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Planning Design Economics

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

**NEW MILTON TOWN CENTRE
STRATEGY STUDY**

CL10387/PW/SPe/SPa

06 July 2006

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7.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

New Milton's Strengths and Weaknesses

7.1 The main strengths and weaknesses of New Milton town centre identified within the Study are summarised below.

Strengths

- New Milton has a good provision of food stores suitable for both bulk and top-up shopping. There are two reasonable sized supermarkets on Station Road, Somerfield and Co-op, along with a small Tesco store in Old Milton Road.
- The centre has reasonable car parking provision with relatively low levels of dissatisfaction amongst visitors.
- In terms of comparison (non-food shops) the centre has a reasonable range of outlets, including a small selection of multiples. The centre has some interesting small independent shops.
- A significant proportion of businesses have been trading in New Milton town centre for over ten years.
- The vacancy rate within the centre is comparable with the national average, but relatively high compared to the other town centres in the District which suggests there is a more limited demand from business occupiers.
- The provision of litter bins within the centre is good, however, they are of poor quality.
- There is good landscaping provision throughout the centre with several established mature trees and purpose built planting areas.
- The centre has a loyal customer base, which uses the centre regularly. New Milton has the highest proportion of residents who use the centre two to three times a week or more.
- Public transport access to the centre is good with relatively high levels of satisfaction amongst visitors and business occupiers.

Weaknesses

- New Milton is located within the Bournemouth/Christchurch catchment area. Therefore, local residents shop within Bournemouth/Christchurch, particularly for comparison shopping.
- The centre has a limited number of comparison national multiple retailers.
- New Milton has a limited provision of cafés/restaurants/bars and leisure and entertainment facilities.
- The centre is elongated and fragmented by the major cross roads of Station Road and Ashley Road/Old Milton Road. This junction acts as a barrier for pedestrian flow in the centre.
- Pedestrian signage within the centre is limited and could be improved.

- The paving and planting areas to the south of the centre look dated, however they are well maintained and it is anticipated that they will be replaced as part of the streetscape scheme.

New Milton's Future Role

- 7.2 The shopping centre hierarchy is clearly set out in the adopted Local Plan. The six main centres are identified as town centres, and these centres will be the main focus for retail and leisure development within the District. At present Lymington, New Milton and Ringwood town centres are the main foci for comparison shopping, in particular national multiple retailers. New Milton has a similar amount of comparison retail floorspace compared with Lymington, Ringwood and Totton, but has a relatively limited selection of multiple retailers, compared with Lymington and Ringwood, but slightly more than Totton.
- 7.3 New Milton is one of the main centres in the south of the District, along with Lymington, and has an important role. However, the centre falls within the catchment area of Christchurch, Bournemouth and Castlepoint. New Milton cannot be expected to compete on level terms with large regional/sub-regional centres, particularly in terms of higher order comparison shopping and major leisure activities and the development strategy must reflect this.
- 7.4 New Milton should be maintained and enhanced as a town centre, and should continue to complement Christchurch and Bournemouth by providing for bulk convenience food shopping and a reasonable range and choice of comparison shopping facilities and other services. The town centre should serve New Milton and the surrounding catchment area, including some of the needs of nearby smaller towns e.g. Barton on Sea, Milford on Sea, Highcliffe, Brockenhurst and Sway. The centre should function as one of the main comparison shopping destinations in the south of the District along with Lymington, and also the main destination for leisure, entertainment and cultural activities that serve New Milton's residents.

Meeting Shopping and Leisure Needs in New Milton

- 7.5 Phase 1 of this study indicates that growth in expenditure should provide opportunities to improve the range and quality of shopping and leisure facilities within the District and specifically within New Milton. The assessment of the potential capacity for new floorspace within this study demonstrates that there is scope to improve shopping facilities within District. Future planning policy and site allocations

should seek to identify opportunities to accommodate growth at least up to 2012. Longer term growth up to 2018 should be monitored and updated as necessary.

Convenience Development

- 7.6 On the basis of the assumption that existing convenience retailers trade at reasonable average turnover levels, the quantitative capacity analysis indicates there is potential for about 1,700 sq m net of convenience goods sales floorspace within the District up to 2012. The projection up to 2018 is about 2,500 sq m net. Based on existing shopping patterns, the central and southern area of the District is the priority area for convenience floorspace. Therefore New Milton is within the identified area of deficiency. The floorspace projection for the central/southern part of the District (i.e. Lymington, New Milton, Brockenhurst and Lyndhurst) is about 1,800 sq m net up to 2018. Surplus expenditure is unlikely to support a new food superstore in this area, but could be sufficient to support smaller stores or extensions to existing stores.

Comparison Development

- 7.7 The development strategy for New Milton should seek to maintain the centres' current position in the shopping hierarchy, and where appropriate improve the centre's existing market share of expenditure. In order to maintain or enhance New Milton's existing position it will be necessary to improve comparison shopping facilities.
- 7.8 The quantitative capacity analysis indicates that, based on existing shopping patterns as a baseline scenario, there could be scope for about 4,400 sq m gross of comparison floorspace within the Lymington/New Milton/Brockenhurst/Lyndhurst area up to 2012, or 8,500 sq m gross up to 2018. A limited proportion of this need for new comparison floorspace can be accommodated in existing floorspace in town centres, because the vacancy rates are relatively low. Therefore, other opportunities need to be identified to accommodate need at least up to 2012.
- 7.9 Based on the existing distribution of comparison floorspace, one might expect New Milton to accommodate about a third of this floorspace projection, if suitable sites are available (1,500 sq m up to 2012 or 2,800 sq m up to 2018).
- 7.10 Subject to the availability of suitable town centre development opportunities, it may be possible for New Milton and other towns in the central/southern part of the District to improve their market share of comparison expenditure. If market shares can be improved then 5,700 sq m gross could be provided by 2012 or 9,400 sq m gross by

2018. Given uncertainties relating to expenditure growth and internet sales, these floorspace projections could be viewed as maximum estimates.

- 7.11 The provision of large format/retail warehouse stores in the District is currently limited. If suitable development opportunities can be identified there may be potential to improve retail warehouse provision in the District. On the basis that large stores, selling goods traditionally sold within retail warehouses (i.e. DIY, furniture, carpets and large electrical goods), can increase the level of comparison expenditure retained in the District, the following retail warehouse floorspace could be supported in the Lymington/New Milton/Brockenhurst/Lyndhurst area: 2,200 sq m gross by 2012 or 3,500 sq m gross by 2018.
- 7.12 Any major comparison retail proposals outside the main town centres, which are either outside village and local centres or development, which is out-of-scale in relation to the role of the village and local centre, will be required to comply with the sequential approach to site selection, and the applicant will also need to demonstrate the proposal will not have an unacceptable impact on existing centres.

Commercial Leisure Development

- 7.13 The provision of leisure and entertainment facilities within the District is relatively limited. The District does not offer major commercial leisure uses, such as a multiplex cinema, ten-pin bowling or bingo halls. The canvas of leisure operators identified no demand for major facilities in the District.
- 7.14 However, in **theoretical** terms there may be potential in the future to provide:
- small (up to 3 screen) cinema in the central/southern area of the District;
 - small /medium size health and fitness clubs;
 - small bingo hall; and
 - small/medium nightclubs.
- 7.15 The general capacity for Class A3 to A5 (food and drink) floorspace within the District's town centres is as follows:
- 2005 to 2012 - 900 to 1,300 sq m gross
 - 2005 to 2018 - 1,800 to 2,600 sq m gross
- 7.16 The Lymington/New Milton/Brockenhurst/Lyndhurst area could provide between 450 to 650 sq m gross by 2012, or 850 to 1,300 sq m gross by 2018.

7.17 Town centre developments where appropriate should provide a mix of uses including Class A1 retail and A3 to A5 uses in order to meet the above floorspace projections.

Opportunities in New Milton

7.18 The need and capacity for additional retail, leisure and business uses, particularly in the short to medium term (over the next 5 years), will need to be considered within the context of available opportunities. The ability of New Milton town centre to accommodate some or all of this potential has been addressed. Potential sites and opportunities to accommodate future growth within and adjacent to New Milton town centre have been considered. We have considered opportunities that could deliver a reasonable amount of additional floorspace (i.e. 500 sq m or over). This assessment has been based:

- discussions with Council officers to review potential development sites and emerging proposals; and
- NLP's own street survey in the centres to identify possible areas suitable for redevelopment, refurbishment or expansion.

7.19 Each option identified has been assessed in terms of its suitability for different forms of retail/leisure/business uses. The assessment of potential sites has considered a number of issues, including:

- the PPS6 sequential approach to site selection, including linkages with the town centre and primary retail areas;
- the capacity of the site to accommodate new floorspace and the type of town centre use suitable on the site;
- the availability of sites for development within a 5 year period, or in the longer term;
- an initial view of commercial viability and development constraints;
- land ownership and land assembly difficulties;
- retail/leisure/business operator demand for space within the centre;
- accessibility (particularly by public transport);
- the regeneration benefits of development;
- other preferred uses for the site (such as housing or community uses); and
- service arrangements and potential traffic congestion problems.

7.20 The review of potential opportunity sites in New Milton town centre has identified a number of opportunities. These sites have been identified and evaluated, and have been assessed against the following factors::

- existing land uses and availability, categorised as follows:
 - short term - potential to be completed by 2009;
 - medium term - likely to be completed between 2009 and 2012;
 - long term - likely to be completed after 2012;

- commercial potential for retail/leisure development and the most likely form of development, categorised as follows:
 - prime site - likely to attract a developer and business occupiers;
 - secondary site – which may generate limited demand or only demand for a specific kind of use.

- potential scope to accommodate additional retail/leisure floorspace (net increase), categorised as follows:
 - small scale - under 1,000 sq m gross floorspace;
 - medium scale – 1,000 to 2,500 sq m gross floorspace;
 - large scale - over 2,500 sq m gross floorspace;

- potential development constraints; and
- possible alternative uses.

7.21 The overall development prospects of each opportunity, taking on board all of the factors listed above, has been categorised as follows:

- *Good* - development sites that have good prospects for providing additional retail/leisure floorspace, and should be considered for implementation in the short to medium term;
- *Reasonable* - development sites which are well located and may provide potential for additional floorspace, although obstacles to development will need to be overcome, but implementation may only be achieved in the long term; and
- *Poor* - development sites that may be unattractive or unsuitable for retail or leisure development where their delivery is very uncertain.

7.22 This overall rating is based on an initial evaluation for each site. The level of analysis undertaken at this stage is limited, i.e. detailed appraisals of development constraints, land ownership and potential development costs have not been undertaken. More detailed examinations of each site will need to be undertaken before sites can be

brought forward for development or ruled out as viable options. The evaluations undertaken for each opportunity are not detailed planning appraisals and they do not imply that planning permission should be granted or refused for retail/leisure development on any site. However, the evaluation is expected to identify potentially suitable development opportunities that may be worthy of further consideration by the Council. This evaluation provides a framework within which the Council can consider the implementation of a development strategy for New Milton.

Evaluation of Potential Development Sites

7.23 Each opportunity site identified has been evaluated based on the factors listed earlier in this section. An assessment of 8 sites is provided in Appendix C, and is summarised in Table 7.1 overleaf.

Table 7.1: New Milton Site Evaluation Summary

Site	Potential Scale Retail/Leisure Development	Potential Availability	Overall Development Potential
N1 – The Post Office 22-24 Station Road	Small	Medium-Long term	Good/Reasonable
N2 – Numbers 36 – 46 Station Road	Small	Medium – Long term	Reasonable
N3 – Crossmead Ave Car Park	Small	Long term	Poor
N4 – New Milton Fire Station	Small	Medium – Long term	Reasonable
N5 – Railway Station Car Park	Small	Medium term	Good
N6 – Osbourne Road Car Park	Medium	Medium-Long term	Poor
N7 – Land bounded by Station Road and the railway line	Medium	Long term	Reasonable
N8 – The Memorial Hall	Medium	Medium – Long term	Reasonable

7.24 Within New Milton six sites have been identified that have ‘good’ or ‘reasonable’ potential to deliver additional retail/leisure floorspace. However, most of the opportunities are small scale and their availability for development is uncertain.

7.25 The priority sites are likely to include:

- The Memorial Hall;
- land at the railway station; and
- land bounded by Station Road and the railway line.

7.26 The comparison retail floorspace projections suggest that between 4,300 – 5,700 sq m gross of comparison floorspace (high street type shops) could be provided within Lymington/New Milton/Brockenhurst/Lyndhurst area by 2012. Up to 2018 there could be scope for up to 4,100 sq m gross of high street comparison shop floorspace. A

further 900 to 1,300 sq m gross of A3/A4/A5 uses could be required within the District up to 2012.

- 7.27 These three priority sites could accommodate additional retail/leisure floorspace of up to about 4,500 sq m gross. As indicated above, based on existing shares New Milton might be expected to accommodate at least a third of new retail and leisure floorspace needed within the Lymington/New Milton/Brockenhurst/Lyndhurst area of the District. With about half accommodated in Lymington and the remainder (not more than 20%) in Brockenhurst and Lyndhurst. These three opportunities, if delivered, could accommodate New Milton share of floorspace up to 2018.
- 7.28 Given the lack of development opportunities within the primary shopping area, it is necessary to safeguard all the opportunities and existing retail premises within the primary shopping area. It is also necessary to safeguard opportunities to extend existing premises.
- 7.29 The New Milton Draft Urban Design Framework highlights the role that site N2 could have in terms of public realm improvements. In particular development of this site could have the benefit of improving the Station Road frontage and therefore increase activity in this area. In relation to site N1 the UDF emphasises that redevelopment of the site should enhance both the Elm Avenue and Station Road frontages. The UDF states that the existing post office building should be maintained.

New Milton Town Centre Boundaries and Retail Frontages

- 7.30 PPS6 indicates that local authorities should define the boundary of town centres. It states that for purposes of the policy statement, the “centre” for a retail development constitutes the primary shopping area. For all other main town centre uses the “centre” should be regarded as the area embraced by the town centre boundary. The extent of the town centre should be defined on the proposals map.
- 7.31 PPS6 states that the Primary Shopping Areas should be the defined area where retail development is concentrated (generally comprising the primary and those secondary frontages which are contiguous and closely related to the primary shopping frontage). The extent of the primary shopping area should be defined on the proposals map. Smaller centres may not have areas of predominantly leisure, business and other main town centre uses adjacent to the primary shopping area, and therefore the town centre may not extend beyond the primary shopping area. Primary frontages are likely to include a high proportion of retail uses. Secondary frontage Secondary frontages provide greater opportunities for a diversity of uses.

- 7.32 Within the context of this PPS6 guidance, we believe that the town centre boundary of New Milton could be more tightly draw around town centre uses along Station Road and Old Milton Road. The town centre boundary to the west of Station Road includes residential areas and public open space, for example residential uses along Whitefield Road. Residential areas to the south west along Elm Avenue and Old Milton Road are also included.
- 7.33 It will also be necessary to continue to designate a separate Primary Shopping Area within this town centre boundary. The Primary Shopping Area as designated within the Local Plan is the main retail focus within the centre and has a predominance of Class A1 retail use, which is consistent with PPS6. Within this area the retail role of New Milton should continue to be protected.