

# Telford and Wrekin Local Plan 2011-2031

Examination Statement on behalf of Telford Trustees No. 1 and Telford Trustees No. 2

## Matter 4: Economy and Community

Representation references: PUB218, 214, 216, 211, 222, 198 and 212.

28 October 2016

### Introduction

1. This Statement is submitted on behalf of Telford Trustees No. 1 and Telford Trustees No. 2 (the Trustees) the owners of Telford Shopping Centre which makes up a significant part of Telford Town Centre.
2. The Trustees have engaged in the Local Plan process and duly responded to the public consultation in March 2016 (rep ID: PUB218, 214, 216, 211, 222, 198 and 212.).
3. Subsequently the Trustees have worked with the Council in the preparation of the Local Plan and have agreed further Modifications to policies to address the representations submitted. The Trustees' objective has been to ensure the policies relating to retail development and Telford protect and enhance the retail function of the Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area in the interests of the overall economy of Telford.
4. This Statement should be read in conjunction with our previous representations. This Statement addresses the specific issues and questions raised by the Inspector in relation to Matter 4, specifically Matters 4.4 and 4.5.

### Scale of Approved Development

5. The Trustees are a major land owner and investor within Telford Town Centre and Southwater since acquiring their land interests in 2007. The Trustees own the Telford Shopping Centre and car parks within the Box Road area. They also own other landholdings within the town centre, including the area known as Central Southwater. Since 2007, the Trustees have implemented several developments all of which have sought to improve the town centre.
6. Outline Planning Permission (TWC/2013/0612) approved in December 2013 sought the comprehensive redevelopment of the shopping centre and surrounding land to provide a significant quantum of town centre uses, principally comparison goods retail and leisure. The permission granted outline approval for the following:

Use Class	Gross Floorspace sq. m.	Net Additional sq. m.
A1	52,975	36,200

A2-A5	23,456	23,000
C1	8,500	8,500
D2	6,000	6000
Sui Generis	1,000	1000

7. This Outline Planning Permission encompasses the whole of the Telford Shopping Centre and specifically the Primary Shopping Area ("PSA") as identified in the emerging Local Plan, and establishes the parameters for its future development and expansion divided into several zones. The zones are: Northern Quarter; Central Square; Bus Station; and Southern Quarter. The new floorspace granted by the Outline Planning Permission and outlined above is being brought forward by the Trustees in phases.
8. The Southern Quarter development is now being implemented following the approval of reserved matters on 21 October 2014 to create a new quarter of restaurant uses, which are complementary to the Southwater development to the east. The development is set to open in 2017.
9. Reserved matters were approved in respect of the Northern Quarter (Ref: TWC/2015/0526) on 21 August 2015 and demolition works have commenced. Notwithstanding, discussions are now on-going in relation to the submission of further amendments to the Northern Quarter approved scheme, following the pre-letting of stores within the development to specific retailers.
10. The Council resolved to grant planning permission (part outline and part detailed) on 21 September 2016 for the redevelopment of the bus station and for an extension to the shopping centre to create large retail units and a reconfiguration of internal retail space. This permission overlaps the 2013 outline planning permission. The Section 106 Agreement is being finalised at present and it is to be completed before the end of October.
11. The Outline planning permission has been implemented by virtue of the commencement of development of the Southern Quarter. The Trustees intend to bring forward the Northern Quarter and Bus station schemes within the next few months, with further retail and associated development being brought forward at subsequent stages.

### **Planning Policy Background**

12. The adopted Core Strategy (2007) includes a set of spatial development objectives which include developing a vibrant and vital Telford town centre to serve the needs of the Borough and the sub-region.
13. The CTAAP adopted in 2011 makes provision via Policy CT2 to promote new mixed-use proposals, with no more than an additional 65,000 sq. m (gross) comparison retail development to be provided in the Town Centre Core over the period to 2016. Policy SA1 seeks to ensure development proposals in the existing shopping area contribute towards delivering a mixture of uses, including approximately 50,000 sq. m (gross) comparison retail.
14. The WYG Retail Study 2014, which forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan, at paras 9.34 and 9.35, concludes on the comparison goods requirement that, whilst the revised estimates for comparison goods floorspace (compared to the previous study in 2009) in the short-term are materially different, it is evident that in the longer term, there is still a significant anticipated need for comparison goods floorspace within the Telford Urban Area. However, it is evident that, depending upon which population scenario is adopted, the minimum net sales floorspace requirement for the Telford Urban Area at 2031 ranges from circa 24,900 sq.m. to circa 33,300 sq.m. The consultants conclude that whilst the level of need and the likely timescale involved suggest that Policy CT2 is now somewhat out of date, the principal of focussing future growth on Telford remains valid.
15. In terms of planning for additional centres WYG conclude at para. 9.47 that some of the quantitative capacity which is identified at Section 7 of this report can be brought forward as local provision which

serves areas of housing growth. It is envisaged that any such centres are likely to be small in scale in order to support and complement the existing town centre hierarchy.

16. The Trustees broadly support the approach the Council has taken to the management of Telford Town Centre in that Policy EC5 identifies four distinct precincts: a retail core defined by the Primary Shopping Area (PSA); a conference and exhibition area focused around The International Centre; a public park where Natural Environment policies will apply; and a strategic employment area north of the PSA where the town's office stock is largely located.

#### **Matter 4.4(1)**

18. Matter 4.4 (1) seeks to determine whether the Local Plan's policies for the development of shopping and town centre uses including the growth assumptions set out in section 4.2 are based on robust and up to date evidence and consistent with national policy and guidance.
19. The Trustees are not in a position to comment on the growth assumptions relating to employment land and housing allocations. However we are aware that there are scenarios being considered as part of the Local Plan preparation which may result in an increase in employment land and housing supply. Thus the question being posed is where any additional retail spending that might result from these additional provisions be accommodated?
20. The WYG report suggests that there is quantitative capacity in the Telford Urban Area at 2031 ranging from 24,900 sq.m. to 33,300 sq.m., based on a series of scenarios. The report states that:

*“... Most of the capacity is absorbed through extant planning permissions at Telford Shopping Centre and it is not necessary to allocate any new site or sites within the Primary Shopping Area to accommodate the identified growth in the short to medium term.”*

21. It is evident that there is physical capacity within Telford town centre and specifically within the PSA for the development of a significant amount of floorspace for retail and leisure floorspace as evidenced by the granting of outline planning permission for 36,400 (net) sq. m (Class A1), 23,000 (net) sq. m (Classes A2-A5) and 6,000 (net) sq. m (Class D2). This planning permission has been implemented and is being brought forward in phases by the Trustees.
22. Para 3.14 of the Council's B1b Technical Paper on Managing Our Urban Centres concludes that:

*“Telford Town Centre has the physical capacity for further growth in its retail and service provision. The Primary Shopping Area has potential for an extension and redevelopment that could create an additional development opportunities for around 3,400 sq.m. of retail. It is proposed that any remaining additional comparison and convenience floorspace can be met through vacant properties in the Town Centre. It has not, therefore, been considered necessary to allocate land for retail development through the Local Plan but instead the policies provide a strong town centre first approach.”*

23. The Trustees consider this underestimates the capacity of the town centre, and specifically the PSA to accommodate additional retail floorspace. The extant planning permission, which is now being delivered by the Trustees in phases, includes significant levels of retail floorspace which more than meets the capacity identified by WYG. For example, in the unlikely event that the Borough were to deliver all of the 148ha of employment land identified in Appendix B to the Plan the PSA could accommodate any consequential increase in retail demand that such a circumstances would generate.
24. On this basis there is no need to allocate any further sites beyond the PSA for town centre uses should this be necessary as a result of delivery of additional employment floorspace or housing. Any new provision, as recommended by WYG, is likely to be brought forward as local provision which serves areas of housing growth and any such centres are likely to be small in scale in order to support and complement the existing town centre hierarchy.

#### **Matter 4.4(2)**

25. Matter 4.4 (2) seeks to determine whether the Local Plan's policies for the development of shopping and town centre uses including the hierarchy of centres contained within Policy EC4 are based on robust and up to date evidence and consistent with national policy and guidance.
26. The Trustees continue to support the proposed hierarchy of centres with Telford Town Centre being recognised for its sub-regional role and being defined as a Principal Town Centre where retail, office and leisure developments and community facilities including the provision of entertainment and cultural activities (for example, health centres, education and social services, residential accommodation, religious buildings) will be focused. The Trustees consider this Policy is robust and based on up to date evidence and is consistent with national policy and guidance.

#### **Matter 4.4(4)**

27. Matter 4.4 (4) seeks to determine whether the Local Plan's policies for the development of shopping and town centre uses including the retail impact thresholds set out in policy EC8 are based on robust and up to date evidence and consistent with national policy and guidance.
28. The Council's B1b Technical Paper on Managing Our Urban Centres sets out the detailed justification for the proposed thresholds set out in the Local Plan which are broadly supported by the Trustees.
29. In our representations the Trustees suggested that in the context of the scale of the Borough's retail environment, Policy EC 8 will be effective and justified only if the threshold is set lower at 400 sq. m. in order to capture local foodstore proposals such as Tesco Express and Sainsbury's Local which trade at this scale and could adversely impact on investment in the town centre and town centre vitality and viability.
30. Like many centres Telford Town Centre, and especially the PSA, is vulnerable to the impacts of competing retail development in edge/out-of-centre locations. Proposals of up to 2,500 sq. m of comparison goods floorspace (or significant comparison goods floorspace delivered as part of a major foodstore development) are likely to have a harmful impact upon the vitality and viability of the town centre, particularly as it is these "everyday" goods that it currently provides for. Proposals for up to 2,500 sq. m represent a significant amount of retail floorspace which should not be permitted without the appropriate sequential and impact tests being met.
31. Paragraph 26 of the NPPF provides the basis for local authorities to set a proportionate, locally set threshold and the Trustees consider it is appropriate to set a lower threshold in Telford.
32. Allowing significant retail floorspace to be delivered in competing edge or out-of-centre locations will undermine the viability and deliverability of significant retail development in the town centre and particularly the PSA. A lower threshold would help to protect the town centre from retail development elsewhere within the catchment area and support the long term viability and vitality of the town centre.
33. Notwithstanding the Trustees' suggestion that the threshold be further reduced to 400 sq.m., in the case of proposals affecting Telford, the Trustees support the Council's position set out in the B1b Technical Paper on Managing Our Urban Centres regarding the setting of a locally set threshold for Telford and thus support Policy EC8 as drafted.

#### **Matter 4.5**

34. Matter 4.5 seeks to determine whether the Local Plan's application of the "sequential approach" to the location of town centre uses is consistent with the Framework.

35. Paragraph 24 of the NPPF requires local planning authorities to apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan. Paragraph 26 advises that local planning authorities should require an impact assessment when assessing applications for retail, leisure and office development outside of town centres, which are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan.
36. Policy EC8 is currently ambiguously worded and should be further modified to ensure it is consistent with the NPPF making reference to “main town centre uses” in the context of the sequential approach and to “retail, leisure and office development” in the context of the requirement for an impact assessment.