GL Hearn

Retail & Hotel Assessment –

Wokingham Borough Council &
Wilson Bowden Developments Ltd

Peach Place & Elms Field
Wokingham
RG40 1XG

September 2013

Prepared by

GL Hearn Limited
20 Soho Square
London W1D 3QW

T +44 (0)20 7851 4900
F +44 (0)20 7851 4910
glhearn.com

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Appendices

Quality Standards Control

The signatories below verify that this document has been prepared in accordance with our quality control requirements. These procedures do not affect the content and views expressed by the originator.

This document must only be treated as a draft unless it is has been signed by the Originators and approved by a Business or Associate Director.

DATE	ORIGINATORS	APPROVED
September 2013	Cathy Hall Planning Associate Director	Ben Wrighton Planning Director

Limitations

This document has been prepared for the stated objective and should not be used for any other purpose without the prior written authority of GL Hearn; we accept no responsibility or liability for the consequences of this document being used for a purpose other than for which it was commissioned.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Retail and Hotel Assessment has been prepared by GL Hearn on behalf of Wokingham Borough Council and Wilson Bowden Developments Ltd, in respect of two linked full planning applications for the development of a comprehensive mixed-use retail and residential scheme on land at Peach Place and Elms Field within Wokingham Town Centre.

1.2 The proposed development seeks to improve the quality and quantity of floorspace available in Wokingham town centre in line with approved Council planning policy; in order to attract new retailers; to retain shoppers in Wokingham; and to help regenerate the town. The development therefore comprises two elements:

- Peach Place redevelopment; and,
- Elms Field development.

1.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) makes it clear that town centres are at the heart of our communities and that local authorities should prepare policies to support their vitality and viability. Moreover, the NPPF confirms that sites should be allocated to meet the scale and type of development needed in a town centre

1.4 This Retail and Hotel Assessment has therefore been produced to support the two planning applications and for the benefit of the Council as planning authority in order for them to fully understand the proposal and its effects on existing town centre uses and future proposals for retail development outside of Wokingham town centre. :

- Section 2: provides an overview of the proposed development;
- Section 3: outlines the planning policy considerations relating to retail and hotel development in this location and examines the existing retail context and shopping patterns
- Section 4: provides an assessment of impact on existing centres;
- Section 5: examines the scheme against the sequential approach to site selection;
- Section 6: considers the implications of the proposed A3, A4 and A5 floorspace on Wokingham town centre;
- Section 7: considers the implications of the proposed development; and
- Section 8: provides the conclusions to this Assessment.

1.5 It is important to note that for retail development within the 'Primary Shopping Area', as defined in the Local Plan, an impact assessment is not required. (The relevant boundary for establishing the status of sites for 'other' defined main town centre uses is also the town centre boundary. 'Other' town centre uses include hotels - National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Annex 2). Furthermore, because the proposed scheme is a 'planned' development as part of an up-to-date development plan and will function as an integral part of the town centre, and both application sites are located entirely within the existing wider definition of Wokingham town centre boundary, the retail (A1-5) and hotel (C1) elements are acceptable in principle and therefore, strictly speaking, there is no requirement for an assessment of impact or sequential considerations as set out in the NPPF in paragraphs 24 and 26 (reviewed in Section 3 below).

1.6 Nevertheless, for completeness, we consider that it is helpful to assess the overall development having regard to these matters in order to assist the Council in considering the proposed development against its policies and evidence base.

1.7 The 'policy' status enjoyed by both sites is, of course, underpinned by a robust evidence base, and for retail purposes part of this evidence base is formed by the Wokingham Borough Council Retail Study Refresh 2010. This Study was undertaken in 2010 by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (WBC RSR), and updates the previous Wokingham Borough Retail Study (August 2007), prepared by Donaldsons, utilising the same 2007 household survey. The WBC RSR has informed the Core Strategy policy; it uses standard industry modelling processes and practice to define capacity for retail in Wokingham for test years 2016, 2021 and 2026. Indeed, the proposed development is consistent with the outputs of this Study.

1.8 The Retail and Hotel Assessment should be considered in conjunction with the accompanying Planning, Design and Access and Transport Statements and other supporting specialist studies.

1.9 It should be noted that a separate application was submitted in August 2012 for the refurbishment of 38-42 Peach Place (reference F/2012/1678). This application represents the first phase of the wider regeneration and is interrelated to the more comprehensive redevelopment of Peach Place proposed by this application and described in more detail in Section 2. The application was granted planning permission on 15 November 2012. Further detail on the relationship between this separate application and the current proposals is provided in the accompanying Design and Access Statement.

2 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

2.1 As summarised in Section 1, the proposal comprises two distinct components: a. redevelopment of Peach Place; and b. Elms Field development. The layout of the proposed development is shown at **Appendix 1**.

2.2 The land uses of the comprehensive new development will include retail space (A1-5) up to 18,314 sqm gross internal floor area (GIA), an 80 bed hotel and up to 159 residential units. A full description of the development is provided on the application forms, the Design and Access Statement. and the accompanying Planning Statement. With reference to main town centre uses, the two applications include the following elements:

a. Peach Place

2.2.1 For the Peach Place site, the proposed development includes:

- Up to 6,565 sqm GIA - of floorspace on ground and first/mezzanine level for a mix of A1-5 class uses including retail, cafes and restaurants.
- Of this A class floorspace, restaurants and cafes, drinking establishments and hot food takeaway (class A3, A4 and A5 uses) could extend up to 1,500 sqm GIA. The exact location and scale of this offer is not yet known; some flexibility is therefore being built into the development.

b. Elms Field

2.2.2 For the Elms Field site, the proposed development includes:

- A food store, up to 7,054 sqm GIA that will anchor the scheme. The store will include a café at mezzanine level. (As with many town centre food stores, the current proposals are formed over three levels including basement and mezzanine space, all designed with an undercroft car parking area. Hence, the net sales space within the store is much lower than would be the case for a similar sized standalone foodstore.) Elms Walk will form a new retail street linking the proposed food store with Denmark Street, comprising up to 4,251 sqm GIA comparison and service A1/A2 floorspace.
- A space for Community Uses (Use Class D1) on the first floor is proposed above the retail on Elms Walk with up to 444 sqm GIA. (Although it is expected that this community use will be delivered, the application also seeks an alternative planning permission for this floorspace for A1 – A5 purposes.)
- Restaurants and cafes, drinking establishments and hot food takeaway (A3, A4 and A5 uses) could extend up to 1,500 sqm GIA. The exact location and scale of this offer is not yet known; some flexibility is therefore being built into the development. A new hotel 80 bedrooms (3,155 sqm GIA). Up to four dedicated disabled parking bays will also be provided at the hotel.
- A new car park under the food store with up to 350 spaces. Additional residents parking for up to 200 car park spaces to be provided; 161 in Elms Field, 32 spaces in a private car park behind the retail on Elms Field and a further 7 spaces within the hotel/adjacent residential site.

2.3 Within these detailed applications, whilst the building envelopes are fixed, flexibility has been built in to allow A1 – A5 Class uses and an either/or opportunity for community use (Use Class D1) or retail use for the 444sq m area on the upper floor on Elms Walk. This Assessment considers this flexibility. However, the floor area of the hotel element, together with the number of bedrooms, is fixed.

2.4 Furthermore, whilst the two applications are separate, this Assessment considers the implications of the combined development. This, in part, reflects the fact that the Peach Place element of the proposal is located entirely within the ‘Primary Shopping Area’. Whilst the Elms Field development is described as part ‘edge of centre’ in terms of the existing town centre definition, it is nonetheless ‘planned’ development in an up-to-date plan, and it forms part of a comprehensive retail-led regeneration strategy to reinforce and revitalise the town centre.

2.5 For assessment purposes therefore, and in common with normal practice, the retail floorspace included within the application description needs to be broken down into appropriate net sales areas. The table below shows the overall quanta and indicative **maximum net increase in sales areas** for convenience, comparison and restaurants and cafes. As some flexibility is being sought for change between the A1-5 class uses it should be noted that the maximum suggested net sales areas in each class does not relate absolutely to the GIA floorspace areas; this does not impact on the total quantum and built form of development being applied for. The hotel area remains as GIA as this is the measure required for the assessment of impact.

Table 1: Maximum proposed retail and hotel floor areas for assessment

	Peach Place			**Elms Field**		**Total Maximum**
Use	Existing Floorspace Net sales Area[1]	Proposed GIA (A1-5)	Proposed Indicative Net Sales Area[2]	Proposed GIA (A1-5)	Proposed Indicative Net Sales Area	Net sales area
Retail A1-5 (GIA)		6,565		11,749		
Maxima:						
Convenience (A1)	604		1,400		2,750	3,546
Comparison & service (A1 & A2)	3,076		3,800		3,890	4,614
Restaurant, café, pubs & takeaways (A3-5)	0	1,500	1,050	1,500	1,050	2,100
Hotel (C1)	0		0	3,155		3,155 (GIA)

[1] No detailed building survey of the existing floor areas is available at this time. The net sales area for convenience is taken from WBC RSR/IGD. Net sales for comparison estimated from architect’s schedule.
[2] The net sales areas for modelling purposes applies a 70/30% split of net/gross that reflects the methodology used in the WBC RSR.

2.6 A full and detailed description of the development proposal is provided within the Planning Statement and the Design and Access Statement.

3 RETAIL CONTEXT

3.1 This section considers the existing retail context of Wokingham and the surrounding area, relevant to the sphere of influence of the application sites/proposals.

3.2 This section first considers the Council-produced evidence base documents that address retail matters. An overview of the health check of the town centre, undertaken by GL Hearn in July 2012 and contained in full at **Appendix 2** is then provided. The remaining part of the section provides a brief review of the main retail centres and out-of-centre shopping provision that currently plays a role in meeting the convenience and comparison needs of the catchment area's residents.

Retail policy matters

3.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. In the Introduction, the Government sets out that the NPPF must be taken into account in the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans, and is a material consideration in planning applications. With its adoption on 27 March 2012, it replaced all previous national planning policy statements with immediate effect. Therefore, it should have significant weight in the consideration any planning application.

3.4 At a local level, the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (January 2010), together with the saved policies of the Wokingham District Local Plan (March 2004), provide the only up-to-date development plan policy on retail and town centre matters. This is supplemented by the Wokingham Town Centre Masterplan SPD (June 2010) (WTCM SPD).

3.5 Further local policy is currently being prepared, specifically the draft Managing Development Delivery DPD, which is due to be adopted later in 2013.

National Planning Policy Framework

3.6 Paragraph 23 to 27 of the NPPF provide national guidance on retail planning policies. The NPPF sets out that planning policy should promote competitive town centres. Paragraph 24 states that '*local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications that are not in an existing centre and not in accordance with an up to date Local Plan*'. Part of one of the application sites is considered to be in an edge-of-centre retail location.

3.7 When applying the sequential test, Paragraph 24 states that local planning authorities should require '*applications for main town centre uses to be located in town centres, then edge of centre locations and only then if suitable sites are not available should out of centre sites be considered*'. In the consideration of edge-of-centre and out-of-centre sites, preference will be given to '*accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre'*.

3.8 For retail development not within the Primary Shopping Area, an impact assessment is required to judge whether the development is over a proportionate threshold. Paragraph 26 of the NPPF states that if no locally set threshold, the default threshold is 2,500 sqm. The assessment should consider:

- The impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planning public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal; and
- The impact of the proposal on town centre vitality and viability, including local consumer choice and trade in the town centre and wider area, up to five years from the time the application is made.

3.9 As noted in paragraph 1.3 above it is important to note that the relevant boundary for establishing the status of sites for other defined main town centre uses beyond retail is the town centre boundary. These other town centre uses include hotels (NPPF Annex 2). Both application sites are located entirely within the town centre boundary; accordingly, hotel development in either location is acceptable in principle and there is no requirement to address either impact or sequential considerations set out in the NPPF in paragraphs 24 and 26.

Core Strategy

3.10 The relevant Core Strategy policies are summarised as follows:

- **CP9 (Scale and location of development proposals)** identifies Wokingham as a 'major development location'.
- **CP13 (Town centres and shopping)** defines the retail hierarchy for the Borough and designates Wokingham as a 'major town centre'. Lower Earley, Shinfield Road, Twyford, Winnersh and Woodley are designated as small town/district centres, sitting below Wokingham in the hierarchy.
- **CP14 (Growth and Renaissance of Wokingham Town Centre)** provides that growth should 'enhance the market character of Wokingham and maintain its position in the Berkshire retail hierarchy by', inter alia, strengthening shopping in the retail core to reduce leakage of expenditure, providing tourist facilities that complement existing provision and provides and maintains leisure and entertainment facilities.

3.11 The supporting text relating to Policy CP14 goes on to state that '*improving the centre means that it can better meet the needs of residents and prevent decline associated with loss of expenditure associated with the loss of expenditure following expansion in nearby larger centres. The Retail Study indicates proposals within the town centre should contribute towards lengthening the time visitors stay (including into the evenings) as this would contribute towards the vitality and viability of the town centre*' (para. 4.69).

Saved Local Plan Policies

3.12 The relevant saved Local Plan policies include the following provisions:

- **WSH5 (Retention of essential retail character of shopping areas)** guards against the loss of retail (Class A1) from Wokingham town centre

- **WSH6 (Non-retail uses in primary frontages)** stipulates that non-A1 retail units should not exceed 20% of the unit floorspace in primary frontages
- **WSH7 (Non-retail uses in secondary frontages)** sets out guidance for the mix of uses in defined secondary frontages, with the underlying principle being that of retaining a predominantly retail function and character

3.13 Paragraph 7.40 confirms that the Peach Place application site lies entirely within the the defined Primary Frontage.

Wokingham Town Centre Masterplan SPD

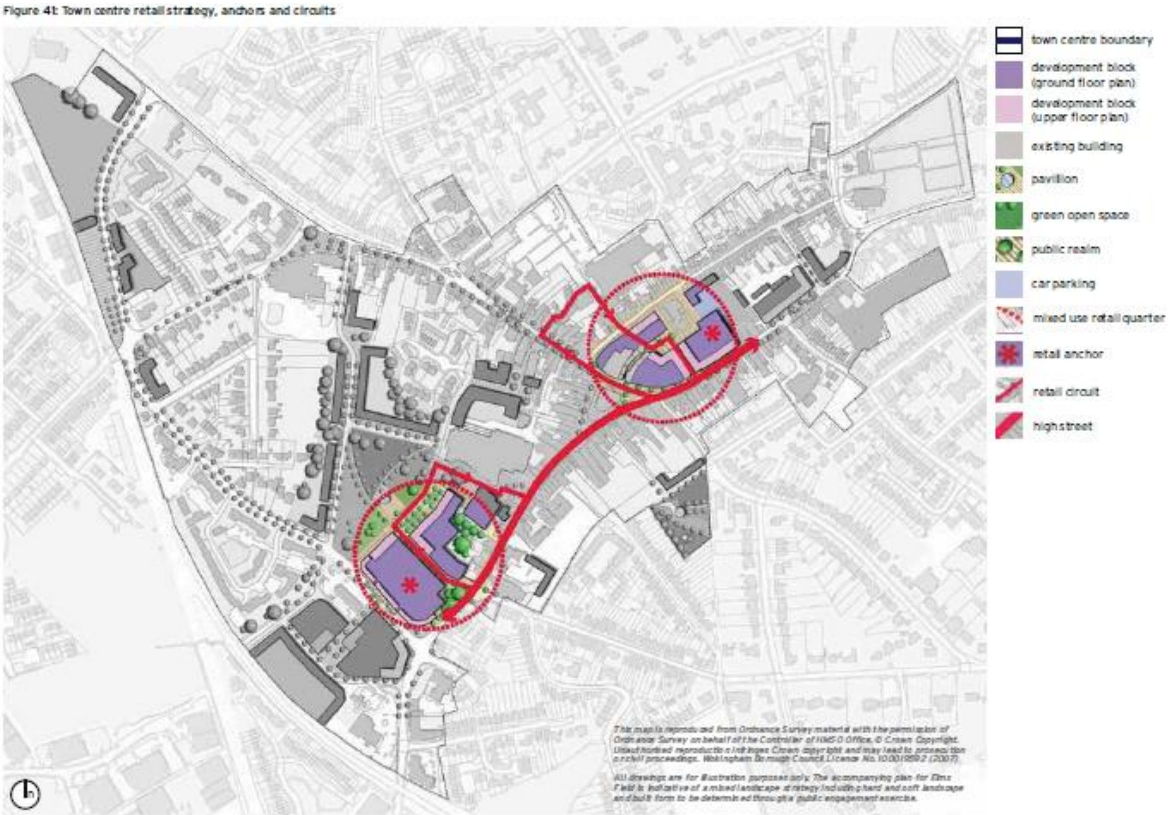
3.14 The overarching objectives of the WTCM SPD include securing a 'thriving town centre' (para. 5.1) and establishing a vital and vibrant 'eighteen hour economy' (para. 5.2), attractive to visitors during the day and evening.

3.15 The WTCM SPD restates the Core Strategy's aim of strengthening the centre by 'providing suitable accommodation to attract a mix of retailers into the town centre to stem the leakage of expenditure to other centres' and includes the guidance on extending the existing retail core southwards (para. 10.2.1). Specifically this will involve:

- Peach Street becoming a focus for a range of comparison goods retailing, based around a coherent retail circuit encompassing Market Place, Old Row Court and Peach Street (para. 10.2.3).
- Denmark Street being anchored by a retail-led mixed-use development to the south on the existing Wellington House site, integrated as part of a mixed-use development to the rear of Denmark Street to create a secondary retail circuit, and including active ground floor uses onto Elms Field (i.e. the Elms Field application site) (para. 10.2.4).
- The Plaza/Elms Field accommodating eating and drinking uses as part of a wider mixed-use strategy to diversify the town centre's existing evening economy (para. 10.3.2).

3.16 These aspirations are expressed in **Figure 1** (Figure 41: Town centre retail strategy, anchors and circuits p. 98 WTCM SPD).

Figure 1: WTCM SPD Town centre retail strategy, anchors and circuits



Managing Development Delivery DPD (Proposed Submission draft)

3.17 The draft MDD DPD underwent consultation in summer 2012. The Council published the Inspector's Interim Conclusions following a hearing in May 2013, and is currently consulting on Proposed Modifications until 25 September 2013. Whilst it is not yet part of the development plan, the draft document has undergone considerable consultation and can therefore be regarded as a material consideration of some weight.

3.18 The key draft policies of relevance are:

- **TB15 (Major town, and Small Town/ District Centre development)** confirms the hierarchy as set out in CP13, sets out proposed primary shopping areas in the respective centres and provides that '*planning permission will only be granted for proposals for main town centre uses within Wokingham town centre*' where they are consistent with the WTCM SPD and demonstrate that:
    - *'They are of a scale and form that is compatible with the retail character of the centre and its role in the hierarchy of retail centres*
    - *How it retains or increases the provision of Use Class A1 (Shops) in primary shopping frontages and the provision of Use Class A1 or A2 (Financial and professional services) or A3 (Restaurants and cafes) or A4 (Drinking establishments) or A5 hot food takeaways in secondary shopping frontages.*
    - *They contribute to the provision of day and evening/night-time uses and are compatible with other uses*

  - *They enhance vitality and viability*.'
- **TB16 (Development for Town Centre Uses)** requires retail proposals in excess of 500 sqm (gross) outwith a defined town centre to demonstrate compliance to the sequential test and satisfy retail impact testing.
- **SAL08 (Allocated Mixed Use Sites)** allocates five sites for development, including land at Peach Place and land at Elms Field for the delivery of (respectively):
  - *'A1 (retail) floorspace with flexibility for A3 (restaurants & cafes), A4 (drinking establishments) and C3 (residential) development*
  - *A1 (retail) floorspace, including an anchor store of circa 3,000 sqm (net) on the existing Wellington House site, with flexibility for A3 uses (restaurants & cafes), A4 (drinking establishments), D1 (community uses), C1 (hotel) and C3 (residential) uses'*

3.19 With regard the draft mixed-use allocations set out in SAL08, the supporting text reiterates the principles enunciated in the WTCM SPD.

Evidence base

3.20 The summary of the Core Strategy set out above makes reference to a retail study. This is the Wokingham Borough Council Retail Study Refresh undertaken in 2010 by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (WBC RSR). The WBC RSR updates the previous Wokingham Borough Retail Study (August 2007), prepared by Donaldsons, but utilises the same 2007 household survey.

3.21 The WBC RSR describes an approach that starts with identifying commitments through the Core Strategy. The town centre commitments are considered to be delivered by 2016. The identified floorspace delivered in the town centre by 2016 is 2,950 sqm net convenience and 3,996 sqm net comparison. In the period from 2016 to 2026 further convenience capacity is identified in excess of the town centre allocations of between 1,523 and 3,985 sqm net (the higher value excludes allocations outside of the town centre). Comparison capacity emerges of 11,711 sqm net. Both these figures are Borough wide and in the the case of the comparison element, assumes a 2% increase in market share.

3.22 In convenience terms, existing floorspace in the Borough is estimated to total 20,623 sqm net. Analysis of market share information suggests that these existing facilities are trading at £42.7m in excess of benchmark levels. This is not distilled into the detail of each specific store but is instead summarised in terms of the defined centres.

3.23 This quantitative need is supplemented by an identified qualitative need; however this need is not only focused in the Wokingham/Winnersh area. The WBC RSR observes that there is no representation from the limited assortment discounters (LAD) in the Borough. In addition to the commitment at Woodley for a new Lidl store, it is noted that since the publication of the WBC RSR, planning permission was granted for a new out-of-centre Lidl store in Wokingham; together these will go some way to addressing this perceived deficiency. The detail of this Lidl is reviewed in the forthcoming section on 'Commitments'[3].

3.24 In modelling the convenience capacity, the WBC RSR makes allowance for a number of new foodstores as part of Core Strategy allocations, specifically: a new district centre at Arborfield Garrison to include a foodstore of 2,600 sqm net, a new foodstore of 2,500 sqm net at Shinfield Road and a 3,000 sqm net foodstore as part of the redevelopment in Wokingham town centre. The latter is subject of this application.

3.25 The former two allocations, which are intended to serve locally generated need arising from planned Strategic Development Locations (SDL), are assumed to come forward by 2016. However, it is understood that the development programmes for the related SDLs are not yet fixed. A 2021 delivery is therefore considered more appropriate for modelling purposes. This is beyond the impact year of this assessment, further detail is provided in Section 5.

3.26 The WBC RSR identifies convenience capacity in the Borough (Table 10B Appendix B), taking into account allocations. The table below shows capacity excluding and including allocations, but otherwise using the same assumptions utilised in the WBC RSR used. **Scenario 1** then shows capacity including all commitments at 2016 and **Scenario 2** then delays the commitments coming forward to 2021. In both scenarios, the town centre commitment is excluded, given this application is advancing the proposal.

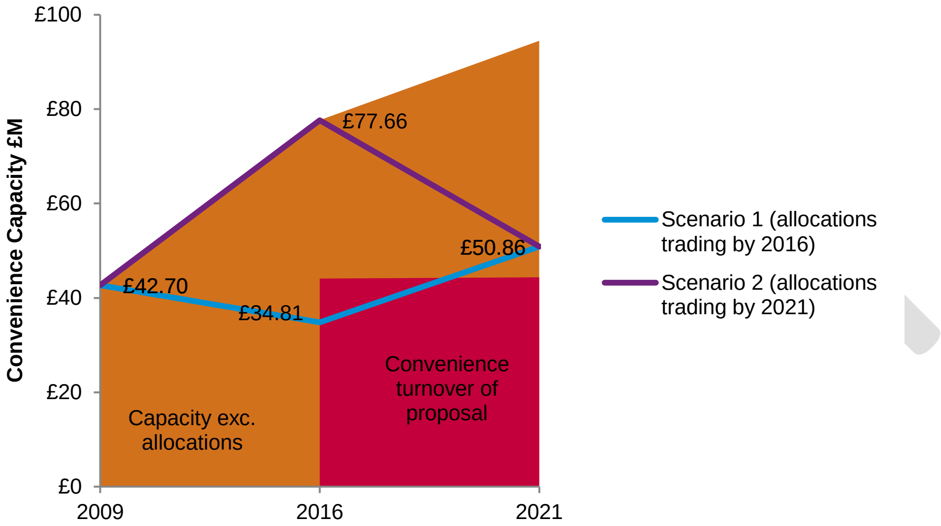
Table 2: WBC RSR convenience goods capacity

Capacity	2009	2016	2021
Excluding allocations	£42.70m 3,881 sqm net	£77.66m 6,935 sqm net	£94.47m 8,311 sqm net
Allocations			
Wokingham TC	£24.75m	£25.20m	£25.66m
Shinfield Road SDL	£21.45m	£21.84m	£22.24m
Arborfield	£20.63m	£21.00m	£21.39m
Total	£66.83m	£68.04m	£69.28m
Including allocations[4]			
Scenario 1	£42.70m 3,881 sqm net	£34.81m 3,109 sqm net	£50.86m 4,473 sqm net
Scenario 2	£42.70m 3,881 sqm net	£77.66m 6,935 sqm net	£50.86m 4,473 sqm net

[3] Both stores are noted to now be trading but do not yet have current mature trading patterns that can be captured in a household survey. The anticipated impacts have been modelled into the submitted quantitative impact analysis.
[4] Excludes Wokingham TC allocation in each scenario

3.27 Accordingly, taking into account planned development elsewhere in the Borough, convenience capacity of between 3,109 and 6,935 sqm net will exist by 2016[5]. By 2021, this capacity is expected to be in the order of 4,473 sqm net. Whilst impact is dealt with in detail in the forthcoming section, it is notable that, taking into account the delayed delivery of the existing allocations and represented by Scenario 2 above and below, at a district level, there is sufficient convenience capacity to accommodate the proposed development, as shown on Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: WBC RSR convenience goods capacity



3.28 The comparison floorspace within the Borough is estimated to extend to 26,165 sqm net, attracting a turnover of £111.52m in 2009. Whilst Wokingham is the 'main comparison shopping centre in the Borough, [it] provides a relatively limited range of comparison shops' (para. 5.40). Nonetheless, the WBC RSR concludes that these existing comparison facilities are 'trading satisfactorily'.

3.29 In comparison terms, the WBC RSR articulates a strategy of increasing market shares in the Borough through improving non-food shopping provision in order to reduce leakage to other retail destinations outside the Borough. An alternative market share is modelled which assumes an increase in market share for both Wokingham town centre and Lower Earley district centre. The capacity implications (net of commitments) of both the constant market share and increased market share (2% increase) scenarios are summarised below (based on WBC RSR Appendix C Tables 7C and 11C). These figures are all Borough-wide; the implications for Wokingham are also shown.

[5] This does not include the Lidl commitment in Wokingham, which will be addressed later in this section.

Table 3: WBC RSR comparison goods capacity

Scenario	2016	2021
Constant market share		
Borough-wide	£12.75m	£44.61m
	2,886 sqm net	9,149 sqm net
Wokingham/Winnersh	£4.69m	£25.75m
	1,062 sqm net	5,282 sqm net
Adjusted market share		
Borough-wide	£37.00m	£76.58m
	8,337 sqm net	15,707 sqm net
Wokingham/Winnersh	£20.74m	£47.25m
	4,697 sqm net	9,691 sqm net

3.30 As such, whilst there is capacity identified in the constant market share scenario, this is significantly larger if the increases in market share are realised. Although the figures above include an allowance for improvement at Lower Earley, it is noted that the majority of the increase is as a result of Wokingham town centre's comparison market share increasing.

3.31 In qualitative terms, the WBC RSR notes that '*there is significant potential to reduce expenditure leakage and create more sustainable patterns of shopping if appropriate development is implemented in designated centres in the Borough*' (para. 5.38). Wokingham, together with Lower Earley, are identified as the locations most appropriate to realise this increase in market share.

3.32 Consequently, and reflecting its location at the top of the retail hierarchy, the WBC RSR states that *'large scale development which serves a significant part of the Borough should be concentrated within Wokingham Town Centre' (para. 6.11).*

3.33 With regard to centre boundaries, the WBC RSR specifically recommends the extension of the designated retail frontages.

> *'The Wokingham Town Centre Boundary could be amended to exclude residential areas, but the defined Retail Centre is broadly consistent with PPS4. There are three main areas that may warrant consideration for re-designation, i.e. The Plaza/Denmark Street, the north-eastern end of Peach Street and Broad Street.' (para. 6.15)*

Retail geography

3.34 The retail geography of the area is dominated, particularly in comparison terms, by the competing centres of Reading and to a lesser extent Bracknell and Camberley.

3.35 Within the Borough, Wokingham is the largest centre which exerts the greatest influence over shopping patterns, both in convenience and comparison terms. The smaller district centres perform a primarily local convenience and service shopping role. Given their fundamentally different role, these are not reviewed in detail in this Assessment.

Wokingham town centre

3.36 The WBC RSR provides the following conclusions on the role of Wokingham town centre:

- It serves a predominantly day-to-day shopping and service function for the local and working population;
- The level of convenience and comparison retail provision is below the national average;
- The recorded vacancy level is comparable to national averages but this is distorted by units acquired for redevelopment, i.e. the true vacancy level is below average;
- The centre is vital and viable by day; however, there is a need to enhance the night-time economy offer in terms of leisure provision and food and drink offer;
- The centre lacks large, modern retail units which would attract higher-end, high street retailers;
- The number and quality of comparison retail tenants should be significantly enhanced to increase the attractiveness of the town centre the prevent leakage of comparison goods expenditure;
- Whilst the overall environmental quality is high, there is no real retail circuit in the centre;
- Much of the above could be resolved through the masterplanning process (WTCM SPD) to establish complementary retail circuits anchored by new retail-led development at either end of Denmark Street.

3.37 A health check was undertaken this year; the results of this are contained at **Appendix 2**. This confirms that relatively little has changed since the WBC RSR was published[6], which is in part a testament to the centre's resilience to the continuing economic adversity but also confirms that the deficiencies in terms of limited retail and A3-5 offer remain.

Competing centres

3.38 **Reading** is located 11 km north west of Wokingham. It is identified as a Primary Regional Centre and a Centre of Significant Change in the the South East Plan. It comprises in excess of 140,000 sqm net of retail floorspace and is consistently ranked as one of the major UK retail centres. Major comparison retailers present in the centre include John Lewis, Debenhams, Zara, H&M, Reiss, French Connection, Topshop, M&S, River Island, Oasis, Mango, Boots, Primark and Waterstones.

3.39 The centre is noted to fulfil leisure, entertainment and cultural needs for a wide catchment, with a well-developed evening economy including a wide variety of pubs, clubs, restaurants, cafes and cinema provision.

3.40 **Bracknell**, located 8 km east of Wokingham, is a New Town and a Secondary Regional Centre in the South East Plan. The retail offer is focused along the High Street and Princess Square (single

[6] It is noted that vacancies in the centre have declined: recorded at 10 units in July 2012 as set out in Appendix 2. Section 4 uses January 2013 information to demonstrate compliance to the sequential approach; clearly vacant premises located within either of the application sites are excluded from this search, thus four units are identified. This is lower than the national average and points towards the strength of the centre.

managed shopping centre). The centre comprises approximately 52,000 sqm gross retail floorspace, with multiple representation from Bentalls (department store), Boots, HMV, Argos and Peacocks. Overall, the centre's offer is focused on budget and discount retailers.

3.41 There is a Compulsory Purchase Order in place to facilitate the regeneration of the town centre to include 250,000 sqm of new retail and leisure floorspace. Whilst this has been planned for some time (the original permission dates from 2006), recent press indicates that there remains momentum to deliver the project which has included some key lettings.

3.42 **Camberley**, to the south east of Wokingham, exerts attraction on the southern parts of the Borough's residents. The centre has recently been strengthened by the development of The Atrium, which provided an additional 12,300 sqm (gross) retail space in the centre, together with the provision of a new cinema, bowling alley, health club and restaurants.

Commitments

3.43 The table below sets out the relevant convenience and comparison commitments in the Borough:

Table 4: Retail commitments (sqm net)

Development	Convenience	Comparison	Total
Lidl, Woodley	683	76	759
Land at Winnersh Triangle	700	0	700
Lidl, Wokingham[7]	1,157	129	1,286

3.44 It is understood that the Lidl at Woodley opened in August 2010 and the Lidl at Wokingham opened in November 2011.

3.45 It should be noted that whilst the permission for the Lidl store in Wokingham supersedes a previous commitment on the site for a DIY store of 2,246 sqm net (reference F/2006/8916). As such, there are no known significant comparison goods floorspace commitments in the Borough.

Conclusions

3.46 The principle of retail-led redevelopment in Wokingham town centre at the application sites is established in adopted and emerging planning policy.

3.47 The evidence base clearly identifies a need for further convenience goods floorspace in Wokingham town centre to resolve existing overtrading and act as an anchor store in a major new scheme to form a new, complementary retail circuit at the southern part of Denmark Street. Whilst there are two commitments for new limited assortment discounters (LADs) in the Borough, these stores serve a distinct section of the convenience market and will primarily address what was

[7] Details derived from Retail Assessment submitted in support of application F/2010/1753

previously identified as a deficiency in the quality of provision, rather than relieve pressure on existing main steam food shopping provision.

3.48 In comparison terms, significant leakage is identified by the evidence base but so too is the potential to resolve this through the provision of modern, large-format retail space in Wokingham town centre. Whilst the centre itself adequately meets some local shopping needs, without significant investment to attract new, higher-quality comparison retailers into Wokingham and in the face of strong competition from surrounding centres, it will not be able to enhance its market share and will not compete effectively as a 'major' town centre location.

3.49 The proposed development delivers in total a net increase in floorspace, as defined in Table 1 above, of:

- Convenience 3,546 sqm net sales area
- Comparison 4,614 sqm net sales area.

3.50 This compares to the WBC RSR identified capacity in 2021 of:

- Convenience 4,473 sqm net sales area
- Comparison 5,282 to 9,691 sqm net sales area.

3.51 Accordingly, it is clear from the above that the proposed new development falls well within the capacity tolerances identified by the WBC RSR and planned for in the development plan.

3.52 There is a qualitative deficiency in the evening offer in Wokingham town centre. This is in contrast to the strong offer available in Reading.

3.53 Wokingham town centre is the preferred location for large-scale retail and leisure investment. Furthermore, the application sites are the key locations allocated to deliver this investment through redevelopment of part of, and the seamless extension to, the existing town centre.

4 SEQUENTIAL APPROACH

4.1 Given that the location of Peach Place within the defined Primary Shopping Area and Elms Field as an edge-of-centre site, the sequential site search is focused on other vacant units within the town centre.

Area of search

4.2 Having regard to the PPS4 Practice Guidance, which remains in force despite PPS4 being superseded by the NPPF, the following advice is provided in terms of the area of search (para. 6.22):

'When considering applications, LPAs will need to consider the extent of the catchment area likely to be served by the proposal, and to then identify alternative sites located in existing centres within the catchment area. This will determine whether sites in other nearby centres may represent more appropriate locations in which to accommodate the scale and form of development proposed'

4.3 Wokingham is at the top of the identified retail hierarchy; given the principle of the proposed retailing, no other centres within the catchment are reviewed as part of the sequential site search.

4.4 Furthermore, given the stated objective of the proposal to deliver high-quality retail floorspace in the town centre suitable to meet the needs of major retailers to enhance Wokingham's market share, the town centre is the only location in which this need could be met. Locating the floorspace in centres other than Wokingham would fail to fulfil this objective. The area of search is therefore limited to Wokingham town centre.

4.5 The site is partially within the Primary Shopping Area; accordingly, only in-centre sites represent sequentially preferable alternatives.

Assessment of sequential sites

4.6 Drawing on the WTCM SPD, which identified three short-term opportunity sites for development in the town centre, and the recently determined Lidl application (reference F/2010/1753), which is located on an out-of-centre site and therefore inferior in sequential terms, three sites are considered:

- Elms Field and Paddocks Car Park
- Peach Street/Rose Street
- Station Gateway

4.7 The first two sites comprise the application sites. The latter site is located more than 500m from the nearest defined Primary Shopping Area on Broad Street, thus it is not sequentially preferable to the application sites.

Vacant premises within the town centre

4.8 A site visit in December 2012 identified the following premises (all figures GIA):

- 4 Denmark Street (100 sqm)
- 24 Denmark Street (70 sqm)
- 11 Peach Street (110 sqm)
- 47 Peach Street (120 sqm)

4.9 Whilst a flexible approach to the sequential approach is advocated in the Practice Guidance, the proposal comprises floorspace significantly in excess of the available floorspace. Additionally, it would have a negative effect upon the town centre, taking up a substantive part of the available vacant floorspace, particularly in circumstances where the applications themselves involve redevelopment or refurbishment of a number of vacant premises.

4.10 The combined vacant floorspace totals 400 sqm and is spread across the town centre. Town centres, even the most healthy, always have a balance of vacant floorspace. This allows for 'churn' where premises are available for new town centre businesses or existing businesses to relocate to. It also allows for refurbishment and upgrading of premises thus improving the overall quality of town centre building stock. Indeed, of the vacant units noted above, a change of use application at 24 Denmark Street has been approved to permit use as an estate agents.

4.11 Given the low number of vacancies, it is unsurprising that there are no substantially sized units, nor are there any significant concentrations that would allow reconfiguration to accommodate larger floorplates.

4.12 Accordingly, the vacant premises within the centre outside the application sites are not considered suitable to accommodate the development are therefore dismissed in sequential terms.

Conclusion

4.13 As such, the application sites represent the most sequentially preferable locations for additional retail floorspace of this scale and fulfil adopted planning policy allocations. The proposal has been designed to ensure that the development forms an integral part of an extended Primary Shopping Area.

5 RETAIL IMPACT

5.1 This section reviews the proposed development against the criteria set out at paragraph 26 of the NPPF: impact on planned investment and impact on town centre vitality and viability.

Impact on planned investment

5.2 As set out in Section 4, the application sites are clearly identified as the preferred location for retail-led mixed-use development of this scale. The proposals adhere to the principles set out in the WTCM SPD and are in accordance with the Core Strategy allocations. As such, the development of the application sites, as both allocations and town centre sites, are the main planned investment in Wokingham. The impact will therefore be overwhelmingly positive.

5.3 Furthermore, it will act as a catalyst for development elsewhere in Wokingham by sending a positive signal to prospective investors in the town.

Impact on town centre vitality and viability

Convenience impact

5.4 Having regard to Wokingham's position at the top of the retail hierarchy, the Borough area will be assumed as the catchment/study area for the development. As such, the impact assessment is modelled on the basis of the catchment contained in the WBC RSR. A plan is contained at **Appendix 3**.

5.5 A quantitative convenience impact assessment is contained at **Appendix 4** and assumes an assessment year of 2018, based on the Peach Place element of the scheme being completed in early 2017 and the Elms Field element being completed in late 2015.

5.6 The tables at **Appendix 4** are structured as follows:

- **Table 1:** Proposed development & turnover 2018
- **Table 2:** Population and convenience expenditure 2011 to 2018
- **Table 3:** Convenience market shares 2011
- **Table 4:** Implied main food and top-up spending 2011
- **Table 5:** Implied convenience turnover 2018
- **Table 6:** Benchmark convenience turnovers 2011 and 2018,
- **Table 7:** Convenience impact 2018
- **Table 8:** Cumulative convenience impact 2018.

5.7 This assessment of convenience impact is based on the WBC RSR, assuming the market share patterns established by the March 2007 household shopper questionnaire undertaken as part of the Donaldsons Wokingham Borough Retail Study (August 2007).

5.8 The assessment employs the most recent data inputs for the following and therefore updates the assumptions used in the WBC RSR:

- Population and expenditure estimates (2011) derived from Experian Retail Planner (2011)
- Expenditure growth derived from Experian forecasts (Retail Planner Briefing Note 9)
- Convenience trading densities derived from Verdict (November 2011)

5.9 Table 1 (Appendix 4) sets out that the convenience element of proposal could have a turnover of up to £47.4m in 2018. This assumes an increase in floor area of 3,546 sqm net and applies a convenience trading density typical of any of the major retailers, projected forward to 2018 and allowing for a 0.2% per annum increase in sales efficiency.

5.10 Because the WBC RSR was prepared as planning policy evidence base, it examines the overall performance of each centre and does not provide a detailed breakdown of existing facilities within each town, including both in and out-of-centre facilities. Given the nature of the proposal and the requirement to assess impact on the town centre, it is important to understand how the proposal will impact on specific stores.

5.11 By utilising the 2007 NEMS survey and applying market shares to current expenditure and population information, Table 4 shows how existing convenience facilities are performing. Whilst the out-of-centre Morrisons at Woosehill Shopping Centre appears to be underperforming against benchmark levels, it is noted that overtrading at the in-centre Waitrose and the out-of-centre Tesco is substantial: more than £30m in 2011.

5.12 When predicting impact, whilst the same study area is adopted as the WBC RSR, it is acknowledged that this does not represent the primary catchment in convenience terms. The impact assessment therefore does not assume that the proposed new convenience floorspace will draw equally from each zone in the study area.

5.13 Accordingly, Zones 1-3 are considered to constitute the primary catchment, with 75% of the turnover being drawn from these zones. It is assumed 10% will represent inflow expenditure, and the remaining 15% will be drawn from Zones 4-6.

5.14 The table below summarises how this translates into impact on existing stores and centres. In relation to the existing M&S store and its foodhall, on the basis an enhanced store will be reprovided within the development, the assessment effectively ring-fences the existing turnover and assumes no impact. This is based on Table 7 of **Appendix 4**.

Table 5: Convenience impact summary

Store/centre	Turnover	Diversion	Post-diversion turnover	Impact
Wokingham (in-centre)				
M&S	£3.65m	£0	£3.65m	0%
Waitrose	£45.34m	£9.19m	£36.15m	20%
Local stores	£3.68m	£0.13m	£3.55m	4%
Wokingham (out-of-centre stores)				
Tesco	£58.52m	£14.56m	£43.96m	25%
Morrisons	£14.39m	£1.96m	£12.43m	14%
Other stores/centres				
Sainsbury's Winnersh	£48.06m	£3.80m	£44.26m	8%
Asda Lower Earley	£93.14m	£3.86m	£89.28m	4%

5.15 The proposal will result in more than £47m of convenience turnover being drawn into the town centre. It is acknowledged that a portion of this is in the form of diversion from existing in-centre facilities (namely Waitrose); however, the majority is new turnover that is currently going to either out-of-centre stores or centres further afield. Furthermore, the existing Waitrose store is significantly overtrading, such that the proposed development is unlikely to undermine the viability of the store or result in its closure.

5.16 The impact on Wokingham will be overwhelmingly positive, promoting more sustainable convenience shopping practices by redirecting expenditure from out-of-centre stores back into the town centre. In addition to a direct increase in turnover by drawing shoppers back to the centre, the opportunities for linked trips and spin-off expenditure will be generated, to the benefit of the centre's overall vitality and viability.

5.17 Table 8 in **Appendix 4** includes analysis of the cumulative impact of the proposed development with the committed Lidl. This adopts the anticipated impacts set out in the applicant's retail work, whereby 50% of the store's turnover (£2.06m) is assumed to derive from Zone 1 stores i.e. Wokingham town centre and the out-of-centre Tesco and Morrisons stores.

5.18 The remaining 50% comes from stores beyond Zone 1; however, this is not translated into diversion from specific stores. Given the conclusions of the above analysis, whereby the impact on centres beyond Wokingham has been shown to be acceptable, this is not considered to give rise to any adverse impacts on other centres.

5.19 With regard to Wokingham town centre, the impact work undertaken for the Lidl application took account of the planned foodstore proposed by this application; accordingly, a cumulative impact assessment has already been undertaken and was judged to be acceptable. For completeness, the exercise has been repeated and it can be seen that whilst there would be further diversion from the in-centre Waitrose (£0.16m), even in the cumulative scenario, the store would continue to trade at a significantly higher level than benchmark. Furthermore, in the cumulative scenario, it should be borne in mind that the convenience turnover of the town centre will have been significantly bolstered by the proposed development.

5.20 As such, the cumulative impact of the proposed development, taking account of the new in-centre element and with existing commitments is considered to be acceptable with reference to the guidance set out in the NPPF at paragraph 26.

Comparison impact

5.21 As set out in Section 4, there is a deficiency in modern, high-quality retail floorspace in Wokingham town centre that is capable of attracting major operators. Furthermore, the WBC RSR confirms the potential of the town centre to deliver such floorspace and increase the market attraction of Wokingham, thereby reducing leakage.

5.22 The comparison impact of the proposal is modelled in **Appendix 4** and are structured as follows:

- **Table 1:** Proposed development and turnover 2018
- **Table 9:** Population and comparison expenditure 2011 to 2018
- **Table 10:** Comparison market share (constant) and implied turnovers 2011 and 2018
- **Table 11:** Comparison market share (adjusted) and implied turnovers 2011 and 2018
- **Table 12:** Comparison capacity 2018

5.23 Table 1 (**Appendix 4**) estimates that the net increase in comparison turnover as a consequence of the development to be in the order of £18.78m in 2018.

5.24 Table 9 (**Appendix 4**) shows comparison goods expenditure growth in the study area of £314m in the period between 2011 and 2018. Taking into account the attraction of existing facilities, this suggests that, based on constant market shares, turnover in Wokingham town centre will increase from £71.19m to £93.74m (Table 10 **Appendix 4**).

5.25 However, as set out in Section 4, the WBC RSR undertook analysis on the basis of further retail development in Wokingham town centre resulting in a reduction in leakage from the catchment as a consequence of improving the town centre's market share. These assumptions are applied to the updated population and expenditure data contained in Table 9 (**Appendix 4**); the outcomes are provided in Table 11 (**Appendix 4**).

5.26 Under this scenario, it is envisaged that the turnover of the town centre, as a consequence of improved market share over the period, will increase from £71.19m in 2011 to £109.78m i.e. an increase in available turnover of £38.59m.

5.27 Table 12 (**Appendix 4**) sets out the benchmark turnover of existing facilities in the centre; this is estimated to be £68.38m in 2011. Applying a sales efficiency of 2.5% per annum, it is estimated that in 2018 this will have increased to £81.28m, pointing towards a surplus of £28.5m.

5.28 Having regard to the anticipated turnover of the proposal, it is clear that there is capacity in the centre to absorb this additional floorspace without detriment to the performance of existing facilities.

5.29 Fundamentally, it is only by allowing this additional floorspace, which will deliver qualitative improvements to the stock of floorspace available in the centre and attract higher calibre comparison retailers, that this uplift in market share that will be realised.

Conclusion

5.30 In quantitative and qualitative terms, the impact of the proposal on Wokingham will be positive. The benefits the scheme will deliver in terms of retaining shoppers in the town centre and promoting more sustainable shopping patterns are entirely compliant in national planning policy terms, as well as with existing and emerging local policy.

5.31 Furthermore, the application represents a significant investment in Wokingham town centre and will act as a positive signal to the market in terms of attracting future investment.

6 IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS FOR A3, A4 AND A5 USES

6.1 Unlike more traditional retail, demand for restaurants, cafes and public houses is by its very nature discretionary and therefore much more elastic. As such, estimates of expenditure on these uses are inherently less reliable; thus predicting the need for and therefore impact of such uses is more difficult.

6.2 Whilst a maximum quantum of 3,000 sqm (gross) across the two application sites has been applied for, it is expected that a much lower quantum will come forward.

6.3 It is acknowledged that saved Local Plan policies WSH6 and WSH7 seek to guard against the dilution of A1 floorspace within the designated shopping frontages; however, this does not take into account the fundamental structure shift that is underway in the role and function of town centres. Faced with increasing competition from special forms of trading, notably the internet, traditional town centres have been increasingly forced to differentiate themselves and provide a range of attractions in terms of leisure and services as an alternative to the traditional retail expansion route i.e. compete in sectors where the internet is not able to.

6.4 Put simply, whilst retailing is important, the availability, quality and choice of complementary leisure based activities within a centre influences consumers' behaviour and necessarily their choice of where to visit. As set out in Section 3, whilst the day time service offer is relatively well established, there is an identified deficiency in evening leisure uses. At present, therefore, Wokingham is less able to compete in an increasingly important sector of the retail and leisure market.

6.5 Given the current economic climate and the changing role of traditional town centres, the need for flexibility in the way in which town centres operate is critical; the planning applications have therefore been submitted on the basis of allowing flexible A Class Uses to ensure the development is capable of meeting market demands. The proposed development will deliver the type of modern floorspace necessary to attract national multiple operators that will perform a complementary role to both the existing day and evening leisure economy.

6.6 Accordingly, approving further A3, A4 and A5 uses as part of the applications which will both generate footfall and benefit from spin-off expenditure as shoppers choose to dwell longer in Wokingham, will serve to enhance vitality and viability in a sustainable town centre location. This accords with the principles laid out in national and development plan policy.

7 HOTEL IMPACT

7.1 The proposed location for the hotel at the corner of Denmark Street and Wellington Road is within the designated town centre boundary and is therefore an acceptable location in principle i.e. there is no requirement under the NPPF to examine either issues of impact or sequential on the basis the proposal is in the most sequential preferable location and, as development in the town centre, will positively impact on vitality and viability.

7.2 However, as part of pre-application discussions, WBC has nevertheless requested that an assessment of hotel impact should be provided as part of the planning application.

Policy guidance and existing provision

7.3 There is no formal WBC-produced evidence base that reviews existing hotel provision or predicts need for further provision over plan period. The PPS4 Practice Guidance acknowledges that the methodology for impact assessment focuses on retail impact and that methodologies for assessing the impact of other town centre uses are less well established. With regard to hotel proposals, it states that: '*having regard to the level of demand and occupancy in different market sectors, there may be cases where the impact of a new out of centre hotel could undermine the viability and contribution of more central hotels, or prejudice the potential of more central hotels, or prejudice the potential to secure further hotel development on a more central site*' (para. 7.13).

7.4 Hotels are an integral part of the tourism industry in Britain. The Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism (2006) ('the Good Practice Guide'), prepared by the DCLG and replacing PPG21 (Tourism), sets out the key considerations that planners should take into account when evaluating a tourism proposal (paragraph 5.5), namely whether the proposal:

- will help to protect or improve a specific site or location;
- will contribute to tourism in the locality, explaining that new development will usually be beneficial to the local economy and complement the area's tourism function; and,
- impact the vitality and viability of town centres.

7.5 The Good Practice Guide states that tourism can be a focus for regeneration in urban areas, provide a catalyst for growth in an area and help maintain underused recreation facilities (paragraph 2.4).

7.6 The following table provides details of known hotels within Wokingham. These are shown on the plan at **Appendix 5**:

Table 6: Existing hotel provision

	Address	Number of rooms
Dukes Head In centre	56 Denmark Street Wokingham	5
Cantley Lodge Out of centre	Wellington Road Wokingham	25
Hilton St Anne's Manor Out of centre	London Road Wokingham	170
Cantley House Hotel Out of centre	Milton Road Wokingham	42
The Emmbrook Inn Out of centre	Emmbrook Road	12
The Pheasant Inn Out of centre	355 Reading Road Winnersh	12
Best Western Out of centre	Mill Lane Sindlesham	129
Holiday Inn Reading Out of centre	Wharfedale Road, Winnersh Triangle	174

7.7 It is clear that provision within Wokingham town centre is very limited. Indeed, provision in the Borough is dominated by out-of-centre hotels, the largest of which are located on major arterial routes (M4 and M32) and are in closer proximity to Reading and Bracknell than Wokingham town centre, thus adding little to town centre vitality and viability.

Impact on planned investment

7.8 The Elms Field application site is allocated for redevelopment in the adopted Core Strategy; this is supplemented by the WTCM SPD which provides an indicative land use strategy for the site. Whilst it is acknowledged that the land use plan does not envisage hotel development on the site, it is notable that the site immediately to the south is marked as potentially suitable for a hotel, establishing the principle of additional hotel development in the town centre.

7.9 Furthermore, as set out in Section 4, the emerging MDD DPD revises the WTCM SPD and includes a hotel as a potential use for the Elms Field site. As such, there is an emerging train of thought in local planning policy for additional hotel development in Wokingham town centre and more specifically on the Elms Field application site. This ties into the acknowledgement in the Good Practice Guide that tourism can provide a catalyst for the growth and regeneration of urban areas.

7.10 There are no other known commitments or proposals being advanced for hotel investment in Wokingham town centre.

7.11 The applications are therefore delivering this planned investment in the town centre. It is not considered that in doing so the development might prejudice any other planned investment in Wokingham town centre.

Impact on town centre vitality and viability

7.12 The proposed hotel will increase the amount and choice of hotel accommodation available in Wokingham town centre. Hotel provision is fundamentally demand led; extensive work undertaken by the consultant team for the applications point to demand from operators in securing representation in Wokingham town centre. An operator is now confirmed for the proposed hotel, and as a national fascia operator they will be capable of attracting both business and tourist guests.

7.13 Existing town centre facilities are limited to a small, independent hotel with only five rooms that caters to a fundamentally different section of the market than that of the proposed 80-bed multiple hotel, which will more readily compete with existing larger scale out-of-centre provision within the Borough, as well as provision beyond the Borough boundaries in Reading and Bracknell. The limited nature of existing provision is considered to, in tourism terms, mean that potentially people view Wokingham as a day trip rather than a base for a break, and so do not dwell in the centre; and in business terms, means that professionals will opt for either out-of-centre options or options in Bracknell and Reading.

7.14 One of the stated aims of the WTCM SPD is that of establishing an 18-hour economy in Wokingham town centre. In combination with the proposed new class A3-5 uses, it is considered that the hotel will increase activity in the town centre beyond the daytime to the benefit of overall vitality and viability, generating additional linked-trip expenditure in the centre.

Conclusion

7.15 Hotel provision at the Elms Field site is acceptable in principle at national planning policy terms. This is reiterated in adopted and emerging local policy.

7.16 A review of existing provision within the Borough shows that it is dominated by out-of-centre hotels and that provision in the town centre itself is very limited. The proposed hotel will therefore result in increased footfall in the town centre beyond traditional work hours, generating potential for spin-off expenditure in the planned 18-hour economy, as well as promoting more sustainable transport patterns by attracting people to an accessible in-centre location.

7.17 The hotel will therefore enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre.

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 Fundamentally, the NPPF articulates a presumption in favour of sustainable development; that is, development should be approved unless the impacts outweigh the benefits.

8.2 This statement has conclusively demonstrated that the proposed development would secure major investment in Wokingham town centre, enabling enhancements to the range and quality of the retail offer in the town. The scale of proposed development is such that it will promote more sustainable shopping and leisure patterns by enabling the centre to compete more effectively with surrounding higher order centres such as Reading and Bracknell without challenging their position in the hierarchy. Moreover, the proposed development is 'planned' development identified through adopted and up-to-date development plan policies of the Council directed expressly at regenerating the town centre of Wokingham.

8.3 The principle of redevelopment within the main retail areas and development as an extension to the main shopping area is established in adopted and emerging planning policy. Furthermore, development of broadly the scale proposed has been modelled into the retail evidence base; this investment has therefore been planned into the development of Wokingham town centre.

8.4 In addition to delivering a significant quantum of high-quality retail floorspace within and adjacent to the town centre, the proposed development will also enhance the leisure offer in Wokingham by increasing the scope for A3, A4 and A5 operators to locate to the town. This, together with the proposed hotel, will assist in the creation of the planned 18-hour economy in Wokingham.

8.5 With reference to NPPF paragraph 27, it is only in circumstances where an application fails to satisfy the sequential approach or would give rise to significant adverse impacts that planning permission should be refused. In this instance, this statement has demonstrated that not only are the application sites the most sequentially preferable locations for the proposed development but that the impacts arising will be overwhelmingly beneficial to the vitality and viability of Wokingham town centre.

Appendices

1. Masterplan

2. Wokingham Health Check

3. Study Area

4. Quantitative Impact Tables

5. Existing hotel provision