

Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

- Redcar & Cleveland has observed a number of positive changes related to Class E including helping areas adapt to changing consumer demands.
- Clearly defining and monitoring town centres and high streets is important - Town Centre survey data collected by the Council’s Planning Strategy Team is mapped and shared across the authority to inform investment initiatives.
- The Council acknowledges the need for future policy to reflect the flexibility introduced by Class E.

Region: North East
 Levelling Up Category: 1

Local Plan adopted May 2018

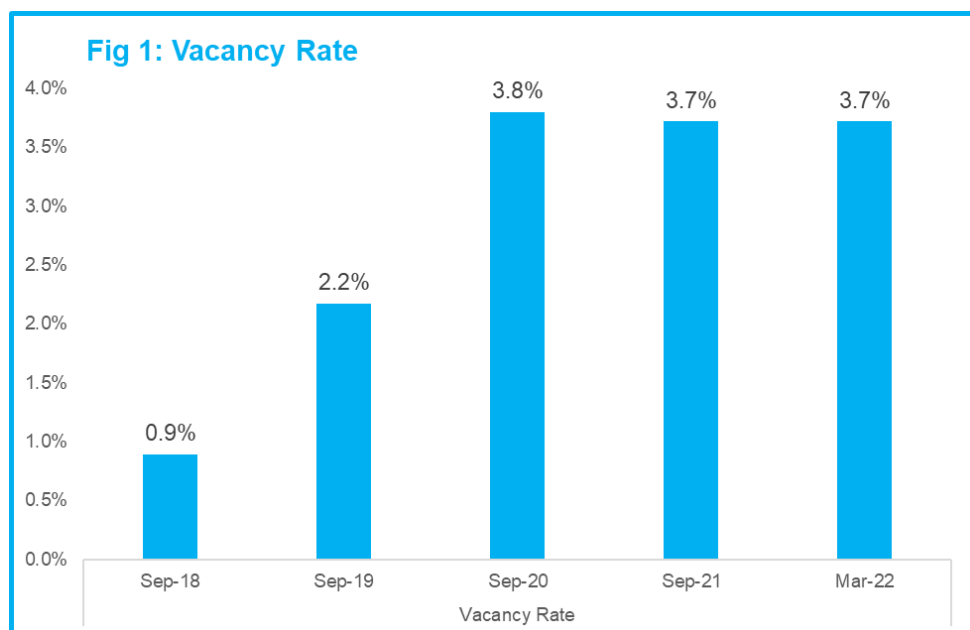
Case Study Centre: Westgate, Guisborough District Centre

Achievement of Class E Objectives

A key objective of Class E is to support greater flexibility and adaptability on the high street. Redcar & Cleveland has identified an increase in cafes and restaurants across the Borough’s town centres, as well as in retail parks (such as drive throughs).

Another key objective was to help underpin the recovery of town centres and high streets from the impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Redcar & Cleveland has noted that the introduction of Class E has helped a number of areas adapt to changing consumer demands such as an increase in food and services in more local centres in response to increased home and flexible working.

An assessment of publicly available data on vacancy rates for commercial uses in Westgate indicates that there was a rise from a very low base between 2018 and 2020, but this rate has plateaued in the latest period data is available for (Fig 1). This has happened at the same time as the introduction of Class E, although it is not possible to say that one is related to the other.



Class E Study: Case Studies

However, across the district as a whole, Redcar & Cleveland has noted that it has observed a slight reduction in vacancy rates since the introduction of Class E due to the repurposing of vacant units no longer requiring planning permission.

Overall, the council has observed a relatively consistent positive impact of Class E across the district, although it has noted more changes to food and drink premises (purpose E(b)) within larger centres and areas with more visitors.

The introduction of Class E coincided with a central government push for “levelling up”. In June 2021 the council submitted an unsuccessful bid for £15m of Levelling Up Fund money for town centre and public realm improvements to Guisborough. The council has resubmitted the bid in round 2, in July 2022.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Officers within the Council’s Planning Strategy Team monitor all designated town, district and local centres by undertaking an annual survey.

The survey records addresses, vacancy, business names, use classes and shop front quality of all ground floor units within

the designated centres.

The data is linked to a GIS layer so that units can be mapped. This is shared with the council’s Place Investment Team on request (particularly vacancy rates and shop front quality).

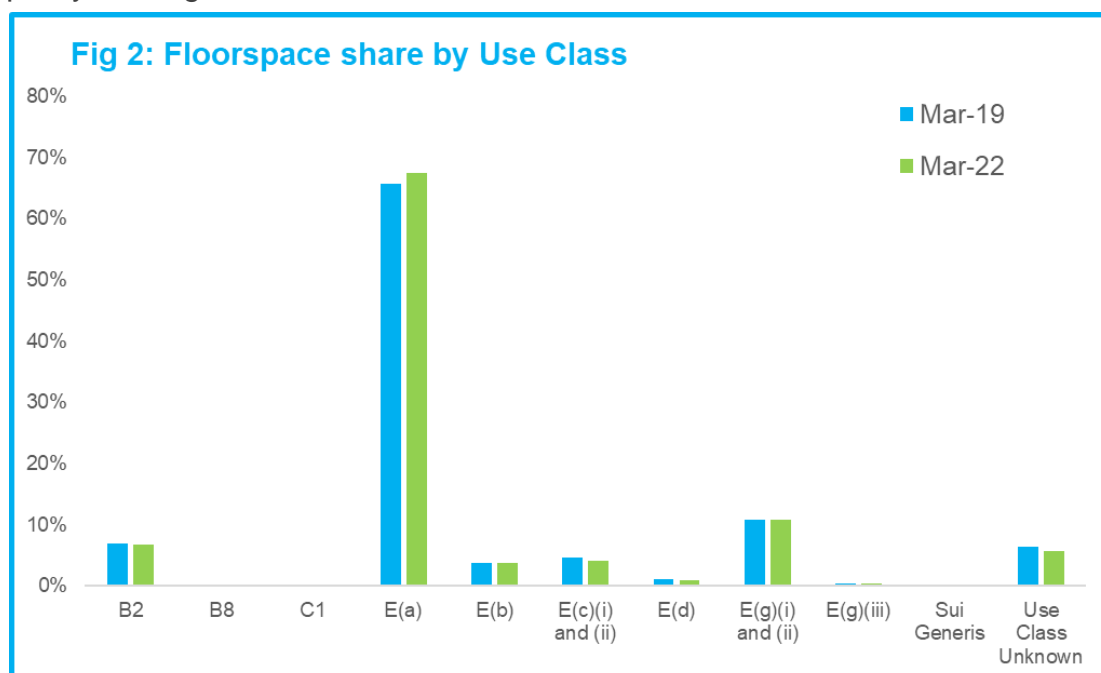
In Westgate in Guisborough District Centre, publicly available data shows that there has been a small increase in retail uses as a share of total floorspace, a small decrease in professional / financial services uses, in the period between 2019 and 2022 (Fig 2).

Key Relevant Policies

The Local Plan pre-dates the update to the Use Class Order in September 2020, and there is no draft plan under development.

The Town Centre Study (2016) in the Local Plan Evidence Base indicates Guisborough is an attractive market town protected by being in a conservation area, with a below average vacancy rate.

Supporting text to “Outcome 1: Grow Our Economy and Create More Jobs” in the Local Plan notes that the Town Centre Study does not identify a need to grow the convenience provision within borough’s centres over the plan period, and modest



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additional demand for comparison goods floorspace can be met within town centre boundaries.

The Local Plan recognises the potential impact of out-of-centre development on the vitality and viability of existing centres, and has thus set lower thresholds for impact assessment (lower than NPPF) for development proposals.

Given the rural location, Guisborough is identified as the borough's Rural Service Centre, at the top of the rural settlement hierarchy. The majority of development in rural areas should be focused on a handful of existing settlements, which includes Guisborough.

Westgate is identified in policy as the Primary Shopping Area of Guisborough. The District Centre is identified in Policy ED1: Protecting and Enhancing the Borough's Centres as "a market town destination at the gateway to the North York Moors National Park", and as such the Local Plan seeks to protect the main shopping frontages along Westgate, with a target of at least 55% to be retained as the former A1 use (and no A5 uses).

The policy seeks to support diversity of uses within town centres but states they should be focused outside of the primary shopping areas.

The policy also supports measures to enhance the appearance, safety and environmental quality of the centre; promoting the use of vacant buildings, and proposals which promote vitality and can better serve the local community.

Policy ED9: Leisure and Tourism seeks to support that offer at Guisborough, as a market town – this may include tourist accommodation and leisure activities.

Whilst Redcar & Cleveland is not currently preparing a new Local Plan, the Council

has acknowledged the need to reflect the flexibility introduced by Class E in future policies, such as through removing the protection of primary shopping areas specified in current Policy ED1.

Development Management

Class E includes 11 purposes. In the determination of planning applications for Class E use, the council has sought to prescribe the Class E purpose by specifying this as part of a condition. The feedback from Redcar & Cleveland is that applicants typically do not challenge these conditions, as often applicants have a particular use (or Class E purpose) in mind for development, and permissions are typically granted in line with any local policy which specifies the use in any case. An example is provided at Box 1.

Officers have noticed that some individuals are not clear on what the introduction of Class E means in relation to applying for Planning Permission. As an example, officers have observed an increase in the rate of units changing to Sui Generis use without seeking planning permission. This is perceived to be a result of a misinterpretation of the recent changes to the Use Class Order.

Box 1: Condition Example

CONDITION: The units hereby approved shall be used for Class E (e) use and for no other purpose (including any other purpose in Class E of the Schedule to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, or in any provision equivalent to that Class in any statutory instrument revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification).

REASON: The site is located on an allocated employment site in accordance with Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council Local Plan Policy ED6.