

Introduction

In April 2004 Breckland Council appointed national retail planning consultancy Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners to prepare a town centre and retail study, including an assessment of the five main retail centres within the authority area – Dereham, Thetford, Swaffham, Attleborough and Watton.

The Study provides the following information:

- An overview of national, regional and local policy on retail planning
- Results of a survey on the shopping habits of 1,000 households in Breckland
- Results of a survey of the views and perceptions of current retail occupiers
- Analysis of the five main retail centres – number and types of shops, environment, accessibility and property indicators
- A detailed assessment of the need for new retail development (2004-2014)
- Assessment of the need for new commercial leisure development (2004-2014)
- The scope for accommodating further growth

The Study was signed off in October 2004 and will now form part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework. It is available to purchase for £70 plus £5 post and packaging in either a paper or CD-Rom format. Set out below is a brief summary of some of the key findings:

Identified Need

Convenience (food) Retailing

No immediate need for additional convenience floor space.

But a longer term need for 1,500sqm net of food floor space 2004-2014 and 700sqm net of small convenience shops 2004-2014.

No need for additional large food stores in Dereham and Thetford.

However, both Dereham and Thetford could sustain a further “top-up” food stores to enhance “offer” and in the case of Thetford to replace the Kwik Save store.

No need for additional food stores in Attleborough, Swaffham and Watton. In the case of Swaffham, the under-performance of the then Safeway (now Waitrose) removes the need for a further food store.

Comparison (Non-food) Retailing

The study concludes that Breckland is leaking significant expenditure to competing centres – but says it would be “unrealistic to assume that the District can claw back a significant level of expenditure leakage in the future”.

Available expenditure could support 3,500sqm net of high street comparison by 2010.

Expenditure projections could support 1,700sqm net of retail warehousing up to 2010.

There is no quantitative case for going over 1,700sqm of retail warehousing.

Commercial Leisure

Theoretically Thetford could sustain a small 3 screen cinema, but this is very much dependent on whether a multiplex is built in Bury St Edmunds.

There is “market share” to sustain large private health clubs in Dereham and Thetford in 2014.

Dereham could sustain a bingo hall, Thetford a small tenpin bowling facility and both towns could support further nightclub provision.

The District in general can support themed restaurants and bars.

Accommodating Need

Existing vacant premises are insufficient to meet the above need. In order to stop leakage and limit over-trading/congestion in existing stores the Council needs to identify development opportunities. The study identifies 5 sites in Thetford, 6 in Dereham, 1 in Swaffham, 3 in Attleborough and 8 in Watton. In the case of Dereham, the town centre redevelopment scheme will absorb immediate need and in the case of Thetford, the former Kwik Save site is an immediate redevelopment opportunity.

The study concludes that there is insufficient support for a new large food store in the District. The 1,700sqm need for convenience retailing should be met through improvements and extensions to existing stores. The additional 3,500sqm comparison for High Streets across the towns and the 1,700sqm retail warehousing should be in Dereham and Thetford, with sequential demonstration if not located in the town centre.

If you would like further information or would like to order a copy of the Study please contact the Planning Policy Team on (01362) 656873 or e-mail planningpolicyteam@breckland.gov.uk