

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 3 MARCH 2020  
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR (PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING  
AND GOVERNANCE)

RETAIL STRATEGY

**1** **Executive Summary**

1.1 Members have requested information on the Council's current retail strategy.

**2** **Recommendation(s)**

2.1 That members note the plethora of policies, documents and activities that guide the retail strategy for Welwyn Hatfield.

**3** **Explanation**

3.1 The Council does not have a strategy document that focuses solely on retail.

3.2 The Council's current retail strategy comprises:

- saved policies in the adopted District Plan
- draft policies in the Submitted Local Plan
- WHBC Licencing Policy 2020-2025
- the vision and objectives in the Welwyn Garden City Town Centre Business Improvement District business plan
- the work of Welwyn Garden City Town Centre Business Improvement District Board
- vision and objectives in the Hatfield 2030+ Renewal Framework
- the work of Hatfield 2030+ Renewal Partnership
- the work of Hatfield Town Centre Forum
- decisions taken by the Estates team in respect of retail properties owned by the Council
- decisions taken by Development Management Committee and the Planning team in respect of planning applications for retail activities
- decisions taken by the Licencing Committee and Public Protection team in respect of licencing applications for retail activities
- the work of Community Partnership team, which works closely with WGC BID and Hatfield Town Centre Forum
- the work of the Economic Development team
- the work of the Environmental Health team
- the work of the corporate Town Centre Group, which meets on a regular basis to discuss town centre issues
- the work of the corporate Regeneration Group, which meets on a regular basis to discuss regeneration issues throughout the borough

- 3.3 The saved policies in the [adopted District Plan](#) are: TCR1 Retail Development in Town Centres and Edge of Town Centres; TCR2 Retail Development in Villages and Neighbourhood Centres; TCR3 Out of Centre Retail Development; TCR4 WGC Town Centre North Development Site; TCR5 WGC Campus East Development Site; TCR6 WGC Land at the Southern Side of the Town Centre; TCR7 Retail Frontages in WGC Town Centre; TCR8 Mixed Use Frontages in WGC Town Centre; TCR10 WGC Acceptable Uses Outside of the Primary Retail Core (The Campus); TCR11 WGC Acceptable Uses Outside of the Primary Retail Core (Parkway and Church Road); TCR14 Hatfield Redevelopment of Land at the Eastern End of Town Centre; TCR16 Retail Frontages in Hatfield Town Centre; TCR17 Mixed Use Frontages in Hatfield Town Centre; TCR19 Hatfield Acceptable Uses Outside of the Primary Retail Core (Lemsford Road); TCR20 Hatfield Acceptable Uses Outside of the Primary Retail Core (The Common); TCR23 Large Neighbourhood Centres; TCR24 Old Hatfield; TCR25 Small Neighbourhood Centres; TCR26 Large Village Centres; TCR27 Small Village Centres; TCR28 Loss of Individual Local Shops; TCR29 Markets.
- 3.4 In summary, they collectively seek to maintain and enhance the role of town, local and village centres as the focal point for communities. They set out a hierarchy of centres and seek that new retail development accords with the sequential approach.

#### Submitted Local Plan

- 3.5 The draft policies in the [Submitted Local Plan](#) are: SP5 Retail Development; SADM4 Development in Designated Centres; SADM5 Development Outside Designated Centres; SADM6 Shopfronts, Adverts, Signage; SP16 WGC Town Centre; SP16 WGC Town Centre Strategy; SADM19 WGC Development in the Core Retail Zone; SADM20 WGC Development Outside the Core Retail Zone; SP20 Hatfield Town Centre Strategy; SADM22 Hatfield Development in the Core Retail Zone; SADM23 Hatfield The Common and Queensway Opportunity Areas; SADM24 Hatfield Lemsford Road Opportunity Area; SADM25 High View Neighbourhood Shopping Centre.
- 3.6 In summary, they collectively seek to make town, neighbourhood and village centres the focus for shopping, leisure, employment, culture and other services. They set out a hierarchy of centres and seek that new retail development accords with the sequential approach. They want at least 70% of the primary frontage and 30% of the secondary frontage in town centres and 50% of the frontage in neighbourhood and village centres to be class A1 retail use. This is to ensure that centres continue to have a focus for shopping, alongside other desirable activities such as leisure, eating and drinking. Losses will only be accepted where there is active and extensive marketing for at least 12 months to demonstrate that there is no demand for A1 uses in that location.

#### Grimsey Review

- 3.7 Retailer Bill Grimsey, together with a team of experts, produced *The [Grimsey Review](#): An Alternative Future for the High Street*, in 2013 and revisited it in 2018 in order to see what had changed, what had worked and what hadn't worked and what was needed to improve high streets and town centres.

- 3.8 The Review suggests that town centres need to become gathering points for whole communities, which also offer a great experience facilitated by technology and incorporating health, entertainment, education, leisure, business/office space and shops at the heart of a thriving community hub, every high street and town centre can have a positive future.
- 3.9 One of the key findings from the Review is that the key to success is outstanding, talented and committed leadership. Local Government should be bringing all stakeholders, including the community, together to develop and implement a plan for the location, strong leadership and vision are essential.
- 3.10 The Review predicted in 2013 the growth of freelancers and remote workers contributing their spending to traditional shopping locations, using cafes and flexible workspaces. The refreshed document notes that whilst there are too many shops, premises for stylish cafes and town centre flexible workspace are still under-supplied.

#### Welwyn Garden City

- 3.11 The Local Plan vision for Welwyn Garden City is to maintain and enhance the commercial, social and environmental success of the town centre. The retail strategy is to support the town centre as the primary comparison shopping designation in the borough, including new retail investment at the Town Centre North site.
- 3.12 The ambition for the Town Centre North project is new residential development on Campus East car park and new retail and residential development on Centenary Gardens between Howard Centre and John Lewis. This is in order to make best use of sustainable urban land and provide new floorspace to meet the projected shopping needs of a growing population.
- 3.13 The achievement of the vision and strategy for Welwyn Garden City town centre is assisted by the existence of the Welwyn Garden City Town Centre Business Improvement District.
- 3.14 The vision in the BID [Business Plan](#) is to create a town centre which is innovative and modern, which builds on the unique garden city principles and characteristics to make it a great place to visit, work and live. Its objectives are: to create a place with a strong sense of identity; to promote and celebrate the great garden city and build its reputation as a place to work, shop, relax and be entertained; to provide a welcoming and easily accessible place; to encourage growth, development and investment of businesses. They regularly engage with retailers to resolve issues and plan a wide range of events to attract shoppers.
- 3.15 The BID also has a [website](#) with the strapline 'Wonderful Welwyn Garden City' which advertises activities and events.

#### Hatfield

- 3.16 The Local Plan vision for Hatfield is to retain its pioneering and entrepreneurial spirit. The retail strategy is to regenerate the town centre with a good quality and variety of shops, more housing and leisure and a better environment and public realm.

- 3.17 The achievement of the vision and strategy for Hatfield town centre is assisted by the existence of the Hatfield 2030+ Renewal Partnership. The vision in the [Renewal Framework](#) is a well-connected, distinctive and multi-centred town with a renewed 'new town' pioneering and entrepreneurial spirit and the objective for the town and neighbourhood centres is to create thriving, high quality places and to achieve transformation through residential-led regeneration and new retail, leisure and services.
- 3.18 The town centre has a [website](#) which advertises activities and events.
- 3.19 There is also a Hatfield Town Centre Forum which engages directly with retailers and market stall holders. It provides businesses with the opportunity to offer insight and ideas which can then be taken up by the Council and our partners.
- 3.20 Hatfield town centre has a very busy event and activity calendar throughout the year, which brings extra footfall to shops and services and increases spend rates.
- 3.21 The Council operates a Shop Safe radio system in Hatfield town centre and liaises with Herts Constabulary, the Community Safety Partnership and others to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.
- 3.22 The Council has a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) in place in Hatfield town centre to tackle street drinking and other forms of anti-social behaviour.
- 3.23 At the time of writing the Council has progressed and is determining a number of planning applications for the redevelopment of the town centre. These include ground-floor retail and upper floor residential development on 1 Town Centre site at the north-eastern end of the high street and the construction of a multi-storey car park on The Common car park, which will free-up opportunities to redevelop Link Drive car park and Lemsford Road car park for housing. The Sports Strategy recommends the co-location of Hatfield swim centre and Hatfield leisure centre. The Council has also decided to decant Queensway House and will in time be considering the future of this building and its surroundings.
- 3.24 Herts County Council has recently relocated its library from a peripheral location to a unit in White Lion Square. The library attracts over 100,000 visitors per year and is expected to make a significant contribution to town centre footfall.

#### Licensing Policy

- 3.25 The Council licences premises for the sale and supply of alcohol, regulated entertainment and late night refreshment. There are a variety of different types of premises holding these licences, including village halls, clubs, hotels, shopping centres, public houses, nightclubs and open spaces. Community events may increase the footfall in the town centres.
- 3.26 The aim of the policy is to secure the safety and amenity of residential communities whilst facilitating a sustainable entertainment and cultural environment. We recognise both the needs of residents for a safe and healthy environment to live and work and the importance of well-run entertainment premises to the local economy and vibrancy of the borough. In addition

commercial occupiers have an expectation of an environment that is attractive and sustainable for their businesses.

- 3.27 It is possible to have areas where there is an exemptions to certain forms of Late Night Refreshment licensing where the local authority has designated a particular area as exempt. This Council has not designated any areas at this time but if it were to do so there are only certain types of premises that can be exempted as set out in the regulations. These include petrol stations, some local authority premises and schools, hospitals, community premises and licensed premises.
- 3.28 We do not currently have any cumulative impact zones in the district. However, we recognise that the cumulative impact of the number, type and density of licensed premises in a given area may lead to serious problems of nuisance and disorder outside and some distance from the premises. Responsible authorities or members of the public can make representations that an area has become saturated with premises making it a focal point for groups of people to gather creating exceptional problems of disorder and nuisance beyond the impact from the individual premises. In those circumstances we would consider whether there is evidence to support the implementation of a cumulative impact zone.
- 3.29 Street trading is restricted in the borough to protect the retail element. There is one street trader in the evening in Welwyn Garden City, and four on industrial estates or laybys. Any other traders in the borough need to consist of five or more stalls to be able to trade as a market.

#### Other Issues

- 3.30 The Council works with a variety of statutory bodies to plan for the future of town and neighbourhood centres, mostly notably Hertfordshire County Council in their role as highways authority, plus other transport bodies such as Network Rail and bus operators.
- 3.31 The Council owns a variety of retail units around the borough, including Stonehills in Welwyn Garden City town centre, large parts of Hatfield town centre and various neighbourhood centres in both Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield.
- 3.32 Planning permission has recently been granted for the redevelopment of High View neighbourhood centre in south Hatfield for mixed use retail and residential.
- 3.33 The planning system defines six main classes of use in town centres: A1 shops, A2 professional services, A3 food and drink, A4 drinking establishments, A5 hot food and takeaways and sui generis which do not fall into any other category. Other uses found in town centres include B1 offices, C1 hotels, C3 dwellings, D1 public services such as libraries and D2 leisure such as cinemas. National permitted development rights means that retail units can sometimes change from one use to another without planning permission. In all other cases units must secure planning permission in accordance with relevant policies.
- 3.34 It is important to note that the planning system has no control over which brand of shop or type of restaurant/pub occupies a retail unit, so long as it is within the appropriate use class. The choice of tenant is a matter for the owner of the unit.
- 3.35 The Council has no control over business rates, which are set by national government.

- 3.36 The Council has no control over rental rates on privately owned properties, which are set by owners.
- 3.37 The Council seeks to achieve best value in the letting of its own retail units.

### **Implications**

#### **4 Legal Implications**

- 4.1 The Council has a duty to determine planning applications in accordance with the development plan, taking account of material considerations.
- 4.2 The Council has a duty to achieve best value in the letting of its own retail units.
- 4.3 The Council has a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) in place in Hatfield town centre to tackle street drinking and other forms of anti-social behaviour.

#### **5 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

#### **6 Risk Management Implications**

- 6.1 There is a desire to avoid vacant units and a risk that high vacancy levels will create doubt in the minds of businesses and shoppers about the desirability of town and neighbourhood centres.
- 6.2 There is a risk that an increase in footfall in town and neighbourhood centres and the encouragement of an evening and night-time economy will increase the occurrence of crime and anti-social behaviour.

#### **7 Security and Terrorism Implications**

- 7.1 Government guidance encourages local planning authorities to think carefully about the design and security of town centres and public spaces, to reduce the risk of terrorist activities.

#### **8 Procurement Implications**

- 8.1 There are no procurement implications associated with this report.

#### **9 Climate Change Implications**

- 9.1 The planning system regards that town and neighbourhood centres, particularly those with railway stations and bus stations, are sustainable locations for retail, housing and other development. The provision of services and facilities in such locations therefore creates the chance to reduce driving rates.

#### **10 Human Resources Implications**

- 10.1 Many different officers within the Council are involved in the management of town and neighbourhood centres, including planning officers, environmental health officers, estates officers, partnership officers and parking officers.

## **11 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

- 11.1 The Council indirectly controls the number of hot food takeaways in town and neighbourhood centres by having policies for the percentage of Class A1 shops.
- 11.2 A number of councils have gone further than this by setting limits on Class A5 hot food takeaways.
- 11.3 [Government mapping](#) reveals that Welwyn Hatfield has 73 fast food outlets; equivalent to a ratio 60 per 100,000 people, which compares favourably with a ratio of 88 in Broxbourne, 68 in East Herts, 83 in Hertsmere and 63 in St Albans.
- 11.4 The [NHS Health Profile 2019](#) for Welwyn Hatfield identifies that 63% of adults are overweight or obese (against an England average of 62%) and that 15% of Year 6 children are obese (against an England average of 20%).

## **12 Communications and Engagement Implications**

- 12.1 The Council seeks to communicate positive news about activities, events and projects that will help to regenerate town and neighbourhood centres and attract new businesses and shoppers.

## **13 Link to Corporate Priorities**

- 13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Business Plan 2018-2021 and particularly Priority 4 Our Economy to revitalise our neighbourhood and town centres.

## **14 Equalities and Diversity**

- 14.1 An EqIA was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

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