

Area Action Plan: Issues & Options Stage

prepared for the
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Borough Council of Wellingborough



North Northamptonshire
Local Development Framework

For more detail please go to
www.wellingborough.gov.uk/towncentreaap

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01 Introduction

Background

The Borough Council of Wellingborough, as the Local Planning Authority, is consulting on examples for the regeneration of the whole of the Town Centre of Wellingborough. This is part of the process of producing the “Town Centre Area Action Plan” (AAP) that is itself part of the “Local Development Framework” (LDF). It is effectively the new local plan for the town.

The need for a new plan is driven by several issues, the foremost being the housing growth of the town as part of the Government’s Growth Area policies. This cascades down through regional strategy (Milton Keynes and South Midlands Study policies and the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy - RSS8), North Northamptonshire policy (the Core Spatial Strategy - CSS, and the Borough’s Local Development Framework - LDF).

The Town Centre AAP is part of the Borough’s LDF but needs to follow on from the CSS and other strategies (“to be in conformity”). For example this not only refers to housing numbers, but also to the amount of shops needed - a minimum 15,000 sqm of new retail up to 2021 (e.g. shops, financial and professional services, restaurants, cafes, take-aways, etc). This roughly the equivalent of another Swansgate, but not necessarily in one new shopping centre. There will also be a need to find space for a further 22,000 - 26,000 sqm of retail in the period 2021 to 2031.

The drive from the housing growth will eventually see our town population increase by 20,000 between 2001 and 2021 and further growth to 2031. There are serious competition issues from other town centres and Wellingborough currently loses 50% of all retail spend to other towns. It is clear from all the consultation undertaken to

date that people understand and expect major changes in the town centre to happen, and that if successful, these changes will help keep the town centre healthy, active, commercially viable and prevent its decline.

Various background studies have been undertaken and these are available on the Council’s website in the “Baseline Study”. This includes the analysis of what already exists in the town centre, the results of the consultations to date, urban design appraisals, socio-economic data, as well as transport, retail and commercial appraisals.

Those consulted are clear that a new town centre is not only about shopping, but also all the other aspects that make up a vibrant community for the town’s residents and visitors alike. In addition to new homes the examples in this document sets out other uses including: community, leisure and cultural facilities, a new (or extension of existing) primary school, new site examples for the Tresham Institute and Innovation Centre, some offices and other infrastructure such as car parks, improved bus walking and cycling facilities and new roads.

A key element is the improvement of what is known as “public realm”. This may include major improvements to the market square, to footpaths and open spaces generally, as well as making places and routes safe and attractive, providing a good setting for the preeminent feature of the town’s heritage. The town has retained a significant built heritage and many modern buildings of architectural merit, and whilst the setting for the best buildings should be protected and/or improved, poorer quality buildings could be replaced.

How these examples have been informed

This report has been produced on a thorough analysis (Town Centre AAP Baseline Report) and a series of consultation events:

- Previous meetings based on the town centre issues and options stage including:
 - Town Centre Partnership meetings
 - Meeting for the general public
 - Black and Ethnic
 - Young People
 - Heritage interest
 - Library Services
 - Highways
 - Technical Stakeholders
- Various Town Centre Steering Group meetings
- Various Town Centre Advisory Group meetings
- 2 (x) Strategic Development Advisory Panel Meetings (WBC Members)
- North Northamptonshire Development Company Meetings
- Wider Borough Council of Wellingborough Officers Meetings

The following points can be found in Chapter 11 of the AAP Baseline Report. More specific key issues on individual topics such as socio-economics, environment, transport, etc. can be found at the end of each chapter of the AAP Baseline Report.

Key Issues derived from the Baseline Report and the series of consultation

- Improvements to the general environment, particularly Market Square
- Congestion within and around the town centre
- Better retail, leisure and community uses provision
- Retention of historic character and enhancement of local distinctiveness
- Redevelopment of sites which are out of character and have a negative impact on the overall appeal of Wellingborough
- Efficient public transport and overall improved accessibility

Town Centre AAP Aims

To promote the vitality and viability of the town centre, exploiting the benefits of enhanced growth of the town whilst retaining the best and most valued aspects of its existing character.

Objectives

- | | |
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| <p>1) To enhance the distinctiveness and appeal of the Town Centre (and Town as a whole)</p> <p>2) To identify a highly recognisable and attractive civic heart, together with substantial improvements to the public realm</p> <p>3) To seek a major increase in retail with enhanced quality and choice in the context of the Growth Agenda.</p> <p>4) To support more opportunities for safe and attractive town centre urban living through improved quality of recreational opportunities and a vibrant, safe evening economy.</p> <p>5) To protect and enhance the best heritage in the town centre and ensure the delivery of quality urban design and architecture.</p> <p>6) To ensure a high degree of accessibility into and across the town centre by providing sufficient and appropriate car parking, better quality public transport, and substantially improved connectivity and priority for pedestrians and cyclists.</p> | <p>7) To offer a range of services and functions for the Town Centre, but acknowledge that major office accommodation will likely be close to the station and in edge-of-town sites (due to space limitations and market demands).</p> <p>8) To bring in more leisure and cultural uses, and enhance the viability of the existing major facilities (e.g. Castle Theatre and Museum).</p> <p>9) To support the retention and enrichment of tertiary education within or on the edge of the Town Centre.</p> <p>10) To seek to achieve development that is carbon neutral.</p> <p>11) To reflect diversity in developing the town centre by providing opportunities to build on the cultural mix of the community</p> |
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Next Steps

This stage of the process presents examples for your consultation. **At this stage we need to hear what you think is good and bad about each of the examples** rather than simply choosing one example over another. In fact it is likely that when we move on to the next stage of “Preferred Option”, we might take the best from each of the Strategic Examples, rather than one of the three.

The Council will initiate, another formal consultation on the Preferred Option in the summer, having taken into account all the consultation responses from the public, as well as from other stakeholders during this Issues and Options stage. The Preferred Options will only be consulted on after a summary of all the previous comments and the Preferred Options are put before the Council’s Environment Committee.

This is an exciting time for the Town, but given the scale of the proposed changes that will shape the future of the town for the next generation, it is critical that we receive as many comments as possible. All contributions are welcome.

Contact Point

For general information on the progress of the Town Centre plans please contact:

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sustainablecommunities@wellingborough.gov.uk

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02 Initial Strategic Examples

Common Principles

Historic Street Pattern

The heart-shaped circuit of Church Street, Market Street and Silver Street defines the central core of Wellingborough. This public realm circuit is clear in the Ordnance Survey map of 1803 (1) and is thought to have its origins in the medieval period. The market still occupies its ancient site adjacent to the Medieval All Hallows Church and many of the town's most historic buildings help to define the central commercial core of Wellingborough. The Town Centre Conservation Area closely corresponds with this central area.

Fortunately, there have been only a few major development interventions that have impacted negatively on this heritage asset. One such intervention is the 1960's high-rise Tresham College that occupies a large site to the north of Church Street. Its relocation and the redevelopment of its current represents an opportunity to repair a major part of the damage done. Similarly, the redevelopment of the Market Square site promises to provide a new focus for the Town, as well as providing much needed mixed-use development.

Although a number of alternative scenarios have been discussed and are subject to consultation, the overwhelming view expressed by stakeholders has been to strengthen and enhance the ancient public realm circuit as the basis for all planning examples generated through the Area Action Plan Process.

Accordingly, all examples seek to build on the heritage assets of the town centre core, using

Church, Market and Silver Street, so far as is possible, as a pedestrian, cyclist, and public transport priority realm.

Restoring Historic Routes

A number of ancient, currently pedestrian, lanes exist within the central core area. These small scale lanes provide narrow, shortcut connections, and yield intimate views through and beyond. Pebble Lane, off Market Street, aligns with the east door of All Hallows'. Church Way(3) and Angel Lane, both off Silver Street are more informal and less deliberate.

Notwithstanding public safety and surveillance of pedestrian routes, it is proposed to introduce where appropriate, modern interpretations of Wellingborough lanes to improve pedestrian and cyclist circulation within the town centre.

Improving important links

The public realm circuit defined by Church Street, Market Street and Silver Street is tightly drawn around the core area, which is itself too small to encompass all of the development required for the envisaged town centre expansion.

The radial routes into the core area also have a role in the expansion and improvement of the town centre. The high quality public realm of the core area will need to expand out along the radial routes to be fronted by buildings, new and old, strengthening their traditional role as trading routes.

All Strategic Examples seek to improve these radial thoroughfares and, in particular Cambridge Street, Midland Road and Sheep Street to improve accessibility to the new swimming pool, to the railway station and to the Castle Theatre.

North-South Spine Route

The Atkins concept master plan, adopted by the Council in 2005,(4) for the town centre emphasises a new north-south spine route, in particular linking the town centre core with the Castle Theatre and a suggested cultural

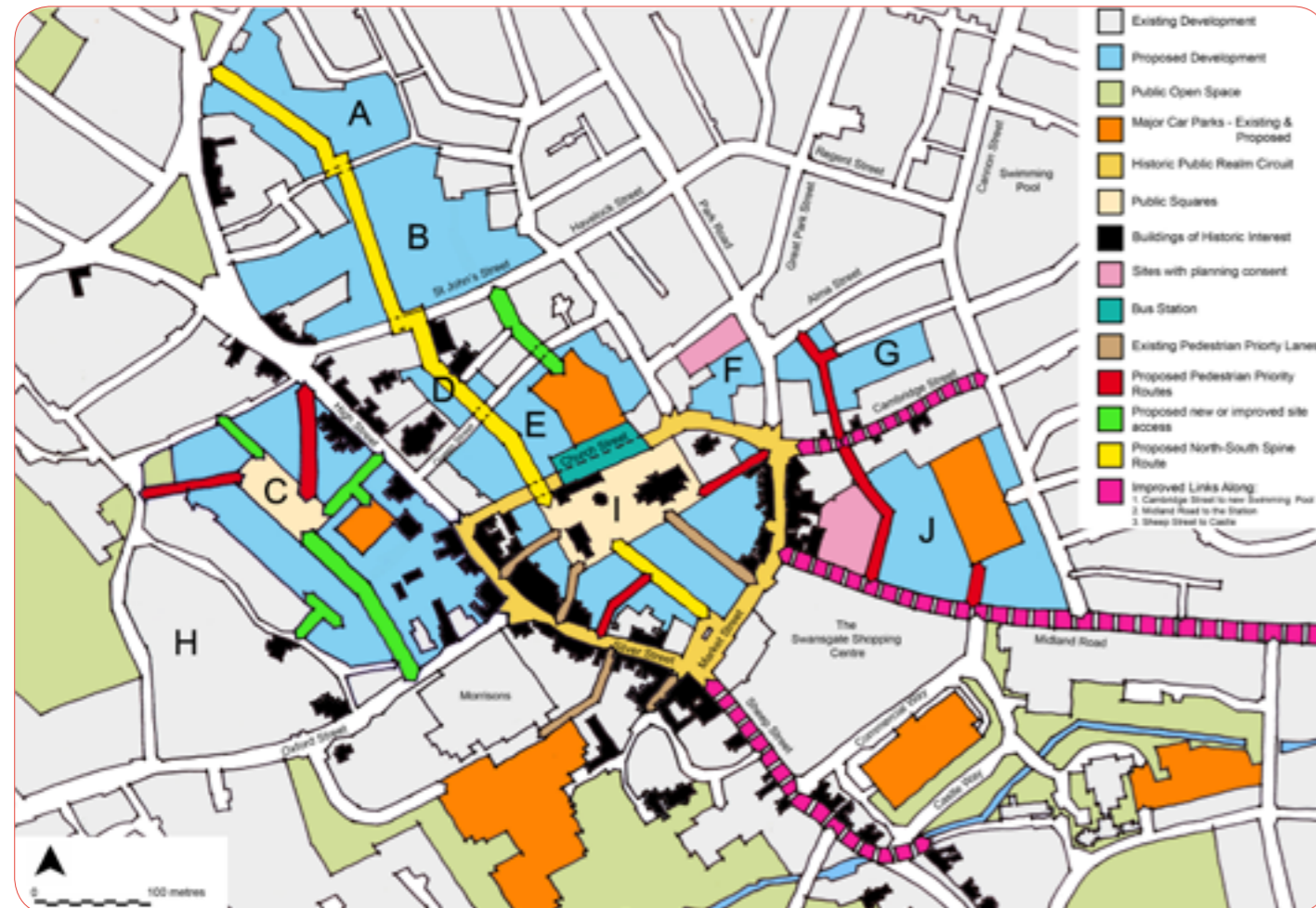


Figure 2.1 Common Principles

quarter of the town adjacent to the Theatre building. A version of this route is a feature of all three examples. In the short-term, it is not possible to implement a direct route to the south of Market Street because the Swangate Shopping Centre and car park are not scheduled for redevelopment before 2021. For this reason the improvement of Sheep Street is emphasised within the examples to better link the Castle Theatre and its proposed cultural quarter (Example C) with the town centre core in the short to medium term.

It is hoped that the redevelopment of the Swangate Shopping Centre will facilitate a more direct link in the longer term.

North of the Market Square and Tresham site, there are a number of major potential opportunity sites, including the Vauxhall garage. For this reason all three examples extend a new north-south spine route as far north as Gold Street. Whilst the north-south spine route will, in places, be vehicular, it will prioritise pedestrian and cycle movements overall.

Historic Buildings

The greatest concentration of listed buildings are along the London Road, Sheep Street and the High Street. Almost all buildings along Sheep Street, identified in the Town Centre Conservation Area schedules as historically 'significant', although the majority are not listed. Further concentrations are clustered around All Hallows Church (2) and along both sides of Market Street, south of Gloucester Place. There are four listed buildings in Cambridge Street, outside the Conservation Area.

As a principle, there is a presumption that listed and otherwise historically 'significant' buildings should be retained. At this strategic stage, no case has been made for the removal of any historic fabric; however, this cannot be precluded if detailed studies identify a greater benefit to the town centre and Wellingborough as a whole. New developments will have to respect the context in which they sit, in terms of scale, height, and materials; and they should reinforce existing positive characteristics.

Important Views

The 'walk through' urban design analysis (8), detailed in the preceding Wellingborough Town Centre AAP Baseline Study identifies a number of important and positive strategic and local views within the town centre, including:

- Along Market Street to the Hind Hotel
- From London Road to All Hallows' spire
- Along Pebble Lane to east door of All Hallows

All positive views (5) are to be retained within the Area Action Plan examples.

Quality Public Realm

The effectiveness of providing high quality public realm (6) to turn around tired and failing shopping centres should not be under-estimated. Duke of York Square, London, (7) has created a much-needed new public space and retail/market destination to the otherwise heavily congested Sloane Square area. It incorporates various leisure activities all year round, including a temporary ice rink in the winter months. Quality, well maintained streets and spaces help to co-ordinating and providing identity, which is essential to attract shoppers, retailers, visitors and investors.

Improving Retail

The initial Roger Tym Report on the future retail capacity of Wellingborough indicated a guide figure of approximately 15,500 -18,500 square metres of potential new retail to be accommodated by 2021 as the town's population expands, with a further 22,000 - 26,000 square metres by 2031.

These figures are a guide only and the examples test a range of retail scenarios above and below the Roger Tym guide figures. Recent Tym report, November 2006.

Currently much of the possible retail spend bypasses Wellingborough for other centres. Improving Wellingborough's retail offer is fundamental to capturing a greater percentage of the available spend.

Attracting quality retailers depends not only on increasing the supply of floor space but also the size of new units, their configuration, the relative location, accessibility, parking, the quality of building and the quality of the public realm. Prime retail sites within the town centre core are assumed to be two-storey and otherwise single-storey for secondary retail sites.

Enliven The Central Area

Above the new retail space there will be, where appropriate, residential accommodation. The expectation is to significantly increase the resident population, extending the life of the town centre into the evenings and weekends on the occasions when the shops are shut. More people and eyes on the street will make the town centre feel inhabited and safer.

Retail Axes

The examples test different configurations of retail, exploring the potential of a northern commercial axis (Examples A & C) and an east-west axis (Example C). The examples acknowledge any issues and solutions that arise from a particular approach, such as road severance. This will no doubt be a factor depending on which sites become available.

Improved Facilities

A town centre is not just shops and flats: A range of other town centre facilities are explored in Example C, giving a central role to community and civic functions. Key questions which arise are:

- Should the existing library be refurbished in its existing building or rebuilt?
- Should Wellingborough have a high quality civic space, a town square?
- Should leisure facilities be expanded?
- Will the new residential accommodation require a new primary school?

The feasibility of providing a range of facilities will be subject to a detailed financial assessment. This will identify not only the cost of providing facilities but also funding sources including enabling development.



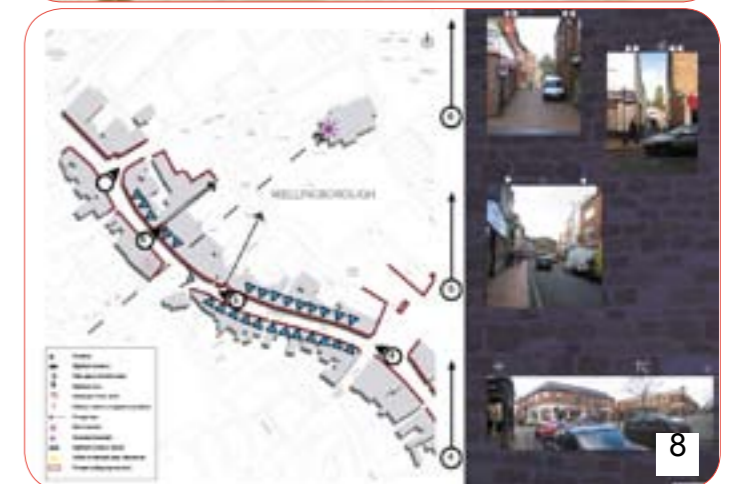
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