6 TOWN CENTRE AND RETAIL DEVELOPMENTS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

6.1.1 There have been considerable changes in the provision of shopping and services over the last ten years. The most obvious of which have been hypermarkets, superstores, retail warehouses and other out-of-town developments, with a consequential increase in service uses within traditional retail frontages. These new forms of retail floorspace reflect the rise in car ownership and a society with increasing disposable incomes and leisure time.

6.1.2 The disadvantage of out of centre retailing is that it is often inaccessible to groups such as the disabled, the elderly and those without private motorised transport. In addition, it is the small and medium sized general traders who have been adversely affected by new forms of shopping. To counter the movement of retailers away from the Town Centre, effort and investment is needed to promote the advantages of the Town Centre. At the same time, however it needs to be recognised that out-of-centre retailing is important to the sub-regional role of Stevenage.

6.1.3 There are three main types of retailing: comparison shopping; bulky goods; and convenience shopping. The perception is that comparison goods shopping needs to be improved in Stevenage. The strategy is therefore to increase market share. This will help to reduce the need to travel. Such shopping should be located within the Town Centre. Bulky goods provision is fairly good within Stevenage and contributes to the sub-regional role of the town. There is no evidence that residents travel outside the Stevenage sub-region to satisfy their needs. The strategy is therefore to maintain market share. It is important that provision for bulky goods shopping does not take space within the Town Centre, which will be required for comparison goods shopping. Research has shown that there is no quantitative need for convenience goods shopping and therefore the strategy is also to maintain market share. The only quantitative need for convenience shops that is likely to arise is that which is needed to meet the needs of new residents at the development at Stevenage West, and this will be the subject of detailed assessment.

6.1.4 The Town Centre is the focus for retailing in Stevenage. It also provides a wide range of leisure facilities and is an important centre for employment opportunities. These facilities cater not only for those who live and work in the Town, but also for people who travel from other areas specifically to use these facilities. There is also residential accommodation within the Town Centre mainly at the southern end. It is provided above the retail and service units and in the residential block, the Towers, at the southern end of Queensway. The Town is recognised as a sub-regional centre for shopping and leisure activities. The Town Centre is also an
important asset in terms of the amount of both public and private investment that has taken place in the past. It is important to maintain and enhance this investment in terms of both the facilities provided and the environment. The Town Centre continues to provide a number of development and redevelopment opportunities, although with relatively restricted land resources the optimum use must be made of available land.

6.1.5 The original plan for Stevenage new town recognised that the centre, as the main focus of the town, would need to satisfy commercial requirements and also provide civic and social functions. When first built it was a model of good practice, attractive and successful.

6.1.6 Stevenage today, like most other new towns, is in need of rejuvenation. Because the town centre was largely built as a whole integrated unit forty years ago, physical decay has become evident across the whole centre at the same time. Other competing towns have benefited from significant new investment and modern retail and leisure facilities whereas Stevenage has not kept pace. There has been some recent quality investment, such as The Plaza, Westgate and The Forum, but this has not been sufficient to overcome the depreciation in the rest of the centre.

6.1.7 The investment has also not had the impact that might have been achieved if it had been in the context of a clear vision and development strategy.

6.1.8 Recognising this, the Borough Council and English Partnerships agreed to jointly fund the preparation of a regeneration strategy for the town centre in 2001. The strategy was the subject of wide ranging consultation with stakeholders and was approved by the Council’s Executive Committee in October 2001.

6.1.9 Following the preparation of the strategy the Council has a newly adopted vision for the regeneration of the town centre: It is:

“To create a vibrant town centre that is a home to a complementary spectrum of retail, leisure, office, civic and residential uses. The centre will have a high quality public realm and significantly improved transport services. It will capitalise on its unique new town history and will be a safe, sustainable and successful place at the forefront of competitiveness and good practice.”

6.1.10 The regeneration strategy creates a co-ordinated, integrated framework for the transformation of the town centre that avoids the piecemeal development of the past.

6.1.11 The key elements of the regeneration strategy are:
1) A retail scheme to accommodate a department store, A1 shop units and associated A3 food and drink uses in Town Centre North.

2) Potential modernised civic facilities, possibly located in a flagship building in front of Daneshill House.

3) High density town centre residential accommodation in Town Centre South

4) A3 and possibly D2 leisure uses adjacent to the Plaza between the Town Square and Town Centre South.

5) The development of a program of environmental improvements, covering:
   a) The creation of a palette of materials for use in schemes;
   b) Improvements to Queensway North and Central, Town Square and other parts of the Town Centre;
   c) The development of a series of linked new urban squares;
   d) The treatment/redevelopment of surface car parks; and
   e) The creation of easier links between the town centre and facilities to the east of St George’s Way.

6) The development of an integrated sustainable transport strategy, covering:
   a) Changed public transport access to the town centre, and the roles and relationships of the train and bus stations;
   b) A reduced role for the ring road;
   c) Improved pedestrian and cycle links across the town centre and ring road; and
   d) A car parking strategy

6.1.12 The new development proposals are reflected in revised allocations in policy TR2, whilst the strategy overall is reflected in changes to this chapter made since the revised deposit stage in mid-2001. The Council will prepare SPG to provide greater detail about these proposals. The purpose of this guidance will be to:
   a) set out a broad-brush development master plan for the town centre as a whole, based on the adopted regeneration strategy;
   b) place the strategy in a more detailed land-use planning context; and
   c) provide the basis for more detailed Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on individual development schemes within the town centre.

6.1.13 New town centre developments pose particular problems in their implementation. Land ownerships are often diverse and fragmented, making it time-consuming to secure site assembly. However, even in such difficult circumstances developers will usually be prepared to invest the time and effort required to implement a development, provided that they can be assured of support should it prove necessary to seek compulsory purchase powers to complete site assembly. Because of this, the Council is willing to consider using its CPO powers if necessary, to bring the retail scheme outlined in policy TR2(i) forward.
6.1.14 In this context small shops outside the Town Centre and Neighbourhood Centres are only acceptable where there is a gap in provision. Most isolated shops in residential areas are uneconomic and, when vacant, consideration should be given to alternative future uses. In addition, there has been a growing trend for retail outlets to be established in industrial areas which can have a detrimental effect on the Town and Neighbourhood Centres.

6.2 TOWN CENTRE POLICY AREA

6.2.1 The Town Centre Inset Area covers all the Town Centre pedestrian areas and extends to cover the railway station, the Firs car park, the swimming pool area the Town Centre Gardens, North Hertfordshire College and the Fire Station/Manulife House all of which are integral to the Town Centre and provide opportunities for enhanced Town Centre activities. It is important that this area continues to provide the opportunities for service provision and activities to enable Stevenage to function as a major sub-regional shopping centre. This will increase the overall attractiveness of the Town Centre not only to workers and residents but also for others who travel to Stevenage to use the Town Centre.

6.2.2 Within the area shown on the Town Centre Inset Map are defined the Town Centre Inset Area and the Town Centre Policy Area (TCPA). The former defines the town centre for office, leisure, social and community and housing purposes, and includes the smaller TCPA which is the focus of the town centre retailing and, thus, represents the retail core. The ring road essentially forms the boundary of the Town Centre Policy Area, and this is the town centre in policy terms (for instance, in terms of the definition to be used in policy TR5). However, the town centre for a number of other uses is slightly larger and is defined by the Town Centre Inset Area. In particular, major leisure proposals are covered by policies L1 and L2. It is essential to maintain the vitality and viability of the town centre by continuing to provide a wide range of employment, leisure and social/community uses within the town centre inset and policy areas.

6.2.3 The Stevenage Retail Study prepared by consultants on behalf of the Borough Council shows that to maintain its sub-regional role there needs to be a provision of 21,500 square metres (231,800 square feet) of retail floorspace for non-bulky comparison goods by 2011. These figures should however be treated with caution as retailing is a dynamic sector. It is envisaged that this will be accommodated within the existing Town Centre Policy Area through development and redevelopment proposals. Policy TR2 identifies development and redevelopment sites.

6.2.4 The Borough Council is currently establishing a Town Centre Development Trust including landowners, potential developers, the
Town Centre Management Company and English Partnerships to provide a detailed strategy and action plan for town centre regeneration. The Borough Council anticipates issuing Supplementary Planning Guidance on the Town Centre when the outcome of this work becomes clearer.

6.2.5 The Borough Council considers that there are opportunities for development within the Town Centre Inset Area in the short and medium term. These opportunities may require site assembly from a number of different owners which the Borough Council will support where the general content of schemes and their scale can demonstrate a benefit to the Town Centre overall. The sites allocated in Policy TR2 are shown on the Town Centre Inset Map and indicate general areas where development is considered appropriate. These are not intended to be entirely prescriptive - land adjacent (but within the Town Centre Inset Area) could be included if this benefits the scheme. Alternatively, areas smaller than those identified could be considered if this would not compromise the integration and impact of the scheme.

POLICY TR1: TOWN CENTRE

WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRE INSET AREA, AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, LEISURE, CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY, HOUSING AND OFFICES WILL BE PERMITTED. RETAIL USES WILL ALSO BE PERMITTED, PROVIDED THEY MEET THE TESTS SET OUT IN POLICY TR5.

WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRE POLICY AREA, AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED FOR:

(A) RETAILING (USE CLASSES A1, A2 & A3)
(B) OFFICE DEVELOPMENT (CLASS B1a)
(C) HOUSING (CLASS C3)
(D) LEISURE, CULTURAL, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL USES (CLASSES C1, D1 & D2)

PROVIDED THAT THEY DO NOT CONFLICT WITH THE COUNCIL’S ADOPTED VISION OR STRATEGY FOR THE TOWN CENTRE OR OTHER POLICIES, MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES COMPRISING TWO OR MORE OF THESE ELEMENTS WILL BE PERMITTED. SPECIFIC SITES ARE ALLOCATED IN POLICY TR2.

PROPOSALS SHOULD ENHANCE THE TOWN CENTRE THROUGH HIGH QUALITY DESIGN AND TOWNSCAPE. THE COUNCIL WILL SEEK THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF DEVELOPERS IN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES THAT ARE WELL RELATED IN SCALE AND KIND TO THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT.
6.3 TOWN CENTRE INSET AREA DEVELOPMENT SITES

6.3.1 In order for the Town Centre Inset Area to meet the changing needs of Stevenage and to enhance its sub-regional role, it is essential to ensure that development opportunities are maximised for retail, office and leisure uses together with housing. There are a number of specific sites which are available to provide this range of opportunities.

6.3.2 The area to the south of the Town Centre currently provides a range of secondary shopping facilities, as well as a number of social and community uses, housing and office accommodation. The Borough Council is concerned that the potential shift in retailing to the north means that the Town Centre South area could become unattractive. In addition, the area to the south of Queensway has significant development potential for a range of retail, office, social, and leisure facilities. Such development could increase the attractiveness of this part of the Town Centre.

6.3.3 The bus station is presently located in the Town Square. This location is now at capacity. With the increase in emphasis on sustainable modes of transport and the increase in housing in the Town the demands on the bus station are increasing. Research has been undertaken to assess which areas can most suitably accommodate an enhanced passenger transport interchange. The preferred site is between the railway line and Lytton Way and this will be actively pursued by the Council. This site would enable the development of a combined rail and bus interchange with good links to the Town Centre.

6.3.4 The bus station is an important element in the character of the Town Square in particular, and the Town Centre as a whole. When the bus station moves to the transport interchange (policy TR2(ii)) the Town Square will become part of the development proposals for a new retail scheme (policy TR2(i)) and new cafes and bars (policy TR2(iv)).
Policies TR2: Town Centre Development Sites

The following sites, as defined on the Proposals Map, are allocated for development as specified below. Development proposals should demonstrate that they can be successfully integrated with existing development and other planned developments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allocation</th>
<th>Site Description</th>
<th>Appropriate Uses</th>
<th>Priorities in Developments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TR2 (i)</td>
<td>TOWN CENTRE NORTH</td>
<td>RETAIL (PRINCIPALLY A1 WITH ANCILLARY A3) AND CAR PARKING; AND OPTIONALLY ANCILLARY (i) D1 COMMUNITY AND/OR (ii) D2 LEISURE USES</td>
<td>NEW SHOPPING MALL TO ADD QUALITY COMPARISON RETAILING. DEPARTMENT STORE AND SMALLER RETAIL UNITS. HIGH STANDARD OF URBAN DESIGN. DEVELOP GOOD QUALITY PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY FROM THE TOWN SQUARE TO LEISURE CENTRE AND TRAIN STATION IN CONJUNCTION WITH TR2 (ii). AA ACCREDITED PARKING. COMMUNITY USES MAY INCLUDE RELOCATED LIBRARY MUSEUM OR OTHER FACILITIES FROM TR2 (v) SITE. SITE TO BE COVERED BY CCTV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TR2(ii)</td>
<td>WEST OF LYTTON WAY</td>
<td>TRANSPORT INTERCHANGE (INCLUDING RELOCATED BUS STATION) AND MULTI-STOREY CAR PARKING; AND OPTIONALLY ANCILLARY (i) A1 SHOPS AND/OR (ii) A3 FOOD AND DRINK AND/OR (iii) B1 OFFICES; AND/OR (iv) D2 LEISURE USES.</td>
<td>CREATE GOOD QUALITY BUILT FRONTAGE ONTO LYTTON WAY AND PROVIDE GOOD QUALITY MULTI-STOREY CAR PARKING. PROVISION FOR PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY TO TOWN SQUARE AND LEISURE CENTRE IN CONJUNCTION WITH TR2 (i). COULD BE BUILT IN PHASES, WITH</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>TR2 (iii)</td>
<td>EAST OF LYTTON WAY</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MULTI-STOREY CAR PARKING; AND (i) B1 OFFICES; OR (ii) D2 LEISURE USES; OR (iii) D1 ‘COMMUNITY’ USES; OR (iv) A COMBINATION OF (i)-(iii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CREATE GOOD QUALITY BUILT FRONTAGE ONTO LYTTON WAY AND PROVIDE AA ACCREDITED CAR PARKING. COMMUNITY FACILITIES MAY INCLUDE RELOCATED LIBRARY, ART GALLERY, MUSEUM OR OTHER FACILITIES FROM TR2 (v) SITE. TO BE COVERED BY CCTV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TR2 (iv)</td>
<td>TOWN CENTRE AND THE QUADRANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A3 FOOD AND DRINK AND Optionally, D2 LEISURE USES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VIBRANT TOWNSCAPE AND THE CREATION OF A NEW URBAN SQUARE. HIGH STANDARD OF URBAN DESIGN. PEDESTRIAN LINK FROM THE PLAZA DEVELOPMENT AND/OR TOWN SQUARE TO TR2(v) SITE. TO BE COVERED BY CCTV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TR2 (v)</td>
<td>TOWN CENTRE SOUTH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C3 RESIDENTIAL AND A3 FOOD AND DRINK; AND Optionally (i) B1 OFFICES AND/OR (ii) C1 HOTEL. MULTI-STOREY CAR PARKING WILL BE REQUIRED FOR B1 AND C1 USES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT. HIGH STANDARD OF URBAN DESIGN AND STREETSCAPE. DESIGN TO ACCOMMODATE ACCESS FROM TR2 (iv) SITE. RELOCATION OF EXISTING COMMUNITY USES MUST BE TO ANOTHER SITE WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRE. GOOD QUALITY MULTI-STOREY CAR PARKING FOR ANY B1/C1 USES. TO BE COVERED BY CCTV.</td>
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6.4 RETAIL DEVELOPMENT IN THE TOWN CENTRE

6.4.1 Retail development will be encouraged to locate within the Town Centre, to maintain vitality and viability. The Town Centre for retail purposes is defined in policy TR 1 and is shown on the proposals map. Moreover, the Town Centre will be maintained as the principal retail location within the Borough.

6.4.2 A major consideration in the changing nature of town centres is the current trend in the growth of services such as building societies which include full banking facilities, estate agents, and insurance offices, as well as the growth of other service facilities such as restaurants, pubs and fast food takeaways. Such services provide a range of facilities required by local people and those using the Town Centre. They are therefore an appropriate use within the Town Centre and make it an attractive and vital place to shop.

6.4.3 The Borough Council recognises that there is a need to provide a place for these services, but without losing the cohesiveness of the retail frontages. A balance is therefore required between these competing uses. To protect and enhance the shopping function of the Town Centre, the Borough Council has designated primary and secondary shopping frontages within the Town Centre. In the primary frontages changes of use will only be permitted for retail (A1). In the secondary areas A2 and A3 uses will also be permitted. Other uses such as services, cultural, leisure and social facilities will only be acceptable outside these primary shopping frontages. The primary retail frontages are considered to be North Queensway, Westgate, and the central part of The Forum. This area is the retail core of the Town Centre, and the primary retail frontages radiate out from it. The area delineated as primary retail frontage allows for a reasonable amount of secondary shopping frontage to be available for Class A2 and A3 uses.

POLICY TR3 : RETAIL FRONTAGES

THE GROUND FLOOR PRIMARY RETAIL FRONTAGES SHOWN ON THE TOWN CENTRE INSET MAP ARE RESERVED FOR RETAIL USE (CLASS A1) AND OTHER USES WILL BE REFUSED. PROPOSALS FOR GROUND FLOOR LEVEL CLASS A2 OR A3 OR OTHER USES APPROPRIATE IN A TOWN CENTRE RETAIL STREET WILL BE PERMITTED IN THE SECONDARY FRONTAGES AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP.

THE PRIMARY RETAIL FRONTAGES ARE:

QUEENSWAY  
38-98 (EVEN)  
41-103 (ODD)
Where new retail development takes place within the Town Centre, the Borough Council will consider its status as a primary retail frontage in terms of its location in relationship to the existing malls.

To ensure that the vitality and viability of the Town Centre Policy Area is enhanced, there is a need to retain and develop the shopping and service provision (as defined in Part A of 1987 Use Class Order) to enable a wide range and type of shopping to be provided and to accommodate changing shopping trends. Although the type of shopping (convenience or comparison) may change with new trends, it is essential that retail provision is retained or increased to maintain the competitiveness of the Town Centre. It is also necessary to ensure that there is an adequate provision of services such as banks, building societies and restaurants outside the primary frontages, to make the town centre an attractive and vital place.

**POLICY TR4 : LOSS OF RETAIL FLOORSPACE**

PROPOSALS WHICH INVOLVE THE OVERALL LOSS OF RETAIL (A1), FOOD AND DRINK (A3) AND SERVICE FLOORSPACE (A2) IN THE TOWN CENTRE INSET AREA WILL BE RESISTED EXCEPT FOR CHANGES OF USE TO SOCIAL, COMMUNITY, LEISURE AND CULTURAL USES AND RESIDENTIAL USE AT FIRST FLOOR
6.5 RETAIL DEVELOPMENT OUTSIDE THE TOWN CENTRE, NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES AND THE OLD TOWN

6.5.1 PPG6 acknowledges that town centres need to be vital and viable places not only to provide a range of local services but also to act as the social/cultural focus for the Town. They provide a range of facilities that can normally be accessed by the widest range of modes of transport. They are therefore most important in terms of sustainable patterns of development and lifestyles. Where out of town centre development takes place it is best for it to be clustered so that the greatest opportunities for linked trips can be made - rather than one trip to one store. Within Stevenage the main areas of retail warehousing are at Roaring Meg (North and South), Monkswood and Roebuck retail parks. Taken together these provide a wide range of non-food and non-fashion shopping, as well as a limited number of restaurants, takeaways, and leisure activities. The Borough Council accepted that with the new trends in retailing in the 1980s, there was both a quantitative and qualitative need for retail warehousing. Therefore, the Roaring Meg Retail Parks were permitted and now perform a specific function which complements the Town Centre retail facilities. The Borough Council was concerned that Roaring Meg could harm the vitality and viability of the Town Centre and therefore restricted the type of goods that can be sold. It is important that linkages to the Town Centre are retained and improved and that these uses complement the Town Centre and movement is encouraged between the two areas by transport means other than the private car.

6.5.2 The need for additional convenience and bulky goods retailing was considered at a Public Inquiry into a number of retail proposals held in April/May 2000. The Secretary of State agreed that the strategy of maintaining market share for bulky goods was justified. Planning permission was granted for three schemes that, if implemented, will provide additional retail warehouse space. In the short to medium term there is therefore little capacity for additional non-food retailing. It is not considered to be appropriate to identify sites for longer term development. Whilst planning permission was granted for a new superstore on an edge-of-centre site the Secretary of State accepted that there was insufficient expenditure to fully support it but that other reasons justified permission being granted. There is no capacity for additional convenience retailing within the plan period with the exception of opportunities in the strategic housing development at Stevenage West to meet the needs of the residents.

6.5.3 Out of centre retailing, and particularly retail warehouse parks are important to the Town’s sub-regional role. Through the Plan period it is anticipated that the demand for such floorspace will increase. Policy TR5 seeks to control the growth of this floorspace so that provision is
only made where need can be demonstrated. For the purposes of the policy, need is not just available expenditure it also includes qualitative aspects, including the wider needs of the community. Once a need has been demonstrated there is a requirement to adopt a sequential approach; starting with the Town Centre Policy Area, followed by edge-of-centre sites and district and local centres (which in Stevenage are referred to as neighbourhood centres), and lastly out-of-centre sites. An edge of centre location is within easy walking distance (between 200-300 metres dependent upon the quality of the pedestrian links and whether roads provide barriers). An out-of-centre location is clearly separate from the Town Centre. A number of the retail parks are dated. It is important that residents have access to quality facilities and therefore proposals that regenerate existing facilities will also be considered favourably providing they do not result in additional floorspace for which there is no need.

**POLICY TR5 : RETAILING OUTSIDE EXISTING CENTRES**

**PROPOSALS FOR FURTHER RETAIL DEVELOPMENTS OUTSIDE THE TOWN CENTRE POLICY AREA, NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES AND OLD TOWN WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS IT CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THERE IS SUFFICIENT RETAIL NEED.**

**RETAIL DEVELOPMENTS AT STEVENAGE WEST WHICH ACCORD WITH POLICY SW14 WILL NOT BE SUBJECT TO THIS POLICY.**

**IN THE EVENT THAT A RETAIL NEED EXISTS DEVELOPMENT WILL BE PERMITTED WHERE:**

(A) **A SEQUENTIAL APPROACH TO SITE SELECTION HAS BEEN TAKEN, WHEREBY SITES WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRE POLICY AREA ARE THE MOST PREFERRED, FOLLOWED BY EDGE-OF-CENTRE SITES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES AND THE OLD TOWN, AND LASTLY OUT-OF-CENTRE SITES;**

(B) **IT CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THE INDIVIDUAL OR CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF A PROPOSAL WILL NOT HARM THE VITALITY AND VIABILITY OF RETAIL USES IN EXISTING CENTRES; AND**

(C) **IT WILL NOT GIVE RISE TO UNACCEPTABLE TRAFFIC CONDITIONS OR PREJUDICE ROAD SAFETY; AND**

(D) **IT WILL NOT HAVE AN UNACCEPTABLE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT; AND**

(E) **IT IS LOCATED IN A POSITION WHICH ALLOWS ACCESS BY A CHOICE OF MODES OF TRANSPORT AND RELATES WELL TO OTHER OUT OF CENTRE RETAILING ALLOWING FOR LINKED TRIPS BY TRANSPORT MODES OTHER THAN THE PRIVATE CAR; AND**

(F) **IT DOES NOT TAKE LAND DESIGNATED FOR OTHER USES.**
Policy SW14

6.5.4 Retail proposals may come forward which either individually or cumulatively could affect existing shopping facilities in the Town Centre and other local facilities. Proposals which would result in an increase of over 2,500 square metres are considered to be sufficiently large, relative to the Town Centre and out-of-town shopping areas, for the Borough Council to require a retail study in order to assess whether the effect of any new proposals would be detrimental to the vitality and viability of the Town Centre and other centres. This may also be necessary for smaller schemes if it appears that they could affect the vitality and viability of the Town Centre and other centres. In line with central government advice in PPG6, it is not the Borough Council’s intention to require detailed computations or analysis of impact, but to require a general study of the likely effect of any such proposal. The Borough Council would wish to be able to consider such effects carefully in order to ensure the maintenance of existing provision, especially in the Town Centre. A Transport Assessment may also be required as outlined in the Transport Chapter.

POLICY TR6 : RETAIL IMPACT STUDY

RETAIL DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS WHICH MAY, EITHER INDIVIDUALLY OR CUMULATIVELY, HAVE A DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON THE VITALITY AND VIABILITY OF THE TOWN CENTRE WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY A RETAIL STUDY TO BE PROVIDED BY THE DEVELOPER. SUCH A STUDY MUST INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING MATTERS:

(A) EFFECT ON THE VITALITY AND VIABILITY OF THE TOWN CENTRE; AND
(B) ACCESSIBILITY TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC; AND
(C) IMPACT ON THE ROAD, PASSENGER TRANSPORT, CYCLEWAY AND PEDESTRIAN NETWORK; AND
(C) EFFECT ON THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBOURHOOD.

6.6 OFFICES IN THE TOWN CENTRE

6.6.1 The Town Centre is considered to be the principal location for offices in Stevenage as it is where the main concentration of offices in the Town are located. However, whilst offices are encouraged to locate in the town centre, it is acknowledged that new office development is unlikely to be built on a significant scale in the Town Centre until after wider regeneration schemes have been implemented which address the problems which currently result in the Town Centre being perceived as an unattractive location for new offices.
(a) to reinforce the role of the Town Centre as Stevenage’s commercial centre;
(b) the contribution that commercial activities can make to the viability and vitality of the Town Centre;
(c) to assist with the regeneration of the Town Centre;
(d) to help achieve sustainable development objectives by reducing the need to travel, and to allow access to development by a choice of transport modes.

6.6.2 Research undertaken by Roger Tym & Partners for Hertfordshire County Council and the Hertfordshire districts has identified that there is a need for new high quality offices in Stevenage because a large proportion of vacant offices are unlettable in their present condition or are unsuitable for meeting modern occupier requirements. In particular, research has identified the need for an attractive office area to be created which would upgrade Stevenage’s image as an office location. The Town Centre is considered to be the most appropriate location in Stevenage for new office development that could address existing qualitative deficiencies in provision. Accordingly, Policy TR1 favourably considers proposals for office development in the Town Centre Inset Area and Policy TR2 identifies a range of development and redevelopment sites in the Town Centre Inset Area which would be suitable for office development. Policy guidance on office developments outside of the Town Centre is provided in the Employment Chapter.

6.6.3 Research has identified that many of the existing offices in the Town Centre are unsuitable for meeting modern occupier requirements because of their design, layout, access, car parking provision and the quality of the surrounding environment. This is particularly applicable to some of the older offices and premises above the shops. Whilst the Borough Council would encourage development proposals for converting existing office accommodation to provide new offices, it recognises that some offices may no longer be viable for retention. In view of the need to maximise the use of the limited land and building resources in the Town Centre, conversion of existing offices to alternative uses may be more appropriate than premises remaining vacant or underused for long periods of time.

6.6.4 Where it can be demonstrated that offices are no longer suitable for retention, conversions for alternative uses such as residential will be permitted where appropriate. When determining whether the loss of offices can be justified, considerations will include the length of time that the accommodation has been vacant, the suitability of the site for office use, the availability of offices elsewhere in the Town Centre and whether the loss of offices to other uses would accord with regeneration objectives.
6.6.5 Proposals for the redevelopment or conversion of existing office accommodation in the Town Centre inset area will be permitted in circumstances where the accommodation is no longer suitable for office uses. Offices are important to the viability and vitality of the town centre, providing customers for the retail and leisure uses. As the most accessible location in the town, the centre represents a good location for office uses and office workers. Journeys to work can be made by a variety of modes and journeys to shop. Consequently, the Council is keen to retain, enhance and encourage new office developments in, or on the edge of the Town Centre. However, it is recognised that some existing Town Centre office floorspace is not up to modern qualitative standards. Where accommodation is no longer suitable for office users it is preferable to convert or redevelop premises, rather than leave them empty and decaying for extended periods as this is a waste of scarce resources and can encourage a cycle of decay and dereliction in surrounding property.

POLICY TR7: LOSS OF OFFICE ACCOMMODATION

PROPOSALS FOR THE CONVERSION OR REDEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING OFFICE ACCOMMODATION IN THE TOWN CENTRE INSET AREA TO OTHER USES WILL BE PERMITTED WHERE IT CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THE ACCOMMODATION IS NO LONGER SUITABLE FOR OFFICE USE.

6.7 LEISURE, CULTURAL, SOCIAL & COMMUNITY USES

6.7.1 The Town is a sub-regional centre for leisure facilities meeting the needs of both Stevenage residents and people from the surrounding area. It is important that leisure facilities are accessible, and the Town Centre is a prime location for such facilities, with its passenger transport interchanges and car parking provision. A number of the Town Centre sites include leisure as appropriate uses in mixed developments. The Town Centre is the favoured location for new leisure facilities of town-wide significance and proposals for major leisure developments outside of the Town Centre Inset Area or Stevenage Leisure Park will only be permitted where they meet the criteria in Policy L2. Detailed guidance on the provision of town-wide leisure facilities in Stevenage is set out in the Leisure Chapter. Further guidance on Town Centre Regeneration Strategy, uses and urban design will form part of the supplementary planning guidance.

6.7.2 Within the area in and around the Town Centre there is a wide range of leisure, social and community buildings and facilities, including the Arts and Leisure Centre, the Library, museum, swimming pool, North Hertfordshire College, health clinics, Citizens Advice Bureau and churches. These are operated by a number of different organisations, including public sector and
voluntary bodies. These are all essential services which need to be located in an accessible position, and the Town Centre is a prime location. A number of them, e.g. the bingo club, have a great degree of reliance on the public transport system, particularly buses, and linkages with shopping and other services in the town centre. These are key determinants of their location. Adjacent to the town centre is the Stevenage Leisure Park, which has a wide range of commercial operations. The Borough Council accepts that it is necessary for the service provider to be able to use both land and buildings efficiently for service provision and to decide on the most effective and efficient means of service delivery. However, it is essential that there is land available for the key social and community facilities that must have a town centre location. This not only ensures that there is ready access to these facilities but also ensures that the role of the town centre as a primary focus for such facilities is retained. It is essential therefore that there is adequate provision of land to ensure that there is no detrimental effect on the provision of services. In addition, if any such existing land or facilities are lost through development proposals, the Borough Council will want to ensure that adequate provision is made in an accessible location elsewhere within the Town Centre unless it can be proven that the service or facility is no longer required or it can be provided elsewhere as efficiently, effectively and as conveniently.

POLICY TR8 : PROTECTION OF LEISURE, SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY USES

THE LOSS OF EXISTING LEISURE, CULTURAL, SOCIAL OR COMMUNITY FACILITIES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED IN THE TOWN CENTRE EXCEPT WHERE:

(A) THE EXISTING FACILITY CAN BE RELOCATED EITHER WITHIN THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL OR ELSEWHERE WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRE INSET AREA IN EITHER CASE ON AN APPROPRIATE SITE TAKING ACCOUNT OF ITS FUNCTIONAL AND OPERATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS, INCLUDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PUBLIC TRANSPORT, PARKING AND SHOPPING FACILITIES; OR

(B) IT CAN BE PROVEN THAT THERE IS NO LONGER A NEED FOR THE EXISTING FACILITY; OR

(C) IT CAN BE PROVEN THAT THE FACILITY CAN BE PROVIDED ELSEWHERE EQUALLY CONVENIENTLY FOR USERS.

▼Policies L4, SC1

6.8 TOWN CENTRE ACCESSIBILITY
6.8.1 The approach to car parking provision has changed dramatically over the past decade. No longer is it acceptable to work on a predict and provide basis. The sustainability aims of the Government have travel as one of the most important elements of their policy. Local plans have an important role to play through the integration of land use and transportation policies and proposals. In the context of Stevenage Town Centre, its attractiveness and the competition from other towns, it is important to ensure that shoppers have choice of all modes of transport. Passenger transport infrastructure should be enhanced to make it attractive to more people as well as accommodating extra visitors to the regenerated Town Centre and new residents from the strategic housing development at Stevenage West.

6.8.2 Most of the car parking provision in the Town Centre is provided in public car parks run by the Borough Council. An important tool in the operation of car parks is a pricing structure that will allow short term shopper parking, whilst discouraging long term worker/commuter parking. A parking strategy for the Town is being prepared by the Borough Council which will consider this issue as well as for example whether there is enough public parking in the Town Centre. Supplementary Planning Guidance is also being prepared by the Borough Council on Vehicle Parking Provision at New Developments which will provide detailed guidance to support policy TR9.

6.8.3 Given the regeneration and additional floorspace that can be supported from its catchment area, it is essential that existing car parking provision, which is shown to be required by the parking strategy is not lost through development proposals and that new developments make parking provision in accordance with policy T15 of the Plan.

6.8.4 If the proposal is on land currently used for car parking, the proposal will need to be assessed against the car parking strategy to establish whether the spaces will need to be replaced within the development or elsewhere and the amount of car parking that needs to be provided for the proposed development.

**POLICY TR9 : TOWN CENTRE CAR PARKING**

**PROPOSALS WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRE POLICY AREA WILL BE REQUIRED TO PROVIDE CAR PARKING IN ACCORDANCE WITH POLICY T15. ADDITIONALLY IN THE TOWN CENTRE THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA WILL APPLY:**

(A) **ANY EXISTING CAR PARKING WHICH IS NECESSARY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE TOWN WILL BE EITHER REQUIRED TO BE REPLACED WITHIN THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL OR A PLANNING OBLIGATION WILL BE SOUGHT TO ENSURE THAT IT IS PROVIDED ELSEWHERE IN THE TOWN; AND**
(B) ALL CAR PARKING PROVISION SHALL BE MADE AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC USE AND OPERATED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL’S PRICING POLICY;

Policy T15

6.8.5 With the increased emphasis on alternative forms of travel to private motorised transport, the need to integrate modes is vital. Rail services play a vital role in this. In order to promote rail travel it is essential that access to the railway station by other modes of travel is convenient, including access by car and cycle. To facilitate this it is important to ensure that existing provision for car parking is retained, and if necessary enhanced, so that rail travel from Stevenage remains an attractive alternative to private motorised transport for as much of the journey as possible. Proposals for the loss of car and/or cycle parking provided for the train station will not be permitted. Proposals for new car and cycle parking at the station will be permitted where they are consistent with policy TR2 (ii).

POLICY TR10 : RAILWAY STATION PARKING

PROPOSALS FOR THE LOSS OF CAR AND/OR CYCLE PARKING PROVIDED FOR THE TRAIN STATION WILL NOT BE PERMITTED. PROPOSALS FOR NEW CAR AND CYCLE PARKING AT THE STATION WILL BE PERMITTED WHERE THEY ARE CONSISTENT WITH POLICY TR2(ii).

6.9 RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION IN THE TOWN CENTRE

6.9.1 There is only a limited amount of residential accommodation in the Town Centre. It is mainly located in the southern part of the Town Centre either as an integral part of the building form at first and second floor levels or within The Towers residential development. Where Town Centre residential accommodation is lost through redevelopment, it must be replaced on at least a one for one basis within the Town Centre

POLICY TR11 : REPLACEMENT RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION

WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRE INSET AREA PROPOSALS THAT INVOLVE THE LOSS OF RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION WILL PROVIDE REPLACEMENT ACCOMMODATION AS PART OF THE OVERALL DEVELOPMENT.

6.9.2 Residential accommodation in the Town Centre is important in keeping the Town Centre ‘alive’ at night, which in turn helps to ensure the security of the area. New residential accommodation is therefore encouraged. It is, however, recognised that Stevenage, because of its planned nature, does not have the same potential for residential use
as other town centres. There is however increasing pressure for changes of upper floor residential units to other uses, including offices, storage and social and community uses. Such changes of use will result in the loss of residential accommodation and could lead to conflict between residential and other users at first floor and above. Such changes of use must be resisted, unless it can be proved that the accommodation is no longer suitable for residential purposes or that there is no detrimental effect on the amenities and environment enjoyed by adjoining residential properties.

**POLICY TR12 : RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION**

**PROPOSALS FOR THE CHANGE OF USE OF RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION IN THE TOWN CENTRE WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS:**

(A) THE ACCOMMODATION IS NO LONGER SUITABLE FOR RESIDENTIAL USE FOR REASONS OTHER THAN LACK OF MAINTENANCE; AND

(B) THERE IS NO DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON THE AMENITIES AND ENVIRONMENT OF ADJOINING RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES.

**PROPOSALS WHICH INCLUDE NEW RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION WILL BE PERMITTED IF THERE ARE APPROPRIATE ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS AND THE PROPERTIES ENJOY SATISFACTORY RESIDENTIAL AMENITIES.**

.gdx Policy H7

6.10 CONSERVATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE TOWN CENTRE

6.10.1 The Town Centre was the first planned pedestrian shopping centre in Britain and the Town Square is the focal point for the Town Centre. The Town Square was designated a Conservation Area in 1988 because of its historic and architectural importance and its significance in Stevenage's history. The built form of the Town Square and the type of buildings and materials incorporated within it are an essential element of the New Town architecture of the period. This does not mean that large scale redevelopments are not acceptable, they should however reflect the modern architecture, urban form and scale of the Town. Indeed, specific proposals for new development in the Town Square are made in policy TR2. The Town Centre Conservation Area boundaries will be reviewed over the period of the District Plan and a Conservation Area appraisal will be produced. Detailed guidance on developments in Conservation Areas is provided in the Environment Chapter.
6.10.2 Successful and modern town centres provide some form of enclosure to the shopping areas, ranging from full scale enclosure with a controlled environment, to more modest options using canopies. The Borough Council wishes to encourage people to visit and use the Town Centre thus enhancing its sub-regional role. It believes that environmental improvements which include a variety of possible options for enclosure will make the Centre more environmentally attractive and commercially viable. Such proposals will therefore be encouraged. Design of enclosures will need to be sensitive in accordance with Policy TW9 and Policy TR13 below.

POLICY TR13 : COVERED WALKWAYS

PERMISSION WILL BE GIVEN TO PROPOSALS FOR COVERING THE MAIN SHOPPING MALLS AND CREATING COVERED WALKWAYS/SPACES WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRE.

6.11 NEIGHBOURHOOD SHOPPING CENTRES

6.11.1 Stevenage has a comprehensive distribution of neighbourhood shopping centres designed to provide shopping facilities within walking distance for residents. In association with changing retail trends, there has been a decline in the number of people making shopping trips to these centres every day for food and convenience goods. This has resulted in a reduction in spending at neighbourhood centres and therefore there has been either a rise in specialist shops at these centres or a problem in terms of turnover of facilities provided. However, the Borough Council recognises that neighbourhood centres fulfil an important function in meeting everyday needs for many people, are a sustainable form of development and, are especially valued by those with limited mobility.

6.11.2 Due to the change in the role of neighbourhood centres the Borough Council believes it is necessary to have detailed policies relating to these Centres and these are set out in Chapter 11. In general, the Borough Council wishes to ensure the continued provision of retail facilities in the Neighbourhood Centres. However new uses will also be considered in the Neighbourhood Centres including small scale business space, education and residential. Redevelopment proposals for an entire Neighbourhood Centre will be determined by reference to policy NC6.

6.12 NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD FACILITIES

6.12.1 Any new residential development of a significant scale will be expected to provide a Neighbourhood Centre, so that the existing pattern of neighbourhood facilities is maintained. The centre should cater primarily for the needs of the new neighbourhood and should not normally seek to fulfil a wider role in the provision of retail facilities unless the proposal is accompanied by a retail study in accordance
with Policy TR6 and shows that it meets the criteria set out in Policy TR5.

POLICY TR14 : NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES

WHERE MAJOR NEW RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOODS ARE PROPOSED, THE DEVELOPMENT WILL INCLUDE A NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD SHOPPING CENTRE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THAT DEVELOPMENT. SUCH PROPOSALS MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY A RETAIL IMPACT STUDY AS REQUIRED BY POLICY TR6 AND WILL BE CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO POLICY TR5.

Policies TR5 and TR6

6.13 INDIVIDUAL SHOP UNITS IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS

6.13.1 There has been a growth in the provision of single retail outlets in association with other facilities, such as at petrol filling stations. It might be argued that these provide a useful service in areas that are not well served by Neighbourhood Centres. However, there is a town-wide network of neighbourhood shopping facilities, such free standing shops can have a detrimental effect on the neighbourhood provision. In addition these shops may have an environmental impact on adjacent residential areas. As part of the Borough Council's commitment to Neighbourhood Centres, free standing shop units will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances.

POLICY TR15 : NEW FREE STANDING SHOPS

PROPOSALS FOR NEW SINGLE SHOPS OR SHOP UNITS ATTACHED TO OTHER SERVICE FACILITIES (INCLUDING PETROL FILLING STATIONS) WILL NOT BE PERMITTED EXCEPT WHERE THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA ARE MET:

(A) THERE IS AN IDENTIFIED LACK OF FACILITIES IN THE AREA; AND
(B) THERE IS NO DETRIMENTAL IMPACT ON ADJOINING RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES IN TERMS OF NOISE AND TRAFFIC MOVEMENTS; AND
(C) ADEQUATE ACCESS, PARKING AND SERVICING CAN BE PROVIDED, INCLUDING PROVISION FOR THOSE ARRIVING ON FOOT OR BY BIKE; AND
(D) IT WILL NOT HARM THE VITALITY AND VIABILITY OF THE EXISTING NEIGHBOURHOOD SHOPS OR THE TOWN CENTRE; AND
(E) IT IS LOCATED IN A POSITION WHICH ALLOWS A WIDE CROSS-SECTION OF THE SHOPPING PUBLIC TO USE THE FACILITIES; AND
(F) IT DOES NOT TAKE LAND DESIGNATED FOR OTHER USES.
6.13.2 Isolated existing shop units in residential areas are often uneconomic and are unable to maintain a retail function. However, due to the proximity of residential accommodation and the planned nature of the town, the Borough Council considers that the best alternative use of such units is residential. The Borough Council is concerned to ensure that there is no adverse effect on the amenities of adjoining residential areas through changes of use of such units.

**POLICY TR16 : LOSS OF FREE STANDING SHOPS**

PROPOSALS FOR THE CHANGE OF USE OF FREE STANDING SHOPS IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS TO RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION WILL BE PERMITTED. OTHER USES WILL ONLY BE ACCEPTABLE IF THERE IS NO DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON THE AMENITIES OF THE SURROUNDING AREA.

6.14 RETAIL OUTLETS IN INDUSTRIAL AREAS

6.14.1 There is an increasing trend for industrial units to incorporate a significant retail element. There is a limited supply of employment land for B1 and B2 uses, therefore this land should be retained for such employment uses. Retail outlets also compete with existing retail centres, therefore it is essential that such pressure for retail outlets is resisted. Policy guidance is set out in Policy E5 in the Employment Chapter.