NEXUS PLANNING

South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan 2041 Town Centres and Retail Study (December 2023)

Supplementary Note on Convenience Retail Floorspace Policy Requirements for Thame, Henley and Wallingford

1. Nexus Planning was instructed by the joint client of South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council (hereafter referred to respectively as 'South and Vale') to undertake a new Town Centres and Retail Study for the two authority areas. The primary focus of the Study was to establish the current position in respect of the need for additional retail and leisure facilities in South and Vale, and to consider the vitality and viability of the authorities' principal defined centres.

2. In respect of quantitative and qualitative capacity for convenience and comparison floorspace, the Study concluded that after account is taken of existing commitments, there is no identified surplus capacity to support additional convenience goods floorspace within the short, medium, and longer-term. Even by the end of the plan period at 2041, we estimate there is no capacity to support additional convenience goods floorspace across the South and Vale area. In actuality, given identified commitments, our assessment identifies that there is a negative convenience goods capacity requirement across the South and Vale area equivalent to between -3,100 sq.m and -4,300 sq.m of floorspace at 2041.

3. However, the Study does identify that the position in respect of overtrading indicates that there may be some qualitative benefit in increasing the provision of convenience facilities in South and Vale to provide residents with additional options.

4. We note that most operators are represented across the authority areas with Asda, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose all occupying large format stores, and the likes of Co-op, Sainsbury's and Tesco trading from smaller local convenience store formats. Whilst there may be opportunity for some such retailers to bring forward additional stores in areas likely to be the subject of significant residential growth, it is in the discount foodstore sector where there is likely to be significant operator interest.

5. In this regard, current discount foodstore provision is relatively modest, with Aldi having representation in Didcot and Faringdon and Lidl having representation in Abingdon and Wallingford. Furthermore, as noted in Section 2 of the Study, Lidl has a number of current requirements to expand its portfolio, with Abingdon North, Botley, Didcot, Faringdon, Henley-on-Thames and Thame being of interest.

6. Providing for a new foodstore in a sustainable location could assist in 'levelling out' some of the identified overtrading and provide for additional consumer choice within the authority area. We note that each of the seven principal centres[1] exhibits some degree of convenience goods overtrading and that each may be able to accommodate appropriately scaled additional convenience goods provision (subject to this being delivered in a sustainable location and there being no unacceptable town centre impacts).

7. The greatest level of convenience goods overtrading is apparent in Abingdon, Didcot, Faringdon and Wallingford, and these centres therefore provide the greatest opportunity in terms of providing additional customer choice. We note that planning permission has been granted for two discount foodstores in Abingdon and Grove (the latter will also help meet needs arising in Wantage), and that two extant permissions exist for foodstores in Didcot. However, the identified level of overtrading is above and beyond this level of committed provision and operator interest is therefore likely to remain strong.

8. We note that Thame Town Council are allocating the Cattle Market site as a mixed use/retail site in their Thame Neighbourhood Plan 2. Policy GDR1 of the Submission Version of the Neighbourhood Plan suggests the

[1] Didcot, Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford in South Oxfordshire, and Abingdon, Faringdon and Wantage in Vale of White Horse.

allocation of the Cattle Market Site for the provision of up to 1,500 sq.m of convenience floorspace, amongst other commercial and residential uses, subject to the appropriate car parking provision being retained. We note also that the allocation is consistent with the currently adopted Policy TC4 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan (December 2020) which allows for the provision of at least 1,500 sq.m of net convenience sales floorspace within Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford.

9. As set out above, the Study has identified that each of the seven principal centres exhibits some degree of convenience goods overtrading and that each may be able to accommodate appropriately scaled additional convenience goods provision (subject to this being delivered in a sustainable location and there being no unacceptable town centre impacts).

10. The overarching convenience offer within the three centres of Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford is relatively limited, and there may be an opportunity to increase consumer choice, reduce the level of over-trading in the existing stores and provide for amenities in sustainable locations. Importantly, any scheme must work with, not against, the existing operators in the centre in order to maintain the overarching vitality and viability.

11. Given the above, although no specific quantitative need was identified in the Study, the qualitative needs identified do support the rolling forward of the requirement (see paragraph 8 above) in Policy TC4 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan[2] for sites to be identified through the Henley-Harpsden and Thame Neighbourhood Development Plans respectively, to accommodate a single format food store with at least 1,500sqm net sales floorspace. This would be subject to any proposal not having a significant adverse impact on existing operators within either town centre. There is a clear opportunity through the delivery of sites in sustainable locations which could benefit these town centres in the future.

12. Looking further afield, should appropriate sites also be identified in the other key settlements which are in a sustainable location, there may be opportunities to further enhance the convenience offer. As set out in the Study, we recommend that proposals are assessed on their own merits and against the relevant sequential and impact policy tests.

[2] Whilst Policy TC4 also included the same requirement in Wallingford, this has since been met through the development of a Lidl food store in Lupton Road, which opened in 2019.