
HAIR CUTS
HAIR PATTERNS
BEARD STYLING
GIFT VOUCHERS AVAILABLE
THAI GUAVA £5.99-KG
10.99 Kg
2.75 EACH
2.50 ABOVE
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Chapter 7: Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres

7.1 To encourage the economic success of our town centres and to support their growth in the decades to come, we need to respond to people's changing needs. This chapter outlines the role of Basildon's town centres and how planning policies will strengthen the vitality and viability of these centres through a flexible mix of uses, regeneration, and high-quality public realm improvements.

7.2 Town centres have an essential role in connecting and integrating communities with economic opportunity and services. These centres provide a focus for retail activity, and a range of other town centre uses, including leisure, outdoor markets, commercial, office, cultural and community facilities. Defined town centre boundaries ensure that town centre uses are focused in areas where there are the best opportunities for linked trips and for access by public transport and active-travel methods such as cycling and walking. For Basildon Borough, our established town centre hierarchy starts with Basildon Town Centre and is jointly followed by Pitsea, Wickford and Billericay as the secondary tier.

7.3 Laindon had previously been included in the second tier of the hierarchy, but an ongoing comprehensive regeneration has reduced the range of facilities available. Once that work is completed, an audit of the services and facilities will be undertaken to ensure the centre is appropriately categorised. Beneath the second tier is a tertiary tier of identified local and village centres, which largely serve the day-to-day needs of their local neighbourhoods and are dependent on higher tier centres for access to a larger range of goods and services. Through its planning policies and proposals, the Council will promote the continued strengthening of the town centres. This will positively contribute towards the viability, vitality, character, and structure of these centres.

7.4 Whilst government policy continues to support town centres by promoting vitality and viability within them; there is a changing role of our high streets and a reduced emphasis on traditional retail activity. Our town centres have faced a number of challenges which include competition from out-of-centre destinations, the growth in online shopping, the cost of living and the added impact on trade from the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the Council is mindful that the approach to local town centre policies be reflective of these socio-economic factors; whilst making use of other opportunities including changes to the Use Classes Order to address the evolving diversity in choice, needs, and demographic of the Borough.

7.5 The Borough's out-of-centre retail and commercial leisure destinations are well-used and provide a complementary offer to our main town and local centres. However, national policy does not include retail parks as part of the defined town centre hierarchy.

7.6 Our *Retail and Leisure Needs Study* (2024) has provided recommendations for our main town centres in relation to opportunities for growth and transformation. It indicates that there is no need for the additional allocation of floorspace to accommodate convenience and comparison retail goods during this plan period. Additionally, in line with the NPPF, the study has defined our Primary Shopping Areas (PSA), which sit within our defined town centre boundaries and are indicated on the Policies Map. These Primary Shopping Areas indicate where a diversity of retail should be promoted and maintained in critical mass, see policy R3 (Primary Shopping Areas); and will allow for the repurposing of other spaces outside of the PSA but within the town centre boundary to enable a greater variety of uses to be introduced, helping to maintain vibrancy. Appropriate local development opportunities for retail including

street and covered markets and other town centre uses should be encouraged where they maintain and enhance the overall health, vitality and offer of an individual centre. This is particularly important in the case of Basildon Town Centre, which is expected to considerably increase its share of leisure provision over this plan period.

7.7 As a general principle, new shops which primarily sell convenience goods should be located close to and be easily accessible for the communities they are intended to serve, with a priority for development in identified town centres, including Basildon Town Centre. The NPPF also identifies housing as a main town centre use, and national policy also encourages higher-density development in locations that are well served by public transport, such as town centres.

7.8 The Retail and Leisure Needs Study has also highlighted the need for a quality designed public realm with urban planting. The role of well-designed and multi-functional public spaces is an increasingly important feature of a successful town centre, contributing to visual interest and climate resilience as well as allowing for valuable outdoor events and meeting spaces.

7.9 New main Town Centre uses and development will be directed to the appropriate Designated Centres as set out below:

BASILDON TOWN CENTRE

7.10 For our Borough, Basildon Town Centre will be the main focus for shopping, major employment, civic and administrative functions, and for arts, culture and leisure and a centre of excellence for education and healthcare. Major new retail, office, leisure, and cultural developments will be directed to the Town Centre to build upon its established role and past successes. Development will be expected to follow guidance within the Basildon Town Centre Masterplan to ensure a comprehensive approach to design and layout and to optimise development potential across the Town Centre for the benefit our local population and to encourage investment.

BILLERICAY, WICKFORD AND PITSEA TOWN CENTRES

7.11 These centres will be a focus for shopping, business, education, leisure, and entertainment. The Town Centres will continue to provide an important role for the residents of each respective town and its surrounding areas. Within the Town Centres, retail development will be concentrated within the Primary Shopping Area. The respective Town Centres and their Primary Shopping Areas are defined on the Policies Map. Furthermore, the *Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study* (2024) recommends the development of a rolling programme of place promotion including fairs / festivals and street markets for Billericay and Wickford.

LAINDON TOWN CENTRE

7.12 The Council will re-evaluate Laindon Town Centre upon the completion of regeneration works to ensure it is accurately categorised within the retail hierarchy. It is anticipated that Laindon will continue to play an important role in serving local residents, and will provide a mix of leisure, retail, entertainment, and services comparable to the other second-tier centres.

LOCAL CENTRES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD PARADES

7.13 Local centre and neighbourhood parades play an important retail, business, and community role, especially in areas more remote from the larger centres. Local centres are shown on the Policies Map, and by their nature have a focus of more localised retail facilities and services.

POLICY R1: Supporting Town Centres

1. The overall strategy for retail and other main town centre uses within the borough is to:
    a. Support and regenerate Basildon Town Centre in line with the adopted Masterplan, in order to promote its viability and vitality and to maintain its position at the top of the retail hierarchy; and
    b. Protect, support, and where necessary regenerate, the secondary tier of centres and Local Centres to ensure they continue to cater for the needs of the communities they serve, ensuring their own continued vitality.
2. Following the Hierarchy of Centres, proposals that focus new development for retail, market stalls, leisure and other main town centre uses (as defined by the NPPF Glossary) within Basildon, Laindon, Wickford, Pitsea and Billericay town centres will be supported, subject to compliance with other applicable policies in this Local Plan.
3. Residential proposals will be supported where they can contribute to the vitality of the Town Centre.
4. Major town centre proposals should achieve a high Urban Greening Factor through measures such as trees, rain gardens, green roofs/walls, and pocket parks. Proposals must demonstrate measurable improvements in thermal comfort and biodiversity, ensure inclusive access to green spaces, and secure long-term maintenance through planning conditions or legal obligations.
5. New uses that contribute to the vitality of the evening economies will be supported unless they result in a harmful impact on residential amenity or on the health of our communities.
6. Where planning permission is required, the loss of retail, office, leisure, and community uses at ground floor level to residential in the Primary Shopping Areas of identified town centres, including local centres, will be resisted.

HIERARCHY OF CENTRES

7. The hierarchy of designated town centres is identified on the Policies Map as follows:
    - Main Town Centre - Basildon
    - Other Town Centres - Billericay, Wickford, Pitsea
    - Local Centres – As defined in the Settlement and Town Centre Hierarchy

OTHER TOWN CENTRE USES

8. The Council will apply a sequential approach to the consideration of applications for other town centre uses, in line with the NPPF, taking into account the above hierarchy of centres. Sites in the town centre will be preferred, followed by edge of centre locations, and then out of centre if no suitable sites are available in closer proximity. Sequential and Retail Impact Assessments will be applicable where proposals involve the re-use, redevelopment, or intensification of

out-of-centre retail locations for retail, leisure and other main town centre uses.

Reasoned Justification

7.14 Paragraph 90 of the NPPF (2024) expects planning policies and decisions to support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management, and adaptation. It also expects Councils to define a network and hierarchy of town centres, and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allow for a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters.

7.15 The Council's Town Centre Hierarchy identifies Basildon as the largest centre within the borough, with the greatest range of services and facilities. It is therefore the main town centre within Basildon borough, and suitable for the largest quantum of growth.

7.16 A masterplan is a long-term plan which sets out where and how physical spaces in the town centre can and should change. This highlights a number of opportunity sites where development has the potential to come forward within the period of the local plan and beyond. The sites represent the opportunity to improve the attractiveness of the Centre as a place of quality and distinction reflecting strong urban design principles.

7.17 In order to strengthen the role of the

centre and enhance its appearance, it is important to make appropriate planned provision for development needs over the period of the Local Plan, building on opportunities to improve access, the public realm and the range and quality of services that it offers so that its role as the main town centre can be sustained.

7.18 The Town Centre is an appropriate location for a broad range of town centre uses including retail, leisure and entertainment facilities, appropriate sport and recreation uses, offices, community arts, culture, and tourism and residential. It is important that opportunities for development improve the centre, adding to vitality and vibrancy and to diversify the centre beyond traditional retail uses, whilst retaining or enhancing important characteristics. The Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) has highlighted the popularity of street food, market hall and 'meanwhile' or 'pop-up' sites, which can help diversify a local economy and act as 'incubator spaces' for growth of new businesses and incentivising long-term investment.

7.19 Furthermore, residential development in the heart of the town centre will support existing commercial and leisure uses, whilst also providing additional activity and vibrancy outside normal shopping and working hours, increasing natural surveillance, and reducing crime and the fear of crime.

7.20 The scale of the changes envisaged for Basildon Town Centre will take some time to realise and will occur gradually throughout the life of the plan, and beyond. The timescales within which the opportunity sites are delivered will be influenced by a range of factors, including land ownership, predicted longevity of existing uses and market conditions. Sites already in public ownership or currently being considered for development are likely to come forward in the short term and will need to be supported by upgrades to the public realm and connectivity. This will help to create a setting for investment in large scale developments in the medium to long term, on sites outside public ownership or with more complex land assembly requirements.

Policy Links

- SG1 – Growth Needs
- EMP1 - Securing Economic Growth
- EMP2 - Protecting Employment Areas
- EMP7 - Non-B or E(g) Class Uses in Employment Areas
- R2 - Development in Basildon Town Centre
- R3 - Primary Shopping Areas (PSA)
- R4 - Locations for New Retail and Leisure Development
- R6 – Hotels
- R7 - Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres
- D1 - Design and Place Shaping Principles
- NE1 - Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Evidence Links

- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 1
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 2
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 3
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 4
- Settlement Hierarchy Review (2024)

Development in Basildon Town Centre

7.23 Basildon represents the largest economy in South Essex and Basildon Town Centre is one of the county's subregional centres, acting as the linchpin of a network of other town centres in the Borough – Pitsea, Laindon, Billericay and Wickford.

7.24 Basildon Town Centre remains a busy and well used town centre. Smaller units away from the main retail spines accommodate a mix of independent commercial uses. The town centre also has an important social function that generally works well. However, there is currently an overprovision of retail space, and an under provision of other uses such as leisure, or food and drink opportunities within the town centre. Residents, retailers, businesses, and visitors are passionate about the area but, like any town centre, Basildon has its challenges and obstacles to overcome.

7.25 Given the importance of Basildon Town Centre, the Council intends to create a Masterplan to help shape the future development and regeneration of this key location. This will provide a framework for future investment and development to maximise the opportunities for investment into Basildon Town Centre; to capitalise on its existing assets and set a clear vision for Basildon as a thriving, vibrant, and visionary place. The masterplan will be underpinned by a baseline assessment of the socio-economic condition of the town centre and market analysis, which reviews the current and potential office, retail, leisure, and residential markets within Basildon Town Centre.

7.26 The Council is keen to promote and support forward positive planning to attract a range of main town centre uses, including offices, leisure and cultural uses that support the daytime and evening economy; as well as further mixed-use residential developments with supporting infrastructure.

7.27 The Vision for Basildon Town centre is one of a welcoming, vibrant, and mixed inter-generational community where new companies can start up, and other businesses will want to open up in. Thoughtful attractive urban planting for climate resilience will create healthy, safe, and pleasant spaces for visitors and workers to rest and take leisure. The town centre will be a destination place that will boast new cultural and entertainment facilities that befit the town's strategic importance and its original pioneering, New Town spirit. The Town Centre will build on the areas existing delivery of public sector and community services, improved connectivity, and accessibility, in particular for active travel, but also for other modes of transport to local neighbourhoods and the wider region.

7.28 To achieve this, new development should follow the guiding principles of the Masterplan and comply with the range of acceptable uses for a main town centre, including:

- retail (convenience and comparison);
- residential;
- employment (e.g. offices, co-working and flexible and adaptable office space);
- active and attractive public spaces (e.g. through urban planting)
- recreational and leisure (e.g. restaurants, bars, bowling alleys, cinemas, open space, gyms);
- civic facilities (e.g. Borough Council offices);
- cultural (e.g. churches and other places of worship, galleries, libraries);
- health facilities (e.g. hospitals, ambulance hubs, or social care facilities); and
- education (including early years and childcare, SEND, post-16 education and skills).

7.29 Basildon Town Centre has increasingly been a focus for residential development. Around 1,000 new homes have been delivered since 2015 and planning permission has been granted for a further 1,002 new homes in

Basildon Town Centre. The majority of these homes are currently under construction. Sufficient land to deliver around 1600 additional homes has been promoted for development. There is potential for further housing to be provided in the town centre over the plan period if additional land becomes available.

7.30 New development is expected to be supported by new and improved infrastructure as set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

7.31 Whilst Basildon Town Centre is accessible by roads, pedestrian footpaths and cycleways from all directions, there is the potential to make further improvements on the fringes to improve the connectivity of the Town Centre with surrounding neighbourhoods and reduce the focus and dependency on the use of private cars. Although the existing rail station and bus terminals provide a multi-modal transport interchange, there is scope to improve the quality of the environment they offer. This should be a consideration when a new development is proposed.

POLICY R2: Development in Basildon Town Centre

1. Basildon Town Centre will be developed and sustained as the main town centre in the Borough. It will continue being the civic heart of the Borough and be the principal focus of commercial activity and public transport in the Borough. It will be shaped and managed to deliver regeneration, ensure investment, economic growth, and success. The extent of Basildon Town Centre is defined on the Policies Map.
2. The character and quality of the town centre will be protected and enhanced through the promotion and careful control of new development.
3. Development will be supported which:
    a. Contributes to the Town Centre's diversity, vitality, viability, environmental and health quality and climate resilience;
    b. Provides a mix of uses which may include retail, including street and covered markets, residential employment, educational, recreational, leisure, civic, cultural, community and health facilities;
    c. Contributes to its role as a public transport hub for the Borough;
    d. Creates a high quality, healthy, distinctive, and well-designed environment and public realm that helps reduce crime and the fear of crime;
    e. Provides necessary infrastructure including public transport services, pedestrian, cycling and wheeling facilities;
    f. Improves existing access and connectivity within, to and from the Town Centre, and
    g. Contributes to the provision of urban greening, which should be integral to the design and layout of buildings and the public realm.
4. Development will be supported which contributes to the delivery of the key principles set out in the Masterplan for Basildon Town Centre, including:
    a. Diversifying Basildon Town Centre through the introduction of new uses to attract more people throughout the day and to meet the changing demands of town centres.
    b. Introducing a broader mixture of land uses across different areas of the town centre which blend together and offer a positive and distinct identity whilst also ensuring that the existing character will be preserved and strengthened.
    c. The desire to strengthen connectivity by providing improved routes for walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport that are high quality, legible, attractive, and safe.
    d. The importance of creating legible, distinctive, flexible, attractive, safe, and inclusive public realm throughout the town centre.
    e. The creation of well-designed pedestrianised areas with active ground floor frontages which encourage vibrant and active street life, creating well defined spaces and routes.
    f. The value of good urban design with urban greening and

sustainable drainage to improve health and environmental quality and resilience to climate change for the town centre.

g. Development in Basildon Town Centre should move away from discharging surface water into the foul network and explore other options of managing the discharge by following the drainage hierarchy.

5. Applications for development in Basildon Town Centre will be expected to set out how they conform to the latest Basildon Town Centre Masterplan.

Reasoned Justification

7.32 Paragraph 90 of the NPPF (2024) expects planning policies and decisions to support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management, and adaptation. It also expects Councils to define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows for a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters.

7.33 The Council's Town Centre Hierarchy identifies Basildon as the largest centre within the Borough, with the greatest range of services and facilities. It is therefore the main town centre within Basildon Borough and suitable for the largest quantum of growth.

7.34 A Masterplan is a long-term plan which sets out where and how physical spaces in the town centre can and should change. This highlights opportunity sites where development has the potential to come forward within the period of the local plan and beyond. The sites represent the opportunity to improve the attractiveness of the Centre as a place of quality and distinction reflecting strong urban design principles.

7.35 In order to strengthen the role of the centre and enhance its appearance, it is

important to make appropriate planned provision for development needs over the period of the Local Plan, building on opportunities to improve access, the public realm and the range and quality of services that it offers so that its role as the main town centre can be sustained.

7.36 The Town Centre is an appropriate location for a broad range of town centre uses including retail, leisure and entertainment facilities, appropriate sport and recreation uses, offices, arts, culture, and tourism and residential. It is important that opportunities for development improve the centre, adding to vitality and vibrancy and to diversify the centre beyond traditional retail uses, whilst retaining or enhancing important characteristics. Residential development in the heart of the town centre will support existing commercial and leisure uses, whilst also providing additional activity and vibrancy outside normal shopping and working hours, increasing natural surveillance, and reducing crime and the fear of crime.

7.37 The scale of the changes envisaged for Basildon Town Centre will inevitably take some time to realise gradually throughout the life of the plan and beyond. The timescales within which the opportunity sites are delivered will be influenced by a range of factors, including land ownership, predicted longevity of existing uses and market conditions. Sites already in public ownership or currently being considered for development are likely to come forward in the short term and will need to be supported by upgrades to the public realm and connectivity. This will help to create a setting for investment in large scale developments in the medium to long term, on sites outside public ownership or with more complex land assembly requirements.

Policy Links

- SG3 - Spatial Distribution of Growth
- EMP1 - Securing Economic Growth
- HOU1 - Size, Type, and Quality of New Housing
- R1 - Supporting Town Centres
- R3 - Primary Shopping Areas (PSA)
- R6 – Hotels
- R7 - Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres
- CC3 - Water Efficiency and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)
- D1 - Design and Place Shaping Principles
- HC1 - Health and Well-being Strategy
- HC3 - Strategic Approach to Education, Skills and Learning
- STAT1 - Strategic Transport
- INF1 - Infrastructure Delivery
- INF2 - Securing Infrastructure Contributions
- INF3 - Social and Community Infrastructure

Evidence Links

- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 1
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 2
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 3
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 4

Primary Shopping Areas in Town Centres

7.38 In September 2020, the Government introduced changes to the Use Classes Order which brought together a range of 'Commercial, Business and Service' uses under one Use Class (E). Class E enables units in town centres to change to other suitable uses without the need for planning permission and means that town centres should no longer be viewed in just 'retail terms'.

7.39 That said, to implement wider policies in the NPPF (such as the sequential test for retail proposals), it remains necessary for the Local Plan (and the associated Policies Map) to identify 'Primary Shopping Areas' (PSAs).

7.40 Within Primary Shopping Areas, development for town centre uses as defined by the NPPF should maintain active frontages, as this will help to contribute towards a lively and safe street scene. Care should be taken to ensure that the frontage provides visual interest and would not be to the detriment of the overall character of the centre.

7.41 Planning policies should guard against the loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where it would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs.

7.42 The 2024 *Retail and Leisure Needs Study* identifies opportunities for new investment in designated centres through the amalgamation or sub-division of existing units and workspaces. This can help to attract new operators and formats and support the vitality and viability of centres. Any such development proposal should not result in an adverse loss of overall floorspace or create small token units which may not offer sufficient retail floor space, staff facilities, or storage area for stock and which will only suit a minority of occupiers. These may be a by-product of sub-dividing a larger unit or could be proposed in their own right. These units gradually undermine the retail character of the frontage and could lead to prolonged periods of vacancy due to their limited appeal to the wider retail market.

7.43 The 2024 study also identifies development opportunities within designated centres for complementary initiatives and 'meanwhile' uses. Meanwhile/temporary uses in long-term vacant and underutilised units or workspaces can be used by occupiers to test out new uses and to reduce costs. They can also provide flexible, low-cost space for business start-ups, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), and community groups. As such, meanwhile uses can provide an opportunity to fill some vacant units and premises over a short duration, and have the potential to diversify and reinvigorate centres.

7.44 Long-term vacant or underutilised units and workspaces are considered more suitable for meanwhile uses, as other short term vacant spaces can be part of the normal churn of the centres and re-occupied by new businesses on standard leases relatively quickly.

POLICY R3: Primary Shopping Areas (PSA)

1. Primary Shopping Areas (PSAs) are defined for the Town Centres in Basildon, Billericay, Wickford and Pitsea as set out on the Policies Map. The respective PSAs should be the focus for retail, other main town centre uses, and commercial, business and service uses falling within Use Class E. Proposals for development should:
    a. sustain and enhance the general vitality of the centre;
    b. attract vibrancy, activity and generate pedestrian footfall to the centre;
    c. be compatible with surrounding uses;
    d. not result in adverse amenity impacts;
    e. provide an active frontage at ground floor level;
    f. be readily accessible by the public from the front of the premises;
    g. make a positive contribution to the townscape of the centre;
    h. not create smaller units through sub-division;
    i. not harm the character and function of the town centre; and
    j. diversify and intensify uses including potential for residential development.
2. Proposals must not have a significant adverse effect on the viability, vitality or character of that or any other centre. They should not have an adverse impact on public health or environmental amenity particularly in terms of noise, litter, and odour; and must not have an adverse impact on the safety and convenience of highway users.
3. Proposals within the Basildon Town Centre PSA should contribute towards the Council's overall objectives to support and regenerate Basildon Town Centre in order to promote its viability and vitality, in line with the Masterplan and to maintain its position at the top of the retail hierarchy.
4. Proposals within other PSA's should be in line with any relevant adopted Masterplan.
5. On upper floors of premises, proposals for separate units of retail or other main town centre uses, including Class E commercial, business and service uses, or residential accommodation will be supported provided that:
    a. separate access from the ground floor is maintained or created,
    b. provision of internal space to segregate recyclable material and a separate recycling and waste store is expanded, and
    c. the proposal does not compromise the viability of any commercial uses on the ground floor.
6. Proposals for complementary initiatives in designated centres, such as the establishing of new market stalls, construction of click and collect 'hubs' or lockers, or the use of outdoor space for public events, will be supported where it can be demonstrated that they will enhance the vitality and viability of the centre and not give rise to unacceptable impacts on residential amenity and the transport network. Positive consideration will be given to temporary, flexible meanwhile and pop-up uses within vacant units which can attract footfall into a centre.

Reasoned Justification

7.45 The NPPF requires that centres are designated and placed in a hierarchy which is defined in Local Plans, and that growth is proportionate to a centre's ranking. The Borough's town centres serve a wide range of people and purposes and will be supported to be attractive and distinctive places at the heart of their communities. The Borough's network of centres is well established, and their location and extent is shown on the Policies Map.

Policy Links

- R1 - Supporting Town Centres
- R2 - Development in Basildon Town Centre
- R7 - Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres
- Dx - Achieving Well Designed Places
- HC1 - Health and Well-being Strategy

Evidence Links

- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 1
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 2
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 3
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 4
- Policy Map

Retail and Leisure Development outside of Town Centres

7.46 Traditional town centres compete for expenditure at retail parks, freestanding retail warehouses, and large format out-of-town convenience goods stores. Typically, these locations offer 'bulky goods' such as furniture, but there has been an increasing demand for such premises from traditional high street retailers. Whilst the retail provision at these locations can complement the retail offer in a town centre, and also provide floorspace which is not available within a town centre, they can be detrimental to the vitality and viability of a town centre because they attract retail and other activities that would otherwise locate within the town centre space and bring footfall.

7.47 The NPPF requires local planning authorities to apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses which are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date plan. Main town centre uses should be located within town centres, then in edge of centre locations; and only if suitable sites are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out of centre sites be considered.

7.48 When assessing applications for retail and leisure development outside of a town centre which are not in accordance with an up-to-date plan, local planning authorities will require an impact assessment if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold. Where there is no locally set threshold, the national default threshold is 2,500m^2 of gross floorspace.

7.49 This would be expected as the focus of smaller, more local centres is on meeting people's day to day needs. In contrast, the main town centres have a greater proportion of comparison retailers. The results also show that the main town centres have a greater proportion of vacant units, which suggests that they may be more vulnerable to out of centre competition.

7.50 In addition, the *Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study* (2024) recommends that any new market demand for floorspace be directed to town centres first, in accordance with national and local plan policy objectives. For this reason, it recommends that an impact threshold of 280m^2 is applied outside of defined town centres.

7.51 A significant change to the Use Classes Order in September 2020 under the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020. This resulted in the amalgamation of Classes A1 (shops), A2 (financial and professional services), A3 (restaurants and cafes) and B1 (business) as well as parts of Classes D1 (non-residential institutions) and D2 (assembly and leisure), into a single new Use Class E.

7.52 Class E has offered greater flexibility for shops, office, and some community spaces to alter their uses which has helped to reduce vacancy rates and keep these spaces occupied. Nevertheless, any premises which were in the former use Classes A, B1 or D1/D2, immediately inherited the Use Class E status without planning conditions. Buildings originally intended for business purposes could change to uses such as retail and leisure without the need of planning consent.

7.53 Protecting the supply of floorspace for defined uses (as far as possible) is also important to meet the needs of new and expanding companies which may be unable to compete with alternative higher value uses. Some uses may not be compatible with established surrounding uses, and this could have unintended consequences for designated town centres and, for example, areas primarily intended for employment uses. The Council will monitor the position very carefully and reserves the right to use conditions and/or planning obligations to restrict new floorspace to business uses within Class E, to ensure that policy objectives are met.

POLICY R4: Locations for new Retail and Leisure Development outside of Town Centres

1. Retail including street and covered markets and leisure uses should be predominantly located within designated town centres. Development and uses must be appropriate to the scale, character, and function of the town centre, be in keeping with its role and function within the borough's hierarchy of centres and should not harm the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole.
2. Sequential testing will be required for planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing town centre, or where the proposal does not accord with the Local Plan. Town centre uses should be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations. Only if suitable sites are not available will out of centre sites be considered. Preference will be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre.
3. Where demand from commercial leisure operators for new floorspace is present, any new facilities should be directed to town centres first, following a sequential approach in line with national and local plan policy objectives.
4. In accordance with the Retail and Leisure Needs Study, any new market demand for floorspace should be directed to town centres first in accordance with national and local plan policy objectives. Outside of the defined town centres, the threshold for an application to require a Retail Impact Assessment is 280m^2 (gross floorspace). The Retail Impact Assessments should include an assessment of:
    a. The impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in the regional, town and local centres in the catchment area of the proposed development;
    b. Individual and cumulative impact of the proposal on the vitality and viability of the borough's centres taking into consideration:
        i. Its impact on linked trip spending between different town centre uses or businesses;
        ii. Its impact on local consumer choice;
        iii. The potential for relocation of businesses currently trading in town centres to locations out of centre;
        iv. The extent to which the market profile of the development proposed will compete with existing facilities in town centres; and
        v. The impact through trade diversion on the role and function of a town centre up to five years from the time the application is made.

Reasoned Justification

7.54 The NPPF requires local planning authorities to apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses which are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date plan. Main town centre uses should be located in town centres, then in edge-of-centre locations; and only if suitable sites are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out-of-centre sites be considered.

7.55 Limiting the growth of out-of-town retail centres is a key aspect of national policy, which promotes the development of town centres first and sequentially looks for the bulk of retail growth to take place in the largest town centre identified through a town centre hierarchy. Out-of-town retail parks do not form part of the town centre hierarchy as set out in national policy. Therefore, seeking to limit the growth of these facilities is consistent with national policy. Currently there is no retail impact threshold defined by the extant Basildon District Local Plan Saved Policies September 2007.

7.56 The Council's *2024 Retail and Leisure Needs Study* advises that an impact threshold of 280 sqm gross is most appropriate and robust for assessing the impacts of any proposed retail/ leisure developments outside of defined centres in accordance with the NPPF. The justification and evidence to support this lower impact threshold is set out in the paragraphs below.

- The growth in internet shopping is having a significant impact on the way households choose to buy food and non-food goods, which in turn is impacting upon retailer business and operating models. This should be considered alongside the long-term impacts of out-of-centre stores, shopping, and leisure facilities on town centres.
- The main grocery operators (i.e. Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Waitrose, and Morrisons) have effectively scrapped their superstore expansion programmes to focus on growing their market shares via online sales and opening smaller convenience stores (i.e. Sainsbury's Local, Tesco Express, Little Waitrose, etc.). Although sizes vary from location-to-location, the main grocers are promoting smaller convenience stores with a minimum gross floorspace of between 280m^2 and 372m^2 (circa 3,000 - 4,000 sqft).
- The 280m^2 gross floorspace figure is also significant, as stores below this threshold are exempt from Sunday trading restrictions. In brief, the Sunday Trading Act defines a 'large shop' as generally being over 280m^2.
- The Government's overarching aim to protect the role, function and integrity of local shops selling essential goods and comprising essential services (e.g. post-office counters) is further demonstrated by the introduction of the new Use Class F2, which covers local community uses. Within this category, Class F2(a) specifically pertains to a shop (previously classified as A1) selling mostly "essential goods", including food, to visiting members of the public where the shop's premises cover an area of no more than 280m^2 and there is "no such facility within a 1,000 metre radius of the shop's location".
- Market demand from operators

seeking representation and space in town centres is falling significantly as the space available in centres is often of the wrong size and configuration, and in the wrong location to meet today's retailer requirements.

- Table 10.8 of the 2024 study shows that, overall, the average unit size for all retail, leisure and service businesses in the Borough's main town centres is 292m^2.

Policy Links

- R1 - Supporting Town Centres
- R5 - Out of Town Retail and Leisure Parks
- D1 - Design and Place Shaping Principles

Evidence Links

- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 1
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 2
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 3
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 4
- Settlement Hierarchy Review (2024)

Out of Town Retail and Leisure Parks

7.57 The NPPF expects local planning authorities to allocate a range of suitable sites to meet a range of needs including leisure needs. The guidance in the Glossary of the NPPF on the status of existing out of town locations applies to leisure parks in the same way it applies to out-of-town shopping areas. These facilities are identified as a location not in or on the edge of a town centre, but which is not necessarily outside the urban area. The NPPF does not consider that retail and leisure parks form part of a town centre hierarchy.

7.58 The Festival Leisure Park is a large purpose-built out of town commercial leisure destination within Basildon Borough's urban area. Its overall offer provides a range of mid-price family restaurants, together with complementary leisure uses including a bowling alley, wakeboarding centre, and hotel accommodation. It is the single biggest family entertainment venue for residents in the Borough. In the vicinity, there is also a David Lloyd Leisure Centre and a go-karting centre.

7.59 In addition to Festival Leisure Park, there are six out-of-town shopping areas within the Borough, which are concentrated in the Basildon urban area (incorporating Pitsea and Laindon). They range in scale, size and the type of goods being sold with the majority providing a mix of convenience and comparison goods. These out-of-town shopping areas account for a large proportion of the overall market share for convenience goods within Basildon. The two main retail parks of Pipps Hill and Mayflower have a strong market share in comparison goods.

POLICY R5: Out of Town Retail and Leisure Parks

The borough has seven key out-of-town retail and leisure locations at Pipps Hill Retail Park, Mayflower, Cricketers Way, Festival Leisure Park, and Vange Retail Park (all Basildon), Hazlemere (Pitsea) and Mandeville Way in Laindon. In these locations, the development of additional retail and leisure floorspace will only be supported where sequential testing and retail impact assessments indicate it is appropriate to do so.

Any new facilities should be directed to town centres first, following the sequential approach in line with national and local plan policy objectives.

Reasoned Justification

7.60 Limiting the growth of out-of-town retail centres is a key aspect of national policy, which promotes the development of town centres first and sequentially looks for the bulk of retail growth to take place in the largest town centre identified through a town centre hierarchy. Out-of-town retail parks do not form part of the town centre hierarchy as set out in national policy. As such, seeking to limit the growth of these facilities is consistent with national policy.

Policy Links

- R4 - Locations for New Retail and Leisure Development outside of Town Centres
- D1 - Design and Place Shaping Principles

Evidence Links

- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 1
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 2
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 3
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 4
- Settlement Hierarchy Review (2024)

Hotels

7.61 A central strand of the NPPF is to achieve sustainable development. The NPPF glossary defines hotels as a main town centre use, while the first two strands of NPPF (2024) Paragraph 8 (the economic and social objectives) are highly relevant to town centres and town centre uses.

7.62 Hotel accommodation forms a key part of the commercial leisure offer. The *Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study* (2024) shows that current hotel provision is clustered along the A127 Southend Arterial Road and close to Pipps Hill Industrial Estate. The nearest town centre to this cluster is Basildon. Furthermore, the current hotel provision in the borough is evenly split between budget hotel operators and 3-star facilities. The borough lacks higher 4-Star and 5-Star establishments.

7.63 There is a notable lack of provision in the Borough's other town centres, and demand for visitor stays in the Basildon area is also met by facilities based in neighbouring local authority areas.

7.64 New hotel development should, therefore, be encouraged in town centres to enable their continued vitality and regeneration. However, it is also recognised that any investment into the hotel sector would be very much subject to market demand and should be directed to town centres first in accordance with national and local plan policy objectives.

7.65 The Council's 2025 evidence on hotel demand indicates that, while new hotel provision in Basildon town centre could contribute towards wider regeneration objectives and help improve town centre vitality, additional hotel provision would also be appropriate in the A127 Enterprise Corridor to help promote business growth.

POLICY R6: Hotels

The Council will ensure that the employment and leisure economy is supported through appropriate hotel provision.

To deliver this the Council will:

1. Protect hotels and hotel bedrooms across the borough;
2. Require new hotels to be located within, or immediately adjoining, the borough's town centres, the A127 Enterprise Corridor alongside and in support of business development, or within other areas where the new hotel would support the function of the area;
3. Encourage the upgrading and expansion of existing hotels where:
    a. This will assist in maintaining the vitality of the centre;
    b. This will not result in the loss of any residential accommodation;
    c. There will be no unacceptable harm to amenity or to the residential character of an area.

Reasoned Justification

7.66 Hotels have a role as important drivers of footfall and consumer spending within town centres. The NPPG section on Town Centres and Retail notes that Local Authorities can take a leading role in promoting a positive vision of town centres, by bringing together stakeholders and by supporting sustainable economic and employment growth, and highlights the role that a range of complementary uses can have in supporting the vitality of town centres. This includes hotels, which are identified as a main town centre use by the NPPF.

Policy Links

- SG1 - Growth Needs
- R1 - Supporting Town Centres
- R2 - Development in Basildon Town Centre
- D1 - Design and Place Shaping Principles

Evidence Links

- Basildon Hotels Future (2016)
- Basildon Hotels Future Update (2025)

Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres

7.67 It is recognised that Use Class E provides flexibility in the re-use of units, but in tandem, there is a concern that some changes may interrupt active frontages in town centres or cause an over-proliferation of non-retail uses affecting the character, vitality and viability of the centre. Subsequently, there is a need to monitor the mix of uses in town centres.

7.68 The NPPF requires planning policies to guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services such as local shops, market stalls particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs. Historically, shops and other town centre uses provide an active street frontage, contributing towards a lively street scene and often meeting an important need whilst maintaining their primarily retail role.

7.69 Whilst a wide range of uses are located in the Borough's town centres, their primary function is shopping and other main town centre uses which should remain the principal role, especially at ground floor level.

7.70 The town centres provide a strong local identity, and it is important to continue to maintain their status as important shopping areas and centres of employment. Defined town centre boundaries ensure that town centre uses are focused in areas where there are the best opportunities for linked trips and for access by public transport, cycling, wheeling and walking. In order for town centres to be successful and competitive, they must provide customer choice, a diverse retail offer and the flexibility to accommodate other town centre uses compatible with maintaining vitality and viability of these locations.

POLICY R7: Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres

1. The borough's Town Centre boundaries are shown on the proposals map along with the primary shopping areas (PSA). Within these two defined areas, proposals for development will be permitted:
    a. Where the use and scale is consistent with the role and function of the town centre;
    b. Are compatible with surrounding uses;
    c. Makes a positive contribution to the townscape of the centre, and
    d. Does not harm the character and function of the centre.
2. The Council, working with partners, will seek to secure improvements for connectivity, in particular, to active travel that is inclusive and accessible, to and from the town centres to promote healthier lifestyles and ease traffic congestion.
3. Shops, street and covered markets and other community facilities should be retained and enhanced where they remain viable and new local centres created where they can meet the day-to-day needs of the local community in accordance with Policy R8.

Reasoned Justification

7.71 The NPPF defines what a town centre use is and states that planning policies should define the extent of town centres and make clear the range of uses permitted in such locations as part of a positive strategy for the future of each centre. Additionally, the NPPF requires the Council to define the Primary Shopping Area.

Policy Links

- EMP1 - Securing Economic Growth
- EMP2 - Protecting Employment Areas
- R1 - Supporting Town Centres
- R2 - Development in Basildon Town Centre
- R3 - Primary Shopping Areas (PSA)
- R8 - Local Centres
- D1 - Design and Place Shaping Principles
- D2 - Major Developments - Design
- STAT1 - Strategic Transport
- INF1 - Infrastructure Delivery
- INF2 - Securing Infrastructure Contributions

Evidence Links

- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 1
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 2
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 3
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 4
- Settlement Hierarchy Review (2024)
- Local Walking and Cycling Implementation Plan (2025) (LCWIP)

Local Centres

7.72 Local Centres perform a more limited but important role in providing residents, including the less mobile and elderly, with day-to-day goods and services. Local Centres typically include a convenience store, post office, pharmacy, newsagents and other shops selling food and beverages.

7.73 The vitality and viability of the Local Centres are, to varying degrees, principally anchored by their convenience store offer, and they fare better when shops are located within a more consolidated geographic area rather than consisting of a collection of dispersed standalone units.

7.74 The Local Centres in Basildon Borough are identified through the *Settlement and Town Centre Hierarchy* paper.

7.75 In accordance with national planning policy and guidance, retail areas must respond to change. A balance must be struck between maintaining the function of Local Centres and accepting that there may be circumstances where the loss of local facilities may be necessary to avoid long term vacancies.

7.76 Active frontages are important for maintaining the vitality and viability of local centres. Non-retail uses can provide an important function.

POLICY R8: Local Centres

1. Within existing local centres, the Council will support proposals for shops, services, and community facilities (including extensions to existing shops), where development is appropriate to serving local needs, subject to satisfying the following criteria:
    a. The development retains or creates an active frontage at ground floor level;
    b. The development does not result in the retail-led focus of the local centre being significantly diluted;
    c. There will be no material adverse impact upon the amenities of nearby residential uses; and
    d. Adequate space for deliveries and servicing is maintained.
2. Proposals to change the use or redevelop active ground floor uses to uses other than retail, leisure, community services, and offices will only be permitted where:
    a. The proposal does not undermine the vitality and viability of the local centre;
    b. Where relevant, they do not alter the character, setting and special qualities of local residential amenity; and can mitigate any resulting environmental nuisance; and
    c. Marketing evidence is provided which demonstrates the premises have been actively marketed for uses falling within Use Class E for a sustained period of 12 months.

Evidence Base / Justification

7.77 The *Retail and Leisure Needs Study* (2024) indicates that there is no need for any site allocations for convenience or comparison retail goods floorspace during the plan period. However, local development opportunities for retail and other town centre uses in individual centres will be encouraged where they are able to maintain and enhance the overall health, vitality and offer of a centre. To assist in this, the provision of new local centres containing a small number of shops or multi-functional community facilities will also be supported.

7.78 The NPPF requires that centres be designated and placed in a hierarchy which are defined in Local Plans, and that growth is proportionate to a centre's ranking. Within the NPPF there is a requirement to define the network and hierarchy of town centres and define their extent. The NPPF also requires local planning authorities to proactively meet the need for new housing, employment, and retail.

Policy Links

- R7 - Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres
- D1 - Design and Place Shaping Principles
- AQMP1 - Mitigating Air Quality and Wider Environmental Pollution Issues

Evidence Links

- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 1
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 2
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 3
- Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study (2024) Vol. 4

