



HEANOR TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
DECEMBER 2008



AMBER VALLEY
BOROUGH COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

Amber Valley Borough Council commissioned Gillespies with DTZ and Mott MacDonald to prepare a Masterplan for the regeneration of Heanor town centre. The purpose of the Masterplan is to map out the future direction of Heanor town centre. At the heart of the Masterplan is the desire to deliver a regenerated town centre where people want to come to work, live, learn, be entertained, socialise, eat and shop. It sets out how Heanor town centre can be made more attractive to residents, visitors and businesses.

The Masterplan establishes a long term vision for the improvement of the town centre which must be shared by the community, business and civic leaders in order to act as a catalyst for a continuous cycle of improvement. The Masterplan will guide future development by influencing planning policy, aid in boosting confidence and signal the transformation of the town centre. The Masterplan also provides an implementation strategy or action plan and priority projects for Amber Valley Borough Council and its partners. This includes setting the context for further detailed planning and project development.

Consultation Strategy

In addition to working closely with Amber Valley Borough Council, a number of consultation events were undertaken as part of the study to inform the development of the Masterplan.

Two workshops were held with local stakeholders and high school students. The first invited participants to identify the town centre's strengths and weaknesses, their aspirations for the future and to generate ideas to achieve those aspirations. The second workshop invited participants to give their views on a number of options and detailed issues. This assisted in the selection of preferred ideas to take forward with the Masterplan.

A public exhibition of the draft masterplan was held over two days in the town centre and advertised through the stakeholders and local media. Over 600 people attended the exhibition and feedback was documented and comments received considered and incorporated into the Masterplan as appropriate.

THE TOWN CENTRE TODAY

Heanor town centre today is essentially the story of two town centres – the traditional Market Street and the more recent retail parks. Both being essential to the sustainable growth of the town, their balanced co-existence needs to be sought.

Heanor has a proud history of mining and industry, but like many other towns in the region, the economy has changed over the years and many residents now commute elsewhere to work and shop. Although much has changed, particularly with the development of the retail parks on the western edge of the town centre, the recognisable form of Market Street and Market Place is still there.

An assessment of the issues facing the town centre today was undertaken in the development of the Masterplan in association with consultation with stakeholders. The town centre's strengths and weaknesses, opportunities for change and possible threats were summarised as follows:

Strengths

- ▶ *A compact town centre*
- ▶ *Market Place*
- ▶ *Independent shops*
- ▶ *Quality old buildings*
- ▶ *South East Derbyshire College*
- ▶ *Leisure Centre*
- ▶ *Accessible, particularly by bus*

Weaknesses

- ▶ *Vacant and derelict shops*
- ▶ *A shift in shopping towards the retail parks that has essentially created two town centres*
- ▶ *A declining market*
- ▶ *Lack of activities for youth*
- ▶ *Heavy traffic on Market Street creating an unpleasant shopping environment*
- ▶ *Difficult to access and consequently underused car parks*
- ▶ *Land reserved for a proposed inner relief road vacant for years*

Opportunities

- ▶ *Market Place*
- ▶ *Proposed inner relief road*
- ▶ *Improvements to Market Street with inner relief road*
- ▶ *Shopfront improvements*
- ▶ *Theatre/cinema*
- ▶ *Area around Red Lion Square*

Threats

- ▶ *Proposed inner relief road taking passing trade*
- ▶ *Increased competition from development elsewhere (Derby/Nottingham)*
- ▶ *Becoming a commuter town*
- ▶ *No decision on inner relief road*
- ▶ *Priorities elsewhere in Borough/County*

Townscape

A number of character areas were identified in the town centre which make it a distinctive place:

- ▶ *Eastern Gateway*
- ▶ *Learning Quarter*
- ▶ *Market Street*
- ▶ *Back Lands*
- ▶ *Derby Road*
- ▶ *Western Gateway*

An analysis of these character areas showed that the town centre has an interesting and varied townscape with some strong features, particularly its topography, varied skyline including the tower of St Lawrence's Church, Market Place and Memorial Park.

One unfortunate feature of the town centre today is the heavy traffic on Market Street which is a major hindrance to pedestrian movement and impacts on the quality of the street. The noise in particular generated by the traffic adversely affects shopping activity on Market Street.

Whilst the Market Street and Market Place are predominantly retail areas, the eastern end of the town centre is characterised by St Lawrence's Church and South East Derbyshire College. Just outside the boundary of the town centre, Memorial Park is key underused open space. In contrast, the western end of the town centre is characterised by 'big-box' retail development and associated car parking.

Property Market Analysis

Heanor has a balance of convenience, comparison and service retail units in line with the national average, but a higher percentage of vacant floorspace. There are currently a small number of requirements for retail space in the town centre and whilst Heanor has numerous vacant properties, the majority of units on Market Street do not provide large enough units to satisfy most of these.

Heanor has a limited leisure offer, with an abundance of takeaways, but low levels of cafes, restaurants or wider leisure uses except for the recently refurbished leisure centre. The evening leisure offer in particular could be expanded on an incremental basis allied to environmental/public realm improvements.

The office market within Heanor Town Centre is very limited, and is dominated by small buildings operated by small professional services companies such as solicitors and accountants. Discussions with local commercial agents indicate very low levels of demand for office accommodation within Heanor Town Centre. Current rental levels mean that the construction of new offices would be commercially unviable and would therefore require either public sector support or be included within a mixed use scheme where higher values could subsidise the office element.

A number of residential developments have either been completed or are underway around Heanor, however none are in the town centre. Residential values are comparable to other areas in the district and providing more residential units within the town centre will broaden and increase the retail catchment which may improve the vitality of the town centre. Although there is a limited provision of apartments within the town centre, there is no premium is attached to them.

Transport

Two-way 12 hour traffic flows in the town centre are in the region of 16,000 vehicles and HGVs typically accounted for between 3% and 7% of the traffic. Market Street is frequently congested during peak times and the topography (stopping and starting on inclines) does not help traffic flows. An inner ring road has been proposed by Derbyshire County Council for a number of years and a decision is awaited on whether it is to proceed or not. A large tract of land is safeguarded and in the ownership of the County Council to the north of the Market Street for this purpose.

Relatively narrow pavements and the mix of heavy traffic along Market Street creates an unpleasant pedestrian environment despite a number of signalised pedestrian crossings. In addition, pedestrian crossings at the roundabout at the retail parks are uncontrolled and it can be difficult, particularly for more vulnerable pedestrians to cross easily.

There is a comprehensive bus network operating in Heanor, although the frequency of bus services is low and the nearest railway station is Langley Mill, located approximately 2km to the northeast of the town centre.

There are a total of eight Council pay and display car parks in and around Heanor town centre, but most are underused except for the short term Market Street car park which is popular due to its central location. The low usage of the other town centre car parks is likely to be due to their location and the poor signage directing visitors. In addition, the more underused car parks tend to be located to the back of existing development where there is little activity (pedestrian and vehicle) or natural surveillance making them feel unsafe. Both retail parks have a large number of popular free car parking spaces for customers.

THE TOWN CENTRE TOMORROW

Improving the quality of the environment and focusing the potential of the town centre as a retail and leisure destination will be essential for delivering change. The masterplan provides a broad yet ambitious vision for the town centre over the next 10 years or so and will require both public and private sector investment to make it happen.

The overall vision for the town centre is that of a hilltop market town centre where increased retail, leisure and residential activity will be the basis for future development and prosperity, helping to create a vibrant and sustainable place.

A reduction in heavy traffic via a relief road will allow environmental improvements to be made to Market Street (or if this is not feasible, other measures will be considered to improve the street and shopping experience).

New retail, leisure and residential opportunities will create an animated scene at all times of the day. Quality streets, public spaces and an

improved Memorial Park will improve the quality of life in the town centre and its attractiveness to residents, visitors and investors.

Supporting Themes

The vision is supported by the five main themes of the masterplan which will guide future development and improvement in the town centre:

Rejuvenating the Retail Core

consider a range of options to improve the Market Street shopping experience to compete with the retail parks and other town centres

Local Distinctiveness

reinforce the character of the town centre and promote the refurbishment and reuse of older buildings

Town Centre Living

widen the housing offer so more people can live in the town centre and support local shops and facilities

A Quality Environment

create a 'green' town centre and focus on Market Place as Heanor's key public space

An Accessible Town Centre

create a 'walk in' town centre where it is easy to get around on foot and also provide convenient car parking for residents and visitors

THE MASTERPLAN

The Masterplan identifies a number of projects and opportunities across the town centre. Although at this point it is unclear whether the proposed inner relief road will proceed, action must be taken now to kick start the regeneration of the town centre regardless of the outcome. Two illustrative masterplans have therefore been prepared, one with and without a proposed inner relief road. It should be noted that the road alignment shown is purely indicative. It has been based on the land currently safeguarded for its construction and interpretation of the requirement for a single carriageway.

Opportunity Sites

Eight opportunity sites have been identified through the masterplanning process and development principles outlined for each. These opportunity sites were selected for priority due to their importance to the overall Masterplan, stakeholders and the degree to which the public sector can influence positive change.

Church Square - a range of new uses (retail and offices with flats above) could provide active frontage to Market Place, Market Street and Ilkeston Road with a significant corner building to Church Square.

Mundy Street School - the conversion of the former Mundy Street School to start up business units would increase employment opportunities in the town centre. Alternatively, it could be converted for community use.

Mount Street Car Park - the existing underused car park could be developed for residential use or retain some public car parking if an access was created through to Market Street.

Red Lion Square - the western gateway to the town centre creates a poor impression and new leisure uses with residential development above focused on Red Lion Square could provide an appropriate link between Market Street and the retail parks.

Bircumshaw's Road - a new access to the area from Fletcher Street would allow the for the closure of Bircumshaw's Road at Market Street and improvements to Red Lion Square to be made. Additional leisure and residential development in this area would be dependent on land required for the proposed inner relief road if it goes ahead.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Whysall Street West - residential development could take place on land not required for the proposed inner relief road (whether it is built or not) to support more people living in the town centre.

Whysall Street East - a central car park on two levels with residential above and new shops on a link to Market Street past the town hall could be developed on land not required for the proposed inner relief road (whether it is built or not).

Eastern Gateway - new gateway buildings could be developed on land not required for the proposed inner relief road on Church Street. Uses include residential development and possibly a hotel.

Projects

In addition to opportunity sites, a range of regeneration projects have been identified to support the regeneration of the town centre:

Inner Relief Road - a new road on the northern edge of the town centre, combined with a weight restriction on Market Street, would remove heavy traffic from the centre and create a more pleasant shopping environment. A decision by Derbyshire County Council on whether the road goes ahead or not is needed quickly to remove uncertainty which deters investment in the town centre.

Memorial Park - a range of improvements could be undertaken to increase the active use of the park, including a bandstand, a 'great lawn' with a small amphitheatre and an ecological area focused on the stream and pond.

Streetscape Improvements - a range of streetscape improvements such as paving and provision of street trees are proposed, particularly where existing pedestrian links are poor such as those to the retail parks. These should be phased in line with a decision on the proposed inner relief road which would allow more substantial improvements to be made to Market Street.

Signage - both vehicular and pedestrian signage for the town centre should be reviewed and improved, particularly with regard to the Council car parks, many of which are difficult to find and consequently under used.

Shopfront - Improvements/Group Repair Works - working with private businesses, shopfront improvements and group repair works to buildings will be promoting to improve the attractiveness of the town centre to shoppers and visitors.

Reopening Derby Road - consideration could be given to the reopening of Derby Road, perhaps just one way out of the town centre, to increase passing trade and reduce traffic at the top end of Market Street.

Market Place - a range of new market ideas (farmers market, antique market, etc.) whether on a temporary or regular basis could be considered to attract new traders and customers. Public realm improvements could be undertaken in the long term to reinforce its role as Heanor's key open space.

Community Cinema/Theatre - the provision of a community cinema/theatre/multi-purpose space could be considered to increase leisure activity in the town centre. Possible locations include the former Cosy Cinema, or even the Town Hall.

Youth Centre - a youth centre with a cyber café and other activities could be developed perhaps in a vacant shop unit to provide a facility for young people in the town centre.

The Masterplan is intended to help guide future development and improvements in Heanor town centre over the next decade and beyond. Through consultation with many stakeholders, it provides the foundation upon which future detailed project specific studies, proposals and funding bids can be developed and works undertaken.

Delivery and Implementation

The stakeholder consultation undertaken in drafting the Masterplan and public exhibition should ensure that the local community are able to broadly subscribe to the themes and key principles within the Masterplan. Some of the proposals will generate a debate, but this is part of the process. It is for Amber Valley Borough Council working with its partners including Derbyshire County Council to continue with this iterative process of participation and consultation to ensure an on going sense of ownership and involvement in the regeneration process. Only with the support of the local community and cooperation of local businesses and land owners can many of the proposals be taken forward.

Funding

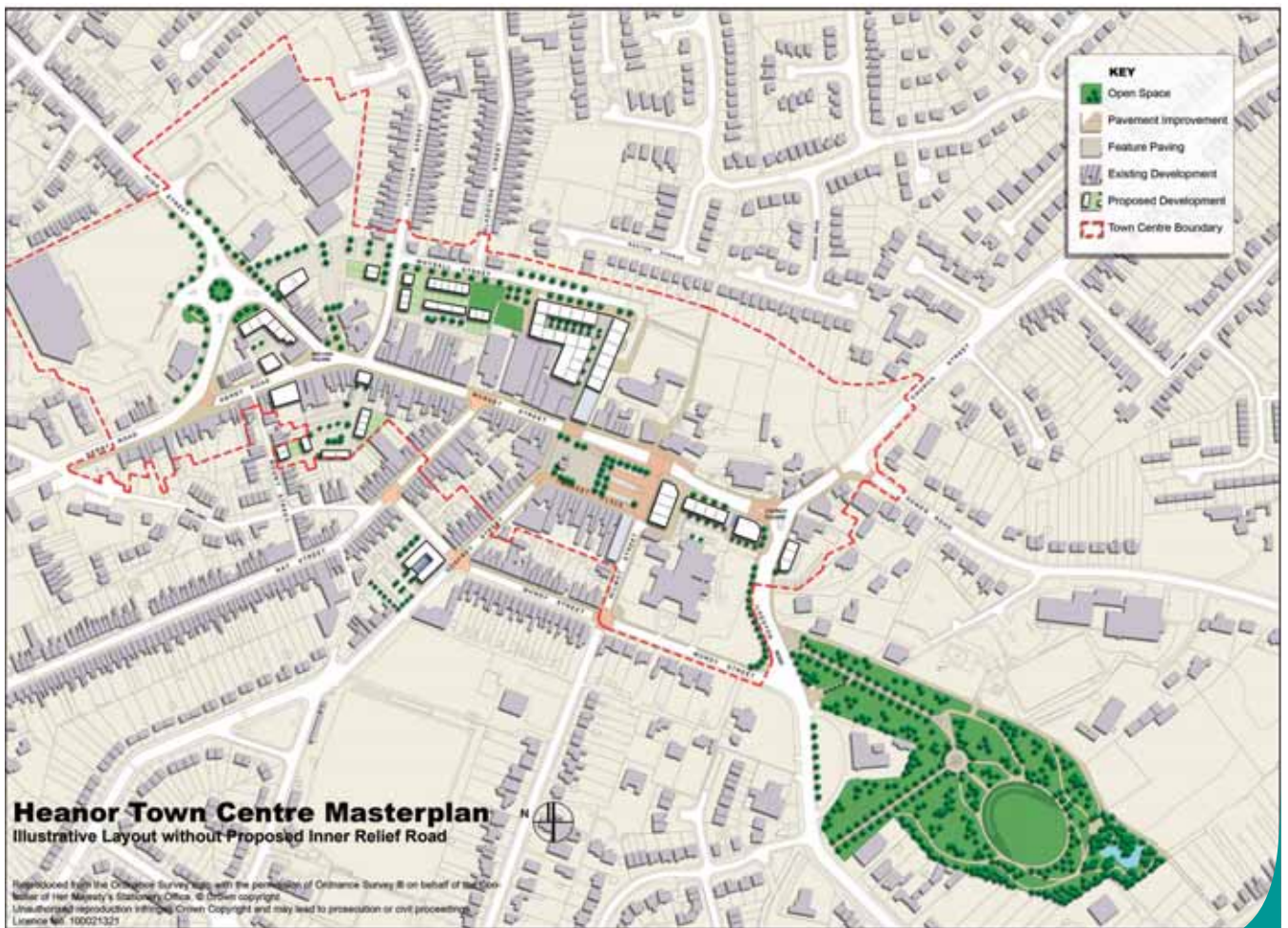
The Masterplan and regeneration of the town centre will be delivered through a combination of public and private sector investment. Public sector investment will need to be carefully focused in order to attract and maximise private sector development.

Competition for private sector investment is fierce, particularly in more difficult locations such as Heanor and in today's economic climate. Investors and developers are seeking either an established location or one that is likely to benefit from direct or indirect public sector investment. To encourage private sector development, public sector investment should be used to bring forward sites for development, improve access and the public realm. Public funding can also be used to regenerate and refurbish existing buildings to ensure the character of the town centre is maintained and enhanced. All of this will help create a town centre environment that provides attractive investment opportunities. Clearly a decision on the inner relief road is key to giving potential investors confidence in the future of the town centre and the opportunity sites.

Management and Maintenance

The public sector needs to engage stakeholders as the Masterplan is developed and refined over the next decade. The message needs to be sent out to the investment market regarding the opportunities that exist in Heanor town centre and how public agencies are working together to deliver the Masterplan. This partnership approach needs to extend to the ongoing management and maintenance of the both the public realm and property development.

The Masterplan calls for extensive improvements and high quality additions to the public realm of the town centre. The success of proposed new public spaces will depend upon sustained first class maintenance and management and this brings a financial obligation. The future maintenance and management of public space should therefore be considered at the planning stage of each project.



GILLIESPIES



DTZ