

Development Control Policy Note

Large new stores

These Notes set out current Ministerial policy and their purpose is to give general guidance to all those concerned in the operation of planning control. Policies are not rigid and from time to time new Notes will be issued in this series taking account of changes in emphasis in policy or of new policy decisions.

Each application or appeal is treated on its merits and the application of a general policy to the particular case must always be a matter calling for judgment.

Any legal views stated in these Notes have no statutory force and should not be relied upon as authoritative interpretations of the law.

A list of other current Notes in this series can be obtained free from the Department of the Environment or the Welsh Office.

This Note replaces Development Control Policy Note 13 entitled "Out of town shops and shopping centres" published in 1972.

Introduction

1. Shopping is an important feature in everyone's life and retailing as an industry is important in the national economy.
2. Distribution and retailing are constantly adapting to changing economic and social circumstances and these, with changes in shopping habits, are bringing about changes in shops and shopping centres. Retailing developments which extend choice in shopping, allow more efficient retailing, enable a better service to be given to the public as a whole and make shopping more convenient and pleasant are, in general, to be welcomed. Indeed, although it is not the function of land use planning to prevent or to stimulate competition among retailers or among methods of retailing, nor to preserve existing commercial interests as such, it must take into account the benefits to the public which flow from new developments in the distributive and retailing fields. Where these lead to a proposal for a large new store, the proposal will need to be carefully studied against the pattern of established shopping centres in the area, taking account of their adequacy, convenience and the need to retain their vitality, and bearing in mind the planning objectives for the whole area likely to be served by the proposed store. Its siting will be a crucial matter and a major factor in the important environmental, economic, transport, social and other planning issues likely to be raised by the proposal. Applicants will need to assess the strength of these issues when formulating their proposals, and it is the essential task of the local planning authority, when considering the planning application, to form a balanced judgement on the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal to the community as a whole.

The pattern of shopping centres

3. The traditional pattern of shopping centres can be summarised as follows, though the pattern in a particular area will depend on many factors, especially the size and distribution of the population. Generally, the smaller centres will be trading mainly in convenience goods¹, but the larger the centre, the bigger the proportion of trade in comparison goods², and this becomes the dominant feature in the major centres.
 - a. The corner shop or small group of shops—a substantial element in the overall pattern which still has a role to play, serving the needs of those within easy walking distance.
 - b. The neighbourhood centre (for say 5–10,000 people)—serving the needs of large villages, very small towns or residential areas away from district or town centres, but not large enough to create much competition or to offer a full range of services.
 - c. The district centre—an important feature in large urban areas (say over 100,000 population) where it acts as a major focal point for groupings of between 25,000 and 40,000 people. In addition to a range of shops large enough to provide competition, including supermarkets and perhaps departmental stores, this type of centre includes non-retail services and will have local significance as an employment centre. It will usually be well served by public transport. District centres vary in size, form, standard of shopping facilities and parking provision. The older district centres will have developed along the principal traffic routes of the larger towns or in centres of smaller country towns which look to larger towns for a higher level of retail service. In the suburbs, district centres may have developed from neighbourhood centres in

1. Convenience goods include food, newspapers, tobacco and durables of a standardised or mass-produced type for which there is a wide sale.

2. Comparison goods are those which while not being purchased frequently by individual customers must nevertheless be stocked in a wide range of sizes, styles, colours and qualities, eg good clothing and footwear, fashionwear, fabrics, jewellery, furniture and goods normally sold at specialist shops and general stores.

order to serve the rapid post war growth of surrounding residential areas. In inner residential areas, small centres may have been expanded or redeveloped into district centres on tightly confined sites where they have been able to complement the town centre facilities. Further out, district centres have been developed as the focus of large new residential areas. The newer or redeveloped district centres will generally afford better facilities for pedestrians and motorists.

d. The major town or city centre—the main focus of shopping, commerce, administration and public transport. The influence of these shopping centres is exerted over a wide area and they fulfil a sub-regional or regional role according to their size and drawing power.

4. The immediate future seems unlikely to provide any radical upheaval in this pattern which must be seen as the context for considering the siting of new shopping facilities. The pattern is, of course, the outcome of factors which are not very susceptible to change—such as the major traffic flows in the area, the availability of public transport for those without access to a car the location of public offices and other central facilities and the amenity of particular towns—as well as of factors which are more readily altered, such as methods of retailing and personal transport.

Changes in retailing

5. There is a marked trend in some trades towards larger shops in order to increase efficiency and achieve economies of scale, the benefits of which can be passed on to the consumer in better value for money. These shops need a large floor area, ready access for trade vehicles and sufficient car parking close at hand. Consequently, shops that sell convenience goods are tending to prefer district or suburban centres where it is often easier to secure large sites. Shops that sell comparison goods and so require a large catchment area tend to concentrate in the major centres which are well served by roads and public transport. But retailers of some comparison goods, eg carpets, furniture and electrical appliances, are also finding it advantageous to move to off-centre sites. These moves can promote the efficiency of retail distribution, make shopping easier and can help to ease congestion in the major centres. The full advantage of developing away from the major centres is, however, fully realised only if adequate car parking is available. Many inter-war and post-1945 suburban areas lack adequate shopping centres and in some the pattern of shops no longer meets modern requirements. As a result, retailers and developers have been seeking sites on the edges of built up areas or further out where they can provide large stores or shopping centres designed primarily for customers who go shopping by car and where development and operating costs tend to be lower. The benefits of this type of development, however, cannot be considered in isolation from the interests of the community as a whole (including non-car owners) and the vitality of its existing shopping centres.

6. No proposal for a new major out of town regional or sub-regional shopping centre has yet received planning permission. On the other hand, there now exist a number of new large single-storey stores of very different sizes with large car parks; more have received planning permission. Many are located in district centres or on the edges of substantial towns, in places where they can draw custom from a large population or where substantial population growth is planned. These stores differ substantially in method of operation and in the division of floorspace between selling and storage and of selling area between convenience and comparison goods. These factors will be decided by the current policies of the retailers concerned. Local authorities will wish to be aware of these differences and to keep themselves informed of new methods of distribution and retailing which can have implications for floorspace usage.

Structure and local plans

7. Local planning authorities have prepared or are now engaged in preparing structure and local plans; policies for shopping may be included in the structure plan or in the local plan. Inclusion in the former will be appropriate where shopping is an issue of key structural importance for the area. In considering their policies, local authorities will wish to take account of the adequacy and convenience of their existing shopping centres and to be aware of changing trends in distribution and retailing and in the facilities that shoppers want. The effect which edge of town retailing will have on existing shopping centres and on community life generally and the implications for the shopping public as a whole are matters which need careful assessment by local authorities and also by retailers who will be able to provide relevant information. It is open to retailers to take an active part in the public participation which is a necessary part of structure and local plan making.

8. Local authorities have powers, particularly under the Community Land Act, to guide new shopping development to suitable sites. In Wales, local authorities will need to liaise with the Land Authority for Wales.

9. It is extremely difficult to assess whether a new shopping development in an edge of town location, which enables the shopper to use the car to buy a large quantity of goods in a single trip, results in an overall increase or decrease in petrol consumption. People's use of cars differs and shopping trips are often combined with trips for other purposes. It is in everyone's interest to bear in mind the need for economy in the use of petrol, but this is not a reason to discourage this form of development or to discriminate against the use of the car for shopping.

Mobility of shoppers and store locations

10. It is estimated that in 1985 about one family in three will still be without a car. These families will be largely dependent on shops they can reach by public transport or on foot. This section of the community includes large numbers of the aged, infirm and disabled and families on low income; this is one of the major reasons why a pattern of shopping provision of the kind described above is important. It is clearly preferable for large new stores to be located where they can serve not only those able to travel by car but also customers travelling on foot and by public transport—and some additional services may be warranted for this purpose. This sharing of the advantage can best be achieved where the new store can be accommodated within the existing urban area, particularly within an expanding or redeveloping town centre or where it acts as the nucleus for a district centre where the commercial and social facilities usually associated with a shopping centre can be provided. Edge of town sites are only likely to be considered for developments where size, land requirements or some other factor precludes their location within the built-up area and where such siting will not be detrimental to the interests of the inner areas of our towns and cities. Proposals should be considered in the context of the relevant planning criteria discussed in this note, and the benefits which a new store can bring must be balanced against the wider social and economic implications for the community of any material change in the pattern of existing centres. In these cases, it will be appropriate for local public transport operators to be brought into discussion of the proposal.

Town centres

11. The improvement of shopping facilities in some town centres has become increasingly difficult because of limited parking space and traffic congestion. Authorities will need to consider whether their central areas are reasonably accessible for suppliers' deliveries and for customers' vehicles and, if not, whether the situation could be improved by new stores, for example, in district centres. Many authorities are seeking to improve the situation by comprehensive traffic

management measures which include priorities for public transport and parking policies designed to strike a balance between short term waiting and the long term parker. The extent to which adequate measures of this kind are being implemented will need to be taken into account in the consideration of proposals for large new stores elsewhere. In historic towns as elsewhere there may be congested streets and a need for more shopping floorspace, and so advantage in providing new stores in fresh locations. But in considering the likely trading impact of a new store, it must be borne in mind that buildings of architectural and historic importance used for shops are generally more expensive to maintain and are limited in the extent to which they can be adapted for more efficient retailing or put to other uses.

12. It should also be borne in mind that the smaller the town, the more important in its life and that of the surrounding area is its centre. The economic base of such a centre is likely to be particularly vulnerable to the effects of large store development in edge of town or out of town locations.

Assessment of demand

13. In recent years there has been much analytical work done on methods of assessing demand. Mathematical models have been produced which aim to help those concerned with shopping development to assess the need for floorspace and the best locations to satisfy new demands. These models may be complicated and based on a number of arguable assumptions; they have not, so far, been of great help to Inspectors at inquiries. They are most likely to be of value where there is agreement on the basic assumptions underlying their use and where, if different models are used, any difference in results can be identified and explained. In any case, full weight needs to be given to other unquantifiable aspects that may be of public concern.

14. It is not possible to recommend a uniform method for assessing the effects of new stores on existing centres. Clearly it must start from estimates of the turnover of the proposed store, the area from which the turnover is likely to be derived and the extent of the likely trade withdrawal from shopping centres within the area. Such assessments can help to secure that land and other resources are not wasted by gross over-provision of new shopping space, but they need to be treated as predictions subject to considerable uncertainty. The scale of proposed development in relation to what exists is plainly important. A major new development of regional or sub-regional importance would require an extensive appraisal of existing shopping provision and the likely impact of the proposed development. Similarly, considerable care would be needed in considering a development that would draw a large and perhaps dominant share of trade from an area of small towns or villages. On the other hand a development that would draw on a large population and add a relatively small increment to the shopping space already serving it may warrant a less elaborate approach. The stores that already exist will increasingly provide retailers and local authorities with evidence of the volume of custom to be expected and the distances from which it is likely to be drawn. Retailers, local authorities and others seeking information about relevant research and statistical data will find it helpful to consult the Unit for Retail Planning Information, 229 Kings Road, Reading RG1 4LS, telephone 0734-661166.

Considerations affecting the site

15. Proposals for large new stores will involve an assessment of the need for the store—not only in terms of additional floorspace but also of alternative, modern or more convenient shopping facilities—in relation to the planning policies applying to the site and the contribution which the site makes to the policy objectives. Both the developer and the local authority will need to consider the provision of public services to the site and the means by which these are to be financed. Other developments, particularly commercial, are likely to be

attracted to the vicinity of large new stores and this possibility should be taken into account in considering the suitability of the proposed store site.

16. For all large new stores with extensive car parks, careful attention will be needed to the siting and design of buildings, the materials to be used and the landscaping of the whole.

Highway considerations

17. A large new store will generate substantial traffic of shoppers and staff in cars and of commercial vehicles serving the store. This may affect substantially the volume and composition of traffic on the road network both near the new centre and over a wider area related to the drawing power of the store. The implications of this should be carefully assessed. Second, at the approaches to the store many new traffic movements are likely to be imposed on the existing roads and these may lead to hazards at junctions, queueing on the highways, congestion and loss of amenity. The advice of the Regional Controller (Roads and Transportation) or, in Wales, the Director of Transport and Highways, should and in certain circumstances must³ be sought where this type of development would directly or indirectly materially affect a trunk road.

"Green field" sites, green belts and industrial land

18. Proposals for large stores on "green field" sites away from urban development will often be open to some or all of the objections usually associated with developments in that kind of location: that they intrude into open country, require additional access to major roads or greatly increase the traffic on minor ones, make demands on public services which cannot easily be satisfied and establish precedents for further developments which it may not be sensible or justifiable to resist once the new development has taken place. Where the site forms part of a proposed or approved green belt the usual presumption against development will prevail unless, most exceptionally, there are compelling reasons for making a departure from this policy.

19. In view of the need to ensure that adequate and suitable land is available for industry, shopping developments should not be undertaken on land which is or will be required for industry.

Local authority co-operation

20. The catchment areas of large new stores may extend across the boundaries of local authorities. Where this is likely to happen it will be appropriate for the local planning authority in whose area the development is proposed to inform the other authorities as soon as possible and seek a joint examination of the implications.

Public local inquiries

21. Proposals for large new stores which come before the Secretary of State on appeal or through call-in are normally subject to public local inquiry. Inspectors can be considerably helped and much time saved by applicants and local planning authorities getting together beforehand to compare the evidence they will submit, with a view to determining those areas where there is disagreement and on which the inquiry can then concentrate.

3. See articles 11 and 15 of the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1977.

Informative summaries of planning applications for edge of town and out of town shopping development, determined by the Secretaries of State in the period 1972-mid 1976, and which discuss the various planning issues raised and the weight attached to them are contained in Circular 71/76 (Welsh Office Circular 98/76), price 35p.

The results of research into the effect of large new stores on food prices, consumers and food retailing are summarised in the annex to Circular 96/77 (Welsh Office Circular 154/77), price 25p.

Guidance on planning applications for wholesale and retail warehouse development is contained in Development Control Policy Note 14 entitled "Warehouses—wholesale, cash and carry, etc." price 11p.

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