

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods
2.	Date:	1 December 2014
3.	Title:	Town Centre Sequential and Impact Tests: Good Practice Guidance
4.	Directorate:	Environment & Development Services and Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

This report provides a brief summary of the Town Centre Sequential and Impact Tests: Good Practice Guidance. This is intended to provide additional guidance to policies in the adopted Core Strategy, where sequential and impact tests are required for planning applications for main town centre uses.

6. Recommendations

- a. That Cabinet Member notes the contents of this report and the preparation of robust Good Practice Guidance to guide the preparation and decision-making of future planning applications and setting out clear requirements for applicants when submitting their proposals.
- b. That Cabinet Member supports the publication of the Good Practice Guidance as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

7. Proposals and Details

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out how planning applications for main town centre uses in edge-of or out-of-centre locations should be considered. The adopted Core Strategy (September 2014) sets out in more locally specific detail how these policies will be applied within Rotherham.

Core Strategy Policy CS12 establishes the retail centre hierarchy within Rotherham. It also provides the more detailed guidance for applying sequential and impact tests including the local threshold for undertaking the impact test. Crucially it encourages early engagement with the Local Planning Authority, indicating that applicants should agree with the Local Planning Authority the scope of the evidence and analysis to be submitted to ensure that this is proportionate to the scale and nature of the proposal.

Prior experience of determining planning applications for town centre uses reveals a wide range in the quality of information provided by applicants to satisfy the sequential and impact test requirements. The guidance attached at appendix 1 has been produced to assist applicants by clearly setting out how national and local planning policy will be applied, and the information which should be provided by applicants.

The guidance comprises a number of sections which address:

- ***When a sequential or impact test is required***
- ***Agreeing the scope of the assessment*** (setting out the factors which will be taken into account, such as the size, type and characteristics of proposed development and the operator's business model)
- ***Carrying out a sequential test***, including:
 - Establishing an appropriate catchment
 - Deciding which designated centres should be assessed (recognizing the roles that different types of centre play within Rotherham)
 - Identifying the sites to be considered
 - Undertaking the assessment (how the availability, suitability and viability of sites should be considered)
- ***Carrying out an impact test*** (required by the locally set threshold for sites of 500 sqm (gross) or more)
- ***How the assessments will inform planning decisions*** (how the assessments may inform any planning decision, including the use of appropriate planning conditions)

The Guidance is intended to ensure that applicants receive consistent advice regarding sequential and impact test assessments, and clearly establish the Council's expectations. It provides a document which can be a material consideration when making planning decisions; however it will not have the status of a Supplementary Planning Document. The Council is preparing further detailed Local Plan policies relating to main town centre uses and retail centres within Rotherham through the Sites and Policies document. It is considered that once this document is adopted then the Good Practice Guidance could form the basis for a comprehensive draft Supplementary Planning Document taking account of all relevant Local Plan policies.

8. Finance

The Good Practice Guidance has no direct financial implications for the Council. The costs associated with the determination of planning applications will continue to be met through Planning department budgets and planning application fees.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

- The Localism Act and National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) express a strong presumption in favour of sustainable development. Our UDP policies only continue to have any weight where they are in accordance with the NPPF.
- Rotherham's Core Strategy is now in place and helps provide an up-to-date planning policy framework for the Borough's future growth and development. Progress on the supporting Sites & Policies document is vital to complete the Local Plan and bring forward the development sites required to implement the Core Strategy. Supplementary Planning documents provide additional guidance on how policies will be implemented.
- Having a complete Local Plan in place will provide a steer for any neighbourhood plans that may emerge under the provisions of the Localism Act.
- Failure to make progress with the Local Plan risks delayed provision of the new homes and employment opportunities that the Borough needs.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The implementation of the Local Plan will make a positive contribution to all of Rotherham's Regeneration priorities. The Adopted Core Strategy and supporting documents, including supplementary planning documents, will further the objectives of the Corporate Plan and support the delivery of the Rotherham Sustainable Community Strategy by:

- providing sufficient good quality homes
- ensuring well designed, decent affordable housing
- providing employment land to meet the needs of the modern economy and support sustainable communities through access to employment opportunities
- promoting the "town centre first" policy approach to help the regeneration and renaissance of Rotherham Town Centre and other town, district and local centres within the borough.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Appendix 1 Town Centre Sequential and Impact Tests: Good Practice Guidance

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