

Thanet District Council

Thanet Retail and Leisure Study - Summary

(Lichfields 2021)



Background

In 2012 a retail study was carried out to inform the Town Centre Strategy in the currently adopted Local Plan 2020. As part of this a telephone survey was carried out to ascertain people's shopping habits and this informed future growth forecasts telling us what town centre uses to plan for and where. This study was updated twice more before the plan was adopted to reflect the increasing housing numbers. The latest iteration was carried out in 2018 and this is what is reflected in the Local Plan.

Table 1 in the Adopted Local Plan shows the levels of town centre uses we are currently planning for.

Floorspace Need (2018 study)

2031 Plan Period	Convenience sqm	Comparison (high street goods) sqm	A2-A5 uses sqm	Total Need sqm
Westwood	-	16,787	910	17,697
Margate	700	1,853	496	3,049
Broadstairs	1,650	2,143	1,161	4,954
Ramsgate	783	2,822	932	4,537

The study includes a review of the town centre boundaries taking into account the level of vacancy. The report also advised on the retail hierarchy and what floorspace threshold the impact test should apply at.

Retail and Leisure Study 2021

To inform the Local Plan Review we have had another Retail Study carried out which involved a new telephone survey to understand any changes in shopping habits. This was also carried out by Lichfields using the same methodology so is comparable. Some questions were also added to understand how shopping had changed during the COVID 19 Pandemic and whether these were likely to change once this was over. The study also used the latest population projections. The need levels for the various town centre uses are as follows:

Floorspace Need (2021 study)

Sqm (gross)	2026	2036
Convenience	-4,342	-1,536
Comparison (high street goods)	-2,283	2,911
Food & Beverage	926	3,784
Leisure/Entertainment/Culture	1,100	4,450

The 2021 Need figures are markedly below those of the last study reflecting the major shift to online shopping possibly exacerbated by the Pandemic. This clearly means that we have no need to provide for any further shopping floorspace to the end of the plan period. One of the things we may need to consider is the contraction of our town centres and/or greater flexibility within them.

The report shows that retention rates for all sectors is high across Thanet meaning that currently Thanet is not losing expenditure to other centres and districts, which is good news.

The report also offers some useful evidence to justify why the retail hierarchy remains appropriate albeit that some more convenience provision may be needed for qualitative reasons in Westgate and Birchington to serve the increasing populations there.

The report also contains some further policy recommendations such as the lowering of the impact test threshold. The 2500sqm NPPF threshold and the Thanet Local Plan 2020 1000sqm threshold for urban areas would exceed the overall long term retail/food beverage/leisure projections for most centres in the District. This will be considered by the Council.