regeneration on the edge of Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton town centres, as identified in Policy 11 – The Economy and Policies 17 to 19; and

g  working with local communities to take forward proposals for town centre enhancement and growth through neighbourhood planning or other local, community-based initiatives.

Town Centre Uses Outside Town Centres

Proposals for retail and other main town centre uses that are not in an existing town centre and are not in accordance with the development plan will only be permitted if:

h  they satisfy the ‘sequential test’ in national policy; and

i  they will not have a significant adverse impact on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal; and

j  they will not have a significant adverse impact on town centre vitality and viability.

Markets

The Council will seek to retain and enhance existing outdoor weekly markets in North Dorset and will not permit development on the sites where the outdoor weekly markets take place that would prejudice their future operation.

Shop Front Design

Proposals for the replacement, alteration or restoration of a shop front should be designed having had due regard to the Council’s advice on shop front design.