

# Town Centre Policies



# 7. TOWN CENTRE POLICIES

## 7.1 Town Centre Uses

### Policy TC.1 TOWN CENTRE USES

Local plans should ensure that town centres are the focus of a balanced mixture of retail (Use Class A1 - A3), office (Use Class B1), entertainment (Use Class D1), leisure (Use Class D1) and residential (Use Class C1 - C3) developments in order to:

- (a) enhance and improve their economic and environmental attractiveness;
- (b) ensure the economic vitality of the town is balanced with maintaining its historic and cultural attractiveness;
- (c) provide for a modal shift towards public transport, walking and cycling

#### INTENT

7.1.1 Policy TC.1 is intended to ensure, first, that town centres contain a dynamic balance of activities and, second, that where new development takes place it positively contributes to vitality and viability. Furthermore, by encouraging a mix of uses, particularly those that attract many trips, the Policy aims to

promote a more sustainable pattern of development.

#### CONTEXT

7.1.2 See under Policy TC.3

#### OPERATION

7.1.3 See under Policy TC.3



## 7.2 Town Centre Hierarchy

### Policy TC.2 HIERACHY OF TOWN CENTRES

Warwickshire's town centre hierarchy is defined as follows:

**Main Town Centres:**

Leamington Spa, Rugby, Nuneaton and Stratford-upon-Avon

**Other Town Centres:**

Warwick, Kenilworth, Bedworth and Atherstone.

All new major shopping, entertainment and leisure developments should be planned to be located in town centres. In particular most new shops of all types (A1), financial and professional services to visiting members of the public such as banks and building societies (A2), pubs, restaurants and similar facilities (A3), should be located in town centres close to transport facilities, preferably in conjunction with other developments.

Local plans will therefore define the boundaries of town centres having regard to the desirability of meeting identified demands for future capacity over the Plan period.

Proposals for development within the defined centres should be compatible with the scale, nature and character of that centre, but broadly:

- (a) all shopping, entertainment and leisure developments, of 1,000m<sup>2</sup>, or over, should be located within the town centres identified in the hierarchy.
- (b) all major shopping, entertainment and leisure developments, of 2,500m<sup>2</sup>, or over, should be located in the main town centres identified in the hierarchy.

Local plans should also define district, local, neighbourhood and village centres, as appropriate, in order to provide people with access to convenience needs and local services.

## INTENT

7.2.1 Policy TC.2 sets out a clear two-tier hierarchy of town centres, defining broadly what scale of development is appropriate to the different centres. The Policy seeks to actively consolidate the role of town centres, through the location of appropriate development, and to prevent potential adverse impact from developments elsewhere.

## CONTEXT

7.2.2 See under Policy TC.3

## OPERATION

7.2.3 See under Policy TC.3

## 7.3 Personal Services Sector

### Policy TC.3 PERSONAL SERVICES SECTOR

To accommodate forecast increases in the personal services sector in the County including retailing, business services, tourism, leisure, education and health some provision will need to be made by local plans for town centre office and shop redevelopment or development. The extent of this provision will depend upon the circumstances of each particular town centre.

## INTENT

7.3.1 Policy TC.3 seeks to ensure that local plans take into account the need to accommodate in town centres, through development and redevelopment, the anticipated increases in activities associated with the personal services sector.

## CONTEXT OF POLICIES TC.1, TC.2 AND TC.3

7.3.2 The overall strategy of the Structure Plan reflects the underlying principles of Government policy as stated in

PPG6 (Town Centres and Retail Development) and, in particular, aims to focus developments on the County's main towns. Within this context, it is intended to enhance the role of the town centre as the natural focus of the community both within the town and for the surrounding rural areas. As a consequence, the town centre policies are not concerned solely with retailing, but with the mix of town centre uses. In addition to retailing, these uses, as defined in PPG6, include commercial and public offices, entertainment, leisure and other such uses. Residential uses are also an important

element of town centres. Apart from being in a very sustainable location, residential development in town centres can also play an important part by, for example, bringing back into use vacant upper floors. It assists in generating life and activity and, furthermore, improving safety by providing natural surveillance.

### Town Centres and Sustainability

7.3.3 Town centres have a key role in the delivery of the Structure Plan's strategy of focusing most development on the County's main towns. It is in town centres where transport and planning strategy can be most effectively integrated. PPG13 (Transport) states that in developing overall strategy local authorities should focus major generators of travel demand in city, town and district centres where they are near to major public transport interchanges. As emphasised in PPG6, this can make it easier to provide good public transport or enable one journey to serve several purposes, thereby reducing both the number and length of car journeys and the need to travel.

7.3.4 In having regard to national policy, town centres have the potential, therefore, to:

- help create more self-contained communities;

- reduce the need to travel and promote the use of non-car based modes of travel;
- move towards a more sustainable pattern of development; and
- promote efficient re-use of accessible brownfield sites, reducing the need to develop greenfield sites.

7.3.5 Town centres can also play an important social role, acting as meeting places where people eat, drink and generally carry out their social lives. They can also help reduce social exclusion by giving people the same access to facilities and services whether they have use of a car or not. In doing so it also gives the opportunity for benefits to accrue from the cheaper prices and the improved quality of services that often result from competition between traders in a town centre.

7.3.6 An approach that promoted the dispersal of facilities and services would be likely to have the opposite effect. People without access to a car would be far less able to benefit from competition and low prices, and would be forced to make multiple trips and spend more of their income on public transport.

## Accommodating New Retail Development

- 7.3.7 Both Government policy, as expressed particularly through PPG6 and PPG13, and Regional Planning Guidance (RPG11) strongly emphasise the importance of town centres as the focus for new retail developments that attract many trips.
- 7.3.8 Policies TC.1, TC.2 and TC.3 reflect the emphasis of this Government and regional policy on the importance of the retail role of town centres and seek to ensure that local plans both continue to direct the appropriate types of development to the identified town centres and also provide sufficient town centre opportunities. Bearing in mind that many of Warwickshire's town centres are historic and relatively small, local plans should be clear about how this will be handled.
- 7.3.9 It is important that where there is a significant demand for new retail capacity greater emphasis should be placed on finding development formats that can be more easily accommodated within the character and fabric of the existing town centres. PPG6 points to the need for developers and retailers to be flexible about the format, design and scale of development in order to fit local circumstances. These considerations

should be taken into account when estimating the likely need for new retail opportunities, defining town centre boundaries, identifying new retail sites and setting out the sequential test for retail developments.

## Town Centre Hierarchy

- 7.3.10 In line with PPG6, Policy TC.2 sets out a clear hierarchy of town centres. This consists of two tiers, main town centres and other town centres, with four towns in each tier as illustrated on the Key Diagram. This hierarchy reflects the nature of Warwickshire, where the higher order centres such as Coventry and Solihull are outside of the County. Within this context, Warwickshire has a network of smaller centres. These centres do not all have the same characteristics and there are clear differences between the role and levels of services and facilities provided by, for example, the town centres in Nuneaton and Warwick.
- 7.3.11 The relationship between the town centres within this network is dynamic and likely to change. They are also likely to be affected by the larger centres outside the County, for example, Coventry, Solihull, Banbury and Birmingham and, potentially, by developments in smaller centres as well. The Structure Plan seeks to control this dynamic balance so that,

while it supports the improvements of individual centres, so that they might prosper, this is not achieved at the expense of significantly undermining the role of other centres, either within or outside of the County.

important part in the sequential tests that local plans will apply to the location of development.

### OPERATION OF POLICIES TC.1, TC.2 AND TC.3

7.3.12 Policy TC.2 controls the scale and nature of developments directed to each level of the hierarchy. It is expected that local plans will extend this hierarchy, as necessary, to define district, local and village centres and set out criteria for determining the scale and nature of developments appropriate to each tier. This extended hierarchy is expected to play an

7.3.13 These policies are intended to focus major concentrations of town centre uses to the town centres identified in the hierarchy. It is expected that local plans will put in place a policy framework which extends the hierarchy of centres and applies a sequential approach to development locations in a way that is consistent with policies TC.1 - TC.3.

## 7.4 Strategic Town Centre Management

### Policy TC.4 TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT

**Strategic management of the town centres should be established to ensure that there is progress towards both greater use of public transport and economic viability of all town centres in Warwickshire and adjoining areas.**

#### INTENT

7.4.1 Policy TC.4 is intended to encourage effective co-operation and co-ordination between the individual town centres of Warwickshire and those town and city centres in adjoining areas.

contribute significantly towards the provision of employment opportunities, local services and community facilities. As the focus for community life, they are also symbols of community identity. The quality of a town centre, including its urban fabric, its accessibility for all sectors of the community and its standard of maintenance, is closely linked to the perception of the town as a whole. Accordingly, it is important that the role of Warwickshire's town centres

#### CONTEXT

7.4.2 Town centres provide key social and economic roles for a community and

is not undermined. This applies as much to the larger centres, such as Nuneaton, as it does to smaller centres.

7.4.3 Many of Warwickshire's town centres are relatively small and are used mainly by the local community. The quantity and quality of the services and facilities are potentially very sensitive to developments elsewhere. The loss of local services and facilities reduces choice for people without private transport and, where shops are empty or boarded up, can lead to a general decline in the quality of the town centre environment.

7.4.4 The County Council supports the continual improvement of town centres and their environment, but is concerned that increases in the range and scale of services and facilities in individual centres, both within and in areas adjoining Warwickshire, are not of such a scale that they would undermine other centres.

7.4.5 Town Centre Management has an important role to play in ensuring that town centres continue to meet the

needs of local people and that they also become attractive places for other people to visit. The County Council encourages the appointment of town centre managers and co-ordinators. It works in active partnership with the private sector and the district and borough council's to share best practice, co-ordinate events and activities and work towards the development of complementary roles for each of the centres. A key element of this partnership work is the development and implementation of visions, strategies and action plans to sustain and enhance town centre vitality and viability.

## OPERATION

7.4.6 The County Council will work with the district/borough council's, town councils, neighbouring authorities and other partners to ensure that town centre and retail developments are compatible with the existing distribution of town centres. It will also continue to play an active role in the town centre management of the County's towns.

## 7.5 Regional Scale Retail Development

### Policy TC.5 OUT-OF-CENTRE RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

**The Plan opposes all proposals for out-of-centre, regional scale, retail development, whether within or outside of the County, that could undermine the vitality and viability of existing town centres in Warwickshire.**

#### INTENT

- 7.5.1 Policy TC.5 affirms the County Council's approach to regional, out-of-centre retail developments.

#### CONTEXT

- 7.5.2 As well as inappropriate competition between town centres, a new large out-of-town retail-based development could also undermine the County's town centres. Warwickshire is generally well connected by road and rail and is potentially an attractive location for a regional scale retail development.
- 7.5.3 Government policy on out-of-town retail development of a regional scale has hardened. Regional Planning Guidance, in echoing the thrust of current Government policy, argues that 'there is unlikely to be scope for major additional out-of-town shopping facilities without adversely affecting the vitality and viability of existing centres and the environment more generally'. Effectively, in emphasising the importance of the sequential test for retail development in which out-of-town locations are not mentioned, it rules out any new out-of-centre retail developments similar to the Merry Hill centre in the West Midlands.
- 7.5.4 At present there is no substantial evidence of demand, in terms of applications, for retail floorspace in Warwickshire, or any part of the County, which cannot be met within the existing town centres. Bearing in mind the lack of demonstrable need, Government policy and indeed this Plan's strategic emphasis on town centres, the County Council would resist any proposals for new out-of-centre, regional-scale retail developments.
- 7.5.5 Given the extent of influence associated with such developments, the County Council would also oppose such development proposals not only in Warwickshire, but proposals outside the county as well. This is particularly

prudent, because although RPG11 effectively states there is no case for new, out-of-centre regional retail centres in the West Midlands, Warwickshire has borders with the East Midlands, the South West and the South East Regions.

## OPERATION

7.5.6 Local plans should set out clearly that there is no scope for regional scale, out-of-centre retail developments.

