

INSPECTOR'S INITIAL FINDINGS (2)

RETAIL MATTERS

1. My Note of 22 February 2016 (document EX.102) sets out my Initial Findings on the soundness of most of Sefton Local Plan following detailed consideration of all the evidence. I was unable to consider retail matters in that Note because the Council was awaiting responses to the draft modifications proposed to policy ED2 after the hearing session in January 2016. These responses were received at the end of February (documents EX.103, EX.104 and EX.105). On 17 March 2016 the Council published its final modifications to policy ED2 and an explanatory note (document EX.106).
2. The purpose of these Initial Findings on retail matters is to ensure that the forthcoming consultation on Main Modifications (MMs) includes all the MMs that, on the basis of the evidence given to date, I consider necessary for the Plan to be found sound. I will take the representations on the MMs into account before the final stage of the examination, the completion of my report to the Council.
3. The Council has modified its approach to town centres and retail policy following consideration of the October 2015 Retail Strategy Review (document EM.7) and the evidence to the hearing. The enlargement of certain town centres to include other uses (such as leisure, office and some community uses) accords with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the new boundaries are sound. In particular, I endorse the inclusion within Southport town centre of the main hotel and leisure area and Central 12 retail park, and the more limited extension to Crosby district centre.
4. One consequence of more extensive town centre boundaries is that the retail core needs to be separately identified. As required by the NPPF, this is achieved by designating Primary Shopping Areas (PSAs); these have first priority when applying the sequential test to retail proposals. For Southport, I consider that the PSA centred on Chapel Street and Lord Street does not extend as far as Central 12 retail park. More generally, I consider it appropriate that Sefton's many retail parks should be given preference over new out of centre sites, as occurs in the current Unitary Development Plan.
5. Although the thresholds for requiring impact assessments are much lower than the default 2,500 sq m set by the NPPF, they are justified by the evidence that some of Sefton's town centres are showing signs of decline and many others are vulnerable. Setting the threshold at the size of a typical anchor unit for the relevant

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centre is a reasonable position to adopt. Adding the need for a proportionate and locally appropriate approach should ensure that demonstrating compliance with the policy would not be unduly onerous in situations where the prospect of a retail impact is small.

6. The MMs to policy ED2, the associated text and the Policy Maps satisfactorily address the above matters and have all been proposed by the Council. They are necessary for the Sefton Local Plan to be found sound.

Martin Pike

INSPECTOR

6 April 2016