

Local Development Framework Briefing Paper Shopping and Town Centres



Devon County Council's advice to Local Planning Authorities.

This is one of a series of briefing papers prepared by Devon County Council to assist the preparation of Local Development Documents.

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Local Planning Authorities are requested to take the following matters into account in preparing their Local Development Frameworks and other documents:

1. Retail development

a) Central areas

Current strategic policy does not quantify retail development needs but the emerging RSS may set out floorspace needs for the major settlements. The County Council would want to work with those Districts concerned to ensure a consistent approach to needs quantification. It will be important to plan for strategic growth and avoid excessive competition between major centres.

b) Other retail development

Major retail development outside of town centres is a concern in terms of traffic generation and accessibility by non car modes, and in terms of impact on central area viability and vitality. Town centre vitality and viability is important in terms of settlement self containment and reducing the need to travel and LDFs should clearly demonstrate how the vitality and viability of town centres will be safeguarded.

2. Town centre accessibility

a) Public transport

The County Council is keen to enhance the accessibility of town centres especially by non car modes. LDFs should help to improve access for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. Town centres are potential locations for transport interchanges / hubs and innovative transport systems, and DCC would wish to work with LDFs to develop proposals / improve facilities to realise this potential.

b) Parking strategies

Central area parking strategies will play a key role in terms of travel demand management. The County Council would wish to work with Districts to develop a strategic approach to central area parking for inclusion in LDFs which supports demand management objectives while maintaining overall town centre accessibility.

3. Town Centre enhancement

a) Public realm

DCC would want to work with Districts to develop positive proposals for enhancing the cultural role and wider public realm within town centres, including a safe and high quality environment for pedestrians

b) Regeneration

In a number of settlements, town centre enhancement can play a direct positive role in urban regeneration and DCC would wish to pursue this objective through the LDF process.

1. Introduction

Town centres play a critical role in the function of settlements, how they relate to each other and the communities they serve. Although town centres accommodate a range of uses, including employment, retail development is a major issue when considering their future development, vitality and viability. They are also a focus for transport networks and movement, and need to be accessible to function effectively. In this context the County Council has particular interest in the role LDFs can play in improving accessibility and enhancing town centres so as to enable them to meet the needs of the community more effectively – particularly retail and employment needs.

2. Town Centre Development

Town centres are normally the most accessible locations for development within a settlement, accessible to a full range of travel modes. They are therefore a prime location for retail, employment and other uses requiring high levels of public use. LDFs should make provision for such development within town centres – assessing potential on a sequential basis – in order to maintain settlement function and self containment, reducing the need to travel. In smaller centres the scale of development will be limited but in the major regional and sub regional centres it will be important to base provision on an assessment of need consistent with those of competing centres in terms of assumptions made.

Assessments undertaken on behalf of the Regional Assembly need to be further refined at a sub regional level and inform the scale of retail and office floorspace provision appropriate at the major centres.

Town centres are also a focus for cultural activity within Devon and the County Council is keen to work with Districts to enhance cultural facilities within town centres and their accessibility, reflecting each settlement's distinctive cultural characteristics.

3. Key Issues to Address

- Ensuring consistency when assessing retail floorspace potential at the major centres – avoiding overprovision
- Providing for retail development outside of town centres only where a sequential assessment has been undertaken or for forms of development incompatible with a central area location
- Including positive policies and proposals to maintain and enhance town centre vitality and viability to reduce the need to travel and promote settlement self containment. The role of town centres is key to the ability of settlements to function within the wider settlement hierarchy. LDFs should include specific proposals for enhancing their role as focal points for cultural activity.
- Include specific proposals to enhance the role of town centres as transport nodes
- How to promote accessibility by non car modes in the context of settlement wide transport strategies
- How to develop parking strategies that contribute towards demand management, modal choice and reduce car dependence in a way that maintains overall accessibility
- How to enhance the quality of the public realm within town centres – especially for pedestrians – and minimise the impact of traffic in central areas (including air quality)
- How to use town centre development and enhancement to support other regeneration initiatives – especially within those towns identified by the County Council as priority areas for regeneration

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