

Town Centre and Business Development draft NP policy February 2019

Policy Objectives

- Deliver living and working environments that will create a 21st Century market town, supporting the commercial activities of the business community and their aspirations.
- Enhance Paddock Wood's potential as a destination by including greater opportunities for the arts, culture, youth facilities, tourism, leisure and retail.
- Create a diversity and vibrancy of land uses by providing opportunities for a range of different business, cultural and commercial uses throughout the town centre.

Paddock Wood is a compact town centre that is well-used by local residents and visitors from surrounding villages and settlements. According to the Tunbridge Wells Retail and Leisure Study 2017 it provides a range of services and amenities not widely available in the smaller settlements to the east of the Borough. The town centre is predominantly surrounded by residential land. The retail and service provision in the centre is primarily located along Commercial Road, with a large Waitrose food store and Paddock Wood Train Station to the north of the centre.

It also has the potential to expand even further with a series of opportunity sites and growth options. These include:

- good mix of independent and national businesses, including Waitrose and the popular independent department store Barsley's, which has been in the town for over 100 years. The neighbourhood plan seeks to maintain and enhance this balance over the plan period.
- a large area of under-utilised land to the south of Station Road and to the west of Commercial Road. It is considered that this provides an ideal opportunity to grow the town centre. This town centre expansion will be vital if the range of shops and services is to keep pace with the expected growth in the number of residents.
- The lack of a focal civic space in the form of a traditional town square in Paddock Wood. Delivering such a space as an integral part of the regeneration project will encourage "dwell time" and boost the social and economic vitality of the centre. This square can provide the space for markets, events and local festivals.
- The need to create a "living and working" town centre, that includes housing and employment alongside a healthy mix of retail, leisure, civic and social uses, together with food and drink establishments.

Section One: What makes a successful town centre?

The topic of maintaining a vibrant town centre has been highlighted through the consultation process. Set out below are some guiding principles on why different activities should be combined into a close-knit, compact town centre.

1a) Physical & Mental Health Benefits

By positioning goods and services within a walkable distance from one another, people can easily access what they need while enjoying health benefits of active travel and the mental well-being benefits of social interaction. Retail, leisure, food and drink and health services or associated support services may well play a key part of a unified town centre strategy.

1b) Increased Footfall & Economic Benefits

As people use the town centre for a range of services — e.g. retail, health, leisure, employment — the combined footfall benefits the local businesses and local economy. Increased levels of activity

Town Centre and Business Development draft NP policy February 2019

help to create a vibrant and attractive town centre, which attracts more customers, tourists, investment, and businesses, further strengthening the economy.

Relatively small-town centres, such as Paddock Wood, need a critical mass of activity to make them economically successful. When the centre is vibrant and pleasant to be in, employees of the local businesses and public services, such as shop workers, will be encouraged to do their lunchtime shopping in the centre, rather than driving out of town. As stated by Centre for Cities ([www.Centre for Cities.org](http://www.CentreforCities.org)), the following insight regarding cities can also apply to lively town centres:

“... cities are match makers; they match workers with jobs, citizens with health and with education services, and they match people with people”.

Signage within the town should enhance and improve the character and appearance of the buildings and surrounding area. The Tunbridge Wells Retail and Leisure Study 2017 also identified that the location of the car parks was not well signposted which may deter non-local visitors to the centre.

1c) Meeting on the Street

The opportunity for exchanging knowledge and sharing ideas on a personal level has been shown to advance business innovation and enterprise. Traditional town centre facilities should be accessible locally rather than in an out of town location. Face-to-face interactions on the street and chance encounters help improve individual happiness and wider social cohesion. This can reduce isolation for the elderly and can improve mental health. (See Health and Wellbeing policy)

1d) Public Transport

Good public transport from peripheral parts of the town and the local villages reduces the need for private cars and potentially increases activity in the town centre. Development of a hub at the railway station would improve peoples ability to access the town and surrounding villages.

1e) Increasing the Dwell Time of an Urban Centre

The ability to dwell within public spaces allows people the time to reflect and relax which is important for health. Quality of life improves with the quality of the public realm. People enjoy spending time in places that are pedestrian-friendly, compact, mixed-use, have public transport, and are green and healthy. Town centres are becoming ever more the focus of leisure and non-retail activity, placing greater emphasis on the need for them to encourage these experiences. It is accepted within the urban planning profession that different categories of public activity can be influenced and affected by the built environment.

Section Two: What is a 21st Century Market Town?

The primary purpose of a market town is to provide goods and services to the surrounding locality. The modern market town should have a little bit of everything, offering those important everyday products and services like food and other shopping, a library, a post office, medical services, opticians etc. It should have leisure and recreation facilities and entertainment such as a gym, a sports centre, an athletics track, playing fields - all of which Paddock Wood currently has. An aspiration for the future continues to be a swimming pool. And there are places in Paddock Wood where the community may meet such as coffee shops, cafes, pubs and restaurants.

Paddock Wood has a semi-rural feel with specialist independent shops and the Neighbourhood Plan aspires to have a central square in the middle of the town. The town has a self-sufficient infrastructure of a health centre, schools and transport. It is popular with young families thanks to good educational

Town Centre and Business Development draft NP policy February 2019

facilities as well as being convenient for Maidstone, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. It is a magnet for families looking for new build properties within walking distance of the town centre and the railway station, from where London can be reached in under an hour by train. There is a direct rail link to Gatwick and the Channel Tunnel is easily accessible. In addition, the town is located close to the A21 and motorways.

Paddock Wood is a small town where many people know one another and there are whole community events such as the carnival and Light Up Paddock Wood. It has a very friendly atmosphere and is the natural centre for the area being surrounded by a cluster of “pretty” villages. It was formerly the centre for the hop industry, had its own cattle market and was/is a railway hub.

In the Neighbourhood Plan there are aspirations to make Paddock Wood an important hub for social interaction and plans are in hand for a community centre to be built within the town,

Section three: policies

POLICY TC1

Land West of Commercial Road

The redevelopment of land south of Station Road and to the west of Commercial Road will be supported, subject to the following criteria:

- a) Ground floors will be for commercial, food and drink and/or retail activity.
- b) Any residential uses will be on the upper floors.
- c) Clear and legible pedestrian and cycle connections are established to Station Road, Maidstone Road and Commercial Road.
- d) Creation of a open, landscaped civic space within the heart of the development.
- e) Creation of active ground floors.
- f) Limited vehicle access for servicing, deliveries and disabled parking.

Policy Justification

The Tunbridge Wells Site Allocations Local Plan 2016 identifies one potential site for development within Paddock Wood as follows:

“Land off Station Road/ Commercial Road and Commercial Road West Car Park is allocated for a mixed use development including retail development to meet retail (A1) requirements including at least 400 sq m of comparison retail, restaurants and cafes (A3), drinking establishments and at least the same revision of existing public parking; unless this can be re-provided at a suitable alternative location within the Town Centre. Other town centre uses including leisure D2 and health and community D1 uses are considered acceptable. (Policy AL/PW1, SALP)

Paddock Wood currently lacks a traditional town square. Providing such a space is an integral part of regeneration and will help encourage “dwell time” and boost the social and economic vitality of the centre. This meeting place could accommodate markets, events, and local festivals. Land between Commercial Road, Maidstone Road and Station Road, plus the area between John Brunt Public House and Clavadal Road should be joined and completed to become part of a comprehensive regeneration package.

Town Centre and Business Development draft NP policy February 2019

This concept plan (right) shows a possible block structure for a regeneration scheme, comprising ground floor uses of cafés, restaurants and shops and an upper floor of residential. Residential would sit on the upper floors above the commercial and retail, food and drink uses. Car parking capacity should be maintained and expanded. A multi-storey car park gives additional capacity at the station. This is “skinned” with single-aspect south facing town houses to hide what can be a dominant structure. This adds financial value to the overall scheme and also creates a better street scene along Station Road. The concept delivers a significant increase in street frontage. This length of ground floor frontage provides opportunities for retail, cafés and other uses dependant on footfall to invest in Paddock Wood. Integrating the green infrastructure through tree planting provides a more pleasant environment. This visually pleasing and provides natural barriers to noise and pollution, provides shade and can create focal points and emphasis to certain streets and spaces. The Tunbridge Wells Retail and Leisure Study 2017 also identified that the town centre would benefit from a greater provision of trees and soft landscaping.

In the future consideration will need to be given to the expansion of the town centre north of the railway bridge

+++ KEY TO BE ADDED +++

POLICY TC2

Retail, High Street & Food / Drink Uses

The town’s retail provision should be enhanced to support an expanding town. Land use classes A1, A2 & A3 uses will be supported where it can be demonstrated that they enhance public and community uses and add to a safe, vibrant and attractive street scene. Appropriate locations are as follows:

- Commercial Road
- Station Road
- Maidstone Road

Policy Justification

Paddock Wood should offer a wide variety of retail, maintaining lots of interesting shops which complement each other, rather than a small number of retailers dominating the town. The local character of the area suits a multi-faceted retail approach and recognises the importance of independent businesses which can successfully occupy smaller premises.

Measures by shop owners to improve their retail frontages will be supported, such as grants to encourage local stores to “up their game”. The vitality of the town centre is dependent on primary retail frontages, so it is important that the retail frontages be retained and enhanced.

Residents would also like to see a wider range of shops generally, such as books, music and health food. The Tunbridge Wells Retail and Leisure Study 2017 also identified that although there was a high proportion of independent comparison retailers there was a lack of clothing stores.

There should be a balance of betting/charity shops with small independent retail outlets and restaurants.

POLICY TC3

Town Centre and Business Development draft NP policy February 2019

Evening & Night Time Activity

- a) Land use class A3 (e.g. cafés and restaurants) will be supported in the town centre subject to there being no detrimental impact upon key retail frontages.
- b) Land use class A4 and A5 (e.g. pubs, cafes and restaurants) will be encouraged in key areas of the town centre retail frontage. Currently, key retail frontage comprises the following streets:
- Commercial Road
 - Station Road
 - Maidstone Road

Future development of a town square should include cafes/restaurants and other social meeting places

Policy Justification

The Tunbridge Wells Retail and Leisure Study 2017 identified that Paddock Wood has a lack of restaurants and other leisure facilities that would contribute towards an evening economy.

Residents of Paddock Wood have identified the need for some affordable restaurants, wine bars or bistros, which are essential to create life in the evening and balance the profusion of takeaways.

POLICY TC4

Protect & Enhance Commercial Road

Proposals that support the retention and enhancement of the existing retail, commercial and ancillary facilities in and around Commercial Road will be encouraged.

Change of use from retail/commercial to residential in the town centre should not be allowed. Any additional frontage should also be retail, commercial or social.

Policy Justification

As the historic heart of the town, residents have identified Commercial Road as an important centre both now and into the future. As this site is well connected to existing residential areas, it must provide high quality shops and services to a local catchment that can arrive on foot and by bicycle, as well as to a wider catchment from further afield. The focus should be on encouraging a good mix of shops for all age groups. The preference is for independent shops rather than national chains to provide variety for shoppers.

An opportunity could exist for redevelopment of the southern end of Commercial Road which currently houses buildings such as Dowding House, The Day Centre and the Telephone Exchange.

POLICY TC5

Tourist and Business Traveller Accommodation

Support will be given for planning applications for the development small hotels and guest houses, subject to the following criteria:

- a) Preference will be given to town centre locations, in close proximity to the railway station and Commercial Road.

Town Centre and Business Development draft NP policy February 2019

b) Support will be given to small boutique hotels and guest houses within residential areas subject to planning conditions to ensure the potential noise and parking impacts are mitigated.

Policy Justification

There are currently no hotels within Paddock Wood, so visitors must stay further afield in Tonbridge or Tunbridge Wells. This means a loss in the potential contributions to the local economy and a subsequent reduction in the town's economic vibrancy. An attractive town with a range of visitor accommodation will allow people to stay close to the core facilities. They will therefore be more likely to use local shops, restaurants and other services.

POLICY TC6

Commercial & Employment Premises

a) Any new development outside existing industrial and employment areas will be required through its design, scale, and materials to enhance the location to make it attractive for new businesses.

b) All employment and industrial proposals need to demonstrate through a Design & Access Statement how they will relate to the wider Paddock Wood area, with specific reference to clear and convenient connections with the town centre, the creation of public access to the railway station and surrounding adjacent areas.

c) Key infrastructure improvements which may be required to support economic development will include the following: good digital connectivity, adequate parking, additional accommodation such as a hotel or bed and breakfast, a transport hub, extra public transport, new access roads, a wider variety of small businesses, an evening economy as well as the expansion of the Town Centre north of the railway bridge, possibly with 3-5 storey buildings and increased leisure facilities. Consideration to be given also to making Commercial Road a one-way street.

d) Specific offices suitable for article 4 direction which withdraws permitted development rights, would include the office space along Commercial Road and in other business areas. This would prevent these employment spaces being converted to residential properties providing a major opportunity for growth in the area.

Policy Justification

Paddock Wood needs to provide a range of uses in addition to housing such as employment, shopping and community facilities including education. It is important that these are accessible to people from the surrounding villages as well as local residents. A restriction in the number of charity shops, estate agents and betting shops would create the opportunity for small businesses to be developed.

There is a growing need for mixed employment opportunities in the redevelopment of the central area bordered by station road and Commercial Road. This might include small workshops or employment units to encourage business "startup" space.

Jobs

With the future rapid expansion of Paddock Wood there are strong reasons for economic development in the area, to provide work for people living locally and to attract employers to the area. Paddock Wood needs skilled and professional work for local employment to encourage business expansion, to reduce the need for commuting to work or for young people to leave the area. The

Town Centre and Business Development draft NP policy February 2019

supply of employment close to main roads, public transport hub, ample car parking and existing amenities could be a successful combination for employers wishing to expand or relocate.

Transport

The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) is seeking investment in transport infrastructure for accelerated growth in the 'knowledge economy' to balance the current reliance on public sector employers.

Due to traffic congestion in Tunbridge Wells, Paddock Wood is an ideal place to locate additional office space. (a need identified by the Economic Needs Study TWBC 2016). It has good road and rail links as well as already being a centre for industry and distribution.

Employment land and offices

The Tunbridge Wells Economic Needs Study 2016 highlighted the shortage of employment land across the borough, including Paddock Wood, with local letting agents holding waiting lists for premises. The combination of a highly skilled and growing labour force could make the area attractive to professional, scientific and technical businesses (TWBC Retail & Leisure Study 2017). The area could also offer opportunities for start-up unit and self-employment if appropriate business units were available (TWBC Retail & Leisure Study 2017). Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has also identified a need for employment opportunities for graduates and professionals within the borough which could be accommodated in Paddock Wood.

Provision of land for economic development in and around Paddock Wood will be important to prevent the town becoming a dormitory town in the future, with the consequent growth in commuting. Enlargement of Paddock Wood with the current 1000 new homes makes the need for employment, retail and leisure space greater than that outlined in the current TWBC documents. (Tunbridge Wells Economic Needs Study 2016 ,TWBC Retail & Leisure Study 2017).

Over the next 15 years with the proposals for further housing numbers we expect the requirement for employment space to be far greater than currently anticipated. Allocations of employment, retail and leisure space should be commensurate with the growth of the town.

POLICY TC7

Town Centre Living

- a) Residential development proposals within the town centre, located on upper floors or away from the primary retail areas, that are within a convenient walking distance of services and facilities will be supported.
- b) Application for residential development above ground floor will be supported provided they respect scale and amenity of the neighbouring buildings and do not reduce existing retail space.

Policy Justification

Paddock Wood residents should find it easy to access daily supplies using sustainable travel. Maintaining a walking distance from their home to a local shops and services will encourage the option of walking and cycling, rather than a greater distance leading people to drive and contribute further to congestion and environmental issues. Therefore, proposals to develop new town centre residential premises will be supported. Living above businesses is an efficient use of land and brings benefits such as vibrancy, mix of people, social interaction, and security through passive surveillance.

Town Centre and Business Development draft NP policy February 2019

For the purposes of this policy, walking distance in this instance is up to a maximum of 800m from origin to destination. This distance has been informed by the Institution of Highways & Transportation “Guidelines For Providing For Journeys On Foot” advice note, 2000.

Car parking for town centre residential development should not unduly displace existing town centre spaces. New residential development in the town centre area should be supported with the provision of appropriate car parking.

POLICY TC8

Public Realm Design

Development proposals that improve the public realm in the town centre will be supported, especially where they improve pedestrian connectivity, encourage cycling and connections with public transport.

Policy Justification

The public realm — the streets, squares and spaces between the buildings — is an essential asset of community life in Paddock Wood. These spaces are where social connections are made and individual well-being is improved. Enhancement of the public realm will be supported and is often the means by which to measure the liveability of the town. Strong pedestrian, cycle and public transport connections are vital factors to ensure successful public realm design.

There is a requirement for a “street clutter” audit. For example, bollards, toilets, litter bins, bike racks, pavement and street surfacing all require attention and rationalisation. Consultation with the relevant authorities, residents and users is required before removals, improvements, additions and maintenance occurs. Particularly noted is the obsolescence of some street furniture in the town centre. It is also noted that drains need to be maintained to prevent flooding.

POLICY TC9

Balanced & Phased Development

All future town centre development should keep the right balance of retail, residential, and community facilities, and should be phased in a manner that is not detrimental to the trading success of existing shops and services.

Policy Justification

Expansion of the mix of town centre land uses should be relative to the planned residential expansion of Paddock Wood. The growth of non-residential uses needs to happen alongside with the growth of housing in the neighbourhood area. This will allow both new and existing residents to access the facilities they need, increase the vibrancy of the town, and make Paddock Wood work for everyone.

5th February 2019

Town Centre and Business Development draft NP policy February 2019

FOR DISCUSSION and DECISION ABOUT ADDING TO POLICY

An earlier meeting looked at the buildings in commercial Road, identified those that might soon be redeveloped and what would like to be seen to replace them.

Eg Dowding House, Day Centre, Phone Exchange, Inprint shop, bank sites.