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Topic Paper 7 Town Centre Growth and Retail

Crawley Borough Council adopted its Core Strategy back in November 2007, providing the spatial vision, objectives and development strategy for Crawley up to 2016. The Council has now begun preparing the successor to the Core Strategy – the Core Strategy Review – which will cover a much longer period up to 2026. Although there are aspects of the original Core Strategy that can be retained there are other areas where significant change has occurred in the intervening years and this will need to be reflected in the new document.

This consultation period is the first of the Review and further consultation stages are planned before the document is adopted in early 2012. This is your opportunity to shape the way the town develops over the next 20 years 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.

Summary of Current Context

Current national planning policy recognises Town Centres as highly sustainable locations which should be the focus for major growth. The guidance sets out the importance of creating vibrant Town Centres, noting that a good range of both day-time and evening uses, including a good mix of shops, leisure uses, and local services, can play an important role in attracting visitors, and also meeting local residents' day-to-day needs.

The South East Plan Proposed Modifications identifies a very substantial growth in residual retail expenditure in the region, and identifies Crawley as one of the 12 Centres of Significant Change, as well as a Regional Hub. Crawley Town Centre is therefore expected to be the focus for significant growth across the range of Town Centre uses.

The Crawley Borough 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. Other "Opportunity Sites" are also identified for mixed use development to support the objectives for the Town Centre.

The Town Centre Wide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) sets planning and design principles for these Opportunity Sites together with three additional sites, and provides guidance on transport issues and planning obligations in the Town Centre, and non-retail uses in the main shopping area.



Indication of the Key Issues Relating to the Town Centre and Retailing

Town Centre Objectives

- The Crawley Borough 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, 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 Government and regional guidance.

Town Centre North Allocation

- The allocation of the Town Centre North (TCN) development in the Crawley Borough 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 independent Planning Inspector at the Core Strategy Examination in Public held in January 2007. However, the current recession is having a significant impact on all parts of the economy, not least the retail sector, and this has delayed the implementation of TCN which is a large scale, complex scheme. Given the current economic climate, there may be ways in which the approach to the delivery of TCN should be adjusted.
- Arguably, the delivery of Town Centre schemes purely through the market is now more difficult, and it is now even more important to have a strong plan-led approach and work closely in partnership with a developer. In order to achieve a step change in the

quality and type of retail and other facilities in the Town Centre, more than simply adding retail floorspace is required. Therefore a comprehensive approach to securing a mixed use scheme with associated improvements to public realm is important. This is also required in order to provide a high quality department store as an anchor to the scheme.

- The key issue is ensuring delivery to achieve the TCN objectives and to identify whether anything in the established policy context needs adjusting. Further evidence on delivery and viability will be sought closer to the Submission date (given the changing market conditions).

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 Core Strategy Review is an opportunity to do so, giving more control over the future development of the sites. However, several of these sites are in multiple ownership and will be complex to deliver. There may also be other opportunities within the main retail area 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 changes take place, it is also important to ensure that the existing function of the town centre is maintained and improved in order to provide local residents with a good mix of shops and other facilities to meet their 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 Martletts in particular provide a good mix of these uses, with few vacant units, and attract a significant footfall of customers. However, although areas such as The Martletts 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 use, although this has been made more flexible for restaurants. Other, more peripheral, areas such as The Broadway tend to attract lower footfall levels during the day, and the number of vacant shop units can be high. The potential impact of TCN on vacancy rates in these areas should also be considered, and a realistic planning policy approach is necessary to ensure that these areas are able to thrive. However, encouraging much more flexibility, especially in the current economic climate, could mean that retail units are lost permanently, undermining the shopping function of the Town Centre. The latest Town Centre Study was undertaken in 2005, and assessment of which areas of the town are currently working well, and which areas are characterised by vacant units and may require a different approach, will be an important exercise.

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

Main Issues for Consultation

- Should different approaches to the delivery of TCN be considered to progress the scheme?
- Can other Town Centre opportunities be formally identified and allocated?
- Should we seek to encourage more non-retail uses and promote evening economy uses? If so, what uses do you think are appropriate?
- Which parts of town do you feel are not working, what are the main problems and reasons?
- Do you think that the neighbourhood parades are 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?

residents. The current saved Local Plan policy recognises that non-retail uses such as take-aways 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.

Indication of the Options for Addressing the Key Issues Outlined Above

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

Town Centre North

The options for TCN include:

- Retaining the TCN allocation as it is, with the expectation of delivery on a comprehensive basis with one lead developer.
- Adjusting the approach to the delivery of Town Centre North, taking into account changes in the economic climate.

Other Development Opportunities

- The Opportunity Sites, together with the additional sites in the Town Centre Wide SPD 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

The options are:

- 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 an even 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

The options for the Neighbourhood Parades are:

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

Indication of the Potential Direction at this Stage

Town Centre North

- The adopted Core Strategy objectives for the Town Centre are still valid and it is currently considered that TCN should remain as they key focus for Town Centre growth, and for achieving step change in the Town Centre. In order to secure delivery of this highly complex scheme, it is considered TCN should remain as a comprehensive allocation to help secure delivery.

Other Development Opportunities

- The Opportunity Sites which form part of the Core Strategy's housing supply should be allocated. If sufficient certainty can be established regarding delivery, other 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 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 development of a Development Management policy for the neighbourhood parades.

Current Context

National

- Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres, sets out the importance of creating vibrant town centres, noting that a good range of both day-time and evening uses, including a good mix of shops, leisure uses, and local services, can play an important role in attracting visitors, and also meeting local residents day-to-day needs. In July 2008, The Department for Communities and Local Government published Proposed Changes to PPS6, which sets out to



revisit various aspects of the adopted PPS6.

Regional

- The South East Plan Proposed Modifications sees development of dynamic and successful town centres as important to achieving sustainable development in South East, and a very substantial growth in residual retail expenditure is identified, even taking into account reducing levels of growth, e-commerce and increasing turnover efficiency.
- Policy TC1 of the South East Plan Proposed Modifications identifies Crawley as one of the 12 Centres of Significant Change, and it is also a Regional Hub. Crawley Town Centre is therefore expected to be the focus for significant growth across the range of town centre uses and a proactive, integrated strategy for its development is important.
- Policy GAT2 on Economic Development within the Gatwick Sub-Region states "High value-added economic growth, and development that seeks to maximise the value added by the sub-region's economy will be encouraged, as will development that contributes to the improvement in the skills and flexibility of the local workforce. This includes:-
- Part ii) Re-generation of the town centres to provide first choice, highly attractive locations for inward investment.

Local

- The adopted Core Strategy sets out broad 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 a 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, for 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 the retail offer within the 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 (January 2009) provides up to date, more detailed guidance on the development principles for the Town Centre North development.

Evidence Base

CB Hillier Parker Retail Study, (2000); CBRE Crawley Retail Capacity Study (2005); GVA Grimley Retail Impact Assessment (2006)

- Studies all identified 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

A new Town Centre Health Check and Retail Capacity Study will be undertaken to inform Proposed Submission in order to be as up to date as possible.