



Uppingham Neighbourhood Plan Review

Paper 3 Local Business Aspirations

Introduction

One of the great qualities of the existing Neighbourhood Plan is that it was prepared with substantial involvement from the local business community in and around Uppingham. The intention is that this will again be a central feature of the review. The work in March - May 2018 included contact with a variety of commercial land agents from the town and the wider area (Corby, Leicester, Market Harborough) but the levels of response to a simple questionnaire were disappointing and did not really provide any robust basis for recommendations or decision making. However, one local agent commented on Uppingham Gate that *“Uppingham is small, most demand is for small units and once built it took a long time to fill up and did so mainly at discounted rents. Investors and developers are therefore likely to be discouraged”*. The May 2018 report went on to suggest that additional employment land at Uppingham Gate could be considered differently (e.g. access and mixed use) given that alternative strategic provision can be made elsewhere in the County. In addition, that work concluded that the Station Road Industrial Estate is successful. but constrained.

Based on the above the intention of this second piece of work was to:

- Involve local businesses in a dedicated session to explore views on what is needed in terms of employment land and premises and hear more general views on business in Uppingham.
- Consider the potential to engage RCC and the LEP in investigating and promoting improvements to Station Road (principally access).

Alongside this work, the critical economic role of the Town Centre has been recognised and research into the planning history and recommendations for future monitoring are set out in Paper 5. In addition, the Town Council is considering baselines and indicators to measure progress on economic growth targets and this may be undertaken separately by an appropriately qualified and experienced specialist.

Main Conclusions

- 1 - Businesses want to be involved in the review of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2 - Station Road plays an important role and every effort should be made to secure improvements. As a start to this information should be collected on businesses, jobs, occupancy rates etc. by a local survey.
- 3 - There will need to be, substantial and evidence based, justification if the allocated employment land at Uppingham Gate is to be reclassified, but there appears to be potential for some flexibility on what constitutes an employment use and what potential there is for mixed use development
- 4 – The NP review could examine the potential for sites/buildings to be identified for small units/storage. In addition, although not covered in this session, self-employment and home working are important.

November 2018 - Prepared for Uppingham Town Council by Clive Keble Consulting Ltd. on behalf of OPUN (the Architecture and Design Centre for the East Midlands).

1. Introduction

1.1 The work undertaken for this task has involved several complementary elements:

- A dedicated breakfast session for local businesses.
- Meetings with economic development and policy officers at RCC.
- A review of RCC and LEP business related plans and strategies.
- A consideration of Census Data (See Paper 1)

1.2 The second and third items have also contributed to the analysis in Paper 2 (Local Housing Needs) and Paper 4 (Roads and Transport). The Greater Cambridge and Peterborough LEP operates at a sub-regional level and RCC reflects the 2014 Strategic Economic Plan in its own documents. However, the engagement has proved difficult and the LEP has become “The Business Board of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority” with a focus on the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Corridor proposals. RCC will be evaluating which LEP alignment meets the needs of the area to best effect).

2. Business Breakfast Session

2.1 This was held on Thursday 15th November 2018 (08:30 to 10:00) at The Falcon Hotel in the town centre. Appendix 1 comprises the invitation and the attendance list. The discussion points were.

DP1 - Awareness of the existing Neighbourhood Plan and what it has done for business?

DP2 - What sort of land, buildings and premises do businesses need to develop/prosper?

DP3 - Are there any specific things that can be done to improve Station Road?

DP4 - How might other plans for business in Rutland affect Uppingham?

Time was allowed for questions and points from the floor with a discussion on key issues and the next steps in the Neighbourhood Plan review. The points arising from the session are summarised below.

DP1 - Good level of awareness and appreciation of what the NP has achieved, but there are always challenges, albeit that some of these do not concern planning matters.

DP2 - Additional small industrial and storage units are needed, but they must be affordable. It is felt that Rutland is more expensive (e.g. compared to Corby). Self-storage units are in high demand.
- There is no general need for larger office developments.

DP3 - The important role that the Station Road Industrial Estate plays was unanimously expressed but it was recognised that expansion there may be difficult.
- However, it was also universally agreed that if access (e.g. a one way exit route) can be improved, it should be. Businesses are willing to get involved in discussions and practical measures. In addition to a new route, practical measures could include better management of parking to allow better access for deliveries and looking at the London/South View junction.
- Attendees do not favour the relocation of businesses on Station Road to enable new housing.
- It is felt that Station Road is too small to be considered as a Business Improvement District (BID). (However, recent guidance states: “There is no “right” size for a BID area. Each area is bespoke...”
This option could be explored but noting that a BID increases the business rates of premises. See; https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/415988/BIDs_Guidance_and_Best_Practice.pdf

In addition, it was agreed that the role that Station Road plays in the local economy could be better appreciated. Data could be collected to support an argument (to RCC and the LEP) for access and infrastructure improvements and for NP policies which recognise and protect the role played by Station Road. This could be collected locally through survey work and should include:

- Size of site
- Number and size of units
- Number and types of businesses
- Number of jobs
- Occupancy/vacancy rates

DP4 - It is considered that the RCC managed units in Oakham affect supply and demand in Uppingham and that any allocations at St Georges could affect the attractiveness of other sites. The impact of Corby was also noted.

- Discussion focussed on Uppingham Gate and the current occupiers/owners felt that more input is required from RCC but also that flexibility on uses and a focus on smaller units might be helpful.
- An agent considered that alternative uses should be considered on the allocated (but as yet undeveloped) land and that this should be done as a matter of urgency. An argument was put forward that the demand for that sort of land is not there and that if land comes forward at St Georges, it will further erode the attractiveness of Uppingham Gate.
- There was a feeling that development at Uppingham Gate should be encouraged, but not at the expense of Station Road

Other points to emerge from discussions, included:

- The way in which the existing Neighbourhood Plan was led by local business should carry through into the review.
- There is agreement in using the Business Forum to get further input into the review process and to provide information on progress.
- Breakfast meetings are seen as being a good time of day to join these sorts of meetings/updates.
- As far as Station Road is concerned, the main issues 4 years ago when the NP was being prepared were: broadband, complex ownership of the road and the need for LEP support for improvements. There was a feeling that over 18 months the number of businesses on Station Road has grown and traffic volumes have increased as a result. An updated view will be sought from businesses.
- The role that farms could play in the provision of premises and the potential of the school to use land/buildings for small units could be considered. This can be considered as part of the review.

3 Outcomes of meetings with RCC Officers

3.1 I met James Frieland (Economic Development) and Roger Ranson & Sharon Baker (Policy) on 30.10.2018.

The focus of the **economic development meeting** was on the following (responses/conclusions *in italics*):

- Any up to date RCC economic information for Uppingham. *Limited, other than Local Plan evidence base, Economic Strategy and Annual Monitoring Report.*
- The Business Breakfast event. *Welcomed and invitation accepted.*

- The possibility of an LEP/RCC a feasibility study for a new means of exit for the Station Road Industrial Estate. *Recognises the value/importance of Station Road. Agreed to consider this but notes difficulty of engaging LEP during its transition phase. Also noted need to involve RCC Highways Officers (See Paper 4).*
- RCC thoughts on the opportunities and challenges ahead for Uppingham Town Centre. *Consider that the town centre is doing well based on a set of unique characteristics and advantages. Highlighted the importance of tourism, hotels and restaurants to the town alongside its specialist shops and businesses.*
- RCC thoughts on the prospect for further (pure) business development at Uppingham Gate or whether a mixed-use approach might be more viable/realistic. *Surprised that it has not been more successful recently but accepts that there is competition from Oakham and slightly further afield from Corby. However, reluctant to lose accessible/easily serviced employment land to non-employment uses but acknowledge that flexibility could be applied to the definition of what constitutes employment uses. Would need facts/evidence to be convinced of the case for a radical shift away from employment uses.*

In addition, it was noted that there is a likely need/demand for small move on (manufacturing/business) units of 1500 to 2000 sq. ft. in Uppingham, if suitable land or buildings could be identified.

Confirmed that St Georges, if it is allocated/approved, will include strategic employment land and this may affect the local labour market. However, emphasized that there is nothing certain on St Georges as yet.

The business-related aspects of the **planning policy meeting** included, (responses/conclusions *in italics*):

- An update on the progress of/programme for the new Local Plan. *A helpful update was provided which forms the basis of the timeline for the Neighbourhood Plan review suggested in Paper 6. This will (eventually) provide a basis for decisions on strategic employment land provision, including at St Georges.*
- RCC traffic studies to inform transport policies, including potential longer-term routes around sections of the Uppingham. *This matter was referred to RCC Highways Officers.*
- In addition, connected with the above and with involvement from the LEP, to consider a feasibility study for a new means of exit for the Station Road Industrial Estate. *The importance of gathering a good, sound, evidence base to support proposal coming out of the Neighbourhood Plan was emphasised, especially if site allocations (residential and employment) are made. Similar concern was expressed over the potential loss of allocated land at Uppingham Gate to non-employment uses but noting that there should be some flexibility in the definition of an employment use. RCC want to maintain a balance of sustainable employment sites linked to existing and future housing.*

Welcomed the idea of a Business Breakfast event and agreed to attend if possible.

4. LEP and RCC business related plans and strategies.

Local Enterprise Partnership Strategic Economic Plan & RCC Economic Growth Strategy.

4.1 The Greater Cambridge and Peterborough LEP operates at a higher, sub-regional level and has little to say about Uppingham, but the RCC reflects the 2014 Strategic Economic Plan in its own documents. (NB - The LEP has now become “The Business Board of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority” and RCC will be evaluating which LEP alignment meets the needs of the area to best effect).

The RCC Economic Growth Strategy (2014 -21)

4.2 This document sets out an overall Vision “By 2021, we want a vibrant, prosperous, sustainable and diverse economy. We plan to achieve this by:

- Playing on our strengths – building on our wealth of natural, cultural, leisure and heritage assets.
- Maximising public and private investments.
- Encouraging growth while retaining our unique characteristics.
- Supporting growth at a community level.”

4.3 The document also focusses on supporting farm diversification and micro-businesses within our more rural areas which will help tap into new forms of entrepreneurship.

4.4 In Uppingham, Uppingham Gate, is identified as the main office park and Station Road Industrial Estate as a focus for manufacturing. In the Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan, there is an allocation of a small area of land at Uppingham Gate for new business development.

RCC Employment Land Assessment and Review (Update 2016)

The high level of employment in the education sector is noted, including several public schools (e.g. Uppingham see census data below). Otherwise, the key recommendations are as follows.

- That the County needs an additional 29.09 ha of land to 2036.
- The County needs to protect employment sites from uses such as housing or retail.
- The Council should designate seven key employment sites and areas to be safeguarded for B Class Uses and other employment uses which achieve economic enhancement.
- There is an identified need for further start-up and micro business accommodation, particularly to meet workshop and storage needs.

(These documents and any links between employment land provision and the new housing requirement are considered in Paper 2 - Local Housing Needs Study).

RCC (adopted and emerging) Local Plans

It is legitimate for the employment land allocations in these documents to be regarded as strategic policies, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework. Therefore, if the Neighbourhood Plan review is to promote alternative uses on such sites, evidence must be presented to substantiate this, and a case must be made that equivalent employment can be provided through alternative uses and/or in other locations. Some of this evidence will be quantitative (e.g. take-up rates) and other parts may be qualitative (e.g. opinions for agents on viability and demand).

Appendix 1 - Business breakfast session invitation and attendance list



Business Breakfast Session

Uppingham Neighbourhood Plan Review

Over the coming 12 months Uppingham will be refreshing the existing Neighbourhood Plan and are keen to start to gather views and input from members of the business community, specifically in relation to land/buildings used to deliver employment and business opportunities. The two areas of focus initially are Station Road and Uppingham Gate.

Date & Time: To be held on **Thursday November 15th 08:30 to 10:00 in the Oak Room at The Falcon Hotel.**

Purpose: To give local businesses a chance to be involved early on in deciding how to approach the review of the Uppingham Neighbourhood Plan.

Attendees: Business from Uppingham Gate and Station Road, commercial agents, developers and representatives from Rutland County Council and the Local Enterprises Partnership.

Agenda:

- (1) - Awareness of the existing Neighbourhood Plan and what it has done for business?
 - (2) - What sort of land, buildings and premises do businesses need to develop/prosper?
 - (3) – Are there any specific things that can be done to improve Station Road?
 - (4) – How might other plans for business in Rutland affect Uppingham?
- Points and questions from the floor
 - Is there any interest in an ad-hoc businesses advisory group as part of the review?
 - Round up of discussions, action points and what will happen next? Thank you.

The session will be facilitated by **Clive Keble** (for OPUN East Midlands) and has been engaged by The Uppingham Neighbourhood Planning Advisory Committee. Coffee/teas and pastries will be available.

Please confirm attendance to townclerk@uppinghamtowncouncil.co.uk or call 01572 822681 by 12th Nov.

Attendance List

Karen Kibblewhite (RCC)

Robert Clayton (RCC)

Mark Shaw (ClockedIn)

Alan McVicar (Arnold Wills & Co)

Peter Crowden (Pest Control Services)

David Lee (Pest Control Services)

Simon Pease (Ancer Spa – Lynton Developments)

James Turcan (Residential Property Group)

Rob Chisholm (Applewood Vehicle Finance)

Ron Simpson (N Plan Deputy Chair & Uppingham First / Uppingham Business Forum)

Amanda James (Safer Products Ltd)

Roger Ranson (RCC Planning Policy Manager)

James Frieland RCC Economic Development & Tourism Manager)

David Casewell (N Plan Chair & Councillor)

Neil Wedge (Town Clerk)