

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Taylor Young, in conjunction with BE Group and Faber Maunsell and in association with White Young Green, have been commissioned by Oadby and Wigston Borough Council to undertake an Area Action Plan (AAP) for the town centre of Wigston. This will be prepared fully in accordance with The Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004, and as such will form part of the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF) in accordance with their Local Development Scheme (LDS). Running in parallel to this work is the preparation of an AAP for Oadby town centre.
- 1.2. This Baseline Report therefore presents the first of a series of stages that will lead to the production of the Area Action Plan. It also develops a thorough understanding of Wigston and presents an in depth evidence base upon which to move forward and if necessary support the Area Action Plan through examination.
- 1.3. This has been achieved through a detailed document review of national, regional and local planning policy in relation to town centres, as well as both generic and locally focussed reports on retailing and regeneration. This is complemented by a thorough understanding of place – surveys undertaken by Planners, Regeneration Specialists, Urban Designers, Landscape Architects, Transport Specialists, Sustainability Experts and Property Specialists.
- 1.4. To supplement this and to further the understanding of wider town centre issues, an analysis of census based information has been undertaken to understand the socio-economic position of the catchment for Wigston, and analysis of retail and housing capacity undertaken to support the eventual proposals.
- 1.5. The findings of these different strands of research are set out in this report, which brings them together with the more anecdotal evidence established through meetings, conversations and discussions with various key stakeholders in relation to this commission, as well as the detailed site survey work. Its conclusions offer a strong position on which to base the next stage of this commission, which is to develop options for change and development in the town centre.
- 1.6. In parallel to this study, White Young Green are progressing the Sustainability Appraisal that forms part of this AAP. The first stage of the Sustainability Appraisal is the Scoping Report, which has been undertaken as part of the LDS. The Scoping Report itself has previously undergone a statutory 5 week period of consultation, and the report and comments received have been fully taken into consideration into this report. Furthermore the appropriate development plan bodies have been advised of the scope of this AAP and had a five week opportunity for comment. The two workstreams will continue to inform one another as this study progresses.

Format of this report

- 1.7. This report is divided into seven sections. The following section places Wigston and this study in context, looking at its location, background, socio-economic profile and documentation and policy review. Sections three and four report on the property market, focussing on Wigston and providing an economic health check and SWOT analysis of the centre. The fifth section offers the urban design analysis concentrating on the built form and fabric of the study area, and the public realm with particular reference to urban design, streetscape, open space and pedestrian movement. The following section reviews Access and Movement. The final section concludes the report and sets out the next steps in this process.

2. Context

2.1. Wigston is located within the Borough of Oadby and Wigston, within Leicestershire, just five miles to the South of the city of Leicester. It sits approximately five miles to the east of junction 21 of the M1 (M1 / M69 junction), as shown in figure 2.1.



Figure 2.1 Regional Location Plan (NTS)

2.2. This figure also shows the town in its context. To the north sits a relatively urban hinterland with Leicester adjoining the town's boundaries. Loughborough, Nottingham, and Derby are located further afield to the north, with Hinckley, Nuneaton, Coventry and Rugby to the south west. To the north east, east and south east lie a largely rural area dotted with market towns such as Market Harborough and Melton Mowbray.

- 2.3. The study area is shown at figure 2.2. This shows the boundary of the town centre, which follows the same boundary as that in the adopted local plan, as shown elsewhere in this report.

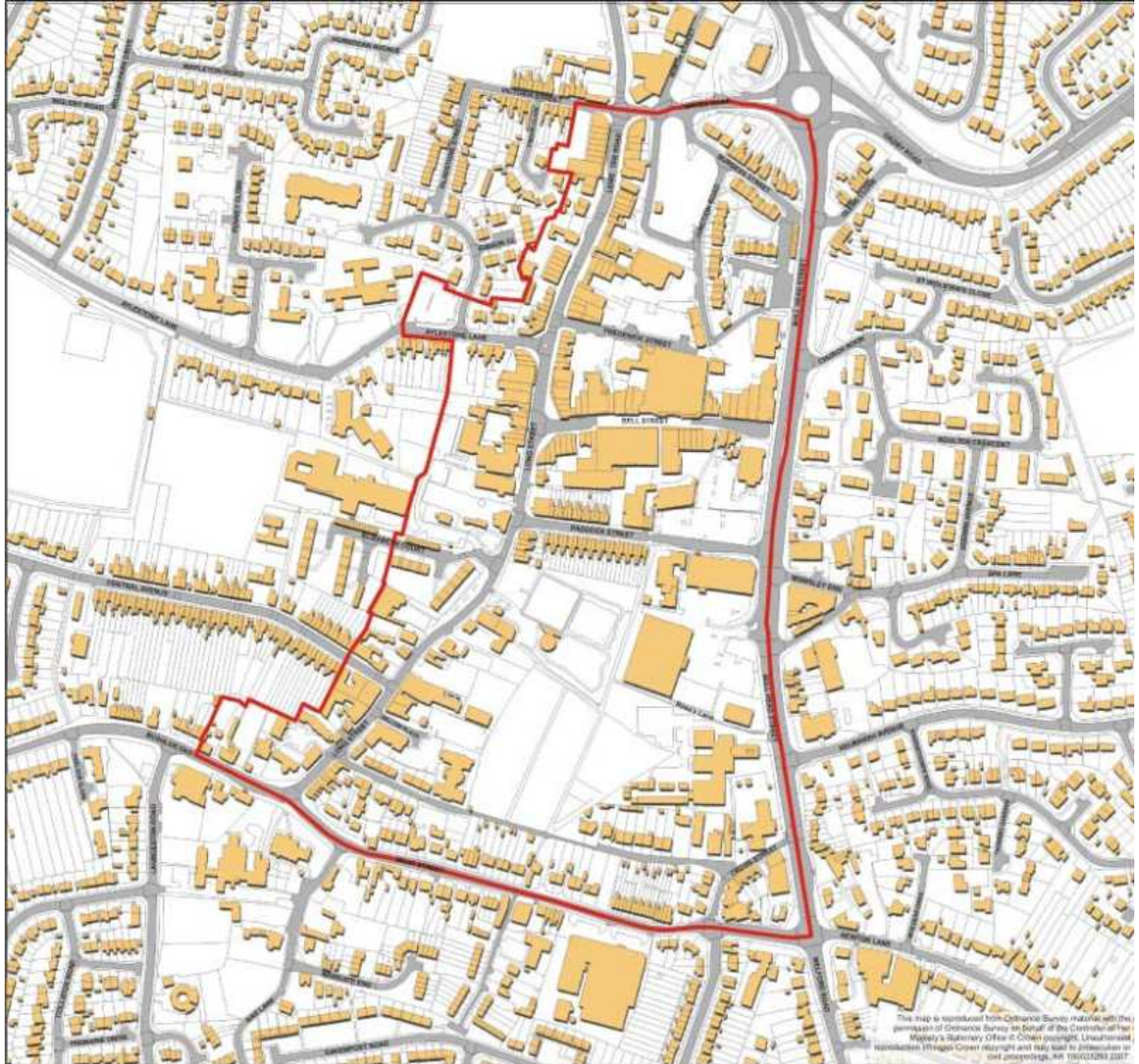


Figure 2.2 Study Area (NTS)

- 2.4. This report does not consider land within this boundary in isolation and takes into consideration the immediate and wider context within which the study area sits. However it is a requirement of the AAP process to review adopted policy and take forward, where appropriate, changes. This boundary therefore is by no means 'set in stone' and will be challenged as this study progresses.

History

- 2.5. Wigston Magna, usually known simply as Wigston, was known throughout the Middle Ages as "Wigston Two Steeples". This is because it has, unusually, two mediaeval churches, All Saints and St. Wistans. The Church of All Saints is very much the focal point of the Wigston All Saints Conservation Area and is an important local feature.

- 2.6. In the middle of the Town Centre are 'The Lanes' which may well have been the site of the original Anglo Saxon settlement until it was abandoned when the Vikings invaded towards the end of the 9th Century. These still exist to this day and are within The Lanes Conservation Area.
- 2.7. The Anglo-Saxon community was centred around St. Wistan's Church and the Viking community centred around All Saint's Church. Eventually the two settlements amalgamated forming the rectangular village centre bounded by Moat Street, Bull Head Street, Bell Street and Long Street.
- 2.8. In 1381 Wigston encompassed an area of approximately 3000 acres (1200ha) and was the largest place in Leicestershire outside the County Town. It was at this time that Magna (meaning great) was added to its name.

The present

- 2.9. The Lanes are some of the last remnants of its mediaeval past. Today, Wigston is almost indistinct as a settlement in its own right and only small areas of open land, mostly parks remain to separate it from Leicester to the north. To the south and west, Wigston's outer limits are defined by the railway line, whilst the eastern side is mostly made up of more recent housing developments.

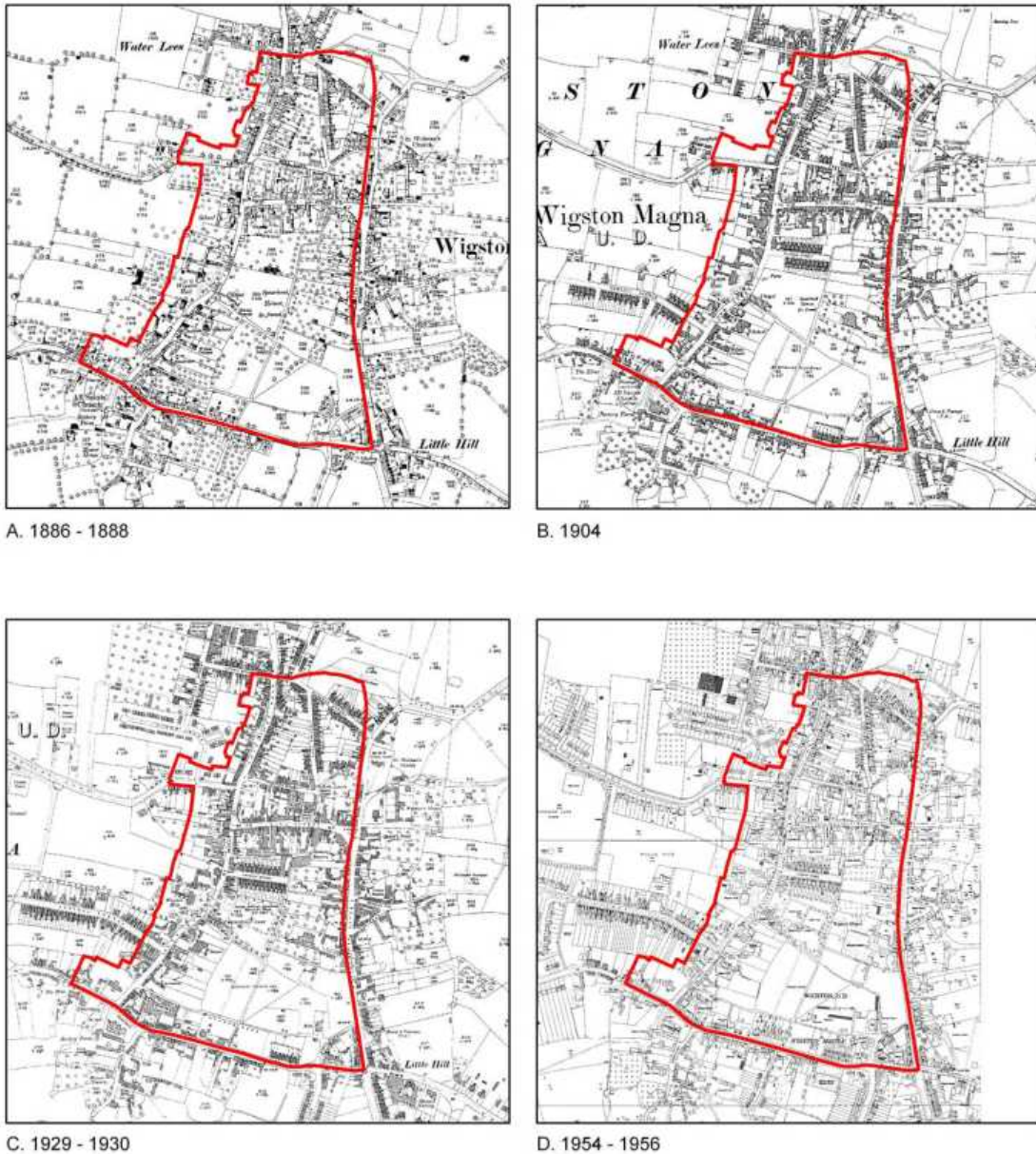


Figure 2.3 Historic Development

2.10. The historic development of the town as identified above shows how the original street pattern has existed for over 100 years, with development focusing on the core of the town as well as developing in a linear form on the main routes into the centre. It also identifies that the allotments originated over 100 years ago.

Policy Review

2.11. This AAP is informed by a range of policy and guidance as illustrated below and detailed in the following section.



Wigston AAP within its policy and guidance context

2.12. Government planning policy with regard to town centres is set out in **Planning Policy Statement 6** (2005). Key objectives include:

- To promote the vitality and viability of town centres
- Planning for the growth and development of existing centres
- Promoting and enhancing existing centres, by focusing development and encouraging a wide range of services in a good environment, accessible to all
- Enhancing consumer choice by making provision for a range of shopping, leisure and local services, which allow for genuine choice to meet the needs of the entire community, particularly socially excluded groups
- Supporting efficient, competitive and innovative retail, leisure and tourism, with improving productivity
- Improving accessibility, ensuring that existing or new development is, or will be, accessible and well-served by a choice of means of transport

- 2.13. There is a key focus on the sequential approach to retail development and the assessment of impact. Other key messages include the importance of sustainable travel and less reliance on the private car, and planning to avoid social exclusion.
- 2.14. It also refers to the importance of measuring and monitoring the vitality and viability of town centres through the use of health checks utilising a range of identified indicators. These indicators have been taken fully into consideration in the preparation of the following chapters of this report, and include such issues as diversity of use, rents, vacancies, accessibility and views and behaviour.
- 2.15. PPS6 stresses the importance of having a realistically defined town centre boundary, and the possibility of having both primary and secondary defined retail frontages, the latter to help encourage diversity and flexibility.
- 2.16. PPS6 is supplemented by a range of national reports on the state of Britain's high streets, pertinent points of which are reported below.
- 2.17. The New Economic Foundation's report, **Ghost Town Britain II** (2003) outlines the problems of British high streets, which are undermining the fabric of communities and derailing government initiatives to tackle poverty. With the growing number of banks, pubs, post offices, grocers and newsagents closing, communities are no longer within easy access of local shops and services. The report also suggests that there is also an unhealthy concentration of power in British retail.
- 2.18. There are worsening economic conditions: loss of jobs in the retail sector, loss of real choice, market failure and loss of diversity and identity, and the spread of ghost towns. It is thought that the impact of the dominance of big supermarkets is hidden, as it is often 2-3 years before smaller shops are forced to close. There is also a growth in what the report refers to as 'fake local' stores e.g. Tesco Express, resulting in a 30-40% drop in business.
- 2.19. The report also sets out that there has additionally been an impact on open space in town centres. The government points out that the condition of parks and green spaces can make or break plans to regenerate neighbourhoods and improve townscape, and can create sense of place and build communities.
- 2.20. A remaining danger is that some neighbourhood renewal strategies are focused around rebuilding town centres and shopping areas, and have driven out small local shops and replaced them with multiple retailers. Practical steps to reverse the decline include rate relief for small retailers, local money flow analysis, local retail plans (ensure town centre focus – to capitalise on supermarkets), support for Community Development Finance Initiatives (CDFIs) and supporting Local Authorities in maintaining open space.
- 2.21. There has been a plethora of regeneration schemes which have led to more money being invested in deprived areas. However, they are not thought to be having a direct benefit on the local economy, and in some cases have a detrimental impact on local services. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests some neighbourhood renewal strategies have driven out local shops replacing them with multiple retailers. In contrast, research by Heriot Watt University suggests that in the best initiatives, large

retailers and local shop keepers work together to provide a high quality shopping environment. The report concludes that regeneration needs to be re-orientated to support local retail – recognising the central role of small shops in the local economy, especially where they sell local produce.

- 2.22. The New Economic Foundation's report **Clone Town Britain** (2004) investigates why the places in which we live and shop are turning into clone towns, due to lack of local retailers, regeneration of town centres, chain stores and loss of distinctiveness. Local shops are also under threat from the high street 'micro format' supermarket stores. It concludes that reversing the spread of clone towns, and the associated impacts on the local economies and cultures, is central to the long-term sustainability of Britain's communities.
- 2.23. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's report **Retailing, Sustainability and Neighbourhood Regeneration** (2001) sets out that supermarkets can have both positive and negative impacts on a centre. For example, they can provide employment opportunities, and a wider and cheaper range of food and products, thereby enhancing social inclusion. If located appropriately they can deliver environmental improvements and draw customers into a centre thereby increasing its footfall.

Regional Policy

- 2.24. Following the enactment of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Regional Planning Guidance has become part of the statutory development plan and has been re-named as a Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). All planning documents must now be in general conformity with its policies.
- 2.25. **Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands (RSS8)** comprises a partial review of RPG8 (2002) which was approved by the Secretary of State in March 2005. The remaining elements of RPG8; housing provision figures, targets for housing built on previously developed land, the sequential approach and affordable housing are being re-examined as part of the Review currently underway (discussed further below).
- 2.26. RSS8 (March 2005) promotes Regional Core Objectives, which include; reducing social exclusion; protecting and enhancing environmental quality of urban and rural settlements; improving health and economic prosperity; improving accessibility and objectives relating to the environment and climate change. A sequential approach to development is adopted, prioritising previously developed sites in urban areas well served by public transport which meet sustainability criteria. It also promotes better design, focusing development in urban areas. The objectives of the RSS support development in accessible town centres.
- 2.27. The RSS provides more detailed advice based on sub area. Oadby and Wigston Borough is within the Three Cities Sub Area, comprising the Principle Urban Areas of Derby, Leicester and Nottingham and their surrounding areas. Corby and Kettering are identified as Growth Towns and nearby Market Harborough and Hinckley are identified as Sub-Regional Centres.

2.28. Regional Priorities for Town Centres and Retail Development include the promotion of vitality and viability. It states that where town centres are under-performing, action should be taken to promote investment through design-led initiatives and development, and implementation of town centre strategies. Local Planning Authorities should bring forward retail and leisure development opportunities within town centres to meet identified need, prevent development/expansion of out-of-town retail and leisure floorspace, and monitor changes in retail floorspace. Within the Three Cities Sub Area, Nottingham, Derby and Leicester are the largest centres, with Loughborough and Hinckley prioritised for support. The towns of Oadby and Wigston are not identified as a regional priority.

Review of Regional Spatial Strategy – Draft Regional Plan

- 2.29. The RSS (referred to as the 'Regional Plan') is currently under partial review, including a review of housing provision, affordable housing and the target for development on previously developed land. The emerging housing policies differ from those in the adopted Structure Plan and Local Plan.
- 2.30. The Draft East Midlands Plan (covering a period up to 2026) was formally launched on 28th September 2006 forming the start of the 12 week consultation. An Examination in Public is to take place in May and June 2007 in Leicester with the Final Regional Plan issued in early 2008.
- 2.31. The Draft East Midlands Plan reinforces the key messages of the previous Regional Plan. Whilst promoting the development of previously developed sites in accessible locations, when assessing the suitability of sites, the Draft East Midlands Regional Plan also encourages the consideration of the impact a development would have on the role and function of existing settlements and the contribution it would make to creating sustainable and vibrant socially inclusive communities. The nature and scale of the development and its particular locational requirements should additionally be considered.

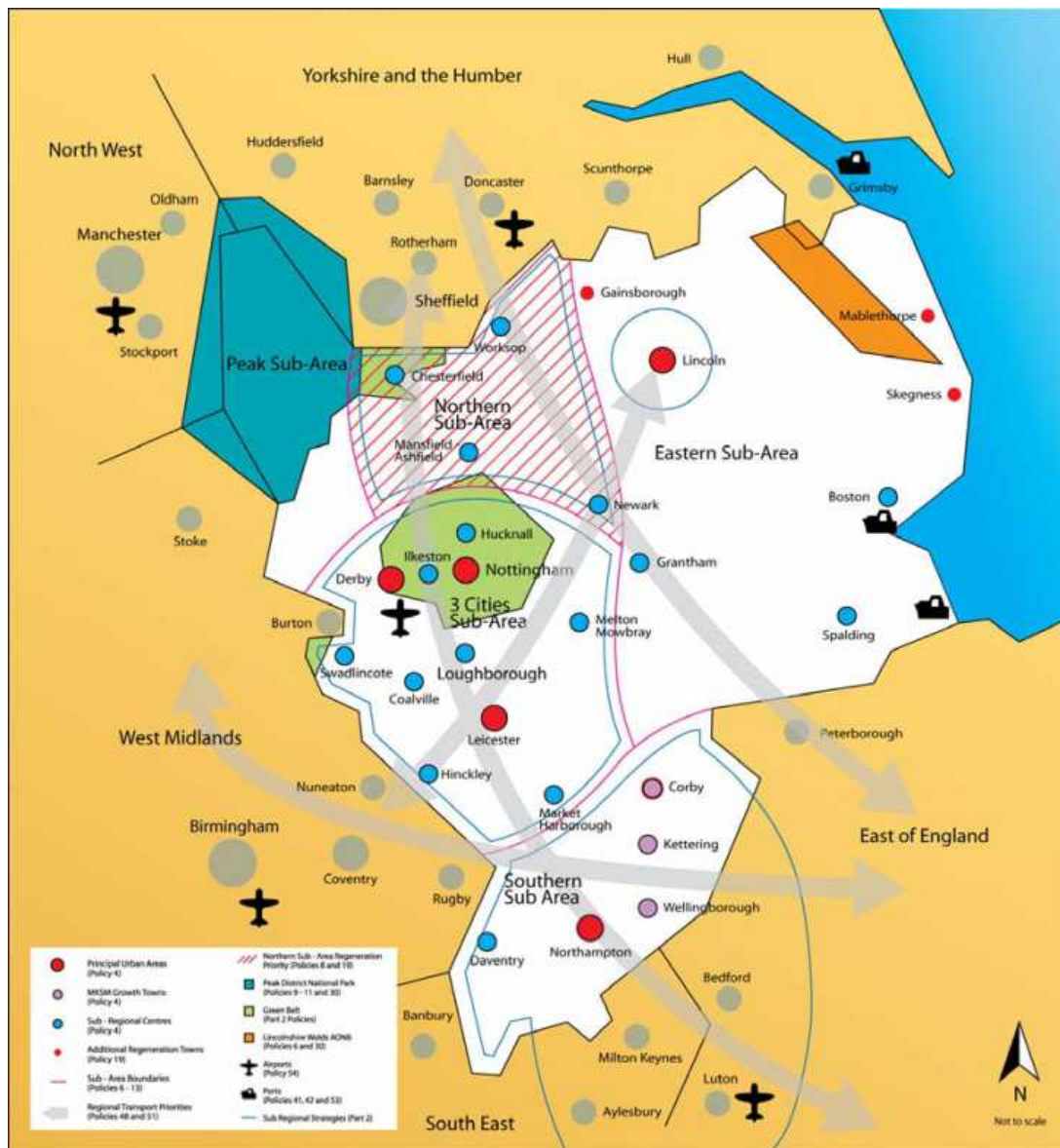


Figure 2.4 (Source) Regional Key Diagram: Draft RSS for the East Midlands, September 2006

2.32. Policies support the concentration of new development in Principal Urban Areas (PUAs) and growth towns and appropriate development of a lesser scale in Sub-Regional Centres (SRCs) such as Melton Mowbray, Grantham and Market Harborough. Oadby and Wigston are not identified within the Regional Plan. Corby and Kettering are identified as 'Growth Towns', Market Harborough, Hinckley are identified as SRCs as in the current RSS (2005). The SRCs have been identified for their ability to perform a complementary role to the PUAs and have been selected on the basis of their size, range of services provided and their potential to accommodate further growth. Development should support individual roles and functions, but not prejudice urban renaissance of the PUAs. It is noted that the PUAs have the capacity to support sustainable development objectives through:

- The use of design-led approaches (e.g. masterplanning and town centre renewal activity) to enhance character and community infrastructure
- Additional development
- Economic diversification
- Provision of a range of services
- Being the most accessible centre in an area with a range of transport modes

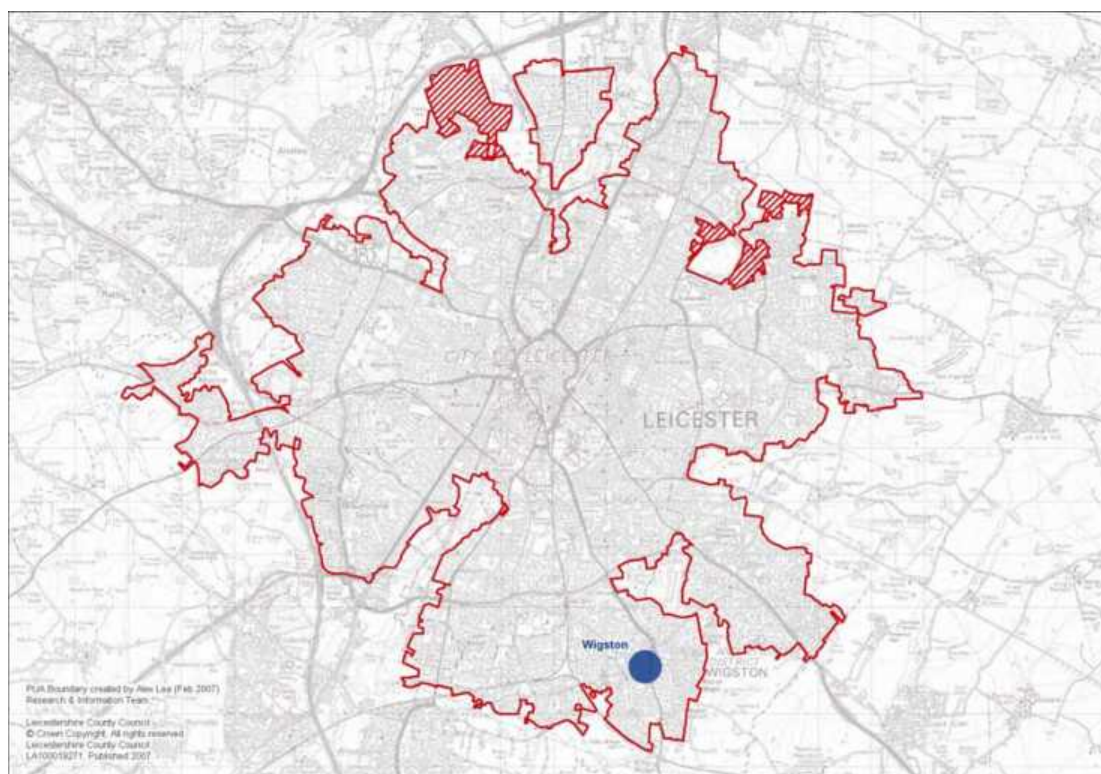


Figure 2.5 Principal Urban Area (courtesy of Leicestershire County Council)

- 2.33. Whilst the policy relating to Regional Priorities for Town Centres and Retail Development remains the same, the Three Cities Sub Area identifies SRCs for complementary growth to retain a higher proportion of local income and reduce pressure on strategic transport infrastructure. The development of transport infrastructure and services across the Region should support sustainable development within such centres.
- 2.34. It also introduced potential for New Growth Points (which includes the Three Cities sub area). With regard to housing provision, this is now distributed according to Housing Market Areas (HMAs). Oadby and Wigston Borough falls within the Leicester and Leicestershire Core HMA. The HMA strategy is to strengthen the role of Leicester as a PUA through urban intensification and planned sustainable urban extensions (for example at Blaby and Charnwood). The considerable cost of providing transport links to the major road networks rule out the possibility of planned sustainable urban extensions in Wigston (and indeed Oadby), although this is questioned in the Roget Tym Urban Capacity Study. The sub-regional roles of Melton Mowbray and, Hinckley and Market Harborough are to be strengthened.

- 2.35. The proposed housing provision for Oadby and Wigston is only 55 dwellings per annum (dpa) between 2001 and 2026 (Policy 4). This level is slightly lower than the current Leicestershire Structure Plan. This reflects the decision not to locate any new development adjoining the PUA in the Borough. The Borough is largely built up and has a high level of supply (Housing Justification Paper). Oadby and Wigston Borough Council are, however, seeking an increase to 90dpa through the Examination in Public of the Draft Regional Plan.
- 2.36. The Government announced in June 2006 that six towns and cities in the East Midlands had been accepted into the new 'Growth Points' Programme; including a three cities bid (Nottingham, Leicester and Derby). The programme aims to *"help develop local economic growth, balancing jobs and new homes and creating more attractive, sustainable places to live"*. In October 2006, the Government announced initial funding allocations, totalling £40 Million, for capital projects and revenue support for studies and capacity building. Allocations are subject to negotiation with LPAs and future years funding will be closely tied to Local Area Agreements.
- 2.37. The programme will provide funding support for communities wishing to pursue large scale sustainable growth, including new housing. The funding will help new growth points to overcome local infrastructure problems, unlock sites for new housing and improve the environment. It is considered that focusing additional growth within designated points will protect the environment from inappropriate development and reduce pressure on Greenfield sites. Proposals for growth points will inform emerging Regional Spatial Strategies which will identify the scale and distribution of provision of new housing.
- 2.38. The Council's draft Core Strategy policy (Preferred Options April 2006) sets out the target figure of 30% of new housing to be affordable on qualifying sites, with 20% for rent and 10% intermediate housing.
- 2.39. Part two of the Draft Regional Plan includes Sub-Regional Strategies (SRS) for the sub areas. The purpose of the SRS is to provide additional direction and guidance to Local Development Frameworks (LDF) on issues that cross strategic planning boundaries and other sub-regional matters of importance. Oadby and Wigston Borough is within the Three Cities SRS (including Nottingham, Derby and Leicester Housing Market Area). Its Vision is:

"An area where the principles of sustainability are implemented through new development and regeneration. This will involve the significant strengthening of the complementary roles of the three Principal Urban Areas by providing new jobs, homes, services, community facilities and green and environmental infrastructure in and around them. The role of Sub Regional Centres will be maintained through appropriate development, and the needs of other settlements requiring regeneration will be met in a sustainable way. Natural and cultural assets will be protected and enhanced".

- 2.40. The Draft RSS sets out that the sub area is well placed to drive the economic growth of the Region. There are challenges, which include acute deprivation in some areas; highest unemployment of the sub areas and projected decline in manufacturing employment (despite a relatively higher proportion employed in office based sectors). There is an understanding that over the sub area as a whole, economic success needs to be underpinned by developing higher value knowledge based employment, with each city targeting relevant economic sectors and clusters for intervention.
- 2.41. It is acknowledged that City Centres such as Leicester also serve a wide catchment for shopping and service functions and their regional function should be promoted. The sub-regional centres, Market Harborough and Hinckley also have a wide catchment and their vitality and viability should be promoted. However, some smaller town centres are suffering from decline, and in these cases, the RSS Policy 21 encourages the use of design led initiatives and the development of town centre strategies.
- 2.42. The Housing Strategy for Leicester and Leicestershire HMA focuses on the Leicester Urban Area, capitalising on the substantial urban capacity. This does not meet all the proposed provision to 2026, which looks to sustainable urban extensions later in the plan period.
- 2.43. Wigston falls within the Leicester Principal Urban Area (PUA) (figure 2.5). The Three Cities SRS Policy 4 sets a sequential approach to selecting land for development, directing significant development to the PUA and to a lesser scale to sub-regional centres. Housing Market Assessments are underway for the Sub-Area, which will be used by the LPA, alongside Housing Strategies, to support policies to develop balanced communities.
- 2.44. The Draft SRS is consistent with the proposals for the sub-area as a 'New Growth Point' from 2006-2021, with new development associated with this status focused on the three Principal Urban Areas (PUAs). The SRS is seen as key to implementing the 'New Growth Point' and will provide guidance for LDFs and implementing agencies to ensure coherent and timely delivery. The Growth Point Status will help provide investment in the sub area's green infrastructure, and ensure levels of housing proposed in this SRS can be developed embodying the principles behind sustainable communities. It will also include economic development initiatives.
- 2.45. The New Growth Point is based on a phased delivery of new housing across the sub area, with early delivery in Derby and Leicester City Centres. Although much growth will be brownfield regeneration, a significant element will be accommodated through mixed-use sustainable urban extensions to meet the level of growth envisaged. This is particularly relevant to the Leicester PUA where many of the brownfield sites are accounted for in planning policy. Growth above this capacity will therefore be accommodated in sustainable urban extensions, in supporting the sub-Regional Centres of Loughborough, Hinckley, Melton Mowbray and Coalville. These will provide the definition, extension and protection of Green Wedges penetrating the PUA and avoiding the coalescence between the PUA, sub-regional Centres and other settlements. In Leicester, further work on identifying the precise scale and location of the urban extensions is required.

- 2.46. Some parts of the Sub-Area have developed Green Wedge policies (including Leicestershire). Green Wedges serve useful strategic planning function of preventing the merging of settlements, guiding development form and providing a green lung and opportunities for recreation. These are being reviewed as part of the Borough's LDDs to ensure that these strategically important areas of open land are protected in order to shape the wider form and direction of urban development, preventing the coalescence of distinct urban areas (SRS Policy 3), as reflected in the Council's management strategies.
- 2.47. **The Regional Economic Strategy (RES) (2006-2020)** was launched in July 2006. It sets out the priorities for transforming the East Midlands into a 'Flourishing Region by 2020'. The RES outlines the main challenges and priorities for action of each of the sub areas. The Vision for the Region is that the East Midlands will be made up of "growing and innovative businesses, where skilled people are employed in good quality jobs, where people feel part of healthy, inclusive communities and live in thriving attractive places". The principles of sustainable development are embedded throughout the strategy.
- 2.48. There are a high number of market towns in the Region, including Oadby and Wigston and the RES considers them an important stepping stone as service centres and feeders to the Region's larger towns and cities. All towns have a role to play in supporting economic growth and the development of their offers should be enhanced and supported. Smaller towns and villages have an important and distinctive role to play for businesses and communities.
- 2.49. **The Place of Choice, A Cultural Strategy for East Midlands, 2006-2011** was produced to supplement the RSS by focusing on the region's cultural assets between 2006 -2011. The strategy builds on the evolving notions of culture in society and seeks to provide a climate for this to develop. Within this there is deemed an increasing role for planning and the processes surrounding development.
- 2.50. The strategy affirms the region's commitment to culture, art, sports, heritage, tourism and media. It aims to transform the region through cultural investment in Nottingham, Derby, Leicester and Lincoln as part of the wider market and rural regeneration. The strategy aims to strengthen culture in the East Midlands through establishing a greater role for planning and sustainable communities in delivering elements of cultural infrastructure. It is hoped that this concept of culture can be embodied in emerging planning processes so that new development might reflect the importance of cultural development beyond the preservation of historic buildings.

Sub-Regional Policy

- 2.51. **The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan, 2006-2016** was adopted in March 2005. Its key aims are to make the optimum use of urban capacity for development in the existing built-up area, balancing housing and employment and securing the integration of transport and land use. The plan takes a sequential approach to new development which is reflected in the more recent RSS, and prioritises Leicester and the existing built up area for the location of new development.
- 2.52. Housing should be located within the urban areas. Provision should be made for 63,000 dwellings within the Structure Plan area, between 1996 and 2016, of which 31,500 will be located in the Central Leicestershire area. 1,700 new dwellings will be provided in the Oadby and Wigston Borough during the plan period. These figures have been reviewed in the Draft Regional Plan and been reduced to 55 dwellings a year for the Borough (subject to the Examination in Public), all of which need to be located within or adjacent to the Leicester PUA as reported above. With the revision of the RSS8 and the identification of the Three Cities Area as a Growth Point, the policy approach of urban concentration in the Leicester PUA is supported. The "Housing Justification Paper for Leicester and Leicestershire", 2006 states that further work needs to be undertaken through the housing market assessments, housing land availability and detailed transport models to further identify the most sustainable locations for the urban extensions.
- 2.53. The Structure Plan aims to sustain and enhance the existing Centres for Shopping and Other Services. The role of central areas, including Wigston will be sustained and increased and where appropriate extended through the provision of retail, leisure and cultural facilities, as well as office and mixed use developments. The policy aims to improve accessibility, safety and attractiveness of the centres which provide adequate provision to serve local needs.

Local Policy

- 2.54. The Oadby and Wigston Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for the Borough benefits from amalgamating a number of key actors and agencies from the private, public and voluntary sectors. This has proved useful as a means of providing a vision for the area and a 'face-to-face' partnership and the eventual development of a community plan.
- 2.55. The **Community Plan** is particularly useful in establishing a framework of priorities for the area. Whilst it acknowledges the role of national and regional strategies and socio-political attitudes it primarily seeks to provide some specific targets. The Community Plan also supports the development of Town Centre Plans within Oadby and Wigston as a mechanism for delivering opportunities for learning and employment, transport and access improvements and overcoming both the physical and social barriers to cultural and leisure activities.

- 2.56. Further to this the document also provides a valuable 'snapshot' of the Borough. Whilst it is not considered by central government to be deprived (241 out of 354 on the Index of Multiple Deprivation), the area hides what is believed to be some significant deficiencies with regard to employment and teaching and learning albeit these exhibit lower levels than found nationally and regionally. Parts of the town centre are also included within the Council's emerging neighbourhood priority areas.
- 2.57. The **Oadby and Wigston Local Plan** was adopted in October 1999 with the main strategic target of delivering the Leicestershire Structure Plan targets for housing, employment and highways (Policy S1). Aside from these overarching goals the Local Plan aims to conserve and enhance the environmental quality and fine features of the Borough whilst responding to the everyday needs of the people who live there. The Local Plan acknowledges the Boroughs lack suitable development sites and as such the Structure Plans (at the time of the Plan preparation) guidance that other nearby authorities should assist in providing more development opportunities.
- 2.58. The Council is currently undertaking the first steps to satisfy the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which are outlined in the Local Development Scheme (LDS). The Core Strategy is currently at Preferred Options stage and the allocations plan at Issues and options stage. The 1999 Local Plan therefore remains the Development Plan as outlined below with some supporting material published to strengthen the policies in the interim period.
- 2.59. The **Town Centre Boundaries** as drawn on the Proposals Map (see figure 2.6) enclose the area designated as Primary Shopping Area (Sh3) with the remainder a mixture of secondary shopping area (Sh4) and Conservation Areas (L3). The principle objective with regard to the policy focuses on providing a range of shops and services, which are responsive to local need within an attractive environment. Policy Sh11 also sets out the desire to enhance the town centres through traffic management and environmental schemes.
- 2.60. Policy Sh12, **Pedestrianisation of Bell Street, Wigston** is key to epitomising the role of these policies play in the physical environment. The pedestrianisation of Bell Street has already been partially undertaken and there are no plans to increase this embodied within the Local Plan.
- 2.61. Policy Sh3, **Primary Shopping Areas** states that shops and shopping related development within these areas will be favourably considered, whilst in **Secondary Shopping Areas** (Sh4) the presumption in favour of retail development is restricted to those developments that are well related to the street scene and maintain residential amenity. There is a clear desire to focus retail development within the existing town centres and this is undoubtedly a reflection of national policy containing **PPS6 – Town Centres**.
- 2.62. **Frontage Lengths** (Policy Sh6) within the Town Centres (aside from a few exceptions) should retain 70% of their units as class A1 use. Along Bell Street, Wigston Magna this percentage is 90%.

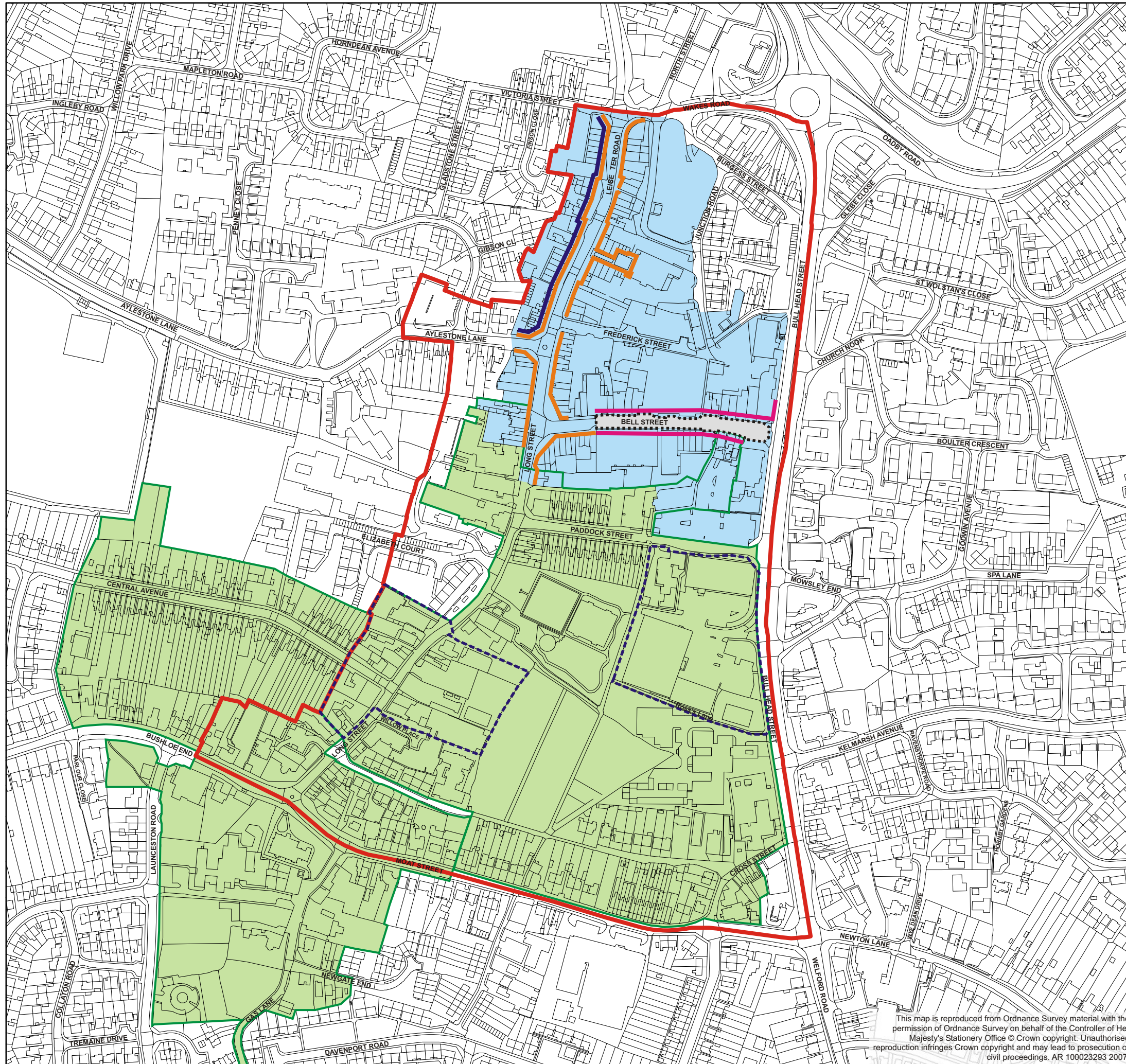


Figure 2.6

- Wigston Study Area Boundary
- Primary Shopping Area (Policy Sh3)
- Secondary Shopping Area (Policy Sh4)
- Conservation Area (Policy L3)
- Possible Pedestrianisation (Policy Sh14)
- Restrictions on Financial and Professional services (Policy Sh6)
- 90% Must Remain A1 Use (Policy Sh7)
- No Food or Drink Use (Policy Sh8)



Oadby & Wigton
 Local Policy Wigton
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- 2.63. **The Conservation Areas (L3)** – Proposals for new development in Conservation Areas will only be permitted where the new development is of a high standard, thus preserving and enhancing the appearance and character of an area. Development sites will have to be well related to the surrounding area, propose sympathetic materials and ensure the retention / re-use of existing built and landscape features where possible. Further to this, policy L4 seeks to maintain the integrity of the street by removing possibilities of premature demolition.
- 2.64. **Listed Buildings (C18)** – Proposals affecting a listed building will only be permitted where no detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the building and the setting will result. Demolition of listed buildings (C20) is not permitted unless reasonable efforts have been made to retain / reuse the building or it is beyond practicable repair.
- 2.65. **Transport** – Policy is mainly focused on a number of key roads and rail links not affecting the town centre. The provision of **routes for cycling (T6)** should affect the Town Centre Area. Policy T17 reiterates national policy guidance to encourage the use of public transport and subsequently expresses a desire to provide new and extended bus routes (as a result of new development) that are feasible.
- 2.66. **Employment** policies within the local plan are focused around issues of local and residential amenity. Policies Em1 – 4 provide the framework for business development within the Borough affecting development falling within use Classes B1, B2 and B8 use. Policy Em1 seeks to retain business use where practicable whilst new development will be governed by conditions relating to neighbouring (residential) amenity.
- 2.67. **Housing** –The majority of the remaining housing allocations are away from the town centre boundaries. The November 2003 Urban Housing Potential Study does provide some further sites within the Town Centre Areas though these are limited. Nevertheless, policy H13 does not remove the potential to provide further residential infill development in an otherwise continuous built up frontage.
- 2.68. **Managing the supply of housing land SPD (December 2003)** – This document forms a direct response to the problems associated with the cumulative impact of planning applications for housing development on small sites, which was unsustainable and has caused an oversupply of housing. Principally this framework sets a series of very tight controls and aims to limit development to the most appropriate sites within the Borough. The need to continue the SPD is reviewed annually as part of the Council's Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).
- 2.69. As a general trend the development of sites for residential purposes are deemed suitable providing they are on brownfield sites within 800m of town centres, well integrated into the character and grain of the existing townscape and seek to maximize the potential for energy efficient design. Greenfield sites are less well supported but have less relevance to these town centre locations of the study area.

- 2.70. The **Residential Areas SPD** (November 2005) is designed to support policies within the local plan and provide a design checklist for small scale residential development (eg. extensions) within the Borough. This is now embodied as part of the LDF documents as outlined in the draft Local Development Scheme.
- 2.71. **Urban Housing Potential Study** (November 2003) - This document sought to identify sites (which could provide over 10 dwellings) within the existing boundaries of the built up area which would be suitable for residential development. Following public consultation during the autumn of that year sites were put forward – resulting in a total of 200 dwellings across eight sites over a period of 2003 – 2016. A very few of these sites are identified within the town centre boundaries. This is kept up to date by the Council as part of preparing the AMR. The Council makes it very clear that an up to date Urban Capacity Study of Town Centres is necessary to support this approach.

Local Development Framework

- 2.72. As required under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Council, has prepared a **Local Development Scheme 2006 (LDS)**. This sets out the following:
- The documents (or Local Development Documents- LDD) to be produced as part of the Local Development Framework;
 - A 42-month programme of activity detailing the preparation of the documents; and;
 - The web of connectivity between the various documents and publications.
- 2.73. As part of this process the Council wishes to deliver a number of specific LDD based around a Core Strategy. The overall programme prepared for the delivery of these documents to mid-2010 involves a continuous update to the LDF as new documents are produced and adopted by the Council.
- 2.74. **Wigston Town Centre Action Plan** has been scheduled for early development within this process. It is described as necessary to establish a spatial framework for developing in this area, including specifically the identification of development sites. It will run alongside the preparation of the Core Strategy and the allocations DPD.
- 2.75. **Residential Land Availability Study** (produced on a yearly basis as part of the LDF process) discusses the oversupply of houses currently in the Borough as a result of net completions since 1996 and commitments already with planning permission. Clearly within this development there is a desire to maximize the use of previously developed land (PDL) and site new housing development as close as possible to urban centres and sustainable transport links.
- 2.76. **Employment Land Availability** (again as a result of the LDF process) suggests the focus of such development should be on urban areas and where possible allied to existing employment areas where often there is excess space.
- 2.77. The Council's **Statement of Community Involvement** was adopted in March 2006 and now provides the framework for involving the community in the preparation of the LDF documents. This provides a framework of consultation on any LDD within the set framework. It seeks to exceed the standards of consultation as laid down by the 2004

Act, developing a three tier approach to consultation – information, consultation and participation.

Other Local Information

- 2.78. **Conservation Area Appraisals** – The town centre boundaries include elements of two Conservation Areas within Wigston (All Saints and The Lanes). Each has a series of documents which include an Appraisal which seeks to analyse the quality and distinctive elements of the Conservation Area and a subsequent Development Control Guidance document which seeks to establish further guidance to help preserve and enhance the characteristics in line with Policy L3 of the Local Plan. Each appraisal gives some guidance as to enhancement opportunities as well as key characteristics.
- 2.79. **The Lanes Conservation Area, Wigston** - With the exception of Central Avenue the entire Conservation Area falls within the town centre boundary. There is a predominance of two storey buildings with some dwellings using gables and roof space. Buildings are positioned to the back of the pavement built of red brick with some rendered panels. A few buildings are set back from the road with small gardens enclosed by a red brick wall. Long Street stands out from this tradition, exhibiting a number of gables to street and some new red/brown brick buildings.
- 2.80. Chimneys remain an important element of the townscape as do mature trees and vegetation. The Peace Memorial Park is seen as an important visual break in the street scene and the allotments (Manchester Gardens) deemed valuable open spaces. Overall the street hierarchy is very well defined ranging from the very formal commercial streets to the informal lanes without footpaths or roadspace.
- 2.81. **All Saints Conservation Area, Wigston** – Only a small section to the north of Moat Street is within the town centre and therefore this area exhibits a differing character. All Saints church remains an important visual element to the wider townscape along Moat Street and Long Lane. Traditionally properties built with the traditional red brick and render to the back of pavement, but there is some influence of detailing (chimneystacks, windows) which is seen as important. Trees are, again particularly important in the Conservation Area.
- 2.82. The **Oadby and Wigston Landscape Character Assessment** (2005) includes a wide range of material on the Borough as a whole. Importantly an assessment of the Urban Character of Wigston is included. It states clearly that the area still retains a physical identity despite the merging with the Leicester Urban Area. It argued that the Town Centre is clearly defined and therefore located centrally within the wider town with opportunities to accommodate new development as a result of a distinct split in character between the more historic southern end and the more modern northern section.
- 2.83. Overall, the report argues that due to its traditionally self-supporting nature (unlike nearby Oadby) the area could support some development opportunities as well as develop a sense of place with some considerable ease.

- 2.84. The Council commissioned a **Preliminary Assessment of Open Spaces and Recreational Facilities** (2003). This concluded that overall the Borough did have the required standards as laid out by the NPFA standards at that time. However, problems arose from limitations in access (since many spaces are privately owned) and a notable shortfall in the provision of children's play spaces. The report does conclude that access to the remaining publicly accessible spaces is somewhat better.
- 2.85. In criticism of the existing provision there is little in the way in community involvement within these Open Spaces, a lack of interaction with built heritage and little in the way of natural and semi-natural environments provided as part of these facilities.

Socio-Economic Review

- 2.86. This section highlights some key statistics for the catchment surrounding Wigston Town Centre, as illustrated on figure 2.7 below.
- 2.87. The area selected includes five wards: Wigston St. Wolston, Wigston Meadowcourt, Wigston Fields and Wigston All Saints. This catchment is designed to take account of the position of the town centre which lies at the centre of all of these wards. Previous policy assessment has demonstrated that the town retains a strong character surrounding the town centre and therefore it can be assumed that the Boroughs wards directly linked (in name as well as in locations) should form the substance of this review.
- 2.88. A range of indicators have been chosen to illustrate the characteristics of the catchment population. These cover the demographics of the population, economic activity, social grade, educational attainment and car ownership. These statistics have been compared with Borough wide, regional and national figures to enable fuller comparison.
- 2.89. The population of the catchment area for the purposes of socio-economic analysis is 25,645.



Figure 2.7 Catchment Area for socio-economic analysis (shown yellow)

Population

2.90. The table below shows the distribution of ages for the catchment population.

	Total Population	0-4	5-15	16-24	25-59	60-64	65-74	75+
Wigston Catchment	25,645	5%	14%	10%	48%	5%	10%	8%
Oadby & Wigston Borough	55,795	5%	15%	12%	46%	5%	10%	8%
East Midlands	4,172,174	6%	14%	11%	48%	5%	9%	8%
England & Wales	52,041,916	6%	14%	11%	48%	5%	8%	8%

Source: Census 2001

2.91. The Wigston catchment demonstrates a similar demographic profile to that of the Borough average. There is a slightly larger working population between 25 and 59 (48%). Overall there is over 50% of the population who are from the workforce. This is again very similar to both the regional and national averages.

Economic activity

- 2.92. This following section outlines the economic activity profile for the catchment population, taken from the 2001 Census.

	Wigston Catchment	Oadby & Wigston	East Midlands	England and Wales
Persons aged 16-74	18,769	40,522	3,020,752	37,607,436
Economically Active	71%	69%	67%	67%
Unemployed (total)	2%	3%	3%	3%
Permanently sick or disabled	7%	5%	5%	6%
Economically inactive - Retired	16%	15%	14%	14%

Source: Census 2001

- 2.93. Whilst the catchment area exhibits trends much the same as the Borough, national and regional averages there is one anomaly which is noticeable. The percentage of permanently sick or disabled is 2% higher than the Borough average. The percentage of retired people (16%) is also marginally higher than averages for the Borough and Region as a whole. Unemployment is lower than the national average at 2%.

Social grade

	Wigston Catchment	Oadby & Wigston	East Midlands	England & Wales
Aged 16+	20,488	42,703	3,261,600	40,666,546
AB: Higher and intermediate managerial / administrative / professional	19%	23%	20%	22%
C1: Supervisory, clerical, junior managerial, administrative, professional	31%	31%	28%	30%
C2: Skilled manual workers	18%	16%	17%	15%
D: Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers	17%	16%	19%	17%
E: On state benefit, unemployed, lowest grade workers	15%	14%	16%	16%

Source: Census 2001

- 2.94. Social grade is an important indicator for disposable income and affluence of the catchment area used by investors and developers when researching new locations. The area exhibits a trend to the lower social grades (C2, D and E) as opposed to the Borough average however; these still remain consistent with the regional and national averages. It is likely that this is one of the less affluent areas of the Borough since only 19% are in grade AB as opposed to 23% at the Borough average. This is marginally below averages for the region and England and Wales as a whole. This may reflect a neighbourhood of more key workers than elsewhere in the Borough which may require a different type of retail / commercial offer.

Educational Attainment

- 2.95. Two indicators have been used to assess the educational attainment within the catchment area. The first, the percentage of students in 2001 achieving 5 A* - C grades at GCSE level is a government indicator of satisfactory education. Further to this those falling within the highest bracket of education achieving – those with degrees, masters degrees and PhD (and similar) are included as a percentage of the population.

	Wigston Catchment	Oadby & Wigston	East Midlands	England & Wales
Percentage of students achieving 5 or more A* - C grades at GCSE (2001)	57%	62%	49%	51%
Percentage of the population with degrees, masters degree, PhD or similar	10%	13%	9%	9%

2.96. In both indicators the catchment area is below the Borough average which reflects the changes to the social grade mentioned above. However, both indicators are above the national average with GCSE A*-C grades (57%) being 8% above the regional average and 6% above England and Wales. The percentage of the population who have attained the top level of educational achievement (10%) is noticeably lower than the Borough (13%) but still above the national and regional averages.

Car Ownership

2.97. When considering the context of Wigston Town Centre, it is important to consider the level of car ownership, as an indicator of accessibility and affluence.

No. cars/vans per household	Oadby Catchment	Oadby & Wigston	East Midlands	England & Wales
None	19%	18%	24%	27%
1	49%	48%	44%	48%
2 or more	32%	34%	31%	29%

Source: Census 2001

2.98. Overall the percentage of households with access to a car (81%) is less than the Borough average but above that of the region or across England and Wales. The majority of the population have access to at least one car. The percentage of the households with two or more cars is below the Borough average at 32% as opposed to 34%. Collectively this demonstrates a trend towards less affluence within the Borough as fewer households can afford to run two cars or even a single car. The importance of alternative transport modes is important in this area of the Borough.

Conclusions

Key emerging issues	Potential masterplan response
Town centres are about diversity of use not just retail	Importance of planning for mixed use development and future role
Importance of measuring and monitoring vitality and viability of town centres	This information is contained in this baseline and can be updated on a regular basis
Regional housing growth agenda	Needs to be confirmed
Higher levels of C2, D and E social grade than Borough, Regional and national averages	Impact on the type of place that Wigston could be in the future and planning for this possibility
Educational attainment below average	Impact on the type of place that Wigston could be in the future and planning for this possibility