

The cover features a solid tan background with a series of vertical stripes on the left side. These include a wide tan stripe, followed by a thin light tan stripe, a thin blue stripe, and a thin red stripe. Two horizontal tan bars are positioned on the left, one above and one below the main title area.

REVIEW OF 2012 WARMINSTER TOWN PLAN FEBRUARY 2022

PRODUCED BY
PLACE STUDIO
FOR WARMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

Scope and Structure

The Warminster Town Plan 2012¹ ('Town Centre Plan' or 'Plan') is a thorough, detailed and well-produced document setting out high level, fine grained and site-specific guidance and direction for the future of the town centre. Its main issue is age and the changed circumstances that now require its review. To a large extent it is considered that the Plan's structure and content make a solid basis for refinement and updating.

The Plan's production was informed by a reported process of stakeholder and community engagement and analysis. The process is considered to be a good basis for shaping the process for continuing the Plan's review process, building upon the desktop review of this report.

The performance of the Plan in delivering its objectives should be assessed to learn where and how objectives have been achieved or are still relevant or where the Plan has been ineffective.

Engagement is therefore strongly recommended as a next step to update key local issues and priorities for the future direction of the town centre.

Status

The Plan is a separate document from the Neighbourhood Plan. It covers matters wider than just town planning and, whilst focusing on the town centre, addresses matters

beyond the town centre that are influential to it. This is sensible and is common to other similar town centre strategies. However, it did not achieve its intended SPD status and therefore does not achieve its potential weight in the planning process.

This can be addressed through the review. Achieving an optimal relationship with the Neighbourhood Plan is considered the best pathway. This can include revisiting how overarching objectives can be soundly and robustly expressed within the updated Neighbourhood Plan.

Context

Much of the baseline material is potentially still relevant for the coming years. However significant changes in strategic priorities including climate change and COVID-19 recovery now may result in re-prioritisation of objectives. Local feedback and performance review will also inform the new local context for the town centre.

In particular, revised national planning legislation and policy has altered how the Plan may direct and influence town centre place making and land use. But the potential parallel review of the Wiltshire Local Plan, Warminster Neighbourhood Plan and the Town Centre Plan create an opportunity to shape a much better integrated strategic and local planning policy framework supporting the delivery of town centre specific objectives and earmarking infrastructure

¹<https://www.warminster-tc.gov.uk/documents/Warminster%20Town%20Masterplan.pdf>

projects for potential Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding.

Vision and Objectives

Whilst changed strategic context will have an influence, only local issues and aspirations can shape refreshed town centre vision and objectives. It is recognised that the current Plan does reflect previous feedback, but this now needs to be refreshed to underpin any updating of the vision and objectives.

Opportunities

New circumstances can create new opportunities as well as challenges. The decline of high street retailing and COVID-19 have impacted heavily on high street economies, and changes to planning legislation may have removed previous planning controls. However, town centres now have an opportunity to re-establish their traditional roles of local community hubs at the centre of a sustainable community, maximising low carbon and active transport and re-mixing retail with community services, leisure, employment and housing uses. Working with the Neighbourhood Plan, the reviewed Town Centre Plan has the opportunity to shape this new future for Warminster.

Town centre vitality is strongly related to local distinctiveness and the attractiveness

of the town. Warminster has an exceptional historic and beautiful town centre. The strong and detailed place shaping approach adopted in the current Plan should be carried forward to optimise the value of the town centre's environment. This may be bolstered by integration of advances in making the historic environment more sustainable and resilient to climate change.

STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

PART 1 *Approach and Background*

PART 2 *Status, Context & Scope*

PART 3 *Vision and Objectives: How has the Plan delivered?*

PART 4 *Opportunities: What new opportunities might there be to help enable future delivery?*

PART 5 *Next Steps: what should happen next in the review of the Warminster Town Centre Plan?*

1 REVIEW OF 2012 WARMINSTER TOWN PLAN

APPROACH AND BACKGROUND

Place Studio was appointed by Warminster Town Council Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group in September 2021 to assist it with the first stage of a review of the town's existing Neighbourhood Plan. Place Studio was also asked to undertake a parallel short review of the Warminster Town Centre Plan (2012).

The objective of both reviews was to inform the priorities and scope for a potential full review and updating of both the Neighbourhood Plan and the Town Centre Plan. This document focuses on the swift review of the Town Centre Plan.

Background

In the decade since the Town Centre Plan was produced there have been significant changes to policy that create a new landscape upon which the Town Centre Plan should now build its updated strategy. The cumulative effect of the ongoing growth in online shopping and COVID-19 has severely impacted the economic health of town centres and potentially accelerated permanent changes to how they are used.

Impacts have been felt most acutely in city centres and shopping centres, but particularly historic town centres are in a better position to harness their distinct character and reconnect with communities.

The recognition of the need to respond to climate change has become an international priority. This is now embedded in national and county policy and strategy. Warminster

town centre has an opportunity to be at the heart of a highly sustainable "20 minute neighbourhood". Working with Neighbourhood Plan, the Town Centre Plan can refresh and extend its strategy to encourage and enable this.

Challenges have accelerated innovative approaches to town centre vitality and new Government support and funding aimed at revitalising high streets. This review will highlight some opportunities that may now be available to help Warminster town centre build a sustainable future.

Review Scope and Approach

This initial review is restricted to a desktop review of the existing Town Centre Plan document, its evidence, vision and objectives and its production processes. This stage is not informed by engagement with stakeholders or members of the community, which should form part of the next steps in any further review of the Plan.

The Town Centre Plan review is being undertaken alongside the Stage 1 review of the Warminster Neighbourhood Plan (WNP). Both the WNP and Town Centre Plan review follow similar and proven approach and method that provides a robust basis upon which to develop a scope and brief for a refreshed plan. This will help ensure that, where there is need and benefit to undertake stakeholder and community engagement, this might be efficiently coordinated to inform both WNP and Town Centre Plan priorities.

Town Centre Plan Status and Links with the Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan already contains a chapter and town centre policy. Although this is less than was intended, it does provide a solid basis upon which to enhance the policy support provided by the revised WNP and to identify key town centre projects.

It was a stated intention for Wiltshire Council to adopt the Town Centre Plan as Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to the Wiltshire Core Strategy. It is not believed this happened. The existing Town Centre Plan is also not formally related to the Neighbourhood Plan, although the WNP chapter 7 does reference it.

It may be feasible to refresh the Plan and seek adoption as SPD to the new Wiltshire Local Plan. However, as a locally distinct document, establishing it as guidance or an appendix to an updated and re-made Neighbourhood Plan would now seem more appropriate and effective. It would then achieve greater weight and importance in planning processes.

The Town Centre Plan's status and the progression of an update needs to be a distinct project. But because of its direct relationship with WNP policy, its review could valuably be undertaken simultaneously, potentially led by the WNP Steering Group. The decision to go ahead, resources, the brief and governance will need to be agreed within the Town Council.

Wider Contextual Issues

The Town Centre Plan sets out nine areas of contextual analysis to underpin the drafting of a baseline report. Evidence gathered to inform the baseline report combined professional technical analysis and a programme of engagement. A separate "Baseline Report" was produced in 2009 containing the results of such analysis.

Contextual analysis focused on nine key themes:

- *Strategic context;*
- *Historic context;*
- *Urban character;*
- *Planning context;*
- *Transport context;*
- *Social infrastructure;*
- *Opportunity sites;*
- *Sustainability;*
- *Consultation.*

Strategic Context

The strategic context section of the current Town Centre Plan will require review of its facts and figures to bring it up to date. Analysis undertaken to update the Wiltshire Local Plan and Warminster Neighbourhood Plan may be a valuable resource to do this swiftly.

Since publication of the Town Centre Plan, there has been significant national research and strategy publications relevant to town centres including approaches to rebuilding a more diverse and sustainable economy after COVID-19, reducing and managing climate change and sustainable and active travel. Part 4 of this review illustrates some of these that could assist in the shaping and delivery of the next years of the town centre's future vitality.

Historic Context and Urban Character

The historic and urban character of the town is analysed and recorded within the Town Centre Plan, it is unlikely this has substantially changed. However, the passage of time, economic changes and the effect of Town Centre Plan objectives will have influenced a decade of Warminster town centre's character. It is recommended that updating of these parts of the Context section be informed by local input.

It is now widely recognised that the attractiveness of historic town centres makes them the most likely to build a new and

sustainable mixed-use economy. Warminster has one of the most historic and beautiful town centres in Wiltshire.

The existing Plan sets out objectives and opportunities for connecting and enhancing the quality of the town centre's environmental and heritage assets. Looking ahead, prioritising the protection, enhancement, promotion and celebration of Warminster's outstanding heritage and environment may be at the forefront of achieving a strong and distinct economic and cultural future.

Linked trips to shop, work, keep fit, eat and drink and have fun are now recognised as vital to optimising footfall and vitality. Promoting land use mixes and regeneration objectives through refreshing those in the Plan will be important. It will also be important to harness and connect to Warminster town centre's lake and pleasure grounds, open spaces and connecting green and blue infrastructure. Refreshed and updated projects may be linked to local infrastructure priorities to benefit from CIL and "oven ready" funding proposals.

Planning Context

Since publication of the Town Centre Plan there have been significant changes to town planning national legislation and policy guidance as well as emerging changes to Wiltshire Council's strategic policy framework.

Legislation

Use Classes Order

The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987² puts uses of land and buildings into various categories known as 'Use Classes'. Change of use can occur within the same use class without the need for planning permission.

Use Class E

In September 2020, the Government introduced a simplified use class order. This included a new Class E. This replaces and amalgamates former use classes of A1 (shops), A2 (financial and professional), A3 (restaurants and cafes) as well as parts of D1 (non-residential institutions) and D2 (assembly and leisure) and puts them all into one new use class. Change of use can occur within this class without planning permission.

Class MA took effect from 1st August 2021. It is a powerful new change of use to go from Use Class E to Residential. Whilst there are criteria that limit the application of Class MA, it uses the "prior approval" process,

which applies a much reduced planning assessment than planning applications³.

These measures are intended to enable town centres to be more responsive to a changing market by removing planning risk and cost. However, they also significantly reduce the ability of planning and plans to protect town centre uses and manage changes.

National Planning Policy

Chapter 6 Paragraph 86 of the National Planning Policy Framework, July 2021 (NPPF⁴) sets out the Government's updated advice to planning authorities for planning for town centres. It states:

"Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation."

Together with Wiltshire Local Plan and Warminster Neighbourhood Plan town centre policies, continuing updating the Warminster Town Centre Plan is consistent with this.

²<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1987/764/contents/made>

³<https://www.planninggeek.co.uk/gpdo/changes-of-use/class-ma/>

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005759/NPPF_July_2021.pdf

NPPF Para 86 reflects a need for current policy to facilitate a more diverse mix of uses away from retail dominance and

incorporating residential uses. It states that planning policies and decisions should:

NPPF Paragraph 86:

- a. promote (town centres') long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters;
- b.make clear the range of uses permitted in such locations, as part of a positive strategy for the future of each centre;
- c. retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate ,re-introduce or create new ones;
- d. allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres looking at least ten years ahead.....
- e. where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available for main town centre uses, allocate appropriate edge of centre sites
- f. recognise that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and encourage residential development on appropriate sites.

The updated Town Centre Plan should recognise the opportunities and changes of control introduced by the Use Class Order. The NPPF introduces opportunity for the strategy to give direction on land use patterns and where residential would be supported. It may also inform how the WNP might allocate town centre land or where a Neighbourhood Development Order might be progressed to stimulate desired investments.

National Planning Policy Guidance provides further information about the matters that the Government consider a town centre strategy should address. These can help inform the robust review of the Warminster Town Centre Plan.

National Planning Guidance: What can a town centre strategy contain?

National Planning Practice Guidance⁵ sets out what the Government considers a town centre strategy should address. It states:

“Any strategy should be based on evidence of the current state of town centres and the opportunities that exist to accommodate a range of suitable development and support their vitality and viability. Strategies can be used to establish:

- the realistic role, function and hierarchy of town centres over the plan period. Given the uncertainty in forecasting long-term retail trends and consumer behaviour, this assessment may need to focus on a limited period (such as the next five years) but will also need to take the lifetime of the plan into account and be regularly reviewed.
- the vision for the future of each town centre, including the most appropriate mix of uses to enhance overall vitality and viability.
- the ability of the town centre to accommodate the scale of assessed need for main town centre uses, and associated need for expansion, consolidation, restructuring or to enable new development or the redevelopment of under-utilised space. It can involve evaluating different policy options (for example expanding the market share of a particular centre) or the implications of wider policy such as infrastructure delivery and demographic or economic change.
- how existing land can be used more effectively – for example the scope to group particular uses such as retail, restaurant and leisure activities into hubs or for converting airspace above shops.
- opportunities for improvements to the accessibility and wider quality of town centre locations, including improvements to transport links in and around town centres and enhancement of the public realm (including spaces such as public squares, parks and gardens).
- what complementary strategies are necessary or appropriate to enhance the town centre and help deliver the vision for its future, and how these can be planned and delivered. For example, this may include consideration of how parking charges and enforcement can be made proportionate.
- the role that different stakeholders can play in delivering the vision. If appropriate, it can help establish the level of cross-boundary/strategic working or information sharing required between both public and private sector groups.
- appropriate policies to address environmental issues facing town centres, including opportunities to conserve and enhance the historic environment.”

⁵<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-the-vitality-of-town-centres>, Paragraph: 004 Reference ID: 2b-004-20190722

Wiltshire Core Strategy

The Core Strategy 2015-26⁶ is being replaced with a new Local Plan. Whilst it is not considered up to date, until the new Local Plan is adopted, the Core Strategy remains the development plan for Wiltshire. Strategic Core Policy 1 (Settlement Strategy) classifies Warminster as a Market Town.

Wiltshire Emerging Draft Local Plan

The Local Plan is currently in preparation. Spatial options for Warminster have been published for consultation. The next stage of consultation on a draft plan (Regulation 19) is delayed until later in 2022. Adoption may not be until 2024.

The Warminster West Urban Extension remains the most significant developable commitment at the town. The urban extension is to deliver approximately 900 homes prior to 2026. A remainder of approximately 650 additional homes is to be delivered up to 2036. It currently leaves a further 60 homes to be accommodated up until 2036. However, this figure is not a ceiling and the target is subject to change.

Warminster Neighbourhood Plan is encouraged to allocate sites for development. Allocation of brownfield land and sites within the town centre could be a priority for the review of the Warminster Neighbourhood Plan. The updated Town Centre Plan may inform the approach to town centre sites, taking forward those sites

previously identified, but with potentially reviewed outputs.

Wiltshire Council's emerging Local Plan document "Planning for Warminster"⁷ identifies the below place shaping principles that should inform the development strategy for the town and influence choices for sustainable development that can best achieve its distinct principles:

1. Deliver well designed homes to meet local needs alongside associated transport infrastructure.
2. Promote sustainable transport modes through an integrated transport network.
3. Strengthen the role of the town centre by encouraging spending; improving accessibility; better managing traffic and parking; and safeguarding heritage assets.
4. Redevelop Warminster central car park and explore the potential for an expansion of the GP surgery on to the site.
5. Manage, and where possible, reduce flood risk.
6. Improve leisure facilities in line with the Wiltshire Council Leisure Services Review.

Nearly all of the draft priorities are reliant on the town centre and, in the case of 2, 3, 4 and 6, directly relate to maintaining development priorities already identified and guided in the existing Town Centre Plan.

⁶ <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/media/372/Wiltshire-Core-Strategy-adopted-2015/pdf/Wcs.pdf?m=637099399373530000>

⁷ https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/media/5663/Planning-for-Warminster/pdf/WLP_Market_Town_Planning_for_Warminster_FINAL_19-01-2021_.pdf?m=637466662709430000 , p5.

Warminster Neighbourhood Plan

The accompanying emerging Local Plan document “Site Selection Report for Warminster”⁸ reviews the sustainability of Wiltshire Council’s Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) sites promoted by landowners for potential development. It identifies the Town Centre as a priority for improvement, but also notes potential heritage impacts on the town centre conservation area as a key consideration for any development.

It does not currently promote any brownfield land within the town centre as a local plan allocation. This does not prevent the Neighbourhood Plan from doing so.

The Local Plan review evidence base can provide updated strategic context for refreshing high level facts and figures within the Town Centre Plan Context section, including updating retail, employment and housing needs. However, these should be bolstered with local evidence that may be coordinated with supporting the reviewed Neighbourhood Plan. This may be obtained through a combination of local survey work and technical support packages provided by Locality to support the Neighbourhood Plan.

Warminster Neighbourhood Plan was formally ‘made’ in 2016. Chapter 7 of the Neighbourhood Plan addresses Warminster Town Centre.

The WNP is currently being reviewed and potentially then being refreshed or “re-made” to provide local planning policies and project priorities until 2038. This provides a strong local management and delivery policy framework to which the updated Town Centre Plan can inform and be “hooked”, if it is not to be SPD to the Wiltshire Core Strategy/Local Plan.

The existing Neighbourhood Plan reflects the Town Centre Plan objectives and contains a core town centre regeneration policy and overarching public realm and movement community project objective. It is appreciated that submission plan policies TC 2-6 more closely reflected Town Centre Plan policy objectives, but these were omitted as a result of the examiner’s report. These deleted policies largely related to delivery of highway, public realm and economy projects and were not deliverable through the planning process.

The review of the Town Centre Plan and Neighbourhood Plan may reconsider how area-specific and public realm and highway objectives may be more successfully connected. This may be achieved in principle through establishing a direct link between the Town Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan.

⁸ https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/media/5665/Site-Selection-Warminster/pdf/WLP_Market_Town_Site_Selection_report_for_Warminster_19-01-2021_.pdf?m=637466571069370000

Review of Warminster Town Centre Plan Policy

The Town Centre Plan is currently a guidance document. A guidance document should be linked to, and illustrate where and how, development plan policy should be implemented. The existing Plan is a material consideration in the planning process and it also sets out a very clear and specific agenda for projects and capital investment within the town centre. However, it does not have the full weight of development plan policy and “policies” within it will not have their strength.

The parallel review of both the Neighbourhood Plan and the Town Centre Plan presents an opportunity to find the right “home” for strategy, guidance, delivery actions and town centre policies. In principle, policies should firstly be considered to be within the Neighbourhood Plan. Strategy that cannot be delivered through town planning policy may also be identified in the Neighbourhood Plan as infrastructure projects and enhancement actions. The Town Centre Plan may then provide the detail of evidence and required outcomes and delivery planning.

Town Centre Plan Policies:

Policy WTC1:

“New retail development will be directed towards the central core of Warminster town centre. New retail development outside of the core area should complement the character of the distinct retail character areas as illustrated.

Improvements to the quality of linkages between the town centre and outlying retail areas will be encouraged, both through improvements to the public realm and through the integration of active frontage between the areas.

The shopping strategy is set out in the adjacent plan.”

WTC1 reflects national and Wiltshire retail policy concerning the definition, role and protection and connection of town centre uses. It is recommended that a review considers relocation of any similar policy to the Neighbourhood Plan.

Policy WTC2:

New hotel and leisure/cultural facilities and enhancements to existing cultural and tourism facilities will be encouraged in the centre of the town to enhance Warminster's tourism potential, particularly new restaurants and cafés.

The promotion of Warminster as a tourist destination and its proximity to Longleat, Stourhead, Center Parcs and Stonehenge will be encouraged.

WTC2 protects and promotes the town centre's visitor economy and seeks to make connections with surrounding attractions and connect the town. The protection, promotion and potential allocation of visitor and tourism related land uses can be a planning policy. A review of the Neighbourhood Plan and Town Centre Plan can consider transferring this into the Neighbourhood Plan.

However, promotion of economic links with surrounding attractions beyond the Neighbourhood Plan Area boundary is outside of its planning authority and power to deliver. Such objectives may be referenced in the Neighbourhood Plan, but may best be linked to economic projects within the Town Centre Plan.

Policy WTC3:

New office and light industrial uses will be supported within existing employment areas and improvements to the environment at Woodcock Industrial Estate will be sought in association with any proposals in this area.

New office space within mixed use development within the town centre will be supported where appropriate.

WTC3 covers employment uses. Its scope reaches beyond the town centre. Employment land use policy would be best placed in the Neighbourhood Plan. However, the Town Centre Plan may provide greater detail on what, where and how employment land uses should be delivered in the town centre to be considered appropriate.

Policy WTC4:

Links with the army garrison will be enhanced and opportunities for new industry to locate in the Warminster area to serve the garrison's specialist needs will be maximised.

WTC4 relates to wider Warminster and economic links with the army. It may be woven into a Neighbourhood Plan policy, but is beyond the Town Centre remit. How this relates to the town centre development and culture should be specified.

Policy WTC5:

The following improvements to public transport in Warminster will be sought as part of any planning application:

- improvement of bus facilities through the development of a new bus interchange off Station Road;*
- improvements to the frequency and efficiency of buses (particularly evening services); and*
- improvements to the links between the bus services and the train station.*

WTC5 relates to specific public transport enhancements. The Town Centre Plan and Neighbourhood Plan can promote improvements to public transport, where this relates to delivery of sustainable development including at the town centre. Specific public transport provision may have altered in the time since the Town Centre Plan was written, requiring more detailed local analysis prior to consideration of how the issue is addressed.

Policy WTC6:

A coordinated approach to the management of town centre parking will be undertaken. The release of part of or some of the town centre car park sites for development will be considered where the overall level of town centre parking can be maintained and the development will not compromise wider Town Plan and parking objectives. A coordinated long-term approach to the management of traffic within the town and its hinterland will be taken.

WTC6 relates to the management of parking and traffic. It is not material for a Neighbourhood Plan policy and, subject to review, should remain as transport objectives in the Town Centre Plan. However, the Neighbourhood Plan may contain policies to protect parking or prioritise how it is used and promotion of sustainable transport, accessibility and public realm quality within the town centre.

Policy WTC7:

Improvements to poor quality buildings and particularly shop fronts will be encouraged and opportunities sought to secure grant aid for schemes which are appropriate to the historic context.

WTC7 may be supported by town centre shopfront policy (and guidance) promoting good design and setting out criteria for new proposals. However, grant funded schemes etc. would be best addressed within the Town Centre Plan.

Policy WTC8:

The re-use of vacant units for local arts, community or business uses in the short term will be promoted and encouraged to ensure Warminster continues to be a vibrant town centre.

WTC8 may be promoted by an NDP policy to promote use of upper floors with amenity and quality criteria. This may also seek to direct particular uses and amounts of residential. This would require robust evidence, which may be through the Town Centre Plan.

Policy WTC9:

Opportunities will be sought to extend the high quality public realm treatment in the town centre to other areas using an agreed palette of materials. Implementation will be through the use of Section 106 funding from developments and through grant aid.

WTC9 is a project objective. It may be reflected as a Neighbourhood Plan project, but would best be located within the Town Centre Plan, where it remains an objective.

Policy WTC10:

New evening, leisure and community uses will be supported in the town centre as part of mixed use development and in suitable town centre locations as a campus hub. In particular provision for new youth and sports facilities will be encouraged, and the sharing of existing army garrison and other organisations' sports and leisure facilities will be explored where possible.

WTC10 may be supported through an allocation or town centre community facilities policy. But the delivery route and scheme details may be within the Town Centre Plan, if still needed.

Socio Economic Context

The Town Centre Plan provided a socio-economic statistical background to inform priorities for the town centre's economic and community development. This background will now need refreshing alongside review of the town centre's changed land use patterns and character after a decade of the Town Centre Plan's existence and delivery.

Changes in retailing, the impact of the pandemic, changes to planning legislation and developments in town centre "community hub" concepts present a challenge and opportunity to refine or even transform the socio-economic purpose and profile of the future of Warminster town centre for the future. This may include significantly more homes, especially for people with needs for accessible, supported living or starter homes. It may also present an opportunity to centralise community services where these are poorly located within Warminster. Wiltshire Council has identified the ongoing significance of town centre leisure which may include commercial as well as community facilities.

Transport Context

The strategic transport framework for Warminster has been updated by the Wiltshire Local Transport Plan (2011-26)⁹.

Wiltshire Council Local Plan Transport Review¹⁰ (Atkins 2021) provides transport planning support for the review process,

using Wiltshire's strategic transport model. This includes:

- Review of the Wiltshire strategic model to ensure that it accurately reflects existing (2018) traffic conditions on the road network;
- Development of forecast scenarios to reflect future development and planned transport improvement schemes;
- Analysis of the impacts of prospective Local Plan growth on the road network;
- Initial assessment of the scope to improve active travel and public transport to enhance travel choices; and
- Development of options for mitigation of the impacts on the road network.

These, and any subsequent documents, will support updating of the strategic picture for Warminster. However, review of local circumstances is not covered within the above documents.

The Town Centre Plan identified a lack of evidence relating to traffic flows and congestion and recommended that "...a full Traffic Assessment of the town" should be undertaken to inform and provide confidence in promoting and delivering "...any major long-term redevelopment of the town centre.". It is unclear whether such an assessment was subsequently undertaken.

Encouraging and enabling increased walking and cycling is a central theme within the Town Centre Plan and approaches to

⁹<https://pages.wiltshire.gov.uk/swcs-add-evidence-3-local-transport-plan.pdf>

¹⁰https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/media/5725/Wiltshire-Local-Plan-Transport-Review/pdf/Wiltshire_Local_Plan_Transport_Review.pdf?m=637460675515330000

specific areas and streets. This remains a key plank of sustainable place making. Its scope must include creating attractive connections to neighbourhoods and places of work beyond the boundary of the town centre. It is anticipated the Neighbourhood Plan review may be able to provide direction across the town, with the Town Centre Plan focussing on connectivity and accessibility within the town centre in greater detail. This may include improving the accessibility evidence base to improve inclusion and respond to ongoing changes in local demography to make the town centre accessible for older and disabled people.

Whilst ultra-low emission vehicles were in development a decade ago, they were not considered sufficiently significant to warrant specific provision. These vehicles now include cars, buses, delivery vehicles, e-bikes and scooters. The reviewed Town Centre Plan has an opportunity to set objectives and projects to optimise their use for town centre visits and servicing and to future proof the town centre. Objectives and policies may be supported by Neighbourhood Plan policy.

The recent concept of Sustainable Transport Hubs brings together all elements of sustainable local transport provision to a single building. This can integrate bus services with e-bike, scooter and car hire, cycle parking, mobility solutions and local transport information, together with a café and showers for commuters. Such a concept may form a development of pre-existing

objectives for the Central Car Park, bus station and leisure facilities.

Sustainability Context

The Town Centre Plan reflected the national and Wiltshire Core Strategy significance given to reducing the impacts of climate change through building a sustainable development, transport and the economy.

The issue has become more significant since the Town Centre Plan was published. Wiltshire Council has declared a climate emergency. It has also committed to a target of achieving a carbon neutral council and county by 2030, as a contribution to national and international accords and commitments. It has published the Wiltshire draft Climate Strategy 2022-2027¹¹, to inform and guide how this target can be achieved.

Planning and transport measures, as discussed above, will contribute to carbon reduction across Warminster. This will wash over and focus on the town centre.

These should remain as key planks upon which to build a refreshed Plan. This might be considered more as a “golden thread” running through the plan and challenging each town centre objective.

Changes to town centre shopping has also increased the importance of social inclusion,

¹¹ <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/media/7020/Wiltshire-Council-Draft-Climate-Strategy-September-2021/pdf/Wiltshire-Council-Draft-Climate-Strategy-Sept21.pdf?m=637655080289230000>

which is recognised as central to creating a sustainable welcoming town centre “community hub”.

Harnessing new thinking in the rejuvenation of high streets and making their uses more low-carbon, the review of the Town Centre Plan may wish to explore new economic objectives and projects. These may relate to encouraging walking and cycling and ultra-low carbon vehicles, exploiting changes to the use class order to support pop-up businesses and exhibitions and supporting business innovation and energy saving.

The high number of listed buildings within and the conservation area status of most of the town centre brings a particular challenge to improving building climate change resilience and energy performance. But the extraordinary character and beauty of Warminster town centre’s heritage can be the foundation for its future, helping to make shorter journeys to visit the local high street a first choice.

Historic England¹² is responsible for advising on how best to address climate change within the ongoing stewardship of the historic built environment.

Baseline Consultation

The Town Centre Plan evidence base was informed by a programme of “front loaded” stakeholder and community engagement from 2009. This produced a set of key community issues and aspirations which are listed overleaf. Together with drivers identified through other evidence gathering, it is evident that these are reflected in the key objectives and projects within the current Town Centre Plan. However, it is also evident that the Town Centre Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan must coordinate to provide an integrated approach to town wide and town centre development. This will also be the case of any other non-planning related initiatives such as a Warminster local transport strategy.

¹² <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/statements/statement-on-climate-change-and-sustainability/>

Key Community Issues included in the Warminster Town Plan 2021

Shopping and Facilities

- Warminster needs an improved range of shops in the town centre and to support independent shops.
- Residents would like an improved range of family friendly cafés and restaurants in the town centre.
- The town needs more youth facilities and better leisure provision such as cinema, bowling alley and climbing wall.
- The library and hospital are well used and valued community assets which should be retained.
- There is a desire for a new supermarket in the town centre - subsequently a new Waitrose supermarket, A1 and A3 units have been approved and constructed at the old Dents site, which have addressed this concern.

Transport and Connectivity

- There is a need to better integrate the army garrison with the town - this relates to the need for improved physical connections such as walking and bus routes; a greater sense of social interaction; and maximising the opportunities for local people to share the garrison's facilities.
- Current levels of parking provision should be retained, and be free of charge.
- Traffic congestion can be a problem in the town centre. This particularly relates to the cross-town movements at peak times which affects Market Place and
- the streets leading into it but also has a knock-on impact on Copheap Lane as people seek alternative routes around congested areas.
- There is also potential for more traffic calming and provision of improved pedestrian facilities throughout the town
- A one way loop for vehicles towards the eastern end of the town centre may help traffic congestion along East Street.
- New cycle routes around the town should be promoted.

Environment and Heritage

- Warminster has a positive historic character which should be conserved and enhanced.
- There are a number of empty shops
- and buildings (significantly the Old Town Hall) which detract from the appearance of the town centre. These should be utilised. Unattractive shop fronts are also a problem.
- There is potential to capitalise on tourism in Warminster, through promoting local assets.

This report does not comment on the soundness of the execution of the process and has not had sufficient time allocated to review the consultation report material. In principle, the process that the Town Council's consultant adopted to produce the Baseline Report is considered robust. This desktop review cannot re-run a similar process, which will be essential to set a new set of priorities and refreshed vision and objectives for the town centre. Only local knowledge can provide a thorough commentary of the extent to which the policies and place specific priorities have been delivered successfully in the decade since the plan was completed.

It is therefore recommended that such engagement is undertaken as a priority action to complete the evidence needed to set a new brief for the Town Centre Plan update.

The Warminster Neighbourhood Plan is also likely to be reviewed in the coming year. It already addresses the town centre (chapter 7). There is an opportunity to coordinate future Town Centre Plan review stakeholder and community engagement to simultaneously obtain updated evidence and issues for both Neighbourhood Plan and Town Centre Plan.

The vision and priority objectives are built upon the evidence bases of strategic background and policies, local survey and stakeholder and community feedback. Sections above have considered where these have or may have changed and how future engagement can add to initial desktop analysis supporting this review.

Existing Plan Performance

Where information is available, the stage 1 review of the Neighbourhood Plan will include consideration of how well the WNP has succeeded in delivering policy WTC1 related to the town centre. It will look at selected planning applications that have been resolved through the lifetime of the current Neighbourhood Plan to comment on the effectiveness of the policy.

The Town Centre Plan also contains a large agenda of projects. The Neighbourhood Plan review will not assess the delivery of these.

At this early stage, it would be premature and ill-informed of this review to pass comment on the degree to which economic, transport, social and environmental objectives have been delivered generally and through specific identified projects and development opportunities.

This may best be achieved through a short stakeholder workshop drawing together

those with experience and knowledge of the town centre and the current set of Town Centre Plan objectives.

Further street surveys may also combine assessment of changed circumstances with considering where and how specific projects that may have been delivered have performed in their lifetime. These may be coordinate with working group surveys linked to developing updated Neighbourhood Plan evidence related to the town centre.

It may be feasible to dovetail this engagement with “light touch” engagement planned for the launch of the Neighbourhood Plan review.

Inspiration and Opportunities

This section of the report will provide an illustrative snapshot of more recent town centre master planning and post COVID-19 high street recovery approaches and opportunities for resources potentially available to Warminster. This is followed by some case studies to provide a quick overview of how these approaches are being successfully implemented in other towns in the UK.

National level thinking

In light of COVID-19 and general consumer attitude shifts to online retail it would be valuable to look at ways other than retail to attract people to the town centre. This represents the most significant opportunity for Warminster in this current plan review stage.

The Grimsey Review¹³ considers how high streets might look to recover from COVID-19 and how town centres can position themselves to thrive in the future. It states that town centres must look to move away from an outdated high street model that focuses around retail as the key driver, recommending a move towards a model which places the town centre as the hub of the community, delivering housing, health and leisure, education, arts and business and office space, alongside retail. Tick box aspirations to attract national high street names should be replaced with looking to other services, facilities and experiences to drive footfall.

This thinking is also reflected in government guidance around town centres (Re-imagining urban spaces to help revitalise our high streets, DfCLG 2012¹⁴).

In light of the significant changes to society that have been seen since the Town Centre Plan was produced, the following section will set out some potential opportunities to address and adapt the centre of Warminster to these changing demands.

¹³ <http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Grimsey-Covid-19-Supplement-June-2020.pdf>

¹⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5987/2185491.pdf

Upper Floor Uses

The town might consider an appraisal of town centre upper floor uses. It is identified that the majority of housing is family housing leaving demand for 1 or 2 bed apartments. There is potential for bringing into use upper floors to increase the vibrancy of the town centre while meeting the demand for housing. Having an increased population living in a Town Centre can increase the demand for shops and goods while also providing passive surveillance of an area reducing vandalism and crime. An analysis by the Federation of Master Builders highlights the potential for delivering town centre upper floors and states that favourable planning policy can be key in delivering this.

Community Groups

Consultations and collaboration with Warminster's community groups should be a key driving element of the reviewed Town Centre Plan, as this can be a key driver of the delivery and success of a town plan. Local hubs such as The Athenaeum are key to this.

Looking into ways local events could be integrated within or focussed around such institutions and groups should be considered for the wider benefit of the town and the individual groups. The government has expressed interest within its 'Build Back Better' campaign in promoting street parties

and celebrations which could be integrated into this programme.

Local Enterprise Market / Arcade

The creation of a local market or enterprise arcade with a low barrier to entry could be considered in Warminster. This would allow entrepreneurs and small businesses to test the demand and viability for their ideas. It would also introduce a more diverse range of retail opportunities in the town centre providing an additional draw to the area.

National Funding Opportunities

The Government's Levelling Up Fund¹⁵ could be a potential source of funding initially for this project which would eventually aim to become self-sustaining.

The levelling up fund is available to local communities focussing in particular on:

- Transport investments
- **Regeneration and town centre investment** - This could include bringing key buildings back into use such as The Old Town Hall or The Post Office Building.
- Cultural investment

Highlighted in the Town Centre Plan is the need for the old town hall to be restored and put back into use. A possible route for this could be via the Levelling Up fund to restore and bring the building back into use in a new guise as a community hub and incubator for local and diverse businesses.

The funding could come via Wiltshire Council who have already made bids for improvements to Melksham House and transport infrastructure improvements in Trowbridge via the levelling up fund. They are able to make additional bids in future.

The Community Ownership Fund¹⁶ is another stream of funding that could be utilised within Warminster to bring derelict buildings back to life within the town centre. This fund is available to voluntary and community organisations to bid for matched funding to

support the purchase or refurbishment of costs of community assets and amenities such as:

- sporting and leisure facilities
- cinemas and theatres
- music venues
- museums
- galleries
- parks
- pubs
- post office buildings
- shops

Bids for round two of the funding are currently open and round three will begin in May 2022.

¹⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/966138/Levelling_Up_prospectus.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.communityownershipfund.co.uk/>

Below are some examples of a range of successful town centre projects from elsewhere. These schemes, which have demonstrated success in other towns, are by no means an exhaustive or prescriptive list of what can or should be done but are presented to provide inspiration and examples of best practice that might be considered for Warminster. Appropriate analysis and evidence gathering beyond the scope of this review will be required to assess the viability and desire for such schemes.

It is recommended that analysis of new opportunities and exemplar high street initiatives forms part of the base line evidence gathering to support the Town Centre Plan review and update.

Stockton-on-Tees:

Stockton-on-Tees Town Council has taken radical steps to re-invigorate their high street, shifting the focus away from retail towards the creation of a place that people wish to visit. The project has involved a large investment in the local Globe Cinema (expected to bring a footfall of 200,000 visitors a year), alongside demolition of a run down shopping centre and the introduction of an enterprise market.

“At the council-supported Enterprise Arcade at the Fountain Shopping Mall, young businesses can take space for as little as £10 a day to try out their format. (Neil) Schneider describes the scheme as a “grow our own” and says the next generation of independent traders is coming through the Enterprise Arcade. Already 14 former tenants have moved into more prominent units in the town centre.”

Retail-Week (2019)¹⁷

For more information on the Enterprise Arcade see [here](#).

For a press overview of the Stockon-on-Tees regeneration project see [here](#).



The Globe Cinema Regeneration



Refocusing of High Street away from retail



Enterprise Arcade

¹⁷<https://www.retail-week.com/stores/from-ghost-town-to-high-street-of-the-year/7031008.article?authen=1>

Paisley:

The town of Paisley have embraced the model of community led regeneration by rethinking management of the town centre and producing the Paisley Town Centre Vision¹⁸. As part of the vision the town has been able to work with the Paisley Community Trust, a local community group, and have demonstrated a successful scheme of community driven town centre interventions that have helped to increase the sense of ownership of the town in the local community. This has resulted in the development of a community cinema in the centre of the town with a focus on being accessible to everyone regardless of age, disability or financial situation.

*"Paisley Community Trust (PCT) is a registered Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation founded in 2014, focused on community driven economic regeneration of Paisley. In partnership with local communities, gathers views, issues and ideas for the future of the town in collaboration with Renfrewshire Council and other key stakeholders in Paisley. PCT believe in community owning the high street and playing a leading part in its cultural, social, and economic renaissance"*¹⁹

Much like Warminster, Paisley has a rich history and the town has a wealth of heritage buildings. Paisley's heritage has been the foundation upon which the regeneration effort has been built. The community trust has worked to bring the

historic buildings back into community use providing a tangible connection between the people of Paisley and their heritage.



Above: Vision for a regenerated High Street that incorporates heritage alongside modern place-making principles.

Below: Blending of heritage and contemporary interventions to create public shared space.



¹⁸https://www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/media/11215/Paisley-Vision-report/pdf/Paisley_Vision_Final_Document_COMPLETE_190910_-_SPREADS_email.pdf?m=1579876706820

¹⁹<https://www.paisleytrust.org/>

Redruth:

Redruth has harnessed its heritage buildings for creative use through the establishment of Cornwall's first creative hub, Krowji. The hub has utilised disused heritage buildings throughout the town to house creative studios and workspaces for cultural and creative industries. Krowji has utilised funding from the High Street Heritage Action Zone scheme to expand and bring local buildings back into use. It now houses over 200 creative practitioners.

Frome:

Frome has been able to harness its heritage and independent spirit to become a widely recognised independent shopping hub which is supported by the community and entertainment facility the Cheese and Grain. The Cheese and Grain is a non profit member owned social enterprise that bolsters the social and cultural offer of the town beyond that which would usually be expected for a town of its size. Once a derelict agricultural market hall the building is now a major asset to the town with 60% of its visitors from outside of the town representing a significant draw to the town and major economic benefit.

The Silk Mill in Frome is another success story for the town in which disused mill buildings have been brought back into use as creative work space and gallery space in the centre of the town.



Above: Krowji creative hub studio occupied by artist



Above: Cheese and Grain, Frome



Above: Vibrant Frome High Street on Market Day

Below, this report sets out recommended next steps that can be taken to establish the review of the Town Centre Plan, ensure desktop information is robust, build local input and knowledge into a new baseline report and then set a brief and process for progressing towards the updated Town Centre Plan.

Resolving Town Centre Plan Review Project Brief, Leadership Brief and Programme

The existing Town Centre Plan is separate from the Neighbourhood Plan. It covers matters wider than just town planning and, whilst focusing on the town centre addresses matters beyond the town centre that are influential to it. This is sensible and is common to other similar town centre strategies.

Early resolution of Town Council governance and resource to advance review tasks will enable it to be taken forward in parallel with the Neighbourhood Plan review, delivering efficiency in evidence gathering and community engagement.

Fact Check Desktop Review

This initial and desktop review aims to provide a high-level review of the strategic context, national and county wide circumstances and priorities that may underpin the refreshment and updating of

the Warminster Town Centre Plan. It also illustrates some of the developments in approaches to vital and sustainable town centre futures and areas of support that may currently be harnessed to assist in shaping and delivering its ongoing vital future. However, the limitations imposed by time and resource means the report lacks community input so far.

This report may form some of the evidence foundation stones for building a robust renewed Town Centre Plan. It will be important to ensure this initial element of the review is correct, particularly where it relates to local circumstances.

A first task can be to bring this report forward to the first component of a "Review Baseline Report".

Stakeholder and Community Engagement

Much of the current Town Centre Plan is founded on a strong body of evidence and aspirations expressed by local stakeholders and the community recorded in the supporting baseline report. Engagement appears to have been soundly undertaken and its approach may be re-used to build community feedback and community input into the next Plan. But feedback is now about 13 years old. Whilst many of the issues may still be priorities today, it is out of date.

As an early next task, it is recommended that local stakeholders and the community are re-consulted to update this evidence. Such engagement doesn't need to start with a blank sheet or reinvent the wheel. It can use previously expressed objectives to renew, refine or remove original objectives, before adding new ones.

Local Surveys

The existing Town Centre Plan is supported by extensive and detailed surveys of streets and sites. Re-visiting these to record changes will add primary evidence to that obtained through desktop review and engagement. However, this labour intensive task may be linked to surveys related to the Neighbourhood Plan, undertaken by WNP working groups or as part of a potential Town Centre Plan Review consultant brief.

Funding Opportunities, Innovation and Case Studies

The opportunities for potential funding are ever changing depending on the political climate and other competing fund applications that may be taking place at a given time. It is therefore recommended to spend time researching the opportunities for funding and keeping up to date with what is available throughout the process.

However it is useful to understand the general areas and availability of funding to

inform the scope and aspirations for projects going forward. It is also beneficial at this stage to continue research into case studies of best practice and successful projects for inspiration of could and should be achieved in Warminster.

Coordination with the Neighbourhood Plan Review

The potential parallel review of the Neighbourhood Plan, which includes a town centre chapter and policy, provides a good opportunity for maximising coordination and integration and minimising consultation overload and repetition. If not already agreed, it is suggested that the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group may enable a wholly joined up approach to delivery of the review of both documents.

Full Review Scope, Brief and Process

Whilst it is too early to specify the scope of the review and the brief, scope and workplan for the full review, this may be progressed once the initial "Baseline Report" has been compiled. This task may form a conclusion to the baseline report and lay the foundation stones for the next stage. It should consider necessary tasks, potential to coordinate with the Neighbourhood Plan, and the resources necessary to progress a review.

Town Centre Review Professional Support

Undertaking the full review may require input of external professional services. However, this can only be resolved once the brief and workplan has been written and the input of in-house and community resources optimised. There may be an opportunity to harness free technical support for some elements of this review, where they are directly linked to the Neighbourhood Plan, through Locality's Neighbourhood Planning support packages. Whilst linking back with the Practice that wrote the original Town Centre Plan would also be logical, it appears not to be operating any longer. This option could, however, be investigated further.

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