

# **PRINCES RISBOROUGH ACTION PLAN**

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## INTRODUCTION

This document has been written by Action for Market Towns (AMT) and Retail Revival (RR) and commissioned by Princes Risborough Town Council (PRTC).

In the past decade a number of studies and research reports have identified the needs of Princes Risborough and the surrounding area. PRTC valued the information in these reports but wanted to distil it into a single action plan to share with the community. It is intended that this report will be circulated to community leaders for their endorsement before being launched at a public event in 2011.

The objectives of this document are:

- To provide a snapshot of the town
- To review and distil the key findings of existing studies and research reports
- To list actions, short to long term, prioritised in order of need
- To list potential stakeholders essential for the delivery of the action plan, including funding organisations, policy making bodies and local groups

## METHODOLOGY

The secondary data review has been augmented by some primary research in the form of the Town Benchmarking System and the use of NOMIS statistics. Town Benchmarking is a process which gathers information on 12 Town Centre Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), through visual surveys and data collection from key stakeholders.

The following studies and reports have informed this report:

- Market Towns Initiative Health Check and Action Plan, 2005
- The Risboroughs 2035, David Lock Associates and Integrated Transport
- Princes Risborough Community Bus Business Plan
- Local Area Transport Plan, Wycombe District Council
- Princes Risborough Local Community Area Profile
- Princes Risborough Parish Plan Document 2004
- Acorn Princes Risborough Visitor Development Plan

- Princes Risborough Project Visitor SEEDA Rural Towns Programme Bid- Draft September 2006
- Assessment of the potential for a new hotel in Princes Risborough, *Tourism Solutions* September 2006
- Delivering the Strategy for Wycombe, Wycombe District Council, June 2009
- Introduction of One-Way System Feasibility Report, Jacobs, March 2007
- The Risboroughs Ward Fact File 34, Wycombe District Council, August 2003
- Statistics about the Risboroughs, Office of National Statistics
- Princes Risborough Historic Town Assessment Report Consultation Draft, Wycombe District Council, March 2009
- Maybe the Future: Princes Risborough Discussion Document, RACA

### SNAPSHOT OF PRINCES RISBOROUGH

- **A strong catchment area:** the Princes Risborough Local Community Area has a population of over 25,000 in 9,800 households. 7,978 live in the town itself in 3,352 households.
- **Well positioned:** 9 Miles from the M40, based on the busy A4010 between Aylesbury and Wycombe. Part of the main Chiltern Rail route between London (49 minutes) and Birmingham (1 hour 40 mins).
- **An expensive location:** the average price of a two bed roomed property in Princes Risborough post code is £270, 381 much higher than the national average of 187,894
- **A wealthy population:** almost half of Princes Risboroughs' households are classified by ACORN as 'wealthy executives' (48%), well above the Buckinghamshire average of 29%.
- **An educated population:** 28% of the population is qualified to a degree level, with 74% of pupils achieving 5 or more A\*-C grade GCSE's.
- **A professional population:** 33.9% are in Managerial, Senior Officer and Professional occupations, which is higher than the national average of 26.1%.
- **An experienced population:** the average age of those in The Risboroughs' Ward is 43, higher than the national average of 38. 28.3% of residents are aged over 60, compared to 20.9% nationally.
- **A mobile population:** 90% of households own one or more cars.

## KEY FINDINGS

### **TOURISM**

*“Much more could be made of tourism and encouragement of visitors to the town and surrounding areas. There is no obvious cohesive and comprehensive tourism development strategy for the town and surrounding area. Much more could be made of the town’s historic heritage and there is scope to develop and promote the existing town trail and signage.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“Develop a coherent and cohesive tourist strategy involving the local community.”<sup>2</sup>*

*“There is little in the way of an integrated and cohesive tourism strategy for the Risborough area.”<sup>3</sup>*

A large amount of the secondary data reviewed refers to the need to enhance the tourism offer to increase the vitality of Princes Risborough. A Princes Risborough tourism strategy would ensure that resources and opportunities were maximised. The issue of tourism also overlaps with other regeneration activities such as improving the town centre offering, youth provision and accommodation.

A report by specialists ACORN in their Tourism Development Plan identified following current and potential visitor markets to Princes Risborough;

- residents of the Chilterns AONB and the surrounding counties
- visitors staying with friends and relatives
- adult repeat visitors
- day visitors

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<sup>1</sup> The Countryside Agency’s Market Towns Initiative Health Check and Action Plan, p7

<sup>2</sup> 2004 Princes Risborough Parish Plan Document, p2

<sup>3</sup> Princes Risborough Project Visitor Seeda Rural Towns Programme Bid- Draft September 2006, p1

Key attractors and areas of interest include:

- Kop Hill Climb Event
- Walking and cycling routes (over 50% of the Princes Risborough ward is in an AONB and green belt land)
- The Princes Risborough Steam Railway bringing an estimated 2500 visitors on an operational weekend
- A Historic Core with 49 listed buildings in the town centre, with the earliest structure the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Church.
- 89 listed buildings and 6 Conservation Areas within the wider Ward area.
- The Roald Dahl Museum in Missenden
- Whiteleaf Cross
- Chequers
- The Red Kite and other wildlife
- West Wycombe Caves and Park in Dashwoods

To achieve a steady increase in visitor numbers the town needs to provide a cohesive offer tailored to meet the needs of visitors using the Chilterns AONB. A weekend economy, where local shops and services remain open on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, is a necessary base for increased tourism.

### Accommodation

*“Both Hypnos and Ercol operate regular training programmes that bring significant numbers of people into the area on weekdays, but when they stay overnight they have to be accommodated out of the town.”<sup>4</sup>*

Accommodation in the town needs to be improved to take advantage of an increased tourist economy and to capture business visitors; a point reinforced in the ‘Assessment of the potential for a new hotel in Princes Risborough’ carried out by Tourism Solutions in September 2006

*‘Our research shows some shortages of hotel accommodation in the Princes Risborough area during the week, evidenced both in terms of business that the existing hotels are denying and difficulties that local companies sometimes have in obtaining the hotel accommodation that they require in the area’.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p32

<sup>5</sup> Assessment of the potential for a new hotel in Princes Risborough, *Tourism Solutions* September 2006

Pubs in the town and surrounding area should look to extend existing/ develop visitor accommodation to cater for the Walker/ Cyclist and Employer market, especially as Tourism Solutions highlighted that Planning Authorities looked favourably upon such requests.

## Food and Drink

*“A lack of local promotion of the potential in the town among suitable entrepreneurs and among likely users.”<sup>6</sup>*

The Risboroughs 2035 highlighted that the town has too few places for refreshments to serve residents, working populations and visitors.

*“The Chilterns attracts significant numbers of weekend and holiday visitors..... all complain about the lack of places for a cup of tea or a meal. This contrasts strongly with competing centres where the choice is much wider.”<sup>7</sup>*

*“Princes Risborough is poorly served by pubs, cafés and restaurants.”<sup>8</sup>*

If Princes Risborough is to attract Walkers and Cyclists into the town at weekends, it is essential that visitors can stop to eat and drink. Existing local pubs, restaurants and cafes need to ensure that they are catering for the needs of this target market.

In terms of establishing more Food and Drink establishments, this could be possible as the ‘Delivering the Strategy for Wycombe’ document outlines that Wycombe District Council will allow developments to Secondary Shopping frontages which do not result in a net loss of Class A use class floor space or result in more than 40% of frontages being in non A1 use.<sup>9</sup>

## Branding

The marquees at the weekly market are currently branded ‘Princes Risborough: Fit for a Prince’, whilst the Market Towns Initiative Health Check illustrated that the town in 2025 needed to be marketed, “along the lines of being the Western Gateway to the Chilterns by adopting a logo and slogan”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p32

<sup>7</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p32

<sup>8</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p17

<sup>9</sup> Wycombe District Council, Delivering the Strategy, June 2009, p130

<sup>10</sup> The Countryside Agency’s Market Towns Initiative Health Check and Action Plan, p9

Well thought out branding is essential to the success of any tourism strategy, so a decision needs to be made in terms of how Princes Risborough will market itself for the future. The branding should be agreed by all key stakeholders in the town.

## **Heritage and Tourist Information**

*“despite the usual growth of modern development around the town’s periphery, Princes Risborough has retained its image as an historic market town.”<sup>11</sup>*

Heritage plays an important part in any tourism strategy, a point which was outlined in both the 2004 Parish Plan Document and the Market Towns Initiative Health Check. The former cited the need for the development of a Heritage Centre alongside the deployment of Heritage Plaques throughout the town, whilst the latter noted the creation of “a small museum, celebrating the town’s unique and rich heritage placed close to the Whiteleaf Cross”.<sup>12</sup>

The production of a Visitor DVD/CD was mentioned in both the 2004 Parish Plan Document and the 2006 Princes Risborough Project Visitor SEEDA Rural Towns Programme Bid. An electronic heritage trail is an excellent starting point in attracting potential customers; it could be made available in hard copy at the Library, Information Centre and selected shops as well as being downloadable on local websites. For Cyclists, Walkers and those interested in local Heritage, the internet is often first port of call whilst planning a potential visit, so it is essential that this virtual experience is a good one.

General Tourist Information also underpins any successful strategy, and the literature review highlighted the following action points which need to be addressed:

- Professional and updated tourist information Boards, especially at the Railway Station, highlighting the heritage in the town
- the information centre to be opened by volunteers outside normal office hours, particularly at weekends
- Improved street signage for visitors, especially along the Ridgeway and Phoenix Trail
- A visitor focused website with particular emphasis on cycling and walking

## **Cycling and Walking**

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<sup>11</sup> Princes Risborough Historic Town Assessment, p69

<sup>12</sup> The Countryside Agency’s Market Towns Initiative Health Check and Action Plan, p11

To achieve sustainable tourism in Princes Risborough, cycling and walking provision needs to be developed. The Local Transport Plan highlighted the promotion of a joint scheme with Wycombe District Council and the National Trust to create a new walking and cycling footpath from High Wycombe to Hughenden linking to existing routes.<sup>13</sup> New short to medium length interpreted colour coded circular walks starting and finishing at Princes Risborough station were also noted. It was felt that if the walks prove to be successful, a longer term project would see the development of all weather surfaces for family routes. The ACORN report illustrated that to enhance this offering Sunday cycle hire and visible bike racks were important. A warm welcome and essential services for walkers and cyclists and events on Sundays would specifically benefit the town.

### **TOWN CENTRE OFFERING**

*“The town centre will remain the key trading location and the centre of community life, but must be enhanced to operate at a stronger level than it does at present.”<sup>14</sup>*

*“an attractive market town...Shopping in Risborough is a pleasant experience with all the shops being concentrated in a small area and the High Street being dominated by an historic Market House.”<sup>15</sup>*

It is essential that 21st century market towns remain places of trade. Princes Risborough currently competes for this trade with other market towns and rural localities in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the larger county towns of High Wycombe and Aylesbury.

Primary and secondary research has identified a number of issues and opportunities which need addressing within the town centre. David Lock Associates for example reported; *“Princes Risborough is felt by many to compare unfavourably with some direct competitors, notably Thame and Wendover, in particular in terms of the strength and variety of shops and the general vitality and diversity of the town centre.”<sup>16</sup>*

### **Diversity**

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<sup>13</sup> Local Transport Plan, Wycombe District Council, P6

<sup>14</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p23

<sup>15</sup> The Countryside Agency’s Market Towns Initiative Health Check and Action Plan, p1

<sup>16</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p2

The AMT 2010 Benchmarking analysis of the town also identified a ‘diversity’ issue within the town centre. Shops selling goods are split into two different types, ‘comparison’ and ‘convenience’. Convenience retail describes merchandise that is purchased on a very frequent basis, is of relatively low value, and is often consumable in nature, whilst comparison retail describes merchandise that is purchased infrequently and is often of a high unit value where shoppers make comparisons before purchase. A balance of both comparison and convenience retail units is therefore ideal in terms of encouraging visitors and potential customers. In Princes Risborough there is an imbalance, with 62% of the A1 Commercial Units (Shops) selling ‘convenience’ goods, which is 28% higher than the national average of 34% (2009).

### **Understanding the Town Centre**

The Market Towns Initiative Health Check indicated that an audit of local business and an understanding of what the High Street should look like, was required to facilitate future developments. The Benchmarking activity in 2010 audited all the commercial units within the town centre and measured Princes Risborough against 12 Key Performance Indicators. This activity need to be repeated annually to enable stakeholders to understand their town centre, measure changes and assess the impact of any project initiative. It is recommended that a Princes Risborough Benchmarking Working Group is formulated for this purpose.

### **The Importance of the Market**

The AMT Benchmarking exercise also illustrated that the weekly market in Princes Risborough is important to the vitality of the town. Measurements conducted on a Market Day between 10am to 1pm highlighted that the average footfall, at the busiest point of the town centre, (Lloyds Pharmacy) was 114 people per ten minutes. When the same measurements were applied on a non Market Day, the count was 81, a 30% reduction in footfall. Similarly, Car Parking occupancy was checked and the ‘draw’ of the market was once again emphasized, with 82% occupancy on a Market Day compared to 60% on a Non Market Day.

A strong weekly market thus appears to be essential to the town centre vitality and further enhancements of farmers and specialised markets at weekends would link in effectively with a tourism strategy.

### **Creating a niche**

As noted, consultation in the production of The Risboroughs 2035 Vision document outlined that Princes Risborough compared unfavourably with the direct competitor towns of Thame and Wendover in terms of the strength and variety of shops, and the general vitality and diversity of the town centre.

Princes Risborough does not currently offer a 'niche' that is attractive to people in the catchment area. In terms of current provision, the Health Check highlighted that specialist shops such as butchers and shoe shop had stood the test of time in the town. The essence of a 'unique selling point' was also mentioned in the Princes Risborough in 2025 section of the Healthcheck. The 'vision' included, *'A High Street filled with diverse specialist shops.'*<sup>17</sup> The Market Town Healthcheck identified the following strap line 'The Western Gateway to the Chilterns'. The market uses the 'Fit for a Prince' strap line.

Future projects need to focus on Risborough' Unique Selling Points (USP) to help the town achieve market differentiation. The town needs to be branded promoting the USP as a logo, in a strap line and in all future marketing material. The community needs to decide if any of the existing strap lines is strong enough to attract potential visitors. Schools and community groups need to be consulted when developing town branding. It will achieve more success if it is created and endorsed by all.

### **Working with Businesses**

*"The town does not have an active Chamber of Trade and Commerce and local businesses do not have a proactive representative body."*<sup>18</sup>

The Health Check reported that; *"Shop rents are high and the result is that many High Street Shops become 'one man bands,' as the owner-manager cannot afford to employ many staff."*<sup>19</sup> When such a situation exists there is often little opportunity for shop owners and staff to attend training events, or plan the future of their business. Ideally for Princes Risborough to effectively compete with locations such as Thame and Wendover the town centre requires promotional management. It is unlikely that public funding would fund this resource, so costs would need to be covered by the private sector or the community partnership.

Businesses need to take more responsibility for planning town centre events and activities. It is recommended that an economy sub group of the community partnership, comprising initially of business volunteers, takes forward many of the town centre actions in this report.

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<sup>17</sup> The Countryside Agency's Market Towns Initiative Health Check and Action Plan, p9

<sup>18</sup> The Countryside Agency's Market Towns Initiative Health Check and Action Plan, p7

<sup>19</sup> The Countryside Agency's Market Towns Initiative Health Check and Action Plan, p6

## Empty Shops

The 'Delivering the Strategy' document by Wycombe District Council reported that; "There has been much concern in the town over the increase in the proportion of empty shops. The Council is committed to working in partnership with local stakeholders to address means of bringing empty shops back into operation."<sup>20</sup>

AMT Benchmarking placed the vacancy rate in the designated Princes Risborough town centre at 4%, which is lower than the national average of 10%. Certain areas of the town centre however, such as Duke Street, are affected by high vacancy rates which can often lead to an unqualified judgmental impression of the retail offer. Against national statistics the vacancy rates in Risborough is high.

Shops are owned by independent landlords who appoint agents to manage them on their behalf. The agents of the empty shops have now been engaged in the revitalize programme delivered by Retail Revival. Retail Revival was able to secure the keys for each property to decorate the shop windows in the lead up to Christmas and the agents contributed some funding for the Christmas programme. It is possible that there will be some movement in the commercial rental market in 2011 and many of the vacant premises are 'under offer'. Meanwhile projects may be considered to fill the shops until new businesses sign leases.

## Public Realm

The Market Towns Initiative Health Check illustrated that Princes Risborough town centre needs to cater for the ageing population; "Disability access to pavements, buildings and buses."<sup>21</sup> Pedestrian routes were also classified as 'critical' to the town centre in the Risboroughs 2035 report, indicating that the town is sufficiently compact to be walk able, but the hierarchy of routes lacks clarity and could be improved through surfacing and signage.<sup>22</sup>

Signage was also noted in The Risboroughs 2035 report and the SEEDA Rural Towns Programme Bid:

- simplification of signage in the town centre to meet the needs of people that do not know the area well.

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<sup>20</sup> Wycombe District Council, Delivering the Strategy for Wycombe, p130

<sup>21</sup> The Market Towns Initiative Health Check, p8

<sup>22</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p24

- guidance for the maintenance and improvement of shop fronts and shop signage, again emphasizing good design and quality materials rather than simply aping historic precedents.<sup>23</sup>
- 10 visitor information boards highlighting local attractions.
- Replacing old/worn out attraction signs/finger posts.<sup>24</sup>

The Jacobs report in 2007, whilst primarily focused on the feasibility of a one way system in the town, commented that the Market House is a focal point, but currently situated on an ‘island’ with traffic passing on all sides. The recommendation was that, ‘Preliminary design work is commissioned to develop proposals to enhance the area around the Market House.’<sup>25</sup>

### **CATERING FOR THE YOUNG**

*“Young people seek more clubs, facilities and recreational areas.....provide jobs and appropriate housing.”<sup>26</sup>*

*“Schools are the bedrock of every urban community and are critical to the social, cultural and economic life of a town. It is imperative that Princes Risborough retains the capacity to educate its children from age 5 to age 18 in strong and diverse schools, enhanced by wider training and adult education facilities. This requires affordable family housing to encourage households with school age children to make their homes in the town.”<sup>27</sup>*

The Risboroughs Ward is one of an ageing population, accommodating a lower than national average population in all age brackets from 0-59, whilst have a higher than average percentage of population in the 60-74 (16.8% in PR, 13.3% nationally) and 75 and over age brackets (11.5% in PR, 7.6% nationally). The literature review has highlighted the need to maintain or attract youngsters to Princes Risborough.

### **Business Support**

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<sup>23</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p38

<sup>24</sup> Princes Risborough Project Visitor SEEDA Rural Towns Programme Bid- Draft September 2006, p7

<sup>25</sup> Introduction of One-Way System Feasibility Report, Jacobs, March 2007, p16

<sup>26</sup> 2004 Princes Risborough Parish Plan Document, 2004

<sup>27</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p21

The Risborough 2035 report suggested improving both education provision and business and employment opportunities; *“There is no point retaining existing young people in the town and attracting new ones if they are unable to fulfill their ambitions and contribute to the local economy.”*<sup>28</sup>

Suggestions for improvements range from developing the advice and information support systems in the town for existing businesses and start up businesses, to the creation of a business centre providing space for new and developing businesses. Previously a ‘Creative Centre’ for business innovation co located with business services have been proposed as part of the Princes Estate Redevelopment. The Risboroughs 2035 noted that there is an, *“ideal opportunity to review the potential for the redevelopment of this area by way of an overall Masterplan, and the best way to secure such accommodation for the future economic prosperity of the area.”*<sup>29</sup>

## Facilities

*“There is considerable concern that the town has little to interest young people, particularly teenagers, in the evenings and at weekends.”*<sup>30</sup>

Secondary analysis highlights that there is a perceived lack of facilities and recreational opportunities for young people in the town. The result of the lack of opportunities is an increase in anti-social behavior. One key suggestion for improvement is the development of Wades Park, *“the potential of Wades Park to become a focus for community, and in particular young persons, facilities, should be fully explored by way of a feasibility study.”*<sup>31</sup> Solutions may lay with the development of new facilities at Wades Park or at the School and in the management and promotion of what already exists within the town.

## Affordable Housing

*“house prices are rising forcing young people out of the local housing market”*<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p22

<sup>29</sup> The Risboroughs, 2035, p28

<sup>30</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p21

<sup>31</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p27

<sup>32</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p18

*“In the first instance additional affordable homes are required, perhaps in a higher proportion to market homes compared to elsewhere in the District, in part to redress the imbalance that has resulted from limited new development in recent years and in part to reflect the premium that local market housing attracts.”<sup>33</sup>*

The Market Towns Initiative Health Check identified key themes for future change in Princes Risborough. One of the main drivers was ‘Community and Housing’ including numbers and types of housing, associated community facilities and the use of Brownfield and Greenfield sites.<sup>34</sup> In terms of the latter Wycombe District Council recently identified Park Mill Farm, North of Longwick Road and the Rear of Poppy Road as potential housing sites.<sup>35</sup>

The Risboroughs 2035 document also noted that the town, *“requires affordable family housing to encourage households with school age children to make their homes in the town”*<sup>36</sup> A recommendation was made for local housing needs to be investigated in detail from the perspective of the Risborough area as a sustainable community, with the view of determining a community-based, affordable housing policy and considering the application of social housing allocations in the Risborough area.

## **TRANSPORT**

*“The centre of Princes Risborough benefits from passing trade that makes use of the facilities on a journey through the town. But the same traffic divides the town and makes crossing the A4010 an unpleasant and at times hazardous thing to do.”<sup>37</sup>*

*“a real solution is needed in the medium to long term that will remove high levels of through traffic from the most sensitive parts of the town. A by-pass would do this but would isolate the town centre from passing trade. Diversions within the town would improve some parts of the network but leave others with the problem. A decision is needed on the preferred solution.”<sup>38</sup>*

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<sup>33</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p27

<sup>34</sup> Market Towns Initiative Health Check, p10

<sup>35</sup> Wycombe District Council, Delivering the Strategy for Wycombe, p128

<sup>36</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p

<sup>37</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p24

<sup>38</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p18

The issues surrounding the transport network in and around Princes Risborough are some of the most contentious within the town. Being based on the busy A4010 between Aylesbury and Wycombe, Princes Risborough' high levels of traffic flow result in the roads in and around the town centre often feeling congested.

## **Traffic Management**

One general consensus is that a bypass would not be beneficial for the town as it would result in the loss of passing trade. Consequently a number of traffic management proposals have been made, ranging from short term and long term measures. In terms of the latter, The Risboroughs 2035 document proposed; *“the diversion of traffic from the most sensitive part of the road – Bell Street – to a new route that takes New Road up the Hill to turn and run parallel to the Upper Icknield Way to the southern edge of the town. This will allow all people to pass close to the town centre but will allow the businesses in Bell Street to be better integrated into the town centre, creating an elegant shopping street and some important new public spaces. It will also create a higher quality approach to the town from the south.”*<sup>39</sup>

In 2007 Princes Risborough Town Council requested a feasibility study of the introduction of a one way system in the High Street. Jacobs UK Ltd conducted the study and recommended,

- Informal consultation should be undertaken with the relevant authorities and other interested parties concerning the concept of a one way system
- The relevant authorities are lobbied to provide an increased and adequate level of enforcement of the existing on street parking restrictions
- A further study is commissioned to review the options and development opportunities available to achieve rear access for deliveries to High Street and Duke Street.<sup>40</sup>

A temporary one way system has been introduced to the town, but feedback during the recent Benchmarking activity has indicated that business owners are not satisfied with the current approach. Subsequently it is essential that a decision regarding its future is made.

Short term traffic management measures cited in the various reviewed reports included humps and speed tables at key points, signal controlled crossings, changes to the configuration of key junctions creating urban spaces rather than roundabouts and attention to the qualities of gateways into the urban area to make an impact on the drivers as they approached the town.

## **Public Transport**

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<sup>39</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p24

<sup>40</sup> Jacobs, Introduction of One-Way System Feasibility Report, p16

The town is currently well serviced by the Chiltern Rail route between London (49 minutes) and Birmingham (1 hour 40 mins) which also provide localised links to High Wycombe and Aylesbury. The Risboroughs 2035 report noted that; *“At present the public transport system centered on the town is relatively good. They are frequent and run late into the evenings.”*<sup>41</sup>

In terms of the local bus service, the level of service needs to be maintained with timing enhancements to support the town centre and locality. According to the Local Transport Plan; *“An integrated local transport network with links to villages and late night services to reflect local needs is required.”*<sup>42</sup>

### **Linking the Town Centre and Train Station**

*“Better links should be in place to link Princes Risborough station to the town centre.”*<sup>43</sup>

*“Linking the Railway Station to the town centre. The connections between should be improved and made more legible, and the station location should be exploited for more intensive commercial and economic activity, providing services to station users and local employees and integrating the employment areas on both sides of the station.”*<sup>44</sup>

The train station at Princes Risborough is located outside of the designated town centre and recent reports suggest the linkage between the two localities needs to be improved. The Risboroughs 2035 for example concentrated on the walking route indicating that Manor Park Avenue, which provides a direct route between the station and the town centre, should be promoted as a cycling and walking route and, *“promoted as such, with minor improvements to enhance the connectivity of other pedestrian and cycle routes to it.”*<sup>45</sup>

The District Council ‘Delivering the Strategy’ document cited the possible redevelopment of the Picts Lane manufacturing area next to the Railway Station as an opportunity to better integrate the station with the town, meeting local housing needs and creating a better quality environment around the station.

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<sup>41</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p22

<sup>42</sup> Buckinghamshire County Council, Local Transport Plan, p6

<sup>43</sup> Buckinghamshire County Council, Local Transport Plan, p6

<sup>44</sup> The Risboroughs 2035, p25

<sup>45</sup> The Risboroughs 20935, p41

## ACTIONS

The following actions have been made as a result of the literature review. The recommendations have been broken down into the emergent 'key themes' to allow for continuity.

- **Tourism;** develop a tourism strategy for the town
- **Tourism: Accommodation;** pubs in the town and surrounding area should look to extend existing/ develop visitor accommodation focusing particularly on welcoming Walker and Cyclists
- **Tourism: Food and Drink;** new businesses encouraged into the town.
- **Tourism: Branding;** a brand name for the town to be agreed upon and marketed
- **Tourism: Heritage and Tourist Information;** development of a Heritage Centre/ Small Museum
- **Tourism: Heritage and Tourist Information;** production of an electronic heritage trail
- **Tourism: Heritage and Tourist Information;** information centre to be opened all weekend
- **Tourism: Heritage and Tourist Information;** improved street signage for visitors along the Ridgeway and Phoenix Trail
  
- **Tourism: Heritage and Tourist Information;** development of a visitor focused website with particular emphasis on cycling and walking
  
- **Tourism: Cycling and Walking;** development of a new walking and cycling footpath from High Wycombe to Hughenden linked to existing routes
- **Tourism: Cycling and Walking;** development of colour coded circular walks starting and finishing at Princes Risborough station
- **Tourism: Cycling and Walking;** offer Sunday cycle hire
- **Tourism: Cycling and Walking;** Walker and Cyclist welcome at local accommodation
- **Town Centre Offering: Diversity;** increasing the number of 'comparison' A1 shops in the town centre
- **Town Centre Offering: Understanding the Town Centre;** creation of a Princes Risborough Town Benchmarking group to evaluate town centre performance and initiatives annually
- **Town Centre Offering: The Importance of the Market;** develop the existing weekly markets alongside specialised weekend markets
- **Town Centre Offering: Creating a Niche;** Develop a strap line and logo based on the town's USP

- **Town Centre Offering: Working with Businesses;** Form an economy sub group of RACA and work towards delivering an economy action plan
- **Town Centre Offering: Empty Shops;** Work with property agents to find meanwhile uses for empty shops
- **Town Centre Offering: Empty Shops;** Build footfall to the town centre through specialist markets and events which in turn will attract new businesses to the town
- **Town Centre Offering: Public Realm;** review disability access to pavements, buildings and buses.
- **Town Centre Offering: Public Realm;** review street signage in the town centre to ensure it meets the needs of visitors
- **Town Centre Offering: Public Realm;** develop guidance for the maintenance and improvement of shop fronts and shop signage
- **Town Centre Offering: Public Realm;** replace old/worn out attraction signs/finger posts
- **Town Centre Offering: Public Realm;** Preliminary design work to be commissioned to develop proposals to enhance the area around the Market House
- **Catering for the Young: Business Support;** development of a 'Creative Centre' for business innovation co located with appropriate business services
- **Catering for the Young: Facilities;** the development of new facilities at Wades Park
- **Catering for the Young: Facilities;** management and promotion of existing facilities for youth provision
- **Catering for the Young: Affordable Housing;** local housing needs to be investigated in detail from the perspective of the Risborough area as a sustainable community, with the view of determining a community-based, affordable housing policy and considering the application of social housing allocations in the Risborough area.
- **Transport: Traffic Management;** a final decision to be made on the one-way system in the town
- **Transport: Public Transport;** timing enhancements made to the provision of public transport within the town centre
- **Transport: Linking the Town Centre and Train Station;** Manor Park Avenue promoted as a cycling and walking route
- **Transport: Linking the Town Centre and Train Station;** investigate the redevelopment of the Picts Lane manufacturing area

## ACTION PLANNING

The 13 actions with the highest priorities have been incorporated into the follow action plan. The plan is organic and as actions are achieved new ones should be added.

Number	Make greater provision for visitors	Priority	Cost	Timescale
1		High		
Description				
<p>55 million leisure trips take place in the Chilterns annually; walking remains the most popular activity; cycling and running are also popular.</p> <p>Local businesses in the Chilterns benefit greatly from people on leisure trips, with an average visitor spend of £8.54 per day. This spending includes meals and drinks, shopping and travel costs. Visitors staying overnight in the Chilterns spend a lot more.</p> <p>Research shows that Princes Risborough needs to work harder to attract their share of visitor spend.</p>				
Actions			Delivery	
<p>Provide adequate sign posting to manage traffic flow, especially through the town centre, and to car parks</p> <p>Explore the potential for the Tourist Information Centre to open on Saturday afternoons and on Sunday during the height of the season. The town has a magnificent TIC but it is closed for the majority of the weekend when visitor footfall is higher.</p> <p>Promote the cycle hire facilities widely and draw more attention to the cycle racks.</p> <p>Encourage local food providers to promote special cycling breakfasts or lunches to attract those using the Phoenix Trail and other cycling</p>			<p>County Council</p> <p>Wycombe District Council</p> <p>Risborough Cycles/Local Businesses</p> <p>Local Food Providers</p>	

<p>routes.</p> <p>Contact cycling clubs in the South East to promote Princes Risborough to groups of cyclists looking for Sunday routes with refreshments.</p> <p>Improve and promote local accommodation to encourage overnight stays. Include these details on the business directory in Horns Lane Car Park.</p> <p>Explore the potential to attract a major hotel chain to the town.</p> <p>To make the town look more attractive during the peak visitor season participate in 'Britain in Bloom' and encourage residents and businesses to look after window boxes, gardens, roundabouts, tubs and hanging baskets.</p>	<p>Economy Sub Group - RACA</p> <p>Economy Sub Group RACA</p> <p>Economy Sub Group</p> <p>Community</p>
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Number	Develop a USP	Priority	Cost	Timescale
2				
Description				
<p>Future marketing needs to develop Princes Risborough' Unique Selling Points (USP) to help the town achieve market differentiation.</p> <p>The town needs to be branded promoting the USP as a logo, in a strap line and in all future marketing material.</p> <p>All organisations need to endorse this branding and the community needs to be involved with developing and creating the wording and conceptual design. To stand the best chance of being adopted by all, it cannot come from a single group in the</p>				

town, although one group could take the lead.  The Market Town Healthcheck identified the following strap line; 'The Western Gateway to the Chilterns'. The market uses the 'Fit for a Prince' strap line. The community needs to decide if either of these is suitable to 'sum up' the town to potential visitors.	
Actions	Delivery
Identify Risborough' USP Develop a branding for Risborough using the USP  Involve the community via the media and through community consultation in the High Street and through schools.	RACA marketing group, with schools and the local media

Number	Car Parking/Traffic Flow	Priority	Cost	Timescale
3		High		
Description				
<p>According to the Small Business Federation (SBF) "Small market towns and their outlying rural communities are hit particularly hard by the imposition of parking charges. In these car dependent communities, free access to the town centre is essential not only for the purposes of shopping but also for social interaction.</p> <p>The dependence of independent retailers on sensible parking policies is being undermined by local councils who treat parking as a means of generating revenue as opposed to a way of managing traffic and benefitting the local community. "</p> <p>The Federation of Small Businesses believes that local authorities need a new attitude to parking provision – "parking should be seen as a vital service not as a short term revenue grab."</p> <p>Princes Risborough has two public car parks owned and run by</p>				

<p>Wycombe District Council. There is no free parking with the exception of three Saturdays leading up to Christmas and Sundays. Wycombe District Council also employs several traffic wardens to patrol the town. These wardens are seen as predatory at worst and overzealous at best.</p> <p>Towns like Thame, competing with Princes Risborough, have free parking.</p> <p>The one-way system in the town has caused anxiety and controversy. This is due to be reviewed and no decision has yet been made on the future of the one-way system.</p>	
<p>Actions</p>	<p>Delivery</p>
<p>Explore the potential for the Town Council or RAP to secure a lease back arrangement with Wycombe District Council for the two public car parks. The lease fee could be met by charging businesses a small annual fee and raising the precept very slightly.</p> <p>Promote heavily the free Saturday parking leading up to Christmas and Sundays</p> <p>Engage the support of the local MP to help lobby District to relax their rigid parking charge policy and reduce the presence of overzealous parking wardens in the town</p> <p>Confirm the future of the town's one-way system so that businesses can plan for their futures with adequate information.</p>	<p>PRTC/WDC</p> <p>Economy Sub Group/RACA</p> <p>PRTC/MP</p> <p>November review by Bucks County Council? PRTC</p>

Number	Boost Local Markets	Priority	Cost	Timescale
4		High		

Description	
<p>A charter was granted to Princes Risborough in 1523 by Henry VIII for a weekly market and two annual fairs.</p> <p>The Charter Market is held every Thursday and attracts up to twelve high quality stalls selling fruit and vegetables, bread, olives, jewellery, plants, fish and other goods. Recent footfall counts show that footfall to the town is increased on Thursdays.</p> <p>The market is quite small and expansion is restricted due to lack of space in the High Street. Several car parking spaces are already lost to the market and if the market expanded into more it might compromise the foot fall in shops.</p>	
Actions	Delivery
<p>Purchase a further 20 market stalls to boost the potential of the charter market</p> <p>Work with the landlords to extend the Charter Market into the George and Dragon car park to host the new stalls</p> <p>Promote the market to start up businesses and craft industries to increase the market stall diversity and volume to add interest and to encourage new customers</p> <p>Offer training to new and existing market stall holders, where required, to ensure attractive merchandising, competitive pricing and business planning</p> <p>Use a mobile demonstration kitchen on market days to enable local food providers – shops and stalls- to cook food samples, adding flavour, smell and interest to the charter market</p> <p>Launch a programme of Sunday markets to attract local people who commute out of the town on weekdays. Theme the markets to include</p>	<p>Market Group</p> <p>In progress - James and Matthew from G&amp;D now working with Market Group</p> <p>Market Group</p> <p>Economy Sub Group /Business link/private retail trainer</p> <p>Market Group</p> <p>Market Group/Economy</p>

antiques, toys, farmers' markets, crafts etc. Promote the markets widely.	Sub Group
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Number	Increase Events Programme	Priority	Cost	Timescale
5		High		
Description				
As well as the Kop Hill Climb, Princes Risborough has two annual festivals, a summer festival and a 'Christmas lights switch-on' event. The town would benefit from an expanded and well publicised annual events programme to attract visitors and increase community spirit.				
Actions			Delivery	
<p>Peter Keen has already secured the hire of the marquees used by the Lighthouse event in July. A use for them now needs to be determined; ideas put forward include a food festival or music festival.</p> <p>Build on existing events; to stage a Victorian (or other themed) Christmas Festival, pram/trolley races/landau carriage routes/</p> <p>Investigate the potential to hold the National Luge Championships on Kop Hill</p> <p>Hold a fund raising marquee based ball to link in with one key event – maybe the Luge event- to encourage attendees to use local accommodation providers and hair and beauty businesses. Some of the profits from the ball could go to the Risborough Area Partnership's Economic Group for town centre projects.</p>			<p>Marketing and Events Sub Group - RACA</p> <p>In progress – Luge management team coming to the town shortly with a view to holding one of three national time trials on the Kop Hill</p>	

Number	Promote Local Businesses	Priority	Cost	Timescale
6		High		
Description				
Princes Risborough is a beautiful town and has many attractive businesses. These need to be promoted more widely; the retail and service offer needs to be obvious to visitors as they arrive in the town. Research shows that less than 2% of people in its catchment area see Princes Risborough as their primary shopping centre, preferring to shop in other local towns.				
Actions			Delivery	
Create a very high quality business directory to be distributed to every household in the town to promote what is available locally, including specialist markets and events			Economy Sub Group	
Create a business directory online to show the name, location and type of business available in the town and rural hinterland. Businesses will have responsibility for updating their own business template and will have the opportunity to upload promotional offers for customers.			Economy Sub Group	
Re-launch the Risborough Rewards Card by taking a stall in the Charter Market each week to distribute new cards. The card will grow in strength if all retailers sign up to use it. Staff training will be available for people who work for local businesses so they can understand the benefits of pushing the card to increase customer loyalty.			Economy Sub Group	

Number	Fill Vacant Shops	Priority	Cost	Timescale
7		High		
Description				
Princes Risborough has a commercial vacancy rate that exceeds the national average. Because the town centre is condensed around three main streets, empty shops are highly visible, look unsightly and devalue the retail offer.				
Actions			Delivery	
Organise a meeting with the agents and landlords of the empty shops to negotiate free overheads for temporary uses.			Economy Sub Group	
Access data to determine which multiple retailers are searching for premises in the immediate area in order to promote Princes Risborough to them			Economy Sub Group	
Put together a pack for potential inward investors, extolling the virtues of the town. Invite selected national retailers to a Princes Risborough 'open day' to show them the empty shops and sell the potential of the town to them.				
Investigate the use of ESF funding to hold training courses/reading groups etc in the empty shops			Economy Sub Group	

Number	Use Public Relations to promote the town to a wider audience	Priority	Cost	Timescale
8		High		

Description	
<p>When promoting the town it is important to consider every means of communication. The following communications model is supported by experts in the field of marketing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For people unaware of the town and need to be made aware use public relations, word of mouth and inspiration</li> <li>• For people aware of the town but without full knowledge of the area use direct mail, websites and persuasive promotional messages</li> <li>• For people who understand the area and what it has to offer use emotional appeals conveying the type of experience they are likely to have</li> <li>• For people who have the intention to visit the area use brochures, websites and accommodation guides</li> <li>• For people who have booked and are committed to visiting the town use walking routes, cycling maps, attractions, shopping guides etc.</li> </ul> <p>Public Relations campaigns can be extremely successful when advertising budgets are small and when people need to be made aware of the town’s existence.</p>	
Actions	Delivery
<p>Use the bank of local celebrities to encourage local endorsements of the town. Attempt to get a local celebrity to front the business directory.</p> <p>Attempt World Record Breaking Event</p> <p>Brainstorm other PR opportunities</p>	Economic Sub Group

Number	Recruit Town Centre Manager	Priority	Cost	Timescale
9		Low		
Description				
<p>Responsibility for town centres has traditionally been divided between the public and private sectors – the private sector concentrating on individual properties and business interests, while local authorities look after the public realm. This relationship is now beginning to change and Government Guidance in Planning Policy Guidance Note 6 (PPG6) recommends that local authorities, in partnership with the private sector and the local community, should develop town centre management strategies to co-ordinate improvements, by working together and pooling resources to achieve sustainable development and tackle the physical, economic and social exclusion problems.</p> <p>A Town Centre Manager would facilitate local stakeholders as they worked in partnership to deliver an agreed action plan. The post would require considerable funding and resources; an average salary is £25k pa and the manager would require a centrally based office and a budget, however small, to get things moving in the right direction.</p> <p>A good town centre manager is a valuable asset and they can attract inward investment, deliver activities and act as an important conduit between the private and public sectors. A poor town centre manager would be worse than none at all.</p>				
Actions			Delivery	

<p>Determine whether the town requires a town centre manager or whether the funding available for such a post could be better used to fund managers and budgets for project based activities.</p> <p>Determine where sustainable funding for a TCM could be sourced. It would be futile and time consuming if each year the TCM needed to find funding to pay for their own salary.</p> <p>Draw up an agreed job description and agree who the TCM would be accountable to</p>	RAC/PRTC
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Number	Boost Heritage Interpretation	Priority	Cost	Timescale
10		High		
Description			Delivery	
Princes Risborough holds some historical interest for cultural tourists but the interpretation and signposting of areas of interest is poor. People working locally in shops and services have some knowledge of their heritage but this could be improved.				
Actions				
<p>Build on the National Heritage Day to encourage visitors to view the town's areas of historical interest through a newly publicised heritage trail</p> <p>Install a new heritage interpretation panel near the car park entry to the town. The current one is very low, battered and hidden by foliage.</p> <p>Promote the use of the Literary Institute as a venue/destination, in the High Street. It was leased at a peppercorn rent to the town in 1891 by the first Baron Rothschild for use as a public reading room and has historical significance.</p>			Francis Gomme/Culture Sub group of RAP/Town Council – in progress	

Number	Benchmarking	Priority	Cost	Timescale
11				
Description				
<p>The Market Towns Benchmarking tool enables the community to measure the town centre against 12 Key Performance Indicators and 70 other towns in the UK.</p> <p>By understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the town the community can then address their key issues and begin to implement solutions. The phrase 'If you can't measure it, you can't manage it' is crucial here.</p> <p>Princes Risborough received its first benchmarking audit in November 2010. This needs to be completed annually for maximum effect and to monitor changes.</p>				
Actions			Delivery	
<p>Analyse Market Town Benchmarking report 2010 and use results to implement changes in the town centre.</p> <p>Repeat the benchmarking audit annually.</p>			RACA economy sub group	

Number	Build on the success of the Kop Hill Climb	Priority	Cost	Timescale
12		High		
Description				

<p>The Kop Hill Climb attracts up to 8,000 visitors to Princes Risborough over two days in September. Now in its second year it has become an important event in the classic car calendar. It benefits from excellent organisation and is accompanied by high quality promotional literature.</p> <p>There is the opportunity to broaden the impact of the Kop Hill Climb to positively affect the local economy.</p>	
<p>Actions</p>	<p>Delivery</p>
<p>Encourage shops and services to open for the full Kop Hill weekend and use special 'Kop Hill promotions' to encourage visitor spend</p> <p>Route some of the participating vehicles through the town centre during the Kop Hill Climb weekend to increase town centre footfall</p> <p>Increase local food sales during the event by inviting local food providers to take a stall on the Kop Hill e.g. a hog roast, local sausage or burger stall (with racing bangers). There is also the opportunity to invite local food providers who are unable to fit into the Thame Food Festival (which runs the same weekend) to take a food stall at the Kop Hill Climb event to boost the food offering and thus encourage visitors to increase the time spent locally.</p>	

Number	Develop annual arts/food/music festival	Priority	Cost	Timescale
13	Develop annual arts/food/music festival	High		
Description				

<p>Festivals celebrate art and culture and as an attraction raise the profile and reputation of a town or area. Research shows that culture in general, and festivals in particular, have been shown to attract younger, more affluent visitors than the average.</p> <p>festivals and events are good at bringing people together and ‘showing off the best of the place’, projecting a vibrant, alive, and happening image, beyond the simple allure of interesting bricks and mortar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• festivals can play a role in raising destination profile through press coverage, positive word of mouth and presenting a diverse, culturally rich, live offering that complements mainstream fixed attractions</li> <li>• festivals and events are good for local people, engendering local pride, sense of community and collective endeavor</li> </ul> <p>Visitors to arts festivals make a much higher economic impact than other tourists. Figures for the UK Tourism Survey (UKTS) demonstrate that visitors to festivals spend more and stay longer than other cultural tourists, ultimately making the a significant contribution to the local economy.</p> <p>Princes Risborough does not currently hold a specific themed festival</p>	
<p>Actions</p>	<p>Delivery</p>
<p>Through the culture sub-group of the Risborough Area Partnership, develop a programme of events and activities that would involve all ages and socio-demographic groups and that would appeal to specific and varied market segments</p> <p>Determine whether the activities will be delivered intensively during one week, as an arts festival, or whether they would form a programme of single day events across the year.</p>	<p>The Whole Community</p>

<p>Build on, or integrate, existing events into the programme to ensure a co-ordinated approach and to prevent duplicated activity</p> <p>Search for potential venues to host events which link the town with the rural hinterland</p> <p>Promote the programme extensively</p>	
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