

Telford and Wrekin Local Plan

Town Centres – Topic Paper

December 2025

Introduction and context to town centres

The borough of Telford and Wrekin has three town centres including **Telford Town Centre (TTC), Wellington and Newport**. TTC and the market town of Wellington are within the Telford urban boundary. The market town of Newport lies to the northeast of Telford. TTC is markedly different from Wellington and Newport which both have traditional high streets, conservation areas and a range of local services. TTC fulfils its role as a regional shopping and entertainment destination and has, for example, larger office buildings, cinemas, leisure venues, hotels and Telford International Centre (a large conference venue) as well as shopping in the centre and retail parks. The Southwater area of TTC connects the Primary Shopping Area with Telford Town Park and provides leisure, and nighttime economy uses. TTC extends north over the A5 to include Telford Central Station and the surrounding hotel and office accommodation due to the concentration of town centre uses. TTC does not have any conservation areas and therefore fewer planning constraints, which allows for a more flexible approach to regeneration and development.

Overall approach to town centres

The Council's overall approach to town centres in the Publication Version of the Local Plan has been to adapt to changes in the role of centres and refinement of planning policy to reflect this. This approach is in accordance with paragraph 90(a) of the NPPF which states that planning policies should seek to promote the long-term vitality and viability of town centres and is encapsulated within the Priority 5 of the Local Plan (p 17). This has enabled a broadly consistent approach whilst recognising the need to guide the introduction of new uses such as residential development. The policy approach in the Local Plan complements the Council's broader support for town centres, which has recently seen around £300m in public and private investment, and includes:

- **The Station Quarter (SQ) Development in TTC** – SQ commenced construction and will see the provision of Further and Higher education facilities in TTC bringing a diversification of uses and increasing footfall. The Quad building containing Telford College, Harper Adams University and business incubator space is now operational, and Telford Sixth Form will be completed in 2026. The development also includes 189 apartments and town houses, currently under construction, across open market and affordable tenures bringing town centre living to TTC for the first time. This approach is supported by NPPF paragraph 90(f) which recognises that residential development plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres.
- **The Pride in Our High Street Programme** - this provides grant support to start-up businesses looking for premises on the borough's high streets including Wellington and Newport. The programme has supported 57 businesses in

Wellington and 15 in Newport since 2020 helping to maintain robust and vibrant high streets.

- **Investment in Wellington** - this includes investment into the market hall, the Orbit cinemas and arts centre and targeted property regeneration. These investments attract additional footfall to the town and create a destination feel for the centre with night markets and community facilities. The investments are also directly contributing towards town centre living through the creation of residential spaces above retail and food and beverage units.

The Council's overall approach in the Publication Version of the Local Plan (CD01) to town centres aligns with section 7 of the NPPF, and includes;

- **Policy EC5** (P 76) sets out the hierarchy of centres within Telford and Wrekin including identifying TTC as the principal town centre and Wellington and Newport as market towns. The supporting policy text further defines the role of these centres.
- **Policy EC6** (p 77) is a comprehensive development management policy which sets the development framework for TTC and supports a broad range of town centre uses as well as uses that would complement these including education and knowledge-based industries. The policy also provides protection for existing retail uses within the Primary Shopping Area (PSA) to maintain active ground floor uses that are complimentary to the PSA. In recognition of TTC's wider role, the policy sets out criteria that will support and guide the location of residential development in the centre. Due to the nature of the town centre with predominantly large single use sites (including sites in existing use and allocations), development at scale is preferable so as not to create isolated pockets of residential development. The policy supports the delivery of multi-generational residential schemes which can support, for example, older people to live in an accessible town centre environment. The Policy directs new conference and exhibition business activities to the Conference and Exhibition Area which is focussed on the Telford International Centre. Policy EC5 also protects and guides development of leisure uses and development which is complementary to the Southwater area.
- **Policy EC7** (p 80) supports the role, vitality and diversification of the borough's market towns as commercial centres, whilst recognising the wider benefits of residential development in centres. This includes, setting out conditions for supporting the change of uses from Class E (commercial, business and service uses) to uses that would complement the shopping, leisure and commercial function of the PSA. The policy also seeks to guard against the over proliferation of non-E Uses such as hot food takeaways, vape shops and betting shops. There are issues with such uses across the borough and although they can contribute towards a vibrant town centre that needs to be as part of a broader mix. Policy EC7 provides criteria that will help guide residential development in the PSA and protects the need for active ground floor uses. The town centre areas are broader

than the PSA and the policy sets criteria for other uses that would be supported helping to maintain a range of services within the centres.

- **Policy EC10** (p 84) directs evening, and nighttime uses to the hierarchy of centres set out in policy EC5 and provides positive policy criteria to help guide planning applications.
- **Policy C14** (p 154) directs;
 - 1) new cultural, tourism and leisure activities to accessible locations within or adjacent to the borough's hierarchy of centres, and
 - 2) major hotel accommodation within or immediately adjacent to TTC, Wellington and Newport.

Evidence base documents

The policy position adopted by the Council with respect to town centres has been guided by evidence and plan preparation documents, including;

The Issues and Options (I&O) paper (PD13) produced to help guide the early stages of plan making recognised the need to diversify town centres away from larger office accommodation (p 24). This has been caused by an increase in home working and the subsequent need to provide smaller more flexible units a need partially fulfilled by the development of business incubator space in the Quad building. The I&O (p26) acknowledges the need to provide a wider mix of uses within town centres including residential, leisure and employment / job opportunities. The document recommended the approach of allocating sites for development in TTC (p 24) that could support a greater range of uses and in particular uses in the PSA that would increase footfall and would complement existing retail uses and maintain active ground floor uses (p 43).

Integrated Appraisal (CD06) (p 55) recognised the benefit of directing growth to locations that are already well served by infrastructure and services, which supports the Council's approach of protecting and diversifying the role of town centres in the borough. The document also recognises the benefits of some growth being directed to Newport such as increased footfall in the town centre.

Economic and Housing Development Needs Assessment (1 of 2) (EH03) and Economic and Housing Development Needs Assessment (2 of 2) (EH03a) included stakeholder commentary on the decline in demand for large office buildings and the need for smaller more flexible office space and mixed-use development, particularly within accessible town centre locations. The evidence base for the EHDNA also reflects the growth in home working which has in turn supported the need for a diverse approach to town centres. This is due to the comparative reduction in floorspace needs across most office-based sectors which has resulted in a growing number of office to residential conversions.

Newport Employment Land Need Study (EH06) noted that a number of units in Newport town centre had recently been converted from offices to residential and

other non-office uses such as children's day nurseries (p 36). The study also highlights the smaller scale of commercial units in Newport Town Centre compared with TTC and the comparatively low level of vacant units.

A review of town and district centres boundaries (EH08) was undertaken to inform the development of the Local Plan. The review resulted in proposed extensions to the PSA areas of Wellington and Newport. This was in recognition that those areas continue to have vibrant retail provision and therefore require protection under the policy.

Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IS01) (p 110) acknowledges that TTC, Wellington and Newport are the most accessible locations in the borough by bus and rail reflecting their role as key services centres within reach of the majority of residents. The new Sustainable Communities will be expected to provide connectivity to all three centres through enhanced bus services. The document (p 109) also supports leisure activities and facilities within or on the edge of Wellington and Newport town centres. The distribution of education facilities (p 74) supports the Council's approach to controlling the over proliferation of vape shops, betting shops and hot food takeaways in town centres.

FPM Sports Halls (IS03) shows that demand for sports hall provision in the Wellington and Newport areas remains high (p 13), and much of this is provided at educational establishments with multi-use agreements which helps with the broader attraction of footfall to town centres.

Monitoring data

The analysis of planning permissions within the centres supports the need to introduce broader uses that will help maintain the vitality and viability of centres. This reflects the national picture which has seen the changes in retail habits due to the increased levels of internet shopping and a decline in demand for large-scale office buildings. Since 2020 there have been:

- 36 applications for new development and changes of use in the town centres, including;
 - 17 residential applications; and
 - 10 mixed use applications.

In terms of applications for changes between uses:

- The uses most commonly lost were retail and office;
- The uses most commonly gained were residential and food and beverage establishments; and
- The most common change of use was from office to residential.

How the approach has changed from adopted Local Plan

The approach between the current adopted Local Plan and the emerging Local Plan has remained broadly consistent as it allows flexibility within the defined town centre areas to encourage growth, diversity and vitality of the borough's centres. The key changes between documents include:

- A more proactive policy position, as reflected in policies EC6 and EC7, regarding residential development in town centres. This allows for more windfall residential development in Wellington and Newport which will benefit the centres by encouraging town centre living. The Council led Station Quarter development will help set the values for 'town centre living' in TTC. The policy emphasises the Council's commitment to facilitate walking and cycling around the TTC area.
- Policy EC6 supports a broader range of uses within TTC which includes education and, for example, high technology knowledge-based employment and training, such as AI development, alongside traditional main town centres uses. This approach is evidenced by the Station Quarter Development including 'the Quad' building (as described above) which includes Harper Adams University's robotics laboratory. These developments will help to regenerate TTC and bring in additional footfall to support retail and leisure uses.
- Boundary changes including;
 - Extensions to the PSA for Wellington and Newport
 - Removal of Strategic Employment Areas¹ (SEA's) overlapping the TTC area boundary.
- The inclusion of site allocations in the Town Centre that can support mixed use development including residential development (MU1, MU2, MU3, MU4, MU5, MU6 and MU7).

Summary

In summary, the overall approach to town centres in the Local Plan:

- Supports the diversification of town centres and aligns with paragraph 90 of the NPPF;
- Provides a policy framework to guide growth and criteria for uses such as residential development to help complement traditional town centre uses;
- Focuses town centre uses in locations accessible by public transport; and
- Has seen a proactive approach to investment in the diversification of centres through, for example, the SQ development.

¹ SEA's cover industrial parks including Halesfield, Stafford Park and Hortonwood and are shown on the Policies Map.