



# INFORMATION SHEET

## ***Planning and Sustainability***

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## **Delivery and Site Allocations Plan – Inspector’s Report and Main Modifications**

Officer contact: Ian Manktelow, HW 421579, [ian\\_manktelow@wycombe.gov.uk](mailto:ian_manktelow@wycombe.gov.uk)

### **Headline**

The independent planning inspector’s report on the Delivery and Site Allocations Plan, the plan that includes the High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan, has been published. The Inspector has supported the plan including the Masterplan, subject to some modifications. The Plan can now proceed to be adopted and the aim is to do this at Cabinet and Council on 16<sup>th</sup> July.

### **Background to the Delivery and Site Allocations Plan and Main Proposals**

The Delivery and Site Allocations Plan sets out planning policies and proposals for the town centres of High Wycombe, Marlow and Princes Risborough, including the High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan. It also includes a number of more detailed planning policies to secure more sustainable development.

The origins of the Plan go back to 2004 and the original work around the High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan, and other site work to underpin the Core Strategy. Following adoption of that Strategy in 2008 extensive consultation and considerable technical work was undertaken to prepare the Delivery and Site Allocations (DSA) Plan – to plan that helps deliver that Strategy. This included consultations in the summer of both 2009 and 2010. Further consultation took place in September 2011 following a reduction in the scope of the document to exclude issues relating to housing targets and other strategic housing and employment issues and sites – these are matters that are now being taken forward in the New Local Plan, work on which has now commenced.

The DSA Plan together with the New Local Plan (when it has been completed) will set out all the Council’s planning policies and site proposals for the District. In the shorter term the DSA will replace some policies that are in the current Local Plan (approved in 2004).

Amongst the key proposals in the DSA are:

- The High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan proposals to integrate the town centre, including changes to the town centre road network, public realm improvements and new development sites;

- Proposals for a range of other mixed use sites in High Wycombe, Marlow and Princes Risborough town centres;
- A revised and more flexible approach to changes of use in the main shopping frontages across the District;
- Proposals for addressing open space deficiency in, and regenerating, the Desborough area;
- A series of ‘development management’ policies aimed at delivering more sustainable forms of development. These include policies relating to:
  - Sustainable transport and transport improvement lines
  - Retail issues (including the definition of town and district centres)
  - Scattered business sites and mixed use sites
  - Green infrastructure including policies for green/open space, biodiversity, and river corridors;
  - Flood risk, carbon reduction and water efficiency
  - Infrastructure and viability.

## **The Examination Process**

The Plan was formally submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for independent examination on 21st September 2012. Inspector Paul Crysell was appointed to carry out the examination and he held hearings for 3 days between 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> December 2012. Following the hearings the Inspector asked the Council to consult on “Proposed Main Modifications” to the Plan – these were changes that the Inspector considered would be necessary to make the Plan “sound”. Consultation on these took place for a 6 week period in March and April 2013. The Inspector has taken account of representations received on this consultation and his report has now been published. A copy of his report is available in the Members Room and also on the website at [www.wycombe.gov.uk/dsaexamination](http://www.wycombe.gov.uk/dsaexamination).

The Inspector’s task in examining the Plan is to assess whether the Plan has been prepared in a legally compliant way and to assess whether it is “sound”, as set out in Government policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). There are four “tests of soundness” in the NPPF, namely that the Plan is positively prepared, justified, effective, and consistent with national policy.

## **Main Conclusions from the Inspector**

Overall the Inspector has concluded that the Plan is “sound” subject to including his recommended Main Modifications (see below). The Council has to include these modifications in the plan to enable it to adopt the plan. He considers that generally the proposals in the DSA accord with the Council’s vision and objectives for each town and illustrates the manner in which individual sites can be used, noting that a number of these sites are critical to the successful delivery of wider objectives.

In relation to the proposals for High Wycombe Town Centre, the Inspector:

- Supports the Town Centre Masterplan. He commented that whilst the proposed changes to the road system will be challenging to implement “they demonstrate the Council’s commitment to plan positively for its residents and business community”. He considered that the design and assessment work to inform the Masterplan was proportionate to explain and justify the proposals, and that the Council’s approach to deliverability is not unreasonable.
- Supports the other main site proposals for the town centre, including key sites such as Swan Frontage, Baker Street, and the Gas Works site.

In Marlow Town Centre, the Inspector has:

- Recommended the deletion of the Portlands Link Road from the plan. He comments that whilst removing traffic from the High Street would significantly improve the centre of the town this would be outweighed by the disadvantages of the link road, notably its urbanising effect on the tranquil environment to the west of the town centre and the fact that the link road would “seriously detract from the character of the Conservation Area and affect the living conditions of nearby residents.”
- Supported the main other proposals in the town centre including the housing allocation on the Portlands site, the proposals for the Riley Road and Liston Road sites, and the proposals relating to shopping frontages in the High Street.

In Princes Risborough Town Centre the Inspector has:

- Supported the two main mixed used allocation sites in the town centre, the Horns Lane site and land Fronting New Road. In relation to the latter he noted that proposals for the site would “improve the retail environment in Princes Risborough adding to the vibrancy of the town centre and enhancing the Conservation Area”.
- Supported the proposals for the flexibility for some additional change of use away from shop uses in the retail frontages that the Plan introduces, but resisted calls for even greater flexibility to ensure that the retail role of the town centre is not undermined.

The Inspector supported the principle of seeking to secure more open space in the Desborough area of High Wycombe, but recommended significant changes to the policy to ensure it was more deliverable and viable.

The Inspector has also supported a range of more detailed “development management” policies to help secure more sustainable development across the District. These cover a range of topics including transport, scattered business sites, retail including district centres, green infrastructure, flood risk and infrastructure/viability. He has recommended main modifications to some of these policies but all have been retained for inclusion in the plan, together with an additional policy (see below).

### **The Main Modifications**

The Main Modifications originally published in March 2013 have subsequently

formed part of the Inspector's recommendations in his final report. They were initially derived from changes that the Council had suggested to the Plan in the run up to, during and immediately after the hearings to help address outstanding objections and issues with the Plan. These changes were approved under delegated authority agreed at the time that the Council approved the Plan for submission (May/June 2012). The Inspector did not propose any other modifications to the Plan.

There are a total of 24 Main Modifications recommended by the Inspector which are set out at the end of his report. Although termed "main modifications" many of the changes are detailed in nature relating to the detailed wording of policy and supporting text in the Plan. In terms of the more substantive changes, these include the following:

- The removal of the requirement for a link road through the Portlands site in Marlow;
- The incorporation of a revised Policy HW2 concerning the provision of new open space in the Desborough area of High Wycombe;
- The addition of a new development management policy to encapsulate the Government's Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development principle into the Plan.

In the High Wycombe town centre section of the Plan, Main Modifications include changes to highlight the historic environment, address a range of detailed comments from the Environment Agency, ensure that the Bucks Fire and Rescue Services' interests are safeguarded, and ensure clarity and consistency in terms of the proposed highway improvements and changes.

In Marlow, in addition to the Portlands site changes, a minor change was proposed to the Liston Street site policy. Similarly in Princes Risborough a minor change was proposed to the policy for the Horns Lane site in relation to the fire station.

Main Modifications are also recommended in relation to a number of more detailed development management policies including biodiversity, green infrastructure, protection of river corridors, flood risk, and carbon reduction. Modifications are also proposed to the Policies Maps, mainly to correct previous errors in the mapping.

## **Next Steps**

The Plan, incorporating the Main Modifications recommended by the Inspector, will be proposed for adoption at Cabinet and Council on 16<sup>th</sup> July. Once adopted it will be published and will form part of the statutory "development plan". Full weight will be attached to its policies and proposals in the determination of relevant planning applications.

In relation to the High Wycombe Town Centre Masterplan, the Council is already working closely with the County Council and other stakeholders to implement the proposals, including bringing forward a planning application for the alternative route around the town centre later this year. Short term improvements also include plans for:

- a new surface crossing between the town centre and the Rye which will complement the proposals for the relocation of the museum; and
- pedestrian improvements in the St Mary's Street area.

It is anticipated that these will be subject to public consultation over the summer/autumn.