

Name: James Cogan

Reference

141

Organisation

Trustees of the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre

On Behalf Of

Type of Consultee

Business



GL Hearn

Part of Capita Real Estate

Medway Council Local Plan


Representations on behalf of the Trustees of Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre

Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre
Gillingham
Kent
ME7 3PD

February 2016

Prepared by

GL Hearn Limited
280 High Holborn
London WC1V 7EE


glhearn.com

Contents

Section	Page
1 PREAMBLE	4
2 HEMPSTEAD VALLEY SHOPPING CENTRE	6
3 EVIDENCE BASE	7
4 RETAIL, COMMERCIAL LEISURE & TOWN CENTRES	11
5 CONCLUSIONS	17

List of Tables

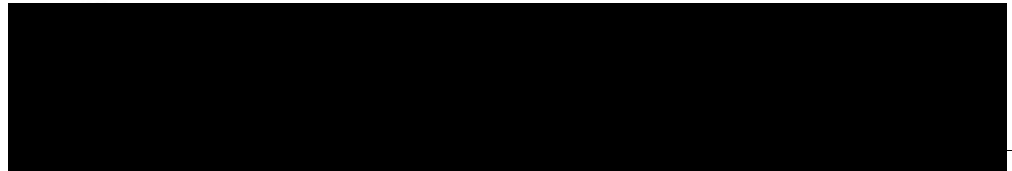
TABLE 1:	PROJECTED RETAIL FLOORSPACE	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
TABLE 2:	PROJECTED CAPACITY IN LEISURE SPEND	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

Quality Standards Control

The signatories below verify that this document has been prepared in accordance with our quality control requirements. These procedures do not affect the content and views expressed by the originator.

This document must only be treated as a draft unless it has been signed by the Originators and approved by a Business or Associate Director.

DATE	ORIGINATORS	APPROVED
25 February 2016	James Cogan Planner	Nick Diment Development Planning Director



Limitations

This document has been prepared for the stated objective and should not be used for any other purpose without the prior written authority of GL Hearn; we accept no responsibility or liability for the consequences of this document being used for a purpose other than for which it was commissioned.

1 PREAMBLE

- 1.1 This report has been produced by GL Hearn on behalf of the Trustees of the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre (hereafter “the Trustees”) and forms their response to Medway Council’s emerging Medway Local Plan (2012-2035). Those representations and recommendations contained within this report have been submitted on behalf of the Trustees in their capacity as investors and managers of the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre (“HVSC”). Representations have previously been submitted on behalf of the Trustees in response to Medway Council’s consultation(s) on the Draft Core Strategy (2011).
- 1.2 As you may be aware the Trustees have invested in the HVSC for over 30 years. The existing HVSC reflects the Trustees’ commitment to, and investment in, Hempstead Valley, indeed the HVSC is a popular, sustainable and well managed allocated District Centre which is highly regarded by the local population it serves.
- 1.3 The Trustees ongoing commitment to the HVSC is evident in the recent expansion and enhancement of the retail and leisure provision within the district centre. This illustrates the Trustees continuing commitment to Medway’s local economy, as well as the enduring need to invest in the HVSC in the light of changing retail patterns and competition from other centres outside of the borough, notwithstanding the extremely challenging market conditions for retail development in the UK that persist.
- 1.4 As reflected through the ongoing investment and improvements at the HVSC, the Trustees remain committed to maintaining and improving the retail and leisure offer within Medway. They therefore welcome the Council’s preparation of the emerging Medway Local Plan, and the opportunity to engage in its preparation at this early stage.
- 1.5 Those policies and objectives contained within the emerging Medway Local Plan will ensure that Medway Council are able to plan proactively to meet the development needs of the borough over the plan period in full. Consequently, the accurate identification of those development needs in the borough over the plan period are critical if the emerging Medway Local Plan is to successfully manage the future development of the borough. Therefore, the strength and robustness of the evidence base in identifying the development needs (including retail and leisure), is fundamental in the preparation of the emerging Medway Local Plan.
- 1.6 Whilst the Medway Local Plan ‘Issues and Options’ document (“Consultation Document”) does not set out specific policies or allocate sites for future development, the purpose of this stage in the preparation of the emerging Local Plan is to present key contextual matters that drive the new Local Plan, and identify a range of options for how these matters can be addressed.

- 1.7 Consequently, although the Consultation Document represents the initial stage in the preparation of the emerging Medway Local Plan, the options identified within the Consultation Document must reflect those overarching objectives and policies of the National Planning Policy Framework (“NPPF”).
- 1.8 Therefore, in accordance with the provisions of the NPPF the Consultation Document should be based upon an up-to-date evidence base that identifies development needs within the borough over the plan period, and plan proactively to meet these needs in full. The Consultation Document should therefore seek to identify the most appropriate approaches to meet this need, including the identification of locations for future development to support sustainable growth in Medway.
- 1.9 Indeed, the Council will prepare the draft Local Plan, which will identify the options for the development of the borough up to 2035, on the basis of the responses received in relation to the Consultation Document. Consequently, those initial ‘options’ that are identified within the Consultation Document are considered to represent the Council’s preliminary objectives for the future development of the borough.
- 1.10 The representations and recommendations provided within this report therefore reflect the Trustees’ key observations with regards to the development needs, in particular retail and leisure need, and the Council’s preliminary objectives for the future development of the borough to meet this need in full.
- 1.11 Given the Trustees interest in the HVSC, the representation and recommendations provided in this report are focused on the identification of retail and leisure needs, and the emerging strategy to meet these needs as set out in the *‘Retail, commercial leisure and town centres’* chapter of the Consultation Document.

2 HEMPSTEAD VALLEY SHOPPING CENTRE

- 2.1 The Trustees of the HVSC have submitted these representations to the Consultation Document in their capacity as investors in the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre (“HVSC”).
- 2.2 The HVSC is situated to the south of Hempstead and lies within the administrative boundary of Medway Council. The existing HVSC is located between Hempstead Valley Drive (west) and Sharsted Way (east), and encompasses the purpose-built indoor shopping centre, associated petrol filling station and access roads and surface level car parks.
- 2.3 Since opening in 1979, the HVSC has undergone a number of renovations and extensions, including recent expansion of, and improvements to, the leisure uses within the HVSC. Recent improvements to the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre further enhance the traditional comparison and convenience retail offer provided within the centre, supplementing the existing retail offer with complementary restaurants.
- 2.4 The existing HVSC provides for approx. 79 retail units, including two anchor stores (Sainsbury’s and Marks & Spencer) as well as a range of national multiple retailers including Argos, Boots, and Clarks, this represents approx. 44,749sq.m. On the basis of the high quality retail and leisure offer provided, the HVSC continues to function as a district centre and represents popular destination for consumers and retailers alike.
- 2.5 The HVSC represents one of the key retail destinations within the borough, making a significant contribution towards meeting demand for comparison and convenience retail and leisure floor space within the borough. Indeed, whilst those other centres within the borough struggle to maintain market share, with consumers choosing to shop outside of the borough, the HVSC continues to maintain its market share and attracts visitors from outside the borough.
- 2.6 Responding to the continued success of the HVSC, the existing Medway Local Plan acknowledges the important role of the HVSC in the retail and leisure provision of the borough, identifying the HVSC as a ‘District Centre’ within the hierarchy of retail centres.
- 2.7 As a ‘District Centre’ the HVSC is considered second only to Chatham Town Centre which is the principle ‘Town Centre’ within the borough. The Proposals Map which accompanies the existing Medway Local Plan (2003) identifies the HVSC ‘District Centre’ allocation as covering the full extent of the existing centre and associated surface level car parks. The existing allocation therefore includes those ‘free standing’ units located within the wider HVSC site.

3 EVIDENCE BASE

3.1 Under the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (“NPPF”), Local Plans must be based upon an up-to-date evidence base that identifies development needs within the borough, with those policies and objectives contained within Local Plans meeting this identified need in full.

3.2 Consequently the emerging Medway Local Plan must plan proactively to meet fully the objectively assessed economic development needs of the borough as identified through the evidence base upon which it is based. Indeed, under the provisions of paragraph 14 of the NPPF, meeting these development needs in full through the emerging Local Plan is fundamental in achieving sustainable development.

*‘At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a **presumption in favour of sustainable development**, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.*

*For **plan-making** this means that:*

- *local planning authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area;*
- *Local Plans should meet objectively assessed needs, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change, unless:*
 - *any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or*
 - *specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.’*

3.3 Existing town centres, such as the HVSC, perform an important role in sustainably meeting the development needs of their area. Indeed, paragraph 23 of the NPPF states that, ‘*In drawing up Local Plans, local planning authorities should: recognise town centres as the heart of their communities and pursue policies to support their viability and vitality*’. Local planning authorities should therefore seek to maximise opportunities to meet identified development needs within existing town centres.

3.4 Achieving sustainable development, which under the provisions of the NPPF should be seen as the ‘*golden thread*’ that runs through plan-making, is intrinsically linked to the identification of development needs, and the adoption of positive policies and objectives to meet this need in full. The identification of development needs is therefore at the heart of the preparation of Local Plans.

3.5 Paragraph 158 of the National Planning Policy Framework states;

‘Each local planning authority should ensure that the Local Plan is based on adequate, up-to-date and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area. Local planning authorities should ensure that their assessment of and strategies for housing, employment and other uses are integrated, and that they take full account of relevant market and economic signals.’

3.6 Furthermore, paragraph 161 of the NPPF states;

'Local planning authorities should use this evidence base to assess:

- the needs for land or floorspace for economic development, including both the quantitative and qualitative needs for all foreseeable types of economic activity over the plan period, including for retail and leisure development;*
- the role and function of town centres and the relationship between them, including any trends in the performance of centres;*
- the capacity of existing centres to accommodate new town centre development'*

3.7 Consequently, under the provisions of the NPPF, the emerging Medway Local Plan must be based upon a robust, and up-to-date, evidence base that identifies the quantitative and qualitative economic needs within the borough (including need for retail and other town centre uses).

3.8 Whilst the Consultation Document represents the initial stage of the preparation of the emerging Medway Local Plan, those options for the future development of the borough identified must plan proactively to meet the objectively assessed development needs in full. Any failure to do so would raise significant concerns regarding the soundness of the Consultation Document.

3.9 Although the Trustees welcome the Council's desire to *'consult widely to gather further information to help it define the best options for new development locations; the role of our towns, neighbourhoods and villages; looking after the environment and historic features; and securing the infrastructure needed to support growth and effective policies to deliver quality development in a timely manner'* (paragraph 2.5), the support of the Trustees for those options identified in the Consultation Document is dependent upon the identification of development need/capacity. Consequently, the Consultation Document must be supported by a robust and up-to-date evidence base that identifies fully the development needs (including retail and leisure) within the borough.

3.10 In this regard it is contended that the evidence base that has been prepared in support of those options to-date is incomplete and fails to identify the full development needs of the borough. Indeed, whilst the Consultation Document suggests that an assessment of future retail and leisure growth capacity in Medway has been undertaken as part of the Strategic Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (SHENA) 2015, the findings of this assessment are not sufficiently robust to support the objectives of the emerging Medway Local Plan or facilitate informed debate.

3.11 In particular, whereas the previous Draft Core Strategy (2011) was supported by the Retail Needs Assessment (2009) prepared by NLP which identified retail and leisure needs within the borough based upon a thorough assessment of consumer behaviour and the health and function of all existing centres within the borough and wider sub-region, the SHENA has sought only to identify retail and leisure capacity based on spending assumptions and population/demographic trends.

The authenticity of those brief findings of the retail and leisure capacity studies that are included in the Consultation Document cannot therefore be established or verified.

- 3.12 Indeed, those brief findings expressed within the Consultation Document do not comply with the requirements of either the NPPF or National Planning Practice Guidance (“PPG”). In this regard paragraph 014 (Ref: 12-014-20140306) of the PPG states:

‘Appropriate and proportionate evidence is essential for producing a sound Local Plan... The evidence needs to inform what is in the plan and shape its development rather than being collected retrospectively... Local planning authorities should publish documents that form part of the evidence base as they are completed, rather than waiting until options are published or a Local Plan is published for representations. This will help local communities and other interests consider the issues and engage with the authority at an early stage in developing the Local Plan.’

- 3.13 Furthermore, although the emerging Medway Local Plan is to extend until 2035, the evidence base that is presented within the Consultation Document provides only projected Retail and Leisure Capacity up to 2031. Consequently, the evidence base that is provided at this stage does not meet the requirements as set out in the PPG, paragraph 003 (Ref: 2b-003-20140306) which states:

‘Any strategy should be based on evidence of the current state of town centres and opportunities to meet development needs and support their viability and vitality. Strategies should answer the following questions:

- *what is the appropriate and realistic role, function and hierarchy of town centres in the area over the plan period? This will involve auditing existing centres to assess their role, vitality, viability and potential to accommodate new development and different types of development. **This assessment should cover a three-five year period, but should also take the lifetime of the Local Plan into account** and be regularly reviewed.’ (Our **emphasis**)*

- 3.14 The absence of an assessment of either current (2016) retail and leisure capacity, or expected capacity at the end of the plan period (2035) is therefore contrary to the requirements of the PPG, and will not enable the emerging Medway Local Plan to meet development needs throughout the plan period.

- 3.15 On the basis that an insufficient evidence base (in particular with regards to retail and leisure needs) has been published in support of the Consultation Document, it is contended that the Council is unable to demonstrate that those ‘Options’ for the future development of the borough will meet the objectively assessed development needs in full. Consequently, should the Council identify the ‘preferred option’ on the basis of the findings of the Consultation Document; the conclusions drawn from this consultation will be contrary to the objectives of the NPPF and PPG.

- 3.16 It is therefore suggested that, due to the absence of sufficient evidence, the local community and interested stakeholders (including the Trustees) are unable to consider fully those issues and options presented within the Consultation Document at this stage.

- 3.17 On this basis the Trustees express significant concerns regarding both the evidence base presented to-date, and those initial 'options' for the future development of the borough identified through the Consultation Document.
- 3.18 The Trustees therefore look forward to the opportunity to make further representations to the Consultation Document once those 'issues' and 'options' included within the Consultation Document are supported by a robust assessment of development needs, and plan proactively to meet these needs in full. Whilst the Trustees wish to assist the Council in formulating policy that will shape Medway, until these short comings are resolved the scope of the representation and recommendations provided, and the conclusions drawn, are restricted.
- 3.19 Nonetheless, the Trustees provide the following representations and recommendations to the Consultation Document, which should be read in conjunction with their concerns regarding the failings and inadequacies of the evidence base.

4 RETAIL, COMMERCIAL LEISURE & TOWN CENTRES

4.1 The Trustees of the HVSC welcome Medway Council's acknowledgement of the improving economic climate and associated increases in consumer spending. This improving consumer climate is reflected within the continued success of the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre, including the recent expansion and enhancement of the retail and leisure offer provided at the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre.

4.2 The opportunities presented by an improving economic climate and increased consumer confidence must be embraced through the emerging Medway Local Plan, with those policies and objectives of the Local Plan harnessing this growth to support sustainable development within the borough.

4.3 Indeed, '*securing economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity*' (paragraph 18, NPPF) is at the heart of the overarching objectives of the NPPF. Under the provisions of both the National Planning Policy Framework ("NPPF") and National Planning Practice Guidance ("PPG"), this overarching objective of securing economic growth and delivering sustainable development, must be reflected through those policies relating to town centres.

4.4 In this regard Section 2 of the NPPF relates to '*Ensuring the vitality of town centres*', and sets out those overarching objectives that should be reflected within the emerging Medway Local Plan. In this regard paragraph 23 of the NPPF states:

Planning policies should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period. In drawing up Local Plans, local planning authorities should:

- *Recognise town centres as the heart of their communities and pursue policies to support their viability and vitality;*
- *Define a network and hierarchy of centres that is resilient to anticipated future economic changes;*
- *Define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, based on a clear definition of primary and secondary frontages in designated centres, and set policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in such locations;*
- *Promote competitive town centres that provide customer choice and a diverse retail offer and which reflect the individuality of town centres;*
- *Retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones, ensuring that markets remain attractive and competitive;*
- *Allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community and residential development needed in town centres. It is important that needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses are met in full and are not compromised by limited site availability. Local planning authorities should therefore undertake an assessment of the need to expand town centres to ensure a sufficient supply of suitable sites;*
- *Allocation appropriate edge of centre sites for main town centre uses that are well connected to the town centre where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available. If sufficient edge*

of centre sites cannot be identified, set policies for meeting the identified needs in other accessible locations that are well connected to the town centre;

- *Set policies for the consideration of proposals for main town centre uses which cannot be accommodated in or adjacent to town centres;*
- *Recognise that residential development can play an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and set out policies to encourage residential development on appropriate sites; and*
- *Where town centres are in decline, local planning authorities should plan positively for their future to encourage economic activity.*

4.5 In accordance with the provisions of the NPPF, the sustainable delivery of retail and leisure needs within the borough will be successfully delivered through a functioning hierarchy of retail centres which includes the HVSC. In this regard the existing Medway Local Plan (2003) identifies a hierarchy of centres within the borough based upon their role, vitality, viability and potential to accommodate future development. Within the existing Medway Local Plan (2003), the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre is identified as a 'District Centre' within the adopted hierarchy of town centres. As a 'District Centre' the HVSC is acknowledged to be one of the principal retail centres within the borough alongside, Rainham, Strood, Gillingham, and Rochester, while Chatham Town Centre is identified as the 'Main Retail / City Centre'.

4.6 Therefore to comply with the provisions of the NPPF, the emerging Medway Local Plan must continue to identify a hierarchy of town centres and unless evidence is presented to the contrary the hierarchy will remain unchanged. In this regard the HVSC continues to perform a significant role in meeting the existing retail needs of the borough, as well as providing opportunities to meet future need through expansion of the existing successful 'District Centre'. The HVSC should therefore continue to be identified as a 'District Centre' through the emerging Medway Local Plan.

4.7 The Trustees therefore object to the assertion within the Consultation Document that the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre *'does not perform the same role as the town centres'* and that *'the success of this centre may have come at the expense of the traditional centres'*. The assertion that the success enjoyed by the HVSC has arisen at the expense of the traditional centres – in particular Chatham Town Centre – fails to acknowledge either the demonstrable interest in the HVSC shown by national and local retailers and leisure providers (including many national retailers whose only presence within the borough is at the HVSC), nor the shortfalls of these 'traditional' centres and the physical barriers to these centres meeting the objectively assessed needs in full.

4.8 Furthermore, the NPPF does not provide a definition of the function or role of District Centres. Consequently the suggestion that the HVSC does not perform the same role as the 'traditional' town centres that is included within the Consultation Documents is inconsistent with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 4.9 It is understood that there is a projected capacity for 34,900sq.m (Comparison) and 10,500sq.m (Convenience) floorspace within the borough by 2031. Although the accuracy of this projected capacity cannot be guaranteed due to the incomplete evidence base that has been provided at this stage, meeting this need in full can only be achieved through future development at all those existing 'District Centres' (including the HVSC) ensuring the hierarchy continues to function and consumer choice is maintained. Consequently, the suggested approach for the focus of future retail and leisure development within Chatham Town Centre and those 'traditional' town centres (excluding HVSC) will not meet this wider policy objective.
- 4.10 The completion of a robust and thorough retail needs assessment, which in addition to identifying development need, will provide an understanding of the consumer behaviour, will not only indicate retail and leisure capacity in the borough, but also in which town centres this capacity is most prevalent. The preparation of the evidence base will therefore assist greatly in developing the Local Plan's strategy.
- 4.11 The Trustees provide the following responses to those questions posed by the Consultation Document in relation to retail, commercial leisure and town centres.
- Should we focus investment & retail capacity on Chatham to consolidate its position as Medway's highest order centre?**
- 4.12 The National Planning Policy Framework states that *'In drawing up Local Plans, local planning authorities should... define a network and hierarchy of centres that is resilient to anticipated future economic changes'* and *'promote competitive town centres that provide customer choice and a diverse retail offer and which reflect the individuality of town centres'*. On this basis it is suggested that the emerging Medway Local Plan must incorporate a hierarchy of retail centres (including the HVSC), and that all those identified centres should perform a role in meeting the objectively assessed retail need in full. The Trustees therefore object to any policy that will focus retail and leisure development on Chatham, which would consequently be contrary to the overarching objectives and policies of the NPPF.
- 4.13 Furthermore, as with those representations submitted on behalf of the Trustees in relation to the Core Strategy (2011), the Trustees also express significant concerns with any proposed strategy that seeks to focus retail development solely on Chatham Town Centre as such a strategy is dependent on whether it is commercially realistic that major new retail development can be delivered in Chatham, which to date has, despite policy support, struggled to deliver such development.

- 4.14 Given the short comings of the Council's evidence base and in this instance the lack of a sequential assessment the Trustees question the appropriateness of progressing with such a Chatham focused objective.
- 4.15 Not only would the adoption of such as strategy be high risk given its dependence upon securing major new retail development in Chatham, a policy that restricts the delivery of leisure and retail development within other defined centres would be contrary to the policies and objectives of the NPPF.
- 4.16 The concerns of the Trustees are all the more pronounced as the aspiration for major comparison retail development in Chatham Town Centre is long standing but undelivered despite the provisions of the existing Medway Local Plan (2003).
- 4.17 As such we question whether the retail strategy is sound in the terms set out within the NPPF. Moreover, it is questionable whether the strategy (i.e. major new retail development in Chatham) is deliverable, certainly in a time frame which would affect the desired change.
- 4.18 It is therefore concluded that the adoption of a strategy to focus future retail and leisure development within Chatham Town Centre, without support of an up-to-date evidence base, is unlikely to meet the objectively assessed development need in full, as required under the provisions of the NPPF.

Should we seek to facilitate development in Chatham of sufficient critical mass to improve market share, or plan for investment to meet currently identified capacity only?

- 4.19 On the basis of the historic failings of Chatham Town Centre to attract significant high quality retail development, which has been further compounded by the recent departure of a number of national retailers from Chatham Town Centre, the Trustees question the adoption of a strategy that is dependent not only on maintaining existing market share in Chatham, but increasing this market share to sufficiently develop critical mass.
- 4.20 Indeed, whilst the Council's objectives to enhance the retail and leisure offer provided within Chatham Town Centre is welcomed, it is again suggested that a strategy based on utilising the diversity of the combined Town and District Centres within the borough will provide the most effective strategy to maintain the market share of the borough as a whole. It is the Trustees view that any strategy that places unrealistic assumptions on growth in one Town/District Centre will come at the expense of other established centres and the borough as a whole.
- 4.21 As with the Trustees wider concerns with the emerging Medway Local Plan, the lack of an up-to-date evidence base, and in particular evidence of Chatham's market share, raises significant

concerns regarding any policy objectives relating to increasing market share of Chatham. Indeed, without benefiting from an understanding of current market share and recent trends, the Trustees question the ability of the emerging Medway Local Plan to improve market share.

What should the mix be in Medway's town centres between retail and other supporting uses, including food and drink, commercial leisure, employment and residential?

- 4.22 Despite an improving economic climate and growing consumer confidence, existing retail centres continue to face significant challenges, namely the persistent growth in on-line shopping and the increased market share enjoyed by discount retailers who often favour out-of-centre locations. Consequently, the future success of those existing town centres in Medway is dependent on their ability to generate increased footfall and spending by visitors.
- 4.23 The NPPF recognises the importance of ensuring the vitality and vibrancy of existing town centres, and the role of sufficient flexibility in the planning system in enabling town centres to respond to the challenges that they continue to face.
- 4.24 A key strategy in ensuring the vitality and vibrancy of existing centres, such as the HVSC, is the encouragement of a mix of uses which allow these centres to diversify from their traditional retail base. Indeed the inclusion of, leisure, cultural, residential and community uses within existing centres is critical in ensuring their survival. In this regard paragraph 23 of the NPPF states that In drawing up Local Plans, local planning authorities should:
- *promote competitive town centres that provide customer choice and a diverse retail offer and which reflect the individuality of town centres;*
 - *recognise that residential development can play an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and set out policies to encourage residential development on appropriate sites;*
- 4.25 It is on this basis that the Trustees have significantly enhanced those leisure facilities within the HVSC, with these expanded and enhanced leisure uses complimenting the traditional retail uses and contributing towards to continued success of the HVSC. Whilst the significant investment in leisure and other complimentary uses at HVSC has contributed to the continued success of the 'District Centre', the NPPF recognises that the success of retail centres is often the result of their individuality and the unique mix of uses provided within each centre. Consequently, it is suggested that the adoption of an approach that seeks to mimic the success experienced at one centre would likely result in the homogenisation of those other centres within the borough, likely to the detriment of these centres.
- 4.26 Therefore whilst the Trustees welcome the Council's acknowledgement of the role that leisure and other complementary town centre uses perform in increasing the vitality of town centres, the Trustees recommend that the emerging Medway Local Plan does not restrict the flexibility enjoyed

by those existing town centres through the imposition of policies requiring a certain combination of uses.

What should our approach be to proposals for new or enhanced out of town retail?

- 4.27 At the heart of the Government's commitment to ensuring the vitality of town centres is the 'Town Centres First' approach, the purpose of which is to guard against inappropriate development of main town centre uses.
- 4.28 The Trustees welcome the Government's commitment in this regard, and the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework, which promote the delivery of future retail and leisure uses within existing defined centres such as the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre.
- 4.29 On this basis the Trustees suggest that those policies of the emerging Medway Local Plan should reflect the provisions of the NPPF in supporting a 'Town Centre First' approach, including establishing policies that require application for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and in an updated plan to be supported by a thorough and robust sequential and impact assessment to consider the impact of any such proposed uses on those existing centres.
- 4.30 It is the view of the Trustees that the adoption of such an approach will safeguard those existing centres within the borough, including Chatham Town Centre and the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre from inappropriate out-of-centre development.
- 4.31 Furthermore, no evidence has been provided that demonstrates that the retail and leisure uses within the borough cannot be met in full in more sequentially preferable sites than out of centre retail development.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 In conclusion whilst the Trustees of the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre welcome the Council's preparation of the emerging Medway Local Plan and the subsequent replacement of those existing out-of-date policies of the Medway Local Plan (2003). The Trustees express a number of concerns regarding both the process that has been adopted by the Council in the preparation of the emerging Medway Local Plan, as well as those options for the future development of the borough that are presented within the Consultation Document.
- 5.2 Firstly, due to the failure of the Council to provide an up-to-date and robust evidence base in support of the Consultation Document, the Trustees question the ability of the Council to identify those initial options for the future development of the borough. Indeed, given the absence of the identified development needs, those initial options presented within the Consultation Document do not meet the objectively assessed needs in full as required under the provisions of the NPPF.
- 5.3 The Trustees also wish to take this opportunity to express their serious concerns with the Council's proposed spatial strategy for the distribution of future retail and leisure development within the borough.
- 5.4 In particular the Trustees object to the Council's assertions regarding the current and future role of the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre. Indeed, the Trustees object to the Council's suggestion that the HVSC does not perform the role of a District Centre, and proposition that the HVSC should not perform any function in meeting the future retail and leisure needs of the borough. It is strongly contended that such approach not only fails to acknowledge the significant role that the HVSC performs in meeting retail and leisure need within the borough, but also jeopardises the ability of the development needs of the borough to be met in full. Any such approach is also considered to be contrary to those overarching objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 5.5 We therefore consider the Council needs to give consideration to a greater level of investment into Hempstead Valley than that set out in the Consultation Document. The acknowledgement of the role performed by the HVSC and the continued success of the HVSC, would not threaten the regeneration of Chatham Town Centre.
- 5.6 Hempstead Valley is a designated District Centre as opposed to a primary centre; it is considerably below Chatham in the NLP national rankings, is substantially smaller and has a much more localised catchment than Chatham. We also consider it significant to note that from the NLP survey that Chatham loses comparatively little expenditure to Hempstead Valley.
- 5.7 By encouraging more retail and associated investment at Hempstead Valley, Medway would benefit from a centre which is capable of helping deliver on the ground some of the quantitative and

qualitative needs of the borough in the early part of the plan period. Indeed, the emerging Medway Local Plan should acknowledge that the HVSC benefits from significant capacity for additional retail/leisure floorspace.

- 5.8 Given Hempstead Valley's location in the south east of the district, additional capacity at HVSC would not only serve Medway itself, but would claw back trade being lost to Medway's largest competitor, namely Maidstone. This would still leave more than sufficient identified need for the redevelopment and regeneration of Chatham, nor would it adversely impact on the investment prospects of the other centres.
- 5.9 We consider that without a flexible and deliverable policy response to meeting retail and leisure needs within the borough, there is a real concern that Medway's shoppers will continue to vote with their feet and take their expenditure out of the borough. If this were to happen then the prospect of any major comparison retail in Chatham at any point in the plan period will significantly recede.
- 5.10 On the basis of these concerns and objections, the Trustees of the Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre look forward to the opportunity make future representations and recommendations to the emerging Medway Local Plan.
- 5.11 We therefore take this opportunity to request that we are kept fully informed of the progress of the emerging Medway Local Plan, including the publication of the evidence base upon which it is to be based.