

# TOWN CENTRES AND RETAILING

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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- 6.1.1 Shopping is an essential element in the social and economic life of communities. It is also a major employer of people and one of the most dynamic sectors of the economy. Medway has a uniquely complex pattern of retail and service facilities. There are five major town centres and a wide variety of established local shopping facilities ranging from traditional district shopping centres on radial roads to the purpose built district centre at Hempstead Valley. There are also numerous small parades and individual shops, primarily serving local shopping requirements within the urban area and in villages. Many of the shopping centres are well served by public transport and some are well placed in relation to large residential areas.
- 6.1.2 The retailing sector has undergone dramatic change since the 1960s, as competitors battled for supremacy in an increasingly competitive industry dominated by powerful retail chains. For many, expansion in out-of-town centres was the preferred growth strategy, often because of the relative ease of developing greenfield, as opposed to brownfield, sites. More recently the emergence of the National Lottery (which has altered spending patterns) and the new wave of shopping formats, (including 'club shopping', factory outlets, superstores, and Sunday trading) have had a significant impact on the spending patterns and shopping behaviour of consumers. But, perhaps, the greatest influence on shopping development over the past 20 years has been the advent of out-of-town retailing. It was the out-of-town movement, which brought government intervention in the form of Planning Policy Guidance on Retailing (PPG6, 1993 and 1996).
- 6.1.3 The past decade has seen the status of the town centres in Medway challenged. The trends most in evidence that have affected the area are (a) the apparent direct competition between the five major shopping centres, which meant that there was no single shopping centre focus for retailing; (b) out-of-centre food superstores and retail warehouse parks and the dispersal of leisure and other major activities from the heart of the traditional shopping centres; and (c) the loss of trade to out-of-town and regional shopping developments (such as Lakeside, and more recently, Bluewater).
- 6.1.4 It is competition, and the fear of competition, that, more than any other factor, has contributed to the current lack of confidence in retail investment in local town centres.
- 6.1.5 Throughout the Local Plan, the term 'retail development' is used to refer to developments within Class A1 (shops) of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987. This Chapter also deals with A2 uses (financial and professional services) and A3 uses (food and drink premises). Retail uses not within a Use Class (called '*sui generis*' uses) which include car sales, taxi or vehicle hire, petrol filling stations, amusement centres' and laundrettes are also considered in this chapter.

## 6.2 THE CURRENT POSITION

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- 6.2.1 The hierarchy of centres is listed and described below. The main characteristics of each centre are set out, together with an outline of how they are expected to develop over the plan period.

### HIERARCHY OF CENTRES

#### MAIN RETAIL / CITY CENTRE

Chatham

#### DISTRICT CENTRES

Strood

Gillingham

Rainham

Hempstead Valley Shopping centre

Rochester

#### LOCAL CENTRES, VILLAGE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES

These 74 centres are listed in Policy R9

#### RETAIL PARKS

Gillingham Business Park

Horsted Retail Park

Strood Retail Park

#### FREE STANDING STORES

Courtney Road, Gillingham

Maidstone Road, Chatham

### CHATHAM

- 6.2.2 The Council has resolved to create a single, strong “city” centre for Medway, by actively promoting the centre of Chatham as the “city” centre and main sub-regional shopping centre. Medway’s “city” centre, will become the focus for the community, not only in retailing terms, but also in terms of jobs, leisure and entertainment. To achieve this the Council will support proposals that attract quality retailers and promote a mixed-use approach in order to encourage diversity in the centre.
- 6.2.3 Chatham town centre is a natural choice because of its sub-regional shopping centre role, which is recognised within the Structure Plan. It has a large range of national comparison retailers and approximately 102,153 sq. m (1.3 million sq. ft) gross retail and service trade floorspace, in 369 units. It competes primarily with Maidstone, Bromley, Canterbury, Tunbridge Wells, Lakeside and Bluewater. In addition to its role as the major retailing centre in Medway, it also functions as one of the main destinations for a range of uses which provide evening

entertainment. These include the Central Theatre, the Medway Arts Centre, the ABC cinema, and the bowling centre.

- 6.2.4 Chatham has seen recent improvements with a major environmental enhancement scheme for the pedestrianised area centred upon the High Street, the refurbishment of The Brook multi-storey car park and the bus station and the provision of closed circuit television security cameras in the car parks. Further areas suitable for environmental enhancement include the Ring Road and the Riverside.
- 6.2.5 The Council wishes to work in partnership with the private sector to achieve its new vision for Chatham. It will be prepared to use its statutory powers and negotiate with third party interests to support appropriate schemes. As a first step the Council and English Partnerships commissioned a study to develop a strategy for the improvement of the “city” centre. The study, which assesses the vitality and viability of the centre, was carried out by consultants to inform the Local Plan on appropriate policies for the shopping centre, and where the focus for regeneration issues should be within it. Further studies are planned to articulate a clear vision and master plan for the centre.
- 6.2.6 Chatham meets the PPG6 definition of a “town centre” which provides a broad range of facilities and services. It also fulfils a function as a focus for both the community and public transport. The growth potential for durable goods floorspace (including bulky goods) is, however, limited in Medway over the plan period and priority will, therefore, be given to directing it to Chatham. The scope for new convenience floorspace is also limited but there is enormous scope to improve the quality of existing floorspace either through refurbishment or replacement.

## **DISTRICT CENTRES**

- 6.2.7 The next group of shopping centres all function as ‘District Shopping Centres’, which PPG 6 defines as groups of shops, separate from the town or city centre, usually containing at least one supermarket or superstore, and non retail services. The five centres are important in terms of the number of retail and service outlets, total gross floorspace and their locations. They provide a range of convenience and durable good shops, some with a speciality appeal. Independent retailers predominate in these centres.

## **STROOD**

- 6.2.8 The centre of Strood operates as a District Centre. It is compact and vibrant with two medium sized convenience stores and three sizable multiple stores. In all it accommodates approximately 35,987 sq.m. (387,400 sq.ft.) gross of retail and service space in 119 units. The District Centre is adjacent to a retail warehouse park with a number of large retail warehouses and a large surface car park. Major through roads (the A2 and the A228) divide the central area of Strood and the quality of the environment is poor in comparison with other similar centres. It needs to improve its quality and attraction as a District Centre, possibly with a new food store. Environmental improvements following the completion of the Medway Towns Northern Relief Road will improve facilities for pedestrians and open up opportunities for urban design initiatives (see the Transportation Chapter). The nearby railway station already provides connections to most of the other main district centres in Medway.

## **ROCHESTER**

- 6.2.9 Rochester City centre performs a specialist role. There is currently 35,699 sq.m. (384,300 sq.ft.) gross retail and service trade area in 160 units in the centre. It has responded to the changing retail environment by diversifying into specialist shops such as arts, antiques and tourist-related uses. The uses are suited to the historic buildings in the High Street (and its connections with the author Charles Dickens), and Rochester Castle and Cathedral. The relatively high proportion of A3 uses and the provision of night clubs within, and close to the centre, combined with an attractive historic environment means that Rochester's evening economy is the most vibrant in Medway. The nearby railway station provides connections to most of the other main district centres. The Council would encourage a limited range of retail opportunities in Rochester meeting primarily local needs, which are sensitive to the conservation character of the area.

## **GILLINGHAM**

- 6.2.10 Gillingham town centre functions as a District Centre. It is centred on a linear High Street and comprises over 200 retail units, totalling approximately 38,690 sq. m. (416,500 sq ft) gross retail/service floorspace. There is a broad range of units, with slightly more than half the floorspace being comparison shopping. The area is well served by public transport with four principal bus routes and a railway linking Gillingham to Chatham, Rochester and London and the Kent coast. There is potential for new investment in convenience floorspace provided the site selected properly relates to the rest of the centre and so underpins the existing retail offer.

## **RAINHAM**

- 6.2.11 Rainham District Centre is the easternmost of the five main traditional shopping centres and provides a range of town centre services. It comprises over 130 retail/service units, totalling approximately 24,300 sq. m. (261,600 sq ft) gross floor space. It has a compact retail area serving local needs and providing a number of community and cultural facilities. Several pubs and restaurants on the High Street provide a relatively vibrant evening economy. The focus of shopping in the town centre is located at the junction of the High Street (A2) with Station Road. Rainham has a pedestrian precinct, built in the 1980s, adjoining a large public car park. The nearby railway station provides connections to most of the other main district centres in Medway. A requirement for additional convenience floorspace has been identified and this could be accommodated by re-configuring and updating the "Precinct" area.

## **HEMPSTEAD VALLEY SHOPPING CENTRE**

- 6.2.12 Hempstead Valley shopping centre is a purpose-built indoor mall style of district shopping centre. The centre has attracted major multiples and was extended in the early 1990's. The Council is however, concerned that any increase in comparison floorspace is likely to have an adverse impact on the strategy for Medway's "city" centre and the more traditional District Centres. As such only minor changes will be permitted during the period of the Plan.

## **LOCAL, VILLAGE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES**

- 6.2.13 These are small groups of shops usually comprising a newsagent, a general grocery store, a sub-post office and occasionally a pharmacy, a hairdresser and other small shops of a local nature.

- 6.2.14 By this definition, there are no less than seventy-four Local Shopping Centres in Medway including villages and neighbourhood centres. These centres cater mainly for day to day convenience needs and lower order durable goods, whilst some centres sell higher order durable goods from specialist outlets. The level of vacant units tends to vary according to their individual floorspace and unit size. These centres are listed in Policy R9.
- 6.2.15 Given the importance of shops to the local economy of villages and the greater emphasis now placed upon their protection by PPG6, all village retail outlets will be afforded a high degree of protection and further facilities will be encouraged.

### **RETAIL PARKS AND FOOD STORES**

- 6.2.16 Retail parks are defined in PPG6 as groups of three or more retail warehouses. There are three such sites in Medway, located at Horsted Retail Park (near Rochester Airport), Gillingham Business Park and adjacent to Strood District Centre.
- 6.2.17 Strood Retail Park is adjacent to a defined District shopping centre and of rather poor quality by modern standards. The site is occupied by B&Q, Homebase, Carpet Depot and Charlie Browns. The dual use of the surface car park by customers to the town centre and the retail warehouse units shows the relative ease of linked trips between the site and the town centre.
- 6.2.18 Horsted Retail Park is a purpose built retail warehouse park on the Maidstone Road (the main radial route into Chatham from the south). The site is occupied by PC World, Currys, Homebase, Toys 'r' Us and Pets Mart. It is some considerable distance from any district, local or neighbourhood centre, but within reasonable walking distance of an Asda Superstore.
- 6.2.19 Gillingham Business Park is a major business park on the A2, accommodating a range of B1, B2 and B8 uses. The Retail Park is on the north-east corner of the site, adjoining the A2 and A278 and is occupied by a number of retail warehouses include Harveys, B&Q, Magnet, MFI and Allied Carpets. It is some distance from any district, local or neighbourhood centre, but close to a Tesco superstore.
- 6.2.20 There are two free-standing food superstores in Medway; Tesco at Courtney Road, Rainham close to Gillingham Business Park and Asda on Maidstone Road, Chatham. A Safeway store at Princes Park functions as a local centre and a Co-op foodstore at Walderslade anchors that local centre.

### **FACTORY OUTLETS**

- 6.2.21 Factory outlet centres are groups of shops that sell comparison goods at discounted prices, including seconds and end of line goods. A proposal to develop a Factory Outlet shopping centre, leisure and business uses in Chatham Maritime is currently the subject of a planning application. The proposal is part of the overall regeneration objective for the former Royal Naval Dockyard. The proposed development, which extends to about 16.75 hectares, includes 12,628 sq.m net comparison retail floorspace and an extensive leisure facility of approximately 18,580 sq.m.

### **TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT**

- 6.2.22 The Council has long-standing Town Centre Management schemes in Chatham and Gillingham, and is extending the benefits of Town Centre Management, in conjunction with

the private sector to Strood, Rochester and Rainham. Forums already exist, or are being established in each of these centres.

## 6.3 POLICY CONTEXT

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### **CENTRAL GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE**

- 6.3.1 PPG 6 and PPG 13 are the main focus for national guidance on retailing.
- 6.3.2 The government advocates a plan-led approach, including a clearer definition of the hierarchy of centres. A sequential test should be applied to development proposals, preference should be given to town centre sites or buildings suitable for conversion, followed by edge-of-centre sites, district and local centres, and only then out-of-centre sites. Any out-of-centre sites must be accessible by a choice of transport modes, including public transport.
- 6.3.3 The guidance does not impose an embargo on out-of-centre development. It advises that when out-of-centre retailing is considered necessary, proposals should be assessed against the harm it could do to the development plan strategy. Local Authorities should also consider the impact on the vitality and viability of town centres and the effect on travel patterns and car use. The sequential test should be extended to include employment uses such as commercial and public offices, hospitals, higher education, entertainment, leisure and community uses.
- 6.3.4 Retailing will continue to underpin town centres. However, the guidance stresses that vitality and viability depends not just on retailing but on a wide range of factors including an attractive environment, good accessibility, other amenities and continued investment. Local Authorities should involve private investors and infrastructure providers in the preparation of town centre strategies. Good town centre management will bring together the relevant public agencies, residents, retailers, leisure operators, developers and investors and will ensure the proper co-ordination and development of services in the town centre.
- 6.3.5 A positive planning framework should encourage town centre strategies and attract development of a wide range of town centre uses, including mixed uses and housing development. Effective use of car parking and encouragement of high quality in urban design are important objectives for town centres.
- 6.3.6 Changes of use, whether in town, district or local centres should be assessed not only on their positive contribution to diversification, but also on the cumulative effects on loss of retail outlets, traffic, parking and local residential amenity.
- 6.3.7 New retail development should be accessible by a choice of means of transport. This will usually mean locating it in, or next to, town centres, or in other locations which are well served by public transport. For new out-of-centre development, local authorities should seek to establish whether public transport would be sufficiently frequent, reliable and convenient. It should also assess whether services are direct or adjacent to the proposals and the characteristics of the catchment area. In terms of overall levels of car travel, PPG13 seeks to reduce the reliance on the car and facilitate multi-purpose trips. PPG6 commends local planning authorities to consider locating major generators of travel demand in locations, which are, or can be, well served by public transport.

## **REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE**

- 6.3.8 RPG9 sets out government policy for the South East region. This recognises that town and district centres perform an important social and economic function, and should be the focus of activity for retailing. Wherever possible, retail development should be located within existing town and district centres. Where this is not possible, sites within the urban area may be acceptable, provided they would not adversely affect the vitality and viability of nearby town and district centres. The site should also be accessible by a choice of means of transport, including public transport.
- 6.3.9 Town centres should be the focus for retail development, to enable one trip to serve several purposes, to ensure that such shopping is more accessible to those without cars and to contribute to the economic strength of existing towns.
- 6.3.10 The “*Thames Gateway Planning Framework*” (RPG9a), emphasises that the town centres can contribute to the regeneration of the sub-region. It recognises that the quality and attractiveness of some centres could be enhanced by upgrading existing facilities, making use of derelict or underused land, improving the environment and securing their effective management and promotion.

## **KENT STRUCTURE PLAN 1996**

- 6.3.11 The Kent Structure Plan expands upon the policy of developing successful town centres by encouraging a diverse mix of uses. Local Plans should create a strong market place and a high quality environment, both physical and cultural, to attract visitors and residents, and make provision for safe and convenient movement into and around shopping centres.
- 6.3.12 The Structure Plan requires retail development to be provided in accordance with the essential requirements and future trade potential of the different sectors of retailing. In order to maintain their vitality and viability it gives priority to town and district centres for the location of retailing, and in relation to Medway, states that the potential for comparison retail development should be focused upon Chatham, building upon recent traffic management and pedestrianisation improvements. Following the sequential approach, town centre and edge-of-centre sites should be identified first, and only if both are unavailable might locations elsewhere in the urban area be acceptable. In the latter case, developments should be planned to enable them to become new local centres in their own right. It also recognises the need for shops to be accessible by a choice of transport modes and the need to protect village shops that are important to the rural economy.

## **6.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

- 6.4.1 The aims and objectives of the Council’s policies for retailing in Medway are:
- (i) to enable Medway’s “city” centre (as a shopping centre of Sub-regional importance) to sustain and increase its role for durable goods shopping, and other activities that will complement the character and functions of the centre including its role as a major employment, leisure and entertainment centre;
  - (ii) to improve the quality of the retail “offer” in Medway, by generating a climate of confidence for retail investment;

- (iii) to concentrate retail and related facilities in existing centres so that they are accessible to all, including those without the use of private vehicles so that combined shopping trips are easy;
- (iv) to maintain a range of local shops and services to meet daily (as well as specialist) needs so that a range of facilities is available locally to reduce the need to travel;
- (v) to improve the vitality and viability of existing shopping centres by creating a positive policy framework for new development, diversification, investment, redevelopment, refurbishment and environmental improvement;
- (vi) to accommodate new forms of retailing or mixed uses where these do not undermine the vitality and viability of town, district and local centres.
- (vii) to sustain a buoyant retail economy with high retail employment.

## **RETAIL CAPACITY**

### **COMPARISON FLOORSPACE**

- 6.4.2 The Council has undertaken a review of past retail policies and proposals. Account has also been taken of changed circumstances, developments implemented and particularly new retail requirements expected to occur during the plan period. This work has been informed by a study undertaken by Hillier Parker which concluded that there is limited capacity for additional comparison floorspace in Medway over the plan period. The reason for this is mainly attributed to the opening of Bluewater shopping centre. However, there is considered to be scope for further investment beyond 2006.

### **CONVENIENCE FLOORSPACE**

- 6.4.3 The study concluded that an allocation for a further food store in Strood was justified and that in quantitative terms, there was also scope for additional floorspace in the eastern part of the area. It concluded that there is a qualitative case for improved provision in Chatham. The Council is concerned that any provision of new floorspace to meet the forecast potential must underpin the functions of the established centres; especially Chatham, Gillingham and Rainham.

## **6.5 POLICIES AND REASONED JUSTIFICATION**

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### **CHATHAM: COMPARISON RETAILING**

- 6.5.1 The Council recognises that Bluewater will have an adverse affect on the prospects for new comparison floorspace during the Plan period. However, it is firmly of the view that a positive response to the situation is required and every effort made to consolidate Chatham's role as the principal location for comparison shopping within Medway.
- 6.5.2 In this context, three factors provide a basis for investment in the short term:
- (i) There is considerable scope to improve the quality of existing floorspace through store refitting and the modest reconfiguration of properties to meet retailer's current requirements. Confidence amongst individual retailers can be improved if groups of shops are up-graded at the same time. A greater level of co-ordination to achieve this can be encouraged through the Town Centre Management Initiative, which is already in place.

- (ii) It is known that, over an extended period, expenditure on comparison goods generated from within the Medway area has been leaking to other centres further afield. If the quality of the retail offer in Chatham can be improved, there is a clear opportunity to win back a proportion of this “lost” expenditure, enabling it to regain its proper status in the hierarchy and to provide facilities of a quality appropriate to a major urban area.
- (iii) Finally, analysis indicates that over the Plan period, some expenditure growth on what are sometimes described as “bulky goods” will occur. In recent years such growth has been met by the development of free-standing retail stores or parks but in the future this will have to change if the guidance in PPG6 is followed. Commercial commentators are already speculating that “large showrooms” in town centres will supersede stores on retail parks and this is a sector in which Chatham could be in the vanguard of change.

- 6.5.3 Given these factors and the wider role for Chatham envisaged in Policy S5, the Local Plan therefore gives specific priority to the centre as the preferred location for new or replacement comparison retailing, including so called “bulky goods”. To facilitate this, Policy R1 gives a general presumption in favour of such floorspace within the Core Area of the centre as defined on the Proposals Map and allocates a specific site at Richard Street.
- 6.5.4 The site at Richard Street is well related to the primary retail area, being to the rear of the Alders department store. It fronts onto the principal shopping street and can be readily accessed from the ring road. It is within easy walking distance of both the railway and bus stations. An imaginative approach to the development of the site would be likely to feature a range of uses in addition to conventional shop units trading in comparison goods. These might include a moderately sized foodstore (see below) and non-retail uses which could contribute to the vitality and viability of the scheme (and the centre) as a whole.
- 6.5.5 The Council also considers that other opportunities exist within the Core Area but does not wish to be prescriptive about them at this stage, pending further work to advance the “City” Centre Vision for Chatham. However they might include improvements and extensions to the Pentagon Centre. Further development opportunities may also occur beyond the edge of the Core Area (i.e. within a radius of 200 metres). These will be expected to relate to and reinforce, the role of the Core Area.
- 6.5.6 To further encourage investment the Council will consider partnership arrangement with intending developers and the use of its statutory powers to bring forward appropriate developments.

#### **POLICY R1: CHATHAM – COMPARISON RETAILING**

***Chatham town centre is identified as a regional scale comparison goods centre. Proposals for retail development which would undermine the strategy for, or the vitality and viability of, Chatham town centre will not be permitted. Major Class A1 comparison proposals (those of over 1,500 sq. Metres gross floor space) will not be permitted outside the defined Core Area of Chatham, as defined on the Proposals Map.***

***Proposals for Class A1, A2 and A3 uses or any other uses appropriate in a shopping street will be permitted in the Core Area subject to:***

- (i) the proposed use(s) contributing to the vitality and viability of the area; and***
- (ii) the singular and/or cumulative impact of such uses not being detrimental to the shopping function of the area and the range of facilities provided.***

***Land at Richard Street, as defined on the Proposals Map, is allocated for use Class A1 retail development (principally for comparison goods), together with ancillary Class A2 and A3 uses. Proposals should make adequate provision for pedestrian access from the High Street and public car parking.***

***Exceptionally, schemes on the edge of the Core Area (defined as within 200 metres of the boundary) will be permitted subject to:***

- (iii) it being demonstrated that the development proposed can not be accommodated within the Core Area; and***
- (iv) the site location and layout being related directly to the Core Area to complement the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole.***

## **CONVENIENCE RETAILING**

- 6.5.7 The 1999 Hillier Parker retail study identified only limited scope for additional convenience floorspace in Chatham town centre although it did indicate that there was an opportunity to re-direct some expenditure growth from areas to the east. In addition, it highlighted the poor quality of the existing convenience space in Chatham and encouraged its replacement or refurbishment. These stores are poorly laid out by modern standards and the Council will work with new or existing retailers to bring about an improvement in the convenience offer.
- 6.5.8 The absence of large flat sites makes it difficult to accommodate a large replacement foodstore. However, a small to medium sized store could compliment any comparison goods scheme which comes forward on the Richard Street site (Policy R1). Any larger-scale proposals will need to be situated outside the Core Area, in locations which do not prejudice the development of the city centre concept, but at the same time relate to the rest of the centre. Thus, sites in the Riverside/Medway Street area would not be appropriate but other opportunities are considered to exist around the Ring Road.

**POLICY R2: CHATHAM – CONVENIENCE RETAILING**

*Within the Chatham Core Area, as defined on the Proposals Map, qualitative improvements to existing Class A1 convenience floorspace will be permitted through refurbishment or redevelopment.*

*Development of upto 1,750 sq. Metres gross of additional Class A1 convenience floorspace will be permitted within the Core Area as first choice, or (if suitable sites are not available) on the edge of the Core Area, subject to:*

- (i) the proposal supporting the vitality and viability of the Core Area; and*
- (ii) there being no highway objections; and*
- (iii) provision being made for access by pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users, and there being adequate car parking provision consistent with policies T12 and T13.*

*Refurbishment or replacement of the existing convenience store at the junction of High Street/The Brook, Upbury Way, Slicketts Hill and Cross Street will be permitted subject to:*

- (iv) the site's location and layout being related directly to the Core Area to contribute to the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole; and*
- (v) convenience floorspace being limited to 2,400 sq. Metres gross; and*
- (vi) provision being made for access by pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users, and there being adequate car parking provision consistent with policies T12 and T13.*

**STROOD**

## 6.5.9

Analysis undertaken by, and on behalf of, the Council indicates that there is no forecast requirement for additional comparison goods floorspace in Strood over the period of this Plan. However, significant growth in convenience spending is forecast, providing the opportunity to develop a new foodstore to compliment those already located in, and adjacent

to, the existing centre. It is important however, that any such store is well related to the existing centre, encouraging multi-purpose trips and contributing to the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole.

- 6.5.10 As indicated in paragraph 6.5.4, the Strood Retail Park is well located in relation to the Core Area but warrants refurbishment. Recently the ownership of this development was combined with that of the Fisher Controls site to the south and this enlarged site is considered to provide the best opportunity to site a new convenience store.
- 6.5.11 This would be best achieved by securing a comprehensive approach to the combined sites. The convenience store should be sited at the northern end, fronting onto Commercial Road, to obtain maximum pedestrian access to the retail core of Strood with any displaced retail warehouse units being relocated to the southern end of the site. Such an arrangement would best contribute to the vitality and viability of the rest of the centre and provide the most robust solution in landscape and urban design terms. It is accepted however, that this approach would require the voluntary relocation of the existing retail warehouses and accordingly the Council will seek to assist in this process by ensuring that their reasonable needs are met within the overall development. Contributions to the Strood Town Centre Environmental Scheme will be sought, to provide the appropriate highway capacity.
- 6.5.12 No specific requirement has been identified elsewhere within the centre of Strood, e.g. Friary Precinct, which has been earmarked for modest retail development in the past. However, it is appropriate to make a policy provision in favour of retail investment of an appropriate scale and nature within Strood's Core Area.

### **POLICY R3: RETAILING IN STROOD**

***The core Area of Strood town centre is defined on the Proposals Map. Within the Core Area, use Classes A1, A2 and A3 and other uses appropriate to a District Centre will be permitted provided they support the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole.***

***Land to the south of Commercial Road, as defined on the Proposals Map, is allocated for:***

- (i) the replacement of the existing retail warehouse park with a Class A1 convenience store of up to 6,000 sq. Metres; and***
- (ii) the provision of up to 7,500 sq. Metres gross replacement Class A1 retail warehouse floorspace on the land to the south of the existing retail park.***

***The development will be permitted subject to:***

- (iii) contributions to the Strood Town Centre Environment Scheme and implementation of an improved access to the site; and***
- (iv) high quality pedestrian links across Commercial Road into the Core Area of the centre; and***
- (v) a quality of architectural design which makes a positive contribution to the town centre.***

## **GILLINGHAM**

- 6.5.13 Gillingham town centre has a well established, and continuing, role as a District Centre meeting the needs of a well-defined and densely populated catchment area. However, its tightly built up fabric acts as a constraint in development terms. Only a very limited increase in comparison spending is forecast over the plan period, but sufficient headroom has been identified to justify a further moderately sized convenience store.
- 6.5.14 The Council in partnership with the private sector and a housing association is promoting a mixed-use regeneration project in the Arden Street area at the western end of the town centre and, nearby, an opportunity exists to promote a mixed scheme anchored by a foodstore in the area defined by High Street/Skinner Street/Jeffery Street and James Street. This would involve building on an existing car park, but significant benefits could be achieved if a scheme linked through to the High Street and Skinner Street, where design improvements would contribute substantially to the image of the centre as a whole.
- 6.5.15 This scheme may be difficult to realise due to the number of ownerships involved but the council would be prepared to consider the use of its Compulsory Purchase powers, if necessary, to secure land assembly to enable the scheme to proceed. It is critical that any new convenience store developed in, or on the edge of, the Core Area relates properly to the rest of the centre and does not function in isolation from it.
- 6.5.16 Elsewhere within the town centre smaller scale opportunities exist to upgrade existing shop units and the council will encourage this.

## **POLICY R4: RETAILING IN GILLINGHAM**

***The Core Area of Gillingham town centre is defined on the Proposals Map. Within the Core Area Use Classes A1, A2, and A3 and other uses***

***appropriate to a District Centre will be permitted, provided they support the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole.***

***Land at High Street/Skinner Street/Jeffery Street/James Street is allocated for a retail development to include a new foodstore (up to 2000 square metres gross floorspace) as the principal floorspace element subject to:***

- (i) improvements to public transport provision to the town centre in lieu of on-site parking; and***
- (ii) high quality pedestrian links to High Street and Skinner Street; and***
- (iii) a high quality of design complementing the established character of the area.***

## **RAINHAM**

6.5.17 Rainham town centre has an extensive and prosperous catchment area, which overlaps with that of Hempstead Valley shopping centre to the south west and the freestanding superstore at Courteney Road. During the plan period forecast increases in convenience spending will provide an opportunity to improve its standing in the retail hierarchy. The Orchard Precinct acts as the central focus for retail activity in the centre, but it is now looking dated and its layout could be improved.

6.5.18 The Council considers that, with the need to accommodate a further foodstore, this should be directed to the orchard precinct which can be readily upgraded, reconfigured and/or extended on its existing site. To this end Policy R5 makes specific provision for a foodstore of up to 2,000 sq. Metres within this location. It also defines the Core Area of the centre within which further new investment will be encouraged.

### **POLICY R5: RETAILING IN RAINHAM**

***The Core Area of Rainham town centre is defined on the Proposals Map. Within the Core Area use Classes A1, A2 and A3 and other uses appropriate to a District Centre will be permitted, provided they support the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole.***

***The Orchard Precinct is allocated for refurbishment, and reconfiguration***

*and/or extension to include a new foodstore of up to 2000 square metres gross floorspace, subject to:*

- (i) retention of the existing number of on-site parking spaces; and*
- (ii) appropriate servicing and access arrangements; and*
- (iii) the provision of high quality pedestrian links from the precinct to the High Street and Station Road; and*
- (iv) a high quality of design complementing the established character of the town centre.*

## **HEMPSTEAD VALLEY SHOPPING CENTRE**

- 6.5.19 Although a district centre in retailing terms the relative shortage of non retail facilities means that Hempstead Valley functions in a different way to Strood, Gillingham and Rainham. Some increase in forecast expenditure within the catchment area is expected over the plan period but it is intended that this be directed to Chatham, Gillingham and Rainham which are under greater economic pressure and fulfil a wider range of functions.
- 6.5.20 Nevertheless there is scope for continuing improvements to the existing centre buildings to maintain its competitiveness and there is a need to bring the former car showroom building back into productive use. The centre is a hub for a number of local bus services and it also provides Medway's connection to the national express coach network but the facilities supporting these functions need to be enhanced. Accordingly the Council is happy to allow for the minor upgrading of the centre and its associated non-retail facilities.

### **POLICY R6: HEMPSTEAD VALLEY SHOPPING CENTRE**

*Within the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre, as defined on the Proposals Map, development will be limited to minor extensions not resulting in a net increase in retail floorspace and improvements to existing facilities.*

## **ROCHESTER**

- 6.5.21 It is intended that the role of Rochester city centre as a largely specialist and tourist related centre should continue to be supported. There will be small- scale opportunities to upgrade existing facilities and perhaps expand them, in a modest way during the plan period as the

local tourism market develops. In addition there is a need to encourage small-scale convenience outlets catering for the day to day needs of the local residential population. Mainstream retail facilities on a larger scale are not, however, appropriate given the geographical proximity to both Strood and Chatham town centres.

#### **POLICY R7: ROCHESTER CITY CENTRE**

*The Core Area of Rochester city centre is defined on the Proposals Map. Within the Core Area, use Classes A1, A2 and A3 uses and other uses appropriate to the form of the centre, will be permitted provided they support the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole. Such uses should be compatible with the specialist and tourism related character of the centre or cater specifically for the day to day needs of the local residential population.*

*A very high quality of design and layout will be required reflecting the unique historic character of the centre.*

### **RETAIL PROVISION AND NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT**

6.5.22

it is important that provision is made for retail and service facilities in Local Centres to serve new residential areas. St Mary's Island is one such area and local provision here will be important as it is not within easy reach of other centres. Rochester Riverside, Wainscott and, to a lesser extent, Lower Upnor also have proposed housing developments of a size warranting a local retail facility. The proposed residential area east of Hoo is close to Hoo village centre and further work is required to determine what additional facilities may be justified. This assessment will be undertaken as part of the preparation of the development brief proposed for the site. The precise nature of the facilities to be provided at Rochester Riverside, Wainscott and Lower Upnor will also be determined through the development briefs being prepared for these sites.

#### **POLICY R8:RETAIL PROVISION IN NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS**

*Local shopping facilities within Use Classes A1, A2 and A3 at a small scale, appropriate to meet the daily needs of residents, workers and visitors, will be provided in association with major residential development at the following sites as defined on the Proposals Map:*

- (i) St Mary's Island*
- (ii) Lower Upnor*
- (iii) Rochester Riverside*

- (iv) East Of Wainscott Road**
- (v) Adjacent to Hoo village centre (subject to detailed evaluation through a development brief).**

## **LOCAL CENTRES, VILLAGES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES**

- 6.5.23 Local Centres (such as Twydall, Parkwood and Walderslade), village shops and pubs and Neighbourhood Centres (local groups and parades of shops) are important in providing locally available retailing and other services to communities. They are also important in promoting sustainable living patterns, by being within easy walking or cycling distance of people's homes thereby reducing reliance on the car.
- 6.5.24 The Council will protect their position in the retail hierarchy by resisting changes of use from A1 uses (especially food). Where opportunities to strengthen Local Centres by the development of additional retail or service uses occur, these will generally be supported.

### **POLICY R9: LOCAL CENTRES, VILLAGE SHOPS AND NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES**

*In Local Centres, villages and Neighbourhood Centres as defined on the Proposals Map and listed below, development involving the loss of existing shopping facilities, including retail, service and food and drink uses (Classes A1, A2 and A3) will not be permitted unless an improvement to local amenity or the provision of community facilities occurs that outweighs the loss.*

<b>Local Shopping Centres</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
<b>Lordswood</b>	<b>1-18 Kestrel Road</b>
<b>Parkwood</b>	<b>1-45 Parkwood Green</b>
<b>Twydall</b>	<b>1-64 Twydall Green</b>
<b>Walderslade</b>	<b>263-385 odds; Walderslade Road 7-11 (odds) &amp; 8-12 (evens) Walderslade Shopping Centre, Units 1-6 Sherwood House, Walderslade Village Centre</b>
<b>Ordnance Street</b>	<b>2-16 (evens)</b>

<b><i>Luton Road</i></b>	<b><i>2-74 (evens)</i></b>
<b><i>Pattens Lane</i></b>	<b><i>106-112 (evens) &amp; 27-35 (odds)</i></b>
<b><i>Wayfield Road</i></b>	<b><i>161-183 (odds)</i></b>
<b><i>Luton High Street</i></b>	<b><i>25-49 (odds) &amp; 50-54 (evens)</i></b>
<b><i>Shirley Avenue</i></b>	<b><i>1a-5 (odds) &amp; 20-25 (Incl)</i></b>
<b><i>Silverweed Road / Yarrow Road</i></b>	<b><i>42-86 (evens) &amp; 27-31 (odds)</i></b>
<b><i>Admirals Walk</i></b>	<b><i>1-12 (evens)</i></b>
<b><i>The Links</i></b>	<b><i>11-16 (Incl)</i></b>
<b><i>Holland Road</i></b>	<b><i>60-68 (evens)</i></b>
<b><i>Rainham Road / Watling Street</i></b>	<b><i>168-182 (evens) &amp; 101-109 (odds)</i></b>
<b><i>Delce Road</i></b>	<b><i>82-128a (evens)</i></b>
<b><i>The Fairway</i></b>	<b><i>64-72 (evens) &amp; 1-2 Leake House</i></b>
<b><i>Marley Way, Central Parade</i></b>	<b><i>1-12 (Incl)</i></b>
<b><i>Maidstone Road, Rochester</i></b>	<b><i>69-83 (odds) &amp; 118-130 (evens)</i></b>
<b><i>Leander Road / Orion Road</i></b>	<b><i>80-82 (evens) &amp; 53-57b (odds)</i></b>
<b><i>Bligh Way</i></b>	<b><i>165-181 (odds)</i></b>
<b><i>Bryant Road / Weston Road</i></b>	<b><i>61-97 (odds) &amp; 34,36,64/49</i></b>
<b><i>Darnley Road / Cedar Road</i></b>	<b><i>9a-29 (odds) &amp; 14/1-5 (odds)</i></b>

<b>Wells Road</b>	<b>1-7 (odds) &amp; 25-35 (odds)</b>
<b>Frindsbury Road</b>	<b>88-110 (evens) &amp; 105-109 (odds)</b>
<b>Brompton High Street</b>	<b>3-25 (odds) &amp; 8-26 (evens)</b>
<b>Fairview Avenue</b>	<b>151-169 (odds)</b>
<b>Hempstead Road</b>	<b>140-148 (evens)</b>
<b>Hoath Lane</b>	<b>30-48 (evens)/Wigmore Rd. No 2</b>
<b>Maidstone Road, Rainham</b>	<b>371-377 (odds)</b>
<b>Sturdee Avenue</b>	<b>42-58 (evens) &amp; 59-65 (odds)</b>
<b>Watling Street</b>	<b>46-94 (evens) &amp; 123-147 (odds)</b>
<b>Norreys Road</b>	<b>1-4 (Incl)</b>
<b>Livingstone Circus</b>	<b>1-8 &amp; 13-17 Livingstone Buildings, Barnsole Road 1-6, Gillingham Road 198-206 (evens) &amp; 239-277 (odds), Franklin Road 142 &amp; Balmoral Road 217 &amp; 219</b>
<b>Allhallows</b>	<b>All shops in village</b>
<b>Chattenden</b>	<b>All shops in village</b>
<b>Cliffe</b>	<b>All shops in village</b>
<b>Cliffe Woods</b>	<b>All shops in village</b>
<b>Cuxton</b>	<b>All shops in village</b>
<b>Grain</b>	<b>All shops in village</b>

<b>Halling</b>	<b>All shops In village</b>
<b>High Halstow</b>	<b>All shops In village</b>
<b>Hoo, St Werburgh</b>	<b>All shops In village</b>
<b>Lower Stoke</b>	<b>All shops In village</b>
<b>Wainscott</b>	<b>All shops In village</b>
<b>Neighbourhood Centres</b>	
<b>London Road, Rainham</b>	<b>12-40 (evens)</b>
<b>Delce Road</b>	<b>48-56 (evens)</b>
<b>New Road, Chatham</b>	<b>139-151 (odds)</b>
<b>Maidstone Road, Rochester</b>	<b>57-59 (odds), 208-214 (evens), 97-109 (odds)</b>
<b>Cuxton Road</b>	<b>Units 1-9 (odds), Unit 2-4 (evens)</b>
<b>High Street, Strood</b>	<b>5-39 (odds) &amp; 4-24 (evens)</b>
<b>London Road, Strood</b>	<b>2-24 (evens)</b>
<b>Canterbury Street</b>	<b>132-136 (evens) 148-206 (evens) 227-255 (odds) 302-304 (evens) 312-320 (evens) 428-432 (evens) 499-563 (odds)</b>
<b>James Street</b>	<b>119-123 (odds)</b>
<b>High Street, Rainham</b>	<b>173-179 (odds)</b>
<b>London Road / Maidstone Road</b>	<b>1-7 (odds) / 2 (evens) Maidstone Road</b>

<i>Station Road, Rainham</i>	<i>88-94 (evens) &amp; 183-191 (odds)</i>
<i>Ashley Road</i>	<i>1-9 (odds)</i>
<i>Barnsole Road</i>	<i>151-157 (odds)</i>
<i>Boundary Road</i>	<i>109-113 (odds)</i>
<i>Carnation Road</i>	<i>41-47 (odds)</i>
<i>Dale Street</i>	<i>289-291 (odds)</i>
<i>Gillingham Road</i>	<i>36-46 (evens)</i>
<i>Grove Road</i>	<i>54 (evens) &amp; 59 (odds)</i>
<i>John Street</i>	<i>78-86 (evens)</i>
<i>Laburnum Road</i>	<i>67-71 (odds)</i>
<i>Lonsdale Drive</i>	<i>286-288 (evens)</i>
<i>Luton Road</i>	<i>268-274 (evens)</i> <i>136-183 (evens)</i> <i>110-114 (evens)</i> <i>84-92 (evens)</i>
<i>Rochester Court, Medway City Estate</i>	<i>Unit 2-6 (evens) &amp; 3-1 (odds)</i>
<i>Palmerston Road</i>	<i>88-106 (evens)</i>
<i>Peverel Green</i>	<i>45-49 (odds)</i>
<i>Richmond Road</i>	<i>136-142 (evens)</i>
<i>Scotteswood Avenue</i>	<i>1-7 (odds)</i>
<i>Trafalgar Street</i>	<i>131-135 (odds)</i>

## **TOWN CENTRE USES AND MIXED USE SCHEMES**

- 6.5.25 The Council wishes to sustain an appropriate and accessible range of non- retail uses in major centres (Chatham, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham and, on a smaller scale, Rochester). Such uses include some forms of business employment (generally offices), leisure and entertainment, health, cultural and educational facilities. These often have large catchment areas and need to be accessible to a large number of people. If sited in town centres they contribute greatly to the vitality and viability of these centres and offer scope for multi-purpose trips.
- 6.5.26 In accordance with the advice given in PPG's 6 and 13, a sequential test for such uses is proposed. Where a proposed facility is intended to meet more than local needs it should be located in Chatham as the preferred location.

### **POLICY R10: TOWN CENTRE USES AND THE SEQUENTIAL APPROACH**

***Business employment (Class B1(a)), leisure and entertainment uses, cultural and educational facilities will be expected to be located in the main centres of Chatham, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham or in the event of no suitable sites being available, on the edges of these centres. Proposals elsewhere for these uses, unless otherwise allocated in the Local Plan, will only be permitted if:***

- (i) it is clearly demonstrated that no suitable centre or edge of centre site exists; and***
- (ii) the site is easily accessible by a choice of transport modes, including public transport; and***
- (iii) the uses proposed would not undermine the vitality and viability of the main centres listed.***

- 6.5.27 Government guidance is clear, and recent national research confirms, that mixed use schemes within, or on the edge of, town centres contribute greatly to their vitality and viability while at the same time promoting sustainability. Such schemes may comprise of a range of uses including residential, offices, service uses, food and drink, entertainment and health facilities as well as retail.
- 6.5.28 Within the main centres of Chatham, Strood, Gillingham, Rainham and, to a lesser extent, Rochester there is considerable scope for the development of well conceived schemes which combine high quality design with compatibility with adjoining uses. More specifically the continuing work on developing the "City" centre vision for Chatham has identified the Riverside/Medway Street area (See Policy S5) as being ideally suited for a mixed approach

to development. Other opportunities exist both within the core area (on a smaller scale) and outside the Ring Road. Such an approach may be suitable within the Friary Precinct site in Strood, while in Gillingham the Council is already promoting the mixed use concept in the Arden Street area. In Rainham an adopted development brief advocates a mixed use approach on the former Co-Op department store site opposite the parish church. Other opportunities exist in each of the centres.

6.5.29 Policy R11 promotes such schemes whilst avoiding inflexibility by listing specific sites.

#### **POLICY R11: MIXED USE SCHEMES**

*Within, or on the edge of, the defined Core Areas of Chatham, Strood, Gillingham, Rainham (and at a lesser scale Rochester) mixed use developments of an appropriate scale and incorporating high design standards and which contribute to the vitality and viability of these centres will be permitted.*

### **RETAIL USES AND THE SEQUENTIAL APPROACH**

6.5.30 The preceding policies in this chapter make generous provision for new retail development within, and on the edges of, the main town centres of Chatham, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham. This provision is of a scale to comfortably absorb forecast growth in retail expenditure over the Plan period and it fully accords with PPG6, which makes it clear that town centres are the preferred location for retail investment.

6.5.31 Policy R12 covers circumstances where, exceptionally, a case is made that a proposed development cannot be accommodated within, or on the edge of, any of the main centres. In such circumstances the tests set out in the policy will be rigorously applied.

#### **POLICY R12: RETAIL USES AND THE SEQUENTIAL APPROACH**

*Retail development outside the main retail centres will only be permitted when it is demonstrated that sites suitable for the proposed retail development are not available in accordance with the following sequence:*

- (i) within the Core Areas of Chatham, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham; then*
- (ii) on the edge (i.e. within 200 metres) of the Core Areas of Chatham, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham; then*

- (iii) within or adjacent to one of the Local Centres, Village and Neighbourhood Centres as listed in Policy R9.**

**Development will be assessed in accordance with the following criteria:**

- (iv) the extent to which the proposal would undermine the strategy and objectives of the Local Plan to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of existing centres; and**
- (v) whether the scale and type of retailing by itself, or cumulatively with other proposals, would have a detrimental impact on the vitality and viability of the Core Areas , Local Centres, Villages or Neighbourhood Centres; and**
- (vi) whether the location enables access by a choice of transport, including public transport;**
- (vii) whether the proposal allows journeys to be minimised, bearing in mind the existing distribution of retail facilities within the proposed catchment area.**

## **“ANCILLARY” RETAIL DEVELOPMENT**

- 6.5.32 A variety of retail uses exist outside retailing centres and these can take many forms. They include shops in hospitals and trade or sales counters in wholesale warehouses and factories. In recent years there has also been a considerable expansion in the number and size of retail outlets associated with petrol filling stations.
- 6.5.33 Where the original function of the retail unit is clearly “ancillary” to the main use of the site or premises there is seldom a difficulty. However, in some cases the temptation to appeal to a wider market can result in the unit losing its original purpose, potentially to the detriment of other retail establishments or local amenity. Where planning permission is needed, appropriate conditions will be imposed on any consent to ensure that the use remains ancillary to the main use of the business or site. In the case of petrol filling stations, the shop can be an effective substitute for the traditional corner shop but it is appropriate to restrict their scale so that they remain ancillary to the sale of fuel.

**POLICY R13: ANCILLARY RETAIL DEVELOPMENT**

*Retail sales which are intended to be ancillary to the main use (such as sales from factories, trade warehouses, hospitals and petrol filling stations) will be permitted subject to the imposition of conditions to ensure that the retail use remains ancillary.*

**AMUSEMENT ARCADES ETC...**

6.5.34

Certain facilities such as amusement arcades, virtual reality centres and sauna/massage establishments also justify degree of control. If inappropriately sited they can have a detrimental effect on neighbouring activities, particularly on residential development. Generally, such uses should be located within, or on the edge of, town centres and sited away from sensitive uses, which might suffer loss of amenity.

**POLICY R14: AMUSEMENT ARCADES, ETC**

*Amusement arcades, virtual reality centres and establishments such as sauna/massage parlours will only be permitted within, or on the edge of, a retail centre and subject to:*

- (i) there being no detrimental impact on the retail character and function of the centre; and*
- (ii) there being no adverse affect on the character of a Conservation Area or other place of special architectural or historic character; and*
- (iii) there being no detrimental effect on the amenity enjoyed by neighbouring uses.*

*Where the proposal relates to ground floor premises, a shopfront of appropriate design will be required.*

**RESTRICTIONS ON GOODS FOR SALE**

6.5.35

It is now common practice to impose planning conditions relating to the range of goods sold from food superstores and retail warehouses. As PPG6 points out “*retail proposals can change their composition over time. Such changes could create a development that the*

*planning authority would have refused, on the grounds of impact on the vitality and viability of an existing town centre. It may be sensible to consider these and planning conditions to ensure that these developments do not subsequently change their character unacceptably."*

- 6.5.36 In the case of some large stand-alone stores, ancillary trading and services can have a serious impact on local centres and retail warehouses are promoted on the basis that they deal with bulky goods which cannot be properly offered in town centre environments.

#### **POLICY R15: RESTRICTIONS ON GOODS FOR SALE**

***Durable goods sold from any foodstores outside an existing retail centre will be limited by condition to exclude: clothing, footwear, books, jewellery, toys, sports goods, recording material and services such as opticians and travel agencies. The floorspace area will also be specified from which other durable goods can be sold if the development would materially affect the viability and vitality of a shopping centre as a whole without such a condition.***

***Retail warehouses will be limited by condition so that they shall not sell food for consumption off the premises (other than confectionery), clothing (including sports wear), shoes, toys, fashion accessories, books, computer software and recording material.***

#### **A2 AND A3 USES AND CHANGE OF USE**

- 6.5.37 Class A2 (Financial and Professional Services) and Class A3 uses (Food and Drink) are important components of town centres and add to their vitality and viability. However, in some cases an undue concentration of such uses within the main retail frontages can have a negative effect, reducing footfall and visual interest and disrupting the benefits which shops gain from being close to one another. Purely takeaway food outlets can also bring a negative image to an area if they are unduly concentrated and cater primarily for the late evening, as opposed to daytime and early evening, trade.
- 6.5.38 Controls on such uses needs to be applied sensitively as there is often a fine line between what might be beneficial or not to the town centre. Nevertheless the Council is of the view that proper control should be exercised in appropriate cases. Policy R16 provides a basis for this which allows the circumstances in each case to be fully considered.

#### **POLICY R16: A2 AND A3 USES AND CHANGE OF USE**

***Changes of use within, and on the edge of, the Core Areas of Chatham, Strood, Gillingham, Rainham and Rochester from Class A1***

***(retail) to A2 (Financial and Professional Services) or A3 (Food and Drink uses) at ground floor level will be permitted except where the addition of such a use within any particular part of the centre would cumulatively have a detrimental effect on the character and retail function of the centre or visual amenity.***

## **VEHICLE SALES AND SHOWROOMS**

- 6.5.39 Purpose designed vehicle showrooms can create visual interest and variety. However, their space requirements and need for high quality access means that they are difficult to accommodate in town centre locations. Largely open vehicle sales areas often have a poor image through the use of low quality temporary buildings, poor boundary treatments and excessive signing and promotional material. Difficulties can also occur if there is an undue concentration of showroom uses within employment areas. They attract large numbers of private vehicles onto roads otherwise frequented by heavy goods vehicles and parking can overflow onto roads, creating a hazard.
- 6.5.40 The Council wishes to encourage high quality showrooms and associated uses in appropriate locations, and also to encourage operators to invest in their sites in the interest of local amenity. The preferred locations are on major routes outside main centres where mixed commercial uses predominate and, in the case of employment areas, close to the main access points and on the main road frontage. Where practicable, buildings should be purpose designed with good architectural detailing being used to provide visual interest. Careful consideration should always be given to the treatment of boundaries and on-site lighting. Signage should also be carefully considered to avoid undue clutter and complement the buildings on the site. Changes of use to Class A1 retail on sites outside established retail centres will be prevented by the application of conditions.

### **POLICY R17: VEHICLE SALES AND SHOWROOMS**

***Vehicle showrooms and open sales areas should feature visually interesting buildings, high quality boundary treatment and surfacing and be accompanied by full details of any outdoor lighting and signage. Sites should be well related to the primary and secondary road network and be of sufficient size to avoid other than incidental on-road parking resulting from the use.***

***Change of use from vehicle sales to Class A1 (retail) will not be permitted if it would prejudice the vitality and viability of a retail centre.***

## **6.6 ENVIRONMENTAL APPRAISAL**

- 6.6.1 In accordance with the guidance contained at paras. 5.52 and 6.24/5 of PPG12 *“Development Plans and Regional Planning Guidance”* the policies in this chapter have been subject to environmental appraisal.
- 6.6.2 The retailing policies are on the whole sustainable. The main themes of the chapter are the support and maintenance of the retail hierarchy; the regeneration and revitalisation of existing major centres and the protection of more local centres. The chapter is also strong on the reduction in the need to travel, the discouragement of out-of-centre retail development, the encouragement in the use of brownfield sites, and the promotion of equal opportunity of use.
- 6.6.3 The policies do not have any direct impact on global sustainability or natural resources, but indirectly they are likely to have a positive effect.

## **6.7 MONITORING MEASURES**

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- 6.7.1 The performance of the Plan in meeting its aims with regard to retailing will be judged against the following criteria:
- (i) Changes in the level of durable and convenience goods floorspace, in particular within Chatham, and any changes in the retail hierarchy of centres;
  - (ii) The number of mixed use development schemes permitted within the main centres during the plan period;
  - (iii) The implementation of the major allocated retail schemes in Chatham, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham;
  - (iv) Changes in the vitality and viability of existing shopping centres and their general environmental condition;
  - (v) The level of retail employment.