



Strategic Framework

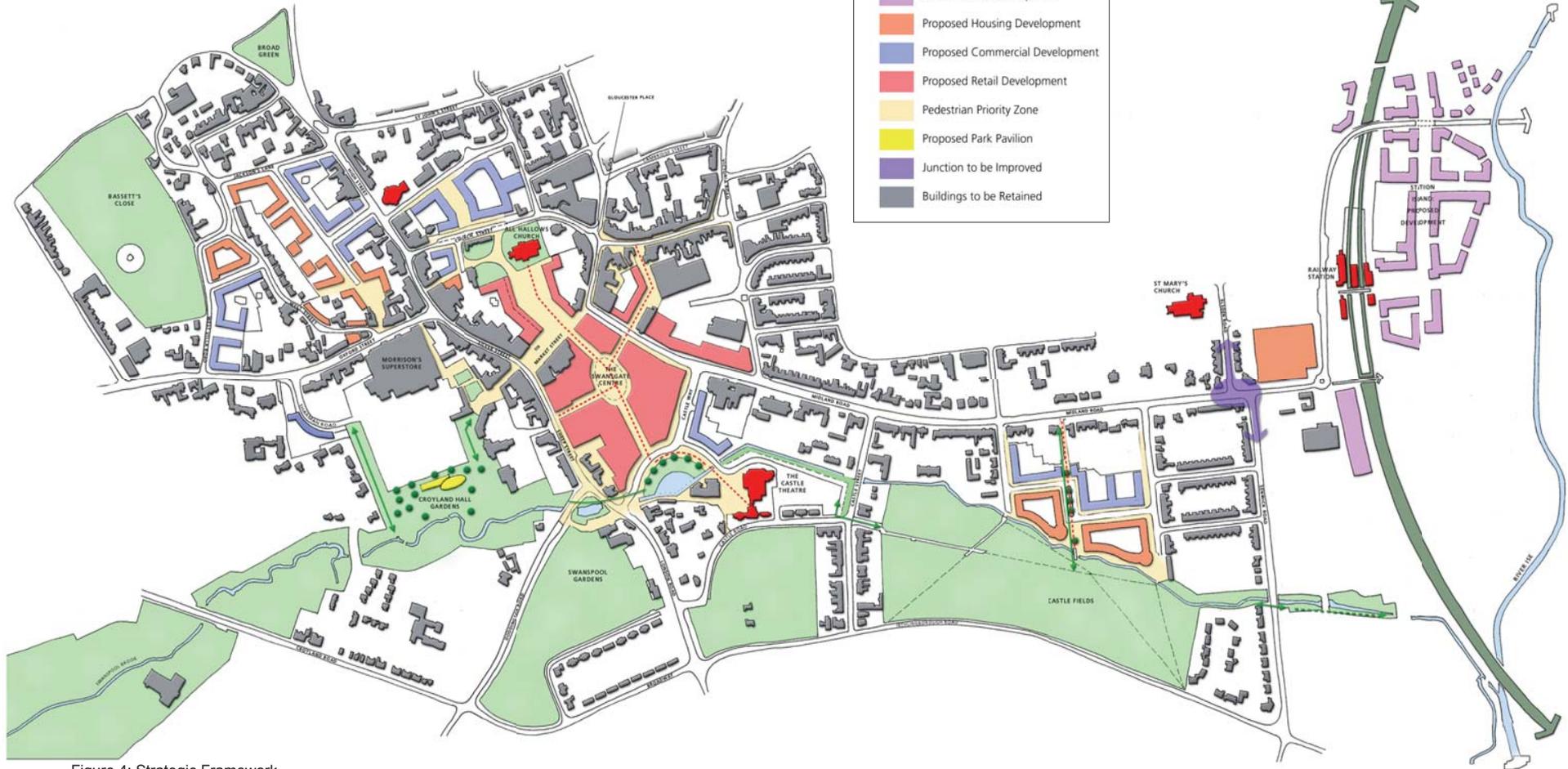


Figure 4: Strategic Framework

The Vision

Strategic Objectives

- Ensure the town centre remains the heart of Wellingborough
- Design a town centre that has something for everyone
- Create a place that is easy to get to and easy to walk around
- Create a stronger identity for the town.
- Provide a focal point and meeting place in the heart of the town
- Identify themes to be used in new developments and public realm improvements
- Raise the quality of the town centre
- Create a series of linked spaces within the town centre
- Bring new uses and activities into the town
- Improve and expand the town's retail offer
- Reduce the leakage of retail spending to other centres

- Encourage specialist roles for secondary shopping streets
- Provide a strong link from Station Island to the town centre
- Improve walking and cycling facilities
- Continue to involve stakeholders and local people in the development of proposals and implementation of projects.

Town Centre and Station Island

The development of Station Island (the area between the Railway Station and the floodplain) will provide Wellingborough with the opportunity of a new hub to complement the functions of the town centre. The Strategic Framework upholds this idea and suggests how the two could interact. It is fundamentally important that Station Island supports the town centre rather than seeks to operate in isolation to it.

The Framework proposes that the town centre should remain the main focus of shopping, administration and entertainment and that Station Island should be a landmark mixed use development.

The core of the town centre is largely modern. This means that there is scope to improve the heart

of the town without causing harm to the historic surroundings. Emphasis would be placed on bringing into use some of the vacant and underused sites to the north and west of the town centre such as High Street car park and the office development on West Villa Road.

There would still be a need for secondary and speciality shopping areas of course and these would probably continue to be found just beyond the expanded retail core in such streets as Oxford Street, Cannon Street and the far end of the High Street.

Station Island has the advantage of being a greenfield site. Its main role will be to provide the large scale Grade A office space that the town centre cannot accommodate. Given its location alongside the railway, it will be a key landmark and gateway that will create lasting first impressions for thousands of visitors and rail passengers as they take their first glimpse of the town.

The town centre and WEAST should be linked by a variety of routes offering a choice of modes of transport with Midland Road acting as the main corridor for traffic and activity.

A New Heart

Research undertaken for the Baseline Report revealed Wellingborough lacking a focus. A new heart is needed to bring together the various parts of the town centre, create a better retail offer and provide something with which local people can identify with pride.

Central to the creation of the town's new focus and crucial to the long term success of the town will be the redevelopment of the Swansgate Shopping Centre. Although the present Centre fulfils a vital role offering prime retail space, its layout hinders the development of surrounding streets, particularly the top end of Midland Road. The Framework proposes a new Swansgate Centre with a broader range of shop units, a more open, street style layout, integral parking and active frontages on Market Street and Midland Road.

To complement this development, the top end of Midland Road could be redeveloped to provide further prime retail floorspace.

At present, the closest Wellingborough has to a focal square is the western end of Market Street. However, this space leaks into the neighbouring Market Square and is flanked by some unattractive buildings.



The rear of the Swansgate dominates first impressions from a key gateway into the town.

The Framework proposes a radical redesign of this whole area to provide Wellingborough with a town square worthy of the town's future. The new square could host the market and should become a natural focus for events. This long term project would require the blocks containing Woolworth's and the Library to be cleared. New buildings would line the square and provide enclosure.

The Castle Theatre is, at present, cut off from the rest of the town centre by the multi storey car park and attendant road network. Under the Framework proposals, it would become the centrepiece of a new leisure and cultural quarter enjoying strong pedestrian links to the Swansgate Centre and Midland Road. This would require the multi storey car park to be demolished and the road network to be altered. A new public space would be laid out on part of the site of the multi storey. This approach would help to create a critical mass of development to kickstart the evening economy. Keeping such

uses together also makes them easier to police and reduces the pressure for this type of development on other areas of the town where it may be less suitable.

One of the key ideas behind this approach is to create a series of linked streets and squares



Castle Theatre

running from the Church to the Castle Theatre, each with its own identity and function. This would provide a strong pedestrian axis through the town centre and would make good use of the site's natural topography.



The Market Place hidden by Woolworths

Midland Road

Midland Road links Wellingborough to its railway station. The designation of this road as the chief link between WEAST and the town centre would maintain and strengthen this role.

At present, Midland Road is, for the most part, a quiet residential street. Twenty years from now it will have to cope with higher levels of traffic and more intense development pressure as it becomes established as one of the town’s main thoroughfares. Our vision for Midland Road is as a pedestrian-friendly space with competing uses carefully balanced to create a street that is lively, attractive and walkable, rather than simply a conduit for traffic.

Between Victoria Road and Castle Street the prime retail floorspace proposed in the previous section would give way to smaller shops and eateries interspersed with housing. From Castle Street to Senwick Road the existing residential nature of the road would be protected. There is an opportunity to develop a strategic site next to the railway station east of Senwick Road. This could feature a transport interchange and high density housing. Some improvements might also need to be made to the road network.



Midland Road

The Green Link



Swanspool Brook

The Swanspool Brook provides an almost continuous swathe of green space across the southern side of the town which includes the important public open spaces of Castle Fields and Croyland Hall Gardens.

The Framework proposes to use this space as a green link from WEAST to the town centre and on to the western suburbs of the town. In order to complete the link, the character and accessibility of the mid section of the Brook, from Castle Street to Doddington Road, would need to be improved. Here, the Brook runs partly in an artificial channel and access is disrupted by roads and buildings.

The setting of the Brook could be enhanced and ways in which access could be improved, if necessary, by providing new bridges and crossings.

The centrepiece of the route would be where it passes the Castle Theatre. Here, there is potential to use the watercourse as a design feature in the proposed public square and to provide seamless access from the ‘green link’ to the Swansgate Centre. The quality of the towpath should be high enough to act as a combined walking and cycling route.

Parking

At present, Wellingborough town centre has ample parking with approximately 2100 spaces. This parking is, however, concentrated in a small number of locations, most notably in the Swansgate Centre. The town centre’s three newest retail developments, Morrison’s, Aldi and Matalan, have their own parking and there are further Council owned car parks at High Street and Thomas Street. Morrison’s also acts as a short stay car park for town centre visits.

The growth of Wellingborough over the next 20 years will lead to greater demand for parking while at the same time increasing development pressure on existing car parks. Clearly, a balance needs to be struck between providing enough car parking and allowing the town to develop to its full potential. It is also clear from the surveys and public consultation that a main factor in encouraging trips to the town centre is the availability of car parking close to the centre’s shopping and other amenities.

This is not unusual for a market town such as Wellingborough. Therefore any perceived loss in car parking or charging policy should be carefully considered to reduce any potential detrimental impact upon the town centre. Further research is required and a long term and detailed strategy for car parking and public transport provision needs to be undertaken to find a suitable and sustainable balance.

In principle however there should be no net loss of car parking as a baseline position. Therefore any development that involves the loss of current public parking should as a minimum include proposals for equal alternative provision.

The masterplan envisages the development of the High Street including the surface car park. In this instance it will be key to provide alternative car parking provision possibly through a multi storey facility. This location is of strategic importance given it sits on the northern gateway to the town which will grow in importance as any potential northern growth area develops.

The provision of additional multi-storey facilities should be given consideration within other key sites such as Church Street. The viability of such schemes would need to be assessed through other more detailed studies. The masterplan envisages that the new Swansgate will include at least an equal amount of car parking possibly in the form of an underground facility.



Market Street

Public Transport

A key dynamic in the growth of the town will undoubtedly be the railway station. This in itself will be a major attractor for people considering moving to the town. This has led to detailed proposals for a dynamic mixed use development known as Station Island. Public transport links between the town centre, Station Island and WEAST need significant improvement. It is likely that the railway station and Station Island will be served as part of a wider bus route. Quality interchange proposals should be developed in detail including the most appropriate routeing between the town centre and the station. The most direct route is clearly Midland Road but the opportunity for accommodating new bus infrastructure along this road is limited. As part of the recommended study for Midland Road consideration needs to be given to the most suitable public transport links between the two nodes.

Bus usage is particularly low in Wellingborough. This is not a sustainable position as the opportunities for providing additional car parking within the town centre are limited and extensive car parking could be detrimental to the overall quality of the town centre environment and urban form. Similarly the highway network has limited scope for accommodating additional growth and therefore the unavoidable conclusion is that public transport infrastructure needs to be more accessible and of a higher quality to attract a significant proportion of the current and potential future road users. The proposed car parking

study should develop a strategy that is compatible with the long term public transport strategy for the town.

The town centre offers a reasonable network of footpaths and cycleways, this infrastructure needs further development to create attractive and safe linkages between adjoining residential areas and the town.

The emphasis in this area would be on conservation and sensitive infill development, respecting the historic character of the area whilst making better use of backland sites.

The thoroughfare known variously as Sheep Street / Silver Street / High Street contains many noteworthy and historic buildings, as does Oxford Street. These buildings and their settings would be protected from inconsiderate modern development. Shopfronts are particularly vulnerable as they tend to be altered more often than other parts of the building. In addition, they are often in competition with each other to attract customers, which can lead to large, garish signs. We would recommend a shopfront design guide be drawn up and used in the determination of planning applications within this area.