

## New Forest National Park Local Plan 2016 – 2036

### Examination Statement – New Forest National Park Authority

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#### **Matter 13 – Retail Development**

***Issue – Whether the Local Plan has been positively prepared and whether it is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to the approach to retail development?***

***Relevant policies: DP40, DP41***

#### **1.1 *Has an assessment of need been undertaken to inform the retail policies?***

1. An assessment of need has not been undertaken to inform the retail policies for the reasons as set out below.
2. In line with the Spatial Strategy for the National Park there are four larger settlements (the ‘defined villages’) and a number of smaller scattered rural settlements. None of the settlements within the National Park are larger than 3,500. There are no designated ‘town centres’ within the National Park.
3. Retail provision within the National Park is concentrated primarily within the four defined villages; in particular Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst; between them they provide a range of convenience goods and local services meeting the day-to-day needs of local residents and visitors. A number of villages contain shops and food and drink outlets catering primarily for tourists, for example Burley and Beaulieu. In addition some smaller settlements contain a shop, although the number of these are declining as shopping patterns change. The village shops are important not only in terms of local shopping but often provide a meeting and social hub, especially for the elderly.
4. Successive local plans have sought to safeguard the role of the four defined villages in meeting some of the day-to-day retail needs of local residents and visitors. In addition, local plans have supported appropriate small-scale retail development (including farm shops) outside the defined villages. Policies DP40 and DP41 of the Local Plan aim to continue the retail strategy of supporting the rural economy and reducing the need for journeys elsewhere.
5. The small, dispersed settlements of the National Park lie within reach of larger town centres located outside of the Park’s boundary (for example, Lymington, Bournemouth, Southampton and Ringwood). The larger town centres (often accessible by public transport) offer diverse retail outlets, competition and customer choice for the residents and visitors of the National Park. It is therefore reasonable to recognise that wider retail needs will continue to be met beyond the Park’s boundaries.

6. The NPPF states that to support a strong rural economy, local plans should promote the retention and development of local shops. With no capacity for the kind of diverse retail choice and competition that town centres provide and mindful of the fact that planning authorities are advised that a local plan evidence base should be appropriate and proportionate (NPPG), it was considered that a retail needs survey was unnecessary to underpin the retail policies of the Local Plan. In addition, much of the guidance contained as set out in the NPPF and NPPG is aimed at promoting town centres that provide customer choice and a diverse retail base and as stated above, with no town centres within the National Park an assessment of need is not considered to be relevant and not in proportion with the Local Plan's focus on providing for residents and visitors day-day retail and other service needs.

**1.2 *What are the inter-relationships with other authorities in terms of shopping patterns and how have these been taken into account?***

1. The small, dispersed settlements of the National Park lie within reach of larger town centres located outside of the Park's boundary (for example Lymington, Bournemouth, Southampton and Ringwood). The larger town centres (often accessible by public transport) offer diverse retail outlets, competition and customer choice for the residents and visitors of the National Park.
2. As there are larger town centres within reach it is considered that the role of the Local Plan is to ensure that day-to-day retail needs of residents and visitors are met. This is in line with the NPPF which states that to support a strong rural economy, local plans should promote the retention and development of local shops.
3. As set out in Core Document 19 (Duty to Co-operate) retail has not been the focus of discussions between neighbouring authorities as it is recognised that the Local Plan's role is to meet the everyday retail needs of residents and visitors whilst neighbouring towns provide for a more diverse retail choice.

**1.3 *What is the basis for the local shopping frontages in the defined villages? Are these justified?***

1. Over the years, planning applications for the change of use from A1 retail use to other uses such as financial and professional services; and food and drink uses within the defined village centres, threatened to erode the number of shops providing for the day-to-day needs of local residents and visitors. Successive local plans for the National Park have therefore sought to define and safeguard the role of the defined villages in providing for these day-to-day retail needs and a continuation of this approach is considered to be an appropriate rural strategy for the National Park as set out in this Local Plan.

2. Without such a defined local shopping frontage, retail development could become more dispersed and isolated resulting in a loss of the retail core and social hub. Shops would become less accessible, particularly for the elderly and those without means of access and potentially result in longer car journeys. Having a defined shopping frontage in successive local plans has also over the years facilitated the provision of infrastructure associated with shopping such as the provision of car parking, bus stops, seating and cycle racks.
3. Annual monitoring (since 2007) (*Retail Development of the National Park Topic Paper CD129*), of the proportion of retail units within the local shopping frontages within the defined villages in line with Policy DP40 has enabled trends in retail to be assessed. Monitoring enables an informed assessment of a submitted planning application for a change of use from A1 retail use to other uses to be made against the proportion of retail units as set out in the policy. Low vacancy rates since 2007 has indicated that the continuation of the policy has not hindered the overall vibrancy and buoyant retail economy of the National Park thus illustrating that the policy is effective and justified.

**1.4 *Is the approach set out in Policy DP40 effective, justified and consistent with national policy? What is the basis for the thresholds set out in the Policy?***

1. The NPPF states that to support a strong rural economy, local plans should promote the retention and development of local services and community facilities, such as local shops. National policy also requires local planning authorities to define retail areas and set out policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in such locations.
2. Following this approach also helps to deliver the Authority's statutory duty (Environment Act 1995) to foster the social and economic well-being of its local communities (without compromising the special qualities and rural character of the National Park). A healthy local economy is essential in maintaining the life and vibrancy of the National Park
3. Over the years the inclusion of a defined local shopping frontage together with the thresholds as set out in Local Plan policy, has enabled them to remain as the focus for retail and thus meeting some of the retail day-to-day needs of local residents and visitors. Without the thresholds, competition for uses would result in an overall decline in the number of retail units. The defined villages would therefore no longer be able to cater for the day-to-day needs of residents and visitors resulting in longer car journeys. The life and vibrancy of the defined villages would also decline as a result.
4. Retail is responsible for meeting only one aspect of residents and visitors' day-to-day needs. There are other facilities which a local shopping frontage can provide, such as banks and building societies; funeral parlours; public houses; cafes and restaurants; health facilities; and solicitors etc. There is therefore recognition within the policy that provision should be made for these other facilities without prejudicing the shopping functions of the defined shopping

frontages. A local shopping frontage with a threshold as set out in Policy DP40 thus seeks to ensure that there are sufficient retail units to enable day-to-day needs to be met whilst also enabling flexibility to ensure that other local facilities can be provided for.

5. Annual monitoring of the uses within a local shopping frontage ensures that this is achieved by enabling any planning application for a change of use to be assessed in light of the thresholds as set in Policy DP40. Thus the policy has been used in successive local plans to help promote the retention and development of local shops within the shopping frontages of the defined villages, whilst also enabling flexibility in other uses to come forward.

**1.5 *Is the approach set out in Policy DP41 effective, justified and consistent with national policy?***

1. The Authority has a statutory duty (Environment Act 1995) to foster the social and economic well-being of its local communities (without compromising the special qualities and rural character of the National Park). A healthy local economy is essential in maintaining the life and vibrancy of the National Park. The NPPF also states that to support a strong rural economy, local plans should promote the retention and development of local shops.
2. It is therefore appropriate that the Local Plan includes a local planning policy supporting appropriate small-scale retail development (including farm shops) outside the defined villages.
3. In recent years the policy has enabled a new village shop to be provided in the village of Woodgreen and redevelopment of an existing village shop in Bashley. The policy is effective in ensuring that small-scale convenience shops and farm shops do not extend into the open countryside or have impacts on adjoining land uses. It also ensures that the potential effects of farm shops on other shops in neighbouring villages are assessed.