

# Chapter 3: A Spatial Portrait of the Borough of Oadby and Wigston

## Introduction

- 3.1 The Spatial Portrait provides a broad picture of the physical characteristics and the current economic, environmental and social conditions that exist in the Borough. It describes the consequent issues and challenges in the context of the Sustainable Community Strategy. It concludes with a summary of the issues and challenges that the Core Strategy will address. These provide the foundation for the Vision and Spatial Objectives in Chapter 4. This process is shown in Figure xx.

## The Borough – A Snapshot

### Physical Characteristics

- 3.2 The Borough of Oadby and Wigston is located immediately to the south east of Leicester. The urban areas of the Borough fall entirely within the Leicester Principal Urban Area resulting in a strong spatial relationship between the two places despite the differences in size and population. The Borough plays an important role in providing residents of the Leicester Principal Urban Area with a link to the countryside due to its position to the south of the urban area.
- 3.3 Initially, the Borough consisted of two distinct villages. Oadby, a large village by the 1860s, established itself around agriculture. It expanded rapidly in the early 1900s as wealthy Leicester businessmen built large family houses immediately to the east of the village. These houses still remain as fine examples of the Arts and Crafts movement, although many are now in the ownership of the University of Leicester which established its Oadby Campus after the Second World War.
- 3.4 Wigston, originally two settlements, was amalgamated into Wigston Magna in 1529. The two settlements were linked by a series of 'Lanes' which still remain. The canal and railway brought further growth to what had been a predominantly agricultural community, resulting in further development to meet industrial and housing needs. This continued after the Second World War with numerous housing estates rapidly extending the size of the town.
- 3.5 South Wigston, a new town developed in the late nineteenth century (by Orson Wright the owner of a large brickworks) follows the tradition of setting up 'model' towns by Victorian philanthropists. Unlike other 'model' towns of the time, it was not just intended to house workers of the brickyard. Other commercial premises, particularly associated with the clothing industry were established right from the start. This history, is still very much evident today, although South Wigston has continued to grow through the establishment of local authority and private housing estates.

## **The Community - Population and Demographics**

- 3.6 At the last Census (2001) the population of the Borough was 55,795. Of this 48.3 per cent were male and 51.7 per cent female. The Borough has an ageing population, with only 19.8 per cent under the age of 16 years of age. The average age in the Borough is above the national average (38.7 years) with an average age of 39.3 years.
- 3.7 Wigston is the largest of the three settlements with a population of 25,645 people. Oadby has the second largest population with 22,679 people and South Wigston has a population of 7,471 people.
- 3.8 Oadby is generally the most affluent area in the Borough. For example, in the 2001 Census the average weekly household income by ward in Oadby ranged from between £410 and £690. This reflects the fact that although Oadby does contain some less prosperous wards, this is often masked by the more prosperous wards. In Wigston, weekly household income ranged from £430 to £560 and in South Wigston it was £530. The census also indicated that less people own a car or van in Wigston and South Wigston compared to Oadby.
- 3.9 The trend for larger family homes has continued throughout the twentieth century in the north east of Oadby, such as in Oadby Grange Ward. This has resulted in the settlement having more large homes compared to the rest of the Borough. There are more than twice the number of households with 8 rooms or more in Oadby compared to Wigston. In contrast, 38.15 per cent of dwellings in South Wigston are terraced houses. These are built to a high density, particularly to the south of the railway line. Houses in Wigston are predominately semi detached and detached.
- 3.10 In recent years, the Oadby and Wigston Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) has worked closely with a number of key stakeholders including the Leicestershire Constabulary to reduce crime and disorder in the Borough. The Partnership has identified 4 main local priorities to address in the Borough which are; anti-social behaviour; acquisitive crime (crimes against property); drugs and alcohol; and, crimes against the person.
- 3.11 The 2001 Census identified that there is above average in-migration to the Borough from within the UK, but very low from outside the country. The neighbouring City of Leicester which also lies within the Leicester Principal Urban Area, has a high number of new National Insurance number registrations from overseas nationals, reaching a level four times higher than the national average.
- 3.12 The Borough's non-white population is large by national standards at 17.5 per cent, compared to 11.3 per cent in England as a whole. In particular, the Borough records a higher share of Asian or British Asian people than the national average.

## **The Centres of Wigston, Oadby and South Wigston**

- 3.13 Wigston is the Borough's main town centre and contains the largest variety of shops, services and facilities. The town is centred around the partly pedestrianised Bell Street, The Arcade and Leicester Road to the north. Bull Head Street provides the town with a bypass and there are a number of small car parks scattered around the town. Wigston is one of only two town centres within the Leicester Principal Urban Area (the other being Beaumont Leys to

the north of Leicester) and therefore fulfils an important town centre function for residents living in the south of the Leicester Principal Urban Area.

- 3.14 Oadby is a large district centre with a smaller, but nevertheless good, range of shops, services and facilities which are mostly located along The Parade. Car parking is situated to the east and west and is easily accessed from the north and south of the town. Oadby is particularly influenced by the presence of three out of centre supermarkets on the A6. A third has recently been given planning permission although this is located close to the centre. Therefore, it is intended that the centre will benefit from linked trips made to the supermarket.
- 3.15 South Wigston is a medium sized district centre extending the length of Blaby Road. This results in the centre being strung out with the largest concentrations of shops, services and facilities located at either end. Many of the properties and retail units clearly date back to the origins of the settlement. South Wigston Library and Community Centre is located on Bassett Street to the south of Blaby Road. A large supermarket is located opposite Blaby Road Park at the eastern end of Blaby Road. South Leicestershire College, open from 2010, is also adjacent to the park further concentrating and reinvigorating the centre in this location.
- 3.16 Each of these centres are of equal importance to many local people. There is a tendency, particularly amongst older residents of Oadby and South Wigston, not to travel out of 'their' settlement to access other shops, services and facilities that are available within the Borough. This leads to each of the centres providing a similar range of opportunities, albeit at a different scale. This arrangement is a result of the way in which the three settlements have evolved and a perception that if needs are not met by the nearest centre it is unlikely that the other centres in the Borough will meet the needs either. It is also a result of the limited public transport services that operate between the three centres, particularly as far as older people are concerned, in comparison to the established links to the City of Leicester.
- 3.17 The centres, particularly Wigston, are not only influenced by their proximity to each other, but their proximity to Leicester City Centre and the Fosse Shopping Park in Blaby District. Both of these offer large amounts of retail floorspace and attract national retailers. Leicester City Centre offers a wide range of services and facilities. Nevertheless, the Borough's centres are valued by the Borough's residents. However, they have suffered from a lack of investment, particularly in relation to their public realm, quality of design and in terms of making the best use of sites within their spatial setting. This has an impact on footfall and the prospects for their future vitality and viability, the types of retailers interested in locating in the centres and the speed at which empty units are brought back into use.

### **The Environment**

- 3.18 The Borough has good access to the open countryside via the Brocks Hill Country Park, the Green Wedge between Oadby and Wigston, the Green Wedge adjacent to the north east of Oadby, parks and open spaces, the River Sence, and the Grand Union Canal. Green Wedges are defined in the glossary and Chapter 6.
- 3.19 There are other areas which contribute to the Borough's Green Infrastructure such as Fludes Lane Woodland, Oadby Grange Country Park, Leicester Racecourse and Oadby and Glen Gorse Golf Courses. Furthermore, the

Limedelves and part of the Grand Union Canal between Kilby and Foxton are classified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and, in part, a Regionally Important Geological Site.

- 3.20 There are 321 allotment plots in the Borough which play an important role in contributing to the natural environment and in promoting healthy lifestyles. However, due to the urban nature of the Borough there is a considerable demand for additional allotment plots which cannot be met, with 131 people currently on the waiting list.
- 3.21 In total, there are 10 Conservation Areas which are influential in maintaining the townscape of the Borough. There are a number of parks and open spaces in the Borough although the potential exists to improve their quality, particularly in relation to equipped play and sports facilities.

### **Housing**

- 3.22 In 2001, 93 per cent of the Borough's total dwelling stock consisted of houses or bungalows with only 7 per cent consisting of flats, maisonettes and apartments. In terms of specific housing types, the single largest component is semi-detached dwellings with a 49 per cent share.
- 3.23 The average household size in Oadby and Wigston was 2.45 people in 2001 which is above the Leicestershire average of 2.43 people. The Borough has a relatively small share of one person households (26 per cent), below the national average of 30 per cent and the Leicestershire average of 27 per cent.
- 3.24 Overall the housing quality within the Borough is very good. Of the total housing stock, 85 per cent of dwellings are owner occupied, which is far above the regional and national averages of 72 per cent and 69 per cent respectively.
- 3.25 The Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2007/08) identified that the Borough has a significant shortfall in affordable housing provision. Based upon the number of new dwellings that the Borough is required to provide up to 2026, the study identified that the Borough has a shortfall of 214 affordable dwellings per year. This equates to a shortfall of 238 per cent. Although the Core Strategy plan period is until 2026 and the study only covered the period to 2016, it does identify that there is presently a significant shortfall in affordable housing in the Borough.
- 3.26 Housing in Oadby and Wigston also plays an important role in accommodating people who work in Leicester City and the wider County. Reasons for this include the Borough's proximity to the wide range of employment opportunities that exist in Leicester and the good reputation of schools in the Borough.

## **The Economy**

- 3.27 The 2001 Census identifies that 40,522 of the Borough's population (aged 16-74 years of age) are registered as eligible to work, although 2,663 of these were classified as full-time students and school children.
- 3.28 The Local Labour Market Bulletin gives a working age population for the Borough of 34,100. Of this figure, in February 2010, the Borough's unemployment rate stood at 3.2 per cent. It was highest in South Wigston at 5.1 per cent and lowest in Oadby at 2.7 per cent. It was 3.2 per cent in Wigston. This compares to a Leicester and Leicestershire unemployment rate of 4.1 per cent and the national unemployment rate of 4.4 per cent.
- 3.29 The 2001 Census indicates that the Borough has a relatively weak knowledge economy with 65 per cent of the Borough's residents qualified up to and including National Vocational Qualification Level 1 and 2 and 27 per cent qualified to Level 3, 4 and 5 equivalents. The Borough's economy is also influenced by the fact that a proportion of residents, particularly the higher skilled, travel outside of the Borough to work. However, the Borough does have a growing local business culture. The sustainability of existing businesses is good, the qualification attainment rate amongst school leavers is good and the Borough has lower levels of unemployment and lower claimant rates than within the City and County generally.
- 3.30 These issues are, partly, a consequence of the Borough's proximity to Leicester City because it is more difficult to retain some types of skills given the range of jobs and salaries available in Leicester or other larger settlements such as Northampton or Nottingham.
- 3.31 The Borough has a number of identified employment areas. These are areas of land designated for uses defined as employment by the Use Classes Order. Much of the accommodation on the identified employment areas lacks the quality and flexibility required by modern industry. In addition the environment, general layout and accessibility is poor. Whilst there is relatively low turnover of businesses, there is a lack of interest in the units that do become available for new employment uses. This is largely due to the quality of units and the identified employment areas having poor accessibility to the larger trunk roads such as the M1 and M69 compared to other nearby districts.
- 3.32 As a result of this, there is frequent interest for the use of land within identified employment areas for non-employment uses. Despite this, it is important to retain employment land to meet local need from existing businesses wishing to expand and for smaller business units to support start-ups. There is limited demand for land in the Borough for storage and distribution type employment uses.
- 3.33 One significant undeveloped parcel of land which has previously been considered for employment uses is the Wigston Railway Triangle. It remains undeveloped due to the difficulties and costs associated with providing access over the railway into the site. Furthermore, Wigston Triangle is also a designated Local Wildlife Site due to the presence of some rare species important to the biodiversity of the Borough. Originally, only the south-eastern side had been designated but this has now been extended to the entire triangle.
- 3.34 One of the major land users in Oadby, and employers and catalysts for inward investment in the Leicester Principal Urban Area is the University of

Leicester. The University has expanded the facilities at its Oadby campus which in particular provides student accommodation and sport facilities.

- 3.35 South Leicestershire College will relocate from Wigston to South Wigston from September 2010, allowing it to offer a broader range of courses, particularly in relation to business and sports development, and to have a positive impact on the local economy of South Wigston because of its proximity to the district centre.
- 3.36 Tourism in the Borough plays a small yet important role in the local economy in relation to the centres of Wigston, Oadby, South Wigston and Kilby Bridge as well as large areas of green space including Brocks Hill Visitors Centre and Country Park, Oadby Golf Course, Leicester Racecourse, Glen Gorse Golf Course and Oadby Grange Country Park.

### **Transport**

- 3.37 The Borough is crossed by three radial highways that serve the City of Leicester, the A6, the A5199 and the B5366, while the B582 serves as an orbital route linking the three centres within the Borough. Since the completion of the Southern District Distributor Road, the A563 has created a link across the northern fringes of the Borough and provides access to the M1 and M69 motorways. Access to the A14 in Northamptonshire is provided by the A6 which passes through Oadby. The Borough's roads do suffer from congestion, particularly at peak times.
- 3.38 Public transport within the Borough is in some locations relatively poor with a limited bus service operating between South Wigston, Wigston and Oadby and between some residential areas, Parklands Leisure Centre, Brocks Hill Visitor Centre and Country Park and the Borough's town and district centres. Generally however, public transport services to Leicester from the town and district centres are relatively frequent.
- 3.39 The Borough has access to the Leicester to Birmingham railway line via South Wigston Station. This mode of transport provides a regular service to Leicester and onward to Nottingham and the north, as well as Nuneaton and Birmingham to the south west. Passengers can change at Leicester to access the Midland Mainline to London.
- 3.40 The Eastern District Distributor Road was originally a proposed transport allocation agreed by Leicestershire County Council and Leicester City Council to complete the City's outer ring road between the M1 and M69 motorways and the A47, in Oadby. The Eastern District Distributor Road would help to relieve congestion on the A6 between Oadby and Leicester. However, the proposal has not come to fruition despite the route being safeguarded in a number of previous plans. It is now even less likely to come forward as the Eastern District Distributor Road, as proposed, because some of the route has been affected by development outside of the Borough of Oadby and Wigston.

## **Kilby Bridge**

- 3.41 The hamlet of Kilby Bridge is located to the south of the Borough, within a 20 minute walk of Wigston town centre and is a part of the Grand Union Canal Conservation Area. The settlement is separated by the A5199 and is situated on the north bank of the Grand Union Canal. The River Sence is nearby and parts of the settlement are liable to flooding. The hamlet consists of a number of residential properties, small scale commercial car sales and a public house. Located slightly out of the main Kilby Bridge settlement, there is a small canal side moorings yard and a canal vessel maintenance yard.
- 3.42 Kilby Bridge is a unique settlement in the Borough and due to its character and setting, it is an attractive and valuable asset. To the east of the settlement, there is a Site of Special Scientific Interest of which part is a Regionally Important Geological site.

## **Eco Town Considerations**

- 3.43 The Planning Policy Statement on Eco Towns published in July 2009 states that 'Eco-towns should have the functional characteristics of a new settlement; that is to be of sufficient size and have the necessary services to establish their own character and identity and so have the critical mass necessary to be capable of self containment whilst delivering much higher standards of sustainability'. An Eco Town should 'make provision for a minimum of 5,000 homes'.
- 3.44 Pennbury Eco Town was proposed jointly by the Co-operative Group and English Partnerships (now the Homes and Communities Agency) to the east and south-east of the Borough. Although largely in Harborough District it was likely that significant development would have fallen within the Borough.
- 3.45 However, Pennbury Eco Town was not identified in the list of Eco Town locations in the Planning Policy Statement. The Locational Decision Statement published alongside the Planning Policy Statement stated that 'this location has not demonstrated the potential to meet the sustainability and deliverability requirements for successful development as an Eco Town at this time'.
- 3.46 Despite this outcome of the Government's Eco Town Programme, Appendix 4 takes into account the potential impact of an Eco Town or new settlement for the following reasons:
- Pennbury Eco Town had a major influence over the spatial context within which the Borough of Oadby and Wigston lies throughout the preparation of this Core Strategy. For example, preparation of a masterplan and publicity by the promoters, technical work commissioned by the Borough Council and other local authorities, public consultation carried out by the Borough Council and the amount of public opinion including a local campaign group.
  - A masterplan now exists for the Pennbury Eco Town and the partial review of the East Midlands Regional Plan considered as an option the possibility of a new settlement within the East Midlands. Therefore, given that the Core Strategy covers the period up to 2026, it is relevant to have regard to the possibility of needing to give further consideration to a new settlement in the vicinity of Oadby in the future because of the significant spatial impact that a new settlement would

have upon the Borough of Oadby and Wigston and the surrounding area.

- The Planning Policy Statement on Eco Towns states that Eco Towns are one of a range of options local planning authorities should consider when determining how to meet their current or emerging housing requirements set out in the Regional Plan.

## **Issues and Challenges**

3.47 The snapshot of the Borough gives rise to a number of issues and challenges, which are identified below:

### **The community - population and demographics**

- An ageing population
- Culturally diverse - more Asian and British Asian people than the national average
- Location within the Leicester Principal Urban Area immediately to the south of Leicester
- Spatial relationship between Wigston, Oadby and South Wigston

### **The Centres of Wigston, Oadby and South Wigston**

- Differing role and scale of each centre
- Proximity to Leicester City and Fosse Shopping Park which provide a wide range of retail opportunities and services close to the Borough
- Residents perception of what each centre offers in comparison to Leicester
- Regeneration of the centres to improve their vitality, viability and spatial setting, the range of retail opportunities and services available and to increase footfall

### **The Environment**

- Access to the countryside for residents living in the Leicester Principal Urban Area
- The presence of a broad range of Green Infrastructure, including green wedges
- A shortage of allotments and limited opportunities to create new plots

### **Housing**

- The housing stock is influenced by the Borough's location and role within the Leicester Principal Urban Area
- The Borough is a desirable place to live
- Higher than average household size and owner occupied housing indicates the presence of a greater number of families
- A significant shortfall of affordable housing units



## **The Economy**

- A relatively low unemployment rate
- A weak knowledge economy but a growing local business culture
- The Borough's economy is influenced by the presence of Leicester
- Identified employment areas are less attractive to businesses which is leading to pressure from other uses and a reduction in the amount of employment land
- There is a need to retain employment land in the Borough to meet local need from existing businesses wishing to expand and for smaller business units to support start-up businesses

## **Transport**

- East west routes through the Borough, and beyond towards the M1 and M69, suffer congestion, particularly at peak times
- There are reasonable public transport links from each of the centres to Leicester but limited public transport links between the centres of Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston

## **Kilby Bridge**

- There is an opportunity to improve and revitalise the character of Kilby Bridge which is the only settlement in the Borough outside of the Leicester Principal Urban Area
- A need to protect Kilby Bridge's environmental and biodiversity qualities
- An opportunity for Kilby Bridge to play a greater role in terms of tourism and providing access to the countryside and the Grand Union Canal

## **Oadby and Wigston Sustainable Community Strategy**

- 3.48 Chapter 2 explains the relationships between the Core Strategy and the two Local Strategic Partnerships and Sustainable Community Strategies covering the Borough. Within the Borough, Local Strategic Partnership partners are working to deliver 19 priorities. Whilst all are likely to have some relevance to a spatial document as strategic as the Core Strategy, 12 priorities are directly relevant.
- 3.49 This section sets out the 12 Sustainable Community Strategy priorities that are directly relevant to the issues and challenges identified above, describes the relationships between them and sets out how the issues and challenges will be tackled by the Core Strategy, via its vision and spatial objectives.

## **The housing needs of the people of Leicestershire are met**

- 3.50 The Core Strategy will identify sufficient land to accommodate the Borough's additional housing requirement to 2026 established by the Regional Plan. It will aim to ensure that issues of design take account of the Borough's location within the Leicester Principal Urban Area and that a broad range of housing types are provided to reflect the needs of the local community.

## **An increase in the provision of affordable housing**

- 3.51 The Core Strategy will aim to reduce the shortfall in affordable housing provision in the context of new development. This will need to be linked to the Borough's additional housing requirement. It will also need to be informed by an assessment of viability, to ensure that the amount of new affordable housing can be viably provided. Whilst the Core Strategy can ensure that the shortfall in affordable housing does not worsen, it is less able to reduce the existing deficit.

**Quality employment sites and premises are more widely available**

- 3.52 The Core Strategy will aim to increase the quality of the employment land available in the Borough, particularly in relation to employment areas to meet the needs of existing businesses wishing to expand and business start ups. The Core Strategy will need to balance the availability of employment land and premises in the context of the overall strategy for employment land in the Leicestershire Housing Market Area which, for example, involves making available strategic employment sites associated with areas of major housing growth outside of the Borough.

**A prosperous and dynamic economy driven by innovation**

**A highly skilled motivated and innovative population and more people in high value jobs**

- 3.53 The Core Strategy will aim to provide the spatial planning context that will allow what is currently a rather weak knowledge economy to benefit from an increasingly strong local business culture. Within the centres of Wigston, Oadby and South Wigston this will be through the identification of land for new employment uses that will secure regeneration and facilitate a more prosperous and dynamic economy in the centres. Outside of the centres this will be achieved through the identification of land linked to additional housing growth. The Core Strategy will also support opportunities to maximise the role that the growth of the Borough's educational institutions can play. However, the Core Strategy will also provide a degree of realism in relation to the extent that these priorities can be achieved in the Borough in comparison to other locations in the Leicestershire Housing Market Area, such as Loughborough.

**The impact of traffic on communities and individuals is reduced**

**Growth of road congestion is reduced**

**Access to services and facilities is enhanced**

- 3.54 The Core Strategy will aim to reduce the impact of traffic and road congestion by supporting the regeneration of the centres of Wigston, Oadby and South Wigston and ensuring that new development is located within them, or close to Wigston, the largest of the Borough's three centres and which has the widest range of services and facilities. This will reduce peoples' need to travel and maximise opportunities for people to use public transport, particularly when travelling between the centres, where public transport is currently most limited, but congestion at its most severe. With this approach, the Core Strategy will also aim to encourage people to walk or cycle as an alternative to using cars.

**Increased resident satisfaction with the built environment and improved green infrastructure**

### **An enhanced accessible natural environment with improved protection**

- 3.55 The Core Strategy will aim to ensure that all new development is built to a high standard, particularly in the centres of Wigston, Oadby and South Wigston, the areas most sensitive to development and areas where significant new development will be proposed. The Core Strategy will identify Green Infrastructure assets and where they combine to form green infrastructure corridors through the Borough. It will identify means by which Green Infrastructure and the wider natural environment can be protected, improved, increased and where appropriate better accessed, particularly in relation to new development.

### **Newer developments are built to higher design, security and environmental standards and are better supported by services and infrastructure**

#### **Our contribution to climate change is reduced**

- 3.56 The Core Strategy will aim to improve the quality in the design of buildings throughout the Borough both in relation to appearance and the environmental standards that they meet. In particular the Core Strategy will aim to ensure that sustainable design is an integral feature of all new development. The Core Strategy will aim to facilitate the regeneration of the centres of Wigston, Oadby and South Wigston to achieve high quality design, especially in relation to the public realm.

## **Key issues and challenges that will inform the Core Strategy's Vision and Spatial Objectives**

- 3.57 Having considered the key issues and challenges in the context of the priorities of the Oadby and Wigston Local Strategic Partnership and its Sustainable Community Strategy a number of key issues and challenges have been identified. These are the main things that the Core Strategy's Vision and Spatial Objectives needs to take into account and they therefore form the basis for Chapter 4 of the Core Strategy. This will ensure that the Core Strategy and the Sustainable Community Strategy will work effectively together to ensure that the Borough's community, economy and environment can flourish up to 2026.

**Key Issues and Challenges to 2026**

Reduce the shortfall in affordable housing

Housing types appropriate for the community

Housing design reflective of the Borough's location

The regeneration of the centres of Wigston, Oadby and South Wigston

The quality of the built environment

Enhancement of green infrastructure

Better availability and quality of employment land

A more prosperous and dynamic economy

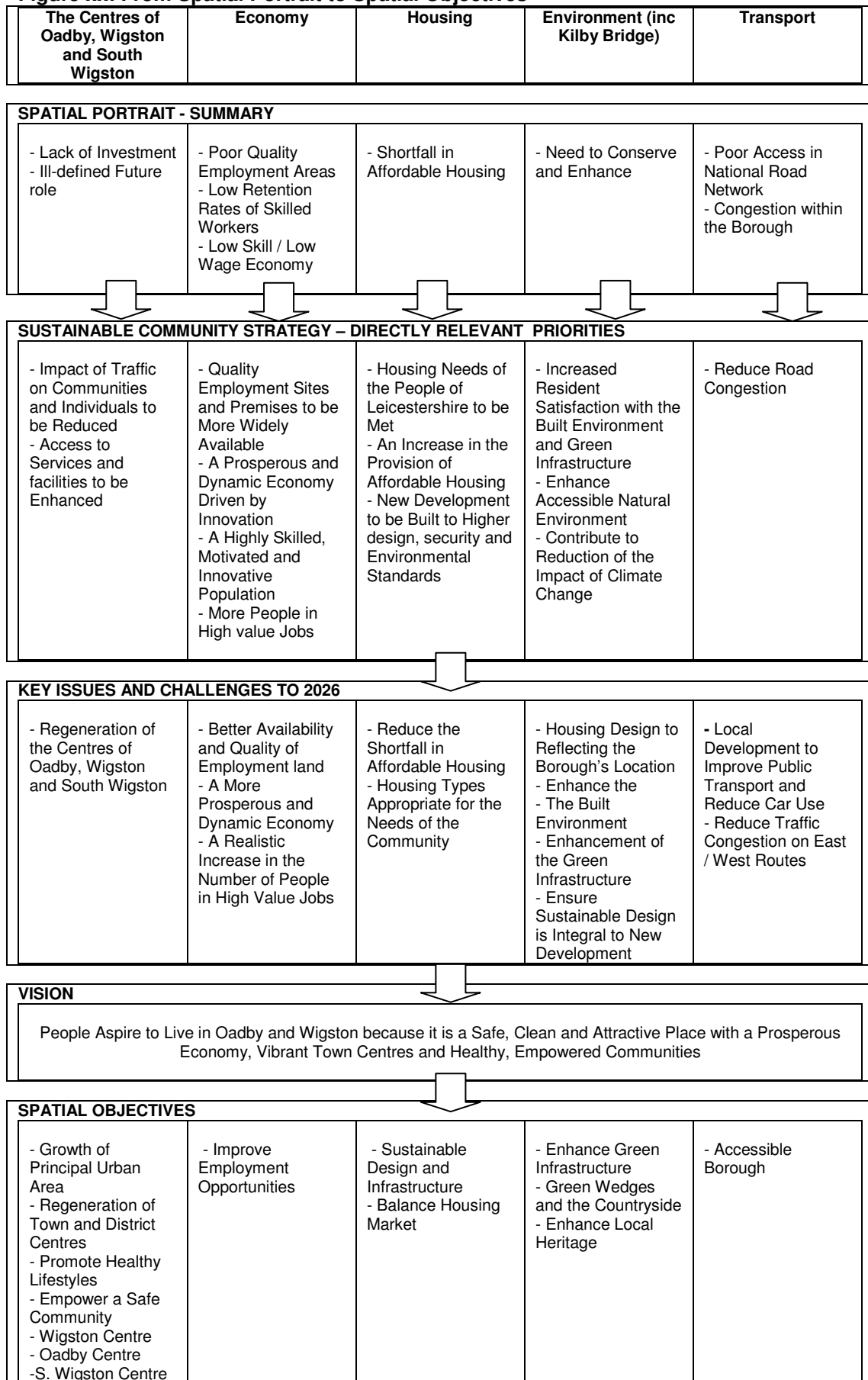
A realistic increase in the number of people in high value jobs

Locate development so as to improve public transport and reduce car use

Reduce traffic congestion on east west routes

Sustainable design is integral to new development

**Figure xx: From Spatial Portrait to Spatial Objectives**



**Note:**

Paragraph 5.17 of the Core Strategy should now refer to paragraph 3.32

Appendix 4 (first sentence) of the Core Strategy should now refer to paragraph 3.46