

## **SHOPPING, ADVERTISEMENTS AND TOWN CENTRES**

### **Shopping and Town Centres**

There are three Town Centres in the District: Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley. Rayleigh provides the most comprehensive range of facilities and is defined in the Replacement Structure Plan as a Principal Town Centre, however neither it nor Rochford or Hockley provides a major food superstore.

The Council commissioned a retail study in 1999, which identified a significant leakage of expenditure from the District. This is not surprising given the proximity of the Sub-Regional Town Centres of Southend-on-Sea, Basildon, Chelmsford and Lakeside for comparison goods, and the existence of a number of food superstores just outside the District's boundaries for convenience goods.

The Council is committed to maintaining the viability and vitality of the District's town centres and reducing the amount of expenditure leakage where possible. To this end, the Local Planning Authority will expect any new retail development (other than local facilities to meet day-to-day needs) to be within the designated town centre boundaries, and meet the criteria of Policy SAT1, below. A specific site has been identified for a large food store in Rochford town centre. This is the subject of an additional policy, SAT2.

Clearly to be attractive to shoppers, town centres need not only to offer an enticing range of shops but also a pleasant environment in which to shop. The Council is committed to maintaining the character and attractiveness of its town centres and, indeed, has carried out significant enhancements to Rayleigh town centre in recent years, in conjunction with the Town Council. Enhancement works are also planned for Rochford and Hockley town centres. Besides Council initiatives, the Local Planning Authority needs to control the provision of advertisements and street furniture that can, if left unchecked, seriously affect the character of an area. Policies covering these issues can be found later in this chapter.

### **POLICY SAT1 - NEW RETAIL, COMMERCIAL AND LEISURE DEVELOPMENT**

**The Local Planning Authority shall adopt a sequential approach to consider the suitability of proposals for retail, commercial, public offices, entertainment, leisure and other such proposals. The preferred location for such proposals shall be within the Town Centre boundaries of Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley, indicated on the Proposal Maps, followed by edge-of-centre sites, district and local centres, and out-of-centre sites. Any application proposing such development outside a Town Centre will be determined having regard to the following factors:**

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- i) the availability of any alternative site (whether allocated for the proposed use, or otherwise) within a Town Centre;**
  - ii) the likely impact of the development on the vitality and viability of existing town centres, including the evening economy, and on the rural economy;**
  - iii) the accessibility of the application site by a choice of means of transport;**
  - iv) the likely effect of the proposal on overall travel patterns and car use; and,**
  - v) the likely harm of the proposal to the foregoing strategy.**
- [NEW]

**Rochford Foodstore**

The need for a large food store has long been identified in Rochford, given the modest facilities that currently exist, and a site for such a store was allocated to the North of the Market Square in the Rochford District Local Plan First Review. However, although a number of operators have expressed an interest in the site over the years, as yet no application to develop it has been submitted.

The primary objective of the Council's retail study carried out in 1999 was to ascertain the size of food store the town could realistically support and to consider whether the provision of such a store posed a threat or an opportunity to existing retailers in the town. The study concluded that the town could support a food store of a maximum of 1,862sq.m (20,000sq.ft) gross, and that the such a store would enhance the viability of the town centre provided that it did not include service facilities found elsewhere in the town centre, for example, a post office or pharmacy.

Since the completion of the retail study, land immediately to the North of the site allocated in the First Review has become available, and forms part of the food store allocation within this Plan. It is considered that the enlarged site offers more scope in terms of layout and design, as well as the opportunity to include other uses that might be beneficially linked to such a development. For example, the County Council has been seeking to provide an enlarged library for some years and such a facility could usefully form part of such a development.

**POLICY SAT2 - ROCHFORD FOODSTORE**

**The Local Planning Authority will assess proposals for a retail food store and associated mixed use development, including a new library, on the allocated site north of Market Square, Rochford against the following criteria:**

- i) the proposal should exhibit a high standard of design, and utilise materials appropriate to this sensitive town centre location within a conservation area;**
- ii) car parking should be provided in accordance with the standards set out in [LPSPG insert number];**
- iii) the proposal should make satisfactory provision for access, parking and servicing arrangements, with servicing to taking place solely via Roche Close;**
- iv) the proposal should be accompanied by detailed hard and soft landscaping and lighting schemes for the site and the accesses to it, particularly to ensure close integration of the site with the Market Square; and**
- v) the provision of a pedestrian link to the Market Square should be an essential and integral part of the proposal.**

[NEW]

### **Non-retail uses in Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages**

To ensure the vitality and long term viability of a Town Centre, it is crucial that it has at its core a predominance of attractive retail uses. Whilst a proportion of non-retail uses (e.g. banks, building societies, restaurants and pubs) will complement a shopping centre, long stretches of 'dead' non-retail frontage and a high percentage of non-retail uses throughout the centre will destroy its synergy.

Policies SAT3 and SAT4 seek to strike the right balance between retail and non-retail uses in Town Centre Primary (main) and Secondary (support) Shopping Frontages. As a guide, the Local Planning Authority expect 75% of the total Primary Shopping Frontage of each Town Centre and 50% of the total Secondary Shopping Frontage of each Town Centre to remain in retail use. However, it is important to note that Town Centres are dynamic environments and that the 'right balance between retail and non-retail uses' shifts as consumer preferences and markets change. These percentages should not, therefore, be used too prescriptively.

There may be cases where units lie vacant for a considerable time, despite the best endeavors of agents to re-let or sell them for retail use. If there is, in reality, no demand for that particular retail unit, the use of the unit for an alternative use might be considered better for the health of the town centre as a whole than for the unit to remain empty for a further and indeterminate period.

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It is also recognised that a number of new uses have become popular since the publication of the Use Classes Order in 1987 which are entirely appropriate with modern primary or secondary shopping frontages, although they may not easily be 'pigeonholed' by the existing Order. Applications for such uses (e.g. internet cafes, beauty salons, etc.) will be considered on their merits having regard to the policies set out below.

The policies also seek to lessen the effect of dead frontage by requiring that premises in non-retail use continue to use shop windows for display purposes, and to ensure that proposals would not result in the loss of any independent means of accessing the building's upper floors, so preventing their beneficial use as self-contained living accommodation, or for other appropriate purposes. NB: a policy covering the use of the upper floors of shops and other commercial uses as self-contained living accommodation can be found in [Housing Chapter] [Policy number].

**POLICY SAT3 - NON-RETAIL USES WITHIN PRIMARY SHOPPING FRONTAGES**

**Within the Primary Shopping Frontages of Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley defined on the Town Centre Proposals Maps, the change of use of the ground floor of premises to non-retail use will be permitted provided that all of the following criteria are met:**

- a. the use proposed would be appropriate within a Primary Shopping Frontage, and would support its vitality and viability;**
- b. the proposal would not result in an over-concentration of non-retail uses in part of the Primary Shopping Frontage;**
- c. the proposal would not result in the undue dominance of non-retail uses in the Primary Shopping Frontage as a whole;**
- d. the proposal would not result in the removal of any independent means of accessing the upper floor(s) of the premises or otherwise prevent an effective use being made of the upper floor(s); and,**
- e. where the proposal relates to a premises with an existing shopfront, the shop window would continue to be used for display purposes.**

[MINUTE 127/02]

**POLICY SAT4 - NON-RETAIL USES WITHIN SECONDARY SHOPPING FRONTAGES**

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**Within the Secondary Shopping Frontages of Rayleigh, Rochford and Hockley defined on the Town Centre Proposals Maps, the change of use of the ground floor of premises to non-retail use will be permitted provided that all of the following criteria are met:**

- a. the use proposed would be appropriate within a Secondary Shopping Frontage, and would support its vitality and viability;**
- b. the proposal would not result in an over-concentration of non-retail uses in part of the Secondary Shopping Frontage;**
- c. the proposal would not result in the undue dominance of non-retail uses in the Secondary Shopping Frontage as a whole;**
- d. the proposal would not result in the removal of any independent means of accessing the upper floor(s) of the premises or otherwise prevent an effective use being made of the upper floor(s); and,**
- e. where the proposal relates to a premises with an existing shopfront, the shop window would continue to be used for display purposes.**

[MINUTE 127/02]

### **Neighbourhood and Village Shops**

A great many shops and services are scattered throughout residential areas in the District's towns and villages. These perform a vital role in providing convenience goods and services to meet people's day-to-day needs. The location of such units within residential areas, means that they can be easily reached on foot, and so meet sustainability objectives. The loss of such units inevitably means that residents need to travel further to find alternative facilities, and would be more likely to drive to them. The protection of local shops and facilities is, thus, crucial to sustainability. Local facilities also provide a lifeline for those without access to public transport, or with mobility problems.

The Local Planning Authority is committed to retaining existing retail units, except in cases where a lack of demand for the unit can be demonstrated. In such cases, the change of use of the premises to a use that would provide a similar service to local residents may be permitted, subject to the criteria set out below. Amongst other things, it will be necessary to consider whether the new use will be compatible with its location close to residential properties, hot food takeaways being a case in point.

In previous Local Plans, certain local shopping parades have been identified on Proposals Maps. It is recognised, however, that individual shops spread throughout a neighbourhood,

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or along a particular street, perform the same function as a parade, and should be subject to the same planning considerations. The policy below relates to all existing shops lying outside the designated Town Centres, but within the boundaries of settlements defined on the Proposals Maps. The Local Planning Authority's policy stance regarding the provision new retail uses in rural areas (including farm shops) is covered by Policy [insert no] in the Rural Issues chapter.

**POLICY SAT5 - NEIGHBOURHOOD AND VILLAGE SHOPS**

**Outside the Town Centres, the change of use of the ground floor of existing retail premises to non-retail use will only be permitted if all of the following criteria are met:**

- a. the loss of the retail unit is justified because the unit has been vacant for a period of 12 months (minimum) or because the existing use is not financially viable. In either case, applicants should be able to demonstrate that all reasonable attempts have been made to sell/let the premises for retail use, but without success;**
- b. the use proposed would serve the day-to-day needs of local residents;**
- c. the use proposed would not reduce the quality of life of residents living in the immediate vicinity of the premises, by virtue of noise, disturbance, cooking smells, litter or other factors;**
- d. the proposal would not result in the removal of any independent means of accessing the upper floor(s) of the premises or otherwise prevent an effective use being made of the upper floor(s); and,**
- e. where the proposal relates to a premises with an existing shopfront, the shop window would continue to be used for display purposes.**

[MINUTE 127/02]

**Servicing**

The provision of off-street servicing and parking facilities in the Town Centres is essential to make them safe and attractive places for shoppers. Such facilities should be an integral part of all proposals for development/redevelopment within the Town Centres.

**POLICY SAT6 - SERVICING**

**The Local Planning Authority will require the provision of off-street servicing in all proposals for new development within Town Centres and will encourage the provision of new or improved off-street servicing facilities as opportunities arise.**

[MINUTE 127/02]

### **Shopfronts: Design and Security**

The design of shop fronts is a key element in establishing the character and identity of the shopping centres. Present day trends are towards wider frontages with large plate glass windows, deep fascias and corporate house styles all bearing little relationship to the scale and character of the buildings in which they are constructed. To achieve an improvement in the visual character of the town centres and local shopping parades, particularly those which are in the conservation areas, it is essential that new shop fronts have regard to the scale and character of the existing street scene. The use of glazing bars to give a small domestic scale is preferable to large areas of plate glass, and fascias should have regard to changes in elevational details in terms of their length and depth. In new developments shop fronts should be conceived as part of the overall design. Permission for the modernisation of historic shop fronts which are part of listed buildings will be refused. In other cases, it is expected that historic shop fronts will normally be retained, particularly within the conservation areas.

A further trend in recent years has been the provision of metal security shutters and grilles. These are usually of unattractive and forbidding appearance, and greatly detract from the character of the building to which they are fitted, as well as the general area. Shutters can also totally change the character and feel of an area, giving the impression that an area is prone to crime, when actually it is not - and can, according to some studies, actually lead to a rise in crime levels. For these reasons, the Local Planning Authority is generally opposed to the provision of metal roller shutters and grilles.

Detailed guidance on shopfronts, from both a design and a security perspective, can be found in the accompanying LPSPG, and in the Built Conservation chapter of this plan.

### **POLICY SAT7 - SHOPFRONTS: DESIGN AND SECURITY**

**Shopfronts should be designed to complement the style and proportions of the affected building, and to those adjoining it. Shopfront designs should also incorporate any features necessary to ensure the security of the premises, and its contents. In this regard, attention is drawn to Policy SAT8 which follows. All applications should comply with the guidance of LPSPG [insert number [Shopfronts - Security and Design]].**

[MINUTE 127/02]

## **POLICY SAT8 - SECURITY SHUTTERS**

**Planning permission for the installation of external roller shutters or grilles will only be granted where these do not cause an adverse impact on the appearance of the building to which they are to be attached or its locality. Where, exceptionally, shutters or grilles are permitted, they should comply with the guidance of LPSPG [insert number [Shopfronts - Security and Design]].**  
[MINUTE 127/02 INCLUDES AMENDMENT]

### **Advertisements**

It is acknowledged that the purpose of advertisements is to attract attention. However, advertisements of garish design, inappropriate materials or excessive illumination can be detrimental not just to the appearance of the building on which they are displayed but also to the character of the wider area. Moreover, a profusion of advertising material on any one building or site, or in any one street scene, can lead to a feeling of clutter and confusion. Thus, when considering advertisements, a balance needs to be struck between the needs of a business to advertise its presence and the need to ensure that the signage would not adversely affect the visual amenities of the area.

When considering advertisements, the Local Planning Authority will have regard to their size, materials, design and illumination, together with their relationship to the building on which they are to be displayed. Illuminated signs will also be assessed to ensure that they would not dazzle drivers, and so constitute a road safety hazard.

To avoid a proliferation of advertisements on one property, where the upper floors of buildings are separately let for business purposes, simple lettering, either on a screen behind the window or on the window panes themselves, should be used in lieu of additional fascia or projecting signs. Similar control will be exercised in respect of petrol filling stations, garden centres and other uses that can, typically, attract a number of advertisements.

The conservation areas are particularly sensitive to the style of advertising used on shops and businesses. The use of internally illuminated fascia or projecting box signs should be avoided since they detract from the appearance of individual buildings and the character of the surrounding area.

The Local Planning Authority will carry out a regular review of advertisements, particularly within the conservation areas. It is considered that damage is being caused to the visual

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appearance of an area, and following consultation with local trade and amenity organisations, the local planning authority will consider making an area of special control order for approval by the Secretary of State under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992.

**POLICY SAT9 - ADVERTISEMENTS: GENERAL DISTRICT-WIDE POLICY**

**Advertisements should be designed and sited such that they relate to the character of the buildings on which they are displayed as well as the surrounding area. Regard will be had to the location, size, materials, design, intensity of illumination and relationship with the buildings to which they are attached.**

[MINUTE 127/02]

**POLICY SAT10 - ADVERTISEMENTS WITHIN CONSERVATION AREAS**

**Within Conservation Areas the use of internally illuminated fascias and projecting box signs will not be permitted. Where illuminated signs are exceptionally permitted illumination shall take the form of spot lighting of hanging signs or other discreet forms of lighting. Traditional wooden, painted fascias and hanging signs will be preferred to coloured plastic fascias and boxes.**

[MINUTE 127/02]

**POLICY SAT11 - ADVERTISEMENTS: VISUAL CLUTTER**

**The Local Planning Authority will exercise strict control to prevent a proliferation of advertisements on any one building or site.**

[MINUTE 127/02 INCLUDES AMENDMENT]