

ECONOMY



7. ECONOMY

Introduction

- 7.1 It is vital for Hampstead's future that it retains a flourishing local economy that attracts businesses and creates jobs. This section seeks to build policies that will nurture and protect the local economy.
- 7.2 A very important reason for assuring the future of businesses in Hampstead is to meet the varied needs of local residents. The NPPF, in section 7, urges local plans to promote competitive town centres that provide customer choice and which reflect the individuality of town centres.
- 7.3 The Covid pandemic from 2020 onwards forced a shift of work to homes, which in many cases has yet to be reversed. This makes it more important to ensure that local residents' needs are being met. However, retailers face the old challenges of high business rents and rates, and the more recent advent of online shopping.
- 7.4 The Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum area contains two important retail centres: the centre of Hampstead itself, and the South End Green area. Each are briefly described below.
- 7.5 Hampstead Town Centre is the second smallest of Camden's six retail centres but one of the most attractive to visitors and residents alike. Many visitors come from outside the area, attracted by the "village feel", the proximity of the Heath and the many restaurants and cafes.
- 7.6 Visitors also come for essential shopping, and there are independent butchers, greengrocers, bakers and off-licences that offer a high-quality range of food and drink. Perhaps as a result of high rates and rents, the majority of retailers cater for the high end of the retail market.
- 7.7 In 2021, the Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum carried out a survey intended to discover residents' attitudes to the high street areas in light of the Covid pandemic, as well as residents' views of these areas. At that time, a significant number of businesses had closed, but there were also quite a number of new arrivals.

figs 7.1 - 7.2
Hampstead has a strong commercial centre



- 7.8 While there were some concerns about the make-up of the retail offering, the survey found a high level of satisfaction: "Those concerned about imbalances in the retail offering were far outweighed by those who commented positively on the range of shops, cafés, restaurants, food stores and pubs in Hampstead. Residents commended the village atmosphere, the sense of community and belonging, as well as the beauty, charm, leafiness and historic heritage. They

appreciated having, with easy walking distance, independent shops selling fresh produce. They liked the buzz and liveliness, the easy availability of public transport and the proximity of Hampstead Heath.”

- 7.9 The chief concern of residents was traffic, with associated air pollution. There was also unhappiness about litter and uncollected rubbish. In addition, “the balance between chain and independent shops was seen by many as skewed too far towards the former.”
- 7.10 The pandemic seemed to accelerate the pace of change in the retail offering. Research by the Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum found that in the two years after lockdown was imposed on 23 March 2020, 33 retail and hospitality businesses closed within the Forum area. In the same period, 28 businesses opened (including the Magdala and Old White Bear pubs, which reopened after long absences). Since March 2022, the rate of change has continued to be brisk, with a further 21 businesses closing by June 2023, more than balanced by the arrival of 23 businesses, with a few more known to be opening in the near future. These figures indicate the overall health of the high street areas remains quite robust, with departures broadly balanced by new arrivals. Many individual businesses found themselves in difficulties at the onset of the pandemic, and a number of sites have been empty for long periods, especially on Hampstead High Street. However, the pandemic did not precipitate a crisis for the Hampstead’s retail centres as a whole.
- 7.11 According to the Forum’s survey of residents, a further effect of the pandemic seemed likely be a permanent change in working patterns. Nearly a third of Hampstead residents were expecting to spend more time operating from home than they did before the pandemic. This led to a belief that the high street areas would need to provide services to support home working, such as places for meeting and co-working, and office supply and IT shops.
- 7.12 For the future, residents wanted a greener Hampstead, with curbs on car use and more pedestrianised streets. They wanted more spaces for community and cultural activities.

figs 7.3 - 7.4
South End Green offers
a pleasant shopping
environment



- 7.13 At the heart of the South End Green Neighbourhood Centre stands the impressive 1881 Gothic Revival drinking fountain located in part of what remains of the “green.” The parades of shops provide essential shopping and services, especially to the nearby neighbourhoods of South Hill Park and the Mansfield area. They also service the thousands of workers and visitors brought to the area by the Royal Free Hospital and Hampstead Heath.

- 7.14 Small independent shops, delicatessens, convenience stores, pubs, cafes and restaurants make up the majority of the retail units, though a number of chains also have a presence. There is a broad range of retailers, such as hairdressers, dry cleaning, shoe repair shops, locksmiths and businesses such as undertakers, estate agents and a betting shop; however, there is no bank branch or post office.

Policy EC1: Encouraging a healthy retail mix

- 7.15 The Plan supports sustainable development that helps retain jobs and encourages a vibrant mix of shops and services.
- 7.16 Since the 2018 Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan took effect, new government regulations have removed distinctions between different classes of high street businesses (A1, A2 etc) and have placed most within a new Class E. Changes within this class are now considered permitted development and need no planning permission. However permission may still be required for changes from Class E to Class C3 (dwellinghouses) as Camden has introduced an Article 4 Direction withdrawing some permitted development rights.
- 7.17 Commercial premises, once converted to homes, are likely to stay in residential use. This is likely to reduce the economic dynamism of the area, reducing jobs and narrowing the commercial offering. For example, in both centres, many first-floor premises are homes to dentists, gyms, solicitors' offices and other businesses.
- 7.18 Camden, alert to the dangers of a loss of dynamism in high street areas, has developed a "Future High Streets" prospectus with an agenda for building community hubs that promote cultural and other activities.

Policy EC1: Healthy retail mix

1. Development that enhances the vitality and viability of Hampstead Town Centre and the South End Green Neighbourhood Centre will be supported where it:
 - a) Provides office and retail units at first floor level.
 - b) Provides a widely varied retail offering, including small and locally based shops, to enhance its village-like character and economic vibrancy.
 - c) Provides hubs for community-related and cultural activities as envisioned in Camden's "Future High Streets" prospectus.
 - d) Provides opportunities for small/independent shops and businesses, which contribute positively to the vitality of the centres.
2. Where planning permission is required, the change of use of space in Class E to residential occupation will not be supported unless it can be shown that there is a long history of vacancy.
3. The aggregation of shop fronts that would result in the loss of viable small retail premises will not be supported.

- 7.19 One factor in the health of Hampstead's retail businesses is the existence of businesses located in the spaces directly above shops. The people who work in businesses in Hampstead are customers for other businesses, such as restaurants and cafes.
- 7.20 South End Green lost its post office in 2008. Post offices – or sub post offices – provide easy public access to essential services including mailing, access to cash and retail goods. The Plan would support a business opening a sub post office in the SEG area.

Policy EC2: Retail centre environment

- 7.21 The appearance of a high street is one of the key factors in its vitality. Despite existing guidance, many inappropriate and poorly designed shopfronts have been inserted into existing frames. Some fascias use inappropriate materials and depths, resulting in a lack of harmony with the original buildings, quite a number of which are listed.

Policy EC2: Contributing positively to the retail environment

1. New shop fronts or alterations to existing shop fronts will be supported where the proposals respect the proportions, rhythm, and form of original frontages. Where possible, lost original features such as unpainted surfaces, pilasters, corbels, glazing bars, part-glazed doors and fascias should be restored (see Camden Planning Guidance Design).
2. The retention of any shop front that is noted in the relevant Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy will be encouraged.
3. Any shop front of historical or architectural quality should be retained, even if its use has changed.
4. Security measures that do not detract from the streetscape, including toughened glass and the strengthening of shop fronts, will be supported. External security shutters, grilles or meshes will not be supported.
5. All "house-style" signage should be sensitively adapted to the streetscape.
6. Internally illuminated signs will not be supported. Signage should either be non-illuminated or externally illuminated, though "halo lit" or illuminated letters may be acceptable if subservient to the general design.
7. All lighting of shopfronts should minimise light pollution and harm to the natural environment. Excessive or bright lighting or 24-hour lighting of shopfronts that would cause harm to wildlife will not be supported.
8. To preserve the local character and visual amenity, the plan will resist the installation of LCD displays in shop windows.
9. Where possible timber fascias should be used on traditional shop fronts with either painted lettering or applied individual letters of another material.
10. Excessive signage will not be supported and generally signage should be limited to one fascia sign and one projecting sign at ground level.



figs 7.5 - 7.6

Good examples respect the scale, style and materials appropriate to the buildings' architecture and provide attractive settings for the display of goods

- 7.22 The Plan supports the development of shopfronts in the Hampstead Town Centre and South End Green Neighbourhood Centre that contribute positively to the character and visual quality of their surroundings.
- 7.23 External illumination of signs is generally preferable; it should be discreetly fixed and the minimum to allow the sign to be seen at night. The colour and brightness of the illumination and its ability to distract or confuse passing drivers will be considered. The size of lettering and logos should be in proportion to the detailing of the building.
- 7.24 The house style of multiple stores will often not be acceptable as they generally involve the use of designs and materials not visually related to, or developed from, the conservation area context.



figs 7.7 - 7.8

Inappropriate use of materials and unsympathetic treatment of details

- 7.25 On 19th century buildings, a painted timber fascia with painted lettering or letters in another material would be the most appropriate.
- 7.26 Temporary banners should not be employed as a long-term substitute for permanent signage.
- 7.27 The Plan encourages shopkeepers to keep windows of shopfronts clear of posters and signs that create visual clutter. Camden Planning Guidance 1 and the Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Strategies provide further details on shopfront guidance.