

New Government Planning Policy puts focus on City and Town Centres

The latest in a series of Planning Policy Statements (Planning Policy Statement 4) has been released by Central Government and, according to Cambridge Consultant Surveyors Januarys, it puts the focus firmly on city and town centres.

The statement is subtitled 'Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth' and has been produced in response to the difficulties – both economic and environmental – being faced by communities. Its aim, according to Housing and Planning Minister Margaret Beckett, is to promote investment and competition whilst at the same time safeguarding city, town and village centres.

The statement makes a number of points that developers and councils will need to be aware of when submitting or considering planning applications. These include; to deliver more sustainable patterns of development and respond to climate change; promote the vitality and viability of town and other centres; encourage competition and choice through the provision of innovative and efficient services in town centres; and raise the quality of life and the environment in rural areas by promoting thriving, inclusive and locally distinctive rural communities

Commenting on the new statement, Januarys' Associate Justin Bainton said, "This latest Statement marks a clear desire on the part of the government to promote existing town, city and village centres as the best places for economic growth over out of town developments.

"In addition to this direction from central government, the Statement also encourages local authorities to give favourable consideration to applications for economic growth and to speed up the planning process, something all would support.

"The previous 'needs test' will be replaced by an 'impact test.' This will give councils better controls over big developments that put smaller shops and entire town centres at risk.

Projects will be assessed against key factors including climate change, impact on the high street, consumer choice, consumer spending and jobs.

"The 'sequential test' remains. This requires the most central town centre sites to be developed before out of town sites that could potentially lure high street shoppers away.

"Naturally, this new Statement has implications for developers. We would particularly recommend that anyone planning to build commercial premises outside of existing town centres seeks professional advice before they begin to engage with the planning process."

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