

Sevenoaks District Town Centres Strategy

Final

April 2022

Allies and Morrison
Avison Young



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Executive summary

Overview

1. This Town Centres Strategy sets a clear vision and roadmap for five centres in Sevenoaks District - Sevenoaks Town, Swanley, Edenbridge, Westerham and New Ash Green. It identifies potential projects, development opportunities, place coordination strategies and delivery considerations.
2. The Strategy has been prepared for Sevenoaks District Council by Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners and Avison Young. The document meets the requirements of national and local planning policy and forms part of the Evidence Base for the District's Local Plan. The Strategy is deliverable within the plan period of 2022 to 2040. Progress should be reviewed on a regular basis.
3. The Strategy is supported by accompanying evidence base work which are available as appendices. These are: Household Survey (2021), In-street Survey (2021), Town Centre Health Check Baseline Report and Needs Assessment (2021), and the Town Centre Baseline Report (2021).
4. Household and in-street surveys were undertaken to form a robust evidence base for the Strategy and is an update to the 2016 Retail Study. In addition, the Strategy has been informed by the views of local stakeholders, businesses and residents. Small group interviews were undertaken and a stakeholder workshop was held on 21 October 2021. The Strategy is also informed by consultation as part of the preparation of a District wide Character Study.
5. The Strategy identifies District wide principles that should inform any future change in its town and local centres. These are:
 - Supporting businesses and creating a resilient local economy
 - Shifting to Net Zero 2030 and supporting a sustainable future
 - Strengthening the character and identity of each centre
 - Improving local people's health and wellbeing

6. Each of the District's centres has a different character, identity and economic function, shaped by its physical, social and economic evolution. Key elements of the vision for each centre is set out below.

Sevenoaks Town

7. The vision for Sevenoaks Town centre in 2040 focuses on:
 - Raising the profile of its best assets - its historic town centre, array of independent shops and the impressive Knole
 - Expansion of its cultural scene and diversifying the town's offer to match other prominent towns, including more things to do in the evening
 - An inclusive town centre - widening the leisure offer with paid and unpaid opportunities, and providing new homes that support different income levels and life stages
8. Opportunities for Sevenoaks Town are: improving connections to Knole; exploring the relocation of the market; revitalising the eastern part of the town centre; the Post Office and telephone exchange site; improving the station arrival; and curating a programme of events.

Swanley

9. The vision for Swanley town centre in 2040 focuses on:
 - A sustainable and welcoming market town that draws in residents and people from surrounding areas to come together and spend time
 - An expanded retail offer with an emphasis on independents, food and drink, alongside an expanded community, leisure and civic offer
 - A space for small businesses and co-working, and new homes of different types and tenures



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- High quality buildings and spaces that embrace and enhance Swanley's character
- Opportunities for Swanley are: improving access into the town centre; transforming the town square and Asda Walk; rebalancing space for pedestrians; new and enhanced station connections; gradual town centre redevelopment; and collaboration between Swanley's civic and community uses.

Edenbridge

10. The vision for Edenbridge centre in 2040 focuses on:

- A flourishing town centre that celebrates its history through investment and renewal of its handsome and historic High Street
- A transformed Leathermarket area as a focus for markets, events and activity in the heart of the town
- An aspirational place where people stay when visiting the District's attractions, with a variety of accommodation and a stronger food, drink, cultural and leisure offer
- Enhancing connections to the river Eden with new activity alongside

11. Opportunities for Edenbridge are: prioritising pedestrians on the High Street; improved access into the town centre; enhanced river connections; redeveloping the Leather Market and backland sites; relocating the market; and shopfront renewal.

Westerham

12. The vision for Westerham centre in 2040 focuses on:

- Being a charming rural town that celebrates its history and that remains a desirable place to live, work and visit
- A broadened offer for all age groups and families
- Connections to the wider Darent Valley, and improved public realm to reduce car dominance and create enjoyable streets and spaces
- Meaningful alternatives to car-based travel

13. Opportunities for Westerham are: improving the High Street streetscape; improving connections to the countryside; London Road

traffic filter and development opportunity; enhancing sustainable transport connections; and a better visitor economy

New Ash Green

14. The vision for New Ash Green centre in 2040 focuses on:

- A vibrant heart to a thriving village community, with shops and businesses supported by a refreshed and well-maintained shopping centre
- Flexible space for small and creative businesses bringing more footfall to the centre, as well as new homes of different types, sizes and tenures
- A renewed public realm with new focal points for events and pop-up activity
- Improving the edges of the shopping centre to open it up and draw people in, including new buildings which turn to face outwards
- Celebrating the centre's one-of-a-kind character and modernist SPAN architectural style

15. Opportunities for New Ash Green are: improving the centre's edges; enhancing the public realm; upper storey improvements; connection to Longfield Station; and improving the arrival experience

Delivery and next steps

16. Several key actions have been identified to support the delivery of recommended projects across each centre:

- Determining early on landowner interest for redevelopment
- Determining appetite for acquisition / delivery within SDC
- KCC engagement on highway matters
- Car park study across the centres
- Setting out Place Coordination Strategy first

17. A set of planning and economic development recommendations are provided followed by a commitment charter that sets out key steps to be actioned over the next 12 months by the Council and key stakeholders.



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1 Introduction and context

We want each of our town and local centres to be vibrant and resilient in order to meet current and future challenges. In creating this Strategy for Sevenoaks Town, Swanley, Edenbridge, Westerham and New Ash Green, we have updated the evidence base and engaged stakeholders to understand the issues and opportunities facing our towns. The Strategy responds by setting a clear vision and roadmap for each centre, identifying potential projects, development opportunities, place coordination strategies and delivery considerations.



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Setting a new Strategy

The project and process

Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) is preparing a Strategy for five of its centres - Sevenoaks Town, Swanley, Edenbridge, Westerham and New Ash Green.

Each of the District's centres has a different character, identity and economic function shaped by its physical, social and economic evolution. Whilst they share the challenges and opportunities presented by wider economic shifts and the pandemic, each has different opportunities and objectives afforded by its location, character and role.

Sevenoaks District Council commissioned Allies and Morrison and Avison Young to support in the production of the Strategy. They have undertaken surveys, stakeholder engagement and baseline analysis to inform a bespoke vision and strategy for each of the five centres.

How to use this document

This document has been created to set the direction of travel for each of the four town centres and New Ash Green. The document provides a future vision and a series of possible interventions to help each place develop the positive aspects of its identity.

The introduction to this document (Chapter 1) sets the visions in context in terms of existing economic and social trends and a set of District-wide priorities. The visions have been developed in coordination to ensure that the strategies for each place are complementary and take account of current strategic challenges.

The five key sections (Chapters 2-6) of this document focus on each of the centres in turn. These sections draw out its existing context, retail needs assessment, town centre health check and views from

the local communities. A series of potential projects and development opportunities have been developed that identify the future priorities for each of the centres. For each intervention, possible timescales, funding sources and leads/partners are explored to support delivery and implementation. For each centre, recommendations are also provided in terms of how the town centres could be managed. Delivery of the Strategy will require collaborative working between the Council and stakeholders, including landowners, businesses, community groups and local residents.

The final section of the document (Chapter 7) considers implications for the Local Plan Review process, providing recommendations for how planning policy could respond to the Strategy. The Economic Development Strategy will run in unison to the Strategy.

Plan period

This document identifies actions for the short, medium and long term. As part of the Evidence Base for the Local Plan, the Strategy is deliverable within the plan period of 2022 to 2040. Progress should be reviewed on a regular basis and the Strategy and evidence will need to be renewed every 5-10 years.

Supporting documents

This Strategy is supported by accompanying evidence base work which are available as appendices:

- Household Survey, 2021 (more information on the following page)
- In-street Survey, 2021 (more information on the following page)
- Town Centre Health Check Baseline Report and Needs Assessment, 2021
- Town Centre Strategy Baseline Report, 2021



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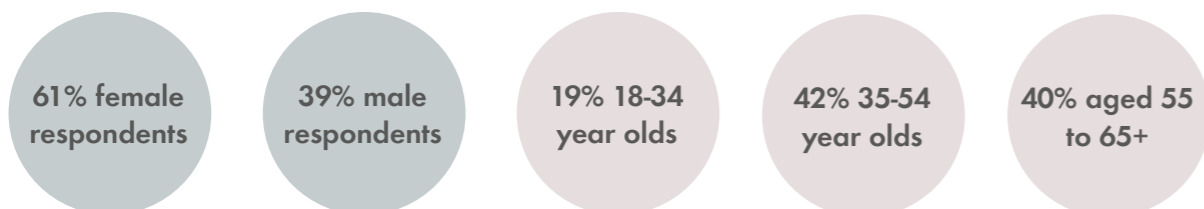
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Engagement and surveys

Household and in-street surveys were undertaken to form a robust evidence base for the Strategy and to update the 2016 Retail Study.

Household surveys

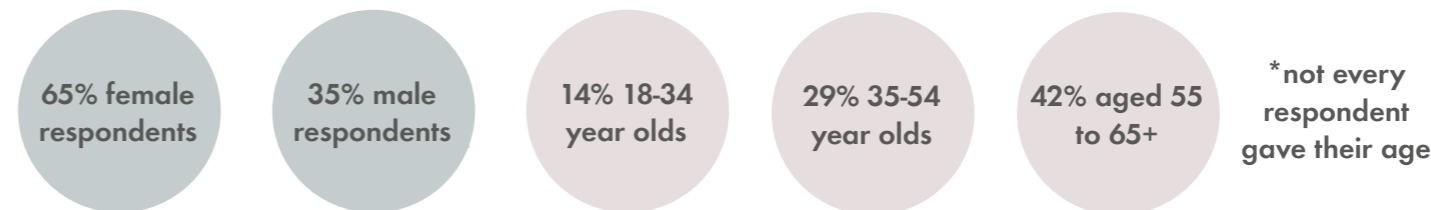
The household survey was designed to capture a representative sample of residents living in and around Sevenoaks District to understand respondents' convenience and comparison goods shopping patterns. The questions and geographical area of the survey have been designed in order to provide a time series analysis from the 2016 Retail Study. The survey included questions covering: first and second choice for main and top-up convenience goods and comparison goods, linked trips, and use of nearby town centres. Respondents' demographics were also captured to seek a representative sample. 804 surveys were completed, distributed equally across the survey's seven zones.



In-street surveys

In addition to the telephone survey, an in-street survey was undertaken in each of the five centres. The in-street survey was commissioned primarily to inform the baseline health check assessment review and included a series of questions covering: the main and secondary purpose of visit to the town centre; mode of travel to the centre; types and specific names of shops and services visited; frequency of visits to the centre and length of stay; likes, dislikes and areas for improvement for each centre; and impact of COVID-19 on visits to each centre.

The number of in-street surveys has been correlated with the size of the centre: Sevenoaks 109, Swanley 78, Edenbridge 75, Westerham 75, and New Ash Green 54.



Stakeholder engagement

In addition to being informed by an up-to-date evidence base, the Strategy is responsive to the insights and views of local stakeholders, businesses and residents. Stakeholder engagement was undertaken to understand the issues and opportunities for each centre:

- Stakeholder discussions (11-12 October 2021): 20 meetings were undertaken with key stakeholders and representatives.
- Stakeholder workshop (21 October 2021): A wide range of people who live, work and visit the centres were invited and 40 people attended. The workshop included a short presentation and a roundtable discussion, with a group focused on each centre.

The feedback from both the discussions and workshop helped to form the vision for each centre and to identify priorities for the future.

Simultaneous to the development of the Town Centres Strategy, Sevenoaks District Council were also developing a District-wide Character Study. As part of the Study, a survey was undertaken to understand what local people felt were the key characteristics and traits of their local area. The data from this survey was filtered, extracting responses from those people who lived in Sevenoaks (87 responses), Swanley (23 responses), Westerham (27 responses), Edenbridge (24 responses) and New Ash Green (20 responses). This feedback helped to inform the Strategy.

804 telephone surveys
391 in-street surveys
20 stakeholder meetings
40 workshop attendees
181 Character Study surveys

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The five centres

A unique context for each centre

Sevenoaks District occupies a strategic position in west Kent, on the edge of Greater London and has strong links and a sense of identity associated with both - providing the best of town and country.

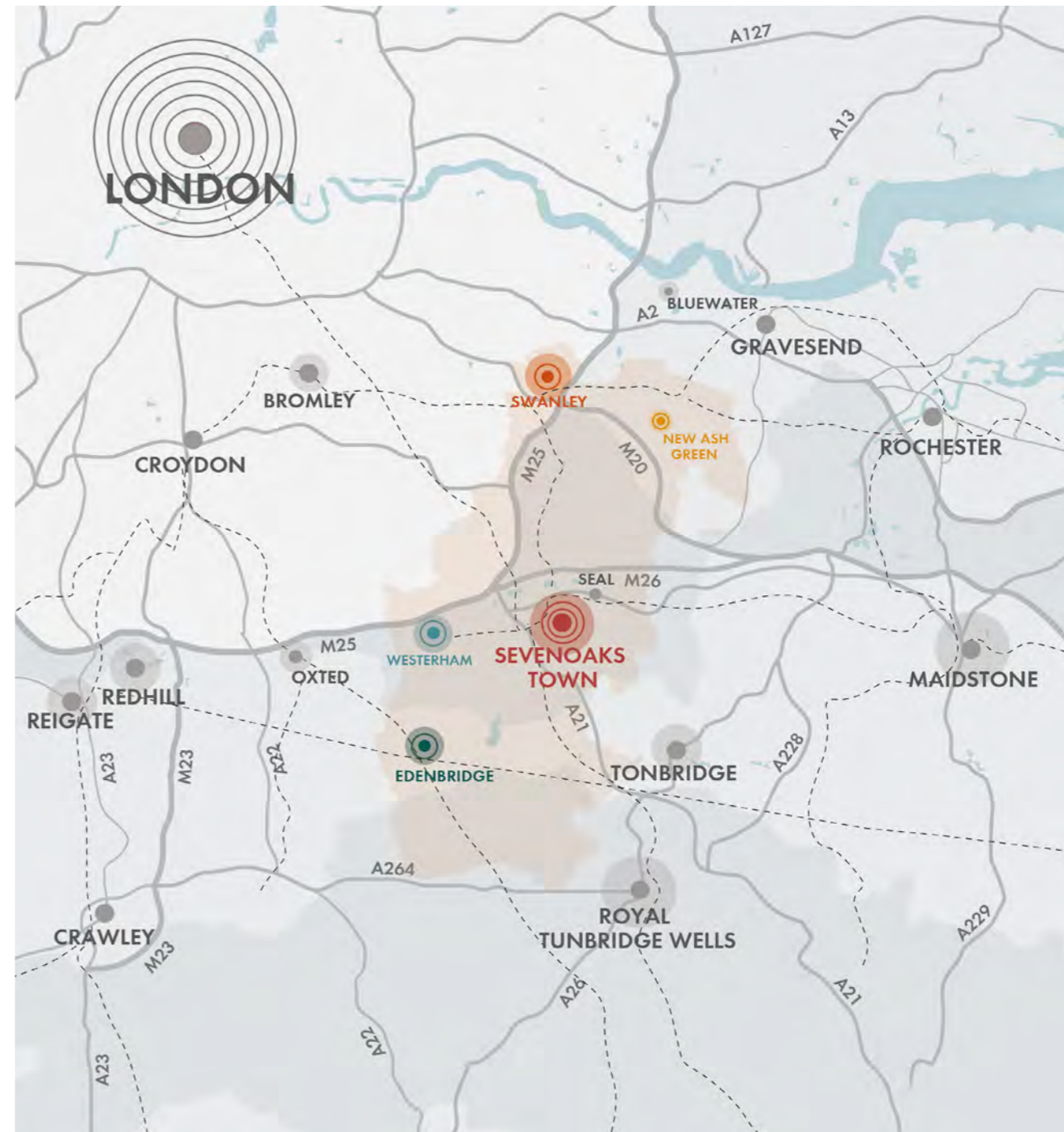
The District falls almost entirely within Metropolitan Green Belt (93% of the District) and takes in both the North Downs and High Weald, with 60% of the District identified as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The character of the District varies significantly, with a more urban focus in the north of the District and a range of distinctive towns and villages.

There are nearby and competing retail centres in Bromley, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone and Bluewater shopping centre. There are four town centres within the Sevenoaks District: Sevenoaks Town, Swanley, Edenbridge and Westerham. The Strategy also considers New Ash Green which is a village and a Local Centre. While they share a wider context, the five centres also harbour their own opportunities and face unique challenges.



Sevenoaks Town

Sevenoaks Town is in the centre of the district, with large suburban surrounds including Riverhead, Dunton Green, Bessels Green and Chipstead. It is the largest of the five town centres and is the principal town of the district. It provides a large retail offer of both food and non-food shops and a significant amount of employment, accounting for an average dwell time of around 90 minutes. It has rich historic significance surrounding the grade I



A map showing Sevenoaks District and the five centres which the Strategy considers in relation to the surrounding region and towns.

listed Knole House and associated Knole Park as well as multiple conservation areas in town. It is served by London Road and the High Street which form a Y shape, providing two high streets and a compact centre.



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Swanley

Swanley is in the north-western corner of Sevenoaks District and is the second largest town. It is a key destination for the surrounding population's shopping needs with Asda (the anchor store) and an Aldi as well as non-food shops along the Asda Walk and the High Street. Swanley has continued its market town legacy with

a weekly market, accounting for over 10% of town centre trips. The town has a long average dwell time of 72 minutes. The town centre's character differs from others in the District, being a 1970s shopping precinct. The centre would benefit from investment and renewal. The town has strong transport connections to London.



Edenbridge

Edenbridge is the third largest town in Sevenoaks District, with the centre structured around the linear High Street. It has a rich history which is maintained by the heritage assets along and surrounding the High Street. The river Eden runs through the town, under Eden Bridge at the southern end of the High Street. It

provides a strong food shopping offer with a Waitrose and a Lidl, accounting for almost half of trips to the town centre. Food shopping tends to be the sole reason for visiting Edenbridge town centre. Edenbridge has experienced significant growth with new residential neighbourhoods and workspace catering for a growing population.



Westerham

Westerham is in the western corner of the district, bisected by the A25 and just south of the M25. It is the only town centre in the district that is used mainly for eating and drinking out, with over 20% of town centre trips being solely for this reason. Its historic nature, listed heritage assets, the green and

the offer of independent shops add to the attractive and pleasant town centre, with an average dwell time of 79 minutes. The town centre is small and set within countryside, giving a rural and quaint feel.



New Ash Green

New Ash Green is a village and a local service centre for the district, in the north-eastern corner. It is a post-modern, planned town centre that has a small catchment area with a tight knit community. The town was designed by Eric Lyons and Span Developments, resulting in a unique architectural

character. The Shopping Centre at the heart of the village is in need of renewal, but remains home to food and other shopping, and opportunities for socialising. The centre has an average dwell time of 35 minutes and is relatively small compared to the other four centres.

Strategic trends

How we use our centres is changing

In order to remain resilient, the five centres will need to respond to several wider trends and strategic challenges which will continue to shape future economic growth.

The changing nature of retail

Prior to the pandemic, online shopping accounted for approximately 20% of retail sales. However, internet sales reached a new peak in January 2021, accounting for 36.4% of total retailing. This has since steadily subsided to about 27% of total retailing, remaining well in excess of the pre-pandemic levels. The considerable progress made in advancing the supporting infrastructure and the public attitude towards online retailing will persist beyond the pandemic, which is likely to be at the expense of physical stores. This trend has already been seen across the UK with the closure of high street chains, the loss of retail jobs, increasing retail vacancy rates and the acquisition of former high street names by online brands.



More flexible working

The use of office and workspaces has significantly changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. Companies have learned to adapt due to the evolving ways of working. The pandemic has shown that flexible or hybrid working does not hinder productivity but instead allows for a better work-life balance for employees. Research has also found that employees want to work closer to home. While businesses find the right balance and blend of office space, which will take many years, flexible office solutions such as co-working will be increasingly attractive. Good digital connectivity is essential to support this shift to more flexible working.



Shopping closer to home

People have spent more time closer to home and research has shown that many consumers have been shopping on their local high street more. Whilst the economic pain seen in many town centres should not be understated, a potential shift to working more flexibly and closer to home is a welcome boost to some local high streets, especially in locations that are home to high proportions of commuters.

A greater focus on leisure, place and experience

Leisure and particularly food and beverage uses have an important role to play in driving footfall back into town centres and high streets. Research shows that people are placing greater value on experiences over traditional shopping. Leisure uses are fundamental to the wider resilience of town centres.



Since the COVID-19 pandemic...

Data from the Sevenoaks District household survey (804 responses):

Has there been a change in your online shopping habits for groceries?



Has there been a change in your online shopping habits for non-food goods?



Has there been a change in your number of visits to the town centre?



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Easier conversion of shops and buildings between uses



In 2020 the Government introduced Planning Use Class E, which subsumes A1, A2, A3, B1, D1, D2 into one single class. This means uses including office space, retail offerings and other services including health centres, crèches, gyms and indoor recreation now fall under the same use class and that planning permission will no longer be required for change of use between these uses. This new use

class system is designed to increase flexibility of existing high street and town centre spaces, allowing for quicker and easier conversion between uses.

In addition, permitted development rights (PDRs) - allowing certain changes within a building without the need to apply for planning permission - were extended in 2021. This now allows Use Class E premises to be converted to homes without the need for planning permission. There will be a 1,500 sqm floorspace limit to protect larger premises as well as a vacancy requirement whereby the unit must have been vacant for three months prior to the application to protect successful business space.

The extension of Permitted Development rights to include Use Class E has the potential to have a significant impact on high streets as landlords look to use their vacant space. This is especially pertinent in a period of turbulence for high streets and town centres as the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic takes place.

Climate change and sustainability

Climate change, due to green house gas emissions, is one of the biggest challenges of our time. We know it is happening and the effects could be devastating for people and wildlife.



The effects of climate change are far reaching. In Kent this means hotter and drier summers and warmer and wetter winters. There will be increased frequency and severity of storms resulting in additional flooding. The changing climate will also have an impact on people's health and wellbeing and biodiversity and wildlife, causing the natural environment to be under increased pressure.



Sevenoaks District Council has committed to being net zero by 2030. Our town and village centres have a critical role to play in transitioning towards a more sustainable future, including:

- Supporting a shift towards more sustainable travel such as walking, cycling, public transport and electric vehicles.
- Integrating green infrastructure, including sustainable urban drainage and planting to increase biodiversity and to improve the microclimate of the town centres.
- Encouraging and supporting sustainable new buildings.
- Embracing the '10 minute town concept', so that people can live within a short walking or cycling distance of the shops, jobs, transport, community facilities and services they need.
- Making the best use of green spaces.
- Encouraging investment in existing buildings to improve their energy and water efficiency and shift to renewable energy sources.



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District-wide approach

Supporting businesses and creating a resilient local economy



- Support our town and village centres to respond to changing shopping habits, with a greater mix of cultural, community, workspace and homes alongside the shops and services.
- Broaden the paid and unpaid leisure offer of each centre to attract people into the centre for more than just shopping.
- Increase the provision of space for SMEs and flexible workspace to adapt to changing working patterns, benefit from decentralisation from London and support small businesses.
- Enhance the public realm to make our town and village centres attractive places to visit.
- Identify and address any gaps in provision in terms of shops and services within each centre, so that each town or village can operate as a '10 minute town'.
- Strengthen local supply chains to keep money in the local economy and to reduce transport-related emissions.
- Attract people in with a calendar of events, festivals and pop-up activity, with a focus on food, music and art.
- Creating the most resilient local economy with as many sectors as possible to decrease reliance on retail, including tourism, leisure, evening economy, education, health and public services.
- Finding areas of niche to help enhance a distinct offer and identity for each centre.

A number of opportunities and principles have been identified which are common to the town and local centres across Sevenoaks District - these are set out below.

Shifting to Net Zero 2030 and supporting a sustainable future



- Encourage residents to walk and cycle for short journeys, and to use public transport for longer trips, reducing transport-related emissions.
- Plant more trees and plants in our centres to provide shade, water attenuation, improve air quality and biodiversity, making use of street planting, green roofs and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS).
- Design any new buildings to be highly energy efficient and to adapt flexibly over time.
- Consider lifecycle embodied carbon and consider the possibility of retrofitting existing buildings rather than demolition.
- Build new homes in sustainable locations, with shops, jobs, public transport, and services accessible in 15 minutes on foot or by bike.
- Promote overall waste reduction and the introduction of smart bin technology.
- Bringing local consumption and production of food closer together, by connecting to local farms and supporting local viticulture.



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Strengthening the character and identity of each centre



- Embrace the fantastic heritage of each centre, protecting and investing in the renewal of historic buildings and ensuring that any new development responds to the character of the place.
- Bringing in a programme of sensitive historic shopfront improvements to further enhance the retail offer and setting of each centre.
- Celebrate the unique history of each centre, perhaps through the modern revival of historic industries or activities, through better information/interpretation or through programming and events.
- Make our town and village centres comfortable and attractive places for people to walk and spend time, with public spaces, lighting, art and greenery.
- Create well-designed centres with attractive buildings with activity at ground floor as well as front doors and shopfronts facing onto streets.
- Redesign routes in the centres to be streets not roads to prioritise people over cars, with wider pavements, greening, active frontage, traffic calming measures and good crossings.
- Draw the character of the wider landscape into the centres through the integration of greenery, protecting key views and revealing the rivers and wider countryside.
- Supporting markets across the District by considering their location, setting and offer.

Improving local people's health and wellbeing



- Invest in streets and spaces, making it safer and more enjoyable for people to walk and cycle for short journeys, embedding exercise into people's day-to-day lives.
- Improve parks and green spaces to provide residents of all ages access to nature, play, outdoor gyms and recreation.
- Broaden the centres' leisure offer and programme of events, with both paid and unpaid activities to make a socially active lifestyle accessible to all.
- Strengthen direct connections into the wider countryside, improving people's access to nature and encouraging people to experience the landscape.
- Improve access to the rivers near the centres and make these waterside routes safe and comfortable.
- Adapt the centres' offer to appeal and cater for a broader range of people, including different age groups, income levels, and lifestyles.
- Build new homes of different types, sizes, price-levels and tenures to support people of different backgrounds making the towns and village their home.
- Supporting community-led initiatives in the centres.



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2 Sevenoaks Town

Context for the vision

Introduction to Sevenoaks Town

Sevenoaks Town is the District's largest and Principal Town with a reasonably high profile across Kent and the south east. The town serves a local catchment of approximately 30,000 residents with an attractive historic core and a good mix of uses. In addition to the shops the town centre features the Stag Theatre, the popular farmers market, and a well-established cafe scene. The town is home to many London commuters, being only a 20-minute train ride away.

The town is formed in a 'Y' shape, along two main corridors - London Road and High Street - which both act as high streets.

The town centre is located to the south east edge of the town's settlement where it is bounded by Knole, a National Trust house and 33ha of parklands which acts as a major tourist destination. Sevenoaks Town is also home to a number of reputable schools, adding to its draw. Unlike most English towns, Sevenoaks was built on a hilltop, resulting in expansive views of the Darent Valley.

Sevenoaks Town is well provided for by the strategic road network, being near to the A25, A21, M25 and M26.



- train station
- cultural use
- health use
- religious use
- education use
- supermarket
- community use
- parking
- key green space
- town centre area and boundary
- main road
- minor residential road
- walkable routes through / into centre
- rail line
- woodland
- landscaped green space
- large hedges
- blue network
- heritage asset
- formal town centre public space: pedestrian-friendly high street
- formal town centre public space: town square
- formal town centre public space: pedestrianised mews
- local visual landmark
- extent of car park

A map of Sevenoaks town centre showing its structure and key features.

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Health Check

A town centre Health Check was undertaken considering property data, survey data (comparing 2016 to 2021) and a site visit of the town centre. The main findings were:

- Sevenoaks Town remains the primary comparison goods shopping destination in the District. There has been a small decrease in the number of retailers but not as sharp as the national trend.
 - Vacant units have increased over the past six years, but remain below the national average.
 - The amount of vacant floorspace has, however, doubled over the past six years (largely in relation to the former Tesco site, which has planning permission for a mixed-use scheme).
 - The town centre has a comparison goods turnover of around £109m pa (50% of total turnover attracted to the town).
 - The town centre convenience goods turnover is much lower, at £27m (against a town-wide total of £208m).
 - There has been a shift towards top-up food shopping function in the town centre – an increase from 35% in 2016 to 47% in 2021.
 - There are a large number of independent retailers in a town centre which is a sign that local businesses feel that they are able to initially invest (and continue to invest) which is a sign of a good / strong trading location. It shows that the population of the retail, service and leisure catchment of Sevenoaks Town is able to provide sufficient and viable financial support to such businesses and they have pitched their retail, service, leisure offer in a correct place to attract local residents to spend money in their businesses and not: (A) go elsewhere in the wider catchment; and (B) not use the internet for certain types of shopping etc.
 - In order to maintain the town centre’s resilience, a focus for the town centre strategy is to ensure that attractive, viable and flexible spaces are available for local independent retail, service and leisure traders
- The internet’s share of comparison goods expenditure locally: 43% clothing and footwear; 38% furniture, floorcoverings, household textiles; 39% domestic appliances and smaller electrical goods; 16% health and beauty; 40% recreational goods.
 - There is a greater propensity to shop on-line after easing of restrictions, but no change in the usage of the town centre.
 - There is a high market share for the town centre for leisure uses: 89% cafés/restaurants, 65% pubs/clubs, 65% cinema.
 - There has been a small drop in the frequency of visits to the town centre (household survey).
 - There is a widening of reasons for visiting the town centre (greater response for leisure uses).
 - There is a shorter average dwell-time in the town centre (146 minutes in 2016; 90 minutes in 2021).
 - For a number of the centres, dwell-times associated with regular visits have reduced since previous studies. This is likely to be down to a number of factors, including the pandemic and the ability / choice to source certain goods on-line. However, in many cases, the shorter average dwell time is accompanied by a wider range of reasons to visit the District’s town centres.



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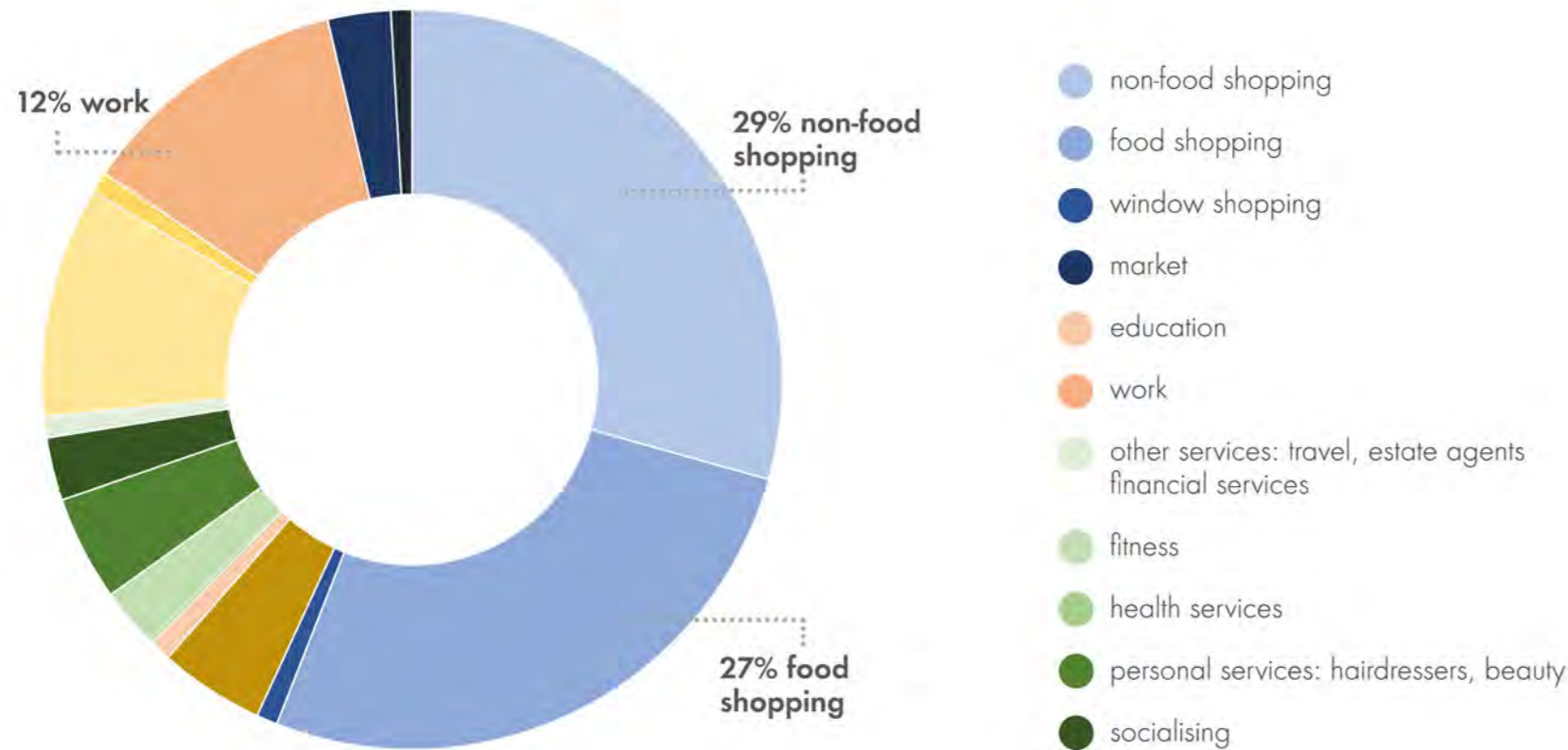
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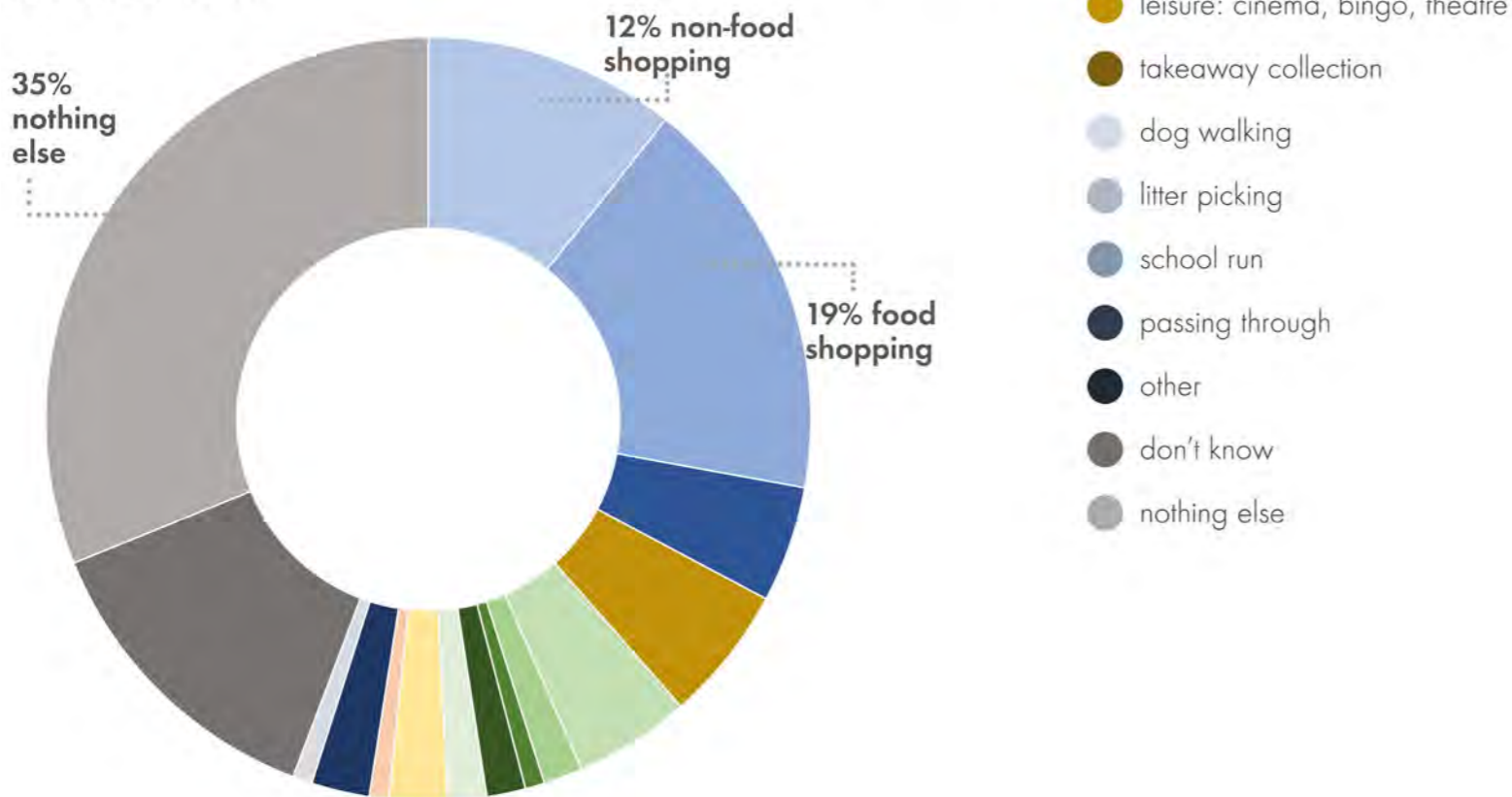
In-street survey findings

109 responses

What is your main purpose of visit the town centre?



Aside from that, what else will you be doing in the town centre?



What do you like about the town centre?

Most frequent responses

- Good layout / shops all close together 37%
- Close to home 31%
- Good range of shops 21%
- Good range of food / drink outlets 17%
- Nice atmosphere 17%
- Attractive environment / nice place 17%

What would you change about the town centre?

Most frequent responses

- Nothing in particular 28%
- More specialist / independent stores 15%
- Improve bus services / access 11%
- Events and temporary activities 11%
- Too many empty shops 10%

Average dwell time in centre:

90 mins



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Stakeholder engagement feedback



Strengths

- A compact town - easy and pleasant to navigate.
- A strong provision of independent shops.
- Good retail anchors - M&S and Waitrose.
- Offers an experience rather than just shopping.
- Cafes and restaurants that encourage people to stay and enjoy the town centre.
- The Shambles - car-free, characterful spaces.
- New outdoor seating at Bank Street.
- Knole Park - draws in visitors and is regularly used by residents.
- A strong cultural offer - The Stag, cinema, bookshop, library, museum, local schools, artists' studios.
- Historic town centre and architecture.
- The landscape and rural setting.
- Easily accessed by road and rail.



Weaknesses

- London Road and the High Street are at times car dominated and difficult to cross.
- There are lorries in the town centre that don't need to be there. Difficult to navigate the corner of London Road and the High Street.
- The quality of the public realm could be upgraded.
- The arrival from the Station does not make the best impression - could do with renewal.
- Market setting - lack of a town square.
- Affordability of housing - makes the town inaccessible to young people and families.
- Two sites not being developed - 1. Corner of Pembroke Road and London Road and 2. Across from Premier Inn.
- Car parking meter limits people's time - could be changed to pay upon leaving.
- Cycling and bus can be difficult.



Opportunities

- To further develop and join up the town's cultural offer and night time economy.
- Potential for transformation - area behind the High Street (Bus Station, Suffolk Way, car parking, 96 High Street and backlands, potentially including the library and leisure centre). Much of this area is in Council ownership.
- Development of the former Tesco's site (136 High Street), will include a mix of uses (3 retail units (935 sqm) and 104 residential units) over 4-6 storeys. The Tesco's site is a significant opportunity for the town, both commercially and in terms of improving the visual appearance of the High Street, with very high quality design.
- Potential for transformation - the buildings along South Park from London Road (Post Office, etc). These buildings let down the townscape, and offer potential for town centre development.
- To strengthen east-west connections.
- An opportunity for streetscape improvements.
- To encourage more walking and cycling with streetscape improvements and electric cars/bikes.
- To provide more homes in the centre, reducing sprawl, generating footfall and vibrancy.

Stakeholder discussions and a community workshop were carried out to understand local people's views on the issues and opportunities facing the town centre. Below is a summary of the feedback for Sevenoaks Town.



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A vision for Sevenoaks Town

In 2040...

Sevenoaks Town is continuing to thrive as the principal town and the commercial heart of the District. Its historic town centre, array of independent shops and the impressive Knole are rightfully celebrated, raising the profile of the town to attract more visitors.

Its cultural scene is expanded and integrated as a way of life for local people. The town's offer is diversified to match that of other prominent towns, with new restaurants and more things to do in the evening. The weekly market plays an important role in the life of the town.

Sevenoaks' appeal extends, beyond its affluent reputation, to be inclusive to everyone. This is in part down to a wider leisure offer, with paid and unpaid opportunities which cater to people of all ages and families. New homes in and around the centre of different types, sizes and tenures support residents at different income levels and life stages, and brings more people to support town centre shops.

District wide principles

This vision statement should be read in conjunction with the District wide approach which sets out principles and objectives relevant to all five centres under the themes of:

- Supporting businesses and creating a resilient local economy
- Shifting to Net Zero 2030 and supporting a sustainable future
- Strengthening the character and identity of each centre
- Improving local people's health and wellbeing



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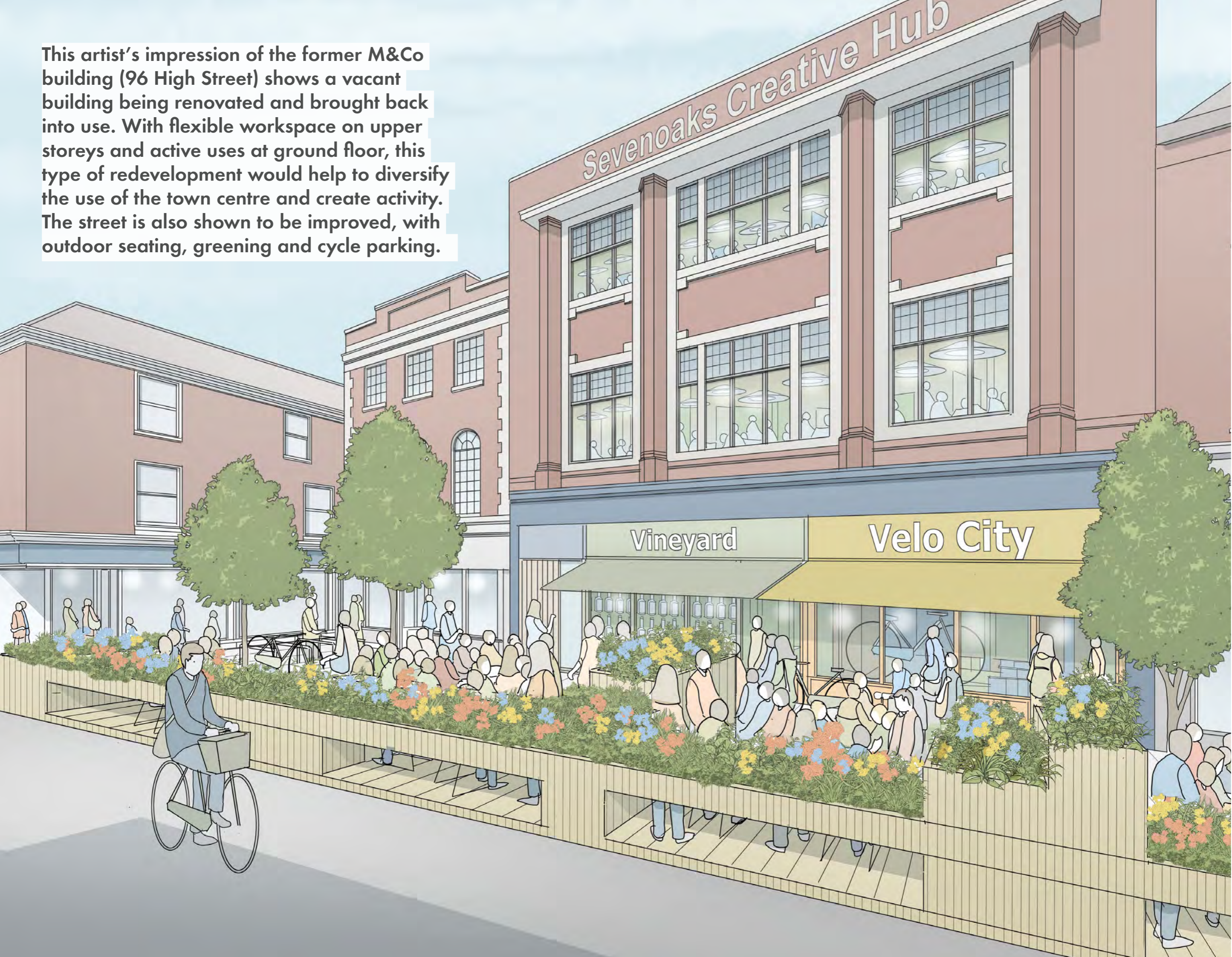
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This artist's impression of the former M&Co building (96 High Street) shows a vacant building being renovated and brought back into use. With flexible workspace on upper storeys and active uses at ground floor, this type of redevelopment would help to diversify the use of the town centre and create activity. The street is also shown to be improved, with outdoor seating, greening and cycle parking.



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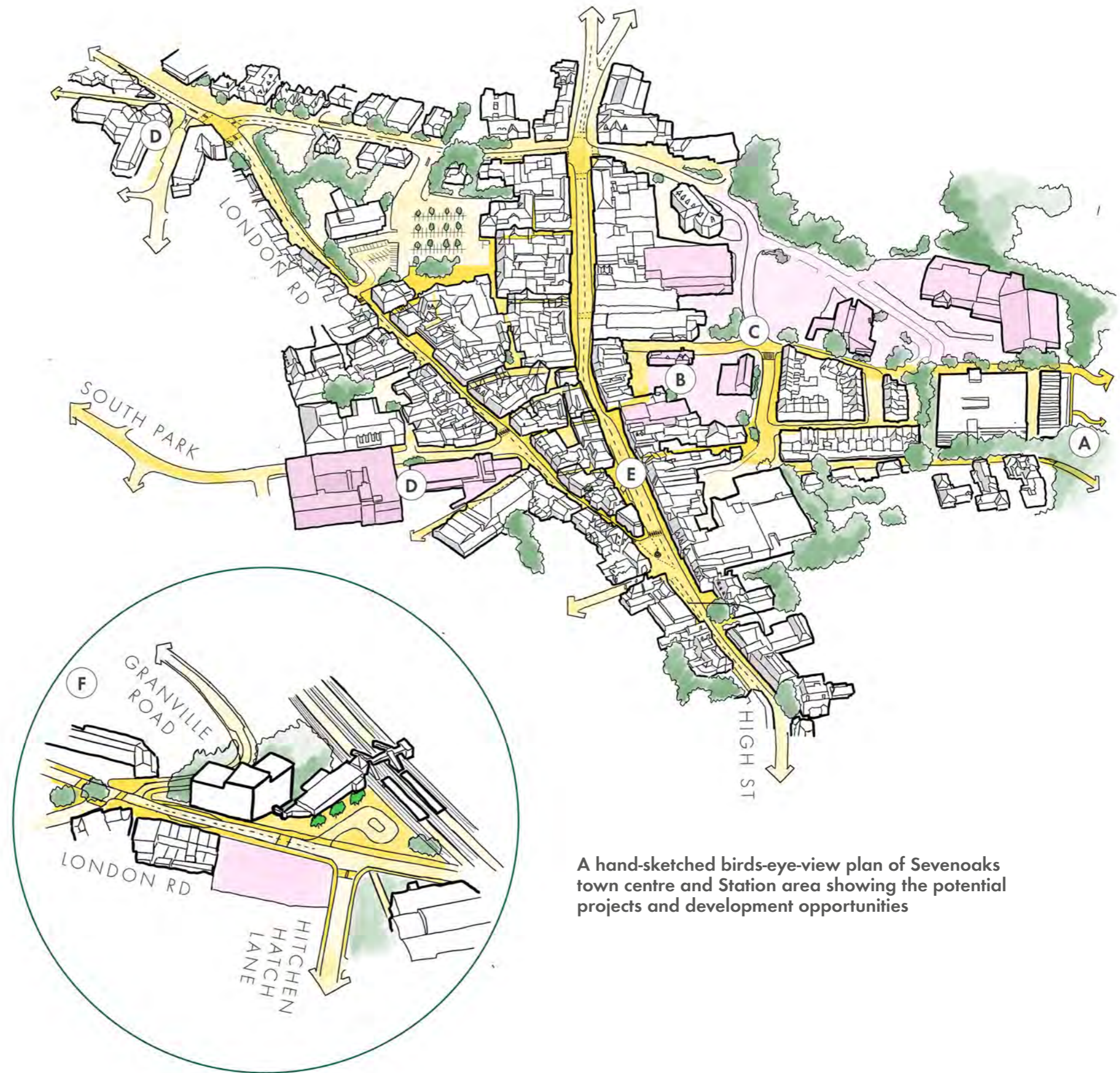
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Potential projects and development sites

Identifying opportunities

The following potential projects and development opportunities have been identified to help realise the future vision for Sevenoaks town centre. The following pages offer a description, a relevant example from elsewhere and delivery considerations for each project.

- A. Connections to Knole
- B. Relocating the market
- C. Eastern town centre revitalisation
- D. Western town centre sites
- E. High streets streetscape enhancement
- F. Improving Station arrival
- G. Programme of events



A hand-sketched birds-eye-view plan of Sevenoaks town centre and Station area showing the potential projects and development opportunities



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A- Connections to Knole

The large historic parkland of Knole on the edge of Sevenoaks Town is a great asset for the town which sets it apart from others. The house and its grounds attract thousands of visitors annually, and local residents enjoy the proximity of the park for recreation and leisure.

Strengthening walking connections would encourage visitors to Knole to spend time in the town, whilst also improving access for local people to support their health and wellbeing.

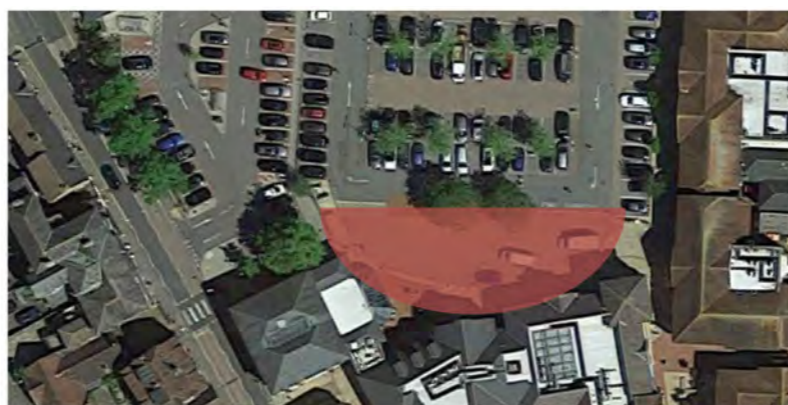
Upgrading routes like Webb's Alley and Akehurst Lane would include interventions such as: increased signage, removing street clutter, introducing better lighting and surfacing, street trees and other types of planting to draw the greenery through from the park into the town and supporting greater biodiversity. Any redevelopment opportunities on backland sites would be designed to support links between the town centre and Knole Park, including establishing active frontages. This would create a better sense of arrival into town, and help people to navigate their way out of town into the park.



In Brighton, improved signage and active uses at ground floor create attractive links along its laneways. Its lanes open up with space for activity to spill out into the public realm. There are opportunities to extend the Shambles character as part of improved connections between the High St and Knole.



Aerial image of Buckhurst car park with approximate existing market footprint highlighted.



Aerial image of Bligh's Meadow Car Park with a servicing and deliveries area highlighted, south of the car park, that could be used to relocate the market.

Maps data ©2022 Google ©2022 Getmapping plc, Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky, Maxar Technologies, The Geoinformation Group

B- Relocating the market

Sevenoaks Town has a weekly Wednesday market which takes place in Buckhurst car park next to the bus station. The market is operated by Sevenoaks Town Council. While the market is highly valued, it was noted through the stakeholder engagement process that the market was let down by its setting, for lack of a town market square.

The market should:

- be in a central location that generates high footfall and is connected to nearby shopping
- be safe and free from traffic
- help to animate a high quality and attractive public space

There is an opportunity to explore relocating the market. Relocation to the southern edge of Blighs Meadow car park could increase its prominence for visitors and residents, with the setting of shopfronts and a tree-lined walk. While further testing would be needed, it seems that a market could operate in this location alongside an active car park.

This intervention would also have the added benefit of freeing up the Buckhurst car park for the possible wider development of the eastern town centre area. Or, in the event that the existing market site is developed and improved, Bligh's Meadow could provide a temporary home.



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C- Eastern town centre revitalisation

The eastern part of the town centre, between the High Street and Knole Park is largely within Council ownership and offers a major opportunity for transformation. The area should be looked at holistically to maximise opportunities, including: Buckhurst car park, the Bus Station, the Library, Sackville House, the Leisure Centre and the associated roads.

While the wider town centre is historic, with a historic street pattern and many listed buildings, this area feels like the 'back' with wide sweeping roads and disjointed buildings. A feasibility study and masterplan for the area would seek to develop and evaluate options which:

- Enhance pedestrian connections between the High Street and Knole Park.
- Deliver new homes and workspace above active ground floors including cultural and community uses.
- Maintain access and servicing needs, while minimising the impact of vehicles.
- Respond to the town centre's character, reinstating a block structure and creating streets and spaces which feel part of the town centre.
- Coordinate with other adjacent schemes for a coherent outcome.



Case study: The old cattle market in Hereford, a precedent of town centre mixed-use development which offers active ground floors including retail and leisure. Buildings have been designed sensitively to fit in with Hereford's existing historic town centre with high quality materials, arranged to give a sense of enclosure and human scale feel. Connections across the main road has been significantly improved with intuitive crossings and public realm enhancements.



A photo of Coachworks in Ashford, a development where existing buildings and new development work together to provide for cultural uses, as could be done for the Post Office site and Stag Theatre. ©Turner Works

D- Western town centre sites

Adjacent to the Stag Theatre, the post office occupies a relatively large footprint and is low-rise, with a contemporary appearance not in keeping with the town's architectural vernacular. If redeveloped, proposals for the post office could explore opportunities to redevelop and densify the site with a mixed-use building incorporating leisure, night-time or F&B uses, with residential above. Designs should also seek to create active frontage onto London Road and improve the built relationship between the post office and the Stag Theatre. In particular, designs should explore opportunities to introduce active frontages and ground floor animation along the passage between both buildings.

In conjunction, proposals could consider converting the telephone exchange site into residential use. Given that building appears to be of good quality and is relatively dense, proposals would promote refurbishment to minimise the carbon cost of building works.

The sites are in private ownership, so would need to be brought forward by the landowner in collaboration with the Council.

In addition to the post office and telephone exchange sites, the Argyle Road site also presents a potential long-term opportunity area for redevelopment.



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E- High streets streetscape

London Road and the High Street could be improved in their environs, creating a more attractive place for people to shop. Public realm improvements would focus on creating a welcoming environment that encourages people to walk and cycle. Measures could potentially include:

- Widening footways, where possible, and integrating parking bays to increase the perceived width of footways.
- Increasing greenery through, for example, tree planting and rain gardens interspersed between parking bays.
- Increasing the quantity and safety of pedestrian crossings. In particular focusing on the junction of the High Street and London Road.
- Improving lighting to increase safety and create a welcoming night-time ambience. Proposals would also consider architectural lighting for historic buildings.
- Upgrading street furniture and surface materials using a coherent, high-quality palette of materials and components
- Considering Historic England 'High Streets for All' guidance for public realm upgrades and HAZ funding opportunities.



Case study: Bromley High Street. Regeneration project funded by GLA and TfL funding with match funding from the local authority. The project included redesigned shop fronts, new paving, planting between parking bays, outside seating areas, wayfinding signs and interactive town maps. The project was undertaken in tandem with community events and training support for local businesses ©TfL



Case study: Bath Station where the Station forecourt has been transformed into a public and green space, providing a positive sense of arrival and improved accessibility. This was achieved through redistribution of car traffic and bus provision, de-cluttering, the introduction of greenery and new active ground floor uses.

F- Improving the Station arrival

Sevenoaks Station is slightly removed from the town centre on London Road, and offers a poor arrival experience to the town. Enhancements should focus on creating a safe and welcoming public realm around the station, seeking opportunities to:

- Create safe and frequent pedestrian crossings along London Road including, simplifying junction layouts, removing guardrailling and resolving conflicts between bus stops and crossings.
- Increase space for pedestrians and/or cyclists by rationalising carriageway widths along London Road.
- Improve the drop-off configuration outside the station, exploring opportunities to introduce greenery and public amenity.
- Incorporate improved signage and wayfinding towards the town centre.
- Introduce a high-quality building with active ground floor frontages onto the vacant site opposite the station building.
- Development opposite the station would be subject to planning consents.



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G- Programme of events

One of the main points of feedback from the engagement was that people would like to see Sevenoaks' flourishing cultural offer expanded. The town centre Health Check also identified a lower provision of leisure and evening uses, compared to similar sized towns. Developing this offer through a programme of events and activities within the town could help add to its draw, bringing more footfall into the town centre, while also supporting residents with an active community life. Actions could include:

- Creating a network of local cultural organisations to coordinate and promote programming.
- Creating a grant scheme to fund initiatives led by local cultural organisations and businesses, which add to the town's cultural programme. Funding should prioritise proposals which cater for young people and older people alike, attract people into the centre, and can adapt to demand in terms of timing.
- Programming events and activities in the public space helping to keep them visible and accessible to all, activating the streets and spaces.



Rue Gambetta in France, a precedent of temporary art in the public realm which could be relevant for the Shambles



Lighting installations can help support a more vibrant and welcoming place in the evenings. Evening events in a public space can make a feature of the built heritage and setting e.g. a backyard cinema.



Book sellers on the Southbank in London make use of the bridge and add to people's day out.



Licensed buskers in key locations can contribute to an ever-changing day out experience.



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Place coordination strategy

Partnership working

Sevenoaks Town is the largest town centre within the District, with the largest catchment and remains to be a key destination for resident population. Despite this, the town centre looks poorly maintained in certain places (for example along the small lanes, such as the Shambles, and back of stores in the core of the town centre) which does not reflect the prestige associated with the area. Moreover, the general environment is hampered by the traffic along the two main roads, London Road and the High Street (A225), which does not favour pedestrians looking to move from east to west across the town centre to access key destinations e.g. moving between the Theatre and Market, and then onwards to Knole Park. Improving connections between these key places will help to build the visitor economy for Sevenoaks Town, whereby a natural increase in dwell time is facilitated through linked attractions. For example, it could encourage visitors to consider visiting both Knole as well as the town centre for more of an evening offer, i.e., to the theatre and restaurants. To add to this, the pavements are narrow at some instances which again hinders permeability and visitor experience. Narrow pavements can be a missed opportunity for restaurants and cafes in terms of limited outdoor seating. This can have an impact on how vibrant the town centre appears to visitors, contributing negatively to the experience.

There are clear areas for improvement. This includes maintaining but more importantly improving the public realm to create interesting spaces to converge as well as 'pause', along the streetscape for pedestrians. This could mean creating opportunities to stop outside stores, sit and take in the atmosphere of the place. This is often overlooked and can have an impact on the way in which the town centre is perceived as an inviting place.

The basis of the town centre management should therefore be centred on more general place management (e.g. painting and upkeep of common spaces) and greening, to improve the experience for visitors as well as creating new opportunities to 'pause'. In turn, the latter could be an opportunity to overlap with other recommendations i.e. greater events programming and cultural installations within the town centre, to draw crowds. This could be an opportunity to embed a spirit of creativity across the town centre through incidental art, and open air performances, as well as other events. The opportunity here is to truly consider how creative elements could permeate through the town and not be reserved in a small 'quarter,' around the Stag theatre. Greater event programming could be a one way to deliver this, which could help transform the perception of Sevenoaks Town as a new creative hub. This in turn could help to create the right environment to attract more diverse retail and business activity. In the medium term, this could support the ability to deliver greater co-working and creative spaces within the town centre.

As a first step, an overarching place management strategy setting out the areas for improvement, and how upkeep and maintenance will be delivered should be scoped out. As part of this, the strategy should move towards delivering the creative elements and event programme. As a medium term objective, scoping out opportunities to delivery greater co-working and creative spaces should be considered.

In terms of responsibility for place coordination strategy this could be delivered through the existing town team, or another existing council team. For the workspace element, this would fall within the Council's Economic Development team's remit to consider opportunities to partner with operators who have expertise to deliver these schemes.



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Delivery and funding

Due diligence to consider

The following table sets out the due diligence that should be taken into consideration to help shape and define the projects recommended for Sevenoaks Town. As part of this, an indication of timescales and potential types of funding has been outlined which is indicative and may be subject to change. It is intended that this table highlight key moves to for SDC to take into consideration and be used as a guide to support moving the projects forward. Note that the town's ownership is relatively fragmented with very few large sites. However, Sevenoaks Parish Council¹ and KCC are prominent landowners.

The existing governance is formed of Sevenoaks Town Council, and the newly formed Sevenoaks Town Team. The Town Team is led by Cllr Andrew Eyre and is understood to be 'business-led.' The ambition of the Town Team is to find opportunities to combine resources to develop innovative and achievable projects to 'boost the Town's footfall and local economy.' The Executive Board consists of representatives from Sevenoaks Town Council, Sencio, the Chamber of Commerce, Sevenoaks Chronicle, Bligh's, Knole, retailers and local businesses. Therefore, the interventions recommended could be aligned to their ambitions and form part of their remit.

¹ This is the registered name on Land Registry. We suspect this may be a historic name, and the land is held within Sevenoaks District's wider ownership.

Table of due diligence for Sevenoaks

	PROJECT	TIMESCALES	DUE DILIGENCE	POTENTIAL FUNDING STREAMS	POTENTIAL RESPONSIBILITY
A	Connections to Knole Park	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed design / movement study to set out new feasible routes that could be delivered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy Towns Fund FHSF (future round) 	SDC
B	Relocating the Market	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with key landowners, market traders and local community to gauge interests Instruct a car park study to determine whether the car park could be consolidated and rationalised to free up space for redevelopment Detailed feasibility studies to ascertain whether the market could viably be moved to the more central location (outside M&S) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) 	SDC
C	Eastern town centre revitalisation	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with key landowners and community to determine what uses they would like to see come forward Detailed feasibility studies / masterplan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) CIL/S106 as new development comes forward 	SDC
E	High streets streetscape enhancement	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place coordination strategy to set out general maintenance and key interventions Determining bodies responsible to carry out maintenance and action interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) 	Town team
F	Improving Station arrival	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with key landowners (Network Rail) to determine interest for revitalisation In parallel, instruct a transport and movement study to outline key routes for improvement to create better connections to the town centre Detailed technical infrastructure studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) 	SDC / Town team
G	Programme of events	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scoping to ascertain event/festival programme Engagement with local businesses to ascertain participation interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council funding 	Town team
D	Western town centre sites	6-10 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scoping appetite for acquisition within the SDC to deliver the sites as part of a comprehensive mixed-use scheme Engagement with key landowners and community to determine their interests in redevelopment (as well as understanding Vacant Possession) Detailed design studies / masterplan to establish the design principles and scheme Determining delivery routes for acquisition / vehicles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) 	SDC / Town team



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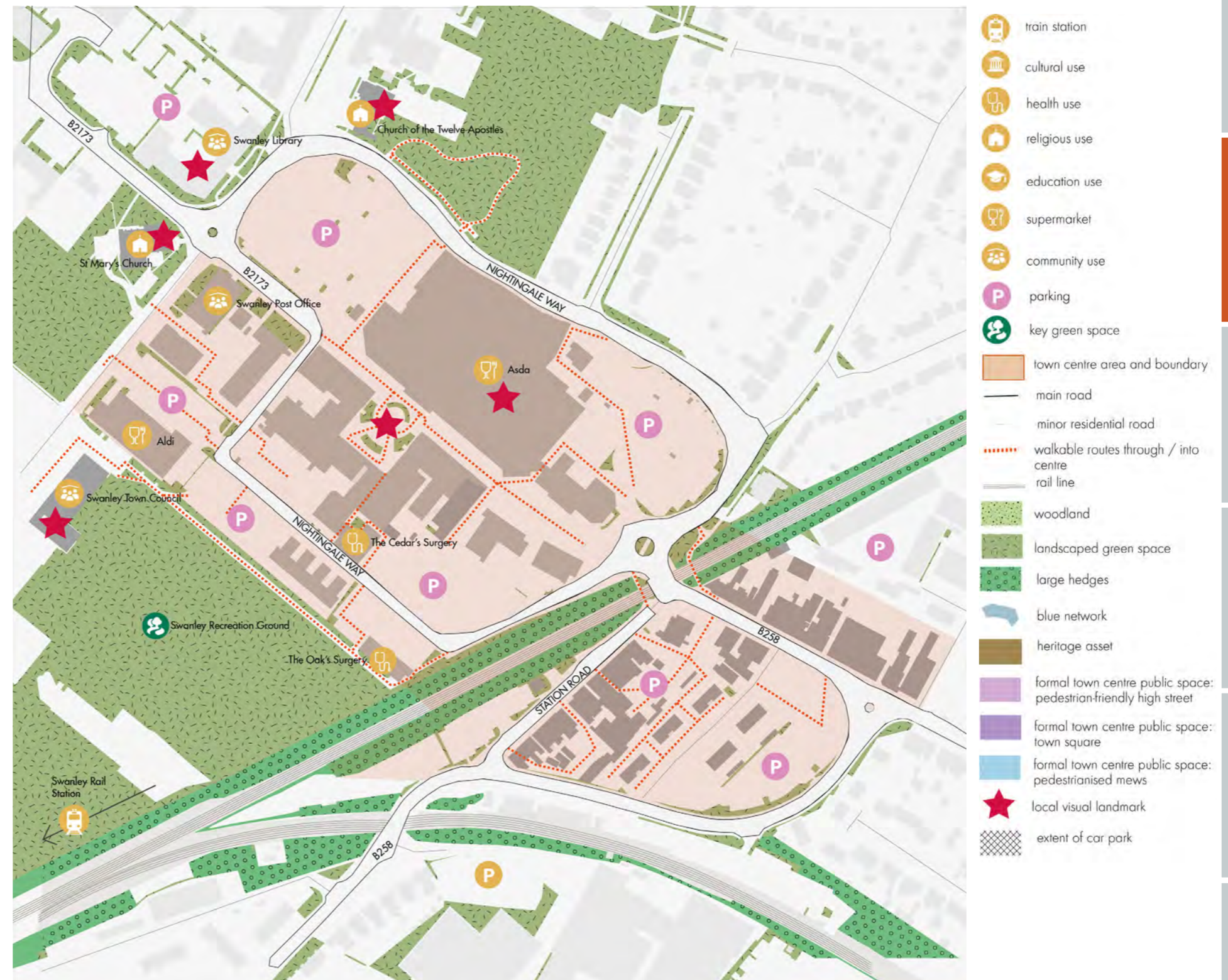
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3 Swanley

Context for the vision

Swanley was a market town whose growth was catalysed by the introduction of the railway. In the 1970s, Swanley's town centre was redeveloped as a modernist shopping precinct following new town principles. As a result, the town has visual markers of its earlier history as a Victorian settlement (St Mary's Church) and its more recent development (William Mitchell sculptural staircase). In recent years, the town centre has lacked investment and feels very car dominated, with an over-bearing road network and significant areas of surface car park. Large sites allocated for development pose an opportunity for the town centre environs to be enhanced and to provide for the growing population.

Swanley is located in the north west of the District and has a stronger relationship with London than the other centres. This has played out historically with Swanley's role as a horticultural market town. The nearest villages are Hextable, Swanley Village and Crockenhill. The town is also very close and well connected to Bluewater shopping centre. This means that despite being the second town of the District, with 16,000 residents, many use Swanley as a local centre for day to day needs rather than as a shopping destination. The anchor store Asda and new Aldi cater for these needs. The town also continues to offer a weekly market.



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Swanley Park in the north offers 24ha of parkland with play as well as natural spaces. It is a much-loved asset to the town.

The town centre is well connected by rail, to London and Ebbsfleet and road via the A20 and M25.

Health check summary

A centre Health Check was undertaken considering property data, survey data (comparing 2016 to 2021) and a site visit of the town centre. The main findings were:

- Around half of all floorspace in the town centre is occupied by convenience goods (food) retailers. Food/grocery shopping is, unsurprisingly, the main reason for visiting the centre.
- There has been a slight increase in market share for main food shopping in the centre between 2016-2021 and a slight decrease in top-up food shopping.
- Almost all convenience goods (food) expenditure attracted to Swanley flows to the town centre.
- There is a lower than average proportion of comparison goods retailers; higher than average proportion of service uses.
- The convenience goods turnover is £67m per annum (£47m pa to ASDA store).
- The comparison goods turnover is circa £20m per annum (50% directly attributed to ASDA and ALDI stores; mainly ASDA)
- There are a number of positive factors to report around the usage of Swanley town centre, including: the widening of reasons for visiting the centre; an increase in the average length of stay in the centre; the increased use of public transport to travel to the centre; and increasing frequency of trips to the centre.
- Swanley's market share for leisure trips from the local area: 28% cafes/restaurants, 51% health/fitness.
- There is an increased level of the use of public transport to get to the town centre, alongside an increased average length of stay (from 96 minutes to 111 minutes).



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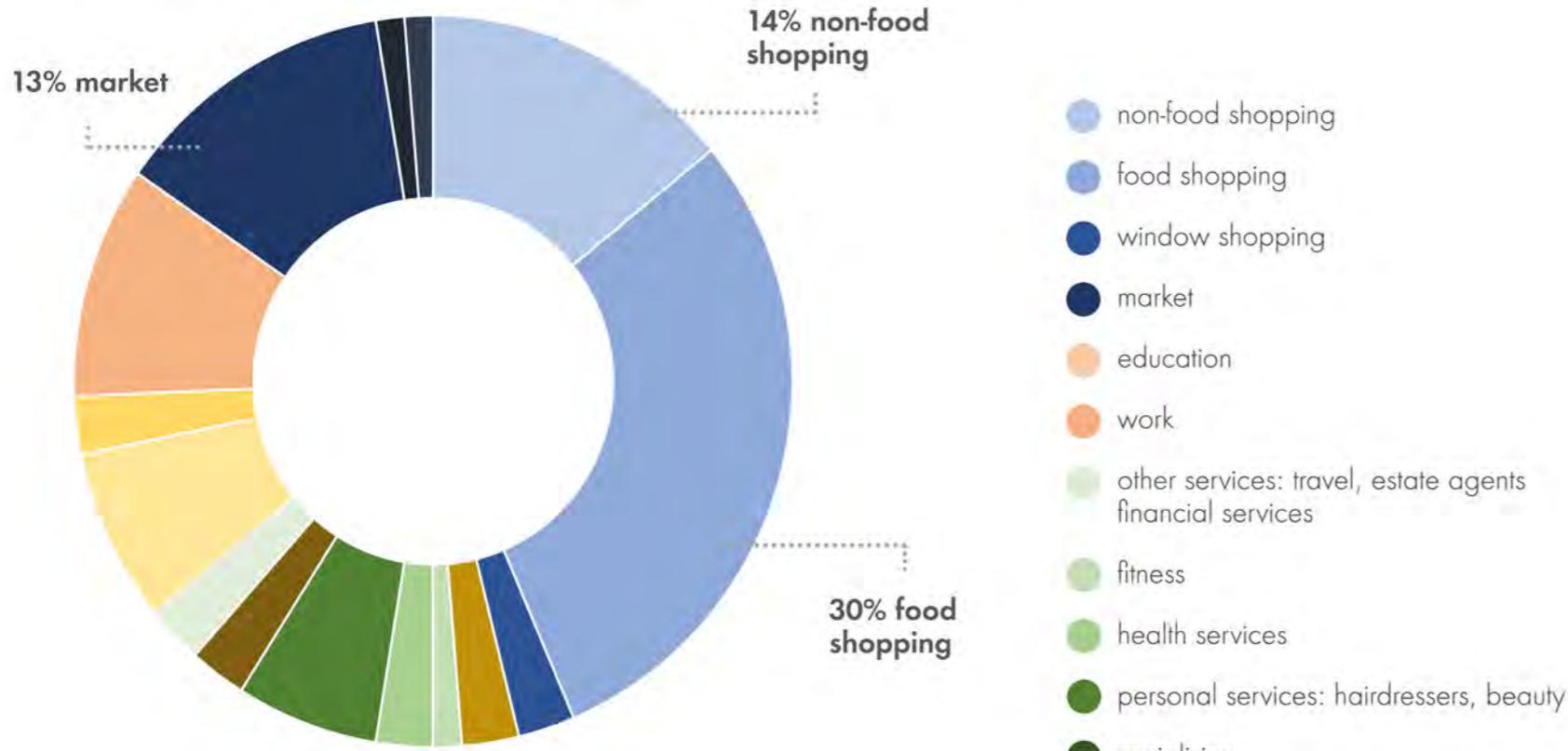
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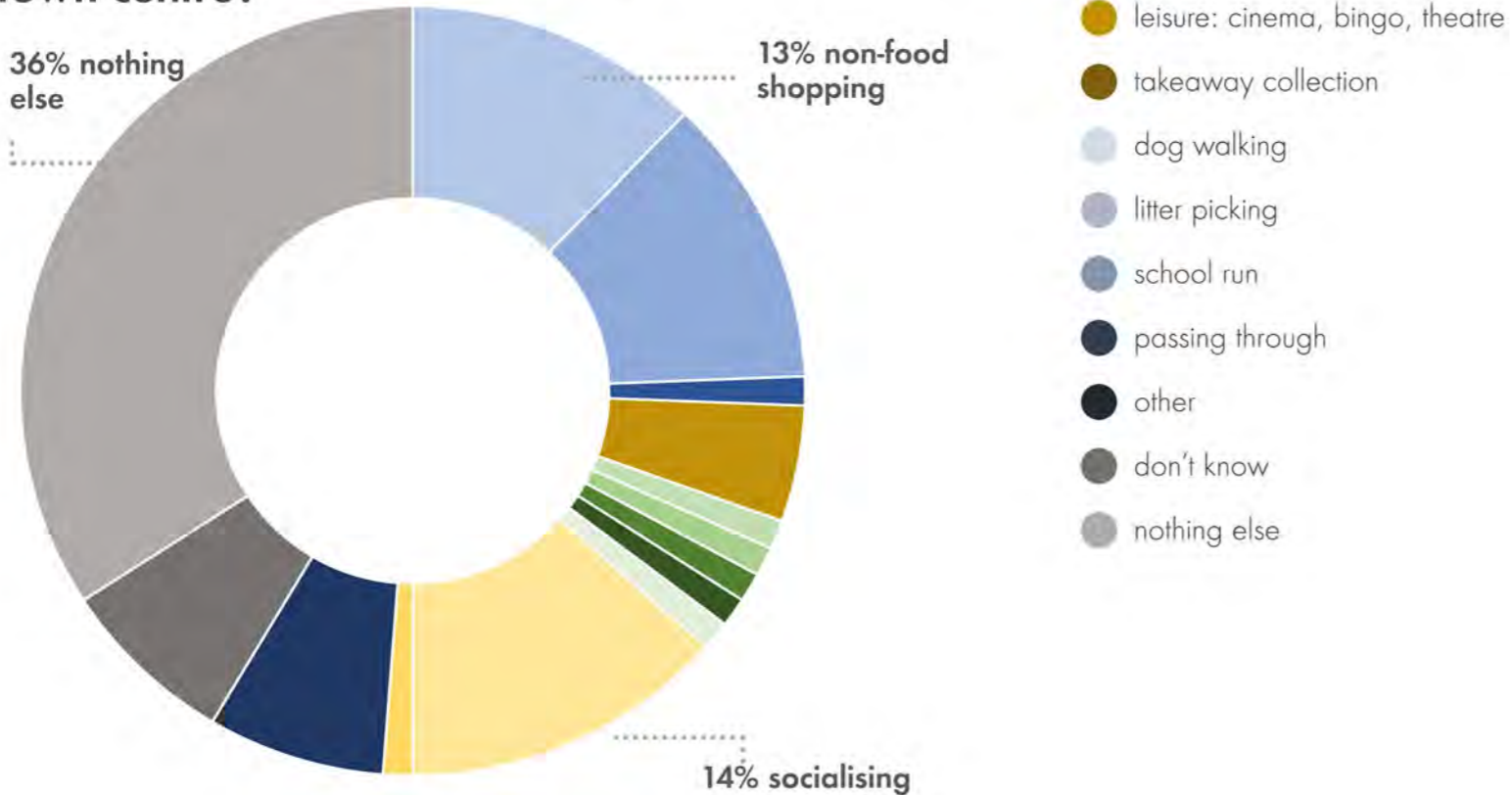
In-street survey findings

78 responses

What is your main purpose of visit the town centre?



Aside from that, what else will you be doing in the town centre?



What do you like about the town centre?

Most frequent responses

- Close to home 45%
- Attractive environment / nice place 8%
- Market 18%
- Nice atmosphere 17%
- Friendly people 13%

What would you change about the town centre?

Most frequent responses

- Nothing in particular 31%
- More / better seating, toilets 19%
- Better choice of shops 13%
- Better facilities for youth 12%
- More large shops/department stores 6%

Average dwell time in centre:

1 hour 12 mins



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Stakeholder engagement feedback



Strengths

- A strong community, a diverse population with friendly people.
- Excellent rail connections -25 minutes to London.
- Excellent road connections - near to M25, M20, A2 and the Dartford Crossing.
- Proximity to London - commuters bring skills and higher incomes.
- High proportion of blue collar workers with access to the M25.
- Best of both worlds - town and country.
- A low vacancy rate.
- Swanley Park is very well used.
- The rural and landscape around the town and the greenbelt preventing sprawl.
- The market brings people in (though there were mixed views on whether it benefits local people).
- Housing is more affordable than surrounding areas.



Weaknesses

- The management of the centre is complex with five groups involved - makes it difficult for the community to plan anything in the Town Square.
- People feel the planning permission for the centre is out of character with the town - too tall, dense and too many flats.
- Many trips in the car are short distances that could be done by other modes.
- The centre is dead in the evening.
- The mix of shops has decreased significantly.
- The high street and town square are very wide and feel empty much of the time.
- Traffic congestion - particularly the pinch point from the bridge crossing the rail line to the south of the centre.
- At times feels unsafe in the centre - lack of front doors, activity and lighting.



Opportunities

- Lots of potential for business growth - workspace, smaller engineering, industrial, storage, etc. - with strong connections to the M25, Dover, and Heathrow.
- Opportunity for transformation with major development sites in the town centre - new homes, workspace and wider regeneration (better provision of shops and services, improvements to public realm etc).
- Opportunity to encourage more walking and cycling.
- To bring a more diverse mix of shops, including more evening activity, e.g. a family restaurant, etc.
- Regeneration of the Station area, and a new connection to the town centre?
- Opportunity to make the final 100m around the centre more permeable and pleasant.
- Opportunities to improve access into the town centre through public realm improvements

Stakeholder discussions and a community workshop were carried out to understand local people's views on the issues and opportunities facing the town centre. Below is a summary of the feedback for Swanley.



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A vision for Swanley

In 2040...

Swanley has reclaimed its identity as a market town, reinterpreting what this means in the 21st century by embracing the concept of a walkable and sustainable town. The town centre is reinstated, not just as a place to do the weekly shop, but as a place for residents and people from surrounding areas to come together and spend time. The town centre's retail offer is expanded with an emphasis on independents and food and drink. The centre is a focal point for an expanded community, leisure and civic offer, including doctor's surgeries, education, recreation and community facilities for the growing population.

The town centre offers space for small businesses and co-working space for commuters who are working more flexibly. This workspace, as well as new homes of different types and tenures, brings more people into the centre to support a greater offer of shops and services. Any new buildings embrace and enhance Swanley's character and are of high-quality design, providing positive frontage and front doors onto streets.

The town centre is a more welcoming place for everyone to enjoy. Central to this is creating better streets, with wider pavements, tree planting, easy crossings and reduced traffic. Walking and cycling into the centre becomes enjoyable and the obvious choice for short distances.

District wide principles

This vision statement should be read in conjunction with the District wide approach which sets out principles and objectives relevant to all five of the centres, under the themes of:

- Supporting businesses and creating a resilient local economy
- Shifting to Net Zero 2030 and supporting a sustainable future
- Strengthening the character and identity of each centre
- Improving local people's health and wellbeing



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This artist's impression shows how Asda Walk could be transformed with pop up activity throughout the week. The space could be improved with the integration of tree planting, sustainable drainage and opportunities for play. Flower planting could celebrate Swanley's horticultural heritage.



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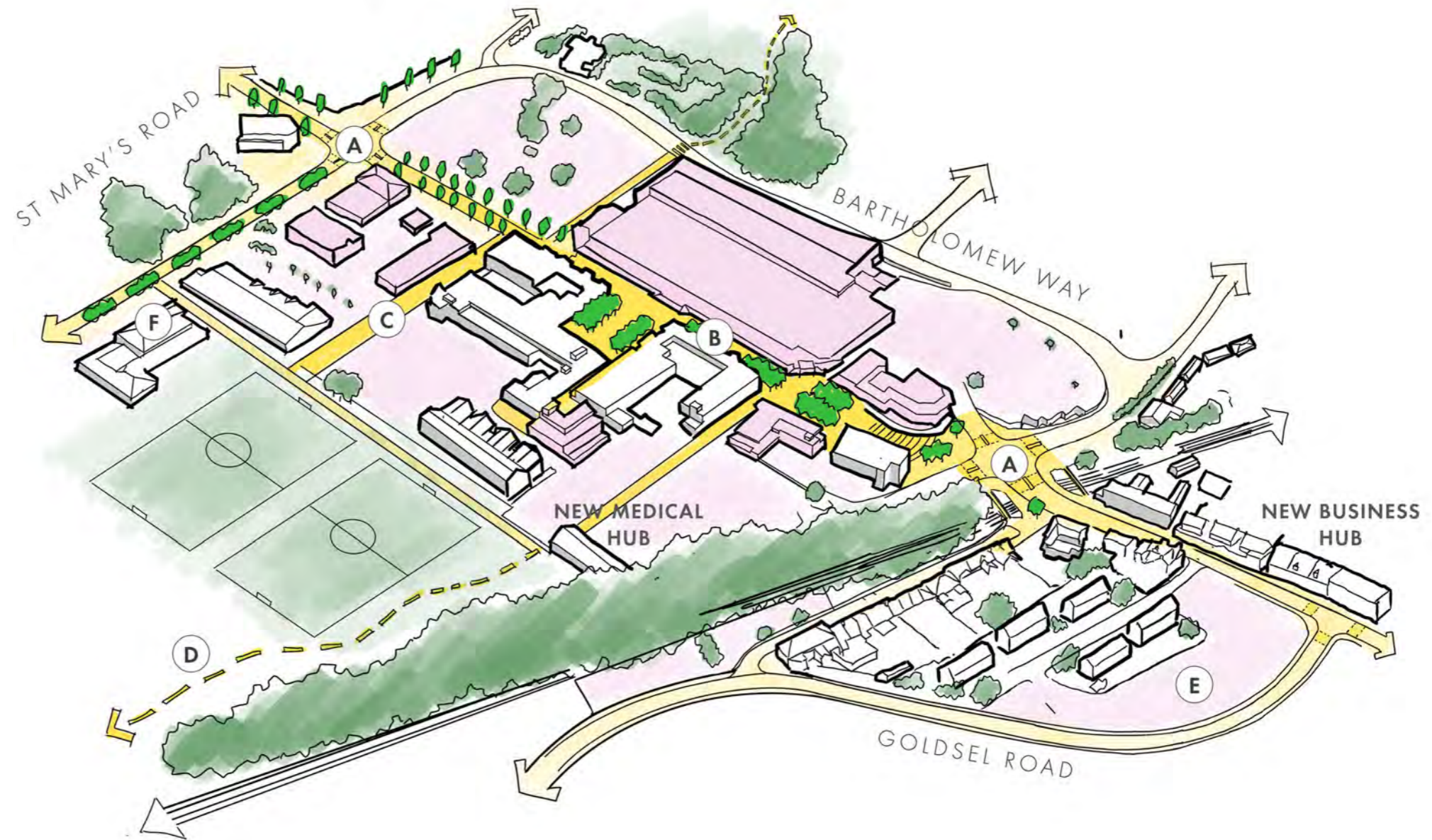
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Potential projects and development sites

Identifying opportunities

The following potential projects and development opportunities have been identified to help realise the future vision for Swanley town centre. The following pages offer a description, a relevant example from elsewhere and delivery considerations for each project.

- A. Improving the arrival experience into the town centre
- B. Transforming town square & Asda Walk
- C. Rebalancing space for pedestrians
- D. New and enhanced station connections
- E. Town centre redevelopment - gradual
- F. Adjacent civic and community uses opportunity



A hand-sketched birds-eye-view plan of Swanley town centre showing the potential projects and development opportunities



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A- Improving the arrival experience into the town centre

Swanley town centre is surrounded by a ring of roads with overly-wide carriageways and fast-moving traffic. This results in a poor arrival experience and difficulty crossing for people walking and cycling to the centre.

Enhancements would focus on strengthening connections between the High Street and Town Centre, particularly exploring options to reconfigure the two key roundabouts which provide arrival points from the north and south. Different junction arrangements would need to be tested, with the aim of slowing vehicular traffic, creating controlled pedestrian and cycle crossings at desire lines and ensuring more footway space for safe pedestrian movement.

In addition, interventions would aim to improve the public realm along the High Street and Bartholomew Way by; increasing footway space, planting on the approach to Asda Walk, creating safe pedestrian crossings, and installing public art along blank walls / frontages to improve the arrival experience.

Options to rename Asda Walk to 'High Street' (or similar) could be considered to increase the perceived continuity of the High Street through the town centre. Beyond the scope of this study, there may be a strategic opportunity to influence town centre traffic by adding a western junction to the A20.



An example of a raised table pedestrian and cyclist crossing with contrasting surfacing. In Swanley, controlled crossings in place of roundabouts would help to improve pedestrian and cyclist accessibility into the town centre.



Central Way, Altrincham. Project to provide a new market canopy for market stalls and seating, with associated public realm upgrades to materials, lighting, and planting. The project has helped to extend market activities beyond the adjacent market hall into the surrounding streets. This type of intervention could be appropriate to Asda Walk to both support market activities and animate blank walls.

©Adrian Lambert Photography

B- Transforming town square & Asda Walk

Proposals would seek to create a flexible and multi-functional public realm with designs that are distinctive, green and welcoming. The design identity would be inspired by Swanley's horticultural heritage with exceptional displays of plants and flowers fully integrated within the public realm (to ensure longevity). An approach focused on greening would also benefit biodiversity, microclimate, and sustainable drainage. Designs would seek to introduce elements - such as water features, artwork and play amenities - to bring variety, activity and interest to the public realm.

Lastly, designs would need to prioritise safety through an animated, overlooked and well-lit night-time environment.

The functional and spatial requirements of the market would need to be considered. Collaborations between partners in the centre should look to explore opportunities to increase active frontage as well as to develop a strategy to bringing activity into the public realm on a regular basis.



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C- Rebalancing space for pedestrians

Swanley town centre is laid out as a shopping precinct facing inwards to Asda Walk, surrounded by car parks. While this arrangement allows for direct accessibility by car, at many points pedestrians are left to traverse large car parks and vehicular routes. This is particularly apparent on Nightingale Way between Aldi and Asda Walk where people can be seen walking on the road for lack of a pavement.

Swanley town centre would benefit from the creation of clear and designated routes which give pedestrians priority. These routes should be designed to be safe and fully accessible. Routes and crossings should be direct and follow clear desire lines. Nightingale Way and other existing routes would benefit from being upgraded with continuous 3m wide pavements crossings with dropped kerbs.



Frodham Street Chester. Example of a pedestrian priority street, level street surface. As part of upgrades the street was decluttered to provide unobstructed pedestrian movement. The scheme uses relatively low cost contrasting surfacing, which could also be applied to Swanley's car parking areas and pedestrian routes such as Nightingale Way (pictured above) ©photo by David Mckenna, Frodham Street, Chester designed by Mott MacDonald and IBI Group



Beeline cycleway in Kingston - a popular and high-quality cycling and walking route alongside a railway. The route is away from main roads, meaning a reduced air and noise pollution. In 2021, sensor data showed, on average, 542 cyclists and 703 people walking used the route each day. ©Kingston Cycling Campaign

D- New and enhanced station connections

Swanley Station is half a mile from the town centre, with strong connections onwards to London and Dover Priory, Ramsgate and wider Kent. The Station building and entrances have recently been upgraded to improve the user experience. With two Station entrances, people can walk or cycle to the town centre one of two ways: from the north along St Mary's Road or from the south along Station Approach, Goldsel Road and Station Road. The route could be improved for people walking and cycling along Station Road/Goldsel Road by creating a safe and attractive public realm with wider pavements, dropped kerbs, crossings and tree planting. There is also potential to create a new route along the northern edge of the rail line through the St Mary's Primary School and the Recreation Grounds, along with wider upgrades to the green space.



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E- Town centre gradual redevelopment

There are a few large sites in Swanley's town centre which are allocated for development. For one such site, a planning permission exists which would see a large area of the centre transformed if delivered. While the delivery of this privately-owned site sits outside of the Council's control, there is an opportunity to think proactively about how other sites could come forward in a way which enhances the centre, consolidates public services, and which benefits the wider town.

There is potential for Swanley to undergo a slower process of infill redevelopment and regeneration, one site at a time. Positive interventions could potentially be made at: Swanley Telephone Exchange, the old Royal Mail site, the car parks adjacent to the Recreation Ground and Bevan Place. Development in the town centre should look to add to, rather than subtract from the range of uses in the centre. Ground floors should provide interesting and active uses to attract people into the centre, such as cafes and restaurants. Upper storeys should provide new homes, adding people who can support a wider offer of shops and services. There is potential for new civic or community facilities to act as a town centre anchor, such as a health hub. Any new buildings should provide positive and active frontage onto streets and onto the recreation ground.

While many of the sites are in private ownership, the Council can play a proactive role in working with landowners and promoting their re-development. The Council also has several sites within their ownership which should be used to meet local needs.



West Norwood Health and Leisure Centre - precedent of a new community facility that consolidated services into a single building, combining an NHS customer service centre with GP, dental surgeries, and sports and leisure facilities. Opposite the building is a new primary school building too, and play area. The project enabled upgrades to the surrounding landscape and attracts people to the nearby high street.

F- Adjacent civic and community uses opportunity

To the west of the town centre in Swanley there is a collection of public sector and community facilities and buildings, including: Swanley Recreation Ground, Swanley Town Hall, Swanley Youth and Community Centre, St Mary's Primary School, Orchards Academy, and Dawn to Dusk Day Nursery and Supalam Education in Music and Media College. There may be an opportunity for some or all of these partners to collaborate around their public service delivery strategies and estate needs. In particular, the redevelopment of Orchards Academy will be a key investment and contribution to the developing urban fabric. Similar projects elsewhere have allowed organisations to arrange themselves more efficiently, freeing up surplus land for housing and other needed uses, and generating revenue for re-investment into the facilities or services. This type of development can be community or locally led. A first step would be to set up a discussion about the operations and estates of each partner organisation, and if an opportunity for collaboration was identified, a feasibility study would be needed.



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Place coordination strategy

Partnership working

Swanley town centre's environment is comparatively 'stark' owing to the vast concrete walkways (Asda Walk for example) and lack of green spaces/ greening. Over the years, general maintenance of buildings have been overlooked as key landowners' ambitions to tackle this through extensive redevelopment plans have failed to come to fruition. A further key element is perception of place. Swanley is notably not known to have the most aspiring and inviting associations as a town centre, and its offer lacks diversity. Therefore, the town centre fails to cater for and attract the wealthier residents who live in the immediate hinterland. The limited F&B and leisure offer is a key part of this shortfall. However, it is not disputed that the town centre does function as is and is well frequented by a certain demographic. In recent years, and accelerated by the Pandemic, Swanley is increasingly being identified as an opportunity area for change and redevelopment. The connections to London have driven interested with new buyers looking for more space. As a knock-on effect, with values increasing, this is driving the interest of private developers to consider sites in/around the town centre for new mixed-use scheme (predominantly residential). Whilst this may be a positive step forward, a place coordination strategy could be a key intervention that could further accelerate investor interest, whilst addressing shortfalls of the town centre to align with the needs of the wider community.

A coordinated place management strategy for Swanley should look to deliver beyond the general maintenance e.g. street cleaning, actions. Firstly, the strategy should consider interventions to change the perception of place and make best use of the assets to create a more inviting landscape that aligns with the wider demographics.

This could be through renewed greening, new public realm, activating ground floors with cafes/leisure uses. Greater ground floor activation through new cafes and restaurants in Swanley to align with the diverse demographic could be a catalyst for drawing further commercial activity to the town centre. Often operators make locational commercial decisions based on existing presence of / and proximity to amenities in town centre. Given the current market dynamics, a business grant may be required to move this forward. Furthermore, delivering a new play space for children in the heart of the centre could be considered. Specifically this could be delivered on the underused stepped gateway facing Nightingale Way and the roundabout. One relatively simple easy win towards transforming the perception of Asda Walk could be by simply renaming the road.

Lastly, the weekly market is a great success, drawing large crowds, but more could be done. A coordinated events programme that delivers a wider range of different offers including specialist markets, performances and street food for example, could help to create a more inclusive Swanley whilst simultaneously helping to rebrand the town centre.

In terms of responsibility for place coordination strategy this could be delivered through the existing town council.



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Delivery and funding

Due diligence to consider

The following table sets out the due diligence that should be taken into consideration to help shape and define the projects recommended for Swanley. As part of this, an indication of timescales and potential types of funding has been outlined which is indicative and may be subject to change. It is intended that this table highlight key moves to for SDC to take into consideration and be used as a guide to support moving the projects forward.

A prominent landowner/stakeholder for Swanley is Evolve Capital, who own the Shopping Centre. Engagement with Evolve Capital concluded that they do not have comprehensive plans to for redevelopment at this point in time and has been factored into the interventions. However, they could have a role to play in more strategic interventions. This has been highlighted below.

Swanley Parish Council¹ and KCC own large sites in/around the town centre which could be advantageous in delivery terms. Other major landowners include Royal Mail, Aldi, and BT.

Governance in Swanley is provided by Swanley Town Council. The Town Council provides a variety of recreation, social and

¹ This is the registered name on Land Registry. We suspect this may be a historic name, and the land is held within Sevenoaks District's wider ownership.

Table of due diligence for Swanley

	PROJECT	TIMESCALES	DUE DILIGENCE	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES	POTENTIAL RESPONSIBILITY
A	Improving the arrival experience into the town centre	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage KCC to ascertain key issues for improvement and funding Transport and movement study to determine traffic calming measures and pedestrianisation and cycle prioritisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 	SDC
B	Transforming town square & Asda Walk	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with key landowners (Evolve Capital and KCC) to outline appetite to deliver change Wider community engagement to ascertain uses / ideas that could improve the place Detailed design studies to set out the public realm interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) 	Town Council
C	Rebalancing space for pedestrians	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with landowner Detailed design study to determine interventions to improve pedestrian experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 	Town Council
D	New and enhanced station connections	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with key landowners (Swanley Parish Council) and KCC Detailed design studies including transport and movement to determine new routes, wayfinding and traffic calming measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) 	SDC
F	Adjacent civic and community uses opportunity	6-10 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with respective organisations Initial scoping session to ascertain opportunities for collaboration Detailed feasibility study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) 	SDC
E	Town centre redevelopment - gradual	11-15 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further detailed design studies to determine mix of uses / proposed schemes on sites that become available / forward for redevelopment Further community engagement to sense test the proposals on a site by site basis Scoping appetite for acquisition within the SDC for delivery Scoping delivery vehicles / mechanisms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) CIL/S106 as new development comes forward 	SDC Partnered with landowners e.g. Evolve Capital?



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other facilities for the benefit of residents and people who work in and visit the town area, working in partnership with other Councils and agencies to promote and deliver local services. Interestingly, the Town Council already hosts a number of events throughout the year. Some of the larger development-orientated interventions set out below may sit outside the Town Council's remit at this point in time. However, thought should be considered towards whether they could be given better 'tools' or funding to do more. Certainly, recommendations in the Town Centre Recovery report (2022) are clear that strengthening the Town Council's role, or creating a Town Team could drive real success.



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4 Edenbridge

Context for the vision

Edenbridge is an attractive historic town centre of around 9,000 people (and 9,000 in surrounding villages) located on the Kent/Surrey border. The nearest villages are Cowden, Chiddingstone, Hever and Four Elms. The High Street is narrow and linear and on a Roman road and is very charming. It is at the south of the wider settlement and enjoys the River Eden flowing through the south of the town centre's boundary. The townscape is made up of the charming medieval and largely intact High Street including timber framed buildings with a varied and appealing roofscape which winds down towards the river. The narrowness of the High Street and the continuity of the building line has created a very compact character for the centre which is brimming with potential. Edenbridge has suffered from a lack of investment in the historic fabric of the original centre, which is largely in the ownership of a very limited number of owners, but the underlying quality of the built fabric is intact and awaiting renewal.

The town has expanded with residential and edge of centre development including an out of centre retail park and significant light industry and employment clusters to the north. It has a popular compact market on a Thursday in the Market Yard car park with stalls including fresh fruit and vegetables.

Edenbridge tends to have a lower footfall and dwell time than the other town centres. This is likely exacerbated by the bypass road which diverts traffic round the High Street and the lack of leisure or evening uses.



- train station
- cultural use
- health use
- religious use
- education use
- supermarket
- community use
- parking
- key green space
- town centre area and boundary
- main road
- minor residential road
- walkable routes through / into centre
- rail line
- woodland
- landscaped green space
- large hedges
- blue network
- heritage asset
- formal town centre public space: pedestrian-friendly high street
- formal town centre public space: town square
- formal town centre public space: pedestrianised mews
- local visual landmark
- extent of car park

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Health Check summary

A town centre Health Check was undertaken considering vacancy rates, survey data (comparing 2016 to 2021) and a site visit of the town centre. The main findings were:

- It remains the case that Edenbridge has a significant service land use function, in terms of units and floorspace.
- The proportion of convenience goods (food) retailers in the centre is in line with the national average, but the amount of floorspace below average.
- Edenbridge is the town centre with the highest proportion of vacant units; above the national average.
- Edenbridge attracts £47m of convenience goods expenditure, with £28m flowing to the town centre.
- Comparison goods turnover for the town centre is £17.5m (drawn from mainly Zone 3 of the study area - see p.15 of 'Town Centre Health Check Baseline Report & Needs Assessment').
- Residents of the Edenbridge catchment have a higher (than average) propensity to use the internet for comparison goods shopping (than the remainder of the study area).
- The new Lidl store has been able to increase the town's convenience goods market share without materially affecting the market share of the town centre.
- Food shopping remains the most popular reason to visit the town centre, although frequency of visits has increased, as has the popularity of food/beverage establishments in the centre.
- The in-street survey indicates that 75% of visitors use the centre at least once week for food shopping.
- Survey data indicates that there is a declining popularity of the Waitrose store, but increasing popularity of the Tesco Express store.
- There is a shift towards more car usage associated with the centre (probably due to nature catchment).
- There are shorter average journey times and average length of stay times. For a number of the centres, dwell-times associated with regular visits have reduced since previous studies.



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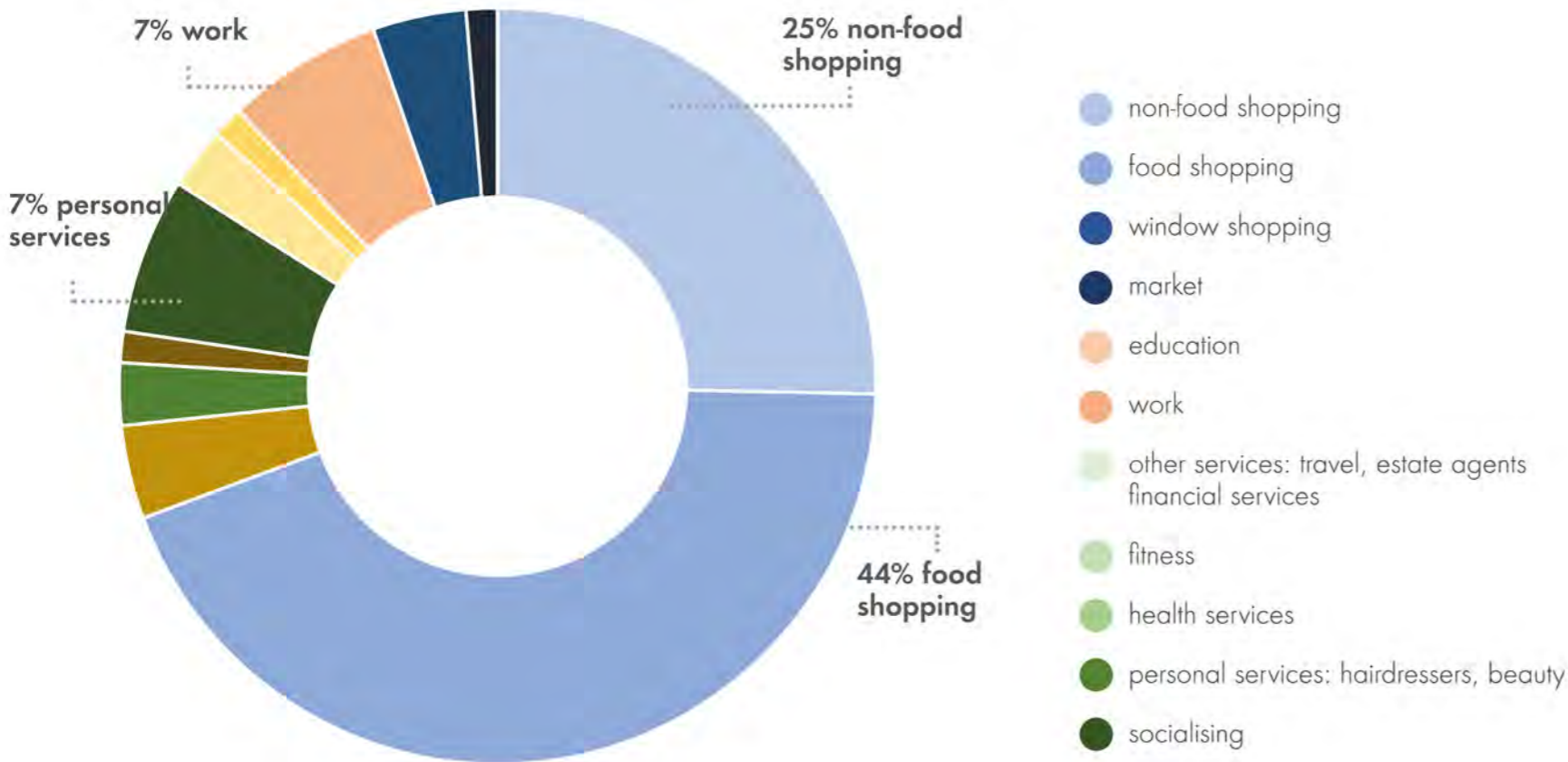
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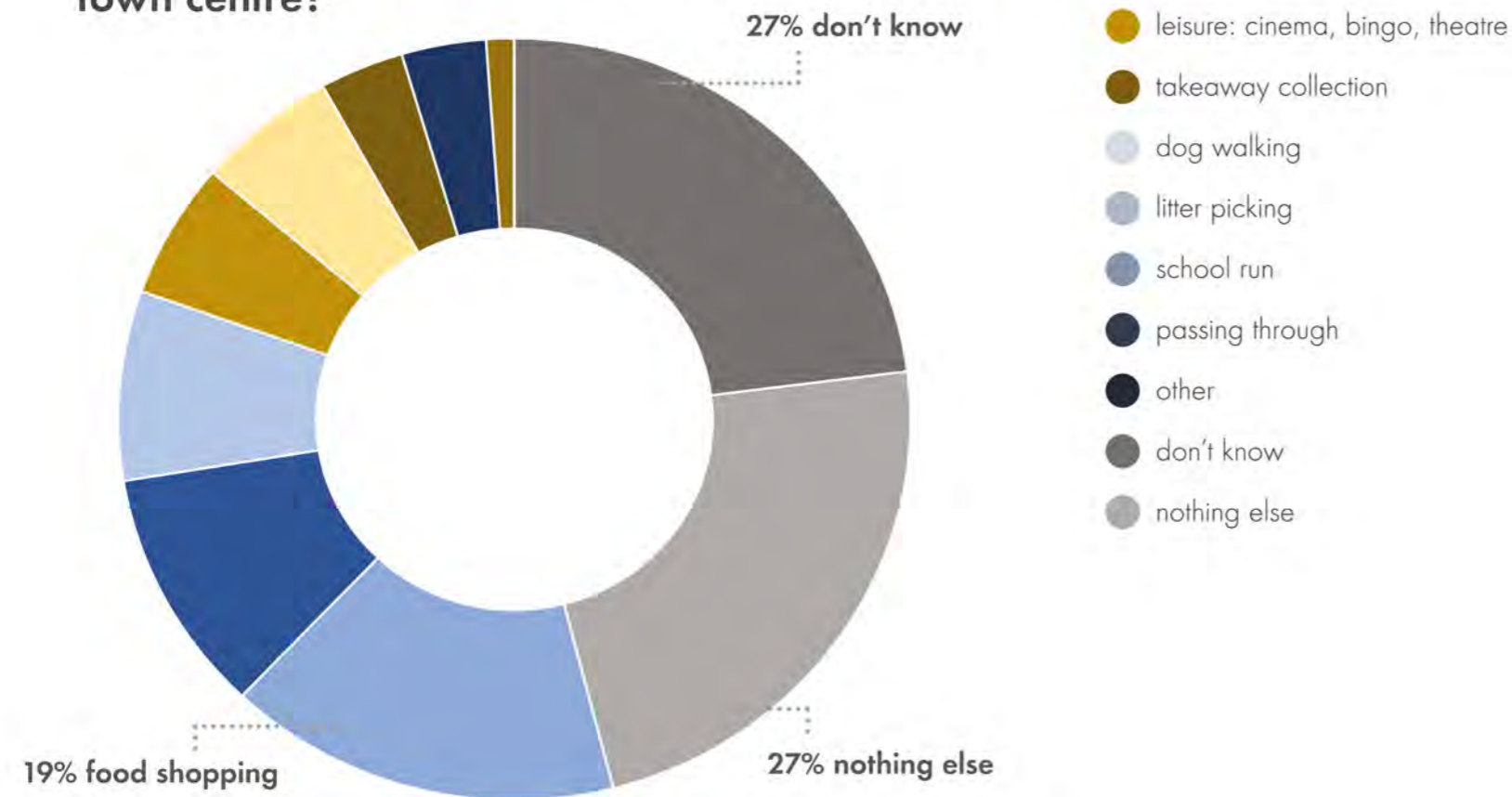
In-street survey findings

75 responses

What is your main purpose of visit the town centre?



Aside from that, what else will you be doing in the town centre?



What do you like about the town centre?

Most frequent responses

- Close to home 29%
- Attractive environment / nice place 23%
- Friendly people 19%
- Nice atmosphere 19%
- Good range of shops 15%

What would you change about the town centre?

Most frequent responses

- More pubs, restaurants, cafés 17%
- Nothing in particular 17%
- More specialist / independent stores 12%
- Events and temporary activities 11%
- No need to improve 9%

Average dwell time in centre:

1 hour 15 mins



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Stakeholder engagement feedback



Strengths

- Strong sense of community - lots of clubs and community organisations.
- An attractive place to live - museum, library, market, sports facilities etc.
- Historic high street and conservation area.
- Supermarkets - Waitrose and Lidl.
- River Eden and green landscape setting.
- Primary school located in the centre brings people to the high street.
- Good public transport - two rail stations and a town circular bus.
- New retail (Lidl, Greggs and Home Bargains) is well used.
- The town has a history of changing and adapting.
- Weekly market and events, notably the annual Bonfire Night parade.
- Hever, Penshurst and Chiddingstone are nearby.
- Thriving business areas with two industrial estates.



Weaknesses

- The Leathermarket building is an eyesore and lets down the High Street.
- Mix of uses on the high street - loss of retail, too many takeaways and hairdressers.
- Little by way of leisure or evening economy.
- The bypass road brings people away from the high street. At times it feels dead.
- People stop at Waitrose, but don't then continue to the high street.
- Area in the north around the Station, poor arrival experience to town.
- Industrial estates can be an eyesore from the main roads.
- People aren't aware of what Edenbridge has to offer.
- The town does not attract many visitors, despite its historic centre.



Opportunities

- Opportunity to enhance the Riverside to add to the town's offer - an area for picnics, cafe, recreational use of the river (boating?), increase biodiversity, etc.
- An opportunity to attract more visitors and tourists, by providing more accommodation (BnBs or hotel) and continued promotion.
- Opportunity to create more of a buzz on the high street - with cafes, restaurants, pop ups, outdoor seating, etc. Potential to pedestrianise?
- Shop fronts and historic fabric could be refreshed.
- Would like to strengthen the market and bring people through to the high street.
- Opportunity to build new homes so the town can grow - bringing more people who can help support the high street.
- Opportunity to redevelop the Leathermarket, creating a building that is in tune with the town and provides a new public space for outdoor seating, pop ups or markets.

Stakeholder discussions and a community workshop were carried out to understand local people's views on the issues and opportunities facing the town centre. Below is a summary of the feedback for Edenbridge.



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A vision for Edenbridge

In 2040...

Edenbridge has flourished from a functional and convenient town into a beautiful and more aspirational destination that celebrates its history. The handsome and historic high street is invested in and renewed, central to the town's appeal.

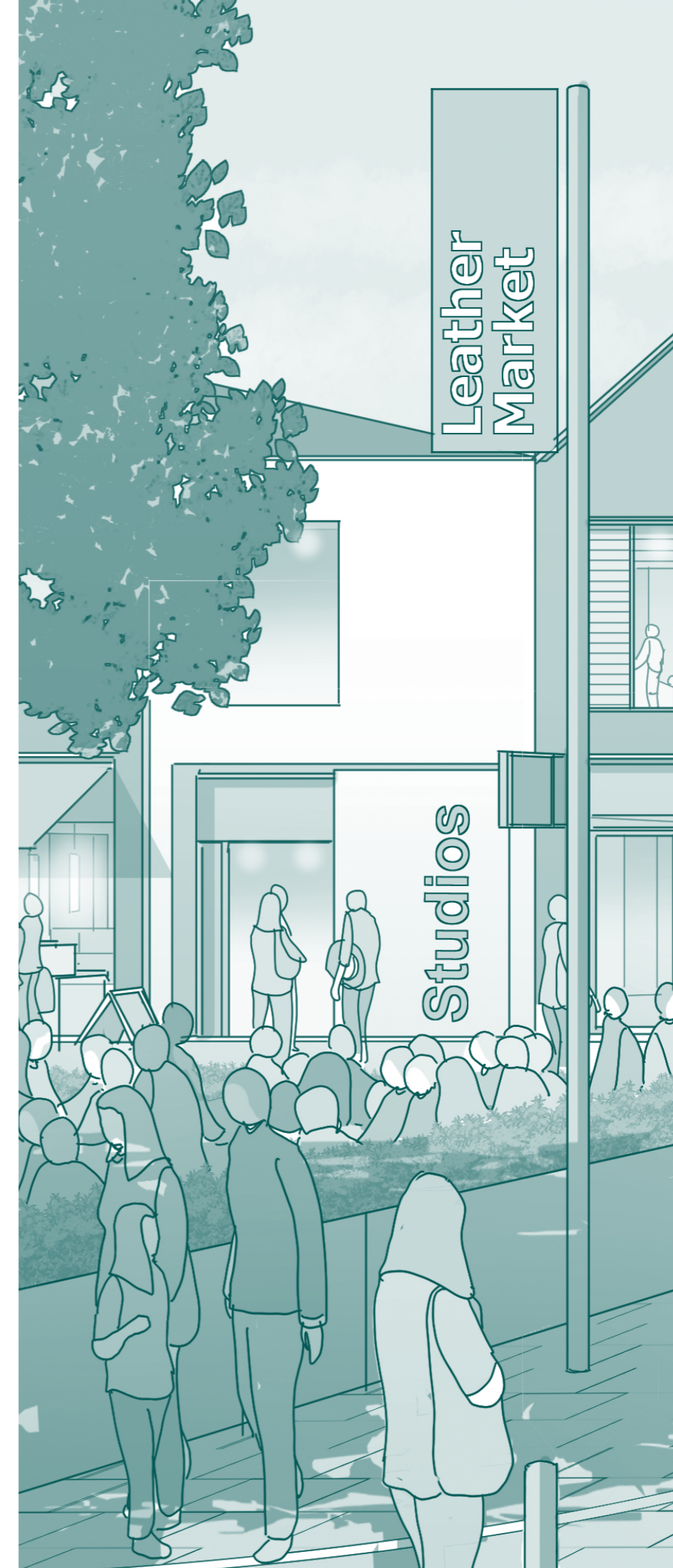
The Leathermarket area is transformed as a focus point for markets, events and activity in the heart of town. The weekly market continues to attract people with ever-changing pop ups alongside old favourites. Edenbridge becomes the place that people stay when visiting the District's attractions, with a variety of accommodation and stronger food, drink, cultural and leisure offer.

The High Street's intersection with the River Eden offers the best of Town and Country. The river environs are enhanced with continuous footpaths, a pavilion or café, and opportunities for recreation.

District wide principles

This vision statement should be read in conjunction with the District wide approach which sets out principles and objectives relevant to all five centres under the themes of:

- Supporting businesses and creating a resilient local economy
- Shifting to Net Zero 2030 and supporting a sustainable future
- Strengthening the character and identity of each centre
- Improving local people's health and wellbeing



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This artist's impression shows how the Leather Market area could become a focal point for the town. Traffic measures on the High Street between Church Street and Lingfield Road could make the High Street a people-friendly space. The building on the corner is shown to be redeveloped, sympathetic to the town's character and adding activity with new workspace. The public space could be refreshed and expanded, with outdoor seating and pop up activity.



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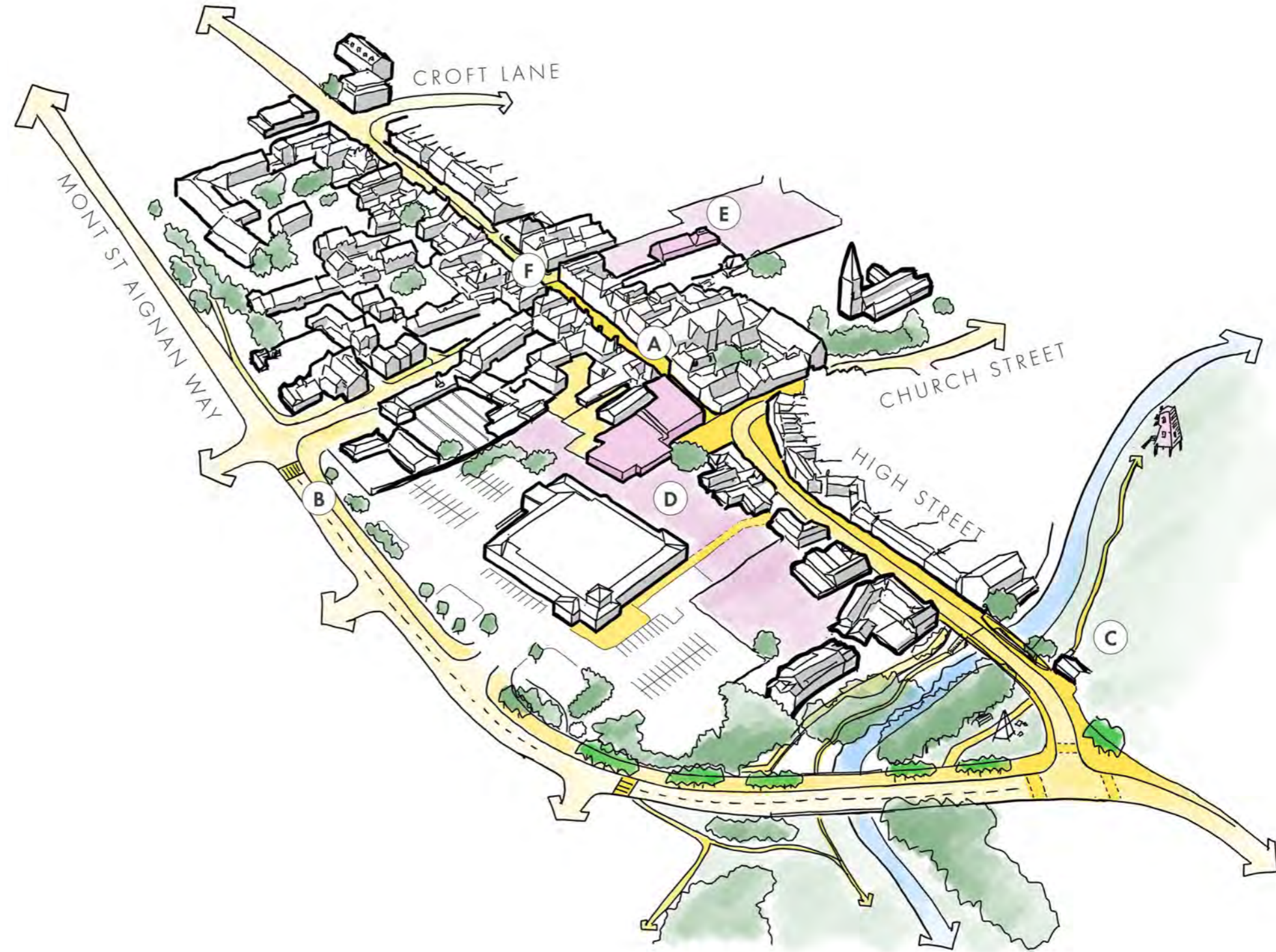
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Potential projects and development sites

Identifying opportunities

The following potential projects and development opportunities have been identified to help realise the future vision for Edenbridge town centre. The following pages offer a description, a relevant example from elsewhere and delivery considerations for each project.

- A. Prioritising pedestrians on the High Street
- B. Improved access into the town centre
- C. Enhanced river connections
- D. Redeveloping the Leather Market and backland sites
- E. Relocating the market
- F. Shopfront renewal



A hand-sketched birds-eye-view plan of Edenbridge town centre showing the potential projects and development opportunities



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A- Prioritising pedestrians on the High Street

With Mont St Aignan Way providing a bypass, Edenbridge's High Street is no longer the primary vehicular route. Yet the High Street does not currently reap the benefits of this arrangement as the street still feels a place for cars rather than people.

Proposals could focus on significantly reducing through traffic on the High Street. A key aspiration would be to pedestrianise or introduce a modal filter excluding HGVs/lorries as a potential initial phase between Church Street and Lingfield Road. This feature could be permanent or timed (e.g. weekends only) to enable events or maintain local/servicing access. In tandem, proposals could explore options to reconfigure the junction of Church Street and the High Street to increase pedestrian priority and enable activation of the public realm. Enhancements would also aim to prioritise pedestrians along the High Street through, for example, raised-table crossings and minimised kerb radii to side streets or integrated parking bays.

Importantly, upgrades should use high-quality surface materials to reflect Edenbridge's exceptional heritage buildings, considering Historic England 'High Streets for All'



Baldock Town Centre. Transformation of public realm in the historic Baldock Town Centre. This included the creation of small new public squares, a new market place - used for car parking on non-market days) and new shared spaces on side streets. Trees, new areas of lawn, high-quality materials, and new lighting were also introduced as part of upgrades. ©BDP/ David Barbour



Case study: South End High Street. Project to revitalise the public realm by de-cluttering, upgrading shopfronts, introducing new trees and street furniture, widening footpaths, and creating new spaces through junction rationalisation (see above). The interventions led to an 80% reduction in vacancy in high street units in the area ©We Made That/Hassell

B- Improved access into the town centre

Many of Edenbridge's residents live to the west of the town centre, on the opposite side of Mont St Aignan Way (B2026). The corridor has poor crossings, restricting access to the High Street.

Interventions should seek to introduce and improve safe controlled pedestrian crossing points across Mont St Aignan Way to strengthen east-west links between the town centre and adjacent residential neighbourhoods. Designs should also consider reconfiguring the junctions of High Street with Mont St Aignan Way and High Street with Station Road to introduce and improve controlled pedestrian crossings and increased footway provision in each instance.

In conjunction, designs should seek to improve Mont St Aignan Way for pedestrians and cyclists by, for example, rationalising carriageway widths and introducing trees or swales as a buffer between the carriageway and footways. In turn, additional planting would help capture carbon and pollutants and reduce flood risk through stormwater attenuation and infiltration.



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C- Enhanced river connections

The proximity of the River Eden to the town centre is a real asset, providing links to the countryside and forming an important part of its identity. There is a real opportunity to celebrate the River Eden and to make it part of Edenbridge town centre's offer for visitors and residents alike.

Enhanced river connections, subject to landowner approval, could take the form of linking the High Street and riverside footpaths for people walking and cycling. Paths would benefit from better signage, widened pavements and improved lighting and surfacing.

Water-based leisure uses, like rowing or paddle-boarding, could support greater activity and draw people through the town to the river. Sensitive redevelopment opportunities could be explored to accommodate a cafe/restaurant space to support activities. This could include innovatively designed waterside structures or pavilions.

Any interventions should seek to protect and celebrate the historic features of the town's riverside, including its stone bridge and green open setting on its southern side.



Images of Thorpness Windmill, Paleys upon Pliers and people paddleboarding: precedents for possible interventions at the River Eden to draw people to the riverside and spend time there ©Cameraman / Thorpness Windmill / CC BY-SA 2.0 <http://tiny.cc/ya5quz>



Appleyard in Holt is an example of a sensitively designed development with small shops, cafes and offices behind the conservation area of the historic town of Holt. A pedestrian link was provided between the existing and new development. Reclaimed materials were used and the whole area was designed to meet the needs of less able visitors. This is a precedent for the potential Leathermarket backland development in Edenbridge.

D- Redeveloping the Leathermarket and backland sites

One of the main points of feedback from the stakeholder engagement was an eagerness to see the leathermarket building redeveloped, given its incongruous architectural style. While the building itself is in private ownership and under a long lease, there are interventions that could be made to transform the leathermarket area and to catalyse its future redevelopment.

There is a potential opportunity to redevelop the car park between Waitrose and the High Street, creating a curated, multi-tenanted space. This could become a destination adding to the town's leisure and food and beverage offer which are currently lacking.

Alongside new buildings, the existing public space could be improved and expanded, creating a space which could become a focal point for the town. This space could be connected to the other yards off the high street with laneways, in keeping with Edenbridge's character.



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E- Relocating the market

Edenbridge's weekly market is held every Thursday in the Market Yard car park behind the Monkey Puzzle Nursery on the High Street. The market is operated by Edenbridge Town Council and offers fruit and vegetables, household wares, fish and meat produce, clothing, plants and flowers, dairy produce, bakery items and a mobile bank.

While the market's offer is good, it does not benefit from the town's charming historic fabric in terms of its setting. There is an opportunity to relocate the market, either to the section of pedestrianised High Street (see project A) or to a new space in the Leathermarket area (see project D), raising its prominence within the town.

If the market were to move, this may create a future opportunity, with further landowner and local community engagement, to reconsider the use of the existing market site, including the including the public toilet and market building, as well as enhancements to the Monkey Puzzle building.



The improvement of some of Walthamstow's shopping parades is an example of successfully renewing the shopfronts and façades of historic buildings, ensuring harmony whilst also celebrating the individuality of buildings and local businesses



Photos of Edenbridge market

F- Shopfront renewal

Improvements to shopfronts along the High Street would go alongside public realm upgrades to improve the attractiveness of the town centre and support its overall viability, by encouraging people to spend longer in town. Shopfront renewal schemes have been successful in supporting local economies in places like Walthamstow, Leyton and Margate.

Improvements should include: protecting and restoring historic features, cleaning and repainting façades, reversing unnecessary alterations/accretions, reducing visual clutter, and introducing more consistent signage that is in keeping with the scale, materials and colour palette of buildings and the overall streetscape.

Shopfront renewal is most effective when a parade of shops are improved together. Good candidates for shopfront renewal include buildings along the middle stretch of the High Street between Croft Lane and Holmden Court.



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Place coordination strategy

Partnership working

Edenbridge town centre is characterised by its historic buildings and frontages as well the proximity to the River Eden and open space. However, over the years the properties have not been adequately maintained leaving the building façades looking tired. This, alongside other factors, have left several properties lying vacant. Moreover, the town centre is linear in nature and as a result there are few opportunities to create a good central public space for visitors to gather and events to come forward.

A sore point amongst the community is the Leather Market building which lies vacant. Owing to the small, underutilised square/walkway to the car park for Waitrose, the redevelopment of this property and ancillary space for new public realm has the ability to be the highest impact intervention towards transforming Edenbridge to becoming an attractive town centre.

Narrow pavements and heavy traffic running through the High Street creates an unwelcoming environment for visitors. Moreover, although surrounded by green spaces and nature, permeability to the river frontage and these spaces remains noticeably separated from the town centre – much to its disadvantage.

A place coordination strategy for Edenbridge should cover the basic requirement for place management i.e. street cleaning, but more importantly set out how to improve the visitor experience and make the most of the heritage of the area. Improvements, set out in the strategy, should seek to retain and enhance the heritage frontages to improve the attractiveness of the town centre. Empty shops should be considered for meanwhile uses, to drive activation and improve the offer for the town centre; particularly if new leisure and F&B uses (pop-up markets, events) or a new market hall style offer can be delivered. Opportunities for pedestrianisation should be explored to overcome

the issue of the narrow pavements and to improve movement for visitors. There should be further consideration on enhancing the links to the heritage (Hever Castle) and making the most of the proximity to the countryside, to help build a visitor economy for Edenbridge. By delivering new retail and F&B, along the lines of a market hall style offer for example, this could be an attractive complementary use to make Edenbridge more of a visitor destination. As part of this, the revitalisation of the small space outside the Leather Market building should be considered to transform the environment as well as helping to create a central point for visitors to congregate, or events to occur. This should seek to therefore create a new revitalised square which would tie in and reflect the heritage of the town. As part of this approach, the focus should additionally be to enhance the connections from the new square to incorporate Waitrose into the high street. As part of the place coordination strategy, greater activation of the river frontage should be considered, as well as reinforcing the pathways from the open space into the town centre to create new gateways and improve signposting. Further greening should be considered as well as eventing to improve the visitor draw and experience.

In terms of responsibility for the place coordination strategy this could be delivered through the existing town council. However, to bring back into activation the empty retail units, there may need to be supplementary support and partnering with e.g. FSB, Chamber of Commerce, SDC, or other specialist business groups. By doing this, favourable leases could be organised i.e. the partner takes on the headlease from landlords and coordinate the letting to independents. Partnering may also be helpful to identify demand/occupiers suitable to take on the nature of these spaces.



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Delivery and funding

Due diligence

The following table sets out the due diligence that should be taken into consideration to help shape and define the projects recommended for Edenbridge. As part of this, an indication of timescales and potential types of funding has been outlined which is indicative and may be subject to change. It is intended that this table highlight key moves to for SDC to take into consideration and be used as a guide to support moving the projects forward.

Public ownership is limited. Governance in Edenbridge is provided by Edenbridge Town Council. The Town Council outline their role as responsible for the “management of many local facilities and amenities (e.g. Parks and Playgrounds, Thursday Market etc.) within the parish and the key point of contact for local government.” The Eden Valley Chamber of Commerce play an important role in the town, as well as several active community associations who host events through the year.

The Town Council already play an active role and could therefore be considered to deliver other interventions. It may be that Edenbridge Town Council will need better ‘tools’ and funding to deliver interventions.

Table of due diligence for Edenbridge

	PROJECT	TIMESCALES	DUE DILIGENCE	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES	POTENTIAL RESPONSIBILITY
A	Prioritising pedestrians on the High Street	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with KCC, relevant SDC teams to scope out potential to part pedestrianise the High Street (pedestrianise section of High Street from Church Street to Longfield). Transport and movement study to understand the potential to reroute the traffic away from the High Street and prioritise cycle pathways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund Air Quality Grant Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 	SDC
B	Improved access into the town centre	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with KCC and relevant SDC teams Detailed design study to understand how new access routes can be delivered which make best use of existing pathways and gateways. Determine where new crossings for pedestrians and cyclists can be delivered as well as integrated cycle lanes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Canal and River Trust 	SDC
C	Enhanced river connections	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with KCC and Environment Agency to determine the initial potential to improve river connections and pathways. Detailed design study to ascertain how this asset can be better utilised and what realistically can be achieved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shop front improvement grant 	Town Council
F	Shopfront renewal	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed study to determine which shop fronts require renewal. Set out funding bid application for monies to carry out the works. Vacant shop strategy to get new occupiers in. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Lottery Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund 	Town Council
D	Redeveloping the Leather Market and backland sites	6-10 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with key landowners and community to understand the appetite for redevelopment, and the mix of uses demand. Scope potential with SDC for whole or partial acquisition of the building. Instruct a car park study to determine whether the Waitrose car park can be rationalised and spaces consolidated across the other car parks in the town centre. This would look to primarily outline whether part of the Waitrose car park site could be freed up to form part of the redevelopment proposals to deliver a comprehensive scheme. Detailed design study / masterplan to outline the scheme, considering whether new public realm can form part of this offer to establish a new central core (and potential new event space) for the town centre. Testing of visitor economy/development of visitor economy strategy to build long term case for hotel and other uses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) 	SDC / Town Council Potential to consider partnership with landowner.
E	Relocating the market	6-10 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with Town Council, key landowners, market traders and local community to ascertain the appetite for the proposals. As part of this scope out key concerns and issues. Detailed feasibility study to determine whether this unlocks the further sites for redevelopment / revitalisation (Monkey Day Puzzle Nursery site) and an opportunity to improve connections to the car park Trial new forms of high street markets to understand what creates a good visitor attraction, whilst preserving the traditional market. Use as a test bed to determine whether the new location is viable and meets requirements for the traditional market to move permanently. Test and deliver diverse range of events on non-market days to align with e.g. the existing festival to attract larger audiences to Edenbridge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homes England Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) 	SDC or Town Council



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Edenbridge market



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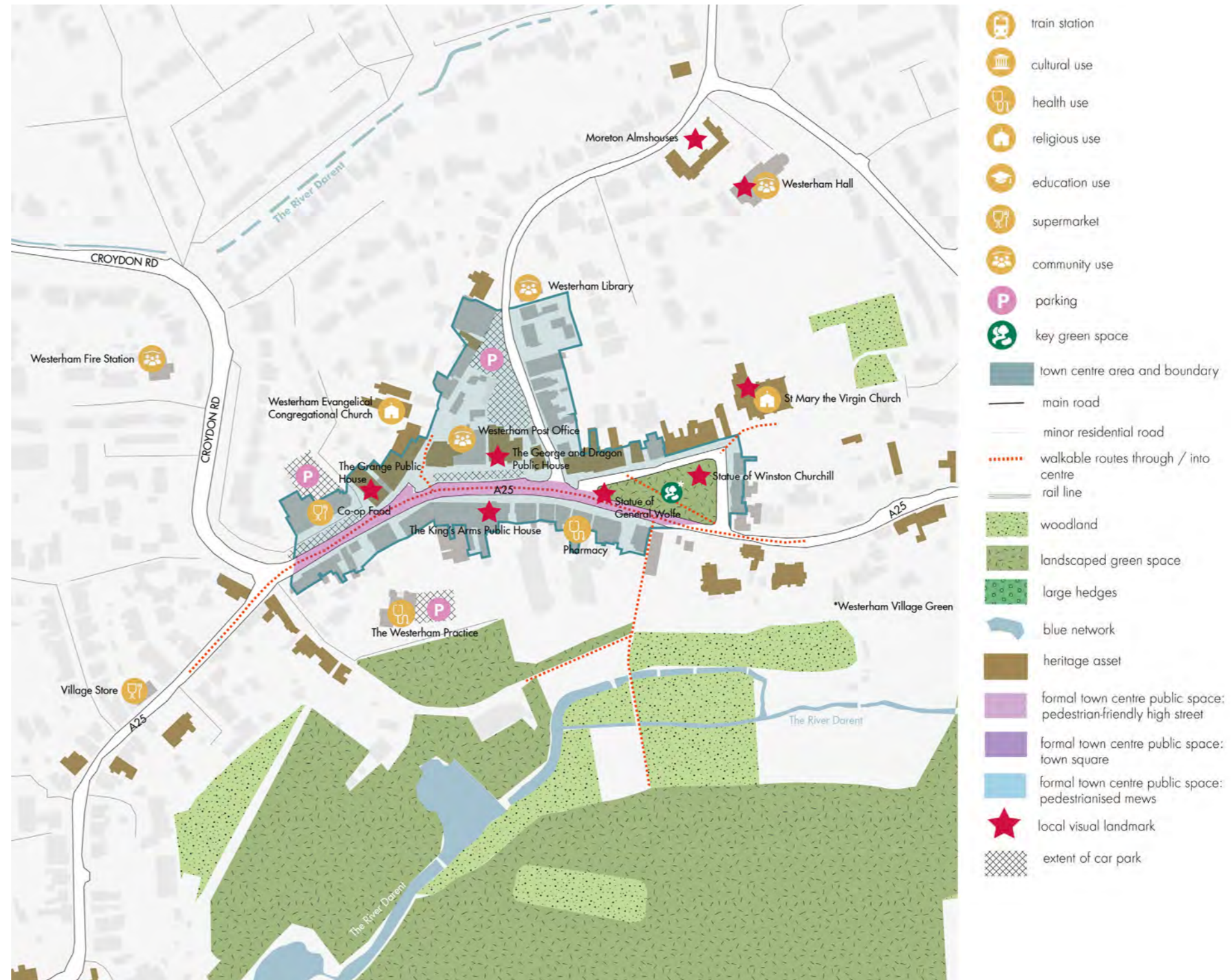
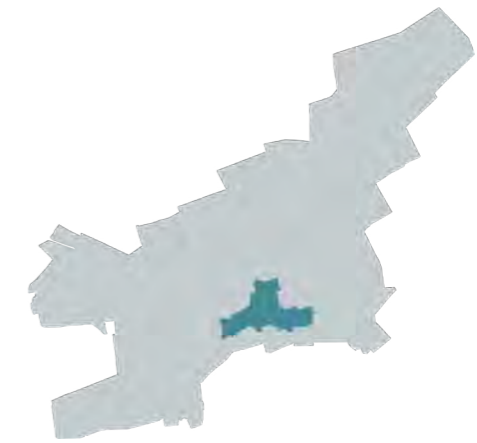
Context for the vision

Westerham is a charming historic town of 4,500 people, set in the Darent Valley. Westerham town centre is in the southern part of the wider settlement, formed around the High Street and historic Green. The High Street is part of the A25 which links Westerham to Oxted and Sevenoaks Town. The town is near to Kent's borders with Greater London and Surrey. The M25 runs east-west just to the north of the town. Westerham has poor public transport with no train station and limited bus services, increasing reliance on cars and, therefore, traffic in the town centre.

Westerham draws high numbers of visitors. Nearby Chartwell (Winston Churchill's former home) and Westerham's Quebec House are major attractions. The town's historic buildings make for a picturesque High Street and scene around the Green, all adding to Westerham's appeal.

The town centre has lots of food, drink, and beauty retailers, many of which are independent and many of which support the thriving visitor economy, though cater less for local residents.

The River Darent flows through the south of the town, and formerly powered three watermills. The town has a rural feel, with countryside surrounding the small town centre allowing residents to enjoy walking and leisure in green spaces.



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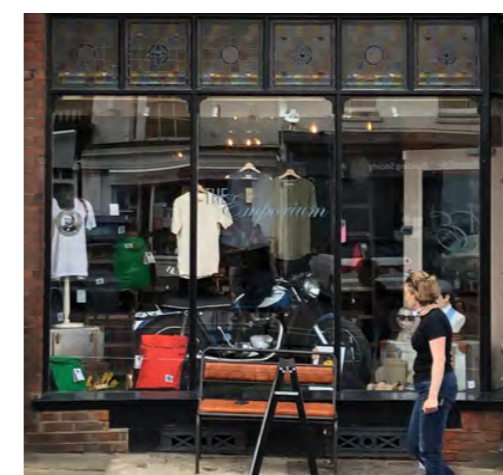
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Westerham has experienced limited development and there are currently no allocated development sites in the town. This may pose challenges to accommodate the growing population and to offer affordable housing in the future.

Health Check summary

A town centre Health Check was undertaken considering property data, survey data (comparing 2016 to 2021) and a site visit of the town centre. The main findings were:

- The proportions of convenience (food) and comparison goods (non-food) retailers were in line with the national average.
- There was a drop in the number of comparison goods retailers - the biggest change in the centre since 2014/2016.
- The proportion of service uses well above the national average.
- There was a consistently low vacancy rate - well below the national average.
- There is a limited catchment area for the centre (Zone 2). The centre attracts just under half of all first choice top-up food shopping trips from Zone 2.
- There was lower average spend on food/groceries between 2016 (£7.4) and 2021 (£4.4).
- Retail turnover of the centre was £4.6m for convenience goods and £1.8m for comparison goods.
- The main reasons for visiting the centre are: eating out (48%), top-up food shopping (35%), non-food shopping (28%). Eating/drinking has increased in popularity (household survey), so has food shopping (in-street survey).
- There is a high proportion of walking to the centre (45%) (compared with a SDC average of 30%) and with 2016.
- High market share in Zone 2 for cafes/restaurants (47%) and pubs/bars (40%).
- Frequency of visits to the centre has increased (household survey).
- 49% of visitors used the centre at least once a week for groceries/food
- Half of food shoppers linked their trip with another purpose.
- There was a lower frequency of visits during the evening between 2016 and 2021.



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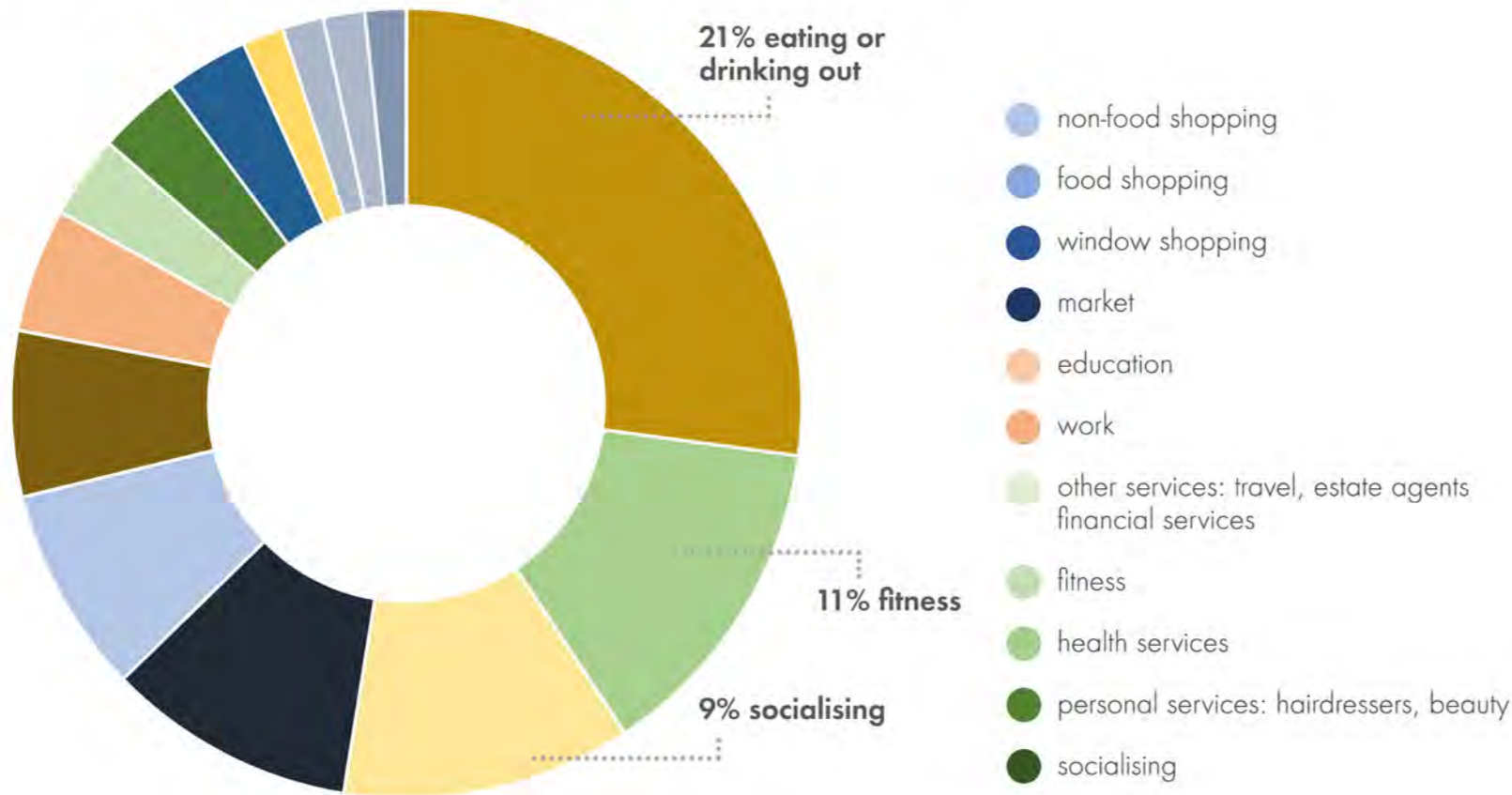
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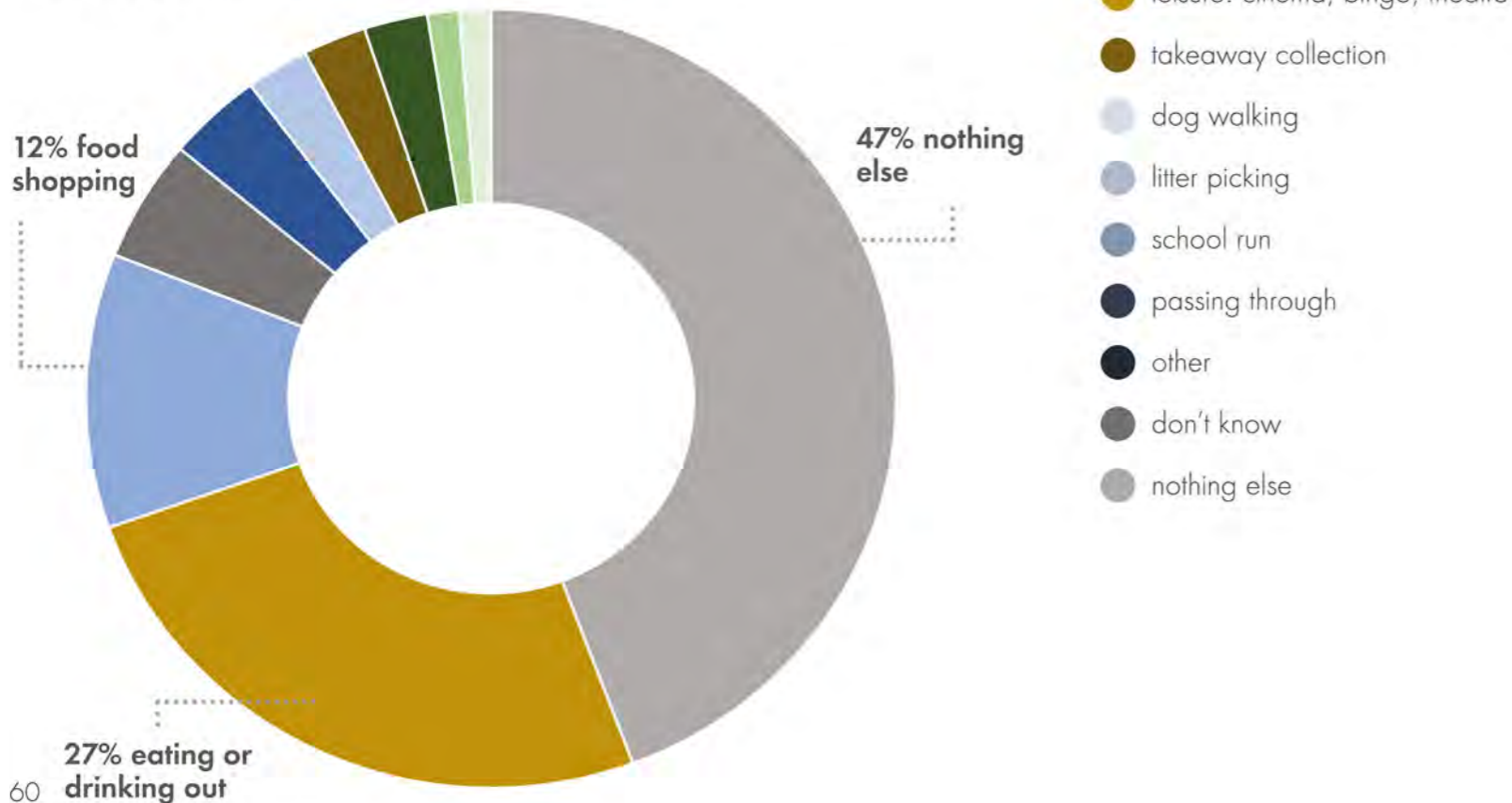
In-street survey findings

75 responses

What is your main purpose of visit the town centre?



Aside from that, what else will you be doing in the town centre?



What do you like about the town centre?

Most frequent responses

- Attractive environment / nice place 33%
- Friendly people 28%
- Nice atmosphere 28%
- Close to home 20%
- Good range of food / drink outlets 13%

What would you change about the town centre?

Most frequent responses

- Nothing in particular 41%
- Don't know 13%
- Better pedestrian facilities 12%
- Better choice of shops 8%
- Better maintenance / cleanliness 7%

Average dwell time in centre:

1 hour 19 mins



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Stakeholder engagement feedback



Strengths

- Historic, charming town centre and conservation area.
- The scene around the Green.
- Independent shops and businesses, leisure/experience focused.
- Great 'day out' offer.
- Quebec House and Grade II listed church.
- Strong visitor economy - near to Chartwell, on popular cycling (Biggin Hill) and walking routes, and easy access into countryside.
- Few empty shopfronts, low vacancy rates.
- Major investment in King George V playing fields is planned - adding sports facilities to the town's offer.
- Plans to bring in a 20mph speed limit on the high street/A25 and a one way system around the Green.
- New winery and brewery are good.
- New development on Croft Road has added new homes and been well received.
- Greenbelt and landscape setting.



Weaknesses

- No train station and public transport is not sufficient - very reliant on car-based transport.
- Car parking is constrained in the town centre with competing demand from residents and visitors.
- A25 plays competing roles as part of the strategic road network and the high street.
- Businesses cater less towards local residents. Have to go to Oxted or Sevenoaks Town to do shopping or run errands.
- Digital connectivity could be improved.
- Winter lull.
- George and Dragon pub in need of renovation.
- Homes in town are not affordable - would be good to have a mix in type and affordability to cater to everyone.
- No identified development sites - any new uses comes at a loss of another use through conversion.
- Mixed views on whether the town should expand or not.



Opportunities

- Would like to keep what's good about the town
- Enabling more trips to be made by sustainable travel modes to and from town. Strengthening public transport links between Oxted, Westerham and Sevenoaks Town?
- Improving cycling infrastructure to make cycling safer and more accessible to local people. Darent Valley trail?
- Improving access into countryside for those with disabilities e.g. short walking trails
- Would like to promote more affordable homes for younger people (but not at a loss of retail).
- More coordination between the business community? Curation and considering where the gaps and market is to support new businesses in being successful.
- There seem to be a significant number of people running businesses from home - opportunity for a co-working space?

Stakeholder discussions and a community workshop were carried out to understand local people's views on the issues and opportunities facing the town centre. Below is a summary of the feedback for Westerham.



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A vision for Westerham

In 2040...

Westerham continues to be a charming rural town that celebrates its history. The town remains a desirable place to live, work and visit. Its existing choice of shops, places to work, eat, drink and be entertained are broadened to offer choice for all age groups and families.

Connections to the wider Darent Valley are strengthened, bringing residents the benefits of access to nature and recreation.

Investment in the public realm has enhanced the quality of the town centre. Interventions have calmed traffic and reduced car dominance, making the streets and spaces safer and more enjoyable for people. On-demand bus services, e-bike schemes, improved public transport and shared-transport schemes have been explored, to provide meaningful alternatives to car-based travel.

District wide principles

This vision statement should be read in conjunction with the District wide approach which sets out principles and objectives relevant to all five centres under the themes of:

- Supporting businesses and creating a resilient local economy
- Shifting to Net Zero 2030 and supporting a sustainable future
- Strengthening the character and identity of each centre
- Improving local people's health and wellbeing



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This artists' impression of Westerham shows how the High Street public realm could be renewed. The carriageway could be narrowed, freeing up space for wider pavements and outdoor seating to support the shops and businesses. Tree planting and sustainable urban drainage could be integrated, softening the streetscape.



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Potential projects and development sites

Identifying opportunities

The following potential projects and development opportunities have been identified to help realise the future vision for Westerham town centre. The following pages offer a description, a relevant example from elsewhere and delivery considerations for each project.

- A. High Street streetscape
- B. Improving connections to the countryside
- C. London Road traffic filter
- D. London Road development opportunity
- E. Enhancing sustainable transport connections
- F. A better visitor economy



A hand-sketched birds-eye-view plan of Westerham town centre showing the potential projects and development opportunities



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A- High Street streetscape

While the buildings are charming and historic, the public realm and streetscape of Westerham's High Street could be improved. This is particularly relevant now that the speed limit is being reduced. Enhancements should mitigate the impact of vehicles to create an attractive High Street suitable for the historic setting. Key projects for consideration include:

- Upgrading the overall public realm quality by introducing an attractive and coherent palette of materials and components.
- Introducing frequent controlled pedestrian crossings e.g. at the London Road junction, the eastern end of the Green, and the Croydon Road junction.
- Maximising space for pedestrians by, for example, minimising carriageway widths, incorporating raised-table crossings to side streets and reducing kerb radii. In addition, the number and distribution of parking and servicing bays could be rationalised.
- Introducing street planting and amenities (e.g. cycle parking) by rationalising parking bays. In particular, focusing on Westerham Green and opportunities to increase animation around its edges through parking management.



Case Study: Marylebone Low Emission Neighbourhood. Integrated rain gardens and street trees, frequent pedestrian crossings, carriageway narrowing, and reduced turning radii to side streets collectively work to reduce vehicle speeds, maximise space for pedestrians, and improve air quality along the high street. ©Urban Movement



In Mayfair, arches and planting provide subtle markers to aid wayfinding along certain lanes. A similar device could be employed in Westerham to mark routes towards the countryside. ©Stephen McKay / Lancashire Court, Mayfair / CC BY-SA 2.0 <http://tiny.cc/ya5quz>

B- Improving connections to the countryside

One of Westerham's strengths is its relationship to the wider countryside, yet this access is not very obvious or prominent when in the town centre. Public realm interventions should seek to implement a legible wayfinding and signage strategy for key connections to the countryside, raising their prominence as routes off the High Street. A wayfinding strategy would also be an opportunity for historic interpretation signage. This strategy could communicate a visitor's loop - along the High Street, Mill Lane to Mill Street - ideally incorporating Quebec House and St Mary the Virgin Church.

Similarly, interventions should seek to enhance connections between the High Street and the Darent Car Park, King George V Fields and the countryside beyond.

Public realm interventions could include, for example, upgrading the surfacing to a common palette of materials, integrating subtle cues in the surfacing to aid legibility, improved lighting for safety and wayfinding markers, and distinctive signage to reinforce connections or loops.



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C- London Road/High Street junction

The London Road / High Street junction in Westerham is a pinch point which results in traffic backing up. This junction has also been the location of a number of accidents.

Proposals could focus on significantly reducing through traffic at this junction by introducing a modal filter or one-way arrangement at some point on London Road. This feature could be permanent or timed to enable events or maintain local/servicing access. Through this type of arrangement, some of the vehicles travelling north-south along London Road would be instead redirected along the alternative route of Beggars Lane/A233 which has higher capacity.

In tandem, proposals could explore options to reconfigure the junction of London Road and the High Street to increase pedestrian priority and enable activation of the public realm. Enhancements could include a raised-table crossings and minimised kerb radii. Importantly, upgrades should use high-quality surface materials to reflect Westerham's exceptional heritage buildings, considering Historic England 'High Streets for All' guidance. Changes would also benefit the shops on London Road by enhancing their environs.



Existing photo at the junction of High Street and London Road. Currently there is a very narrow footway on one side of the street and no footway provision on the other side.



Orford Road is an example of a road with a simple timed access traffic filter with contrasting raised table crossing to prioritise pedestrians. The road also has a one way road system to reduce overall traffic flow. A traffic filter and one-way traffic arrangement similar to this could be used for London Road in Westerham.

D- London Road development opportunity

While there are very few sites in the town centre, there is a small opportunity for intervention. The George and the Dragon's car park, which has access from the High Street and faces on to London Road could be transformed, alongside wider improvements to the pub.

The space could be redeveloped as an open space or pub garden, alongside edge development of workspace/studios or mews housing.

This could help increase the town centre's offer, while also decreasing the number of vehicles crossing the High Street.



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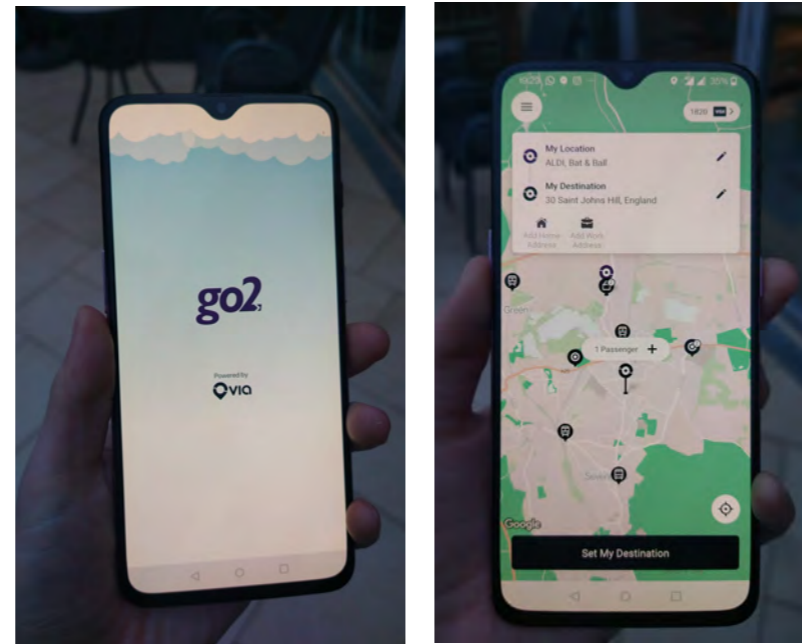
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E- Enhancing sustainable transport connections

Unlike the other three towns in the District, Westerham does not have a train station. The lack of a station and the limited bus services result in residents and visitors being very reliant on cars, as was noted through the stakeholder engagement process. This reliance also has knock on effects in terms of town centre traffic and parking congestion.

Westerham would benefit from alternative modes of transport being enhanced. Cycling is popular for leisure in and around Westerham, but could be encouraged as a way for getting around. Cycling infrastructure could be enhanced, including cycle lanes, junction improvements and cycle parking. Given the hilly terrain, e-bikes may help to make cycling accessible for a wider audience.

Enhancing bus services, on-demand buses or shuttles to key destinations (eg. between Oxted and Sevenoaks Town) should also be considered.



go2 on-demand bus service in Sevenoaks town - an example of sustainable transport which offers an alternative to private vehicles

F- A better visitor economy

Westerham experiences high levels of visitors, which is a central part of the town's economy. There is an opportunity to strengthen this visitor economy to maximise the benefits for everyone. This could include:

- Bringing together key partners, such as local businesses, Squerryes Estate, Town Council, Visit Kent, Visit Westerham and SDC to discuss Westerham's branding and offer to visitors.
- Monitor level of Airbnb activity and capture passing trade information to have a clearer picture of the visitor economy's strengths and weaknesses.
- Most visitors just come to Westerham for the day, limiting spend within the town. Scope out and plan opportunities to encourage further investment in accommodation.
- Work in partnership to deliver new events to attract visitors, particularly in low seasons. These events could also be used to strengthen Westerham's branding.



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Place coordination strategy

Partnership working

Westerham town centre is characterised by its historic shop frontages, quaint settings and green spaces. The town centre is pleasant but is impacted by traffic on the A25 running through the town centre and lack of long stay car parking close to the commercial core. The lack of a station nearby is a further hindrance, drawing a heavy reliance on cars. In terms of the offer, this is moving towards serving tourists coming in for the heritage sites and nature walks, rather than local community. Moreover, a key landowner's (Squerryes) plans to extend the offer for Squerryes Vineyard as a visitor attraction to encourage overnight stays could transform the way in which the town centre is used. Plans include a new boutique hotel and use of the stately homes for functions.

The place coordination strategy for the town centre should therefore focus on some general upkeep and maintenance but predominantly look to capitalise on the likely growth in tourist trade and simultaneously providing for the local community. A key part of the strategy should look to engage and work alongside Squerryes, as they are the major landowner with a plan of action for further investment which could have a positive material impact for the town centre. Implementing and coordinating a diverse events programme, to keep the town centre inclusive of the residents but additionally continue to attract visitors should additionally be part of the focus for Westerham. As part of this, although Westerham is relatively well-known, further branding and marketing through e.g. eventing could transform the town centre and support local businesses. Additionally, part of the branding could be centred on natural and build heritage, which is plentiful in Westerham. This could help to strengthen the visitor and Airbnb economy for the town centre, as more people begin to consider staycations at Westerham due to the greater offering.

Enhanced cycling and walking routes should be considered to enable better accessibility and to downgrade the reliance on cars that congest the town centre. Where possible, enhancing bus services should additionally be prioritised.

In terms of responsibility for place coordination strategy this could be delivered through the existing town council.



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Due diligence to consider

The following table sets out the due diligence that should be taken into consideration to help shape and define the projects recommended for Westerham. As part of this, an indication of timescales and potential types of funding has been outlined which is indicative and may be subject to change. It is intended that this table highlight key moves to for SDC to take into consideration and be used as a guide to support moving the projects forward.

The Warde Family (Squerryes) are major landowners and a key stakeholder. The family have plans to extend their offering beyond the restaurant and vineyard to create more of a visitor attraction and increase overnight stays in the town. Despite not having defined timescales, the ambition to deliver this has been factored into the vision and recommendations for the town centre. Furthermore, the Warde family could be potential development partners in the future, should the opportunity arise.

Table of due diligence for Westerham

	PROJECT	TIMESCALES	DUE DILIGENCE	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES	POTENTIAL RESPONSIBILITY
A	High Street streetscape	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Car Parking audit to understand how car parking is used (particularly along the High Street). As part of the study, determine capacity to remove car park and deliver new public realm and greening. Engage with KCC on the highways element to downgrade the road, or provide traffic calming measures. Detailed design solution (technical infrastructure drawings) to ascertain scope for delivering improvements to widen pavements along the High Street, improve crossovers at side streets, narrowing the bellmouth and making crossing easier for pedestrians with raised table crossings, and adding a crossing from the green, across the High Street. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) 	Town Council
B	Improving connections to the countryside	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with KCC to review key routes (Mill Lane and Mill Street), to discuss the feasibility to raise the prominence of the footpath to further encourage walking to the town centre. Detailed design study to determine viable routes and interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Countryside for All Countryside Commission National Lottery Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 	Town Council
C	London Road traffic filter	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with KCC on the existing movement and traffic flows Detailed road capacity assessment to determine whether the road could be downgraded, and new routes prioritised to minimise traffic flow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Air Quality Grant 	SDC
E	Enhancing sustainable transport connections	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with KCC on the existing movement and traffic flows Detailed transport design study to understand potential or greater cycle infrastructure and routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 	Town Council
F	A better visitor economy	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with Squerryes Vineyard landowner to determine the extent of the new attractions proposed. Engage with the Chamber of Commerce to understand business needs and set new branding for Westerham. Work in partnership to deliver new events to attract visitors whilst simultaneously consider this as platform to deliver new branding for the town centre. Scope out and plan opportunities to encourage further investment around hotels through researching the level of Airbnb activity or by capturing passing trade information, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Lottery Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) 	Town Council
D	London Road development opportunity	6-10 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building on the basis of the car park audit and, transport and movement studies, identify the opportunity for London Road development Engagement with landowner to scope interest Identify appetite for acquisition Detailed design study to outline the scheme and mix of uses Identify delivery vehicles and funding opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homes England Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) 	SDC Potential to partner with landowner



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In terms of current governance, this currently comprises Westerham Town Council. The Town Council's remit is similar to that of Edenbridge Town Council who manage many local facilities and amenities including allotments, playing fields and highways and lighting. The Town Council appears to be quite active in promoting Westerham as a business location and tourist destination.

Similar to the consideration for Swanley and Edenbridge, it could be that thought is given to how the Town Council could be empowered to do more. This for example, includes providing better 'tools' and funding to deliver the more complex interventions set out which they are already invested in i.e. improving the visitor economy.



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6 New Ash Green

Context for the vision

New Ash Green is located in the north east of the District, between Hartley and Ash, near the border with Dartford and Gravesham. Unlike the other four centres which are all towns, New Ash Green is a village and designated as a local service centre within the District's settlement hierarchy.

New Ash Green has an exceptional history, being a planned concept village by designer Eric Lyons and Span Developments. Formerly farmland, development of the village began in 1967 and was intended as a prototype for a new way of living. Reflective of its planned origins, New Ash Green's village centre is located centrally with twenty-four neighbourhoods formed around the centre. Villagers benefit from generous landscaping, including a village green, woodland and orchard, as well as a network of pedestrian footways which are separated from vehicles.

The centre has struggled in recent years, with ageing building fabric and shop vacancies and is identified in policy as a regeneration priority (Policy LO 7 in Core Strategy, 2011). The shopping centre faces inwards on to a pedestrian street. As a result, it lacks visibility and a sense of arrival from the outside. It has seen several failed redevelopment attempts yet it remains home to a number of shops, businesses and services which support the thriving community.



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In addition to the shopping centre, villagers benefit from a village hall, library, surgery, sports clubs and primary school, which are all key attractors.

Health Check

A Health Check was undertaken considering property data, survey data (comparing 2016 to 2021) and a site visit of the town centre. The main findings were:

- The proportion of convenience goods (food) retailer units in the centre is similar to the national average, although the proportion of space occupied by this category is double the national average, indicating the dominance of convenience retail - i.e. the Co-op store).
- There is a lower than average proportion of comparison goods retailers, but two-thirds of the units are occupied by service uses.
- New Ash Green is able to attract a small amount of second choice main food shopping trips from Zone 4 residents, although the centre is much more popular as a top-up food shopping destination (primarily the Co-op store), attracting around one fifth of all trips from Zone 4.
- There has been no change in the market share of New Ash Green for top-up food shopping trips.
- Based upon a sample of all local residents in and around New Ash Green, taken from the current and previous household surveys, there has been a noticeable fall in the frequency of visits to the village centre, from 56% visiting at least once a week in 2016 to around half that in 2021. When the frequency of visits is focused upon just those people visiting the centre, and taken from the in-street survey, there are very low levels of visits in the evenings, while 80% of in-street respondents visit the centre at least once a week during the day-time.
- There has been modest growth in local residents using the centre for eating and drinking out over the past five years.
- There is a small increase in the proportion of local residents

travelling to the village centre by car and corresponding (small) fall in the proportion of journeys on foot.

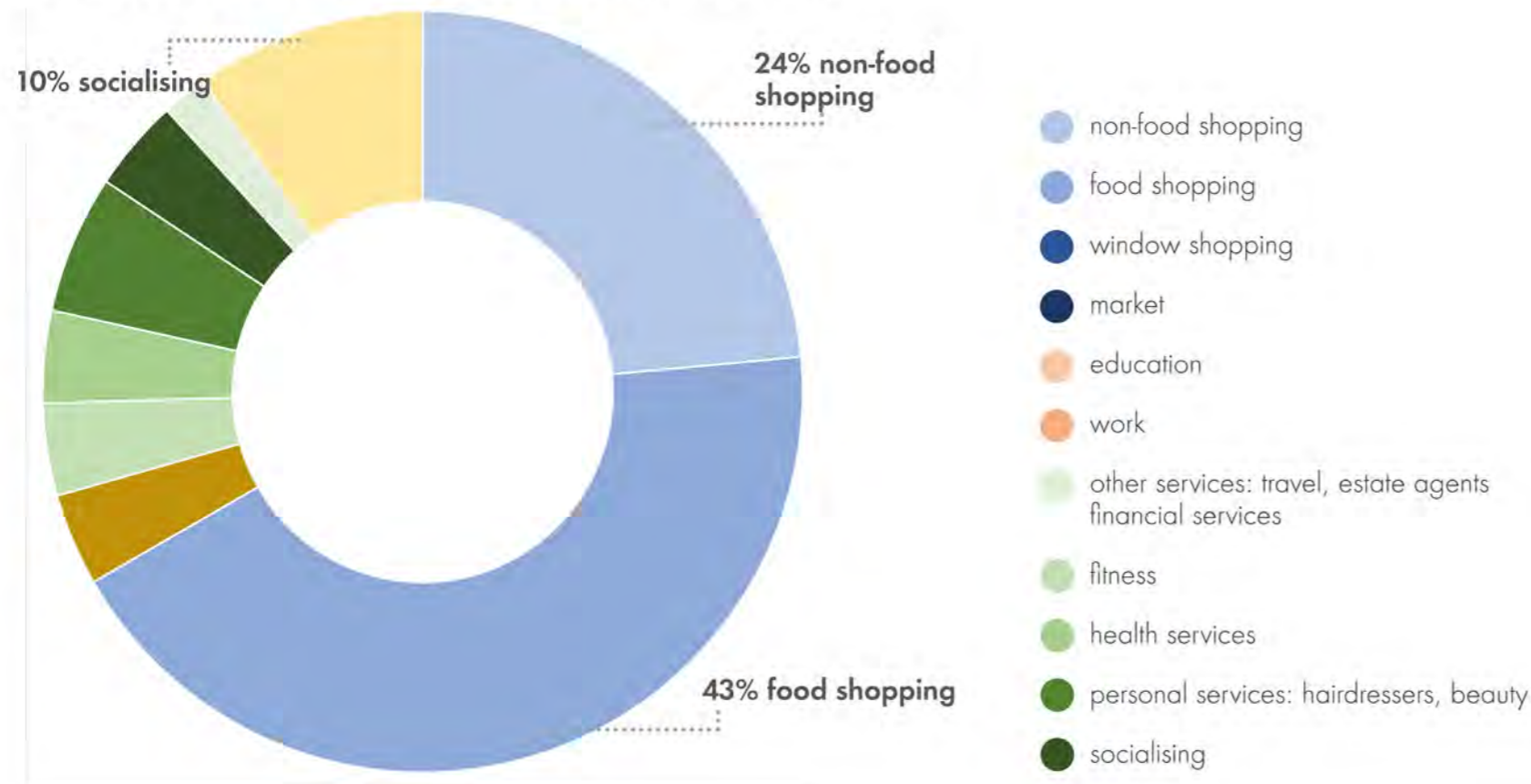
- There has been a drop in the average spend per visit on food goods, alongside low levels of average spend on other retail and service uses.
- Foodstores/general stores remain the most frequently visited stores, although the Co-op appears to be comparatively less popular (albeit still the most popular single store).



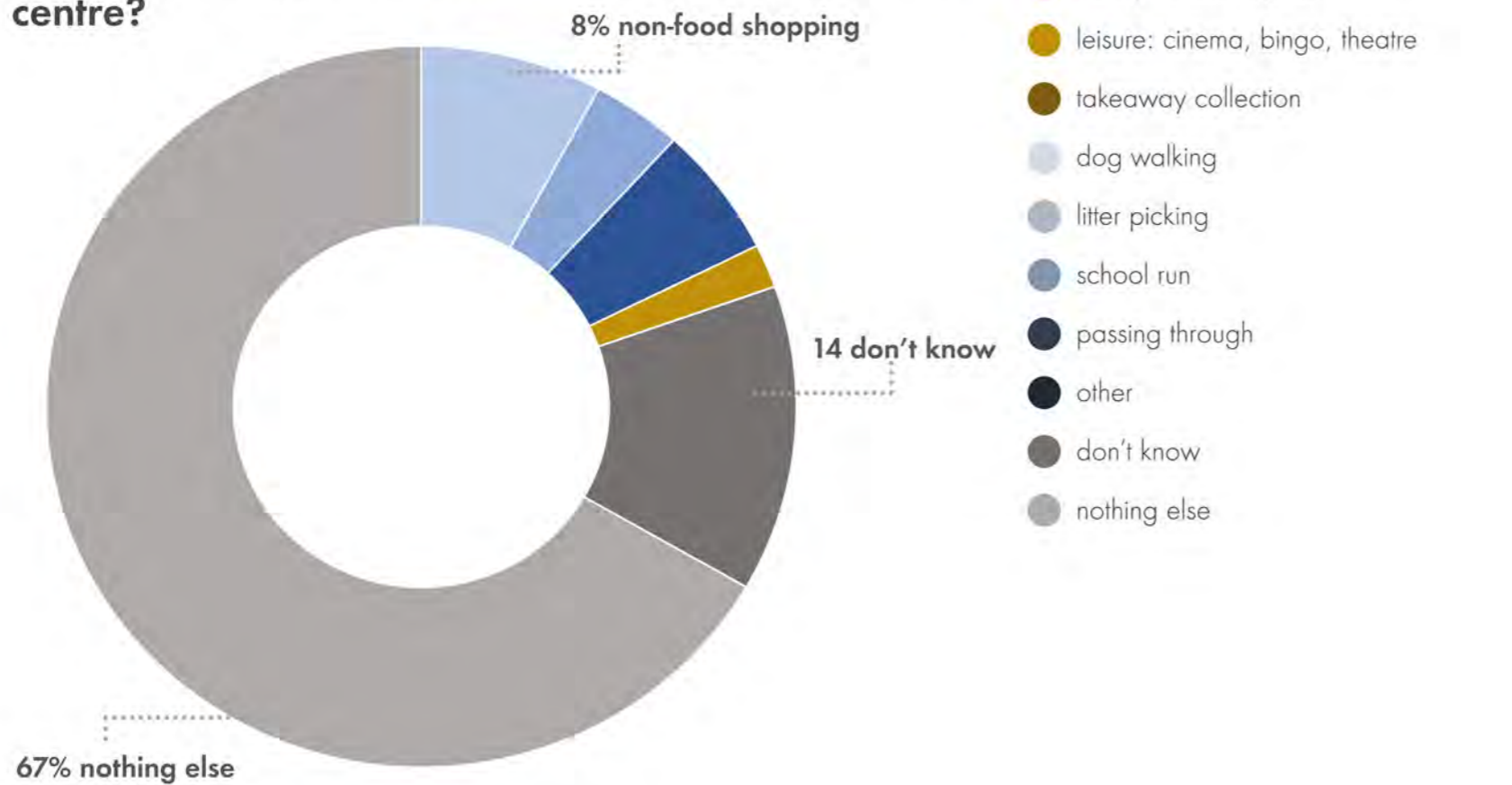
In-street survey findings

51 responses

What is your main purpose of visit the centre?



Aside from that, what else will you be doing in the centre?



What do you like about the centre?

Most frequent responses

- Close to home 57%
- I like supporting local businesses 24%
- Habit / always used it 22%
- Friendly people 16%
- Good layout / shops all close together 14%

What would you change about the centre?

Most frequent responses

- More supermarkets/food shops 29%
- More specialist / independent stores 24%
- Market 18%
- Nothing in particular 18%
- Improve bus services / access 14%

Average dwell time in centre:

35 mins

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Stakeholder engagement feedback



Strengths

- A successful planning and design concept village Span Developments (designer and architect Eric Lyons).
- A strong local community.
- Span housing.
- Designed to be car-free - footpaths throughout.
- Exceptional green spaces (green, orchard, woodland, etc).
- Mix of housing sizes, types and tenures to achieve a 'social balance'.
- Younger people choosing to stay in New Ash Green.
- Centre continues to offer some well used retail which supports the local community- Coop, bakery, pub, Oxfam, hardware store, chemist, gym, takeaways, etc.
- Well organised community through neighbourhoods and village association.
- People attracted into town by school, sports facilities, library, GP surgery, etc.



Weaknesses

- The central shopping centre is in a poor state and lets down the wider village. The shopping centre is inward facing and unattractive from the arrival. Upstairs is largely vacant.
- The change in shopping habits has led to a loss in the retail offer in the village.
- Lease lengths in the shopping centre not secure enough for long term development.
- Redevelopment attempts of the shopping centre seem to have failed.
- The village is not well connected to its surroundings - one track roads and limited bus services. People are car-dependent.
- Light industrial part of the concept village was never delivered - the village would benefit from more local employment.
- People from outside the village have few reasons to come in.



Opportunities

- Opportunity for transformation - renovation or redevelopment of the shopping centre upgrading the built fabric, retaining local businesses and creating new homes.
- Any development in keeping with the original concept and design intent.
- Better maintenance and management.
- Opportunity to consider workspace which meets the needs of local people and decreases outbound commuting.
- Expanding the role of arts.
- The possibility of capitalising on the planning and architectural history of the town - for example forming a partnership with an architectural school? Tourism?
- Strengthen connections to the surroundings.
- Consider programming to help bring activity in the short term - markets, temporary pop ups, etc.
- Village association owns the public spaces and much of the village's assets.

Stakeholder discussions and a community workshop were carried out to understand local people's views on the issues and opportunities facing the town centre. Below is a summary of the feedback for New Ash Green.



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A vision for New Ash Green

In 2040...

New Ash Green's centre is a vibrant heart to the thriving village community. Shops and businesses are supported by a refreshed and well-maintained shopping centre. Vacant units are brought back to use, creating more space for small businesses and allowing people to both live and work in the village (as was originally conceived). A renewed public realm is decluttered allowing the architecture to shine, greening and drainage is integrated, and focal points are created for events, spill out and pop-up activity.

Interventions around the edges of the shopping centre help to improve the approach and draw people in. This could include new buildings which turn to face outwards and which integrate well with New Ash Green's civic and community facilities on the edge of its centre. Any development is in keeping with the modernist SPAN architectural style, making a positive contribution to the village's one-of-a-kind character. New homes of different types, sizes and tenures and new SME, creative and flexible workspace is provided, helping to provide for the growing population and bringing more footfall to the village centre.

People living nearby are made more aware of what's happening in the centre. Visitors are signposted into the centre, with signage, promotion and a more prominent village centre.

District wide principles

This vision statement should be read in conjunction with the District wide approach which sets out principles and objectives relevant to all five centres under the themes of:

- Supporting businesses and creating a resilient local economy
- Shifting to Net Zero 2030 and supporting a sustainable future
- Strengthening the character and identity of each centre
- Improving local people's health and wellbeing



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This artists' impression of New Ash Green shows how the outer edges of the shopping centre could be transformed. New light-touch buildings inserted at the edge could provide a stronger frontage and enclose the yard space. The yard could be brought to life for villagers with outdoor seating and spill out activity, play features, lighting and planting.



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Potential projects and development sites

Identifying opportunities

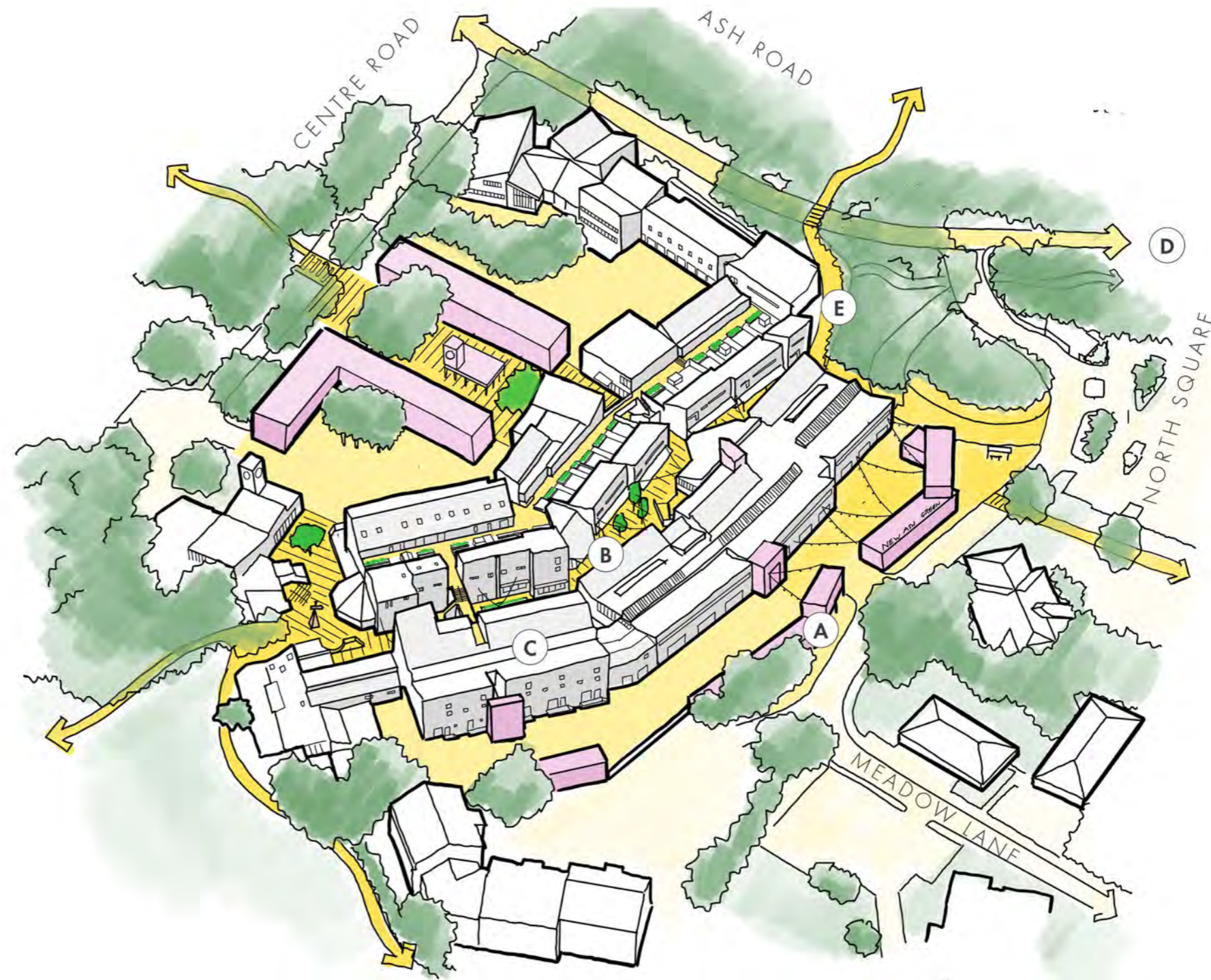
The following potential projects and development opportunities have been identified to help realise the future vision for New Ash Green village centre. The following pages offer a description, a relevant example from elsewhere and delivery considerations for each project.

- A. Shopping centre edges
- B. Shopping centre public realm
- C. Upper storey improvements
- D. Connection to Longfield Station
- E. Footpaths and arrival experience

The projects identified are intended as flexible, worthwhile interventions that allow for further development opportunities to be explored in the future, if desired. This includes better integration with uses just outside of the village centre. Any proposal for the centre should consider:

- Its unique history and built character
- Continuity for existing businesses
- Community significance of the local centre

These considerations go alongside the District wide principles and together should guide any future change.



A hand-sketched birds-eye-view plan of New Ash Green village centre showing the potential projects and development opportunities



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A- Shopping centre edges

New Ash Green's shopping centre has blank frontage and exposed servicing areas around the edges detracting significantly from the arrival experience. Interventions should make the shopping centre outward-looking, with active and welcoming edges on each side, and which support integration with the civic and community uses that sit just outside, as well as Ash House Business Centre.

In the first instance proposals would consider opportunities to introduce light-touch infill buildings to enclose yard spaces. These buildings would be connected to existing businesses. They would animate the yards and help to create an improved sense of arrival to the north and south of the shopping centre. In tandem, proposals would explore options to activate existing blank ground floor frontages and create new/improved access routes into the shopping centre by, for example, making existing stairwells prominent features and improving signage.

The reconfigured yards could become flexible, multi-use spaces for activities and events, and would be complemented by new features such as; artwork, feature lighting, outdoor seating and planters. Existing ongoing servicing requirements and constraints from existing trees would need to be considered within reconfigured spaces.



Case study: Hackney Bridge. Meanwhile project to provide incubator space for start-ups and public facilities, including food hall and event space. The temporary buildings are arranged around a central courtyard which can also be used for servicing access.



Sketch of New Ash Green shopping centre showing the principle of working with and completing the existing urban form

B- Shopping centre public realm

The public spaces within the shopping centre are in need of upgrade. Interventions would seek to celebrate the shopping centre's mid-century design identity, with proposals exploring opportunities to:

- Upgrade lighting to improve safety at night time. Designs would review older lighting fixtures (particularly around circulation areas) which provide poor illuminance and are energy inefficient.
- De-clutter e.g. removing redundant telephone boxes, managing A-board signs, and potentially removing lightweight canopy structures where these cause significant obstructions.
- Integrating sustainable drainage features such as permeable paving, rain gardens and new tree planting.
- Creating focal points for spill out, events and pop up activity. This could be achieved through new public seating, planting, artwork, feature lighting or special paving areas.
- Upgrade shopfront signage to better reflect New Ash Green's brand identity and introduce distinctive public signage.



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C- Upper storey improvements

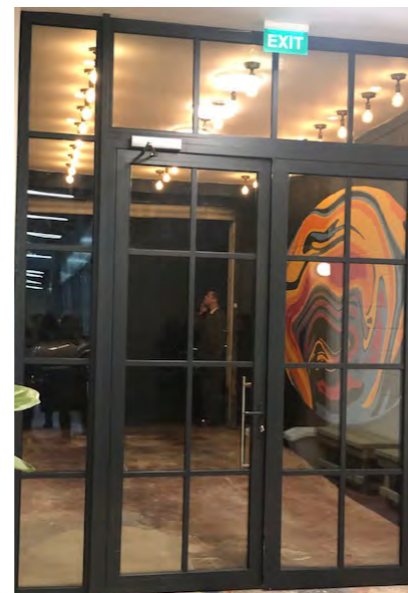
New Ash Green Shopping Centre has a second storey above the shops. In the northern block, upper storeys were historically used as workspace and studios, but now have high vacancy rates. In the southern block, the upper storey is made up of homes accessed off a shared walkway. There is an opportunity to refresh and revitalise these upper storeys, attracting more activity into the village centre and adding to its vibrancy.

To the south, the communal routes could be improved and gardens opened up, creating a high quality communal space for residents. To the north, renovations to the upper storey workspace and more prominent entrances and stairwells could be created.

A workspace operator or a housing association could be involved and public funding sought to take the onus off of the landowner for making improvements.



Marmalade Lane, an example of low front garden boundary walls overlooking a shared pedestrian space. A precedent for the residential upper storey of New Ash Green Shopping Centre.



Park Royal conversion of space into artist studios and creative workspaces, a precedent for the upper storeys of New Ash Green Shopping Centre.

D- Sustainable connections to Longfield Station

While the village is designed to be completely accessible on foot, with an extensive network of footpaths, limited public transport services have resulted in a high dependence on cars for travel beyond the village.

Longfield Station is New Ash Green's nearest and is just over 2 miles away with onward rail connections to London and Dover Priory, Ramsgate and wider Kent.

Enhancing connections to Longfield Station via sustainable modes of transport would help to decrease reliance on cars, support the transition to net zero carbon and support a healthy lifestyle for villagers. The creation of segregated and lit routes should be explored for people walking and cycling, as well as an electric or on-demand shuttle bus service.



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E- Improved arrival experience

New Ash Green's village centre is a Shopping Centre which faces inwards to a pedestrianised route. As a result, it is very low profile, to the detriment of attracting visitors. While the village's extensive greenery is generally a positive attribute, there are places where it feels overgrown or blocks key views into and awareness of the village centre. This could be trimmed and managed selectively.

The arrival experience and profile of the village centre would benefit from being raised, through signage and the redesign of key arrival points. New Ash Green has an existing graphic identity which could play a role in this.



In addition, the network footpaths leading into the town centre would benefit from management, integrating subtle lighting, cutting back greenery and improving surfaces. Public realm improvements would strengthen links between the shopping centre and nearby community and civic facilities.



Example of a formalised footpath through a wood with managed low-level planting to increase visibility. A similar device could be used to aid legibility from Ash Road to the Shopping Centre entrance. Pathways could be lit with low level pathway lighting.



Graphic signage, which could be relevant for New Ash Green shopping centre. Particularly at key points of arrival by foot and by bus



Signage which gives people an idea of what's inside.



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Place coordination strategy

Partnership working

New Ash Green is dominated by the shopping centre development, which over time has fallen in parts to disrepair. Despite this, the local centre is relatively well utilised and is home to a diverse range of primarily independent shops, anchored by a Co-op. Close by is the business centre which appears to be well occupied, but is somewhat disconnected from the main thoroughfare by the disused shopping centre blocks boarded off and a car park. The local centre is surrounded by thick greenery which to an extent, creates a unique setting and visitor experience. Positively, the local community and village association is relatively active with several events going forward each year.

However, the wider upkeep of the shopping centre, surrounding built space and greening management is relatively poor. The latter of which effectively 'hides' the entrances to the local centre, making it difficult to see from the road and pathways for new visitors. Therefore there is a clear need to consider greening management, as well as wider public realm improvements where possible, to improve permeability and wayfinding which the place coordination strategy could address.

Largely, the responsibility for the shopping centre maintenance falls to the landowner. For reasons unknown, maintenance has been minimal which has resulted in entire blocks being closed down and boarded up (as noted above). This does not make best use of the existing asset but could be an opportunity for redevelopment to deliver new workspace. The place coordination strategy in respect of New Ash Green, should therefore include basic maintenance and upkeep (where possible) but primarily should be focused on setting out interventions to bring the buildings in disrepair back to use.

Not part of the strategy, but an important consideration to deliver change is New Ash Green could be through setting up a workspace delivery vehicle, which seeks to scope out the extent of the proposal, and suitable workspace operators. This offer could be taken forward to the shopping centre owner and may be a proactive way to redevelop the blocks and local centre.

In terms of responsibility, the Village Association are very active within the community. There could be scope to partner with SDC to co-manage the place coordination strategy and deliver some of the actions identified.

Given the scope of the intervention, the curation of a workspace delivery vehicle would ultimately fall to SDC and potentially an external partner or Ash House operators to deliver.



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Due diligence to consider

The following table sets out the due diligence that should be taken into consideration to help shape and define the projects recommended for New Ash Green. As part of this, an indication of timescales and potential types of funding has been outlined which is indicative and may be subject to change. It is intended that this table highlight key moves to for SDC to take into consideration and be used as a guide to support moving the projects forward.

The major landowner in New Ash Green, the Shopping Centre owner (Piperton Finance), were not engaged with the study. As this is the case, the intervention associated with the Shopping Centre buildings are proactive in that they aim to guide the Council to work towards delivering an 'ready-made' offer to the landowner for redevelopment, which they may wish to sign on to/ partner on.

Table of due diligence for New Ash Green

	PROJECT	TIMESCALES	DUE DILIGENCE	POTENTIAL FUNDING STREAMS	POTENTIAL RESPONSIBILITY
A	Shopping centre edges	0-5years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with shopping centre landowners to determine scale of interest toward general maintenance. Scope out series of interventions and key actions to improve edges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) 	Village Association and Parish Council if providing greater funding.
B	Shopping centre public realm	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with shopping centre landowner to determine scope to deliver public realm improvements. Instruct detailed design study to determine the type of public realm intervention required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) 	SDC
D	Connection to Longfield Station	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with KCC on the connections and cycle paths to the station. Instruct a detailed design study (technical infrastructure drawings) to ascertain scope for delivering improvements to improve the connections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) DfT funding Air Quality Grant Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 	SDC
E	Footpaths and arrival experience	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with KCC on footpaths and routes. Detailed study on routes and arrival experience, to set out series of interventions to take forward. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) 	SDC
C	Upper storey improvements	6-10 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial engagement with shopping centre landowner to generate interest in taking this forward. Instruct site feasibility study to identify solutions to bring building back into active use. Determine scope for the use to be predominately workspace. Engage with workspace operators on initial design elements and Soft Market Test the approach. Understand interest partner. Consider workspace delivery vehicle. Share proposal with shopping centre landowner to outline scope to proceed/ move forward. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Towns Fund FHSF (if another round in the future) Levelling Up Fund (future round) Landowner 	SDC / ED team



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In terms of governance, there are several key parties to consider. This includes the NAG Village Association who are very active in upkeep and maintenance, and organisations of events. They may be responsible for some elements of delivery for the interventions. Recommendations in the Town Centre Recovery Report by National Retail Planning Forum and Public Practice (2022), identify that community groups can play a key role in managing change and driving improvements, so long as they are supported by the Local Authority and provided the right tools to lead. It is highly recognised in the report that community-led governance can help to build a stronger connection between social and commercial needs of a place.

Other than this, there is the Parish Council whose main asset in the village is the Sports Centre to the north of the village. The Village Hall is in the freehold ownership of the Village Association and managed directly by them. The Youth and Community Centre is in the freehold ownership of the Village Association but held on a long lease by the New Ash Green Village Trust, a registered charity, who operate it.

Funding and engagement with the Piperton Finance will be key to ensuring that interventions can be delivered.

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Drawing on lessons learnt...

To provide SDC with confidence, the Town Centre Recovery Report (2022) provides a series of recommendations to help build resilience in Town Centres, and shape approaches to management. Reviewing the recommendations outlined, there are synergies between what has been outlined and the approach and body of the interventions set out in this report.

This includes:

Recognise local authorities as the stewards of the high street.

This is certainly required across all centres to deliver interventions.

Create strategic visions to bring ideas, people and funding together.

A strong vision is crucial, to steer improvements. Recommendations within the report are focussed on expanding the understanding of what needs to be addressed in each centre – particularly in terms of the softer interventions around place management.

Look beyond retail

Recommendations in this report recognise that other uses and activities can drive animation, such as good leisure and workspace uses, as well as a string event programme.

Bring cross-sector partners together through governance.

This is a key consideration, where it is believed that SDC should not act in isolation. Recommendations have been to consider empowering Town Teams, Town Councils and where available, community groups. Engagement and partnership with key landowners (public-private partnerships), can additionally be beneficial.

Provide the tools and opportunities for communities to lead.

This again, builds on above and highlights the importance of engaging with the Village Association and other key community groups to establish a sense of ownership to deliver change.

Taking this one step further, the following case study has been set out to demonstrate the importance of partnership working as a form of town centre governance. Given the multiple stakeholders within each town centre and the presence of Town Councils etc, there could be further thought as to how to better empower these existing bodies to deliver change. Moreover, if there are opportunities to bring in other partners to support and drive success.



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Shrewsbury is a strong example of how excellent cross-sector partnerships stewarded by the local authority can produce a clear vision for a place and long-term buy-in for regeneration.

For context, Shrewsbury had a strong vision outlined. They had a draft Masterplan Vision (which was at consultation stage at beginning of 2021) and underpinning this, a Big Town Plan (2018). For context, Shrewsbury are now entering the delivery phase of their plan, and had a number of funding bids made for large scale projects.

Town Centre Context

Shrewsbury town centre is a lively place with a high number of independent shops and cafes, an award-winning market and a strong historical character. It is a popular tourist destination, particularly in the summer when it hosts numerous events and festivals, and draws visitors from neighbouring towns due to its size and strength of retail mix. Shrewsbury has a lively BID, established in 2014 and renewed in 2019. The BID plays an active role in development and regeneration plans for the town centre.

Whilst the Council had some successes in terms of purchasing key shopping centre assets to take back control of high vacancy rates, reconfigure the retail core, and free-up two sites for redevelopment, there were still major challenges.

To summarise, this included:

- Shrewsbury struggles to attract and retain young people to live and work in the town, with a low waged and low skilled economy, a lack of affordable housing and a lack of affordable and flexible workspace forcing people out to Birmingham in particular.
- The town also suffers from being disconnected from some surrounding neighbourhoods, with connectivity work required to link communities better to the town.
- There has generally been a trend for office and commercial

properties to move out to the edges of the town – creating a potential over-reliance on retail and lack of diversity in the core of Shrewsbury.

- Though footfall in Shrewsbury has demonstrated good resilience, there are underused spaces in the centre and its vacancy rate is higher than the national average.
- Geographically, Shrewsbury has a very constrained street plan based on its medieval structure, which means development is physically very difficult.
- This has also limited movement and access through the town, with parts of the centre disconnected and a strong reliance on private vehicles.

Vision

To address these issues, Shrewsbury delivered a town centre strategy – the aforementioned Big Town Plan. Whilst this was a success to some extent, a masterplan was commissioned to go one step further. A key part of the masterplan process was engagement with the partnership board and public. Community engagement was at the heart of this, and the Town Centre Recovery Report (2022) outlines that “ensuring that everyone feels a sense of ownership over the plan, and buys into it at every level, has been key to developing a strong vision.”

Teams and Approach

The key players in the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan are the council’s Shrewsbury Programme Manager, and the cross-sector Partnership Board. The council created the role of Programme Manager in 2018 to manage the Big Town Plan and to develop the masterplan vision. This key role is focused on managing relationships and working with stakeholders and the community. Crucially, the council were able to recruit an officer into this role who is from Shrewsbury – providing an advantage in terms of their insight and relationship to the community and the place. The council’s Shrewsbury Programme Board cuts across service areas to oversee all aspects of the plan, feeding into the partnership through the Programme Manager.



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The partnership board includes two members from each partner – the Executive Director of the BID and a BID board member, Head of Economic Growth at Shropshire Council and the Leader of the council, and the Leader of the Town Council and the Town Clerk. A broader team from all three organisations work with the board. Initially the board had a rotating Chair, but there was a desire to bring in an independent voice – somebody who can hold the partnership to account. A decision was made to recruit a voluntary Chair, which was advertised openly and a local business owner was appointed in 2019.

Any decisions that are made that involve significant funding or larger decision making, goes back through each partner’s respective governance – the council reporting to Cabinet, the Town Council to their members and the BID to their board. Each partner has signed up to a partnership agreement, which involves putting in an agreed amount of money annually to support the partnership, which is spent in line with the partnership’s constitution. Given the scale of the Big Town Plan and the size of the in-house team, the council leans strongly on the partnership and the skills and resources that the partnership can offer – to carry out pieces of work or deliver certain aspects of the programme. Each partner plays to their strengths in terms of skills, knowledge and assets, for example the BID takes a strong lead on the engagement and communications elements. Whilst there are no BIDS in Sevenoaks District, this role could potentially be carried out by the Town Team or Town Council. However, for places like Westerham (given the strong business community) a BID may be a positive contribution to governance.

Financing

The Town Centres Recovery Report outlines that the funding for the Big Town Plan was co-funded by the partnership board, with each partner contributing an equal share annually to support the ongoing work. The council are the partner that have led on funding bids, making opportunistic bids for different parts of the Big Town Plan – such as the Getting Building fund and LEP funds. This has been able to fund the visioning work and some smaller-scale interventions, but the challenge

now lies in structuring the financing of the delivery phase.

The council’s approach is to invest up-front in the town centre, using their position and borrowing capacity to unlock early stages of development. Through development of their own assets, particularly the shopping centres they hope to leverage council-led delivery to improve the market in Shrewsbury in order to attract private sector investment. Once the market has been activated, they will look to either a capital release scheme or joint venture to recover the initial investment. The partnership are also seeking larger grant funding through the LUF and other schemes.

Whilst all may not be applicable to Sevenoaks District, there are strong learnings from this case study – particularly the need to have a strong, upfront vision that partners can buy into a adhered to, with some form of ownership embedded to drive responsibility and ‘buy-in.’ In terms of key take-aways, this includes:

- A cross-sector partnership brings a range of knowledge, skills and resources to the table.
- Governance is key and an independent chair provides accountability and rigour to cross-sector partnerships.
- A clear and consistent vision, unified around a strong brand, can focus stakeholders and maintain momentum.
- Dynamic and sustained community engagement generates a strong community voice and buy-in.
- Consolidating council-owned assets around key sites provides a strategic advantage.

Making change happen

Cutting across the recommended projects and delivery considerations for each town centre are several key actions that should be considered by SDC in the immediate term to move the strategies forward. This is set out below and is not in any respective order:

Determining early on landowner interest for redevelopment

Several sites identified for redevelopment proposals are not within SDC's ownership. Therefore, early engagement with key landowners will help determine the likelihood and feasibility of delivery on these sites and provide an indication of timescales. As part of this, there is additionally a need to understand when Vacant Possession will occur (e.g. the BT site in Sevenoaks Town), to provide SDC a realistic timeframe for redevelopment aims. As part of this, any opportunities for public-private partnership should be explored to drive success (as outlined in the Town Centre Recovery Report, 2022).

Determining appetite for acquisition / delivery within SDC

Gathering an initial steer internally on the appetite within SDC for acquisition and delivery could help guide the conversations with landowners as well as outline potential delivery routes for specific sites.

KCC engagement on highway matters

For each town centre there are proposals to improve connections and accessibility. KCC should be consulted early on to determine whether there is an opportunity for collaboration, and to consider whether there may be funding available. If funding is not available, this will inform the decision to consider bidding for other funding streams. Moreover, early engagement will give a better sense of timeframes to deliver the improvements, which is in some cases linked to the ability to deliver other recommendations.

Car park study across town centres

A detailed study on existing car park sites in terms of occupancy levels and opportunities for rationalisation and consolidation would help inform other interventions and identify possible development sites.

Setting out Place Coordination Strategy first

As set out in the town centre chapter, a clear strategy on how upkeep and maintenance should be coordinated as a starting point. The place coordination strategy should seek to outline and itemises the key actions, role and responsibilities and timeframes. Softer interventions to feed into place-making approach should form part of this strategy. Having this in place could help to achieve other aims and objectives, particularly around branding through a coordinated events programme. Therefore embedded within this, is the need to consider who may be the responsible body to manage the strategy e.g. respective town councils.



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Planning recommendations

The recommendations in relation to planning strategy and planning policy are as follows:

In relation to planning strategy, we recommend:

- Inclusion of a new over-arching strategy policy for all town centre matters, which includes the centre hierarchy and re-emphasising the town centres first approach to policy.
- Continuation of the individual strategy policies for each of the main town and local centres, highlighting key themes and development projects.
- An approach to retail which does not seek to plan for an expanded level of retail floorspace in the main settlements and instead concentrates upon maintaining and consolidating existing provision within the influence of the new Use Class E.
- Consideration within the new Local Plan of the provision of new neighbourhood facilities. The amount and location of new facilities should taken into account the size of the new community which the facilities will serve; the geographic distribution of retail floorspace and main town centre uses; and walk-in catchments and public transport accessibility.

In relation to development management policies, we recommend:

- Providing development management policies which provide a bespoke approach to proposals in either town centre or primary shopping area boundaries, including the provision of qualitative factors / criteria to assist in the determination of proposals requiring planning permission.
- The removal of quantitative assessment criteria from town centre / primary shopping area development management policies and the inclusion of an acknowledgement of how Use Class E will influence town centres in the District.

- Inclusion of a policy which deals with the sequential and impact planning policy tests, with the latter setting local impact assessment thresholds of between 300sq m and 500sq m gross for retail and leisure proposals outside of defined 'town centres'.

In relation to town centre boundary definitions, we recommend:

- In principle, retaining the town centre boundary definition (subject to the amendments below) and replacing the primary and secondary retail frontage definitions with a primary shopping area in each centre.
- In Sevenoaks Town, we recommend that the existing town centre boundary is extended to include the area around the station (as currently separately defined as a local centre). The station area is physically separated from the main town centre but has a reasonable range of shops and services which, in our opinion, are close enough to act as part of the main town centre. In relation to the primary shopping area, we recommend that this boundary should include all of those areas currently defined as primary and secondary retail frontages apart from the following revisions: (A) the exclusion of properties along Tubs Hill; and (B) the inclusion of the M&S store (and adjacent car parking area) at Blighs Meadow / London Road.
- No change to the Swanley town centre boundary, with a primary shopping area which lies to the west of the railway line
- No change to the Edenbridge town centre boundary and renaming the primary retail frontage as a primary shopping area.
- No changes to the Westerham town centre boundary (including a primary shopping area which covers the same area).
- In New Ash Green, we consider that the general boundary of the defined town centre remains appropriate and is clearly well defined given the purpose built nature of the centre. However,



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there is a good case for including New Ash Business Centre as it also comprises a main town centre land use, as defined by the NPPF. Due to the small size of the centre, the primary shopping area boundary should be the same as the town centre boundary.

Article 4 Directions

Following the introduction of the new Use Class E and new Permitted Development Rights (i.e. changes of use of Class E uses - such as shops, services and some food/beverage uses - to residential use) there is focus on whether local authorities remove such rights via Article 4 Directions. National planning policy indicates that Article 4 Directions should be used sparingly and are necessary to avoid wholly unacceptable adverse impacts including the loss of the essential core of a primary shopping area which would seriously undermine its vitality and viability. The potential for Article 4 Directions in Sevenoaks District has been considered as part of this study and has taken into account the following factors:

- the strategic importance of 'town centres'
- sustainability and accessibility
- pushing demand elsewhere and loss of retail sales - i.e. out of centre / other towns
- recovery from the pandemic
- vacancy rates - in retail and overall
- the % / amount of units subject to PD
- the contribution of residential use to town centres
- geographic factors facing different parts of town centres

This has resulted in a recommendation that there is a good case for the introduction of Article 4 Directions in focused parts of the five main town centres in SDC's administrative area. The evidence shows that there is a good case for ensuring that Class E uses remain an important and significant component of the main defined 'town centres', with the amount of weight which will be placed upon different factors for each individual centre will depend upon the circumstances relevant to each centre.

Should SDC wish to pursue the introduction of Article 4 Directions, then we recommend that the following actions are considered:

- Based upon the contents of this document and the supporting evidence base information (such as the town centre health checks) SDC to formally determine which centres, in SDC's opinion, should be taken forward for the introduction of A4Ds.
- In order to assist with the above issue and in order to support the wider case in support of Article 4 Directions, SDC to consider a set of wider issues such as those associated with the size and type of dwellings, dwelling standards, noise, disturbance and other environmental effects, loss of employment space, impacts upon the high street, impacts upon existing businesses, affordable housing and contributions to local infrastructure.
- In order to provide the best response to national policy, we recommend that SDC provide a separate evidence document to support each proposed Direction (using the evidence gathered as part of this study). It is expected that there will be a series of cross-cutting themes across all relevant 'town centres', although a separate evidence based justification should be prepared for each Direction.
- On the assumption that the Article 4 Directions are adopted, planning permission will be required for the introduction of residential uses. On that basis, we would recommend that those development management policies in the new Local Plan, which will apply to changes of use in locations where Article 4 Directions are brought into effect, include assessment criteria which tackle the salient issues which are relevant to the introduction of the A4D.



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Economic development recommendations

Prioritisation of interventions

In terms of aims, SDC should consider which recommendations set out in the strategy would provide the greatest impact (social, community and economic) for the town centres and prioritise their delivery across the town centres (rather than within them) given limited resources. For example, prioritising interventions in New Ash Green to deliver new workspace (for artist) could deliver greater economic benefit than actioning general maintenance in Sevenoaks town centre. Sevenoaks town centre is a well-established area that already draws large crowds and different audiences to support the offer and businesses; therefore any intervention would likely have a smaller, positive impact. Moreover, the delivery of new workspace in New Ash Green could have positive, longer term knock-on effects for the local community, though the delivery of new retail or F&B who are now able to locate in New Ash Green owing to the larger audience. Similarly, certain interventions for Edenbridge may have a similar, larger impact. The town suffers from high vacancy rates, which is an immediate signal that priority should be given.

Creative Economy and other target sectors

The presence of the creative economy has been noted to be prevalent in both Sevenoaks town centre and New Ash Green. However, there is very little evidence to be seen which clearly outline the size, scale and presence in Sevenoaks District. Commissioning a study alongside further engagement would be beneficial to outline the types of activities, key locations and demand from occupiers/artists, to support future proposals. Adding to this, a more detailed study on key target sectors would help to determine the types and quantum of spaces required to be delivered in town centre locations to support economic growth and businesses. It should be noted that any future investigations should set out to look beyond the traditional B Class sectors and

review the retail and leisure impact for example, to provide a 'whole economy' view.

Focussed assessment of visitor economy

A focussed assessment of the visitor economy potential in Sevenoaks Town, Edenbridge and Westerham would help to support an understanding of the current existing offer and most importantly, the gaps. This would inform the recommendations in the strategies and provide a greater focus on the size, scale and nature of offer that can be delivered to boost the visitor economy. As part of this assessment, a view on the need for accommodation in line with this would support further thinking.

Engagement with operators

Given the recommendations around SDC potentially setting up a workspace delivery vehicle in New Ash Green and delivering new uses across sites in Sevenoaks Town, Swanley and Edenbridge, it would be sensible to consider proactively engaging with a range of operators (workspace, retail, F&B, Leisure) early on. This could be done before the place coordination strategies are established, to get a better sense of prospective markets for those uses and operator interest. Moreover, early engagement will provide SDC with a view on the commercial realities of what can be delivered in respective town centres, and any further interventions or actions that need to happen to move forward. In addition to this, this will provide an opportunity to build relationships early on and help shape and test the propositions to ensure that what is delivered is fit for purpose and aligns with SDC's objectives. In other words, proactively engaging with operators may give SDC a better understanding (and to some degree of control) of the size, scale and nature of the uses that could come forward on those sites.



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Operational Models

In line with the recommendations for Edenbridge, SDC should consider investigating operational models that could be provided to support delivering a curated retail offer within the vacant units. Best practice should be considered, and particularly there should be a focus on models which best leverage SDC funding, assets and opportunities for partnering, whilst providing businesses favourable lease conditions. Given the context in Edenbridge, operational models that work across multiple vacant units should be prioritised.



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A commitment charter

This Town Centres Strategy sets a clear vision and roadmap for five centres in Sevenoaks District - Sevenoaks Town, Swanley, Edenbridge, Westerham and New Ash Green. It has identified potential projects, development opportunities, place coordination strategies and delivery considerations.

To assist with next steps to deliver the Strategy, a commitment charter has been developed which sets out key actions for the Council and stakeholders to address in the next year.

It is recommended that over the next 12 months Sevenoaks District Council and parties should...

- Provide / refresh the District-wide car park study, to ascertain the latent potential to use car parks for new development
- In relation to Swanley town centre, work with landowners to understand developer interest
- Engage and work with KCC to trial/investigate road configuration in Edenbridge and Sevenoaks Town, to improve placemaking
- For Westerham, engage with KCC and look to commission a study to explore the options for public realm improvements along the A25
- In relation to New Ash Green, deliver a scoping study to ascertain the extent of the unmet demand for creative workspace, specifically Artist Studios
- In relation to Sevenoaks Town, to scope out and deliver 'quick win' public realm improvements including public art installations in e.g. public art installations in the Shambles



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