
Huntingdon: A Prospectus for Growth

DRAFT VERSION. NOT TO BE MORE WIDELY SHARED.

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About this document

This document has been commissioned by Huntingdonshire District Council, funded by the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority, and developed in co-ordination with a local team of councillors, business, and other stakeholders. It delivers a 'prospectus for growth' - identifying Huntingdon's strengths and opportunities through highlighting interventions and areas where more detailed planning is required. The document establishes a vision, and will be instrumental in securing funding to deliver these short-term, medium-term and long-term initiatives which is seen as crucial to the growth and prosperity of Huntingdon, as well its wider economy.

This prospectus builds upon the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER), which was commissioned to give a thorough review and set of priorities for the Combined Authority. It recognises three broad economies existing in the Combined Authority region:

- 1) Greater Cambridge
- 2) Greater Peterborough
- 3) The Fens

Huntingdon overlaps Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough. It has naturally strong North/South connections to Peterborough with the A1 and Thameslink. With the completion of the new A14, access between Cambridge and Huntingdon will become increasingly more fluid.

This 'prospectus for growth' report endorses mayor James Palmer's target for the region, to **double its Gross value added (GVA) over the next twenty years.** For this to be achieved, all areas will be required to 'do their bit' to improve the three economies. Huntingdon's output (GVA) was £1.22bn in 2017 - doubling will add more than one billion pounds again. The interventions hereby enshrine the importance of inclusive growth, in line with the CPIER recommendations.

Lastly, the devolution deal which created the Combined Authority recognises the **important role of market town economies** in growing the wider Cambridgeshire and Peterborough economy. A masterplan or 'prospectus for growth' document for each of the eleven market towns across the region provides the opportunity to look at the unique features of each town, and offers deliverables which will benefit the immediate and wider economy.

Introduction

What sets apart the town of Huntingdon? What do we want it to look like in ten, twenty, even fifty years' time? What are the big things which need to happen to secure a prosperous future for our residents?

This document sets out our answers to these questions. We begin with an overview of what the town of Huntingdon is like, drawing upon a broad analysis of all the available data. Then we set out a vision for the future of our town, which has been developed in co-ordination with local partners. This leads to a list of key priorities which, if acted upon, will be transformational for our town.

We have called this document a “prospectus for growth”. The choice of words is deliberate. Similar to an investment prospectus, we don't expect everything in this document to be funded immediately. There are some quick wins where an injection of funding can get things moving. For other projects, we will need to spend time developing detailed plans and compelling investment cases before we can begin to leverage in funding. While the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) has funded this report, and is keen to invest in our town, we know we will need to build a coalition of supporters, including central government, to get some of the schemes detailed here delivered.

But we will not let the complexity or time requirement dim our ambitions for our town. Now is a pivotal moment. With the arrival of the new A14 imminent we stand poised to integrate ourselves much more deeply into the Cambridge innovation ecosystem. This also provides a unique moment to remodel our town's physical environment. At the same time, we are grappling with the questions faced by towns up and down the country – how to support our high street during the transition to greater online retail, how to encourage people into more sustainable and healthy ways of living and moving, and how to attract new labour and business in what has been dubbed “the age of the city”. The towns which will prosper are those which don't shy from taking bold steps to address these issues.

We welcome the involvement of the public and businesses as we develop these plans. **[Details to be added of how people can have their say].**

Why does Huntingdon need a “prospectus for growth”?

What is the prize on offer? The Combined Authority's target is to double output (as measured by Gross Value Added, or GVA) from 2017 levels by 2040. We estimate that in Huntingdon, our output (GVA) was £1.22bn in 2017. Doubling will add more than one billion pounds again.

But, by focusing on the interventions which change the look and feel of our town, we will also make it a more pleasant place to live and work.

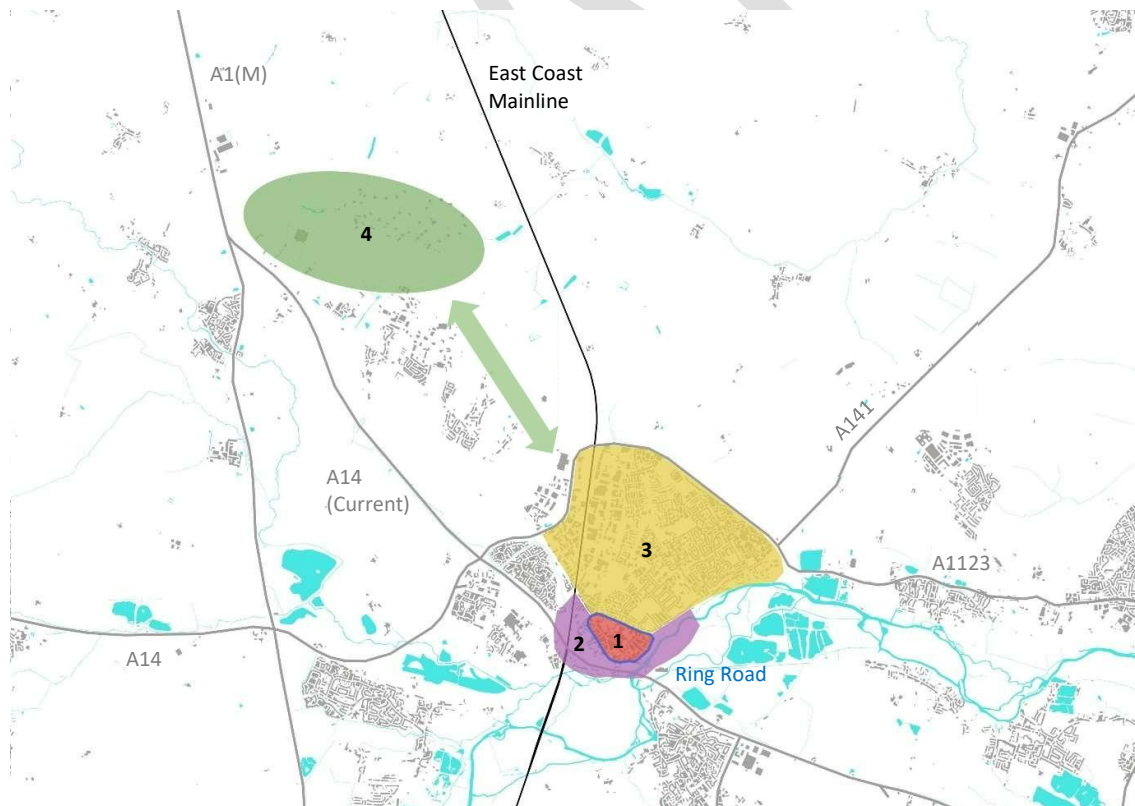
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A vision for Huntingdon

Huntingdon brings together brilliant transport connectivity, the architecture and heritage of a market town steeped in history, a breadth of opportunities for leisure and recreation and a vibrant and diverse community.

Now is the time for Huntingdon to raise its game, combining all of these elements so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We need to exploit our connections to London, Cambridge, and Peterborough, to develop clusters of high-quality jobs. We need to connect our people to opportunities through developing their skills. We need to build upon the Chequers Court redevelopment to rejuvenate our town centre, looking not just to infrastructure but culture and heritage to deepen a unique sense of place. We need to be bold in encouraging walking and cycling, by removing congestion and promoting active travel. We need to integrate the Great Ouse into the town centre, and stimulate a more vibrant evening economy.

We have taken a spatial approach to developing our vision for Huntingdon by looking at four key geographical areas of focus.



- 1. Huntingdon Town Centre will be a social and cultural hub.** A renewed town square will be the focal point. We will use this to develop and promote the town's

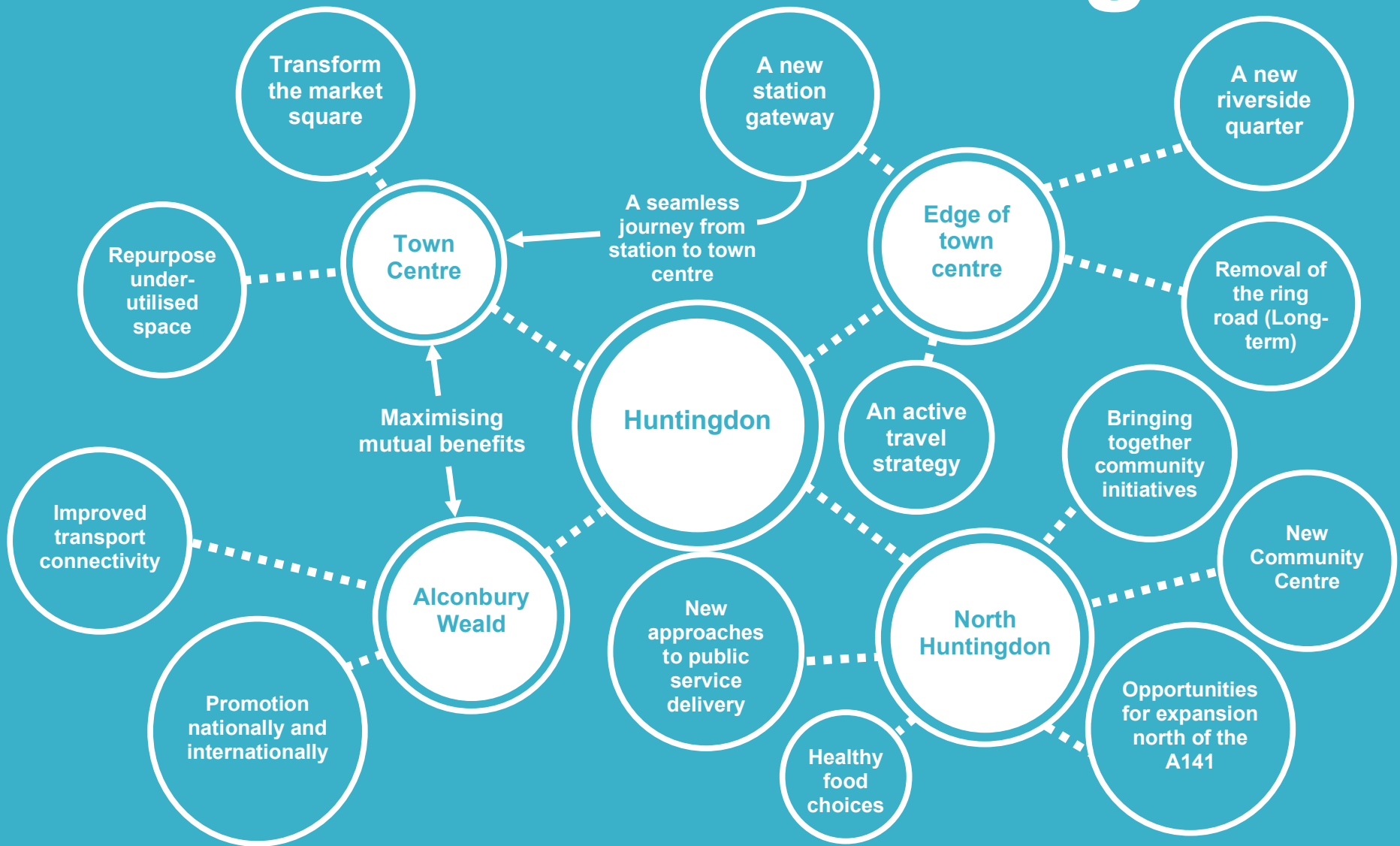
historical connections, bringing increased visitor numbers. The town square will be a vibrant, buzzing space, with an environment that encourages people to dwell, while playing host to cultural events. The square and high street will also become the centre of an evening economy, with bars, cafés, and restaurants spilling out onto the streets in the summertime. We will make better use of vacant or poorly used space within the town centre to bring more people to work and live there.

2. **The edge of the town centre will be transformed, from an environment that is currently congested, noisy and unwelcoming, to one which allows the town centre to expand, and creates attractive gateways for visitors.** We will reintroduce the river to Huntingdon town centre by improving access and developing a riverside quarter based around the currently unused Tyrells Marina. With the removal of the A14 viaduct, we will transform one of the worst gateways to Huntingdon at present – the train station. This area will be reimagined – plans will create a welcoming place that naturally draws people into the town, connecting through to the town centre via the bus station and St Benedict’s Court developments. Longer term, we will seek to reduce traffic and remove the ring road to allow the town centre to expand.
3. **North Huntingdon will house a growing population, with employment and educational opportunity.** It will offer a wide range of properties within easy reach of the town centre – and in future, employment to the north at Alconbury Weald. Huntingdon will continue to grow, with residential, leisure and amenities provision pushing north of the town, beyond the A141. We will continue to drive improvements in the area – working with key local partners such as GPs and schools, using the new community centre as a focal hub for engaging and helping the community. We will explore innovative ways of delivering public services to help residents, and work with employers to improve workplace health.
4. **Alconbury Weald will provide jobs of the future, as a hub for companies in hi-tech sectors such as advanced manufacturing.** The relationship between Alconbury Weald and Huntingdon town will be mutually beneficial, with job opportunities created for residents, and a larger catchment population for the retail and hospitality offer in the town. There will be much easier connectivity between the two, including a more rapid express link to Cambridge and Peterborough (initially guided bus, morphing into the Cambridge Autonomous Metro). We will put Alconbury Weald on the map by promoting key sectors and attracting businesses from around the UK and abroad.

Environmental vision

It is our concern to create a vision with environmental benefits, one which is people-focussed and can be delivered in a sustainable manner. The recommendations herein, are considerate of the Combined Authority’s zero neutral ambition.

The Plan on a Page



An overview of Huntingdon

A well connected town, across multiple modes

Huntingdon is easily accessible for work, retail, and leisure opportunities. Via rail, Huntingdon is well-connected via Thameslink, with trains to Peterborough taking under 20 minutes and the direct service to London St Pancras International just over an hour. On road, the town is just off the A1 – providing good connectivity to London, the Midlands, and the North. Local connectivity to surrounding towns and villages is assisted by the A14 and A141.



Local connections to nearby Godmanchester, Brampton and Hartford link Huntingdon with other smaller economies. While each town has its own distinct identity, they contribute to a wider economic unit. The new Huntingdon South A14 bypass has recently opened, bringing increased speeds to Cambridge, and the associated works upgrading the A14 are expected to be completed by the end of 2020.

It is worth noting that East-West connectivity, at least by public transport, is weaker, as is common across much of the country. The Guided Busway links Huntingdon east to Cambridge (which cannot be reached directly by rail) – but is slow between Huntingdon and St Ives. A town centre that is adapting to the 21st century

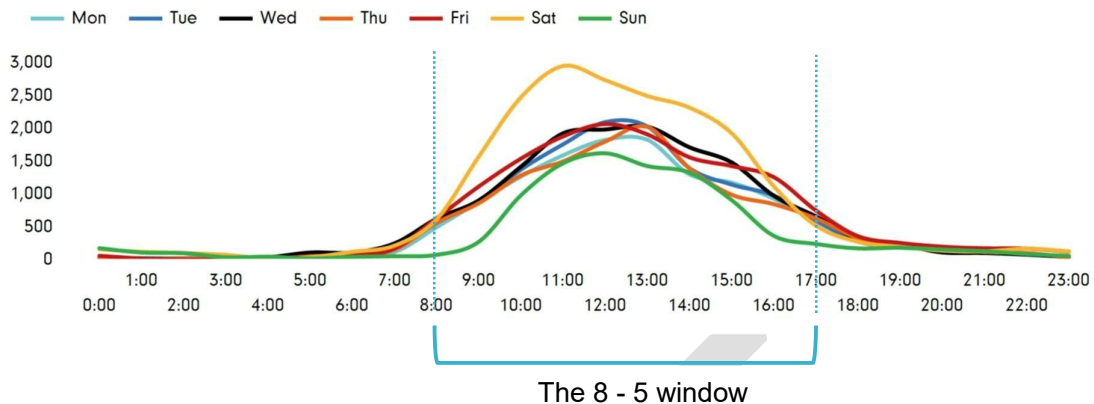
A mixture of value brands and high-quality chains make up the retail offer in Huntingdon, appealing to a diversity of shoppers. However, there is some inconsistency in the urban fabric of the town, with the development at Chequers Court creating an inviting scene for shoppers whilst Benedict's Court looks “of its time” and offers an opportunity for redevelopment.

The town is also responding to trends towards the evening economy – with some businesses offering later opening hours matched with free parking after 6pm. This helps attract the 21st century busy consumer. While having some good independent businesses, the town centre is potentially vulnerable due to the number of large anchor units.

“You can get most things in Huntingdon these days”

While during the day the town centre is often bustling, recent data collected by Huntingdon First shows that there is still a long way to go in developing the evening economy – with footfall on all days dropping off dramatically at 5.00pm.

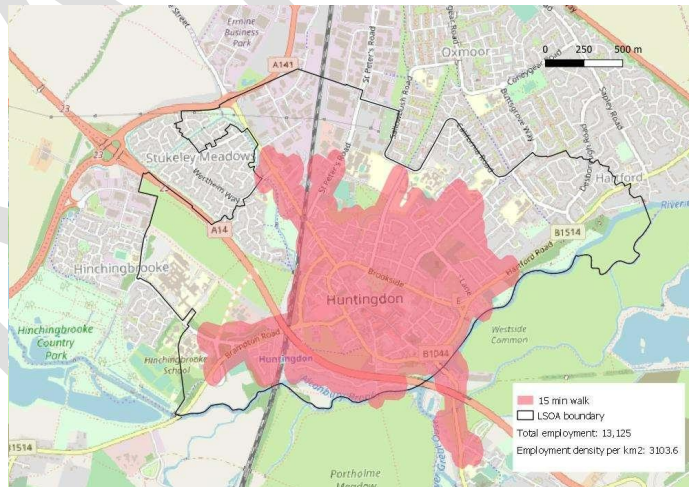
Footfall across the day in Huntingdon



Source: *Huntingdon First*

The creation of a Business Improvement District (BID) in 2012 is an example of positive action - created for the business community, by the business community. The BID was recently endorsed again by local businesses, and has produced a five-year business plan to increase footfall and sales. An additional result from the BID has been the championing of town spirit and efforts to make Huntingdon look more inviting.

Development of a desirable evening economy will not only draw people into the town but retain those who are already there. Increasing the evening offer of food, retail and leisure to those who are already in town for work, reduces travel time and benefits the local economy. This target group is identified by the map to the right, showing employment within the town centre, within a 15-minute walk.

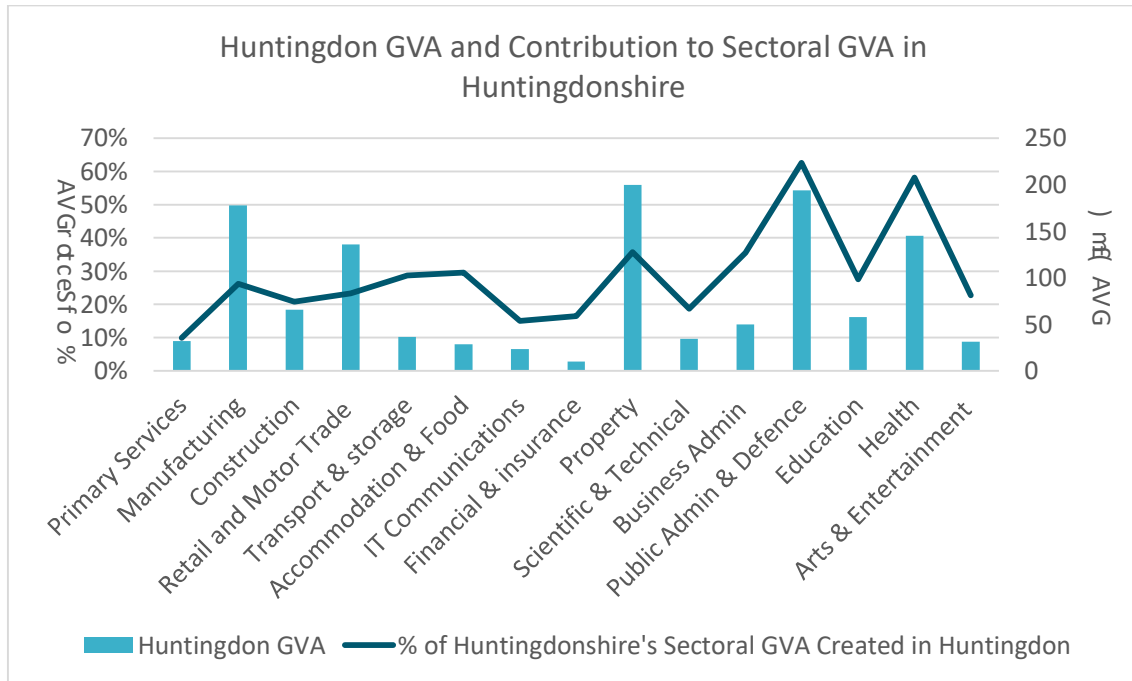


Source: *BRES 2018, LSOA level*

Sectors of district-wide value: Health and Public Administration and Defence

The value of economic output in Huntingdon is estimated at £1.22m¹ in Gross Value Added (GVA) terms. This is 30% of Huntingdonshire district's output. As a share of Huntingdonshire's total GVA, Huntingdon contributes a greater proportion of value to the Health sector, as well as to Public Administration and Defence. Huntingdon's high-value industries are Property and Public Administration and Defence.

¹ SIMILAR FOOTNOTE TO ST IVES WITH HUNTINGDON WARDS? 'In 2017. Based upon analysis of ONS regional GVA figures at a district level then using employment figures for the wards of [HUNTINGDON WARDS] to estimate the proportion of district-level GVA produced in the town.'

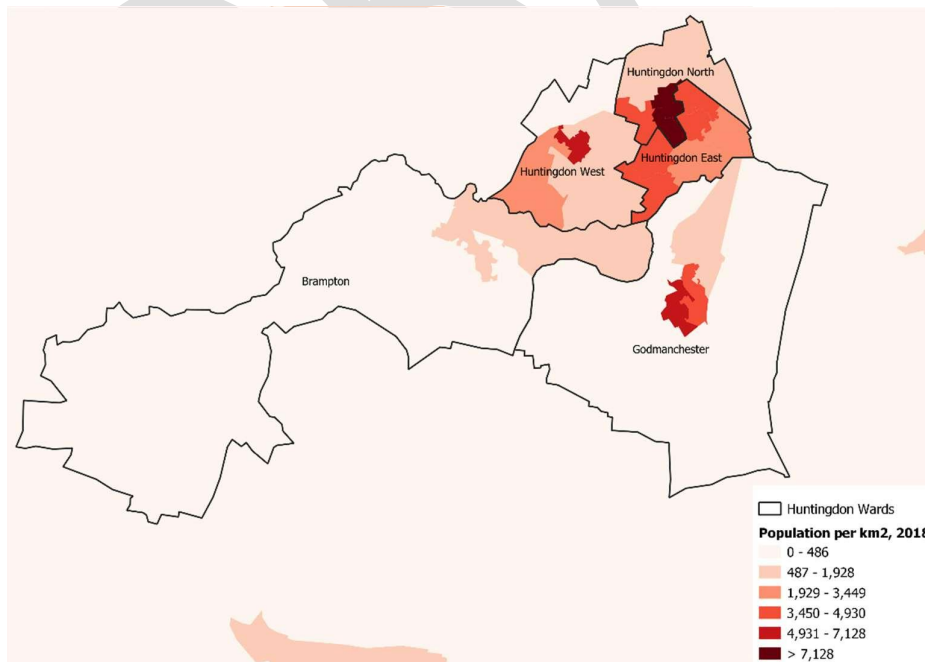


Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Regional GVA figures and ONS Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)

A large community to the North-East of the town centre

Due to the constraints imposed to the south by the river, the majority of Huntingdon's residents live to the North-East of the town centre.

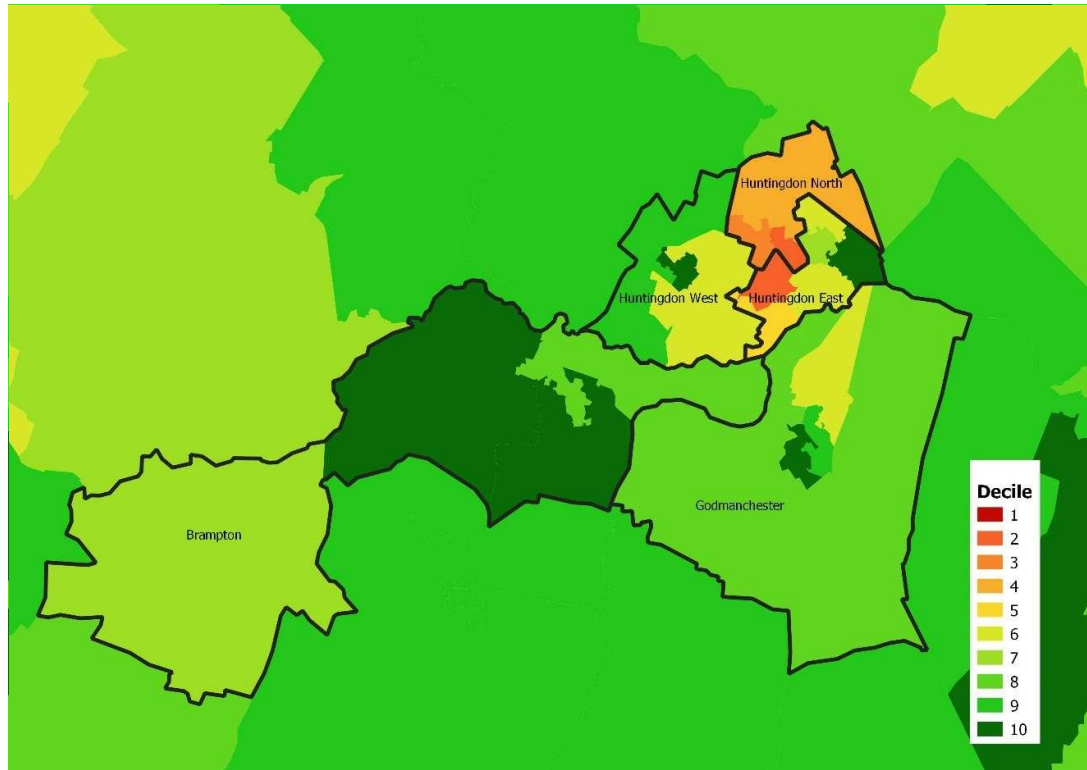
Population density in Huntingdon



Source: Analysis of ONS population estimates.

In Huntingdon North and Huntingdon East, population density is contributed to by social housing and houses in multiple occupation (HMO). In general, levels of deprivation are higher in the centre and to the North of the town.

Index of multiple deprivation 2015 deciles – 1 (deepest red) = most deprived 10% of the UK



Source: Analysis of MHCLG data

Within the North of the town is the Oxmoor Estate, which was originally designed as a London overspill estate. There have been many improvements on the estate in recent decades, although some of the design features – such as severance caused by fast roads like Coneygear Road – are challenges for the community. Access to amenities and public services is also a concern. Retail development has seen larger supermarkets built on the outskirts of town, whilst a precinct shopping area continues to serve the estate, providing a fairly limited shopping offer which in general does not promote healthy choices.

However, there are many positive initiatives and changes taking place. New development is coming forward in the area, bringing in residents and improving the overall quality of the dwelling stock. The local College has improved in recent years, following the merger with Cambridge Regional College. There is also a strong community spirit – with churches and other community groups doing a great deal to support residents.

Heritage buildings and historic connections

Huntingdon is the birthplace of Oliver Cromwell. It is also home to numerous historic buildings of interest: including the Town Hall, a civic centrepiece dating back to 1745; Wykeham House, a grade II listed building; Hinchingsbrooke House, a substantial property built after 1538 on the site of a Augustinian nunnery; the Falcon Pub, a restored sixteenth century coaching inn, and the Cromwell Museum, an impressive collection of artefacts housed in the former Huntingdon Grammar school where Cromwell himself attended school.²



Despite an exhaustive list of historic buildings, the town's heritage offer is generally underpromoted, with few outsiders being aware of the town's historic significance.

An attractive environment – but access challenges

Huntingdon sits beside the River Great Ouse, where the Riverside Park offers people a chance to enjoy the riverside setting. The town has a wealth of countryside within reach, including the Godmanchester Nature Reserve, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, and the Great Fen. These provide for outdoor leisure activities such as dog walking and boating.

However, unlike other towns nearby, such as St Ives and Ely, the river is kept out of the centre of the town, and is not made a feature of. To access the riverside park requires crossing the ring road, creating a feeling of separation. We have also heard concerns expressed that cycling infrastructure in Huntingdon is inadequate, discouraging people from using active travel to get around town and access the countryside.

² <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1128649>

Area of focus 1: Huntingdon Town Centre³

Huntingdon Town Centre will be a social and cultural hub. A renewed town square will be the focal point. We will use this to develop and promote the town's historical connections, bringing increased visitor numbers. The town square will be a vibrant, buzzing space, with an environment that encourages people to dwell, while playing host to cultural events. The square and high street will also become the centre of an evening economy, with bars, cafés, and restaurants spilling out onto the streets in the summertime. We will make better use of vacant or poorly used space within the town centre to bring more people to work and live there.

Where we are now

Huntingdon Town Centre has improved significantly over recent decades:

- The Chequers Court area has significantly improved the look and feel of the North side of the town centre, bringing in large anchor stores, such as M&S, TK Maxx, and Sainsburys. The urban fabric here is of significantly higher quality than elsewhere in the town centre.
- The town centre is successfully pedestrianised, helping to support footfall and dwell time.
- We are seeing the high street adapt to changes. There is a growing “café culture” in the town, which is taking the place of vacant retail units. The example of Olmo Lounge in a unit previously occupied by Argos epitomises this trend.
- Occupancy has held up in most of the town centre, with few vacant units.

However, the town centre also faces some significant challenges:

- Footfall is not currently sustained into the evening. This represents a missed opportunity to develop an evening economy in Huntingdon, which may be linked to **a perception that the town centre is a good place to shop** (largely a daytime activity) **but less of a good place to socialise** (more of an evening activity).
- The St Benedict's Court area is looking dilapidated and unattractive. The retail offer has failed to recover since Waitrose left the main unit, yet the area offers potential for redevelopment, particularly on account of its prime location, attracting trade from those heading into the town centre from the railway station.

³ Huntingdon Town Centre here refers to the area within the ring road

- Some of the urban realm in the town is dated, including unattractive paving and confusing/ugly signage.
- The town centre hosts relatively few events, and there is sometimes low awareness of events which do take place.

In order to maximise the social and economic potential of the town centre, there are two actions which need to be taken.

1. Transform the market square to become a social and cultural hub

The market square remains the traditional focal point of our market town. It is a huge asset, and currently underused. The square is fronted on the east side by the grandeur of the Town Hall, and on the west side by the All Saints Church. To the South stands Wykeham House, a Georgian, Grade II listed house, which was the first home of the London and County Bank and is earmarked to be converted into flats.. To the North is both the Cromwell Museum, newly renovated for March 2020, and a parade of “value” shops including Shoe Zone and Savers.



To transform the square requires taking action on multiple fronts.

Firstly, we need to build on what we already have to draw people into the square. The war memorial is located in the square and both the Town Hall and Church are attractive buildings. The Cromwell Museum is currently under refurbishment and due to reopen in March 2020. Future plans to address the square's historic narrative include a description of the war memorial and the introduction of Cromwell-themed street furniture.

We will use our Cromwell links as a basis for our cultural programme in Huntingdon, focused on the town square.

The example of how Prescott in Knowsley (see case study) has used its connection to Shakespeare to drive culture-led regeneration shows the potential Huntingdon has to draw on its heritage and reinvent itself as part of a placemaking project.

Case Study: Culture-led regeneration in Knowsley

Prescot, in the Knowsley area of Liverpool lays claim to having once offered the only indoor playhouse (outside London) in the Elizabethan period. The town has taken this little known USP, and developed it as the focal point for a regeneration strategy. This has culminated in plans for the 'Shakespeare North Playhouse' to be built in Prescot.

As well as burnishing the town's reputation, the proposed benefits this state-of-the-art venue has for the local economy are great. The visitor attraction offers a new theatre, education centre, outdoor performance garden and exhibition space.



As to the North side of the market square, **we need to adopt policies through the planning process to encourage cafés and restaurants** with support to make the most of outdoor space. This will help to activate the square both around the year, throughout the day and most importantly **support the evening economy**. This will tackle the current tendency for footfall

to drop off drastically in the evening (as noted in the overview) and encourage Huntingdon's workers to spend time in the town centre after work. This will also help to tackle any challenges of antisocial behaviour, which can be worse later on.

The market square offers a distinctive 'open space' for residents to dwell, yet is currently under-utilised. Relocation of the weekly markets to the High Street means the area's primary function is currently only used for 'special' events such as the Christmas Markets and International Food and Gift Markets. The decision to move the weekly Wednesday and Saturday markets was in part, a reflection of reduced footfall. This trend is not unusual and must be set in a wider context of retail concerns about the future of the high street. Despite this, some market towns, such as nearby Ely, are bucking this trend.

Development of Huntingdon market's offer could increase popularity and turnover, and maybe even see the market return to its traditional location. A simple first step would be to **invest in new physical market infrastructure such as stalls and power supply points**. In addition, a training programme for traders, covering product presentation, social media promotions and marketing will help them to raise awareness and build value. Huntingdon market, which is overseen by the District Council, provides the opportunity to explore 'shop local' initiatives and to provide a selling platform for amateur local entrepreneurs.

The market square's open space should be utilised on days where events in the Town Hall, Cromwell Museum and All Saints Church bring increased footfall to this area of town. The availability of outside space (subject to weather conditions) will complement the activities available in these buildings, creating a vibrant feel in the townscape and potentially drawing more visitors in. Events held by All Saints Church such as coffee mornings and craft stalls already encourage the approach of "bringing things out into the square", and the visitor figures of an Arts Festival held at the Town Hall earlier this year demonstrate the potential scale of this use of the open space, with 2000 attendees recorded in a single day.⁴ With more resources to plan and co-ordinate events, there is scope to better incorporate the market square into the townscape.

2. Transforming key spaces to bring more people to live and work in Huntingdon

Some areas in Huntingdon town centre are underutilised and have been identified as key spaces for repurposing for some time. The Combined Authority's agenda gives an opportunity to address these spaces and push on with the required work.

The town centre in Huntingdon is currently not as effectively used as it could be. There are particular areas where space is wasted – and where there are opportunities to be much more ambitious. There are two significant areas we want to focus on are:

⁴ [This figure from the most recent town team meeting – may need corroborating]

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- **St Benedict's Court**, which contains a large vacant unit, and sees lower usage than other parts of the town centre.
 - **The Bus Station**, a large area which forms part of the movement corridor from the train station to the centre of town.

These should both be developed as mixed-use schemes – combining the provision of accommodation, employment space, amenities, leisure, and education.

What needs to be provided in the town centre?

In order to support our high street and town centre, the previously retail-heavy space needs to adapt and integrate a multi-purpose use. A combination of following three provisions have been selected to bring more people to live and work in Huntingdon, with emphasis on increased residential provision:

1) Residential Accommodation: A desirable place to live

Building accommodation into these schemes will “densify” Huntingdon town centre, growing the local catchment of the town centre, and bringing greater vibrancy.

Though different in specification, this efficient use of space in these builds would suit both young professionals and older couples, who may desire a modest amount of living space with shared communal green space and would benefit from the proximity to amenities and work. The town centre residential offer should be designed as being as car-free as possible – freeing up space and promoting travel by foot, bus, cycle or rail.

Alongside transforming these two areas, there are opportunities to repurpose other underutilised space such as creating flats above businesses where stock rooms had previously stood. The town centre residential offer will be characterised by apartment living.

2) Employment space: An attractive place to work

A recent Centre for Cities report⁵ has argued that the key to high street success often lies less in the amount of retail space, and more in create a thriving environment around it. The key element of this is increasing the working population in and around the town centre, with offices being particularly beneficial – office workers tend to be more well-paid and can be fit into closer proximity. This contributes to the increased number of people spending time and money in a place, increasing customer demand in the local market. This also helps stimulate demand for accommodation, as people look to live near their place of work.

3) Amenities, leisure, and education: Creating further draws to the town centre

These schemes can also integrate uses, generally at the ground floor level, that can create more of a draw to the town centre. Most of Huntingdon's leisure provision is out of town, on

⁵<https://www.centreforcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2019-02-13-City-centres-past-present-and-future.pdf>
p. 1

St Peter's Road (which is part of the reason for the lack of evening activities in Huntingdon town centre). Integrating emerging leisure trends, such as competitive socialising (which covers activities such as escape rooms, mini golf, and virtual reality experiences) will build the evening economy of the town and increase dwell time. Other uses, such as vocational training, should also be considered. Building on the efforts of Commemoration Hall's cultural programme, Huntingdon town centre has the capacity to draw visitors in opposed to outsourcing them.

How should it be done? As 'out of town' developments become a familiarity, the want for a town centre 'experience' prevails and is strengthened. For those whose preference of shopping, dining and choice of leisure pursuit are conveniently located on such a development, the 'out of town' offer remains advantageous. But the town centre experience, offers consumers greater choice: a chain or independent option; the pedestrian is favoured over the last available car parking space and travelling to and from is covered by active travel and public transport links. In order to achieve a fluid experience to resident and visitor, key spaces in the town centre need to be easily navigable. The approach of softening space is an example of connecting areas, so that the journey from residential accommodation to amenities (and therefore between any town centre provision) is clear and inviting. Examples of this include the use of green space and architecture to soften the experience from A to B.

Area of focus 2: The edge of the town centre

The edge of the town centre will be transformed, from an environment that is currently congested, noisy and unwelcoming, to one which allows the town centre to expand, and creates attractive gateways for visitors. We will reintroduce the river to Huntingdon town centre by improving access and developing a riverside quarter based around the currently unused Tyrells Marina. With the removal of the A14 viaduct, we will transform one of the worst gateways to Huntingdon at present – the train station. This will become a welcoming place that naturally draws people into the town. Longer term, we will seek to reduce traffic and remove the ring road to allow the town centre to expand.

At the moment, none of the entry points to Huntingdon town centre are very attractive. A visitor who arrives at the train station finds themselves in a car park underneath a dual

carriageway flyover, with little clear sense of where the town centre may be. A visitor arriving by car will find themselves often locked in traffic congestion on the unattractive ring road. Meanwhile, anyone who is in the town centre on foot is unlikely to venture out beyond the inner ring road, which acts as a “collar” on the centre – constraining the growth of retail and leisure uses. This also contributes to a perception in some quarters that the town is more functional than aesthetic – which doesn’t do justice to the many attractive areas of the town.

This has other costs too – the river, which is such a feature of St Ives and St Neots and a big part of their draw, feels almost excluded from Huntingdon altogether, and a visitor could easily spend a day in the town without noticing it. **This constitutes a huge missed opportunity for the town.**

Car parking provision on the edge of town is good for reducing congestion, but there is an opportunity to make the final part of a journey into town more natural by signposting routes and opening active travel options up (walking and cycling).

However, there is also a very attractive environment around Huntingdon, including common lands and meadows. These offer links to the waterways, and eco-leisure activities such as birdwatching, canoeing and cycling.

In order to transform the edge of the town centre, we will focus on four main actions:

1. A new riverside quarter

The area around the Old Bridge brings together the Riverside Park, Old Bridge Hotel, and Tyrell’s Marina. However, traffic, which can be heavy, often damages the ambience at the moment. Whereas St Ives has managed to build an evening economy around its river, and attract many visitors, Huntingdon has so far failed to do so. But as the Hebden Bridge case study (below) shows, taking a proactive approach to local waterways can deliver substantial benefits.

The central aim of this proposal will be to **integrate the river into the centre of the town.** This will require:

- A reduction in traffic flow alongside the riverside park, and over the Old Bridge, tied to improved pedestrian access across the river.
- A strategy to improve signage and walkways to encourage greater flow of people between the river and the town centre
- The ground floor of Tyrell’s Marina to be opened up as a centre for leisure/retail uses which will bring people over the river from the town centre
- Redevelopment of the Purvis Marina, including moorings and provisions (e.g. fully accessible toilet and shower facilities, electric hook up), as a draw for visitors, increasing the amount of boating and family usage of the area. This will create more of a boating community in this part of town, bringing it to life.

Case Study: Waterway tourism – Hebden Bridge

Hebden Bridge is a small market town in the Upper Calder Valley, West Yorkshire. The provision of fast-flowing water set in a low-lying landscape secured Hebden Bridge's involvement in the Wool Trade during the Industrial Revolution. But like so many of its industrial neighbours, the town experienced an upheaval of identity with the decline of the cotton industry – Hebden Bridge Mill was vacated in 1956.

The 1970s and 1980s saw a resurgence of interest in the town - a combination of cheap housing, the market town's compelling charm and a co-operative society attracted an artistic and New Age population.

Since then, Hebden Bridge has grown as a tourist destination – independent shops and galleries attract visitors from across the Pennines and further afield. A key tourism feature and transport route is the Rochdale Canal, thirty-two miles of waterways connecting Manchester to Sowerby Bridge. Once in Hebden Bridge, a separate stretch of water runs through the town centre, where a number of restaurants, cafes and bars make optimum use of this feature.



This will bring multiple benefits to Huntingdon. Over time, the town can come to be seen as a riverside town. This will:

- Provide health and wellbeing benefits to residents – with the positive impacts of green and blue space well established. This includes encouraging an active lifestyle such as canoeing on the Great Ouse and integrating the riverside quarter into walking and cycling routes.
- Transform the image of Huntingdon, making it a more attractive place and bringing in further investment.

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- Increase land values in the town, improving the viability of development in Huntingdon.

The final result for the town will be a porous boundary to the town centre, where footfall naturally flows across the river – both with those based in the town looking to use the restaurants and bars at Tyrell’s Marina, and those living in the Marina coming to use the town’s main amenities.

2. A new station quarter to reshape entry to Huntingdon

At the moment, someone arriving at the train station would be forgiven for thinking “where am I?” The area lacks a distinctive sense of place, and feels completely separated from the rest of the town.

Instead, we need to totally transform the experience of arriving in Huntingdon by train, creating a pleasant environment and drawing people towards the town centre.

The removal of the A14 viaduct, which passes over the train station, is now underway. This in itself will greatly improve the look and feel of the area. The next steps will be to develop an access strategy into the centre of Huntingdon. A pedestrian leaving the train station has two options to get to the town centre – either cross Mill Common, or walk along the Brampton Road. The route through the Common is attractive, and likely to become more so once the old A14 is removed. Designated cycle and pedestrian lanes cover the stretch across the Common. Brampton Road should be made more pedestrian friendly, adopting a “boulevard feel” to draw people into the town. In both cases, a signage strategy should support the aim of making the routes into town clear and natural for visitors.

A seamless journey from station to town centre

Plans for the station do not just end at the edge of the town centre. With the introduction of a spur off the old A14 into town, the area that is currently around the bus station will also become a key entry point. We will ensure that the journey from the train station to the town centre, via the bus station and St Benedict’s Court area forms one seamless link – with access prioritised for pedestrians and cyclists. Bringing the investments in these areas into one coherent plan will make arrival into Huntingdon straightforward and pleasant. The future arrival of the CAM gives an opportunity to build a mobility strategy around integrated transport hubs.

3. A long-term plan to remove the ring road from Huntingdon

Given the position of the existing A14, the ring road around Huntingdon is necessary infrastructure to bring people into the town. But once the new A14 is in place, this will no longer be the case.

After a rush of enthusiasm to make places more car friendly in the 1960s, many towns and cities are realising the negative consequences and taking action. Have a continual flow of vehicles close to the town centre has a number of disadvantages:

- Reduction in footfall in town centres, as pedestrians steer clear of busy roads. That makes these roads hard barriers (or severance), taking away the ability of the town centre to expand
- A discouragement of active travel (walking and cycling), and encouragement of the use of private vehicles
- Aesthetic damage
- Poor air quality – the health consequences of which are only beginning to become known

Removing the ring road would take time. But in the long run, it will be vital for the success of Huntingdon. Breaking the collar of the ring road would need to follow a piecemeal approach and would be informed by a detailed transport plan. A gradual approach would likely see the gradual phasing out of the ring road, replacing this gained space with better residential provision and amenities.

Removing the ring road will be a huge step in improving our town's environment and making it a more pleasant place to dwell. We need to go beyond this, implementing an active travel strategy. This would focus on making sure each of the areas around Huntingdon – including Brampton, Godmanchester, Hartford, Oxmoor – has well developed routes to connect walkers and cyclists into the town. An active travel strategy in Huntingdon would need to enshrine clear transport user hierarchy, with pedestrian priority. This lends itself to a culture where active travel is promoted in the town centre and reliance on cars is phased out.

Case Study: Birmingham's Inner Ring Road

With construction beginning in 1957 and an official opening in 1971, Birmingham's A4400 served as an inner ring road for motorists travelling around the city centre for approximately 40 years.

The infrastructure was designed to create ease for motorists and cater for the heavy flow of traffic with its dual-carriageways, in practice however, the inner ring road proved problematic and was considered a 'concrete collar' constraining the city.

Not only did the road restrict development and expansion of the city, its design favoured motorists, as crossings were unfit for pedestrian use. Pedestrians were directed to use a series of subways and underpasses, some of which generated their own problems as opportunities for crime.

The removal of Birmingham's inner ring road (a phased process) has opened-up the city centre allowing expansion of the city centre. It's a win-win situation as motorists still have use of the A4540 – a 'middle Ring Road', the city centre is now more pedestrian-friendly and a reduction of concentrated vehicle emissions has improved pollution levels in the centre.



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Area of focus 3: North Huntingdon

North Huntingdon will house a growing population, with employment and educational opportunity. It will offer a wide range of properties within easy reach of the town centre – and in future, employment to the north at Alconbury Weald. Huntingdon will continue to grow, with residential, leisure and amenities provision pushing north of the town, beyond the A141. We will continue to drive improvements in the area – working with key local partners such as GPs and schools, using the new community centre as a focal hub for engaging and helping the community. We will explore innovative ways of delivering public services to help residents, and work with employers to improve workplace health.

Huntingdon's town centre is contained within its ring road, and while there is some residential provision here, the majority of Huntingdon's residents live to the north of the town centre. As we look to design a Huntingdon that works for everyone, we need to develop interventions in this area, particularly on the Oxmoor estate. While North Huntingdon contains much more than just the Oxmoor, we are highlighting this as an area of priority, given its relatively high levels of deprivation (see Overview section).

1. Bringing together community initiatives

Greater scope and longer-term community **interventions** have been achieved in North Huntingdon with the Town Council, education providers and community groups working together to achieve a shared aim.

A 'Developing Oxmoor' programme is a good example of this collaboration, an initiative which has been established with the approach of working differently to deliver improvements for the community. The early stages of the programme involved a series of workshops, bringing together agencies, organisations, community groups, residents, charities and faith groups in an effort to gain a better understanding of the multidimensional challenges facing the estate. The programme strives to build trust within the community by adopting a gradual process of change, and to ultimately support residents to recognise the issues that they are faced with and work willingly with others to secure sustainable change.

The Developing Oxmoor programme focuses on four grand challenges:

- Giving people a good start in life
- Ensuring that people have good work
- Creating a place where people want to live

-
- Ensuring that people are healthy throughout their lives

Co-ordination of support in these areas will, in time, reduce the demand on public sector services resulting in more resilient and less challenged communities. Facilities on the estate include a youth club, school clubs, play areas, churches and even a boxing class run by the police, which teaches young people respect, and gives a positive outlet for their energy.

A 'Community Safety Strategic Assessment' provides understanding of the safety issues affecting the Oxmoor estate, this includes an overview of crime and anti-social behaviour. Findings indicate that while the rate of crime per 1000 population remains lower than the national average, Huntingdon North Ward exceeds the average rate of crime for Huntingdonshire. The aim of the assessment is to provide recommendations based on findings to improve outcomes within the area.

The Developing Oxmoor programme needs to continue, sharpening its recommendations. As and where funding needs arise, local partners including HDC and CPCA must work to support the programme, recognising the long-term benefits (social and financial) of improvements in the community.

2. Making the most of the new community centre

The new community centre has recently opened, replacing the over-stretched and in need of repair Medway Centre. The bigger site offers the same services, as well as an internet suite, library, volunteer-ran community café, an open field and changing rooms. The centre has already been confirmed as the new home for a Football Association registered girls football club and a coding club will be among the new offers.

This community centre will be a focal point of contact for many in the community, providing a natural and informal opportunity to pick up on the needs of community members.

3. Encouraging healthy food choices

The 'Grub Hub' is a weekly initiative feeding 48 families on a weekly basis and totalling in approximately 90 people being fed. The scheme provides them with a healthy, hot meal and is designed on a referral-basis and reflects a spike in the number of food bank referrals in recent years. The meals at Grub Hub are chosen with intent that families could recreated them at home, on a budget.

Creating more affordable, healthy food choices in is an example of preventative health intervention and schemes such as the Grub Hub are an effective way of educating families about eating healthy and affordably. Co-operation between Huntingdon's allotment growers and the new community centre could address imbalances between surplus produce and food shortages. As is stands there is no formal agreement between the allotment and the Oxmoor estate around food surplus/shortages, skill exchange and improving wellbeing. A structured approach would be required, tying into voluntary work and the estate's track record of multi-agency achievements.

Case Study: Herts & Essex Community Farm

Herts & Essex Community Farm is a non-for-profit project established in 2013 as a response to tackling insufficient access to fresh, healthy food for residents. The project also shares growing skills and brings people together. The organisation relies on the hard work of volunteers from the community and efforts have been recognised with the awarding of Cultivation Street's Community Garden of the Year Award 2019.

Two of the organisation's foundational aims include to 'show participants how to grow food in a sustainable way' and to 'give access to fresh food to the local community.'



In the absence of a local university acting as an anchor institution, the responsibility held by further education providers is elevated. Just as co-operation between education providers and businesses should address local skills and qualifications, this model should be reciprocated between education institution and the surrounding community. In Huntingdon there is scope for collaboration between the Regional College's catering course and a project similar to the Grub Hub: exploring nutrition, affordability and healthy eating.

4. Taking a new approach to public services

The digital revolution is transforming many areas of life – not least the delivery of public services. Huntingdonshire District Council is undergoing a process of service transformation to make contacting the Council more straightforward. This can help individuals access exactly the services they need.

In order to make these changes work most effectively for those in receipt of Council services, we propose:

- 1. On-street Wifi to be provided in the North Huntingdon area**

Among lower income households there is generally less take up of broadband. On-street Wifi will allow those who don't have this access to use digital services, making it easier for the Council and other service providers to directly respond to their needs.

2. Support for those lacking digital skills

At the same time, some in the community have lower digital skill levels and will struggle to access services by this route. This means we need to work with local skills providers (such as Cambridge Regional College) to provide digital skills training. It also means we need a continued HDC presence in the Estate – which at the moment is Thongsley Primary School.

5. Further growth beyond the A141

North Huntingdon is also the big opportunity for growth in our town, which cannot grow further to the south due to flooding constraints. We see the area beyond the A141 as the next frontier in developing the community of our town, and building the demand for the town centre. This will need to be done so as to grow a sustainable community in this area, ensuring greening of infrastructure throughout and adequate community facilities. Over time this will enable a more natural connection between Huntingdon and Alconbury Weald.

While an integral part of the vision, housing more people north of the river will add pressure to Huntingdon's current infrastructure. It will be important to ease the traffic burden concurrent with expansion. A Huntingdon Transport Strategic Study is currently studying capacity challenges. Moving forward, a rescoping of the A141 study will be extended to include the Third River Crossing issue.

Area of focus 4: Alconbury Weald

Alconbury Weald will provide jobs of the future, as a hub for companies in hi-tech sectors such as advanced manufacturing. The relationship between Alconbury Weald, personnel at RAF Alconbury and Huntingdon town will be mutually beneficial, with job opportunities created for residents, and a larger catchment population for the retail and hospitality offer in the town. There will be much easier connectivity between the two, including a more rapid express link to Cambridge and Peterborough (initially guided bus, morphing into the Cambridge Autonomous Metro). We will put Alconbury Weald on the map by promoting key sectors and attracting businesses from around the UK and abroad.

At first sight, it might seem surprising to include Alconbury Weald in a prospectus for Growth for Huntingdon. The Alconbury Weald Enterprise Zone is a few miles north of Huntingdon town centre, and access currently requires leaving the town, and typically joining the A14 for a couple of miles. Road access between Alconbury Weald and Huntingdon will be strategically joined by cycle and pedestrian lanes and there is scope for landscaping some open space for residents of either to enjoy.

But Alconbury Weald is Huntingdonshire's big growth opportunity, and how it develops over the next few years will have huge implications for Huntingdon. By integrating what is happening at Alconbury Weald with the other plans for Huntingdon, we can realise huge benefits for both areas. The two places should act as *complements*, not threats, to each other, and over time increasingly be seen as one place together.

Alconbury Weald was established as an Enterprise Zone by the government in 2012. Enterprise Zones are designed to create favourable conditions for business to support local economic growth. The site plays host to:

- Many companies in knowledge intensive sectors, including Mole Solutions and Enval. These are housed in state-of-the-art facilities, including the business incubator.
- The iMET college, which specialises in training individuals for jobs in the composites, manufacturing and built environment sectors
- 300 homes built, looking towards a long term target of 5,000 dwellings, and planning application in place to raise this to 6,500.

Alconbury Weald benefits from immediate proximity to the A1, providing rapid road access to London, the Midlands, and the North.

- In future Cambridgeshire County Council will relocate to the site.

In order to realise the full potential of Alconbury Weald, we need to take the following three steps:

1. Provide improved transport connectivity into Alconbury Weald

This has three elements:

An express guided bus connection

Firstly, Alconbury Weald is currently on the guided busway route (though not the guided bus track). This route takes buses from Cambridge to St Ives on a segregated route, then joins the main roads to continue to Huntingdon, then up to Alconbury Weald, and on to Peterborough.



However, this public transport connectivity is slow and therefore far less useful than it could be. Busway times from Huntingdon Town Centre to Alconbury Weald takes 10 minutes. From Peterborough, it takes 45 minutes, and from Cambridge, over 90 minutes.

This journey takes so long partly because the guided bus stops at so many places. Between Cambridge and Alconbury Weald, there are at least 20 stops. While it is important that the guided bus stops at these places, it is not necessary for every bus to do so. It is common across many modes of transport to have “stopper” services

which ensure greater coverage at the expense of speed, and express services, which in order to maximise speed stop only at a few key destinations. We need guided buses which stop only in Cambridge, once in central St Ives, once in central Huntingdon, once at Alconbury Weald, and once at Peterborough. This would necessitate the building of overtaking bays at certain points along the section between Cambridge and St Ives. These express services would be provided as a feasible transport option for commuters between Huntingdon/Alconbury Weald/St Ives and Peterborough/Cambridge. They must be integrated into the timetable as

additional services rather than at the expense of current routes which serve the likes of Yaxley and Sawtry and may also be used for commuting purposes.

This idea is also of critical importance for St Ives as they plan to integrate their town more deeply into Cambridge's economy – and is picked up in the St Ives Prospectus for Growth.

Extension of the Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro (CAM)

Our proposal for express services on the guided busway acts as a precursor to a larger project, the Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro (CAM). Since the CAM's first route and costing proposals, Mayor James Palmer has requested an extension to serve Alconbury Weald: 'the CAM gives us the ability to quickly put in place the public transport infrastructure we know is so urgently needed.' This stretch is expected to be prioritised ahead of other routes, which are due to be delivered from 2023.⁶

A railway station in the longer term

Alconbury Weald will, at some point in the future, need to be joined to the national rail network to make the most of its potential. While there are some funds to do this, and conversations are ongoing with Network Rail, it is clear that there are challenges. In order to run trains from Alconbury Weald in a way that doesn't delay East Coast Mainline Services requires creating a "four track" rail link (giving passing places), and larger station to accommodate. Conversations need to continue, recognising the long-term importance of this development.

Active travel provision

All three recommendations of improved transport connectivity into Alconbury Weald must feature active travel elements, where viable. Commuters should be able to undertake part or all their journey by active travel methods. To achieve this: secure cycle provision

2. Promote Alconbury Weald nationally and internationally

Alconbury Weald has brilliant facilities. But recent analysis by the Centre for Cities shows it has not grown as quickly as some other enterprise zones⁷. This is partly a question of timing. Whereas many of the other enterprise zones were already developing at the time enterprise zone status was conferred upon them, Alconbury Weald was starting from scratch. And it is generally easier for city centre enterprise zones to attract companies who are already based in the area – compared to attracting a company to an as yet undeveloped area.

⁶ <https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/news/new-blog-entry-2/>

⁷ <https://www.centreforcities.org/publication/in-the-zone-have-enterprise-zones-delivered-the-jobs-they-promised/>

Now, however, is the time to ramp up promotion of Alconbury Weald in the UK and beyond, building on the work done by Urban and Civic to date. As part of a recent agreement between the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) and Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC), 20% of the business rate income stemming from the enterprise zone will be put towards promoting the site.

This promotional material should focus on the following key features:

- Marketing Alconbury Weald as the foremost location for composites businesses in the UK – building on the existing strength in this sector
- IMET as a training facility, offering particular expertise
- Fast links to Cambridge through the new A14
- The attractive local environment, including the offer in Huntingdon town centre

Over time, **Alconbury Weald should also look to develop its business tourism offer** – for conferences, away days, and short-term training courses. The well-connected nature of Alconbury Weald (and Huntingdon more widely) place it strongly to attract events which need to be accessible for participants around the UK and visiting from overseas. Furthermore, there is potential for Alconbury Weald to become a local host for sector-specific conferences and events generating business tourism in the area, building on existing specialisms, such as the composites sector, specifically related to light industry and motor parts.

A Business tourism strategy can reinforce Huntingdonshire's specialisms in the minds of industry leaders, by creating strong associations through sector-specific events. Business Tourism advantages can be categorised as soft (knowledge and idea exchange, reputation building and relationship forming), as well as hard (improving skills, application of new techniques and technologies). In terms of investment, Business Tourism can broadly be divided into direct spending in the form of restaurants, hotels, taxis and venues, as well as indirect, creating jobs, new research centres and receiving funding for example. Business Tourism is often understood using the acronym MICE (Meetings, Incentive, Conference and Events) and the market is expanding steadily. Metrics from 2018 inbound tourism data reveal MICE visitors spend 30% more per visit than leisure visitors and spend double than the average leisure visitor per night.

Case Study: Business Tourism – 'Brilliant Science'

From its sites in Manchester, Cheshire and Stoke-on-Trent, 'Brilliant Science' celebrates all things scientific, whilst championing the UK as the world-leader in science and holder of the second highest number of Nobel prizes in the world.



'Brilliant Science' offers bespoke tours around its sites which include Chester Zoo, Jodrell Bank (pictured), the Science and Industry Museum and World of Wedgewood. Experiences are tailored to the client's interests and can be enjoyed as a standalone tour or incorporated into a conference programme.

Science also provide conference support for sites across Manchester, Cheshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Intimate knowledge of the areas, including sector strengths, allows the team to help local hosts in the conference bidding process.

Brilliant Science epitomises the "start small, grow later" approach for venues in the infancy of hosting conferences. When attracting events and conferences, Brilliant Science emphasises the importance of marketing the right kind of event for the area – starting small, means affirming connections between the area and its specialisms, drawing world experts and their knowledge, and growing on this synergy in years to come.

The UK business events industry generates substantial economic and social gains. The size and scale of business events vary considerably, Huntingdon's offer mirrors that of the "start small, grow later" mentality addressed in the above case study, in that Alconbury Weald has the facilities to host smaller scale events, drawing a moderate number of experts, from the UK and further afield. A Business Tourism strategy with tailored support for the bidding process will build Huntingdon's reputation as an area of specialism in Composites.

3. Maximise mutual benefits between Alconbury Weald and Huntingdon

Improving access and connectivity between Alconbury Weald and Huntingdon will have significant benefits:

- **We can provide quality jobs for residents living in Huntingdon:**
 - There is a significant construction pipeline associated with Alconbury Weald. It is anticipated that the full site will take 15-30 years to build out. This means there is a very natural fit between the training available at Cambridge Regional College and

iMET on the one hand, and a significant employment opportunity on the other. Urban and Civic, the developers at Alconbury Weald, are keen to support young people into these roles, and offer support for training, as demonstrated with their onsite construction training facility.

- We know that at the moment, those working in Huntingdonshire earn less than those living here (£13.54 per hour vs £14.95⁸). In other words, there is an outflow of more highly paid workers from our district on a daily basis to better paid occupations elsewhere. Alconbury Weald is our big opportunity to change this. As more and more companies in hi-tech sectors such as advanced manufacturing, composites, clean tech and life sciences come to Alconbury Weald, we will begin to provide significant levels of well-paid employment on the doorstep of Huntingdon. This will bring more money to those living in the town.
- **We can grow the catchment population for Huntingdon town centre.** For the town centre to thrive it needs to draw on a significant population. By making it easier to pop to Huntingdon town centre, we can bring more footfall. The majority of new houses being taken up in Alconbury Weald are by young professional couples and families, with 140 children in the new primary school already. These demographics tend to have disposable income to spend on the high street. In order to attract them, Huntingdon needs an interesting independent offer with a good evening economy – we have heard from social media commentary that residents of Alconbury Weald are looking for more things to do in Huntingdon. The developer, Urban and Civic, have made clear their commitment to supporting the high street in Huntingdon by promoting its offer to their residents, so there is every opportunity to make this work for all parties.

In the same way creating an attractive residential offer in the town centre is built around providing a mixed-purpose offer, of work, residential, amenities and leisure - successful integration of Alconbury Weald into Huntingdon's economy is underpinned by maximising mutual benefits. It is important to play to the strengths of both areas, enhancing the offer of Huntingdon as a desirable place to work and live.

⁸ Office for National Statistics Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2018 data

Conclusion and Next steps

[To be completed when final range of activities is agreed]

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