

Contents

Contents

Your Views	2
1 Introduction	3
Convenience (Food) Retailing	3
Comparison (Non-Food) Retailing	3
Commercial Leisure	3
Hotels	3
High Wycombe Town Centre	3
Marlow	4
Princes Risborough	4
2 Changes Since 2004	5
Development Capacity	5
Planning Policy Statement 6 and the Draft South East Plan	5
3 Strategic Objectives for Wycombe District	6
The Hierarchy of Centres	6
High Wycombe Town Centre - Strategic Objectives	6
Marlow and Princes Risborough Town Centres - Strategic Objectives	7
District Centres - Strategic Objectives	7
Local Centres - Strategic Objectives	7
4 Implementation	8
High Wycombe	8
Marlow	9
Princes Risborough	9
5 Summary and Conclusions	10

Your Views

Key Questions

1 We want to hear your views on the suggestions in this document and for you to help us improve it. You may comment on any aspect of this document, but we would be particularly interested in your views on the following questions:

- Do you support the focus for new retail and commercial leisure in or adjoining our existing Town and Local Centres?
- If all development cannot be accommodated within town centres, what type of uses should be located out-of-centre, and where is the preferred location for out-of-centre development?
- Thinking longer term (post 2011) should we plan now for a continuing growth in the requirement for extra retail floorspace or should we be cautious/ avoid identifying or releasing further sites because of the uncertainties (e.g internet shopping/ retail sales downturn)?

How to Respond

2 Please let us know your thoughts on these questions, and anything else you think about the suggestions in this paper. Your comments should be returned to the address below, or emailed to planning_policy@wycombe.gov.uk by 4th November 2005. Please use the form provided which is available on our website at www.wycombe.gov.uk/imaginethefuture, in the Imagine the Future pack, or from Beth Wiseman at:

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Introduction 1

1.1 This paper sets out the emerging strategy for town centres in Wycombe District. It provides a development strategy for retail and commercial leisure uses and builds on the findings and recommendations of the Retail and Town Centres Study 2004, prepared by Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners. The conclusions of the 2004 study will provide the framework for the future strategy for centres within Wycombe District. The main conclusions of the 2004 Study are summarised below.

Convenience (Food) Retailing

1.2 Allowing for food store commitments (Waitrose in Marlow and Sainsbury in High Wycombe) expenditure growth up to 2011 could support some additional convenience goods sales floorspace, the majority of which is likely to be concentrated in High Wycombe. Within Marlow, the proposed enlarged Waitrose is expected to meet emerging demand. In Princes Risborough the catchment potential is not sufficient to support a large food superstore. However, surplus convenience expenditure could be sufficient to support extensions to existing stores or the development of a small food store.

Comparison (Non-Food) Retailing

1.3 Commitments in 2004 were expected to meet the existing and future need for comparison retail floorspace up to and beyond 2007. However, continued expenditure growth between 2007 and 2011 could provide additional scope for comparison goods floorspace over and above existing commitments. High Wycombe town centre was identified as providing the main opportunities to improve comparison shopping in the District. However, Marlow and Princes Risborough could have some potential for small infill development or intensification.

Commercial Leisure

1.4 Wycombe District has a modest selection of commercial leisure facilities for a town of its size and catchment population. Wycombe's catchment potential could support an additional multiplex cinema. There is also demand for additional health and fitness facilities. High Wycombe could support a tenpin bowling facility, bingo hall, small casino, small nightclub and Class A3 to A5 uses (e.g. restaurants and bars), over and above commitments.

Hotels

1.5 A separate study prepared for the Council suggested there is potential for hotel development within the District, including new 4-star (up to 150 rooms) and 3-star (up to 130 rooms) hotels, and two budget hotels (50-100 rooms).

High Wycombe Town Centre

1.6 The choice of comparison shops in High Wycombe town centre is limited for a town of its size. If High Wycombe is to emerge as a true sub-regional centre then the strategy must seek realistic and sustainable expansion of the town centre. Three main areas where expansion could be accommodated were identified, as follows;

- the Town Centre Redevelopment area (potential over and above floorspace originally permitted).
- the Dovecot area; and
- Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College (assumed relocation) and Gas Works.

1.7 In addition to these major opportunities other smaller scale opportunities were identified that could provide additional retail and other town centre uses.

1.8 Within the remainder of the town centre the main focus of high street comparison shopping facilities within the town centre is located within The Octagon Centre, White Hart Street, Church Street, the west end of the High Street and the Chilterns Centre. The existing level of comparison goods retail floorspace within these parts of the town centre should be maintained.

1.9 The Frogmoor/Oxford Street area and the improved civic space provide an opportunity to create a new café quarter. The eastern half of the High Street is peripheral to the primary shopping area and acts as the financial service quarter. The Crendon Street, Easton Street and Castle Street area should be identified as mixed use areas where non-retail uses (Class A2, A3 and D2 leisure) will generally be encouraged. The Swan Theatre and the surrounding area could provide the focus for an entertainments quarter, including commercial leisure uses and restaurants.

1.10 Desborough Road has a dual role, as a fringe town centre shopping/service area and a local centre. Desborough Road could be included within the town centre, following implementation of the Town Centre Redevelopment Scheme. Desborough Road's role as a secondary/tertiary retail area for High Wycombe town centre should be enhanced.

1 Introduction

Marlow

1.11 Marlow should provide a range and choice of shops and services that meet most of the shopping needs of its immediate catchment population. Food store provision suitable for bulk food shopping is currently poor.

The proposed enlarged Waitrose store is expected to meet this need, and implementation of this proposal should be a priority.

1.12 There are limited opportunities to accommodate a significant amount of additional retail and commercial leisure floorspace over and above the Waitrose proposals. Major development proposals within High Wycombe and physical/ historic constraints in Marlow will limit the scope for retail and leisure development in Marlow. The strategy for Marlow should be to maintain and consolidate rather than expand the role of the town centre.

Princes Risborough

1.13 Princes Risborough caters well for the area's convenience shopping and day to day service needs. The town's comparison shopping facilities are more limited, with few national multiple retailers. The town is likely to remain an important and successful convenience shopping and service centre. This role should be maintained rather than expanded, through the implementation of redevelopment and intensification. Retail or leisure development in Princes Risborough would only be appropriate where the development serves the local area or addresses a specific area of deficiency in the town and its catchment area.

Changes Since 2004 2

Development Capacity

2.1 Since the 2004 study was completed, some of the commitments in High Wycombe have changed. The Wycombe Retail Park at Wycombe Marsh has been implemented and has addressed the identified qualitative deficiency in retail warehouse provision within the District. The High Wycombe Town Centre development proposals have been amended and enlarged and one of the retail warehouse units at Wycombe Marsh has been occupied by a Marks & Spencer *Simply Food Store*. The floorspace projections within the 2004 Retail Study will need to be amended in the light of these changes.

2.2 The Marks & Spencer food store at Wycombe Marsh will reduce surplus convenience expenditure capacity in High Wycombe. The proposed new Marks & Spencer store in the town centre and any changes to Sainsbury's proposals at Dovecot may also affect convenience goods retail capacity. In the light of these changes the requirement for convenience sales within High Wycombe will need to be carefully monitored. However, it appears unlikely that expenditure growth up to 2011 will be sufficient to support a new food superstore in High Wycombe.

2.3 The occupation of one of the retail warehouse units at Wycombe Marsh by Marks & Spencer will reduce the expected comparison turnover of this development, and will in theory marginally increase surplus comparison expenditure within High Wycombe. However, the revised High Wycombe Town Centre Redevelopment proposals are expected to significantly increase the amount of comparison retail floorspace in the town centre. The precise scale of new comparison floorspace on other town centre sites (e.g. Dovecot and the Gas Works) is also uncertain at this stage. There is a strong possibility that additional floorspace in the town centre will absorb most of the residual comparison goods floorspace projection in High Wycombe up to 2011, and would leave limited potential for other development elsewhere in High Wycombe.

Planning Policy Statement 6 and the Draft South East Plan

2.4 PPS6 was published in March 2005 and replaces PPG6 and ministerial statement clarifying PPG6. The main policy changes that will influence the future strategy for Wycombe District are as follows:

- Local planning authorities should actively plan for growth for a range of town centre uses and identify a range of sites to meet demand for a five-year period. They are also expected to adopt a more proactive role in identifying town centre

development sites. Greater weight should be placed on quantitative need for additional floorspace, but qualitative considerations should also be taken into account.

- A network or hierarchy of centres should be defined to provide a more even distribution of functions, and it may be appropriate to set upper limits for the scale of development appropriate in each type of centre. High density mixed use development is encouraged.
- The guidance suggests that specific provision should be made for larger format developments, which may be located on edge-of-centre sites. Local planning authorities should be sympathetic to the business models of operators.
- Policies should make clear which uses will be permitted in primary and secondary town centre locations, recognising the need to encourage diversification of uses in town centres.

2.5 The Draft South East Plan was published for consultation in January 2005. The plan indicates that all town centres should be developed as "multi-nodes" to enable people to shop, work, live and visit. The plan also seeks to distribute growth to middle and lower order centres, to avoid over-concentration in the highest order centres. Nevertheless, sub-regional and regional centres will remain the focus for large-scale development. There are also specific policies relating to regional and sub-regional centres, but the plan provides no guidance on which centres are upper, middle and lower order centres. High Wycombe is identified as one of 50 main town centres across the region, along with Aylesbury, Maidenhead, Oxford, Reading and Slough.

3 Strategic Objectives for Wycombe District

The Hierarchy of Centres

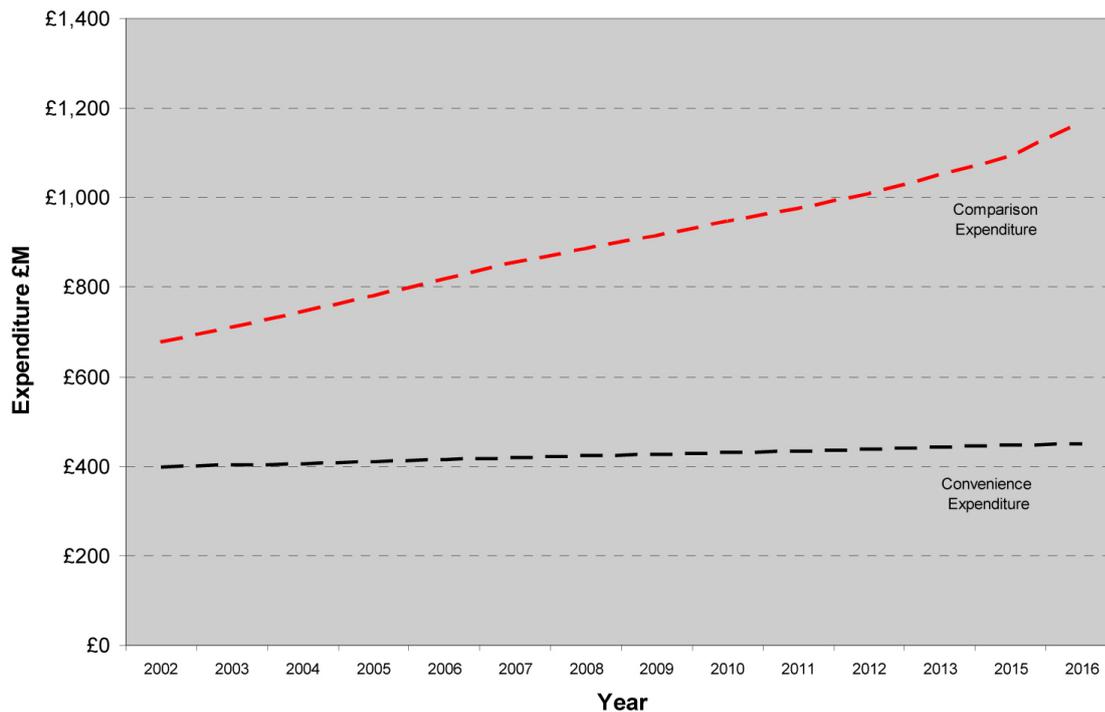
3.1 The 2004 Retail and Town Centre Study recommended the following hierarchy of centres in Wycombe District:

Sub-Regional Town Centre	High Wycombe (including Desborough Road)
Other Town Centres	Marlow and Princes Risborough
District Centres	Hazlemere, Bourne End and Flackwell Heath
Local Centres	Other local parades and village centres

3.2 This hierarchy of centres is consistent with the definition of centres contained within Annex A of PPS6, and should be adopted as part of the development strategy for Wycombe. Development within all centres should be appropriate in terms scale and the role of the centre within the hierarchy.

3.3 PPS6 indicates that local planning authorities should actively plan for growth. The Retail and Town Centre Study indicates that retail expenditure, particularly comparison goods expenditure (non-food), will growth significantly over the next decade, as shown below. The strategy will identify opportunities to accommodate growth within the hierarchy of centres outlined above.

Figure 1 - Projected Expenditure Growth 2004 to 2016



High Wycombe Town Centre - Strategic Objectives

3.4 The town centre should be maintained and enhanced as a sub-regional centre.

3.5 As a sub-regional centre, High Wycombe town centre should serve the District as a whole, and should embrace a wide range of activities. The town centre should function as the main comparison shopping

destination in the District, and also the main destination for leisure, entertainment and cultural activities that serve the town's catchment area.

3.6 In order to maintain and enhance this role, the town centre will be the focus for major retail developments, large scale leisure and other uses that attract large numbers of people including major cultural, tourism and community facilities.

Strategic Objectives for Wycombe District 3

Marlow and Princes Risborough Town Centres - Strategic Objectives

3.7 Marlow and Princes Risborough town centres will continue to be second level centres in the hierarchy, after High Wycombe town centre. Their role as important service centres should be maintained and enhanced to ensure they provide an appropriate range of facilities and services.

3.8 The strategy will seek to ensure these centres adequately serve their respective towns and rural catchment areas. In order to maintain and enhance their important roles, some development and expansion will be required. However, given their position below High Wycombe in the hierarchy, the strategy will seek development of an appropriate scale. Development in these centres should not seek to serve residents in other towns, or rural areas outside their primary catchment areas.

District Centres - Strategic Objectives

3.9 Bourne End, Flackwell Heath and Hazlemere third level of centres in the hierarchy. These centres should be maintained to ensure they provide basic food and grocery shopping facilities, supported by comparison shops selling lower comparison goods (bought on a regular basis) and a range of non-retail and community uses.

3.10 The District Centres should serve small catchment areas, focused on their respective local communities. Development within these centres should be commensurate with this role and limited catchment area.

Local Centres - Strategic Objectives

3.11 Local Centres should predominantly serve catchment areas extending no more than walking distance from the centre, although some centres may also serve passing trade. Facilities in more rural areas e.g. Lane End and Stokenchurch will also serve a wider area. Local centres and parades should be maintained and protected, in order to ensure all residents in Wycombe District have access to a basic range of small shops and services of a local nature. Core facilities will include convenience stores, sub-post office, newsagents and pharmacy.

4 Implementation

High Wycombe

4.1 In order to meet the District's need for retail, leisure and other town centre uses major development is required in High Wycombe. An appropriate balance of uses needs to be maintained and existing town centre uses should be protected. There is a continuing need to designate shopping frontages within the town centre, and to adopt policies to protect Class A uses. In the longer term it may be appropriate to extend the primary shopping area and the town centre boundary in order to accommodate expansion beyond 2011.

4.2 The Wycombe Marsh Retail Park has been successfully implemented and has significantly improved retail warehouse provision. The current priority is to ensure the successful implementation and occupation of other development proposals within and adjacent to the town centre in order to deliver new retail, leisure and entertainment facilities, as follows:

- the Town Centre Redevelopment;
- Sainsbury's redevelopment in the Dovecot area; and
- redevelopment of the Lily's Walk Gas Works site.

4.3 These developments should be appropriately integrated with existing town centre activity and the primary shopping area. The Town Centre Redevelopment is expected to significantly increase the level of comparison retail floorspace within High Wycombe, including two large anchor stores i.e. House of Fraser and Marks & Spencer. In addition this development is expected to provide a significant amount of floorspace devoted to commercial leisure uses.

4.4 The successful completion of this development and its occupation is a key priority. The development is unlikely to be exclusively occupied by new retailers not represented in High Wycombe, and some relocations from elsewhere in the town centre are inevitable. The strategy will seek to ensure that any voids that do occur are re-occupied by other appropriate town centre uses. Therefore, the impact of the new development should be monitored. Nevertheless, relocations to the new development should provide opportunities for other operators (retail, leisure and other town centre uses) to locate within High Wycombe town centre.

4.5 The Lily's Walk Gas Work site has outline consent (for up to 4,000 sq m retail gross) as part of a mixed use development, and is restricted to the sales of bulky goods (i.e. DIY, electrical, furniture etc). This site is expected to meet any additional need over and above the

Wycombe Retail Park scheme. This site together with the Town Centre Redevelopment is expected to meet the need for new comparison floorspace within High Wycombe for at least the next 5 years, as advocated in PPS6. Together the developments should provide a range of retail units of different sizes, which should be capable of accommodating a variety of retailers' business models and a choice of different types of shopping, capable of meeting the needs of customers.

4.6 In relation to food and grocery retail uses, the priority will be the successful implementation of Sainsbury's proposals to redevelop their store at Dovecot to provide an extended and improved store. This development will meet the majority of the need for food shopping in High Wycombe over the next five years.

4.7 At present there is no clear quantitative or qualitative need for further retail or leisure development outside the town centre, unless a developer/operator can clearly demonstrate that none of the emerging opportunities or other sites/premises within or on the edge of the town centre are suitable or viable to accommodate their proposed development. This will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis. The developer/operator will need to show appropriate flexibility and will need to demonstrate that the type of use proposed cannot be accommodated on more central sites. Given the future availability of a range of different types of units proposed within the town centre and edge of centre locations, the circumstances where out-of-centre development may be considered appropriate are likely to be exceptional.

4.8 During the next five years there is no pressing need to implement further major retail or leisure development over and above current commitments in High Wycombe. The impact of these major developments in the pipeline is uncertain. Therefore a cautious approach should be adopted in considering other major developments, certainly in the short to medium term. Nevertheless, in the longer term (after 2011) continued growth may generate further opportunities for new retail, leisure and other town centre uses. The strategy must address the longer term vision for the town centre, and how the structure of the town centre may change beyond 2011.

4.9 Whilst PPS6 advocates that sites should be identified to meet the need for development over a 5-year period, the guidance also recognises that large town centre schemes may take a longer period to allow for site assembly. Therefore, the strategy must consider what may happen after current schemes are implemented.

Implementation 4

4.10 Assuming existing commitments are successfully implemented and occupied and there is continued growth in customer demand, opportunities for longer term development should be considered. It is unlikely that the current structure of the town centre can accommodate significant growth in the long term. Therefore, radical solutions may need to be considered, including the potential extension to the town centre boundary or the rationalisation of the existing highway network in order to release sites for redevelopment/intensification. This is under consideration in the High Wycombe Masterplan.

4.11 The expansion of the Primary Shopping Area is most likely to be towards the south west in the Desborough Road area.

Marlow

4.12 The need to improve main and bulk food shopping facilities in Marlow town centre is the key priority, and the successful implementation of Waitrose's proposals for an enlarged store will meet this objective. Development opportunities for other major town centre uses are likely to be limited. Therefore existing town centre uses within designated shopping frontages should continue to be protected.

4.13 Smaller scale opportunities to intensify town centre uses within Marlow will be encouraged subject to environmental and design considerations.

Princes Risborough

4.14 There are small scale development opportunities for town centre uses in Princes Risborough town centre, including the existing Budgen store and surrounding area and backland areas along the High Street. These opportunities will be explored and the potential to improve convenience and comparison shopping and other town centre uses will be considered. It is envisaged these opportunities can meet the need for town centre uses within Princes Risborough at least over the next five years. In addition, shopping frontage policies will continue to protect existing town centre uses.

5 Summary and Conclusions

5.1 In order to actively plan for growth and to meet the District's need for retail, leisure and other town centre uses, major development is required in the next five years. As a result the development strategy has and will continue to encourage significant improvements to retail and commercial leisure uses.

5.2 Wycombe Marsh Retail Park has been successfully implemented and has addressed the need to improve retail warehouse provision in the District. The next priority is to secure town centre developments, which will improve both comparison and convenience shopping and commercial leisure provision. The strategy for development within the town centres will seek to provide a mix of uses, and a range of opportunities capable of meeting different operator requirements have been identified.

5.3 Emerging town centre developments will be subject to further changes. Nevertheless, it is envisaged that these opportunities can meet the remaining requirement for retail and commercial leisure uses up to 2011. The amount of development currently proposed, particularly within High Wycombe, is significant. The current priority is to ensure the successful implementation of these developments. It is now time to take stock and to monitor emerging developments and wider trends in retailing and leisure.

5.4 For these reasons, there is no clear quantitative or qualitative need for further retail or commercial leisure development outside the town centres up to 2011.

Development outside the hierarchy of centres will be resisted by the Council, unless the developer can demonstrate there is a need for their proposal, over and above commitments, which cannot be accommodated on opportunities within the town centres.