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PLANS

APPENDICES

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 GVA Grimley was instructed in May 2009 by Worthing Borough Council to prepare a Retail Study of Worthing town centre. The Borough Council have previously produced a number of reports and studies in order to plan for the future of retailing in the Borough, and this study, "Supporting the Retail Sector in Worthing Town Centre", intends to add value to the existing evidence base, and contribute to the Council's policy and strategy preparation within the LDF.

1.2 Our terms of reference are:

- To re-examine and advise on the shopping frontages and policy boundaries in Worthing Town Centre, taking into account the current composition of retailing and identified major development sites;
- Develop a strategy to support existing retail areas in preparation for the delivery of the new 'Retail Core';
- Develop a strategy for the creative use of vacant shops during the economic downturn and throughout the delivery of the new retail core.

1.3 This report specifically seeks to preserve the viability of the existing shopping provision and the vitality of the various retail character areas in anticipation of the Council's growth aspirations for the town centre. The findings will feed into the preparation of the LDF and the formulation of policies. The report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 sets out the relevant planning policy framework;
- Section 3 provides a detailed overview of the various reports and studies produced to date to inform and guide planning in Worthing Town Centre and which form part of the evidence base for the LDF;
- Section 4 discusses the current composition and performance of Worthing Town Centre;
- Section 5 reviews the key development opportunity sites identified and consequent future change to the composition and performance of Worthing Town Centre;
- Section 6 sets out our recommended retail strategy to maintain and enhance the performance of Worthing town centre before, during and after major change/retail development;
- Section 7 sets out our recommended implementation measures.

2. POLICY FRAMEWORK

2.1 This section sets out the points of relevance from the national and local policy framework, focusing specifically on town centre strategy policy formulation and the management of growth and change.

PPS6: Planning for Town Centres, 2005

2.2 The Government's key objective for town centres is to promote their vitality and viability by:

- Planning for the growth and development of existing centres; and
- Promoting and enhancing existing centres, by focusing development in such centres and encouraging a wide range of services in a good environment, accessible to all.

2.3 The statement advises that local planning authorities should plan positively for growth and development by assessing the need for further main town centre uses and ensure there is capacity to accommodate them; and to focus development in, and plan for the expansion of, existing centres as appropriate, and at the local level identify appropriate sites in development plan documents. Wherever possible, growth should be accommodated by more efficient use of land and buildings within existing centres, and local planning authorities should aim to increase the density of development, where appropriate. Opportunities within existing centres should be identified for sites suitable for development or redevelopment.

2.4 PPS6 states that, in planning for town centres, where growth cannot be accommodated in identified existing centres, local planning authorities should plan for the extension of the primary shopping area if there is a need for additional retail provision or, where appropriate, plan for the extension of the town centre to accommodate other main town centre uses. Any such expansion should be carefully integrated with the existing centre both in terms of design and to allow easy access on foot.

2.5 Local planning authorities should adopt a positive and proactive approach to planning for the future of all types of centres within their areas. Having regard to the regional spatial strategy and reflecting their community strategy, local planning authorities should, through the core strategy development plan document, set out a spatial vision and strategy for the network and hierarchy of centres, including local centres, within their area, setting out how the role of different centres will contribute to the overall spatial vision for their area.

2.6 PPS6 encourages local planning authorities to work in conjunction with the stakeholders and the community to:

- assess the need for new floorspace for retail, leisure and other man town centre uses, taking account of both quantitative and qualitative considerations;
- identify deficiencies in provision, assess the capacity of existing centres to accommodate new development, including, where appropriate, the scope for extending the primary shopping area and/or town centre, and identify centres in decline where change needs to be managed;
- identify the centres within their area where development will be focused, as well as the need for any new centres of local importance, and develop strategies for developing and strengthening centres within their area;
- define the extent of primary shopping area and the town centre, for the centres in their area on their Proposals Map (see Annex A);
- identify and allocate sites in accordance with the considerations set out below (paragraphs 2.28 - 2.51);
- review all existing allocations and reallocate sites which do not comply with this policy statement;
- develop spatial policies and proposals to promote and secure investment in deprived areas by strengthening and/or identifying opportunities for growth of existing centres, and to seek to improve access to local facilities (paragraphs 2.55 - 2.59); and
- set out criteria-based policies, in accordance with this policy statement, for assessing and locating new development proposals, including development on sites not allocated in development plan documents.

2.7 In addition to defining the extent of the primary shopping area for their centres, local planning authorities are encouraged to distinguish between primary and secondary frontages (Annex A). These frontages should be realistically defined. Having regard to the need to encourage diversification of uses in town centres as whole, PPS6 states that primary frontages should contain a high proportion of retail uses, while secondary frontages provide greater opportunities for flexibility and a diversity of uses. Where frontages are identified the appropriate local development documents should include policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in such locations. It is emphasised that town centre strategies can play an important and complementary role in ensuring the continued vitality and viability of centres.

PPS4: Planning for Prosperous Economies (Draft), May 2009

2.8 Consultation changes to PPS6 were published in July 2008 and again within a new document 'PPS4: Planning for Prosperous Economies, in May 2009. The stated intentions remain consistent with existing policy, to support town centre investment, and to ensure that planning promotes competition and consumer choice. In respect of the local planning approach to town centres, draft PPS4 confirms that local planning authorities should positively and proactively encourage sustainable economic growth in both urban and rural areas, prioritise previously developed land, and seek to make the most of efficient and effective use of land and buildings, especially vacant or derelict buildings.

2.9 As part of the vision and strategy for town centres, local planning authorities are still encouraged to define the extent of the primary shopping area and the town centre on their Proposals Map and consider distinguishing between realistically defined primary and secondary frontages in designated town centres with policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in such locations. The statement adds that primary frontages should contain a high proportion of retail uses while secondary frontages provide a greater opportunity for flexibility and a diversity of uses. When addressing growth and change in town centres, the document emphasises the importance of careful integration.

Good Practice Guide: Need, Impact and the Sequential Approach, Draft May 2009

2.10 The content of this Practice Guidance will not constitute a statement of Government policy. It is guidance to help those involved in preparing or reviewing need, impact assessments and sequential site assessments, and to support the interpretation of town centre policies set out in PPS4. Of particular relevance to this Retail Study, the draft document comments that there are many examples of the benefits which positive planning for retail led and other mixed use developments in town centres have delivered. A common feature of most of these projects is that they have formed part of an overall strategy, promoted through the planning process and other parallel initiatives.

2.11 Moreover, it notes that not all of the successful town centre regeneration projects have been retail led, or involved significant new development. The Good Practice Guide highlights that experience suggests a range of measures, including active management and promotion, public realm improvements, and access and public transport improvements and other measures promoted through partnerships and in some cases Business Improvement Districts can all play a key role. Importantly, to be effective, a plan's vision and strategy has to be based on a sound evidence base which demonstrates an understanding of the existing situation, and the potential opportunities for change.

2.12 The draft document adds that strategies for individual centres can be prepared at any time but they should be incorporated into the LDF at the earliest opportunity. This is likely to be important where key site allocations are involved, either through strategic allocations in the Core Strategy, or through sites allocated in an Area Action Plan or other document. Promoting town centre strategies through the LDF process ensures that the evidence base which underpins the strategy will be properly tested. A strategy which has been progressed through the LDF process, and been subject to effective public and stakeholder consultation and tested through independent examination will ensure that proposals must be determined in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

2.13 When preparing their LDF's, local planning authorities are advised to identify what they regard as the Primary Shopping Area (PSA). This is important to provide clarity to applicants about the policy status of different sites. In defining the PSA, it may be appropriate to take into account the anticipated future role of the centre, and in particular the scope for growth and expansion. In centres where major expansion is planned, it may be appropriate to indicate where the PSA is likely to be extended to, having regard to the potential for achieving effectively integrated new development. Local planning authorities should also identify an appropriate 'town centre boundary' within which it will seek to locate other main town centre uses. It may also be appropriate to define other areas within the town centre but outside the PSA where specific uses are encouraged e.g. specialist retail, offices bars/restaurants etc.

2.14 In addition to defining the PSA, the draft Good Practice Guidance, states that where LPAs identify a need for new development to accommodate main town centre uses, they should allocate sites which are suitable, viable and likely to be available within a reasonable timescale to accommodate such needs.

Worthing Adopted Local Plan, 2003

2.15 The Worthing Local Plan was adopted on the 4th September 2003. After the introduction of a new planning system through the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Local Plan was saved for a period of three years and then expired in September 2007. From this date, the Local Plan was no longer functional in its entirety. However, as the Core Strategy was not yet adopted, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government 'saved' a number of specific policies from the local plan for use after this date.

2.16 The supporting text to the Local Plan states that the Council recognises that a balance has to be struck between the demands of competing uses, such as retail, leisure, employment and other services, in the Central Shopping Area. For this reason, the Council divided it's Central Shopping Area into Primary and Secondary Areas for policy purposes. The Primary area was further sub-divided into Zone A and Zone B. Zone A constituted the dominant retail area, comprising major stores and the then new Montague Centre. Policy S7 stated that the change of use of the ground floor of a shop (A1) within Zone A, to any other use will not normally be permitted. This policy has not been 'saved'.

2.17 Zone B consists of four areas: retail units on the western side of Montague Place, an area centring on the Arcade and part of South Street, Warwick Street and the Guildbourne Centre. The supporting text states that Montague Place and the Arcade/South Street area lie between the main shopping centre and the seafront and therefore tend to fulfil a dual role serving both shoppers and tourists, rather than a purely retail function. The text also states that Warwick Street has adopted its own special character since being pedestrianised and has a mix of specialist shops and restaurants/cafes. It also describes the Guildbourne Centre as being still largely in retail use, but operates on the edge of the main centre.

2.18 For these reasons, the policy considers that some further A3 uses may be permissible within Zone B. This is formally stated in Policy S8, which ensures that permission will not normally be granted for the change of use of the ground-floor of a shop (A1) to non-A1, other than to A3 Use Class. Within Zone B, permission will not normally be granted for the change of use of the ground floor of a shop (A1) to any other use. Exceptions may be granted where:

- the use proposed is an A3 use;
- the proposal causes no significant adverse effects for the occupiers of neighbouring properties;
- the proposal does not intensify car parking problems; and
- the use does not extend or result in a block of non-shop uses with a frontage of more than 20 metres or result in the proportion of non-shop uses exceeding 35% within Zone B of the Primary Area as a whole.

2.19 The remaining 'saved' policies, relevant to shopping in Worthing Town Centre, are detailed below:

2.20 S9 – A policy that was formulated in response to the decline of the Guildbourne Centre which has experienced a growing vacancy rate. As a result, the Council is prepared to operate a more flexible policy towards changes of use on the upper floor in an attempt to promote an improvement in the Centre's vitality and viability. Such uses include A1 shop, A2 financial and professional services, A3 food and drink. Other community and leisure uses are also deemed acceptable including beauty salons, health suites, crèches, health care uses and advice centres or meeting rooms. Today, however, the Guildbourne Centre has been unsuccessful in diversifying and the upper floor is no longer in use as a shopping destination with the ground floor experiencing low pedestrian footfall and few national multiple retailers.

2.21 S10 – Within the Secondary Area of the Central Shopping Area, including Montague Street to the west of Crescent Road, the southern part of Portland Road, Brighton Road and much of Chapel Road, it is considered that a less restrictive policy should apply. The policy allows changes of use on the ground floor from A1 to either A2 financial and professional service use and/or A3 food and drink use, provided that there would be no adverse effects created for the occupiers of neighbouring properties. The policy states that proposals for changes of any unit to uses outside A1, A2 or A3 Use Class will not normally be permitted.

2.22 The Local Plan identified three sites it considered suitable to accommodate large scale retail development in response to The Sussex Retail Study (1996) which suggested a need for 40,000 sq m of comparison floorspace by 2006. The sites, which policies have ***not*** been saved, include:

- The British Gas site off High Street,
- The Stage Coach site and
- The Union Place car park and Police Station.

2.23 The Local plan describes the first of these, the British Gas site, as adjoining an existing food store with access from High Street and surrounded on three sides by residential properties. As such the Local Plan states that the design and operation of any development must not have any significant adverse impact on the occupiers of these properties. Previous uses of the site are likely to have led to some contamination of land, which would require further investigation by potential developers.

2.24 The Stagecoach site is well integrated with the existing Primary Area (Zone B). Stagecoach Buses currently occupies this site, and any plans to relocate the use have been unsuccessful in recent years. The site adjoins the South Street and Steyne Gardens Conservation Areas and several Listed Buildings, including the Dome Cinema and most of Bedford Row. The site also occupies an important location between the seafront and some of the town centre's main shopping streets, namely Warwick Street and South Street. Any re-development should therefore encourage pedestrian flows between these key features by including attractive routes through the site.

2.25 The Union Place car park site is located further north on the eastern side of Chapel Road, offering an important development opportunity within the town centre and the principle use should be non-food retail. The site's proximity to the Connaught Theatre also makes it suitable for an ancillary element of leisure use, and any proposals should be sympathetic to the adjoining theatre. The Police Station, following the decision to relocate to Durrington, was incorporated into the site. A pedestrian link currently exists from the site to Chapel Road, and any new development should create and enhance such links to ensure that the site contributes to the overall vitality of the town centre.

2.26 These site allocations have not been 'saved', and are therefore being reviewed as part of the LDF.

Worthing Local Development Framework

2.27 The Core Strategy is the key planning policy document that will set out the overall vision and planning strategy in Worthing over the next 10-20 years. The Core Strategy will address the key issues and challenges facing the town in the future and it highlights the priority areas that need to be addressed. Worthing Borough Council began the Issues and Options consultation for the Core Strategy in November 2005. In September 2007 the Council prepared a submission version of the

Core Strategy, although this was withdrawn in July 2008 in order to finalise and extend the evidence base.

2.28 The Council is currently undertaking a further consultation stage on the Revised Core Strategy which will run until August 10th 2009, and will produce the submission version of the document by early March 2010. The submission of the document to the Secretary of State is expected to take place in June 2010, followed by a Pre-Hearing consultation in August. Based on current timescales, the Council expect to adopt the Core Strategy by December 2010/January 2011.

2.29 The current consultation document interprets 'retail' as a major economic asset for Worthing town centre, which would greatly benefit by focussing additional retailing close to the seafront and its associated attractions. The strategy acknowledges that the central retail area is supported by secondary shopping areas including Warwick Street, Warwick Lane, the Broadway and the west end of Montague Street, and the Core Strategy emphasises that these areas are important for the overall mix of the retail and the vitality of Worthing's shopping experience.

2.30 The Strategy acknowledges that the town's size and the configuration of existing retail units is one of the main constraints facing the centre. The town faces a challenge in providing modern, appropriately sized retail units, and the strategy favours the creation of opportunities that will attract national, high quality retailers to the town to meet the requirements of existing and potential occupiers. The Core Strategy envisages that this will require the enlargement of the Primary Shopping Area, and states that resisting retail development in out-of-centre locations will be an important element in sustaining the established retail hierarchy. Strategic Objective 2 of the strategy states that the town centre and the seafront will be the main focus of change and regeneration over the period of the plan.

Summary

- The Government's key objectives for town centre is to promote their vitality and viability by planning for the growth and development of existing centres and encouraging a wide range of services in a good environment, accessible to all. Local authorities are encouraged to identify the need for new floorspace, and define appropriate frontages and boundaries to assist in planning for new development. They are encouraged to identify and allocate sites where necessary and develop strategies to bring forward new investment whilst maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of the respective town centre.
- The stated intentions of draft consultation PPS4: Planning for Prosperous Economies, remain consistent with current policy and re-emphasises the need for local authorities to plan positively, proactively encouraging sustainable economic growth. The need to define primary and secondary shopping frontages remain central, and the draft Good Practice Guide clarifies that a plan's vision and strategy has to be based on a sound evidence base which demonstrates an

understanding of the existing situation, and the potential opportunities for change. Notably, in defining the Primary Shopping Area, the document suggests that it might be appropriate to take into account the anticipated future role of the centre, and in particular the scope for growth and expansion.

- The Worthing Adopted Local Plan (2003) saved only three policies in respect of Worthing Town Centre. These protect A1 and A3 uses within Zone B of the Primary Shopping Area, encourages flexibility of uses within the Guildbourne Shopping Centre, and protects A1, A2 and A3 uses within the Secondary Shopping Frontages. No allocated development sites have been saved. The Core Strategy is in progress with consultation running until 10 August 2009 and adopted expected in October 2010. The strategy recognises the deficiencies of existing units to meet modern retailer requirements and the need to improve retail accommodation. Enlargement of the Primary Shopping Area is accepted as a requirement to allow this change and growth.

3. BACKGROUND CONTEXT

3.1 This section reviews and summarises previous reports and studies commissioned by Worthing Borough Council which form part of the evidence base for the LDF and which are specifically relevant to this study. The subject reports include DTZ's Coastal District Retail Study (2005), Worthing Evolution Town Centre and Seafront Masterplan (2006), and the Worthing Retail Core: Development Brief (2008). These reports set the framework for this Retail Study and the key findings are therefore crucial to the ongoing development of the LDF evidence base. This Retail Study should be read in conjunction with the documents discussed here.

DTZ's Coastal District Retail Study (2005)

3.2 DTZ was commissioned by Arun District Council, Chichester District Council and Worthing Borough Council in March 2005 to carry out a Retail Study for the Coastal District which would inform and support the preparation of the Local Development Framework (LDF) for each local authority area. The study's key objectives were to carry out a health check of the key town centres in the Coastal District, assess their position in the regional and sub-regional hierarchy, review the impact of evolving market trends and larger neighbouring and competing centres as well as to review the likely future capacity and market demand for new retail floorspace and assess the options for future additional retail and mixed-use development.

3.3 The scope of the DTZ study was largely strategic and whilst it did set out a detailed review of Worthing town centre and undertake a high level review of potential development opportunity sites, it did not drill down to the intricate level of redefining retail areas, primary and secondary shopping frontages or town centre boundaries. The Retail Study provided a useful starting point to move forwards with the development of the more detailed Masterplan (discussed below) through an analysis of the performance of the town centre, it's role in the retail hierarchy, retail capacity projections and the identification of general development sites/growth areas.

3.4 The Study identifies Worthing as the largest retail centre in the Coastal District with capacity for over 23,000 sq m net of new comparison goods retailing in the town centre up to 2013, rising to about 38,000 sq m net by 2017. This is a significant increase in retail floorspace and the study identifies the challenge for the Council as being the identification and delivery of sites capable of accommodating this forecast growth. The study further states that Worthing is facing increasing competition from competing towns and that 'to do nothing is not an option'. The town centre currently lacks the critical mass and quality of retailing to anchor the town's comparison retail offer. The Study concludes by stating the following:-

> *"For Worthing the key challenge is to create a new retail heart for the town centre. New development is needed to provide the necessary critical mass and quality of retail and leisure uses to help maintain and raise its status as a major sub-regional shopping destination over the longer term, particularly as it will face increased competition from neighbouring centres and out-of-centre developments. Neither the Montague nor the Guildbourne shopping centres currently provide strong or attractive anchor's to the town's retail offer. We therefore consider that there is a unique opportunity to redevelop the Union Place/Police Station site and to link it with the potential redevelopment of the unattractive Guildbourne Centre to create a significant mixed use development in the heart of the town centre, with frontages onto Chapel Road, South Place and the High Street. If development on this site fails to create these linkages, then it will effectively turn its back on the prime shopping area and an opportunity to create a significant retail development will be missed."*

Worthing Town Centre and Seafront Masterplan (2006)

3.5 The Masterplan emphasises that a successful town centre and seafront will bring significant benefits to Worthing as a whole, setting out a clear vision and framework for development and change. Worthing faces the challenge of how to reinvent itself in the face of increasing competition from other centres, and the Masterplan aims to provide a framework to help reverse the decline of the town centre and seafront. Specifically, the document states that a coordinated approach to the regeneration and development of these areas provides the best opportunity for the town to become the location for high quality cultural, civic and commercial facilities; secure the capacity for new development; and improve and extend the housing market.

3.6 In terms of key gateways, the Masterplan identifies a lack of quality gateways that announce arrival into Worthing for visitors. At present, the Teville Gate area provides the only real gateway, yet the Masterplan states that this fails to create a positive first impression of the town centre, with visitors currently greeted by the Teville Gate multi-storey car park and the rear servicing area of the Morrisons foodstore. It is also noted that the town centre also lacks any form of gateway feature or development for those approaching the town from the east along Brighton Road or from the west along either Richmond Road or Marine Parade, and there is no announcement that visitors are entering an active and thriving town centre.

3.7 The Masterplan identified the following key issues when reviewing the retail sector in Worthing town centre:

- Worthing's retail offer is relatively poor for a town of its size and catchment;
- There is an under provision of modern retail units within the town centre;

- Retail development in the town centre has been limited in recent years whereas Worthing's competing centres, notably Brighton and Crawley have significant retail expansion proposals. If these proposals are implemented then Worthing is at risk of falling behind the enhanced offers that will be provided by these centres;
- Whilst significant retail capacity has been identified within the town, the centre currently lacks sites of a suitable size to accommodate larger retailers;
- Worthing's retail layout is linear in nature making it difficult to create a successful shopping circuit;
- Worthing's shopping centre offer is perceived to be poor, with the Guildbourne [Shopping] Centre failing to offer either quality retailers or retailing environment expected by the residents;
- Whilst more high quality high street retailers are wanted by users, there is also a strong desire that this should not be to the detriment of the specialist niche retailers focussed along Warwick Street, Brighton Road and Montague Street (west).

3.8 The Masterplan highlights that there is a consensus amongst the stakeholders of Worthing that the quality and range of the town's retail offer does not reflect the town's status as a sub-regional town, with a wide and affluent catchment. However, whilst the town suffers from a low quality primary retail offer, it does benefit from a relatively strong secondary and tertiary retail offer. In particular, Warwick Street offers a range of niche retailers and a growing café culture, and Brighton Road is identified as an area developing a specialist retail role. To the north of South Street and west of Montague Street, however, the retail environment deteriorates significantly in both appearance and in the quality and mix of retailers.

3.9 Of relevance to this study, the Masterplan notes the significant decline in visitors over the last 20 years, largely as a consequence of 'cheap' holiday's abroad. During the 1990's, Worthing has typically been 'type cast' as a destination for the elderly. The tourism offer is accepted as being of poor quality and out-dated, accommodation is often poor in quality, there is no one single tourist attraction (aside from the sea), current facilities are underused and Worthing, in general, lacks an 'identity'.

3.10 The document puts forward the Masterplan Strategy, including that related to the key retail areas, and we summarise these below.

Station Gateway

3.11 The existing gateway into Worthing town centre provides a poor entry experience and perception of the town for visitors due to the poor quality of existing buildings, extent of underutilised land, lack of activity, issues of safety and security, poor pedestrian linkages and unattractive public realm. It is envisaged that the area will provide a mix of town centre uses, with an emphasis on establishing a distinctive business area with a range of accommodation to meet employment floorspace requirements, including the potential adaptation of existing workspace to meet needs identified within the growing creative sectors, in addition to residential, leisure and entertainment and retail uses.

3.12 Teville Gate is identified as an appropriate location for a mixed use development which substantially improves the pedestrian route between the station and town centre, in terms of routing and the environment. The Masterplan sets out the appropriate uses as including new leisure and entertainment facilities including a new swimming pool, cinema, bowling alley, ice skating rink and complementary bars, restaurants, cafes and small scale retail. Given the scale of the site and its strategic location adjacent to the railway station, it also provides a good opportunity to incorporate commercial office space, expanding the town centre's employment offer. The nearby Morrisons store provides important retail space but is outdated and has a blank façade fronting onto Broadwater Road. The redevelopment of the site would provide a modern convenience foodstore, with a mix of other uses (commercial / residential), and improved linkages with Teville Gate and the station.

Retail Core

3.13 The Masterplan proposes the transformation of the town's retail offer through the development of modern new retail space and the strengthening of the existing niche retail sector around Warwick Street and Brighton Road. Central to transformation of the retail centre is the provision for future development to accommodate in the region of 40,000 sq m new retail floorspace. The Masterplan highlights that the new retail development proposed incorporates the existing Guildbourne Centre and to the north on Union Place which will provide a range of high quality retail units including a new department / anchor store.

3.14 The Masterplan proposes that the retail development creates a street structure that links the development with the adjoining retail areas and wider street network. It is intended that the existing multi-storey car park to the rear of the Guildbourne Centre is retained and enhanced to serve the needs of the town centre. Any scheme should endeavour to incorporate a new access frontage onto a high quality public square; a 24 hour accessible route through the scheme, providing connections east-west and north-south; a range of uses to provide a varied town centre offer, such as cafes; and a range of retail unit sizes.

3.15 Elsewhere within the retail core, the Marine Parade Bus Garage is identified as being a strategic site in the heart of both the town centre and seafront area. The site backs on to Warwick Street, which is a distinctive area of the town centre with a quality mix of specialist and niche shopping, bars, cafes and restaurants. The existing use sits uncomfortably with the neighbouring uses, principally the Grade II listed Dome theatre, the attractive Victorian terrace along Bedford Row and the Chatsworth House to the east on the Steyne. The Masterplan concludes that a mixed use development that continues the fine grain form and nature of the historic Warwick Street area would be appropriate, providing a link to Marine Parade and moving the existing bus station to an out-of-centre location.

3.16 A current weakness of the town centre is the lack of quality connections between the town centre and the seafront promenade, with many of the existing connections being narrow alley-ways of dead/blank frontage. Montague Place is identified as a key opportunity to enhance such linkages, leading directly from the core retail area through to the seafront. The Masterplan explains that a small scale single aspect mixed use development that will help to frame the route and create a real street without reducing the area of open space would be key to encouraging such pedestrian circuits and linkages.

3.17 Warwick Street/Brighton Road are highlighted again as being the focus for enhanced restaurant/café culture, whilst Montague Street West is highlighted as having a tired retail environment falling short of meeting the needs of modern retailers.

Central Seafront

3.18 At the heart of the transformation of Worthing will be the creation of new destinations and activity nodes along the central part of the seafront promenade. Of particular relevance to retailing is The Grafton Site, which provides a key strategic development opportunity to address the severance that currently separates the town centre and the seafront and promenade. The Masterplan states that 'through the redevelopment of the existing multi-storey car park and bowling alley, a mixed use scheme incorporating retail, residential and leisure uses could be brought forward on the site; adding new active uses along Marine Parade.

3.19 Crucially, the redevelopment of this site should help to create a new landmark on the seafront and provide the opportunity for a first phase of major new retail development in the town centre providing an anchor at the western end of the prime pitch which will act as a counterbalance to the proposed retail development at the Guildbourne Centre. The Masterplan adds that development of the Grafton site could be considered in relation to the adjoining retail units fronting onto Montague Street; enabling a more comprehensive phased development to be brought forward which would provide an improved frontage and retail units on the existing high street and could help to strengthen pedestrian connections between Montague Street and the promenade.

Retail Strategy: Conclusions

3.20 It is generally accepted that the Guildbourne Centre does not provide the shopping experience usually expected of a main shopping centre for a town of Worthing's size. The Union Place car park and the former police station in conjunction with a potentially redeveloped Guildbourne Centre provides 'the best opportunity for comprehensive new high street, retail, leisure and residential development to help meet the identified market demand and forecast capacity for non-food retailing. In addition to the Retail Core, the secondary retail areas are identified as the specialist independent offer located south and east of Warwick Street and at the western end of Montague Street, which build on the town's heritage and character. The document emphasises that these areas will offer an alternative retail environment to that of the more modern developments, with the small scale independent and specialist retail offering a diverse retail experience.

3.21 The Masterplan states that respecting the existing street patterns and enhancing the characteristics of the surrounding area, these areas [secondary retail areas] will become one of Worthing's distinct retail and visitor destinations. The preservation and enhancement of these environments combined with the varied and diverse mix of uses will help to rebalance the 'shift' in retailing focused on the new developments. Clearly, this Retail Study – Supporting the Retail Sector in Worthing Town Centre – aims to develop recommendations to manage this shift in activity over the forthcoming LDF period.

Worthing Retail Core: Development Brief (2008)

3.22 In April 2008 Worthing Borough Council adopted the Retail Core Development Brief. The objective of the document is to set out a clear framework for the delivery of the redevelopment of the Retail Core site as identified in the preceding Masterplan (2006) – a key development project and important regeneration area. The vision for the site is to improve the town's retail offer through the delivery of new retail floorspace in order to provide a range of high quality units which would, in turn, attract quality retailers to the town centre at a time of increasing competition from neighbouring centres such as Brighton, Chichester and Crawley.

3.23 The Development Brief recognises that the current quality of Worthing's town centre and seafront, existing retail and leisure offer, tourism attractions and visitor facilities and the quality of the environment, are all below the standard that Worthing deserves and aspires to. It adds, however, that there is significant potential for positive and sustainable change to bring about the renaissance of Worthing as a vibrant town, with a more balanced mix of land uses, a stronger retail offer, economic and commercial growth, a more attractive seaside and leisure destination, and a cultural hub with strong education, arts and learning facilities. The Retail Core is viewed as a unique opportunity to develop a key site in Worthing town centre which will deliver a retail led mixed use development and a step change in Worthing's retail offer.

3.24 The site (Plan 7) is located approximately 900m to the south of Worthing mainline station and 300m north of the seafront and comprises a rectangular shaped site bounded by Chapel Road to the west, Ann Street to the south, High Street to the east and Union Place to the north. The site is approximately 3.65ha (9.0 acres) and is bisected from west to east by Chatsworth Road. It is comprised of a number of individual sites and existing buildings including the Guildbourne Shopping Centre and a multi-storey car park constructed in the 1970's. Part of the site and some of the buildings are currently vacant or underutilised.

3.25 The site has good pedestrian and vehicular access, but the Brief does identify a number of key issues which need to be resolved in any redevelopment of the site. These include the poor integration of the site with the wider town centre; poor pedestrian linkages; a lack of vitality, viability and sense of place; inward looking frontages; and The Guildbourne Centre acting as a barrier between the northern part of the site and the main retail area and seafront. The Development Brief states that the development of the Retail Core should aim to provide:

- New department store/anchor store/s;
- New retail floorspace to accommodate contemporary retailer needs in a range of unit sizes;
- Flexible floorspace which is capable of meeting changing market demands;
- New high quality public spaces with active street frontages;
- Increased permeability;
- New streetscapes and frontages to Union Place and High Street;
- Open 24 hour pedestrian routes through the scheme, providing connections east to west and north to south;
- Enhanced setting of listed buildings and buildings of heritage interest;
- A range of uses to provide a varied town centre offer including residential, commercial, leisure and community uses.

3.26 The preferred approach is to redevelop the existing Guildbourne Centre as part of a comprehensive redevelopment scheme. It is proposed to retain the existing multi-storey car park as part of any future development scheme, and any proposals which retain the structure of the existing Guildbourne Centre will need to clearly demonstrate how the development aims, objectives and principles can be achieved. The underlying driver is the achievement of retail circuits, integration with existing retail areas, and the enhancement of the existing town character. The development will provide for up to 34,000 sq m of retail floorspace, anchored by a new department/anchor store, with the remaining space being predominantly comparison goods with ancillary convenience and café, restaurant and bar uses.

3.27 The Development Brief highlights the opportunity to provide entirely new frontages for the site to High Street and Union Place and make significant improvements in the existing frontages to Chapel Road and Ann Street. These frontages are encouraged to provide strong edges to the site with active ground floor uses creating an attractive environment for pedestrians. The opportunity for development on the land immediately to the east of the High Street multi-storey car park has been highlighted, providing new frontage which masks the façade of the multi-storey car park. The new anchor/department store should be located in the north eastern part of the site and provide strong frontages to both High Street and Union Place. There is also an identified opportunity for a landmark entrance at the junction of High Street and Union Place.

Summary

- The DTZ Retail Study (2005) concludes that Worthing town centre lacks a 'retail heart' and new development is needed to provide the critical mass and quality of retail and leisure uses to ensure it maintains its status as a sub-regional shopping destination. Neither the Guildbourne nor Montague Shopping Centres provide sufficient retail anchors or mix of retailers.
- The Masterplan (2006) emphasises that a successful town centre and seafront will bring significant benefits to Worthing as a whole, but at present it lacks a clear vision and framework for development and change. The document identifies the Teville Gate area as a new gateway for the town; the redevelopment of the Guildbourne Centre and Union Place for a new 'Retail Core'; and the potential to significantly enhance linkages between the seafront and shopping streets, particularly through the development of The Grafton site. The Masterplan concludes that the town suffers from a low quality primary retail offer, but does benefit from a relatively strong secondary and tertiary retail offer.
- The Retail Core Development Brief (2008) sets out the preferred approach to redevelop the existing Guildbourne Centre as part of a comprehensive redevelopment scheme. The underlying driver is the achievement of retail circuits, integration with existing retail areas, and the enhancement of the existing town character. The development will provide for up to 34,000 sq m of retail floorspace, anchored by a new department store/anchor store, with the remaining space being predominantly comparison goods with ancillary convenience and café, restaurant and bar uses. The Development Brief highlights the opportunity to provide entirely new frontages for the site to High Street and Union Place and make significant improvements to the existing frontages to Chapel Road and Ann Street.

4. CURRENT COMPOSITION / PERFORMANCE

4.1 This section sets out the baseline position in respect of policy designations and retailing in Worthing Town Centre in advance of identifying areas of change and subsequent policy recommendations to manage this change in later sections. We focus on the current composition of the town centre and the performance of defined retail areas comparable to each other, taking into account frontages, linkages and connectivity, but first we examine the existing retail designations and the policies attached to each.

Policy Designations (Local Plan, 2003)

4.2 Worthing's policy designations were set out in the Proposals Map accompanying the Local Plan of 2003. We have presented these existing designations on our own map of Worthing to represent the Council's retail policies for different parts of the centre.

Town Centre Boundary

4.3 The Town Centre Boundary was defined in the Worthing Local Plan (2003) and reproduced here in this Retail Study on Plan 1. It essentially encompasses the Central Shopping Area, including the defined Primary and Secondary Areas, as well as a range of residential areas and civic uses at the north of the town centre and the British Gas site to the northeast of the town centre. The boundary also encompasses a public park and an area designated for residential development to the southeast of the town centre.

Central Shopping Area, Primary Area

4.4 The Primary Area is focussed around the junction of South Street and Warwick Street where the entrance to the Guildbourne Centre is located, and continues west along the pedestrianised area of Montague Street. The 2003 Plan divided the Primary Area into two distinct categories, 'Zone A' and 'Zone B'. Policies in relation to Zone A have not been saved. Zone A constituted the dominant retail area with the major multiple stores and the recently developed Montague Centre. Local planning policy attempted to ensure that the centre maintain a strong retail core and stated that the loss of any ground floor shop uses in Zone A was not normally to be permitted. In addition the 2003 Plan stated that where a unit was not in A1 use, its change of use to any class other than A1, A2 or A3 use would not normally be permitted.

4.5 Policy S8 in relation to Primary Area Zone B has been saved. Zone B comprises four areas at the periphery of Zone A including units on the western side of Montague Place, the area around the Royal Arcade and part of South Street, Warwick Street and the Guildbourne Centre. Local policy encourages retail as the dominant use in Zone B and states that like Zone A, permission for a change of use of ground-floor A1 units will not normally be permitted, but the distinction between the two zones allows for Zone B to accommodate further A3 uses. Interestingly the plan encourages conditions of permission to ensure that A3 uses in Zone B should only change to A2 uses with a specific planning permission, whereas the change to an A1 use would still be considered permitted development.

Central Shopping Area, Secondary Area

4.6 In accordance with national policy a more flexible and less restrictive policy approach is taken to the Secondary Area, which includes the stretch of Montague Street to the west of Crescent Road, as well as Brighton Road, the southern part of Portland Road, and much of Chapel Road as far north as the civic area. The Local Plan states that permission will be granted for the change of use of ground-floor shops to A2 or A3 uses. Proposals for changes of any unit to uses outside A1, A2 or A3 use classes will not normally be permitted.

Retailer Representation

4.7 Worthing town centre is identified in the South East Plan as a Primary Regional Centre, and is one of the largest towns in West Sussex and the main retail centre in the Borough, playing a key role in the network of centres across the south coast. The retail area's configuration broadly comprises three long, linear shopping streets: i) South Street/Chapel Road which runs north-south; ii) Warwick Street/Brighton Road which runs eastwards from the junction of Chapel Road and South Street; and iii) Montague Street which runs westwards from the centre, parallel to the seafront.

4.8 The presence of multiple outlets can enhance the appeal of a town centre relative to other centres within a sub-regional hierarchy. As set out in previous reports and summarised in earlier sections, it is broadly acknowledged that Worthing's retail offer is relatively poor for a town of its size and catchment, and there is an under provision of modern retail units within the town centre. According to Experian Goad, multiple retailers (defined as being a network of nine or more outlets) comprise 50% of the comparison shopping offer and include four key anchor stores: Debenhams and Beales on South Street, and Bhs and Marks & Spencer on Montague Street. Other major comparison retailers include the Body Shop, Argos, Holland & Barrett, Next, Boots the Chemist, Currys Digital, Waterstones, HMV, Monsoon, Laura Ashley, Mothercare, River Island, Dorothy Perkins, Jones Shoes and Claires Accessories.

4.9 The representation of comparison retailers is reasonable but largely mainstream mid-range, and unlike competitors such as Brighton there is no representation from the higher quality retailers such as Russell & Bromley, Molton Brown, East, Karen Millen, LK Bennett, Reiss, Hobbs, Whistles, White Stuff, Jigsaw, Ted Baker, Zara, Mango, Space NK and Cath Kidston. Poor unit size is reflected in the Debenhams store on South Street, which is small in scale and poorly configured compared to modern such stores elsewhere in the UK. It has also been previously acknowledged that whilst the town suffers from a low quality primary retail offer, it does benefit from a relatively strong secondary and tertiary retail offer. Warwick Street already offers a range of niche retailers and a growing café culture, and Brighton Road is identified as an area developing a specialist retail role.

4.10 In terms of convenience foodstores, Worthing town centre has a Waitrose foodstore with customer car park on the junction of High Street and Lyndhurst Road, and a Lidl foodstore on North Street. Both are located outside the Primary Shopping Area in edge/out of centre locations. Within the Primary Shopping Area, Somerfield is located at the rear of the Guildbourne Shopping Centre; Iceland is located at the bottom of South Street on the junction with Marine Parade; and a newly refurbished Co-Op foodstore at the far western end of Montague Street. Just outside the Teville Gate area, beyond the town centre boundary, there is a Tesco Express foodstore on South Farm Road. Tesco Express is due to open on Chapel Road in October 2009.

4.11 In order to look in more detail at retail and leisure provision throughout the town centre we have identified nine retail character areas, which assists in the description of the centre, but does not at this stage relate directly to current or future policy designations. Plan 2 illustrates the defined character areas.

Character Areas

Character Area 1: Teville Gate

4.12 Teville Gate is located outside of the town centre boundary but forms one of the key entrance points for the town centre with the mainline train station being a key land use. It therefore provides the first impression for visitors arriving by rail, as well as by car. As previously identified in the Masterplan, this has the opportunity to be a key quality gateway but at present falls short of this opportunity and instead forms a confusing, disparate spread of different land uses and the road network and roundabouts lead to a relatively unfriendly environment for pedestrians.

4.13 Visitors are instead greeted by the Teville Gate multi storey car park, the rear servicing area of the Morrisons foodstore and the Grand Victorian Hotel public house which faces the station on the corner of Oxford Road. Other secondary and tertiary uses include a pharmacy, hardware and households goods store, bed and furniture store, music store and a Comet unit. The area has a number of vacant premises, and is also occupied by a multi-storey car park and government buildings (built in the 1970s), and other offices. Buildings are disparate with little relationship or connectivity. There is a particularly poor sense of place and no direction for pedestrians through to the primary shopping area and seafront beyond. Very few pedestrians navigate through to Chapel Road and the start of the town centre retail provision.

Pedestrian Flows

4.14 PMRS were commissioned to undertake a pedestrian footfall survey which was conducted over a number of days in June 2009 in order to get a robust picture of average pedestrian statistics for different parts of the town centre. Pedestrian counts were conducted at 30 strategic locations around Worthing, consistent with the locations of the same survey undertaken in 2000. It is a useful means to understand the performance and attractiveness of different parts of the town centre and their current role in the function of primary and secondary shopping areas (See Plan 3).

4.15 This Character Area is not included in either the town centre boundary or the PMRS survey Area, and we have assessed the footfall in the area on the basis of our general observations from our site visits. Pedestrian flows around this area are very light, mainly generated by the train station. Upon train arrivals pedestrian traffic dissipates in all directions and some traffic filters down to the town centre, although via a variety of routes. The PMRS surveys show that at the northernmost end of the pedestrian survey area, pedestrian traffic at Chapel Road, which links Teville Gate to the Primary Shopping Area, was one of the least 'walked' areas.

Character Area 2: Chapel Road North

4.16 The Chapel Road North character area (outside the town centre boundary) forms the key link route from the train station at Teville Gate through to the town centre boundary and beyond to the Primary Shopping Area. The retail provision is low density and poor in quality and mix, with the main, busy road presenting barriers to connectivity between the eastern and western sides of the road. As such the retail frontage is located entirely on the western side and occupiers include a newsagent, an army surplus store, a solicitor's, a county insurance office, a natural therapy store and a hairdresser's.

4.17 In the south of the defined area is the Chapel Road/North Street roundabout with pedestrian sub-ways. The high vehicular movement prevents ease of pedestrian movement other than via the designated sub-way or pedestrian crossing points. At this southern end of the Chapel Road North area, there are a number of larger units occupied by retailers including a bedding and furniture shop, Dreams bed superstore and a Blockbuster video rental. One large vacant unit is located to the rear of Blockbuster video fronting Stoke Abbott Road. In general, this area is dominated by busy roads and heavy vehicular traffic. Retail provision is secondary in nature and the general built environment is not conducive to active pedestrian movement around a 'retail' area. Pavements do, however, enable pedestrian movement from Teville Gate southwards through this area.

Pedestrian Flows

4.18 Like Character Area 1 this area is not included in either the town centre boundary or the PMRS survey Area. We have assessed the footfall in the area on the basis of our general observations from our site visits, as well as adjoining areas on the pedestrian footfall survey. Pedestrian activity is light, and the character area falls on the main route from Teville Gate to the stretch of Chapel Road which is included in the pedestrian survey results. The evidence through observation and the performance of adjoining areas suggests that this character area is amongst the lowest pedestrian activity areas in the town centre.

Character Area 3: High Street

4.19 The High Street area is located within the town centre boundary at its north-eastern fringe. It did not have any retail designation in the adopted Local Plan, and land uses are therefore in edge/out-of-centre locations until revised policy indicates otherwise. Retail units and other buildings are low density and fragmented in location, with the largest retailer being Waitrose on the corner of Lyndhurst road. Other retailers include Lidl foodstore accessed from North Street, Ladbrokes, a glass merchant, a surveyors practice, a hairdresser, café, a furniture showroom, and two undertakers. There is also a hall and a jobcentre. The general area is not well linked to the core shopping area and together with the limited and fragmented retail offer, footfall is low. The Retail Core Development Brief does propose new entrances and pedestrian linkages from a redeveloped Guildbourne Centre through to the surrounding network of streets, including High Street.

Pedestrian Flows

4.20 The PMRS survey did not monitor footfall on High Street on the basis that it does not currently perform the role of a key retail area attractive to shoppers and visitors. For this reason, and in the context of the low density of uses discussed above, this area has one of the lowest observed pedestrian footfalls in the centre. This indicates the limited nature of linked trips generated between the Waitrose car park and the core shopping area.

Character Area 4: Chapel Road Cultural and Civic Quarter

4.21 Adjoining Chapel Road North (Character Area 2), this character area comprises the town's concentration of key cultural and civic uses. The area continues the southwards link, along Chapel Road, from Teville Gate and the train station through to the core shopping area. Whilst it is within the town centre boundary, it sits outside of the previously defined primary and secondary shopping areas, and is largely dominated by civic and cultural uses including the Council offices, library, museum and art gallery and tourist information building.

4.22 Units on the eastern side of Chapel Road include a gift shop, beauty salon, hairdressers, a club and a careers centre. There are two small vacant units, more offices, the Tabernacle Church, and the large postal sorting office and customer post office. The architectural quality of the area is good, and the presence of the attractive town hall building on the eastern side of Chapel Road and the Tabernacle help to give the area a strong identity. The area benefits from wide pavements and a greater sense of place than is detectable in Character Areas 1 and 2, as the built environment becomes more cohesive with a feeling of greater connectivity with the core shopping area. The Character creates a pleasant lead up to the focus of retailing in Worthing.

Pedestrian Flows

4.23 This character area is included within the PMRS survey results, and is one of the lowest pedestrian footfall areas in the town centre (Plan 3). The figures demonstrate that footfall is less than 25% of the town centre average. This reinforces evidence that it is not characterised by key retail attractors and is a more secondary town centre area, and also that it does not form a key route from the train station through to the core shopping area.

Character Area 5: Chapel Road South & Guildbourne Centre

4.24 Chapel Road continues southwards from Teville Gate and the station, through Character Areas 2 and 4 (described above) and into Character Area 5, and the future intended focus of the Retail Core. The area lies in the heart of the town centre and although it has an increasing number of vacant units, it has an active and bustling street scene. Vehicles are able to travel part way down Chapel Road South, but diverted away from the retail area along Chatsworth Road.

4.25 The southern part of Chapel Road is densely lined on both sides with contiguous retail premises of varying sizes and architectural design, adding diversity to the area and enhancing its vibrancy. There is a high proportion of service uses characteristic of secondary shopping frontages, including banks, estate agents, restaurants, an arcade, an employment agency and a beauty salon. Comparison goods retailers are limited in number and include Argos, a number of charity shops, Fludes carpet and flooring, the Fabric Haberdashery and Household textures, and Bargain Express Household Goods.

4.26 The two-storey Guildbourne Shopping Centre is accessed from Chapel Road and is the only covered shopping centre in Worthing Town Centre, anchored by Somerfield and Wilkinson. It has a multi-storey car park with around 650 spaces. The retail offer is poor and footfall low with the remaining units being small and occupied by mainly independent retailers including a restaurant, a health food shop, an arcade and a butcher. The entire upper floor is currently vacant and now closed to shoppers, which has a negative impact on the vibrancy and appearance of the shopping centre, and could have implications for the viability of the remaining units if vacancy levels persist in the long term. The Guildbourne Centre was designated as Primary Shopping Area B, and its retail offer is more secondary in character relative to other areas in the town centre.

4.27 The area also comprises Ann Street, which is a narrow passageway connecting Chapel Road to the High Street, alongside the blank façade of the southern edge of the Guildbourne Centre. There are a number of small secondary units on the south side of the street, footfall is low and there are a handful of vacant units. The route links through to High Street which has a low retailer attraction and therefore little draw for shoppers and visitors to follow Ann Street which is clearly secondary in nature.

Pedestrian Flows

4.28 Pedestrian activity increases within this part of the town centre, and footfall counts are in line with the centre average (Plan 3). The entrance to the Guildbourne Centre is marginally above the average (110 with 100 equating to the average), whilst counts within the shopping centre were only 1% above the average. Outside and further north on Chapel Street, lower counts equated to only 64%, 79% and 87% of the average. This character area is clearly more attractive but remains peripheral to the core shopping areas, and is not the main focus of shopping/town centre activity.

Character Area 6: Warwick Street / Brighton Road

4.29 Warwick Street / Brighton Road forms one linear shopping street and runs parallel to Ann Street, south of the Guildbourne Centre and accessed directly from Chapel Street. The area lies within the town centre boundary, with South Place/Warwick Street allocated as Primary Shopping Area Zone B, and Brighton Road allocated as a secondary shopping area. Both Warwick Street and South Place benefit from a car free setting which creates a safe and pleasant environment for pedestrians and helps create a vibrant and bustling street scene.

4.30 Warwick Street currently operates as a successful food and drink destination, with restaurants, bars and cafes combining to provide a daytime and evening economy focus. As such it is a vibrant street within the retail core of the town centre, also offering a number of niche specialist and independent retailers selling ladies fashions, jewellery, crafts, sportswear and a cook shop. Multiple retailers include a large public house, Jessops and HSBC, although these are located at the Chapel Road end. Many of the cafés, sandwich shops and restaurants have outdoor seating areas which add to the sense of place and vibrancy, and encourage pedestrians to stay longer.

4.31 Unit sizes are small and the shop frontages are narrow, but this adds to the character of this particular area and creates a pleasant environment in which to shop, eat and rest. There are a number of side streets that extend from Warwick Street including Stanford Square, which leads to Pizza Express, past the bus station and through to the seafront, although the route is narrow, hidden and unclear for pedestrians unfamiliar with the area. At the time of the site visit there were three vacant units on Warwick Street. Vibrancy and pedestrian footfall on Warwick Street is encouraged by the mix of uses, but also assisted by retailer representation on Brighton Road located beyond.

4.32 Brighton Road is essentially an extension of Warwick Street but it accommodates vehicular traffic and is more secondary in nature. Although footfall is lower in this area, we understand from the Council that there are a number of well established retailers, and there is clearly a lower vacancy rate compared to other areas in the town centre. The area has a high proportion of service and convenience units including two greengrocers, a newsagents, several takeaways and hairdressers, which indicates that this area may function more as an everyday food and service location for local residents. There are also several specialist comparison shops including Blacks outdoor wear, a bike shop, a bowls centre, a Christian bookshop and a music shop. Brighton Road leads outwards to the town centre boundary away from the retail core, and there is little retail beyond.

Pedestrian Flows

4.33 While the Character Area is pleasant and vibrant the survey results reveal that pedestrian activity along Warwick Street and Brighton Road is less than the average flow for the centre (Plan 3). The highest footfall in this particular character area is recorded on the junction of Warwick Street and South Street, i.e. the area closest to the core shopping area. Here the count is 80% of the centre average, with footfall dropping off to the eastern end of Warwick Street, recording only 62% of the average count. Footfall drops still further on Brighton Road, with only 39% and 29% respectively. Warwick Street and Brighton Road record some of the lowest footfall counts in the town centre and demonstrates their more secondary shopping function.

Character Area 7: South Street

4.34 The South Street character area lies within Primary Shopping Area A, and currently forms the focus of higher order comparison retail activity, together with Montague Street (Character Area 8 below). The Royal Arcade, which is within the area is, however, identified as Primary Shopping Area Zone B. Chapel Street runs into South Street on the north/south axis which then reaches the seafront. The tourist information centre lies at the bottom of South Street, across Marine Parade, on the seafront in The Pavilion Theatre. The street layout in this retail area is relatively complex with a number of inter-linking narrow streets and arcades.

4.35 South Street, which is partially pedestrianised apart from buses and service vehicles, is anchored by Debenhams and Beales department stores. Debenhams comprises four floors and is of a scale and format inconsistent with their modern development requirements. Beales has three floors and a larger floor plate than Debenhams, although has an awkward unit shape. Other comparison retailers on South Street include Robert Dyas, the Officers Club and Mothercare. At the far south of South Street, nearer the seafront, are a number of eating and drinking destinations including Café Nero, Pizza Hut, Macaris Restaurant, and Blue Ocean fish and chips. Iceland frozen foodstore is located on the eastern side of South Street at the junction with Marine Parade, and adjacent to Sofa Pizza Restaurant.

4.36 The Royal Arcade is a narrow and traditional style arcade comprising densely packed retail units largely occupied by specialist, independent retailers including a gallery, a bridal shop and a health food shop. The arcade provides an attractive historic architectural building with detailed glass. This character area also comprises Bath Place, which lies adjacent to the Royal Arcade to the south of

Montague Street. It is lined on both sides by small retail units occupied by a bakers, a menswear store, a restaurant, Games Workshop, a grocer, a jeweller's and a sandwich bar.

4.37 The Montague Centre, to the rear of Beales, is a part covered, modern built shopping street with a number of key multiple high street retailers. The street has a selection of reasonably sized retail units occupied by a range of national multiples including TK Maxx, Clinton Cards, HMV, GAME, Laura Ashley and McDonalds. Montague Street, running westwards and parallel with the seafront, starts in this character area and continues the representation of multiple retailers from the Montague Centre including a number of larger retail units such as Nationwide, Top Man, H Samuels, Principles, Top Shop, Curry's and Shoe Zone. The former Woolworths store lies on the corner of Montague Street with Montague Place and is currently vacant, but has recently been let to H&M and is scheduled to open in November 2009.

4.38 Marine Parade, on the seafront, offers further leisure destinations including Connaught restaurant and amusements, Tangerine Bar, Istanbul restaurant and Bar Breeze Public House. Vacancy levels in this area of the town centre are generally low.

Pedestrian Flows

4.39 This character area has some of the highest footfall figures in the town centre (Plan 3). Counts outside Natwest bank on South Street were 20% above the centre average, whilst those outside Mothercare were 2% above the centre average. Further south, outside WH Smith on the junction with Montague Street, recorded counts were a strong 62% above the centre average, demonstrating the strong pull of retailing on Montague Street. The strongest counts in this section, however, were recorded in the Montague Centre, with a count 102% above the centre average outside Laura Ashley, and 93% above the centre average outside TK Maxx.

4.40 Footfall clearly drops off significantly to the south of South Street on the link through to the sea front, recording only 43% of the centre average. Other low counts here include those in the Royal Arcade (19% of the centre average) and on Bath Place (21% of the centre average); both of which are located on the 'cut-throughs' to the seafront.

Character Area 8: Montague Street

4.41 Montague Street continues from Character Area 7 (above) through to Crescent Road and is entirely pedestrianised creating a safe and easy to move environment, assisting retailers on both north and south sides of the street. Montague Street is designated as a Primary Shopping Area Zone A, Montague Place is designated as Primary Shopping Area Zone B, and Portland Road and Buckingham Road are designated as Secondary Retail Areas. The street is in relatively close proximity to the seafront, although there are few direct pedestrian linkages which might have significant opportunity to enhance pedestrian circuits between the shopping area and the town's strongest asset – the seafront.

4.42 Montague Street is arguably the dominant location for national multiple retailers in the town centre at the current time. Benefiting from a number of sizeable retail units retailers include Marks & Spencer, Bhs and Boots, which act as anchors for this part of the town centre. Additional national multiple retailers include JD Sports, Next, Evans, Bay Trading, River Island, Clarks, Millets, Early Learning Centre, Thomson Travel, Holland & Barrett and Clinton Cards. Retail units decrease in size further west with distance from the Primary Shopping Area, particularly beyond the junction with Buckingham Road.

4.43 The number of smaller, independent stores on Montague Street increases beyond Buckingham Road, and includes Game Player Computer Games, Table N Chair.com Furniture, Him Gifts, Eureka Furniture, HG Scadgell Furniture and Flooring, and Churchill's CTN. The number of vacant units also increases on this stretch of Montague Street. Portland Road runs north/south and is occupied by three large vacant units, and a number of smaller independent retailers including County Fitted Furniture, Synergie Hairdressing, Scholl Shoes, Pestle & Mortar Deli and Café, Kwik Snak take-away, and Jazz Hot dancewear.

4.44 Montague Place is the key route through to the seafront, providing a wide vehicular turning area/taxi stand, as well as a 10-12 retail units on the western side. These include a number of eating/drinking establishments such as Costa Coffee, Café Continental, Subway sandwich bar, The Biz restaurant and Luna restaurant. Other units are occupied by a bank, hairdressers and a ladies clothes boutique. The eastern side, however, is effectively dead frontage, and it is apparent that the street as a whole does not draw visitors from the seafront along Montague Place into the shopping area, and nor from the shopping area towards the seafront. The frontage is relatively 'inactive' at the current time.

Pedestrian Flows

4.45 This character area is undoubtedly the most heavily trafficked part of Worthing (Plan 3). The highest footfall count in the town centre is recorded to the far eastern end of Montague Street outside Ernest Jones jewellery shop (145% above the centre average). Nearby, outside Vision Express, footfall is 65% above the centre average; moving west, outside Bhs, footfall is 178% above the centre average, and outside Optical Express counts are 145% above average. At the far western end of the pedestrianised area of Montague Street, footfall remains high at 17% above average. Footfall falls in the more peripheral streets, notably on Montague Place, again a route through to the seafront where counts were only 20% of the centre average. On Portland Road, outside Superdrug, counts were 64% of the centre average.

Character Area 9: Rowlands Road

4.46 Rowlands Road continues Montague Street westwards parallel with the seafront and outwards towards the town centre boundary. As such it is relatively peripheral and designated as secondary frontage. This end of Montague Street is characterised by small retail premises occupied largely by niche, independent service businesses including public houses, bars, restaurants, hairdressers, furniture stores, sandwich bars and charity shops. These retailers provide an excellent mix of uses and vibrancy in the area, with many retailers offering good quality and often unusual niche and specialist goods, such as second hand bookshops and furniture stores.

4.47 The strong range of convenience goods retailers should be emphasised including good quality butchers, fishmongers, greengrocers and florists, all of which enhance the mix of uses and shopper draw to the area. At the far western end, on the town centre boundary, is a reasonably sized Co-Op Supermarket, a Post Office, and a Gala Bingo Hall provide good anchors and continued footfall in this area. The area also comprises several adjoining streets, which have a handful of independent shops. There are a number of vacant units scattered throughout Rowlands Road, although nothing of great concern at the current time with no major concentrations.

Pedestrian Flows

4.48 Pedestrian activity falls off considerably in this character area, with counts declining with distance from the core retail area (Plan 3). Counts were only 41%, 38% and 20% of the centre average respectively as survey points move from east to west. This demonstrates the more secondary function of this shopping area.

PMRS Pedestrian Survey Results, 2000

4.49 PMRS last undertook a pedestrian survey in Worthing town centre in March 2000. It is apparent from a detailed analysis that pedestrian movement in different parts of the town centre have changed little over this nine year period. Indeed, the highest and lowest levels of pedestrian footfall compared to the centre average mirror the more recent 2009 survey results with one exception. It is evident that footfall has fallen marginally to the south of Chapel Road and inside the Guildbourne Shopping Centre in more recent years (Plan 4).

Vacancy Rates

4.50 Experian last surveyed the town centre in November 2008. At this time, there were 72 vacant retail units in the Goad survey area, which stretches up to Teville Gate, equating to 10.9% of total retail units. This was only marginally above the national average at that time (9.2%). We have also reviewed vacancy rates from November 2006 and February 2008; these indicate that in November

2006 there were 59 vacant units, and in February 2008 there were 65 vacant units, illustrating a steady increase over time.

4.51 We have now updated the Experian town centre survey from our own site visits during the summer of 2009 and have discovered that vacancy rates have increased still further, although only marginally since November 2008, on the basis that there has also been some take-up of previously vacant units, and the identification of newly vacant units. Taking this into consideration, the total number of vacant retail units in June 2009 stood at 75.

4.52 At the time of the Experian Report in November 2008, vacancies were concentrated in three areas of the centre:

- Around the southern end of Chapel Road in Character Area 5;
- Ann Street/Warwick Street in Character Area 6; and
- Towards the far western end of Montague Street in Character Area 9.

4.53 Since this survey was undertaken our update reveals that c.4 additional units have become vacant at the western end of Montague Street. Elsewhere c.3 additional vacant units were identified on Brighton Road, and an increase in vacancies was identified on Warwick Street/Ann Street and at the southern end of Chapel Road. The large Woolworths unit has now been let to H&M and is scheduled to open in November 2009. The concentrations of vacant units appear to have remained consistent over this period, and mirror those areas with lower footfall levels as discussed throughout this section.

Summary

- The town centre has a reasonable representation of mainstream, mid-range comparison retailers, but no significant representation from the higher quality retailers found in competing centres such as Brighton. The majority of units are small in scale and poorly configured compared to modern store developments, and consequently unlikely to attract an improved retail offer. It is evident that Worthing does have a relatively strong secondary and tertiary offer, with a range of niche retailers and a growing café culture.
- Teville Gate and Chapel Road North are outside the town centre boundary. Here the retail offer is low density and secondary in nature, reflected also in the low pedestrian footfall observations. The road network, subways, roundabouts and speed of vehicular movement prevent against strong linkages throughout the area, and there is little direction for visitors moving from the train station in the north to the main retail area in the south. This is a clear weakness for the centre as a whole, and the full length of Chapel Road would benefit from improved signage, direction and consequent higher pedestrian movements.

- High Street, the Cultural and Civic Quarter, Brighton Road and Rowlands Road are all located within the town centre boundary, but are peripheral retail areas with some of the lowest pedestrian footfall counts identified. High Street, the Cultural and Civic Quarter, and Rowlands Road have the highest concentrations of vacant units in the town centre, and Brighton Road has recently experienced a marginal increase in number. Brighton Road and Rowlands Road do, however, have a strong representation of specialist/niche retailers to their advantage. High Street is disparate in offer and separate from the main retail area, and the Civic Quarter is dominated by other uses.
- Chapel Road South, The Guildbourne Centre and Warwick Street have a greater retail role with a stronger representation of mainstream retailing offer, although it is apparent that this is the only part of the town centre where footfall has fallen relative to other areas since 2000. Warwick Street has a growing café culture and is identified as a strong niche/independent retail area, central and well linked to the core shopping area.
- South Street and Montague Street are the best performing retail areas in the town centre. They have the highest concentrations of national multiple retailers, the highest pedestrian flows, and the lowest concentrations of vacant units. The large vacant Woolworths unit has successfully been re-let to H&M. Our assessment identifies the weak relationship between the central shopping area and the seafront, despite a series of link roads and short distances to walk.

5. FUTURE CHANGE

5.1 Sections 2-4 have set out the current baseline position of Worthing town centre in respect of policy and the function/attractiveness of different areas. This section sets out the confirmed aspirations for Worthing. We set out details of the key development opportunity sites that will have direct implications on the future retail policy designations in Worthing Town Centre: The Grafton Site, Teville Gate and the Retail Core. The three key retail development opportunity sites are illustrated on Plan 7, and implementation measures required to manage change in the centre as a consequence are discussed in Section 6.

Town Centre Development Opportunities

Teville Gate

5.2 The location, policy position and function of the Teville Gate area has been discussed in detail in previous sections, with the key conclusion being that it provides a sub-standard gateway to the town centre. The Masterplan identifies the area as an appropriate location for a mixed use development which substantially improves the pedestrian route between the station and town centre, in terms of routing and the environment. Indeed, the routing and signage is key to ensure a linked and cohesive town centre in which the different character areas support each other and enhance the vitality and viability of neighbouring character areas.

5.3 The site is, however, out of centre in retail policy terms and the type of retailing should be complementary to the town centre rather than competing. It is important to ensure that new development contributes to the overall health of the centre, rather than impact negatively on established sequentially preferable areas. Teville Gate is some distance from the core shopping area, separated by the Civic Hub and lower density/secondary uses on the northern parts of Chapel Road. The outcome of development should, therefore, be an enhanced gateway that ensures an inspiring and exciting first impression of Worthing and which encourages a greater number of visitors, but which also effectively guides arrivals through to the core shopping area.

5.4 Development should not provide such a strong mix of competing retail uses which prevents shoppers from continuing through to the core shopping area for their retail needs; this would cause a detrimental impact on the core shopping area and be contrary to policy. Given development opportunities within the retail core, as discussed in more detail below, and the composition and performance of Character Areas (2 and 4) it is unlikely that Teville Gate will ever form part of the Primary Shopping Area in retail policy terms. On the basis that the overall aim is to enhance the vitality and viability of the shopping centre, it is unlikely to be appropriate at the current time to extend the town centre boundary to include Teville Gate. This would ensure the Council retains control over the mix and scale of wider town centre uses, whilst facilitating a much improved 'gateway' to Worthing Town Centre.

5.5 We understand that that the Council resolved to grant outline permission in 2007 for the following mixed use scheme:

> "a new public swimming complex with associated health and fitness centre, multi screen cinema, indoor bowling centre and bingo club, ancillary restaurants, shops and cafes, two residential towers (one at 18 levels and second at 11 residential levels) containing 235 apartments together with 25 apartments on a new residential frontage to Teville Road, 635 basement car parking spaces, together with a new partially covered pedestrian arcade, landscaping and access from Teville Road."

5.6 The purpose of this report is not to determine the appropriateness of development proposals, but to review the implications of confirmed aspirations on future town centre policies. Nevertheless, we would raise caution to an expanded retail element in this location outside the town centre boundary and some distance from the Primary Shopping Area. Provided the Teville Gate area does not offer a level of retailing which competes with the town centre it will enhance this important gateway and encourage visitors. This must also take place alongside enhancements to signage through to the core shopping area, the environment along Chapel Road and the general routing of visitors through to the shops and beyond to the seafront, to ensure wider positive implications for the town centre. On the basis that the mix of development is appropriately controlled to avoid impact on the Primary Shopping Area, the regeneration of this area will clearly be a positive outcome for Worthing town centre

Retail Core

5.7 The Retail Core, which is the subject of the Retail Core Development Brief (2008), is the largest aspiration to enhance the retail offer within the Primary Shopping Area. Driven by 40,000 sq m of new retail floorspace, integration with surrounding areas facilitated by open and accessible routes, and modern new retail units, the development will substantially alter retailing in the town centre. The area, incorporating Chapel Road south and the Guildbourne Centre, is currently performing poorly and is the only area in the town centre declining in terms of footfall relative to other areas. This is despite its central location on the main route southwards towards Montague Street and the seafront.

5.8 The aspiration is to attract the quality of retailer currently present in competing centres such as Brighton, Chichester and Crawley; for Worthing to make a step change in retail offer; and to achieve the creation of 'retail circuits' and integration with existing retail areas. In particular, the development is intended to provide entirely new frontages on High Street and Union Place and make significant improvements in the existing frontages to Chapel Road and Ann Street, creating active ground floor uses. Provided the scheme delivers in respect of retailer representation, integration and the quality of the environment, this development will have significant implications in respect of the function of the town centre and key areas of shopper activity.

5.9 High Street to the rear, which has some of the lowest footfall counts in the town centre will benefit from increased pedestrian activity on the adjoining Retail Core site and direct linkages through the site to Chapel Street. High Street itself is a peripheral area and does not perform a key retail draw aside from Waitrose. In this context, it is unlikely that its performance will significantly improve, although the proposals do seek to enhance the pedestrian linkages between Waitrose and the Retail Core. There will be some benefit from enhanced retail circuits, pedestrian activity and improved sight lines through the scheme. We do not, however, envisage this will justify an altered policy position in respect of retail shopping frontages, and the street should remain beyond the primary and secondary frontage allocations.

5.10 Ann Street and Warwick Street are currently identified as Primary Shopping Areas (Zone B), within which further A3 uses may be acceptable; i.e. a more flexible policy is applied compared to Zone A in which any loss of A1 uses will not normally be permitted. These streets will certainly benefit from the Retail Core development with improved frontages onto Ann Street and increased integration and shopper activity on both Ann Street and Warwick Street. As we have noted in earlier sections, Warwick Street is evolving into a niche retailing and daytime eating/drinking area and there will be strong momentum for this role to develop further alongside the new Retail Core development. It is in an optimum location to reap the benefits. In this context their position within the Primary Shopping Frontage would appear to remain relevant over the forthcoming LDF period.

5.11 Given the scale of development, the introduction of modern store formats and the aspiration for a strong range of higher quality retailers, our assessment indicates that South Street (Character Area 7) and Montague Street (Character Area 8) are likely to be vulnerable to the change in retail activity. At present these are the strongest retail areas with the highest levels of pedestrian activity and representation of major multiple clothing/footwear retailers in the centre. The new Retail Core could divert shopper interest and activity.

5.12 The new retail core could also lead to relocations of existing operators from these character areas into the new development and result in a subsequent decline in pedestrian footfall. Potential key relocations include M&S, Debenhams, Top Shop, Waterstones, Next and River Island, for example. Whilst the Retail Core is intended to attract new retailers to the town centre, there will inevitably be relocations given the sub-standard units some operators occupy compared to their modern retailer requirements. Nevertheless, the character areas are all in relatively close proximity to each other, and many retailers have been identified which are not yet located in Worthing. The opportunities to enhance the wider area comprehensively are therefore evident.

5.13 Many town centres elsewhere in the UK operate with a number of successful different retail areas, and it will be important for Worthing to introduce the Retail Core alongside parallel town centre improvements elsewhere. Character Area 9, Rowlands Road, is peripheral and in earlier sections we identified that this area had some of the lowest levels of pedestrian activity in the town centre. Clearly, if Montague Street and South Street suffer negatively from development in the Retail Core, Rowland Road will also feel the fall in shopper activity with detrimental consequences. There are a number of interesting independent and niche retailers located in this area and it should be a priority to retain footfall on South Street and Montague Street in order to protect this more peripheral area.

5.14 The overall objective should be to lift the town centre as a whole, rather than one enhanced area having detrimental impacts on existing established shopping areas. Clearly, the function of areas might change, but policy encourages proactive strategies to manage such change and maintain the vitality and viability of town centres as a whole. We discuss such improvements in Section 6. At the current time, and for the purposes of policy making, it would seem appropriate to retain the primary and secondary frontage designations on South Street, Montague Street and along Rowlands Road. Clearly, if the Retail Core comes forward the appropriateness of these policy designations will need to be monitored over the LDF period and beyond.

Grafton Site

5.15 The Grafton Site provides a key strategic development opportunity to address the severance that currently separates the town centre and the seafront and promenade. The site incorporates all uses between Montague Street and the seafront, currently occupied by M&S, the NCP car park and bowling alley, and retail units fronting Montague Street including Barratts, JD Sports, Bay Trading, Next, Evans and River Island. The Masterplan states that through the redevelopment of the existing multi-storey car park and bowling alley, a mixed use scheme incorporating retail, residential and leisure uses could be brought forward on the site; adding new active uses along Marine Parade. This opportunity is widely supported as a positive option to contribute to the revitalisation of the primary shopping area, underpinned by the growth of the relationship with the seafront.

5.16 This opportunity would appear crucial in enhancing the relationship with the seafront, creating a quality new development for retail and leisure operators, and providing a counterbalance to the Retail Core development. Based on potential concerns in respect of a diversion of shopper and pedestrian activity from Montague Street as a consequence of the Retail Core, this development would contribute to maintaining the health of this key character area. The aspiration is set out clearly in the Masterplan:

> *"The redevelopment of this site should help to create a new landmark on the seafront and provide the opportunity for a first phase of major new retail development in the town centre providing an anchor at the western end of the prime retail pitch which will act as a counterbalance to the proposed retail development at the Guildbourne Centre/Union Place.*

Development of the Grafton Site should be considered in relation to the adjoining retail units fronting onto Montague Street. This would enable a more comprehensive phased development to be brought forward which would provide an improved frontage and retail units on the existing high street and could help to strengthen pedestrian connections between Montague Street and the promenade."

5.17 In policy terms, this site only strengthens our conclusion to retain the previous primary and secondary policy designations on Montague Street and South Street. Again, these would need to be monitored over the LDF period as change takes place. Depending on the layout and mix of retailing, additional primary/secondary frontage designations may be justified following development and a review of any change in shopper activity/retail function.

Summary

- Teville Gate, The Retail Core and The Grafton Site, have been identified as the three key major retail development sites over the forthcoming LDF period. Each have different policy implications and opportunities:
  - Teville Gate is out-of-centre is retail policy terms and the scale of retailing should be complementary to the town centre rather than competing. Proposals should comply with the key policy tests set out in PPS6, and we do not recommend the site is incorporated into an expanded town centre boundary at the current time.
  - Provided the Retail Core delivers in respect of retailer representation, integration and the quality of the environment, this development will have significant implications in respect of the function of the town centre and key areas of shopper activity. It is the only significant town centre opportunity to provide modern retail units, and it will be important for Worthing to introduce the Retail Core alongside parallel town centre improvements elsewhere to ensure the whole centre benefits through integration/linkages.
  - The Grafton Site provides a key strategic development opportunity to address the severance that currently separates the town centre and the seafront and promenade, whilst enhancing the existing Primary Shopping Area/core retail representation. There is an opportunity here to extend the provision of modern retail units within the primary shopping area.

6. TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

6.1 This section sets out our recommended strategy for maintaining and enhancing Worthing Town Centre over the forthcoming LDF period. This includes policy implementation measures, the protection and enhancement of existing retail areas during and following major change, and development and wider regeneration initiatives. It is important to highlight that planning policy itself can't commit retailers to a town centre or achieve investment/improvement, but it can develop and facilitate the creation of an environment, as well as appropriate restrictions to certain uses, with which to enhance the demand for representation.

Policy Implementation Measures

6.2 Policy implementation measures are the key planning tool in managing the health of a town centre. Frontage boundaries can restrict and encourage uses through the 'Use Classes Order' and prevent non-retail uses from emerging in inappropriate areas. Policy cannot, however, control the mix of independent and multiple retailers that are represented in a town centre. Other, wider measures, aside from restricting fast food take-aways, are discussed later in this section. Our recommendations for the Council are as follows.

6.3 As set out earlier, the previous Local Plan (2003) defined Primary Shopping Areas (Zone A), Primary Shopping Areas (Zone B), Secondary Shopping Areas and the wider town centre boundary. Moving forwards, the LDF should take account of the current performance of the town centre and proposed changes supported in policy to identify retail frontage and boundary definitions in accordance with national policy:

- Town Centre: Defined area, including the primary shopping area and areas of predominantly leisure, business and other main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. The extent of the primary shopping area should be defined on the proposals map.
- Primary Shopping Area: Defined area where retail development is concentrated (generally comprising the primary and those secondary frontages which are contiguous and closely related to the primary shopping frontage). The extent of the primary shopping area should be defined on the proposals map.
- Primary Frontage: Primary frontages are likely to include a high proportion of retail uses.
- Secondary Frontage: Secondary frontages provide greater opportunities for a diversity of uses.

6.4 Our qualitative assessment of the centre enabled a detailed understanding of retail composition and pedestrian footfall throughout different areas of the town centre and as such gives a clear indication of where the frontage designations should be drawn. Our review of the three major development schemes, including Teville Gate, The Retail Core and the Grafton Centre have enabled us to understand how retail activity in the centre might change over the forthcoming LDF period. It should be noted, however, that what appears to be a declining retail frontage should not necessarily be relegated to a more secondary role, and should instead be given the opportunity to development and improve over the LDF period through policy intervention; thereby enhancing and retaining its role.

6.5 Likewise, a retail frontage should not be relegated to a more secondary role on the basis of a concern about the implications of pipeline development elsewhere in the town centre which could divert shopper activity. Again, these more peripheral areas should be allocated the opportunity to change and enhance their roles, facilitated by appropriate policies and restricting undesirable uses and non-retail uses. In Worthing, for example, there are a number of regeneration proposals throughout the town centre and along the seafront which will enhance visitation rates, promote circulation and counterbalance the effects of new development in different areas. In this context, we set out our policy recommendations below (as illustrated on Plan 8).

Town Centre Boundary

6.6 We recommend no change to the town centre boundary. The boundary defined in the 2003 Local Plan incorporates the full extent of secondary frontages to the west including Rowlands Road; and in the east including the full extent of Brighton Road. The town centre boundary does not stretch any further in the east/west direction and we recommend this remains the case in the future. Adjoining areas comprise largely residential areas and it is not appropriate to elongate the centre any further to incorporate such uses. We also do not advise contracting the boundary in these directions given the important and niche roles both Rowlands Road and Brighton Road contribute to the retailing sector in Worthing.

6.7 The boundary incorporates the seafront areas including part of the ‘Western Gateway’, the ‘Visitor and Entertainment Hub’, and the ‘Fisherman’s Quarter’. All of these are identified in the Masterplan for major enhancement initiatives and will be closely integrated and linked in to the revival of the town centre and primary shopping area in particular. The focus here is on commercial activities and entertainment facilities, informal relaxation, and the heritage of the seafront. All will contribute to the visitor experience and attraction of the town centre and in retail policy terms it is appropriate to retain these uses within the town centre boundary.

6.8 To the north, the town centre boundary stretches to the north of the Cultural and Civic hub. Again, this is identified in the Masterplan for future investment over the LDF period, building on the existing town hall and museum, new civic and community facilities. The aspiration is to create a civic and community heart for Worthing, with the potential to rationalise existing civic accommodation on the site including the library building, Council offices and Magistrates Court on Richmond Road to provide new modern and contemporary facilities of the highest standard. It is highlighted that in the longer term there may be potential for a new library and resource centre. In this context, it is entirely appropriate to retain the town centre boundary to incorporate this character area consistent with the advice set out in PPS6 and 'other' town centre uses.

6.9 We do not recommend the town centre boundary is stretched any further north, which again would elongate the centre over too wide an area and facilitate policy support for town centre uses in locations some distance from the Primary Shopping Area and priority areas for regeneration and revitalise – the seafront for example.

6.10 Teville Gate is identified for mixed use development to enable the creation of a new gateway to Worthing town centre. Whilst we support this aspiration in principle it is crucial that the Council retains control over the mix and scale of uses (particularly retail) deemed appropriate in this out-of-centre location. It would be inappropriate to enable a strong mix of competing retail uses that would impact upon the Primary Shopping Area some distance away, and any application for retail and wider town centre uses should comply with the key policy tests set out in PPS6.

6.11 Nevertheless, we understand there are major aspirations for Teville Gate to create a prominent gateway with a mix of town centre and commercial leisure uses with some ancillary eating/drinking and retail uses. We have acknowledged that an appropriate scheme would be positive for Worthing in the future. Such development and change might lead to a review of the town centre boundary in the future, although the site remains some distance from the current town centre boundary separated by Chapel Road North. As we have pointed out above such a change would elongate the centre facilitating policy support for town centre uses some distance from the primary shopping area and other priority areas for regeneration.

6.12 Should the redevelopment of Teville Gate secure a significant mixed use development, incorporating leisure, residential and supporting retail uses there would need to be a review of the town centre boundary and reassessment of the role of Teville Gate in supporting the currently defined town centre. Conclusions would need to be drawn in respect of whether it remains a separate policy allocation, or whether the area should be incorporated into the town centre. In the meantime, however, we recommend the Council retain control over the mix of uses and scale of development through its current position in an out-of-centre location and through the formulation of a special policy allocation.

6.13 Based on the Masterplan and previous considerations for the site, Teville Gate is likely to be an appropriate location for larger commercial leisure uses (Use Class D2), such as a cinema or swimming pool, with some ancillary retail leisure uses (Use Class A3/4/5). It should be noted that Use Classes A3/4/5 should be directed to the Primary Shopping Area in the first instance, to ensure it's continued vitality and viability and a strong and vibrant evening economy. The Council should carefully control the mix of such uses (A3/4/5) at Teville Gate.

Primary & Secondary Shopping Frontages

6.14 We recommend the following uses allowed within the policy wording for Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages in Worthing Town Centre:

- Primary Frontage Zone A: The change of use of the ground floor of a shop (A1) within Zone A, to any other use will not normally be permitted;
- Primary Frontage Zone B: The change of use of the ground floor of a shop (A1) within Zone B, to any other use other than A3/A4, will not normally be permitted;
- Secondary Frontage: Allow the change of use from ground floor A1 to A2 financial and professional service use, A3 restaurants and cafes, and A4 drinking establishments. Restrict the introduction of further A5 hot food take-aways.

Primary Frontages

6.15 We have already highlighted the extent of potential change arising from the Retail Core development site. This will inevitably change the focus of shopper activity and the location of Primary Shopping Frontages in Worthing over the LDF period. It would not, however, be appropriate to implement these changes in policy in advance of development occurring – this would be premature. It is our recommendation that the Retail Core Development Site has a special policy allocation in the forthcoming LDF setting out the aspirations and mix/scale of appropriate uses as set out in the Development Brief. This would provide a strategic allocation in policy and facilitate developer confidence to invest.

6.16 Depending on a range of external factors, development may come forward on this site during the LDF period which would supersede the development site policy allocation. At this point, and following an appropriate 'settling down period' after opening (c.1-2years), the role and function of different parts of the town centre should be reviewed again in order to identify any change to the role of primary frontages and to conclude whether changes should be made within the revised LDF. At present, the Guildbourne Centre is Primary Area Zone B; but if the aspirations are realised then these shopping streets are likely to form part of the Primary Shopping Area Zone A.

6.17 Ann Street would fall within this special policy area, and we recommend that whilst it is included in the Retail Core special policy allocation the LDF should, in the meantime, also retain it as Primary Frontage Zone B to enable a more flexible policy approach until such time that development comes forward.

6.18 Warwick Street is achieving a niche retailing and eating/drinking role and forms an attractive pedestrianised street. As we have noted earlier, this area will benefit from the Retail Core development and it's function will only improved. As such, we recommend this area is designated as Primary Frontage Zone B, protecting A1 uses but allowing A3 and A4 uses to facilitate a 'café culture'. We strongly recommend restricting against A5 hot food take-aways which are often unsightly and undesirable uses which can detract from the vibrancy of an area and become unattractive to higher quality eating/drinking operators.

6.19 South Street, the Montague Centre and Montague Street should be retained as Primary Frontage Zone A. Our assessment has demonstrated that these are the key retail areas at the current time with the highest levels of pedestrian activity and national multiple high street retailers. We have noted earlier that the Retail Core development might shift shopper activity and lead to relocations of some retailers. Nevertheless, many town centres have a number of different 'key' retail areas, and we consider it vital to maintain the performance of these areas which underpin the health of the full extent of the centre, particularly given the proximity to the seafront, and linkages with Rowlands Road.

6.20 Montague Street, South Street and the Montague Centre form a strong linked route through to the Retail Core development site and this should be protected and encouraged through policy. It will be important to safeguard this area for A1 retail uses to maintain it's attraction and shopper footfall alongside the new Retail Core. A more flexible policy stance would erode the strong retail function to the detriment of the Primary Shopping Area as a whole.

6.21 There are clearly many retailers who are not yet represented in Worthing town centre, and whilst there might be some relocations from Montague Street, South Street and the Montague Centre, development activity will generate renewed interest in the centre and strategies should be put in place to encourage retailer interest in existing units in this area alongside the Retail Core if relocations do take place. The objective should not be a shift in the location of core 'high street' retailing, but rather an expansion of the area to meet the aspiration of a step change in retail offer to compete with centres such as Brighton. The redevelopment of the Grafton site should ensure strong linkages with Montague Street, to enhance the important relationship with the seafront.

6.22 Primary Frontage Zone B allocations should also be retained on Montague Place and in the Royal Arcade. Montague Place in particular provides one of the key pedestrian links through to the seafront, yet has one of the lowest footfall counts in the town centre. This stretch already has a mix of retail and eating/drinking uses, but there are also two A2 uses including Bradford & Bingley and

Royal Bank of Scotland. The further expansion of A2 uses in this area should be prevented to ensure an active and vibrant frontage building on the seaside location. Likewise, the Royal Arcade is inappropriate for A2 uses given it's architectural contribution and 'shopping' character.

Secondary Shopping Frontages

6.23 The northern part of Chapel Road is currently designated as part of the Secondary Shopping Area in which changes of use from A1 to A2 and A3 would generally be accepted. Our assessment has identified that this area, which adjoins the Retail Core, is struggling and experiencing a growth in vacant units. Given current health concerns, we recommend that this stretch of Chapel Street should remain within the Secondary Shopping Area thus allowing a more flexible mix of uses. A restriction against Use Class A5 would be appropriate given the future redevelopment of the Retail Core on the eastern side of Chapel Road and the aspiration for quality higher end retailing. We do not recommend that the secondary frontage is extended any further north given its location adjoining the Civic and Cultural Hub forming a different town centre function.

6.24 Brighton Road has experienced a small increase in vacant units in recent years, but has a number of well established retailers and the vacancy rate remains low. Our assessment highlights the important niche and specialist role Brighton Road plays in the overall retail function of the town centre offering independent convenience retailers and specialist comparison retailers. Underpinned by the Retail Core and consequent benefits to Warwick Street, Brighton Road is in a strong position to gain from increased visitor numbers and shopper circulation in adjoining areas. We note that there are a number of takeaways already represented in this area.

6.25 We recommend Brighton Road is protected as an important contribution to retailing in Worthing, and the Secondary Frontage designation is retained whilst prohibiting a further infiltration of A5 take-away outlets. The overall objective should be to allow an element of flexibility whilst protecting the interest and shopper attraction. A growing proportion of hot-food takeaways would erode the mix of retailing and remove the incentive for shoppers to 'make the journey' on foot. Such a trend would lead to a less desirable and vibrant location.

6.26 We recommend that Portland Road and Buckingham Road, both accessed from Montague Street, are retained as Secondary Frontages for the LDF period. Portland Road in particular has two large vacant units and is underperforming as a retail area despite being adjoined to the most heavily trafficked part of the Primary Shopping Area. A flexible policy position together with environmental enhancements is crucial to ensure improvements to the health of these areas.

6.27 Rowlands Road is peripheral to the core shopping area, characterised by small retail premises, occupied largely by niche and independent businesses. Whilst there are scattered vacant units the area provides a good mix of retailing and interest for shoppers, as well as Gala Bingo at the far western end and a refurbished Co-Op foodstore. Rowlands Road is not currently designated as either secondary or primary frontage, but does fall within the town centre boundary. We recommend this are is, however, included as secondary shopping frontage over the forthcoming LDF period. Whilst it is peripheral and some distance from the core shopping area, it is well linked and provides a strong continuation from Montague Street.

6.28 Given the good mix of uses on Rowlands Road, we advise that this area would benefit from policy protection to retain A1/3 and 4 retail uses and prevent the infiltration of A5 hot food take-aways. The stretch of the seafront running parallel with Rowlands Road has been identified in the Masterplan as the 'Western Gateway', with proposals to create a quiet, informal area for relaxation to enable people to enjoy the unique environment. Given a number of linked pedestrian routes, Rowlands Road is in a good position to benefit from visitors to this part of the seafront provided appropriate signage was put in place. If circulation can be maintained and enhanced, Rowlands Road could build on the specialist and independent niche retailing sector and eating/drinking provision. For this reason, we recommend Rowlands Road is designated as Secondary Shopping Frontage.

Policy Formulation

6.29 We have already identified the function and performance of different parts of the town centre in previous sections, and recommended above where the Town Centre Boundary, and Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages should be drawn. As we have noted earlier, major development and change will shift the focus of activity in a town centre to some extent, but it would be complacent to accept this as an inevitable outcome, or indeed the only outcome.

6.30 Instead, it is important for local authorities to be proactive and implement strategies to ensure these developments enhance the centre as a whole, expanding key focus areas rather than shifting them to alternative areas. It is evident that there is a shortfall of major high street and higher quality retailers in Worthing Town Centre and the objective should be to expand the Primary Shopping Frontage to accommodate a growing mix and choice of retailers. Given the gaps in retailer representation, for example, Worthing has the ability to offer prime retail accommodation in the existing frontages on Montague Street and South Street, as well as in the proposed Retail Core.

6.31 Clearly, as development settles down, the role of some areas might evolve and change but this should be monitored in the longer term and incorporated into revised LDF documents at a later date. In the meantime, our recommended Primary and Secondary Frontage boundaries for Worthing are illustrated on Plan 8. They are designed to protect the retail function of existing areas alongside proposed major development areas including the Retail Core and the Grafton Site.

6.32 We also recommend special town centre policy designations for the Retail Core, The Grafton Site and Teville Gate. Such boundaries can ensure an appropriate and accepted mix of uses and guide development proposals to achieve the aspirations and vision for an area. The focus of the Retail Core is clearly to enhance the mix and choice of retailing in Worthing to compete with similar sized centres in the wider sub-region such as Brighton. This is the only major town centre development opportunity site which has the ability to meet the identified shortfall in comparison high street retailing. A special policy allocation setting the boundaries for development would encourage developer investment moving forwards, removing elements of risk for developers which commonly arise in other town centres across the UK.

6.33 The Grafton site is an excellent opportunity to enhance the existing Primary Shopping Frontage and general quality of the environment, whilst considerably enhancing linkages through to the seafront. Whilst it is not the remit of this study to define the appropriate mix or scale of uses on this site, it would seem an appropriate opportunity to enhance the mix of modern units and encourage pedestrian footfall in this area.

6.34 Teville Gate, however, should be restricted from any retail development of a scale which would impact on the Primary Shopping Area. Being located outside the Primary Shopping Area and town centre boundary any application would need to be tested against national policy to ensure it is of an appropriate scale, that there is a need for the development, that it won't have an impact on the town centre, and that there are no sequentially preferable sites for such development. The special policy allocations are illustrated on Plan 8.

Eating / Drinking

6.35 Daytime and evening eating/drinking facilities form an important element to any town centre, adding to the overall vibrancy, attraction and visitor 'stay-time'; whilst creating a 'destination' to compete with other town centres as well as the purely retail shopping function of the internet. Warwick Street is evolving as an attractive niche eating/drinking quarter which should be encouraged and facilitated through policy as discussed in Section 5. Additional eating/drinking quarters could also be encouraged on the junction with South Street and Marine Parade, Rowland Road and Chapel Road, and should be encouraged on parts of Marine Parade fronting the sea. Key requirements of the Retail Core, and perhaps more importantly The Grafton Site, should be the introduction of further eating/drinking facilities.

6.36 The Primary and Secondary Frontage designations, as well as the special site policy allocations for Teville Gate, The Grafton Site and the Retail Core recommended in Section 5 will ensure flexibility and the promotion of certain uses in the appropriate areas. The restriction of A5 hot food take-away outlets will be equally important.

Town Centre Management

6.37 Worthing Town Centre already has the support of a Town Centre Manager, and this should be utilised when formulating a planning strategy to enhance the role and performance of the town centre over the LDF period. This is equally important before, during and after new development which will have implications on the wider town centre and shopping area.

6.38 There is an identified need to consolidate Worthing's role, to encourage new, higher quality operators and niche/specialist retailers to ensure the differentiated retail offer – rather than a 'clone town'. The importance of secondary shopping areas is reflected in our policy recommendations to safeguard the mix of uses in areas such as Rowlands Road and Brighton Road to create areas of an ilk similar to those found at The Lanes in Brighton and the streets around Minster in York City Centre. Such retailing in Brighton and York form an attraction in their own right and create a single reason to visit the centre.

6.39 In conjunction with policy formulation, the Town Centre Manager can contribute significantly to facilitate 'business partnership working' between key stakeholders, commercial contacts with key operators (both existing and potential); manage the monitoring of key performance indicators, and the promotion of marketing and publicity campaigns. The importance of making and maintaining commercial contacts is crucial to enhancing a town centre and contributing to the realisation of a strategy. In this case, the leverage of new retailers to the town centre is key whilst at the same time building an understanding from existing retailers about the town centre and their future requirements, representation and intentions.

6.40 In Worthing it will be important to maintain consultation with the existing retailers to understand their views on change and development, the implications of change on different parts of the centre and their performance both before and after development. The monitoring of key performance indicators will be crucial to ensure informed decisions and revised policy recommendations in the future. These should include vacancy rates, the loss of named retailers and those that take up previously vacant units, as well as potential problem areas experiencing high vacancy rates. Other indicators could include the implications of business rates, rents and pedestrian flows across the whole centre, for example.

6.41 Key commercial, retailer and business contacts alongside focused marketing strategies, will assist in stimulating demand and targeting the desired retailers into the centre. A marketing strategy and promotional material and publicity to achieve an increased awareness of the town centre. This should include the cultural heritage, the seafront and cultural and entertainment events and local activities as well as simply the shopping offer. The Town Centre Manager will also play a key part in monitoring and maintaining the continued and improved control/awareness of cleanliness, security, physical environment and other potentially problematic issues – all of which are discussed further below.

6.42 The Government has recently re-affirmed the importance of Town Centre Management in the evolution of town centre strategies. In April 2009, for example, Communities and Local Government published the document 'Looking After Our Town Centres'. It is intended as a guide for town centre managers and their local partners, offering guidance on how to work together to ensure that the UK's town centres realise their full potential, even in tough times.

6.43 The document summarises the range of powers, tools, and approaches available to local councils and their partners that can help to provide solid foundations on which to build strong and attractive centres. It is emphasised that town centres that get the basics right will be better able to respond to the consequences of the downturn, and better placed to ensure that they are ready to take advantage when the recovery begins. The importance of town centre management, joint working town centre strategies and a proactive approach, alongside the planning policy framework, cannot be underestimated.

Environment/Public Realm

6.44 As emphasised already, the planning policy framework cannot in itself enhance an area or ensure that existing retail streets won't decline following major development/regeneration in other parts of the centre. We are aware there has been some investment in some parts of the centre already, but it is absolutely crucial to ensure a quality public realm reflecting consistency across the full extent of the Primary Shopping Area and beyond towards Teville Gate to improve the cohesiveness of the centre. This will include the pavements, street furniture, shop frontages and planting, for example.

6.45 Many parts of Worthing Town Centre are attractive with historic character and shopfronts should respect the building of which they are part. Within town centres there are many pressures to 'clutter' shopfronts, and often the extension of shopfronts across separate buildings can lead to larger window display areas and more competitive advertising, for example. We recommend that this is a key policy formulation area to protect the historic built environment and ensure a consistent strategy for shopfront design throughout the town centre.

6.46 The adopted policy framework should refer applicants and development pressures to an endorsed 'Shopfront Design Guide', which should be monitored and reviewed throughout the LDF period to enhance and improve a high quality appearance. These can be highly detailed documents setting out clearly the planning regulations and requirements to obtain planning, listed building, conservation area and advertisement consent; but also setting out the requirement for a high standard of design and focusing on issues such as windows, guttering, joinery and masonry, proportions and scale of fascias and entrance doors, lighting, security, materials, ventilation, blinds and canopies, for example.

6.47 Inconsistent fascia redevelopment could have significant detrimental impacts on the appearance of the town centre in the future. Moreover, consistent fascia appearance on Rowlands Road and Montague Street with those on Chapel Road and Brighton Road will provide a greater sense of place for visitors and allow the more peripheral retail areas to join and merge more effectively with more central shopping streets.

6.48 We would also caution against a 'cluttered' environment through the town centre, and adding signs and street furniture might appear to be an accepted strategy, but in many proven cases a reverse strategy of 'cleaning up' and removing such items can be more beneficial. Evidently every town centre will differ and options need to be tested according to local circumstances, but Worthing could look to incorporate elements of other successful schemes such as the example at High Street Kensington or other across the UK.

6.49 The scheme in Kensington, know as 'Streetscape', believes that elements of the streetscene, such as paving, street furniture, lighting and signage, when designed well and carefully co-ordinated, can be used to enhance the built form, giving greater emphasis to the qualities of particular buildings and landmarks. They explain the approach as follows:

> *"In recent years, the conventional approach to street management has been based on a 'one is good, so more must be better' approach. This accounts for the increasing plethora of signs, markings and street furniture"*

6.50 'Streetscape' challenges this approach through it's philosophy of less is more. The document specifically states that the competition for road space between different users presents new challenges to streetscape design that need a thoughtful and imaginative approach to resolve them elegantly. Key targets were based on the following principles:

- Eliminating unnecessary signs and markings reduces visual clutter;
- Footways and street surfaces provide the context in which buildings are seen and should be a neutral carpet and complementing the adjacent buildings;
- The finest streetscapes have the minimum amount of street furniture. Only items that make a positive contribution deserve a place in the street;
- Traffic schemes: a holistic approach where there is a proven need;
- Caring for the environment we have inherited and the one we are creating.

6.51 The Masterplan recognises the importance of the Public Realm to the future of Worthing and sets out in some detail the suggested strategy to achieve an improved environment for shoppers and visitors. Within the Primary Retail Area, the importance of connectivity between proposed and existing retail areas should be emphasised, and the ability of the public realm in achieving this outcome, highlighted. The connectivity and linkages between the new Retail Core, South Street and Montague Street will be crucial to ensure seamless integration and the continued vitality and viability of Montague Street through to Rowland Road. The east/west movement should be promoted and facilitated, and the public realm strategy is a key means to achieve this. This is also relevant to the north/south spine, as well as reaching out to Brighton Road and High Street.

6.52 The Masterplan specifically states:

> *"The public realm has a major part to play in the character and attractiveness of any town centre or seafront. At present, the quality of the public realm in parts of the central area does not reflect the aspiration for the new, modern and vibrant city centre. Improvements to the public realm are essential to complement development proposals and transport improvements, to ensure that those using the centre have a pleasant and enjoyable experience."*

6.53 The Masterplan goes on to set out the key objectives to reinforce the image and identity; focus on public realm; establish meeting areas; priorities pedestrians; and green the town. Most importantly, however, is the issue of identify which should underpin any future strategy. Notably, the approach to design and procurement of public realm is co-ordinated and well thought through – to deliver a common approach that is identified as being 'Worthing'. The objective to maintain more peripheral retail areas - such as Chapel Road, Brighton Road and Rowlands Road - before, during and following new development is the creation of an overriding identity and their unquestionable inclusion in the 'retail heart' of the town centre.

Town Centre Retail/Seafront Linkages

6.54 The seafront is the town's most important asset and provides a major attraction for visitors and an amenity for local residents. The Masterplan identified that although there has been some investment in the form of recent environmental enhancements, the appearance of the seafront is diminished by the generally poor quality of street furniture and by the underutilisation of the area. In retail terms, and of particular relevance to this study, are the weak linkages and connectivity between the Primary Retail Area and the seafront. It will be crucial over the LDF period to enhance this relationship to build on the identity of the centre and the 'destination' attraction of the centre to facilitate a wider and stronger catchment area.

6.55 Focusing on the role and functionality of the seafront, the Masterplan sets out the following zones of activity intended to re-establish the seafront as a high quality visitor destination and local leisure and recreational resource, with an improved range of facilities and environment to meet local and visitor expectations:

- **Western Gateway**: Quiet informal area for relaxation to enable people to enjoy the unique environment;
- **Visitor and Entertainment Hub**: Central hub of visitor activities and entertainment facilities. Proposals include restoring the Lido, tourist information centre, signature seafront restaurant/café, and promoting the Pavilion Theatre;

- **Fisherman's Quarter**: Develop distinct Fisherman's Quarter to cater for a range of activities including the creation of a fishing museum, a central location for 'art on the seafront', and investment in landscaping, planting and seating;
- **Active Recreation**: Integrated tourism and leisure facilities. This will include themed/adventure play facilities; the development of a water splash feature/paddling pool; establish active beach zone; a new seafront hotel with Aquarena redevelopment; and new water-based recreation;
- **Eastern Gateway**: Improved 'gateway' and up-grading of fisherman's boat pound. Proposals include enhancing signage, planting and seating; and improved facilities for boats.

6.56 Clearly, such regeneration and investment will substantially improve the attraction of the seafront, and the retail strategy should focus on benefits arising through increased visitor numbers. The retail strategy should aim to improve pedestrian connectivity between the main retail streets and the seafront, particularly given potential development on the Retail Core which could have the affect of shifting shopper activity from Rowlands Road/Montague Street. The Grafton Site is an excellent opportunity to open up the built environment with enhanced sight lines and pedestrian connectivity linking Montague Street with the seafront. This would facilitate pedestrian circulation and help maintain levels of footfall on Montague Street before, during and after development on the Retail Core.

6.57 Further areas for improved linkages include enhancing the ease of pedestrian movement at the junction of Marine Parade with South Street, and the creation of an enhanced environment on Montague Place. Montague Place in particular has one of the lowest footfalls in the town centre suggesting weak linkages between the shopping heart and the seafront at the current time. The representation of two A2 office uses on this frontage does not contribute to an active and vibrant, seafront atmosphere, and such uses should be restricted in policy in the future. Shops and A3/4 eating/drinking establishments should be encouraged.

6.58 Moving west, further roads link the seafront with Rowlands Road and Montague Street, including Prospect Place, New Street, West Buildings, West Street and Western Place. These streets are largely characterised by housing, but improved environments and signage from the seafront and from the shopping street could improve pedestrian circulation throughout this area. The Western Gateway seafront 'zone' is located parallel to Rowlands Road and would seem a pleasant activity for local residents and visitors/tourists, to wander between the quiet seafront and the niche/specialist retailers represented on Rowlands Road.

6.59 Linkages and integration between the retail streets and the seafront are likely to be influenced by an improved public realm, enhanced signage and ease of pedestrian movement, opening out the built environment between Montague Street and the seafront where possible, and the creation of shopper/visitor circulation routes.

Vacant Units

6.60 A degree of vacancy among retail units is a normal part of a healthily functioning town centre and on average approximately 10% of all units in a centre will be vacant at any one time. The failure to let empty shops, however, leads to periods of prolonged vacancy which negatively affects the character of an area. Blank facades, permanently drawn shutters and the removal of active street frontage does not attract the wandering shopper and clusters of such vacancies can harbour anti-social behaviour, and in extreme cases create no-go areas and urban blight.

6.61 Fluctuations in footfall in a certain location may affect the viability of the units there, as the rents/business rates asked may be too high to allow a shop or business to trade viably in new circumstances. The negative impact of that particular vacant unit on the surrounding area may have encouraged other vacancies nearby, in units that were also struggling to reconcile their rents with lower levels of pass-by trade, and together the combined prolonged vacancies can produce further reductions in pedestrian activity, effectively blighting the area. As detailed in Section 4, Worthing is currently experiencing a growth in vacant units.

6.62 Our assessment set out in Section 4 identifies that the number of vacant retail units in Worthing Town Centre has increased from 59 in November 2006 to 65 in February 2008, 72 in November 2008, and 75 in June 2009. Evidently, not all of these units have remained vacant over this period, as many have been re-occupied whilst others have become newly vacant. Nevertheless, the average number across the centre has gradually increased over the last 3 years, and Worthing requires a strategy to manage the presence of vacant units through the transition period between now and a stronger economy combined with major new retail development and regeneration in Worthing Town Centre. Clearly, such schemes will require greater consideration of business rates, insurance and contracts, but we outline some recommended approaches to address concerns in respect of vacant units.

6.63 The Government document, 'Looking After Our Town Centres' (April 2009) provides commentary of the position of many town centres across the UK and provides imaginative examples of ways to deal with vacant units as well as proactive measures being introduced to assist local authorities to respond quickly. The economic downturn is starting to have a visible impact on some of our town centres. A recent survey estimated that the number of empty shops in Britain rose from 63,500 in December 2008 to 90,000 in February 2009 and forecast further increases. Boarded up shops have knock-on effects: they can attract fly-posting and litter, they can suffer vandalism and fall into disrepair, and they can create a sense of neglect that has serious consequences for the wider area.

6.64 The Government has demonstrated commitment to enable vacant properties to be used for temporary purposes until demand for retail premises starts to improve. We set out a range of ideas below, together with the package of relaxation measures the Government have and are proposing to introduce.

6.65 Many vacant shop windows in town centres are being used to post information about community events, the local area, healthy living choices, local fitness classes, and so on. In Chelmsford, for example, the Town Centre Management Team has used the frontage of the former Woolworth's store to showcase the other shopping facilities and attractions in the area. One window features a bright, vibrant poster inviting visitors to 'Explore Chelmsford' and 'shop local and shop Chelmsford'. Another shows a large map of the town centre showing all the shops and open spaces, plus places of interest, and amenities such as taxi ranks, park-and-ride stops, and public toilets.

6.66 In Worthing a similar exercise could use a unit to present and consult on major planning and regeneration proposals and to secure ideas, concerns and feedback. This could relate to the station area, the core retail area and the seafront, for example.

6.67 Some town centre managers have brokered arrangements to enable a vacant shop to be used as an art gallery, a museum, or a community services centre. An empty shop in Dewsbury, for example, was turned into a new base for police and community services for a short period. It is widely recognised that there are barriers that hinder similar activities; there may be uncertainty about whether planning permission is needed to change use, landlords may be difficult to contact or may be reluctant to consider a temporary lease, or some modest funding might be needed to redecorate and adapt a shop for a temporary use. The Government emphasises that these can be addressed by focusing on the following issues:

- helping local authorities respond more quickly and flexibly to proposals for a change of use;
- working with landlords to make interim leasing arrangements easier, quicker and less costly;
- enabling councils to help landlords who do not wish to enter directly into short-term leasing arrangements with temporary occupiers for community purposes; and
- providing funding to accelerate temporary uses of vacant premises.

6.68 The Government are aiming to make it easier to change uses in town centres. Temporary uses of vacant premises, for example, may require planning or other consents; but in order to allow local authorities to respond more quickly and flexibly to change of use requests, the document states that the government will bring forward plans (June 2009) to remove the requirement for Local Development Orders (LDOs) to be linked with policies in local development plans. There is a wide range of potential uses for LDOs – in a town centre, they could allow changes from shops to banks, building societies, clinics, day centres, art galleries, or museums; and the reforms will allow local planning authorities to implement LDOs with greater speed and flexibility.

6.69 Commercial landlords have a strong interest in maintaining the vitality of town centres, as thriving towns provide the best security for their investment. They are obviously keen to let empty shops on a normal commercial footing at the earliest opportunity, but the current economics conditions can make that difficult in some places, particularly with the prospect of an upturn in the market. The document suggests that landlords can be better supported by offering clear assurance that any temporary change of use has a proper legal basis, their property will be kept in good condition and that they will be able to take the premises back as soon as there is a likelihood of commercial letting. The government intends to provide specimen legal documents that landlords can use for temporary occupiers in order to minimise the cost of setting up such arrangements.

6.70 The document also reports that community uses can be boosted by local authorities acting as intermediaries between community groups and landlords in order to agree terms on which space can be let on a temporary basis. The council could agree a temporary (or 'meanwhile') lease with a landlord which enables the council to make use of empty property by granting an interim licence to local groups for community uses. The lease would include a short term notice period so that the property could be passed back to the landlord quickly should a potential commercial occupier be found. This can offer real advantages to landlords, for example:

- Having expenses such as security costs and utilities covered;
- empty rates would not have to be paid as the properties have been leased to the council; and
- the insurance cover provided by the council.

6.71 Properties that might otherwise have been boarded up could be used by a variety of local groups. For example, artists could turn eyesores into potential local attractions; young people could run their own safe space for leaning and leisure purposes; job clubs could be set up where people who are not working at the moment could come together and find out about job opportunities, volunteering, business tart-up, and what's of offer in terms of support; or small retail enterprises could be established where individuals and small groups use the outlets to sell their wares (for example locally grown food).

6.72 Thanet District Council have, for example, used art to revitalise Margate town centre. A former Marks & Spencer site has been rechristened the Turner Contemporary Project Space, and houses a number of exhibitions and events that have increased footfall in the vicinity. In recent years, Chorley arts department has utilised empty retail spaces for craft exhibitions and workshops. By working with the centre managers it has put on events that have been mutually beneficial, bringing shoppers to the area, making the retail spaces more attractive to future tenants and providing venues for informal learning (including a summer long music workshop).

6.73 The document references the Asset Transfer Unit (ATU), an independent service set up by CLG and the Development Trusts Association. It provides support, expertise and advice to anyone involved in the transfer of assets to local communities. It may help in developing, testing and promoting 'meanwhile' leases to facilitate community uses of otherwise empty properties, and is an available resource to all local authorities. The government is also establishing a fund to provide access to small-scale grants to help with cleaning and decorating vacant premises, basic refit for temporary uses, publicity posters and other activities which may help town centres attract and maintain visitors.

6.74 Finally, the paper draws attention to a number of initiatives designed to help small businesses and independent retailers:

- Real Help for Businesses Now package – offers free support on how to find finance, raise productivity and save money www.realhelpnow.gov.uk/pdf/national.pdf ;
- Deferring business rates – the government will bring forward legislation to allow businesses to spread the payment of planned increases in business rates over the years 2011-2012 www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/businessrates ;
- Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) – helps small businesses reduce their business rates bill;
- Non-profit rate relief – local authorities have discretion to grant rate relief of up to 100% to a range of non-profit making bodies;
- Raising threshold of empty properties business rates – the government has announced a temporary increase from 1 April 2009 to the threshold at which empty properties become liable for business rates, from £2,000 to £15,000;
- Charity shop rate relief – charity shops are entitled to mandatory rate relief www.businesslink.gov.uk.

6.75 There are a number of tasks that can commence immediately, in order to form a baseline position with which to take forwards proposed strategies discussed above. These include:

- To compile a register of vacant properties in the town centre that have the potential for meanwhile leases, these premises should be ranked in order of the sensitiveness of their location. The Town Centre Manager could provide useful information needed for compiling such a list.
- To design and carry out an outreach programme which seeks to contact the owners of these premises and their agents and inform them of the existence of the strategy, how they could benefit by taking part, and the means by which they can sign up. This outreach programme should take the form of a mail shot, including a concise information sheet and directions to a website and contact details. Once landlords have signed up to the scheme, they would be added to a list of participating premises ranked in order of the suitability of the unit and the sensitivity of the surrounding area to urban blight.
- To compile a register of potential beneficiaries; these would include community and interest groups, charities, artistic associations and cultural bodies that might be interested in taking over premises for a temporary period. The Worthing Council volunteer Service could be a good resource from which to compile this register.

- To design and carry out an outreach programme which seeks to contact potential beneficiaries and inform them of the existence of the scheme, how they could benefit from it, and how they can sign up to take part. This programme could take the form of an e-mail-shot to a list of interest groups, an advertisement of the Council's website as well as an advertisement campaign on local radio and in local newspapers, and a poster campaign and leaflet drop at strategic locations in the town centre.
- To vet those potential beneficiaries that applied to take part in the scheme. Applicants with proposed uses that are deemed appropriate would be added to a waiting list until suitable premises can be found for their purposes. Applicants could fill out a simple form detailing:
  - The nature of their proposed use of the premises
  - The intended duration of the use/project
  - Details of premises required (size, configuration etc)
  - The estimated cost of the occupancy (including bills, and fit out)
  - Proof of means of implementing and delivering the project.
  - How the public will benefit from the occupancy
  - How the street frontage will be activated
- To match up worthy applicants with appropriate participating premises, and handle the lease arrangements which assure the landlord that vacant possession of his premises can be attained at short notice in the event that the landlord has found a permanent tenant. The leasing arrangements should provide a solid legal basis for the temporary occupancy.

Summary

- Our review of the three major development schemes have enabled us to understand how retail activity in the centre might change over the forthcoming LDF period, but we consider it premature to implement changes to frontage designations at this stage. Existing frontages should be protected in policy to enable the opportunity for enhancement alongside new development, rather than accept already their demise to more secondary roles. The objective should be to expand the primary retail core, rather than move it elsewhere; and a restriction against A5 uses in more secondary areas will encourage the growth of specialist and niche retailing.
- Our recommendations endorse the Primary Frontage Zone A and B designations to enable more flexibility in Zone B whilst restricting against A2 and A5 Uses; and Secondary Frontages which restrict A5 Uses. We recommend no change to the town centre boundary, or Primary Frontage Zone A and B, but recommend Rowlands Road is included in the Secondary Frontage.
- We recommend Special Policy Allocations for Teville Gate, the Retail Core and The Grafton Site to guide proposals. The role of the Grafton site within the Primary Shopping Frontage should be

maintained and enhanced over the LDF period, with any development being driven by comparison high street multiple retailers to counterbalance the effects of major retail growth on the Retail Core. The overall objective is to encourage an enhanced retailer representation, particularly from national multiples, and to grow the centre rather than to experience a shift in activity to the Retail Core once developed.

- Major development and change will shift the focus of activity in a town centre to some extent, but it would be complacent to accept this as an inevitable outcome, or indeed the only outcome. Instead, it is important for local authorities to be proactive and implement strategies to ensure these developments enhance the centre as a whole, expanding key focus areas rather than shifting them to alternative areas. For this reason, we have recommended few changes to frontage designations, subject to ongoing monitoring, and suggest a comprehensive town centre strategy to benefit the town centre as a whole – not just certain areas.

- The importance of diversity and variety, beyond the hours of 9am-5.30pm cannot be underestimated. We have recommended Warwick Street, Marine Parade, Rowlands Road and Chapel Road are the focus for Use Class A3/A4 eating/drinking venues. Clearly, the special policy allocations for The Retail Core and The Grafton Site should encourage such uses; whilst the infiltration of Use Class A5 should be restricted throughout all Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages.

- Policy Formulation cannot work alone in enhancing a town centre, but can clearly create the boundaries to stimulate appropriate regeneration, change and investment. Town Centre Management is crucial alongside policy to build business/stakeholder partnerships; implement performance and monitoring of key health check indicators; promote the importance of the local residential and business community; create attractive and safe environments; and develop the importance of diversity.

- In terms of the environment and public realm, we are aware of recent investment and clear recommendations in the Masterplan. We emphasise here, however, the importance of a comprehensive strategy across all parts of the centre to ensure the creation of an overriding identity and a sense of inclusion for the more secondary/peripheral areas. Linkages and integration between the retail streets and the seafront are likely to be influenced by an improved public realm, enhanced signage and ease of pedestrian movement. The seafront is the town's most important asset and is currently underutilised.

- Boarded up, vacant shops can create a sense of neglect that has serious consequences for the wider area, and the Government has demonstrated a commitment to enable vacant properties to be used for temporary purposes. These include relaxing regulations in respect of LDOs, support for landlords and legal advice to ensure short term notice periods, and funding initiatives. Creative uses include display windows, community groups, and art galleries, for example.

7. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Our terms of reference were:

- To re-examine and advise on the shopping frontages and policy boundaries in Worthing Town Centre, taking into account the current composition of retailing and identified major development sites;
- Develop a strategy to support existing retail areas in preparation for the delivery of the new 'Retail Core';
- Develop a strategy for the creative use of vacant shops during the economic downturn and throughout the delivery of the new retail core.

7.2 There are a clear set of implementation measures and key recommendations arising from our analysis, set out as follows:

- Define the town centre boundary in accordance with our recommendations set out in Section 6. This recommends no change to the previously adopted boundary;
- Define appropriate Primary Shopping (Zone A and B) Frontages as set out in Section 6 and illustrated on Plan 8. Zone A should protect A1 uses, whilst Zone B should allow a more flexible approach to A3 and A4 uses. A5 uses should be prevented;
- Define appropriate Secondary Shopping Frontages as set out in Section 6 and illustrated on Plan 8. Policy should allow a more flexible approach to A2, A3 and A4 uses whilst restricting the infiltration of A5 uses;
- Frontage policy designations and restrictions against certain uses are the key policy measures available to assist in the vitality and viability of different areas of a town centre;
- Introduce special policy allocations for the Retail Core and the Grafton Site, in order to encourage developer investment by offering policy support to new development. The importance of high street comparison retailing should underpin any policy in respect of the Grafton Site to demonstrate the importance of this area to maintain a Primary Shop Frontage role and a counterbalance to the Retail Core. The aim being to achieve growth in the core shopping area and the representation of national multiple retailers. The Retail Core should be an addition to the retail offer rather than a replacement and a shift in shopper activity;
- Exclude Teville Gate from the town centre boundary and Primary Shopping Area to retain control over the mix and scale of development, and it's distance from the Primary Shopping Area. Restrict high street comparison retailing which would compete with the Primary Shopping

Area; focus on ancillary convenience, eating/drinking, leisure and small scale comparison units to develop a key gateway site;

- Should the redevelopment of Teville Gate secure a significant mixed use development, incorporating leisure, residential and supporting *ancillary* retail uses there would need to be a review of the town centre boundary and reassessment of the role of Teville Gate in supporting the currently defined town centre. As we have pointed out, this would not be an appropriate policy alteration at the current time;
- Do not alter shopping frontage designations in advance of development proposals/allocations coming forward – this would be premature. Policy allocations should be based on current performance, and only after development and monitoring should alterations be implemented;
- Eating / drinking 'destinations' could be encouraged on the junction with South Street and Marine Parade; Rowland Road and Chapel Road; and part of Marine Parade. An element of A3/A4 uses should be encouraged in the Retail Core and the Grafton site to ensure vibrancy. A5 Uses should be restricted in Primary and Secondary Frontages where advised;
- Town Centre Manager should continue to facilitate 'business partnership working' between key stakeholders, commercial contacts with key retail operators (existing and potential); monitor key performance indicators, and develop and promote marketing and publicity campaigns. All crucial to encouraging inward investment and retailer representation;
- Town Centre Manager to consult with existing retailers to understand their views on change and development, the implications of change on different parts of the centre and their performance before and after development. Ongoing and regular consultation would assist in monitoring and the identification of change and areas to focus on;
- Produce a Shopfront Design Guide to ensure consistent fascia appearance, enhancing the identity of the town centre;
- Develop a streetscape strategy to 'de-clutter' and streamline street furniture and the public realm. Ensure consistency which will help the integration of new development into the existing street pattern. Develop a common approach that is identified as 'Worthing';
- Enhance linkages between the seafront and the Primary Shopping Area. Site specific recommendations and connectivity enhancements discussed in Section 6;
- Develop a proactive approach to vacant units as set out in Section 6. Compile a register of vacant properties; undertake an outreach programme; compile a register of potential beneficiaries. This will enable the use of vacant units to be occupied at the earliest opportunity.