

Hastings Planning Strategy

Retail Sites Assessment

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Executive Summary

Hastings town centre operates at a sub-regional level, competing directly with Eastbourne to the west, Tunbridge Wells to the north and Ashford to the north-east. There is a clear desire to ensure that Hastings town centre retains and strengthens its retail offer.

Hastings Borough Council is currently preparing both a Planning Strategy (formerly called the Core Strategy) and a Development Management Plan, which includes site allocations. The Planning Strategy is at an advanced stage of preparation and is due to be submitted to Government for independent examination in October 2012. This document sets out that approximately 20,500m² of comparison goods retail floorspace will be required in the town over the Plan period to 2028. Comparison goods include clothing, footwear, household and recreational goods. This requirement is based on evidence set out in the latest Retail Floorspace Needs Assessment, which was carried out in 2011. The Planning Strategy indicates that site selection to accommodate this additional retail floorspace will be undertaken through the Development Management Plan.

This paper sets out the steps we have taken in terms of site identification including ongoing discussions regarding a large, single site within the town centre.

An assessment of potential sites in Hastings town centre in 2010 has revealed only a limited number of infill sites that could, cumulatively help meet future floorspace requirements, and only a single site capable of accommodating in full, future retail floorspace needs. Though the update of the retail capacity requirements in 2011 has revised earlier forecasts of need downwards and further into the future, in preparing the Development Management Plan, it has become apparent that economic conditions and the resulting lack of developer interest in developing large scale retail premises in Hastings town centre, means that the present time, the Council can have little certainty regarding site delivery. Therefore we do not believe we are in a position to allocate a site/sites for such a use at the present time.

The Council intends to deal with this uncertainty by defining a town centre boundary, within which development for additional comparison goods floorspace will be encouraged. This proposed boundary has been subject to consultation with stakeholders and the local community. This will provide flexibility within the Development Management Plan without being specific about which site(s) will be developed. It will then be down to market forces to determine when, and if the economic situation is right for such development. At the same time, the boundary will give developers a clear steer about the area where such development will be encouraged.

Adopting this approach will mean that we can take into account future forecasts of retail needs having regard to economic conditions, whilst simultaneously continuing to develop our site suitability and deliverability assessment work.

Introduction

1. An update of previous retail capacity study – the 2006 Knight Frank Study was commissioned in 2011. This was necessary due to changes in the current economic climate, and the impact this has had on future retail floorspace needs. It was also necessary to advance the previous forecasts by a further 7 years to 2028 to be consistent with the timescale of the Planning Strategy.
2. The update has shown that between 2006 and 2009 new shopping floorspace growth has been minimal and vacancies have increased. In consequence, Hastings town centre could have experienced a small market share loss during this period of about 1.0%. Between 2009 and 2014, the requirements for additional comparison goods floorspace can largely be met by schemes that already have planning permission. National economic forecasters currently anticipate that the UK will have largely pulled out of the economic downturn by 2014. Taking account of the revised expenditure growth rates, the "most likely" forecast in the 2011 update makes clear that the Local Plan needs to provide for an additional 14,793m² (gross) during 2016-2028. This figure rises to 20,360m² (gross), taking account of the related service trade shops required to support such development, and gross requirement of 866m² of convenience retailing. A development of 20,360m² would be slightly smaller than the existing Priory Meadow development.
3. The update also considered the need for additional retail warehousing, or bulky goods, typically electrical goods, furniture, carpets and DIY stores. The results of the update represent a significant downward revision of the 2006 forecasts. The results show that:
 - Between 2014-2021 a need for 1,274m² of gross new floorspace
 - Extending up to 2028 requires a further 1,496m² of new gross floorspace
4. This brings the total additional bulky goods floorspace requirement to 2,770m², up to 2028.
5. In March 2010 the Council completed an informal "Big Map" consultation as part of the development of the Development Management Plan Document. One of the questions asked was about locating the additional 30,000m² of comparison shopping floorspace. This figure was based on the earlier forecast requirements. Of the 56 people who responded 29 (51%) preferred a combination of smaller sites and 16 (28%) one large single site. 11 didn't know. A number of potential sites were suggested, all of which are considered in this paper.
6. A significant number of respondents suggested that empty shops should be used first. The update of the retail needs assessment has taken empty shops into account. In April 2009, following the letting of the former Woolworths building (Wellington Place), the update found a relatively low vacancy rate at 6.3% of total floorspace. A healthy rate of vacant floorspace to allow the property market to function properly is 4-5%. At the time of updating the Retail Needs Assessment, 2011, vacancies stood at 5.4%, i.e. only slightly above what is regarded as a "healthy" level of vacancies. The update includes an allowance for re-tenanting vacant units in the 2009 to 2014 floorspace requirement. After allowing for the potential for re-tenanting of vacant premises and reducing vacancies to a healthy level, the re-use of vacant properties will not make a significant contribution to meeting the 20,500m² requirement in the later period.

Policy Background

7. Government Policy on the location of retail development is contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This advocates the adoption of the sequential approach in site selection for retail development. This means where possible focusing development within existing defined centres or failing that on sites on the edge of town centres, which are well connected to the core. Only if town centre or edge-of-centre locations are not available, are out of centre locations likely to be considered, provided that they are well served by alternative means of transport to the car and are acceptable in all other respects, including impact on existing centres. The South East Plan also places emphasis on the development of town centres. Hastings is identified as part of the strategic network of town centres in the region.
8. Policy DS3 of the Council's Planning Strategy Proposed Submission document provides for the location of this comparison goods floorspace requirement within Hastings town centre. If for any reason the floorspace cannot be accommodated in the centre the Council will adopt the sequential approach looking first at edge of centre sites and then at out of centre sites. The preferred approach to retail warehousing is to look to edge of centre or out of centre sites which are well served by a choice of transport. Policy DS3 indicates that the identification for both types of retailing will be undertaken as part of the Development Management Plan.
9. The Council's site assessment work has looked first at the potential for identifying one large site within the town centre for comparison goods purposes, then at smaller sites which cumulatively might meet retail needs. Finally consideration has been given to District, Local and Neighbourhood Centre sites and other out of centre locations.
10. The site requirements for retail warehousing have also been considered.

Hastings Town Centre

11. The following plan shows those town centre sites examined as part of the site assessment work.

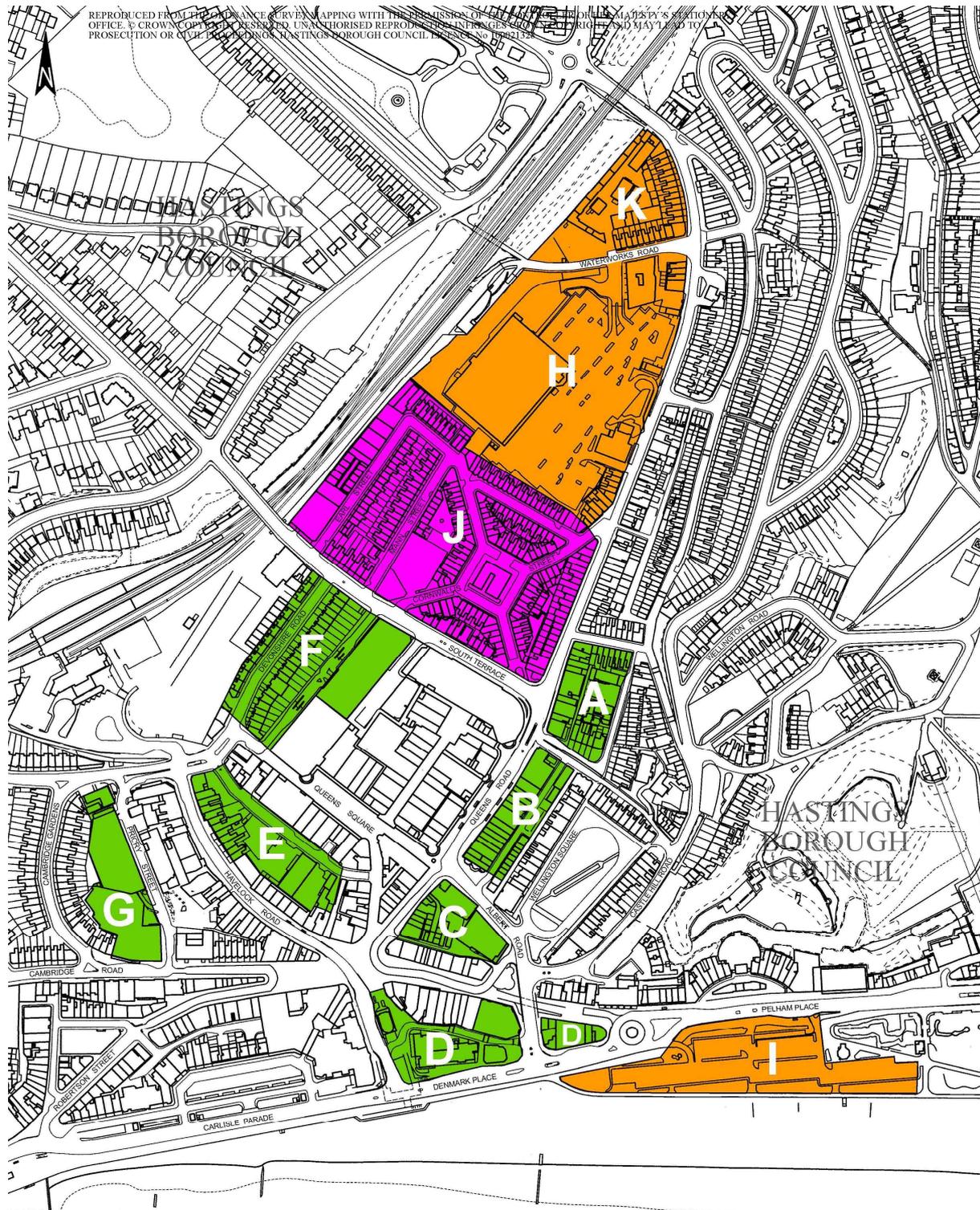


Figure 1: Town centre sites examined as part of the site assessment work.

Comparison goods

Town Centre locations - A single site

Site J

12. There are strong economic arguments for seeking to locate the bulk of the 20,500m² comparison goods floorspace in one location. It would provide a critical mass of development that is attractive to developers, retailers and shoppers. Such a development as a natural extension to the existing core shopping centre, creating new prime shopping frontages, would provide Hastings with a sufficient mass of shopping to remain competitive with its neighbours, such as Eastbourne. Spreading the floorspace around the centre in smaller packets is unlikely to have the same impact, although this approach is more likely to appeal to existing retailers, because it would reinforce existing shopping patterns. Unfortunately Hastings town centre is heavily constrained. To the south is the sea, to the east historic buildings in Wellington Square with the Castle and the Old Town beyond and to the west the education/office/leisure developments in Priory Quarter and Station Plaza.
13. Only to the north / north-east is there the scope to physically accommodate an extension to the retail core. Site J – the St Andrews Square (see attached plan) is the area between Priory Meadow and the Morrisons store. This area would form a natural extension to Priory Meadow and would be capable of accommodating the bulk of the 20,500 comparison goods floorspace. In order to facilitate pedestrian movement between Priory Meadow and the new shopping area to the north, a closure of South Terrace at the Queens Road end may be required or at the very least the down grading of this part of the road to allow for pedestrian priority. The area does however contain a large number of dwellings. It is estimated that there are over 200 separate ownerships, including a significant number of leasehold flats. It is doubtful, in the present economic climate, whether a developer would be prepared to consider land acquisition on this scale and the Council, with its limited financial resources, is unlikely to be able to consider the use of its Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) powers unless any expenditure was underwritten by a developer. Moreover, such a proposal would also be controversial involving the loss of a significant amount of housing. It has been concluded therefore, that the site is not considered further.

Site H

14. This site mainly comprises the Morrisons store and its car-park. It also includes some properties fronting Queens Road and Waterworks Road. A significant area is taken up by ground level parking, which is not a particularly economic use of town centre land. The store trades well and the fabric of the existing building has a 20–30 year life span. The availability of surface level car parking is of significance to customers and the retailer in terms of competing with nearby revival stores. However, the site is capable of redevelopment with ground floor shopping with car-parking above. The site might also accommodate some residential development on upper floors. Assuming that Morrisons would wish to remain as an anchor store, the site could accommodate an additional 20,000m² gross of comparison shopping floor space. In townscape terms a sympathetic redevelopment would benefit one of the main entrances to the town centre. There was formerly a gas works on the site and there may be contamination issues.
15. The main issue with this site is its distance from the core shopping area. It is some 200 metres to the north of Priory Meadow. Good pedestrian links would be required via

Queens Road. It may be desirable to remove properties on the west side of Queens Road in order to provide an attractive pedestrian boulevard. The impact on the town centre would also need to be considered. It would move the centre of gravity of the shopping area to the north and is likely to have some impact on areas centred on Wellington Place in the eastern area of the town centre, and Robertson Street in the west. However given the lack of obvious sites adjacent to the core shopping area, this option is worth considering further.

16. An early approach (Aug 2010) has been made to Morrisons and discussion has taken place regarding 2 possible approaches – redevelopment in which Morrison would remain on the site, operating a store of the size and format of its existing store. Alternatively, Morrisons vacate the site and trade from a new site elsewhere in the Town. Whilst no definitive outcome has arisen from discussions at the present time, the potential to meet future comparison goods requirements at this location during the life time of the Planning Strategy, has not been ruled out.

Smaller Sites

17. A number of sites have been identified adjacent to the core shopping area (see figure 1 above:

Site A

18. This site is bounded by Queens Road, Stone Street, Portland Place and Castle Hill Passage. There is already shopping on the Queens Road frontage and the land rises steeply to the rear making it unsuitable for shops. There would therefore be no net gain of floorspace. This site offers no potential to contribute to future floorspace needs.

Site B

19. This site facing Queens Road is already in shopping use and there would be no net gain. This site offers no potential to contribute to future floorspace needs.

Site C

20. This site is bounded by Queens Road, Albert Road and York Gardens. It contains the Odeon Cinema, a large Pound Store and Queens Arcade. Whilst the area forms part of the core shopping area and would benefit from some redevelopment to remove the unattractive Pound Store and to make more of Queens Arcade, there would be a small (650m² gross) gain in shopping floorspace. Redevelopment at this location could contribute to floorspace requirements and help contribute to town centre vitality and viability.

Site D

21. This site is bounded by Pelham Street, Denmark Place, Harold Place and Breeds Place. The site includes public toilets and Homedane House, a modern block of specialist (old persons) flats. The eastern end of the site is already in shopping use (Argos). Redevelopment of the toilets would only create about 600m² of shopping floorspace. There may be scope for redeveloping the old Woolworths store with the Carlisle Pub behind, which would strengthen this part of the shopping area (net gain of retail space 700m²). Redevelopment at this location could contribute to floorspace requirements and help contribute to town centre vitality and viability.

Site E

22. This area is centred on Middle Street. There are very good pedestrian connections to Priory Meadow via Queens Square and Station Road. There is also a considerable amount of underused land to the rear of properties in Havelock Road but the telephone exchange and the University Centre may be constraints. Middle Street also serves as a rear service access to the shops in Queens Square, which limits its redevelopment value. In order to secure a meaningful area it may be necessary to include properties on the eastern side of Havelock Road, which, although not listed are within a conservation area and would require special justification. The area might accommodate between 1500 and 2000m² gross. Redevelopment at this location could contribute to floorspace requirements and help contribute to town centre vitality and viability.

Site F

23. This site includes the ground floor of Priory Meadow car-park and properties on Devonshire Road. At present, the owners of Priory Meadow have no plans to expand beyond the mezzanine floor, which has planning permission. This is already included as a commitment in the update of the retail capacity study. Taking the bulk of the ground floor of the Priory Meadow car-park (provision would still have to be made for vehicles to get to the upper floors) and Devonshire road properties would provide an area of about 12,000m². There are however major difficulties. About 40 properties would have to be acquired and Devonshire Road would need to be closed, which would limit access around the town centre and to Priory Meadow in particular. If Devonshire Road and the properties to the north of it were excluded, this would reduce the available area to about 10,000m². A cautious view is needed here in the present economic climate, since there would be only a limited gain in shopping floorspace relative to the level of property acquisition involved. The Council, with its limited financial resources, is unlikely to be able to consider the use of its CPO powers unless any expenditure was underwritten by a developer. Not with standing this, redevelopment at this location should not be ruled out, and the location is capable of contributing to floorspace requirements.

Site G

24. This site includes the Priory Street car-park and adjoining sites including the ESK store. It is proposed to allocate this area of Priory Quarter for office/education/ leisure use with some retail, for which planning permission exists. The gain in additional shopping floor space will be very small. There are also doubts whether this location would attract primary retail users. This site offers no potential to contribute to future floorspace needs.

Site K

25. If the triangle to the north bounded by the railway, Waterworks Road and Queens Road were included, a further 7000m² gross floorspace could be created. This would however involve the loss of business space and housing. In conjunction with Site H, this site could form a second phase of development if required.

Site I

26. This comprises the Council's car-park on the seafront opposite Pelham Crescent. A scheme, by the then inward investment company Sea Space, to develop the site for

office, hotel and leisure uses, was put forward some years ago. It is not considered that this site is suitable in locational and townscape terms for a shopping development. It is somewhat removed from the core shopping area and is a prominent sea-front site. Ground floor shopping with parking above would be difficult to assimilate aesthetically. For these reasons the location should be ruled out from further consideration.

Edge of centre sites

27. Hastings town centre is made up of a broad range of uses which goes beyond its shopping centre role, including business, education, leisure, transport interchange and other uses. Whilst the Hastings Local Plan 2004 does define a primary shopping area, it does not define a town centre boundary. It is evident from this work that defining the wider town centre boundary is beneficial for planning purposes. All of the above sites (A-K) are considered to fall within the town centre. Beyond this no edge-of-centre sites complicit with national guidance, have been identified.

Other sites

28. People who responded to the “Big Map” consultation suggested a number of edges of centre sites. These have been considered and rejected for a variety of reasons:
- Former Tressell workshops, near station - these are now demolished and are included in future phases of the Priory Quarter development.
 - Upper Queens Road (ground floor, new shopping with residential above) - this would not provide any net increase in shopping floorspace
 - White Rock Baths - too far removed from the primary core.
 - The Pier - too far removed from primary core.
 - Ground floor of Cavendish House - frontage already in shopping use.
 - Hastings Library - this site is no longer to be vacated and the library is to remain in-situ.
 - Cambridge Road - peripheral to shopping core, loss of housing.
 - The Oval, open space of high amenity value - as an out-of-town location this option is undesirable as it would split the main retail offer in the town and could detract from the viability of the town centre.
 - Football Ground, Elphinstone Road - as an out-of-town location this option is undesirable as it would split the main retail offer in the town and could detract from the viability of the town centre.

District, local and neighbourhood centres

29. The only centre considered to be worthy of consideration is Central St Leonards. The Old Town plays an important role as a specialist shopping centre but has little or no scope for expansion because of its historic character. The other district centres – Ore and Silverhill, together with the local centre - Bohemia, and neighbourhood centres of West St Leonards, Battle Road, Mount Pleasant and Mount Road are small and too constrained by adjacent housing development to provide a meaningful amount of

comparison goods floorspace. Comparison shopping development on any significant scale in any of these centres would be likely to impact adversely on the town centre.

Central St Leonards

30. The Central St Leonards Regeneration Strategy identifies Crystal Square as the only significant redevelopment opportunity in the District Centre. This site includes a public car-park but would involve a considerable amount of property acquisition. The site may have the potential for some 2,600m² of shopping floorspace as part of a mixed use development including housing, workshops and parking. The amount of shopping floorspace could probably be increased but it is extremely unlikely that this site would attract a developer willing to undertake a comparison goods development, in view of the centre's generally district-level shopping function. The site is better suited to a supermarket development, which is a more realistic aim and would benefit the centre as a whole.
31. Respondents to the "Big Map" consultation suggested Norman Road and Grand Parade. Both are unsuitable. Norman Road mainly comprises existing shops and residential properties. Considerable property acquisition would be involved for very little net gain in shopping floorspace. Grand Parade is not well related to the centre and includes a number of listed buildings. It is therefore concluded that Central St Leonards, the other district local and neighbourhood centres are not considered further.

Out of Centre Locations

32. It is not considered desirable to encourage out of centre comparison goods shopping in Hastings on the scale required because of the serious impact that it would have on the town centre. In any event Hastings is tightly constrained by environmental designations and any out of centre shopping development would be at the expense of housing or employment development, which would not in its self be desirable.

Retail Warehousing

33. The requirement of 2,800m² represents a modest requirement. 1,110m² of this requirement will be met by the refurbishment and insertion of a mezzanine level into the former Focus unit at Sedlescombe Road North. In view of the remaining floorspace requirement, which could be accommodated in a single unit, it is felt that Policy E3 of the Planning Strategy provides sufficient guidance to developers without the need to identify a site/sites for retail warehousing.

Conclusions

34. The difficulties of identifying land for the future redevelopment/development of Hastings town centre, whilst at the same time maintaining the viability of the existing shopping core, cannot not be underestimated.
 - The 2011 Retail Needs Assessment update shows that there is a forecast requirement for up to 20,500m² of additional comparison goods floorspace in the town 2016 – 2028.
 - Whilst there is potential to accommodate this all of this requirement in Hastings Town centre, the preferred location from a planning perspective, an extensive site search to-date has revealed that:

- a) Site H (the Morrisons site) offers the best potential for meeting this need on a single site. However its future availability remains unknown.
 - b) There were a number of smaller sites spread around the town centre which could contribute between 10,850–11,550m² of net new floorspace. At the upper limit this represents 56% of the requirement. Again site availability is far from certain.
 - c) There is only limited potential for expansion of Priory Meadow, and this has already been taken in to account in determining the future floorspace needs. Further expansion on the existing footprint is limited. In part owing to the marketability of upper floors in shopping centres generally and specific to this site, physical problems about ground conditions and supporting structures.
 - d) The loss of housing that would required through the redevelopment of St Andrews Square is felt to be impracticable – due to the high costs of delivery and more especially – undesirable, as it would displace a lot of people living in the area.
 - e) There is only limited opportunity in St Leonards at Crystal Square.
 - f) Out-of-centre options are unacceptable in planning terms as development at this scale will split the main retail offer in the town and could detract from the viability of Hastings town centre.
35. The response of the Council at this time, given the uncertain economic climate, is to retain flexibility through the identification of a Town Centre Boundary, which in conjunction with proposed Planning Strategy Policy DS3, provides a clear boundary within which development for comparison goods floorspace will be encouraged. Until further research is able to confirm with more certainty the identification of a site(s) for retail expansion, a number of other measures will be implemented in order to help improve the quality and strengthen the existing town centre shopping area through:
- i. The inclusion of a shopping management policy within the Development Management Plan, which will protect existing shopping floorspace by setting a threshold against which the change away to non-shopping uses are resisted.
 - ii. Making Hastings town centre more attractive to visitors and residents through creating high quality streetscape, active marketing of special features and events, improving pedestrian and cycle access and flows.