

Economy and Town Centre

Purpose

To achieve sustainable growth and development, including enhancing retail areas, attracting employment and creating local economic opportunity and realising the social and economic potential of Lowestoft's heritage.

Rationale and Evidence

National Policy

Rapid changes to the retail and leisure necessitate a more flexible and positive approach to planning for the future of town centres, especially following on from COVID impacts. Paragraph 20 of the NPPF states that strategic policies should make "sufficient provision" for retail, leisure and other commercial development. Paragraph 85 states that meeting anticipated needs for town centre uses should not be compromised by limited site availability, it suggests review of town centre boundaries can take place to meet these needs. In line with Paragraph 185, plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment. In developing their strategy, plan-making bodies should identify specific opportunities within their area for the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets

Local Policy

Local Plan policies in the Retail, Leisure and Town Centres chapter provide support for economic development through specific policies on 'New Town Centre Use Development', 'Vitality and Viability of Town Centres' and 'Local Shopping Centres'. The Local Plan identifies within the economic profile for Lowestoft (p13) that:

"The town's economy benefits from its strong links to Great Yarmouth, which also profits from the offshore sector. Tourism is an important sector to the town, and its unique position between the Broads and the sandy beaches on the North Sea help attract high numbers of tourists each year. The town is quite self-contained with 54% of working people living in the town also working in the town. However, an increasing number of residents are commuting to Great Yarmouth for work."

The Local Plan further states that Lowestoft's economy has shifted from fishing and manufacturing in recent years and recognises potential for future jobs growth in offshore renewables and the significant benefits from the Port of Lowestoft.

The Local Plan also states:

“Lowestoft town centre acts as a day-to-day shopping centre for residents of the town and the surrounding area. However, its catchment is quite small, given its coastal location and competition from nearby centres of Great Yarmouth and Norwich. The town centre has suffered in recent years with higher levels of vacant shop units and residents consider that the shopping offer could be better.”

Planning Rationale

Lowestoft is recognised as a place to invest by different industries due to its access to the North Sea and lower operating costs, fueling demand for leisure, community and retail. To offer employees a healthy life/work balance, East Suffolk Council aims to improve this offer across Lowestoft, with the town centre at its core.

The following policies recognise the need for Town Centre and Historic High Street to diversify. Retail alone will not create a competitive town centre. The whole offer needs to be considered, including retail, food and drink, entertainment, community facilities, culture, recreation and other uses that draw people into the area. The historic environment is also an important factor in making the Town Centre attractive. The Historic High Street in particular has potential to create a magnet for visitors, perhaps based more on independent businesses. Lower rentals mean that the area can support enterprise, independent business and start-ups.

The bustling town centre is surrounded by a mix of residential housing and industry an [Enterprise Zone](#) and the seafront tourist area. It is served by the central railway station with direct links to Norwich, Ipswich and London.

There are three Enterprise Zones in Lowestoft (South Lowestoft Industrial Site, Riverside Road and Mobbs Way), designed to fast track development on vacant employment land and encourage business investment. They represent an ideal relocation area to unlock future development opportunities in and around Lowestoft. Businesses relocating to the enterprise zones can apply for up to 3 years of Business Rate Relief.

Enhancing the public realm by improving accessibility and developing the urban landscape, will act as a catalyst for investment and link the whole Lowestoft area from the south beach to the Heritage Action Zone. Development of the former post office and Battery Green car park will address the need for a central leisure offer, whilst residential developments and the utilisation of vacant properties will develop the area as a community hub, following the aims of the Waveney Local Area Plan.

Repopulation of the town centre based on conversion of upper floors and new build development around the edges has potential to make it far more vibrant (see also next chapter on 'Living').

ETC1: Lowestoft Town Centre and Historic High Street

- 1. The Town Centre is defined as the retail core, Historic High Street, London Road north and south and railway station retail areas (see plan **).**
- 2. The refurbishment or extension of sites and buildings in and around the Town Centre will be supported, subject to meeting other requirements of this and other policies.**
- 3. Redevelopment of buildings will be supported, providing it does not involve the demolition of listed buildings or a buildings in a Conservation Area that contribute positively to the special architectural or historic interest of the area.**
- 4. Ground floor street-frontage units must remain in appropriate town centre uses. Appropriate town centre uses include shops, financial or professional services, food and drink, pubs, leisure and recreational uses, community facilities, and other open to the public.**
- 5. Residential uses will be supported for upper levels or sites peripheral to the town centre, but not for ground floor street-frontage units. Upwards extension will be supported, subject to meeting the requirements of design and other policies.**
- 6. Ground floor street frontages must retain or create shop fronts or other active frontages;**
- 7. Reuse and refurbishment of listed buildings and buildings in the Town Centre Conservation Area, will be supported, providing the scheme preserves the buildings and their settings and preserves or enhances the character or appearance or special architectural or historic interest of the Conservation Area.**
- 8. Conditions relating to the hours of operation of uses may be considered where necessary to protect residential amenity.**

Interpretation and Guidance

The policy recognises the need for high street ground floors to remain as town centre uses, but recognises that this is not just about retail, but other uses such as food and drink and personal services. The policy also recognises that upper floors can accommodate a range of commercial uses or hotels or residential accommodation. Appropriate town centre uses include those falling within Use Classes E and F1.

The policy does aim to repopulate retail areas through residential development. This requires some care and possible use of conditions to avoid conflicts between residential development and evening commercial uses.

ETC2: Historic Town Hall Regeneration

- 1. Change of use of the Town Hall to provide a creative hub will be supported (see Plan **). This may include enterprise space, meeting space, work space, a café and other uses to support creative and knowledge-based businesses and activities.**
- 2. Conversion works for the Town Hall must preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the building and retain features of interest.**
- 3. Change of use of land adjacent to the historic town hall for parking, servicing and other uses connected with the regeneration of the building will be supported (see Plan **). This is subject to provision of a high-quality scheme for the layout, surfacing and landscaping of the site.**
- 4. Development of the land adjacent to the Town Hall for other purposes that would compromise the reuse of the building will not be supported, unless alternative parking and servicing space is provided nearby.**

Interpretation and Guidance

The policy recognises the need for servicing areas to support the regeneration of the historic town hall and ensures that any such scheme is carried out to a high standard.

ETC3: Enterprise, Employment and Tourism

- 1. New business and enterprise uses will be supported in sustainable locations, including:**
 - a) Newbuild development, redevelopment or reuse of floorspace within the Town Centre, subject to the requirements set out in Policy ETC1;**
 - b) Within existing business or industrial areas outside of the Town Centre, providing there are safeguards to prevent change of use to retail;**
 - c) As part of mixed-use development on strategic housing sites allocated by the Local Plan, meeting the requirements of Policy SW3;**
 - d) Suitable schemes to reuse historic buildings or to bring vacant community buildings back into use.**
 - e) Schemes to create hot desking or co-working space close to residential areas.**

- 2. Support for business and enterprise development is subject to there being no significant adverse impacts on the amenities of local residents or the local environment, including through visual, noise, pollution, vibration or other impacts.**
- 3. Newbuild development must include infrastructure within sites for fast broadband connectivity.**

Interpretation and Guidance

The policy sets out suitable locations where employment, enterprise and tourism development will be supported, subject to consideration of impacts. This helps to ensure that existing retail areas and employment areas remain viable and encourages the reuse of vacant historic or community buildings (this could include designated and non-designated heritage, or disused schools and public houses).

It is recognised that much employment involves home working. However, homeworkers often also need meeting space or occasional desk space. The policy supports development to create co-working space.