

MATTER 29

I have conducted a brief search of the empty retail units in Letchworth as an exercise to view the current state of the town. Check done 26/11/2020.

In the main centre precinct, known as Garden Square Shopping Centre there were 11 completely empty units which were retail plus a very large empty ex Argos showroom. There was also a 46 units luxury home development being constructed, opposite/amongst the cluster of retail in this same Precinct.

In Station Road, near Letchworth Station there were 5 empty units which were retail. This road has on one side both properties and commercial premises. One empty unit in Birds Hill. 3 empty units in The Wynd – a shopping area.

I would guess that if I were to conduct a similar search in Stevenage Town Centre I would find a similar story, or Royston. Stevenage Town Centre is in the process of being “re-imagined” and I believe they receive a great deal of government funding to do this, which they bid for.

I see no reason why NHDC should not use the new laws on Class Uses to re-imagine its Town Centres where it is possible to do so – I would rather they had a mix of housing development in Town Centres than building on precious Green Belt countryside, but I do wish the Planning Inspector to be aware that NHDC and SBC appear to me, and others, to be consistently saying that they don't have the land or the opportunity to do so when they actually do. One has to do Freedom of Information Requests to force the information out of them.....or indeed beg a Planning Inspector to do so.

Out of town retailing may take over from Town Centres.

Easier to change Office to residential.

There is a concern that under new Permitted development rights Councils will not be able to extract CIL or S. 106 payments.

LA's may not be able to exercise the level of control over development that they have been accustomed to.