Melksham Town Centre Masterplan

Draft report
October 2022

AECOM

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Quality information

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Revision History

Issue no.	Issue date	Purpose	Issued by	Comments received	Comments / approved by
1 - Draft sections 1-6	05.10.2022	For Review	Jessie Watson, Associate Director	xx.x.xx	Name Surname
2 -	xx.xx.xxxx	For Review	Name Surname, Position	xx.x.xx	Name Surname
3 -	xx.xx.xxxx	For Review	Name Surname, Position	xx.x.xx	Name Surname
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Contents

1. Executive Summary

This report sets out a spatial masterplan and guidance for Melksham Town Centre Area, linked to the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan (JMNP) Town Centre Policy 9, to lead and stimulating its protection, conservation, enhancement and regeneration and sustained vitality.

The masterplan presented in this report aligns with the vision of the JMNP and recognises the key longer term trends that town centres now must respond to, in order to stay current.

Executive summary

01

The vision of the Neighbourhood Plan is to:

"make the town of Melksham and the parish of Melksham Without great places to live, to work, to play and to visit; attractive, healthy, convenient and environmentally sustainable, with access to employment, education, shops and services via walking, cycling and public transport."

This report presents an overarching vision and a set of objectives for the town. Supporting that are a number of Development Proposals, as follows:

- Economy and vitality
- Heritage and distinctiveness
- Townscape
- Sustainability and climate change
- Public realm and connectivity

The Development Proposals are underpinned by a high-level masterplan framework for Melksham Town Centre. The masterplan focuses on two clusters for new investment and regeneration and presents potential complementary uses for these areas.

The Masterplan acknowledges that any new development in the town will take time to be delivered. As such, this document sets out a broad timeline as to when the proposed interventions could come forward. In the short term, there are also opportunities to continue to hold town centre-wide events (to complement the market day), which will help bring vibrancy and footfall into the town centre.

Introduction

02

2. Introduction

AECOM have been commissioned to prepare a Masterplan report for Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Town Council, through the department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)Neighbourhood Planning Programme led by Locality.

2.1 Introduction

The government is placing significant importance on the quality of design through the development of design codes which aim to set standards for design upfront and provide firm guidance on how sites and places should be developed. The role of design guidelines and codes in the development of a Neighbourhood Plan is expressed in the NPPF 2021, paragraph 128 which states that:

'To provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, plans should use visual tools such as design guides and codes. These provide a framework for creating distinctive places, with a consistent and high-quality standard of design. However, their level of detail and degree of prescription should be tailored to the circumstances in each place and should allow a suitable degree of variety where this would be justified.'

2.2 Purpose and status of this document

It is intended that this report becomes an integral part of the Neighbourhood Plan by informing policies that will influence the design of new development and have weight in the planning process.

The design studies are high level and illustrative, prepared to demonstrate how the design principles that the Town Council wishes to promote could be applied on the sites. We have not undertaken technical studies on topics such as ground conditions, traffic and drainage (although AECOM specialists have inputted into design development). It is expected that full co-design exercises are undertaken by applicants on the sites. This report is just a step in that direction, enabling stakeholders to progress from an informed position.

The report provides an evidence base and high-level masterplan framework and should be read in conjunction with the Design Code document, which covers the whole Neighbourhood Area.

2.3 Preparing the report

The following steps were agreed with the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to produce this report, which draws upon policy development and engagement work undertaken by the Group.

02 Review of existing baseline documents

04 Preparation of draft report in consultation with group members.

06 Final design code report issued to the group to form a part of their plan, subject to it being 'made'.

STEP 01

STEP 02

STEP 03

STEP 04

STEP 05

STEP 06

01 Inception meeting and site visit with the Neighbourhood Planning Group members.

03 Townscape and character analysis based on site visit, photographic study and further desktop analysis.

05 Draft report reviewed by neighbourhood plan group and Locality.

F.1 | **Figure 01:** Timeline of report

This Masterplan seeks to build upon the town's existing strengths – its vitality, its people and strong community, its key cultural assets - and identify the right type of development to come forward to make the most of the key opportunities.
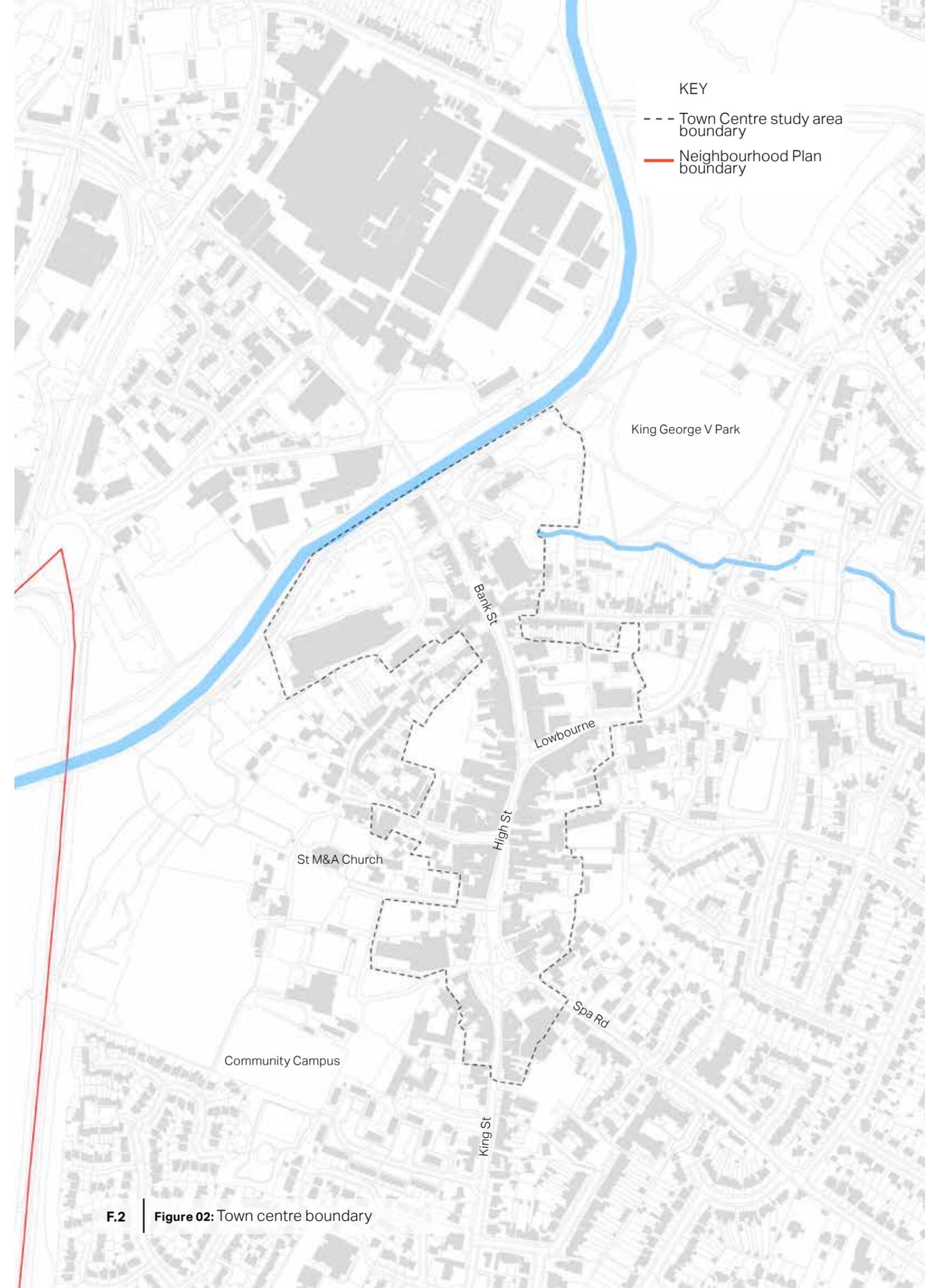
2.4 Area of study

Melksham is a market town located in the southwest of England in the county of Wiltshire. Melksham is approximately 7km northeast of Trowbridge and 10km (c.6 miles) south of Chippenham. It is Wiltshire's fifth-largest settlement after Swindon,

Salisbury, Chippenham and Trowbridge. It occupies a strategic location on the A350 road from the M4 motorway; by rail it is directly linked to Trowbridge & Westbury and Chippenham & Swindon, where connections to the rest of the rail network are possible.

The history of Melksham is described in more detail later on in this document.

The Defined Town Centre (JMNP Policy9) is shown on the plan, opposite. There are around 155 businesses operating in the town centre and a number of shops comprising a mix of independent traders, supermarkets and national retail brands.

The prime shopping area around the intersection of Church Street and High Street is busy but activity declines down Bank Street toward the river. Consultation feedback linked to the town centre highlighted that people were concerned about the poor retail offer, unattractive 1960's buildings and heavy traffic flows were all issues perceived to detract from the shopping experience.

KEY
- - - Town Centre study area boundary
— Neighbourhood Plan boundary

King George V Park

Bank St

Lowbourne

High St

St M&A Church

Spa Rd

Community Campus

King St

F.2 | **Figure 02:** Town centre boundary

Strategic regeneration context

03

3. Policy and evidence base

Whether small town or large city, a town centre is traditionally the hub of its surrounding community. Town centres across the UK are shifting rapidly. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated trends significantly.

3.1 The changing nature of Town Centres

Throughout the middle ages and for centuries to follow, Britain's town centres were the established setting for frequent markets and fairs, rendering them epicentres of commerce, variety entertainment and face-to-face interaction.

Today, many town centres are on the decline, particularly post pandemic. The retail sector is suffering from rapid change and wholesale shifts in the way that consumers behave and engage with their physical surroundings. The proliferation of ecommerce, online retailing and the reduction in floorpsace required, is now widely acknowledged.

However, retail is not the only element of a thriving town centre. Recent research by the Greater London Authority found that 45% of primary high street use was for social reasons, as opposed to retail related. The majority of those surveyed (75%) also identified something other than retail as the best thing about their high street. This is creating opportunities for new uses to emerge and delivering a different offer.

COVID19 has placed the UK under great strain but has also reminded us of the value of certain elements of the places in which we live: green spaces and parks, local shops and services and local walks. All of these elements allow us to interact with our family, friends and local community, which is essential for our overall wellbeing.

Related to this, one of the key elements for a thriving town centre is being able to offer what digital cannot. Town centres must provide social spaces; hives of face-to-face interaction where the focal point is not a distinctive monetary offer, but a cultural one.

Melksham is arguably not a town centre that is in a position of decline and is experiencing regeneration in the present day. It is therefore uniquely positioned to continue to thrive in the future. A key strategic objective for Melksham town centre will be to maintain its existing, well used retail offer and function, but to re purpose and regenerate less successful elements of the town centre, such as the public realm and connectivity and to consolidate certain land uses, so that they create complementary zones of activity which act as anchors, pulling people into the town centre.

3.2 Future Town Centre trends

1 Landlords will welcome emerging brands that are experience-driven and connected with the local community. Lease contracts may become shorter and more flexible and demand for local concepts may require changes to credit risk models.

2 Town centres will focus on active travel and will reduce the presence and dominance of private vehicles. Personal ownership of cars will dramatically reduced. Car fleets will own and operate driverless vehicles.

3 The sharing economy will be commonplace, extending beyond accommodation, transport and workspace.

4 An ageing population will bring with it various land use demands, such new models of extra care facilities.

5 An acute shift to living and working locally; more people are shopping, working and exercising in their local community - flexible space is key.

6 Flexible lease structures will be more common and some will be automated – with renewals and negotiations carried out via tech. Blockchain registry of leases, land registry, previous tenants etc. will also be in place.

7 Independent stores and F&B operators will become more prevalent. Retail destinations will feature unique offerings curated towards the local catchment. Chains will develop "local" concepts and brand names giving the appearance of independents.

8 Retail will be leisure; the divide will become increasingly blurred with brands addressing the need for experience in their stores. Stores will become as much showrooms as a place to make a purchase with in-store leisure elements integrated.

9 Wellness establishments will grow in number. Fitness centres will become commonplace and lifestyle stores will become more popular as people look to buy clothes and products to support their healthy-living aspirations.

3.3 Walkable neighbourhoods

Walkability is extremely important as it encourages a healthy, active lifestyle. As described above, the compact nature of the village will certainly contribute towards this.

The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) recently published the guide '20 Minute Neighbourhoods' (2021), which picks up on the concept of walkable communities. The guide prioritises pedestrians and proposes that 'most of people's daily needs can be met within short walk or cycle'. The benefits of this approach that residents are encouraged to become more active, which improves their mental and physical health; residents tend to use local facilities and green spaces more regularly; traffic is reduced, and air quality improved; and people see more of their neighbours, strengthening community bonds. The guide defines 20 minutes as the maximum time that people are willing to walk to meet their daily needs and that the 20 min journey represents an 800m walk from home to a destination and back again (10 minutes each way).

The impact of Covid has made the 20-minute neighbourhood even more pertinent, with access to local facilities and green and natural space being so important for wellbeing. Indeed, Place Alliance has recently published a report 'Home Comforts' (2020), which also picks up on the walkability factor, specifically in response to the pandemic, summarising that access to basic needs and services within 15 minute radius improves the daily lives of all local residents and as a response to certain issues highlighted during the pandemic, e.g. significant dissatisfaction with newer neighbourhoods that don't provide these daily needs.
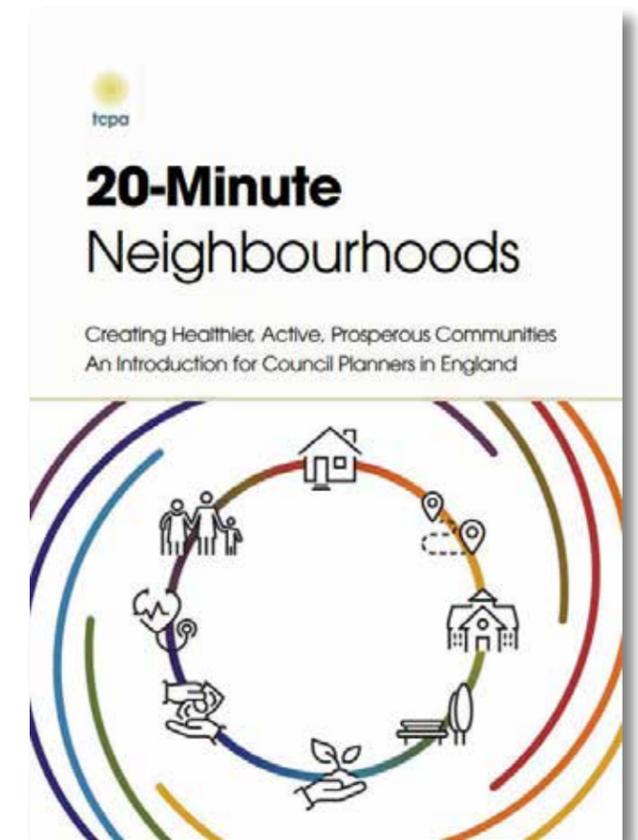
F.3 | **Figure 03:** TCPA 20 Minute Neighbourhood Guide

3.4 National planning policy and guidance

The National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 126) states that:

"good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities".

National and local policy documents can provide valuable guidance for bringing about good design and the benefits accompanying it. Some are there to ensure adequate planning regulations are in place so that development is both fit for purpose and able to build sustainable, thriving communities.

Other documents are more technical and offer specific design guidance which can inform design codes and masterplanning activities.

Developers should refer to these key documents when planning future development in Melksham.

In preparing this Masterplan, consideration has been given to national, regional and local planning policy. This includes both adopted and emerging policies as set out below.

2022 - Levelling up Agenda

Government has prepared a Levelling up White Paper, which sets out their strategy to tackle economic challenges across the country, and the opportunity for everyone to flourish.

Key initiatives within the White Paper include the opportunity for new investment in digital connectivity, transport infrastructure and regeneration, to help implement some of the proposals put forward. Government also sets out key missions to be achieved by 2030, including restoring a pride in place and community's satisfaction with their town centres.

2021 - National Planning Policy Framework

A revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) came into force in July 2021. Chapter 7 'Ensuring the vitality of town centres' sets out the Government's approach to town centres. It identifies that planning policy should promote the long-term vitality and viability of town centres – 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 (Paragraph 86).

Paragraph 86 encourages allocation of a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of development likely to be needed, looking at least 10 years ahead. Meeting anticipated needs for retail, leisure, office and other 'main town centre uses' over this period should not be compromised by limited site availability, so town centre boundaries should be kept under review where necessary.

It identifies that where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available for main town centre uses, appropriate 'edge of centre' sites that are well connected to the town centre should be allocated. If sufficient edge of centre sites cannot be identified, policies should explain how identified needs can be met in other accessible locations that are well connected to the town centre.

2021 - National Model Design Code

This report provides detailed guidance on the production of design codes, guides and policies to promote successful design. It expands on 10 characteristics of good design set out in the National Design Guide. This guide should be used as reference for new development.

2021 - National Design Guide

The National Design Guide illustrates how well-designed places that are beautiful, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice. Ten characteristics in the guide outline the Government's priorities for well-designed places.

2021 - Build Back Better High Streets

This policy strategy document notes the importance of our high streets at the forefront of the UK's recovery post-Covid and focuses on five key priorities and the overarching ambition is for high streets to become 'clean, green, mixed-use spaces in which people not only want to shop but also live, work, and relax'.

2021 - Building with Nature Standards

The mission of this document is to put high-quality green infrastructure at the heart of placemaking in the UK, maximising benefits for people and wildlife. By bringing people closer to nature and building great places for us to live, work and play, development can make a major contribution towards better health and wellbeing in our communities and tackling our climate and ecological emergencies.

The 12 Standards in this document are built around the themes of Core, Wellbeing, Water, and Wildlife, helping residential and commercial developers to design and deliver high-quality green infrastructure, and guiding policy makers in clearly defining requirements for green-infrastructure in policy documents.

2020 - Planning for the Future

The 'Planning for the Future' White Paper, proposed a desire to streamline and modernise the planning process, bring a new focus to design and sustainability, improve the system of developer contributions to infrastructure, and ensure more land is available for development where it is needed. Consultation on the White Paper closed on 29 October 2020, during which time approximately 40,000 responses were received. Government is currently reviewing these consultation comments.

2020 - Living with Beauty

The Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission is an independent body set up to advise Government on how to promote and increase the use of high-quality design for new build homes and neighbourhoods. In its report, 'Living with Beauty' (January 2020), the Commission set out three overall aims: ask for beauty, refuse ugliness and promote stewardship, and made 45 detailed policy propositions.

These recommendations resulted in an amendment to national policy (NPPF) (2021) (Paragraph 134) to have a stronger focus on beauty and the introduction of a National Model Design Code in July 2021.

2020 - Building for a Healthy Life

Building for a Healthy Life (BHL) is the new (2020) name for Building for Life, the government-endorsed industry standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. The new name reflects the crucial role that the built environment has in promoting wellbeing. The BHL toolkit sets out principles to help guide discussions on planning applications and to help local planning authorities to assess the quality of proposed (and completed) developments, but can also provide useful prompts and questions for planning applicants to consider during the different stages of the design process.

2007 - Manual for Streets

Development is expected to respond positively to the Manual for Streets, the Government's guidance on how to design, construct, adopt and maintain new and existing residential streets. It promotes streets and wider development that avoid car dominated layouts, and place the needs of pedestrians and cyclists first. It also supports streets that create better places and a sense of community.

3.5 Legislative Changes - Use Class Order

Of relevance to town centres across the UK, during 2020, Government brought in changes to consolidate a number of separate Use Classes under a single 'Commercial, Business and Service' Class E. This update to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (the 'UCO') came into effect in September 2020 and combined shops, restaurants, offices, gyms and nurseries (amongst others) that no longer require planning permission to switch between uses.

These changes intend to make it easier to enable greater utilisation of existing assets and where appropriate, re purposing of buildings in town centres such as Bury. Class E is intended to facilitate diversification and facilitates an enhanced role for town centres as places of work, providing space for services, research and development, creating and making. Shops can change to restaurants, cafes, gyms, offices, health centres and indoor sports facilities. This fits well with a 'mixed-use neighbourhood' approach.

In March 2021, an update was then made to the related legislation3 to allow for the change of use of these commercial properties to residential from August 2021 under a fast track 'prior approval' process. This demonstrates the Government's desire to ensure that high streets thrive and survive through adopting mixed-use approach in town centres.

3.6 District planning policy and guidance

Melksham lies within the Wiltshire District Council area. Melksham is located within the county of Wiltshire and is the fifth-largest settlement after Swindon, Salisbury, Chippenham and Trowbridge. The following documents at a district level have informed the design guidance within this report:

2022 - Wiltshire Climate Strategy

Wiltshire Council acknowledged the climate emergency in 2019 and have been working towards several climate objectives. The Wiltshire Climate Strategy sets the framework for reducing emissions over five years and for making the county resilient to climate impacts. The non-statutory document will influence key documents, such as the Local Plan review.

2022 - Wiltshire Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

The Wiltshire Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy identifies, and provides a vision and goals for, the District's blue and green infrastructure networks for the next eight years. The non-statutory document will influence key council documents, such as the Local Plan review.

2015 - Wiltshire Core Strategy

The current Development Plan for the District comprises the Wiltshire Core Strategy, Site Allocation Plans and Minerals and Waste Plans, alongside Neighbourhood Plans. The Wiltshire Core Strategy was adopted in 2015 and is currently under review.

Emerging - Wiltshire Local Plan

The new Local Plan is anticipated for adoption late 2023 and will provide a vision and framework for addressing housing and employment needs and the provision of infrastructure for a period until 2036. It will be informed in part by a Joint Spatial Framework under preparation by the Wiltshire and Swindon Borough Councils. Initial consultation on the new Local Plan concluded early 2021, and identified the scale of growth, place shaping priorities, potential development sites and settlement profiles for Melksham.

2011 - Wiltshire Local Transport Plan

The third Local Transport Plan (LTP3) for Wiltshire seeks to provide a sustainable transport system and covers a period to March 2026. The LTP3 supports overarching national transport goals (Guidance on Local Transport, July 2009) and themes for sustainable local transport (Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon: Making Sustainable Local Transport Happen White Paper, January 2011). Several strategy documents that provide further guidance on key transport themes support the LTP3.

3.7 Local planning policy and guidance

Local planning policy provides guidance that is tailored to the local context, where the development is located, which is supported by analysis taken directly from the area. Therefore, is it vital local policy is considered when proposing development within Melksham. The following documents at a local level have informed the design guidance within this report:

2022 - Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2

Issues such as climate change, providing affordable homes in the right places and helping local business recover from the impact of COVID make it imperative that the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan evolves to provide strong local powers, alongside Wiltshire's upcoming new Local Plan. The Joint Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has resolved that Neighbourhood Plan 2 is starting in early 2022 and will look at the following topics:

- Assessment and information to inform approach to housing (together with the Local Plan)

- Protecting valued local green spaces

- Further addressing climate change

- Planning for future vitality of the town centre

- Protecting our local heritage

- Ensuring that local priorities are addressed as the bypass project is developed.

2021 - Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 1

In July 2021 Melksham's first Neighbourhood Plan was voted into force. It provides the communities of Melksham Town and Melksham Without real local planning power in guiding the conservation and development of our area until 2026.

2019 - Town Centre Scoping Report

This report reviewed the opportunities, challenges and drivers facing Melksham Town during the period of the Local Plan.

2006 - Town Centre Urban Design Study

This study suggests a number of ways in which the street scene of Melksham town centre could be more pleasant and welcoming, and therefore more prosperous. It analysed the physical character of the town centre and then proposed a number of small scale, medium term and long term regeneration projects.

Engagement

04

4. Engagement

This section presents analysis of the whole neighbourhood plan area, including the historic origins, landscape character and urban settlement pattern across the parish.
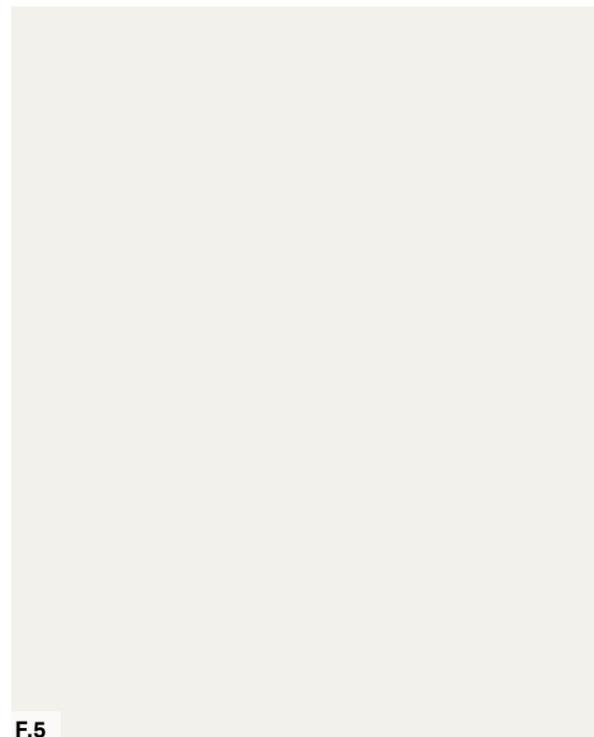
4.1 Overview

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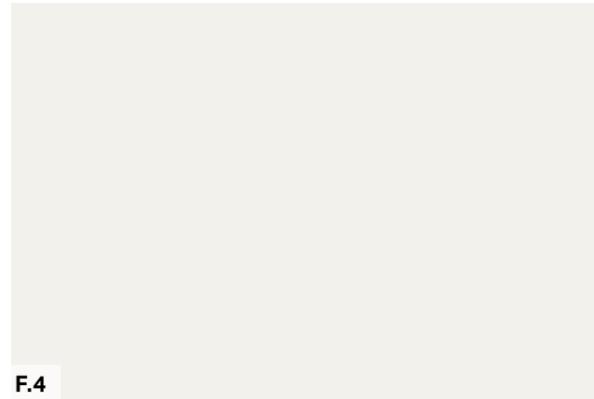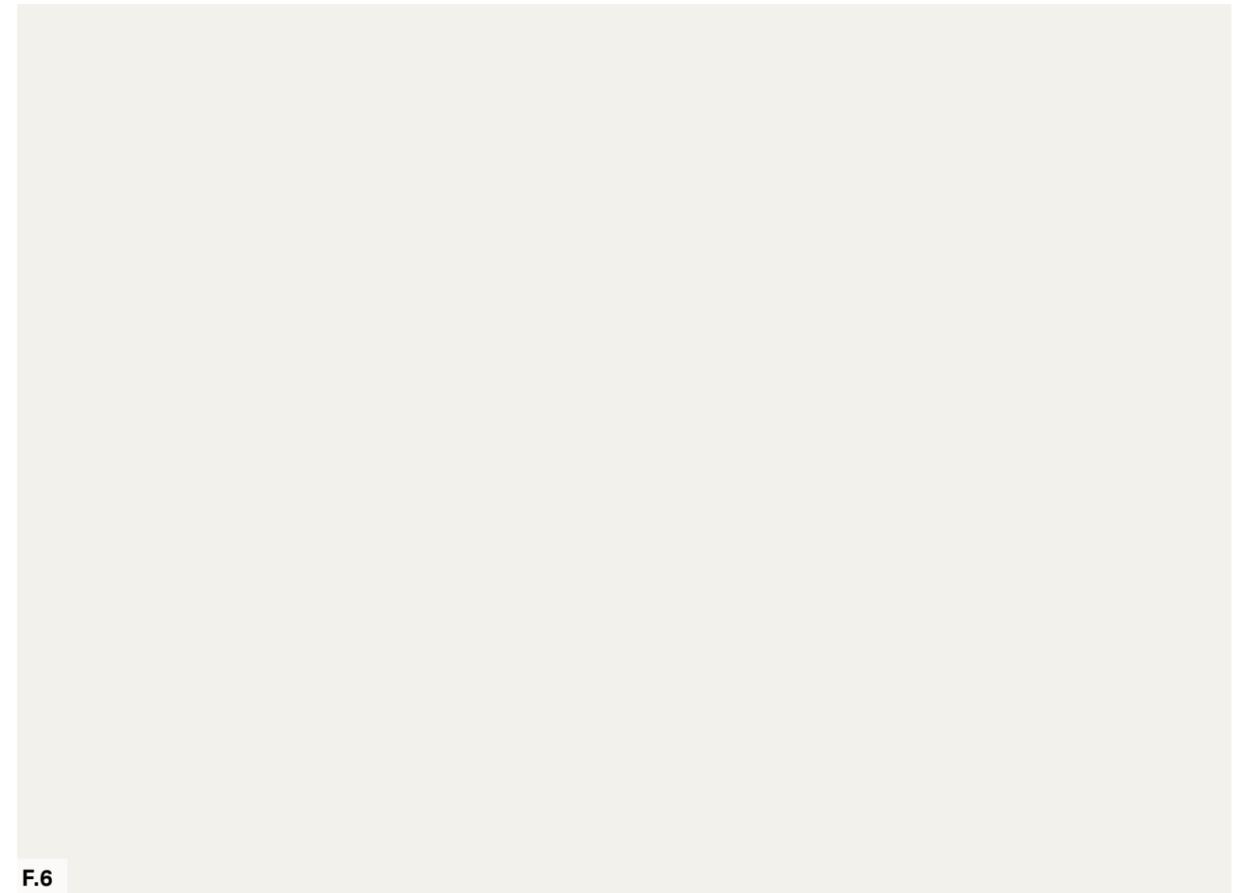
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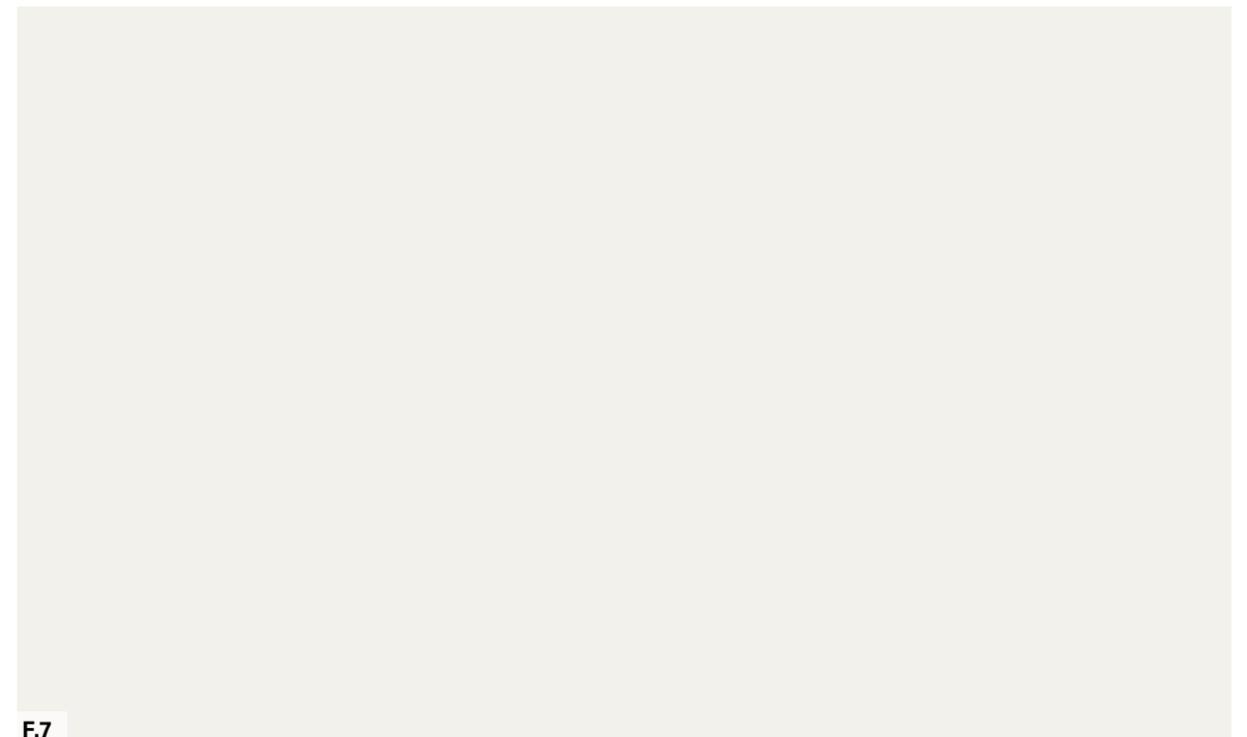
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The town centre vision, aims and objectives

05

5. Town centre vision, aims and objectives

The vision for Melksham in the JMNP is the overarching strategy for the future development of the Neighbourhood Plan Area. The vision is set out below.

To make the town of Melksham and the parish of Melksham Without great places to live, to work, to play and to visit; attractive, healthy, convenient and environmentally sustainable, with access to employment, education, shops and services via walking, cycling and public transport.

5.1 Town Centre aims

The Aims of the JMNP are to:

- Protect and enhance the vitality of Melksham town centre;

- Sustain and enhance the diversity and quality of the town centre retail, service and leisure offer and maximise its sustained vitality;

- Protect and enhance the appearance and character of the town centre and the Conservation Area;

- Improve town centre pedestrian, cycle and public transport connectivity with surrounding "edge of centre" retail, service and business uses, Melksham and MWO Parish and its wider community area;

- Enhance mobility, accessibility and sustainable and active travel facilities within the town centre area;

- Enable efficient and effective business deliveries and service access;

- Provide car parking to efficiently and effectively contribute to the vitality of the needs of the town

5.2 Strategic objectives

The following strategic objectives will help to achieve the masterplan for Melksham town centre:

01.

A connected town centre

Improve connectivity, in particular improving the linkages between retail and leisure assets, such as the river and park. Wayfinding, signage and improved walking and cycle facilities.

02.

A healthy and active community

Reduce the dominance of the car and improve the public realm to make it more accessible for pedestrians, and encourage active travel.

03.

A vibrant town centre

Provide opportunities for residents to live in the town centre. Animate the streets and public spaces and ensure that they are safe and attractive.

04.

A diverse town centre

Diversify the uses on offer and look to create clusters of complementary uses either side of the retail core, encouraging people to live, work and study in Melksham.

05.

A place for culture

Melksham's rich heritage and cultural attractions should continue to be promoted and celebrated, attracting residents and visitors alike.

06.

Low carbon and green

Promote new development which supports sustainable travel, and the use of technologies that support low carbon growth.

The town centre development principles
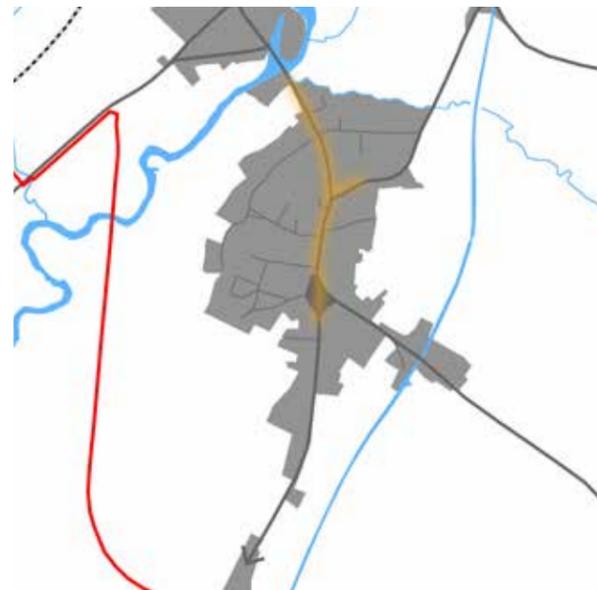
06

This section analyses the various built and spatial components of Melksham town centre including heritage, public realm, land use, activities, movement and its economic and regeneration context. It provides a foundation of the emerging issues and opportunities which inform and underpin the proposed development principles and interventions as set out within the Masterplan.

AECOM

6. Town centre development principles

6.1 Evolution of Melksham

A review of historical mapping illustrates the considerable change of Melksham town centre over the last 150 years. The plans below illustrate the evolution of a traditional market town through the expansion associated with the dawn of the industrial revolution and the arrival of the railway; and more recently the development of the town's retail focus and movement networks which have shaped the town to the present day.


Figure 08: XXXX

Figure 09: Market Place, c.1860

Melksham's origins lie in its location at the fording point of the river, fertile land and elevation above the river flood level. The name 'Melksham' is believed to come from the old English 'meoloc' meaning 'milk'. As the name implies, the area has long been associated with pasture and dairy farming.

Melksham was also for many years a cloth town. In the 16th and early 17th centuries, Melksham clothiers exported as far as central Europe. In the later 17th and the 18th centuries there was some revival, but in the 18th century the industry declined and ended in the 19th century.

1880

Early development focused around Church Walk and the Market Place. Mills were constructed along the riverside and by the town bridge (the last mill was closed in 1888).
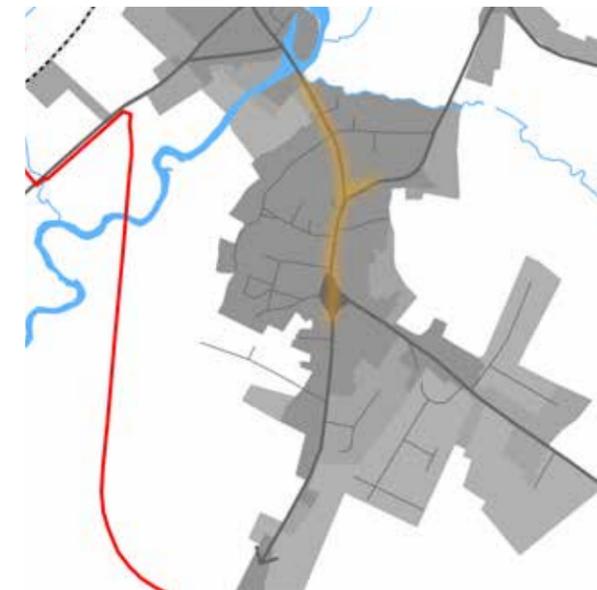
Later growth and infill along arterial roads such as Lowbourne, Forest Road and Spa Road, due to its position on the coach route between London and Bath.

1920
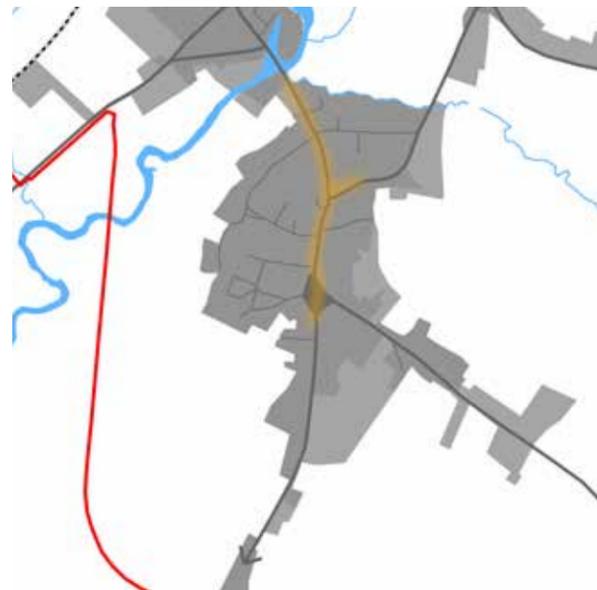
Continued, limited development can be seen during the inter war period, along the fringes of the eastern and southern edges of the town centre.

1970

Dairy farming was the towns main industry in 1953.

By 1970, there was considerable infill development to the south east of the town centre, in between Spa Road and King Street.

Large scale industrial development also emerged along the river edge and the town bridge.

2022

Significant development occurred in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, in the form of clusters around most of the town.

These formed distinct new neighbourhood groups located between the arterial routes to the south and east of the town centre, Bowerhill to the south and Roundponds to the north-west.

6.2 Town centre today

A large proportion of the population of Melksham are at working age, which is one of the reasons why the town centre is a thriving and vibrant place.

According to an early draft of the nascent Melksham Neighbourhood Plan, there are approx. 155 businesses in the town centre. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.

As highlighted in the Melksham Town review report, the Which? magazine in October 2019 s stated that:

"a [retail] model more familiar to older generations is re-emerging – with flourishing personal services, markets, and food specialists that focus on 'experiences' replacing retailers hit directly by the rise of online shopping. The analysis found businesses offering personal services that cannot be replicated easily online – such as hair and beauty services, tattoo and piercing shops, and funeral directors – have boomed."

6.3 Key issues, challenges and opportunities

Melksham has a lot to offer, and many elements that already encourage people to visit the town centre. The town centre masterplan will look to improve the potential for connection between visitors to the town centre, which will make the experience of visiting more enjoyable for all.

Figure 10: River Avon

People are the key to creating economic value to the place where they live

6.4 Introduction to development principles

The following section explores the existing components of the town centre and then goes on to suggest key opportunities, which if tackled, will attract visitors to the town centre again and again. These are founded on the following principles:

6.5 Economy and vitality

6.5.1 Economy and vitality today

The town centre benefits from a wide range of land use types which influence the economy and the vitality of the town centre today. The town centre has a range of independent shops and a weekly food and drink market. This sector has grown significantly in the last few years, however, the over provision of supermarkets so close to the town centre has a detrimental impact on food retailers. There is a limited demand for office space.

The Wiltshire Council's 2011 Town Centre and Retail Study; Wiltshire Core Strategy Retail Review (2015) and the Melksham Town 2020-2036 report all cover the intricacies of these issues in more detail. Of particular importance in this report, is the range of potential development sites within the town centre.

Figure 11: Waitrose

Figure 12: High St shops

Figure 13: Church St shops

Figure 14: Lowbourne shops

KEY

- - - Area of study
— Town boundary
● Retail & commerce
● Services & offices
● Food & beverage
● Entertainment
● Health
● Religion
● Community
● Garages & storage units
● Residential
● Car parking
● Potential development site
□ SHELAA site

King George V Park

Bank St
Lowbourne
High St
Church St
St M&A Church
Community Campus
King St
Spa Rd

N

Figure 15: Town centre land uses

0m 50m 100m 200m 500m
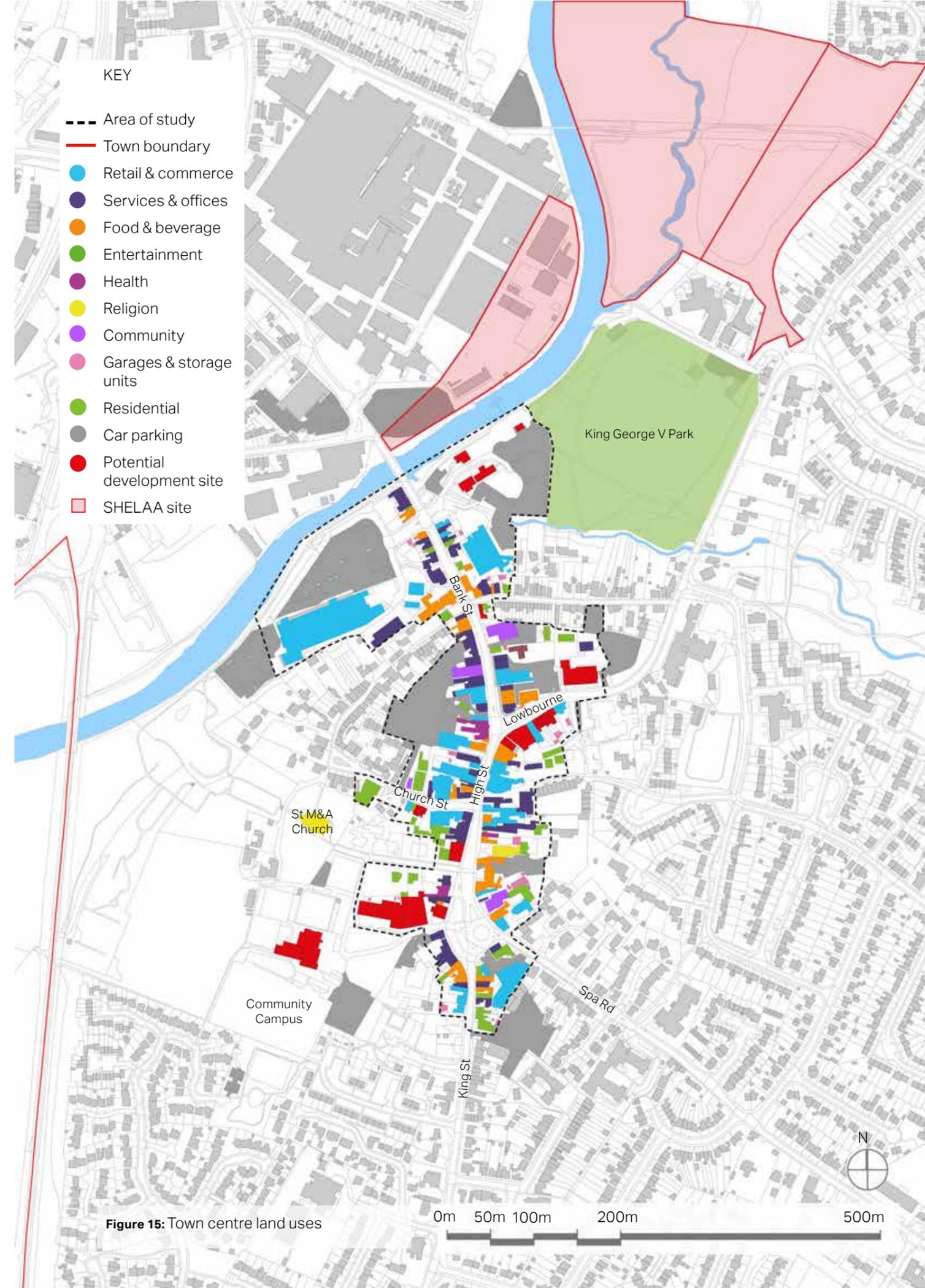
6.5.2 Economy and vitality opportunities

Within the variety of uses described on the previous page, there are a range of potential development sites that are vacant, dissused or underused and that would benefit from investment, as shown on the plan, right.

An key factor dimension in bolstering the local economy, is attracting and retaining workers within the town. Gentle intensification and layering of different land uses is one way of achieving this.

There are two potential development clusters at key gateway locations, either end of the town centre, which address this challenge, with a multi use and layered approach to development, which could include community hubs, housing, health and leisure, entertainment, education, arts, business/office space and some shops.

More detail on the potential of the clusters is covered in the next section of this report.

Number	SHLEAA Ref	Call for sites development sites
1	3333	Land to North of River Avon (Area 8)
2	3334	Land to North of River Avon (Area 9)
3	3335	Land to North of River Avon (Area 10)
4	607	Land at 28 Bank Street
5	N/A	Blue Pool at Melksham House, Market Place
6	N/A	Library & Lowbourne House, Lowbourne
7	N/A	Vacant Lloyds Bank Building, 1 High Street
8	N/A	Vacant HSBC Bank Building, 32 High Street
9	N/A	Vacant NatWest, 34 High Street
10	N/A	Vacant Dragon Delight Chinese, 7 Lowbourne
11	N/A	Vacant Marjo Fashion, 8-12 Lowbourne
12	N/A	Vacant Nettl, 14 Lowbourne
13	N/A	Vacant Co-op Funeral Care, Church Street
14	N/A	Assembly Hall

No.	Ref	Other potential development sites
15	N/A	Town Hall
16	N/A	Scout hut
17	N/A	Guide headquarters
18	N/A	Riverside club
19	N/A	Community club
20	N/A	Melksham House

No.	Ref	Sites that are constructed or in planning
21	Constructed	Community Campus
22	Application refused	3 Lowbourne

Figure 16: Assembly Hall

Figure 17: Former library site

Figure 18: Former chinese take away site

KEY
- - - - Study area boundary
- Call for sites development site
- Other potential development site
- Constructed or in planning

Figure 19: Key sites
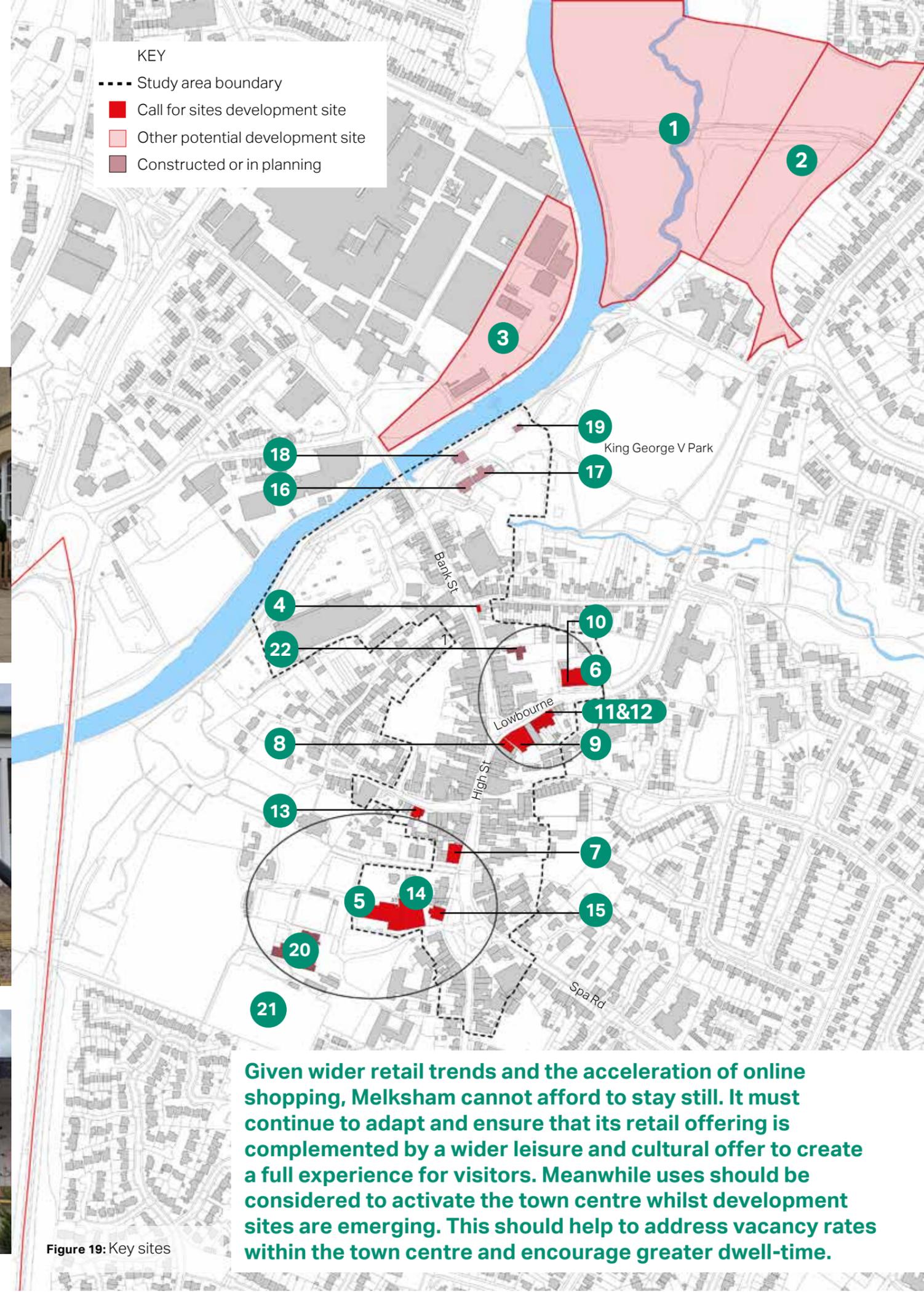
Given wider retail trends and the acceleration of online shopping, Melksham cannot afford to stay still. It must continue to adapt and ensure that its retail offering is complemented by a wider leisure and cultural offer to create a full experience for visitors. Meanwhile uses should be considered to activate the town centre whilst development sites are emerging. This should help to address vacancy rates within the town centre and encourage greater dwell-time.

6.5.3 Economy and vitality opportunities cont'd

The following opportunities could be explored to bolster the vitality and economy of Melksham:

- A diverse range of uses, which will be active throughout the day and night, to support an evening economy;

- Support for small independent businesses and retailers that are community led-ventures. The idea of community wealth-building aligns with the principles of the 20-Minute Neighbourhood, with a focus on locally productive forms of business and employment, ensuring that a strong neighbourhood centre exists to support everyday needs;

- Shifting away from traditional retail towards food and beverage, event space, the arts and leisure (which is already happening via the Community Campus) will create a more balanced employment profile, a diverse economy and attract more people to the town centre and retain them once they've arrived. Examples of this are drawing classes or book club and reading events, organised by the new library;

- The temporary re-use of vacant retail and commercial spaces should be considered to provide affordable spaces for new creative and community led uses to start up and reanimate the streetscene, whilst a permanent use is secured;

- Provision of multi-functional uses in any given premises can benefit the community by providing multiple services in the same location, such as the model employed by the recently constructed Community Campus. This could be employed in the town centre with an alternative focus such as performing arts, bike cafe, arts centre, employment services etc. This creates a strong social offer to attract activity/community uses;

- Provision of a banking hub on the High Street given the recent bank closures; and

- New, affordable, low-carbon housing in the town centre for all generations will improve health and wellbeing of Melksham's population.

Figure 21: Artists' workshop space

Figure 20: Drawing classes in key spaces could be organised by the library or the creative community

Figure 22: Book reading, attracting families and promoting community engagement

Figure 23: Pop up food stall

Figure 24: Layered uses with bike shop / cafe / workspace

Figure 25: Independent business

Figure 26: Cafe and workspace allowing for connection

6.6 Heritage and distinctiveness

6.6.1 Built heritage and distinctiveness today

Much of the heritage and fabric of the historic town remains today, which gives Melksham its strong setting. The importance of its built character is reflected in the wide extent of the Conservation Area and multitude of listed buildings, shown right.

Its built character is formed by the use of both built and spatial elements.

Some of those notable built elements include:

- Its many stone shops, pubs and houses (more on this on the next page);

- The 17th century buildings along Church Walk;

- The two key buildings overlooking the Market Place; the Town Hall and the Limes;

- 1 High Street (former Lloyds building), a substantial building, and the grand buildings in the same style along Place Road;

- 11 High Street, on the south corner of Church Street; and
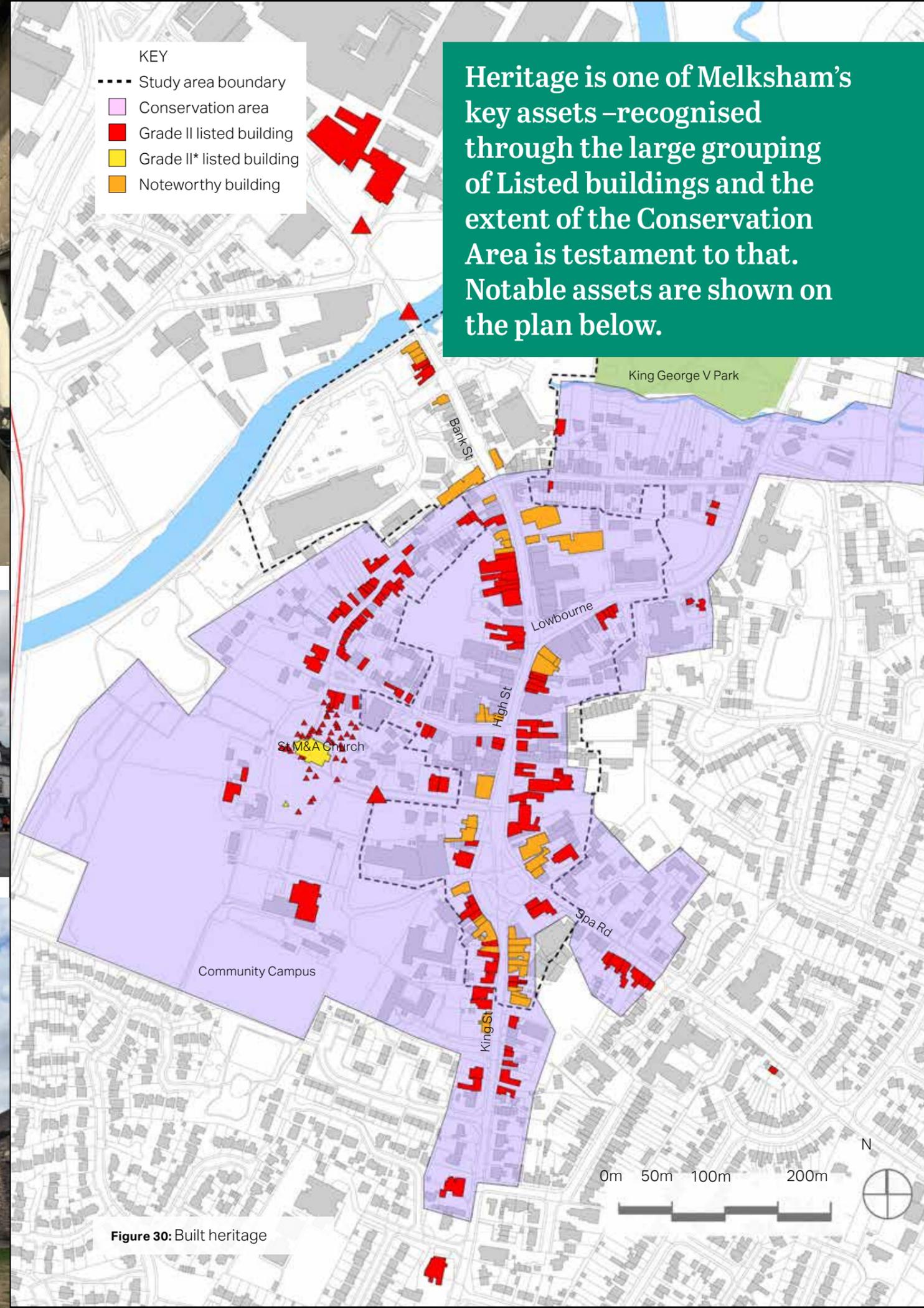
- The Avon Bridge.

Figure 27: Use of stone in town centre housing

Figure 28: Vacant Lloyds building

Figure 29: United church

KEY

- ▪▪▪ Study area boundary
- Conservation area
- Grade II listed building
- Grade II* listed building
- Noteworthy building

Heritage is one of Melksham's key assets –recognised through the large grouping of Listed buildings and the extent of the Conservation Area is testament to that. Notable assets are shown on the plan below.

King George V Park

Bank St

Lowbourne

High St

St M&A Church

Spa Rd

Community Campus

King St

Figure 30: Built heritage

0m 50m 100m 200m

N

6.6.2 Built heritage and distinctiveness today - shopfronts and material palette

Each street has a character and visual hierarchy that is established by the relationship between the buildings found there. Shop frontages and materials play a vital role in contributing towards the streetscape and character of Melksham.

It is therefore important to ensure that they are designed with consistency at the façades level - in terms of colour, scale, fenestration and labelling.
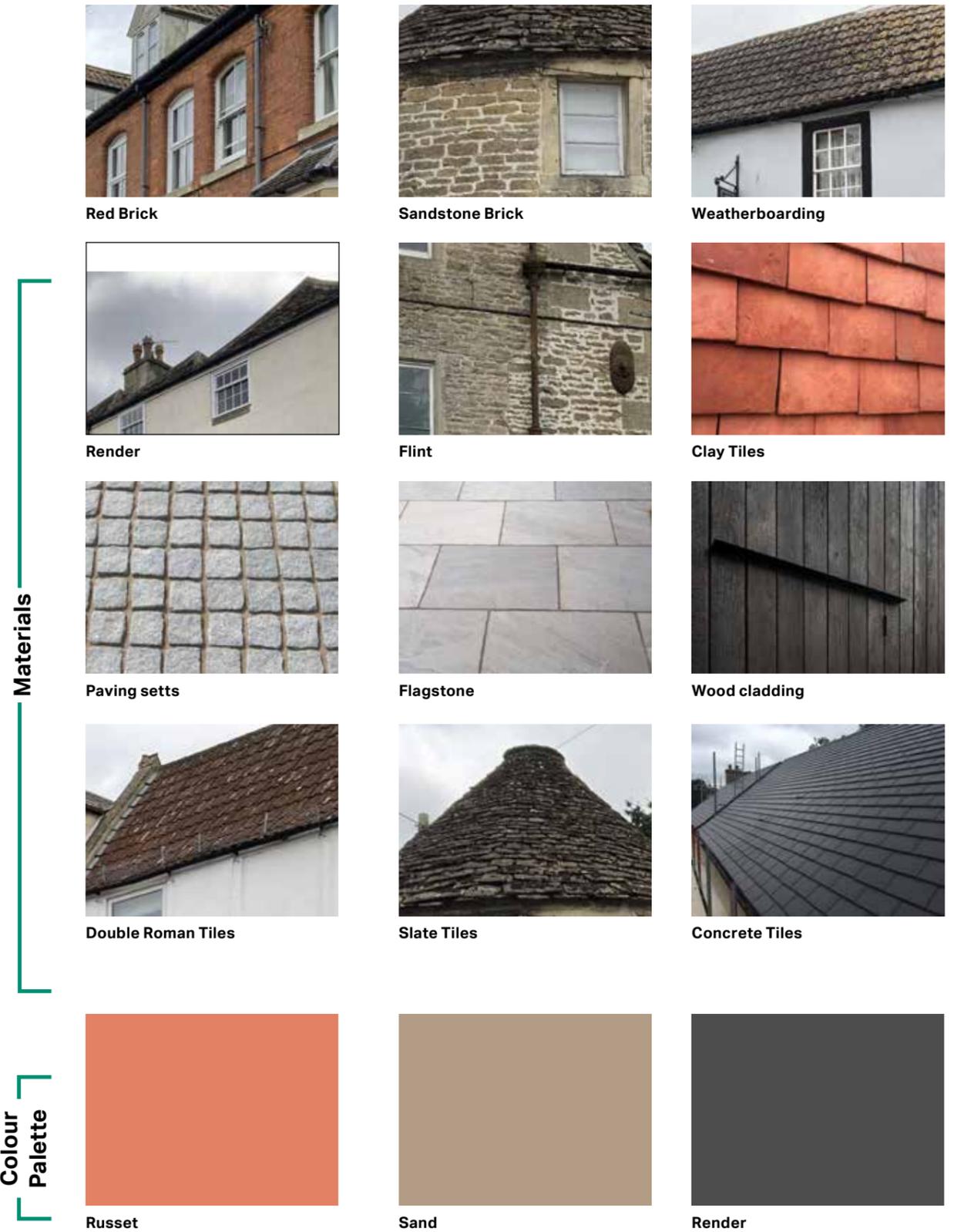
There is a great variety in the style and quality of the shopfronts and within Melksham town centre, as demonstrated on the pictures below. The material pallete is more consistent, as shown, right.

Figure 31: Consistent, but tired shopfronts, Bath Rd

Figure 32: High quality shopfronts, Church St

Red Brick

Sandstone Brick

Weatherboarding

Materials

Render

Flint

Clay Tiles

Paving setts

Flagstone

Wood cladding

Double Roman Tiles

Slate Tiles

Concrete Tiles

Colour Palette

Russet

Sand

Render

6.6.3 Spatial heritage and distinctiveness today

As stated on the previous page, the setting and character of the town centre is influenced the use of both built and spatial elements.

Some of those notable spatial elements are shown on the plan, right, and include the following:

- The use of cobbled paving;

- The web of historic footpaths, which weave throughout the town centre and once provided short cuts through the fields around the town centre towards the church;

- The Market Place, which is a key area of public realm and one of the most distinctive parts of Melksham. It has recently been re-paved and hosts weekly markets. It is thought to be medieval in origin dating to 13th Century when in 1219 the first recorded market and fair was granted. A covered well marks the location of the old town pump;

- Church Street Gardens, a quiet space away from the high street;

- Canon Square, a formal space but intimate and welcoming space with a ceremonial role;

- The historic streets around the River Avon and the tranquility of the Riverside walk; and

- King George V Park.

Figure 33: Existing wayfinding mapping

Figure 34: Cannon Square

Figure 35: Market day, Market square

Figure 36: Cobblestone alleyway

KEY

- - - Historic short cuts to the church
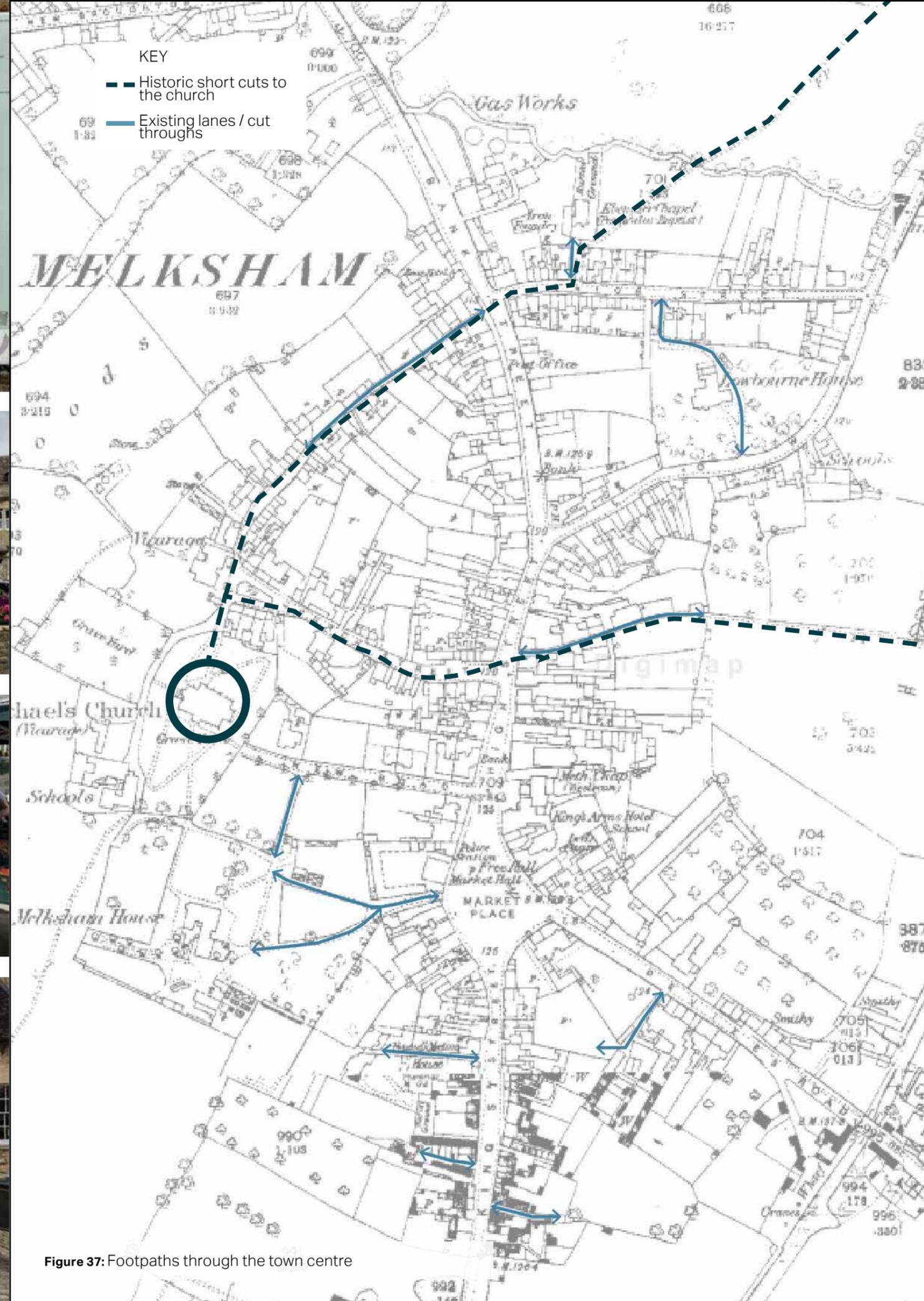
——— Existing lanes / cut throughs

Figure 37: Footpaths through the town centre

6.6.4 Heritage and distinctiveness opportunities

Celebrate the historic environment

- Improve existing and integrate new information on Melksham's history via public realm and public art;

- Develop a palette of high-quality materials and street furniture which will help to create a distinct identity that reflects the importance of the historic environment; and

- Rationalise and improve the amount, consistency and location of street furniture (including signage, cycle stands, railings, bollards, lighting, planters, litter bins and benches) to minimise street clutter and preserve important views and desire lines.

Promote Melksham's cultural assets

- Consider a programme of cultural events, which would help to publicise Melksham's assets to a broader audience and engender civic pride;

- Explore the potential for a culture trail which in addition to physical signposting, could also explore the opportunities for digital gamification which could appeal to a more diverse audience;

- Develop a public arts strategy, which could have links with schools or youth groups and also help to create and attractive and animated streetscape; and

- The temporary re-use of empty retail and commercial spaces to provide affordable spaces for pop-up art galleries and leisure activities to start up and create life and activity pending the permanent redevelopment of premises.

Melksham's rich heritage is a key strength, and one which gives the town its character and uniqueness. It is imperative that as the town centre develops in the future, these assets are preserved and celebrated; ensuring that the quality of public realm highlights their importance and new development responds sensitively in terms of design and scale.

Figure 38: Allocating space for spill out uses activates the street (permanent or temporary)

Figure 39: Digital wayfinding and cultural information

Figure 40: Temporary performance event, Belfast

Figure 41: Art installations can animate spaces 24/7

Figure 42: Clear, simple wayfinding mapping, Barnes

Figure 43: A signage totem that locates cultural landmarks, St Albans

6.6.5 Shopfronts and material palette opportunities

The public realm along the high street can be improved by decluttering signage and tidying the shopfronts. The following principles should be considered:

- Consider the overall proportion, form, and scale of the building's upper floors when designing new shop-fronts and alterations to shop fronts. Unnecessarily large shop-fronts or signage can detract from or even cover historically valuable architecture and, more generally, create a disjointed appearance;

- Reflect the street and historic styles. Integrate the shop front with the established streetscape, introducing a sense of variety but responding to the overall character of the high street. This includes using the right materials, responding to a dominant scale and

proportion, and following an established pattern;

- Respond to and enhance the existing conditions of the public realm. Street elements and furniture should be considered when designing shopfronts. This will help improve the overall user experience;

- Unnecessary visual clutter should be avoided. This includes reducing unnecessary advertisements, plastic foliage or other elements stuck onto the shopfront, and removing general clutter such as visible AC units, wires and intrusive roller shutter boxes; and

- Innovative design will always be supported, but not to the loss of the Melksham's distinct history and character.

Figure 44: Unified, vibrant signage, in keeping with local character, Burnham Market

Figure 45: Clear paving transition, and use of traditional cobblestones to slow down traffic

Figure 46: Consistent shop fronts and generous pedestrian zone, Wokingham High Street

Figure 47: High-quality, restrained material palette for pedestrianised street and shopfronts, Bath
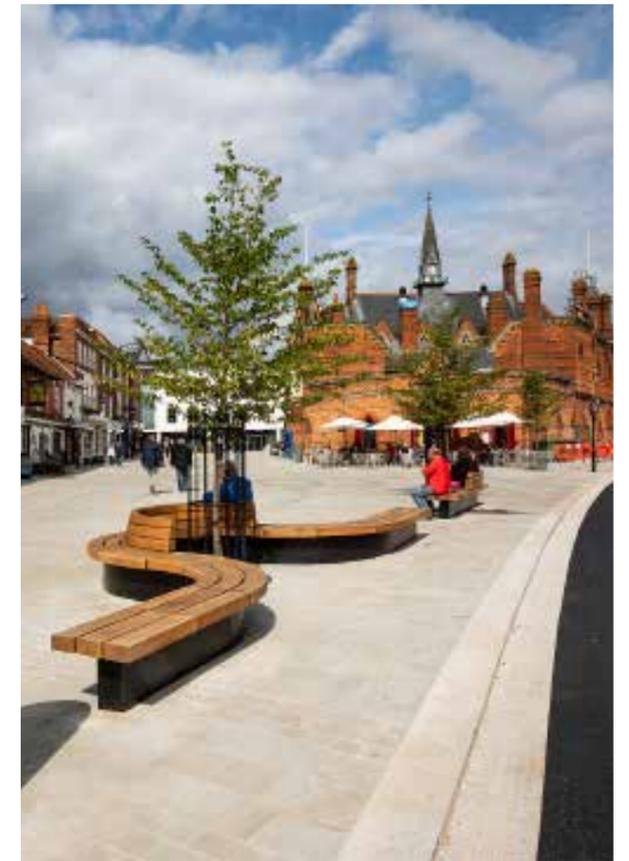

Figure 48: Creative street furniture offers opportunities for resting and socialising, Wokingham

Figure 49: Subtle changes in materials to delineate separation of uses, with priority for pedestrians, Preston

6.7 Sustainability and climate change

Melksham Town Council declared a climate emergency in February 2019 and have stated an aspiration to become carbon neutral by 2030.

6.7.1 Sustainability and climate change today

The Town Council subsequently prepared a Climate Action Plan to clean the air, protect the environment, and care for the health and wellbeing of its residents.

The Council's environment and climate working group have launched an event called Climate Fest, which will help raise awareness of the climate emergency amongst the local community.

Alongside this, Places for People have recently been commissioned by the Council's to investigate how Melksham can respond to the climate emergency.

This Masterplan seeks to entrench these aims within the regeneration of Melksham town centre, ensuring that it promotes sustainability and reductions in carbon.

Figure 50: Raised planters to provide temporary shade

6.7.2 Sustainability and climate change opportunities

Greening Melksham

Plants, trees and green spaces have a significant impact on the public realm and its visual amenity which will help to strengthen the character of place and make the town centre a better place to live, work and invest. In addition, these green features can also play a pivotal role in improving air quality, reducing the risk of flooding, provide natural shading and also improving biodiversity and contributing to net zero carbon targets. There are limited opportunities for the creation of significant green spaces, and therefore the Masterplan should look to:

1. Introduce more street tree planting in streets and public spaces, to create an urban green network;

2. Utilise native planting palettes and trees which provide a good mix of heights and species, with dense cover, attractive flowers and a range of berries and seeds to maximise biodiversity benefits;

3. Introduce green roofs and walls where possible - e.g. the design of new buildings and public realm interventions;

4. Explore opportunities to enhance the planting in existing parklets like Church Street Gardens, Canon Square and the sunken space off Bath Road near the river;

5. Introduce new parklets along key streets, which will provide temporary green oases for people to sit, relax and enjoy the town centre;

6. Incorporate further raised planters into the design of the streetscape to reduce the visual impact of parked cars, direct pedestrian movement and incorporate integrated seating; and

7. Explore innovative ways to incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS), which can help to manage surface water, whilst also enhancing biodiversity. Strategies could include the use of permeable paving to on street parking areas and public spaces, incorporation of rain gardens into public spaces, filters strips and bio-retention systems.

Figure 51: Sedum roof is simple and easy to introduce

Figure 52: Raised planter with integrated seating
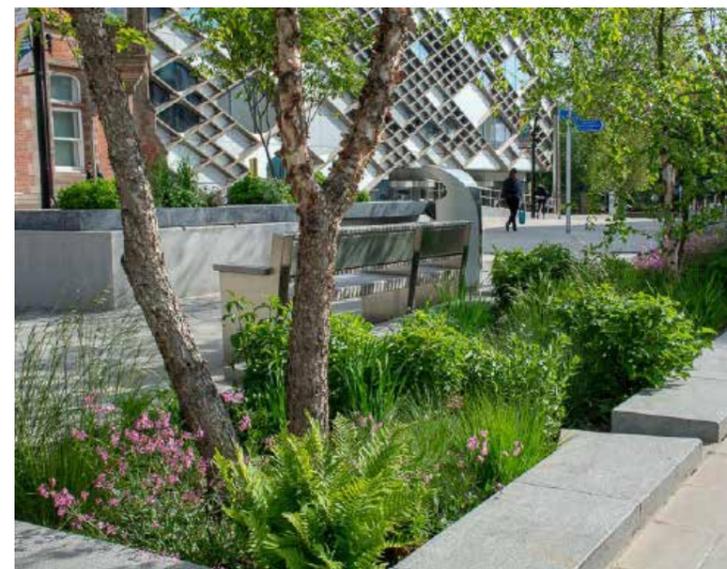

Figure 53: Raingardens with outlet kerb in stone

Figure 54: Living wall, London

Figure 55: Street trees

AECOM

Sustainability and climate change opportunities cont'd

Facilitating Active Travel

Active travel (walking and cycling) should be promoted wherever possible and should be encouraged to form part of longer trips via public transport. Relevant guidance documents on this matter include the Manual for Streets (MfS) and more recently the TCPA's 20-minute neighbourhood model, both of which promote active travel and walkable neighbourhoods.

This is a key aspiration of the Councils and is being explored through the work that Places for People are currently undergoing.

In order to encourage more people to choose to walk and cycle when making local journeys, pedestrian connectivity will be enhanced throughout the Masterplan area together with improvements to the public realm. In order to minimise the need to the travel and maximise the ability to make trips by sustainable modes of transport, new housing will be directed to the most accessible and sustainable locations within the Melksham town centre area, subject to other policy considerations.

Sustainable Buildings

Proposals to refurbish or re-use existing buildings will be encouraged to reduce energy consumption including through improving the building fabric, lighting and heating and ventilation systems.

Proposals for new buildings should seek to incorporate a high performance envelope to minimise heat loss/ gain, maximise the use of natural and use low energy lighting systems, and use low temperature heating and cooling systems based on heat pumps where practicable. In developing new buildings and infrastructure elements, the commissioning of whole life carbon assessments will be encouraged.

Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

Energy networks will have an important role to play in enhancing energy efficiency. They are especially effective at providing heat for developments with high demand (e.g. leisure facilities, office space and high density residential) together with existing buildings that may not be suitable for retrofit with heat pump systems. Opportunities to deploy phased energy networks in clusters (including the potential for decentralised energy) should be fully investigated and implemented subject to further feasibility and viability.

Additionally, future development proposals should consider the potential to incorporate decentralised energy.

The use of renewable zero carbon technologies, such solar PV and heat pumps will be embraced. All new development should aim to incorporate appropriate zero/ low carbon measures to offset energy requirements. Opportunities to enhance the electric vehicle charging infrastructure in suitable locations throughout the Masterplan area will be supported, having regard to existing provision in the local area.

Figure 56: Cycle hub with bike racks and storage within public realm

Figure 57: Bike hub with storage within retail unit

Figure 58: PV cells on pitched roof

Figure 59: Electric charging points

6.8 Public realm, connectivity and accessibility

This section will focus primarily on public realm, alongside connectivity and accessibility - which are inextricably linked - so as not to replicate the work that Places for People are doing. Their agenda is to explore and develop an ambitious long-term strategy to promote mobility's role in fostering good health, well-being and inclusion for all.

A high-quality public environment can have a significant positive impact on the economic life of a town centre, with the presence of good parks, squares, gardens and other public spaces being a vital component in attracting businesses, investment, employees and visitors. Access to good-quality, well-maintained public spaces can help to improve our physical and mental wellbeing, as well as providing a wealth of other environmental benefits.

6.7.3 Public realm, connectivity and accessbility today

Open space and connectivity

There is a substantial network of open space surrounding the town centre, comprising the riverside walk, parks and sports pitches. However, there is a lack of green space within the centre itself and the spaces around the edges.

In terms of connectivity and accessibility, the green spaces are sometimes difficult to navigate towards and/or hard to access.

Whilst the town centre is accessible, it suffers from poor interconnectivity between its key assets, for example King George V Park and the High St.

This is also true of the network of historic lanes and alleyways that snake through the town (shown on the map, right) which are underused.
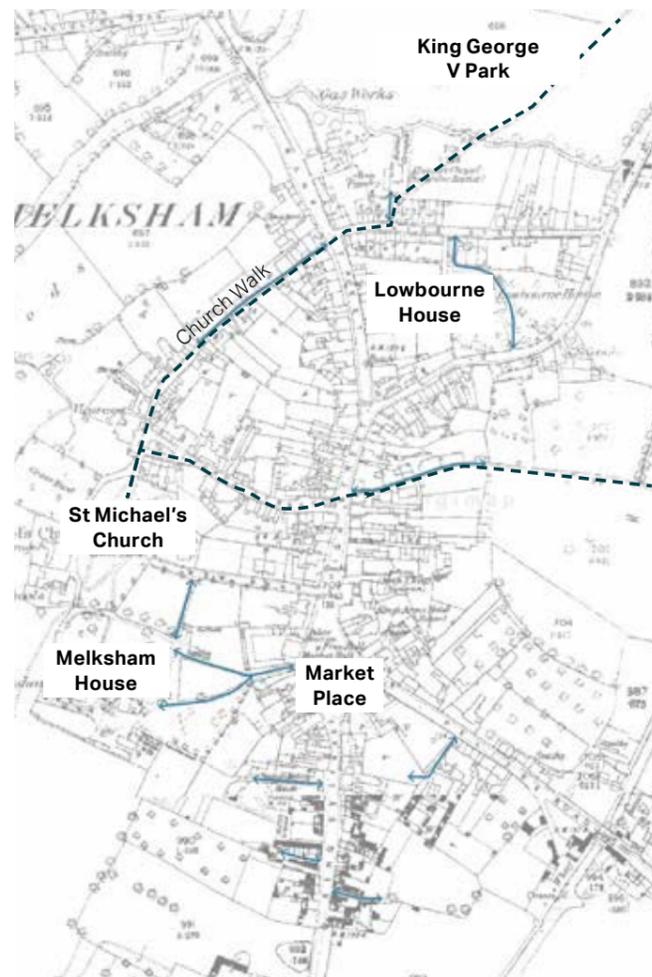
Figure 60: Walking routes

KEY

- - - Area of study
- - - Footpath
- - - National cycle route
—— Cycle path (on road)
-·-· Cycle path (shared with pedestrian)
→ Lane
Green verge
Planters
Amenity green space

Allotment
Sports
Park
Churchyard
School ground
Natural green space
Square
Market area
Car parking
● Key tree
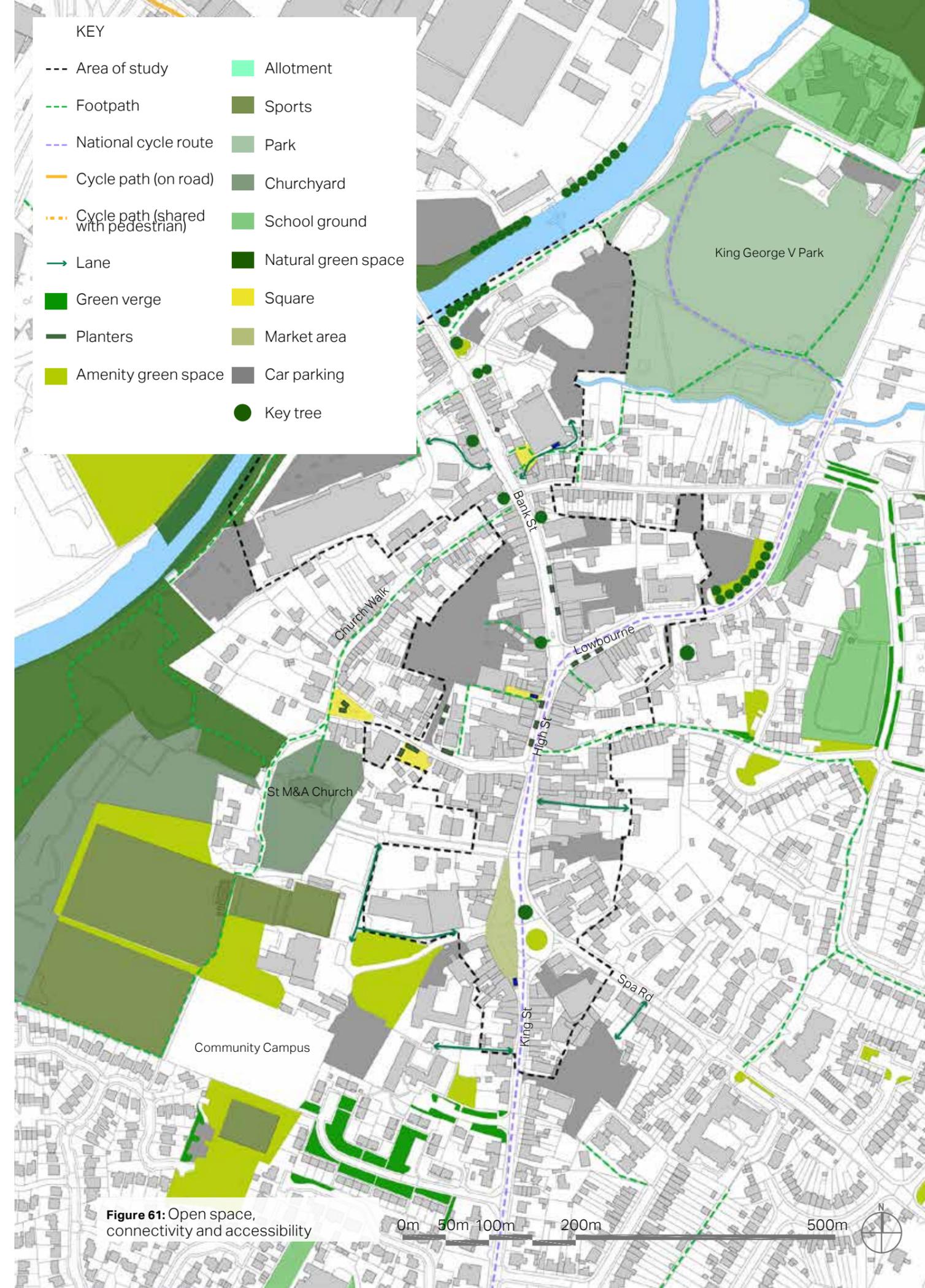
Figure 61: Open space, connectivity and accessibility

0m 50m 100m 200m 500m

Public realm, connectivity and accessibility today cont'd

Public realm, accessibility and connectivity

The public realm of Melksham town centre is currently car-oriented with inadequate infrastructure for walking and cycling and a dominance of surface car parking.

The main streets through the town centre are traffic heavy and the footpaths are often narrow. There are insufficient crossing points and several junctions are traffic heavy and over engineered, such as the Market Square and the access to Sainsburys / Waitrose. The pedestrian and cycle experiences is not welcome and is often hampered by busy roads, complicated junctions and narrow footways.

Away from the high street are a network of underused spaces, such as Canon Square and the riverside walk gateway space.

As mentioned on the previous page, there is a web of footpaths that provide short cuts through the centre, linking up with the surrounding residential communities. Some of these routes, such as Church Walk, are extremely attractive.

Figure 62: Car park, Union St

Figure 63: Church Walk

Figure 64: Car dominated arrangement, High St

Figure 65: Church St Gardens

KEY

- ▪▪▪ Study area
- → Main road
- ╌╌ Footpath
- ←→ Alleyway
- ── Cycle land (on road)
- ╌╌ Cycle lane (shared with pedestrians)
- ╌╌ National cycle network
- ● Bus stop
- ∿∿ Raised kerb
- ── On-street parking
- ▪ Car park
- ▪▪▪ Pedestrian crossing
- Traffic light
-][Bridge
- ── Bus/ taxi rank
- ● Train station
- ╌╌ Train line
- ▪ Cycle parking
- ○ Roundabout

Key spaces:

1. Riverside Walk gateway space
2. Canon Square
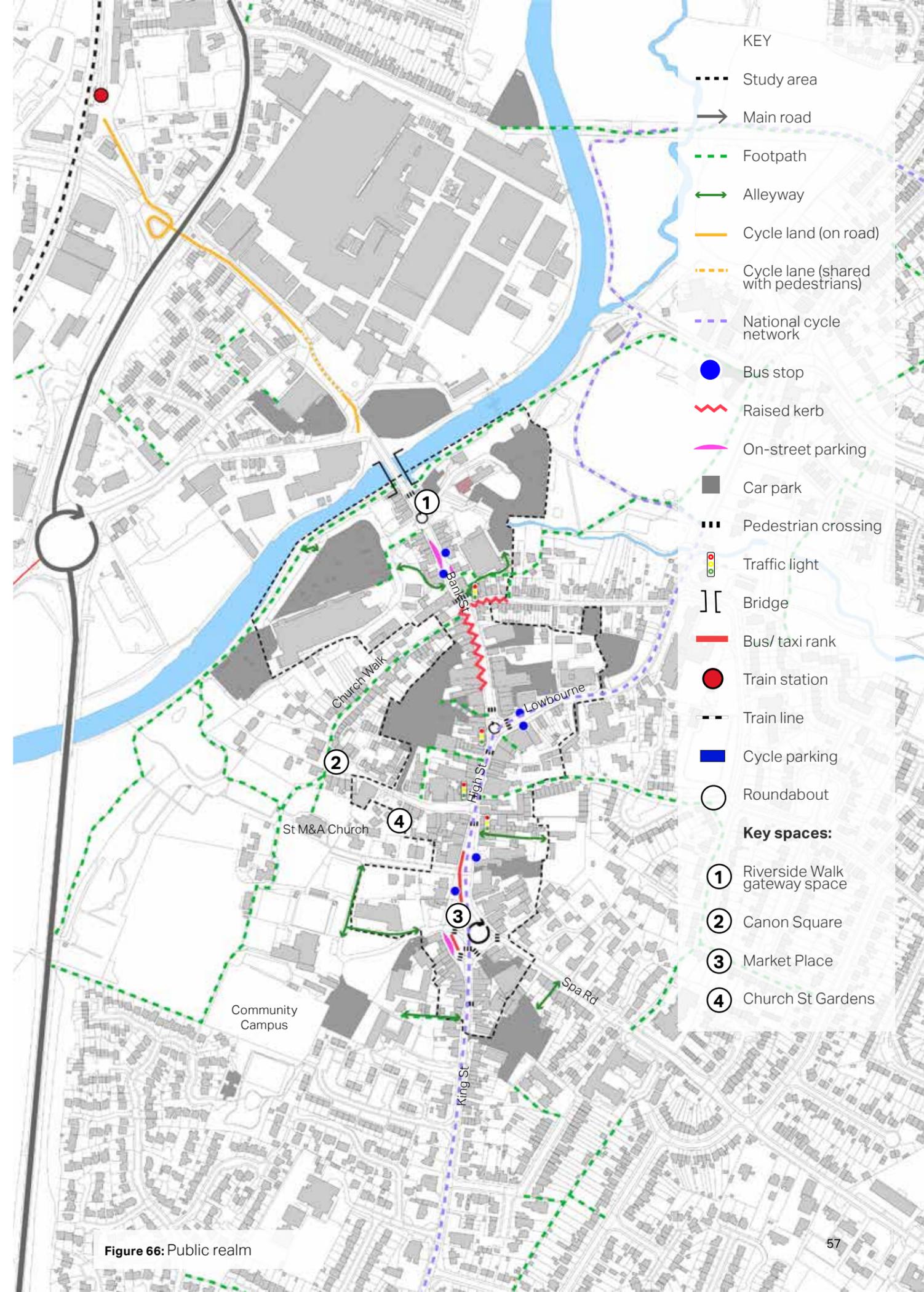3. Market Place
4. Church St Gardens

Figure 66: Public realm

6.8.1 Public realm, connectivity and accessibility opportunities

A key aim of the Masterplan is to ensure that new development and public realm interventions create successful public spaces and routes which are attractive, inclusive, easy to navigate and safe will help to increase footfall and encourage people to explore, rest and interact with Melksham town centre. Moreover, the public realm should be vibrant and welcoming. Therefore, the following opportunities could be implemented:

Connectivity/accessibility interventions:

- Focus street design on moving people rather than traffic, giving priority to pedestrians and cyclists at junctions. This would encourage active travel and improve connectivity and is linked with the Healthy Streets approach;

- Pedestrianise key parts of the town centre;

- Create mobility hubs with charging points for cars and scooter/bike hire, encouraging active travel;

- Rationalise and consolidate surface car parking; and

- Improve connectivity to, and along the River Avon.

Figure 67: Distinctive materials for junction, footpath, use of shared surface for all users to reduce traffic speed in Poynton

Figure 68: Central median, street trees and planters, with clear crossings, using high-quality paving materials, Altrincham

'Healthy Streets aid wayfinding and promote active travel, connecting together a series of linked key public spaces which encourage people to well and explore the town centre'.

Figure 69: Simple raised planters separate the pavement and street

58

Public realm interventions:

- Generally, the key assets within the town centre, including the town's unique architectural heritage and cultural offer, could be represented more positively by enhancing the public realm and spaces, and more appropriate consideration of wayfinding and permeability.

- Implement Healthy Streets, by:

  - Transforming the river Avon gateway space to attract more visitors and mark it as a key space;

  - Introduce more greening in small spaces to create pocket parks and improve biodiversity;

  - Provide more places to rest and spend time along the high street, which will increase dwell time and encourage wider uses of the street– such as play, performance and café-spill out;

- Improve wayfinding to existing rest spaces such as Canon Square and Church St Gardens;

- Improve the quality of paving materials throughout (e.g. as implemented in Market Place);

- Consider small art interventions throughout the centre and possibly link them up to form a trail; and

- Introduce more street trees to provide shading, enclosure and make the streets more welcome to pedestrians;

- Introduce elements of play within the town centre (possibly in some of the existing peripheral spaces) to widen the existing user and add vitality; and

- Introduce growing gardens.

Figure 70: E-scooters and street trees providing shading, London

Figure 71: Raised planters with integrated seating

Figure 72: Community gardens

Figure 73: Simple public art adds richness and encloses the public realm

Figure 74: Vertical play elements incorporated into the urban environment, Manchester

Figure 75: Creative artwork integrated into the paving add playful feel

Figure 76: Inventive urban greening

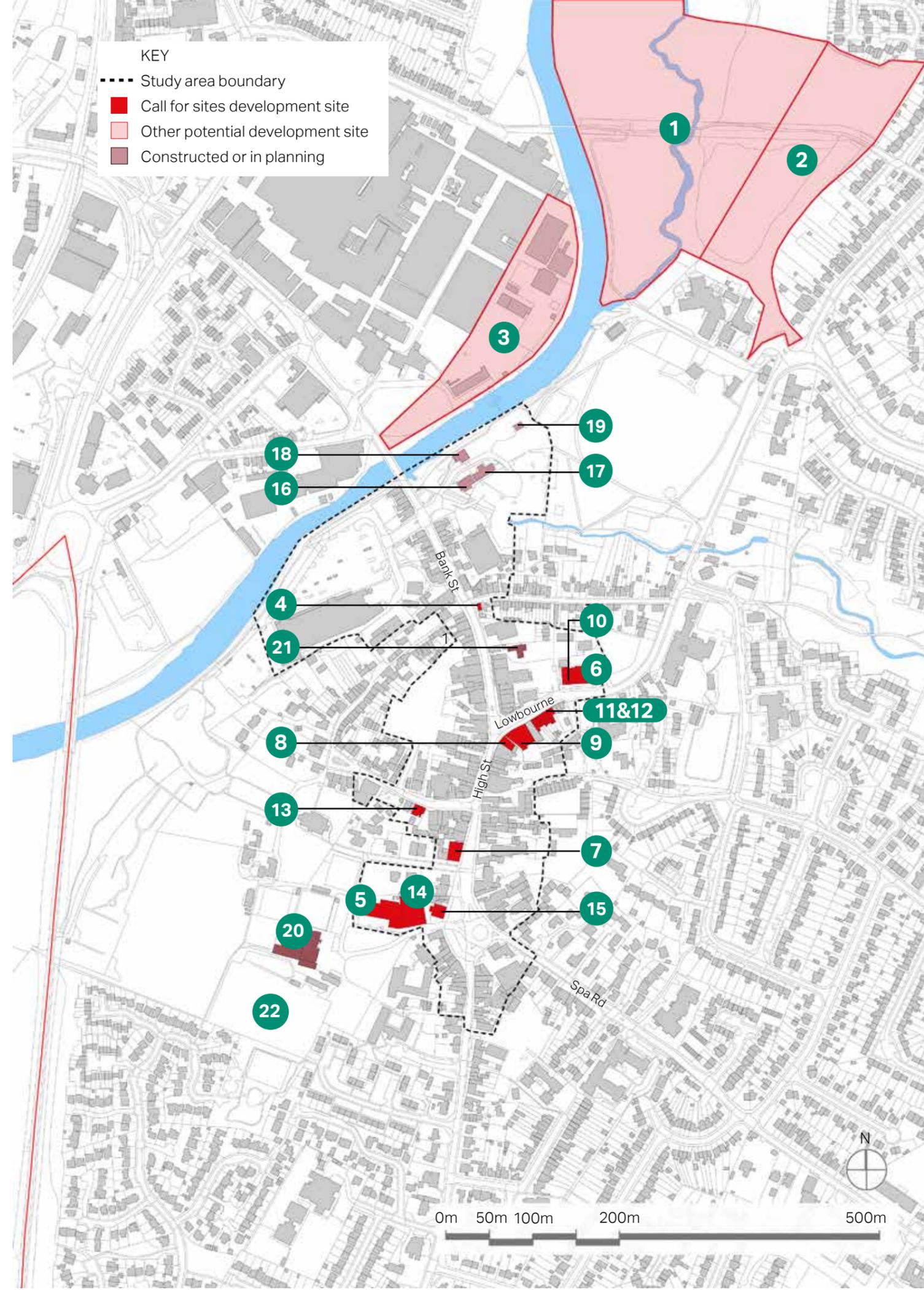# The town centre framework masterplan

06

7. The town centre masterplan

The Development Principles presented in Section 06, provide the overarching framework for considering future development within the town centre, informed by the vision and objectives in Section 05.

Within the town centre, there are a number of potential development sites, which are introduced in the 'Economy and Vitality Development Principle' in Section 06. These sites are vacant, dissused or underused and include a number identified as regeneration opportunities. The sites are shown again, for ease, on the plan, right

The following pages set out a broad masterplan for these sites and include land use principles, which will promote innovation and inform appropriate land uses incrementally over the lifetime of the NDP and beyond.

No	Call for sites development sites
1	Land to North of River Avon (Area 8)
2	Land to North of River Avon (Area 9)
3	Land to North of River Avon (Area 10)
4	Land at 28 Bank Street
5	Blue Pool at Melksham House, Market Place
6	Library & Lowbourne House, Lowbourne
7	Vacant Lloyds Bank Building, 1 High Street
8	Vacant HSBC Bank Building, 32 High Street
9	Vacant NatWest, 34 High Street
10	Vacant Dragon Delight Chinese, 7 Lowbourne
11	Vacant Marjo Fashion, 8-12 Lowbourne
12	Vacant Nettl, 14 Lowbourne

No.	Other potential development sites
13	Vacant Co-op Funeral Care, Church Street
14	Assembly Hall
15	Town Hall
16	Scout hut
17	Guide headquarters
18	Riverside club
19	Community club
20	Melksham House

No.	Sites that are constructed or in planning
21	3 Lowbourne
22	Community Campus

KEY
- Study area boundary
- Call for sites development site
- Other potential development site
- Constructed or in planning

7.1 Town centre masterplan

The town centre masterplan is intended to provide the town centre with a framework that will shape development over the next xxx years. Consequently, some of the opportunities may have the potential to be delivered quickly, whilst other opportunities may take longer to come forward, once land is freed up or other developments.

There are a number of opportunity sites located within the town centre study area. These sites have been identified by the NP group as being important for the wider regeneration of the town centre. Historic towns do not often have large tracts of land potentially available for re-development and so, collectively they are hugely important assets.

The sites are located as such to form two potential development clusters as shown on the plan, right. These are located at key gateway locations, either end of the town centre and each has a different feel, character and therefore potential development focus. The following pages sets this out in more detail. Regardless, both clusters should encourage a flexible and layered approach to development which could include multiple, complementary uses.

The Masterplan envisages the potential for different types of development opportunity within each cluster:

- Comprehensive Redevelopment: where a previous user leaves and the site is then substantially redeveloped for new uses.

- Sensitive Redevelopment of Heritage Asset: where much of the built fabric is retained, but with new development that revitalises the existing uses.

- Rationalise Existing Use: the existing user might remain on site, but will rationalise their activities and land take, freeing up land for development.
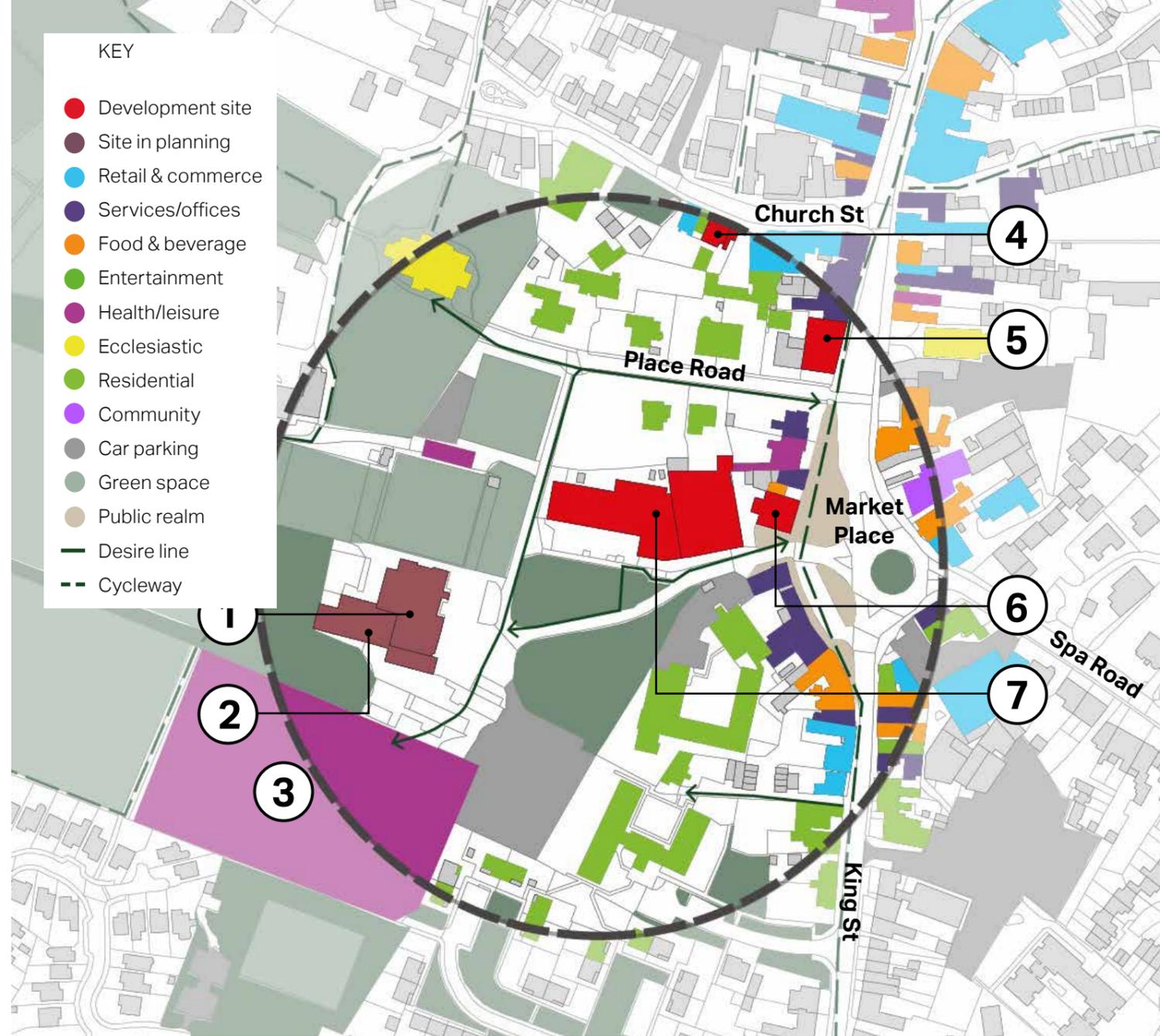

KEY
- Cluster area
- Call for sites development site
- Constructed or in planning site
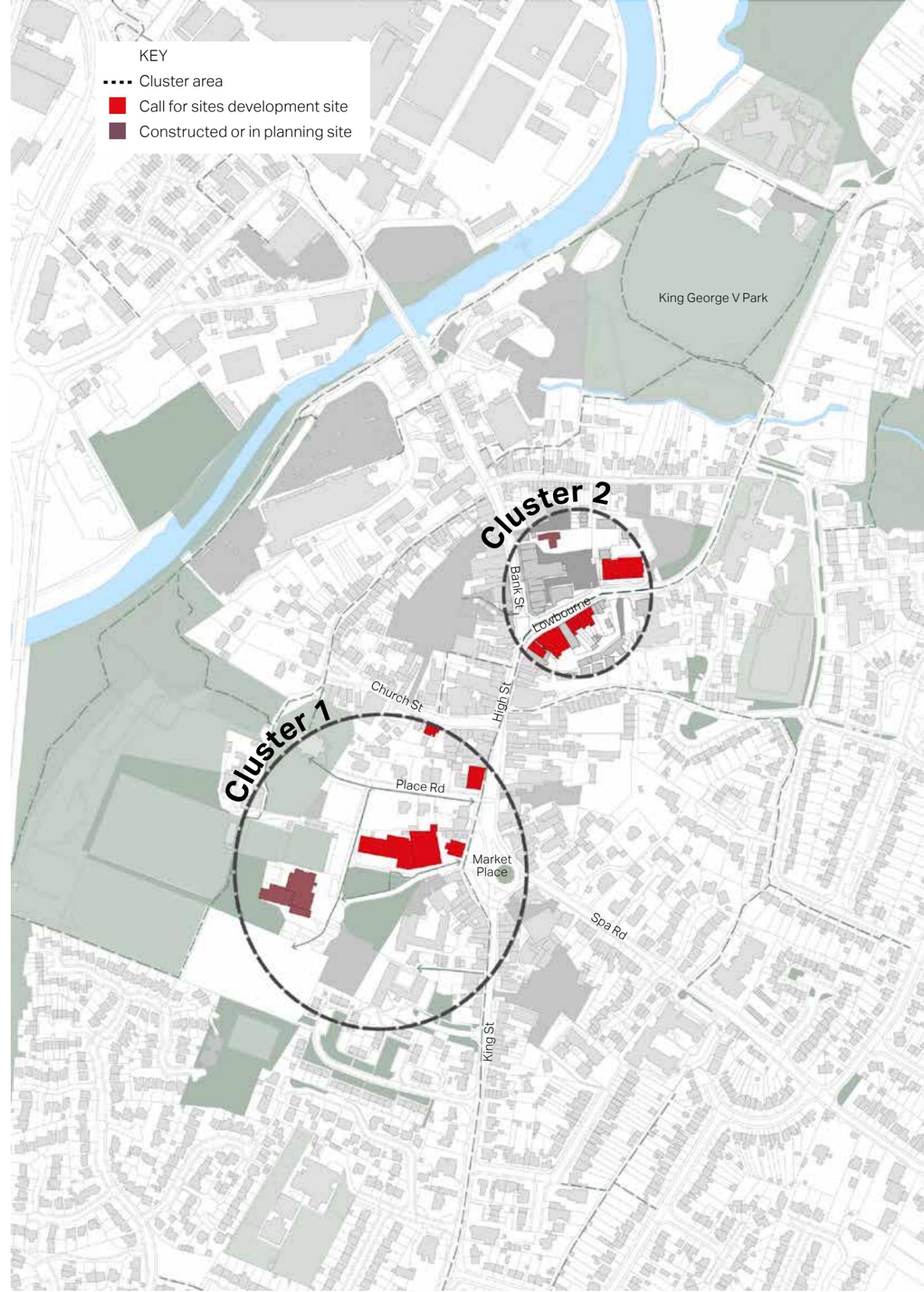
7.2 Cluster One
Existing Uses

This cluster currently comprises a wide variety of uses, with an emphasis on health and leisure, due to the recent opening of the Community Campus. It is an important gateway into the town and has a longstanding civic focus. The market place is a key community space and one of the most recognisable spaces in the town centre, with a history in trading and which still to this day hosts a weekly food market. The built setting is high quality and historic, with a significant proportion of attractive stone built Georgian and Victorian buildings.

The cluster comprises a number of important land uses as follows:

1. Vacant Melksham House

2. Vacant Blue Pool at Melksham House

3. Melksham Community Campus. This is a leisure and community facility, which is now constructed and includes:
   - Library
   - Health Centre
   - Flexible workspace, including break out and meeting rooms
   - Cafe

4. Vacant Co-op Funeral Care

5. Vacant Lloyds Bank

6. Town Hall (currently houses the Town Council)

7. Assembly Hall (currently hosts live music and other leisure events).

Market Square

Blue Pool

Melksham House

66

KEY

- ● Development site
- ● Site in planning
- ● Retail & commerce
- ● Services/offices
- ● Food & beverage
- ● Entertainment
- ● Health/leisure
- ● Ecclesiastic
- ● Residential
- ● Community
- ● Car parking
- ● Green space
- ● Public realm
- — Desire line
- -- Cycleway

Church St

Place Road

Market Place

Spa Road

King St

Town Hall

7.3 Cluster One - Civic and Cultural Quarter
Proposed interventions

The Civic and Cultural Quarter is an important gateway into the town centre of Melksham. It will become a lively, active place for people of all ages and demographics to connect. It will be a creative hub with places to play, work and create.

Built form - the right mix

The new Community Campus includes new leisure, library and employment facilities, which will improve the tourism and hospitality offer in Melksham by drawing footfall from across Wiltshire. Clustering a range of facilities, such as culture, shops, leisure centres and youth facilities, close to each other consistently creates reasons to visit the same area.

As mentioned in the Economy and Vitality section, an important dimension in improving the local economy, is attracting and retaining employment within the town. Gentle intensification and layering of different land uses (not just residential, but commercial) will encourage all types of people to live and work locally.

To complement the new facility, a more diverse range of uses in this cluster should be provided, which will be active during the day as well as through to the evening. Some initial ideas are listed, right.

- In order to create a day and night time economy with a range of venues, uses could include local and independent food and drink uses layered alongside community facilities or workspace. An example of this is a book store or reading room with a cafe; or a cycle shop with a cafe / workspace area.

- Meanwhile uses should be considered for buildings which take a while to come forward as they are very effective for immediate activation of place. This could comprise a multi use facility such as an art gallery with an integrated cafe.

- The Campus could be paired with other health and care facilities, to create a wellbeing hub. Putting leisure, arts and sports facilities together with other community facilities can help increase awareness of opportunities to take part in sports, cultural and leisure activities, which creates good physical wellbeing. For example, youth groups, drawing classes, book clubs could be housed in the Town Hall. There should be an emphasis on features that welcome marginalised communities. Intergenerational facilities such as workshops, communal kitchens, craft rooms and growing gardens are good examples of this.

- A particular emphasis on arts and culture in this hub would complement the civic legacy of this part of the town centre and the longstanding provision offered by the Assembly Hall. This could include a new performing arts centre or an outdoor performance space.

- To layer the uses further, the former Blue Pool site and / or Melksham House could deliver a significant amount of new homes, across a mix of types and tenures. These should be designed to meet the need of a wide range of users and are adaptable to change, over time and therefore should comprise a range of houses and apartments as well as older persons' housing.

- Given the significant heritage of this area, new housing could include initiatives that articulate the characteristics of the town centre, to root it in its context. For example, in Barking Riverside new and established residents have taken part in a radio project that explores memories and histories of the river.

Art gallery

Pop up cafe, Warsaw

Temporary cultural activation

Reading Room, Welcome Collection

AECOM

7.4 Cluster One - Civic and Cultural Quarter
Proposed interventions

Public realm - connectedness

Connectedness is integral to our overall wellbeing. A lack of connection can lead to loneliness, which is a growing public health issue.

Disconnection from surrounding spaces and facilities limits walk and cycling, which in turn discourages interaction. This is the case in parts of Melksham town centre.

Designing with connectedness in mind will build upon the existing offering and introduce new elements and layers to this part of the town centre, to widen the visitor demographic and allow them to visit and use the town throughout the week.

The market and the Community Campus are fantastic facilities which offer the opportunity for residents to connect with one another. Beyond that, the following suggestions could be employed:

- Walking can be encouraged by making streets seem shorter than they are by adding points of interest (Jan Gehl research – something new to look at every 10m). The streets in the centre should encourage interaction; with trees, benches, streetlights, ramps for buggies, bikes, scooters, wide footpaths, and continuous and safe connections. These elements also transform a street into a welcoming place.

- Accessible wayfinding should also feature to ensure that spaces and facilities are available to everyone, particularly those with disabilities and those who may struggle to access or feel comfortable with active travel or public spaces. Wayfinding exists in the town centre but it is inconsistent.

- Well-placed temporary interventions along important routes will animate key areas and create dwell spaces and opportunities for trails and themed linking spaces. For example, to complement the weekly food market and the new library, temporary food and drink facilities could be located in key locations such as the Market Place or the spaces such as the front of the Community Campus to activate the area.

- The Market Place could be designed to be more multi-functional, so that it can accommodate a range of activities, which allows different groups of people to use them. This would encourage inter-generational mixing and help to reduce loneliness and isolation. In addition, it is more cost effective to maintain a smaller number of multi-use spaces, rather than a larger number of single-use spaces. Alternative uses are open-air performances and art exhibitions.

- Lighting, installations and street furniture bring life and connection to previously under or poorly used spaces. Lighting can also make spaces safe at night. Pop-up meeting pods and a colourful light installation are proposals to change the tone of an area. This could be employed in the zone between the campus and Melksham House.

Temporary meeting pods, Our Future Foyle, Foyle River, Derry
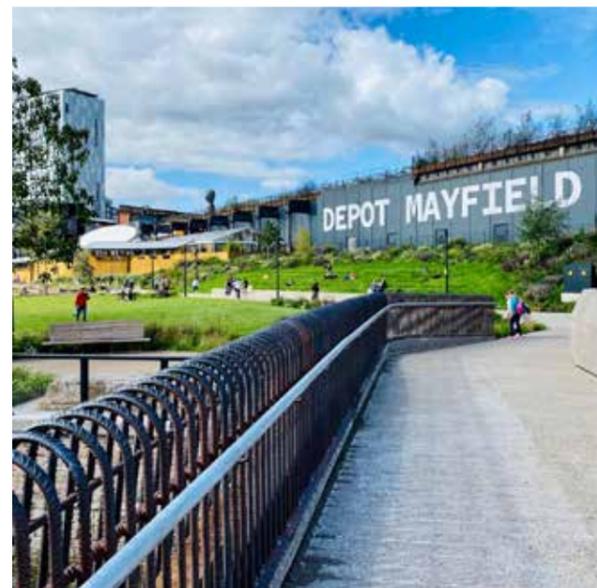
Clear wayfinding and green space, Depot Mayfield, Manchester

Pedestrianised square with performance space, Sant Antoni, Barcelona

A place to linger and connect, Bath

7.5 Cluster One - Civic and Cultural Quarter
Proposed interventions

Public realm - playfulness

Play encourages our ability to live in the moment and at an unhurried pace, meaning that other often overlooked groups such as the disabled and the older generation can benefit. The Civic and Cultural Quarter should seek to grow and develop into a community destination which encourages playfulness. A playful place is not just for children; it is related to the activities that we all do in our free time – the time we take for us. Places that encourage play are usually located within the public realm and these spaces - markets, parks, playgrounds, squares - play a vital role in bringing people together and providing space for light hearted fun and an escape from the humdrums of life.

- Opportunities for play could be threaded through the town centre and located in pocket parks and spaces such as. Streets can also be designed as spaces, with play as a focus, with art and wayfinding providing fun elements within the streetscape.

- Small play interventions help to stimulate the imagination and provide prompts for people to explore and can include elements such as sculptures, mazes or public art. Specifically, community-generated art, enables residents them to make a stake in their neighbourhood, helping to make them feel safe and productive. This is especially potent if it uses local narratives to articulate a sense of place and as a way to improve wellbeing.

- Create spaces that promote creativity, such as pop-up uses (Lexington pop up water parks and the 'Front Room' barge café in Birmingham) or pop up art (Kew, London etc).

College Square, Croydon, London

Local artist murial, West Byfleet
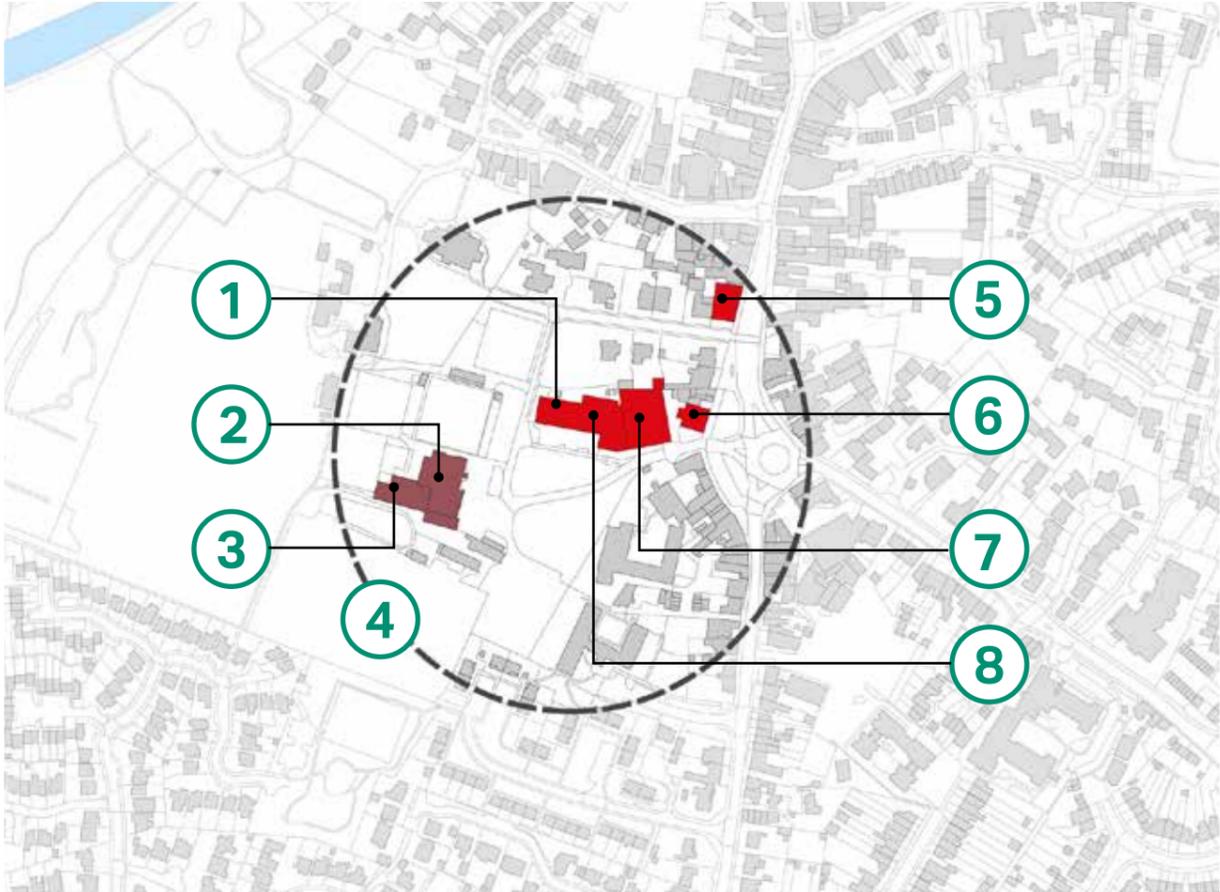

Camille Walala pedestrian crossing

Pop up playground, Dalston, London

7.6 Cluster One - Civic and Cultural Quarter
Masterplan

This cluster comprises a number of culturally important buildings as follows:

1. Melksham House - new residential

2. Blue Pool at Melksham House - new residential?

3. Co-op Funeral Care

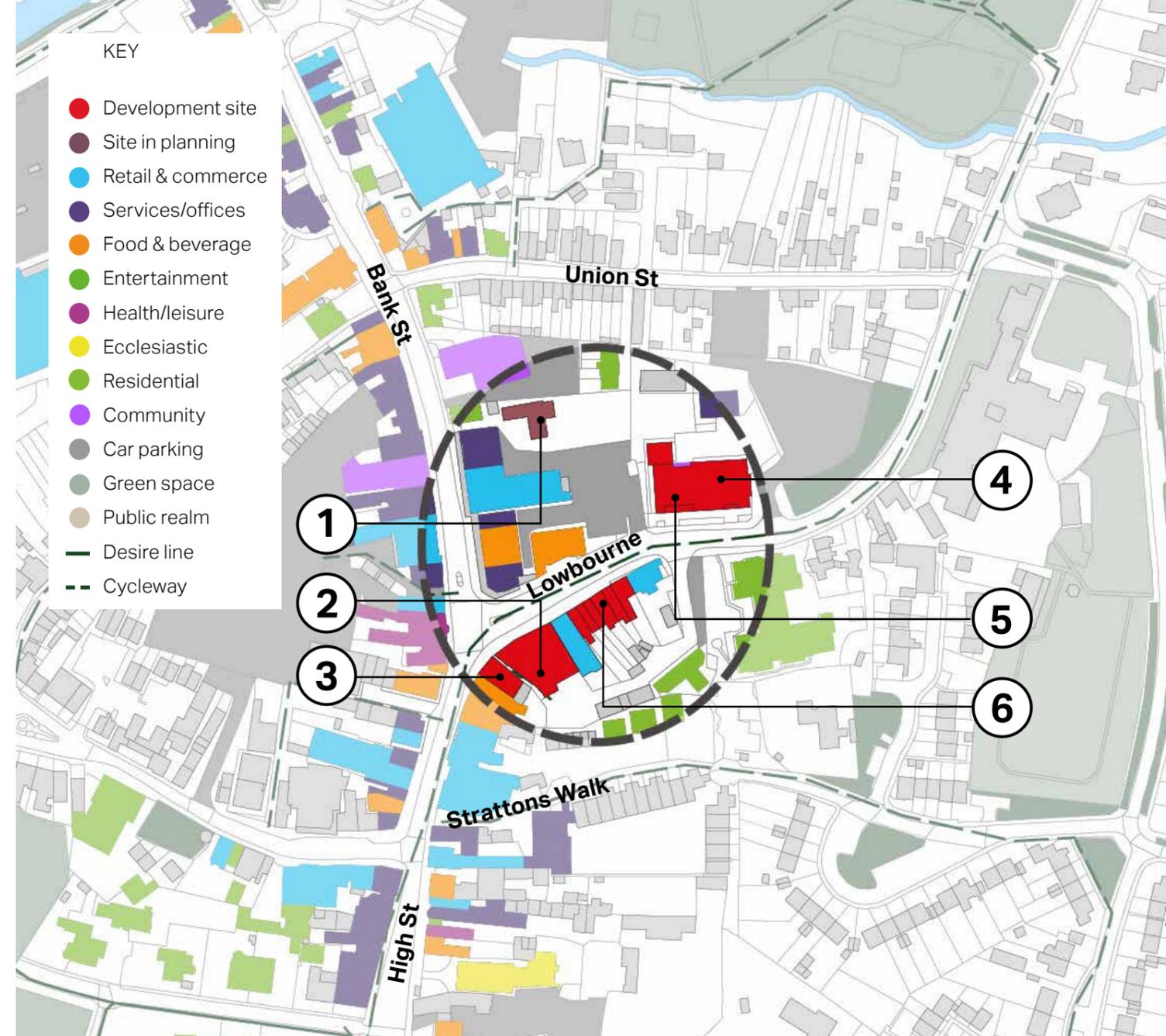4. Lloyds Bank

5. Town Hall

6. Assembly Hall

7.7 Cluster Two
Existing uses

This cluster sits in a key, central crossroad location within the high street. It features a variety of uses, with an emphasis on retail and services. However it has a great many vacant units, offering plentiful scope for revitalisation. It has recently suffered the loss of the library closure and so needs another comparable community based feature. It is surrounded by housing of all types. Its built character is mixed, with some well preserved Victorian buildings alongside several the vacant sites which require significant refurbishment or demolition.

This cluster comprises a number of vacant buildings as follows:

1. 3 Lowbourne (in planning)
2. Former Natwest bank
3. Former HSBC
4. Library
5. Chinese takeaway
6. Cluster of vacant retail units

Vacant units, Lowbourne

Vacant takeaway unit

Vacant library

KEY
- Development site
- Site in planning
- Retail & commerce
- Services/offices
- Food & beverage
- Entertainment
- Health/leisure
- Ecclesiastic
- Residential
- Community
- Car parking
- Green space
- Public realm
- Desire line
- Cycleway

Vacant unit, Lowbourne

Former Nat West bank

7.8 Cluster Two - Community Quarter
Proposed interventions

Built form

- New homes in this cluster could be located on the former library and takeaway site, and could also be woven into under used upper floorspace, above the re-developed ground floor units along Lowbourne. It is important to avoid creating a mono community by using only a limited number of house types and tenures. Progressive build-to-rent schemes are emerging throughout the UK and are being specifically designed for families. Such facilities often embrace resident lounges and co-working spaces, employing 'hosts' to activate the spaces and welcoming in the wider local community

- Alongside new housing, local work 'hubs' would reduce peoples' commute time and build local social connections. These can be provided as part of other community facilities within a new residential development (perhaps on the ground floor), or provided as specific flexible workspace, with access to local 'work hubs' through the week.

- Where people are encouraged to work locally, other wrap around facilities such as on-site childcare can make workspaces more inclusive for parents. Impact Hub Birmingham's Radical Childcare programme not only provides a crèche for co-workers but actively engages children in their mission to create a fairer city.

- Bank closures on the high street have taken away convenient access to cash for those who need it, and brought about difficulties for small businesses trying to deposit takings. A bank hub would offset the loss of Nat West, Lloyds and HSBC, providing customers of any bank access to their accounts, deposit cash and cheques, and withdraw money at any time.

- The loss of the library in this cluster will be felt by the local community. Long term, it could be replaced with a cultural/commercial use, such as a reading cafe. Meanwhile, the temporary re-use of vacant retail and commercial spaces should be considered to provide affordable spaces for new creative and community uses to start up and reanimate the street scene, whilst a permanent use is secured.

Public realm

- Meanwhile spaces close to the workspace provide informal meeting space and encourage employees to form friendships. These can be outdoor gyms, running trails, bars, pocket parks and roof gardens and can be used by other local businesses. MAKE @ Story Garden is a public space for creative collaboration with, and by, the local communities in Somers Town and St Pancreas, London. The aim is to build community and creative skills through a programme of arts activities and projects.

- There should be small passive spaces in this part of the town centre, given its proximity to the river and the park. These would offer the opportunity for personal reflection and quiet connectedness. Growing gardens, pocket parks and low key play areas encourage connections with more distant members of the community. These could be introduced as temporary and long term interventions.

- When people grow food, they learn about horticulture and healthier eating and gain access to affordable vegetables and fruit and are able to connect with nature, and neighbours. So, small scale growing facilities such as growing gardens and roof gardens could be introduced, with potential learning links with the school. The former take away site would be well suited to this, alongside some new homes on the library site.

- This part of the town centre is particularity traffic dominated and given it is a transitional area, with homes and the park nearby, some public realm interventions would greatly improve the pedestrian experience. Public art on crossroads, new paving and new trees are suggested.
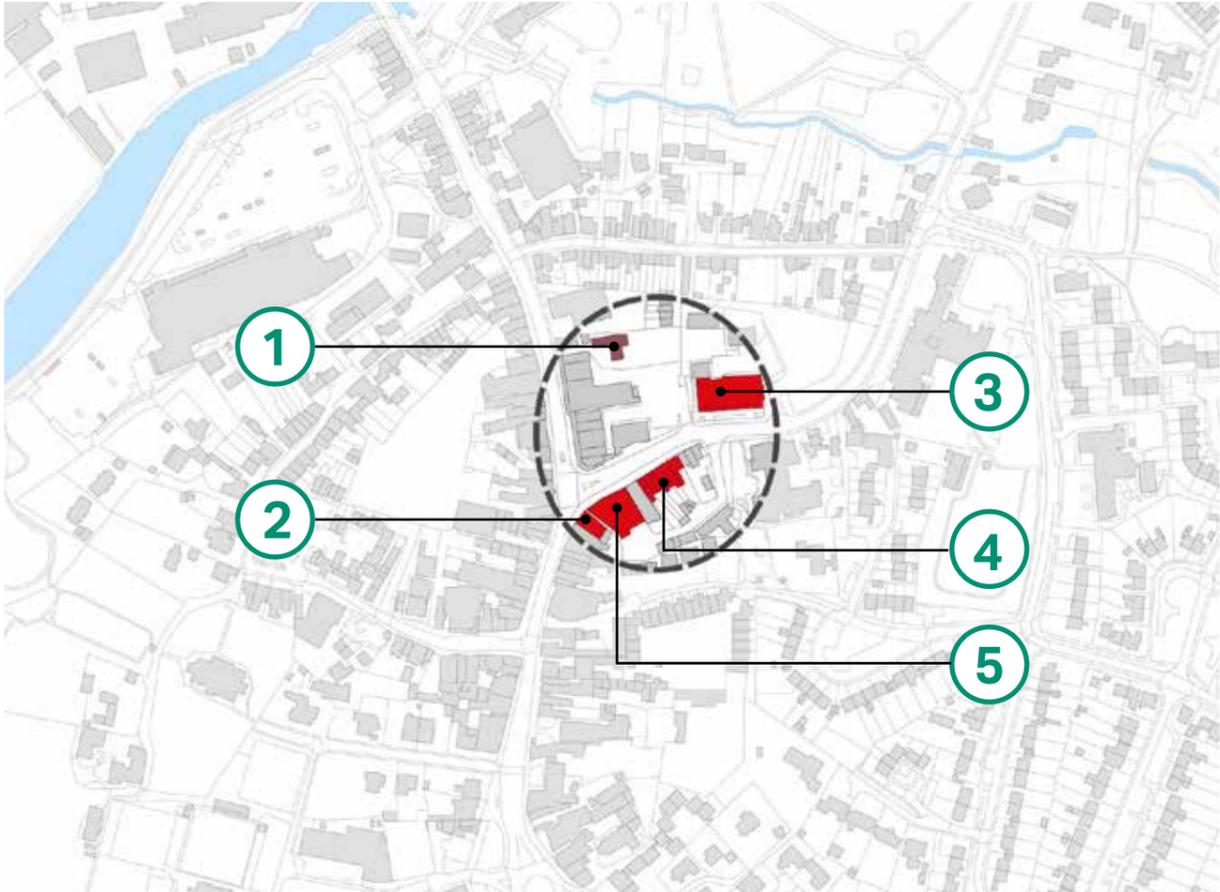

Communal space, Union Wharf, Greenwich

Rowntree Park reading cafe, York

Story Garden, Somers Town, London

Marmalade Lane gardens, Cambridge

7.9 Cluster Two - Community Quarter
Masterplan

Next Steps

06

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AECOM is the world's trusted infrastructure consulting firm, delivering professional services throughout the project lifecycle — from planning, design and engineering to program and construction management. On projects spanning transportation, buildings, water, new energy and the environment, our public- and private-sector clients trust us to solve their most complex challenges. Our teams are driven by a common purpose to deliver a better world through our unrivaled technical expertise and innovation, a culture of equity, diversity and inclusion, and a commitment to environmental, social and governance priorities. AECOM is a *Fortune 500* firm and its Professional Services business had revenue of $13.2 billion in fiscal year 2020. See how we are delivering sustainable legacies for generations to come at aecom.com and @AECOM.

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