

SHOPPING AND TOWN CENTRES

INTRODUCTION AND PLANNING CONTEXT

- 12.1 Shopping is an activity which is constantly changing and evolving in response to changes in the retail industry, patterns of consumer spending and demands, the national and local economy and technology (for example shopping via the internet). Shopping is also very significant in terms of its importance to the economy, employing about 10% of the UK workforce and creating over 20% of new jobs. As well as being a necessity, shopping is also a major social activity for many people and in this respect the quality of the shopping experience, particularly in town centres, is associated with a wider range of facilities and activities than just shops. It includes being able to visit cafes and restaurants, banking and professional services and leisure facilities. Access to these services is therefore important to the quality of peoples' lives, as is the quality of the shopping environment itself. The existence of attractive and safe walkways, good street furniture, town squares and convenient seating areas all contribute to how a centre is viewed by its users.
- 12.2 It is important that the Local Plan sets out a clear policy framework for guiding shopping development and helping to maintain thriving town centres. The traditional shopping facilities for the residents of the Vale are the town centres of Abingdon, Wantage and Faringdon; the shopping centres at Botley and Grove; local centres in Abingdon, Wantage and Faringdon; and village shops. In addition, Abingdon and Botley now have well established out-of-centre shopping facilities at Fairacres and Seacourt respectively. There are also other forms of retail development throughout the district including garages/filling stations, and their ancillary shops, garden centres and plant nurseries. Competition has grown for local spending as shopping centres and out-of-centre retail developments attract customers across district boundaries. Shops in the Vale face competition from sub-regional shopping centres at Oxford, Reading, Swindon and Newbury; and accessibility to London's shopping attractions has improved as a result of regular and affordable bus services from Oxford to the capital.
- 12.3 The aims of the Local Plan (as set out in Chapter 2) include aim 6: 'to ensure that the main settlements of Abingdon, Botley, Faringdon, Grove and Wantage are attractive places for living, working and pursuing leisure interests'. In order to achieve this, the Council will seek to safeguard and promote the vitality and viability of the town centres and the local centres at Botley and Grove and to reduce traffic congestion and improve conditions for cyclists and pedestrians.

Structure of this Chapter

12.4 Policies and proposals in this chapter are broadly consistent with and follow the *Local Plan Strategy* set out in Chapter 3. For the main settlements, policies are put forward for:

- defined town centre areas at Abingdon, Wantage and Faringdon and the uses within them;
- existing shopping centres at the main settlements of Grove and Botley, and local shopping centres at Abingdon, Wantage and Faringdon;
- for Didcot, provision is made for new local shops in the proposed neighbourhood and district centres associated with the town's western development (part of which is located within the Vale);
- provision is made for new local shops and retail services within the proposed mixed use local centre associated with the strategic housing site at the former airfield west of Grove.

In the predominantly rural parts of the Vale, policies focus on:

- small-scale local shops within villages;
- garages and garage shops.

(Policies dealing with developments such as farm shops and pubs can be found in Chapters 11 and 9 respectively).

12.5 There is widespread concern that increased numbers of cars and goods vehicles has led to congestion, noise and air pollution. Accordingly, aim 3 of this local plan, as identified in Chapter 2 is 'to reduce the need to travel and the harmful effects of traffic on people and the environment'. Furthermore policy GS10, a key element in the overall local plan strategy, states that 'new development will only be permitted in locations where the need to travel, particularly by car, can be minimised'. In the interests of encouraging sustainable development and reducing the need to travel, this chapter includes a range of policies aimed at achieving this objective.

12.6 It is inevitable that there will be overlap with policies in other chapters, and appropriate cross-referencing is included in the supporting text to aid understanding of the more complex and interrelated issues.

12.7 In framing policies for this Local Plan the Council has taken full account of planning advice from central government, regional planning guidance, and policies in the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. The findings of a report by Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners Ltd on shopping in the Vale (dated 1991) and its review

(in 1996) are also still relevant, as are the results of consultation through the Local Plan Issues Report (published in 2000). Town centre surveys undertaken more recently have also influenced the Council's thinking. These factors are considered briefly below.

Planning Guidance from Central Government

12.8 Current government advice to planning authorities on shopping related issues is contained in PPS6: *Planning for Town Centres* (2005) and PPG13: *Transport* (2001). PPS6 emphasises the role of existing town centres, clearly stating that the government's key objective for town centres is to promote the 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.

There are other Government objectives which need to be taken into account in the context of the key objective above:

- enhancing consumer choice and allow genuine choice to meet the needs of the entire community;
- supporting efficient, competitive and innovative retail, leisure, tourism and other sectors, with improving productivity; and
- improving accessibility, ensuring good access by a choice of means of transport.

12.9 The potential for reducing the need to travel, and reliance on the private car, are key government objectives. This view is emphasised in both PPG13 and PPS6, which advise that shopping should be promoted in existing town centres which are more likely to offer access by a choice of means of transport. PPS6 also places emphasis on a sequential approach being taken to the location of new retail development.

Regional Policy Background

12.10 *Regional Planning Guidance for the South East* (RPG9), published in March 2001, emphasises the importance of urban renaissance incorporating mechanisms to revive and rejuvenate town centres. The regional guidance acknowledges that town centres have suffered from the last recession and from the diversion of investment to out-of-centre retail developments. To reverse this trend there is a need to focus retail development in town centres and to avoid further development in out-of-centre locations. In preparing development plans, the guidance advises that local authorities should assess the need for retail, leisure and office development in their area. It suggests that town and district improvement strategies and management schemes can help to improve the vitality and viability of centres. These will require a close partnership between retailers and other town centre interests including local authorities.

The Oxfordshire Structure Plan

- 12.11 The Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2011 (policy TC1) states that further shopping provision will be permitted in the existing shopping centres of Banbury and Oxford to meet the comparison and specialised requirements of the population of the wider catchment areas of these towns. In respect of Oxford, the wider catchment area includes a significant part of the Vale. Whilst the principal locations for major new shopping development will be in the country towns of Banbury, Bicester, Didcot and Witney (policy TC2), the Structure Plan permits proposals for shopping development sufficient to meet the day-to-day shopping needs of the local population in towns and villages throughout the county (policy TC3), including settlements in the Vale. (This approach is continued in the plan to 2016.)
- 12.12 Structure Plan policy TC4 (TC2 of the plan to 2016) reflects government guidance in PPS6, confirming that major new development in towns should be located in accordance with the sequential approach. First preference should be for town centre sites, followed by edge-of-centre sites, district and local centres, and only then in out-of-centre locations that are accessible by a choice of means of transport. Proposals should sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres by, amongst other things, extending the range and quality of shops and other central facilities and encouraging a diversity of uses, including residential accommodation.

Shopping Study Review (1991) and Further Review (1996)

- 12.13 In February 1991, the Council commissioned consultants Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners to undertake a review and update of the 1979 Abingdon Shopping Study. The brief extended the scope of the study to include the other main centres in the district (Wantage, Grove, Faringdon and Botley) along with out-of-centre retailing sites and local or neighbourhood shops. In March 1996, the Council commissioned the same consultants to undertake a further review of their earlier work taking into account new government advice on the sequential approach to the location of new retail development. This would enable new policies to be incorporated into the emerging district wide Local Plan. The 1996 Review looked at the need and potential for additional retail floorspace of various kinds in the existing shopping centres and in edge or out-of-centre locations. The availability of development sites to meet the potential for different types of shopping was also considered.
- 12.14 A summary of the consultants' conclusions and recommendations is set out in supplementary guidance. In general terms, the more recent 1996 review confirmed the findings of the earlier study, concluding that taking into account existing and committed provision of out-of-centre convenience stores in and around the Vale, the district is amply provided for. Any new convenience floorspace should be located in the town centre of Wantage where it would help to improve the quality of the centre and bring significant benefits. No further

major convenience floorspace is required in Abingdon. There is scope for further non-food shopping in the town centres of both Abingdon and Wantage and they could be enhanced by, for example, further encouraging tourism, improving the environment and pedestrian circulation and making better use of existing car parks.

Local Consultation

12.15 The Local Plan Issues Report (August 2000) sought views on whether the vitality and viability of the district's town centres would benefit from allowing throughout the centres a wider range of uses. It was suggested that this could help to make them more attractive to local residents, shoppers and visitors and would fit better with changing retail patterns. Such uses could include restaurants, bars, cafes and leisure facilities which would benefit the evening economy of the towns, as well as residential accommodation, including in particular, flats above shops. The response from public consultation was overwhelmingly in favour of such an approach and Oxfordshire County Council as the strategic planning authority confirmed that a relaxation of the current more restrictive policies would be in line with the Structure Plan.

Town Centre Surveys

12.16 The Council has recently undertaken a composition study to identify all the ground floor uses in the shopping streets of the three town centres. The results were then compared with the findings of the studies undertaken by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (referred to above). The composition study identified three key changes to the town centres over the last 11 years, as follows:

- i) the town centres have all contracted in size and the trend appears to be towards further contraction. There has been a move towards changes of use to residential on the margins of the town centre area and this seems to be continuing;
- ii) there has been little change in the overall number of vacant units in Abingdon Town Centre but in Wantage and Faringdon a marked reduction was revealed. Although the number of vacant units in Abingdon increased very slightly only about five or six of these have been vacant on a long-standing basis. The survey results reveal the following statistics:
 - Abingdon:1991 = 11 vacant units, Feb 2002 = 12 vacant units
 - Wantage: 1991 = 25 vacant units, Feb 2002 = 7 vacant units
 - Faringdon:1991 = 7 vacant units, Feb 2002 = 3 vacant units;
- iii) there has been a decrease of about 10% in class A1 shop units in both Abingdon town centre (from a total of 119 to 108 units) and Wantage town centre (from a total of 97 to 85 units). These have occurred predominantly within the secondary frontages. In Faringdon town centre

the overall number of retail units has stayed broadly the same (36 to 38 units respectively). The changes of use in these centres have been mainly to A2 uses (banks, building societies, financial and professional services) and A3 uses (restaurants, pubs, cafes).

- 12.17 In 2004 the Council commissioned Nathaniel Lichfield to carry out a review of their 1996 study. This, together with the recent town centre composition study, underpins the shopping policies in this chapter, as set out below.

POLICIES AND PROPOSALS

The Location of New Retail Development

- 12.18 It is the Council's intention to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of the Vale's existing shopping centres and to oppose proposals for shopping developments which could put at risk its strategy for these centres. This aim is in accordance with up-to-date government guidance, the Oxfordshire Structure Plan and the recommendations of the Council's consultants.
- 12.19 For this Local Plan period up to 2011, the Council still accepts the conclusions put forward in Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners 1996 Shopping Study Review, i.e. that no further large out-of-centre or edge-of-town food stores are needed within the district. At Wantage, the Study Review recognised that provision to meet the needs of the town for food shopping would be met by a planning permission for a major development at Limborough Road comprising a foodstore and other retail units. This permission has now been superseded by a new proposal for a Sainsbury food store, seven comparison goods shop units and six retail warehouse units, for which planning permission was granted in February 2002. The Council is satisfied that this new permission will meet the needs of Wantage for food shopping.
- 12.20 The 1996 Review confirmed that the Vale is also well served in qualitative and quantitative terms with non-food retail warehouse floorspace both within and beyond its boundaries. Significant provision within the Vale exists at Seacourt, Botley (close to the Oxford Ring Road), and at Fairacres, Abingdon (close to the Marcham Road). The Review also confirmed that the provision of additional non-food shopping as part of the planning permission at Limborough Road (referred to above) would meet the scope for additional floorspace in Wantage and enable the town centre to maintain and enhance its position in the retail hierarchy. This permission has since been superseded by the new proposal in 2002, described above, which the Council is satisfied will meet the needs of the town for non-food retail floorspace.

The Sequential Approach to the Location of New Retail Development

- 12.21 The Local Plan seeks to keep town centres as a whole relatively compact. Compact town centres, where a range of town centre shops, services and facilities are reasonably close together, have the advantage of being convenient for town centre users and are more likely to be sustainable in terms of being within walking distance of town centre bus stops, cycle parks or car parks. The outward spread of retail development could put at risk the vitality of a town centre which needs to remain compact to function effectively. Furthermore, commercial activities should not be allowed to encroach on residential areas because of the potential damaging effects of parking, servicing or advertising associated with such activities.
- 12.22 In preparing policies for this Local Plan the Council has paid regard to government advice in PPS6 (as referred to above) which states that in drawing up their development plans local planning authorities should, after considering the need for new development, adopt a sequential approach to selecting sites for new retail development. Adopting a sequential approach means that the first preference should be for town centre sites, where suitable sites or buildings suitable for conversion are available, followed by edge-of-centre sites, district and local centres and only then out-of-centre sites in locations that are accessible by a choice of means of transport. It should be demonstrated that all potential town centre options have been thoroughly assessed before less central sites are considered for development. The guidance states that if there is no need or capacity for further developments, there will be no need to identify additional sites in the town.
- 12.23 In relation to the above, the Council is satisfied that adequate provision exists or has been made for new retail development for both food and non-food shopping in the main town centres. Therefore in respect of the sequential test there is no need to look any further than the town centres for the location of new retail development and no need to identify any additional sites. Furthermore, it is appropriate for the local plan to include a policy to allow retail development (including re-development) in the town centres but to resist proposals involving the expansion of such development beyond them. This will facilitate the concentration of retail uses in order to maintain town centre vitality and viability and will provide shopping facilities at a focal point which is accessible to those who travel by public transport or on foot to shop.

Hierarchy of New Retail Provision

- 12.24 In accordance with PPS6, including the sequential test, the general policy for the location of new retail development (policy S1 below) sets out a hierarchy of shopping provision. This approach is also consistent with the general strategy for guiding the location of development in the Local Plan, as set out in Chapter 3. The hierarchy is described briefly below starting with town centre areas, followed by existing local shopping centres at Grove, Botley, Abingdon, Wantage

and Faringdon, and the policies for small-scale shops within villages. Outside these locations retail development will not be permitted unless it is in accordance with policy S15 for new service/petrol filling stations and their shops, policies E18 and E19 for farm and craft shops or policy E13 for small-scale ancillary retail development on key business sites.

- 12.25 **Town Centre Areas in Abingdon, Wantage and Faringdon.** In defining town centre areas for Abingdon, Wantage and Faringdon, the areas identified in the Local Plan to 2001 have been reviewed and amended to take into account recent changes. One of the key findings of the town centre composition study outlined above is the trend towards the contraction of town centres, in particular, changes from commercial to residential use on their margins. The town centre areas, as now defined on the Local Plan proposals map, have been drawn up taking into account the results of the composition study and detailed surveys of each centre.
- 12.26 **Existing local shopping centres at Grove and Botley and in the main towns of Abingdon, Wantage, and Faringdon.** Grove has two local shopping centres (at Millbrook Square and Grovelands), Botley has a shopping centre (at West Way and Elms Parade) and there are also smaller local centres in each of the Vale's main towns. New retail development will be permitted within all of these locations, as defined on the proposals map.
- 12.27 Local shops and retail services at Grove and Didcot associated with Policy H5 for the strategic housing site at the former airfield west of Grove, which includes a mixed use local centre, and Policy H7 for the proposed neighbourhood and district centres associated with Didcot's western development. The precise location of these centres and the composition and size of local shops and retail services within them will be subject to the preparation of detailed planning and development briefs. Therefore at the present time it is not possible to define them on the proposals map.
- 12.28 **Small-scale local shops within villages.** It is not appropriate to identify specific shopping or commercial areas within villages since they tend not to have a definable concentration of such premises. The Council believes small-scale local shops should generally be permitted within villages to meet the local needs of the settlement, provided their provision can be accommodated without harming the amenity of nearby residents or causing highway safety problems.
- 12.29 **New service/petrol filling stations and their shops.** Proposals for new petrol filling stations will only be permitted in the built-up areas of the towns and villages, in accordance with policy S15. The Council considers new stations are not generally appropriate in countryside locations where such development would be likely to damage the character of the landscape.
- 12.30 **Shops in the countryside outside settlements, and other retail development.** Policies dealing with proposals for farm and craft shops, including proposals for

their modest expansion, are set out in Chapter 11. Plant nurseries, which sell only produce grown on site, are unlikely to require planning permission. However, garden centres, where a significant proportion of the goods sold are not produced on site, will always require permission. It is considered that this form of retail development is not appropriate within the countryside because it tends to give rise to significant planning and environmental problems, including causing harm to the landscape and creating additional traffic movements, often on unsuitable rural roads. Given their primarily retail emphasis garden centres should be considered in relation to the sequential test in PPS6, (referred to above) which means that the first preference should be for a town centre site.

- 12.31 Small-scale ancillary retail development will be allowed on key business sites to meet the needs of users of the business site in accordance with policy E13 in Chapter 11. Such small-scale retail provision potentially has the advantage of helping to make strategic business sites more sustainable by reducing the need for employees to travel by car to larger retail centres.

POLICY S1

PROPOSALS FOR NEW RETAIL DEVELOPMENT OR CHANGES OF USE TO RETAIL WILL BE PERMITTED IN THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS PROVIDED THEY ARE IN KEEPING WITH THE SCALE AND CHARACTER OF THE CENTRE OR AREA CONCERNED AND WOULD NOT CREATE UNACCEPTABLE TRAFFIC OR ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS:

- i) **WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRE AREAS OF ABINGDON, WANTAGE AND FARINGDON AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP SUBJECT TO POLICIES S2, S3 AND TR6 (THE RETENTION OF PUBLIC CAR PARKING SPACES);**
- ii) **WITHIN THE LOCAL SHOPPING CENTRES AT ABINGDON, BOTLEY, FARINGDON, GROVE AND WANTAGE AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP SUBJECT TO POLICIES S12 AND TR6 (THE RETENTION OF PUBLIC CAR PARKING SPACES);**
- iii) **IN VILLAGES, TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY IN ACCORDANCE WITH POLICY S13.**

PROPOSALS FOR NEW RETAIL DEVELOPMENT INCLUDING CHANGES OF USE WILL NOT BE PERMITTED OUTSIDE THESE LOCATIONS OTHER THAN IN ACCORDANCE WITH POLICIES H5, H7, S15, E13, E18 OR E19.

Town Centre Policies

Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages for Abingdon and Wantage

- 12.32 In recent years there has been increasing pressure to replace shops in town centres by other uses. The Council's Local Plan to 2001 distinguished between

primary shopping frontages, where there is a high proportion of retail uses, and secondary frontages, where there is a wider range of non-retail uses such as banks, building societies and restaurants. The policies in the Local Plan to 2001 aimed to resist the loss of shops from ground floor premises in the primary shopping frontages and to direct other uses to the secondary shopping streets or to upper floors above primary frontages. They were introduced in order to underpin the shopping function of the town centres at a time when there was particular pressure to convert shops to banks, building societies, offices and estate agents. There is now demand to allow the conversion of shop units (class A1) in primary areas to restaurants and cafes (class A3 uses) and to some extent to allow office uses within class B1 of the Use Classes Order rather than those which offer a direct service to the customer in respect of financial and professional services (class A2).

- 12.33 In its Local Plan Issues Report the Council consulted on whether the vitality and viability of the district's town centres would benefit from allowing a wider range of uses that would fit better with changing consumer demand and emerging retail patterns. Local people were generally supportive of such an approach and the Council has concluded that the policies for Abingdon and Wantage town centres should be made more flexible. The Council has sought to achieve this through a redefinition of the primary and secondary frontage areas, and by being more explicit in the wording of its policies to allow a wider range of uses in those parts of the town centre outside of primary and secondary areas. In the review of the primary and secondary frontages some have been demoted from primary to secondary which will allow a wider range of uses to occur, and some secondary frontages have been deleted, either entirely or in part. Although the Local Plan defines primary and secondary shopping frontages for Abingdon and Wantage town centres, they are not appropriate for Faringdon because the town centre is too small for such policies to be meaningful.

Primary Shopping Frontages

- 12.34 A high proportion of retail uses in the main shopping streets is vital to the character, vitality and viability of the town centres and it is still considered justifiable in the primary shopping core area to resist the change of retail frontages to other uses including A3 (cafes and restaurants). Many of the primary frontages already include units which are not in A1 use. Some are in A3 use, others are in uses which could be the subject of proposals for change to A3 use at some time in the future. Without a policy to retain A1 uses, there is a danger that rows of non A1 uses will develop, creating 'dead frontage' which interrupts retail frontage and through lack of activity at certain times or the absence of varied and interesting window displays can affect the vitality of the centre. The primary frontages in Abingdon and Wantage are considered and described below.
- 12.35 **Abingdon.** The following frontages will form the primary shopping core of Abingdon and include a wide range of shop units in terms of size and type: High

Street, Bury Street, Market Place, Stert Street and the top of West St Helen Street (west side) to include the Co-op supermarket. They are in accessible locations relative to town centre bus stops, cycle parking and public car parks. The Council believes their retention as primary frontages is crucial to the long term vitality and viability of the town centre. In Bury Street, the previously defined primary frontages have been extended to include three small units adjacent to Superdrug (currently a shoe repairer, sandwich bar and florists). The primary frontage on High Street, which extends to the Market Place opposite the County Hall, has been extended to include the end property (the Punch Bowl public house) for the sake of completion and consistency with other frontages.

12.36 Although Stert Street has been generally less attractive as a shopping environment, there has been an increase in activity in recent years, including the take-up of previously vacant retail units. The street is likely to become more attractive for shoppers as a result of proposals being put forward under the Abingdon Integrated Transport and Land Use Strategy (ABITS) as discussed in Chapter 5. The proposals will include footpath widening, resurfacing and improved pedestrian crossings. Therefore, Stert Street is being confirmed as part of the town centre primary frontage.

12.37 **Wantage.** The Local Plan continues to identify Market Place as the heart of the primary shopping core of the town with primary frontages feeding into it along parts of Wallingford Street, Newbury Street, Grove Street and Mill Street. Victoria Cross Gallery, linking Market Street with Church Street, and Post Office Vaults, on the eastern side of the Market Place, also continue to be identified as primary frontages at ground floor level. An extension to the primary frontage on Mill Street is proposed, which includes ground floor commercial premises as far as the junction with Limborough Road. This is in order to reflect the increase in shop units within the street over recent years.

Secondary Shopping Frontages

12.38 The policy wording for secondary shopping frontages makes it clear that the Council will refuse proposals for the change of use of A1 shop units to other uses where the proposal would individually or cumulatively with other non-retail uses cause harm to the function, character or appearance of the frontage concerned or to the town centre as a whole. There is clearly no need to define secondary shopping frontages where there are no remaining shop units in a frontage and it should be noted that removal of a secondary frontage designation will not prevent new shops being established in these premises in the future. The extent of secondary shopping frontages defined in the Local Plan to 2001 has been reviewed and reduced significantly in the light of more recent survey work.

12.39 **Abingdon.** The following areas are considered still to be appropriate for inclusion as secondary shopping frontage: the west side of Bridge Street (which has several shop units including one large unit); West St Helen Street south of

the Co-op supermarket as far as number 25 (the newsagent shop); Bath Street (northern part of the frontage to the south of Stratton Way) and Coxeter House. Most of Bath Street was formerly identified as primary shopping frontage but is now proposed as secondary frontage to recognise changes over recent years which have resulted in a wider mix of uses becoming established including restaurants, cafés, surveyors and estate agents, offices and residential. Relatively few shop units now remain in the street.

- 12.40 Secondary shopping frontages have been deleted where they have no remaining retail units, such as Ock Street between the Square and the junction with Stratton Way, and in peripheral locations where there is little demand for shops and very low pedestrian flows, for example East St Helen Street and Lombard Street. This will allow empty shop units to be converted to alternative uses, subject to market demand.
- 12.41 **Wantage.** Changes are proposed to the secondary shopping frontages previously shown in the Local Plan to 2001 to reflect recent changes in the composition of certain streets. Alfred Street, Market Place behind Barclays Bank, Church Street, Regent Arcade, Wallingford Street, parts of Grove Street and Newbury Street continue to have a range of town centre uses including shop units where it is appropriate to continue the secondary shopping frontage designation. Newbury Street (west side) now has a mix of uses including only one shop unit and is therefore redesignated as secondary frontage. Secondary shopping frontage designation has been removed from Wallingford Street (north side) to the east of the entrance to Campbell's Yard where there are no shop units, and at Newbury Street where there are two units which are physically separate from any other shopping frontage and lie outside the town centre.
- 12.42 Policies S2 and S3 below make clear the types of use which will be permitted in the primary and secondary shopping frontages identified for Abingdon and Wantage on the Local Plan proposals map.

POLICY S2

IN THE PRIMARY SHOPPING FRONTAGES DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP FOR ABINGDON AND WANTAGE, PROPOSALS WHICH INVOLVE A NET LOSS OF CLASS A1 SHOPPING FLOORSPEACE AT GROUND FLOOR LEVEL WILL BE NOT BE PERMITTED.

POLICY S3

IN THE SECONDARY SHOPPING FRONTAGES DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP FOR ABINGDON AND WANTAGE, PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED FOR USES WITHIN CLASSES A2, A3 AND FOR AMUSEMENT/ENTERTAINMENT USES PROVIDED:

- i) **THE PROPOSALS WOULD NOT INDIVIDUALLY OR CUMULATIVELY WITH OTHER NON-RETAIL USES CAUSE HARM TO THE FUNCTION, CHARACTER OR**

APPEARANCE OF THE FRONTAGE CONCERNED OR TO THE TOWN CENTRE AS A WHOLE; AND

- ii) **THERE WOULD BE NO HARM CAUSED TO THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF ANY NEIGHBOURING RESIDENTS IN TERMS OF NOISE, COOKING SMELLS OR GENERAL DISTURBANCE.**

WHERE PERMISSION IS GRANTED FOR SUCH USES, CONDITIONS RELATING TO HOURS OF OPENING, SOUND PROOFING AND THE CONTROL OF COOKING ODOURS WILL BE IMPOSED AS NECESSARY TO ENSURE THE PROTECTION OF RESIDENTIAL AMENITY.

Non Retail Uses in Town Centres

- 12.43 According to PPS6 the vitality and viability of town centres depends on retaining and developing a wide range of attractions, uses and amenities; creating and maintaining an attractive environment; and attracting continuing investment in development or refurbishment of existing buildings. Local planning authorities are advised to encourage diversification of uses in town centres as a whole, whilst recognising and supporting their primary function as shopping areas. This means that as well as retaining shop units, the vitality and viability of town centres should also depend on accommodating a range of other uses. This will have the additional benefit of helping to secure continued occupation and on-going maintenance of town centre buildings, many of which are within conservation areas.
- 12.44 In all of the town centres provision needs to be made for A2, A3, B1 and amusement/entertainment uses. In Abingdon and Wantage the Council believes these should be accommodated in non-primary shopping locations (which would include the upper floors of premises in the primary and secondary shopping frontages, and property in other town centre locations). However, the Council will be concerned to ensure that such uses will not harm the living conditions of neighbouring residents or damage to the overall character and function of the town centres. Furthermore, healthcare facilities (within Class D1) may also be appropriately located within town centres, especially where they need to be accessible to a large number of people.
- 12.45 Policy S4 below allows a diverse range of uses to become established in appropriate town centre locations in Abingdon and Wantage including new residential accommodation, such as flats above shops. This flexible approach to uses outside of primary shopping frontages is intended to help enhance town centre vitality and viability and encourage regeneration where appropriate.
- 12.46 A different approach is necessary in Faringdon taking into account its smaller town centre. In Faringdon, A2, A3 and amusement/entertainment uses will be permitted within the town centre, including ground floor premises, subject to

certain criteria as described in policy S5 below. However, the Council considers that new B1 uses at ground floor level could harm the town centre by diluting its shopping and service role. Instead B1 uses will only be allowed on upper floors, where residential uses will also be permitted.

POLICY S4

IN THE TOWN CENTRES OF ABINGDON AND WANTAGE (OTHER THAN ON THE GROUND FLOOR OF PREMISES IN THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY FRONTAGES DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP) PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED FOR USES WITHIN CLASSES A2, A3, B1 (OFFICES), FOR HEALTHCARE FACILITIES (WITHIN CLASS D1), FOR AMUSEMENT/ENTERTAINMENT USES AND FOR RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION (CLASS C3) PROVIDED THERE WOULD BE NO DEMONSTRABLE HARM CAUSED TO THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF ANY NEIGHBOURING RESIDENTS IN TERMS OF NOISE, COOKING SMELLS OR GENERAL DISTURBANCE.

WHERE PERMISSION IS GRANTED FOR SUCH USES, CONDITIONS RELATING TO HOURS OF OPENING, SOUND PROOFING AND THE CONTROL OF COOKING ODOURS WILL BE IMPOSED AS NECESSARY TO ENSURE THAT ENVIRONMENTAL, HIGHWAY OR OTHER PROBLEMS ARE NOT CREATED AND THAT RESIDENTIAL AMENITIES ARE PROTECTED.

POLICY S5

IN THE TOWN CENTRE AREA OF FARINGDON AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED FOR USES WITHIN CLASSES A2 AND A3 PROVIDED:

- i) THE PROPOSALS WOULD NOT INDIVIDUALLY OR CUMULATIVELY WITH OTHERS CAUSE DEMONSTRABLE HARM TO THE FUNCTION, CHARACTER OR APPEARANCE OF THE FRONTAGE CONCERNED OR TO THE TOWN CENTRE AS A WHOLE; AND**
- ii) THERE WOULD BE NO DEMONSTRABLE HARM CAUSED TO THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF ANY NEIGHBOURING RESIDENTS IN TERMS OF NOISE, COOKING SMELLS OR GENERAL DISTURBANCE.**

WHERE PERMISSION IS GRANTED FOR SUCH USES, CONDITIONS RELATING TO HOURS OF OPENING, SOUND PROOFING AND THE CONTROL OF COOKING ODOURS WILL BE IMPOSED, AS NECESSARY, TO ENSURE THE PROTECTION OF RESIDENTIAL AMENITY.

CHANGES OF USE FROM CLASSES A1, A2 AND A3 TO OTHER USES INCLUDING RESIDENTIAL (CLASS C3), HEALTHCARE FACILITIES (WITHIN CLASS D1) OR OFFICE (CLASS B1) USES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED ON GROUND FLOOR FRONTAGES.

NEW RESIDENTIAL, HEALTHCARE OR B1 USES WILL BE PERMITTED ON UPPER FLOORS SUBJECT TO CRITERION (ii) ABOVE BEING MET.

Upper Floors in Town Centres

- 12.47 The under-use of upper floors above commercial premises can lead to lack of maintenance to the detriment of the fabric of town centre buildings. Cumulatively, vacant upper floors can also adversely affect the appearance and character of the centre as a whole. The Council is anxious to avoid this and to exploit the potential economic resource of upper floors for commercial or for residential uses. It is therefore considered desirable that new shopping and commercial proposals within the town centres, including changes of use, should incorporate specific provision to maintain and, where possible, improve the means of access to upper floors.
- 12.48 PPS6 states that the vitality and viability of town centres depends on more than retailing. It stems from the range and quality of activities the centres offer and their accessibility to people living and working in the area. PPG13: *Transport* provides guidance on the policies local authorities should adopt in order to reduce the need to travel, including locating employment and residential uses close to each other and providing housing in central locations close to facilities. Policy S6 below can help to achieve these objectives, as well as being justified in the interests of maintaining and maximising the economic potential of buildings in the Vale's town centres.

POLICY S6

NEW SHOPPING AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT (INCLUDING CHANGES OF USE) WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRES OF ABINGDON, FARINGDON AND WANTAGE AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP SHALL, WHERE POSSIBLE, INCORPORATE SPECIFIC PROVISION TO MAINTAIN OR IMPROVE THE MEANS OF ACCESS TO UPPER FLOORS.

The Bury Street Precinct, Abingdon

- 12.49 The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2001 included three areas within Abingdon town centre where there were policies to guide new development or redevelopment: the Vineyard policy area (including part of the old cinema site), West Central and the Bury Street Precinct. The future of the Vineyard and West Central areas has now been largely resolved. Schemes have come forward in the Vineyard area, predominantly for housing, and at West Central the Council has resolved to grant detailed planning permission for a mixed-use scheme including residential, a foyer (a residential/training facility for young people) and offices uses. However, no comprehensive proposals have come forward on the Bury Street Precinct and therefore it is appropriate to continue with a policy in the

Local Plan seeking environmental enhancement and major refurbishment for this area.

- 12.50 The 1991 Shopping Study recommended that long-term consideration should be given to the redevelopment or extensive refurbishment of the Bury Street precinct to provide modern well-serviced retail accommodation. A sensitively designed scheme, it was suggested, would significantly enhance the whole central area of Abingdon. This recommendation was reiterated in the 1996 Review for implementation as a shorter term priority.
- 12.51 The Bury Street precinct was designed over 30 years ago and, although it is well-positioned on major pedestrian routes and offers the potential for attractive traffic-free shopping, it is now dated in design. Although the Council has designed, funded and implemented a new scheme for re-paving and street furniture, the precinct remains in need of major refurbishment. Such a scheme could include the rationalisation or provision of new and larger shop units and measures to improve pedestrian circulation, weather protection, security and the overall appearance of the area. Particular attention should be paid to the provision of high quality shop fronts. The improvement of the precinct together with proposals in the Abingdon Integrated Transport Strategy (ABITS) described in Chapter 5 are vital elements in any strategy aimed at enhancing the vitality and viability of Abingdon's town centre.
- 12.52 It is considered that the policy for environmental enhancement and refurbishment of the Bury Street precinct should be extended to include The Charter, the multi-storey car park and the adjoining service areas in the interests of achieving a comprehensive approach. Policy S1 will be relevant in considering proposals for new shopping associated with any refurbishment scheme.

POLICY S7

WITHIN THE BURY STREET PRECINCT AND CHARTER AREAS (AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP) PROPOSALS WHICH LEAD TO ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENT AND MAJOR REFURBISHMENT WILL BE PERMITTED.

The Limborough Road Area, Wantage

- 12.53 The Local Plan to 2001 set out 'to support the role of the town's centre as the social and commercial heart of Wantage and as an important centre for a wider hinterland, including Grove'. It acknowledged the historic quality of Wantage town centre focused on the outstanding Market Square. Area-based policies were included in the Local Plan to guide new development or redevelopment at the Limborough Road area and Campbell's Yard.
- 12.54 Campbell's Yard on Wallingford Street (which was originally allocated in the 1987 Local Plan for Wantage and Grove for housing and/or commercial

development) was identified in the 2001 Local Plan for mixed commercial/residential development with an emphasis on small-scale retail development. However, this has not come to fruition and no planning applications have been submitted for such development. In view of the lack of progress in this site coming forward for development, it is questionable whether there is a market demand for mixed uses in this location. Instead, the site is now considered to be suitable wholly for residential purposes and it is therefore no longer being identified for mixed use. Accordingly, the town centre area for Wantage shown on the proposals map now excludes this site.

- 12.55 The Local Plan continues to identify Limborough Road for a comprehensive scheme including major new shopping development in policy S8 below. A detailed development brief for the area was published by the Council in 1992. In the context of this brief, planning permission was granted in 1995 for an attractive shopping development incorporating a supermarket (3995 square metres gross floorspace), together with a small precinct of four shop units leading to Grove Street and Mill Street, a new road access from the A338 (Grove Street) and car parking for 388 cars.
- 12.56 Since then two further planning permissions have been granted, both of which involved a significantly enlarged site area. The first of these, submitted in 1996 by developers Master Property Ltd, has now been superseded by a planning application submitted in 2001 by Master Property Trading Ltd and Sainsbury Supermarkets Ltd for the erection of a foodstore, seven comparison goods shop units and six retail warehouse units with a combined floorspace of 11,223 square metres, together with a new link road and roundabout access from the A338. Planning permission was granted for this scheme in February 2002. A revised application was granted planning permission in March 2006 which provided for a new Sainsbury foodstore, seven small shops with twenty four flats over and five retail warehouses
- 12.57 The Local Plan carries forward proposals for the area which reflect the 2002 planning permission and show the site within the re-defined Town Centre Policy Area (Policy S1) for Wantage as indicated on the proposals map. This will provide a convenience store of modern scale and standards, open up a new northern entrance to the town centre, create attractive new urban spaces in a currently unsightly area, thereby enhancing the visual character of the town centre and underpinning economically the whole shopping area.

POLICY S8

THE LIMBOROUGH ROAD AREA AS IDENTIFIED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP IS PROPOSED AS THE SITE FOR ANY MAJOR NEW SHOPPING PROVISION FOR WANTAGE. A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH WILL BE REQUIRED FOR DEVELOPMENT OR REDEVELOPMENT ON THIS SITE TO INCLUDE RETAIL USES (SUBJECT TO POLICY S1) AND PARKING PROVISION. RESIDENTIAL OR B1 OFFICE USES WILL BE ALLOWED ON UPPER FLOOR LEVELS.

Faringdon Market Place

- 12.58 Faringdon is an important 'local needs' shopping and service centre for its own population and surrounding rural area and its maintenance and enhancement as such must continue to be a prime planning concern for the Council.
- 12.59 The 1991 Lichfield Study recommended that greater use of existing premises should be encouraged by promoting the town as a tourist attraction in its own right. The Study identified little need in either quantitative or qualitative terms for an increase in comparison (non-food) or convenience (food) goods floorspace. Faringdon's role in the retail hierarchy was nevertheless seen as an important one which should be maintained, even though there was no justification for major new development. The 1996 Review reiterated the above recommendations, stressing Faringdon's 'local needs' shopping role and the continued importance of maintaining and enhancing this role.
- 12.60 The Local Plan to 2001 identified land in the Swan Lane area of the town centre for mixed residential and commercial development, possibly including some limited expansion for shopping. However, such development has not and is unlikely to come forward and the Council now considers that the site is most suitable for a wholly residential scheme. This is reflected in the revised town centre area for Faringdon shown on the proposals map, which now excludes the Swan Lane site.
- 12.61 The conclusions of 1991 Study concerning the promotion of the town as a tourist attraction and attractive centre for local shopping are still considered to be relevant. Accordingly, the District Council has prepared a scheme for the enhancement of Faringdon Market Place, which was aimed at improving significantly the heart of the town centre as an environment for shoppers and other town centre users, including visitors. The scheme, which involved conservation area enhancement measures to improve surfacing and street furniture, together with initiatives to improve security and safety in the area, was implemented by the Council in 2004.

POLICY S9

FARINGDON MARKET PLACE IS IDENTIFIED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENT SCHEME. PROPOSALS WHICH WOULD JEOPARDISE ITS IMPLEMENTATION WILL NOT BE PERMITTED.

- 12.62 At Faringdon, the Countryside Agency has funded a 'Health Check' under its market town initiative in order to look at a wide range of issues which may affect people's quality of life and the vitality of the town. An action plan has been produced in order to help bring forward projects which may include measures to improve the town centre and its market place.

Town Centre Approaches

12.63 The Local Plan to 2001 included two policies for town centre approaches: Ock Street in Abingdon and Park Road in Faringdon, aimed at protecting and enhancing their attractiveness and, indirectly, helping the image of the town centres. The Ock Street policy has been beneficial in terms of securing a high standard of design for development which has taken place over recent years, for example residential schemes at Crown Mews, Ock Mews and more recently the entrance to the Morland Brewery development. In Faringdon, developer contributions have been made for enhancement and landscape improvements to Park Road. There are further opportunities for sites to come forward for development or redevelopment in Abingdon and Faringdon along both of these approaches to the town centres and therefore it is considered that these policies are still relevant. Accordingly, this Local Plan continues to identify Ock Street in Abingdon and Park Road in Faringdon on the proposals map as key town centre approaches where particular care needs to be taken in the design of development proposals.

12.64 **Ock Street, Abingdon.** Ock Street, although not of conservation area status, has a distinctive historic quality, with its wide gentle curve and its own traditions (its Morris team and ancient mayor-making ceremony, for example). For many years, the street formed part of the main Southampton–Birmingham trunk road, and during this period parts of its frontage were redeveloped in a commercial style, which in places remains incongruous. Nevertheless, the general appearance of Ock Street retains its integrity and there are a number of individual buildings of great historic interest and merit, such as Tomkins Almshouses and the Baptist Church. Its environmental quality remains fragile and could easily be eroded further.

12.65 The Council considers it important to draw attention to the significance and potential of Ock Street and to urge all concerned to take every opportunity to reinstate the quality of the environment by new building or refurbishment and by improvements to street furniture, shop fronts, landscaping or paving. Proposals should not result in any further erosion of the environmental quality of the street. The amount of traffic passing through the centre of Abingdon may be reduced as a result of the Abingdon Integrated Transport and Land Use Strategy (referred to in Chapter 5). This may provide the opportunity to improve Ock Street as a pedestrian, residential and in part commercial environment. Planning applications for development and redevelopment in the Ock Street area will be considered in the light of the following policy.

POLICY S10

WITHIN THE OCK STREET POLICY AREA AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, PROPOSALS WHICH LEAD TO ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS WILL BE PERMITTED. PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT OR REDEVELOPMENT WHICH HAVE A

SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE OCK STREET APPROACH TO THE TOWN CENTRE WILL BE REFUSED.

12.66 **Park Road, Faringdon.** Whereas Ock Street was once a trunk road which has been reduced to the level of a local distributor, Park Road in Faringdon has experienced the opposite process. It was once a cul-de-sac at the edge of town and at that time business and industrial units grew up alongside it in an uncoordinated and unscreened way on the site of a former branch line and railway sidings. Subsequently, Park Road was linked into the Faringdon bypass and has now become one of the main approaches into the town centre. The business and industrial site remains largely unscreened and presents an unattractive introduction to the town. The site does not show itself to best advantage and this in the long term may affect its business and employment prospects. There is an opportunity for new development to enhance the approach to Faringdon in respect of land north of Park Road identified under policy E3 of this Plan. Part of the site fronts on to Park Road and any development in this location should be designed to enhance visually the approach to the town. In recent years the District Council and the Joint Environmental Trust have sought to facilitate a co-ordinated enhancement and landscaping programme for the edge of the industrial estate and other Park Road frontages but it has proved difficult to achieve improvements. Nevertheless the Council continues to consider that landscape treatment along the length of Park Road remains desirable, even if only a minimal amount of planting and screening may be practicable. The District Council will therefore use the following policy to promote and seek further improvements.

POLICY S11

ON THE PARK ROAD FRONTAGE IDENTIFIED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP PROPOSALS WHICH LEAD TO ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS BY MEANS OF SCREENING, LANDSCAPING OR BUILDING DESIGN WILL BE PERMITTED. PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT OR REDEVELOPMENT WHICH HAVE A SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE PARK ROAD APPROACH TO THE TOWN CENTRE WILL BE REFUSED.

Other Policies for Shopping

Policies for Local Shopping Centres

12.67 The following section relates to neighbourhood shopping centres and local shopping parades. Survey work in the autumn/winter of 2000 confirmed the largest local centres in this category to be:

Botley (39 units)

Millbrook Square, Grove (13 units)
Grovelands, Grove (10 units)
Peachcroft, Abingdon (9 units)

Each of these centres has a small anchor supermarket, with a reasonable range of other shops and services.

12.68 Other local centres include Reynolds Way, Wootton Road, Northcourt Road, Parsons Mead, Hadland Road and Oxford Road in Abingdon; Barnards Way in Wantage; and Folly View Road in Faringdon. These generally have a smaller range of convenience shops and services to meet local needs, although there are a few specialist shops in some of the local Abingdon centres. At the time of the 2000 survey, three vacancies were recorded in the four larger local centres and three vacancies in the remainder. The Lichfield Study Review of November 1996 concluded that Botley and Grove and the other local centres provide valuable shopping facilities conveniently serving the surrounding residential areas and that their maintenance is essential in order to complement town centre facilities. The Council continues to share this view and, accordingly, policy S12 below seeks to maintain the role of these centres.

12.69 **New retail development.** Policy S1, which considers the location of new retail development, states that proposals for retail development or changes of use to retail will be permitted within the existing local centres at Grove, Botley, Abingdon, Wantage and Faringdon, subject to certain criteria. The criteria include that proposals are in keeping with the scale and character of the centre or area concerned, that they reflect the need to ensure the proposed development will not adversely affect the vitality and viability of an existing town centre and that planning, traffic and other environmental problems will not be caused.

12.70 **Non-retail uses.** The change of use of units from shopping to non-retail use in these centres is an issue which has arisen regularly in recent years and is likely to continue to arise. Financial and professional uses (class A2) and food and drink uses (class A3) may provide a service for local residents but the spread of such uses in relatively small shopping centres at the expense of retail units can be problematic. In considering planning applications for changes of use to non-retail the Council will be concerned to ensure that proposals will not narrow the choice of neighbourhood shopping and that a range of facilities is maintained consistent with the scale and function of the centre and the need to provide for people's day-to-day shopping needs, locally, so reducing their need to travel. The Council will, in particular, seek to retain facilities such as post offices and pharmacies. Proposals should not cause parking and other traffic problems or affect the amenities of residents.

12.71 Unlike the town centres, which are of a sufficient size to accommodate a wide range of uses including residential and B1 office uses, the Vale's local shopping centres are much smaller and do not have the capacity for accommodating such

uses at ground floor level without harm being caused to their function and character. Therefore, at ground floor level although changes of uses from retail to class A2 or class A3 uses may be permitted subject to criteria, residential (class C3) or class B1 office uses will not. On upper floors in local shopping centres, however, residential or B1 office uses can be of benefit in helping to secure the on-going maintenance of buildings and viability of the centres as a whole, as well as helping to reduce the need to travel. Residential use, for example flats over shops, can help to meet local housing needs and office uses can provide local employment opportunities.

POLICY S12

WITHIN THE EXISTING LOCAL SHOPPING CENTRES AT ABINGDON, BOTLEY, FARINGDON, GROVE AND WANTAGE AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, CHANGES OF USE FROM CLASS A1 (RETAIL) TO CLASSES A2 AND A3 WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF:

- i) THE PROPOSAL WOULD NOT INDIVIDUALLY, OR CUMULATIVELY WITH OTHER EXISTING NON-RETAIL USES, CAUSE DEMONSTRABLE HARM TO THE FUNCTION, CHARACTER OR APPEARANCE OF THE SHOPPING CENTRE CONCERNED;**
- ii) THE PROPOSAL WOULD ADD TO THE RANGE AND VARIETY OF GOODS AND SERVICES AVAILABLE TO THE LOCAL RESIDENTS; AND**
- iii) THERE WOULD BE NO DEMONSTRABLE HARM CAUSED TO THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF ANY NEIGHBOURING RESIDENTS IN TERMS OF NOISE, COOKING SMELLS, OR GENERAL DISTURBANCE.**

CHANGES OF USE TO RESIDENTIAL (CLASS C3) OR OFFICE (CLASS B1) USES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED AT GROUND FLOOR LEVEL. SUCH USES WILL BE PERMITTED ON UPPER FLOORS SUBJECT TO CRITERIA (i) AND (iii) ABOVE BEING MET.

Village and Other Small Local Shops

12.72 The Council recognises the importance to local communities of small neighbourhood shops, particularly village shops. Government guidance in PPS6 acknowledges that village shops play a crucial role in maintaining villages as viable communities. PPS6 states that local planning authorities should respond positively to proposals for the conversion and extension of shops, which are designed to improve their viability. Their importance to the local community should be taken into account in assessing proposals which would result in their loss or change of use.

12.73 In assessing whether all reasonable efforts have been made to sell or let a village shop this will involve consideration of the marketing, either as a going concern or where it has ceased trading. It will need to take account of how the shop was operated over time and what efforts were made to advertise and market it on the open market, whether or not the sale value was realistic and whether the potential of the business was made clear. It will not be sufficient for an applicant to state that a village shop is not viable if this cannot be proved to be correct.

12.74 Village shops can help to minimise the need to travel by car and are invaluable to residents who may not have access to a car. They may also be significant as places of social contact and local employment. The Council therefore supports the retention of such facilities and will look favourably on proposals for new provision provided they do not give rise to planning or environmental problems. In locations where the provision of shops on a commercial basis has not been viable, the Council encourages local initiatives by the community to maintain a service. The Council has given encouragement and financial support to such community shops, for example at Appleton, Letcombe Bassett and the Hanneys, and grants may continue to be available to support local initiatives via the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council.

POLICY S13

PROPOSALS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OR EXTENSION OF VILLAGE AND OTHER SMALL SHOPS DESIGNED TO MEET THE DAY-TO-DAY NEEDS OF THE LOCAL POPULATION WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THEY DO NOT GIVE RISE TO PLANNING OR HIGHWAY PROBLEMS.

POLICY S14

PROPOSALS INVOLVING THE LOSS OF VILLAGE AND OTHER LOCAL SHOPS TO OTHER USES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS THE COUNCIL IS SATISFIED THAT THERE ARE OTHER SIMILAR FACILITIES OF EQUIVALENT COMMUNITY BENEFIT AVAILABLE IN THE AREA, AND:

- i) THE BUILDING IS OR HAS BECOME UNSUITABLE FOR ITS EXISTING USE AND CANNOT REALISTICALLY BE ADAPTED TO ALLOW CONTINUATION OF THE USE;**
- ii) THE RETENTION OF THE SHOP IS NOT ECONOMICALLY VIABLE AND IT CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THAT ALL REASONABLE EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO SELL OR LET THE PROPERTY AS A SHOP ON THE OPEN MARKET AT A REALISTIC PRICE; OR**
- iii) THERE IS NO REASONABLE LIKELIHOOD OF AN ALTERNATIVE APPROPRIATE FACILITY OR SERVICE OF BENEFIT TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY MAKING USE OF THE BUILDING; OR**

- iv) **THE RELOCATION OF THE SHOP TO A CONVENIENT LOCATION TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY, INVOLVING THE RE-USE OF AN EXISTING BUILDING OR THE PROVISION OF NEW PREMISES, IS NOT ECONOMICALLY VIABLE; OR**
- v) **THAT EXISTING BUILDINGS WORTHY OF RETENTION DO NOT BECOME UNUSED IN THE LONG TERM AND THEREBY DECAY.**

Garages and Garage Shops

12.75 Service stations can be intrusive features, especially in the open countryside where they can seriously damage the character and appearance of the local landscape. It is difficult to blend the buildings, canopies, advertisements and parking areas associated with modern service station development into the rural environment. There are clear conflicts between the needs of the operator for adequate, direct and clear access to the highway, a prominent position and distinct advertising to attract trade, and the requirement to protect the character and appearance of the countryside from inappropriate and conspicuous sporadic development. The Council is generally opposed to the provision of new service stations in the countryside for this reason. Similarly it is concerned to ensure that the expansion or redevelopment of existing stations causes the minimum harm to the amenity and character of the local environment. In opposing the development of new service stations in the countryside the Council has taken into account the fact that some large villages already have garages, which supply petrol during normal business hours, and that in the towns and on most principal routes through the district there are now stations which operate late into the evening and which offer a wider service to motorists.

12.76 The closure of small garages and filling stations has given rise to concern in recent years, in relation to their loss as local facilities and, to a lesser extent, as a provider of employment. There is a trend towards village garages serving to some degree as the village shop. The Council will look favourably on such facilities in recognition of their contribution to the social vitality of villages, particularly where no other similar facility exists. The crucial role of village shops (including those which are ancillary to petrol filling stations) in maintaining villages as viable communities is recognised in PPS6, however care should be taken to ensure that shops ancillary to rural petrol stations do not adversely affect easily accessible convenience shopping available to local communities. Extensions of petrol filling stations including their shops may be permitted, subject to criteria. Proposals for the redevelopment of garages and service stations outside settlements for other uses will be subject to policy GS6 in Chapter 3 of the Plan, which deals generally with previously developed land outside settlements. Proposals for the redevelopment of garages/service stations for other uses in villages will be considered in relation to policies elsewhere in the Local Plan depending on the use proposed (for example proposals for residential development will be subject to policies in Chapter 8). Special policies are needed

to deal with proposals for service facilities to meet the particular needs of drivers on local stretches of the A34 and A420 trunk roads and these are set out in Chapter 5, together with their background justification.

POLICY S15

PROPOSALS FOR NEW SERVICE/PETROL FILLING STATIONS INCLUDING THOSE WITH ANCILLARY SHOPS WILL BE PERMITTED IN THE BUILT AREAS OF THE VALE'S MAIN SETTLEMENTS AND VILLAGES ONLY, PROVIDED CRITERIA (i) to (iii) BELOW ARE ALL MET. PROPOSALS FOR THE EXTENSION OF PETROL FILLING STATIONS OR GARAGE SHOPS OR THE REDEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING STATIONS WITHIN THE SAME USE WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED:

- i) THE IMPACT OF ADVERTISING, LIGHTING AND CANOPIES WILL NOT CAUSE DEMONSTRABLE HARM TO THE CHARACTER OR THE QUALITY OF THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT;**
- ii) NO DEMONSTRABLE HARM WILL BE CAUSED TO THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF LOCAL RESIDENTS IN TERMS OF VISUAL INTRUSION, NOISE, DISTURBANCE OR POLLUTION; AND**
- iii) THE SCALE OF THE PROPOSAL IS IN KEEPING WITH ITS SURROUNDINGS;**
- iv) WHERE THE DEVELOPMENT IS IN A RURAL AREA NO DEMONSTRABLE HARM WILL BE CAUSED TO THE ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF A NEARBY VILLAGE SHOP WHICH PROVIDES EASILY ACCESSIBLE CONVENIENCE SHOPPING AVAILABLE TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY.**

Other Shops/Retail uses

12.77 There are other retail uses for which policies are required in the Local Plan. They relate primarily to activities covered in other chapters, as follows. Farm shops are considered in Chapter 11, in recognition of their role in helping farms to diversify. Public houses, which often make a strong contribution to the social life of communities in both urban and rural areas, are dealt with in Chapter 9.