

Draft: Retail floorspace in Brentford.

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1. Introduction.

The Local Plan (2015) sets out its objectives for ensuring the vitality of our town centres with particular emphasis on Hounslow and Brentford.

Policy TC1 identifies Brentford as “a District Centre which struggles to fulfil that role”

Policy TC2 states that “we will approach the regeneration of our town centres with particular emphasis on Hounslow and Brentford – linked to the broader regeneration of their locations”

Policy TC3 states that “we will support the Council’s regeneration objectives by directing growth of retail uses to the borough town centres.

Despite these clear objectives there appear to be proposals for new retail floor space in Brentford outside the town centre which could threaten its success and vitality.

We ask that the Council commission a thorough review of the need for retail space in and outside the Brentford Town Centre, taking into account the increasing local population, the policies and proposals to reduce reliance on private cars and improve connectivity, increasing on-line sales and other factors and to make proposals which would guide decisions on planning applications for retail floorspace in Brentford.

2. Brentford Town Centre.

The South side of Brentford is now undergoing phased reconstruction which will include provision of larger shops and smaller premises. It is not known whether any up-to-date assessment has been made as to whether the new provision will be sufficient to meet the predicted needs of the expanding Brentford community.

Additional retail floor space on the site of the Morrison store and car park

has been granted. It is not known whether an assessment has been made of the need for this additional floor space nor whether the current proposals could be modified.

The review should give guidance on any proposals for retail or associated uses on the north side of the High Street.

The centre's future success will largely depend on its accessibility. Currently the proposals include less car parking. While this is in line with the Mayor's policy to reduce reliance on private cars it could inhibit shoppers who will have heavy goods to take home. It should be noted that journeys to Chiswick and Richmond would involve crossing the north/south circular and paying a daily congestion charge.

An assessment of the importance of private cars should be included in the review.

It is understood that the officers currently believe that there are sufficient bus routes serving the town centre. It is possible that with the reduced reliance on private cars more public transport will be required, possibly by adjusting bus routes and/or by adding hopper bus services.

One possibility which has already been put forward would make Half Acre and South Ealing Road one way. This would take the 65 bus closer to the town centre and improve the pavements and landscaping between Brentford station and the town centre.

Reference has also been made to the fact that Brentford would be the town centre for residents living in or close to the former Homebase and Tesco sites. The schemes which are before the Council would generate over 4,000 additional cycles and would clearly need new proposals to improve connectivity.

The review should take account of the need to improve connectivity and assess realistic timetables and funding predictions for these improvements.

3. Out of Town Retail.

The Tesco superstore at Osterley has probably affected the viability of the Brentford Town Centre more than any other retail outlet.

The proposed review should evaluate the impact the present Tesco store has had on Brentford Town Centre and calculate whether the proposed relocated Tesco would have a greater or less impact on the Town Centre.

The Great West Road is also the location of other retail outlets for carpets, IT, white goods, cars, etc. Some of these uses may disappear when sites on the Great West Road are redeveloped for employment and/or housing which may in turn affect the vitality of the town centre.

Some convenience retail floor space opened comparatively recently (on Boston Manor Road) and in the Northwest Quarter or is due to open shortly (new supermarket close to Chiswick roundabout).

Further retail floorspace is proposed in the Great West Corridor Local Plan Review and there are indications of still further retail elements in the planning pipe line.

Additionally preliminary discussions are being held to guide development at Albany Parade. The parade at Busch Corner may be affected by the opening of the Green School for boys.

Taken together they propose far more retail floor space than is likely to be accommodated in the town centre.

The review should examine the quantum of out of town retail floorspace which may be required in Brentford to provide for local needs and to protect the vitality of the town centre.

4. Connectivity.

Although the GWC Review does not fully examine how to improve connectivity in Brentford nor how to ensure that new routes help to re-establish the town centre as the focal point, it does show the general need for these improvements.

With the Mayor's objective of reducing reliance on cars, with the need for better paths, for a better landscape, for more cycle routes and better public transport it will be necessary to review connectivity and to relate practical options to the vitality of the town centre.

Among the many issues are:

Cycle super highway 9.

Secure space for locking many hundred cycles at focal points

Improving the link between Brentford Station and Brentford Town Centre

Opening up the canal- side walk near Commerce Road.

Completing Thames side path with Thames Landscape Strategy including the proposed Ham footbridge and route through Syon Park.

Safe routes parallel to the A4. and generally improved disabled access.

Improvements to connectivity will enhance the importance of the town centre.

The Review should note which improvements are practicable and the realistic programmes for achieving them in assessing the area and type of the retail space which should be provided in the town centre.

5. Enhancing the Town Centre.

The existing town centre was built on both sides of the Roman Road to Bath. It maintained this primary function as the travellers went by horse drawn carriages serviced in local hostels.

Today the Highway is congested with commuter traffic at rush hours making it unsafe for children and the elderly to cross except at one designated point.

As speed limits are reduced it may be possible to re-design the whole of the public realm, the pavements and roadways. to meet the needs of pedestrians wishing to cross the highway freely, and in reverse the order of priority to meet the needs first of pedestrians, then of cyclists and last of vehicular traffic.

In Urban Design terms the whole of the space between the facades on both sides of the High Street represent a single urban space which needs to be designed as a whole to meet all the needs of the focal point of our community.

The fact that nearly all the new retail floor space is on the South side of the High Street, that all the off street parking will be on the south side and that the majority of residents living close to the centre lie on the north side will mean that many people will want to be able to cross and re-cross the High Street frequently.

The Review should contribute to the design brief for the new Brentford Town Centre.

Brentford is blessed in having direct access to the river Brent and to water-side activities.

On the north side of the town centre development along both sides of Lion Way may come to be incorporated in the town centre.

Many residents have objected to the excessive height of the new flats to be built in the centre. It is particularly unfortunate that some of the highest buildings will cast long winter shadows over the public realm and dominate

the central space. If any opportunities occur to reduce their impact they should be taken. This particularly applies to the council block on the site of the former Nat West Bank and to block A behind the Beehive.

The new paving in the town centre is particularly welcome.

A permanent market could contribute to the vitality of the centre.

The BCC has already drafted suggestions to guide the future redevelopment of the whole of the north side of the centre, (See annexe 1).

It is to be hoped that this Review will focus our residents and our council's attention on the significant opportunities to create a truly vibrant centre in Brentford and encourage investors with the confidence they need to make our town centre a spectacular success.