

ECONOMY (STRATEGIC CHALLENGES)

Retail hierarchy

Retail need

Town and district centres and their boundaries

Local centres



***Oadby and Wigston
Borough Council
Leicestershire***

Retail hierarchy

What the government says:

- 4.1 NPPF states that *‘planning policies should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation’*. It goes on to state that *‘planning policies should - define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters’*.
- 4.2 NPPF goes on to suggest that local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses (as defined in the NPPF), which are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date plan. Further, it details that main town centre uses should be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations; and only if suitable sites are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out of centre sites be considered.

What the Council says:

- 4.3 In order to plan positively to promote the vitality and viability of the town centres, the Council is required to identify a local retail hierarchy for the Borough area that sets out the role and function of each of the centres identified.
- 4.4 The Council’s current Local Plan, sets out a retail hierarchy of centres and specifies what role each centre plays. In addition, the policy sets out what types of development will be supported within the hierarchy of centres identified.
- 4.5 It is expected that current Local Plan Policy 23 – Retail Hierarchy will be ‘rolled’ forward into the new Local Plan with some amendments. The policy has been effective in managing change within the Borough areas identified centres and the approach that it takes is, in the main, consistent with current national planning policy and guidance. The presumption will be that any proposals for a main town use will have to follow the ‘sequential test’.
- 4.6 However, to ensure that the hierarchy of centres remains up-to-date and relevant, the Council will undertake a review of: the existing hierarchy list of centres; and, the role that each of the centres play, as it is apparent that each of the main centres play very different roles and have very different offers.

Potential options:

- Continue with the hierarchy list of centres that is illustrated within the current Local Plan.
- Carry forward the existing policy wording set out within current Local Plan Policy 23 Retail Hierarchy, ensuring that it is up-to-date with current national planning policy and guidance.
- Introduce other centres into the hierarchy list should evidence justify a need to do so.
- Remove centres from the hierarchy list should evidence justify a need to do so.
- Amend the role that centres play with hierarchy list should evidence justify a need to do so.

Questions:

- Do you consider that the existing list of centres, set out within the current Local Plan, is up-to-date and relevant?
- Do you consider that the existing list of centres needs amending to reflect changes that have occurred within the Borough area?
- Do you consider that the existing policy wording set out within Local Plan Policy 23 Retail Hierarchy reflects current national planning policy and guidance?
- Do you consider that the apparent differences in the Borough's three main centres of Wigston, Oadby and South Wigston are reflected appropriately, for example should both Oadby and South Wigston, be designated 'District' centres, or should the difference between them be better reflected?

Please explain your answer in a few words. Also if there are other options that you feel are more appropriate please explain.



Retail need

What the government says:

- 4.7 The NPPF states that strategic policies contained within Local Plans should set out the overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places and make sufficient provision for...retail.
- 4.8 The NPPF goes on to suggest that local planning authorities should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a proactive and positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation.
- 4.8 The document also states that planning policies should *'allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of development likely to be needed, looking at least ten years ahead. Meeting anticipated needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses over this period'*.

What the Council says:

- 4.9 The Council will continue to recognise the town and district centres of the Borough as the heart of their communities and pursue policies to support their viability and vitality. Further, the Council will ensure that the town and district centres are recognised, grown and protected for now and future generations.
- 4.10 In 2016 the Council commissioned Nathaniel Litchfield & Partners (NLP) to undertake a Retail Capacity Study for the Borough, to serve as local evidence to support local planning policy. The study underpinned the retail need requirements set out in the current Local Plan.
- 4.11 Due to changing shopping habits and the Covid pandemic, it is expected that the new Local Plan will be evidenced by an updated Retail Capacity study that will set out up-to-date need requirements for the Borough area in relation to retail.
- 4.12 In terms of retail provision within the Borough, it is expected that a 'town and district centre first' approach will be applied. Proposals for main town centre uses will be prioritised within the town or district centres, however, it is expected that some flexibility will be allowed for edge of centre locations if the main centres cannot accommodate the retail provision proposed.
- 4.13 The Council's current retail need requirements are set out within Local Plan Policy 22 Delivering Retail. It is expected that the retail need policy set out in the new Local Plan will follow a similar approach, however will be updated with up-to-date retail need requirements.
- 4.14 It is worth noting that to this date, none of the sites allocated for retail development have been built out since the current Local Plans adoption in April 2019. Recent retail development within the Borough area has consisted of retail churn and changes of use of un-allocated sites.

Potential options:

- Maintain the Council's town and district centre first approach to retail development.
- Carry forward the existing Local Plan town and district centre allocations in relation to retail provision.
- De-allocate the current retail allocations and allocate other sites within the Borough area subject to evidence suggesting a need to do so.



- Concentrate new retail provision within one of the town and district centre, rather than spread new provision across each of the three main centres.

Questions:

- Which of the above potential options do you consider is / are the most appropriate for the Borough area?
- Should the Council be allocating any further sites for retail provision, bearing in mind that the existing allocations have yet to be built out?
- Should the Council be concentrating retail development within just one of the three main centres, rather than spread across all three?
- Should the Council be promoting a greater mix of uses within its main centres, rather than having a retail dominant approach, taking account of the changing shopping habits of its local communities?

Please explain your answer in a few words. Also if there are other options that you feel are more appropriate please explain.



Town and District centres and their boundaries

What the government says:

- 4.15 The NPPF states that planning policies should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities. It goes on to suggest that planning policies should take a proactive approach to town centre growth, management and adaptation. Further the NPPF states that – planning policies should; define a network and hierarchy of town centres...define the extent of the town centres and primary shopping areas...allocate a range of suitable sites within town centres to meet need arising...and recognise that residential development plays a key role in ensuring vitality.
- 4.16 The NPPF goes on to suggest that town centres should be dominated by ‘main town centre’ uses and should apply a sequential test to proposals for main town centre uses that are not located in a town centre.

What the Council says:

- 4.17 The Council’s current Local Plan and Adopted Policies Map, sets out tightly drawn town and district centre boundaries. The Council considers that focusing opportunities within the core of the town and district centres, with a balance of development types including retail, commercial, leisure, residential, civic and public realm, will ensure that the centres function for longer during any given 24 hour period.
- 4.18 This will be achieved through town centre living, increased footfall and more attractive centres. Increasing the number of people that live and visit the centres, will not only positively affect the local economy, but will also improve security, through natural surveillance.
- 4.19 The concentration of development within the town and district centre boundaries will promote the vitality and viability of the town and district centres and sustainable communities.
- 4.20 The current Local Plan, is evidenced by the retail capacity work that Nathaniel Lichfield undertook. The evidence base work, reviewed all of the existing town and district centre boundaries within the Borough area. The review illustrated that no change was required to the existing town and district centre boundaries, and that the tightly drawn boundaries positively impacted town and district centre vitality due to concentration of similar uses, rather than a diluting, if the centres were more spread.
- 4.21 It is therefore expected that the town and district centre boundaries, as currently defined, will continue to be drawn tightly. It is considered that this approach will continue to deliver a well-defined and focussed core that contains the majority of existing and proposed town and district centre use floor space. This also ensures that any retail development on the edge of the centres that could undermine the vitality and viability of the centres - and therefore achievement of the spatial objectives and the vision - is resisted and / or managed appropriately.
- 4.22 Although it is expected that the Covid pandemic may well impact retail need, shopping habits and requirements, it is not expected that the pandemic will impact how tightly the boundaries are drawn.



4.23 In terms of moving forward, the Council is proposing to 'role' forward the current planning policy (Policy 29 – Town and District centre boundaries) set out in the Local Plan, as it has been effective in managing growth within the town and district centre areas over the past few years. However, it is expected that the new Local Plan will have a greater emphasis on town and district centre living. This will be achieved through the provision of high quality new homes that are of a good size, as well as the regeneration of the open spaces and public realm, and the offer that is provided to the visitor.

Potential options:

- Maintain the current tightly drawn boundaries of the town and district centres.

Questions:

- Should the Council continue with the current tightly drawn boundaries of its town and district centres?
- If the answer is no to the answer above, how do you consider that the Council should approach town and district centre boundaries?
- Do you consider that more high quality new housing should be provided within the Borough areas three main centres of Wigston, Oadby and South Wigston?

Please explain your answer in a few words. Also if there are other options that you feel are more appropriate please explain.



Local centres

What the government says:

4.24 The NPPF states within its Glossary that any references to town centres or centres apply to city, town centres, district centres and local centres, but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance.

What the Council says:

4.25 In the context of the Borough area, local centres are centres that include a range of shops of a local nature, serving a small catchment. Typically, Local Centres might include, amongst other retail uses, a small supermarket, a newsagent, a sub-post office and / or a pharmacy. Other facilities could include a hot-food takeaways and a launderette. For the purposes of defining Local Centres, the Borough Council has set a threshold of 3 units (minimum) in order to be classified as a designated Local Centre. The Borough areas local centres are defined on the current Adopted Policies Map.

4.26 Although the Council defines local centres, it could be argued that the definition that the Council uses, does not meet the definition set out within the NPPF, as the local centres within the Borough area are small parades of shops that are of purely neighbourhood significance.

4.27 Irrespective of whether the NPPF recognises the Borough areas local centres, the Council considers that local centres within the Borough area play a significant role in local communities everyday way of life and want to protect (and enhance where possible) them from inappropriate development and / or loss. On a regular basis the Council undertakes an assessment of the local centres within the Borough area, to ensure that they remain relevant and of neighbourhood significance.

4.28 It is not expected that a retail need figure will be identified for local centres within the Borough area, as it will for town and district centres, however it is envisaged that they will continue to be identified on the Adopted Policies Map, relating to the new Local Plan. A full list of Borough centres can be found in the current Local Plan Policy 23 Retail Hierarchy.

Potential options:

- Continue to define the local centres of the Borough area and protect them (and enhance where possible) from inappropriate development and / or loss.
- As they are not defined within the NPPF, remove the designation and not have any policy considerations relating to the Borough areas local centres.

Questions:

- Should the Council continue to define local centres and protect them (and enhance where possible) from inappropriate development?
- Should the Council remove the designation and not have policy considerations relating to local centres?
- Are there any currently designated Local centres that should be removed?
- Are there any areas within the Borough area that you consider should be designated as Local centres?

Please explain your answer in a few words. Also if there are other options that you feel are more appropriate please explain.

