

4. Public Involvement

- 4.1. The Issues and Options Report underwent a six week period of consultation from Friday 29th June 2007 to Friday 10th August 2007. A number of comments were received which are publicly available and have been made available on the Council's website.
- 4.2. Whilst there is general support for the proposals for the town, a number of objections were raised. Responses to the representations are also publicly available in the same way and this report reflects areas where the Council deems it appropriate to make alteration, and where not, explanation is given.
- 4.3. A number of comments were raised that require more detailed explanation and these are outlined below.

One way system

- 4.4. Representations were made both in support of and objection to the option of a one way system in the town along The Parade. It is acknowledged that there are traffic and movement issues in the town that need resolving. These are covered elsewhere in this report, and explained in detail in the baseline report. Upon further investigation it is considered that a one way system would not be an appropriate strategy for the town, primarily due to the possible loss of passing trade, the significant cost and property requirements that would enable such a scheme, the possible detrimental impact on the efficient movement of traffic on the A6 and the requirement for a contra-flow bus lane.
- 4.5. Instead, a comprehensive traffic management system is proposed that may involve the partial re-alignment of the junction of The Parade and the A6, with associated traffic management along The Parade, including on-street parking, built out pavements to tabled pedestrian crossings, and a public square that would also benefit from a raised table. Proposals would be subject to close working with the Highways Authority and local public transport providers and detailed modeling that would ensure the optimum solution.

Contextual Relationships

- 4.6. Concern was raised that the Issues and Options report did not show clear links to the Council's other policy documents, including the Core Strategy and Community Strategy.
- 4.7. The Council has fully taken into account the policy guidance as set out in its relevant documents, and these relationships are explored in the supporting baseline report, including the adopted Local Plan, Supplementary Planning Documents, Conservation Area Appraisals, and Residential and Employment Land Availability Studies.

- 4.8. In particular, the Baseline Report outlines that the Council's Community Plan (Sustainable Community Strategy) supports the development of town centre plans for Oadby and Wigston as a mechanism for the delivery of future opportunities, and indeed that is one of the key aims of the AAP.
- 4.9. The Council's revised Community Plan (October 2007) sets out a series of outcomes and priorities, and it is considered that this emerging AAP contributes to some extent to the majority of them; in particular, the sustainable use of land, a balanced housing market and a healthy economy. The AAP will also help to achieve excellence in the quality of the natural and built environment and encourage an appropriate mix of new development in town centres, including retail as well as leisure and residential. It will also seek to reduce the reliance on the private car and maximise accessibility to and by a choice of travel mode.
- 4.10. The importance of the Community Plan as an over-riding and strategic policy document is not underestimated - particularly as its preparation through the Local Strategic Partnership has involved so many local stakeholders, as well as reflecting the Local Area Agreements. It is aimed at truly reflecting the desires of the Borough's population - and it is considered that the progression of the AAP both reflects and will help to achieve the wide range of objectives set out therein.
- 4.11. Whilst reference is made to the emerging Core Strategy and its relationship with the AAP, it is acknowledged that this may require further explanation. The Core Strategy is at Preferred Options stage, although the Council is currently considering representations made during a supplemental Issues and Options Paper in June - August 2007.
- 4.12. The emerging Core Strategy is structured around a vision and fourteen spatial objectives. These have been informed by public consultation and set out the key spatial policy directions that the Core Strategy aims to deliver.
- 4.13. The emerging vision of the Core Strategy, therefore, is "...to achieve excellence in the quality of our natural and built environment...to have a planning framework embraced by the entire community that will result in a sustainable Borough." The development of the AAP and the policies that it contains will have undergone three six-week periods of consultation with associated stakeholder engagement. This is over and above the requirements of the Local Development Framework regulations and helps to ensure community buy-in and belief. The policies and proposals will help to support development decisions to ensure the highest quality of development in the town centre; they will have been developed with this as an underlying principle. Design guidance set out as part of the AAP, both more general for the town and detailed for some of the Masterplan type proposals, will have at its heart the importance of quality design and development in all aspects.
- 4.14. The AAP and the policies and proposals it contains therein will assist directly in achieving a number of the Council's spatial objectives as set out in the emerging Core Strategy, as set out below:

- **SO1 – Develop a balanced housing market by providing adequate affordable housing and a variety of choices to meet local needs and forecasts.** The allocation of land for residential purposes will contribute towards this objective, and the application of relevant core strategy policies will help re-enforce and ensure the appropriate mix of type and tenure.
- **SO2 – Concentrate new development on previously developed land and encourage medium to high density land use of suitable sites across the Borough.** The Masterplan only promotes development on previously developed land and indeed focuses higher density development into the town centre.
- **SO3 - Promote and implement sustainable high quality design and preserve local aesthetic character.** The core of the town centre has little of architectural merit, but where appropriate, e.g. in the immediately surrounding area, the more detailed design guidance that will emerge through this Preferred Options Report and the Submission Report will promote the preservation of existing high quality design, and indeed support the use of high quality design in development proposals.
- **SO4 – Encourage mixed use development that integrates housing with employment, leisure and retail activity within the existing infrastructure.** The Masterplan promotes a range of uses within the town centre that will assist in achieving a mixed use sustainable centre.
- **SO6 – Enhance mobility within the Borough and promote the use and development of sustainable transport (including public transport, cycling and walking) ensuring good access to facilities and services for the entire community.** The Masterplan has sustainability at its core, and the proposals include the consideration of alternative means of travel to the car throughout. Also the introduction of a wider mix of uses in the town centre will assist in improving access to these facilities for the community.
- **SO7 – Support the role of Town Centres by developing strategies for regeneration, investment and growth.** The AAP itself helps in achieving this objective.
- **SO12 – Encourage the preservation of historically significant buildings, archaeological sites, parks and other cultural assets providing opportunities for people to access and understand local heritage.** Existing such facilities are protected in the Masterplan and where appropriate drawn into the proposals, although in Oadby many such assets lie beyond the core of the town. Environmental and transport improvements will assist in improving their setting beyond the centre, for example at St Peter’s Church.

4.15. The emerging policies and proposals of the AAP will also reflect the Council’s preferred approaches under relevant policy themes, primarily:

- Achieving Sustainable Development (Policy Theme 1) through focusing development on brownfield land

- Town Centres and Regeneration (Policy Theme 2) through the actual development and progression of the AAP itself
- Transport and Accessibility (Policy Theme 3) through improvements to access to essential facilities through proposed new developments
- Built Environment, Culture and Heritage (Policy Theme 5) through a policy approach of sustainable and mixed use development close to the centre
- Community Facilities, Leisure and Recreation (Policy Theme 8) through proposing new leisure facilities in the centre

Strategic Options

- 4.16. The Council approached the options process through developing options that represented different levels of intervention – low, medium and high – and assessed them against principles agreed at the Baseline Stage (see section 3). This methodology is clear, and helps in achieving a transparent process of options development and assessment towards preferred options.
- 4.17. Perhaps what this does not achieve is showing how these different options may relate to more strategic options for the future of the town. In developing the ‘high, medium, low’ approach, the Council has been mindful of three possible strategic options for the future of the town, which have been informed by all their research that contributed the options of the AAP.
- 4.18. High levels of intervention will, primarily, contribute to achieving the **growth** of the town through the plan period and beyond. This would be growth of retail in particular, but also other uses such as leisure and office development as well as residential. As shown through the options process, this option is likely to lead to difficulties in deliverability, for example through the requirement for the acquisition of property. Whilst the AAP has to be aspirational and ‘aim high’, the likelihood of schemes being delivered in the future is questioned on some sites.
- 4.19. Medium levels of intervention relate more to the **consolidation** of the town, and creating and focusing on its future role of involving independent retail, eating and drinking opportunities, and a closer relationship to the town’s demography which it current does not maximise. This relates to focusing on an improved retail offer, particularly on independent retailers, with an appropriate amount of new retail development within and close to the existing centre, without being to the detriment of existing retail provision. It also looks to the ‘café culture’ in relation to students, shoppers, workers and visitors particularly at lunchtimes, and to restaurants and bars to help develop the evening economy. This is in addition to providing residential opportunities within the centre to help to contribute towards a more activated town throughout the day. This role is investigated in more detail later in this report.

- 4.20. Low levels of intervention, such as those restricted to minimal improvements to the public realm only, may inevitably lead to **contraction**. Baseline research has shown a lack of retailer interest to a certain extent related to inappropriate floorplates for many modern retailers, and a poor quality of townscape and public realm. This level of intervention alone, and leaving future development to the market, is considered likely to result in the contraction of the overall function of the town as a shopping destination for local people.

Spatial Thinking

- 4.21. The Council has been mindful in considering the future of the town, of its location and role, particularly in relation to the city of Leicester, just five miles to its north west, as well as its position within the retail hierarchy of the South East Leicester Quadrant. This contains towns including Market Harborough and Blaby, as well as South Wigston, Oadby and Wigston.
- 4.22. To some extent the town is a commuter suburb for the city and an attractive location for people moving out from the city – a desirable place to live. Leicester is going through a significant regeneration programme and it is hoped that the beneficial knock-on effects are felt in Oadby. The benefits of this are maximised through the emerging policies and proposals to try to capture this population, as opposed to trying to compete with the city.
- 4.23. It has been ensured that the emerging AAP for Wigston (and the emerging masterplanning work being undertaken for South Wigston) relates well to this AAP for Oadby. In particular it is acknowledged through the development of the possible future role for Oadby that Wigston will inevitably be a stronger centre in terms of national retailer representation and civic function. The promotion of these differing roles in the futures of the towns will help to ensure that the two complement one another and do not compete, particularly as they share a very similar catchment area. Likewise, the importance of South Wigston in its relation to Wigston – carefully developing proposals that ensure its long term success are essential.
- 4.24. Surveys undertaken at baseline stage conclude that most customers in Oadby come from Oadby itself and Wigston, with only about 10% from further afield. Nearby towns such as Market Harborough and Melton Mowbray may provide more attractive shopping environments with wider retail choice, but this has to be balanced with the significant travel distances involved. Equally its is important for Oadby to be attractive to people living in towns nearby and on the Borough’s boundaries, for example Great Glen, Kibworth Harcourt, Kibworth Beauchamp and Fleckney, in order to attract visitors from further afield.