

WINCANTON TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN



**South Somerset
District Council**



QUEEN VICTORIA
(1819 - 1901)
STAYED HERE AS A
CHILD IN 1825

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Wincanton Town Centre Strategy has been prepared by Chilmark Consulting, Owen Davies Consulting and Robert West Design on behalf of South Somerset District Council.

Identified as a Council Priority Project, the Wincanton Town Centre Strategy supports the regeneration of the town centre and acts as a framework to guide future investment, activity and priorities for intervention.

The role and contribution of Wincanton town centre in serving its local residents and wide rural hinterland is long established although like many market towns (and town centres) across the country, fundamental structural trends in retailing and leisure have exerted significant change and challenges for traditional high streets.

The Strategy has been informed by a comprehensive baseline review and developed through collaboration with key stakeholders and the local business community together with local community consultation to shape and develop the vision, objectives and strategy for Wincanton town centre.

Vision and Strategic Objectives

The 'vision' is for Wincanton town centre to become a place that:

- Is well used and a thriving place to live, work and visit.
- Has an enhanced retail, community and social function that encourages visits during the day and evening.

- Has a wider mix of uses, including commercial floorspace and quality housing that supports enterprise, creativity and vibrancy.
- Makes more of the centres special cultural and heritage character through improvements to the public realm and buildings to attract investment into the town centre.
- Will create a convenient and attractive destination for both local residents and visitors using the unique assets of Wincanton town centre and the surrounding area.

The Vision is supported by six strategic objectives which together set the ambitions to support and deliver the Vision. These relate to:

- Catchment - Encourage a greater level of use and strengthen loyalty for the town centre from local residents.
- Mixed Uses - Encourage a wider mix of uses, including new employment, homes, community, leisure and creative enterprises.
- Historic and Built Environment - Safeguard and improve the quality and attractiveness of the historic built environment and the public realm.
- Culture and Heritage - Protect and develop the cultural and heritage attraction of the town centre for visitors.
- Movement - Strengthen and safeguard the convenient access and movement of people to and through the town centre on foot, bicycle, public transport and car.

- Communication - Strengthen place branding, communication and marketing to the local catchment and visitors.

Town Centre Strategy

The Wincanton Town Centre Strategy establishes a framework that seeks to deliver positive change focused on the following core themes:

- Broadening a mix of uses in the town centre.
- Enhancing the attractiveness of the town centre environment.
- Creating a destination.

To achieve this change, the Strategy identifies a series of projects, actions and interventions developed from the baseline and consultation exercises, which will collectively help to deliver the key objectives and Vision.

Development Sites

A number of prospective development sites are identified that are considered to offer opportunities to support an enhanced range and mix of suitable main town centre uses to encourage greater footfall and visits, attract investment and extend the economic vibrancy of the town centre.

The sites relating to land to the rear and side of 7 High Street and the former Health Centre at Carrington Way are identified as offering realistic long-term potential (subject to further detailed investigation) although in both cases the Strategy seeks to maximise flexibility for future end uses.

A number of unimplemented planning permissions exist in the town centre which offer

the prospect of delivering land uses and activities which support the Strategy objectives.

Public Realm

The Strategy identifies a series of traffic calming and qualitative improvements at priority areas in Wincanton town centre for new and improved public realm. These proposals seek to enhance the attractiveness and distinctiveness of the town centre and promote a safe, pleasant pedestrian environment for local residents.

The following locations are identified for public realm improvements, subject to detailed design and further investigation:

- Market Place;
- 7 High Street and 12 - 15 High Street;
- Carrington Way;
- High Street (eastern gateway).

Complementary Initiatives

To complement the 'physical' options for change, the Strategy identifies a range of softer initiatives and interventions. These draw on ideas which are realistic and relevant from the stakeholder engagement process and best practice from other market towns.

Complementary initiatives typically require a more holistic approach working alongside local stakeholders (which the Strategy considers is essential) to develop and implement a package of initiatives to meet the Strategy's objectives.

Relevant examples include the promotion of more town centre events/festivals and the evening economy alongside flexibility of opening hours and collection points for internet deliveries, which together seek to boost footfall.

The management, marketing and promotion of the town centre is equally important to ensure the image and perception of Wincanton is widely communicated to its local community and acts as a promotional tool for visitors and investment. Improved signage, appropriate car parking strategy and grant support for refurbishment of key buildings and the streetscape represent further identified initiatives together with encouragement for appropriate change of use and temporary uses to rejuvenate underused and vacant buildings.

Action Plan and Responsibilities

The Strategy is supported by an Action Plan which sets out how the Vision and strategic objectives can be delivered.

It identifies a series of priority interventions and projects over a 1 – 3 year period which are considered the most crucial in the short term to move the Strategy forward. A number of longer-term aspirations are also identified although the majority of actions are considered ongoing and subject to review.

The Action Plan provides a clear identification of the roles, responsibilities and partnering arrangements that will be required to effectively and efficiently deliver and implement the Strategy.

Leadership

South Somerset District Council will provide the strong leadership and strategic direction to drive forward the implementation of the Wincanton Town Centre Strategy. This will be administered

through the Wincanton Regeneration Programme Board.

The Board will be responsible for managing, directing and delivering the aims of implementing the Strategy. It will also monitor and maintain progress and ensure the strategic framework can adapt to changing local circumstances and priorities.

The Action Plan will help to inform the Action Plan presented to the Wincanton Regeneration Programme Board.

In addition, the Wincanton Town Centre Regeneration Stakeholder Group will be established to act as a forum for sharing ideas with the Board and support engagement, consultation and communication with local stakeholders. This is considered integral to ensuring a locally informed programme of actions and initiatives.

Performance Monitoring and Review

The Strategy represents a working document, the delivery of which is dependent on a collaborative approach with key partners. It will need to be regularly monitored and evaluated by the Wincanton Regeneration Programme Board in relation to identified priorities and project milestones to ensure progress can be effectively measured against Strategy objectives.

Importantly, the Strategy adopts a flexible, long term vision. This recognises the need to adapt to changing circumstances in the town centre and the implications for project priorities carried forward in the Action Plan.

Part One: Aims

Overview and Context



1 Introduction

Overview

South Somerset District Council (SSDC) commissioned Chilmark Consulting, Owen Davies Consulting and Robert West Design to produce a Strategy for Wincanton town centre with the underlying objective to boost footfall, create a more vibrant centre and support future regeneration aspirations.

The importance of Wincanton town centre to its local community and wider hinterland in serving the east of the District is long established and provides a range of services and facilities to meet local retail, social and community needs. However the town centre's influence and attraction has and continues to face ongoing challenges, as experienced by market towns across the country, driven by structural changes in retailing and leisure such as online shopping and competition from larger centres.

The Council's Plan identifies the creation of a Wincanton Town Centre Action Plan as a priority for 2018-19. In accordance with this priority, this Strategy sets out the following:

- an overall approach to enhance and develop the economic vibrancy of the town centre, set within the context of the local issues relevant to Wincanton and the national trends and pressures impacting on market towns;
- opportunities to increase footfall and improve the vitality and viability of the town centre, including the potential for development sites; and

- complementary initiatives and interventions to improve the existing environment in the town centre and boost the local economy through increased use by residents and visitors.

This Strategy is informed by a comprehensive baseline review of the town centre working with the local business community and key stakeholders to embed local knowledge in the preparation of a SWOT analysis. This has shaped a clear overarching vision for Wincanton town centre together with key objectives to deliver the vision which have been tested and supported through local consultation.

A number of projects related to potential development site options and public realm improvements are identified to help deliver and support change. To complement the 'physical' options, a series of softer initiatives and interventions are also proposed.

The Strategy is supported by an Action Plan which outlines the projects and initiatives considered a priority for the next 1-3 years to deliver the shorter-term objectives.

This Strategy will help support the newly established Wincanton Programme Board which will be responsible for managing, directing and delivering the aims of the Strategy, maintaining progress and achievements, and ensuring the strategic framework can adapt to changing local circumstances and priorities.

Purpose

The purpose of this Strategy is to:

- understand the baseline performance of the town centre and the opportunities for change;
- outline a vision for Wincanton town centre that is supported by key objectives;
- identify the priorities for improvement and regeneration in the town centre in line with the key objectives;
- develop an action plan that outlines the priorities needed and the mechanisms for delivery, including a co-ordinated town centre partnership approach that identifies the responsibilities of the District Council alongside other public sector partners, local town centre businesses and the local community; and
- establish how performance will be managed and monitored.

Structure

The Strategy is structured into three main parts:

- **Part One:** Aims – Overview and Context
- **Part Two:** Shape – Vision, Development Options and Initiatives
- **Part Three:** Delivery – Action Plan, Delivery Responsibility and Performance Monitoring.

A number of appendices support the Strategy and Action Plan, and provide a more detailed overview of the following:



town centre way-finder

- relevant national and local policy context;
- national trends impacting on town centres; and
- engagement undertaken with key stakeholders and the local town centre business community alongside public consultation to inform the final Strategy.

2 Setting the Context

Introduction

This chapter establishes the baseline for Wincanton town centre set in the context of the relevant planning policy framework, national trends and the characteristics of the centre today. It provides an assessment of the role and function of the town centre which has shaped the aims and objectives of the Strategy.

The analysis has drawn on a review of published information together with engagement with the town centre business community and key stakeholders in the form of a business survey, individual meetings and workshop events. This approach has ensured the baseline fully incorporates local knowledge and aspirations in the preparation of the Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) analysis in identifying key local issues and opportunities relevant to the town centre.

Wincanton

Situated in the east of South Somerset, Wincanton is identified as 'The Gateway to Somerset' from the east and is strategically located adjacent to the A303 trunk road which



High Street: the historic London south-west road

links London and the South West. The town is situated on the north eastern edge of the Blackmore Vale and is closely located to Wiltshire, North Dorset and Mendip. Yeovil is 15 miles to the south west whilst Bruton, Castle Cary, Gillingham and Milborne Port are all within 10 miles.

Wincanton is the fourth largest settlement in the district with a population of 5,435 (2011 Census). It acts as an important local retail and service centre for the rural east of the district and over recent years has experienced significant levels of residential development.

The employment role of the town is characterised by its associations with the dairy and food production industries, and historically logistics and distribution, with the main employment areas located in close proximity to the A303. A number of important tourist assets and attractors unique to the town include Wincanton Racecourse and Terry Pratchett's 'Discworld Emporium' which contribute to the wider appeal of the town.

Policy Context

A number of Council Plans and Strategies together with national policy and guidance have informed the preparation of the Wincanton Town Centre Strategy, including:

- South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028 (2015);
- Wincanton Neighbourhood Plan 2018 – 2028 (2018);

- Tackling the Challenges: Council Plan 2016-21;
- South Somerset District Council District-wide Car Parking Strategy (2013);
- South Somerset Economic Development Strategy (2019);
- National Planning Policy Framework (2019); and
- National Planning Policy Guidance (2014).

In addition, the Council are in the process of undertaking a Local Plan Review and have recently concluded Preferred Options consultation with adoption anticipated during 2021.

The importance of high streets to local communities and local economies is central to the Council and Government's commitment to supporting vibrant town centres and helping centres adopt and evolve as multi-functional destinations. The 'town centre first' policy approach seeks to encourage and promote growth and development of town centres that allow people to live, shop and work alongside access to entertainment, leisure and services. This extends beyond retail with policies and strategies focused on supporting the vitality and viability of centres which are diverse, attractive and unique to residents and visitors.

A policy overview is set out in **Appendix 1**.

National Town Centre Trends

Market towns (and town centres in general) face significant commercial challenges driven by changing consumer dynamics and competition from online retailing. These challenges raise specific issues and pressures for smaller centres such as Wincanton.

While the issues vary by location, there are a number of core trends which are driving change in shopping and leisure patterns and the way communities use their centres. This threatens the vibrancy of market towns across the country and has serious implications for their continued vitality and viability. These structural changes are shaping a funding and policy response which seeks to future proof high streets beyond the traditional retail role and function of centres in order to evolve and adapt to the speed and nature of change. The recent expansion of the Future High Streets Fund by the Government reflects the scale of the challenge faced by town centres.

In summary, relevant key trends include:

- the growth of online shopping, e-services and technology innovation which has significantly increased greater choice and convenience compared to high street retailers;
- changes in retailer and commercial requirements, including estate rationalisation, flexibility of business models and consolidation towards higher order centres;
- competition from out of centre developments which are increasingly focused on a mixed uses destination offer;

- national economic trends, including reduced forecast retail expenditure projections;
- the impact of business rates on many retail occupiers; and
- wider socio-economic trends driven by lifestyle and convenience considerations and a desire for a centre 'experience', sense of community and service offer not offered online.

An overview of the national trends impacting on town centres is outlined in **Appendix 2**.

Town Centre Business and Stakeholder Engagement

The Wincanton Town Centre Strategy has been informed and shaped by stakeholder engagement to help identify the key issues and opportunities set out in the Strategy. This involved a survey of town centre businesses, together with presentations and workshops. Individual meetings and workshops were also held with other key stakeholders with an active interest in the town centre to identify key issues and inform the relevant vision and objectives.

Details of the extent of engagement undertaken, organisations involved and a summary of stakeholder feedback are set out in **Appendix 3** whilst **Appendix 4** summarises the community consultation undertaken.

Wincanton Town Centre Today

The baseline analysis of Wincanton town centre has been assessed in relation to three themes:

- Land Use, Diversity and Performance;
- Townscape and Heritage; and
- Access and Movement.

A summary of the findings from the baseline review and business and stakeholder feedback is outlined below.

Land Use, Diversity and Performance

Composition, Representation and Offer

As one of the district's designated Primary Market Towns, Wincanton town centre is characterised by a noticeable level of 'independent' representation with national multiple representation limited (Boots and the Co-op).

In terms of convenience retailing, the Co-op acts as the main retail anchor with support from high quality retailers (butcher, grocer and baker).

Levels of comparison retail are varied, including



some national retailers are represented in the High Street



High Street: "Disc World Emporium"

specialist traders (e.g. photographer, cobblers, antiques, vinyl sounds, jewellers, home furnishings and electricals). This ensures a healthy retail offer which is recognised by stakeholders for the scale and role of the town centre. There is a large presence of retail services, particularly in the hair and beauty sector. This issue is acknowledged by stakeholders and reflects an evolution at the national level away from traditional transactional retail activity towards a greater mix of activities to meet consumer demands, such as retail services.

The overall level of diversity and attraction is considered healthy with many 'essentials'



Market Place: Bootmakers

present including the Post Office, newsagent, pharmacy, butcher, baker and grocer alongside key services (e.g. opticians). The town centre has also successfully attracted a number of distinctive artisan and 'maker' lifestyle businesses, concentrated around the Market Place area. These new investments have contributed high quality additions to the offer of the town centre. Furthermore, stakeholders identify a unique asset in the town centre at Discworld Emporium. This is considered a Unique Selling Point (USP) for Wincanton.



The Balsam Centre

The attractiveness of the town centre is enhanced by community and cultural facilities including the library, museum and town hall together with the Balsam Centre and Memorial Hall. Stakeholders highlight the importance of these facilities as key town centre attractors which appeal to a wide catchment area.

Although the town centre provides a diverse mix of traditional retail, services and attractions with some strong specialist businesses, many stakeholders consider the town centre lacks a critical mass and 'browsability' associated with a more interesting mix of uses that reflect modern



South Street: the Nog Inn

tastes and customer expectations and which can retain shoppers and visitors.

The food and drink offer in the town centre is focused on cafes and public houses. Restaurant provision is currently limited for residents and visitors and impacts on the range, choice and quality of offer. Stakeholders are supportive of the need for an improved restaurant offer to support the evening economy and attract more younger families to the centre.

The level of workspace provision in the town centre is limited. There is a recognition from stakeholders that employment opportunities are

currently focused outside the town centre and opportunities for new floorspace to meet modern needs should be explored to help promote vitality and footfall in the town centre.

Events

Events such as The Christmas Extravaganza continue although other events are either less frequent, for example The October Carnival (planned for 2019) or the one-off Wincanton Town Festival. Overall, this has led to a decline in the number and frequency of events organised in Wincanton town centre. Feedback from stakeholders indicates a desire to promote events but also a recognition of the need for support in organisational and attendance terms from the local community and local businesses.

Whilst located outside the town, Wincanton Racecourse hosts various race and non-racing events throughout the year. It is considered a key asset by stakeholders which offers strong potential to attract more visitors into the town centre from racecourse events.

The town centre lacks a regular market (with the exception of the small monthly indoor Country



Wincanton Racecourse is a key local visitor asset close to the town centre: "Last Fence" by Clare Tupman

Market). Previous efforts have not proved successful although there is a recognition amongst stakeholders of the need to promote a more innovative approach to markets.

Role, Performance and Catchment Area

The Council's Retail and Main Town Centre Uses Study confirms the role and function of Wincanton as an important top up retail and service centre that is characterised by an extensive rural catchment area. There is an identified capacity for additional convenience retail floorspace in Wincanton (circa 1,500 sq. m). The same evidence base confirms a more limited comparison retail role with a low level of market share and identifies the dominance of higher order centres, especially Yeovil.

The main food destinations in Wincanton are located out of centre at the gateway to the town, and dominated by Morrisons and, to a lesser extent, Lidl. The Council's retail study confirmed the appeal of these out of centre facilities in market share terms for food shopping.

Stakeholders recognise that local residents are drawn to these facilities due to their convenience to the detriment of the town centre.

The Council Retail Study identified the town centre had a high vacancy rate of over 18% (at January 2017) which was well above the national average. Whilst the perception of vacancies has fallen, there remain a number of prominent long term vacant and underused units and buildings in the town centre which reduce the quality and perception of the centre. There is strong support from stakeholders to encourage alternative re-



The long-established hardware shop on High Street, Clementina, has now closed



A mobile facility in a car park now replaces branch banks

use options, particularly for employment and, where appropriate, residential uses where it would not detract from other main town centre uses.

The town centre has lost a number of important services / retailers over recent years following the relocation of the doctors' surgery, closure of key shops including antiques/collectables and hardware on the High Street and loss of bank branches. There is no 24 hour cash machine available with bank services restricted to mobile

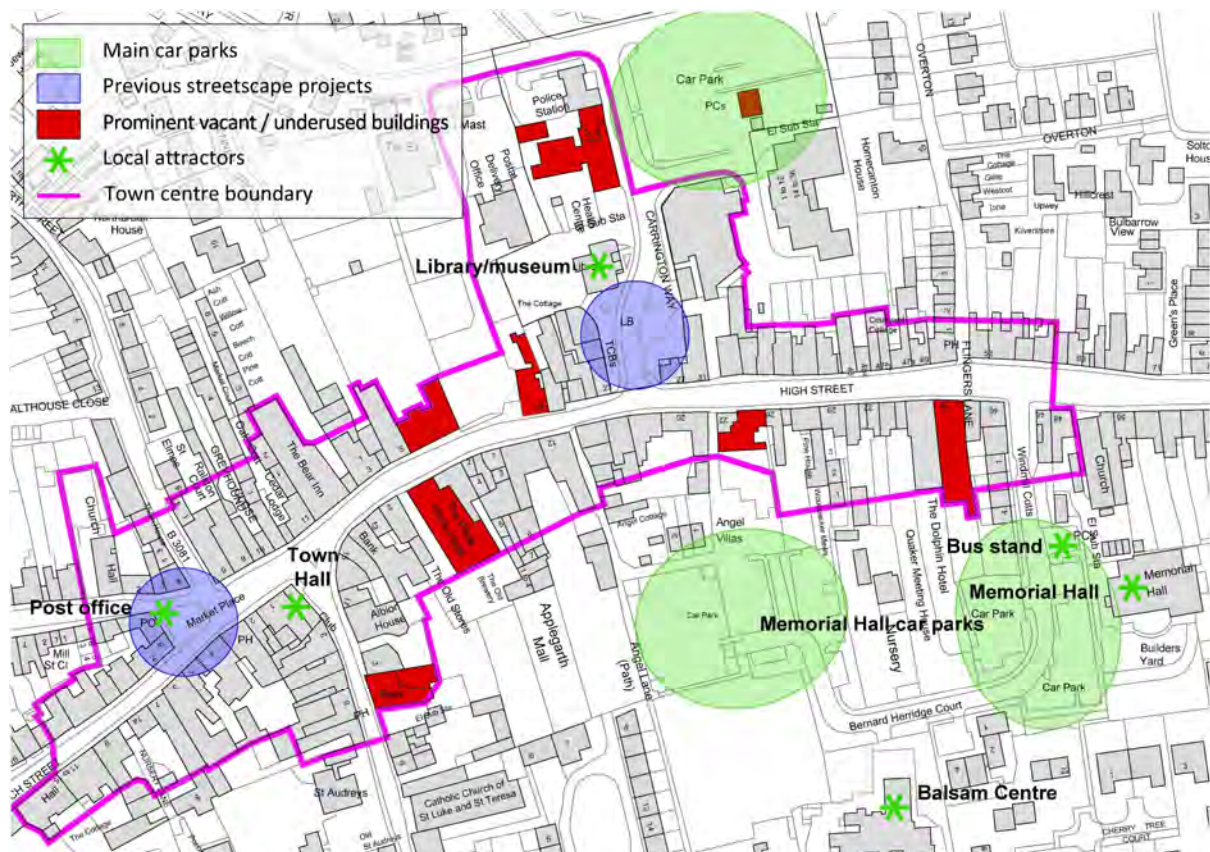
banks (provided four days a week from the Memorial Hall car park which lack a visible high street presence). The consensus from stakeholders is that these losses have contributed to a marked reduction in footfall and vitality. Observations suggest that there is an inconsistent range of business opening hours with several traders routinely closing during the daytime and many businesses closing on Saturday afternoon. This impacts on the vitality of the town centre and limits the opportunity to serve the local population.

Development Activity

A number of existing planning permissions in the town centre have the potential to contribute positively to a wider mix of uses. New homes have been built at Balsam Park while unimplemented consents exist for a boutique B&B (10 High Street), residential infill (rear of 24 High Street) and refurbishment of the former White Horse Hotel into a restaurant/pizzeria. The encouragement for a greater mix of uses is firmly supported by stakeholders, subject to planning considerations.

Figure 1 identifies the key features in Wincanton town centre.

Figure 1: key features in the town centre



Townscape and Heritage

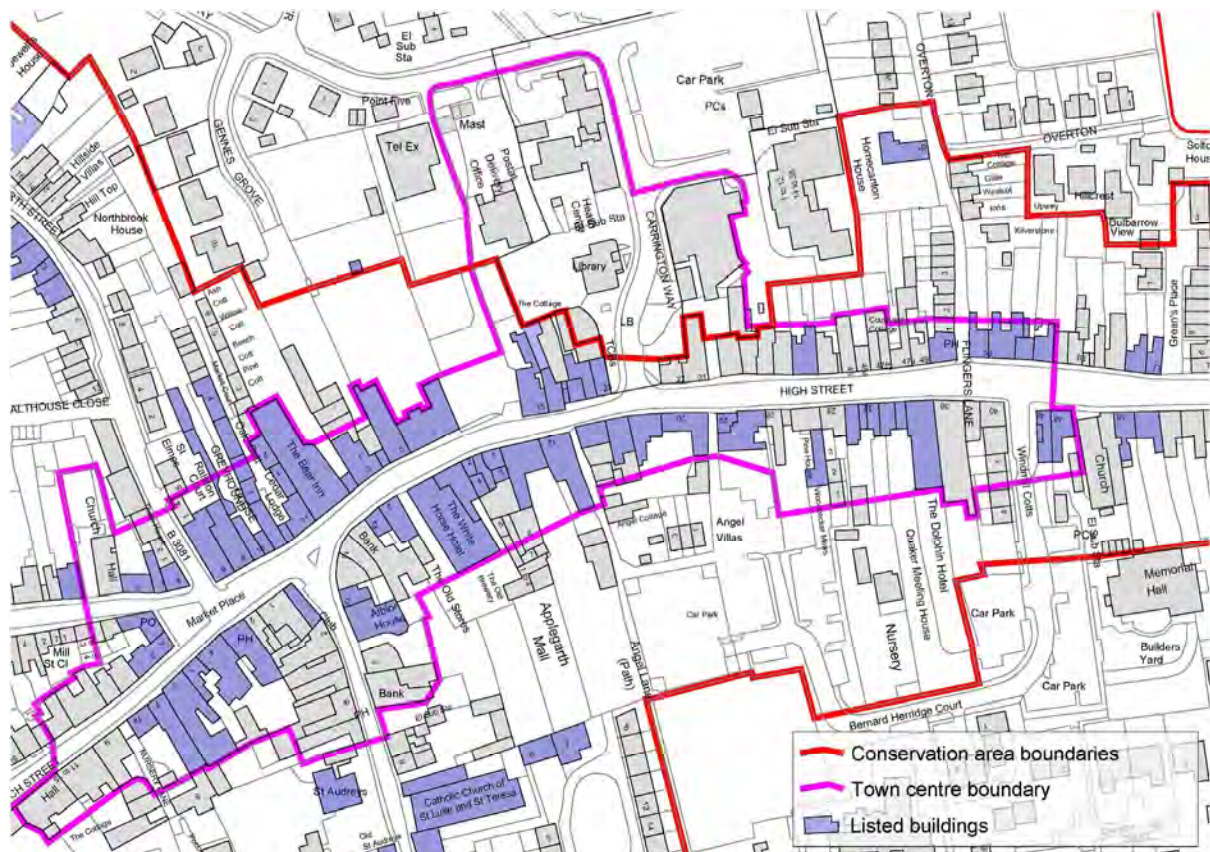
Built Environment

The historic town centre contains many attractive and listed buildings and is largely designated part of the Wincanton Conservation Area which contributes to the special quality of the streetscape and heritage character of the town. The protection and safeguarding of the built environment is strongly supported by stakeholders.

Figure 2 identifies the extent of the Conservation Area and listed buildings in the town centre.

The distinctive townscape is influenced by topography and characterised by a number of landmarks and important town spaces, including Market Place with its landmarks of the Town Hall tower and the lantern. The tight built up street pattern and return frontages (arches/alleys) present in the town centre offer a series of views and vistas, especially from the car parks, which provide an attractive and unique outlook.

Figure 2: heritage assets



Public Realm and Appearance

A number of heritage buildings are in need of maintenance and investment and detract from the overall quality of the townscape. The improvement in appearance of key buildings is considered important by stakeholders for enhancing the image of the town centre.

Parts of the town centre, particularly around Carrington Way/High Street junction and service area are compromised by poor public realm, which offers the potential for an attractive focal space. The western part of the High Street is also



High Street has evolved to a typical mediaeval "burgage" plot pattern



Alleys and archways typically link the High Street to the burgage plots behind



Carrington Way car parking and Co-op supermarket

characterised by inadequate pedestrian environments (narrow pavements). The focus on opportunities for improvements to the pedestrian environment forms a key objective of the Wincanton Neighbourhood Plan alongside the initiatives outlined in this Strategy.

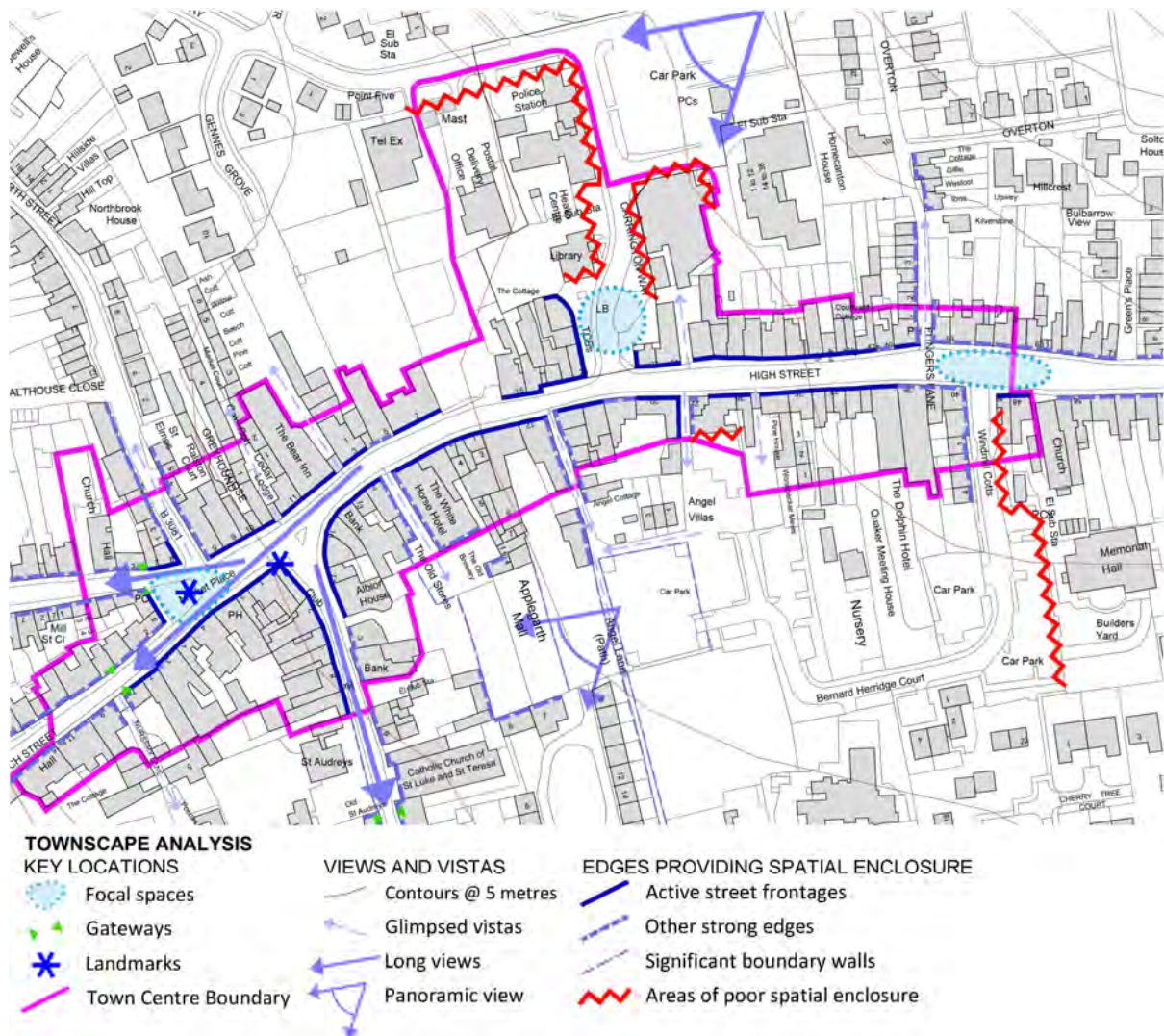
A number of open spaces to the north and south of the High Street, accommodate the surface level car parking and include modern unsympathetic development at Carrington Way. Opportunities to improve the existing and to create new focal spaces in the town centre would improve the sense of place and enhance the use

of public spaces. Such improvements would complement wider public realm improvements. Nearly all of the main streets in the town centre are contained within long building frontages associated with a 'burgage' pattern, especially to the south of the High Street, with significant boundary walls. This influences the layout of development and has led to elements of poor

spatial enclosure, particularly between Memorial Hall car park and the rear of some High Street properties. This creates a poor and unattractive impression.

Figure 3 provides a townscape appraisal of the town centre in respect of the key locations and landmarks, views and vistas and street frontages.

Figure 3: townscape analysis



Access and Movement

Pedestrian Movement and Traffic Circulation

The main vehicle approach to the town centre is from the west via the B3081 one-way system which is characterised by a historic pattern of narrow streets and a traffic flow which can be confusing for visitors, including scope for redirection away from the High Street. This has wider implications for traffic speeds, pedestrian safety and movement, and impacts on the 'gateway' experience into the town centre.

Pedestrian movement in parts of the town centre is compromised by narrow pavements and



The pedestrian environment is frequently compromised by the highway layout



Car parks dominate areas south of High Street

limited crossing points whilst opportunities for cyclists are not considered easy. These issues form a key objective of the Wincanton Neighbourhood Plan to improve the attractiveness and safety of the town centre for pedestrians through traffic calming (pinch points and speed zone) and widening of pavements, with suggested improvements at High Street and South Street. It also seeks to improve mobility and access to the town centre for cyclists and mobility scooters. Stakeholders endorse the need for improvements to enhance the pedestrian environment.

Car Parking

The town centre benefits from two main surface level car parks at Carrington Way and Memorial Hall to the north and south of the High Street, which provide easy access for all and linkages to the town centre. Additional parking is available at Churchfields and on street along Church Street and the eastern part of the High Street.

Qualitative improvements to a number of the linkages from the Memorial Hall car park are considered important.

Car parking is currently free in the town centre with observations of high car park utilisation. The stakeholder consultation outlined key concern at the potential introduction of parking charges in the town centre and that any changes would need to be carefully managed. It also identified the need for a car parking strategy focused on parking management, particularly to address the reported impact of long stay and resident residential parking on town centre spaces.

Location and Gateways

The strategic location of Wincanton with direct accessibility from the A303 is considered a key opportunity by stakeholders for attracting more visitors to the town centre. This geographical advantage provides a convenient midpoint between London and the South West and offers strong potential to better promote the town centre through enhanced marketing and improved signage from the A303 and within the town.

The gateway for vehicle arrivals into the town centre is concentrated from the west which impacts on the sense of place. An opportunity exists to promote more arrivals from the east which represents a more attractive approach into

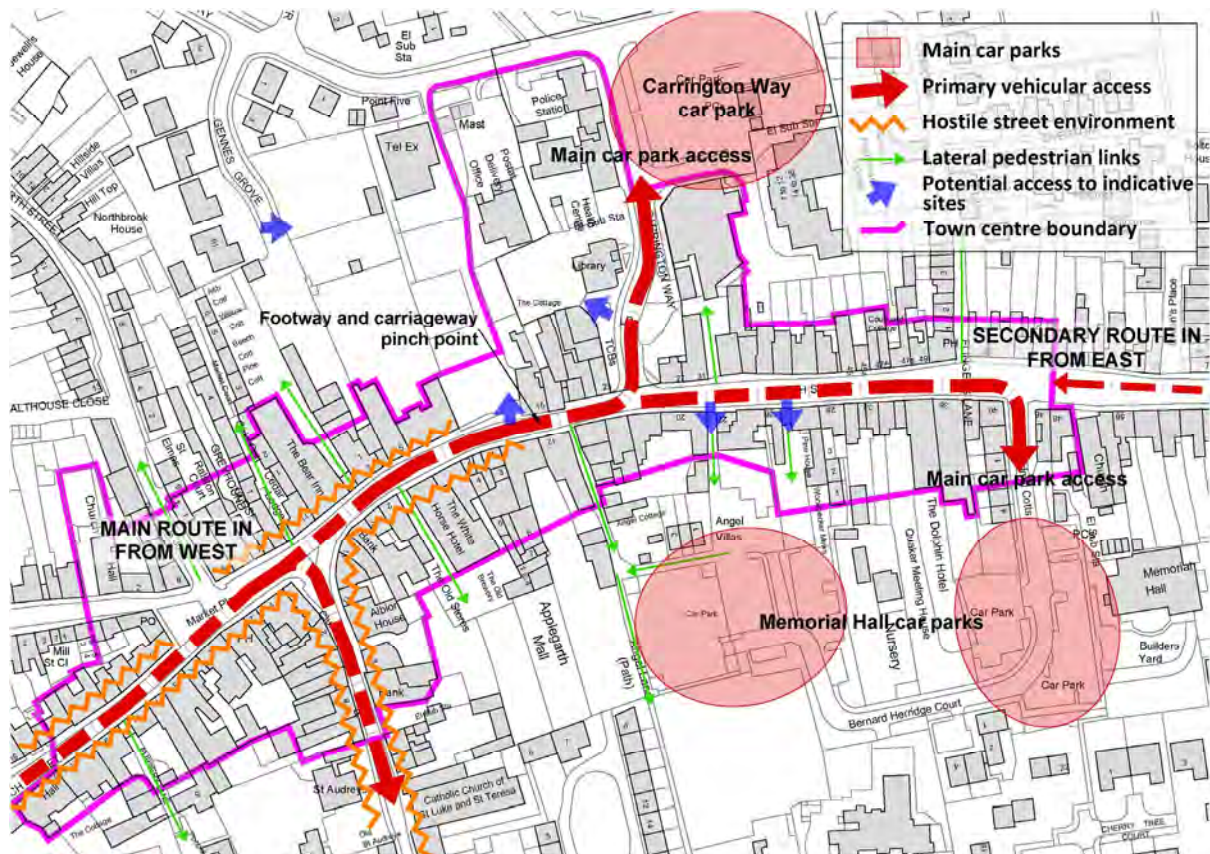
High Street with easier access to the main car parking areas.

Public Transport

Public transport is focused at the bus stop at the Memorial Hall car park which provides a network of bus services to local centres (of varied frequency) and a dedicated London coach service (geared towards commuting and weekends). Whilst stakeholders support an improved level of local services, there is recognition of the value of a centrally located bus stop for the town.

Figure 4 sets out key vehicular and pedestrian routes into and within the town centre.

Figure 4: vehicular and pedestrian access



SWOT Summary

Drawing the summary analysis together, the following SWOT analysis has been derived for the town centre. This has informed the Wincanton Town Centre Strategy.

Strengths

- Designated Primary Market Town and identified location for future growth and development
- Strategic geographical location on the A303 between London and the South West
- Historic and attractive townscape with variety of frontages, mix of uses and Conservation Area setting
- Specialist high quality convenience and comparison retailers
- Independent retailer and service representation
- Healthy diversity and offer of 'essentials' available in the town centre
- Quality and attraction of service facilities attractors (Balsam Centre, Memorial Hall, Library/Museum)
- Business investment in new higher quality 'maker' retail offer
- Provision of centrally located and free car parking
- Market Place and supporting landmarks as a focal space for the town
- Unique Selling Point - Discworld Emporium
- Sense of community and appetite for change
- Views and vistas offered by the topography of the town centre
- Residential development activity in the town centre (Vedlers Hey)

Weaknesses

- Out of centre provision
- Above average vacancy rate and long-term nature of large vacant and underused units and buildings
- Physical condition and appearance of some historic assets
- Limited evening/night time economy, especially restaurant provision
- Leisure and social facilities for the younger population are limited
- Absence of bank and 24-hour ATM provision in the town centre
- Limited range and choice of visitor accommodation
- Localised catchment area with low market share for comparison expenditure
- Unsympathetic design of some buildings
- Poor spatial enclosure of certain sites due to burgage pattern
- 'Gateway' approach from the west, traffic speed and movement through the town centre
- Low activity in the town centre at weekends
- Limited key footfall generators in the town centre
- Poor signage from the A303 and within the town
- Decline in local events and festivals
- Poor quality pedestrian environment in parts of the town centre

Opportunities

- Levels of planned residential growth to expand local population
- Affluent rural catchment area
- Key sites with potential to accommodate new uses, including town centre anchor
- Identified capacity for additional retail floorspace in town centre
- Public realm improvements and traffic calming to improve pedestrian movement and safety, and slow traffic
- Linkage with major local quality visitor assets to encourage visits e.g. Wincanton Racecourse, The Newt, Stourhead
- Time limited opportunity for mix of uses via unimplemented planning consents
- Lower property costs compared to local competitor centres to attract investment
- Management regime for car parking
- Promotion of artistic and wellbeing offer of the town centre
- Improvement in the quality, frequency and marketing of community events and festivals
- Innovative market for the town centre
- Branding of the town
- Support for heritage high streets and Government funding/support initiatives

Threats

- National trends and challenges facing markets towns
- Over representation of certain retail services
- Lack of investment in heritage buildings
- Community and business apathy
- Continued out of centre residential and employment development
- Edge of town sites
- Car parking charges
- Competition and differentiation from comparable local centres
- Landowner aspirations and intentions, including non-implementation of planning permissions

Part Two: Shape

Vision, Development Options and Initiatives



3 Vision and Strategic Objectives

Vision

The 'vision' is for Wincanton town centre to become a place that:

- Is well used and a thriving place to live, work and visit.
- Has an enhanced retail, community and social function that encourages visits during the day and evening.
- Has a wider mix of uses, including commercial floorspace and quality housing that supports enterprise, creativity and vibrancy.
- That makes more of the centres special cultural and heritage character through improvements to the public realm and buildings to attract investment into the town centre.
- Will create a convenient and attractive destination for both local residents and visitors utilising the unique assets of Wincanton Town Centre and the surrounding area.

Strategic Objectives

The Vision for Wincanton town centre is supported by six strategic objectives.

In combination, the strategic objectives set out the ambitions to help support and deliver the Vision.

The objectives are organised to form the basis for prioritising projects, actions and interventions.

The strategic objectives are:

Objective 1

Catchment - Encourage a greater level of use and strengthen loyalty for the town centre from local residents.

Objective 2

Mixed Uses - Encourage a wider mix of uses, including new employment, homes, community, leisure and creative enterprises.

Objective 3

Historic & Built Environment - Safeguard and improve the quality and attractiveness of the historic built environment and the public realm.

Objective 4

Culture & Heritage - Protect and develop the cultural and heritage attraction of the town centre for visitors.

Objective 5

Movement - Strengthen and safeguard the convenient access and movement of people to and through the town centre on foot, bicycle, public transport and car.

Objective 6

Communication - Strengthen place branding, communication and marketing to the local catchment and visitors.

4 Town Centre Strategy

Introduction

In order for the vision for Wincanton town centre to become reality, the key strategic objectives concentrate on three inter-related main themes to address the identified main issues and challenges. These relate to the following:

- Broadening the mix of uses to enhance footfall by residents and visitors
- Enhancing the attractiveness of the town centre environment
- Creating a destination

These themes guide the Town Centre Strategy which sets the framework for the identified projects, initiatives and interventions to deliver the key objectives. In summary, the themes are grouped under the following interventions:

- Development Sites
- Public Realm
- Complementary Initiatives

Aim and Purpose of the Strategy

The Wincanton Town Centre Strategy aims to provide a clear direction to deliver positive change moving forward, encourage more quality investment from the public and private sector and improve business confidence. It will support the promotion and marketing of the town centre, inform future decision making to ensure alignment with existing and emerging Council strategies, and guide the co-ordination of town centre activities to achieve complementary improvements. Finally, it seeks to encourage the development of partnerships amongst key stakeholders and delivery partners in order to

ensure a successful implementation of the Strategy.

The baseline assessment confirms Wincanton town centre as typical of a multi-functional centre with a need to diversify its offer, increase footfall and activity levels across the year. As a 'Convenience and Community Centre', it is characterised by a localised customer base and catchment area, often involving a short duration visit by car and foot to access essential shops, local services and facilities. Such centres support steady footfall over the year without any dramatic seasonal peaks typical of a tourism centre and offer a personal character to the visitor experience often developed through inter-personal relationships and word-of-mouth marketing.

The main objectives of this Strategy is to promote and emphasise the convenience of Wincanton town centre as an attractive, reliable and mixed-use hub which responds better to the needs of its local community and catchment.

Rebuilding centre loyalty through enhanced use and community engagement will help encourage greater footfall. Equally the Strategy needs to focus beyond retail to generate activity through a wider range of uses and footfall generators such as employment, community, recreational, cultural, entertainment and residential uses.

Development Sites

A key objective of this Strategy focuses on the promotion of a wider range of uses in Wincanton town centre to help encourage greater footfall, attract new investment and extend the vibrancy of the town centre during the day and evening. In addition, the lack of a town centre anchor is identified as a perceived weakness for generating visits.

To inform the Strategy, a review of prospective sites has been undertaken to identify potential opportunities for new development within the town centre boundary together with edge of centre locations. Many of the sites have been

identified through the existing and emerging Local Plan process together with consideration of new sites that may, over time, offer opportunities for an enhanced range and mix of suitable main town centre uses to support the delivery of the vision and its objectives. The physical regeneration of appropriate sites has considered the contribution and range of preferred uses that the sites could support but recognises the need to maximise flexibility in order to respond to market requirements. It has also taken account of relevant constraints and the land ownership position to ascertain the realistic prospects for development and delivery moving forward.

Figure 5: indicative development opportunities

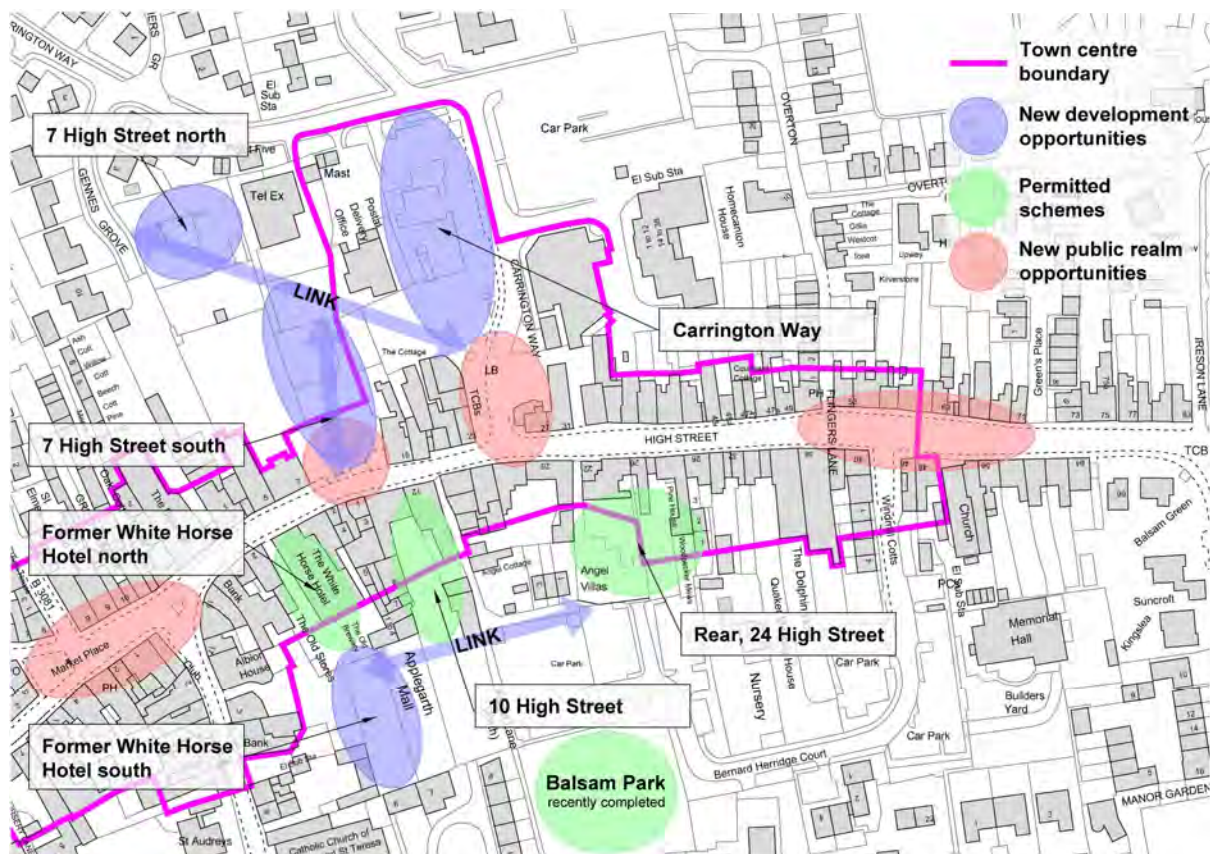


Figure 5 identifies the potential development opportunities together with key unimplemented planning permissions in the town centre.

The site options have been assessed on an individual basis although in a number of cases the opportunity exists for a larger development area through consolidation with adjoining sites.

In summary, the key potential development opportunity sites are:

- Land side and rear of 7 High Street
- Former Health Centre, Carrington Way

Land side and rear of 7 High Street

The site comprises a listed building, formerly occupied by Clementina for retail uses with occupied living accommodation over, an adjacent car parking area and extensive garden area to the rear. It represents a prominent location with a distinctive frontage to High Street and access from Gennes Grove. It also provides access to the operational BT telephone exchange. The

front (southern) element of the site is located within both the town centre boundary and the Conservation Area. The site is in single private ownership and there remains a longer-term opportunity to review site options.

Whilst the main building remains in residential use (first floor), the former retail floorspace at ground floor level is currently occupied as an art studio alongside plans to re-surface the car park in the short term. The potential of the site has been previously tested as part of the Council’s Retail and Main Town Centre Uses Study which concluded the site offered a ‘reasonable’ development option (combined with the adjoining library/car park to the east).

The site is considered to offer a strong potential development opportunity directly accessible from the High Street with scope to retain the main listed building and the domestic walled garden curtilage together with its distinctive shop front for retail use thereby retaining an active street

Potential development site at 7 High Street, including the adjacent car park and access road





There is potential space for market stalls: e.g. Taunton farmers' market

frontage. The opportunity exists to remove the modern unlisted single storey shop extension which does not contribute to the visual quality or setting of the main building.

Given the relatively large site size, it is considered part of the site to the rear could offer potential for residential uses from Gennes Grove and High Street subject to high quality design which respects the existing main garden area and mature trees. Further clarification of the extent of the site and the potential for end uses through a masterplan/capacity design exercise would help to further test the suitability and deliverability of a key opportunity site which would contribute to greater activity and vibrancy in the town centre.

The eastern part of the site currently provides access to the adjacent car park and offers potential for a new square/market place together with mixed commercial uses, subject to re-siting of the current access arrangements. The scope for a new public space could accommodate a street market, which would further encourage public use of the town centre and contribute towards improvements to the public realm.

Equally the scale of the site could support an element of mixed commercial uses towards the High Street frontage although the nature of end uses will be determined by market requirements and represent an appropriate use in planning policy terms.

Although considered on a stand-alone basis, the site offers scope for a larger land assembly opportunity with adjoining landowners (BT, private landowner and the Somerset County Council owned library site). This is considered a longer-term option and dependent on other landowner aspirations.

In terms of prospective delivery, the site represents a large centrally located opportunity in single ownership which is considered of key importance to supporting the objectives of the Strategy. It is envisaged a Development Brief would be required to inform the potential of the site. This exercise would further explore the potential for amalgamation with adjoining uses at Carrington Way and offer a large redevelopment opportunity for the town centre.

Figure 6 gives a 3D visualisation of the potential of the site to the rear and side of 7 High Street.



Example of a small new town square at Brackley, Northamptonshire



Figure 6: aerial impression of the potential for development to the rear and side of 7 High Street

Former Health Centre, Carrington Way

The former doctors' surgery is located within the town centre boundary at Carrington Way and has remained vacant for a number of years. The site is in single private ownership and represents a modern building which is not part of the Conservation Area. Neighbouring uses include a funeral director, Royal Mail delivery office and the library. Although the site does not have dedicated car parking, opportunities exist at the public car park directly opposite. It is understood potential workspace options for the site have been previously investigated by the landowner although no development has occurred.

The site benefits from a central and highly accessible location off the High Street and is considered potentially suitable for mixed commercial uses, including employment floorspace. A key objective of the Strategy seeks to encourage a wider range of uses such as employment, particularly to support flexible innovative workspace to meet modern needs. No comparable offer exists in the town centre and such a use would help generate footfall, support existing town centre businesses and contribute

towards vitality and viability. The site could also offer the potential for the co-location of key public service provision in the town centre.

In view of the local topography of the site, the opportunity exists to increase the density of the site if appropriate to accommodate further uses although this would be subject to detailed design through the planning process.

Given the relatively modest site opportunity, it is anticipated the site would be delivered by the private sector. However, it is recognised that opportunities could exist for a larger site assembly although this would require the involvement of a number of adjoining land interests. Under this scenario, it is recommended that a Development Brief be prepared to explore the potential of the site. This is also relevant in considering the scope to link with the larger Clementina site.

In the short term, it will be important to encourage a reuse of the building with the potential for refurbishment of the building to secure end occupiers.

Figure 7 presents a 3D visualisation of the potential reuse of the former doctors' surgery.



Former Health Centre, now vacant, on Carrington Way



Figure 7: aerial impression of Carrington Way and the former doctors' surgery site

Other Site Options

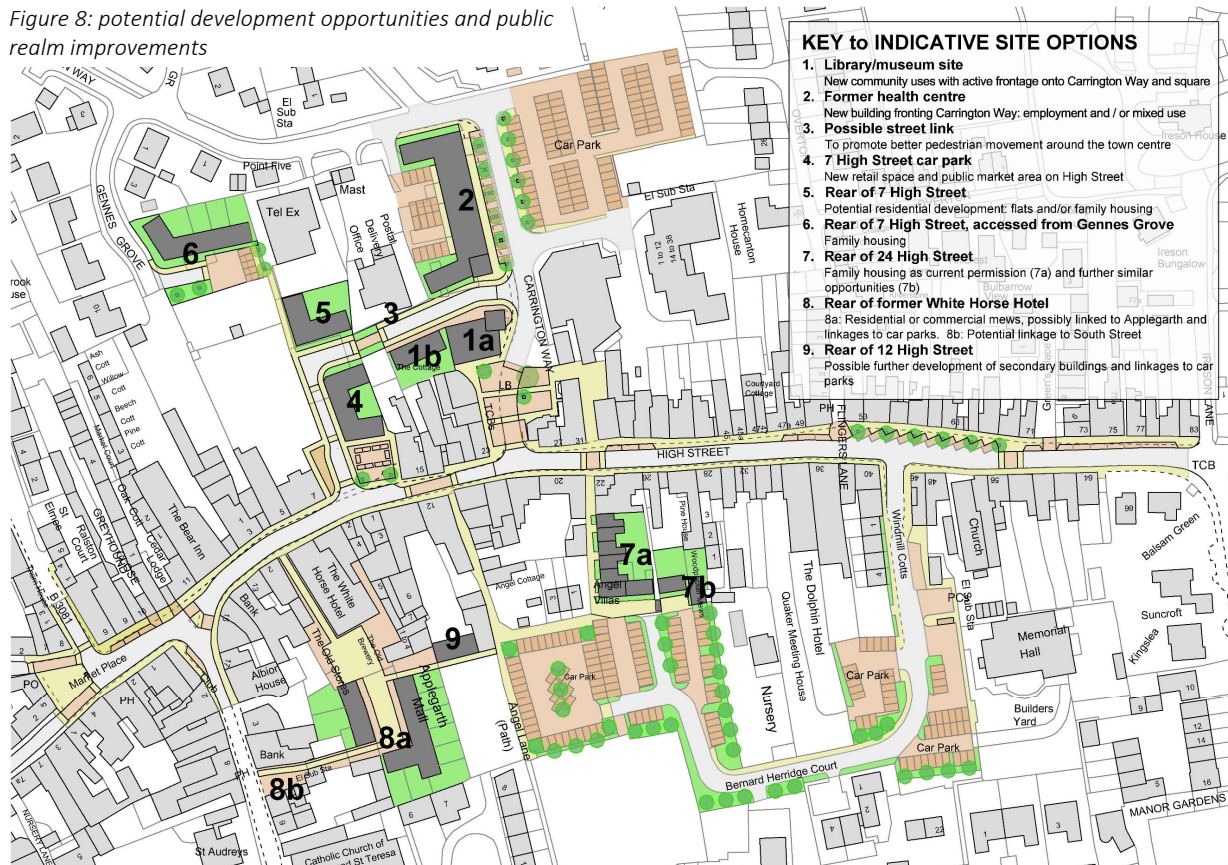
The Strategy has identified a number of other prospective sites and buildings throughout the town centre which could offer future opportunities for development.

The library site (incorporating the museum and rear parking) at Carrington Way occupies a prominent plot and represents an important community facility and town centre attractor, which is well located and could offer scope for enhanced community service provision. The site is in County Council ownership which may offer future development potential with public sector partners although this is considered unlikely in the short term.

Elsewhere in the town centre, a number of site options already benefit from unimplemented planning permissions and demonstrate the scope for sensitive residential infill and refurbishment of specific listed buildings. Examples include the former White Horse Hotel, Ash House and land to the rear of 24 High Street.

The principle of these small site approvals represents the type of high quality residential development opportunity considered suitable for Wincanton town centre which support the objectives of the Strategy to widen the mix of uses, in this case residential. It also contributes towards the enhancement of the townscape and

Figure 8: potential development opportunities and public realm improvements





White Horse Hotel, awaiting redevelopment

heritage building assets of the town centre, some of which are in a poor quality of condition and in need of urgent repair. These opportunities also help to deliver active frontages and promote the scope for improved linkages in the town centre.

Within the town centre, with the exception of the identified sites, opportunities for the reuse of vacant and underused buildings will be encouraged which support main town centre uses at ground floor level and accord with planning policy. Opportunities for residential use over ground floor uses will also be encouraged where appropriate, subject to development management considerations.



Residential development opposite the Memorial Hall as an exemplar for similar development south of High Street

The two public car park sites at Carrington Way and Memorial Hall are considered essential town centre car parking facilities and are not deemed appropriate development site options unless car parking can be replaced at a similar level of convenience and capacity. The opportunity may exist to extend parking provision at Carrington Way through the acquisition of the former toilet block.

A number of underused sites exist in edge of centre locations including Churchfields, the Travis Perkins site and the former Cow and Gate site. These sites may in time offer potential for appropriate alternative uses, subject to relevant planning policy considerations.

Figure 8 illustrates the overall potential for development opportunities and public realm improvements in Wincanton town centre.

In all cases, it is recommended the status of prospective town centre sites and buildings are kept under regular review to ensure changes in site circumstances are fully incorporated into the realistic assessment of the availability and suitability of sites relevant to the Strategy. The end potential of sites will also be subject to detailed design and consideration through the planning process.

Public Realm

New and improved public realm is proposed to enhance the attractiveness and distinctiveness of the town centre environment. These improvements will help to create a pleasant environment for local residents and visitors in Wincanton town centre and help support wider



Public realm improvements need to address issues such as very narrow footways

objectives to encourage use and increase footfall. It also endorses the priority of the Neighbourhood Plan which identifies qualitative improvements to make the centre safer for pedestrians and non-car users particularly to address the narrowness of footways and the impact of traffic circulation and speed.

The Strategy responds to the key objectives to improve the visual quality of the historic built environment and public realm and to safeguard movement throughout the town centre, especially on foot. In addition, there are opportunities throughout the town centre to provide new public squares, where events/markets and other activities could take place which would help to enliven the centre. This provides scope for associated qualitative enhancements such as tree planting, landscaping, improvements to the paving, lighting and public art, which together contribute to the quality of the town centre environment.

Like many market towns, Wincanton has evolved in a linear form along a single main street. As a consequence, the town lacks a main public space. To address this issue, the Strategy seeks

to maintain and improve the traditional form of the High Street alongside the identification of opportunities for enhancement of small spaces and the creation of focal points for activity.

The Strategy outlines a number of guiding principles to promote public realm objectives in the town centre. These support the Neighbourhood Plan and Wincanton Town Council Transport Plan and relate to:

- 2 metre minimum width footways in the town centre (noting this can be achieved over most of the length east of Market Place although some sections are well below 1 metre);
- 6 metre carriageway between kerbs and/or kerbside parking bays (which is acceptable for a bus route and clearly defined parking bays). Where this is not possible over all sections, there is scope for a 3.80 metre priority section which would provide a traffic calming feature;
- Formalise on-street parking with kerb build-outs and surface material changes;
- Emphasise the central High Street as a linear space with surface materials and tree planting (designed in with the echelon parking);
- Encourage more arrivals into the town centre from the east as an attractive gateway to the High Street which leads more directly to the town centre car parks.

Drawing on the suggested principles, the Strategy identifies a number of priority areas for public realm improvements. These relate to:

- Market Place
- 7 High Street and 12 - 15 High Street
- Carrington Way
- High Street (eastern gateway)

Market Place

Market Place acts as a busy junction on the town’s one-way gyratory system which creates a perception of traffic dominance, particularly for arrivals from Church Street. It also acts as an important core retail and service cluster with an element of parking provision although the active use of the outdoor space is impacted by the traffic environment.

The suggested improvements identify a continuous surface across Market Place in front of the Post Office with vehicle running lanes picked out in a contrasting material. Stone sett ramps into Market Place from Church Street and Mill Street will alert drivers entering the space. The main carriageway is narrowed with wider footways and raised kerbs. Parking and loading

areas (for core trading hours) are created by kerb build-outs with paved surfaces to differentiate from the carriageway.

The Town Council Transport Plan recommended changing priorities at the junction with South Street. This is supported and offers the opportunity for improved management through the creation of a larger pedestrian refuge and level access across the carriageway in contrasting surface material and/or ramps.

It will be important to work closely with Wincanton Town Council to develop the use of the Market Place.

Figure 9 sets out the suggested public realm improvements for the Market Place area.



Figure 9: indicative public realm improvements Market Place

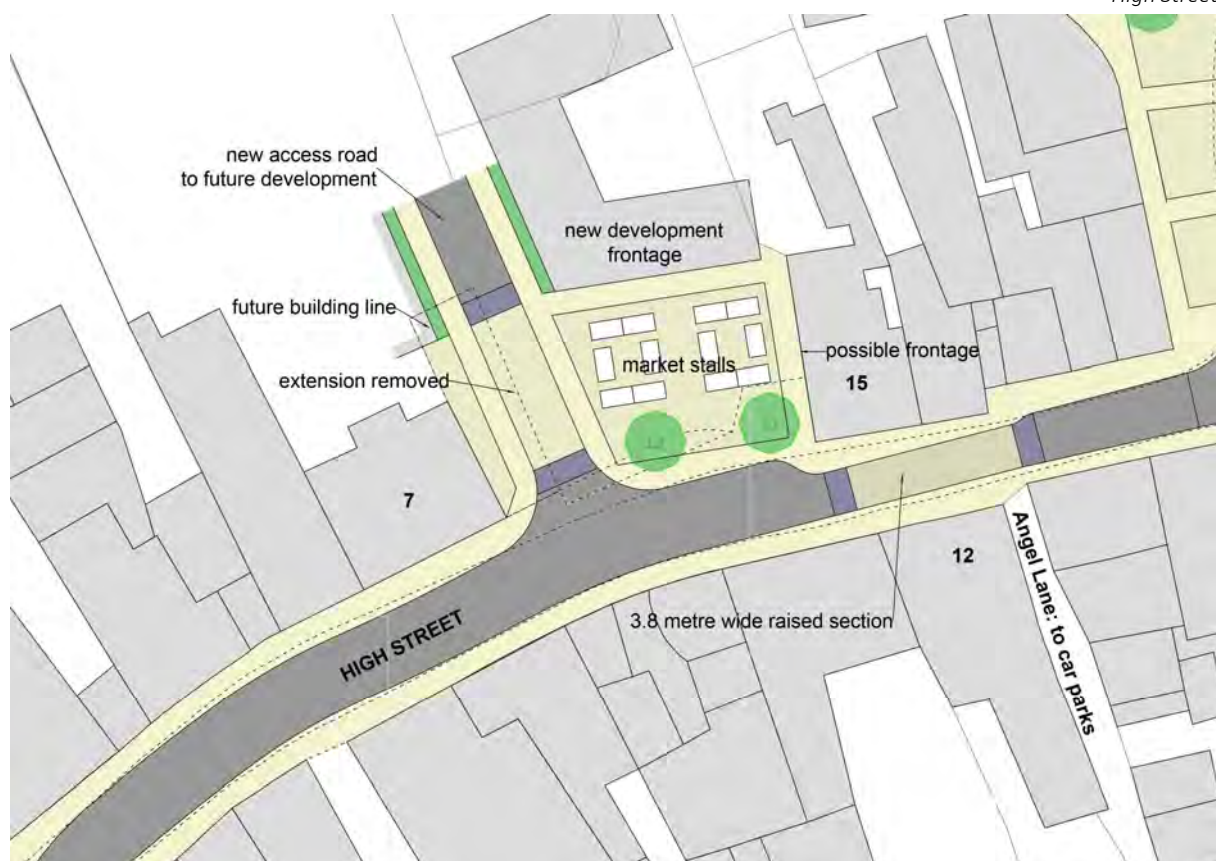
7 High Street and 12-15 High Street

Opportunities for public realm exist at 7 High Street but are related to the development potential of the site. This is focused on the removal of the shop extension and re-siting of the existing vehicular access into the site (and away from adjoining 15 High Street). This creates the potential for a new development plot between 7 and 15 High Street, set back to create a new paved space. It is considered this provides a southerly aspect to encourage commercial uses such as cafés on a new square. The new space could also be designed to accommodate an outdoor market.

This area is also one of the narrowest parts of the High Street (between no.15 on the north side and no.12 on the south). This provides the opportunity for traffic calming, with a raised table and reduction in carriageway to 3.8 metres with vehicle priority westbound. This improvement would help to widen the footpaths on both sides to c1.50 metres (from 0.87 metres and 0.97 metres currently).

Figure 10 identifies the indicative public realm improvements in the western High Street.

Figure 10: indicative public realm improvements western High Street



Carrington Way

The area at the junction of Carrington Way/High Street was repaved in 2006 as part of a town centre enhancement scheme. The west side is used for outdoor seating by Hooga Coffee shop although no other buildings take advantage of this space. In reality, it remains a busy junction for access into the Carrington Way car park and the Co-op service goods entrance, which requires manoeuvring space for HGV vehicles. There is some potential for activity on the east side, with the recent extension of 27 High Street and an entrance into Boots Chemists.

In the longer term, the potential exists to improve the wider space by linking the two sides of the junction visually. It is suggested this could be designed as a continuous surface with a 6 metre

wide vehicle route demarcated in contrasting materials (largely aligned to the existing raised kerbs). Frontages to all buildings on the west, north and east sides should be opened up to use the outdoor space, and on the east side level changes would have to be designed into the scheme which offers opportunities for a west-facing terrace to a café/restaurant for evening trade.

Shorter term opportunities exist to declutter space through the removal or relocation of bins, phone boxes and raised planters. The clearer open space could also offer another suitable location for market stalls.

Figure 11 illustrates the suggested public realm improvements at Carrington Way/High Street.



Figure 11: indicative public realm improvements Carrington Way / High Street

High Street (eastern gateway)

The eastern part of the High Street widens and currently supports on-street car parking. The carriageway offers scope for a reduction to 6 metres and allow widening of footways. In-line and echelon car parking can be maintained largely in current locations and defined by kerb build-outs.

As the arrival point from the east, the opportunity exists to improve the quality of surface materials, and elements such as street trees in the echelon parking, where the street is at its widest, can emphasise the sense of arrival. The eastern end of the improvement area also offers potential for a continuous surface crossing point, possibly with ramps, to calm traffic as it enters the core of the town centre.

The identified opportunities for public realm and traffic calming improvements will need to be subject to detailed highway design and consultation at each location.

In each case, the priority will be to balance the improvement of the pedestrian environment in an historic town centre whilst maintaining the High Street’s status as a diversionary route for the A303 (when required).

Figure 12 outlines the potential for public realm improvements at the eastern part of High Street.



Figure 12: indicative public realm improvements eastern High Street

Complementary Initiatives

The physically led options focus on potential development sites and suggested public realm improvements but need to be complemented by a range of softer initiatives. In combination, these interventions will together help to support the key objectives and deliver the Strategy.

Drawing on the key issues and challenges identified through the baseline review and stakeholder feedback, a number of initiatives are suggested. These are supported by examples of best practice from comparable market towns which are responding to similar challenges, but which have bucked the downward trend and managed to revive and reinvent themselves as multi-functional destinations.

Complementary initiatives typically require a more holistic approach compared to a development project. In much the same way that a successful centre will have both a multitude of users, there are a multitude of key stakeholders such as civic leaders, entrepreneurs, creatives and community activists who together will need to contribute to the softer initiatives to help boost footfall and reposition the town centre in the minds of its residents, visitors and investors.

This Strategy provides a framework of ideas and examples. However, it is for the local stakeholders and delivery partners, preferably in conversation with local residents, to shape these initiatives into something local and deliverable for Wincanton and to both promote and feedback relevant initiatives with the Wincanton Programme Board.



A pop-up event at Lovingtons, Market Place

Increasing footfall

Wincanton town centre needs to draw people in for a much wider 'bundle of benefits' than just shopping. This requires a better collective experience that serves differing needs, encourages the local population to use the town centre more often, and to strengthen its reputation as a reliable, convenient and friendly centre offering great customer service. Areas identified where this could be achieved include the following:

- Opening hours - reviewing business opening hours to ensure more consistency and alignment with resident expectations. This includes remaining open as advertised, identifying residents preferred and consistent weekend hours and staying open for longer on one or more days a week reflecting the 'working town' character of Wincanton.
- Better served – encourage telephone or online orders during the day that can be

collected from an out of hours town centre collection point shared by all businesses. Scope exists for an expanded offer which could encourage potential use of a vacant/underused town centre building.

- Reposition the weekly mobile banks - relocate to a visible high street location that encourages linked visits, footfall and spin off expenditure to other businesses.

Successful centres place a greater emphasis on creating new reasons to visit a town centre through events, street markets and celebrations. Ideas include:

- Night market – as a market town, the absence of a regular market is a perceived weakness. However, there is a need to differentiate the market offer with a food orientated night market considered a healthy combination which appeals to all age groups, especially families but which also provides greater convenience for the working population. Well run night markets are entertaining, exciting and can have a wide catchment draw. The opportunity to link with local food and drink



Signposting to town centre attractions

producers in South Somerset further supports wider economic benefit to the local economy.

- Festivals and complementary events – these do not necessarily need to be major events (e.g. the Christmas Extravaganza) but a more frequent programme of activity, events and celebrations to enhance footfall across the year appealing to residents and visitors. Suggestions include themed 'Super Saturdays', linked celebration for key fixtures held at Wincanton Racecourse such as the Badger Chase (November), Somerset National (January) or Cheese and Cider (May); and arts events linked to the range of

Night markets are a popular way to extend the visitor day





Maximise use of public space

creative businesses located in the town centre. The loss of the annual Hogswatch Weekend should be investigated to encourage the opportunity for its return.

- Evening economy – successful town centres are multifunctional with importance attached to entertainment and leisure. The quality of the evening economy has grown in importance putting a greater emphasis on safety and convenience of the night time environment which appeals to a wider audience. This links with public realm improvements and lighting recommended by the Strategy and can be augmented by encouragement of more intensive use of outdoor spaces, support for an improved restaurant offer and encouragement of ‘pop up’ restaurants.
- Footfall attractors – initiatives to enhance the expansion of the museum should be supported together with ideas under

development to create an arts trail about the town working with local and ‘media worthy’ artists.

Reposition the town centre in peoples’ minds

The relationship between the town centre and the catchment population is an important variable that can heavily influence activity levels. Whilst retailer representation and offer remains an important factor that affect customer behaviour, successful centres have focused on the collective offer to attract visits. Suggested initiatives include the following:

- Management, marketing and promotion of the town centre – this is essential in a centre like Wincanton which is characterised by numerous private ownerships. It will be vital for collaboration and co-ordination amongst the business community and stakeholders to take forward initiatives to develop a strong brand and communication strategy for Wincanton town centre which connects the local population with its centre and better understands what residents really want. This marketing and communication will also act as a promotional tool to investment and visitors.



Initiatives to encourage use of local shops and businesses

- Improved signage – the opportunity should focus on maximising Wincanton’s strategic location on the A303 to attract more visitors, including enhanced signage such as ‘brown signs’ at the town junctions to promote the town centre. This offers a ‘quick win’, a visible improvement and clear statement of the town centre that communicates with the local population and visitors.
- Town centre campaigns - there are a number of tried and tested ‘shop local’ campaigns that have worked across the country, and free to use resources such as Totally Locally (www.totallylocally.org). These campaigns engage with people and foster pride in the town centre as a place to work, live and visit. It also helps to build community and stakeholder involvement around a strategy.

Property grants and support

There are a number of prominent underused and/or vacant buildings in Wincanton town centre, which in certain cases have opened up the opportunity for more diverse enterprises and community involvement in the reuse of redundant space, alongside new quality investment.

Stakeholder feedback indicates the attraction of the heritage quality and relative affordability of certain town centre buildings to the creative community in which “creative people come here, like it, buy & refurbish buildings & stay”.

Given the importance of the distinctive built environment alongside the availability of town centre property, this Strategy seeks to encourage new investment into existing buildings but recognises the additional costs associated with

the repair and refurbishment of listed and locally significant historic buildings. It also seeks to support more local entrepreneurship and community involvement in temporary and longer term uses to develop placemaking and promote the vitality and viability of the town centre.

Initiatives include:

- Property related grants – review of existing property related grants, including the Retail Support Initiative for shop front enhancements, to provide a more targeted approach to encourage investment and incentivise occupancy.
- Refurbishment of buildings – ensuring public sector partners and property owners work earlier together to encourage and maximise the appropriate conversion/refurbishment of town centre buildings that meet modern occupier requirements.
- Publish a town centre prospectus – working with property owners and locally active commercial agents to promote the ‘golden opportunities’ in the town centre to help attract new investment and encourage take up of vacant units.
- Temporary uses – work with property owners and commercial agents to encourage ‘pop up’ and meanwhile uses in long term vacant properties.
- Community ownership – in the longer term, the community may develop an interest in taking ownership of a property as an investment and to deliver community and social enterprise objectives through a Community Interest Company model.

Car Parking

Wincanton town centre is served by two main public car parks (Carrington Way and Memorial Hall), located to the north and south of the High Street respectively. These facilities are complemented by the Churchfields car park located off Church Street together with on street parking in parts of the town centre. At the local level, Wincanton Town Council's Wincanton Transport Plan (2013) identified a total of 342 on and off-street spaces (including 15 disabled spaces) in the town centre. All of the parking spaces are currently free under the compensation scheme paid by the Town Council to the District Council.

The South Somerset Car Parking Strategy Review (2013) represents the most up to date district wide evidence base and identified a need in the short term to address car parking capacity in Wincanton (albeit related to an insignificant shortfall in spaces). The review identified this could be addressed through management measures or additional off-street parking provision. The Town Council Transport Plan further identified a number of recommendations related to active management suggestions or the re-negotiation of the current compensation scheme to retain free car parking.

There appear to be good levels of car parking occupancy in the town centre, at convenient locations which are well linked to the town centre and accessible to all. The location of car parking and current free cost is considered a major incentive by stakeholders for attracting visits to

Wincanton town centre although there are management issues related to long stay and resident parking which impact on parking availability.

Changes to the town centre car parking management regime (including withdrawal of the local compensation scheme and introduction of proposed parking charges) are planned for Autumn 2019. Any change, including charging, will need to be carefully managed to conform with the Council's Parking Strategy and ensure the attraction of Wincanton town centre is not diminished. To help positively inform this process, this Strategy recommends the importance of a car parking survey of Wincanton town centre to update the 2013 evidence base. This is considered essential for identifying the supply, demand and capacity of existing facilities and to complement and inform the District wide Parking Strategy.

Whilst the need for additional spaces cannot be verified at present, it is considered important that any emerging car parking strategy for Wincanton town centre actively investigates appropriate management options. This should include options such as the differentiation of long and short stay parking areas, resident parking permits, and a charging strategy which is aligned to the parking areas including encouragement of opportunities for free and/or reduced parking charges for shorter term visits.

Part Three: Delivery

Action Plan, Delivery Responsibility and Performance Monitoring



5 Action Plan and Responsibilities

Introduction

This section sets out an Action Plan to support the delivery of the key elements of the Wincanton Town Centre Strategy.

The Action Plan covers a 1 - 3 year period and identifies a series of priority interventions and projects which are considered the most crucial in the short term for supporting the Strategy objectives. The actions are all framed with the aim of enabling the delivery of realistic and achievable projects and initiatives identified in the Strategy. A series of longer term aspirations are also identified for Year 4 and beyond to support the transformation of the town centre over the medium to long term.

Action Plan

The focus of the actions aligns to the strategic objectives which seek to enhance footfall and extend activity within the town centre through support for a wider mix of uses. It also seeks the improvement of the town centre environment to encourage visits whilst balancing the heritage quality and character. Overall, the underlying aim is to create a vibrant destination for residents and visitors. These themes complement each other and together seek to achieve the aims, objectives and vision of the Strategy.

A number of Early Interventions are identified to be progressed over the next 12 months (2019 - 2020). These offer an opportunity for short term 'easy wins' and would produce immediate impact and generate momentum towards the medium and longer term projects and improvements. These are supported by Momentum Actions, which remain of core importance to the delivery of the Strategy but are considered of relevance over Years 2 and 3 (2020 - 2022) of the Action Plan and focus on maximising activity and community engagement to generate a change in behaviour.

The Action Plan outlines the Council's commitment to delivering change in Wincanton town centre and identifies the key partners working in conjunction with South Somerset District Council, who together can best achieve the identified priorities.

To focus attention, key milestones are identified at the end of Year 1 for each action. This is considered important for maintaining progress and assists with performance review and monitoring.

The Action Plan will help to inform the plan for the Wincanton Programme Board.

1. Broadening the mix of uses to enhance footfall by residents and visitors

Early Interventions (Year 1)	Delivery Responsibilities	Timescale/Milestone
<p>1.1: Prepare and maintain a register of vacant/underused town centre properties, working closely with commercial agents and property owners, to provide a town centre prospectus identifying golden opportunities for economic reuse and investment.</p>	<p>South Somerset District Council – Lead, Coordinate, Resource, Monitor</p> <p>Partners – Property Owners, Commercial Agents</p>	<p>Year 1: to have created a town centre prospectus of available properties with owner/agent contact details.</p> <p>Ongoing action supported by regular monitoring and updated twice yearly.</p>
<p>1.2: Engage with key town centre land and property owners to understand site intentions to maximise reoccupation and secure delivery of unimplemented planning permissions. Priority to focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former White Horse Hotel • 7 High Street • Former health centre, Carrington Way • 15 High Street • 24 High Street • 36 High Street • County Council assets 	<p>South Somerset District Council – Lead, Coordinate, Resource, Monitor</p> <p>Partners – Property Owners, Commercial Agents, Somerset County Council</p>	<p>Year 1: to have identified and contacted the priority site owners to understand timescales for delivery and, where appropriate, research best practice to secure investment, including meanwhile/temporary uses.</p> <p>Ongoing action.</p>
<p>1.3: Investigate potential for ATM provision (24hour) in the town centre and relocation of the weekly mobile banks to a more prominent location in the town centre to maximise linked trips.</p>	<p>South Somerset District Council – Influence, Support</p> <p>Partners – Town Council, Business Community, Local Community, Third Sector</p>	<p>Year 1: to have engaged with the mobile bank operators to relocate the mobile banks to a more central location (that remains safe and convenient).</p> <p>Ongoing action to encourage and secure provision of a 24/7 ATM.</p>

Momentum Actions (Years 2-3+)	Delivery Responsibilities	Timescale/Milestone
<p>1.4: Support and encourage opportunities to maximise mixed use development, including change of use and 'meanwhile/ pop up' temporary uses, where appropriate, with early signposting of advice and guidance to promote a diversity of uses.</p>	<p>South Somerset District Council – Lead, Support, Resource, Monitor</p> <p>Partners – Property Owners, Commercial Agents, Town Council, Somerset County Council</p>	<p>Year 1: to have engaged with relevant site owners (public and private sector) and identified opportunities for alternative uses. Input to Local Plan review to promote flexibility of uses in the town centre.</p> <p>Ongoing action to encourage appropriate change of use and temporary uses, including planning advice where required.</p>
<p>1.5: Prepare a Development Brief for the land to the rear and side of 7 High Street and adjoining sites to guide the longer term development potential of the key town centre site.</p>	<p>South Somerset District Council – Lead, Resource, Coordinate, Deliver</p> <p>Partners -Property owner, Town Council, Somerset County Council</p>	<p>Year 1: to have commissioned the preparation of a Development Brief and masterplan, in consultation with relevant landowners. Input to Local Plan review to promote allocation of key sites.</p> <p>Ongoing action.</p>
<p>1.6: Support work by other partners to ensure Wincanton town centre keeps pace with improvements in digital connectivity to help attract new enterprises, including new workspace provision to the town centre.</p>	<p>South Somerset District Council – Influence, Support</p> <p>Partners – Connecting Devon and Somerset, Government Agencies, Business Community, Third Sector, Somerset County Council</p>	<p>Year 1: to maintain support at a district level to secure improvements to digital connectivity.</p> <p>Ongoing action.</p>
<p>1.7: Work alongside key partners to investigate and encourage enhanced use of the library for community services and an expanded museum/heritage centre.</p>	<p>South Somerset District Council – Support, Influence</p> <p>Partners – Somerset County Council, Town Council, Third Sector</p>	<p>Year 1: to have identified the opportunity to expand use of the library for community and education benefit.</p> <p>Ongoing action.</p>

2. Enhancing the attractiveness of the town centre environment

Early Interventions (Year 1)	Delivery Responsibilities	Timescale/Milestone
2.1: Prepare a register of heritage buildings for improvement to identify priorities for action and engagement with property owners.	South Somerset District Council – Lead, Coordinate, Resource, Deliver Partners - Property owners, Town Council, Somerset County Council	Year 1: to have prepared a register alongside owner engagement to identify priority list of town centre buildings in need of maintenance and refurbishment. Ongoing action to be reviewed annually.
2.2: Investigate sources of funding to support the restoration of town centre properties.	South Somerset District Council – Lead, Coordinate, Resource, Monitor Partners – Government Agencies, Town Council, Business Community	Year 1: to monitor and review funding eligibility and opportunities, including Heritage Lottery Fund and Future High Streets Fund. Ongoing actions linked to application deadline.
2.3: Undertake a town centre car parking survey to understand local car parking patterns, to complement the District wide Parking Strategy.	South Somerset District Council – Lead, Coordinate, Resource, Deliver Partners – Somerset County Council, Town Council, Business Community, Local Community	Year 1: to ensure the District wide Parking Strategy is supported by a comprehensive survey of town centre parking to inform advice on management and charging, if appropriate. Ongoing action.
2.4: Work with the local community and town centre businesses to review better alignment of opening hours in Wincanton town centre.	South Somerset District Council – Influence, Support Partners – Local Community, Business Community, Town Council	Year 1: to review and encourage opening hours which meet local community needs. Ongoing action.
2.5: Review application of the Retail Frontage Initiative to ensure intervention in shop	South Somerset District Council – Lead, Coordinate, Resource, Deliver, Monitor	Year 1: to review existing grant and eligibility criteria and ensure focus on properties in most need of improvement. Proactive

fronts in greatest need of improvement.	Partners - Property owners, Town Council, Business Community	targeting of initiative to inform building owners. Ongoing action.
Momentum Actions (Years 2-3+)	Delivery Responsibilities	Timescale/Milestone
2.6: Work with key partners, including Somerset County Council Highways, to prioritise delivery of a series of identified projects to improve the public realm in the town centre, focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speed zone • Traffic calming • Pavement improvements • Enhanced public spaces 	South Somerset District Council – Influence, Support Partners – Somerset County Council, Town Council, Business Community	Year 1: ongoing dialogue with Somerset County Council to secure detailed design to plan and deliver programme of public realm improvements identified in the Wincanton Neighbourhood Plan. Ongoing action.
2.7: investigate a scheme to encourage floral/window box displays, signage and planting to town centre business frontages, including promotion of seasonal displays.	South Somerset District Council – Lead, Coordinate, Resource, Deliver, Monitor Partners - Property Owners, Town Council, Business Community, Education Community	Year 1: linked to the Retail Frontage Initiative, to have identified potential to extend grant support to cover floral/window box/planting seasonal displays and new/refurbishment of existing signage. Scope to engage with local schools and local community to encourage ideas. Ongoing action.
2.8: Review town centre lighting schemes to promote a safe town centre at night and support the night time economy.	South Somerset District Council – Lead, Coordinate, Resource, Deliver, Monitor Partners – Somerset County Council, Town Council, Business Community	Year 1: to have identified areas in need of improvement, including the potential for new lighting. Ongoing action.

3. Creating a destination

Early Interventions (Year 1)	Delivery Responsibilities	Timescale/Milestone
<p>3.1: Establish a Town Centre Stakeholders Group to develop a co-ordinated programme of actions and marketing initiatives to promote Wincanton town centre and report to the Wincanton Programme Board.</p>	<p>South Somerset District Council – Influence, Support</p> <p>Partners – Town Council, Business Community, Third Sector, Local Community</p>	<p>Year 1: to have established a Town Centre Stakeholder Group with identified structure and leadership. Regular meetings to be held and programme of events agreed, with active reporting to the Wincanton Programme Board.</p> <p>Ongoing action.</p>
<p>3.2: Improve signage to the town centre, to include potential for a 'brown' sign on the A303</p>	<p>South Somerset District Council – Influence, Support</p> <p>Partners – Government Agencies, Somerset County Council, Town Council, Business Community</p>	<p>Year 1: to have investigated potential and cost for a brown sign alongside wider review of signage to/within the town centre.</p> <p>Ongoing action.</p>
<p>3.3: Work with key partners to investigate opportunities for a new themed festival, market and complementary events, including options to support the evening economy.</p>	<p>South Somerset District Council – Influence, Support</p> <p>Partners – Business Community, Town Council, Third Sector</p>	<p>Year 1: linked to the Town Centre Stakeholder Group, establish a working group alongside partners to investigate and identify suitable market/festival/complementary events and review of existing events.</p> <p>Ongoing action.</p>

Momentum Actions (Years 2-3+)	Delivery Responsibilities	Timescale/Milestone
3.4: Investigate new promotional initiatives such as Totally Locally and identify suitable town centre campaigns for trial purposes.	South Somerset District Council – Lead, Resource, Support, Monitor Partners – Business Community, Town Council, Third Sector	Year 1: to have reviewed available promotional networks and initiatives and identify a suitable scheme for trial in the town centre. Ongoing action.
3.5: Encourage coordinated marketing and networking between partners and local attractions such as Wincanton Racecourse and other local visitor destinations to promote the town centre.	South Somerset District Council – Influence, Resource, Support, Monitor Partners – Business Community, Town Council, Third Sector, Local Attractions	Year 1: to have engaged with relevant partners to establish and identify appropriate promotional opportunities with Wincanton racecourse and other local destinations. Ongoing action.
3.6: Investigate the potential for arts-based community involvement to deliver meanwhile uses, shopfront and public realm improvements and an arts trail.	South Somerset District Council – Lead, Support, Resource, Monitor Partners – Arts Community, Third Sector, Town Council, Business Community, Property Owners	Year 1: to have identified and engaged with the local arts community to investigate opportunities for a programme of arts-based activities to support other town centre initiatives, including temporary uses. Ongoing action.

Longer Term Aspirations (Year 4+)

Although the Action Plan is focused on a 1 to 3 year period, the majority of identified projects and interventions represent ongoing actions which set the context and conditions for the rejuvenation of Wincanton town centre. Whilst it is recognised projects may be reordered as new opportunities

emerge due to changing circumstances, this Strategy has identified the importance of a number of ambitious key projects which seek a positive step change in the attraction and performance of the town centre. Realistically, these could be considered medium term

aspirations (Year 4 onwards) given third party involvement. A summary of key projects is outlined below.

The delivery and implementation of a number of key sites are considered of core importance to the objectives of the Strategy. This will take time and whilst it is anticipated the focus of the Council's attention should focus on positive dialogue and support to private landowners to encourage the delivery of appropriate development, the site opportunities identified at 7 High Street (rear/side), the former doctors surgery at Carrington Way and potentially the library site, individually and collectively, offer major transformation potential for the town centre.

These opportunities may require Council intervention if the prospects for private sector delivery is unlikely although the aspiration remains that the High Street and former surgery sites should move forward to implementation early in the Strategy period. Both sites support ambitions to promote mixed uses in the town centre, including the potential for workspace provision whilst maximising flexibility for future commercial uses such as a potential anchor facility.

The delivery of unimplemented planning consents for prominent town centre sites represents an equally important ambition, particularly at the former White Horse Hotel and land to the rear of 24 High Street. It is envisaged that both these sites should be developed in the short term by the private sector, including

encouragement to revisit the planning approvals as appropriate. If this is not forthcoming, the sites offer scope for proactive Council intervention, particularly at the former White Horse hotel.

The reduction in the town centre vacancy rate through the beneficial reuse of long-term vacant properties should be a key ongoing aspiration. The scope for temporary uses or appropriate change of use for main town centre uses, subject to planning considerations, should be proactively encouraged and remain an ongoing priority for generating activity and footfall in the town centre. The potential to enhance the restaurant offer in the town centre is considered particularly important for supporting the diversification of the evening economy.

A series of public realm initiatives are identified for the town centre although once consideration is taken of County Council funding and the need for detailed design, procurement and implementation, this will likely represent a Year 4+ priority.

Leadership

The Action Plan provides a clear identification of the roles, responsibilities and partnering arrangements that will be required to effectively and efficiently deliver and implement the Wincanton Town Centre Strategy.

Leadership is fundamental to the delivery of the Strategy.

South Somerset District Council will provide the strong leadership and strategic direction required to drive forward the key Strategy objectives. This

will be administered by the Wincanton Programme Board modelled on the dedicated boards at Yeovil and Chard, which will manage, direct and deliver the broad aims of the regeneration programme for Wincanton town centre. The Wincanton Programme Board will report to the Council's new Strategic Development Board.

It is anticipated that the Wincanton Programme Board will include both Ward Members and the Chair of Area East Committee together with other relevant local representatives.

The Board will be supported by the Wincanton Town Centre Regeneration Stakeholder Group which will act as a forum for sharing ideas with the Board, provide specialist knowledge and advice where required, and support engagement, consultation and communication with local stakeholders.

Partnerships and Joint Working

The ambitions for Wincanton town centre are significant but entirely achievable.

However, South Somerset District Council alone cannot deliver and implement the identified projects and initiatives.

There will be the need to proactively work in collaboration with a range of delivery partners, local organisations and stakeholders where possible, including:

- Wincanton Town Council
- Wincanton Chamber of Commerce

- Town Centre Business Community
- The Balsam Centre
- Community Organisations
- Private Owners
- Developers and Commercial Agents
- Government Agencies

Whilst this is not an exhaustive list, the level and enthusiasm of local town centre stakeholder involvement provided to inform and shape the preparation of the Strategy has indicated a strong appetite for change. It has also confirmed a desire and willingness amongst key local partners and organisations to play a central role in helping to deliver initiatives that are locally informed. This provides a solid community base for successfully progressing the implementation of the Strategy with support channelled through the Wincanton Town Centre Regeneration Stakeholder Group and reported to the Wincanton Programme Board.

Wherever possible, the Wincanton Programme Board will seek to move forward the delivery of identified priorities complemented by the significant resources available from examples of best practice initiatives relating to market town regeneration.

This sharing of expertise and ideas with the key partners and the Stakeholder Group will help to build confidence and support the delivery of projects that have been successful in other comparable locations.

6 Performance Monitoring and Review

Performance Monitoring

The Wincanton Town Centre Strategy sets out a framework to guide development, investment and promotional activity. To achieve this, the supporting Action Plan identifies a number of priority projects and initiatives and also provides a mechanism for monitoring the progress and performance of the actions and the key partners working to deliver the Strategy.

The Strategy will act as a working document. At the current time, the Action Plan is focused on the short term (Year 1-3 period) and identifies key actions at the Year 1 milestone stage to guide activity towards early wins.

This will be crucial for informing decision making by the Wincanton Programme Board which will be responsible for managing the delivery of the Strategy objectives through the Action Plan. It will also be required to put in place robust project management arrangements, in accordance with the Council's prescribed methodology alongside preparation of an outline programme, details of the objectives and outcomes, a delivery plan and a programme risk log. The need for regular monitoring and evaluation of achievements and progress by the Programme Board will help to align funding allocated to the Wincanton Town Centre Regeneration Programme. This will maintain project momentum and assist with changes as necessary to projects, responsibilities, budgets and timescales.

The importance of performance monitoring will also need to take account of ongoing changes in local and economic circumstances, such as

trends and other policies/strategies which could impact on the identified priorities in Wincanton town centre. The Wincanton Programme Board will undertake ongoing monitoring of identified priorities and review project milestones to ensure progress can be effectively measured in the context of the delivery of core goals.

There will also be the opportunity to link performance monitoring with other Council led monitoring publications, such as the Annual Monitoring Report.

Review and Update

Alongside performance monitoring, it is essential the Strategy and its supporting Action Plan is regularly reviewed. This will ensure that the document remains updated and importantly responds to changes in circumstances, such as economic conditions and national and local policy. This is considered particularly important given the ongoing South Somerset Local Plan Review, once adopted, will set the future planning policy framework for Wincanton town centre.

Given the early years focus of the supporting Action Plan, it is recommended an annual review is undertaken which draws on the agreed performance monitoring. This will allow for relevant changes and re-profiling by the Programme Board as necessary to the individual projects/action priorities, including the adjustment of timescales or the identification of new projects/actions that may subsequently arise. This will also help inform the performance of the

Strategy as a whole although the regular performance monitoring provides the opportunity for ensuring any subsequent update is well informed and targeted.

It is recommended an update to the Strategy is kept under regular review and whilst much will depend on the achievement of projects and actions, it is anticipated a review and refresh be undertaken by Wincanton Programme Board at the end of Year 3 and thereon at five-year periods moving forward.

WINCANTON TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN



South Somerset
District Council

Prepared for South Somerset District Council by:



Robert West Design
architect + urban designer
