Retail Strategy
Local Plan Evidence Base

July 2019
Introduction and Purpose of the Paper

The Doncaster Local Plan will set out planning polices and proposals which will be used to guide decisions across the borough up to 2032. This paper aims to explain how the housing, employment and retail strategies have been developed, and how strategies to distribute new development around the borough have evolved. It supports draft Policy 2 of the Local Plan (Spatial Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy), and Policy 3 (Level and Distribution of Growth).

With regards to retail, the paper will reflect the spatial distribution of retail uses and types across the borough, and how this links in to the spatial strategy. Although the local plan will not be allocating new sites for retail uses, work has been undertaken to establish the boroughs network of centres.
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1. The Retail Strategy

1.1. Introduction

1.1.1. Doncaster has 71 different retail centres, all of various types and sizes, which have been identified as part of the Local Plan process. These vary from town centres which support the sub-regional offer (a wider shopping and service functions for the whole borough); to district and local centres which support a more local need for convenience and top-up shopping and provide local services within communities.

1.1.2. These centres usually sit at the heart of local communities and provide a range of services to local people, visitors and businesses. The NPPF (para 85) requires planning policies and decisions to take a positive approach to their growth, management and adaption. In defining a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability 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. Retail centres are a source of local employment, they promote beneficial competition and create healthier and safer places where people want to live visit and work.

1.1.3. The most recognised role of a town centre is to provide shopping provision but they also provide sources of employment, business and leisure uses. Successful centres assist in supporting growth and investment and in creating the right environment to deliver economic growth, delivering local jobs in Doncaster and taking a flexible and responsive approach to its delivery within the borough retail and servicing will help meet some of the retail, employment services and leisure needs.

1.1.4. Centres are an important component of the settlement strategy for the borough. They provide services for the boroughs residents, and their location is important to the sustainability of settlements and residential areas in particularly.

1.1.5. Having these centres in the right place with the right level of needs to each community provides for the most sustainable pattern of development that minimises the need to travel and maximises the potential to use sustainable transport modes. In supporting retail and services in these centres it would not lead to unsustainable trip generations from outside their catchments.

1.1.6. This section gives a brief summary of national policy and the local retail picture. It discusses the need for these centres and explains how the strategy
has developed, and how the data, evidence and feedback that have informed the choices made in formulating the retail policies.

1.1.7. This section will make various references to a hierarchy of “centres”. What is meant by a “town”, “local” or “district” centre is defined in the NPPF and the GVA Retail, Leisure and Town Centres Study (2015) for Doncaster. These are defined as follows, alongside a definition of Neighbourhood Shopping Parades:

| Town Centre | These will usually be the second level of centres after city centres... and in rural areas ‘they are likely to be market towns and other centres of similar size and role which function as important service centres, providing a range of facilities and services for extensive rural catchment areas. |
| District Centre | These will usually comprise of groups of shops often containing at least on supermarket or superstore, and a range of non – retail services, such as banks, building societies and restaurants, as well as local public facilities such as a library. |
| Local Centre | These include a range of small shops of a local nature, and typically ‘might include, amongst other shops, a small supermarket, a newsagent, a sub-post office and a pharmacy. Other facilities could include a hot food takeaway. |
| Neighbourhood Shopping Parade | Small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance. |

Figure 1: Centres and Neighbourhood Shopping Parades

1.1.8. For the avoidance of doubt, it is also useful to clarify what is meant by the following terms:

| Primary Shopping Area | A defined area where retail development is concentrated (generally comprising the primary and those secondary frontages that are contiguous and closely related to the primary shopping frontage). |
| Primary Frontages | Primary frontages are likely to include a high proportion of retail uses which may include food, drinks, clothing and household goods. |
| Secondary frontages | Secondary frontages provide greater opportunities for a diversity of uses such as restaurants, cinemas and businesses. |
| Sub Regional Centre | Competing large centres with catchments which may overlap. In Doncaster’s case, these are areas such as Leeds, Sheffield, Scunthorpe and Rotherham, as well as out of town shopping facilities at Meadowhall Shopping Centre, Sheffield and Parkgate, Rotherham. These provide a prime focus for shopping, leisure, employment, education, health and cultural activities and facilities for residents within and beyond. |
| Out of Town Centre | A location out of centre that is outside the existing urban area. Unless they are identified as centres in the Local Plans, existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including town centre uses, do not constitute town centres. |
| Main Town Centre uses | Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment facilities the more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, night-clubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres, and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities). |

Figure 2: Other Retail Definitions

1.1.9. The Vision and Objectives sets out the following objectives in relation to Retail for the Local Plan:

**Objective 1:** encourage and support a competitive diverse and stable economy focusing on our town and district centres, Doncaster Sheffield Airport growth corridor and strategic transport network;

**Objective 8:** make efficient use of existing infrastructure to improve accessibility to jobs and services and aim to reduce the need to travel by car by ensuring all journeys are undertaken by the most sustainable mode of transport;

**Objective 10:** focus new homes primarily within the main urban area of Doncaster and the Borough’s main towns, particularly in areas with access to services;

1.1.10. The proposed borough spatial strategy and policies for retail will enable Doncaster meet these objectives.
1.2. National Policy

1.2.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (para 85) states that planning policies should:

“define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – 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;.”

1.2.2. The NPPF also indicates that planning policies and decisions should “support the role of that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking on a positive approach to their growth, management and adaption.” In order to do so, Local Planning Authorities should define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas and make clear the range of uses which will be permitted in locations as part of a positive strategy.

1.2.3. The definition of a town centre in the NPPF’s Glossary (Annex 2) is:

“an area defined on the local authority’s proposal map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. References to town centres or centres apply to city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance. Unless they are identified as centres in Local Plans, existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute town centres.”

1.2.4. The existing Core Strategy the hierarchy of centres identifies five levels of centres. It was not possible to prescribe a minimum level either of floorspace or number of units to each type. A centres position is determined by a number of factors, including floorspace, number, size and type of shops and the level of provision of non-retail facilities, characteristics of the centre, catchment area and proximity to other centres. The retail hierarchy in Doncaster was previously defined in the Unitary Development Plan. This was subsequently updated with a more robust hierarchy in the Core Strategy, as shown in Figure 19:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Regional Centre</th>
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<td>Thorne and Mexborough</td>
</tr>
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</table>


### District Centres

| Adwick, Armthorpe, Askern, Bawtry, Conisbrough, Tickhill |

### Local Centres

| Woodfield Plantation, Rossington, Carcroft, Skellow, Bentley, Hatfield, Dunscroft, Intake, Balby, Moorends, Edlington, Stainforth, Edenthorpe, Denaby Main |

### Neighbourhood Shopping Parades

| Various |

*Figure 3: 2012 Core Strategy Hierarchy of Centres*

#### 1.3. Local Evidence Base

1.3.1. Local evidence in relation to retail is largely contained within the GVA report ‘Retail, Leisure and Town Centre Study’, however consultation on the approach to retail was held as part of the Issues and Options Consultation, and the Doncaster Urban Centre Masterplan also sets out a vision for the transformation of the town centre. Additionally, an important component of the Settlement Audit, which has influenced the housing settlement hierarchy, was centres and localised provisions. These are dealt with in turn below.

#### Issues and Options Consultation

1.3.2. Early in the Local Plan Process, consultation was undertaken on the Issues and Options, which included questions related to retail. This was mainly in the form of a question asking “How can we best protect, maintain and improve Doncaster town centres?”

1.3.3. Feedback through consultation was limited but generally positive, and included a number of suggestions about improving town centres, including a high quality mix of affordable housing and commercial uses; encouraging residential uses above shops; more greenspaces and places of interest; developing and building on existing infrastructure; creation of a mixed use student village; heritage led regeneration; promoting distinctiveness and character of certain streets and areas of interest; transforming the old art college into a research centre / museum; and creating a railway museum.

1.3.4. The role of housing and economic growth in the borough was also highlighted, and the impact this can have on the town centre in terms of a wider range of potential customers and the associated benefits of this was also highlighted.

1.3.5. There was some support from three respondents for a flexible approach to town centres, including from consultants, however support for an emphasis on
specific opportunities for redevelopment of specific sites such as Waterfront was more limited. One respondent recognised that successful town centre regeneration depends on a number of approaches such as high quality master planning and comprehensive redevelopment. Another respondent suggested undertaking further research on the factors (other than competition) which are hindering the performance of town centres such as public realm management and car parking.

1.3.6. Only two consultees responded to the question of whether town centre boundaries should be extended to reflect changing shopping patterns, both in support, and similarly two people responded stating that preventing further leisure and retail development outside of existing centres (except bulky goods etc. within existing retail warehouse parks) was unduly restrictive and contrary to the provisions of the NPPF – proposals for main town centre uses outside of existing centres should only be considered with regards to the sequential and impact tests. As such, the policy should be worded to reflect the positive aims of the NPPF which encourages growth and is consistent with the national retail guidance. For the same reason, the option of permitting of non – bulky goods (food and clothes) within existing retail warehouse parks is also dismissed.

1.3.7. The general consensus on questions relating to developing a hierarchy of town, district and local centres across the borough was that the general hierarchy should be maintained and brought forward in the Local Plan. A specific comment was made regarding Bawtry and Armthorpe which are currently designated as principal towns and that the retail and service provision should be linked to the settlement strategy.

Retail, Leisure and Town Centre Study (2015)

1.3.8. In 2015, consultants GVA were commissioned to provide an update and robust evidence on the retail and leisure needs within the borough, which was published in September 2015. The work was required as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan with an aim to provide an up to date and robust assessment of retail and leisure needs in the borough. The report updates previous studies using more recent population and expenditure data and forecasts which also take into account recent planning applications and upswing in spending.

1.3.9. There are a number of main findings the evidence provides, including, the health and performances of the existing town centres, the food shopping (convenience) provision in the borough, the non-food (comparison) shopping provision and the leisure provision.
1.3.10. The results of the findings are as follows:-

**Doncaster town centre**

Doncaster is generally a healthy town centre performing in accordance with its role as an important sub-regional shopping destination. There are low vacancy rates in the Frenchgate Centre. However, there is an imbalance in performance across the town centre with a weaker performance in secondary retail areas such as Hallgate and Silver Street. However, aside from the Frenchgate Centre, there are concerns with falling pedestrian footfall, high levels of vacancies in some areas, a limited range of café/restaurant and an over concentration of pub/bar uses.

**Mexborough**

The performance of Mexborough town centre was reasonable up to the recent closure of Tesco store in the town centre. There are areas of concerns including the limited food store provision, decline in non-food (comparison) retailers, declining environment and concentration of vacant units (York Square).

**Thorne**

Thorne is performing reasonably well for a town centre of its size and provides an attractive market town environment, farmers market, a strong convenience offer and a reasonable mix of retailers and uses. The areas of concerns are the high number of vacancies increasing since 2009, a poor pedestrian environment and a limited range of café/restaurants. Opportunities exists to improve the connectively between Finkle Street and King Street and for Market Place to act as a focal point.

**Doncaster Urban Centre Masterplan (December 2016)**

1.3.11. Published in December 2016, the Urban Centre Masterplan is acting as a prospectus for investment and change in Doncaster that will enable all parties to unite and capitalise upon the potential that exists.

1.3.12. Work on the masterplan commenced in January 2016, and was led by a corporate officer steering group. The work reviewed the existing town centre’s physical and economic conditions as a whole and proposes a slight refocus of efforts to regenerate the Urban Centre, building upon the successes of investment elsewhere in the Borough and ensuring the centre is connected to
these opportunities whilst providing a complementary development offer. It prioritises a number of key areas of change in the town centre and proposes subtly different development scenarios for these areas, which seek to capitalise upon developments currently planned or underway, including:

- Ensuring the centre is a focus for business and enterprise.
- Recognising the core as the heart of the economy and the borough and the place where image of Doncaster is more clearly reflected.
- Developing city-scale functions and assets, to become a stronger draw for business, workers, visitors and inward investment.

1.3.13. The masterplan supports policies proposed in the Local Plan which identifies key development sites where significant re-development and mixed use regeneration is planned and outlines the uses and activities that will be supported within these locations. Furthermore, it reiterates a strong focus on the town centre and the local commitment for the town centre to be commercial focus of the borough.

**Settlement Audit**

1.3.14. In scoring the Settlement Audit, consideration was given to retail opportunities in each settlement. Settlements could score 1 point if they were assessed as having a town centre (a primary service) and 1 point if they were assessed as having shopping provision (a secondary service – neighbourhood shopping parades and large supermarkets). It was possible to score a point for both. However, services such as post offices, hairdressers and vets were not recorded specifically in the Settlement Audit, although they may make up parts of the facilities that exist in town centres or in shopping parades.

1.3.15. This highlights the value that retail provision provides to the sustainability of settlements. Having local places to purchase goods not only reduces reliance on cars and unsustainable transport methods, it supports local employment opportunities and provides convenient shopping options which make areas more attractive places to live.

**1.4. Locally Based Issues**

1.4.1. The two main challenges to retail provision and retail centres in the borough are rise of out of town shopping centres, and the increase in online shopping.

1.4.2. Traditionally, out of town shopping centres were areas which were warehouse led and provided larger items such as white goods which were not as readily available on High Streets. However, there has been a recent trend for
consumers to buy these larger/bulkier items such as sofas, beds, large kitchen appliances etc. online and have them delivered direct to the home. This has in turn left these larger stores empty with retailers opting to develop stores in the most strategic and cost effective locations.

1.4.3. Another trend is the evolution of the traditional retail box warehouse development into retail parks; retail park owners have sub-divided units and expanded the product offer and developing beyond just retail to introduce food and beverages, encouraging longer dwell times. Retail park owners have also refurbished their parks to include new walk ways, car parks, landscaping and seating to enhance the visitor experience. This has occurred at Danum Retail Park, Wheatley Hall Road and other previously known warehouse led parks.

1.4.4. Additionally, a number of new food store developments have been established in out of centre locations such as Morrisons at First Point, Lidl in Mexborough, M&S foodhall at Wheatley Hall Road and other supermarkets around the borough. Generally, these parks are all on main arterial roads which lead into Doncaster's main town centre, and consumers are finding it easier and more cost effective to use these out of town centres than actually visit the town itself.

1.4.5. Whilst such developments have their advantages, they also pose challenges for centres.

1.4.6. With the shift towards online shopping, and the growth of out of town shopping, it is vital that local centres are as flexible as possible to ensure their continued vitality and continued role in contributing to the socio-economic wellbeing of local communities. Within district and local centres a degree of flexibility will be needed to with regards to the mix and range of uses and activities to secure protection of the centres function.

1.4.7. To address these challenges, Local Plan policies will seek to protect and enhance the vitality and viability of the retail areas within the borough, which in turn will minimise the trip generation from residents, workers and visitors. Policies will also seek to encourage new shops, offices, leisure and entertainment venues within existing centres, and discourage further development in out of town locations. Retail uses will instead be directed towards centres in the defined hierarchy, as shown in Figure 20.

1.4.8. The spatial strategy seeks to concentrate growth in the larger settlements of the borough, making the most of existing services and facilities.

1.4.9. Some centres are larger than others and have local facilities such as health centres, libraries, surgeries and places of religion. These facilities are much needed and create a social space for local communities to provide an
opportunity for meetings between members of the community who might not otherwise come into contact with each other. They also provide a place to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities meeting other aims of national policy (i.e. facilitating social interactive and creating healthy, inclusive communities NPPF, section 8). In, doing so it is also meeting the social role of a sustainable community to provide places to grow up and grow old in.

1.5. Updating the Evidence Base

District and Local Centres Survey (January 2018)

1.5.1. Over the winter of 2015/16 a District and Local Centres survey was carried out. All district and local centres were visited to ascertain their retail composition. The GVA report recommended the town centres remained as was previously defined i.e. Doncaster, Thorne and Mexborough; and referred to definitions as set out in the now defunct Planning Policy Statement 4, which comprised the national planning policy on retail and town centre matters until its replacement in the NPPF. These definitions were agreed and used in this current study.

1.5.2. The survey work revealed the borough has a number of dispersed centres and an existing network of town, district and local centres.

1.5.3. In many cases, a settlement has its own retail hierarchy, comprising of a retail centre, with neighbourhood shopping parades or local shops distributed in the settlement.

1.5.4. For the Main Urban Area, which is large and made up of many individual settlements, there are a wide range of shopping opportunities distributed around the various settlements that make up this area, however smaller settlements such as the Main Towns and some Service Towns and Villages also have their own retail hierarchy within them, and not necessarily a reliance on one retail destination.

1.5.5. The survey established a number of changes to the boundaries of existing centres (as defined in the Core Strategy), in some cases relatively minor changes given vacancies or changes of use to residential premises. In other cases it revealed some areas had provision more akin to that of a Local Centre than a neighbourhood shopping parade, or had grown and established themselves as a District Centre, rather than a Local Centre as previously defined in the Core Strategy or Unitary Development Plan. Their position in the retail hierarchy has therefore been amended.
1.5.6. The table shown below indicates a newly proposed draft hierarchy of centres taking account of the survey findings. This is reflected and drafted in Policy 2: Spatial Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy, and updates the previous hierarchy of centres as set out in the Core Strategy.

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Centres</td>
<td>Adwick &amp; Woodlands, Armthorpe, Askern, Bawtry, Bentley, Conisbrough, Edlington, Rossington, and Tickhill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Centres</td>
<td>Balby (Springwell Lane), Balby (Warmsworth Road), Bessacarr (Nostell Place), Cantley (Goodison Boulevard), Carcroft, Denaby Main, Dunsccroft, Edenthorpe, Hatfield, Intake, Moorends, Scawby, Scawthorpe, Skellow, Stainforth, Woodfield Plantation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Neighbourhood Shopping Parades | Not to be shown on proposals map. |

*Figure 4: Proposed Hierarchy of Centres*

1.5.7. The centres mentioned above are all part of settlements which are within the three tiers of the settlement hierarchy, highlighting the contribution of good retail provision to the overall sustainability of settlements.

1.5.8. The Main Urban Area comprises of Doncaster Town Centre, as well as a number of local centres such as Balby, Bessacarr, Cantley, Edenthorpe, Intake, Scaswby, Scawthorpe and Woodfield Plantation.

1.5.9. With the exception of Dunsccroft, Dunsville, Hatfield and Stainforth (which has three respective local centres within the settlement), all the Main Towns have District Centres, or in the case of Thorne and Mexborough, Town Centre provision. The Main Urban Area and the Main Towns are the settlements which are proposed to take on the biggest share of the housing requirement for the borough, and good service levels are key to their role as the main and most sustainable centres of population growth.

1.5.10. Additionally, some of the settlements which are the larger amongst the Service Towns and Villages, and generally have a greater share of the baseline housing requirement (as explained in the housing section), also have District Centres. These include Askern, Bawtry, Carcroft, Edlington, Skellow and Tickhill.
1.5.11. It should perhaps be noted that Askern, Bawtry and Tickhill are Service Towns and Villages located further away from central Doncaster or the Main Towns, and provide services for other more isolated settlements. Therefore good provision of services in these settlements is crucial to their sustainability and vitality, as well as that of other nearby smaller settlements.

1.5.12. Both Carcroft – Skellow and Edlington are the largest of the Service Towns and Villages, and good retail provision – be it district or local centres – support these populations and also indicate that these settlements are well placed to take on the slightly higher share of housing they have been allotted in the settlement hierarchy.

1.6. Summary

1.6.1. Town centres cannot rely on retail alone to remain viable; there needs to be an appropriate mix of uses and offer to ensure their resilience.

1.6.2. Doncaster's centres all contribute to the sustainability of settlements - each having its distinct characteristics, strengths and opportunities. Each in their own right, offer retailing services and facilities to their residents and offer opportunities to meet the needs of the area.

1.6.3. Doncaster town and district centres face significant competition from established out of centre locations and online shopping, as such policies proposed in the Local Plan will support the town centre approach based upon the drafted policy which defines the network (or hierarchy) of town, district and local centres.

1.6.4. This will encourage new shops, offices, leisure and entertainment uses in these centres and discourage them in out of centre locations.

1.6.5. The proposed retail hierarchy for the Local Plan makes suggestions in respect of the geographical extent of the town, district and local centres and takes account of designating centres according to the size and function of the centres and validates the overall strategy. Where appropriate it allows for the growth of, potential expansion and the strengthening of the existing centres. Where necessary, it reduces the size of centres by removing from them premises not currently in commercial/retail use, where it would appear unlikely that will be required during the plan period.

1.6.6. Good retail provision is important to the sustainability of settlements, and many of the larger settlements in the settlement hierarchy have town, district or local centre provision within them. This means there are conveniently located retail
opportunities located for existing and prospective residents in these locations, which helps to validate the settlement hierarchy, which delivers on the feedback at to the Issues and Options consultation that new housing should be located in the most sustainable locations.