



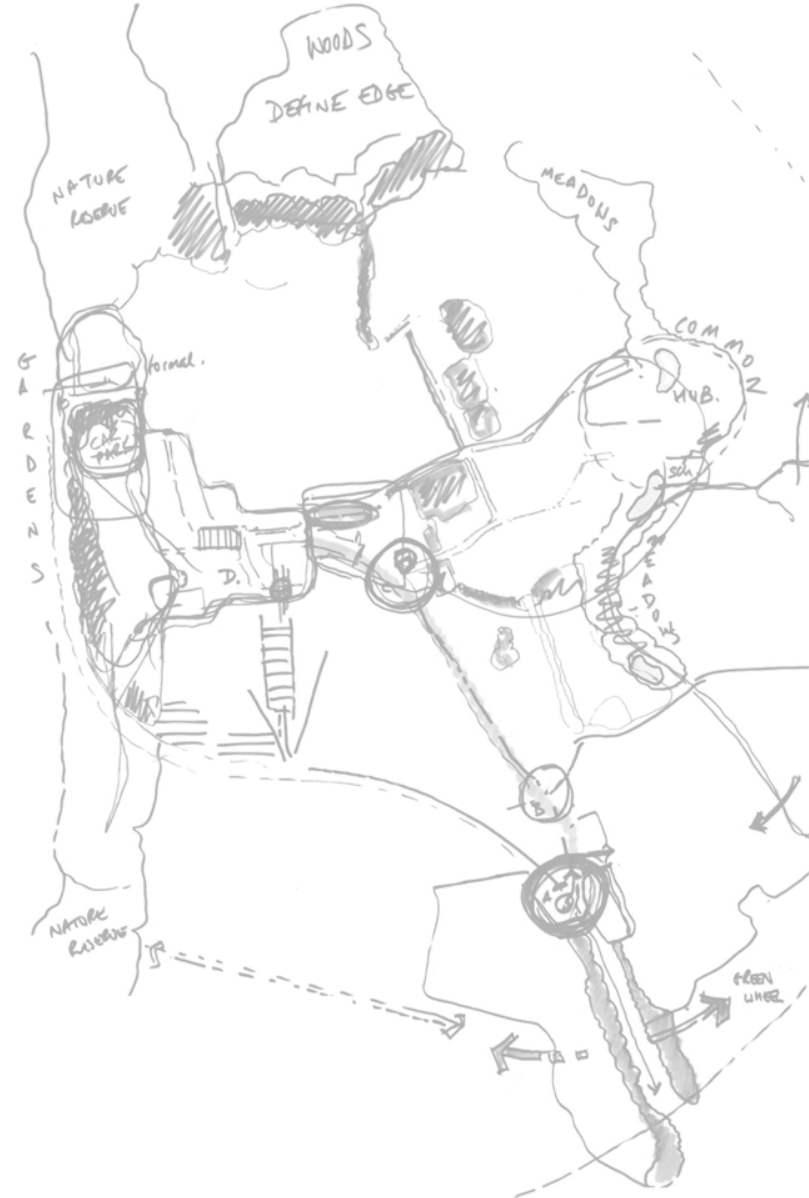
Biggleswade Place Shaping: First Thoughts

Presented to Biggleswade Town Council | 13th January, 2020

PLACE-MAKE

Introduction

- In November 2019, PLACE-MAKE were engaged by Biggleswade Town Council (BTC) to assist in the development of an overarching vision strategy for the town.
- The core intent of this is to;
 - Inform the emerging Neighbourhood Plan and potential applications for funding (Future High Streets etc.).
 - Identify potential action areas and catalyst projects as part of a viable phasing strategy.
 - Identify the nature of any further technical studies at a greater level of detail.
- Representing a total of six person days, the Consultant's scope includes the following aspects;
 - a. Prepare a composite plan (Plan of Plans) of approved plans and strategic initiatives in and around the settlement to provide a true indication of character and arrangement.
 - b. Conduct two visits around the town and workshops.
 - c. Review the Town Centre Strategy of 2011 and highlight any aspects that may still be relevant.
 - d. Prepare a summary of initial findings and potential next steps to the Town Council for review and discussion.
- This document represents 'Part D' of the above – a presentation to the Town Council for discussion and if applicable, determination of next steps.



Maximising the assets; Biggleswade has multiple strengths that can be harnessed to support a unique sense of place and identity

1. Strategically located – close to London, Bedford, Cambridge; Oxford - Cambridge Arc; E-W rail and two airports.
2. Good access/ connectivity via A1(M) and a mainline train station (40 mins to London terminals).
3. Relatively well defined, compact town centre with a variety of traditional urban forms: High Street; market square; mews; arcades.
4. Historic core; conservation area and heritage assets (including the remains of a medieval castle and one of Bedfordshire's best-preserved moated enclosures).
5. River frontage.
6. Semi-rural character/ close connection to nature.
7. Strong sense of community.
8. Self sufficient and sustainable; a broad mix of activities and employment generating opportunities.
9. Growing population bringing a greater demand for a variety of activities and experiences.
10. Availability of brownfield sites in/ around the town centre and mainline train station.



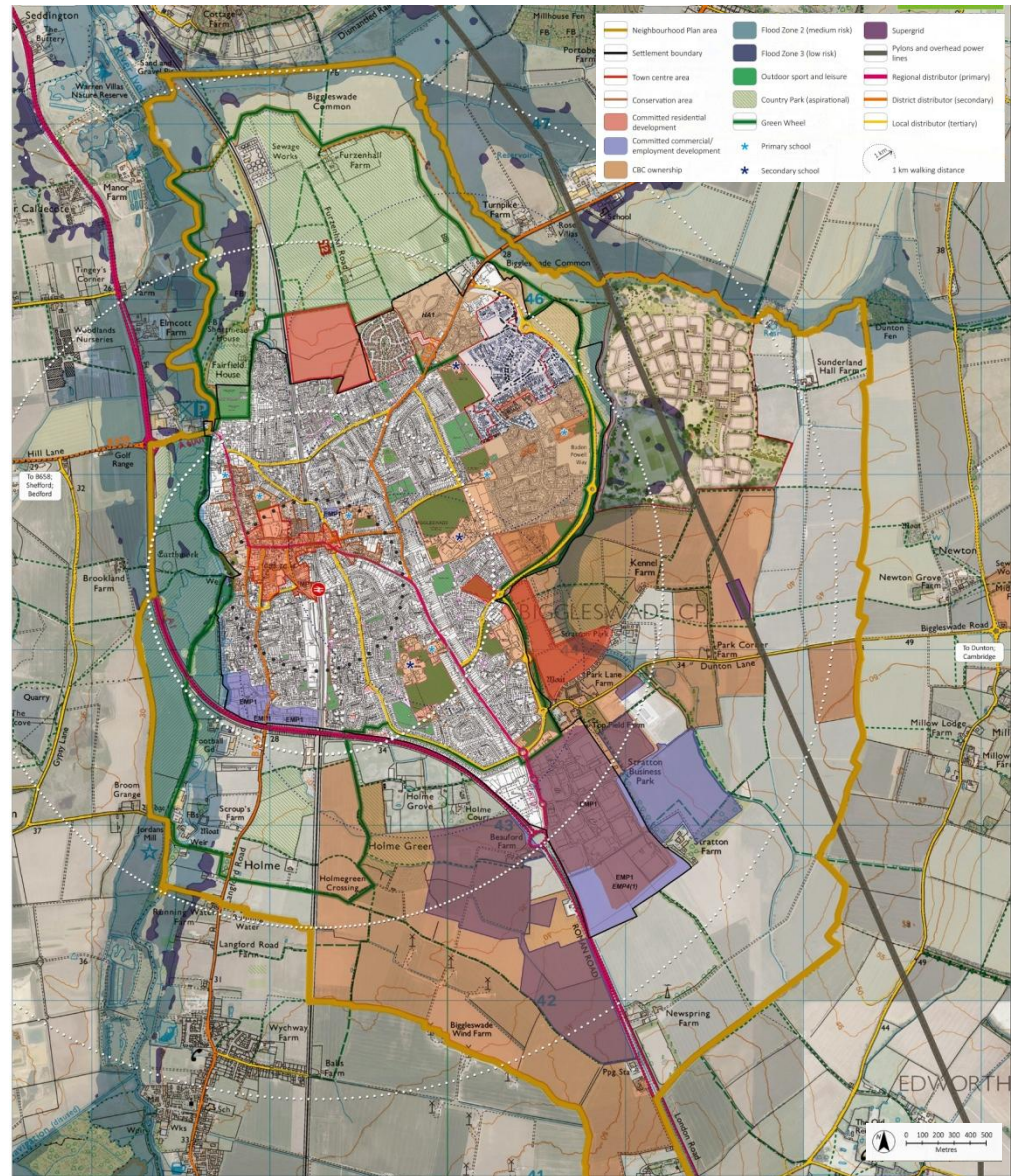
Mitigating constraints; there are also threats and constraints for place-making

1. The town is expanding away from its core: historic; retail; commercial/ employment; train station.
2. Various north-south barriers/ poor east-west connectivity.
3. Access between destinations (retail park, town centre, river, station, employment, schools) is reliant on only a few arteries – Potten Road, Shortmead St., London Road and the High Street.
4. Limited variation in modes of transport – heavily reliant on cars with limited travel by bus, cycle and/ or walking.
5. Traffic; central areas are congested, particularly at peak times.
6. Large land ownership that negatively impacts views and connectivity at a strategic location.
7. Access by road is heavily reliant on the A1(M) – there are limited supporting routes to/ from the wider locale.
8. Limited sense of arrival and wayfinding to the town centre from both A1(M) junctions.
9. Limited leisure and recreation activities within the built-up area.
10. Reduced awareness of heritage assets.
11. River corridor is isolated 'at the back' of the town.
12. Potentially coalescence with surrounding villages, particularly to the south and east.



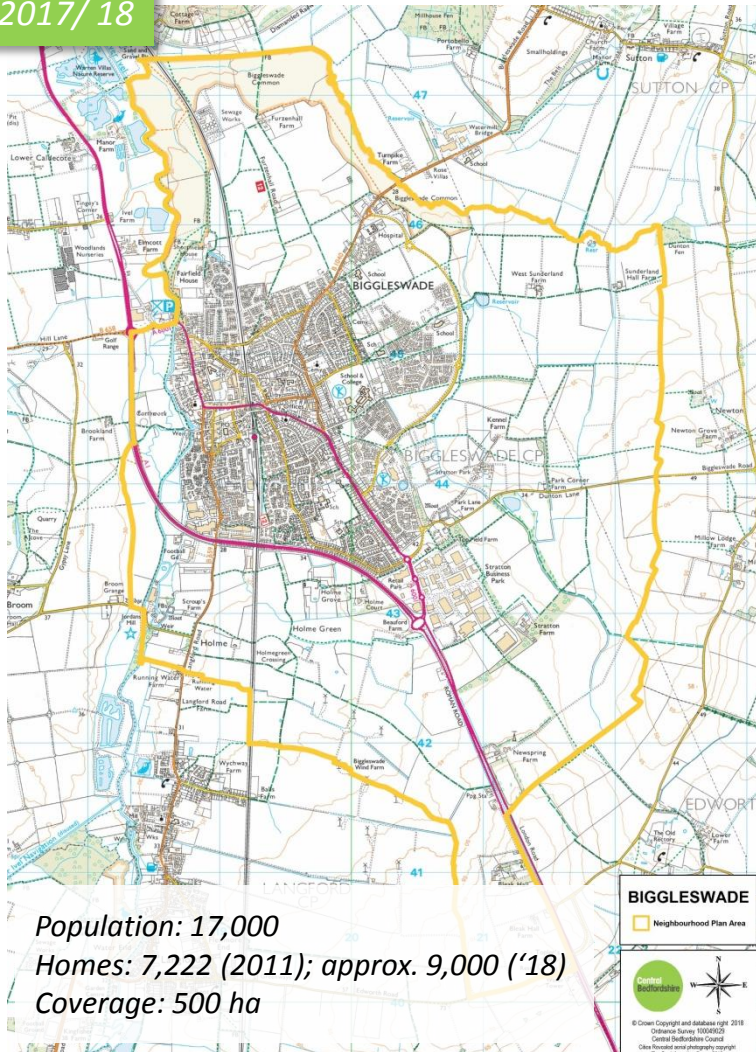
A composite 'Plan of Plans' has been prepared

- Provides an indication of the size and character of Biggleswade in 5 - 10 years time (once approved/ permitted developments have been completed).
- Covers the Neighbourhood Plan area.
- Incorporates maps of current policy, committed developments and strategic initiatives.
- Illustrates;
 - Conservation, town centre and settlement areas.
 - Road structure and hierarchy.
 - Areas of open space/ Green Wheel.
 - Development considerations/ constraints; flooding, contours, pylons and overhead power lines.
 - Schools (with 1km walking distances).
 - Trains station (with 500m and 1km walking distances).
 - CBC land ownerships.



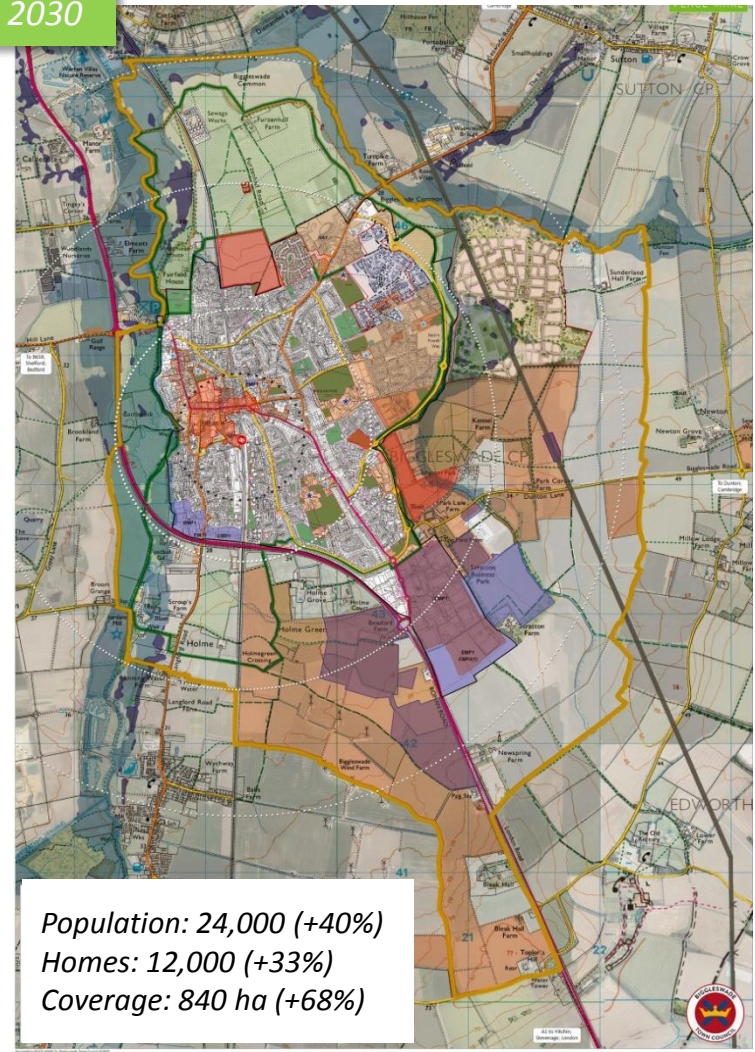
The variation between perceived and real character is clearly apparent ...

2017/ 18



*Relatively compact and well-defined settlement
between the A1(M) and the flood plain/ common land*

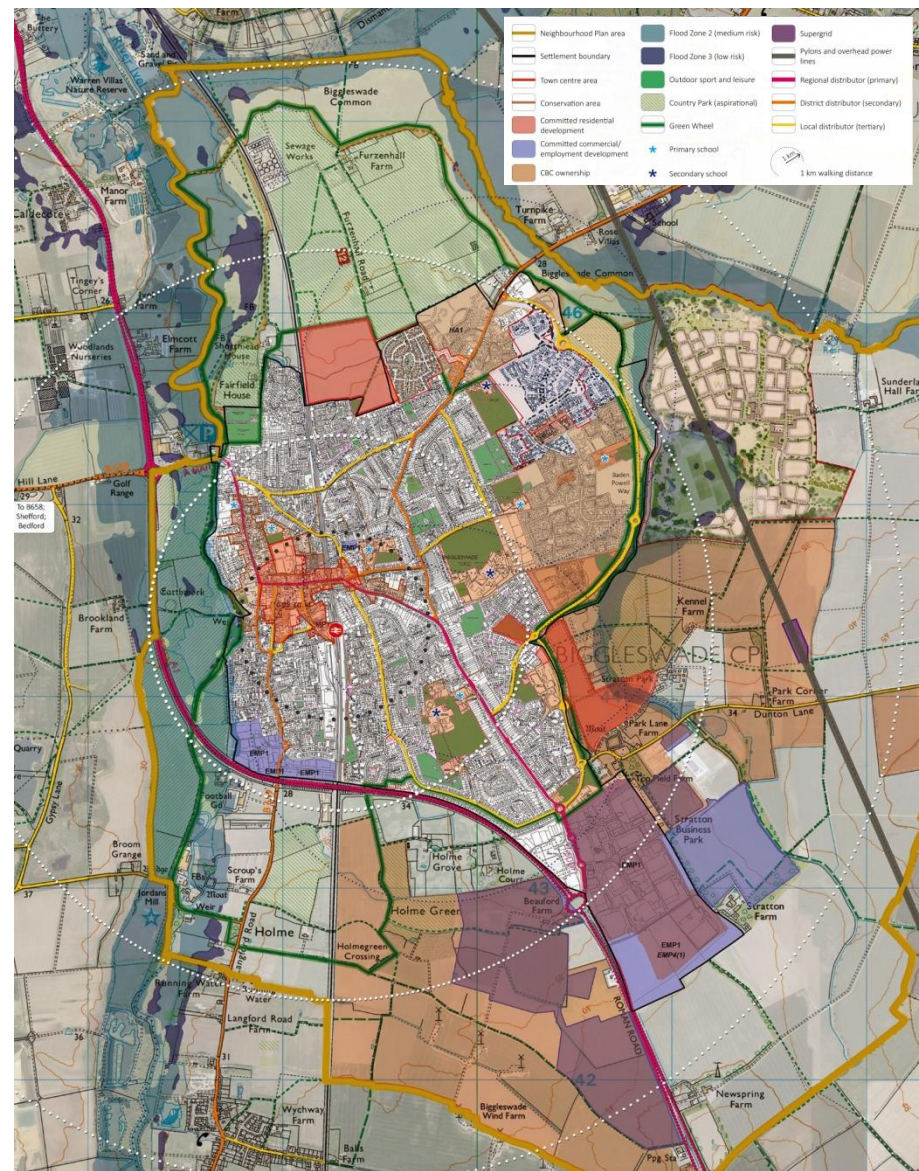
2030



*Significantly expanded settlement beyond its historic
constraints – east of the flood plan and south of the
A1(M)*

The Plan of Plans also highlights some prevalent issues ...

- Biggleswade has grown in relation to significant north-south barriers: river corridor; A1(M); railway; flood plain; power lines.
- Through poor east-west connectivity, traffic to/ from the town centre is channeled along Potten Road and London Road. *For instance, a journey from the Saxon Centre to St. Andrew's Church involves a 3km route by car – almost twice as far as the point-to-point distance.*
- If Eagle Farm Road or Hitchmead Road connected to Bayden Powell Way, traffic could be dispersed across the network with more opportunities for walking/ cycling - thereby reducing congestion along primary arteries.
- The location of schools compounds peak time traffic – *a car journey from the Saxon Centre to Stratton Upper School involves a 2km route via Saxon Way despite being ½ km away.*
- New homes and jobs to the east and south of the existing settlement will be up to 3km from Market Place, which is only 200m from the western edge of the settlement.
- There is limited connectivity/ synergy between the town centre and emerging employment sites to the south.
- The southern A1(M) junction is developing into a secondary centre – a hub for employment and retail activities.



Summary - how we got here and where it is leading ...

- Up to now, Biggleswade's growth has been constrained by the north-south constraints of the river corridor, A1(M) and flood plain/ common land.
- In 2010, King's Reach and Baden Powell Way were planned to form the edge of the settlement up to the flood plain/ common land.
- However, sites allocated in the 2015-35 Local Plan represents a significant shift for the town's growth to the east of the flood plain/ common land and to the west of the A1(M).
- This has had a significant impact on movement in the town and its character. Principally, the existing town centre will not be the geographic centre (this will be Kings Reach), while the southern A1(M) junction is emerging as a secondary centre.
- Circulation is already compromised through a lack of permeability in the layout of Kings Reach. Unless this is properly reviewed at a holistic level, further development to the east of the town will increase trip generation along Potten Road and London Road and congestion in the town centre.
- In addition, Biggleswade is embarking on a period of significant growth – 40% more residents/ 70% greater area.
- If this expansion is unchecked, the town is at risk of sprawling away from its historic core – already apparent through the decentralisation of town centre activities and congestion on main arteries.



Fortunately...

- Biggleswade has a number of valuable assets: historic core/ heritage assets; river; mainline train station; sustainable mix of activities; strong sense of community.
- Collectively, these set it aside from other settlements in the region.
- Coupled with its strategic location, this presents a fantastic scale of opportunity for growth and a good basis for establishing a strong sense of place.
- It is worth noting the attraction and longevity of nearby traditional settlements (St. Albans; Berkhamsted; Hertford; Hitchin) and the emergence of these as popular commuter destinations in relation to their proximity to London.
- The preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan presents an opportunity for stakeholders to shape Biggleswade's expansion in a holistic and unifying manner.
- This should be guided by a shared vision with primary objectives and delivered through a sustainable mix of short- and long-term strategies.
- It is noted that a Town Centre Strategy was recently prepared in 2011 – this is reviewed in greater detail in the following slide.



High Street, St. Albans

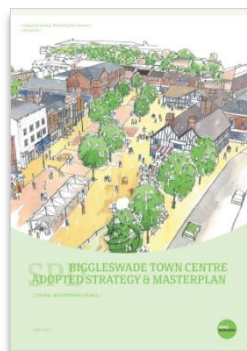


Market Place, Hitchin

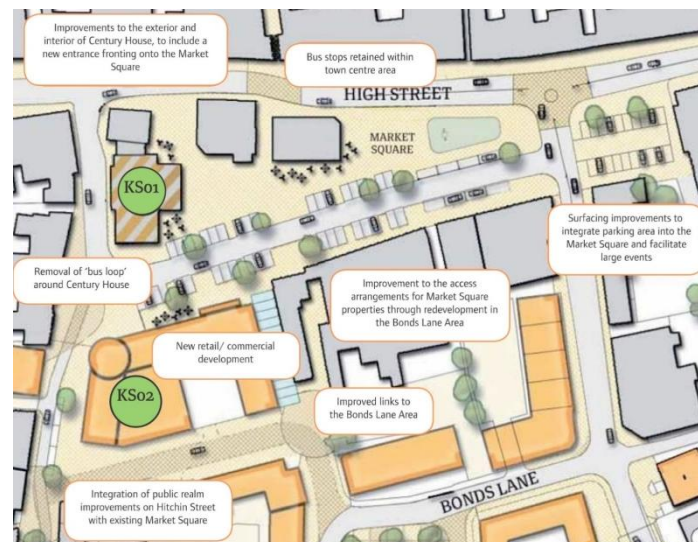


Riverside, Hertford

Town Centre Adopted Strategy & Master Plan SPD (2011)



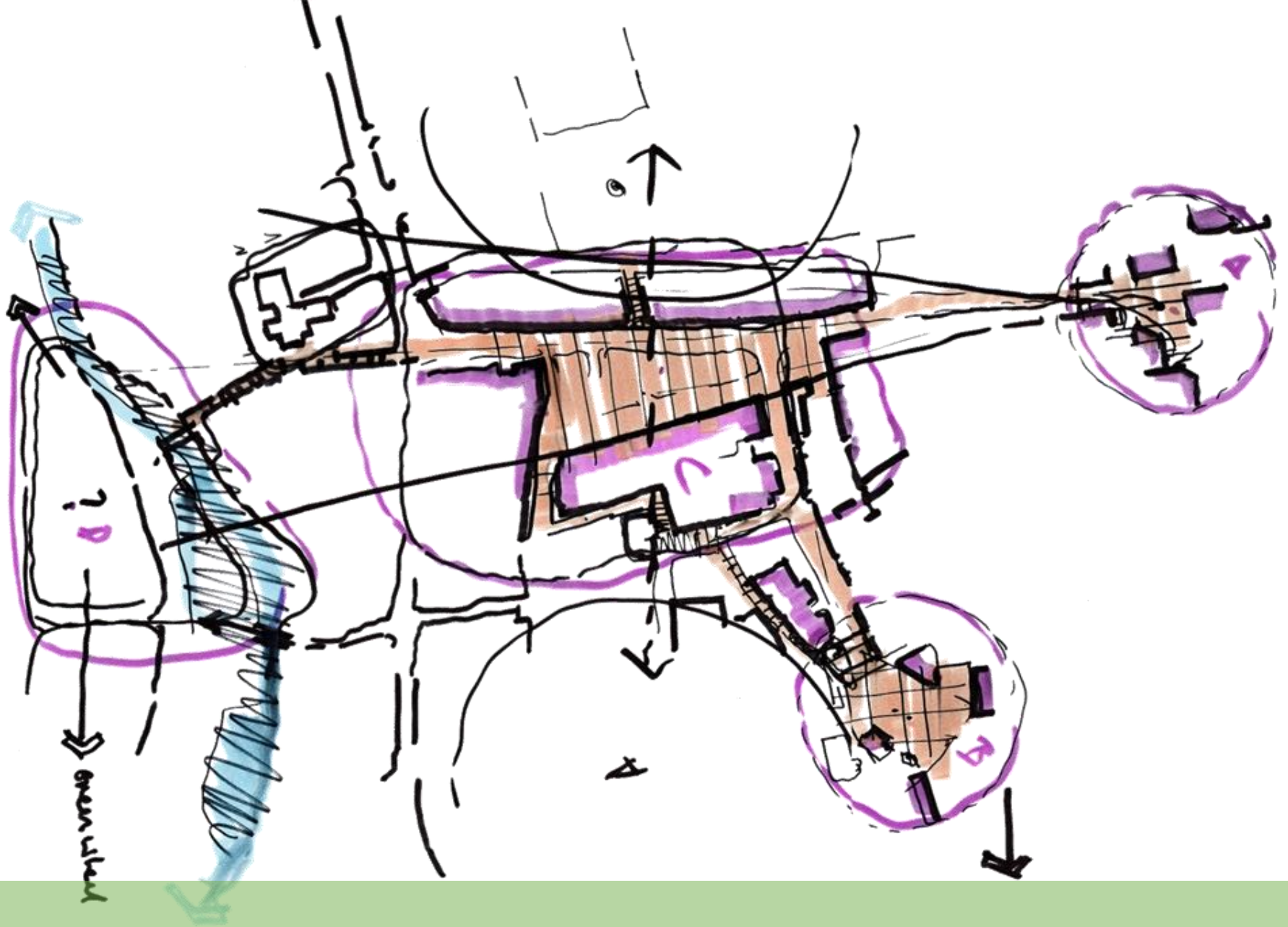
- A comprehensive study completed over two-year period.
- Based on data collected in 2009 – 2011 (before the current Local Plan).
- Primarily focused on the town centre over a 15 – 20-year period (up to 2030 - the current Local Plan period).
- The study seeks to;
 - Identify different character areas in the town centre.
 - Establish overarching objectives.
 - Consider the potential character and treatment of Action/ Key Areas.
 - Outline a potential phasing strategy and mechanisms for delivery.
 - Provide an indication of treatment/ design guidance.
- While many observations are still relevant, the following aspects would benefit from a review and update;
 - Current market forces and future trends.
 - Changes in local and national planning policy.
 - Traffic flows/ movement based on the projected number of residents and visitors.
 - Integration with neighbouring areas - particularly St. Andrew's Church and the river corridor.



Existing initiatives present opportunities for synergy and funding

1. Supergrid, coupled with Biggleswade's growing position as a hub for renewable energy and sustainability - watermills, windmills and the Green Wheel.
2. Lindsells Crossing – a new connection across the railway; could this be widened/ redirected for cars, busses, cycles?
3. Integrated, multi-modal transport hub at the train station; might this be considered as part of an Area Action Plan to improve/ strengthen the gateway to Biggleswade;
 1. New accommodation; commercial/ retail.
 2. Rationalise circulation: drop-off, taxis, cycles, pedestrian.
 3. Parking provision.
 4. Signage/ street furniture.
 5. Public realm enhancement up to Market Place.
4. New secondary school - can this be located to;
 1. Support integration between new and existing communities.
 2. Alleviate private car traffic.
 3. Enable the relocate an existing facility to provide a secondary route that links the town centre and Bayden Powell Way?
5. Potential funding streams such as the Future High Streets Fund or funds for flood alleviation, heritage and conservation?

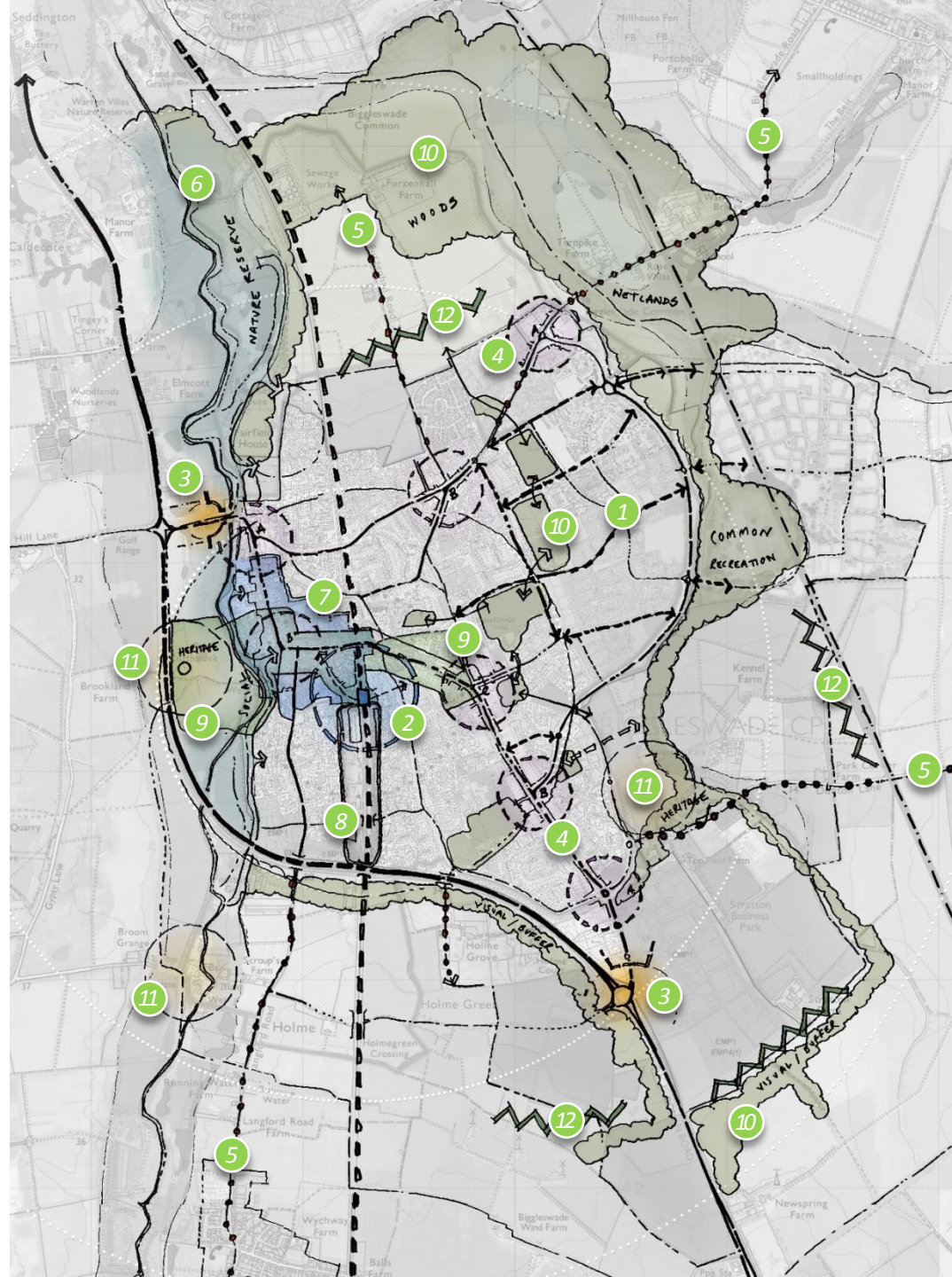




Place Shaping: First Thoughts

A '12 Point Programme' for Place-Shaping

1. Improve east-west connectivity; no 'New Town' and 'Old Town' - one Biggleswade!
2. Revitalise the station quarter as the principal point of arrival and departure.
3. Reinforce the A1(M) junctions as 'front doors' to Historic Biggleswade.
4. Encourage movement from the gateways to the town centre.
5. Strengthen secondary routes into the town to reduce reliance on the A1(M) junctions.
6. Integrate the river corridor as an asset, not the back of the town.
7. Diversify the town centre offering.
8. Review town centre/ station parking provision and the impact on movement and circulation.
9. A string of pearls; create a spine of activity from the Stratton House Hotel and the Station Quarter to the river corridor linking multiple attractions.
10. Develop an underlying landscape strategy/ connect the Green Wheel as a continuous circuit with a series of different character areas.
11. Celebrate heritage assets – castles and forts, moats and mills.
12. Consolidate the edges to prevent urban sprawl.



1. Improve east-west connectivity; no 'New Town' and 'Old Town' - one Biggleswade!

- Forge connections between the town centre and Baden Powell Way to disperse traffic and reduce reliance on Potten Road and London Road.
- Encourage a variety of routes for different modes of transport – walking, cycle, bus and car.
- Incorporate an integrated public transport strategy with a regular, reliable service.

2. Revitalise the station quarter as the principal point of arrival and departure;

- Rather than seeking to entice visitors from the retail park to the town centre, focus on strengthening the train station as the gateway with regular connections to the retail park.
- Public transport interchange with links to key hubs around the town; attractions, local centres, retail park and employment areas.
- Improvements to Station Road as the 'first impression' for visitors.
- Cycle parking.
- Sensitive signage and wayfinding.
- Rationalise access, movement and parking provision (cycle and car).
- Strengthen the secondary pedestrian/ cycle link from Back Street/ Dells Lane.
- Potential development/ commercial opportunities; workspace, café, tourist information, local centre retail.

3. Reinforce the A1(M) junctions as 'front doors' to Historic Biggleswade;

- Move the southern threshold up to the A1(M) junction to integrate the retail park as part of the town (not an independent entity at the edge).
- Bolster the northern gateway as an entrance, not an exit/ back door.
- Sensitive signage (Historic Market Town), landscaping and wayfinding that marries with the treatment of the public realm in the town centre/ Station Quarter/ Market Place.

4. Encourage movement from the gateways to the town centre;

- Enforce primary arteries (London Road, Potten Road and the section of Hill Street up to Sun Street) to maintain free-flowing traffic/ ease of movement; these should remain as primary routes, not become local.
- Bus routes with regular stops (while maintaining traffic flows).
- Strengthen key nodes, vistas and areas of open space.
- Potential development opportunities around key nodes with greater densification and/ or landmark buildings and structures.

5. Strengthen secondary routes into the town to reduce reliance on the A1(M) junctions;

- Existing access and circulation is heavily reliant on the A1(M).
- Consequently, traffic is focused along connecting routes/ junctions at peak times.
- To effectively disperse traffic across the wider network, review the potential to strengthen secondary connections.
- This would also improve access from nearby communities and reinforce Biggleswade's role as the regional hub.

6. Integrate the river corridor as an asset - not the back of the town;

- A valuable attraction and untapped resource.
- Forms the western outlook – views from the A1(M).
- Integral section of the Green Wheel.
- Contains heritage connections – scheduled monuments, mills.
- Opportunities for different activities; tourism, recreation, leisure, culture and entertainment.
- Improve links to the town and the wider landscape.
- Potential allowance of car parking in constrained flood areas.
- Resolve land ownership issues to improve views and access.

7. Diversify the overall town centre offering;

- Greater variety of activities and character areas.
- De-clutter Market Place to provide a multi-use space for different activities.
- Strengthen parallel routes to the High Street/ Market Place – Church Street, Back Street/ Bonds Lane to provide a more expansive pedestrian circuit and experience.
- New employment opportunities, particularly offices/ shared workspaces and studios for creatives/ independents.
- An accessible Town Council presence/ one-stop-shop; tourist information, town centre management etc.
- Museum/ art gallery/ event space.
- Programme of different events to encourage visitors to the town centre throughout the year – markets, entertainment, temporary installations.
- Review the potential/ desirability of a BID-style entity (including retail park stores) that can assist in funding/ promoting events to increase footfall and shoppers.
- Review one-way system to see if two-way movement, pedestrian priority or designated bus/ taxi sections would assist movement and reduce congestion at peak times.

8. Review town centre/ station parking provision and the impact on movement and circulation;

- Locate parking in areas that are constrained yet within walking distance of town centre activities – for instance, in Hitchin, the main car parks are around the edges of the town centre (across the river/ behind the church and at the Priory), which creates a greater circuit of footfall.
- This might allow the removal of parking from Market Place and release prime brownfield sites for potential development.
- Improve links between parking and the town centre; signage, planting, lighting, surface treatment.

9. Create a spine of activity from the Stratton House Hotel and the Station Quarter to the river corridor;

- The town centre is contracting to the core retail offering around Market Place.
- Improving the overall experience will increase the number of visitors to the town centre and through this, footfall for retail activities.
- A 'string of pearls'; strengthening a route from Stratton House to the river presents an opportunity to link multiple attractions including, the train station/ transport hub, Market Place, High Street, St. Andrew's Church, river corridor, mills and ultimately, the site of the castle and the Green Wheel.
- Shifting the threshold of town centre activities from Market Place to the river and the node between London Road and The Baulk will also increase access and activity (point #5).
- Potential for such an initiative to underpin a bid for Future High Street funding.

10. Develop an underlying landscape structure;

- Support a semi-rural character/ connection to nature as a key component of Biggleswade's unique offering.
- Link areas of open space with the river corridor, Green Wheel and the wider Green Infrastructure.
- Encourage biodiversity and natural habitats.
- Connect the Green Wheel to form a continuous circuit with different activities and character areas; meadows, nature reserve, sports and recreation, formal gardens, wetlands, woods, potential outdoor event spaces with café's/ studios/ workshops.
- Improve links to the Green Wheel so this becomes part of the wider movement and circulation strategy (akin to Letchworth's Greenway).
- Rationalise and connect areas of open space across the town - this might involve removing some open spaces where provision is duplicated in order to create new spaces where provision is limited.

11. Celebrate the heritage assets – castles and forts, moats and mills;

- Located amongst new settlements, Biggleswade's rich history is a significant asset. However, moving through the town, there appears to be little reference to the existence of scheduled monuments such as the castle and the medieval moated enclosure north of Dunton Lane.
- Integration with the Green Wheel to provide destinations/ hubs along walking routes/ trails.
- Naming and branding – reinforce references to 'Historic Market Town'/ 'Historic Biggleswade'.
- New signage at the Retail Park and gateways to increase awareness of the town's historic sites.
- Potential museum or temporary exhibition space in the town centre.

12. Consolidate the edges;

- Clearly define the edge of the settlement to prevent urban sprawl and the gradual decentralisation of town centre activities.
- A Brownfield first approach; focus on redeveloping redundant brownfield sites and previously developed sites around transport hubs;
 - Increases activity and security in the town centre.
 - Preserve open space, habitats and biodiversity.
 - Reduces traffic/ congestion.
- If required as part of a long-term strategy, consideration of sites that adjoin existing infrastructure and communities and will help to consolidate the settlement boundary.
- Strengthen the edges with planting; connected to the Green Wheel/ underlying landscape strategy.
- Mitigate views – particularly to/ from the A1(M).

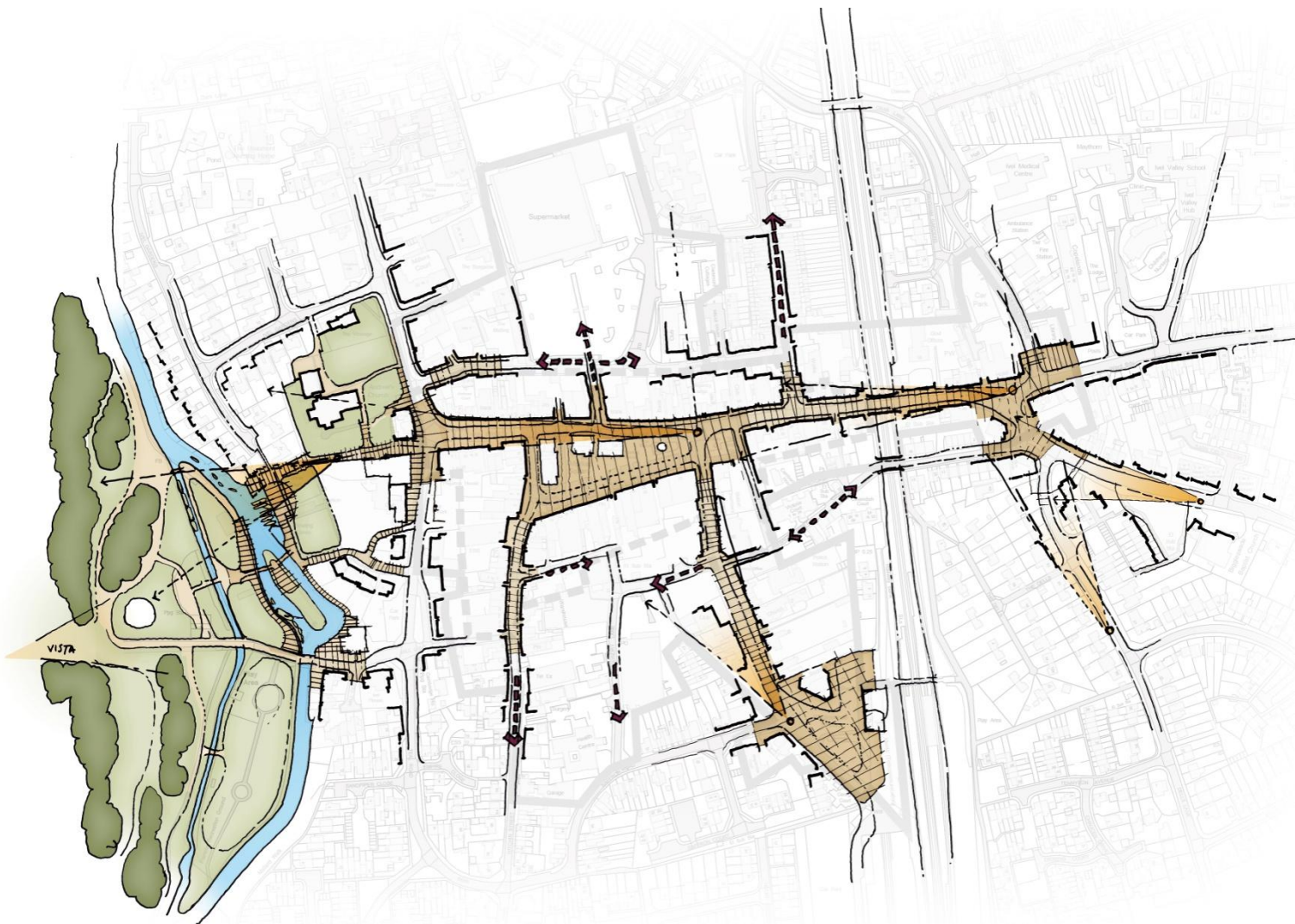
Reintegrate the river (#6)

1894



A string of pearls: an east-west spine of activity that connects multiple assets (#9)

- Continuous link from Stratton House and the station to the site of the castle.
- Connects the town centre, station, conservation area and river corridor/ Green Wheel.
- New riverside quarter.
- Dense planting to screen the A1(M) and frame a vista to St. Andrew's
- Strengthen views from key nodes/ wayfinding.
- Improve north-south links to create a circuit.
- New infill development opportunities.
- Rationalise circulation and parking.



a Stratford-Upon-Avon



b Ware



c Danish Camp, Willington



d Thameside Nature Park



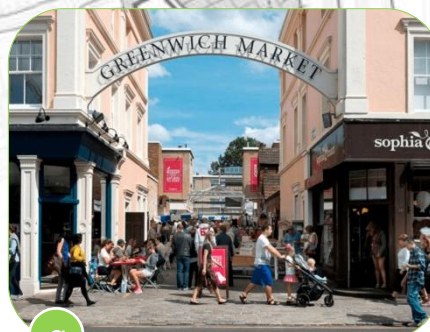
e St. Mary's Church, Hitchin



f Bishop Stortford



g Greenwich Market



h Market Place, Hitchin



Discussion points and 'next steps' ...

1. Agreement of core principles/ strategic objectives; a shared vision for growth and identity over the next 10 – 15 years... and beyond.
2. CBC consultation: alignment with Local Plan, potential synergy with strategic objectives (station upgrade/ interchange, new school) and funding/ technical support.
3. Neighbourhood Plan - integration of overarching principles in the emerging Plan.
4. Design development (may include);
 - Developed Place Making Study:
 - Benchmarking of similar local examples; Hitchin's station approach, market square and arcades; Hertford/ Ware's riverfront, sections of Letchworth's Greenway; Berkhamsted's High Street; Barnet's presentation of heritage assets and Danish Camp's waterfront activities.
 - Develop/ synthesise 12-Point-Programme.
 - Phasing; quick gains/ long term ambitions.
 - Define catalyst projects/ action areas.
 - Options for implementation – funding and management
 - Consultation and stakeholder engagement.
 - Catalyst Area Appraisal: potential character and quantum of catalyst projects/ action areas.
 - Integrated Transport Strategy; settlement-wide study to review access, movement, parking and public transport and the impact of these on the location and make-up of future growth zones.
 - Update Town Centre Master Plan (or integration of overarching principles into NP).



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