

14. Dartford Town Centre

Local Plan Aim

To maintain and enhance Dartford Town Centre's role as a retail, leisure, employment and housing centre.

Key Objectives

1. To safeguard the vitality and viability of the town centre.
2. To retain a predominant mix of shops within the primary shopping frontages.
3. To identify sites and appropriate uses where development will most contribute to the vitality and viability of the town centre, while acknowledging a need for flexibility in responding to new proposals as they come forward.
4. To seek the retention of existing businesses where there will be no adverse impact on neighbouring areas.
5. To seek a mix of uses on undeveloped sites which includes an element of housing wherever possible.
6. To seek a closer integration between public transport services and town centre facilities and to achieve a higher standard of accessibility to the town centre.
7. To seek a high standard of design in all developments within the town centre and to safeguard and enhance existing environmental assets, including pathways, river frontage and open space.

14.1 Introduction

14.1.1 The Borough Council is committed to the future sustainable development and improvement of Dartford town centre. The town centre has undergone substantial change and remains an important focus within the Borough, providing a good range of shops, colourful markets and a lively and thriving theatre, as well as a mix of employment, housing and leisure.

14.1.2 The town centre is, nevertheless, likely to experience continuing change during the Plan period as new shopping patterns become established following the opening of Bluewater. The town centre is fortunate in being well served by convenience foodstores and the development of ~~a new~~ *the upgraded Sainsbury's store at the Priors Centre will help to* ~~supermarket that has been relocated within the town centre~~ *helps* ensure that the town centre continues to serve the day-to-day needs of residents.

14.2 Policy Context

14.2.1 Government guidance issued in the form of a Parliamentary Answer in February 1999 states that retail and leisure proposals within an existing centre, or within a local plan allocation, should not be required to demonstrate that they satisfy the test of need, *provided that retail needs have been assessed through the local plan process*, but that elsewhere they should. PPG6 encourages authorities to study the need for new development in preparing their development plans, and to make provision accordingly. PPG6 also states that town centres should be the preferred location for all developments that attract a lot of people - not just shopping but offices, entertainment, leisure and other key uses usually found in town centres. The guidance requires local authorities to adopt a sequential approach to selecting sites for new retail development based on an assessment of need.

14.2.2 Thames Gateway Planning Framework (RPG9a) acknowledges that town centres in the Thames Gateway should be the focus of a range of services and shopping facilities which contribute to the regeneration of the wider area. The attractiveness and quality of centres should include upgrading existing facilities, making the best use of derelict or underused land, improving the environment and securing effective management and promotion of the town centre. Local authorities are asked to build on the essential qualities of their town centres, and to review existing allocations and new site proposals outside the town centre.

14.2.3 A key approach of the Kent Structure Plan is to improve the vitality and viability of town centres. It identifies three interdependent ingredients to a successful town centre:

- a diverse and concentrated mix of uses that creates a strong, lively market place;
- a high quality of environment, both physical and cultural, to attract residents and visitors; and
- provision of safe and convenient movement into and around the centre.

14.2.4 The Structure Plan policy towards town centres (policy S8) encourages the viability and vitality of town centres and the promotion of high environmental standards. There is a general presumption in favour of developments that enhance the quality, range and choice of shopping; or expand and diversify service, business, or leisure activities; or provide residential accommodation. Developments should also improve the visual quality, functioning, and environment of the town centre; and be accessible by transport, particularly public transport, in a way which enhances convenience for town centre users.

14.3 Background

~~14.3.1 In preparing the current Structure Plan, the County Council undertook an assessment of need for additional retail floorspace up to the year 2001. This indicated that in North Kent prospects would be dominated by Bluewater, which would absorb the expenditure growth of North Kent in the short term. Given the additional competition of the Lakeside centre at Thurrock, there was likely to be very limited potential for new proposals in North Kent. Accordingly, the Structure Plan advocates that such potential as may exist should be channelled to the improvement of existing town centres.~~

14.3.2 As part of the Local Plan Review process retail consultants have undertaken an assessment of retail demand in the Borough over the Plan period. This study has guided the Council's town centre policy approach.

~~14.3.3 There is limited scope less than 6,000 sq m for additional comparison goods floorspace to the year 2001, generally confirming the Structure Plan assessment. Beyond 2001, however, there is likely to be increasing scope for new comparison goods floorspace. At 2006 this is estimated to be in the order of 17,000 sq m, The consultants' study identifies scope for rising to 27,000 sq m of comparison floorspace at to 2011. An assessment of suitable sites for new retail development that meet the requirements of the sequential approach has been undertaken. This identified one site within the defined town centre at Westgate Road and one at the North-eastern edge-of-centre (North West Quadrant). Together these sites have capacity to accommodate around 17,000 sq m of the 27,000 sq m identified total need. In the absence of additional suitable sites within or adjacent to the town centre the Plan makes provision for the remaining 10,000 sq m of the identified comparison floorspace demand to be provided at Bluewater. If For Dartford town centre is to compete effectively with centres outside the Borough its role needs to be~~

safeguarded and enhanced. ~~It is important, therefore, that the majority of the scope for additional floorspace should be concentrated in Dartford town centre in order~~ *The Plan identifies Town Centre and edge-of-centre sites for retail development and is supportive of retail development within the North-eastern edge-of-centre to help strengthen the vitality and viability of this focal point of the Borough's offer.*

14.3.4 When existing convenience (food) floorspace and commitments are taken into account, the retail consultants conclude that there is no scope for additional convenience floorspace over the Plan period. There may be scope for additional floorspace in qualitative terms where this would sustain, update or upgrade the centre's convenience offer.

14.3.5 The most important anchors in Dartford town centre are its food stores. Value retailing is also a major strength of the town centre. The importance of the more mainstream value retailers to Dartford's shoppers is an indication of the way forward for the town centre. Two main options to maintain and improve Dartford town centre's position in the retail hierarchy would be the expansion of non-food retail warehousing or the introduction of a factory outlet centre. The latter suggestion raises particular transport and environmental issues which would require further study to assess the implications.

14.4 Town Centre and Edge-of-Centre Development

14.4.1 The Local Plan Town Centre Inset Proposals Map identifies town centre and edge-of-centre boundaries, together with primary and secondary shopping frontages. The Council's approach to primary and secondary shopping frontages is set out at policies TC4 and TC5 below.

14.4.2 The Council has undertaken an assessment of suitable locations for new retail development that meet the requirements of the sequential approach. It is satisfied that land at Westgate Road is the only site likely to be available during the Plan period, within the town centre. However, it is clear that this site alone will not be capable of satisfying the whole of the identified need. Therefore, an edge-of-centre site is identified in the Plan at the North West Quadrant. ~~Together these two sites have sufficient capacity to meet the~~ *sites are capable of making a significant contribution towards the provision of the identified demand for additional comparison floorspace to the year 2006 2011. These, along with Bluewater, are the preferred locations for the provision of future comparison floorspace.*

14.4.3 Dartford town centre, *North-eastern and Southern edges-of-centre and Bluewater* will be the preferred locations for any comparison goods proposals. ~~Proposals outside the defined town centre and the identified edge-of-centre site at the North West Quadrant at other locations will have to demonstrate that there are no available, suitable or viable sites within the town centre, at the identified locations and that there is an identified need for the retail floorspace, and that the proposal will not harm the prospects of bringing about the comprehensive development of the North West Quadrant.~~ In addition, any such proposals will need to be part of a mixed-use scheme, well served by public transport, provide strong pedestrian linkages to the primary shopping area, broaden the range of retail offer, and not have an adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the primary shopping area.

14.4.4 Within the town centre the preference will be for mixed-use developments, especially on any large site that may come forward.

14.4.5 Policy TC1 sets out the Council's approach to all development in the town centre, whilst policy R1 (Retail chapter) sets out the general approach to retail development in the town centre. Policy TC1 needs to be read in conjunction with policies TC4 and TC5.

14.4.6 Residential development will be acceptable above shops or commercial premises in the town centre or in the Southern edge-of-centre, where there would be no loss of amenity to residents, especially in relation to the evening economy.

14.4.7 The edge-of-centre area can be divided into two distinct elements. The North-eastern segment is close to public transport routes, including the railway station and the proposed Fastrack corridor, and has a coarse building grain. Development proposals that would encourage greater public transport patronage or benefit from good public transport linkages, such as comparison retail, leisure or offices, will be preferred. *Proposals should also make improvements to the quality of urban design and streetscape. It is recognised that there may be some opportunity for residential use as part of mixed use development proposals.* ~~The policy approach to this area is set out in policy TC2.~~

14.4.7a. The Manor Gate House is an important listed building and any development in the vicinity of the building will need to be of a scale, grain and design quality that respects and enhances the setting of this architecturally and historically important building.

14.4.7b The Medieval Priory and post Medieval Manor of which only the Manor Gate House and Priory Walls on Priory Road South and Victoria Road remain are located at the western end of the North-eastern edge-of-centre. These are listed buildings. The whole site is known to contain potential archaeological remains. Developers will be expected to provide information on the nature and quality of these archaeological remains and these findings should influence the form of the proposed built development. Any scheme will be expected to provide for the restoration/repair and upkeep of the Priory Walls.

14.4.7c At Acacia Hall social and recreational uses will generally be the preferred use. Acacia Hall lies within the Town Centre Conservation Area. The Mansion House and the adjacent Bridge House and nearby Holy Trinity Church are important listed buildings. Development proposals will therefore need to be sensitive to the setting of these buildings. The County Council's Areas of Archaeological Potential maps indicate that the area at the bottom of East Hill, including Acacia Hall, is known to contain potential archaeological remains. Proposals will be expected to provide information on the nature and quality of these remains and these findings should influence the form of any proposed development.

14.4.7d The policy approach to this area is set out in policy TC2.

14.4.8 The Southern segment *generally* has a much finer grain and is less accessible by public transport. Lowfield Street, south of Instone Road and north of Vauxhall Place, performs an important specialist retailing role. These retail units are important to the economic function of the town centre as a whole. These properties do not lie within the town centre boundary and therefore cannot be subject to the primary or secondary shopping frontage designations. Nevertheless loss of retail use will be resisted. Any proposals for redevelopment of land fronting Lowfield Street should make provision for retail units at ground floor level, and any individual food and convenience floorspace unit should not exceed 500 m² gross floorspace. Within this area, with the exception of ground floor properties fronting Lowfield Street, residential

accommodation will generally be the preferred land use. The policy approach to this segment is set out in policy TC3.

TC1 Town Centre Development

Within the town centre, as shown on the Town Centre Inset Proposals Map, proposals for development, redevelopment, or refurbishment will be permitted where they would:

- 1. incorporate a mix of uses, where possible, which include use classes A1, A2, A3, B1, C1, C3, D1, D2, together with sui generis uses which contribute to the vitality and viability of the town centre;**
- 2. sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of the centre;**
- 3. be in keeping with the scale and character of the centre;**
- 4. enhance the visual appearance of the town centre; and**
- 5. be of a high standard of design.**

TC2 Northern North-eastern Edge-of-Centre Development

Development proposals within the northern North-eastern edge-of-centre as shown on the Town Centre Inset Proposals Map, will only be permitted if they:

- 1. enhance the range, quality or diversity of leisure and service facilities;**
- 2. incorporate a mix of uses, where possible, which include use classes A1 (comparison goods), A2, B1 or D2;**
- 3. ~~respect and reflect the building grain, and general character and density~~ *improve the level of urban design and streetscape;***
- 4. strengthen pedestrian linkages with the primary shopping area and public transport nodes;**
- 5. are readily accessible by public transport, bicycle and on foot, and make appropriate provision for transport infrastructure and services; and**
- 6. are of a high standard of design.**

Within the vicinity of Overy Liberty development proposals should respect and reflect the building grain, and general character and density of the area.

In addition proposals for use class A1 (comparison goods) other than at the North West Quadrant (site TC9) will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that:

- a) there are no available, suitable or viable sites within the town centre as shown on the Town Centre Inset Proposals Map; and**
- b) there is a need for the retail floorspace; and**
- ~~c) the development would not harm the prospects of bringing about the comprehensive redevelopment of site TC9.~~**

TC3 Southern Edge-of-Centre Development

Development proposals within the Southern edge-of-centre as shown on the Town Centre Inset Proposals Map, will only be permitted if they:

- 1. safeguard and consolidate the existing retail function of Lowfield Street;**
- 2. restrict A1 (food) floorspace to no more than 500 sq m in any one unit;**
- 3. respect and reflect the surrounding building grain, land uses, residential amenity, character and density;**
- 4. are readily accessible by public transport, bicycle and on foot; and**
- 5. strengthen pedestrian linkages with the primary shopping area and public transport nodes.**

In addition proposals for use class A1 (comparison goods) will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that:

- a) there are no available, suitable or viable sites within the town centre as shown on the Town Centre Inset Proposals Map; and**
- b) there is a need for the retail floorspace; and**
- c) ~~the development would not harm the prospects of bringing about the comprehensive redevelopment of site TC9.~~**

14.5 Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages

14.5.1 At present, shopping provision is along both sides of the length of Spital Street, High Street, Hythe Street and Lowfield Street (as far as Heath Street). However, the multiple stores and larger retail units are located in the central area bounded by the Priory and Orchards Shopping Centres, Co-op Department Store and the High Street. In order to consolidate the retail function the Plan has identified primary and shopping frontages.

14.5.2 Use classes A2 (financial and professional services) and A3 (food and drink) have an important role to play in the town centre, but the concentration and location of such uses in a town centre can give rise to a number of problems. Some of these uses can afford ground floor frontages in those 'prime pitches' which are most prominent in the street scene. Use class A1 shops can be 'squeezed out' and the perception of a town centre as an attractive place to shop can begin to be undermined by a concentration of non-retail use.

14.5.3 Dartford town centre has a well defined compact core with two distinct components - traditional main streets (High Street, Spital Street, Hythe Street and Lowfield Street) and purpose built shopping centres behind the main shopping streets (Priory Centre and the Orchards Shopping Centre).

14.5.4 Distinguishing between primary and secondary frontages in town centres can help recognise the relative importance of these areas to the character of the town centre. In recent years there have been losses of use class A1 shops to use classes A2 and A3 uses within the central area of the town centre such that non- A1 uses now account for just under 30% of frontages in the defined primary shopping area. In order to help retain the remaining A1 uses, the Council has identified primary frontages where use class A1 use should continue to remain the predominant use. These are shown on the Town Centre Inset Proposals Map. The policy approach reflects the existing overall pattern of A1 uses and sets out an appropriate policy approach to safeguarding the primary shopping area.

14.5.5 Proposals for changes of use from A1 uses to A2 or A3 uses will not be permitted where the building is situated at a conspicuous location within the primary shopping frontage, such as on a street corner. In special circumstances an exception may be made where the proposal would assist or ensure the preservation or restoration of a listed building and meets the requirements of policies BE5 to BE8.

TC4 Primary Shopping Frontages in Dartford Town Centre

Proposals for changes of use or redevelopment of shops (in use class A1) in the primary shopping frontages to ~~use classes A2 and A3~~ other uses will only be permitted where the following criteria are met:

- 1. the site is not in a conspicuous location;**
- 2. the proposal does not involve a prominent building;**

- 3. the nature and character of the use(s) proposed, including the level of activity associated with it, will not have an adverse impact on amenity, including disturbance or nuisance;**
- 4. genuine and sustained attempts to let the premises for use class A1 uses on reasonable terms have proved unsuccessful;**
- 5. there are no adverse cumulative ~~efforts on~~ effects of new concentrations of single uses, including loss of retail units, traffic or parking; and**
- 6. the proposal ~~would not result~~ results in non use class A1 uses cumulatively amounting to ~~30% or more~~ at least 70% of the length of the total defined primary shopping frontage within the town centre and ~~not result~~ results in ~~40% or more~~ at least 60% of the individual frontage within which the unit lies having non use class A1 uses.**

14.5.6 Secondary shopping frontages attract service and community uses, together with specialist and local shops that cannot afford the rents of the core area. The eastern extremity of the High Street, Spital Street west of the Co-op, Hythe Street north of the Post Office and Copperfields, Market Street, Market Place and Lowfield Street between Market Street and Instone Road are identified as secondary shopping frontages. Within these frontages the Council considers that service and community uses can make a positive contribution to the vitality of the town centre and provide a useful function. Accordingly, redevelopment or changes of use to use class A1 and from A1 to A2, A3, B1, D1, D2 and residential uses (classes C1 and C3) will be acceptable. Sui generis uses contributing to the vitality and viability of the town centre will also be acceptable.

TC5 Secondary Shopping Frontages in Dartford Town Centre

Proposals for change of use or redevelopment of shops (in use class A1) in the secondary shopping frontages to other uses (in use classes A2, A3, B1, D1, D2, C1 and C3 and sui generis) will be permitted where the nature and character of the use(s) proposed, including the level of activity associated with it, will not have an adverse impact on amenity, including disturbance or nuisance.

14.6 Business Development

14.6.1 The town centre is an important location for smaller office based activities, such as solicitors, accountants, and insurance brokers, as well as banking and recruitment agencies. The Council wishes to retain these businesses where there are no adverse impacts on the amenity of neighbouring uses.

14.6.2 Financial and professional services and businesses (use classes A2 and B1) will be acceptable in the town centre, preferably as part of a mixed-use development. In the primary shopping frontages, however, office uses falling within use classes A2 and B1 will only be acceptable on upper floors.

14.6.3 Policy TC4 and TC5 apply where the change of use or redevelopment involves a loss of use class A1 to A2 use. Policy TC6 applies for all other changes of use to A2 use.

TC6 Business Development in the Town Centre

Proposals for the redevelopment or change of use to use classes A2 and B1, other than from use class A1, will only be permitted in the town centre where they:

- 1. result in no adverse impact on surrounding uses;**
- 2. are in keeping with the scale and character of the centre;**
- 3. enhance the visual appearance of the town centre;**

- 4. are readily accessible by public transport, bicycle and on foot, and make appropriate provision for transport infrastructure and services; and**
- 5. strengthen pedestrian linkages with the primary shopping area and public transport nodes.**

In the case of a change of use the building should be capable of conversion and suitable for the type and level of activity proposed.

Within the primary shopping frontage use classes A2 and B1 office uses will not be permitted at ground floor level.

14.6.4 The street block bounded by Summerhill Road and Highfield Road has a long established concentration of office activities amongst residential accommodation. The conversion of residential accommodation to office use (Classes A2 and B1) will be acceptable, as will the redevelopment for office use (Classes A2 and B1), provided that development reflects and respects the general building grain and scale and mass of surrounding properties.

TC7 Business Development at Highfield Road

Development proposals for redevelopment or changes of use to use classes A2 and B1 will only be permitted at Highfield Road as defined on the Town Centre Proposals Inset Map where they:

- 1. are of a scale and mass that is compatible with surrounding properties;**
- 2. provide a level of parking provision that is in accordance with the Council's standards; and**
- 3. result in no adverse impact on surrounding uses.**

14.7 Housing

14.7.1 The town centre and edge of centre areas are good locations for housing. The town centre contains a wide range of facilities and has good public transport links. The reintroduction of residential accommodation in appropriate locations within and on the edge of the town centre can help enhance the atmosphere and vibrancy of the local community as well as provide an increase in the use of town centre facilities. Government Guidance supports the introduction of housing in town centres especially where sites are well related to public transport corridors or nodes.

14.7.2 Strengthening the residential component will require careful consideration of the inter-relationships between housing and other uses, particularly those that encourage and support the evening economy, in order to achieve an attractive residential environment. There are no primary schools within the town centre. The nearest are almost a kilometre away and access involves crossing and walking along busy main roads. Whilst the Council considers that there is strong demand for affordable and low cost housing in the town centre it is unlikely that the town centre will be a suitable location for family accommodation. High density housing may be appropriate on some sites served by good public transport and could meet the needs of single people, childless couples, and people of retirement age. Residential accommodation that is capable of generating a pupil product may be required to make a contribution towards safe walking and cycle routes to schools along with any contribution for education facilities required as a consequence of the development (see Community Facilities chapter).

14.7.3 The Council supports the re-use of vacant office and commercial premises to residential accommodation, as well as the re-use of redundant floorspace above shops and commercial properties (see policy H11).

14.8 Leisure and the Evening Economy

14.8.1 The town centre is well suited to ~~community sports provision, arts and entertainment venues, pubs and restaurants~~ *leisure, artistic, cultural, sports and recreation activities* that fit in with its role as a historic market town and district shopping centre.

~~14.8.2 An Arts and Cultural Strategy and Five Year Action Plan has been prepared by the Council, which seeks to use 'the arts' as a means of improving the quality of life for Dartford's residents and increasing the appeal of Dartford's cultural facilities to a wider audience. The strategy has identified the need for an art gallery and exhibition space along with an enlarged museum, 'heritage' display and other meeting facilities for art groups. One possibility is for the library to move to new premises and for the museum and new cultural facility to expand into the space vacated.~~

14.8.3 The town centre is considered to be an appropriate location for future leisure uses such as *art galleries*, cinemas, night clubs, bingo halls. *Dartford Borough is one of several locations specifically identified by the Home Office as being appropriate for casinos. The Town Centre is an important contributor to the evening economy and a focus for pubs, nightclubs and restaurants. The retention and improvement of such leisure uses will be essential. Issues of particular concern with leisure uses are traffic generation, late night disturbance to residents and anti-social behaviour can cause concern*, particularly from night-clubs. CCTV, good lighting and close co-operation with the police can help minimise these concerns. Within the town centre, therefore, the Council will need to be satisfied that the particular use and site is acceptable. The Council's policy approach to leisure uses in the town centre is set out in policy LRT1 (Leisure, Recreation and Tourism chapter).

14.8.3a Land at Mill Pond Road, adjacent to the railway station and located within the North-eastern edge-of-centre policy area, will become available for redevelopment in the future. The site does not lie within a residential area and has the potential to be developed as a 'leisure' quarter. It is identified for leisure uses and the policy approach is set out at policy TC10.

14.8.4 Whilst an encouraging land use approach can provide the basis for a successful evening economy it is also dependent upon other factors, generally beyond the Council's control, such as a regular late night public transport service, or a publican's desire to provide live entertainment.

14.9 Movement

14.9.1 The Kent Thameside Urban Transport Strategy identifies a number of proposals to promote car traffic restraint within Dartford town centre and improve access by other means of transport. These include directing unnecessary traffic away from the town centre by reallocating road space in favour of buses and cycles, and improving bus interchanges to give greater bus priority. A study of the ring road around the town centre, carried out in 1997, identified measures which would convert the ring road to two way operation, improve access for cyclists, pedestrians and bus users, control traffic speeds and improve access to the town centre car parks. Works have already been made to introduce a new traffic signal crossing at Overy Liberty for pedestrians. Further signal controls on the ring road will encourage vehicles to travel at more

appropriate speeds while allowing greater access into the town centre for pedestrians and cyclists.

- 14.9.2 A key component of the improvements to movement within the town centre will be the proposed Fastrack public transport system. The alignment is safeguarded on the Proposals Maps. Within the town centre, there will be a new public transport interchange at Dartford Station which will help to improve movement around Home Gardens.
- 14.9.3 A new road link between Lowfield Street and Market Street will continue to be safeguarded. This scheme will provide environmental improvements to the south east quadrant of the town centre and provide better access and a more flexible operation for public transport.
- 14.9.4 In the town centre there are 5,000 publicly available car parking spaces, of which only 1,240 are controlled by the Borough Council. The remainder are under the control of retail operators, such as B&Q, or Railtrack. Because Dartford has a walk-on rail service to London, there is considerable demand for long-stay car parking in both the public pay car parks, and on nearby residential streets. The safeguarded route for Fastrack will result in the loss of the Darenth Road car park.
- 14.9.5 The car parking strategy for the town centre has a two pronged approach which will be linked to phased improvements in the public transport system and services, such as Fastrack. The first is to deter the overall level of long-term car parking through increased parking charges, along with the introduction of “*Controlled Parking Zones*” and “*Residents Parking Schemes*” to deter long-stay parking in residential areas. The parking plan in the Kent Thameside Urban Transport Strategy identified the need to provide additional off street long stay car parking for Dartford town centre. In total some 300 new spaces are needed. Consequently, the Council will carry out further work to establish whether and where additional car parking provision can be identified within the town centre.
- 14.9.6 The second is to encourage short-term parking. There is a need to improve shopper parking in the south east sector of the town centre, particularly in the area of the Market Street surface car park.

14.10 The Environment

- 14.10.1 The appearance of a town centre has a major part to play in its vitality and viability and it will therefore be important to maintain and enhance Dartford's image as a market town. This is dependent to a large degree upon good design and high quality development. Development proposals will need to demonstrate that they seek to overcome traffic problems, enhance the setting of the town's historic buildings and define more clearly gateways to the town centre.
- 14.10.2 The emphasis in RPG9a and in the draft Regional Planning Guidance (*RPG9*) is on urban renaissance and the creation of an attractive environment for people to live, work, spend leisure time and invest. The need for a high standard of design in all development is particularly important in the town centre, where the potential exists for improving the quality of the built environment. In particular, development should reflect the human scale of most of the town centre. It should be of varying heights, generally low to medium rise and should not be unduly massive in scale and appearance.

- 14.10.3 Much of the town centre lies within the Dartford Town Centre Conservation Area. Policies BE1-BE4 (Built Environment chapter) deal with proposals for the demolition, development, alteration and extensions, and changes of use within a conservation area.
- 14.10.4 Since Roman times the town has been a focus for the surrounding area. *The County Council's Areas of Archaeological Potential Maps indicate that ~~M~~much of the central area and edge-of centre areas ~~are identified by the County Council as Areas of Archaeological Potential~~, based on the old market town and Priory, *are likely to contain potential archaeological remains.* Development proposals will need to take account of policy BE11.*
- 14.10.5 Shops and their shopfronts form a very important visual element in the street scene, both individually and in terms of their collective design and impact. The policy approach towards the design of shopfronts is set out in policy BE12. Excessive or poorly sited advertisements can have a damaging effect upon the quality of the town centre environment. The Council's approach towards advertisements is set out in policy BE13.

14.11 Westgate Road

- 14.11.1 This ~~0.72~~ 0.43 hectare site lies on the southern side of Westgate Road which forms part of the town centre ring road. It is the only site within the defined Town Centre specifically allocated for retail use in the Plan. The site is close to the railway station, existing bus routes and the proposed Fastrack corridor.
- 14.11.2 The site occupies a pivotal location between the town centre and the North West Quadrant (see policy TC9), which is allocated for non-food retail uses. This important inter-relationship needs to be reflected in the uses that are proposed for this site. It is essential to safeguard the Westgate Road site for town centre uses that can help underpin and enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre. The Plan allocates the site for primarily non-food retailing and leisure development, with office floorspace and/or residential units above. In all circumstances, a ground floor level retail frontage onto Hythe Street and a return retail frontage onto at least part of Westgate Road will be required.
- 14.11.3 The development of the site provides an opportunity to increase levels of footfall and activity along Westgate Road and Kent Road. There is the possibility of rationalising the pattern of access to the various parts of the site. Advantage should be taken to create greater permeability between the town centre and the North West Quadrant. There may be an opportunity to create an arcade type scheme that provides links between Westgate Road and Orchard Street. Because the site is close to bus and rail services there may be a possibility to relax the Council's normal parking standards.
- 14.11.4 The Council would prefer to see the site developed comprehensively. However, the incremental development of the site will be acceptable where proposals for individual parts are designed in such a manner as to integrate with an agreed framework for the site as a whole. In all circumstances development proposals should conform with a planning brief, either prepared or agreed by the local planning authority, and be accompanied by a masterplan prepared by the applicant.
- 14.11.5 The inclusion of the site does not signal an intention on the Council's part to displace existing buildings or occupants, but to provide a clear policy base to guide

development proposals should they be forthcoming. Development will be dependent upon all the landowners' intentions.

14.11.6 The scale and design of any development proposals should reflect the site's prominent position. A 3-4 storey development would be acceptable. The most important elevations of the site are those fronting Westgate Road and Hythe Street; particular attention will be needed to create interesting and visually pleasing frontages. It will also be important to pay attention to the detail and design at the junctions of Kent Road and Westgate Road, and Westgate Road and Hythe Street.

14.11.7 There are community buildings currently located within the site. Liaison with the owners should be undertaken at an early stage in order to determine their needs and whether alternative facilities will be required on site.

~~14.11.8 No direct access will be permitted off Westgate Road. Access to the site will, therefore, need to be from either Kent Road or Orchard Street. Development proposals for land west of Kent Road will need to be accessed from Kent Road, ideally as far to the south of the site as possible, and should also make provision for rear accessing to the houses immediately adjacent to the site.~~

TC8 Westgate Road

Land is safeguarded at Westgate Road for comprehensive development primarily for non-food retail and leisure uses, with office floorspace and/or residential units above. Proposals will only be permitted where they:

- 1. conform with a planning brief for the whole site which has been prepared or agreed by the local planning authority and are accompanied by a masterplan;**
- 2. are readily accessible by public transport, bicycle and on foot and make appropriate provision for transport infrastructure and services;**
- 3. provide a level of parking provision that is in accordance with the Council's standards;**
- 4. make provision for rear accessing to the dwellings immediately to the west of the site;**
- 5. are of a scale, grain and design that reflects the site's prominent location;**
- 6. provide ground floor retail frontage onto Hythe Street and a return frontage onto at least part of Westgate Road; and**
- 7. are accessed to the site from either Kent Road or Orchard Street.**

14.12 North West Quadrant

14.12.1 The retail consultants' investigations indicate that there is scope for additional comparison retail floorspace over the Plan period. The Council has undertaken an assessment of suitable locations that meet the requirements of the sequential approach. It is satisfied that there is only one site available within the town centre (Westgate Road), but that this will not be capable of satisfying the whole of the identified need. An edge-of-centre site or sites are required to meet the demonstrable need identified in the retail study.

14.12.2 A ~~5.8~~ 5.1 hectare site at the North West Quadrant, which encompasses the J & E Hall complex, the existing B&Q and MFI retail warehouse units ~~and land north of the railway line~~ is the only site within ~~or at the edge of the town centre~~ *edge-of-centre* which is capable of ~~meeting the majority of the~~ *making a major contribution towards the provision of* additional non-food retail floorspace identified by the retail consultants. This is an important, prominent edge-of-centre site that lies immediately to the north of the town centre. It is within close proximity of the

railway station, existing bus services and the proposed Fastrack corridor. The site is therefore identified in the Plan for development for non-food retail, ~~which may include non-food retail warehousing.~~ There may be scope for an element of related town centre uses, such as leisure (use class D2). These should be of a scale that does not prejudice the role of this site in accommodating non-food retail uses. ~~Proposals will need to incorporate and deal positively with land to the north of the railway line.~~

- 14.12.3 The Council would prefer to see the site developed comprehensively. However, the incremental development of the site will be acceptable where proposals for individual parts are designed in such a manner as to integrate within an agreed framework for the site as a whole. In all circumstances development proposals should conform with a planning brief, either prepared or agreed by the local planning authority, and be accompanied by a masterplan prepared by the applicant.
- 14.12.4 The inclusion of the site does not signal an intention on the Council's part to displace existing buildings or occupants, but to provide a clear policy base to guide development proposals should they be forthcoming. Development will be dependent upon all the landowners' intentions. However, any redevelopment of the retail warehouse units fronting Westgate Road will need to be based upon a comprehensive scheme that includes the land to the rear adjacent to the railway line and fronting onto Hythe Street.
- 14.12.5 Because of the proximity of the site to the town centre and the significant role it can perform in extending the town centre's non-food retail offer, development proposals must be of a high design quality and give the scheme a 'town centre' look.
- 14.12.6 It is important that the site is not designed as a self-contained entity but is well linked to the town centre (particularly the Westgate Road site - see policy TC8), and both existing and proposed public transport corridors. The development of the site provides the opportunity to investigate the re-alignment of Westgate Road, including improvements that would bring about better integration with the Westgate Road development site (TC8) and pedestrian movement into the town centre, as well as to the railway station. Development proposals will be expected to make provision for east-west Green Grid links.
- 14.12.7 The railway line forms a strong barrier to movement between the major employment areas and residential areas to the north of the line and the town centre to the south. Hythe Street on the eastern boundary of the site is a main pedestrian route whilst Priory Road South on the western edge of the site could be upgraded. Development of the North West Quadrant site provides opportunities to improve pedestrian access to the town centre. The railway arches on the north eastern boundary could open up vistas and perform a new pedestrian 'Gateway' function into the site from the north.
- 14.12.8 Proposals that will be likely to act as a major destination will be required to provide a Transport ~~Impact~~ Assessment.
- 14.12.9 The site was formerly part of the Mediaeval Priory and post Mediaeval Manor of which only the Manor Gate House and the Priory Walls on Priory Road South and Victoria Road remain. These are listed structures. The whole site is known to contain potential archaeological remains. Developers will be expected to provide information on the nature and quality of these archaeological remains and these findings should influence the form of the proposed built development. Any development in the vicinity of the Gate House will need to be of a scale, grain, and

design quality that reflects, respects and enhances the setting of this architecturally and historically important building. Any scheme will also be expected to provide for the restoration/repair and upkeep of the Priory Walls.

- 14.12.10 The site was formerly used for heavy manufacturing purposes. Any proposals will be required to provide an assessment of the extent of any contamination on the site and where necessary undertake remediation work to be agreed with the local planning authority and implemented prior to the opening of any units.

TC9 North West Quadrant

Land at the North West Quadrant is safeguarded for comprehensive development for non-food floorspace (use class A1). Proposals will only be permitted where they:

- 1. conform with a planning brief for the whole site which has been prepared or agreed by the local planning authority and are accompanied by a masterplan;**
- 2. are readily accessible by public transport, bicycle and on foot and make appropriate provision for transport infrastructure and services;**
- 3. strengthen pedestrian linkages with the primary shopping area, public transport nodes and surrounding employment and residential areas;**
- 4. provide east-west green grid links;**
- 5. are of a scale, grain and design that reflects, respects and enhances the setting of the Manor Gate House;**
- 6. provide for the restoration, repair and maintenance of the listed Priory Wall; and**
- 7. provide an assessment of contamination of the site and where necessary remediation work to be undertaken to be agreed with the local planning authority and implemented prior to the opening of any units.**

14.13 Mill Pond Road

14.13.1 *Land at Mill Pond Road, also known as the GlaxoSmithKline West Site, is surplus to GlaxoSmithKline's requirements. The site is 4.5 hectares in area and is bounded by the River Darent, Lower Hythe Street, Mill Pond Road and Central Road. This is an important regeneration site which is well located in relation to Dartford Railway Station and the North West Quadrant - a site that is allocated in this Plan for comprehensive development for non-food floorspace - and is close to the town centre with good direct access via Hythe Street. Mill Pond Road is also well located in relation to existing bus services and the proposed Fastrack corridor. It provides an opportunity to broaden the range of facilities provided by the town. In conjunction with the North West Quadrant it has the potential to act as a catalyst for the enhancement and improvement of the quality of the environment at this edge of the town and important gateway to the town. Because of the ability of development here to complement the role and potential of the town centre and because of its proximity thereto, the site is included in the North-eastern edge-of-centre policy area.*

14.13.2 *The site was previously used for employment purposes as part of a wider complex and the Council would prefer to see the site developed primarily for employment generating uses. PPG6 ('Town Centres and Retail Development') encourages leisure uses that need to attract customers from a wider catchment area, such as small multi-screen cinemas and family entertainment centres, to be located in or on the edge of town centres. There are no suitable, available or viable sites within the town centre for such leisure uses. Mill Pond Road is a large, self-contained site, away from residential uses and well served by public transport. It is well located for leisure activities, particularly those that contribute to the evening economy. The site is therefore identified in the Plan for a mixed use, primarily indoor leisure*

development, with supporting uses which may include an hotel, non-food retail and employment (use B1). Subject to considerations of design and the inter-relationship of uses, it may also be possible to include an element of residential.

- 14.13.3 *The site is in a prominent location situated as it is at the Hythe Street 'Gateway' to the town and opposite the railway station. The site is very visible from the railway station and passengers travelling on the North Kent Line. It is important that proposals for the site are of high quality and designed such that they improve the visual quality of the Hythe Street 'Gateway'. Care should be taken with the design of the frontages facing Mill Pond Road and with the roofline to ensure quality views of the site from the North Kent Line and Dartford Railway Station.*
- 14.13.4 *It is important that the site is not designed as a self-contained entity but is well linked to the town centre, the North West Quadrant, Dartford Railway Station and both existing and proposed public transport corridors. The development of the site provides the opportunity to provide improved pedestrian linkages to the town centre, such as improved pedestrian crossings across Mill Pond Road and a possible footbridge link with the station.*
- 14.13.5 *The Plan seeks to extend the Darent Valley Footpath to the River Thames as part of the Green Grid. There are gaps in the Darent Valley Footpath and the riverside at this point is one such 'missing link'. Redevelopment provides the opportunity not only to provide public footpath access along the river side but also to improve the river setting through the provision of an open space corridor that provides unrestricted access to the public.*
- 14.13.6 *The existing lake is a valuable asset. It provides a pleasant feature and setting for the site that could be enhanced. It also performs an important floodwater storage role that the Environment Agency advises should be retained in any future redevelopment of the site. There is no direct public access to or around the lake. Development proposals should consider means of improving public access to and around the lake along with improving its relationship to Mill Pond Road and with the open space corridor along the River Darent.*
- 14.13.7 *The site lies within the fluvial flood plain and tidal flood zone and development should conform with polices NR6 (Fluvial Flood Risk Area – Developed Areas) and NR8 (Tidal Flood Zone). Hotels should not have living accommodation below the flood risk level. The Environmental Agency prefers residential schemes that provide living accommodation above the flood level and sleeping accommodation above flood risk level. All proposals must be accompanied by a flood risk assessment.*
- 14.13.8 *Proposals that will be likely to act as a major destination will be required to provide a Transport Assessment.*
- 14.13.9 *The site was formerly used by the pharmaceutical industry. Any proposals will be required to provide an assessment of the extent of any contamination on the site and where necessary undertake remediation work to be agreed with the local planning authority and implemented prior to any development on site. GlaxoSmithKline have undertaken some investigative and study work, including on-site bore hole testing.*
- 14.13.10 *The County Council's Areas of Archaeological Potential maps indicate that there were post medieval bridges in the area around the footbridge across the River Darent. Developers will be expected to provide information on the nature and*

quality of these archaeological remains and these findings should influence the form of the proposed built development. An appropriate condition will be attached to any planning permission.

TC10 Mill Pond Road

Land at Mill Pond Road is allocated for comprehensive development primarily for indoor leisure uses with supporting uses which may include an hotel, non-food retail and employment (use class B1). Subject to considerations of design and the inter-relationship of uses, it may also be possible to include an element of residential.

Proposals will only be permitted where they:

- 1. Conform with a planning brief for the whole site which has been prepared or agreed by the local planning authority and are accompanied by a masterplan;***
- 2. Are readily accessible by public transport, bicycle and on foot and make appropriate provision for transport infrastructure and services;***
- 3. Are of a high quality of design that reflects the site's prominent location at an important 'gateway' to the town;***
- 4. Provide improved pedestrian connections from the site to the town centre and Dartford Railway Station;***
- 5. Provide unrestricted public pedestrian access along the River Darent within the site as part of the extension of the Darent Valley Footpath;***
- 6. Provide an open space corridor along the course of the River Darent within the site; and***
- 7. Provide an assessment of contamination of the site and where necessary remediation work to be undertaken to be agreed with the local planning authority and implemented prior to any development on site.***

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