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Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Strategy

Supplementary Planning Document January 2007



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Part I

Background

1 Introduction

1.1 Letchworth is the world's first Garden City. Garden cities were a reaction against the overcrowding of cities and poverty of rural areas in the late Victorian period, with the profits from land development going towards the local public good. Letchworth town centre is the Garden City's most prominent public 'face'. In recognition of this historic importance, large parts of the town, including the whole of the town centre, are designated a conservation area.

1.2 Letchworth Garden City is the largest of four towns in North Hertfordshire, having the second largest town centre (in terms of floorspace) only after neighbouring Hitchin.

1.3 Over the years the town centre has been subject to much greater change than the other parts of the pre-1918 core of the Garden City, as the town centre has gradually developed and adjusted to changing needs and circumstances.

1.4 Today the centre primarily serves the day to day shopping and service needs of the local residents with a reasonable mix of comparison shops and a small range of national/regional multiples. It is however facing particular challenges.

1.5 The late 1980s and early 1990s saw significant growth in out of town shopping. This had serious repercussions for many town centres as they struggled to compete. Letchworth was no exception. Sainsburys relocated to the edge of the town in 1991, significantly reducing the numbers of people using the town centre. This spurred on efforts to rejuvenate the Town Centre, particularly by the then newly formed Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation the successor body to the First Garden City Limited which founded the town. It undertook considerable investment in the centre with refurbishment of buildings and provision of new shops and facilities. The District Council undertook town centre enhancement works in 1993, which reduced the dominance of the car. The town centre is now more vibrant and appears more cared for, due in part to the establishment and work of the Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Partnership.

1.6 Despite these efforts the number of local residents doing their main non-food shopping outside the town centre has increased. It is widely

perceived as not offering the range and quality of shops and services that people expect. Parts of the town centre are poor in character. It will also face increasing competition from Stevenage and Luton, once major new development there is completed. Already residents do much of their shopping elsewhere, especially for clothes and durable goods.

1.7 If Letchworth Garden City Town Centre is to rise to this challenge, regeneration efforts need to go a step further. It needs to provide the range of shops, and kind of quality environment that shoppers expect. It has a number of significant development opportunities, on sites which detract or make a neutral contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area. The planned origins of the town means that there are relatively few landowners. In particular the freeholder for much of the centre is the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, which has consulted on early ideas for redeveloping a number of key sites and improving parts of the centre. North Hertfordshire District Council is working in close partnership with the Foundation, traders, the Letchworth Garden City Town Council, the Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Partnership, shoppers and other stakeholders, and this strategy builds on previous consultation in taking ideas forward and putting them within a proper statutory framework.

1.8 Full Council adopted this strategy on 18 January 2007 in time to be an important material consideration on planning applications on several sites. It should be noted however that this town strategy covers a period of 15 years, and so provides guidance on sites, which are not proposed to be brought forward by the Foundation or others at this stage. It is intended to be read and used as a whole and so cross references are minimised. Repetition of other strategies and policies, such as those of the Corporate Plan and the local plan, which it should be read in context with, are kept to a minimum as advised by government. The most important background strategies and documents are listed as Appendix A. The strategy will be implemented in accordance with the Council's statutory duties with regards to matters such as race relations, crime and disorder prevention and disabled access.

2 What is the role of the Town Centre Strategy?

2.1 North Hertfordshire District Council set down a framework for developing town centre strategies in 2001. Their scope is wider than that of land use planning and covers all those aspects of policy guidance with a spatial dimension relevant to town centres, including economic, environmental and social well being and matters such as community safety, community facilities, traffic management, marketing and delivery. This will be the third such strategy prepared, and the first under the umbrella of the reformed statutory development planning system as a 'supplementary planning document' (SPD). This has required some changes in the structure and format of the document.

2.2 The strategy comprises: a vision and aims for the town centre, a series of objectives whereby progress can be monitored, and a planning strategy for the centre including opportunity sites. The strategy sets down, in terms of broad principles and examples of how these can be met, the approach towards conservation management and urban design in the centre, as well as broad proposals for improving the public realm, and managing and improving transport. It is not a fixed blueprint but a guide to action, part of a continuing process of town centre and conservation area management.

It is informed by and will inform other strategies and approaches including those by other agencies. In particular this strategy should be seen as contributing to the District's vision and proposals in its Community Strategy and Letchworth Area Visioning Action Plan.

The Wider Context – Key Documents

The North Hertfordshire Corporate Plan – sets out the district's vision of 'Making North Hertfordshire a vibrant place to live, work and prosper' and the Council's mission 'To work collaboratively with its partners and communities to achieve the vision'. Its six strategic objectives are:

- Sustainable Communities;
- Safer Communities;
- Healthier Communities;
- Equal Communities;
- Prosperous Communities; and
- Satisfied Communities.

The adopted Local Plan defines the town centre and sets down policies for retail development.

Strategic Plans - This is currently the Hertfordshire Structure Plan. In due course (when finalised) this will have its statutory role replaced by the East of England Plan. Both plans focus development on towns and town centres. The draft East of England Plan (with proposed modifications) encourages strategies for individual town centres within local development documents.

National Policy is contained in legislation, ministerial statements and planning policy guidance notes/statements (PPGs/PPS's). Sustainable development and community strategies are key priorities. The Government is committed to creating sustainable communities by assessing the impacts and interrelationships of three main areas of human activity - the Environment, society and the economy.

Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1)
– Delivering Sustainable Development
– specifies that planning authorities should promote sustainable economic development by:

- Recognising that economic development can deliver environmental and social benefits;
- Recognising the wider benefits of economic development and considering these alongside local impacts;
- Ensuring that sustainable locations are available for developments;
- Providing for improved productivity choice and competition;
- Recognising that all local communities are subject to change;
- Actively promoting good quality development;
- Ensuring the provision of sufficient, good quality homes;

- Ensuring that infrastructure and services are provided;
- Ensuring that plans take account of regional strategies; and
- Identifying opportunities for future investment.

Herts County Council (HCC) are in the process of preparing a sustainability guide for the County (see Appendix A) and once published in March 2007 will assist planning authorities in meeting the Government's principles for sustainable development. This Strategy through its spatial vision, aims and policy guidance contributes to fulfilling the aims of sustainable development as set out in PPS1. The Strategy has also been subjected to a formal sustainability appraisal and strategic environmental assessment (SA/SEA), the report of which is available separately.

Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS6)
– Planning for Town Centres – which requires local planning authorities to promote the vitality and viability of existing town centres by planning for their growth and development; through promotion and enhancement, by focusing development in such centres and encouraging a wide range of services in a good environment, accessible to all. Where possible sufficient land must be allocated in town centres to meet changing retail needs.

Key Facts

- Letchworth Garden City has a population of around 33,600, just over the original Ebenezer Howard ideal of 32,000.
- The number of young adults in the town is decreasing and the number of retired persons increasing.
- 83% of Letchworth residents do their main non-food shopping outside Letchworth Garden City, increasing from 70% in 1989.
- 64% of residents within the town centre's catchment area visit once a week or more frequently
- There is a high proportion of car based shoppers in Letchworth (66.8%), higher than other towns in the District. It also has fewer walking into the town centre. 22% of people visiting the town centre have no car.
- There are 252 ground floor retail/service units.
- Vacancy rate (9.1%) slightly lower than the national average
- Proportion of Food and drink A3/4/5 (13.5%) slightly higher than national average (12.5%) – but not unusually high given the size of the town centre.

(Sources: NHDC Household Survey Feb/March 2004 and NLP Town Centre and Retail Study 2004).

Key Problems (from the town centre study)

- There is concern about the extent to which the existing layout and facilities meet today's requirements. The evidence is that competition from other centres, both inside and outside the District, is having a detrimental effect on the town centre's performance.
- Whilst larger centres, such as Stevenage, will always take a large share of what is called 'high order comparison goods' such as fashion goods, larger centres have been taking an ever increasing share in recent years. At the same time smaller towns and centres have suffered and are increasingly reduced to a 'local service' only role. In Letchworth the current retail offer in the town centre does not match the spending needs of a relatively affluent catchment population.
- From a 2004 shoppers and traders survey the main aspect users disliked in Letchworth Garden City is the poor choice of shops and services.
- There is a lack of medium and larger size units, which limits the number of national chains. A frequent comment in the survey was that the town centre 'needs more chain stores'. Overall the town centre is perceived as too down market.

Throughout the strategy these boxes show how the strategy has responded to the views, ideas and concerns the people in the town centre stakeholder group raised during the workshops.

What You Said

Involved in the preparation of this Town Centre Strategy for Letchworth has been the town centre stakeholder group, which comprises individuals who represent various voluntary and commercial interest groups, as well as local residents, district councillors, landowners and members of the Garden City Town Council. Also involved have been members of the Bytes Youth Centre and Fernhill School Council. The group will continue to act as a sounding board for ideas over the town centre. Meetings with the Stakeholder Group have shown the following as the most common themes.

Strengths

- Compact Centre
- 1920s & Classical architectural character
- Parts of the town centre have high quality environment, wide footways, gardens etc. especially the Broadway.
- Some good independent shops and restaurants.
- Railway Station in town centre
- The new Morrison's brings people into the town centre.
- The Farmer's Market
- Town centre not dominated by traffic.

Note: A copy of the stakeholder workshop comments are available as a separate document or can be viewed on the Council's website at www.north-herts.gov.uk

Weaknesses

- Lack of flagship/department store
- Not enough larger shops, too many charity shops/budget outlets.
- Lack of restaurants
- Lack of quality clothing shops
- Lack of facilities for children and teenagers.
- Lack of public transport information
- Lack of quality town centre residential accommodation
- Not much to do at night-time.
- Garden Square Shopping Centre dark and unattractive.
- Multi-storey car-park not user friendly and a potential crime risk
- Poor signage.
- Bus services considered poor, infrequent and expensive.
- Young people considered there was a lack of shops and facilities attractive to them. They are also concerned that they don't feel safe in the centre with groups of older teenagers and young adults hanging around.

Overall there was general support amongst the stakeholder group for the principle of the sites being put forward for development by the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation but concerns over the designs and details of the development proposals. Also concerns were raised about parking proposals and where this would result in narrowing of pavements.

Town Centre Management

A town centre partnership has been formed which is made up of members from local organisations including businesses, retailers, public sector, voluntary and community groups. It has the aim of improving the town centre as a place to live, work and visit.

An executive is elected from these representatives. Funding is provided from the executive's members, in particular the District Council and the Heritage Foundation, and the executive employs a town centre manager. The town centre manager is responsible for implementing the work of the partnership and organises marketing of the town centre.

- More survey respondents suggested not enough national multiples as opposed to too many. 67% of occupiers considered this as main issue. Also there is a demand for more small independent shops.
- There is a higher than normal (for a town of this size) level of comparison goods (e.g. clothes and electrical goods) expenditure 'leakage', especially to Cambridge and Stevenage.
- Too much of the town centre appears tired and run down, today's shoppers expect a quality environment.
- There is low expenditure on eating/drinking out and the town centre lacks vitality, particularly outside traditional shopping hours.
- The shoppers' survey showed that the Garden Square Shopping Centre is considered to be relatively unattractive. Several people particularly disliked the indoor market.
- The parking was considered poor quality and confused, although a survey for the District's Parking Strategy found that it was considered better than other towns.
- Good quality shops are few and the best routes through the town centre and between these shops is unclear.
- The town centre attracts fewer residents in the evening than other centres, probably due to the weaker choice of facilities;
- Safety and security is relatively good; 40% of retail occupiers considered the safety of the town centre to be good, with only 19% suggesting it was poor.

Key Positive Features

- The centre is compact and as a whole is relatively well defined.

- There is potentially a natural circuit through the Garden Square shopping area and along Leys Avenue and Eastcheap.
- There is a sense of spaciousness with wide pavements and tree lined avenues.
- It has a reasonably large and affluent catchment population.
- Some good specialist shops and independent service outlets.

Key Opportunities

- There are opportunities for change with areas of poor architecture and urban design which could be improved
- There is a willingness to improve the environment and 'offer' of the town centre.

Relationship of the Town Centre Strategy to the Development Plan

2.3 There is now a statutory requirement for all statements of planning policy concerning the development and use of land to be included in the Local Development Framework – the portfolio of documents that will replace the adopted local plan. This is the first of the District's Town Centre Strategies to be prepared within this framework. The Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Strategy has been prepared as

a 'supplementary planning document' (SPD) - that is a document which 'may expand or provide further detail to policies in a development plan document' (PPS12 para. 2.43). SPD must be in general conformity with the development plan. Currently the development plan comprises the existing adopted Local Plan no. 2 (with alterations) and the structure plan.

2.4 Specifically this supplementary planning document has been prepared to expand and provide further guidance on the following policies in the District Local Plan no. 2 (with alterations): Policy 58 Letchworth Garden City Design Principles - which requires that in Letchworth development takes into account Garden City design principles, and Policy 42 part (i) which seeks to support and maintain shopping as the main activity in town centres, providing it safeguards and enhances the environment of towns such as the World's first Garden City Letchworth. These policies will eventually be replaced by those contained within development plan documents. Structure plan policies 4, 16 and 17 are also relevant. In due course these will be replaced by the East of England Plan the current draft of which requires town centre strategies to be prepared as local development documents.

3 The History of the Garden City Centre

3.1 Ebenezer Howard had a vision to end the slum conditions suffered by many in late Victorian times. In his book 'Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to real reform' published in 1898 he proposed a scheme of 'Garden Cities' – the best elements of town and country would be combined and the profits from the town would be used for community benefit. He showed, and stressed diagrammatically, a city focused on a garden surrounded by public buildings, and off which would radiate a series of avenues leading to residential areas.

of old Letchworth, Willian and Norton. In 1903 the First Garden City Limited was formed to build the town and a competition was held for a masterplan, won by the partners Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin who had a rising reputation as Arts and Crafts architects and planners. Construction began in 1904.

3.3 Building on the geometrical principles of Ebenezer Howard, Parker and Unwin incorporated their own concepts into combining formal geometry with the natural contours and features of the land. The Master Plan included a central town square with radiating axes, layouts with crescents and grid patterns as well as retaining existing routes.

3.4 An existing line of trees marked the line chosen for the main axis of Broadway running at an angle from Hitchin Road and the railway line, leading through the town centre on an area of almost flat land, near the railway line, which was to provide an ideal location for a station. Roads radiated out from the proposed Town Square. The concept behind this design was to provide open vistas of countryside, whilst glimpses of the intended public buildings were envisaged when approaching the town. The square now forms a public garden, recently renamed Broadway Gardens, which is included on English Heritage's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. Many glimpses of the



3.2 An association was formed to build a Garden City and the estate of Letchworth, previously an isolated rural hamlet, was purchased, together with adjoining estates covering the villages

countryside are no longer possible due to further development encroaching into the open fields, principally after the First World War. However, the tree lined Broadway provides visual unity and the gardens at the centre of the square (Broadway Gardens) create a visual focus.

3.5 Zoned areas also formed an essential part of the Master Plan. A clearly defined town centre along with residential, industrial and recreation areas were planned into the design. The geometrical framework balanced with the natural features united the individual elements into a cohesive layout. Corner and focal buildings were also an important part of the Master Plan. In Letchworth most of the churches are positioned on corner plots.

3.6 The Master Plan is a comprehensive layout, which has been largely adhered to during the development of Letchworth and strongly reflects the concepts of Howard, Parker and Unwin. The principles behind the Master Plan are essential to the special interest and character of Letchworth leading to the creation of a town dominated by open space, varied species of trees, and houses sited to obtain the maximum benefits of daylight. Letchworth created widespread interest in Town Planning and led to the development of pioneer planning legislation.

3.7 The early years were focused on affordable cottage housing, which Parker and Unwin had particular expertise in, rather than developing the town centre. In any event there was not as yet enough population to support large amounts of shopping and civic facilities – a problem faced in the early years of all new settlements.

3.8 Howard had imagined a city centre comprised of glazed shopping walkways, like at Victorian Southport; and he admired Crystal Palace and the Gallery Vittore Emmanuel in Milan. Raymond Unwin had imagined a formal town square fronted by public buildings at the centre of the Garden City. He took as his cue Wren's uncompleted plan for the rebuilding of the City of London and the Royal Military College at Greenwich.

3.9 Raymond Unwin set down a number of clear design principles for a Garden City in a conference paper in 1901, 'On the Building of Houses in the Garden City', later expanded in 'Town Planning in Practice' (1909). This paper set down his key town planning principles, which formed the basis of the masterplan. These works however paid little attention to the design of shopping areas. *'sites for our civil, religious and recreative public buildings... have been determined, dominating the city. Wide avenues or roads must be planned to lead off from these in all directions...and vistas*

leading up to the finest buildings shall greet the visitor from every direction'

3.10 In 1910 the First Garden City Limited was stung by criticisms following a visit by a delegation from the Royal Institute of British Architects of a lack of civic design.

3.11 In 1911 in response Raymond Unwin, inspired by a visit to America and its projects of city beautification, launched a 'Letchworth 1914' project proposing a formal town square courtyard of public buildings, which would have been ambitious for a town of several times Letchworth's size. In the event the courtyard of public buildings was never completed and the land for the town square was planted and laid out at what is now known as Broadway Gardens.

3.12 A design policy was introduced in Broadway between Broadway Gardens and Station Place. A preference was made for a Classical style to maintain visual unity.

3.13 In the event a combination of circumstances led to modification and abandonment of the Letchworth 1914 proposals following Unwin's departure to live in and further work on Hampstead Garden Suburb (where learning from Letchworth he proposed an intimate commercial and mixed use town centre, never implemented due to the inter-war obsession with shopping parades along major

roads), the slow development of the Garden City, the postponement of building by the First World War and post-war high building costs, and the concern for thrift as the Garden City Limited struggled to raise capital (it had no wealthy philanthropist to develop grandiose public buildings like at other planned settlements such as Port Sunlight). The central courtyard was dropped in favour of gradual development of a series of public buildings around an enlarged open space, now known as Broadway Gardens. In doing so, however, one of Unwin's central town planning precepts, of public buildings being the focal point of vistas, was broken. Public buildings were developed episodically, and the Town Hall and Grammar School set a clear intent and style but without the earlier ambition of a grandiose civic design. The intention of a harmonious civic setting around the square was somewhat eroded by later buildings such as ICL (now Nexus) and Plinston Hall and the Social Services Centre (the last two buildings on parts of the Grammar School site). Coherence of civic design has been more successfully achieved along the Northern section of the Broadway.

3.14 The original masterplan aim of symmetrical development along the Broadway was broken to some extent by the rapid development of the commercial heart of the Garden City in the 1920s around Eastcheap

and Leys Avenue. The First Garden City Limited imagined providing shopping facilities themselves, as later happened at Welwyn Garden City, however development happened in a piecemeal way in the form of small private sector shops. The final version of the company masterplan published in 1946 showed a shopping centre area very similar to the extent of the town centre today. The incompleteness and lack of symmetry was reinforced by the development in 1958 of North Herts College on land intended as 'West Cheap'.

3.15 Arena Parade, developed in 1958 on a vacant site, was planned with rear servicing to enable the pedestrianisation (never carried out) of Eastcheap. As Dr Mervyn Miller has commented 'It would have fitted without comment into Stevenage Town Centre only six miles away but had no affinity with Letchworth' (Letchworth-The First Garden City, Mervyn Miller 2002). In the 1970s major town centre redevelopment took place at what is now the Garden Square Shopping Centre and the Gernon Road multi-storey car park and District Council offices, redeveloping a street of shops - Commerce Way and cottages.

3.16 The town planning principles established in the original 1903 masterplan have stood the test of time extraordinarily well, and in the case of residential development were completed fairly closely to

the 1903 masterplan. More widely the broad masterplanning ideas of the Garden City movement in Britain and America have been taken up as a 'New Urbanism' which is now backed in Britain as part of official government urban design policy. In the case of the Garden City Town Centre, however, plans have evolved, often pragmatically, often harmoniously, but sometimes unsatisfactorily. There are multiple sources and layers of development over time and in different styles, which in that sense are similar to the phases of development in unplanned settlements. But in other regards its character is very different to that of unplanned settlements, because of the age and relatively short time span of early 20th century development in Letchworth Town Centre, the limited palette of architectural styles, and the harmonious patina of age.

3.17 The episodic nature of development is due in part to the grandiose and in some ways impractical nature of the 1903 and in particular the 1912 proposals for the Garden City Centre. Also the original masterplan could not have foreseen the need for provision for uses such as offices and car parks, which have had to be squeezed into their surroundings. In addition, issues which would be of principal concern in designing a new settlement today, such as providing an efficient public transport system, energy efficiency and sustainability, providing for modern

high tech start-ups and constructing housing affordable for first time buyers and low income renters, pose challenges in terms of how they are to be met within the existing historic town structure. One wonders how Howard, Parker and Unwin would have applied their minds to these challenges today.

3.18 The 1980s saw a period of economic decline in the town centre leading to widespread concern about its future, escalating vacancies and declining retail confidence. A low point was reached by the closure of Sainsburys in the precinct in 1991.

3.19 An opportunity was presented by the proposed closure of the North Herts College in 1994 and a consequent application for a supermarket development. The newly formed Garden City Heritage Foundation focused its attention on the town centre including restoration of buildings (such as the cinema and the Colonnades - in Station Place) and shop fronts and acquiring interests in key sites. Use of covenants by the Foundation, and land assembly and positive planning powers by the District, led to the redesign of the college site scheme more in keeping with and addressing the Broadway and a retained college presence in a new building. Morrisons occupied the new supermarket and immediately more people were attracted to the town centre, which for the first time resolved what Dr Mervyn Miller has

called the '*lopsided mismatch*' of retail attractions on both sides of the Broadway. Although the sharp decline has reversed there is a continuing loss of trade to Stevenage and other centres – increasingly Stevenage acts as the hub at the core of a ring of 'social city' settlements, with Letchworth playing a satellite role. Howard, although he could not have foreseen Stevenage, always saw Letchworth playing a role as a spoke of a future 'social' city, but with a greater retail focus in Letchworth than has turned out.

4 Vision and Objectives

4.1 To help focus the strategy it has an overall vision and a number of specific objectives to enable progress to be monitored. These give a required spatial planning dimension to the corporate strategy objectives (see para. 2.2).

Spatial Vision and Aims

1. Letchworth Town Centre will be preserved and enhanced to protect its special character as the town centre of the world's first Garden City, including providing, on appropriate sites, the quality buildings and facilities it deserves.
2. To promote the vitality and viability of Letchworth Garden City Town Centre through planning for its growth and development.
3. To develop the town centre's role as the focus for civic and social life and public transport networks in Letchworth Garden City, and as a place which is sustainable, pleasant, safe and inviting to visit, live and shop in.

Spatial Objectives

4.2 In support of these broad aims are a number of more specific objectives. Aims are a statement of mission, of purpose, whilst objectives point towards specific actions in support of the aims. The suggested objectives will require action and agreement from a range of partners, such as Hertfordshire County Council, the Letchworth Garden City Heritage

Foundation and other local bodies as well as North Hertfordshire District Council. In some cases objectives will take a number of years to come to fruition. The District is preparing a number of town centre health checks for all its four towns and ensuring that these are compatible across the county and with national standards. These objectives may need amendment in the light of the final health check indicators chosen, and are set initially between the baseline year of 2007 for a 10 year period through to 2016.

1. To increase comparison retail gross floorspace by 2016 by the amount to be allocated within forthcoming development plan documents.

2. To increase the number of larger (above 100 sqm. gross floor area) retail stores in the centre.

3. To support and develop local retailing by maintaining or increasing the number of local independents in the centre as a whole at 2005 levels in 2016.

4. To increase the footfall of shoppers on Eastcheap by 15% by 2016.

5. To achieve a 20% reduction in recorded crime levels between the hours of 21:00 and 03:00, by 2016.

6. To create a public transport interchange for the town centre and increase the proportion of those using non car modes to access the town centre by 5% by 2016.

7. To achieve a +20% or higher satisfaction rating of residents who believe when surveyed that new development – by 2016

Note: Satisfaction rating refers to the 5 surveyed holding a positive view minus those holding a negative view.

– has made the town centre a better, as opposed to worse, place. (see footnote).

8. To achieve a +10% or higher satisfaction rating of residents who believe when surveyed that the town centre is a cleaner, as opposed to dirtier, place than the previous year.

9. To have in 2007 an agreed strategy for civic accommodation and to have commenced implementation of this by 2010.

Spatial Themes

4.3 To meet these aims and objectives, policies and actions have been drafted to meet a number of key spatial themes.

Ensuring that **its character and design qualities as the civic, community and social centre of the world's first Garden City are protected and enhanced.**

Expanding the town centre's retail offer with increased floorspace and more stores of all sizes.

As the main priority bringing forward sites capable of providing, **larger, better quality and better designed retail units** for high quality comparative goods retailing.

Providing for **more small specialist stores** and some expansion and more choice in **quality food shopping.**

To encourage more **choice in evening facilities** whilst discouraging anti-social

behaviour.

Additionally **tourism, business and investment** in the town centre will be promoted.

Alongside this will be measures to **improve the public realm and pedestrian environment**, to attract visitors and encourage them to linger.

More visitors will require **improved management of parking**, ensuring security and appropriate expansion of provision alongside new development, and **improved public transport, walking and cycling.**

Improving the centre as **the focus of community and family life in Letchworth Garden City**, providing more facilities for children and young people, for families that visit, and for the full range of **modern community facilities** that are accessible for all.

Ensuring that its **open spaces and gardens that contribute to the landscape character** of the Garden City **are protected and enhanced** for their amenity and environmental value including biodiversity.

Last but by no means least making Letchworth Garden City a **model of how to apply ideas of sustainability** to a planned settlement.