

Oadby Town Centre Area Action Plan Issues and Options Report

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Contents

1.	Introduction.....	1
2.	Issues: Baseline Findings.....	3
3.	Methodology	7
4.	Options & Assessment	10
5.	Planning Policy	12
6.	Conclusions and Next Steps	14

Figures

- 3.1 Character Areas and Opportunity Sites
- 4.1 Low level of intervention
- 4.2 Medium level of intervention
- 4.3 High level of intervention
- 5.1 Local Plan Policy

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 Oadby. This is being 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 Wigston town centre.
- 1.2. The Baseline Report has been produced in draft form and has informed the development of the options as set out in this report. Also informing this report has been an options workshop, which involved stakeholders from both towns in addition to more strategic stakeholders. Letters and representations to the Council, as well as planning applications submitted to the Council leading up to this stage, have also been taken into consideration in the development of the options.
- 1.3. This report is divided into six sections. The following section sets out a broad summary of the issues raised in the Baseline stage of the study, and those emerging from the options workshop. It also details the emerging objectives for the future of the town which have led on from the issues research.
- 1.4. The third section sets out the methodology employed in the generation and assessment of the options. The fourth section sets out the options for the identified sites and themes in a tabular and visual form, including their assessment against the objectives and issues of deliverability and sustainability.
- 1.5. The fifth section briefly sets out options questions relating to future planning policy, and the final section concludes the report and sets out the next steps in taking the AAP forward.
- 1.6. *Text in the report presented in pink and in italics are areas that raise issues and questions that can be responded to.*
- 1.7. *Comments are welcome on any of the contents of this report, particularly on the options as presented in the spreadsheets and illustrations. These are also summarised on the associated leaflet and exhibition available during the consultation period.*
- 1.8. *To make comments:*
 - *Electronically - By completing an online response form on the planning consultations page at www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk.*
 - *In writing - Request a questionnaire and return it to us Telephone: 0116 288 8961 Fax: 0116 288 7828 Email: forwardplans@oadby-wigston.gov.uk*

- *In person from Helping Hands Community Trust, Local Libraries or Oadby and Wigston Borough Council Offices, Station Road, Wigston, Leicestershire, LE18 4PG*

1.9. *Comments must be received by 4.15 pm on Friday 10 August 2007*

2. Issues: Baseline Findings

Context

- 2.1. The document review shows that the regeneration of town centres is a key issue of **national planning policy**. However, other reports also suggest that it is important to bear in mind the dangers of perpetuating 'Ghost Towns', as more and more local shops and services close and local communities therefore no longer live within easy walking distance. This, as well as the 'Clone Town Britain' report, stresses the importance of local distinctiveness and local retail.
- 2.2. **Regionally**, Oadby falls within the Three Cities sub-area but is not identified as a town that is proposed to accommodate significant growth. Although Oadby is within the Principal Urban Area, this falls to the city of Leicester and the Strategic Regional Centres. The review of the regional plan is proposing a decrease in the Borough's annual housing requirement from the current structure plan, although this is under consideration at the Examination.
- 2.3. The Local Plan identifies the town centre boundary, as well as primary and secondary shopping areas and frontage lengths, seeking to focus retail uses in the centre of the town, with adjacent complementary services.
- 2.4. The **socio-economic analysis** shows a higher than average proportion of residents of the town's catchment falling within social grades AB, as well as higher educational attainment, and generally a degree of affluence above the Borough and national averages.

Property analysis

- 2.5. Oadby has a niche role as a district centre serving its local population, with a high proportion of independent retailers. Although it sits in close proximity to Leicester, it offers a complementary rather than competing role, competition coming more from nearby Wigston and Fosse Park.
- 2.6. Research suggests that the town is relatively static in retail terms, with little investment other than the Marks and Spencer Simply Food store. The town centre also suffers from a lack of modern units that are capable of satisfying retailer requirements and it is this absence that is preventing investment.
- 2.7. The town centre is clearly an important provider of local services – with banks, solicitors, and especially estate agents in plentiful numbers. The Parade is evidently an attraction for these uses, especially at its western end, although such uses do not necessarily contribute to the vibrancy of the shopping experience.

- 2.8. There is limited investment transaction evidence, and there is only one retail property currently on the market. Details of past transactions are indicative of moderate sale prices. This is likely to reflect Oadby's role as a district centre, with most significant retail interest drawn to Leicester city centre and considerable competition for the remaining investment from Wigston and Fosse Park.
- 2.9. The town centre offers a reasonable range of offices relative to its size, however demand is seen as being limited by the close proximity of Leicester city centre and by the office parks around junction 21A, M1. There are limited commercial leisure opportunities, also due to the proximity of Leicester. Oadby does benefit from a number of eating and drinking establishments.
- 2.10. Public and community facilities are limited. The most significant facility is Oadby library, which is the subject of proposals to be relocated to alternative premises in the town centre. The town centre includes significant areas of residential property. The market is seen as buoyant with high demand evidenced by several recent developments in the south of the town centre. However, discussions with agents suggest that buyers are less attracted by the town centre offer (although that is valued) than by the proximity of Oadby as a whole to Leicester. This emphasises Oadby's role as a commuter town.

Townscape and Landscape

- 2.11. Oadby still retains some of its village characteristics with a mixture of uses, preserving the appearance of its organic growth. This is centered on the oldest remaining part of Oadby around St. Peter's Church and stretches along London Road towards the more recent developments on the Parade.
- 2.12. The linear characteristics of the Conservation Area reflect the development of the original settlement along the road between Leicester and London to the southeast of St. Peter's Church. Much of the building fabric outside of the Conservation Area is relatively poor and detracts from the town centre as a whole.
- 2.13. Towards the north of the town centre the quality of the architecture deteriorates and the history is lost.
- 2.14. The village green has long since disappeared with the redevelopment of the village as its size and nature has become much more urban. The only key green space within the town centre is Lawyers Lane. As this is a public footpath it doesn't allow for much social interaction to take place.

Access and Movement

- 2.15. In strategic terms Leicester is well placed with good links to core national and regional networks. Oadby is the far south-eastern suburb and as such is less well placed in relation to the major road networks concentrated to the west and north of the city. However the A6 links Oadby directly to Leicester (also a quality bus route) and Kettering, the A14 and Bedford providing strong links to the south-east and east via the A6, A14 and M11.
- 2.16. The A6 has a severance affect on the town, and there is little or no signage off the A6 to indicate to passing traffic that Oadby town centre is located in close proximity. It does however offer easy public transport access
- 2.17. There is a wide ranging parking offer in the town, with time and cost restrictions designed to discourage use for park and ride purposes into Leicester. There are limited pedestrian circuits in the town centre, partly due to the existing layout of the shopping area. There are also often poor pedestrian linkages to the car parking areas, frequently via narrow alleyways. There are minimal cycling facilities.

Character areas and opportunity sites

- 2.18. The various analyses as set out above have led to the division of the town into various character areas, within which are identified potential opportunity sites for future development. Some of these sites would require clearance to enable the option to be achieved.
- 2.19. The Council is not at this stage promoting any particular area, site or option. The purpose of this stage of consultation is to engage with communities to seek their opinion of the options. It is, however, important to ensure that all relevant options are taken into consideration at this stage, if only to be discounted at a later stage.

Emerging objectives

- 2.20. Taking into consideration all that is set out in this report, the emerging strategic objectives are as follows:
 - *To establish a distinct and sustainable role for Oadby*
 - *To encourage the growth of economic and social benefits for local people*
 - *To create a safe, distinctive and pedestrian friendly environment*
 - *To achieve an attractive and accessible place to shop, live and work*
 - *To ensure that Oadby reflects high quality and inspirational design*
 - *To link the town, physically and economically, to its catchment*
- 2.21. *Do you think these objectives are right? What alternative do you propose?*

Workshop Feedback

2.22. An options workshop was held in May 2007, inviting 50 or so key local and more strategic stakeholders. Following a presentation of the baseline findings, attendees were divided into one of three groups – those representing Oadby, Wigston, or both towns. Key outcomes of the workshop in relation to Oadby are summarised below –

- Key attributes – car parking, village feel, The Parade at the heart of the town, good restaurants
- Negatives – parking on pavements, paving in poor condition, obstruction of the bus, usage of just the supermarket and not the town centre, access into the town from A6
- Opportunities – community facilities need to underpin new developments, importance of evening facilities (not just pubs), improvements to public realm, importance of green infrastructure, links to work, shops, leisure and education
- Priorities – pedestrianisation but allowing bus access around the parade, meet the needs of the diverse community, better connections with Asda, managed workspace, cultural industries, future branding, links to population e.g. students, ageing population, AB groups

2.23. More strategic issues that are relevant to Oadby are summarised below –

- Perceived distinction between Oadby and Wigston – this can be turned into a strength
- Contribution of the town centre to the sustainability of the Borough
- Public transport connections between the towns are currently poor.
- Need for better / more community facilities

3. Methodology

3.1. This options stage of the study has involved the generation of different levels of intervention or change in each of the areas / sites identified through the baseline report, as identified in the following spreadsheet and Figure 3.1. This has been informed, as set out above, by the baseline research, discussion, best practice and professional knowledge and experience. The draft options have been changed in the light of the outcomes of the options workshop, and then taken forward for further assessment as set out in this report.

3.2. The projects have been structured into two basic types:

- Area / site based interventions including public realm; and
- Supporting, largely non-physical projects

3.3. For each site / area, a number of options have been explored with varying degrees of intervention, referred to as low, medium and high. An explanation of these terms is set out below:

Low What the public, private and voluntary sector would be most likely to deliver at recent aspiration and resourcing levels

Medium Taking intervention up to a level that is appropriate to begin to address effectively the regeneration challenge facing Oadby

High Ensuring the consideration of more radical interventions that test the apparent boundaries presented by likely timescale, resources and medium-term policy constraints.

3.4. Options are not mutually exclusive, and it is likely that the emerging masterplan / AAP will eventually be made up of various options from high / medium / low options in each of the areas. The preferred options therefore may include those that are easy to deliver in the short term together with longer term projects that may require significant investment.

3.5. An assessment of the options for each site / project has involved analysis against the emerging objectives as set out in section two, reviewing how well each of the options contributes to the masterplan objectives. The assessment ranges from low (the intervention contributes poorly to meeting the criteria) to high (the intervention fully meets the criteria). To assess how well each option met the objectives, the following types of questions were considered:

- **To establish a distinct and sustainable role** (How well does the option support Oadby as a local centre? Will it attract people to the town? Will it provide a different offer to other locations?)

- **To encourage the growth of economic and social benefits for local people** (How well does the option benefit local people? Does it remove an eyesore? Does it provide additional community facilities? Does it increase availability of affordable housing? Does it increase employment opportunities?)
 - **To create a safe, distinctive and pedestrian-friendly environment** (Does the option increase safety in the town centre? Will it make people feel safer? Does it enhance sense of place? Does it increase pedestrian priority?)
 - **To achieve an attractive and accessible place to shop, live and work** (Does the option improve the town's attractiveness to residents and visitors? Does it make it more accessible in all senses of the word, not just by private vehicles?)
 - **To develop and integrate town centre attractions – retail and non-retail** (Does it improve connections between different areas of the town? Does it improve linkages by foot / car? Are complementary uses close together?)
 - **To ensure that Oadby reflects high quality and inspirational design** (Does the option help to ensure that future development is of a high standard of design?)
 - **To link the town, physically and economically, to its catchment** (does the option maximise the potential of its catchment area? Does it encourage local residents to shop in the centre?)
- 3.6. An assessment of how well the options meet the objectives of the masterplan is completed for each option.
- 3.7. As the objectives have been developed to try to focus on protecting and maximising the positive issues, as identified through baseline research, and overcoming negative issues, identifying how well the options meet the objectives also shows how they react to the issues – both positive and negative. For example, one of the key negative issues identified through baseline research in Oadby has been the lack of modern retail space – options being put forward include the provision of new retail floorspace in the centre linked to the development of a new town square.
- 3.8. Other strands of assessment consider the deliverability of the project, involving broad financial considerations, property demand, land ownership and political considerations. This is an important element as the aim of this masterplan is to have ambitious, yet achievable outputs. On the Options Spreadsheet, deliverability is shown as follows:
- **Green** indicates that delivery is achievable with current public, private and voluntary aspiration and resourcing levels – i.e. primarily market led;
 - **Amber** indicates that assistance would be required to deliver the option, for example from the Council or other stakeholders;
 - **Red** indicates that delivery is more difficult, for example that requiring major demolition or land assembly.
- 3.9. A broad assessment is also made of sustainability of the project. This includes not only environmental sustainability considerations, but also those of financial sustainability (e.g. revenue costs) and which support the sustainability of the town centre. On the Options Spreadsheet, sustainability is assessed as: positive, indicating good levels of sustainability could be achieved; neutral, indicating the development

would have neither a positive or negative impact on sustainability; or negative, indicating that the development would have a detrimental impact on sustainability. Where the outcome is 'uncertain' this means that at this stage, it is not possible to ascertain what impact the proposed intervention may have upon sustainability, and it will only be possible to determine this, once the scheme has progressed further and more details have been developed. This assessment is somewhat separate from the Sustainability Appraisal that sits alongside this report, and is a more detailed and independent review of the options provided in this report.

- 3.10. The options report is subject to a separate and more detailed Sustainability Appraisal – this report is also subject to public consultation.

4. Options & Assessment

- 4.1. The following spreadsheet sets out the options by character area and the non-physical projects, as well as their assessment as set out above. The information contained within the table is presented in visual form at figures 4.1 4.2 and 4.3. These illustrations include major transport interventions but not smaller detailed schemes, particularly due to the wide geographical implications of some of the options. More information on all access and movement issues is set out below.
- 4.2. At this stage in the AAP process, the consultation period seeks responses to the options as set out in this report and the associated exhibitions.
- 4.3. *Stakeholders and members of the public are therefore encouraged to submit representations both in support and objection to the options:*
- *Which options / sites are your preferred options?*
 - *What are your priorities – which of the options do you think should be progressed as a priority and which do you think may be less of a priority?*

Access and Movement

Highway

- 4.4. Severance created by the A6 is a key consideration of this masterplan. A signage strategy and creation of strong gateways off the A6 and from the B582 would assist to indicate the close proximity of the town centre.
- 4.5. The geometry of the existing junctions along the A6 near the town centre (The Parade, East Street and Sandhurst Street) could be amended to open up the town centre, providing strong visual links with the A6 and allowing land to be set aside for a gateway feature. As a high level of intervention, a clockwise gyratory system could be introduced with traffic entering Oadby off the A6 via East Street, taking traffic directly to the East Street/Brooksby Drive car park, making South Street one-way westbound and The Parade one-way northbound except buses. Reducing traffic on The Parade, via the gyratory system and supported by a signage strategy, would allow a traffic management scheme to be implemented to create a better pedestrian environment. Public realm improvements could be implemented as part of the traffic management scheme and would 'lift' the appearance of The Parade. Raised junction tables could be introduced to assist in reducing the high vehicle speeds at the junction of The Parade/Chestnut Avenue and also create a virtual market square area.
- 4.6. A junction improvement scheme would be beneficial at the mini roundabout of Wigston Road/Leicester Road.

Public Transport

- 4.7. Discussions with Arriva have established that the 31 & 31A bus routes, which serve the east and south of Oadby respectively, are defined by patronage. The route to the north is convoluted but would appear to be fixed.
- 4.8. The only service linking Oadby to Wigston is the 45 Centrebus, having recently been under review the service will remain, but no additional services will be added.
- 4.9. The bus stops around Oadby vary in design, all of which are fairly low quality. Introduction of consistent facilities at bus stops should be considered and could be delivered relatively easily.

Parking

- 4.10. There are a significant number of similar parking restrictions within Oadby which vary by half an hour or so. Consideration could be given to amending the current restrictions so that they all apply for the same time periods. This would limit the amount of signs required so reducing sign clutter.
- 4.11. The northern section of The Parade suffers from illegal parking. Consideration could be given to changing the restrictions to 'no parking at any time' or possibly providing lay-by parking. Parking enforcement is essential to maintain restrictions and needs to be introduced.
- 4.12. The car parks in Oadby are of low quality with poor pedestrian linkage to the shops. The variety of coloured parking spaces is also confusing for visitors, and this colour system needs to be amended to a more conventional short stay and long stay arrangement. The parking survey results showed that East Street/Brooksby Drive was at 95% capacity and Sandhurst Street at 75% capacity on the day of the car park survey. Sandhurst Street car park is identified as an opportunity site. Working on the aforementioned percentages, if the total 192 parking spaces at Sandhurst Street are to be lost, a minimum of 150 spaces need to be replaced to accommodate the existing demand for parking in Oadby.

Walking & Cycling

- 4.13. Currently, pedestrians cross The Parade along its entire length - a traffic management scheme along The Parade could give pedestrians more priority over vehicles, improving safety and the pedestrian experience. There are limited pedestrian circuits in the town centre and pedestrian linkages to car parking areas are often via narrow alleyways. A future circuit could be provided from the proposed new gateway at the A6 along The Parade and Chestnut Avenue up to the Sandhurst development. Pedestrian linkages east/west from The Parade to the Sandhurst Street development need to be improved.
- 4.14. Cycle facilities within Oadby are minimal but well used. Creation of a cycle network and an increased number of stands would encourage more cyclists into Oadby.

5. Planning Policy

- 5.1. The Council's current development plan includes the policy tools of a town centre boundary, primary and secondary shopping areas, and restricted frontages to focus on A1 retail in the core of the town.
- 5.2. This AAP process will identify a planning framework to be taken forward forming part of the future planning policy for the town centre. It will be developed to support the implementation of the masterplan as well as the long term sustainability and success of the town centre.
- 5.3. The current town centre boundary is set out in the Oadby and Wigston Local Plan, adopted in 1999. This is the boundary that has defined the study area for the Masterplan. The primary and secondary shopping areas are also set out in the adopted local plan and are also shown at figure 5.1.

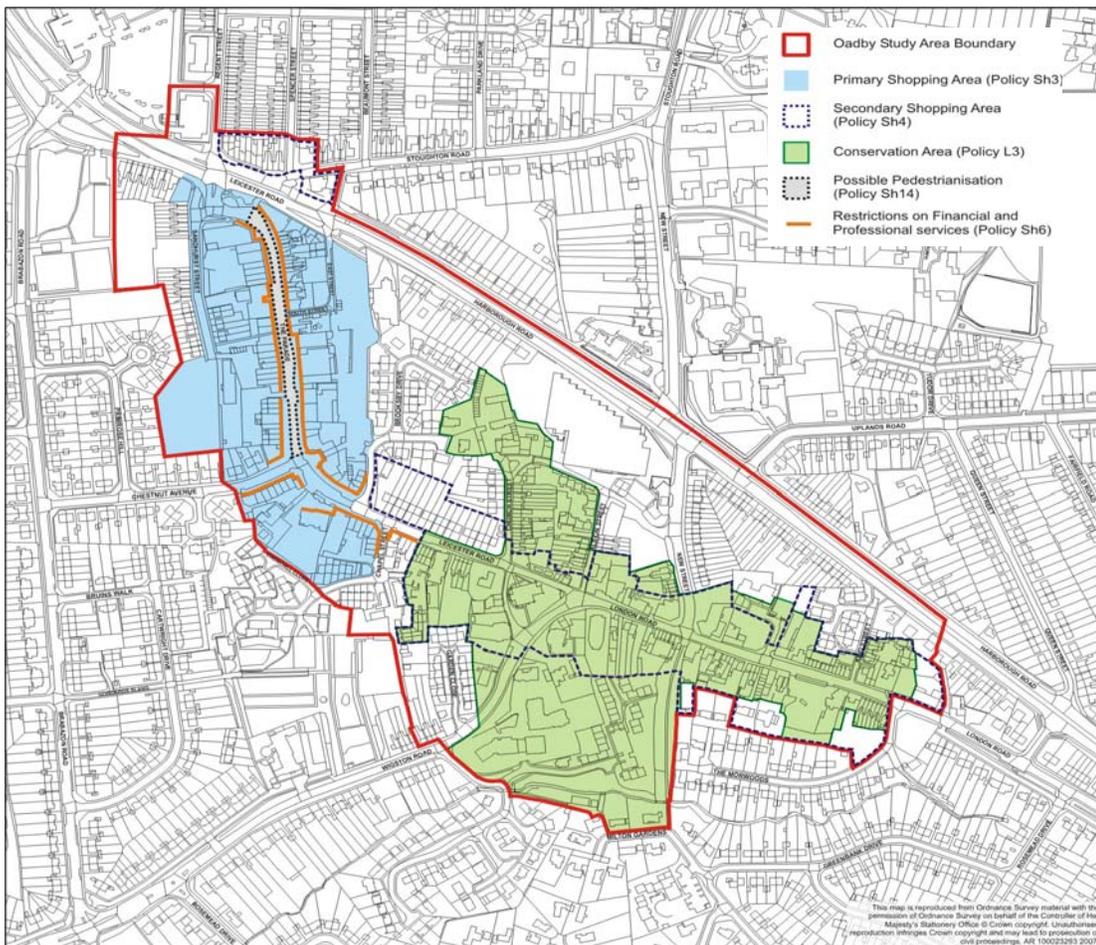


Figure 5.1 Local Plan Policy (NTS)

5.4. National Planning Policy (PPS6) requires town centre boundaries and primary shopping areas to be defined to help define the town centre and focus retail development in the core of the town, as follows:

- **Town centres** will usually be the second level of centres under city centres and perform the role of important service centres providing a range of facilities and services which serve the catchment area.
- The **Primary Shopping Area** is a defined area where retail activity is concentrated (generally comprising primary and secondary frontages which are contiguous and closely related to the primary shopping frontage). Smaller centres may not have areas of predominantly leisure, business and the main town centre uses adjacent to the primary shopping area, therefore the town centre may not extend beyond the primary shopping area. It is important to ensure a balance between safeguarding shopping as the primary role of the centre whilst encouraging a mix of other uses to enhance the centre's vitality and viability.
- **Shopping Frontages** will be defined and use restricted in accordance with the Use Classes Order 2005. This includes:
 - A1: Shops, Post Offices, Travel Agents, Hairdressers, Funeral directors, Dry cleaners and Sandwich premises (consumed on premises).
 - A2: Financial services e.g. banks, building societies and estate agents, plus other services such as betting shops.
 - A3: Restaurants and Cafes.
 - A4: Drinking establishments.
 - A5: Hot food takeaway.

5.5. This stage of consultation offers an opportunity to make representations to have these boundaries changed. The development of preferred options will also help to inform the future boundaries, and their location will be consulted upon at the next stage of consultation.

5.6. *At this stage therefore, key issues and options to consider are:*

- *Do you feel this is the correct approach to take in identifying the predominant uses for primary and secondary frontages? If not, what approach would be appropriate?*
- *Is the town centre boundary drawn correctly? Should it be a small town centre boundary just including the primary shopping area, or a wider boundary similar to that currently adopted? (It may be useful to refer to the character area analysis as shown at figure 2.1 as a starting point – should all those character areas remain within the boundary or not? What alternative do you suggest?)*
- *Are the primary and secondary shopping areas appropriate to the town?*
- *If you consider that a change needs to be made - what alternative are you proposing?*

6. Conclusions and Next Steps

- 6.1. This report sets out options for the future of Oadby town centre, and invites comments on those options. These comments will all be taken into consideration in the development of the preferred options.
- 6.2. The preferred options will be subject to a further six week period of consultation in Autumn 2007 in accordance with the Council's Local Development Scheme. Comments will again be encouraged and taken into consideration.
- 6.3. The preferred options will identify the emerging strategy and masterplan for the future of the town. Comments made at this stage will be taken forward to the Submission Document. This will in effect be the final draft Masterplan, and will also include detailed information on a number of key sites in Oadby that will show how they may look in the future. These sites will be chosen through the preferred options consultation and also by how they can demonstrate the strategy, as well as encouraging and guiding future development proposals.
- 6.4. The submission document goes through a further period of consultation. Any objections to the AAP that remain unresolved following this stage are heard by an independent inspector who makes the final decision. Upon receipt of their report, necessary amendments are made to the AAP and it will at that stage be adopted by the Council.