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South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan

Final Report

May 2008

FABER MAUNSELL | AECOM **B&E**group

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Taylor Young, in conjunction with BE Group and Faber Maunsell, has been commissioned by Oadby and Wigston Borough Council to undertake a review of the existing South Wigston Regeneration Masterplan. This review has been undertaken with a view to identifying key sites that can be included in the Local Development Framework (LDF) Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD).
- 1.2 This report follows the Baseline and Options Reports which provided a review of the context and background to South Wigston. It also included an overview of access and movement and the local property market. It discussed a range of strategic and site-specific options for South Wigston, focusing on 9 key sites for the Town. These sites were then assessed against agreed criteria, including deliverability and sustainability and their contribution to the study objectives.
- 1.3 This report builds upon the Baseline and Options Reports, including the feedback from a Visioning Workshop. It presents the Vision and Strategy for the Town which is supported by transport, property and planning policy commentary. The Masterplan is also illustrated through selected projects.

2. Summary of baseline findings

Context

- 2.1 South Wigston is located in the Borough of Oadby and Wigston, Leicestershire, approximately 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.

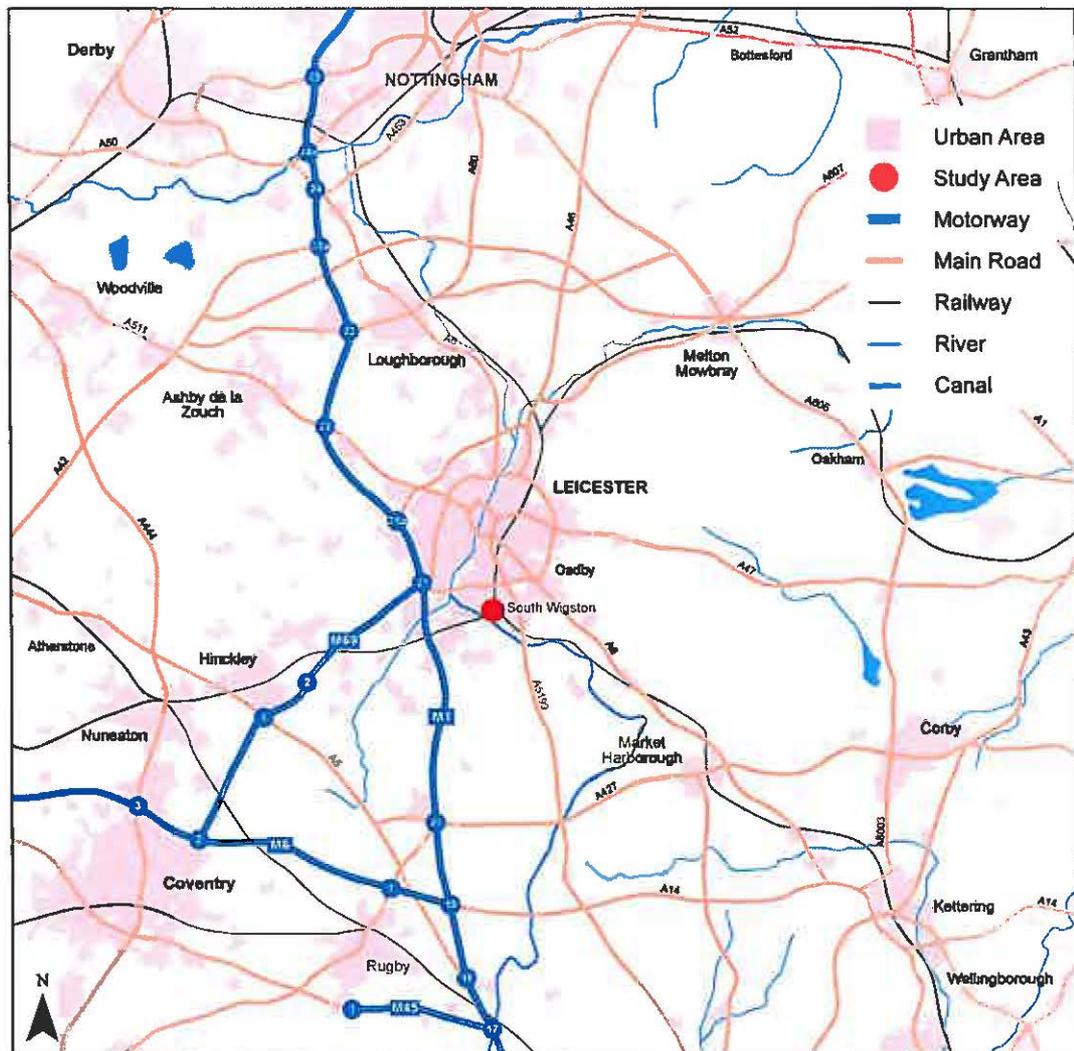


Figure 2.1 Regional context plan (not to scale)

- 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 lies a largely rural area dotted with market towns such as Market Harborough and Melton Mowbray.

- 2.3 In the hierarchy of centres within the region, Leicester, Nottingham and Derby are City Centres. Other significant centres close to South Wigston include Coventry and Rugby (in the West Midlands Region).
- 2.4 Supporting these centres are Sub Regional Centres, which currently include Ilkeston, Coalville, Loughborough, Hinckley, Melton Mowbray and Market Harborough. Within the Oadby and Wigston Borough, South Wigston, alongside Oadby and Wigston, is identified as a town centre. South Wigston sits within the Leicester Principal Urban Area (PUA). In addition, Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough in neighbouring Northamptonshire are identified as growth towns, which in particular will see a significant increase in housing numbers and supporting facilities.
- 2.5 The study area is shown in figure 2.2. This is indicative only and the masterplan process ensures that this area is not considered in isolation.



Figure 2.2: Study Boundary (not to scale)

Property analysis

- 2.6 South Wigston represents the third Town Centre in Oadby & Wigston Borough, ranking behind the larger centres of Oadby and Wigston. In contrast to these two other Town Centres, South Wigston still embraces manufacturing and associated employment in close proximity to its retailing. Decline in these industries has impacted on trade levels in the Town Centre, which essentially comprises retail outlets strung in a linear fashion along Blaby Road.
- 2.7 South Wigston is much smaller than either Wigston or Oadby in scale and provision. It seems to be suffering a lack of investment and is having to come to terms with the recently opened large Tesco supermarket sited on the edge of the centre.
- 2.8 Impetus and opportunity to change is provided by the move of South Leicestershire College from Wigston to a new site adjacent to the South Wigston Town Centre. This gained planning permission during November 2007. This will introduce substantial new footfall associated with the College, that presently only penetrates into South Wigston as far as the Tesco site.

Townscape and landscape analysis



- 2.9 There is a mix of uses within the Town Centre, with residential sitting adjacent to employment / industrial uses. Retail provision is arranged along Blaby Road, dominated by Victorian shops and offices with some modern infill. The east of the Town Centre is anchored by the new Tesco store, and to the west by St Thomas Church on the corner of Saffron Road, whose spire dominates the townscape. To the eastern end of the Town, the Blaby Road Park is an excellent resource. The Council is currently undertaking a Masterplan for Blaby Road Park, which will recommend future improvements for this key area within the Town. The Grand Union Canal is an element that appears under-exploited, being difficult to access and badly signposted from the retail core along Blaby Road.
- 2.10 There are a number of local landmarks within the Town Centre, including the South Wigston Methodist Church. The Art Deco cinema has now been converted to a bingo hall. There are two primary Gateways into the Town Centre both on Blaby Road, one at the intersection with Saffron Road and the other at the intersection with Bennett Way, other secondary gateways into South Wigston, which are Countesthorpe Road and Dorset Avenue leading to Saffron Lane. The sites close to these gateways are also important sites which provide first impressions of the Town Centre.

Access and movement



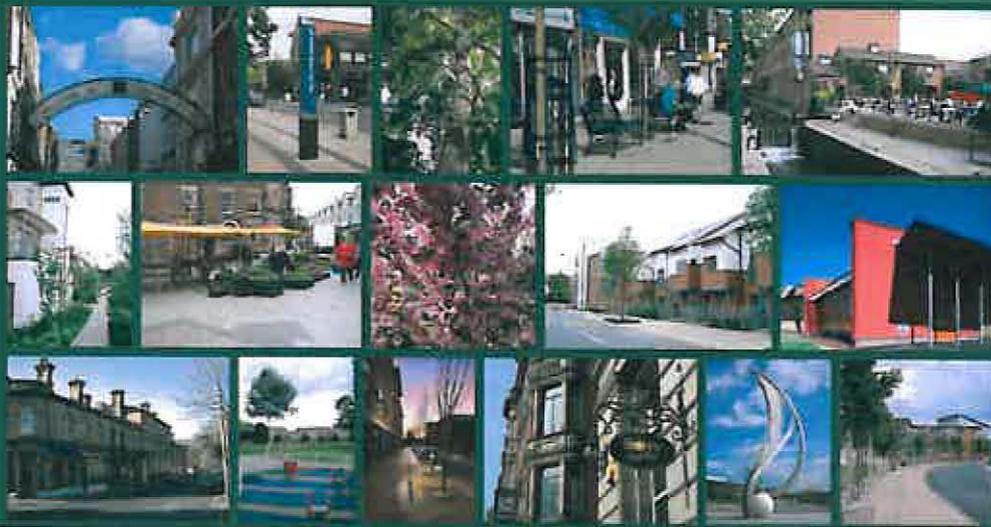
- 2.11 In strategic terms South Wigston is located south of Leicester and is neighboured by Wigston to the east and Blaby to the west. The B582 runs west to east through South Wigston from Blaby to Wigston, with the B5366 running south from Leicester and ending in South Wigston, where it meets the B582. The Town also benefits from a train station, with some trains running between Birmingham and Leicester stopping at South Wigston.
- 2.12 There are a number of car parks around South Wigston; the largest of which is the car park at the Tesco store, which appears to have substantial additional capacity available. The Kirkdale Road (train station car park) is also well used, but not well signposted. There is also on-street provision for short-stay (maximum 30 mins). Pedestrian movement is focused around Blaby Road, but there are few pedestrian circuits through the Town. There are minimal cycling facilities.

3. Vision and objectives

- 3.1 The following vision and objectives have guided the development of this masterplan. They have been informed by the baseline review, officer steering groups and visioning workshop with key stakeholders.

The Vision

A vibrant, safe, attractive, accessible and successful town centre with a distinct and sustainable role and a range of business, educational and community facilities and opportunities for local people. A town centre which makes the most of its countryside and canalside setting and heritage architectural strengths



Strategic Objectives

- **To establish a distinct and sustainable role for South Wigston, within the Borough and surrounding centres, making the most of its countryside and canalside setting**
- **To improve business, educational and community facilities and increase opportunities for local people**
- **To provide accessible, safe and pedestrian-friendly routes by all modes, to key destinations in and around the town centre**
- **Building on the town's current heritage architectural strengths, creating a vibrant, safe, attractive and successful town centre**

4. Options: Opportunity sites and assessment

Opportunity sites

- 4.1 Opportunities for development are limited since the townscape and grain is very tight and well used. However, the following potential opportunity sites have been identified:

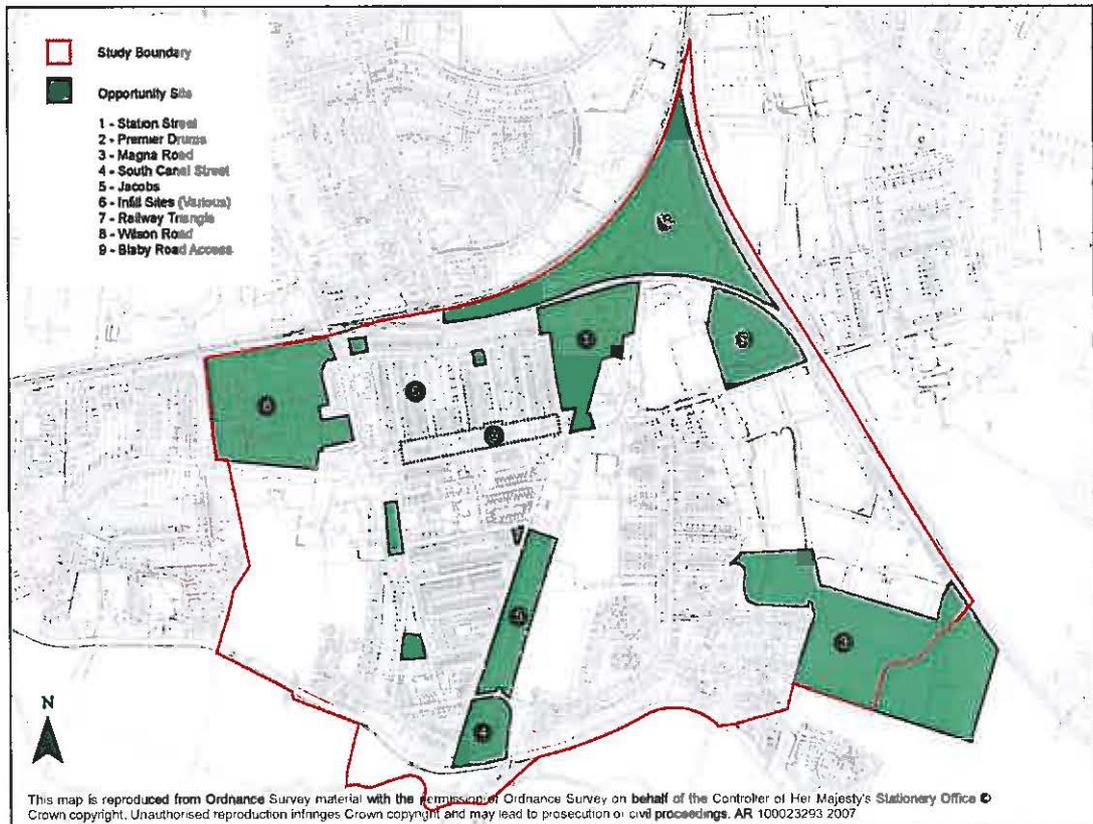


Figure 4.1: Opportunity sites (not to scale)

- **Site 1: Station Street** – predominantly occupied by Shoefayre and Arriva
- **Site 2: Premier Drums** – recently vacated by Premier Drums. Bookmart Limited occupy part of the site.
- **Site 3: Magna Road** – former landfill site, now underutilised land
- **Site 4: South Canal Street** – large site on canalside, various occupants
- **Site 5: Jacobs** – large site fronting Blaby Road Park, occupied by Jacobs
- **Site 6: Infill sites (various)** – a number of under-utilised sites
- **Site 7: Railway triangle** – large area between three live rail lines
- **Site 8: Wilson Road** – western gateway to the Town Centre, existing employment site
- **Site 9: Blaby Road access** – Blaby Road corridor

- 4.2 These sites will be taken forward and options for their future use and role explored and assessed.

Options generation and assessment

- 4.3 The options stage of the study involved the generation of a number of strategic approaches for the future of South Wigston Town Centre and site-based options for the opportunity sites identified in the previous section. The options process explored a wide range of options for the future of the Town Centre, not all of which would be supported by the Council or the current planning policy context. However, the options were explored in any event so as not to discount options prematurely. The options assessment process helped to identify those options that did or did not contribute to the study objectives and the vision for South Wigston.

Strategic options

- 4.4 The following section seeks to outline three potential strategic options for South Wigston Town Centre. They explore a number of approaches for the future strategy for the Town Centre. These are:

- Option 1: **Contraction** of the Town Centre
- Option 2: **Consolidation** and strengthened role of the Town Centre
- Option 3: **Major growth** of the Town Centre, particularly the retail function

Option 1: Contraction of the Town Centre

- 4.5 The option for contraction would involve a reduced role for South Wigston in the hierarchy of towns in the Borough, with its role more akin to a local centre, providing shops and services for the immediate and local population. This would see opportunity sites being redeveloped for primarily residential-led uses or community facilities to support local people. There would be little new retail development in the heart of the Town Centre or in its immediate surroundings.

Option 2: Consolidation and strengthened role

- 4.6 The option for consolidation would involve strengthening the role of South Wigston Town Centre, to provide a range of shops, services and facilities for its local catchment. The existing Town Centre offer would be strengthened through new development and investment. This option recognises and complies with the existing Town Centre hierarchy, where South Wigston would develop a specific role providing local facilities and functions for a local catchment. Rather than directly competing with Oadby and Wigston Town Centres it would complement the offer of these areas.
- 4.7 Town Centre uses would be focused in the Town Centre core, and the benefit of investment would be concentrated here to achieve maximum benefit. The Town Centre would not 'leak-out' to the edges. This would see opportunity sites within the Town developed for a range of retail, community and leisure uses. This would be supported by residential development at the edges (where appropriate) to add critical mass of local population and new / improved / maintained employment provision. The location of uses would need to contribute to achieving the overall vision for the area.

Option 3: Major growth of the Town, particularly the retail function

- 4.8 The option for growth would involve increased retail development within the Town, to provide a range of shops, services and facilities similar to that in Wigston and Oadby Town Centres. The existing Town Centre offer would be significantly increased through new retail-led and some leisure development and investment. This would see most opportunity sites redeveloped for retail-led development, with minimal additional residential or employment uses.

Site-based options

- 4.9 The strategic approaches for the South Wigston Town Centre clearly have an impact on the balance and location of particular land uses within the area.
- 4.10 The following section explores the site-based options for each opportunity site, within each strategic approach. Each option was then assessed against the strategic objectives and against deliverability and sustainability issues.
- 4.11 The baseline assessment identified the positive and negative features of the Town, and the objectives were developed with the aim of protecting and maximising the positives as well as overcoming the negatives.
- 4.12 To **assess** how well each site-based option met the objectives, the following types of questions were considered:
- **To establish a distinct and sustainable role** - How well does the option support South Wigston as a local centre? Will it attract people to the Town? Will it provide a different offer to other locations? Does the option lead to an improvement in range and quality of the retail / office / leisure offer in the Town? Does it maximise the use of local assets such as the canal and countryside setting? Does it make best use of a sustainable brownfield site?
 - **To improve business, educational and community facilities and increase opportunities for local people** - How well does the option benefit local people? Does it provide additional community and educational facilities? Does it increase availability of affordable housing? Are employment opportunities increased?
 - **To provide accessible, safe and pedestrian-friendly routes by all modes, to key destinations in and around the Town Centre** - Does the option help to achieve a safer Town Centre that is easier to understand and find your way around? Does it maximise the use of each sites accessibility in all senses of the word, not just by private vehicles?
 - **Building on the Town's current architectural strengths, creating a vibrant, safe, attractive and successful Town Centre** - does the option help to ensure that future development is of a high standard of design? Does the intervention increase safety in the Town Centre? Will it make people feel safer? Does it enhance sense of place? Does it improve the built fabric? Does it increase pedestrian priority?

- 4.13 An assessment of how well the options meet the objectives of the masterplan was completed for each option.
- 4.14 Reference should be made to Figure 4.2 for the assessment of site based options (at the end of this section). This provides a useful summary of the options assessment process. When assessing how well the options contribute to meeting the **strategic objectives**, the assessment is as follows:
- **Low** - the intervention contributes poorly to meeting the objective
 - **Medium** - the intervention part contributes to meeting the objective
 - **High** - the intervention fully meets the objective.
- 4.15 Other strands of the assessment consider the **deliverability** of the project, involving broad financial considerations, property demand and land ownership. This is an important element as the aim of this masterplan is to have ambitious, yet achievable outputs. On the options table (Figure 4.2), 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.
- 4.16 A broad assessment of the **sustainability** of the project is also undertaken. This is a key consideration for the assessment of projects. This includes not only environmental sustainability considerations, but also in terms of financial sustainability (e.g. revenue costs) and also supporting the sustainability of the Town Centre. On the options table (Figure 4.2), sustainability is assessed as:
- **Positive** - indicating good levels of sustainability could be achieved
 - **Neutral** - indicating the development would have neither a positive nor negative impact on sustainability
 - **Negative**, indicating that the development would have a detrimental impact on sustainability
 - **'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.
- 4.17 The options were **not mutually exclusive** i.e. not all site-based options needed to be from one of the strategic approaches (contraction / consolidation / growth). The final strategy for each of the 9 opportunity sites, has therefore incorporated primarily consolidation site-based options, but has also included elements from the contraction and growth for some sites, as they better delivered the masterplan objectives and overall vision for the future of South Wigston.

		Distinct Role	Local benefits	Accessible	Vibrant, safe, attractive & successful	Deliverability	Sustainability
1	Station Street						
1) Contraction	Residential	Medium	Medium	Low / Medium	Medium		Positive
2) Consolidation	Mixed use (residential-led)	Medium / High	Medium / High	Medium	Medium / High		Positive
3) Growth	Mixed use (retail, leisure, some residential)	Medium / High	Medium / High	Medium	Medium / High		Positive
2	Premier Drums						
1) Contraction	Residential	Medium	Medium / High	Medium	Medium		Positive
2) Consolidation	Employment-led mixed uses	Medium / High	Medium / High	Medium	Medium / High		Neutral
3) Growth	Edge-of-centre retail	Low / Medium	Medium	Low / Medium	Medium		Negative
3	Magna Road						
1) Contraction	Promotion and management as open space	Medium	Medium	Low / Medium	Medium		Positive
2) Consolidation	Employment uses	Medium	Medium / High	Medium	Medium / High		Positive / Uncertain
3) Growth	Out-of-centre retail	Low / Medium	Low / Medium	Low / Medium	Low / Medium		Negative
4	South Canal Street						
1) Contraction	Consolidation / Improvement of industrial	Low / Medium	Low / Medium	Low / Medium	Low / Medium		Neutral
2) Consolidation	Mixed use (leisure / community / residential)	High	Medium / High	Medium	Medium / High		Positive
3) Growth	Redevelop for new employment uses	Medium	Medium / High	Medium	Medium		Negative / Neutral
5	Jacobs						
1) Contraction	Environmental improvements to buildings and servicing	Low / Medium	Low / Medium	Low / Medium	Low / Medium		Neutral
2) Consolidation	Improve / partially/wholly redeveloped for employment uses	Medium	Medium / High	Medium	Medium		Positive
3) Growth	Residential, decanting Jacobs to larger site	Medium / High	Medium / High	Medium	Medium / High		Positive / Uncertain
6	Infill sites (various)						
1) Contraction	Environmental improvement	Low / Medium	Medium	Low / Medium	Low / Medium		Positive
2) Consolidation	Residential	Medium	Medium / High	Medium	Medium / High		Positive
3) Growth	Retail / non-residential uses	Medium	Medium / High	Medium	Medium / High		Positive / Uncertain
7	Railway triangle						
1) Contraction	Environmental improvement / art project	Medium / High	Low / Medium	Low	Medium		Positive
2) Consolidation	Infill employment development	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium		Negative
3) Growth	Retail	Medium	Low / Medium	Low	Medium		Negative
8	Wilson Road						
1) Contraction	Environmental improvement	Low / Medium	Low / Medium	Low / Medium	Low / Medium		Positive
2) Consolidation	Infill employment development	Medium	Medium / High	Medium	Medium		Positive
3) Growth	Residential	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium		Negative
9	Blaby Road access						
1) Contraction	No change	Low / Medium	Low	Low	Low		Neutral
2) Consolidation	Improved access to the front of retail units and to the rear of units where rear access already exists	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium		Positive
3) Growth	New rear access provided which would involve some land assembly	Medium / High	Medium	Medium / High	Medium		Positive

Figure 4.2 Options Assessment Summary Table

5. The Way Forward

- 5.1 The vision and strategy for the future of South Wigston as set out below, has been developed and informed by an understanding of the place through baseline analysis and understanding aspirations for the future through current policy, the officers' steering group and the visioning and options workshop.

Vision

- 5.2 The vision and objectives for the masterplan have been outlined in Section 3. They have informed the following strategy for moving forward.
- 5.3 The Vision is:

A vibrant, safe, attractive, accessible and successful town centre with a distinct and sustainable role and a range of business, educational and community facilities and opportunities for local people. A town centre which makes the most of its countryside and canalside setting and heritage architectural strengths.

Strategy

- 5.4 The strategy for the future of South Wigston is to strengthen the offer by refocusing the Town through consolidation:
- The role of South Wigston Town Centre would be strengthened to provide a range of shops, services and facilities for its local catchment.
 - The existing Town Centre offer would be strengthened through limited new retail, residential and employment development and investment.
 - New residential development would also increase the local catchment and activate the Town for longer periods of time through the day and night.
 - The Town will also benefit from good accessibility, with well integrated public transport services, particularly the train station.
- 5.5 This strategy complements the existing Town Centre hierarchy, where South Wigston would develop a specific role providing local facilities and functions for a local catchment. Rather than directly competing with Oadby and Wigston Town Centres, it would complement the offer of these areas.

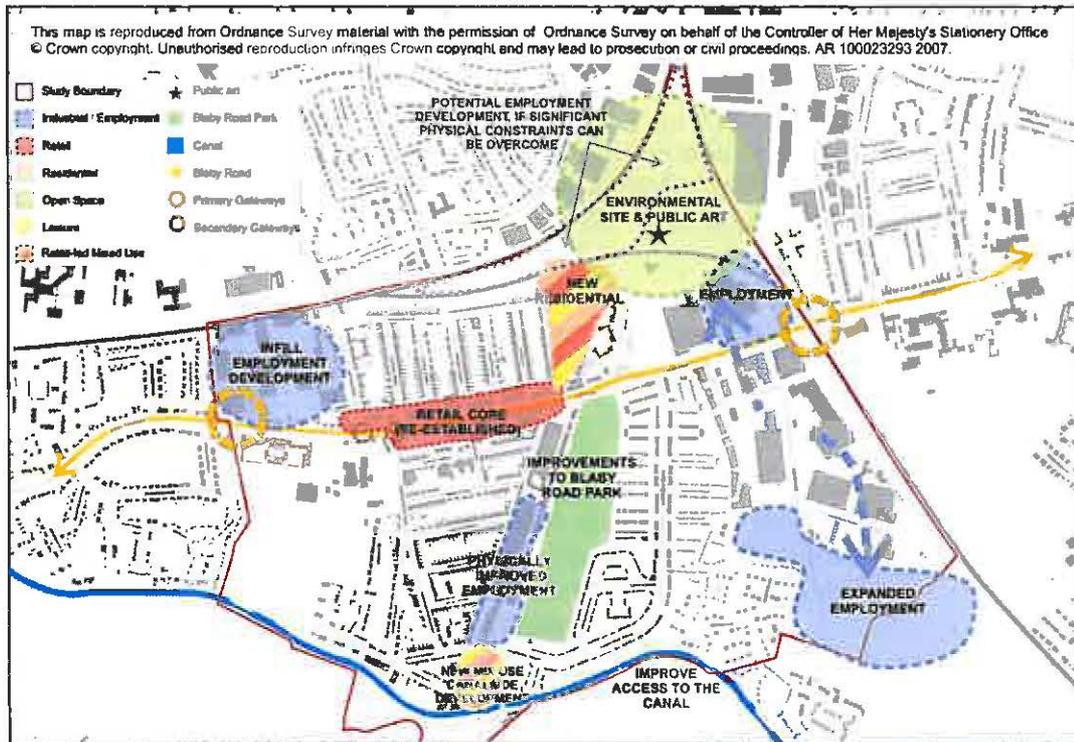


Figure 5.1: Strategy for the future of South Wigston (not to scale)

- 5.6 Town Centre uses should be focused in the Town Centre core, and the benefit of investment would be concentrated here to achieve maximum benefit. The Town Centre should not 'leak-out' to the edges. This will see opportunity sites within the Town developed for a range of retail, community and leisure uses. This would be supported by residential development at the edges (where appropriate) to add critical mass of local population and new / improved / maintained employment provision. The location of uses would need to contribute to achieving the overall vision for the area.
- 5.7 This strategy will help to ensure that South Wigston complements and does not compete with other towns in the Borough. Given that the towns of Oadby and Wigston are larger than South Wigston, it is important that the Town has something different to offer which will help to encourage people to visit one or the other for a specific purpose, as opposed to having to choose between the three.
- 5.8 The regenerative impact of the proposed development areas could be very significant. To enable the various proposed developments, as well as any other development proposals, to come forward and be negotiated and determined in an appropriate manner, it requires a strong planning policy framework with appropriate supplementary guidance.
- 5.9 This strategy seeks to positively contribute to the current policy context. In particular, it meets many objectives of the Council's Sustainable Communities Plan updated 2008, by aiming to improve the physical environment, facilitate the use of public transport to reduce reliance on the car, improve health and

reduce congestion, enhance leisure opportunities and create a safe and secure place in which to live, work and shop. It also seeks to secure employment opportunities in the town. This masterplan also progresses the previous study completed in 2003, which is also supported by the Sustainable Communities Plan.

- 5.10 This Masterplan for South Wigston also contributes to the objectives of the emerging Core Strategy, as follows:
- 5.11 **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.
- 5.12 **SO2 – Concentrate new development on previously developed land and encourage medium to high density land use of suitable sites across the Borough.** The Masterplan promotes development on previously developed land and indeed focuses higher density development into the Town Centre.
- 5.13 **SO3 - Promote and implement sustainable high quality design and preserve local aesthetic character.** The masterplan seeks to enhance the vitality and viability of the Town Centre, protecting buildings of architectural merit, particularly within the conservation area. The design framework will also guide future development quality in the Town Centre, and indeed support the use of high quality design in development proposals.
- 5.14 **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.
- 5.15 **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. Additionally, the introduction of a wider mix of uses in the Town Centre will assist in improving access to these facilities for the community. Improving access to and use of the town's railway station is also key.
- 5.16 **SO7 – Support the role of town centres by developing strategies for regeneration, investment and growth.** The masterplan itself helps in achieving this objective.
- 5.17 **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. The parallel work being undertaken at Blaby Road Park will also help to achieve this objective.

5.18 The emerging policies and proposals of the Masterplan 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 Masterplan 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 and health facilities in the centre.

Development opportunity sites

5.19 The options process set out options for each of the key sites within the Town. They include:

- Site 1: Station Street
- Site 2: Premier Drum
- Site 3: Magna Road
- Site 4: South Canal Street
- Site 5: Jacobs
- Site 6: Infill (sites)
- Site 7: Railway triangle
- Site 8: Wilson Road
- Site 9: Blaby Road access

5.20 Through their assessment as set out in the "Baseline and Options for the Future" report and informed by the visioning workshop, the preferred way forward for each site is detailed below, along with reasoning for not selecting other identified options. This should be considered alongside the overarching frameworks for transport, property and design.

Site 1: Station Street

5.21 The Station Street site is considered to have an important role to play in the future of the Town Centre, providing an opportunity to redevelop the site for residential-led mixed uses. This would enable the south of the site to be redeveloped for retail with residential and/or community uses to the rear. To ensure that the retail element reinforces the vitality of the Town Centre, retail uses would be restricted to the Blaby Road frontage area. The new retail development would complement the new College use opposite and relate extremely well to the existing retail provision on Blaby Road.

5.22 Redeveloping the whole site for retail or residential has not been pursued at this stage. It is considered that this is a key development site adjacent to the town centre boundary. However, if it was developed wholly for residential development, the opportunity for additional retail facilities in this location would