

## 3.0 Our Vision and Strategic Objectives

- 3.1** Wycombe District is ambitious and hopeful about the future. The Sustainable Community Strategy for Wycombe District<sup>19</sup> sets out the following vision, which also applies to this Plan and the Council’s Corporate Plan:

Vision for Wycombe District

“Wycombe District: economically strong and the place to live work and visit.”

- 3.2** The Sustainable Community Strategy sets out our ambitions for the different places in the District and in addition to the economic vision includes the following themes:

- Sustainable Environment
- Safe Communities
- Health and Wellbeing
- Community Involvement

- 3.3** This Plan develops those ambitions both for the District as a whole and for the different places in the District.

- 3.4** We have identified eight district-wide strategic objectives and our ambitions to achieve those objectives. In addition principles are identified for the main places in the District, which show how the district-wide objectives would be implemented locally. These are set out in Section 5 of the Plan.

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<sup>19</sup> Sustainable Community Strategy for Wycombe District 2013 – 2031 (July 2014, The Wycombe Partnership)

**3.5** The eight strategic objectives are to:

1. Cherish the Chilterns
2. Strengthen the Sense of Place
3. Foster economic growth
4. Improve strategic connectivity
5. Facilitate local infrastructure
6. Deliver housing
7. Champion town centres
8. Mitigate Climate Change

**3.6** Under each of these objectives are a number of themes and an outline of what we want to achieve under each objective. Collectively these objectives and themes, together with the core planning principles sets out in the National Planning Policy Framework<sup>20</sup>, add up to delivering the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable development for the District.

## **1. Cherish the Chilterns**

*Cherish the Chilterns by conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape of the Chilterns Hills.*

**3.7** The Chilterns is a landscape of national and international importance, and includes a complex suite of geological and ecological features, some of which are extremely rare. Over a quarter of the Chiltern's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is within Wycombe District so we hold a significant responsibility to cherish it. Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape of the AONB is, therefore, central to the strategy of the Local Plan. Millions of people visit the AONB each year and residents of Wycombe District also benefit from its recreational opportunities. The appropriate management and conservation of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in a holistic and integrated way is therefore also very important. However, the Chiltern Hills extend beyond the AONB – and the hills exert an influence over the landscape of the Aylesbury Plain as well.

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<sup>20</sup> National Planning Policy Framework (2012) paragraph 17

This objective is not ‘just’ about that part of the hills that is designated: it is about valuing the heritage and influence of the hills throughout the District, and looking as much to enhance areas of poorer quality as it is to maintain the areas of outstanding quality.

## 2. Strengthen the Sense of Place

*Strengthen the sense of place throughout Wycombe District by:*

- *protecting and enhancing the District’s natural and built environment, including landscape, biodiversity, green and blue infrastructure, historic and cultural assets;*
- *maintaining place identity by using Green Belt to keep main settlements separate;*
- *securing high quality, bespoke responses in the design of new development*

**3.8** The sense of place of the District derives from the Chiltern Hills, both inside and outside the area designated as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty through its unique landform, distinctive woodland cover, rare chalk grasslands and streams, architecture and rich historic environment. In addition, the network of woods, chalk grasslands, green links and waterways that extends into the urban areas provides vital green and blue infrastructure that nurtures biodiversity and promotes mental and physical wellbeing. The Green Belt has proved an effective tool in helping to maintain place identity. Development within the District must take that sense of place as its starting point, providing bespoke quality responses for each place, to achieve sustainable development.

## 3. Foster economic growth

*Foster the economic strength of the M40/A404 location and that of the rural economy.*

**3.9** The location of the District at the M40/A404 and on the Birmingham Chiltern line is favourable for economic development. However, our challenging topography means that we have a very limited supply of flat land for commercial development that is also outside the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and does not adversely affect its setting. This, combined with difficult

market conditions in some sectors, means we need to work hard to ensure existing employment sites remain attractive so existing businesses can thrive and new businesses can start up, at the same time harnessing the links with Bucks New University and Bucks Business First. Helping High Wycombe to become an established office location on the fringe of the Thames Valley and London is also an important part of the employment strategy. For larger scale inward investment and growth of local firms there is a limited greenfield release together with new sites at Princes Risborough to complement housing growth. In our rural areas, we will encourage farm diversification and the establishment of rural business centres that will foster the social and economic well-being of the communities in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

#### **4. Improve strategic connectivity**

*Improve strategic transport connectivity within Buckinghamshire by road and rail; this includes strategic connectivity between the South East Midlands, Aylesbury, Princes Risborough, High Wycombe, London as well as the Thames Valley.*

- 3.10** At the junction of the M40 and A404, the District has a unique location, a short distance from the M25 and central London, and with the A404 providing access to the M4 and Thames Valley. Improvements are needed to this connectivity to ensure it remains a strength to the District. Strategic road connections north through Buckinghamshire to Aylesbury and the South East Midlands are currently weak, significant improvements are needed. Work is being progressed by the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) on the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway which could provide a strategic connection from Aylesbury to the M40 via an upgrade of the A418, or via a new road alignment. This new strategic route could provide an option for north south connectivity by road that minimises undue unacceptable damage in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 3.11** Rail connectivity between Aylesbury, Princes Risborough and High Wycombe will be strengthened by the implementation of East West Rail as well as the safeguarding of land for dual tracking of the Princes Risborough to Aylesbury line.

- 3.12** However, connections to the South East Midlands are needed both in terms of improving passenger and freight between Old Oak Common and Milton Keynes/Northants. Further investment will be needed for East West Rail to achieve additional capacity through twin tracking through Buckinghamshire, to maximise opportunities for north-south connectivity especially between the two main urban centres, Aylesbury and High Wycombe.
- 3.13** By contrast, the rail connections to the Thames Valley are weak, with only Bourne End and Marlow having direct access to Crossrail. Explorations of closing the strategic rail gap from High Wycombe to Bourne End need to be made, thereby connecting East West Rail with Crossrail. In the context of Heathrow expansion, this gains a wider significance.
- 3.14** Working closely with the County Council and the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership we need to continue to improve connectivity to the Thames Valley and to the South East Midlands, and more locally between the two main towns of the County, Aylesbury and High Wycombe, if we are to continue to get the most economic, environmental and social benefit from the geographical position of the District within the County, M40 growth corridor and Oxford to Cambridge growth corridor.

## **5. Facilitate local infrastructure**

*Facilitate timely improvements to local infrastructure by focused investment and by securing appropriate benefits from new development.*

- 3.15** Development places new demands on existing infrastructure, but also brings with it opportunities for investment. At Princes Risborough, development has been clustered together to maximise the infrastructure benefits to the town as a whole. Elsewhere, plan policies specify the infrastructure required, to ensure it maximises the potential improvement for existing residents, and Community Infrastructure Levy will be used in a targeted way to maximise the benefits, working with the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership. Where infrastructure that is essential for social and economic wellbeing cannot be accommodated within existing settlements, it must be implemented in a way that wherever possible conserves or enhances the natural beauty of the landscape.

## 6. Deliver housing

*Contribute our fair share towards tackling the need for more housing including for affordable housing and other specific housing needs of the community, including catering for a growing aging population.*

- 3.16** With high housing demand, over 70% Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, nearly 50% Green Belt, and limited local infrastructure, Wycombe is a constrained district. The Plan seeks to optimise the amount of housing, both market and affordable, that is provided in the District within these constraints, and ensure that the needs of specific groups are also addressed – that is what we mean by “fair share”.

## 7. Champion town centres

*Champion thriving town and business centres to provide the focus of our social and economic activity*

- 3.17** The centres of our towns and larger villages provide vital services and leisure opportunities, often in ways that facilitates access by public transport. The M40 “gateway” area into High Wycombe has also become a vibrant mixed business and retail area, extending the offer of the District as a whole in a way that does not undermine the town centre. We see the environmental quality of these centres as critical to their success. Enhancing them to strengthen their economic attractiveness as well as making them pleasant, people friendly places to visit, is vital to their long term future.<sup>21</sup>

## 8. Mitigate Climate Change

*Reduce CO2 emissions by reducing the need for travel by private car, and aid public transport viability, through intensifying existing urban areas by re-use of brownfield sites, locating development in settlements with the widest range of services and facilities, and by clustering development to achieve high quality walking, cycling and public transport provision.*

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<sup>21</sup> Detailed policies on High Wycombe, and Marlow town centres are contained in the Delivery and Site Allocations (DSA) Plan adopted in July 2013. Policies for Princes Risborough will be found in the DSA, and the Princes Risborough chapter of this Plan document.

- 3.18** We plan to focus housing and economic development in High Wycombe, which has the widest range of local services and an improving bus services, to limit dependence on the private car for day to day activities. Of the homes we plan to deliver around 50% will be on brownfield sites, and our economic strategy seeks to both regenerate existing employment areas whilst providing some new sites. Consolidating housing and additional economic development at Princes Risborough will allow the provision of critical infrastructure that will benefit the town as a whole. Small amounts of development that are sensitive to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the larger villages together with rural exceptions schemes will help to foster the social and well-being of those communities.