Birmingham Local Plan Preferred Options (Reg 18)

Background Paper: Urban Centres

July 2024

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1. Introduction

1.1. Birmingham City Council is in the process of updating the Birmingham Development Plan (adopted 2017) (BDP). The new plan, once adopted, will replace the existing BDP and be used to inform decisions on planning applications, regeneration and investment.

1.2. The purpose of this background paper is to help inform the preparation of the new Birmingham Local Plan (BLP) (2020-2042) policy in relation to urban centres. This paper:

Sets out the key policy relating to urban centres.
Reviews the current centre hierarchy and provides justification for proposed changes to the hierarchy.
Reviews the existing centre boundaries and provides justification for proposed changes to the boundaries.
Sets out the justification for additional local centres.

through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities).

3.2 National Planning Practice Guidance

The Town Centres and Retail Planning Practice Guidance (ôthe Town Centres PPGô) was updated in September 2020. It provides additional direction in respect of how retail and town centre planning policy should be applied in respect of plan-making and decision taking. The Town Centres PPG affirms the Governmentôs aspiration to support town centres in order to generate employment, promote beneficial competition and create attractive, diverse places where people want to live, work and visit.

Paragraph 004 indicates that a local planning authorityôs strategy for their town centres should include:

- The realistic role, function and hierarchy of town centres over the plan period.
- The vision for the future of each town centre, including the most appropriate mix of uses to enhance overall vitality and viability.
- The ability of the town centre to accommodate the scale of assessed need for main town centre uses.
- How existing land can be used more effectively.
- Opportunities for improvements to the accessibility and wider quality of town centre locations.
- What complementary strategies are necessary or appropriate to enhance the town centre and help deliver the vision for its future.
- The role that different stakeholders can play in delivering the vision.
- Appropriate policies to address environmental issues facing town centres.

Paragraph 006 identifies a series of key indicators of relevance in assessing

The masterplan sets out an ambitious road map to make Royal Sutton Coldfield town centre a great place for local people, visitors, businesses and investors in the short and long-term.

Improvements are required to walking, cycling and public transport and the public realm.
Existing public spaces and crime/public safety need improvement.
More facilities for young people, including educational programmes.
Local centres need to be refocused. Retail space will reduce in most centres, as a natural outcome of online shopping. Retail spaces should be replaced by other uses such as residential, hotels, co-working, childcare and community facilities.6.59 Tm0 g0 G[<0078>]TJETg045/F1 12 0 g0 G[(r)-6(e)-4bTfnBT/

An extensive household survey to inform and support the RLNA was undertaken by NEMS Market Research in July 2022.

Key findings:

There is an identified surplus capacity for additional convenience goods floorspace within the short, medium and longer term, but there is not a need to specifically allocate any sites for convenience goods retail development as part of the local plan process. Any proposals should be assessed appropriately against the retail policy requirements of the sequential and impact tests.

From a qualitative perspective, there are a few ógapsô in provision in certain areas, and an absence of a large foodstore within Birmingham city centre.

In terms of comparison goods, there is a surplus of expenditure which can be accommodated.

In terms of the leisure sector, Birmingham is generally appropriately provided for in respect of bingo halls, casinos and ten pin bowling alleys.

Whilst there is some potential capacity for additional cinema screens, the existing offer sufficiently serves the existing population. Any additional market interest may take the form of óboutiqueô style cinema operators or independent cinema operators.

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The Shopping and Local Centres SPD set out a centres hierarchy as follows:

This hierarchy was effective from the adoption of the SPD in March 2012. When the BDP was adopted in January 2017, minor changes were made and the BDP Hierarchy took precedence.

5.2 Birmingham Development Plan (BDP) (2017)

In the BDP, para 7.23 (accompanying Policy TP24) defines categories in the hierarchy as:

Regional Centre - Very large centre, embracing a wide range of activities and serving a regional/national catchment.

encouraging new investment, and protecting and enhancing their vibrancy, vitality and viability.

However, definitions within the hierarchy have been inconsistent in the past, and a potential source of confusion. As part of the RLNA commissioned from Nexus Planning, we requested advice and recommendations on Birmingham's centres hierarchy. Based on Nexus' recommendations, the proposed new centre hierarchy is set out below.

5.3 Proposed New Centre Hierarchy ï DRAFT

Tier	Definition	Centres
City Centre	The highest level of centres, of regional and national importance. The city centre serves a regional / national catchment, is geographically and economically large, and embraces a very wide range of activities. It also acts as a national transport hub.	Birmingham City Centre
Principal Town Centre	The top tier of town centres, being the principal (sub-(sub	

Tier	Definition	Centres
District Centres	Comprising groups of shops containing at least one supermarket, range of non-retail services and public facilities. District centres provide for everyday needs, and are focal points for business, leisure and service needs. Functional considerations prevail - no centre size range but typically <125 units.	Castle Vale Edgbaston Fox and Goose Hay Mills Maypole Mere Green Moseley (formerly Local Centre) New Oscott Sparkhill (formerly Local Centre) Springfield (formerly Local Centre) Swan, Yardley Stirchley Witton (formerly Local Centre)

Local Centres	Including a range of small shops of a local nature, serving a localised catchment and typically meeting a ótop-up shoppingô need. May also be a location for small scale local leisure and/or specialist service activities. Typically 25+ units. * Partial cross-boundary centre	Balsall Heath Boldmere Bordesley Green College Road Cotteridge Dudley Road Frankley Glebe Farm Green Lane The Parade, Hall Green Hawthorn Road Highfield Road, Hall Green Highgate Ivy Bush Jewellery Quarter Kings Norton Green Kingsbury Road Kingstanding Circle Ladypool Road Lea Village Lozells Meadway (formerly District Growth Point) Newtown Olton Boulevard (Fox Hollies) Pelham Queslett* Quinton* Robin Hood, Hall Green Rookery Road Scott Arms* Shard End

There are a number of locations across Birmingham which function as centres but have never been identified as such. There are other centres whose function suggests they may be in the wrong tier. The proposed new hierarchy and definitions are intended to provide a sound basis for any changes.

5.4 Proposed New Centre Designations

Having defined the hierarchy and definitions, we assessed each adopted centre and its boundaries accordingly. This resulted in a number of proposed changes to hierarchy position among the existing centres. We also assessed over 50 locations which had potential for designation as centres.

Each assessment followed the same process as annual monitoring for existing centres, enabling GIS data, calculations and plans to be produced in the same way. As a result, 14 locations are considered to meet the criteria for Local Centres, and these have been added to the hierarchy in 5.3 above. The remaining locations were mainly found to be too small to be designated as Local Centres, but would be typical of Neighbourhood Centres. In addition, some out-of-centre retail locations are recognised, but are not included in the centres hierarchy in accordance with the NPPF. Appendices 1 and 4 contain the detailed background information.

6. Local Centres Health Checks

New health check assessments were undertaken by Nexus for the city, town and district centres identified in the BDP. These are set out in Appendix 3 of the Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment. In addition to the City Centre and Town and District Centres Health Checks provided by Nexus, a similar exercise has been undertaken in-house to produce Health Checks for Local Centres. This follows the National Planning Practice Guidance, but takes a proportional approach based o

The Local Centres boundaries have remained broadly the same since the Shopping and Local Centres SPD was adopted in 2012. Over time, some centres have changed, and there is a need to revisit the extent of the boundaries of both the centres and their Primary Shopping Areas to ensure they are up-to-date and relevant.

To provide robust and up-to-date baseline information for the Birmingham Local Plan, the annual local centres monitoring full resurvey work in 2022 included full resurveys of all 73 local centres. This identified locations where the adopted boundaries require attention and after closer examination, it became clear that the GIS data for the boundaries is not always matched exactly (snapped) to OS Mastermap data. Nexus also made recommendations for the boundaries of the City Centre, Sutton Coldfield and the District Centres in the RLNA.

New GIS boundaries have therefore been drawn for the City Centre, adopted Centres and Primary Shopping Areas. Full details are set out in Appendix 5.

8. Out of Centre Retail Parks

There is an extensive wider out-of-centre retail offer across the city, ranging from retail parks such as The Fort, to standalone foodstores which are sometimes accompanied by a small number of other commercial units. Appendix 1 contains details of these locations.

It is acknowledged that these play an important role in serving local needs, particularly for convenience retail, but there is concern that the growth of out of centre retail development may adversely affect the health of nearby centres.

In this regard, the Nexus study advises that such destinations should not be part of the hierarchy. Continued emphasis should be placed on helping to support the future vitality and viability of the existing defined centres, which provide a wider offer and important amenities for residents.

9. Night-Time Economy

The term night-time economy (NTE) is used to describe a wide range of activities that take place after 5 pm, typically based around leisure and hospitality - for example a trip to the theatre or cinema, a family meal, or a night out at a pub or club. A vibrant and mixed night-time economy can encourage tourism, boost the local economy and contribute to shaping places where people want to live. It is about catering for a wide range of demographics and interests.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) indicate that hospitality is continuing to fuel the night-time economy, but emerging trends indicate that there are concerns in respect of future viability and many businesses in the night-time economy now face a new period of uncertainty as inflation and the cost of living impact on disposable income.

The annual local centres monitoring and health checks have revealed variations in the night-time economy in Birminghamôs local centres. Many businesses which open beyond 5pm close around 8pm, and those remaining open later tend to be food and drink, convenience retail or hospitality related activities. Further information can be found in the Health Checks in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

Maintaining a safe, vibrant and well-balanced evening and night-time offer is essential to the overall health of centres and the local economy.

Policy EC7 addresses the evening and night-time economy in detail.

10. Impact Assessments and Thresholds

The NPPF states that it is appropriate to identify thresholds for the scale of edge of centre and out of centre retail and leisure development that should be the subject of an impact assessment. Any threshold policy applies only to the impact test (all planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and not in accordance with an up-to-date development plan will generally be the subject of the sequential test). Annex 2 of the NPPF specifies what comprises ôedge of centreô.

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and create linkages and connections with the rest of the centre and improve accessibility. Proposals that are not within a centre will be considered against the tests identified in national planning policy and other relevant planning policies set at local level, in particular the policies for the protection of employment land.

This policy effectively duplicates parts of TP21 and can be discontinued.

11.3 BDP Policy TP23 ôSmall shops and independent retailingô

This policy states that proposals which promote and encourage independent and niche retailers across the City will be supported, and that the Council will seek to ensure that:

- There is a range of retail premises across the City including provision of smaller units.
- Future developments within centres consider the need for a range of unit sizes to suit all potential needs.

The BRNA Update (2013) identified a deficiency in independent retailing in the City Centre. Consequently, the policy sought new retail development within the City Centre to encourage the creation of new specialist and independent shopping destinations. Proposals for other forms of retailing such as markets that encourage smaller and independent retailers are also supported and encouraged.

The policy also noted that a number of other centres have developed specific niche roles (for example the Jewellery Quarter, Alum Rock Road and Soho Road), and this would

Rising levels of childhood and adult obesity have been a key part of the

recommended that the proposed Policy and text were not justified and should be deleted.