APPENDIX C

Economic Health Check – Rationale and outline figures

To enable the development of future Retail and Town Centre Management Plans it is important to understand how our town centres are currently performing. There are a number of different methodologies for assessing the economic wellbeing of town centres and it has been the subject of much debate in associations such as Action for Market Towns and the Association of Town Centre Managers. An online tool kit for economic analysis is due to be launched towards the end of 2009 which will enable towns to process data against a set of indicators and benchmark against each other locally and nationally.

The data collated for this report to date is a hybrid of current indicators intended to give a snapshot of current performance in Central Bedfordshire. It is proposed that when the online toolkit is released that we use it to carry out future health checks.

The retail and economic survey of each of the town centres was undertaken by Economic Growth Staff during July and August 2009. The Local Plan definition of the area of the town centre has been used. Where there is no formal definition of the 'town centre' the area of the town with the greatest concentration of retail outlets was surveyed. The figures do not therefore include every shop in the whole town but only those within the defined town centre area or the area of the town with the greatest concentration of retail outlets.

Definitions

Town Centre is an area defined by the Local Plan for that area or the area (Zone A) with the greatest concentration of retail outlets.

"Premises", 'outlets' and "units" refer to street level business units only and does not include the 'office over the shop'.

"Services" refer to street level business units that are not retail, for instance, Solicitors, Accountants, Doctors, Dentists, Undertakers etc.

Deprivation is derived from the 'Top 10 deprived areas in Central Bedfordshire in the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Percentages are rounded to the nearest 0.5 so the sum of percentages may not equal 100.

Unemployment figures are sourced from the Central Bedfordshire Council website on 26th August 2009.

Proposed economic indicators and their uses

As outlined above we would like to work closely in partnership with Town Councils in terms of collation and analysis of the data. It is highlighted in Italics where Town Councils would be best placed to gather data on a 6 monthly or annual basis. The development of local action plans to address issues highlighted by the data can then be drawn up by Town Councils with full support from Central Bedfordshire Officers as required.

Town Indicators	Rationale & Use of Data
Town Population	The size of the population provides data from which to work out the number of retail units per head allowing analysis of potential need for expansion of retail areas. This is particularly important within the proposed growth areas. It is important to note that the population of a town does not necessarily equate to the catchment of the town which may serve surrounding villages and further afield where town centres are larger. However, it provides a standard baseline from which to calculate other indicators.
Total number of retail & service businesses *(Town Council)*	The total number of businesses allows analysis against population and other indicators. The mix of service and retail is useful to monitor over time in terms of business sustainability. The number of service businesses is important in relation to the number of ‘other’ employers within the town, as they tend to be business services such as solicitors, insurance agents, banks, post offices etc.
Number of vacant premises (including the number vacant for more than 6 months) *(Town Council)*	This is one of the most important indicator in terms of the health of the town as is an understanding for the reasons behind the figures. This data and the rationale behind will allow us to develop projects with partners, which focuses on creating an environment and the conditions for business growth.
Mix of retail offer *(Town Council)*	Where they are represented on our high streets, the performance of national retail chains will need to be monitored to ensure that we are well placed to respond to expansion or contraction of their outlets. Relationships will need to be developed with local & regional managers of chains to identify issues early. Where there is a reliance on small independents business growth activity can be targeted to ensure business productivity and sustainability.
Footfall	Footfall in town centres is one of the main indicators examined by retailers when making location decisions. It analyses the number of people using the retail areas. At present there is a lack of footfall data. Historical data has been gathered by the LDF team in the South of the area but a methodology for gathering effective footfall data will be needed. The data is particularly important when identifying potential retail chains to attract to an area as each has requirements in terms of footfall. It is also very important to monitor over time.
Deprivation & socio economic indices	The socio economic data for areas around our town centres is important in terms of defining catchment areas and the likely volume of spend.
Central Bedfordshire wide indices	
Employment in retail (ABI data)	Retail is currently the largest source of employment in Central Bedfordshire. Figures need to be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that we are able to monitor trends and react to them as necessary. Monitoring national chain performance and building up relationships with retail employers we can ensure that we are also proactive in our business growth activity.

Number of Business Link visits / interventions to retail businesses	There is massive scope to make our retail businesses more efficient, effective, profitable and to create the conditions for growth. The number of 'intensive assist' visits by business advisors needs to be increased for retail businesses. This will help prevent business closures as a result of the current recession and ensure that our businesses are well placed to take advantage of the upturn when it occurs.
Number of retail business start-ups. *(Town Council)*	There is a huge amount of business support for start-ups. Retail is a key sector for start-ups. We need to ensure that new businesses are given as much support as possible to ensure their longevity and that the sector image is developed to encourage start ups. Town Councils will be asked to monitor new businesses on their High Streets.
Number of retail businesses showing year on year growth	This is key in terms of our NI172 outputs (the number of businesses employing less that 50 people in Central Bedfordshire showing year on year employment growth). Data will be available from November 2009.
Number of businesses undertaking skills development or training of 1 day (7 hours or more)	There is a huge amount of training support available from partners such as Business Link that could be of significant use to our businesses in terms of profitability, sales, environmental sustainability, merchandising as well as business processes. We need to ensure that it is accessible in a number of formats such as online, webex , weekend and evening workshops and that our businesses are participating.

It is important to note that data gathered as part of the development of masterplans, LDF Documents, and town plans will be brought together to provide a full set of data for each town area.

As well as formal data it is proposed that an assessment be made of the following

Visual assessment of town centre environment Guidance will be sought from the ATCM on the best methodology for doing this.

Main economic drivers influencing the town centre – major employers, proximity of key employers etc.

Appendix C Cont .

Breakdown of Available Retail Data by Town

Town	No outlets	Vacant		Nationals		Independents		Services		Pub/Club	
AMPTHILL	74	5	6.5%	5	6.5%	50	67.5%	13	17.5%	1	1.5%
ARLESEY	11	0	0%	1	9%	10	91%	0	0%	0	0%
BIGGLESWADE	156	12	7.5%	22	14%	86	55%	26	16.5%	10	6.5%
DUNSTABLE	250	58	23%	41	15%	98	39%	37	15%	9	3.5%
FLITWICK	44	3	7%	7	16%	19	43%	13	29.5%	2	4.5%
HOUGHTON R	31	1	3%	6	19%	20	64%	3	9.5%	1	3%
LEIGHTON BUZ	220	12	5.5%	30	13.5%	125	56%	30	16%	9	4%
POTTON	25	0	0%	3	12%	16	64%	5	20%	1	4%
SANDY	59	2	3.5%	10	17%	36	61%	8	13.5%	3	5%
SHEFFORD	35	2	5.5%	3	8.5%	18	51%	9	25.5%	3	8.5%
STOTFOLD	23	0	0%	1	4.5%	16	69.5%	6	26%	0	0%

Data collated by CBC staff August 2009 and verified by Town Clerks.

Business Growth Data

Total employment in Retail Central Bedfordshire	9413
Total number of retail businesses	1785
Number of Business Link visits / interventions to retail businesses	Data to be collated
Number of retail business start-ups. *(Town Council)*	Data to be collated
Number of retail businesses showing year on year growth	Data to be collated
Number of businesses undertaking skills development or training of 1 day (7 hours or more)	Data to be collated

Appendix C Cont

The following data was collated in August 2009 , and is currently being checked by Town Clerks to ensure its accuracy.

Ampthill

Ampthill is situated near the centre of Central Bedfordshire and is within the ward of Ampthill.

Within the defined town centre there are 74 premises serving a town population of approximately 7,000. Of the 74 units, 5 (6.5%) are vacant, 5 (6.5%) are National or chain stores, 50 (67.5%) are Independent traders, 1 is a pub (1.5%) and 13 (17.5%) are services. The largest national store in Ampthill is Waitrose and is a major employer within the town.

Unemployment in Ampthil rose from 0.6% in March 2008 to 2.1% in March 2009 falling back to 1.9% in June 2009.

Ampthill Town Council run the weekly market, which is held on Thursday, and the Farmers Market which is held on the last Saturday of the month.

Ampthill has no train station. Car parking is an issue in the town. The car park at Waitrose is free for up to 2 hours. Waitrose have declined to extend the length of time customers may park without charge. On street parking is limited due to the narrow streets, but there are extensive lay-byes on Woburn St together with a small off street car park.

Of the top 10 most deprived areas in Central Bedfordshire there are none in Ampthill.

One of Ampthill’s strengths lies in the niche it has carved being a centre for small, specialised independent shops.

Arlesey

Arlesey is situated in the eastern area of Central Bedfordshire and is within the ward of Stotfold and Arlesey.

Within the area of the town with the greatest concentration of street level business units there are 11 premises serving a town population of approximately 5,500.
Of the 11 units, 0 are vacant, 1 (9%) are National or chain stores, 10 (91%) are Independent traders and 0 are services. The largest national store in Arlesey is a convenience supermarket.

Unemployment in Arlesey rose from 1.1% in March 2008 to 3.7% in March 2009. The increase continued to 3.9% in June 2009.

There is no regular market in Arlesey.

Arlesey has a train stain station with direct links south to London and north as far as Peterborough.

Appendix C Cont

Of the top 10 most deprived areas in Central Bedfordshire there are none in Arlesey.

Although boasting one of the longest High Streets in England, Arlesey has little in the way of a retail centre. Hitchin and Letchworth are both a short drive away. As Arlesey is experiencing significant housing growth, efforts should be made to ensure the retail offer is improved to serve the growing population.

Biggleswade

Biggleswade is situated in the northern area of Central Bedfordshire and is within the ward of Biggleswade.

Within the defined town centre there are 156 premises serving a town population of approximately 17,500.

Of the 156 units, 12 (7.5%) are vacant, 22 (14%) are National or chain stores, 86 (55%) are Independent traders, 10 (6.5%) are pubs or clubs and 26 (16.5%) are services. The largest national store in Biggleswade is Asda and is a major employer within the town.

Jordans Cereals have 3 sites in and around Biggleswade who employ in excess of 300.

Unemployment in the three legacy wards in Biggleswade rose from 1.4% in March 2008 to 3.7% in March 2009 falling back a little to 3.6% in June 2009

Biggleswade Town Council run the weekly market, which is held on Saturday, and the Farmers Market which is held on the third Wednesday of the month.

Biggleswade has a train station with fast and frequent links to London Kings Cross and north to Peterborough.

Of the top 10 most deprived areas in Central Bedfordshire there are none in Biggleswade.

Dunstable

Dunstable is situated in the south of Central Bedfordshire and is made up of four wards being Dunstable Downs, Icknield, Northfields and Watling.

Within the defined town centre there are 250 premises serving a town population of approximately 36,000. Of the 250 units, 58 (23%) are vacant, 41 (15%) are National or chain stores, 98 (39%) are Independent traders, 9 (3.5%) are pubs or clubs and 37 (15%) are services. The largest national store in Dunstable is Asda and is a major employer within the town.

Other major employers serving the town are Superdrug Distribution in Prologis Park who employ 7-800 and Honeytop Foods in Woodside who employ 2-300.

Appendix C Cont

Unemployment in the 6 previous wards in Dunstable rose from 1.5% in March 2008 to 4% in March 2009 continuing to rise to 4.1% in June 2009.

Wendy Fair Markets Ltd manages the markets under contract to Central Bedfordshire Council. The regular markets are held on Wednesday and Saturday with bric-a-brac held on Friday.

Dunstable has no train station. Work on a new guided busway linking Luton, Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard is due to start shortly. Car parking in Council owned car parks cost 50p for 2 hours.

Of the top 10 most deprived areas in Central Bedfordshire Dunstable has two areas, one each within the previous wards of Manshead (Downside Estate) and Northfields (Area west of Chiltern Rd).

Flitwick

Flitwick is situated near the centre of Central Bedfordshire and consists of two wards Flitwick East and Flitwick West. Within the defined town centre there are 43 premises serving a town population of approximately 13,000. Of the 44 units, 3 (7%) are vacant, 7 (16%) are National or chain stores, 19 (43%) are Independent traders, 2 (4.5%) are pubs or clubs and 13 (29.5%) are services. The largest national store in Flitwick is Tesco and is a major employer within the town.

Unemployment in Flitwick rose from 0.8% in March 2008 to 2.3% in March 2009 staying the same at 2.3% in June 2009.

Flitwick Town Council run the weekly market, which is held on Friday.

Flitwick has a train station with trains south to London and beyond and North to Bedford. The car park at Tesco is free for up to *3 hours*. .

Of the top 10 most deprived areas in Central Bedfordshire Flitwick has one area in Flitwick East ward.

Houghton Regis

Houghton Regis is situated in the south of Central Bedfordshire and is within the ward of Houghton Regis.

Within the area of the town with the greatest concentration of street level business units there are 31 premises serving a town population of approximately 17,000. Of the 31 units, 0 are vacant, 6 (19%) are National or chain stores, 20 (64%) are Independent traders, 1 (3%) is a pub or club and 3 (9.5%) are services. The larger national stores in Houghton Regis are the Co-op and Tesco.

A major employer in Houghton Regis is Whitbread situated on the Houghton Hall estate. They employ approximately 200.

Appendix C Cont

Unemployment in Houghton Regis rose from 2.3% in March 2008 to 4.9% in March 2009 staying the same at 4.9% in June 2009.

There is no regular market in Houghton Regis but there is a fruit and veg stall every Friday.

Houghton Regis has no train station.. The nearest station is Leagrave offering services to London & Bedford..

There are two free car parks and a third that provides free car parking for 3 hours.

Of the top 10 most deprived areas in Central Bedfordshire Houghton Regis has four with two areas in each of the previous wards of Parkside (both Parkside Drive areas) and Tithe Farm (both Tithe Farm Rd areas).

Leighton Buzzard

Leighton Buzzard with Linslade is situated in the south-west of Central Bedfordshire and consists of four wards being Grovebury, Leighton Linslade Central, Plantation and Southcott.

Within the defined town centre there are 220 premises serving a town (Leighton Buzzard and Linslade) population of approximately 38,000.
Of the 220 units, 12 (5.5%) are vacant, 30 (13.5%) are National or chain stores, 125 (56%) are Independent traders, 9 (4%) are pubs or clubs and 30 (16%) are services.
Leighton Buzzard has several larger national stores in the town, Waitrose, Wilkinsons, Boots and Argos among them.

Unemployment in Leighton Buzzard and Linslade rose from 1.1% in March 2008 to 3.4% in March 2009 falling back to 3.3% in June 2009.

Wendy Fair Markets Ltd manages the markets under contract to Central Bedfordshire Council. The regular markets are held on Tuesday and Saturday with a Farmers Market held on the third Saturday in the month.

Leighton Buzzard has a train station situated in Linslade with fast frequent services to London and Milton Keynes, Northampton and Birmingham. Car parking in Council owned car parks cost 50p for 2 hours in ground level car parks and 70p for 2 hours in the multi storey car park. On street parking is available for 30 minutes free of charge.

Of the top 10 most deprived areas in Central Bedfordshire Leighton Buzzard has two one each in the previous wards of Planets (Meadow Way) and Plantation (Area west of Vandyke Rd).

Appendix C Cont ..

Potton

Potton is situated in the north east of Central Bedfordshire and is within the ward of Potton.

Within the area of the town with the greatest concentration of street level business units there are 25 premises serving a town population of approximately 5,000.
Of the 25 units, 0 are vacant, 3 (12%) are National or chain stores, 16 (64%) are Independent traders, 1 (4%) is a pub or club and 5 (20%) are services. The largest of the small national stores in Potton are the Co-op and Tesco Express.

Unemployment in Potton rose from 0.9% in March 2008 to 3% in March 2009 staying the same at 3% in June 2009.

There is no regular market in Potton.

Potton has no train station. Buses run to Biggleswade, Sandy and Baldock. Car parking is free of charge in the car park with a small additional amount of on street parking.

Of the top 10 most deprived areas in Central Bedfordshire there are none in Potton.

Sandy

Sandy is situated in the north of Central Bedfordshire and is within the ward of Sandy. Within the defined town centre there are 69 premises serving a town population of approximately 12,000.
Of the 59 units, 2 (3.5%) are vacant, 10 (17%) are National or chain stores, 36 (61%) are Independent traders, 3 (5%) are pubs or clubs and 8 (13.5%) are services. The largest national store in Sandy is Budgen.

Unemployment in Sandy rose from 1.6% in March 2008 to 3.8% in March 2009 falling back to 3.5% in June 2009.

Sandy Town Council runs the weekly market, which is held on Friday, and the Farmers Market which is held on the first Saturday of the month.

Sandy has a train station with services to London and Peterborough. Car parking in car parks is free of charge with some additional on street parking. Issues with commuters parking all day have been overcome by the introduction of limited parking hours.

Of the top 10 most deprived areas in Central Bedfordshire Sandy has one in the previous Sandy Pinnacle ward.

Shefford

Shefford is situated near the centre of Central Bedfordshire and is within the ward of Shefford.

Appendix C Cont …

Within the area of the town with the greatest concentration of street level business units there are 35 premises serving a town population of approximately 5,400.

Of the 35 units, 2 (5.5%) are vacant, 3 (8.5%) are National or chain stores, 18 (51%) are Independent traders, 3 (8.5%) are pubs or clubs and 9 (25.5%) are services. The largest national store in Shefford is Morrison's and is a major employer within the town.

Unemployment in Shefford rose from 0.7% in March 2008 to 2.8% in March 2009 staying the same at 2.8% in June 2009.

Shefford Town Council runs the weekly market, which is held on Friday, and the Farmers Market which is held on the 2nd Saturday of the month.

Shefford has no train station. Car parking is difficult in the town. Parking in Council owned car parks is free as is the car park at Morrison's (for up to 2 hours). However as there is a time restriction in Morrison's car park, the council car park fills up early with all day parkers. There is some on street parking.

Of the top 10 most deprived areas in Central Bedfordshire there are none in Shefford.

Stotfold

Stotfold is situated in the eastern area of Central Bedfordshire and is within the ward of Stotfold and Arlesey.

Within the area of the town with the greatest concentration of street level business units there are 23 premises serving a town population of approximately 6,200.
Of the 23 units, 0 are vacant, 1 (4.5%) are National or chain stores, 16 (69.5%) are Independent traders and 6 (26%) are services. The national retail store in Stotfold is the Co-op.

Unemployment in rose from Stotfold 0.9% in March 2008 to 2.9% in March 2009 rising to 3.5% in June 2009.

There is no regular market in Stotfold

Stotfold has no train station. Buses. Car parking is an issue in the town. The car park at the Co-op is free for up to 2 hours. The Co-op have declined to extend the length of time customers may park without charge.

Of the top 10 most deprived areas in Central Bedfordshire there are none in Stotfold.