

# Samuel Shoemsmith's response to Wellingborough Town Centre vision

[http://www.wellingborough.gov.uk/news/article/1429/have\\_your\\_say\\_on\\_plans\\_for\\_wellingborough\\_town\\_centre](http://www.wellingborough.gov.uk/news/article/1429/have_your_say_on_plans_for_wellingborough_town_centre)

Dear the Borough Council of Wellingborough, please find below my general views and suggestions for our town centre vision *followed* by a more in depth and case by case review of the Wellingborough Town Centre Vision plan documents. Please reply to the email to confirm receipt of my response.

It was interesting to note that the consultants offer a 'fresh pair of eyes' to our town centre. I have been a resident of Wellingborough for the vast majority of my 27 years except 3 academic years at the University of Nottingham. I have become used to the reality of the town centre but for a very long time have realised it does not need to be this way and it can be so much better.

Writing this piece has made firstly go out and take a critical look at different parts of the town centre and then sit down and draw up a vision and plan and criticise the other. I note that some schemes I propose are radical but I hope that each is understood in the light that I want to make our town centre a wonderful place for all. I hope that I will be able to offer a critical suggestion of possible improvements. With a particular focus on evidence, I think our town centre needs alterations and these radical changes to enhance it, make it ready for the changing shopping and leisure habits and make Wellingborough a place to be proud of. This opportunity should not be wasted.

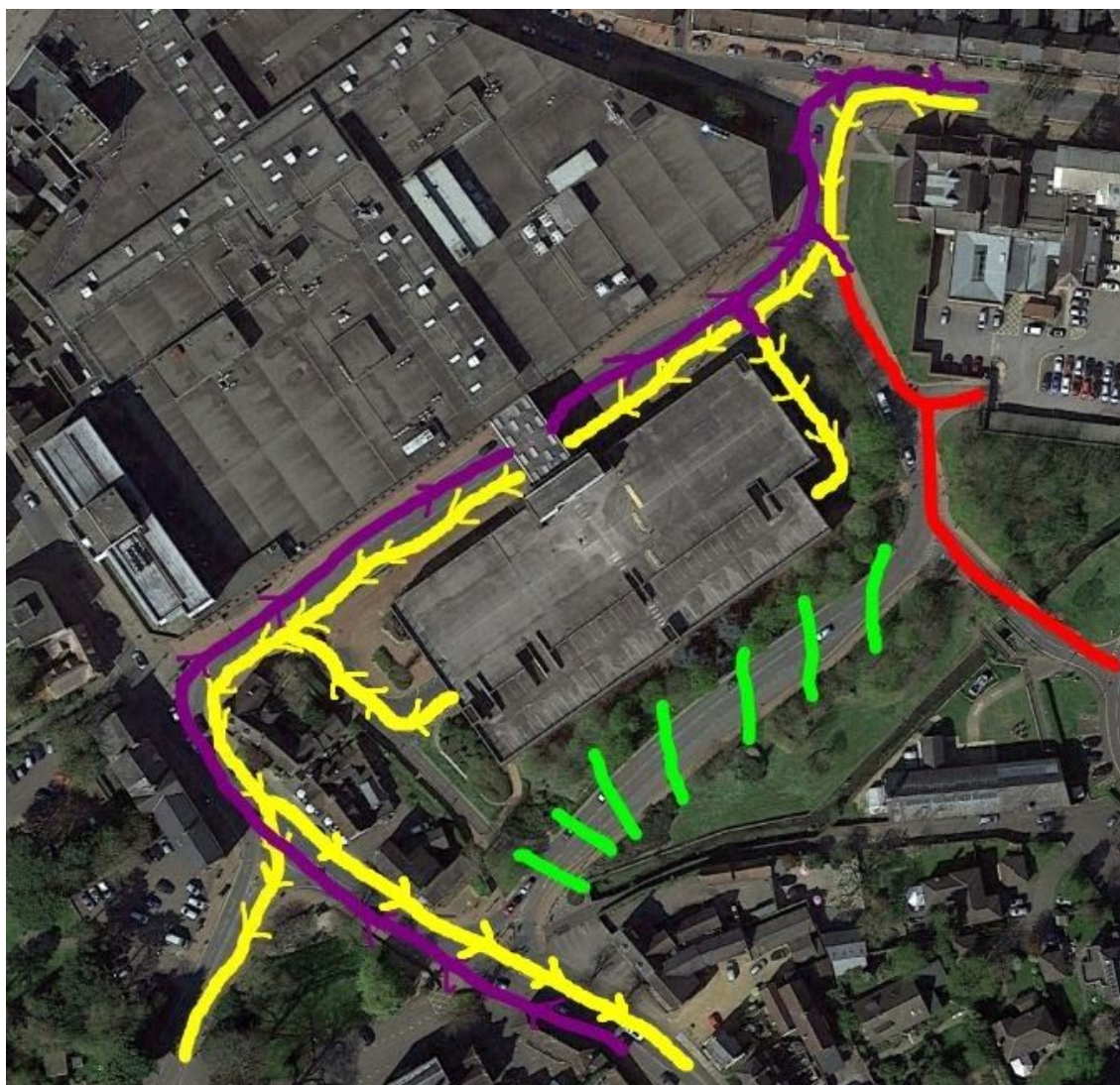
## **My suggestions and views**

Below are some of my suggestions and views for the Wellingborough Town Centre vision.

- 1) Rearrange road traffic flow around south of town centre which will greatly enhance the cultural hub of the town and improve pedestrian connectivity.

As illustrated on the map below I believe the traffic flow at the south of the town centre needs to have a radical overhaul to enable the suggestions which have been set out in the Wellingborough Town Centre vision plan, Document B. Commercial Way will become multi-directional, traffic from Midland Road, or from Commerical Way wanting to go to the Castle or the Museum can do but by access only. It is not

to be a through road. Perhaps a bus gate? Castle Way can then be utilised as a 'green' area and opened up. It can be made into a walking and cycling friendly place and enable a link to Castle Fields. Enhancements can be made to the brook and seats, benches and a small park can be installed here. A walking, green town.



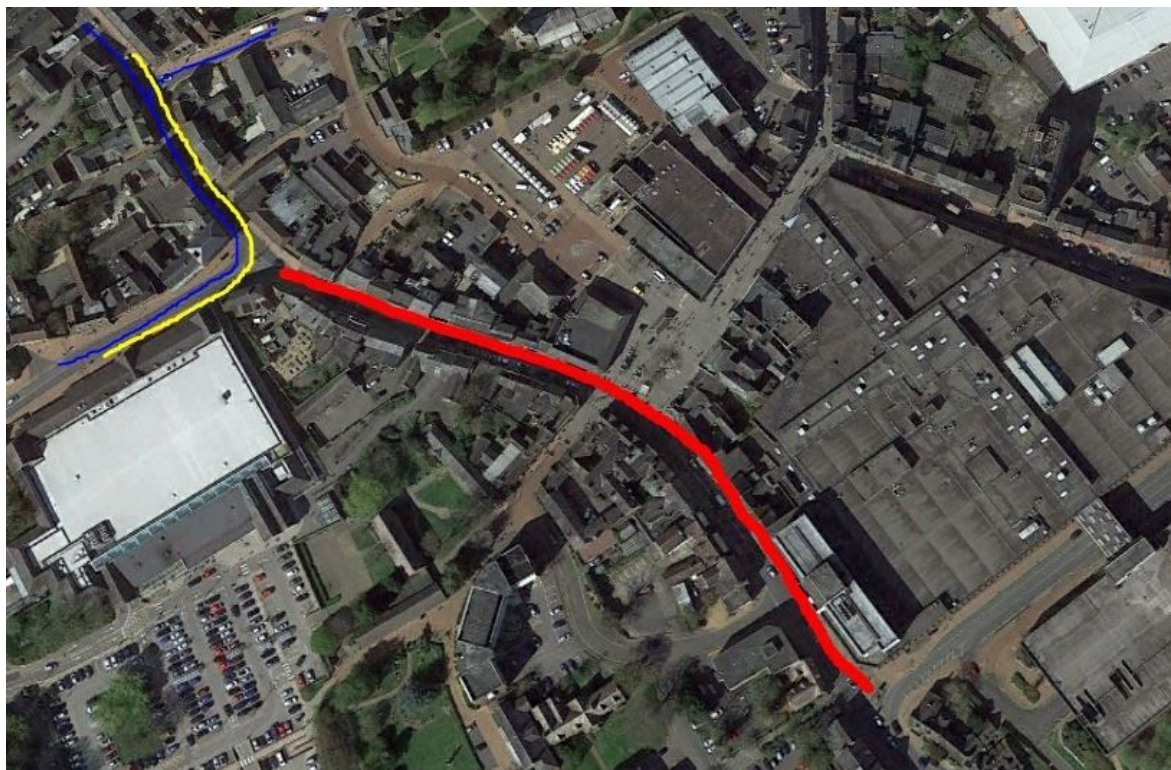
- 2) Make Cambridge Street access only. It shall not be a through road. This will create a 'Mini-Holland' atmosphere (1). Beneficial for shoppers, for the environment and for the economy (2).
- 3) Pedestrianise Sheep Street and Silver Street or make it a bus route only. The traffic either has to go up Commercial Way or up Doddington Road. The fact that minutes can no longer be cut off by directly cutting right through the town centre will defer people from coming this way altogether and they will instead use the ring road - the dual carriageway around the edge of town to get the closest to their destination and come in. These outer roads are carriageways - they are built to maintain a high volume of motor traffic. Sheep Street and Silver Street are not. It was mentioned time and time again in the consultation about the negative effects of private motor

vehicles. I believe we should have a 'Mini-Holland' scheme **(1)** along these roads to increase footfall, reduce air pollution, noise pollution, encourage walking and cycling and bring the economic benefits **(2)**.

There was brief mention in Document B of trying to create a 'shop window' but this is futile. The drivers of the cars do not drive by at 5mph and have a look at the town centre in its glory but instead travel through at over 20mph on average. At 20mph, it is scientifically proven that people do not absorb the environment.

There was suggestion that a gentle nudge could remind drivers that the area is a town centre for people to shop and not to use a cut through to shave off a few minutes. This is futile. No matter how narrow road is, despite how many signposts there are, and perhaps even if there was a police officer on 24/7 watch, cars would still continuously use this route with speed and pavement park and idle. It is fed by traffic coming from Midland Road direction, traffic coming down Doddington Road and the vast majority of traffic coming from London Road. Studies in the 2000s confirmed that Sheep Street had the highest levels of air pollution in the borough. Sheep Street and Silver Street should be made into a bus lane only with access to the properties and disabled access up Tithe Barn Road. It will only allow buses, cyclists, emergency vehicles and a rare few exemptions up here. This lack of cut through for private vehicles allows shoppers to walk, explore, linger and spend.

The map below shows Sheep Street / Silver Street pedestrianised or made into a bus gate marked in red, and junction at Oxford Street / High Street being multidirectional.



As constantly mentioned in the document this area which should be a continuous walk way. It is currently extremely unpleasant for the people who it should be for - users of the town centre. People should be able to sit outside Castello Lounge and have a conversation, walk around town; through from Tithe Barne all the way along past Castello Lounge, up Silver Street, or down Sheep Street, or up Market Street, and even to Cambridge Street; shopping, socialising and using the services, without the constant roar of continuous traffic and billowing air pollution.



Please watch each short clip I recorded of Sheep Street. Warning: you may need to turn down your speakers as the noise of the traffic is so loud. This is the regular level pedestrians have to put up with. It is nearly constant. Traffic cutting through the heart of the town centre is anti-social, damaging to health regarding pollution, creating a barrier to easily walk and cycle, and increases danger.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4HLHkAYe1o>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YRZG5DMyzc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xulX07DbGEg>

- 4) Install at least 1 full cycle hub in the town centre. This is a shed where bicycles can be locked to individual Sheffield stands inside. This building is accessed by a key card. This has dedicated CCTV.

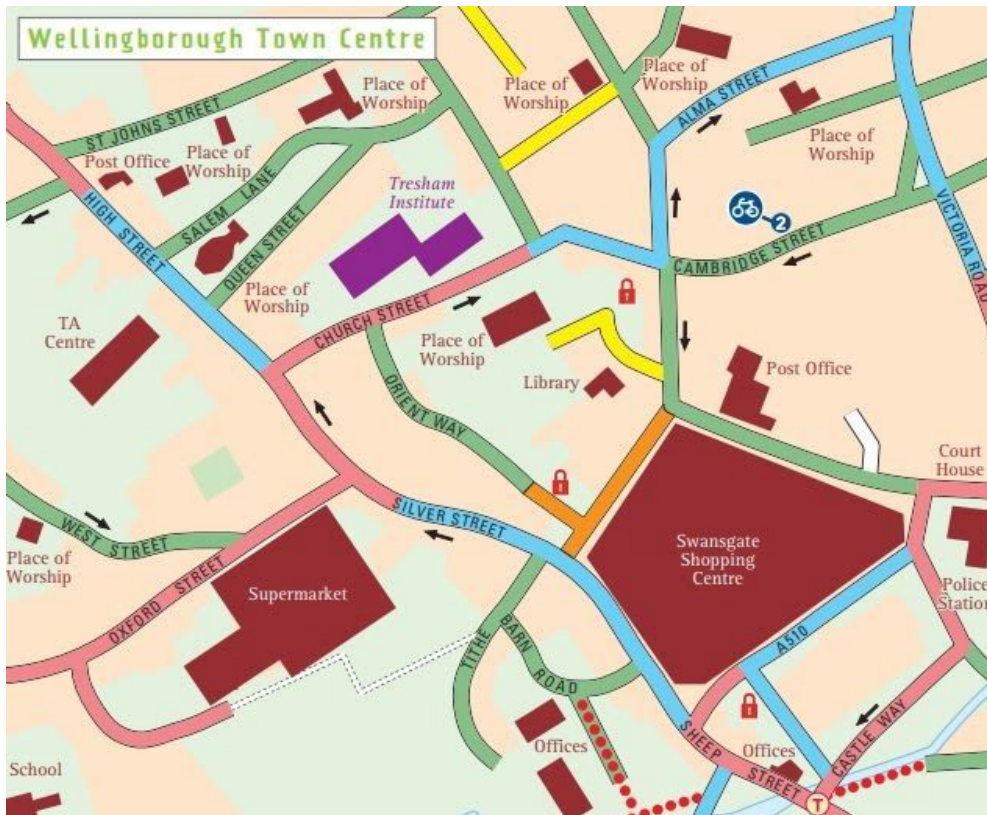


- 5) As well as a separate hub, smaller collections of Sheffield bicycle (circa 5) stands should be located at convenient locations. These will have a roof; similar to a bus stop shelter to protect the bicycle from all weathers in the same manner the

multistorey protects cars and their users from the elements. A suggestion of locations is marked in red below. These need to be in conspicuous locations, such as just outside the Swansgate Centre near the new information panel, or by the front of Castello lounge, both covered by CCTV.



- 6) Create a 'green' network of cycling around the town and formalise the cycle network to encourage bicycle usage. To create a better environment for people that is quieter, cleaner and healthier, the approach to cycling around the town centre needs to be reviewed. Below are two screenshots of the Wellingborough Cycle Network focussing on the town centre and its key. This was published over a decade ago so the situation has got worse with more traffic. Let it be made that there are red dots through the town centre and the streets are yellow and orange. A formal cycle route should be through Croyland Gardens, up past Tithe Barn and to the Hind.



### Key

- Roads that are normally hazardous for cyclists, but experienced adult highway users may find them useful especially in quiet periods.
- Busy principal roads with high speeds, HGVs, and complex junctions. Suitable for highly skilled commuting cyclists.
- Busy roads mostly lower speeds, some complicated traffic movements. A medium to high level of skill is required for trouble-free cycling.
- Through routes with moderate traffic and usually low speeds, but often turning and parking movements. Well trained school children should cope.
- Quiet roads with low traffic speed and volume. Suitable for all cyclists behaving responsibly if they have some training.
- Pedestrianised street.

- Cycle track, path or bridleway with tarmac, stone all weather surface, or calmed advisory route.
- Bridleway or other path with soft surface. May be unsuitable for cycling, especially on a road bike, in wet weather.
- Footpaths
- Cycle shop (see overleaf for contact details)
- Cycle parking
- Toucan crossing
- Residential
- Employment



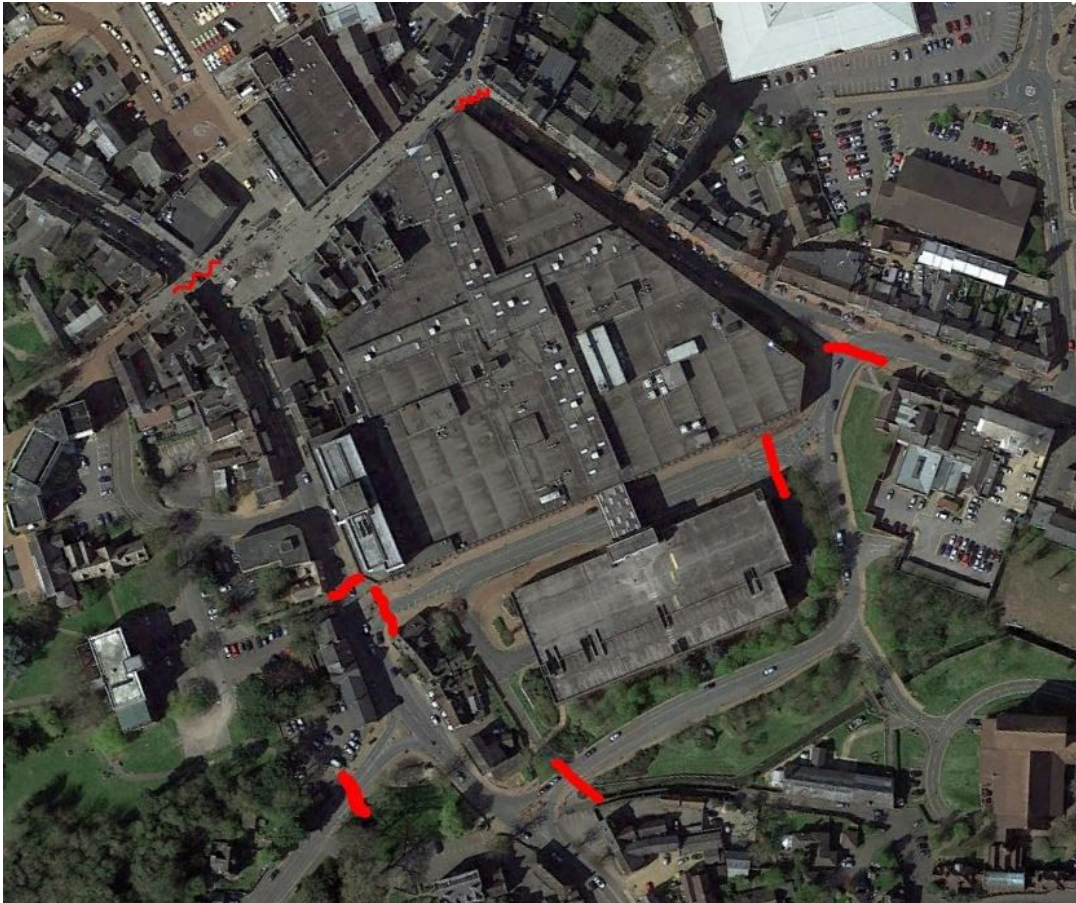
7) Wellingborough Cycle Hire Scheme - WellyBikes - Wellingborough Bicycles. This shall be a for hire scheme, similar to Boris bikes dotted over the borough. This will encourage cycling for short journeys such as from the train station to the town centre or from the edge of the town to the centre. Look at the benefits of the Boris bike scheme. It can generate money for the borough through hire.

8) The wide Midland Road to have a dedicated / segregated cycle lane on either side of the road. The pavements to be resurfaced to make them smooth and pleasant to make the short walk from the station to town. Improved / clear / bold signage at the station saying 'Wellingborough Town Centre'. Shuttle buses need to be free to get from the train station to the town and back and need to be regular.



- 9) Continuing the cycle network up past the Hind Hotel. Also create a contraflow cycle lane down Silver Street and Sheep Street. This will encourage people from north of the town to cycle to the town centre travelling the less than 1.5 miles from the outer reaches of town.
- 10) Cambridge Street to be made access only. No longer a through road. Market Street therefore becomes a bus gate, open to Hackney taxis, bicycles and emergency vehicles.
- 11) Pelican crossing or zebra crossing near Wellingborough Magistrates making the route friendly for pedestrians on this side of the road from the station to the town centre.
- 12) A pedestrian controlled traffic light next to other one at Commercial Way allowing pedestrians to walk from London Road / Castle Way / southerly direction up to Sheep Street / Silver Street into the town centre. Or vice versa. See Map below. At the moment if you happen to be on this side of the road, it is impossible to knowingly safely cross as a driver can be speeding around the blind corner. See video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4HLHkAYe1o>

This below map shows the points I suggest are made into pelican crossings or zig zags.



## **Analysis and criticism of town centre vision documents**

### ***Document A - Wellingborough\_Town\_Centre\_Vision\_Plans\_.pdf***

Very supportive of the overview principle of making Wellingborough Town Centre a more walkable and greener market town, for a huge number of reasons. It is seeking to make it a unique area with a special character that people choose to experience rather than a run of the mill shopping trip that many people are moving towards doing online or in higher variety densely commercial out of town shopping outlet.

The document places great emphasis on enhancing the public realm and green space but emphasising and creating strong connections between - Tithe Barn and Croyland Gardens - Market Square and Church Street, the church, and the Swansgate car park and theatre entrance. I am fully in agreement with this. I note a lack of suggestion of the curtaining of the private motor vehicle in order to achieve these aims but do recognise talk of studies to look at measures to 'reduce the impact of traffic'. This will be explored in Document B analysis and my suggestion above.



The map as presented does not have a key and therefore I can only guess, from discussion here and later peppered in the second document, that the dotted purple line means pedestrianisation or a bus-gate only or a limitation of some sort? This would make sense for achieving the aims of a greener more walkable market town.

A.) Church Street - Agree. Looks very similar to before though. I suggest limiting the speed limit to 20mph here. I see the bus stops have been suggested to be moved back. Please ensure these have a much large roof, sides and a front to protect from all weathers. Please make sure each stop has a digital display. Also I suggest a second zebra crossing making easy pedestrian access from both ends of the college.

B.) Church Street - disagree - this view has been taken because the artist impression looks like it has clad the old picture house/cinema. This is a historic asset and it should be enhanced not hidden. I agree with the green walkthrough though. But isn't this private land? Perhaps a zebra closer to the lens of this camera which took the photo and then one nearer the church. See last point.

C.) Footpath to Morrisons. Agree. This artist impression shows how a small bit of landscaping can make the link more appealing and more connected.

D.) Tithe Barn Entrance & Public Realm - Agree. This artist impression also shows how a slight bit of alteration can bring out the visibility of Tithe Barn without touching the trees. I agree with the block paving alteration. This connects the areas, and leads pedestrians from the town to the green of Croyland Gardens. And vice versa.

E.) Market Square - Agree. I do not know why the artistic impression is taken at a different angle to the photo. It glosses over the fact that what hides Market Square is the B&M building. If only this building could be demolished or partially demolished to open up the walkway to the market I agree that the space can be utilised for cafes, activities and relaxation. Perhaps a permanent roof large market like that found in Leicester. It will have a low roof ensuring views of the church are not blocked but will protect traders and shoppers from all weathers.

F.) Swansgate. Agree. But further enhancements are needed. At the position on the artistic impression where the bollards are, or perhaps 5 metres to the right, there should be a zebra crossing or pelican crossing. This will make it more attractive for pedestrians coming from the station. I agree with the metal fence removal. This is a sign of the hostility between motorist and pedestrians and it is fencing in the latter. To make it more appealing for cyclists, I believe a dedicated cycle lane should be installed from the train station to town and vice versa on both sides of the road. For motorists, cyclists and pedestrians approaching the town from this angle, I believe

that there should be some street art here saying 'Welcome to Wellingborough town centre' or art of some sort perhaps placed on top of the fitness centre.

G.) Theatre Walk. Agree. This important culture centre seems too disconnected and therefore enhancements, as shown in the artistic impression need to be made. See above suggestions.

H.) Multi-storey car park. Agree. More accessible car park for all - meaning it has some cycle provision, easier pedestrian access so people can walk in here from The Castle direction at street level and go to the shops and vice versa.

### ***Document B - Wellingborough Town Centre High Level Review.pdf***

This document, produced by Pick Everard is entitled 'Wellingborough Town Centre High Level Review' commissioned by the Borough Council of Wellingborough.

In hand with document A, document B highlights some observations and makes suggestions. These have been divided into quick wins, medium-term wins, and longer-term objectives. They state the situation that the council have a capital fund that they need to either spend or commit to be spent before responsibility of the town is handed over to the unitary. I agree with the commitment needed as soon as possible and the division into these three categories makes projects more achievable.

### **Highways**

On the 'Mental Map' lines have been drawn and the black lines and colouring are blights that need sorting. I widely agree. It is stated that 'cars create a barrier and unpleasant environment'. It states from first impression they feel there is a 'fine-grained, small-scale town centre' but this is 'swallowed up' by large structures and **highways**. It states that pedestrians and motorists have 'settled into' a way of using and moving through these environments and this 'isn't maximising vitality or facilitating its improvements'. A curtaining of traffic is needed here (explored further above). On Page 6, it notes that they got an impression that the user is in 'car space' not 'people space'; noise, fumes, hazards, inadequate pedestrian space in some areas, no opportunity or incentive to dwell'.

It notes about the 'language' of the environment with a focus on the 'highway' utilisation of space for cars, "speed of vehicles', signals and traffic signs". This talks about the great negatives of traffic so the logical conclusion is that it needs to be removed as a cut through however it says that it is at the moment 'just a

disadvantage' and hopes that it could 'be utilised to 'advantage' suggesting that the corridor could become a 'shop window' for the town centre. I fundamentally disagree. Drivers of vehicles will not be driving through at 5mph and have a browse at what's on offer. The document states to reduce dominance of traffic and improve the pedestrian experience, to 'Reinforce the message to motorists that they are arriving at/driving through the town centre and therefore the priority is for pedestrians and their behaviour must be appropriate'. However the drivers will be driving through at antisocial speeds reaching the speed limit to quickly cut through the town centre to get to their destination.

On page 20, it states current traffic management system around Commercial Way / Castle Way is stated as 'counter-intuitive' and suggests that it is confusing for motorists and may lead someone into making a wrong turn and accidentally heading up Sheep Street / Silver Street. I disagree with this suggestion. Most drivers can follow signs or their Sat Nav. The people driving up Sheep Street are cutting through the town in the most part and know they are doing this but do not realise it is harmful. The vast majority of which are coming from London Road direction. The document suggests that slight tinkering with Sheep Street / Silver Street might declassify this from an 'A' road in 'critical locations' making 'modest interventions'. No. Fundamental interventions such as pedestrianisation are needed to reach the aims suggested.

From the consultation document:



There is suggestion of the assets of the town that exist in pockets that need to be enhanced and I agree. There are many historic building and wonderful architecture that needs to be preserved, enhanced and displayed.

### **Access from the train station**

It states about the railway station is an asset but there is a feeling it is disconnected. I agree. A safe, segregated cycle route and clear and easy bus shuttle need to be made from the train station to the town and back. It should be free or incredibly cheap. This should go further. As mentioned in the document Stanton Cross is currently being delivered and in order to avoid missing the opportunity to capture new residents for our town centre usage action needs to be taken. As mentioned above, near the Magistrates' Court, barriers need removing on the entry to the town centre, I suggest a zebra or pelican crossing need installing too.

### **Unique Selling Point and connection**

The document suggests that there is currently no USP, or Unique Selling Points or the town. This is true. Through creating a pleasant environment, the town can become a walking and cycling and overall a green town. It is a place that shall be good to live, work, study or shop or be leisurely in. Perhaps with a Dutch town feel where the car is the guest and people explore, shop, linger and enjoy the leisure of the town.

It notes about 'active frontages' and key highways obvious only to road users but suggestions that green spaces are currently hidden and less obvious, the brook is hidden and I suggests that focus needs to shift away from the user of the car and to pedestrians who shop and use the town.

The document goes in to highlight the fragmentation of areas of the town and suggest that there is no uniformity in character. It states the poor quality public realm and furniture makes it appear 'unloved'. I somewhat agree. There does need to be further investment on street signs, benches, hanging baskets, waste bins and the like as well as enhancements to walking and cycling to make the town more cohesive. Making Wellingborough town centre a green and pleasant environment can be its USP.

The document continues by focussing on 'bridging the gaps' and protecting the church. I agree. It needs to be made easier, more pleasant and more attractive and more connected to walk from area to area. In terms of the pedestrian route between the college, Orient way and Market Street, the zebra crossing needs to be moved nearer to Lazer Maze, and a wide pavement of access needs to be constructed here. Road space needs to be taken away. Here is the narrow pathway down here:



There is mention in one of the documents about taking down the church fence to open it up. I disagree. The fence and the trees are an asset and should remain. A disabled space near the entrance should be removed from here and located nearer the shops and the church gate made more appealing and open.

### **Cultural zone**

In terms of the Theatre Zone, on Pg 16, it states that this is a segregated and isolated zone disconnected from the town centre by the highway route. It states pedestrian connections are weak. This can be resolved by a fundamental highways alteration as explored above in my suggestions. It involves Castle Way being pedestrianised or created as a bus gate only, Commercial Way being a two way street, and a pelican crossing installed to facilitate movement down to this cultural hub. I agree about extending the opening hours of the multi-storey car park.

### **Other notes**

There is further analysis of area by area and many have been explored above. One to note is Market Square. This has incredible potential. This needs to become a hub of activity by encouraging pedestrians up here, having a great market, potentially a low roof permanent market like that found in Leicester. Perhaps in the short term, Market Square taxi turnout at the bottom of Orient Way can be pedestrianised, the market stalls can come up here and snake around. The taxi turnaround does not need to come down.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Samuel Shoesmith  
Resident of Wellingborough

### **References**

- (1) 'Mini-Holland' schemes have proved their worth in outer London boroughs
- (2) 'Economic benefits of walking and cycling' published by Transport for London.  
<https://tfl.gov.uk/corporate/publications-and-reports/economic-benefits-of-walking-and-cycling>