

North Norfolk District Council

Brief for a North Norfolk District-wide Retail and Town Centre Study

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 North Norfolk District Council is in the early stages of preparing a Local Development Framework (LDF) in accordance with the Government's proposed changes to the development plans system contained in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill. It is intended that the policies and proposals in the 'development plan document' (DPD) elements of the LDF will, in the main, cover the period up to 2021. This is in order to be consistent with the plan period of the emerging Regional Planning Guidance for the East of England (RPG 14), with which the North Norfolk LDF must conform.
- 1.2 Having regard to the Government's draft Planning Policy Statements for the preparation of LDFs (PPS 12) and Planning for Town Centres (PPS 6), it is clear that this Authority needs to update its understanding of retail needs in the District. This was last achieved with the preparation of the North Norfolk District-wide Shopping Study in October 1993 (revised January 1995) by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners. This covers the period up to 2006 to coincide with the end date of the adopted North Norfolk Local Plan.

2 NORTH NORFOLK DISTRICT

- 2.1 North Norfolk District covers a large rural area of 373 square miles and has a 45-mile coastline extending from Holkham Bay in the north round to the Broads in the east. Its estimated resident population for mid-2001 is 98,500 (source: Norfolk County Council). North Norfolk's seven market towns and its many villages and hamlets are fairly evenly distributed across the length and breadth of its area. In terms of population, the principal settlements are:

<i>Settlement</i>	<i>mid-2001 pop.</i>
North Walsham	11,750
Cromer	7,915
Fakenham	7,575
Sheringham	6,920
Holt	3,615
Stalham	2,995
Briston/Melton Constable (adjoining villages)	2,500
Mundesley (village)	2,465
Wells-next-the-Sea	2,280
Hoveton (village)	1,825

a) Retailing characteristics

- 2.2 Whilst most of the retailing activity in the District is focussed on the seven town centres, the proximity of this rural District to larger retail centres at King's Lynn, East Dereham, Great Yarmouth and, especially, Norwich is known to have a considerable influence on the pattern of retail spending in the area. Within North Norfolk itself, there are still a number of villages that retain a local convenience store, either on its own or in association with a sub-post office facility, petrol-filling station etc. In addition, there are

instances of more isolated retail facilities either in the form of ‘farm shops’ or in association with petrol-filling stations on principal roads.

- 2.3 North Norfolk is a popular holiday and tourist destination and experiences significant increases in population and hence retail trade during the Easter, Whit and school summer holiday periods. One of North Norfolk’s attractions is the quality of its built heritage, and each of the seven *town centre* areas designated in the Local Plan is situated, either wholly or in significant part, within a Conservation Area. In addition, a number of retail and other town centre uses occupy Listed Buildings. In this regard, the town centres of Cromer, Fakenham and North Walsham have all been the subject of conservation-led regeneration schemes in the last few years.
- 2.4 In addition to the above considerations, it is widely accepted that the town centre of Holt performs a specialist and higher order shopping function as well as meeting local needs. Also, the village centre of Hoveton performs an unusual retail function given the size of the village, in that it provides a range of facilities more commonly characteristic of much larger centres (although this is partly explained by its proximity to the Broads and the village of Wroxham in Broadland District).

3 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

a) North Norfolk Local Plan

- 3.1 The North Norfolk Local Plan (covering the whole of the District except for a small part for which the Local Planning Authority is the Broads Authority) was adopted in April 1998 and covers the period up to mid-2006. Its shopping policies and proposals were informed by the District-wide Shopping Study.
- 3.2 The current Local Plan’s ‘Development Strategy’ seeks to focus development on the inland towns of Fakenham and North Walsham because of their suitability for achieving a sustainable relationship between employment, housing and services and the relative lack of environmental constraints on their growth. It is expected, having regard to the provisions of current and emerging regional and national planning policy guidance, that the general thrust of the Development Strategy will be retained in the new LDF.

b) Draft Planning Policy Statement on Planning for Town Centres (PPS 6)

- 3.3 Draft PPS 6 encourages a plan-led approach to the planning of city, town, district and local centres. Roles are identified at both regional and local levels to complement the proposed new system of development plans.
- 3.4 In preparing its LDF, draft PPS 6 requires this Authority to set out a vision and strategy for the pattern and hierarchy of centres, including local centres, within its area, setting out how the role of different centres will contribute to the overall vision for this area. This should draw on both the emerging RPG 14 and the local community strategy.
- 3.5 It is clear that the emerging RPG 14 will not identify any retail centres in North Norfolk as having any regional importance. Accordingly, it appears that this Authority will only be required to identify the market towns, villages and any local centres which make up the structure of retail provision within this area in order to meet the provisions RPG 14.

- 3.6 The progress on the local community strategy is, as yet, not well advanced. However, this is compensated by the fact that ‘Whole Settlement Strategies’ have been produced for the District’s seven towns to inform the review of the current Local Plan. (NB: The inclusion of such strategies in local plans is a requirement of Policy CS. 5 of the current Norfolk Structure Plan.)
- 3.7 The other main tasks for this Authority emanating from draft PPS 6 are to update its assessment of the need for additional retail development, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, and to assess the need for other town centre uses covered by the draft Statement. Given the nature of North Norfolk’s town centres and the earlier reference to the importance of tourism to the District, it is considered that the study should focus on the need for additional leisure facilities, accommodation for financial and professional services, and food and drink outlets (i.e. uses covered by Classes A2, A3 and D2 of the Town and Country Planning [Use Classes] Order 1987, as amended).
- 3.8 In view of the dynamic nature of the retail industry, it is considered that a new study should *not* seek to address retail issues in the District up to the proposed end date of the new LDF in 2021. Instead, a shorter time-scale, similar to the previous shopping study, is thought to be more appropriate. Therefore, it will only cover the period up to 31 March 2016.

4 RETAIL STUDY OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 The first part of the study will:
- i. describe the national trends in retailing and how they are expected to develop over the period to 2016, and the implications of these trends, particularly in respect of internet sales, for North Norfolk District;
 - ii. provide an up-to-date analysis of retail and town centre policy at the national and regional levels to set the context for the preparation of more detailed policies on such matters for North Norfolk District;
 - iii. provide a qualitative analysis of existing and proposed (i.e floorspace either allocated in a local plan or with planning permission) retailing in North Norfolk District and the surrounding area;
 - iv. identify the specific implications of the historic character of North Norfolk’s towns and the influence of tourism on planning for retailing and town and other centres in the District;
 - v. identify the scope for specialist roles for North Norfolk’s town and other centres;
 - vi. following the achievement of objectives i.-v. above, identify a pattern and hierarchy of centres within the District and their catchments (which may extend beyond the District boundary);
 - vii. following the achievement of objective vi. above and having regard to other relevant factors, propose a vision and strategy for the identified pattern and hierarchy of centres, and set out how the role of different centres will contribute to the overall vision for the District;

- viii. undertake a catchment-based quantitative analysis of the capacity for new retail floorspace within the District;
 - ix. having regard to the findings of i.-viii. above, assess the need for additional convenience and comparison retail floorspace within each centre in the District hierarchy; and
 - x. having regard to the findings of i.-viii. above, assess the need for additional floorspace for other town centre uses covered by Classes A2, A3 and D2 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, as amended.
- 4.2 The second part of the study will, in the light of the above findings, recommend policies and proposals which support the attainment of the proposed vision for the District's centres and the role each centre should play within it. Where appropriate, the study will identify suitable sites for meeting the need for additional floorspace for retail and other town centre uses in accordance with the Sequential Approach. Investigations into site suitability must be informed by a thorough knowledge of the property market in order to ensure that all site-specific proposals are commercially viable and deliverable when required.
- 4.3 A detailed methodology for achieving the above objectives must be agreed with District Council officers prior to the commencement of the study.