

Farnham Neighbourhood Plan

Farnham Town Centre

June 2016

Farnham Town Centre

Introduction

The town centre is the focal point for the Farnham community and is an asset which should be retained and enhanced.

The NPPF makes it clear that planning policies should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period. It states that in drawing up Local Plans, local planning authorities should *define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, based on a clear definition of primary and secondary frontages in designated centres.*

In addition, local planning authorities should: *allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community and residential development needed in town centres. It is important that needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses are met in full and are not compromised by limited site availability. Local planning authorities should therefore undertake an assessment of the need to expand town centres to ensure a sufficient supply of suitable sites.*

To date, Waverley Borough Council have undertaken retail studies to assess future retail needs and have accepted that the definition of the town centre is an appropriate role for the Neighbourhood Plan.

Town Centres Retail Study Update 2013

The Borough Council's Town Centres Retail Study Update 2013

(www.waverley.gov.uk/downloads/download/1403/waverley_draft_town_centre_retail_study_update_2012) updated the quantitative and qualitative assessment of future floorspace requirements for both convenience goods (mainly food) and comparison goods (such as clothes, electrical or furniture) in the Borough together with an assessment of how any identified need can best be met and undertook an updated and comprehensive 'health check' for each of the main centres (including detailed survey of existing floorspace) including Farnham.

It is clear from the householder shopping survey (2007) that households in Waverley have a choice of destination for their shopping trips. As well as the shops in the four main centres in the Borough, there are also several major town centres and retail parks in relatively close proximity which offer significant additional shopping facilities. In particular, the primary regional centre of Guildford offers a significant quantum and range of retailing, including retail warehousing and the recent extension to the Friary Centre. The secondary regional centres of Aldershot and Farnborough also lie just beyond Waverley Borough's boundary, as do the significant out-of-town retail locations of Farnborough Gate Retail Park and the Meadows at Blackwater Valley. Residents of Waverley Borough therefore have a multitude of shopping destinations from which to choose and these centres exert considerable influence over Waverley residents' shopping behaviour - particularly for comparison goods.

Each of the four main towns in Waverley is well served by major foodstores. Waitrose and Sainsbury's are present in Farnham and Godalming, Tesco and Co-op serve Haslemere and Weyhill and Cranleigh village is served by Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer Simply Food and Co-op. Between them, these stores tend to dominate their local area, and in some cases attract expenditure from a wider area.

Convenience Goods

In terms of convenience retailing, there are a low number of shoppers heading to other major centres from Farnham.

Comparison Goods

Patterns of shopping for comparison goods amongst Waverley residents are far more complex. Of the main centres, Farnham offers the greatest quantum and range of comparison shopping and this is reflected in the percentage of expenditure retained. Godalming, Haslemere/Weyhill and Cranleigh all have a limited comparison goods offer, but in the main, their comparison needs are met by other centres.

In almost all categories of goods, Farnham retains a healthy percentage of expenditure from the nearby residential areas. 30% of expenditure on clothing and footwear is retained in the town, which represents good performance in a key sector, given the proximity of higher order centres with more significant comparison goods offers.

Farnham retains

- 30% of expenditure on clothing and footwear
- 40% of expenditure on furniture and floor coverings,

- 37% of expenditure on household textiles and soft furnishings,
- 47% of expenditure on domestic electrical appliances,
- 46% of expenditure on audio visual and photographic goods,
- 40% of spend on china, glass and hardware,
- 19% of DIY expenditure and
- 68% of expenditure on books, jewellery and luxury goods.

Although Farnham does not dominate comparison shopping in Waverley it is clearly the most important of the four study centres, and performs as a higher-order shopping centre. In each category of goods, a significant percentage of trade is captured from the rural area in Waverley. Residents of this zone have a choice of destinations and the road network encourages movement toward Guildford but, despite this, Farnham is a popular destination.

Health Check of Farnham Town Centre (undertaken in Nov 2012)

On almost every indicator of retail health, Farnham scores well.

Diversity of uses

Based on the Goad Centre Report and the consultant's street surveys there are currently 252 units trading in Farnham town centre on a total of 443,300 sq ft of retail floorspace. There are 14 convenience units in the centre showing an increase from the 2007 survey. These stores include the large Waitrose and Sainsbury's units and as a result convenience goods floorspace constitutes 17% of the total which is in line with the national average.

There are 116 comparison units, representing 46% of the units in the centre – although this is higher than the national average, it is a marked decrease from the level witnessed during the 2007 survey of the centre. The number of units accommodating services is much higher than the national average, though only slightly higher in terms of floorspace. Overall, the figures show that Farnham is a significant centre in terms of all three categories.

Outside of Farnham town centre, leisure facilities are more prevalent with Maltings which serves as a theatre, museum and events venue and Memorial Hall which runs children's activities, a bridge club, bowls, martial arts, as well as private events. Other facilities are James Hockey Gallery, Craft Study Centre, New Ashgate Gallery, Farnham Pottery and The Museum of Farnham. The proposed multi-screen cinema within the East Street development would undoubtedly add to the leisure offer within Farnham, particularly within the town centre which is limited at present.

The large Sainsbury's store at Water Lane, Farnham is the main out-of-town foodstore. It is supplemented by Farnham Retail Park on Guildford Road, with Homebase, Pets at Home and Halfords all represented. The Lidl foodstore at Dogflud Way also occupies an edge-of-centre location.

Potential for Growth

Farnham's major development site is the land between East Street, South Street and Dogflud Way, which has been identified for some time within various local planning documents. It is proposed that the site will be brought forward for a major mixed-use redevelopment including 167 new homes, 72 affordable homes, a six screen Odeon cinema, new town square with landscaped gardens, replacement court tennis club as well as new shops, restaurants and cafes totalling some 9,814 sq m

of floorspace. It is understood that the proposed development would be anchored by and M&S store including a significant element of Simply Food offer.

The existing Brighwells scheme was granted planning permission in 2008 and an application for a new planning permission to replace the extant permission was granted in 2012. Waverley Borough Council issued a Compulsory Purchase Order in May 2012 on the parts of the site that remain outside their control.

In light of the proposed development, Chase & Partners made a recommendation within the original Waverley Town Centres Retail Study, that the town centre boundary of Farnham be redrawn to include the proposed development site at East Street.

Retailer Representation and Demand

There are currently 11 major retailers - including Waitrose, Sainsbury's, Argos, Waterstones, Boots, Dorothy Perkins, WHSmith, Clarks, Clintons, Vodafone and Carphone Warehouse - and a total of 81 multiple retailers across a variety of goods categories trading in Farnham town centre.

Rental Levels

It can be noted that Farnham's prime zone A rents have increased in the last three years, rising from a low of £75 per sq ft to £85 per sq ft. whilst the large majority of centres suffered a fall in zone A rental levels.

Vacancy

The vacancy rate for Farnham, based on our recent survey, stands at less than 9%, which is an improvement on the position at the time of the Experian Goad survey (10%) and is some 5% below the national average (14%).

Pedestrian Flows

Farnham has a classic "dumbbell" retail layout, with major anchors at either end (Waitrose and Sainsbury's) with the resultant footfall supporting comparison retailing in between.

Accessibility

Farnham enjoys good accessibility by road given its proximity to the A31. The town centre is relatively well provided for in terms of car parks with over 1,700 spaces being available at car parks throughout the centre. This includes a good proportion of disabled spaces. The centre is also well served by bus routes from all parts of its environs.

Customer and Resident's Views and Behaviour

The results of a 2008 Business Survey show that Farnham is generally favourably viewed by local businesses, though few give it top marks. The shopping offer in terms of the number of multiples, independents and specialists is considered to be average to good; the quality of the shops is considered fairly good and prices are seen as average. Views on access were mixed with most considering access by public transport to be average to fairly good, but many considering access by car to be fairly poor. Car parking was generally considered average to fairly poor. In terms of appearance and character, Farnham was considered to be average to very good, with no respondents considering it poorer than this.

Perception of Safety and Occurrence of Crime

Waverley Borough does not suffer greatly from crime. By inference, it can be assumed that neither do the four main centres of Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere and Cranleigh.

Environmental Quality

Farnham has areas of extremely good environmental quality, particularly the Lion & Lamb Shopping Centre which is seen as a model example of a “niche retailing” area. There are no obvious pockets of dereliction or visual signs of graffiti or litter. The area around East Street is not particularly attractive, though it is not so environmentally poor as to deter retailers entirely. In any case, the area is expected to be greatly enhanced by the proposed mixed-use development.

Quantitative Need Assessment

The Retail Study Update derived estimates for available expenditure for both convenience and comparison goods over five-year periods to 2033, from the design year of 2013.

Future Growth

Convenience

The total expenditure available to support new floorspace in Waverley Borough is estimated to be £79.6m, which would give rise to a potential floorspace requirement of 8,376 sq m (net). However, as stated above, the estimates of expenditure per capita on which these calculations are based should be treated with a degree of caution beyond the short to medium term. Given the localised nature of convenience retailing, a more meaningful indicator of potential future need can be found in the disaggregated figures for each of the Borough’s main town and village centres. This shows that whilst there may be potential need for further convenience floorspace in all the centres during the course of the study period, this is not of a scale to justify a new store. It may, however, provide some basis for the possible improvement or extension of one or more existing foodstores in the towns during the plan period.

Comparison

The modelling exercise suggests that Farnham is currently overtrading and an expansion in its retail offer is overdue. The Total Floorspace Requirement 2011-2033 (sq m) including overtrading 2011-2033 is estimated to be 20,871 sqm (gross) and 14,610 sqm (net). The East Street scheme has the potential deliver 9,814 sqm of floorspace and potentially fulfil the town’s immediate retail development needs, will address this overtrading and satisfy the forecast growth in expenditure, providing a medium to long term solution to the existing deficiency. The East Street scheme must therefore be seen as a timely solution to an existing deficiency that will satisfy Farnham’s needs for not only the short term but the majority of the plan period.

Farnham Town Centre Boundary

The NPPF defines town centre uses as: retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community and residential development.

The Town Council have used the GOAD map of the Town Centre Area (defined on the adopted Local Plan Proposals Map (Farnham Inset) and approximately 100m beyond) to plot existing land

uses in the centre. The map was supplemented by local knowledge and a walkabout. The resultant map identified the clusters of town centre uses (shown on Map 1 in Appendix 1).

Retail provision

Shops are focused on West Street, Downing Street and The Borough and associated yards leading from them. East Street and South Street have retail frontages but are separated from the principal shopping streets by the A325 and A287. There remains a range of unit sizes and independent shops but these are under threat from high rents and high parking charges. Vacancy rates remain low.

Land with planning permission between East Street, South Street and Dogflud Way has the potential to deliver 9,814 sqm of retail floorspace and potentially satisfy Farnham's needs for not only the short term but the majority of the Plan period.

The Woolmead development, built in the 1970s, has redevelopment potential during the Plan period as a mixed use scheme comprising principally retail floorspace on the ground floor with residential development above.

All these areas have been included in the Town Centre boundary as they incorporate the principal retail frontages and the potential areas for future growth.

Offices

The town centre is the focus for Farnham's service sector. Offices are located within the older Georgian and Victorian premises as well as modern office blocks including the St Georges Yard.

The Waverley Employment Land Review Update, August 2014 projects that demand for office space (Use Class B1a and B1b) will outstrip supply over the Plan period, with additional floorspace required.

From interviews conducted by Town Councillors in connection with the Neighbourhood Plan, local agents report a strong demand for town centre offices, particularly the modern premises.

This office accommodation is included in the Town Centre boundary as an important town centre use.

Restaurants, Cafes and Public Houses

In common with other towns, the number of restaurants and cafes within the town centre has increased over recent years. Alongside public houses they add to the variety of uses in the town centre and support the night time economy. Whilst generally interspersed with shops, there is now a concentration of places to eat and drink at the southern end of Castle Street.

Leisure and Entertainment Facilities

The Borough Council-owned Farnham Leisure Centre is located at Dogflud Way. An extensive refurbishment scheme resulted in an improved swimming pool, extended gym, and refurbished sports area in 2010. The Leisure Centre plays an important part in the provision of community sport and fitness, especially in respect of community access and affordability and because there are 'pay and play' opportunities and is included within the Town Centre boundary.

The range of cultural attractions within, and close to, the town centre is important to the vitality of the town centre during the day and night.

The Maltings offers a diverse programme of activities including theatre, cinema, craft, music and comedy and is renowned throughout South-East England.

St. Andrew's Church in the town centre has some very modern meeting-rooms, designed by the architect, Ptolemy Deans. The modern structures and removal of the old pews have enabled the church to host concerts, art exhibitions and dramatic works.

The Museum of Farnham is located inside within the designated town centre boundary on West Street. It is situated in an elegant Grade I listed Georgian townhouse. It has a walled garden and garden room, which is used for talks and exhibitions.

The library, within the designated town centre boundary, offers more than just books and computers. It has workshops and activities for children throughout the year. The library gardens have hosted charity fairs and fund-raising concerts.

The Memorial Hall, just outside the town centre, is a well-used venue for concerts and drama.

Tourism

The historic town centre and its cultural attractions attract many visitors. Farnham Castle is the jewel in the crown of Farnham attractions. It dates back to the 12th century and the Norman keep is open to the public daily.

Farnham has two trails around the town for visitors to follow, using a free booklet. The first is the heritage trail, which takes visitors to historic features within the town and the other is the craft trail, which leads visitors to the historic and modern centres of craft.

The town centre has two hotels (The Mercure Farnham Bush Hotel and the Bishop's Table Hotel) which are an important component in the town's economy.

The commercial core of the historic centre and hotel accommodation are included within the Town Centre boundary.

Conclusion

The town centre boundary has been defined in the Neighbourhood Plan around the range of principal facilities listed above together with the two redevelopment sites at East Street and Woolmead, and is shown in the map in Appendix 1).

The boundary excludes the northern end of Castle Street from the adopted Town Centre boundary as this area is now occupied almost exclusively by residential properties.

Appendix I – Town Centre Boundary and Use Classes

See following page

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