



Respecting the past, shaping the future

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Suffolk Preservation Society
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Town centres threatened by new Government proposals

Government plans to scrap a 'needs test' planning system for town centres could see high street shops swallowed up by large supermarkets, it is feared.

Under new proposals (Communities and Local Government, *Proposed Changes to Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres Consultation, July 2008*) central Government is looking to take away the rights of local authorities to resist large supermarkets on the grounds of need and replace it with a new impact test.

Influential environmental group the Suffolk Preservation Society fears the new impact test could shift power from planners to the developers.

Society Director, Richard Ward, said: "The changes proposed appear to move focus from retaining the vitality and viability of town centres, to one of providing choice for the sake of it.

"This appears another ill conceived tinkering of the planning system to benefit developers of large supermarkets, while threatening the very survival of market town high streets, which then erodes choice.

"One might even say the Government is reverting to type."

Statistics publicised by the Competition Commission (April 2008) chart the rapid decline of specialist high street stores from 22,190 to 18,456 in 2007, a decline of 17%. On these trends such stores would disappear within 20 years.

Mr Ward added: "It is vital the 'need test' system is retained, otherwise local decision making and diversity could be adversely affected. If this happens there is a real danger of yet more superstores being built outside town centres, which in worst case scenario could force local and independent greengrocers, butchers, bakers, fishmongers and other small shops out of business."

Note to editors:

SPS, founded in 1929, originally worked to protect the county's buildings and landscape. Today, the Society has broadened its focus to help shape Suffolk's future, largely campaigning for sensitive and appropriate development, more and better quality affordable homes and to ensure sustainable infrastructures are in place to support the county's communities.

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