

Melksham Town Centre Masterplan

Draft report
December 2022

Quality information

Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
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Executive summary

01

1. Executive Summary

This report sets out a spatial masterplan and guidance for Melksham Town Centre Area, linked to the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan (JMNP) Town Centre Policy 9, to lead and stimulate its protection, conservation, enhancement and regeneration and sustained vitality.

The masterplan presented in this report aligns with the vision of the JMNP and recognises the key longer term trends that town centres now must respond to, in order to stay current.

The vision of the JNMP is to:

“make the town of Melksham and the parish of Melksham Without great places to live, to work, to play and to visit; attractive, healthy, convenient and environmentally sustainable, with access to employment, education, shops and services via walking, cycling and public transport.”

This report presents an overarching vision and a set of objectives for the town. Supporting that are a number of Development Proposals, as follows:

- Economy and vitality
- Heritage and distinctiveness
- Townscape
- Sustainability and climate change
- Public realm and connectivity

The masterplan focuses on three clusters for new investment and regeneration and presents potential scenarios and complementary uses for these areas.

The Masterplan acknowledges that any new development in the town will take time to be delivered.

Introduction

02



2. Introduction

AECOM have been commissioned to prepare a Masterplan report for Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Parish Council alongside a Design Code for the wider Melksham Neighbourhood Plan area, through the department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Neighbourhood Planning Programme led by Locality.

2.1 Introduction

The role of design guidelines and codes in the development of a Neighbourhood Plan is expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, paragraph 128 which states that:

'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.'

Recent government guidance placed emphasis on the importance of town centres. One of the key initiatives within the White Paper (2022) is to restore pride in place and community's satisfaction with their town centres and 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 3 describes relevant policy in more detail.

2.2 Purpose and status of this document

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

The master planning studies are high level and illustrative, prepared to demonstrate how the town centre policy principles that the Joint Neighbourhood Plan and Town Council 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 Melksham Neighbourhood Plan pre-application protocol is undertaken by applicants on the sites.

The report provides an evidence base and high-level masterplan framework and should be read in conjunction with the Design Code document, which covers the whole Neighbourhood Area.

2.3 Preparing the report

The following steps were agreed with the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to produce this report, which draws upon policy development and engagement work undertaken by the Group.



F.1 | **Figure 01:** Timeline of report

This Masterplan seeks to build upon the town's existing strengths – its vitality, its people and strong community, its key cultural assets - and identify the right type of development to come forward to make the most of the key opportunities.

2.4 Area of study

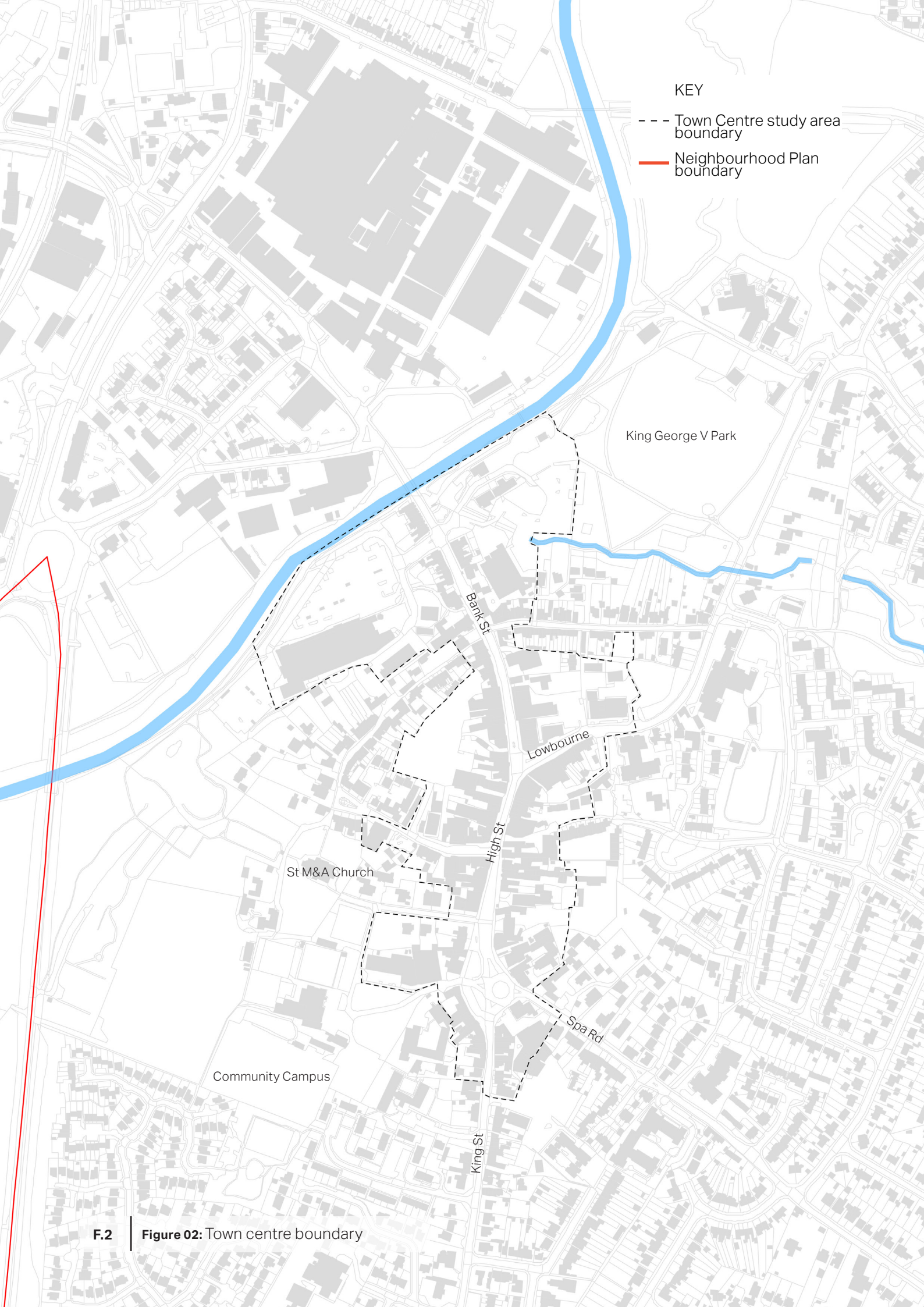
Melksham is a market town located in the southwest of England in the county of Wiltshire. Melksham is approximately 7km northeast of Trowbridge and 10km (c.6 miles) south of Chippenham. It is Wiltshire's fifth-largest settlement after Swindon, Salisbury, Chippenham and Trowbridge. It occupies a strategic location on the A350 road from the M4 motorway; by rail it is directly linked to Trowbridge & Westbury and Chippenham & Swindon, where connections to the rest of the rail network are possible.

The history of Melksham is described in more detail later on in this document.

The Defined Town Centre (JMNP Policy 9) is shown on the plan, opposite, which defines the area of study for this masterplan. The scope slightly extends beyond this area to the north of the town centre boundary, to include land at the edge of the town centre (ref JMNP1 Town Centre Priority Statement). Connections to and from the town centre will be addressed within this document.

There are around 155 businesses operating in the town centre and a number of shops comprising a mix of independent traders, supermarkets and national retail brands.

The prime shopping area around the intersection of Church Street and High Street is busy but activity declines down Bank Street toward the river. Consultation feedback linked to the town centre highlighted that people were concerned about the poor retail offer, unattractive 1960's buildings and heavy traffic flows were all issues perceived to detract from the shopping experience.



KEY

- - - Town Centre study area boundary
- Neighbourhood Plan boundary

King George V Park

Bank St

Lowbourn

High St

St M&A Church

Spa Rd

Community Campus

King St

**Strategic regeneration
context**

03

3. Policy and evidence base

Whether 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.

3.1 The changing nature of Town Centres

Throughout the middle ages and for centuries to follow, Britain's town centres were the established setting for frequent markets and fairs, rendering them epicentres of commerce, variety entertainment and face-to-face interaction.

Today, many town centres are on the decline, particularly post pandemic. The retail sector is suffering from rapid change and wholesale shifts in the way that consumers behave and engage with their physical surroundings. The proliferation of ecommerce, online retailing and the reduction in floorspace required, is now widely acknowledged.

However, retail is not the only element of a thriving town centre. Recent research by the Greater London Authority found that 45% of primary high street use was for social reasons, as opposed to retail related. The majority of those surveyed (75%) also identified something other than retail as the best thing about their high street. This is creating opportunities for new uses to emerge and delivering a different offer.

COVID-19 has placed the UK under great strain but has also reminded us of the value of certain elements of the places in which we live: green spaces and parks, local shops and services and local walks. All of these elements allow us to interact with our family, friends and local community, which is essential for our overall wellbeing.

Related to this, one of the key elements for a thriving town centre is being able to offer what digital cannot. Town centres must provide social spaces; hives of face-to-face interaction where the focal point is not a distinctive monetary offer, but a cultural one.

Melksham is arguably not a town centre that is in a position of decline and is experiencing regeneration in the present day. It is therefore uniquely positioned to continue to thrive in the future. A key strategic objective for Melksham Town Centre will be to maintain its existing, well used retail offer and function, but to re-purpose and regenerate less successful elements of the town centre, such as the public realm and connectivity and to consolidate certain land uses, so that they create complementary zones of activity which act as anchors, pulling people into the town centre.

3.2 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.

3.3 Walkable neighbourhoods

Walkability is extremely important as it encourages a healthy, active lifestyle. The compact nature of Melksham Town Centre will certainly contribute towards this.

The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) recently published the guide '20 Minute Neighbourhoods' (2021), which picks up on the concept of walkable communities. The guide prioritises pedestrians and proposes that 'most of people's daily needs can be met within short walk or cycle'. The benefits of this approach that residents are encouraged to become more active, which improves their mental and physical health; residents tend to use local facilities and green spaces more regularly; traffic is reduced, and air quality improved; and people see more of their neighbours, strengthening community bonds. The guide defines 20 minutes as the maximum time that people are willing to walk to meet their daily needs and that the 20 min journey represents an 800m walk from home to a destination and back again (10 minutes each way).

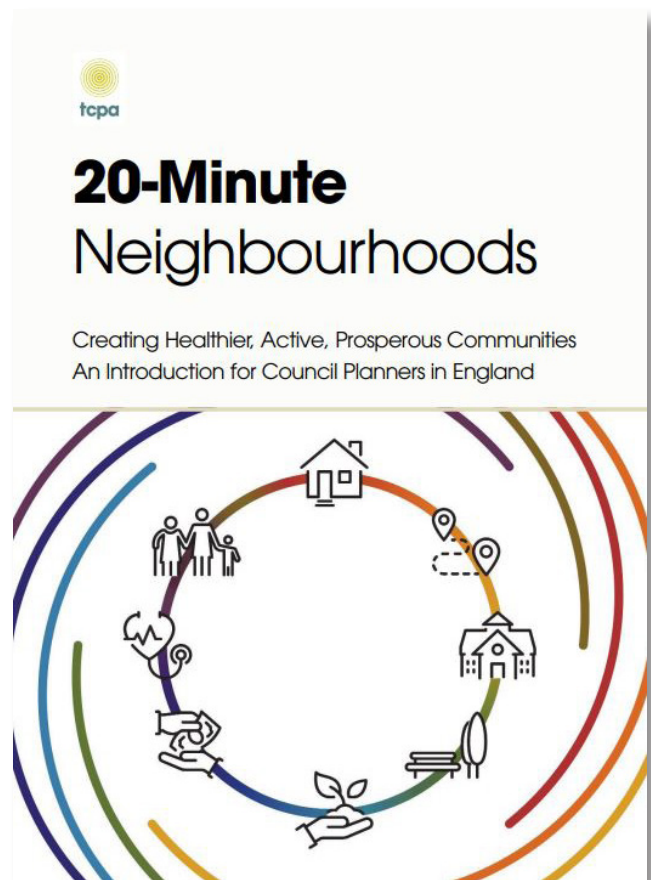
The impact of Covid has made the 20-minute neighbourhood even more pertinent, with access to local facilities and green and natural space being so important for wellbeing.

The Steering Group see accessibility as a critical factor in the Masterplan work and as part of the preparations for the revised JNMP, have engaged Priority for People to prepare a programme to create a long-term vision for mobility, broken down into short, medium and longer-term ideas and opportunities, such as improving walkability to more ambitious and far-reaching projects for sustainability, wellbeing and a healthier environment.

As part of this work, Priority for People have proposed projects and ideas within the following themes:

- Active Travel
- Public transport
- Cars and trucks
- Inclusive and accessible
- Climate change
- Town centre
- Sustainable urban mobility planning.

The relevant proposals are integrated into this report.



F.3 | **Figure 03:** TCPA 20 Minute Neighbourhood Guide

3.4 National planning policy and guidance

The National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 126) states that:

“good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities”.

National and local policy documents can provide valuable guidance for bringing about good design and the benefits accompanying it. Some are there to ensure

adequate planning regulations are in place so that development is both fit for purpose and able to build sustainable, thriving communities.

Other documents are more technical and offer specific design guidance which can inform design codes and masterplanning activities.

Developers should refer to these key documents when planning future development in the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan area.

2022 - Levelling up Agenda

Government has prepared a Levelling up White Paper, which sets out their strategy to tackle economic challenges across the country, and the opportunity for everyone to flourish.

Key initiatives within the White Paper include the opportunity for new investment in digital connectivity, transport infrastructure and regeneration, to help implement some of the proposals put forward. Government also sets out key missions to be achieved by 2030, including restoring a pride in place and community's satisfaction with their town centres.

2021 - National Planning Policy Framework

A revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) came into force in July 2021. Chapter 7 'Ensuring the vitality of town centres' sets out the Government's approach to town centres. It identifies that planning policy should promote the long-term vitality and viability of town centres – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters (Paragraph 86).

Paragraph 86 encourages allocation of a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of development likely to be needed, looking at least 10 years ahead. Meeting anticipated needs for retail, leisure, office and other 'main town centre uses' over this period should not be compromised by limited site availability, so town centre boundaries should be kept under review where necessary.

It identifies that where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available for main town centre uses, appropriate 'edge of centre' sites that are well connected to the town centre should be allocated. If sufficient edge of centre sites cannot be identified, policies should explain how identified needs can be met in other accessible locations that are well connected to the town centre.

2021 - National Model Design Code

This report provides detailed guidance on the production of design codes, guides and policies to promote successful design. It expands on 10 characteristics of good design set out in the National Design Guide. This guide should be used as reference for new development.

2021 - National Design Guide

The National Design Guide illustrates how well-designed places that are beautiful, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice. Ten characteristics in the guide outline the Government's priorities for well-designed places.

2021 - Build Back Better High Streets

This policy strategy document notes the importance of our high streets at the forefront of the UK's recovery post-Covid and focuses on five key priorities and the overarching ambition is for high streets to become 'clean, green, mixed-use spaces in which people not only want to shop but also live, work, and relax'.

In preparing this Masterplan, consideration has been given to national, regional and local planning policy. This includes both adopted and emerging policies as set out below.

2021 - Building with Nature Standards

The mission of this document is to put high-quality green infrastructure at the heart of placemaking in the UK, maximising benefits for people and wildlife. By bringing people closer to nature and building great places for us to live, work and play, development can make a major contribution towards better health and wellbeing in our communities and tackling our climate and ecological emergencies.

The 12 Standards in this document are built around the themes of Core, Wellbeing, Water, and Wildlife, helping residential and commercial developers to design and deliver high-quality green infrastructure, and guiding policy makers in clearly defining requirements for green-infrastructure in policy documents.

2020 - Planning for the Future

The 'Planning for the Future' White Paper, proposed a desire to streamline and modernise the planning process, bring a new focus to design and sustainability, improve the system of developer contributions to infrastructure, and ensure more land is available for development where it is needed. Consultation on the White Paper closed on 29 October 2020, during which time approximately 40,000 responses were received. Government is currently reviewing these consultation comments.

2020 - Living with Beauty

The Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission is an independent body set up to advise Government on how to promote and increase the use of high-quality design for new build homes and neighbourhoods. In its report, 'Living with Beauty' (January 2020), the Commission set out three

overall aims: ask for beauty, refuse ugliness and promote stewardship, and made 45 detailed policy propositions.

These recommendations resulted in an amendment to national policy (NPPF) (2021) (Paragraph 134) to have a stronger focus on beauty and the introduction of a National Model Design Code in July 2021.

2020 - Building for a Healthy Life

Building for a Healthy Life (BHL) is the new (2020) name for Building for Life, the government-endorsed industry standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. The new name reflects the crucial role that the built environment has in promoting wellbeing. The BHL toolkit sets out principles to help guide discussions on planning applications and to help local planning authorities to assess the quality of proposed (and completed) developments, but can also provide useful prompts and questions for planning applicants to consider during the different stages of the design process.

2007 - Manual for Streets

Development is expected to respond positively to the Manual for Streets, the Government's guidance on how to design, construct, adopt and maintain new and existing residential streets. It promotes streets and wider development that avoid car dominated layouts, and place the needs of pedestrians and cyclists first. It also supports streets that create better places and a sense of community.

3.5 Legislative Changes - Use Class Order

Of relevance to town centres across the UK, during 2020, Government brought in changes to consolidate a number of separate Use Classes under a single 'Commercial, Business and Service' Class E. This update to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (the 'UCO') came into effect in September 2020 and combined shops, restaurants, offices, gyms and nurseries (amongst others) that no longer require planning permission to switch between uses.

These changes intend to make it easier to enable greater utilisation of existing assets and where appropriate, re purposing of buildings in town centres such as Melksham. Class E is intended to facilitate diversification and facilitates an enhanced role for town centres as places of work, providing space for services, research and development, creating and making. Shops can change to restaurants, cafes, gyms, offices, health centres and indoor sports facilities. This fits well with a 'mixed-use neighbourhood' approach.

In March 2021, an update was then made to the related legislation to allow for the change of use of these commercial properties to residential from August 2021 under a fast track 'prior approval' process. This demonstrates the Government's desire to ensure that high streets thrive and survive through adopting mixed-use approach in town centres.

3.6 District planning policy and guidance

Melksham lies within the Wiltshire Unitary Council area. Melksham is located within the county of Wiltshire and is the fifth-largest settlement after Swindon, Salisbury, Chippenham and Trowbridge. The following documents at a district level have informed the guidance within this report:

2022 - Wiltshire Climate Strategy

Wiltshire Council acknowledged the climate emergency in 2019 and have been working towards several climate objectives. The Wiltshire Climate Strategy sets the framework for reducing emissions over five years and for making the county resilient to climate impacts. The non-statutory document will influence key documents, such as the Local Plan review.

2022 - Wiltshire Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

The Wiltshire Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy identifies, and provides a vision and goals for, the county's blue and green infrastructure networks for the next eight years. The non-statutory document will influence key council documents, such as the Local Plan review.

2015 - Wiltshire Core Strategy

The current Development Plan for the county comprises the Wiltshire Core Strategy, Site Allocation Plans and Minerals and Waste Plans, alongside Neighbourhood Plans. The Wiltshire Core Strategy was adopted in 2015 and is currently under review.

Emerging - Wiltshire Local Plan

The new Local Plan is anticipated for adoption late 2023 and will provide a vision and framework for addressing housing and employment needs and the provision of infrastructure for a period until 2036. It will be informed in part by a Joint Spatial Framework under preparation by the Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council. Initial consultation on the new Local Plan concluded early 2021, and identified the scale of growth, place shaping priorities, potential development sites and settlement profiles for Melksham.

2011 - Wiltshire Local Transport Plan

The third Local Transport Plan (LTP3) for Wiltshire seeks to provide a sustainable transport system and covers a period to March 2026. The LTP3 supports overarching national transport goals (Guidance on Local Transport, July 2009) and themes for sustainable local transport (Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon: Making Sustainable Local Transport Happen White Paper, January 2011). Several strategy documents that provide further guidance on key transport themes support the LTP3.

3.7 Local planning policy and guidance

Local planning policy provides guidance that is tailored to the local context, where the development is located, which is supported by analysis taken directly from the area. Therefore, it is vital local policy is considered when proposing development within Melksham. The following documents at a local level have informed the design guidance within this report:

2022 - Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2

Issues such as climate change, providing affordable homes in the right places and helping local business recover from the impact of COVID make it imperative that the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan evolves to provide strong local powers, alongside Wiltshire's upcoming new Local Plan. The Joint Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has resolved that Neighbourhood Plan 2, which commenced in early 2022 and is looking at the following topics:

- Assessment and information to inform approach to housing (together with the Local Plan);
- Protecting valued local green spaces;
- Further addressing climate change;
- Planning for future vitality of the town centre;
- Protecting our local heritage; and
- Ensuring that local priorities, such as the Melksham Link canal project and the bypass project, are explored.

2021 - Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 1

In July 2021 Melksham's first Neighbourhood Plan was voted into force. It provides the communities of Melksham Town and Melksham Without real local planning power in guiding the conservation and development of our area until 2026.

2019 - Town Centre Scoping Report

This report reviewed the opportunities, challenges and drivers facing Melksham Town during the period of the emerging Local Plan.

2006 - Town Centre Urban Design Study

This study suggests a number of ways in which the street scene of Melksham town centre could be more pleasant and welcoming, and therefore more prosperous. It analysed the physical character of the town centre and then proposed a number of small scale, medium term and long term regeneration projects.

**Town centre
context**

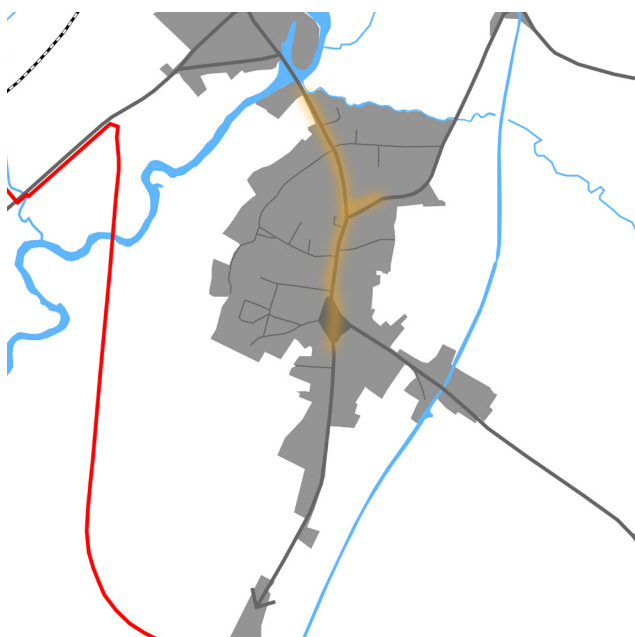
04

4. Town centre development principles

4.1 Evolution of Melksham

A review of historical mapping illustrates the considerable change of Melksham town centre over the last 150 years. The plans below illustrate the evolution of a traditional market town through the expansion associated with the dawn of the industrial revolution and the arrival of the railway; and more recently the development of the town's retail focus and movement networks which have shaped the town to the present day.

> 1880



Early development focused around Church Walk and the Market Place. Mills were constructed along the riverside and by the town bridge (the last mill was closed in 1888).

Later growth and infill along arterial roads such as Lowbourne, Forest Road and Spa Road, due to its position on the coach route between London and Bath.

> 1920



Continued, limited development can be seen during the inter war period, along the fringes of the eastern and southern edges of the town centre.



Figure 04: Church of St Michael and All Angels, c1860



Figure 05: Market Place, c.1860

Melksham's origins lie in its location at the fording point of the river, fertile land and elevation above the river flood level. The name 'Melksham' is believed to come from the old English 'meoloc' meaning 'milk'. As the name implies, the area has long been associated with pasture and dairy farming.

Melksham was also for many years a cloth town. In the 16th and early 17th centuries, Melksham clothiers exported as far as central Europe. In the later 17th and the 18th centuries there was some revival, but in the 18th century the industry declined and ended in the 19th century.

> 1970



Dairy farming was the towns main industry in 1953.

By 1970, there was considerable infill development to the south east of the town centre, in between Spa Road and King Street.

Large scale industrial development also emerged along the river edge and the town bridge.

> 2022



Significant development occurred in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, in the form of clusters around most of the town.

These formed distinct new neighbourhood groups located between the arterial routes to the south and east of the town centre, Bowerhill to the south and Roundponds to the north-west.

4.2 Town centre today

A large proportion of the population of Melksham are at working age, which is one of the reasons why the town centre is a thriving and vibrant place.

According to an early draft of the nascent Melksham Neighbourhood Plan, there are approx. 155 businesses in the town centre. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.

As highlighted in the Melksham Town review report, the Which? magazine in October 2019 stated that:

"a [retail] model more familiar to older generations is re-emerging – with flourishing personal services, markets, and food specialists that focus on 'experiences' replacing retailers hit directly by the rise of online shopping. The analysis found businesses offering personal services that cannot be replicated easily online – such as hair and beauty services, tattoo and piercing shops, and funeral directors – have boomed."

4.3 Key issues, challenges and opportunities

Melksham has a lot to offer, and many elements that already encourage people to visit the town centre. The town centre masterplan will look to improve the potential for connection between visitors to the town centre, which will make the experience of visiting more enjoyable for all.

**People are the
key to creating
economic value to
the place where
they live**

**The town centre vision,
aims and objectives**

05

5. Town centre objectives

The vision for Melksham in the JMNP is the overarching strategy for the future development of the Neighbourhood Plan Area. The vision is set out below.

To make the town of Melksham and the parish of Melksham Without great places to live, to work, to play and to visit; attractive, healthy, convenient and environmentally sustainable, with access to employment, education, shops and services via walking, cycling and public transport.



5.1 Town centre objectives

01.



A connected town centre and healthy, active community

- *Improve town centre pedestrian, cycle, and public transport connectivity with surrounding “Edge of centre” retail, service and business uses, Melksham and MWO Parish and its wider community area;*
- *Enhance mobility, accessibility and sustainable and active travel facilities within the town centre area.*
- *Enable efficient and effective business deliveries and service access.*
- *Provide car parking to contribute to the vitality of the needs of the town efficiently and effectively.*

02.



A vibrant and diverse town centre. A place for culture.

- *Protect and enhance the vitality of Melksham town centre.*
- *Promote healthy, safe streets.*
- *Sustain and enhance the diversity and quality of the town centre retail, service and leisure offer and maximise its sustained vitality.*
- *Protect and enhance the appearance and character of the town centre and the Conservation Area.*
- *The rich heritage of the town centre should be promoted and utilised to attract visitors and residents alike.*

03.



Low carbon and green

- *Promote new development which supports sustainable, active travel via healthy streets.*
- *Promote the use of technologies that support low carbon growth.*
- *Support community led renewable and low carbon energy generation projects.*
- *Explore the potential for the pedestrianisation of Bank Street / High Street.*
- *Explore the potential for re-wilding projects and tree planting to enhance biodiversity, provide solar shading and improve the character of the town centre.*

**The town centre
development principles**

06



Figure 06: King Street

6.1 This section analyses the various built and spatial components of Melksham Town Centre including heritage, public realm, land use, activities, movement and its economic and regeneration context. It provides a foundation of the emerging issues and opportunities which inform and underpin the proposed development principles and ideas set out within the Masterplan.

6.2 Economy, vitality and culture

The town centre benefits from a wide range of land use types which influence the economy and the vitality of the town centre today.

6.2.1 Economy, vitality and culture today

The town centre has a range of independent shops and a weekly food and drink market. The retail and food and drink market has grown significantly in the last few years, however, the over provision of supermarkets so close to the town centre has a detrimental impact on food retailers. There is a limited demand for office space, however this may change in the future as our patterns of working changes.

There are a number of relevant planning policy evidence base documents relating to the economy of the town centre, covering the intricacies of these issues in more detail, such as:

- Town Centre and Retail Study, (TCRS) 2011, Wiltshire County Council
- Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA), 2017 Wiltshire County Council
- Core Strategy Retail Review, (CSRR) 2015, Wiltshire County Council
- Melksham Town 2020-2036, (MT), 2019, Melksham Town Council

Culturally, Melksham has a strong community spirit and a well established offering of events, groups and facilities which focus on inclusivity. Events include the weekly market, annual Food and River Festival, Melksham Music Festival incorporating Party in the Park, weekly park runs and the annual Melksham Carnival. Groups are also well established, with the arts being a particular point of interest within the community. Arts Together improves the quality of life of older people through the provision of a range of participatory arts projects. AbsolutelyYou and Splitz focus on activities to increase emotional and mental resilience and wellbeing for all age groups. This network is an invaluable asset to the town and should be further bolstered wherever feasible.

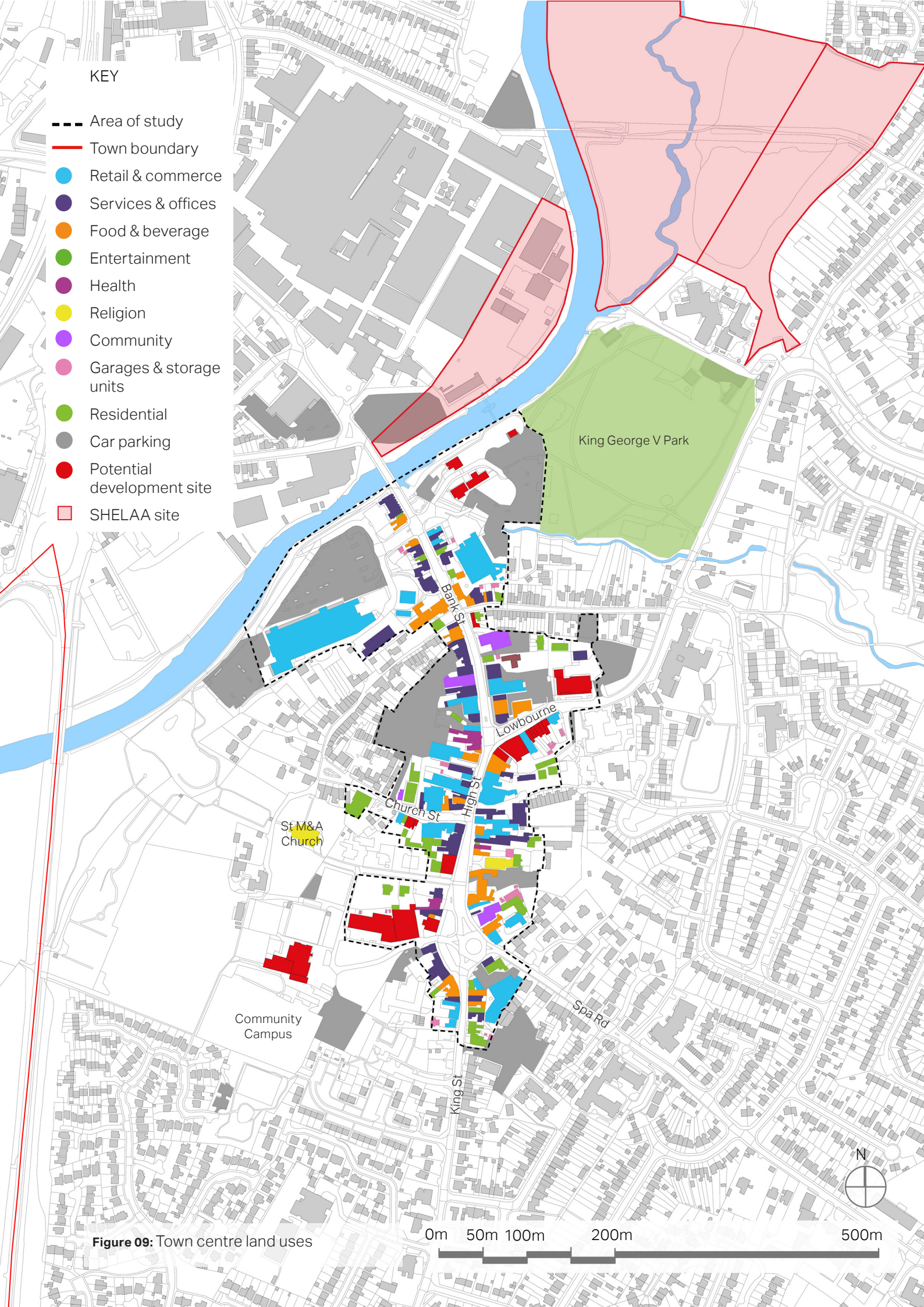
In terms of sites for development, the SHELAA assesses the suitability, availability, and achievability of land for both housing and economic development. Of particular importance in this report, is the range of potential development sites within the town centre, shown on the plan, right.



Figure 07: Waitrose



Figure 08: High St shops



KEY

- Area of study
- Town boundary
- Retail & commerce
- Services & offices
- Food & beverage
- Entertainment
- Health
- Religion
- Community
- Garages & storage units
- Residential
- Car parking
- Potential development site
- SHELAA site

Figure 09: Town centre land uses

0m 50m 100m 200m

500m



6.2.2 Economy, vitality and culture opportunities

Within the variety of uses described on the previous page, there are a range of potential development sites that are vacant, disused or underused that would benefit from investment, as shown on the plan, right.

A key factor in bolstering the local economy, is attracting and retaining workers within the town. Gentle intensification and layering of different land uses is one way of achieving this.

There are three potential development clusters at key gateway locations which address this challenge, with a multi use and layered approach to development, which could include community hubs, housing, health and leisure, entertainment, education, arts, business/office space and some shops.

More detail on the extent of the clusters is covered in the next section of this report.

Number	Status	Call for sites development sites
1		Land to North of River Avon (Area 8)
2		Land to North of River Avon (Area 9)
3		Land to North of River Avon (Area 10)
4		Land at 28 Bank Street
5	N/A	Blue Pool at Melksham House, Market Place
6	N/A	Library & Lowbourne House, Lowbourne
7	N/A	Vacant Lloyds Bank Building, 1 High Street
8	N/A	Vacant HSBC Bank Building, 32 High Street
9	N/A	Vacant NatWest, 34 High Street
10	N/A	Vacant Dragon Delight Chinese, 7 Lowbourne
11	N/A	Vacant Marjo Fashion, 8-12 Lowbourne
12	N/A	Vacant Nettle, 14 Lowbourne
13	N/A	Vacant Co-op Funeral Care, Church Street
No.	Status	Other potential future development sites
14	N/A	Town Hall
15	N/A	Assembly Hall
16	N/A	Melksham House
No.	Status	Sites that are constructed or in planning
17	Constructed	Community Campus
18	Application refused	3 Lowbourne

Table 03: List of development sites

Add in any new refs to planning applications/permissions here - group to provide



Figure 10: Assembly Hall

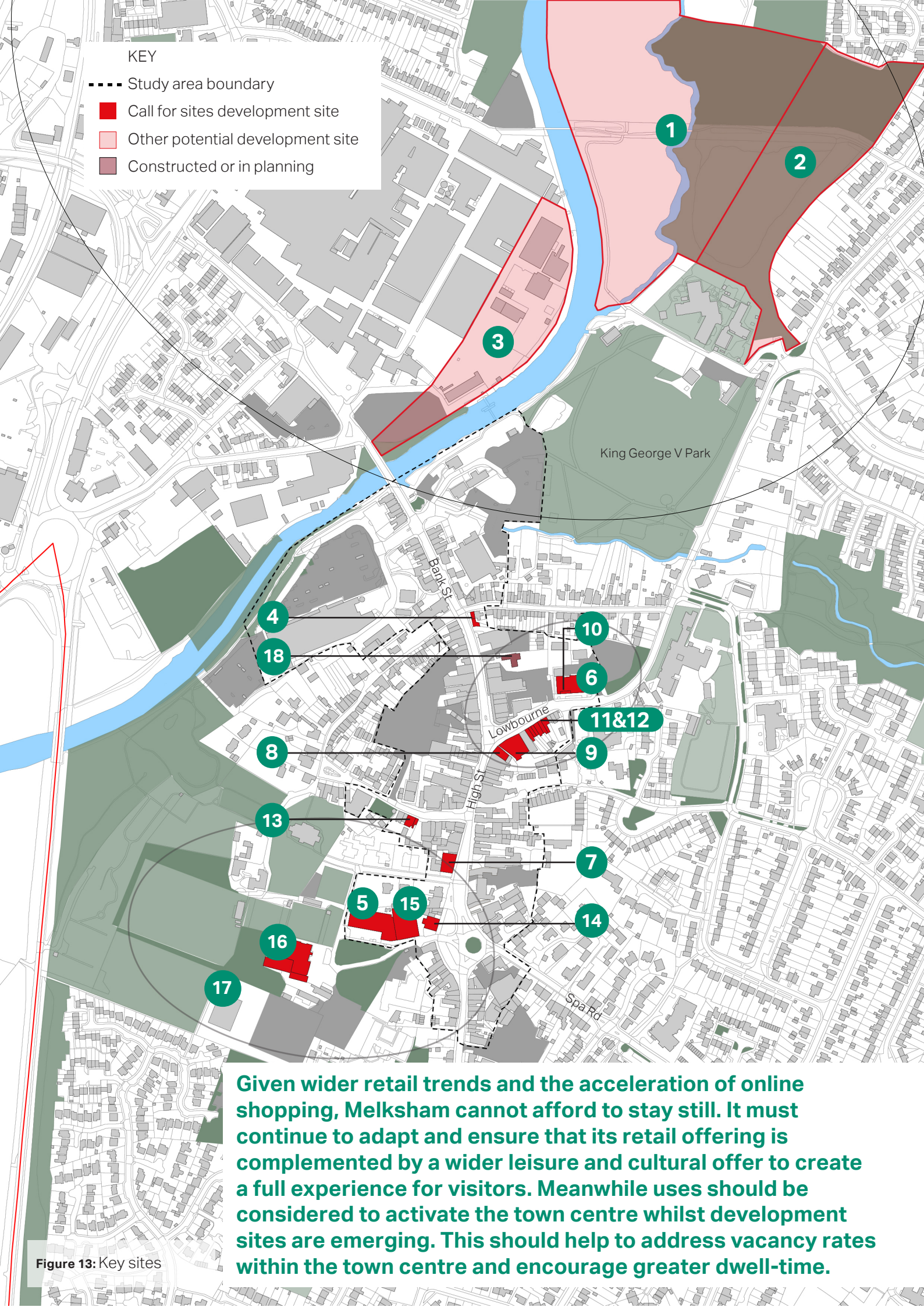


Figure 11: Former library site

I have removed the group of buildings around the river - i.e. the scout hut etc



Figure 12: Former chinese take away site



Given wider retail trends and the acceleration of online shopping, Melksham cannot afford to stay still. It must continue to adapt and ensure that its retail offering is complemented by a wider leisure and cultural offer to create a full experience for visitors. Meanwhile uses should be considered to activate the town centre whilst development sites are emerging. This should help to address vacancy rates within the town centre and encourage greater dwell-time.

Figure 13: Key sites

6.2.3 Economy, vitality and culture opportunities cont'd

The following opportunities could be explored to bolster the vitality and economy of Melksham:

- A diverse range of uses, which will create visible activity throughout the day and night, to support an evening economy;
- A focus on vibrant meeting places, especially along High St, Bank St, Old and New Broughton Road, that deliver people's needs for social exchange and entertainment. The aim is to strengthen social functions to offer a lively atmosphere;
- Support for small independent businesses and retailers that are community led-ventures. The idea of community wealth-building aligns with the principles of the 20-Minute Neighbourhood, with a focus on locally productive forms of business and employment, ensuring that a strong neighbourhood centre exists to support everyday needs;
- Shifting away from traditional retail towards a curated combination of uses such as food and beverage, event space, the arts and leisure, to create a more balanced employment profile, a diverse economy and attract and retain more people in the town centre. Examples of this are drawing classes within an open space in the town centre, or book club/reading events, organised by the relocated library;
- The temporary re-use of vacant retail and commercial spaces should be considered to provide affordable spaces for new and existing creative and community led groups and facilities to start up and reanimate the streetscene, whilst a permanent use is secured;
- Provision of multi-functional uses in any given premises can benefit the community by providing multiple services in the same location, such as the model employed by the recently constructed Community Campus. This could be employed in the town centre with an alternative focus such as performing arts, bike cafe, arts centre, employment services etc. A travelling cinema or a temporary performance space. This creates a strong social offer to attract activity/community uses;
- Explore the introduction of digital infrastructure to create a digitally enabled and connected town centre and to support flexible working;
- New, affordable, low-carbon housing in the town centre for all generations will improve health and wellbeing of Melksham's population.



Figure 14: Drawing classes in key spaces could be organised by the library or the creative community



Figure 15: Artists' workshop space



Figure 16: Book reading, attracting families and promoting community engagement



Figure 17: Pop up food stall



Figure 18: Layered uses with bike shop / cafe / workspace



Figure 19: Independent business

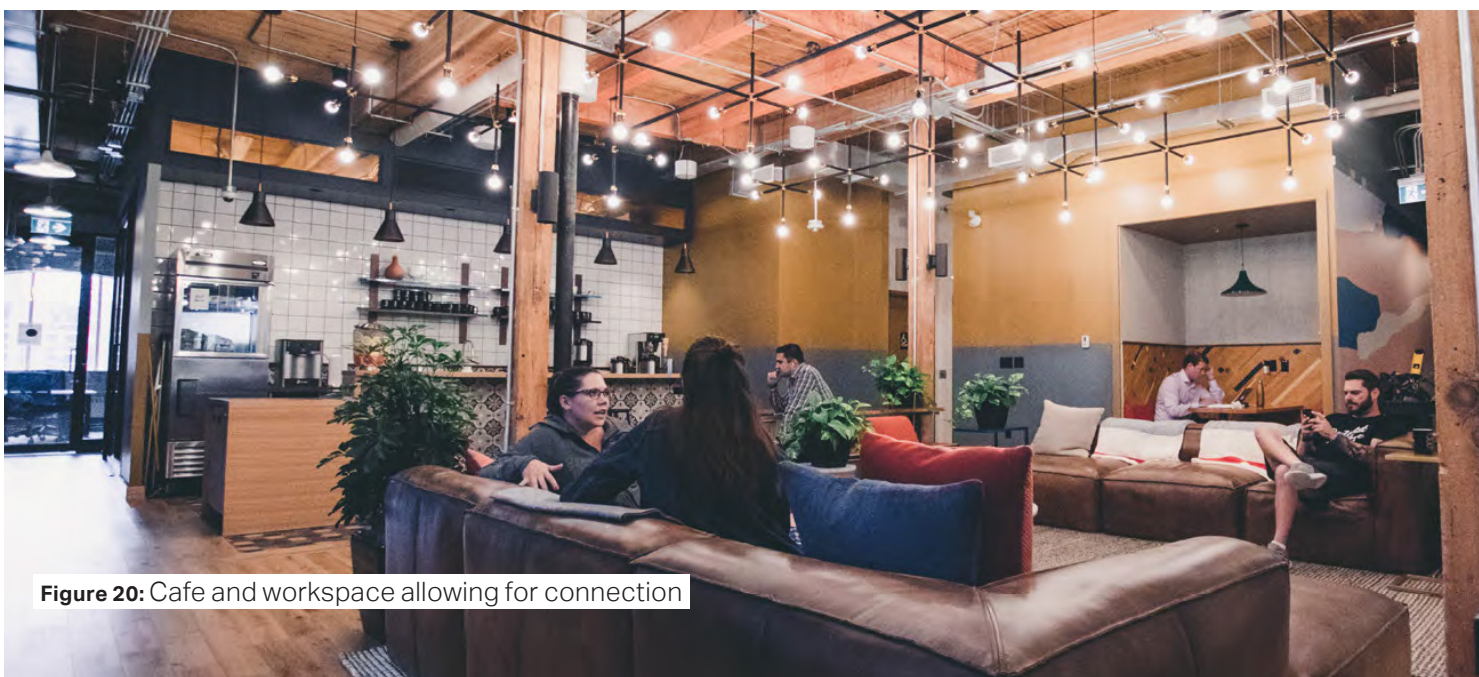


Figure 20: Cafe and workspace allowing for connection

6.3 Heritage and distinctiveness

6.3.1 Built heritage and distinctiveness today

Much of the heritage and fabric of the historic town remains today, which gives Melksham its strong setting. The importance of its built character is reflected in the wide extent of the Conservation Area and multitude of listed buildings, shown right.

Its built character is formed by the use of both built and spatial elements.

Some of those notable built elements include:

- Its many stone shops, pubs and houses (more on this on the next page);
- The 17th century buildings along Church Walk;
- The two key buildings overlooking the Market Place; the Town Hall and New Hall;
- 1 High Street (former Lloyds building), a substantial building, and the grand buildings in the same style along Place Road;
- 11 High Street, on the south corner of Church Street; and
- The Avon Bridge.



Figure 21: Use of stone in town centre housing



Figure 22: Vacant Lloyds building



Figure 23: United church

KEY

- Study area boundary
- Conservation area
- Grade II listed building
- Grade II* listed building
- Noteworthy building

Heritage is one of Melksham's key assets – recognised through the large grouping of Listed Buildings and the extent of the Conservation Area is testament to that. Notable assets are shown on the plan below.

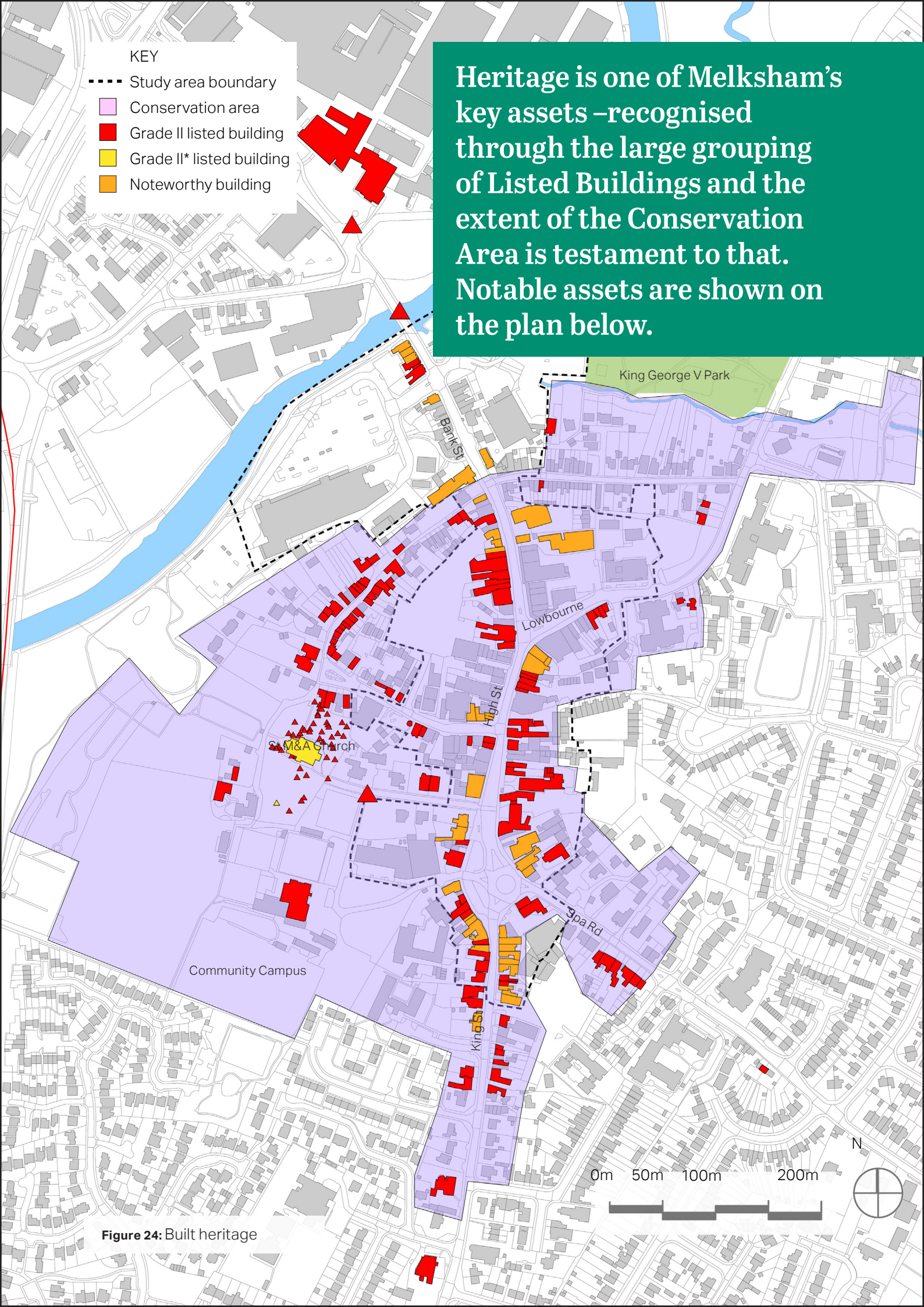


Figure 24: Built heritage

6.3.2 Built heritage and distinctiveness today - shopfronts and material palette

Each street has a character and visual hierarchy that is established by the relationship between the buildings found there. Shop frontages and materials play a vital role in contributing towards the streetscape and character of Melksham.

It is therefore important to ensure that they are designed with consistency at the façades level - in terms of colour, scale, fenestration and labelling.

There is a great variety in the style and quality of the shopfronts and within Melksham Town Centre, as demonstrated on the pictures below. The material palette is more consistent, as shown, right.



Figure 25: Consistent, but tired shopfronts, Bath Rd



Figure 26: High quality shopfronts, Church St

Materials



Red Brick



Sandstone Brick



Weatherboarding



Render



Flint



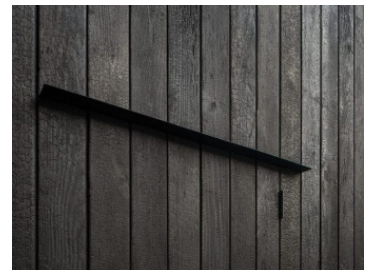
Clay Tiles



Paving setts



Flagstone



Wood cladding



Double Roman Tiles



Slate Tiles



Concrete Tiles

Colour Palette



Russet



Sand



Render

6.3.3 Spatial heritage and distinctiveness today

As stated on the previous page, the setting and character of the town centre is influenced by the use of both built and spatial elements.

Some of those notable spatial elements are shown on the plan, right, and include the following:

- The use of cobbled paving;
- The web of historic footpaths, which weave throughout the town centre and once provided short cuts through the fields around the town centre towards the church;
- The Market Place, which is a key area of public realm and one of the most distinctive parts of Melksham. It has recently been re-paved and hosts weekly markets. It is thought to be medieval in origin dating to 13th Century when in 1219 the first recorded market and fair was granted. A covered well marks the location of the old town pump;
- Queen Mary Garden, a quiet space away from the high street;
- Canon Square, a formal space but intimate and welcoming space with a ceremonial role;
- The historic streets around the River Avon and the tranquility of the Riverside walk; and
- King George V Park.



Figure 27: Existing wayfinding mapping



Figure 28: Cannon Square



Figure 29: Market day, Market square



Figure 30: Cobblestone alleyway

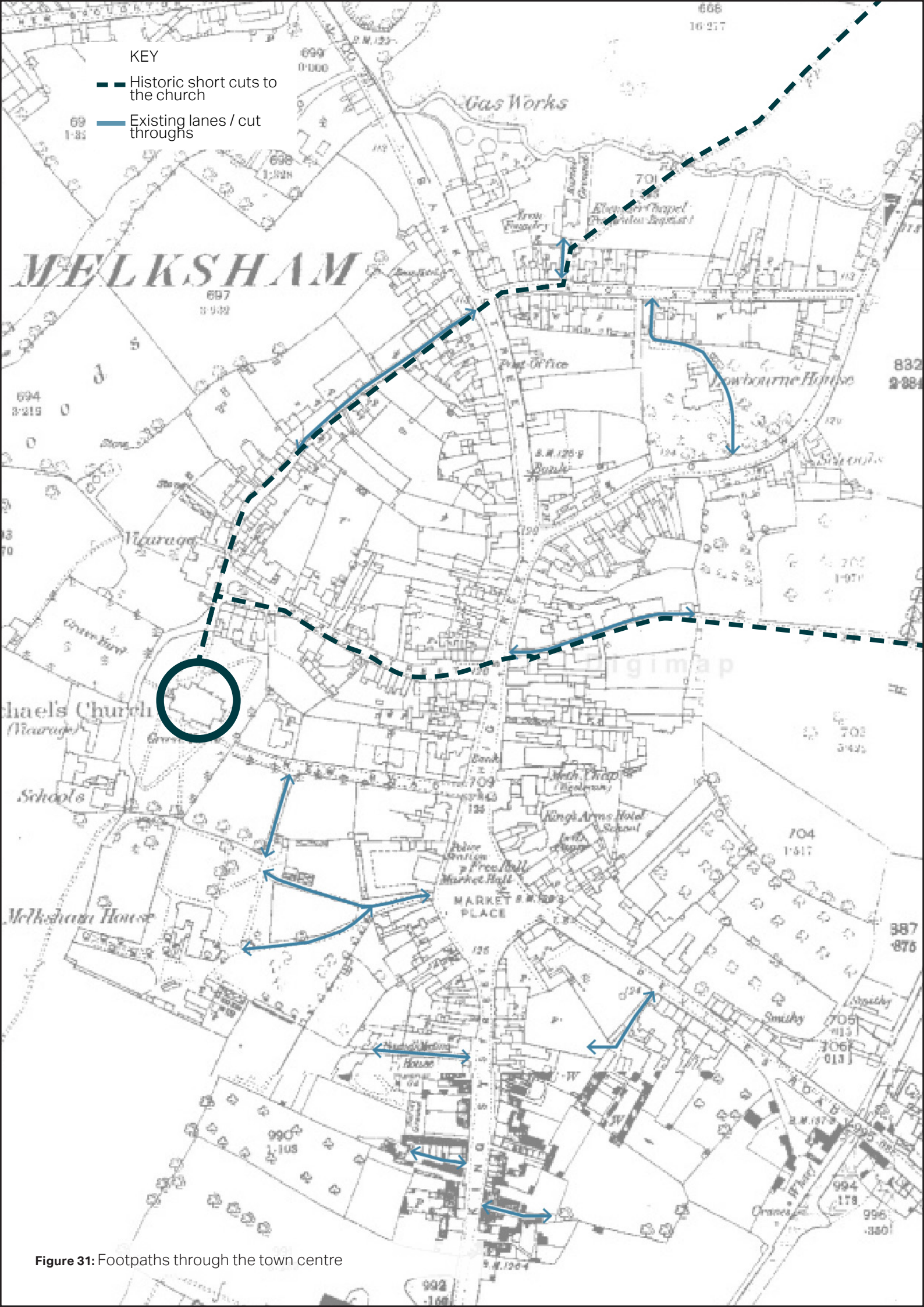


Figure 31: Footpaths through the town centre

6.3.4 Heritage and distinctiveness opportunities

Celebrate the historic environment

- Improve existing and integrate new information on Melksham's history via public realm and public art;
- Develop a palette of high-quality materials and street furniture which will help to create a distinct identity that reflects the importance of the historic environment; and
- Invest in shared spaces, as with homes. Remove the myriad barriers and signs which hamper play and enjoyment of the public realm. Rationalise and improve the amount, consistency and location of street furniture (including signage, cycle stands, railings, bollards, lighting, planters, litter bins and benches) to minimise street clutter and preserve important views and desire lines and make spaces more inclusive and accessible.

Promote Melksham's cultural assets

- Consider a programme of cultural events, which would help to publicise Melksham's assets to a broader audience and engender civic pride. The work that Peabody has developed in Thamesmead, London is relevant, creating a sense of belonging in the area and excitement about the future of the town via a diverse cultural programme.;
- Explore the potential for a culture trail which in addition to physical signposting, could also explore the opportunities for digital gamification which could appeal to a more diverse audience;
- Develop a public arts strategy, which could have links with schools or youth groups and also help to create an attractive and animated streetscape. This could include carefully commissioned artwork, such as the murals on Thamesmead underpasses which have transformed the look and feel of previously unloved grey spaces; and
- The temporary re-use of empty retail and commercial spaces to provide affordable spaces for pop-up art galleries and leisure activities to start up and create life and activity pending the permanent redevelopment of premises.

Melksham's rich heritage is a key strength, and one which gives the town its character and uniqueness. It is imperative that as the town centre develops in the future, these assets are preserved and celebrated; ensuring that the quality of public realm highlights their importance and new development responds sensitively in terms of design and scale.



Figure 32: Allocating space for spill out uses activates the street (permanent or temporary)



Figure 33: Digital wayfinding and cultural information



Figure 34: Temporary performance event, Belfast



Figure 35: Art installations can animate spaces 24/7



Figure 36: Clear, simple wayfinding mapping, Barnes



Figure 37: A signage totem that locates cultural landmarks, St Albans

6.3.5 Shopfronts and material palette opportunities

The public realm along the high street can be improved by decluttering signage and tidying the shopfronts. The following principles should be considered:

- Consider the overall proportion, form, and scale of the building's upper floors when designing new shop-fronts and alterations to shop fronts. Unnecessarily large shop-fronts or signage can detract from or even cover historically valuable architecture and, more generally, create a disjointed appearance;
- Reflect the street and historic styles. Integrate the shop front with the established streetscape, introducing a sense of variety but responding to the overall character of the high street. This includes using the right materials, responding to a dominant scale and proportion, and following an established pattern;
- Respond to and enhance the existing conditions of the public realm. Street elements and furniture should be considered when designing shopfronts. This will help improve the overall user experience;
- Unnecessary visual clutter should be avoided. This includes reducing unnecessary advertisements, plastic foliage or other elements stuck onto the shopfront, and removing general clutter such as visible AC units, wires and intrusive roller shutter boxes; and
- Innovative design will always be supported, but not to the loss of the Melksham's distinct history and character.



Figure 38: Unified, vibrant signage, in keeping with local character, Burnham Market



Figure 39: Clear paving transition, and use of traditional cobblestones to slow down traffic



Figure 40: Consistent shop fronts and generous pedestrian zone, Wokingham High Street



Figure 41: High-quality, restrained material palette for pedestrianised street and shopfronts, Bath



Figure 42: Creative street furniture offers opportunities for resting and socialising, Wokingham



Figure 43: Subtle changes in materials to delineate separation of uses, with priority for pedestrians, Preston

6.4 Sustainability and climate change

Melksham Town Council declared a climate emergency in February 2019 and have pledged to reduce the town council's carbon footprint.

6.4.1 Sustainability and climate change today

The Town Council subsequently prepared a Climate Action Plan to clean the air, protect the environment, and care for the health and wellbeing of its residents.

The Council's environment and climate working group have launched an event called Climate Fest, which will help raise awareness of the climate emergency amongst the local community.

Alongside this, Places for People have recently been commissioned by the Council's to investigate how Melksham can respond to the climate emergency.

This Masterplan seeks to entrench these aims within the regeneration of Melksham town centre, ensuring that it promotes sustainability and reductions in carbon.



Figure 44: Raised planters to provide temporary shade



Figure 45: Sedum roof is simple and easy to introduce



Figure 46: Raised planter with integrated seating

6.4.2 Sustainability and climate change opportunities

Greening Melksham

Plants, trees and green spaces have a significant impact on the public realm and its visual amenity which will help to strengthen the character of place and make the town centre a better place to live, work and invest. In addition, these green features can also play a pivotal role in improving air quality, reducing the risk of flooding, provide natural shading and also improving biodiversity and contributing to net zero carbon targets. There are limited opportunities for the creation of significant green spaces, and therefore the Masterplan should look to:

- Introduce more street tree planting in streets and public spaces, to create an urban green network;
- Utilise native planting palettes and trees which provide a good mix of heights and species, with dense cover, attractive flowers and a range of berries and seeds to maximise biodiversity benefits;
- Introduce green roofs and walls where possible - e.g. the design of new buildings and public realm interventions;
- Explore opportunities to enhance the planting in existing parklets like Church Street Gardens, Canon Square and Queen Mary's Gardens;
- Introduce new parklets along key streets, which will provide temporary green oasis for people to sit, relax and enjoy the town centre;
- Incorporate further raised planters into the design of the streetscape to reduce the visual impact of parked cars, direct pedestrian movement and incorporate integrated seating; and
- Explore innovative ways to incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS), which can help to manage surface water, whilst also enhancing biodiversity. Strategies could include the use of permeable paving to on street parking areas and public spaces, incorporation of rain gardens into public spaces, filters strips and bio-retention systems.

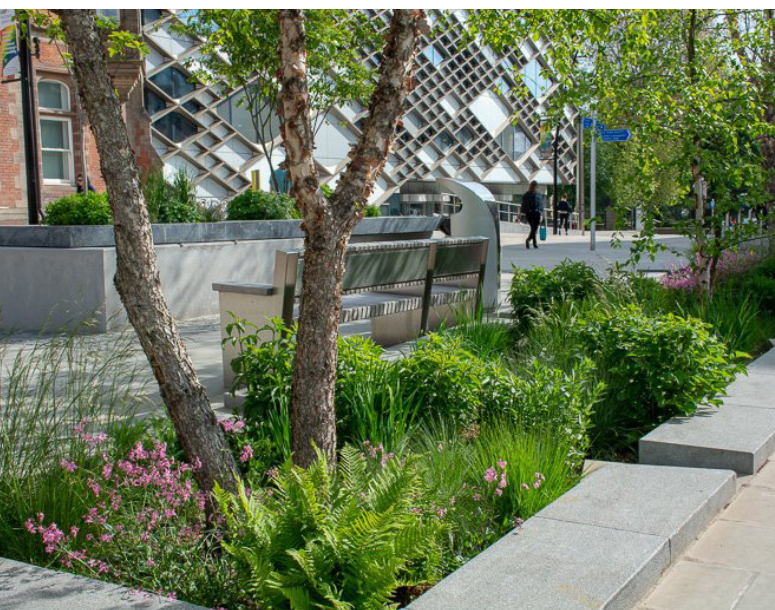


Figure 47: Raingardens with outlet kerb in stone



Figure 48: Living wall, London

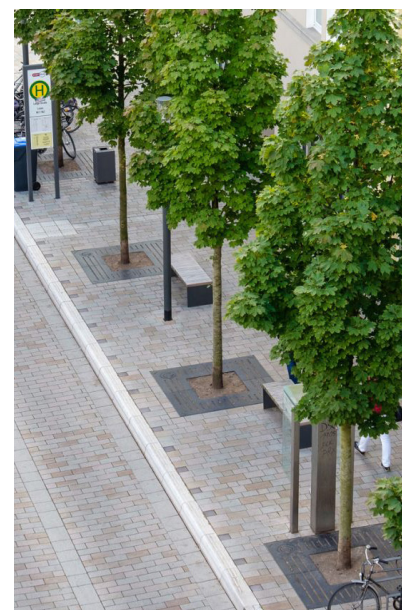


Figure 49: Street trees

Sustainability and climate change opportunities cont'd

Facilitating Active Travel

- Active travel (walking and cycling) should be promoted wherever possible and should be encouraged to form part of longer trips via public transport. Relevant guidance documents on this matter include the Manual for Streets (MfS) and more recently the TCPA's 20-minute neighbourhood model, both of which promote active travel and walkable neighbourhoods. This is a key aspiration of the Councils and is being explored through the work that Priority for People are currently undergoing. Pedestrianisation of certain streets should be explored.
- In order to encourage more people to choose to walk and cycle when making local journeys, pedestrian connectivity will be enhanced throughout the Masterplan area together with improvements to the public realm.
- In order to minimise the need to the travel and maximise the ability to make trips by sustainable modes of transport, new housing will be directed to the most accessible and sustainable locations within the Melksham Town Centre area, subject to other policy considerations.
- Introduce a programme for an extensive electric vehicle charging points and policy on electric scooters.



Figure 50: Cycle hub with bike racks and storage within public realm



Figure 51: Bike hub with storage within retail unit

Sustainable Buildings

- Proposals to refurbish or re-use existing buildings will be encouraged to reduce energy consumption including through improving the building fabric, lighting and heating and ventilation systems.
- Proposals for new buildings should seek to incorporate a high performance envelope to minimise heat loss/ gain, maximise the use of natural light and use low energy lighting systems, and low temperature heating and cooling systems based on heat pumps where practicable. In developing new buildings and infrastructure elements, the commissioning of whole life carbon assessments will be encouraged.



Figure 52: PV cells on pitched roof

Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

- Energy networks will have an important role to play in enhancing energy efficiency. They are especially effective at providing heat for developments with high demand (e.g. leisure facilities, office space and high density residential) together with existing buildings that may not be suitable for retrofit with heat pump systems. Opportunities to deploy phased energy networks in clusters (including the potential for decentralised energy) should be fully investigated and implemented subject to further feasibility and viability.
- Additionally, future development proposals should consider the potential to incorporate decentralised energy.
- The use of renewable zero carbon technologies, such as solar PV and heat pumps will be embraced. All new development should aim to incorporate appropriate zero/ low carbon measures to offset energy requirements. Opportunities to enhance the electric vehicle charging infrastructure in suitable locations throughout the Masterplan area will be supported, having regard to existing provision in the local area.
- Promoting Melksham Town Centre as a clean air zone should be prioritised.

6.5 Connecting the Town Centre

This section will focus on the connections into and out of the town centre. It will address movement networks and hierarchies and in doing so, it will reference the objectives from the initiative Priority for People (PfP), being undertaken by Townswork.

6.5.1 Movement into and out of the town centre today

Connectivity into and out of the town centre is vehicular dominated, as demonstrated on the plan, right. As highlighted in the PfP work, the town is car orientated with low availability / usage of public transport. It also has inadequate infrastructure for walking and cycling.

A roads

The A350 acts as a hard edge and defines the settlement boundary. It provides connections to nearby towns. Most of its length is a single carriageway road, with no pavements on either side, permitting two-way travel, however, where it branches out from Farmers Roundabout until it meets Bath Road, it widens up allowing for dual carriageway and four-way travel. The rest of the A-roads, the A365 to the north and the A3102 and A365 to the east, are all single carriageways which permit two-way travel and feature pavements through the town centre.

Secondary roads

There is a network of secondary roads within the town, offering immediate connections to the A-road network, the High Street and residential neighbourhoods. All roads are single carriageways, with pavements on either side or both sides, permitting two-way travel.

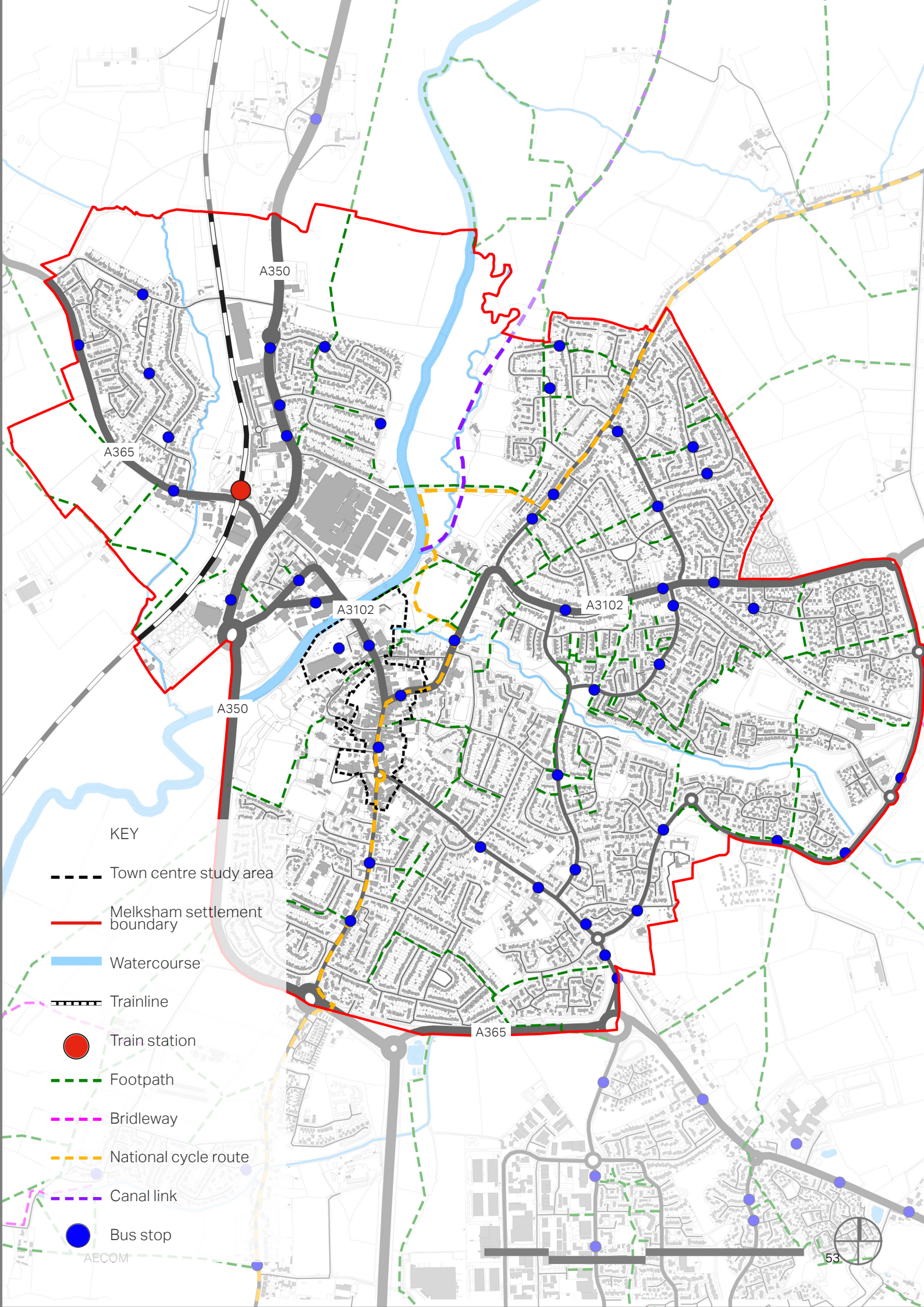
Active travel network

Melksham has some, but a largely disjointed network of active travel routes.

The National Cycle Route 403 runs through Melksham Town Centre and along part of the River Avon, and towards the north of Melksham. The riverside part of the route linking Halfpenny Bridge and King George V Playing Field is in poor condition and could be extended along the rest of the river.

The extensive Public Right of Way (PRoW) network links the town centre with the villages and surrounding landscape of Melksham. However, there is a distinct lack of pedestrian connectivity to the north of the river and along the river itself.

Melksham Railway Station has car and cycle parking, and is served by local bus routes, however connectivity to it is car dominated.



KEY

- Town centre study area
- Melksham settlement boundary
- Watercourse
- Trainline
- Train station
- Footpath
- Bridleway
- National cycle route
- Canal link
- Bus stop

AECOM



6.5.2 Movement into and out of the town centre opportunities

As part of the Priority for People initiative, Townswork are preparing a Sustainability Mobility Plan, which will investigate how to make it easier and safer for people, vehicles and goods to move within Melksham Town. In doing so, they are creating a long-term vision for urban & rural mobility, broken down into short, medium and longer-term ideas and opportunities.

As described on the previous pages, the town centre is encircled and dominated by A roads. Whilst these strategic routes provide good links to the wider settlement of Melksham, they are car dominant environments which constrain pedestrian and cycle permeability. Pedestrian and cycle experiences are often hampered by busy roads, complicated junctions and narrow footways.

There are opportunities to improve existing junctions to encourage active travel and promote better connectivity into and out of the town centre.

The PfP proposals are integrated into the opportunities listed below:

- Improve cycling provision around the edges of the town centre, including safe and connected cycle lanes, cycle hire and cycle parking facilities.
- Create a network of pavements, mapped & publicised. Provide legible, clear signposting & on-site information – including direction & distance – to encourage journey planning and exploration on foot.
- Encourage active travel from the town centre and employment areas to the train station; ie. a shuttle bus, cycle routes and parking, electric charging points.
- Explore the feasibility of a town centre hub for deliveries to retailers/the public.
- Provide electric charging points in the town centre.
- Improve connectivity to the River Avon and the key spaces along it such as Conigre Mead.
- Reduce traffic speeds via cameras and traffic calming measures along the A roads close to the town centre.
- Provide secure parking in schools and encourage 'walking buses' or 'school cycling trains'. Introduce 'Park & Stride' (where cars park 500m/1km from school and walk the distance) to encourage mobility.
- Map existing road crossings and identify where new accessible crossings are needed. Explore the potential for zebra crossings without Belisha beacons at key junctions into and out of the town centre.
- Scope opportunities for the use of cargo bikes in Melksham.
- Explore the potential for Melksham to introduce on-demand public transport. (e.g. Swaffham Flexibus+ service in Norfolk).



Figure 53: Distinctive materials for junction, footpath, use of shared surface for all users to reduce traffic speed in Poynton

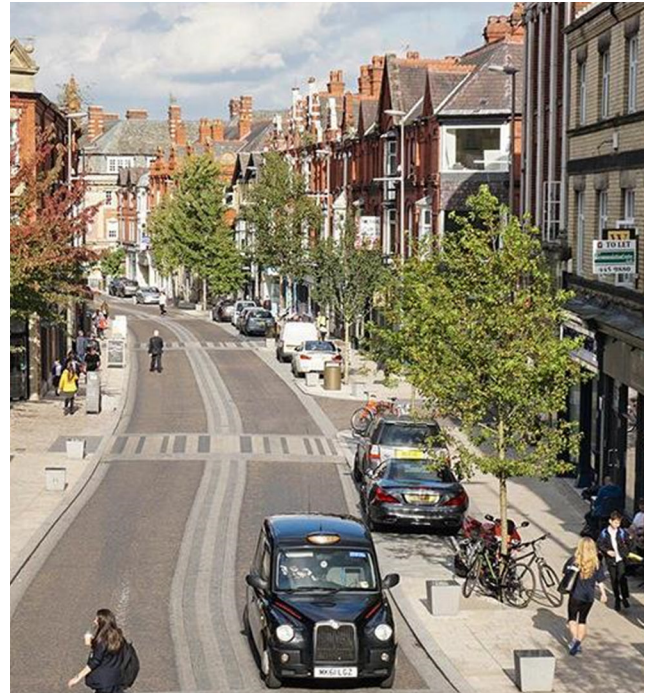


Figure 54: Central median, street trees and planters, with clear crossings, using high-quality paving materials, Altrincham



Figure 55: Bee Network precedent image, Manchester



Figure 56: Electric charging points

6.6 Public realm, connectivity and accessibility within the town centre

This section will focus primarily on public realm, alongside connectivity and accessibility within the town centre.

A high-quality public environment can have a significant positive impact on the economic life of a town centre, with the presence of good parks, squares, gardens and other public spaces being a vital component in attracting businesses, investment, employees and visitors. Access to good-quality, well-maintained public spaces can help to improve our physical and mental wellbeing, as well as providing a wealth of other environmental benefits.

6.5.3 Public realm, connectivity and accessibility within the town centre today

Open space and connectivity

There is a substantial network of open space surrounding the town centre, comprising the riverside walk, nature reserves, parks and sports pitches. However, there is a lack of green space within the centre itself and the spaces around the edges of the main streets.

In terms of connectivity and accessibility, the green spaces are sometimes difficult to navigate towards and/or hard to access. This is particularly true of the riverside, which is not well signposted and is inaccessible in some parts. Considering what a wonderful asset it is within the town centre, this is a missed opportunity.

Whilst the town centre is accessible, it suffers from poor interconnectivity between its key assets, for example King George V Park and the High St.

This is also true of the network of historic lanes and alleyways that snake through the town (shown on the map, right) which are underused.

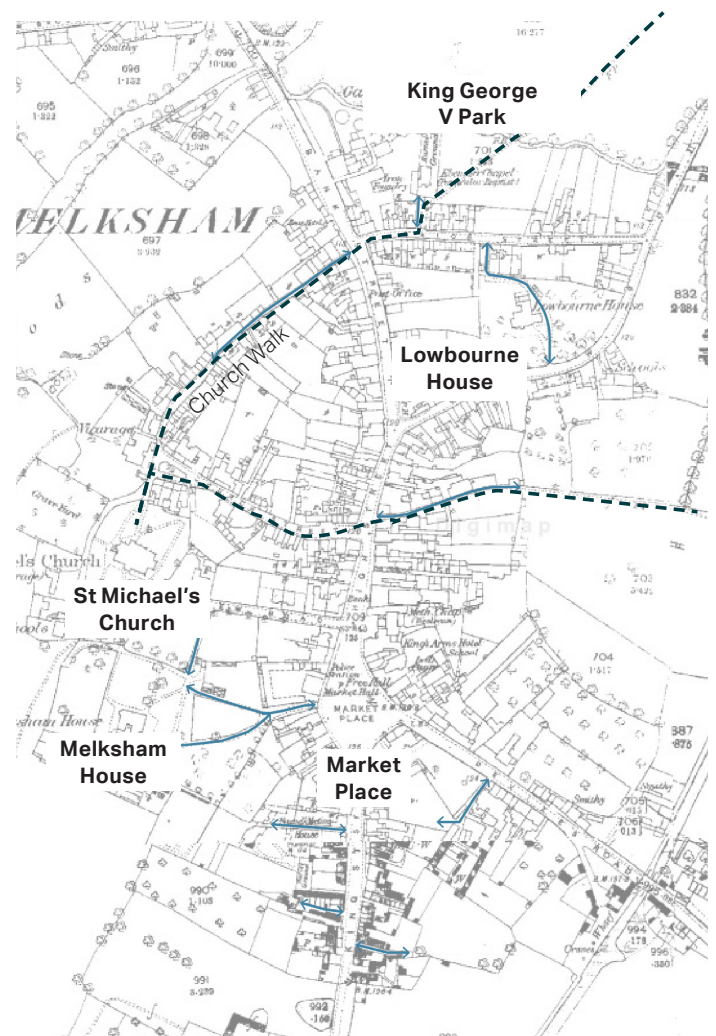
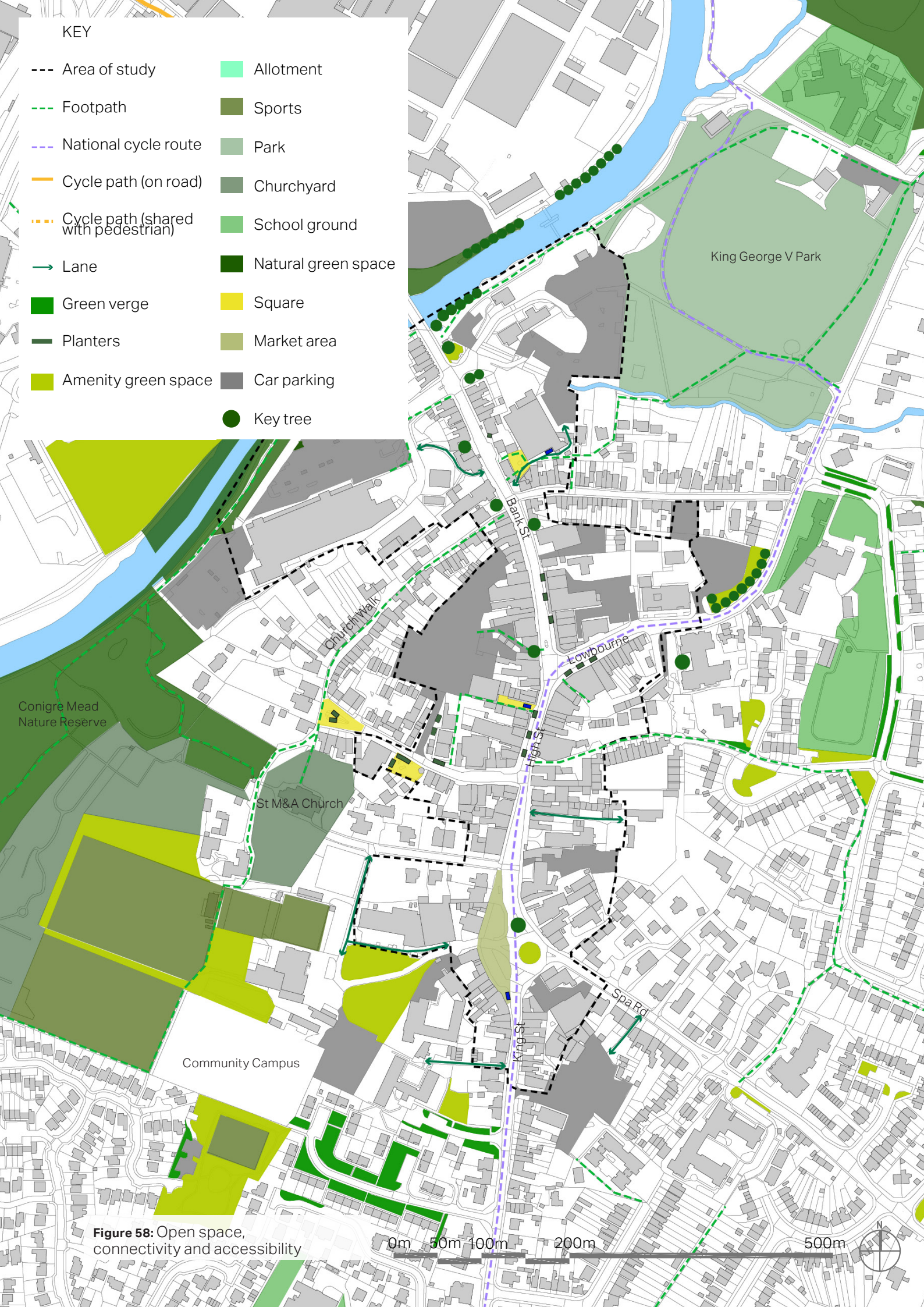


Figure 57: Walking routes



KEY

- Area of study
- - - Footpath
- - - National cycle route
- Cycle path (on road)
- - - Cycle path (shared with pedestrian)
- Lane
- Green verge
- Planters
- Amenity green space
- Allotment
- Sports
- Park
- Churchyard
- School ground
- Natural green space
- Square
- Market area
- Car parking
- Key tree

Figure 58: Open space, connectivity and accessibility



Public realm, connectivity and accessibility within the town centre today cont'd

Public realm, accessibility and connectivity

The public realm of Melksham Town Centre is currently car-oriented with inadequate infrastructure for walking and cycling and a dominance of surface car parking.

The main streets through the town centre are traffic heavy and the footpaths are often narrow. There are insufficient crossing points and several junctions are traffic heavy and over engineered, such as the Market Square and the access to Sainsburys / Waitrose. The pedestrian and cycle

journey is often hampered by busy roads, complicated junctions and narrow footways.

Away from the high street are a network of underused spaces, such as Canon Square and the riverside walk gateway space.

As mentioned on the previous page, there is a web of footpaths that provide short cuts through the centre, linking up with the surrounding residential communities. Some of these routes, such as Church Walk, are extremely attractive.



Figure 59: Car park, Union St



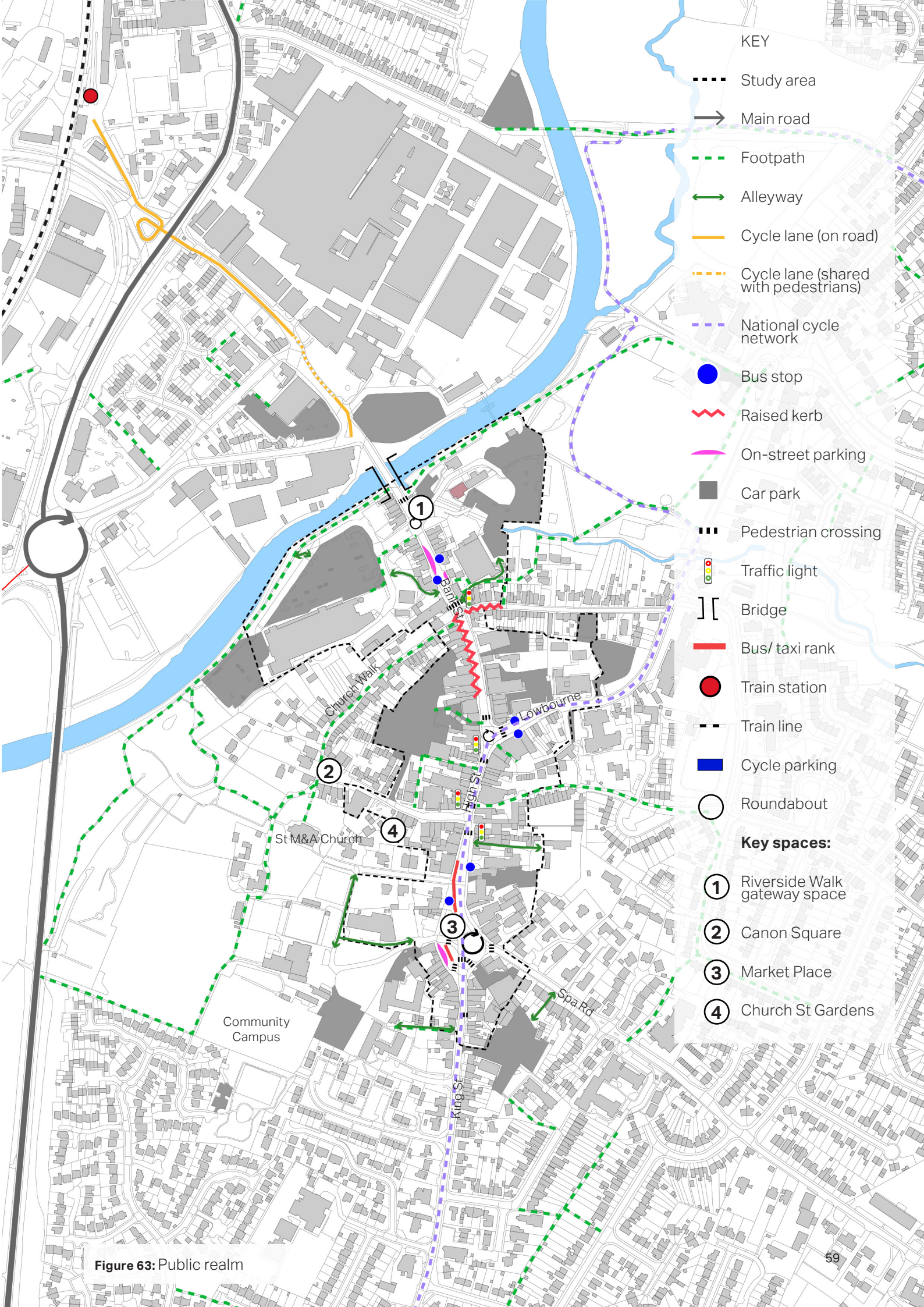
Figure 60: Church Walk



Figure 61: Car dominated arrangement, High St



Figure 62: Prince of Wales Gardens



KEY

- Study area
- Main road
- - - Footpath
- Alleyway
- Cycle lane (on road)
- - - Cycle lane (shared with pedestrians)
- - - National cycle network
- Bus stop
- ⋈ Raised kerb
- On-street parking
- Car park
- ⋈ Pedestrian crossing
- 🚦 Traffic light
-] [Bridge
- Bus/ taxi rank
- Train station
- - - Train line
- Cycle parking
- Roundabout

Key spaces:

- ① Riverside Walk gateway space
- ② Canon Square
- ③ Market Place
- ④ Church St Gardens

Figure 63: Public realm

6.6.1 Public realm, connectivity and accessibility within the town centre opportunities

A key aim of the Masterplan is to ensure that new development and public realm interventions create successful public spaces and routes which are attractive, inclusive, easy to navigate and safe will help to increase footfall and encourage people to explore, rest and interact with Melksham Town Centre. Moreover, the public realm should be vibrant and welcoming. Therefore, the following opportunities could be implemented:

Connectivity/accessibility interventions:

- Focus street design on moving people rather than traffic, giving priority to pedestrians and cyclists at junctions. This would encourage active travel and improve connectivity and is linked with the Healthy Streets approach;
- Pedestrianise key parts of the town centre;
- Create mobility hubs with charging points for cars and scooter/bike hire, encouraging active travel;
- Rationalise and consolidate surface car parking, which would help free valuable public space (requires a strategic approach); and
- Improve connectivity to the River Avon and the key spaces along it such as Conigre Mead. A good example is the Pathways to the Thames programme, which aims to create a more welcoming and accessible green route from South Thamesmead to London's great river.



Figure 64: Simple public art adds richness and encloses the public realm

‘Healthy Streets aid wayfinding and promote active travel, connecting together a series of linked key public spaces which encourage people to well and explore the town centre’.



Figure 65: Simple raised planters separate the pavement and street

Public realm interventions:

- Generally, the key assets within the town centre, including the town's unique architectural heritage and cultural offer, could be represented more positively by enhancing the public realm and spaces, and more appropriate consideration of wayfinding and permeability.
- Launch a programme for clean, well-lit paths with greenery, trees etc that provide shade or rain protection. Ensure sufficient seating and toilets to make the town more accessible to older people and those with disabilities, creating meeting places for everyone.
- Implement Healthy Streets, by:
 - Transforming the river Avon gateway space to attract more visitors and mark it as a key space;
 - Introduce more greening in small spaces to create pocket parks and improve biodiversity;
- Provide more places to rest and spend time along the high street, which will increase dwell time and encourage wider uses of the street– such as play, performance and café-spill out;
- Improve wayfinding to existing rest spaces such as Canon Square and Prince of Wales Gardens;
- Improve the quality of paving materials throughout (e.g. as implemented in Market Place);
- Consider carefully commissioned art interventions throughout the centre and link them up to form a trail;
- Introduce more street trees to provide shading, enclosure and make the streets more welcome to pedestrians;
- Introduce elements of play within the town centre (possibly in some of the existing peripheral spaces) to widen the existing user and add vitality; and
- Introduce growing gardens.



Figure 66: E-scooters and street trees providing shading, London



Figure 67: Raised planters with integrated seating



Figure 68: Community gardens



Figure 71: Vertical play elements, Manchester



Figure 69: Creative artwork integrated into the paving add playful feel



Figure 70: Inventive urban greening

**The town centre
framework**

07

7. The town centre framework; bringing the principles and opportunities together

The Development Principles presented in the previous section, provide the overarching framework for considering future development within the town centre, informed by the vision and objectives in Section 05. The following pages set out a high level, holistic concept plan for the whole study area. It then goes on to focus on potential development principles for each specific cluster.

7.1 Concept masterplan

The concept framework masterplan outlines how the town centre development principles align together. It focuses on holistic proposals for the town centre, which are based on key infrastructure interventions including the existing movement network and the enhancement of the public realm. Some of the initial ideas are shown on the plan opposite and include:

- Given the key location of The City, and its proximity to the river, there is significant potential to create a high-quality mixed use development. There are opportunities to create a modern, distinctive and vibrant development which promotes sustainability and celebrates the surrounding landscape.
- Enhancement of the existing riverside green connection between King George V Park and the Campus, which wraps around the conservation area core and high street. New building frontages should be focused towards this route promoting activity and ensuring overlooking.
- Improvements to active travel provision, particularly along Bank Street, to make the route towards the train station more

accessible to cyclists and pedestrians, based on healthy streets principles. This could include street trees, active travel crossings, cycle parking, widening of the pavements, the provision of cycle lanes and traffic calming interventions such as shared surfaces. This also applies to the key junctions and gateway points.

- An integrated transport hub at the train station, with the potential for cycle/e-bike parking, cycle hire, e-scooter, cargo bikes and parcel lockers. This should link up with a more small scale hub in the Market Square.
- A focus of interventions at the key nodal points and gateways, such as public art, wayfinding and tree planting, lighting, improvements to shop fronts. Mixed use and multi functional uses should be concentrated in these zones.
- Opportunities to increase dwell time at the book end nodal points (market square and town bridge), such as public art and seating.

Further analysis and consideration of a town centre wide car parking strategy will need to be undertaken to select the final preferred locations.



Train Station

The City

Cooper Tyres

King George V Park

Town bridge

Riverside walk

Church Walk

St M&A Church

Community Campus

Market Square

Spa Rd

KEY

○ Key nodal point / junction

— Key frontage zone

○ Gateway point

— Enhanced active travel link

⚡ Hard edge

— Enhanced green connection

Figure 72: Concept plan

The following pages present land use principles for the three development clusters, which will promote innovation and inform appropriate land uses incrementally over the lifetime of the NDP and beyond.

7.2 Development Clusters

The following section is intended to provide the town centre with a framework that will shape development over the next 10-20 years. Consequently, some of the opportunities may have the potential to be delivered quickly, whilst other opportunities may take longer to come forward, once land is freed up or other land developed.

There are a number of opportunity sites located within the town centre study area. These sites have been identified by the NP group as being important for the wider regeneration of the town centre. Historic towns do not often have large tracts of land potentially available for re-development and so, collectively they are hugely important assets.

The sites are located as such to form three potential development clusters as shown on the plan, right and as follows:

1. The Civic Quarter
2. The Library Sites
3. Other Opportunity Sites

The clusters are located at key gateway locations, either end of the town centre and each has a different feel, character and therefore potential development focus. The following pages sets this out in more detail. The clusters should encourage a flexible and layered approach to development which could include multiple, complementary uses.

This section envisages the potential for different types of development opportunity within each cluster:

- Comprehensive Redevelopment: where a previous user leaves and the site is then substantially redeveloped for new uses.
- Sensitive Redevelopment of Heritage Asset: where much of the built fabric is retained, but with new development that revitalises the existing uses.
- Rationalise Existing Use: the existing user might remain on site, but will rationalise their activities and land take, freeing up land for development.



KEY

- Cluster area
- Call for sites development site
- Constructed or in planning site

Cluster 3

Cluster 2

Cluster 1

King George V Park

Figure 73: Location of clusters

7.3 Cluster One

Existing Uses

This cluster currently comprises a wide variety of uses, with an emphasis on health and leisure, due to the recent opening of the Community Campus. It is an important gateway into the town and has a longstanding civic focus. The market place is a key community space and one of the most recognisable spaces in the town centre, with a history in trading and which still to this day hosts a weekly food market. The built setting is high quality and historic, with a significant proportion of attractive stone built Georgian and Victorian buildings. The cluster comprises a number of important land uses as follows:

1. Vacant Melksham House
2. Vacant Blue Pool at Melksham House
3. Melksham Community Campus. This is a leisure and community facility, which is now constructed and includes a new Library; a Health Centre; Meeting rooms; and a Cafe

4. Vacant Co-op Funeral Care
5. Vacant Lloyds Bank
6. Town Hall (currently houses the Town Council)
7. Assembly Hall (currently hosts live music and other leisure events).

KEY

● Development site	● Ecclesiastic
● Site in planning	● Residential
● Retail & commerce	● Community
● Services/offices	● Car parking
● Food & beverage	● Green space
● Entertainment	● Public realm
● Health/leisure	— Footpath



Figure 74: Market Place



Figure 75: Blue pool



Figure 76: Melksham House

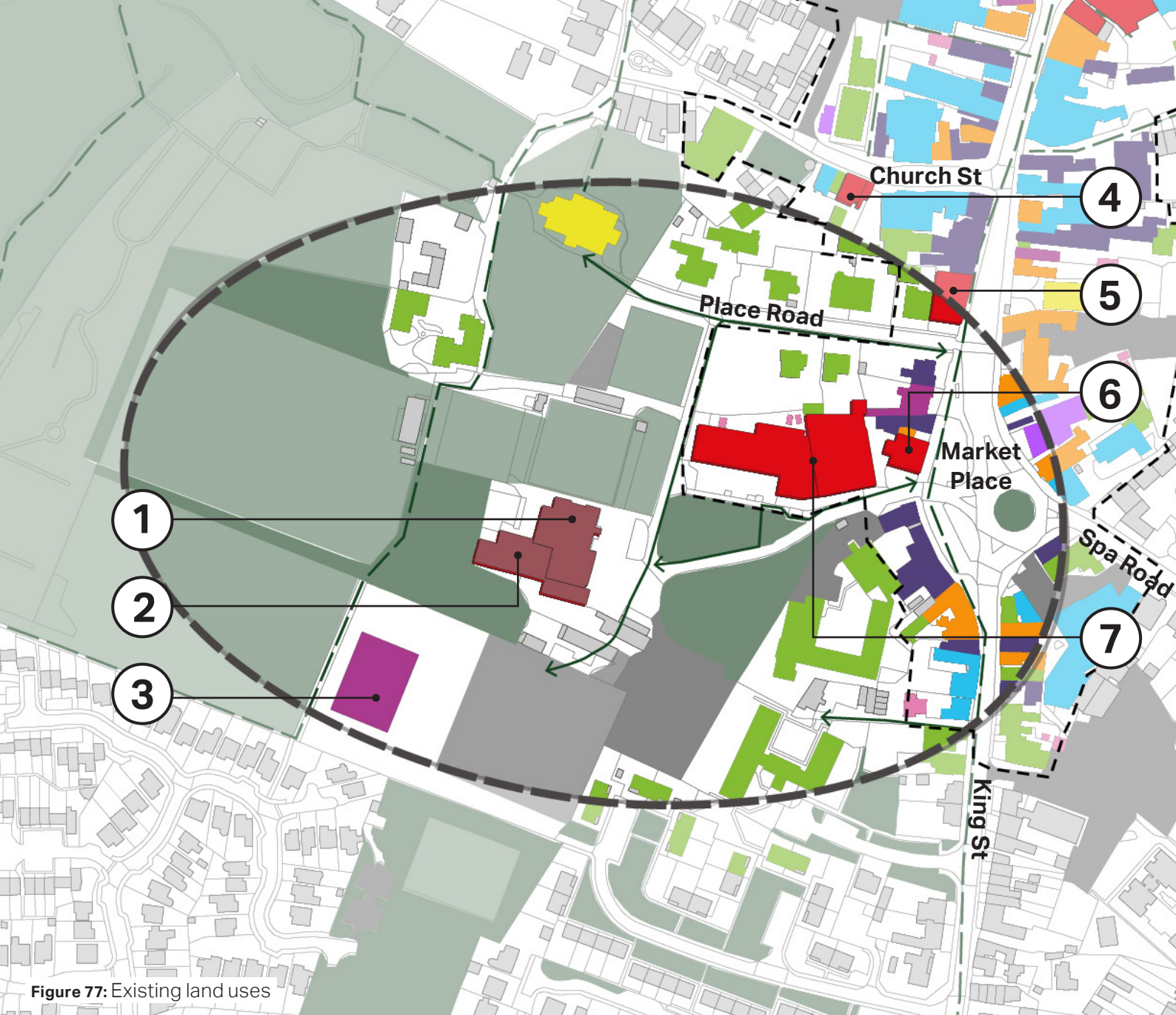


Figure 77: Existing land uses



Figure 78: Market Place, including Melksham House

7.4 Cluster One - Civic Quarter

Proposed interventions

Built form - the right mix

The buildings within this cluster should be considered within a joined up approach to potential land uses and development. This section proposes some ideas about how this could happen in Cluster One, which includes the new Community Campus, which will improve the tourism and hospitality offer in Melksham by drawing footfall from across Wiltshire.

Clustering a range of facilities, such as culture, shops, leisure centres and youth facilities, close to each other consistently creates reasons to visit the same area. As mentioned in the Economy and Vitality section, an important dimension in improving the local economy, is attracting and retaining employment within the town.

To complement the new facility, a more diverse range of uses in this cluster should be provided, which will be active during the day as well as through to the evening.

Group - can you advise where you would like these activities/uses to take place. I've added in some ideas below.

- To layer the uses, the former Blue Pool site could deliver a significant amount of new homes, across a mix of types and tenures. These should be designed to meet the need of a wide range of users and are adaptable to change, over time and therefore should comprise a range of houses and apartments as well as older persons' housing. Given the move towards hybrid and home working, digital infrastructure co-working opportunities, creative spaces and high-speed internet connectivity are all critical. To layer the uses further, the Blue Pool site and Melksham House could accommodate gentle intensification and layering of land uses (not just residential, but commercial) to encourage a variety of people to live and work locally. - **BLUE POOL & MELKSHAM HOUSE?**
- Given the significant heritage of this area, new housing could include initiatives that articulate the characteristics of the



Figure 79: Art gallery



Figure 80: Pop up gallery

The Civic Quarter is an important gateway into the town centre of Melksham. It will become a lively, active place for people of all ages and demographics to connect. It will be a creative hub with places to play, work and create.

town centre, to root it in its context. For example, in Barking Riverside new and established residents have taken part in a radio project that explores memories and histories of the river.

- In order to create a day and night time economy, a combination of uses within a range of venues is essential for diversity. Uses could include local and independent food and drink uses layered alongside community facilities or workspace. An example of this is a book store or reading room with a cafe; or a cycle shop with a cafe / workspace area. **ASSEMBLY HALL?**
- Meanwhile uses should be considered for buildings which take a while to come forward as they are very effective for immediate activation of place. This could comprise a multi use facility such as an art gallery with an integrated cafe. **VACANT LLOYDS BANK / CO-OP**
- The Campus could be paired with other health and care facilities, to create a wellbeing hub. Putting leisure, arts and

sports facilities together with other community facilities can help increase awareness of opportunities to take part in sports, cultural and leisure activities, which creates good physical wellbeing. For example, youth groups, drawing classes and book clubs **could be housed in the Town Hall**. A particular emphasis on arts and culture in this hub would complement the civic legacy of this part of the town centre and the longstanding provision offered by the **Assembly Hall**. **This could include a new performing arts centre or an outdoor performance space.**

- There should be an emphasis on features that welcome marginalised communities. Intergenerational facilities such as workshops, communal kitchens, craft rooms and growing gardens are good examples of this. **GROWING GARDENS COULD BE LOCATED IN THE PUBLIC REALM OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY CAMPUS, OR IN THE GROUNDS OF MELKSHAM HOUSE.**



Figure 81: Layered uses and activation of public realm



Figure 82: Reading room, Welcome Collection

7.5 Cluster One - Civic and Cultural Quarter

Proposed interventions

Group - can you advise where you would like these activities/uses to take place. I've added in some ideas below in red.

Public realm - connectedness

Connectedness is integral to our overall wellbeing. A lack of connection can lead to loneliness, which is a growing public health issue.

Disconnection from surrounding spaces and facilities limits walking and cycling, which in turn discourages interaction. This is the case in parts of Melksham Town Centre.

Designing with connectedness in mind will build upon the existing offering and introduce new elements and layers to this part of the town centre, to widen the visitor demographic and allow them to visit and use the town throughout the week.

The market and the Community Campus are fantastic facilities which offer the opportunity for residents to connect with one another. Beyond that, the following ideas could be introduced:

- Walking can be encouraged by making streets seem shorter than they are by adding points of interest (Jan Gehl research – something new to look at every 10m). The streets in the centre should encourage interaction; with trees, benches, streetlights, ramps for buggies, bikes, scooters, wide footpaths, and continuous and safe connections. These elements transform a street into a welcoming place. **In particular, this should apply to High Street**
- Accessible wayfinding should also feature to ensure that spaces and facilities are available to everyone, particularly those with disabilities and those who may struggle to access or feel comfortable with active travel or public spaces. Wayfinding exists in the town centre but it is inconsistent. **in particular, wayfinding should be introduced to clearly signpost the walking link between the High Street,**



Figure 83: Temporary meeting pods, Our Future Foyle, Derry, Ireland

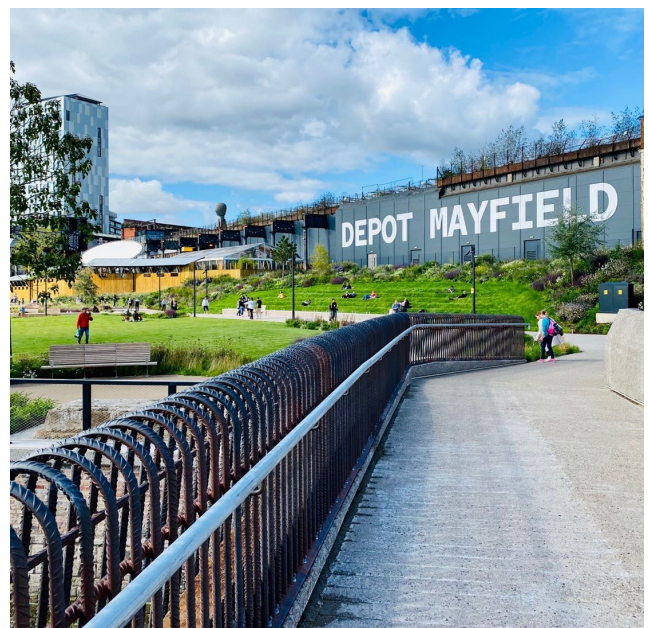


Figure 84: Clear wayfinding and green space, Depot Mayfield, Manchester

Market Place and the Community Campus.

- Well-placed temporary interventions along important routes will animate key areas and create dwell spaces and opportunities for trails and themed linking spaces. For example, to complement the weekly food market and the new library, temporary food and drink facilities could be located in key locations such as the Market Place or the spaces such as the front of the Community Campus to activate the area.
- The Market Place could be designed to be more multi-functional, so that it can accommodate a range of activities, which allows different groups of people to use them. This would encourage inter-generational mixing and help to reduce loneliness and isolation. In addition, it is more cost effective to maintain a smaller number of multi-use spaces, rather than a larger number of single-use

spaces. Alternative uses are open-air performances and art exhibitions.

- Lighting, installations and street furniture bring life and connection to previously under or poorly used spaces. Lighting can also make spaces safe at night. Pop-up meeting pods and a colourful light installation are proposals to change the tone of an area. Lighting and planting should be introduced along the desire line between the new campus building and Melksham House / the High Street. This route should, ideally, be more overlooked and would benefit from the removal or lowering of the dividing wall alongside the Assembly Hall, which creates an unwelcome, tunnel effect.



Figure 85: Pedestrianised square with performance space, Sant Antoni, Barcelona



Figure 86: A place to linger and connect, Bath

7.6 Cluster One - Civic and Cultural Quarter

Proposed interventions

Group - can you advise where you would like these activities/uses to take place. I've added in some ideas below in red.

Public realm - playfulness

Play encourages our ability to live in the moment and at an unhurried pace, meaning that other often overlooked groups such as the disabled and the older generation can benefit. The Civic and Cultural Quarter should seek to grow and develop into a community destination which encourages playfulness. A playful place is not just for children; it is related to the activities that we all do in our free time – the time we take for us. Places that encourage play are usually located within the public realm and these spaces - parks, playgrounds, squares - play a vital role in bringing people together and providing space for light hearted fun and an escape from the humdrums of life.

- Small play interventions help to stimulate the imagination and provide prompts for people to explore and can include elements such as sculptures, mazes or public art. Opportunities for play could

be threaded through the town centre and located in pocket parks and spaces such as Queen Mary's Garden.

- Streets can also be designed as spaces, with play as a focus and art woven into wayfinding, providing fun elements within the streetscape. This would work well along the High Street and Church Street.
- Community-generated art enables residents to make a stake in their neighbourhood, helping to make them feel safe and productive. This is especially potent if it uses local narratives to articulate a sense of place and as a way to improve wellbeing. This could tie into the existing heritage trail that starts on Church Street.
- Create spaces that promote creativity, such as pop-up uses (Lexington pop up water parks and the 'Front Room' barge café in Birmingham) or pop up art (Kew, London etc).



Figure 87: Local artist mural, West Byfleet



Figure 88: Camille Walala pedestrian crossing



Figure 89: College Square, Croydon, London

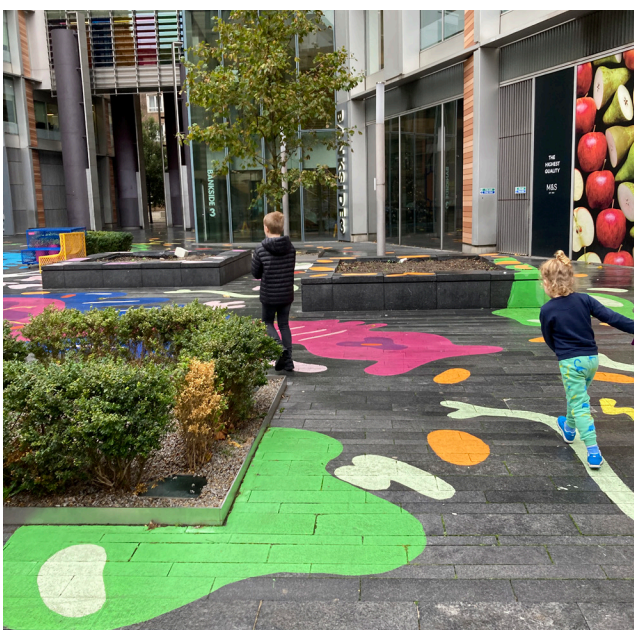


Figure 90: Interactive, playful floor painting, Bankside, London



Figure 91: Community art project, Bankside, London

7.7 Cluster Two - The Library sites

Existing uses

This cluster sits in a key, central crossroad location within the high street. It features a variety of uses, with an emphasis on retail and services. However it has a great many vacant units, offering plentiful scope for revitalisation. It has recently suffered the loss of the library closure and so needs another comparable community based feature. It is surrounded by housing of all types. Its built character is mixed, with some well preserved Victorian buildings alongside several the vacant sites which require significant refurbishment or demolition.

This cluster comprises a number of vacant buildings as follows:

1. 3 Lowbourn (in planning)
2. Former Natwest bank
3. Former HSBC
4. Library and car park
5. Chinese takeaway
6. Cluster of vacant retail units

planning application for the bank?



Figure 92: Vacant units, Lowbourn



Figure 93: Vacant take away / restaurant unit



Figure 94: Vacant library

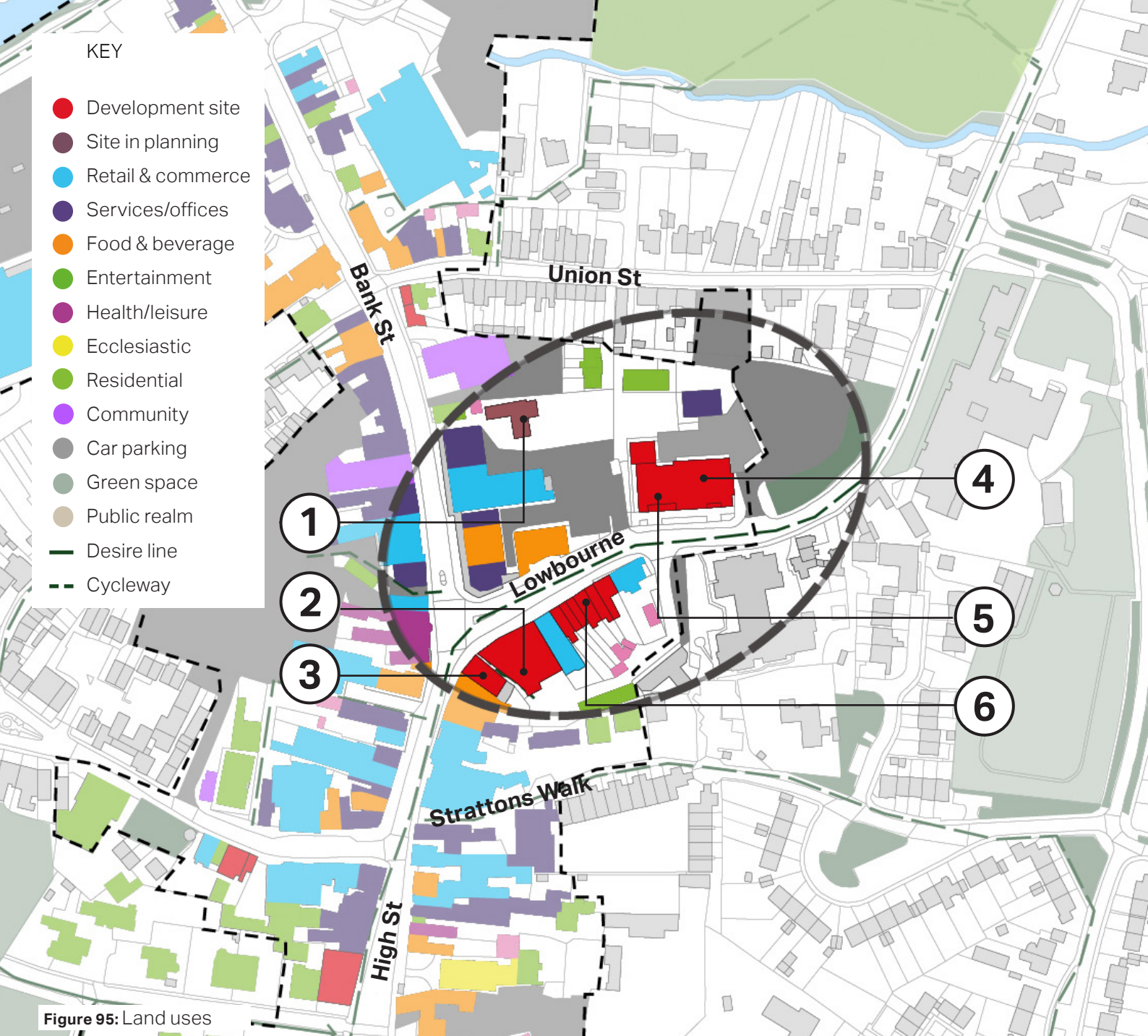


Figure 96: Vacant unit, Lowbourn



Figure 97: Former Nat West bank, Lowbourn

7.8 Cluster Two - the Library sites

Proposed interventions

Group - can you advise where you would like these activities/uses to take place. I've added in some ideas below in red.

Built form

- It is important to avoid creating a mono community by using only a limited number of house types and tenures. Progressive build-to-rent schemes are emerging throughout the UK and are being specifically designed for families. Such facilities often embrace resident lounges and co-working spaces, employing 'hosts' to activate the spaces and welcoming in the wider local community. **New homes in this cluster could be located on the former library and takeaway/restaurant site, and could also be woven into under used upper floorspace, above the re-developed ground floor units along Lowbourne.**
- Alongside new housing, local work 'hubs' would reduce peoples' commute time and build local social connections. These can be provided as part of other community facilities within a new residential development (perhaps on the ground floor), or provided as specific flexible workspace, with access to local 'work hubs' through the week. **New workspace could be accommodated in the former HSBC bank building.**
- Where people are encouraged to work locally, other wrap around facilities such as on-site childcare can make workspaces more inclusive for parents. Impact Hub Birmingham's Radical Childcare programme not only provides a crèche for co-workers but actively engages children in their mission to create a fairer city.
- Bank closures, such as those in this cluster, have removed convenient access to cash for those who need it, and brought about difficulties for small businesses trying to deposit takings. **A bank hub application has been rejected, but a facility to deposit money would work well in this cluster, possibly on the former library site.**
- The loss of the library in this cluster will be felt by the immediately local community, albeit it has relocated to the Community Campus. **Long term, it could be replaced with a cultural/commercial use, such as a reading cafe.**
- **The temporary re-use of the library, vacant retail and banks should be considered to provide affordable spaces for new creative and community uses to start up and reanimate the street scene, whilst permanent uses are secured.**



Figure 98: Communal space, Union Wharf, Greenwich



Figure 99: Rowntree Park reading cafe, York

The Community Quarter will be an active community hub, with links to the surrounding residential communities, park and the schools. A focus on contemplation and learning will balance the strong retail and commercial services function in this part of the town centre.

Public realm

- Meanwhile spaces provide informal meeting space and encourage residents to form friendships. These can be outdoor gyms, running trails, bars, pocket parks and roof gardens and can be used by other local businesses. MAKE @ Story Garden is a public space for creative collaboration with, and by, the local communities in Somers Town and St Pancras, London. The aim is to build community and creative skills through a programme of arts activities and projects. Given the close proximity of the park, running trails could start along Lowbourne. Small meanwhile spaces could be introduced in the small part of the car park behind Buds Bar.
- There should be small passive spaces in this part of the town centre, given its proximity to the river and the park. These would offer the opportunity for personal reflection and quiet connectedness. Pocket parks with seating areas and sensory gardens encourage connections with more distant members of the community. These could be introduced as temporary and long term interventions in the raised, wooded space separating Lowbourne East Car Park from Lowbourne.
- When people grow food, they learn about horticulture and healthier eating and gain access to affordable vegetables and fruit and are able to connect with nature, and neighbours. So, small scale growing facilities such as growing gardens and roof gardens could be introduced, with potential learning links with the school. The small raised planters in front of the former take away and library would be well suited to this, alongside new homes on the library site.
- This part of the town centre is particularly traffic dominated and given it is a transitional area, with homes and the park nearby, some public realm interventions would greatly improve the pedestrian experience. Public art in the centre of the Lowbourne / High Street roundabout, new paving and new trees along Lowbourne and Bank Street are suggested.



Figure 100: Story Garden, Somers Town, London



Figure 101: Marmalade Lane gardens, Cambridge

7.9 Cluster Three

Existing uses

Located at a key point, providing a vital link between the town centre and the train station, this cluster is integral to the broader regeneration of the town centre. It sits in a peripheral town centre location, but is included in this report, given the significant uses in and around it, particularly in the context of the announced closure of Cooper Tyres, which created a new circumstance on the edge of the town centre.

The JMNP1 referenced the Cooper Tyres site in the priority statement and it is now likely to become vacant during the lifetime of JMNP2. It is not considered appropriate or timely for this report to set development principles for the site. This should be based upon a bespoke and proportionate master planning process that is undertaken with the active support of the owners and through stakeholder and community engagement.

The potential re development of this cluster, in whatever form it takes, can certainly help to enable the delivery of the town centre objectives. The sites in this cluster are:

1. Land to North of River Avon (Area 8)
2. Land to North of River Avon (Area 9)
3. Land to North of River Avon (Area 10)
4. King George V Park
5. Various other industrial uses

Development in this area, known as 'The City', has focused on providing jobs and accommodation for residents since the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, when it featured myriad of mills and factories alongside housing, laid out in a finer grain than exists on the site today. This use continues to dominate this cluster today. There are some valuable buildings within this area, with some fine examples of art deco and Victorian architecture, including the listed Grade II listed Avon House.



Figure 102: Cooper Tiles entrance with curve of Art Deco building on the left

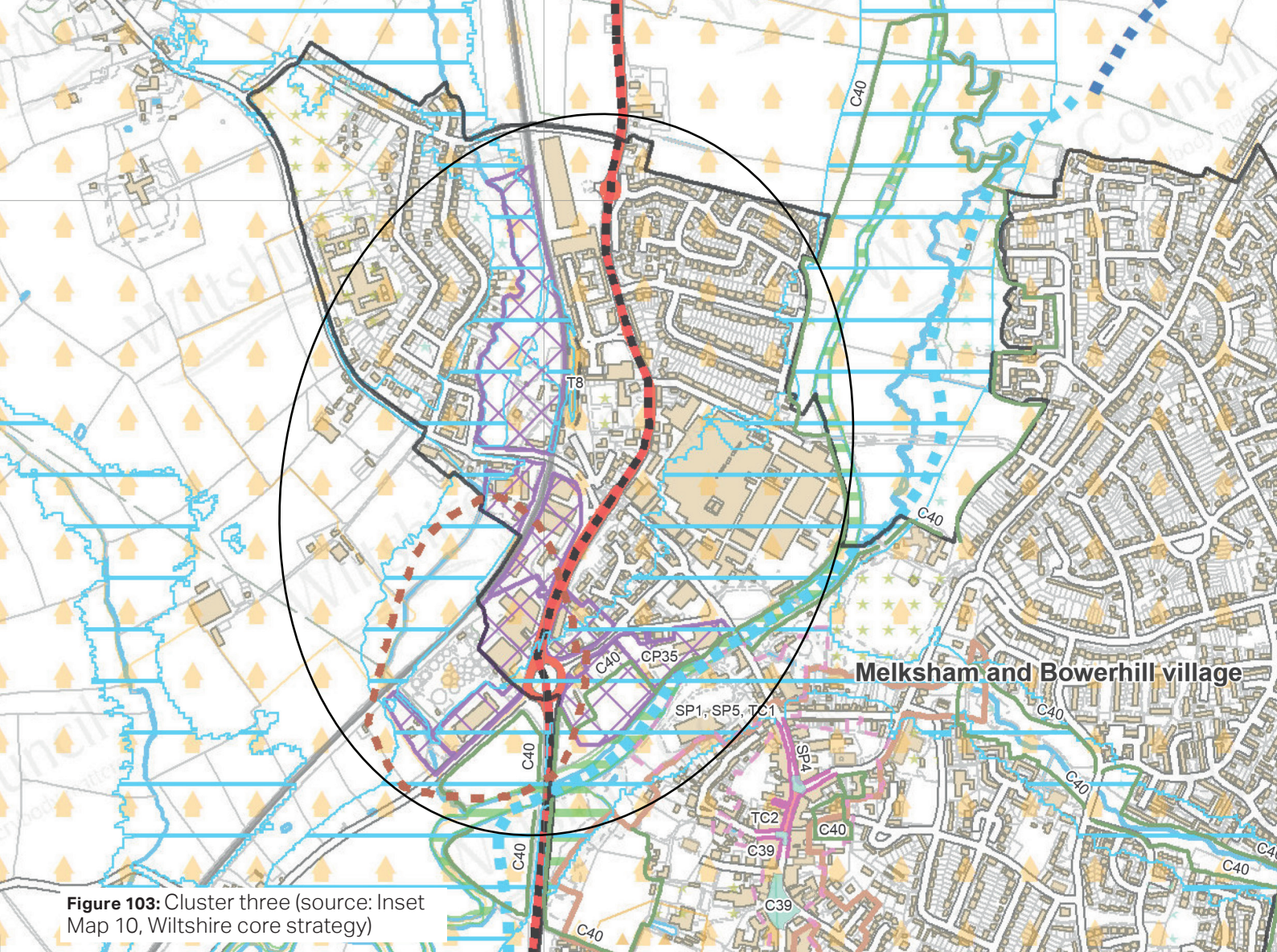


Figure 103: Cluster three (source: Inset Map 10, Wiltshire core strategy)



Figure 104: Grade II listed Avon House



Figure 106: Typical gabled roofline



Figure 105: Typical Victorian red brick with clay pantile roof



Figure 107: Soft, muted palette of Ashlar Stone with 3/4 storey building scale

7.10 Cluster Three

Proposed interventions

This section provides development criteria for land at the edge of the town centre (ref JMNP1 Town Centre Priority Statement), including land at Cooper Tyres. A separate site assessment of Cooper Tyres will be undertaken to future proof assessment should the site become available through ongoing JMNP2 process.

Built form

- Re-establish the fine historic grain of this area which was prevalent in the 18th and early 19th century, focusing on a perimeter block layout, providing definition of public and private realm; clear, direct routes and good overlooking; Perimeter blocks can vary in sizes and shapes to respond to site and surrounding context (e.g. landscape features, topography and desired density). Courtyards could be used within large blocks to create interesting and efficient arrangements;
- Maintain and refer to the scale, massing and articulation of the historic built assets within this cluster, such as Avon House and the Red Lion Public house;
- Reflect any interesting architectural features within a contemporary context, such as the repeated gabled roofline, which creates visual interest, or the material palette of soft stone, white render and steel cladding and stone.
- Provide active frontages onto the riverside and along any main routes within new development, creating a safe environment and promoting interaction between residents and visitors;
- As outlined in the economy, vitality and culture section of this report, seek to intensify and layer land uses, to attract and retain workers within the town, particularly in the context of this site. New homes should sit alongside workspace, shops, childcare facilities, cultural and entertainment facilities;
- Energy networks are effective at providing heat for developments with high demand (e.g. leisure facilities, office space and high density residential) together with retained existing buildings that may not be suitable for retrofit with heat pump systems. Opportunities to deploy phased energy networks in clusters (including the potential for decentralised energy) should be explored within this cluster;



Figure 108: Example of signage that could be introduced along the riverside



Figure 109: Integrated cycle parking into the streetscape, softened by vegetation

- Additionally, future development proposals should consider the potential to incorporate decentralised energy;
- The layout of new development should optimise the benefits of daylighting, and passive solar gains to reduce energy consumption; and
- Proposals to refurbish or re-use existing buildings will be encouraged to reduce energy consumption through improving the building fabric, lighting and heating and ventilation systems.

Public realm

- Make it easier to walk, wheel and cycle between the train station and the town centre. This could be via a dedicated cycle route along Bath Road and car free routes through any new development within the Cooper Tyres site.

- Focus investment on improvements to the public realm around the station, with better wayfinding, seating and planting. Active travel provision, such as electric vehicle charging points, bike hire and safe storage.
- Create an accessible and interesting path along the river, that people want to travel along. One way of doing this by creating different linear routes focusing on passive and active recreation, to cater for different needs and ages and to encourage everyone to use and enjoy the riverside. For example, an active, interactive route could feature a series of outdoor gym equipment and a running trail, and a focus on nature and reflection in another stretch of the river, with bird hides and public art.



Figure 110: Activation of the public realm



Figure 111: A shared space, with active frontages

Next Steps

08

8. Next steps

The Melksham Town Centre Masterplan sets out an overarching vision and set of objectives for the town centre. The report provides an evidence base and high-level masterplan framework and should be read in conjunction with the Design Code document, which covers the whole Neighbourhood Area.

This report is linked to the JMNP Town Centre Policy 9, to lead and stimulate its protection, conservation, enhancement and regeneration and sustained vitality.

The implementation and delivery of the Melksham Town Centre Masterplan will take time but there are key next steps which will continue the momentum.

Future work aligned to the Masterplan will include:

- This report will become an integral part of the evidence base of the new Neighbourhood Plan;
- Engagement will continue as the Masterplan is developed and individual sites and projects are scoped out; and
- The Council will also identify new funding opportunities to help address some of the ambitions contained within this Masterplan.

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