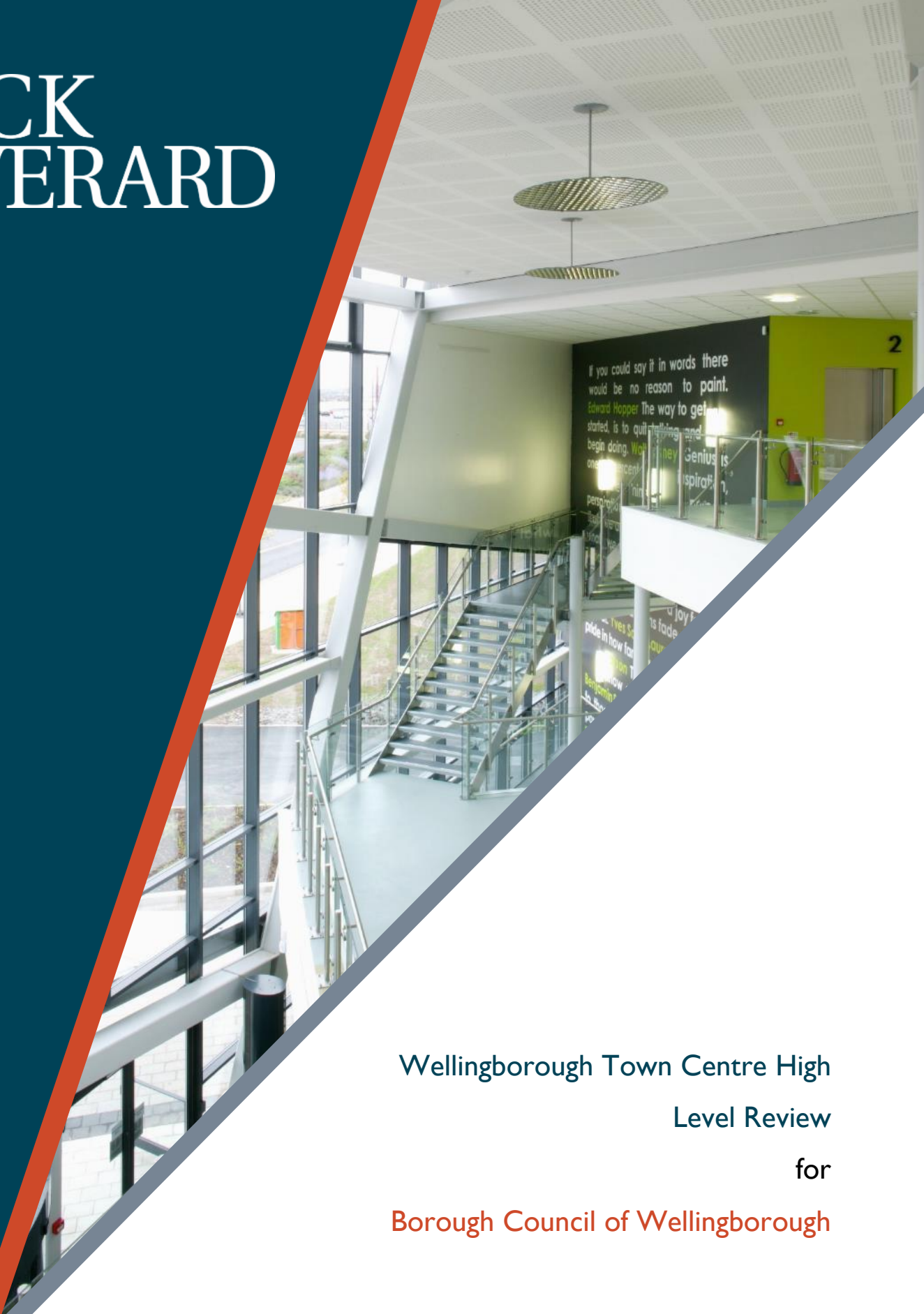


PICK EVERARD



Wellingborough Town Centre High
Level Review
for
Borough Council of Wellingborough

Issue Number 02
11 September 2018

Document History

Issue	Date	Comment	Author	Chk'd
2	11.09.2018		DHR	



Contents

1.0 Introduction..... 1

2.0 Our Observations2

3.0 Opportunities for Change..... 17

4.0 Next Steps29

5.0 Conclusion34



1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to assist the Council in its delivery of several key objectives:

- The improvement of the quality, success and economic performance of Wellingborough town centre
- Better utilisation of the town's existing assets and destinations
- Improved utilisation of the Council's own assets, either for more efficient use by the Council or disposal for use by others
- Increased value of Council assets, for the benefit of the assets themselves, the Council and the wider town centre improvement
- The creation of a medium-term to longer-term 'plan', to hand over to the Unitary Authority

The Council has capital to invest in the town centre, through disposals, and there is a two-year window in which to plan and commit (though not necessarily spend) this capital. A strategy is therefore required, which identifies and prioritises projects and interventions. In order to deliver some change within the two-year window, 'Quick Wins' and short term projects will be required, but it is considered very important that these are delivered within the context of a longer term delivery strategy.

The Council therefore requires a Vision Plan and physical framework, which identifies the strategic town centre opportunities, and within which potential initiatives and projects can be identified, assessed and agreed.

Our study, therefore was intended to create a Strategic Physical Framework, Vision Plan and potential Projects Programme. The study has been a high level and strategic exercise, which could be generated quickly and efficiently, as a collaborative process with Council officers. It was not intended to repeat or duplicate previous work or studies, or to create a detailed 'masterplan'. The intention was to bring a 'fresh pair of eyes' to how the town centre is currently performing, and help to identify how it could change, with relatively modest, affordable and deliverable interventions and projects. These changes will themselves improve the town centre, but, importantly, they would be likely to improve the investment context, for further, longer-term investment and delivery by private sector investors, occupiers and users.

The 'Vision Plan' is not intended to be a static, stand-alone, two-dimensional masterplan. It is a visual representation of the Strategic Physical Framework and suggested Projects Programme. The Vision Plan should be considered alongside the rest of the Study, and they should collectively become an evolving, dynamic working tool, which:

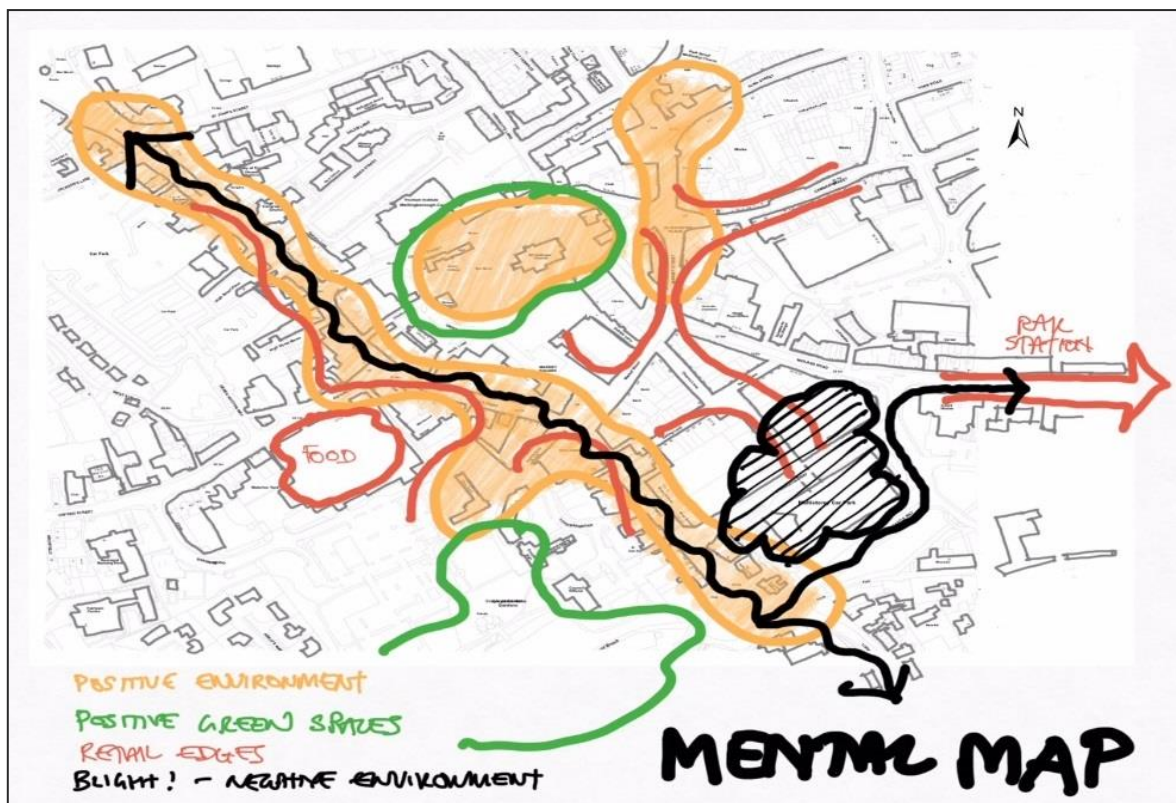
- Visually identifies and illustrates current physical weaknesses
- Visually identifies and illustrates potential opportunities and options for resolving problems and creating/capturing physical opportunities to improve the town centre
- Aids the consideration of options for change, over time, and their likely positive and negative impacts/opportunities for spun-off etc.
- Becomes and aid to informed decision-making
- Evolves over time, to take account of changes, growing information and unforeseen circumstances

The Projects Programme is based on our observations during the study, and identifies our suggestions for:

- Quick Wins
- Medium-term projects
- Longer-term objectives and projects

2.0 Our Observations

Mental Map



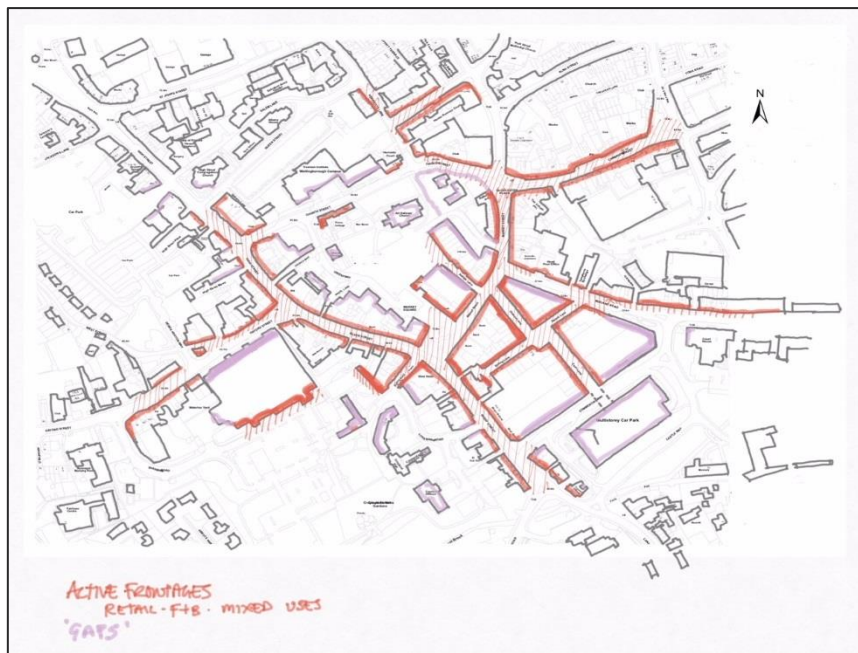
- We find it useful to record our very first impressions of a town centre before we start to analyse it – Our first impressions probably reflect those of other people
- Key elements:
 - Some positive, largely historic fabric exists, but in separate pockets
 - Cars create a barrier and unpleasant environment
 - The retail core feels very small
 - Areas of green exist, but these are separate and disconnected
 - The railway station is disconnected
 - The multi storey car park is an area of blight
- Unique Selling Points (USP):
 - These are unclear; what defines Wellingborough and makes it special? What makes it stand out against its competitors as a place worth visiting or a good place to live, work, study or invest?

Scale



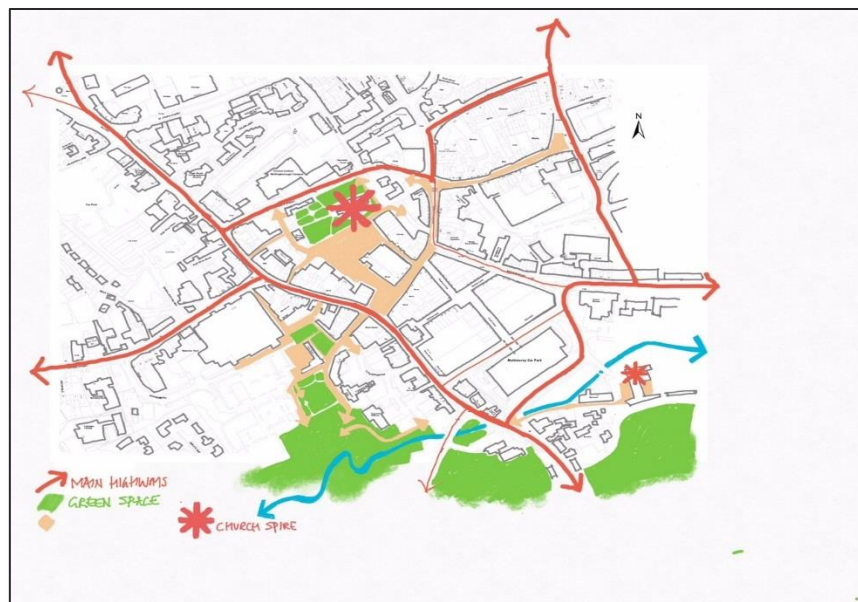
- First impressions are of a fine-grained, small-scale town centre, 'swallowed up' by large scale structures and highways
- These two characters fight against each other
- There are mixed messages for the user/visitor

Active Frontages



- First impression of the activity dynamics
- Many of the key mixed-use frontages are along highway routes
- Gaps exist – some in key locations

Key Structural Elements

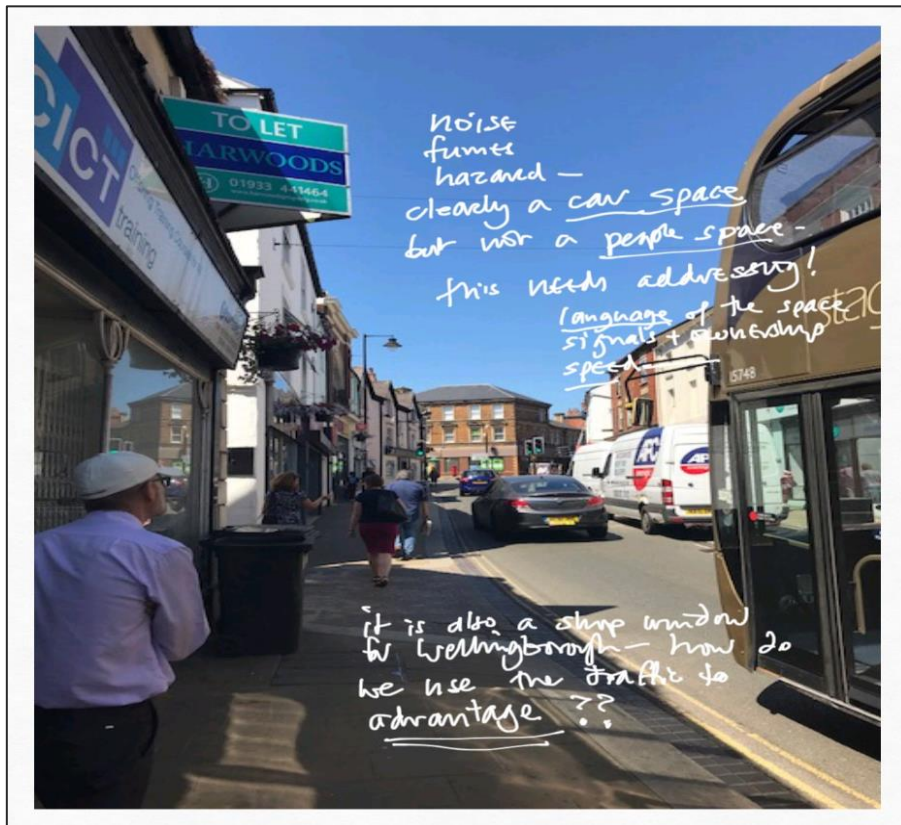


- Key highways are obvious to the user
- Green space is partly obvious, but generally hidden/less obvious
- The brook is largely hidden
- The church spire can be seen from several points, and helps the user locate themselves

General Observations:

- Although the two centre is small it's not easy to understand its layout or relationship between areas and assets. It is necessary to walk around it to piece it together
- There is no clear USP, brand or identity, which ties together the strongest elements: market, historic townscape, park/green space
- There is little evidence of significant private sector/commercial investment having taken place over the recent past. This is no doubt due to complex economic and social factors, but given its accessibility to London and its range of services and facilities, it feels like the town centre should be a more attractive proposition for investment. Stanton Cross housing and infrastructure is currently being delivered, which will provide population, jobs and community facilities. This will provide opportunities, but it will be essential to ensure that as many of these people as possible choose to visit the town centre, as often as possible, rather than 'leak out' to other centres. The town centre needs to be ready to capture this potential – see under Potential Projects & Interventions
- Pedestrians and motorists have 'settled into' a way of using and moving through the environments, which isn't maximising vitality or facilitating its improvement
- There is little incentive to explore beyond the familiar (for residents) or the obvious (for visitors)
- The railway station is an asset, but feels disconnected from the town centre
- Interventions are required – these largely need to be modest/deliverable but with significant/high impacts

The High Street/Silver Street/Sheep Street 'Corridor'



- The impression to the user is one of 'car space' not 'people space'; noise, fumes, hazards, inadequate pedestrian space in some areas, no opportunity or incentive to dwell
- The 'language' of the environment reinforces 'highway'; 'ownership' of space, speed of vehicles, signals, traffic signs
- Traffic is currently just a disadvantage. How could the traffic be utilised to *advantage*? – the corridor could be a 'shop window' for the town centre, encouraging people to spend time there

A Further Layer of the Mental Map – ‘Use Zones’



- The 'highways barrier' is an issue, but it's not the whole story:
 - All elements of the town centre exist quite separately; key destinations are disconnected from each other
 - The town centre is polarized into quite distinct 'Use Zones', which operate quite independently. There is little opportunity or incentive for these to work together, for mutual benefit or to encourage 'linked trips' or longer stays

Spaces and Hierarchies



- There is a relatively high proportion of space compared to built form
- Few of the spaces are exploited for the benefit of a coherent town centre
- Many of the areas have simply evolved and then become reinforced
- Many of the spaces have negative issues:
 - Introspective
 - Polarised, cellular
 - Unclear identity; public, private
 - Unclear access points/thresholds/sense of arrival
 - Undefined character/identity
 - Poor enclosure
 - Lack of active frontages/natural surveillance/footfall
 - Potential for anti-social behaviour/community safety issues
 - Poor utilisation (uses)
- Many of the spaces reinforce the confusion over scale and character of the town centre

Examples of Spaces:

Main Park Entrance



- Confused messages; where are we? – park, town centre, private office areas and car parks?
- Lack of identity/defining character/sense of place
- Unclear routes or connections
- Ambiguous edges, fronts/back
- Lack of distinction/clarity about public and private space
- No invitation or incentive to explore
- Hidden brook
- Poor quality public realm and furniture – appears ‘unloved’

Car Park, Rear of Tithe Barn



- A critical location in the urban fabric
- A dead space (at the time of visit)
- Lack of identity/defining character/sense of place
- Unclear routes or connections
- Barriers to movement and fronts/back issue
- Lack of natural surveillance/observation

Front of Tithe Barn



- An introspective space, but well known and well used, but mainly as a 'corridor' for pedestrians moving between Morrisons and the Market Place and Silver Street/Sheep Street
- Under-exploited as a 'place', a threshold to other places or a context to invite/support investment/uses in the surrounding properties

Silver Street Link



- A key link connecting town centre destinations and a critical link in the urban fabric
- 'Branded' as the entrance to Morrisons – there is no hint about other places
- Un-used space
- Lack of character/sense of place
- Blank facades
- Unclear routes/connections (one feels like it might be the entrance to public conveniences)

A Few Other Issues & Observations: 'Arrival' from the East and the Railway Station



- The scale of the highways and the Swansgate Shopping Centre, together with the 'language' of street furniture suggest 'edge of town', not 'gateway' or arrival into the town centre
- There are several 'barriers' to movement
- Only the regular motorist knows where to go to access the town centre and car parks – and this familiarity encourages speed at a critical crossing point for pedestrians
- Visitors are unclear about where they are in relation to the town centre, or where to go to access it, and the form of the highway doesn't allow thinking time
- There are no crossing facilities for pedestrians – they have to make their decision further back about where to go – this is a key route between railway station and future housing expansion
- The blank façade to the shopping centre creates poor urban fabric and limits the vitality of the street
- The planted beds between the street and the blank shopping centre façade limit visibility and present community safety issues

The Influence of the Church



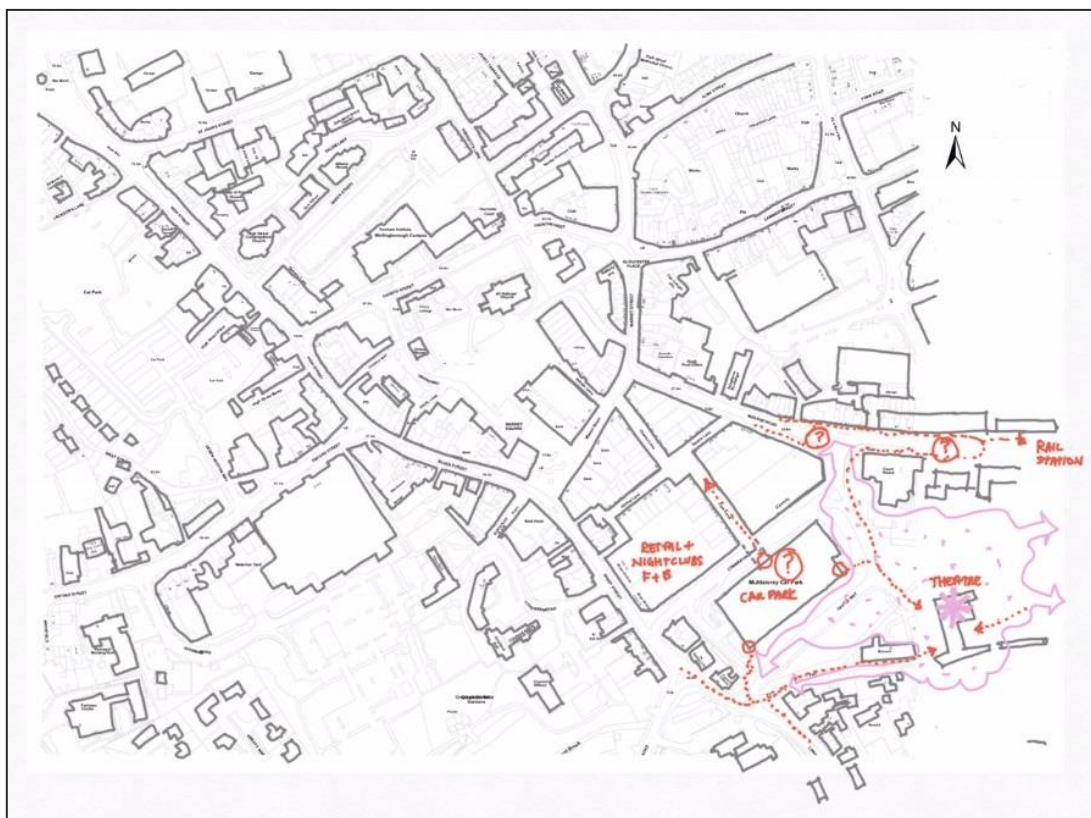
- The church spire can be seen from several points in the town centre. This helps people locate themselves, but it still isn't easy for the visitor to find their way there, as many routes are unclear or blocked by buildings
- The 'zone of influence' is therefore small
- Nearby spaces should form part of the 'thresholds' to the church, providing clarity, reinforcing character and sense of place and helping to improve access
- Wider areas should be able to 'borrow from this quality'

Areas Around the Tithe Barn & Park



- The positive influence is currently very small, over short distances. Perceptions and legibility quickly break down
- Connections, interfaces and thresholds are weak and confusing
- Spaces merge into each other and characters/identities are blurred
- There is little to lead people on, or to encourage them to explore between areas
- The hierarchy of routes is unclear
- The link down the side of Morrisons, between Oxford Street and the Tithe Barn is enclosed and has no natural surveillance. This appears unsafe and unnecessary

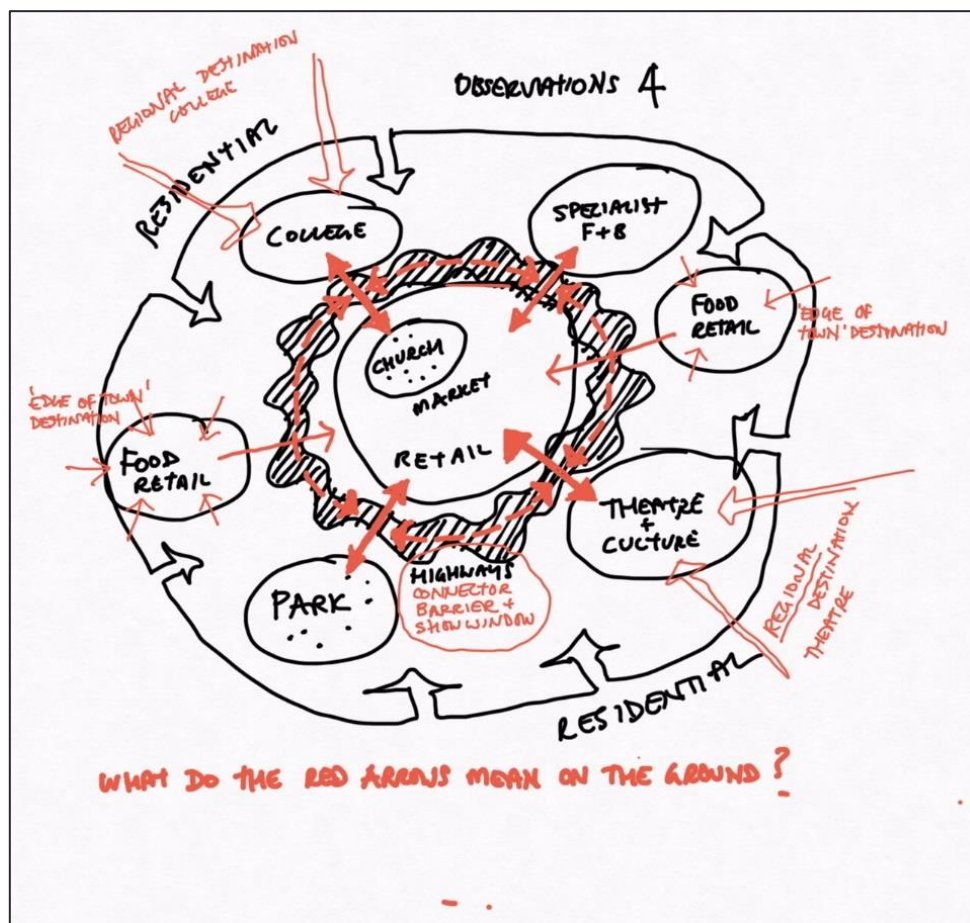
The Theatre Zone



- One of the isolated 'Use Zones', disconnected from the town centre and other assets/destinations
- Highway routes create barriers
- Blank building facades and large scale buildings prevent 'safe streets' and limit activity, vibrancy and pedestrian footfall
- Its positive influence does not meet or overlap with anything else
- Facilities, uses and attractions within the Zone itself operate quite independently; they add little value to each other
- Pedestrian connections, thresholds and 'arrival experiences' are weak and lack clarity
- The multi-storey public car park is under-utilised and under-exploited as an asset, particularly to serve this area. It is understood that this car park closes at 18.30, which means it is not available for evening workers/uses, including the theatre. This is likely to be increasing the use of alternative car parks, perhaps resulting in increased traffic along Sheep Street, Silver Street, High Street, from the south. The car park and surrounding environment create a poor experience for pedestrians. They are not user-friendly, create poor perceptions of the area and Wellingborough town centre and do not provide clear information for access to facilities
- Much of the external space is taken up with 'highway-scale' access roads and surface car parking, which result in a poor setting for the theatre and other facilities and little sense of place
- There is little opportunity or incentive for linked trips, within the zone or beyond the zone. The theatre is a regional attraction, but visitors are discouraged from exploring other areas of the town centre

3.0 Opportunities for Change

Bridging the Gaps



- Where are the opportunities, on the ground, to create/reinforce pedestrian links and views between areas, and ensure that it is easy, attractive and inviting to walk, wander and explore between all areas of the town centre, even where the topography is less conducive?
- Different user groups, at different times of the day will require different 'circuits' and choices, to take account of
 - Levels
 - Highways
 - Night time use
 - Commercial need for concentrated pedestrian flows
 - Leisure/time limited
 - Ability/disability
 - Community safety and anti-social behaviour
- Convenient and attractive pedestrian routes between existing/proposed housing areas and the town centre will encourage more people to use the town centre, more of the time, and reduce their need/desire to travel to competing centres

Exploiting and Protecting the Church as a Jewel



- The church, churchyard and historic environment are a key asset, within the heart of the town centre, and visible from several locations within it
- The quality and 'place' are currently under-exploited
- The adjacent car park is a crucial site for sensitive new development which reinforces the 'place', the church and its setting and important pedestrian routes
- A careful design for the building and site will be required, which protects a very important view of the church spire from close-quarters
- New development must create a successful pedestrian route between the College, Orient Way and Market Square, with active frontages and natural surveillance over this route and Church Street

Barriers Between the Churchyard and Market Square



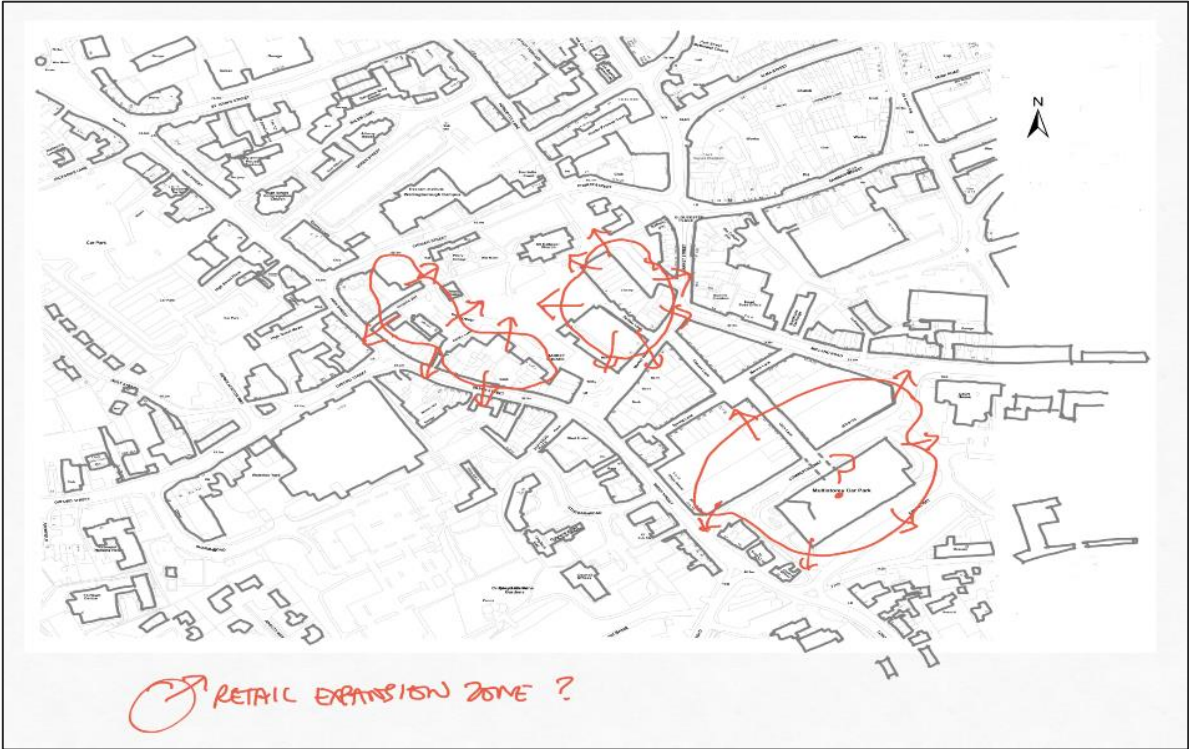
- The trees, wall and railings are visual and physical barriers between these key areas – they say 'keep out'
- There is very little opportunity for linked events or use of space – the two spaces are separate entities and cannot 'borrow from' or contribute to each other
- The barriers and lack of visibility/observation lead to anti-social behaviour in the churchyard, especially in hours of darkness
- Both spaces are significantly under-used and under-exploited – they could be the town's greatest asset

Improving Integration of the Multi-Storey Car Park and Theatre Zone



- The current traffic management system is counter-intuitive. It was designed to do something different to what it is currently required to do. It is confusing for motorists and doesn't allow enough time for them to understand where to go or to make good decisions or choices. This leads to motorists missing the entrance to this car park and then having to continue along Sheep Street/Silver Street/High Street. This results in unnecessary through traffic along this important pedestrian/activity corridor
- Options and opportunities for improving this situation, through modest interventions, need to be explored, perhaps including the 'down-grading' of the 'A' road in critical locations, to improve pedestrian connectivity, environments and experience
- The existing car park could be significantly enhanced, for motorists and pedestrians, with greater clarity to routes, improved facilities (including crossing facilities and signage) and enhanced links between pedestrian routes and wider facilities. Longer opening hours would encourage greater use and improve it as a facility to support other venues and facilities, especially the theatre. More people choosing to use this car park could result in less through traffic along Sheep Street, Silver Street and High Street
- Greater integration could allow the multi-story car park to become the car park of choice for the theatre and other cultural uses in this area. This could potentially free-up land currently used as surface parking, for alternative development, possibly residential. This could achieve benefits for local authority assets, the cultural facilities and evening economy and for the town centre

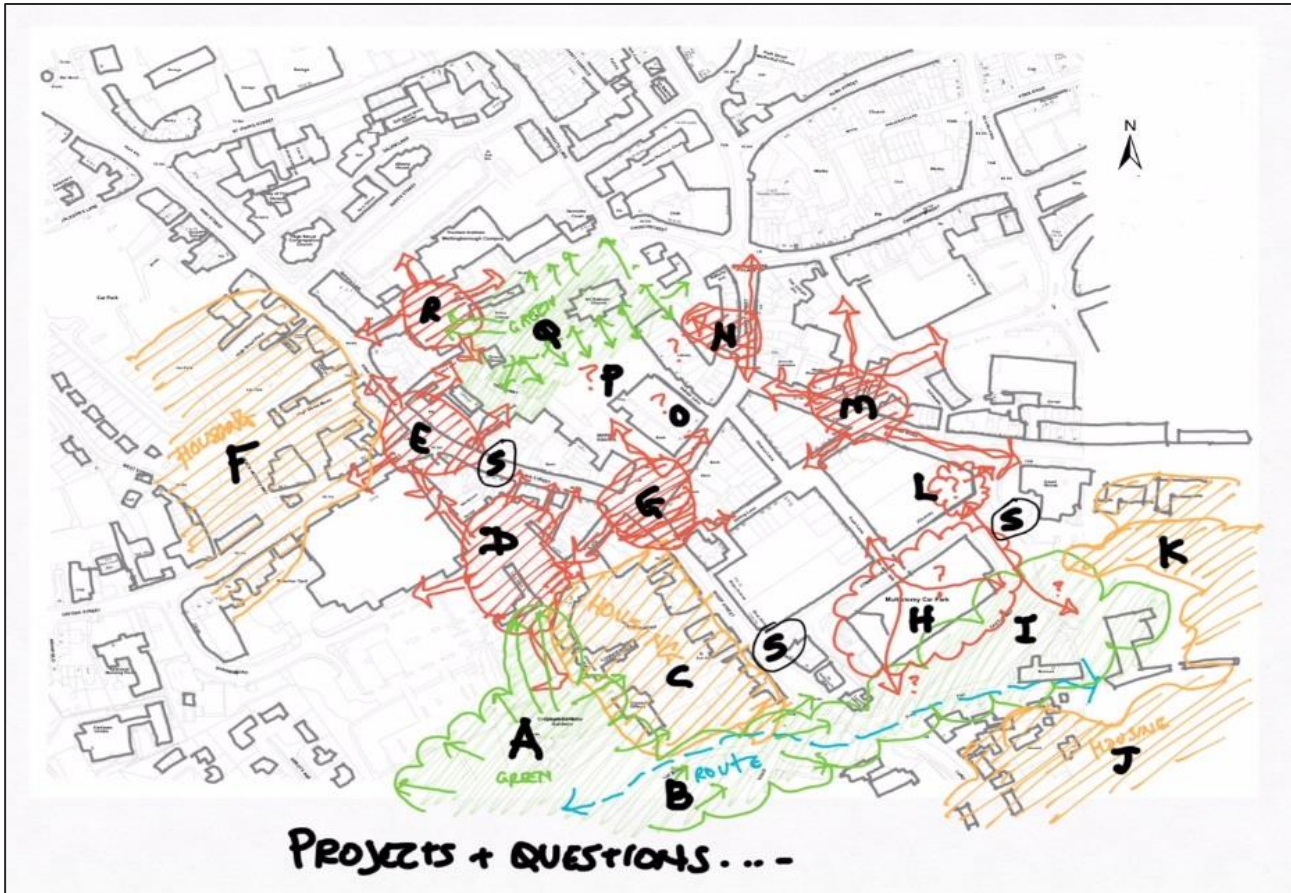
Potential Retail Expansion Opportunities



- There are no easy options; all will require creative intervention and support if they are to be realised. All small and creative opportunities for incremental change must therefore be explored, to ‘drive’ change forward and prevent opportunities being lost
- The obvious location for improvement and potential expansion, as is well known, is the urban block around the church, Market Place, Market Street and High Street. However, this is complex and will require a pragmatic and creative approach, which achieves appropriate urban form and a commercially viable offer for investors and occupiers
- Interventions by the Council may be required, to help create an investment and delivery context for investors and developers
- The ‘plan’ should be future-proofed, to allow unforeseen opportunities to be realised
- A long-term opportunity may exist in the vicinity of the existing Swansgate shopping centre and the multi-storey car park, as this would create a natural extension and link between the core shopping area, the park and the theatre/cultural area, with high visibility and accessibility
- Any new development will need to contribute towards active streets and spaces and help create links between uses and areas

Potential Physical Interventions

- Our high-level search has been for opportunities which:
 - Reinforce Wellingborough's USP
 - This could possibly be a 'Green Market Town', as this would build on the town's key assets of market, historic townscape and parkland/green space
 - Generally require low levels of intervention for significant benefit
 - Are pragmatic and deliverable
 - Would be likely to act as catalysts for further, private sector investment and delivery
- Some of the projects could/should be grouped together for maximum benefit



Details of Potential Interventions:

A

- Connecting parkland into core town centre
 - Physically
 - Visually
 - Emotionally
 - Harness fully as key contributor to quality 'offer' and identity
- Raising awareness of parkland as major town centre asset
- Encouraging linked trips and longer stays
- Creating opportunity for events/activity space, accessible from core town centre

B

- Revealing watercourse
 - Reinforce leisure route/connectivity – connect park to Theatre/Cultural Attractions
 - Recreate positive contribution to town 'offer'

C

- Quality housing offer – Tithe Barn Road
 - Exploiting high quality parkland environment
 - Connecting parkland/historic environment/town centre (key assets) through safe streets
 - Consolidating pedestrian links, to increase connectivity and legibility, maximise commercial potential and strengthen footfalls
 - Utilising underused land and buildings
 - Integrating existing isolated housing to create mini resi community
 - Considering the re-use of existing building for residential (including upper floors of shops) and encouraging mixed uses
 - Increasing resi population in heart of town centre, for economic and social benefit
 - Encouraging walking to town centre facilities/amenities, through high quality, attractive and convenient routes

D

- Exploiting heritage
 - 'Announcing' and fully integrating heritage/parkland offer into town centre
 - Rationalising/concentrating footfall
 - Increasing pedestrian legibility
 - Fully utilising external space and environments
 - Creating context for leisure/visitor offer
 - Increasing appeal to operators/investors

E

- Create 'connecting space'
 - Better utilising routes and links to improve pedestrian connectivity between areas
 - Extending influence of Church and Churchyard

F

- New Housing scheme
 - Maximising positive impact and connectivity, for benefit of town centre
 - Increasing resi population in heart of town centre, for economic and social benefit
 - Encouraging walking to town centre facilities/amenities, through high quality, attractive and convenient routes

G

- A stronger town centre 'heart'
 - Enhancing identity and success as key town centre 'go-to' space
 - Improving key pedestrian desire lines, views – increasing visibility and focus of route
 - Maximising potential as flexible, useable space (markets and events) and 'dwell' space (rather than a 'corridor' to other weaker and hidden spaces)
 - Successfully linking to wider areas

H

- Multi-storey car park
 - Exploiting as significant town centre asset
 - Breaking down barriers
 - Improving integration and pedestrian connectivity
 - Facilitating/promoting as primary car park for theatre, cultural facilities, Park, Council offices etc., and for drivers arrive from the south and east of the town (to reduce travel along Sheep Street, Silver Street and High Street)
 - Re-ordering traffic flow/entrance exit, to reduce barrier effect
 - Undertaking public realm improvements to better integrate car park and environment into theatre/cultural offer and parkland
 - Protecting the potential for long term retail/commercial expansion

I

- Integrating the theatre and culture offer
 - Creating a parkland setting for the theatre and cultural offer, through the improvement/extension of the existing parkland and improved watercourse route
 - Linking theatre and other cultural facilities to quality heritage, parkland, adjacent residential, town centre, Midland Road commercial area, through high quality, attractive pedestrian routes, to encourage linked trips and expand town centre 'offer'
 - Removal of existing surface car parking (to create opportunity for enhanced context and residential development) and creation of links to multi-storey car park

J

- Enhancing residential
 - Seeking opportunities to protect and enhance the residential content and offer, assisted by other initiatives and improvements: better connectivity, river walk, extension of parkland influence, enhanced market and spaces
 - Encouraging residential in existing building stock (especially high quality), where possible
 - Increasing resi population in heart of town centre, for economic and social benefit
 - Encouraging walking to town centre facilities/amenities, through high quality, attractive and convenient routes

K

- Enhancing residential
 - Seeking opportunities to protect and enhance the residential offer and content, especially on under-utilised land
 - Up-grading of multi-storey car park may release housing land. Up-grade may be funded through new housing delivery
 - Current car park and site layout/use is poor utilisation of space and watercourse and barrier to resi area
 - Increasing resi population in heart of town centre, for economic and social benefit
 - Encouraging walking to town centre facilities/amenities, through high quality, attractive and convenient routes
 - Utilising new development to help create an enhanced setting and integration for the Theatre and other cultural facilities

L

- Town centre arrival experience
 - Enhancing arrival experience for pedestrians/cyclists approaching from the East (major urban expansion and railway station) –
 - existing form is a major physical, visual and emotional barrier
 - sudden change of scale and blank wall is misleading and daunting – ‘keep out’
 - nature of road suggests ‘edge of town’ not town centre
 - gives wrong messages about what Wellingborough is
 - Improving legibility and connections with town centre and facilities – giving clarity to options
 - Helping to link together Midland Road commercial area/town centre/multi-storey car park/shopping mall/theatre and cultural facilities/parkland

M

- Strengthening Midland Road connections
 - Improving Midland Road as a trading environment – enhanced profile and footfall
 - Strengthening the connections between Midland Road and adjacent facilities: shopping mall/town centre/retail stores/Cambridge Street
 - Strengthening the commercial environment of Midland Road – increasing visibility of shopping mall entrance and increasing profile of location (supported by development opportunity in this location)
 - Strengthening the potential for additional development to the frontage and rear of Midland Road
 - But... A link here would weaken existing key routes

N

- Strengthening upper Market Street
 - Raising awareness of upper Market Street and Cambridge Street as part of core town centre
 - Enhancing the profile and attractiveness of Church Street as part of the town centre ‘circuit’
 - Potentially closing the access between Market Street and the ‘service yard’ to the rear of the library, which currently present community safety issues and reduces the concentration of footfall along key routes (Church Street, Market Street)

O

- Market Street/Market Square/Pebble Lane building
 - Arguably the most important development opportunity in the town centre
 - Maximising the economic potential of key site/building – short and longer term
 - Maximising the physical contribution the site/building makes to Market Street and Market Square, and the opportunity to significantly enhance connectivity/footfall between significant assets and the useability of key public spaces
 - Seeking opportunities to create essential active frontages, even in short term
 - Reinforcing the Market Street/market Square space as the heart of the town centre

P

- Market Square (rear)
 - Exploiting the potential of the space for activities and events – flexible
 - Exploring possibility of more green space
 - Increasing appeal to college students, market/retail visitors, office workers
 - Maximising the opportunity to create/reinforce the Wellingborough **identity/USP**
 - Exploiting and enhancing the physical and visual links/continuity between the space and the church/churchyard, for mutual benefit
 - ‘Borrowing’ the quality of the church/churchyard and pulling it into the space
 - Resolving the issues with rears of properties, as far as possible, through creative development, planting, public realm
 - Maximising perimeter buildings fronting onto space (active facades)
 - Exploiting ‘college route’ and enhancing other critical pedestrian routes and views with wider areas and assets, especially Market Street, Church Street and Silver Street

Q

- Churchyard
 - Exploiting the asset for wider town benefit and ‘offer’
 - Removing the barriers between churchyard and Market Square, for mutual uplift and to help address issues of anti-social behaviour in churchyard
 - Enhancing links between Church Street/college and market Square/market Street, to encourage college footfall into town centre
 - ‘Borrowing’ from green churchyard environment for the benefit of wider areas
 - Utilising churchyard as additional town centre events/activities space

R

- Development site, Church Street
 - Protecting, and maximising the potential of this key site
 - Protecting and exploiting key view of church
 - Creating successful links and connectivity between the college, High Street, Church Street (and bus hub), churchyard and Market Square
 - Helping to reinforce Church Street as part of town centre circuit

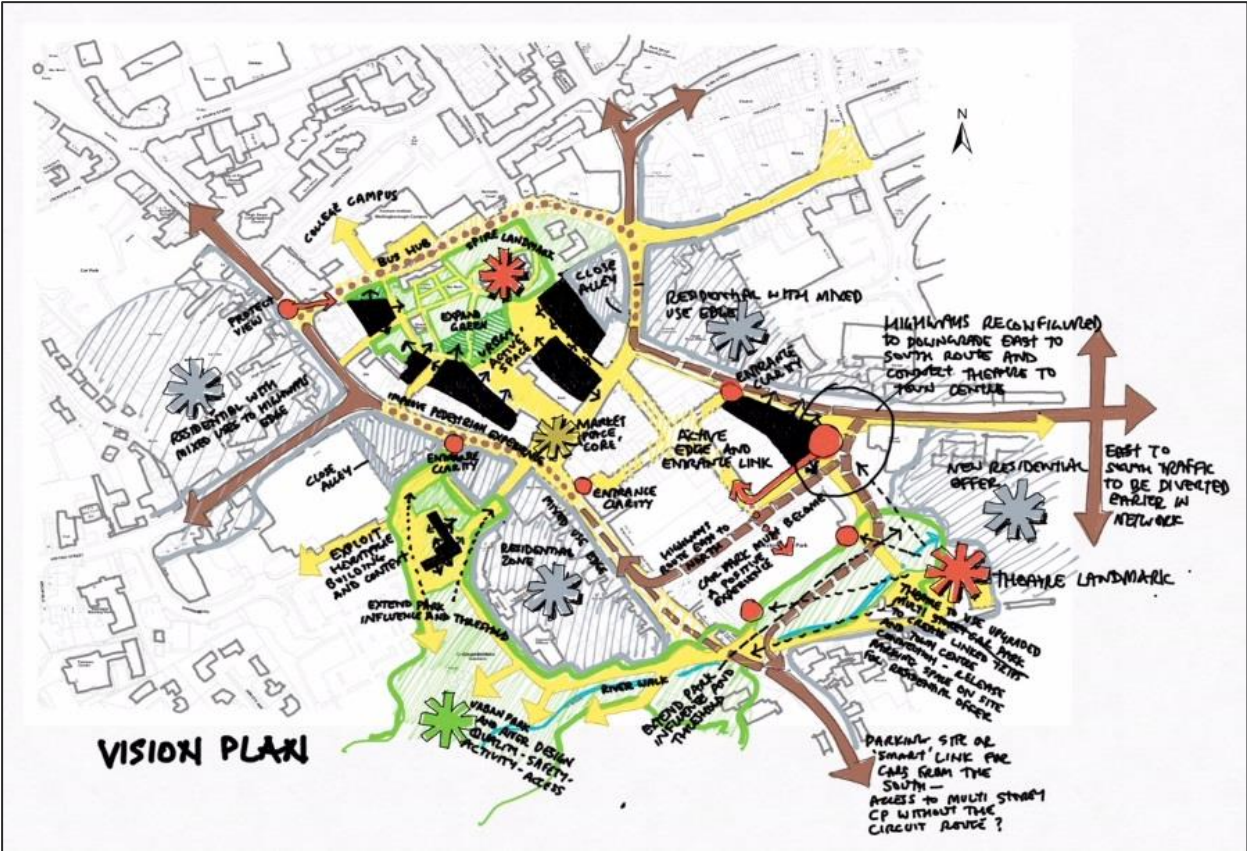
S

- Highway impact
 - Reducing the negative impact of the main highways in key locations
 - Minimising through-traffic, especially along Silver Street/Sheep Street, through car park locations, traffic management, signage etc
 - Reducing the dominance of traffic in key pedestrian environments, especially where the highway corridor is also a retail/commercial corridor
 - Turing the road into an asset – a ‘shop window’
 - A pedestrian space through which cars pass
 - Revealing, celebrating assets
 - Providing clarity to motorists
 - Where the town/pedestrian priority starts – influencing motorist behaviour
 - Where to park (for benefit of town and motorist)
 - Where to go
 - Reduce confusion, frustration, impatience
 - Improving pedestrian facilities in key locations and at key crossing points
 - Potentially re-routing traffic in the vicinity of the multi-storey car park, to downgrade the ‘A’ road and reduce severance between the town centre and the theatre/culture/parkland environments

T

- Retail/commercial expansion/improvement zones
 - Ensuring all opportunities within the heart of the town centre are fully exploited, to strengthen core offer and to enhance key spaces, routes and pedestrian connectivity

A Vision Plan – A ‘What-if’ Plan



- This is not *the* Vision. It is a framework; one illustration of what a connected town centre could possibly be like, helping to create a stronger USP: perhaps ‘Green Market Town’
- Having a visual image ‘A Vision’ and a Delivery Plan of interventions and projects can help:
 - ‘Optioneering’ and decision-making
 - Create and promote opportunities
 - Prevent inappropriate development on critical sites
 - Focus and prioritise projects and resources
 - Improve perceptions and create investor confidence
 - Improve the physical and investment context, to facilitate, unlock and pump-prime private sector investment and delivery
 - Brand, market and promote Wellingborough, as an attractive place to live, work, study and invest
- All projects, opportunities and interventions require further study and exploration, which could lead to different approaches
- The ‘plan’ will need to remain fluid and responsive, so it can adapt and change over time, to respond to on-going change and to capture new, unforeseen opportunities.
- The ‘plan’, and the consideration/assessment of options should be driven by over-arching objectives for the improvement of the town centre

4.0 Next Steps

It is unlikely that many of the suggested projects or interventions would be realised without the Council's leadership, direct intervention and a supported Strategy and Action Plan.

We suggest the on-going process could be as follows, but we would be happy to discuss this in more detail and assist the Council in all aspects of the further work.

Recommended Projects and Further Work:

Potential projects to help realise Potential Interventions and opportunities for change & improvement:

A number of projects has been identified which would help to address the identified weaknesses in the current town centre and explore how the opportunities for positive change can be realised.

Whilst these projects have been listed separately, there will be overlaps and connections between many of the projects, and the findings and outputs of studies will feed and inform further, related projects.

Detailed briefs will be required for each project, but our initial thoughts are as follows:

I. Reinforcing the USP: 'A green, walkable market town'

A study, physical plan and identification of required interventions, in order to achieve the following:

- a. A connected town centre, visually and physically
 - i. Where are the gaps/weaknesses and how can these be resolved
- b. Connecting 'green' areas together as far as possible, through planting/landscaping and identifying opportunities to increase the amount of 'green'
- c. Reinforcing the market and market environs as the heart and hub of the town centre
- d. Integrating key assets (especially Tithe Barn, Church, park, watercourse and walk, historic environments)
- e. Linking together areas, destinations and assets, to encourage linked trips
- f. Creating good, safe links to car parks, railway station, bus stops
- g. Linking town centre facilities to outer residential areas and employment areas, to encourage visits to town centre (pedestrians/cyclists). Including new development at Stanton Cross, to maximise people using town centre and minimising 'leakage' to other centres
- h. Reinforcing/improving:
 - i. Thresholds/interfaces
 - ii. 'Places'
 - iii. Distinct characters and identities
 - iv. Sense of arrival and arrival experiences (especially from railway station and multi-storey car park)
 - v. Clarity and hierarchy of routes
- i. Consider 'circuits':
 - i. Evening economy:
 1. Connecting areas of evening activity together
 2. Encourage 'clustering'

3. Creating/promoting safe routes between uses, car parks, public transport and key residential areas (well-lit routes with natural surveillance and over-looking)
 - ii. Visitor/heritage
 1. Connecting together attractions
 2. Encouraging longer visits/linked trips
 3. Safe, attractive routes between destinations and car parks, railway station, bus stops
 4. Influencing choice of routes to 'showcase' the best parts of the town and its assets
 - iii. Local/shopper/worker/students
 1. Connecting together uses and facilities
 2. Encouraging longer visits/linked trips/use of town centre
 3. Encouraging walking and cycling (day and evening)
 4. Safe, attractive routes between uses and car parks, railway station, bus stops, residential areas
- j. Develop, promote and market brand/identity; 'Green. Walkable Market Town' to attract residents, visitors, students, workers, employers, investors
 - i. Use the Vision Plan for a connected town centre, and the details of proposed improvements to seek views and gain support/interest and help demonstrate an enhanced investor context

2. Maximising the value of external spaces

A study to explore the function and potential of each space:

- a. SWOT analysis of each space
- b. Ensure each space has an identified role/function (which may simply be passive space), to create a range of experiences and environments and to reinforce their functional and visual context
- c. Utilise spaces to support the connectivity of the town centre (routes and spaces), and to reinforce character/identity and create activity and/or visual focal points
- d. Encourage active edges and natural observation/surveillance (where appropriate)
- e. Encourage/facilitate uses as appropriate
- f. Explore commercial potential around the space (where appropriate) through increased activity and footfall, especially where key buildings/assets would benefit from this i.e. Tithe Barn
- g. Reinforce character, role and function through appropriate landscaping, furniture, planting etc

3. Converting the multi-storey car park from a liability to an asset

A study to identify requirements (including building structures and highways), potential opportunities and required interventions

- a. A combination of Identified Opportunities H & I
 - i. Improving vehicular access and signage from approach highway
 - ii. Improving the quality and structure of the car park
 - iii. Improving pedestrian facilities, experience and links to wider town centre facilities, including the theatre and cultural offer
 - iv. Improving environments and user experience between the car park and the shopping centre
 - v. Promoting the car park as the car park of choice for motorists from the south and for theatre users, to avoid unnecessary traffic along High Street etc
 - vi. Creating the potential for major redevelopment on the existing theatre car park etc (see below)
 - vii. Protecting the car park site/area for longer term redevelopment

4. Major Development Opportunities

Two high level feasibility/viability studies, followed by detailed feasibility/viability studies and exploration of commercial interest and funding potential

- a. Theatre, multi-storey car park, highways, residential development
 - i. Identified Opportunities H & I
- b. Market Place/Churchyard environs
 - i. Commercial development around Market Place, Market Street, Church Street (Identified Opportunities O,P,Q,R)
 1. A *pragmatic* approach to unlocking phased investment and delivery, including early phase(s)
 2. Unlocking interventions, to kick-start and facilitate private sector investment and delivery
 3. Solutions-focussed – overcoming hurdles and creating opportunities
 - ii Joint exploration of Market Place, churchyard and link to Church Street
 1. To create a major, new public space; breaking down the barriers between Market Place and the churchyard
 2. A flexible activity space, which could hold a range of events and activities, including ‘character and ‘interest’ markets, aimed at visitors as well as locals
 3. In part, a green space, to reinforce the USP of ‘Green Market Town’ – a place to dwell and relax
 4. Strengthening the pedestrian links between Church Street (College and bus stops), Market Place and Market Street
 5. Strengthening the visual and physical links with the church and surrounding quality areas
 6. Strengthening the area as the town’s hub and focal point
 - iii Integrating the Church Street development site (Identified Opportunity R)
 1. Preparing a development brief, to ensure the physical requirements for this site are met (i.e. protection of view of church, reinforcement of safe, strong pedestrian route)

5. Reducing the dominance of traffic and improving the pedestrian experience

Identification of opportunities to reduce the amount of unnecessary traffic moving through the town centre, in particular along Silver Street/Sheep Street. A single, integrated study, made up several smaller studies, in order to identify how to:

- i. Successfully direct traffic to appropriate car parks, especially the multi-storey car park
- ii. Provide clarity to motorists about where to go and to influence driver behaviour
- iii. Improve pedestrian facilities, especially crossings in key locations
- iv. Potentially re-route traffic around multi-storey car park
- v. Create the impression of a pedestrian environment through which cars pass
- vi. Free-up space for pedestrians and enhanced trading environments
 1. Opportunities for reclaiming space for street cafes, shop displays etc
 2. Most appropriate locations for loading bays, bus stops, disabled parking, taxis (to avoid conflict with pedestrians/street cafes/important frontages etc, but to adequately meet operational needs)
- vii. 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)
 1. Changes to highway geometry, scale, width etc, to influence behaviour and speed
 2. Changes to street furniture/barriers
 3. Appropriate landscaping/planting

4. Signs – provide clarity about direction and reduce confusion

6. Funding/investment potential and implications

A study to identify:

- a. Funder/investor interest, and what would need to happen to secure this
- b. What changes and improvements could attract funding, what could be funded and/or delivered through development, and what would have to be funded or delivered by the Council
- c. How projects and priorities need to be shaped/changed in order to secure funding/investment
- d. How investment/funding opportunities need to be pursued:
 - i. Business cases for funding bids
 - ii. Promotional material for investors (including information on how the town centre could change)

7. Town Centre housing opportunities

A study to identify the best opportunities for maximising the number/mix of residents within easy walking distance of the town centre

- a. A creative study of potential opportunities (not just known sites)
- b. Locations which will achieve greatest benefit for footfall, commercial opportunities, economic prosperity, safe pedestrian routes
- c. Attractive locations which exploit quality assets (park, heritage assets etc), to increase attractiveness and values
- d. Increasing commercial attractiveness of town centre
- e. Increasing activity and vibrancy, especially evening economy and weekends
- f. Initial focus on housing types/resident groups which will be attracted by existing and easily-achieved qualities of 'Walkable, Green Market Town' (potentially over 55 market), and will help to reinforce this identity. Some housing groups may require improvements to be in place first.

8. Retail expansion/improvement opportunities

A study to identify the potential physical opportunities for short/medium/longer term retail improvements and/or expansion, including:

- a. Major development opportunities identified above:
 - i. Market Street/Market Square/Church Street area
 - ii. Multi-storey car park site/environs and connections to existing shopping centre (longer term)
- b. Edges of existing inward-facing shopping centre, especially where this currently presents dead/weak frontages and interfaces with key pedestrian and/or arrival areas i.e. Sheep Street, Midland Road
- c. Any other commercially attractive opportunities which help to reinforce circuits, connectivity and concentrations of pedestrian flow
- d. Seek views of potential investors/commercial advisors and create/shape opportunities accordingly

9. Car Parks

A study to identify:

- a. Suitability of the existing car parks (locations and facilities)
- b. Optimum locations for greatest town centre benefit and positive impacts on vehicular flows movements and conflicts
- c. Opportunities for meeting needs

10. Council-owned assets

A study to identify how these can be fully utilised and exploited

- a. A plan showing all Council-owned assets in town centre
- b. Consideration of the physical contribution each asset could make to a connected, walkable, green town centre, and how to achieve this
- c. Consideration of which assets could be pivotal to achieving change and/or kickstarting/facilitating/unlocking private sector investment and delivery
- d. Consideration of how each asset could benefit from wider changes: uplift in value, increased commerciality, creation of appropriate environments for investment/occupation, protection of heritage assets

11. Opportunities for increased activity

A study to identify how activity and vibrancy levels in the public realm can be increased

- a. Opportunities for street cafes, especially to support key pedestrian routes and spaces, to reinforce messages of 'pedestrian space' and to aid legibility, influence pedestrian movements and encourage people to explore further
- b. Reinforcement of the Market offer. This could be significantly assisted by the creation of a much-improved space, surrounding commercial development and strengthened pedestrian routes. The market area could shrink or grow on a needs basis, to suit season, festival, events etc. The design of the space could allow comfortable spaces within the space, so the market could occupy a small section or a significant area (Market Square/ Market Place/Market Street. Successful spaces could create opportunity for a range of functional, local and visitor markets, including Christmas, farmers, vintage, continental etc.
- c. Use of improved, connected spaces for events activities and performance. Christmas and Summer festivals etc. could take place over several spaces. This would allow larger events and encourage people to stay longer and visit more of the town centre. This could help to increase visitor numbers and economic prosperity
- d. Seating areas
- e. Facilities for picnics and play etc., in appropriate locations
- f. Residential opportunities
- g. The creation of environments which support business, networking and interaction, especially start-ups, creatives, small businesses and other target groups

5.0 Conclusion

Wellingborough has a compact and potentially walkable town centre, containing a number of strengths, defining features and assets. Individually these are rather modest, and operate as isolated attractions or destinations. However, if these were successfully joined together, they could add value to each other and create a much stronger, collective offer, with a unique and distinct identity as a 'Green Market Town'.

A range of projects and interventions have been identified which could help to exploit the assets themselves, connect assets together, resolve some of the weaknesses in the urban fabric, reduce the dominance of the motor vehicle and improve the user environments and experiences. The improvement to the physical quality of the town centre, combined with increased activity and use will be likely to create a more attractive context for private sector investment and delivery.

There is little physical opportunity for significant new development, so the few opportunities which exist need to be protected and deliver the most appropriate type of development in the most beneficial locations. A pragmatic and proactive approach is likely to be required, to create deliverable and viable opportunities for enhancing the retail, leisure and commercial offer, especially in the vicinity of Market Street, Market Square, All Hallow'Church and Orient Way.

The collective consideration of issues, assets and opportunities could present greater potential for development opportunities. An example of this could be the potential opportunity created by the integration of the multi-storey car park, to reduce traffic issues, assist key venues, improve green space and achieve a potential development site for new housing.

The 'Next Steps' section of this report sets out our suggestions for taking the work forward, and we would be very happy to discuss this with you further and offer our on-going assistance into each of the studies and projects.

