



A VISION FOR FLEET TOWN CENTRE

2011 -2026



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INTRODUCTION

Fleet owes its existence to the great changes in living conditions that occurred in the nineteenth century. It flourished because it was ideally placed to take advantage of good road and particularly Rail communications. Today however the future prosperity of its town centre is threatened by the mobility of the local population and the changing requirements of its users. Hart District Council has recognized the need to respond to these changes by comprehensively planning for the future and have produced a Vision which, if adopted, will build on the existing town centre investment and provide a sound basis for future investment. Importantly it recognizes the need to maintain the existing character of the town centre but accepts the need to promote local ownership and use in a sustainable way. The Vision reflects the views of the people who have responded through the public consultation exercises. Its success will be measured against the confidence it generates in attracting investment and whilst the District Council has land assets that can play a vital role, this investment has to come from the private sector. There can be no room for complacency. Those town centres which remain viable and prosper will be those that have planned to take account of the great changes in living requirements that are occurring in the twenty-first century. The way Fleet has prospered from past changes is no guarantee that the future will bring success but by working and planning together the likelihood of success can be immeasurably increased. The Vision is an important tool in the process.

Martin Pearson
Project Leader
for Denning Male Polisano Limited
July 2010

CONTEXT

- 1.1. Spatial Planning is a process of place shaping and delivery. It aims to produce a vision for the future of places that responds to the local challenges and opportunities, and is based on evidence, a sense of local distinctiveness and community derived objectives. PPS12: Local Spatial Planning.
- 1.2. Hart District Council has established a Local Strategic Partnership, which has produced a Community Strategy for the years 2005 – 2016 'To improve, sustain and promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of communities in Hart District'.
- 1.3. Building on this work it has produced a 'Hart Sustainable Community Strategy' which identifies the need 'to secure the long term vitality and viability of Fleet Town Centre' (P.14)
- 1.4. Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth is the national policy advice for town centres and economic development. *Inter alia* The Government's key objective for town centres is to promote their vitality and viability as important places for communities. By promoting and enhancing existing centres, economic growth needs to be focused in existing centres and enhanced consumer choice should be delivered.
- 1.5. PPS 4 – Policy EC1 further exhorts a proactive, plan- led approach to planning for town centres. Local authorities should use tools such as town centre strategies to address the transport, land assembly, crime prevention planning and design issues associated with the management of centres.
- 1.6. It is a key point that wherever possible growth should be accommodated by more efficient use of land and buildings.
- 1.7. Opportunities within existing centres should be identified for sites suitable for development or redevelopment or where conversions and changes of use will be

permitted or encouraged for specific buildings or areas. An example of better use is the introduction of residential at first floor level.

- 1.8. The importance of first working within the primary shopping area is essential to maintain and promote viability and vitality but where appropriate secondary shopping streets can play an important role.
- 1.9. The British Retail Consortium have studied the performance of High Streets (21st Century High Streets – A new vision for our town centres) and have concluded that their future is under threat unless clear strategies exist to promote the vitality and viability of town centres and these strategies are backed up by active public/private partnerships.

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT

- 2.1. In July 2006 Hart Council commissioned ATKINS to undertake a Retail Capacity Assessment, which dealt inter alia with Fleet Town Centre. Although it was conducted in accordance with the guidance set out in PPS 6, which has now been replaced by PPS 4, the differences are considered to be insufficient to warrant redoing the Assessment. The key findings therefore remain relevant and are set out in Enclosure 1.
- 2.2. This work included extensive public consultation.
- 2.3. In 2008 the County Council agreed to commission a Fleet Town Access Plan. This is relevant to the Vision as it identifies with the agreement of the local planning authority the following as key objectives:
 - Regenerating civic space in the town for community and cultural events, socialising and markets
 - Encouraging al fresco eating and drinking
 - Improving the range and facilities for young people in and around the town centre
 - Promoting more efficient use of public car parks

- Improve the safety and attractiveness of pedestrian alleyways from Fleet Road to car parks and other areas
- Improved access from the shopping areas to open spaces such as The Views and Calthorpe Park and Oakley Park
- Influencing the development of new shops and extensions to encourage specialist retailing and the provision of a variety of goods and services
- Encouraging the evening economy for all by promoting cafés, restaurants and cultural activities
- Enhancing the vitality of streets and spaces by allowing the use of wider areas of pavement for outdoor dining, the display of goods and market stalls
- At key locations in the town centre multi storey buildings of high architectural quality could be encouraged to create land marks, focal points or the containment of new public spaces.

The final conclusions will be available in autumn 2010.

- 2.4. In 2009 Hart Council commissioned the Conservation Studio to undertake an 'Urban Characterisation and Density Study'. The Key findings are set out in Enclosure 2.
- 2.5 In 2009 the Council undertook a car parking study (through the Stillwell Partnership), which concluded that the present level of provision was adequate for the foreseeable future.
- 2.6 The Vision draws on this quantitative and qualitative evidence and the aims expressed to produce a strategy for positive community involvement and leadership. A plan base is adopted in accordance with national policy advice.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- 3.1 There has been constant public involvement through the work of the Local Strategic Partnership and the commissioning of the Studies. Market research conducted as part of the Retail Capacity Report provided a valuable insight to local views. A two day manned Public Exhibition held in a town centre shop on the 3rd and 4th December 2009 attracted over 500 people. The Exhibition developed possibilities

for key sites and showed how these ideas could be welded into a comprehensive Vision.

- 3.2. The Ideas were canvassed in the Fleet News and Mail of the 13th November 2009; the Exhibition material was transferred to the Harlington Centre until the 31st December and is still available in summary on the Council's web site. Enclosure 3 summarises the responses.
- 3.3. Subsequently in January 2010 a series of meetings was held in the Council Chamber with local traders, voluntary organisations and with young people.
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- 3.4. No alternative emerged as a basis for a comprehensive Vision. There was a clear split between those people arguing for a reactive strategy i.e. for letting the commercial world dictate the future and those supporting a positive strategy to control future development.
- 3.5 All the national evidence referred to supports a positive approach. High Streets across Britain are under threat as the way we live changes. When this is aligned with the needs of an aging population, high mobility of the local population and the investments being made in nearby retail centres the case for community leadership becomes overwhelming.
- 3.6 The results of the public consultation have informed the preparation of a comprehensive Vision. Further consultation will be carried out as part of the ongoing work to produce a Local Development Framework for the District.

THE VISION

The Vision cannot rely on population growth to sustain the viability of the town centre. It must increase the appeal of the town centre to local residents – viability and vitality will only be maintained and improved by increasing footfall and dwell time. The sequential test required by PPS 4 is met by identifying the primary shopping area and improved sustainability results from increased local footfall and improved dwell time contributing to multi-purpose visits.

- 4.1. Fleet has developed from the advent of the railways in the 1860's in a linear fashion. The town centre serves a local population of some 35000 (planned to grow by 6378 between 2001 and 2026) and its size precludes designating separate secondary shopping areas.

Nevertheless the identification of a core retail area and zones in which there will be a stronger emphasis on mixed or residential development is a helpful way of dealing with the flexibility that the changing requirements of the Community's needs requires. Enclosure 4 is a spatial map identifying these zones with insert references to key parts of the Vision.

Retail

- 4.2. The Retail Capacity Assessment makes it clear that the presence of competing Centres partly explains why Hart District experiences significant leakage of both convenience and comparison expenditure. Fleet provides the main offer for comparison goods but is lacking in diversity particularly with regard to the provision of higher value durable goods such as clothing. There is a weakness in the quantum of convenience and comparison floor space that supports local needs. It quantifies the convenience shortfall at around 6,000 square metres (net) in the District up to 2016, the majority of the need being in Fleet. A larger shortfall in comparison retail capacity is potentially identified but this is heavily caveated because of extrapolating from a small base.

- 4.3. These factors contribute significantly to 'the leakage' of spending power to neighbouring towns and other out of town centre shopping opportunities.
- 4.4. The assessment was made in 2005 and therefore consideration has had to be given to its current relevance. It is considered that the convenience shopping conclusions remain robust but the current economic situation has certainly impacted on the comparison shopping offering. A 1600 square metres 'Woolworth' in the Hart Centre has closed and there is considerable evidence that charity and pound shops have weakened the comparison offering. There is no strong demand for space. The conclusion is therefore that in respect of comparison floor space, greater emphasis should be placed on the quality of the 'town centre visit' and a more flexible range of units rather than growth.
- 4.5. In considering future strategy it is also necessary to consider the threat posed by competition from other local shopping opportunities. Principally the availability of large supermarkets with free car parking will pose a continuing threat to the twin objectives of increasing footfall and dwell time, a threat that will not be addressed by one or two new medium size convenience stores in the town centre (as postulated in the Capacity Assessment).
- 4.6. To compete requires a convenience store able to provide a full range of goods. A store with a net sales area of around 5500 square metres would provide this opportunity with a sales area split between 4000 square metres food and 1500 square metres other goods. Square footage of this amount is supported by the Capacity Assessment.
- 4.7. This concept received public support but only on the basis that it involved one of the existing town centre operators. There is considerable merit in this approach, as it would create an opportunity for renewal in a comprehensive strategy whilst removing the case for further out of town centre retail development.

- 4.8. The creation of 5500 sq. metres net floor space within the primary shopping area presents challenges particularly in its impact on the character of the High Street and traffic generation. Yet to fulfil core objectives of increased footfall and dwell time its siting would need to be in the primary shopping area to facilitate multi purpose visits and integration with the Hart Centre. To be a sustainable option it would need to link in with community buildings and public spaces whilst being able to support the night economy through the public use of its car parking.
- 4.9. Considerable effort has been taken to establish whether these criteria can be met. Options were trialled in the December public exhibition but detailed analysis has shown that only one site meets the requirements set out in Para. 4.8. Expansion in the Church Road area would adversely affect both the character of Fleet Road and the housing adjoining the existing car park. Neither this area nor the area in the vicinity of the Fleet Road/Reading Road junction would be large enough to adequately site a store of the proposed size. A store in the vicinity of Victoria Road would be feasible. Figure 1. shows Gurkha Square and the view towards the store.
- 4.10. This site is located in Areas C and D identified in the Urban Characterisation and Density Study (see enclosure 2). Redevelopment would be in accordance with the principles set out for Area C but there is a need to reconcile the comprehensive redevelopment of the site with the findings in respect of Area D. There are seven references in Area D to buildings having merit. None of these are nationally or locally listed and in two cases the buildings lie behind the buildings fronting Fleet Road.
- 4.11. It is necessary to exercise judgement in deciding whether the benefits of meeting a proven shortfall in the convenience shopping offering outweigh the loss of these buildings. In isolation there may be room for differing views but when the benefits to be derived from the comprehensive redevelopment of the area are taken into account it is submitted that there is an overwhelming case for the redevelopment option.

These benefits include:-

- Better integration of the Views into the town centre
- Improved public realm
- Residential development
- Improved town centre vitality and viability
- The removal of buildings having no merit
- Better town access



Fig 1.

4.12. The store would need to be carefully designed, especially on the Fleet Road frontage. It would have a retail sales area of 5500 square metres built at first floor level with two floors of car parking below providing for approx. 430 cars. Rear servicing would be provided (preferably) off Victoria Road and detailed design work would address the building's impact on the street scene. Landscaping between the store and the adjoining residential premises in Victoria Road would be an essential requirement. The store could provide a coffee shop at ground level and a 'knowledge learning' facility possibly in a mezzanine.

4.13. This proposal would address the quantitative shortfall but it remains necessary to address the qualitative issue.

4.14. Reference has already been made to the advantages of working with an existing convenience store operator. In terms of a comprehensive improvement approach to the town centre the siting of Waitrose is key to the economic performance of the Hart Centre whereas relocating the 'Sainsbury' store would create a substantial opportunity to plan that end of the High Street to better effect. The idea of creating a 'lanes' effect to provide some internal depth to the High Street was strongly supported by those attending the December exhibition and incorporated into the proposal as The Walks. The opportunity to adjust the servicing arrangements via Church Road would enhance the status of Church Road, enable some residential development and most importantly create space for a 'hub' (see Para 6&7). Figure 2 illustrates how these ideas would work.



Fig. 2.

- 4.15. The case against large scale increases in the square footage devoted to comparison shopping has already been made. A superstore of the size proposed would increase the area devoted to comparison shopping by 1500 sq.metres (net) but this does not address the issue of diversity identified in the Capacity Assessment. The creation of small 'boutique' shops together with environmental improvements to the High Street will create additional floor space. No attempt has been made to calculate the overall increase in comparison shopping floor space that would result as detailed design work would be required to determine the net addition to floor space that could be provided. Such work would have to achieve the necessary flexibility that independent traders would find appealing. There is a case for extending this principle to the opposite side of the road through the creation of Walks on both sides of the High Street. The introduction of width into a predominantly linear High street would create interest and a 'bookend' to the High Street. The Hart Centre would continue to provide for the larger retailers' requirements and it is important not to conflict with this focus. Turnover rents and a flexible approach to covenant strengths would help reinforce the difference between the management of this floor space and the prime zone 'A' rental values achieved in the Hart Centre and on the High Street frontage.
- 4.16. It is a key objective of the Vision to support a Market. The proposals for better public space will provide an enhanced facility and in the longer term it may be possible through a revised Fleet Access Plan to provide space in the High Street through temporary road closures with core time servicing arrangements.
- 4.17. Fleet Town Centre already supports a strong café and restaurant offering. The continuation of this is important to maintain and develop a mixed economy. Much of the existing investment is concentrated in the vicinity of Gurkha Square and the improvement of this public car free space would greatly improve the ambience of this part of the town. There would be opportunities for outdoor eating and entertainment and better leisure facilities (e.g. a small cinema) could be provided in new public buildings. The new car park that would be provided with the new convenience store would provide good access for night visitors and better public space will enhance the offering.

4.18. The Vision will create a framework for investment and improvement until 2026. It will link with other Council policies and provide a basis for the Council to use its town centre land assets as part of an implementation strategy. Partnerships with the private sector will be vital in creating the confidence to succeed. It is however impossible to predict the impact of lifestyle and demographic changes. Indeed the Capacity Assessment refers to the difficulty of predicting beyond 2016 and calls for a further study nearer that time. It is essential therefore that within the framework created by the Vision there is flexibility to encourage private entrepreneurs to invest. Areas of mixed use have been designated to create this flexibility and the balance between retail, residential, leisure and office space will be determined by the viability of schemes that come forward.

4.19. Community leadership is the key to attracting private investment. This requires a strong planning led framework. The Vision provides this but in order to achieve step change in confidence levels the Council have established that it is viable to implement as a first phase the convenience store and Gurkha Square proposals (see para.6).

THE RETAIL VISION; TO RECTIFY IDENTIFIED QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE DEFICIENCIES BY INTRODUCING A LARGE CONVENIENCE STORE BETWEEN GURKHA SQUARE AND THE HART CENTRE AND REDEVELOPING THE CHURCH ROAD/HIGH STREET AREA TO PROVIDE A HUB AND FLEXIBLE SPACE FOR INDEPENDENT TRADERS

THE PUBLIC REALM

5.1. The linear nature of the High Street has resulted in relatively poor public spaces. The principal open spaces are to be found in Ghurkha Square and the Views.

5.2. A step change in the quality of Gurkha Square could be achieved by removing the cars and visually linking it with the Views. These objectives are supported in the Urban Characterisation and Density Study (enclosure 2)

5.3. The Vision would facilitate this by enabling the vehicles to be removed from the Square. The benefits of a high quality public space providing better café and outdoor refreshment opportunities, a higher profile Market opportunity and stronger visual and access links to the Views are very significant. Indeed early implementation would do much to create the confidence for the public sector/private sector partnerships which will be an essential feature for maintaining and improving the future vitality and viability of the town centre. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate how this could be achieved and illustrate how existing and new community facilities could be integrated.



Fig. 3

5.4. A new library designed in a modern building to provide a wider range of facilities (as recommended by CABI and being implemented in 'discovery centres' in Hampshire) would incorporate a one stop help point giving the public better access to advice and information. A high quality modern building would provide a setting for

the Square and sited between Gurkha Square and the new convenience store would substantially reduce the impact of the latter.

The Harlington Centre would be adapted or rebuilt (depending on viability) to provide cultural and leisure facilities. The extent of these have still to be determined and it will be an early requirement of the new Fleet Town Council and Hart District Council to specify the facilities they wish to see developed. There is the opportunity for a small bespoke cinema (approx. 200 seater) (possibly multi purpose to include a council chamber and multi hall use), youth facilities, meeting rooms etc.



Fig. 4

5.5. The provision of youth facilities, possibly a day centre to serve the needs of an aging population and facilities for voluntary groups will be of the utmost importance in meeting a wide range of community needs. The Vision provides for these to be incorporated in the Harlington Centre or in the new Hub (see para.6). Clearly the resulting plans will be a mixture of built form and management with viability a key. Partnerships between the Health Community, Sentinel Housing Association, and the County, District and Town Councils and the voluntary agencies will be essential and whilst the Vision proposes that more work on these issues is carried out before the final design work is completed, the Vision provides for the spatial requirements of such work to be met.

5.6. Provision has been made for a community policing presence in the new community building.

5.7. The implementation of the Vision will require developer contribution policies to be tailored to establish a clear priority for investment in the town centre.

THE VISION; TO CREATE HIGH QUALITY VEHICLE FREE PUBLIC SPACE AT GURKHA SQUARE VISUALLY LINKED WITH THE VIEWS TO PROVIDE A NEW LIBRARY AND A RANGE OF NEW COMMUNITY AND YOUTH FACILITIES AND TO CREATE LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDING A SMALL CINEMA

RESIDENTIAL

6.1 The introduction of residential development into the town centre is a key part of the Vision. It is highly sustainable, meets the needs of an aging population through good quality apartment design incorporating high quality environmental standards, is a good location for affordable housing and meets national policies for the better use of land through higher density development.

6.2. Distinct strategies are proposed as follows:

- Zone 1 – a principally apartment development with underground parking and taking account of views over the Views. Height is a function of design rather than principle. Development value will be maximised to help secure the Public Realm Vision and the development is unlikely to realise significant levels of affordable housing.
- Zone 2 – this site is well located between the shops and the station and affords a major opportunity to re-develop redundant office buildings whilst improving the appearance of the area. Affordable housing should be concentrated in this Zone. Financial contributions from other residential developments will be required to make such development viable (with the percentage of affordable housing

required on such sites being adjusted to reflect these financial contributions). This policy will be required to meet the existing use values of sites in this Zone which would otherwise frustrate the viability of affordable housing and prevent a substantial percentage of affordable homes for rent being provided. A mixed housing and apartment development is proposed with apartments set back on the Fleet Road frontage.

- Zone 3 – residential on part of the Church Road car park.
- Zone 4 – residential with a substantial element of affordable housing.

6.3. In mixed use zones residential development will be encouraged with a substantial element of affordable housing.

6.4. Without detailed design work an exact number of dwellings have not been calculated but it is envisaged that a minimum of 500 can be relied on to help meet housing need.

THE VISION: TO ENCOURAGE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRE WHERE IT WILL NOT WEAKEN THE PRIMARY SHOPPING AREA

TRANSPORT

7.1. The Fleet Town Access Plan has been prepared to improve access to the town by various modes of transport. The Station is too distant to impact directly on the town centre and cars and buses (hopefully) will provide the principal means of access. The extent to which neighbouring residential development can provide linked foot and cycle access will improve the town's viability and the location of residential development close to the town centre is seen as a particular strength. The Vision will not significantly affect the conclusions reached in the Access Plan work save that the impact of a multi-deck car park and the servicing requirements of the new convenience store will need addressing.

7.2. The Vision does however go further in supporting a Hub to provide facilities for public transport and importantly a drop off point for those operating voluntary

transport schemes. It is envisaged that these schemes will play an increasingly important role in meeting the needs of the aging population whilst providing a lifeline for those with special needs.

7.3. Recent car parking studies have demonstrated that the existing parking provision is satisfactory and the introduction of 430 public spaces in the new convenience store will help cater for population growth.

7.4 The main public parking areas affected by the proposals are Church Road, Victoria Road, Civic Offices, Gurkha Square and Birchayes. These together provide a total of 567 spaces during the day with an additional 63 spaces in the Civic Offices area being available in the evenings and on Saturdays.

The alterations to these arrangements shown in the proposals provide a total of 650 spaces for use during the day, providing an increase of 83 spaces. Late evening and night time use is likely to be reduced to about 450 spaces due to the fact that the basement parking in the proposed large convenience store will not be available during these hours.

Other parking areas that are available for public use, such as at The Hart Centre, off Upper Street, and the Saturday availability of Admiral House and Flagship House, are not affected and remain available as at present.

7.5. It is proposed that the position be the subject of on-going review as development comes forward in the mixed use zones.

7.6. There is a need for a shop mobility scheme.

7.7. The provisions for taxis and disabled parking will be dealt with in the Fleet Access Plan.

7.8. Revised car parking management arrangements should examine moving to a pay on foot strategy to increase dwell time and security.

THE VISION; TO PROVIDE A DROP OFF/COLLECTION POINT IN A NEW HUB

SUSTAINABILITY

8.1. The Vision contains the ideas to make the town centre more attractive to local residents. Importantly this will reduce the length of car journeys. The introduction of residential development will further lessen the need for reliance on cars.

8.2. A mixture of council owned land and the Council's sustainable policies should ensure that the redevelopment achieves a high sustainability rating. An example would be to take the work of the County Council in providing low energy street lighting solutions further by using LEDs where public realm lighting is required.

MANAGEMENT

9.1. The Vision is for the period until 2026. It cannot predict the changes that changing lifestyles will bring or the rate of investment which will depend upon national economic factors. Nevertheless it is a robust Vision and sufficient work has been done to establish that a first phase implementation plan for the new convenience store, the residential development in zone 1 and the new community buildings and pedestrianisation of Gurkha Square is affordable with a public sector/private sector partnership. The Vision therefore proposes this work be completed by 2016. The Vision should then be reviewed and further implementation plans produced.

9.2. The Urban Character Study places importance on maintaining the existing character of the Town Centre. The Vision reflects this as far as possible and where major new development is proposed care will be taken to see that the overall design respects this. It is proposed that a design guide is established to specify design approaches and that a Voluntary Code be established to co-ordinate maintenance work including colour schemes, removal of redundant equipment and street maintenance work.

- 9.3. Good management requires attention to detail and it is not always a function of money. The Vision requires the most effective use of resources and this requires attention to detail and co-ordination with other strategies.
- 9.4. Thus the night time economy is best addressed with the Licensing Management Plan; the management of crime and the perception of crime require a strategy for managing the impact. Mechanisms already exist and can be modified as need arises.
- 9.5. Good management also requires robust intelligence and here the Vision require the public and private sectors to establish a framework to provide comprehensive and current intelligence. The existing town centre management mechanisms and work with existing businesses is with the good car park information a good starting point but more work is required if data is to be turned into timely intelligence to drive performance.
- 9.6. The Council could consider the use of existing resources to provide support and encouragement for new investment whilst making it clearer as to the value placed on existing businesses. Marketing can be very effective in generating confidence.
- 9.7. Above all management is about commitment. If the Vision is to fulfil its potential then this commitment must shine through. The establishment of a new Town Council is an opportunity to be grasped.

THE VISION IS FOR A FRAMEWORK TO DRIVE NEW INVESTMENT AND TO SUSTAIN EXISTING INVESTMENT. IT WILL PROVIDE CLEAR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP BUT ITS SUCCESS WILL DEPEND UPON COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Enclosure 1

A summary of Urban Capacity Assessment Findings - July 2006

The South East Plan identifies a strategic network of town centres in the regions. With regard to the Western Corridor and Blackwater Valley sub-region it aims to focus major new retail development in large centres including Basingstoke but also stresses the importance of sustaining and enhancing small and medium-sized centres. Fleet is the main town centre in Hart District. Hart is situated within the wider catchments of a number of regional and sub-regional centres including Basingstoke, Farnborough, Bracknell, Guildford and Reading. Other significant centres in the locality include Aldershot, Farnham and Camberley. This choice of competing centres partly explains why the District experiences significant leakage of both convenience and comparison expenditure.

Fleet accounts for the majority of the existing retail offer in Hart.

In 2006 the breakdown of its retail offering Floor space (Gross sq.m) was as follows:

Convenience	9130
Comparison	20070
Services	10410
Others	560
Vacant	2880
TOTAL	43050

Little has changed since 2006 except that vacancy rates have increased.

The household survey indicates that local perceptions of Fleet are relatively poor particularly in terms of having a limited range of shops and not displaying specific identities or retail attractions.

Based on the analysis of existing and future retail expenditure patterns the retail capacity assessment considered four scenarios in order to cover all reasonable outcomes during the course of the LDF period.

- No population growth and constant market share
- Moderate population growth and constant market share
- No population growth and increased market share
- Moderate population growth and increased market share

In terms of the levels of additional retail floor space that should be provided, taking into consideration the range of scenarios adopted in the study, the level of existing floor space provision in Hart, and having regard to the existing position of Hart's centres within the sub-regional retail hierarchy, the Consultants consider that it is appropriate for the Council to plan for approximately 6000sqm (net) of additional convenience floor space in the District up to 2016. This should comprise:

- The provision of at least one new medium-sized convenience store in Fleet in the period up to 2016 and subject to on-going monitoring, it may be appropriate for a second medium-sized store to be developed.

With regard to the provision of new comparison floor space, the analysis has shown that there is substantial theoretical capacity in the District. The Consultants consider that the provision of additional comparison floor space in Fleet would bring significant benefits to the town centre and encourage a greater level of vitality and viability. This particularly would be the case if new stores add to the diversity and range of facilities in the centre.

It is important to note that the capacity estimates provided in the Assessment should be subject to ongoing monitoring. Particular emphasis should be given to changes in the stock and quality of floor space in the centres and to changes in household shopping patterns. Given the limitations of forecasting retail need over long periods of time, it is recommended that the LDF should focus initially on the period up to 2016. Retail provision beyond this period should be subject to further monitoring and up-dated information and research.

It is essential that policies aimed at increasing and diversifying the provision of convenience and comparison shops are complemented by other policies which promote the balanced growth of other key town centre uses such as leisure, entertainment, community facilities and residential units. Policies for employment generation will also be needed.

NB

The South East Plan is now to be abolished. The District Council will need to justify the housing figures in its core strategy work but it is concluded safe to rely on population growth being insufficient to warrant a revised approach to the Vision.

Enclosure 2.

Extracts from the Urban Characterisation and Density Study

The study identifies Areas A to F and attributes design Guidance for each Area
The Vision respects the desire of the Study to maintain the overall character of Fleet town centre, a view that received public support in the December Public Exhibition. The Study did not seek to preclude change but sought to identify how this could best be accommodated.

AREAS C AND D are the most relevant to the Vision and the Guidance is set out below.

AREA C

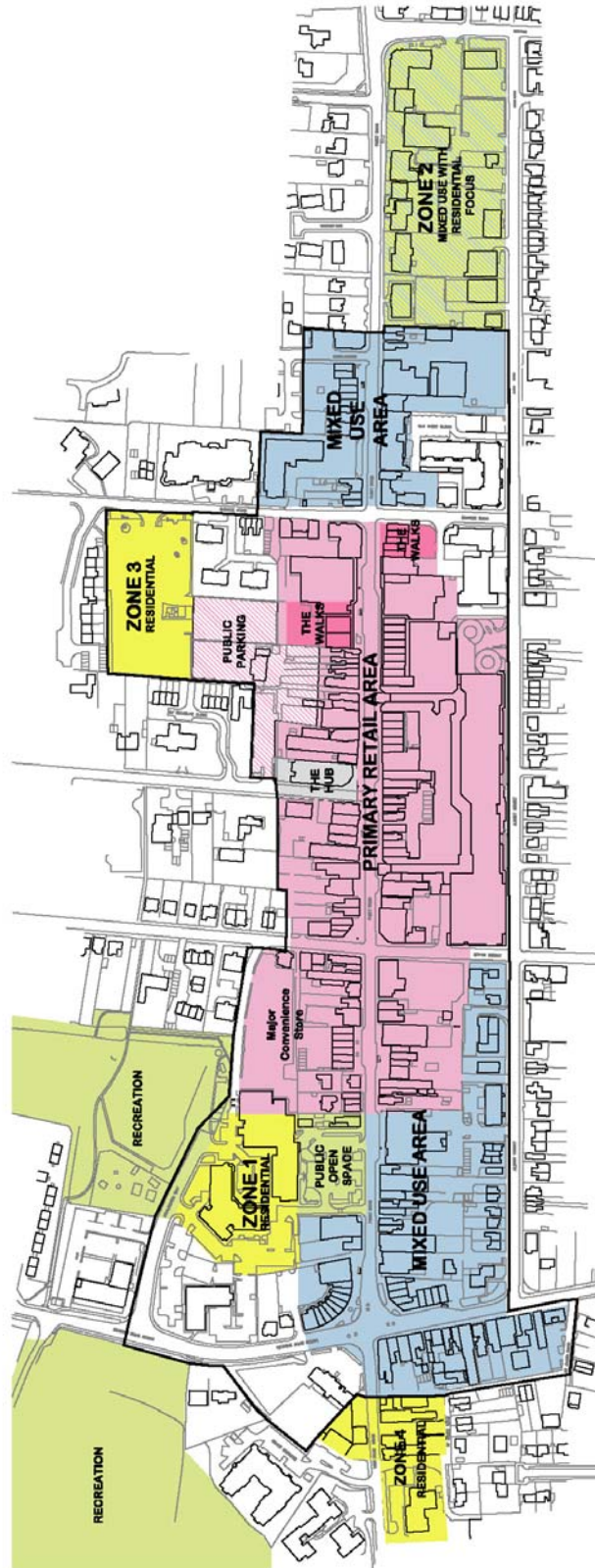
- Significant renewal opportunities exist in these areas
- The redevelopment of identified negative sites would be welcome
- Sites facing Fleet Road, Reading Road North and Harlington Way, have the potential to maximise their sustainability through the development of multiple storeys
- However, sites facing Albert Road should reflect the domestic scale of buildings on the opposite side of the road
- Development on the boundary of the parkland should seek to improve the integration of the park into the town centre

AREA D

- * New development facing Fleet Road will need to be of the highest possible quality where the retention, enhancement and potential reinterpretation of the unique Edwardian character should be a priority, including the enhancement of the locally listed and 'positive ' buildings (as identified on the Town Appraisal Map)
- * Generally, development should either be two or three storeys
- * There are various opportunities for public realm and traffic management improvements

Enclosure 3. See report to Hart Cabinet dated 1st April 2010 “*FLEET VISION EXHIBITION – PUBLIC RESPONSE*” appended to the back of this document.

Enclosure 4 - Spatial Map



CABINET

DATE OF MEETING: 1 APRIL 2010

TITLE OF REPORT: FLEET VISION EXHIBITION – PUBLIC RESPONSE

Report of: Chief Executive

Cabinet Member: Cllr Ken Crookes, Leader of the Council

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To outline to Cabinet the public response to the Fleet Town Centre Vision Exhibition which was held in January 2010

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That the report be noted.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 Members will recall that the Council held a public exhibition about the Fleet Town Centre "Vision" proposals, during January this year.

3.2 Attached as an appendix is a report from the Council's Consultant, Martin Pearson, outlining the results of the exhibition in terms of public responses.

3.3 Work is now in hand to develop the proposals with a view to their inclusion in the "Options" report on the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework, due to go to public consultation in July/August of this year.

3.4 Cabinet is invited to note the report.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. As and when proposals are developed for action, full financial implications will be subject to Cabinet approval.

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REPORT ON PUBLIC RESPONSE TO FLEET VISON EXHIBITION

Project Leader: Martin Pearson

Date: January 2010

1. Introduction

The bald facts are set out in the attached table and graph

The Exhibition was well attended and attracted considerable public interest. Five hundred and seventy people attended during the two days the Exhibition was displayed in the shop unit and whilst we do not have a record of the numbers of people who viewed the display material in the Harlington Centre seventy seven forms were returned in the electoral box. The total number of written representations received was one hundred and forty two. There were six hundred and forty three hits on the Vision for Fleet Council web site and a further two hundred and twenty eight hits on the Virtual Exhibition electronic display. These together generated only eleven responses.

2. Conclusions

Analysis of the one hundred and forty two written responses shows an encouraging majority of comments favouring a pro-active approach to managing change. No alternative vision was put forward although there was support for leaving Fleet Town Centre to its own devices. The inference from these responses is that Fleet will survive better than most towns and a reactive approach to change is all that is required. A majority of the responses however support the need for a managed vision and find the approach put forward acceptable. Indeed although none of the comments support a different approach the degree of support for individual components contained in the ideas put forward varies considerably.

It is possible to distill from the views expressed at the Exhibition and the written observations some particular issues:

1. Unsurprisingly it would seem that the strongest support for "no change" comes from older people whilst the strongest case for a Vision is reflected in the electronic replies.
2. The "affordability" of implementing a Vision and the impact on tax levels were of concern. These worries were reflected on the need to demolish the existing council offices and the Harlington Centre. The desirability of maintaining a central location for the council offices and the need to replace the Harlington Centre will be dependent on the revenue implications and this will require a separate study.
3. There was uncertainty over what a "discovery centre" is although the concept of a better library and more effective joint working between the councils was endorsed.
4. The views on better food shopping were coloured by a lack of clarity as to whether this meant an additional supermarket or better food shopping. The latter involving one of the existing food operators received far stronger support,

5. There was a call for more detail as to the function of the Hub with concerns over experience in adjoining towns where day centres had been closed being quoted
6. The need to distinguish the type of apartments that could form the basis of residential development was a precursor to support; higher value apartments were in general felt to be most appropriate.
7. There was a strong lobby for better management of the existing town facilities including the need to have clearer car parking policies. Shop mobility received strong support.
8. The approach to maintaining the "character" of Fleet was endorsed.
9. Car parking and access to Fleet generated the greatest amount of comment. A separate study of these issues is called for and will in any event follow on from the County Council's Access Plan. There was a need to bring the future role of the Station and access to it, into any visionary work.
10. There were concerns regarding the future of the Hart Centre and the future of the Woolworth site.
11. Management of the "night economy" was raised as an important issue and might well benefit from a separate working party led by the new Town Council.
12. A preferred Vision would need to have a stronger focus on town facilities, particularly for young people. A cinema and bowling alley were among the ideas raised.
13. There were understandably particular worries from people who had direct interests that would be affected by the implementation of the ideas put forward.

It is now for the Council to decide how they wish to proceed. In my experience the reaction of the public to the ideas put forward does support a proactive approach to managing change but it is clear that a considerable amount of work is needed before a preferred Vision could be put forward for consultation

I would suggest that this work should include:

1. A further review of car parking policies
2. Consideration of setting up a night economy working party
3. Asking the embryonic town council to focus on improving standards of maintenance in the town centre. Much of this is about enthusiasm and not money (e.g. colour co-ordinated themes, weed clearance, putting pressure on service companies).
4. Continuing consultation with interested groups and individuals. This is happening and there will be meetings with the Voluntary Organisations, the Access Group, Church Groups and traders by the end of February.
5. Looking for quick wins e.g. Introduction of a shop mobility scheme
6. Publishing work on the economies of developing a new approach to the Council's operations and joint working with the County Council on a replacement Harlington Centre.

The greatest support came for the Ideas for Gurkha Square and the Walks. It is clear that there is consultation fatigue and therefore if the Council is to move towards publishing a

preferred Vision, say in September 2010 (to comply with the core-strategy work) an implementation plan for producing the step-change that a successful scheme would generate is an early requirement. Such a plan would address the revenue implication of the councils operations but would require a private/public sector partnership. I would suggest that this should be in place by August. This is a matter for the council officers to advise on but the involvement of the District Valuer would have the additional benefit of providing invaluable professional advice on the valuation issues implicit in the development of the preferred Vision.

Finally if the Council are minded to take this work further there is a need to keep the public involved in the work being undertaken. This will require monthly press/web statements and continued work with directly interested parties.

I am encouraged by the interest shown by the public and firmly believe that we have stimulated the public's interest. The degree of support at this early stage is also encouraging and the work I have suggested will provide a good basis for more informed debate in the coming months,

Martin Pearson
Project Leader for Denning Maile and Polisano

	SUPPORTIVE				AGAINST		
	VERY GOOD	GOOD	SATISFACTORY	TOTAL	NOT VERY GOOD	POOR	TOTAL
1. What do you think of the overall vision for Fleet?	11	30	27	68	15	23	38
2. What do you think about the suggestions for The Views?	13	28	27	68	28	21	49
3. What do you think about the suggestions for The Walks?	20	45	20	85	10	18	28
4. What do you think about the suggestions for The Hubs?	14	35	21	70	22	31	53
5. What do you think about the suggestions for Gurkha Square?	23	34	15	72	23	30	53
6. What do you think about the suggestions for the provision of enhanced food shopping?	18	26	25	69	27	41	68
7. <u>TOTAL</u>	99	198	135	432	125	164	289

