

INTRODUCTION

8.1 The Council sees the town centres of Dorking and Leatherhead and the local centres of Ashted, Bookham and Fetcham as the main sources for convenience¹ and comparison goods² shopping in the District, together with the two out of town supermarkets in north Leatherhead and Hookwood. Shopping facilities in major neighbouring areas such as Guildford, Epsom, Crawley, Horsham, Reigate and Redhill will also serve certain of the shopping demands of some Mole Valley residents particularly for comparison goods. At the same time residents from neighbouring authorities visit shops in Mole Valley taking advantage of specialist shops and the attractive environment.

STRATEGY

8.2 The objectives of the strategy are as follows:

Dorking

- *To sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of Dorking town centre which acts as the focus and serves the whole community of Dorking and the surrounding rural area and where the proximity of competing businesses facilitates competition from which the consumers benefit.*
- *Not to allow any shopping development on the edge of or outside Dorking shopping centre that would undermine the above objective.*
- *To encourage retail uses in the town centre as being the most accessible location by a choice of means of transport and in order to facilitate multi-purpose trips.*
- *To encourage improved town centre supermarket provision.*
- *To allow the principle of small-scale extensions to shops and additions to town centre shopping. Larger scale shopping*

schemes are not planned and will only be allowed in the longer term if there is clearly a need.

Leatherhead

- *To sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of Leatherhead town centre as a primarily convenience and household goods shopping centre serving the local communities of Leatherhead, Ashted, Fetcham and Bookham.*
- *Not to allow any shopping development on the edge of or outside Leatherhead shopping centre that would undermine the above objective.*
- *To encourage the provision of larger stores in Leatherhead shopping centre through the adaptation of buildings and through redevelopment.*
- *To concentrate retail uses in the town centre as being the most accessible location by a choice of means of transport and in order to facilitate multi-purpose trips.*

Ashted, Bookham, Fetcham and Other Neighbourhood Shops

- *To maintain the vitality and viability of Ashted, Bookham and Fetcham shopping centres and avoid them being undermined by out-of-centre shopping developments.*
- *To control the introduction of non-retail units detracting from the shopping attractiveness of Ashted, Bookham, Fetcham and neighbourhood shopping areas.*

FURTHER SHOPPING PROVISION IN THE DORKING AREA

Convenience Goods / Food Shopping in the Dorking Area

8.3 A shopping study, commissioned by the Council in 1994, concluded that the shopping catchment population for Dorking amounted to 29,440 in 1991. The shopping study calculated that, of the

¹ Convenience goods are goods, such as food, newspapers, and drinks, which tend to be purchased regularly and for which convenience of purchase is therefore important.

² Comparison goods, such as clothes and electrical equipment, for which the consumer generally expects to invest time and effort into visiting a range of shops before making a choice.

total pool of expenditure on convenience goods of £33.3 million in 1991, some £8 million - £9 million was then leaking from the catchment to stores and towns elsewhere. Convenience goods expenditure was calculated only to increase by between 3.6% - 4.8% between 1991 and 2001.

- 8.4 Unlike larger towns, food shopping and the existing supermarkets in Dorking perform the important anchor role in the town centre. The shopping study showed it to be the most important single reason for shopping in the town with over half of shoppers doing some food shopping.
- 8.5 The effect a large food store located on the periphery of the centre would have on the character of Dorking is of fundamental importance. The Council shares the views expressed by many responding to the public consultations in 1994 that a major contributory factor to the uniqueness of Dorking is the nature of the shopping provision comprising mostly small shops. Furthermore, Dorking shopping centre comprises, in the main, a collection of small buildings fronting traditional streets or courtyards that are an essential part of its heritage. The development on the periphery of a large, freestanding, new foodstore building with extensive car parking would constitute a different physical form of shopping development uncharacteristic of Dorking. It is likely also to undermine the viability of the smaller shops which are a very important part of the town's character. This would erode the distinctiveness of Dorking.
- 8.6 Unlike some larger historic towns, Dorking is not so congested that it would benefit from transferring much of the food shopping to a location outside the centre. Dorking needs to retain the activity generated by the centre because the bustle is an essential part of its market town character.
- 8.7 The Council wishes to support relatively recent shopping investment in the town centre, such as St Martin's Walk, to encourage further retailer investment to be made and give the necessary investor confidence in the town centre. Subject to full feasibility studies, scope exists to enlarge the two existing supermarkets.
- Policy S1 encourages this to happen in appropriate ways and for any improvements to be made to the anchor store in St Martin's Walk. These improvements should include easier pedestrian access from Church Square and if possible the car park, including for those people with disabilities, in accordance with Policy ENV30.
- 8.8 Whilst appreciable improvements can be made to these stores, the increase in sales area should not be so extensive as to dominate convenience goods shopping in the town if competition, customer choice and the town's character are to be maintained.
- 8.9 The approach set out in paragraphs 8.7 and 8.8 requires flexibility by all parties involved. Developers and retailers will need to be more flexible about the format, design and scale of the development and the amount of car parking, tailoring these to fit the circumstances of Dorking. At the same time the Council recognises that supermarket operators wish to offer customers better supermarket facilities in Dorking. It will do what it reasonably can to assist in providing attractive, convenient to use, food shopping in the town centre and maintain competition. This may include the use of its compulsory purchase powers to assemble a site for improved supermarket provision, where there is no alternative and private initiatives have been exhausted. In such event, and in assisting generally, the Council will need to ensure it incurs no net financial cost.
- 8.10 The level of car parking for any new or improved town centre supermarket development will take into account:
- that it will be accessible to those using buses,
 - the physical difficulties of achieving the amount of car parking associated with out-of-centre retail developments and
 - the greater spread of supermarket shopping across the hours of the day and days of the week, resulting in less marked peaks in such shopping.

- 8.11 Policy S2 sets out stringent criteria against which any edge or out-of-centre shopping development will be assessed. All eight criteria need to be met for the Policy to be satisfied. The Policy should not be taken to imply that any such site will be acceptable or is ever likely to become so.
- 8.12 The Council's shopping and town centre strategy does not envisage there being any edge or out-of-centre new stores. Apart from undermining the viability, vitality and character of the town centre there are major constraints in finding a new site which could satisfactorily accommodate a modern foodstore with its extensive car parking. Within Dorking itself both the physical fabric of the town and the limitations of the road system impose severe constraints. Development land in the town is extremely scarce and subject to the competing demands for space. Any foodstore development is therefore likely to result in the loss of needed housing or industrial land or premises for community facilities. The countryside beyond the built-up area is Green Belt where such development would be objectionable in principle. Moreover sites that are not on the edge of the town centre would be even less likely to generate linked town centre shopping trips.
- 8.13 Through avoiding one large food store on the edge or outside the town centre dominating food shopping, greater competition will be created whereby smaller food and other convenience goods shops can complement improved town centre supermarket provision. The retention of these smaller shops appeared from the public consultation to be important to many Dorking people. Taken together this shopping provision should provide a balanced and competitive food and convenience goods retail offer consistent with the character of Dorking.
- 8.14 This approach accords with Government guidance to sustain or enhance the viability and vitality of town centres. Moreover it has been supported by the great majority of just over 1000 residents in the Dorking area who responded to the Council's 1994 public

consultation on supermarket shopping in Dorking. 83.2% of respondents agreed with the Council's draft shopping policy at the time, resisting out-of-centre shopping development. A further 10.5% agreed but with reservations, whereas only 6.1% disagreed.

Comparison Goods / Retail Warehousing in the Dorking Area

- 8.15 The level of growth in comparison goods expenditure provides only a theoretical basis for further floorspace provision. Consideration of the adequacy of existing floorspace needs to be judged in the light of the nature and scale of retailer demand for the town and also against the background of the results of the local retailers survey which was part of the Dorking Retail Study. Retailers demand for Dorking at the time of the study was very limited and Dorking retailers themselves in the main were satisfied with their accommodation both in terms of location and size requirements.
- 8.16 Dorking is a third order centre in a wider hierarchy of shopping centres. Part of the major increase in comparison goods shopping expenditure will be absorbed by the larger centres of Epsom, Guildford, Redhill, Crawley and Horsham, where major new shopping provision has been made. There is also scope for existing Dorking shops, including vacant shops, to absorb more expenditure. If there is the demand, further town centre redevelopment of a small scale can also take place. This will allow further increases in the efficiency and quality of shopping provision but without prejudicing the character and fabric of the town centre. In the longer term large-scale shopping development will depend upon proven retailer demand. This form of development is not envisaged as the scope is severely limited by the physical constraints of the town centre.
- 8.17 As retail warehouses have the potential to affect the vitality and viability of the town centre and have implications for travel and traffic, the same criteria should be applied to

retail warehouses as to major foodstores (see Policy S2 below).

- 8.18 For a small town, Dorking is adequately served by DIY stores outside the town centre, as well as by other similar retailers. The sale of electrical goods and furniture, often sold from retail warehouses, is very much part of the shopping function of Dorking town centre. A further limiting factor is that retail warehouses are large units requiring large sites that are in short supply in Dorking. In this connection, the industrial area of Vincent Lane has been identified as fulfilling an important industrial function including provision for small firms and is safeguarded for that purpose in this Plan under Policy E5. Any additional retail warehousing is likely to entail the loss of other land for industry or land for housing or community uses. It may also result in additional traffic movements on inappropriate roads in the vicinity and/or a form of development out of keeping with the character of its surroundings. The Council considers that the need for additional retail warehousing is unlikely to outweigh any of these disadvantages and will be inconsistent with the Council's policy of seeking to concentrate retail activity in the town centre. For the purposes of this Plan retail warehouses also include warehouse clubs and major factory outlet centres.

POLICY S1 – SHOPPING IN DORKING

Retail provision and investment will be concentrated in Dorking town centre. Encouragement will be given to achieving improved town centre supermarket shopping including extension to the two existing supermarkets and to suitable modifications to the main store in St Martin's Walk with, if necessary, appropriate adjustments to access, servicing and car parking arrangements. Small additions to town centre shops will also normally be acceptable. All developments covered by this Policy shall be of a scale that respects the setting of the existing buildings and the overall character of Dorking town centre.

POLICY S2 – EDGE OR OUT-OF-CENTRE SHOPPING IN DORKING

Proposals for major retail development, including large new foodstores and/or retail warehousing, on the edge of or outside Dorking town centre will only be permitted if all the following criteria are met:

1. there is a need for the development;
2. there are no suitable sites available or likely to become available within a reasonable period of time within or, in the case of out-of-centre proposals, on the edge of the town centre;
3. the proposal, either individually or cumulatively with other existing retail developments, or those with outstanding planning permission in the catchment area, would not harm the vitality and/or viability of the town centre;
4. the proposal is of acceptable scale, materials and a high quality of design and would not harm the urban or rural environment or residential amenity;
5. the proposal is sited so as to reduce the number and length of car journeys and to be accessible to those using public transport;
6. the traffic generated by the proposal can be accommodated safely on the local highway network, with sufficient car parking and servicing provided on site, and in the case of out-of-centre proposals, is easily accessible to the Distributor Road Network;
7. in the case of edge-of-centre proposals, be easily accessible to and from the primary shopping area for those travelling on foot;
8. the proposal will not cause harm to the Development Plan strategy nor be located on land used or allocated for other purposes and/or required to meet other Plan objectives, unless at the time of the proposal the need for it outweighs the harm caused by the loss of such land.

8.19 For the purposes of these policies, the town centre is defined as the prime shopping area (Zone 1 in Policy DTC2) as indicated on the Proposals Map. Also, "on the edge of the town centre" should be taken to mean a location where there is a reasonable prospect that customers using the proposed retail development could walk to the prime shopping area and back carrying shopping. This is unlikely to exceed 200-300 metres of the prime shopping area. In determining the figure in a particular case, account will be taken of any barriers to pedestrians, such as major roads and car parks, the strength of the attraction of the town centre and the attractiveness of the route to and from the town centre.

8.20 The linear form of Dorking town centre results in the shopping centre not being particularly compact for shoppers. Therefore any linear extension of the shopping centre arising from a large store being located to the east or west of the centre would aggravate this problem.

8.21 Foodstores are the anchor to the shopping role in Dorking town centre. The criteria in Policy S2 will be applied to proposals stringently. Proposals for large new foodstores and retail warehousing, on the edge of or outside Dorking town centre, will be required to be supported by a retail impact study to show how the proposal will meet the Plan's strategy of sustaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of the town centre. In this connection the study should include an assessment of the current vitality and viability of the town centre using the indicators in Figure 1 of PPG6 (1996) or the relevant criteria set by replacement Government Guidance, how this has changed over time and how it would be affected by the development proposal. Account will also be taken of the following:

- The likely impact, including the cumulative impact with other recent proposals in the town or nearby areas, on the retail turnover of the town centre and the extent to which retailers would be affected by such proposals.
- How the proposal would maintain strength, or improve weakness, of retailer demand in the town centre.

- The scope for the increased estimated level of expenditure arising from the store being achieved without harming the vitality and viability of the town centre.
- The extent to which the town centre's market share would change and how this would affect the role and character of the town centre.
- The degree to which the proposal is likely to generate linked shopping trips to the town centre having regard to the ease and convenience of so doing.
- Evidence that the proposal would not harm the important anchor role of food and associated shopping of the town centre.
- The effect on committed developments.
- The extent to which the proposal would enhance the environmental quality of the town centre.

FURTHER SHOPPING PROVISION IN THE LEATHERHEAD AREA

Convenience Goods / Food Shopping in the Leatherhead Area

- 8.22 The 1995 shopping study estimated the 1991 population of the primary catchment area to be 42,015 and that of the secondary catchment to be 9,330. The shopping study calculated convenience goods expenditure to 2001 would be insufficient to support a further large new foodstore.
- 8.23 The study also calculated that the level of trade retention by all stores in Leatherhead was high (about £45 million). This is to be expected as there are two good-sized food stores with successful food retailers. Since the study was undertaken, the town centre supermarket was substantially enlarged in 2000, and permission was granted the same year for an extension of 500m² to the out-of-centre supermarket. Any additional new superstore will not be supported by growth in expenditure and/or by any significant clawback of trading leaking elsewhere.

It will probably rely on diverting trade from the existing two main foodstores instead. Trade loss from the town centre foodstore would be of serious concern as it forms the “anchor” function of Leatherhead town centre as a whole. The existing convenience goods shopping provision in Leatherhead should also assist in the retention of the foodstores in the more local centres of Bookham, Fetcham and Ashted and other smaller food shops which is beneficial to the local communities. Consequently in all these circumstances any additional large new foodstore in the Leatherhead area would be harmful to the overall community interest. As it is, no suitable site sufficiently large to accommodate such a store with adequate car parking is known to exist in the town centre. If such a site did become available, the shopping priority in Leatherhead would be for non-foodstores.

Comparison Goods / Retail Warehousing in the Leatherhead Area

- 8.24 Leatherhead's comparison goods expenditure is currently catered for mainly in 3 ways; in Leatherhead town centre and the other local centres of Ashted, Bookham and Fetcham, in existing out-of-centre non-food retail stores in the Leatherhead area, and in higher order centres and out-of-centre retail warehouses outside the Plan area. In theory the growth of expenditure calculated in the 1995 shopping study would support further provision of comparison goods floorspace within the Leatherhead area. However, the degree and manner in which any additional provision should be met in the Leatherhead area depends upon wider planning considerations, including national planning advice and County planning policy.
- 8.25 The circumstances surrounding Leatherhead town centre point to its best prospects lying in offering both convenience and household goods shopping facilities for its catchment population. The level of convenience goods expenditure generated by its catchment population is insufficient to ensure the viability of the town centre bearing in mind the existence of the out-of-centre large foodstore at north Leatherhead. Therefore taking into account also Leatherhead's position in the shopping hierarchy, the town centre will also have to look primarily to household goods retailers (e.g. electrical, furniture, hardware, carpets, china, DIY).
- 8.26 In applying the national planning advice which indicates that the first preference for new retail development should be for town centre sites, followed by edge-of-centre sites, the Plan proposes both to encourage town centre opportunities to be taken for the provision of larger stores selling household goods, and to allocate the Fairfield/Cornhill site for a large new retail store or cinema (see Policy LTC9). In addition, provided certain criteria are met, retail warehousing development selling bulky goods or requiring large showrooms may also be acceptable if a suitable site comes forward on the edge of the shopping centre.
- 8.27 In recognising also Leatherhead's position in the wider shopping hierarchy the approach taken in this Plan is considered to be the right balance of provision. The catchment areas of higher order shopping centres overlap the northern part of the District, and therefore it is not considered necessary or appropriate for the Leatherhead area to meet locally the majority of the comparison goods expenditure generated by its population. Furthermore comparison goods expenditure is not confined to household goods but to a whole range of other goods, including fashion.
- 8.28 To allow further retail warehousing other than provided for in this Plan would undermine the strategy for revitalising Leatherhead town centre. The vulnerability of Leatherhead shopping centre is of such concern that any diversion of retail trade away from it will be critically judged against any convenience of such a location to shoppers. These considerations override the possible added convenience to shoppers of having further out-of-centre retail warehousing in the Leatherhead area and the desirability of reducing travelling distances by private car. Policy S3 should foster investor confidence in the town centre.
- 8.29 With the confidence that Policies S3 and S4 provide, developers and retailers are

encouraged to look to opportunities in the shopping centre to develop stores selling non-bulky household goods. This may be through the adaptation of existing buildings, particularly former large shops, or through redevelopment. The Fairfield/Cornhill site, which is identified on the Proposals Map (Policy LTC9), and where the Council agreed in 2000 to a redevelopment scheme, offers one such opportunity to provide for the more extensive floorspace requirements of retailers selling household goods. There may also be scope for such accommodation including housing in any mixed use redevelopment of the upper High Street. Although this approach does not rely on them, it is considered that, in accordance with national guidance, retailers should be more flexible about the format, design and scale of development, and the amount of car parking. It is intended that any new, larger stores in the town centre will reinforce the household goods shopping role of Leatherhead town centre and attract more shoppers.

POLICY S3 – SHOPPING IN THE LEATHERHEAD AREA

New retail provision and investment will be concentrated in Leatherhead town centre and its development as a convenience and household goods shopping centre serving the Leatherhead area will be encouraged. Improvements to the Swan Centre and adaptation or redevelopment of suitable existing town centre buildings for larger, more modern retail stores will be encouraged.

POLICY S4 – EDGE OR OUT-OF-CENTRE SHOPPING IN LEATHERHEAD

Proposals for major retail development, including large new foodstores and/or retail warehousing, on the edge of or outside Leatherhead town centre will only be permitted if all the following criteria are met:

1. there is a need for the development;
2. there are no suitable sites available or likely to become available within a reasonable period of time within or, in the case of out-of-centre proposals, on the edge of the town centre;
3. the proposal, either individually or cumulatively with other existing retail developments, or those with outstanding planning permission in the catchment area, would not harm the vitality and/or viability of the town centre;
4. the proposal is of acceptable scale, materials and a high quality of design and would not harm the urban or rural environment or residential amenity;
5. the proposal is sited so as to reduce the number and length of car journeys and to be accessible to those using public transport;
6. the traffic generated by the proposal can be accommodated safely on the local highway network, with sufficient car parking and servicing provided on site, and in the case of out-of-centre proposals, is easily accessible to the Distributor Road Network;
7. in the case of edge-of-centre proposals, be easily accessible to and from the primary shopping area for those travelling on foot;
8. the proposal will not cause harm to the Development Plan strategy nor be located on land used or allocated for other purposes and/or required to meet other Plan objectives, unless at the time of the proposal the need for it outweighs the harm caused by the loss of such land.

- 8.30 For the purposes of these Policies, the town centre is defined as the prime shopping area (Zone 1 in Policy LTC5) as indicated on the Proposals Map. Also for the purposes of this Policy "on the edge of the town centre" should be taken to mean the same as is set out for Dorking in paragraph 8.19. In addition proposals for edge or out-of-centre retail development will need to be supported by a retail impact study covering those matters set out in paragraph 8.21 for Dorking.

ASHTEAD, BOOKHAM AND FETCHAM SHOPPING CENTRES

- 8.31 These shopping centres have an important role in catering for convenience goods shopping and in forming the focal points for the local communities. They are often used for "topping up" purchases which form an essential part of the overall shopping pattern. In addition, for people with limited mobility or with a preference for local shopping, these shops are their main shopping facility. Some of the shops may need to be extended or redeveloped to meet modern demands.
- 8.32 The central core of these local shopping centres provides a variety of facilities and the Council does not wish to see this gradually eroded through too many shops changing to premises offering professional and financial services (Class A2 of the Town and Country Planning Use Classes Order 1987) or restaurants and takeaways (Class A3 use). The change of use of shops to general office use (Class B1 use) which do not depend on visiting members of the public, will not normally be permitted.
- 8.33 In the case of Ashtead there are two local centres; the older village centre astride the A24 and Craddocks Parade.

POLICY S5 – ASHTEAD, BOOKHAM AND FETCHAM SHOPPING CENTRES

In Ashtead, Bookham and Fetcham shopping centres, as defined on the Proposals Map:

1. proposals involving minor increases in shopping floorspace, in relation to the centre as a whole, will be permitted subject to other relevant considerations;
 2. proposals involving the change of use of a shop (Class A1) to use for professional and financial services (Class A2) and/or food and drink including takeaways (Class A3) will be permitted provided that:
 - a) they would not result in a concentration of such uses that would be harmful to the centre's vitality and viability as a local shopping centre;
 - b) they would not otherwise have an unacceptable impact on the character of the area;
 - c) they would not result, individually or cumulatively with existing premises, in nuisance and/or disturbance to neighbouring residents or in conditions prejudicial to road safety;
 3. changes of use of shop units (whether or not they are used for retail purposes) to general office use (Class B1) will not be permitted.
- 8.34 The properties that lie within the local shopping centres identified in Policy S5 are as follows:
- The Street, Ashtead**
- 11-73 The Street (north side)
 - 40-126 The Street (south side)
 - 2-4 Woodfield Lane (east side)
 - 2-6 Rectory Lane (west side)
 - 1-5c, The Old Coach House, Rectory Lane (east side)

Craddocks Parade, Ashtead

1-13 (garage) Craddocks Parade (south side)

14-22 Craddocks Parade (north side)

86-88 Woodfield Lane (east side)

Bookham

10-30 Church Road (east side)

1-47 Church Road (west side)

167 Lower Road

214 Lower Road

1 (Old Crown PH) – 69 High Street (east side)

2-22 High Street (west side)

Fetcham

216-248 Cobham Road (north side)

141-149 Cobham Road (south side)

81-111 The Street (west side)

- 8.35 In considering development proposals within these local shopping centres, account will be taken of the frontage width of the shop, and the location and prominence of the premises within the shopping frontage. The endeavours made by the owner to let or sell the premises as a shop and/or the level of vacancies within the centre may also be relevant considerations.
- 8.36 Any out-of-centre large new foodstores or retail warehouse developments other than provided for in Policy S4, and detrimentally affecting the vitality and viability of Ashtead, Bookham and Fetcham shopping centres, will not be permitted.

NEIGHBOURHOOD SHOPS

- 8.37 The increased use of the car has reduced the demand for shops in the smaller centres including parades of shops. However, some residents who do not have access to a car still rely heavily on these shops. It is recognised that demand may not always be sufficient to sustain the viability of such stores, but the Council wishes to see their retention wherever possible, although ultimately planning control cannot prevent the closure of a shop.
- 8.38 Compared to the larger centres, there is much less justification in neighbourhood centres for

shops being lost to professional and financial services (Class A2 uses).

POLICY S6 – NEIGHBOURHOOD SHOPS

Proposals for the change of a neighbourhood shop (Class A1) to premises for professional and financial services (Class A2) or business (Class B1) will not be permitted and proposals involving the loss of a shop to any other use will only be permitted where:

1. all reasonable endeavours have been taken to let or sell the premises as a shop (Class A1);
2. the proposed non-retail use will not prejudice the character and appearance of the group of neighbourhood shops;
3. any activities or traffic generated, parking and access can be satisfactorily accommodated.

- 8.39 Where it is claimed that there is no demand for a neighbourhood shop, and the Council are satisfied that the premises have been marketed at a reasonable price and for a satisfactory period, then a change to a residential use may be permitted. Only if a retail use is not practical should an alternative use be accepted.

Village and Farm Shops

- 8.40 Proposals involving the development of village and farm shops will be considered in the light of Policies RUD24 and RUD18 respectively.

Garden Centres

- 8.41 Proposals for garden centres in the built-up area will be considered in accordance with Policies S1 and S3. Garden centre proposals outside the built-up area will be considered in the light of Policy RUD25.