

Cornwall Council

- Since the introduction of Class E, Cornwall has observed an increase in more mixed and versatile uses – Class E is enabling a desire for diversification.
- Detailed survey data helps to track change - Cornwall publishes survey data for their 16 main town centres in Annual Monitoring Reports which includes comparison to previous years to monitor changes.
- Cornwall is embracing Class E - a more flexible approach is being applied to the determination of planning applications.
- Emerging policy is reflecting the intentions of Class E to increase diversity - Cornwall Local Plan predates Class E, however development of a Development Plan Document is enabling considerations to be brought up to date.

Region: South West
 Levelling Up Category: 2

Local Plan adopted November 2016

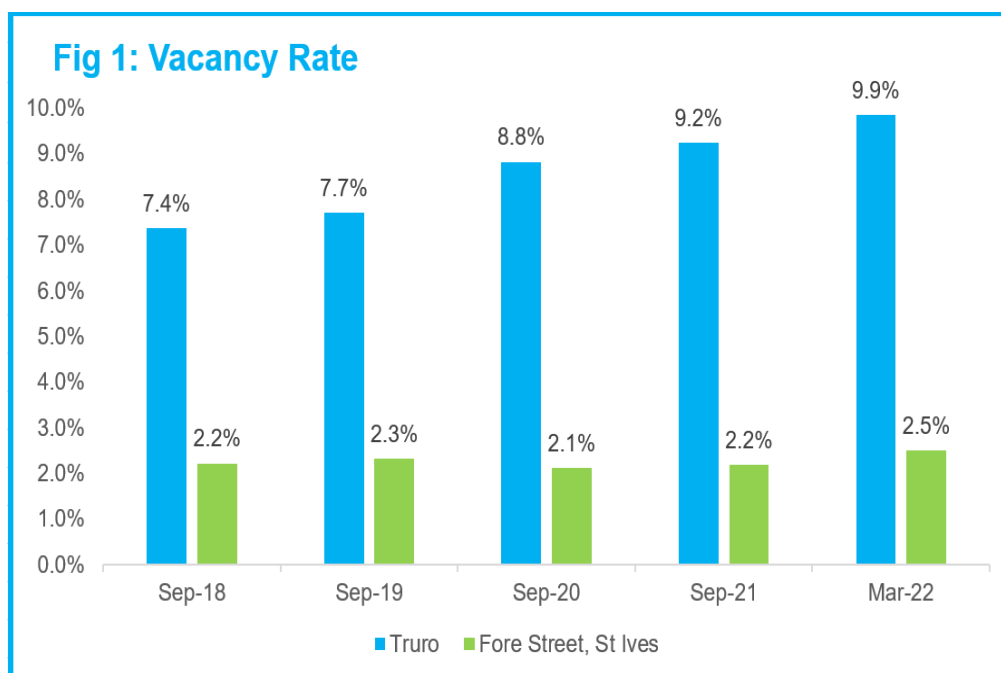
Case Study Centres: Fore Street, St Ives; Truro

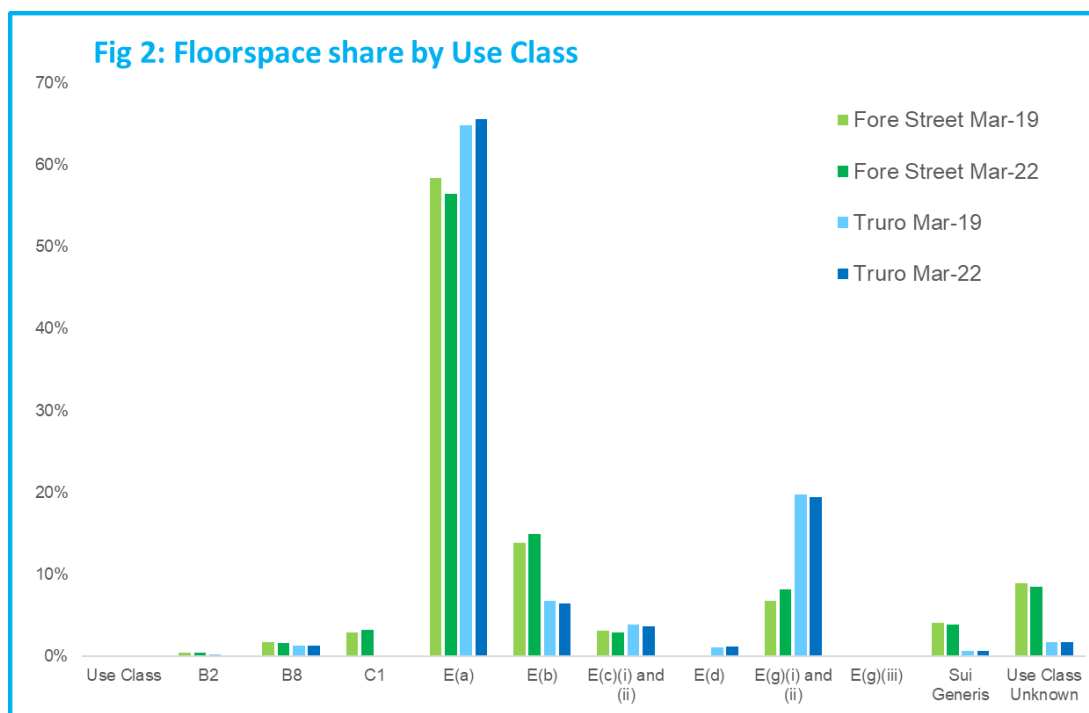
Achievement of Class E Objectives

A key objective of Class E is to support greater flexibility and adaptability on the high street. Cornwall has identified an increase in cafes and restaurants and offices across the county’s town centres, as

well as an increase in more versatile and unusual uses such as barbers selling clothes, and florists which now also have a café/restaurant function. Whilst a desire for such diversification in response to changing shopping habits had been noted prior to the introduction of Class E, the changes have enabled such dual uses to be more easily implemented.

The Council has identified that it is difficult to disaggregate the impacts of the introduction of Class E from the other impacts on town centres in the past few years, including





Council sponsored ones such as tourism campaigns, as well as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and now the cost of living crisis.

Cornwall’s Annual Retail Surveys (2021) for St Ives and Truro identify growing vacancy rates in both centres. This is measured by number of units, as opposed to floorspace. The vacancy rate has gone up from 7.5% in 2013 to 13.7% in 2021 across all uses in Truro, and from 4.3% in 2012 to 8.3% in 2021 across all uses in St Ives.

The publicly available data for commercial uses indicates a similar pattern to the Survey data in Truro, with rates growing from around 7% in September 2018 to around 10% in March 2022. The trend is less clear cut in St Ives, although the centre has very low vacancy rates overall (Fig 1).

In Fore Street, St Ives, there has been some change in floorspace proportion across a number of different classes within Use Class E (Fig 2). In Truro, the share of floorspace by uses has not changed materially since the introduction of Class E.

Officers have commented that since 2019 there has been a slight reduction in retail dovetailing with a slight increase in food and beverage use.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Council has undertaken an in-house survey of the 16 main town centres in Cornwall as defined in the Local Plan.

An Annual Monitoring Report is published with the survey results for each town centre on the council’s [website](#).

The Annual Monitoring Reports present the data collected on the number of units for each use class (to date using the former Use Class Order), the number vacant, and the percentage vacant. Comparison figures for the previous 10 years are also provided to track change.

Key Relevant Policies

Cornwall’s Local Plan was adopted in 2016 and as such pre-dates the adoption of Class E. Local Plan Policy 4: ‘Shopping, services and community facilities’ states that former Class A uses are permitted within the defined primary shopping areas.

Floorspace capacity requirements for convenience and comparison retail by settlement are set out in the Local Plan and the policy states that consideration for the need for further provision within DPDs and Neighbourhood Plans should be reviewed in the context of these.

Class E Study: Case Studies

Relating specifically to Truro Centre:

In the Local Plan, Policy 2: Spatial Strategy explains that Truro has a wider role as an economic service centre, as well as being a retail centre (at the top of the retail hierarchy) – and that it should be considered an alternative to major town centres outside of Cornwall.

The 2015 Truro and Kenwyn Neighbourhood Plan identifies that:

- Development proposals in the city centre will be permitted where they contribute to a well-balanced mix of uses,
- Policy EJ2 sets out the Primary Retail areas and states that mixed use redevelopment is supported as is a town centre first approach to new retail

Relating specifically to Fore Steet St Ives:

The 2015 Neighbourhood Plan identifies:

- Support for a greater diversity of uses within St Ives, including “industrial”, “business” and “mixed use” developments (LED1)
- That local people do not shop locally because the economy is geared towards tourists – so a broader range of shops is

required to increase local resilience (LED2 and LED3)

Cornwall is currently developing a Climate Emergency Development Plan Document (DPD) to supplement its Local Plan (2016) policies and help bring considerations up to date through replacing out of date sections.

The draft policies move away from concentration on use classes towards uses that support and increase diversity, footfall and completeness of centres (Policy TC1 ‘Town Centre Development Principles’ and Policy TC3 ‘Diversification of Uses in Town Centres’) as set out in Box 1.

Development Management

Cornwall has expressed that it is adopting a more flexible approach to uses within town centres in terms of granting planning permissions.

The Council is no longer applying the former use classes, where these are identified in existing policy, in the determination of planning applications.

However, a review of determinations in the past two years shows that applicants have made change of use applications for uses within Class E e.g. retail to food and beverage (E(a) to E(b)).

Box 1: Cornwall Climate Emergency Draft DPD

Policy TC1 ‘Town Centre Development Principles’:

- “1. Development in town centres should support, maintain or enhance the viability and vitality of the settlement, recognising that they are at the heart of the communities that they serve and may act as a wider service centre for a number of other settlements.
2. Support will be given for the diversification of uses [...].
3. Development of community facilities and appropriate temporary uses that maintain or increase footfall and vitality will be supported [...].”

Policy TC3 ‘Diversification of Uses in Town Centres’:

- “1. Development in town centres, including in primary retail areas, will be supported where they will positively contribute to a mix of uses so that centres become community hubs that people want to visit [...].”