

## SECTION 2.2

# SHOPPING AND THE TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

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## SECTION 2.2

# SHOPPING AND THE TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

### 1. Introduction

Shopping plays an important role in maintaining the vitality of the small towns and larger villages. Provision within the Plan Area is influenced by the impact of Norwich as a regional shopping centre and the attractions of Great Yarmouth and market towns located just outside the District. The major shopping centres within the Plan Area are at Diss, Harleston and Wymondham. These are complemented by the smaller service centres of Hethersett, Hingham, Loddon and Long Stratton and larger villages such as Poringland. The remaining settlements provide limited facilities.

It is important to recognise that retailing patterns have been and will continue to be altered by:

- Increasing population, consumer expenditure and demands for an improved choice and quality of goods.
- Increasing car ownership, customer mobility and improving accessibility.
- Development pressures for larger supermarkets, supermarkets in smaller centres, edge-of-centre stores and the expansion of existing out-of-centre stores.
- The losses of traditional village shops and post offices.
- The potential for new forms of local retailing jointly with other uses.

Recent development trends and potential in the Norwich and Rural Policy Areas are summarised below.

#### a) The Norwich Area

New developments in Norwich over the last ten years have included the Castle Mall Shopping Centre, the Riverside shopping area and retail warehousing off the Norwich ring road. These have been supplemented in South Norfolk by new large food stores at Harford Bridge (A140) and Wymondham, plus a food store at Longwater, Costessey in conjunction with a new retail park. The main general shopping centres are Wymondham and Long Stratton. The following sections 3a and 4 describe the potential for new retail floor space in Wymondham (which has benefited from a joint County and District Councils town centre enhancement scheme) and Longwater, Costessey. A further supermarket is also proposed for Long Stratton.

#### b) The Rural Area

Most recent retailing development pressures have been for major supermarket proposals in Diss. Other changes have comprised small scale retail developments and turnovers of occupancy in existing shops. Concern has been raised at changes of use of central area shops to non-retail uses such as estate agencies, financial and professional services and hot food takeaways, and some changes over which there is no control such as to card shops and charity shops. Service centre peripheral shops have also been under steady pressure for conversion to dwellings. Overall however shop vacancy rates have fallen significantly in the main centres over the last five years to well below national rates.

Section 3a describes the potential for new shopping floor space in Diss and Harleston. Diss continues to be the focus for large scale retailing proposals while the Plan also allocates a site adjacent to the town centre on Park Road for mixed retail and leisure uses (see policy DIS 6). Elsewhere pressures are expected to be modest, but the Council will continue to seek environmental and access improvements to maintain the attractions of the rural centres.

## 2. Policy considerations

The key elements are the amount and type of retail floor space to be provided for, and the most appropriate locations for development. The Plan's provisions are based on current Government retail planning policy advice, the Norfolk Structure Plan 1999 and Council's 1997 South Norfolk Retail Study.

Government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 6 "Town Centres and Retail Developments" (June 1996) aims to maintain the vitality and viability of town centres by encouraging within them new developments and a diversity of complementary uses, environmental enhancements and improved access, especially for alternatives to the car. The Plan also takes into account advice in Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPG's) 7 "Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development" (February 1997), 12 "Development Plans" (December 1999) and 13 "Transport" (March 1994). (The March 2001 PPG 7 and PPG 13 revisions are also taken into account by development control decisions). The general aim of shopping policy advice remains the concentration of new shopping development which attracts a lot of people within existing centres which provide for ease of non-car access.

Within the Plan Area the Norfolk Structure Plan (1999) seeks to maintain the existing hierarchy of shopping centres. It provides for major new shopping development in Diss, Harleston, Loddon and Wymondham and small scale shopping development elsewhere in keeping with local needs, subject to access and environmental considerations.

## 3. General shopping provision

The Council wishes to maintain and enhance the role of the District's small towns as retailing and service centres. The appropriate measures are set out in the town centre strategy described in Section 5a and the policies below. The main provisions include:

1. The encouragement of retail and service uses in defined Central Business Areas.
2. The additional definition of Primary and Secondary Shopping Areas in the major centres in which to encourage respectively mainly shopping and mixed retail/service uses.
3. Controls over retailing on sites adjacent to and away from the defined centres.
4. Controls over undesired changes of use to and from retailing.
5. Encouragement of the use of the upper floors of retail premises.

The Council also supports the provision of local and village shops, but there may be less scope for maintaining their provision through the implementation of planning policies. Overall the Council considers that the Plan provides for an appropriate scale and location of retailing development within the District, subject to access and environmental considerations.

The provision for future “planned” and “unplanned” shopping development will be considered within the context of the above policy considerations. Government guidance in PPG 6 has been qualified by subsequent ministerial statements which have further emphasised the importance of a plan-led approach to new retail development to safeguard and strengthen local centres and the rural economy, the assessment of “need” in quantitative and qualitative terms, the application of the “sequential test” to site selection and the consideration of the economic and transport “impact” of proposals. This is set out below.

#### **a) The potential for development**

Within the Norwich Policy Area (NPA) the 1999 Norfolk Structure Plan states that a capacity analysis has indicated that there is unlikely to be a need for further large scale retailing development beyond current commitments in the period up to 2011. It also proposes that significant new provision for non-food retailing (including retail warehouses) will only be made in or adjacent to Norwich city centre. This policy is not intended to restrict small scale retailing developments serving local needs.

This has implications for the future development of the retailing centres of Long Stratton and Wymondham, the retail park at Longwater, Costessey, and the out-of -centre food superstores at Longwater and Harford Bridge. Long Stratton would be a suitable location for some small scale retailing development as it falls within the Norwich catchment for food and most non-food retailing. Although Wymondham retains most of its food expenditure due to an out -of-centre large foodstore, the 1997 South Norfolk Retail Study concluded that it had a very limited potential for new food stores and a limited capacity for new non-food retailing. Future retail development at the Longwater, Costessey: Retail park is provided for by policy SHO 3 below.

The 1997 South Norfolk Retail Study established the potential for new food and non-food retailing development in, and undertook a PPG 6 criteria-based “health check” of the Plan Area’s main centres of Diss, Harleston and Wymondham. This study concluded that the largest potential for additional floorspace to 2006 was in Diss, mainly for non-food (comparison) goods of 3160m<sup>2</sup> net plus limited further food (convenience) goods potential of 480m<sup>2</sup> net. Relatively little capacity was found for either sector in Harleston (convenience goods 130m<sup>2</sup> net/ comparison goods 760m<sup>2</sup> net), whereas capacity for a small addition to mainly comparison goods floorspace was found in Wymondham (convenience goods 90m<sup>2</sup> net/ comparison goods 1515m<sup>2</sup> net).

The study also concluded that these centres were robust and not showing notable symptoms of retail and economic decline. It considered that Diss was trading well but lacked vitality and could benefit from additional leisure and catering facilities. Harleston was trading well and showed signs of vitality, while Wymondham showed a positive vitality, albeit its viability was less strong due to its proximity to Norwich.

Within the above context therefore, the Council proposes to provide for its “planned” provision through the allocation of a site for mixed retail and leisure uses on the edge of Diss town centre, provisions for local shops as shown below in section 6 “Local and rural shops and services” and the designation of Central Business Areas within the Plan area’s major shopping centres as shown in Part Two of the Plan. “Unplanned” proposals will be considered within the context of the shopping policies of this Plan, prime considerations of need, the sequential test for site selection and the economic and transport impacts of proposals as set out below.

### **b) Need**

Outside designated Central Business Areas, developers will be expected to establish a need for all retailing development proposals likely to attract large numbers of people, where such proposals are not in accordance with the Plan, or are in accordance with the Plan but where the Plan has not established a need. Such need must be demonstrated in both quantitative and qualitative terms, and will not be regarded as being fulfilled by showing only that there is a physical capacity to accommodate the development or that the required expenditure is available from the proposal’s catchment.

### **c) Sequential test**

When the need for new retailing development is established, the PPG 6 sequential test for site selection makes clear that the preferred locations for development that attract many trips, such as major stores, should be in existing centres with easy and convenient access by a choice of means of transport. Where there is a need and where suitable potential town centre sites or buildings suitable for conversion are not available, consideration should be given to edge-of-centre locations with equally easy access, including attractive pedestrian access from the centre. If such sites cannot be identified, out-of-centre sites may be considered. These should also be easily accessible by pedestrians, cyclists and public transport from the surrounding catchment area.

Where the town centres of small and historic towns do not have suitable sites for large scale development, proposals should be of a scale appropriate to the centre. When assessing the suitability of sequentially preferred sites, retail operators and developers should be flexible regarding the format, design and scale of proposals intended to meet the identified need. This may entail the consideration of more than one site which cumulatively could accommodate the development proposed.

The search for sites should depend primarily on the nature of the goods proposed to be sold, and the suitability of town centre or edge-of-centre sites for that purpose. It should not focus primarily on the availability of out-of-centre sites, just because they are cheaper and can accommodate large car parks and retail ‘sheds’. Sites may be suitable for the sale of “bulky goods” for example, in retail centre and edge-of-centre locations, albeit in a different form from out-of-centre sites and without adjacent surface parking.

Sites previously permitted for retail development under out-dated planning policies shall not take precedence over the consideration of other sites through the PPG 6 sequential approach. (This includes the recently developed Longwater, Costessey: Retail park). Within the Norwich Policy Area however, the Norfolk Structure Plan (1999) limits significant new non-food retail (and indoor leisure and entertainment) development to only sites within or adjacent to Norwich city centre.

Where major uses (for which a need is identified) cannot be accommodated within or on the edge of an existing retail centre, considerations should also include their likely effects on overall travel patterns and car use. Such proposals should be combined with or located closely to existing out-of-centre retail, leisure or employment developments, to reduce the need for travel and to encourage linked trips.

#### **d) Impact**

Once need has been established and the sequential site selection test followed, further tests will be applied to establish the likely impact on the vitality and viability of existing centres and on the rural economy. While a “needs” test is not required for a town centre location, an “impact” test will still be required, as vitality and viability may be affected by factors other than need alone. The size and type of a proposed shop may, for example, be out of keeping with the existing size and function of the centre, undermine its environmental qualities, or cause unacceptable traffic congestion.

The impact of proposals on vitality and viability should also include their cumulative impact on proposals to enhance the existing centres and their fringes, the latter areas identified on the Inset Maps by the defined Central Business Areas. The weight to be given to proposed developments when assessing cumulative impact will depend on the likelihood of their development in the foreseeable future.

New development will only be acceptable if there is no significant detrimental impact on vitality and viability, the town centre strategy, landscape, townscape, amenity, natural environment and the highway and transportation network. An impact assessment will be required for all new retail proposals in Diss and Wymondham of above 1000 square metres net and above 500 square metres net elsewhere. The former limit reflects the Norfolk Structure Plan (1999) requirement (from policy TCR.3) as applied to the two largest town centres within the Plan Area, whereas the latter limit reflects the size of small supermarkets identified in the Council's Shopping policies Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), which could have a notable impact on the remaining and significantly smaller settlements.

Where out-of-centre development is permitted, the Council will ensure that it cannot change its form and nature over time in an unacceptable way to create a development that would have been refused planning permission on the grounds of impact on the vitality and viability of a nearby centre. The Council therefore will consider the need to control the subdivision of the development into smaller units and the range and type of goods sold, generally through the imposition of planning conditions rather than planning obligations, in accordance with the guidance of Circular 1/97 (Annex B). The use of planning conditions will be in accordance with the advice of Circular 11/95.

Outside Central Business Areas, retail warehouses permitted to sell predominantly “bulky goods” will be limited to the sale of ancillary and incidental goods on a combined floorspace not exceeding 15% of gross floorspace or 200 square metres net, whichever is the smaller. The sale of comparison (non-food) goods in large convenience goods stores in such locations will be similarly limited to 15% of gross floorspace or 200 square metres net, whichever is the smaller.

Overall therefore, the Council wishes to maintain and enhance the retailing role of the Plan Area by providing for suitably scaled development in accordance with policies SHO 1 and SHO 2 as shown below. Subsequent policies provide for the development of the Longwater, Costessey, Retail park, specific provisions for smaller scale development within the designated town centres and local shops and services.

**~~Policy SHO 1: Retail development – need and sequential tests~~**

**~~Planning permission for new retail development will be granted within the Central Business Areas of the District’s main towns and villages, as identified on the Proposals Map, subject to the provisions of policy SHO 2.~~**

**~~If suitable sites cannot be found within the defined Central Business Areas to meet the identified need, consideration will be given to edge-of-centre locations where pedestrian access to and from the centre is easy and attractive.~~**

**~~Only where no suitable Central Business Area site or edge-of-centre site is available to meet the identified need, will consideration be given to out-of-centre locations. In out-of-centre locations, the following criteria must also be satisfied:~~**

- ~~i) The site is not designated for an alternative use; and~~**
- ~~ii) The site is easily accessible by pedestrians, cyclists and public transport from the surrounding catchment area; and~~**
- ~~iii) The site is close enough to other retail, employment or leisure facilities to encourage linked trips; and~~**
- ~~iv) The proposals would result in a net reduction in total private motor vehicle trip length.~~**

**~~The types of goods sold in out-of-centre retail development, and the subsequent sub-division of premises, will be limited by planning condition or by legal agreement.~~**

**Attention:** Please note that Local Plan policy **SHO 1** has been **discontinued** since 28<sup>th</sup> September 2007 as part of the ‘saved policy’ process. Applicants should now instead refer to national planning policy statement PPS6 (Planning for Town Centres).

**Policy SHO 2: Retail development – impact test**

**New retail development on sites within the Central Business Areas as identified on the Proposals Map, of the District’s main towns and villages, or on edge-of-centre sites, or on out-of-centre sites will only be permitted if the nature and scale of the proposed retail provision would be in keeping with the size and function of the settlement it is intended to serve, and there would be no demonstrable harm (either individually or cumulatively with other proposed development) to:**

- i) The vitality and viability of the identified Central Business Areas; and**
- ii) Proposals to enhance these Central Business Areas or their fringes; and**
- iii) The quality of the local environment; and**
- iv) The transport network.**

**All new retail proposals of 1000 sq m or more in Diss and Wymondham, and 500 sq m elsewhere, will be required to be the subject of an impact assessment covering the above matters.**

*(N.B. The above floor space thresholds refer to net floor space).*

#### 4. Longwater, Costessey: Retail park

The Norwich Area Local Plan allocated land for a six hectare retail park at Longwater, Costessey within the context of Norfolk Structure Plan (1993) policy N.30. This provided for retail warehousing requiring large sites and selling a large proportion of “bulky goods”, within the context of 1980s studies which defined a need for such development within the Norwich Area. This retail park has since been completed and opened, and has been supplemented by a Sainsbury food superstore also opened on an adjacent site within the Longwater employment area. Both retail developments were permitted before the latest revisions to Government PPG 6 advice emphasising the priority development of town centre sites as part of the “sequential test”. The developments together form a retail park.

Arising from the completion of this development, and in view of the potential for development on the adjacent Longwater employment area, the Plan defines a Development Limit to control the future environmental impact of both the retailing and employment areas. Although a Development Limit would normally signify an appropriate location for development in general terms, the area can not be considered to be a “town centre” in its own right and must be regarded as an “out-of-centre” location in retail terms.

When applying the PPG 6 sequential test for site selection for new retail development (having established a need), permitted retail sites such as this should not be seen as favourable locations, especially if they have been permitted as a result of outdated policy. If the application of the “need”, “sequential” and “impact” tests conclude that an out-of-centre site would be acceptable, then it may be appropriate to select already developed sites such as Longwater in preference to greenfield sites, in accordance with PPG 6 (para. 1.17) guidance on combining out-of-centre travel generating uses and other policies of the Plan. As the Norfolk Structure Plan (1999) states that there is unlikely to be a need for further large scale retailing beyond current commitments to 2011, there is no reason to identify Longwater as a potential retailing location.

The Council does not propose to provide for specific new retailing development at Longwater. Proposals for minor alterations or extensions to the existing retail units for operational reasons, but which do not include an increase in retail floorspace will be considered. Such alterations should be ancillary and incidental to the retail use and could include, for example, amendments to offices, storage areas, staff facilities and goods loading and unloading facilities. With regard to the existing retail development, the Council will control changes of use through the conditions imposed on the original permissions in accordance with Government advice and policies SHO 1 SHO 2 and SHO 3 below.

**Policy SHO 3: Retail development at the Longwater retail park**

**Other than in the circumstances provided for by policies SHO 1 and SHO 2, planning permission for further development at the Longwater retail park will only be granted if:**

- i) The proposal is for a minor alteration or minor extension to an existing retail unit, necessary to improve its operational efficiency; and**
- ii) There would be no increase in retail floorspace.**

## 5. The towns

Despite widespread above average car ownership in the Plan Area, many people do not have access to a car and are unable to take advantage of the cost savings and choices of goods available in the major retailing centres elsewhere. The Council considers therefore that the vitality and viability of the Plan Area's main shopping and service centres should be maintained and enhanced through the implementation of the general retail development provisions of policies SHO 1 and SHO 2, the town centre strategy below and the subsequent policies providing for the development of designated Central Business Areas and local shops.

### **a) Town centre strategy**

The Council aims to improve the quality of the District's town centres to enhance their vitality and viability. It will encourage the development of their distinct and positive identities by providing for the appropriate mix of development and other activities in a clean, safe, high quality environment, served by good access, public transport provision and the appropriate vehicle parking facilities. The provisions for town centre access will emphasise alternatives to the car in line with Government planning policy advice.

The strategy will be achieved by the implementation of the policies of this Plan and the activities of South Norfolk Council. The strategy comprises the following elements as described below.

1. An appropriate development mix.
2. A high quality environment.
3. Communications and access.
4. Other requirements.

**i) An appropriate development mix**

The vitality of town centres can be encouraged by ensuring their use by both day and by night. However, the role of town centres is under pressure to change due to an increasingly mobile population and the demands to locate retailing and other commercial developments elsewhere. Government planning policy advice in PPG 6 emphasises the promotion of mixed-use development and the retention of key town centre uses (such as cinemas). The Council acknowledges these pressures and will:

- Maintain and encourage an appropriate mix of retailing, commercial, leisure and housing uses within town centres.
- Designate Central Business Areas, qualified where necessary by designated Primary and Secondary Shopping Areas to facilitate policy implementation.
- Promote the use of the upper floors of commercial premises within town centres.
- Continue to support appropriate local and neighbourhood shopping provision.

The Council will achieve these aims through the implementation of in particular, policies SHO 4 to SHO 7 (commercial development), policies LEI 4-6 (leisure facilities), policies TOU 2 and 3 (tourism development) and HOU 4-5 and 17 (housing provisions). These policies are complemented by the Plan's provisions for new retail development in policies SHO 1 and SHO 2. The Plan also allocates a new site for retailing in Diss town centre in policy DIS 6. The Council will continue to encourage people to live within town centres through the implementation of the 'Living over the shop' initiative (when resources are available) and the Conservation Area Partnership (CAP) schemes using housing association funding.

**ii) A high quality environment**

The Council aims to secure an enhanced quality of built environment and is committed to the environmental enhancement of its main settlements. It has completed town centre enhancements in Diss and Harleston and contributed significantly to the enhancement of the centre of Wymondham. The Council will seek to enhance the centres of the other retailing/service centres in the District as resources permit.

The Council will implement its policies to ensure attractive, safe and clean town centres. To achieve this the Council will:

- Publish and secure widespread implementation of a design manual for the District and promote the advice of the Council's 'Shop fronts and advertisements in town centres' design guide of 1993.
- Have effective grant aid policies for partnership schemes, historic buildings, Conservation Areas and environmental improvements.
- Publish up-to-date statements for all Conservation Areas within the District and revise and/or designate new Conservation Areas where appropriate.
- Have an ongoing programme of enhancement schemes for town centres and Conservation Areas.
- Have an effective policy and system for saving buildings at risk.
- Improve the standards of design, planting and management of new landscaping schemes through the publication of the appropriate guidance.
- Promote and publicise the Council's tree planting grants scheme.
- Protect important trees within development sites and development boundaries by designating Tree Preservation Orders.

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The Council will support the maintenance and enhancement of town centres by directly supporting economic initiatives within them and indirectly supporting similar initiatives by local business communities. The Council will also:

- Allocate land in the Local Plan for economic activity.
- Provide business premises and facilities (such as “telecottages”).
- Provide indirect financial assistance to South Norfolk’s firms.
- Promote improved communication and transport links.
- Develop local economic and community activities.

The Council will also strive to ensure that town centres are safe and clean. Personal safety is a significant issue, especially where the use of a town centre is to be encouraged by day and night. Some problems may arise due to the limitations on police resources, but the Council will take the following positive steps to:

- Provide for consultations with the police regarding the design of new development proposals (to ‘design out crime’).
- Provide advice on shopfront security as set out in the Council’s design guide ‘Shopfronts and Advertisements in Town Centres’ (1993).
- Have regard to the provision of street lighting and encourage its improvement where required.
- Investigate the rationalising of responsibility for street lighting.
- Investigate the introduction of closed circuit television (CCTV) at town centres, public car parks and industrial sites within the District to implement one or more schemes as appropriate.

To provide for a cleaner town centre the Council will:

- Ensure that all public areas comply with national standards for litter collection.
- Carry out a litter public education campaign.
- Ensure that public toilets are clean and well maintained.

Air quality and noise nuisance are also significant. The Council monitors air quality to DoE standards and controls for example (through an annual authorisation system), the continuation of manufacturing and waste disposal processes which can adversely affect air quality. The Council will protect the health, safety and well being of residents, visitors and businesses by help, advice and, where necessary, fair enforcement. The Council will also work positively towards reducing all forms of pollution and the incidence of noise nuisance throughout the District.

The District Council will encourage improvements to the quality of the built environment in town centres through the implementation of the following:

- The enhancement of town centres - policies DIS 10 and HAR 11.
- Improved/appropriate design - policy IMP 1.
- Retention of open spaces/important frontages - policies IMP 3 and IMP 4.
- Improved street furniture, signs, lighting and removal of unsightly overhead cables – policy IMP 5.
- Protection/enhancement of Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings and shop fascias – policies IMP 11 – IMP 18 inclusive.
- Advertisements and shop fascias, designs and restrictions - policies IMP 19 – IMP 21.
- Corporate shopfronts and signing - policy IMP 22.
- Visual impact/enhancement of car parks – policy IMP 6.
- The provision of street works of art - policy IMP 26.

**iii) Communications and access**

The life of town centres depends on good communications and access. In line with the Government's promotion of sustainable development, this should also provide for alternative means of access to the car. While South Norfolk's town centres have limited rail access, the potential exists to enhance provisions for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. Car use will remain a significant element, but will be increasingly subject to access and parking limitations to reduce its adverse environmental impacts and to provide for the effective use of alternative travel modes.

To enhance the economic viability of town centres and the District in general, the Council will:

- Improve provisions for the above in association with the Council's environmental enhancement schemes, local transportation authority provisions and new development proposals.
- Seek improved provisions for pedestrians, cyclists, public transport users and the mobility and sight impaired.
- Promote alternatives to road based transport and the easy interchange between different modes of transport.
- Campaign for improved trunk road access to the District.
- Press the County Council to improve road links to and within the towns, including traffic management and traffic calming where appropriate.
- Monitor the use of car parks and provide for the appropriate types of good quality off-street parking in the required locations.
- Manage parking facilities with due regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness
- Provide for lorry parking where required.
- Press the County Council to revise its car parking standards to provide for the mobility impaired.
- Provide financial assistance for community car schemes.

The Council's aims will be achieved by its own actions and the implementation of Local Plan policies TRA 1-4 and 16-19 in particular.

**iv) Other requirements**

The attraction of town centres is enhanced by their provisions for social, cultural and leisure activities. Tourism may be encouraged by the towns' historic and other attractions which may include musical or theatrical events in the street. Tourism is a rapidly expanding industry with considerable employment implications and benefits to the local economy. The Council wishes to increase the number of visitors to the District with their related expenditure, while supporting the development of tourism in ways which contribute to, but do not detract from, the quality of the environment. The Council already operates a tourist information centre in Diss, grant aids a Town Council run tourist information centre in Wymondham and contributes towards the Broads Authority financed tourist information point in Loddon.

In respect of town centres therefore, the Council will:

- Seek to improve transport links as set out under section iii) 'Communications and access' above.
- Promote the District as a tourist destination in its own right and as a base for other destinations.
- Strengthen and develop the quality and range of tourist attractions and indoor leisure facilities.
- Improve and expand the range and quality of accommodation and other tourist-related facilities.
- Consider the introduction of a grant aid scheme to encourage the improvement of tourist-related facilities.
- Enhance the experience of visitors.
- Ensure the provision of car parking and public toilets and ensure their good management.
- Continue to support and develop the operation of the tourist information facilities at Diss, Wymondham and Loddon and investigate the provision of others.
- Maintain the attractive appearance and character of the commercial centres in the District.

As part of the aim to strengthen and develop the quality and range of tourist attractions, the Council will seek to develop and sustain a series of events to extend the season and provide regular entertainment capable of attracting visitors to the District.

The Council encourages certain leisure activities through its Leisure Services Team. The Council has a leisure strategy and provides facilities including leisure centres at Long Stratton and Wymondham and a swimming pool at Diss. Although these facilities are not located within their respective town centres, they contribute towards the attractions of those towns with other privately provided facilities. As part of its encouragement of an improved quality of life, the Council will ensure that a wide range of opportunities for sports, recreation, fitness, arts, leisure and community facilities is enjoyed by all sections of the community.

The provision for tourist related, leisure, cultural and community facilities within town centres will be achieved through the implementation of the relevant policies of the Leisure and Tourism chapters of the Local Plan and by the Council's encouraging of other organisations to promote events and activities.

#### **b) Retailing and other uses in town centres**

Recent pressures for development have included changes of use from retailing to non-retailing uses and limited large scale retail developments. It is considered desirable to define Central Business Areas in which to focus Local Plan policy, enhance the shopping attractions of the small towns, confirm the principal distribution of existing retail premises, provide for easier comparison shopping to maintain a centre's attraction and maximise the benefits of environmental improvement schemes carried out by the District Council. The inclusion of Hingham within policy SHO 4 reflects its local perception as a retail and service centre, but it is not a 'selected town' in which the Norfolk Structure Plan provides for major new retailing development.

The small towns however vary in size, level of shopping provision and pressures for change. Where non-retailing development pressures could adversely effect a town centre's vitality and viability, Government advice in PPG 6 provides for the designation of Primary and Secondary Shopping Areas, in which support may be provided for the ground floor shopping uses of the former, while a wider complementary range of uses may be provided for in the latter.

Policy SHO 4 provides for this distinction in Diss, Harleston and Wymondham. Given the relatively small scale of the small towns in the Plan Area, the fringe locations of the Secondary Shopping Areas would still provide for relatively easy customer access.

**Policy SHO 4: Town centres**

**Within Diss, Harleston, Hethersett, Hingham, Loddon, Long Stratton and Wymondham, the District Council has defined a Central Business Area in which a wide range of retailing and associated service development will be encouraged in accordance with policy SHO 5 (see Inset Maps 19B, 44B, 31A, 32B, 34B, 35, 62B). The District Council has also defined Primary and Secondary Shopping Areas in Diss, Harleston and Wymondham in which the retailing and associated service uses defined in policies SHO 5, SHO 6 and SHO 7 will be encouraged. All proposals within the areas defined will be assessed subject to normal planning considerations, should respect their historic and architectural importance and include satisfactory servicing and access arrangements including cycle parking facilities where space is available and no adequate alternative provision exists nearby.**

The attraction of a Primary Shopping Area is largely dependent upon the uses made of ground floor premises in which the Council wishes to maintain a high proportion of retail uses. However, certain changes between financial and professional services and from food and drink uses to financial services are allowed by the Use Classes Order 1987 (as amended 1995) and the General Development Order 1995. Therefore, the Council considers that the enhancement of Primary Area shopping facilities requires the control of the provision of financial and professional services and proposals for new food and drink uses in ground floor premises. A wider range of commercial and residential uses in the upper floors of premises within defined Central Business Areas and Primary Shopping Areas will be encouraged in accordance with policy SHO 7.

The Council will seek to ensure that the predominant uses within ground floor premises in defined Central Business Areas and Primary Shopping Areas are Class A1 retail uses. The consideration of proposals for Class A2 financial and professional services and Class A3 food and drink uses within ground floor premises will take into account their existing distribution and the potential for existing food and drink premises to change their use to financial and professional services, where planning permission is not required. This could result in undue concentrations of Class A2 uses which could detract from attractions of the retail centre by the creation of "dead frontage".

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Within the smaller towns which have defined Central Business Areas which are not sub-divided between Primary and Secondary Shopping Areas, and where retail premises are dispersed among residential and other commercial uses, the Council will seek to prevent the further dispersal of retailing premises by the development of intervening non-retail uses. In these circumstances, the Council will seek to retain existing groups of shops and encourage the development of non-retailing uses within peripheral locations within the Central Business Area.

**Policy SHO 5: Mix of uses within Central Business Areas**

**In the defined Primary Shopping Areas of Diss, Harleston and Wymondham, permission will not be granted for changes of use, at ground floor level, from Class A1 to Class A2 and Class A3 uses.**

**In the defined Central Business Areas of these settlements and within the defined Central Business Areas of other settlements, the Council will permit, at ground floor level, uses within Classes A1, A2 and A3 provided that they do not require the loss of a Primary Area Class A1 shop, and that the predominant use, within the Central Business Area concerned, remains Class A1 shops.**

**Conditions may be imposed in any permission for Class A3 uses to avoid undue concentrations of Class A2 uses arising through subsequent permitted changes of use from Class A3.**

Secondary Shopping Areas are the parts of the Central Business Areas for Diss, Harleston and Wymondham, which fall outside their defined Primary Shopping Areas (see Inset Maps 19B, 44B and 62B respectively). Such secondary areas are considered to be suitable locations for a wider range of retailing and services uses, which will be encouraged in accordance with policy SHO 6.

**Policy SHO 6: Secondary Shopping Areas**

**Within defined Secondary Shopping Areas, in both ground and upper floors, the District Council will encourage a mixture of retail uses, financial and professional services and food and drink sales in Classes A1, A2 and A3. Proposals for small scale commercial uses where not a permitted change of use under the General Development Order 1995, will be considered on their merits.**

**c) Upper floors**

The Council encourages the use of under-used or redundant upper floors of shopping and commercial premises to restore vitality to town centres outside normal business opening hours and to ensure a building's maintenance in the longer term. Potential uses include self-contained flats and small offices, subject to the provision of adequate access. The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development Order) 1995 permits changes of use from shops (Class A1) and financial and professional services (Class A2) to their equivalent uses incorporating a flat above, subject to certain considerations. Class A2 uses may also change to Class A1 uses incorporating a flat (where the premises include a ground floor display window). The reverse of these conversions is also a permitted change of use.

The new Order however does not provide for such changes in premises used for the sale of food and drink (Class A3) to and from those including flats. Other commercial uses in upper floors are also not included. The Council will give favourable consideration to the use of upper floors above shops and commercial premises where permission is required, provided that:

- The amenity of the new use is protected, especially if a residential use.
- The proposal would not detrimentally affect the amenities of adjacent occupiers, especially residential uses.
- Access can be provided without detriment to the amenities of adjoining occupiers and the fabric and character of the building.
- There would be provision for car parking and refuse storage. The District Council considers that the provision of off-street car parking for the permitted change of use is not essential in areas with good access by alternative means of transport to the car.

In the case of upper floor premises in defined Central Business Areas, the District Council will give favourable consideration to a wider range of retailing and commercial uses than provided for in ground floor premises by policy SHO 5, subject to the amenity and access considerations described above.

#### **Policy SHO 7: Conversion of floorspace on upper floors**

**Encouragement will be given in Central Business Areas to the conversion of redundant and under-utilised floorspace above retail units and other business premises to residential and small scale commercial uses where not a permitted change of use under the General Permitted Development Order 1995. The District Council will consider favourably proposals for financial and professional services (Class A2) and for food and drink sales (Class A3) in addition to retail uses (Class A1), although the District Council must be satisfied that there will be no harmful effects on the amenity of adjoining residential uses. Other complementary small scale commercial uses will be considered on their merits.**

## 6. Local and rural shops and services

Changes in retailing patterns and the property rating system have put further pressures on the viability of small local shops which provide an important local service and meet needs not met by the larger stores. A significant proportion of the population does not have access to a car or public transport and requires the provision of easily accessible shops. While it is stressed that the provision of local shops is purely a commercial decision, the District Council considers that such shops should be retained and encouraged, in particular within existing settlements and their designated Development Limits and Village Boundaries, to reduce the need for extra travel and to maintain their vitality and viability. However the Council also recognises the valuable contribution to rural life and the economy made by farm shops and shops related to services such as petrol filling stations, especially where village shops have already closed. The development of new uses such as small shops in potentially redundant rural buildings can also ensure their retention.

Government advice in PPG 6 provides for the encouragement of local shops by taking a positive approach to their provision and the conversion and extension of premises designed to improve their viability. It seeks to provide for appropriately sized supermarkets and the control of provisions of, for example, post offices and pharmacies in out-of-centre shopping developments through planning conditions or legal agreement (as in policy SHO 1).

PPG 7 provides for reasonable access for people in rural areas to a range of services and for the Council to facilitate and retain rural services by identifying needs and suitable sites and buildings to meet those needs. Following consultations with Parish Councils and the relevant organisations, the Plan provides for new education, child care, health care, recreation and community facilities through policies UTL 8-11 inclusive. The Plan also provides for new shopping and/or community facilities in association with the major housing land allocations (detailed in Part Two of the Plan) at Costessey, Cringleford, Long Stratton, Poringland, Trowse and Wymondham.

The Council also proposes to maintain and provide for local retailing and services by encouraging the retention of suitable premises through the implementation of policy EMP 7, and the conversion and extension of suitable premises in general. The Council will also consider proposals for retailing, services and mixed uses in the countryside, provided that they do not have an adverse impact on existing village provisions and can be adequately accessed by the local transport network capable of accommodating the associated travel demand.

**Policy SHO 8: Local and rural shops and services**

**The District Council will encourage local shops and services within Development Limits and Village Boundaries on a scale appropriate to the needs of the locality and form, character and function of the settlement by;**

- i) The favourable consideration of proposals for new, converted and extended facilities;**
- ii) The control of the ranges of goods sold in out-of-centre retail developments where deemed to have an adverse impact on local facilities**
- iii) The control of the loss of premises in use for retailing and service provision**

**Outside the settlements identified above, proposals for retailing, services and their mixed uses will be considered where there is a local need and where they do not have an adverse impact on existing local facilities.**

**All new shops and services should have adequate access to the local transport network able to accommodate the associated travel demand.**

**Policy SHO 9: Shop sites in major residential development**

**In appropriate cases where major residential development is proposed, the District Council will require sites to be reserved for local shopping uses.**

## 7. Food and drink sales

Class A3 uses for the sale of food and drink (and hot food takeaways in particular) have caused concern due to their adverse effects on residential amenity. Related problems, exacerbated by late night opening, include cooking odours, noise, demands for short term road side car parking related to hot food takeaways and for the longer term at night in residential areas related to restaurants, and the impact on traffic circulation. The need to reduce the effects of cooking odours may require unsightly ventilation flues or the installation of deodorising equipment which can adversely affect the appearance of buildings. This would be contrary to the Plan's provisions to maintain high design standards, the attractive character of the built environment and in particular, listed buildings and their settings, due to their frequent occurrence in the main centres.

Class A3 uses however, contribute to the vitality and viability of town centres and the rural economy and are encouraged in accordance with policies SHO 5 - 8 inclusive. The Council considers that Class A3 uses should be expected to be located in defined Central Business Areas, but that residents elsewhere should be protected from their adverse effects as shown in policies SHO 10 and SHO 11.

Such proposals should not result in the loss of residential uses in accordance with policy HOU 18, should not produce adverse environmental effects that could not be overcome by planning conditions, should not adversely affect a Listed Building, should respect the provisions of policy IMP 18 and should not prejudice local traffic movement or require late night parking in residential side streets. Outside defined settlement boundaries, the main potential for Class A3 proposals will depend on the availability of existing suitable premises already in such a use.

### **Policy SHO 10: Class A3 uses outside the defined Central Business Areas**

**Uses within Class A3 will be permitted within the Development Limits of towns and villages, outside the defined Central Business Areas, if:**

- i) The use would not give rise to adverse environmental effects in terms of noise, smell and general disturbance; and**
- ii) The risk of such effects can be avoided by planning conditions; and**
- iii) The safe and free flow of traffic on the highway network would not be prejudiced; and**
- iv) The proposals would not be likely to give rise to demands for late night parking in residential side streets.**

The problems experienced by neighbours of Class A3 uses are exacerbated by late night opening hours. The Council will seek to control the potential disturbance that could arise by limiting the hours of operation at night in accordance with the nature of the proposals, character of the surrounding area and the controls imposed on established and permitted Class A3 uses nearby. The trading hours limitations are no more restrictive than those for public houses in general, and are more relaxed within Central Business Areas and along principal and main distributor roads (as defined by the Highway Authority). The areas of relaxed control relate to areas where provisions for Class A3 uses would be expected and where adverse impacts on residential amenity due to smells, noise, traffic and parking would be relatively reduced.

**Policy SHO 11: Class A3 uses – control over hours of operation**

The Council will seek to control, by planning condition, the trading hours of uses within Class A3. In establishing the opening hours for any particular proposal, the Council will have regard to:

- i) Consistency with the opening hours of other established or permitted Class A3 uses in the vicinity; and
- ii) The character of the surrounding area; and
- iii) Prevailing levels of background noise, including traffic noise; and
- iv) The particular nature of the proposal concerned

Unless such considerations indicate otherwise, trading hours will be limited to no later than as follows:

1. Within the Central Business Areas defined on the Proposals Map and, along principal routes and main distributor routes as defined by the highway authority within the defined Development Limits of towns and villages:  
23.30 hours Mondays to Saturdays; and  
23.00 hours on Sundays and bank holidays.
2. Elsewhere:  
23.00 hours on Mondays to Saturdays; and  
22.30 hours on Sundays and bank holidays.