

# BOROUGH PLAN BACKGROUND PAPER: Hierarchy Of Centre

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Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council

2015



Introduction.....	3
National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012).....	3
Determining the hierarchy of centres.....	5
Nuneaton & Bedworth Town Centres Study (June 2011).....	6
Convenience Retail Study (June 2011).....	7
Local Shopping Study (March 2012).....	7
Conclusion.....	8
Why set a threshold for accessing District and Local Centres.....	8

## Introduction

The purpose of this technical paper is to draw together the key datasets/information that has been used in developing the Hierarchy of Centre policy. The technical paper provides the detail behind the development of the policy and is used to help justify the elements included within the policy. It also explains why there are omissions within the policy.

## National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out a number of requirements for Local Plan making, in relation to the town centres growth. The following requirements have been identified and it is considered, as detailed by this technical paper, the requirements have been met.

Part 2 'Ensuring the vitality of town centres' states that planning policies should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period. In addition paragraph 161 of the NPPF sets out requirements around retail matters. The table below depicts the key requirements from the NPPF along with a brief summary as to how these matters have been achieved within the Policy. There are a number of cross over's with Nature of Town Centre growth policy.

NPPF requirement	How policy development meets requirement
Recognise town centres as the heart of their communities and pursue policies to support their viability and vitality.	The policy sets out a hierarchy of centres in order of priority. The aim is to ensure that Nuneaton and Bedworth are the 'hearts' of the Borough from a town centre use perspective. To enable this a set of appropriate uses have been identified within each centre to ensure any future applications seek to locate those particular uses within the designated Centres.
Promote competitive town centres that provide customer choice and a diverse retail offer which reflect the individuality of town centres.	This is predominantly dealt with through the Nature of Town Centre growth policy. However this policy does include a set of appropriate uses and defines the function of the Centre to ensure that these remain competitive.
Retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones, ensuring that markets remain attractive and competitive.	The markets are considered to be anchors within both Centres and as such there are no proposals, at this stage to make policy recommendations regarding the markets.
Allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail,	This is dealt with through the Nature of Town Centre growth policy.

NPPF requirement	How policy development meets requirement
<p>leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community and residential development needed in town centres. It is important that needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses are met in full and are not compromised by limited site availability. Local planning authorities should therefore undertake an assessment of the need to expand town centres to ensure a sufficient supply of suitable sites.</p>	
<p>Allocate appropriate edge of centre sites for main town centre uses that are well connected to the town centre where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available. If sufficient edge of centre sites cannot be identified, set policies for meeting the identified needs in other accessible locations that are well connected to the town centre.</p>	<p>The purpose of this policy is to outline appropriate uses within each centre. It is intended that if a Town Centre could not accommodate necessary growth, that the hierarchy would be the first port of call for identifying other potential locations. The policy also defines the primary shopping frontage, and the Nature of Town Centre growth policy does identify proposals outside of this area of Nuneaton. In relation to Bedworth, the proposals go beyond the identified primary shopping area.</p>
<p>Set policies for the consideration of proposals for main town centres uses which cannot be accommodated in or adjacent to town centres.</p>	<p>The policy approach is to follow the requirements of the NPPF paragraph 26 which states:</p> <p>“When assessing applications for retail, leisure and office development outside of town centres, which are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan, local planning authorities should require an impact assessment if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold (if there is no locally set threshold, the default threshold is 2,500 sq m). This should include assessment of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal; and</li> <li>• The impact of the proposal on town centre vitality and</li> </ul>

NPPF requirement	How policy development meets requirement
	<p>viability, including local consumer choice and trade in the town centre and wider area, up to five years from the time the application is made. For major schemes where the full impact will not be realised in five years, the impact should also be assessed up to ten years from the time the application is made.</p> <p>In addition it is proposed within the Borough Plan that the Hierarchy of Centres be maintained and this should be the basis for directing non Town Centre development. The Hierarchy policy outlines the characteristics of a District or local Centre. Therefore if any new Centres were put forward during the Plan period policy ECON 4 would help to determine their suitable make up.</p> <p>At this stage no evidence has come forward that a lower threshold for impact assessments should be set.</p>
Where town centres are in decline, local planning authorities should plan positively for their future to encourage economic activity.	This is dealt with through the Nature of Town Centre growth policy.
Use evidence base to identify the role and function of town centres and the relationship between them, including and trends in the performance of centres.	The overall aim of the policy is to achieve this requirement. Based on evidence, specifically the Local Centres study, Convenience study and Town Centre study, a hierarchy has been developed. This hierarchy identifies the function of each centre as well as appropriate uses.

### Determining the hierarchy of centres

This section of the technical paper provides further detail regarding the determination of a hierarchy, and expands upon the explanation provided in relation to the NPPF. This work around developing a hierarchy has been informed by the Nuneaton & Bedworth Town Centres Study (June 2011) and the Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Local Shopping Study (March 2012).

Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth, although now superseded by the NPPF, provided guidance on defining a hierarchy of centres

that is considered still to be of relevance and therefore have been used to develop a hierarchy of centres for the Borough Plan. The definitions set out in PPS4 are as follows:

- A network of centres is defined as the pattern of provision of centres and a hierarchy the role and relationship of centres in the network.
- City centres are the highest level of centre. In terms of hierarchies, they will often be a regional centre and will serve a wide catchment. The centre may be very large, embracing a wide range of activities and may be distinguished by areas which perform different main functions.
- Town centres are usually the second level of centres after city centres, and in many cases, they will be the principal centre of centres in a local authority's area.
- District centres usually comprise of groups of shops often containing at least one supermarket or superstore, and a range of non-retail services, such as banks, building societies and restaurants, as well as local public facilities such as a library.
- Local centres include a range of small shops of a local nature, serving a small catchment. Typically, local centres might include, amongst other shops, a small supermarket, a newsagent, a sub-post office and a pharmacy. Other facilities could include a hot-food takeaway and launderette.
- Small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance are not regarded as centres for the purposes of this policy statement.

#### Nuneaton & Bedworth Town Centres Study (June 2011)

Chapter 2 'Assessments of Quantitative Capacity' identifies Nuneaton as a town centre as one of 12 'Tier 4' centres in the Region (as per Policy PA11 of the WMRSS Phase 2 Revision), part of a network of 25 town and city centres to be the focus of 'major retail developments' upwards of 10,000 sq.m gross and 'large scale office developments', upwards of 5,000 sq.m gross.

Chapter 2 states that Bedworth does not form one of the 25 Strategic Centres in the West Midlands, rather it fulfils a role more geared towards meeting local shopping needs. The WMRSS Phase 2 Revision noted the complementary role such centres should play, supporting growth where required. Accordingly, the study concludes that Bedworth cannot be considered suitable for large scale comparison shopping floorspace and cites paragraph EC5.1 of PPS4 which states that: '*...the scale of the sites identified and the level of travel they generate, are in keeping with the role and function of the centre within the hierarchy of centres and the catchment served*'. It is accepted that PPS4 has now been superseded, however this principle is still considered useful.

The chapter explains that in the RTP West Midlands Regional Centres Study and subsequent update, it was assumed that 80 per cent of overall floorspace requirement for the West Midlands would be directed towards the 25 Strategic

Centres, with the remaining 20 per cent to support additional comparison goods floorspace in smaller centres across the region. Given the nature of the retail hierarchy for Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough – i.e. one dominant strategic centre (Nuneaton), one smaller, district-level centre (Bedworth), and a small number of local-level centres (such as Bulkington), it is considered appropriate that the apportionment of retail floorspace need in the Borough follows similar lines to the approach adopted by RTP across the wider West Midlands region; i.e. allocating the majority of floorspace requirement to the main centre, and apportioning the remainder of the requirement between smaller centres. This is dealt with in the Scale of growth policy.

In light of the above, the Borough Plan policy considers Nuneaton should be placed at the top of the hierarchy, followed by Bedworth.

#### Convenience Retail Study (June 2011)

As part of the Convenience Retail Study (June 2011) a “health check” of Nuneaton and Bedworth town centres was undertaken. The findings for Nuneaton indicated that despite having a slight under-representation of convenience goods outlets, the centre has a relatively strong convenience floorspace provision due to its large supermarkets. The centre also has a lower than average vacancy rate. Whilst the town centre has an attractive environment, it faces significant challenges due to the lack of recent investment in its retail offer. The study considers new investment is needed to help improve both the shopping environment and the perception of the centre as a place to shop and visit for a range of uses and activities.

The findings for Bedworth indicated that the centre has a comparatively higher vacancy rate than Nuneaton and it too has not benefited from any significant recent investment. Since the study was completed the Tesco store at George Street Ringway and Leicester Street has been redeveloped which has significantly transformed this part of the centre. The centre also benefits from a pleasant environment and the Council has made attempts to avoid ‘dead frontages’ on Council owned empty retail units by innovative cladding. It is considered that the centre is both vital and viable.

The study identified District Centres as attractive places to shop and provide important environmentally sustainable services which predominantly serve their local areas. They serve a top-up shopping function. The study has not found any deficiencies in provision and that the majority of them are vital and viable. However, the study recommended that Chapel End and Kingswood Road should be re-designated as Local Centres. In addition the study recommended that Camp Hill centre be designated as a District Centre. This has been reflected in the Hierarchy.

In light of the above, the Borough Plan policy considers Nuneaton should be placed at the top of the hierarchy, followed by Bedworth, then the District Centres and finally the Local Centres.

#### Local Shopping Study (March 2012)

The Local Shopping Study (March 2012) was prepared to inform the development of the Borough Plan about the provision of shops and services to meet the needs of the Borough's residents and identifies District and Local Centres. The study seeks to review the Borough's existing network of local shopping and service provision and to make recommendations in relation to the future roles of each local centre and shopping parade. Effectively the report monitors the shopping provision within each centre which assists in determining their appropriateness within the hierarchy.

#### Updated Town Centre Studies

The Retail and Leisure Update (2014) and Office Study (2013) focused on assessing the appropriate capacity for the Town Centre requirements. These requirements significantly reduced the requirements for the Borough. However the findings of the study relate to policy NB6.

#### Conclusion

In light of the evidence set out above it is the following hierarchy of centres is recommended:

1. Nuneaton
2. Bedworth
3. District Centres
4. Local Centres

This recommendation is further supported by the recommendation of The Portas Review (December 2011) to make explicit a presumption in favour of town centre.

#### **Why set a threshold for accessing District and Local Centres**

The policy sets out a minimum walking threshold for District and Local Centres. It is considered suitable to include a threshold to ensure that acceptable provision of top up shopping facilities are provided. The threshold selected has been identified from the Warwickshire County Council Local Transport Plan No.3. The threshold of 1200m walking distance is derived from the Walking Strategy section. The standard itself is derived from 'The Institute of Highways and Transportation Guidelines for Providing for Journeys on foot'. The guidelines do not provide anything specifically relating to Local and District Centres, however 1200m is identified as the maximum threshold for walking to something other than a Town Centre or a school. It is intended that as part of any new development proposals as well as assessing existing deficiencies this threshold can be used to identify requirements for new centres.

There is also a question within the policy relating to acceptable drive times to a District Centre. This is something that needs to be assessed and included within the final policy.



