

Savills on behalf of Cottam Hall Properties Ltd (Representor ID A16)

Examination into the Central Lancashire Local Plan 2023-2041

Hearing Statement

Matter 10 – Economic Policies (Policies EC7 – 14), Issue 10 Retail Hierarchy

November 2025

Issue 10 – Does the Plan set out a positively prepared strategy and policies for business and industrial development, rural employment, retailing and town centres and the visitor economy, which is justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

10.1a In relation to policy EC11 is the Town Centre Hierarchy based on up-to-date evidence and is it sound?

Cottam Hall Properties consider that the allocation of Cottam (a site known as the former Cottam Brickworks) under draft Policy EC11 as defined on the Proposals Map is not based on a full suite of relevant up-to-date evidence and as such it is not sound.

Policy EC11 notes that existing centres are identified on the policies map and proposed centres are referred to in site allocation policies for the strategic sites. Whilst there is no existing development at Cottam, the site is identified on the draft Proposals Map (Appendix 1).

The land thereby identified extends to approximately 5.8ha.

The scale of this allocation is considered to be excessive, based on up-to-date evidence, and may hinder the scope to bring forward appropriate mixed-use development at the site, including residential.

Evidence Base

The principal evidence base documents for draft Policy EC11 are the Preston Retail and Leisure Study (WYG 2019) and the Central Lancashire Retail and Town Centres Policy Advice (Nexus Planning, 2025).

It is not within the scope of either of these documents to explicitly review the scale of the allocation at Cottam and as such the position of the site in the retail hierarchy.

The site has an extended planning history since it was originally allocated in the Central Lancashire New Town Plan and the 2006 Interim Planning Statement 1 – Cottam Development Area (Preston City Council). This was carried forward into the 2015 Preston Local Plan.

The allocation of the site as a District Centre of the scale currently envisaged pre-dates significant changes in shopping habits and retail sector development and does not fully reflect a number of developments that have come forward since or are proposed in the Cottam/North West Preston area.

These include:

- The development of the Eastway Hub, on which comprises a Lidl and commercial properties. Outline permission was first approved in 2018 (reference 06/2018/0055)
- The development of a Sainsbury's Local on Tag Lane, following planning approval in 2016 (ref 06/2016/0506)

- The development of a Co-op Food Store on Merry Trees Lane, following outline planning approval in 2012 (ref 06/2012/0145)
- The development of a Tesco Express as part of a planned local centre including a medical centre, public house and hotel, granted planning approval in 2021 (ref 06/202/0966)

None of these developments were explicitly referenced in the 2015 Local Plan or presumably the relevant evidence base and whilst 2015 policy did refer to local centres being provided for in the North West Preston Masterplan area, further definition was only provided in 2017 in the North West Preston SPD – and again only broad references were provided with no specifics on the scale of retail and other development proposed.

The 2019 Retail and Leisure Study does note at paragraph 7.5.21 that there is a qualitative deficiency in convenience retail in the wider Cottam area (at the time) which that additional provision at Cottam will ‘go some way to meet...’

As noted earlier it was not within the scope of the 2025 Policy Advice report to provide an assessment of the appropriate scale of the allocation at Cottam. The report does however note at paragraph 3.18 that ‘*recent socio-economic conditions have led to significant shifts in convenience goods retailing...*’ and in that context it does urge some caution in respect of the scale of retail development that can be expected at Cottam.

At paragraph 5.51 the 2025 Policy Advice notes that ‘*the continued allocation of a centre to serve the local catchment around Cottam should form part of the hierarchy in the new Local Plan.*’

At paragraph 5.52 it continues:

‘However, it is unclear whether a wider range of commercial uses as currently referred to within the adopted Local Plan would be supported in the area and as such, sufficient flexibility should be applied in terms of the overarching provision of the centre and the allowance for a wider range of uses should appropriate market testing dictate as such. As such, we recommend that the retention of the allocation is provided for within the new Local Plan, but that the precise future uses and quantum of floorspace to be provided for is not overly constrained and appropriate flexibility is allowed for in terms of future uses.’

In that context Cottam Hall Properties Limited consider that the relevant evidence base does not provide an up to date assessment of the appropriate scale of the allocation at Cottam and as such does not sufficiently justify the scale of development proposed (as suggested by the Proposals Map allocation) and as, far as is relevant, its proposed position in the retail hierarchy and definition as a District Centre.

Retail Hierarchy and Definition

Notwithstanding the proposed reduction in the extent of the EC11 allocation at Cottam, Cottam Hall Properties Limited, are of the view that the site can reasonably remain allocated as a District Centre, although there is a need to be clear on the extent of retail and other facilities that it can provide.

The most recent government definition of a district centre was provided in by Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth (‘PPS4’), which was published in December 2009 (and was superseded by publication of the original iteration of the NPPF in March 2012). This sought to define district, and local centres as follows:

‘District centres will usually comprise groups of shops often containing at least one supermarket or superstore, and a range of non-retail services, such as banks, building societies and restaurants, as well as local public facilities such as a library.’

Local centres include a range of small shops of a local nature, serving a small catchment. Typically, local centres might include, amongst other shops, a small supermarket, a newsagent, a sub-post office and a pharmacy. Other facilities could include a hot-food takeaway and launderette. In rural areas, large villages may perform the role of a local centre.’

We also note that District Centres are defined in the 2012 Core Strategy as:

‘Usually comprise groups of shops often containing at least one supermarket, and a range of non-retail services, such as banks, building societies and restaurants as well as local public facilities such as a library.’

The definition of a centre as District or Local will be based on an assessment of its role and character, including scale. Retail will be a key component of a District Centre, but community and other services are a common element.

There is understandably limited information available to make a quantitative comparison between existing District and Local Centres in the proposed hierarchy, however it is instructive to consider the total number of units. The number of units in each of the centres is provided for in Appendix 3 to the 2025 Policy Advice report.

In terms of District Centres, the data provided in Appendix 3 is as follows:

Table 1

Central Lancashire District Centres	Units
Buckshaw Village	10
Clayton Green	6
Station Road, Bamber Bridge	47
Longton	33
Liverpool Road, Penwortham	77
Tardy Gate	46

In terms of Local Centres in Preston, the data providing in Appendix 3 is as follows:

Table 2

Preston Local Centre	Number of Units
/	
Blackpool Road / Woodplumpton Road (Lane Ends)	64
Eastway Hub	--
Land West of Sandy Lane	--
Langcliffe Road	n/a
Longsands Lane	3
Miller Road	9
New Hall Lane	53
Plungington Road	61
Ribbleton Lane	18
Broughton Crossroads*	
Granton Walk*	
Water Lane/ Strand Road*	
Sharoe Green	7
Proposed Local Centres at North West Preston / Bartle	--
Proposed Local Centre at Preston West Strategic Site	--

*Added in the proposed schedule of minor amendments.

The definition of District and Local Centres, in quantitative terms then, covers a broad spectrum, with the role of the centre – i.e. that serves more than a local catchment perhaps being the definitive factor. The more ‘traditional’ district centres are of course substantial, with Longton, the smallest of these, comprising 33 commercial premises, including a E.H. Booths, a Spar Convenience Store as well as pubs, restaurants, and a health centre.

Clayton Green and Buckshaw Village are the smallest District Centres in terms of units

Clayton Green, an area comparable to Cottam in some ways, is part of a now well-established Central Lancashire New Town driven ‘urban extension’ to Chorley. Clayton Green District Centre is a smaller centre in terms of the number of units, is anchored by an Asda superstore.

Buckshaw Village, a new settlement develop on the former ROF site near Chorley, has a slightly larger District Centre of 10 shops, anchored by a Tesco Superstore. An Aldi food store is located to the edge but outside of the defined District centre. The site is also close to the Buckshaw railway station. The allocation on the proposals map extends to approximately 2.5 ha.

Whilst some District Centres can be relatively small in terms of the number of units (although both Clayton Green and Buckshaw Village are anchored by food superstores), several defined Local Centres are sizeable.

Given this review there would understandably appear to be some overlap between the definition of District and Local Centres and an equally broad scope as to what can be considered a District Centre (e.g. Buckshaw Village). There are many similarities between Cottam and say Buckshaw Village in that Cottam could perform a similar role (albeit with a smaller food store anchor). However it remains important that, as an undeveloped site, there is clear and realistic definition of the scale of retail and commercial that can

reasonably be expected, so as not to preclude other uses coming forward on land unnecessary to retain for centre uses.

This matter is considered further in the context of the appropriate scale of the allocation.

Cottam Hall Properties have no objection to part of the Cottam site being identified as a District Centre, akin to Buckshaw Village – however in that case it does need to be clearly understood that the occupier demand, residual need and the very limited prospects for investment in public service provision will combine to ensure that the centre can only ever reasonably be expected to be at the smaller end of the District Centre spectrum with, as discussed below, the potential for a small foodstore and some associated, small retail/commercial units.

Scale of the Allocation

Market Evidence and Occupier Demand

A February 2025 report by Savills (submitted with the Cottam Properties Limited objection) confirms that market demand for commercial floorspace given current provision and foreseeable market conditions, occupier demand an existing provision at Cottam will likely be focussed on a discount food retailer with limited or no requirement for non-food retail warehousing and most leisure sectors. Similarly with likely limited retail critical mass and limited roadside visibility and relatively local traffic flows along the adjacent Tom Benson Way the site will not appeal to roadside uses.

We are not currently aware of any public or community uses that require additional space at Cottam.

This conservative view of the scope for occupier demand at Cottam reflects the position of the 2025 Policy Advice report.

Prospective occupiers will therefore be focussed on a discount food retailer, which would be a positive addition to retail provision in Cottam alongside a limited number of small, retail units for complementary businesses.

Current Approval

The area allocated in the draft proposals maps for a district centre is the subject of a current approval (refs 06/2019/1451 and 06/2022/1157), which remains live.

The approval comprises full permission for a retail foodstore (1,785 sqm); the delivery of an access from Tom Benson Way and link through to Cottam Avenue; outline approval for up to 11,425 sqm of flexible use commercial floorspace for A1, A2, A3, A4, B1, C3 and D1 uses; up to 229 car parking spaces and up to a further 89 no. residential dwellings to the north of the site.

An illustrative masterplan submitted in support of the application shows the foodstore approved in full, with 12 two storey units either side of a village street. Approximately 1.8 ha of the site (around 30%) is identified for housing.

The site has been marketed following the 2020 approval and a discount food retailer is actively seeking to deliver the foodstore. This is intended to be delivered in the short to medium term. Similarly, there is strong market interest in the housing element which again is to be progressed in the short to medium term.

However, reflecting the Savills assessment, no substantive interest has been expressed in the remaining outline commercial elements.

Accordingly, whilst the approved foodstore and housing will be delivered as initial phases of the s73 approval, it is likely Cottam Hall Properties Limited will need to revisit and revise the remaining commercial element of the scheme to bring forward deliverable proposals. Whilst these proposals are as yet to be prepared it is considered that, given market conditions and development requirements, they will comprise significantly reduced commercial uses (flexible use comprising Class E uses) and car parking with the remainder of the area given over to a residential led scheme, including potentially specialist and later living housing.

It is therefore considered that the extent of the centre allocation on the Proposals Map be amended to reflect this more modest retail/commercial provision.

10.2 Are there any omissions in the policies and are they sufficiently flexible?

In respect of Cottam, Policy EC11 and the Proposals Map is not sufficiently flexible in that it does not provide for residential (at ground floor) and other potential uses, such as later living, within the allocated area. The allocated area is too large to be dedicated solely to main town centre uses.

The deficiency in policy could be addressed in one of two ways:

Option 1: The allocation be amended to define a smaller area for the District Centre, with the remains of the site allocated for residential under HS4 and/or dealt with as a previously developed site in the urban area, where residential would be, in principle, an appropriate use. The proposed extent of this allocation is show in Appendix 2. This area extends to approximately 1.5ha.

Option 2: To provide additional flexibility, allocate the whole site as a mixed-use site for residential and a District Centre uses comprising a foodstore (approximately 2,000 sq. metres), complementary small-scale retail and commercial uses, subject to viability, and approximately 180 dwellings. This would require an additional 'ECx Mixed Use Allocation Preston' policy.

10.3 Are the Council's proposed modifications to these policies and the supporting text necessary for soundness?

Cottam Hall Properties Limited are not aware of any proposed relevant modifications to Policy EC11 and its supporting text.

Appendix 1
EC11 Allocation – Cottam



Appendix 2
Proposed Allocation (Option 1) – Cottam

