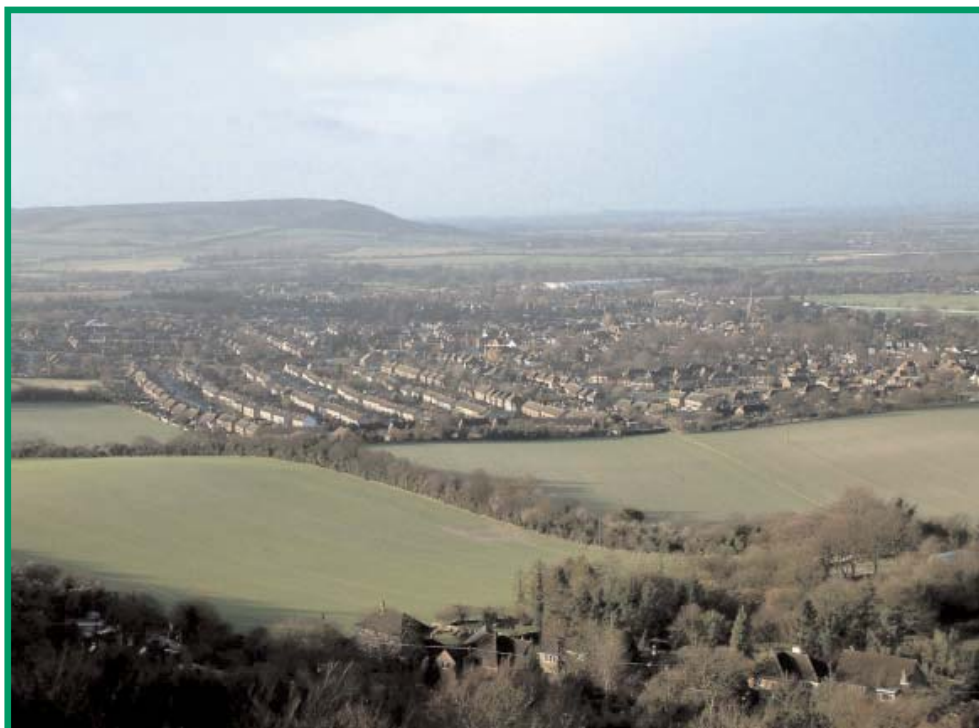


The Countryside Agency's market towns initiative

**HEALTHCHECK
AND
ACTION PLAN
FOR**

Princes Risborough

**“Your town – your future,
Your community – your voice”**



HEALTHCHECK
AND
ACTION PLAN
FOR

Princes Risborough

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Princes Risborough

The past ... a rich cultural heritage

Lying in a broad gap in the western slopes of the Chiltern Hills in Buckinghamshire, the town provides a link between the River Thames and the Ickneild Way, both of which were prime commercial routes from the earliest times.

Neolithic and Bronze age barrows are present in the town and the Upper and Lower Ickneild Way, ancient trackways, pass around the heart of the town. In 903 AD the first reference is made to the name Risborough as "Hrisebyrgan be cilternes efese", which has been translated as "the brush covered hills by the Chiltern eaves."

The Domesday Book contains references to "Riseburg", and records show that a Royal Stud and deer park was established here.

From 1343, when the stud passed to him, Edward, the Black Prince, visited his horses at the Royal Stud and it was in 1359 that Riseburg was prefixed by "Princes". i.e. the brush covered hills belonging to the Prince.

The adjoining village of Monks Risborough, now incorporated in "The Risboroughs" parish, was the oldest documented parish in England, its boundaries being defined in a Charter of 903 AD. It takes its name from the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury.

In 1523 Henry VIII granted the charter for a weekly market and two annual fairs "for the improvement of the status...of the inhabitants." The fee for the market and fairs to be paid to the Royal Chancery was 20s. 4d. The market and the fairs still take place, though the fee is no longer paid.



Above the town a huge chalk cross carved into the hill dominates the town and landscape. Known as the "Whiteleaf Cross", it was originally referred to as "Crux Saxonica" in 1742. The Cross is visible for miles around, and it may have been etched in the chalk hillside to provide a marker of the gap in the hills for travellers.

Risborough continued to be a successful market town during the ensuing centuries. It traded in furniture and beech-wood. The furniture was made by 'bodgers', who lived in the in the beech woods of the Chilterns, and brought down to the weekly market, The town also provided a way-station for local farmers and Welsh drovers to take their produce and livestock on to the larger markets in High Wycombe and London.

The 19th Century saw the emergence of the modern Princes Risborough with enclosure in 1823, at which time there were 1200 inhabitants of the parish. In 1839 and 1941 the British school and National schools, respectively, were founded. In 1862 the railway and gasworks were built, and in 1880 a large brewery was constructed.



In the 20th Century the aviatrix Amy Johnson lived in Princes Risborough for a time, and a WW II American airman saved the town by steering his stricken craft clear of the town before crashing and burning. In the fifty years after WW II a library, community centre, swimming pool and leisure centre were built to provide recreational facilities for residents.

Princes Risborough

The present... a very pleasant place in which to live

With a high ranking on the National Indices of Deprivation Risborough is a relatively affluent town with a population of c7500 and approximately the same surrounding population in the hinterland.

Lying at the foot of the Chiltern Hills and within the Chilterns A.O.N.B., and the Whiteleaf Cross above it, residents make use of numerous bridle, cycle and footpaths from which to enjoy the spectacular scenery and unspoilt countryside on their doorstep.

It is an attractive market town, with predominantly brick and flint architecture interspersed with charming 16th and 17th Century cottages. Shopping in Risborough is a pleasant experience with all the shops being concentrated in a small area and the High Street being dominated by an historic Market House. One large supermarket on the outskirts of the shopping centre attracts shoppers and provides employment for people from the surrounding villages.

It offers a friendly community with a variety of facilities: a modern library, a spacious and efficient Information Centre, a community centre, a leisure centre and swimming pool, various other sports and social amenities; and a plethora of hobby and interest clubs and societies.

The annual Risborough Festival is a renowned event attended by thousands of visitors who stream in to Risborough to enjoy a week of festivities and special events.

Access by rail is relatively easy as it is on the Chiltern Rail route between London and Birmingham. Access by vehicle is less easy as it is 9 miles from the M40 and the roads through the town are congested due to the town being on the only direct route between the much larger towns of High Wycombe and Aylesbury.

Buckinghamshire still uses the selective educational system, and Risborough has two good primary schools and a good upper school, which serves pupils from as far afield as Aylesbury and High Wycombe.

The town is blessed with relatively strong civic and social support networks, without which the town would not be such a pleasant place to live. The Town Council is proactive, Wycombe District Council is strongly supportive and the Risborough Area Forum meets regularly on a quarterly basis to discuss issues and concerns.

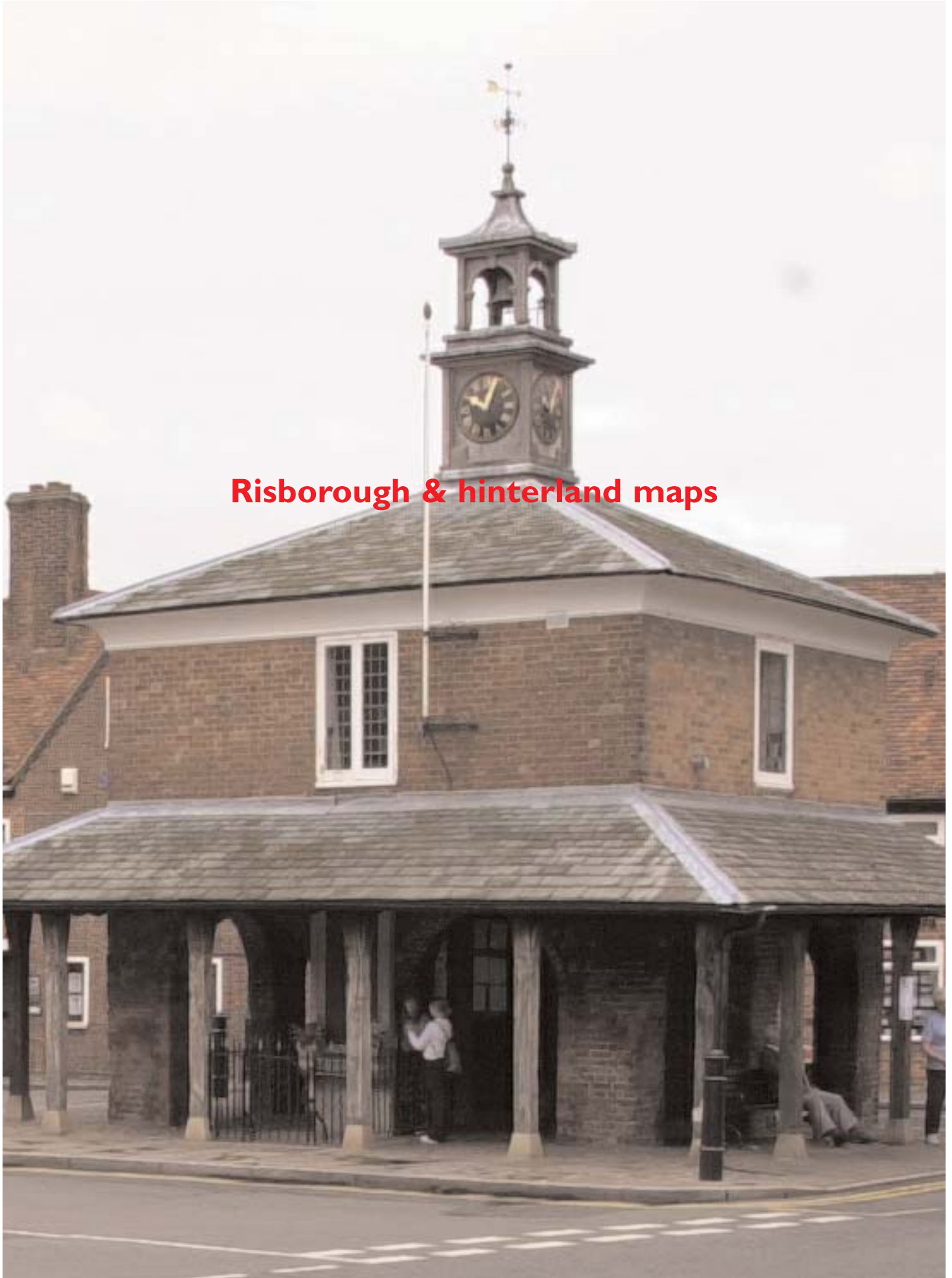
Background to the Healthcheck...

In 2000, at the suggestion of Wycombe District Council, with the support of Risborough Area Forum and cooperation of the Town Council, a committee called the Risborough Area Community Action Group (RACAG) was formed.

In 2002 an application to the Countryside Agency for match funding was made and granted in 2003. In October 2003 a Market Town Healthcheck Coordinator, Lis Dobb-Sandi, was appointed initially on a 6-month contract which was then extended to 9 months. The neighbouring market town of Thame in Oxfordshire was twinned with Risborough for the purpose of this exercise. This represented a challenge due to a) the very limited time factor of doing two towns in a third of the time usually taken and, b) the lack of many common factors between the towns, and c) the different aspirations of the two towns. At the end of the Healthcheck process it was decided, given the foregoing limitations, that it would not be possible to produce a joint action plan for Thame and Risborough.

A Healthcheck of Risborough was undertaken. There was wide community consultation and the residents' issues and concerns were taken on board. From this The Vision was prepared and presented to the community. A partnership with the Princes Risborough Town Council was formed and the resultant Action Plan represents the final product of many hours of meetings and deliberations.





Risborough & hinterland maps

Princes Risborough

The future ... a dormitory town, a retirement village only for the wealthy, or a thriving, vital and diverse town?

Though the town is currently “a very pleasant place to live”, various threats to the continued social and economic vitality of the town were identified during the course of the Healthcheck.

These are briefly summarised below:

Social

The demographics of the town show that a quarter of the population (28%) is over 60 and one fifth of the population (19%) is under 16. Within the next thirty years the 30-59 year olds will retire: they represent 41% of the population.

The younger generation do not have many facilities at their disposal and boredom leads to mischief and anti-social behaviour, all of it upsetting and some of it extremely hazardous, by a small percentage of young people. The C.N.A. has shown that a significant proportion of the senior generation generally regard the younger generation with fear and suspicion.

Many of the present residents bought their houses more than a decade ago. The disproportionate rise in house prices has made buying a house in Risborough very difficult for people with average incomes. Local young people cannot afford to buy a house in the area in which they were born and where their roots are.

Those who can afford to buy houses in Risborough and the surrounding villages are usually professionals and, if not self-employed from home, they commute to London and Birmingham.

This has an effect on community composition, leading to an unbalanced proportion of highly paid professional and managerial workers compared with skilled, semi-skilled and manual workers. Risborough consequently has difficulty attracting key workers such as artisans, policemen, teachers and social, medical and youth workers. The unbalanced community composition also has the inevitable knock-on effect on community spirit and social life as commuters often lack the time and energy to become actively involved in putting something back into their community.

There is little opportunity for local people to be housed locally, as in common with other market towns, housing is not allocated by the town council, but by the district council from their district-wide waiting list. This reduces the opportunity for local people to be housed in social housing and as a consequence there is a fragmentation of the local community.

Risborough needs to draw up a holistic town plan which will move it forward to the year 2025, taking into account housing, traffic, business and employment opportunities, recreational and public utilities. There are various sites within the town suitable for development. Possible planned developments may not be utilising those sites for their most rational usage in keeping with a holistic town plan to the year 2025. A key project will be to examine the sites available and rationalise decisions as to where to site recreational spaces, additional housing and commercial & industrial developments. This process is currently underway via the Local Development Framework.



There are generally good health facilities, but there is no NHS dentist. The Primary Care Trust responsible for Risborough is based at Aylesbury, but Risborough falls within Wycombe District Council's domain. Some residents feel that this leads to a lack of communication between authorities, confusion and a sense of marginalisation amongst the community.

Economic

Shop rents are high, and the result is that many High Street shops become "one-man bands", as the owner-manager cannot afford to employ many staff and expand his business. This reduces his profit-making opportunity and enforces the cycle of "low profit so low job opportunities available" in the High Street.

There is a view that there are too many Charity shops in the High Street offering unfair competition to other shop-owners.

There is room for improvement in the weekly market both in quality and quantity of the stalls.

As a consequence of the opening of the larger, second chain supermarket, many long-term residents feel that small High Street food retailers closed (eg: bakery and greengrocers). However, speciality shops such as the butchers, the quilting shop and the shoe shop have stood the test of time.

Local jobs for local people needs to be addressed. A survey of thirty-two supermarket employees showed that only four were from Risborough. All others were from surrounding villages and as far afield as Aylesbury and Wycombe. Local jobs for local people involves the provision of diverse and better-paid employment opportunities in the town in order for local workers to be able to afford the town's high cost of living.

The town does not have an active Chamber of Trade and Commerce and local businesses do not have a proactive, representative body.

There is room for improvement in street lighting to some areas. Princes Risborough Town Council is responsible for meeting the costs of the town's lighting from the precept. The matter needs to be addressed as this has a limiting effect on the Town Council's overall spend on development.

Transport

Risborough lies on the direct route between Aylesbury and High Wycombe and there is already traffic congestion in the town due to heavy through-traffic. There are thousands of new houses to be constructed at Aylesbury and Stoke Mandeville, as well as up to 600 houses within Risborough. The impact these are going to make on Risborough's traffic situation has to be examined.

An overarching survey of the town's traffic situation will need to be undertaken with regards to a possible bypass, signage, parking and bus routes.

Car parking needs to be improved and there is scope for a small-scale multi-storey parking garage with a suitably sympathetic architectural appearance.

With an ageing population more wheelchairs and shop-mobile scooters will be used in the future. Disability access to pavements, buildings and buses needs to be addressed.

No buses run from either the station or some of the outlying villages into the town. People have no option but to use their own vehicles. Buses also have no provision for carrying bicycles: thereby increasing the number of vehicles used for moving between both the surrounding countryside and the station to and through the town.

Environment

Attracting visitors to the town is a way of increasing revenue to the town without stressing some infrastructures such as medical and educational provisions. Much more could be made of tourism and encouragement of visitors to the town and surrounding areas. There is no obvious cohesive and comprehensive tourism development strategy for the town and surrounding area.

Much more could be made of the town's historic heritage and there is scope to develop and promote the existing town trail and signage.

An ageing population will require more town furniture and sheltered places to rest.

There is scope for both better definition of the urban edge and beautification of tarmacked pavement areas by more planting and street sculptures.



Princes Risborough in 2025

The Vision ... a sustainable environment in which people are pleased to live, work and visit: where commercial and leisure opportunities flourish; which visitors find attractive; with good access and ease of movement; that is socially strong with a cohesive community spirit; and whose historic character is enhanced.

The above summarises the broad aims, principles and aspirations of the town and hinterland residents. During many hours of meetings, consultations and deliberations with partners, residents and stakeholders these broad aims were crystallised and refined into a more specific vision for Risborough.

What have emerged are common areas of agreement that represent what the community envisions Princes Risborough will be like in the year 2025. What follows is The Vision Statement:

- ❑ “a flourishing economy” – in which an overarching business survey has been completed, leading to a sound economic base and:
 - A pro-active Chamber of Commerce,
 - A High Street filled with diverse specialist shops,
 - A vibrant and successful weekly market,
 - Another shopping centre has been established,
 - The town has “branded” itself along the lines of being “The Western Gateway to the Chilterns”, by adopting a slogan and logo. The town is actively marketed, and the Town Council employs a Town Manager.
 - A cohesive “tourist/visitors’ package” has been developed in conjunction with neighbouring villages, and there are diverse activities for visitors.
 - The town is also centre for visitors using the facilities offered by the Chilterns AONB (hikers, campers, riders and cyclists).
 - Risborough Information Centre has been expanded to offer visitors a service for coordinating trips and booking accommodation.
 - Within the town’s boundaries there is at least one quality hotel, tearoom, conference centre, caravan and camping site and a youth hostel for use by visitors.
 - Unique and historic features of the town are preserved, improved and promoted.
 - The availability of local jobs for all who want them locally.
 - A limited number of small “start-up” industrial units are available for local craftsmen and artisans. These buildings are architecturally finished in such a way as to fit well with the town’s historic character. The crafts practised within may well form part of Risborough’s attraction to visitors, and will certainly form part of a sub-contractual web for Risborough’s larger industries (eg: a foundry might provide handles to the furniture manufacturers, make attractive souvenirs and cast iron pots to sell to visitors and also provide a guided tour of a working foundry to visitors)
 - The employment offered is secure and offers opportunities for long-term development for individuals

□ “socially strong with a cohesive community spirit” – in which an overarching survey and rationalisation of the sites available for development, and the concerns of young and old have been addressed, leading to a safe and pleasant place for all to live, and:

- The establishment of a strong volunteer base, giving the town a high degree of self-reliance
- There are adequate facilities and support for teenagers, shown by the presence of a teenage amusement centre, another, more advanced, skate-park and an e-games café. Such activities for young people have not only reduced the incidences of anti-social behaviour, but also provide an added attraction to visitors with teenage children.
- Following a comprehensive survey of needs and resources, it is possible that economies of scale are rationalised and the teenage amusement centre is not in the town, but centrally placed between the marginalized areas (of Risborough, Thame, Longwick, Kingsey, Towersey and Chinnor) which each need facilities for youth: thus leaving the towns only to organise safe transport for their young people to and from the centre. Responsibility for the centrally placed facility is shared between Wycombe DC, Aylesbury Vale DC and South Oxfordshire DC.
- There is a large, multi-purpose meeting hall, which doubles as a cinema and theatre, placed close to suitable coach and car parking. It also offers rehearsal and recording rooms and is open, at certain times, as a supervised youth facility.
- There is better coordination of activities for the residents, particularly the elderly, through the development of a comprehensive electronic and hard copy “What’s On” and a 12/7 Citizen’s Advice and Information Centre with a Free-phone call line.
- Following an intergenerational social development project, young and old assist and cooperate with each other in a friendly and comfortable atmosphere of understanding.
- The community centre has been enlarged to encompass sufficient meeting rooms. An attractive tearoom (on the lines of “The Centre” at Chinnor) has been established which offers both a pleasant place for residents to meet friends and have refreshments and meals at reasonable rates.
- The town is a place for young people to remain with their families through the maintenance of a good educational system and leisure opportunities and the provision of local jobs and affordable housing.
- The Town Council is actively involved in the allocation of affordable housing for local residents and is working in partnership with housing associations to provide affordable rental housing for young people on a “social contract” basis.
- The security concerns of the population have been addressed by the implementation of CCTV and the availability of both special constabulary and pro-active volunteers to turn out to answer distress calls and attend scenes that require appropriate reaction.
- A small museum, celebrating the town’s unique and rich heritage is in place. A town trail and attractive information boards help to: educate residents in their local knowledge of the town’s historic past; and to enrich visitors’ experience of the town.
- Amenities and utilities for the town’s residents have been assured for the foreseeable future as the proactive Town Council has applied long-term planning principles and actively involved itself, and the residents, in the issues of burial sites, sewerage and waste treatment, recycling, active promotion of sustainable energy means, reduction of fossil fuel usage and carbon emissions, and promotion of a cleaner, healthier environment.

□ “with good access and ease of movement” - in which an overarching transport survey has been completed, leading to uncongested and environmentally friendly transport routes and systems and:

- Through traffic between Wycombe and Aylesbury has been diverted away from the town via a Bypass.
- Adequate parking facilities for cars, coaches and bicycles has been created by the construction of a suitable scale multi-storey car park with appropriate architectural finishes to sit well with the town’s historic core.
- There are regular mini-buses, which carry residents and visitors between the station and town centre, and between parking areas and town centre.
- There are more frequent, and smaller, buses from the surrounding villages, which run later into the night.
- All buses provide: space for cycles and shop mobiles to be carried; and good disability access.
- All pavements and buildings in the town provide disability access.
- The High Street is a place people come to, not through. It is pedestrianised; shoppers have comfortable, sheltered seats; pavements are covered, allowing people to move freely in any weather; and the whole area is attractive through appropriate plantings, landscaping and sculptures.
- There is an attractive cycle route around the town, with adequate cycle parking spaces provided where needed.
- People are able to access bus route information easily: via the Internet; Information Centre with its later opening hours; and posters at all bus stops.
- The Phoenix Trail’s surface between Towersey and Risborough has been improved per the original specifications agreed to by Buckinghamshire Country Council, and the trail is well maintained and used. It is more actively promoted as a visitor attraction. It is lit at night by sustainable solar or aolar energy, making it a safe place for late transit, thus expanding its usage as an environmentally healthy facility.
- Mini-buses run regularly and late into the night to Oxford, Aylesbury and High Wycombe.
- Signage into and around the town is clear and concise. The entry points to the town are marked by attractive plantings and unique sign-sculptures which identify it with its branding as the western gateway to the Chilterns.

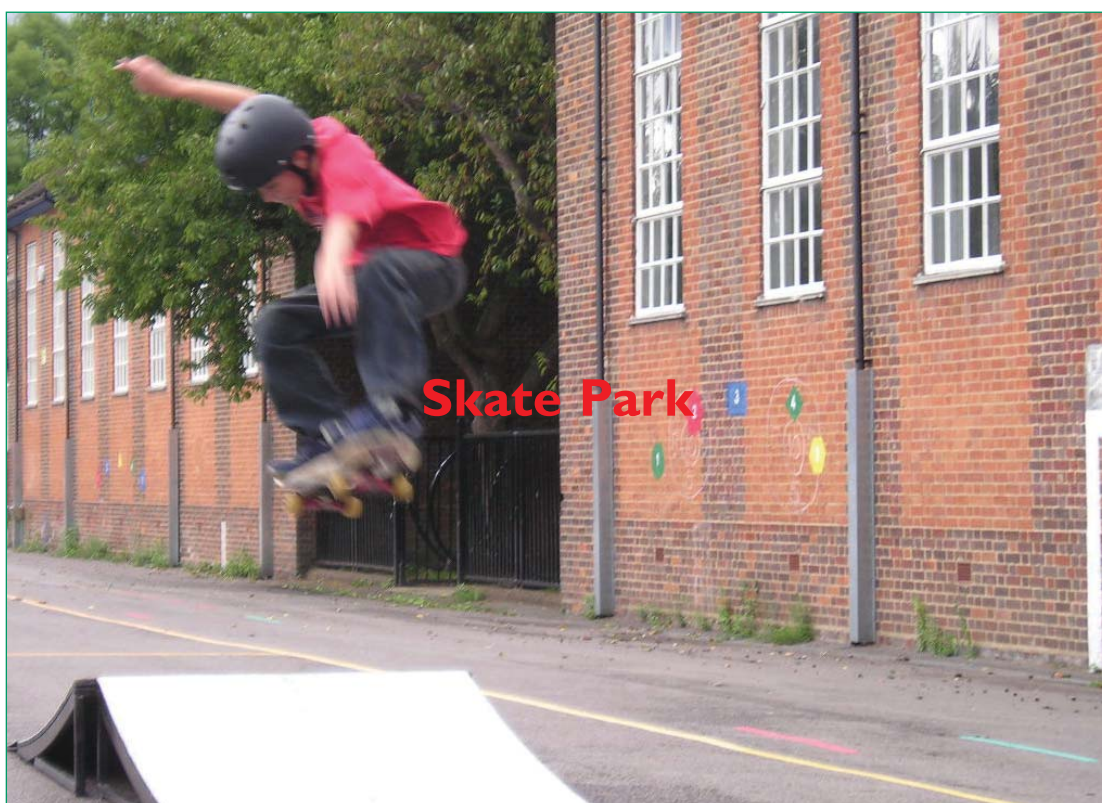
* **“a sustainable environment ... whose historic character is enhanced”** – Change over time is certain. It is the direction that the change takes which must be actively managed. Risborough has a unique and historic situation and very many positive characteristics. All development plans shall aim to keep, enhance and develop that which is good, and to remove or ameliorate that which is not good.

Risborough's Vision fits well with other visions:

The **Countryside Agency** has a vision for a countryside that is “**environmentally healthier, economically more successful and socially stronger.**”

SEEDA has a vision set out in its Regional Sustainable Development Framework: ‘**A prosperous region delivering high quality of life and environment for everyone, now and in the future.**’

DEFRA has a vision of a “... future where, here in the **UK**, rural communities are diverse, economically and environmentally viable, and socially inclusive with high quality public services and real opportunities for all.



MARKET TOWNS INITIATIVE - PRINCES RISBOROUGH HEALTHCHECK - ACTION PLAN - INDEX OF PROJECTS

DRAFT ONLY

PRO-FORMA PROJECT #	PROJECT NAME	TIMELINES			PARTNERSHIPS See key for acronyms
		SHORT > 2 YRS	MED 2-5 YRS	LONG < 6 YRS	
	ECONOMIC				
EC PF 1	EXPLORATION OF JOINT TOURISM DEVELOPMENT		X		
EC PF 2	DESIGN GUIDE TO HISTORIC BUILDINGS		X		
EC PF 3	TOURISM - INCREASE & COOPERATION WITH NEIGHBOURING VILLAGES		X		
EC PF 4	VISITORS CENTRE - MUSEUM			X	
EC PF 5	HOTEL, YOUTH HOSTEL, CARAVAN-CAMPING CARAVAN SITES SURVEY			X	
EC PF 6	FARMING DIVERSIFICATION		X		
EC PF 7	WHITELEAF CROSS - PUBLICITY & DEVELOPMENT		X		
EC PF 8	"WHITE BIKE" HIRE		X		
EC PF 9	LOCAL BUSINESS NETWORKING EVENT	X			
EC PF 10	2 SURVEYS - RETAIL & BUSINESS	X			
EC PF 11	2 DIRECTORIES - LOCAL BUSINESS & SHOPPING	X			
EC PF 12	REVIVE CHAMBER OF TRADE	X	X		
EC PF 13	IMPROVE WEEKLY MARKET	X			
EC PF 14	SUPPORT FESTIVAL	X			
	ENVIRONMENT				
EN PF 1	BLUE PLAQUES REVIEW & UPDATE	X			
EN PF 2	TOWN TRAIL REVIEW	X			
EN PF 3	TOWN FURNITURE REVIEW	X			
EN PF 4	TOWN APPEARANCE - UGLY HOT SPOTS SURVEY	X			
EN PF 5	REVAMP TOWN'S SIGNS & TOWN MAPS NOTICEBOARD		X		
EN PF 6	TREE PRESERVATION AND PLANTING REVIEW	X			
EN PF 7	IMPROVE PLANTINGS AT TOWN'S EDGES		X		
EN PF 8	SHOP FRONTS COMPETITION	X			
EN PF 9	CHRISTMAS LIGHTS IMPROVEMENT		X		
EN PF 10	BRUSH HILL PRESERVATION SUPPORT	X			
EN PF 11	MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL		X		
EN PF 13	ICKNEILD WAY PRESERVATION SUPPORT	X			
EN PF 14	BLACK HEDGE PRESERVATION SUPPORT	X			
EN PF 15	WHITELEAF CROSS PRESERVATION SUPPORT	X			
EN PF 16	STREET LIGHTING SUPPORT & IMPROVEMENT	X			

PRO-FORMA PROJECT #	PROJECT NAME	TIMELINES			PARTNERSHIPS
		SHORT > 2 YRS	MED 2-5 YRS	LONG < 6 YRS	
	SOCIAL				See key for acronyms
SC PF 1	DEVELOP VOLUNTEER BASE	x			
SC PF 2	RATIONALITY SURVEY OF ALL SITES FOR HOUSING EMPLOYMENT AND RECREATION	x			
SC PF 4	SURVEY & DEVELOP A YOUTH STRATEGY (INCL. THE ARK)	x			
SC PF 5	POSSIBILITY OF CENTRALLY PLACED YOUTH ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE	x	x	x	
SC PF 6	ADVANCED SKATE PARK	x			
SC PF 7	COORDINATION OF EVENTS FOR ELDERLY	x			
SC PF 8	PROMOTION OF EVENTS FOR YOUTH	x			
SC PF 9	DEVELOPMENT OF "ACCESS" & "WHAT'S ON" WEBSITE & HARD COPY - RISBOROUGH & HINTERLAND	x			
SC PF 10	MAINTENANCE OF "ACCESS" & "WHAT'S ON" WEBSITE & HARD COPY - RISBOROUGH & HINTERLAND	x			
SC PF 11	CCTV SURVEY	x	x		
SC PF 12	INVESTIGATE FAST RESPONSE GROUP & SPECIAL CONSTABULARY	x	x		
SC PF 13	NEW HOUSING - SOCIAL IMPACT STUDY	x			
SC PF 14	INVESTIGATE/LOBBY CHANGE OF POLICY RE LOCAL ALLOCATION OF HOUSING	x	x		
SC PF 15	INVESTIGATE/LOBBY WDC RE SHELTERED HOUSING PROVISION FOR TOWN	x	x		
SC PF 16	INVESTIGATE/LOBBY PCT RE PROVISION OF NHS DENTIST	x	x		
SC PF 17	INVESTIGATE CO-OPERATIVE VENTURE - PRTC, WDC, PCT - DRUGS ACTION	x			
SC PF 18	INVESTIGATE AN INTERGENERATIONAL "YOUNG AND OLD WORKING TOGETHER" PROJECT	x			
SC PF 19	PROVISION OF A TEAROOM AND RESTAURANT FOR THE COMMUNITY AT A SOCIAL CENTRE	x	x		
SC PF 20	PROVISION OF MULTI-PURPOSE MEETING HALL	x	x	x	
SC PF 21	PROVISION OF ADULT EDUCATION				
	TRANSPORT				
TR PF 1	NEW HOUSING - TRAFFIC IMPACT STUDY	x	x		
TR PF 2	CYCLE NETWORK FOR RISBOROUGH TOWN & IMPROVED CYCLE PARKING AREAS	x	x	x	
TR PF 3	EXTENSION OF PHOENIX TRAIL TO LEISURE CENTRE	x	x	x	
TR PF 4	FEASIBILITY STUDY VILLAGE CYCLE LINK EXTENSIONS	x	x	x	
TR PF 5	CYCLE RACKS ON BUSES	x	x		
TR PF 6	TRAFFIC CONGESTION STUDY (INCL HIGH STREET)	x			
TR PF 7	VEHICLE PARKING STUDY	x			
TR PF 8	SAFETY MEASURES AT TRAFFIC BLACKSPOTS	x			
TR PF 9	SIGNAGE IMPROVEMENTS	x			
TR PF 10	DISABLED & SHOPMOBILITY ACCESS STUDY	x	x		
TR PF 11	SHOPMOBILE SCHEME	x	x		
TR PF 12	COMMUNITY TRANSPORT STUDY	x	x		
TR PF 13	BUS TIMES INFO IN RISBOROUGH & SURROUNDING AREAS	x			
TR PF 14	INCREASED BUSES TO RISBOROUGH STATION AT PEAK TIMES & BETTER COORDINATION	x			
TR PF 15	TOWN BUS ROUTES STUDY	x			
TR PF 16	SURVEY BUSES TO VILLAGES & MARKET BUS	x	x		
TR PF 17	PHOENIX TRAIL IMPROVEMENT	x	x		
TR PF 18	TRANQUIL AND OTHER PROJECTS (PREVENTION OF RAT-RUNS)	x	x	x	

The Healthcheck...

In 2000, at the urging of Wycombe District Council, with the support of Risborough Area Forum and cooperation of the Town Council, a committee called the Risborough Area Community Action Group (RACAG) was formed.

The initial committee comprised:

Tony Bacon – retired – Chairman
Chris Waterton – WDC Economic Development Officer
Dave Furze – WDC Community Development Officer
Reg Orsler – PRTC Councillor & resident
Rod Lugton – retired – PR resident
Maureen Judd – retired – PR resident
Francis Gomme – BCA and PR resident

Their deliberations showed that it would be desirable to conduct a Market Town Healthcheck.

In 2002 an application to the Countryside Agency for match funding was made and granted in 2003.

The Countryside Agency twinned the neighbouring market town of Thame in Oxfordshire with Risborough for the purpose of this exercise. Their reasoning was that, geographically, the two towns shared a large hinterland. This represented a challenge due to a) the very limited time factor of doing two towns in a third of the time usually taken and, b) the lack of many common factors between the towns, and c) the diametrically opposite paradigms and modalities espoused by the two towns, and d) the bureaucratic/ administrative complexity of the area - in all 49 parishes, three district councils and two county councils were involved.

In October 2003 a Market Town Healthcheck Coordinator, Lis Dobb-Sandi, was appointed. Initially on a 6-month contract this was then extended to 9 months, but still meant that each town had half the time usually given to one.

The initial brief was for Ms Dobb-Sandi to produce an individual action plan for each town and separate action plan for the hinterland.

At the end of the Healthcheck process it was decided, given the aforesaid limitations, that it would not be possible to produce a joint action plan for Thame and Risborough's hinterland.

A thorough Healthcheck of Risborough was undertaken. There was wide community consultation and the residents' issues and concerns were taken on board. From this The Vision was prepared and presented to the community. A partnership with the Princes Risborough Town Council was formed and the resultant Action Plan represents the final product of many hours of meetings and deliberations.

The final RACAG committee comprised:

Chris Waterton – WDC Economic Development Officer – Joint Chair
Dave Furze – WDC Community Development Officer – Joint Chair
Reg Orsler – PRTC Councillor & resident
Rod Lugton – retired – PR resident
Maureen Judd – retired – PR resident
Alan Turner - PRTC Councillor & resident
Maggie Wooster - PRTC Councillor & resident
Pamela Wilson - PRTC Councillor & resident
John Coombe - PRTC Councillor & resident
Philip Arnold - PRTC Councillor & resident



Community Consultation:

Besides making contact with, & consulting various people who were representative of organisations, the following “mass” consultations were undertaken:

Supermarket employees - November 2003
Community Needs Assessment – December 2003
The Vision Event – January 2004
Youth Questionnaire – April/May 2004
Hinterland Questionnaire – May/June 2004

Supermarket employees - November 2003

The Coordinator spent a morning at the large supermarket in the staff canteen handing out a simple questionnaire form and waiting for staff to hand them in once complete. Fifty forms were handed out, thirty-two were returned, and of those only four had been completed in any detail. Those four were residents of Risborough. The rest of the respondents lived in Aylesbury, High Wycombe and surrounding villages. The prevalent feeling conveyed by most of the staff was that, as they didn't live in Risborough, they came in to Risborough for no other reason except work. They seldom went in to the town centre, didn't do any shopping on the High Street, had no idea what facilities were available and even less interest in, or knowledge of, the town's pertinent issues. Some claimed that as they were not paid for their tea break, they saw no reason to spend it completing a form on a town in which they had no interest. Interestingly, in conversations with the Coordinator, many indicated that they would like to live in a place like Risborough if only they could afford it. As a means of gathering meaningful data the exercise was ineffective. However, it was valuable in that it: highlighted the issue of the types of local jobs that local people might need – the high cost of living in Risborough means that many local people cannot afford to work at lower pay scales; the almost complete disinterest of non-residents in the town; and the fact that drawing a large immigrant workforce from surrounding areas does not necessarily mean that High Street commerce benefits from the daily influx of people.

Community Needs Assessment – December 2003

In the winter of 2003 the Berryfield School site was a pertinent and controversial issue in Risborough. The town appeared to be divided over the issue and public meetings were taking place. The Town council indicated to the Steering Group that they did not know how the majority of the residents felt about this, and many other issues. As a result of the prevailing situation it was decided to conduct a comprehensive survey. A Community Needs Appraisal (C.N.A.) questionnaire was devised and printed. Princes Risborough was divided into thirty smaller areas following the boundaries of the 2001 Population Census. Volunteer pollsters were called for at a public meeting called by the Town Council. Over a period of two days before Christmas they were briefed by the Coordinator and handed their questionnaires, maps and instructions. During the “dull” period between Christmas and New Year the pollsters knocked on the door of approximately every seventh house in Risborough. They spoke with the occupant to gain their cooperation. The forms were left with the occupant and the pollsters called back later, at a prearranged time and day, and collected the completed forms.

In order to encourage residents to respond to the C.N.A. the Town Council offered £100 for a prize draw. The Healthcheck also called for volunteers to step forward. These two facts meant that it would be necessary for some residents to write their names and contact details on the form. At the same time it was important that residents were uninhibited in expressing their views, so it was necessary to assure the respondents that their opinions would remain anonymous.

To ensure respondents' anonymity the last page of the form, containing space for the respondents name etc., was perforated. An envelope was handed out with each form. The respondent sealed the completed form in the envelope. All envelopes collected were handed over to the Coordinator who undertook to open each envelope and detach the last page before handing over all the forms for collation.

The C.N.A. achieved a 78% return rate, and over one tenth of the 3500 households in Risborough responded. The data obtained from this questionnaire were invaluable. What was also invaluable were the unseen benefits: it engendered a lot of interest; it increased the residents' awareness of both the Healthcheck process and the issues in the town; and thirty eight people volunteered to assist with any future initiatives. Only 42% of the respondents wished to participate in the £100 draw.

A volunteer spent the best part of two weeks typing up the thousands of respondents' written comments, and once completed, the forms were handed on to Wycombe District Council's Secretarial Services Bureau for collation of the "Yes/No" answers on their computers' SNAP software.

The results of the C.N.A. are included in the Appendices schedule.

The Vision Events – January 2004

Using the preliminary results of the C.N.A., and issues raised by both the Risborough Area Forum and the Town Council, a draft Vision was compiled and presented to the community at two public meetings on the 13th January.

These meetings took place in St Mary's Church Hall at 15:00 and 19:00 hrs and both meetings followed the same agenda. The hall was divided into: an area where relevant organisations had various interest displays on view; a formal seating area where the public were addressed; an area where four separate tables and chairs allowed panel discussions on the four Healthcheck categories (economy, social & community, transport and environment); and finally a refreshments area.

The public were met at the door by members of the Steering Group and were then left to walk around and examine the displays, most of which were manned by representatives of the organisations concerned. Fifteen minutes later the meeting was called to order. The Chairman of RACAG addressed the public and the Coordinator then presented an update and the draft Vision on overhead display. A discussion from the floor ensued. The public were then offered refreshments and asked to take part in panel discussions. A member of the RACAG steering group facilitated each panel discussion.

The two meetings were well attended, with 32 and 48 respectively, and provided sufficient information and opinions for a final version of The Vision to be compiled.

Youth Questionnaire – April/May 2004

This Questionnaire formed part of the joint initiative between Thame and Risborough. It was directed at young people from the ages of 11 to 19, and sought to, not only establish what their issues and concerns were, but also to feed data into the joint hinterland survey. 1000 copies were printed, 650 copies were distributed to Lord Williams School in Thame, 50 copies to youth associations around Thame, 150 copies to Princes Risborough School and 150 copies to Wheatley Park School, Oxford. The poll was scheduled to be distributed in late March 2004, timed to coincide with half term. Due to the diametrically opposite paradigms and modalities espoused by the two towns there were various delays created which caused the questionnaire's late distribution, collection and collation from Thame.

This affected the return rates, which were :

Princes Risborough School	35%
Lord Williams School	11%
Wheatley Park School	3%

The very low return rate from Wheatley Park can be ascribed to the fact that it lies on very periphery of the large area that Thame claimed as its hinterland.

Despite the poor return rate, the returns showed that the main issues for youth were: a need for more entertainment in their leisure time, a lack of knowledge about the various youth initiatives in their area, a dissatisfaction with the skate parks and a concern about drugs.

The results of the Youth Questionnaire are included in the Appendices schedule.

Hinterland Questionnaire – May/June 2004

This Questionnaire formed part of the joint initiative between Thame and Risborough. It was directed specifically at parish clerks and farmers in the large hinterland and sought to, not only establish what their issues and concerns were, but also to feed data into the joint hinterland survey. 200 copies were printed, 50 copies were distributed to farmers through Thame Cattlemarket's billing database, and 49 parishes received 3 copies each. The poll was scheduled to be distributed in late February 2004. Due to the diametrically opposite paradigms and modalities espoused by the two towns there were various delays created in its compilation which caused the questionnaire's late distribution, collection and collation. Most questionnaires were only received after the printed deadline date for return.

Of the 200 copies distributed 21 had been returned by the 30th June 2004, a return rate of 10%. It is felt that the response would have been greater if: the forms could have gone out earlier; and if there had been adequate time to do a telephonic "chase-up".

The results of the Parish & Farmers Questionnaire are included in the Appendices schedule.

List of Appendices (separate publication)

From the Countryside Agency:

The Snapshot – Economy
The Snapshot – Social & Community
The Snapshot – Transport & Accessibility
The Snapshot – Environment

The Worksheets – Economy 1-6
The Worksheets – Social & Community 1-6
The Worksheets – Transport & Accessibility 1-3
The Worksheets – Environment 1-3

For Data Compilation – Princes Risborough:

The Tesco employees – questionnaire
The Community Needs Appraisal – questionnaire
The Community Needs Appraisal – results
The Vision / 13th Jan 2004 Event – panel discussion

For Data Compilation – Joint Hinterland Risborough and Thame:

The Youth questionnaire – questionnaire
The Youth questionnaire – results
The Parish & Farmers questionnaire – questionnaire
The Parish & Farmers questionnaire – results

The Action Plan Projects – Princes Risborough:

Economic - Proformas I – 14
Social & Community - Proformas I – 20
Transport - Proformas I – 19
Environment - Proformas I – 16