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Planning Design Economics

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

**NEW FOREST DISTRICT TOWN
CENTRES STRATEGY**

PART 1 – Strategic Assessment

Final Report

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7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 This report provides a district wide assessment of the need for retail and commercial leisure uses in New Forest District. It provides a guide to the shopping and leisure needs of the District up to 2012 and 2018. The principal conclusions of the analysis contained within this study are summarised below.

The Role of Shopping Centres

- 7.2 PPS6 indicates that local planning authorities should adopt a positive and proactive approach to planning for the future of the centres within their areas, whether planning for growth, consolidation or decline. Local planning authorities are expected to set out a vision and strategy for the pattern and hierarchy of centres, including town, district and local centres within their area. This strategy should set out how the role of different centres will contribute to the overall vision for their area.
- 7.3 The shopping centre hierarchy is clearly set out in the adopted Local Plan. The six established 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. Totton has more comparison retail floorspace than these centres, but has a more limited provision of multiple retailers. However, Totton is the main centre in the east of the District.
- 7.4 As the established centres in their respective parts of the District, the established centres should continue to be the main focus for retail and leisure development. However, these town centres fall within the catchment areas of larger centres, i.e. Southampton, Bournemouth and Salisbury. Town centres within the District 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.
- 7.5 Town centres within the District should seek to complement the larger regional/sub-regional centres by providing for bulk convenience food shopping and a reasonable range and choice of comparison shopping facilities and other services. Smaller town centres within the District i.e. Hythe and Fordingbridge should also cater for bulk

convenience shopping and services, but a more limited range of comparison shopping. Below the town centres village and local shopping centres should serve small localised catchment areas, providing coverage across the District.

The Location of New Development

- 7.6 The sequential approach indicates that city, town, district and local centres are the preferred location for new retail/leisure/cultural development. Development should be appropriate in terms of scale and the catchment area the centre serves. Therefore, large scale development should be concentrated within the larger centres. However, some forms of development may be more appropriate in smaller centres, if there are localised areas of deficiency. The key issues are the nature and scale of retail/leisure development proposed and the catchment area the development seeks to serve. Development should normally be consistent in terms of scale and nature with the character and role of the nearest centre. Therefore, development plan policies should provide clear advice in this respect.
- 7.7 PPS6 suggests that local authorities should adopt policies that enable town, district and local centres to meet the needs of residents of their area. The sequential approach indicates that the first preference for new developments should be within centres followed by edge-of-centre sites in town and district centre locations. Out of centre sites are last in the order of preference.
- 7.8 As indicated, development within all centres should be appropriate in terms of nature and scale to the role of the centre. Developments which are likely to attract customers from a significantly wider area than the centre's intended catchment area may be considered to be out-of-scale with the role of the centre, and may be better located within a larger centre, if alternative sites are available, which would meet the identified need. Again, each proposal would need to be considered on its individual merits. Therefore major development which is expected to serve a sub-regional catchment should be located in larger centres, e.g. Southampton or Bournemouth.
- 7.9 Lymington and New Milton should be the foci for major retail and leisure development that is needed to serve the central and southern part of the District. This will be dependant on the identification of suitable development opportunities within the town centres, which will be undertaken in Part 2 of this study.

- 7.10 In the west of the District, Ringwood should be the main focus for retail and leisure development. Development should predominantly serve the Ringwood and Fordingbridge area. Totton should be the main focus for major development in the north east of the District, complementing the role of Southampton city centre.

The Designation of Centres

- 7.11 The distinction between city, town, district and local centres is important when applying the sequential approach, which will assist the consideration of scale when determining proposed retail/leisure schemes.
- 7.12 Future development plan policies in the District must continue to clearly define which centres are town, district or local centres within the context of PPS6, in order to avoid confusion when applying the sequential approach. At present development plan policies designate 6 Town Centres and 21 Village/Local centres. There are no designated District centres. However, town and local centres in the District vary significantly in terms of size, range of facilities and catchment area. Hythe and Fordingbridge are small town centres and provide a more limited range and choice of facilities than the four other town centres. Lyndhurst is much larger than the other village and local centres, and is closer in size and character to Hythe and Fordingbridge. Therefore, it may be appropriate to introduce a new category of centres within the District. Hythe, Fordingbridge and Lyndhurst could be designated as District centres.
- 7.13 Annex A of PPS6 indicates provides guidance on the definition of centres. It indicates that town centres in rural areas are likely to be market towns and other centres of similar size and role which function as important service centres, providing a range of facilities and services for extensive rural catchment areas. The household survey results suggest that Hythe and Fordingbridge have relatively small catchment areas focused primarily on their respective study area zone, whilst Lymington, New Milton, Ringwood and Totton attract customers from a wider area.
- 7.14 PPS6 indicates that district centres will usually comprise groups of shops often containing at least one supermarket or superstore, and a range of non-retail services, such as banks, building societies and restaurants, as well as local public facilities such as a library. The provision of shops and services in Hythe and Fordingbridge

perhaps meet and surpass this range of facilities, and the two centres perhaps fall between the PPS6 definitions for town centres and district centres.

- 7.15 On balance, it may be appropriate to designate Hythe, Fordingbridge and Lyndhurst as District centres, unless major development opportunities within the centres can be identified, which could significantly enhance the range and choice of facilities without undermining other centres.
- 7.16 PPS6 indicates that local centres usually include a range of small shops of a local nature, serving a small catchment and might include a small supermarket, a newsagent, a sub-post office, pharmacy, hot-food takeaway and launderette.

Meeting Shopping Needs in New Forest District

- 7.17 Growth in expenditure should provide opportunities to improve the range and quality of shopping and leisure facilities within the District. The assessment of the potential capacity for new floorspace within this study demonstrates that there is scope to improve shopping facilities within District. In order to meet projected growth in expenditure, there is a need for additional shopping facilities. 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.
- 7.18 The floorspace projections shown in this report should be treated with caution and should only be used as a broad guide, particularly when translated into the development plan allocations or when used to guide development control decisions. For instance if town centre schemes comes forward in the period to 2012, which exceed the comparison floorspace projection up to 2012, it may be acceptable to permit such a scheme if it is of an appropriate scale in terms of the role and function of that centre. Such floorspace limits should not inhibit competition between retailers when located within centres, subject to the consideration of scale and impact.
- 7.19 Long term forecasts (up to 2018) may be more susceptible to change, due to unforeseen circumstances. Projected surplus expenditure up to 2018 is attributable to projected growth in spending per capita. If the growth in expenditure is lower than that forecast then the scope for additional space will reduce. Long term projections should be monitored and kept under-review. On this basis, we believe the lower

baseline comparison floorspace projections are the most appropriate guide for long term capacity up to 2018.

- 7.20 The implications of major retail development within the District and competing centres should also be monitored and the affects proposals may have on the demand for additional development in the District should be carefully considered.

Convenience Development

- 7.21 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, given that Sainsbury has occupied the former Safeway store in Ringwood.
- 7.22 Surplus expenditure is unlikely to support a new food superstore in the District (2,300 sq m net or more) up to 2012, but could be sufficient to support smaller stores or extensions to existing stores.
- 7.23 Any food store proposals located outside the six established centres 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.

Comparison Development

- 7.24 The development strategy for the District should seek to maintain all centres' current position in the shopping hierarchy, and where appropriate improve the main town centre's existing market share of expenditure. In order to maintain or enhance the main town centre's existing position it will be necessary to improve comparison shopping facilities.
- 7.25 The quantitative capacity analysis indicates that, based on existing shopping patterns as a baseline scenario, there could be scope for about 8,900 sq m gross of comparison floorspace within the main town centres up to 2012, and/or 17,800 sq m gross up to 2018, broken down as follows:

Area	Floorspace Sq M Gross	
	2005-2012	2005-2018
Ringwood/Fordingbridge	2,000	4,000
Totton/Hythe	2,500	5,300
Lymington/New Milton/Brockenhurst/Lyndhurst	4,400	8,500

- 7.26 The floorspace projections in the above table are the totals for the three main sectors of the District. Based on existing shopping patterns, the bulk of the floorspace projections in Ringwood/Fordingbridge and Totton/Hythe are likely to be accommodated in Ringwood and Totton respectively, subject to the availability of suitability of development opportunities. In the Lymington/New Milton/Brockenhurst/Lyndhurst area development is likely to be focused in Lymington and New Milton. Based on existing shopping patterns the approximate split could be Lymington 45%, New Milton 35% and 20% for other locations (i.e. primarily Brockenhurst and Lyndhurst). However, the appropriate distribution will be dependent on a detailed analysis of development opportunities and the ability of these opportunities to accommodate new development.
- 7.27 A limited proportion of this need for new comparison floorspace can be accommodated in existing vacant floorspace in existing centres. The vacancy rate within the town and local centres is relatively low, e.g. 5.8% in the six established centres, and most of the vacant premises are in secondary areas on the fringe of the town centres. In terms of development commitments with planning permission (not implemented before October 2005) there is only one significant proposal in the District, at Water Lane in Totton that will provide 4 units totalling 500 sq m gross. This leaves a further 2,000 sq m gross to be identified in the Totton/Hythe area by 2012.
- 7.28 Other opportunities need to be identified to accommodate need at least up to 2012. However, the Council should encourage the re-occupation of vacant shop units in all centres. Allowing time for sites to be identified, assembled and developed and allowing time for new development to achieve settled trading patterns, it is necessary to bring forward opportunities now in order to meet projected need up to 2012.

7.29 An analysis of potential development opportunities within the established centres, Lymington, Ringwood, New Milton and Totton will be undertaken in Part 2 of the study. Subject to the availability of suitable town centre development opportunities in Part 2 of the study, it may be possible for centres within the District to improve their market share of comparison expenditure. If market share can be improved the following high street comparison floorspace could be provided:

Area	Floorspace Sq M Gross	
	2005-2012	2005-2018
Ringwood/Fordingbridge	2,700	4,400
Totton/Hythe	4,500	7,000
Lymington/New Milton/Brockenhurst/Lyndhurst	5,700	9,400

7.30 Given uncertainties relating to expenditure growth and internet sales, these floorspace projections could be viewed as maximum estimates. The distribution of floorspace may need to be revised when town centre development opportunities and the future role of each centre has been assessed in Part 2 of the study.

7.31 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. These facilities should only be permitted if they complement rather than compete directly with existing comparison shopping facilities, and should not have an adverse impact on existing centres.

7.32 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:

Area	Floorspace Sq M Gross	
	2005 - 2012	2005 - 2018
Ringwood/Fordingbridge	1,000	1,700
Totton/Hythe	1,700	2,600
Lymington/New Milton/Brockenhurst/Lyndhurst	2,200	3,500

7.33 These projections are relatively small bearing in mind large format retail warehouses are usually at least 500 sq m gross in size and DIY stores are usually at least 2,000 sq m gross. Therefore, the projections suggest that it is unlikely that all parts of the District could sustain large format stores/retail warehouses. Therefore, the floorspace

projections may need to be focused in one or two areas, i.e. where they will serve more than one town.

7.34 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

7.35 The provision of leisure and entertainment facilities within the District is relatively limited, reflecting the District's position within the catchment area of larger centres. The District does not offer major commercial leisure uses, such as a multiplex cinema, ten-pin bowling or bingo halls. The disperse population within the District and the proximity of major facilities within larger surrounding towns will restrict the potential to improve leisure facilities within the District. The canvas of leisure operators identified no operators wishing to develop major leisure facilities in the District.

7.36 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.

7.37 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

7.38 These projections can be broken down as follows:

Area	Floorspace Sq M Gross	
	2005-2012	2005-2018

Ringwood/Fordingbridge	200 to 300	400 to 600
Totton/Hythe	250 to 400	500 to 800
Lyminster/New Milton/Brockenhurst/Lyndhurst	450 to 600	900 to 1,200

7.39 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.

Criteria for Meeting Assessing Development Proposals

7.40 The criteria for assessing major retail and leisure development proposals (perhaps 500 sq m gross or more) that may emerge within the District should be as follows:

- What is the locational area of need the development seeks to serve and what centre could potentially fulfil the identified area of need?
- Is the nature and scale of development likely to serve a wide catchment area e.g. most of District and beyond? If the development has an extensive catchment area then opportunities in larger regional/sub-regional centres should be explored.
- If the development has a more localised catchment area, is a site available in the town centres in that area and will this site meet the identified need?
- If so, is the site/unit acceptable in terms of site specific/land use policy, design and highway terms?
- If there is no town centre site is an edge of centre site acceptable and available with good links to the centre and accessible by a choice of means of transport;
- Is the likely development of an appropriate size in relation to the role of the town in which it is located, i.e. does it meet an identified need within the town's catchment area, without harming the centre or another centre in the hierarchy?
- If there are no town centre sites suitable, available and viable to meet the identified need, is there an out-of-centre site, which is genuinely accessible by means of transport other than the car?

7.41 Having followed these steps the Council must evaluate whether development proposals or proposed allocations in the emerging LDF accord with these criteria. If edge-of-centre sites or out-of-centre proposals are the only opportunities to meet identified needs, consideration must be given to the potential impact effects on the vitality and viability of existing centres, as should transport issues including accessibility and the effect on the use of the car.

Town Centre – Strategic Objectives

- 7.42 Lymington, New Milton, Ringwood and Totton should be maintained and enhanced as town centres. As the main centres in their respective parts of the District, the town centres should serve their settlements and the surrounding catchment area, and should embrace a good range of activities. The centres should function as the main comparison shopping destinations in the District and also the main destination for leisure, entertainment and cultural activities that serve the District's residents. However, facilities in these centres will complement facilities within surrounding regional/sub-regional centres. The primary catchment area of development within these centres should not extend significantly beyond the District boundary. Development in Lymington and New Milton should primarily serve the central and southern part of the District, whilst Ringwood should serve the west of the District and Totton the north east of the District.

District Centres – Strategic Objectives

- 7.43 Hythe, Fordingbridge and Lyndhurst should be defined as District Centres, which are expected to complement the four main town centres by providing for bulk convenience food shopping, community uses and services, and a limited range of comparison shopping facilities focusing on day to day comparison goods. Small scale infill development may be appropriate within local centres.

Village and Local Centres – Strategic Objectives

- 7.44 Designated village and local centres are the fourth level of centres in the hierarchy, i.e. city, town, district and local centres. The District's village and local centres generally provide a small food or convenience store. These stores are not ideal for main and bulk food shopping trips, but do cater for basket and top-up shopping trips. The future priority for these centres should be to consolidate and maintain their roles as important local centres. Opportunities for small scale development to provide additional shop premises should be encouraged. These centres should be maintained to ensure they provide basic food and grocery shopping facilities, supported by a limited range of other shops and services.

- 7.45 Local centres should continue to serve small catchment areas, focused on their respective local communities. Development within these centres should be commensurate with this role and limited catchment area.
- 7.46 Local centres should predominantly serve catchment areas extending no more than walking distance from the centre, except where they serve a rural area with a dispersed population. Some centres may also serve passing trade, but should not encourage additional car borne trade. Local centres should continue to be maintained and protected, in order to ensure all residents in the District have access to a basic range of small shops and services of a local nature. Core facilities will include convenience stores, post office, newsagents and pharmacy.

Future Strategy Implementation and Monitoring

- 7.47 In lien with existing development plan policies the Council should continue to maintain and enhance the role of shopping centres within the District, by continuing to:
- Apply guidance within PPS6, particularly relating to need and the sequential approach in determining out-of-centre retail and other development proposals that generate significant numbers of trips;
 - Implement measures to improve accessibility and public transport to the town, district and local centres in order to encourage more residents to shop within their nearest centre;
 - implement shop frontage policies within the development plan to protect retail and other desirable town centre uses;
 - implement of public realm improvements to improve the attractiveness of shopping environments within all centres; and
 - implement measures to bring forward development opportunities.
- 7.48 The recommendations and projections within this study are expected to assist the Council in preparing development plan policies over the coming years and to assist development control decisions during this period. The study provides a broad overview of the potential need for further retail and leisure development up to 2012, with longer term forecast up to 2018. However, projections are subject to uncertainty and forecasts may need to be amended to reflect emerging changes as and when new information becomes available. In particular long-term projections up to 2018 should be treated with caution.

7.49 Therefore, we would recommend that this retail/leisure capacity study should be updated in 4-5 years time and the floorspace projections rolled forward. The following key assumptions should be updated as necessary:

- population projections;
- local expenditure estimates (information from Experian or other recognised data providers);
- growth rate assumptions for expenditure per capita (information from Experian or other recognised data providers);
- the impact of potential increases in home and internet shopping;
- existing retail floorspace and average turnover to floorspace densities (floorspace surveys and turnover data from Management Horizons Retail Ranking); and
- implemented development within and around the study area.

7.50 These key inputs into the retail/leisure capacity assessment can be amended to provide revised capacity projections. We do not envisage that the structure of the capacity assessment set out in this report will need to be amended. It may be necessary to undertake an updated household survey to address the implementation of major developments that will significantly alter shopping/leisure patterns in the sub-region.