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| Oxford Core Strategy Examination Statement of Oxford City Council | | www.oxford.gov.uk  OXFORD CITY COUNCIL |
| C/M3/1 | Matter 3 – Retailing and the hierarchy of centres Issue 1 – The hierarchy of centres | |

i) How and why was this particular hierarchy defined?

The hierarchy of centres in Policy CS1 represents an evolution of the hierarchy set out in the Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 (CD7/6). The Local Plan identifies the City centre; the four district centres of Cowley centre, Cowley Road, Headington and Summertown; and 24 neighbourhood shopping centres.

The two main changes from the Local Plan are the designation of Cowley centre as a primary district centre and the addition of Blackbird Leys to the list of district centres. The Council considers that the Local Plan strategy needed to evolve to meet additional needs identified in the Retail Needs Study, to support the spatial strategy by reducing the need to travel, and to promote regeneration.

The changes proposed to the status of Cowley centre and Blackbird Leys are consistent with national guidance in PPS6 (CD11/5), which indicates at paragraph 2.9 that *“in promoting and enhancing existing centres, regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should consider the network of centres (i.e. the pattern of provision of existing centres) and their relationship in the hierarchy”*. It adds that local planning authorities should consider, amongst other things, *“the need to address deficiencies in the network by promoting centres to function at a higher level in the hierarchy or designating new centres”*. Similar advice is contained in draft PPS4 (CD11/18), which adds at Policy EC5 that priority should be given to deprived areas where there is a need for better access to services, facilities and employment by socially excluded groups.

The South East Plan (CD10/1) also indicates at Policy TC2 that local planning authorities will need to consider whether there are areas where investment should be stimulated, including town centres with deficiencies, deprived areas or areas that will undergo significant housing and employment growth.

With regard to the proposed hierarchy, the City centre is naturally at the top of this hierarchy given the wide range of services it contains, the fact that it has excellent accessibility and its designation as a Centre for Significant Change in the South East Plan.

The reasons for Cowley centre assuming a higher position in the sequential hierarchy than the other district centres are set out in detail in Background Paper B: the Spatial Strategy (CD5/5). In brief, these relate to the particular character of this district centre; its capacity to accommodate further growth, the fact that it has a larger catchment area than the other district centres; and its relationship to the South Oxford SDA. The Core Strategy uses the terminology 'primary district centre' rather than 'town centre' because it is felt that the term town centre doesn't fit comfortably within the context of a single urban area comprising a city centre and various district centres.

The reasons for designating Blackbird Leys as a district centre are also described in detail in the Spatial Strategy background paper. It is considered that this will act as a catalyst and a focal point for regeneration. A district centre would provide a broader range of facilities and services than the existing neighbourhood centre, whilst providing a strengthened focus for public transport, and cycling and walking routes. The City Council or Oxfordshire County Council own many of the existing buildings, and some are considered suitable for redevelopment or expansion. An opportunity therefore exists to provide a coordinated approach to the future masterplanning of this area. Blackbird Leys is also well placed to potentially benefit from the SDA, although the precise relationship is difficult to gauge at the present time since the SDA is at a very early stage of planning.

In order to provide a comprehensive hierarchy, it was decided to add neighbourhood centres to the hierarchy at the revised submission stage. The designation of these centres is not new, having been derived from the Local Plan, but it is considered to be a clearer expression of spatial planning to list them in Policy CS1 since they perform a wider role in the provision of local services than simply being part of the retail hierarchy.

ii) Could the Core Strategy be more explicit about the amount and type of development proposed for each level and location?

Policy CS1 defines the hierarchy and provides clear strategic guidance on the type of development expected in each tier.

The centres are underpinned by retailing, for which projected floorspace requirements are provided in Policy CS32 (Retail). Floorspace figures for other 'town centre' uses in the West End are set out in Policy CS5 (West End) and in the adopted West End AAP (CD7/5). For the district and neighbourhood centres, the amount and type of other development is difficult to quantify at the present time, pending identification of opportunities for redevelopment and intensification in the Site Allocations DPD.

While it would be possible to prescribe upper limits for floorspace at each level of the hierarchy, the Council is reluctant to do this as it may reduce the flexibility for the market to bring forward innovative schemes tailored to the circumstances of a particular centre. In practice, many schemes in the City and district centres are likely to be mixed use, and it is not felt appropriate to be too prescriptive about the amount and type of development in the Core Strategy.

In any event, given the high land values in Oxford and the fact that the opportunities for extension of a number of the centres are constrained by surrounding residential development, the City Council will wish to ensure that the maximum use is made of development sites within identified centres (subject to other LDF policies and material considerations).

In a single urban area such as Oxford, where the centres are generally not competing with each other but instead providing a different range of services for their respective catchments, it felt that Policy CS1 provides an appropriate level of guidance for a Core Strategy.

iii) What steps does the Council intend to take to ensure that development achieves the objectives for each of these areas?

Well-established arrangements exist to take forward the objectives for the City centre. The West End Partnership (comprising the City Council, County Council and SEEDA) has established a project team to progress the Partnerships objectives, and this team is involved in sourcing external funding, liaising with developers and overcoming any constraints to development. There is also a City centre Manager who liaises with businesses and a range of other interests to ensure that the City centre maintains its vibrancy and vitality.

With regard to the district centres the Council is committed to the production of an SPD to guide the development of the Blackbird Leys district centre. This will be the early focus of attention because it will need the most coordinated effort to attract investment and to deliver the intended regeneration benefits. Subject to resources, an SPD may also be undertaken to promote the effective masterplanning of development opportunities in Cowley centre. The Core Strategy sets out a boundary for the new Blackbird Leys district centre and an extension to the existing boundary for Cowley centre to reflect its enhanced status.

Development sites in the district centres will be progressed via the Site Allocations DPD and, where appropriate, via pre-application discussions with developers. This is consistent with paragraph 2.31 of PPS6, which indicates that local planning authorities should use the allocation of new sites to secure their strategy for strengthening and improving the performance of the centre.

The Development Management DPD will undertake a review of the Local Plan policies relating to retail frontages in the City and district centres. As part of the evidence base for the Development Management DPD, it is intended to carry out detailed healthchecks of the centres (using market indicators, vitality indicators and qualitative indicators) so as to inform the options for the appropriate mix of uses within the retail frontages.

The Council intends to make proactive use of its assets to achieve its objectives, for instance in Blackbird Leys where the Council will be carrying out an area property review in 2009/10. The Council also carries out regular monitoring of the mix of uses and vacancy levels in all centres, including neighbourhood centres. Monitoring data for the City and district centres is reported annually in the AMR. Similar data for the neighbourhood centres could be published in the AMR periodically (e.g. every three years). If this monitoring reveals that certain centres are failing to meet the objectives set, we will consider what remedial actions may be appropriate in the circumstances.

Additional steps that the Council will take include working in partnership with the County Council on accessibility, interchange and environmental improvements; the Council's role as local planning authority in determining planning applications; and our intention to update the Retail Needs Study every five years.