

Policy L48 52: Town centres

Measures which secure or promote the vitality and viability of town centres and which create a safer and more attractive environment will be supported. In particular development or land use change should:

1. support the role of the town centre and meet the needs of its catchment area,
2. provide an appropriate scale of development
3. support a ~~and~~ mix of uses,
4. enable the consolidation or regeneration of centres in cases where the centre has ~~with~~ a declining role.

Development or land use change that has a significant adverse effect on the vitality and viability ~~catchment area~~ of other town centres will not be permitted.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE QUALITY OF LIFE

- 9.1 The quality of places where people live, the location of shops, services and social facilities and opportunities for recreation and leisure, are all factors that can be influenced by land use planning decisions. The factors that contribute to a good quality of life are common to both urban and rural areas.
- 9.2 Many facilities are only located in Cumbria's town centres. Smaller centres have become increasingly vulnerable as customers bypass them for the larger centres or facilities developed out of centre. Service providers, such as banks and building societies continue to consolidate, focusing their activities on a limited number of larger centres, and particularly, in rural areas, shops and post offices struggle to survive. Exceptions may occur where visitors provide additional custom, for example, in parts of the National Park. However, in some situations, the high value of leisure retailing ~~may displace other local businesses, such as~~ outdoor clothing shops and souvenir shops, may displace other businesses, providing local services like chemists and butchers.

Town Centres

- 9.3 To be successful town centres must adapt to change yet still aim to be attractive and safe as places to live, work and shop. The development of retail, leisure or tourism facilities in town centres such as Barrow In Furness, Carlisle, Kendal, Penrith and Whitehaven has been beneficial. It has helped to secure regeneration environmental improvements and increased choice for customers. However out of centre retail and leisure facilities do compete with town centres. Development that supports the roles of town centres needs to be encouraged. This includes housing and proposals that add to, and complement the range of facilities and services available. In appropriate cases local authorities may need to identify sites for new development.
- 9.4 Its important that the scale of development is well suited to the size and function of the town centre and should not prejudice the role of nearby centres. The design of all new development or redevelopment must be of a high standard and conserve and enhance the best features of Cumbria's towns, including their historic character. Town centres provide an important expression of civic pride and local identity and this must be fostered. **Policy L48-52**

- 9.5 Ease of access to and within town centres is an important factor in ensuring they function well. People without a car must not be disadvantaged. This means providing safe and convenient facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. Such facilities may in addition help to reduce journeys by private car. It is also important that car parks are located and managed to support the role of the centre. In some cases the provision of Park and Ride facilities will be appropriate as part of an integrated approach.
- 9.6 Journeys within towns can be facilitated by the provision of cycle ways and routes for walkers. Public safety and the quality of the environment can be improved by making special provision for, or giving greater priority to, pedestrians, cyclists and people with disabilities. This can be achieved by pedestrianisation, pedestrian priority environments, cycle and walk ways, traffic calming and speed controls. Local Plans should aim to provide infrastructure to ensure that a variety of modes of transport are available. **Policy L4953**
- 9.7 Town centres can be adversely affected by competition from retail, business and leisure facilities developed elsewhere. National and regional guidance requires such development to be tested in accord with a sequential test. That means they should be directed in the first instance to town centres to encourage their vitality and viability. Where no suitable sites are available in the town centre, then a site on the edge of the town centre should be chosen. Only if no suitable sites are available within or on the edge of the town centre, should an out of centre location be considered, and only then if it is accessible by a variety of means of transport. Farm shops, proposed in support of farm diversification consistent with Policy EM14 or where facilities fulfil an essentially local role, addressed in Policy L525 are not subject to this sequential test. **Policy L5054**

Services and Facilities

- 9.8 Whilst town centres will continue to provide the majority of facilities and services there is a need for some local facilities close to the heart of communities. In rural areas, they can help reduce travel and in particular a sense of isolation but local services are in decline. In 2001, 52% of rural parishes lacked a permanent shop, 36% a post office and 21% a Public House²⁴.

Policy L49 53 : Access and town centres

Access to town centres will be encouraged by supporting appropriate levels of public transport, walking, cycling, arrival facilities and appropriate levels and management of car parking. Links to the town centre from these facilities will give priority to pedestrians and cyclists, ensuring safety and attractiveness.

Within town centres opportunities to enhance travel by public transport, walking and cycling and to meet the needs of disabled people will be secured. All new development and land use change will be required to give the highest priority to the pedestrian, cyclist and disabled persons and high priority to public transport.

Developments that improve traffic management, including delivery facilities adjacent to town centres, will be encouraged.

Policy L50 54: Retail, leisure and office development

Proposals for retail, leisure and office development (except Class B1 of the use class order 1987) will be assessed against the sequential approach, with preference being given to development in defined town centre areas, followed by edge of centre locations and finally locations with access to a range of transport modes.

Proposals for retail and leisure use in edge of centre or out of centre locations must be able to demonstrate a need for the development and not prejudice the retention of local services. In addition, proposals in out of centre locations will only be permitted when situated to minimise travel by having a location which:

1. maximises the opportunity for combined trips with other retail and service uses, or
2. relates well to its catchment by reducing journey lengths.

Policy L545: Local services and facilities

Proposals for new, or extensions to, existing local or neighbourhood services and facilities will be supported in towns or villages where their detrimental impact including traffic generation is minimised. Development proposals which through redevelopment or ~~reuse~~ change of use would result in the loss of an important local service or facility will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that the use is no longer viable ~~or~~ and the site or building is not required by the community for a business or community use, is not needed by the community.

Policy L526: Health, education and training facilities

Proposals for new or improved facilities for health, education and training will be supported in key service centres and other towns and villages defined in Local Plans, in locations which relate well to the intended catchment, ~~and~~ which are, or ~~can~~ will be, served by a range of transport modes and where their detrimental impact, including traffic generation, is minimised.

- 9.9 ~~It is therefore important for~~ Local Plans should establish the importance of local centres and facilities and to identify measures, which help to sustain them local facilities. This could include proposals for extensions, refurbishment, parking provision, flexible operating hours or innovative ways of combining services in one property. This approach should apply to a wide range of commercial activities, services and facilities, such as shops, post offices and public houses, doctors' surgeries, places of worship and village halls and leisure facilities. In determining applications for change of use or redevelopment of existing facilities, evidence will be required that property has been extensively marketed to demonstrate that its current use is no longer viable and there is no interest from other businesses of facilities serving the local community. Local communities will be encouraged to undertake Parish Plans identifying the communities needs. Local Planning Authorities should seek to retain premises in business or community use, where at all possible. Policy L515
- 9.10 Access to a wide range of health, education and training facilities is important, to help retain young people within Cumbria, attract investment and promote confidence. The needs of the service providers change as they adapt to new demands and opportunities. Implications for land use planning include the need for refurbishment, new build, expansion or relocation. The most appropriate ~~sites~~ locations for such uses will be those well related to their catchment areas, that can be served by a range of transport, usually town centres and village or local centres. Proposals will need to be supported by Transport Assessments and Travel Plans in line with Policies T30 and T31. **Policy L526**

9.11 Leisure and recreation spaces provide a valuable resource in both rural and urban locations, and help to facilitate cultural events activities, promote healthy living and contribute to the visual quality of the environment. Local Planning Authorities should carry out surveys of the existing and future needs of the community for open space, sport, ~~and~~ recreational and cultural activities and carry out audits of existing facilities. Surveys should also include a qualitative assessment of facilities and consider whether measures are required to improve usage and enhance the quality of the activity provided. Local standards should be developed and set out in Local Plans and these should be used to identify specific needs and areas of shortfall. Where facilities are required by the community it is important that they are protected from development and new sites brought forward to satisfy reasonable needs. This could include the community's need for informal open space such as play space, parks, waterways, footpaths or bridleways, natural greenspace or local nature reserves as well as more formal sport and recreation provision. **Policy L537**

Regional Parks

9.12 Regional Parks have been promoted through the Regional (Economic) Strategy to support the regeneration of urban communities and enhance existing open space networks. In Cumbria regional parks will be targeted on the principal towns in Furness and West Cumbria. The focus of regional parks should be on informal outdoor recreation with limited all weather facilities. They will be much larger than urban parks and could in the case of linear parks be several miles in extent. They should be used to upgrade and improve the appearance of urban fringe environments, urban approaches, transport corridors and derelict and despoiled land and secure landscape and biodiversity enhancement. In addition to providing recreation facilities for urban residents, including a range of sporting facilities they can also provide venues for displays and performing art, and provide attractions for visitors, taking the pressure off popular tourism and leisure facilities. It will be important to provide and extend footpaths, cycleways and bridleways through the regional parks and provide links into urban areas and other leisure areas such as the coast and waterways. **Policy L548**

Policy L537: Leisure and recreation spaces

Formal and informal recreation and leisure space will be met through:

1. the provision to an appropriate standard in new residential development and in areas where a shortfall exists,
2. protection from development in areas where a shortfall can be demonstrated or the space contributes to the quality of the built or natural environment,
3. enhancing the quality of existing open spaces, and
4. bringing forward new sites to address community needs including Local Nature Reserves and amenity uses.

Policy L548: Regional Parks

Favourable consideration will be given to the development of regional parks in the vicinity of Whitehaven / Workington and in the vicinity of Barrow In Furness. The focus should be on promoting access to informal outdoor recreational provision with opportunities taken to upgrade urban fringe environments, promote landscape and biodiversity enhancement, reclaim derelict and contaminated land and extend woodland cover.