

AGENDA

CABINET

MONDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2022

4.00 PM

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, FENLAND HALL,
COUNTY ROAD, MARCH**

Committee Officer: Linda Albon
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Whilst this meeting will be held in public, we encourage members of the public to view the meeting via our YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/KSIPKU4iNbo>

- 1 To receive apologies for absence
- 2 Previous Minutes (Pages 3 - 6)

To confirm and sign the minutes of 3 October 2022.
- 3 To report additional items for consideration which the Chairman deems urgent by virtue of the special circumstances to be now specified
- 4 To receive members' declaration of any interests under the Local Code of Conduct or any interest under the Code of Conduct on Planning Matters in respect of any item to be discussed at the meeting
- 5 Freedom Leisure Utilities (Pages 7 - 26)

To consider possible approaches to mitigating the excessive energy costs currently being placed on Freedom Leisure and options to support Freedom with such costs.

Appendix 2 to this report comprises exempt information – to exclude the public (including the press) from a meeting of a committee it is necessary for the following

proposition to be moved and adopted: "that the public be excluded from the meeting for Items which would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) as indicated."

6 Levelling Up Fund - Wisbech Masterplan (Pages 27 - 136)

This report revisits the projects within the Council's Levelling Up Bid, as well as presents the final draft of the Wisbech Masterplan to Cabinet.

7 Draft 6 Month Cabinet Forward Plan (Pages 137 - 138)

For information purposes.

8 Items which the Chairman has under item 3 deemed urgent

CONFIDENTIAL - ITEMS COMPRISING EXEMPT INFORMATION

To exclude the public (including the press) from a meeting of a committee it is necessary for the following proposition to be moved and adopted: "that the public be excluded from the meeting for Items which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) as indicated."

9 Wisbech High Street Update - Confidential (Pages 139 - 142)

To provide Cabinet with an update regarding ongoing work related to 11 – 12 and 24 High Street, Wisbech.

Friday, 4 November 2022

Members: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor S Clark, Councillor S Count, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor C Seaton and Councillor S Tierney

CABINET



MONDAY, 3 OCTOBER 2022 - 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor S Clark, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor C Seaton and Councillor S Tierney

APOLOGIES: Councillor S Count and Councillor Mrs D Laws

The meeting commenced with Cabinet reflecting on recent national events and a minute's silence was held in memory of HM Queen Elizabeth II. A further minute's silence was also held for former Councillor Ralph Butcher, who had sadly also recently passed away.

CAB30/22 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The public minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2022 were confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

CAB31/22 FENLAND WALKING, CYCLING & MOBILITY AID STRATEGY

Councillor Boden stated that since publication of the agenda, revised versions of the Fenland Walking, Cycling & Mobility Aid Strategy report and Appendix 4 had been produced. The changes had been highlighted and two additional pages circulated to Cabinet and published online. All members agreed to the alterations.

Councillor Seaton presented the report and thanked the Hereward Community Rail Partnership for their assistance with funding in helping to develop this important policy approach for Fenland.

Councillor Mrs French said that although this is welcome, she is disappointed about the mixture of who is responsible for what. She stated that County Council has a legal responsibility to replace faded white lines, but she has been asking for over 12 months for the 'keep clear' signs outside the fire station to be repainted as well as the zebra crossing on the High Street. She asked why these now appear in this document when County has a statutory duty to replace them. Furthermore, there is nothing in the document regarding cycle paths from Peas Hill to Mill Hill using the grass verge and not the road space. When she spoke to county council officers at a MATs meeting last week, they knew nothing about it, and she would like an explanation from officers as to why this has been missed out.

Councillor Seaton responded that firstly there is mention within the document of the cycle path from Peas Hill to Mill Hill and it is part of the policy going forward. Regarding the lines outside the fire station, it states in the report that this has been passed to the County Council as it falls under the responsibility of Highways; no part of the policy strategy document can therefore address that. Councillor Boden said it is important to point out for clarification that, in respect of the use of the grass verge on the Isle of Ely way between Peas Hill and Mill Hill, we should not merely state that we want to use it for the cycle path but that it needs to be a segregated cycle way and not conjoined to the highway. Councillor Seaton advised he would note that and forward the information to officers.

Councillor Boden commented that in respect of NCN63 the situation in respect of wet and dry routes is unsatisfactory and there needs to be more discussion with Sustrans regarding this. Councillor Seaton agreed that he would take this matter up further with Sustrans.

Proposed by Councillor Seaton, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and Cabinet AGREED to:

- **Note the progress relating to the approved schemes and the March Area Transport Strategy Walking and Cycling Projects**
- **To note the outcome of the public consultation on version 1 of the strategy**
- **To note the action plans of schemes**
- **To review the proposed Cycling, Walking & Mobility Aid Improvement Strategy following the above and adopt this as Version 2.**

CAB32/22 BIDDING FOR EXTERNAL FUNDING & PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Members considered the Bidding for External Funding and Project Management report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Boden said that although this report did not need to come to Cabinet as it is an internal matter about the way in which projects are funded, bid for, and managed, he felt that given the importance of the subject and this being a different environment from that of six months ago, it was important to bring this into the public arena. He added that the Council must be alert to and aware of the difficulties with capital projects in terms of funding them, keeping to budget, and managing them effectively and efficiently to achieve the best outcomes for our local communities.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Seaton and Cabinet AGREED to note the changes in agreed processes.

CAB33/22 11-12 AND 24 HIGH STREET, WISBECH (VERBAL UPDATES)

Councillor Seaton gave a verbal update on progress with the Wisbech High Street projects.

Councillor Seaton advised that several bids had been submitted in respect of 24 High Street, one for £200k to the Brownfield Land Release Fund and one for £210k to the CPCA for a housing grant. He added that the Council will shortly be signing a pre-construction service agreement with the contractors and construction is due to start early next year.

In respect of 11-12 High Street, Councillor Seaton advised that discussion is ongoing with a housing provider and a cost consultant report has been received for a façade scheme, i.e., a frontage wall, with further cost information awaited in respect of party wall works. Due diligence is required on the offer of a freehold purchase from a company. Two developers approached informally have confirmed they have no interest in the site as they say the scheme is unviable even with a £1m grant and for a £1 purchase price. No formal market testing has been undertaken to date.

Councillor Tierney said that it is good to see some movement on this. He has heard it said in the public domain that this should have been completed by now but as nobody will take it on even with £1m off and a £1 purchase price then clearly there are problems with the site. His concern is that a frontage will make it look better, but once it is up, the project can be put to the back of the mind. Broadly, we would like to hear better news, but at least it is not a disaster.

Councillor Seaton pointed out that the façade would be dependent on the Lottery Grant funding allowing some of the monies to be used towards that and we are currently waiting for that confirmation should we go down that route. Councillor Hoy requested that if a façade is to be built

then it be built high enough to hide the scaffolding and general mess; to which Councillor Seaton gave his agreement.

Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Seaton for his update.

CAB34/22 CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

Members considered the Constitutional Amendments report presented by Councillor Boden.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and Cabinet AGREED a proposed amendment to paragraph 10.1 of the Standing Orders so that motions on notice are required to be submitted by 12 noon as opposed to 5pm and to recommend that change to Full Council for approval.

CAB35/22 DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Councillor Boden presented the draft 6-month Cabinet Forward Plan for information.

Councillor Mrs French said she was disappointed that no mention is made of Civil Parking Enforcement on the Forward Plan, but she understands why because this is not progressing as quickly as it should at County Council. Councillor Boden agreed it is disappointing but said as this matter is in the hands of County Council, unfortunately he cannot guarantee when it can go on the Plan.


CAB36/22 PREVIOUS MINUTES (CONFIDENTIAL)

The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2022 were confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

2.30 pm

Chairman

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Agenda Item No:	5	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	14 November 2022	
Report Title:	Freedom Leisure - energy crisis impact and cost mitigation measures and support	

1 Summary

- 1.1 Freedom Leisure has asked the Council to consider providing financial support and/or changes in service provision to fund the increase in energy costs to run the four leisure facilities. This report asks Cabinet to consider possible approaches to mitigating the excessive energy costs currently being placed on Freedom Leisure and to consider options to support Freedom with such costs.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 Leisure centres play a critical role in supporting health and wellbeing, tackling health inequalities and levelling up communities. Fenland's leisure centres offer the community the opportunity to maintain or improve their activity levels, improving their health and reducing their risk of ill health. The leisure centres also offer children the opportunity to learn the important life skill of swimming.
- 2.2 In December 2018 Freedom Leisure, a charitable trust, took over the operation and management of the Council's four leisure centres with a 15 year agreement.
- 2.3 This arrangement has saved FDC £351,000 p.a. Additionally, a staff review of contract management staff as a result of the new Freedom contract added an additional £49,000 p.a to the annual savings, equating to £5.6 million of savings over the life of the contract.
- 2.4 The Council supported Freedom through the impact of Covid 19 as a part of our contractual obligations which is set out for context within the report.
- 2.5 The energy crisis that the country is currently experiencing has added exceptional unavoidable costs into the Leisure contract with Freedom. It was anticipated that the Government's support to businesses on increased energy costs would keep costs down, however that has not been sufficient. Whilst Government has set up a scheme, the Energy Bill Relief Scheme (EBRS) to support businesses, the impact of the scheme is limited, especially for high energy services such as leisure centres, particularly those with swimming pools.
- 2.6 In the final 6 months of 2022/23 Freedom estimates excess energy costs of £281,254. The predicted excess energy costs for 2023/24 are estimated to be in excess of £600,000. These costs are estimations based on previous energy use. It should also be noted that the 2023/24 estimation assumes a continuation of the Government's EBRS scheme. This continuation has not been confirmed

by Government at this time. Nor do we know the trajectory of energy costs into the future.

- 2.7 Freedom is not in a unique position. Excess energy costs are affecting the whole leisure sector regardless of whether services are delivered in house or through a contract partner. Therefore, Freedom and other leisure providers have been actively lobbying the Government through the LGA, District Councils Network, UK Active, Swim England and directly to Fenland's local MP Stephen Barclay, highlighting the severe financial difficulty that the leisure sector is facing and the potential consequences and threat of closure of leisure facilities in future without additional financial support. Examples of this lobbying and of facilities closing elsewhere are contained in the appendices.
- 2.8 Cabinet should note that this paper only covers the current financial year. The Government's current EBRS support scheme ends on 31 March 2023. No confirmation of an extension has been made. Even if the EBRS remains in place next year, the excess costs for energy will exceed £600,000 for the leisure centres. Without a significant reduction in wholesale energy costs or significant Government intervention to support vulnerable industries, a further paper will be presented to Cabinet in early 2023 reviewing the situation in regards to Freedom once more.
- 2.9 Cabinet are asked to consider whether to financially support Freedom Leisure with their excess energy costs or provide feedback on what elements of service provision could be altered to bridge this financial gap in 2022/23 as set out in the options at section 9. Members should note that the figures within each option are an estimate.

3 Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet;

- 3.1 notes the considerable impact that the energy crisis has had on leisure businesses across the country;
- 3.2 notes the good work being carried out by Freedom Leisure in the leisure centres following the covid pandemic, particularly with regard to the increased number of children on the learn to swim programme every week;
- 3.3 recognises the essential role that the Council's leisure facilities play in helping to maintain the health of our community;
- 3.4 recognises the significant financial challenges that the Council itself is facing;
- 3.5 considers Option 2 (Section 9) - changes to opening hours for the 4 centres from 1 December 2022-31 March 2023 and advise officers whether they wish to agree to this change saving Freedom approximately £45,000.
- 3.6 notes Option 3 (Section 9) regarding energy billing adjustments saving £27,000.
- 3.7 notes Option 4 (Section 9) regarding the pending NNDR relief application.
- 3.8 to advise officers as to whether to add items at Option 5 (Section 9) on additional Solar PV (£350,000) and swimming pool LED lighting (£40,000) to the Council's Capital Programme and adjust the programme as per Option 6.

- 3.9 notes the price rises as set by Freedom in Option 8 (Section 10) of the report and agree the above CPI rises for swimming for children and concessions.
- 3.10 to consider and delegate to the Section 151 Officer, working in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Finance and Leisure, to offer direct financial support to Freedom Leisure in the form of a repayable loan, on an open book basis, up to a sum of £281,254, reduced by the implementation of any of the mitigating measures as set out in the Options table in the report.

Any repayable loan shall become payable through an annual deduction of 75% of any profit generated in excess of the levels predicted in the Leisure Operators Base Trading Account (LOBTA). This is a change from the current 50/50 profit share, and will be subject to the performance of the business over the contract period.

Wards Affected	All Wards
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Chris Boden, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance Cllr Sam Clark, Portfolio Holder for Leisure
Report Originator(s)	Phil Hughes, Head of Leisure Services Carol Pilson, Corporate Director
Contact Officer(s)	Paul Medd, Chief Executive paulmedd@fenland.gov.uk Carol Pilson, Corporate Director cpilson@fenland.gov.uk Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director and Section 151 Officer petercatchpole@fenland.gov.uk Mark Saunders, Chief Accountant msaunders@fenland.gov.uk Phil Hughes, Head of Leisure Services phughes@fenland.gov.uk Amy Brown, Head of Legal and Governance abrown@fenland.gov.uk
Background Papers	See appendices

4 Introduction

- 4.1 In December 2018 Freedom Leisure, a charitable trust, took over the operation and management of the Council's four leisure centres with a 15 year agreement.
- 4.2 This arrangement will save FDC £351,000 p.a. Additionally, a staff review of contract management staff as a result of the new Freedom contract added an additional £49,000 p.a to the annual savings, equating to £5.6 million of savings over the life of the contract.
- 4.3 The first 15 months of the contract (prior to the covid pandemic) proceeded better than either partner could have hoped for. Customer feedback, as well as income growth, demonstrated that Freedom had been doing a very good job on the Council's behalf. Following Covid, the Freedom operational team has worked incredibly hard to attract customers back into the leisure centres and income levels are now approaching pre-covid levels.
- 4.5 The Council financially supported Freedom Leisure during Covid 19 due to its contractual obligations. In financial years 2020/21 and 2021/22, this support amounted to £636,808. Of this amount, £164,988 was non-repayable. The remaining support of £471,820 becomes repayable through an annual deduction of 75% of any profit generated in excess of the levels predicted in the LOBTA. This is a change from the current 50/50 profit share, and will be subject to the performance of the business over the contract period.
- 4.6 Since April 2022, the contract has returned to its pre Covid 19 position with Freedom paying FDC its management fee as per the contract which demonstrates the health of the business and recovery from the impact of Covid 19.

5 Key Issues; Energy Crisis Impact

- 5.1 At a time when recovery from Covid is beginning to gain momentum, leisure providers are being hit hard by rising utility costs and the recent cost of living pressures on households. This may adversely impact participation rates in the leisure centres.
- 5.2 Freedom Leisure has asked the Council to consider providing financial support to cover the increase in energy costs. The excessive scale of these costs were not built into the bid submission when the contract was let. Without a form of intervention from the Council, the operation of leisure centres, as currently delivered, will be placed at risk.
- 5.3 Despite Freedom managing the leisure centres very well, the energy crisis that the country is currently experiencing has added exceptional and unavoidable operating costs into the business. Whilst Government has set up a scheme, the Energy Bill Relief Scheme (EBRS) to support businesses, the impact of the scheme is limited.
- 5.4 In the final 6 months of 2022/23 Freedom estimates excess energy costs of £281,254. The excess energy costs for 2023/24 based on previous usage are estimated to exceed £600,000. It should also be noted that the 2023/24

estimation assumes a continuation of the Government's EBRS scheme. This continuation has not been confirmed by Government at this time.

- 5.5 As a large organisation, Freedom has the capacity to absorb typical market fluctuations and respond in a more agile manner than a Council might. However, the current situation in terms of excess energy costs is untypical. These costs are not affordable for Freedom within the current contractual arrangement with the Council.
- 5.6 It is worth highlighting that were FDC still managing the leisure centres directly, the Council would not be benefitting from the annual reduction in cost that the Freedom contract offers, but the Council would be in a similar position with regard to paying substantial excess energy costs.
- 5.7 Fenland has a 15-year contract with Freedom Leisure that is starting its 5th year in December 2022. The significant increase in user numbers, particularly in swimming lessons, operational efficiencies and cashable savings that Freedom has made since Covid 19 has enabled the contract to return to its pre Covid 19 position, with Freedom paying FDC the full management fee in the current year to date. The energy crisis may have a more severe impact on local leisure facilities than Covid 19, if further government support is not made available.
- 5.8 Freedom and other leisure providers continue to lobby the Government through the LGA, District Council Network, UK Active, Swim England and directly to Fenland's local MP Stephen Barclay, highlighting the severe financial difficulty that the leisure sector is facing.

6 Freedom Leisure - Fenland contract current financial position compared with Leisure Operators Base Trading Account (LOBTA)

- 6.1 The LOBTA is the original document that Freedom used to project income and expenditure in their bid. It indicates the anticipated contract financial position in each year of the contract.
- 6.2 In September 2022, based on information for the financial year to date, Freedom projected an annual deficit of £18,000 - before utility cost increases. The LOBTA position projected a surplus of £43,000. This projection, although £61,000 in deficit to the LOBTA, indicates that operationally the contract is running well and recovering from the previous 2 years of Covid 19.
- 6.3 Whilst inflation is also a concern, energy cost increases are the most serious issue facing the management of the contract.

7 Energy mitigation measures already implemented

7.1 FDC spent in excess of £800,000 on energy mitigation measures within the leisure centres 5 years ago. These included;

- LED lighting replacement
- Combined heating and power units in three centres
- Improved control systems for heat and air controls
- Solar PV on all four leisure centres
- 2 replacement boilers

This equipment is still in place and continues to deliver the energy savings as anticipated.

7.2 Since taking on the management of the facilities, Freedom has implemented a further suite of measures to reduce costs and increase income. These include;

- Income generating interventions such as targeted price rises that reflect current and future inflation rates;
- Staff structure reviews;
- Increased efficiency of internal processes aligned to income generation;
- Improved membership acquisition, improved membership retention and a subsequently improved membership yield;
- A complete review of swimming lesson management leading to an increase of children on learn to swim courses of 61% - an additional 1,235 children learning to swim every week in Fenland pools. The total number of children on the learn to swim programme is now 3,200 per week;
- Improved rate of collecting income derived by Direct Debit, linked to an improved debt collection scheme;
- Electrical system upgrades;
- Energy metering upgrades and energy monitoring software upgrades;
- Building management system (BMS) upgrades, including air handling systems and regular review of system schedules to reduce energy use.

7.3 More recent interventions include;

- Staff and customer awareness campaigns of energy usage;
- Reduction in stored hot water temperatures by 1 degree, with a reduction in boiler temperatures by 2 degrees;
- Pool water temperatures have been reduced gradually where possible, whilst noting the potential adverse effect this could have on participation;
- Air conditioning minimum set points have been increased to 20 degrees;
- Closure of the sauna and steam rooms at the Manor Leisure Centre.

8 Freedom Leisure - staffing cost reductions to mitigate costs due to the energy crisis

8.1 Freedom Leisure is in the process of implementing further significant cost reduction actions to mitigate the energy costs increases. These include;

- A full review of the leisure centre staff structure targeting a significant reduction in staffing costs.
- Implementation of a reduction of the head office team of at least 15%.

- The completion of a 10% pay reduction for the executive team.

These measures are not immediate enough to impact on the financial situation in regards to energy costs for 2022/23 but will have a significant impact if these additional energy costs remain for future financial years.

9 Options Appraisal

There are a series of both revenue and capital options available to Cabinet to assist in mitigating the financial impact of increased energy costs on the leisure contract, in addition to further steps Freedom are also taking which are included below for completeness.

Revenue options that will make a positive impact in the 2022/23 financial year:

Option 1

- 9.1 FDC has the option to support Freedom Leisure financially, on an open book basis, underwriting the estimated excess energy cost for the remainder of 2022/23 of £281,254. This sum would be subtracted from the management fee received from Freedom.
- 9.2 If Members wish to pursue option 1, this direct financial support would take the form of a repayable loan, on an open book basis, up to a sum of £281,254 reduced by the implementation of any of the mitigating measures by FDC or Freedom as set out in section 9 of this report. Any repayable loan would become payable through an annual deduction of 75% of any profit generated in excess of the levels predicted in the Leisure Operators Base Trading Account (LOBTA). This is a change from the current 50/50 profit share and will be subject to the performance of the business over the contract period. Members should note if profits do not exceed the LOBTA levels over the 10 years remaining on the contract, the loan will be repaid.
- 9.3 Cabinet may decide not to support Freedom financially with the whole value of the expected excess energy costs and instead work with Freedom implementing the following alternative measures to reduce the financial impact of excess energy costs. FDC would then have the option to offer a lower level of financial support. These are:

Option 2

- 9.4 As a part of the Council's contract with Freedom, there are minimum opening hours across the four leisure centres when the facilities must be open to the public. These minimum opening hours can be varied with the agreement of the Council. Cabinet have an option to agree to reduce the current opening hours across all four leisure centres until March 2023 to mitigate the costs (staffing, energy etc.) incurred by Freedom as follows:

Chatteris

Current: 07.00hrs – 21.30hrs Mon - Fri / 08.00hrs – 16.00hrs Sat & Sun

Proposed: 07.00hrs – 20.00hrs Mon - Fri / 08.00hrs – 14.00hrs Sat & Sun

Expected saving £4,000 between December and March. It is expected that the impact on customer income and satisfaction will be marginal.

Manor

Current: 06.30hrs – 22.00hrs Mon - Fri / 08.00hrs – 17.00hrs Sat & Sun

Proposed: 06.30hrs – 20.00hrs Mon - Fri / 08.00hrs – 14.00hrs Sat & Sun

The expected saving is in the region of £13,000 between December and March.

George Campbell

Current: 06.30hrs – 22.00hrs Mon - Fri / 08.00hrs – 17.00hrs Sat & Sun

Proposed: 06.30hrs – 20.00hrs Mon - Fri / 08.00hrs – 14.00hrs Sat & Sun

The expected saving is in the region of £14,000 between December and March.

Hudson

Current: 06.30hrs – 22.00hrs Mon - Fri / 08.00hrs – 17.00hrs Sat & Sun

Proposed: 06.30hrs – 20.00hrs Mon - Fri / 08.00hrs – 14.00hrs Sat & Sun

The expected saving is in the region of £14,000 between December and March.

- 9.5 At all sites customers will have to alter their activity habits, but the centres offers many options to attend within the proposed opening hours.
- 9.6 The reduced opening hours for all four centres will reduce operational costs by a total estimate of £45,000 between 1st December 2022 and March 31st 2023.
- 9.7 It should be noted the Council will be forgoing the notice period required in the contract for agreement of new opening hours.
- 9.8 Whilst more severe closures, including pools, could increase the savings being made consideration of such an option is not recommended by the Leader of the Council nor by the Portfolio Holder for Leisure. However, the savings differential between the implementation of reduced opening hours and a full pool closure is limited (£23,000 extra savings in the same period) due to a full closure reducing all aquatic income to zero and reducing some membership income by c.15%. In addition to the comparatively low increase in savings levels, a full pool closure would have profound impacts on the ability of Freedom to re-open the pools with staff finding roles elsewhere during any closure.
- 9.9 Additionally, this alteration to the contract with Freedom would mean a reduced management fee payable by Freedom to FDC impacting the FDC revenue position, offsetting the additional saving being made.

- 9.10 This being the case, full closure of any of the pools would not be advised and is not a viable option for FDC and Freedom.
- 9.11 The position on opening hours if pursued would require review in early review as to whether to continue with the proposed reduction or revert back to the existing opening hours to inform opening hours from 1st April onwards.

Option 3

- 9.12 FDC's contract with Freedom states that Freedom is responsible for all operational costs, whilst receiving all income. This arrangement means that Freedom pays VAT on their energy costs. If Fenland were to pay leisure centre energy costs (with a corresponding ex-Vat increase to the management fee that Freedom pays to FDC, equating to the energy costs) then the VAT element of those costs would not be payable by the Council. Putting this in place for December 2022 - March 2023 would reduce costs by approximately £27,000.
- 9.13 Implementing this approach would require an alteration to our current Freedom contract.

Option 4

- 9.14 Freedom as a non-profit making charitable trust currently receives 80% mandatory business rate relief. Under our current Rate Relief policy, charities can receive up to a further 20% discretionary relief (effectively giving them 100% relief). The decision to award the additional 20% discretionary relief is delegated to the Chief Finance Officer.
- 9.15 Cabinet should note the intention for Freedom to submit an application to ARP for the 20% discretionary relief. ARP will then forward the application to the Chief Finance Officer for a decision. Within this decision it will be determined whether or not relief will be granted, how long any relief will last for and any future review dates.
- 9.16 It should be noted that relief can be backdated to 1st April 2022 and if this continued until 31st March 2023, would save Freedom £46,534 for 2022-23. There would be a corresponding impact on FDC business rates income for the year which would be £18,614.

Capital investment options that will make a positive revenue impact in 2023/24 financial year and future years:

Option 5

- 9.18 As set out in section 7, a number of energy efficiency projects have been implemented by both FDC and Freedom, however there are further opportunities to improve this position through additional solar PV units and improved swimming pool lighting as below:

- a) Install additional solar PV units onto the leisure centres;
- Chatteris 10 kWp

- Manor pool 59 kWp
 - Hudson 135 kWp
 - George Campbell 77kWp
- 9.19 Capital expenditure for these works to be borne by FDC with costs in the region of £350,000 (estimation). FDC is working with the Combined Authority for funding for the additional solar PV at the Manor Leisure Centre. This support will be in the region of £80,000 to £100,000 if agreed.
- 9.20 Any new solar PV cannot be fitted until April 2023 due to current market demand. Members should note that all leisure centres already have solar PV in place - this would add to their capacity and reduce electricity costs directly as a result.
- 9.21 The total saving, at current electricity prices, for all 4 installations is estimated at £61,000 p.a. Modelling and final design of any additional PV panels will gauge the saving more accurately prior to purchase.
- 9.22 There would be no impact on Freedom's revenue position in the current financial year however there would be an impact from the point of installation from financial year 2023/24. The contractual terms between FDC and Freedom in operating the centres will need to be amended to reflect ongoing revenue savings to Freedom from this substantial additional capital expenditure and Members ask officers to consider options on how this is achieved.
- 9.23 This cost would need to be added to the FDC capital programme.
- b) Install replacement swimming pool lighting at the George Campbell and Hudson pools;
- 9.24 The lighting at the Manor pool has been replaced as part of the leisure energy efficiency works several years ago. The Hudson and the George Campbell lighting was not replaced as the payback period was just under 10 years at that time. With the increase in energy costs the payback period will now be far shorter.
- 9.25 An estimate for cost / energy saved is not available at this time, but the recommendation is that this project is viable in the current energy context so long as any calculated payback period is below 10 years. Any savings would not occur in the current financial year due to the design lead time, procurement process and the fitting of the new units.
- 9.26 Capital expenditure for these works to be borne by FDC - costs in the region of £40,000. This cost would need to be added to the FDC capital programme.

Option 6

- 9.27 As part of the arrangement with Freedom, FDC is liable to replace exercise bikes (value £100,000) in year 5 of the contract and the gym's cardiovascular exercise equipment - treadmills etc (value £500,000) in year 7 of the contract. Whilst not saving against the energy revenue bill, this replacement of equipment can be pushed back by a minimum of a year, delaying FDC's capital cost of the purchase. This should form part of a reconsideration of the terms of the agreement for equipment during the remaining ten years the agreement has to run, ensuring that FDC Officers must agree that all items of equipment which are proposed to be replaced in future are only being replaced for reasons of

safety, obsolescence or irreparable wear and tear. Members ask officers to consider options on how this can be achieved.

Option 7

- 9.28 The option of bringing the operation of leisure centres back 'in-house' at this time has also been considered, but discounted as the increase in costs faced by Freedom Leisure would also be faced by the Council if it were the operator.
- 9.29 Furthermore, the Council would incur significant additional costs as highlighted in the risk and financial section of this paper.

10 Further mitigation measures Freedom are implementing:

Option 8

- 10.1 Freedom have the flexibility to increase most prices for its services without recourse to the Council except for the following prices:

<i>Facility & Activity</i>	<i>Maximum annual price rise from reference date</i>
Swimming pool - Price of a casual swim for child and concessions	CPI level price rise annually
School pool hire	CPI level price rise annually
Exercise referral scheme	Access at the current daytime membership price. CPI level price rise annually
Disabled persons assistant	Free access

Price rises always have to be balanced against the impact on customer attendance. Freedom have advised that they are increasing the following prices to assist with the excess energy cost deficit from 1st December with the below revenue impact;

- £1 swim for under 5's to be replaced with £2 for under 3's and over 3's to increase to the junior swimming price of £3.60.
Income to increase by £1,050 / month.
- £10 per year swim for over 75's to be replaced with concessionary swim price for all over 65's.
Income to increase by £2,090 / month.
- Learn to swim sessions to be increased.

Income to increase by £4,975 / month if a 5% increase was applied for example but this charge is for Freedom to determine.

As Freedom are proposing to increase swimming pool charges by more than CPI for children and concessions, this needs the agreement of Cabinet up to 31st March 2023.

10.2 The total increase in income for the period December 2022 to March 2023 is anticipated to be approximately £32,460.

10.3 Additionally, Freedom will raise prices in January as normal across a broader number of products. These annual rises are already planned and will not increase the differential between income and costs as other costs are rising with inflation.

11 Options Appraisal summary table

Option Number	Proposal Summary	Revenue cost to FDC	Estimated in year cost saving	Estimated Capital cost to FDC
1	Underwrite entire energy cost deficit	Up to £281,000	N/A	
2	Leisure centre opening hour reduction programme		£45,000	
3	Energy billing adjustments		£27,000	
4	Freedom to apply for discretionary NNDR relief (subject to separate decision making)	£18,614	£46,534	
5	Add additional solar PV to each leisure centre Replace pool lighting in 2 leisure centres		Savings realised in 2023/24 approx. £61,000 per year	£390,000
6	Deferral of gym equipment replacement scheme		N/A	
7	In house operation	Significant additional costs.		

8	Targeted customer prices increases by Freedom		£32,460	
Total potential operational savings for 2022/23			£150,994	

11.1 Freedom's estimated excess energy costs for 2022/23 are £281,254. Implementing the options 2-4 above plus price increases by Freedom (option 8) will reduce overall operational costs, reducing the need for financial support from FDC. If these options are all implemented, the remaining gap due to the energy costs will be in the region of £130,260.

11.2 Further savings will come on stream in 2023/24 if additional solar PV is added to the centres and lighting upgrades are carried out.

12 Risks and Financial Assessment

12.1 Members agreed, prior to the leisure centre management outsourcing process, that they wished leisure centres to continue to remain in each town.

12.2 FDC is not managing the leisure centres - it is Freedom's business, but it is very much a partnership and it is in FDC's interests that the Freedom management contract continues if Members wish to continue the provision of leisure centres for the Fenland community. If Freedom breaks the contract with FDC or the company fails as a result of unsupportive clients, then FDC's short term costs by bringing the service back in house will increase by at least £400,000 p.a. FDC would be taking back the health and safety risk, staff management, accountancy and payroll functions, administrative functions and human resources of over 160 different staff. Staff restructures took place in FDC's back office teams to reflect leisure being outsourced. These additional costs would have to be added back into the FDC budget to support any in-house change. It will not be possible to find an alternative provider of the Service at short notice.

12.3 If FDC were to take the facilities back in-house, then the current excess energy costs would be payable by the Council directly. There would be no way of avoiding these costs. This would be a similar case if another contractor took on the contract; any revised contract would include the current energy costs and the Council would not be able to avoid these costs.

12.4 Should the contract with Freedom not continue as a result of the energy cost crisis, FDC will not realise the £4.1m of savings over the outstanding period of the contract. Taking a long-term view, putting in place supportive operational changes in conjunction with Freedom, alongside potential financial support, is in FDC's best financial interests.

12.5 FDC's current MTFs highlights the requirement to find £974,000 in savings by 2026/27 as well as consideration of the added uncertainty of fairer funding, new homes bonus and business rates retention as well as current inflationary pressures which may mean this figure rises through the budget setting process. If the Freedom contract ceases and FDC brings the service in-house this will add a minimum additional base revenue cost of £400,000 per annum to the

Council. Additionally, added to this sum are the excess energy cost increases leading to a total increased revenue cost to FDC in the region of £1m p.a.

- 12.6 If the Council's contract with Freedom were broken, the planned savings of the Freedom contract will then not be possible leaving the Council to reconsider the strategic approach to leisure centre provision in Fenland, with financial pressures inviting a reassessment of the current level of provision across the four towns to balance the Council's budget.
- 12.7 There is a risk that, despite FDC's support, Freedom does not remain viable. This is a risk that FDC needs to recognise, whilst understanding the larger risk being that an unsupportive approach from FDC may lead to the contract being dissolved. FDC has asked Freedom for information regarding other client's approach to support for energy costs. The current situation (as at 2 November) is out of their 25 contracts, there is confirmed support (in the form of financial support, agreed mitigating actions or a combination of the two) in 10 of those plus another 5 where there are contractual protection against utility costs (either with a cap mechanism, a benchmark process or where the LA pays utility costs directly without a recharge). There are 10 (including Fenland) with agreed support confirmation outstanding with various meetings occurring in November.

13 Legal and Governance Implications

- 13.1 Subject to the options selected within this report, financial support would be managed and provided on the same basis as during COVID-19 via an open-book arrangement with payments or reductions from the management fee that Freedom pays to FDC.
- 13.2 Any energy mitigation measures that are selected would be fitted to the leisure centres as capital improvement works of an asset in FDC's ownership. All costs would be borne by FDC, funded via FDC's capital programme. The resulting efficiencies of the improvements would benefit the leisure operator and help to avoid (but not eliminate) future financial requests in regards to excess energy costs.
- 13.3 There was clear provision within the contract between FDC and Freedom to provide financial support when Covid occurred. The Government changed the law, requiring closure of facilities and staff to remain at home. This meant that the change in law clause within our contract highlighted the Council's contractual requirement to support Freedom.
- 13.4 The energy crisis is very different in that there is no change in law. The Council has no contractual responsibility to support Freedom and any supportive arrangement is very much in the spirit of the contract being a partnership arrangement, with the benefit of that support being in both parties' interests - and more importantly, in the interests of the community in Fenland who enjoy the use of excellent leisure facilities.
- 13.5 Should the package of support devised by Freedom and FDC be insufficient to meet the challenge of the excess energy costs then the contract with FDC could become unviable. If Freedom took this view and wished to break the contract with FDC, our contractual terms are clear in regard to compensation due to FDC;

- a) Where the Authority carries out a Retendering Process, the Retendering Costs;
- b) where the Authority carries out a Retendering Process, an amount equal to the aggregate of the Retendered Annual Payment less the Current Annual Payment where it is a positive number
- c) All other Direct Losses which the Authority suffers or incurs arising out of any breach of this Agreement or as a result of the termination of this Agreement including (without limitation) any liability to any third party,

13.6 These terms are clear, with item b) above having a potential of incurring significant costs on Freedom should they break the contract. Retendering the contract with the current state of the economy, Covid recovery and the excess energy costs is likely to return tenders that incur the excess energy costs within the contract itself, with the overall contract unlikely to be as favourable to FDC as the Freedom contract - if a contractor did tender.

14 Appendix I

Local government Association and UK Active

Briefing note for councils – the impact of rising energy costs to the leisure sector



Appendix 1 -
Briefing note from L

15 Appendix II

Joint letter to Government from

- Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity
- Chief Leisure Officers Association
- Community Leisure UK
- District Council's Network
- Swim England
- UK Active



Appendix 2 - Letter
to the Secretaries of

16 Appendix III

Useful links for context

[Community Leisure UK Statement on Energy Bill Relief Scheme - Community Leisure UK](#)

[Temporary closure of pools due to energy costs 'the tip of the iceberg' \(swimming.org\)](#)

17 Appendix IV

Rye swimming pool closure Press Release



Appendix 4 -
Rye_Pool_Closure pr

By virtue of paragraph(s) 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

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Agenda Item No:	6	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	14 November 2022	
Report Title:	Wisbech Levelling Up Fund bid update & Wisbech Masterplan	

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 The Council bid to Government in Round 2 of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) for £12m to add to the £2m already secured from the Combined Authority as match funding. This £14m project was developed following master planning work from a group of consultancies that developed a Masterplan for Wisbech that included shorter term projects as well as longer term visions.
- 1.2 This report revisits the projects within the Council's Levelling Up Bid, as well as presents the final draft of the Wisbech Masterplan to Cabinet.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 Government's response to Covid-19 through Build Back Better and the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) agenda offered a unique opportunity to attract significant levels of funding to Fenland which is designated as a 'Priority 2' area. The recent success of the March Future High Street (FHSF) bid demonstrates that with the right professional input, stakeholder engagement and political prioritisation, the Council is capable of pulling together a credible and compelling business case for investment.
- 2.2 Announced at the Spending Review in 2020, the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) will invest in capital investment in local infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK. Building on and consolidating prior programmes such as the Local Growth Fund and Towns Fund, it will have a visible and tangible impact on people and places and support economic recovery. In doing so it will also create opportunity across the country, prioritising bids that invest in regeneration and growth in places of need and areas of low productivity and connectivity. The fund will support town and city centre regeneration to deliver economic and social levelling-up. LUF provides a new approach to tackling economic differences between areas and driving prosperity in towns and cities that have been left behind, and which have now been prioritised by Government for support.
- 2.3 To be better positioned for future bid opportunities, with the ability to respond to demanding deadlines, and to ensure that schemes are capable of delivery on the ground within the timescale expected by Government, the Council made some upfront investment in scheme development to create oven ready bids. This work was necessary in order to develop a cohesive and well developed LUF bid.
- 2.4 Working with a group of experienced consultants led by Norr, a spatial masterplan for Wisbech was developed. It is important to note that this spatial

plan builds on work already completed through extensive partner and community engagement through the Growing Fenland project and associated Wisbech Masterplan and did not start afresh on revisioning the town. It is anticipated that the Masterplan will be integrated into the Council's emerging Local Plan to give it not only significant weight in the planning process but also greater status when being used to form the basis of future bids for funding.

- 2.5 The masterplan contains short, medium and longer term projects and offered potential projects for Members to select for the Council's LUF bid.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet notes the current position in relation to the Council's LUF bid.
- 3.2 That Cabinet recognises the importance of the Wisbech Masterplan in the future development of funding applications and investment opportunities for the town.
- 3.3 That Cabinet instructs officers to ensure that the Wisbech masterplan is incorporated within the next draft of the Local Plan, giving the masterplan significance for any future regeneration work developed for Wisbech.

Wards Affected	Wisbech Wards	
Forward Plan Reference	KEY/110CT22/01	
Portfolio Holders	Cllr Chris Seaton Cllr Ian Benney Cllr Chris Boden	Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility and Heritage Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance
Report Originator	Phil Hughes	Head of Leisure Services
Contact Officers	Simon Machen Paul Medd	Growth and Regeneration Advisor Chief Executive

4 Levelling Up Fund Bid

- 4.1 As Members will recall, the Council submitted a LUF Round 2 bid in the summer. Government launched the Levelling up Fund (LUF) in 2021, with a tight deadline for Round 1 bid submission. Following internal discussions, Member's felt that submitting a considered and well worked up bid in Round 2 (summer 2022) would give Fenland the best chance of success in what is likely to be a very competitive process.
- 4.2 Fenland was assessed as a category 2 priority place for the LUF process. Unfortunately, this means that the Council receives no Government financial

support to develop a bid. In August 2021 Cabinet agreed that the Council should invest in the development of a town centre spatial masterplan for Wisbech to support the development of a LUF bid.

- 4.3 Consultants were appointed to develop the Wisbech Spatial Masterplan, with a further specialist appointed to support the Council in developing a compelling LUF bid, based on the emerging masterplan.

Masterplan development

- 4.4 Members had an initial meeting with consultants to discuss potential opportunities in the town and to help guide the development of the master planning work. Members also met with the bid development consultant who has described the process as very competitive, requiring a bid that is cohesive with projects linking together well and a bid that is compelling in terms of its economic impact and resultant benefit-cost ratio.

- 4.5 Following the development of the draft spatial masterplan, a further discussion with Members took place to narrow down potential project options to submit as a LUF bid. Cabinet then selected the three projects to submit to Government in June 2022. The projects selected met the LUF criteria of:

- Spend within three years
- One project to be significantly underway in 2022/23
- Regeneration & town centre investment
- Cultural investment
- Capital only investment

- 4.6 Cabinet selected the following three projects to be submitted to the Government as Fenland's LUF bid for Wisbech.

- Castle visitor centre and improved public realm linking the castle and market place. Value; £1.7m
- Old market place including street greening and public realm enhancements between the town centre and Nene waterfront. Value; £2.6m
- College of West Anglia - green skills centre. Value; £9.7m

It should be noted that with the selection of the College of West Anglia project, the College is bidding to the CPCA for up to £2m match funding through the recycled local growth fund bidding process. This funding forms the necessary match funding required of a LUF bid.

Total LUF bid value;	£12,027,489
CPCA match funding;	<u>£ 2,000,000</u>
Total project value;	<u>£14,027,489</u>

- 4.7 If the bid is successful, these projects will bring significant capital investment into the town centre regenerating public spaces, ensuring that Wisbech has every opportunity to harness the potential of its heritage and cultural assets to attract people into the town to live, work and visit in the future. These projects

will have a demonstrable impact on the local economy - necessary for the LUF bid.

5 Current LUF status

- 5.1 FDC submitted the LUF bid on time to Government. Since that time little information has been forthcoming, with the large number of bids received by Government being assessed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- 5.2 Fenland has been contacted on one occasion to supply a couple of documents, but otherwise has received no contact since bid submission.

6 Wisbech Masterplan

- 6.1 To develop a spatial, map-based expression to identify further opportunities for regeneration and investment, as well as supporting the initial LUF application, a Wisbech Masterplan was commissioned from Norr Consulting.
- 6.2 This work directly supports the development of the town's quality of life offer. The March FHSF fund bid was successful in no small part due to the funded investment in consultancy support following the Council's successful expression of interest.
- 6.3 Following site visits and discussions with Members, Norr developed a masterplan for the town. It is important to stress that this plan builds on work already done through extensive partner and community engagement on the Wisbech Growing Fenland project, not starting afresh. Its integration into the Council's emerging Local Plan will give it significant weight in the planning process, but also greater status when being used to form the basis of future regeneration work, including future funding applications.
- 6.4 The masterplan includes;
 - Analysis - consideration of the key ingredients of the wider town centre including its physical context, historic context, urban grain, connectivity, views and landmarks, land use, social infrastructure, open space and public realm
 - Identifying barriers and constraints to growth and change
 - Identifying opportunity sites and character areas across the wider town centre for renewal and investment
 - A high-level illustrative masterplan and spatial vision for the wider town centre which is visual in its design, featuring a number of artists impressions, plans/maps and photographs
 - Renewal and regeneration options for opportunity sites and character areas
 - A high-level public realm strategy including improved connectivity and accessibility
- 6.5 The masterplan is attached in Appendix 1.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 There are no specific legal implications in relation to this report however each bid and/or funding allocation is managed in accordance with the Council's constitutional requirements with separate and specific legal advice being sought in relation to potential subsidy and/or procurement implications on a case-by-case basis.

8 Effect on corporate objectives

The corporate objectives which link to the projects and proposals discussed in this report are as follows:

8.1 Communities

- Support vulnerable members of our community
- Promote health & wellbeing for all
- Work with partners to promote Fenland through culture and heritage

8.2 Environment

- Work with partners and the community on projects that improve the environment and our street scene
- Work with partners to keep people safe in their neighbourhoods by reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and promoting social cohesion

8.3 Economy

- Attract new businesses, jobs and opportunities whilst supporting our existing businesses in Fenland
- Promote and enable housing growth, economic growth and regeneration across Fenland
- Promote and lobby for infrastructure improvements across the district

9 IMPLICATIONS

Legal Implications

- 9.1 Not applicable at this time. If the LUF bid is successful it is anticipated that the College of West Anglia would be wholly responsible for the development and delivery of the Green Skills Centre, arranged through a grant funding agreement to ensure that funding and risk is allocated correctly
- 9.2 Additionally, as a County Council asset, delivery of the Old Market Place would be a County Council project, again backed by a grant funding agreement to ensure that funding and risk is allocated correctly
- 9.3 Finally, FDC would manage the Castle Visitor Centre project, with a steering group consisting of FDC Members, as well as Town Councillors and volunteers from the Castle, as well as a County Council representative, as owners of the site.

Financial Implications

- 9.4 At bid submission stage, the Council added in significant inflation assumptions into estimates prepared in the bid. It is anticipated that this will cover the current market situation, should the LUF bid be successful and the three projects progress.
- 9.5 Financial risk to the Council will be mitigated regarding the Old Market Place and Green Skills Centre, with the partner organisations being responsible for delivery of these projects as described above.

Equality Implications

- 9.6 N/A

10 Appendix I

Wisbech masterplan



Wisbech Masterplan

June 2022 | Revision P03



NORR



Please note this document represents a high level vision of a potential masterplan and re-use of the identified Town Centre sites in Wisbech Town Centre. Detailed design, engineering services and highways analysis and consultation would still need to be undertaken to understand feasibility requirements. Detailed legal consultation is also required to understand exacting boundary conditions, ownership, easements covenants and any other legal restrictions that might apply to the site. Cost exercises are required and have not been undertaken as part of this masterplan.

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6 Summary

01

INTRODUCTION

A Vision for Wisbech
Masterplan Extent
Core Objectives
Process & Structure

A VISION FOR WISBECH

As the 'Capital of the Fens', Wisbech has proven many times in its history that it has all the ingredients to ensure financial and cultural strengths can be sustainable on a local level. People are rightly proud of their town and where they live.

Sitting between Peterborough, Cambridge, and Kings Lynn, ten miles north of March, Wisbech has relatively poor public transport and road links. Despite this, the town's location has ensured continued growth since its inception and it is an established key local centre within the Fens as a place to live, shop and work.

Wisbech has fantastic attributes to celebrate and build from including:

- ➔ **A collection of some of the most impressive Heritage Assets in the county**
- ➔ **A fantastic community that has proved resilient and proud through multiple generations**
- ➔ **A central focus for the wider region across the Fens that has remained relevant since its origins**
- ➔ **Multi generational living**
- ➔ **A bright Future**



Together with the good times, there remains some challenges to overcome to realise the potential the town aspires to.

The agricultural industry is in constantly evolving to suit modern times, and the change of industry demands have resulted in increase in poverty rates within the area.

The area has attracted high levels of migrant labour from Eastern Europe to work in the farming and food processing industries, creating a multi generational and multi cultural community.

Whilst unemployment is relatively low, wages are also low and employment opportunities are in lower skilled occupations.

With changes in labour demand there has been increases in the amount of Houses for Multi Occupation within Wisbech and a perception that affordable housing standards are in need of improvement.

Like many town centres across the UK, indeed globally, the retail market has significantly changed leaving voids in once busy high streets and Wisbech has not been immune to these forces.

As a consequence the retail and cultural offer has somewhat deteriorated. It is an opportune time to consider re-purposing underused premises in the town centre for the current community and societal needs.

Looking forward to the future, this aim of this masterplan is to set out a long term vision for Wisbech that responds to the needs of local people, building upon its core strengths to put the town on the map for investment and as a visitor destination.

Our vision establishes aspirations for a vibrant, adaptable and resilient town of the future. The document identifies a range of development opportunities and community benefits in the town centre.

There are clearly challenges to overcome to achieve this ambitious goal, including tackling issues of health, education and employment, support for local businesses and meeting the need for housing growth.

We will need to create a balanced mix of facilities, with creative solutions to constraints including environmental considerations such as climate change, as well as putting forward realistic, deliverable proposals.

The regeneration process will provide facilities to support the community in the coming years, create job opportunities for local people and allow new and existing businesses to thrive - all key ingredients for a healthy and a sustainable community.

MASTERPLAN EXTENT

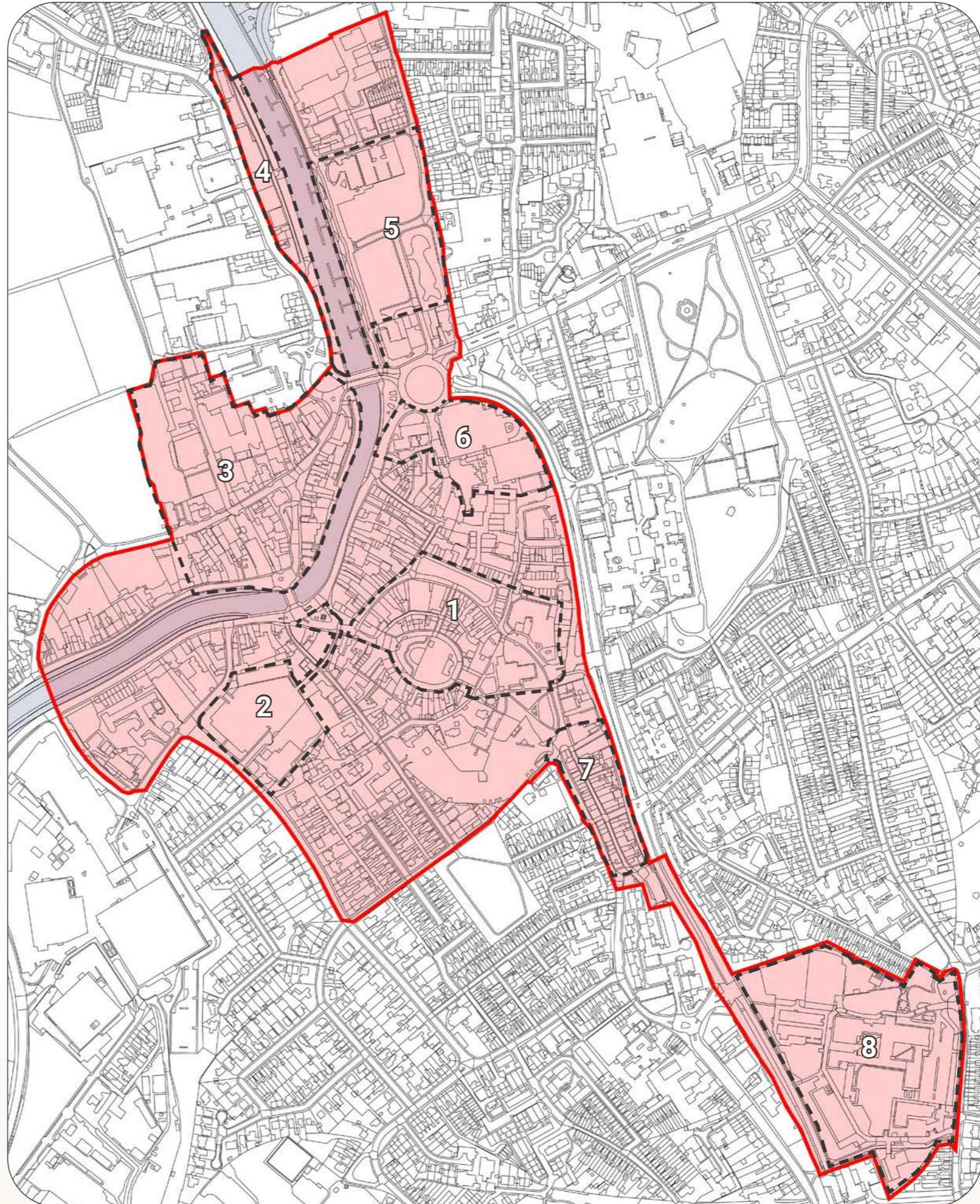
The total area of the Wisbech masterplan is approximately 40 ha and comprises of houses, parking areas and commercial area, with the A1101 and the River Nene running through the town.

The masterplan area has been defined by Fenland District Council and Wisbech Town Council, as shown by the red line boundary on the plan opposite.

The area focuses on the core of the town centre, comprising the historic areas such as the market, castle and church area, sections of the Brinks, Norfolk Street, Nene Waterfront to the north and the Wisbech Campus to the south.

With the historic fabric and general urban planning of Wisbech being so well defined, whole-scale interference is not the purpose of this exercise as directed by the Stakeholders and commissioners of this piece of work.

We have worked with Wisbech Town Council and Fenland District Council to identify opportunity sites that have the potential to cater for the community and assist with the economic and social sustainability in the future.



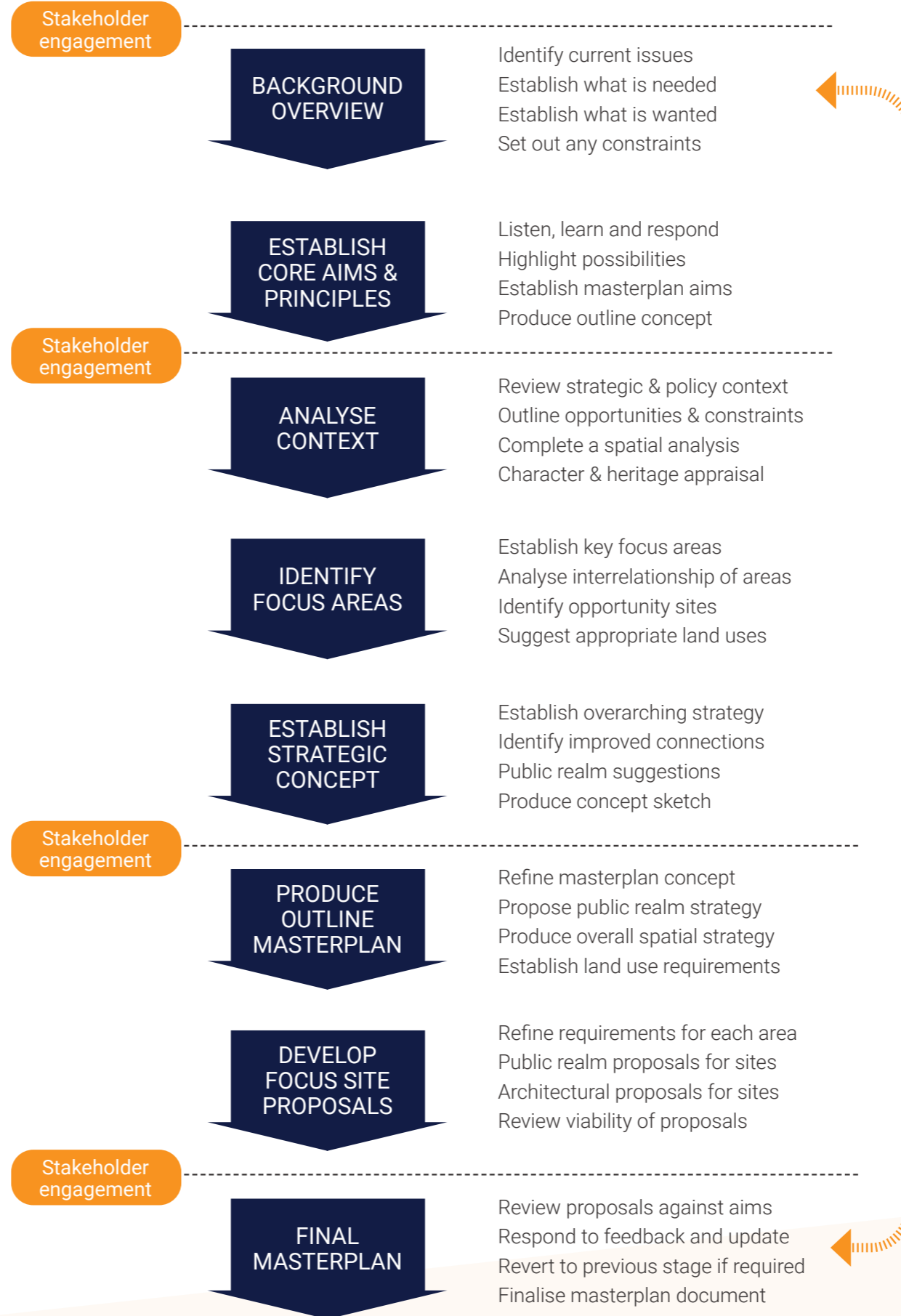
MASTERPLAN PROCESS

This document has been prepared in conjunction with Fenland District Council and Wisbech Town Council's direction and sets out expectations and requirements for redevelopment within the Town Centre of Wisbech. An experienced team of designers and consultants have worked collaboratively alongside Fenland District Council and Town Council Members to establish an aspirational long-term vision for Wisbech town.

The Masterplan has been prepared in the context of National and Local planning policies including Previous Studies, which encourage the improvement of towns and built environments and sustainable patterns of development. This strategic process considers the current land use and social context, opportunities and constraints, together with a spatial analysis.

It should be noted that the diagrams and proposals included within this document are illustrative to help establish design concepts and development principles for the masterplan area rather than final outcomes, which may be subject to land acquisition and planning consents. This document should be used flexible tool that continues to evolve over the coming years of regeneration.

NORR	Masterplanners / Architects
ELG	Planning and Heritage Input
Tetra Tech	Highways, Ecology and Flood Risk
Harrison Stevens	Urban Designers / Landscape Architects
Arrow Commercial	Commercial Commentary (no cost input)



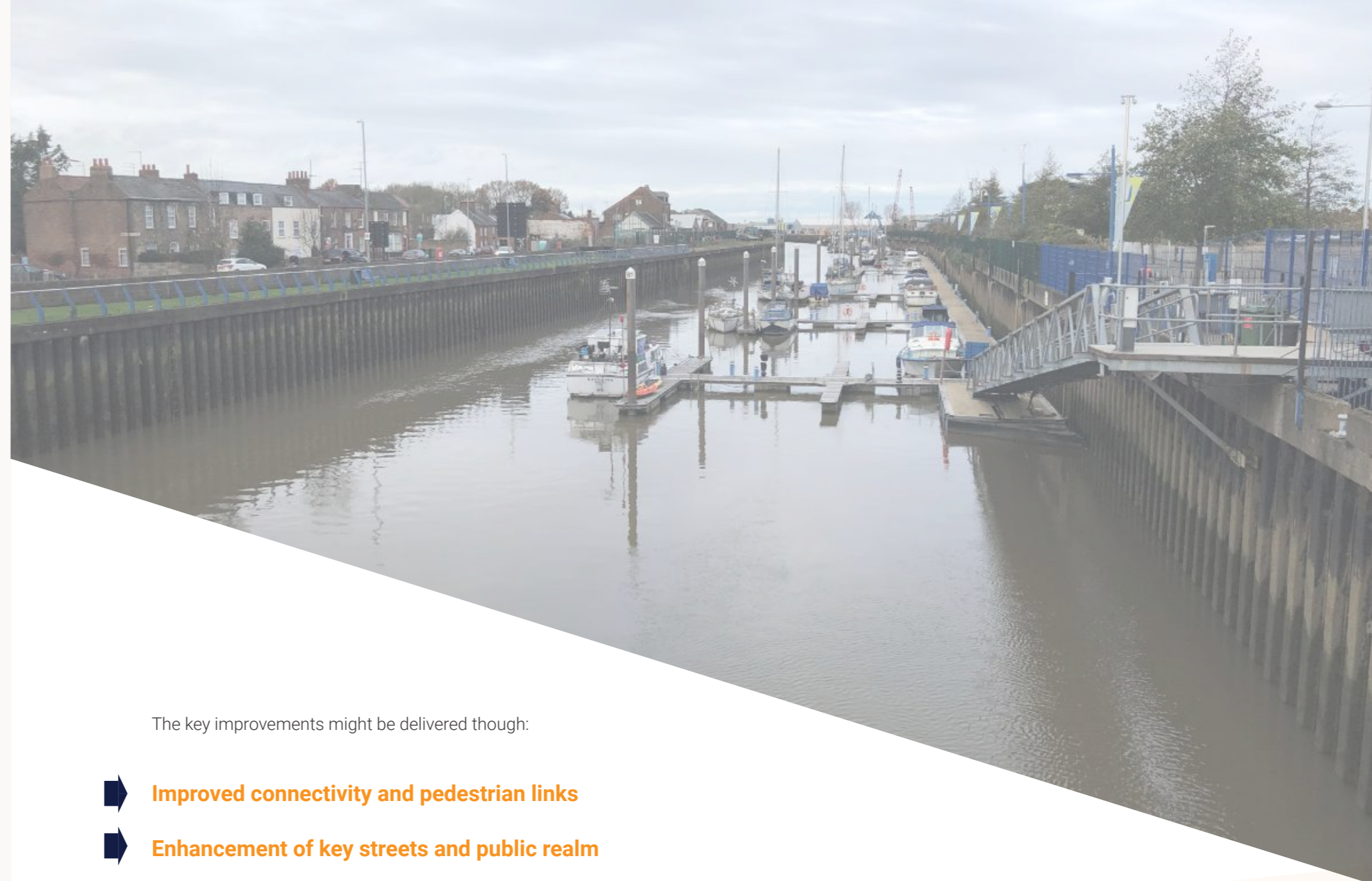
CORE OBJECTIVES

At the heart of the masterplan is an overarching goal to improve the lives and livelihoods of the residents of Wisbech by responding to local needs.

The proposals suggest ways in which this might be achieved through investment into local infrastructure, public realm and opportunity sites for development. This would include a wide range of realistically deliverable community benefits.

The overall aims for the masterplan document are:

- To identify barriers and constraints to growth and change
- To promote investment into the town and its wider surroundings
- To provide a development a framework for positive and sustainable growth
- To produce a strategy for well-connected, quality public spaces and streets
- To establish key areas of focus and identify opportunity sites for development
- To provide suggestions on appropriate land use and quantum of development
- To provide suggestions on appropriate scale and massing of future development
- To provide a flexible framework which will evolve over time and respond to change



The key improvements might be delivered though:

- ➡ **Improved connectivity and pedestrian links**
- ➡ **Enhancement of key streets and public realm**
- ➡ **Extending the town centre to Nene waterfront**
- ➡ **Celebration of historical assets of Wisbech**
- ➡ **Making Wisbech an attractive visitor destination**
- ➡ **Creation of new community and civic facilities**
- ➡ **New leisure, entertainment and hospitality venues**
- ➡ **A range of new quality housing for diverse needs**

02

STRATEGIC & POLICY FRAMEWORK

Policy Context

Location & Surroundings

Infrastructure

Past, Present & Future

POLICY CONTEXT

PREVIOUS STUDIES

There have been a number of recent reports and strategies developed in respect of the economic growth and regeneration of Wisbech.

Through the bold and ambitious Wisbech 2020 Vision, it was intended to regenerate the town and surrounding areas making it "a great place to work, live and visit."

A lot has been achieved so far, with a number of strategy actions developed along with a raft of other regeneration proposals including transport and health and well being projects, such as:

- the Nene Waterfront Scheme;
- Healthy High Streets Programme;
- £1.9 million National Lottery granted funded Wisbech Townscape Heritage scheme

There was Independent Economic Review of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough carried out in 2018(CPIER). Following the CPIER analysis, the Combined Authority (CPCA) has supported the process of and awarded funding to Fenland District Council to create market town plans for each town in the Fenland district and Fenland Council have produced an economic development strategy for 2012-2031 which aligns with the development plan objectives.

The Combined Authority released a report Growing Fenland Wisbech: Market Town Masterplan and in June 2020, the CPCA Board approved its CPCA Market Towns Programme - Investment Prospectus 2020 with bids for capital works available across the towns to fund regeneration works.

The current master planning works are the next step in realising this regeneration process.

PLANNING POLICY

The Fenland Local Plan (May 2014), the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Plan and 'made' Neighbourhood Plans, comprise Fenland's Development Plan. Collectively, they set out policies that the Council uses to make decisions on planning applications.

Fenland Council are in the process of preparing a new local plan and this is an emerging planning policy document.

Through monitoring of the Local Plan and as a result of changes to National Planning Policy, Fenland District Council decided to review the Fenland Local Plan in February 2019. An LDS was approved that set the timetable to 2022.

The Issues and Options Consultation was carried out in October 2019 in accordance with the LDS, which included a call for sites exercise. However, in early 2020 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic the production of the Local Plan was delayed, and an updated LDS was approved in July 2020, setting out adoption of the Local Plan by the end of 2022.

The Local Plan has been delayed and consultation on the draft version was due to take place December 2021. An updated LDS was published in July 2021 which shows a revised timetable for the production of the Fenland Local Plan to 2023, with anticipated adoption in November 2023.

Additionally, there are extant supplementary planning guidance documents that specifically relate to the town centre and area of the masterplan including:

- Shopfronts, signs and advertisements Supplementary Planning and Design Guidance
- Nene Waterfront development brief 2004
- Supplementary Planning Guidance



LOCATION & SURROUNDINGS

Located between Peterborough, Cambridge, and Kings Lynn, ten miles north of March, Wisbech is the largest market town in the Fens, with a population of approximately 31,500. The town is inland port located on the River Nene, which has long played an important role as a trading centre serving a wide rural catchment.

In the absence of another city nearby the town is an important local centre offering retail, leisure and healthcare services to the area. The town draws commuters in from the surroundings, with key sources of employment including food processing industries, as well as manufacturing, logistics and storage.

Wisbech suffers from poor connectivity due to issues with lack of public transport provision and inadequate road links. It is one of the largest towns in the country without a train station and has limited cycle infrastructure. Key arterial routes such as the A47 running east to west are predominantly single carriageway and are prone to closure and heavy traffic.

The lack of connection to the wider region and beyond limits commuting opportunities and growth. Geographical location is the first key strength of attracting people into the town and retaining generations and employment, which is much needed to ensure the long term, sustainable success of new development.

Proposals are being explored for future bus station improvements and reinstatement of a railway station. As the regional infrastructure strategy continues to unfold, and the momentum builds, the timing of bringing back Wisbech's presence on the rail network would only further enhance the commercial viability of the Central Wisbech town centre masterplan.

However, it is recognised that infrastructure improvements take time to deliver and as such the masterplan focuses on regeneration that can be delivered potentially in short to medium based timescales, as directed by the stakeholders. The proposals introduce meaningful community benefits and viable improvements which preserve key vehicular routes and parking provision, whilst being able to integrate with future proposals to connect to the wider region.



“

The re-opening of the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor is critical for supporting future growth (...) We want to transform Wisbech as a place for great rail connectivity, affordable housing and good employment and education.

”

INFRASTRUCTURE

REGIONAL NETWORK

Wisbech is strategically located along the A47 trunk road route between Norfolk (to the east) and Leicester and the Midlands (to the west). The town is also located south of the A17 which is a key arterial route connecting Norfolk to Lincolnshire and the North.

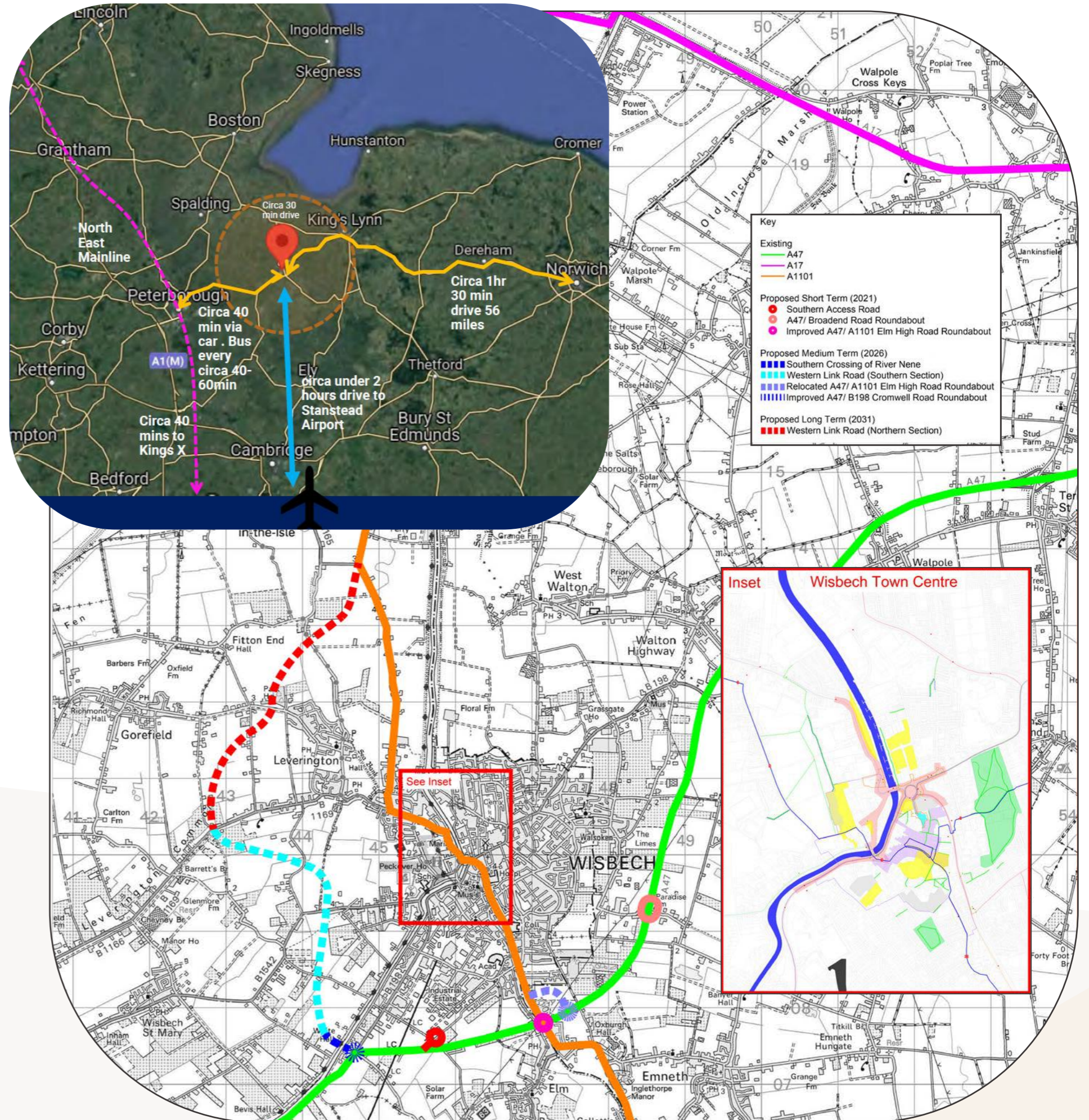
Due to its proximity to these two key routes Wisbech is often used by traffic transferring between the A17 and A47 with vehicles passing through the centre due to a lack of alternative routes around the periphery of the town.

Wisbech Access Strategy was a large scale options assessment of a number of highway improvement schemes at several locations in and around Wisbech. The main purpose of this was to facilitate the growth sites promoted in Fenland District Council's (FDC's) Local Plan which was adopted in May 2014.

In terms of the regional road network Wisbech Access Strategy identified the A47/ A1101 Elm High Road and A47/ B198 Cromwell Road roundabouts as key concerns for congestion and safety during both the weekday commuter AM and PM peak periods.

Those findings led to highway improvement schemes being worked up and assessed at the following four locations:

- New River Crossing.
- Western Link Road.
- Southern Access Road.
- New A47 Junctions, i.e. east (in the vicinity of the Broad End Road junction and south in the vicinity of the New Bridge Lane junction).



LOCAL NETWORK

The key routes into Wisbech from the regional road network are the A1101 Elm High Road/ Churchill Road, B198 Cromwell Road/ Nene Quay and Lynn Road (all from the A47 in the south) and the A1101 Leverington Road (from the A17 in the north).

All these roads connect at Freedom Bridge Roundabout which is the main junction in the town centre and as a result can suffer from significant congestion during the weekday AM and PM peak periods. The roundabout also serves Wisbech Bus Station.

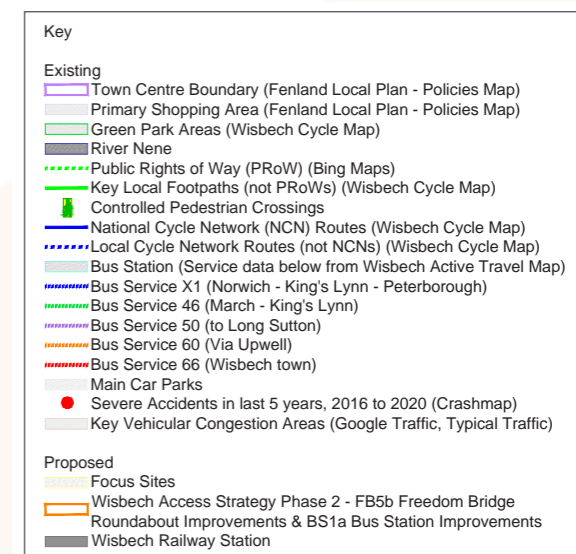
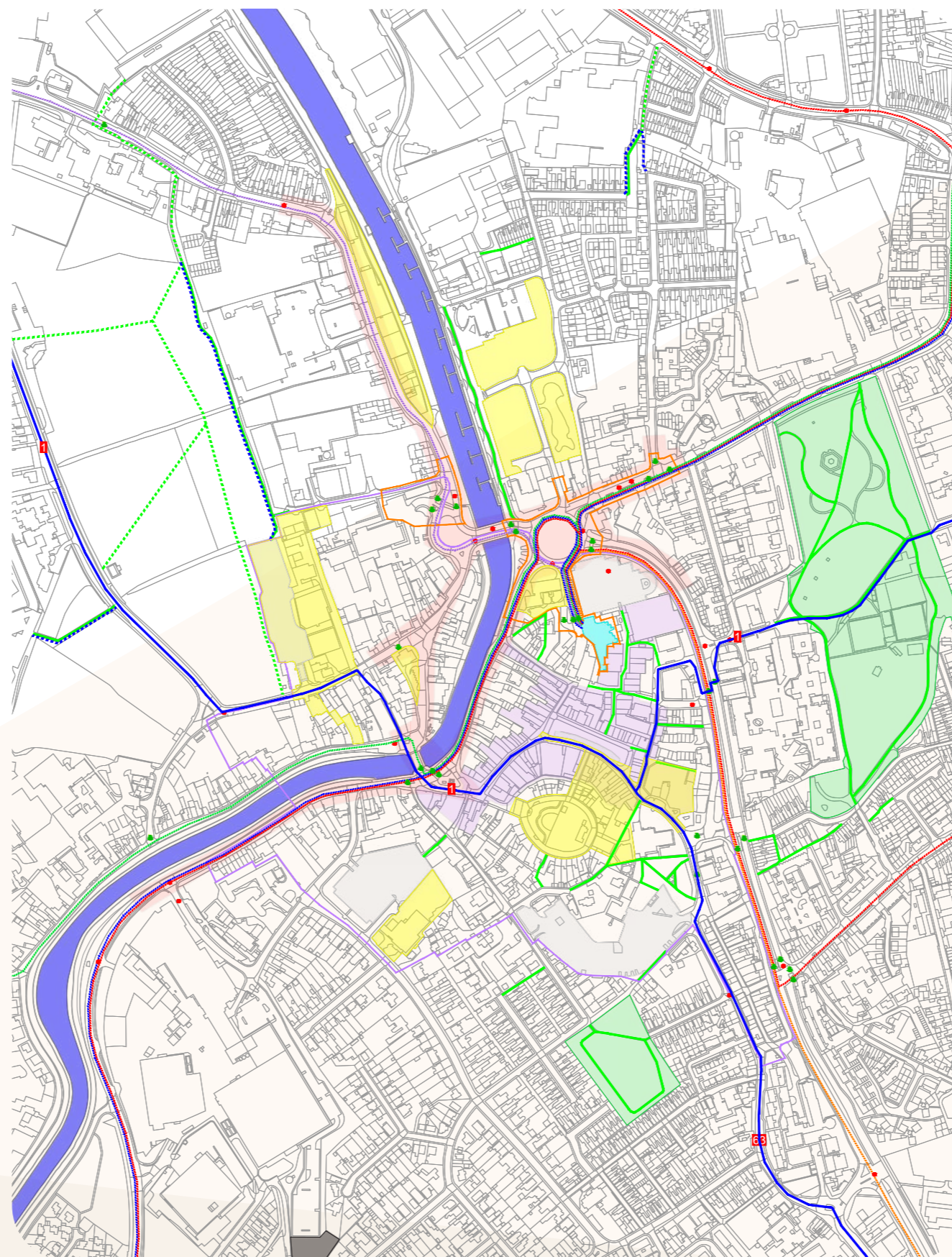
In terms of the local road network Wisbech Access Strategy identified Freedom Bridge Roundabout, Town Bridge, the A1101 Churchill Road/ Norwich Road, and the junctions at each end of Weasenham Lane as key concerns for congestion and safety during both the weekday commuter AM and PM peak periods.

Those findings led to highway improvement schemes being worked up and assessed at the following four locations:

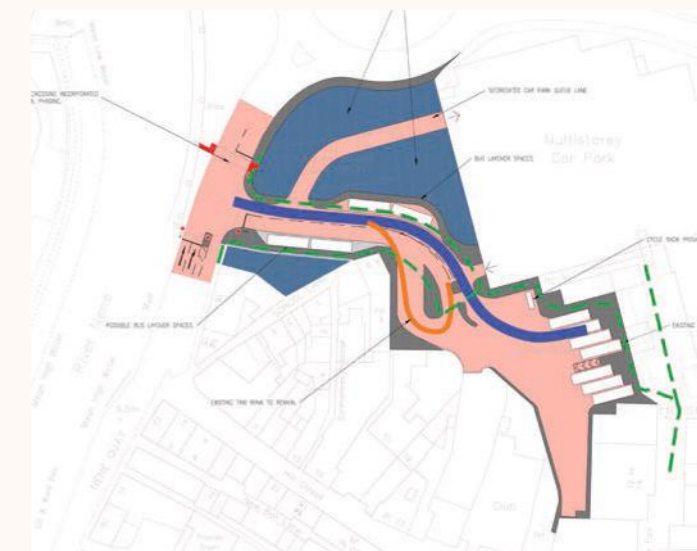
- B198 Cromwell Road/ Nene Quay.
- A1101 Elm High Road/ Churchill Road.
- Freedom Bridge Roundabout.
- Wisbech Bus Station.

FUTURE REINSTATEMENT OF RAILWAY

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (C&PCA) have assessed two station locations for reinstating rail to Wisbech (i.e. Town Centre and South of A47). Each location has two layout options (i.e. one bay platform and two bay platform). The chosen station would operate on a line between March and Wisbech then thereafter onward connections to Cambridge and Peterborough. Attached are the Wisbech drawings extracted from the study.



FUTURE BUS STATION IMPROVEMENTS



PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

An in-depth knowledge of the history and evolution of a place is key to understanding its present-day context. Appraisal of past successes and failures, physical characteristics and identity enables a responsive and progressive approach to masterplanning.

Wisbech has a rich and fascinating history and this is clearly one of its greatest assets. Celebration of its heritage assets forms a key driver for the proposals for the town centre.

ORIGINS

The town has origins as a riverside Saxon market, but its development was encouraged by the construction of a Norman fortification following the conquest of the Fenland by William the Conqueror. A stone castle constructed by 1087 likely replaced an earlier timber structure at the meeting of the estuary with the Old Nene and the Wellstream.

The central part of the town, between the two watercourses, is a good example of a manorial borough, with the site of the castle midway in the peninsula and dominating the Market Place. Wisbech developed around the Church, Castle and two marketplaces throughout the medieval period, with the river becoming the main conduit for wealth and trade during this time.

The general lay-out of the Castle Estate, with the 'circus' round the present castle expanding into squares at each end, with Market Street bringing the whole into relation with the town centre and street plan, is a good early example of formal town planning.

1500-1800s

The Castle Estate provided a platform which informed the town's later growth, with the marketplace adjacent to the Norman castle providing a blueprint for the marketplace in existence today. Consequently, the earlier Saxon marketplace has been identified as the 'Old Market' since the early thirteenth century.

A charter making Wisbech a corporate borough was granted in 1549. The town had its own weights and measures from at least 1662 and in the same decade the production of Wisbech farthings was authorised, demonstrating the town's ongoing prosperity through the seventeenth century.



It was the banking industry that drove Wisbech's post-eighteenth century development. The town's first bank, the 'Wisbech and Lincolnshire Bank' founded by Jonathan Peckover in 1782, was informal, and later partnered with Gurneys & Co. of Norwich. The Peckover family managed the bank until 1893, and it was absorbed into Barclays Bank in 1896.

Commercial enterprise dominated the town by 1796, and the legacy of Wisbech's eighteenth century commercial buoyancy is visible in the construction of grand houses along The Brinks from c1720 onwards.

1800-1900s

A Parliamentary Act of 1810 granted the Corporation of Wisbech power to improve the market and port areas, leading to the rebuilding of the Town Hall, and the widening of Union Street.

The town's growth, primarily around the port, was driven by the corn, coal and timber trades which dominated the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century (although soft-fruit growing was a long-term agricultural interest).

It is thought that during the 1840s, the corn market of Wisbech was one of the largest in the country. The legacy of this industry can be seen in warehouses along the historic quayside, including south of the bridge, which now stops larger vessels from entering the River Nene channel any further than Wisbech.

Milling also contributed to commercial industry before the advent of the First World War, with nine mills recorded as having stood in the town.

Similar growth occurred in the direction of the railway stations after 1847, and around the Wisbech and Upwell Tramway in the late nineteenth century. Traffic on the Wisbech Canal ceased by 1922, and it became a landfill site during the 1960-70s, before a road was constructed that overlaps the infilled canal in some areas. The location of this road has informed further development, as well as traffic flow through and around Wisbech.

Small-scale industries such as boot making, and photographic and picture-framing studios, are recorded from the nineteenth century and undoubtedly predate this. Later commercial activity and production took place on a larger scale, in tandem with agricultural growth: for instance, canning and punnet factories provided employment to many in the early twentieth century.

late 1950s

The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century saw the emergence of the Wisbech area as one of the key market garden locations in England and the town soon developed industries ancillary to this such as fruit canning, all of which led to a substantial increase in population of about 30 percent throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

In 1951 the number of people living in the town was 17,430, up from 9,276 in 1891. This later prosperity and growth manifests itself in the built environment in a number of significant Art Deco buildings such as the Empire Cinema, parts of the High Street and in pastiche historical buildings at the top of North Brink.

During the Second World War, Wisbech hosted a significant number of evacuees from London. The later twentieth century saw the decline of Port and river traffic due to a combination of the advent of the shipping container and the greater size and sustainability of ports to the north in Lincolnshire.



Wisbech Town Map 1903



WISBECH TODAY

Wisbech maintains an incredibly strong collection of unique Historical Assets within the Town Centre giving an immediate and lasting sense of identity to visitors and members of the community.

It is these unique features and embodied characteristics that need to be harnessed and enhanced in the spatial masterplan, future public realm and focus sites, to establish a successful future for the town.

The rich heritage of Wisbech attracts visitors from further afield, many of whom are specifically drawn to the town for its distinctive historic character and waterfront setting. The 12th Century market and the Brinks continue to be a strong focus.

Noteworthy attractions include Wisbech Castle, Peckover House (a National Trust property), Octavia Hill Birthplace Museum and Wisbech Museum, and events such as the Rose Fair, a flower festival until recent years held in summer within the grounds of the parish church.

Remarkably, the urban grain of the town centre is relatively unchanged since the late 1800s, due to the preservation of key heritage assets. The main and general circulation routes are as they have been historically, which demonstrates little change in the historic form and use of the place.

The town does retain some of its industry, including brewing and fruit packaging, and it is currently developing and expanding marina and pleasure boat facility in place of some of the former dock area north of the bridge.

The Port of Wisbech does still see seaborne trade traffic however, with one significant import being timber from Scandinavia.



Wisbech crowds visiting for the Rose Fair parade. Photo Owen Smithers



Rose Fair Parade 2019

Held over four days at the beginning of July each year since 1963, the festival historically offered visitors and townspeople the opportunity to visit flower displays in many of the town's churches, craft market stalls, entertainments and to enjoy lunches and teas. Due to the pandemic, the fair has been cancelled for the past two years, and now there is uncertainty about its future.

Source: <https://www.wisbechstandard.co.uk/news/wisbech-rose-fair-to-end-8486986>

WISBECH FUTURE

The future of Wisbech is bright and will build upon the town's rich history and fantastic attributes to create a vibrant and sustainable town for generations to come.

The vision set out in the masterplan for the identified sites and indeed the vision for Wisbech Future includes:

- ➔ **Enhanced Public realm throughout the town, connecting the historic centre with the North Brinks and Nene Parade**
- ➔ **Reconnecting the waterfront with the town centre to make the most of this key asset of Wisbech**
- ➔ **Celebrating the town's heritage assets including a new visitor centre and cafe within the Castle grounds**
- ➔ **New Wisbech Hub to give an updated Community facility linked to business enterprise teaching and training**
- ➔ **New educational facilities at the Wisbech Campus to provide improved facilities and new approaches to curriculum delivery**
- ➔ **New quality housing in the town centre offering a range of accommodation including consideration for later living**

03

APPRECIATING THE CONTEXT

Spatial Analysis

Connectivity

Character & Heritage

Environment

Open Space

SPATIAL ANALYSIS

The historic fabric of Wisbech is very well defined, and the general layout of the town centre has remained relatively unchanged since the late 1800s due to the preservation of key heritage assets.

The main and general circulation routes are as they have been historically, which demonstrates little change in the historic form and use of the place. The existing land use pattern is characterised into a number of distinct areas.

The heart of the retail district centred around the New Marketplace and Horsefair Shopping Centre. Further retail provision extends down Norfolk Street to the south of the historic centre.

The Brinks, stretching along the north and south river banks, are characterised by historic terraces of varied style and use. The urban grain becomes less dense to the outskirts of the town centre, comprising more recent housing and industrial districts.

Many of Wisbech's streets vary in form, widths and function and align with the history of the town. The narrow block paved streets in the centre relate to new landscape interventions from 3 or 4 decades ago while the cobbled streets that remain are over 100 years old.

The images opposite present the diverse range from cobbled streets to wide two lane roads. In original areas of the historic core of the town the pedestrian realm is compromised within the narrow streets but these block paved interventions from the 90s suggest a pedestrian priority with cars parked neatly to one side.

Some of the narrow streets where the paving materials are more traditional black top and kerb the vehicle parking is detrimental to the pedestrian experience of the street, for example along Norfolk Street.

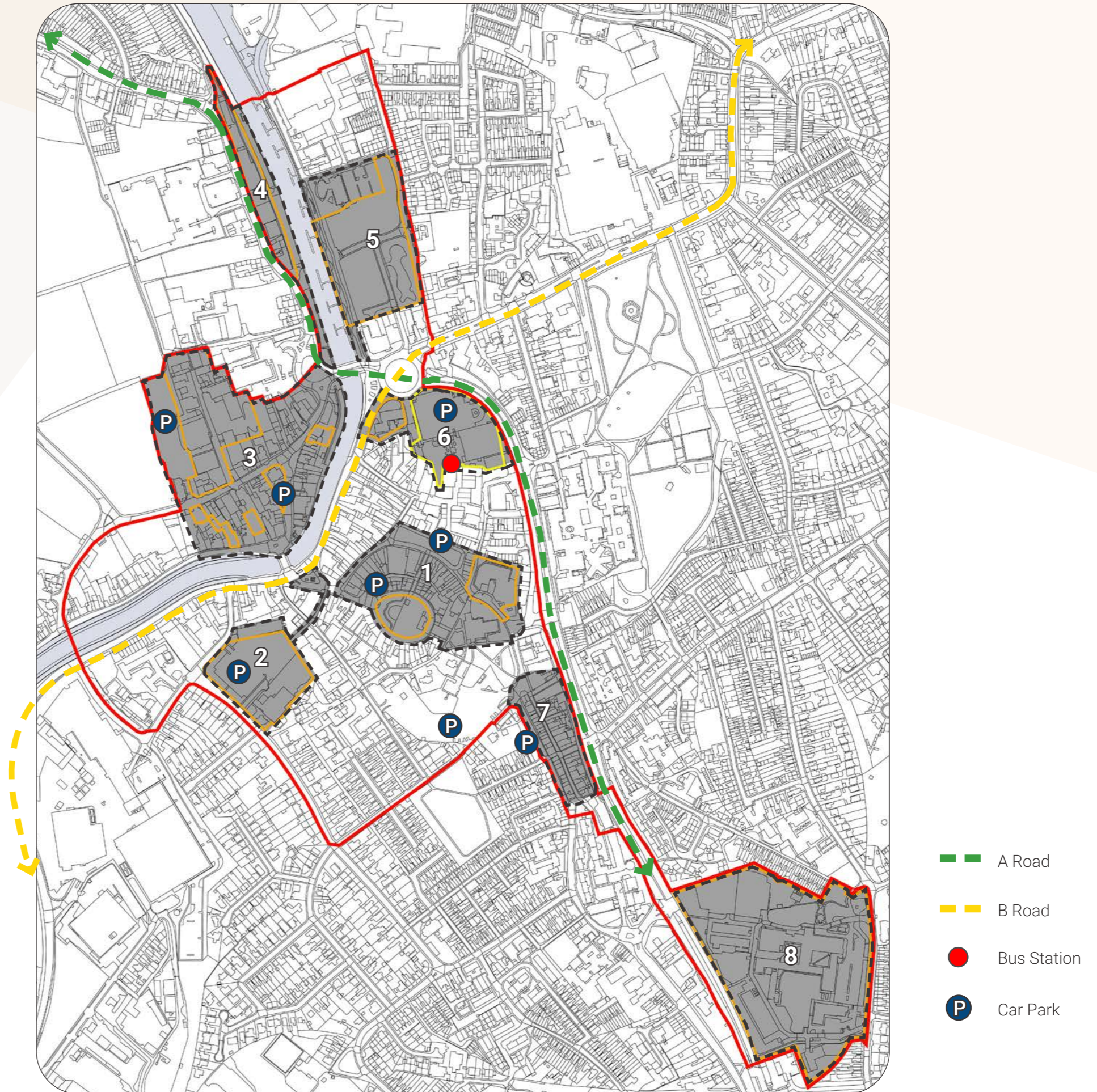


Image row top - left to right;

- 1. Nene Parade** - new landscape defines the vehicle route while maintaining a predominately pedestrian environment. The planting and wall structures to the West (left) block views of the Nene and the west bank of the River Nene
- 2. Norfolk Street** - a lively street compromised by parked cars and deliveries. Consider rationalising parking and introducing new surfaces with landscape/trees/planting
- 3. Nene Quay** - wide functional street with high wall to the river which blocks the view. Wall to river is most likely functional flood protection

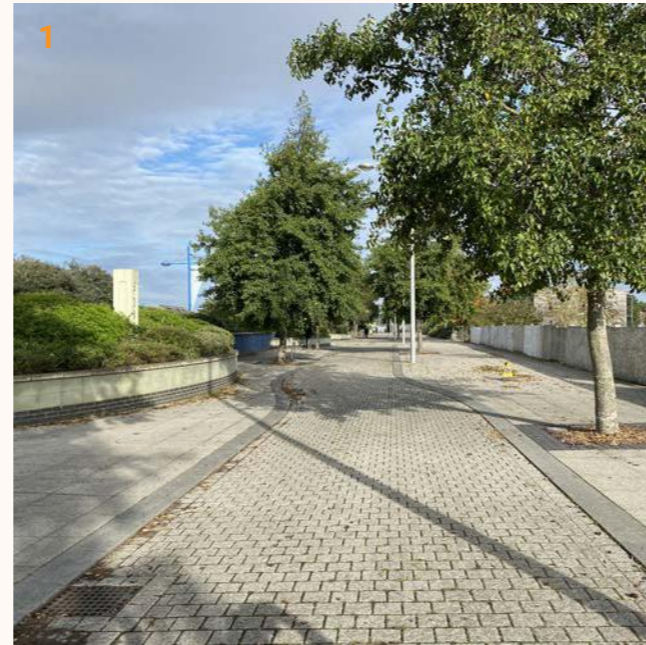


Image row middle - left to right:

- 4. Bridge Street** - potential here to improve the extent of the public realm and close off the north side, extending the path to meet the monument
- 5. Church Mews** - tight block paved street with occasional parked car, opportunity to define the pedestrian areas more clearly and relate to the New Market Square
- 6. Market Place** - limiting vehicle movements at certain times of day will improve the quality of the space, including the proposed improvement works to the market area



Image row bottom - left to right:

- 7. Post Office Lane** - widening of the paths has provided larger areas of space for pedestrians and reduced vehicle dominance
- 8. The Crescent** - a fine example of period architecture and streetscape. Surfaces could be more robust and minimise cars to residents only
- 9. Horse Fair** - fully pedestrianised street connecting car parks with town centre market. Retail mall and bus station. A busy part of the town. Improvements could include greater areas of landscape with trees and planting

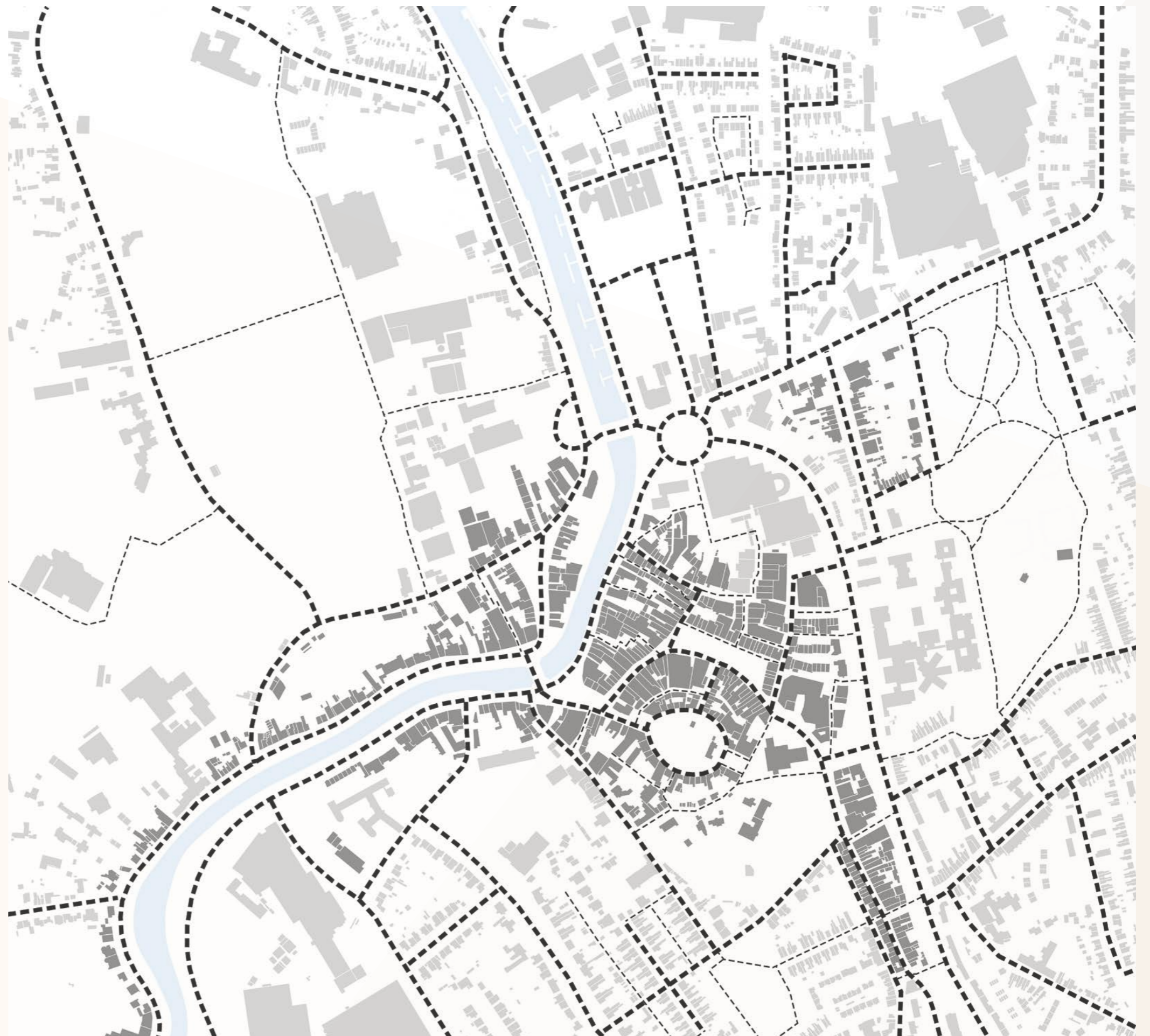


CONNECTIVITY

IMPROVING CONNECTIVITY

Wisbech town centre is dominated by roads and streets which at times are busy with vehicles. The network of pedestrian areas, footpaths and pedestrian malls is restricted by the necessity to have maximum access for the vehicle, often in narrow streets. Footpaths are narrow and connectivity is compromised. In this post pandemic world and in the context of social distancing spaces for people should be a priority.

There are opportunities within the town centre to maximise the area for pedestrians, widen footpaths, reduce carriageway widths, close some roads off to traffic, introduce shared surfaces such as Church Mews. Alongside the public realm improvements is an exercise in improving the connectivity and legibility through the town. This can be achieved with improved signing and the introduction of interpretive themed trails such as a heritage trail.



Connectivity - Key Routes & Connections

Image row top - left to right;

1. High fences obscure views and are not inclusive
2. Large roads prohibit pedestrian movement
3. Narrow lanes connect into the town centre



Image row middle - left to right:

4. Potential improved connections to the The Chase and Pocket Park
5. Beautiful framing of routes back into the town centre
6. Some of the pedestrian routes can be improved with trees and planting leading into potential development opportunities

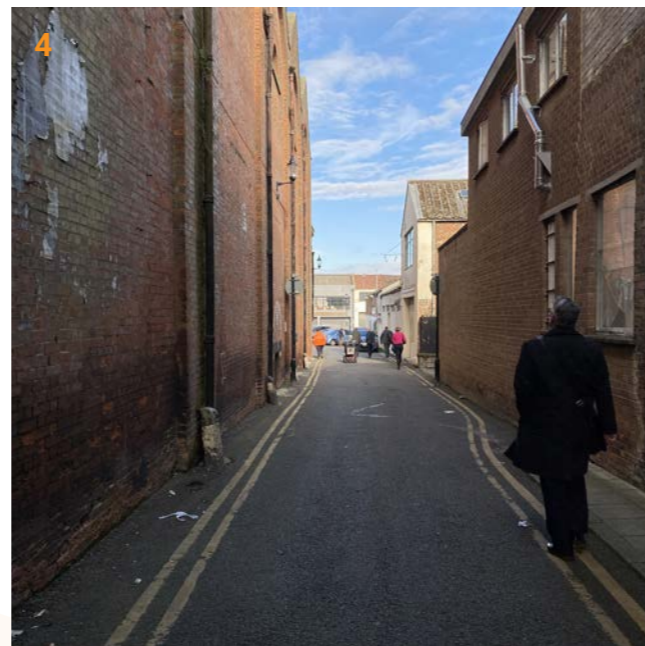


Image row bottom - left to right:

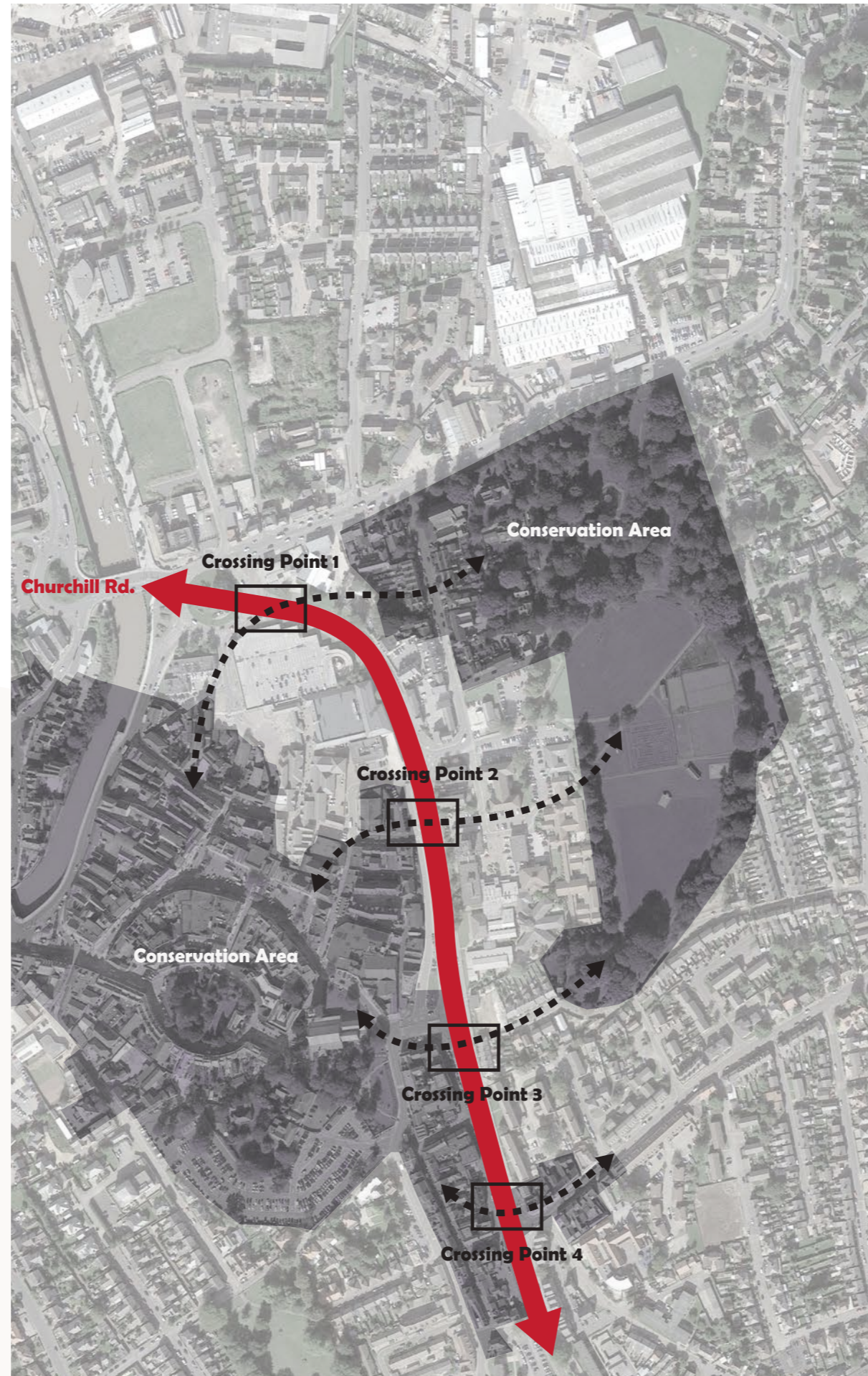
7. Links to green spaces can be improved
8. Bus stations and other large areas of hard standing restrict movement and connectivity
9. Routes to the Market Place are pedestrian priority spaces often with no vehicle access



LINKING CONSERVATION AREAS

The two conservation areas are separated by Churchill Road (A1101), a key vehicle route with multiple lanes of traffic. Improved pedestrian connections between the two would better link the town centre with Wisbech Park.

There are four existing crossing points (shown opposite) which would benefit from public realm improvements and enhanced crossings, to give the pedestrians more priority and activate the landscape.



Crossing Point 1



Crossing Point 2



Crossing Point 3



Crossing Point 4

Conservation Areas & Crossing Points on Churchill Road

CAR PARKING

Car parking is a key consideration for Wisbech, as most visitors to the town arrive by car. The masterplan area is well served by car parking and the proposals seeks to preserve existing provision.

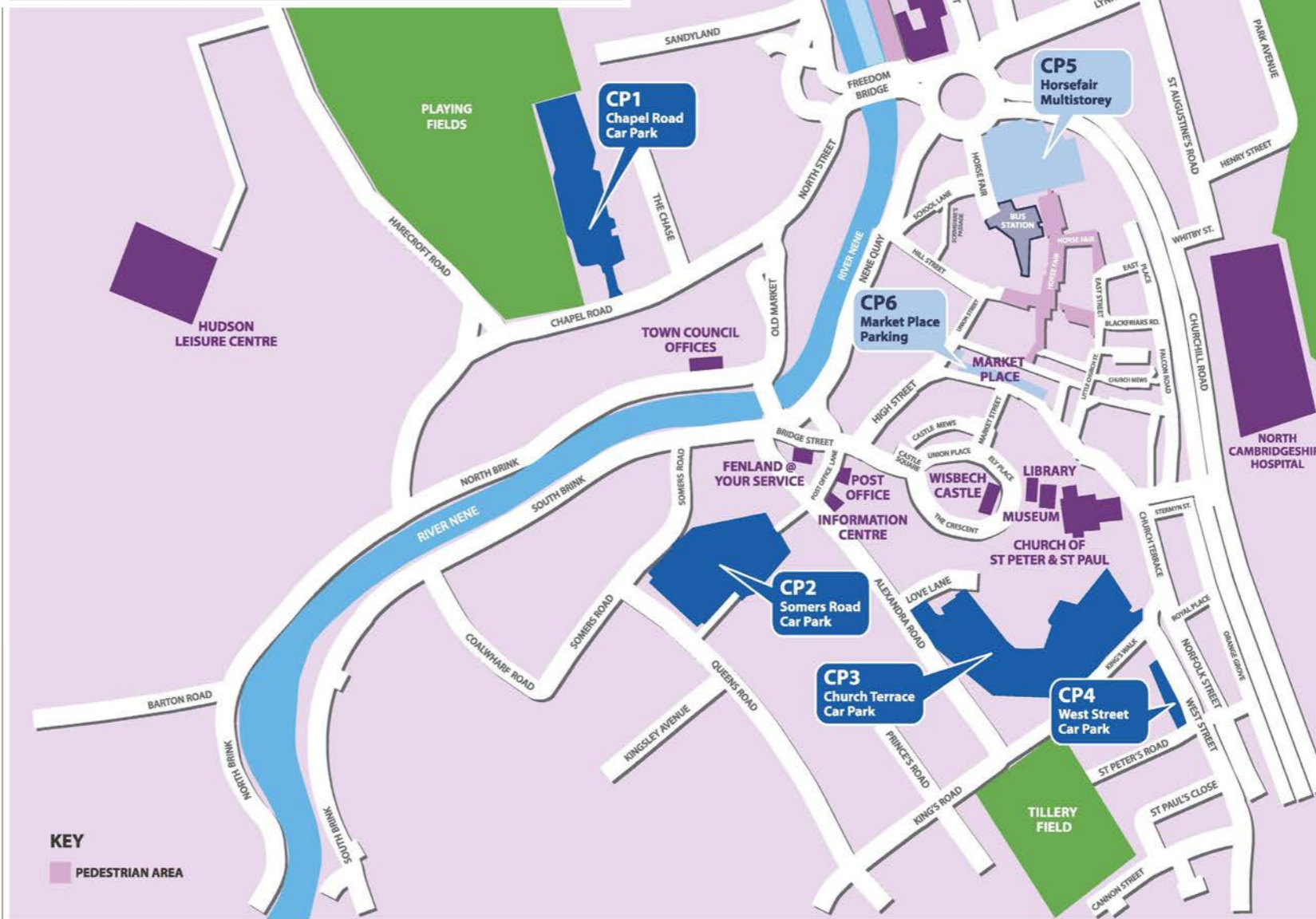
There are four council managed car parks providing access to the town centre, which are free to park in, and two privately managed car parks. On street parking and smaller parking areas are interspersed throughout the town.

PUBLIC CAR PARKS MANAGED BY FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL



CAR PARK	CAR PARK NAME / LOCATION	TIME LIMIT RESTRICTIONS				RECYCLING CENTRE	CCTV COVERAGE	NO. OF DISABLED SPACES	NO. OF PARKING SPACES
		ALL DAY	24 HRS	2 HRS	1 HR				
CP1	Chapel Road		✓			✓	6	199	
CP2	Somers Road		✓		✓	✓	9	273	
CP3	Church Terrace		✓		✓	✓	12	377	
CP4	West Street			✓			0	15	
CP5*	Horse Fair	✓				✓	14	345	
CP6*†	Market Place				✓	✓	4	17	

*Car Park privately owned and managed. †Market day parking restrictions apply. Time restrictions and charges may apply.



Wisbech Car Parking Map

Source: <https://www.fenland.gov.uk/carparks>

CHARACTER & HERITAGE

The town centre is home to a rich and distinctive historic building fabric that has national architectural merit. The designated Wisbech conservation area covers the town centre, with an extension encompassing the iconic Brinks.

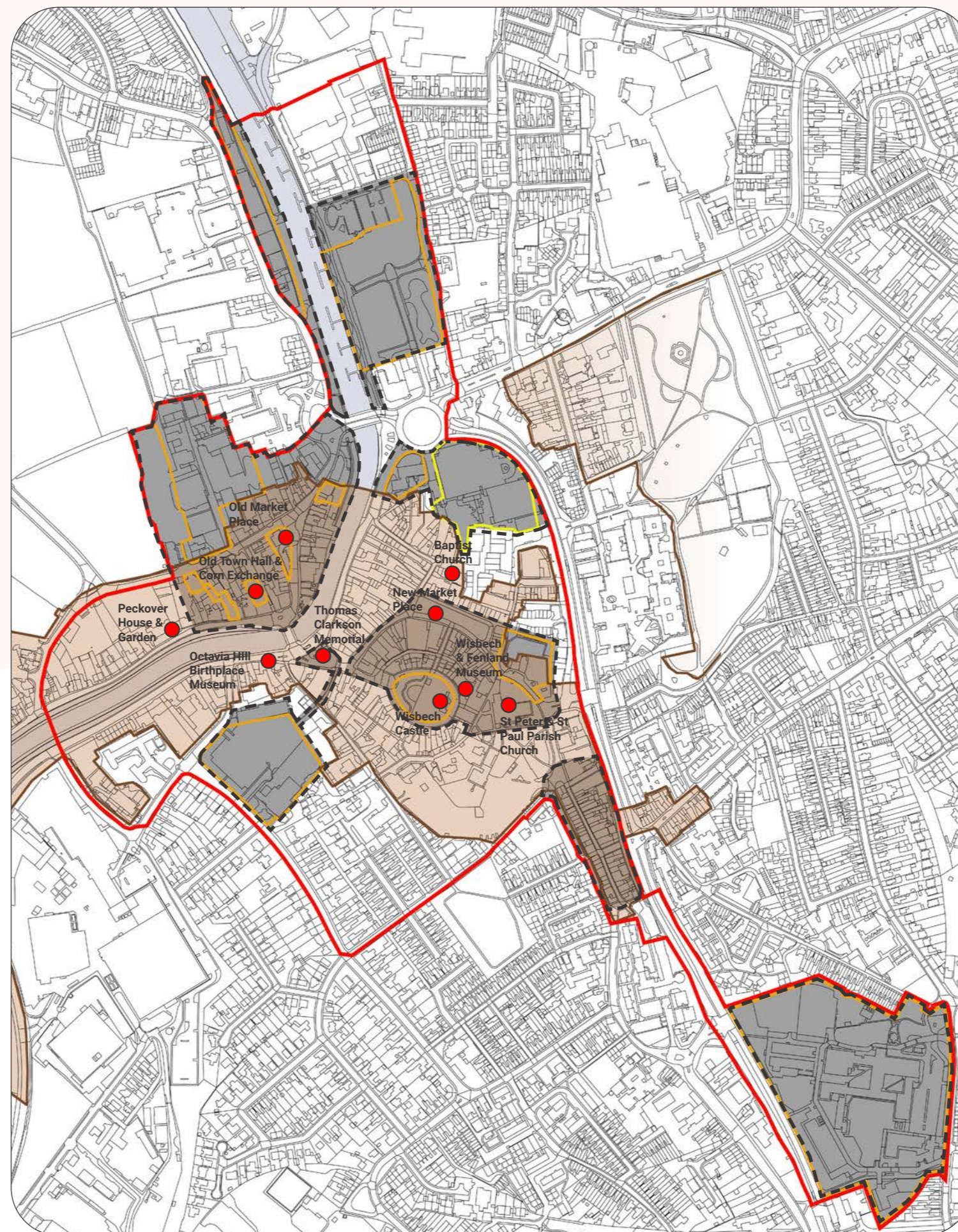
Within the boundary is a diverse wealth of historic buildings and structures documenting the changing commercial, industrial and residential fortunes of Wisbech over the centuries.

This diversity is reflected in five distinctive character areas within the Conservation Area, each with their own distinct historic environments which combined make up the unique historic character of the town centre.

The key historic environmental components of Wisbech town centre are the diverse range of largely 18th and 19th century buildings fronting the riverside. The town is noteworthy for its fine street architecture of the Georgian and Regency periods.

In particular, the group of buildings along the North Brink, from the Town Hall to No. 25, is of exceptional merit, and the streets laid out between 1793 and 1816 on the site of the castle - The Crescent, Castle, Ely Place, Market Street, Museum and Union Place - and the block of warehouses between the Old Market and the river, have architectural distinction not often found in towns of this size.

The masterplan proposals are informed by the conservation area appraisal and conservation area management plan to ensure the heritage assets of the town centre are better appreciated, managed and understood. The proposals focus on the key heritage assets of the town centre.



Conservation Area & Heritage Asset Map of the Masterplan Area

“ Wisbech is one of the most attractive towns of east Anglia.... Along the new course is the ‘west end’ of Wisbech – the two Brinks, one of the finest Georgian brick streets of England ”

The Nicolaus Pevsner (Buildings of England)

Image row top - left to right;

1. Wisbech Castle
2. Wisbech & Fenland Museum
3. St Peter & St Paul Parish Church

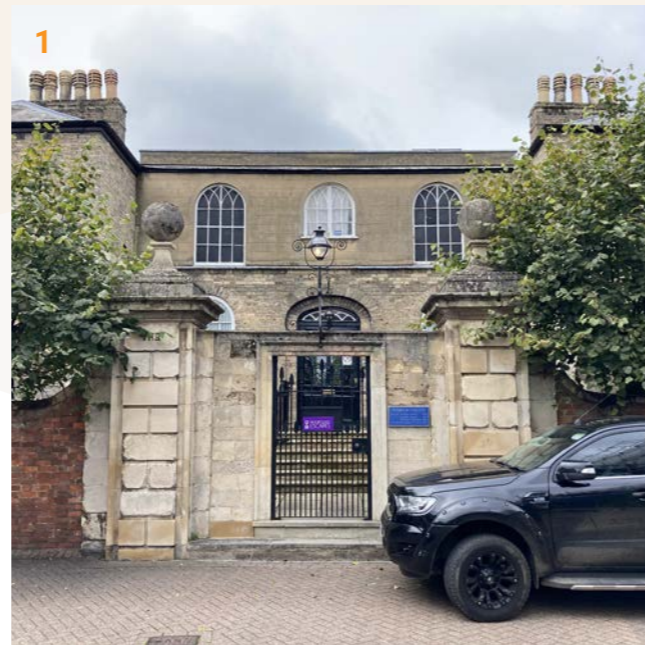


Image row middle - left to right:

4. Rose and Crown Hotel
5. Octavia Hill Birthplace Museum
6. The Brinks

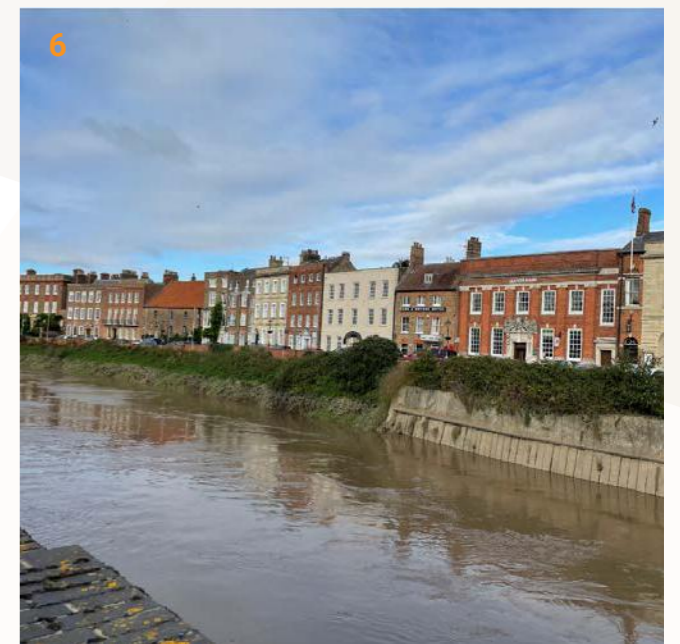


Image row bottom - left to right:

7. Thomas Clarkson Memorial
8. Peckover House & Garden
9. Old Town Hall & Corn Exchange



ENVIRONMENT

FLOOD RISK

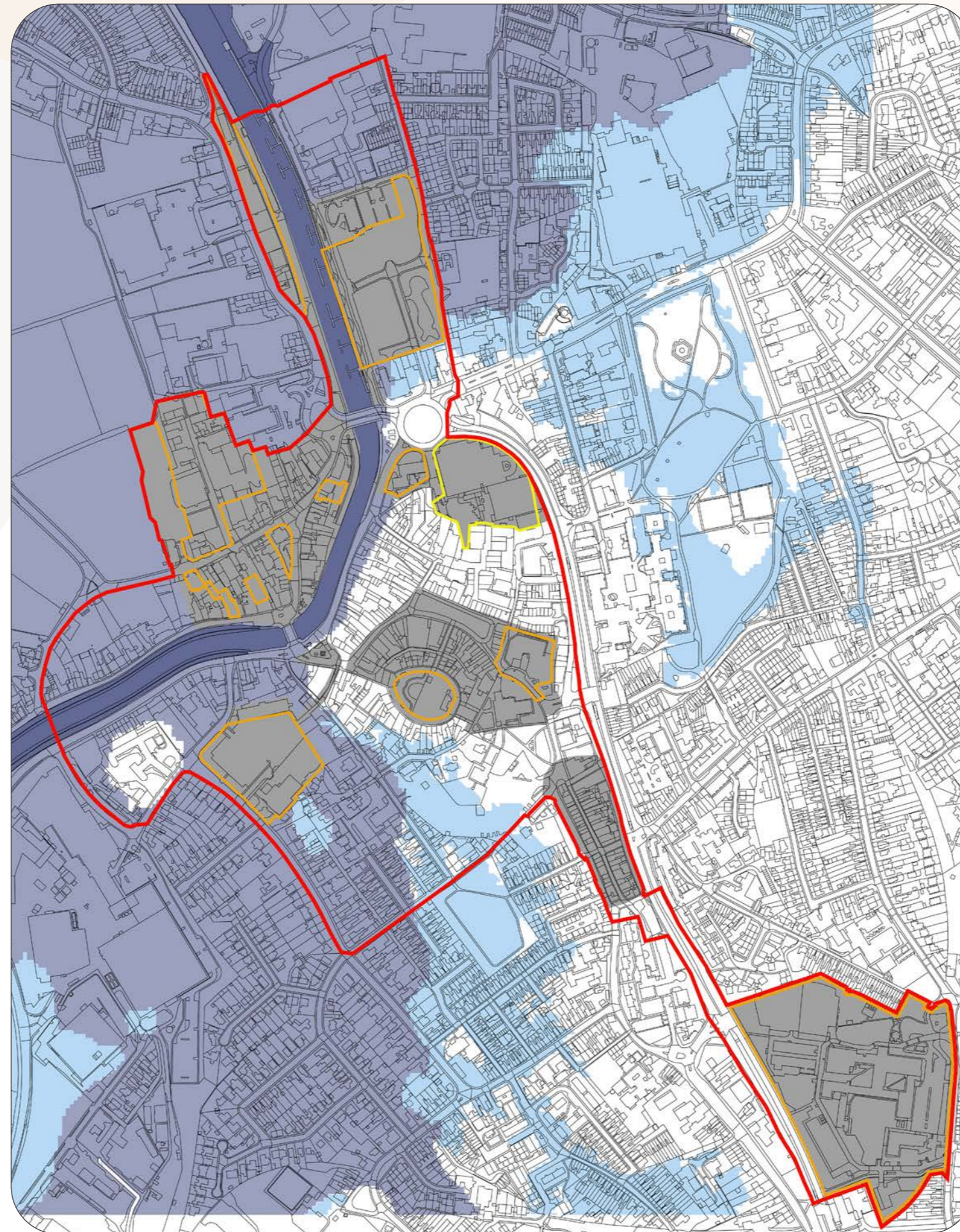
Fenland District has significant areas which lie within fluvial and tidal flood zone, with the market town of Wisbech located on an 'island' of high ground above the fens. The majority of the land within Fenland District Council is mostly pump drained and is reliant on flood defenses to minimise the flood risk to existing developments.

There is a history of flooding in Wisbech and in the location of the proposed site, with an extreme being surface water flooding in 1978. The town of Wisbech is protected from tidal flooding up to 1-in-200-year flood event through flood gates and flood walls. These flood gates can be closed when predicted tidal water level reaches a trigger level by Environment Agency staff.

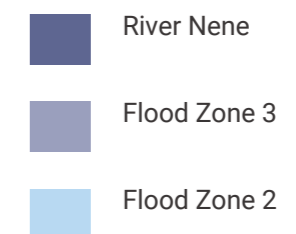
There are flood defenses alongside the River Nene and therefore the risk of flooding from the River Nene within the town centre is low. However, there remains a residual risk in the areas within the town centre that are in Flood Zone 3 as the existing defenses could be breached or overtopped.

The majority of the town centre is at low risk of flooding from surface water, however there are areas at risk, including some of the potential development sites. The risk of flooding from groundwater, sewers and reservoir failure is considered to be low.

Any development within Flood Zone 3 will have to be provided with appropriate flood mitigation and/or resilience measures. It will also have to demonstrate that flood risk elsewhere is not exacerbated, and therefore that flood volumes are not displaced by any proposed development.



Flood Risk Map of the Masterplan Area

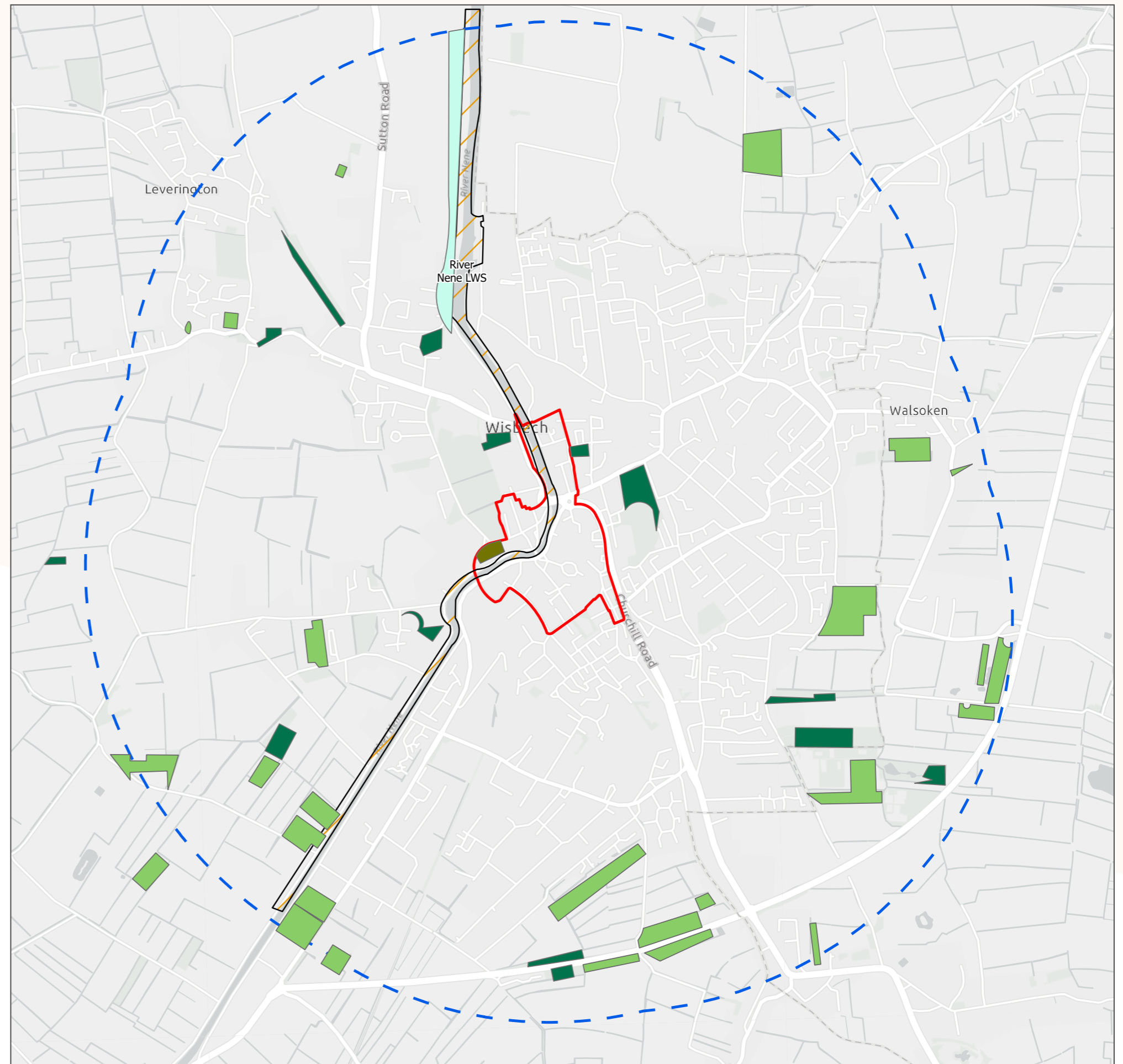


ECOLOGY

The masterplan boundary and surrounding area are fairly dense and urban in character with few ecological sites, due to the prevalence of buildings, streets and hardstanding.

The River Nene does provide a wildlife corridor and green swathe through the town and is a valuable ecological asset to the town. There are also several HPI sites in or close to the masterplan area.

As part of the public realm proposals there is a significant opportunity to improve existing habitats and introduce new wildlife habits, which could include measures such as street greening, species rich planting and bat and bird boxes.



Designated Sites and Habitat of Principal Importance (HPIs)

Wisbech Central

Fenland District Council

Legend

- Site boundary
- Site boundary 2 km buffer
- Broadleaved Woodland
- Traditional Orchard
- Woodpasture & Parkland
- Coastal & Floodplain Grazing Marsh
- Local Wildlife Site (LWS)

Designated Sites and Habitat of Principal Importance (HPIs) Plan

OPEN SPACE

EXISTING PARKS

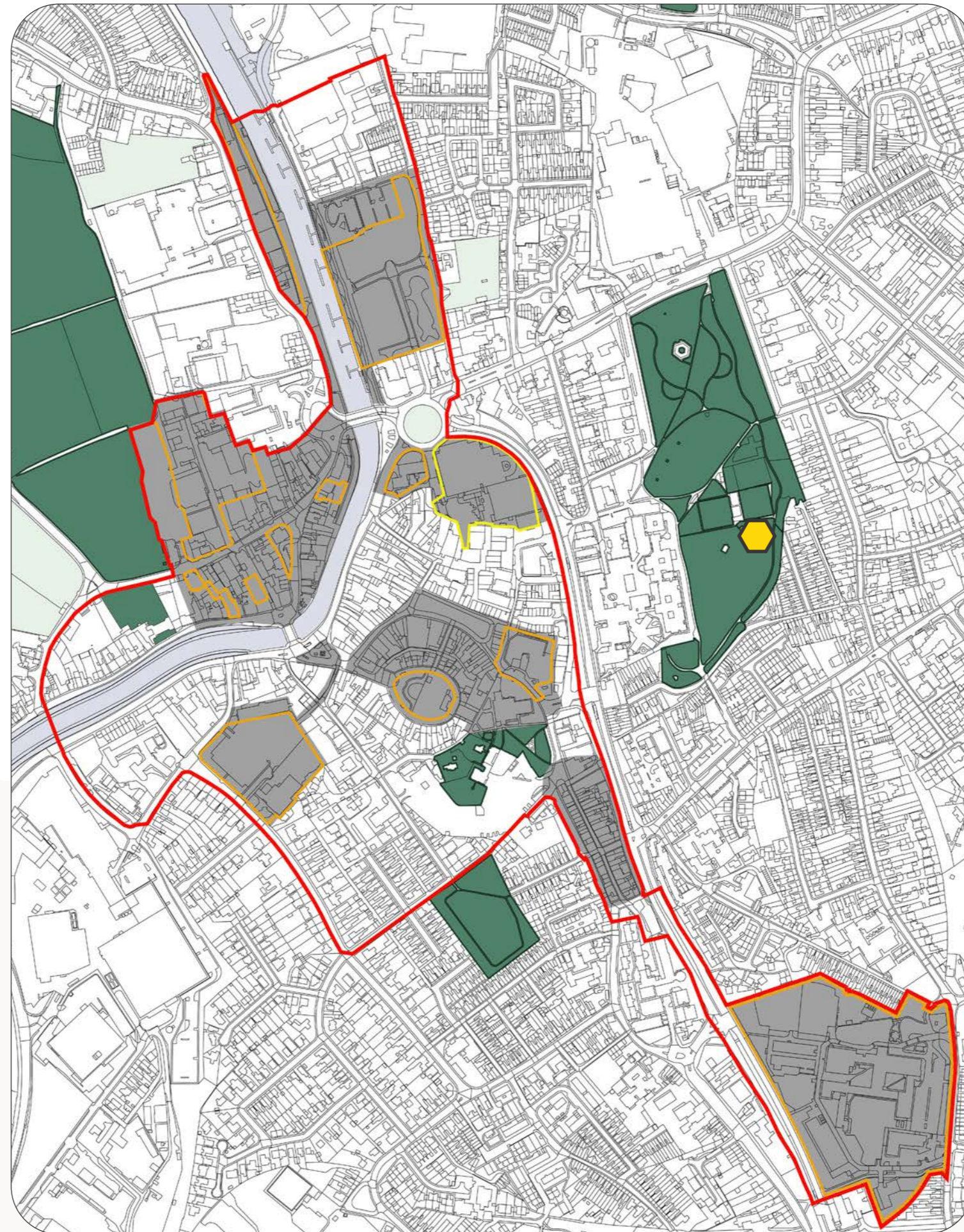
There are a number of large open green spaces which lie to the edge of the town centre and are easily within walking distance, however they are poorly connected into the town centre. An opportunity exists to provide improved connections through way-finding, lighting and signing.

In the town centre the church grounds provides a high quality landscape public space which is popular and well maintained.

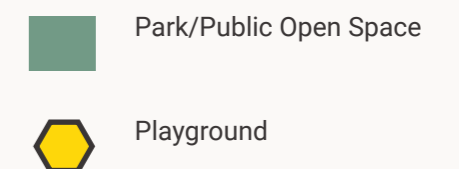
Kings Walk Park to the south of the town centre is the smallest of the three parks. It is laid out to lawn with mature trees to the perimeter and a couple of paths dissecting the lawns. The park is easily accessible from residential streets but not so well connected to the town centre.

Wisbech Park to the east of the town centre is in easy walking distance but the routes are not clearly defined and crossing the dual carriageway Churchill Road is not ideal. However it is a well equipped community asset with tennis courts, bowling green, play area, large lawns, maze and a network of paths across the park which connect to adjacent roads and medical facilities.

The playing fields to the north west of the town centre and is a large recreational park accommodating a number of sports pitches, pavilions and walking routes around the perimeter. The park is divided into sectors with strong lines of mature trees. It is a quality green space of much value to the town. It is also easily accessible especially from the North Brinks and from the potential new developments at The Chase.



Parks & Public Open Space Map of the Masterplan Area

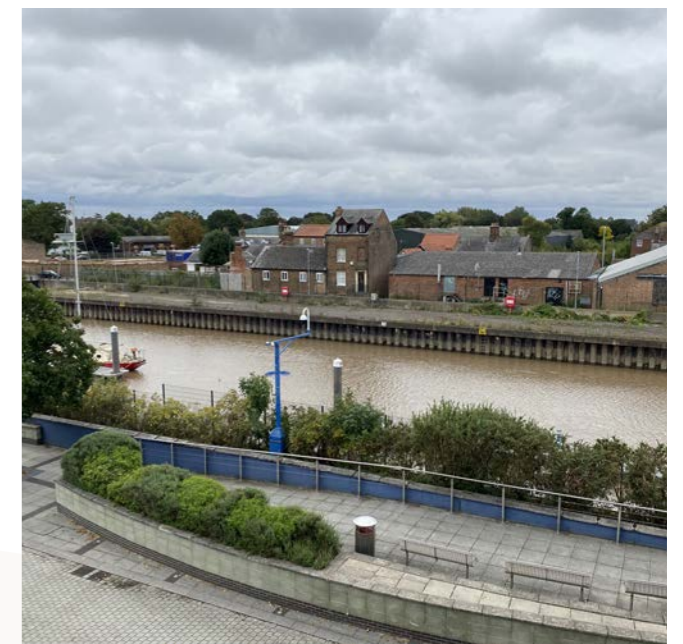


OPEN SPACE CHARACTER

The images here provide a snap shot of the typical green spaces and landscape within the town centre. Many of the small green spaces within the town centre are require maintenance and are not fully accessible.

Existing public realm spaces along the Nene Parade are planted with single species blocks obscuring views and providing minimal contribution to the town's biodiversity and wildlife habitat.

New proposals for these areas should consider improving links into the park as a valuable asset for the residential developments, alongside increasing the visual connection to the river.



04 THE MASTERPLAN

Key Aims

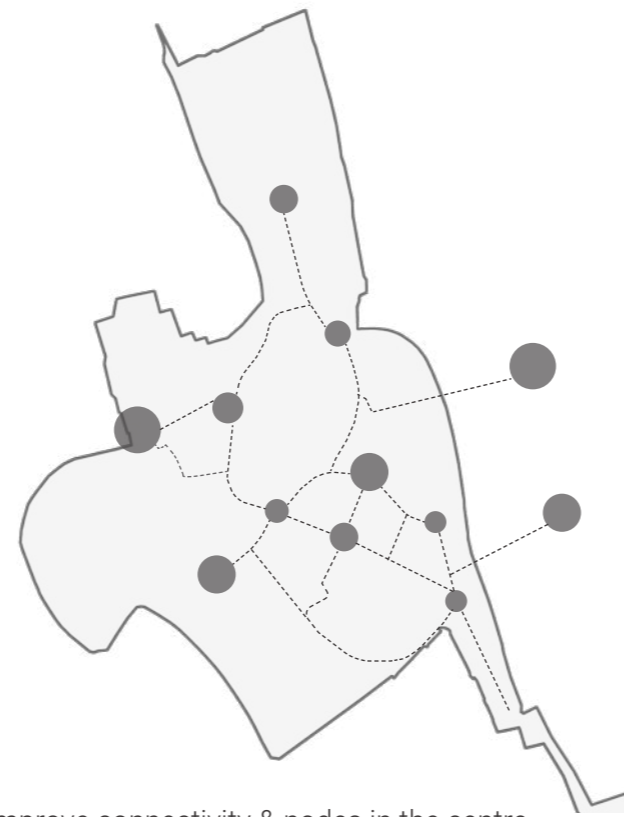
Land Use

Spatial Strategy

Public Realm

KEY AIMS

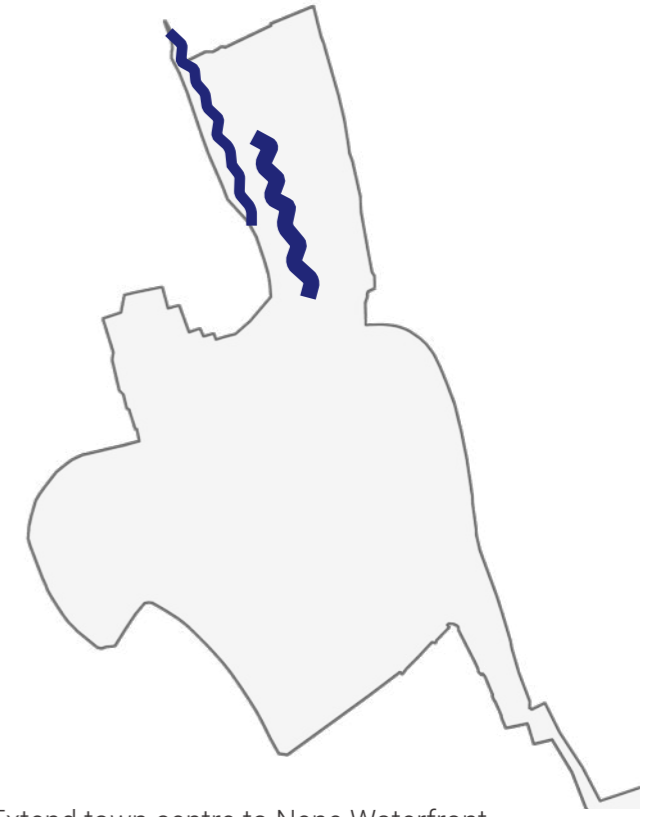
The masterplan focuses on a series of aims throughout the town centre which form the core drivers of the overall master plan concept; renewed town centre focus, improved connectivity, street greening & public realm enhancement, reconnecting to the waterfront, celebrating heritage assets, new community services, innovation & educational facilities & new housing in the centre.



Improve connectivity & nodes in the centre



Create green streetscapes & public realm



Extend town centre to Nene Waterfront



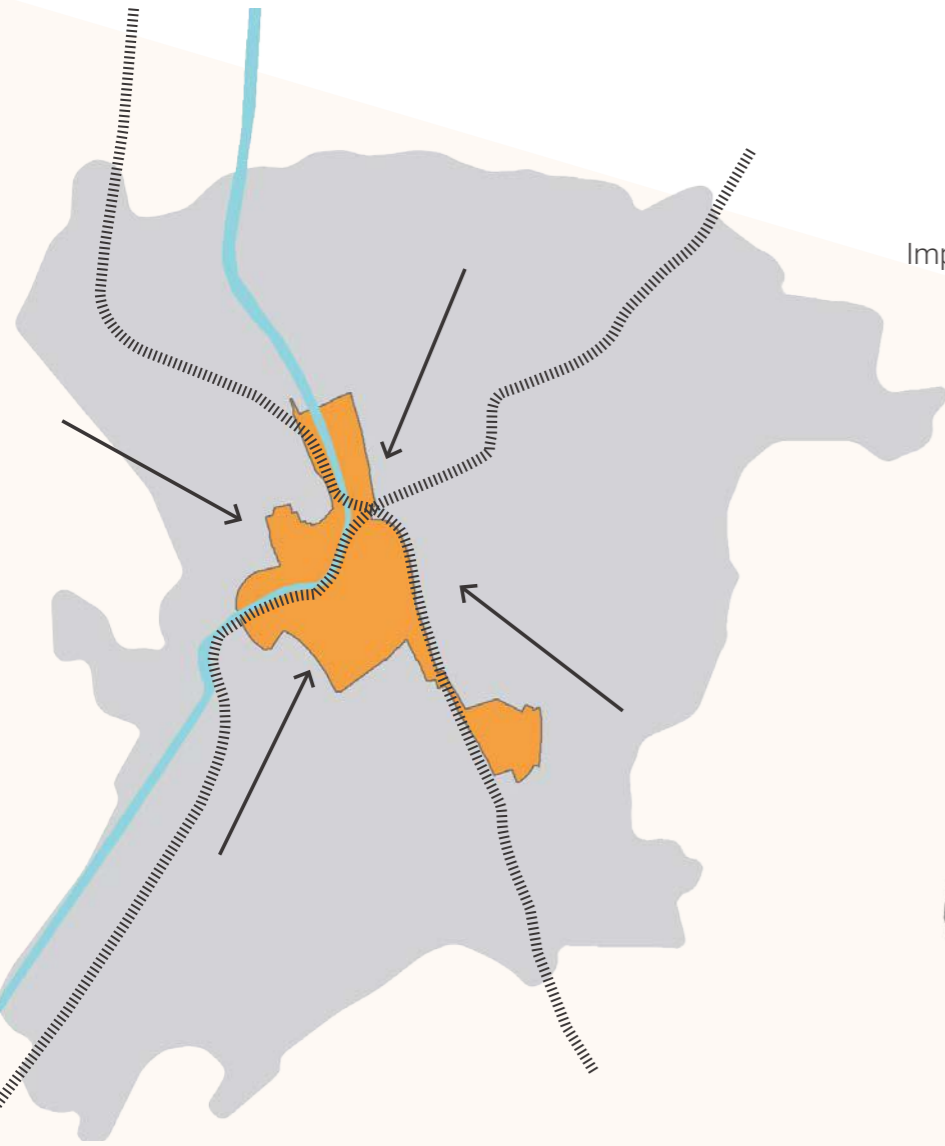
Celebrate character & historical assets



Community services, innovation & education



New housing in the town centre



Reinforce existing town centre focus



THE CONCEPT

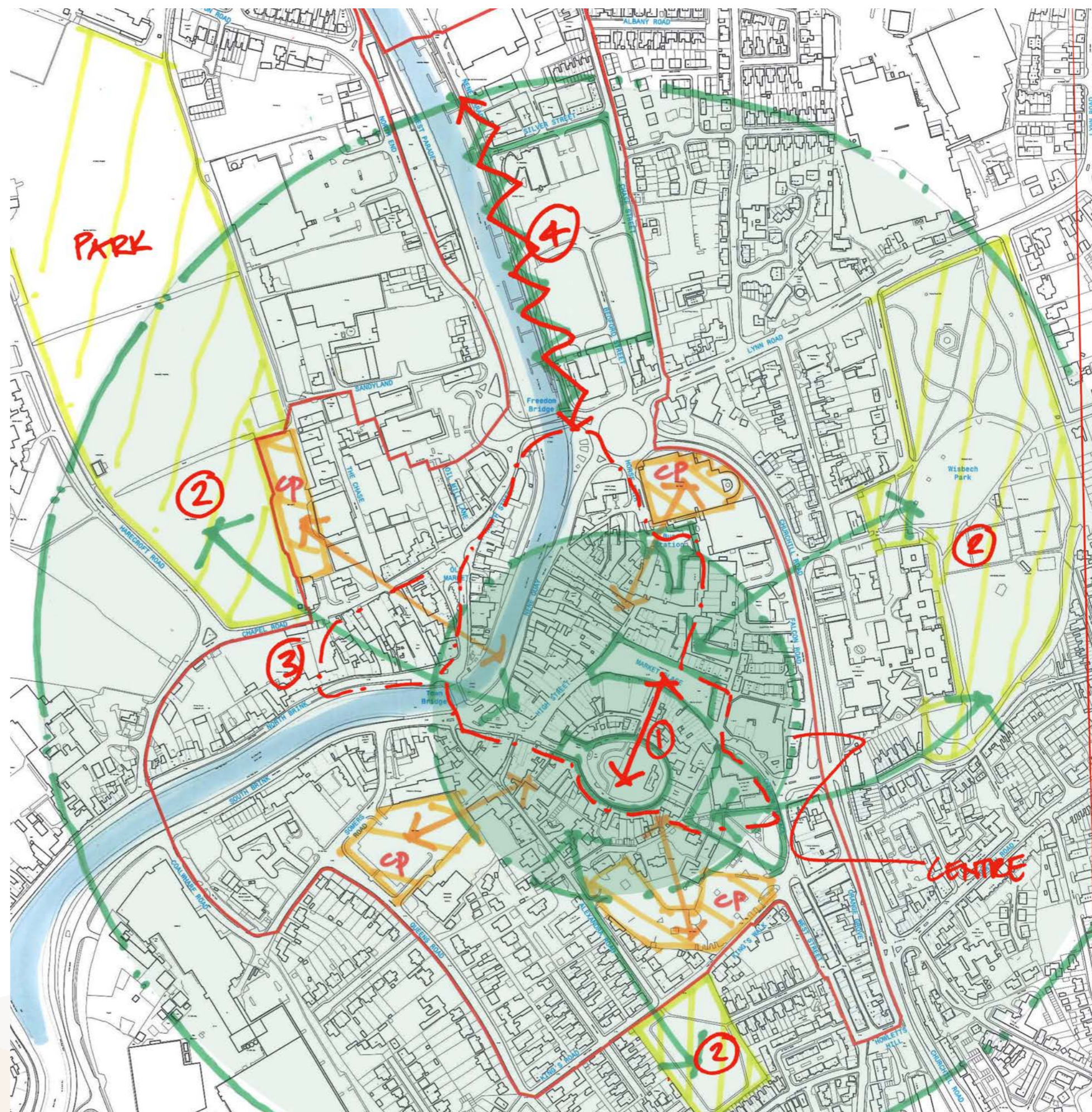
The series of potential development sites are scattered throughout the town, north east, south and west. They are however sitting around a perimeter of the town centre and engage with car parking and open spaces.

There is potential to create a network of improved pedestrian connections linking the new sites inwards towards the town centre and outwards to the green open spaces.

Central to this approach is the market place, and the castle area with a destination and attraction point drawing people into the centre. A heritage trail links the areas in a looped walking route, while the town centre to open spaces links form a radial pattern starting from the castle and town centre areas.

CONCEPT KEY

- ➡ 1. Pedestrianise/improve Market St.
- ➡ 2. Connections to green space
- ➡ 3. Walking route - historic points of interest
- ➡ 4. Increase prominence of river



LAND USE

THE CURRENT MARKET

Across the UK there has been a decline of over 5,000 operators, with chain stores closing 9,000 branches nationally, which together with the effect of the pandemic has seen all town centres having had problems with occupancy, footfall and regeneration.

Many centres are looking at conversion of buildings to generate activity and encourage business with a particular focus on local companies in terms of investment and occupiers.

The pandemic has also created a preference for a more open environment, including the use of public space for street markets and vendors

WISBECH SITUATION

In line with the national situation Wisbech suffered the loss of two large space users (one temporarily occupied as vaccination centre) with it unlikely that another operator will move in.

Fortunately, the town has a strong core of local trades people with an ethos of entrepreneurship which is supported by the community.

Whilst many facilities are now served along Cromwell Road by national operators these are perhaps appealing to a wider catchment or perhaps monthly trip, whereas the high occupancy of the existing town centre car parks on a daily basis demonstrate a strong basis for expansion within the core.



THE WAY FORWARD

The future of Wisbech will include the provision of a safe and welcoming environment to attract all sectors and provide opportunities that can be delivered in a relatively short timescale in order to satisfy the demand, both current and anticipated. The Masterplan identifies a way in which the town centre will be attractive to business owners looking to expand or locate in the area and provide the opportunities for leisure operators to bring in additional investment to boost the town.

The land use strategy proposes to enhance the town centre through public realm and street frontage improvements, combined with development that mixes complementary uses to generate increased footfall and investment. Advantage should be taken of the current buoyant leisure sector such as hotel, coffee shop and public house operators that are currently active. There are further opportunities to celebrate the town's heritage assets to attract visitors to Wisbech.

Core land use principles could include:

- **A Visitor Destination**
- **Civic & Community**
- **Innovation & Flexible Workspace**
- **Entertainment & Culture**
- **Leisure & Hospitality**
- **New & Existing Retail Opportunities**
- **Residential to suit different user groups**
- **Education / Green Skills**

A VISITOR DESTINATION

There is a strong opportunity to capitalise on the key strengths of Wisbech which already draw visitors to the town; its distinctive historic character and waterfront setting.

Enhancement of the Heritage Quarter such as a historic walking route and a new visitor centre at the Castle could help celebrate the towns history and introduce opportunities for small scale tourism related coffee shops and retail. A hotel development would provide visitor accommodation as well as bringing more corporate style restaurant operators the North Brink area, offering an exciting opportunity to create a more independent style entertainment facility.

The river frontage improvements along the Nene Parade would uplift the connection to the waterfront maximising the connections with the existing marina facilities, hopefully attracting further commercial opportunities. The public realm proposals will create a closer connection with the River Nene both for residents and visitors to Wisbech spending more time in and around the town centre with benefits to both viability and personal well-being.



The Garden Museum, London



Glasgow's City Halls and Old Fruitmarket

ENTERTAINMENT & CULTURE

Reinstatement of former entertainment venues such as the Corn Exchange, located behind the Old Town Hall. Venues such as this could accommodate flexible uses for event, concerts and fairs.

The nature of the historic buildings could provide venues for music, arts and culture with the larger spaces being utilised for exhibition/performance whilst surrounding buildings could provide then support studio/workshop space.

Existing larger food and beverage could be taken by nationals with flexibility to restore historic buildings as has been seen by some pub brands restoring old cinemas/banking halls.

These operations would benefit visitors to Peckover House utilising the River Nene frontage walk together with the creation of linkages to Chapel Road would give access to open parkland around the cricket and rugby grounds.

LEISURE & HOSPITALITY

A new hotel of 80 beds would be of significant benefit to the town, with potential to bring in excess of £1M to the local economy through visits to local shops, bars, restaurants.

Consideration has been given to the location of the potential hotel requirement and a desire for the location to provide complimentary food and beverage operators, budget hotels often provide only basic facilities. Sites explored include Nene Waterfront, Freedom Bridge Roundabout and the Beales Site.

The hotel site identified as preferable lies adjacent to the main town centre public car park, provides access to the riverside, council offices and easily accessed having frontage to the town centre roundabout. The hotel could be supported by a new coffee shop within the premises.

There would be a strong opportunity for restaurant and public house operators to locate in the immediate facility to cater for the guests, such as a new public house at the Phoenix Hotel site. This also leads to the same customers visiting shops and attractions in the town.



Premier Inn Peterborough City Centre

RETAIL

The existing retail core will significantly benefit from investment to the public realm and street frontage improvements which would create a more pleasant pedestrian environment. The removal of buildings such as the former “Beales” will create a more open welcoming environment whilst creating further opportunities for local street vendors in the public space.

The vacant units both in the Horsefair Shopping Centre and in surrounding streets would see interest from food and beverage operators looking to serve the visitors staying in the new hotel. New retail opportunities could be created along the river, in particular at Nene Waterfront which would see increased footfall from the residential developments.

Together, the measures in the Masterplan will create opportunities for the private sector to take advantage of the gaps in the marketplace to deliver jobs, activity and investment in the town centre, which will significantly benefit both new and existing businesses.



High Street, Rochester Kent



Pollok Civic Realm, Glasgow - NORR Consultants

CIVIC & COMMUNITY

There is an identified need for a new ‘one stop shop’ hub building located close to the town centre. This could provide the physical space for a range of complementary services such as civic, employment and community spaces, a library, study rooms, nursery facilities, teaching and training facilities, function rooms and a café.

Available for young and old together, the hub is anticipated to be the central location where the local population will be able to access a wide range of services and assist the Wisbech community with cultural welfare, education and vocational needs through easy access to a wide range of more structured support from both national and local bodies.

A central location with parking provision would provide easy access to the hub as well as attracting visitors and supporting the local businesses. Furthermore, it would provide the impetus and opportunity for further public services to locate in or around the hub area and could help stimulate a high-quality office market and flexible innovation space.

INNOVATION & FLEXIBLE WORKSPACE

The recent pandemic has changed how many of us live and work. Increased prevalence of home working has led to people relocating from city centres in search of larger properties with a home office and open space. There is a real opportunity for Wisbech to encourage graduates back to where they grew up and to retain families that want to stay in the area but previously felt the need to move to Cambridge, Peterborough, London or beyond to further their careers.

There is also an increasing demand for more flexible office spaces for “start-ups” and small businesses alongside live/work unit. The masterplan proposals should capitalise on this opportunity with key potential areas being the Nene Waterfront, West Parade and within or nearby a new Hub building. This would in turn generate a demand for town centre shops and restaurants and support existing local businesses.



The Bus Station, Whitehaven - NORR Consultants



Fletton Quays, Peterborough - NORR Consultants



EDUCATION

The Wisbech campus of the College of West Anglia offers a range of vocational courses and apprenticeships.

Facilities include a £7.2m Technology Centre with facilities for mechanical engineering, welding, motor vehicle, plumbing and paint & body, a £5.5m teaching centre with modern classrooms and social space, Bespoke Anglian Water Alliances training facilities and The Salon, a hair and beauty facility offering treatments for men and women.

The college is currently reviewing its accommodation requirements and the masterplan offers the potential to accommodate replacement facilities in exciting and stimulating new buildings and better connect the college to the town centre. This would include a new Green Skills Centre to provide better facilities and new approaches to curriculum delivery within the Wisbech Campus.



The Chocolate Works Care Village, York - NORR Consultants

RESIDENTIAL

Wisbech has a need for new housing to suit a mixture of user groups including general needs / family homes, affordable housing, apartments and consideration for later living quality housing. The masterplan proposes a range of appropriate sites throughout the town that would be suitable for residential development, integrated with other complementary uses to create a vibrant and healthy and community.

The potential locations are well positioned to create low-carbon developments and eco-homes, and could incorporate building techniques and technologies to reduce both emissions and embodied carbon through use of energy efficient materials, innovative space heating and cooling technologies such as air source heat pumps and solar panels.



Wisbech Campus, College of West Anglia

SPATIAL STRATEGY

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The Town Centre is predominantly hard landscape. There are however opportunities to reinforce the existing green networks such as the River Nene and the large perimeter parks.

Links to these green assets should be improved with enhanced signing and green landscape links within the existing street structure. The green open spaces are a great asset to the town, consideration should be given to improving the connections to these spaces from the town centre.

Within the existing street network, street trees can be introduced and rain gardens set into the paving to sustainably accommodate the run off from the hard surfaces, while enhancing biodiversity and the attractiveness of the streets.



PUBLIC REALM STRATEGY

The town is an easily walkable place. Within short walking times one can walk across the town centre as demonstrated opposite.

The public realm can be improved in parallel with the approach to the heritage trail and provide improved connectivity to both the new development sites and the green open spaces.

These improvements in addition to the green interventions noted above could be new surfaces with natural stone paving, new definition of pedestrian and vehicle domains, improved signing and street furniture.



HISTORIC WALKING ROUTE

The town has a number of nationally and locally significant heritage assets. Listed buildings and key historic events are downplayed throughout the existing experience of the town.

An exciting opportunity exists to provide a connection to all these places, events and objects through a heritage trail.

The trail while connecting heritage assets will also link to the wider public realm and routes strategy to provide greater legibility across the town, by linking green spaces to the historic centre and the new development opportunities which exist within the town centre.

A proposed heritage trail could link among others the following - the Brinks, Peckover House, Octavia Hill's Birthplace, Museums, Markets, Church and Gardens, and the Castle.



PUBLIC REALM

Improvements to the public realm form a core component of the masterplan strategy and are considered crucial to the town's future success and that of the opportunity site projects.

The proposals outlined in the spatial strategy rely on the implementation of landscaping improvements such as shared surfacing and wayfinding signage, street greening, new and existing parks and squares, and celebration of the waterfront as described opposite.

The public realm proposals have been designed as cohesive scheme which focusses on linking five core areas of the town centre, allowing for phased delivery in the coming years in order to realistically implement the improvements.

The public realm proposals focus on the below listed areas. The improvements considered to provide the most benefit to Wisbech and are recommended as priority works are the Old Market, Nene Parade and The Castle area.

- ➡ **The Castle Area & Market Street**
- ➡ **Bridge Street, Thomas Clarkson Memorial & Somers Road**
- ➡ **Old Market, Town Bridge & North Street**
- ➡ **Waterfront - Nene Parade & West Parade**
- ➡ **South Gateway & Norfolk Street**

WATERFRONT

The River in Wisbech first and foremost offers amazing value to the town centre but at the same time does have some constraints within it. The Brinks district has an obvious connection with the river but otherwise it is recognised that the more formal town centre pieces do not really acknowledge the waterfront.

The masterplan elevates such sites as The Nene waterfront to offer a completely unique social connection back to the river. The existing public realm work has had a real positive impact and gives the scheme something really good to work from, not to mention reduces the costs of enhancing the river edge as part of the future development of the Town Centre.

How the new masterplan connects to this public realm is critical to its success. Opening the promenade to as many as possible through careful orientation is key. Ensuring the river is considered throughout will make the Town Centre character areas attractive to the post-Covid world, where the market for housing, commercial and leisure activities has changed.



Whitehall Riverside Concept, Leeds - Re-form Landscape Architecture



Precedent: Integrated Street Greening & Low Level Planting

STREET ENHANCEMENT & GREENING

The Town Centre is predominantly hard landscape, much of which is dominated by necessary access for vehicles throughout much of the centre. Within the existing street network, public realm improvements could be introduced to significantly improve the experience for pedestrians including safety, mobility and aesthetics. The proposals would look to introduce shared surfaces and quality paving, new street furniture, way-finding, lighting and signing.

Alongside new hard landscaping, green infrastructure could be introduced such as trees, planting and rain gardens set into the paving to sustainably accommodate the runoff from the hard surfaces. This has significant positive impacts, including promoting biodiversity, improving air quality and flood risk management while enhancing the attractiveness of the streets.

These improvements will integrate well with the historic character of the town centre, further enhancing its strong sense of place. Street greening and improved pedestrian environments are proven to encourage active living and good mental health, as well as helping to create a pleasant environment for different social, cultural and tourism activities.

PUBLIC SQUARES

Wisbech possesses several public squares which are a strong asset to the town. At present the squares are restricted by the necessity to have maximum access for the vehicle, often in narrow streets. There are opportunities to enhance existing spaces by improving the network of pedestrian areas and footpaths in and around the squares, and additional trees and planting.

Proposals are already underway for the Market Place in the town centre. The Old Market Place to the north of the river would also strongly benefit from public realm enhancements. New squares and public realm improvements could also be introduced at key gateway areas to the town centre, such as the junction of Norfolk Street and the church.

These improvements would enhance the presence of the buildings into the squares and create an opportunity for a high quality public realm, flexible for a number of functions and public events, and generating a desirable place to sit, relax, drink and eat - all great elements towards a healthy town.



Venn Street Market, Clapham



Wisbech Park

PARKS & OPEN SPACE

There are a number of large open green spaces which lie to the edge of the town centre, and are easily within walking distance. In particular, Wisbech Park to the east of the town centre provides an excellent range of open space including lawned areas, woodland, children's play and tennis courts. However, the parks are poorly connected to the town centre. An opportunity exists to provide improved connections through way-finding, lighting and signing

POCKET PARKS

There are opportunities to soften the urban landscape of the town centre by introducing pocket parks at several sites.

A pocket park is a small park accessible to the general public, where space for the development of larger urban parks is limited. They are frequently created on small, irregular pieces of public or private land and often part of urban regeneration efforts by transforming underutilized spaces into vibrant community assets.

These small areas of green space can serve as focal points of activity and interest in urban areas and provide communities with greenery, a place to sit and rest, and an ecological foothold for urban wildlife. Common elements of pocket parks include benches, tables, fountains, playgrounds, monuments, historic markers, art installations, barbecue pits, flower beds, community gardens.

Pocket parks are often created as neighbourhood projects and managed by volunteers, and as such can create much loved, informal, vibrant spaces that bring together a local community.



The Floating Pocket Park, London

THE CASTLE AREA & MARKET STREET

Enhancement of the streets surrounding the Castle would provide significantly improved connections between the town's heritage assets and the Market place Improvements.

The architecture to the south edge of the Crescent is exceptional and the streetscape should simply provide a setting for the buildings. High quality stone paving setts can be arranged to reduce the impact of the vehicle surfaces while defining clear areas for parking, bins and pedestrians. Street trees could be introduced within the parking areas to reduce the impact and provide shade and human scale to the street

The north side, Ely Place, has similar architectural merit in many ways, but is slightly compromised by the insertion of the library building. Here presents an opportunity for street tree planting to offer a uniformity to the street along the eclectic architectural styles. As noted in the Crescent high quality stone paving setts can be arranged to reduce the impact of the vehicle surfaces while defining clear areas for parking, bins and pedestrians.



- Pedestrian paving
- Residential access only - improve the surface and street tree
- Existing public realm - improvement needed
- New public realm
- General improvement - surface
- Landmark building
- Proposed raingarden/planting area
- New street tree



Raingardens and avenue trees for green spaces



Green spaces to reduce the impact of the vehicle



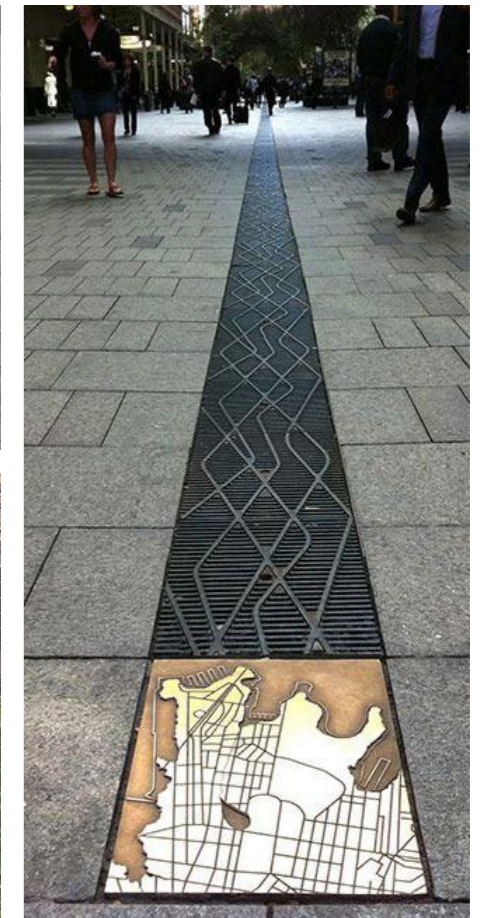
Linear green infrastructure to connect spaces



PLANTING PALETTE



PAVING PALETTE



STREET FURNITURE PALETTE

BRIDGE STREET, MEMORIAL & SOMERS ROAD

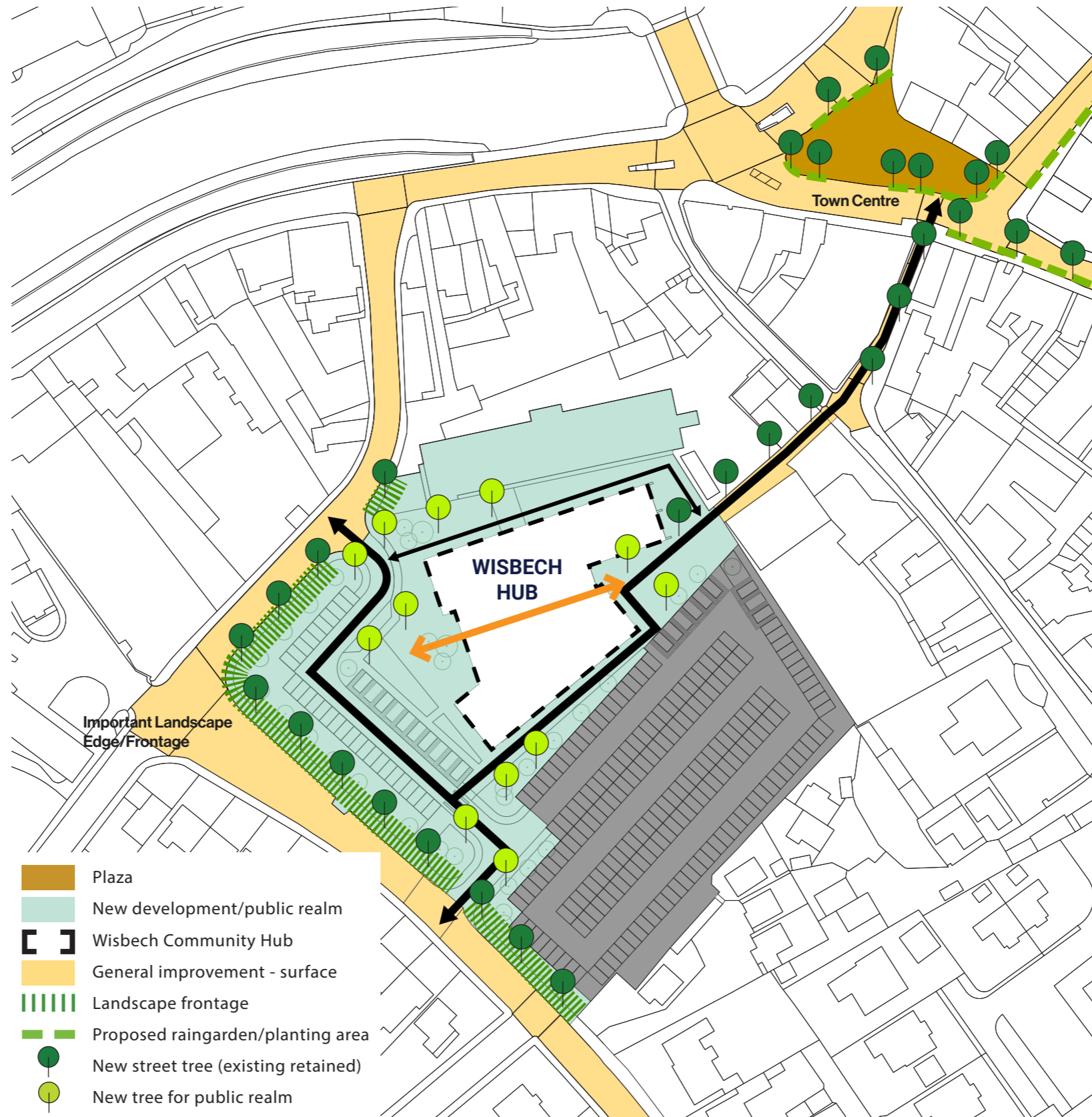
Currently Bridge Street takes two routes to the north and south of the Thomas Clarkson memorial. This space with the memorial feature is a gateway into the town centre, it is one of the first impressions of the town. The north route linking to the north Brinks and Old Market presents an opportunity for significant public realm improvement.

The road here is one way, acting as a left filter from Nene Quay. It is not necessary, other than service access to the adjacent businesses and offices. If the road was to be closed and the public realm spread across from the north buildings to the existing kerbline of the south Bridge Street this would create a large useful area of public space.

It would celebrate the memorial rather than it appearing on a traffic island and provide the adjacent businesses the opportunity to spill out onto the public space, which would be a valuable asset to the lease value of the units, particularly if the occupants changed over time to cafe and restaurants the public space outside.

Emergency vehicle, service access and deliveries can all be accommodated on the new public realm surface and it is possible to divert existing left turn traffic to the south Bridge Street. New Tree planting would enhance the setting of the memorial and the welcome into the town centre. Additional parking could be accommodated within the new public space.

The existing car park and the adjacent BT exchange building to the south, off Somers Road present significant development opportunities for a multi-use community hub building with associated public realm.



From a landscape perspective it is important to consider the following:

- key links into the building from the town centre and adjacent residential use, and use of trees to strengthen these links
- a strong landscape boundary and frontage to Somers Road and Queens Road, to provide an appropriate scale to the streets
- provision of parking within the development and/or relocation of parking elsewhere
- the relationship with adjacent buildings

In addition it is important to pick up on some of the wider heritage walk and public realm legibility strategies coming forward from this study, to ensure that any new proposals help to reinforce these principles and enhance the environment for walking around the town centre.



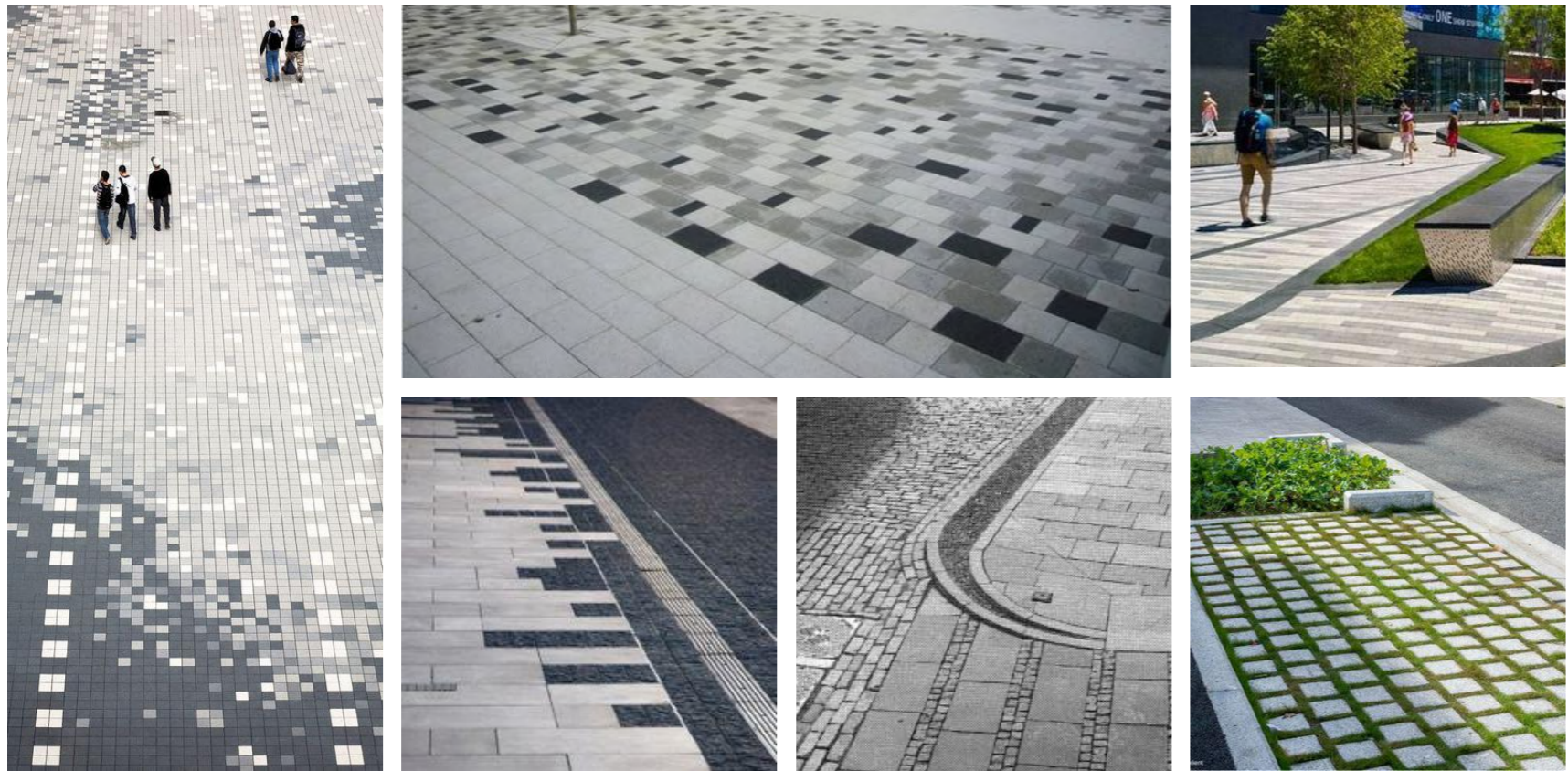
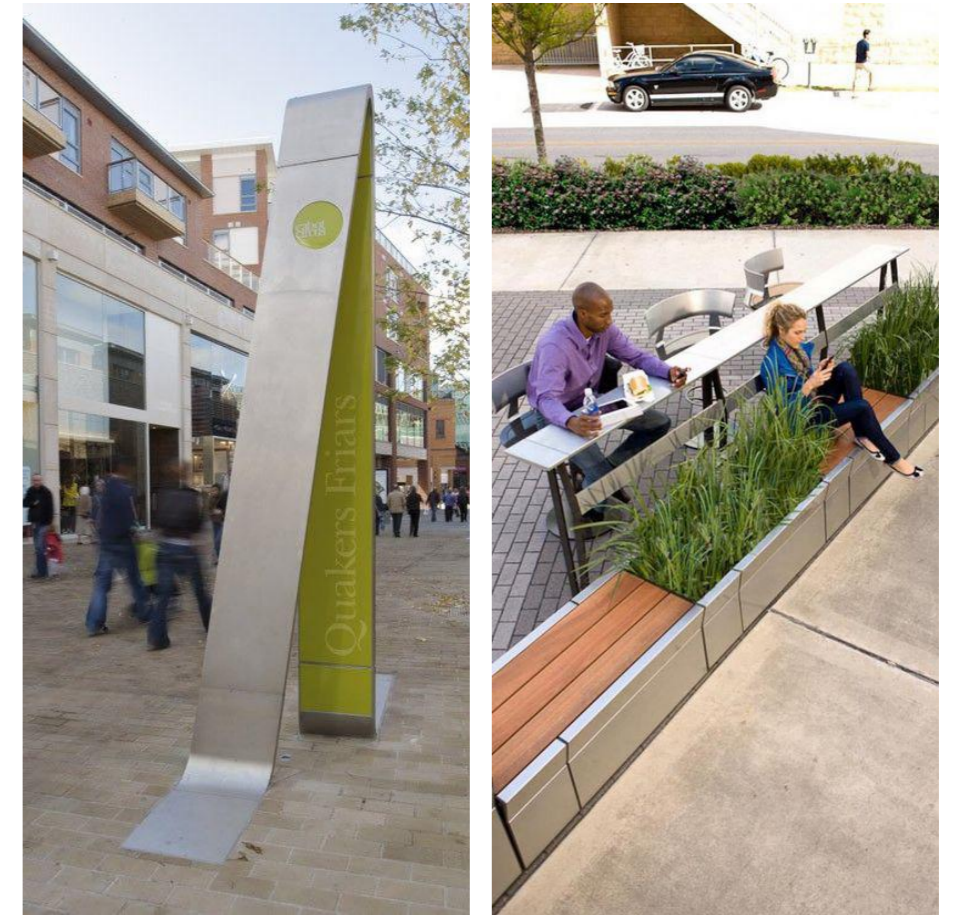
Linear green infrastructure to connect spaces



Landscape Edge



PLANTING PALETTE



PAVING PALETTE



STREET FURNITURE PALETTE

OLD MARKET, TOWN BRIDGE & NORTH STREET

It is anticipated that the Old Market road which currently cuts through the space could have its impact lessened with shared surface principles and street greening, enhancing the setting for the valuable heritage buildings that form a backdrop to the square.

Similar paving materials could run across the street and the pedestrian public areas while the road still functions as a two way route. This would enhance the presence of the buildings into the space and create an opportunity for a high quality public realm, flexible for a number of functions and public events, and generating a desirable place to sit, relax, drink and eat.

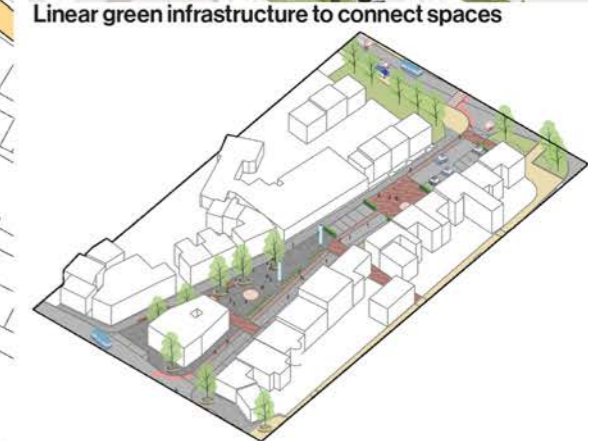
The businesses around the could open out onto the new public spaces and make best advantage of the southerly aspect for warmth and sunshine - all great elements towards a healthy town.

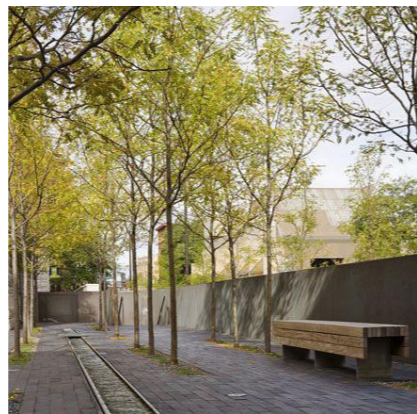
New tree planting could help to define the routes through the space and provide additional benefits such as reduction in noise and air pollution and increasing the biodiversity of the town.

Within the new public spaces sustainable urban drainage systems such as rain gardens and swales could be utilised to accommodate the surface run off, while creating an attractive and meaningful feature in the landscape.

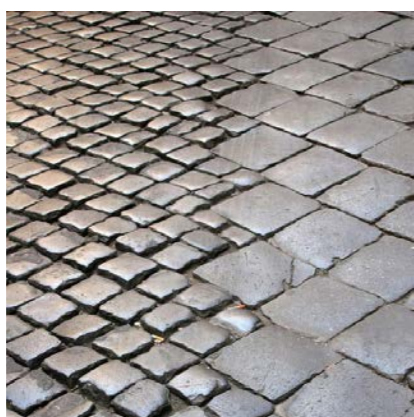
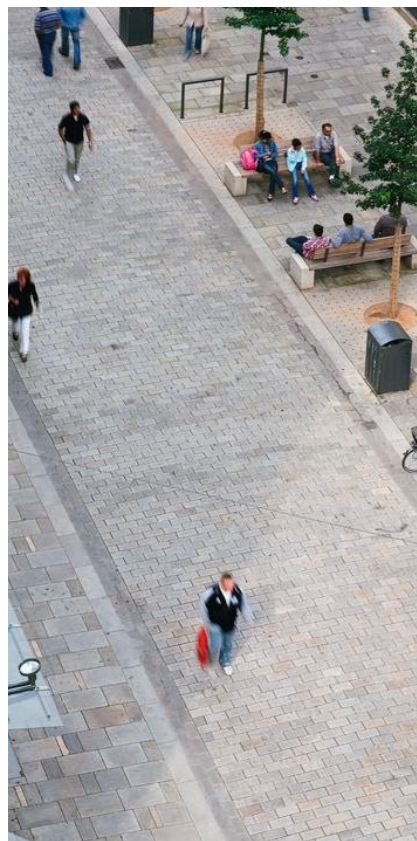


- Old Market - plaza / shared surface
- Shared surface street
- New development/public realm
- General improvement - surface
- Car park
- Proposed raingarden/planting area
- New street tree
- New tree for public realm





PLANTING PALETTE



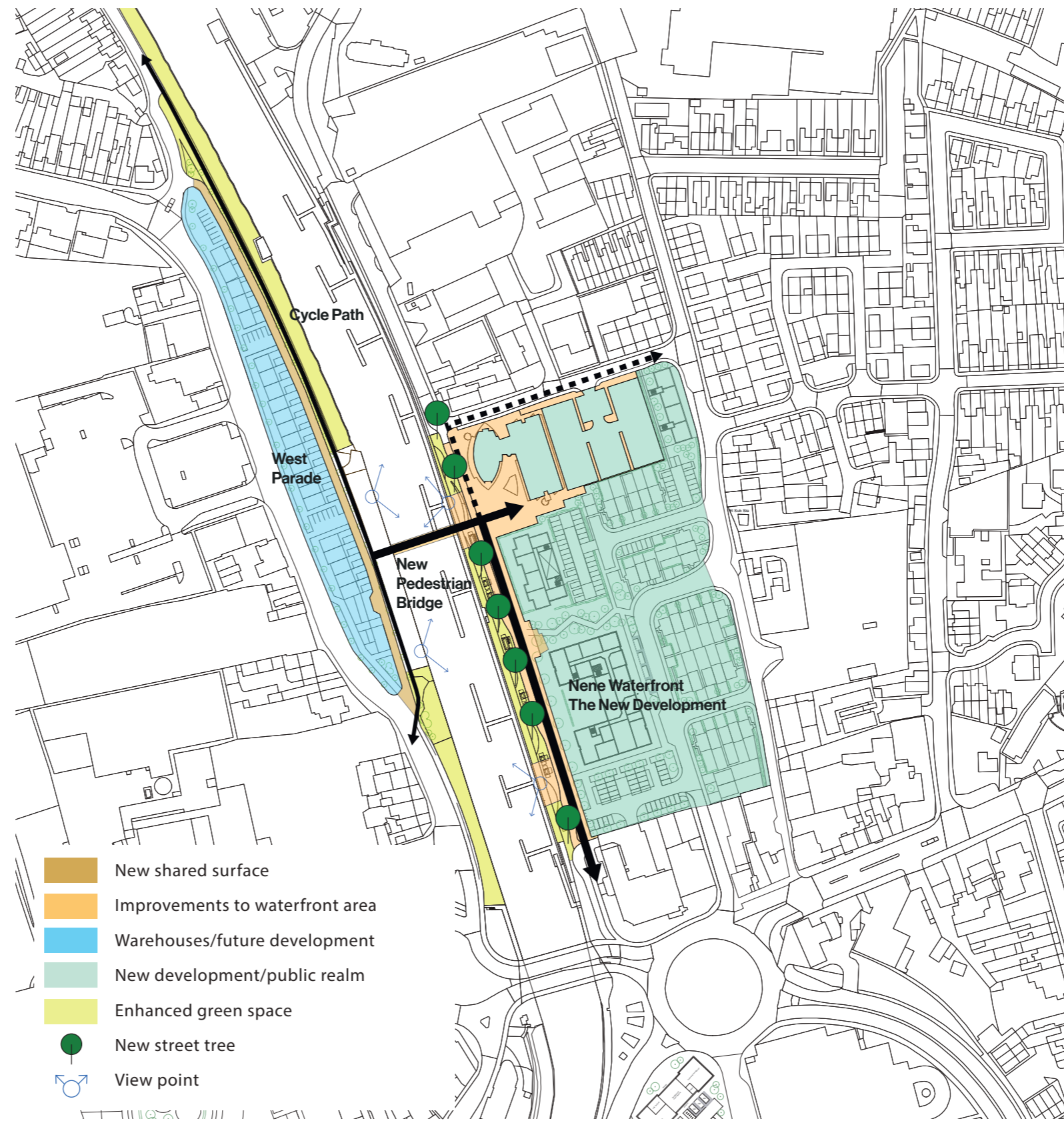
PAVING PALETTE

STREET FURNITURE PALETTE

WATERFRONT - NENE PARADE & WEST PARADE

Reconnecting the town with the waterfront is a massive opportunity for the town. Further improvements to the existing very successful public realm along Nene Parade could integrate with residential proposals to the empty sites to the east to bring new people and develop a community here. In order to create a destination with a unique sense of place that takes best advantage of the site location and context, the following interventions are recommended:

- remove high planting to the River edge, replace with low ground covers and swathes of herbaceous planting with seasonal and ecological interest
- remove high fence to the River edge, replace with a balustrade
- replace lower planted areas with urban beaches, with sand and shelters, to give Wisbech it's beach
- introduce playful elements in the landscape within the beach areas and out with to enhance the attractiveness to all ages
- introduce small sets of seating/viewing/steps along the side of the existing structures to provide informal seating, viewing out to the river and spectator spaces for events and impromptu musical and theatrical performances
- allow for food kiosks, seasonal markets, themed markets (food, arts crafts for example)
- encourage ground floors of the residential developments to have cafe and retail offer to activate the ground floor elevations towards the Parade
- innovative lighting proposals to create a safe and unique evening environment
- improve connections to the south across the large roundabout and also to the west - a gateway pedestrian/cycle bridge across the River Nene
- improve access to the water and marina with more secure access points, could the lower marina pontoon at water level be publicly accessible while maintaining the privacy



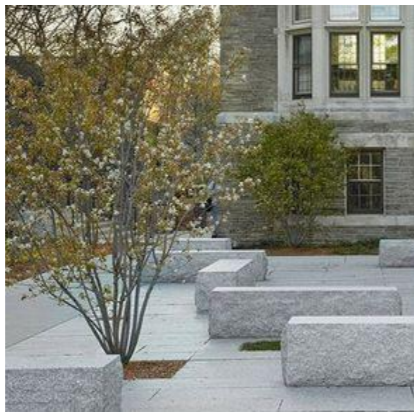
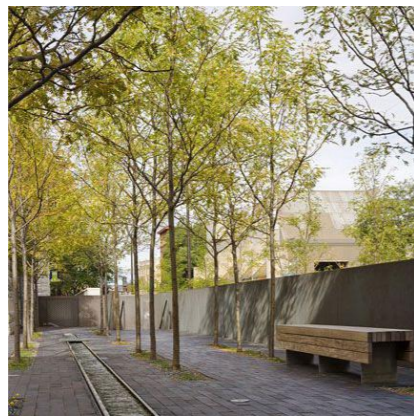
Market to activate the public realm



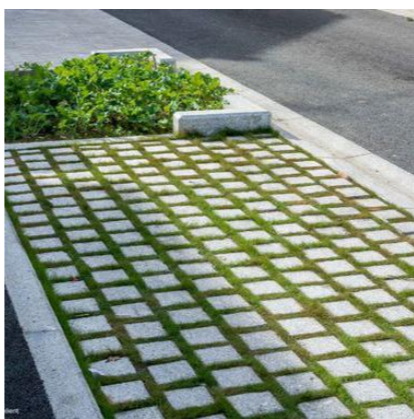
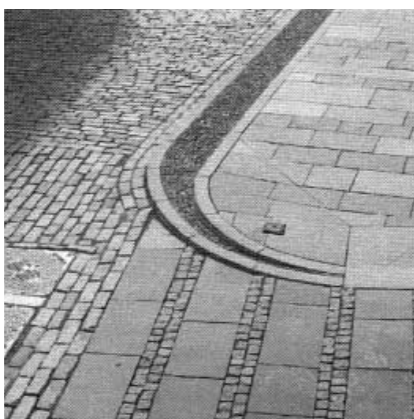
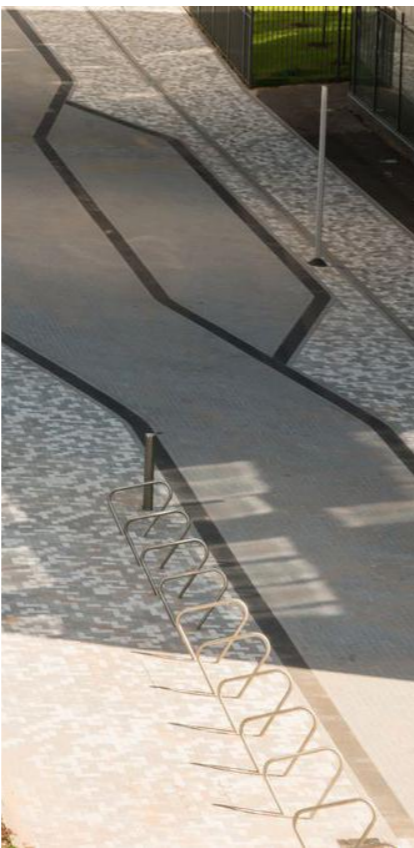
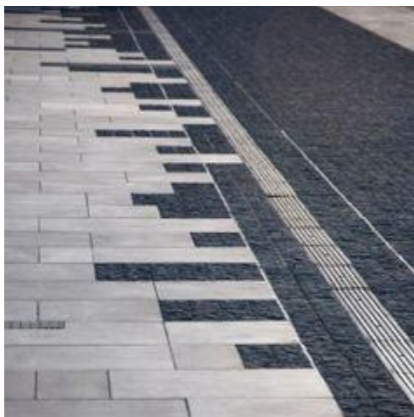
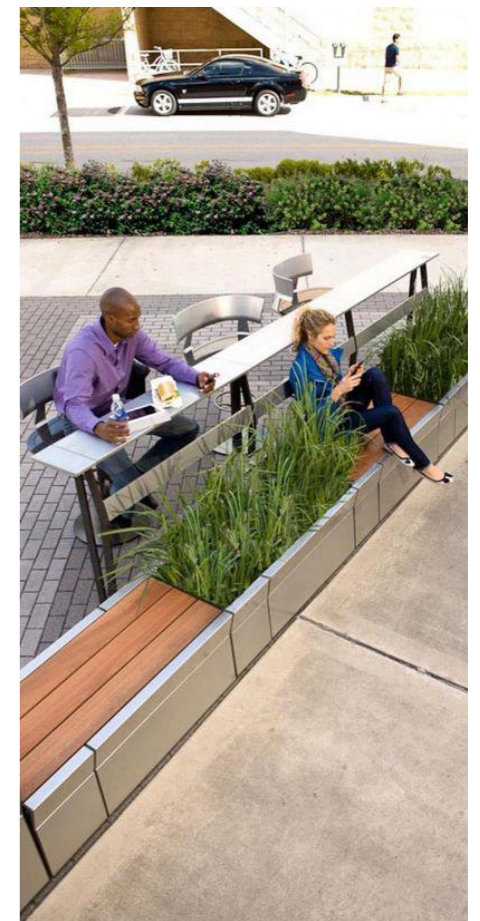
Improving the views and plantings for water edge



New bridge



PLANTING PALETTE



PAVING PALETTE

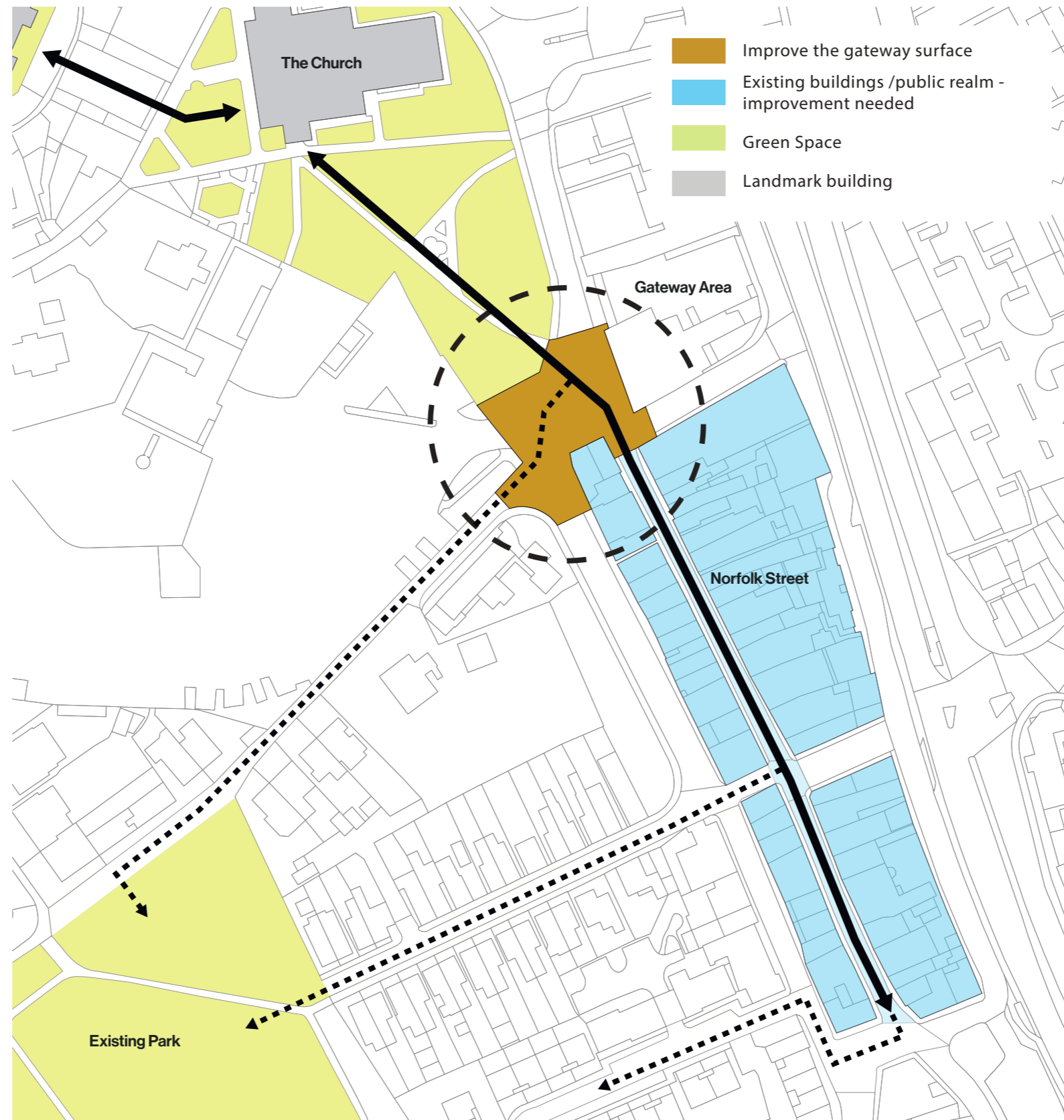


STREET FURNITURE PALETTE

SOUTH GATEWAY & NORFOLK STREET

Norfolk Street is a busy area of the centre and has a unique character and appeal, however at present vehicles dominate the street with long lines of parking down the east side. As the road is narrow, often these vans and large vehicles park on the pavement compromising the pedestrian space. The area has real potential, and would significantly benefit from improvements such as:

- An alternative vehicle access strategy - timed prohibition, limited access for deliveries only or full pedestrianisation similar to Horse Fair
- Improved pedestrian environment - remove kerbs and height definition, lay a new surface across the street from building facade to facade, allowing for integrated parking spaces but interspersed with street trees and rain gardens
- Kerbs omitted but channels incorporated into the street should define building frontage, cafe spaces and parking areas
- Surfaces to be robust and laid to define the uses along the length of the street, paving materials could incorporate artist and creative patterns for way finding and interpretation.
- Street Trees - locate trees along the east side of the street to break up the parking spaces
- Rain gardens incorporated into the street structure with diverse planting
- Lighting - catenary lighting connected across from building to building to provide an attractive lit 'ceiling' to the spaces at night
- Shop/cafe frontages - enhance the shop frontages to enliven the space with colour and light
- Improved links and connections to adjacent streets and parks through signage and wayfinding



Activating Norfolk Street



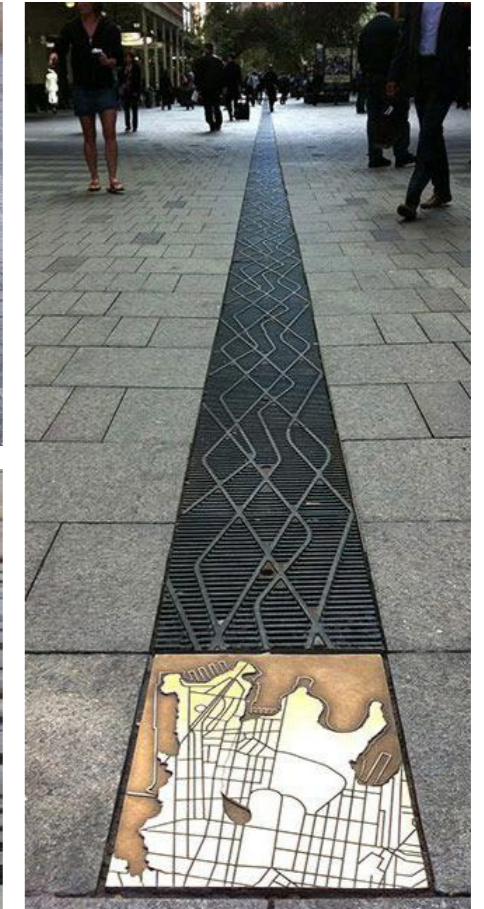
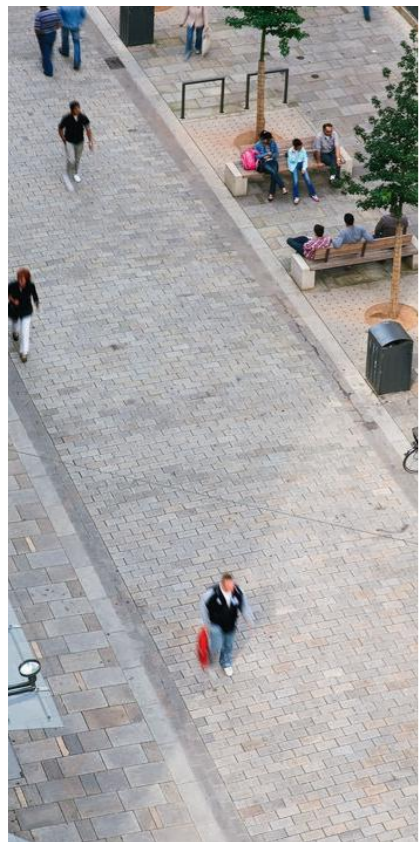
Creating night time activities



Improving public spaces for linking up the sites



PLANTING PALETTE



PAVING PALETTE

STREET FURNITURE PALETTE

05

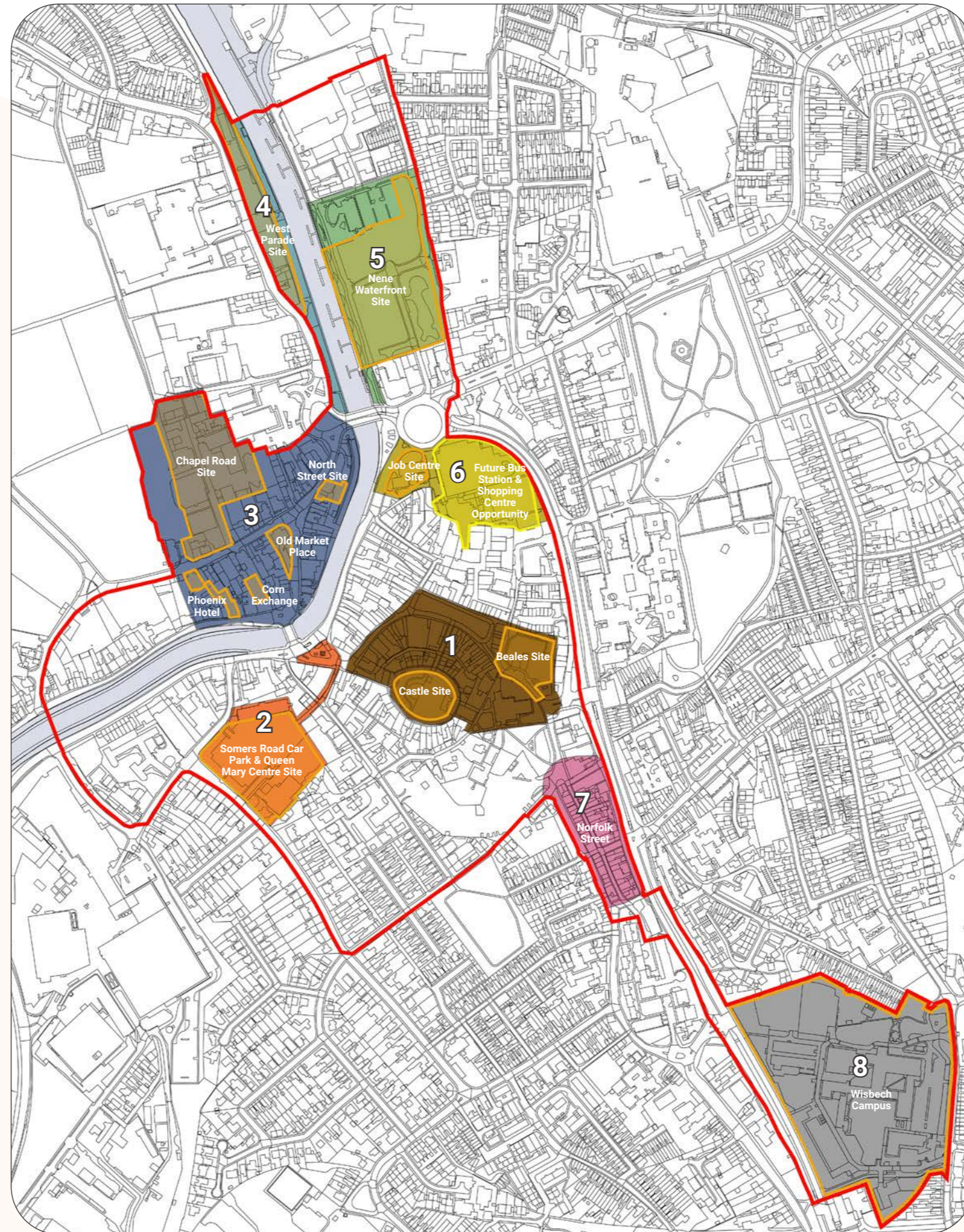
FOCUS AREAS & OPPORTUNITY SITES

FOCUS AREAS OVERVIEW

The masterplan boundary contains eight areas of focus in the heart of the town centre, each with a variety of opportunity sites for new development and public realm improvements. The sites all have very different characteristics and a diverse range of proposed uses, which will complement and integrate with the existing town centre.

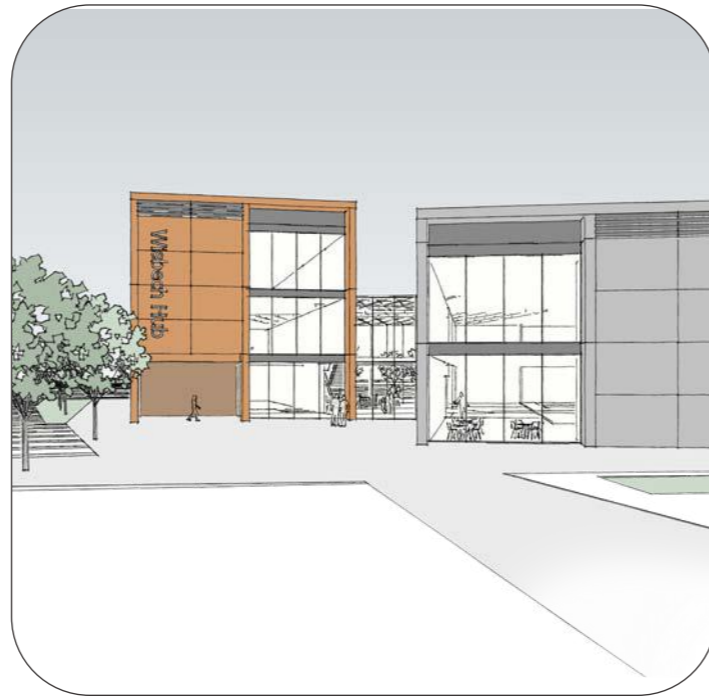
KEY:

- 1** Historic & Cultural Quarter
- 2** Community, Training & Employment
- 3** Leisure, Entertainment & Housing
- 4** West Parade Live / Work
- 5** Nene Waterfront Extra Care & Housing
- 6** Northern Gateway
- 7** Southern Gateway & Norfolk Street
- 8** Education / Wisbech Campus





Area 1. Historic & Cultural Quarter



Area 2. Community, Training & Employment



Area 3. Leisure, Entertainment & Housing



Area 4. West Parade Live / Work



Area 5. Nene Waterfront Extra Care & Housing



Area 6. Northern Gateway



Area 7. Southern Gateway & Norfolk Street



Area 8. Education / Wisbech Campus

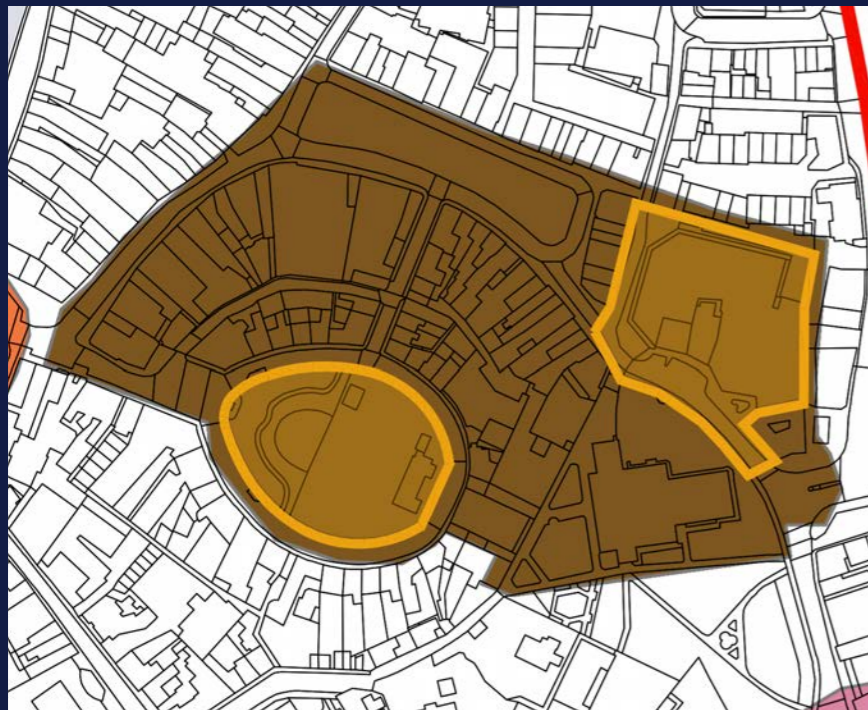
FOCUS AREA 1

HISTORIC & CULTURAL QUARTER

The historic town centre has been identified as a key area for enhancement. The primary focus would be on the Castle site, which would become the heart of the heritage quarter. Opportunities include:

- linking to the public realm proposals including key nodes to the market along Market Street
- improved views of the castle and setting through removal of the existing 'shed'
- new visitor facilities / cafe within the castle grounds to enhance the heritage experience
- increased footfall for the public to better appreciate the heritage significance of the site and improved visitor numbers
- new commercial and office opportunities to replace Beales & introduce high quality green space / new public realm in the centre
- improved views of the church from surrounding streets

Market, Castle, Museum, Church & Beales



THE AREA

High Street

High Street is located in Wisbech town centre in the heart of the Wisbech Conservation Area. It is a vital street within the town providing a historic link from the west side of the town including the Brinks, to Market Place which is the focus of the town's commercial activity.

The High Street is also a commercial street with a variety of shops and businesses along its length. It is the street most out of town visitors to Wisbech are likely to use to access the town centre being that visitors coming in to town to visit attractions such as the Octavia Hill Museum or Peckover House (National Trust) will access the centre from the west side of town.

Some of the town's largest car parks are also located to the west side of the town centre making High Street a focus for movement through the town. High Street makes an intrinsic contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area and it has a significant role to play in the commercial vitality of Wisbech.



Wisbech Castle Gardens

Market Place improvements

Improvements to the market place are identified as a key objective within the management strategy of the Wisbech conservation area management plan:

Wisbech Town Council took on management of the Market Place in 2012. This large market area holds markets Monday to Saturday. Thursday and Saturday are seen as the main market days when the area is pedestrianised and given over solely to the market with the markets on other days operating alongside the carpark.

The Town Council has a vision to operate the area as a flexible space for trade and community activities and to this end they are looking to develop and enhance the market space to improve its appearance and usability within the town.

The proposals would further enhance works already undertaken to open up views of the space and create better linkages to neighbouring key heritage sites such as the Castle, Wisbech & Fenland Museum and the Church.



Wisbech Castle



The Crescent



Wisbech Castle Entrance



St Peter & St Paul Parish Church

Church/Castle

Wisbech developed around the Church, Castle and two marketplaces throughout the medieval period, with the river becoming the main conduit for wealth and trade during this time.

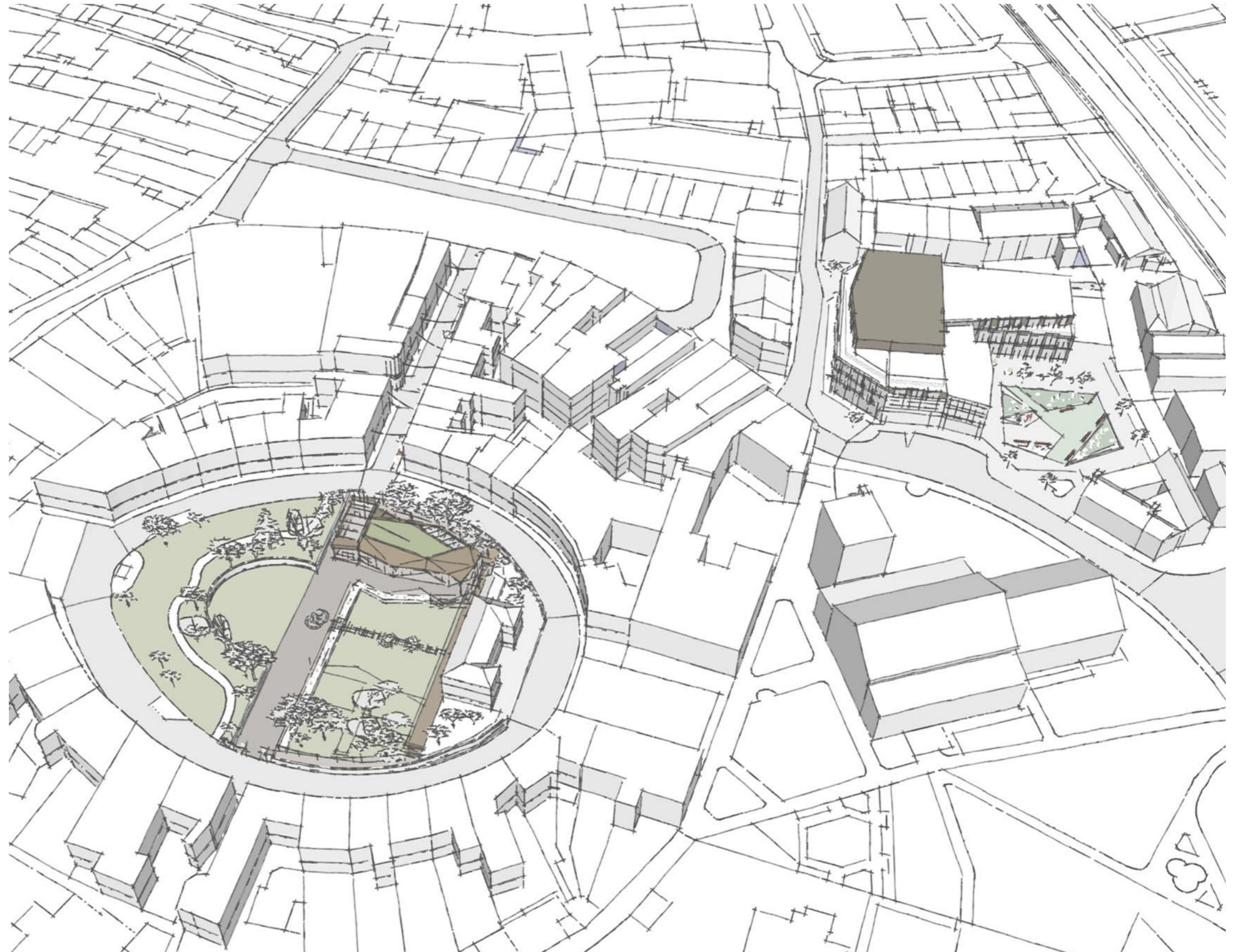
The Castle and Circus areas, encompass some of the oldest and most significant areas of Wisbech, with numerous listed buildings, including the Grade I early medieval church, a landmark building of great architectural interest, the Grade II* castle, with the outline of the bailey still discernible in the street pattern.

The circus, much of which is also statutorily listed, is undoubtedly one of the highlights of Georgian Wisbech, described in Pevsner as "a sophisticated planned development" and in the 1883 Kelly's Directory as "a handsome street, with shrubs and trees in the centre".

The Castle along with the surrounding circus is a significance piece of townscape in the central core of Wisbech. Along with the grade II listed vaults are a key heritage component with a long complex history, which offers opportunities for greater celebration through improved public access and interpretation.

The garden setting in the heart of the town, contributes positively to the character of the circus as it widens out around The Castle and its grounds, which also has a number of large significant trees, a green oasis in the midst of the town.

The new pavilion building offers the potential to create a new multi purpose visitor space that can be used for events in conjunction with the castle building. A high quality, light touch building in a contemporary and contrasting style to that of the main listed building



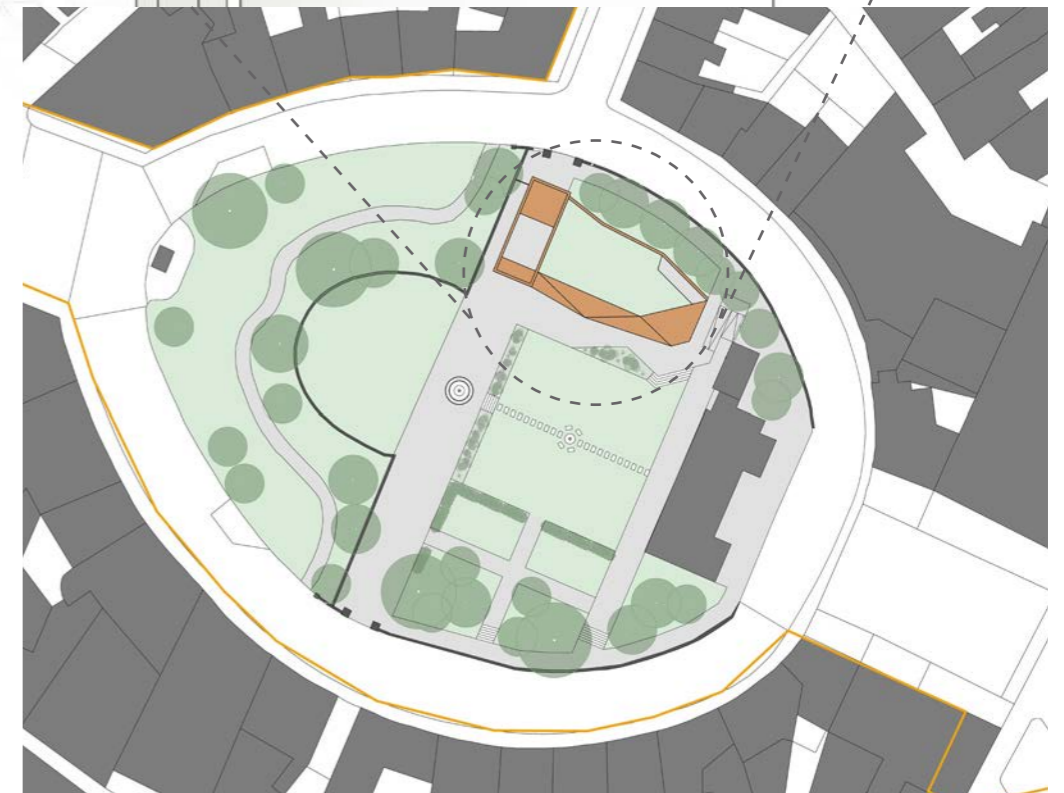
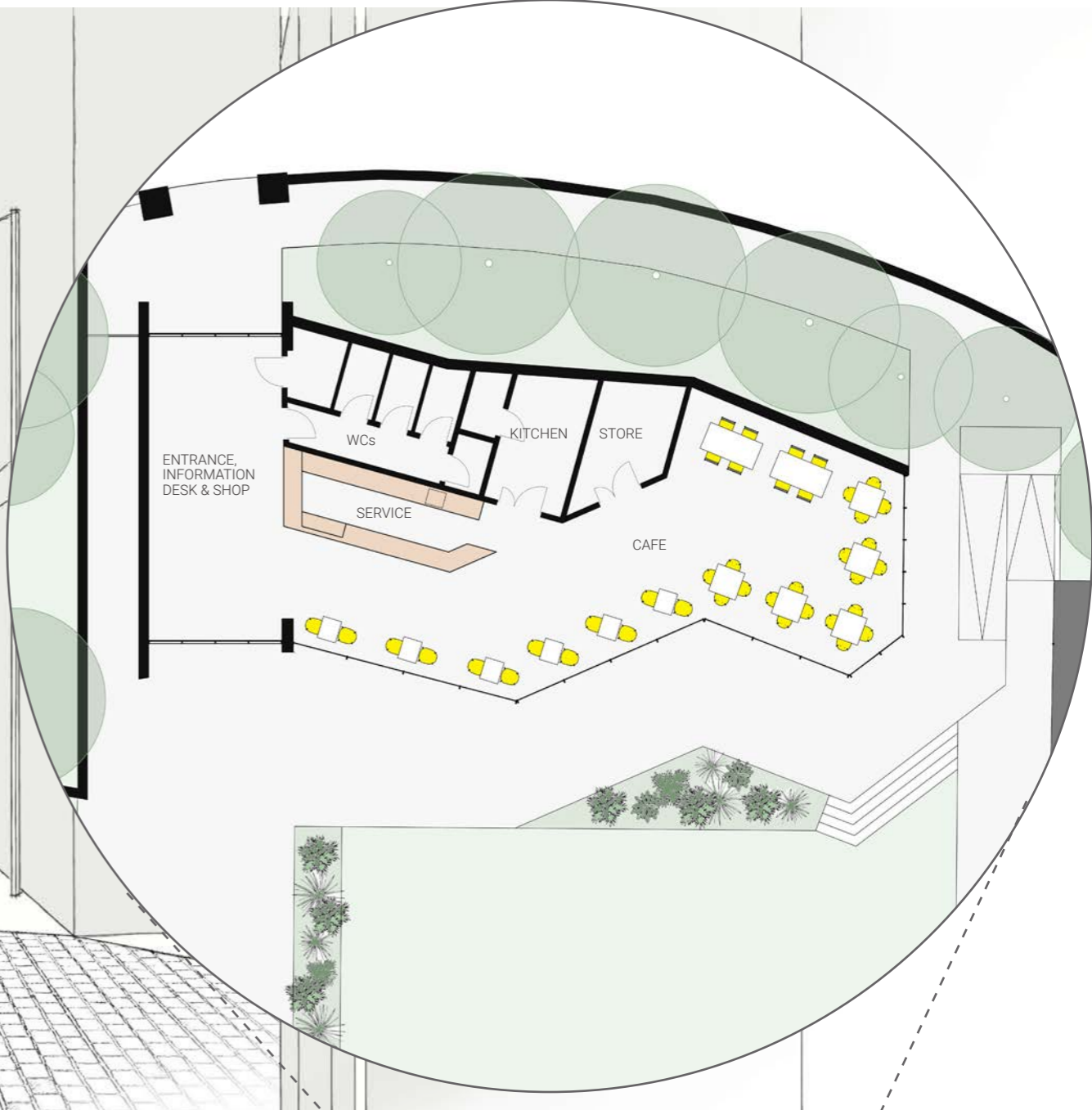


Proposed view of Market Street towards the new pavilion

WISBECH CASTLE SITE

It is envisaged that a new visitor centre with main entrance, cafe, orientation and information point and facilities will be located at the north edge of the Castle Gardens, accessed from the gates on Market Street. In order to appropriately address the proposed new building within the castle grounds it is anticipated that the main route to the entrance will be pedestrianised, or at least resurfaced, with subtle integrated parking and new street trees.

These additions will enhance the experience of approach towards the building from the Market Place. New materials to the street would be a mix of granite and sandstones appropriate to the adjacent building materials. Rain gardens set into the street will take the surface water run off and provide a series of biodiversity gardens. The materials will be laid out to reduce the impact of vehicles in the street and aligned with the gateway pillars into the gardens.



Conservation is a balance between preserving the special character, quality, and significance of the historic place and facilitating change in a way that sustains it into the future. Change in the historic environment is inevitable and new layers should represent the ideas, technology, materials, and architectural language of each generation.

The historic environment can, in fact, accommodate a rich variety of interpretations and expressions. Most successful new buildings designed in a valued historic context inevitably rely on an understanding of, and then response to, the special character and qualities of the context.

Modern interventions within historic settings are a recognised approach to breathing new life into historic spaces, and as such the design of the visitor centre could take a deliberately contemporary approach.

The proposal would be a prominent point terminating the view from the Market Place. Quality of design is therefore crucial to ensure that contemporary architecture responds positively and contributes to this change in ways that conserve and celebrate the special character and quality of the historic environment.

In order for the new intervention to sensitively sit within the grounds of the castle as much of the existing tree line as possible should be conserved and new planting provided around the cafe terraces which enjoy the sunny aspect on the south side of the building.

The planting and landscape solutions will be informed by the historic context and could be laid out in a contemporary interpretation of formal geometry, with potential to provide production gardens for the cafe.



Garden Museum. Integrates well into the surrounding landscaping & compliments the historic setting



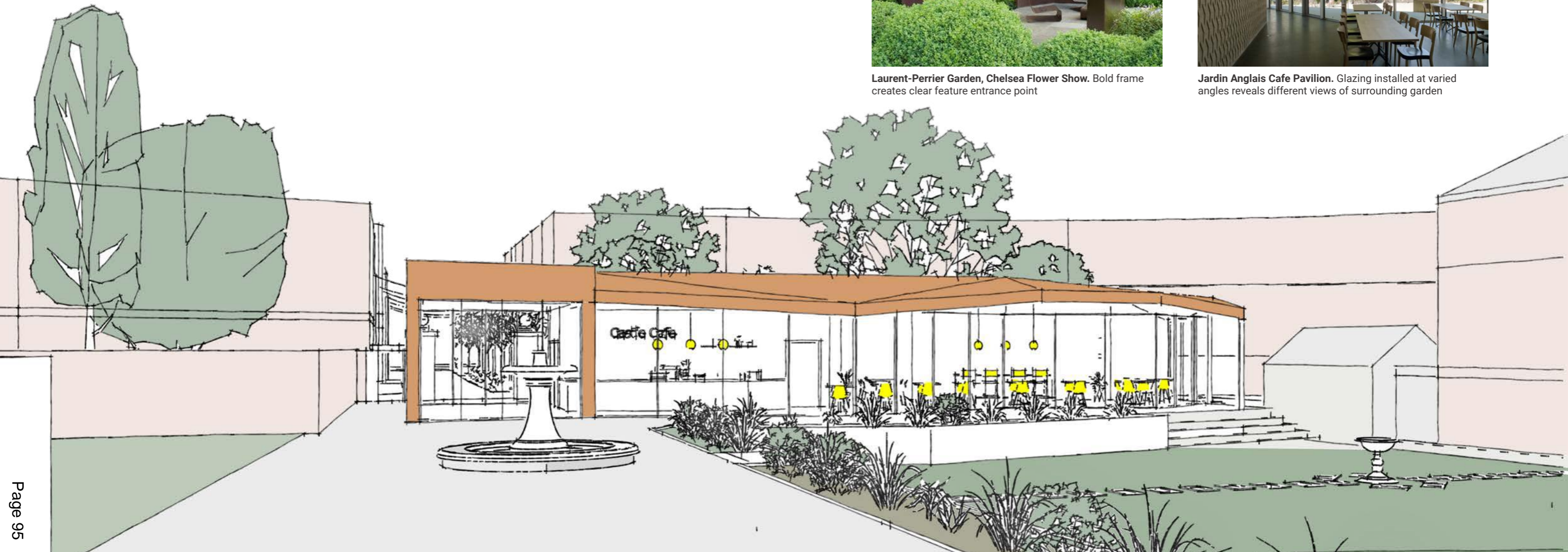
Jardin Anglais Cafe Pavilion. Chamfered roof forms add visual interest to linear built form



Laurent-Perrier Garden, Chelsea Flower Show. Bold frame creates clear feature entrance point



Jardin Anglais Cafe Pavilion. Glazing installed at varied angles reveals different views of surrounding garden



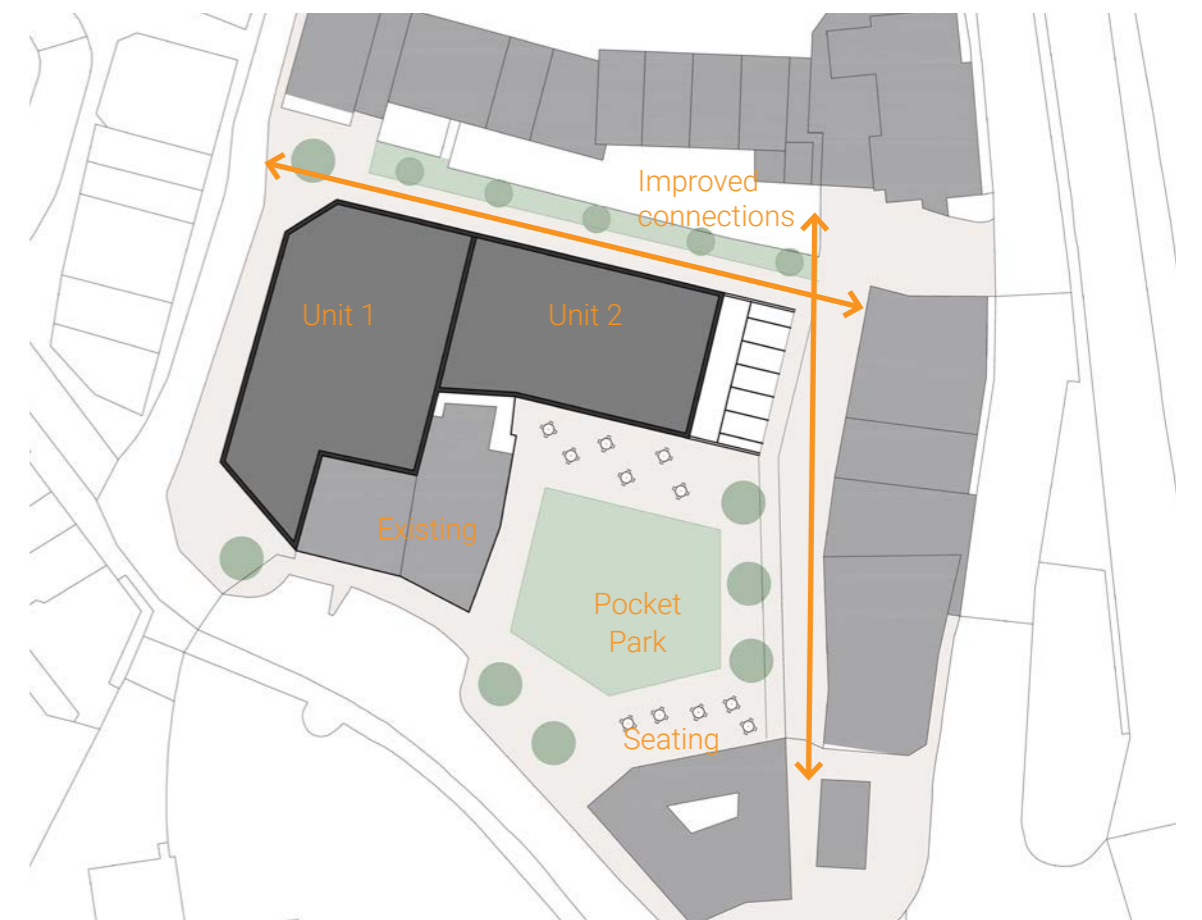


BEALES SITE

Historically this site had a tighter urban grain, which has been lost through modern retail development. The existing Beales building is of modern construction of low architectural quality, as identified in the Conservation area appraisal. This is redundant retail space which is no longer required.

Removal of excessive vacant retail space offers opportunities to relocate into other key buildings, and reducing vacancy across the town centre creates a focus for investment into heritage buildings, shrinking and consolidating the key retail offer.

If the vacant Beales Store site is to be demolished there is an opportunity to create fantastic new public open spaces, which would complement the uses of the Market Place and enhance the setting of remaining historic buildings such as the Dukes Head (Grade II listed) creating a new plaza to the wider setting of the church.



Improvements to the buildings set around and new nodes through areas such as Little Church Street and a new plaza would create an improved setting to the Church and opportunities for businesses to spill out into the area with pavement cafes (already evidence of small seating use)

There is a potential for this to be a multi-functional events with a loose programme of street furniture and tree planting and an understorey of herbaceous shrubs, which would allow for flexible use of the space for festivals, seasonal events and attractive everyday activities.

The design of the spaces surrounding the existing retail units would also accommodate future use of the site for residential, hotel or civic uses should this be appropriate and desirable.



Precedent : Boiler Shop Newcastle University. 60's style extensions were demolished to allow for public realm scheme and unveiling of Listed buildings behind significantly enhancing setting and place making attributes.



Peterborough Cathedral square areas: previous redundant buildings were demolished to enhance public realm and setting of historic assets.



OPTION A - REPLACE BEALES

Beales could be demolished and replaced with part new build and part public realm. It is envisaged that the plot adjoining Little Church Street would benefit from a new building of up to 3 storeys with a fourth floor set back from the principle elevation.

This would be a high quality architectural intervention which would improve vistas to the church and could provide functions such as new office and innovation space for business start ups, a job centre and/or retail units at ground floor.

The section facing onto the new public realm would be ideal for a restaurant/cafe at ground floor level or alternatively a break out area for the office space. This would connect well and integrate with the public realm which is envisaged as a pocket park.

OPTION B - NEW PARK

An alternative option would be to replace Beales and the existing units subject to vacancy with a new town centre park. This would fully open up the area around the church and provide attractive green amenity space to the centre.

It is envisaged that the park could contain high quality hard and soft landscaping, children's play area and potentially a band stand to accommodate outdoor events. The Dukes Head public house could also open out onto the park with pavement seating.

FOCUS AREA 2

COMMUNITY, TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT

Through the stakeholder dialogue we explored precedents such as Pollok Civic Realm in Glasgow that showcased the success of bringing together community facilities such as health care, a library, job centre and leisure activities, into a single hub allowing the functions to inter-relate to each other.

This prompted a discussion that the Queen Mary Centre which is well used could be revitalised as a new fit for purpose community building and combined with other public functions such as a citizens advise, innovation space for business startups or growth to utilise and a cafe/restaurant.

The location of the site would create predominantly pedestrian traffic by visitors either leaving their car in the car park to enter the town Centre or from local residential areas, and as such it could act as a very successful gateway to the town centre itself.

Bridge Street, Somers Road Car Park, Queen Mary Community Centre



View of Somers Road car park viewed from Queens Road to the south

THE AREA

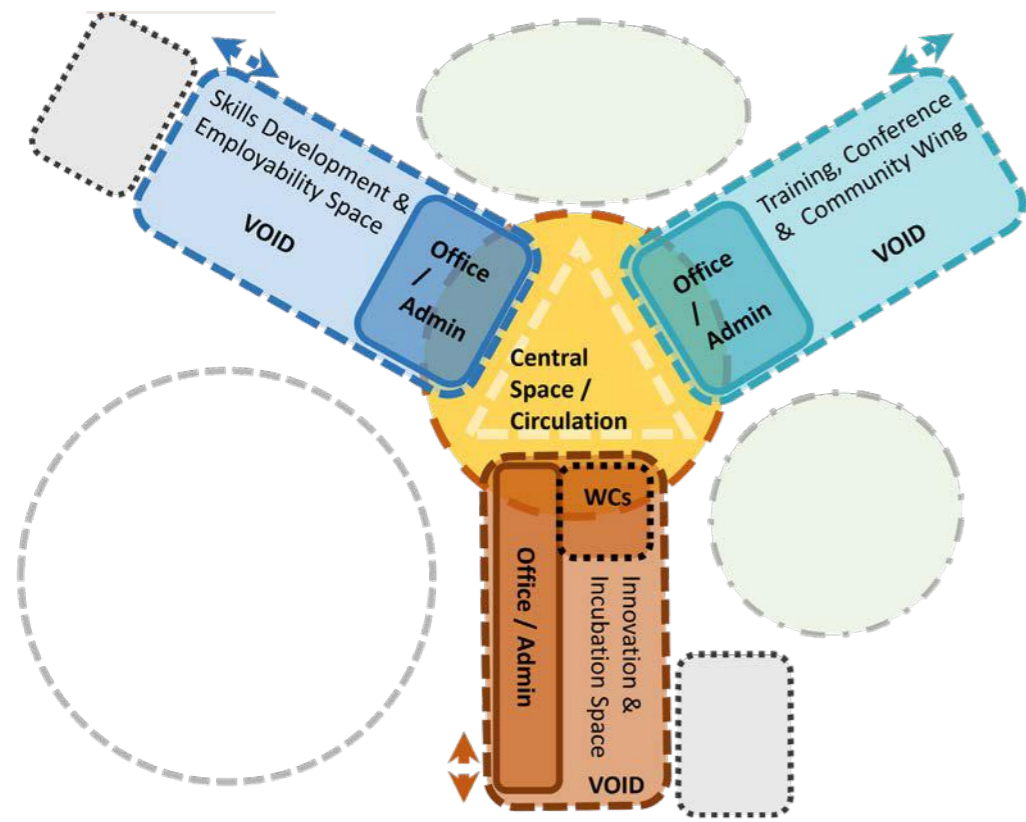
The site is adjacent to the BT Building and formed of Somers Road car park and the Queen Mary Community Centre. The site was previously a Bowling green but interestingly it has never really been developed except for its present use as a car park and has remained generally free from built development on historic maps. The site is outside of the conservation area and there are opportunities to redevelop without any harmful impact on historic character.

A key consideration for any development here is retention of existing parking provision as this is a main car park serving the town centre. At present there are 273 spaces + 9 disabled spaces, and circa 40 spaces associated with the community centre. Whilst some loss of provision will be required to accommodate a large new building, care must be given to retain as many spaces as possible. A suitable figure has been suggested at a minimum of 201 + 9 UA spaces and 36+ for the hub.

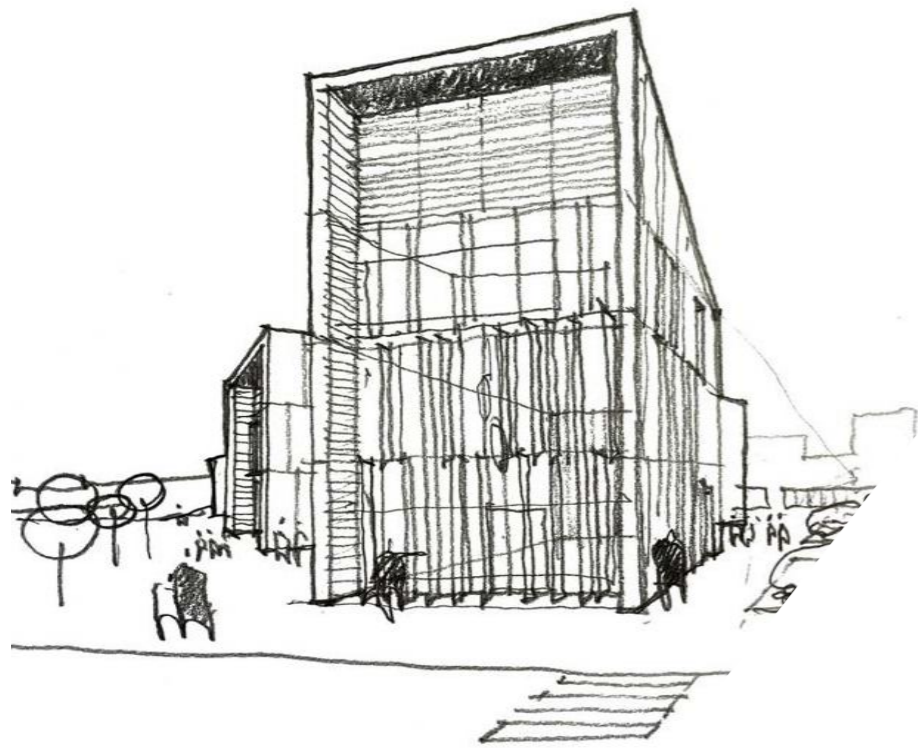


Pollok Civic Realm, Glasgow - NORR Consultants



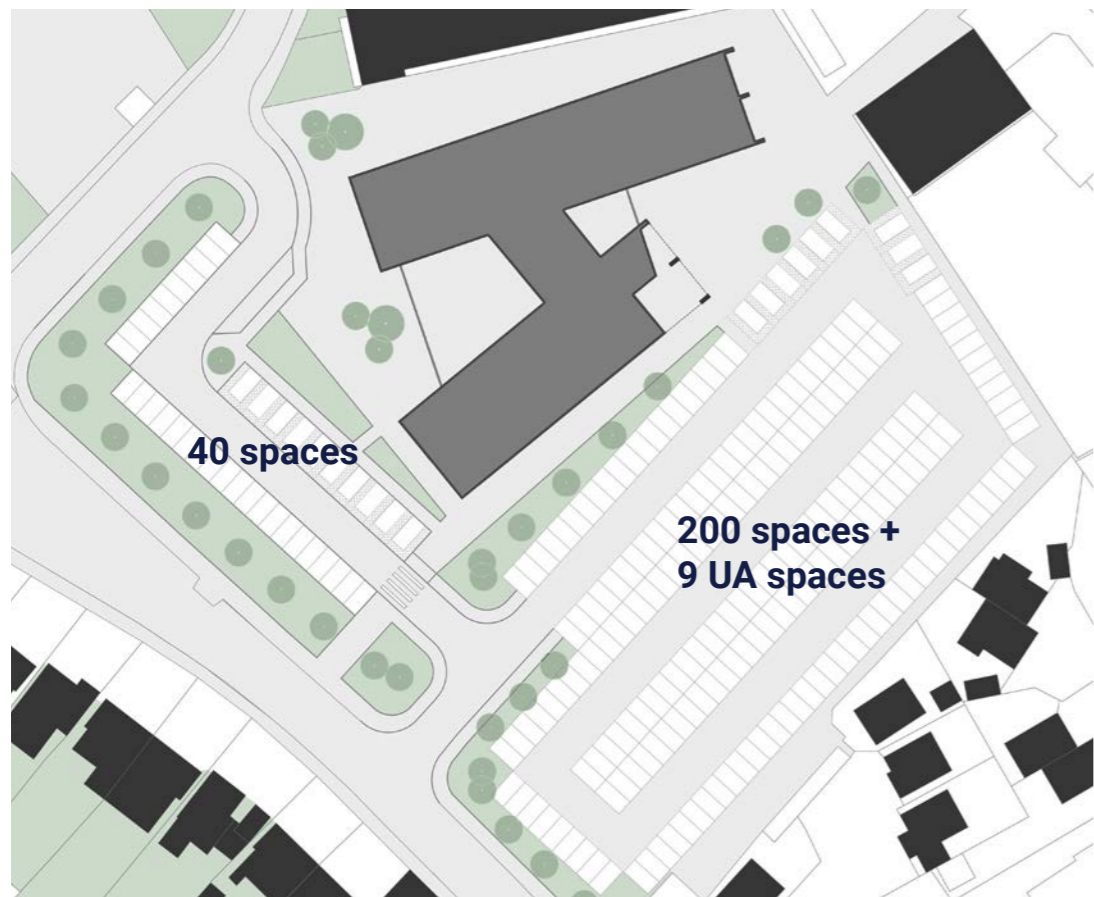


HUB Concept Diagram



NORR Concept Sketch



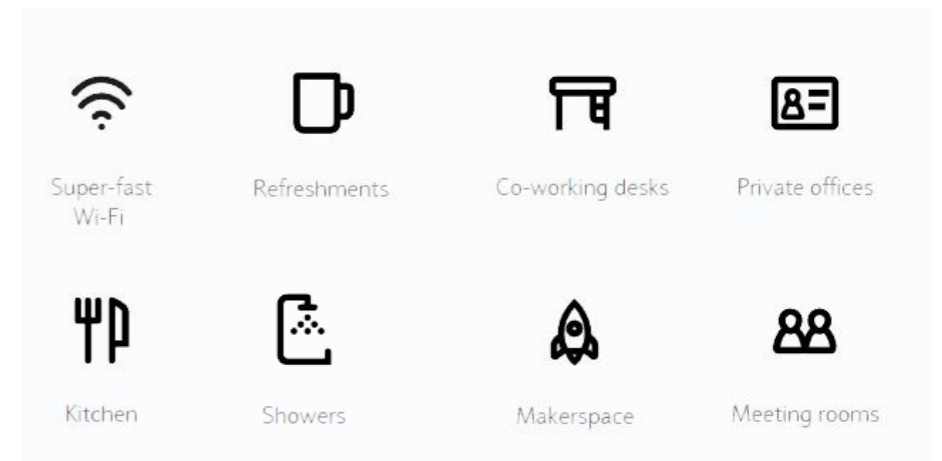


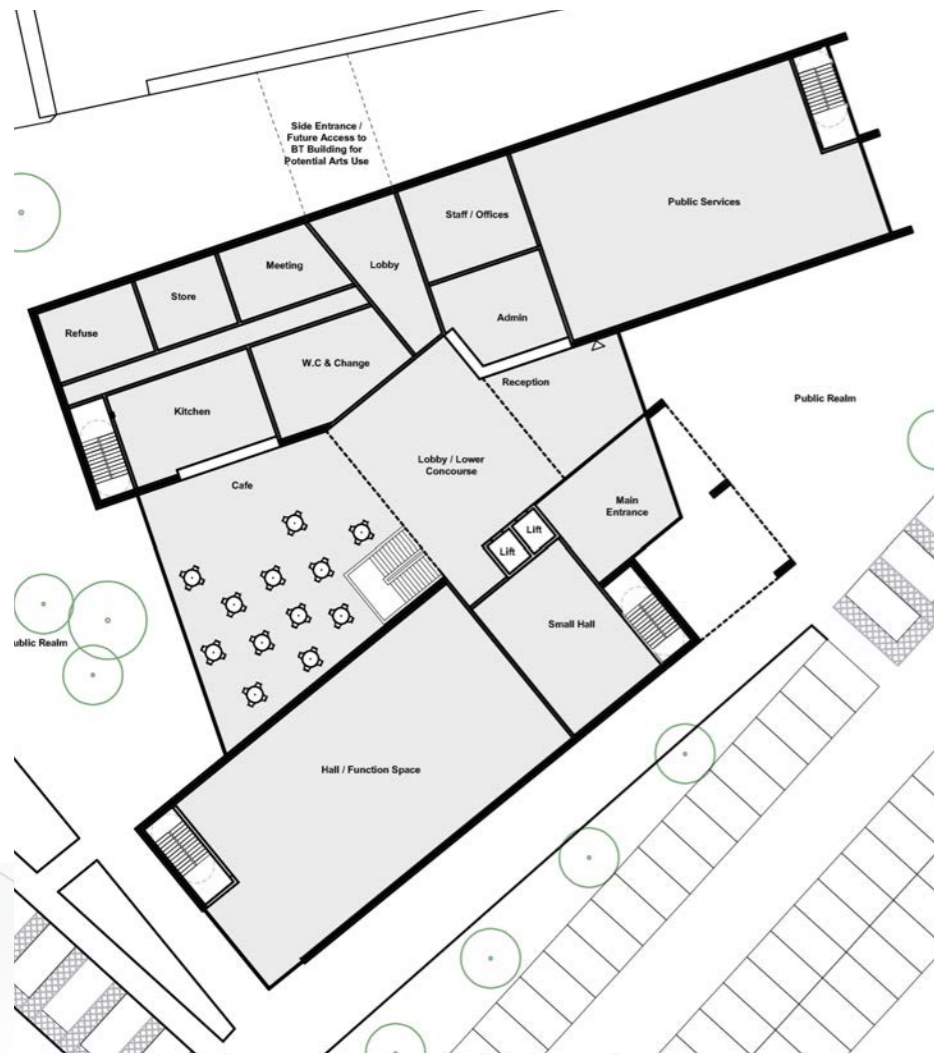
Proposed Site Plan

WISBECH HUB

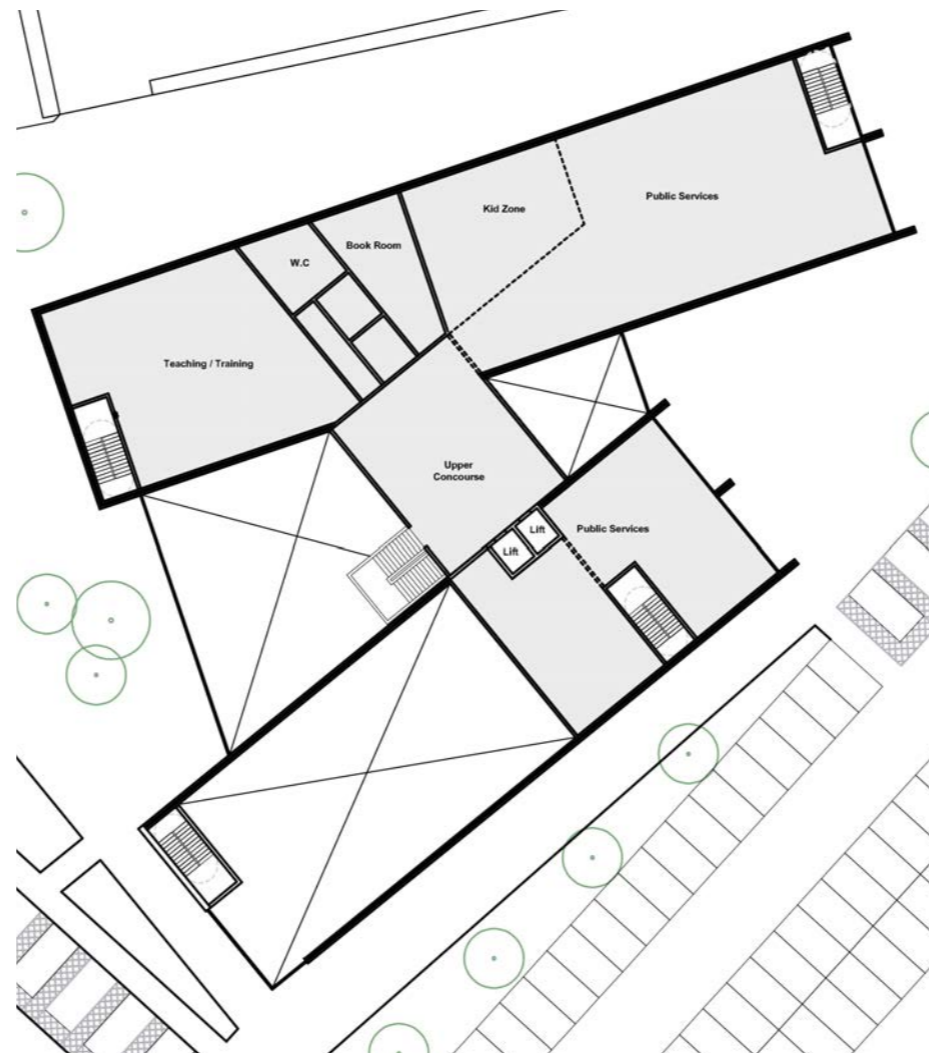
A hub building presents an opportunity to provide joint community services to the residents of Wisbech as well as support for local business through an enterprise type hub. Facilities could include:

- Performance space re-provided from the QM Centre
- Job Centre (should it chose to re-locate in the future)
- Citizens advice
- Bookable training and education resource space
- Cafe/bar & function space
- Innovation space for business startups to utilise
- Outreach space for the town Library

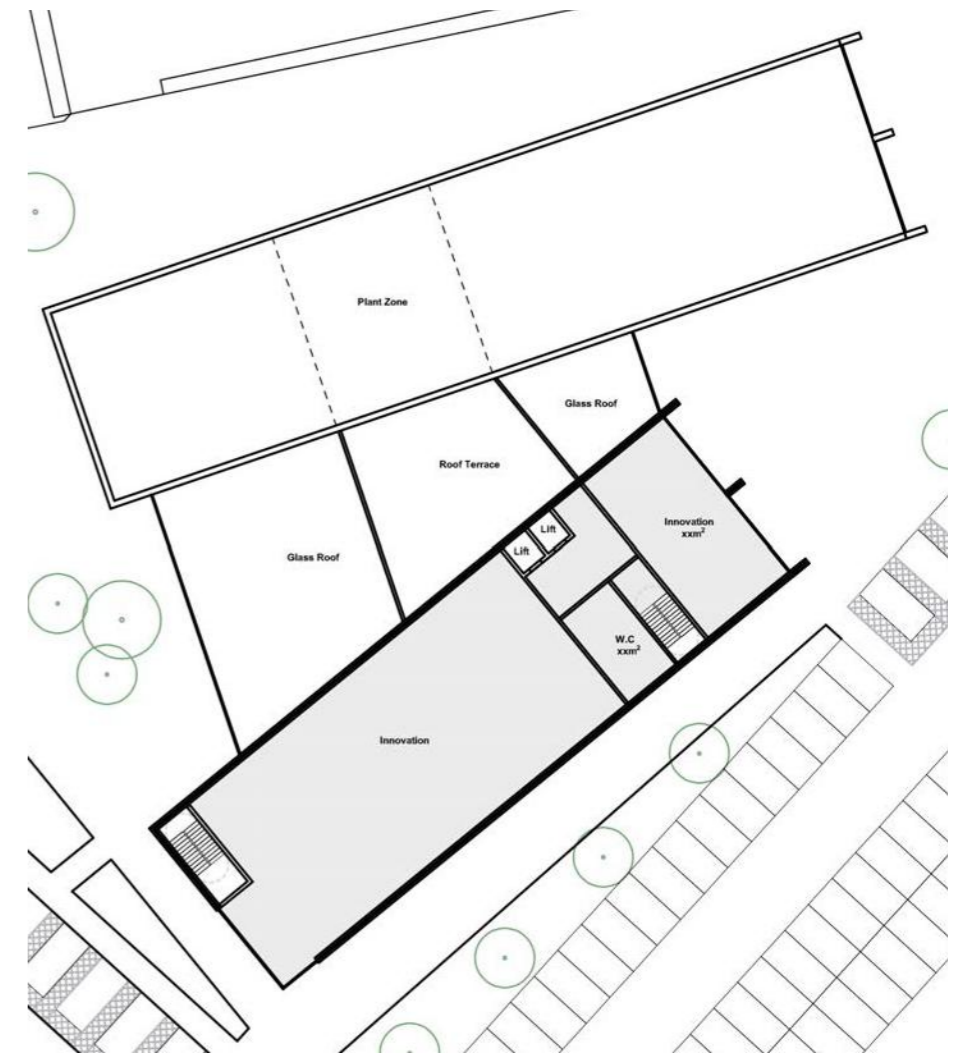




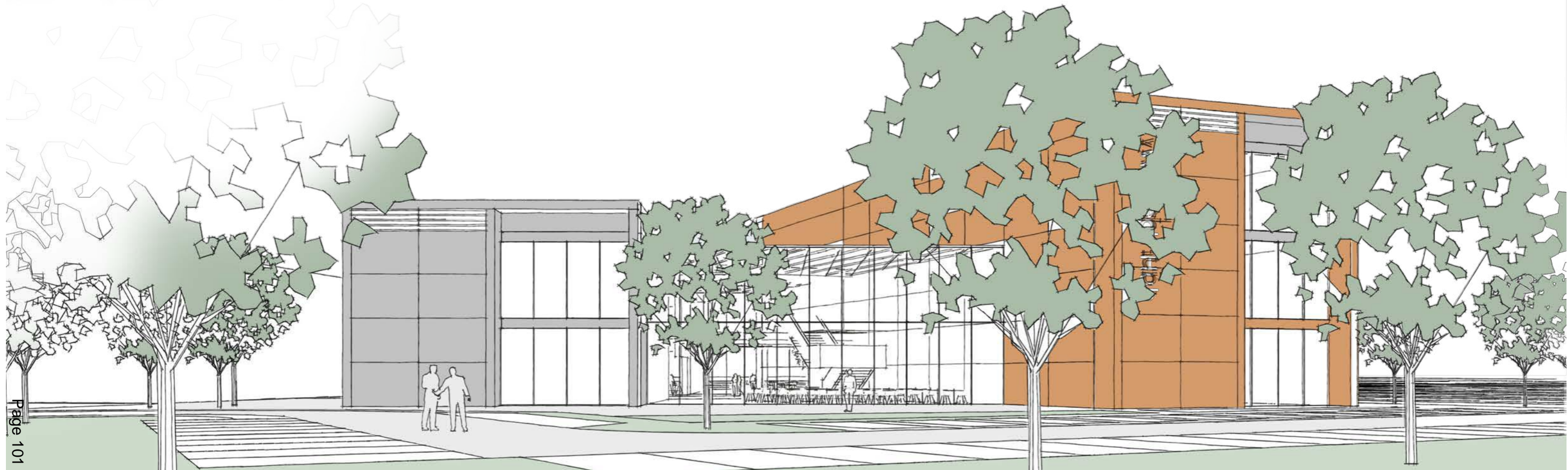
Level 00 Area: 1925m²



Level 01 Area: 1228m²



Level 02 Area: 665m²

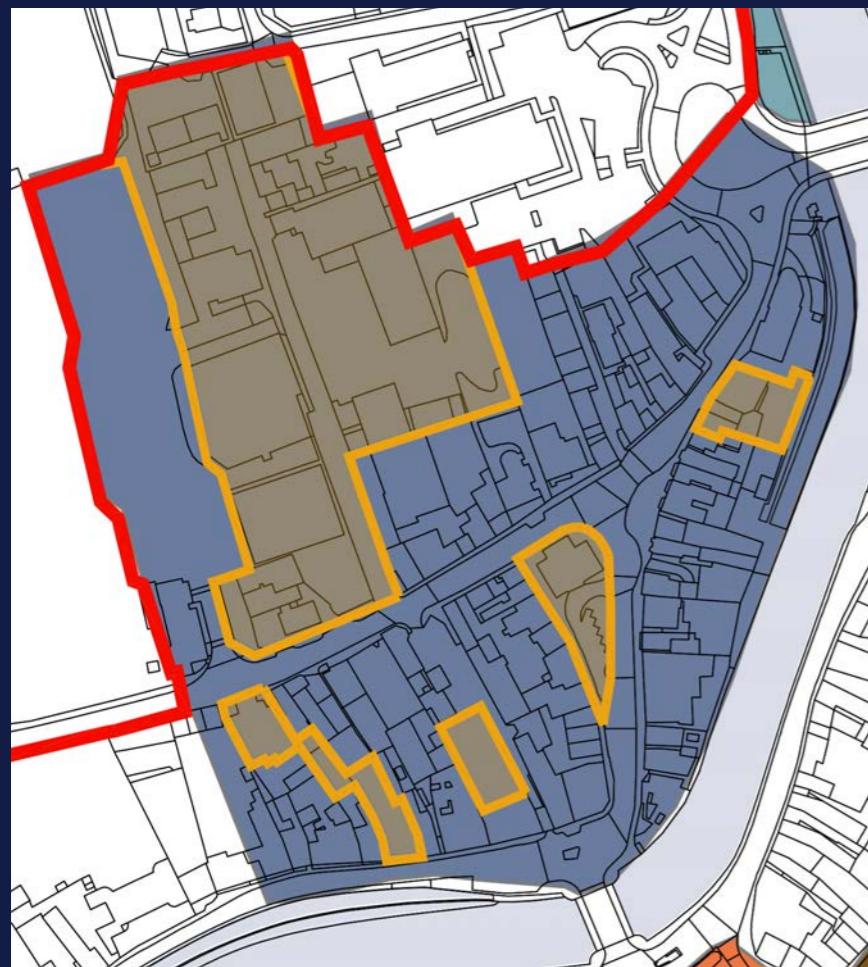


FOCUS AREA 3

LEISURE, ENTERTAINMENT & HOUSING

This focus area extends from the North Brinks up to Chapel Road and includes the Old Market square. There were various sites identified as opportunities for the masterplan, however the study area is perhaps the most complicated in terms of ownership restrictions, in particular at the Chapel Road site. It was discussed with the stakeholders that this section could offer a long term framework should land assembly become a possibility in the future.

Old Market Place, Phoenix Hotel, Corn Exchange, Chapel Road & North Street



THE AREA

Old Market

The space has heritage significance for the town as the old market place, which was an early contributor to the growth and prosperity of the town. Whilst the setting displays a number of exceptional historic buildings the old market itself is currently used as a car park.

The road through the space is busy; it is one of the main routes into the town centre and leads to one of only two bridges crossing the river Nene. It is therefore recognised that traffic should be accommodated into the space and full pedestrianisation would not be appropriate.

Enhancements to the public realm would significantly improve the approach to the town centre. There are a number of mature trees which should be retained where possible however the areas of parking could be reduced to present back more space for public activity and life.



Old Market car park with a backdrop of heritage buildings

North Brinks

Various sites along the North Brinks form part of the focus area including heritage assets such as the former Corn Exchange and the Phoenix Hotel facade. Further east, a vacant site on North Street offers opportunity for development.



View of the Chapel Road housing site - currently under multiple ownerships

Chapel Road Site

Adjacent to the rugby club and Chapel Road car park, this site was historically the site of a cattle market and now is formed of multiple buildings with numerous occupiers. Due to extensive business uses ongoing in this area and multiple land ownerships, this would be very much a long term vision and one that may be more applicable to phasing.

CORE OBJECTIVES

- Public realm enhancements and street greening of the Old Market
- Improved links through to the river and historic town centre
- Repurposing and restoring derelict heritage assets including the Phoenix Hotel site
- Enlivening the Brinks with a new flexible venue / entertainment space in the historic Corn Exchange
- New family housing with supporting commercial unit adjacent to the rugby club open space
- Smaller scale housing at the North Street site



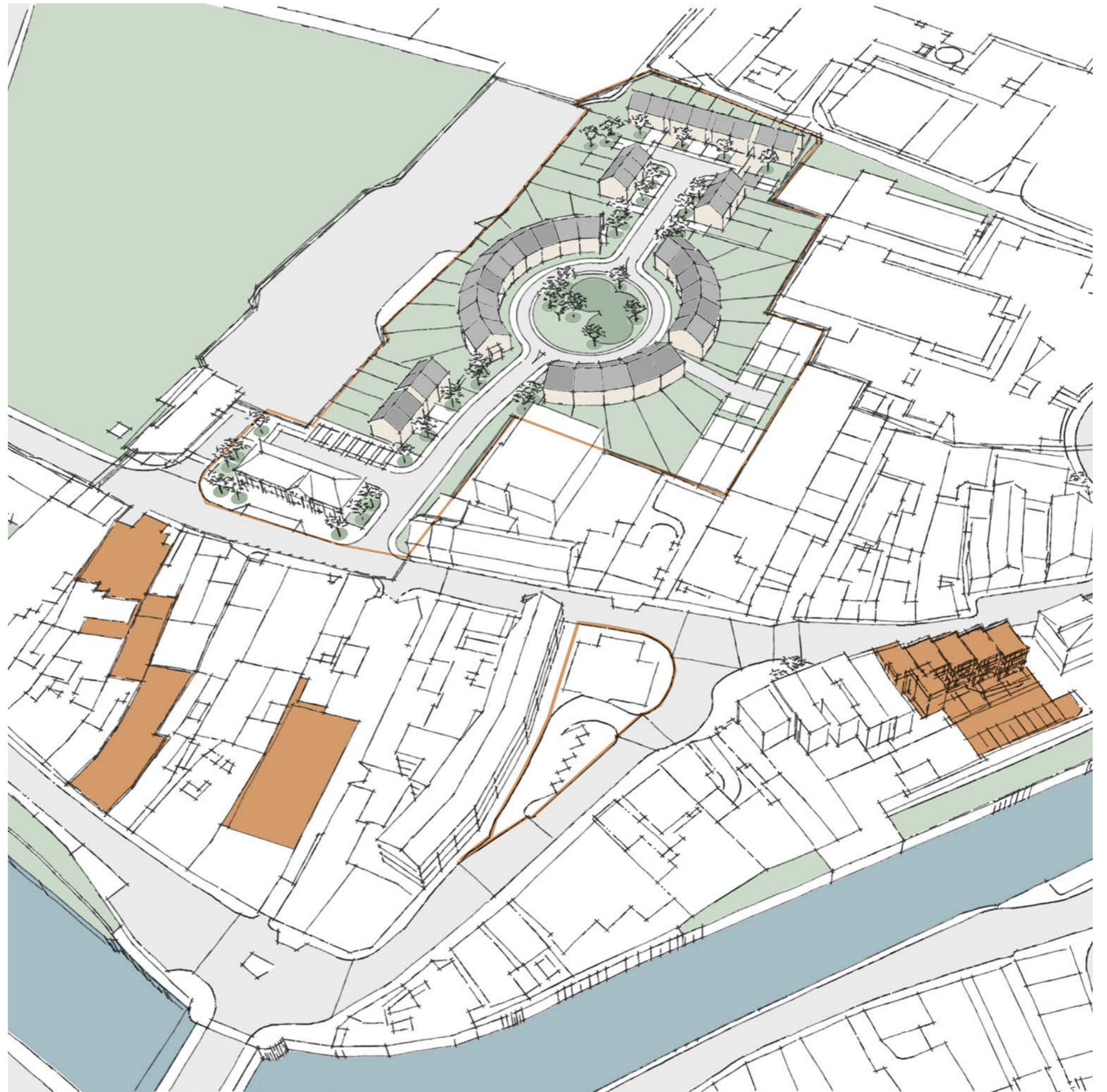
Phoenix Hotel facade - all that remains following a fire in 2010



Interior of the historic Corn Exchange located behind the Town Hall

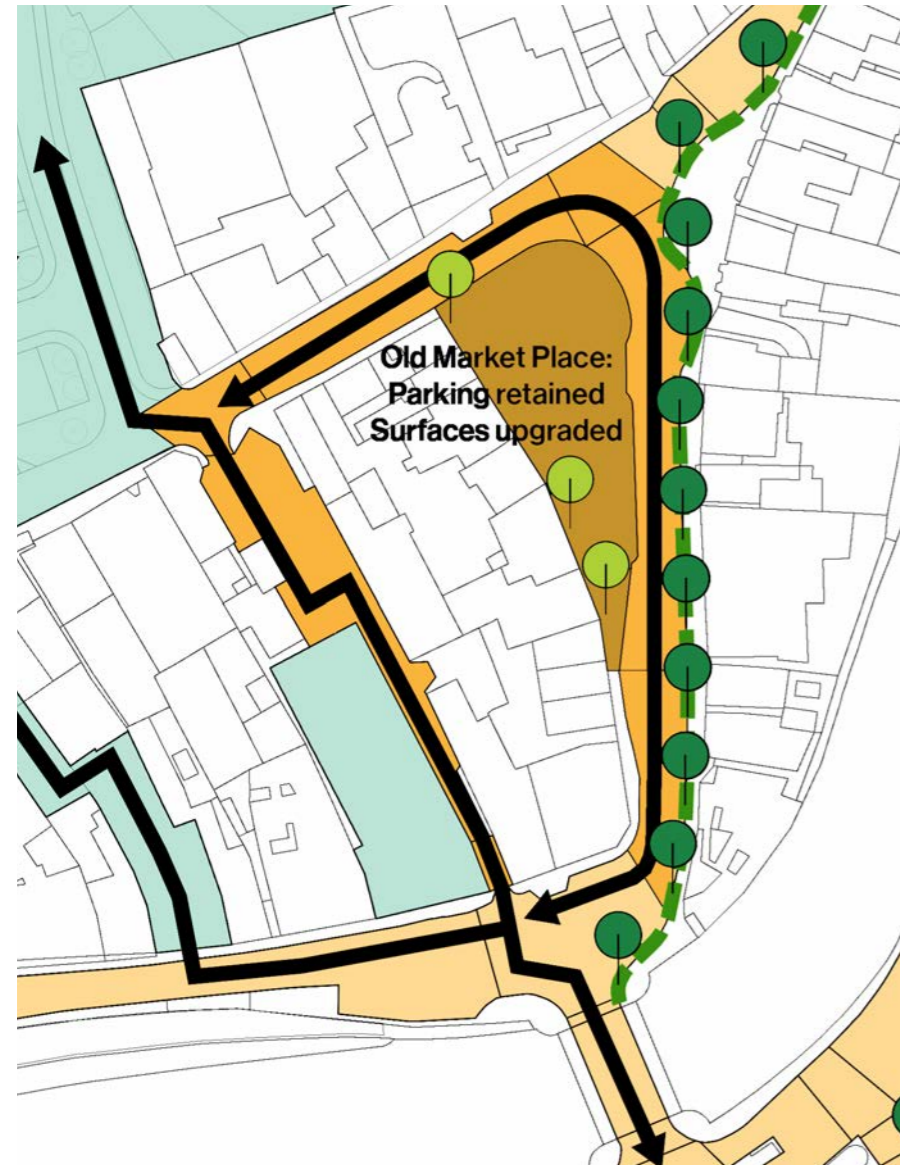


Vacant cash and carry shop on the North Street residential site

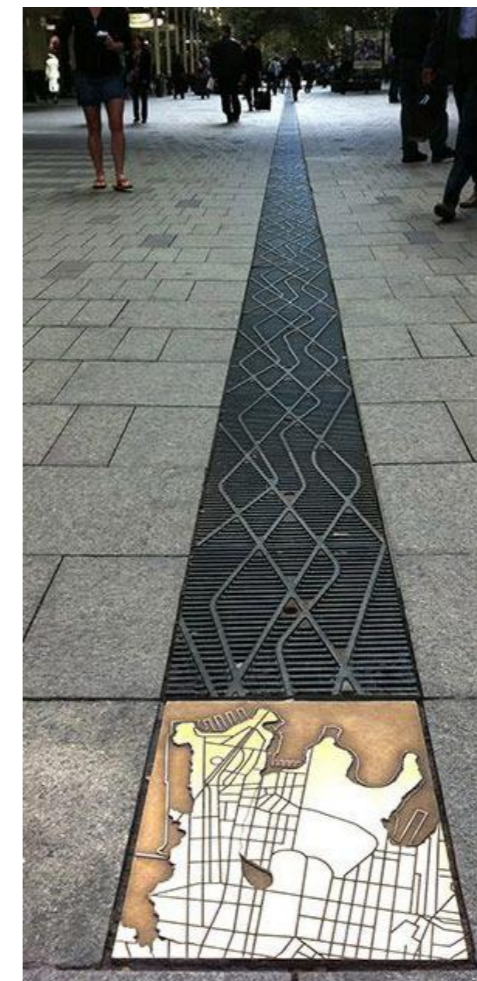


OLD MARKET PLACE

The Old Market opportunity site is at the heart of this focus area and the proposed public realm improvements are considered to be of fundamental importance to the overall success of the other opportunity sites in the vicinity - linking together the various proposals. The improvements are described in greater detail within Chapter 4 of this document and a concept design is shown opposite.



- Old Market - plaza / shared surface
- Shared surface street
- New development/public realm
- General improvement - surface
- Car park
- Proposed raingarden/planting area
- New street tree
- New tree for public realm





Old Market concept visual - Harrison Stevens

WISBECH CORN EXCHANGE

Wisbech's Town Hall is a landmark building within the North Brinks originally constructed as the Exchange Hall in 1811 later becoming the Town Hall in 1836. It is a landmark building distinguished by its rusticated stone front with arched doorways and windows and is a grade II listed building. The Corn Exchange sites behind the frontage, with an internal structure dating from 1857.

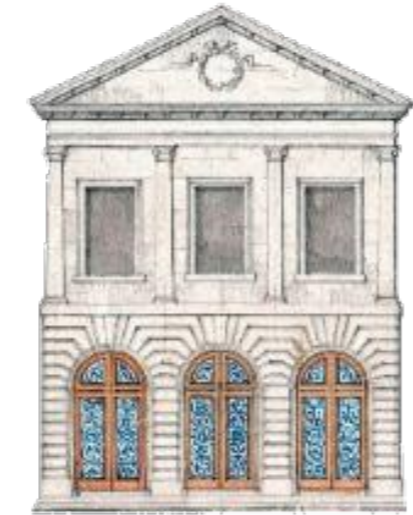
In the latter years of the 20th century, the Corn Exchange became a regular place for public entertainment – from Shakespeare recitations to dancing, rollerskating, wrestling and bingo. Appearances by major figures in the 1960s include The Rolling Stones, Jerry Lee Lewis, Lulu, Tom Jones, Adam Faith, Frankie Vaughan and The Hollies.

The Corn Exchange closed in the early 1990s after initial plans to change its use to a cinema were halted. Virtually untouched since 1992, Wisbech Corn Exchange is a genuine 1960s time capsule. The building is currently only open to visitors once a year in September, when guided tours are available as part of the national Heritage Open Days initiative.

The Wisbech Corn Exchange Conservation Trust has already begun working on a heritage and culture-led development plan in partnership with local and national community organisations, with the ultimate objective is a major refurbishment of Wisbech Corn Exchange, which will enable it to be used once again as a public entertainment space.

This will involve sensitive restoration of the building's period features and structure, retaining and revealing the past whilst making the interior accessible and practical for community use and private hire. The plan includes increasing seating capacity, and creating a magnificent new viewing gallery and audience circulation space.

A flexible entertainment venue on the North Brinks is considered to integrate well with the overall masterplan. It is envisaged that the restored venue could accommodate a range of uses including a space for indoor markets and craft fairs, a small scale music and entertainment venue and a hall space for community events.



The Corn Exchange interiors. Photographs by Alan Wheeldon, taken from Wisbech Corn Exchange Conservation Trust website

Rich with exceptional heritage features, the regenerated space would provide a striking new venue for the town.



Precedent - Artist Impression of the Newton Abbot Market redevelopment. Source: Teignbridge District Council



The regenerated Corn Exchange could also be used as a local market or for arts and craft fairs



Precedent - Old Fruitmarket, Glasgow. A flexible space used for a variety of functions including as a unique wedding venue

PHOENIX HOTEL

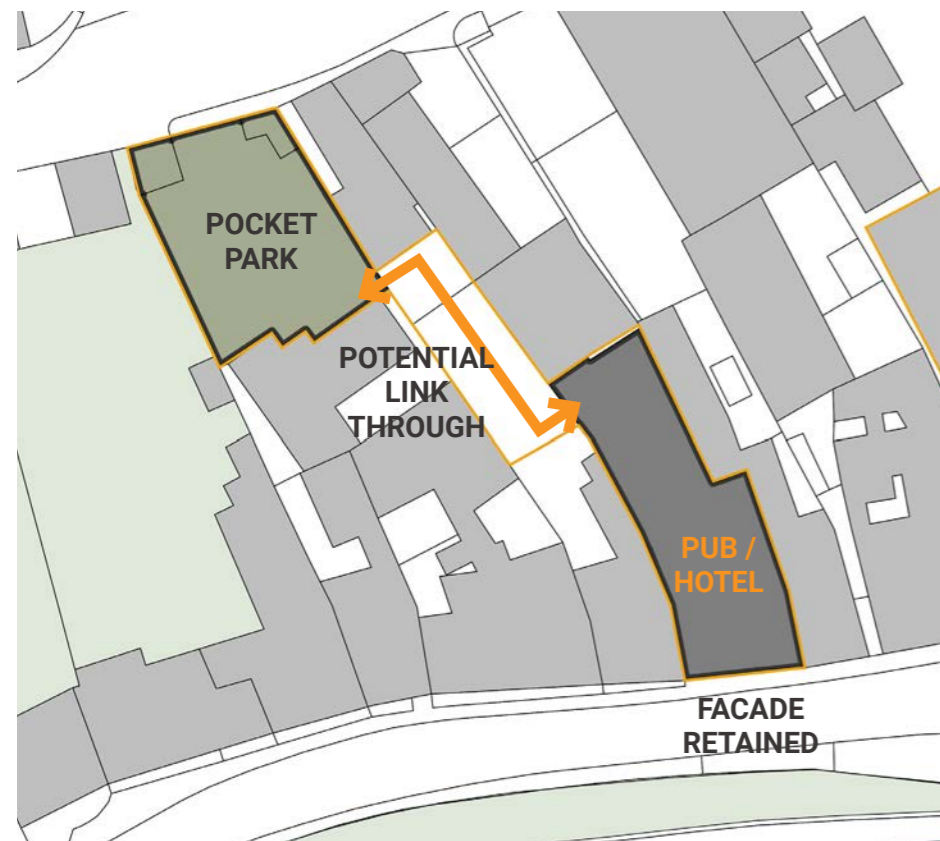
Following a fire in 2010 and subsequent stabilisation works only the Georgian façade of the building now remains with false windows and doors painted into the structure. The façade retention has ensured this nationally important Georgian Street scene of the Brinks and the wider conservation area has been retained. The cleared site behind offers opportunities for reinvention and linkages beyond.

Two options have been explored for this underutilised site. The first would be to create a pocket park accessed from Chapel Road, with a through route created through the Phoenix Hotel facade connecting to the Brinks. Unfortunately the plots do not quite align to make a straightforward connection through but there could be an opportunity to provide a creative and collaborative space for growth and innovation such as 'pop up' spaces for markets, creative arts and crafts stalls.

The pocket park space would not prevent a new use in future but provide an interim solution for this vacant site. A future use could be to reinstate a new building behind the listed facade, such as a new public house, potentially with hotel or residential accommodation on the upper floors. The pocket park and connection to the rear could be retained.



Despite the 2010 fire the facade of the The Phoenix Hotel remains, allowing the Georgian street scene of the north Brinks to be preserved

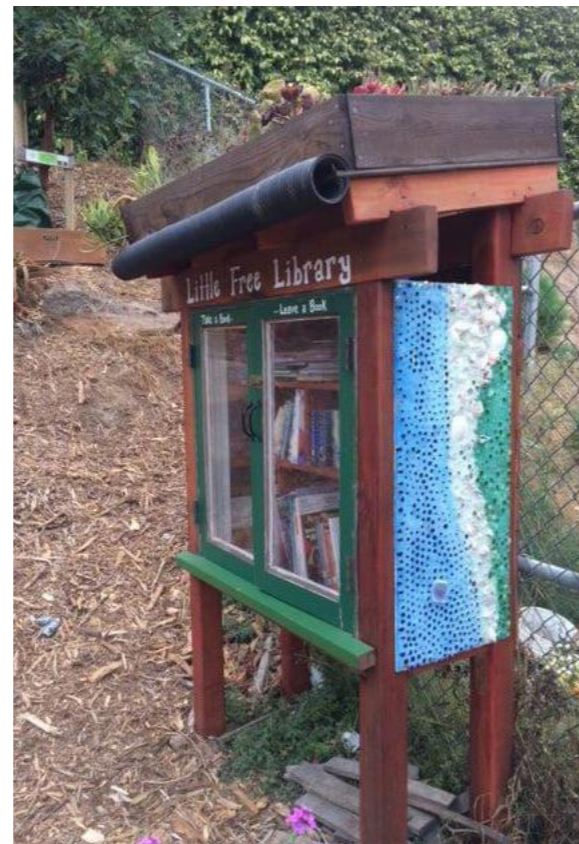


Proposed Site Plan Diagram



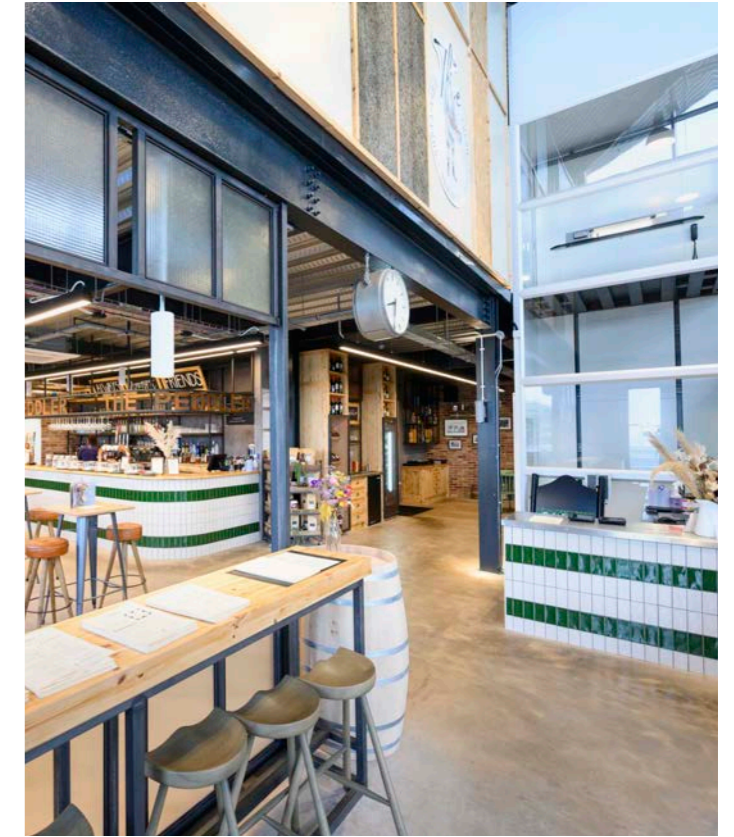
The car park to the rear of the Phoenix Hotel, which could be repurposed as a pocket park or potential route through to a future venue at the Phoenix Hotel

POCKET PARK



Precedent - Burrows Pocket Park. Source: <https://openarchcollab.org/429/burrows-pocket-park/>

NEW PUBLIC HOUSE



Precedent - The Bus Station, Whitehaven: NORR Consultants

4-6 NORTH STREET

The site is understood to comprise a former 'cash & carry' store building, the adjacent vacant plot and car park to the rear, accessed from North Street. The frontage faces onto the road, and to the rear lies the River Nene, separated from the plot by the existing tree line.

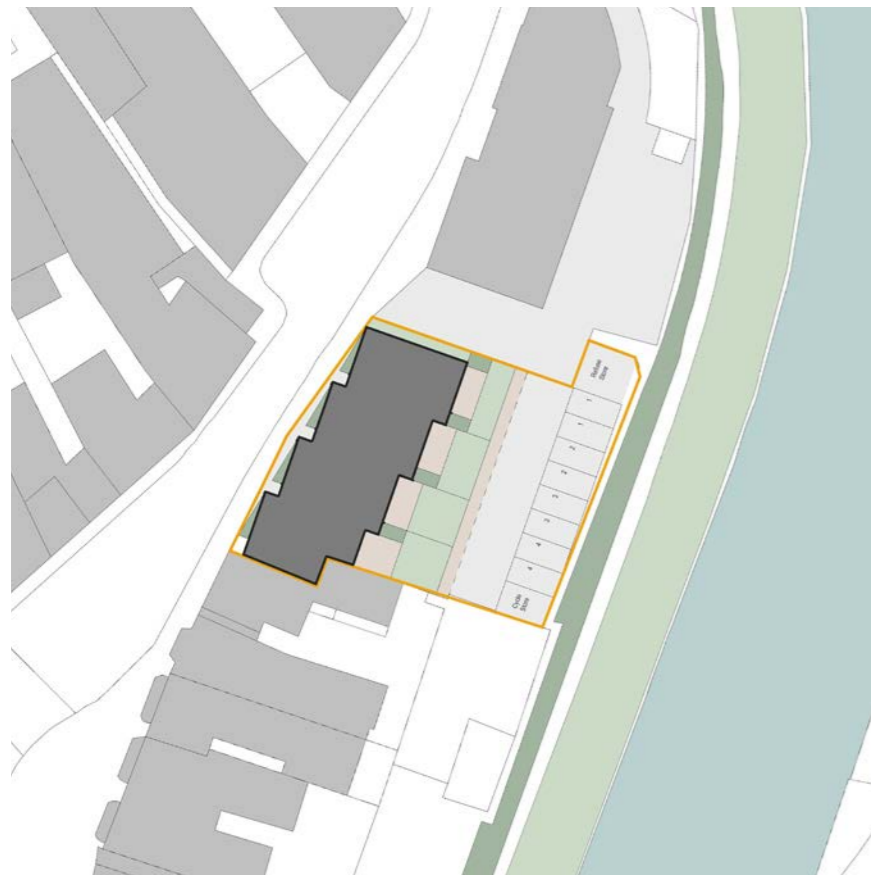
This opportunity site is considered to be best suited to residential development. Due to its location in flood risk zone 3, sleeping accommodation will need to be located across the upper floors. As such a town house configuration would suit the plot.

In terms of scale and massing, the development should endeavour to integrate with the storey heights and rhythm of the adjacent adjoined terrace properties - two stories with third set back mansard style roof.

Materials should be in keeping with the context, as the Old Market Place and other heritage buildings will form a back drop to the plot. Facing brick would be suitable, potentially with some contemporary features and detailing.



Street view of the North Street site, comprising the former 'cash & carry' shop and adjacent vacant plot



Proposed Site Plan Diagram



Concept street visual of potential residential development at the North Street site



Precedent: Kyson Architects



Precedent: zvaa visualisation



Precedent: Kyson Architects



Level 00



Level 01



Level 02



CHAPEL ROAD SITE

Whilst this site has significant challenges with regards to land assembly and flood zones, it also offers great potential for new high quality housing right in the town centre, benefiting from both proximity to the river and open space.

Development in the flood risk zone requires that sleeping accommodation should be avoided at ground floor and as such we have proposed traditional 2 to 3 storey housing across the site.

Two options have been explored which would potentially suit inter-generational family living to include starter homes and larger homes to suit families and downsizers alike, all with generous private gardens.

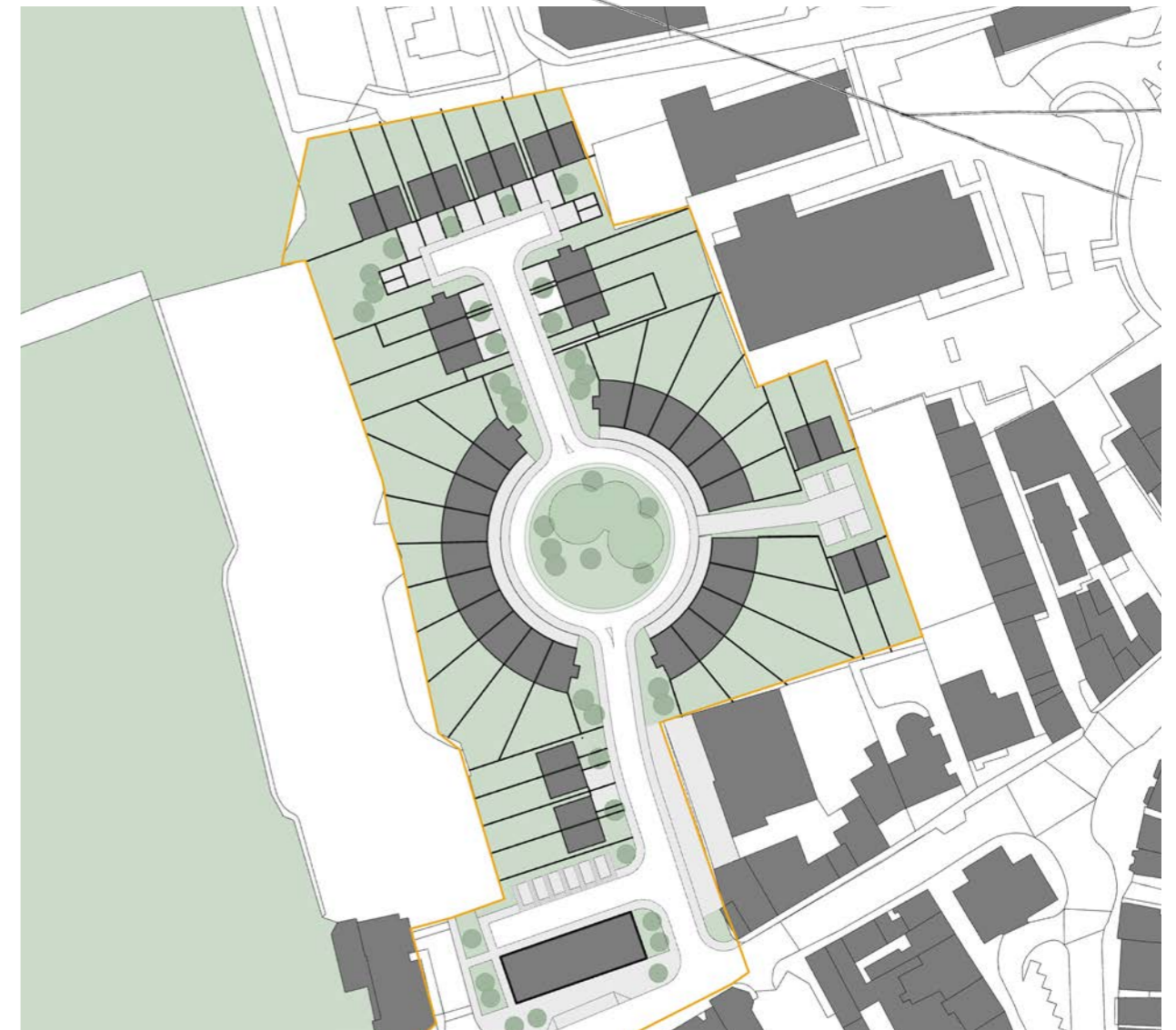
Both options take their concept from the Crescent, the form of which responds to the historic urban grain of Wisbech and enables a key shared soft landscape feature at the heart of the development to deliver amenity and identity.

The homes within the Crescent/Square would be 3 storey with parking access and utility at the ground floor and living accommodation above. Other housing might be more conventional 2 storey homes.

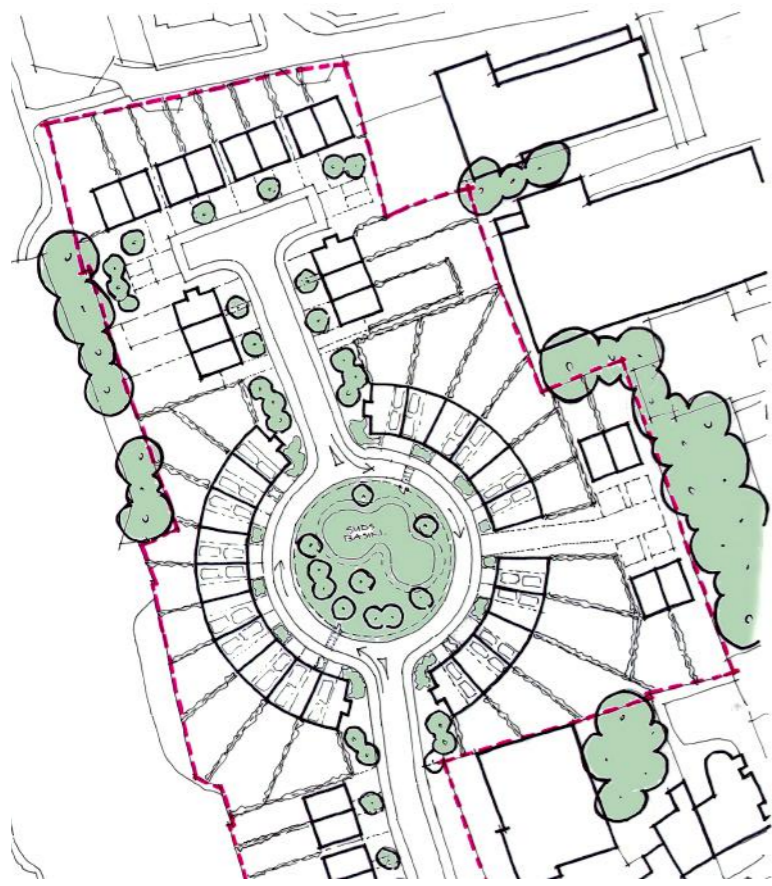
A commercial unit such as a local supermarket could also be incorporated at the entrance to the site on Chapel Road. This would help to support the housing development and also benefit from the footfall generated by the adjacent car park.



Precedent - New Co-op store, Lincolnshire. Image: Paul Marriott



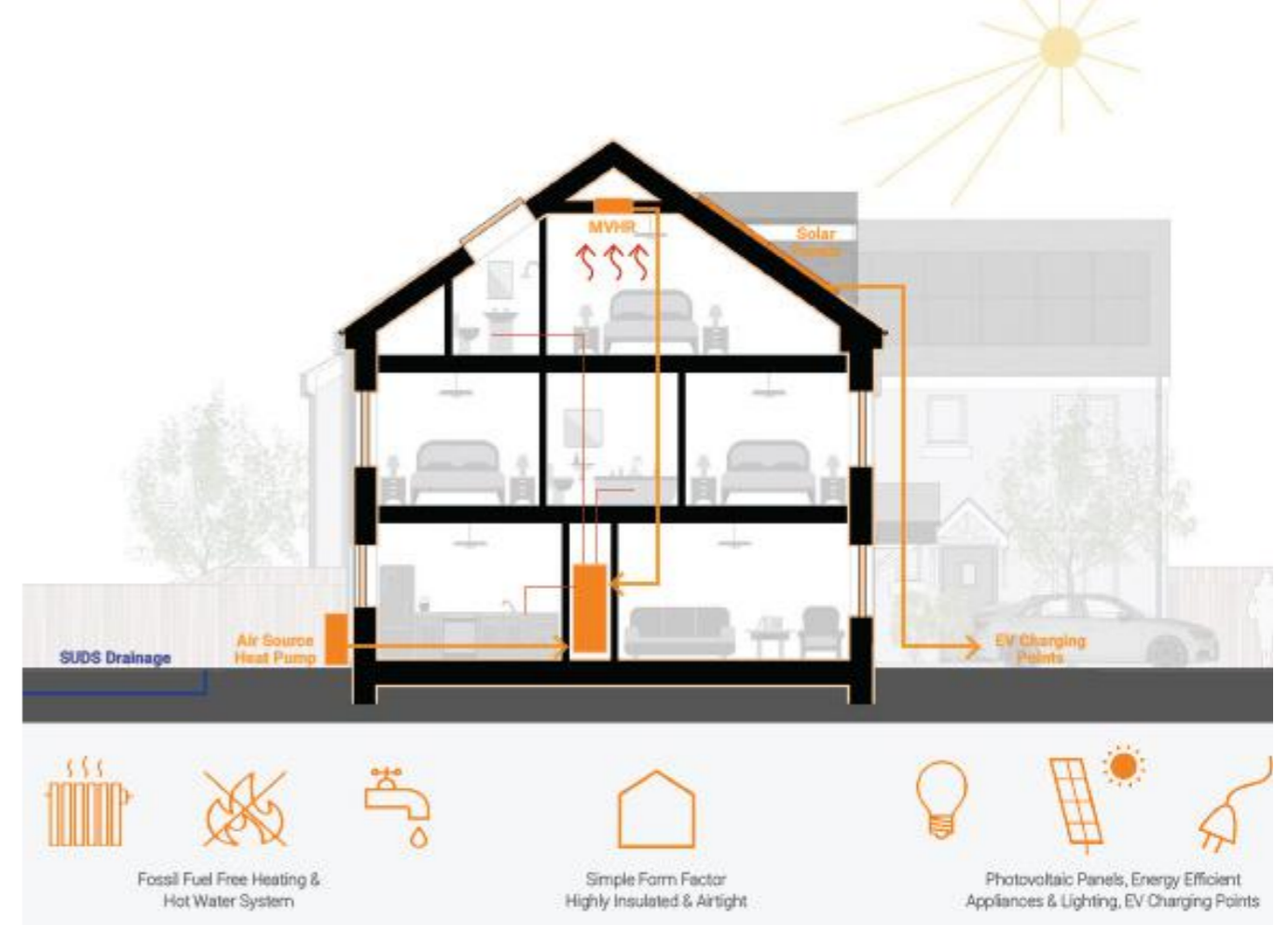
Proposed Site Plan Diagram



Option 1 - The Crescent



Option 2 - The Square



The Chapel Road site would be appropriate for new quality eco homes



FOCUS AREA 4

LIVE / WORK

Similarly to the Chapel Road site, this contains multiple land owners, business premises and the like so land assembly will be a challenge. However through the stakeholder engagement it was felt appropriate to indicate the attractiveness the site might hold to live/work and residential uses. This could be delivered in multiple phases by the landowners themselves should they see the benefit in bringing similar proposals forward in the fullness of time.



THE AREA

The site spans the length of West Parade, a narrow road along the west bank of the River Nene that provides access to the warehouses and business on the waterfront. To the south of the site lies the Freedom Bridge and town centre, and to the north is an attractive residential development.

The plot is long and narrow, formed of the available space between the river and A1101. Existing development on the site is predominantly commercial and industrial units, housed in a range of historic and more recent warehouse buildings, some of which are vacant and dilapidated.

The site is one of the first impressions of the town entering from the north. It has the potential to become a very successful gateway and could open up attractive vistas of the river, with visual connections to the vibrant Nene Parade on the east bank.

A development in this area would suit a lively combination of residential and office space, including new quality housing, live / work units and potentially offices for start ups or maker spaces. The development would benefit from river views and public realm improvements.



A1101 approach to Wisbech from the north



Warehouses/flood defences on West Parade



View from Freedom Bridge, with West Parade to the left side of the image

CORE OBJECTIVES

- **Creation of an attractive and welcoming approach to Wisbech along the main arterial route into the town**
- **Public realm enhancements, street greening, improving views and links through to and along the river**
- **Creation of new high quality housing, apartments, live / work units and flexible office / creative space**
- **Potential for a new waterfront cafe, retail units and flexible commercial space along the river**
- **Improving the connection from the residential district to the north end of West Parade with the town centre**



WEST PARADE SITE

The proposals take cues from the existing eclectic rhythms of historic architecture along the River Nene in the town centre, reinterpreted through a more contemporary aesthetic.

It is envisaged that this plot would be developed as a series of terraces, broken up by sections of public realm, which allow routes and views through to the river from the A1101.

The intention is to create an attractive approach into Wisbech centre and to enliven this stretch of the town, making the most of its advantageous position on the waterfront.

Access would be one way, shared surface along West Parade, with parking provision included for each unit. Small gardens and balconies could face onto the river.

Land use is proposed as a combination of residential and office space, with some commercial / retail provision closer to the town centre which could include a waterfront cafe.

The scale and massing would suit a combination of 3 and 4 storey buildings. This would allow for some town houses, apartments, live / work units and office / business start up spaces.





FOCUS AREA 5

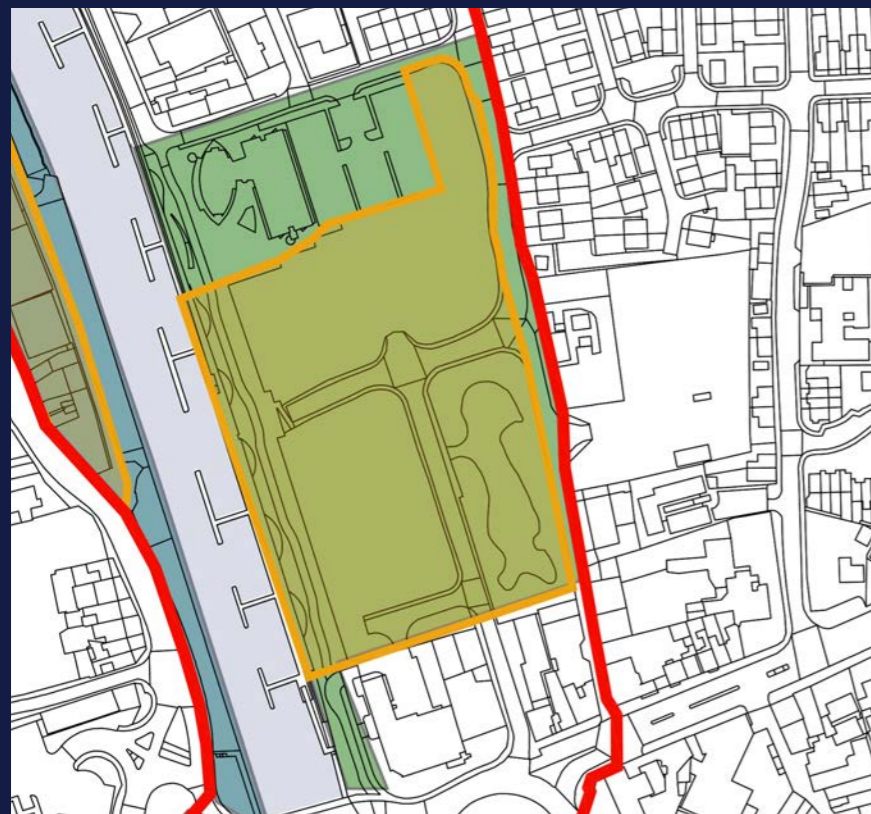
EXTRA CARE, HOUSING & RETAIL

Nene Parade presents an exciting opportunity for Wisbech to create a really unique public place associated with a vibrant new residential neighbourhood along the River Nene waterfront.

The key challenges of the space are:

- visual block to the waterfront
- inaccessible waterfront
- lack of identity and life
- poor planting selection in many ways reinforce the first two points
- poor boundary definition
- lack of destination
- connectivity to other areas of the town - south to the town centre and west to the West Parade on the other side of the river

Waterfront & Nene Parade



View from the Boathouse business centre overlooking Nene Parade and the development plots

THE AREA

The site covers a large area along the River Nene to the north of the town centre, comprising Nene Parade public realm and a series of vacant development plots, with the successful Boathouse business centre to the north and the police station to the south.

Access is via Nene Parade for pedestrians and the Freedom Roundabout/Lynn Road for cars. Existing streets already run through some of the development, subdividing the site into logical development plots, with two zones directly along the waterfront and plots further east along Chase Street.

A key attribute of the site is undeniably its proximity to the River Nene and the marina, but despite its prime location and easy walking distance to the town centre, at present there is a lack of destination to draw visitors to the area.

This is partly due to the lack of connectivity with the river and the rest of the town. Enhancing the excellent existing public realm of the Parade to open up views to the river and introducing interventions such as urban beaches and pop up stalls could draw more visitors to the area.

New residential development on the vacant plots should encourage ground floors to have cafe and retail offer to activate the ground floor elevations towards the Parade, which combined with the public realm improvements will help to create a vibrant and unique sense of place.

CORE OBJECTIVES

- **Creation a new vibrant destination along the waterfront that attracts residents and visitors**
- **Enhancement of the existing public realm to open up views of the river and create seating areas**
- **A range of new residential development including starter homes, apartments, family houses and extra care**
- **Potential for a new waterfront cafe, retail units and flexible commercial space along the river**



The Boathouse business centre to the north of the site





NENE PARADE VISTAS

Proposals include enhancements to the public realm along Nene Parade, building upon the previously developed landscaping to open up views to the river.

This could include reducing the heights of fencing and planting and introducing small sets of seating/viewing/ steps along the side of the existing structures to provide informal seating and views over the river.

Playful elements in the landscape of the promenade could be introduced such as an 'urban beach', and spectator spaces for events and impromptu musical and theatrical performances to enhance the attractiveness to all ages.

Access to the water could also be improved with more secure access points, potentially enabling the lower marina pontoon at water level to be publicly accessible whilst maintaining the privacy.

The developments, in conjunction with the Boathouse, are anticipated to increase footfall along the parade. To further activate the public realm, a series of pop-up market stalls could be introduced.

Existing



Proposed





Precedent: OPEN UP Market, Darling Quarter Sydney. Source: Wiltshire & Dimas

POP UP MARKET

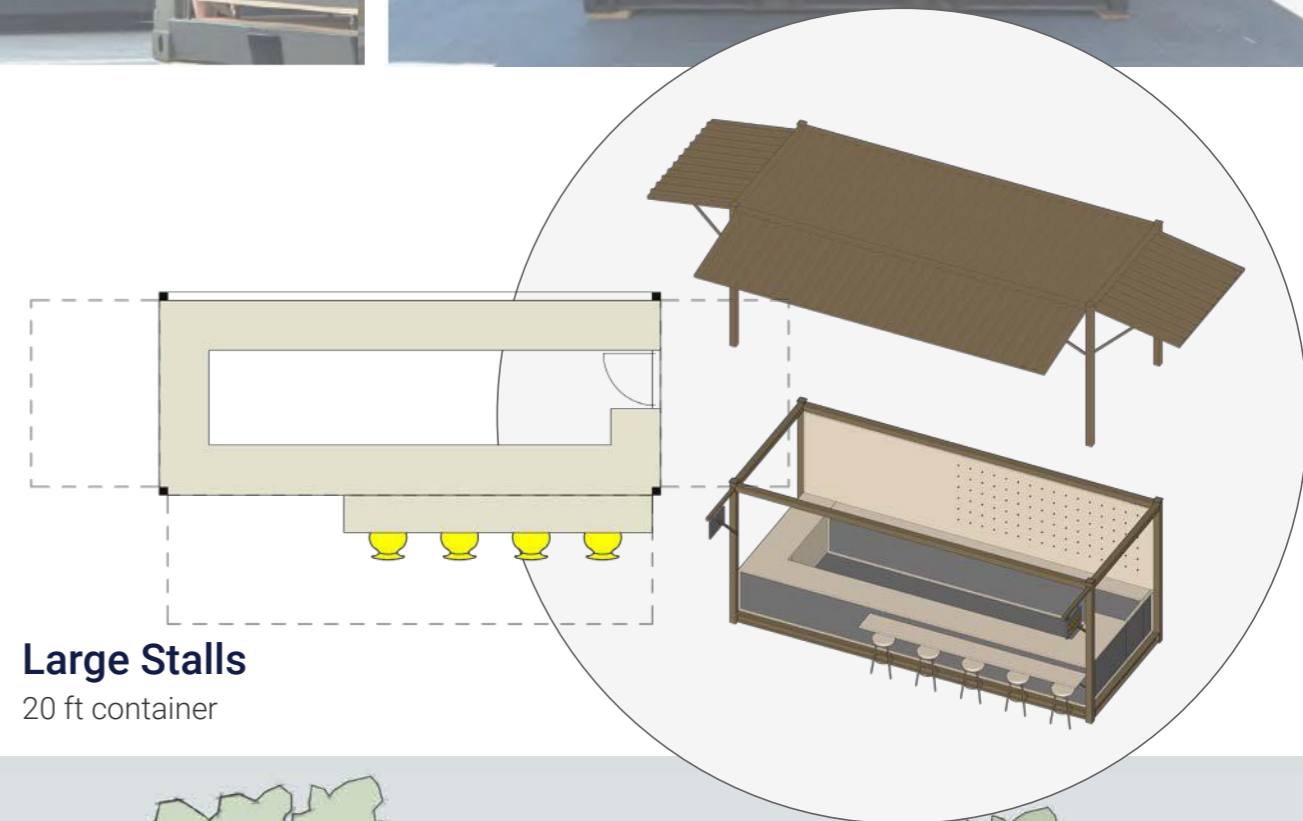
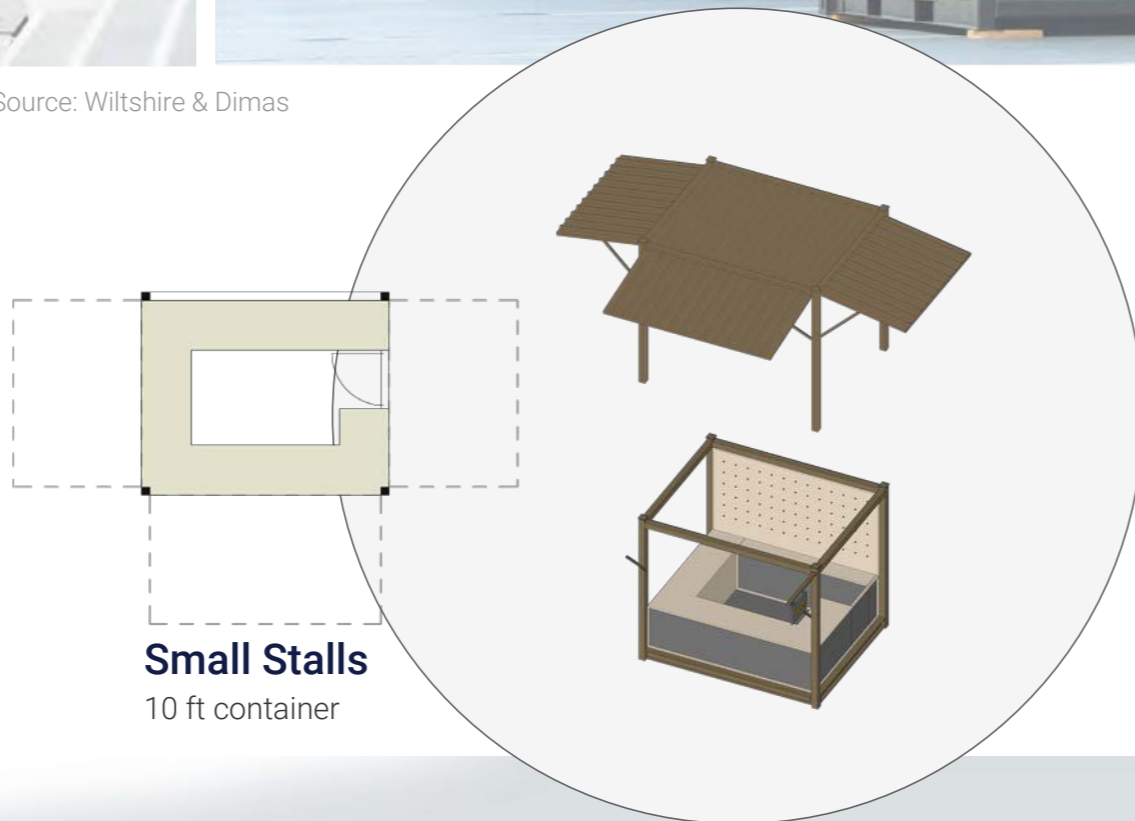
A pop-up market place could enliven Nene Parade and take advantage of increased footfall.

This could include:

Semi-permanent / lockable units, potential reuse of shipping containers

Mixture of sizes to accommodate different uses including pop up eateries

Use as a craft fair to celebrate local artists, designers and makers



LAND USE

The proposals incorporate 5 plots with different land uses to suit location and surroundings. The opposite plan shows an illustrative layout for the site.

The waterfront is considered to be best suited to apartments and extra care, with commercial units such as a cafe bistro on Nene Parade. Plots 2 & 3 are better suited to two-storey family homes, being adjacent to existing developments of a similar use and scale.

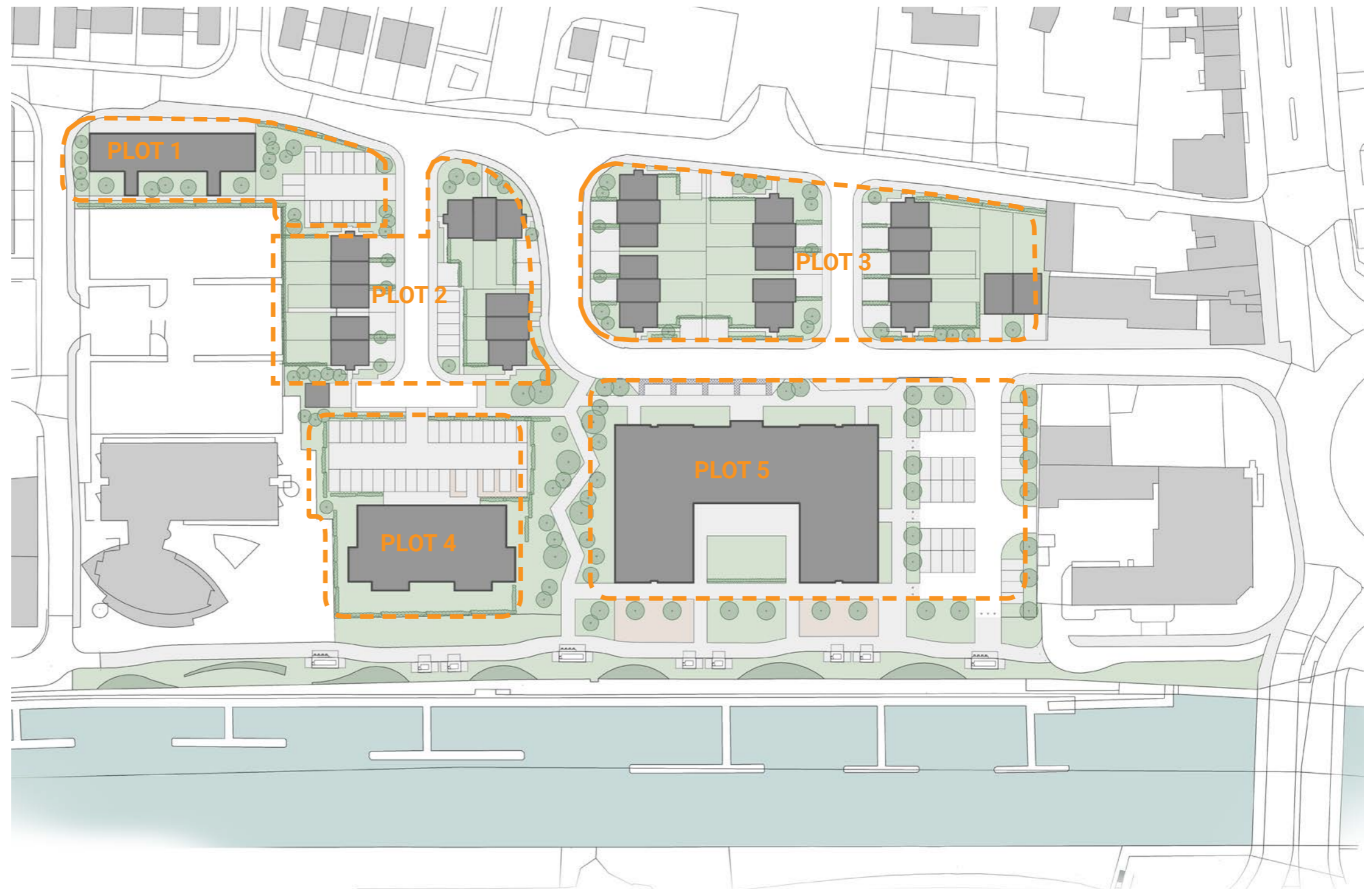
PLOT 1 - Offices / Commercial

PLOT 2 - Residential Housing

PLOT 3 - Residential Housing

PLOT 4 - Residential Apartments

PLOT 5 - Extra Care with Commercial



Schedule of Areas	
Plot 1 (Block D) - Retail and Flats	Retail - 70sqm - 4no. Flats - 73qm - 8no.
Plot 2 - Housing	Type C1 - 84sqm - 3B4P 5no. Type T1 - 73sqm - 3B3P 3no. Type T2 - 84sqm - 3B4P 3no.
Plot 3 - Housing	Type C1 - 84sqm - 3B4P 6no. Type T1 - 73sqm - 3B3P 4no. Type T2 - 84sqm - 3B4P 6no. Type T3 (3st) - 110sqm - 3B6P 2no.
Plot 4 - Apartments	1 bed(2P) flats - 10no. @ 50sqm ea 2 bed(4P) flats - 12no. @ 72sqm ea
Plot 5 - Extra Care	1 bed flats - 48no. @ 56sqm ea 2 bed flats - 12no. @ 71sqm ea Includes 225sqm cafe bistro (inc kitchen) Includes 100sqm commercial unit Includes 145sqm 'unit' - hairdresser Additional commercial 130sqm unit tbc Different sized sub divisions are also possible



Precedent: Fletton Quays, Peterborough - NORR Consultants



Precedent: Fletton Quays, Peterborough - NORR Consultants

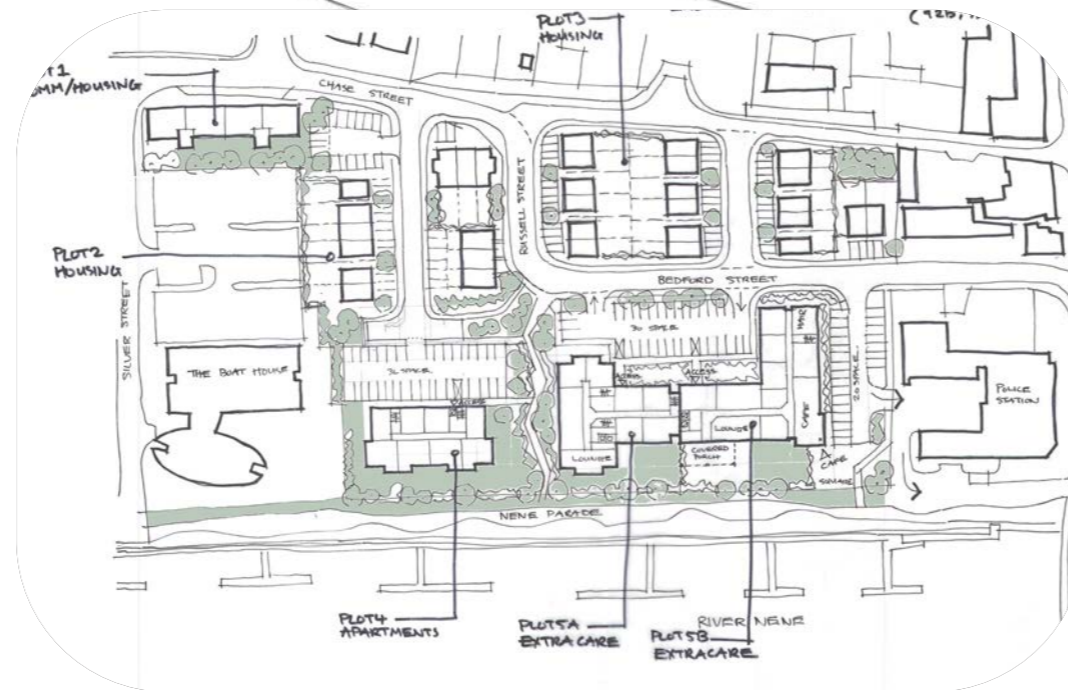


ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Two alternative options were explored for the site:

Option A - Extra Care facility split into two plots, one of which accommodated 'suite' style accommodation as opposed to flats.

Option B - Extra Care facility to Plot 5A with a possible location for a new hotel on plot 5B, adjacent to the police station.



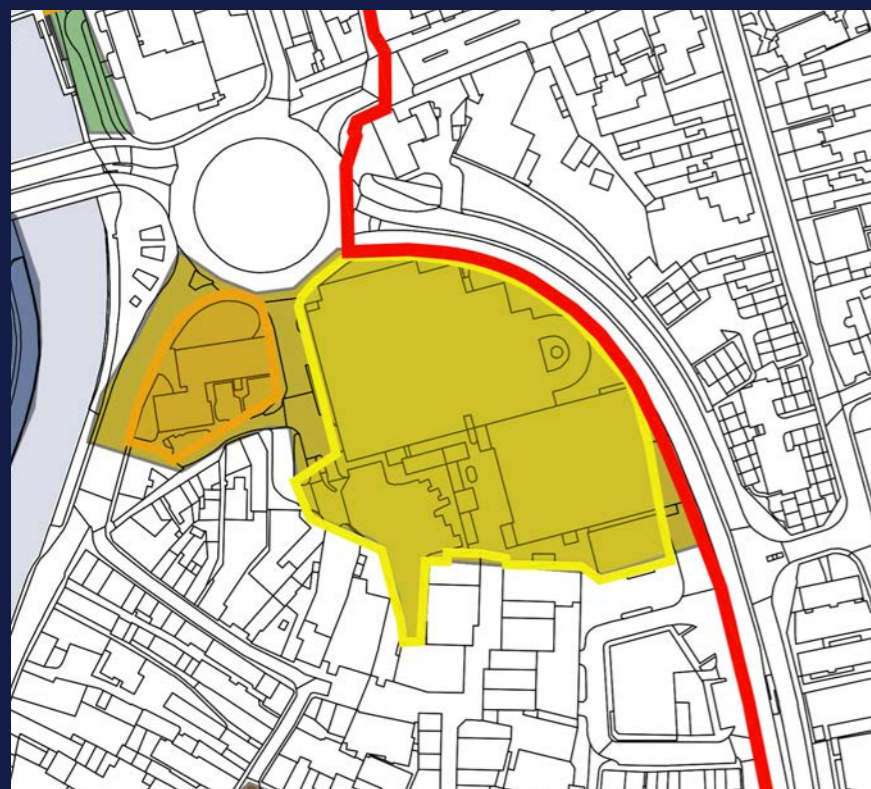
FOCUS AREA 6

NORTH GATEWAY

This section focuses on the current Job Centre site, located on the Freedom Roundabout to the north of the town centre. The masterplan exercise has identified it as a key gateway to the Town Centre, as such it is considered to have the potential for a Hotel location should the site ever become available.

It should be noted that it is not known that this site would become available or there are any plans to divest the use of the site now or in the future. Ownership boundaries, easements and covenants would need to be established but in terms of scale and massing the images look appropriate in our view for the prominence of the site.

Freedom Bridge Roundabout, Job Centre Site, Bus Station & Horsefair Shopping Centre



View of the roundabout and Job Centre site from Freedom Bridge

THE AREA

The site is located to the northern extent of the historic town centre, situated just outside of the conservation area boundary. To the east lies the Horsefair shopping centre and car park, and the bus station.

The opportunity site is on the Freedom Roundabout, where all key routes into and out of the town centre converge. Due to the prominent position, it is considered to form a key gateway to Wisbech town centre.

Whilst the site is currently occupied by the Job Centre, should it become vacant in the future the plot would be very well suited to a new hotel due to its excellent access to the waterfront, council offices and town centre.

A new hotel of 80 beds would be of significant benefit to the town, with potential to bring in excess of £1M to the local economy through visits to local shops, bars, restaurants. The hotel could also support a new coffee shop within the premises.

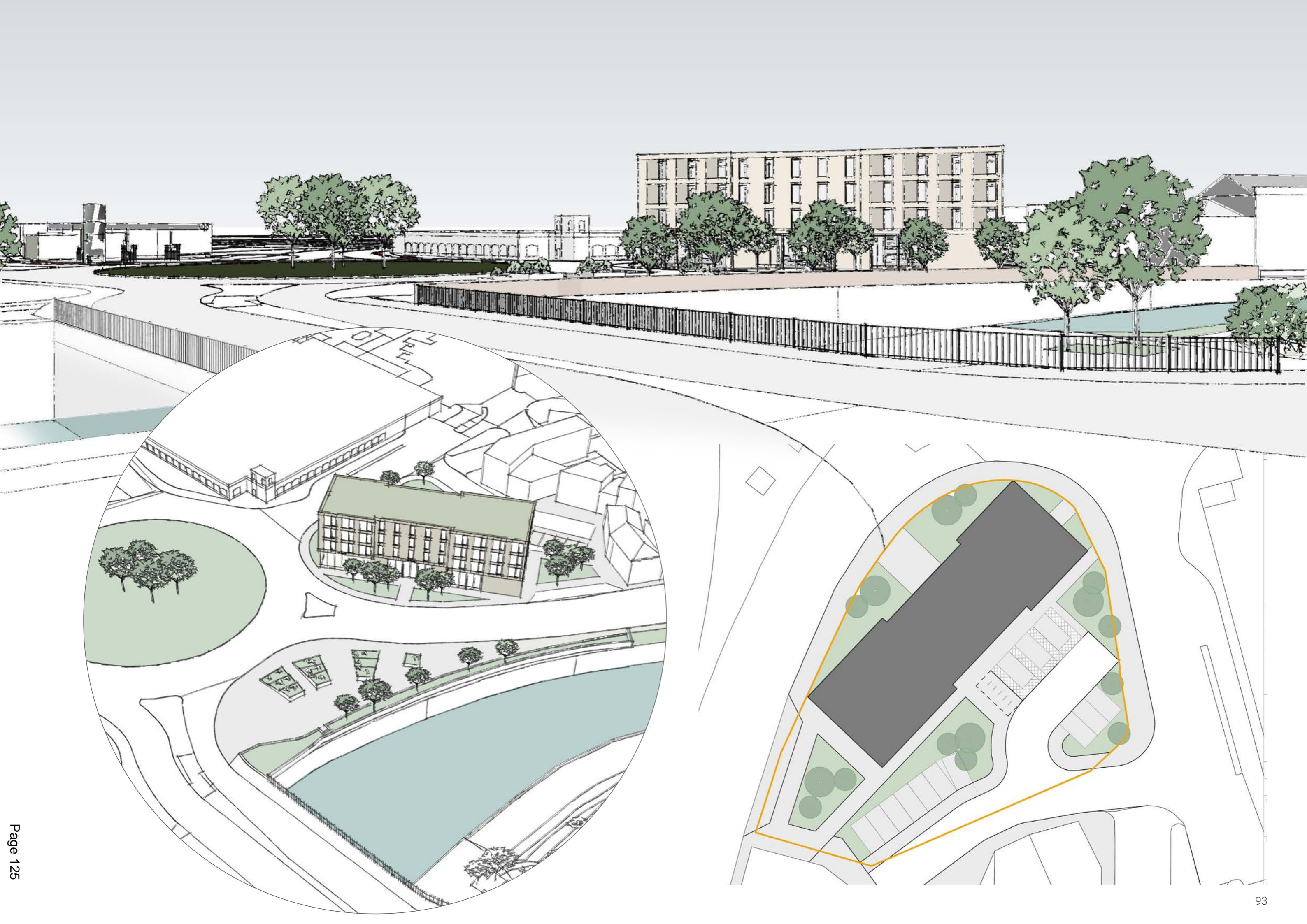
Access to the site would likely be via School Lane, an existing highway that provides access to the commercial units and houses behind the Job Centre. The lane could be improved by widening the road and footpath, surface improvements and street greening.

CORE OBJECTIVES

- **Creation of a high quality development on a key gateway to Wisbech town centre**
- **Establishing a new hotel of around 80 beds with a supporting coffee shop in the premises**
- **Potential to bring in excess of £1M to the local economy through visits to local shops, bars & restaurants**
- **Providing an improved link from the town centre to Nene Parade and the new development along the river**



View of the Job Centre site (Albion House)



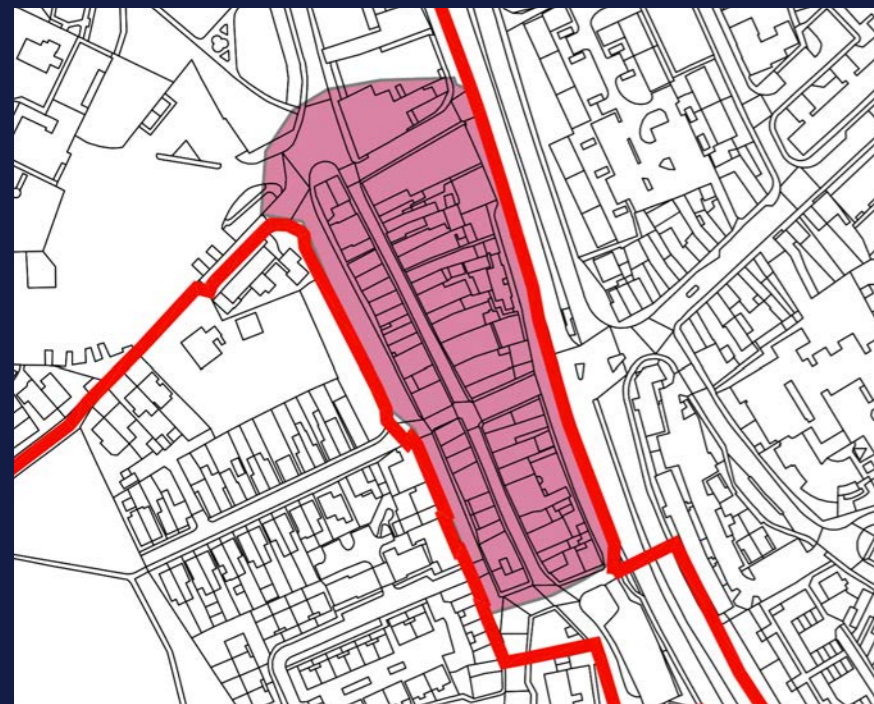
FOCUS AREA 7

SOUTH GATEWAY & NORFOLK STREET

Norfolk Street is a narrow street with shops, cafés and fast food outlets. It lies to the south edge of the town centre within easy access of the town centre life through the Church yard and Gardens and leading from Church Terrace and King's Walk.

This could be a street to celebrate community diversity and create another arts and culture opportunity – based on people and their culture, and not a museum / heritage-led culture offer as envisaged on the other side of the street.

Previous grant schemes have seen little uptake for shop front improvements and the like, however the character of the area could be enhanced by a scheme to reduce but not remove entirely parking and add appropriate greening.



Views of the entrance to Norfolk Street and the existing public realm/street frontages

THE AREA

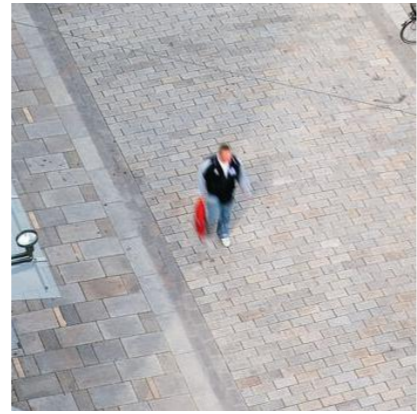
Norfolk Street lies to the south of the historic centre, extending from the church area towards the south. It is a busy area of the centre and has a unique character and appeal. In the evenings it is a busy street with revellers spilling out from the clubs and bars.

The area has real potential as a pedestrian environment connecting down towards Wisbech Campus, however at present vehicles dominate the street with long lines of parking down the east side. As the road is narrow, often these vans and large vehicles park on the pavement compromising the pedestrian space.

The proposals for this opportunity site therefore focus on public realm improvements, which are described in greater detail within Chapter 4 of this document. Future works could also include shop front enhancements to enliven the space with colour and light.

CORE OBJECTIVES

- **Creation of a vibrant quarter celebrating local people and cultures**
- **Establish a southern gateway connecting down towards the Wisbech Campus**
- **An improved pedestrian environment including an alternative vehicle access strategy**
- **Hard landscaping improvements such as shared surfaces and street greening**
- **New catenary lighting connecting building to building for an attractive 'lit ceiling' at night'**



Precedents for Norfolk Street public realm palette

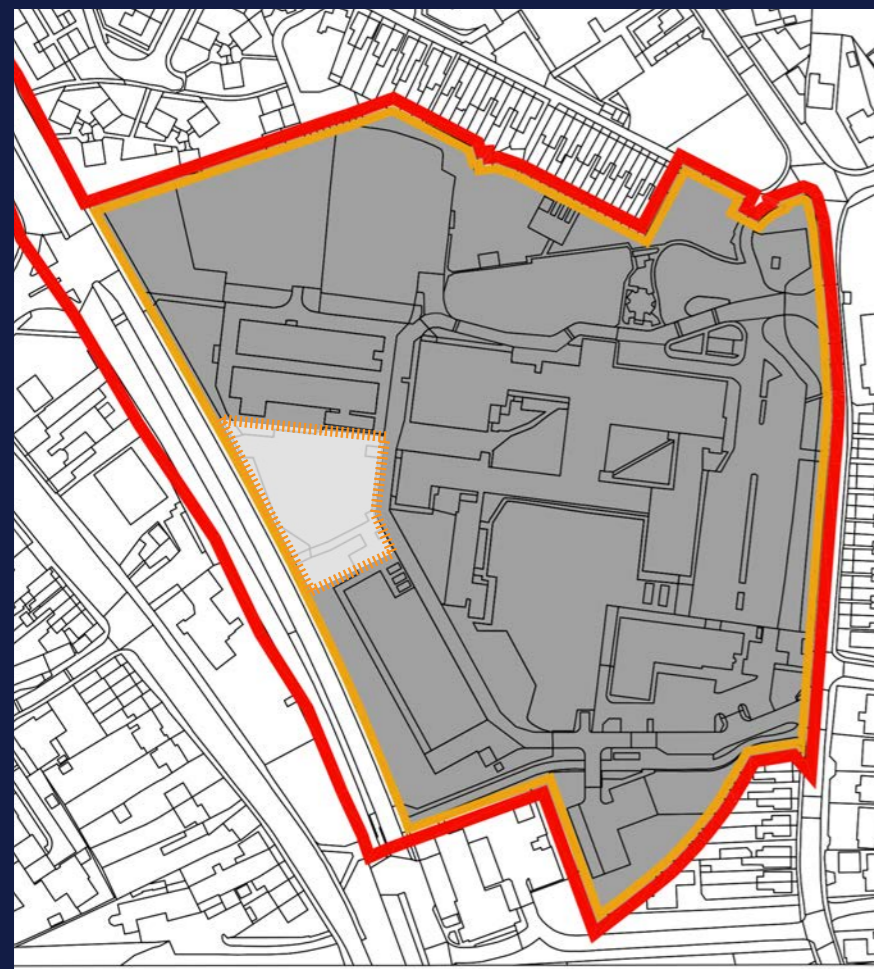
Concept sketch for Norfolk Street public realm - Harrison Stevens

FOCUS AREA 8

GREEN SKILLS CENTRE WISBECH CAMPUS

COLLEGE OF WEST ANGLIA

The new proposed Green Skills Centre will provide better facilities and new approaches to curriculum delivery within the Wisbech Campus. The centre will contain a new carpentry, painting and decorating department, new renewable energy teaching facility, rooftop learning spaces, and collaborative learning spaces. As part of the proposal, public realm improvements could be introduced including a new crossing point on Churchill Road, to better connect the campus with good pedestrian links to the town centre.



Views of the Green Skills Centre plot at the Wisbech Campus from Churchill Road

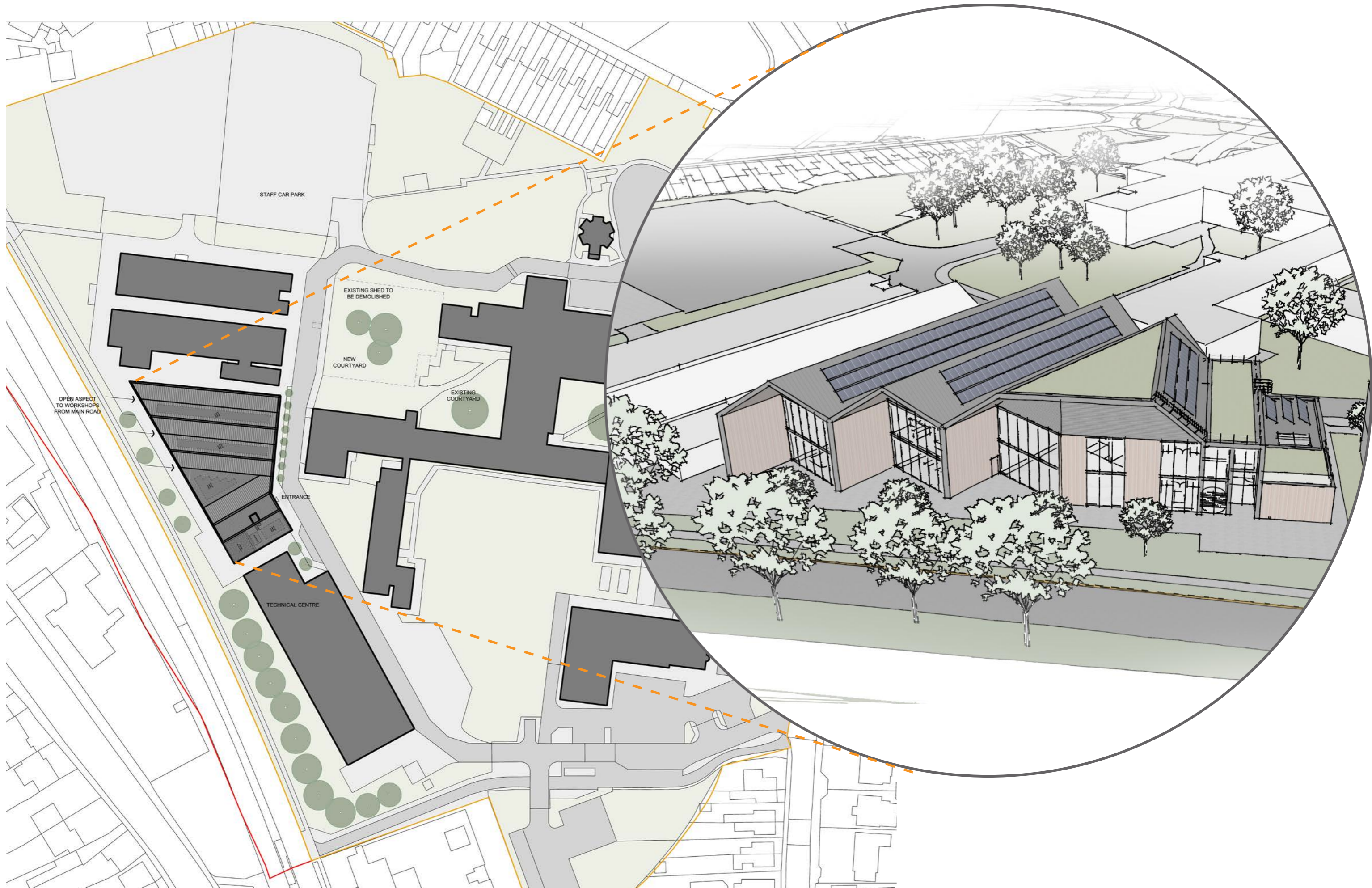
THE AREA

The Wisbech Campus is part of the College of West Anglia, offering a range of vocational courses and apprenticeships. Facilities include a Technology Centre with facilities for mechanical engineering, welding, motor vehicle, plumbing and paint & body; teaching centre with modern classrooms and social space; Bespoke Anglian Water Alliances training facilities and; The Salon, a hair and beauty facility offering treatments for men and women.

The college is currently reviewing its accommodation requirements and the masterplan offers the potential to accommodate replacement facilities in exciting and stimulating new buildings and better connect the college to the town centre. This would include a new Green Skills Centre to provide better facilities and new approaches to curriculum delivery within the Wisbech Campus. The development plot would be located to the north of the campus along Churchill Road.

CORE OBJECTIVES

- **A new Green Skills educational facility at the Wisbech Campus of the College of East Anglia**
- **Make excellent use an available plot that connects well to the buildings on the Campus**
- **Create an exciting high quality new development in a prominent location on Churchill Road**
- **Improve the connection between the Campus and the town centre**



Site plan of the Wisbech Campus and proposed Green Skills Centre

GROUND FLOOR LAYOUT

It is envisaged that the ground floor would provide the entrance and main teaching spaces for the Green Skills centre. The reception space would be located closest to the existing buildings and technology centre to integrate the new building with the main campus.

Class rooms could face on to the main route through the campus, with workshops to the west facing onto Churchill Road. It is envisaged that two of the workshops would be double height volumetric spaces, with an additional single storey workshop between.

The ground floor could also include social spaces and break out areas, facilities such as W.C.s, changing rooms and cleaning rooms, and a flexible exhibition / teaching space on the prominent corner adjacent to the reception.



FIRST FLOOR LAYOUT

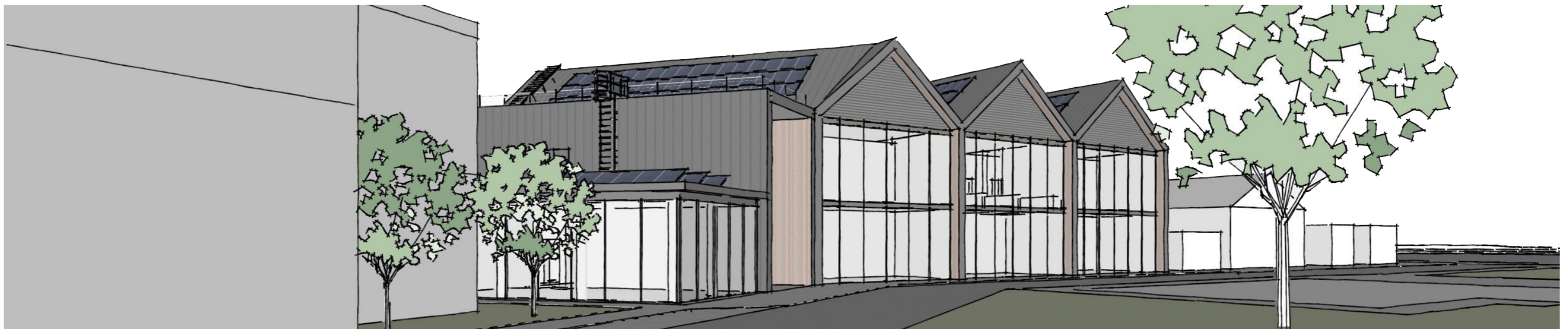
It is envisaged that the first floor would provide smaller teaching spaces and areas for private study. This could include renewables class rooms along with study spaces and work booths.

Less formal break out and social spaces, and supporting facilities could be located either side of the study areas, taking advantage of the views overlooking the volumetric workshop spaces.

This level would also provide access to rooftop learning spaces, including a living blue/green roof and solar panels to both the flat and pitched roofs.



Green Skills Centre - Proposed First Floor Plan



07

SUMMARY

MASTERPLAN SUMMARY

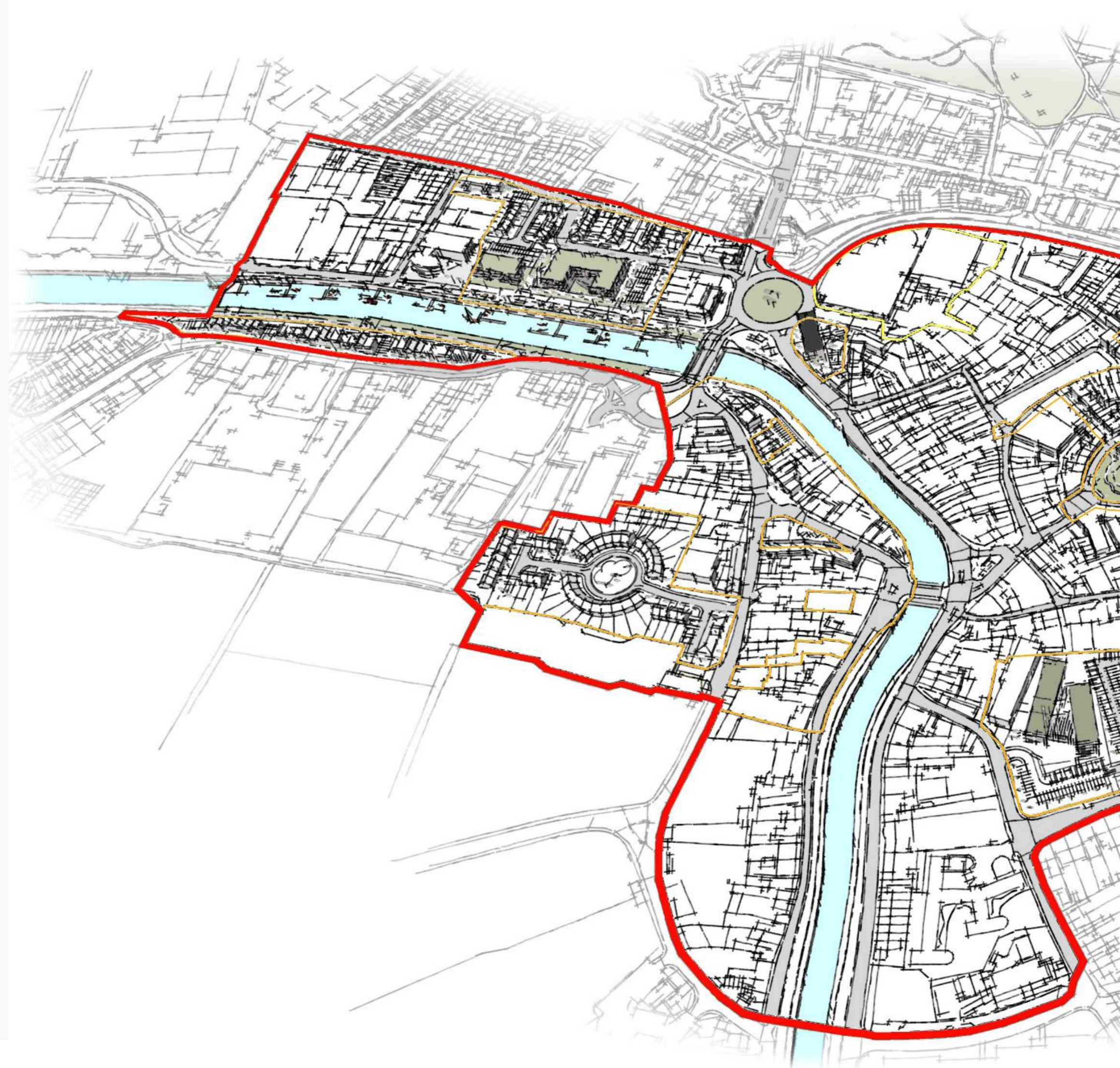
The proposed masterplan offers an exciting and unique opportunity for Wisbech to take control of its future, providing a long term vision for the town that responds to the needs of local people, building upon its core strengths to put the town on the map for investment and as a visitor destination.

The challenges the town faces such as health, education and employment, support for local businesses and meeting the need for housing growth, alongside environmental considerations are possible to overcome and we believe that the ambitious goals set out in this masterplan are all achievable.

The regeneration process will provide facilities to support the community in the coming years, creating job opportunities for local people and allow new and existing businesses to thrive - all key ingredients for a adaptable and resilient town of the future.

This document has been produced in conjunction with Wisbech Town Council and Fenland District Council to establish their aspirations for the town. As the timescale to conclude developments is likely to be longer term and stretch into the future, the masterplan should be revisited periodically to adapt and evolve in response to ongoing change in Wisbech.

Whilst the diagrams and proposals included within this document are illustrative to help establish design concepts and development principles for the masterplan area rather than final outcomes, they provide a strong road map for change and showcase the true potential that the town has to offer.





Contact

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Agenda Item 7

DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN – Updated 27 October 2022



(For any queries, please refer to the published forward plan)

CABINET

CABINET DATE	ITEMS	LEAD PORTFOLIO HOLDER
12 Dec 2022	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Draft Business Plan 2023/24 2. Draft Budget & Mid Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 3. Treasury Management Strategy Statement & Annual Investment Strategy Mid-Year Review 2022/23 4. 24 High Street, Wisbech - Update (TBC) 5. Whittlesey Neighbourhood Planning Referendum 6. Land Transfer – Wisbech 7. Land Transfer – Chatteris 8. Climate Change Update and Action Plan 9. Investment Board Update 10. Inward Investment from Central Government to support Gypsy & Traveller Site improvements (TBC) 11. Cabinet Draft Forward Plan 	<p>Cllr Boden Cllr Boden</p> <p>Cllr Boden</p> <p>Cllr Seaton / Cllr Hoy / Cllr Tierney Cllr Laws</p> <p>Cllr Benney Cllr Benney Cllr Tierney / Cllr Boden</p> <p>Cllr Tierney / Cllr Benney / Cllr Boden Cllr Hoy</p> <p>Cllr Boden</p>
30 Jan 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fees and Charges 2. 24 High Street, Wisbech - Update (TBC) 3. Allocation of DEFRA Grant for Air Quality Monitoring 4. Cabinet Draft Forward Plan 	<p>Cllr Boden Cllr Seaton / Cllr Hoy / Cllr Tierney Cllr Boden / Cllr Hoy Cllr Boden</p>
20 Feb 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Business Plan 2023/24 2. Budget & Mid Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 3. Investment Board Update 4. 24 High Street, Wisbech - Update (TBC) 	<p>Cllr Boden Cllr Boden Cllr Boden / Cllr Benney / Cllr Tierney Cllr Seaton / Cllr Hoy / Cllr Tierney</p>

CABINET DATE	ITEMS	LEAD PORTFOLIO HOLDER
	5. RECAP Partnership Waste Strategy Review 6. Cabinet Draft Forward Plan	Cllr Tierney / Cllr Murphy Cllr Boden
16 Mar 2023	1. Award of Gas Supply Contract 2. 24 High Street, Wisbech - Update (TBC) 3. Cabinet Draft Forward Plan	Cllr Benney Cllr Seaton / Cllr Hoy / Cllr Tierney Cllr Boden
17 Apr 2023 (Reserve date)	1. Cabinet Draft Forward Plan	Cllr Boden
TBC May 2023	1. Cabinet Draft Forward Plan	Cllr Boden
TBC Jun 2023	1. Cabinet Draft Forward Plan	Cllr Boden

TBC = To be confirmed

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

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