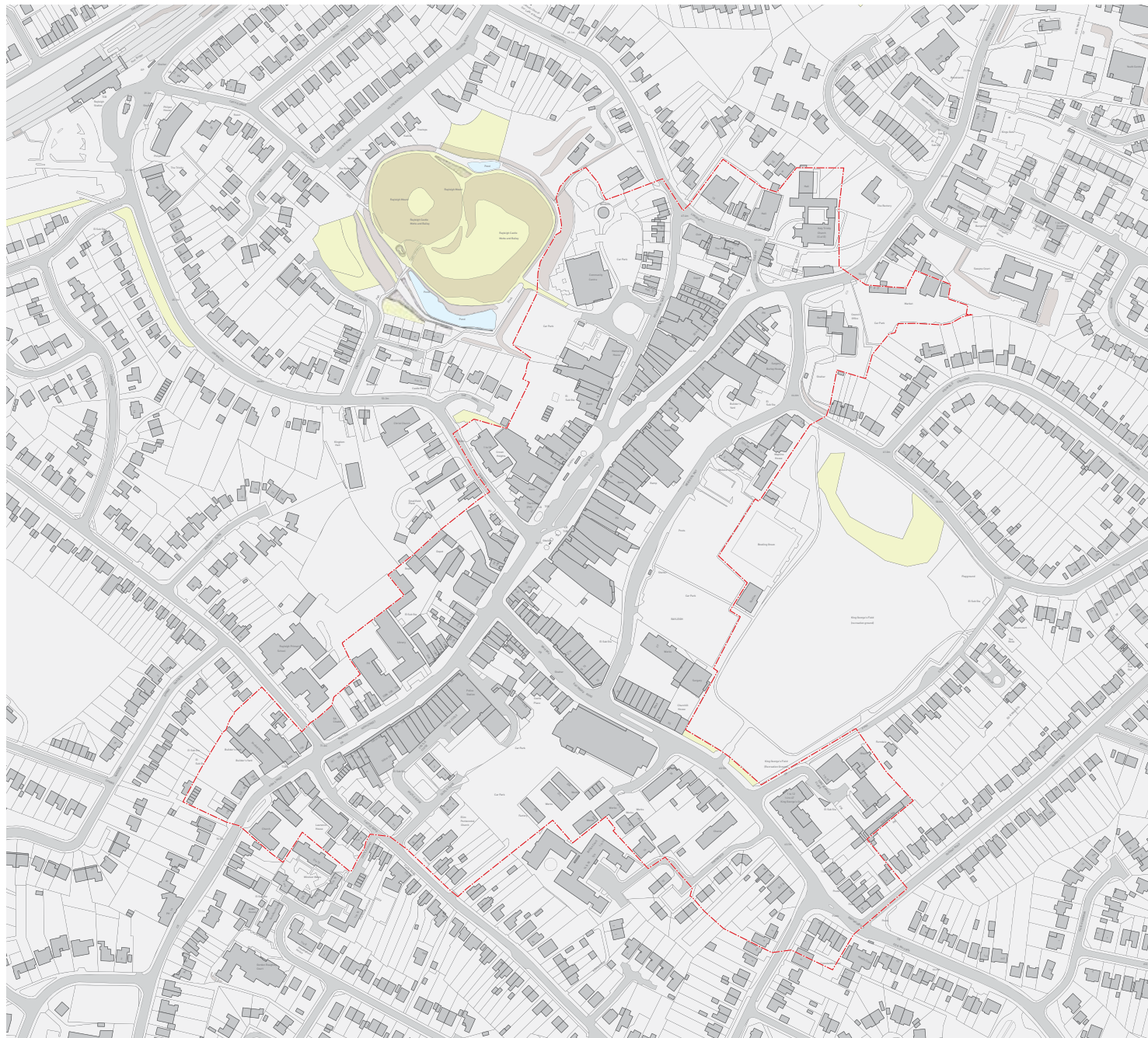




Rayleigh Town Centre Issues and Options

A discussion and consultation report



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Figure 1: Rayleigh Town Centre Study Area

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Rayleigh Town Centre: Issues and Options;
A Consultation and Discussion Report
September 2009

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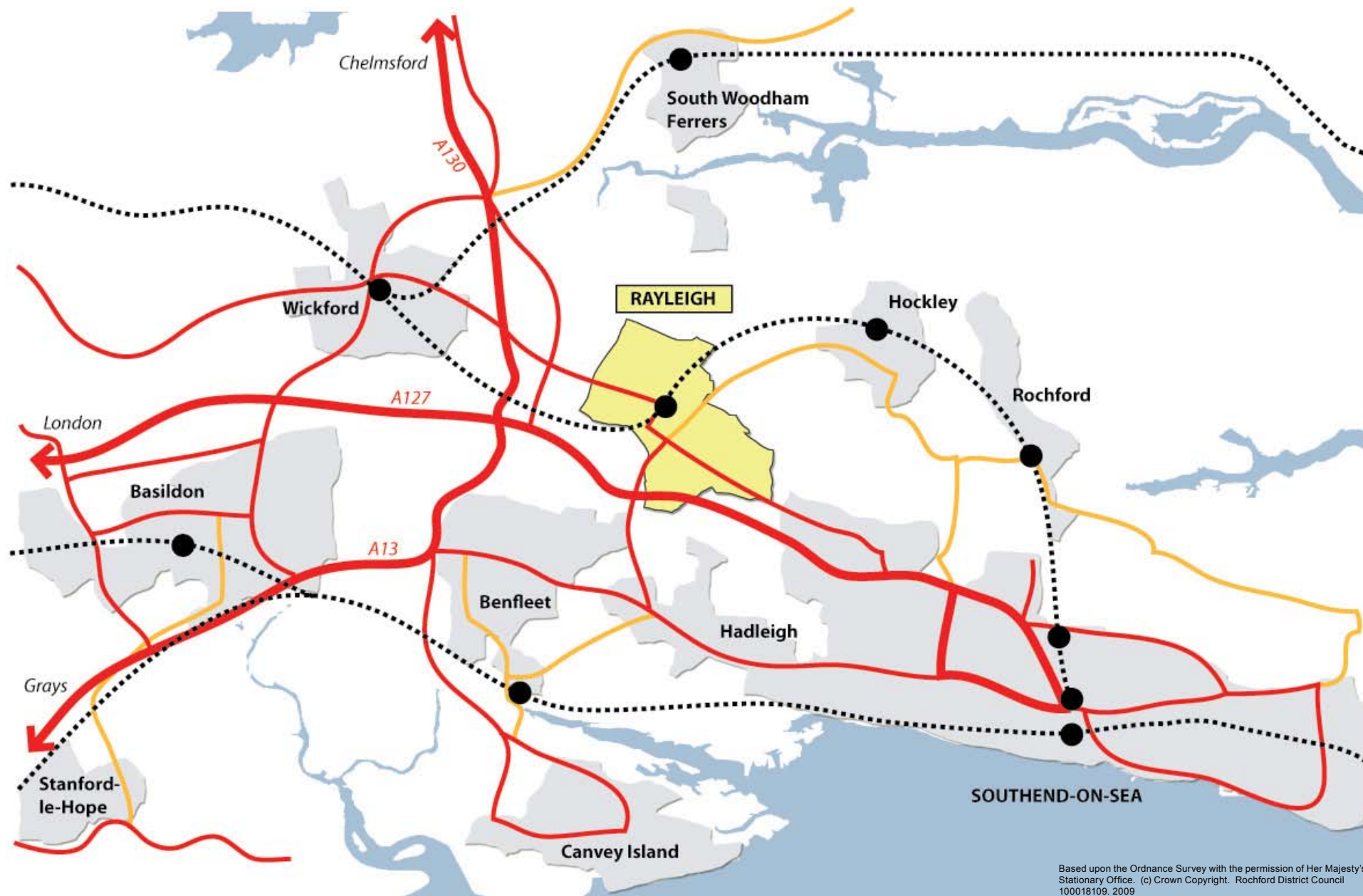


Figure 2: Rayleigh; Regional Context

01 Introduction

1.1 What is an Area Action Plan?

1.1.1 An Area Action Plan creates the framework for development sites and planning policies in a specific area. It acts as the focal point for the coordination of other public policies and programmes and guides public and private investment in the area.

1.1.2 Planning Policy Statement 12 (PPS12) is Government guidance which explains what local spatial planning is and how it benefits communities. It also sets out what the key ingredients of local spatial plans are and the key Government policies on how they should be prepared. It should be taken into account by local planning authorities in preparing development plan documents and other local development documents. As set out in PPS12 (published June 2008), Area Action Plans should be used to provide the planning framework for areas where significant change or conservation is needed. PPS12 states that Area Action Plans should:

- Deliver planned growth areas;
- Stimulate Regeneration;
- Protect areas particularly sensitive to change;
- Resolve conflicting objectives in areas subject to development pressures; or
- Focus the delivery of area based regeneration initiatives

1.2 What is an Issues and Options Report?

1.2.1 This document forms the Issues and Options report for the Rayleigh Town Centre Area Action Plan. The process of preparing an Area Action Plan can be divided into a number of stages. The first stage involves gathering an evidence base to identify the issues that need to be addressed by the AAP. The second stage is the preparation of the Issues and Options report that sets out the initial issues and options for the area in question and seeks the views of the public on them. Once the views on this Issues and Options report have been taken into consideration the Council will prepare a preferred options report and then progress towards submission of the AAP in line with the guidance contained within PPS12.

1.2.2 It should be noted that the options presented in this report are not mutually exclusive, rather they present a 'mix and match' set of options which can be chosen from. The preferred options will be informed by your comments and once prepared there will be a further opportunity for comment and consultation.



Figure 3: The High Street



Figure 4: Eastwood Road

1.3 Rayleigh Town Centre

1.3.1 The focus for the Area Action Plan is the defined town centre boundary as illustrated on the current Rochford District Local Plan (adopted 2006) proposals map (Figure 1). The Local Plan seeks to promote sustainable development patterns that minimise land take and reduce the need to travel. The plan also designates Rayleigh Town Centre as a primary retail area in the district. The Local Plan is soon to be replaced by the Local Development Framework, within which the Rayleigh Town Centre AAP will sit. The Core Strategy is at submission stage: policy for Rayleigh Town Centre (policy RTC4) states:

“The Council will ensure that Rayleigh town centres role as the District’s principal town centre is retained through the production and implementation of an Area Action Plan which delivers the following:

- *improved accessibility to and within the town centre;*
- *a safe and high quality environment for residents and visitors;*
- *a predominance of retail uses, including intensification of retail uses, which cater for a variety of needs;*
- *a range of evening leisure uses; and*
- *promotes provision of community facilities, including exploration of potential locations for a healthcare centre and, if appropriate, delivery of such a facility”*

1.3.2 In many ways, Rayleigh town centre is already a successful and vital place. It is the largest retail centre in the district, it has a strong comparison and convenience offer, low vacancy rates and a range of unit sizes. However, some parts of the High Street suffer from unattractive infill, some of the gateways to the town are uninspiring and, despite regeneration projects that have already taken place, more still needs to be done to enhance the historic heritage of the town centre. Recent studies have also indicated that there is capacity within the town centre for further office uses, comparison shopping and leisure uses (Retail and Leisure Study August 2008; Employment Land study October 2008). The Core Strategy identifies Rayleigh as a top tier settlement within the District and also seeks to direct a proportion of the District’s housing requirement to the town.

1.3.3 Rayleigh has a relatively attractive town centre: the High Street is wide and money has been invested in the public realm, making this a comfortable shopping environment. With the exception of several unsympathetic infill developments it is lined with many historic buildings and generous public spaces. Holy Trinity Church and the Windmill are unique local landmarks.

1.3.4 The core of the town centre retail environment is located between London Hill and Eastwood Road. Moving south along the High Street beyond Eastwood Road retail uses continue, though the quality of the offer begins to fall away and there is evidence of higher vacancy rates. The quality of the building stock also diminishes: the Police Station and adjacent buildings do little to complement the historic heart of the town. Some retail uses also extend along Eastwood Road towards King Georges Fields. Like those uses around the Police Station they feel peripheral to the core area. However, this cluster of uses includes a relatively large Somerfield store, which generates movements to and from the main core and local car parking facilities. This store though presents a blank and unwelcoming façade to the street in what is an important gateway location between the town centre and surrounding residential neighbourhoods.

1.3.5 The recent Retail & Leisure study (August 2008) recommends that the emerging LDF adopts a supportive approach to further comparison floorspace within the town centre. It also notes that the centre would benefit from a greater range of leisure services, including cafes and restaurants. Equally, the employment land study (October 2008) notes that potential exists for the provision of new office space within the town centre.

1.3.6 On one hand, this Issues and Options report is concerned with the protection of the special intrinsic qualities in the town centre that provide its local distinctiveness and character, such as Holy Trinity Church, Mount and Windmill. On the other hand, there is a need to address potential physical interventions. Key opportunity areas, as this report will go on to discuss, include the challenges presented by the arrangement of buildings and spaces along Websters Way (Figure 6). This is the 'back door' to the town, lined with service yards, blank building facades and large areas of surface car parking. This represents a major contrast to the High Street.

1.3.7 The town centre has a partial gyratory system in operation, which sends a large proportion of traffic along Websters Way. Despite this, there are also often tailbacks along the High Street, particularly at the junction of Church Street and the High Street. Traffic here is controlled by a veritable forest of traffic signals. Scope may exist to rationalise the number of signs, poles and controls, removing street clutter, enhancing the quality of the public realm and setting of the Church.

1.4 Getting Your Views

1.4.1 Your views are needed to help develop the AAP. Please note that we are not just asking whether the correct issues have been identified but, importantly, we want your views on the options put forward.

1.4.2 In order to encourage discussion and consideration of the matters in this report we have presented questions throughout this report. These questions are meant to be thought provoking and there is no need to answer all the questions. Your responses to these questions and any other submissions will be taken forward to the preparation of the document

QUESTION BOX:

Throughout the document we present a number of questions that we want your comments on. These are presented in green boxes, like this, and each question has an associated reference number. Please respond to us with your views using these references where possible. That will help us to ensure your views are considered and will help us to identify a preferred set of options for the town centre.



Figure 5: The High Street and taxi rank ('Boots Lagoon')



Figure 6: Websters Way



Figure 7: The High Street

02 The Issues

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This section of the report presents our understanding of the issues to be addressed within Rayleigh Town Centre. These have been informed by a combination of technical information and research prepared for the Local Development Framework, site visits and associated analysis, and consultation with stakeholders. The issues are presented by topic area and summarised towards the end of the chapter. The options that have been developed and presented later in the report respond to these challenges.

2.2 What you told us

2.2.1 Consultation has formed an important part of the process and the views of stakeholders have been sought in identifying issues. This has been undertaken through a combination of meetings with Council Members, a letter drop and 'Placecheck' event with stakeholders (Figure 8).

2.2.2 Both the letter drop and 'Placecheck' event encompassed local residents on the Councils Citizens Panel and a cross-selection of locally interested stakeholder groups, including the District and Town Councils, Chamber of Trade, Federation of Small Businesses, Historical Society, National Trust and the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE).

2.2.3 The Placecheck event was held to help inform ideas and options for future change and improvement in the town centre, ensuring that the views and opinions of local people help generate these options. Placecheck is a method of assessing the qualities of a place, showing what improvements are needed, and focussing people on working together to achieve them. Placecheck asks questions about the processes of change and the potential for improving the area physically.

2.2.4 The responses made through the consultation process highlight concerns around a number of aspects relating to:

- The appearance of the townscape;
- Mix of uses and activities;
- The quality of the pedestrian environment; and
- Traffic congestion and car parking.

2.2.5 Comments note that the Rayleigh has an attractive, historic town centre, but more could be done to improve this and, in particular, improving the quality of buildings that visually intrude on the intrinsic qualities of the High Street. Along the High Street, the former Tesco store, Police Station and adjacent development of retail units, flats and offices are considered to be the most unattractive buildings. A mix of façade improvements and/or redevelopment are suggested as ways forward. The quality of the Websters Way and Bellingham Lane frontages are also considered in need of improvement. These are particularly important given (a) the function of Websters Way as an arrival point into the town centre and (b) the setting of the Mount and the Mill. Linked with these comments is the recognised importance of local heritage and historic assets in the town centre.

2.2.6 The comments also highlight the need for a greater diversity and mix of uses within the town centre. Specifically, comments indicate there are a limited range of shops, restaurants and cafes and few amenities for the younger population. Any new development should be flexible to allow for different use types: a particular concern was expressed

about the number of vacancies in the town centre, particularly to the southern end of the High Street, and that efforts should be made to attract footfall and activity. Discussion during the Placecheck event included whether arts and cultural events could be held on the High Street, and whether this might be a location for a relocated and expanded market. It was considered that the taxi-rank in the High Street could be reduced in size or relocated altogether, improving the retail environment and potential for accommodating a street-based market.

2.2.7 During the Placecheck it became evident that consideration should be given to improving pedestrian connections in the town, particularly between Websters Way, High Street and the Mount. Direct, safe and well-signed routes should be considered. It was also suggested that the High Street could be part pedestrianised, though this would need to be considered in association with wider traffic implications.

2.2.8 Car-parking and traffic congestion were major concerns, particular the location and cost of parking, the volume and speed of traffic through the town. It was suggested that short-term parking should be free and that payment should be on exit, which would allow the town centre to compete with out-of-town retail stores providing free parking. Congestion along Websters Way and at key junctions around the town were also an area of concern.



Figure 8: Images from the Rayleigh Town Centre Placecheck Consultation Event

2.3 Heritage and Conservation

2.3.1 A thorough understanding of the historic context of Rayleigh is important to ensure that any options developed respond appropriately to this context, protecting and enhancing local distinctiveness. This understanding is particularly critical because Rayleigh heritage plays a large part in its attractive and distinctive character.

2.3.2 There are a number of documents that describe Rayleigh's heritage including the Rayleigh Conservation Area Appraisal (2007), Listed Buildings in the Rochford District (2005), the Heritage Conservation Record of Rayleigh Castle and the Rayleigh Historic Town Assessment Report (1999).

2.3.3 Rayleigh is an attractive market town with a strong heritage and a number of attractive listed buildings. It is located on the crest of a north south ridge, a prominent feature in low-lying south west Essex. The Domesday Book demonstrates that there was a village at Rayleigh at the end of the Saxon period (410 – 1066). Swein of Essex built his castle there at some point between 1066 and 1086 and there is still a substantial Motte and Bailey on the site (now 'Rayleigh Mount'). It appears that the town remained as a small market town with a stable population until the beginning of the 20th Century when the introduction of a railway led to its growth as a commuter town (Rayleigh Historic Town Assessment Report, 1999). The Rayleigh Historic Town Assessment Report outlines some of the archaeological findings from the town and

states that there may be archaeological evidence still extant.

2.3.4 The Rayleigh Conservation Area (designated in 1969 and extended in 2009 - see Figure 9) covers the historic centre of the village and also takes in Rayleigh Mount (the site of the Swein of Essex' castle), a scheduled ancient monument, on a spur to the north west of the High Street. The conservation area was designated partly in response to rapid development taking place in the High Street. The Rayleigh Conservation Area identifies some of the key features in Rayleigh, including:

- 24 listed buildings in the historic town area of Rayleigh, all of which are grade II listed except Holy Trinity Church which is Grade II*.
- The most notable of the listed buildings are the Holy Trinity Church, the Windmill (19th Century), Kingsleigh House (18th Century red brick building on the High Street which has been converted into offices) and Francis House (now Lloyds Bank on the High Street)
- The original structure and framework of the town remain legible today
- Rayleigh has an exceptionally wide High Street (a feature of the medieval period), presided over at one end by Holy Trinity church
- Rayleigh Mount, the site of a Norman castle, given to the National Trust in 1923 and designated a scheduled ancient monument. Rayleigh Mount is a site of national importance because it is one of the very few castles mentioned in the

Domesday Book, and one of the oldest recorded castles in England. Abandoned as a castle in the 14th Century, it was used as a Royal Stud and then a farmyard. It is now a key area of open space in the area and is well used for recreational purposes.

- A High Street which consists largely of 20th Century buildings but also has buildings from the late medieval times (which represent an important archaeological resource), 16th, 17th and 18th centuries and still retains the sense of an historic town.
- Attractive views looking up and down the High Street (in contrast to the unattractive ones looking up and down Websters Way).
- Attractive views over the surrounding countryside from the top of London Hill.

2.3.5 It is these features which have contributed to the conservation area designation and which contribute to Rayleigh's distinctiveness and character. The Conservation Area Appraisal (2007) also sets out a number of management proposals which will need to be considered when making proposals for the masterplan. These include:

- The protection of Brooklands Gardens and King George's Field;
- Better management of the trees and boundaries of the Mount;
- Highlight the attention that needs to be paid to the backland space in particular at Websters Way and Bellingham Lane;
- The need to deal with issue of car parking (suggests a multi storey car park but questions whether it is viable);
- Suggests more rigorous implementation of shopfront and advertisement control;
- Justifies the extension of the conservation area boundaries, most notable extending it to the east side of Websters Way and possibly even to include the car park and King George's Field to the east; and
- Justifies the use of an Article 4 (2) direction in the conservation area to further control development such as application of render, alterations to windows.

2.3.6 In order to ensure that masterplan proposals are deliverable and fit within the wider policy direction of the Council it is important to consider the policies that concern conservation of heritage that are currently part of the planning policy framework. There are a number of policies within the Rochford District Replacement Local Plan June 2006 (which have now been saved until the core strategy is adopted) that seek to preserve and enhance the conservation areas.

2.3.7 This policy is supplemented by the Conservation Area SPD (January 2007) regarding scale, form, materials, siting and also covering more specific topics such as design for roofs, chimneys, walls etc. The SPD notes however that:

"The advice contained in this Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is not intended to be prescriptive. There is little value in modern architecture simply reproducing all the building styles that have gone before."

2.3.8 Of particular importance for this study is Policy BC2 which covers demolition in a conservation area. This policy states that:

"Consent for the demolition of a building in a conservation area will only be granted in cases where all of the following criteria are met:

i.

a) the building to be demolished is of no architectural or historical interest and makes no positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area;

b) sufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that the building is beyond reasonable repair, having regard to its structural condition, the cost of repairing and maintaining it in relation to its importance, and to the value derived from its continued use; and that every effort has been made to find compatible alternative uses for the building and to sell it on the open market at a price reflecting its structural condition

ii.

detailed plans for the after-use of the site have been submitted to, and approved by, the Local Planning Authority. (In cases where the after-use of the site includes development requiring planning permission, such permission must have been applied for and granted in order that the terms of this criterion be met); and

The local planning authority will require the signing of a legal agreement before permission for demolition is granted, requiring the redevelopment of the site within an agreed timeframe."

2.3.9 The reason for highlighting the detail of policy BC2 is that careful regard will need to be had to this policy should any demolition in the conservation area be proposed as a part of the masterplan. There is also a potential conflict here with regard to the desirability of redeveloping unattractive buildings in the town centre to enhance the quality of the conservation area. This is discussed within the section on planning policy below (see section 2.5)

2.3.10 Policy SAT8 provides guidelines on shop fronts (for example that they should be designed to



Figure 9: Town Centre Heritage Aspects



Figure 10: Police Station and adjacent buildings on the High Street



Figure 11: Buildings along Bellingham Lane



Figure 12: Former Tesco store on the High Street

complement the style and proportions of the affected building, and to those adjoining it) and Policy SAT10 provides guidance on advertisements in conservation areas (for example that the use of internally illuminated fascias and projecting box signs will not be permitted).

2.3.11 The implications of this is that the historic value of Rayleigh means that the options developed will need to be very sensitive to the context of the area and seek to preserve and enhance the characteristics and special buildings discussed above. Options will also need to have regard to the planning policy that guides development in Rayleigh, in particular in the conservation area.

2.3.12 However, the fact that Rayleigh has a large number of important historic features and a conservation area that is controlled by a range of planning policies does not mean that development (including development using modern architectural design) should not take place. As is set out in the Conservation Area SPD guidelines:

“conservation areas are not museums; they need to change and evolve over time just as they have always done. Carefully designed new buildings can make a positive contribution to character and there are situations where the sensitive redevelopment of an eyesore can enhance the quality of an area.”

2.3.13 The Conservation Area Appraisal (2007) reiterates the point that redevelopment of certain buildings in the backlands and even the High Street may be appropriate and could be carried out to the benefit of the town centre.



Figure 13: Looking north along the High Street to Holy Trinity Church



Figure 14: Rayleigh Windmill



Figure 15: Historic buildings on the High Street



Figure 16: More recent development on the High Street

2.4 Form and Structure

2.4.1 Rayleigh has broadly retained its historic urban structure (Figures 17-19). The 'Y-shaped' High Street remains intact and the open space and topography formed by the Rayleigh Mount is also still in existence. The main divergence from the historic pattern comes with Websters Way, which forms a newer route running parallel to the High Street.

2.4.2 As with the form of the town, the urban grain remains largely intact along the High Street. Whilst the aesthetic value of some of the infill development can be questioned, in the main it retains the fine grain pattern of the High Street, exceptions including the Police Station. It is one of the attractive and distinctive traits of Rayleigh that the historic form of development is still apparent, making it representative of a traditional Essex market town .

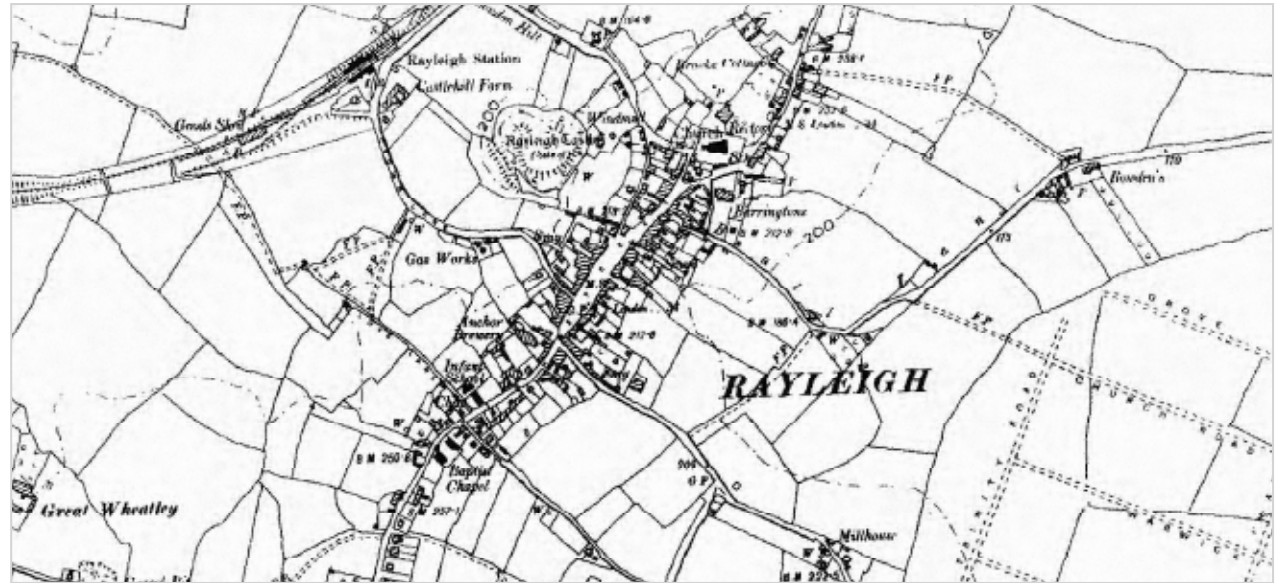


Figure 17: Historic map of Rayleigh, dated 1896 (source: Rochford District Council)



Figure 18: Plan of Rayleigh today



Figure 19: Plan of Rayleigh today (Figure Ground Plan)

2.4.3 The main focus of Rayleigh town centre today is still the High Street, between Eastwood Road and London Hill. Running south west to north east through Rayleigh, the High Street is dominated by retail uses with some residential properties above the shops. Further peripheral retail can be found to the south western end of the High Street and the Holy Trinity church and an outdoor market are positioned at the north eastern end (Figure 22).

2.4.4 To the south east of the High Street, retail gives way to an area dominated by Websters Way car park (a well-maintained surface car park) and accesses for servicing. Servicing to the shops along the High Street mainly takes place along Websters Way and the frontage along this road is unattractive, formed as it is by the backs of shops, which do not form an even building line with the street. For vehicles coming from the north, Websters Way forms a poor first impression of Rayleigh town centre (Figure 21).

2.4.5 The town centre is bounded to the south east and the north west by areas of open space. To the south east (forming a boundary with Websters Way car park) lies King Georges Field, a large area of public open space (Figure 20). Forming the north western boundary to the town centre is Rayleigh Mount. Owned by the National Trust, this is a large, attractive and well maintained area of public open space. As the name implies, the area is on a hill with paths round the wooded slopes of the hill which lead into open areas affording excellent views onto surrounding countryside.

2.4.6 There are good links from South West to North East through the town along the High Street. However, the links are weaker between the high street and Websters Way to the east and Rayleigh Mount to the west with a lack of ways through off the High Street into the surrounding areas.

2.4.7 The building heights in Rayleigh town centre mainly range between two and three storeys, with the higher buildings usually associated with more modern infill development (Figure 23). There are a scattering of four and five storey buildings including Holy Trinity Church Spire and Rayleigh Windmill. These are important landmarks for the town and the church in particular enhances the legibility of the town, positioned as it is on top of a hill at the end of the High Street.

2.4.8 Outside of the study area, the buildings are predominantly residential and are mainly between one and two storeys, built at a relatively low density.



Figure 20: King Georges Field



Figure 21: Websters Way



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Figure 22: Broad structuring plan

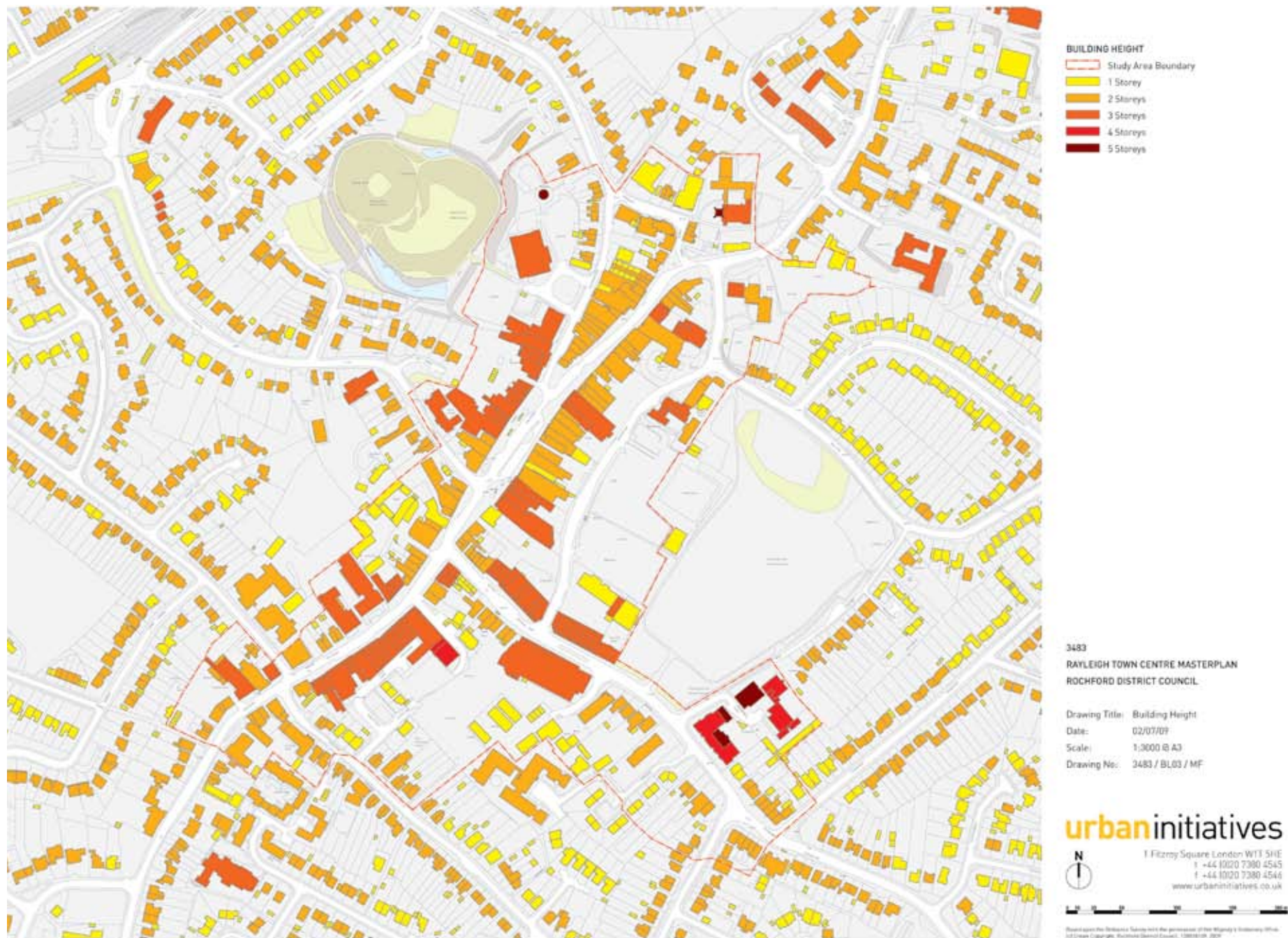


Figure 23: Town centre building heights

2.5 Policy Context

NATIONAL LEVEL

2.5.1 At the national level, Government planning policy for town centres is set out in Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 6 (Planning for Town Centres, March 2005). This is currently subject to review. A consultation draft of the proposed changes was published in July 2008, although this has since been superseded by consultation on revised PPS 4 (Planning for Prosperous Economies) published in May 2009 and which incorporates policies for town centres. Although the adopted version of PPS 6 remains Government policy, the consultation documents represent the current direction of thinking and must be given due weight in developing plans and proposals.

2.5.2 Emphasis is given to safeguarding and protecting investment in town centres, recognising the important role that attractive town centres play at the heart of community life. However, it is recognised that in the current economic climate planning policies need to be flexible and responsive to change, particularly to support the start-up and growth of businesses, attracting inward investment and increasing employment.

2.5.3 In addition to this, the Government has also published a document entitled 'Looking after our town centres' (April 2009). This provides guidance on how the potential of town centres can be realised during the economic downturn in order to maintain vibrancy, identity and sense of place. In particular, the guide highlights the importance of attractive and safe town centres, variety, diversity and the positive use of planning and licensing powers.

REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL LEVEL

2.5.4 The Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England (RSS 14: East of England Plan) was published in May 2008. The strategy seeks to bring about sustainable development, supporting urban and rural renaissance, new housing, employment and other facilities, and improved transport accessibility. Outside of the region's main areas of change (i.e.: its larger towns and cities), the role and importance of smaller market towns is recognised: thriving, vibrant and attractive centres are central to the overall approach to sustainable development and should be at the focus of investment, environmental enhancement and regeneration.

2.5.5 The regional spatial strategy sets minimum growth targets for each district. For Rochford, it is expected that 4,600 new dwellings be provided in the district over the period 2001 – 2021. Similarly, provision for job growth is required. In this instance though Rochford is grouped with Thames Gateway sub-region. 55,000 new jobs are expected to be provided across the region over the period 2001 – 2021, most of which will though be in Thurrock, Basildon, Southend and Castle Point.

2.5.6 Although the district falls outside of the Thames Gateway Growth Area the implications of this can not be ignored, particularly in terms of accessibility and the growth of competing centres. It is thus important that local character and distinctiveness is central to any future change or regeneration within Rayleigh. Indeed, RSS 14 notes that plans and policies should ensure that historic environments are protected, enhanced and conserved as appropriate. In particular, Policy ENV7 (Quality in the Built Environment) states that:

"Local Development Documents should require new development to be of high quality which complements the distinctive character and best qualities of the local area and promotes urban renaissance and regeneration".

DISTRICT LEVEL

2.5.7 At the district level, the Sustainable Community Strategy 2009-2021 (Rochford Local Strategic Partnership, April 2009) is seeking to achieve a better quality of life for everyone in the District. The strategy identifies seven priority areas for consideration and action:

- Supporting the ageing population;
- Fostering greater community cohesion;
- Strengthening the Third Sector¹;
- Increasing accessibility to services;
- Keeping Rochford safe;
- Encouraging economic development; and
- Promoting a greener district.

2.5.8 These priority areas are embedded within the Councils emerging Core Strategy, which is currently at submission stage (September 2009). In terms of Rayleigh Town Centre, the Core Strategy notes that it is the principal centre in the district and that an Area Action Plan will be prepared (see policy RTC4, as referenced in the introduction to this issues and options report). People will be encouraged to use the centre by ensuring that it is attractive, accessible and contains a variety of uses.

2.5.9 The Core Strategy also states that permissions for non-retail uses will be restricted to maintain and the long-term viability and vitality of the town centre, 'avoiding long stretches of dead non-retail frontage'. Some non-retail uses will be allowed, though the amount will be controlled, focussing retail uses within core areas and non-retail uses within secondary shopping frontages (see paras 12.15 and 12.16).

2.5.10 However, the Retail and Leisure Study (Rochford District Council, August 2008) undertaken to inform the production of the Core Strategy recommends that the town centre would benefit from a greater range of leisure service providers and that the Council should adopt a supportive approach to further comparison goods (generally relating to non-food items which are likely to be subject to comparison between suppliers before they are purchased) floorspace within the town centre. The study also notes that there are few vacancies in the centre, that it has a good range of retail service, financial and business service providers, and that its mix of unit sizes make it attractive to a wide variety of retailers.

2.5.11 One of the important parts of this AAP will be to consider the role and function of Rayleigh Town Centre in relation to other town centres. Whilst Rayleigh is the principal town centre in the district, there are a number of competing centres in the wider region, such as Southend, Basildon and Chelmsford. In order to retain vitality and viability in the face of these larger centres, Rayleigh will need to build on its key strengths – the cultural attractions of Rayleigh Mount and Windmill, the High Street with its good range of shops and community facilities (for example Holy Trinity Church and associated community centre) and the attractiveness of its built form.

¹ The Third Sector includes voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, cooperations and mutuals

2.5.12 The Employment Land Study (Rochford District Council, October 2008) recommends that the Council investigate the possibility of allocating employment land in Rayleigh Town Centre for office use in the form of a mixed-use scheme. Whilst both the employment and retail studies were undertaken during different economic circumstances to those being experienced at the time of writing, they do look forward over a long timeframe. Even though the recommendations may not stand at the current time, they do need to be considered, with the Issues and Options report putting in place the framework for opportunities for change once the economy does pick-up.

2.5.13 Policy also states that a positive approach will be taken to residential uses in the centre, particularly in terms of conversions above retail uses, enhancing the vibrancy of centres and reducing the amount of green belt land take.

2.5.14 This suggests that a mix of uses within the town centre will be encouraged, ensuring activity and vibrancy, but that the primary role of the town as a retail centre should be strengthened.

2.6 Development Pipeline

2.6.1 Within the town centre two applications have been granted permission. These are adjacent to each other:

- Permission has recently been granted (July 2009) for the redevelopment of the Rayleigh Lanes building between the High Street and Websters Way (Figure 24). The proposed scheme seeks to retain the ground floor retail uses and access points to this on both the High Street and Websters Way. However, the proposals seek to redevelop the upper floors, replacing the current snooker hall use with two floors of residential units. A total of twelve units are included within the scheme proposals, comprising a mix of one and two bed flats. These would be accessed via Websters Way. The scheme includes a blank façade along its southern edge, allowing for the redevelopment of the adjacent site.
- Next to Rayleigh Lanes (on land to the rear of 91 High Street - Figure 25), permission was granted in September 2006 for a new four-storey building accommodating fifteen two-bed flats and eighteen car parking spaces. Work has yet to commence on the scheme and permission is due to expire in September 2009. This may allow scope for elements of the scheme to be re-considered, including the relationship between the proposed buildings and the pedestrian route alongside this, linking Websters Way to the High Street. Development should help to formalise

this route and make it a safer, more attractive link for pedestrians, with active ground floor uses, landscaping and lighting.

2.6.2 The options presented in section 4 of this report show either redevelopment or façade improvements to the Rayleigh Lanes site. Development of the adjacent site is considered in higher-change and improvement options presented in section 4. The principal of development on this site is accepted, but should the permission expire it may be possible to review the form and nature of the development.



Figure 24: Rayleigh Lanes as existing



Figure 25: Site adjacent to Rayleigh Lanes

2.7 Transport and Movement

Street Network

2.7.1 Historically, as illustrated in Figure 17, the town grew up around the High Street and the Mount. As with most medieval settlements, streets were designed with the horse and cart in mind and vehicular traffic has put pressure on the historic road system.

2.7.2 Up until the implementation of a Department for Transport pilot project scheme some ten years ago, a gyratory system was in place around the town centre. Two eastbound lanes of traffic ran along the High Street and two westbound lanes along Websters Way (Figure 27).

2.7.3 As a result of the pilot project, the High Street remains one way only east bound, although Websters Way has reverted to two way operation. This has removed some traffic from the High Street and helped contribute to an enhanced retail environment as eastbound traffic is now able to use both the High Street and Websters Way.

2.7.4 It has though reduced road capacity for westbound traffic, which is limited to one lane only along Websters Way. Coupled with the presence of the main town centre car park and retail servicing arrangements along this route, Websters Way now experiences congestion. This is the main arrival point into the town for vehicles but conditions along Websters Way are decidedly poor, with the backs of retail premises forming the northern edge of the street

and surface parking forming a large portion of the southern street edge

2.7.5 The western part of the High Street is two way and provides a critical link from the town to the Southend Arterial Road (A127), a largely grade separated dual carriageway running from Southend-on-Sea all the way through to the M25.

2.7.6 Crown Hill connects the High Street with Rayleigh Railway Station and, after it becomes Station Road, is the main link across the railway line to residential areas to the north and onwards to Hullbridge. London Hill provides an alternative local route for traffic moving from the High Street to Station Road. Eastwood Road, to the south west of the study area, is a local route running parallel to the Southend Arterial.

2.7.7 Road junctions in the town centre primarily take the form of roundabouts (Figure 26). Mini roundabouts are in place to the east at the junctions of the High Street with Crown Hill and Eastwood Road, and the Websters Way and Eastwood Road junction. A partially signalised junction is in place at the Church Street, High Street, Bull Lane (Websters Way) and Hockley Road junction, of which there are currently proposals for improvement in the form of full signalisation and the introduction of an additional right turn lane from the High Street into Websters Way, relieving congestion at a localised pinch point.

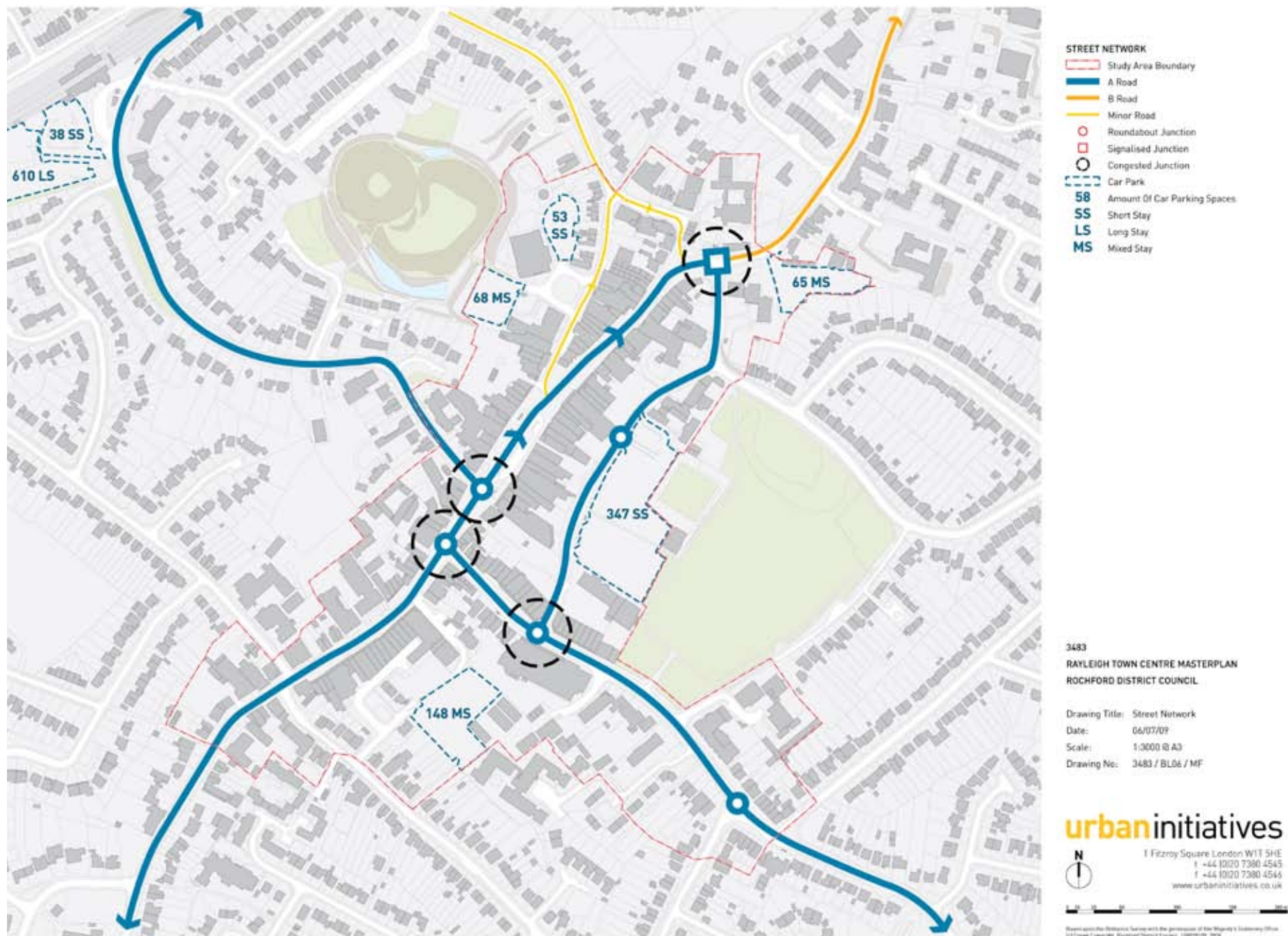


Figure 26: Rayleigh town centre street network and car parking provision



Figure 27: The former highways arrangement created a one-way gyratory around the town centre (image source: Wikipedia)

Parking

2.7.8 A range of short and long term parking is provided in and near to the town centre (Figure 26). The railway station has approximately 610 long-stay parking spaces spread over two connected car parking areas, and a 38 space short-stay car park adjacent to the station building.

2.7.9 There are a number of short (less than four hours) and mixed-stay car parks spread around the town core, of which the most substantial and anecdotally well used is the Websters Way car park

with 347 spaces. Another 53 space short-stay car park is located adjacent the Windmill and The Mill Arts and Events Centre, with a further mixed-stay car park located to the west with 68 spaces.

2.7.10 Behind the Somerfield store there is a 148 space mixed-stay car park. To the east of the town adjacent to the Council Civic Suite is a 65 space mixed-stay car park that is also used as a market. In March 2003 the market licence was extended for a further seven years. The licence will therefore expire in March 2010. This represents an opportunity to review its location and operation.

2.7.11 An origin and destination survey undertaken for users of the Websters Way car park by Mouchel Ltd, identified that the majority of people using this car park were accessing the town centre for personal business and shopping reasons.

2.7.12 This survey, supported by observations on site, alludes to the fact that town centre car parking is critical in supporting the local economy and wholesale removal of parking spaces would not be advisable. That being said, some rationalisation of car parking may be considered appropriate on the basis of managing travel demand, and justified on the grounds of replacing car borne trips to the centre with new walking trips generated from new development in close proximity.

Public Transport

2.7.13 An extensive bus network operates in Rayleigh with the wider sub-regional service structure gravitating to Southend-on-Sea (Figure 28). Bus routes with one or more services per hour connect Rayleigh with Hockley and Rochford to the east (services 7, and 8), with Southend and Shoeburyness to the south (services 1, 9, 20, 24, 25), with Basildon to the west (service 25) and with Hullbridge to the north (20). The X30 also runs through the town providing an hourly express bus service from Southend through to Stansted Airport.

2.7.14 Numerous bus routes begin and terminate at Rayleigh Railway Station (services 1, 7, 8, 9, 24) making this an important rail bus interchange point for the town. Rayleigh is on the London Liverpool Street

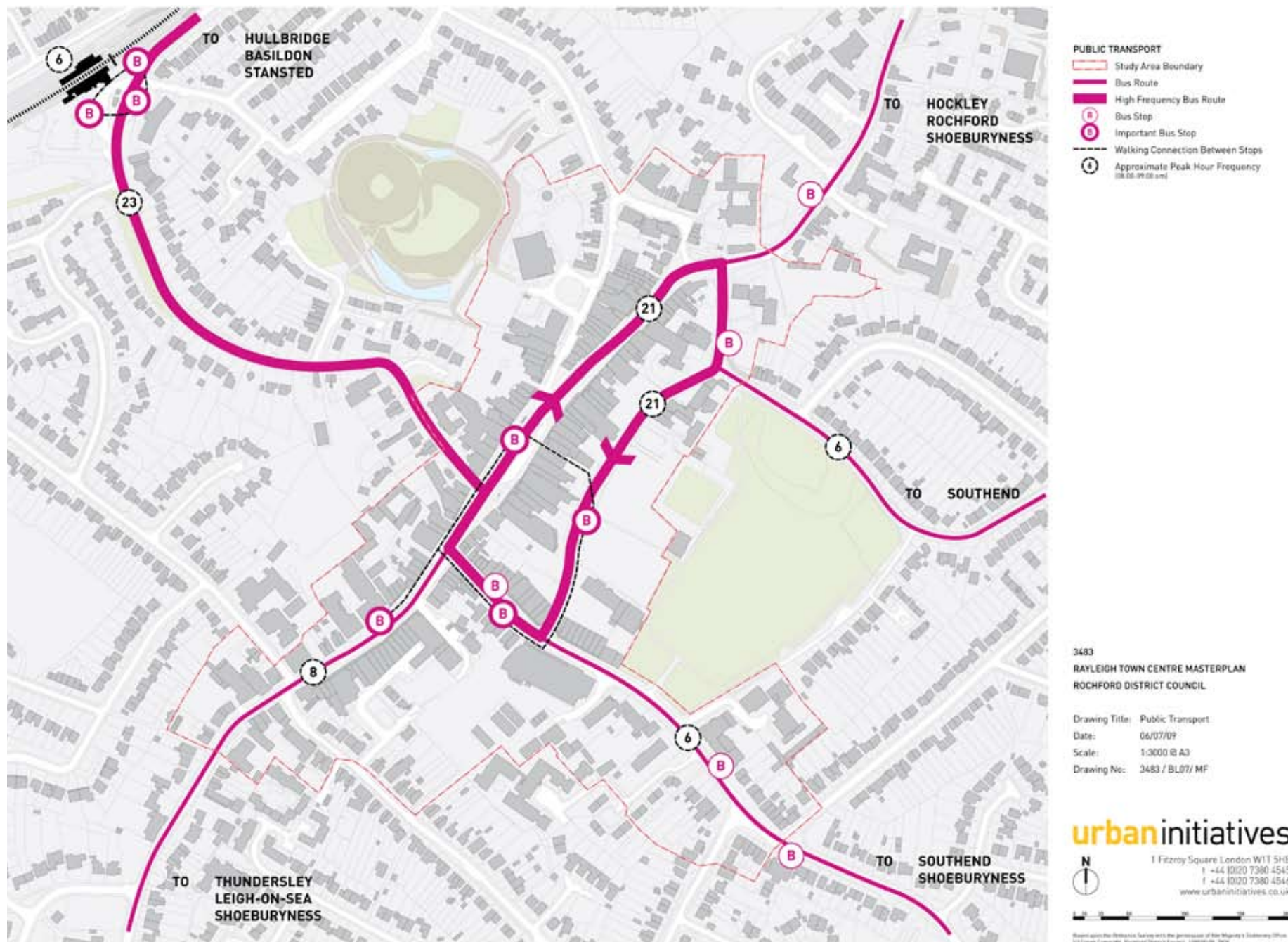


Figure 28: Rayleigh town centre street public transport provision

railway line. The line offers a ten minute service in the peak hour and a twenty minute service in the off-peak with an approximate journey time to London Liverpool Street of between 41 and 44 minutes.

2.7.15 Buses heading towards Southend and Shoeburyness typically move in a clockwise direction around the town core via High Street, Websters Way and Eastwood Road. Services branch off this route at Hockley Road, Bull Lane, Eastwood Road or the western part of the High Street. Total flows on this one-way route are approximately 21 buses per hour on an average 0800 – 0900 am peak period, or a bus every two minutes.

2.7.16 Buses travelling north through Rayleigh typically stop on Websters Way, Eastwood Road and the High Street, dependent on the approach road, but do not travel through the town core proper. This means that in addition to the rail-bus interchange, there are four key stops in the town core that provide access to all bus services passing through Rayleigh.

2.7.17 Efforts should aim to improve the operation of the bus rail interchange, and the four town core stops, the quality of the waiting environments and the walking connections between them. Bus information and signage should also be used to improve the interchange between bus routes.

Walking and Cycling

2.7.18 Walking is provided for generally by way of the publicly accessible street network. The main walking route from the station to the town core is via Crown Hill (Figure 29). This is an uphill walk with, in some instances, very narrow footways and high volumes of traffic. A further, though at present inconspicuous route, is via Castle Drive and through Rayleigh Mount to Bellingham Lane. Although relatively direct, unmade surfaces and secluded areas do not encourage pedestrian use.

2.7.19 Although there are a variety of formal walking facilities provided across the town, the presence of guardailing and bollards result in pedestrians being diverted away from what would be a direct crossing point. That is, rather than being able to walk directly between areas of attraction, people have to deviate around and along junctions. This impacts on most junctions around the town but also along the High Street itself. In particular, the High Street bus stop, stand and taxi rank dominate and require pedestrians to modify their routes accordingly. Websters Way also has a significant section without a footway that needs to be resolved.

2.7.20 There is no information on current signed or advisory cycle routes in the town and no national cycle routes pass through Rayleigh. There are also no on road facilities to speak of. Patches of cycle stands are provided on the High Street.

2.7.21 The walking connections between the station and the High Street need to be reviewed in detail and improvements identified and prioritised. For the High Street, building upon the success of the existing streetscape, minor walking improvements could be delivered in the form of redesign of the taxi rank (known locally as 'Boots Lagoon'), the removal of pedestrian guard railing and general decluttering.

2.7.22 A focus for walking improvements in the town should be at the roundabouts so that direct pedestrian crossing points are appropriately provided. This will require consideration of interventions to slow traffic approach speed and to speeds through the junction itself. This may involve moving crossings closer to the junction, tightening kerb radii, raising the carriageway, the use of vertical elements like trees or lighting, and the treatment of the roundabout island.

2.7.23 The approach to cycling in the town will be to manage traffic speeds and focus on the provision of appropriately located cycle racks at the station and High Street.



Figure 29: Rayleigh town centre pedestrian movement network

2.8 Summary of Issues

2.8.1 We summarise a range of issues below, which are illustrated in Figures 30-34 and which include:

1 **Quality and appearance of the town centre:**

Much of the town centre includes high-quality, attractive historic buildings. However, the quality of relatively recent development in and around the High Street (i.e.: from the 1960s onwards) serves to undermine the quality and setting of the conservation area and the towns many listed buildings. The Conservation Area Appraisal (2007) rates many of these as being negative or very negative. Policy BC2b of the Conservation Area SPD 2007 (see section 2.3 above) however requires full consideration to be given to alternative uses and potential of the building prior to redevelopment. There also a number of buildings outside the conservation area which undermine the quality of the town, including the Somerfield store on Eastwood Road and the Police Station and neighbouring shops / flats to the west end of the High Street. The scale and flexibility of these buildings for alternative uses in the future may be limited. The High Street taxi-rank is also relatively large for the size of the town and is visually intrusive.

2 **Range and mix of uses:** Although the town centre is relatively buoyant with few vacancies the LDF evidence base notes that the town centre would benefit from a greater range of leisure service providers, adoption of a supportive approach to further comparison goods floorspace and the promotion of mixed-use schemes incorporating office floorspace. Where there are vacancies, these tend to be located in clusters, with the highest concentration alongside the Police Station. The Core Strategy however seeks to restrict the introduction of restaurant and café type uses within the primary retail areas (see paras 12.15 - 12.16 of the Core Strategy). The current Market, located off Hockley Road, is off-centre. Its operation is considered important to the mix and offer within the town centre but its license is due to expire in March 2010.

3 **Connections between the High Street, Mount and Mill:** Rayleigh Mount, the Windmill and Mill Arts and Leisure Centre represent an important and locally unique cluster of leisure and cultural activities. The Mount, in particular, as a National Trust site, is a major asset for the town. This cluster of uses is however poorly connected with the High Street: although distances between the two are short, the relationship between the two is poorly defined. This is also undermined by the quality of the interface between buildings and the public realm on Bellingham Lane.

4 **Function, quality and appearance of Websters Way:**

In terms of the overall highway network for the town, one way working on the High Street means that Websters Way functions as an important traffic corridor around the town core. This is also the main servicing and car park access route for the town. It is an unwelcoming arrival point into the town centre and suffers from traffic congestion. In particular, the quality of Websters Way contrasts with the High Street, its form and appearance does little for the attractiveness and vitality of the town. It is very traffic dominated, in places lacks any footway and is generally uncondusive to walking. Connections between the main town centre parking facility and the High Street are limited.

5 **Pedestrian movement and public realm:** The pedestrian is relatively well catered for along much of the High Street: pavements are generous in places and seats are provided. However, in some locations, the presence of guardrailing and bollards hinder pedestrian movement. On-street and, in some places, on-kerb parking conflict with pedestrians, particularly towards the top of the High Street. The taxi rank is also visually intrusive and occupies a large area of space on the High Street, reducing pedestrian and shopper amenity.

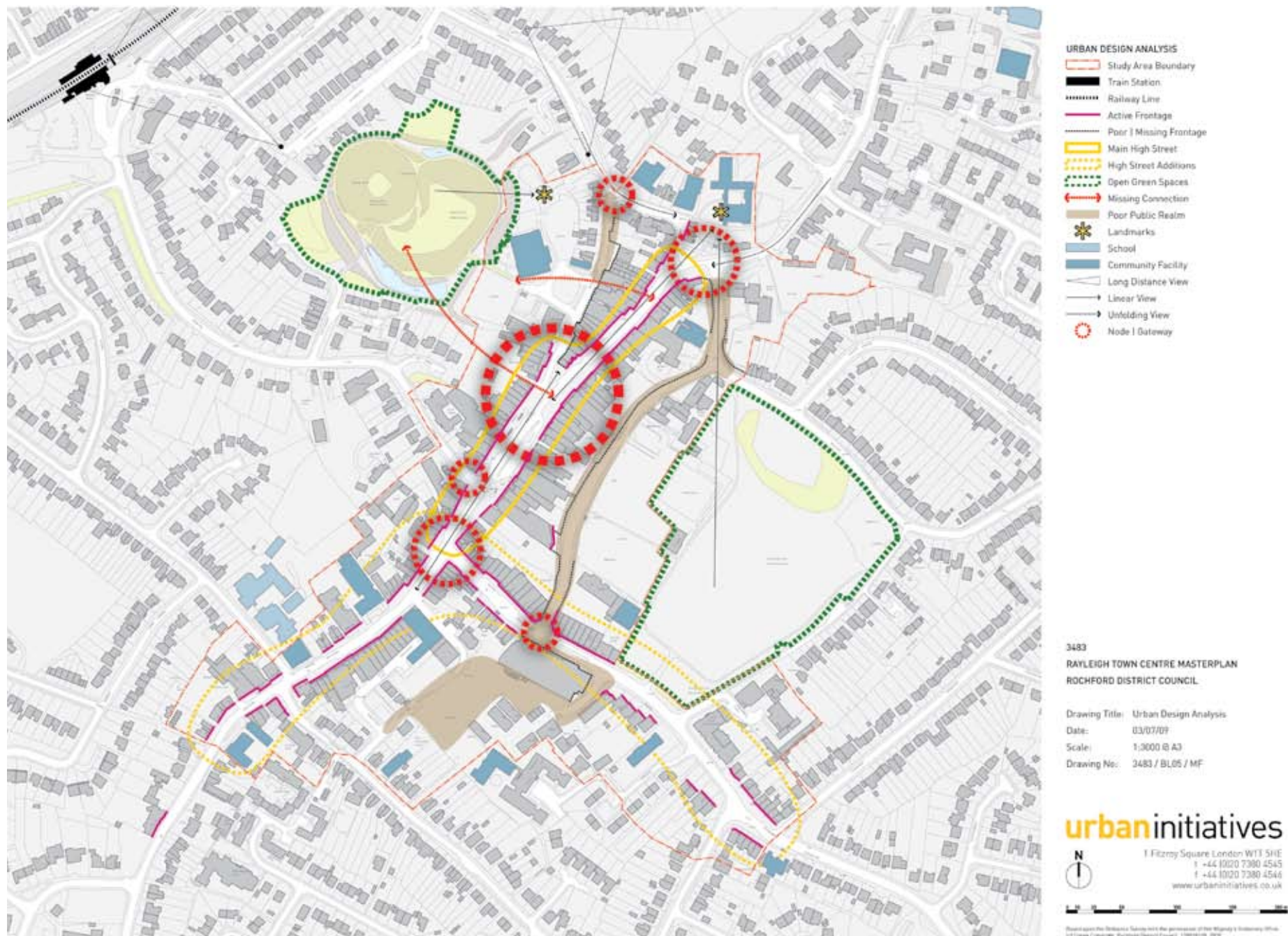


Figure 30: Rayleigh town centre summary urban design analysis plan

6 Traffic movement and congestion:

Although the one-way system does not appear to unduly impact on the quality of the High Street environment it does result in traffic queues at several locations, including the junction of Church Street, the High Street and Bull Lane (Websters Way). Here, the proliferation of street signs and signals required to control traffic results in street clutter that undermines the setting of Holy Trinity Church and surrounding historic environment. There is also evidence of queuing into the Websters Way car park and at the junctions of the High Street with Crown Hill and Eastwood Road. Footpaths also narrow at some of these points, limiting the quality of the retail environment.

QUESTION 1:

Do you agree with the issues identified? Are there any other issues that we should be considering?



Figure 31: Traffic congestion at the High / Church Street junction



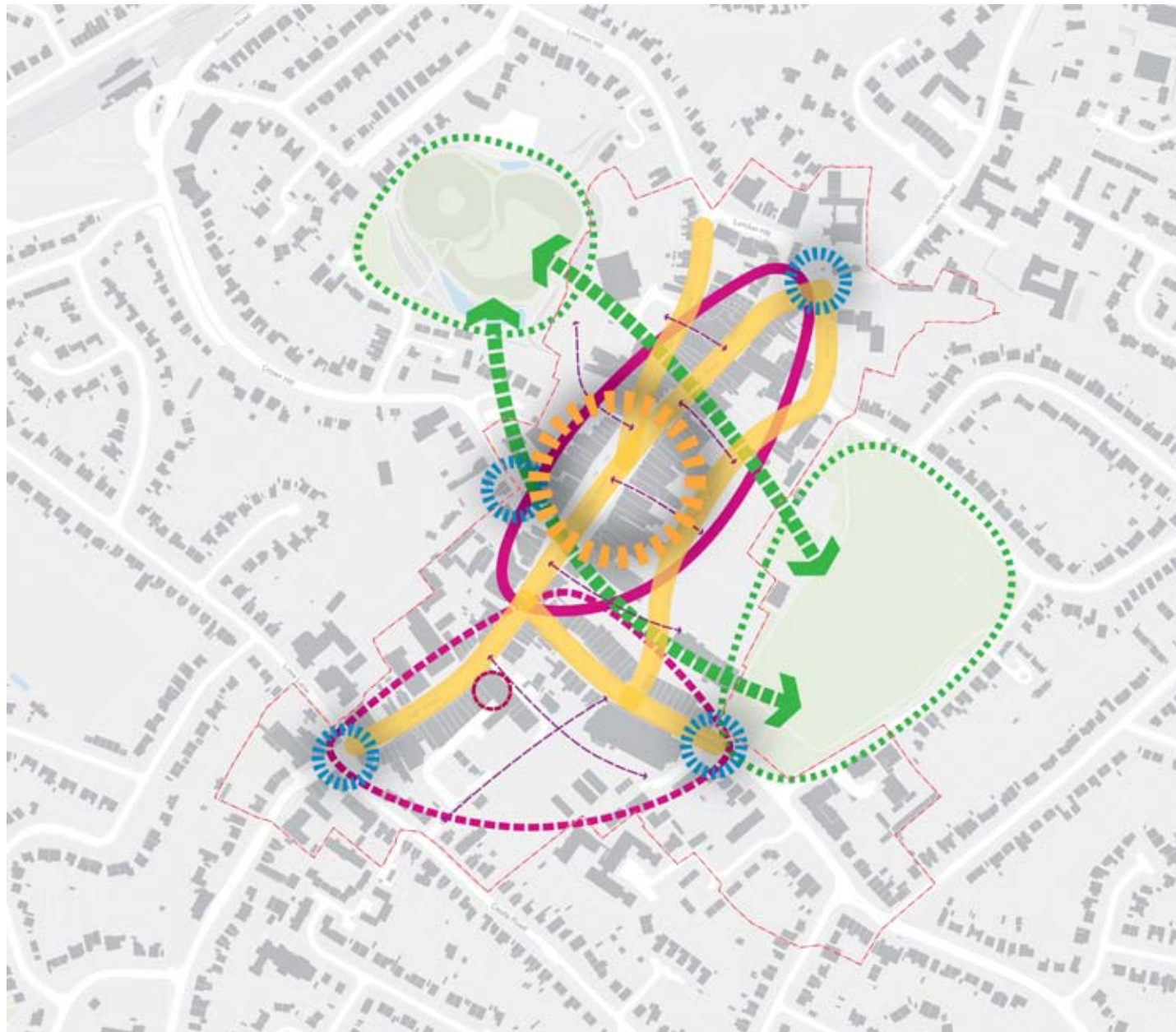
Figure 32: Exposed servicing areas on Websters Way



Figure 33: Rear of High Street properties on Bellingham Lane



Figure 34: Street signs and signals outside Holy Trinity Church



Based upon the Ordnance Survey with the permission of Her Majesty's Stationary Office. (c) Crown Copyright. Rochford District Council 100018109. 2009

Figure 35: Rayleigh Town Centre Concept Plan

03 Our Vision and Objectives

3.1 Vision and Objectives

3.1.1 Our vision for Rayleigh Town Centre is:

"REVITALISING AN ATTRACTIVE AND HISTORIC MARKET TOWN: to strengthen Rayleigh's role and function as the districts primary town centre, encouraging a diverse mix of retail, community, leisure and cultural facilities, creating a vibrant, attractive and welcoming centre for all, at all times of the day, and responding sensitively to the unique local heritage and identity of the town".

3.1.2 The vision will be delivered through a set of strategic objectives, responding to the specific issues identified and discussed above. The Objectives are:

Objective 1: Strengthen Local Character and Identity

- Create a strong image for Rayleigh which will promote the town
- Enhance the setting of heritage assets, the conservation area and listed buildings in the town centre
- To maximise the unique character of the town afforded by the Mount and the Windmill

Objective 2: Improve Quality of Place

- Enhance the appearance, interest and quality of the townscape
- Encourage high quality new development and attractive refurbishment
- Improve the streetscape and public realm, removing street furniture clutter and improving the

quality of arrival points

- Rationalise vehicular servicing, reducing the prominence of exposed service and parking yards
- Encouraging beautification programmes

Objective 3: Strengthen Vitality and Vibrancy

- Develop the conditions to attract useful and interesting shopping and restaurant / leisure outlets, including niche shopping to the town centre
- Encourage new town centre residential development, thereby making the town centre functionally more attractive and encouraging more people to use it

Objective 4: Improve Town Centre Access for All

- Make the town centre easier to reach by all modes of transport (Walking, cycling, bus and by car)
- Create a more friendly town centre environment for pedestrians and cyclists
- Reduce the negative environmental impact of traffic
- Improve connections developing vehicle, pedestrian and cycle routes that enhance access to the centre between retail uses, car parking, leisure and cultural attractions
- Create direct, safe and attractive routes between Websters Way, High Street and The Mount.

3.1.3 The overarching concept plan (Figure 35) illustrates the vision and objectives, which the options presented in section 4 of this Issues and Options report develop further. This concept plan gives primacy to the core of the High Street, between Eastwood Road and Holy Trinity Church, reinforcing the role and function of the town centre. It is important to work on the central area and ensure this is functioning to its best ability in the first instance: the success of this area will then have trickle-down benefits for the wider area. This will also ensure that peripheral areas do not start competing with the core area for business and footfall. The vision and objectives seek to promote diversity and choice through a greater mix of compatible uses that work together to create vital and viable places, and meet a wide range of local needs.

QUESTION 2:

Do you agree with the vision and objectives established for Rayleigh Town Centre?

3.2 Best Practice Principles

3.2.1 The options presented in this report have been prepared in accordance with best practice principles relating to place making and the creation of successful, vibrant, safe and attractive places. Government guidance in the form of 'By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice' establishes seven principles which should be integral to any effort to improve the quality of the built form. The principles are set out in Table 1, along with commentary on how these might be incorporated within the opportunities for Rayleigh Town Centre:

3.2.2 In addition to national guidance it is important to recognise that presented within the Essex Design Guide. Originally published in the early 1970s, the Guide was updated in 1997 and again in 2005. It provides guidance for designing within the context of market towns and for lower density schemes. The latest version also provides links to the new Urban Place Supplement (UPS).

3.2.3 The UPS provides a design framework for the delivery of compact, mixed-use sustainable urban development. The guidance emphasises design quality while ensuring the improvement of infrastructure and the sustainability of existing urban places. The UPS is being adopted as a supplementary planning document by most district and borough councils in Essex. The opportunities presented in this report are thus mindful of the advice contained within both the Essex Design Guide and UPS.

Best Practice Principle / Objective	Application to Rayleigh
Character: A place with its own identity. To promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture	Options should seek to maximise the heritage value of the town centre and quality of its built fabric. Its historic role as a market town should inform the scale of change and development, specifically in terms of the fine grain of development and buildings of architectural merit within the conservation area. The unique presence of the Mill and the Mount should be strengthened.
Continuity and Enclosure: A place where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished. To promote the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development which clearly defines private and public areas	Options should seek to enhance the quality of unsympathetic buildings within the conservation area and also address the exposed backs of properties along Websters Way and Bellingham Lane. Options for backland and infill development opportunities exist along Websters Way, strengthening the street front. Active development frontages, enclosing streets and providing for a safe and pleasant public realm should be promoted. This should apply to main streets, potential; development areas (such as to the rear of the Police Station) and connecting pedestrian routes between the High Street, Mount and Websters Way.
Quality of the Public realm: A place with attractive and successful outdoor spaces. To promote public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including disabled and elderly people	Options should seek to balance vehicular and pedestrian movement along the High Street, creating a comfortable and attractive retail environment, including rationalisation of the High Street Taxi Rank, street tree planting and façade improvements to those buildings that undermine the quality of the Conservation area and the visual impact of exposed service areas and blank walls along Websters Way and Bellingham Lane

Table 1: Urban design principles

Best Practice Principle / Objective	Application to Rayleigh
Ease of movement: A place that is easy to get to and move through. To promote accessibility and local permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before traffic and integrating land uses and transport	Connections between Websters Way the High Street and Mount should be improved, through the potential creation of new routes and enhancement of existing connections. Traffic management measures, junction improvements and removal of street clutter. Provision of new pavements along both sides of Websters Way
Legibility: A place that has a clear image and is easy to understand. To promote legibility through development that provides recognisable routes, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around	Options should provide for enhanced and new direct routes through the town, leading between primary arrival points and attractors on Websters Way, the High Street and around the Mount.
Adaptability: A place that can change easily. To promote adaptability through development that can respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions	Options for new development along and adjacent to the High Street should include flexible building sizes and floor-to-ceiling heights, allowing for adaptation over time in response to changing economic circumstances and the requirements of different users. Space for independent and high street retailers should be provided.
Diversity: A place with variety and choice. To promote diversity and choice through a mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs	A mix of retail uses, cafes and restaurants should be encouraged along the High Street, creating a vibrant town centre at all times of the day. Residential properties could be incorporated above new retail development, encouraging active use of the town centre at all times of the day. New development opportunities and / or a more flexible approach to planning policy in the High Street could also be explored, including reuse of vacant properties. Options could also include the reintroduction of the market to the High Street.

Table 1 continued: Urban design principles

QUESTION 3:

Do you agree with our interpretation of Government best practice principles in terms of how they might be applied in Rayleigh Town centre?.



Figure 36: Street sign, Station Road, Rayleigh

04 The Options

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 In responding to the issues and the established objectives a range of options have been developed. These are presented in Table 2 and then discussed in more detail in following sections. These options directly relate back to the set of issues identified and summarised in section 2.8 of this report.

4.1.2 There are a range of opportunity areas within the town centre and variety of options relating to these, including lower levels of intervention such as cosmetic improvements to shopfronts, through to larger more strategic interventions, such as redevelopment of existing buildings. These are outlined in section 4.2: The Component Options. These have implications for transport and movement in the town, which is then discussed in more detail in section 4.3: Circulation Options.

4.1.3 We also present four spatial options, relating to the level of intervention, change and improvement that may be possible. These are presented in section 4.4: The Spatial Options. It must be recognised that these are not masterplans between which a preferred approach must be selected. They are not mutually exclusive and the preferred option that is taken forward during the next stage is likely to combine elements from each. That is, the preferred option may incorporate a combination of low, medium and higher level interventions. We are seeking your views on the component options and the circulation options to help shape the preferred option.

4.1.4 In section 4.5 we discuss the delivery implications and considerations associated with the different options. This section focuses on the primary development opportunities and the options presented relating to public realm and highways improvements.



Figure 37: Holy Trinity Church, at the top of the High Street

Issues	Options (by level of change and improvement)	
	Low	Medium
1. Quality and setting of conservation area/listed buildings undermined by unsympathetic development and 'street clutter'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationalisation of street clutter • Review existing planning policy to allow for strategic redevelopment which would improve the setting of the conservation area • Shop front improvement scheme (cosmetic) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Façade treatments to unsympathetic buildings, including structural alterations, recladding and refurbishment • Public realm enhancements (surface treatments and new furniture along High Street and Bellingham Lane) to improve the function and quality of the heritage setting
2. Need to introduce a greater range of leisure service providers, further comparison goods floorspace and office floorspace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review existing planning policy to allow for a greater mix of uses within the town centre • Extend market license and improve access through enhanced wayfinding and widening of the offer, including continental style markets • Proactive approach to reusing vacant units for temporary uses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of 'infill' sites for a mix of uses • Relocate market to central location along the High Street • Refurbishment and re-use of Police Station as a new community hub
3. Cluster of leisure and cultural uses around Rayleigh Mount are poorly integrated with the town centre core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve Town Centre Wayfinding • Restrict servicing along Bellingham Lane to certain hours to improve pedestrian conditions • Landscaping and lighting along Bellingham Lane • Cosmetic improvements to rear of properties on Bellingham Lane 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Façade treatments along Bellingham Lane to improve frontage / pedestrian conditions • Create new access routes through redevelopment of sites and associated infill along North side of Bellingham Lane, including creation of new 'courtyard' shopping areas • Landscaping to Rayleigh Mount car park

Table 2: Summary options table. Continued on next spread

Issues	Options (by level of change and improvement)	
	High	Higher
1. Quality and setting of conservation area/listed buildings undermined by unsympathetic development and 'street clutter'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic redevelopment of unsympathetic buildings along the High Street • Shared space scheme along High Street 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential full or part pedestrianisation of High Street and introduction of wider traffic management measures • Redevelopment of large development blocks, including cluster around Police Station
2. Need to introduce a greater range of leisure service providers, further comparison goods floorspace and office floorspace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic redevelopment of existing buildings, new courtyard retail / leisure areas and associated rationalisation of car parking • Reconfigure and potential partial (or full) relocations of taxi rank to facilitate extended public realm improvements and new permanent market location on the High Street 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major mixed-use redevelopment at southern end of High Street, creating a new 'anchor' and encouraging footfall along length of the High Street. Including potential for new residential development in town centre, increasing footfall and town centre viability • Potential full or part time pedestrianisation of High Street area for market activities throughout the week
3. Cluster of leisure and cultural uses around Rayleigh Mount are poorly integrated with the town centre core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential shared space treatments along Bellingham Lane and also at the entrance to the community centre • Create new access routes through redevelopment of infill sites and High Street frontage between Bellingham Lane and the Mount, including creation of new 'courtyard' shopping areas 	

QUESTION 4a:

Which of the options outlined above do you prefer? Are there any other options that should be considered?

Issues	Options (by level of change and improvement)	
	Low	Medium
4. Traffic dominated, service access nature of Websters Way represents a poor quality environment and arrival to the town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landscaping and lighting along northern side of Websters Way to screen blank facades and service areas Gates and fencing to screen service areas and define the public / private realm, and create new footway along length of Websters Way and Bull Lane (Websters Way) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Façade treatments to blank walls, including creation of new active frontages at ground floor level Development on 'infill' sites to create new active frontages Enhance gateway locations, potentially through junction improvements Extend surface car park to provide new replacement car parking lost through infill development on service areas along Websters Way
5. Pedestrian movement hindered or uncatered for in some locations through a combination of vehicle dominated junction forms, street clutter and guardrailing, narrow or missing pavements, or poorly defined routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance existing routes from Websters Way through to the High Street through surface treatments, lighting and wayfinding signage Removal of pedestrian guardrailing and rationalisation of street furniture to improve pedestrian circulation Management of servicing and rationalisation of on-street parking and taxi-rank provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Façade treatments and infill development opportunities to improve quality and surveillance of existing routes between Websters Way and the High Street. Including creation of new active frontages at ground floor level Walking focussed improvements at junctions
6. Congestion along Websters Way and approaches into the town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain existing capacity for vehicular movement whilst improving conditions for walking and cycling through public realm treatments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider minor capacity improvements to junctions at approaches to town centre, for example those already under consideration at Church Street

Table 2 continued: Summary options table.

Issues	Options (by level of change and improvement)	
	High	Higher
4. Traffic dominated, service access nature of Websters Way represents a poor quality environment and arrival to the town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelopment of larger properties between the High Street and Websters Way to create continuous street frontage and improve pedestrian connections between the High Street and Websters Way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of multi-storey car park on Websters Way fronted with active development units • Redevelopment of block fronting Eastwood Road for mixed-use development • Creation of improved, direct link between High Street and King Georges Fields
5. Pedestrian movement hindered or uncatered for in some locations through a combination of vehicle dominated junction forms, street clutter and guardrailing, narrow or missing pavements, or poorly defined routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelopment at strategic locations to create new, direct walking routes • Reconfigure the taxi rank and bus stop to provide high quality walking routes, commensurate with the heritage setting, from Crown Hill to the High Street with the possible introduction of formal crossing facilities and a shared space treatment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential part or full pedestrianisation of High Street
6. Congestion along Websters Way and approaches into the town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the introduction of signalised traffic control at all junctions on approaches to the town centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce traffic management measures that encourage through traffic to use alternative routes outside the town centre

QUESTION 4b:

Which of the options outlined above do you prefer? Are there any other options that should be considered?

4.2 The Component Options

4.2.1 The following sections expand on the options summarised in the table above. They are presented in the same order and presented thus:

- Enhance the appearance of the town centre;
- Introducing new / mixed uses in the town centre;
- Improving connections between the High Street, Rayleigh Mount and the Mill;
- Improving the quality and appearance of Websters Way;
- Walking and public realm improvements; and
- Improving public transport attractiveness (as one measure to reduce traffic movement and congestion).

4.2.2 There are however overlaps between some of the options. We have therefore sought to avoid repetition and only present options once. This will help us to identify a set of preferred options to take forward. It should also be noted that the options presented in this section with regard to transport, movement and public realm are explored in more detail in section 4.3: Circulation Options.

Enhance Appearance

4.2.3 Options to improve the appearance of the town centre include cosmetic improvements to shop fronts and facades, streetscape and public realm schemes, and the redevelopment of unsympathetic, under-used or unsightly buildings. Cosmetic improvements, including painting and planting would represent a potential low intervention. Shop front improvement schemes and associated policy guidance could be prepared to guide this, supporting and strengthening existing policy SAT8 in the Conservation Area SPD (2007). Areas of particular sensitivity which would benefit from such treatments include the top of the High Street (between the junctions with Bellingham Lane and Church Street) and the rear of properties along Bellingham Lane. This location would also benefit from a general 'tidying-up' of servicing arrangements. The potential for green walls, including the use of climbers (Figure 41), could be promoted to hide blank walls fronting onto streets, such as along Websters Way, although this would require regular maintenance.

4.2.4 There are also a number of buildings in the town centre which have been identified as having a negative impact on the quality and setting of the conservation area, such as the Police Station and former Tesco store. These could be refurbished and enhanced through recladding (Figure 38). Equally, potential for redevelopment may exist, as explored in sections below. Current planning policy may need to be revised to allow for improvements to buildings, ensuring they respond sensitively to the High Street and maximise the qualities of the conservation area.



Figure 38: Potential for recladding and refurbishment of old buildings, as at Kings Road, London



Figure 39: Potential for shop front improvements and public realm improvements, encouraging outdoor dining

QUESTION 5:

Should we promote a shop front improvement scheme and encourage facade treatments, or should redevelopment be promoted?



Figure 40: Potential for landscaping and public realm treatments



Figure 41: Climbers and green walls could be used to enhance the appearance of buildings and blank walls, as at Westfield in London



Figure 42: As a temporary, short-term measure, the blank facades of buildings along Websters Way could be screened, as in this example from Berlin

Introduce new/mixed uses in the town centre:

4.2.5 Potential may exist to either reuse or redevelop some existing uses, backland or infill sites to provide for new retail, leisure, employment and residential floorspace within the town centre. Any new development that does take place should be flexible and adaptable so that it can respond to future circumstances. This is an important design consideration and is even more so given the current economic circumstances (and policy changes set out in PPS4). The development opportunities are set out below, and discussed in more detail in following sections of the report:

- Creation of new active development frontage along Websters Way, with enhanced links through to the High Street;
- Potential redevelopment between the High Street and Websters Way, providing new premises and enhancing the quality of the built form, particularly within the conservation area;
- Creation of new courtyard retail area providing links from the High Street through to the Mount;
- Restructuring and redevelopment around the Police Station and Somerfield store to the south of the High Street.

QUESTION 6:

Should new development be encouraged in the town centre to provide opportunities for new retail, leisure and other uses?

4.2.6 Other opportunities to increase the mix and diversity of uses could be explored through proactive policy measures. At present, non-retail uses are restricted from locating within the primary retail area, i.e.: between Eastwood Road and Holy Trinity Church. This however means there are few uses within this area that contribute to an evening economy. The Councils Retail and Leisure Study (2008) identified a need for restaurants and cafes in the town centre. Relaxing controls on primary and secondary retail areas could allow for a greater mix of uses within the High Street and thus contribute to its vibrancy throughout the day.

4.2.7 A proactive approach could also be taken towards the reuse of vacant buildings, potentially encouraging temporary reuse of space during the economic downturn. The Communities and Local Government (CLG) document 'Looking After our Town Centres' (2009) provides guidance. Temporary uses could include arts and gallery space or community uses such as further education, training, performance or meeting space. This will have overall benefits for the visual appearance of the town and use of the town, creating activity throughout the day and having spin-off benefits for other businesses. Local Development Orders can be used to allow for change of use in a flexible and efficient manner.

QUESTION 7:

Should the Council review its planning policies and use of Local Development Orders to encourage a greater mix of uses, even if only on a temporary basis?

4.2.8 Associated with the creation of a vibrant and diverse High Street is the operation and location of the town market. The license for the market was extended for a period of seven years in 2003 and thus expires in March 2010. This could be relocated to a more centrally located position, potentially along the High Street, increasing the intensity of uses and activities in the centre of the town. This may require the rationalisation or permanent relocation of the taxi rank (potentially to Websters Way, the Railway Station or elsewhere) or a temporary closure/relocation of this on market days to provide the space for erection of market stalls. The existing market could then be fully utilised as a car park or as an opportunity site for development.

4.2.9 Relocating the market to the High Street may be contingent upon resolving traffic management impacts, in particular the impacts on bus routing and access to all important town centre car parks during weekend retail peaks. It is however likely that the market could be accommodated within the High Street with only minimum impact on traffic flows as the street width is relatively generous.

QUESTION 8:

Should the Market be relocated into a more centrally accessible location, such as the high Street?

Area around the Police Station and Somerfield Store

4.2.10 To the south of the High Street a major opportunity for redevelopment and restructuring exists, focused on the Police Station and adjacent buildings, including the shops, offices and flats fronting the High Street, the Council car park to the rear and the Somerfield store on Eastwood Road (Figure 43).

4.2.11 The Police Station is temporarily being used as a jail and many of the adjacent retail and commercial units are vacant (Figure 45). These could be improved through facade treatments, refurbishment or redevelopment.

4.2.12 If redevelopment was considered to be the preferred option, it would allow scope to reconsider the location of the foodstore. Relocation of this from Eastwood Road to the High Street would strengthen the High Street frontage and pedestrian footfall between the top and bottom of the High Street.

4.2.13 Any redevelopment scheme would need to consider the appropriate mix of uses, including residential, to create an active and viable development scheme. The location and provision of car parking would also need careful consideration.

4.2.14 Our options for this area are presented on the facing page: these are indicative ideas and need to be considered in more detail before progressing.

QUESTION 9:

Which of the options illustrated on page 46 do you prefer?

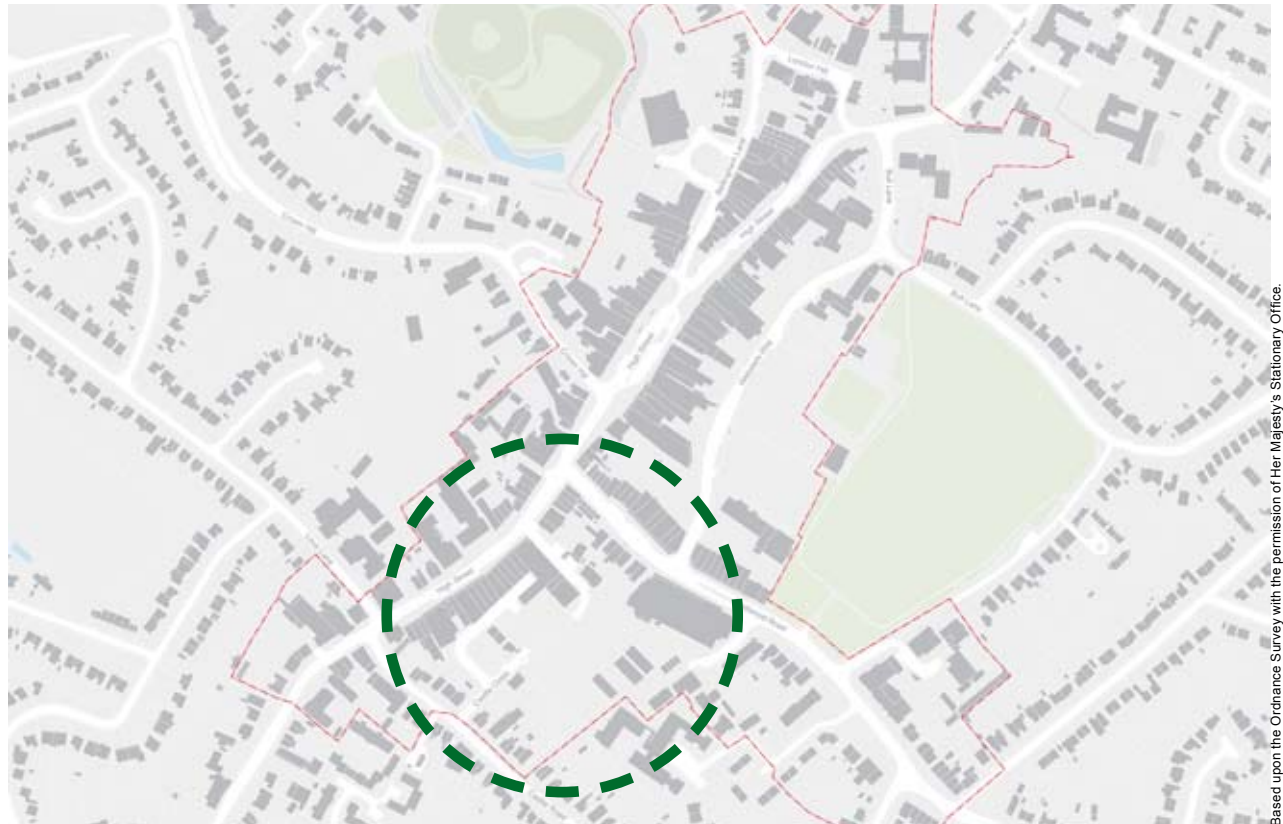


Figure 43: Location Plan: Police Station area development opportunity



Figure 44: Somerfield store, viewed from Websters Way



Figure 45: Police Station and adjacent buildings



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Figure 46: Option 1

Option 1 - Key Aspects:

- Cosmetic improvements to the facade of the existing Somerfield foodstore to improve the quality of the street frontage along Eastwood Road
- Paving, lighting and tree planting to improve walking conditions between the Council car park and Eastwood Road



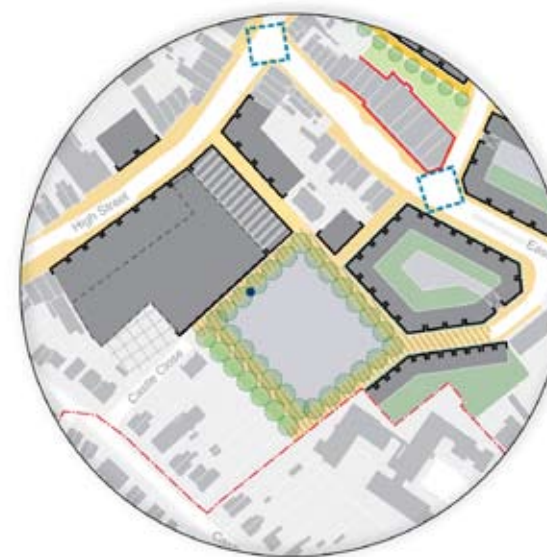
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Figure 47: Option 2

Option 2 - Key Aspects:

As with option 1 but also including:

- Recladding and refurbishment of the former Police Station for re-use as a new community hub acting as an attractor and anchor for the southern end of the High Street. This could include a new or relocated health centre, library, education and training facilities
- Shop front improvement schemes and encouragement of temporary uses in vacant units alongside police station



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Figure 48: Option 3

Option 3 - Key Aspects:

- Refurbishment of former Police station as in option 2
- Relocation of library into new community hub and redevelopment of current library site for retail and residential purposes
- New town centre foodstore with High Street frontage and other modern retail units. Existing foodstore redeveloped for mixed use, including commercial and residential (Figure 49)
- Infill development to create safe, active and well defined streets and spaces
- Landscaping of car park. Development may also require additional car parking to be provided in the town centre

	Study area boundary
	Public realm improvements
	Public open space
	Landscaping
	Surface car parking
	Shared space
	Servicing area
	Fencing
	Walking focussed improvements
	Signalised traffic control
	Facade improvements
	New active frontage
	Refurbished development
	Planning application
	New development
	Potential food store
	Potential multi-storey car park
	Private green space
	Potential location for taxi ranks

Key to all plans in section 4.2 of this report



Figure 49: Potential for new retail-led mixed use development on the police station site, reflecting the grain and rhythm of the historic built form, as at Chichester

The High Street taxi rank ('Boots Lagoon')

4.2.15 The town centre taxi rank ('Boots lagoon') comprises a large area of parking (Figure 50). It is visually intrusive and takes space away from the pedestrian, reducing the quality and enjoyment of the town centre retail offer (Figures 51-52). It was considered during the consultation exercise as an opportunity for rationalisation or relocation. Two options are presented here, both of which include public realm improvements and new public spaces. Transport and wider public realm issues are discussed in more detail in section 4.3.

4.2.16 Our options for this area are presented on the facing page. Please note these are indicative ideas and would need to be considered in more detail before they could be progressed.

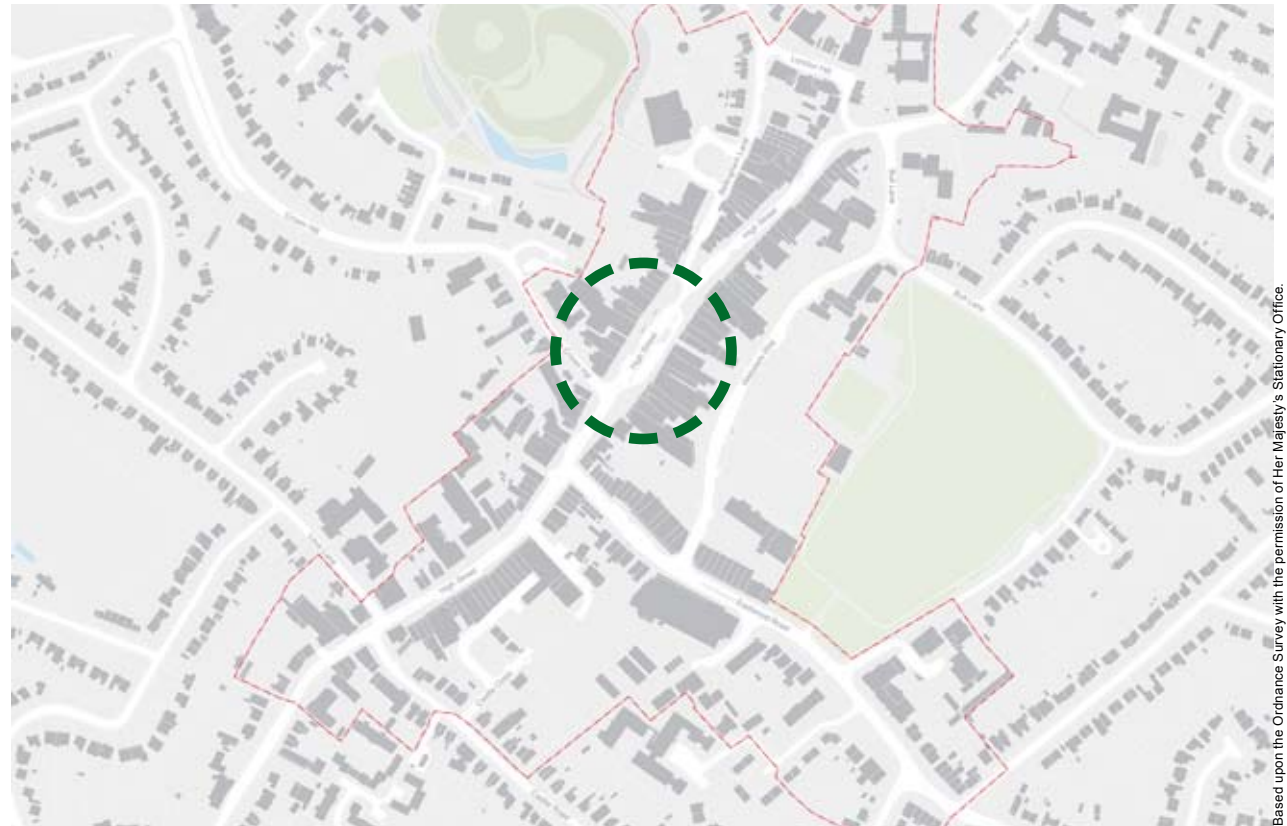


Figure 50: Location Plan: The High Street taxi rank

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QUESTION 10:

Which of the options illustrated on page 49 do you prefer?



Figure 51: 'Boots Lagoon' taxi rank as existing



Figure 52: 'Boots Lagoon' taxi rank as existing



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Figure 53: Option 1

Option 1 - Key Aspects:

- Reduced number of taxi waiting spaces within the 'Boots Lagoon' area
- Restrictions on taxi waiting within the actual High Street carriageway
- Landscaping and public realm improvements, including creation of increased area of public space



Figure 54: Option 2

Option 2 - Key Aspects:

- Removal of all taxi waiting spaces, requiring relocation to alternative locations, potentially including the railway station
- Public realm and landscaping of area, creating a new central public space in the town centre (Figure 55)
- Potential use of public space for market stalls, including relocation of current market and introduction of additional markets, such as continental and farmers markets (Figure 56).



Figure 55: Potential exists to create new outdoor space



Figure 56: Potential exists to relocate the market to the heart of the town centre

Improve connections to Rayleigh Mount and Mill:

4.2.17 The Leisure and Cultural uses on Bellingham Lane are a great asset for the town, although they are poorly connected back to the High Street. The exposed 'backs' along Bellingham Lane also undermine the setting of these uses. Opportunities to improve these connections involve:

- Enhancing signage, lighting and public realm treatments to increase awareness and setting of these uses. The public space at the junction of the High Street and Bellingham Lane could be the focus for such interventions.
- Maximise existing routes as access points, such as the link through Berrys Arcade.
- Creating new access arrangements through potential development opportunities, which could allow for improved linkages, enhancement to the quality of the townscape (where existing buildings are considered as detrimental to the quality of the conservation area) and provision of new floorspace providing for needs set out in the employment, retail & leisure studies.

4.2.18 These connections are focussed on the links between the Mount and the High Street. Equally, there are potential improvements to be made between the Mount and the railway station. This is the most direct link between the station and High Street and although it may not be the main movement corridor for residents it does provide an important connection, particularly for visitors. Whilst there may be concerns at increasing footflow along this route (particular given the potential impact on residential uses along Castle Drive) opportunities may exist to formalise this, which could include signage and/ or improved lighting.



Figure 57: Current route to the Mount along Bellingham Lane



Figure 59: The Mount



Figure 58: The Mill arts and leisure centre



Figure 60: The current entrance to the Mount

Opportunities between the High Street and Mount

4.2.19 To the rear of properties on the High Street an opportunity exists to create attractive and intimate new retail courtyard spaces, providing space for new shops, restaurants and cafes, as well as residential. This could take place on the existing area of hard standing but could potentially be extended to include redevelopment of buildings on the High Street frontage, which the Conservation Area Appraisal (2007) rates as having a negative impact on the quality and setting of the conservation area (Figure 61). Coupled with landscaping to car parking areas and a formalised entrance to the Mount, this could provide attractive new connections between the High Street and cluster of cultural uses in the town centre.

4.2.20 Any development here would be subject to a range of delivery considerations (see section 4.5). At the lower end of the scale, measures such as facade treatments, public realm improvements, landscaping, lighting and signage might be employed as a means to improve connections.

4.2.21 Our options for this area are presented on the facing page. Please note these are indicative ideas and would need to be considered in more detail before they could be progressed.

QUESTION 11:

Which of the options illustrated on page 52 do you prefer?

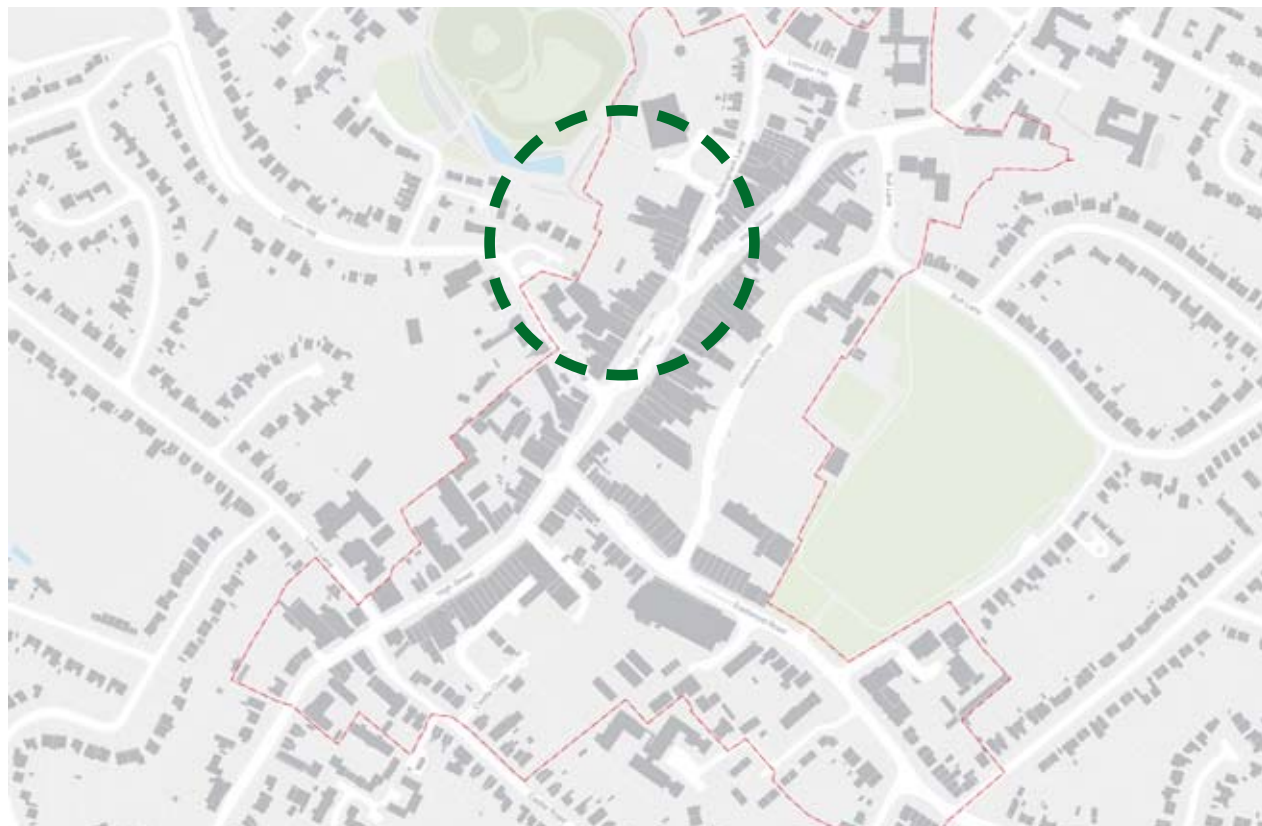


Figure 61: Location Plan: Development opportunities between the High Street, Mount and Mill



Figure 62: Bellingham Lane street frontage



Figure 63: Area behind Bellingham Lane (source: bing.com)



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Figure 64: Option 1

Option 1 - Key Aspects:

- Cosmetic facade treatments and shop front improvements to properties along the High Street and Bellingham Lane
- Improvements to paving, lighting, tree planting and signage along the High Street and Bellingham Lane



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Figure 65: Option 2

Option 2 - Key Aspects:

As with option 1 but also including:

- Small scale retail and residential courtyard development on current backland site to rear of properties on High Street (Figure 69)
- Landscaping of the Mount car park, with formalised pedestrian routes, lighting and improved entrances to the Mount



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Figure 66: Option 3

Option 3 - Key Aspects:

As with option 2, but incorporating:

- Larger retail, residential and commercial redevelopment of properties on High Street and area of hard standing behind, creating larger retail footprints and a larger central public space (figure 67)
- Creation of legible and continuous street frontage along the High Street, sensitively responding to the quality of the conservation area
- Wider public realm improvements to the High Street (as discussed in section 4.3)



Figure 67: Potential for intimate, mixed use courtyard space, as at Pied Bull Yard, London



Figure 68: Entrance to Pied Bull Yard, London



Figure 69: Smaller scale courtyard retail environments, as at The Spires, High Barnet, which provides an attractive and seamless retail connection between the High Street, Library and town centre car park

Improving the quality and appearance of Websters Way:

4.2.22 Websters Way suffers from 'exposed backs', lack of footway width (and in cases footways altogether), large areas of parking and few connections with the High Street. It is one of the main arrival points into the centre yet also acts as its servicing and parking 'back door'. A range of opportunities potentially exist:

- Landscaping and streetscape improvements, including tree planting, lighting and new footways and paving. This would also involve enhancing existing access routes between the High Street and Websters Way, and potentially formalising some of the small lanes where the public realm is poorly defined (such as through pub gardens and rear yards)
- Strategic interventions to create new links between the High Street and Websters Way, including redevelopment of some unsympathetic development on the High Street (which currently undermines the historic assets within the town and also undermines the Websters Way frontage).
- Creation of new active frontage along Websters Way, which again may require some strategic interventions.
- Rationalisation of Websters Way car park to create active development frontage, although this would also need to respond positively to the King George Playing Fields.

- Improve gateways into Websters Way at Eastwood Road junction, particularly paving widths, which may though require remodelling of the junction or potential redevelopment of adjacent buildings.

4.2.23 Any improvements to walking facilities on Websters Way will need to consider impacts on the highways network for the town as a whole and, in particular impacts on bus journey times and for traffic movement through the town generally.



Figure 70: Rear service areas, Websters Way



Figure 71: Websters Way

Development opportunities along Websters Way

4.2.24 A primary area of opportunity for new development in the town centre is focused on the former Tesco Store (Figures 72-74). This is rated within the Conservation Area Appraisal (2007) as having a very negative impact on the quality and setting of the conservation area. This could be improved through facade treatments and screening, though opportunities also exist for a range of development interventions, providing new retail floorspace, an attractive new street environment and improved connections between Websters Way, the car park and the High Street. The delivery implications of these options need to be considered (see section 4.5).

4.2.25 Our options for this area are presented on the facing page. Please note these are indicative ideas and would need to be considered in more detail before they could be progressed.

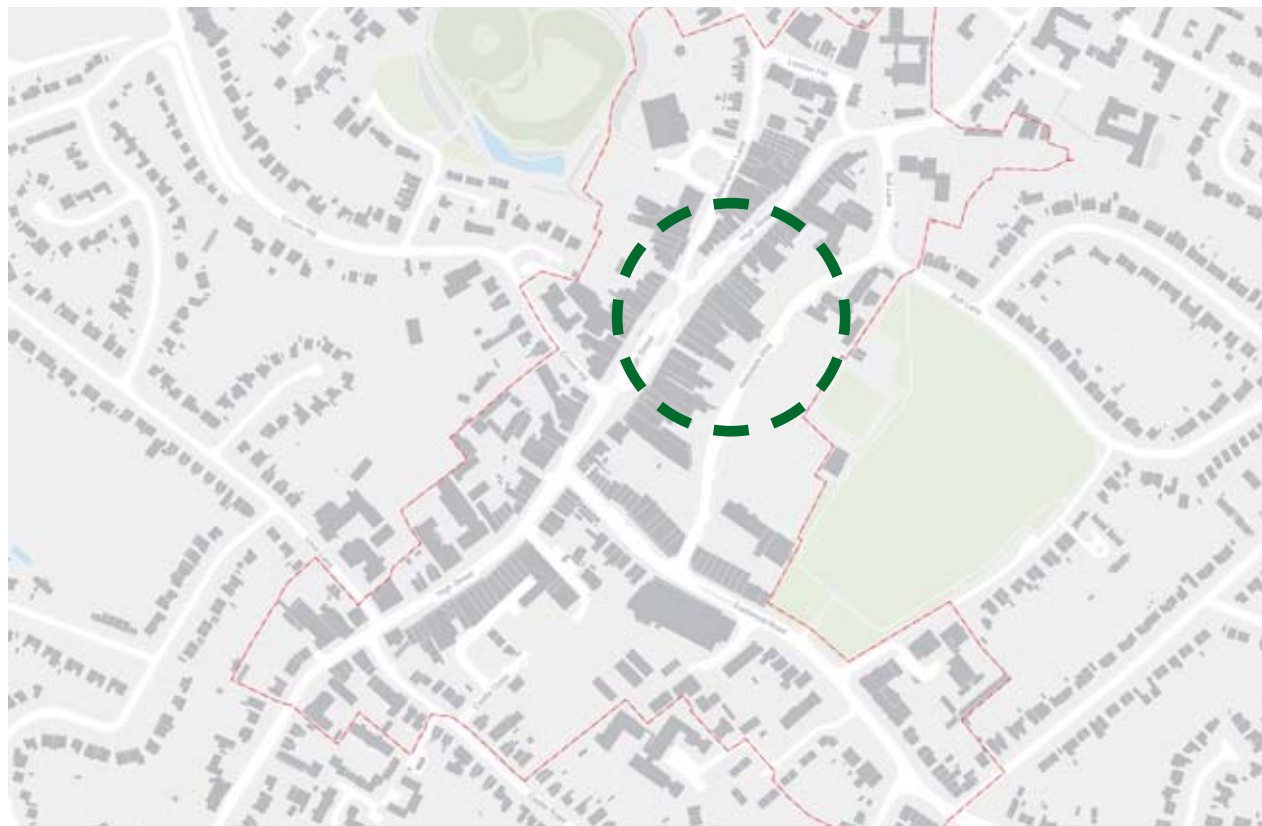


Figure 72: Location Plan: Development opportunities along Websters Way



Figure 73: Rear of the former Tesco store on Websters Way



Figure 74: Front of the former Tesco store on the High Street

QUESTION 12:

Which of the options illustrated on page 56 do you prefer?



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Figure 75: Option 1

Option 1 - Key Aspects:

- Screening of access and servicing through gating and fencing areas and associated creation of new footpath along northern side of Websters Way
- Public realm, lighting and landscaping along routes between Websters Way and the High Street
- Cosmetic facade treatments and opening up of building frontages on pedestrian routes between the High Street and Websters Way, creating safe and attractive spaces



Figure 76: Option 2

Option 2 - Key Aspects:

As with option 1 but including:

- Facade improvements to exposed blank walls of properties on Websters Way and unattractive buildings on the High Street. Could include new cladding, painting or planting of green walls
- Small infill development on parking and servicing areas, formalising pedestrian routes between Websters Way and the High Street and creating new building fronts onto Websters Way
- Shops may require timed / regulated servicing along Websters Way or the High Street resulting from the loss of servicing areas. Compensatory car parking may also need to be provided elsewhere (potentially along Websters Way)

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Figure 77: Option 3

Option 3 - Key Aspects:

- Redevelopment of former Tesco store with new, appropriately sized retail floorplates, creating new development on the High Street and Websters Way. Would need to be sensitively designed to respond to the conservation area
- Potential for incorporating a mix of uses, including commercial and residential
- Strengthens pedestrian links between Websters Way and High Street by formalising routes between the two (Figure 79)
- Provides for internal, screened servicing, but would require compensatory car parking elsewhere (potentially along Websters Way)

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Figure 78: Potential for new retail-led mixed use development, complementing the scale and form of the High Street, as in this example from Staines



Figure 79: Potential for retail lined pedestrian routes, linking the High Street and Websters Way, as in Staines



Figure 80: Mixed use retail and residential development reflecting historic character of the town, Lion & Lamb Yard, Farnham

Development opportunities at Rayleigh Lanes

4.2.26 As outlined in section 2.6, permission has recently been granted on the Rayleigh Lanes site, converting the Snooker Hall into residential use. The adjacent site also benefits from a permission for residential use, though this is due to expire soon. Should this expire, then the opportunity exists to re-examine the potential of this site and its surroundings, providing wider public realm improvements relating primarily to pedestrian links between Websters Way and the High Street at this point (Figures 81-83). As with the options presented above, lower interventions include the screening of servicing and access areas to minimise the visual impact of these.

4.2.27 Our options for this area are presented on the facing page. Please note these are indicative ideas and would need to be considered in more detail before they could be progressed.

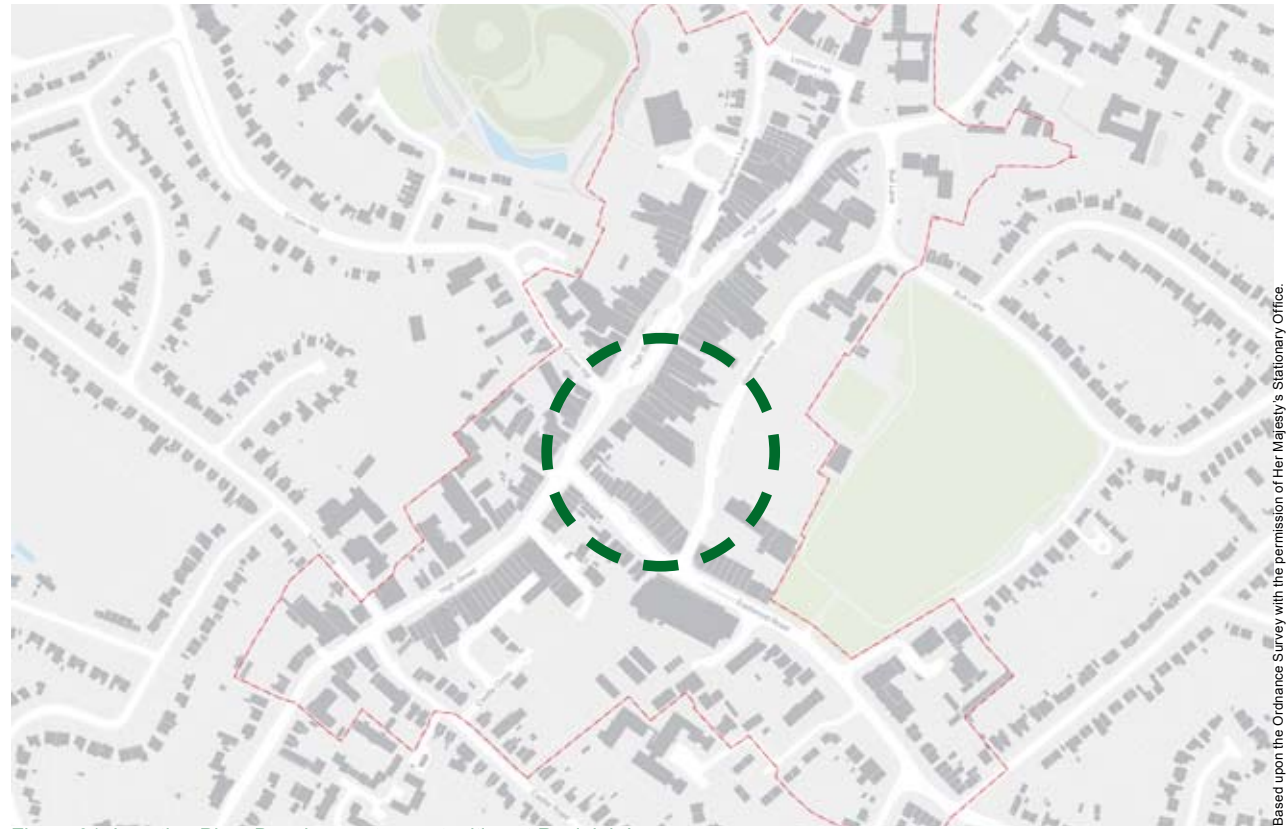


Figure 81: Location Plan: Development opportunities at Rayleigh Lanes

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QUESTION 13:

Which of the options illustrated on page 59 do you prefer?



Figure 82: Rayleigh Lanes and adjacent site



Figure 83: Pedestrian route alongside Rayleigh Lanes



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Figure 84: Option 1

Option 1 - Key Aspects:

- Screening of access and servicing areas (through fencing and gating) and associated creation of footpath along northern side of Websters Way
- Recently permitted development of Rayleigh lanes takes place, with associated facade improvements to Websters Way entrance
- Landscaping, lighting and paving improvements, formalising pedestrian connection between Websters Way and the High Street



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Figure 85: Option 2

Option 2 - Key Aspects:

Redevelopment of Rayleigh Lanes building as per option 1 but also including:

- Redevelopment of adjacent site for a mix of retail, commercial and residential uses (Figures 86-87)
- Landscaping of servicing and parking area to rear of properties on Eastwood Road, including removal of brick wall alongside pedestrian link, improving safety and quality of this space.
- Facade treatments to properties on Eastwood Road
- Will require compensatory car parking to be provided



Figure 86: Attractive mews style development, Cambridge



Figure 87: Safe, residential lined pedestrian routes, Greenwich

Car parking provision on Websters Way

4.2.28 The options presented above are likely to result in the need for compensatory car parking to be provided in the town centre. Websters Way is the main town centre car park and, given both the current highways network and the opportunities presented to improve pedestrian connections between Websters Way and the High Street, it is considered the most logical place in the town centre to provide replacement parking spaces (Figure 88). We explore the provision of additional surface parking and a new multi-storey car park. Both have associated delivery considerations and are discussed in section 4.5.

4.2.29 Our options for this area are presented on the facing page. Please note these are indicative ideas and would need to be considered in more detail before they could be progressed.

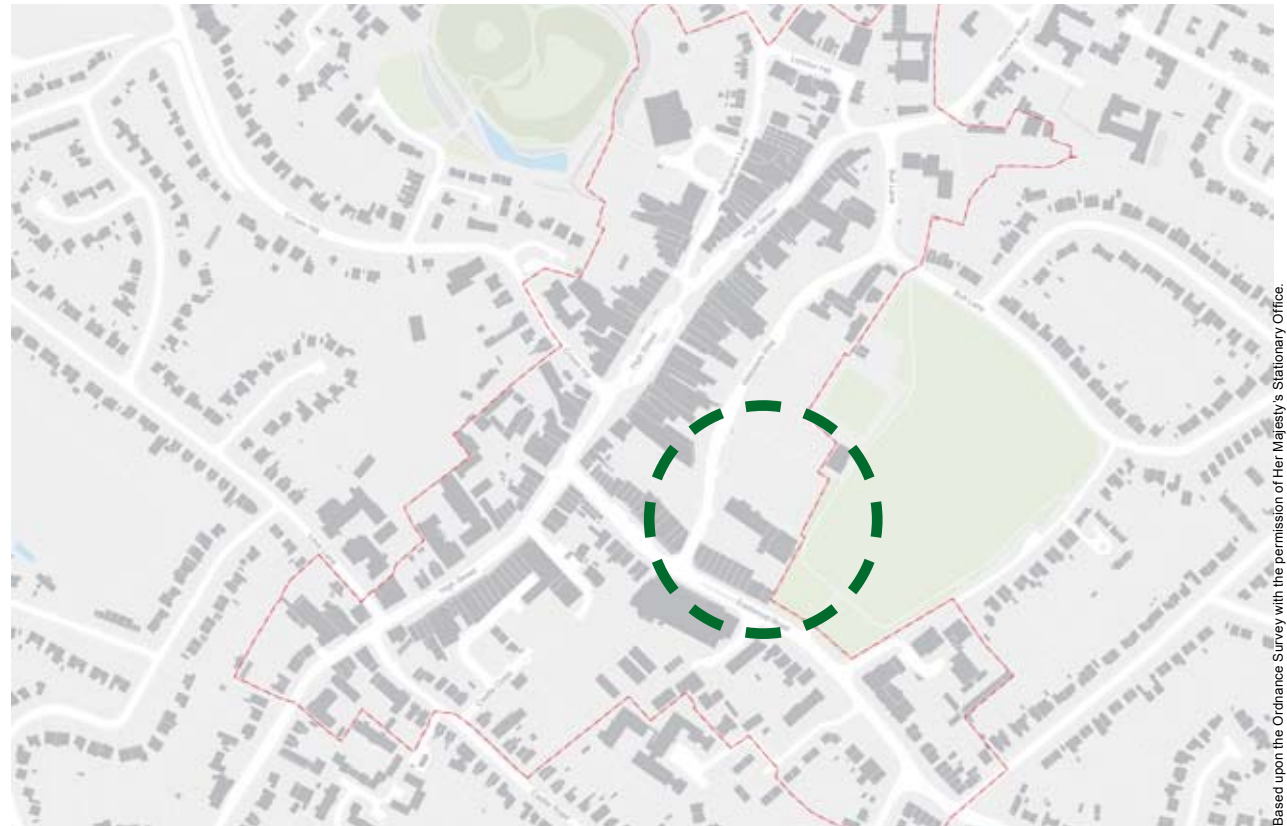


Figure 88: Location Plan: Car parking provision on Websters Way

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QUESTION 14:

Which of the options illustrated on page 61 do you prefer?



Figure 89: Websters Way car park



Figure 90: Websters Way car park

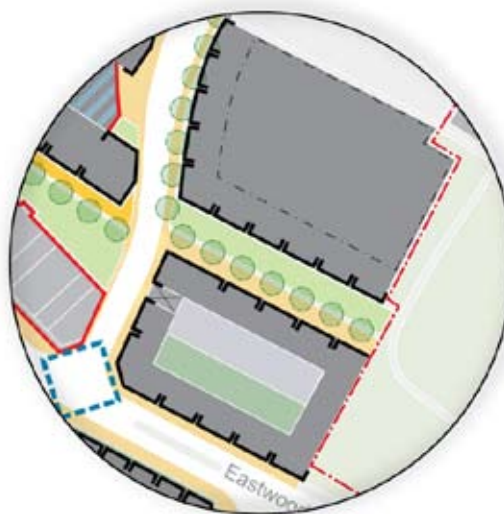


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Figure 91: Option 1

Option 1 - Key Aspects:

- Redevelopment of existing businesses and health centre immediately south of existing car park to provide for an enlarged car park area
- Relocation of health centre into potential new community hub within refurbished Police Station (see earlier options)
- Improvements to pedestrian crossing conditions at junction of Eastwood Road and Websters Way



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Figure 92: Option 2

Option 2 - Key Aspects:

- Redevelopment of existing businesses and health centre immediately south of existing car park to provide for an enlarged car park area, comprising a new multi-storey car park.
- Multi-storey car park wrapped with commercial activities to create an active street front and screen car parking from view (Figure 93)
- Refurbishment and redevelopment of properties on Eastwood Road, including new links to and development addressing King Georges Fields (Figure 94), connecting to wider pedestrian route to the High Street
- Signal controlled junction improvements at junction of Eastwood Road and Websters Way



Figure 93: Sensitive designed multi-storey car park, hidden behind shops and housing, Norwich



Figure 94: New development wrapping the car park could also provide a positive frontage to King Georges Field

Walking and public realm improvements:

4.2.30 Walking facilities are generally well provided for across the town, although in response to traffic engineered junction designs, pedestrian crossing points are set back from the junction and result in some convoluted movements for pedestrians. Public realm interventions should focus on small-scale improvements to the efficiency and quality of walking facilities. It is likely this will involve the reconfiguration of roundabout junctions to the west of the town core so as to re-provide direct pedestrian crossing facilities and give pedestrians a higher level of priority, without having undue impacts on bus movements or traffic flow.

4.2.31 There are also number of exposed 'backs' to properties in the town, particularly along Websters Way and Bellingham Lane. As a short-term measure these areas could be properly defined, clearly separating the public from the private/semi-public realms. Generally streetscape improvements could be implemented, including landscaping and façade treatments. Ad-hoc parking and servicing arrangements could also be formalised, including the use of measures to limit servicing to particular times of the day.

4.2.32 The High Street has benefited from public realm investment relatively recently. This has created relatively wide and comfortable shopping environments for pedestrians. However, there are locations where pedestrian guardrailing hinders pedestrian movement (such as at the Crown Hill / High Street junction) and also where the proliferation of disorganised street furniture (bollards, traffic signage, lighting columns and bins) undermines the quality of the public realm and surrounding townscape (such as at the junction of the High Street and Church Street outside Holy Trinity Church). Opportunities may exist to rationalise the amount of 'street clutter' in the town. The consultation undertaken also drew attention to the opportunity to pedestrianise, or part pedestrianise the High Street area, though this may have wider implications for traffic movement, servicing and activity throughout the day.

4.2.33 Further there are also opportunities to improve development frontages and the relationship of buildings with the street.

4.2.34 Options are presented in more detail in section 4.3, where we also ask questions relating to public realm, movement and circulation.

Improve public transport attractiveness:

4.2.35 Given the arrangement of traffic flows through the town centre bus routes use the High Street, Websters Way and Eastwood Road. The condition of the public realm around the main bus stop on Websters Way is satisfactory, however the overall lack of active frontage (exposed backs) and associated levels of passive surveillance significantly detract from the quality and safety of this setting. Equally, although outside the immediate study area, consideration should also be given to the setting the quality of the interchange between the railway station and adjacent bus stop facilities. Improvements here that encourage public transport use should be encouraged and could include a mix of new walking facilities and vehicle speed management, public realm 'gateway' improvements, and wayfinding/legibility signage.

4.2.35 Options are presented in more detail in section 4.3, where we also ask questions relating to public realm, movement and circulation.

4.3 Circulation Options

4.3.1 This section presents options for change and improvement relating to movement and the public realm. The options are predicated on the understanding that transport and development are not only linked, but that transport must serve development envisaged in the town, not dominate it. Transport also has a vital contribution to make to the achievement of broader sustainability objectives, such as the achievement of carbon emission targets and greater social inclusion.

4.3.2 Rayleigh is located at the convergence of a number of strategic routes that bring people to and through the town, and support it as the districts primary town centre. The future success of the town is therefore intrinsically linked to the ability to maintain and enhance town centre access by all modes of travel in support of the town centre vision.

4.3.3 New development has a vital role to play in encouraging more sustainable patterns of growth and change. Development should be designed and laid out in a way that facilitates and emphasises movement by less polluting and healthier modes, so that people will more readily choose walking, cycling and public transport over private car trips. To minimise the impact of new development on the public realm and pedestrian environment, changes in the number and locations of long and short stay parking in the town may need to be considered, as well as the manner in which buildings are serviced and deliveries made.

4.3.4 In addition to the manner in which the town is to evolve and grow, there are a number of public realm interventions that can support the vision. By rationalising and removing excess items of street furniture, and by placing items in the correct place, it will be possible to greatly improve movement along and across streets and access around the town, particularly for pedestrians. It will also markedly improve people's perception of the town as an attractive place to be and encourage people to inhabit the public realm more often, for longer periods of time, and for a greater range of necessary, social and spontaneous activities. Similarly, the removal of guardrail will remove feelings of severance and vastly improve the directness, legibility, efficiency and quality of walking journeys and improve the effectiveness of the town's retail circuit.

4.3.5 There are four transport circulation options that have been considered for the town. These are: (1) Working with the existing network; (2) Partial Pedestrianisation of the High Street; (3) Full Pedestrianisation of the High Street; and (4) Two way working on the High Street. These are illustrated (Figure 97) and discussed in turn below.

Working with the existing network

4.3.6 As noted in section 2.7 above, a modified one-way system along the High Street was introduced as part of a Department for Transport (DfT) pilot project ten years ago. Websters Way forms an important distributor route around the town core. Traffic throughout the town is controlled via a series of mini roundabouts to the east on the High Street, and a signalised junction is in place to the west. The arrangement of junctions and form of control is appropriate to the volume and nature of traffic using the towns streets in the context of the constraints imposed by the layout of the town itself. Without pursuing changes to traffic circulation, it is possible to institute a wide variety of tangible and achievable transport improvements.

'Shared Space' transformation for the High Street

4.3.7 There is an opportunity to build upon the success of the DfT pilot project and to transform the High Street into a new and improved landmark 'shared space' (Figure 97, image 1, and example Figures 100 & 104). This could involve widening footways, possible reductions in kerb heights (or even their removal), installation of new seating, trees, public art and lighting elements (Figure 101). This would not involve any reductions in traffic or buses through the street, but rather would manage the speeds and behaviour of vehicles to levels that would create a much safer and higher amenity street environment for all users. These improvements would also result in higher footfalls past retail premises due to an increase in the number and

duration of stay of pedestrians attracted to a higher quality and much more usable space.

4.3.8 As part of this transformation, the 'Boots Lagoon' taxi rank can also be transformed into a functioning urban space that could possibly provide for relocated market stalls on certain days of the week. This would involve the rationalisation of the under utilised taxi ranks and the possible re-provision of spaces in nearby locations.

Pedestrian crossing improvements to the town's roundabouts

4.3.9 The existing design of the towns roundabouts has favoured the fast and efficient movement of vehicles over that of pedestrians. This has impacted on the desirability of walking as the primary mode of movement within the town, and may constrain pedestrian footfall to particular areas. In order to increase the number of walking trips, and to support the towns continued economic and social development, it is critical that the directness, efficiency and attractiveness of walking journeys be improved.

4.3.10 The towns roundabouts are a particular issue for pedestrians, and one option is that pedestrian crossing facilities on junction approaches be moved closer to the junction so as to line up with logical and direct pedestrian walking routes. These roundabouts can also be designed as critical gateways to the town core and important landmarks in their own right (Figures 102 & 103).

Junction capacity improvements at either end of Websters Way

4.3.11 Websters Way is a critical traffic route around the town and main access point to the town centre car park. Junctions at either end are under considerable pressure and small scale improvements would markedly improve traffic circulation (Figure 97, point c). The Church Street and High Street junction has been identified as a particular issue. This is a priority controlled Junction and the High Street and Hockley Road is signalised. A study undertaken by Mouchel Ltd has clearly proven that by adding a right turn lane from the High Street into Bull Lane (Websters Way), and by bringing the Church Street and Bull Lane (Websters Way) junctions with the High Street under signal control, that existing congestion at this junction can be relieved. There is sufficient width between buildings to provide for this improvement without materially impacting upon the pedestrian environment.

4.3.12 Websters Way and Eastwood Road roundabout is also very congested at peak times. Improving capacity at this junction would improve circulation. Physical constraints at this point may however mean that signalisation is the only option to pursue.



Figure 95: Existing pedestrian routes between Websters Way and the High Street



Figure 96: Guardrail at the Crown Hill / High Street junction

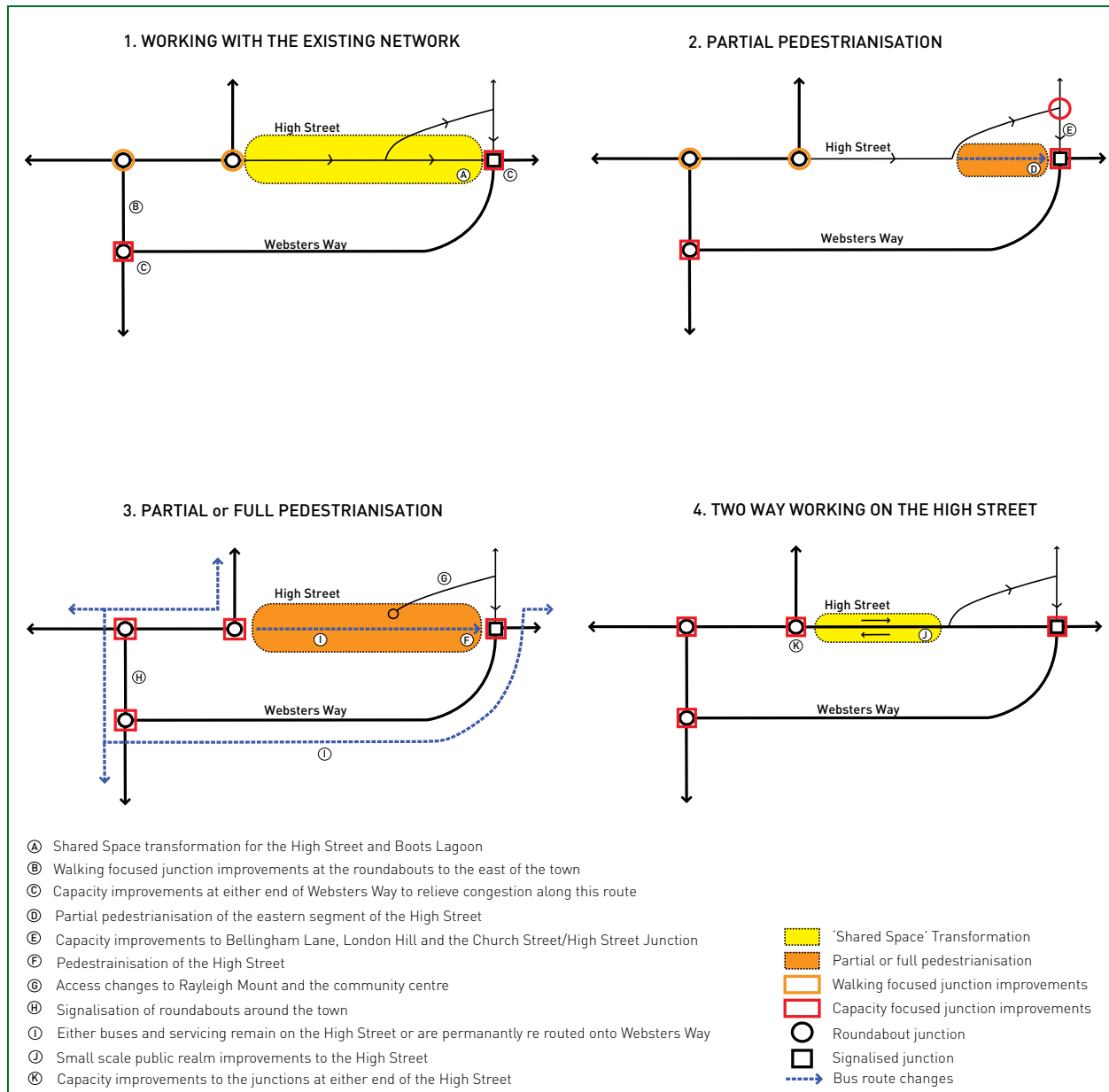


Figure 97: Town centre circulation and public realm options



Figure 98: Junction of Eastwood Road and Websters Way



Figure 99: High Street bus stop

Partial pedestrianisation of the High Street from Bellingham Lane to Church Street

Public realm

4.3.13 An option exists to pedestrianise the eastern arm of the High Street from Bellingham Lane to Church Street (Figure 97, image 2). This section of the street could be transformed into a new public space for the town, and could potentially accommodate the relocation of market stalls on particular days of the week. This treatment would allow for the substantial improvement of the quality of the space and would attract higher footfall that would drive improvements to retail premises offer over time.

Transport

4.3.14 While this would have marked benefits to the quality of this section of the High Street, it would require the diversion of traffic onto Bellingham Lane, London Hill and Church Street and significant capacity improvements / modifications would be required to the junction of Church Street and the High Street for this to occur. Critically, buses will not be able to use this route given the narrowness of these streets. Bus journey times would also be significantly impacted upon if this route were to be used, and it is unlikely this would be acceptable to Council or bus operators. This means that buses will still be required to use the High Street under this option.

Partial or full pedestrianisation of the High Street

Public realm

4.3.15 The High Street could be transformed into a central pedestrian retail spine and a civic focal point for town centre social and economic activity (Figure 97, image 3). A series of unique yet unified public spaces could be designed accommodating a range of activities along its length. This would markedly boost the attractiveness of this space for residents and visitors, and would therefore translate into an increase in footfall past retail premises. Given the space made available, it is also possible under this option to relocate the market from outside the Town Hall to the High Street for certain days of the week.

4.3.16 However, there are also many well documented problems associated with pedestrianisation. Critically when shops are not open – i.e. in the evenings - there is little reason for people to use this space and therefore the area becomes deserted. The absence of natural surveillance provided by either foot or vehicular traffic can become a place for antisocial activities and behaviour, making the area both an undesirable and unsafe place to be at night.

Transport

4.3.17 As with most pedestrianisation schemes, the banning of cars from one street limits permeability through the town and concentrates vehicles to a limited number of alternative routes. The highways response is to re-provide vehicular capacity on the route that vehicles will be diverted onto. Under this scenario there are two options for busses. The first

and easiest option is for busses to remain in operation along the high Street, although that would restrict the potential to relocate the Market here. The second option is to permanently divert busses away from the High Street to Websters Way (Figure 97, Image 3, point i). It is likely that in order to offset increased delay for vehicles, that signalisation of town centre junctions will be required, which will come at a substantial cost.

4.3.18 Access to Rayleigh Mount and the Community Centre would also be severely restricted under this option given that Bellingham Lane would need to be turned into a two-way cul-de-sac, accessed via London Hill. Disabled parking would also need to be relocated to Websters Way car park or to the Market Car park, greatly increasing distances to be travelled and obstacles to be overcome for disabled persons needing to access town centre goods, services and facilities. Buses would also be subjected to unacceptable levels of delay on this route – with little opportunity to provide priority measures – that would impose greater costs to the bus operator, which may in turn trigger the possible retraction of commercial services from operation.

Two way traffic on the High Street

Public realm

4.3.19 The majority of the High Street is wide enough to accommodate two-way traffic while leaving substantial room for pedestrian movement along the footways (Figure 97, image 4). The exception is the eastern section of the High Street between Bellingham Lane and Church Street where parking would be lost. Under this option all footways would need to remain largely as they are now, and in places be reduced in width. The 'Boots Lagoon' area would also need to accommodate a new westbound double length bus bay and associated stop facilities, as provided on the opposite side of the road.

4.3.20 The critical issue with this option is that it would double the amount of traffic that currently uses the High Street. This would have significant environmental and amenity impacts on other street users and may, without proper treatment, lead to the decline in footfall and retail quality and viability. Under this option, footways will need to remain at their current widths, whereas for the other options, significant improvements to widths and the quality of this space are possible. Instead of moving to a less regulated and informal crossing situation as is possible under a shared space scenario, crossings would need to be regulated at controlled crossing points given volumes of traffic and buses using the street.

Transport

4.3.21 Two waying the High Street would greatly improve the legibility of this route through the town and would remove the need for traffic to divert along Websters Way. It would effectively relieve congestion through the town by adding a second lane for eastbound traffic. It would also allow for the provision of two-way buses on the High Street, vastly improving the legibility and efficiency of the bus network, and position stops where people want to be. Junction improvements would be required at Church Street, High Street and Bull Lane (Websters Way), as well as the High Street and Crown Hill. This would most likely involve some form of widening and or signalisation.

Conclusions

4.3.22 In considering the options presented above, due consideration has been given to the both public realm and transport benefits and costs of each.

4.3.23 Although pedestrianisation of part or whole of the High Street would provide a new retail focused civic space, the dis-benefits to the town need to be fully considered. Pedestrianisation effectively moves the issue of traffic routing and congestion to somewhere else in the town, and in turn triggers the need for capacity improvements on alternative routes, that in themselves create a new vehicular barrier to movement to and from the town (albeit away from the main retail circuit) and a constraint on longer term expansion.

4.3.24 Another critical issue with pedestrianisation is that when shops are closed in the evenings there is little reason for people to use this space and therefore the area becomes deserted. The absence of natural surveillance or 'eyes on the street' provided by either foot or vehicular traffic is likely to encourage antisocial activities to relocate to this area, making it both an undesirable and unsafe place to be at night.

4.3.25 The costs of upgrading alternative routes such as Bellingham Lane or Websters Way to accommodate increases in traffic would be substantial, and the quality of these streets would become degraded. Also, the increases in delay to buses would be so dramatic as to discourage people from using them, and impact upon commercial viability of services. In this context, it is considered that the negative impacts

of either pedestrianisation scheme would far outweigh the benefits, and neither option is considered viable.

4.3.26 The final option to be considered is that of the potential to two-way the High Street. This option has significant transport benefits to be considered. By adding an additional eastbound traffic lane through the town, congestion on Websters Way would be relieved. Bus movement through the town would also be vastly improved in terms of the legibility and efficiency of the service provided. There are however major public realm disbenefits. The volume of traffic using the High Street would effectively double and bring with it associated environmental, amenity and retail related impacts. The High Street would also become much more difficult for people to cross on foot due to the need to restrict crossing to formal crossing points. It is therefore considered that this option, although beneficial in transport terms, would deliver outcomes that work against the achievement of the vision of the town.

4.3.27 It is considered that the existing layout of streets and method of traffic control is entirely appropriate for a town of the size of Rayleigh, and that seeking to deliver transport improvements to this network – as presented in option one – is the most desirable and feasible option to pursue. Transformation of the High Street and 'Boots Lagoon' will deliver similar benefit to the performance of retail premises as pedestrianisation schemes, and will create a new civic space for the town – without the loss of town centre access, without the impacts on bus services, and without the need for substantial mitigation works.

4.3.28 Critically, option one allows for incremental transport and public realm improvements to be delivered as development comes forward, responding to changes in the property market and the availability of material and financial resources. This means that it is a much more feasible and deliverable option to pursue, as achieving the towns overall vision is not dependent upon a major costly intervention (such as pedestrianisation or two-waying the High Street) that may take 5-10 years to deliver, at substantial cost and with the potential for major consultation issues. Maintaining the existing network will also allow maximum flexibility for the town to respond to changes in the property market, movement demands, and community needs, long into the future.

QUESTION 15:

Which of the circulation options do you prefer? We believe there is merit in maintaining the movement network but improving the quality of this, providing a more attractive series of spaces in the heart of the town. Do you agree?



Figure 100: Shared space scheme, New Road, Brighton



Figure 101: Public realm improvements, New Road, Brighton



Figure 102: Junction treatments, Shoe Lane, London



Figure 103: Junction treatments, New Malden

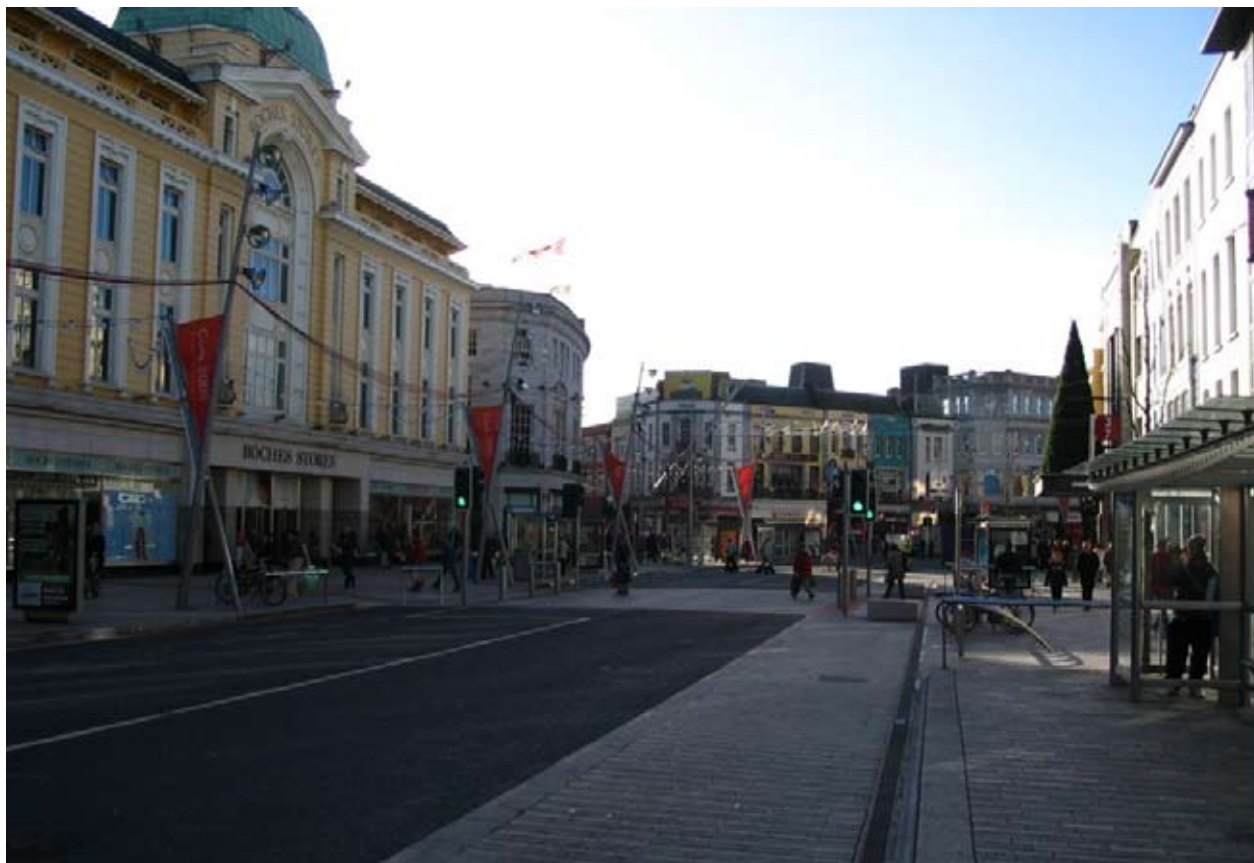


Figure 104: Potential exists to create a shared space scheme on the High Street, as at Patrick Street, Cork

4.4 Spatial Options

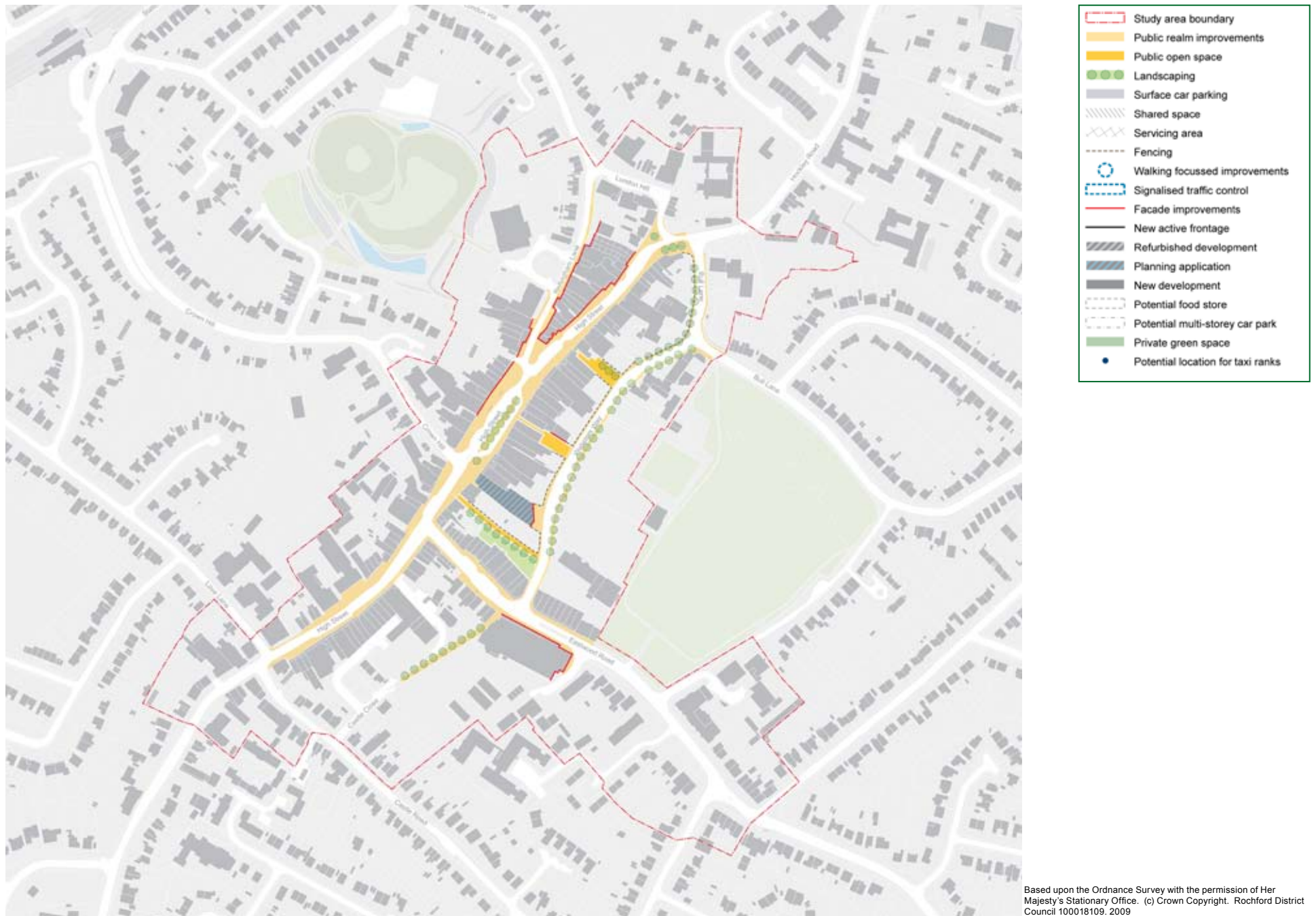
4.4.1 In this section we present four potential combined masterplan approaches for the town centre, each relating to the level of change and improvement that might be taken forward. They show the options discussed above in their wider, town centre scale context.

4.4.2 Please note that we are not asking for your comments on which of these masterplan options you prefer: the preferred option is likely to comprise a mix of elements relating to different degrees of change and improvement (at low, medium and high levels) and it is thus likely that a composite approach will be progressed. Your comments on and response to the questions presented earlier in the report will be used to help identify the best way forward.

Change Level 1: Low

4.5.2 A low level change and improvement, comprising potential early wins, enhancing and improving existing built form / streetscape (Figure 105):

- Screening of service yards on Websters Way to reduce visual intrusion and define areas of public and private realm, through use of fences and tree planting
- New pavement along north side of Websters Way, associated with definition of service areas
- Hard landscaping, tree planting and street lighting to define pedestrian routes from Websters Way through to the High Street
- Co-ordinated public realm improvements along High Street, including rationalisation of street clutter and improved wayfinding strategy, particularly between the High Street and Mount and between the High Street and Market.
- Reduce size of taxi-rank on High Street, with potential relocations of waiting areas to the railway station and Websters Way
- New public realm treatment to define routes from the Castle Road car park via the Somerfield store to Eastwood Road
- Review of planning policies to allow for greater mix of uses within the High Street
- Proactive approach to reusing empty and vacant units on the High Street for temporary alternative uses, such as art space or education.



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Figure 105: Spatial option one: Low change / improvement

Change Level 2: Medium

4.4.3 Further develops level 1, but with introduction of some new development (Figure 106):

- Façade treatments to rear of exposed properties along Websters Way and Bellingham Lane. Also to unsympathetic properties along High Street and Eastwood Road
- Backland / infill development along Websters Way, creating new active street fronts and also opening out onto pedestrian routes between Websters Way and the High Street, potentially acting as new 'shopping lanes'. Also involves timed / restricted servicing arrangements along the High Street.
- New mixed use courtyard development on land to rear of High Street (north side) providing a new direct connection to the Mount. Landscaping of this route, including surface car park at the Mount, to enhance quality of connections
- Extension of Websters Way car park to south west, offsetting car parking space lost through development of backland sites. Would also potentially involve relocation of health centre to new development within the town centre.
- Relocation of market to the High Street and promotion of different types of market on alternative days
- Improvements to junctions in and around the town centre, enhancing crossing facilities for pedestrians

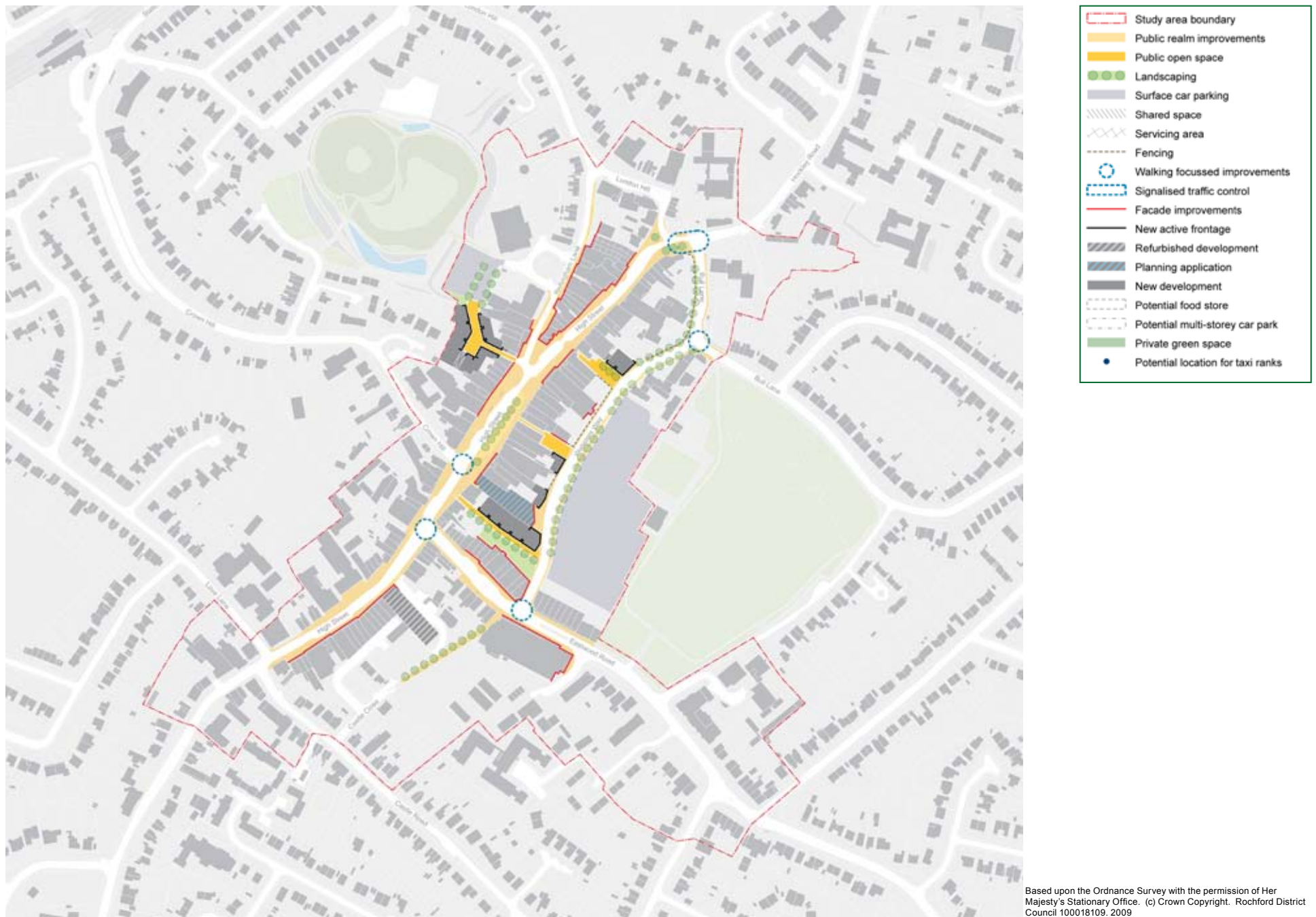


Figure 106: Spatial option two: Medium change / improvement

Change Level 3: High

4.4.4 Further development of change and improvement level 2, with additional new development within the core High Street area and the introduction of new traffic management measures (Figure 107):

- Redevelopment of former Tesco store and adjacent units on High Street, providing new retail, commercial and leisure space with active development frontages on the High Street, Websters Way and routes between these. Includes enclosed servicing area.
- Expansion of courtyard retail development between High Street and the Mount, including redevelopment of the high Street frontage and refurbishment of adjacent buildings current considered as contributing negatively to the conservation area
- Refurbishment of units located along main pedestrian route between Websters Way and High Street to provide active frontages
- Introduce shared surface treatment along High Street and Bellingham Lane
- Potential signalisation of road junctions at gateway entry points into the town centre

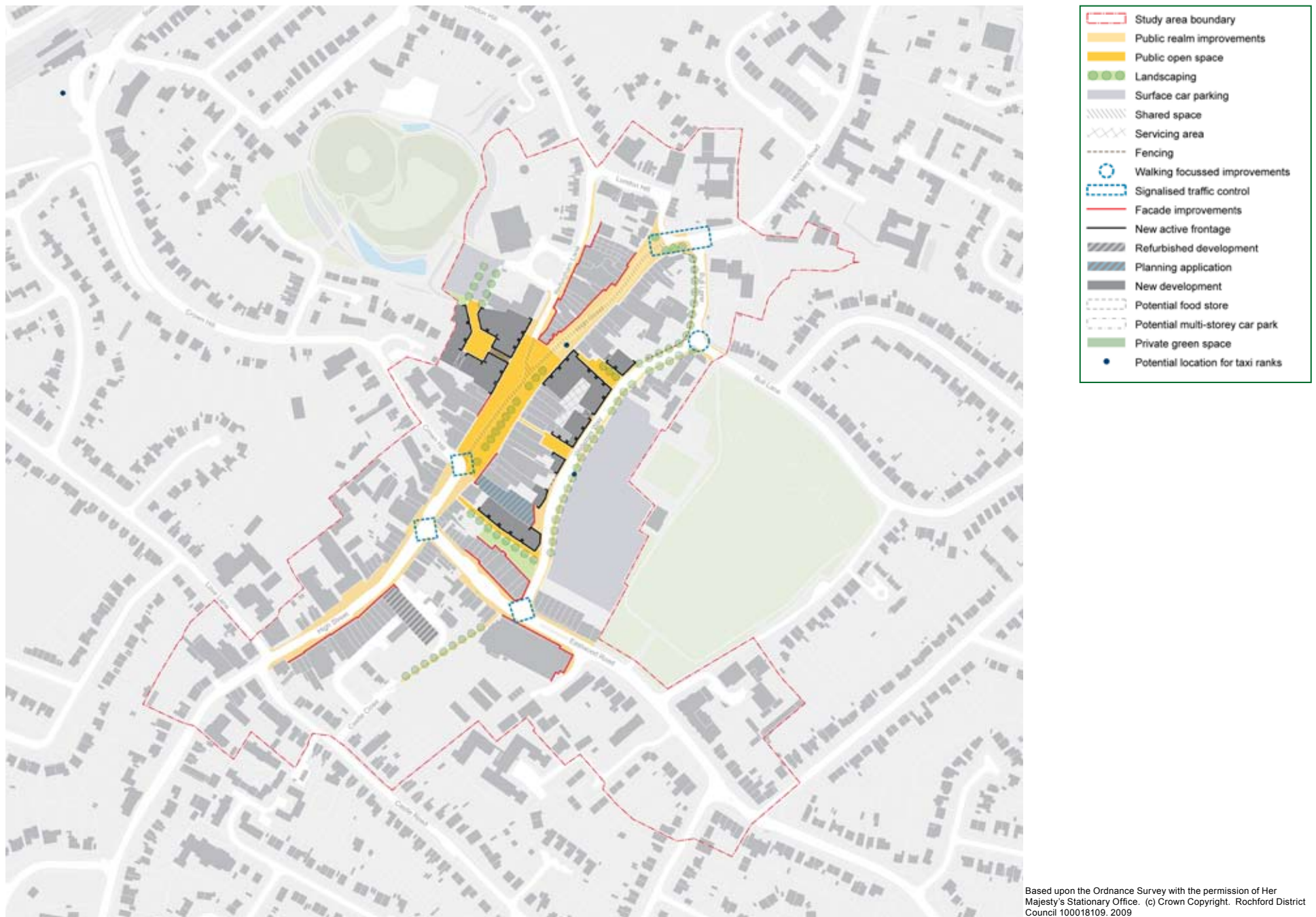
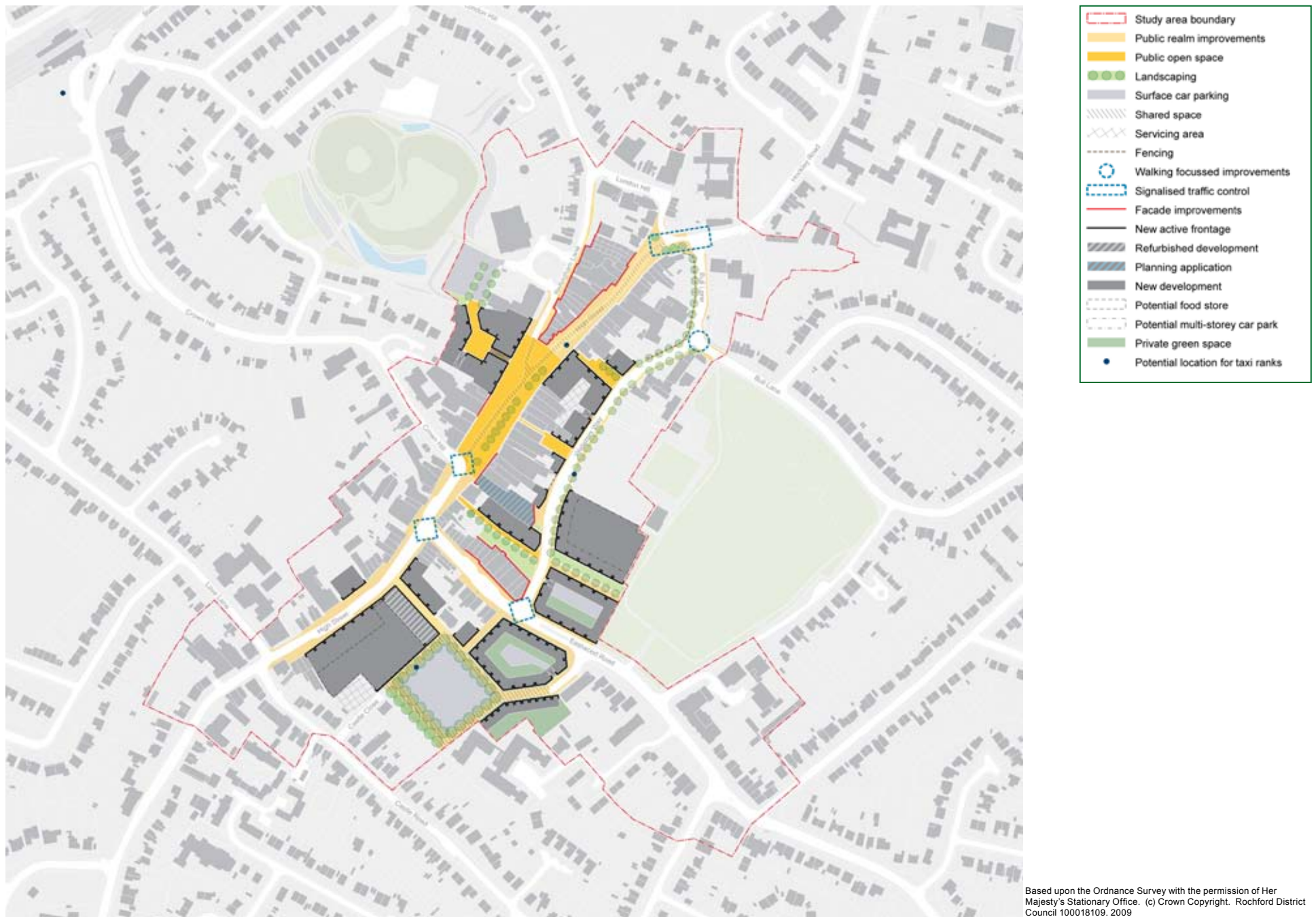


Figure 107: Spatial option three: High change / improvement

Change Level 4: Higher

4.4.5 This level of change looks at a wider area, considering potential for change and development along Eastwood Road and the southern end of the High Street (in the vicinity of the Police Station and Somerfield foodstore) (Figure 108):

- Refurbishment of Police Station as a new community hub, including relocated health centre and library facilities. Also allows for redevelopment of existing library on the High Street for new mixed use development
- Redevelopment of retail units, offices and flats adjacent to Police Station to include new town centre foodstore, acting as a southern anchor to the High Street.
- Current surface car park accessed via Castle Road transferred to foodstore, with replacement town centre parking provided by way of new multi-storey car park on Websters Way, with active development uses around this fronting onto Websters Way
- Mixed-use redevelopment on Eastwood Road on site of current Somerfield store and opposite this at junction of Eastwood Road and Websters Way, including space for town centre residential units.
- Shared surface treatments and new development fronting onto routes between the High Street, new footsore car parking and Eastwood Road frontage.
- Potential pedestrianisation of High Street and diversion of all through traffic to alternative routes
- Relocation of all taxi waiting facilities from the High Street to alternative locations around the town centre



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Figure 108: Spatial option four: Higher change / improvement

4.5 Delivery Considerations

4.5.1 This section looks into the delivery implications of the potential public realm and highways improvements, as well as the major development opportunities identified in section 4.2 above and including:

- 1 land around the Police Station (see 4.2.10 - 4.2.14)
- 2 land between the High Street and the Mount (see 4.2.19 - 4.2.21)
- 3 land between the High Street and Websters Way (see 4.2.24 - 4.2.29)

Public Realm and Highways

4.5.2 The options relating to the public realm and transport network vary according to the level of change. The lower change options essentially involve improvements to the public realm while the higher change options also include modifications to highways. Depending upon the anticipated level of new development within the town centre and the financial viability of the development uses, improvements to the public realm could be funded from planning obligations (s.106 receipts/ Community Infrastructure Levy - see Box 1) obtained as part of the grant of planning permission for development within the town centre. However, unless significant and financially viable development was forthcoming in the short-term, the public sector would need to either fund the improvements itself or forward-fund the improvements and claw the costs back from future developments).

Infrastructure Tariff

- As an alternative to securing planning obligations through the traditional s.106 means, the Council could consider establishing a tariff, such as a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The overall purpose of the CIL is to ensure that development contributes fairly to the mitigation of the impact it creates: to ensure that development is delivered, and in a more sustainable way. The CIL is a standard charge which could be levied as a certain amount per dwelling or per square metre of development and is decided by designated charging authorities and levied by them on new development.
- The advantage of a tariff is that the Public Sector could potentially deliver improvements to the Study area (e.g. public realm) in the short term to stimulate development and investment and secure the receipts from developers over the longer term as and when phases of development are constructed. However, the Public Sector would need to secure the necessary funding to achieve this and if development is slow in coming forward, it could take a long time to recover the expenditure.
- If the Council has to prudentially borrow, it needs to identify a secure revenue stream and may have to carry holding costs until tariff receipts arise. The alternative approach might be to use its assets to lever in such funds from the private sector.
- If the public sector wishes to explore the implications of a tariff/ CIL, it will need further advice and guidance to assess the structure and operation of such an option.

Box 1: Infrastructure Tariff

Tax Increment Funding

- Sometimes the remediation and infrastructure related costs of brownfield sites can be so large that property developers are reluctant to get involved. In these circumstances, the only way to proceed may be for the public sector to help prepare land for development through up-front investments. In the US, Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is the mechanism by which this is usually funded.
- TIF is a mechanism for using anticipated future increases in tax revenues to finance the current improvements (such as new or improved infrastructure) that are expected to generate those increased revenues. It enables a local authority to trade anticipated future tax income for a present benefit. Typically, those who invest in municipal debt which is funded using TIF are incentivized to do so by a tax exemption for interest they receive.
- TIF works on the principle that the supply of new or improved infrastructure usually leads both to new development and to an increase in the value of surrounding property, both of which serve to increase the level of property taxation in the area. Within a designated TIF district, this anticipated increased taxation (the 'tax increment') is captured and used to fund the infrastructure that has been provided.
- Following designation of a TIF district, property taxes within that district are divided into two streams. The first tax stream is based on the original assessed value of the property before any redevelopment, with the city or other taxing body receiving that money. The second stream is the additional tax money generated after development takes place and, as a result, property values have risen. Typically that revenue is used to pay off bonds that raise money for infrastructure improvements in the TIF district, for land acquisition through compulsory purchase or for direct payments to a private developer for site preparation and construction.
- TIFs generally capture the increase in value within the district, including increases attributable to:
 - new development;
 - overall inflation in property values unrelated to development;
 - market effects that are attributable to the TIF development (proximity to a new development, in many cases, will increase the value of surrounding properties); and
 - market effects that are unrelated to the TIF development (market values may increase through shifts in locational values, or for other reasons unrelated to the TIF development).

Box 2: Tax Increment Funding

4.5.3 The public realm and transport improvements proposed for the town centre should help to improve the attractiveness of the street to shoppers and retailers, which should have a positive impact upon rental values and the financial viability of retail development. However, because of the current economic climate, development in the town centre may not be forthcoming and even if it is, financial constraints may mean that it cannot support contributions towards the public realm and transport infrastructure improvements.

4.5.4 However, if the public sector is able to 'forward fund' the improvements, it may help to stimulate development and it may be possible to claw back some of those costs if the uplifts in value generated are significant enough

4.5.5 The forward funding of public realm improvements by the public sector may be achieved through Tax Incremental Financing (TIF), which the Government is currently debating whether to introduce (Box 2). TIF is a scheme that is common in the United States and that would enable the public sector to raise funds to forward-fund infrastructure improvements. If the Government does introduce TIF's, the Council should consider its suitability for the town centre.

4.5.6 The Council may also wish to consider the feasibility of establishing a Business Improvement District (BID) for the town centre (Box 3). This would need to have the support of a majority of businesses within the BID area but if successful, could help to raise the funds to carry out improvements which would not otherwise be undertaken by the Council.

Business Improvement District

- A BID is a flexible funding mechanism to improve and manage a clearly defined commercial area. It is based on the principle of an additional levy on all defined ratepayers following a majority vote. Once the vote is successful, which must achieve both a majority in terms of number of ratepayers and the proportion of their rateable value, the levy becomes mandatory on all defined ratepayers and is treated in the same way as the Business Rate, becoming a statutory debt.
- The public sector has an important role in assisting the development of a BID. It is vital that the proposed BID has the support of the public sector and necessary that a strong partnership is formed between the public sector and the BID proposer at an early stage. A BID can help the public sector to establish relationships with businesses where none may have existed before, or develop existing ones, and this will help in balancing business needs with those of residents.
- The public sector can work with businesses through the BID mechanism to improve the safety, cleanliness and marketing of an area. This will benefit not only the businesses but all those who live in, work in and visit the area. In this way BID's can also help local authorities to achieve their statutory aim of improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their communities.
- Most BID's will offer at least one service, such as an extra street cleaning team, which complements and adds to those already provided by the council. Therefore a BID is also likely to have an impact on service delivery for local authorities. If this is the case, a detailed baseline agreement will need to be drawn up that will set out the council's responsibility for each service that the BID will be complementing. The council will have to adhere to this agreement to ensure that businesses can see that the BID is adding to council services as opposed to replacing them. One of the key issues for businesses in deciding to support a BID is that they must feel assured that the council will not reduce or remove existing services that it provides.

Box 3: Business Improvement District

Land around the Police Station

4.5.7 The quality of the retail offer on the southern side of the High Street, immediately to the west of Eastwood Road, is significantly weaker than to the east of Eastwood Road. This is because of its peripheral location away from the core area and lack of a strong anchor at the western end of the High Street.

4.5.8 The options presented explore the opportunity to develop a new anchor store along the High Street, immediately to the west of the former police station (Figure 48). The former police station could also be converted or redeveloped, potentially to create a new civic hub which could include a library and health services. These proposals would help to draw people to this end of the high street which would improve the footfall and could attract other retailers.

4.5.9 The most likely anchor at this end of the High Street would be Somerfield, assuming that it wished to relocate from its existing premises on Eastwood Road. The advantage of the proposed new store to Somerfield would be the High Street prominence, the maintenance and operational advantages of a new store, the improved car parking and the opportunity to develop or sell its existing store site for residential purposes. The financial viability of developing a new building fronting the High Street could also be improved if residential, civic or commercial accommodation could be developed above the ground floor retail.

4.5.10 If a tenant cannot be found for the proposed new anchor store, an alternative form of development for the site fronting the High Street may be required. If the former police station could be refurbished/

redeveloped for a new civic hub, it may prove sufficient in itself to draw smaller retailers to the west of the former police station. This could make development of the site for smaller ground floor retail units with residential, civic or commercial above financially viable. However, if the former police station is not refurbished/ redeveloped or if it does not prove a sufficient anchor in itself, development of retail accommodation to the west of it may not be financially viable. Alternative uses, such as town houses, could therefore be more appropriate.

Land between the High Street and Mount

4.5.11 The sites at the junction of the High Street and Bellingham Lane have been identified as an area for improvement (Figure 61). This could vary anywhere between a cosmetic refurbishment of the exterior and a more significant redevelopment of the existing units and the creation of a courtyard parade of shops to the rear, creating a new access to the Mount.

4.5.12 Although the land to the rear is predominantly car parking, development of the parade of shops may be marginal if a significant footfall through cannot be created. This will depend in part on the quality of entrance to the parade from the High Street and Bellingham Lane. Redevelopment of any part of the High Street and Bellingham Lane area will not only depend upon the value that can be generated on land to the rear, but also the value that can be generated on the sites fronting the street compared to the value of the existing premises.

4.5.13 To create a suitable entrance to the rear courtyard and to achieve noticeable change to the built environment along the High Street/ Bellingham Lane, it may be necessary for a number of landowners to work together, or for one landowner/ developer to assemble a number of sites. Unless much of the land is already in single ownership, redevelopment in the short to medium term may not be possible without public sector intervention.

4.5.14 Development of residential units above retail, both fronting the High Street/ Bellingham Lane and a parade of shops, could help to improve financial viability. The AAP for Rayleigh town centre will have a

15 to 20 year lifespan. Property values may fluctuate significantly over this period and developers will have to choose an appropriate time to develop. Although the residential development market in Rayleigh has suffered, like elsewhere, as a result of the 'credit crunch', we would expect demand to pick up as the economy recovers. What may not be viable today, may be in the future and it is therefore important that the current economic downturn does not unduly influence the long term objectives for the town centre.

4.5.15 The Council should work with the landowners to explore the potential redevelopment opportunities for their sites and to assess whether it may be able to offer assistance, such as through using its compulsory purchase powers to assemble developable sites or to secure vacant possession; by helping to relocate existing occupiers; or by reviewing whether financial viability could be improved through requiring, say, a lower level of affordable housing.

Land between the High Street and Websters Way

4.5.16 The financial viability of redeveloping retail units on the High Street will depend upon whether the residual land value exceeds the current value of the existing units (Figure 77). Demand for retail units is driven by footfall and this in turn drives rents. Simply improving the architecture of a unit may not improve the footfall. Although the exteriors of some units on the High Street are unattractive, if the space is leased on market terms to retailers with strong covenants and for a reasonable length of time, it may not be financially prudent to redevelop the units.

4.5.17 However, the Council could seek to stimulate development through means such as:

- supporting residential development above ground floor retail along the High Street to encourage redevelopment of unattractive buildings and to improve the mix of town centre uses;
- encouraging the development of small retail accommodation along Websters Way to improve the attractiveness of the street and to provide cheaper accommodation for start-up businesses;
- improving the quality of the linkages between the High Street and the car park on Websters way;
- increasing the quantity of car parking on Websters Way;

4.5.18 The above measures would be in addition to the public realm and highways improvements outlined earlier. If successfully implemented, these should also help to improve the attractiveness of the shopping experience in Rayleigh town centre and may help to increase footfall, demand for units and rental values, thus providing an added stimulus for redevelopment of unattractive units.

4.5.19 To be implemented, however, the proposals would need the active support of the landowners (and potentially the leaseholders). For example, development of small retail accommodation along Websters Way will only be supported if it does not interfere with servicing of the retail units fronting the High Street. In this instance, the options presented have thus also looked at introducing timed servicing to shop units and the potential reprovision of parking arrangements. Freeholders will not develop secondary accommodation if it hampers their ability to let the more valuable primary accommodation fronting the High Street and a leaseholder will not permit a variation to its lease if it affects its ability to service, and hence trade from, its principal unit.

4.5.20 To develop a multi-storey car park on Websters Way (Figure 92), an appropriate site will need to be assembled. The public sector will need to consider whether it is prepared to use its Compulsory Purchase powers if it is to undertake site assembly itself or to support a private sector developer if it cannot be achieved through negotiation. In acquiring any sites, it will be necessary to try to relocate any of the existing users, such as the health centre and carpet warehouse. This might present an opportunity

for the health centre to be relocated to the proposed new civic centre in the refurbished police station (see above) just to the west of the junction between the High Street and Eastwood Road.

4.5.21 Once a site has been assembled and planning permission secured, the landowner could:

- construct and operate the car park itself;
- construct the car park itself but procure an operator;
- sell the site to a developer and lease back the car park to operate itself;
- lease the site to a developer/ operator;
- sell the site to a developer/ operator.

4.5.22 The viability of multi-storey car parking on Websters Way will depend upon what the operator intends to charge customers for using it. Decked car parking is more expensive to construct than surface parking but shoppers are unlikely to be prepared to pay more to use it. The Council may therefore need to consider what appropriate car parking charges are throughout the town centre.



Figure 109: Rayleigh Windmill

05 Moving Forward

5.1 The Area Action Plan Process

5.1.1 As a statutory Development Plan Document, the AAP is being prepared in accordance with regulations set by Central Government. The process and the proposed time scale are set out below:

- Issues and Options consultation: November 2009 - January 2010
- Preferred Options consultation: August - October 2010
- Pre-submission consultation: May - June 2011
- Submission to the Secretary of State: July 2011
- Examination in Public: November 2011
- Adoption: June 2012

5.1.2 The first stage in the process above is the culmination of a period of research and analysis that has involved evidence gathering and working with key stakeholders within the AAP area.

5.1.3 We are at the stage of seeking your views on the Issues and Options report to feed into future work. There will be further opportunities for community involvement at later stages of the AAP process as outlined above.

5.2 Sending in your views

5.2.1 The feedback received from this Issues and Options draft will play an important role in the development of the Rayleigh Town Centre Area Action Plan.

5.2.2 An online facility has been created that enables comments to be submitted quickly and easily, as well as providing the respondent with instant confirmation of receipt. The facility can be found at the web address below:

<http://rochford.jdi-consult.net/ldf/>

5.2.3 We recognise that not everyone has access to the Internet and that it is important that no one is excluded from participating. If you wish to submit your views but are unable to do so online, please contact the Planning Policy team at the Council on 01702 318191.

5.2.4 The consultation period will last until 30th January 2010. Please ensure that any comments that you have on the document are received before this time.



Figure 110: Millennium Beacon, Bellingham Lane, Rayleigh

APPENDIX

A Glossary

Note: this glossary of terms used in planning is intended to provide a simple guide. It is not a statement of the law nor does it claim to be an authoritative interpretation of the law.

Adoption - the final confirmation of a plan as a statutory document by the local planning authority.

Affordable Housing - low cost housing for sale or rent, often from a housing association, to meet the needs of local people who cannot afford accommodation through the open or low cost market, or subsidised housing.

Amenity - the pleasant or normally satisfactory aspects of a location which contribute to its overall character and the enjoyment of residents or visitors.

Backland - land which is behind existing development with no, or very limited, road frontage. Usually applied to describe land previously or currently in use as rear gardens to existing residential properties.

Brownfield Site - land which has been previously developed, excluding mineral workings or other temporary uses.

Change of Use - more correctly referred to as a 'material change of use'. A change in the use of land or buildings that is of significance for planning purposes, often requiring planning permission.

Comparison Goods - 'non perishable' goods for retail sale which are often stocked in a wide range of sizes, styles, colours and qualities, including furniture, carpets, televisions etc.

Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) - notice issued by the government or a local authority to acquire land or buildings for public interest purposes.

Conditions - stipulations attached to a planning permission to limit or direct the manner in which a development is carried out.

Conservation Area - an area designated under Section 69 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, by the local planning authority, as an area where it is desirable to preserve or enhance the character of its special architectural or historic interest.

Conservation Area Consent - consent required from the local planning authority before demolishing an unlisted building in a conservation area.

Consultation - procedures for assessing public opinion about a plan or major development proposal, or in the case of a planning application, the means of obtaining the views of affected neighbours or others with an interest in the proposal.

Density - in the case of residential development, a measurement of either the number of habitable rooms per hectare or the number of dwellings per hectare.

Design Brief - a statement prepared by the Local Planning Authority indicating the preferred way in which the Authority envisages the development may be accommodated.

Design Statement - a document provided by applicants to demonstrate how they have taken account of the need for good design in their development proposals.

Development - the carrying out of building, engineering, mining or other operations in, on, over or under land, or the making of any material change in the use of any buildings or land.

Development Brief - document providing detailed information to guide developers on the type of development, design and layout constraints and other requirements for a particular, usually substantial, site.

Development Plan - the Local and Structure Plans are both development plans. The development plan for the District is comprised of the Essex and South-end-on-Sea Replacement Structure Plan (adopted April 2001) and the Rochford District Local Plan First Review (adopted April 1995) [or the Rochford District Replacement Local Plan, when adopted].

English Heritage (Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England) - a national body funded by the government to promote and give advice on building conservation matters.

English Nature - a national body funded by the government to promote and give advice on the conservation of England's wildlife and natural features.

Essex Design Guide - prepared by Essex Country Council, the Design Guide forms the basis for the design of housing development in the District.

Green Belt - specially designated area of countryside protected from most forms of development in order to stop urban sprawl and the coalescence of settlements, preserve the character of existing settlements and

encourage development to locate within existing built-up areas.

Greenfield Site - an area not previously used for built development.

Infrastructure - permanent resources serving society's needs, including roads, sewers, schools, hospitals, railways, communication networks etc.

Intensification - increasing densities within existing residential areas through the bringing forward for development of unidentified

Listed Building - building or other structure of special architectural or historic interest included on a statutory list and assigned a grade (I, II* or II).

Local Plan - statutory development plan prepared by a local planning authority setting out detailed policies for environmental protection and development.

Local Planning Authority - the local authority or council that is empowered by law to exercise planning functions. This is normally the local borough or district council, but in National Parks and some other areas there is a different arrangement.

Planning Control - the process whereby a local planning authority decides whether a planning application meets the requirements of planning policy, particularly as set out in development plans.

Proposals Map - an obligatory component of a local plan showing the location of proposals in the plan on an Ordnance Survey base map.

Public Open Space (POS) - land provided in urban or rural areas for public recreation, though not necessarily publicly owned.

Residential Land Availability - the annual statement indicating all sites available for housing and their development status for the next 5 years, in order to ensure that an adequate housing land will be made available.

Structure Plan - a plan produced jointly by Essex County Council and Sotuhend-on-Sea Borough Council, mainly comprising a written statement setting out the strategic policies and framework for development throughout the County. The Plan is approved by the Secretary of State following an Examination in Public, and District Councils then put the flesh on the framework with their Local Plans.

Sustainable Development - environmentally responsible development, commonly defined as "development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Town Centre - describes city, town and traditional suburban centres which provide a broad range of facilities and services and which fulfil a function as a focus for a community and for public transport.

Town Centre Management - partnership of local organisations, businesses and individuals to promote the common good of a town by developing, managing, promoting and improving facilities, the useful resources, the economy and the environment of a town centre.

Townscape - the appearance and character of buildings and all other features of an urban area taken together as a whole.

Urban Regeneration - the re-use or redevelopment of decaying or run-down parts of older urban areas to bring them new life and economic vitality.

