



**Horsham
District
Council**

PLANNING
FOR OUR FUTURE



Defined Town and Village Centre Boundaries



HORSHAM DISTRICT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Background Document

September 2006

£2.00

**Horsham District Defined Town and Village Centre Boundaries
Background Document in support of the submitted Core Strategy Policy CP18
and the Vitality and Viability of Existing Centres section of the General
Development Control Policies Development Plan Document**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This background paper has been prepared to explain the approach taken to new retail and leisure development in Horsham District. It is of particular relevance to the Development Control Policies Document although it also expands on the overall philosophy and vision as set out in Core Strategy Policy CP18 Vitality and Viability of Existing Centres.
- 1.2 The background paper explains in more detail the reasoning behind issues relating to where new retail and recreation, leisure and entertainment¹ development will be located and how the vision as set out in the Core Strategy has been translated in the General Development Control Policies.
- 1.3 In general terms, the retail strategy as set out in Policy CP18 supports appropriate new retail development within the existing centres. It states that the maintenance and enhancement of the role of the town and village centres within the District, as a focus for activities which give them their distinct character, is fundamental to the achievement of sustainable development in the District. Although retailing plays a significant role in achieving the overall objectives for the town and village centres, the need for diversity and the ability to offer a range of choice in an attractive environment is also recognised as a key component for enhancing their vitality and viability.

2. Background and Policy Guidance

- 2.1 In preparing the Local Development Documents produced to date we have sought to understand the respective roles of the town and village centres by specific studies and by engagement with the local communities. With regard to retailing, we have commissioned studies to understand better their performance and the key trends affecting them. The Retail Health Check report, prepared in February 2003, has informed the position and has been updated so far as Horsham Town is concerned by the Horsham Retail Health Check Update 2005.
- 2.2 Horsham District has seven town/village centres. Horsham town centre is by far the largest and is identified in the South East Plan as part of a network of strategic town centres within the region and performs a sub-regional role. Although it could not compete with the larger centres in the sub-region on retail floorspace grounds, it must reinforce its own identity to ensure it becomes a destination in its own right. The smaller centres (Billingshurst, Henfield, Pulborough, Southwater, Steyning and Storrington) each have different issues relating to their role and function but are a focus for the local community and the wider area in a variety of ways.

¹ Recreation, leisure and entertainment include cinemas, theatres, restaurants, public houses, bars, cafes and nightclubs. It does not include other sports/recreation and community facilities as there are separate Core Strategy and General Development Control policies relating to such development.

2.3 In 2005, the Government released a new Planning Policy Statement 6 on Planning for Town Centres (PPS6). The fundamental objective of PPS6 is to promote the vitality and viability of town centres by 'planning for the growth and development of existing centres and promoting and enhancing existing centres, by focusing development in such centres and encouraging a wide range of services in a good environment, accessible for all'. A sequential approach is adopted, enabling all town centre options to be considered before edge of centre or out of centre sites are developed. This approach calls for Local Planning Authorities (LPA) to define the extent of the town or village centre. Paragraph 2.16 of PPS6 requires LPAs to identify centres within their area where development will be focused and develop strategies for developing and strengthening the centres within their area. LPAs should define the extent of the main shopping area and the town/village centre on the Proposals Map. In addition, the guidance allows authorities to distinguish between primary and secondary shopping frontages within the main shopping areas.

3. Policy Interpretation

3.1 The Proposals Map of the adopted 1997 Local Plan provided a natural starting point for identifying retail frontages, main shopping areas and town/village centre boundaries. However a number of changes have taken place in the District's centres since the Local Plan was prepared; a number of retail developments have been granted planning permission, the mix of uses has changed and the way that the centres work may now be different. To react to the changes and best manage the functioning of the centres, further work was necessary. Apart from recent advice given at national and regional level, a series of issues were considered including:

- Local knowledge
- Physical barriers such as roads or a topographic feature
- The strength of attraction and size of the centre
- Studies and surveys undertaken

3.2 Each of the District's centres was surveyed to enable the identification of retail frontage(s) and main shopping area(s) within them and a town/village boundary around the main shopping areas. This is consistent with national and regional planning policy and provides an opportunity to give a clear indication as to where new development may be acceptable. However, it is clear from the policies contained within the Core Strategy and the General Development Control Policies documents that new development must be appropriate to its location to ensure that the development does not undermine the vitality and viability of the centre and does not have any serious detrimental implications on a wider scale. Again this is consistent with the advice contained within PPS6 which specifically states that any significant change in the role and function of centres should come through the development plan process, rather than through planning applications.

It is crucial to the strategy to define the town and village centres in a way which allows for a certain level of flexibility without jeopardising the overall well-being of the District's centres and their individual roles in the hierarchy of centres. The town and village centre boundaries have been defined to reflect the current position on the ground whilst providing for appropriate development proposals to come forward. This is in line with the strategy of taking a positive but cautious approach to the Districts'

centres, by monitoring their performance and potential needs which might arise over time, rather than putting forward specific development proposals at this stage. The policies contained in the documents also require new retail or other town centre-related development within the defined town and village centres to be well connected to the defined frontage(s) and main shopping areas of the centre. This is important in order to allow for some flexibility whilst preventing proposals in inappropriate locations within the defined centres.

Conclusion

The redefined retail frontages and main shopping areas are not radically different from those established in the 1997 Local Plan. The shopping areas have not changed significantly over the last decade although some new retail proposals have been granted, particularly in Horsham town. The requirement for LPAs to identify town and village centre boundaries has provided an opportunity to allow for greater flexibility whilst ensuring the continued well-being of our town and village centres. It was considered appropriate and in line with the spatial objectives to build and shape the General Development Control policies on the principles of PPS6 and Core Strategy CP18 with a greater focus on the main shopping areas of the town/village centres. It is considered that this approach will allow for greater flexibility for new development whilst allowing for the stringent control of the change of use proposals to be applied to a wider area.

The consultation exercises undertaken to date have not identified any alternative to this approach. In general, the only other options proposed were the non-inclusion of the proposed policies or continuing with the established approach as set out in the current Local Plan. Neither option was considered to meet the criteria set out in PPS6 and would not be appropriate to meet the needs of this dynamic sector.

It is therefore felt that the policies contained within the General Development Control Policies help in maintaining and enhancing the individual town and village centres of the District; their facilities and roles at the local level as well as their position and function in the wider network of centres. It is considered that the policies represent an appropriate way for tailoring each centre's assets and ensuring the vitality and viability of the centres is protected whilst enabling change to occur when necessary, thereby meeting the future needs of the retail sector and those of the people living and working in and visiting the District.