

6 Retail

Introduction

6.1 The retail strategy is to provide a broad range of retail and other facilities in the town centres, maintain their roles and enhance the historic nature of the town centres which attracts people to visit them. The Uttlesford Retail Study (May 2018) ⁽²⁶⁾ underpins the approach identifying when retail needs arise and how these can be met sustainably without harm to the town centres. The study notes that new facilities have recently come forward, although opportunities remain to improve the retail offer. These opportunities will exist where proposals meet convenience needs and some comparison needs locally minimising travel outside the District. Policies in the Local Plan will seek to protect the character of the towns and villages so that they continue to provide an attractive environment which encourages people to visit them.

6.2 The District's two main towns are Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow, both traditional market towns while Stansted Mountfitchet and Thaxted provide local centres. All the centres benefit from the tourist offer of the District. The Uttlesford Economic Development Strategy (2018-2021) ⁽²⁷⁾ puts in place a focused strategy and measures to assist its centres including identifying funding opportunities and support for town teams. Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow centres each have town teams while Stansted Mountfitchet local centre has an Economic Development Working Group. The Great Dunmow Neighbourhood Plan 2016 was made on 8 December 2016 and includes policies on protecting and enhancing Great Dunmow town centre

6.3 Saffron Walden is the largest town in the District serving an extensive rural hinterland with the widest range of shops and facilities. The town centre also has a significant supporting services sector closely related to tourism. It has a Waitrose supermarket in the town centre with Tesco and Aldi stores outside the centre of the town. There is a Homebase store and Ridgeons, a builder's merchant on the edge of the town. Granite Retail Park, Thaxted Road, has permission for retail warehouses and a garden centre.

6.4 Great Dunmow is an important focus for residents who live in the southern part of the District. It has a smaller range of shops and services in the town centre including a small Co-operative store and a Tesco supermarket outside the centre of the town.

6.5 The Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow food superstores capture nearly all the main food-shopping spend in the District. Saffron Walden attracts a significant proportion of expenditure on comparison spend albeit for lower order goods. This offer is however under pressure from larger centres especially Cambridge and Chelmsford. Great Dunmow has a much smaller comparison retail offer that only extends locally.

6.6 Stansted Mountfitchet is the third largest retail centre in the District. It has a much more limited range of shops, including a Tesco Express and a Co-operative store in the local centre but because it is so close to Bishop's Stortford most residents from this part of the District will shop there for anything other than basic day to day shopping.

26 <https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/article/4126/Retail>

27 [Uttlesford Economic Development Strategy And Action Plan 2018 – 21.](#)

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Thaxted offers a limited variety of retail uses. Thaxted's primary function is to provide a service to the local population as well as tourists. Weekly street markets are held in Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Thaxted.

6.7 Outside the main centres retailing is limited and the range of facilities varies from village to village, some only have a pub, others may have a shop and/ or a post office. In some villages there is a broader range of facilities. There continue to be losses due to economic circumstances, change of use etc. Village services remain important to the vitality of local communities and the Local Plan seeks to address the loss of village services where possible.

6.8 There is a range of fashion and other outlets landside at London Stansted Airport but this is unlikely to represent a realistic shopping destination for most people.

6.9 Outside the District key centres like Cambridge, Chelmsford and Harlow and the smaller centres of Braintree, Haverhill and Bishop's Stortford provide a much wider range of shops, services and recreational opportunities and there is a loss of expenditure to these nearby centres.

Retail Strategy

6.10 The Uttlesford Retail Study (May 2018) provides an up to date assessment of retail. In relation to the main centres the key issues are as follows.

Saffron Walden

6.11 Vacancy rates in the town generally remain relatively low, which would suggest that Saffron Walden is a healthy town centre.

6.12 In Saffron Walden there is a case for providing some additional comparison floorspace (clothes, shoes, furniture, electrical goods) given interest from retailers to secure representation in the town and from customers for expanded and improved facilities. Two Development Opportunity Sites are proposed within the town centre to facilitate new development and redevelopment for retail and other town centre uses. Planning permission has been granted for 2,973 sq.m of retail warehousing at Thaxted Road Granite Retail Park. The need for further comparison retail outside the town centre will need to be carefully considered in the light of impacts on vitality and viability of the Town Centre.

6.13 In relation to convenience floorspace (food and drink) new food retail facilities have recently opened including an Aldi superstore and a Tesco Metro improving the retail offer of the town. The retail study shows this additional floorspace has increased the number of residents shopping locally, reduced unnecessary travel, and encouraged walking. Further new convenience floorspace should be provided in line with Policy RET1 and should take into account identified need and impact on the town centre.

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Great Dunmow

6.14 Evidence suggests that it would be unreasonable to plan for any significant additional comparison floorspace in Great Dunmow. A small Opportunity Site is proposed incorporating the post office sorting yard and the Council's depot off New Street and potentially the parking area to the rear of 48 High Street. The Council recognises land ownership and configuration issues on the site but equally its value to town centre expansion encouraging additional town centre uses and presence of a local town team in helping support proposals. In terms of convenience floorspace planning permission exists for 1,400sqm of additional floorspace to allow for a medium sized main trader as part of the existing permission for the Chelmsford Road. Further new convenience floorspace should be provided in line with Policy RET1 and should take into account identified need and impact on the town centre.

Stansted Mountfitchet

6.15 Stansted Mountfitchet is primarily a convenience shopping centre. A Development Opportunity Site is proposed to the east of Cambridge Road incorporating Crafton Green to enable the provision of additional town centre uses.

New Garden Communities

6.16 New local centres will be key to providing for the day-to-day needs of the new garden communities. These new local centres will provide top-up shopping and access to services and facilities as well as social interaction. These local centres will be particularly important for people who are less able to travel to the towns within Uttlesford as well as the larger towns and cities beyond Uttlesford. Masterplanning will address these issues in line with a town centre first approach as set out in Policy RET1 below. It is important that these local centres ultimately provide the type and range of retail and commercial uses necessary to serve and support the new communities.

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Policy RET 1

Town and Local Centres

New retail, employment, leisure and cultural uses will be supported and focused in the town and local centres as defined on the Policies Map.

Taking into account the Council's Retail Study 2018 and any subsequent update to that Retail Study during the Local Plan Period, new retail floorspace will be supported where it is directly consistent with identified need.

To ensure the vitality and viability of Uttlesford's existing town and local centres the location and scale of development will need to be consistent with the following hierarchy with larger scale development focused on the town centres:

1. Town Centres

- a. Saffron Walden
- b. Great Dunmow

2. Local Centres

- a. Stansted Mountfitchet
- b. Thaxted

3. Proposed Local Centres

- a. North Uttlesford Garden Community
- b. Easton Park Garden Community
- c. West of Braintree Garden Community

Convenience floorspace capacity arises by 2033 for a small to medium sized foodstore in Saffron Walden and a large sized foodstore in Great Dunmow.

There is capacity for additional comparison floorspace in Saffron Walden by 2026, amounting to 5,000 sq.m (net). There is no capacity in Great Dunmow for comparison floorspace by 2026.

The type and scale of retail development within the new garden communities should be commensurate with their scale and will be determined through the masterplanning process for each garden community.

The presumption therefore is that new retail development is first provided in the existing town centres with a preference to preserve their vitality and viability. However, retail in the Garden Community Local Centres is important to achieving the garden city principles.

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The Location and Impact of New Retail Development

6.17 In accordance with Paragraph 24 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the District Council will apply a sequential test to applications for main town centre uses. The main town centre uses, as defined in the NPPF, should be located in the town centre, then in edge of centre locations, and only if suitable sites are not available, should out of centre locations be considered. When considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference will be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre. The District Council and the applicant will demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale. In accordance with the NPPF the District Council will also require an impact assessment to be submitted with proposals that exceed 1,000 sqm (net).

Policy RET 2

The Location and Impact of New Retail Development

Any proposals for retail and other town centre uses outside the defined town and local centres or other sites allocated for those uses must demonstrate compliance with the impact and the sequential tests in the National Planning Policy Framework. A Retail Impact Assessment must accompany proposals that exceed 1,000 sq.m (net) in Uttlesford district.

Town and Local Centres

6.18 The town centres of Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow and the local centres of Thaxted and Stansted are identified on the Policies Map. Retail uses in Stansted are split between two locations – Cambridge Road and Lower Street and Policy RET2 will apply to both. For the purposes of this policy, town centre uses are defined under the NPPF as including retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, culture, community and residential development needed in towns. The Town and Local Centres include Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages. The Primary Shopping Frontages are the retail 'core' of the centre where the majority of footfall and activity occurs. These are the main shopping streets which attract the most shoppers and therefore the District Council wishes to retain Class A1 shops along these streets. The secondary shopping frontages extend from the primary shopping frontages to the edge of the town or local centre and provide a mix of town centres uses, such as restaurants, commercial services and leisure facilities, which provide a supporting role for the centre as a whole. The District Council will expect details of the marketing to be submitted with any application for the change of use of ground floor units along the primary shopping frontages to non-A1 class uses including associated town centre uses/food and drink. The requirements for marketing are set out in Appendix 5. This will be subject to the current permitted development rights and prior approvals system.

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6.19 Residential uses can add to the vitality of the town centre and the District Council will support the change of use of upper floors to residential within the centres. Mixed schemes on development sites could also include a residential element but the Council would expect to see town centre uses at ground floor level on the street frontage.

6.20 Tourism is an important economic activity in all centres as a result of visitor attractions like Audley End House on the edge of Saffron Walden, the Guildhall in Thaxted and the Castle in Stansted Mountfitchet. Events such as the Music Festival and Morris Weekend in Thaxted also attract significant numbers of visitors. Development which supports this tourism function like art galleries, craft workshops, cafés, and bed and breakfast accommodation would be appropriate development within the centres.

Policy RET 3

Town and Local Centres and Shopping Frontages

Along Primary Shopping Frontages as identified on the Policies Map, change of use (that require planning permission) of the ground floor to non-A1 uses will only be permitted if the applicant is able to demonstrate that the unit is not viable as an A1 shop use. The change of ground floor uses (see the definition in the NPPF) to uses falling outside the definition will only be permitted if the applicant is able to demonstrate that the unit is not viable as a main town centre use. The non-viability of the unit would need to be proven by marketing and an independent assessment in accordance with the requirements set out in Appendix 5.

Along Secondary Shopping Frontages as identified on the Policies Map change of use of A1 shop units to town centre uses of retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses will be permitted. The change of ground floor uses from main town centre uses (see the definition in the NPPF) to uses falling outside that definition will only be permitted if the applicant is able to demonstrate that the unit is not viable as a main town centre use. The non-viability of the unit would need to be proven by marketing and an independent assessment in accordance with the requirements set out in Appendix 5.

Along both Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages change of use to residential will be allowed on upper floors. Mixed use schemes with a residential element will be appropriate within the town and local centres. Development that would contribute to the tourism function within these centres will be supported where it conserves or enhances the character of the townscape.

Loss of Shops and Other Facilities

6.21 Within the towns, but outside the designated town and local centres and in the villages, individual shops, small parades of shops and other facilities like public houses, places of worship, village halls and health services provision are important to the local communities they serve. Some villages also have specialist outlets like antique shops,

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garden centres and restaurants which may contribute to the tourism economy. There have been continued losses of services in recent years through conversion to other uses, mainly housing. It is important to recognise that some facilities perform a number of functions and their closure could result in a significant loss to the community and more travel as a result, e.g. rooms in pubs or places of worship used by local groups as meeting rooms, children's nurseries etc.

6.22 The District Council is generally unable to prevent the loss of these facilities unless planning permission is required e.g. for a change of use/subject to Permitted Development (PD) rights. Where planning permission is required the Council will apply the tests in Policy RET3 below. Applicants will be required to demonstrate that the use is no longer viable. The requirements for marketing etc. are set out in Appendix 5. It is important that communities make good use of local facilities to make a sound case for refusing changes of use. The policy below will apply to all services and facilities. Facilities which the community feels are important to their social well-being can be listed as Assets of Community Value. Where these facilities are listed as an Asset of Community Value additional requirements apply as set out in Appendix 5.

Policy RET 4

Loss of Shops and Other Facilities

Beyond the defined Town and Local Centres change of use (that require planning permission) of shops and other community facilities including those identified in the list of Assets of Community Value will only be permitted where the applicant can demonstrate that:

- 1. There is no significant demand for the facility within the catchment area;**
- 2. The facility is not financially viable;**
- 3. The marketing criteria in Appendix 5 has been met; and**
- 4. Equivalent facilities in terms of their nature and accessibility are available or would be made available nearby.**

New Shops in Rural Areas

6.23 In villages where there is interest in opening a new shop the District Council will allow provision outside development limits where no sites are available within the development limits, providing the chosen site is next to the village, residents can walk to the new shop and the scale of the new shop would be in keeping with its location. Applicants will be expected to define the catchment area which the new shop is intended to serve. If there are existing shops within this catchment area applicants will need to submit a report with the application showing what the likely impact (if any) will be on these existing businesses. The District Council will encourage community run schemes

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and schemes which provide a mix of facilities which might include a shop, post office, meeting rooms, internet access and possibly local transport hub, e.g. for community run transport schemes, and interchange for cyclists to use public transport. This policy does not relate to settlements which have a Town or Local Centre as identified on the Policies Map.

Policy RET 5

New Shops in Rural Areas

For settlements where a Town or Local Centre is not identified, planning permission will be granted for new shops on sites beyond development limits where all the following criteria are met:

- 1. The proposal is of a size compatible with the catchment area it is intended to serve;**
- 2. The site is well related to the village and has the potential to reduce the need for travel by car;**
- 3. There would be no adverse impact on existing shops within the catchment area;**
- 4. There would be no adverse impact on the character and amenity of the area including visual intrusion, noise and traffic generation; and**
- 5. There are no suitable alternative sites within development limits.**