

6. SHOPPING

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

6.1 As South Cambridgeshire is a rural area much spending takes place outside the District. This applies particularly to comparison shopping (the purchase of goods bought on an irregular basis in larger centres with a range of shops, such as clothing, footwear, household goods, electrical goods and jewellery). The nearest destination for this is Cambridge which is at the heart of the District. The Council supports the role of the City Centre as the sub-regional centre and, since 1995, has taken an active role in 'Cambridge City Centre Management'. However, for a variety of reasons South Cambridgeshire residents also shop at other major centres such as Peterborough or visit the smaller market towns just outside the District. Such reasons may include difficulties in gaining access to and from Cambridge City Centre and in moving around it; the availability of different ranges of shops in other centres; and the variety of opportunities offered by other centres for linking shopping trips with other activities.

6.2 Convenience shopping (the regular daily or weekly purchase of food, drink and newspapers) is typically undertaken at superstores in and around Cambridge and in the surrounding market towns. However, convenience needs are also catered for within the District itself. Sawston is recognised as a Town Centre in the Structure Plan 1995 and supports a range of shops including both comparison and convenience units.

6.3 Bar Hill has a mix of shops characteristic of a local centre although the scale of its Tesco Extra store attracts shoppers from well beyond the village. In addition, a number of the larger villages perform the role of local centres, with small groups of convenience shops. There are also large stand-alone superstores at Fulbourn and Milton and many small village shops used mainly for top-up shopping. None of these are appropriate locations for shops serving a wide catchment for which a sequential approach to site selection is required by government planning policy guidance and which only applies to urban areas. Small rural shops and post offices perform an important community role but are increasingly under pressure from larger competitors. About half of the District's villages have inadequate facilities even for daily top-up shopping. Policies SH5, SH6 and SH9 aim to provide support for proposals to build or extend local shops.

GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE AND STRUCTURE PLAN POLICY

6.4 Government policy for shopping is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Notes No.6 "Town Centres and Retail Developments" and No.7 "The Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development."

6.5 The government's objectives for shopping development are broadly to encourage shops to locate in town and district centres where shopping trips can be combined with other activities and where shopping is accessible by a choice of means of transport. In rural areas, the government recognises the crucial role that village shops play in maintaining villages as viable communities.

6.6 The Cambridgeshire Structure Plan 1995 acknowledges the continued growth in expenditure and subsequent demand for more retail floorspace in the sub-regional centre of Cambridge. The Structure Plan's objectives are to maintain Cambridge's role as the focus for retailing within the sub-region whilst retaining a balance with existing and potential shopping elsewhere. Outside Cambridge, demand will be met partly by encouraging retail development in market towns, including Sawston. Proposals for new shopping developments in these locations should be on a scale appropriate for more local needs.

OBJECTIVES

6.7 Some measure of additional provision for shopping needs is possible in the District at least for convenience shopping, but in the light of government and Structure Plan policy to protect the rural environment and locate comparison shopping in towns, South Cambridgeshire's residents will on the whole need to travel at least as far as Cambridge for comparison shopping. The shopping policies of the Local Plan therefore have the following objectives:

- To ensure that Cambridge continues as the main sub-regional comparison shopping centre for South Cambridgeshire and to protect the vitality and viability of other established centres and villages within South Cambridgeshire.
- To encourage the provision of local shopping facilities within villages consistent with the scale and function of existing centres to meet people's day-to-day convenience shopping needs.
- To limit retail development in the countryside to goods produced in the immediate locality of any individual enterprise.

THE RETAIL HIERARCHY

POLICY SH1: A retail hierarchy of preferred centres will be taken into account in considering proposals for retail development. The hierarchy is established through the Structure Plan, this local plan, and the local plans of other nearby local planning authorities. In South Cambridgeshire Sawston is the only town where the sequential test for retail development will apply. Any proposals for new retail provision in these centres should be in scale with their position in the hierarchy.

6.8 Government advice is that development plans establish a range and hierarchy of centres from City Centres, through town centres and district centres to local centres and village centres where investment in new retail and other development will be promoted and existing provision enhanced. As indicated above, Cambridge is the relevant city centre in the local hierarchy while Sawston and the ring of market towns just outside the District represent town centres. A number of larger villages fulfil the role of local centres but are not appropriate locations for shopping development which serve urban areas and which are subject to the sequential test in policy SH2. They are the appropriate location for shopping to serve their local catchment area only. Any such proposal should be in scale with (and not disturb) the village's position in the hierarchy. At Bar Hill further provision of complementary non-retail services would be welcomed.

APPLICATIONS FOR NEW RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

POLICY SH2: Other than retail developments in villages under policies SH5 and SH9, planning permission for retail development will not be granted unless the applicant has successfully demonstrated that:-

- a sequential approach has been adopted to site selection and the availability of suitable alternative sites; and
- in the case of proposals in defined centres, the development would be in scale with that centre's position in the hierarchy; or, in the case of proposals outside defined existing centres, the impact of the development would not have an adverse effect on the vitality and viability of other town centres, district centres, and local centres defined in development plans, and on the rural economy, including village shops;
- the store would be conveniently accessible by a wide range of modes of transport other than the car, including frequent public transport from a wide catchment area, and effective measures would be taken to enhance such accessibility, including that for pedestrians and cyclists;
- the delivery and servicing arrangements would be compatible with local environmental conditions and would not cause local traffic difficulties.

In addition, in the case of proposals to develop sites in edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations (or to extend existing stores in such locations) developers will be required to demonstrate a positive need for additional floorspace *before* any of the above tests are applied.

6.9 For the reasons set out beneath, the present need for further retail development in the Cambridge area is considered to be fully met by current schemes.

6.10 The Cambridgeshire Structure Plan 1995 proposed (Policy SP18/8) that one or possibly two large-scale shopping developments totalling around 27,900 sq.m be built in the Cambridge Area in the period to 2006. The policy went on to state that "*Land available within the Cambridge Northern Fringe appears suitable for this purpose and options for its development should be fully explored before alternative locations are considered.*"

6.11 Subsequently, a commissioned study of the need for further retail floorspace in the Cambridge area was undertaken by Arup & Partners and published in March 1997. This recommended (p.65) that a scheme in the historic core be supported as the principal location for high-value comparison goods retail development to meet retail expenditure growth and retailer demand to the period 2006. Further developments in the Fitzroy Burleigh area were also to be supported in principle (p.65). It was also recommended that proposals for high-value comparison goods floorspace in the Cambridge Northern Fringe be rejected as premature while proposals for city centre development were being actively pursued and that if

a city centre scheme were promoted successfully, out-of-centre comparison goods retailing needed to be constrained to bulk goods retail warehousing (p.67).

6.12 In 1998 the Secretary of State considered a called-in proposal for 41,800 sq.m (gross) retail space and other development at Arbury Park, now known as CNF (West). His decision on the case took account of the sequential approach set out in paragraph 1.11 of PPG6. This approach gives *“first preference (to) town centre sites where suitable sites or buildings suitable for conversion, are available, followed by edge-of-centre sites, district and local centres and only then out-of-centre sites in locations that are accessible by a choice of means of transport”*. The requirement to apply this test post-dated the Structure Plan.

6.13 The Secretary of State found that the sequential approach had not been applied, so the potential of the City Centre to accommodate major development had not been tested. Since he was satisfied that there might be potential there he concluded that (a) the CNF should not be re-considered until it was clear that the City Centre was not an option and (b) that in the event that city centre plans did not come forward within a realistic period it would not be inappropriate for those with interests in the CNF to put forward fresh proposals for retail development. He did ‘not disagree’ with the Inspector’s assessment that the eastern end of the CNF would be preferred to the western end in terms of the sequential test, although he noted that the former was subject to uncertain factors.

6.14 Since then planning permission has been granted for the ‘Grand Arcade’ scheme in the centre of the City and compulsory purchase procedures are under way to complete the necessary land assembly. In the Council’s view, this confirms that implementation of the preferred site is being seriously pursued. In addition, sites for retail warehousing continue to come forward within the City of Cambridge. The Council therefore takes the view that there is unlikely to be any need for significant comparison goods retail development in South Cambridgeshire during the life of this Plan. The above policy reflects that position.

6.15 The CNF West site, i.e. Arbury Camp, is now allocated under policy CNF1 of this Plan for a housing-led mixed-use development. This includes only local shopping. However, in preparation of the masterplan for CNF East consideration needs to be given as to whether or not there may be longer-term need or scope for a larger retail element in the development mix, subject to the considerations indicated under policy CNF2 of this Plan. The review of retail aspects of the Structure Plan 1995 will inform this decision.

6.16 In view of the above, it is unlikely that retail schemes of any size will receive planning permission in South Cambridgeshire. However, policy SH2 provides guidance on the way in which the Council will consider any application for new retail development or for the extension of existing retail development. As stated, the policy does not apply to proposals for small-scale retail developments and extensions in villages. These will be considered under policies SH5 and SH9. Policy SH2 embraces the principles of PPG6.

Retail Development on Land Allocated for Other Uses

POLICY SH3: Retail development will only be permitted on land allocated for housing, employment, recreation or other uses in the Local Plan, where it can be demonstrated that the effect of such loss would not limit the range and quality of sites available for that particular use or the quantity of land required to meet Structure Plan 1995 requirements for housing and employment.

6.17 Keeping land available for the purpose for which it is allocated in South Cambridgeshire is particularly important. The overall development policy in the District is for the restraint of growth. Retail development will be resisted on land allocated for other forms of development in the Local Plan where this would result in unplanned limitations being placed on the range and quality of sites available for that particular use or the quantity

of land required to meet Structure Plan 1995 requirements. The policy will not be operated to prevent the provision of small-scale retail facilities to complement the other elements of mixed development schemes.

Retailing at Cambourne

POLICY SH4: Development at Cambourne will include a shopping centre providing a range of convenience and comparison shops consistent with its eventual population size and its designation as a Rural Growth Settlement.

6.18 Cambourne will have a population of about 8,000 and will therefore be comparable in size with Sawston, which is defined as a 'town centre' for the purposes of Structure Plan 1995 policy SP6/1. If it is to be sustainable Cambourne will need to be similarly self-contained for shopping purposes. It is therefore intended that the shopping centre at Cambourne will provide a wide range of facilities consistent with the scale and function of the centre, meeting local people's daily needs and reducing the need to travel.

RETAILING IN THE VILLAGES

New Retail Development

POLICY SH5: Proposals for the development of new shops, redevelopment or extension of existing shops or the change of use of buildings to top up shops within a village framework will be permitted provided:

- (1) the size and attraction of shopping development is of a scale appropriate to the size of village or other centre;**
- (2) development would not have an adverse impact on the amenity of nearby residential or other development; and**
- (3) the site in its present form does not form an essential part of village character.**

6.19 Small neighbourhood shopping centres and village shops are vital to meet local needs for goods and services, and play an important social role in small villages. The District Council, through its planning powers can do little directly to alleviate the commercial pressures which have led to the decline of the village shop. The Council will however, wherever possible, encourage the provision of local shops through new development and the change of use of existing buildings.

Loss of Shops

POLICY SH6: Proposals which would involve the loss of a retail unit or post office in a village will be resisted where it would result in a significant reduction in the level of retail provision locally available. In determining the significance of the loss, regard will be had to:

- (1) if vacant, how long the premises have been on the market and the likelihood of another retail use being found;**
- (2) the current use of the premises and its existing and potential contribution to convenience shopping provision for the local population; and**
- (3) the presence of other convenience shops in the vicinity which would provide an alternative and which are conveniently located for access by public transport, cycling and walking.**

6.20 The District Council shares the view of Government about the economic, environmental and social importance of village shops stated in Planning Policy Guidance Notes No.6 and No.7, and in the White Paper "Rural England - A Nation Committed to a Living Countryside". In seeking to retain village shops, the District Council will take a pragmatic view of the retention of local shops but is aware that once a shop is lost the facility may be gone forever as its customers will change their shopping habits and physical alterations to the building often make return to retail use impractical. Without local shops providing some day-to-day needs, village life will become increasingly dependent upon the ability to travel for even the most basic goods at a time when the government has made an international obligation to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases, including those from traffic.

Vehicle Sales and Maintenance, and Plant Hire

POLICY SH7: Proposals involving the sale, hire, modification or repair of motor vehicles or plant will not be permitted in villages where they would create environmental problems by virtue of traffic generation, noise, smell or vehicle parking.

6.21 Certain forms of retailing are not appropriate in villages where they would create environmental problems to surrounding housing. Vehicle and fuel sales, vehicle hiring and vehicle and plant repairs can be unsympathetic to these locations by virtue of noise, smell, dust and traffic generation. Where these uses exist and are already creating such difficulties, unless any development/redevelopment proposals would resolve any such existing problems, expansion will not be permitted and they will be encouraged to move to designated or established industrial estates.

Shop Fronts

POLICY SH8: The District Council will not grant planning permission for new shop fronts and alterations to existing shop fronts which:

- (1) create a fascia and shop windows which is out of character with the building itself and the street scene;**
- (2) result in a needless loss of architectural features; or**
- (3) introduce 'house styles' and materials which are alien to the building and its surroundings.**

6.22 Both customers and shopkeepers benefit if the shopping street scene is enhanced by well designed and maintained shops. The District Council will therefore not grant planning permission where the proposal is not in keeping with the building and its surrounding areas.

Advertising

6.23 The District Council's most recent policy for advertising is contained in Supplementary Planning Guidance adopted by the District Council on 3rd November 1993 and is available separately.

Extensions to Shops

POLICY SH9: The District Council will permit extensions to village shops if the proposal is sympathetic to the general environment in terms of siting, design, layout, materials and parking standards.

6.24 Whilst generally welcomed, the provision of additional retail floorspace within villages must be sympathetic to the character of existing buildings and ensure the protection or enhancement of their surroundings.

6.25 Any proposals for new shop fronts and/or alterations to existing shop fronts within Conservation Areas in South Cambridgeshire should have regard to the individual character of each Conservation Area and to the policies which apply within them as set out in Chapter 10 of this Local Plan.

RETAILING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Farm Shops and Nurseries

POLICY SH10: Sales from farms and nurseries of produce and/or craft goods will be permitted, subject to the other policies in the Plan, provided they:

- (1) only sell goods of which the majority must be produced on the farm or in the locality;**
- (2) do not generate a traffic problem;**
- (3) do not create a nuisance or create visual intrusion;**
- (4) do not adversely affect the setting or character of existing development.**

6.26 The District Council is concerned about sporadic development for retail uses in the open countryside but it is aware of the special cases of nurseries and farm shops which can assist the viability of existing enterprises. Whilst nurseries and farmers may sell goods produced on the holding, there has been a trend for such outlets to include a wider range of goods including goods which are not produced locally. Operating with lower overheads, these sales could have an adverse effect on the economic viability of existing shopping facilities in nearby villages. Nursery and farm sales should therefore be restricted to those goods which are primarily produced at the site.

Shops Ancillary to Petrol Filling Stations

POLICY SH11: Shops ancillary to petrol filling stations will not be permitted where they would adversely affect the viability of village shops selling convenience goods.

6.27 Shops ancillary to other uses can serve a vital function in rural areas where they provide a convenience shopping facility where villages are too small to support local shops. However, increasingly, service stations are being located outside villages on main roads where they serve through traffic; they are only convenient with a car and could have an adverse impact on the viability of village shops which are better located to meet village needs.

POLICY SH12: Garden centres will not be permitted unless they conform to the following criteria:

- (1) convenience sales will not be permitted where it would have a significant adverse impact, either individually or cumulatively, on the viability and vitality of the existing the Rural and Limited Rural Growth Settlements in South Cambridgeshire, or other village centres;**
- (2) not be located within the countryside or in such a location that the visual amenities of the countryside would be adversely affected;**
- (3) be well related in scale and character to the settlement or surrounding development;**
- (4) be conveniently located and well related to the primary road network and accessible by public transport, cyclists and pedestrians;**
- (5) not create local traffic difficulties;**
- (6) not prejudice the residential environment; and**
- (7) not conflict with other policies and proposals in the Structure and Local Plans.**

6.28 Garden centres are different from nurseries because the retail activity undertaken is not ancillary to the growing of stock on the site. Therefore, whilst they can be large users of land, garden centres do not need to be located in the countryside. A garden centre is wholly a retail activity and can be accommodated on retail warehouse parks or on the edge of existing urban areas. However, like petrol filling stations and farm shops, they can benefit from lower overheads and should not be permitted to sell convenience or other goods where it could undermine the viability of village shops which are better located to serve the entire local population, not just those with ready access to a motor car.