

Bassetlaw District Council Response to Inspectors Matters, Issues and Questions

Matter 9 – Visitor Economy and Retail & Town Centres

4 November 2022

(Issue 9)

Please note: Where the Council is proposing changes to policies or reasoned justification in the submitted plan these are detailed in the responses as follows:

- Additional and new text proposed underlined
- ~~Deleted text~~ proposed strike through

(Policies ST12 – 14)

Issue 9 – Does the Plan set out a positively prepared strategy and policies for retailing and town centres and the visitor economy which is justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

- 9.1 Would Policy ST12 be effective in supporting tourism development whilst protecting the built and natural environment?

BDC Response:

The policy provides an appropriate framework to consider tourism development: it supports the location of new facilities in accordance with the sequential approach for main town centre uses in accordance with Policy ST13. Policy ST12 also sets out the circumstances whereby such development in rural areas will be supported. It is considered that Part 3c) makes reference to impact on biodiversity and heritage.

The Plan is clear that when considering proposals the provisions of all relevant policies will be applied. This will ensure that the built and natural environment are protected.

As such, this policy in combination with other strategic policies is considered to be effective in that it supports tourism development whilst appropriately protecting the built environment and biodiversity.

- 9.2 a) Is the retail hierarchy defined in ST13 justified and consistent with national policy?

BDC Response:

In accordance with the NPPF (Paragraph 86a), Policy ST13 defines a network and hierarchy of town centres and local centres across Bassetlaw. The centres fulfil an important role in meeting not only the shopping needs, but the cultural and leisure requirements of the residents of the area. Policy ST13 therefore seeks to protect the established retail hierarchy of the District.

The retail hierarchy as set out within Policy ST13 derives from the Bassetlaw Retail and Leisure Study [SS-015]. The terminology applied to the retail hierarchy within Policy ST13 has effectively streamlined the evidence base approach to ensure that it is consistent with the Local Plan's vision and objectives, Spatial Strategy (Policy ST1), and the NPPF.

It reinforces the principle that the town centres of Worksop, Retford and Harworth & Bircotes will be the principal locations for major retail, leisure, entertainment, cultural facilities and community services over the Plan period.

It should be noted that whilst the Bassetlaw Retail and Leisure Study [SS-015] proposes a town centre boundary for Tuxford, paragraph 9.26 [of SS-015] recognises

that it functions as a local centre, in that, it provides a smaller concentration of retail and leisure activity which are more of local value. Annual monitoring for the AMR confirms this is still the case. Additionally the vision and objectives, spatial strategy and distribution of growth positions Tuxford as a 'Large Rural Settlement'. As such the Local Plan proposes to classify Tuxford as Local Centre to be in line with the definition of Town Centres set out in Annex 2 of the NPPF and its role within the Local Plan.

The Bassetlaw Retail and Leisure Study [SS-015] also identified Large Local Centres and Small Local Centres as supporting a smaller range of everyday shops and services for a local catchment. Annual monitoring for the AMR confirms that all listed within Policy ST13 continue to maintain that role and function. To ensure consistency with the NPPF and to reflect the ongoing role and function of these centres, it is considered justified that these are classified as Local Centres within the Plan.

The retail hierarchy as set out in policy ST13 is considered to be justified and clear.

b) Are the boundaries for the town centres and primary shopping areas justified and will they be effective?

BDC Response:

The town centre and primary shopping area boundaries were reviewed as part of the Bassetlaw Retail and Leisure Study [SS-015]. The findings are set out in paragraphs 9.67 – 9.79 of the study. Appendix FI [of SS-015] provides the recommendations for the boundaries in Worksop, Retford, Harworth & Bircotes and Tuxford. As part of this review, the boundaries for Worksop was contracted, the boundary for Harworth & Bircotes was extended, and the boundaries for Retford and Tuxford were considered appropriate.

The boundaries are also reviewed annually as part of the Council's Authority Monitoring Report (AMR). Annual monitoring in 2020 - 2021 (as confirmed in paragraph 6.7.6 of [BG-004]) identified changes to the Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area boundaries in all 3 towns. The AMR is an important tool to enable comparison of year on year changes in the town centre and the primary shopping area (as the focus of retail). It helps ensure that the primary purpose of town centres and primary shopping areas, as defined by national policy, is maintained, and the future management is justified and effective. It also helps inform future reviews of the boundaries.

The 2020-2021 AMR (paragraph 3.29) confirms that "The Bassetlaw Retail and Leisure Study 2017 strengthened the Primary Shopping Areas by accepting the changing nature of more peripheral retail units and redefining their boundaries". Paragraph 3.34 goes on to say "The emerging Local Plan provides an opportunity to better understand these issues and should consider whether the town centre boundaries remain fit for purpose, and what opportunities regeneration of town centres can bring to promoting positive use in the future".

As such, through the plan-making process, the Council considered and consulted on the Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area boundaries, which are considered to positively enhance vitality and viability within the town centres.

It is the Council's view that the defined boundaries within the Plan are justified and effective (as demonstrated by the most recent AMR), and will remain so, post adoption of the Local Plan.

c) Is there convincing justification for the thresholds for retail impact assessments set out in ST13(8)?

BDC Response:

The thresholds for retail impact assessments are set out as a clear recommendation within the Bassetlaw Retail and Leisure Study [SS-015] (as per Paragraph 9.64). The justification for the thresholds are set out in Paragraphs 9.53 – 9.66 of the study.

The thresholds have taken account of the average size of units where floorspace figures are available, existing trading patterns of the centres, convenience and comparison goods spending, consolidation plans (in the Priory Shopping Centre in Worksop) and capacity for new convenience and comparison floorspace.

The Council acknowledges that thresholds have also been applied to Local Centres as recommended in the Bassetlaw Retail and Leisure Study [SS-015]. Whilst this is not a direct requirement set out in the NPPF, the Council considers that the thresholds applied are necessary as the centres are equally vulnerable to convenience, non-bulky and bulky comparison growth given the lack of capacity for any new retail development and the consistently strong performance of edge-of-centre and out-of-centre facilities across the District (paragraph 9.63 [of SS-015]). Additionally, this approach is considered necessary to protect both local shops and services in the more rural locations which are vital for sustainable economic growth in Bassetlaw (as per paragraph 84 of the NPPF).

It is further noted that this approach has not been challenged through representations received as part of the emerging Local Plan.

The Council considers that the thresholds for retail impact assessments set out in Policy ST13 (8) to be justified.

d) Is the approach to changes of use and loss of premises used as a local shop in ST13(10) justified and consistent with national policy?

BDC Response:

Criteria 10(a) will ensure that the loss of a unit does not result in inadequate local provision in the area. Criteria 10(b) (with modification) which requires open marketing for a period of 6 months is considered to provide enough time to demonstrate that there is no local demand or market interest in the unit, and as such the change of use can be permitted if appropriate.

Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (c) states that planning policies should “guard against unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the communities ability to meet its day-to-day needs”.

As such, the Council considers that the approach set out within ST13 (10) to be justified and consistent with national policy.

e) Are the proposed main modifications to the Policy and supporting text necessary for soundness?

BDC Response:

The justification for proposed modification associated with Policy ST13 were in response to representations received from ID Planning following consultation of the publication version of the local plan, for clarification purposes and to strengthen consistency with national planning policy. Therefore it is considered these changes are justified in order to produce an effective local plan and the modifications are necessary to enhance soundness.

- 9.3 a) Would the framework in ST14 be effective in supporting the vitality and viability of main town centres? Is it consistent with national policy?

BDC Response:

Policy ST14 supports appropriate uses, (particularly evening and weekend) that will increase footfall, promote longer stays, passing trade and increase expenditure which in turn will improve the quality, vitality and vibrancy of Bassetlaw's town centres.

The policy aims to direct most retail development to the primary shopping areas in order to retain the existing retail function within easy walking distance, maintain vitality and viability, avoid the area being diluted by too many non-retail uses and contribute to stronger town centres. It also ensures that other main town centre uses such as leisure, office and secondary shopping take place within the wider town centre boundary and complement the retail focus within the primary shopping area.

The NPPF (paragraph 86) requires planning policies to define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability by allowing them to grow and diversify quickly, as part of a positive strategy for the future of each centre. It is the Council's view that the individual approaches to each town centre as set out in Policy ST14, which builds on a range of emerging delivery tools and their evidence bases, will ensure that Policy ST14 is effective in promoting long-term vitality and viability, and thus are in-line with national policy.

The expansion proposed at Harworth & Bircotes town centre adjoins the current town centre boundary. As such, the approach in Policy ST14 is justified in that it aligns with paragraph 9.64 of the Bassetlaw Retail and Leisure Study [SS-015] and is consistent with the NPPF paragraph 86e) which supports the allocation of appropriate edge of centre sites that are well connected to the town centre.

- b) Are the proposed main modifications necessary for soundness?

BDC Response:

The Council considers the changes proposed as part of ST14 are not necessary for soundness but help to strengthen the implementation effectiveness of the policy. The changes proposed to criterion 1(a) clarify the approach taken. The changes proposed to criterion 4(b) are in relation to a grammatical error.