

# CHAPTER 13: VILLAGE CENTRES

## INTRODUCTION 3/4

- 13.1 This chapter is concerned with the continuing development of village centres within the Borough. It sets out how the Local Plan will contribute to implementing the Council's Village Centres Strategy and also sets out four general policies relating to new development in the Village Centres.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE BOROUGH AND RECENT TRENDS

- 13.2 There are fourteen Villages within the Borough. Seven of these have been designated 'District Centres' in retail terms, characterised by their physical size and/or the range of uses that they provide. These are Byfleet, Goldsworth Park, Horsell, Knaphill, St. Johns, Sheerwater and West Byfleet. The remaining centres have been designated 'Local Centres', ranging from those settlements with smaller central service areas and a more limited range of functions to those providing only basic services and seldom consisting of more than a handful of non-residential properties. These comprise Brookwood, Kingfield, Mayford, Old Woking, Pyrford, Walton Road, and Westfield. (There are also a number of smaller parades of shops that are dealt with in the Shopping Chapters.)
- 13.3 These centres play a vital role in the life of the Borough as a focus for the districts and neighbourhoods they serve. In performing this role they provide a range of facilities to meet local needs which, depending upon the scale and individual character of the centre, can include retail, local employment, restaurants, leisure uses and community facilities such as halls and open space.
- 13.4 Whilst Village Centres provide a variety of facilities to meet the everyday needs of local residents, it is important to note that they complement the Town Centre - a highly accessible strategic centre serving a wide catchment area and playing host to a large number of major and specialist facilities. Planning policies for the Town Centre are presented in Chapter 12. Therefore, although varying in size and character, the role of Village Centres is essentially local.
- 13.5 The key role traditionally played by these centres in the economic and community life of the Borough has recently come under threat from changing trends in demand and retailing methods, notably brought about by increasing levels of car ownership which have made larger stores and retail parks an attractive option when compared with smaller village outlets. However, in order to meet the economic and environmental needs of the Borough, it is important to reaffirm the importance of the Village Centres as places for living, working and recreation without fundamentally changing their character. As

such, the Village Centres need to offer a full and diverse range of land use activities and facilities.

- 13.6 In environmental terms, a concentration of uses and services to meet local demand at accessible locations throughout the Borough is extremely desirable, reducing the need to travel unnecessarily, thereby helping to limit harmful vehicle emissions and maintaining environmental quality. The Village Centres also provide services to those without private transport and act as foci for community life.

#### NATIONAL/REGIONAL CONTEXT

- 13.7 The policies in this plan are guided by government guidance in the form of Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPG's). Although it is recognised that much government guidance relating to topic areas such as shopping and employment can have implications for the development of villages, only guidance of specific relevance to the Village Centres Chapter is listed below:
- 13.8 *PPG6 - Town Centres and Retail Developments* covers both District and Local Centres and is therefore relevant to the Village Centres. It states that local authorities should encourage a wide range of facilities in District and Local Centres, consistent with the scale and function of the Centre. This will meet people's day to day needs and so reduce the need to travel and dependence on the car.
- 13.9 *PPG12 - Development Plans and Regional Planning Guidance* explains that the 1990 Act requires local plans to include policies in respect of the improvement of the physical environment and goes on to recognise the importance of including policies designed to maintain the character and vitality of town centres.

#### COUNTY PLANNING CONTEXT

- 13.10 The Surrey Structure Plan reflects national and regional policy and provides the strategic policy framework for the Borough. It contains no specific policy guidance that relates to Village Centres other than policy DP16 which seeks to protect the vitality and viability of any nearby town centre from the development of new retail units outside of that town centre and policy DP18, which stresses the importance of maintaining and enhancing the character of town centres, defining townscape, improving the environment, improving transport provision, providing opportunities for small scale activities and ensuring the provision of a diverse range of uses, on an appropriate scale.

#### OBJECTIVES FOR THE VILLAGE CENTRES: VILLAGE CENTRES STRATEGY

- 13.11 The Village Centres have a fundamental role to play in the future development of the Borough. Accordingly, the general objective of the plan is as follows:

***The Council will seek to regenerate the Village Centres so that they may continue to serve their local neighbourhood but without fundamentally altering their character.***

- 13.12 This overall aim draws together the key objectives of the Council's Village Centres Strategy.

- 13.13 This Strategy, adopted in 1996, seeks to promote a new and more diverse role for the villages, providing specific Action Plans for each of the fourteen Centres. These have been developed from the issues identified and discussed at a series of public forums held in 1993 and again in 1995/96 which highlighted issues regarding the local environment, traffic and parking, employment and business, the retention of local shops and community services. Environmental improvements have been carried out to address measures identified in the Action Plans. The nine objectives of the Village Centre Strategy are discussed below together with an explanation of how this local plan seeks to meet each objective.

- 13.14 ***Objective 1 - to promote and diversify the economic role of the villages***

*Relevant Local Plan Policies:*

*EMP1; EMP2; EMP3; EMP8; EMP9; EMP10; SHP1, SHP3-6; REC5; CUS1; VCN2.*

The survival of the Village Centres as foci for community life has been threatened as their primary retail role has declined as patterns of shopping have changed. The land use policies of this plan seek to support the centres retail role by permitting new retail provision and seeking to safeguard the predominant retail characteristics of the centre, so retaining an adequate range of retail uses (SHP3 & 4). At the same time the plan seeks to aid diversification by encouraging small business development (EMP2 & 8) and the provision of hotel and guest house developments on an appropriate scale (EMP9 & 10). More flexible land use policies have been included to find new economic use for vacant shops and other sites (SHP6, EMP2, REC5, CUS1, VCN2). The development of new facilities and extensions of existing facilities for recreation and the arts is also encouraged (REC5).

- 13.15 ***Objective 2 - to develop the role of the Village Centres as sustainable communities, providing a focus for meeting local needs***

*Relevant Local Plan Policies:*

*CUS1; REC5; HSG11, 15 & 16; SHP5; VCN2;*

The overall strategy of the Local Plan seeks to ensure that development is sustainable. This strategy seeks to locate developments that are likely to attract a high number of visitors including retail, office, leisure and community uses at accessible locations so as to reduce the need to travel. Policies CUS1, REC5, SHP5 and VCN2 seek to ensure that such facilities are encouraged to locate in Village Centres. Also policies HSG11, HSG15 & 16 seek to promote residential development within and close to Village Centres where there are a range of facilities and good public transport nearby.

13.16 The Plan's location strategy develops a hierarchy of centres whereby facilities serving a larger catchment locate in centres with the greatest accessibility. The Plan distinguishes between larger (generally more accessible) District Centres and smaller Local Centres. District Centres are identified as generally suitable for a range of Housing, Business, Leisure and Community and Retail Uses, Local Centres being generally suitable for uses on a smaller scale.

13.17 ***Objective 3 - to enable and encourage the community to take responsibility for, and participate in the future of their Village***

*Relevant Local Plan Policies:*

*Local Plan Process*

A fundamental aim of the Village Centres Strategy is to encourage the local community to participate in the future of their village. This has been mainly through a series of Village forums which have helped to establish the needs of each Village. This work will continue as community liaison groups are established and meet on a regular basis. These meetings will continue to discuss a wide range of issues and should provide a useful input into monitoring the implementation and review of the Local Plan. The Local Plan Review process has also contributed to this empowerment process by bringing before the public key land use issues for discussion.

**13.18 Objective 4 - to stimulate, encourage, and co-ordinate public and private investment in the Village Centres**

*Relevant Local Plan Policies:*

*CUS3, 4, & 5; VCN3 & 4; IMP1,2 & 3*

The Local Plan can assist in this aim by presenting a positive attitude towards development, promoting a diversified local economy, adopting a flexible approach to land use (see 13.14 above), and highlighting the Village Centre areas for investment. The plan seeks to maximise the contribution which private investment can make to the community by seeking planning gain from commercial development where possible (Policy IMP3). This can be in the form of improvements to public transport, provision of cycling facilities, provision of public art and other facilities, provision of small industrial units and starter homes, conservation enhancement and improvements to poorly designed areas. Where appropriate the Council can assist in the assembly of sites through the use of its Compulsory Purchase Powers. Additionally, the Community and Utility Services Chapter highlights three specific areas (Community facilities at the Brookwood Hospital Core, Knaphill Library, Sheerwater Health and Community Centre) which may involve a public/private sector partnership.

**13.19 Objective 5 - to make the best use of vacant or under-utilised land and buildings in or adjacent to Village Centres**

*Relevant Local Plan Policies:*

*VCN2*

In order to reduce the need to build on land in the Green Belt beyond the urban area the plan seeks to concentrate development within the existing urban area. Policy VCN2 supports the development of a range of new facilities within Village Centres and recognises the importance of bringing into use vacant and under used sites. Furthermore, policies in the Employment Chapter support the expansion of existing business and the Housing Chapter supports higher densities of development in and around Village Centres.

**13.20 Objective 6 - to provide appropriate parking, cycling and pedestrian facilities in the Village Centres**

*Relevant Local Plan Policies:*

*MV9, MV11, MV12, MV17, MV18,*

Local access to the Village Centres is an important aspect in sustaining their role as centres of Economic and Community Activity. The policies of the Movement Chapter seek to ensure that any new development is accessible to local users by providing adequate parking, cycling and pedestrian facilities, and

by improving pedestrian and cycle routes to the centres. Specific action is planned in Horsell to relieve local parking pressure.

**13.21 *Objective 7 - to seek to alleviate problems associated with traffic on roads in the Village Centres***

*Relevant Local Plan Policies:*

*MV5, MV19,*

Many Village Centres lie on major traffic routes. This can provide a healthy passing income for traders, but can also lead to a deterioration in local environmental quality. Whilst the Local Plan includes proposals to ensure that any new development does not exacerbate existing problems, it also aims to enhance environmental quality, and offers the potential to restrict larger vehicles. Route Management Studies are to be carried out on major roads such as the A247 and A245 which will have implications for the Village Centres of Kingfield, Old Woking and West Byfleet.

**13.22 *Objective 8 - to seek to sustain and improve the provision of public transport between and to the Village Centres***

*Relevant Local Plan Policies:*

*MV2, MV20, MV21*

The provision of convenient and competitive public transport is a key component of the Local Plan. The aim is to give people a realistic alternative to private transport in order to minimise the environmental impact of their movement in the Borough. By capitalizing on the accessibility of the existing Village Centres this will also help to reinforce the role of Villages as local economic and community centres. The plan therefore seeks to promote improvements to public transport services and facilities.

**13.23 *Objective 9 - to protect what is best in the Villages and to take positive steps to maintain and enhance the character and identity of the different Village Centres***

*Relevant Local Plan Policies:*

*BE7 - BE14; VCN2,3 & 4;*

Whilst sharing many things in common, each Village has its own special function and identity, composed of unique open spaces, trees and landscaping, building forms and patterns of use. The Plan includes proposals to protect Statutorily and Locally Listed Buildings (Policies BE10-14) and Village Conservation Areas at Old Woking, St. Johns, Byfleet, West Byfleet and Horsell. In terms of new development the plan seeks to support development in the Village Centres which respects and enhances their character (Policy

VCN2). Generally, development will be expected to maintain and enhance this character. Policies of the Built Environment Chapter also seek to retain and enhance the best aspects of the Village Centres by resisting the loss of open space where it makes a positive contribution to the visual amenity of the area and designating new conservation areas (Policy BE8).

13.24 The Plan sets out general planning policies for particular subjects, many of which are key policies necessary to achieve the regeneration of the Borough's Village Centres. However, these need to be supplemented by a series of specific policies designed to focus on the general needs and role of Village Centres. The policies for Village Centres and Neighbourhoods are set out over the following pages.

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## POLICIES

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- 13.25 The following policies aim to guide development in the Village Centres. In land use planning terms these seek to encourage the location of development within a hierarchy of centres, guide the scale of development in order to protect and enhance the fundamental character of the Village Centres and stimulate regeneration. Policies are also included with regard to planning benefits which amplify and emphasise the importance of securing environmental enhancement and improvements to access specifically within the Village. These supplement general policies elsewhere in the Plan covering these issues.

### VCN1 VILLAGE CENTRES

VILLAGE CENTRES ARE DEFINED AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP

### VCN2 SCALE OF DEVELOPMENT

WITHIN THE VILLAGE CENTRES THE COUNCIL WILL PERMIT PROPOSALS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF BUSINESS, COMMUNITY, LEISURE, RESIDENTIAL AND RETAIL USES WHERE THEY ARE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE RELEVANT POLICIES ELSEWHERE IN THE PLAN AND WHERE:

- (i) THEY ARE OF A FORM AND ON A SCALE THAT WOULD NOT DAMAGE OR ALTER THE FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTER OF THE VILLAGE CENTRES; AND
- (ii) THE PROPOSED USE WOULD NOT HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT UPON THE AMENITY OF NEIGHBOURING USES; AND
- (iii) THEY CAN DEMONSTRATE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE REGENERATION AND VITALITY OF THE CENTRE.

### JUSTIFICATION

- 13.26 The Council has defined thirteen villages throughout the Borough as 'Village Centres' within the context of this Plan to which policies VCN1 and VCN2 will apply. The fourteenth Village, Mayford, is defined as a Settlement in the Green

Belt' where policy GRB4 will apply. The Village Centre boundaries are shown on the Proposals Map. Generally the boundary is drawn to include only the area where non-residential uses predominate. Exceptionally, because it has no single identifiable centre, Walton Road has been defined to enclose a wider Local Area. As a consequence of this, the Walton Road Local Area includes some predominantly residential areas. All fourteen Villages have been identified in the Shopping Chapter, relative to size and retail function, as either District or Local Centres. It is important to note that whilst the Shopping Chapter designates further Local Centres, the policies of this chapter only apply to those that are identified in Policy VCN1.

- 13.27 Changes in demand for small shops have meant that the traditional retailing role of the village centres is diminishing. As a result it will be important to develop a new role for villages which reflects this reality without fundamentally changing the scale and character of the centres as places providing for a range of local needs. A key element in sustaining this new role will be encouraging the integration of a wider range of uses such as business, community, leisure, residential and retail units, appropriate to the village's size and population catchment area.
- 13.28 Within many of the Village Centres there are a number of sites that are either vacant or under-used. This policy permits the development of such sites where they would make a positive economic and/or environmental contribution to the diversification of the role of the Village Centre, because the successful regeneration and establishment of vitality is critical to the continuing survival of the Village Centres. Proposals that make a positive contribution to this aim will typically generate local activity, encourage visitors and generally increase the number of people in and around the centre.
- 13.29 In assessing whether a development is appropriate in a Village Centre the scale, type and form of the proposal will be key criteria. Policies elsewhere in the plan provide more specific guidance on the appropriate scale and type of development. These include policies EMP1 & 2 (Business), SHP1, 3, 4, 5 & 6 (Retail), REC5 (Recreation) and CUS1 (Community and Utility Facilities). Policies SHP1 and EMP2 provide guidance on the appropriate maximum levels of floorspace for retail and business use, whereas other policies set out more general criteria. In all cases consideration needs to be given to the size of the particular Village Centre and the individual units within it when assessing the acceptability of any individual development.
- 13.30 Special regard should be had to the physical form and quality of new development in the Village Centres in order to ensure that the individual and distinctive character of the centre is reinforced. In this respect general policies of the plan on matters such as design and parking will also be important.

13.31 Development proposals for any of the uses suggested in this policy should not result in the loss of other desirable land uses protected in this plan, such as residential or retail uses. The retention of a diverse range of uses in the Village Centres is key to their future vitality. Development should also pay due regard to existing residential amenity in accordance with the other policies of this plan.



WEST BYFLEET

VCN3    Ÿ    COMMUNITY    BENEFIT:    ENVIRONMENTAL  
ENHANCEMENT

WHEN CONSIDERING DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS, THE COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO SECURE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WORKS TO ENHANCE THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE VILLAGE CENTRE IN SUCH A WAY AS TO MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE REGENERATION AND VITALITY OF THE VILLAGE CENTRE.

JUSTIFICATION

13.32 Within the Village Centres, the Council will support a range of uses and developments that make a positive contribution to the regeneration and vitality of the Village Centre. Clearly, the re-use of vacant and under used sites will contribute towards this aim. However, the physical environment of Village Centres is also critical to their regeneration and a resident's willingness to make use of

them. Furthermore, an attractive physical environment is more likely to attract continuing private development interest.

13.33 Where relevant to the development, the Council will apply its Planning Benefit Policy (IMP3) to enable the Council to secure contributions towards environmental improvements or other community benefits. However, the provision of a planning benefit will not render a normally unacceptable development acceptable. Whilst benefits cannot be required they can make a positive contribution to the environment of the Village Centre. The Village Centre Strategy has identified a need for a wide range of improvements. Examples of benefit which could be provided include:

- § Repaving
- § Street Furniture
- § Trees and Landscaping
- § Community Information Boards
- § Refurbishment of Statutorily and Locally Listed Buildings
- § Improvement of Eyesore Buildings
- § Public Art
- § Signing

13.34 The redevelopment of an area of poor layout and design may also be regarded as meeting the needs of this policy.

**VCN4    ÿ    COMMUNITY    BENEFIT:    IMPROVEMENTS    TO    ACCESSIBILITY**

WHEN CONSIDERING DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS, THE COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO SECURE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WORKS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO THE VILLAGE CENTRE, IN SUCH A WAY AS TO MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE REGENERATION AND VITALITY OF THE VILLAGE CENTRE. PARTICULAR PRIORITY WILL BE GIVEN:

- (i) TO IMPROVEMENTS TO PEDESTRIAN, CYCLE AND DISABLED ACCESS; AND
- (ii) TO THE PROVISION OF AMPLE VEHICLE PARKING ON SITE, PARTICULARLY WITHIN VILLAGES WHERE PARKING IS AT A PREMIUM
- (iii) TO THE PROVISION OF CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARD FACILITIES THAT WOULD IMPROVE THE ACCESSIBILITY OF VILLAGE CENTRES BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT

DEVELOPMENTS RESULTING IN A LOSS OF PUBLIC PARKING IN VILLAGE CENTRES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED WHERE THIS WOULD RESULT IN A SHORTAGE OF VISITOR PARKING. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS WHICH DO NOT MEET THE COUNCIL'S PUBLISHED PARKING STANDARDS IN FULL ARE UNLIKELY TO BE ACCEPTABLE.

#### JUSTIFICATION

13.35 Access within and to the Village Centres is of great importance. The District Centres attract a larger number of visitors by a variety of means. Some people drive, some people use public transport, some people cycle and some people walk. It is of critical importance to ensure that facilities are provided so as to encourage more sustainable means of transport and to give people a choice, whether this means providing facilities for the disabled and those with pushchairs, cycle racks and cycle paths, or improved public parking. The Council has adopted a Strategy for Access in Woking to meet the needs of people with disability and mobility problems including people with pushchairs or prams. Suitable provisions include crossing facilities and ramps. Due to their smaller catchment areas, the Local Centres have the potential to attract a greater number of people by foot and cycle. Particular attention will need to be given to the provision of pedestrian, disabled and cycle facilities. However, the provision of a planning benefit will not render a normally unacceptable development acceptable. In applying this policy, the Council will have regard to policy IMP3.

13.36 Examples of benefit which could be provided include:

- § Improvements and Facilities for the Disabled
- § Cycle Facilities
- § Extra Public Parking
- § Traffic Calming
- § Public Transport Services
- § Bus Lanes
- § Bus Shelters
- § Improved Information

13.37 The Council recognises that convenient publicly available parking is crucial to the successful regeneration of the Villages. However, in many Centres public parking is extremely limited. Therefore, when considering any development proposal for the Village Centres, particular care will be taken, where parking is at a premium, to accommodate full parking provision on site. The Council will seek to encourage increases in parking where floorspace is increased and through applications for Changes of Use where feasible. Furthermore, development proposals resulting in a loss of public parking will be resisted where this might undermine the regeneration

and operation of the settlement, for instance where this would result in a shortage of short stay visitor parking.