



# **Andover and Romsey Town Centres**

## Topic Paper

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this topic paper is to present a coordinated view of the evidence that has been considered in drafting policies in relation to delivering high quality development and regeneration in the Borough's Town Centres at Andover and Romsey. It is hoped that this will make it easier to understand how we have reached our conclusions.
- 1.2 It provides background information, including relevant national and local policies, summarises the key issues for this matter taking account of evidence and consultation feedback. It also sets out policy options we have considered and assessed to inform our draft policies or approach.
- 1.3 This topic paper may be revised and updated at each stage of preparation of the Local Plan. This would encompass any subsequent changes to policy, our key issues and any new relevant evidence which has been produced to guide the draft policies or approach. The papers are available to view and access from the council website: [www.testvalley.gov.uk/localplan2040](http://www.testvalley.gov.uk/localplan2040)
- 1.4 This topic paper supports the first statutory stage of preparing the draft Local Plan 2040 which is known as Regulation 18 which we are undertaking in two stages. This is Stage 1 which focusses on strategic matters. Following the public consultation for Stage 1, we will take account of any feedback to refine the draft Local Plan.

## ***Overview of Topic***

- 1.5 There are clearly a number of issues for town centres at present. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also accelerated the change in habits and behaviours of shoppers which was already impacting high streets across the country. As a result high streets need to be able to adapt quickly to meet the changing expectations of communities for a mix of shop and leisure uses, and to reflect new businesses that continue to emerge. However, flexibility does need to be balanced against the Council's ability to manage uses, in line with the masterplans for Andover and Romsey's town centres.
- 1.6 Ensuring the potential of our town centres so that they are able to adapt and be attractive, vibrant, and prosperous places is one of the Council's corporate priorities for Test Valley. Both Andover and Romsey have Adopted Town Centre Masterplans for mixed use developments, which has informed the draft Local Plan.
- 1.7 National policy recognises the role for residential use within town centres, however the appropriate location of dwellings is very important for maintaining the vitality of town centres as well as the amenity for residents, especially as the Council is seeking to encourage town centres to provide services to residents during the day and into the evening

- 1.8 How town centre policies interpret the Use Classes Order must remain current for the modern high street. Premises on the modern high street can often include more than one of these uses, for example a bookshop and café, which allows them to attract a wider range of customers.

## 2 Policy Context

### ***National Policy Context***

- 2.1 Chapter 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) sets out the Government's planning policies for town centres and deals with the matter of ensuring the vitality of town centres.

*“Paragraph 86: Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation. Planning policies should:*

- a) define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters;*
- b) define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, and make clear the range of uses permitted in such locations, as part of a positive strategy for the future of each centre;*
- c) retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones;*
- d) allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of development likely to be needed, looking at least ten years ahead. Meeting anticipated needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses over this period should not be compromised by limited site availability, so town centre boundaries should be kept under review where necessary;*
- e) where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available for main town centre uses, allocate appropriate edge of centre sites that are well connected to the town centre. If sufficient edge of centre sites cannot be identified, policies should explain how identified needs can be met in other accessible locations that are well connected to the town centre; and*
- f) recognise that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and encourage residential development on appropriate sites.”*

- 2.2 For the Local Plan it will need to draw boundaries in order to define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, in addition to making clear the range of uses permitted on the ground floor within each of these locations; this will allow the Council to encourage a greater flexibility of uses within both town centres.
- 2.3 The National Planning Policy Framework Annex 2 Glossary includes a definition of town centres, primary shopping area and main town centre uses

**“Town centre:** Area defined on the local authority’s policies map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. References to town centres or centres apply to city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance. Unless they are identified as centres in the development plan, existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute town centres.”

**“Primary shopping area:** Defined area where retail development is concentrated.”

**“Main town centre uses:** Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities).”

- 2.4 Other matters covered in the NPPF such as a sequential testing approach and impact assessments for out centre developments will be for Regulation 18 Stage 2 where these shall all be set out in relevant policies. Other chapters within the NPPF also have regard to a number of matters relevant to town centres including the promotion of public safety, parking standards and the creation of healthy, well designed areas.
- 2.5 While the importance of maintaining active street frontages remains given their role in maintaining vibrancy within town centres and giving a sense of security, what is no longer a requirement in the NPPF is the definition of primary and secondary frontages. Therefore such an approach has not been taken forward in the draft Local Plan; unlike the current Adopted Local Plan which identified primary and secondary frontages for both Andover and Romsey.
- 2.6 The Council may consider the use of Article 4 directions to limit Class MA permitted development within the conservation areas of Andover and Romsey at the next stage of plan preparation. This would be to restrict the scope of such permitted development rights to prevent the loss of commercial units within town centres in order to retain active frontages which contribute the viability and vitality of town centres.
- 2.7 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) sets out a similar approach, highlighting the merits of a wide variety of uses being permitted in town centres in order to maintain vitality. This includes residential development in close proximity to town centres allowing residents convenient access to services available in these locations. It also highlights the need for caution especially with regard to uses which may bolster the evening economy but which could result in noise and other impacts which may affect neighbouring uses.

*A wide range of complementary uses can, if suitably located, help to support the vitality of town centres, including residential, employment, office,*

*commercial, leisure/entertainment, healthcare and educational development. The same is true of temporary activities such as ‘pop ups’, which will often benefit from permitted development rights. Residential development in particular can play an important role in ensuring the vitality of town centres, giving communities easier access to a range of services. Given their close proximity to transport networks and local shops and services, local authorities may wish to consider locating specialist housing for different groups including older people within town centres or edge of centre locations.*

*Evening and night time activities have the potential to increase economic activity within town centres and provide additional employment opportunities. They can allow town centres to diversify and help develop their unique brand and offer services beyond retail. In fostering such activities, local authorities will also need to consider and address any wider impacts in relation to crime, noise and security.* Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 2b-001-20190722

### **Local Policy Context**

- 2.8 The Councils Corporate Plan, approved in 2019, sets out a vision and corporate objectives to guide the work of the Council and its investment priorities. Town Centres and their ability to adapt and be attractive, vibrant and prosperous places are one of the four core strategic priority areas which will inform our Local Plan.
- 2.9 The Local Plan will need to take account of the potential availability of additional sites for consideration for development. The Council has approved masterplans for Andover town centre and South of Romsey town centre. These have the potential to deliver housing and commercial development through redevelopment in the future.
- 2.10 The Revised Local Plan Five Year Review 2021 recommended policies for town centres should be revised to reflect the proposals in the recently adopted town centre masterplans. Also given the changes that are occurring in the retail sector and the general concern about the vitality of town centres it may be the appropriate for the Council to consider more emphasis on the introduction of residential development in the town centres, particularly in Andover where it appears that there may be more scope for introducing additional housing into the town centre.

## **3 Key Issues**

### **Adopted Local Plan**

- 3.1 The current Adopted Local Plan policies for town centres were considered appropriate at the time they were written, however changes in consumer behaviour have come about unexpectedly quickly and their impact has been felt not just by Test Valley but across the country. It is considered that the approach taken in policies LE12 and LE13 remain in line with current national policy, however changes in consumer and retailer practices now require additional flexibility to be considered in formulating new policies. As the use

and function of town centres are changing there is still a need to manage appropriate uses to maintain both vitality and viability and meet community needs.

- 3.2 Other current policies may also be relevant to our town centres and retail uses, however these are more detailed than the strategic policies being considered at Regulation 18 Stage 1 and will be reviewed as part of Regulation 18 Stage 2.

### ***Changing Pattern of Town Centre Use***

- 3.3 The way people have been using town centres has been evolving for some time. The way town centres are used by residents has changed considerably over the past decade with the increased popularity and dominance of online shopping with bricks and mortar retailers struggling to adapt to changing habits of customers. This means that flexibility in the range of uses in our town centres needs to be considered to ensure renewal.
- 3.4 The town centre boundaries will need to be reviewed to reflect this change in behaviour and consider, among other matters, where new development including new residential uses may be considered suitable within town centres. Bringing people into the towns to live as well as work and enjoy could have a positive impact through increased activity throughout the day and into the evening.

### ***Relevant Evidence and Studies***

- 3.5 The Andover and Romsey Retail Capacity & Leisure Study (2018) comprises a review of trends driving changes in the retail and leisure sectors, a health check for the Council's main town centres of Andover and Romsey and strategic advice on how the Council can effectively plan for, manage and promote the vitality and viability of the main centres over the plan period to 2036.
- 3.6 The Adopted Andover and South of Romsey Town Centre Masterplans are already being delivered and the Local Plan can play a role in further helping to deliver these plans where appropriate. The Andover Masterplan sets out a range of transformative projects for Andover town centre with independent retail, leisure, food and beverage; with arts and culture, public services, education and community facilities; with homes and workspace; green spaces and event spaces.
- 3.7 The South of Romsey Town Centre Masterplan identifies key opportunity sites together with guidelines for their redevelopment. It is intended that this approach ensures that each site supports the retention of the town centre's character, and resilient and sustainability conscious proposals, as well as economic vitality.

- 3.8 The Council is also in the process of producing further studies to support the delivery of the regeneration of the Town Centres. As this evidence emerges it will feed into the next stage of preparation of the Local Plan

### ***Review of Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area Boundaries***

- 3.9 It is a national requirement to carry out a review of the existing boundaries for Romsey and Andover town centres and their primary shopping areas as identified in the current Adopted Local Plan. Therefore we have undertaken a review of these boundaries.
- 3.10 The boundaries were assessed by using the Adopted town centre boundaries as a baseline. Additional evidence came from data collected by the Planning Policy Team regarding the uses that currently exist within these existing boundaries along with the current uses within the primary and secondary shop frontages. Surveys are undertaken twice a year.
- 3.11 Additional evidence from mapping and aerial data was also collected to analyse the boundaries and how these relate to buildings and other physical features. Consideration was given to key features that contributed to the town centres, this included considerations of:
- Current use classes and land uses (as informed by the survey);
  - Adopted town centre masterplans for Andover and South of Romsey Town Centre
  - Accessibility and pedestrian flows;
  - Understanding the location of key public transport nodes and routes into the centre;
  - Potential sites and areas of land that could be redeveloped to meet any future town centre needs or rationalisation of existing shops and facilities;
  - Avoiding the inclusions of existing residential development at ground floor level, whilst acknowledging that residential development plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres; and
  - Natural boundaries based upon distinctive and recognisable features, ensuring that the boundaries are logical and easy to identify on the ground.
- 3.12 Details of the proposed boundary changes and the justification for each change are provided in an Annex. The amendments to the town centre boundaries involve the removal of areas of predominantly residential development.

### ***Main Issues from Consultation on Previous Local Plan Stages***

- 3.13 The Issues and Options consultation in 2018 sought feedback on whether the Council should continue to encourage retail uses within primary frontages or should a more flexible approach be taken with a greater range of uses being allowed. Whilst national policy has moved on since 2018, as frontages are no longer needed. It was asking for views on the flexible approach within town centres.

- 3.14 There was consensus that a better quality and choice of shops was considered as a way to improve town centres, which needed to be coupled with recognising that our town centres need to evolve. It highlighted that for Andover the Council has aspirations to create a cultural quarter to the north of the town centre and in Romsey, land south of the town centre was recognised in the existing Local Plan as a location for a range of uses including retail and community uses with the Council working with Romsey Future and consultants to create a masterplan for the site.
- 3.15 The Refined Issues and Options consultation in 2020 addressed the matter of town centres and their ability to adapt and be attractive, vibrant, and prosperous places as one of Council's Corporate Plan priorities. The key issues regarding town centres included:
- the need to incentivise consumers back into town centres to make them competitive against online retailers; suggestions included removing parking restrictions, improving the design and facilities throughout town centres and providing grants and relaxing certain restrictions to encourage a new variety of businesses into these centres, including cafés, restaurants and bars in order to create a relaxed café culture.
  - Others suggested the provision of small or start up units for a range of businesses from retail to commercial and office spaces; it is felt that such an approach would not only bring more activity into the town centres, but will also be a show of confidence in local innovation, entrepreneurship and producers, including locally sourced food and drink products. This could contribute to creating a unique selling point for Andover and Romsey with them having an offer not found elsewhere.
  - A common response was that future development within town centres will need to have community benefits, this could be through actions such as the provision of new cultural, recreation or leisure facilities which do not have competition from online alternatives. Additionally new developments should be permitted which will encourage visitors from further afield into the Borough's market towns and bolster the tourism sector, including providing new tourist accommodation.
  - There was much support for new town centre residential development in the Borough. It was considered a sustainable approach to development which reduces commuting and encourages more walking and cycling. Specific comments related to supporting high density development within close proximity to services, facilities and employment which could also provide a source of affordable dwellings for first time buyers.
  - Need to increase sustainability by encouraging an increase in the amount of walking and cycling between the places where people live and where they work and spend leisure time.
- 3.16 The majority of these main issues relate to the importance of the future viability and vitality of Romsey and Andover town centres and that they are able to allow for increased flexibility of town centre uses which would allow for an increase in the variety of uses to be permitted rather than focussing solely on retail.



- 3.17 Other suggestions included increasing the amount of appropriately located dwellings in town centres to increase sustainability and decreasing traffic as well as doing more to promote tourism in Test Valley.

### ***Summary of Key Issues***

- 3.18 The key issues informed by public consultations, evidence and national policy include:
- The way people have been using town centres has changed significantly moving away from a retail orientated offering due to increased accessibility to online retail
  - The need for greater flexibility to allow for change of use of units within town centres is key to attracting new business into town centres and encouraging more people to visit
  - Other uses including arts and culture, public services, education and community facilities will also be important to establish allowing town centres to serve the communities which rely on them
  - New dwellings in town centres will make for increased sustainability and increase levels of vitality and viability but needs to be balanced by ensuring there are active frontages in the primary shopping area.
  - The appearance and attractiveness of the environment within town centres will play an important role in encouraging visitors, highlighting the heritage of these places and creating vibrant new neighbourhoods
  - The adopted town centre masterplans will play a key role in particular in establishing town centre boundaries, which is required by national policy.

## **4 Options for Policy Approach**

- 4.1 Following on from the assessment of our key issues and taking into consideration of the importance of town centres as a corporate priority there were two key themes which resulted from this. These were:
- The quality and diversity of activity and uses; and
  - The quality, attractiveness and accessibility of the town centres.
- 4.2 With regard to identifying the extent of Andover and Romsey town centres, the identification of the extent of these areas has been undertaken and set out above and in the Annex. National policy establishes that policy should identify the extent of primary shopping areas, which represents the area where retail development is concentrated, which is reflected in our proposed boundaries.
- 4.3 National policy sets out that planning policies should define the uses that would be permitted within the town centre and primary shopping area. There is some indication on the broad types of uses that are likely to be appropriate, in the form of the definition of main town centre uses. However, the Council has identified a series of options for different approaches to this matter, with varying degrees of flexibility, particularly in relation to the primary shopping area.

- 4.4 There are three options which have been considered concerning the flexibility of uses in Andover and Romsey town centres, these are:
1. Continuing a retail focused approach to ground floor uses in the primary shopping area, with further uses identified as acceptable in the wider town centre and in upper floors.
  2. Identifying a set range of main town centre uses that would be acceptable at ground floor level within the primary shopping area, with further uses identified as acceptable in the wider town centre and in upper floors.
  3. Greater flexibility of uses within both primary shopping area and whole of town centre that would be acceptable (i.e. no focus on particular uses in different locations)
- 4.5 The Sustainability Appraisal assessed these three options and for many of the sustainability objectives, there was either no effect identified, or the implications would depend on implementation. Additionally, all three options performed in a similar way in relation to some of the objectives. The objectives that did see a difference related to the local economy and maintaining and improving health and wellbeing with options 2 and 3 outperforming option 1. With option 1 and a continued retail focused approach, in the town centres, there was the potential to undermine the fulfilment of the objectives in relation to the town centres, including in relation to supporting their vibrancy.
- 4.6 While the outcomes of the assessment broadly comparable for options 2 and 3 the Council has sought to proceed with an approach that aligns with option 2; identifying a range of main town centre uses that are acceptable for ground floor level. This will help provide greater clarity to potential developers on the types of uses that would be acceptable within these locations and provide a means of seeking to concentrate activity within the core of the town centres with a degree of flexibility. Additionally, option 2 still allows the Council to manage certain uses that would not be appropriate for the primary shopping area, while this would not have been possible by proceeding with option 3.
- 4.7 The Equality Impact Assessment found the approach taken by the two town centre policies promoted high quality and mixed-use development, whilst preserving and enhancing heritage, character and distinctiveness, and would benefit all identified equality groups, particularly the less mobile groups, by increasing accessibility to a range of services and accessibility within our town centres and supporting sustainable, integrated and healthy living environments, to create safe, legible, attractive and inclusive public realm.
- 4.8 The Health Impact Assessment found the two town centre policies for Andover and Romsey centres would promote high quality investment and mixed-use development, increasing accessibility to a range of services and facilities that support health, wellbeing and inclusivity, safety and accessibility within the town centres. Including encouraging a healthy, vibrant and active public realm and employment opportunities. The two town centre Masterplans also prioritise green infrastructure networks, river frontages and access to sustainable public transport options.

## **5 Proposed Way Forward and Recommended Approach**

- 5.1 The proposed approach to improving the quality and diversity of activity and uses will allow for greater flexibility for the future uses in the town centres. This will also allow the Council to manage uses by identifying where certain uses would best be located.
- 5.2 This is supported by the key issues in shifting away from a retail led approach to town centres; but instead it will be necessary for the future policy to be more flexible, allowing for a wider range of uses to be established within town centres. This is set out in draft strategic policy 3: Delivering Development and Regeneration in Andover and Romsey Town Centres. The aspiration to update the role of town centres into the future is at the heart of this draft strategic policy.
- 5.3 The boundaries of both Andover and Romsey town centres and both primary shopping areas have been reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose and support the change in flexibility proposed. This review also ensures that the extent of both town centre masterplans have informed the identified town centre boundaries for the draft Local Plan. These boundaries are set out as part of the draft strategic policy 3: Delivering Development and Regeneration in Andover and Romsey Town Centres.
- 5.4 Increasing the number of permanent residents in the wider town centre boundary will also be an important opportunity with the provision of new residential or mixed use developments allowing more people to live in close proximity to all of the services that any vibrant town centre has to offer. An increased population could not only benefit the town centre during the day but could see activity continue into the evening.
- 5.5 The design and appearance of town centres is important, and plays a key role in helping to attract visitors and increase activity in our town centres. It is also important to help maintain the strong character and heritage that already exists. Any new development will have to compliment and not detract from the existing fabric of the towns. Creation or enhancement of green space within town centres will also be an opportunity to improve the look of the towns but also come with environment and health benefits for residents and visitors. This is set out in draft Strategic Policy 4: Delivering High Quality Development in Town Centres.
- 5.6 Matters which could be considered at Stage 2 include town centre uses in out of centre locations and the requirement for impact assessments and sequential tests for such applications. Other detailed policies focused on the implementation of the two town centre masterplans, allowing for the establishment of new community and cultural facilities and expansion of the evening economy could also be explored.

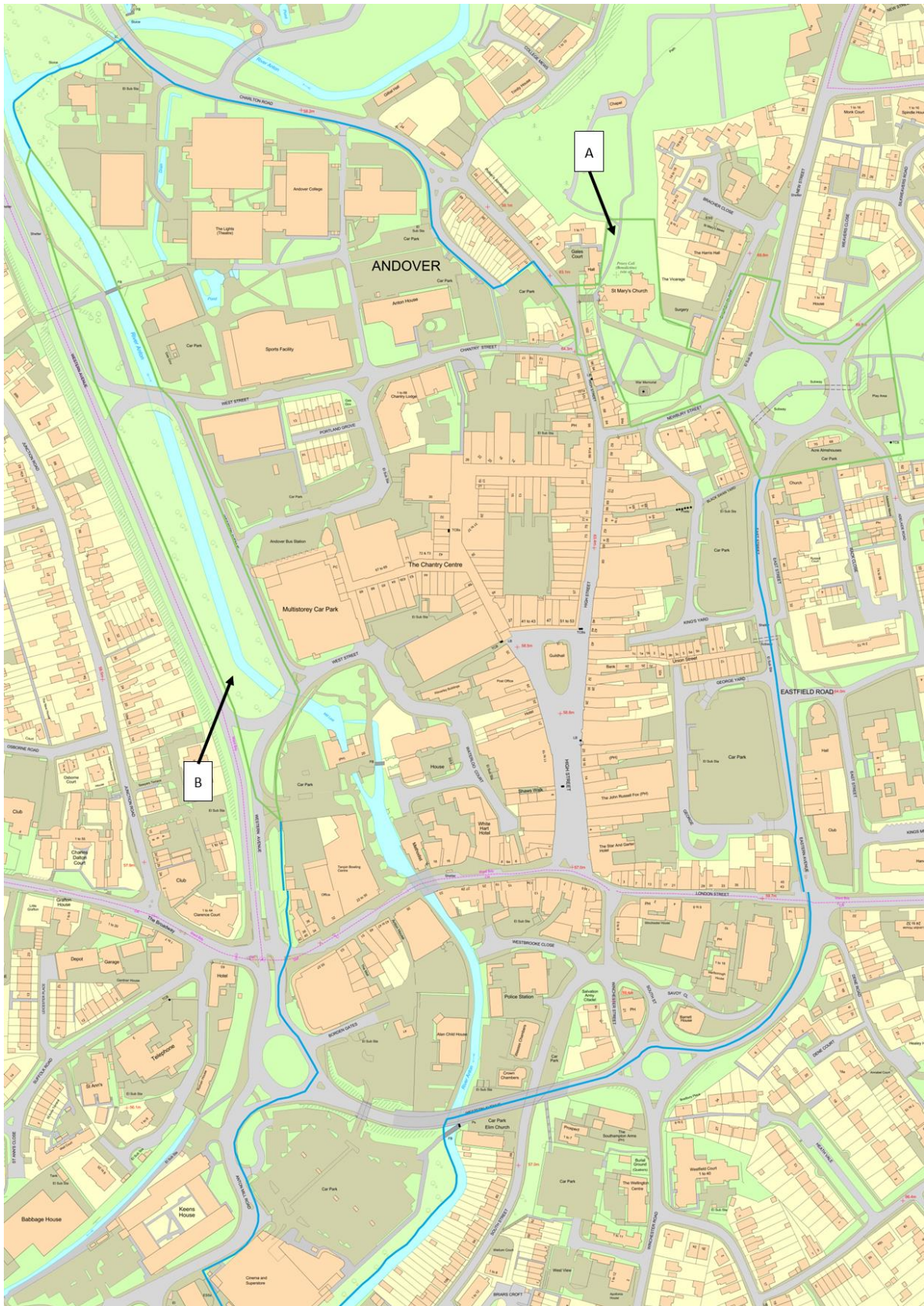
## **Annex**

This Annex sets out the changes proposed to the Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area Boundaries. The starting point is what is included in the Adopted Local Plan 2029. The areas of proposed change are identified on the maps as either green (area proposed to be expanded) or red (area proposed to be removed).

### **Andover Town Centre**

Map Point	Proposed Change	Justification
A	Extend boundary to include St Mary's Church, Andover Museum and Vigo Park	Includes an area identified within the Andover Town Centre Masterplan as being appropriate for future development to develop a town centre Cultural Quarter
B	Extend boundary to include River Anton	Includes an area identified within the Andover Town Centre Masterplan as being appropriate for future urban parkland

Map 1: Andover Town Centre Boundary

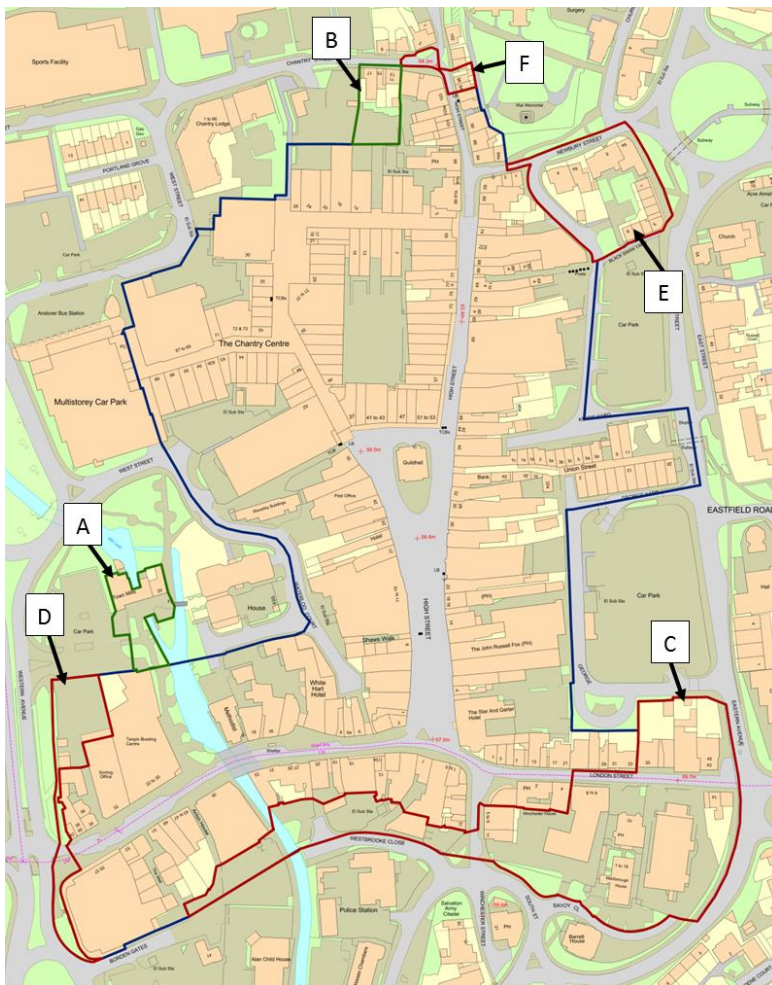


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## Andover Primary Shopping Area

Map Point	Proposed Change	Justification
A	Extend boundary to include Town Mills	Includes uses which have been identified as appropriate for the primary shopping area
B	Extend boundary west along Chantry Street	Includes uses which have been identified as appropriate for the primary shopping area
C	Contract the south and south east boundary	Removes uses which have been identified as appropriate for town centre use, but not for primary shopping area
D	Reduce the south west boundary and rear of former Post Office	Removes service areas and public realm which are not necessary for inclusion in the primary shopping area
E	Reduce boundary to the north east	Removes units which are physically separated and facing away from the town centre.
F	Reduce boundary at the north of High Street	Removes areas of predominantly residential development accessed from High Street.

Map 2: Andover Primary Shopping Area Boundary

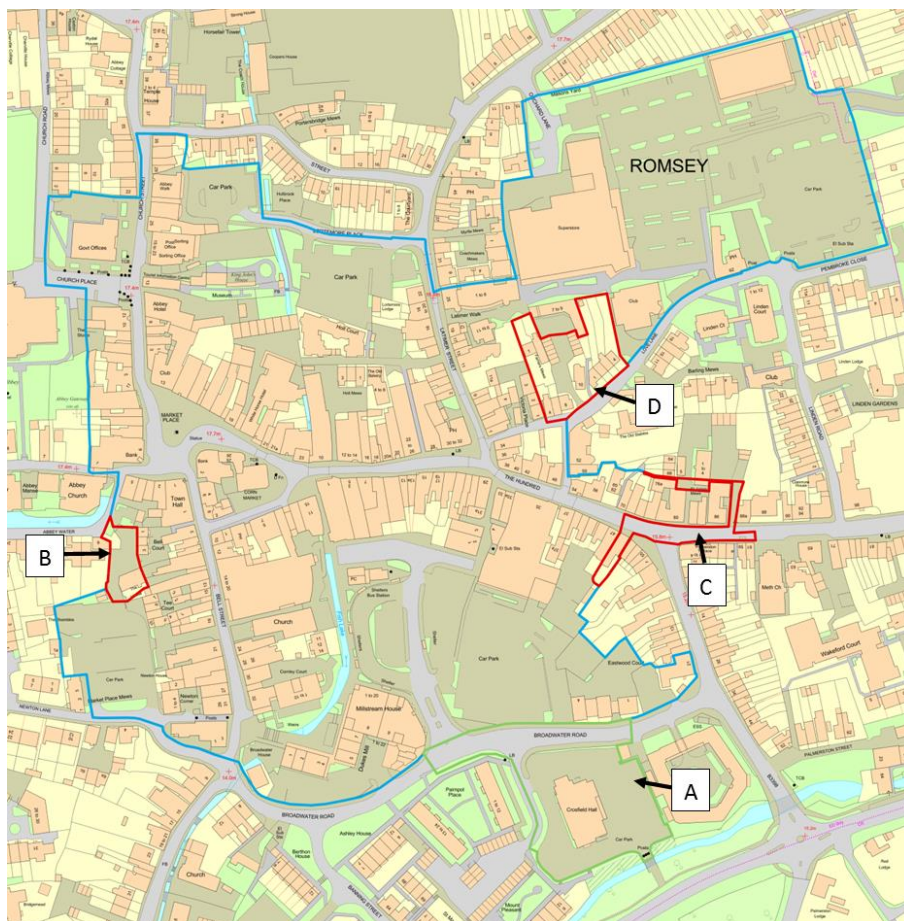


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## Romsey Town Centre

Map Point	Proposed Change	Justification
A	Extend boundary to include Crosfield Hall	Includes an area identified within the South of Romsey Town Centre Masterplan as being appropriate for future development for a future Supermarket
B	Reduce boundary north of Newton Lane car park	Removes areas of predominantly residential development accessed from Newton Lane.
C	Reduce boundary to the east	Removes residential uses in addition to removing service areas and public realm which are not necessary for inclusion within the town centre boundary
D	Reduce boundary along Love Lane	Removes areas of predominantly residential development accessed from Love Lane.

Map 3: Romsey Town Centre Boundary

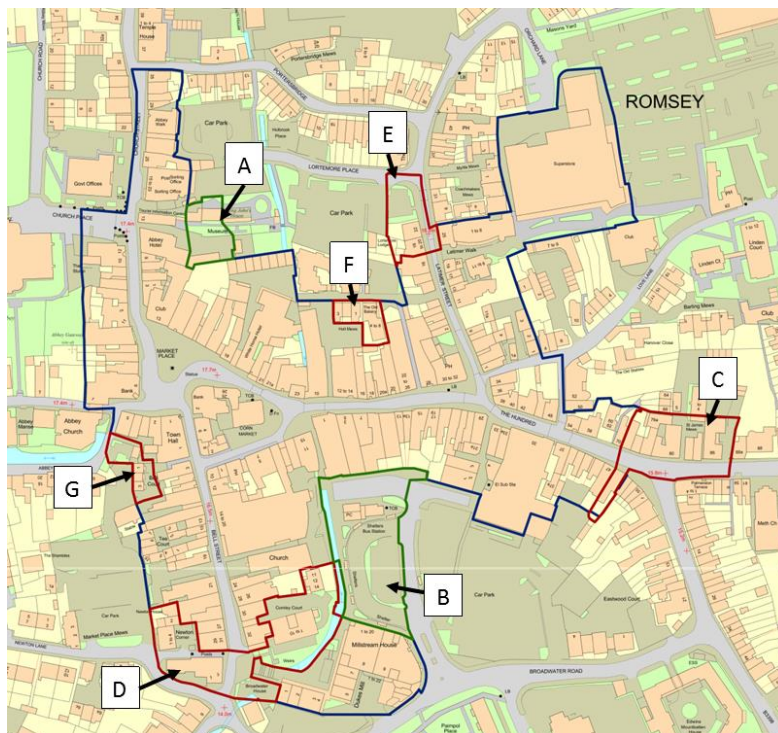


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## Romsey Primary Shopping Area

Map Point	Proposed Change	Justification
A	Extend boundary to include King John's House	Includes uses which have been identified as appropriate for the primary shopping area
B	Extend boundary to include Bus Station	Includes an area identified within the South of Romsey Town Centre Masterplan as being appropriate for future development for a mixed use development
C	Reduce boundary to the east	Removes areas of predominantly residential development accessed from The Hundred.
D	Reduce boundary to the south and rear of properties along Bell Street	Removes areas of predominantly residential development accessed from Broadwater Road/Bell Street.
E	Reduce boundary along Latimer Street	Removes areas of predominantly residential development accessed from Latimer Street.
F	Reduce boundary to rear of properties along The Hundred	Removes areas of predominantly residential development accessed from The Hundred.
G	Reduce boundary north of Newton Lane car park	Removes areas of predominantly residential development accessed from Newton Lane.

Map 4: Romsey Primary Shopping Area Boundary



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