

Section 4: Town Centre

The town centre gives Stratford-upon-Avon its distinctive character and charm. Residents rely on it for shopping, work and leisure opportunity; it is what visitors come to see. It is an historic town centre with a rich past. Its heritage is founded firstly on its status as a market town serving a wide community in South Warwickshire, enriched by its celebration as the place of Shakespeare's birth. The different elements of its past have been comfortably accommodated as the town has grown. The market survives, shops and offices have grown and spread and above all the Royal Shakespeare Theatre has come into a splendid maturity.

The fact that the town centre functions well and is successful is expressed in one inescapable indicator - it has been and remains extremely popular.

Our expectations are of:

- A flourishing commercial and retail town providing for a high proportion of residents' shopping choices and employment with a wide variety of entertainment and recreation;
- A town that cherishes its heritage and enhances the enjoyment of it;
- A town enjoyed equally by residents and visitors;
- A town that residents and visitors can access, move about in and enjoy with a carefully designed balance between traffic on foot, on cycles and in motor vehicles;
- A town that includes imaginative new or adapted housing in its centre; and where new housing to meet the needs of the wider community has a choice of means of access to enjoy the centre.

The town has prospered because of its heritage. Yet visitors when they come for the Shakespeare experience come also for the shopping and the whole experience of the market town; and changes to say transport or parking arrangements can support enjoyment of the town's historic buildings and its commercial life.

The town centre is defined on the Proposals Map [Figure 2].

Objective A: Promoting the Vitality and Viability of the Town Centre

Shopping and commerce in the town centre has evolved from market town with associated trades into the mix of multiple, national and independent traders, offices and workshops we have today. The town centre has been regarded both locally and further afield as a secure, prosperous and above all a quality centre.

However, there are some signs that this is changing:

- The expansion of the town in recent years with large housing developments is giving rise to a changing demographic within the town with a corresponding change of demand for shopping and other services;
- The increasing pattern and volume of remote shopping using the internet;
- The loss of some nationally recognised “chain” traders who are concentrating their activities in primary locations. We can see this in Next, Boots and recently TK Maxx focusing on the Maybird Centre and in the absence of others from the town centre;
- The lack of choice; for example in female fashion where there is a particular gap for the 25-45 age range;
- The significant gap in the town by the failure of Town Square and the consequent unbalanced spread of shops within the town; and
- The expansion of the Maybird Centre - an edge of town development.

No one change of policy can set the town back on a course of strengthening prosperity. But a series of individual measures are proposed which, when taken together, will ensure that the necessary focus is given to the need to protect the vitality and viability of the town centre. Its success can no longer be taken for granted.

Policy TC1 – Town Centre Strategic Partnership

A Town Centre Strategic Partnership comprising of key stakeholders and led by a Town Centre Manager will be formed and tasked with preparing and implementing a Town Centre Strategy to address key issues such as:

- Improving the perception and image of the town;
- Supporting independent businesses;
- Liaising with established retailers to encourage the desired mix of retailers;
- Further developing a markets policy to include an entrepreneurs' market;
- Advocacy and administration of parking and traffic policies;
- Improving the pedestrian and cyclist experience in accordance with Policy CLW7;
- Building on the recognised contribution that creative industries make to the town's prosperity; and
- Enhancing the overall appearance of the town and public realm including pedestrian and vehicle signage.

Explanation

The ongoing strategy for securing the wellbeing of the shopping and commercial centre will not be delivered without active and purposeful management. The key recommendation of Casely is centred on the development of strategic marketing drive to focus on the strengths and advantages of the town as a tourist, cultural and shopping centre, on the introduction of car parking policies to encourage shoppers and shared space - traffic and pedestrians - to create a coherent and welcoming pedestrian environment.

The Town Centre Strategic Partnership will include representatives of the three Local Authorities (Warwickshire County Council, Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Stratford-upon-Avon Town Council), the RSC, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the Town Trust, Stratford and Stratford Vision.

The current indication is that Stratford, with the additional membership of the Town Trust, are able and prepared to fulfil this role. In the event that Stratford are unable to fulfil this role then contingency plans will be put in place to appoint an appropriate body to take this forward.

The Partnership will be tasked with facilitating and implementing where possible the vision and policies contained within this Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Policy TC2 – Primary Shopping Frontages

The following primary shopping frontages play a vital role in maintaining a competitive and vibrant town centre:

- Bridge Street
- Henley Street
- High Street
- Sheep Street (north side only)
- Wood Street

In order to preserve the vitality and viability of the town centre, non-retail uses at ground floor level within the primary shopping frontages shall not exceed 10%.

Explanation

For the purposes of this policy, retail uses are those defined in Use Class A1 of the Town and Country Planning (Uses Classes) Order 1987 (as amended).

Due to competition from higher order retail centres there is a need to strongly resist proposals that would reduce the proportion of retail units in the primary shopping frontages. In order to safeguard the retail function of town centres, consideration shall be given to the guideline of no more than 10% of non-retail units within the primary shopping frontages.

Concentration of non-retail units and the break up of large retail units often dilutes the retail offer, which, due to the subsequent decline in ‘footfall’, can have a detrimental impact on the remaining retail units.

Policy TC3 – Shop Fronts

A town centre shop front scheme will be produced, adopted and administered by the District Council and the Town Council in consultation with the Stratford Society in which:

- a) Free architectural advice is given to owners or lessees or prospective lessees on appropriate new shop fronts or improvements or changes to existing ones; and
- b) Grants of up to 75% of approved works are made by the District Council to support principles of sympathetic design consistent with the character of the historic town centre as described below.

In order to promote principles of sympathetic design, schemes should be:

- a) In keeping with the guidelines set down in the Stratford-upon-Avon High Street Study as adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance;
- b) Consistent with the updated design guide;
- c) Consistent Policy BE9 on advertisements; and
- d) Consistent with current listed building regulation advice.

Explanation

To be completed...

Policy TC4 – Rother Street and the Rother Market

Proposals to encourage Rother Street shopping and the Rother Market to become more established as a key anchor area shall be encouraged in the following ways:

- Promoting and expanding the traditional market use and its frequency;
- Promoting the area as a place of public interest and resort; and

- Permitting the sensitive conversion of existing buildings and new buildings designed sympathetically for consistent uses including hotel and restaurants

Proposals which would conflict with the objectives of this policy will be resisted.

Figure 3 - Rother Street and the Rother Market

Explanation

The Rother Street market has become increasingly popular and has been recently refurbished. It makes a positive contribution to life on the west side of the town where the shopping use is weakest.

It is strategically placed with Town Square on one side, which is also a critically important central site with consent for redevelopment, yet with only a few remaining trading lessees it currently has an abandoned atmosphere dampening the vitality of a key part of the central area. On the other side of the market is Greenhill Street, which is rapidly losing its earlier character as a lively trading street with a variety of small independent shops and becoming dominated by fast food and night-time entertainment clubs and bars.

For these reasons the Rother Street and Rother Market area is identified as an important focus for attention and catalyst for regenerating Town Square and Greenhill Street.

Policy TC5 – Town Square

Phase 1 - This Neighbourhood Development Plan supports proposals which provide a mix of retail and leisure in use classes A1/A3 and D2 in order to enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre where they:

- Create an enhanced high quality pedestrian link between Rother Market and High Street together with improved public realm;
- Open up vistas into and through the development, particularly at the Wood Street and High Street entrances and create attractive and open streets; and
- Are of high quality design and on a scale compatible with the historic town centre.

Phase 2 - This Neighbourhood Development Plan supports the inclusion of the existing NCP car park as a second phase to the redevelopment of Town Square. Proposals should:

- Include town centre compatible uses, e.g. retail, leisure, cultural and offices, or residential, and conform with the three principles set out in above; and
- Such development to be subject to the provision of any necessary alternative car parking.

Figure 4 – Town Square

Explanation

Town Square needs urgent attention. The first priority is to ensure that the scheme for which permission has been granted is implemented in such a way as to secure the three principles set out above; in order to help achieve this objective the developers and the district council will consult closely with community representatives on the key principles of good design which are to be applied to the site.

A second phase will ensure that the site opens into Rother Market with an attractive and high quality design. This development will need to be coordinated in respect of traffic, car parking and service considerations and the principles and parameters of Policies TC4 and TC9.

Policy TC6 – Digital Showrooms and Demonstration Outlets

The provision of digital showrooms and demonstration outlets linked to out of town or internet shopping sites and the provision of incubator units will be supported in the town centre.

Explanation

Digital showrooms and demonstration units in the town centre allow shoppers to browse and buy primarily via interactive screens. They can encourage businesses to establish themselves with a presence in the town centre whilst maintaining premises outside the town centre.

Policy TC7 – Out of Town Retail

All retail development in excess of 150sqm shall be located in town centre or edge of town centre locations unless it can be demonstrated by an independent retail study or other relevant evidence that there are exceptional circumstances to deviate from this approach or that the development will not adversely impact on the vitality and viability of the town centre.

Explanation

This policy is designed to support a town centre first approach. At present 60% of retail businesses (as defined in the emerging Core Strategy and Use Classes Order) are independents giving the town a major competitive advantage. Everything possible needs to be done to maintain and enhance this strength.

Equally, more needs to be done to adapt to the increasing trend of internet shopping by introducing a flexible approach to shopping uses such as demonstration units and encouraging start-up business in the town centre.

Policy TC8 – Increasing the Presence of Housing in the Town Centre

Proposals for new residential accommodation within the town centre will be supported providing there are no conflicts with other policies in this Plan e.g. Policies E1 and CLW1.

Explanation

There is traditional and relatively new housing currently within the town centre. It adds to the business and prosperity of the town. It is an essential feature of a flourishing town supporting as it does the commercial life of the town at all times of the day and facilitates an important evening activity.

Its provision should increase and opportunities taken to introduce new sites and encourage the conversion of first floor premises. Particular locations for housing development or conversions are Town Square, the Birmingham Road and the canal frontage. This plan stresses the importance of locating new housing to meet overall housing need as close to the town centre as possible and ensuring that there is a choice of modes of access to the town centre from those sites. Housing within the Regeneration Area will have access on foot or cycle along an improved canal side and into Birmingham Road with enhanced attractiveness as outlined in the previous section.

Policy TC9 – Greenhill Street and Arden Street Environmental Improvement Area

Greenhill Street, Station Road, Station Approach and the Arden Street junction is designated as an Environmental Improvement Area with the primary objective of enhancing one of the main entrances to the town for residents and visitors with high class pedestrian links.

This is to be achieved through the following means:

- Restricting uses to primarily shops, cafés and restaurants;
- Improving the public realm by better quality paving and signposting;

- Introducing stricter controls over the display of advertisements;
- Including the area within the Shop Fronts Design Guide;
- Improving the Arden Street junction for pedestrian and cycles through a new crossing; and
- Creating an attractive pedestrian and cycle route from the station into the town centre

Proposals which positively contribute to and enhance the Environmental Improvement Area will be supported.

Proposals which fail to take account of the objectives of the Environmental Improvement Area will be resisted.

Figure 5 – Greenhill Street and Arden Street Environmental Improvement Area

Explanation

Greenhill Street is a key gateway into the town centre and the main route from the railway station as well as being a location for secondary shopping which is invaluable for the encouragement of small independent traders.

Improvements to the public realm and the quality of the built form along this important corridor will be given great weight in the consideration of development proposals.

Policy TC10 – Rother Triangle Environmental Improvement Area

The site known as the Rother Triangle i.e. the whole site bound by Greenhill Street, Grove Road, Rother Market and Rother Street, shall be safeguarded for future redevelopment for mixed uses including retail, education, conference and hotel, and open space.

Any comprehensive development of this area shall be subject to:

- A master plan addressing massing, layout, land uses, connectivity and transport implications;
- An appropriate impact study justifying the need and demand for any of the uses proposed not outlined above; and
- A design brief for all aspects of the development

Full public consultation should be carried out prior to the submission of any application.

Figure 6 – Rother Triangle Environmental Improvement Area

Explanation

The shopping related policies within this Plan are based on the principle that within the currently forecast trends any further comparison goods shopping will be accommodated within Town Square (see Policy TC5). However, in the event of the forecast changing within the intended period of the Plan it is prudent to make provision for possible further shopping opportunities which would be made within phase two of the Town Square site and the Rother Triangle. The site would also accommodate the possibility of further car parking (see Policy TC15) and a site for a conference centre or hotel.

Policy TC11 – Birmingham Road, Arden Street and Windsor Street Environmental Improvement Area

To support the evolution of the cultural quarter the site bounded by Birmingham Road, Arden Street and Windsor Street shall be safeguarded principally for hotel, higher education and office uses, including an open ground floor frontage for shopping or other uses with public access.

Any comprehensive development of this area to be subject to:

- A master plan addressing massing, layout, land uses, connectivity and transport implications;
- An appropriate impact study justifying the need and demand for any of the uses proposed not outlined above; and

- A design brief for all aspects of the development

Full public consultation should be carried out prior to the submission of any application.

Figure 7 – Birmingham Road, Arden Street and Windsor Street Environmental Improvement Area

Explanation

This important quadrant, situated on the edge of the town centre, provides a key pedestrian link with the Maybird Centre and is an important gateway into the town centre. It has the potential to support further development of the cultural quarter (see Policy TC12) particularly with the expansion of educational and study uses together with hotel and office uses.

There is also an opportunity to make provision for some open access development e.g. shopping units on the ground floor fronting Birmingham Road which would maintain and support the Town Centre to Maybird Centre Environmental Improvement Area (see Policy TC18).

Environmental enhancements to the public realm, the renewal of unsympathetic buildings and improved pedestrian and cycle access will all be encouraged.

Objective B: Improving the Visitor Experience in the Town Centre

Stratford-upon-Avon is a cultural destination recognised around the world. Visitors come to enjoy the theatre and wider Shakespeare experience, the shopping, the amenities of the town, its heritage and the river. They add to the vitality of the town and they contribute to its prosperity.

This Neighbourhood Development Plan seeks to encourage visitors to the town by making it as easy as possible for them to enjoy

and experience the wide variety of businesses, services and attractions on offer.

Whilst there is no evidence that there is a need for a large-scale development of visitor facilities, there is a continuing need for reasonable growth and modernisation. As a tourist and visitor centre the town needs to be contemporary and competitive. In this context the area around the Birthplace in Henley Street is critical and opportunity should be given for it to evolve into an attractive cultural quarter with museum, education and public exhibition facilities.

Policy TC12 - Promoting a Cultural and Learning Quarter

Development proposals which promote cultural or learning activities, including new public exhibition space, in Henley Street between Meer Street and Windsor Street will be actively promoted.

A design brief should be agreed by the local authorities for the whole quarter, including the south side of Henley Street where further sensitive courtyard shopping and cafes should be permitted.

Figure 8 – Cultural and Learning Quarter

Explanation

This part of Henley Street around Shakespeare's birthplace has long been established as one of the principal cultural areas of the town drawing a high proportion of the town's visitors. It is an appropriate location for the further expansion, particularly for public exhibition space or a museum related to the life and work of Shakespeare. The shopping use can be consolidated around the existing emerging courtyard shopping on the south side of Henley Street and any need for development of educational resource would be suitably located within the Windsor Street, Birmingham Road, Arden Street Environmental Improvement Area (see policy TC11).

Policy TC13 - Promoting New Conference Facilities in the Town Centre

Proposals for new conference facilities adjacent to the existing leisure centre will be supported where they do not conflict with other policies in this Plan.

Explanation

This provides one of two sites for the location of a conference centre development in the future. See also Policy TC10.

Objective C: Improving Access and Movement within the Town Centre

The town centre is dominated by car usage and yet accommodates at certain times of the week a very high number of residents and visitors moving around on foot. It is a less friendly environment for both pedestrians and cyclists than exists in many other historic towns. Creating a better balance and safer environment would support the re-invigoration of the town's shopping experience and enjoyment of its heritage for residents and visitors.

Improved transport and parking arrangements and pedestrian and cyclist connectivity throughout the town centre would create a more welcoming experience for visitors; safer environment for people on foot and better accessibility between railway station, coach and bus stations and car parks and about the town for shopping and recreational visiting; and vehicles for different purposes would still have the opportunity to use the centre in conveniently arranged car parks or on the street.

Policy TC14 - Improving the Balance Between Vehicles and Pedestrians and Cyclists

The following schemes will be promoted to provide improvements within the town centre:

- a) **In Bridge Street:** The narrowing of carriageways and the widening of footways; retained car parking on the northern (M&S) side; retained taxi ranks on the southern side; extension of the bus stopping bays on both sides; continued two way traffic flow; 20mph speed limit; and improved public realm and landscaping
- b) **In High Street (between Bridge Street and Sheep Street):** An experimental closure for 6 months with no access for vehicles between 11am and 4pm except for emergency vehicles, buses, taxis and blue badge holders; 20mph speed limit; continued two way traffic with restricted loading. Subject to the results of the experimental closure, any permanent closure of High Street will include a redesigned carriageway; widened footways; 20mph speed limit; and improved public realm and landscaping
- c) **Bridge Street and Wood Street roundabout:** An improved crossing point from High Street to Henley Street over the Wood Street arm of the Bridge Street roundabout should be designed and implemented in order to improve pedestrian movement between

Explanation

An improved balance has been successfully achieved in Henley Street with a daily period of closure and in Waterside by redesigning the carriageway and introducing a one-way traffic flow. Extending one or other these initiatives to High Street and Bridge Street will create an improved experience for residents and visitors in these key streets in the town centre.

However, if a sense of continuity for pedestrians between Henley Street into High Street is to be achieved it will be essential to make movement between the two easier across Wood Street. There are some choices about how this may be achieved which would be better considered in the light of the results of an experiment for a limited closure in High Street.

Policy TC15 - Parking in the Town Centre

The strategic objective for car parking in the town centre, both on and off street, should be the prosperity, vitality and competitiveness of the town's businesses and shops whilst having full regard to the following:

- The significance of car parking to the economic and financial well-being of the community;
- The levels of traffic congestion in and around the town centre and the impact of those levels on the town; and

- The operation of the park and ride schemes

A Car Parking Advisory Body should be set up to monitor:

- The use of car parks;
- The operation and patronage of the park and ride;
- The level of charges; and
- Advise on their effectiveness in meeting these strategic objectives

The Car Parking Advisory Body should be administered by the Town Centre Strategic Partnership with membership from the Local Transport Group, members of the local authorities and representatives from the key commercial interests in the town.

With the exception of the NCP car park on Rother Street, all existing car parks within the town centre will be protected in order to ensure that appropriate levels of parking is maintained to support the economic viability of the town centre.

New public car parks will only be permitted where the need has been clearly evidenced and the location is suitable and does not conflict with any other policies contained within this plan.

Explanation

The location of car parks has evolved as the town has grown and cannot easily be changed. The provision of further off street parking needs to be kept constantly under review particularly in the light of anticipated increases in housing provision in the district. This will fall under the stewardship of the Car Parking Advisory Body.

The policy underlying car park charges also needs to be kept under review by the Car Parking Advisory Body together with a clear parking strategy to support the longstanding well being and competitiveness of the town centre.

The growing problem of congestion in the town and its approaches also needs to be kept under close review. Parking strategies and their relationship with the use of park and ride will be an increasingly critical instrument in dealing with congestion.

Policy TC16 - Coaches in the Town Centre

Routing agreements for coaches in the town centre will be encouraged between the Town Centre Strategic Partnership and the various town centre hotels and tour operators in order to avoid unsuitable narrow streets and facilitate smooth and easy access to pick up and drop off points.

The introduction of designated coach set down areas within the town centre will be encouraged including the dual use of existing loading bays.

Explanation

With such large numbers of tourists visiting the town centre and the popularity of the numerous excellent hotels in the town centre, the volume of coaches travelling through the town centre is high.

This policy builds on progress already made by the Local Transport Group. The agreed routes would be secured by voluntary arrangement between operators and the Local Transport Group with the support of the County Council as Highway Authority.

Policy TC17 - Cycling in the Town Centre

Proposals for safer cycling within the town centre will be actively encouraged and implemented in consultation with the County Council and amenity groups. This will include a priority to establish safe and connected cycle to school routes, which, wherever possible, will be segregated from traffic.

Priority will be given to improving the following road junctions:

- Alcester Road with Arden Street
- Evesham Road with Seven Meadows Road
- Clopton Road with Birmingham Road

Explanation

This policy specifically emphasises the needs of the town centre. Detailed guidelines are stated under INF3 which covers the whole Neighbourhood area.

Policy TC18 - Town Centre to Maybird Centre Environmental Improvement Area

Improvements to the route from the town centre along Windsor Street and Birmingham Road to the Maybird Centre will be encouraged by promoting the following schemes:

- Widened footpaths and improved public realm including street planting;
- The creation of lively and active street frontages consisting of residential and mixed uses linked to the canal side proposals in accordance with Policy H3;
- The redevelopment of the corner of Birmingham Road and Clopton Road with a carefully designed housing development in accordance with Policy H4 and TC10;
- The creation of a pedestrian and cyclist priority crossing at the junction of Birmingham Road and Clopton Road; and
- The creation of a pedestrian and cycle link using the existing disused railway bridge over the canal to facilitate links with the Canal Quarter Regeneration Zone as well as with the Maybird Centre via the canal towpath

Figure 9 – Town Centre to Maybird Centre Environmental Improvement Area

Explanation

The Birmingham Road is one of the principal routes into the town centre and should be made more attractive and welcoming from the Maybird Centre as far as the Windsor street junction with an improved public realm and links to the canal side area giving an important new amenity to the town.

Policy TC19 - Alleviation of congestion on the Tramway Bridge

In the light of the current levels of use of the Tramway Bridge proposals to relieve congestion and improve accessibility and pedestrian safety will be encouraged.

Explanation

Further explanation is provided in Policy INF3 which draws attention for the need to provide additional pedestrian and cycle capacity across the River Avon. This is driven in part by the congestion on the Tramway Bridge, especially when festivals are in progress, and the need to provide ease of access to the Town Centre as utilisation of the recreation car park increases (see Policy INF1 initiatives to reduce peak time travel).