

Amendments to the Town Centre Policies within the Fleet Neighbourhood Plan, following further feedback from Hart District Council

Land Use Planning Policies

Land Use Policies

2.13 Land use policies are used to determine planning applications. They can be used as the basis for retaining or changing the use of land and set the conditions against which development proposals will be judged.

2.14 The purpose is to either encourage planning applications to be made for things the local community will support or to discourage applications for developments that they will not support. Policies must be clearly written so they can be easily applied when considering planning applications.

2.15 Our Neighbourhood Plan avoids repeating existing national or local planning policies and focuses on a relatively small number of key development issues in the area.

Policy Issues

2.16 Consultation with the community raised a number of issues for the Neighbourhood Plan to address:

- How can the Plan assist the long term viability and vibrancy of the town centre?
- Can the Plan deliver the town centre regeneration that the community seek?
- Can the Plan help secure community benefits as a result of this regeneration?
- What town centre development plans will be supported by the local community?
- How can the Plan control design management within the area to maintain the character of the town that residents value?
- How can the Plan assist with the provision of a safe network of footpaths and cycle ways within Fleet?
- How can the Plan protect the green character and open spaces in our area?

2.17 The Pre-Submission consultation took account of the views of the community and others on how to address these issues. This Submission Plan includes amendments to policies as a result of an extensive consultation.

What the Town Centre policies are seeking to achieve and how they align

2.18 The Fleet Town Centre policies, which cover the area shown on the Policies Map, support the development of retail, social, cultural and civic uses, including the creation of a new 'Civic Quarter' and the management of the mix of uses within the town centre, through consultation and agreement with the business community.

2.19 In its Saved Local Plan Policy F1, Hart District Council outlines the commitment "to support Fleet's position as the District's principal shopping centre by concentrating principal retail uses along Fleet Road, encouraging a mix of uses in order to maintain the centre's vitality and securing environmental quality. Where appropriate, landscaping schemes will be encouraged in association with new developments in order to enhance the attractiveness of the town centre". Policy

ED5 of HLPSS also outlines the commitment to Fleet Town Centre; "Fleet town centre will be the main focus for future town centre development in the District." Within that context, our Neighbourhood Plan identifies the areas that are available to make a difference to our town.

2.20 The town centre policies within the Plan have the following objectives:

- To promote the vitality and vibrancy of Fleet Town Centre
- To enhance accessibility and improve the public realm within the town centre
- To create a modern and vibrant "Civic Quarter" which forms a hub for civic functions, entertainment, recreation and leisure activities
- To improve the green and urban environment

2.21 The Plan sets out to manage the design features for all development within the town centre area and to identify any areas which will add to its vitality and vibrancy. To best describe this, the town has been defined within the following areas:

- Social and Community Zone
 - Civic Quarter – Zone 1a (the catalyst for future development)
 - Future expansion zones – Zones 1b – 1d
 - Leisure and Night time economy – Zone 2
- Core Shopping Zone
 - Area between Church Road & Victoria Road/Upper Street and area between Church Road & 151 Fleet Road – Zone 3
- Other areas
 - Residential – Zone 4
 - Land at Albert Street – Zone 5
 - Fleet Road public realm – Zone 6

as illustrated by the policies maps below:

The major opportunity for change

2.22 The major opportunity for change lies in the creation of the new Civic Quarter. The town centre policies provide a framework to deliver this change whilst acknowledging that areas of land will come forward within different timeframes. The framework provides the flexibility to deliver the overall vision for this area of the town centre as part of the planning process.

2.23 It is worth noting that, in 2009, Hart District Council in its "Vision for Fleet Town Centre" also outlined plans for the strategic redevelopment of this area of the town but the withdrawal of a major supermarket as a potential development partner left the project in abeyance at that time. The Neighbourhood Plan provides the driver to take this vision forward.

2.24 The importance of the development of the Civic Quarter was further recognised by the community as part of the 2013 Fleet Town Plan consultation which recommended that:

“the land centred on the Civic Offices, The Harlington, library, and Gurkha Square should be redeveloped for mixed use which might include residential, commercial, community, entertainment and cultural activities, whilst preserving a link to a town square and The Views”.

2.25 Policy 1 (Zone 1a) is therefore the core policy which will drive the overall vision for this new community area. It can be applied on a standalone basis to deliver the principal objectives for the creation of the new Civic Quarter and provides the catalyst for the development of the adjoining areas (Zones 1b – d)

2.26 The area of land within Zone 1a is owned by the three local authorities (Hampshire County Council, Hart District Council and Fleet Town Council) and, since it is in restricted land ownership, its development is deliverable within the plan period. The first action will be to move forward with a comprehensive development plan agreed by the three parties.

2.27 Policy 2 covers the neighbouring/adjacent areas (Zones 1b – d) which are in multiple ownership and have the potential to come forward as part of longer term regeneration over, or beyond, the plan period. Whilst, this ownership makes land assembly more difficult, it is important that the development of all the land within Zones 1b –d are seen within the context of the overall vision. It is anticipated that the development of the Civic Quarter will provide the stimulus for this further development but, if Zones 1b – d are developed before Zone 1a, Policies 1 and 2 will provide the strategic framework that ensures that the overall vision is respected.

Maps

1.1 Policy 1 – Fleet Civic Quarter (Zone 1a)

Development proposals within Zone 1a will be supported where:

- 1. They are consistent with a comprehensive regeneration plan for the whole site**
- 2. They will not result in an overall loss of public parking provision within the town centre**
- 3. Building uses and layout have regard to the general design principles set out in Policy 10 and are designed to provide positive enclosure and oversight of the public realm with active frontages which contribute to the vibrancy of the area**
- 4. Development proposals that provide for the following uses will be supported:**
 - 1. a performance/community facility**
 - 2. a library**
 - 3. facilities to accommodate Hart District Council and Fleet Town Council civic functions**
 - 4. a pedestrianised public space connecting to the high street**

Departure from this will only be supported where:

- 1. The non-customer facing services can be practically and more economically provided elsewhere or**
- 2. The existing premises/uses are no longer required**

5. *Alternative town centre uses will be supported where it can be demonstrated that they support the vitality of the town centre, and are justified to ensure the viable redevelopment of the site*

2.28 This area includes the Hart District Council offices, The Harlington and the Fleet Library buildings. It also includes two public car parks, Gurkha Square and Victoria Road.

2.29 As detailed in “The major opportunity for change” above, it has the greatest opportunity to make significant improvements to the town centre. Its scale and depth offers an opportunity to create a vibrant community space that will provide a focus for the cultural and social activities of the town and, in so doing, contribute to the success and ongoing resilience of the town centre.

2.30 Fleet Town Council is already investigating the replacement for the existing Harlington building. The intention is to provide improved facilities for a theatre/cinema/performance space and a variety of other community activities. Discussions have already started with Hart District Council and Hampshire County Council and in consultation with the local community.

2.31 The opportunity to create the Civic Quarter will be through collaboration between Hart District Council, Hampshire County Council and Fleet Town Council. Hart District Council own and currently occupy the Civic Offices adjacent to Harlington Way as well as the Gurkha Square and Victoria Road public car parks Fleet Town Council own the land occupied by the War Memorial in Gurkha Square and that portion of Harlington Way that lies within Zone 1a. Hampshire County Council own the land and building forming Fleet Library immediately adjacent to Gurkha Square. The Harlington, which includes a performance space and accommodates a number of community uses, is owned by Hart District Council and managed by Fleet Town Council.

2.32 The Harlington is in need of refurbishment or replacement and its future has been the subject of consultation with the local community. A planning application was submitted by Fleet Town Council to build a new Harlington on Gurkha Square but this has subsequently been withdrawn after the results of a second public consultation with the people of Fleet in October 2018. The consultation showed that, whilst people wished to see improvements to The Harlington, they wanted these to be set within the context of the wider regeneration of this Zone and wished the local authorities to work together to deliver these improvements.

2.33 This policy, therefore, retains the community facilities (a performance centre/facility and District and Town Council functions) as part of a comprehensive regeneration plan designed to improve this area as a vital part of the town's economic sustainability and long term vibrancy.

2.34 The Policy supports uses that may be required to contribute to the redevelopment of the site including; continued residential, retail, commercial and office uses, provided they meet the objectives set out in this policy.

2.35 It supports Hart District Council's Local Plan Saved Policy F1 which outlines a commitment to encourage “a mix of uses in order to maintain the centre's vitality and securing environmental quality” adding that “where appropriate landscaping schemes will be encouraged in association with new developments in order to enhance the attractiveness of the town centre”. It also supports draft Policies ED4

and ED5 of HLPSS. This approach is entirely in line with the Grimsey Review 2 (July 2018) conclusions which highlight the need to reshape town centres into community hubs which incorporate health, housing, arts, education, entertainment, leisure, business/office space, as well as some shops, while developing a unique selling proposition.

Policy 2 - Land between Victoria Road & Gurkha Square (Zone 1b)

The development of the land fronting onto Fleet Road between Victoria Road and Gurkha Square, as identified in the Zone 1 Policies Areas map (page 23), for suitable town centre uses will be supported.

2.36 This area lies along Fleet Road between its junction with Victoria Road and Gurkha Square. It is in multiple ownership which may prevent it coming forward as a single development within the plan period. It currently has an active commercial street frontage that contributes to the high street and some buildings of architectural interest which this policy seeks to sustain or enhance. This policy will support parts or all of this land coming forward in conjunction with Policy 1.

2.37 The rear areas of the properties within this Zone are mainly given over to parking and service uses which may detract from the character of the new Civic Quarter as set out in Policy 1. It is anticipated, however, that the redevelopment of this area is only realistic if the development of the new Civic Quarter provides the catalyst for regeneration of the town centre. This will create additional commercial value within these rear areas which in turn will provide a commercial incentive for their redevelopment,

1.2 Policy 3 - Land on the corner of Reading Road North & Fleet Road (Zone 1c)

The comprehensive redevelopment of land on the junction of Reading Road North and Fleet Road, as identified as Zone 1c on the policies area map (Page 23), will be supported provided that:

- 1. the built form, massing and scale create a strong corner that contributes to the function of this area as key gateway to the town (up to a maximum of four storeys for new development);***
- 2. town centre uses are proposed which include retail at ground level (predominantly A1 and A2) with residential or commercial above;***
- 3. layout improves pedestrian access and connections to the town centre, with consideration given to traffic flow and safe pedestrian crossings at road junctions***

2.38 This land forms a part of, and is recognised as, a key gateway to the town centre by Hart District Council in the Fleet Legibility and Movement Map¹. The redevelopment of this site could provide significant improvements to the character and quality of this gateway and contribute to the appearance, vitality and activity of the Civic Quarter and the town. As with Zone 1b the land is in multiple ownership, which may prevent it coming forward as a single development.

¹(https://www.hart.gov.uk/sites/default/files/4_The_Council/Policies_and_published_documents/Planning_policy/UCDS_Fleet_Legibility_and_Movement_Map%20-%202010.pdf)

2.39 The main building mass that forms the junction of Reading Road North and Fleet Road is a three storey curved block with retail uses at ground level and residential and commercial above. The building line is set back from the street edge creating a wider street and landscaping. Both the buildings and the public realm have scope for improvement and the potential to increase access to the Civic Quarter by opening up routes and vistas at ground level and above. Building scale in this location could be increased to create a stronger gateway and such development would be supported.

2.40 As with Policy 2, the rear areas of the properties within this block are mainly given over to parking and service uses which may detract from the creation of the new Civic Quarter. Again, it is anticipated that the regeneration set out in Policy 1 will provide a commercial incentive for the redevelopment of these service areas, providing that suitable alternative service arrangements are provided.

2.41 This area has greater potential than the Policy 2 area for a more comprehensive redevelopment that utilises the full depth of the site.

1.3 Policy 4 - Land off Harlington Way (Zone 1d)

Redevelopment of the two land parcels either side of the Harlington Way junction with Reading Road North as identified on the policy map will be supported provided that:

- 1. The built form, scale and massing create an appropriate gateway to the Civic Quarter and a positive relationship to the Campbell Place Extra Care housing,***
- 2. Layout and uses contribute to the commercial, civic and cultural activities of the town centre,***
- 3. Existing landscape and trees which contribute to the setting are retained, and***
- 4. Active frontages are created to provide surveillance of the footpath/cycleway link from The Views to Calthorpe Park***

Subject to being in compliance with HLPSS Policies ED4 and ED5, retail at ground floor level (predominately A1 and A2 with residential or commercial above) will be supported.

2.42 The area of land on either side of the Harlington Way junction with Reading Road North is currently occupied by two large office buildings, one of which is currently for sale and may result in its conversion to residential flats.

2.43 This Policy seeks to develop the two areas on either side of the Harlington Way so that they contribute to the formation of an appropriate gateway to the new Civic Quarter as part of the regeneration of Zone 1.

2.44 This policy supports business (B1) use and residential

Policy 5 - Leisure and Night Time Economy - Fleet Road between Upper Street & the Oatsheaf crossroads (Zone 2)

Proposals for development within Use Classes A1 – A5 or uses within Class C1, D2 and D3 will be permitted. The loss of ground floor A1 – A5 uses will not be supported

2.45 This Policy is intended to complement the proposals for the Civic Quarter and covers the area of Fleet Road between the Upper Street junction and the Oatsheaf crossroads and is a combination of traditional buildings with a building line along the pavement edge and parades that are set back from the kerbside. The architectural

character is a mix of late 19th and early 20th century styles with brick and slate, terrace and gable frontages. There is interest in building a hotel in this area which could have a positive impact in terms of character and activity.

2.46 This area provides a number of food and drink outlets serving the night time economy, as well as small businesses. As the night time economy is an expanding and important part of the Town, a leisure offer that consists of a broad range of restaurants, cafes and cultural/recreational activities, together with opportunities to widen the evening offer, will be supported in this area.

2.47 This zone adjoins the Civic Quarter and should, therefore, be considered alongside the development of that area. Opportunities to provide “shared space” or “raised table” on Fleet Road within this area will be supported subject to appropriate traffic studies, equalities impact assessment, and acceptance by the Local Highways Authority, to provide pedestrian friendly entry to the Civic Quarter with gateway treatment at key locations.

2.48 Development and changes of use will be supported where they introduce A1 (shops), A3 (restaurants and cafes), A4 (drinking establishments) and A5 (hot food outlets). Offices and residential uses at first floor level will also be supported. High quality environmental enhancements in the form of paving, street furniture, street trees, landscaping and lighting, improved pedestrian and cycle access and the incorporation of street art as an intrinsic part of such improvements will be supported.

Policy 6 – The Core Shopping Zone – from 151 Fleet Road on the South East side of Fleet Road and 78 Fleet Road on the North West side of Fleet Road and extending to the junction of Fleet Road with Upper Street & Victoria Road- (Zone 3)

Proposals for development in the core shopping zone will be supported provided that:

- 1. They are in conformity with other statutory, Local and Neighbourhood Plan policies***
- 2. They do not harm the character of the zone; are for main town centre uses that retain or provide an active frontage; have no significant adverse impact on surrounding amenities (noise, odour, waste collection, highways and parking); and enhance the character of the street scene***
- 3. There is no loss of an existing shop front of Heritage and Townscape Value identified in Policy 12,***
- 4. the design of the shop front or signage is in keeping with the character of the building and its surrounding shop frontages; and***
- 5. access to upper floors is preserved where this already exists***
- 6. They are in conformity with HLPSS Policies ED4 and ED5***
- 7. Development of the vacant land to the South East of Church Road carpark that contributes to the growth of this zone will be supported, so long as it respects the setting of the Grade II* listed Church in Church Road***

Proposals for uses outside A1-5 or C1, D1 and D2, will not be supported unless they provide sufficient on-site parking to meet Hart District Council's Parking Guidance.

2.49 This Policy centres on the Fleet Road from number 151 Fleet Road (currently the 'Tackle Up' outdoor activity shop) on the South East side of the Fleet Road and 78 Fleet Road (currently the 'Majestic Wines' store) on the North West side and stretching to the Victoria Road/Upper Street junction of Fleet Road. It is where the major convenience and comparison stores are located, including the Hart Shopping Centre. As all the properties are in private ownership, development within this area will be brought forward through private sector investment.

2.50 The Zone comprises both independent and well-known high street stores at ground level, with office and residential accommodation above. It provides access to the Hart Shopping Centre indoor shopping mall and management offices. Development supported in this area includes new retail opportunities with business and residential accommodation above.

2.51 There is one large vacant plot of land (map below in blue) to the south east of Church Road car park (known locally as "The Shed"). This area is accessible (currently for pedestrians) from Fleet Road and also potentially for vehicles via the Branksomewood Road car park. The use of this area for a small shopping mall or other use that will expand the primary shopping area will be supported.

2.51 In line with Hart District Council's Retail Town Centre and Leisure Study (2015), prepared by Nathaniel Lichfield, this Policy seeks to complement the retail offer with a range of services and leisure uses consistent with the scale and function of the centre

2.52 Changes of use in conformity with HLPSS Policies ED4 and ED5 will be supported

2.53 Whilst recognising the importance to the vibrancy and sustainability of the area of promoting retail use (class A1-A5) over non-retail use, the policy supports a balance of class A1 –A5 within the Core Shopping Zone in order to avoid the proliferation of class A5 outlets (takeaways), which could be detrimental to both public health and town centre vitality.

2.54 Fleet town centre continues to experience difficulties associated with development that is not supported by sufficient parking provision that takes account of current travel requirements and car ownership. Whilst not seeking to encourage unsustainable modes of travel, the intention of this policy is to ensure that any new development, either commercial or residential, is designed to cope with likely car ownership, avoids potential safety issues with parking on pavements and junctions and addresses adverse impacts on the local highway network.

No changes to Policies 7 & 8

Policy 9 – Fleet Road Public Realm policy (Zone 6)

Development and redevelopment of the public realm within Fleet Town Centre will be supported provided that it:

- 1. improves the movement of pedestrians and cyclists around the town centre;**
- 2. promotes sustainable travel to the railway station;**
- 3. improves pavements, signage and street furniture;**
- 4. 'Greens' Fleet Road by the addition of street trees and soft landscaping as well as Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) where appropriate; and**
- 5. fosters active frontages such as shop or office windows and doors at ground level; and,**

Proposals for the creation of "shared space" or a "raised table" on Fleet Road to enhance the setting of Gurkha Square will be supported, subject to appropriate traffic studies, equalities impact assessment, and acceptance by the Local Highways Authority