

Battle CP Call for Sites for Retail and Employment 2020 - Report

Summary

A Call for Sites for Retail and Employment opportunities was launched on 5 June 2020 with a closing date of 5:00pm on 30 June 2020 as RDC are requiring that the Neighbourhood Plan finds 1000 sq.m of new Retail space and 642 sq.m of new Employment space based on the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy adopted September 2014, which did not include Netherfield.

Extensive local awareness of the call was made during the first week through the local print media, additionally targeted letters were sent to 49 recipients, of which there were 10 replies. Reminder letters and emails were sent out during the consultation period in the hope of eliciting a response to the initial call.

Despite all of the efforts above, only a very small response was received.

Retail

There were no substantive offers that would add to the existing retail base available to users in the Battle CP. None of the major supermarkets that were contacted expressed an interest in opening stores in the CP. The existing supermarket, Jempsons, have not responded to several enquiries about the possibility of expanding their existing floor space. It should be noted that some six units (~240 sq.m total) have remained unused over at least the last 12 months and that where changes of retail offer have occurred these have generally been closures followed by opening in the same premises with a different retail offer - notably with a predominance of cafés. It is further noted that long term, four retail premises are occupied by charity shops.

In addition to the steering groups own findings, we have received authoritative evidence from a former local commercial letting agent that there is very little or indeed no appetite for retail expansion in Battle. Indeed the current situation with regard to "High Street Retail" has shown us that the turnover of retail operations is at a very depressed level in Battle Town centre.

Further, some evidence shows that property owners are now unable to fill their retail spaces and are consequently applying to change from business/retail use to domestic use in the central retail zone of Battle and there is currently an extremely well documented planning application (RR/2020/614/P and RR/2020/615/L) which supports our findings.

Employment

Rother District Council has advised the steering group that there is an existing residual requirement of 3342 sq.m, stating “Reallocating the Rutherford allocation from the 2006 local Plan would absorb the majority of the outstanding residual figure, leaving a requirement of 642 sq.m.”

Following the call for sites, two offers for employment opportunities were put forward by land owners and additionally the steering group has identified a number of other sites. **However, it should be noted that neither of these sites nor any others are being allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan. See conclusion below.**

The Rother Local Plan Core Strategy September 2014 states “Sites located in sustainable locations in close proximity to the town centre will be preferred.” Whilst it should be noted that the site at Beech Farm (approx 2000 sq.m) and the site at Loose Farm (approx 288 sq.m) do not meet the core strategy requirements, both sites are immediately adjacent to existing employment locations and with careful design could be considered acceptable employment places subject to planning permission.

The steering group has identified, in two approved planning applications (RR/2018/2089/P and RR/2019/1597/P), increased employment opportunities in two care homes. The former is an expansion of an existing care home adjacent to Loose Farm where other employment already exists, whilst the latter in North Trade Road will provide employment in accordance with the Core Strategy.

The aforementioned sites could potentially provide significant more employment space than is required in the Local Plan Core Strategy as shown:

Site name	Square Metres	Increase in potential employees
Beech Farm	2000	Up to 50
Loose Farm	288	8 to 40
North Trade Road Care Home	4020 (over 3 floors)	60
Cedarwood Care Home extension	560	3

Additionally the steering group is aware of six sites within the Battle High Street and nearby, the majority of which is office space that is currently unoccupied and amounting to 345 sq.m. This shows there is not a demand for office space.

1. Old Ladies Court 956 sq.Ft.
 2. Old Ladies Court 532 sq.Ft.
 3. Red Barn Mews (High Street) 497 sq.Ft.
 4. 81 High Street 415 sq.Ft.
 5. Battle Langton House 630 sq.Ft.
 6. Chain Lane 679 sq.Ft. (Near to the high street)
- (Total 3709 sq.Ft. = 345sqm)

Conclusion

In view of the above, the steering group is not recommending any allocations for additional retail or employment space. We note that Care Homes are classified as C2 for planning purposes and there are two which have been recently received planning permission. (e.g. North Trade Road care home and Cedarwood care home extension)

This will deliver a total of 4580 sq.m of new accommodation space, which will result in 63 new employment positions and therefore, meet the residual employment requirement.