B O R O U G H   O F K E T T E R I N G

Committee	**PLANNING POLICY**	Item 6	Page 1 of 11
Report Originator	Head of Development Services	*Fwd Plan Ref No:* -	
Wards Affected	Burton Latimer, Desborough St. Giles, Desborough Loatlands and Rothwell Wards	15 March 2016	
Title	**SITE SPECIFIC PART 2 LOCAL PLAN – UPDATES FOR BURTON LATIMER, DESBOROUGH AND ROTHWELL TOWN CENTRES**		

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To provide Members with information on the results of the healthcheck updates undertaken for the town centres of Burton Latimer, Desborough and Rothwell; and

2. To update Members on the review of town centre boundaries for these towns and to consult the relevant Town Councils and Chambers of Trade/ Town Centre Partnerships on these proposals prior to a public consultation on the draft full Site Specific Part 2 Local Plan.

2. INFORMATION

2.1 The Site Specific Part 2 Local Plan (SS Part 2), when adopted, will form part of the North Northamptonshire Development Plan. In addition to allocating land for housing and employment, retail, leisure and community facilities it will contain policies relating to specific areas such as Burton Latimer, Desborough and Rothwell town centres.

2.2 The emerging North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS), which sets out the strategic over-arching planning policies for the area is evidenced by a number of studies and background documents including a retail capacity study (dated October 2014). The JCS states that the majority of additional retail development of higher order facilities and retail investment within the Borough to serve its growing communities will be focused in Kettering Town Centre. This requirement is to be met through the implementation of the adopted Kettering Town Centre Area Action Plan (adopted July 2011) and includes a minimum increase of 12,500 sq. m net comparison shopping floorspace[1].

2.3 The JCS recognises the town centres of Burton Latimer, Desborough and Rothwell as providing mainly for convenience shopping and local services. Policy 12 'Town Centres and Town Centre Uses' also supports the provision of a medium-sized foodstore (around 2,000 sq. m net) to serve the Desborough/ Rothwell area.

[1] Convenience goods - broadly defined as food, drinks, tobacco, newspapers, magazines, cleaning materials, toilet articles.
Comparison goods - other goods not classified as convenience goods.

2.4 The JCS suggests that retail investment alone will not be sufficient to sustain and regenerate the town centres. Part 2 Local Plans, such as the SS Part 2 and Neighbourhood Plans, should therefore identify additional development opportunities where these do not undermine the focus of retail development at the town centres of the Growth Towns.

2.5 In line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the JCS states Part 2 Local Plans are expected to define the extent of the town centres and, within them, the primary shopping areas where retention of retail uses is most important. It makes clear that policies and proposals may be included to accommodate new uses as well as the identification of development sites, an enhanced public realm, improved access and adequate parking.

Assessment of Health of Town Centres

2.6 In previous years, a number of 'healthchecks' have been carried out for Burton Latimer, Desborough and Rothwell town centres to establish the baseline position demonstrating the health of each town centre through a set of indicators and to assist in the formulation of policies for the SS Part 2. These healthchecks identify opportunities to enhance the role of the town centres and form the baseline position against which policies can be assessed in the future.

2.7 The healthcheck for Desborough was originally completed in July 2010, while the healthchecks for Burton Latimer and Rothwell were originally completed in May 2011. The original assessments were completed based on the Established Shopping Areas (ESA) of the town centres as identified on the proposals maps accompanying the adopted Kettering Borough Local Plan (1995).

2.8 The healthcheck for Desborough was updated in May 2011 and again in October 2012. The healthchecks for Burton Latimer and Rothwell were first updated in October 2012.

2.9 Officers have now carried out further updates of Use Class surveys for all three towns – dated February 2016. This report discusses the results of the updates most recently undertaken. Reports for each individual town centre are attached at Appendix 1. The headline results are summarised in Section 3 below.

2.10 Officers have also undertaken shopper/visitor surveys and questionnaires at specified days and times in each of the towns. This also involved a series of footfall surveys at six key locations within each town centre. This work was carried out in November 2015 so as to avoid the Christmas shopping period and immediate post-Christmas period. Reports for each individual town centre are attached at Appendix 2. The headline findings are summarised in Section 4 below.

Review of Town Centre Boundaries

2.11 Part of the evidence base prepared for the SS Part 2 has included a background paper on defining town centre boundaries for the three towns. A copy of the document is attached at Appendix 3. These boundaries are based on the Established Shopping Areas identified in the Local Plan (1995) and are proposed to be updated to take into account land use changes and opportunities to accommodate growth in town centre uses.

2.12 Given some time has elapsed since this work was undertaken and the planning policy context is in the process of being updated, it is proposed to revisit this work and carry out a round of focused consultation with Town Councils and local Chambers of Trade/ Town Centre Partnerships to ensure this evidence can readily inform the formulation of policies and proposals in the SS Part 2.

3. USE CLASS SURVEYS 2016

3.1 To carry out the updates, a use class survey was completed in Burton Latimer, Desborough and Rothwell. The findings of this data collection and an assessment of the changes are set out below.

3.2 As with previous healthchecks a comparison has been made against a national average. In this case an average for 2014 has been sourced as the most recent available. However, all three towns are identified as market towns and offer a service role for their locality and rural hinterland. They have different characteristics compared to larger towns which are a focus for higher levels of growth and development. As a result, direct comparison with national average figures (which combine data from a range of differing towns) should be treated with caution, and emphasis should be applied to how the town centres are performing against previous years.

Burton Latimer

3.3 Burton Latimer shows an above national average presence of restaurants, cafes and takeaways. Although figures show a percentage fall in the number of these uses, the actual number of units is shown to have increased. Similar to Rothwell and Desborough, the town has the potential for a thriving night time economy, which could be assessed through further work.

3.4 Overall, the number of service units in Burton Latimer has shown an increase. These include restaurants and estate agent uses.

3.5 Local retail uses including off-licence and newsagent have shown an increase since the last health check update. The prevalence of these uses is above the national average, and shows that Burton Latimer is retaining its role as a market town focused on serving its locality and rural hinterland. Although Sainsbury's is located outside of the town centre and cannot be included in the assessment, any town centre boundary amendments which change this would further strengthen the presence of convenience goods retail uses in the town centre.

3.6 There has been a fall in the number of vacant units by 50% from 8 to 4 units, which is a positive indicator as the rate is significantly below the national average.

Desborough

3.7 Service units in Desborough town centre have maintained a relatively static level, although there has been a slight decline compared with previous survey periods and compared against the national average figures.

3.8 The number of gift shops and restaurants/cafes/takeaways has shown an increase in Desborough, and is above national average in terms of representation, whilst hair salon/beauty parlour uses have remained steady and slightly above the national average.

3.9 The level of vacant units in Desborough town centre has remained unchanged since the first health check update assessment in 2011, possibly indicating a degree of resilience in challenging economic times. However, due to changes in national average figures and an increase in the number of units in Desborough, as a percentage, calculated vacancy rates have increased slightly.

Rothwell

3.10 The strengths of Rothwell town centre are evident in its above national average presence of service uses including restaurants/cafes, building societies, and estate agents; the latter suggesting the town may also benefit from a buoyant property market.

3.11 Although total convenience retail and comparison retail uses are below national average levels, as a market town with a focus on serving its immediate locality and rural hinterland, Rothwell town centre is performing relatively well and retains its place within the settlement hierarchy. It is evident within the town a wide range of independent retail uses including butchers, greengrocers, musical instrument shop, together with service uses which include independent hairdressers, beauty salons, cafes, takeaways and restaurants. All these uses create a more individual niche retail experience unique to Rothwell.

3.12 The town centre has an established base of service uses, which exceeds the national average, despite being a small market town. Given the above national average level of restaurants, cafes, takeaways, the town has the potential to build on its night time economy.

3.13 The existing weekly market at Rothwell strengthens the town centre’s offer and provides further scope to enhance this further, in line with shopper/resident survey views (see Section 4).

3.14 The number of vacant units in the town remains significantly below the national average and below 2011 levels when it was assessed through the first health check.

4. SHOPPERS AND RESIDENTS SURVEYS

4.1 The six locations chosen for the surveys were split between two surveyors, with each surveyor recording passing footfall over a period of 5 minutes at each location. This was repeated 4 times between 10:00 and 14:25hrs, with 35 minutes break between each survey which was used to undertake shoppers and residents views and behaviours questionnaire. The surveys were carried out on one weekend day (Saturday), market day (where relevant), and non-market day.

Burton Latimer

Summary footfall findings

4.2 The weekday and weekend footfall survey revealed that weekend mornings [10:00 – 11:25] were the busiest, with 117 passers-by recorded. During the weekday, the afternoon [13:00 – 14:25] period was busiest with 101 passers-by recorded. However, given that AM/PM periods are twice as long as the lunchtime periods, it is revealed that the weekday week lunch period [12:00 – 12:25] was actually the busiest period with 63 passers-by recorded. As a result, weekday activity is overall busier with a total of 251 passers-by compared with 228 at the weekend, over the 4.5hour survey period.

Summary shopper and resident behaviour questionnaire

4.3 The majority of people who responded to the shoppers and residents views and behaviour survey walked (76%) into the town from Burton Latimer (81%).

4.4 The majority of people surveyed, have short visits lasting less than 1 hour (57%).

4.5 The majority of people surveyed eat or drink out in Burton Latimer once a month (29%).

4.6 The top three reasons people reported visiting Burton Latimer for some ‘other’ undisclosed reason (24%), outdoor activity (19%), and to buy groceries or for personal services (14%).

4.7 The top three most liked town centre attributes were that it is near/convenient (90%), free parking (52%), and easy parking/likeable people (38%).

4.8 The top three most disliked town centre attributes were the lack of choice of specialist shops (43%), lack of choice of multiple shops (29%), and too much traffic/congestion (24%).

4.9 The top three suggestions for improving the town centre which came out of the shoppers and residents views and behaviour survey were more independent shops / better choice of shops in general (38%), better quality shops / other (24%), specified new shops / more or secure parking (19%).

Desborough

Footfall survey findings

4.10 The survey data showed the morning periods [10:00 – 11:25] to be the busiest time of the day, except for Friday afternoon which was marginally busier than the morning. Saturday afternoon [13:00 – 14:25] saw a distinct drop in footfall, it seeing half the numbers of passers-by to the activity taking place in the town centre in the morning. The lunchtime (99 & 110) and afternoon (173 & 186) visitor numbers for the weekdays were higher than the comparable towns at Burton Latimer and Rothwell.

Summary shopper and resident behaviour questionnaire

4.11 The majority of people who responded to the shoppers and residents views and behaviour survey walked (48%) into the town from Desborough (89%), although a significant proportion (nearly as many again) travelled by car (44%).

4.12 The majority of people surveyed, have short visits lasting less than 1 hour (52%)

4.13 The majority of people surveyed never (37%) eat or drink out in Desborough, although a fairly high proportion state that eat or drink out once a month (26%) in Desborough.

4.14 The top three reasons people reported visiting Desborough for were to visit public services (22%), work and to buy groceries (19%).

4.15 The top three most disliked town centre attributes were lack of larger supermarket (44%), lack of choice of multiple shops and lack of clean/secure toilets and derelict buildings (41%), and lack of choice of independent/specialist shops (33%).

4.16 The top three most liked town centre attributes were likeable people (56%), safe feeling/groups (48%), and near/convenient (41%).

4.17 The top three suggestions for improving the town centre which came out of the shoppers and residents views and behaviour survey were bigger / better supermarket (52%), more parking / secure parking (37%), and better choice of shops in general (30%).

Rothwell

Summary footfall findings

4.18 The weekday (market day and non-market day) and weekend footfall survey revealed that weekend mornings [10:00 – 11:25] were the busiest, with 245 passers-by recorded. During the weekday, market day morning period was busiest with 187 passers-by recorded. Weekday (non-market day) period was equally busy in the mornings and afternoons with a slight decrease at lunchtime (taking into account its shorter monitoring period).

Summary shopper and resident behaviour questionnaire

4.19 The majority of people who responded to the shoppers and residents views and behaviour survey walked (77%) into the town from Rothwell (74%).

4.20 The majority of people surveyed, have short visits lasting less than 1 hour (48%), although a high proportion of respondents also stay for between 1 – 2 hours (39%).

4.21 The majority of people surveyed eat or drink out in Rothwell once a month (23%), although a high proportion also do this 2 – 3 times a week or once a week (19%).

4.22 The top three reasons people reported visiting Rothwell for were for some ‘other’ undisclosed reason (29%), to eat or drink out (26%), and to buy groceries (23%).

4.23 The top three most liked town centre attributes were near/convenient (35%), historic buildings/range of eating places (32%), and character/ atmosphere and free parking (29%).

4.24 The top three most disliked town centre attributes were too much congestion/traffic (39%), lack of clean/secure toilets and dirty shopping streets/litter and shortage of secure parking (16%), and lack of police/ security and specified shops absent (10%).

4.25 The top three suggestions for improving the town centre which came out of the shoppers and residents views and behaviour survey were more parking/secure parking (22%), improvement to weekly market (19%), and removal of litter/cleaner streets (16%).

Conclusions

Burton Latimer

4.26 Weekday footfall activity in Burton Latimer exceeds activity in the weekends. Given few respondents work in the town and the main reason for their visit was ‘other’ and ‘outdoor activity’, followed by ‘grocery shopping’, there appears to be a number of draws to the town centre which may not be solely commercial.

4.27 The proximity and ease of access to the town was highly rated, which encouraged access by foot, indicating that the town centre is well connected to residential streets. The fact that the town scored well in terms of ‘feeling safe’ and what people liked is also likely to further encourage this. An emphasis on delivering a greater range and quality of shops is likely to provide further draw to the town as this was one of the most popular requests to improve the town.

4.28 Whilst better parking was also raised as an area for improvement, this will require careful consideration in order to maintain the high level of pedestrian based trips to the town centre. It is noted that Burton Latimer had 55% of the measured footfall compared with footfall levels in Rothwell and Desborough (focusing on non-market week and weekend survey days only).

Desborough

4.29 Weekday footfall activity in Desborough slightly exceeds weekend activity; however, overall, activity in the town is relatively consistent. Employment (19%) was given as one of the top three reasons for people's visit to the town on survey days, which may assist with levelling off peaks in footfall activity, and provide a more diverse customer/visitor base.

4.30 The need for a bigger and better supermarket and choice of shops, as well as better parking were the three most recommended improvements needed for the town, and was a running theme relating to what people disliked about the town, together with the number of derelict buildings. Although the use survey indicates that vacant units have not increased in number since 2011, their vacancy is long standing and clearly visible within the community; they are therefore recognised as an area of opportunity to enhance the town centre.

4.31 The need for improved parking may correlate with a high number of people surveyed confirming they visited the town centre by car despite travelling from Desborough, and making relatively low numbers of linked trips with other activities. One of the top three reasons for liking the town included the fact that it was near and convenient, so the high levels of car use may be linked to demographic factors. Like Rothwell, the footfall in Desborough exceeds that of Burton Latimer by 183% (focusing on non-market week and weekend survey days only).

Rothwell

4.32 Rothwell showed it had the highest levels of weekend footfall out of all of the market towns, but had the same level of footfall as Desborough over the entire monitoring period. The footfall in both towns exceeds that of Burton Latimer by 183% (focusing on non-market week and weekend survey days only).

4.33 A greater proportion of the people surveyed in Rothwell, stated they eat and drink out in the town 2-3 days a week, once a week and once a month. 26% of people who visited Rothwell on the days of the survey to eat/drink out, and its restaurants and bars were rated as one of the top three reasons for liking the town. Improvements to the market were one of the top three suggestions for improving the town. This suggestion coincides with the slight increase in footfall presence on market day compared with non-market day.

Scope for further work

4.34 Given the above national average presence of restaurants/takeaways in all three towns, future survey work could be undertaken to verify findings from the shoppers and residents views and behaviours survey results, to establish the extent that the night time economy contributes to the vitality and overall health of the towns. Further investigation into 'other' reasons people visit each town may also provide additional insight into non-commercial aspects of the town that may also contribute to its vitality and health.

5. PROPOSED TOWN CENTRE BOUNDARIES/ PRIMARY SHOPPING AREAS

5.1 As stated above in Section 2.5 above, local planning authorities are required to define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas.

5.2 The background paper "Defining town centres boundaries for Burton Latimer, Desborough and Rothwell" (February 2012) was prepared for Options Stage of the SS Part 2 which was published for public consultation in March 2012. The background paper sets out the methodology for defining town centres and primary shopping areas in these towns and a justification for how the boundaries have been drawn.

5.3 At the Options stage, a number of responses were received and there was strong support for policies identifying development sites and opportunities for redevelopment and environmental improvements in town centres as well as setting criteria in policies to assess development proposals in these town centres.

5.4 The town centre boundaries will be included in the draft SS Part 2, which will be subject to a full public consultation alongside other policies proposed in the Plan. However, consultation on the proposed boundaries was last undertaken in March/April 2012 and it is considered prudent, prior to this exercise, to undertake some focused consultation with Town Councils and the local Chambers of Trade and Town Centre Partnerships. It would be helpful to understand aspirations for these local areas. In the cases of Desborough and Rothwell draft neighbourhood plans are being prepared which may also be of relevance.

5.5 Within the background document, Table 1 on pages 3 and 4 sets out justification for changes to the town centre boundaries/ primary shopping areas. It is recognised that some of the areas in and around town centres have experienced a change in their status since the proposed boundaries were prepared and this report was produced. For instance, buildings or sites have become vacant or have been redeveloped. Some revisions, therefore, may be needed to take account of such changes. Where this information is known, an update is highlighted in the text. It is proposed that Table 1 will be further amended and justification provided based on any feedback from the focused consultation being recommended to be undertaken.

6. CONSULTATION AND CUSTOMER IMPACT

6.1 A set of plans showing the suggested town centre boundaries previously consulted on at the Options stage of the SS Part 2, will sent to the relevant Town Councils and Chambers of Trade and Town Centre Partnerships to ask for their views. Any comments received will be taken into account in drawing up the proposed boundaries and town centre policies for the SS Part 2. Full public consultation will then take place on the Full Plan, or Pre-Submission Plan later in the year.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The findings of the healthcheck updates as well as town centre boundaries for Burton Latimer, Desborough and Rothwell will be used to assist in the formulation of policies in the SS Part 2

8. USE OF RESOURCES

8.1 There are no direct costs as a result of this report.

9. RECOMMENDATION

That Members:

1. note the contents of the report on healthchecks carried out for the Town Centres of Burton Latimer, Desborough and Rothwell; and

2. agree to a consultation with the relevant Town Councils and Chambers of Trade/ Town Centre Partnerships and ask for their views on updates to the boundaries for the three town centres.

Appendix 1 – Results of 2016 Use Class Survey – Burton Latimer, Desborough and Rothwell Town Centres

Appendix 2 – Results of 2016 Shoppers and Residents Views Surveys

Appendix 3 – Background Paper "Defining town centres boundaries for Burton Latimer, Desborough and Rothwell" (February 2012)

Background Papers:

Title of Document: Site Specific Proposals Local Development Document – Healthcheck Updates for Burton Latimer, Desborough and Rothwell Town Centres
Date: 6th June 2013

Title of Document: Site Specific Proposals Local Development Document – Options Consultation
Date: 4th September 2012

Title of Document: Site Specific Proposals Local Development Document – Background Papers and Consultation Proposals
Date: 4th October 2011

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