

Wigston Town Centre Area Action Plan

Issues and Options Report

June 2007

Document: 3496/options

Compiled By: MW/PW

Reviewed By: RG

Date: June 2007



EMS 75854



FS 00920



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Taylor Young
Chadsworth House
Wilmslow Road
Handforth
Cheshire SK9 3HP

Tel: 01625 542 200

Fax: 01625 542 250

Email: mailroom@tayloryoung.co.uk

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	15

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 Wigston. 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 Oadby 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 as well as more strategic stakeholders. Letters and representations to the Council, in addition to planning application 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 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 blue 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*
- *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. **Socio-Economic analysis** shows a lower than average proportion of residents falling within social grades AB, and educational attainment slightly below to Borough average.

Property analysis

- 2.5. Wigston has a niche role as a district centre, providing convenience goods, services and local comparison shopping. The town is not in direct competition with the city centre although the development of Fosse Park does seem to be impacting on the town's capacity to develop its comparison offer.
- 2.6. The town has a healthy number of national multiples, and has notably more than the competing centre of Oadby. Wigston also has a high number of independent shops. The town centre is clearly an important provider of local services – with banks, solicitors, and especially estate agents in plentiful numbers.
- 2.7. There is limited investment transaction evidence and there are only two retail properties currently on the market. This is a reflection of Wigston's role as a district centre, with most significant retail interest being drawn to Leicester city centre and considerable competition for the remaining investment from Oadby and Fosse Park.
- 2.8. The town centre has very little office accommodation, which can be seen to be a problem with regard to having a competitive edge with Oadby, which has a substantial amount of office accommodation within its town centre boundary.

- 2.9. There are several leisure facilities in the town, including two health and fitness clubs and a snooker club. Public and community facilities are plentiful with two community halls as well as the Borough's main public library. The town centre allotments are also a very popular community asset.
- 2.10. The town centre includes significant areas of residential property, mostly in the form of terraced houses. Prices are below the national average, but the market is seen as buoyant with high demand.

Townscape and Landscape

- 2.11. Wigston still retains some of its village characteristics with a mixture of uses, preserving the appearance of its organic growth. This is centred on the oldest remaining part of Wigston around The Lanes and stretches to the more recent development of the retail developments at the top of Leicester Road.
- 2.12. The public realm in terms of quality, performance, functionality / features and appearance is generally poor (with the exception of Peace Memorial Park). It reflects the overall character of the town, i.e. a fragmented local shopping centre with a shopping street at its heart.
- 2.13. There are pockets of low quality housing within the study area where comprehensive redevelopment would deliver more appropriate town centre uses.

Access and Movement

- 2.14. The town suffers from congestion, partially as a result of its traffic circulation patterns, but also because of the number and distribution of car parking spaces. This in turn has a detrimental impact on the pedestrian environment.
- 2.15. Whilst the town benefits from good bus links, the infrastructure is in poor condition, potentially making public transport a less attractive choice for visitors to the town.

Character areas and opportunity sites

- 2.16. 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.
- 2.17. 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

2.18. 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 Wigston*
- *To encourage the growth of economic and social benefits for local people*
- *To improve and diversify the town centre offer*
- *To provide a safe and legible town centre*
- *To achieve an attractive and accessible place to shop, live and work*
- *To ensure that Wigston reflects high quality and inspirational design*

2.19. *Do you think these objectives are correct? What alternative do you propose?*

Workshop Feedback

- 2.20. 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 Wigston, Oadby, or both towns. Key outcomes of the workshop in relation to Wigston are summarised below –
- **Positive attributes** – The Lanes and the historic environment including a number of key buildings and the two spires, Peace Memorial Park
 - **Negative attributes** – traffic flow patterns, range and quality of retail provision, poor architecture, lack of social space, poor pedestrianisation scheme at Bell Street, negative frontage onto Bull Head Street
 - **Opportunities** – identification of key gateways into the town, town branding, tree planting / boulevard approach on Bull Head Street, redevelopment north of Paddock Street, potential of the Lanes
 - **Priorities** – redevelopment of the arcade with high quality shops, gateways, redevelopment including improved / extended pedestrianisation at Bell Street, improved legibility and permeability including the Lanes.
 - **Future role** – strong sense of identity, vibrant centre to help attract people in to the town.
- 2.21. More strategic issues that are relevant to Wigston are summarised below –
- Perceived distinction between Wigston and Oadby – 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:

- o Area / site based interventions including public realm; and
- o 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 Wigston

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 Wigston 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 improve and diversify the town centre offer** (Does the option lead to an improvement in range and quality of the retail / office / leisure offer in the town?)
 - **To provide and safe and legible town centre?** (Does the option help to achieve a safer town centre that is easier to understand and find your ways around?)
 - **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 ensure that Wigston reflects high quality and inspirational design** (Does the option help to ensure that future development is of a high standard of design?)
- 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 positive issues identified through baseline research in Wigston has been the town's heritage – options being put forward include the improvements to the Lanes, and building improvements through various schemes throughout the town and particularly within the Conservation Area.
- 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 options. This includes not only environmental sustainability considerations, but also those of financial sustainability (e.g. revenue costs) and which also 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.
- 4.4. ***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

Highways

- 4.5. Options to reduce the existing congestion on Leicester Road should be considered. An enhanced pedestrian environment would greatly benefit the shopping area. Signage could assist with separating through traffic from town centre traffic and provide greater assistance for drivers to find a car park. This could be supported by a traffic management scheme on Leicester Road, to help enforce the existing 20mph speed limit. Pedestrian buildouts, and possibly raised tables on entry to the 20mph restriction, would slow vehicle speeds and assist shoppers cross between shops. A new east/west link is a high level intervention option that would take through traffic away from the main shopping area. An extra north/south link would also provide direct access to car parks, keeping vehicles away from the main shopping area and also providing enhanced gateways into Wigston. If these new link roads were established, the one-way system westbound on Paddock Street could be reconsidered.
- 4.6. The priority at the junction of Leicester Road with Wakes Road is currently north/south for continuation along Leicester Road. Continuing north along Leicester Road leads to a dead end and the majority of traffic has to turn right onto Wakes Road to reach the local highway network. Changing the priority at this junction would naturally lead vehicles to the highway network.

Public Transport

- 4.7. The level of bus services in Wigston is generally good with two routes running services every 10 minutes and two more every 20 minutes. A bus interchange facility would be beneficial to Wigston, a possible location being along a proposed new north/south link road between Paddock Street and Bell Street. Increase in some services would be beneficial, especially the 45 Centrebus service that provides a local link to Oadby.
- 4.8. The high-tech 'Star Trak' bus information system is used in Wigston, however the condition of shelters on these routes is very poor in comparison. Introduction of consistent facilities at bus stops should be considered.

Parking

- 4.9. Car parking is an issue in Wigston due to the number of small car parks dotted around the centre. These are all generally well used indicating that the number of spaces should be retained. Consolidation of parking should be focused close to the shopping core with easy access from the new link roads and strong pedestrian links to the shopping area.
- 4.10. The current variety of coloured parking spaces is confusing for visitors, this colour system could be amended to a more conventional short stay and long stay arrangement. Parking charges could also be considered.

Walking & Cycling

- 4.11. Extension of the pedestrianised area along Bell Street would be beneficial. This would create stronger linkages to the shopping area of Leicester Road.
- 4.12. The new link roads assist the opportunity for pedestrian circuits along new shopping fronts. Enhanced pedestrian linkage to the well-used allotments would be beneficial as well as improved links across the A5199 to the residential area.
- 4.13. Consideration should be given to enhancing the existing cycle facilities in Wigston. Creation of a local cycle network would link the surrounding residential areas to the town centre and encourage more people to cycle.

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.

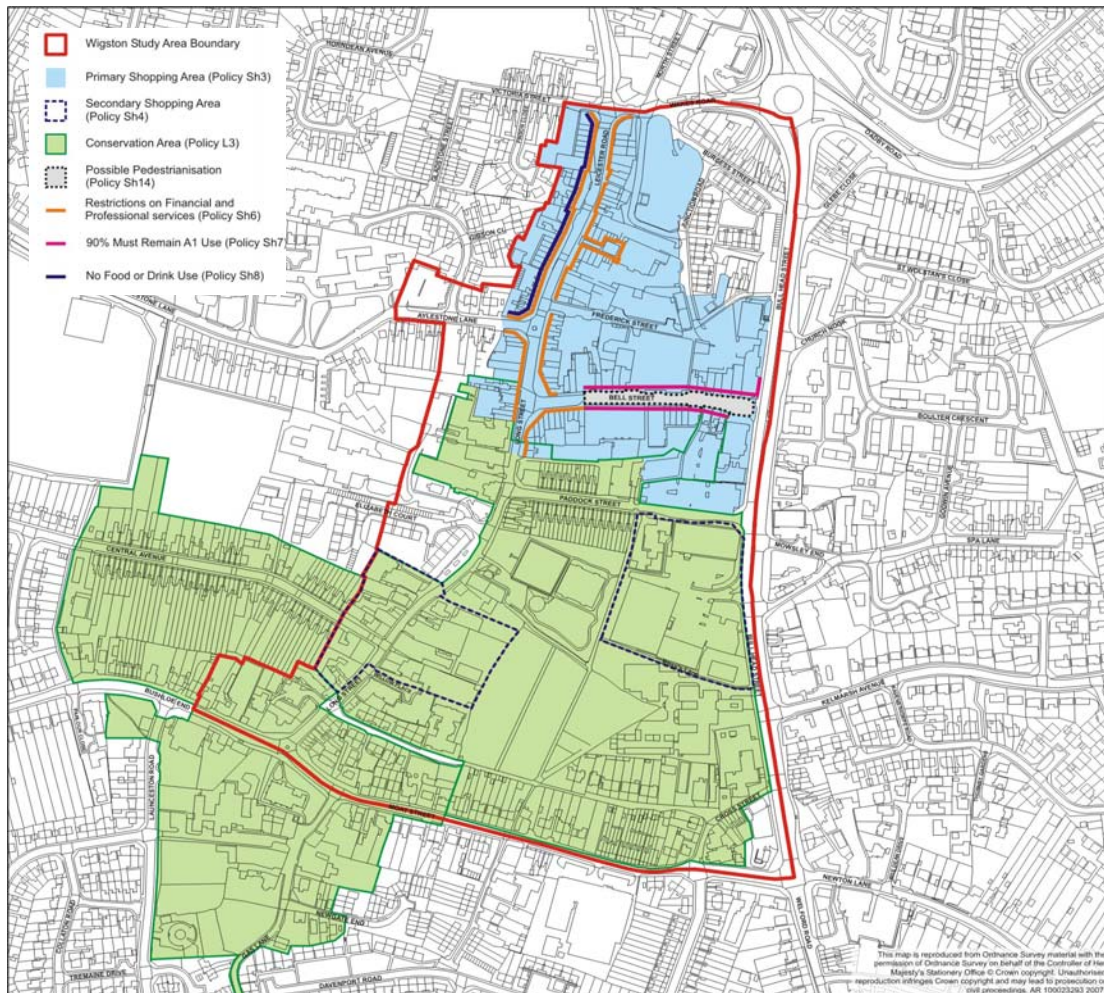


Figure 5.1 Local Plan Policy (NTS)

- 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?*

5.7. *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 Wigston 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 Wigston 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.