

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This appendix contains the methodology for undertaking the vitality and viability health checks in line with national retail planning policy.

1.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

1.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework¹ (NPPF) was revised in February 2019. The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It sets out the Government's requirements for the planning system only to the extent that it is relevant, proportionate and necessary to do so.

1.2.2 The NPPF identifies a number of factors which are of relevance in delivering sustainable development, with one such factor being the need to ensure the vitality of town centres. Paragraph 85 of the NPPF states that "*planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaption*". Paragraph 85 also requires planning policies to promote the long-term viability and vitality of town centres. It notes this should be achieved by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters.

1.3 Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres Planning Practice Guidance

1.3.1 Whilst the NPPF does not provide a list of indicators to be used to assess the health of a centre, such criteria have been published in the NPPG section 'Town Centres and Retail' (July 2019). Paragraph 006 of the Practice Guidance identifies a series of key indicators which are of relevance in assessing the health of a centre over time. Indicators which should be monitored on a regular basis in order to judge the health of a centre and its performance over time include the following:

- Diversity of uses - data on the diversity of uses was collated during fieldwork in January/February 2019.
- Proportion of vacant street level property - vacant properties were also identified during the undertaking of on-site surveys.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>



- Retailer representation and intentions to change representation - information on the current strength of the defined centres, retailer representation and retailer requirements, has been derived from on-site surveys and various published sources.
- Commercial rents - where available rental data has been sourced from recognised UK property consultants/retail data providers.
- Commercial yields on non-domestic property - where available commercial yield data has also been sourced from property consultants/retail data providers.
- Pedestrian flows - general footfall and pedestrian flows were also observed during WYG's on-site surveys.
- Accessibility - consideration of access to and around the centres is informed by WYG's on-site surveys.
- Perceptions of safety and occurrence of crime - informed by our observations and initiatives present in each centre.
- Customers' experience and behaviour - information on views is based on the NEMS household survey and in-centre visitor survey results, along with feedback from key stakeholders, where available.
- State of town centre environmental quality - consideration of the quality of the buildings and public realm in the centre has also been informed by WYG's 'on the ground' observations.
- Balance between independent and multiple stores – information on the balance between independent and multiple retailers has been derived from on-site surveys.
- Extent to which there is evidence of barriers to new businesses opening and existing business expanding – informed by our observations and discussions with the Council and, if relevant, stakeholders.
- Opening hours/availability/extent to which there is an evening and night-time economy offer – informed by observations during visits to each centre and a review of existing store opening hours and evening economy provision.



1.4 Wirral Borough Health Checks

- 1.4.1 For the purposes of this Study the health check assessments for all town, district and local centres are based on surveys undertaken by the Council. The surveys are primarily based on the development plan boundary for the centres, apart from Birkenhead, which also includes the large Primarily Commercial Area covering Hamilton Square and Argyle/Market Street.
- 1.4.2 The composition categories adopted for the surveys are based on those adopted by Experian Goad. This allows data on the occupation of units to be 'benchmarked' with national average Goad data.

