

A Bilfinger Real Estate  
company



## Report

GVA  
65 Gresham Street  
London  
EC2V 7NQ

# South Oxfordshire District Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment 2016

South Oxfordshire District Council

Final Report - May 2016



[gva.co.uk](http://gva.co.uk)

Contact:  
Caroline Marginson, Director  
[caroline.marginson@gva.co.uk](mailto:caroline.marginson@gva.co.uk)  
DD: 020 7911 2551 / M: 07818 001 658

Adam Bunn, Principal Planner  
[adam.bunn@gva.co.uk](mailto:adam.bunn@gva.co.uk)  
DD: 020 7911 2209/ M: 07557 202 784

Switchboard: 0844 902 0304

**For and on behalf of GVA Grimley Ltd**

## CONTENTS

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Policy Framework .....	3
3. Retail Market Review and Town Centre Trends.....	22
4. Didcot Health Check.....	28
5. Henley-on-Thames Health Check .....	37
6. Thame Health Check.....	45
7. Wallingford Health Check.....	52
8. Quantitative Convenience Needs Assessment .....	58
9. Quantitative Comparison Needs Assessment .....	67
10. Commercial leisure assessment .....	78
11. Conclusions and Recommendations .....	84

### Plans

Plan 1	Telephone Survey Area Plan
Plan 2	Town Centres and Foodstores
Plan 3	Didcot Town Centre Convenience Goods Market Shares
Plan 4	Henley Town Centre Convenience Goods Market Shares
Plan 5	Thame Town Centre Convenience Goods Market Shares
Plan 6	Wallingford Town Centre Convenience Goods Market Shares
Plan 7	Asda, Wheatley Convenience Goods Market Shares
Plan 8	Tesco, Henley-on-Thames, Convenience Goods Market Share
Plan 9	Tesco, Didcot, Convenience Goods Market Share
Plan 10	Didcot Town Centre Comparison Goods Market Share
Plan 11	Henley-on-Thames Town Centre Comparison Goods Market Share
Plan 12	Thame Town Centre Comparison Goods Market Share
Plan 13	Wallingford Town Centre Comparison Goods Market Share
Plan 14 – 16	Competing Centre Comparison Goods Market Share

### Appendices

Appendix I	Convenience Capacity Modelling
Appendix II	Comparison Capacity Modelling

# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Bilfinger GVA has been instructed by South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) to undertake an assessment of retail and other town centre uses within the District's four main centres (Didcot, Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford) and forecast the need for new retail floorspace in the District up to 2031.
- 1.2 The study will update the last retail and leisure needs assessment<sup>1</sup> and provide an evidence base and reasoned justification for the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 and neighbourhood plans.
- 1.3 Our terms of reference are to:
- Review and advise on the performance of the four main centres of Didcot, Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford, identifying any potential deficiencies or 'gaps' in existing provision or underserved markets; and
  - Identify the capacity for new retail provision across the four main centres up to 2031 in accordance with the provisions of the NPPF and in light of potential increases in population and forecast changes in retail expenditure.
- 1.4 In addition to on-site and desk based evidence gathering, this report is informed by a new and up-to-date household telephone survey of shopping patterns across the survey area which has been used for this assessment. The household telephone survey identifies current patterns of food, non-food and commercial leisure visits of residents in South Oxfordshire and the surrounding area; further details of our approach to the survey are provided in Section 8. The household telephone survey was supported by in-centre visitor surveys and business surveys in the town centres of Didcot, Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford, in order to provide further insight on the current performance of these centres. All survey work was undertaken by NEMS Market Research, as sub-consultant to Bilfinger GVA.
- 1.5 Our health check assessments (and subsequent analysis) refer to different types of retail and commercial leisure floorspace, as follows:
- **'Convenience'** goods refers to food shopping – including supermarkets, and specialist stores such as bakers, greengrocers, off licences and so on;
  - **'Comparison'** goods refers to non-food shopping – including fashion, home furnishings, electrical items, DIY goods, books and music
  - **'Services'** uses refers to commercial leisure services such as restaurants and cafes, as well as retail services such as hairdressers, beauty salons, banks, building societies and estate agents.

---

<sup>1</sup> South Oxfordshire District Council Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment 2009, updated 2010, Roger Tym & Partners

Non-retail uses such as cinemas and arts centres are not included in Experian Goad's analysis, but are accounted for qualitatively through our own analysis.

## Structure

1.6 This report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** sets out our review of relevant national, strategic and local planning policies;
- **Section 3** provides an overview of current national economic trends influencing town centres and retailing, including the role of online shopping;
- **Sections 4, 5, 6 and 7** present our qualitative assessment of Didcot, Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford, highlighting key changes since the last Study, which was completed in 2009;
- **Section 8** sets out the quantitative capacity forecasts for new retail provision within the District, split between comparison (non-food) floorspace and convenience (food) floorspace;
- **Section 9** sets out our assessment of commercial leisure needs; and
- **Section 10** concludes the report, summarising our findings and recommending a strategy for guiding the retail growth of South Oxfordshire's centres based upon evidence from previous sections.

## 2. Policy Framework

- 2.1 In this section we examine the key features of national and local planning policy guidance which provides the context and framework for this study.

### National Policy

#### The National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)

- 2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published on 27 March 2012 sets out the Government's planning policies for England and replaces the suite of national Planning Policy Statements, Planning Policy Guidance and Circulars with a single document.
- 2.3 The NPPF continues to recognise that the planning system is plan-led and therefore Local Plans, incorporating neighbourhood plans where relevant, are the starting point for the determination of any planning application. In line with the Government's aim to streamline the planning process, each Local Planning Authority (LPA) should produce a single Local Plan for its area with any additional documents to be used only where clearly justified.
- 2.4 The NPPF maintains the general thrust of previous policy set out in PPS4 – Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth (2009). It advocates a 'town centres first' approach, and requires planning policies to positively promote competitive town centre environments and manage the growth of centres over the plan period. In planning for town centres LPAs should:
- Recognise town centres as the heart of their communities and pursue policies to support their viability and vitality;
  - Define a network and hierarchy of centres that is resilient to anticipated future economic changes;
  - Define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, based on a clear definition of primary and secondary shopping frontages in designated centres and set policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in such locations;
  - Promote competitive town centres that provide customer choice and a diverse retail offer which reflect the individuality of town centres;
  - Retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones, ensuring that markets remain attractive and competitive;
  - Allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of economic development needed in town centres. Where town centre sites are not available, LPAs should adopt a sequential approach to allocate appropriate edge of centre sites;
  - Set policies for the consideration of proposals for main town centre uses which cannot be accommodated in or adjacent to town centres;
  - Recognise that residential development can play an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres; and

- Where town centres are in decline, plan positively for their future to encourage economic activity.
- 2.5 LPAs should ensure that the Local Plan is based on adequate, up-to-date and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area. These assessments should be integrated and take full account of relevant market and economic signals. LPAs should use the evidence base to assess, inter alia;
- The needs for land or floorspace for economic development, taking account of both quantitative and qualitative requirements for all foreseeable types of economic activity over the plan period, including retail and commercial leisure development;
  - The existing and future supply of land available for economic development and its sufficiency and suitability to meet the identified needs;
  - The role and function of town centres and the relationship between them, including any trends in the performance of centres; and
  - The capacity of existing centres to accommodate new town centre development.
- 2.6 The Local Plan will be examined by an independent inspector whose role is to assess whether the plan has been prepared in accordance with the Duty to Cooperate, legal and procedural requirements, and whether it is sound. In order to be found sound the Plan should be:
- **Positively prepared** i.e. based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements;
  - **Justified** i.e. the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the alternatives;
  - **Effective** i.e. deliverable over its plan period and based on effective joint working; and
  - **Consistent with national policy** i.e. enable the delivery of sustainable development.
- 2.7 In respect of development control, paragraphs 24 and 26 of the NPPF set out the criteria for assessing applications against the sequential and impact tests. Paragraph 24 states that local planning authorities are instructed to apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan. Similarly, paragraph 26 states that when assessing applications for retail outside of town centres, which are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan, local planning authorities should require an impact assessment (schemes over 2,500 sq m gross, unless a locally set threshold indicates an alternative).
- 2.8 Overall, the NPPF adopts a positive approach, with a presumption in favour of sustainable development and support for economic growth. In terms of decision-making, applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions.

## National Planning Policy Guidance (online)

- 2.9 On 6 March 2014 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) launched the online planning practice guidance, which cancelled a number of previous planning practice guidance documents, including the Practice Guidance on Need, Impact and the Sequential Approach (2009). Although it does not constitute a statement of Government policy, it provides technical guidance on how to prepare a robust evidence base and how to assess the impact of proposals for main town centre uses.
- 2.10 The web-based resource provides guidance on how to assess and plan to meet the needs of main town centre uses in full through production of a positive vision or strategy for town centres. This strategy should be based on evidence of the current state of town centres and opportunities to meet development needs and support their viability and vitality and should consider:
- The appropriate and realistic role, function and hierarchy of town centres in the area over the plan period. This will be informed by audits of existing centres to assess their role, vitality, viability and the potential to accommodate new development. It should cover a three to five year period, but also take the lifetime of the Local Plan into account and be reviewed regularly;
  - The most appropriate mix of uses in the centre to enhance overall vitality and viability;
  - The potential to expand centres or enable new development or redevelopment of under-utilised spaces to accommodate the scale of need identified for main town centre uses. This should involve evaluating different policy options (for example, expanding the market share of a particular centre) or the implications of wider policy such as infrastructure delivery and demographic or economic change;
  - Appropriate timeframes for provision of new retail floorspace;
  - Complementary strategies that may be necessary or appropriate to enhance the town centre and help deliver the vision for its future; and
  - How car parking provision can be enhanced and both parking charges and enforcement be made proportionate in order to encourage town centre vitality.
- 2.11 The NPPG sets out a range of indicators relevant when assessing the health of town centres over time. These include:
- Diversity of uses;
  - Proportion of vacant street level property;
  - Commercial yields on non-domestic property;
  - Customer views and behaviour;
  - Retailer representation and intentions to change representation;
  - Commercial rents;
  - Pedestrian flows;
  - Accessibility;
  - Perceptions of safety and occurrence of crime; and



- State of town centre environmental quality.

- 2.12 When planning for town centres, LPAs should take full account of relevant market signals and keep retail land allocations under regular review. Where it is not possible or appropriate to accommodate identified capacity in town centre locations, LPAs should plan positively to identify the most appropriate alternative strategy for meeting the need for these main town centre uses, having regard to the sequential and impact tests.
- 2.13 When applying the sequential approach in plan-making, LPAs should take into account the need for main town centre uses, the supply and demand for land, and whether there are sites which are suitable, available and viable having regard to the nature of the need that is to be addressed. If the additional main town centre uses cannot be accommodated in town centre sites, the next sequentially preferable sites should be considered. Local Plans should contain policies to apply the sequential test to proposals for main town centre uses that may come forward outside identified sites or locations allocated in the Local Plan.

## Relevant Government Research

### The Portas Review (2011)

- 2.14 In May 2011, Mary Portas was appointed to lead an independent review into the future of the high street, largely in response to the far-reaching effects of the recession on the retail industry and local high streets in particular. The report, published in December 2011, suggests measures to tackle the further decline of the high street.
- 2.15 Amongst the 28 separate recommendations set out in the report, there is a call to strengthen policy in favour of 'town centres first'. This followed the publication of the draft NPPF. In summary the recommendations aim to:
- **Run town centres like businesses:** by strengthening the management of high streets through 'Town Teams', developing the BID model and encouraging new markets;
  - **Get the basics right:** by looking at how the business rate system could better support small businesses and independent retailers, encouraging affordable town centre car parking and looking at further opportunities to remove red tape on the high street;
  - **Level the playing field:** by ensuring a strong town centre first approach in planning, introduce Secretary of State 'exceptional sign off' for out-of-town development and encouraging large retailers to show their support for high streets by mentoring local businesses;
  - **Define landlords' roles/responsibilities:** by looking at disincentives for landlords leaving properties vacant, and empowering local authorities where landlords are negligent and making proactive use of Compulsory Purchase Order powers; and
  - **Give communities greater say:** by including the high street in neighbourhood planning and encouraging innovative community uses of empty high street spaces.

## Government Response to Portas Review (2012) and subsequent developments

- 2.16 The Government published its formal response to the Portas Review in March 2012, which accepted virtually all of Portas' recommendations. It announced that 24 'Portas Pilot' were to be set up, with Town Teams to create plans for the future of their high streets. In addition the Government will provide investment to help Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) access loans for their set-up costs and funding for a Future High Street X-Fund to reward towns which are delivering innovative plans to bring their town centres back to life. In its response, the Government also supports a National Market Day in June and have doubled small business rate relief until March 2015. It also supports community involvement in the redesigning of high streets to reinvigorate areas of decline, increase footfall and encourage people to live in their town centres. None of the centres in South Oxfordshire are Portas Pilot towns.
- 2.17 The Government did not support the call to introduce the suggested Secretary of State 'exceptional sign off' for all new out-of-town developments or require all large new developments to have an 'affordable shops' quota. The Government states that LPAs are best placed to understand local needs and 'exceptional sign off' is contrary to the Government's ethos of devolution. As such, the Government will continue to use the call-in power sparingly.
- 2.18 Other measures which have been introduced by Government subsequent to the Portas Review include:
- Funding for 330 'town teams' in addition to the 24 Portas Pilot towns set up under the initial Government response;
  - Establishment of the Future High Streets Forum, which brings together businesses, academics and local leaders to work with councils to drive forward new ideas and policies for improving town centres. The Forum is co-chaired by the DCLG and members include Mary Portas, senior figures at the British Independent Retailers Association, British Property Federation, Association of Town & City Management, the British Council of Shopping Centres, and retailers such as Tesco, John Lewis and McDonalds.
  - Changes to business rates, effective from April 2014, including discount for business rates for retail premises with a rateable value of up to £50,000;
  - Relaxation of aggressive parking policies in town centres, and allowing local people and businesses to demand a review of parking in their area (separately, a number of local authorities have also reviewed and revised parking charges, including offering free or discounted provision at quiet times);
  - The establishment of a fund to support the creation of new business improvement districts through the so-called 'loan fund scheme', and a review of how the business improvement district model could be improved, including increasing their involvement in the planning process;
  - Support for promotion of local markets through the 'Love Your Local Market' campaign; and
  - The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 has introduced greater flexibility to enable a more straightforward change of use within shopping

frontages. Of particular relevance, the amendments allow permitted change from retail premises (A1) to financial services (A2), and restaurants and cafes (A3) without a time limit on that change of use. The move is designed to reduce vacancies on high streets. This will however serve to bypass the retail policies of many Local Authorities, which restrict the amount of non-A1 units in a retail centre or frontage.

## Local Policy

- 2.19 South Oxfordshire have commenced a review of the local plan called the Local Plan 2031, and this assessment will update the last retail and leisure needs assessment and provide an evidence base and reasoned justification for the emerging policy framework. It is important to understand the existing spatial strategy and detailed site considerations in advance of formulating the new evidence and policy recommendations.

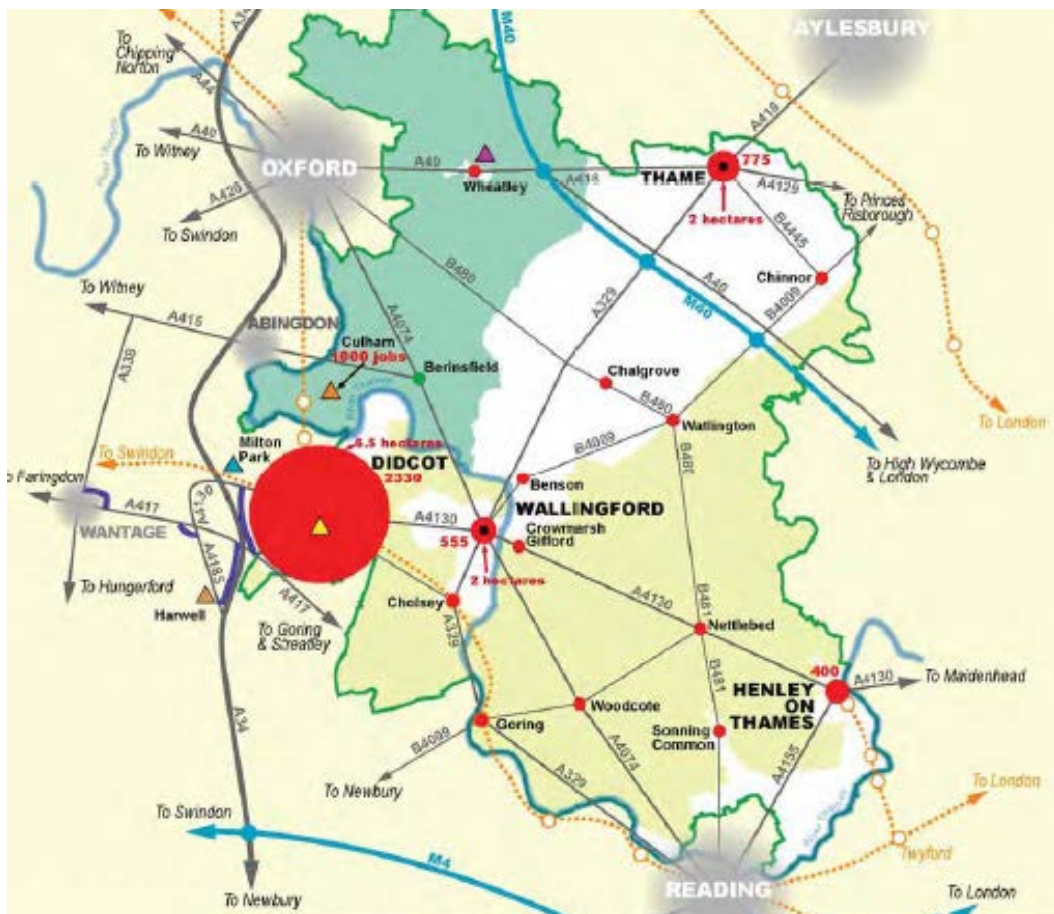
## South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (2012)

- 2.20 The Core Strategy was adopted in December 2012. It sets out the key elements of the Council's spatial planning framework which will be used to deliver the Council's vision for the District to 2027. This vision is for a prosperous District with access to high quality leisure, cultural, health and shopping facilities. According to this vision and the objectives which aim to achieve it, Didcot will be a major centre following regeneration of its central area, particularly east of the Orchard Centre, the Broadway and the station, and the construction of new greenfield neighbourhoods.
- 2.21 Reflecting Didcot's status as a New Growth Point, a significant amount of residential growth is planned for the town over the Core Strategy period. Paragraph 7.14 of the Core Strategy confirms that a total of **6,300 new dwellings will be constructed in Didcot** over the period to 2027.
- 2.22 Of this total figure of 6,300:
- almost 4,000 dwellings have been accounted for by existing permissions and Local Plan strategic allocations for new development which have been 'carried over', including a large allocation at Great Western Park (2,587 dwellings, with further construction of a further 2,750 dwellings on adjacent land which falls within the administrative area of Vale of White Horse);
  - two new strategic allocations are identified, at North East Didcot (2,030 dwellings) and 300 dwellings as part of the proposed Orchard Centre Phase II development in Didcot town centre (2,330 new strategic allocations in total for Didcot).
- 2.23 A total requirement of **5,187 dwellings is identified for the rest of the District**, which is treated as a single housing area in the Core Strategy. Of this figure of 5,187 dwellings:
- 2,460 are accounted for by completions and existing Local Plan allocations which have been 'carried forward';

- new strategic allocations for an additional 2,884 dwellings for the rest of the District, distributed as follows:
  - o 400 additional dwellings at Henley (recognising that Henley is a constrained centre with limited scope to accommodate significant additional housing growth);
  - o 775 additional dwellings at Thame;
  - o 555 additional dwellings at Wallingford; and
  - o The remainder of the allocation (1,154) distributed between the larger villages in the District.

2.24 **Figure 2.1** is an extract from the Core Strategy key diagram, confirming the levels of housing growth identified for each of the main centres in the District (identified by the red circles) and the Council's policy aspiration to focus growth in Didcot.

**Figure 2.1: Strategic housing allocations in South Oxfordshire Core Strategy**



Source: South Oxfordshire Core Strategy, 2012

2.25 The Core Strategy identifies key challenges for the town centres of Didcot, Henley, Thame and Wallingford, including the influence of larger competing centres such as Reading, Oxford, Aylesbury and High Wycombe, and the potential threats to viability and vitality of South Oxfordshire's market towns identified in the Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment 2009 (the '2009

Study'). The Council will seek to encourage the provision of facilities and services in the District's towns, whilst maintaining and developing their distinctive character and tourism potential.

2.26 Policy CST1 'Town centres and shopping' defines the retail hierarchy in the District as follows:

**Table 2.1: South Oxfordshire District Retail Hierarchy**

Town centres serving a local and wider catchment area					
Didcot	Henley				
Town centres serving a local catchment area					
Thame	Wallingford				
Local centres serving their immediate rural area					
Berinsfield	Benson	Chalgrove	Chinnor	Cholsey	Crowmarsh Gifford
Goring	Nettlebed	Sonning Common	Watlington	Wheatley	Woodcote

Source: South Oxfordshire District Council Core Strategy, December 2012

2.27 The policy seeks to maintain and enhance the roles of the centres according to their position in the hierarchy, including through the management of changes of use in primary and secondary frontages. It states that developments will be permitted which:

- Provide further retail and leisure uses within the town and larger village centres through infill development and small scale redevelopment;
- Diversify the town centres to provide uses which are complementary to retail, while not undermining the town's retail role, including mixed use developments for community facilities, upper floor residential and office uses, and uses which contribute to the evening economy;
- Reinforce the local distinctiveness of market towns, improve their vitality and viability and encourage more visits.

2.28 The Council will seek to site main town centre uses within defined town centres. Proposals on unallocated sites outside the town centre will be required to be in accessible locations and to satisfy the sequential test, and an impact assessment if over 2,500sqm.

2.29 According to the Strategy, the 2009 Study found that residents tended to travel outside the District for comparison goods shopping, with the exception of Didcot, but that convenience goods trade is more localised and retained by the District. All four of the District's main centres were successful in maintaining leisure expenditure, particularly Henley and Thame. The aspiration is for Didcot to expand its role to that of a secondary regional centre.

2.30 The quantitative need for future retail and leisure floorspace in the District's main centres identified by the 2009 Study is summarised in **Table 2.2**.

**Table 2.2: Existing and future town centre floorspace need identified by 2009 Study**

Town	Existing A1-A5 floorspace, sqm gross	Quantitative need for future A1-A5 floorspace, sqm gross	
		2007-2016	2007-2027
Didcot	29,707	26,800	52,700
Henley	37,534	2,100	9,200
Thame	22,556	1,400	5,700
Wallingford	21,870	2,500	6,900

Source: South Oxfordshire District Council Core Strategy, December 2012

Note: these figures will be superseded by the outputs from this Retail and Leisure Needs Assessment (2015)

- 2.31 For the purposes of this Assessment, the relevant remaining sections of the Core Strategy are split into sections for each of the District's main centres, and we describe the main contents of these under the same headings below.

### Didcot

- 2.32 Didcot is identified for significant housing growth, with 3,661 additional homes committed at the time of the Core Strategy and a further 2,330 homes planned. It is part of the Science Vale UK area, which is set to experience significant employment growth in knowledge intensive and high technology industries. This growth provides the impetus to improve the town centre with retail-led redevelopment and regeneration of the station and Broadway. Policy CSDID1 states that the Council will work to secure these improvements, amongst others.
- 2.33 Policy CSDID2 deals specifically with mixed-use retail-led development at the Orchard Centre. The site is allocated for 20,000-25,000sqm gross of additional A1-A5 floorspace, c. 300 dwellings as well as the potential for leisure, community, commercial and hotel uses.
- 2.34 Policy CSDID4 describes a number of other proposals for Didcot, including new sports and recreation facilities. It is suggested that this provision should be located within the new north-east Didcot greenfield neighbourhood, a new neighbourhood designation for 2,030 homes north of the A4130.

### Henley-on-Thames

- 2.35 The Core Strategy identifies a number of challenges facing Henley in the future which must be addressed through planning policy. These include a trend towards smaller households, an ageing population, ease of access to improved retail and leisure facilities in Reading, internet shopping, the high cost of housing and traffic congestion.
- 2.36 Policy CSHEN1 states that the Council will identify land for 400 new homes in Henley, including through infill and redevelopment, will strengthen commerce in the town centre through retail-led redevelopment and identify additional retail and leisure floorspace, and improve the town's

environment. Other measures include improved car parking, strengthening the Market Place as a focal hub and encouraging a greater mix of uses. A Henley-Harpsden Joint Neighbourhood Plan has been submitted, which will allocate sites for 450 dwellings and retail, leisure and commercial uses. This is discussed further below.

## Thame

- 2.37 One of the key issues facing Thame is the expansion of the nearby competing centres of High Wycombe, Oxford and Aylesbury, which each draw trade from residents in the Thame area. Other issues include a lack of parking, particularly on market days, and a lack of leisure and community facilities.
- 2.38 Policy CSTHA1 states that the strategy for Thame town centre is to strengthen commerce and identify sites suitable for future retail, leisure and community uses, to improve Thame's attractiveness to visitors and businesses, to improve accessibility, and to enhance the quality of the town centre environment. In order to maintain Thame's market share, the document states it will be necessary to expand the existing offer with new retail and leisure operators. At the same time, small and independent retailers should also be retained in order to maintain the existing character of the town. The 2009 Study identified 2 potential sites, the Cattle Market and the postal sorting office/telephone exchange. These have been reviewed in the Thame Neighbourhood Plan, which also assesses the town centre boundary and the primary and secondary frontages.
- 2.39 Policy CSTHA2 states that the Thame Neighbourhood Plan will allocate land for 775 new homes. This document has subsequently been adopted.

## Wallingford

- 2.40 The Core Strategy states that as Didcot has grown and will continue to grow, so the retail function of Wallingford has declined. A key part of the Council's strategy for the centre is therefore to encourage greater development of the town's role as a local centre which can be complementary to Didcot's offer, rather than in competition with it. Other issues include the need to find a permanent use for the former Waitrose store, and the need to more fully attract visitors to the centre.
- 2.41 The strategy for Wallingford, as outlined by Policy CSWAL1, therefore involves the redevelopment of the former Waitrose site, provided that retail and car parking are retained, supporting the market place as a focal hub, a focus on the River Thames as a draw for visitors, improving accessibility, supporting the enhancement of the town's environment, and allowing housing on suitable infill and redevelopment sites.
- 2.42 In terms of retail, Policy CSWAL1 states that the redevelopment of the former Waitrose site should be retail-led and mixed-use. The Strategy also identifies that Wallingford is lacking in bars, restaurants, cafés and food stores. Policy CSWAL2 states that 555 new homes will be granted on a greenfield site to the west of the town.



## South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (2006)

- 2.43 A number of the policies contained in the Local Plan 2011 remain in operation after being ‘saved’ in November 2008, and only being partially updated by the Core Strategy. Originally adopted in 2006, the Local Plan 2011 seeks to improve the quality of life of present and future residents of South Oxfordshire, making provision for further development whilst protecting and enhancing the natural and built assets of the District. Much of the strategic policies were not saved, but many of the more specific policies remain in force.
- 2.44 Section 5 is concerned with meeting the social needs of the District. Policy R3 states that new indoor sports facilities will be permitted within towns and villages provided that the design and materials of the building are in keeping with its surroundings and there are no overriding objections on highway or amenity grounds. Policy CF1 deals with community facilities, and states that loss of a recreation facility or an essential community facility will not be permitted unless suitable alternative provision is made, or the facility is no longer needed or viable. Conversely, Policy CF2 states that proposals for additional community facilities or services in settlements will be permitted provided there are no overriding amenity, environmental or traffic objections. Policy CF3 states that, in the local and neighbourhood centres of towns and in the larger villages, change of use of shops to non-retail uses will only be permitted where this would not detract from the overall role and attractiveness of the shopping area.
- 2.45 Section 6 of the Local Plan deals with the District’s local economy. Policy E6 states that proposals for the redevelopment or change of use of redundant buildings in employment use to non-employment use will be permitted if the site is less than 0.25ha and buildings under 500sqm and in the towns of Didcot, Henley, Thame or Wallingford, or if the existing use is no longer viable following marketing of at least a year for employment uses.
- 2.46 Policy TSM1 addresses tourism, providing that the tourist industry will be supported through encouragement of enterprises which are based on the conservation and enjoyment of the inherent qualities and heritage of the area, provided that there are no overriding amenity, environmental or highway objections. Policy TSM2 further provides that improvements to tourist attractions and facilities, and proposals for new attractions based on the character of the area, will be permitted, subject to the same considerations in TSM1, and that there is no conflict with Green Belt policy, that the development is in character with the local area in terms of scale, nature, design, layout and materials, and where appropriate the site is accessible by public transport, on foot and by bike.
- 2.47 Other leisure uses are dealt with in the remainder of Section 6. Policy TSM3 permits the conversion of existing buildings for use as hotels, other serviced accommodation, public houses and restaurants, provided that the proposal is in keeping with the character, appearance and setting of the building, that there is no objection on highway/traffic grounds and no loss of amenity for local residents, and that there is no conflict with Green Belt policies.



- 2.48 The construction of new buildings for the same uses will be permitted within the built-up area of existing settlements under Policy TSM4, provided that the site is not in the Green Belt, the scale and location of the development is appropriate and the design and materials are in keeping with the locality, there is no significant loss of amenity for local residents, where appropriate the site is accessible for public transport, pedestrians and cyclists, and there are no overriding amenity, environmental or highway objections.
- 2.49 Section 7 contains policies to support the vitality and viability of the District's town centres. Policy TC2 provides that within Town Centre boundaries proposals for the extension of buildings, infilling and small-scale redevelopment will be permitted for mixed use development including shops, offices, housing and other key town centre uses. This is provided that the site is well integrated with the primary shopping frontage and there are no overriding amenity, design, environmental or traffic issues.
- 2.50 Policy TC5 states that the loss of existing residential accommodation in town centres will not be permitted, except where an independent access cannot be provided, or where there are insurmountable environmental factors which militate against continued residential use. Policy TC6 provides that office use at upper floors above existing commercial premises will be permitted within the town centre boundary, provided that the viability of the ground floor shop would not be adversely affected, no viable or potentially viable dwelling will be lost, the site is well integrated with the primary shopping frontages, and there is no conflict with the policies for business uses or the control of alterations and changes of use to listed buildings.
- 2.51 Policy TC7 states that proposals for shops and other key town centre uses that attract many people will not be permitted outside of the town centre boundaries. Policy TC8 provides that the change of use of an A1 shop to a non-retail use will not be permitted within the primary shopping frontage if it would undermine the vitality and viability and the dominant retailing character and function of that frontage.
- 2.52 Section 8 describes the transport strategy for the District. Policy T8 states that car parking provision and management will improve the attraction of existing town and village centres and seek to maintain and enhance their vitality and viability, and encourage alternative transport nodes. Current car parking levels will be maintained until public transport and cycle routes are sufficiently development, but additional parking will only be provided where there is special justification.
- 2.53 The remaining relevant sections of the Local Plan describe site specific policy and allocations, which we discuss for each centre below.

### Didcot

- 2.54 In Didcot, there are a number of sites around the town allocated for major residential-led development. None of these allocations are within the town centre. The only allocation within Didcot town centre is the extension of the Orchard Centre (Core Strategy policy CSDID2) (which, as discussed above, has subsequently been the subject of a planning application and permission).

### Henley-on-Thames

2.55 Allocations for Henley-on-Thames include:

- a housing site to the northwest of the town centre at the Townlands Hospital sites;
- B1/B8 redevelopment of land at Reading Road Industrial Estate, to the southeast of the town; and
- the expansion of Market Place Mews in Henley town centre (Policy HEN2). This is the only allocation for development in Henley town centre. This allocation is for a comprehensive redevelopment of the site and adjoining land for up to c 2,000sqm gross GIA A1 retail units, and residential or office uses at the upper floors. Proposals should also entail no loss of parking and include a pedestrian link between Kings Road and Market Place.

### Thame

2.56 Thame has an allocation in the Local Plan 2011 for mixed use development including retail, at the Thame Cattle Market site within the town centre boundary (allocation THA1). Under the designation, mixed-use development will be permitted only where it comprises a comprehensive scheme for the site. Potential uses of the site include A1/A2/A3 retail units, excluding supermarkets, residential units or B1/A2 office uses up to 500sqm GIA on the upper floors, residential and non-residential institutions and assembly and leisure uses, improved pedestrian links with the primary frontage and public car parking spaces.

### Wallingford

2.57 There are two site allocations within the town centre boundary of Wallingford:

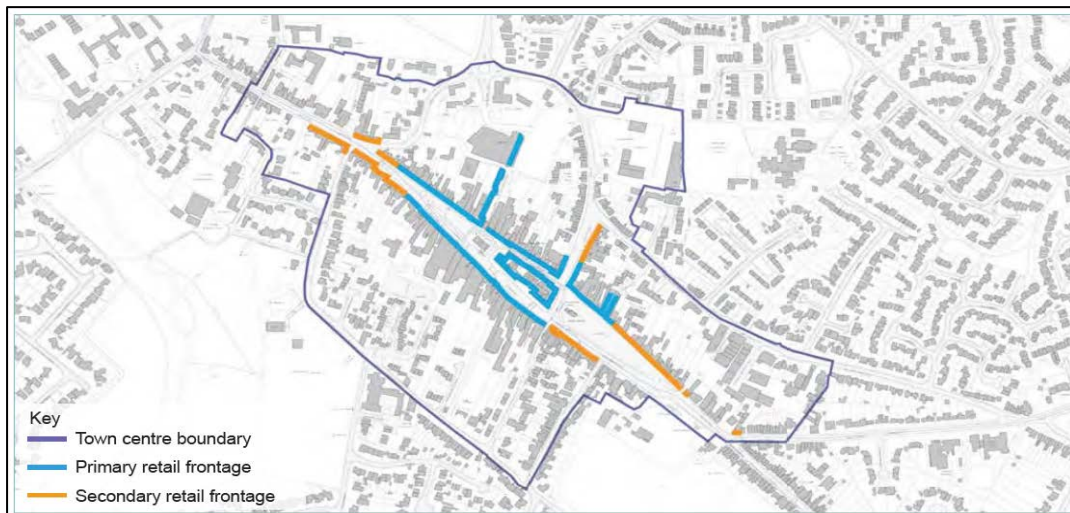
- The first is designation WAL2, which provides for the redevelopment of the Lamb Garage for residential use.
- The second allocation, policy WAL4, provides that proposals for the redevelopment of the former Waitrose supermarket and car park will be resisted where they would involve the loss of A1 use and public car parking spaces.

## Neighbourhood Plans

2.58 Through the Localism Act 2011, the government introduced neighbourhood planning, allowing Town or Parish Councils or community groups to draw up plans and policies for their local areas which become part of the statutory development plan. A number of these plans are being prepared within South Oxfordshire, with two plans now 'made' and forming part of the development plan for the district: Woodcote (May 2014) and Thame (May 2013). Many other towns and villages are in the process of preparing neighbourhood plans.

### Thame Neighbourhood Plan (2013)

- 2.59 Thame Town Council formally completed their Plan in May 2013 following a positive local referendum result. As one of the main centres in the District, we consider the policies in the Neighbourhood Plan for Thame below. The policies in the Neighbourhood Plan post-date the adoption of the District-wide Core Strategy in 2012.
- 2.60 The key vision set out for Thame is that it should remain a “real market town”, which means that it should continue to feel compact, that it should retain its existing weekly market and other events, and that it should continue to have a close relationship with the surrounding open countryside. Objectives which result from this vision include:
- Spread new housing allocated in the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy across several integrated sites and include a mix of housing sizes and types including affordable housing;
  - Improve pedestrian and cycle links with new housing, Haddenham and Thame Parkway station and other surrounding destinations, and ensure that car parking supports the vitality of the centre;
  - Support existing, particularly independent shops, allocate new employment land and ensure the Cattle Market supports the future of the centre;
  - Provide a new 200+ capacity community facility and allocate land for a new primary school ; and
  - Increase the amount of open space in new developments, improve existing open space including with riverside walks, ensure new development is sustainable, energy efficient and addressing flooding and drainage issues.
- 2.61 As a Neighbourhood Plan, the Plan must comply with strategic policies set out in the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy. As such, the Plan seeks to allocate 775 new homes under policy H1, a net gain of 2ha of employment land under policies WS11 and WS12, and up to 5,700sqm of new A1-A5 uses (except convenience stores) under policy WS1. A plan is provided, and reproduced below (**Figure 2.6**), which defines the Thame town centre boundary, and the primary and secondary frontages. This differs from the allocations in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 in that the secondary frontage has been added and the primary frontage has been extended slightly to include Swan Walk. The town centre boundary remains the same.

*Figure 2.6: Thame Neighbourhood Plan town centre boundary and retail frontages*

Source: South Oxfordshire Adopted Proposals Map

- 2.62 Policy WS1 of the Neighbourhood Plan states that proposals for new A1-A5 uses will be granted within the town centre.
- 2.63 Policy WS1 determines that within the primary retail frontage the proportion of A2-A5 uses a ground floor level will be restricted to 35%. Within secondary frontage, changes of use from residential and/or employment to A1-A5 uses will be supported provided that the proposed use is compatible with nearby residential properties. Other policies covering the town centre in general include policy WS7, which allows the change of use of ground floor employment uses to non-employment uses only when that the employment use is no longer viable, or if the change is to an A1-A5 use within the primary or secondary frontage.
- 2.64 Policy WS8 of the Neighbourhood Plan supports the use of upper floors for residential use within the town centre, subject to Policy WS7 and to the viability of ongoing ground floor shop use. Policy WS10 supports retail use on upper floors anywhere within the town centre boundary, provided the ongoing commercial use of the ground floor would not be compromised, that the proposals would be consistent with Policy WS9, that the site is well integrated with the primary and secondary frontages, and that there would be no negative impacts on neighbouring amenity.
- 2.65 A number of policies also deal with specific sites within the town centre. Policy WS3 of the Neighbourhood Plan allocates the postal sorting office and/or telephone exchange, at the western end of the High Street, for retail-led redevelopment should these uses become redundant. Policy WS4 of the Neighbourhood Plan states that the Fire Station site, on Nelson Road near the eastern end of the High Street, should be redeveloped for retail, business or community uses should the use become redundant. Policy WS5 states that land at 10 High Street, opposite the postal sorting office, should be redeveloped for retail uses should the use become redundant.
- 2.66 The main site allocation in the town centre, however, is the Cattle Market site. Policy WS14 of the Neighbourhood Plan allocates the site for mixed use redevelopment provided that the principal

use is retail. The development may include up to 3,000sqm of A1-A3 uses excluding a supermarket, residential uses at upper floor levels, B1 or A2 office uses at upper floor levels, residential and non-residential institutions and community facilities, public car parking spaces, and improved pedestrian links along North Street to the High Street.

- 2.67 Policy WS15 further sets out a number of principles which any redevelopment of the Cattle Market must adhere to in order that it relates positively to the wider town. These principles include the creation of a positive building frontage onto North Street, the inclusion of direct and attractive links to the pedestrian routes adjacent to Barley Hill Primary School, the positive integration of existing neighbouring residential uses, and the possibility of a new civic space at the south-western site entrance. Policy CLW1 repeats the potential for the Cattle Market site to incorporate a new community facility as part of a mixed use development.
- 2.68 Policies WS14 and WS15 in the Neighbourhood Plan replace policy THA1 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan. In combination, the retail policies in the Neighbourhood Plan supersede Local Plan policy TC8 for Thame.

#### **Joint Henley and Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan**

- 2.69 The Joint Henley and Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan (JHHNP) has been under preparation since 2012, and an 'examination stage' version was published in October 2015. The Neighbourhood Plan identifies land for 450 new dwellings, reflecting the Core Strategy requirement, largely on brownfield sites in and around Henley.
- 2.70 The Plan notes that short-term retail needs (as identified in the Council's previous retail evidence base study) have been met through the development of the Market Place Mews scheme in Henley town centre (discussed further in Section 5), and that, as this report discusses, changes in shopping patterns have had an impact on the amount of physical retail floorspace which needs to be planned for. The Plan's priority is therefore to ensure existing town centre units are filled to enhance the overall vibrancy of the town centre, rather than developing new retail areas which may detract from town centre spending.
- 2.71 Notwithstanding this, in order to plan for future retail needs arising in the town, the Plan identifies one site (Site E, Stuart Turner / Empstead Works) for up to 3,000 sq.m of 'town centre uses', which would deliver a modest expansion of the town centre. The site principally fronts onto Grays Road, with the rear of commercial properties along Gravel Hill forming the northern boundary.
- 2.72 The Plan states that a Design Brief is required for the site which should, inter alia, demonstrate how the proposed development contributes to town centre vitality, parking requirements, and responds to the surrounding Conservation Area. In addition to the aforementioned 3,000 sq.m of 'town centre uses', which includes retail, the Plan also indicates the site as being suitable for employment uses and for accommodating up to 42 dwellings. Local-scale retailing and community space (up to 500 sq.m) is also proposed for Site M, which seeks the residential-led redevelopment of a site at Highlands Farm.

### Didcot Town Centre SPD (2009)

- 2.73 As Didcot has grown rapidly in recent years, so the Town Centre has needed to evolve in order to meet the needs of an increasing population, but also to reflect the development of Didcot into the District's principal centre. The Didcot Town Centre SPD was adopted to guide the ongoing development of the centre given the scale of change that still remained to be realised.
- 2.74 The SPD considers the broadly triangular section of the centre enclosed by the Broadway, Hitchcock Way and Station Road. Key objectives identified by the SPD include the needs to introduce a greater mix of uses to the town centre, to expand and improve the retail offer, to provide new town centre homes, to improve accessibility and movement within and around the town centre, to provide new public open spaces, to create a sense of place and civic pride through high quality design, and to ensure that development is future-proofed and sustainable.
- 2.75 The SPD builds on the designations in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011, many of which have now been superseded by the Core Strategy. Nevertheless, Local Plan Policy DID8, and the provisions of the SPD relating to it, remain extant, and the SPD remains a material consideration for proposals across its study area.
- 2.76 In accordance with a Masterplan prepared for the centre as part of the SPD evidence base, it is suggested that retail provision is expanded eastwards from the current Orchard Centre, split as follows:
- c 3,400 sq.m extension to existing foodstore;
  - c 9,500 sq.m department store;
  - c 16,500 sq.m new retail units; and
  - c 2,700 sq.m redevelopment of existing units on The Broadway.
- 2.77 This provides for a total increase in floorspace of c 32,000sqm. It is envisaged that the majority of this, including a department store, would be incorporated within an eastward extension of Orchard Street (eastwards of the existing Orchard Shopping Centre). The SPD also states that the expansion of the town centre should include an enlarged and enhanced public library and facilities for young people, and possibly other community and social facilities. The SPD also encourages the provision of A3 uses to foster an evening economy, and of commercial leisure uses such as a fitness centre or ten-pin bowling. A hotel may also be appropriate, as may small offices to suit businesses serving the growing local community.
- 2.78 The SPD also states that new housing should be incorporated in the town centre to support the new uses, particularly evening uses. The Masterplan suggests that housing could comprise 50-100 townhouses, 50-100 flats, and c 250 flats above shops.

- 2.79 Development must create high quality pedestrian routes to connect with the surrounding residential areas, and other proposals should also seek to improve connections with the train station and the surrounding countryside.
- 2.80 Buildings should generally be at least 3 storeys in height, unless sunlight would be blocked as a result, and may be shorter closer to Hitchcock Way and taller closer to the centre of town. Landmark buildings should be incorporated at key nodes and address corners. The Cornerstone Theatre is stated to have set a benchmark for the centre in terms of quality. The High Street/Orchard Street confluence will be a key public space.
- 2.81 The Orchard Street / Orchard Centre extension, which roughly corresponds with the Local Plan policy DID8 designation, should create a continuous street from the Cornerstone in the west to the junction with Hagbourne Road in the east. Orchard Street would become the main retail street in the centre. The new public space at Orchard Street/High Street should be large enough to accommodate events.

## Summary

- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 and replaces the suite of national planning policy statements, including PPS4. The NPPF clearly advocates a ‘town centres first’ approach and requires planning policies to positively promote competitive town centre environments and manage the growth of centres over the plan period. The online National Planning Practice Guidance was published on 6th March 2014 and provides technical guidance on how to prepare a robust evidence base, including a list of indicators relevant when assessing the health and vitality of town centres over time.
- South Oxfordshire’s Core Strategy was adopted in December 2012 and aims to deliver the Council’s vision of creating a prosperous District with access to high quality leisure, cultural, health and shopping facilities. Policy CST1 defines the retail hierarchy in the District and identifies South Oxfordshire’s town centres as Didcot, Henley, Thame and Wallingford. Most notably, Didcot town centre has been flagged as a major opportunity area where significant increases in housing stock and retail floor space is expected.
- A number of the policies contained in the Local Plan 2011 remain in operation after being ‘saved’ in November 2008, and only being partially updated by the Core Strategy. These saved Local Plan policies seek to improve the quality of life for present and future residents of South Oxfordshire, making provisions for further development whilst protecting and enhancing the natural and built assets of the District.
- The Council have begun preparation of a replacement Local Plan, which will upon adoption supersede the policies of the Core Strategy and Local Plan 2011. The Local Plan 2031 will set out a strategy for delivering sustainable growth in South Oxfordshire, with particular regard to the meeting the additional growth for the District which has been identified in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment.

- The majority of neighbourhood plans within the District are at the preparation stage, however, Thame Town Council made a plan in 2013 that forms part of the development plan for the district. The key vision set out within this plan is for Thame to remain a 'real market town' by staying compact, retaining its weekly market and traditional events and continuing its close relationship with the surrounding countryside.
- The Didcot Town Centre SPD (2009) was adopted to guide the on-going development of the centre given the scale of change that is expected to take place. Key objectives identified by the SPD include the needs to introduce a greater mix of uses to the town centre, to expand and improve the retail offer, to provide new town centre homes, to improve accessibility and movement within and around the town centre, to provide new public open spaces, to create a sense of place and civic pride through high quality design, and to ensure that development is future-proofed and sustainable. Major retail and residential provision in Didcot is expected to be expanded eastwards from the Orchard Centre.



---

### 3. Retail Market Review and Town Centre Trends

- 3.1 At the time of the Council's previous retail evidence base study (completed in 2009), the retail sector was experiencing considerable challenges as a consequence of the extremely rapid deterioration in the national economy during the final months of 2008. Much has changed during and since this period of economic instability and recession, and this section considers these economic fluctuations in more detail, identifying implications for retail and town centre growth and/or change in centres in South Oxfordshire.

#### Economic Upswing

- 3.2 Analysis published by Experian (Retail Planner 2014) concluded that following several years of subdued performance, including a period of recession, a 'strong economic upswing' took place in early 2013, driven by increases in consumer spending and business investment. Experian note that whilst there remain drags on growth in terms of fiscal constraint and a weak export market, 'low inflation, strong employment growth and high levels of consumer and business confidence point to sustained expansion, albeit at a more modest pace'.
- 3.3 Consumer and investor confidence is tentatively returning, and town centres with a strong, broad retail and leisure mix can be expected to benefit directly from the upturn in the wider national economy as footfall and expenditure in town centres increase.

#### Changing Retailer Space Requirements

- 3.4 During the recession retailers' margins were squeezed, whilst other costs have continued to rise and a raft of multiple and independent retailers have either collapsed or significantly shrunk their store portfolios. The growth of the internet means that retailers no longer need stores in every town to achieve national coverage, and many are therefore focusing their development programmes on the provision of large flagship stores in strategic locations, supported by smaller satellite stores and transactional websites. This can have implications for centres such as those in South Oxfordshire, which are surrounded by a network of higher-order centres such as Oxford, Reading and Aylesbury – for many retailers, representation in these locations is likely to provide sufficient coverage for this part of the country.
- 3.5 The larger flagships accommodate full product ranges whilst smaller stores offer more select ranges, supplemented by internet kiosks allowing access to the full range. This offers many advantages to retailers including lower property costs, more efficient logistics and being able to open stores where there is a high level of demand despite there being space restrictions. This 'polarisation' of retailing is enabling larger dominant centres – like Oxford and Reading – to continue to attract key flagship formats, but does not rule out smaller, medium sized centres from offering the more limited floorspace formats being sought, and more upscale/specialist centres

such as Henley and Thame are particularly likely to continue to experience strong levels of demand.

## Internet Growth & Multichannel Retailing

- 3.6 The online shopping population is reaching saturation, and any future growth in the market is likely to come from increased spend driven by new technology, a better 'browsing' experience and improved delivery options. The growth in online sales has previously raised concerns about the continued need for bricks and mortar stores; however trends indicate that online and in-store shopping channels are becoming increasingly blurred.
- 3.7 The 'Click and Collect' market is the largest on-line growth sector in the UK at the current time. It is forecast to be one of the most significant drivers of growth, with expenditure set to grow by 82% between 2014 and 2019 to £6.5bn (Verdict 2014). Verdict comment that 'the importance of click & collect should not be underestimated. Maintaining a store network that can offer locality, whilst also having highly informative websites to drive growth, is now a fundamental requirement'. It can be used as an important tool in helping town centres to continue to have an important role and function, by being a footfall generator in its own right.
- 3.8 It is apparent that, despite being a relatively new concept for the retail sector to embrace, click & collect is affirming that physical stores will continue to have a role in the multichannel shopping environment. The advantages of physical stores, in terms of the shopping experience, service and immediacy of products in a showroom setting, will ensure that a network of key stores remains a fundamental component of retailer's strategies to provide an integrated multichannel retail proposition. Importantly for centres in South Oxfordshire, the click & collect phenomenon will drive an occupier desire to have a representation of physical store units across town centres.

## The Role of the Town Centre

- 3.9 The town centre has been the main shopping channel for centuries, but in the face of new forms of E-Tailing competition many will need to continue to adapt in order to remain viable shopping destinations. Emerging trends suggest that many centres will be used increasingly for leisure and social activities as well as traditional retailing, with more bars, restaurants, food outlets and community spaces.
- 3.10 Enhancing the non-retail offer so towns function as more than just retail locations will help drive footfall and increase dwell time. Towns should promote unique attractions such as heritage assets, historic buildings and cultural features which can differentiate a centre and improve its attractiveness. Many of the centres in South Oxfordshire are well placed to capitalise on this, with Henley, Thame and Wallingford all offering historic, attractive town centre environments, and Henley in particular has a diverse offer which includes a well-developed evening economy.

- 3.11 To ensure that town centres have a viable function moving forwards they must provide an attractive shopping and leisure experience which the internet is unable to match. A wider strategy must deliver a mix of town centre uses to enhance the attraction of a centre, and increase frequency of visit and dwell time. A vital component of this will be making town centres as accessible as possible, with improved and affordable car parking, as well as investment in public realm and place marketing initiatives.

### Convenience Goods/Foodstores

- 3.12 The main foodstores ('big four' - Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda, Morrisons) have reigned in substantial expansion and the roll-out of super-sized stores. The combined spread of convenience store openings, online grocery sales, and the expansion of 'deep discount' retailers such as Aldi and Lidl has fundamentally changed consumer shopping behaviour. These trends have encouraged repetitive top-up shopping that in turn diminishes main grocery sales and renders large-format stores less profitable.
- 3.13 The 'big four' have historically had a combined market share of over 75% of the convenience goods market, although in recent years their dominant market position is being increasingly challenged by discount retailers such as Lidl and Aldi and also the continued growth in convenience retailers offering a more upscale product offer such as Waitrose. The value/discount retailers are, in particular, in the midst of a period of rapid expansion, having gained considerable market share during the recession. The recent opening of a new Aldi store in Didcot is evidence of the expansion of the discount retailers beyond their traditional heartlands and we would expect further applications for discount foodstores in the District to come forward in the short to medium term.
- 3.14 The 'big four', meanwhile, are scaling back expansion plans, with Tesco, Sainsbury's and Morrisons all 'mothballing' a number of sites on which they had previously secured planning permission for new supermarkets, with Morrisons now seemingly unlikely to progress with their permitted store in Wallingford, for example. Both Tesco and Morrisons have also taken to closing underperforming supermarkets in recent months, and Morrisons have also recently disposed of their 'M Local' convenience store chain, partly as a consequence of being a late entrant to the convenience goods market and therefore securing less profitable trading locations.

### Out-of-Centre Retailing

- 3.15 Retailers are opting to develop stores in the most strategic and cost effective locations, with a notable resurgence of out-of-centre destinations apparent in recent years, which offer benefits of lower rents, larger retail units and in most cases, free car parking. According to Verdict, out-of-town retailing is the only form of retailing which has seen store numbers increase consistently since 2000. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) reports that the number of out-of-centre stores has increased by up to c.1,800 (25%) since 2000; whilst the number of town centre

stores fell by almost 15,000 between 2000 and 2009, the majority of which are likely to have been in 'high street' locations.

- 3.16 The recovery of market confidence is benefitting out-of-town retailing. Vacancy rates have fallen, footfall has increased, and many retailers are seeking expansion in out-of-centre locations. A number of these are traditional town centre retailers which have developed out-of-town store formats, including John Lewis, which now operates a number of 'At Home' stores in out-of-centre locations, as well as other traditionally 'high street'-focussed retailers such as Debenhams, Next, Primark and H&M.
- 3.17 Another trend is the evolution of traditional retail 'box' warehouse developments into retail parks, sub-dividing units, expanding the product offer, and developing beyond just retail to introduce food and beverage, encouraging longer dwell times. Retail park owners are also refurbishing their retail parks; i.e. public realm, walkways, car parks, signage, landscaping and seating to enhance the visitor experience. South Oxfordshire has, with the exception of limited provision in Didcot, witnessed relatively little in the way of out-of-centre retail warehouse development, although as this trend could strengthen such provision in neighbouring boroughs with greater levels of provision (for example, there is a considerable concentration of retail warehouse development in Abingdon, which is easily accessible for residents in parts of South Oxfordshire), it should be monitored.

## Commercial Leisure

- 3.18 As the nature of retail and high-street shopping continues to change over time, the commercial leisure sector is becoming an increasingly important contributor to the vitality and viability of town centres. Leisure time is a precious commodity to consumers and in order to maximise free time, research suggests that town centre visitors often combine leisure activities as part of an overall going out experience.
- 3.19 Reflecting this trend, leisure is becoming an increasingly important component in town centre regeneration schemes, particularly in secondary / sub-regional towns (Didcot being a good example of this) which, reflecting the wider trends in the retail sector previously identified, are in some cases becoming less attractive as retail destinations.
- 3.20 The recession brought mixed fortunes for the restaurant sector. The main casualties were from the more exclusive end of the market, as well as smaller companies with less established brands. Many companies owning multiple brands expanded throughout the economic downturn and continue to trade well, often by offering heavy promotions and discounts. Family dining restaurants such as Pizza Express and TGI Fridays are increasingly anchoring leisure-focussed (often cinema-led redevelopment schemes), and also increasing representation in other strong trading destinations such as major retail parks. With the exception of Henley and to a lesser extent Thame, there is relatively limited provision of these type of operators in the District, representing an opportunity for enhancement of provision.

- 3.21 The coffee shop sector remains buoyant; there are now approximately 16,500 coffee shops across the country. Recent analysis shows that the UK's coffee shop sector remains one of the most successful in the nation's economy and will continue to expand.
- 3.22 The pub industry suffered during the recession with a record number of pub closures across the UK as a direct consequence of a decline in both drinks sales and rental revenues. This decline continues today, at a rate of approximately 30 pub closures per week across the country. Many pubs have in recent years been converted to small-format convenience stores using permitted development rights. Additional factors such as competition from supermarkets, changes to licensing legislation and the smoking ban have further compounded the problems faced by many operators. Similar to the foodstores, however, value led brands such as JD Wetherspoon have achieved sales growth in recent years and continue to expand.
- 3.23 The health & fitness sector continues to perform strongly as the social trend involving the maintenance of personal health and fitness shows no sign of abating. The health and fitness market is currently being expanded through investment by value and budget operators such as Easy Gym, JJB and Pure Gym. This new breed of venues aims to appeal to a wider market with flexible, low cost monthly or 'pay as you go' subscriptions. These facilities are usually located in high-footfall, in or edge of centre locations, often as part of a wider leisure offer. The budget operators' influence has not extended to centres in South Oxfordshire yet (the nearest such facilities are in Reading), but we would expect there to be scope for representation from this sector in the District, most likely in Didcot. 'Mainstream' health and fitness operators (e.g. LA Fitness, Virgin Active, Gymbox, Bannatyne's) also currently have limited representation in the District, with the exception of an LA Fitness in Henley.

## Summary

- The 'traditional' high street continues to face a number of challenges stemming from the impacts of the recent economic downturn, the tightening of retail spending in recent years, and continued significant changes in consumer shopping behaviour. The growth in online shopping, including multi-channel retailing, acts as tough competition for the high street, but also presents an opportunity for the high street to capitalise, by maximising the opportunities arising from services like 'click & collect', and retailers moving towards a seamless transition between store-based and virtual shopping experiences.
- Out-of-centre retailing remains an ever-present source of competition, and market evidence suggests that many retail parks have performed well during the economic downturn, and are becoming increasingly attractive to 'high street' retailers. Portfolio aspiration is generally to increase footfall through a greater product offer and mix of uses to encourage footfall and longer dwell times.
- Town centre strategies which support the continued evolution of the high street are therefore considered ever more vital. This may involve providing a high quality shopping 'experience',

maximising the benefits of tourist trade, and improving the mix of retail and non-retail outlets to increase length of stay and spend.

- It will be important for town centres to be well positioned to be able to adapt to on-going changes in the retail and leisure sector over the development plan period and to reaffirm their unique selling points which differentiate their retail offer from other centres, allowing them to differentiate themselves from – rather than directly compete with – higher order centres. Heritage, tourism assets and other ‘unique selling points’ should be capitalised on, and robust place marketing strategies put in place. Many of the centres in South Oxfordshire are well-placed to capitalise on this.

## 4. Didcot Health Check

### Introduction to health checks

- 4.1 In **Sections 4 to 7** we set out our ‘health check’ assessments of the centres of Didcot (remainder of Section 4), Henley-on-Thames (Section 5), Thame (Section 6) and Wallingford (Section 7). For each centre, we undertake an appraisal of the current ‘vitality and viability’ of the town centre, set against a range of key indicators as defined by the PPG (discussed in full in Section 2). Our assessments have regard to data provided by Experian Goad’s ‘Category Reports’ and land use survey maps, and are supplemented by our own visits to the centre and desktop research. We have also had regard to findings of a household telephone survey and business telephone survey of users and businesses in each of the town centres, undertaken by NEMS Market Research in support of this study.

### Didcot town centre health check

- 4.2 Situated on the western border of the District adjacent to the Vale of White Horse, Didcot is approximately a 25 minute drive from Oxford in the North and a 36 minute drive from Reading in the southeast. In the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (2012), Didcot is defined as a ‘town centre serving a local and wider catchment area’, and there is a stated aspiration to increase its role to that of a secondary regional centre.
- 4.3 There are three broad retail areas within Didcot town centre — the Orchard Centre, the Market Place and Broadway. Unlike some of South Oxfordshire’s other town centres, Didcot does not portray the same historic character profile. The centre experienced significant development at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the Orchard Centre shopping area opening in 2005. We discuss each of these areas in detail below.
- 4.4 The Adopted Policies Map inset for Didcot, accompanying the Core Strategy, identifies that the Primary Shopping Frontage in Didcot comprises the north side of Broadway between WH Smith and the Job Centre Plus; the Market Place; the eastern side of Station Road; and both sides of Orchard Street including Sainsbury’s.

### Diversity of Uses

- 4.5 The Experian Goad category report for Didcot town centre (November 2013) identifies a total of approximately 33,700 sq.m of ground floor floorspace for retail trade and service units (retail, leisure

and financial and business services combined), comprising 147 units<sup>2</sup>. **Table 4.1** sets out the composition of the number of units in Didcot.

**Table 4.1: Didcot Town Centre Composition of Units**

	Number of Units	% of Total	UK Average (%)	Variance (%)
Convenience	10	6.81	8.27	-1.46
Comparison	49	33.33	32.72	+0.61
Service	74	50.34	47.23	+3.11
Vacant	14	9.52	11.46	-1.94
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Experian Goad Category Report (November 2013)

- 4.6 The main convenience goods offer in Didcot town centre comprises a large Sainsbury's and a small Co-op supermarket. The Sainsbury's supermarket located in the Orchard Centre has a net sales area of c. 4,000 sq m. The smaller Co-op is located on Broadway and has a net sales area of c. 250 sq. m. This convenience goods offer is supplemented by a number of other retailers including a butcher, a bakery, a confectionary store and a specialist store selling Polish produce.
- 4.7 Didcot's proportion of comparison goods retail units sits in line with the UK average. The centre provides a relatively broad retail offer including a range of multiple and independent retailers catering to a mid to low-end market. The majority of comparison stores are situated within the Orchard Centre which was built in 2005.
- 4.8 The total proportion of service units in Didcot is above the UK average. Whilst there is an above average proportion of retail services and financial and business services (most notably property services and retail banks), there is a below average proportion of leisure services (but an above average proportion of fast food takeaways).
- 4.9 The cultural offer within Didcot is only partially recorded by Experian Goad reports, but is important to consider as the services play an important role in the overall vitality and viability of a centre. Didcot benefits from a six screen Cineworld Cinema Complex, the Cornerstone arts/entertainment/cultural centre and the Didcot Railway Museum located adjacent to the mainline train station. In terms of Didcot's food and drink offer, there is little by way of restaurants, cafes and bars. The Goad category report reveals that there are no bars within the centre, and only three cafes and six restaurants. Three of the six restaurants are Indian restaurants and are all located together at the western edge of the centre. There are two Italian restaurants including a Prezzo, and a Chinese restaurant. There is only one public house, 'Broadways', situated in the middle of the town centre.

<sup>2</sup> The floorspace figures derived from Experian Goad only use the footprints of the units and therefore only provide an indicative floorspace figure.



## Retailer Representation

- 4.10 The Experian Goad category report (November 2013) identified that there were 70 multiple retailers in Didcot (48% of retail units). Experian define multiple retailers as being part of a network of nine or more outlets. The majority of Didcot's multiple retailer units are located within Orchard Street and the Orchard Centre.
- 4.11 The Orchard Shopping Centre (which includes Orchard Street) opened in 2005 and is a modern, pedestrianised retail and leisure development. The shopping centre provides more than 30 stores including the larger anchor stores of Sainsbury's, Argos, Next and Currys. Smaller units are occupied by retailers such as Superdrug, Poundstretcher, Shoe Zone and The Body Shop. Also included within the shopping centre is a café, cinema complex and monthly Farmers' Market (the Thames Valley Farmers' Market). The development of the Orchard Shopping Centre is likely to have had an impact on footfall across the town centre, as the retail 'heart' of the centre will have shifted eastwards towards the stronger retail offer of the Orchard Centre, suggesting a greater need to focus future strategy on what are now more peripheral areas of the town centre, such as Broadway.
- 4.12 The Sainsbury's supermarket located within the Orchard Centre is a large supermarket containing a deli, bakery, fishmongers, butchers, pharmacy, cafe and dry-cleaners. There are 30 manned tills, and approximately 25% of the store's floorspace is designated for non-food products. The adjacent car park has 500 spaces and provides free parking for the first 2 hours.
- 4.13 The Market Place is a smaller, pedestrianised retail area adjacent to the Orchard Shopping Centre that provides a range of retail units including a Wilkinson, the Cornerstone Arts Centre, Prezzo, Thomas Cook travel agents and True Mobility disabled equipment specialists. Cornerstone Arts Centre opened in 2008 and hosts art exhibitions, various live entertainment shows, dance classes and also features a café. The north side of Broadway provides a variety of retail services for a mid to low-end market. The Co-op is located to the western end of Broadway and acts as a basket only, top-up convenience store that includes a bakery. Multiple retailers are represented elsewhere along Broadway and include WH Smith, Peacocks, Boots, HSBC and Natwest.
- 4.14 Independent retailers are present throughout the town centre and provide a range of shops and services. The independent retailers are primarily located along Broadway or within the Market Place, generally occupy smaller shop units and in a number of cases benefit from a poor physical appearance.

## Vacancies

- 4.15 The proportion of vacant street level property is one of the relevant indicators which can be used when assessing the health and viability of a town centre. However, it should be used with caution as vacancies can arise even in the strongest, most healthy town centres. Conversely, a lack of vacant units can be a symptom of under provision of space which can prevent prospective or

current retailers from securing new, or enhancing their representation. **Table 4.2** indicates that as of November 2013 (when the Experian Goad Survey was completed) there were 14 vacant units in Didcot, equating to a vacancy rate of 9.52%. This is below the national average of 11.46%. Furthermore, the 2013 Experian Goad Category report indicates that 4.63% of floorspace in Didcot is vacant compared to a national average of 9.29%.

**Table 4.2: Vacancy Rates in Didcot by Unit and Floorspace**

Vacant Units	% of Total Units	UK Average (%)	Vacant Floorspace (sqm)	% of Total Floorspace	UK Average (%)
14	9.52	11.46	1560.77	4.63	9.29

Source: Experian Goad Category Report November 2013

- 4.16 GVA undertook a site survey in November 2014 which enabled the Experian Goad data to be updated. The survey highlighted that the number of vacant retail units had fallen by two from 14 to 12. Of the 14 original vacant units, five have been reoccupied, as illustrated in **Table 4.3** below. For the most part, the previously-vacant units have been re-occupied by fairly low-grade retail outlets. Only one unit has become newly vacant within the primary shopping frontage. Adjoining vacant units currently exist at 3 and 4 Market Place, and 114 and 116 Broadway, however, there are no areas within the town centre where a significant clustering of vacant units is occurring. All of the units in the Orchard Centre are currently occupied.

**Table 4.3: Re-occupied units in Didcot since November 2013**

Retail Fascia	Address	Retail Category
Vintage Fashion	122A Broadway	Comparison
Pizza Takeaway	88 Broadway	Leisure Service
Pizza Takeaway	2A Edinburgh Drive	Leisure Service
O2 Store	22A Orchard Street	Comparison
Beds and Mattresses	182 Broadway	Comparison

Source: GVA survey, November 2014

## Environmental Quality

- 4.17 Didcot does not benefit from the historic character of the other centres in the District (discussed in the following sections), but there is clear evidence of investment in the public realm. In particular, the Orchard Centre has a well-designed public realm, with well-maintained shop frontages, uniform street paving, litter-free streets, planted trees, public seating and an attractive urban amphitheatre towards the eastern end of Orchard Street.
- 4.18 Market Place is a relatively pleasant, spacious pedestrianised area featuring planted trees and sporadic seating. The shop frontages are less well-kept than those in the Orchard Centre, with some facades in need of refurbishment. Broadway's public realm is complemented with amiable characteristics such as wide pedestrian pavements, intermittent suspended flower pots, planted

trees and suitably-located public seating, particularly towards the western end around the Co-op. However, the eastern end has poor quality public realm aesthetics overall, with many poorly maintained and fragmented frontages. There is scope to provide further enhancement to the public realm in this part of the centre.

## Accessibility

- 4.19 Didcot town centre is easily accessible by car, and there is a good availability of free car parking in a variety of locations. The bulk of car parking (c. 500 spaces) is located adjacent to the Sainsbury's supermarket, where parking is free for the first two hours. Elsewhere, there are public car parks off Edinburgh Drive and the eastern end of Broadway. There are also on-street, short-term (30 minute) car parking spaces situated along various stretches of Broadway. Current levels of car parking provision appear to be appropriately scaled. There are a number of well-located bicycle park stands pepper-potted around the centre. There are six bus stops within the centre located on Broadway, Haydon Road and to the east of the Orchard Centre on High Street. Regular services connect Didcot with Oxford, Wantage, Wallingford, Abingdon and the local surrounding residential areas.
- 4.20 Didcot Parkway train station is located close to the town centre which provides a regular rail service to Oxford, Swindon, Bristol, South Wales, Reading and London. The station has benefitted from being awarded a £14m investment in 2014 to fund a 10 year programme of station improvements to improve local infrastructure. A planning application is currently being considered for Didcot Gateway, the comprehensive redevelopment of the area opposite Didcot Parkway Station, aiming to transform the space into a high quality Gateway to Didcot and the Science Vale area. The application (ref **P15/S2159/O**) seeks permission for:

'Outline planning application for demolition of existing buildings and a mixed use development comprised of up to 300 residential units (use class C3), a 70-bed hotel (use class C1), up to 800 sq.m gym (use class D2), **up to 2,400 sq.m retail uses (A1, A2, A3, A4, A5)**, up to 1,800 sq.m commercial office floorspace (use class B1), a replacement nursery school (use class D1) and a decked car park of up to three levels and supporting infrastructure' (our emphasis)

## Out of Centre Retail Provision

- 4.21 Located approximately one kilometre to the east of Didcot town centre is a Tesco superstore (c. 1,987 sq m net sales area), adjacent to Wallingford Road Retail Park, which contains branches of Halfords, Carpetright and a B&M Homestore. The 24-hour Tesco features a pharmacy, Costa café, deli counter, bakery, butcher, fish monger, fuel station, car wash and a 'click & collect' service. It also includes a small range of non-food products.

## Customer Views and Behaviour

4.22 The household telephone survey undertaken in support of this study by NEMS Market Research (as discussed in **Section 1**) included various attitudinal questions about the frequency of visits to Didcot town centre, the reasons for choosing to visit and likes and dislikes about the town centre. The key findings from the telephone survey are summarised below:

- Of those respondents in the survey area who stated that they visit Didcot town centre, 48% of respondents stated that food shopping was the main purpose for visiting Didcot, whilst 21% stated that non-food shopping was the main purpose for their visit.
- Results indicate that 41% of respondents shop who shop in Didcot visit once a week, and 9% shop between 2 and 3 times a week.
- 20% of survey participants stated that they visit Didcot for daytime or evening eating and drinking purposes, and 4% visit the centre for the cinema in the Orchard Centre, suggesting that the town has an important leisure as well as shopping function.

4.23 When asked what they liked about the centre, 24% of respondents who visit Didcot stated the fact it is close to their home; 13% like the ease of parking; 8% stated it has good leisure facilities, and 7% find it easy to get around. In terms of dislikes, it is positive to note that the majority of respondents (54%) felt that there was nothing that they disliked about Didcot centre, with the main concerns relating to traffic congestion (5%) and a lack of shops to choose from (10%). When asked how they think Didcot town centre could be improved, the main results were: no need to improve (34%), a better choice of shops (18%), better car parking (7%) and more pubs or restaurants (7%). The results of the survey suggest a reasonably high level of satisfaction amongst users of the centre, therefore.

## Business Views

4.24 Alongside the household survey, NEMS Market Research also conducted a Business Survey during October 2014 in order to ascertain the views and opinions of a number of business owners within the town centre. The key findings from this survey are as follows:

- 70% of the survey participants were owners of Independent businesses, and 30% were reportedly part of a regional or national store chain<sup>3</sup>;
- 38% of respondents reported that their business had traded in Didcot for twenty years or more, and 22% stated that their business has been trading in Didcot between 6 and 10 years. Furthermore, 34% chose to locate their business in Didcot because it was local to where they lived, and 88% of participants explained that their business had always operated from Didcot.

---

<sup>3</sup> Defined as a store with nine or more retail outlets

- When asked how their business turnover has changed over the last 5 years whilst trading in Didcot centre, 12% of respondents reported that it had 'grown significantly', 30% reported that their business turnover had 'grown moderately' and 36% stated that their business turnover had remained 'largely static'. Only 18% of participants reported that their turnover had declined over the last 5 years, and 4% of the participants refused to answer the question.
- Similarly, participants were also asked to describe how their business is currently performing. 42% answered 'moderately' and 52% answered 'well' or 'very well'. Only 4% answered 'poorly' or 'very poorly'.
- The majority of business owners/managers (74%) reported that they employed between 1 and 5 full-time staff, and 18% stated they employed between 6 and 10 full-time staff.
- When asked to grade how accessible they perceived Didcot centre to be overall (i.e. from a pedestrian, public transport and private vehicle perspective), 36% of respondents replied very good, 28% quite good, 20% average, 10% quite poor and 2% very poor. Similarly, 50% felt that the availability of parking was either very good or quite good, 24% said it was average and 24% thought it was either quite poor or very poor.
- 42% of respondents rated the overall environmental and physical quality of Didcot centre as quite good, whilst 32% described the centre's environment as average.
- When asked to consider what the weaknesses are in Didcot's retail offer, 20% of respondents felt that there was a poor range of major national multiple retailers, and a further 20% felt that there was a poor range of shops in general. 18% of business owners stated that increasing the choice and range of shops in the centre was an improvement they would like to see.

## Proposals and Commitments

### Orchard Centre Phase II

- 4.25 Planning permission was granted in July 2015 for a 'Phase II' expansion of the Orchard Centre, amounting to approximately 15,000 sq.m of new retail (class A1) and commercial leisure (class A3) floorspace. The extension will be anchored by a Marks & Spencer foodhall, with a complementary range of supporting retail units and restaurant uses set around a new public square – the latter element will, importantly, address one of the key qualitative gaps in the current town centre offer which our analysis has identified. We are not aware of any other confirmed tenants for the scheme. The proposed scheme will also include additional car parking provision, and enhanced public transport connectivity. We discuss this 'commitment' in further detail in **Section 9**.

### Other commitments

- 4.26 In July 2014 planning permission was granted for an Aldi foodstore at The Broadway, on the edge of the Didcot town centre. This is now trading (but commenced trading following completion of the household telephone survey, and therefore is not accounted for in the survey results) and has a net sales area of 1,140 sq m, and is the first discount foodstore trading in the district. Given the

timing of this consent and subsequent opening, this store has been incorporated as a commitment for the purposes of quantitative forecasting in later sections.

- 4.27 Planning permission has also been granted for a supermarket to serve the Great Western Park urban extension to the west of Didcot. The foodstore falls within the administrative area of the Vale of White Horse, and therefore we do not account for this store in our capacity modelling – but qualitatively the store will, if developed, provide additional convenience goods shopping choice for residents in Didcot.
- 4.28 Beyond the town centre (i.e. out-of-centre), proposals are being considered for the Didcot Gateway site, which is expected to include up to 2,400 sq.m class A1-A5 floorspace, as well as other ‘town centre’ uses including a gym and hotel. Proposals are also being considered for the Didcot A Power Station site, to the north-west of the Didcot urban area. Didcot A comprises major proposals to redevelop the Didcot A site following the closure of the power station in 2013; the scheme proposes a *‘mixed use redevelopment comprising up to 400 dwellings, 110,000 sq.m of Class B2/B8 units, 25,000 sq.m of Class B1 units, 13,000 sq.m Class A1 units (includes 1,500m<sup>2</sup> convenience food store), 150 bed Class C1 hotel and 500 sq.m of Class A3/A4 pub/restaurant,’* It is understood that the foodstore will, if approved, be operated by a discount retailer, whilst the remaining proposed retail floorspace is expected to be used for the sale of ‘bulky’ comparison goods (large items such as DIY goods, large electrical items, and so on).

## Summary

- Didcot town centre appears to be performing reasonably well. Almost 50% of the retail outlets in the town centre are operated by national multiple retailers. The offer is generally pitched towards the middle / lower-end, with an absence of higher quality retail outlets.
- The offer in the town centre is anchored by a large Sainsbury’s store in the Orchard Shopping Centre. The store caters for both ‘main’ and ‘top-up’ shopping trips owing to its town centre location. Visitor survey results undertaken in support of this study confirm that food shopping is the main reason for visitors’ trips to Didcot town centre.
- The centre has an important cultural / leisure function, with an arts centre and cinema both forming part of the town centre offer. There is a shortage of family dining-type restaurants to support this cultural offer, however, and few respondents to our household survey identified that they currently visit the centre for dining.
- The vacancy rate in the town centre is below the UK average, and has decreased since the most recent Experian Goad survey of the centre in November 2013 – although the majority of the subsequent lettings have been to downmarket, poor quality retailers. However it is positive to note that all of the units in the Orchard Centre – which can be considered the primary shopping area within the town centre – are fully occupied.

- The environmental quality of the centre is generally good, although the eastern end of Broadway would benefit from further investment. The centre is also readily accessible and has a good level of parking provision.
- The convenience goods function of the centre is clearly important, and almost half of all respondents to the household survey stated that food shopping was their main reason for visiting the town centre. Conversely, only 21% of respondents stated that non-food shopping was their main reason for visiting, suggesting that there is scope for Didcot to improve its comparison goods offer.
- The recently-approved application for Phase II of the Orchard Centre should assist in addressing the qualitative shortfalls in respect of Didcot's limited comparison goods and family dining provision.
- The Orchard Shopping Centre is likely to have shifted footfall patterns in the town centre since its opening, with the eastern end of the town centre now providing the focus for comparison and convenience goods shopping, suggesting that any future strategy should focus on more peripheral areas which will have experienced a fall in shopper activity as a consequence.
- Out-of-centre retail floorspace in the town is currently limited and this is likely to help contribute to the relatively strong performance of the town centre. On this basis the Council should carefully consider the potential impacts of the Didcot Gateway and Didcot A Power Station proposals on the health of Didcot town centre.

## 5. Henley-on-Thames Health Check

- 5.1 The South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (2012) defines Henley-on-Thames (in common with Didcot) as a 'town centre serving a local and wider catchment area'. Henley is situated at the south-eastern border of the District. It is approximately a 25 minute drive from Reading to the southwest, a 22 minute drive from Maidenhead to the east and 30 minutes from High Wycombe in the northeast.
- 5.2 The Adopted Policies Map inset for Henley, accompanying the Core Strategy, identifies the Primary Shopping Frontage as both sides of Bell Street from the junction with Hart Street/Market Place to New Street, including Waitrose; both sides of Market Place from number 30 to the junction with Bell Street/Duke Street; both sides of Hart Street from the Junction with Bell Street/Duke Street and number 37 on the north side, and number 40 on the south side; Duke Street from the junction with Market Place/Hart Street to number 30 on the western side and 51 on the eastern side; and 3 Friday Street.
- 5.3 The town centre has seen recent investment in its retail offer through the development of Market Place Mews, a mixed-use development comprising 1,500 sq.m of retail and restaurant floorspace in a mews-style development, which also includes 14 residential apartments. The development sits adjacent to the principal shoppers' car park in the town centre, and is occupied by local / independent operators trading from small-format units.

### Diversity of Uses

- 5.4 The Experian Goad category report for Henley town centre (November 2013) identifies a total of approximately 46,000 sq.m of ground floor floorspace for retail trade and service units, comprising 251 units. Henley is the largest town centre in the District in terms of number of units and total town centre floorspace. **Table 5.1** sets out the diversity of uses in the centre.
- 5.5 The main convenience goods offer in Henley town centre comprises a Waitrose supermarket and a Sainsbury's Local. The Waitrose, located behind the eastern side of Bell Street is the anchor convenience store for Henley and has a net sales area of c. 1,640 sq.m. The Sainsbury's Local is located on Bell Street and has a net sales area of c. 245 sq.m. This convenience goods offer is supplemented by a small number of other retailers including a deli, bakeries, grocers, a health foods store and a confectionary store.

**Table 5.1: Henley Town Centre Composition of Units**

	Number of Units	% of Total	UK Average (%)	Variance (%)
Convenience	15	5.98	8.27	-2.29
Comparison	103	41.04	32.72	+8.32
Service	112	44.62	47.23	-2.61
Vacant	21	8.36	11.46	-3.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>-</b>



Source: Experian Goad Category Report (November 2013)

- 5.6 Henley's proportion of comparison goods retail units is above the national average. The centre provides a relatively broad retail offer including a range of multiple and independent retailers, and caters almost entirely to a mid to high-end market.
- 5.7 The total proportion of service units in Henley lies just below the national average. Whilst there is a below average representation of leisure services as a whole, there is a strong presence of restaurants and pubs within the centre and a below average proportion of fast food takeaways. This can generally be considered to be a positive trend.
- 5.8 Cultural services within Henley town centre include the three-screen Regal Picturehouse cinema which also features a café and bar, the River and Rowing museum, a number of independent art galleries and the Kenton Theatre. The town's annual festival also makes an important contribution to the cultural offer of the centre.

## Retailer Representation

- 5.9 The Experian Goad category report (November 2013) identified that there were 68 multiple retailers in Henley (27% of retail units). The multiple retailer units are situated throughout the town centre, with a particular cluster along Bell Street. Multiple retailers present within Henley town centre include Boots, Fat Face, Jules, White Stuff, Clarks, Starbucks, Cargo, Crew Clothing and Pizza Express.
- 5.10 There is also a wide selection of independent retailers situated throughout the centre including florists, jewellers, fashionable clothing brands, holiday sports shops and art galleries. As mentioned previously, much of the comparison goods offer is towards the upper-middle end of the retail market, a reflection of the catchment area of the town. Clothing stores are particularly well-represented within the town centre: there are 28 clothing stores in Henley town centre, including a number of high-end, boutique fashion shops.
- 5.11 The Waitrose contains a deli, bakery and butchers. There are 14 manned tills and eight self-service basket tills. The adjacent car park has an estimated 200 spaces, and provides free parking for supermarket users. Sainsbury's Local on Bell Street is a small, basket only top-up convenience store. Weekly markets are held in the Market Place every Thursday, and several weekend continental-style feature markets are held through the year. These markets add to the vibrancy of the town and overall retail offer of the town.
- 5.12 Unit sizes within the town centre are all very varied, reflecting the historic nature of the town's buildings. The largest unit is occupied by a Wetherspoon Public House on Hart Street.

## Vacancies

- 5.13 **Table 5.2** indicates that as of November 2013 (when the Experian Goad survey was completed) there were a total of 21 vacant units in Henley, equating to a vacancy rate of 8.37%, below the national average of 11.46%. The 2013 Experian Goad category report indicates that 5.56% of floorspace in Henley town centre is vacant compared to a national average of 9.29%. These figures imply that Henley has no major occupancy problems, and we would expect demand for premises in the centre to be strong.

**Table 5.2: Vacancy Rates in Henley-on-Thames by Unit and Floorspace**

Vacant Units	% of Total Units	UK Average (%)	Vacant Floorspace (sqm)	% of Total Floorspace	UK Average (%)
21	8.37	11.46	27,500	5.56	9.29

Source: Experian Goad Category Report November 2013

- 5.14 GVA undertook a survey in November 2014 which enabled the Experian Goad data to be updated. The survey highlighted that the number of vacant units have since fallen by seven from 21 to 14. **Table 5.3** below identifies what the previously vacant units are now occupied by. Although some have become reoccupied, five units remain vacant within the centre's primary shopping frontage. The rest of the vacant units are located on the centre's periphery, around New Street to the north and Station Road to the south.

**Table 5.3: Re-occupied units in Henley since November 2013**

Retail Fascia	Address	Retail Category
Phone Repairs	40A Bell Street	Comparison
Mounts, Frames and Mirrors	2 Market Place Mews	Comparison
Christmas Shop	24 Market Place	Comparison
Homeware Interior Design	4 Duke Street	Comparison
Café	3 Duke Street	Leisure Service
Costa	25 Duke Street	Leisure Service
Mexican Restaurant	30 Duke Street	Leisure Service

Source: GVA survey, November 2014

## Environmental Quality

- 5.15 Located alongside the River Thames, Henley is a picturesque, historic town that attracts visitors from around the UK and overseas. The traditional market town falls within the Henley Conservation Area and boasts many Georgian frontages. The attractiveness of the town centre is an important factor in its overall vitality and viability. The majority of the buildings within the centre along Bell Street, Market Place, Hart Street and Duke Street have been given listed status, designated as sites of special architectural or historical interest. It is evident that the character of the town has been

protected and enhanced, and many retailers have adopted signage and store designs that are sympathetic to Henley's context.

- 5.16 Henley's Market Place is spacious, clean and well-kept, featuring appropriately designed public seating, planted trees, flower pots and bushes. The cafes and restaurants situated along the Market Place also extend their seating and tables into the pedestrianised area which creates an active, pleasant shopping and leisure location. Due to the historic nature of the town, pavements on Duke Street and Bell Street are relatively narrow yet equally clean, uniform and well-maintained.
- 5.17 Throughout the town centre, the majority of shop fronts and building facades are in excellent condition and utilise similar colour palettes which all contributes to an aesthetically pleasing shopping environment. Henley's Thameside is a particularly attractive area of the centre and features a wide pavement running alongside the Thames river bank, a variety of shops, restaurants, cafes and hotels.
- 5.18 During our site visit, fairly high volumes of traffic were noted. However, various traffic measures serve to keep vehicle speeds low, making the centre and roadsides feel safe.

## Accessibility

- 5.19 Henley-on-Thames is reasonably accessible by car, with one way systems in place throughout the centre that manage traffic flows through the traditional narrow streets. There is a good availability of car parking in a range of locations. A car park with approximately 200 spaces is located on Kings Road, behind the Waitrose supermarket, which offers free parking to Waitrose customers. Elsewhere, a car park providing c. 170 spaces is located to the North of Greys Road, and the car park adjacent to the train station provides c. 300 spaces. There are also on-street, short-term car parking spaces situated along various stretches of Duke Street, Hart Street and Market Place.
- 5.20 There are bicycle stands located within the car parks, and a number of bike stands are also available on Falaise Square at the Market Place. Henley town centre benefits from seven bus stops located on Bell Street, Hart Street, Market Place, Duke Street, Reading Road and Station Road. Bus services connect Henley with Wallingford, Reading, Marlow, High Wycombe and the local residential areas.
- 5.21 Henley-on-Thames railway station is a terminal station. Located on the fringe of the town centre to the south, it provides shuttle services to Twyford via Wargrave and Shiplake. Trains from Twyford then service Reading, London, south-west England and south Wales.

## Out of Centre Retail Provision

- 5.22 Located on Reading Road, just over one kilometre to the south of Henley town centre is a Tesco superstore (c. 2,000 sq.m net sales area). The store features a pharmacy, butcher, baker, fish monger, deli and a 'click and collect' service. There is no significant concentration of out-of-

centre retail warehouse-format provision in Henley, with the nearest provision of this nature located in Reading.

## Customer Views and Behaviour

5.23 The household telephone survey undertaken by NEMS Market Research in support of this study included a number of attitudinal questions about the frequency of visits to Henley town centre, the reasons for choosing to visit and likes and dislikes about the town centre. The key findings from the telephone survey are summarised below:

- 31% of respondents who visit Henley town centre for stated that food shopping was the main purpose for visiting Henley, whilst 30% stated that non-food shopping was the main purpose for their visit. 13% of respondents who visit the centre stated that leisure activity was the main purpose of their trip to Henley.
- 46% of survey participants to visit Henley town centre stated that another reason why they visit Henley was for daytime or evening eating and drinking, significantly higher than the corresponding figure for Didcot. 5% of respondents stated that they also visited Henley to go to the Picturehouse cinema.
- 25% of respondents who visit Henley visit the centre less than once a month, 17% shop once a week, and 15% shop once every two weeks, suggesting that the centre has less of a 'day to day' shopping function than some of the other centres in the Borough, but instead acts as more of a shopping 'destination'.

5.24 When asked what they liked about Henley, the answers most regularly cited were:

- The environment is attractive and pleasant (43%)
- Henley is close to home (15%)
- Because it is by the river (13%)
- It has a range of specialist/independent stores (8%)
- There is a good range of non-food shops (7%)

5.25 When asked what they disliked about Henley, 33% replied to say there was nothing they disliked, 30% felt there was a lack of parking, and 23% stated that traffic congestion was their main issue with the town. When asked what could be improved about the town centre, 29% of the participants felt there was no need to improve Henley's centre, whilst 33% thought that it could be improved by providing more parking. 15% of participants said they would like to see more traffic-free, pedestrianised areas.

5.26 Based on information collated in the South Oxfordshire Visitor Survey (Q&A Research on behalf of South Oxfordshire District Council, 2011), in which users of Henley town centre were asked for their home postcode as part of the survey exercise, it was identified that 43% of visitors surveyed were

from outside the study area we have used to inform our quantitative need assessment (see **Section 9**). This confirms that Henley plays an important role as a tourism destination as well as a centre for meeting the shopping and leisure needs of local residents.

## Business Views

5.27 As part of our assessment, alongside the household survey NEMS Market Research conducted a Business Survey during October 2014 in order to ascertain the views and opinions of a number of business owners within the town centre. The key findings from this survey are as follows:

- 84% of the survey participants were owners of Independent businesses, and 16% were reportedly part of a regional or national store chain.
- 35% of respondents reported that their business had traded in Henley for twenty years or more and 24% stated that their business has been trading in Henley between 11 and 20 years. Only 10% of respondents had been trading in Henley for 3 years or less.
- When asked how their business turnover had changed over the last 5 years whilst trading in Henley town centre, 14% of participants stated that it had 'grown significantly', 37% stated that their business turnover had 'grown moderately' and 22% explained that their business turnover had remained 'largely static'. Surprisingly given our wider observations in respect of the current performance of the town centre, 25% of respondents reported that their business turnover had either declined moderately or significantly.
- Participants were also asked to describe how their business is currently performing. 31% answered moderately and 59% answered 'well' or 'very well'. Only 10% answered 'poorly' or 'very poorly', which therefore marks a more encouraging trend.
- The majority of business owners/managers (78%) reported that they employed between 1 and 5 full-time staff, and 12% stated that they employed between 6 and 10 full-time staff.
- When asked to grade how accessible they perceived Henley's centre to be overall (i.e from a pedestrian, public transport and private vehicle perspective), 37% felt that it was either quite good or very good, 31% of participants thought Henley's overall accessibility is average, and 29% felt that it was either quite poor or very poor. Almost two-thirds of businesses (63%) stated that availability of parking was either quite poor or very poor. 22% felt that parking availability in Henley was average, and only 4% felt parking availability was quite good.
- 71% of respondents rated the overall environmental and physical quality of Henley town centre as either quite good or very good, and 14% of respondents described the environment as average.
- When asked to consider what the strengths of Henley's retail offer are, 22% of respondents noted the town's good location, 18% felt it was the broad mix of types of goods, and 12% stated that the good range of niche retailers and boutique shops was a particular strength of the town.

- 5.28 The business survey supports our assessment that the vitality and viability of Henley town centre is generally strong. There are a large number of long-standing, independent businesses in the centre which are, for the most part, reporting static or increasing trading performance, and good levels of satisfaction with the town centre. Many respondents raised concerns over parking provision in the town centre, which almost one quarter of all respondents to the visitors survey also identified as being a concern. Whilst the nature of the urban fabric of the town centre means that no easy solution to this matter is likely to be forthcoming, it is apparent that matters related to parking and in particular traffic congestion can be considered to be the principal area of concern in respect of the wider vitality and viability of the town centre.

## Proposals and Commitments

- 5.29 The Joint Henley and Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan identifies 'Empstead Works/Stuart Turner' (Site E) as a suitable site for mixed use development including retail allowing for an expansion of the town centre and the potential to remodel the car park at Greys Road. The Plan states that the site would be suitable for up to 42 dwellings and 3,000 sq.m of mixed use development including employment and retail.

## Summary

- 5.30 We have undertaken a full assessment of the vitality and viability of Henley-on-Thames town centre, and it is apparent that the centre is currently performing strongly. In summary we have identified that:
- The diversity of uses and quality of the retail offer in the town centre is strong. There are a range of national and independent convenience goods retailers which co-exist successfully. The Waitrose store anchors both the convenience goods and wider town centre offer.
  - The comparison goods offer is generally high-end, with a number of upscale national and independent retailers trading in the centre, including speciality clothing boutiques. For the most part, there is also sufficient range of retailer representation that more everyday shopping needs can also be met, although it would appear the centre functions strongly as a retail 'destination' rather than a 'day to day' shopping centre.
  - The commercial leisure offer in the centre is also strong, and makes full effect of the compact and historic town centre. The results of the visitor survey confirm that Henley also performs an important evening economy role.
  - Examples of national retailer and leisure operators trading in the centre include Waitrose, Sainsbury's Local, Boots, Fat Face, Jules, White Stuff, Clarks, Starbucks, Cargo, Crew Clothing and Pizza Express.
  - The vacancy rate is below the UK average, and subsequent to the most recent Experian survey of the centre it is apparent that the number of vacant units within the centre has fallen further.

- The town centre is a well-maintained, historic centre, with much of the centre forming part of a Conservation Area, with a large number of listed buildings in the centre. Buildings are well-maintained and the utilisation of similar colour palettes further enhances the centre. Both the Market Place and Thameside are particularly positive assets. Overall, the environmental quality of the centre makes a significant contribution to the wider vitality and viability of the centre.
- The strong environmental quality of the centre was identified as important reason for visiting the centre in the visitors survey, and it is noteworthy that almost half of visitors surveyed were from outside the South Oxfordshire area. The centre therefore also has an important tourism role, which adds footfall to the centre and contributes significantly to its vitality and viability.
- 30% of respondents to the household telephone survey who stated that they visit Henley identified non-food shopping as the main purpose of their visit, compared to 31% for food shopping and 13% for leisure. This confirms that Henley successfully meets a broad range of local needs, rather than being overly reliant on one particular sector or store.
- The centre benefits from good accessibility by public transport and private car – although a shortage of car parking, and issues relating to traffic congestion in the centre, were identified as an area of concern in both the visitors survey and the business survey. The survey of businesses in the town centre identified no major issues of concern.
- The Joint Henley and Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan identifies the ‘Empstead Works/Stuart Turner’ site as a suitable site for mixed use development including retail allowing for an expansion of the town centre and the potential to remodel the car park at Greys Road. The Plan states that the site would be suitable for up to 42 dwellings and 3,000 sq.m of mixed use development including employment and retail.

## 6. Thame Health Check

- 6.1 In the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (2012) Thame is defined as a 'town centre serving a local catchment area'. Thame is situated towards the northeast of the District, approximately a 35 minute drive east of Oxford and a 35 minute drive from Aylesbury in the northeast.
- 6.2 The Adopted Policies Map inset for Thame, accompanying the Core Strategy, identifies that the Primary Shopping Frontage in Thame is comprised of the north side of the High Street from number 90 to the Swan Hotel; the south side of the High Street from number 16 to Rooks Lane; Cornmarket; Greyhound Walk including Waitrose; the west side of North Street between the Library and the High Street; and the east side of North Street between number 60 and the High Street. The adopted Neighbourhood Plan also identifies primary and secondary shopping frontages for the town centre.

### Diversity of Uses

- 6.3 The Experian Goad category report for Thame town centre (September 2013) identifies a total of 22,200 sq.m of ground floor floorspace for retail trade and service units comprising 131 units. **Table 6.1** sets out the composition of the number of units in Thame.

**Table 6.1: Thame Town Centre Composition of Units**

	Number of Units	% of Total	UK Average (%)	Variance (%)
Convenience	17	12.98	8.27	+4.71
Comparison	49	37.4	32.72	+4.68
Service	58	44.27	47.23	-2.96
Vacant	7	5.34	11.46	-6.12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Experian Goad Category Report (September 2013)

- 6.4 Thame town centre's proportion of convenience goods units is above the UK average. The main convenience goods offer in Thame town centre comprises Waitrose, Co-op and a Sainsbury's supermarket. The largest convenience store is the Waitrose supermarket located to the north end of Greyhound Walk and has a net sales area of 2,078 sq.m. As with Henley, the Waitrose store can be considered an important 'anchor' to both the convenience goods and wider town centre offer. The Waitrose is a fairly large supermarket containing a fishmonger, deli, hot food counter and bakery. There are 10 trolley tills and six basket-only, self-service tills.
- 6.5 The Sainsbury's supermarket is located in a former Woolworths unit at 1 High Street, and has a net sales area of 632 sq.m. The Co-op at 6-7 High Street has a net sales area of 1,020 sq.m, and we would expect these stores to cater for a mixture of main and 'top-up' shopping, likely with an emphasis towards the latter. This convenience goods offer is supplemented by a good selection of smaller retailers including four bakers, two butchers, three grocers and delicatessens, and a health



foods store, and it is apparent that the independent, specialist food sector makes an important contribution to the diversity of uses in the town centre. A weekly market in the town centre further enhances the diversity of uses.

- 6.6 Thame's proportion of comparison goods retail units is also above the national average. The town centre provides a reasonably broad retail offer including multiple and independent retailers that cater to all ranges of the consumer market. The majority of comparison stores are situated on High Street, Cornmarket, Buttermarket and the north side of Upper High Street.
- 6.7 The overall proportion of service units in Thame sits below the national average. However, there is a slightly higher proportion of retail services and an above average proportion of financial and business services. Whilst the overall proportion of leisure services falls well below the UK average, there is an above average proportion of hotels and guest houses.
- 6.8 The cultural offer within Thame is only partially recorded by Experian Goad reports, but is important to consider as such services play an important role in the overall vitality and viability of a centre. Thame benefits from a cinema, the Thame Museum, the Delphine Art Gallery and the Players Theatre which holds musical and theatrical shows throughout the year.

## Retailer Representation

- 6.9 The Experian Goad category report (September 2013) identified that there were 37 multiple retailers in Thame (28% of retail units). The majority of Thame's multiple retailer units are located around the Cornmarket and High Street. The multiple retailers occupying the largest units include Waitrose, Sainsbury's, Co-op, Boots, Superdrug, Robert Dyas, and Barclays and Lloyds banks. There are a number of smaller retail areas that complement that main retail zone comprising Upper High Street, Cornmarket and the High Street:
- The Buttermarket is a narrow, single carriageway road lined with smaller retail units. Other than the Prezzo restaurant on the eastern corner, the rest of the units are occupied by independent stores such as a baker, butcher, ladies accessories and boutique clothing shops and hairdressers. Adjacent to the Buttermarket is The Shambles and Pump Lane which also feature small units occupied by clothing shops, a deli, restaurants, a kitchen furniture store and a vintage guitar shop.
  - Swan Walk is situated off Upper High Street. The small courtyard of units is occupied by a range of retail services such as an Indian restaurant, giftshop, home entertainment store, barbers and women's clothing shop. Greyhound Walk is a linear avenue of shops situated between the High Street and Waitrose supermarket. The units are occupied by a jeweller, optician, travel agents, health food store, café, deli and two clothing shops.
  - Across all of these smaller retailer areas, the retail offer is focussed on the provision of quality, specialist boutique retailers, which are generally upscale in nature. This indicates that, in

common with Henley, the centre caters towards meeting the needs of a relatively wealthy population.

## Vacancies

- 6.10 **Table 6.2** indicates that as of September 2013 (when the Experian goad survey was completed), there were seven vacant units in Thame, equating to a vacancy rate of 5.34%, well below the national average of 11.46%. The 2013 Experian Goad Category report indicates that 2.85% of floorspace in Thame is vacant compared to a national average of 9.29%. These figures imply that Thame is a healthy town centre performing well, with a good level of demand for retail premises.

**Table 6.2: Vacancy Rates in Thame by Unit and Floorspace**

Vacant Units	% of Total Units	UK Average (%)	Vacant Floorspace (sq.m)	% of Total Floorspace	UK Average (%)
7	5.34	11.46	6,800	2.85	9.29

Source: Experian Goad Category Report September 2013

- 6.11 GVA undertook a survey in November 2014 which enabled the Experian Goad data to be updated. The survey highlighted that the number of vacant retail units had fallen by three, with just four vacant units observed. Vacant units that have been newly occupied since September 2013 are shown below in **Table 6.3**. Two units have become newly vacant within the primary shopping frontage, one at the western end of the High Street, and the other on the eastern corner of Buttermarket. There is no significant clustering of vacant units within one specific area of the town centre. The new operators in Thame are all independent retailers, with the exception of a new Costa coffee shop on High Street.

**Table 6.3: Re-occupied units in Thame since September 2013**

Retail Fascia	Address	Retail Category
Costa	9 High Street	Leisure Service
Toy Shop	96-97 High Street	Comparison
Women's Boutique Clothing	4 Buttermarket	Comparison
Conservatories	3 Swan Walk	Comparison
Indian Restaurant	8 Swan Walk	Leisure Service

Source: GVA On-site Survey November 2014

## Environmental Quality

- 6.12 Thame is a historic, quintessential English market town. The idyllic and picturesque town falls within the Thame Conservation Area and boasts many traditional buildings and facades, fostering a pleasant retail and leisure environment. The majority of the buildings within the centre along High Street, Cornmarket, Buttermarket, North Street and Upper High Street have been given listed status,

designated as sites of special architectural or historical interest. Subsequently, it is evident that the character of the town has been protected and enhanced.

- 6.13 Suspended flower pots and a small amount of public seating and bicycle stands are provided intermittently in the area around the Town Hall. Elsewhere, the public realm is maintained in keeping with the town's historic character and physical constraints. Pedestrian pavements are of a reasonable width and well-maintained.

## Accessibility

- 6.14 There are a number of car parks within Thame town centre of varying sizes. Car parking provision for approximately 230 vehicles is provided adjacent to the Waitrose supermarket, and approximately 70 car parking spaces are provided off North Street. Furthermore, approximately 40 spaces are provided behind the Co-op supermarket on High Street. Unless the market is being held, a further c. 120 spaces are provided on Upper High Street, where parking is free for three hours on a Monday, Wednesday and Saturday or free for one hour on a Tuesday. There is also a car park for c. 50 vehicles in the middle of High Street to the west of the Town Hall. During our visit it was noted that by 9.30am the central car parks were nearing full capacity.
- 6.15 There are four bus stops within Thame town centre located on High Street, North Street and Upper High Street. Bus services connect Thame with Aylesbury, High Wycombe, Henley-on-Thames, Princes Risborough, Oxford and the local surrounding residential areas. The nearest train station is Haddenham & Thame Parkway which is located approximately 3 miles to the north of the town centre. Trains from Haddenham & Thame Parkway provide services to Bicester, High Wycombe, Birmingham and London.

## Out of Centre Retail Provision

- 6.16 Located approximately seven miles to the west of Thame town centre is the Asda Wheatley Superstore (2,673 sq.m sales area). The Asda store features a deli, bakery and fishmongers, with approximately 80% food and 20% non-food products on offer. There are 13 manned tills and ten unmanned tills, and the store also features an on-site petrol station. Bus services run between Thame town centre and the foodstore at twenty-minute intervals during the daytime.
- 6.17 There is no other out-of-centre retail provision in Thame at present, although a planning application has been submitted for the redevelopment of the DAF Trucks site on the eastern edge of the town (discussed below under 'Proposals and Commitments').

## Customer Views and Behaviour

- 6.18 The household telephone survey asked respondents if they visited Thame town centre, and for those who did, asked a number of attitudinal questions about the frequency of visits to Thame

town centre, the reasons for choosing to visit and likes and dislikes about the town centre. The key findings from the telephone survey are summarised below:

- 28% of respondents who use Thame town centre stated that they shop in Thame once a week, and 12% stated that they shop in Thame twice a week.
- 62% of respondents who use Thame town centre stated that food shopping was usually the main purpose of their trip to Thame, and 13% stated that non-food shopping was usually the main purpose of their visit.
- 45% of respondents stated that non-food shopping was a secondary reason why they visit Thame, and 27% stated that food shopping was a secondary reason why they visit. These findings confirm that the town centre plays an important role as both a convenience and comparison goods shopping destination.
- When asked to explain what they liked about Thame, 21% of respondents noted the town's attractive environment, 37% of participants stated that it was close to home, and 12% stated Thame's market.
- When asked to explain what they dislike about Thame, 65% of respondents said 'nothing'. 17% of respondents disliked the lack of parking within the town centre. Similarly, 15% of respondents also felt that Thame could be improved by having more available parking. Levels of satisfaction amongst users of the centre are therefore generally high.

## Business Views

6.19 NEMS Market Research conducted a Business Survey in order to ascertain the views and opinions of a number of business owners within the town centre. The key findings from this survey are as follows:

- 72% of the survey participants were owners of Independent businesses, and 28% were part of a regional or national store chain.
- 42% of respondents stated that their business had traded in Thame for twenty years or more, and 44% stated that their business had been trading in Thame between 6 and 20 years. Only 14% of respondents had been trading less than 5 years within Thame town centre.
- When asked to describe how their business turnover has changed over the last 5 years whilst trading in Thame town centre, 38% of respondents reported that their business turnover had either grown moderately or significantly. 30% stated their turnover has remained largely static, and 26% stated that their turnover had either declined moderately or significantly.
- Similarly, respondents were also asked to describe how their business is currently performing. 50% answered either well or very well, 36% answered moderately, and 10% answered poorly.
- The majority of business owners/managers (78%) stated that they employed between 1 and 5 full-time staff, and 12% stated they employed between 11 and 25 full-time staff.

- When asked to grade how accessible they perceived Thame centre to be overall (i.e from a pedestrian, public transport and private vehicle perspective), 46% of respondents answered very good, 34% quite good and 20% average. Moreover, 62% felt the availability of parking was either quite good or very good. 34% felt the availability of parking was average to poor.
- 98% of business owners/managers rated Thame's environment and physical appearance as good or very good.
- When considering the strength of Thame's retail offer, 32% stated the mix of types of goods as a strength and 24% stated the presence of niche retailers and boutique shops as another strength.

## Proposals and Commitments

- 6.20 As noted above, a planning application has been submitted for the redevelopment of the DAF Trucks site on the eastern edge of the town on Howland Road (planning application ref **P15/S1637/O**). The application seeks the redevelopment of the site to provide replacement accommodation for DAF Trucks alongside a 2,522 sq.m net foodstore and petrol filling station, which is expected to be operated by Tesco. The application is currently undetermined and therefore not factored in as a 'commitment' in our retail capacity forecasts, but would, if permitted, be the largest foodstore in Thame, approximately 500 sq.m net larger than the town centre Waitrose store.
- 6.21 As we have identified in Section 2, the Cattle Market site in Thame town centre is identified as the principle retail development opportunity in the town centre; the Neighbourhood Plan states the site could accommodate up to 3,000 sq.m of A1-A3 uses as part of a mixed use development, although the Plan excludes development of a foodstore on the site. The site is currently not the subject of any planning applications, however a planning application for a Sainsbury's foodstore on the site was refused in March 2013.

## Summary

- 6.22 From our assessment Thame is a well-performing town centre, displaying a number of positive signs of vitality and viability. In particular we note the following:
- The town centre unquestionably has an important convenience goods function, with a large Waitrose supermarket forming the anchor to the town centre offer, and we would expect this store plays an important role in supporting the wider vitality and viability of the town centre. The independent convenience goods sector in the town centre is also strong, and, along with the weekly market, helps to diversity the convenience offer and provide a number of specialist shopping destinations.
  - The comparison goods offer is a mixture of mainstream retailers (e.g. Boots, Robert Dyas) and more specialist independent retailers and contributes to a diverse retail offer. There may be

scope for strengthening of the café / commercial leisure offer in the centre to help expand the offer of the town centre beyond retail trading hours.

- The vacancy rate is significantly below the UK average and a number of previously-vacant units have been taken up by a mixture of national and independent operators in recent months.
- Thame is a picturesque town centre and the environmental quality is strong throughout. The centre is within a Conservation Area and there are a significant number of listed buildings. Public realm is of a good quality, and enhances the overall appearance of the centre. 98% of businesses surveyed said they were satisfied with the physical appearance of the town centre, and feedback from the business community and visitors of the centre is generally very positive.
- The most popular reason for visits to the centre is for food shopping (62% of all trips), with non-food shopping generally a secondary reason for visiting the centre. This affirms the important role of the town centre foodstores in supporting the wider vitality and viability of the centre.
- The centre is accessible by car and bus services. Whilst visitors to the centre identified parking as an area of concern, most businesses surveyed in the centre were satisfied with the adequacy of parking provision. Car parks were observed to be well supported at the time of our visit to the centre.
- The Cattle Market site is the principal retail development opportunity in the town centre, with the adopted Thame Neighbourhood Plan identifying the site as suitable for up to 3,000 sq.m A1-A3 uses, although the Plan prevents the development of a foodstore on the site.

## 7. Wallingford Health Check

- 7.1 The South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (2012) defines Wallingford as a 'town centre serving a local catchment area'. Wallingford is located in the centre-west of the District and is approximately a 15 minute drive east of Didcot.
- 7.2 The Proposals Map inset for Wallingford, accompanying the Core Strategy, identifies the Primary Shopping Frontage as: the south side of the High Street from Waitrose to number 20; 1 Castle Street and the Lamb Arcade; both sides of St Martin's Street from High Street to number 16; numbers 23 and 24 Market Place; both sides of St Mary's Street from High Street to number 21b on the eastern side and number 45 on the western side; and the Arcade.

### Diversity of Uses

- 7.3 The Experian Goad category report for Wallingford town centre (November 2013) identifies a total of approximately 23,000 sq.m of ground floor floorspace for retail trade and service, comprising 132 units. **Table 7.1** sets out the composition of the number of units in Wallingford.

**Table 7.1: Wallingford Town Centre Composition of Units**

	Number of Units	% of Total	UK Average (%)	Variance (%)
Convenience	7	5.30	8.27	-2.97
Comparison	48	36.36	32.72	+3.64
Service	65	49.23	47.23	+2
Vacant	12	9.09	11.46	-2.37
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Experian Goad Category Report (November 2013)

- 7.4 The convenience goods provision in Wallingford is below the national average, accounting for only 5.3% of total units (compared to the national average of 8.27%). The main, large format foodstore in Wallingford is the Waitrose located on the corner of High Street and St. Martin's Street. The store is located at the northern end of the allocated Primary Shopping Frontage and has a net sales area of c. 2,400 sq.m. The store is served by an adjacent car park which provides approximately 200 spaces. In common with Henley and Thame, we consider that the Waitrose store can be considered as the 'anchor' store within the town centre. This convenience goods offer is supplemented by a number of smaller convenience stores dispersed throughout the town centre, including a deli, butchers, Greggs baker and a confectionary store.
- 7.5 Wallingford's proportion of comparison goods retail units is above the national average. A more detailed analysis of the specific comparison goods categories reveals that Wallingford's proportion of antique, musical instrument and craft shops is considerably above the UK average, suggesting the centre has a number of specialist outlets.

- 7.6 The provision of service units within Wallingford is generally in line with the national average. Service units are sub-divided into three categories by Experian goad: retail, leisure and financial and business services. The Goad survey identifies an above average proportion of retail services (which account for 20.45% of total units compared to the national average of 14.02%). There is a below average proportion of leisure services (17.42% compared to the UK average of 22.28%), and the proportion of financial and business service units sits in line with the national average.
- 7.7 The cultural offer within Wallingford is fairly limited, however, it does benefit from the Corn Exchange – a 175 seat theatre which features regular drama, art, music and cinema shows. Wallingford also has its own museum, and the Gallery on the High Street showcases art primarily created by artists from the surrounding area.

## Retailer Representation

- 7.8 The Experian Goad report identifies 34 multiple retailers in Wallingford (26% of retail units). Most of Wallingford's multiple retailer units are dispersed throughout St Martin's Street and St Mary Street. There are three broad retail areas within Wallingford comprising the High Street, a combination of St Martin's Street and St Mary's Street, and the small pedestrianised area of the Market Place and upper St Mary's Street. The retail offer in Wallingford is predominantly tailored towards a middle market, however, the presence of a stringed instrument music shop, art and antique shops subsequently means the town, to some extent, also caters to a specialist / high-end market.
- 7.9 The Waitrose on the corner of High Street and St Martin's Street is the key anchor retailer. The store features fish, deli, bakery and butcher counters. There are ten manned tills, quick pay tills, a click and collect service and approximately 15% of the store's floorspace is designated for non-food products.
- 7.10 St Mary's Street and St Martin's Street generally feature larger units and offer a wide variety of retail service. Occupiers include Lloyds Pharmacy, Boots, Greggs, the Wallingford theatre and cinema, Pizza Express and the Pettits department store. The pedestrianised area of upper St Mary's Street offers a range of small to medium sized retail units including an arts and crafts shop, cafes, Clarks shoe shop, book shops, hair dressers, a hardware shop and a public house. St Leonards Square, to the south of the primary shopping area, and the small row of shops on St Peters Street behind the High Street provide a small number of units including a tool hire shop, hair dressers, a pub and a Chinese restaurant.

## Vacancies

- 7.11 **Table 7.2** indicates that as of November 2013 there were 12 vacant units in Wallingford, equating to a vacancy rate of 9.09%, slightly below the national average of 11.46%. The 2013 Experian Goad category report also indicates that 9.55% of floorspace in Wallingford is vacant compared to a national average of 9.29%.



**Table 7.2: Vacancy Rates in Wallingford by Unit and Floorspace**

Vacant Units	% of Total Units	UK Average (%)	Vacant Floorspace (sq.m)	% of Total Floorspace	UK Average (%)
12	9.09	11.46	23,800	9.55	9.29

Source: Experian Goad Category Report November 2013

- 7.12 GVA undertook a survey in November 2014 which enabled the Experian Goad data to be updated. The survey highlighted that the number of vacant units had fallen by 1 from 12 to 11. Of the 12 originally vacant units, three have been reoccupied, as illustrated in **Table 7.3**. No units have become newly vacant within the primary shopping frontage, however, the large vacant unit at 12-16 St Martin's Street still remains which is allocated as primary shopping frontage. This is a long-standing vacant unit was previously occupied by Waitrose prior to development of their new store at High Street / St Martin's Street. There is also a cluster of four vacant units at the southern end of St Martin's Street, whilst the other vacant units are distributed throughout the rest of the centre.

**Table 7.3: Re-occupied units in Wallingford since November 2013**

Retail Fascia	Address	Retail Category
Bean and Brew Café	57 St Mary's Street	Leisure Service
Café	28 High Street	Leisure Service
Co-op funeral care	18 St Martin's Street	Retail Service

Source: GVA survey, November 2014

## Environmental Quality

- 7.13 In a similar fashion to Henley-on-Thames and Thame, Wallingford is typical of a historic English Market town. The town is situated within the Wallingford Conservation Area and features many traditional buildings. The majority of the buildings within the town centre have listed status, designated as sites of special architectural or historical interest, and the town has evidently been well protected. The environmental quality (and wider vitality and viability) of the centre is less strong towards its southern end, with the vacant former Waitrose having a detrimental impact on the immediate surrounding area, both from a visual sense and also its effect on surrounding businesses: footfall is generally lower and the quality of the retail offer is weaker.
- 7.14 The town centre is quaint and pleasant, with public seating, cobbled roads and a wide pedestrian area located near to the town centre. The shop facades are generally well kept, and street pavements are maintained to a good standard. Intermittent potted plants and hanging baskets also contribute towards an aesthetically pleasing town centre.

## Accessibility

- 7.15 There are four car parks located within Wallingford town centre. The largest car park is situated behind the Waitrose supermarket and provides capacity for approximately 200 cars. A car park

providing space for approximately 100 cars is located off Goldsmiths Lane behind the large vacant unit on St Martin's Street, and a further 150 spaces are provided off New Road to the south of the town centre. There is also a smaller car park with c. 30 spaces situated behind the High Street off Thames Street.

- 7.16 Roadside parking within the centre is very limited due to the narrow road widths. Three bus stops were identified within Wallingford centre located near to the Market Place on St Martin's Street and St Mary's Street. Bus services connect Wallingford with Henley, Reading, Didcot, Oxford and the local surrounding residential areas. Located approximately three miles south of Wallingford is the centre's nearest train station, Cholesey. Trains from Cholesey station service Didcot and Reading, which in turn provide connections with London and the South West.

### Out of Centre Retail Provision

- 7.17 There are no out-of-centre stores of any significant size within the Wallingford catchment area. The closest store of this nature is the small retail warehouse complex in Didcot.

### Customer Views and Behaviour

- 7.18 The household telephone survey undertaken in support of this study asked respondents whether they visited Wallingford town centre, and for those who do, asked a number of attitudinal questions about the frequency of visits to Wallingford town centre, the reasons for choosing to visit and likes and dislikes about the town centre. The key findings from the telephone survey are summarised below:

- 37% of those respondents who visit Wallingford town centre stated that they shop in Wallingford once a week, 12% shop in Wallingford once every two weeks, and 14% shop there once a month.
- 57% of respondents who visit Wallingford stated food shopping was the main purpose of their trip, compared to 12% who stated that non-food shopping was usually the main purpose of their visit. 28% of respondents who visit Wallingford stated that non-food shopping was a secondary reason for visiting Wallingford, and 20% stated that food shopping was a secondary reason why they visit.
- When asked to describe what they like about Wallingford, 32% answered the town's attractive environment, 27% of participants indicated it was because it was close to home, 10% liked how easy it was to park, and 8% liked Wallingford's market. When asked what they disliked about Wallingford, it is positive to note 66% of respondents said 'nothing'. A small number of respondents indicated that lack of parking was a problem.
- Of those surveyed, 79% of respondents were from the South Oxfordshire study area (see Section 8), suggesting that Wallingford's retail offer is more geared towards meeting local needs when compared to Thame and Henley.

## Business Views

7.19 Alongside the household survey, NEMS Market Research also conducted a Business Survey in order to ascertain the views and opinions of a number of business owners within the town centre. The key findings from this survey are as follows:

- 84% of the survey participants were owners of independent businesses, with 16% part of a national chain.
- 44% of respondents stated that their business had traded in Wallingford for twenty years or more and 28% stated that their business had been trading in Wallingford between 6 and 10 years. 10% of respondents had been trading 5 years or less within Wallingford.
- When asked to describe how their business turnover has changed over the last 5 years whilst trading in Wallingford town centre, 42% of respondents reported that their business turnover had either grown moderately or significantly. 36% of respondents reported that their business turnover had remained largely static, and 22% reported that their turnover had either declined moderately or significantly. It would appear that the performance of businesses in Wallingford town centre has generally been quite muted compared to other centres in the District.
- Similarly, respondents were also asked to describe how their business is currently performing. 60% answered either well or very well, 28% answered moderately, and 10% answered either poorly or very poorly.
- The majority of business owners/managers (74%) stated that they employed between 1 and 5 full-time staff, and 16% revealed they employed between 6 and 25 full-time staff.
- When asked to grade how accessible they perceived Wallingford centre to be overall (i.e. from a pedestrian, public transport and private vehicle perspective), 12% of respondents answered very good, 34% answered quite good, a further 34% answered average and 20% answered either quite poor or very poor. 20% of respondents felt the availability of parking was either quite good or very good, whilst 70% felt the availability of parking was average to poor.
- 66% of business owners/managers rated Wallingford's environment and physical appearance as quite good or very good.
- When asked to consider what the strengths of Wallingford town centre is, 16% made reference to the presence of independent retailers and 14% referred to the town's good location. Conversely, 18% of participants felt a weakness of the centre's retail offer is the poor range of shops in general, and 12% felt there were too many empty shops.
- 52% of participants rated the evening eating and drinking provision in Wallingford as either quite good or very good, and 30% rated it as average. 58% rated the daytime eating and drinking provision as either quite good or very good and 32% rated it as average.

## Proposals and Commitments

- 7.20 There is extant planning permission for the development of a Morrisons foodstore at the G Stow Plc. site on Hithercroft Road.. The store is outside the town centre boundary. The foodstore will have a net sales area of approximately 2,800 sq m and include floorspace for the sale of convenience and comparison goods. It is understood that Morrisons have now withdrawn from the site which is on the market for sale; however for the purposes of our quantitative needs assessment we have listed this store as a 'commitment', as the planning permission remains extant even if Morrisons dispose of the site.

## Summary

- 7.21 Our healthcheck assessment of Wallingford town centre has identified that:
- In common with the other South Oxfordshire centres, Wallingford exhibits generally positive signs of vitality and viability, although there are a number of areas where some concerns can be identified, particularly in the respect of the southern end of the town centre in the environs of the former Waitrose store.
  - As with Thame, the convenience goods function of the centre is particularly important to the overall 'health' of the centre and the relocated Waitrose store can be considered the 'anchor' to the retail offer. The household survey confirms that for those residents in the District who visit Wallingford, food shopping is the principal reason for their visit to the centre.
  - The comparison goods retail offer is a mixture of day-to-day goods and services, interspersed with a more specialist retail offer, largely provided by the independent retail sector. Overall the retail offer of the centre errs towards the more functional rather than higher-end side.
  - The vacancy rate in the town centre is below the UK average but higher than other centres in the District, and feedback from local businesses has identified concern over the number of vacant units in the town centre. The former Waitrose store at St Martin's Street has remained vacant for some time, and the attraction of a quality replacement store for this unit to help drive footfall in the southern part of the town centre is important, particularly as there are a number of other smaller vacant units in this part of the centre. The letting of this store will help rebalance the vitality and viability of the town centre, which at present is skewed towards the very healthy northern part of the centre, and the underperforming southern part.
  - There may also be scope for an improved range of evening economy uses, particularly restaurants, within the centre. The environmental quality of the centre is, in common with the other smaller centres in the District, makes a positive contribution to the overall vitality and viability of the centre.

## 8. Quantitative Convenience Needs Assessment

- 8.1 This section outlines our quantitative assessment of retail needs which we expect to come forward over the Council's plan period. Using the results of the household telephone survey undertaken in support of this study, we provide an analysis of shopping patterns arising in the survey area. The current performance of convenience and comparison goods floorspace across the District is then used as the basis for forecasting the need for additional retail floorspace in five year periods up to 2031. The findings of this section should be read alongside the detailed convenience goods capacity tabulations set out in **Appendix I** (for convenience goods) and **Appendix II** (for comparison goods).
- 8.2 It is important to note that capacity forecasts become increasingly open to margins of error over time and will invariably be influenced by potential changes in economic circumstances. Longer term projections should therefore be treated with caution. As such, it will be necessary for the Council to update these forecasts regularly over the Local Plan period.
- 8.3 For clarity, the capacity figures referenced below and set out in Appendices I (for convenience goods floorspace) and II (for comparison) are cumulative.

### Methodology

- 8.4 We have used a conventional and widely accepted step by step methodology, consistent with best practice, which draws upon the results of the household telephone survey of existing shopping patterns to model the existing flows of available expenditure to centres in South Oxfordshire. We also identify the main competing centres which have an influence on shopping patterns in the District. To develop the 'baseline' position to use as the basis of our capacity forecasts we have:
- **Step 1:** Identified the current patterns of spending for convenience and comparison goods, on the basis of the household telephone survey of shopping patterns undertaken in support of this study;
  - **Step 2:** Identify the key data inputs required for the capacity assessment, in terms of population, per capita expenditure on retail goods, and 'claims' on expenditure to take into account, including commitments for new retail floorspace and 'special forms of trading' such as online shopping;
  - **Step 3:** calculate the total amount of convenience and comparison goods expenditure which is available within the postcode and ward areas comprising the Spelthorne study area;

- **Step 4:** Assess the trading performance of existing floorspace in the District (which also informs our qualitative recommendations)<sup>4</sup>; and
- **Step 5:** Allocated the available projected expenditure to the convenience and comparison goods shopping destinations (as identified in Step 1), and identify the quantitative capacity for additional retail floorspace which arises as a result.

## Household telephone survey and definition of study area

- 8.5 In order to identify current shopping patterns across the District, GVA commissioned a new household telephone survey covering 1,200 households, split across 12 survey zones, to ensure accuracy of local shopping patterns. GVA designed the survey questionnaire in consultation with the Council and NEMS Market Research, who undertook the interviewing and data processing in October 2014. The wording of the survey was structured to ensure that the results are representative of shopping habits across the whole of the year.
- 8.6 The extent of the study area is illustrated in Plan 1, and in order to accurately capture the extent of trade draw to centres in South Oxfordshire, the study area extends beyond the administrative boundaries of the District. Consequently, Zones 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10 are referred to in this report as South Oxfordshire's "core zones", as they most closely approximate to the extent of the District boundary, and hence are particularly useful for determining shopping patterns for South Oxfordshire's residents.
- 8.7 The household telephone survey results identify shopping habits of households for both convenience and comparison goods, as well as commercial leisure spending (which we discuss separately in the following section). For convenience goods, the household telephone survey included questions on main food and top-up food shopping. The results of the two types of food expenditure were then merged through the application of a weight which reflects the estimated proportion of expenditure accounted for by each goods type (70% main food / 30% top-up food). This forms a composite pattern of convenience spending, expressed as a market share for each destination centre or foodstore for each survey zone.
- 8.8 For comparison goods, the household telephone survey included seven questions on where respondents normally undertake shopping for the following comparison goods types:
- Clothing and footwear;
  - Furniture, floor coverings and household textiles;
  - DIY and decorating goods;
  - Domestic appliances;
  - Audio-visual equipment;

---

<sup>4</sup> Step 4 is undertaken for the convenience goods capacity assessment only

- Personal and medical goods; and
- Recreational and luxury goods.

8.9 In order to determine the 'composite' market share for all comparison goods spending within the survey area, we apply the weighted averages of the household telephone survey results for each goods type based on the proportion of per capita spend on that goods type. This process establishes the pattern of comparison spending for residents in each of the survey zones and is an accepted approach which ensures that market shares for centres and stores are not skewed by any particular goods category.

## Convenience goods capacity assessment

### Step 1: Convenience goods catchment analysis

- 8.10 **Table 5 in Appendix I** shows that in total, there is £720.77m convenience goods expenditure available to residents of the study area, and £382.93m of convenience goods expenditure available to residents in the 'core zones' (sum of the above listed<sup>5</sup> zones from Table 3, Appendix I). By adding up the turnover achieved by existing stores and centres within these zones which fall within these zones, we have calculated that £203.92m is 'retained' within the core zones – equivalent to 53.3% of total available convenience goods expenditure. The rest of the expenditure is spent at stores in Abingdon, Twyford, Princes Risborough and High Wycombe, and other destinations outside the study area. A degree of expenditure leakage is not, in itself, a concern – the study area is not a 'closed system' in respect of shopping patterns. What needs to be established is whether any centres are losing more expenditure than would be expected for a centre of their size, which that local shopping needs are not being met in a sustainable manner.
- 8.11 In **Table 8.1** therefore, we identify the 'local' retention rate for the zones containing each of the main centres in the District, in order to gain an understanding of the extent to which convenience goods expenditure is retained in the respective local areas.

**Table 8.1: Convenience goods expenditure retention rate for key 'local' zones**

	Total convenience goods expenditure available to zone (£m)	Convenience goods expenditure retained within 'local' zone (£m)	Convenience goods expenditure retained within 'local' zone (%)
Zone 2 (Thame)	26.35	20.34	77%
Zone 6 (Henley-on-Thames)	23.44	21.81	93%
Zone 9 (Wallingford)	42.08	20.17	48%

<sup>5</sup> See paragraph 8.6

Zone 10 (Didcot)	63.91	56.51	88%
------------------	-------	-------	-----

Source: Table 5, Appendix I

8.12 Table 8.1 shows that:

- For residents in Didcot (zone 10), 88% of total convenience goods expenditure which is available to residents in zone 10 is spent at stores in Didcot. In other words, only 1 in 10 residents who live in the Didcot area are choosing to travel to locations outside of Didcot for their convenience goods shopping.
- For Henley, 93% of available convenience goods expenditure available to residents in zone 6 is spent at stores in Henley, and it can be seen that the Henley zone has the highest level of convenience goods expenditure retention of all the main centres in the District.
- The localised retention rates are lower for the smaller centres of Thame (localised expenditure rate of 77%) and particularly Wallingford (localised expenditure rate of 48%), suggesting that for these centres there may be scope for improvements to existing foodstore provision, in order to promote more sustainable patterns of convenience goods shopping. We would expect that the permission for a new Morrisons foodstore in Wallingford (discussed further below) will contribute towards improving the current localised retention rate however, as there are currently no 'mid-market' foodstore operators trading in Wallingford.

8.13 It is positive to note that as the highest order centre in the District, Didcot is largely self-sufficient in terms of its convenience goods shopping needs. Recent permissions for an Aldi foodstore at The Broadway, an M&S Food store as part of Orchard Centre Phase II, and a new foodstore as part of the Great Western Park urban extension (within Vale of White Horse District) will, if developed, further improve local consumer choice and encourage competition between retailers and deliver improvements to the localised retention rate.

8.14 Much of the performance of the other zones can be explained by their geographical distribution. For example, only 8.4% of available convenience goods expenditure available to residents of zone 4 is spent within the core zones – but many residents living in this zone are closer to large foodstores in High Wycombe and Princes Risborough than they are to facilities within any of the South Oxfordshire centres. We therefore do not consider the aggregate retention rate for the core zones of 53.3% to be a particular cause for concern, given the geographic extent of the survey area and the proximity of other competing centres and destinations outside the study area boundary.

8.15 **Table 8.2** sets out the most popular destinations for convenience goods shopping in each of the 'local' zones for the four South Oxfordshire centres. The blue shading denotes stores within the District's town centres; the grey shading denotes stores which are (when assessed under the sequential test), not within a defined centre.



**Table 8.2: Convenience goods expenditure retention and shopping patterns by zone**

	Convenience goods expenditure retained within zone (%) (Table 8.1)	Most popular convenience goods shopping destination	Second-most popular convenience goods shopping destination	Third-most popular convenience goods shopping destination
Zone 2 (Thame)	77%	Waitrose, Thame (46%)	Co-Op, Thame (17%)	Sainsbury's, Thame (13%)
Zone 6 (Henley-on-Thames)	93%	Tesco, Henley (45%)*	Waitrose, Henley (43%)	Sainsbury's Local, Henley (5%)
Zone 9 (Wallingford)	48%	Waitrose, Wallingford (47%)	Other stores outside study area (28%)	Sainsbury's, Didcot (17%)
Zone 10 (Didcot)	88%	Tesco, Didcot (49%)*	Sainsbury's, Didcot (30%)	Other stores outside study area (9%)

Source: Table 4, Appendix II

- 8.16 Table 8.2 shows that the most popular foodstore in each of the four South Oxfordshire centres (Waitrose in Thame and Wallingford; Tesco in Henley and Didcot) attracts between 45 and 49% of total available convenience goods expenditure available to its 'local' zone, and these stores consequently serve to dominate food shopping patterns in their respective zones. In Henley, the second-most popular supermarket (Waitrose) also commands a similarly high market share, which explains the high localised expenditure retention rate identified for zone 6 (as shown in Table 8.1). In Didcot, the second-most popular store (Sainsbury's) also attracts a significant market share. In zone 2 (Thame) and zone 9 (Wallingford) however, there is no real competition to the dominant Waitrose stores.
- 8.17 Table 8.2 also shows that the most popular foodstores in Henley and Didcot are not within the town centre, but are out-of-centre standalone foodstores.

## Step 2: Convenience goods data inputs

- 8.18 This section sets out approach to the following key data inputs, which are required in order to identify the surplus convenience goods expenditure capacity which is available to support new convenience goods retail floorspace:
- Estimates of population in the study area;
  - Expenditure growth rates; and
  - 'Claims' on expenditure, e.g. Special Forms of Trading and commitments for new retail floorspace.
- 8.19 We discuss these in turn below.

## Estimates of Population in the Survey Area

- 8.20 Population estimates and forecasts for each of the survey zones are obtained from the Experian E-Marketer in-house system. This provides estimates of population in 2014 for the duration of the study

period through to 2031. Overall, the population of the survey area in 2014 is estimated to be 347,413. It is forecast to grow to 360,545 by 2019, 372,529 by 2021, and 382,183 by 2031. This equates to an overall population growth rate of 10%.

- 8.21 Experian E-Marketer is an industry standard source of evidence, based on the 2011 Census and mid-year estimates. Experian's population forecasts are past-trends based and therefore can be considered a reliable barometer of likely future levels of growth. Having considered the Experian population projections, alongside Oxfordshire County Council population projections for South Oxfordshire (produced in 2014) and also the South Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), it is apparent that all demonstrate consistent levels of projected population growth. Between the period 2014 and 2031 each calculates a c.10% growth in population.
- 8.22 SODC have advised that the growth rate of c.10% is the lowest range of growth identified in the SHMA, and the Council's emerging Local Plan is expected to provide for a higher range of growth (c. 23%), but there is currently no agreed trajectory for planned growth, nor an agreed position on where this growth will take place.
- 8.23 On this basis, we consider that the use of Experian figures represents the most robust approach in forecasting future floorspace capacity, but advise that they are likely to represent minimum requirements in the event that a higher level of population growth comes forward. Once the Council has a clearer indication of growth projections (including trajectories and locations for growth), it is recommended that a refresh of the capacity forecasts identified in this report is undertaken.

### Expenditure Growth Rates

- 8.24 The Experian E-Marketer system provides per capita expenditure available for both convenience and comparison goods. This is produced at the zonal level, in order to highlight variations across the study area. To estimate available expenditure in the survey area over the Plan period, it is necessary to apply growth rates to the base per capita expenditure forecasts. Growth rates set out in Experian Retail Planner Briefing Note 12.1 (October 2014) are based on the latest economic forecasts and estimate a convenience goods expenditure growth rate of 0.6% per annum for the period 2014-31<sup>6</sup>.

### Claims on expenditure

#### Deductions for Special Forms of Trading (SFT)

---

<sup>6</sup> Experian only forecast growth rates up to 2030, so for the final year of the study period to 2031 we assume the convenience and comparison expenditure growth rates will remain unchanged from the previous period. These growth rates reflect the expectation that spending on comparison goods will grow faster than convenience goods, as the scope to purchase more food is limited. These assumptions take into account current economic circumstances, with a recent return to higher levels of expenditure growth after several years of suppressed growth during the economic downturn.

- 8.25 The Experian E-Marketer system provides estimates of per capita expenditure for convenience and comparison goods. We have made deductions for Special Forms of Trading (SFT) which represent expenditure not available to spend in shops (for example internet or catalogue shopping). The deductions we have applied for SFT for convenience and comparison goods are derived from Experian Retail Planner Briefing Note 12 and range from 2.6% in 2014 to 5.6% in 2031.

#### Commitments

- 8.26 In order to ensure capacity forecasts are as up to date and robust as possible, we take account of new convenience goods developments expected to come forward as a result of existing planning permissions. We have factored into our assessment the following convenience goods planning 'commitments':

- **M&S, Orchard Centre Phase II, Didcot** (assumed net convenience goods sales area of 1,018 sq.m net<sup>7</sup>, turnover in 2012 prices £11.32m);
- **Foodstore, Lupton Road, Wallingford** (net convenience goods sales area 2,208 sq.m, estimated turnover in 2012 prices £26.50m<sup>8</sup>; and
- **Aldi, The Broadway, Didcot** (net convenience goods sales area 969 sq m; estimated turnover in 2012 prices £9.40m) (store is now trading)

- 8.27 The convenience goods commitments listed above have a total turnover of £47.22m in 2012 prices (Table 11, Appendix I).

#### Step 3: Total available convenience goods expenditure

- 8.28 Appendix I, Table 3 applies per capita expenditure within each zone to the population forecasts, which indicates that total available convenience goods expenditure within the survey area at 2014 is £720.77m. This is forecast to increase to £761.44m at 2019, and £851.28m at 2031 – a growth of £130.51m over the study period. The figures include allowance for SFT, as set out above. Longer term projections should be treated with caution due to the potential for changing economic circumstances and susceptibility of longer-term forecasts to margins of error.

#### Step 4: Assessment of performance of existing floorspace

- 8.29 In Table 10 of Appendix I, we provide a summary of the trading performance of existing supermarkets<sup>9</sup> in South Oxfordshire relative to the company average or 'benchmark' position.

<sup>7</sup> There is no figure for the M&S Food store providing in planning application documentation for Orchard Centre Phase II. We have therefore assumed the foodstore will be 10% of the total permitted A1 / flexible A1 A3 floorspace (12,722 sq.m GIA x 10% = 1,272 sq.m GIA, or 1,018 sq.m net with a gross:net ratio of 80% applied)

<sup>8</sup> We have assumed a turnover per sq.m of £12,000 for this foodstore as there is currently no operator attached to the permission.

<sup>9</sup> The convenience and comparison goods floorspace data used in our modelling has been drawn from the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD) and Experian Goad. Our floorspace assumptions for the foodstores include adjustments, where necessary, to identify the proportion of purely convenience goods floorspace. Most superstores include a proportion of non-food floorspace; we have adjusted the net floorspace to identify the proportion of sales floorspace allocated for convenience goods based on 2014 data from Verdict Grocery Retailers, in some cases supplemented by our own observations based on site visits to particular stores.

Coupled with our health check observations and visits to the existing large supermarkets in the District, analysis of this information can help frame qualitative recommendations in terms of the need for new convenience goods floorspace<sup>10</sup>. Table 10 of Appendix I shows that:

- Existing supermarkets in Didcot are collectively achieving a turnover of £79.42m, compared to a 'benchmark' figure of £57.06m. The out-of-centre Tesco supermarket, Didcot, is trading at over double company average levels (£38.6m), whilst the Sainsbury's store in the town centre is trading below average (£32.2m). Tesco Express, Cockroft Road and other local stores in Didcot town centre account for the remainder of turnover identified.
- We would expect the existing permissions for the M&S at Orchard Centre Phase II, Aldi store at Broadway (now trading), and the new foodstore at Great Western Park (which falls outside South Oxfordshire District) will serve to reduce the over-trading currently taking place at the Tesco store (whilst also drawing trade from the town centre Sainsbury's). Assuming these developments come forward as planned, we therefore do not consider there to be an urgent qualitative need for additional convenience goods floorspace in Didcot.
- The two large foodstores in Henley-on-Thames are performing strongly; the Waitrose store is trading at approximately £11m above company 'benchmark' levels, and the Tesco store is trading approximately £5m above benchmark. However it can also be seen that the Sainsbury's Local store on Bell Street in the town centre is achieving a turnover below its expected level.
- The Waitrose supermarket in Thame is trading strongly, achieving a turnover approximately £7m above its 'benchmark' level. The smaller Co-Operative store is trading at approximately 65% of its 'benchmark', whilst the Sainsbury's is trading slightly below company average levels.
- The Waitrose supermarket at St Martin's Street in Wallingford appears to be trading particularly strongly, achieving a turnover approximately £14m above its 'benchmark' level. Again, this suggests pent up need for additional convenience goods floorspace. If the permission for a new foodstore at Lupton Road comes is implemented, this will have the effect of improving consumer choice and competition in the town, and reducing the over-trading at the Waitrose. Therefore if this permission is implemented, we do not consider there to be a qualitative needs for additional provision in Wallingford over and above this. However should this development not come forward, there is a clear quantitative need for additional convenience goods provision to serve Wallingford.

---

<sup>10</sup> For convenience goods, we have estimated the expected benchmark turnovers of various stores within the District by adopting company average sales densities from Verdict Grocery Retailers 2014. For example, the benchmark sales density for a Co-Op store is in the region of £7,800 per sq.m net; the benchmark sales density for a Tesco is in the region of £11,600 per sq.m net, and a benchmark sales density for an Asda supermarket is approximately £13,400 per sq.m net. Specialist / independent convenience goods retailers typically trade at significantly lower sales densities, and for these other retailers we have assumed a sales density of £2,500 per sq.m.

---

#### Step 4: Calculation of baseline convenience capacity

- 8.30 In assessing capacity for future convenience goods floorspace, we have assumed that the efficiency with which existing floorspace is being used will change over time. We have adopted the latest advice published by Experian (Retail Planner Briefing Note 12), which estimates per annum sales density changes of 0.4% per annum between 2012 and 2019, and 0.2% per annum between 2019 and 2031.
- 8.31 Based on the combined turnover and current market share of the main convenience destinations in South Oxfordshire (including out of centre foodstores), we estimate that there will be a surplus of £25.98m of convenience goods expenditure in the District at 2019, which can support new convenience goods retail floorspace. By virtue of the forecast growth in population and expenditure, and after allowing for existing in-centre convenience stores to improve sales efficiency in line with Experian's advice, we estimate that the identified expenditure surplus will increase to £34.09m by 2024 and £46.29m by 2031.
- 8.32 To translate this surplus expenditure into floorspace, we have assumed that mainstream foodstore operators would aim to achieve an average sales density of around £12,000 per sq.m net, increasing over the duration of the study period in line with Experian's sales density forecasts (as summarised above). We have focussed on the capacity available to support main foodstores. If smaller operators or discount retailers came forward, the amount of capacity arising would be greater as they would typically achieve a lower sales density.
- 8.33 **Table 8.3** summarises the forecast capacity for additional convenience floorspace in South Oxfordshire District, assuming a constant market share approach (i.e. that current shopping patterns will remain unchanged over the duration of the study period to 2031). As stated above, capacity forecasts over the longer term should be treated with caution.

**Table 8.3: District-wide convenience capacity forecasts for large store-format floorspace**

	2019	2024	2029	2031
Floorspace capacity (sq.m net)	2,122	2,757	3,461	3,691
Floorspace capacity (sq.m net, rounded)	2,100	2,800	3,500	3,700

Source: Table 12, Appendix I

- 8.34 Our analysis has demonstrated that there is a requirement for the Council to plan for up to 3,700 sq.m net (rounded) over the course of the study period to 2031, including a short-term requirement to 2019 of up to 2,100 sq.m net. In **Section 11** of this study we set out recommendations for the most appropriate locations for this floorspace.

## 9. Quantitative Comparison Needs Assessment

- 9.1 This section presents our analysis in respect of the capacity for additional comparison goods floorspace over the plan period to 2031. The detailed comparison goods capacity tabulations are set out in **Appendix II**. The approach to identifying capacity reflects that described in the previous section for our convenience goods capacity assessment, and we do not repeat discussion of the catchment area or methodology approach here.

### Step 1: Comparison Goods Catchment Analysis

- 9.2 **Table 5 in Appendix II** shows that, in total, there is £1,215.88m of comparison goods expenditure available to residents in the study area, and £645.93m of expenditure available to residents of the 'core zones' in the study base year of 2014. Of this total available expenditure, the results of the household survey have identified that centres in South Oxfordshire retain £220.23m of comparison goods expenditure, equivalent to a retention rate of 18.1%.
- 9.3 When solely considering the 'core zones', £174.00m of expenditure is retained, equivalent to a retention rate of 26.9%. Again, we highlight that the study area (or District) are not 'closed systems', and particularly in the case of comparison goods shopping, customers are increasingly willing to travel to larger, higher-order centres to visit large branches of their preferred stores, and where there are a wider range of shopping options available (as our study has previously identified).
- 9.4 The centres in South Oxfordshire attract the following turnovers from the study area and core area respectively (**Table 9.1**). The turnover figures do not make allowance for 'inflow' of expenditure from beyond the study area boundaries. Table 9.1 shows that of the £220.23m 'retained' comparison goods expenditure, £96.20m is spent in Didcot town centre, which has the highest survey area-derived turnover of any centre in the District. Table 9.1 also shows that 86% of Didcot's turnover comes from within the core zones, suggesting that it has relatively limited popularity as a shopping destination for residents outside the District. Henley town centre has a lower turnover than Didcot, but draws trade from a wider area, with only 74% of turnover drawn from the core zones. Again, it should be emphasised that these turnover figures do not include 'inflow', and for centres such as Henley this can be expected to contribute significantly to town centre turnover. We return to discuss this further below.

**Table 9.1: Comparison goods turnover of South Oxfordshire centres**

	Turnover of centre from study area, 2014 (£m)	Of which, turnover from core zones, 2014 (£m)
Didcot town centre	96.20	82.38 (86% of study area total)
Henley-on-Thames town centre	46.21	34.10 (74% of study area total)
Thame town centre	32.24	21.95 (68% of study area total)

Wallingford town centre	18.62	13.66 (73% of study area total)
Wallingford Road Retail Park, Didcot (out-of-centre)	1.94	1.29 (66% of study area total)

Source: Table 5, Appendix II

9.5 The remaining comparison goods expenditure is spent at stores and centres outside the study area. This is referred to as expenditure 'leakage', and Table 5 of Appendix II identifies the most popular destinations for comparison goods shopping outside the study area are as follows:

- Reading town centre: £243.10m (of which, £134.23m from the core zones);
- Oxford city centre: £116.63m (of which, £61.52m from the core zones);
- High Wycombe town centre: £112.02m (of which, £102.82m from the core zones);
- Retail parks in competing centres / other locations: £460.36m (of which £160.15m from the core zones).

9.6 The centres within South Oxfordshire therefore principally compete for comparison goods expenditure with Oxford, High Wycombe and Reading. These are all higher-order comparison goods shopping destinations with a strong retail offer, including department stores and a greater number of middle to upper-market fashion retailers, and therefore, reflecting the wider market trends which this study has identified in Section 3, loss of expenditure to these centres is to be expected. There are also smaller flows of expenditure to Abingdon (£6.82m from the core zones) and Aylesbury (£6.39m from the core zones).

### Comparison goods shopping patterns by centre

9.7 In **Table 9.2** we identify the proportion of comparison goods available to residents in zone 2 (Thame), zone 6 (Henley-on-Thames), zone 9 (Wallingford) and zone 10 (Didcot) which is spent by residents in their 'local' zones. This identifies the extent to which each of the District's centres are meeting their residents' comparison goods shopping needs. **Table 9.2** also shows the three most popular comparison goods shopping destinations for residents in each centre.

**Table 9.2: Comparison goods expenditure retention and shopping patterns by zone**

	Comparison goods expenditure retained within zone (%)	Most popular comparison goods shopping destination	Second-most popular comparison goods shopping destination	Third-most popular comparison goods shopping destination
Zone 2 (Thame)	34%	Thame (34%)	Aylesbury out-of-centre (28%)	Oxford (11%)
Zone 6 (Henley)	42%	Henley (42%)	Reading (30%)	Reading out-of-centre (9%)
Zone 9	14%	Reading (33%)	Didcot (28%)	Wallingford (14%)

(Wallingford)				
Zone 10 (Didcot)	55%	Didcot (55%)	Oxford (14%)	Abingdon out-of-centre (11%)

Source: Table 4, Appendix II

### Didcot

- 9.8 Table 9.2 shows that the **Didcot zone** (zone 10) has the highest level of comparison goods expenditure retention - 55% of total available comparison goods expenditure available to residents in Didcot is spent at stores in Didcot, and the vast majority of this is accounted for by Didcot town centre. However, Table 8.4 also demonstrates that Didcot is losing a considerable amount of market share to surrounding locations, including to Oxford – some 14 miles away.
- 9.9 Whilst the retail offer in Oxford city centre is strong and will inevitably draw trade from a wide area, it should nevertheless be an aspiration of the Council to improve this local retention rate over the course of the study period. We would expect that, providing a suitably strong comparison goods tenant mix can be attracted, the Phase II development of the Orchard Centre will assist in this respect (although this scheme will in itself face competition from an enhanced offer in Oxford as a result of the redevelopment of the Westgate Centre, which is currently under construction and will introduce a number of new comparison goods retailers to the city, including John Lewis).
- 9.10 **Figure 9.1** shows the extent of Didcot's comparison goods shopping catchment. It confirms that Didcot is the dominant comparison goods shopping destination for residents in its 'local' zone (zone 10), and that Didcot town centre also attracts market share from zone 9 (Wallingford) as well as a limited market share (under 10%) from zones 11, 12 (which includes Abingdon) and 13. Residents in the south and east of the study area do not look towards Didcot for comparison goods shopping.



Figure 9.1: Didcot comparison goods market share

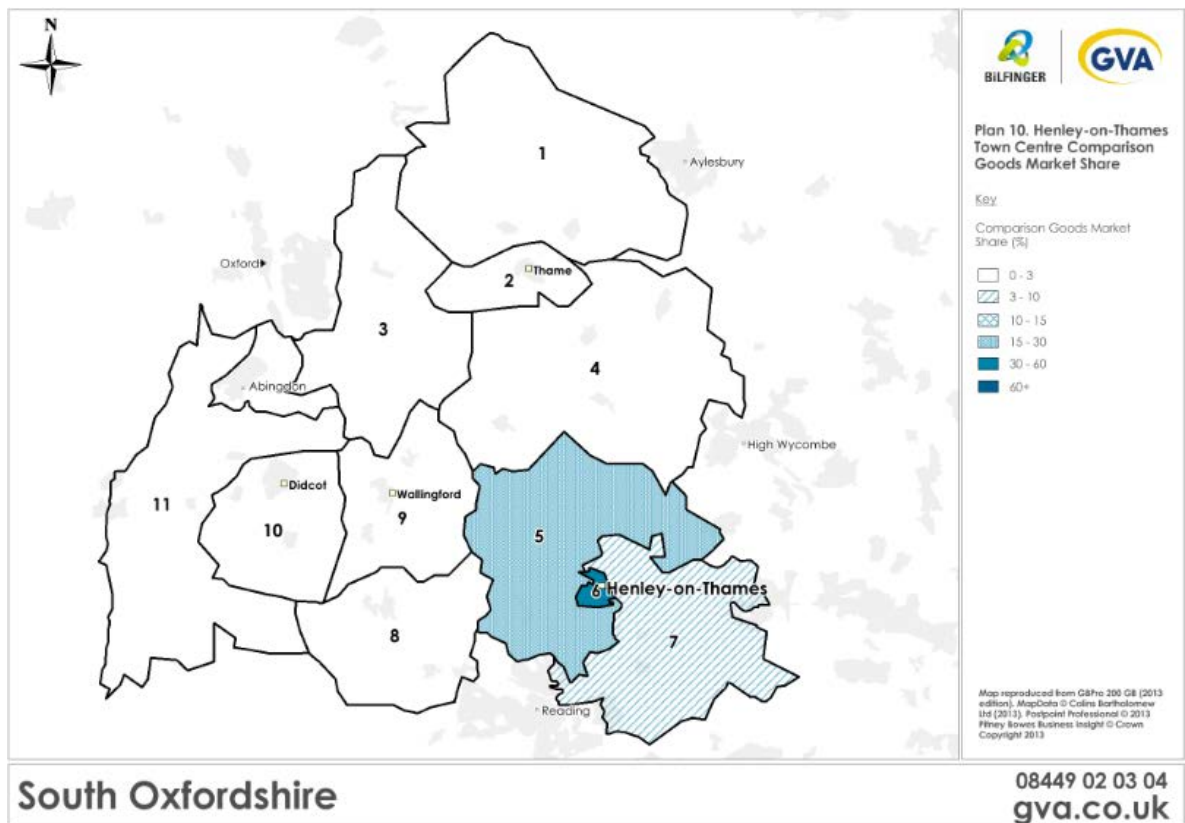


Source: Table 4, Appendix II

#### Henley-on-Thames

- 9.11 42% of comparison goods expenditure which is available to residents in the **Henley zone** (zone 6) is spent at stores within Henley. Our health check analysis confirmed that Henley has a strong high-end retail offer, although is a relatively small town centre in terms of size, and on this basis, and taking into account the close proximity of Reading, we consider this to represent a respectable performance
- 9.12 **Figure 9.2** shows the extent of Henley's comparison goods shopping catchment within the study area. It shows that, in addition to the 42% market share from its local zone, Henley also draws market share from zone 5, and limited market share from zone 7. Given the proximity of Reading and High Wycombe to Henley, coupled with the more specialist nature of much of the retail offer in the town centre, we consider that Henley's catchment is largely as would be expected. Figure 9.2 also confirms that Henley's trade draw is restricted to the south-eastern part of the study area, and it does not exhibit any influence over shopping patterns over the wider area.

Figure 9.2: Henley comparison goods market share

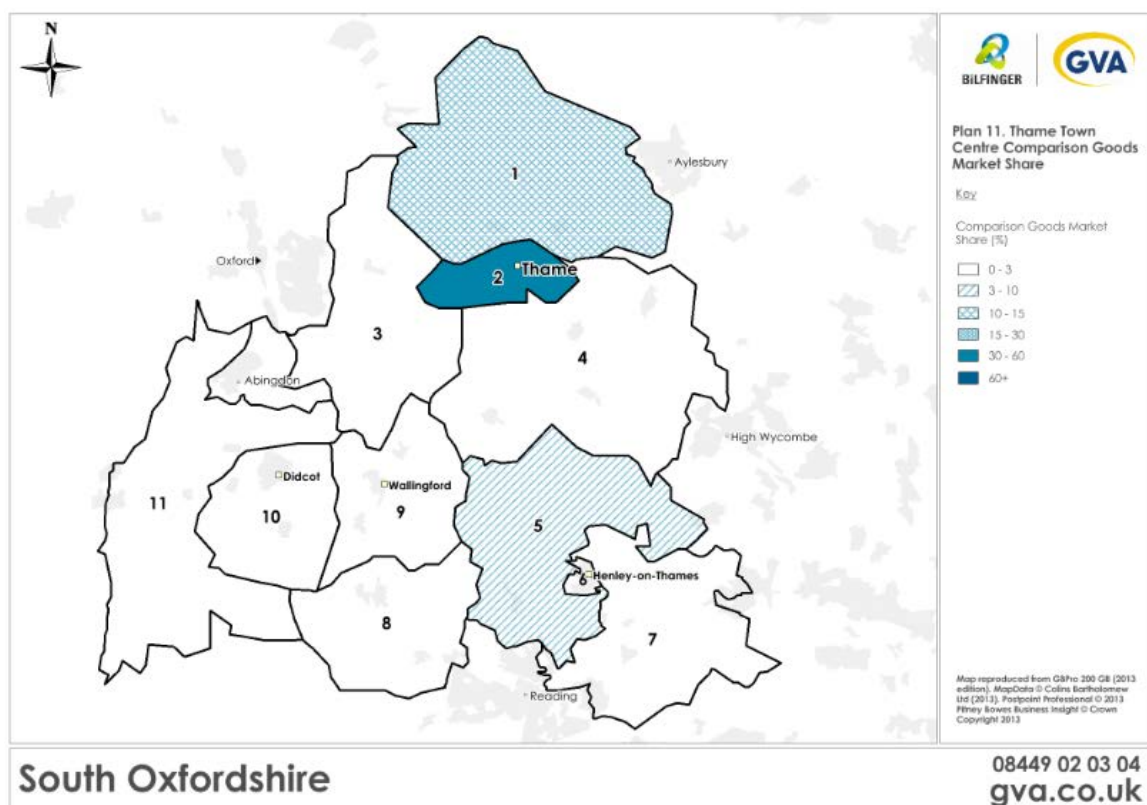


Source: Table 4, Appendix II

### Thame

- 9.13 Thame's comparison goods offer is less developed than Didcot and Henley, but Table 9.2 shows that the **Thame zone** (zone 2) nevertheless retains just over one-third of all comparison goods expenditure available to residents. Thame is approximately 20 minutes' drive from Aylesbury and 30 minutes' drive from Oxford, and in order to encourage sustainable patterns of shopping there may be scope to seek some improvement to this localised retention rate over the course of the study period.
- 9.14 **Figure 9.3** confirms that, aside from the expenditure drawn from its local zone, its catchment area is relatively restricted, drawing a limited market share from zone 1, and also a modest market share from zone 5 (the market share to Thame from residents of this zone is only 3%). This confirms that Thame, for the most part, only acts as a comparison goods shopping destination for its immediate catchment, although as we discuss below we also anticipate that it fulfils a tourism function.

Figure 9.3: Thame comparison goods market share

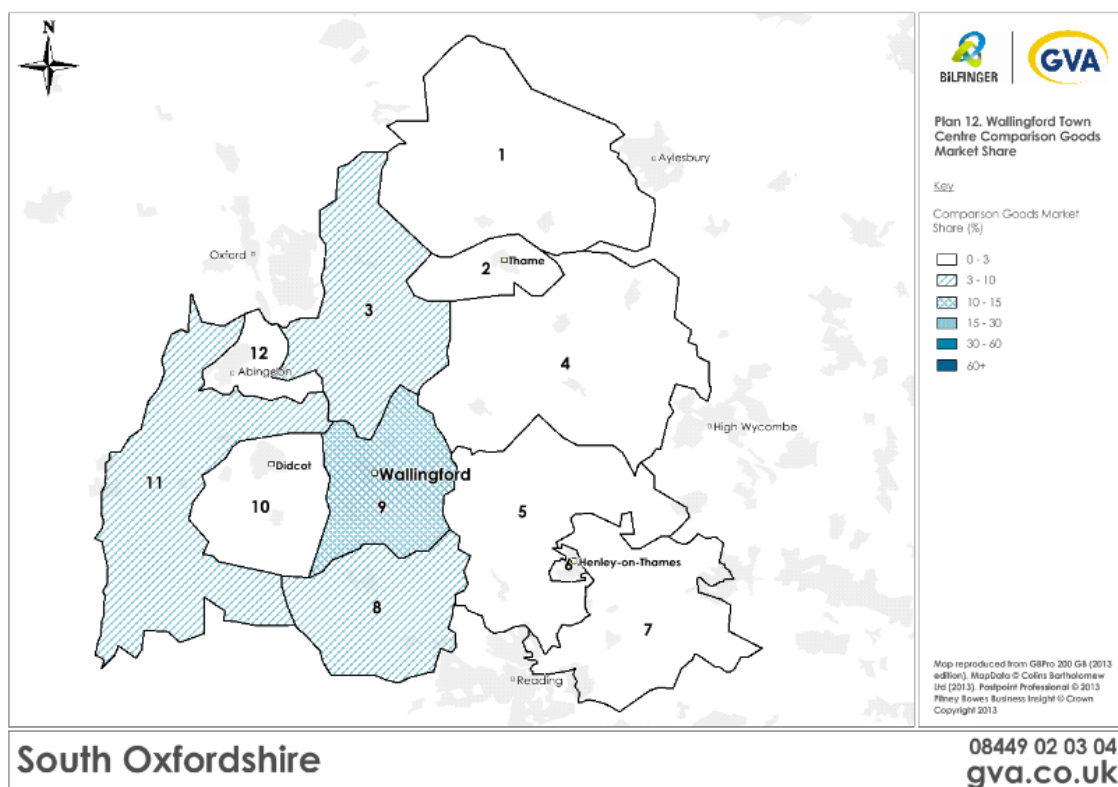


Source: Table 4, Appendix II

#### Wallingford

- 9.15 Wallingford has the most limited comparison goods shopping offer of all the centres in the District, and only 14% of comparison goods expenditure available to residents in the **Wallingford zone** (zone 9) is spent in Wallingford town centre. Most residents in Wallingford undertake their comparison goods shopping in Reading and Didcot, with some expenditure flows to Oxford also identified from the household survey results. The proximity of Wallingford to Didcot means that there is probably more limited scope for improvements in the local retention rate to come forward.
- 9.16 **Figure 9.4** shows that, in addition to the 14% market share from its local zone, Wallingford also attract limited amounts of trade from zones 3, 8 and 11, although in each instance the market share is under 10%. The household survey results indicate that residents in Didcot are currently not travelling to Wallingford for comparison goods shopping, despite its slightly more specialist/independents-focussed retail offer.

Figure 9.4: Wallingford comparison goods market share



Source: Table 4, Appendix II

### Changes in centres' trade draw

- 9.17 In **Table 9.5** we compare the localised retention rates for the four centres which we have discussed above with those identified in the 2009 Retail Study.

Table 9.5: Localised comparison goods retention rate, 2009 Study and 2014 Study

	Localised comparison goods retention rate, 2009 Study	Localised comparison goods retention rate, 2014
Zone 2 (Thame)	24%	34%
Zone 6 (Henley)	29%	42%
Zone 9 (Wallingford)	16%	14%
Zone 10 (Didcot)	32%	55%

Source: Table 4, Appendix II for 2014 data and Table 14, Appendix 14 of 2009 Study

- 9.18 It is positive to note that the localised retention rate for the Didcot zone has increased from 32% to 55% between 2009 and 2014, suggesting that more local residents are choosing to visit Didcot town centre for comparison goods shopping. Some of the 'clawback' of market share has been at the expense of Oxford, which recorded a market share of 22% in the 2009 Study, which has now decreased to 14%.

- 9.19 Henley-on-Thames' local retention rate has increased by 13 percentage points, and Thame's has increased by 10 percentage points. Clearly in all cases this is a positive reflection on the vitality and viability of these centres, suggesting that they have weathered the economic downturn and are meeting an increasing number of residents' shopping needs. The trends may also reflect an increasing willingness by residents to shop in their local town centres, rather than travelling further afield. Wallingford has, however, lost market share from its local zone relative to the 2009 Study, and the majority of residents in this zone continue to look outside the town for their comparison shopping needs.

## Step 2: Comparison goods data inputs

### Population and expenditure inputs

- 9.20 Our estimates of population growth in the survey area reflect those set out in Step 2 of the convenience goods capacity assessment, as discussed in **Section 8**. We again use per capita expenditure figures derived from Experian E-Marketer to establish the base year comparison goods expenditure which is available to residents at the zonal level. To estimate available comparison goods expenditure in the survey area over the Plan period, it is necessary to apply growth rates to the base per capita expenditure forecasts, which again reflect those set out in Experian Retail Planner Briefing Note 12.1 (October 2014). Based on guidance set out in this document, we adopt a convenience goods expenditure growth rate of 3.3% per annum for the period 2014-31<sup>11</sup>. The higher growth rate for comparison goods spending reflects the fact that spending on comparison goods will grow faster than convenience goods, as the scope to purchase more food is limited.

### Claims on expenditure

#### Deductions for Special Forms of Trading (SFT)

- 9.21 The deductions we have applied for SFT for comparison goods spending are derived from Experian Retail Planner Briefing Note 12, and range from 11.7% in 2014 to 15.5% in 2031.

#### Commitments and pipeline developments

- 9.22 We have factored into our assessment the following comparison goods planning 'commitments':

- **Foodstore, Lupton Road, Wallingford** (net comparison goods sales area 601 sq.m; estimated turnover in 2012 prices £5.41m);

---

<sup>11</sup> Experian only forecast growth rates up to 2030, so for the final year of the study period to 2031 we assume the convenience and comparison expenditure growth rates will remain unchanged from the previous period. These growth rates reflect the expectation that spending on comparison goods will grow faster than convenience goods, as the scope to purchase more food is limited. These assumptions take into account current economic circumstances, with a recent return to higher levels of expenditure growth after several years of suppressed growth during the economic downturn.

- **Aldi, The Broadway, Didcot** (net comparison goods sales area 171 sq.m; estimated turnover in 2012 prices £1.35m) (store now trading).
- 9.23 These commitments have an estimated turnover of £6.77m (in 2012 prices), which we factor in as a 'claim' on future comparison goods capacity (**Table 11, Appendix I**).
- 9.24 If the Orchard Centre Phase II permission is implemented in the form and composition suggested in the outline planning application, it has potential to change the market share of Didcot and result in different patterns of trade draw to those which are currently taking place. The supporting documentation to the planning application provides little indication as to potential tenants or the composition of the scheme, with the exception of naming M&S Food as the convenience goods anchor (we have factored this element of the permission into our convenience goods modelling, see section 8), which makes estimating the potential turnover and trade draw of the new floorspace a difficult exercise.
- 9.25 We can, however, provide a broad estimate as to the potential turnover of new comparison goods floorspace at Orchard Centre Phase II, as follows:
- The supporting documentation to the planning application states that a total of 12,722 sq.m GIA floorspace is applied for. This is split between 10,848 sq.m GIA class A1 floorspace, and 1,874 sq.m GIA flexible class A1/A3 floorspace.
  - In Section 8, we have assumed that 1,272 sq.m of this (10% of total GIA) will be accounted for by the M&S Food store.
  - If we assume that all of the 1,874 sq.m GIA flexible floorspace is developed for A3 uses (which is supported in light of our comments regarding the lack of café/restaurant provision in Didcot town centre at present), this leaves a balance of 9,576 sq.m GIA (i.e. 10,848 sq.m minus 1,272 sq.m) which could potentially be developed as comparison goods floorspace.
  - A gross: net ratio then needs to be applied to estimate the net sales area of the new floorspace. We have adopted a gross: net ratio of 80% for the purposes of this exercise, which results in a net comparison goods sales area of **7,661 sq.m**.
  - Applying a benchmark comparison goods sales density (turnover per sq.m) of £6,528 per sq.m to the net sales area (which reflects the sales density used in our capacity assessment at 2019), produces an indicative turnover of **£50.01m at 2019**. However, this figure can only be considered indicative as it will be highly dependent on the final composition of the scheme, including the nature of tenants attracted, and the proportions of units which are given over to A1 convenience or A3 uses.
- 9.26 The proposed floorspace has potential to result in Didcot 'clawing back' comparison goods market share which is currently being lost to nearby centres. However, we would expect that the extent to which expenditure 'clawback' will be highly influenced by the nature and quality of retailers which are secured for the scheme, particularly in light of the increased competition from Oxford City Centre upon completion of the Westgate redevelopment.



### Step 3: Total available comparison goods expenditure

- 9.27 Appendix II, Table 3 applies per capita expenditure within each zone to the population forecasts, which indicates that total available comparison goods expenditure within the survey area at 2014 is £1,215.88m. This is forecast to grow to £1,424.32m by 2019 and £2,225.08m by 2031 – a growth of £1,009.20m. The figures include allowance for SFT, as set out above. As previously advised, longer term projections should be treated with caution due to the potential for changing economic circumstances and susceptibility of longer-term forecasts to margins of error.

### Step 4: Calculation of baseline comparison capacity

- 9.28 In assessing capacity for future comparison goods floorspace, we have assumed that the efficiency with which existing floorspace is being used will increase over time. Drawing on the latest advice published by Experian (Retail Planner Briefing Note 12), we have adopted annual sales density growth rates of 1.7% per annum for the duration of the study period to 2031, and applied this to the turnover of existing floorspace in the study area.
- 9.29 Based on the combined turnover and current market share of existing comparison goods destinations in the District, and after taking into account existing commitments, our assessment concludes that there will be a surplus of £15.23m comparison goods expenditure across the study area by 2019. By virtue of the forecast growth in population and expenditure, and after allowing for existing comparison stores to improve sales efficiency, this surplus increases significantly to £55.09m by 2024, £106.10m by 2029, and £129.96m by 2031.
- 9.30 Our comparison goods capacity forecasts have also been informed by estimates of 'inflow' of expenditure from outside the study area into each of the four principal towns. This inflow is an important factor in calculating the overall turnover of each town centre, particularly in a centre such as Henley which have an important tourism function. Our estimates of inflow have been informed by the findings of the South Oxfordshire Visitor Survey (Q&A Research on behalf of South Oxfordshire District Council, 2011), which identified that 'inflow' of visitors from beyond the District accounted for:
- 43% of visitors to Henley town centre;
  - 17% of visitors to Thame town centre; and
  - 8% of visitors to Wallingford town centre.
- 9.31 No comparable figure was provided for Didcot town centre, and therefore in this instance, having regard to the location of the centre within the District, the presence of competing centres, and the retail / commercial leisure offer of the town, we have estimated the inflow into Didcot town centre to be 5% of total turnover.
- 9.32 To translate the identified surplus comparison goods expenditure into floorspace, we have adopted an average turnover of £6,000 per sq.m and grown this in line with sales density

assumptions discussed above. **Table 9.6** summarises forecast capacity for additional comparison floorspace in the District assuming a constant market share approach (i.e. that current shopping patterns as identified in the household survey will be unchanged). As stated above, capacity forecasts over the longer term should be treated with caution. Should the permitted for Phase II of the Orchard Centre be implemented, it is recommended that an updated household telephone survey of shopping patterns is undertaken one to two years after opening of the scheme (and ideally allowing for a similar period of trading for the Westgate Centre redevelopment in Oxford) in order to establish the extent to which the two developments have altered comparison goods shopping patterns.

**Table 9.6: District Wide Comparison Floorspace Capacity Forecasts**

	2019	2024	2029	2031
Floorspace capacity (sq.m net)	2,333	7,757	13,733	16,263
Floorspace capacity (sq.m net, rounded)	2,300	7,800	13,700	16,300

Source: Table 12, Appendix II

- 9.33 Table 9.6 shows that in the short-term there is only a small requirement for up to 2,300 sq.m net comparison goods floorspace across the study area at 2019. Once the forecast growth in population and expenditure begins to come forward, the requirement for additional comparison goods floorspace increases to 7,800 sq.m net by 2024 and 16,200 sq.m net by 2031. As we have discussed, if the Orchard Centre Phase II development is constructed in line with the current outline permission, this could account for approximately 7,700 sq.m of comparison goods floorspace. Therefore, based on the figures set out in Table 9.6, if Phase II of the Orchard Centre comes forward as proposed, the Council will not need to plan for any additional comparison goods floorspace in the District until the end of its Plan period (i.e. post-2024).
- 9.34 These figures represent baseline comparison goods floorspace capacity, which assume that current patterns of shopping will remain unchanged. As stated above, the Orchard Centre Phase II offers the opportunity for Didcot to increase its comparison goods market share, but this may be tempered by the proposals for improvements to the Westgate Centre in Oxford, which has recently been granted reserved matters planning approval and is due to commence trading by Christmas 2017. An update of the Council's retail capacity evidence base following a 'bedding down' period for these two developments is therefore recommended.



## 10. Qualitative commercial leisure assessment

### Introduction

- 10.1 Emerging trends suggest that leisure uses are playing an increasingly important role in the vitality and viability of centres by providing complementary uses that strengthen both the daytime and evening economies. Due to the changing nature of high-street shopping, leisure uses also often now represent a significant proportion of a town centre's overall turnover.
- 10.2 This section of the report considers the current provision and performance of leisure uses throughout the District, including patterns of visits to restaurant, café, cinema, entertainment venues and cultural facilities, and identifies any qualitative 'gaps' in the provision of these facilities. The results are informed by the site visits carried out by GVA and the findings of the household telephone survey undertaken in October 2014.
- 10.3 As an overview, the key findings from the household survey are as follows:
- Eating in restaurants is the most popular leisure activity undertaken by 74% of the survey participants. This is followed by going to cafes, pubs or bars (62%), visiting the cinema (57%) and going to the theatre, museums or art galleries (55%).
  - 26% of participants stated that they visit health and fitness facilities, and 23% of participants visit various entertainment venues including ten-pin bowling, ice skating and bingo.
  - 10% of survey respondents did not partake in any of the above leisure activities.
  - Henley town centre stands out as the district's main location of choice for leisure uses. For those that visit Henley most often, 13% of participants stated that leisure activities were usually the main purpose of their trip, and 11% stated that eating and drinking was usually the main purpose of their visit. 46% of respondents stated that eating and drinking was often the secondary reason for visiting Henley.
  - Despite the fact that across the district, leisure uses tend not to be the main reasons for people visiting a town centre, very few survey respondents stated that the leisure offer in South Oxfordshire's town centres would benefit from improvement.

### Restaurants, Cafes, Pubs and Bars

- 10.4 The household survey identified that:
- Going to restaurants was the most popular leisure activity for the household survey population, with 74% of all respondents taking part in this form of leisure activity.

- Oxford City centre was mentioned the most as the location that people go to for visiting restaurants (14%). Henley was the second most-visited location (13%) and Reading was the third (11%).
  - In fact, for those participants who visit Henley town centre most often (21% of the total survey population), 11% of those respondents stated that eating and drinking was usually the main purpose of their trip. Moreover, 46% of respondents stated that eating and drinking was usually another reason why they visited Henley, which is a much larger percentage than any other town centre within the district, confirming our health check findings that Henley benefits from a particularly good offer in this respect.
  - Similarly, visiting cafes, pubs or bars was the second most popular leisure activity amongst all survey respondents, with 62% stating that it was an activity that they partake in.
  - When asked which location they visit most often to go to cafes, pubs, or bars, Henley town centre received the most responses (14%). Thame was the fourth most visited location for this purpose (11%), Didcot the sixth highest (6%) and Wallingford only had 4% of responses. Other well-cited locations for this leisure activity included Abingdon (12%), Oxford (11%) and Reading (10%) – all of which are outside of the district boundary. The relatively limited number of responses for Didcot confirms a qualitative gap in the town centre offer in this respect.
- 10.5 The restaurant, café, pubs and bars offer in Henley is attractive and varied, and there is no doubt that the strength of this sector makes an important contribution to the wider vitality and viability of the town centre. The town centre has a healthy mix of chain venues including Strada, Pizza Express, Loch Fyne, Zizzi, CAU Steakhouse and Starbucks along with a good range of independent cafes and restaurants which offer a variety of different cuisines. The strong tourism/destination role offered by Henley is likely to increase its attractiveness to restaurant and leisure operators.
- 10.6 Within the other three town centres, the restaurant, café and bar offer is much more limited, often with only a handful of ‘family dining’ options (e.g. Prezzo in Didcot, Pizza Express in Wallingford). With relatively few restaurants, pubs and bars on offer it is felt that there is considerable potential for greater provision of these facilities in Didcot town centre in particular. The approved Orchard Centre Phase II application makes provision for 1,900 sq.m GIA of floorspace for flexible class A1/A3 use, and a further 700 sq.m GIA of class A3 floorspace, and therefore offers a clear opportunity for this qualitative shortfall to be addressed.
- 10.7 The site visits and household surveys have also revealed that, excluding restaurants all centres within South Oxfordshire have little to offer in terms of evening leisure venues. Centres may benefit from a stronger night time economy, which would add vitality to the town for more hours in the day and perhaps encourage visitors to stay longer than they do at present.

## Cinemas

- 10.8 Cinema use was the third most popular leisure activity among all respondents, with 57% stating that it was an activity that they partake in. The most visited cinema across the survey area is Cineworld in Didcot, with 23% of respondents (of those who undertake this activity) visiting the Cineworld most often. The Regal Picturehouse in Henley is the second most-visited cinema (14%) and the Vue in Oxford (outside the survey area) is the third most-visited facility (12%).
- 10.9 2% stated that they visited the Corn Exchange in Wallingford, a further 2% stated that they visit the Cornerstone in Didcot most often. Only 0.3% stated that they visited the cinema in Thame most often. None of these facilities are bespoke cinemas, but rather offer occasional film screenings as part of a wider cultural offer.

## Entertainment Venues

- 10.10 For the purpose of our analysis, the umbrella term ‘entertainment venues’ has been used to incorporate a number of leisure activities including ten-pin bowling, ice skating and bingo. The household survey undertaken in support of this study identified that:
- 23% of all survey participants stated that they took part in at least one of the entertainment venue activities.
  - Of that 23%, only one of the venues mentioned by participants is actually located within the district boundary – the New Coronet Bingo Club, Didcot.
  - The majority of respondents visited either Oxford (41%) or High Wycombe (16%) to take part in such activities.
- 10.11 There is clearly limited provision of facilities of this nature in the district – although this has to be seen in the context of fairly low levels of patronage by residents in the first place. The Didcot bingo facility is a small facility housed in a former cinema which appears in need of investment. The household survey respondents did not specifically express a desire for additional provision of such facilities within South Oxfordshire’s town centres. However, there are a good range of facilities available in the higher-order centres which surround the district, including the Bowlplex in Oxford, Hollywood Bowl in High Wycombe and Oxford Ice Rink in Oxford, and we would expect that these will temper the need (and operator demand) for new facilities within the District itself over the course of the Plan period.

## Health and Fitness Facilities

- 10.12 The household survey found that 26% of the total participant population use health and fitness facilities. **Table 10.1** illustrates the main locations that the survey respondents visit most often. In addition to the facilities listed in Table 9.1, we expect many survey respondents will use specialist

fitness classes, personal trainers and small, independent services which are not accounted for by the list of locations in the household survey.

**Table 10.1: Most popular health and fitness facilities for survey area residents**

Venue/Location	Usage by household survey respondents (%)
Thame Leisure Centre, Thame	11%
White Horse Leisure Centre, Abingdon	7%
Didcot Wave, Didcot	7%
The Club, High Wycombe	5%
Magnet Leisure Centre, Maidenhead	5%
LA Fitness, Henley	4%
Willowbrook Leisure Centre, Didcot	4%
Henley Leisure Centre, Henley	3%
Aqua Vale, Aylesbury	3%
Racquets Fitness, Thame	3%
Didcot Leisure Centre, Didcot	2%

Source: NEMS Household Survey results

- 10.13 The majority of leisure and fitness facilities in the District are Council-operated, and there is relatively little in the way of private operator representation, with the exception of LA Fitness in Henley. Demand for representation is generally driven by operators, where gaps in the market are identified. As we have set out in Section 3, many budget gym operators are currently seeking to expand representation, and this may present an opportunity for centres in the District to capitalise on. In particular, there is currently no representation of health and fitness facilities in Didcot town centre. We note that the approved proposals for Phase II of the Orchard Centre make allowance for a gym operator, and therefore this qualitative shortfall is likely to be rectified in the short to medium term. Elsewhere, we advise that facilities of this nature can help generate town centre footfall outside of retail trading hours and should, in principle, be supported.

## Theatres/Museums/Art Galleries

- 10.14 Visiting theatres, museums or art galleries was a reasonably popular leisure activity for the participant survey population: 55% stated that they took part in at least one of these cultural activities. The location visited most often to partake in any of the above activities was Central London (37%). After that, other popular locations included Oxford, High Wycombe, Reading and Aylesbury, reflecting the greater concentration of these type of facilities within larger centres. Oxford city centre in particular is well provided for in terms of these types of facilities, with established cultural institutions such as the Ashmolean Museum, Modern Art Oxford and the New Theatre, as well as live music venues such as the Oxford O2 Academy, all playing a significant contribution to the cultural offer of the city centre.

- 10.15 There are, however, some theatres and museums located within the district boundary such as the Kenton Theatre in Henley, Cornerstone in Didcot, the Corn Exchange in Wallingford and the Players Theatre in Thame. These are relatively small venues but nevertheless they provide an important service to their surrounding areas. We consider there to be the scope for the Cornerstone facility in Didcot in particular to play an increasingly important role as a focal point for improving the leisure / cultural offer in Didcot town centre, in turn contributing to its wider vitality and viability.
- 10.16 The household survey results reveal that the usage at many of the district's venues is fairly limited, but this needs to be considered in the context that only just over half of all respondents to the household survey stated that they undertake visits to cultural facilities. As a result, it is considered that the current theatre, museum and art gallery offer within South Oxfordshire is of an appropriate and reasonable scale, and that encouragement of greater patronage to existing facilities represents the most effective strategy. The survey results revealed no significant demand for more leisure services of this type.

## Summary

- 10.17 We have considered the current commercial leisure facilities provision within the district. By using the results gathered from the household telephone survey and site visits, we have also been able to identify the usage patterns of the various commercial leisure uses, and the potential need for additional leisure facilities. Our assessment has identified that:
- Visiting restaurants is the most popular leisure activity undertaken by 74% of the survey participants. This is followed by going to cafes, pubs or bars (62%), visiting the cinema (57%) and going to the theatre, museums or art galleries (55%). 26% of participants stated that they visit health and fitness facilities, and 23% of participants visit entertainment venues which include ten-pin bowling, ice skating and bingo.
  - Henley town centre stands out as the district's most popular location for commercial leisure uses. In particular, the town centre boasts a good range of restaurants and cafes which make an important contribution to its overall vitality and viability.
  - Elsewhere, the restaurant offer is more limited, and facilities tend to be of a lower quality. Most notably, Didcot would benefit from an increase in restaurant and bars offer in the town centre, particularly in terms of family dining. Such developments should be encouraged to help strengthen the town's daytime and evening economy, and overall enhancement to its vitality and viability. The approved Orchard Centre Phase II application makes provision for 1,900 sq.m of floorspace for flexible A1/A3 use, and a further 700 sq.m of class A3 floorspace, and therefore offers a clear opportunity for this qualitative shortfall to be addressed.
  - There may also be a qualitative case for improvements in health & fitness provision in the District's town centres, and the continued expansion of private sector operators, in particular at the budget end of the market, offers an opportunity for centres in the District to capitalise on this. Again, it is considered that this qualitative shortfall is most apparent in Didcot, but we note that the Orchard Centre Phase II makes provision for 1,500 sq.m GIA of floorspace to be

used for a gym, which will help to meet this shortfall. Generally, it is recommended that proposals for enhancement of facilities in suitable locations within the District's network of town centres should be supported in principle.

- We do not consider there to be a need to plan for enhancement of other types of commercial leisure activity. Bingo halls have a relatively limited appeal to residents in the District, whilst larger scale facilities such as bowling and ice skating tend to concentrate operations in higher order centres with larger catchments. We therefore recommend that applications for development of this nature are considered on their individual merits, should they come forward, but do not need to be actively planned for.

## 11. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 11.1 In this section we set out our headline conclusions on the qualitative and quantitative capacity for growth and change in retail provision across the District, and sets out recommendations to inform the Council's retail strategy over the plan period. Where relevant, it also identifies any 'gaps' in the provision of other main town centre provisions which the Council may seek to rectify.

### The context of the study

- 11.2 The study has set out that the high street, in its traditional form, has faced a number of challenges in recent years — and this is likely to remain the case over the course of the Council's plan period. The effects of the economic downturn and contraction in retail spending have been well-documented, with many retailers entering administration and a general trend for 'value' and convenience retailers becoming more prominent, particularly in sub-regional and smaller centres. Whilst economic recovery is now underway, fundamental changes in consumer shopping behaviour means that the high street needs to continue to evolve in order to remain a vital and viable destination for its local community. For town centres to continue to be successful, they will need to offer unique selling points to differentiate them from competing centres, and give people a 'reason' to want to visit them. South Oxfordshire is in the fortunate position of having a number of town centres – particularly Henley, Thame and to a lesser extent Wallingford – which are able to offer more of a unique selling point as quintessential market towns.
- 11.3 The key drivers of this change are the continued growth in online shopping, and the strategic decision by many retailers – particular comparison (non-food) fashion retailers – to concentrate their activities in larger-format stores in a smaller number of generally higher-order locations (in the context of the study area, Oxford and Reading are two such examples of these centres).
- 11.4 Online retailing itself is becoming a complex sector however, and is not the 'death knell' for the high street which many people originally feared. Rather, whilst the growth of multi-channel retailing acts as tough competition for the high street, it also presents an opportunity for the high street to capitalise, by maximising the opportunities arising from services like 'click & collect', and retailers moving towards combined store-based and virtual shopping experiences. Out-of-centre retailing remains an ever-present source of competition, and market evidence suggests that many retail parks have performed well during the economic downturn. There is limited provision of out-of-centre retail parks in South Oxfordshire, which is likely to be an important factor behind the generally positive vitality and viability of the Council's network of centres.
- 11.5 Town centre strategies which support the continued evolution of the high street are therefore considered ever more vital. This may involve providing a high quality shopping 'experience', maximising the benefits of tourist trade, and improving the mix of retail and non-retail outlets to increase length of stay and spend. As stated previously, the centres in South Oxfordshire are

considered well-placed to take full advantage of this, but will need continued investment and support in order to achieve this.

- 11.6 The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 has introduced greater flexibility to enable a more straightforward change of use within shopping frontages. Of particular relevance, the amendments allow permitted change from retail premises (A1) to financial services (A2), and restaurants and cafes (A3) without a time limit on that change of use. The Council's policy framework has effectively protected and enhanced the primary shopping area in recent years, and we recommend the proactive consideration of legislative controls to prevent such a change of use where considered inappropriate and harmful to the vitality and viability of the shopping frontage – i.e. the dilution of A1 uses underpinning footfall and connectivity across a centre. This recommendation is applicable to each of the centres in South Oxfordshire we discuss below.

## District-Wide Capacity

- 11.7 Notwithstanding the significant shifts which are currently taking place in the sector, retail is – and will continue to be – an important contributor to town centres and a driver for growth over the Council's plan period. Our study has identified that expenditure growth will take place in the District over the course of the Council's plan period, and there will be a need for both comparison (non-food) and convenience (food) floorspace, as follows:
- Up to 2,100 sq.m net additional convenience goods floorspace by 2019, increasing to up to 3,700 sq.m net additional convenience goods floorspace by 2031;
  - Up to 2,300 sq.m net additional comparison goods floorspace by 2019, increasing to up to 16,300 sq.m net additional comparison goods floorspace by 2031.
- 11.8 National policy guidance enforces the sequential approach and it is not policy compliant to disaggregate comparison goods into bulky and non-bulky at the plan making stage. In respect of development control, town centre sites should be encouraged in the first instance, and each application considered on a case by case basis. Planning applications promoting bulky goods should consider the policy framework with a particular focus on the sequential and impact test.
- 11.9 The capacity projections are based on current market shares, identifying capacity for new floorspace based on current estimates of population and expenditure growth provided by Experian. It is recommended that the capacity projections are refreshed once a clear picture of the level and trajectory of planned housing growth which is expected to come forward in the District has been established.
- 11.10 Our assessment has factored in known 'commitments' for retail floorspace, chiefly a new foodstore in Wallingford, an Aldi store in Didcot (which has recently commenced trading), and a M&S Food store which is expected to come forward as part of the Orchard Centre Phase II development in Didcot town centre.



- 11.11 If the Orchard Centre Phase II development is constructed in line with the current outline permission, this could account for approximately 7,700 sq.m of comparison goods floorspace. Therefore, if this development materialises, the Council will not need to plan for any additional comparison goods floorspace in the District until the end of its Plan period (i.e. post-2024).
- 11.12 The location of any new retail development should be subject to the sequential test and impact test where appropriate. We also advise that figures towards the end of the Plan period should be treated as indicative, and subject to further review and updated during the Plan period. A full update to the retail capacity forecasts (including a new household telephone survey) is recommended in a period 1-2 years following the opening of Orchard Centre Phase II and the redeveloped Westgate Centre in Oxford, to establish the effect these developments have had on shopping patterns of residents in the District, and ascertain the extent to which 'clawback' of comparison goods expenditure has taken place.
- 11.13 Having identified the overall quantitative retail capacity for the District, below we set out our recommendations for each of the four principal centres in South Oxfordshire.

### Didcot – Summary of Performance

- 11.14 Our assessment of Didcot town centre suggests the centre is currently performing reasonably well. There is a good representation of national retailers in the centre (this is a significant consideration, as in many centres these act as drivers of footfall) – however the offer is, for the most part, pitched towards the middle to lower end of the market. The attraction of a broader retail mix is important to enhancing the vitality and viability of the centre in the long term.
- 11.15 The location of a Sainsbury's foodstore in a prominent position in town centre is an asset to the retail mix and wider vitality and viability of the town centre. The store plays an important 'anchor' role and allows for linked food and non-food shopping trips to be undertaken. Evidence from the household telephone survey undertaken in support of this study confirms that food shopping is the principal reason respondents visit Didcot town centre at the current time, although the town centre also clearly has an important comparison goods shopping function. If applications for out-of-centre convenience goods floorspace come forward in the District (or neighbouring areas which Didcot's catchment extends into), care will need to be taken that no significant adverse impact arises against this store, given its important contribution to the wider vitality and viability of the centre.
- 11.16 The centre also has an important leisure function. The Cornerstone is a purpose-built, Council-operated arts, culture and entertainment venue, well-positioned within the town centre. The adjacent Cineworld multiplex further enhances the leisure offer in the town. However, the supporting network of facilities — and in particular cafes and family dining restaurants — which are required to increase dwell-time and visitor spend, and make the town centre more of a 'destination' are largely under-represented. The encouragement of these type of uses, should be a target for the Council, as it will enable the town centre to more seamlessly function as an 'all

day' centre rather than having separate daytime (shopping) and nighttime (cinema) functions. We would expect that the Orchard Centre Phase II will assist in meeting the current shortfall in respect of this type of provision.

- 11.17 The vacancy rate is below the UK average, and has decreased since the most recent Experian Goad survey of the town centre in November 2013. However, the majority of the lettings have been to lower-grade retailers which ultimately do not contribute significantly to the vitality and viability of the town centre.
- 11.18 The environmental quality of the centre is generally good, although would benefit from improvement at the eastern end and along the Broadway. Parking provision in the centre appears adequate, and the centre is well served by public transport.

## Didcot – Strategic Recommendations

### Comparison goods

- 11.19 Both businesses trading in Didcot town centre and visitors to the town centre identified a limited retail offer as being the area which the town centre needed to improve. We are aware of proposals by Hammerson for a Phase II of the Orchard Shopping Centre, which will add approximately 15,000 sq.m of retail and commercial leisure floorspace to the existing town centre offer. Although we are not aware of a full tenant mix or split between comparison and convenience floorspace within the scheme, the extension is expected to be anchored by an M&S Simply Food store, plus a further 23 shops and six restaurants and cafes and a gym, as well as investment in the public realm and additional car parking facilities. The scheme has been granted outline planning permission. As we have identified in Section 2, extension of the Orchard Centre benefits from policy support through Core Strategy allocation CSDID2.
- 11.20 Assuming this scheme comes forward in line with the outline permission, we would expect it to meet many of the qualitative deficiencies in the current offer in the town centre which our assessment has identified. As set out above, we have estimated that up to 7,700 sq.m net of floorspace at Orchard Centre Phase II could potentially come forward as comparison goods; if this eventuality materialises, this development would account for virtually all of the identified comparison goods need for the District up to 2024 (7,800 sq.m net).
- 11.21 As with all new in-centre developments, the provision of new retail and leisure floorspace will invariably change the 'centre of gravity' within the town centre, drawing more footfall towards the new development, and away from more peripheral parts of the centre. There may also be instances of existing retailers upsizing into new units. Whilst Didcot is fortunate to benefit from a relatively compact town centre, it nevertheless will be crucial to the long-term vitality and viability of the town centre that any new development is fully integrated to the existing offer, with clear linkages, uniform public realm, and directional signposting. There is a need for what now function as secondary areas of the town centre (following opening of the Orchard Centre in 2005) to

improve their physical appearance, particularly retailers on and around the Broadway, and mechanisms to introduce these improvements as an early priority during the Plan period should be explored.

- 11.22 We would expect new development to reinforce Didcot's status as the focus of retail and commercial leisure activity in the District – although the presence of centres such as Oxford, Aylesbury and Reading means that, in reality, there is only likely to be a finite level of demand for retailer representation in Didcot. It is also for this reason that the Council should seek to plan for as broad a mix of uses in the town centre as possible, to enable the town centre to have a wide appeal, and is able to attract customers who may continue to visit other centres for their comparison goods shopping, for example.
- 11.23 As stated above, we would expect the majority of the identified comparison goods floorspace requirements which have been identified for the District to be accommodated in Didcot, in line with the Council's aspirations for the growth and development of the centre, and to enable it to meet the needs of its existing residents, plus the substantial amount of additional population expected to come forward as a result of the planned future housing developments in the town, including urban extensions at Great Western Park and North East Didcot, each of which will see the development of upwards of 2,000 new dwellings.
- 11.24 Of the four principal town centres in the District, Didcot town centre also contains the only opportunity site (the Orchard Centre Phase II site) which could accommodate a substantial quantum of the identified comparison goods floorspace capacity requirements. As we have identified above, development of this would be expected to meet the Council's identified comparison goods needs in full up to 2024, assuming the development comes forward in line with the current outline permission. This approach does not rule out appropriately-scaled developments on smaller town centre opportunity sites elsewhere in the District (e.g. the Cattle Market site in Thame), but does ensure that the Council will be able to meet its identified needs in full, as required by the NPPF.

### Convenience goods

- 11.25 We do not consider there to be a strong qualitative need for additional convenience goods provision in the Didcot area. As mentioned above, the Sainsbury's store performs an important anchor role to the wider town centre offer. The recently opened Aldi store at Broadway complements the offer, albeit this store is a little distance from the town centre. Should the proposed M&S Food store come forward as the anchor to Phase II of the Orchard Centre, this will further diversify the offer.
- 11.26 As we have described above, significant new residential development is planned in the Didcot area, including at Great Western Park, which falls partly within South Oxfordshire District and partly within Vale of White Horse. Planning permission has been granted for a new foodstore (2,375 sq.m GIA) to serve the Great Western Park community, and assuming this permission comes forward,

there is no requirement to allocate additional sites for convenience goods floorspace to serve Great Western Park. There are undetermined planning applications which include an element of convenience goods floorspace, at Didcot Gateway and Didcot A Power Station; these locations are outside of Didcot town centre and should be accordingly be considered on their own merits in accordance with policy requirements.

- 11.27 There is no Local Plan provision for new retail floorspace to serve the other principal urban extension at North East Didcot. Nevertheless, local level floorspace could be considered to meet the needs of the new residential community, although this should not be of a scale which would serve anything wider than the new residential community at North East Didcot, nor adversely impact any existing defined centre.

#### Other town centre uses

- 11.28 There are currently no Council facilities in Didcot town centre. Whilst we are unsure of the Council's plans for the long-term location of their headquarters following the fire damage to their Crowmarsh Gifford premises, the Council may wish to consider the introduction of a 'one stop shop' facility in Didcot town centre, which will further assist in driving footfall and diversifying the uses in the town centre.
- 11.29 It is considered that the current theatre, museum and art gallery offer within Didcot (and the other South Oxfordshire centres) is of an appropriate and reasonable scale, and that encouragement of greater patronage to existing facilities represents the most effective strategy. The survey results revealed no significant demand for more leisure services of this type.

#### Recommendations

- 11.30 Having regard to the above conclusions, our recommendations for Didcot are:
- Seek to accommodate the majority of the identified comparison goods floorspace requirement for South Oxfordshire District (16,300 sq.m net by 2031) in Didcot town centre, in line with Core Strategy allocation CSDID2, and in order to reinforce its role and function as the highest-order centre in the District, meet the shopping needs of its existing and future residential population and that of its catchment, and promote more sustainable patterns of comparison goods shopping.
  - Ensure that any new retail and other town centres uses which comes forward is well-integrated with the existing town centre offer, in order that the vitality and viability of the whole town centre is able to benefit. This should include a programme of integrated public realm works to aid movement through the centre.
  - Explore mechanisms for securing improvement works to secondary-functioning areas in Didcot town centre (most notably Broadway), including investment in shopfronts, pavements and landscaping, to ensure these areas are well-placed to continue to contribute to the vitality and viability of the town centre over the course of the Plan period.

- Diversify the range of non-retail functions offered by the town centre, with a particular focus on improving café/family restaurant provision to bridge the gap between the daytime shopping function and nighttime leisure function. Consideration should also be given to introducing a Council customer services facility in the town centre.
- Provide continued support to the cultural facilities in Didcot town centre, in recognition of the important role they play in diversifying the range of uses available to users of the town centre.
- Resist applications for open class A1 retail development outside of Didcot town centre, in order to protect the vitality and viability of the town centre, and prevent dilution of relatively finite operator demand for new retail floorspace.
- Support applications which seek to modernise existing retail floorspace in Didcot town centre, including amalgamation of premises and improvements to visual appearance. However it is important that the centre continues to provide a wide range of unit sizes in order to encourage a broad diversity of uses and operators.
- There is no need to plan for additional medium or large-format convenience goods floorspace in the Didcot area, assuming existing permissions are implemented. However the Council should ensure that new residential communities have access to an appropriate range of local-scale shops and services which enable day to day shopping needs to be met.

## **Henley-on-Thames – summary of performance and strategic recommendations**

- 11.31 Henley is evidently a strong-performing town centre. To a greater extent than the other centres in the District, it performs a dual function, both as a shopping and services centre for residents in the south-eastern part of the District, and also as a tourism destination, chiefly focussed around events such as the annual Royal Regatta and the Henley Festival of Music and Arts. Survey data has identified that almost half of users of the town centre are from outside the South Oxfordshire area.
- 11.32 The centre has an affluent catchment and the retail and leisure offer of the centre is reflective of this. The retail offer is anchored by a Waitrose foodstore, which plays an important contribution to the wider vitality and viability of the town centre as a generator of linked trips. Our analysis has showed that this store is trading particularly strongly, reflecting its dominant position in the town centre, but also indicating pent up demand for additional convenience goods provision in the town, particularly given the out-of-centre Tesco supermarket in the town is also trading strongly.
- 11.33 The comparison goods offer is also towards the upmarket end of the scale, with retailers such as Fat Face, White Stuff, Space NK Apothecary, Joules, Cargo and Laura Ashley, as well as a number of specialist art dealers and interior design shops indicative of the upscale offer in the centre in this respect. There is a limited range of more typical ‘high street’ retailers such as Boots and WH Smith also present in the centre which are likely to ensure that some (but possibly not all) ‘day-to-day’ shopping needs are being met. Absent from the centre are the more ‘mass market’ clothing retailers such as H&M, New Look etc – which is both an asset to the town centre, as it helps the

centre retain more of a 'unique' feel – but the lack of such retailers could arguably also a drawback, in the sense that the centre will invariably lose some of its comparison goods expenditure to other nearby centres. However, the relative lack of retail homogeneity in the town (despite there being strong representation from national retailers) can for the most part be considered a benefit to the vitality and viability of the centre.

- 11.34 It is positive to note that relative to the Council's previous retail study, the proportion of comparison goods expenditure retained by Henley town centre from residents living in the Henley area has increased from 29% to 42%. In light of the proximity of Henley to Reading – and the strong retail offer available in Reading town centre – this is a particularly strong performance.
  
- 11.35 Reflective of both its affluent catchment and its tourism role, there is also a particularly good range of restaurants and coffee shops present in the centre – national operators such as Starbucks, Caffè Nero, Strada and Pizza Express sit alongside independent operators, although the latter are generally in more peripheral parts of the town centre. The presence of a Picturehouse Cinema is a further asset to the vitality and viability of the town centre.
  
- 11.36 We would expect demand for representation in Henley from both retailers and commercial leisure operators to remain strong in the short to medium term. This may generate pressure for modernisation, amalgamation and extensions to premises which will need to be carefully considered in light of Henley's conservation area location and presence of a substantial number of listed buildings.
  
- 11.37 The environmental quality of the centre is a highly important asset to the town centre. The centre also benefits from a low vacancy rate. Both users of and businesses in the town centre expressed concern over issues related to parking and traffic congestion, however.
  
- 11.38 Looking forward over the course of the study period, we would not expect the role and function of Henley town centre to change substantially from that of the historic, unique centre it is today. The key opportunity site which has potential to accommodate retail floorspace is the 'Empstead Works/Stuart Turner' (Site E) site, which has potential to form a natural opportunity to extend the existing town centre offer. The site is allocated for retail development in the Henley-Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan. There are, however, no significant opportunities for development within the town centre which would serve to change the role and function of the centre.
  
- 11.39 In the absence of substantial change, which is an acceptable policy position, the town will continue to compete with Reading for comparison goods expenditure, albeit the offers of the two centres are fundamentally different. Henley's retail profile is more niche and upscale, whereas Reading's is reflective of being one of the largest retail centres in the south east, with department stores, mainstream fashion retailers and so on. Henley should therefore not seek to take on Reading but continue to provide a complementary role, further developing its own unique identity based on the quality of the environment it can offer.
  
- 11.40 Our recommendations for Henley are as follows:

- Maintain the strong comparison goods function of Henley town centre, ensuring that this remains the primary function of the centre, whilst also supporting a diverse range of complementary retail and leisure services which enhance the vitality and viability of the centre;
- Ensure that day-to-day shopping functions of the centre, as well as the more specialist retail offer, is protected and enhanced, through the enforcement of appropriate development management policies to protect primary retail frontage;
- Whilst we do not consider that a significant proportion of the identified comparison goods floorspace capacity should be directed to Henley, applications for new comparison goods floorspace in Henley town centre should be treated on individual merits and should be of a scale appropriate to the size of the centre and having regard to its historic fabric;
- Applications for new comparison goods floorspace outside Henley town centre should be resisted, and be required to demonstrate compliance with the sequential test and a locally-set retail impact threshold (discussed separately below).
- Promote the Empstead Works/Stuart Turner site (Site E), as allocated in the Henley-Harpsden Neighbourhood Plan - for mixed use development including retail, in order to enhance the town centre offer.
- Subject to identification of a suitable site, seek to provide additional convenience goods floorspace, in the format of a single foodstore in the region of 1,500 to 2,000 sq.m net sales floorspace (i.e. broadly comparable in size to the existing Waitrose store), in order to enhance consumer choice, provide genuine competition to existing foodstores, and reduce the dominant trading performance of the Waitrose foodstore. Applications for new development should ideally be located in the town centre, so as to minimise impact of potential loss of footfall from Waitrose, or if no suitable town centre site is available, a sequential approach should be followed. Any new development should ensure a good level of integration with the existing retail offer, to enable the wider centre to benefit.
- Continue to promote the overall shopper and visitor 'experience' of Henley town centre, through a combination of marketing and ongoing investment to maintain the environmental quality of the centre;
- Monitor usage of car parking in the centre and develop a strategy for management of potential increases in demand throughout the Plan period.

## Thame: Summary of performance & strategic recommendations

- 11.41 Thame appears to be functioning generally well as a town centre. It has a strong — and important — convenience goods function. As with Henley, the Waitrose store forms the 'anchor' to the wider town centre retail offer; and as with Henley, evidence from our household survey indicates that this store is trading strongly, and in excess of company 'benchmark' levels. There is also a well-established and diverse independent convenience goods sector which plays an important

contribution to its overall vitality and viability. The comparison goods offer is, like Henley, pitched towards the upper end of the market, with retailers such as The Aga Shop and Cargo trading alongside more day-to-day operators such as Boots and Robert Dyas.

- 11.42 Whilst Thame continues to face competition for expenditure from destinations outside the District (most notably Aylesbury), its local comparison goods retention rate has increased by 10% between 2009 and 2014, suggesting there has been an improvement in the offer of town centre over this time. The Council should seek to protect and support the comparison goods shopping function of the town over the Plan period, in order that these recent improvements in market share can be maintained.
- 11.43 Thame also benefits from a reasonable selection of cafes and restaurants, but scope exists for further enhancement of provision in this respect.
- 11.44 The vacancy rate is below the UK average, and a number of vacant units in the town have been let in recent months, including the attraction of national operators such as Costa. As with Henley, Thame is an attractive, affluent town, and most of the town centre forms part of a Conservation Area with a number of listed buildings. The town centre thus benefits from a strong environmental quality, which enhances the vitality and viability of the centre and forms an integral part of reinforcing the appeal of the centre.
- 11.45 With the Cattle Market site on North Street (Core Strategy allocation THA1 / Neighbourhood Plan allocation WS14), the town centre benefits from a prominent opportunity site within close proximity to the existing retail offer, which if developed, provides the opportunity for further enhancement of the retail and leisure offer of the town. The Thame Neighbourhood Plan and the adopted Local Plan both recognise the opportunity which the site presents, and advocate its comprehensive redevelopment for a mixture of uses, to include retail, leisure, residential and office uses. Securing the comprehensive redevelopment of this site should remain a priority for the Council.
- 11.46 The Thame Neighbourhood Plan specifically excludes development of a foodstore on the Cattle Market site, and this was a reason behind the refusal of an application by Sainsbury's to redevelop the site. Future iterations of the Plan might wish to consider whether scope for a smaller-format foodstore than that proposed by Sainsbury's would be acceptable (as part of the comprehensive mixed-use redevelopment of the site), in order meet the qualitative need which arises owing to the over-trading of the existing Waitrose foodstore. Any convenience goods provision should be of a size capable of meeting main and top-up shopping, as the Waitrose is the only store in Thame currently meeting main food shopping needs. However, there is an undetermined application for a Tesco foodstore at the DAF Trucks site on the outskirts of Thame which would, if approved and subsequently developed, meet the qualitative need for an additional 'main' foodstore to serve Thame.
- 11.47 Thame lacks, for the most part, modern comparison goods floorspace, and there may be scope for some provision as part of the redevelopment of the Cattle Market site. However we would not



envisage that this would form a significant component of the site's redevelopment, as such an approach may divert the 'centre of gravity' away from the historic core, and undermine part of what makes Thame an attractive and successful retailing centre. The development of complementary other 'town centre' uses, including office and commercial leisure, as well as residential, may be a more suitable approach. There may be scope for a small-scale cinema facility on the site, as no facility of this nature currently exists in Thame.

11.48 Overall, the strategy for Thame town centre should be one of consolidation and strengthening of the existing retail and leisure, as opposed to the delivery of significant quanta of new comparison goods floorspace. Such a strategy is considered to be the best approach for ensuring that the existing historic centre remains a vital and viable retail destination over the course of the Plan period.

11.49 Our recommendations for Thame are as follows:

- Retain and support the shopping function of the town centre, through resisting the loss of A1 retail floorspace below a total proportion of units within the defined primary shopping frontage (the Council may wish to consider the use of Article 4 Directions in respect of this point), in order to maintain a critical mass of retailing activity at the heart of the town centre;
- In relation to the point above, adopt a flexible approach to frontages elsewhere in the town centre, to encourage diversification of the retail and leisure offer;
- In relation to the point above, applications for commercial leisure and 'evening economy' uses should generally be supported, although resisted within primary shopping frontage if (1) the proportion of units in A1 use would fall below the threshold prescribed by the Thame Neighbourhood Plan (35%) and (2) the use would not be open during typical retail trading hours;
- Continue to support the Cattle Market site as the principal opportunity site in Thame town centre, in line with Core Strategy allocation THA1 and Thame Neighbourhood Plan policy WS14. Any redevelopment of the site should be comprehensive in nature and include a mixture of residential and town centre uses;
- The development of comparison goods floorspace of appropriate scale on the Cattle Market site (and in the wider town centre) should be supported in principle, but, aside from this, there is no need for a significant quantum of additional comparison goods floorspace to be developed in Thame over the Plan period.
- Examine scope for inclusion of a small to medium-format foodstore (indicatively, up to 1,500 sq.m net sales) on the Cattle Market site, having regard to the need for its comprehensive redevelopment, as part of future revisions to the Thame Neighbourhood Plan and Local Plan policies, in order to provide genuine consumer choice and competition for 'main' food shopping in Thame town centre (this recommendation is not applicable if the application for a Tesco foodstore on the DAF Trucks site is granted planning permission and subsequently developed);

- Consider the scope for a small-format cinema as part of the comprehensive redevelopment of the Cattle Market site; and
- Continue to promote the overall shopper 'experience' of the town centre, through investment in improvements to its environment, market town character, and accessibility by sustainable methods of transport.

## Wallingford – summary of performance and strategic recommendations

- 11.50 In common with the other South Oxfordshire centres, Wallingford exhibits generally positive signs of vitality and viability. The compact and attractive town centre has a more localised offer than any of the other centres, and the offer is more orientated towards meeting convenience goods and local services needs as opposed to comparison goods shopping. There is a strong focus on independent retailers in the centre, which, whilst an asset for lending the centre a less homogenous feel, does mean that there are relatively few key 'attractors' in the centre, and that the centre is unlikely to cater for much more than a localised catchment. This is, to a large part, also reflective of the centre's proximity to Didcot. This more localised function which Wallingford offers is reflected in its lower placing in the hierarchy of centres in South Oxfordshire (alongside Thame).
- 11.51 The Waitrose store at the junction of High Street / St Martin's Street towards the northern end of the town centre is unquestionably the 'anchor' store in the town centre – and indeed Waitrose's decision to upsize their presence in the town in recent years is an endorsement of its vitality and viability. However the former Waitrose store towards the southern end of the town centre (also on St Martin's Street) remains vacant several years after Waitrose's departure, and securing a strong replacement retailer for this unit should remain the priority for the town centre (as acknowledged through Core Strategy allocation WAL4). A small-format convenience store or comparison goods retailer to provide a suitable southern 'anchor' store in the town centre, improving local choice, and, consequently, reducing expenditure leakage, is required. The household survey has identified that Wallingford has seen a reduction in its market share from the local area, from 16% in 2009 to 14% in 2014 – the only one of the four South Oxfordshire centres to post a reduction in its retention rate.
- 11.52 Securing a strong replacement store for the former Waitrose unit will assist in preventing further decline in Wallingford's market share over the course of the study period. There may be an opportunity to sub-divide the unit provided a range of quality tenants could be attracted to maintain footfall at this end of the town centre. We would recommend a preference to retain a larger anchor unit, but evidently applications must be considered on their merits.
- 11.53 Whereas the retail offer in the other market towns of Henley and Thame is relatively upmarket, Wallingford's offer is more 'mainstream' – but in terms of depth and variety is also more limited, owing to the smaller nature of the town centre. Coupled with the proximity of the town to Didcot, the majority of comparison goods spending available to the Wallingford area is spent outside the

town – just 14% of available comparison goods expenditure in zone 9 of our survey area, which covers Wallingford, is spent in the town centre itself, compared to 33% spent in Reading (14 miles from Wallingford) and 28% in Didcot (6 miles from Wallingford). The ‘localised retention rate’ for Wallingford has dropped by 2 percentage points relative to the 2009 Study, indicating that the retail offer in the town may have stagnated. Just 12% of respondents to our on-street survey identified that non-food shopping was the main purpose of their visit to the town centre.

- 11.54 Wallingford also has the lowest convenience goods retention rate of any of the four centres – under 50% of available convenience goods expenditure is spent in the town. Whilst expenditure leakage to higher-order centres is to be expected for comparison goods shopping, convenience goods shopping is a more localised activity and the results of the household survey indicate that the convenience goods needs of many residents are not being adequately catered for, resulting in unsustainable shopping trips.
- 11.55 We would have expected the permitted out-of-centre foodstore on the Hithercroft Industrial Estate to have significantly improved the amount of convenience goods expenditure retained in the local catchment, as well as having other benefits such as improved consumer choice, given Waitrose is the only foodstore currently serving the town. Morrisons, the proposed operator, have however withdrawn from the site, and it is on the market for sale. The planning permission does, however, remain extant and the site could theoretically be acquired by another operator. Should a foodstore not be implemented, there will remain an outstanding qualitative need for additional convenience goods provision in Wallingford.
- 11.56 The vacancy rate in the town centre is below average, but the former Waitrose store undoubtedly lends the southern end of the centre a slightly run down feel. The securing of a quality retailer in the former Waitrose store will likely help ‘claw back’ some expenditure loss, and reinforce the wider vitality and viability of the centre, helping to draw footfall throughout the entire centre.
- 11.57 Aside from this store, we are not aware of any other opportunities within or on the edge of Wallingford town centre which suggest that a retail strategy for anything other than consolidation would be a suitable approach. This approach would also be consistent with the role and function of the centre identified in the Council’s Core Strategy.
- 11.58 Accordingly, subject to the permitted foodstore at Hithercroft Industrial Estate coming forward, we do not consider there is a need for the Council to plan for additional convenience or comparison goods floorspace in Wallingford over the Plan period. Notwithstanding the lack of sites to accommodate any ‘need’, Wallingford’s proximity to higher order centres means that it is unlikely to become a ‘destination’ comparison goods shopping destination in its own right. The Council’s approach to Wallingford should therefore be ensuring that the centre remains an attractive and pleasant shopping destination, and applications which seek to improve the existing retail offer (amalgamation / modernisation of premises, for example) should be considered favourably in principle. Such a strategy will also support the Council’s ambitions to improve Didcot’s role in being the principal comparison goods shopping destination in the north of the District, whilst ensuring that

Wallingford remains a vital and viable town centre which is well-placed to meet local shopping needs.

11.59 Wallingford's leisure offer is relatively limited, but the presence of the Wallingford Theatre & Cinema in the heart of the town centre is an important asset, which should continue to be supported. There are a small number of complementary leisure services – e.g. a nearby branch of Pizza Express – which also contribute to the evening economy, but ultimately this offer is quite limited. Enhancements to provision of A3/A4 uses should be treated on individual merits, but should also be operational during retail trading hours, and should be monitored to ensure that cumulatively there is not a significant loss of A1 retail floorspace.

11.60 Our recommendations for Wallingford are therefore as follows:

- The centre should continue to be a focus for local convenience, comparison and day-to-day services, and new retail and leisure floorspace within or outside the town centre (beyond commitments) should be resisted.
- Through discussions with relevant parties, secure the letting of the former Waitrose store on St Martin's Street to a quality retailer (as supported by Core Strategy allocation WAL4) which has the ability to act as a second town centre 'anchor' store, as an immediate priority.
- Should the permitted foodstore at Hithercroft Industrial Estate come forward, there is no requirement to plan for additional convenience goods provision for Wallingford. Should this permission not progress – given the site is now for sale and Morrisons have withdrawn from implementing the scheme – there is a qualitative need for a new foodstore (indicatively, in the region of 2,000 sq.m net), to deliver improvements to customer choice and improve the sustainability of current convenience goods. There may be scope for this to be accommodated on the site of the former Waitrose store on St Martin's Street. Applications for development outside the town centre will be required to demonstrate compliance with the NPPF.
- Consider applications which diversify the town centre offer, including change of use from A1 to A3/A4, on individual merits, but monitor decision-making on these applications to ensure that cumulatively the retail function of the centre is not undermined.
- Continue to promote the overall shopper 'experience' of the town centre, through investment in improvements to its environment, market town character, and accessibility by sustainable methods of transport;
- Retain and support the shopping function of the town centre, through resisting the loss of A1 retail floorspace below a total proportion of units within the defined primary shopping frontage, in order to maintain a critical mass of retailing activity at the heart of the town centre;
- adopt a flexible approach to frontages outside the primary shopping area, to encourage diversification of the retail and leisure offer; and

- Applications for commercial leisure and ‘evening economy’ uses should generally be supported, although resisted within primary shopping frontage if (1) the proportion of units in A1 use would fall below a defined threshold and (2) the use would not be open during typical retail trading hours

## Impact Assessment Threshold

- 11.61 The NPPF sets a default threshold for requiring an impact assessment for applications for retail developments which are outside town centres, and not in accordance with an up-to-date development plan, of 2,500 sq.m. The NPPF also directs local planning authorities to consider setting a local threshold for retail impact assessments. Our analysis has demonstrated that Didcot town centre requires improvements to its comparison goods retail offer in order to meet the growth agenda of the town, and that the other main centres in the District – whilst generally performing strongly – are relatively small and could potentially be adversely impacted by inappropriate out-of-centre development. On this basis, we consider there may be merit in the Council setting lower thresholds than national planning policy in respect of retail impact assessments.
- 11.62 The smallest ‘main’ foodstore (excluding small convenience stores) in the South Oxfordshire centres is the Sainsbury’s foodstore in Thame (569 sq.m). We consider that retail and leisure developments of a similar scale could potentially have an adverse impact on the centres of Didcot, Henley, Thame and Wallingford. To protect the vitality and viability of these town centres, a local impact threshold of 500 sq.m is recommended.

## Hierarchy of centres

- 11.63 The Council’s adopted Core Strategy defines Didcot and Henley as ‘town centres serving a local and wide catchment area’, and Thame and Wallingford as ‘town centres serving a local catchment area’. Whilst we agree that a distinction should be made in policy term to reflect the broader offer in terms of retail and other ‘town centre uses’ offered by Didcot and Henley, it is recommended that the naming of the different grades of centre is given further consideration by the Council as part of its Local Plan Review. We would recommend the following hierarchy of centres:
- **Major town centre:** Didcot, Henley
  - **Town centre:** Thame, Wallingford
  - **Local centre:** Berinsfield, Benson, Charlgrove, Chinnor, Cholsey, Crowmarsh Gifford, Goring, Nettlebed, Sonning Common, Watlington, Wheatley, Woodcote

## Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages

11.64 The NPPF requires local planning authorities to define primary and secondary shopping frontage in their network of centres. Together, the primary and secondary shopping frontages form the 'primary shopping area', which, for the purposes of the NPPF's retail policies (i.e. the sequential and impact assessment, paragraphs 24-27 of the NPPF), equates to the 'town centre'.

11.65 The NPPF defines primary and secondary shopping frontages as follows:

*'Primary frontages are likely to include a high proportion of retail uses which may include food, drinks, clothing and household goods. Secondary frontages provide greater opportunities for a diversity of uses such as restaurants, cinemas and businesses'.*

11.66 The NPPF defines the primary shopping area as follows:

*'Defined area where retail development is concentrated (generally comprising the primary and those secondary frontages which are adjoining and closely related to the primary shopping frontage'*

11.67 Currently, the Council's Adopted Policies Maps only define town centre boundaries and primary shopping frontages. In order to be compliant with the NPPF, there is therefore a requirement for the Council to identify secondary shopping frontages in its town centres. We set out our recommendations for this in **Table 11.1**, alongside comments on the suitability of the Council's existing primary shopping frontages, as defined on the Adopted Policies Map.

**Table 11.1: Recommendations for Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages**

	Recommendations for Primary Shopping Frontage (PSF)	Recommendations for Secondary Shopping Frontage (SSF)
Didcot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current PSF is considered excessive and not reflective of the fact that the 'centre of gravity' in the town centre has changed following the opening of the Orchard Centre. It is recommended that all of the PSF along Broadway is removed and reclassified as SSF.</li> <li>PSF should be restricted to Orchard Centre and Market Place (units 2 to 6 plus Wilko store)</li> <li>Review and update if Orchard Centre Phase II development comes forward.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All PSF fronting Broadway should be reclassified as SSF</li> <li>Cornerstone Arts Centre and Cineworld should also be classified as SSF.</li> <li>Review and update if Orchard Centre Phase II development comes forward.</li> </ul>
Henley-on-Thames	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove Hart Street (both sides) from PSF</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocate Hart Street as SSF frontage (both sides, reflecting current PSF allocation).</li> <li>Allocate Reading Road (up to and including number 32, western side, and up</li> </ul>

		to and including number 27, eastern side) as SSF.  • Allocate Market Place Mews as SSF.
Thame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove Thame Library (North Street) from PSF;</li> <li>Remove Swan Hotel (9 Upper High Street) from PSF;</li> <li>Review and update if Cattle Market development comes forward.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider definition of SSF at High Street (north of number 16, western side) and north of number 92 (eastern side); and at 9 to 13 Upper High Street and 38-39 to 44 Upper High Street.</li> <li>Review and update if Cattle Market development comes forward.</li> </ul>
Wallingford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove PSF allocation on north side of High Street</li> <li>Remove PSF allocation at 23-24 to 28 High Street (south side)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocate current PSF on north side of High Street as SSF; extend westwards (north side only) as far as number 64-65 High Street; extend eastwards to include number 82 High Street (Natwest).</li> <li>Allocate current PSF on south side of High Street (23-24 to 28) as secondary shopping frontage.</li> </ul>

## Monitoring and Review

- 11.68 We recommended the Council continues a close monitoring approach to town centre change, the economy, planning applications/permissions, and developments in the wider sub-region. These will also impact upon the outputs of this study, and dictate when it is deemed appropriate to undertake technical evidence based updates. A comprehensive monitoring approach will also enable the most accurate and flexible approach to development control decision and policy formulation over the plan period.
- 11.69 As this study has identified, there is potential for the shopping patterns of residents in the District to change in future years, on account of development of Phase II of the Orchard Centre in Didcot town centre, and the completion of the Westgate extension in Oxford city centre. On this basis, we recommend that the Council's retail capacity forecasts are updated at regular intervals through the Plan period, and that an updated household telephone survey is undertaken in support of a refresh of the capacity forecasts for the District 1-2 years after the opening of the Orchard Centre Phase II and/or Westgate developments. We also recommend that a refresh of the retail capacity forecasts is undertaken once the Council has a clearer indication of population growth projections (including trajectories and locations for growth) which it expects to come forward.