



**Friends of
the Earth**

Briefing

Retail development

Key policies for inclusion in Local Development Frameworks

Friends of the Earth believes that Local Planning Authorities, via their Local Development Frameworks (LDF), should play a positive role in promoting vibrant, diversified and localised retail development in their areas. Policies that support a diverse range of retail provision including smaller independent shops and local food initiatives will deliver advantages to the local economy, provide access to the less mobile shopper, and deliver environmental benefits. By contrast, policies that encourage the domination of local retailing by a few large format operators will damage local economies and encourage car-dependent shopping with consequent environmental pollution. This briefing suggests key policies on retail development for inclusion in LDFs.

Friends of the Earth inspires solutions to environmental problems, which make life better for people.

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- a unique network of campaigning local groups, working in over 200 communities throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- dependent on individuals for over 90 per cent of its income.

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Introduction

Friends of the Earth believes that sustainable development should be at the heart of the future development of our society. It provides planning with its core purpose to enhance the quality of life of communities by promoting the highest quality forms of development in the most appropriate locations without compromising environmental limits. Such development should seek to promote social equity over private gain and the wise use of limited natural resources to protect the interests of future generations.

Friends of the Earth is therefore promoting the inclusion in every LDF of an overarching policy statement to ensure sustainable patterns of development. However, it is essential that this principle is followed through in every policy area covered by the LDF. For retail development we consider that this means promoting vibrant, diversified and localised retail development.

We recognise that in developing local retail policies local planning authorities will be guided by PPG6 and the new PPS6 when it is issued, probably early next year. Friends of the Earth supports the key principles of PPG6 and the draft PPS6 to reverse the decline of town centres and encourage renewed investment in the UK's high streets. However, given the current trend for the major large format retail operators to move into more central locations, we do not think that it is sufficient to rely on restriction on new out-of-town developments. We have raised serious concerns with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) about the encouragement in draft PPS6 for large format stores on the edge of town centres and hope to see this removed from the final version. The market dominance of the companies that operate out of large format stores is such that they can have an equally negative impact on town centre and high street stores when they are located on the edge of town centres. Evidence of these impacts is included in a Friends of the Earth briefing¹. The loss of some 30,000 independent food, beverage and tobacco retailers over the last decade is in part due to the difficulty that smaller retailers have in competing with the dominant supermarkets.

We are also concerned by the apparent encouragement by local authorities for the development of 'regeneration stores' in deprived areas. Friends of the Earth is not convinced that this is the best way to boost the local economy or provide access to healthy food, especially if the opening of a large store results in the loss of smaller local businesses. Over a quarter of households in the UK don't have access to a car and the less affluent are less likely to have private transport. Yet 'regeneration' stores are still geared up to car-based shopping. Food poverty is not necessarily confined to specific geographical areas, and those on lower incomes and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to impacts on local shopping provision. Large supermarkets can have impacts on smaller shops at a considerable distance, so any benefits to those in the immediate vicinity of the supermarket need to be weighed against the negative impacts on people living within its area of influence, which could be several miles away. And in looking at claims that supermarkets make about creating jobs it is important to remember that other local retail jobs are lost when a new supermarket opens.

Friends of the Earth considers that the wider community must be involved in the future retail provision in their areas. Any policy that favours a particular business sector, such as large format retail operators, will prejudice the views of that sector over and above those of the wider community and should not be included in policies at the national, regional or local level.

We have drawn up retail policies which we believe address these issues and we recommend that these be included in local planning authorities' LDFs.

Retail Development – recommended policies for inclusion in the Local Development Framework

Friends of the Earth considers that the sequential approach that is already defined in Government planning guidance, which favours town centre development over out-of-town retail development, is a vital component of a sustainable retail strategy. However, we also believe that large format stores located on the edge of town centres can equally damage the vitality of town centres. It is also essential that a threshold to restrict the development of large scale retail outlets that would otherwise damage existing retail centres is adopted. We therefore recommend that, in addition to the sequential approach, the following policy be incorporated into the LDF:

In future, all development plans should incorporate clear policies and proposals for retail development, including a cap of at most 3,000m² of net retail floor space in retail outlets. In some local authority areas it will be necessary to set the cap at a lower level, for example: in areas where the aim is to protect existing, or encourage new provision of, a diverse range of shops and services; in areas where a large proportion of the retail floorspace is already provided in large format stores; in local centres or smaller town centres where a large format store would not be appropriate in scale or catchment to that centre.

There will be a presumption against the approval of developments above the threshold except in the following exceptional circumstances:

- where the applicant can satisfy all the safeguards contained within PPG 6/Draft PPS 6 and specifically the sequential approach and the requirement to demonstrate 'need'.
- where the development would have no detrimental impact on the vitality and diversity of existing retail centres. Applicants will be expected to submit a detailed Economic Impact Assessment of both the quantitative and qualitative impacts of the proposed development.
- where the applicant can satisfy the principles of sustainable development set out in paragraph 1.4.

The presumption against approval will also apply to any change of use or extension which would result in the total net retail sales space of an outlet contravening the floor space threshold. No existing out-of-centre developments should be redefined as town centres.

Promoting diversity and vitality in existing retail centres

The LDF should play a positive role in promoting vibrant, diversified and localised retail development in an area. Retail planning policy should therefore reinforce investment in urban renewal by supporting the continuing role of town and district centres. This should include the effective use of master planning, action plans and supplementary planning guidance on issues such as urban design. In assessing the need for additional retail floorspace in or adjacent to existing centres local authorities should not simply consider the

quantitative need for floorspace but should also assess the format in which the additional floorspace will most likely contribute to the vibrancy and diversity of existing retail centres.

Promoting retail diversity and vitality in new developments

Growth areas provide an opportunity to put into practice the principles of sustainable development and to demonstrate the benefits of a pro-active approach to encouraging vibrant district and local centres. We recommend the following policy:

In any significant new area of housing development, provision should be made for local retail outlets which:

- avoid an overall increase in travel;
- provide access to essential shopping facilities for those without access to a car;
- encourage vibrant and diverse neighbourhood/district retail centres.

Retail policy and support for the rural economy and local communities

Friends of the Earth believes that planning policy has a key role to play in delivering on the Government's policies on sustainable rural economies and that it should be supportive of local facilities in small to medium towns and villages which provide an effective and valuable service to the local community, particularly the elderly, disabled and those with no access to a car or those who are poorly served by public transport. We recommend the following statement:

Local authorities should develop policies that provide a presumption in favour of retail developments which make a primary contribution to sustaining local food producers, and providing accessible retail facilities to local communities, including specific guidance in Supplementary Planning Guidance.

References

ⁱ *Why the new PPS6 could damage town centres.* MP briefing, Friends of the Earth. November 2004