Appendix A – Economic Summary

The below Economic Summary has been prepared by Treasury Solutions, Capita Asset Services. Given the impact of the EU Referendum vote in June 2016, a Q1 commentary has been included in this section to provide a more relevant economic picture.

Treasury Officers at the Council, supported by advice from Capita, monitor the wider economy on a daily basis as it provides the context in which the Council invests its funds and provides information on credit risk relating to the Council’s money.

The wider economic picture also provides information regarding the timing interest rates may change, impacting investment strategy and also decisions on borrowing if applicable. Most Local Authority borrowing in general has traditionally been from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), a Central Government lending facility, whose rates are determined by UK Gilt rates and these fluctuate based on the wider UK economic environment. Although Wycombe District Council did not have any borrowing from the PWLB or the financial markets as at 31 March 2016, the economic background is important should the Council choose to borrow in future.

Capita Asset Services Economic Summary

2015/16 Economic Summary

Market expectations for the first increase in Bank Rate moved considerably during 2015/16, starting at quarter 3 2015 but soon moving back to quarter 1 2016. However, by the end of the year, market expectations had moved back radically to quarter 2 2018 due to many fears including concerns that China’s economic growth could be heading towards a hard landing; the potential destabilisation of some emerging market countries particularly exposed to the Chinese economic slowdown; and the continuation of the collapse in oil prices during 2015 together with continuing Eurozone growth uncertainties.

These concerns have caused sharp market volatility in equity prices during the year with corresponding impacts on bond prices and bond yields due to safe haven flows. Bank Rate, therefore, remained unchanged at 0.5% for the seventh successive year. Economic growth (GDP) in the UK surged strongly during both 2013/14 and 2014/15 to make the UK the top performing advanced economy in 2014. However, 2015 has been disappointing with growth falling steadily from an annual rate of 2.9% in quarter 1 2015 to 2.1% in quarter 4.

The Funding for Lending Scheme, announced in July 2012, resulted in a flood of cheap credit being made available to banks which then resulted in money market investment rates falling materially. These rates continued at very low levels during 2015/16.
The sharp volatility in equity markets during the year was reflected in sharp volatility in bond yields. However, the overall dominant trend in bond yields since July 2015 has been for yields to fall to historically low levels as forecasts for inflation have repeatedly been revised downwards and expectations of increases in central rates have been pushed back. In addition, a notable trend in the year was that several central banks introduced negative interest rates as a measure to stimulate the creation of credit and hence economic growth.

The ECB had announced in January 2015 that it would undertake a full blown quantitative easing programme of purchases of Eurozone government and other bonds starting in March at €60bn per month. This put downward pressure on Eurozone bond yields. There was a further increase in this programme of QE in December 2015. The anti-austerity government in Greece, elected in January 2015 eventually agreed to implement an acceptable programme of cuts to meet EU demands after causing major fears of a breakup of the Eurozone. Nevertheless, there are continuing concerns that a Greek exit has only been delayed.

As for America, the economy has continued to grow healthily on the back of resilient consumer demand. The first increase in the central rate occurred in December 2015 since when there has been a return to caution as to the speed of further increases due to concerns around the risks to world growth.

On the international scene, concerns have increased about the slowing of the Chinese economy and also its potential vulnerability to both the bursting of a property bubble and major exposure of its banking system to bad debts. The Japanese economy has also suffered disappointing growth in this financial year despite a huge programme of quantitative easing, while two of the major emerging market economies, Russia and Brazil, are in recession. The situations in Ukraine, and in the Middle East with ISIS, have also contributed to volatility.

**2016/17 Q1 Economic Summary**

- During the quarter ended 30 June 2016:
  - The UK voted to leave the EU;
  - The economic recovery lost some momentum ahead of the vote;
  - Growth remained highly dependent on consumer spending;
  - The jobs recovery slowed, but wage growth picked up;
  - Inflation remained stuck at very low levels;
  - Sharp fall in sterling following the referendum result;
  - Post-referendum uncertainty brought the prospect of a near-term rate cut onto the agenda;
  - Both the ECB and the Federal Reserve kept policy unchanged.
The economic recovery lost a little momentum in Q1 2016, with real GDP growth slowing from 0.7% q/q in Q4 to 0.4% – an annual rate of 2.0%. The recovery remained highly unbalanced too, with net trade subtracting from GDP growth for the second time in three quarters. And the current account deficit stood at 6.9% of GDP in Q1, only a little off the record 7.2% of GDP seen in Q4 2015. Business surveys suggest that activity slowed further in Q2 ahead of the EU referendum. Indeed, the Markit/CIPS composite PMI for May is consistent with quarterly growth slowing to 0.2% or so in Q2.

However, the official output data for Q2 so far have been a little more upbeat. Industrial production rose by a monthly 2% in April – which suggests that the sector may have pulled out of recession in the second quarter – and construction output rose by a monthly 2.5%. Beyond the referendum, the first PMI survey conducted after the vote – released on August 1st – will provide an initial indication of the extent to which the vote to leave has affected activity. The first post-referendum official activity data are for industrial production, due to be released on August 9th.

Consumers generally appear to have taken pre-referendum uncertainty in their stride, with household spending still the principal driver of economic growth. The pace of retail sales volumes growth has picked up, rising to a healthy annual rate of 6% in May. Away from the high street, the Bank of England’s Agent’s scores of consumer services turnover growth rose too. Admittedly, GfK/NOP consumer confidence has slipped back from its 2015 highs in the run-up to the referendum but remained elevated prior to the vote. Indeed, the balance for major purchases stayed at +9 in June, well above its long-run average of -6, pointing to solid growth in durable goods spending. However, consumer confidence is likely to weaken following the referendum result: the extent of any immediate impact on confidence will be evident in the next GfK/NOP data, due on July 29th.

The labour market performed fairly well prior to the EU referendum too, with employment rising by 55,000 in the three months to April. Admittedly, this is below the strong rises seen last year, but some easing in the pace of the jobs recovery was always to be expected given how much slack has already been eroded. Indeed, the ILO unemployment rate fell to 5.0% in the three months to April, it’s lowest in over a decade. The timelier claimant count measure held at 2.2% in May. Pay growth also picked up in April – annual growth in regular pay (ex. bonuses), jumped from 1.9% to 2.5%.

However, the labour market story hasn’t been entirely positive. At least some of April’s rise in pay growth was probably down to the imposition of the National Living Wage, so may not entirely be a reflection of a tighter labour market. And much of the rise in employment in the three months to April was driven by self-employment, which may reflect people struggling to find employee roles. In any case, employment growth may slow markedly in the next few months due to the disruption associated with the vote to leave the EU.
Away from the labour market, inflation has been very subdued in the months preceding the EU referendum. CPI inflation has stood at just 0.3% every month so far this year, with the exception of March when Easter timing effects distorted the figures. But price pressures are likely to pick up in the months ahead. Around 80% of the difference between headline inflation and the Bank of England’s 2% target is due to low food and energy price inflation. But the dampening influence of food and energy prices is set to wane as last year’s sharp falls drop out of the annual comparison. What’s more, sterling dropped by more than 8% following the UK’s decision to leave the EU, leaving it around 14% below its mid-November peak. This should eventually feed through to higher inflation, which we expect to rise above the Bank of England’s 2% target in the first half of next year.

This leaves the MPC with an awkward trade-off between minimising the short-term hit to the economy and overshooting its inflation target. However, given how low inflation currently is, the MPC has some room for manoeuvre. We expect interest rates to be cut from 0.5% to 0.25%, probably at the MPC’s next meeting on July 14th. Indeed, in a speech on 30 June, Governor Carney stated that “some monetary easing will likely be required over the summer”, and markets are pricing in a rate cut at the MPC’s next meeting. A ramp-up in the Bank’s asset purchase programme is also a possibility, depending on the scale of the short-term economic damage.

Like the Bank of England, both the Federal Reserve and the ECB kept rates on hold during Q2. However, despite leaving its economic projections largely unchanged, the FOMC nonetheless cut its interest rate projections quite sharply. Six of the 17 officials anticipate just one hike in the US this year, and median interest rate forecasts for end-2017 and 2018 were revised down too. What’s more, this was before the financial market turmoil which followed the results of the UK’s EU referendum. At the margin, this could delay hikes even further. Meanwhile, we expect the ECB to respond to the economic damage generated by the UK’s vote to leave the EU by accelerating the pace of its asset purchases and possibly with another small cut in interest rates.

Turning to the public finances, the data released since March’s Budget will only have added to the Chancellor’s worries. Public sector net borrowing (excluding public sector banks) was only slightly down on a year earlier at £9.7bn in May, indicating that borrowing was already on course to overshoot the OBR’s forecast of a 25% fall in FY 2016/17 as a whole before the effects of any post-referendum disruption are accounted for.

The plans laid out in the March Budget stated that fiscal tightening would intensify this year – and Chancellor Osborne has warned that he would impose an austere emergency budget following a vote to leave the EU. However, Mr Osborne has already rowed back on this threat. What’s more, if the OBR projects that the four-quarter average of annual GDP growth will fall below 1%, this activates a get-out clause in the government’s fiscal rules. This could lead to
some of the near-term tightening described in the Budget being deferred to help reduce the damage caused by the referendum result.

- Finally, the FTSE 100 has now recovered the ground it lost following the UK’s vote to leave the EU, and stands around 3% higher than at the start of Q2. But the multinational-heavy FTSE 100 has benefitted from sterling’s collapse, which boosts the value of firms’ overseas earnings. The FTSE 250, which better reflects the domestic economy, is down 5% since the start of the quarter. Meanwhile, 10-year bond yields have sunk to new record lows of just under 1% on the back of safe-haven demand.

### Interest Rate Forecast

Capita Asset Services, has provided the following forecast:

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<td><strong>50yr PWLB rate</strong></td>
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Capita Asset Services undertook a quarterly review of its interest rate forecasts on 4 July 2016 after letting markets settle down somewhat after the Brexit result of the referendum on 23 June. It is generally agreed that this outcome will result in a slowing in growth in the second half of 2016 at a time when the Bank of England has only limited ammunition in its armoury to promote growth by using monetary policy. We therefore expect that Bank Rate will be cut by 0.25%, probably at the 14 July MPC meeting but possibly at its quarterly Inflation Report meeting on 4 August when it has a greater opportunity to report in depth on its research and findings. Bank Rate could even be cut to 0% or 0.10% over this period. Thereafter, we do not expect the MPC to take any further action on Bank Rate in 2016 or 2017 as we expect the pace of recovery of growth to be weak during a period of great uncertainty as to the final agreement between the UK and the EU on arrangements after Brexit. However, the MPC may also consider renewing a programme of quantitative easing; the prospect of further purchases of gilts in this way has already resulted in 10 year gilt yields falling below 1% for the first time ever. We do not expect Bank Rate to start rising until quarter 2 2018 and for further increases then to be at a slower pace than before. The Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, has repeatedly stated that increases in Bank Rate will be slow and gradual after they do start. The MPC is concerned about the impact of increases on many heavily indebted...
consumers, especially when the growth in average disposable income is still weak and for some consumers, who have had no increases in pay, could be non-existent (other than through some falls in prices).

**CAPITA ASSET SERVICES’ FORWARD VIEW**

Economic forecasting remains difficult with so many external influences weighing on the UK. Our Bank Rate forecasts, (and also MPC decisions), will be liable to further amendment depending on how economic data and developments in financial markets transpire over the next year. Forecasts for average earnings beyond the three year time horizon will be heavily dependent on economic and political developments. Major volatility in bond yields is likely to endure as investor fears and confidence ebb and flow between favouring more risky assets i.e. equities, or the safe haven of bonds.

The overall longer run trend is for gilt yields and PWLB rates to rise, albeit gently. An eventual world economic recovery may also see investors switching from the safe haven of bonds to equities.

We have pointed out consistently that the Fed. rate is likely to go up more quickly and more strongly than Bank Rate in the UK and recent events have not changed that view, just that the timing of such increases may well have been deferred somewhat. While there is normally a high degree of correlation between the two yields, we would expect to see a decoupling of yields between the two i.e. we would expect US yields to go up faster than UK yields. We will need to monitor this area closely and the resulting effect on PWLB rates.

The overall balance of risks to economic recovery in the UK remains to the downside. Although economic growth remains relatively steady, only time will tell whether some of the global headwinds sap some of the strength from the UK’s future growth.

We would, as always, remind clients of the view that we have expressed in our previous interest rate revision newsflashes of just how unpredictable PWLB rates and bond yields are at present. We are experiencing exceptional levels of volatility which are highly correlated to emerging market, geo-political and sovereign debt crisis developments. Our revised forecasts are based on the Certainty Rate (minus 20 bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1st November 2012.

Apart from the uncertainties already explained above, downside risks to current forecasts for UK gilt yields and PWLB rates currently include:

- Emerging country economies, currencies and corporates destabilised by falling commodity prices and / or Fed. rate increases, causing a further flight to safe havens (bonds).

- Geopolitical risks in Europe, the Middle East and Asia, increasing safe haven flows.
• UK economic growth and increases in inflation are weaker than we currently anticipate.

• Weak growth or recession in the UK’s main trading partners - the EU and US.

• A resurgence of the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis.

• Recapitalisation of European banks requiring more government financial support.

• Monetary policy action failing to stimulate sustainable growth and combat the threat of deflation in western economies, especially the Eurozone and Japan.

The potential for upside risks to current forecasts for UK gilt yields and PWLB rates, especially for longer term PWLB rates include:

• The pace and timing of increases in the Fed. funds rate causing a fundamental reassessment by investors of the relative risks of holding bonds as opposed to equities and leading to a major flight from bonds to equities.

• UK inflation returning to significantly higher levels than in the wider EU and US, causing an increase in the inflation premium inherent to gilt yields.