

## Comments with paragraph reference:

### Background

I notice that the unit of measurement used throughout the report is metric i.e. Kilometres and sqm  
Given that all road signs are in miles and very few of the public reading this document use metric I think it would be useful if distances were given in miles (imperial) as well as metric.

Some of my comments are duplicated as some of the VALP statements overlap.

1.15 The report says *the indicative target for convenience floor space is 6,980 sqm in Aylesbury town centre by 2033.*

Given the increase in the town's population over the past 10 years, vacant shop floor space has increased. This is particularly true with Vale Retail Park, Friars' Square and Hale Leys. With the increase in on-line shopping I would say that this figure is optimistic.

### Strategic Delivery

4.17 The report says *'to continue to grow the town successfully, key transport issues need addressing including tackling congestion, managing demand, enhancing access, increasing active travel and enhancing public transport in Aylesbury'.*

One key issue is the completion of the ring road. This is reliant on HS2 and the developers. Two key parts of the ring road are missing and are unlikely to be built. These are a link road north from A413 to the A418 and west from the A418 to Berryfields on the A41. In addition the ring Roads are not conformal dual carriage way but a mixture of carriageways.

4.18 The Aylesbury Transport Strategy says it wants to -

- *Improve transport access and movement to the town centre.*

From the south there are only two ways into Aylesbury. One is Tring Road and the other is Walton gyratory. There is no mention on how these two pinch points can be overcome. The chance of widening lower High Street by compulsory purchase has been lost as overdevelopment has taken place right up to the pavement edge.

- *Minimise the impact of future growth on traffic levels, congestion and air quality.*

This could be contradictory to later statements in the report saying that an increase in the use of the town centre is envisaged to help the economy and help with its vibrancy.

- *Make it easier and more accessible through provision of walking and cycling connections and the use of public transport.*

Cycling is decreasing in the town and walking is only possible from homes within less than a mile of the centre. Given that buses are heavily subsidised and most routes stop after 8.00 pm, the car will still be used as the primary means of access to the town centre.

4.21 *The report says 'In creating a Garden Town, the Plan must include green spaces and natural environments for local communities. Strategic multi-functional green infrastructure assets should be identified, retained and enhanced, including improving connectivity through the development of green corridors. Local open spaces should be protected and where possible connected to strategic multi-functional green infrastructure networks.'*

With the exception of the Canal, green corridors are not possible into the town centre. If anything any green space in or near to the town centre has been identified elsewhere the report as prime development land i.e. Thame Road, Ardenham Lane and Friarage Road

4.19 Quoting from the report *'The Aylesbury Transport Strategy builds on previous and currently planned improvements to transport infrastructure. The initial work has identified a list of potential transport interventions Proposed Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan as Proposed to be Modified 70 for Aylesbury which will enable growth, influence travel behaviour and meet the strategic objectives'*

My comments are as follows on the objectives

- *completing a series of outer link roads that will take traffic away from the town centre and allow*

*public transport priority improvements to take place on the main radial roads closer to the town centre, improving public transport journey time reliability.*

As already mentioned elsewhere in my comments this wish is entirely dependent on developers and HS2. Two big gaps in the scheme look as though they will never be accomplished.

- *implementing an overarching strategy to connect new developments, with each other, to key destinations and to the town centre by active travel and public transport.*

Transport for Bucks are already making it difficult to connect communities. I would point out a series of no right turns implemented on major routes into the town. i.e. A4157 Douglas Road into Stocklake, A418 onto Churchill Avenue

- *considering new ways to redesign roads within central area of Aylesbury to ensure access for all.*

This is difficult with the A41 running through the town centre and no room for widening. The 20 mph speed limit within the inner ring road is not enforced and Bucks CC policies (street parking) allow free movement of traffic in so called pedestrian areas such as the High Street and Market Square. The idea to traffic calm Exchange Street is ludicrous and has been spoken about for at least 20 years but never implemented.

- 4.30 The report says *'Aylesbury's most valued assets such as the historic old town, conservation areas, the river Thame, the Grand Union Canal and Hartwell House historic park and garden will be protected and enhanced, allowing communities to celebrate their history, their identity and their diversity'*. There is no mention of the River Bearbrook which is a great underused asset running through the town centre, most of which cannot be seen. This is probably because the plan is to culvert it for more development.

*'The growth will be planned in a way which minimises the need to travel by private car, with more and more people choosing to walk, cycle or use public transport through integrated forward looking and accessible transport options which supports economic prosperity and wellbeing for residents. Traffic growth will be managed to control congestion'*.

I have mentioned this elsewhere but will repeat my comments. Cycling is decreasing in the town and walking is only possible from homes within less than a mile of the centre. Given that buses are heavily subsidised and most routes stop after 8.00 pm, the car will still be used as the primary means of access to the town centre.

- *All residents will feel a strong sense of distinctive local identity as part of the garden community of Aylesbury Garden Town, including residents and visitors to its attractive and functioning centre.*

This is a major task for an incoming council. Over 15% of Aylesbury's population are from other ethnic origins. Very few participate in the leisure activities in the town be it theatre, cinema, restaurants, pubs or the arts centre. This statement is a meaningless just to be politically correct.

- 4.209 The report makes a number of statements relating to Aylesbury Town Centre. *'Market Square, Walton Street and Friars Square. Make more of the area's presence as a key retail, catering and leisure hub. Town centre policies to support proposals for retail and other main town centre uses, provided they are in accordance with the vision and aims for the town centre Kingsbury (including George Street and Pebble Lane)'*.

At present AVDC are not supporting their own policy and are allowing non-retail into key areas. i.e. 10. High Street & new units in Ling Lionel

*Create a more attractive environment for residents, visitors and businesses and improve it as the gateway to the Old Town. Town centre policies to support public realm improvements and improving the quality of the town centre Aylesbury Old Town (the historic quarter). Preserve and enhance this residential area as a key part of the town's heritage and culture offer and improve its links with the rest of the town centre, in keeping with its conservation area status Heritage assets policy to ensure these are properly considered when assessing development proposals.*

I very much support this initiative but it needs to be carried through. The hidden gem of the old town has been neglected for too long. i) Poor surfaces, cobbles and brick sets tarmacked over by utility companies, bad potholes. ii) Poorly placed traffic signage iii) pedestrian areas are not safe and are not policed. Traffic ignore speed restrictions and one way streets.

*Gateway South (railway and bus stations) Improve the railway and bus stations as key arrival points and improve their connection with the rest of the town centre. Allocation of area for comprehensive redevelopment (as shown on the policies map) including co-locating the bus and railway stations to create a public transport interchange.*

By far this is the daftest idea in the town centre plan. Firstly the bus station in its present form brings passengers directly into the heart of the town. The new scheme would add a physical barrier in the A41 in order to get to the town centre. Older visitors to the town centre would not want to walk that distance. Morrison's is a much used supermarket particularly for the residents across the Bourg bridge in Southcourt. The demolition of the supermarket would deplete the shopping offer in the town centre, something VALP says it wants to enhance. This idea should be depleted from VALP along with the demolition of the Friars Square car park.

*Upper and middle High street Create a more attractive retail environment (especially in middle High Street), improve connections between upper High Street and Exchange Street, ensure both upper and middle High Street are part of the retail circuit and flow with the rest of the town centre.*

I oppose the demolition of the former Granada cinema/Gals bingo hall. This should be made a central feature of the regeneration of the High Street

*Town centre policies to support public realm improvements and improving the quality of the town centre, including improvements for pedestrian access Cambridge Street, Buckingham Street and New Street. Cambridge Street: Improve the quality and attractiveness of the whole area, the continuity of active frontages along Cambridge Street and the appeal of Cambridge Street to independent shops.*

I applaud this idea, although it is not a new ambition. Bucks County Council have introduced parking in Cambridge Street as a money making machine. There has never been a will to have a fully pedestrianized area in the town centre or the will to enforce it. Active frontages would need fair landlords and the enforcement of AVDC's own shop front policy.

*Buckingham Street and New Street: Improve the physical environment, reduce dominance of the car and integrate the area more fully into the rest of the town centre and the retail Town centre policies to support proposals for retail, public realm improvements and improving the quality of the town centre, including improvements for pedestrian access.*

Buckingham Street once had an avenue of trees. As each one has been felled through one reason or another they have never been replaced. Until Bucks CC or the new Unitary changes its policy of a dislike for trees the town centre will lose more trees. Reasons given by Bucks CC include, leaf fall hazard, cost of clearing up leaves, utility cables and loss of parking spaces.

*Break down the concrete barrier of the inner ring road and improve links and accessibility from the rest of the town centre to Aylesbury Waterside Theatre, Aqua Vale Leisure Centre, Vale Park and the retail parks.*

Given that the inner ring road are trunk routes, A41, A413 & A418 I don't see how this can be achieved. Traffic is already gridlocked on these roads and adding pedestrians into the mix will only make things worse. The mixed use areas at the top of Great Western Street and at the Bourg bridge crossing of the A41 are an accident waiting to happen.

## **6.1 & 5 Employment and the Protection of key employment sites**

The report says *'The vision for the Plan in relation to employment is to ensure the availability of a diverse and flexible range of employment opportunities for new and existing businesses, which match the expectations for employment growth in the district. To support this, there is a need to maintain a flexible supply of employment land and premises. This includes making the best use of existing employment land and premises by retaining the most suitable sites and encouraging their refurbishment and renovation where necessary.'*

Your own published data says the 2011 Census shows that 35,025 residents commute out of the district to work (predominantly to areas just outside the district, but also further afield such as London), yet office space in the town centre has almost disappeared where office blocks have been converted to residential. The Economic Development Team at AVDC have said that there is a shortage of office space in and near to the town centre and supports the growth in office space in the local economy. Yet

they did nothing to stop the demolition of Derby House in Wendover Road or the conversion of small and large offices blocks in Walton Street, Buckingham Street and Oxford Road. The loss of employment space not only loses trade for shops in the week-day but also increases car journeys out of town.

### **Primary shopping frontages**

6.22 6.23 The council recognises the importance of the retail role of primary shopping frontages, and of having a mix of uses within Aylesbury town centre, and says it will ensure that A1 (shops) continue to predominate while allowing some provision of A3 (restaurants and cafes) and A2 uses, provided the overall mix of uses is considered acceptable. Whilst I applaud this approach as I have said previously at present AVDC are not supporting their own policy and are allowing non-retail into key areas. i.e. 10. High Street & new units in Long Lionel

### **E7 Tourism development**

The plan says *'The council will promote a growing, sustainable tourism sector, and will support proposals. Proposals for new or expanded tourism, visitor or leisure facilities will be supported within or adjacent to settlements'*. I would suggest reinstating a tourist office in Aylesbury and providing decent stop offs and parking for coaches.

### **Heritage assets**

VALP declares *'The historic environment is an asset of great cultural, social, economic 8.1 and environmental value. It contributes significantly to our quality of life and to the character of the district, representing a non-renewable resource that once lost is gone forever'* Yet in Aylesbury looking after the assets including listed buildings is poor. AVDC have only paid lip service in the pretence of protecting historic areas, conservation areas and listed buildings. Some examples:

- i) The civic group of buildings in Market Square including the old courts has been spoilt by adjacent over development of Friars Square with the garish frontage of the Metro bank.
- ii) Taxis continue to use Market Square as a rank, hence spoiling the look of the conservation area and the listed civic buildings. . Bucks CC in the pursuit of income do not want to lose valuable meter parking.
- iii) The splendid Grade 2 listed Ardenham House in Oxford Road is spoilt by adjacent businesses, parking uncaring tenants and owners and the promise in VALP of future development nearby
- iv) The grade 2 listed Walton Mill house continues to rot.

### **Conservation areas, listed buildings**

8.10 VALP says *'Conservation areas are areas of special historic or architectural interest, the special character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Conservation areas are locally designated heritage assets. Conservation areas are designated by Aylesbury Vale District Council, according to strategy set out in the AVDC Conservation Areas Supplementary Planning Document (adopted March 2011)'*.

Again just lip service. Aylesbury's 3 conservation areas continue to be spoilt by dustbins on show, poor pavement and road surfaces, temporary signage such as adverts on Byron House railings in Wendover Road and estate agent for sale boards and the abundance of weeds everywhere in the summer.

### **Registered historic parks and gardens & Scheduled monuments**

I note that there I no mention of Quarrendon Leas on periphery of Aylesbury, owned and managed by Buckinghamshire Conservation Trust

### **Heritage at Risk**

8.38 *The report says 'Investing in historic buildings can have a direct impact on the quality of life of residents. Many buildings at risk have a rich historic legacy and contribute to local identity. The repair and refurbishment of declining and/or derelict historic buildings can often be a catalyst in*

- encouraging confidence and investment in an area.*
- 8.39 *Wherever practicable the council will support endeavours to repair and reuse heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance and to provide long-term viable uses for buildings and structures that are vacant and at risk through cooperation with owners and Historic England.*

AVDC's record of protecting assets is poor and again the comments above need to be implemented. We have lost in the past 30 years many historic unlisted buildings. These include Duck Cottages in Green end, Oxford Road Mill, old police station in Walton Street, cattle market auction rings, electricity showrooms in Exchange Street to name just a few.

#### **Biodiversity and Geodiversity Protected sites**

- 9.56 *VALP states 'Where tree loss is unavoidable, they should be replaced with suitable new planting, either within the site or in the locality if this is more appropriate. Replacement planting should, as a minimum, be of commensurate value to that which is lost Development can make a positive contribution to the tree and hedgerow resource in the locality through new planting or the restoration and improved management of existing features. New plantings should endeavour to link up fragmented areas of existing woodland.'*

Aylesbury continues to lose trees on important sites and they are not replaced. Where developments have specified that tree planting should be carried out as screening, there is no enforcement id not carried out.

My main interest has been focused on Aylesbury and particularly the town centre. There is much to commend the report but also much is repeated. It seems to me that authors of the report have no empathy with the town and possibly do not live in the town. There is no talk on how any of the plans and schemes will be funded. I await with some enthusiasm.

**Cllr Roger King**