

Appeal: APP/D1265/W/23/3336518

Site: Land to the south of Ringwood Road, Alderholt

LPA: Dorset Council

Appellant: Dudsbury Homes (Southern) Ltd

Date: 11 June 2024

TOPIC PAPER

The Content and Location of the Local Centre and Retail Impact

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1. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF TOPIC

- 1.1 This Topic paper has been produced at the request of the Inspector to assist in the appeal by Dudsbury Homes (Southern) Ltd against the decision of Dorset Council. It has been prepared and agreed by both parties and covers the matters of the location of the local centre and retail impact.

GUIDANCE

- **CIHT** – Planning for Walking – 2015. (CDF15)
- **CIHT** – Providing for Journeys on Foot – 2000 (CDF.50)
- **TCPA** – 20-Minute Neighbourhoods – Creating Healthier, Active, Prosperous Communities – 2021. (CDF48)
- **National Model Design Code** – 2021
- **National Design Guide** - 2019
- **Urban Design Compendium** – 1 & 2. 2000. (CDF47)
- **NPPF** and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

2. THE LOCATION OF THE LOCAL CENTRE

Existing facilities in Alderholt

- 2.1 The village of Alderholt, as it exists presently, has some limited services and community facilities, the majority of which are located along Station Road / Daggons Road.
- 2.2 Within the village envelope there exists a Co-op with a post office, a retail unit, a pub, a vet (reopened since the application was submitted), a village hall, a reading room, a first school, a church, a recreation ground, play areas and other areas of informal open space. A doctor's branch surgery exists but it is not currently operational for the reasons set out in the letter from the NHS Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board (CDF35).
- 2.3 Outside of the village envelope there is a nursery, a church and a garden centre with café.

Purpose of the local centre

- 2.4 The vision set out in the Design and Access Statement (DAS) (CDA49) is for the 'creation of a village square that will create a 'heart' to Alderholt Meadows where people can meet, pass time, and access services, all within a 15-minute walk of their homes.'
- 2.5 The Appellant's intended role of the local centre in the urban design and place-making of the proposal is as a hub. The Local Centre is intended to be a hub for existing and new residents of Alderholt.

The Proposed local centre

- 2.6 The application is in outline with all matters save for some access elements reserved. The broad location of the Proposed Local Centre (PLC) is identified on the parameters plans which the appellant expected would be referred to in conditions and that the detailed layout would be in broad conformity with those parameters.
- 2.7 The proposed location of the PLC is at the southern bend of the proposed internal spine road.
- 2.8 The employment uses as identified on the Land Use Parameter Plan (LUPP) (CDA11) are located approximately 500m to the east of the PLC, if travelling along the route of the spine road shown on the Access and Movement Parameter Plan (AMPP) (CDA9).
- 2.9 Care / sheltered accommodation will be included within areas defined as homes/neighbourhood on the submitted LUPP, these adjoin the PLC.

- 2.10 The Green Infrastructure parameter plan (CDA8) and Landscape Strategy Plan (LSP) (CDA7) identify a variety of types of open space, including amenity greenspace, a recreation ground, and areas for play. The PLC is positioned adjacent to a small pocket of existing trees, which are shown to be provided as natural greenspace. The closest areas of play to the PLC are shown as approximately 220m to the east adjacent to the business park, and 220m to the north.
- 2.11 The PLC is located approximately 1,100m from the main road network that takes passing trade through the village on the B3078 and 500m to Hillbury Road the main route south to the A31.

The Alternative local centre

- 2.12 The location of the Alternative Local Centre (ALC) is at the junction between Ringwood Road and the new spine road. The identification of this is intended by the LPA to demonstrate an alternative option exists for placement of a local centre within the development boundary.
- 2.13 The ALC is approximately 750m from the employment uses shown on the LUPP, if travelling along Ringwood Road via the spine road. The proposed employment uses are within Class E and as such are uses that can be carried out within a residential area. There is no requirement that employment is located as shown on the LUPP and so there is flexibility in the relationship between the employment and the ALC.
- 2.14 The ALC is located adjacent to areas defined as homes/neighbourhood within which care accommodation will be provided (that is to say, the location of care accommodation within the site is not specifically defined).
- 2.15 The ALC is located approximately 50m from an identified area of play, and adjacent to areas identified for recreational open space, and allotments.
- 2.16 The ALC is located approximately 400m from the main road network that takes passing trade through the village on the B3078. It is located adjacent to an indicative bus stop for the route proposed along the spine road.

The walkable neighbourhood

- 2.17 The TCPA describe 15- or 20-minute neighbourhoods as creating attractive, interesting, safe, walkable environments in which people of all ages and levels of fitness are happy to travel actively for short distances from home to the destinations that they visit and the services they need to use day to day – shopping, school, community and healthcare facilities, places of work, green spaces, and more. These places need to be easily accessible on foot, by cycle or by public transport – and accessible to everyone, whatever their budget or physical ability, without having to use a car.
- 2.18 CIHT Planning for Walking 2015 (CDF.15) and Manual for Streets 2 (CDF.51) provide context for walkable neighbourhoods and provide a good practice example at RAF Halton where 5, 10 and 15 minute isochrones are used for walking. The PLC is within a

15-minute walk for over 87% of the built-up areas of Alderholt, existing and proposed, and within a 10-minute walk of 44%. The ALC is within a 15-minute walk for over 93% of the built-up areas, and within a 10-minute walk of 65%.

2.19 All built-up areas are within a 20 minute walk of either centre.

Accessibility, and linkages existing and proposed

2.20 Alderholt sits within a hierarchy of 3 principal roads: Station Road (B3078), Ringwood Road, and Hillbury Road.

- Station Road provides connections to Fordingbridge, Verwood and Cranborne. It is the main east/west linkage from the village and experiences a degree of through traffic.
- Hillbury Road provides a link between the small village of Ashford to the north, and the A31 junction east of St Leonards and St Ives
- Ringwood Road provides a connection between Station Road and Hillbury Road, which passes through the village of Alderholt

2.21 The proposals show Ringwood Road diverted for vehicular traffic and forming a spine road that heads east and connects with Hillbury Road.

2.22 The PLC, the ALC and the existing Co-op are all located at stops for a new hourly bus service with stops throughout the village. The principal purpose of the bus service is to enable travel beyond Alderholt to other settlements.

2.23 Permeability diagrams have been submitted by the Appellant, intended to show that the PLC sits on the natural convergence of surrounding facilities, both existing and new. The LPA has submitted similar diagrams for the PLC, ALC and existing Co-op. The LPA agrees that the PLC would be within a 20 minute walk of the dwellings in the settlement.

2.24 The Appellant's urban design proof (CDG16) assesses the PLC and ALC against criteria, which include 'promoting travel through recreation grounds, rather than along the road, for the majority of existing Alderholt households.' The Addendum to the Transport Assessment (TAA) (CDA99) assesses the existing route from Birchwood Drive across the recreation ground to Ringwood Road (para. 3.9), identifying that it varies in width being 1m at its narrowest, and is occasionally lit.

3. RETAIL IMPACT

Background

- 3.1 It is agreed that the Reason for Refusal 5 refers to Policy KS7 of the Development Plan and national planning policy.
- 3.2 It is agreed that the appellant submitted a scoping report to the Council regarding the scope of a Sequential Test and Retail Impact Assessment following the refusal of planning permission. The Council advised that the assessment should test the impact on Fordingbridge and Verwood and the sequential test should cover the same towns.
- 3.3 The Council also advised that draft conditions would be required if less than 14,000 sqm of town centre/retail uses was being assumed in the assessment and that the assessment would need to assume development at the maximum possible level of retail and town centre uses proposed.
- 3.4 A Retail Impact and Sequential Test Assessments report (RISTA) prepared by DPDS was provided as part of the appeal submission. This was reviewed by LSH for the Council and comments provided in an appraisal report (ARISTA).

The content of the local centre

- 3.5 The illustrative plans, drawings and schedule show several individual buildings in the centre, but the quantum of floorspace and number of units has not been consistently assessed in the appeal submission and conditions will be required to control the form of development considered acceptable
- 3.6 The application submission (CDA1) specified 4,000 sqm of Class E uses within the local centre and the Retail Impact and Sequential Test Assessment (RISTA) (CDA77) indicates that 2,958 sqm of this would be main town centre uses as defined by Annex 2 of the NPPF.
- 3.7 The breakdown provided is as follows:
- 1,258 sqm retail (Class E(a))
 - 673 sqm food and beverage (Class E(b))
 - 316 sqm community/sports (Class E(d))
 - 724 sqm medical (Class e(e))
 - 1,026 sqm offices (Class E(gi)).

Retail Impact and Sequential Test Assessment (RISTA)

- 3.8 The RISTA (CDA77) assessed a specific mix of uses, namely one convenience outlet of 400 sq m (giving the maximum net floorspace of 280 sqm for unrestricted Sunday opening) 429 sqm gross (300 sqm net) of comparison floorspace, 429 sqm gross (300 sqm net) of retail service floorspace and 643 sq m (505 sqm net) of food and beverage

space. The RISTA included sensitivity testing of different combinations of these uses, solely based on different turnover forecasts. The LPA does not agree that either the original or the sensitivity test findings can be relied upon for reasons set out in the ARISTA (paras 5.7 – 5.10) (CDF.1).

3.9 The RISTA assesses the likely impact of the village centre on existing centres and does not cover the proposed business park. As part of the consultation following submission of the Scoping report, the Appellant suggested the inclusion of a condition preventing the use of the employment area for main town centre uses. The RISTA subsequently defined these excluded uses as:

- Class E(a) Display or retail sale of goods other than hot food;
- Class E(b) Sale of food and drink for consumption (mostly) on the premises;
- Class E(c) Provision of medical or health services (except the use of premises attached to the residence of the consultant or practitioner);
- Class E(f) Creche, day nursery or day centre (not including a residential use);
- public houses, wine bars, or drinking establishments;
- hot food takeaways (for the sale of hot food where consumption of that food is mostly undertaken off the premises).

3.10 It is agreed that main town centre uses include office uses (NPPF, Annex 2). The Appellant is content for a condition on the business park to exclude office uses, if that is considered necessary in planning terms.

3.11 It is agreed that the impact test does not apply to office development (NPPF para 94) but that any office use would need to demonstrate either a specific locational requirement or compliance with the sequential test (NPPF, para 91).

3.12 A condition preventing the inclusion of office uses within the employment uses on the business park is acceptable to the Appellant in principle and that it is expected such a condition will be agreed.

3.13 The application is for a village centre with associated retail commercial community and health facilities and is in outline. Para 4.2 of the Appellant's retail proof notes that the illustrative material for the village centre submitted with the application included:

- Coffee shop
- 6 Retail/Shops
- Dentist
- Village store
- Community building + Youth Centre
- Public House/Restaurant
- Doctor's surgery
- Pharmacy
- Opticians

- Business Enterprise + Business Hub
- Estates Office
- Offices /Retail

- 3.14 A schedule of unit sizes is provided in Appendix DM1 to the Appellant’s Retail Proof, but this does not specify the retail uses. The Council considers that that this offer is not consistent with the planning condition proposed in the RISTA (CDA.77, para 2.4) or being proposed by the Appellant. However, the development of the village centre will be in accordance with a planning condition and that condition will ensure that the impacts are in accordance with those assessed. Residential occupation within the village centre is stated as with 15 flats above some retail and facilities, although there is no condition or obligation which would secure this. The Appellant does not consider that a condition is necessary in this respect to make the development acceptable in planning terms and the Council has not proposed one.
- 3.15 The ability of the local centre to meet the day-to-day needs of existing and local residents, whilst not drawing trade from further afield, will depend on the types of uses occupying the space. This will be influenced by various factors including the size of units provided, the location of the centre and the phasing of development.
- 3.16 As the application proposal is in outline, it is agreed that a detailed occupier list cannot be expected at this stage, but the amount of floorspace and number of units will influence this. A condition controlling these elements is therefore required.

Retail Context

- 3.17 Paragraph 2.1 of the Statement of Common Ground March 2024 (SOCGM) (CDC1) provides a description of Alderholt in relation to surrounding settlements. In terms of retail provision within Alderholt, there is a Co-op foodstore of about 280 sq m (net sales) with adjacent parking and a Childrens’ second hand clothes shop next to the Co-op. In terms of retail services there is a public house, the Churchill Arms at the western end of the village.
- 3.18 The nearest towns are Fordingbridge (in Hampshire) and Verwood. Fordingbridge is described in the RISTA (CDA.77) as having 9 convenience goods shops in the town centre including a medium sized Co-op and a Tesco Express. There are 24 comparison goods shops including a hardware store, a couple of ladies clothing shops, interior décor shops and several gift shops. There are 6 pubs/restaurants and two takeaways in the town centre, as well as a range of retail services including hairdressers, estate agents and opticians. There is a post office, library, museum, a small cinema (The Regal) and a small hospital. There were 3 vacant shop units at the time of the DPDS site visit.
- 3.19 Verwood is described in the RISTA as having 43 outlets with 19 comparison shops, 22 service outlets and 2 convenience outlets in the town centre (Tesco Express and an independent butchers). The main convenience shopping is carried out in the out of centre Co-op, Morrison and Lidl stores. The town centre had one vacant shop unit at the time of the DPDS site visit.

3.20 There is a wider range of shopping available about 7 miles away in Ringwood including Sainsbury and Waitrose food stores. Higher order shopping is available in Salisbury (about 15 miles from Alderholt, Bournemouth (about 16 miles away) and Southampton (about 25 miles away).

4. MATTERS AGREED AND NOT AGREED

The existing context

- 4.1 It is agreed that existing facilities in Alderholt are as set out in this document.
- 4.2 It is agreed that the following planning policies relating to retail and town centre matters are relevant:
- The East Dorset and Christchurch Core Strategy Part 1 (adopted 2014)
 - Policy KS2 – Settlement Hierarchy
 - Policy KS6 – Town Centre Hierarchy
 - Policy KS7 – Role of Town and District Centres
 - Policy PC5 - Shops and Community Facilities in Local Centres and Villages
- 4.3 The relevance of the following policies is not agreed:
- Policy LN7 - Community Facilities and Services. The LPA does not accept this policy is relevant in terms of the main town centre uses proposed. It is relevant to the community and health facilities proposed but these uses are not main town centre uses and so are not relevant to the retail assessment
 - KS11 – Transport and Development. The Appellant considers this may be relevant to the determination of the appeal but is a separate matter from those raised in Policy PC5. The LPA considers that the policy is relevant to the current consideration of retail and main town centre uses.
- 4.4 It is agreed that material considerations include the NPPF particularly paragraphs 90 -95 and Annex 2 and Planning Practice Guidance Town Centres and Retail paras 06, 07, 09, 011, 012, 014, 015, 017, 018.

The PLC location

- 4.5 it is agreed that the submitted parameter plans, if conditioned, would fix the broad location of the local centre in the area identified on the LUPP
- 4.6 It is not agreed that the PLC is in the most accessible location for all Alderholt's residents
- 4.7 It is not agreed that the spine road will be the most likely route for 'passing trade', from either pedestrians or vehicles.
- 4.8 It is not agreed that the south-western loop of the spine road would sit towards the top of the hierarchy of streets in Alderholt, nor that the PLC is located at a 'natural node'.
- 4.9 It is not agreed that the PLC is positioned adjacent to the recreation ground, nor is it agreed that the route shown from existing residential areas along footpaths through the recreation ground, and proposed development would offer legible, direct and safe routes that are attractive to existing residents.

- 4.10 It is not agreed that the viability of the Co-op depends on the new centre being distanced from it.

The proposal

- 4.11 It is agreed that the provision of a Local Centre carries benefits toward the sustainability of Alderholt and the concept of “living locally”. Residents will continue to travel elsewhere for main supermarket food shopping, most comparison shopping, commercial leisure facilities etc.
- 4.12 It is agreed that the inclusion of 316 sqm of community space to serve the needs of the new community is considered a benefit, although the weight attributed to this is not agreed.
- 4.13 The proposed content and mix of uses is not agreed and this will determine the degree of sustainability and self containment that can be achieved and the impact of the development on other centres and the Alderholt Co-op.
- 4.14 It is agreed that the submitted parameter plans do not specify the location of the extra-care accommodation.
- 4.15 It is agreed that Class E employment uses proposed can be carried out in a residential area without detriment to its amenity.
- 4.16 It is not agreed that any guidance or standard exists as to how far walking distances and any time limit that might apply to them, should extend from a proposed local Centre into an existing setting.

The design assessment

- 4.17 It is not agreed that 15 minutes represents a preferred maximum walking distance. The Appellant’s position is that a 20 minute walking distance is acceptable (paras. 6.3-6.4,CDF.15) The Council’s position is that walking distances should be minimised for as much of the built-up areas as possible, to encourage sustainable travel.
- 4.18 It is agreed that both travel distance and quality of the route are important considerations when making travel choices. However, the relevant factors contributing to these considerations are not agreed.
- 4.19 It is agreed that community integration is important, especially in the context of strategic extensions such as this proposal.

The retail impacts

- 4.20 It is agreed that the impact of the development and its compliance with the sequential test depends on the scale and form of development.
- 4.21 The LPA and the Appellant agree that there is no sequential test objection to the proposal provided the scale and permitted uses are appropriate to a local centre.

- 4.22 It is agreed that the relevant centres for the impact assessment are Fordingbridge and Verwood in terms of impacts on defined town centres.
- 4.23 It is agreed that the impact of the proposed local centre and specifically the proposed convenience store needs to be assessed in terms of Policy PC5.
- 4.24 It is also agreed that to achieve the suggested benefits relating to improvements in provision, the local centre must be deliverable at an appropriate time.
- 4.25 It is agreed that the local centre is proposed to be delivered by 2030. It is agreed that the RISTA identifies positive impacts on the Co-op arising from between 2035 and 2040.
- 4.26 It is agreed that the existing Co-op store will experience a significant negative impact as a result of the proposed development in the short term. In the longer term (some time after 2035 but before 2040) the impact is likely to be positive, if the store continues to trade at that time.
- 4.27 The implications of the Co-op's possible closure in planning policy terms are not agreed. The Appellant considers that the closure would not lead to a substantial decline in the range and quality of services for local people and would not therefore conflict with Policy PC 5. Furthermore, the village centre as a whole would comply with the first part of Policy PC 5 (and Policy LN 7) and would improve the retail and community services available to local people. The LPA considers that the combined effect of the closure of the Co-op and the development of the local centre at the Appellant's proposed location would result in poorer access to convenience shopping facilities for existing residents of Alderholt and a likely increase in travel by car for food shopping purposes.

Acceptability in planning terms

- 4.28 It is agreed that Alderholt does not currently represent a sustainable settlement, and that the Appellant's proposal relies upon the delivery of services and facilities within the local centre to improve the sustainability of Alderholt.
- 4.29 It is agreed that the submitted parameter plans form part of the application, and that a condition is proposed requiring future proposals in to be accordance with these plans. It is agreed that the parameter plans identify the broad location of the local centre.
- 4.30 It is agreed that a condition is necessary to control the permitted uses and scale of development to those appropriate to a local centre. The LPA has suggested a condition which would limit the development to that tested within the RISTA, while also requiring the delivery of certain elements. However, the Appellant has indicated the proposed wording is unnecessarily prescriptive and has proposed an alternative version. The LPA considers that it is standard practice to base a condition on the form of development tested in any sequential and impact assessments that have been provided.
- 4.31 It is agreed that a suitable condition is also required to restrict main town centre uses within the 'business park' and a condition has been jointly agreed.
- 4.32 Subject to suitable condition, it is agreed that the proposal would not have a significant adverse impact on the relevant existing town centres.

