

**REVISED DRAFT**

**VIBRANT AYLESBURY VALE - AN EMERGING VISION**

**1. Context**

Aylesbury Vale faces a period of significant growth. The District Council is determined to seize the opportunities created by growth, so that Aylesbury and the Vale may thrive as a vibrant community, rather than become little more than a dormitory area.

But, it is concerned to create a sustainable community too, where the quality of the local environment is nurtured and residents are encouraged to participate in their local communities.

As part of the concern to create a sustainable community, the Council wants to contain the trend in out-commuting; currently the Vale is a net exporter of labour (in net terms, approximately 10,000 people leave the area each day to work elsewhere). The Council is keen to ensure that residents don't simply sleep in the Vale overnight; we want them to work, shop and spend their leisure time here too.

**1.1 Aylesbury**

Aylesbury, as a town, is scheduled to grow by approximately 25% over the next ten years, which equates to approximately 5,000 additional homes. Proposals announced recently by the Deputy Prime Minister envisage yet more growth for both Aylesbury and the Vale in the medium term.

This growth brings with it important opportunities. It brings the prospect of more homes and more land for business premises, which will help to position Aylesbury as an economic powerhouse, with links both to the Thames Valley and beyond it, to London, and to Milton Keynes and the emerging South Midlands. Growth also brings with it the opportunity to rejuvenate the town and extend the range of shops and other facilities available to local people. At the same time, growth needs to be accompanied by investment in public infrastructure, such as roads, education and health services.

**1.2 Aylesbury in the wider Vale**

The future of the town and its rural hinterland is inextricably linked; rural communities surrounding Aylesbury look to it for services, while urban communities access rural areas for leisure opportunities and local food producers. If urban services stagnate or decline because Aylesbury becomes little more than a dormitory town, residents in rural communities will lose out too. The impact on the local environment and transport infrastructure could be greater too, as residents are forced to travel further and further for work and services.

Given the development pressures on the area, compromises will need to be struck, but the rural feel of great swathes of the District should be retained and enhanced, characterised by open countryside. These areas need to be served by vibrant market towns, such as Buckingham and Winslow, and village centres, such as Haddenham and Wendover, providing as wide a range of local facilities and amenities as possible. The local infrastructure serving these centres should be upgraded at every opportunity. Rural diversification should be encouraged and the opportunities for local people and visitors alike to enjoy the countryside enhanced, including through such projects as the Bernwood Jubilee Walk.

### 1.3 The Vision

Aylesbury Vale District Council's vision for Aylesbury Vale is of a network of vibrant towns, based on a thriving, inclusive community, an expanding and diverse local economy, with good quality shops, facilities and services. It is determined to avoid Aylesbury becoming little more than a dormitory town at the end of a railway line. As a vibrant town, residents and visitors alike would shop, work and spend their leisure time locally.

For the wider Vale, the Council is concerned to see vibrant communities here too, but in keeping with the essentially rural nature of much of the District.

## 2. Defining characteristics

There are two important elements to the characteristics of the Vale: the physical structure, which provides a sense of place; and the community, which brings a sense of belonging.

What should be the defining characteristics of the Vale? What should it be known for and its reputation be based on? Perhaps there are three defining characteristics for each element:

The physical structure should be characterised by:

- **Individuality.** Across the country, many towns have become bland and indistinguishable from each other. Yet Aylesbury has some strong elements of individuality, including independent retailers, a distinctive Market Square, and a number of distinguished public and residential buildings. These need to be retained, nurtured and, wherever possible, added to. In the case of buildings, it is not only the old ones that provide this individuality; newer ones, such as the "blue leanie" or Aqua Vale, illustrate the contribution of new structures.

- **Local Character.** The heritage of the area gives it a strong local character. In the town, examples include the Market Square, Kingsbury, Temple Square, St Mary's Church and the old town. In the Vale, character comes from its close proximity to the Chilterns, to Rothschild properties (such as Waddesdon Manor, Claydon House and Ascott House) and other National Trust sites.

But newer developments can contribute to the character too, such as the

emerging café culture in parts of the town and the periodic farmers' and continental markets.

- **Quality.** The Vale must insist on this, both in terms of future developments and services. For example, the quality of buildings and the standard of maintenance of both those buildings and the street scene, through to the standard of service provided in shops and restaurants, councils and local hospitals. The town must demand quality in some of the key developments in the pipeline, such as the redevelopment of “sites A and B” on either side of Exchange Street, and the creation of new business premises within the Aston Clinton and Berryfields major development areas.

The community should be characterised by:

- **Diversity.** Communities comprise people from different backgrounds, with different attributes. Diversity may be reflected in terms of age, ethnicity, ability, employment and religion, to name but a few. We need to draw on this diversity, which can add to the sense of vibrancy.

- **Inclusiveness.** An area which does not provide equality of opportunity is ill at ease with itself and one where the full potential of its local population is not being realised. A vibrant community needs to be matched by good quality housing, education, employment and social opportunities. In the case of Aylesbury itself, focus on the centre must not be to the exclusion of those who live on the periphery, and provision for one social group must not restrict access for another.

- **Participation.** All members of the community should be encouraged to participate in community activities. By doing so, they will be both contributing to the community in which they live and influencing its future development.

### 3. Dimensions to a vibrant Aylesbury Vale

These distinguishing characteristics need to be reflected in the different elements to a vibrant Aylesbury Vale. These elements include:

- Physical elements ..... what should it look and feel like?
- Transport ..... getting in, out and about.
- Services and the economy.
- Community.
- Image.

#### 3.1 Physical elements

In terms of Aylesbury itself, which will see significant development in the next few years, one of the distinguishing features is a succession of (public, open) squares. These include Temple Square, Kingsbury and Market Square. The water frontage provided by the Aylesbury Arm of the Grand Union Canal has the potential to be nurtured as another distinguishing feature. The development of “sites A and B” on either side of Exchange Street represents an important opportunity to build upon and reinforce these features and to create a new cultural centre for the town.

There is scope to delineate and encourage visitors to move through a succession of overlapping quarters:

- An historic quarter, comprising the old town, St Mary’s Church and the Museum, and incorporating Aylesbury’s Civil War connections;
- A café quarter ..... the pedestrianisation of Kingsbury could represent a particular opportunity here.
- Market Square, where the link between retail and heritage could be enhanced. The Market Square’s role, including as a public meeting place, with good quality public seating and improved lighting, could be strengthened. This could have implications for the current transport arrangements, with alternatives to bus flows through the Square providing an enhanced pedestrian environment.
- Canal Basin, which could form part of a cultural quarter, incorporating a new Civic Centre, with a link to Vale Park and Aqua Vale.

Throughout the Vale, the planning of development must prevent our towns and villages losing their identity, but instead emphasise the unique nature of each settlement. It must also safeguard the rural nature of much of the Vale and protect the quality of the environment.

### 3.2 Physical – feel and appearance

To facilitate a vibrant ambiance, a quality street scene is important. This might entail co-ordinated street furniture, streets which are clean and areas which are well lit and safe. Local residents and visitors alike must feel they can amble through the town and other settlements and use its facilities free from crime or, perhaps more importantly, the fear of it. Community safety must be built into future development at an early stage.

Several other elements also contribute to a sense of place. The role of green spaces and trees within the town is important, and these must be well maintained. Signage needs to be up to date, co-ordinated, accurate and of good quality. Public art can help delineate the various quarters of the town and add an air of anticipation. Public buildings need to be well maintained, as do commercial and private properties. There may be scope for introducing shop design guides to avoid cluttered advertisements and encourage quality shop fronts. A design strategy and management plan for key parts of the town, such as Kingsbury, could help to ensure proper co-ordination and an appropriate

emphasis on quality, as well as reinforcing the characteristics of different quarters.

Surrounding housing estates need to reinforce the appearance and sense of quality, including the dwellings themselves, the streets, open spaces and public amenities. Not only should the Council and other service providers maintain their own facilities, but local communities should be encouraged to contribute to their own surroundings and, where possible, private industry should play an active role in the communities in which they are based.

### 3.3 Transport

The population and economy of the Vale are set to grow, but there is increasing pressure to reduce reliance on the car. A comprehensive and integrated transport system will be crucial to the future success of the Vale.

First impressions count, so the main gateways into the town and the Vale need to project the defining characteristics. They should be attractive, easy to use and should provide rapid access to the destination. Approach roads, roundabouts and signage in particular need special attention. This includes removing unauthorised and unnecessary signage, as much as providing reliable information about what's available, where, and how to get there. The transport facilities need to be based on the different roles the town serves.

Aylesbury's developing evening economy needs to be supported by late-night transport systems, including (where possible) quality buses and taxis, which are clean, safe and comfortable to use, and car parks which are open to evening visitors. Innovative solutions to transport issues may be needed, for example to overcome the problem of providing drivers for late night bus services.

The conflicts between pedestrians and vehicle traffic need addressing. Particularly within Aylesbury town centre, the public areas need to be preserved for people, free from traffic. If residents are to be encouraged to use public transport, services should be readily accessible to enable swift and convenient transfer from one mode to another. Park and ride facilities planned for the edge of the town also represent an opportunity to reduce traffic congestion

Meanwhile, the designation of Aylesbury as a transport hub increases the need to enhance strategic transport links, for example between Aylesbury and Milton Keynes, and Aylesbury and the Thames Valley, as well as an effective rail link across London to European rail services, and to the emerging east/west rail link.

### 3.4 Services and economy

If Aylesbury Vale's reputation is to be based in part upon quality, this must be reflected in the standards of service provided by public agencies, such as local councils, schools and colleges, the health service and the police, as well as commercial organisations, such as shops, restaurants and cafes.

The emerging night-time economy needs to be complemented by effective lighting and transport links, together with services and arrangements which tackle both actual and perceived problems of crime and community safety.

If Aylesbury is to become a sustainable, economic powerhouse, its attraction as a place to do business needs to be marketed more actively, with the positive nurturing of businesses through business support centres and visible and readily accessible business advice and contacts.

The development of the employment land at Aston Clinton and Berryfields Major Development Areas needs to be of a quality which reflects the area's concern to move "up the value chain". Those parts of the "offer" that let the town down need to be tackled, such as long-standing empty office accommodation at important gateways into the town or industrial units that require refurbishment or redevelopment.

As well as encouraging major businesses into the area, smaller, more local ventures should also be supported, both during their start up phases and beyond, including in the more rural areas of the Vale. Rural industrial estates provide opportunities for local employment, while helping small businesses to take up and maintain a town centre presence can help to serve a range of interests and to reinforce a sense of local character.

The local Councils - Aylesbury Vale District Council, Buckinghamshire County Council and Town and Parish Councils across the Vale – each have a crucial role in promoting and developing Aylesbury Vale, including:

- in their planning and shaping of future development;
- as major land owners;
- in their influence over local transport arrangements;
- in their work to support business development;
- as providers of quality and customer focused services and facilities;
- in their role as community leaders, nurturing a sense of community.

By linking this vision to regional and national strategies, there is an opportunity to gain Government support and funding to help deliver it.

Other services, including health and education, must make long term plans to cater for changes in patient and pupil numbers, and changing health and educational needs and demands. Similarly, the transport infrastructure needs to be able to cope with changing patterns, as well as an increased volume of transport. Appropriate investment in local infrastructure will be necessary before the major population growth occurs.

### 3.5 Community

Physical infrastructure needs to be in place to provide for transport, health, educational and social needs, from the quality of housing to the capacity within

hospitals and schools. However, it is the people who make a community, not buildings.

To support learning and development throughout the community, the range of educational and training opportunities must be adequate to provide the appropriate skills base for the immediate future, and also the longer term.

The voluntary, community and charitable sectors should be recognised for their contribution to communities, and need to be involved in the long term development of the Vale. They will need to be supported appropriately to make their contribution fully.

The needs of particular sectors of the community also need recognition. For example, young people are future decision-makers, and should be empowered to contribute to the development of the Vale. The young and the elderly need affordable housing, access to good quality support services, facilities for active lifestyles, and safe environments.

Local communities facing disadvantage need particular support to help them identify and address those issues that prevent them making their full contribution.

A cohesive community is an important element of a vibrant community. In capitalising on the future population and economic growth of the Vale, the communities here already must not be ignored. New and old communities must be integrated, as must different age groups, ethnic groups and religious communities.

### 3.6 Image

Aylesbury Vale needs a clear and distinctive brand, reflecting its defining characteristics. This should be developed jointly by both the public and private sector and applied consistently by all stakeholders. The brand should create an air of mystery and anticipation, inviting people into the town and wider Vale, and be used in signage, events promotion, websites and promotional literature. This must be balanced with clear, accurate and up to date information on what is available and where.

Events and promotion can provide new attractions, particularly when based on personalities or characteristics associated with the area. For example, events and public art could be developed around Roald Dahl's association with Aylesbury.

The location of important information points, such as the Tourist Information Centre, should reflect the needs of visitors and residents alike, who are likely to be drawn to central places, such as the Market Square, particularly if its potential is fully exploited. Local people and businesses have an important role to play also: they are ambassadors for the area too, and could be encouraged to promote or sponsor events.

The Vale's appeal as a tourist attraction should be taken into account in the development of the brand too.

#### 4. **Process and funding**

This emerging vision needs to be dynamic, to take account of changing circumstances and the perspectives of many who have an interest in the Vale. Its very development needs to help create a sense of pride and place. It needs to influence the thinking and activities of those who have an interest in the Vale, for example, those who determine the transport arrangements, those who own or control property, and those who provide shops and services. It also needs to engage local residents and communities in both its development and delivery.

Clarity of vision and a consensus that the Vale should, indeed, be developed as a vibrant district and Aylesbury as a sustainable, economic powerhouse, should of itself give us the confidence to market ourselves to others in a way which attracts their investment for the benefit of existing residents and newcomers alike. This vision is a statement of intent, to which, it is hoped, many others will add their voice and ongoing support.

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