

Appendix A: Retail Planning Assessment

Rotherham Town Centre Masterplan Retail Planning Background and Policy Context

1. Introduction

1.1 The Masterplan and development management decisions that flow from and implement it will sit within the appropriate national and local policy context, including notably that set by the Rotherham Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document (“RTCSPD”, August 2016) and the evidence base, notably the Sheffield and Rotherham Joint Retail and Leisure Study, (“the Study”, February 2017 but also the preceding Rotherham Economic Growth Plan 2015-2037: these documents have been prepared within the context of the National Planning Policy Framework (“the Framework”, 2012) and Rotherham’s Core Strategy (2014).

1.2 A central theme of both the Framework and the Core Strategy is to maintain and enhance the role of Rotherham Town Centre as the principal Town Centre within the District. Importantly, both nationally and locally further research has highlighted continuing threats to Town Centres generally and the importance of local authorities adopting proactive roles in encouraging diversification and the establishment of new roles and functions for centres going forward into the 21st Century. The RTCSPD represented a first step in this process which this current Masterplan builds on and introduces more detailed steps to delivery. The subsequent publication of the Study has served to confirm key elements of the background setting out clear findings on the current role of the Town Centre relative to other provision in the sub-region and consequently highlighting the range of uses which might most successfully encourage and underpin the enhancement of the principal Town Centre role.

1.3 The purpose of this summary section is to consider the context set by the relevant documents.

2. National and Strategic context

2.1 The aims and objectives established in the Framework are clear in paragraph 23 which states, inter alia:

“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 drawing up Local Plans, local planning authorities should:

- recognise Town Centres as the heart of their communities and pursue
- policies to support their viability and vitality;
- define the extent of Town Centres and primary shopping areas, based on a
- clear definition of primary and secondary frontages in designated centres,
- and set policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in such
- locations;
- retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce
- or create new ones, ensuring that markets remain attractive and
- competitive;
- allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail,
- 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;
- recognise that residential development can play an important role in
- ensuring the vitality of centres and set out policies to encourage residential

- development on appropriate sites; and
- where Town Centres are in decline, local planning authorities should plan
- positively for their future to encourage economic activity.”

2.2 The adopted Core Strategy, at Policy CS 13, confirmed just such an approach establishing policy elements such as:

“The Council and its partners are committed to delivering Town Centre regeneration through developments that improve the quality and diversity of retail and other Town Centre uses, promote sustainable urban living, support opportunities for learning, reinforce the distinct identity of the town, encourage the re-use of vacant floorspace, enhance the public realm, and address social deprivation.

...the Council will:

- a. support development which enhances Rotherham Town Centre’s appeal as a family friendly destination and require proposals to demonstrate how they contribute towards creating a safe, attractive and accessible Town Centre.
- b. seek to deliver new entertainment, leisure and cultural offer focused in the western part of the Town Centre
- c. on the former Guest and Chimes site, support proposals well integrated with adjoining uses and which support the vitality and viability of the Town Centre
- d. Support the provision of additional and/or improved health facilities
- e. Support proposals which improve and enhance transport infrastructure and public transport connections
- f. support proposals which improve the range and quality of retail and leisure facilities by
 - i. broadening the appeal of the Town Centre offer
 - ii. delivering larger stores and more national retailers
 - iii. delivering more quality independent retailers
 - iv. raise the profile and improve the physical and environmental quality of the indoor and outdoor markets
 - v. providing opportunity for tourism and leisure facilities, such as quality food and drink, cinema and hotel developments
 - vi. bringing vacant units back into use.”

3. Rotherham Economic Growth Plan 2015-2015

3.1 This document references the Core Strategy but aims to establish in more detail a programme of investment in relation to a series of key themes which together are identified as driving economic growth and particularly seeking to deliver both new businesses and new jobs. The Town Centre is identified as one of these.

3.2 It identifies various major capital investment projects as main drivers, including Forge Island redevelopment and delivery of a cinema and hotel. It states:

“The Town Centre is a high priority for the borough, will be a major driver of economic growth and acts as a barometer of the overall health of the borough. There is considerable potential to increase employment in and close to the Town Centre in leisure, retail, office and other commercial activities. We will also seek to substantially increase the residential offer within the Town Centre, making it a much more vibrant and diverse place to visit, work and live.”

3.3 It goes on subsequently to identify specific projects:

- “Work with partners to deliver a number of identified infrastructure projects:
- Redevelopment of Forge Island
 - Redevelopment/refurbishment of Markets Complex
 - Provision of a Town Centre hotel
 - Provision of a Town Centre cinema
 - Construction of a HE Campus on the Doncaster Gate site
 - Identify/provide sites for 1,000 more residential units in the Town Centre”

3.4 Importantly, as with previous documents, it points clearly to the constraint on retailing in the Town Centre in particular of its location between but close to the two major out of centre developments (neither defined as a ‘Town Centre’) of Parkgate and the Meadowhall Shopping Centre.

4. Rotherham Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document

4.1 The RTCSPD aimed to translate the broad goals of the Core Strategy into a document updating the 2005 Renaissance masterplan and:

“setting out a framework for development of the key sites within the Town Centre, such as Forge Island, how best to utilise them and how to link them to existing attractions such as Clifton Park. This SPD, together with the emerging vision for the borough, will set a future course for the investment and works required to provide Rotherham with the Town Centre it both needs and deserves”

4.2 The RTCSPD effectively accelerated the process in the Sites and Policies document which is at Examination. It includes a draft Policy SP 27 “Rotherham Town Centre Regeneration” which sets out key uses and aspirations to be encouraged to support regeneration whilst accepting that other uses may also assist in the process. It therefore recognises the need for flexibility in approach to deliver the overarching regeneration objectives. The formal Examination process is not unusually a lengthy one, particularly as the document encompasses housing and employment provision, green belt boundaries and full range of development management issues and further consultation and hearing sessions are expected.

Given the scope for and importance of securing early wins for Town Centre regeneration, the RTCSPD and this current Master-planning exercise, both essentially consistent with the emerging Sites and Policies document as well as importantly the Core Strategy, represent important delivery documents. While a number of specific matters are before the Sites and Policies Examination Inspector, it is our view that in the context of key matters arising through this Master-plan approach there are none which have specific or fundamental implications, although this will be a matter for the judgement of the Local Planning Authority.

5. Sheffield and Rotherham Joint Retail and Leisure Study

5.1 The Study states at the outset that it is to provide background both for future development documents and to support development management functions. Its findings are therefore significant for the preparation of this Master-plan.

5.2 The Study in its early chapters sets out the relevant policy context and highlights general trends in retailing. It references the competitive difficulties faced by retailing in the Town Centre given the proximity of Parkgate and Meadowhall Shopping Centre, both of which offer traditional Town Centre retailer offers and greater representation and floorspace than does Rotherham Town Centre.

5.3 The reality of this situation is made clear in the Study from Section 6 (“The Rotherham Retail Hierarchy and Town Centre Health Checks”) onwards. The Study relies on broadly accepted data sources in relation to Rotherham Town Centre. The Health Check presents a number of important findings including:

- The Town Centre retains an important role for food shopping.
- A falling representation of comparison goods retailers: while this is a general trend the significance of the fall here clearly reflects the strong competition from the two freestanding shopping centres.
- This is further evidenced by the falling shopper choice of the Town Centre for comparison goods shopping (the household survey data upon which the analysis is based shows, 2012-2016 a fall from 70% to 32% of households questioned while both Parkgate and Meadowhall have experienced increases in rates of patronage).
- Increasing shop unit vacancy rates.
- Currently a poor leisure offer.

The Study states:

“In summary, the Town Centre's retail core is clearly vulnerable to competition from out of centre retail units accommodating a range of clothing/ fashion and luxury goods. There is a clear dominance by MSC in Sheffield for these types of goods, closely followed by Parkgate Shopping.”

5.4 It goes on to refer to emerging proposals set out in the Publication draft Sites and Policies document and in particular points to the potential benefits for Town Centre vitality and viability of increasing the number of new homes within and on the edge of the Town Centre. The combination of these factors leads the Study to the conclusion:

“we consider that the future health of the Town Centre lies in the ability to diversify its offer and suite of land uses. This will include introducing a greater diversity of leisure and food/drink uses, in order to increase vitality and activity throughout the day and evening. This will also be assisted by an increase in the local residential population. The Council has already started to take steps in this regard, including acquiring and promoting development sites and commissioning a Town Centre masterplan, and will now have to carefully consider the impact of development proposals for retail and leisure uses in the wider area in order to ensure that they do not impact upon the delivery of this planned investment.”

5.5 These conclusions, derived from health check data related to consumer habits, is subsequently supported by the quantitative and qualitative analyses presented in Section 9 “Assessment of need for retail and leisure floorspace in Rotherham”.

5.6 In relation to convenience (food and groceries) shopping it finds no requirements for additional floorspace across the Borough as a whole. Unsurprisingly, given the presence of the Drummond Street Tesco, other retailers and the markets, there is no exception for the Town Centre. The household survey confirmed the importance of the Town Centre in fulfilling this function for its immediate catchment area.

5.7 In relation to non-food/comparison goods the quantitative analysis finds very limited requirements for additional floorspace across the Borough and suggests that the floorspace that is required should be directed to the Town Centre in accordance with the Framework and Core Strategy policies. Currently the Study finds that while the town has a reasonably good representation of comparison goods retailers the issue relates to the distribution of the retailers with Parkgate being more significant than the Town Centre – the floorspace levels alone indicate this with the Town Centre having about 23,225 square metres (250,000 sq ft) ground floor retail in comparison goods use and Parkgate over 37,000 square metres (400,000 sq ft).

In terms of clothing and fashion goods, staples of ‘Town Centre’ shopping offers, Parkgate attracts 3.5 times the expenditure of the Town Centre.

5.8 The overall Study finding is that the floorspace and expenditure data derived from the quantitative analysis clearly demonstrates the competition the Town Centre faces from its immediate vicinity “which prompts the need to be realistic over the ability of the centre to improve its offer and attract new comparison goods retailers. Indeed, on this issue, we consider that comparison goods retailer demand for the Town Centre is likely to be subdued.”

5.9 The strength of the two competing attractions lead the Study to conclude that it would be difficult to affect a significant shift in the Town Centre comparison goods offer and that the key aim should be to maintain the existing role.

5.10 The Study then moves to assess Leisure issues and notes moves by the Borough Council to address identified deficiencies, with particular reference to Forge Island and objectives of improving significantly leisure facilities. The overall conclusion is:

“In particular, we consider that there is a particular quantitative and qualitative need for a new cinema in Rotherham and there is also scope for a material improvement in food and drink uses. The provision of both of these uses are likely to be hand-in-hand and are increasingly being seen as key to the future diversification and attractiveness of Town Centres, including the ability to increase vitality and activity in centres throughout the day and into the evening.”

6. Overall conclusions

6.1 The land use and retail planning context set by the relevant National and development plan policies and supported by relevant evidence base material highlight common themes for the Masterplan preparation, themes which are generally being pursued.

1. Town Centres generally have become under increasing pressure from both free-standing developments and from online trading.

2. In order to maintain their position as the focus for the community – generally being in particularly sustainable locations – it is both appropriate and necessary for local planning authorities to adopt the advice of the Framework and to adopt a proactive role in promoting development to enhance attractiveness.

3. Rotherham is in probably a unique position in terms of competition, by virtue of being located close to two major free-standing retail centres – Parkgate and Meadowhall, both of which were designed to meet the particular floorspace requirements of modern retailers while Rotherham Town Centre exemplifies a traditional centre with elements of redevelopment during the second half of the 20th century. The Tesco relocation represents the significant example of the most modern retail redevelopment and this is no doubt significantly responsible for the strong role still played by the Town Centre in meeting convenience shopping needs.

4. The needs and scope for enhancing the leisure offer of the Town Centre have been noted for some time and evolving documents have refined how they might be addressed and met.

5. Similarly, as sites have become available and both nationally and regionally trends in Town Centre living have changed, the opportunities to introduce homes and therefore people into and around the Town Centre have become more attractive and significant, and figure more significantly in the means of meeting the national and local aim of boosting significantly the supply of housing.

6.2 Securing key changes taking advantage of any or all of these opportunities will be important to encouraging on-going physical and economic regeneration that are set out in the various documents referenced above, delivering economic improvement, job

opportunities and enhanced facilities for the Rotherham community. It is important that aspirations and projects are deliverable and this is the primary focus of the current Master-planning exercise.

