

ALTON

Town Centre Masterplan

Final report
April 2024

Quality information

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Contents

1	1. Introduction	5	4	4. Town centre contextual analysis	23
	1.1 Introduction	5		4.1 Town centre today	23
	1.2 Purpose of this document	6		4.2 Key issues and opportunities	24
	1.3 Preparing the report	7		4.3 Identity and belonging	26
	1.4 Area of study	8		4.4 Connectivity and legibility	36
				4.5 Streetscape	40
				4.6 SWOT analysis	42
2	2. Strategic regeneration context	11	5	5. Town centre framework	47
	2.1 The changing nature of town centres	11		5.1 Design principles	48
	2.2 Future town centre trends	12		5.2 Shop fronts	52
	2.3 Planning policy and guidance	13		5.3 Concept masterplan	54
	2.4 Relevant evidence base	15		5.4 Key opportunity areas	56
				5.5 Area 1	58
				5.6 Area 2	62
3	3. Town centre vision and objectives	19	6	6. Next steps	67
	3.1 Town centre vision	19			
	3.2 Town centre objectives	20			



Introduction

01

1. Introduction

AECOM have been commissioned to prepare a masterplan report for Alton Town Centre alongside a Design Code for the wider Alton Neighbourhood Plan area, through the department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Neighbourhood Planning Programme led by Locality.

1.2 Introduction

Alton is a historic market town within East Hampshire. It's strong history of commerce and activity continues today, providing retail and services to local residents and visitors. This is a core part of the town's identity and continuing to meet retail and leisure needs is a priority for the community. As shopping trends continue to change, the town centre must continue to react and adapt to this, welcoming new opportunities.

This document supports the policies East Hampshire District Council have developed within the Emerging Local Plan (2017-2036) to support the vitality and viability of the town centre. This is also reflected in the wider UK context where recent government guidance has placed emphasis on the importance of town centres. Opportunities identified later in this document reflect the brownfield first approach advocated by the Alton Neighbourhood Plan. It is understood that the emerging Local Plan is now promoting significant growth on the edge of Alton which will maintain car dependency in the town centre. If this is confirmed the town centre masterplan may need to revisit these opportunities in light of the need to maintain town centre car parking.

One of the key initiatives within the White Paper (2022) is to restore pride in place and community satisfaction with town centres. The Build Back Better High Streets report (2021) notes the importance of our

high streets at the forefront of the UK's recovery post-COVID and focuses on five key priorities. Section 2 sets out relevant policies in more detail.

This Town Centre Masterplan report is prepared in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021, paragraph 128, specifying the role of design guidelines and codes in the development of a Neighbourhood Plan:

'To provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, plans should use visual tools such as design guides and codes. These provide a framework for creating distinctive places, with a consistent and high-quality standard of design. However, their level of detail and degree of prescription should be tailored to the circumstances in each place and should allow a suitable degree of variety where this would be justified.'



1.3 Purpose of this document

It is intended that this independent technical report becomes an integral part of evidence base to the Neighbourhood Plan by informing policies that will influence the design of new development and have weight in the planning process.

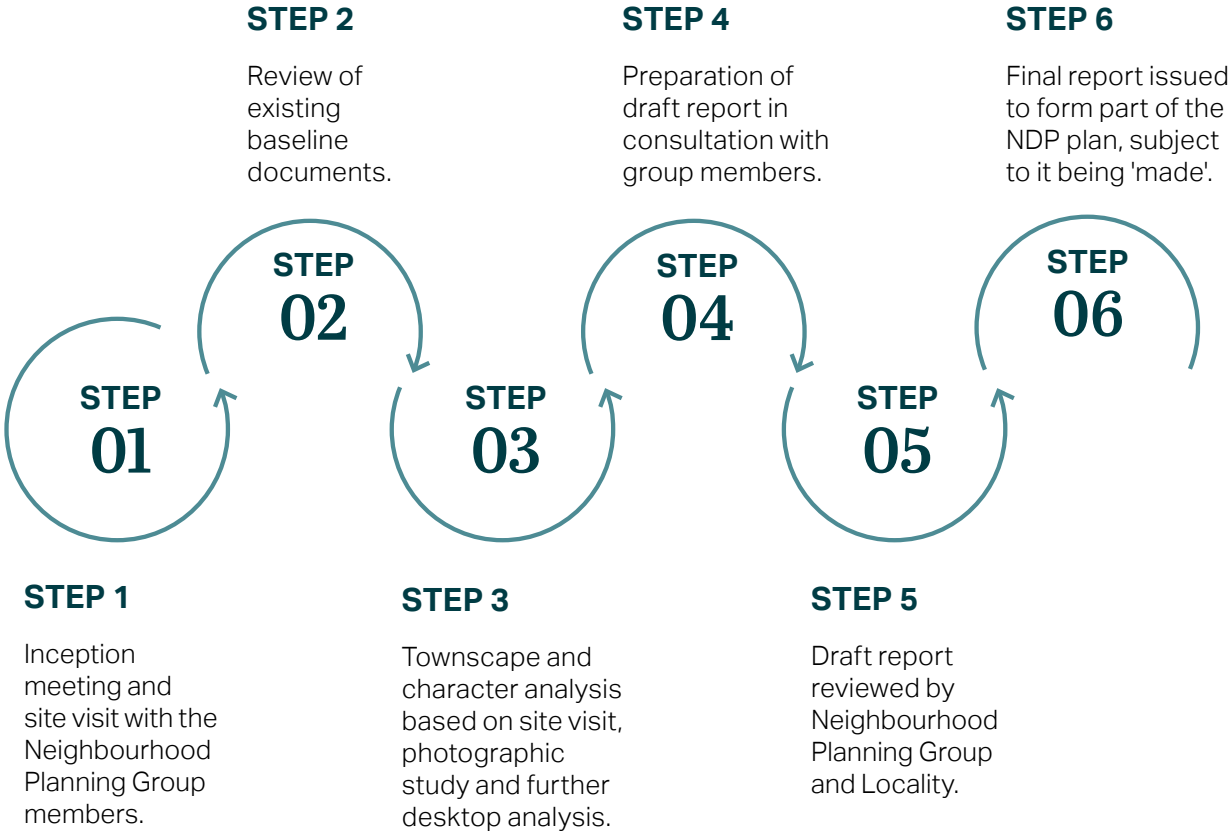
The report provides a high-level masterplan framework. The masterplanning studies in this document are high level and illustrative, prepared to demonstrate how the town centre policy principles that the Alton Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) wishes to promote could be applied to the town centre and opportunity sites.

It is expected that a detailed evidence and design process including pre-application engagement in accordance with the NDP pre-application protocol, is undertaken by applicants.

This report should be read in conjunction with the Design Code document, which covers the whole Neighbourhood Area.

1.4 Preparing the report

The following steps were agreed with the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to produce this report.



1.5 Area of study

Alton is a historic market town located in East Hampshire. The Alton Town Centre is serviced by the A31, with connections to Winchester, Southampton, Farnham, Guildford and London, and offers direct rail links into London Waterloo.

Most of the town centre falls within the Designated Alton Conservation Area, with a number of listed buildings, which add to the attractive character of the shopping streets.

There were around 215¹ shop premises (A1 or A5) in 2016, operating in the town centre and a number of shops comprising a mix of independent traders, supermarkets and national retail brands. The town centre is home to important local landmarks such as the Curtis Museum, Allen Art Gallery, and St. Lawrence Church.

Fig 1 illustrates the Alton Town Centre study area boundary, which defines the masterplan report.

¹ Alton NDP, Economic sustainability and viability, pg 81.

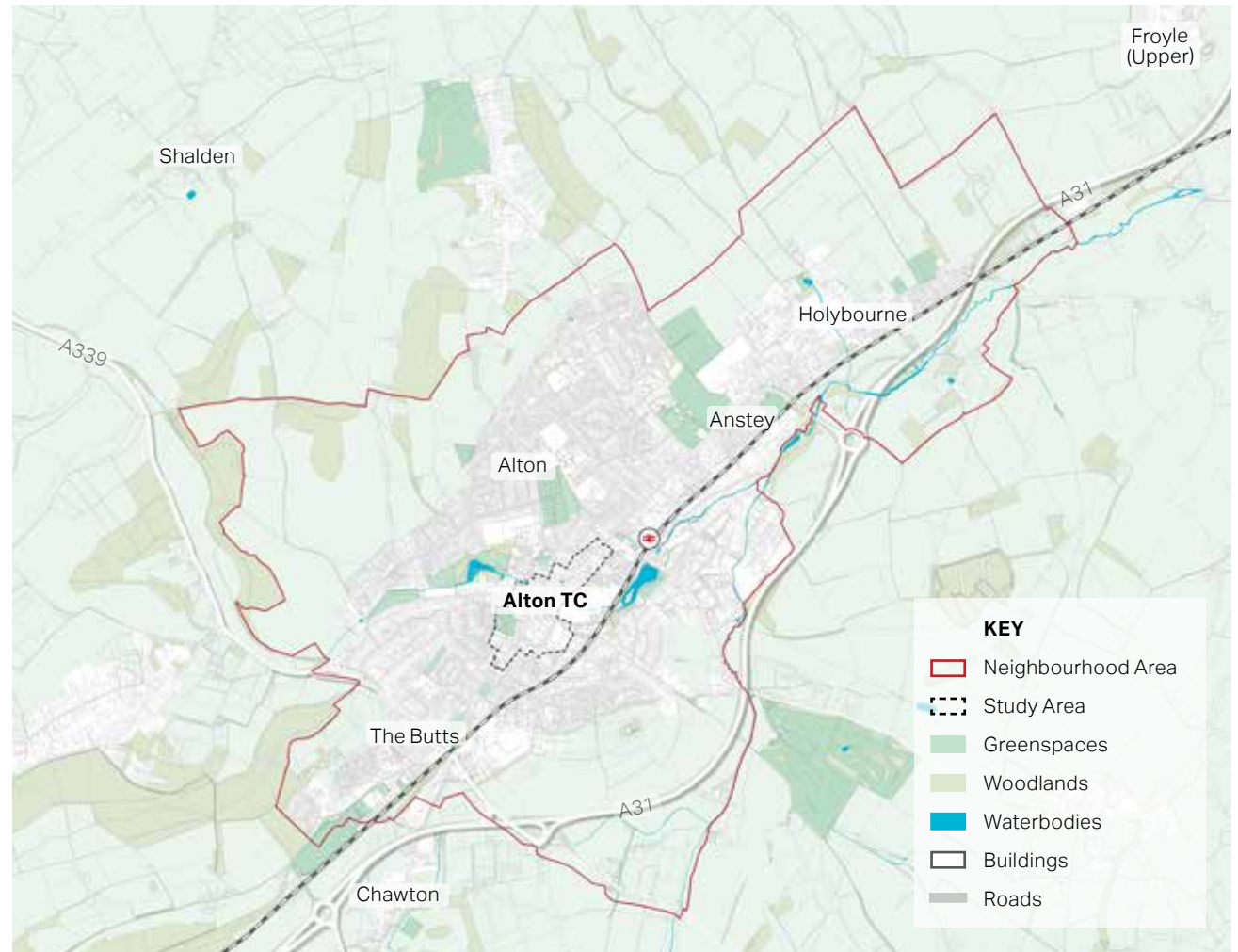


Figure 01: Map showing Alton Neighbourhood Area in context (Source: OS MasterMap)



Figure 02: Alton Town Centre Study Area

The background image shows a narrow, paved alleyway between two-story brick buildings. On the left, a black street lamp is mounted on a wall. On the right, there are large windows with blue frames and some potted plants. In the distance, a small white building with a clock tower is visible. A large, semi-transparent teal circle is centered over the image, containing the text 'Strategic regeneration context' and the number '02'.

**Strategic regeneration
context**

02

2. Strategic regeneration context

Whether a small town or large city, a town centre is traditionally the hub of its surrounding community. Town centres across the UK are changing rapidly. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated trends significantly.

2.1 The changing nature of town centres

National trends see a rise in vacant shops and a decline in the health of high streets across the UK. This is due to a multitude of factors, which stem from systemic economic shocks and social changes (i.e. Brexit, the resulting aftermath of Covid-19, cost of living crisis, and a long term shift to online shopping).

However, this means new opportunities can arise. New relationships with high streets and town centres are emerging. These urban spaces are increasingly seen as a destination to socialise and seek out community. Support for independent shops and businesses and local craft has surged since the pandemic and as a counter movement to the hyper-globalised and digital world we now live in.

These new trends in support of social spaces and local activity provide great potential for the future of town centres.

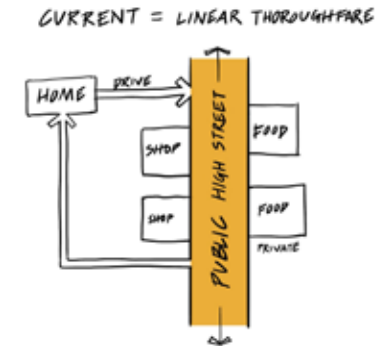


Figure 03: High Streets 2020. Image credit: [mata-architects](#)

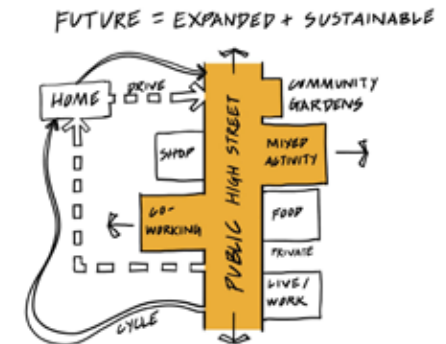


Figure 04: Future High Streets. Image credit: [mata-architects](#)

2.2 Future town centre trends

- 1** Landlords will welcome emerging brands that are experience-driven and connected with the local community. Lease contracts may become shorter and more flexible and demand for local concepts may require changes to credit risk models.
- 2** Town centres will focus on active travel and will reduce the presence and dominance of private vehicles. Personal ownership of cars will be dramatically reduced. Car fleets will own and operate driverless vehicles.
- 3** The sharing economy will be commonplace, extending beyond accommodation, transport and workspace.
- 4** An ageing population will bring with it various land use demands, such as new models of extra care facilities.
- 5** An acute shift to living and working locally; more people are shopping, working and exercising in their local community - flexible space is key.
- 6** Flexible lease structures will be more common and some will be automated – with renewals and negotiations carried out via tech. Blockchain registry of leases, land registry, previous tenants etc. will also be in place.
- 7** Independent stores, and food and beverage operators will become more prevalent. Retail destinations will feature unique offerings curated towards the local catchment. Chains will develop “local” concepts and brand names giving the appearance of independents.
- 8** Retail will be leisure; the divide will become increasingly blurred with brands addressing the need for experience in their stores. Stores will become as much showrooms as a place to make a purchase with in-store leisure elements integrated.
- 9** Wellness establishments will grow in number. Fitness centres will become commonplace, and lifestyle stores will become more popular as people look to buy clothes and products to support their healthy-living aspirations.



East Hampshire District Local Plan Joint Core Strategy 2014

Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011 to 2028 (modified 2021)

Alton Design Guidance and Codes 2023

2.3 Planning policy and guidance

The masterplan has been developed in accordance with national and local planning policy and guidance documents. These documents are summarised in the Neighbourhood Plan Design Guidance and Codes Report, 2023 (see 1.6 Policy Context). This section highlights the local priorities and particular points of relevance to the masterplan.

DISTRICT PLANNING POLICY

Emerging - Local Plan (2021-2040)

The Plan review started in 2017, and adoption is expected by Autumn 2025. The themes of the objectives will grow strategically to meet the area's needs, and to manage change while protecting and enhancing the area's heritage and natural environment. Policy DM24 seeks to designate a condensed Primary Shopping Area for Alton town centre. The most recent draft for Regulation 18, designates Alton as Tier 1 status with a housing number allocation of 1700 additional homes during the Plan period.

2014 - Joint Core Strategy (Part 1 Local Plan)

The policy framework within the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) sets out the role of Alton as a principal centre in the District that should be maintained and enhanced (CP8).

2019 - East Hampshire Place-Making Strategy 2019-2036

The report provides a framework to strengthen the connections between people and places; to prioritise investment in public places and the built environment; and to engage and inspire people to live, work and play in the district. The overarching priorities for Alton include:

- Strengthening its identity and sense of pride of place.
- Improving public realm in and around the high street.
- Delivering key sites.
- Improving walking, cycling and wayfinding routes.
- Effectively deploying Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and other funding to support neighbourhood plan objectives and improvements that deliver the most benefit to the town.

LOCAL PLANNING POLICY

Emerging - Alton Neighbourhood Plan

The emerging Neighbourhood Plan (NP) is in progress including the revised draft policies. A key new consideration will be in making better use of existing urban infrastructure. This is to be considered alongside the Design Guidance and Codes and this Masterplan report.

2023 - Alton Neighbourhood Plan Design Guidance and Codes

The recently prepared Alton Design Guidance and Codes provides context for this Masterplan report and can be read alongside this report.

2011 (modified 2021) - Alton Neighbourhood Development Plan

The NPD seeks to proactively shape and manage Alton's growth up to 2028. This is largely in the form of residential development at edge of town greenfield sites. 14 objectives are set out in line with the wider policy context, of which, the most relevant to the town centre: **Objective 5a: To protect and enhance the role of Alton town centre as a retail, tourism and hospitality hub, which is vibrant and adaptable to future needs.**

2.4 Relevant evidence base

A number of studies have been commissioned by East Hampshire District Council and Alton to assess the health of town centres within the respective areas and to create an evidence base to inform policy development and to plan for the future.

2018 - East Hampshire Retail and Main Town Centre Uses Study (RMTCUS)

The study forms part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan. The role of the RMTCUS 2018 is to inform future planning policy in the District (excluding the South Downs National Park area), together with a wider strategy for the future of the District's centres to 2036.

The report covers the East Hampshire area, sub-divided into 5 zones that broadly reflect the catchment areas of the main centres within the District. Alton Town Centre is identified as having a large zone of influence extending across the north of the district.

The Centre Health Checks section sets out the initial assessment of Alton Town Centre (page 56-58). This is also contextualised with findings from the previous 2007 household survey. It is noted that Alton receives a relatively high proportion of visits for shopping within the District.

2023 - East Hampshire Retail and Main Town Centre Uses Study Update: Final Report

The updated 2023 report provides a partial update of the RMTCUS 2018 and rolls forward need/capacity projections to 2040. To be read alongside the RMTCUS 2018.

2022 - Alton Town Centre Study

This was commissioned to update and supplement the RMTCUS 2018 assessment of the town centre with further detail. The further updated strengths and weaknesses are as summarised:

Strengths

- A reasonable selection of shops is maintained, in particular a range and choice of independent shops.
- Sustained and suitable food and grocery provision. The street markets add to the centre's attraction.
- Suitable range of non-service facilities (e.g. banks and building societies) and non-retail service categories (e.g. hair & beauty salons).

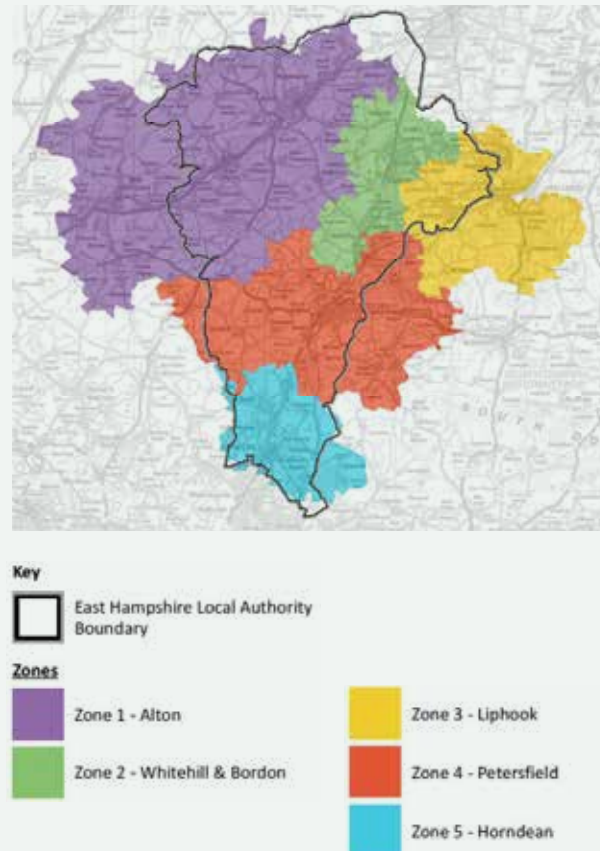


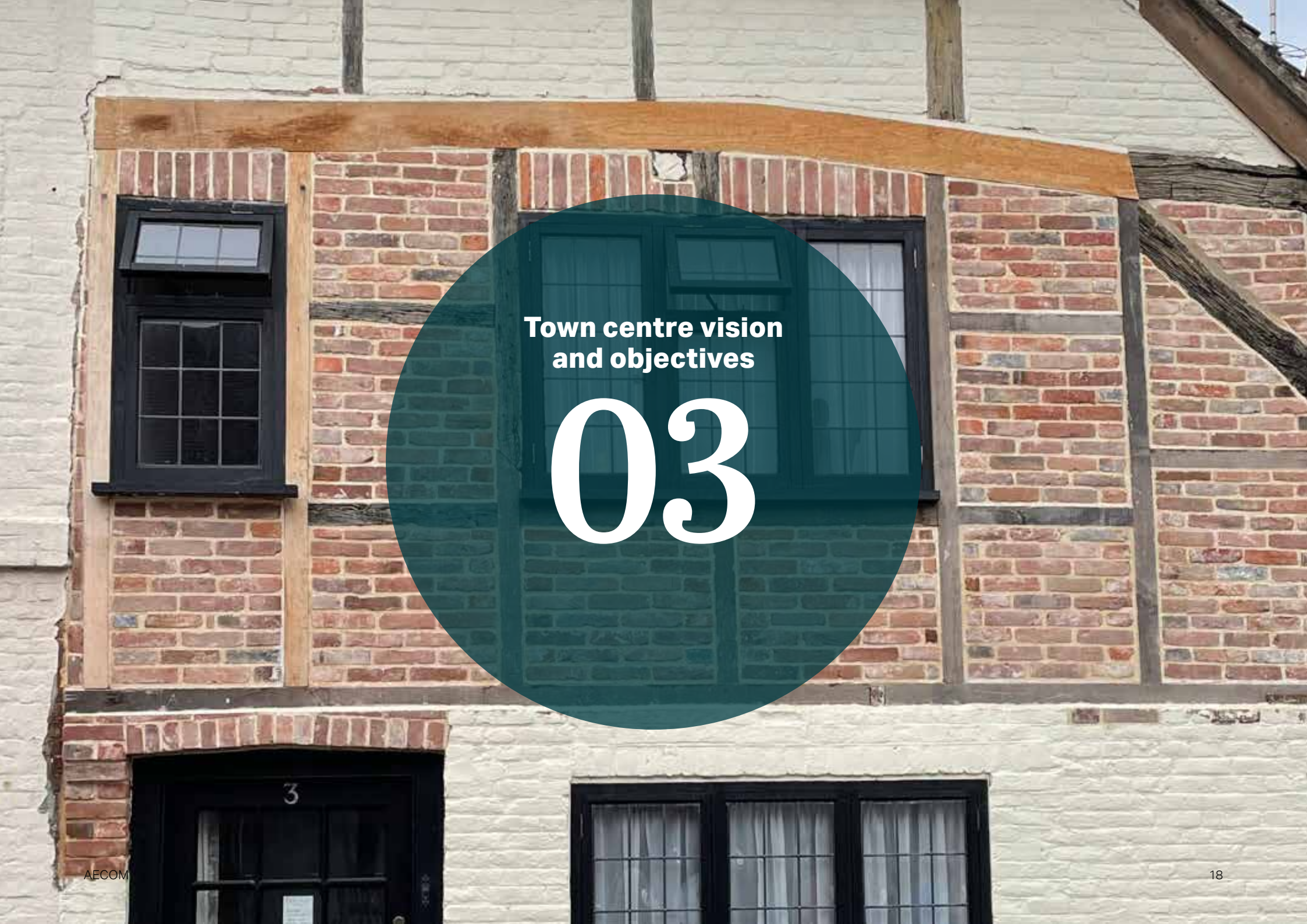
Figure 05: Study area zones in the East Hampshire Retail and Main Town Centre Uses Study. Image credit: [Lichfields](#)

- The architectural quality of buildings and streetscape remains a strength, although some areas could be improved. Potential streetscape improvements to enhance the shopping environment.
- The overall environmental quality remains good and relatively safe
- Various car parks located near the main shopping area. However there are high volumes of traffic (see below).

Weaknesses

- The shop vacancy rate (16.1%) has increased since 2018 and is now higher than the national average (14.7%), suggesting the demand for premises has weakened since 2018. The number of vacant units has increased from 30 to 33 units. Vacant units are evident across the centre including the Primary Shopping Area.
- Most of the vacant shop units are small (under 150 sq.m gross) and may not meet space requirements of potential new operators. There is a limited provision of larger modern premises in the conservation area.
- Some vacant units have unattractive shop frontages. A continued increase in long term shop vacancies could undermine the quality of Alton's streetscape.
- The number of comparison good shops has decreased. Notably for clothing and footwear shops. The continuation of this trend is a key threat to the town centre's vitality and viability if alternative uses cannot be attracted.
- Lack of quality, range and choice of comparison goods facilities available in larger surrounding centres such as Basingstoke, Guildford, Southampton and Winchester, especially clothing and footwear retailers. Alton has a high proportion of charity shops.
- Alton's evening economy continues to be based primarily on restaurants, pubs/hotels. The provision of restaurants/café's has improved since 2018 but remains below the national average. The evening economy could still be improved through diversification. The food/beverage floorspace capacity projections and published operator space requirements suggest this sector can be improved in the future, although residential amenity impact issues will need to be considered.
- The linear structure of the centre does not encourage shoppers to visit all parts of the town centre during their shopping trip, and pedestrian flows within peripheral areas are low. The linear High Street and narrow pavements in side streets and Normandy Street continues to restrict pedestrian flows in peripheral areas.
- High volumes of traffic can make it difficult for pedestrians to cross the road in certain areas.
- Alton town centre remains heavily reliant on the private car, as indicated by the household survey results in 2018, although bus and rail services are available.

The independent Palace Cinema has closed since this report was published and has been omitted from the summary.



**Town centre vision
and objectives**

03

3. Town centre vision and objectives

3.1 Town centre vision

The vision for Alton has been developed with input from the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG), and is in accordance with existing local and district planning policy. The vision is set out, right.

"The vision is to ensure a vibrant, adaptable town centre, where the community can come together to undertake a range of activities, in a flexible space which provides retail, social and business opportunities as well as providing a level of residential spaces to make best use of the most accessible locations."

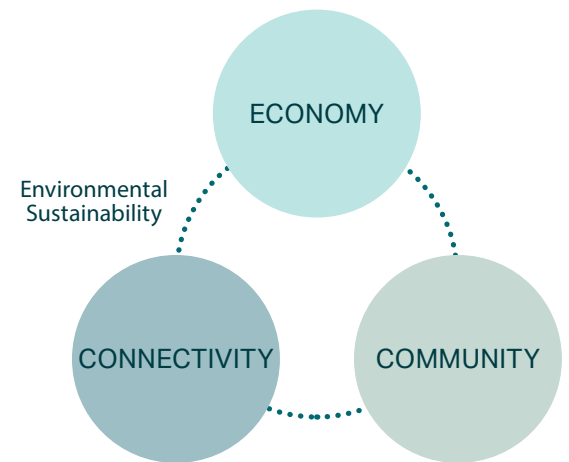


Figure 06: Vision diagram

3.2 Town centre objectives

The town centre Objectives provide a framework to achieving the Vision.

These have been separated thematically for simplification but together are key to the future success of the town centre. The Objectives also must embed sustainability principles to support the environment in the face of climate change.



Figure 07: Public Gardens entrance



Vibrant Community

- Enhance the town centre to help facilitate connectedness; bringing people together.
- Create a more distinctive identity and sense of place in the town centre.
- Strengthen the historic heart of Alton, by making better use of heritage assets through visibility and integration within the streetscene, and the use of information points.
- Identify underutilised areas for reactivation with the reuse of town centre car parks balanced alongside alternative parking and travel provision.



Strong & Thriving Economy

- Provide a destination space for visitors.
- Improve public spaces and their visual identity, supporting a high quality public realm with high footfall.
- Support a town centre land use strategy: consolidating the main shopping area and supporting viability and flexibility.
- Support specialist shops and markets and protect the balance between independents and national multiples.
- Revitalise and consolidate shopfronts.



Connected & Active Community

- Provide and enhance walking and cycling links to support town centre access and an increased footfall. Ensure links are well-connected, legible, safe, and accessible.
- Support sustainable travel and the provision of facilities and infrastructure (e.g. bicycle parking facilities, rental services).
- Improve the walking environment for all, including measures targeting speeds and volumes of vehicular traffic.

**Town centre
contextual analysis**

04

4. Town centre contextual analysis

This section analyses the various built and spatial components of Alton Town Centre including heritage, land use, key spaces, legibility, connectivity and streetscape. The key findings of this analysis are summarised at the end of this section. These have informed the town centre framework within Section 5. As such, these layers of analysis underpin the proposed concept development principles and ideas set out within the masterplan.

4.1 Town centre today

The linear stretch along Alton High Street and Normandy Street make up the focal point of the Alton Town Centre. Market Square has seen new levels of activity since the pandemic, when food and drink establishments opened up into the public square. This has continued as a place for people to convene.

The centre has many heritage assets, creating a positive impression of the town. However a number of elements detract from this, including, for example, a lack of continuity in the building and public realm quality and character. In addition, some streets also prioritise car use and discourage pedestrian use.

The number of vacant shops is notable and although this is generally in line with national trends, it has negatively impacted the overall sense of the area. Despite this, the town centre has been resilient and presents a key strength in its range of independent shops.



Figure 08: View from the intersection between the High Street and Market street, looking north-east.



Figure 09: View from the intersection between the High Street and Market street, looking south-west.

4.2 Key issues and opportunities

This section has been structured to respond to the Vision and Objectives set out in Section 3. Here the key issues and opportunities are identified within the context of Alton Town Centre. These elements will also be brought together within the more detailed study areas of Section 5.

The town centre benefits from a wide range of elements which make up its identity and strengthen a local sense of belonging. Key themes identified have been mapped and analysed together to generate a composite assessment of issues and opportunities.



Figure 10: The historic market square, with the Town Hall, and a number of restaurants.



Figure 11: View towards shopfronts along Market Street.



Figure 12: View towards shopfronts along Normandy Street.

Through our analysis and place assessment, the key issues and opportunities have been grouped into three themes as follows:

- **Identity and belonging:** strengthening the town centre, and strengthening the sense of community.
- **Connectivity and legibility:** improving connections and access to bring visitors and residents to their destinations.
- **Streetscape:** improving the public realm to better support the town and the community.

HERITAGE

Listed buildings, conservation area,
Locally important buildings

PUBLIC REALM

Squares, active travel routes, desire lines,
open spaces, waterbodies, trees, flood
risk, tree preservation orders

LANDUSE

Retail, residential, community,
education, services, health, shopping
frontages

CONNECTIVITY

Major and minor routes, key
intersections, landmarks

LEGIBILITY

Major and minor routes, key
intersections, landmarks

STREETSCAPE

Existing built form and spaces between

Figure 13: The various layers that formulate the analysis of Alton Town Centre

4.3 Identity and belonging

Alton is well known for its strong community spirit and well established commercial centre, with its mix of historic buildings, shops and arcades. The town centre offers various amenities including: independent shops, weekly markets, local cultural attractions, and various other community uses.

The primary shopping streets consist of active frontages on the ground floor, with groups of listed buildings providing architectural interest. Land uses within the town centre form a local retail hub, which are located along meandering shopping lanes.

A number of recreational facilities and public open spaces provide key community spaces. These include the Public Gardens, the Bowling Green, children's play area, and religious grounds. The Public Gardens offer various recreational facilities catering to the different needs of local residents.

The weekly street market takes place on the High Street every Tuesday selling local produce. Craft and farmers markets are also held regularly. Other events include a variety of specialty markets (such as the Alton Vegan Market) and fairs (such as the Model Railway and Bottle Fairs, annual Christmas Fairs) held throughout the town.

Active community groups serve the town and the surrounding area, such as the Alton Rotary Club, Alton Lions Club, Alton Climate Action Network (ACAN).

Community events and gatherings also take place within a number of key buildings within the Town. Some of these spaces are listed below:

- Alton Community Centre
- Allen Gallery
- Alton Library
- Assembly Rooms
- Methodist Church



Figure 14: Alton's Public Gardens, featuring a bandstand which provides space for gatherings for local residents.



Figure 15: The Allen Gallery, hosts a selection of pottery, ceramics and tiles dating from 1250 to the present day.



Figure 16: Walkway between Market Square and Market Street



Figure 17: Market Square



Figure 18: Westbrook Walk



Figure 19: Recent Public Realm at High Street

4.3.1 Heritage and distinctiveness

Historic buildings in Alton are a source of local identity. They connect to the area's heritage and are usually locally distinctive in their construction and character. Keeping them well maintained, and visible is key and further design interventions will raise their profile within the public realm.

Most areas of the town centre falls within the Alton Conservation area, which influences its strong heritage setting. This is formed by both built and spatial elements. The town is an interwoven mixture of medieval, Tudor and Jacobean buildings, with the Georgian Town Hall, Victorian facades and modern arcades.

The surviving medieval street pattern continues to characterise the area. The urban structure of the historic core is set along the wide High Street with the narrower, meandering roads leading off it. The figure ground in the centre has a narrow form and conforms to the original medieval burghage plot pattern of one rod wide.

Some of the notable built elements include:

- **Westbrooke House (Grade II*);** Circa early C18. Brick, slate roof featuring front door in pedimented stone doorcase.
- **The Assembly Rooms and Curtis Museum (Grade II);** 1880, extended and altered circa late C20. Red brick with yellow and moulded brick dressings.



19 and 21, Normandy Street, Grade II listed.



Town Hall, Grade II listed.



The Assembly Rooms and Inwood Court, Grade II listed. War Memorial, Grade II listed.



Westbrooke House, Grade II* listed.



8 and 10, Turk Street, Grade II listed.



The White Horse public house, Grade II listed.

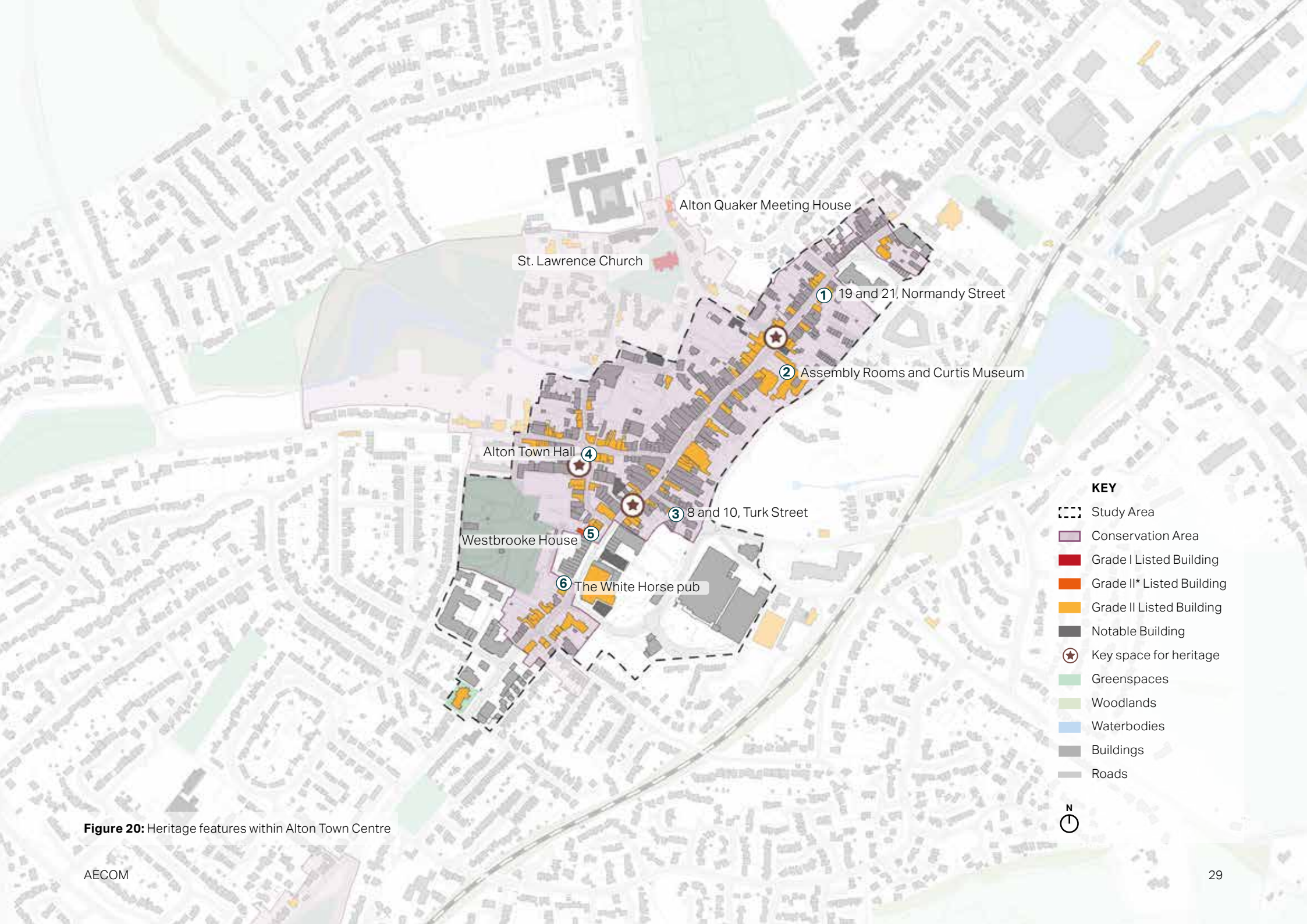


Figure 20: Heritage features within Alton Town Centre

4.3.2 Land uses

The land uses within Alton Town Centre consist of retail, office, hospitality, commercial, community and services, together with some outdoor recreation areas and residential uses.

The shopping frontages are identified in the East Hampshire Local Plan. The Primary Shopping Frontages (S2) are along High Street, Market Street, Westbrook Walk, and Cross & Pillory House. Secondary Shopping Frontages (S4) extend to Market Square, Normandy Street, and to Turk Street. Market Square has become more of a destination since its pedestrianisation and the provision of tables and seating.

The mixed nature of uses is something to be supported for future vitality, while the proportions and types of uses are undergoing a long term shift. Long term changes include a move away from some retail types, such as electronics and footwear, and towards more social uses including hospitality. The Alton Town Centre Study 2022 recommends improvements

to the night time economy through diversification, and identifies opportunities to improve the food and beverage sector.

Currently, there are a number of vacant units across the town centre, which provides opportunities for new, agile operators/uses.

A potential response to this would be to condense shopping activity into a smaller area, and to increase residential capacity. This is in line with recent trends in shopping post-pandemic, which has seen the increase of online shopping. A more defined retail core in the town centre would create a busier space with lower vacancy rates.

The diagram overleaf shows the ground floor land use within Alton Town Centre.



Figure 21: Local independent cafe, Cross and Pillory Lane.



Figure 22: Example of underused and vacant units.



Figure 23: The Bank Car Park

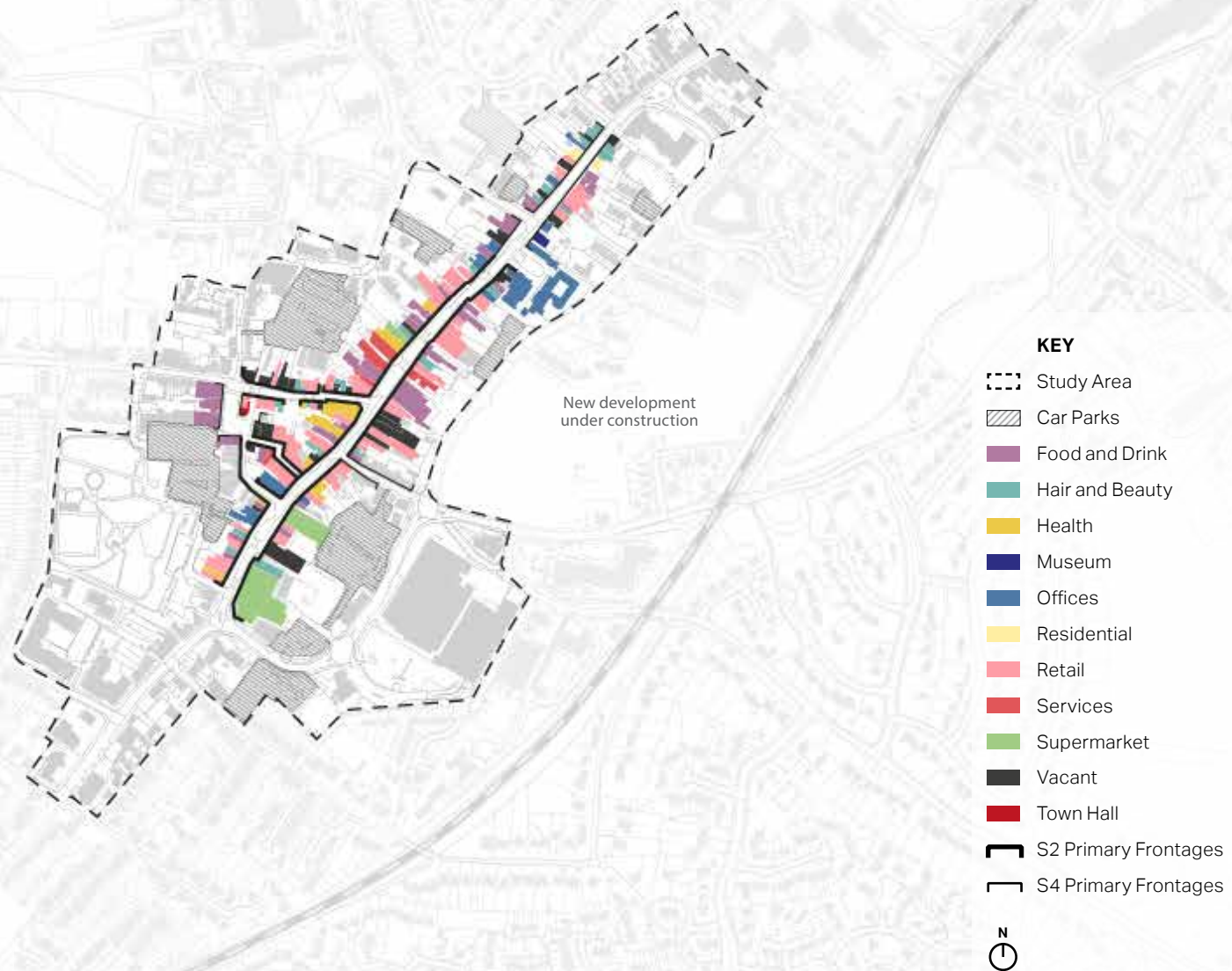


Figure 24: Land use features within Alton Town Centre

4.3.3 Landscape and public realm

Key public spaces within Alton encourage people to explore the town centre. These are identified on Figure 38 and include Alton Market Square, the Public Gardens, the square by Curtis Museum, and a series of primary shopping frontages.

Alton sits in a relatively discrete hollow in the landscape, and as such the built form sits within the lower lying areas (see Alton Design Code). More subtle landform undulations within the Town Centre create additional interest and influence Alton's unique townscape.

The public realm of Alton Town Centre is currently car-oriented. Surface car parking take up large areas of space within key parts of the town centre, such as The Bank Car Park around the community centre, and Lady Place Car Park between Market Square and the Public Gardens. Car parking along the High Street and connecting roads detracts from the otherwise peaceful atmosphere of the Town Centre.

Footways are provided for pedestrian movement throughout the town centre, but can be too narrow in places.

The historic network of footpaths provide short cuts through the centre, linking up with the surrounding residential communities. Some of these routes, such as Westbrook Alley, are very attractive, whereas others like Goodfellows Alley, are narrow and have little passive surveillance.

There is a general lack of greening within the town centre, which tends to amplify the impact of the large areas of hard surfacing (e.g. High Street and the Market Square) and creates a slightly harsh setting.

The River Wey runs through the town centre, currently culverted. Glimpses of the river can be seen at Amery Street, Weyside Walk and at The Bank Car Park. The River Wey is a focal point as it runs through Flood Meadows, the Town Centre and Brewery site into Kings Pond. Further opportunities to de-culvert it are limited.



Figure 25: Willow tree on the bank of the open section of the River Wey within The Bank Car Park.



Figure 26: Entrance to The Public Gardens from Westbrook Alley



Figure 27: Public Gardens



Figure 28: Westbrook Alley



Figure 29: Lady Place Car Park and Cross and Pilory House, located behind Westbrooke House



Figure 30: View looking south along High Street



Figure 31: Westbrook Walk



Figure 32: Cross and Pilory Lane Cobblestones



Figure 33: The intersection at Normandy Street and High Street is a gateway into the Town Centre but the public realm lets down the historic setting.



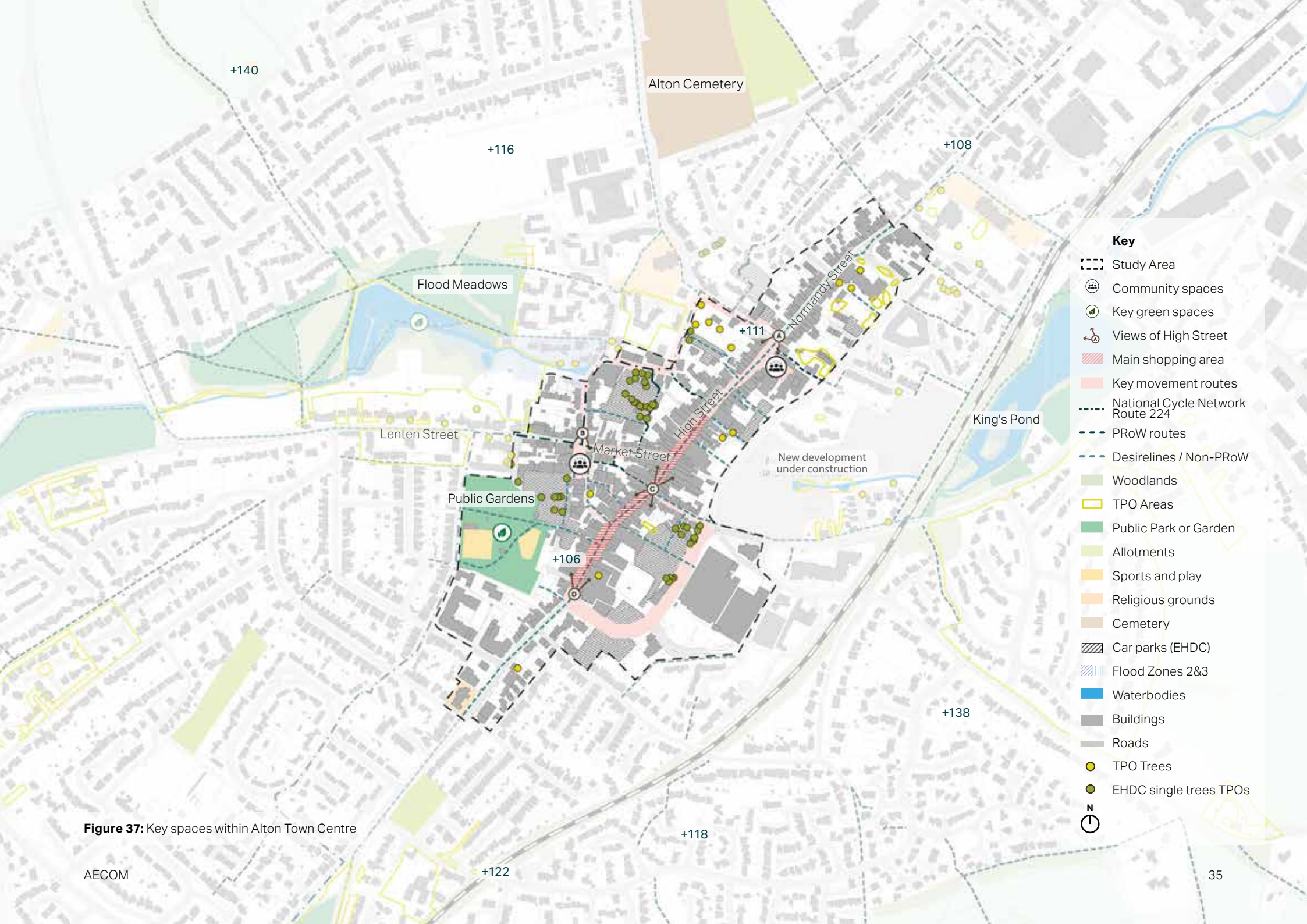
Figure 35: Active shopping area of the High Street, view north from Turk Street intersection.



Figure 34: View to Market Square from Amery Street



Figure 36: View towards the intersection of High Street and Draymans Way.



Key

- Study Area
- Community spaces
- Key green spaces
- Views of High Street
- Main shopping area
- Key movement routes
- National Cycle Network Route 224
- PRoW routes
- Desirelines / Non-PRoW
- Woodlands
- TPO Areas
- Public Park or Garden
- Allotments
- Sports and play
- Religious grounds
- Cemetery
- Car parks (EHDC)
- Flood Zones 2&3
- Waterbodies
- Buildings
- Roads
- TPO Trees
- EHDC single trees TPOs

N

Figure 37: Key spaces within Alton Town Centre

4.4 Connectivity and legibility

4.4.1 Connectivity and accessibility

Road network

Alton Town Centre stretches in a north-east to south-west direction. It is structured along the historic main axis formed by Normandy Street, High Street, and Butts Road, which runs centrally through the town centre. Church Street and Market Street are historic routes which branch off from the High Street. These key historic routes attract the most pedestrian footfall. The main axis is connected in a loop with Draymans Way which offers access to larger supermarkets. Draymans Way is a wider and more recently constructed road which provides primary vehicular access to the town centre and has considerably less pedestrian footfall.

Public transport

Alton's railway station is situated in close proximity to the town centre, within a 10 minutes' walk. The railway station

provides a direct link to London Waterloo (approximately 1 hour 15 minutes journey time). There are a number of bus stops along the High Street and within the Town Centre, providing bus links within Alton and to surrounding settlements.

Active travel network

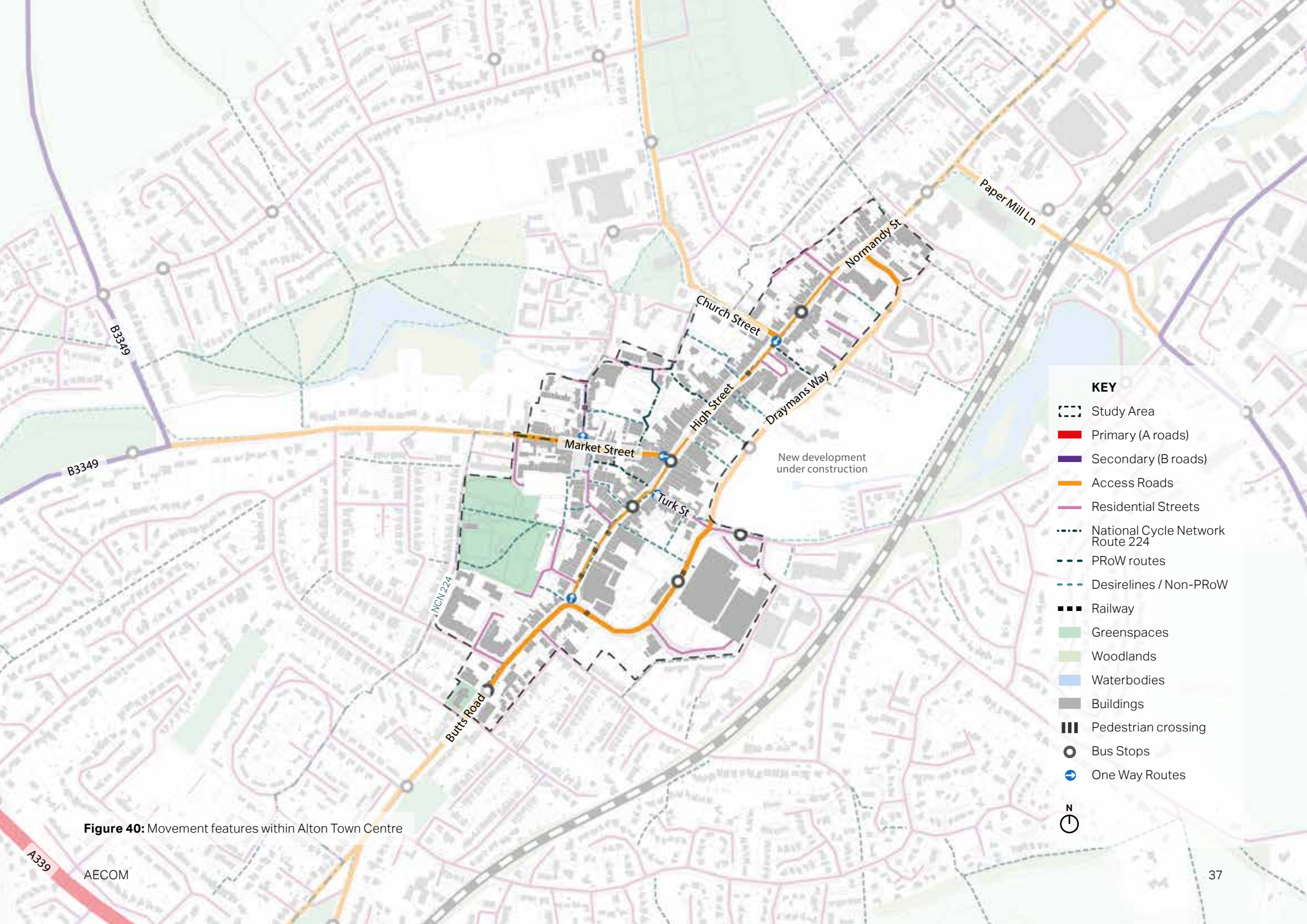
The national cycle network 224 skirts the town centre. Opportunities to better integrate the cycleway would benefit the town centre. There is also a good network of Public Rights of Ways (PRoW), mainly footpaths that connect the town centre to the rest of the neighbourhood area, and the surrounding countryside. The town centre is woven with historic walkways that connect the east and west side of the shopping fronts. These add a great deal of permeability but need further surveillance and light so that they are more widely used.



Figure 38: High Street bus stops



Figure 39: Westbrook Walk was created in early 1980s as a link between Lady Place car park and the High Street



KEY

- Study Area
- Primary (A roads)
- Secondary (B roads)
- Access Roads
- Residential Streets
- National Cycle Network Route 224
- PRoW routes
- Desirelines / Non-PRoW
- Railway
- Greenspaces
- Woodlands
- Waterbodies
- Buildings
- Pedestrian crossing
- Bus Stops
- One Way Routes

N
⌚

Figure 40: Movement features within Alton Town Centre

4.4.2 Legibility

Alton Town Centre generally provides good connectivity, landmarks and wayfinding signage, allowing visitors to navigate through the town easily. Alton's rich history provides the town centre with an abundance of landmarks, with distinctive buildings and spaces. However many of these are dispersed and are located away from the High Street, without clear connections between them. Some notable elements include:

- The northern and southern gateways to the Town Centre.
- The historic streets and the narrow walkways through the burgage plots.
- Key spaces where people can gather.
- Nodal points where different modal users interact to navigate the space.
- Key landmarks including historic buildings.



Figure 41: Existing wayfinding elements



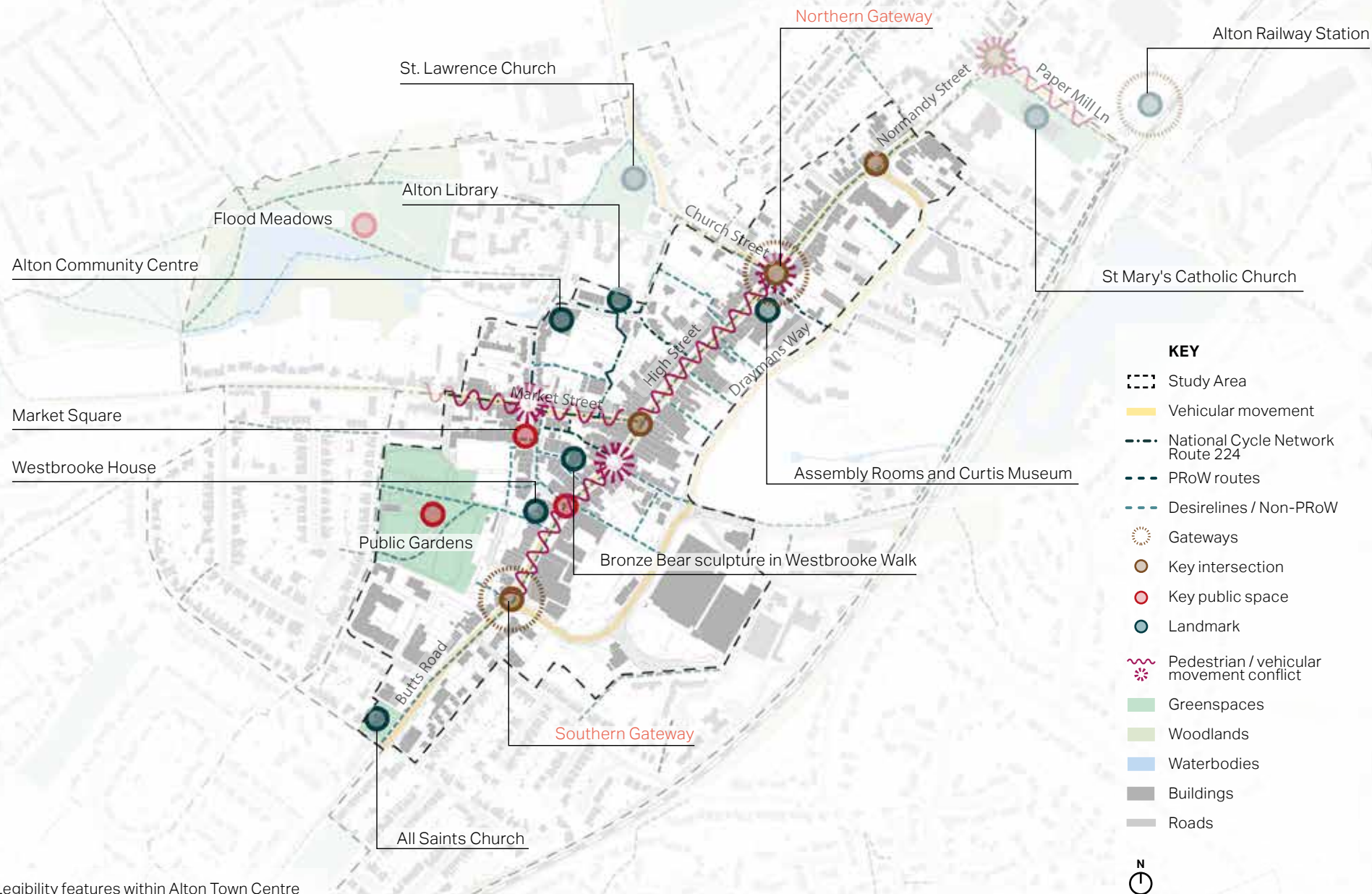
Figure 43: St. Lawrence Church is a landmark. The framed views of the steeple along Church Street create emphasis.



Figure 44: Section of High Street regularly closed to cars for the market. Public realm improvements would strengthen place identity and visibility of heritage assets.



Figure 42: The Curtis Museum, at the intersection of Church Street, High Street and Normandy Street is a key landmark.



4.5 Streetscape

4.5.1 Built form

The street pattern within the town centre is medieval and has changed little from the 17th-century layout. Some of the buildings still feature 14th, 15th and 16th-century origins and earlier timber-frame buildings often feature behind 18th-century facades

Traditional building materials include flint, red brick and clay tiles including clay tile hanging. The roofing material is typically clay tiles or slate with symmetrical and well-balanced proportions.

There are some out-of-place examples of end of war, 1960s development on the High Street with shop fronts on the ground level, and residential or commercial uses on the floors above.

Building heights are primarily two or three storeys, with some very limited four storey examples. The roofline varies in terms of its height and form. The shopfronts on the ground level follow a consistent, traditional style with some shops featuring projections in the way of awnings or signage.

Distinctive built form features within the town centre includes:

- The surviving medieval street pattern;
- The many historic buildings of different ages and local vernacular details;
- Narrow plot form, with the original medieval burgage plot pattern.
- Rooflines vary in gable arrangements, pitches and roof dormers. Most building heights vary between 2 to 3 storeys.
- Building lines are generally continuous with small gaps allowing pedestrian use.



Figure 50: Figure ground comparison for 1897 and 2023



Figure 51: Roofline study on High Street showing a variety of gable arrangements and roof dormers. Building heights vary between 2, 2.5 and 3 storeys.



Figure 53: North section of High Street confines the pedestrian footway to a small proportion of the overall public realm. The streetscape here has good enclosure with a varied roofscape.



Figure 55: Weyside Walk is an attractive historic walkway with the adjacent brick and timber buildings, and block paving and the sense of openness, located alongside the River Wey.



Figure 52: Here a large surface of High Street is for vehicular use, with relatively narrow footways. The cars detract from the historic frontages.



Figure 54: A section of public realm enhances the town centre with opportunities to improve public realm



Figure 56: The traditional shop fronts create interest but there is little space for pedestrians to linger. The footway has been tapered out to allow additional pedestrian space at the bus stop.

4.6 SWOT analysis

STRENGTHS

- Alton's rich heritage is clearly evident in it's built fabric. Key assets such as Grade I listed St. Lawrence Church, and multiple other listed buildings underpin the character of the parish;
- The town centre provides access to a number of green spaces including the Public Gardens and Flood Meadows;
- Thriving and active local community;
- The existing footpath network supports permeability towards surrounding community facilities and businesses;
- Recent interventions to small areas of High Street.



Figure 59: Grade II Listed Building Normandy Cottage, Normandy Street



Figure 61: Alton's Public Gardens



Figure 60: Westbrook Walk



Figure 62: Westbrook Alley



Figure 63: Signage for Market Street Businesses

WEAKNESS

- Lack of in keeping, high-quality architecture adjacent to some of the existing listed buildings;
- Limited street furniture, planting, and street trees, with limited opportunities for further tree planting on High Street;
- Crowded streetscape due to on-street parking and traffic congestion along High Street;
- Areas of narrow footways limit pedestrian movement;
- Inconsistent use of materials in the public realm creates a fragmented streetscene;
- Lack of consistent use of local materials in some of the retail units. For more details see Section LB07 in Alton Design Guidance and Codes;
- The River Wey, a key blue infrastructure, is hidden in culverts within the town centre.



Figure 64: Westbrooke House



Figure 66: Example of surface treatments inconsistencies and lack of response to surrounding heritage assets.



Figure 65: Congested High Street



Figure 67: Culverted River Wey

OPPORTUNITIES

- Improve the legibility of the town and the wayfinding strategies to help visitors to easily navigate and experience the town centre;
- Opportunity to consolidate uses within a small activity area;
- Pay homage to key historic assets by framing views, and improving the design of the adjoining public realm;
- Enhance connections and movement between key spaces;
- Enhancing the combined role of Market Square and the Public Gardens as a community hub;
- Introduce wider footways, shared surfaces, and pedestrianisation to enhance walkability;
- Enhance and introduce more green and blue infrastructure.



Figure 70: Wayfinding signage and street planters



Figure 73: High Street weekly pedestrianisation for the market



Figure 71: Town Hall on Market Square



Figure 72: View of All Saints Church

THREATS

- Empty premises on the High Street create inactive frontages and can lead to issues associated with vandalism and declining image;
- The car-dominated town centre discourages active travel within High Street, particularly affecting more vulnerable users;
- Car dependency is associated with worse public health and environmental outcomes;
- There are some issues of minor flooding within certain parts of the town centre;
- A number of recent additions within the town centre detracts from the local vernacular. This includes shop front design.



Figure 74: Example of vacant shop



Figure 76: Negative shop frontages and large number of cars



Figure 75: Twentieth century addition to High Street that contrasts with existing architectural quality



Figure 77: Gateway into the town centre lacks identity and encourages car use over walking



Town centre
framework

05

5. Town centre framework

This section responds to the contextual analysis over four sections. The design principles thematically identify opportunities for improvement across the town, assisted by the shop front guidance. The concept masterplan provides a spatial framework to apply the principles. This is followed by a detailed area study illustrating how the design principles can be applied.

5.1 Design principles

The following design principles are based on the key themes identified in the previous section. These are to be applied across the Town Centre area.

5.1.1 Identity and belonging

To improve the sense of place and community of the Town Centre, the following principles should be applied:

- To draw attention to heritage assets and raise their profile, streetscape design should create focal areas, and highlight features and connections.
- The material palette in the public realm and on new adjacent buildings should reference or complement existing colours, materials, and textures.
- Draw people in by creating high quality walkable environments. This can be applied to areas such as the square on High Street at The Assembly Rooms and Curtis Museum and Inwood Court.
- Introduce high quality street furniture (including lighting, seating, bins and signage) in all areas of public realm.
- Information should be accessible to all. Digital tours and audio information can be used alongside physical signage. Heritage routes and audio tours can make a town's history more accessible.
- Consider placemaking benefits of trees, planting and landscape.
- Build upon and further activate the successful examples of pedestrianised areas including the Market Square and Westbrook Walk area. These areas create an intimate and social atmosphere.
- Consider the continuation of the temporary pedestrianisation of the section of High Street from the entrance to Lady Place Car Park by the White Horse up to Westbrooke House.
- Potential to incorporate public art by local artists and makers to help activate spaces.
- Opportunities to create focal points within the town at key street intersections. This could include new paving, seating or planting. These are critical parts of the streetscape and would make the high street more pedestrian friendly and bring activity to underutilised spaces.
- Similarly, the creation of town centre 'gateways' would create a sense of arrival to the town and assist traffic calming.
- Current vacant units are generally of a smaller size and therefore could potentially be revitalised for the use of local traders and non-retail uses.



Figure 78: Revitalising the historic square. Bonn Square, Oxford



Figure 79: Digital wayfinding and cultural information can increase accessibility when used with conventional signage



Figure 80: Incorporate locally distinctive design features and public art



Figure 81: Incorporate locally distinctive and high quality materials to complement heritage features



Figure 82: Signage totem that locates cultural landmarks

5.1.2 Connectivity and legibility

To improve movement and navigability around the Town Centre, the following principles should be applied:

- Highlight the important destinations, nodes, landmark buildings, and open spaces and the connections between them with wayfinding;
- Frame views of the historic townscape where possible;
- Ensure the centre is easily accessible for pedestrians and people with disabilities;
- Increase the use of the alleys and historic walkways by identifying which destinations these lead to. A lighting strategy would make them feel safer. This should integrate any architectural features and use diffused lighting that illuminates faces rather than harsh downlit light sources;
- Implement a wayfinding strategy through identifiable visual cues beyond signage. This can be in the surface materials and detailing along a specified area or route, and signage plaques embedded within paving, the use of colours and even in the use of planting, and street furniture design;
- Enhance wayfinding throughout the shopping area to encourage movement beyond the confines of the linear high street; and
- Draw upon these strategies to bring people into key areas such as Market Square, Westbrook Walk and The Public Gardens as these serve as activity hubs with opportunities for additional footfall.

5.1.3 Streetscape

To improve the visitor experience and access within the Town Centre, the following principles should be applied:

- The streetscape should cater to all users and this should balance modal users accordingly, and depending on the route typology and location;
- Overall, more priority and space should be afforded to active travel users;
- Key areas within the primary shopping area would benefit from shared surfacing or pedestrianisation;
- Signage needs to be improved, made clearer, or consolidated; and
- Street design can vary by street typologies or character areas to enhance legibility.



Figure 83: Wide footways and clear crossing points



Figure 84: Pedestrian zones using materials within a de-cluttered environment



Figure 85: Creating access to existing waterways



Figure 86: Increasing awareness of pedestrians while creating visual interest and opportunities for local artists

5.2 Shop fronts

Good design of shopfronts can enhance the appearance of the street scene, providing a more attractive atmosphere for shoppers and visitors, and opportunities for investment.

5.2.1 General principles

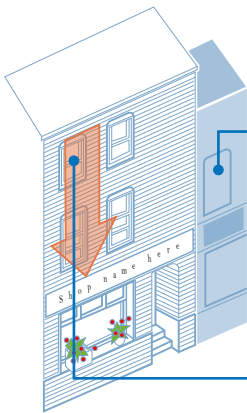
- The design of shopfronts should be considered as a part of the overall composition of the building and the wider context of the town centre. The design of shop fronts should take into account the rhythm and character of the street such as the width of building, the horizontal or vertical emphasis, the variety of style and the architecture of the building itself. Where the shop front continues to another building, a change in its design may be required;
- Sensitivity to the history and local vernacular in terms of layout, design, materials and colour palette;
- Any principles for listed or old buildings need to be taken into account and be commensurate with preserving the building's character and setting.
- The fascia is the most important area of a shop front for advertising the business. Signage within the established proportions and confines of the fascia board should be maintained. Box signs or additional flat boards should be avoided as they create disproportionate depth and height;
- Avoid using visually distinct sources of illumination that result in disproportionate signage, such as internally-illuminated box signs;
- The most appropriate signage at fascia level are individual letters applied or painted directly onto the fascia board;
- Traditional hanging signs could also be acceptable.
- In general, the character of the town centre can be enhanced paying particular attention to the colour, scale and detailed design of shopfronts, fascias and hanging signs.



Figure 88: Examples of negative shop fronts, which are not in keeping with the colour palette or local vernacular

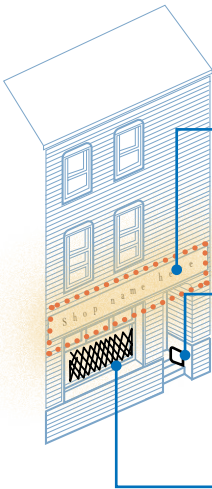


Figure 87: Examples of positive shop fronts



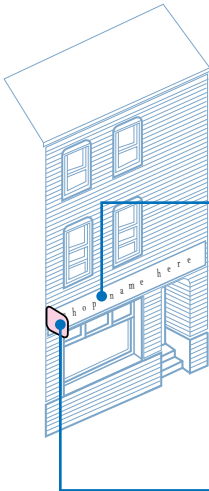
Character & Design

- Integrate the shop front with the surrounding streetscape. Consider adjacent buildings and typical details in the area
- Incorporate the overall proportion, form, and scale of the building's upper floors into the design of the shop front



Lighting & Safety

- Avoid using internally-illuminated box signs
- Conceal alarms from the shop front façade and integrate them in the design
- Avoid using external roller shutters and grilles. Favour the use of internal open grilles which cover only the glazed part of the shop front



Signage

- Avoid unnecessary visual clutter
- Signage should not be placed on upper floors
- Use the fascia as the predominant position for signage
- Hanging signs should be in proportion to the building and street and should not dominate pavements

5.3 Concept masterplan

The Concept Masterplan is Alton Town Centre's main spatial framework, shown overleaf. It is informed by the analysis laid out in the previous section and addresses the key issues and opportunities identified.

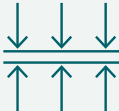
While to support the town centre, the following key strategies are applied:



Co-location
Create a balanced mix and choice of facilities and land uses attracts diverse activity and creates multiple destinations within a single trip.

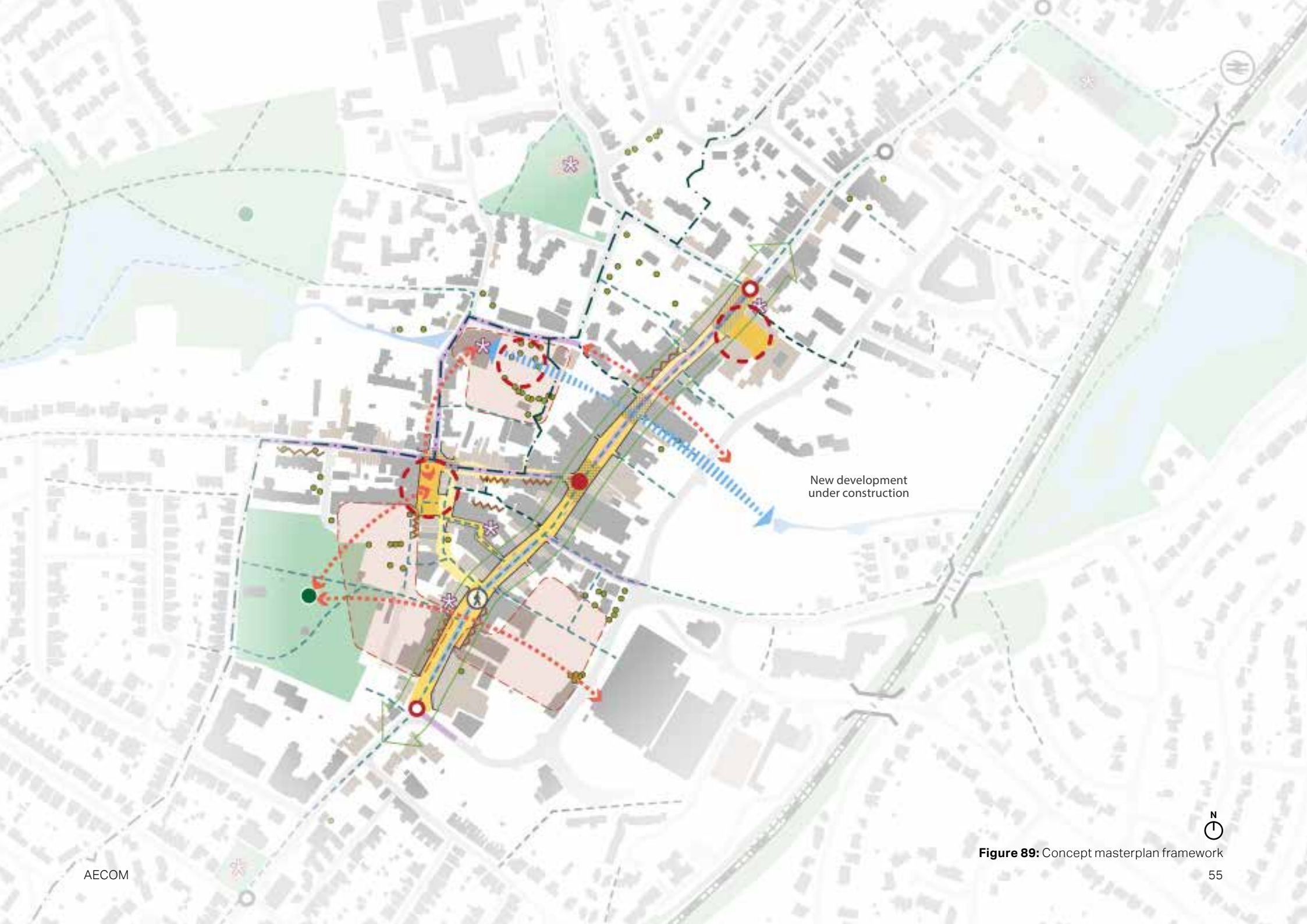


Activation
Transform unproductive or single use spaces into flexible, multi layered spaces, to activate and animate the town centre.



Connection
Attract visitors with easy access via active travel, making the journey enjoyable and convenient.

KEY	
	Study area
	Opportunity areas
	Improved social and cultural spaces
	Shared surfacing
	Active public squares
	Pedestrian circuits
	Improved connections
	Key retail frontages
	Visual detractors
	Pedestrian improvements
	High Street pedestrianisation area
	Road enhancements to encourage active travel
	Celebrated presence of River Wey
	Street trees and planting
	National Cycle Network Route 224
	PRoW routes
	Desirelines / Non-PRoW
	Listed buildings
	Buildings
	GBI
	Gateways
	Retail Junction
	Key Nodes
	Landmark buildings
	TPO trees
	Railway crossings
	Railway line



New development
under construction

5.4 Key opportunity areas

Key opportunity areas have been identified as shown in the Concept Masterplan Framework. Of these, two areas have been selected for the development of illustrative design proposals which will demonstrate how the design principles should be applied, see Figure 91, right.

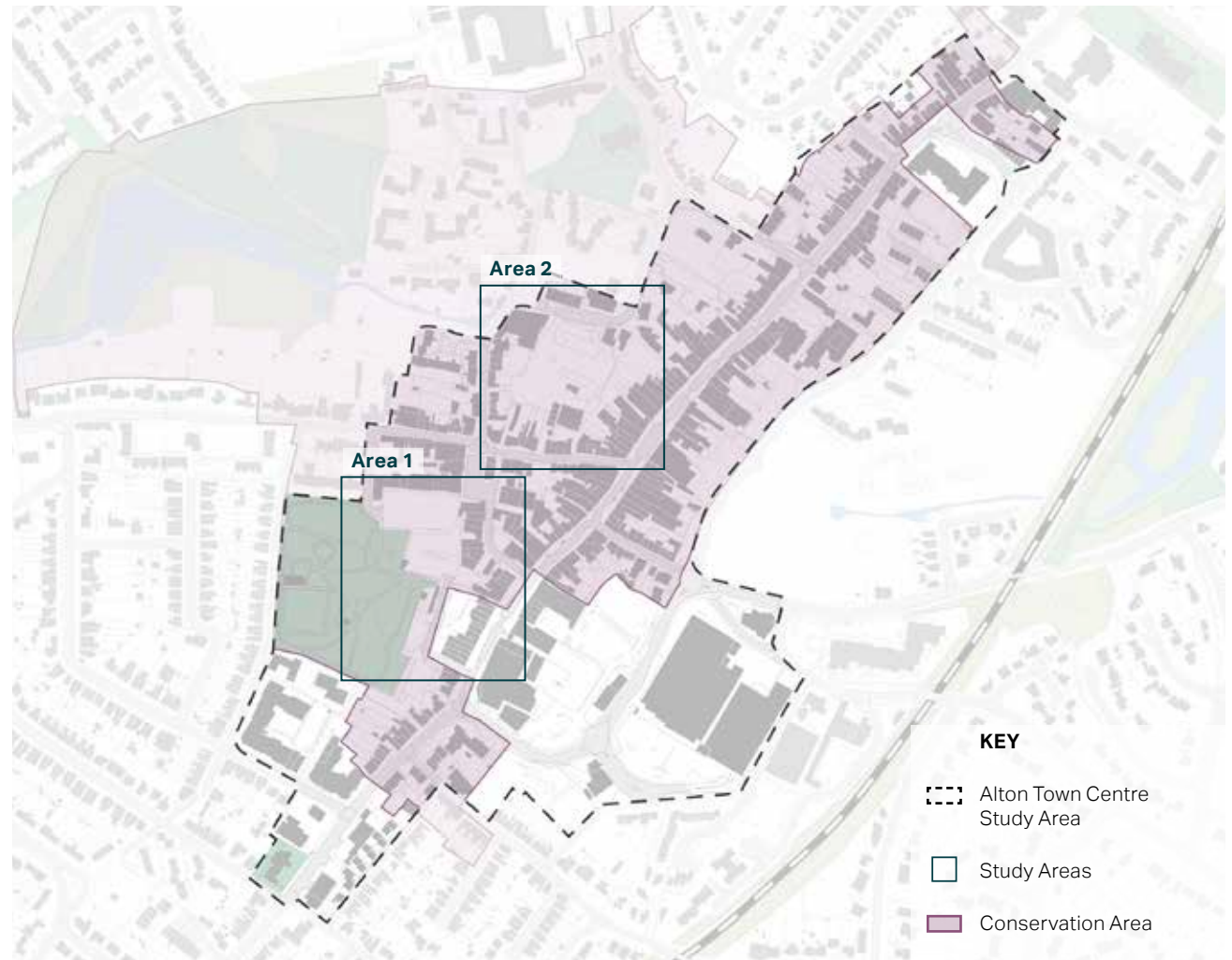


Figure 90: Key identified opportunity areas within Alton Town Centre

Existing features within the study area include:

Area 1

- Hamlet House and the associated car park
- The existing ancillary community facility and structure on the eastern edge of the Public Gardens
- Lady Place Car Park
- TPO trees

Area 2

- Bank Car Park and existing green and blue infrastructure
- The adjacent section of Vicarage Hill
- River Wey
- TPO trees



Figure 91: Area 1 - Rear view of Hamlet House and the car park



Figure 92: Area 1 - View of Lady Place Car Park and the surrounding frontages



Figure 93: Area 2 - View of Bank Car Park and existing green and blue infrastructure



Figure 94: Area 2 - View of Bank Car Park and community centre

5.5 Area 1

This opportunity area has been chosen as an underutilised space within a key part of the town centre. Its location between High Street, the Public Gardens, and Market Square will help to attract activity beyond the lengths of the linear shopping street and further activate the core of the town centre. Currently, car parks and visual detractors within the study area create a disconnect between these three key public spaces, separating one from the other.

Identity and belonging

The activation of the study area will strengthen the prominence and identity of Market Square, the Public Gardens, and the section of High Street south of Westbrook House. The co-location of different uses and activities will allow people to stay longer and do more during their visits to Alton Town Centre. The study area proposes:

- New residential use, partly replacing or incorporating the existing Hamlet House apartment block. The frontages facing the High Street will comprise retail use on the ground floor. The proposed residential

frontages facing the Public Gardens will provide a strong visual connection onto the public park, beyond the retained tree belt. This aims to increase the sense of enclosure and safety within the Public Gardens while delivering attractive new homes.

- To allow for this, the existing ancillary community facility currently used for gardening will be reprovided within the study area.
- Development at Lady Place Car Park could support leisure use, including health, fitness, or culture. Alternatively this could be a flexible space for food and crafts within a barn style building. Bin storage for existing commercial units at Market Square could be provided here. Vehicular access to the Car Park is retained, via The Cooperage.
- Good quality public realm would facilitate local trips on foot or by bicycle to benefit from the increased activity generated by new uses.
- Informal social spaces and play spaces will support a sense of community and belonging.

KEY

-  Potential residential use
-  Potential community use
-  Potential leisure use
-  Ground floor retail use
-  Potential parking spaces
-  Private parking/servicing from retained vehicular access
-  Pedestrianised area
-  Pedestrian routes
-  Potential shared space
-  Restricted vehicle use
-  Potential extension of park
-  Existing green spaces
-  Existing buildings
-  Grade II Listed buildings
-  Grade II* Listed buildings
-  Roads
-  Frontages
-  Potential street trees
-  Existing trees
-  EHDC TPO trees
-  Landmark building
-  ① Alton Market Square
-  ② Alton Town Council
-  ③ Westbrook House
-  ④ The Public Gardens

TPO tree location based on designation maps and aerial.



Retained access
to car park from
The Cooperage

Additional opportunity area
for future development
(indicative boundary)

Connectivity and legibility

Improving the appearance and setting of the existing connections and focal spaces will assist in creating a more legible town. The movement hierarchy and destinations will be easily identified by visitors. The study area proposes:

- The pedestrianisation of High Street from the entrance to Lady Place Car Park by the White Horse up to Westbrooke House.
- The improvement of the setting of Westbrook Alley connecting to the entrance of the Public Gardens.
- Vehicular access points will be retained but access to general parking (the existing Lady Place Car Park) will only be from Lenten Street.
- A signage strategy reflecting Alton's identity would provide a hierarchy of waymarkers (e.g. fingerposts; directional signs; and waymarking posts and disks).

Streetscape

The streetscape of a place can have a considerable impact on how, when and why people visit spaces, and with whom. Improving the setting of the connections as well as the focal spaces will encourage healthier lifestyles, while making the town centre more attractive as a destination. Proposals within the study area should:

- Differentiate routes and user priority through materials and colour palettes. This should avoid signage including road signs that impede pedestrian flow and that clutter the streetscape, detracting from built and natural features. For example, a consistent use of materials along Westbrook Alley up to the Public Gardens would improve the prominence of the park.
- Improve the quality of the connection between the Public Gardens and Market Square: creating active frontages through new development; the inclusion of murals or planting to

cover existing blank frontages; the introduction of visually interesting surface materials; and soft landscaping

- Enhance and highlight the existing trees.
- Consider sustainable drainage such as rain gardens.
- Enhance destinations through a public realm strategy that encourages dwell time. This will provide: seating, cycle parking and bins; social spaces and informal play spaces; sheltered spaces for sun and rain; sympathetic lighting to public spaces.
- Pay homage to the existing historic assets and integrate these within the public realm.
- Consider design factors such as variety, rhythm, and the sense of enclosure.



Figure 95: Public realm at Altringham Market (image: Sarah Thain)



Figure 96: A vibrant and inclusive market square



Figure 97: Shared spaces to minimise modal segregation (Slovenska Boulevard, Slovenia)



Figure 98: Structures provide flexible vendor units at Kingston Market (image: Timeout)



Figure 99: Example of landscaping along a narrow walkway (Clay Farm, Cambridge)



Figure 100: Active travel provision (Kings Cross, London)



Figure 101: Informal learning & events space



Figure 102: Street design featuring shared spaces to encourage active travel modes



Figure 103: Example of varied storey heights

5.6 Area 2

This opportunity area has the potential to deliver more town centre homes and to improve the existing green and blue infrastructure.

The setting for the nearby Alton Community Centre and Alton Library should be enhanced as a civic hub. Currently, car parks and blank walls within the study area create a disconnect between these community resources and the primary frontages of the town centre.

Identity and belonging

The presence of the community centre and the library should be enhanced as key spaces for all sections of the community. The prominence of these buildings, and the spaces between, will in turn support their role in strengthening the sense of community. The study area proposes:

- Areas of new residential use, creating active frontages and increasing activity in the area.
- A cafe within a landmark building, such as a Community Centre cafe.
- Potential for formal and informal play spaces.
- The deculverting of River Wey where possible, and the creation of an attractive natural waterway.
- Enhancement to the existing green infrastructure with the potential to provide an amenity space.

KEY

-  Potential residential use
-  Potential leisure use
-  Potential parking spaces
-  Pedestrianised area
-  Pedestrian routes
-  Potential pedestrian connection
-  Potential shared space
-  River Wey
-  Green spaces
-  Existing buildings
-  Grade II Listed buildings
-  Roads
-  Frontages
-  Potential street trees
-  Existing trees
-  EHDC TPO trees
-  Landmark
-  ① Alton Community Centre
-  ② Alton Library
-  ③ Restored natural waterway
-  ④ Potential location for cafe

TPO tree location based on designation maps and aerial.



Amery Street

Vicarage Hill

Bakers Aly

High Street

Market Street

Lenten Street

AECOM

Connectivity and legibility

Activating the site will help integrate the community centre and library within town centre and create a stronger sense of place. The enhanced setting of the connections between these and the surrounding areas would encourage trips on foot, bicycle or by bus. The study area proposes:

- The creation of an arrival space at Vicarage Hill, providing a better walking environment with retained parking for library users.
- A pedestrianised focal space in front of the community centre for people to gather and linger.
- A focal space at the water edge with seating and natural landscaping.
- Connections over River Wey: a pedestrian bridge and a bridge providing shared use access to the east.
- A landmark building providing cafe use.
- The improvement of existing car parking.

Streetscape

The streetscape will provide a civic setting, ensuring inclusive access to buildings and public spaces. Proposals within the study area should:

- Differentiate routes and user priority through materials and colour palettes. This should avoid signage including road signs that impede pedestrian flow and that clutter the streetscape, detracting from built and natural features. For example, a consistent use of materials to denote the vehicular movement.
- Improve the quality of the connection between the community uses and the town centre: creating active frontages through new development; the inclusion of murals or planting to cover existing blank frontages; the introduction of visually interesting surface materials; and soft landscaping.
- Enhance and highlight the existing trees.
- Consider sustainable drainage such as rain gardens and water management within the landscaping and restoration of River Wey. This is particularly important because of the restrictions that the Flood Zone poses on building construction within 8m of the River.
- Enhance destinations through a public realm strategy that encourages dwell time. This will provide: seating, cycle parking and bins; social spaces and, formal and informal play spaces; sheltered spaces for sun and rain; sympathetic lighting to public spaces.



Figure 106: Co-location of facilities (Tibbys Triangle, Southwold)



Figure 107: Footbridge over a natural waterway (Graphisoft Park, Hungary)



Figure 108: Re-integrating the river as part of the landscape (Deichgärten and Donaupark, Germany)



Figure 109: Well designed interface between homes and public realm (Clay Farm, Cambridge)



Figure 110: Housing with variations of facing materials & soft landscaping (Clay Farm, Cambridge)



Figure 111: Parking with permeable paving and tree planting (Calvados-Honfleur Business Park, France)



Figure 112: Informal natural play area (Great Notley, Braintree)

Next steps

06

6. Next steps

The Alton Town Centre Masterplan provides a clear picture in design terms of the current layout and functionality of the Town Centre. The suggested schemes provide the Town Council with starting point for discussion with relevant parties as to how the town centre may be shaped in the future in order to respond and adapt to longer term changes in the focus of town centre uses. The suggested schemes, or adaptations thereof, may help facilitate early engagement with landowners and placemakers to understand how desired outcomes could be achieved and whether community led Neighbourhood Development Orders or other mechanisms can be used to deliver both public realm and brownfield development opportunities.

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