

TOPIC PAPER 7: Town Centre Growth and Retail

The way that the whole town develops in the future will be affected by planning decisions. Crawley Borough Council has started work on a new local plan that will help to guide development in Crawley over 15 years from 2014-2029.

This consultation period forms part of the early engagement, and further consultation stages are planned before the document is adopted in 2014. Comments received to earlier consultation periods, including to the Topic Papers in 2009, the Town Centre North Supplementary Planning Document and the Manor Royal Masterplan, will continue to be taken into consideration, alongside the technical evidence base, when formulating the Local Plan Preferred Strategy. The Preferred Strategy will be made available for a further period of consultation later in 2012.

This is your opportunity to shape the way the town develops and the council would appreciate and value any comments you have on this Topic Paper or any of the others that form part of this consultation.

Consultation Questions:

- R1. What uses are appropriate on the Town Centre Opportunity sites?
- R2. Can other Town Centre opportunities be formally identified and allocated?
- R3. Should we seek to encourage more non-retail uses and promote evening economy uses? If so, what uses do you think are appropriate?
- R4. Which parts of town do you feel are not working? What are the main problems and reasons?
- R5. Are the neighbourhood parades offering a sufficient mix of uses to meet residents' day-to-day needs, or should we put firmer policies in place to protect their role and function?

Summary of Current Context:

National Planning Policy Guidance, in particular PPS4, recognises town centres as highly sustainable locations which should be the focus for major new economic growth. The vitality and viability of town centres should be promoted by the encouragement of a wide range of both day-time and evening uses, including a good mix of shops, leisure uses, and local services. A sequential approach is advocated, with town centre sites considered first for new town centre development which includes retail and leisure. This "town centre first" approach and the sequential test is reiterated in the draft National Planning Policy Framework.

Regional Planning: the South East Plan 2009 identifies Crawley as a Primary Regional Centre (Policy TC1), and as a Centre for Significant Change in Policy TC2 where significant change is anticipated, and where major retail uses should be located. The Gatwick Diamond Authorities have drafted a Local Strategic Statement which recognises that Crawley is best positioned to fulfil the role of a competitive regional centre, and reaffirms the approach to Town Centre North.

The adopted Core Strategy includes a series of policies to promote a thriving Town Centre and to secure growth to meet the needs of the Gatwick Sub-Region. It allocates the Town Centre North (TCN) site for a major mixed-use, retail led development with residential and office uses in order for Crawley to fulfil its role as a

primary regional centre and act as a catalyst for a step change in the facilities, quality and environment of the whole Town Centre.

The revised Town Centre North Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), adopted in November 2011, provides specific guidance for this development, including the approach to delivery. This document has been revised in the light of the changed economic climate, to aid delivery by allowing a more flexible approach which enables developments to come forward in a series of phases. However, the SPD makes it clear that a comprehensively planned approach is still of key importance. Each phase of development must ensure that delivery of the wider TCN redevelopment is not prejudiced, that strong linkages to TCN and the rest of the town centre are provided, and that reasonable contribution to the wider TCN development is made.

The Core Strategy also includes policies outlining that new retail development will be supported within the main shopping area but that it will not be permitted outside this. Policy E2 encourages the redevelopment and intensification of existing employment sites in sustainable locations such as the town centre.

The Core Strategy also identifies other "Opportunity Sites" for mixed use development to support the objectives for the Town Centre. These are covered in greater detail in the Town Centre Wide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which sets planning and design principle for the Town Centre Opportunity Sites, together with three additional sites, and provides additional guidance of transport issues and planning obligations in the Town Centre. This document also provides planning guidance on the presence of non-retail uses in the main shopping area.

Key Issues:

Town Centre Objectives

- The adopted Core Strategy sets clear objectives for Crawley Town Centre, including promoting a thriving Town Centre with a rich mix of uses, fulfilling its role in meeting the needs of the Gatwick Sub-Region, enabling Crawley to compete effectively with other centres, increasing residential development in the Town Centre and promoting the evening economy. High quality public realm, public transport and community safety are also advocated. The existing planning policy framework therefore sets a clear direction for the Town Centre which is still in line with existing and emerging government policy, regional guidance, and the Local Strategic Statement for the Gatwick Diamond sub-region.

Town Centre North

- The allocation of the Town Centre North (TCN) development in the adopted Core Strategy is seen as the key element for securing growth and achieving a step change in the facilities, quality and environment of the rest of the Town Centre, and was strongly endorsed by the Inspector at Examination in Public. Since December 2008, the national economic downturn has slowed progress in bringing forward the Town Centre North scheme, however recent work has confirmed that redevelopment along The Boulevard could still happen. Major development companies remain interested in investing in the town and have been engaging in discussions with the Borough Council. Therefore, it is considered that the objective of a major step change scheme is still valid, and to assist in the delivery of Town Centre North in a difficult economic climate, the council has now further revised its Town Centre North SPD, adopted in November 2011.
- Consultants DTZ assessed Retail Capacity and Impact for Crawley, determining that there is still sufficient expenditure capacity to support a step change TCN development without having a significant adverse impact on the existing town

centre or neighbouring town centres. DTZ also advised on the Delivery and Viability for TCN, and this work, together with discussions with developers, suggested that it is no longer likely that an individual developer will deliver the whole TCN scheme on a comprehensive basis. The revised SPD therefore provides greater flexibility and allows the development to come forward in separate phases, each contributing to the overall improvement of the town centre. The SPD also accepts that residential development is likely to be developed separately to the main retail scheme.

- The first phase of the Town Centre North development, the redevelopment of land west of the High Street for a supermarket, hotel, restaurants/bars and a town centre car park *already has planning permission*.

Other Town Centre Opportunities

- The adopted Core Strategy and the Town Centre Wide SPD identify several sites within the Town Centre to secure a mix of uses, including some significant housing numbers. However, these sites are not formally allocated and the Local Plan is an opportunity to do so, giving more control over the future development of the sites. Several of these sites are in multiple ownership and will be complex to deliver. Advice from DTZ and discussions with developers indicates that the delivery of high density residential units, particularly above other uses, on these sites is increasingly placing a burden on development viability and may deter investors. The delivery of housing in the town centre remains an important objective as it enhances the vitality of the town centre and contributes to housing supply in a sustainable location. However, the appropriate mix and/or layout of uses on these sites needs to be carefully assessed to ensure housing can be delivered without preventing other development coming forward. There may also be other opportunities for development within the town centre which could be identified and allocated.

Town Centre Shopping

- In addition to securing new development in Crawley Town Centre, and in the intervening period before major change takes place, it is important to ensure that the existing function of the town centre is maintained and improved to provide a good mix of shops and other facilities to meet day-to-day needs, and ensure Crawley remains a place where people want to live, work and visit.
- Crawley Town Centre functions well, providing a good mix of shops, services and other uses. County Mall, Queens Square and The Martlets in particular provide a good mix of uses, with few vacant units, and attract a significant footfall of customers. However, although The Martlets and Queens Square are busy, people-friendly environments during the day, there is little activity during the evening, resulting in empty streets. These core retail areas have policies which restrict changes of use to non-retail, although this has been made more flexible to allow for more café and restaurant uses. Other, more peripheral, areas, such as The Broadway, tend to attract lower footfalls levels during the day, and the number of vacant shop units has increased as a result of changes in the economy. Although the DTZ work identifies that TCN could create additional footfall in these areas, there is still a need to consider current vacancy rates and develop a realistic planning policy approach to ensure these areas are able to thrive. However, encouraging much more flexibility, especially in the current economic climate, could mean that shop units are lost permanently to non-retail uses, potentially undermining the shopping function of the Town Centre.

Neighbourhood Parades

- It is also important to look at retail beyond the Town Centre. As a New Town, Crawley has been built in neighbourhoods, with each neighbourhood providing its own local shops, facilities and services. The neighbourhoods are an important part of Crawley's character and the majority function well in providing shops and services to meet the day-to-day needs of residents. The current saved Local Plan policy recognises that non-retail uses such as takeaways and betting shops can provide an important local function, but that too many can undermine the ability of the parade to meet local shopping needs.

Options:

It is considered that the overall objectives for the Town Centre are still valid, and in line with existing and emerging government and regional guidance. The options therefore relate to the means of achieving these objectives.

Town Centre North

- The approach to the delivery of Town Centre North, as a result of market changes, has been adjusted through the SPD, providing more flexibility and allowing the development to come forward in phases. The emerging Local Plan will therefore need to reflect this.

Other Development Opportunities

- The proposed mix and layout of uses for the Opportunity Sites, together with the additional sites in the Town Centre Wide SPD, could be reassessed, particularly where housing is proposed.
- These sites could be allocated to strengthen delivery.
- The council could seek to identify more opportunities within the retail centre for development.
- Or opportunity sites and other possible retail sites could be left unallocated to come forward on a market-led basis.

Town Centre Shopping

- Continue with the current policy approach set out in the Town Centre Wide SPD, limiting the amount of non-retail use allowed in each part of the town through Development Management policies.
- Apply a more flexible approach to allow for a greater variety of non-retail uses, including commercial leisure opportunities. This could involve a slight relaxation of current policy to allow for greater percentage of non-retail uses, and/or a relaxation of the current approach which restricts the amount of adjoining non-retail uses in a given area.
- Consider applying a highly flexible approach in some areas, similar to that of the High Street, to attract non-retail uses into areas of high vacancy rates.

Neighbourhood Parades

- Maintain the current policy approach when considering applications for change of use to non-retail in neighbourhood parades, seeking to ensure there is a good mix of retail alongside non-retail uses such as takeaways.
- Apply a more stringent approach to the loss of retail units in neighbourhood parades.

Indication of Potential Direction:

Town Centre North

- The adopted Core Strategy objectives for the Town Centre are still valid and it is considered that TCN should remain as the key focus for achieving Town Centre step change and growth. The Local Plan will reflect the revised approach to delivery established in the revised SPD for TCN adopted in November 2011.

Other Development Opportunities

- The mix and layout of uses for the Opportunity Sites will be reassessed, particularly to determine how and where housing can be delivered. If sufficient certainty can be established regarding delivery, these opportunity sites will be allocated in order to strengthen their contribution to achieving the objectives of the Town Centre.

Town Centre Shopping

- The Development Management policy approach for the majority of the Town Centre's Main Shopping Area should remain unchanged. However, in areas experiencing low footfall and high vacancies, a more flexible Development Management policy may be developed to allow for a greater range of non-retail uses.

Neighbourhood Parades

- As each parade is unique, an overarching detailed policy controlling changes of use could be too prescriptive, and it may be more appropriate to continue to assess planning applications on the individual merits of the application. However, this will be reviewed alongside the corporate approach to the parades, in the drafting of a Development Management policy for the neighbourhood parades.

Evidence Base:

National

- National Planning Policy Guidance, in particular PPS4 (Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth), advocates a proactive approach to planning retail and town centre development, encouraging the growth and development of town centres to provide a strong retail focus and a wide range of supporting town centre uses in a sustainable location. A key objective is to promote the vitality and viability of town centres by focusing new economic growth in existing centres to promote the range of services and quality of the environment and to promote competition between retailers and enhanced customer choice through innovative and efficient shopping in town centres which allow genuine choice for the community. It advises local planning authorities when allocating sites for retail and town centre development to examine the need for retail development over the period of their Development Plan, assess the impact on existing centres and to take a sequential approach with town centre sites considered as the first location for new development.
- The draft National Planning Framework reiterates the objective to promote competitive town centre environments, and pursue policies to support the viability and vitality of town centres. It encourages local planning authorities to allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail, leisure and other development needed in town centres. Local planning authorities should prefer applications for retail and leisure uses to be located in town centre.

Regional

- The South East Plan identifies Crawley as a Primary Regional Centre (Policy TC1), and as a Centre for Significant Change in Policy TC2 where significant change is anticipated, and where major retail uses should be located. Gatwick/Crawley are the centre of a regional hub. Policy GAT1 seeks to maximise sustainable economic growth. Policy GAT2 seeks high value economic growth and in particular the regeneration of the town centres which should be seen as the first choice for inward investment.
- The Gatwick Diamond Local Strategic Statement, drafted by the Gatwick Diamond local authorities (including Crawley) recognises that Crawley is best positioned to fulfil the role of a competitive regional centre, and reaffirms the approach to Town Centre North. The statement is currently being adopted by the authorities (CBC adopted it in October 2011).

Local

- The adopted Core Strategy sets out objectives to promote a thriving Town Centre with a rich mix of uses to enhance vitality; secure growth to meet needs of Gatwick Sub-Region and compete effectively; increase residential development; balance retail circuit; promote evening economy; enhance role as public transport interchange; provide and manage high quality public realm and improve community safety.
 - Policy TC1 allocates Town Centre North for a major mixed-use, retail-led development, to provide in the region of 50,000 sq. m retail floorspace, 800 residential units, an appropriate range and quantity of high quality offices (including a new Town Hall) and a range of leisure, community and other uses.
 - The objectives of this development are to fulfil Crawley's role as a primary regional centre, enhance retail offer within sub-region, and act as a catalyst for step change in facilities, quality and environment of the whole Town Centre. Its mix of uses also creates a significant presence for residential development in the Town Centre, adds leisure and restaurant facilities which will be open into the evening, and supports the economy of the town centre. The scale and complexity of the scheme are such that the adopted Core Strategy and the supporting SPD state it should be delivered on a comprehensively master planned basis, with one lead developer.
 - Policy TC2 identifies several "Opportunity Sites" for mixed use developments to support the objectives for the Town Centre. Further guidance on the development principles for these sites is provided in the Town Centre Wide SPD. Several of these sites now form part of the strategic housing land supply for the adopted Core Strategy.
- Town Centre North SPD (November 2011) provides up to date, more detailed guidance on the development principles for the Town Centre North development.
- DTZ Crawley Retail Capacity and Impact Study (2010)
 - Assesses retail capacity within the Crawley catchment area
 - Determines capacity availability for a step change scheme
 - Identifies impact of a major scheme on the existing town centre and neighbouring town centres
- DTZ Town Centre North Viability and Delivery Study (2011)
 - Assesses current town centre development market
 - Analyses alternative sites and option for Town Centre North
 - Assesses appropriate elements of a major town centre scheme
 - Identifies appropriate delivery mechanisms and strategy
- CB Hillier Parker Retail Study (2000); CBRE Crawley Retail Capacity Study

(2005); GVA Grimley Retail Impact Assessment (2006)

- Studies all identify significant unmet retail expenditure within the Crawley retail catchment area.
- Identified need for high quality department store within the sub-region, in order to clawback trade from other centres further away.
- Recognised that greatest impact likely to be on larger retail centres, rather than neighbouring town centres.
- Town Centre Feasibility Study, Stage 1 (2001) and Feasibility Study for Town Centre North (2003)
 - Identified land north of the Boulevard as the most appropriate location for significant redevelopment.
 - Assessed the commercial viability of the scheme.
 - Assessed transport implications.
- Crawley Town Centre Strategy (2008) and Town Centre Wide SPD (2009)
 - Both documents promote major mixed use development on opportunity sites within the Town Centre and seek to protect its vitality and viability.
 - The Strategy sets objectives for the management, maintenance and promotion of the Town Centre and the improvement of public realm.