

Retail Frontages and Ground Floor Units in defined centres

Designated centres have been identified on the basis of their function and role within local communities, with a primary purpose of making retail and shopping provisions available to their local community in a sustainable and accessible way. The role and offer of centres are changing though and the need for flexibility is becoming increasingly important. This is particularly true within Coventry where vacancy rates are relatively high. Therefore, with the exception of the city centre there are no plans to designate primary or secondary retail frontages. The importance of the city centre at the top of the centres hierarchy and the need to promote the city centre as the focal point for A1 retail means primary and secondary frontages remain important to identify. These will be managed through the City Centre AAP.

When considering uses within the centres hierarchy this is generally focused towards the ground floor of units. As such, the ground floor element of these units is of primary importance as they offer the 'shop windows' for the centre.

Policy R5: Retail Frontages and Ground Floor Units in defined centres

1. Proposals to use ground floor units within defined centres for non-A class uses will normally be permitted provided that:
 - a. the primary retail function of the centre would not be undermined in the context of Policy R3;
 - b. the use would make a positive contribution to the overall role, vitality and viability of the centre;
 - c. the use is compatible with other Plan policies.
2. The impact of a proposal on the primary retail function of a centre will be determined on the basis of:
 - a. the location and prominence of the unit within the relevant frontage;
 - b. the width of the frontage of the unit when compared to other units in the centre;
 - c. the number and proximity of other units occupied by 'A' class uses;
 - d. compatibility of the proposal with nearby uses.

By considering the issues identified in Policy R5, such proposals will be assessed in the context of ensuring and maintaining a viable and vibrant centre with lively street frontages.

By way of prominence and size of the unit, consideration will need to be given to the character of the centre and how the unit in question compares to other units within the centre. For example, Coventry's defined centres are characterised by a concentration of smaller units supplemented by a small number of larger units that are more prominent in terms of size and frontage within the centre. They are also often 'anchor' type units within the centres and provide a principle focus and attraction. The change of use of such a unit is likely to have a greater impact in terms of prominence and frontage than the change of use of a smaller unit. Furthermore, consideration will also need to be given to the lay out of the centre. This will need to have regard to whether the centre is a single grouping of units in a continuous row or if it is segregated by roads or open space etc. Where a centre is focused around more than 1 grouping of units, it should normally be the single grouping that is considered when examining the prominence of the unit. Where it is a single grouping the whole centre should be assessed.

It may also be important to consider the highway implications of non-retail proposals, especially if such proposals involve larger social or community provisions which may require significant car parking or concentration of activity at certain periods.