



Urban Design Framework
Land at Chequers Court, Huntingdon



April 2004

Operational Services - Planning

Huntingdonshire
district council

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April 2004

Produced by
Donaldsons

For

Huntingdonshire
district council

Report

1	Introduction	4
2	Policy Context	9
3	Land Use Consideration	14
4	Highways & Movement	16
5	Urban Design Approach	18
6	Suggested Development Framework	23
7	Summary of Development Issue	29

Chequers Court v3i

Contents

Contents

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Brief in draft seeks to bring forward a major high quality, high profile scheme in Huntingdon Town Centre. This new proposed environment will integrate existing Town Centre components, particularly the retail offer along St. Germain Walk, Chequers Court and Newton's Court with the High Street on its western edge and the residential environments to its southern edges.
- 1.2 Once this draft has been the subject of consultation it will be considered by the Cabinet and adopted as supplementary planning guidance.

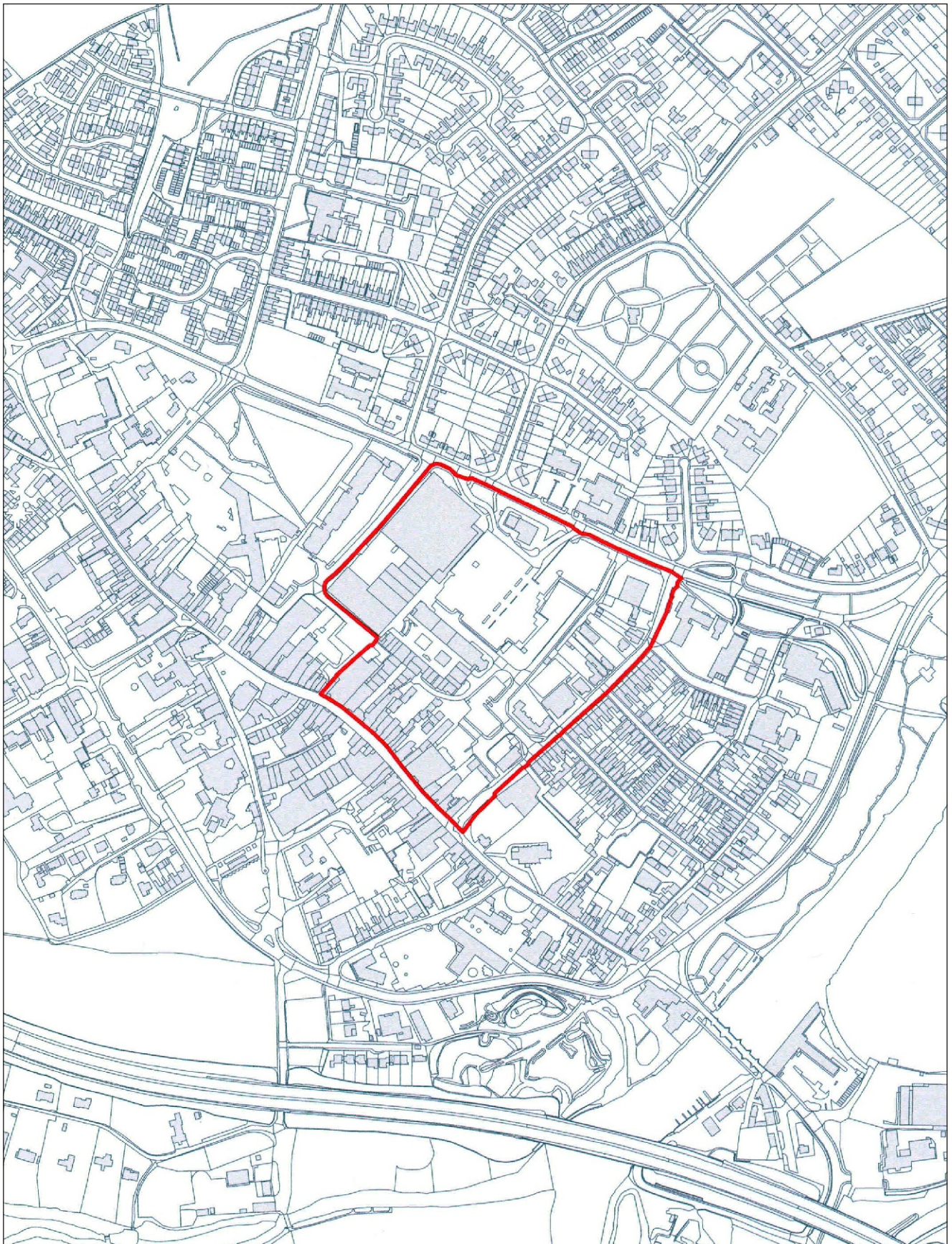
The Site

- 1.3 The area covered by this Planning Brief, shown in Figure 1.1, is an important component of the Town Centre and includes the main Town Centre car park and key pedestrian routes from the east into the High Street. The site lies within the ring road, and is the location of several retail units including the Chequers Court shopping area, comprising a range of smaller units, a large proportion of which are occupied by local traders. This links into the more recent St Germain Street scheme, comprising larger, multiple retail units such as Sainsbury's and Wilkinsons, to the Town Centre. Major proposals for the redevelopment of this area is the main focus of the Brief.
- 1.4 A number of office uses are also present on the site, the Government offices (Inland Revenue) being the largest of these. It is understood that the Inland Revenue are re-locating shortly, leaving this space vacant. Car parking spaces are provided on the site, within a Council controlled car park – this being the largest car park in the Town Centre. Two other car park areas are located here, one utilised by the Government office workers, the other, Trinity Place, is located at the rear of the shops fronting the High Street. The houses and offices off Hartford Road back onto this area. The neighbouring ATS site is also included within the red line plan illustrated at Figure 1.1 below.

Area Covered by the Planning Brief

- 1.5 The area covered by the planning brief is identified in Figure 1.1. it is contained to the north by St Germain St. to the west by the High Street, Hartford Road to the south and Nursery Road (ring road) to the east.

Figure 1.1 - Land at Chequers Court, Huntingdon - Location Plan



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Brief Context

- 1.6 Huntingdon Town Centre is currently the focus of a number of transport, economic, environmental and retail lead policy initiatives. These initiatives are in response to the recognised need for improvement to the vitality and viability of Huntingdonshire Town Centre in terms of its operational efficiency, retail capacity and quality. The successful redevelopment of the Chequers Court site will significantly contribute to the realisation of many of the strategies' objectives and help challenge both external and internal threats to the future success of the town.
- 1.7 Huntingdonshire District Council commissioned the Civic Trust to prepare an overall vision to guide and stimulate investment in the Town Centre. The final study, published in October 2000, highlighted the need to improve the image and identity of the Centre as the overall environmental quality was considered weak. One of the key areas identified by the study was the need to improve the Chequers Court area and help build a strengthened east-west 'commercial axis'. The key findings of the study and how any new development within the site boundary should respond to this are reviewed below.
- 1.8 In this context, the Council is keen to ensure that the redevelopment of this high profile area benefits from the highest standards of architecture and urban design. Pedestrian movement patterns across the site in an east-west direction from the car park area to the High Street are particularly important and improvements to these routes will be crucial to the success of a comprehensive scheme.
- 1.9 This Planning Brief summarises the relevant urban design, planning, transportation and development issues associated with the implementation of a comprehensive new development on the site. Development principles have been applied to a number of different development concepts on the site as part of the initial process of refining a 'Development Framework' for the area. It is envisaged that a justified masterplan that responds to the framework established in this Planning Brief will form the basis of a future planning application.

Stakeholder Involvement

- 1.10 The Planning Brief has evolved through a process of consultation with Huntingdonshire District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and key landowners and tenants within the Centre.
- 1.11 The Planning Brief reflects the diversity of views of the District Council and the main consultees. The Brief seeks to broker between the differing priorities to create a common base from which a detailed masterplan can be established.

Development Principles

- 1.12 The Brief envisages a Huntingdon Town Centre of the future to be a mixed-use sustainable area that provides a strong retail core with housing, offices and leisure development adding to the diversity of use, with quality public transport facilities and safe and secure car parking provision.
- 1.13 The vision is to create the opportunity for development that substantially enhances the retail capacity and quality of the Chequers Court retail offer, improves the links to other Town Centre components, improves both the quantum and quality of the car parking offer, and significantly improves the urban environment. It involves creating a lively, contemporary, high quality retail environment that will integrate improved car parking with existing businesses and neighbourhoods in and around the Town Centre. The future of this area is to be seen as an exemplar of sustainable development which will result in an urban environment of which the local community can be proud.

Purpose of the Brief

1.14 The purpose of the Planning Brief is to:

- Set out a clear Development Framework that establishes the key components which will underpin the comprehensive redevelopment of the area;
- Provide clear direction of the type of development required by potential developers – focusing on redeveloping the Chequers Court buildings facing onto the car park and main pedestrian routes and achieving improved townscape quality and pedestrian priority both within and beyond the site;
- Establish a design philosophy that promotes a high quality retail environment which will further enhance the existing retail uses of the site, such as Sainsbury's and Wilkinsons;
- Improve the car parking, taxi services and accessibility by bus and provide easy pedestrian movement through the area and beyond;
- Reflect the key aspirations of the main landowners and statutory bodies and to gain their support for the vision of the Chequers Court site; and
- Provide the statutory planning policy framework which will assist in any necessary land acquisitions via Compulsory Purchase Order, if necessary.

1.15 In order to achieve the aims set out above, the Planning Brief has the following objectives:

1. *Regeneration objectives*:- to promote the revitalisation of the Chequers Court retail development area, to act as a successful link between the Town Centre car park, Sainsburys and the High Street and act as a catalyst for regenerating the surrounding areas;
2. *Development objectives*:- to create a commercially viable development that enhances the prime commercial/retail east-west axis, making Huntingdon Town Centre a desirable commercial and residential destination as well as a lively and attractive place to experience;
3. *Urban design objectives*:- to create a distinctive and memorable retail quarter in Huntingdon. The retail units should be designed to the highest quality in order to attract new retailers to Chequers Court and create a pleasant environment for shoppers in Huntingdon. Development should also adhere to the wider sustainable development principles; and
4. *Access objectives*:- to develop a strong fine-grained, permeable network of routes that maximises the east-west links between the car park and the High Street along Chequers Court and Newton's Court. Improvements to the northern access to the site from St Germain St. and southern approach from Hartford Road should also be considered. Enable buses and taxis to pick up and set down passengers within the development.

Opportunities and Challenges

1.16 The following characteristics are important in considering the future development of this site:-

Site attributes

- High profile area forming an eastern gateway into Huntingdon Town Centre;
- Identified in the Local Plan and 'Civic Trust Vision' as a key development opportunity;
- Substantial car parking provision which could be improved;
- Key stores such as Sainsbury and Wilkinsons are present in strategic locations;

- A regeneration opportunity of strategic importance for Huntingdon;
- Key opportunity to enhance the east-west retail axis in the Town; and
- Good road connectivity, being on the inner ring road - opportunity to exploit new road layouts, traffic management initiatives and be better served by public transport.

Site Constraints

- Poor physical and commercial linkages between the car park and the Town Centre retail core;
- Ring road layout reduces ease of access to the site by car;
- Significant barriers to pedestrian and cycle movement - poor environmental quality and site levels;
- Insufficient car parking and poor parking layout;
- Poor traffic management arrangements on site - pedestrian/vehicle conflicts arise, in particular service access arrangements need to be reviewed and separated where possible from service cores;
- Part of the existing area suffers from a negative image and problems of vandalism, crime and fear of crime;
- Poor physical environment – environmental assets such as open spaces are poorly defined and not properly highlighted;
- Poor enclosure of pedestrian routes - some open into service cores and blank facades - level changes poorly treated;
- Food supermarket not trading as well as it should primarily due to the fact that there is poor site accessibility. The car park is currently congested, with cars waiting for spaces, making the environment currently unattractive to shoppers coming to Huntingdon. In addition, there is limited pedestrian flow between the High Street and Chequers Court, possibly due to the limited range and mix of units. The ability to modify car park layout will be influenced by requirement to ensure sufficient capacity during construction phase; and
- Proximity of residential properties on southern edge of site will have to be considered in respect of new developments on this site.

2 Policy Context

2.1 The relevant statutory planning framework for the area is set out in the Huntingdonshire Local Plan, adopted in 1995. In addition to this the material planning considerations that need to be taken into account include:

- National Planning Guidance as set out in Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPG's);
- Regional Planning Guidance including the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Structure Plan Deposit Draft 2002; and
- Market Town Transport Strategy for Huntingdon and Godmanchester.

National Planning Guidance

2.2 Relevant guidance is found in PPG1, PPG6, PPG13 and PPG3.

PPG1: General Policies and Principles

2.3 PPG1 puts sustainable development, mixed-use and urban design at the heart of the Government's approach to planning. Guidance states that urban regeneration and the re-use of previously-developed land are important supporting objectives for creating a more sustainable pattern of development. Emphasis is placed on concentrating development for uses which generate a large number of trips in places well-served by public transport, especially town centres.

2.4 In stressing that mixed-use development can help create vitality and diversity and reduce the need to travel, Guidance states that major mixed-use developments which would attract a significant number of trips should be in locations which are well served by public transport, have adequate infrastructure and are properly integrated, in terms of land use and design, with surrounding areas. In considering the importance of good urban design, PPG1 states that it can help promote sustainable development; improve the quality of the existing environment; attract business and investment; and reinforce civic pride and a sense of place.

PPG6: Town Centres and Retail Development

2.5 One of the key features of PPG6 is its promotion of mixed-use development and the retention of key Town Centre uses. The importance of good urban design is also emphasised. Central to this is the need to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres. The important role that can be played by the evening and leisure economy is emphasised.

PPS6: Draft Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning For Town Centres

2.6 The Government has now published a draft consultation of a document intended to replace PPG6 and its clarifications under Caborn (1999) and McNulty (2003). The update of this document seeks higher density, diversity and mixed use within town centres and will have potentially significant impact to Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), developers, investors and other key stakeholders in property.

Key policies and proposed changes

2.7 The Government emphasis, in the draft PPS6, that the core policy framework of PPG6 should be maintained with key considerations ensuring:

- The need for the development;
- That the development is of an appropriate scale;
- That there are no more central sites for the development;
- That there are no unacceptable impacts arising to centres from the development; and
- That locations are accessible;
- Scale and format of operators is also recognised.

PPG13: Transport

- 2.8 The guidance contained in PPG13 seeks to promote more sustainable transport choices, to promote accessibility to jobs, shopping, leisure uses and services by sustainable modes and to reduce the need to travel. PPG13 seeks to integrate planning and transportation. Local authorities are urged to seek to make the best use of the most accessible sites, such as those in town centres. Guidance also sets out the benefits of mixed-use development, in terms of promoting vitality and diversity, and in promoting walking as a primary mode of travel.

Regional Policy Guidance 6 (East Anglia) (November 2000)

- 2.9 Regional Policy Guidance for East Anglia (November 2000) (RPG6) advises that town and local centres should continue to be the main focus of social and economic life and should be the preferred location for development. RPG6 sets out the growth potential of the main urban areas and the Cambridge sub-region, which includes the area surrounding Cambridge as far as the market towns of St Neots and Huntingdon in Huntingdonshire.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan (2003)

- 2.10 The Structure Plan has recently been adopted in late 2003. The new Structure Plan is proposed at a time of major growth in the economy needs of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area. The Plan rolls forward to the period 2016. The following are key policy areas which have been considered in relation to Chequers Court.

Places for Work

- 2.11 Policy P2/1 addresses the strategic employment strategy for the region. Economic growth will be supported in Peterborough and North Cambridgeshire by securing investment in physical infrastructure and supporting social, environmental and community initiatives which will assist economic regeneration and taking full advantage of the range of existing land allocations and vacant or under-used sites in the area.

City, Town and Rural Centres

- 2.12 Under **Policy P3/1** the vitality and the attractiveness of city and town centres will be promoted and enhanced through the development and implementation of integrated City and Town Centre Strategies. This includes:
- Supporting the role of the city and town centres as the primary locations for shopping, employment, leisure, culture and entertainment;
 - Seeking to diversify and enhance the local economy through the provision of a wide range of services and facilities;
 - Encourage a high quality environment; and
 - Reducing the impact of traffic on centres.

Movement and Access

- 2.13 **Policy P8/1** establishes the link between land use and transport and new development will not be permitted unless it:
- Is located in areas that are highly accessible by public transport, cycle and foot;
 - Is designed to reduce the need to travel, particularly by car;
 - Provides opportunities for travel choice;
 - Provides for the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and bus users; and
 - Provides appropriate access from the highway network that does not compromise safety.
- 2.14 New development will be required to make provision for integrated and improved transport infrastructure through financial contributions and direct improvements to transport networks, to increase the ability to move by cycle,

public transport and on foot (**Policy P8/2**). Travel Plans will be required to accompany new non-residential developments and the expansion of existing non-residential developments as a means of reducing car dependency and promoting alternative modes of travel.

- 2.15 In Cambridge, Peterborough and the Market Towns, parking standards for non-residential development should not exceed the standards specified in PPG13.

Local Plan Context

Huntingdonshire District Council Local Plan (adopted December 1995)

- 2.16 The Local Plan comprises the Huntingdonshire Local Plan adopted in 1995. Alterations to the adopted Local Plan which amends settlement strategy, promotes new housing allocations and provides new policies on housing and planning obligations was adopted on 18th December 2002. The review of the adopted 1995 Local Plan is due to begin in June 2003 when issues papers will be published. The review of the adopted 1995 Local Plan has begun with the publication of an issues report, and will feed into the Local Development Framework (LDF) process.
- 2.17 In view of the nature and scale of development envisaged on the Chequers Court site, most areas of Local Plan Policy are relevant. However, in putting forward a Development Framework for the area, this Brief outlines chiefly those policies relevant to the proposal site falling within the Town Centre boundary area together with other key policies.

Site Allocations

- 2.18 Part of the subject site is allocated as a Town Centre Redevelopment Commitment. The Local Plan does not detail proposed uses for this site in policy. Rather the written justification indicates the District Council's wish to secure the implementation of a town centre redevelopment scheme on and around the area of Chequers Court.

Site Designations

- 2.19 Frontages along the High Street and Chequers Court are designated as frontages to be protected for retail use. Sections to the east of the site are designated as Conservation Areas, further constraining development. Each of these designations will be addressed in turn.

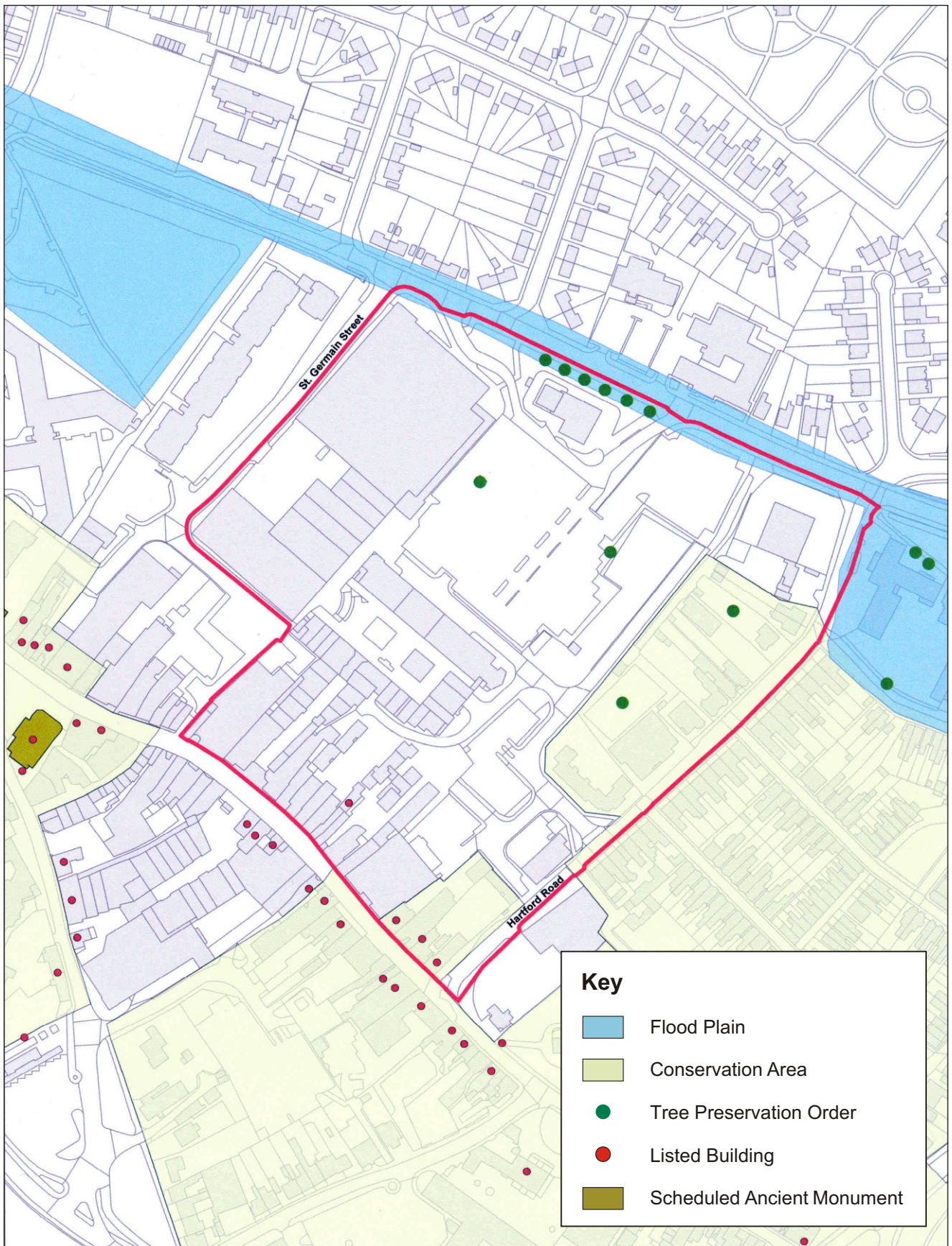
Conservation Areas

- 2.20 Part of the subject site, as shown in Figure 1, is designated as a Conservation Area. **Policy En5** states that development within or directly affecting conservation areas will be required to preserve or enhance their character or appearance.
- 2.21 Furthermore, under **Policy En6** the District Council will require high standards of design in Conservation Areas with careful consideration being given to the scale and form of development in the area and to the use of sympathetic materials and appropriate colour and texture.
- 2.22 If demolition is to be followed by redevelopment, conservation area consent may be withheld until acceptable plans for the new development have been approved (**Policy En8**).

Huntingdon Town Centre and Shopping Policy

- 2.23 The general town centre policies of the Adopted Plan provide a good summary of the Council objectives for Huntingdon Town Centre (**Policies S1 and S2**). These policies state that new development, which is not likely to have an adverse effect on the established shopping centres, will be permitted. However, proposals will be assessed taking into account the likely effect of the new proposals on the overall viability and vitality of these established centres and their effect on traffic movements.

Figure 5.0 - Context and Constraints Plan



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- 2.24 Furthermore, individual shopping proposals will need to be satisfactory in terms of siting, design, car parking, servicing, accessibility by car, foot, cycle and public transport, environmental impact and conservation.
- 2.25 Turning to major convenience shopping development, proposals for 15,000 square feet of sales floorspace or over, will normally be located within or immediately adjacent to the established town centre shopping areas (**Policy S3**).

The Shopping Environment

- 2.26 A number of policies within the adopted Local Plan refer to the shopping environment. The Council will seek to maintain and enhance the vitality of established town centres by carrying out environmental improvement schemes, providing adequate car parking, and maintaining an appropriate mix of commercial, retail and residential uses (**Policy S10**).
- 2.27 **Policy S12** must also be addressed which seeks to retain existing retail units within the town centres. This policy aims to minimise the loss of retail units to other uses and hence retain the viability and vitality of the town centres.
- 2.28 Proposals for A3 uses will have to be determined against **Policy S14** where criteria will be considered including the effect on adjacent and nearby residential properties, car parking facilities and general highway implications and the proposed hours of opening and whether they can be controlled by restrictive planning conditions.

Transport Policy

- 2.29 As a result of the nature and scale of the change envisaged through the Development Framework, there are very significant implications in terms of transport policy, particularly in terms of access, movement and parking. Relevant policies can be found throughout the transport section of the adopted Local Plan. As indicated above, the improvements put forward in this Planning Brief are considered to supplement many of the policies seeking to improve provision for pedestrians and public transport.
- 2.30 Under **Policy T9** the District Council will press for a new road scheme to relieve congestion on the Huntingdon ring road and approach roads to the Town. The District Council considers that a third crossing of the River Great Ouse is required to relieve the Huntingdon Ring Road and Godmanchester. The Market Town Strategy considered this bypass but rejected it at this stage as being outside the scope of the present strategy.

Bus Travel

- 2.31 The Council will support proposals which maintain or improve the present level of public transport services (**Policy T21**). There is currently no direct bus access into the Chequers Court area.

Car Parking

- 2.32 The Council in accordance with the recently adopted Structure Plan state that parking standards should not exceed the standards specified in PPG 13. Parking provision is an important element in making Huntingdon a successful town centre, this is a particular area that needs addressing as the lack of high quality parking is acting as a deterrent to potential shoppers coming to Huntingdon. A recent report conducted by The Transportation Consultancy (TPI), on behalf of the Council, notes that due to the major growth in Huntingdon, and its importance as a retail and employment centre leads to a shortfall of around 430 spaces by 2016. Parking will be reviewed further at paragraph 4.10 of this report.

Environment Policy

- 2.33 Key policies concerning the conservation area designation of part of the site are set out in sections 2.24 – 2.26. In addition to these policies it is important to address Policy En20. This states that wherever appropriate, the grant of

planning permission for development will be subject to conditions requiring the execution of an approved landscaping scheme.

- 2.34 Access for the disabled is addressed in **Policy En24** where the Council will encourage the provision of access for the disabled in the design of new development and where necessary take account of the adequacy of provision in the determination of planning applications.
- 2.35 Turning to design new development should generally respect the scale, form, materials and design of established buildings in the locality of the application site and where appropriate make adequate provision for landscaping and amenity areas (**Policy En25**).

Local Transport Plan

- 2.36 The Transport Strategy for Huntingdon and Godmanchester forms part of the Local Transport Plan (LTP). The aim of the strategy will be to provide a five-year programme of integrated transport initiatives up until 2008 that supports the LTP objectives.
- 2.37 Huntingdon is one of the most accessible market towns in the country due to its road and rail links. Huntingdon has a range of transport services including rail and bus in addition to major road links with the A1 and A14.
- 2.38 Six main proposals are set out in the Transport Strategy:
- i) *Making Travel Safer:-* the Strategy identifies locations for safety improvements including the Huntingdon Inner Ring Road and Hartford Road;
 - ii) *Huntingdon Ring Road:-* the Strategy proposes a new link road through the proposed west of Town Centre development site between Ermine Street and George Street; removing traffic between St Mary's Street and Hartford Road (except for buses, taxis, cyclists and pedestrians) and creating a new lane on the ring road between the Bridge Hotel and Hartford Road and along Nursery Road to this development site running in the opposite direction to the ring road;
 - iii) *Walking and Cycling:-* Proposed improvements include a comprehensive cycle network; new cycle parking in the Town Centre; introduction of new signage to reinforce the existing pedestrianisation and production of a comprehensive cycling and walking map;
 - iv) *Bypass Improvements:-* The provision of additional capacity at the four roundabouts on the A141 bypass is proposed;
 - v) *Public Transport:-* Proposed measures include an extension to the Town Centre services to provide an additional loop through Hinchingsbrooke residential areas; improved rail/bus interchange at Huntingdon Rail Station; provision of integrated information and a number of bus lanes including contra-flow bus lane on the ring road between George Street and the bus station and an extra lane for the Guided Bus along Nursery Road from the development site in the St. Ives direction.
 - vi) *Car Parking:-* The Study will consider ways of ensuring there remains sufficient parking places to serve shoppers and short stay users within the Town Centre whilst balancing this with providing adequate facilities for other users, such as long stay, all day parking. This is discussed further in Section 6 of this report.

The Design Guide

- 2.39 In preparing a development scheme for this site the basic consideration set out in part 1 of the Design Guide need to be taken into account.

3 Land Use Consideration

Retail Assessment

- 3.1 In August 2001 CB Hillier Parker produced, on behalf of Huntingdonshire District Council, a Retail Study for Huntingdonshire. The report undertook both a qualitative and quantitative assessment of retail in Huntingdon.

Qualitative Assessment of Huntingdon

- 3.2 The report concludes that in terms of qualitative assessment Huntingdon has a good choice of convenience provision, with three Town Centre main foodstores, an out of centre superstore, some smaller multiple and local food retailers and a twice weekly market. The report goes on to state that the Centre does, however, lack food provision at the discount or value end of the market.
- 3.3 Comparison goods provision in Huntingdon is mainly middle market and the Centre lacks clothing and footwear provision and gifts and luxury goods. The report stresses that the Chequers Court scheme is in need of refurbishment/redevelopment.
- 3.4 The report goes on to comment on the commercial leisure offer in Huntingdon which it concludes is limited, particularly for eating and drinking out, with a lack of wine bars, pubs and restaurants.

Quantitative Assessment of Huntingdon

- 3.5 Convenience goods retailers in the Town Centre are currently under-performing. The report comments that this is likely to reflect the poor performance of Sainsbury's on the Chequers Court Site, rather than Waitrose and Tesco at other locations within or out of the centre. Some convenience goods capacity in Huntingdon has been forecast by virtue of the overtrading of the out of centre Tesco, however, this is balanced by the under-trading of the Town Centre stores.
- 3.6 Overall, the report concludes that in quantitative terms there is not considered to be scope for further large scale convenience retailing over the Replacement Local Plan period. There may however, be capacity towards 2011 sufficient to support a smaller supermarket, such as a discount food retailer, but the priority is to improve the performance of the existing foodstore anchors, in particularly Sainsburys.
- 3.7 Huntingdon is trading adequately in terms of comparison goods, both in-centre and the out of centre retail warehouses. It is estimated that there is capacity to support further comparison goods floorspace in Huntingdon Town Centre over the Replacement Local Plan period. The CB Hillier Parker Retail Capacity Study, notes a requirement of over 5,000 sq m of additional comparison floorspace required in Huntingdon town centre by 2011. In addition, a further 4,370 sq m net of additional bulky durable goods retailing by 2011, based on the current market share.
- 3.8 Potential opportunity for the redevelopment and further expansion of the Chequers Court scheme is also identified in the report and it is recommended that the site should be allocated as a redevelopment opportunity within the emerging Local Plan.
- 3.9 A number of significant potential benefits are indicated in the report through the redevelopment of Chequers Court including:
- i) the potential to enhance the turnover of existing Town Centre retailers through increased footfall;
 - ii) the extension and improvement of existing primary shopping frontage within the Town Centre;
 - iii) the considerable enhancement of the existing Chequers Court scheme and a more seamless integration within the remainder of the Town Centre;

- iv) the potential to improve the number of car spaces in this important town centre location; and
- v) the improvement of pedestrian linkages to the Town Centre.

1.17 A need has therefore been identified within the report for further retail floorspace, and the opportunities to and the benefits of that need at Chequers Court has been identified.

Demand

3.10 The Churchmanor Estates development at St Germain Walk has increased the quality of convenience and comparison shopping in the Town Centre, as well as providing a greater range of units in terms of size. The offer of larger units would undoubtedly attract investment from comparison goods retailers.

3.11 The development of new units within the Town Centre to accommodate the size requirements of key comparison retailers is vital to ensure that Huntingdon retains a respectable proportion of comparison goods relative to the nearby regional centres of Cambridge, Peterborough and Bedford. Further developments at Chequers Court and other centre sites will enhance, the Town's appeal as a comparison goods destination.

3.12 Initial discussions with Churchmanor Estates have shown that there is considerable interest from national and single operators for all the proposed units. Operators are likely to be new to the Town rather than relocation from the High Street, thus strengthening the retail mix.

4 Highways & Movement

Movement

- 4.1 The site borders the ring road which travels around the Town of Huntingdon. This road is two lanes, one-way flow of traffic from northwest to southeast.
- 4.2 Vehicular access into and out of the Town Centre car park is off the ring road at two points, both controlled by traffic lights. Another vehicular access onto the site is off Hartford Road via Trinity Place.
- 4.3 Service routes to the retail units on and around the site are provided by both Trinity Place to the Chequers Court shopping area and St Germain Street to the Sainsbury's supermarket and adjacent retail units. Due to the size and number of retail units being served, these routes and areas are busy with regular deliveries made by large lorries.
- 4.4 The Town Centre car park is linked to the High Street, the adjacent shopping area of Chequers Court and the surrounding residential area by a number of pedestrian routes.
- 4.5 The primary route from the car park to the High Street is past the St Germain Walk retail development and through Chequers Court. This route is pedestrianised and therefore provides a safe and convenient access to the High Street and beyond. Another 'undesigned' route by Wilkinsons has now been blocked off in order to increase pedestrian safety.
- 4.6 Huntingdon bus station is located within the ring road, on the opposite side of the High Street to the site, and can be reached via the pedestrianised route through Chequers Court, St Benedict's Court and Princes Street. Buses travel frequently along the ring road and Hartford Road, to and from the bus station, to many of Huntingdon's estates and outlying villages as well as nearby settlements of St Ives and Cambridge. However, no buses penetrate the Chequers Court area directly, making the area less inviting to potential shoppers/visitors.
- 4.7 From the surrounding area outside the ring road, pedestrian access is achieved via a light controlled crossing over the ring road, adjacent to the petrol station. This provides, along with the other routes mentioned above, a pedestrianised link from one side of the ring road to the other, travelling through the heart of the Town Centre and across the High Street.
- 4.8 There are no specifically designated cycle routes in the area. This area is currently been addressed as part of the Council's Cycling Strategy.
- 4.9 The Town Centre car park on the site is particularly congested as it is the closest and most convenient parking area for the High Street, Chequers Court and the large supermarket within the St Germain Street development.

Parking

- 4.10 Transportation Planning (International) Ltd, (Tpi), was appointed by Huntingdonshire District Council in July 2002 to undertake a parking study and identify options for a future strategy for the four towns of Huntingdon, St Ives, St Neots and Ramsey.
- 4.11 In this study, Huntingdon shows the largest shortfall with a requirement for nearly 430 additional spaces by 2016 and 200 by 1011 on a peak weekday. The current surplus of spaces will be fully taken up in the next few years. Unless additional space is provided, the shortfall could produce negative affects for the town centre, such as:
- Trips are made to other centres; and
 - Fewer, longer trips are made to the town centre.

- 4.12 The consultants carrying out this study were aware of the proposals for redevelopment at Chequers Court, which envisages larger units than are currently provided and noted the possible inclusion of a multi-storey car park.
- 4.13 The provision of 430 additional spaces in Huntingdon to cater for the unconstrained demand to 2016 is a difficult task for the Council. In order for Huntingdon to maintain an attractive destination for residents and visitors this additional parking must be found.
- 4.14 Therefore, in light of the severe shortage in car parking spaces it is advisable that the Council take a pro-active stance in recognising Chequers Court as the most appropriate site for additional town centre car parking to compliment the existing and proposed retail facilities.
- 4.15 This is inline with the District Council who recently approved a car parking strategy that recognised the need to meet the parking needs of existing and planned development, provide an appropriate mix of public car parking and ensure that the majority of spaces within the town centre are short term serving the needs of shoppers for the benefit of the economy.

5 Urban Design Approach

Site Description

- 5.1 St Germain Walk is the main pedestrian route from Sainsburys to the High Street. There has been some improvements in recent years in order to maintain the overall environment, however, the 1960's architecture still dominates Chequers Court and detracts from the overall area.
- 5.2 Around Chequers Court and leading up to the Square and around Chequers Court, there is an awkward change of level of about 1.5m. Rather than climb the steps or use the ramp provided, many shoppers have preferred in the past to use the short cut of the St Germain Street service yard at the rear of Argos, and did not pass the shops in Chequers Court. This route has now been closed off in order to secure the safety of passers-by and direct pedestrian movement through Chequers Court.
- 5.3 The square itself has been refurbished but still appears run down and not an attractive space. The marginal trading of the shop units on the north-east side illustrates that the space is too large and not sufficiently well used.
- 5.4 There have however, been some recent improvements to the area, for example, the corner buildings forming the opening in the two-storey retail frontage on the south-west side of the square have been refurbished to form a matching gateway. In addition, Churchmanor have carried out enhancement to some of the shop units along the north-west side of the Court. The District Council is currently giving consideration for plans to replace the oppressively low archway to join the High Street.
- 5.5 The Sainsbury's Store encloses the north-west side of the car park comprising a 1-2 storey timber framed structure supporting a red tiled-pitched roof. The south west side is enclosed by the flat roofed bulk of the 4 storey brick Chequers Court building which is both too large and too bland to make a positive contribution to the space. There is no activity on the ground level as the internal ground floor is below Chequers Way road level.
- 5.6 The north-east side of the car park is partially open to the domestic scale building fronting the one way system along Nursery Road, and partially obscured by the PFS which occupies a strategic location between the car entrance and exit points leading to an inefficient use of space.
- 5.7 A line of trees and bushes encloses the fourth side of the car park. This hides a service lane that provides access to the garages of the houses fronting Hartford Road. The view is completed by the cluttered service area at the rear of the Inland Revenue building and the exposed rear service yards of the High Street shops and the unattractive Job Centre office building. The overall impression is of an untidy collection of backs and undefined edges that present a poor impression of the town centre as seen from the Ring Road.

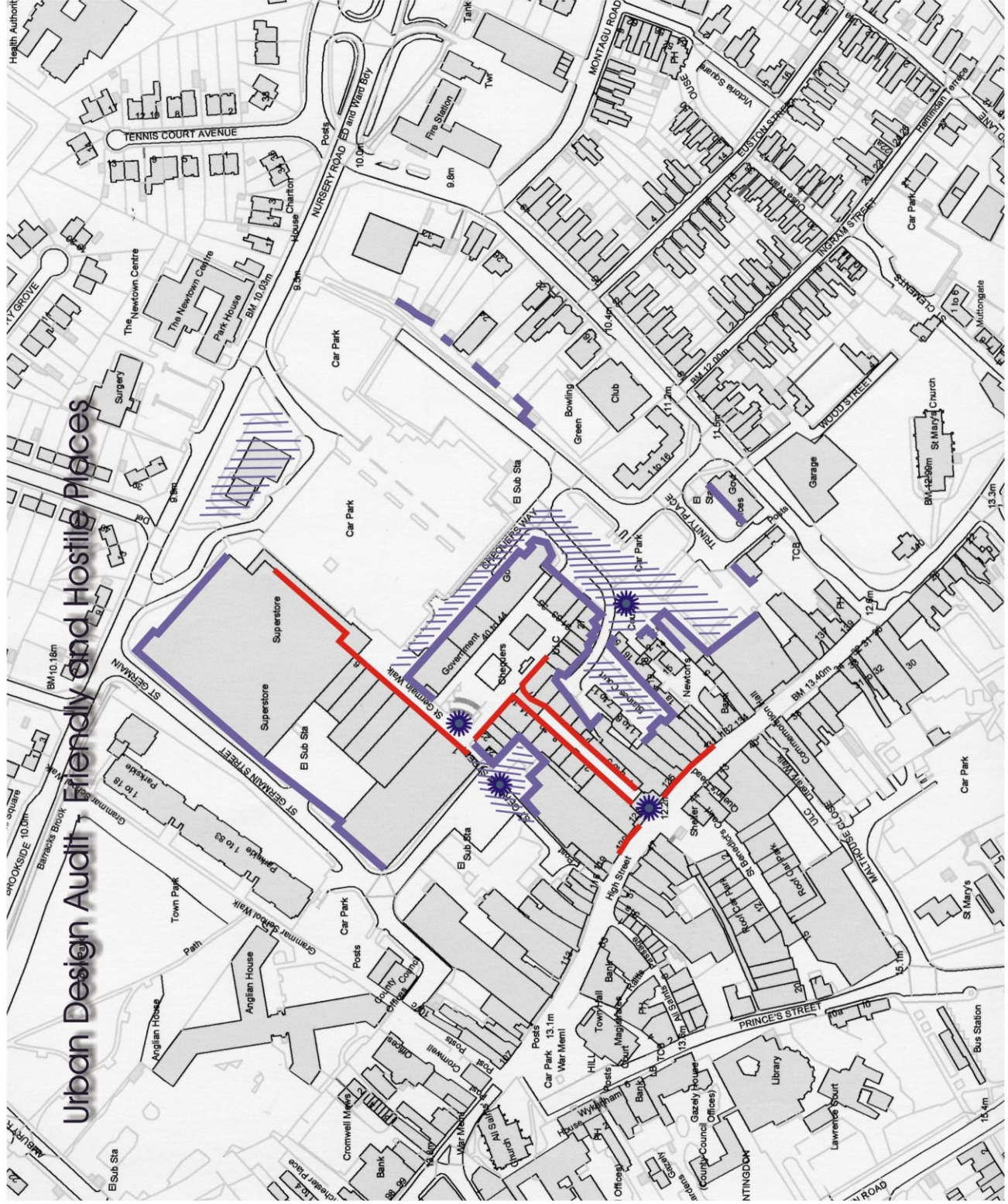
Urban Design Audit

- 5.8 The Urban Design audit exposed a number of issues that the new Development Framework must seek to resolve. These include:
- Chequers Court is an unsightly building block that makes a negative contribution on all four sides, both to the immediate pedestrian environment, and within the overall townscape scene. The large and bulky flat roof does not disguise the 4-storey height and clashes with the grain and roofscape of the rest of the town.
 - Chequers Court Square is too large to support active frontages on both sides and suffers from the poorly designed change of level that discourages use by shoppers;

- This results in there being an ambiguous choice of pedestrian routes that link the Sainsburys retail cluster to the High Street to the detriment of shops in both locations;
- The main pedestrian link into the High Street emerges below an oppressively low and dark gateway and does not present an inviting face to attract shoppers to the Sainsburys side of the Town Centre;
- The large car park is unattractively laid out with insufficient planting to screen the cars and provides insufficient spaces to meet projected demand;
- Newton's Court leads down a narrow alley from the High Street and provides a useful location for small retail units but users must pass through inhospitable service areas and past blank walls to reach the car park;
- The whole area is bounded by one-way streets on two sides and feels cut off from adjacent areas; and
- Links from the Victoria Square conservation area bounded by Hartford Road must cross a wasteland of service areas to reach the shops.

5.9 The Urban Design Audit Plan. 'Friendly and Hostile Spaces' (Figure 5.1) summarises these aspects.

Fig. 5.1



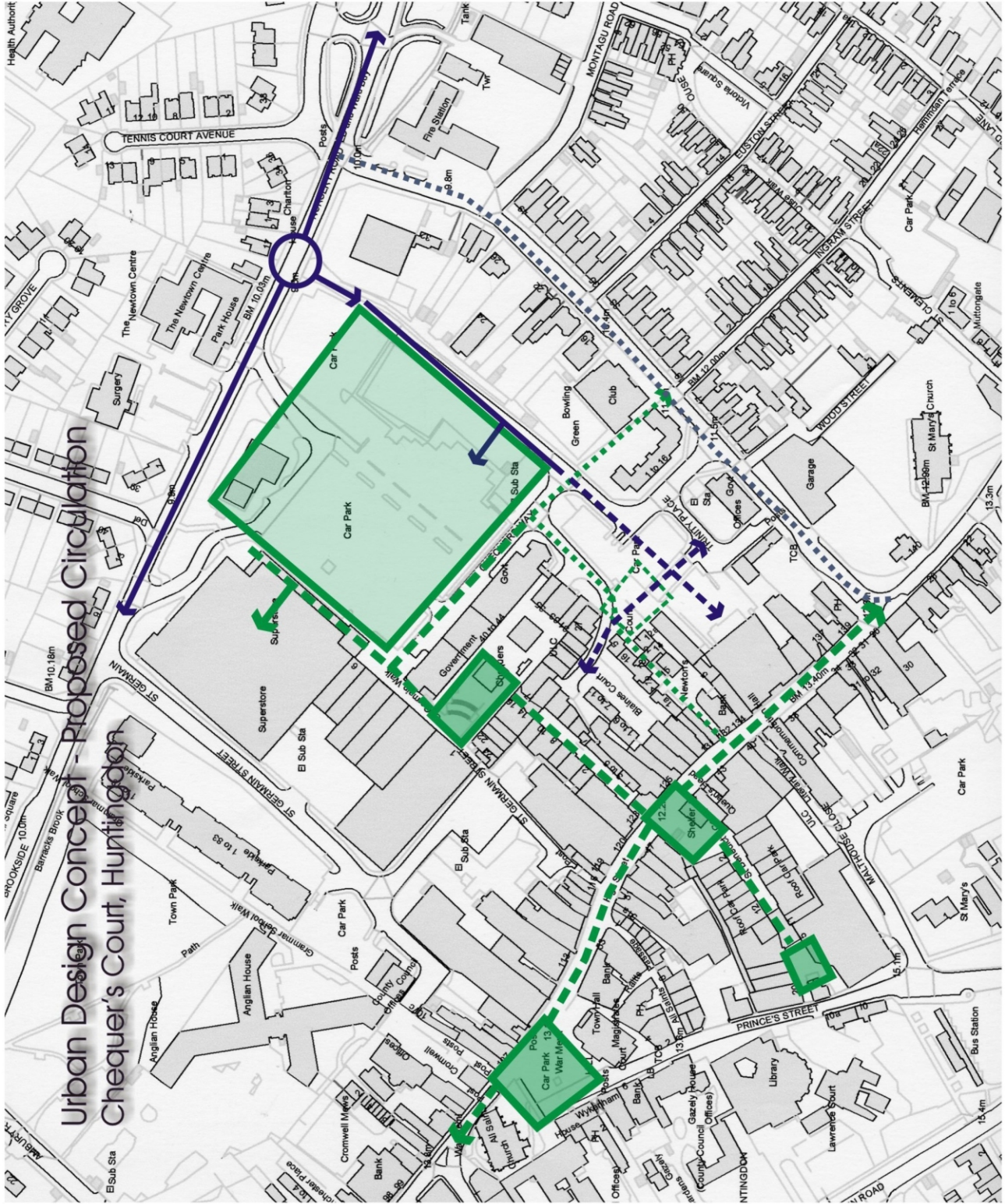
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Urban Design Objectives

5.10 Following on from the Urban Design Audit a number of objectives can be formulated which the framework plans and redevelopment schemes must seek to achieve.

- The urban design approach needs to reflect the Town Centre location rather than an out of town ethos. This will determine the architectural design of buildings to create street frontages, the design of street furniture and landscape, highway layouts must be urban and pedestrian friendly and signage should be coordinated and discreet;
- The existing Sainsbury's retail cluster should act as a catalyst for future high quality retail units in order to strengthen retail and car parking provision;
- There needs to be one clear principal pedestrian route to link to the High Street through Chequers Court, which attracts shoppers and casual users along a strengthened east-west axis through the Town Centre.
- A secondary route through Newton's Court can provide variety to building scale and space for small-scale uses. This would also connect to the main pedestrian route without passing through threatening service areas;
- New buildings need to provide for the large retail spaces required by potential occupiers;
- Pedestrian links to the Victoria Square and the Riverside need to be improved to encourage more people to walk to the Town Centre;
- Shoppers given a choice of better access from St Germain Walk to Chequers Court,
- Improve level changes around the Square to make easier access for the elderly, young and disabled;
- Provide an increased number of convenient located car parking spaces.
- Buses to be accommodated within the site.
- New access to Nursery Road to allow Hartford Road to be traffic calmed.

Fig. 5.2



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6 Suggested Development Framework

Urban Design Options

6.1 A number of urban design layouts have been generated which respond to the Urban Design Audit and Objectives based on the Shillam & Smith Report (April 2001). Two of the key aims of the proposals are to encourage 'active' frontages and to foster a night-time economy with the introduction of possible A3 units into the Chequers Court area. Two out of the four options have been dismissed due to financial feasibility, but the others are considered in greater detail. A summary of options 1 & 2 are detailed below. Both options have the remaining common themes:

- Enclosing a central service court servicing all units with continuous retail frontages to a remodelled Chequers Court. Entrance to the service area via a gateway adjacent to the retained Newton's Court;
- Ensuring genuinely 'Active' frontages;
- A new service access street links to a new all movement junction at the proposed two way section of Nursery Road allowing Hartford Road to be traffic calmed as a two way residential street;
- Introduction of an evening economy including A3 units;
- A significant increase in parking provision in a town centre location.
- Additional car park provision;
- Maintain the Petrol Filling Station where it is;
- Allowing busses to penetrate the development

OPTION 1

Advantages

- Ease of implementation, no change to PFS;
- Clear pedestrian routes;
- Open prospect from new residential blocks; and
- Flats and offices over retail add vitality to town centre
- Access for busses

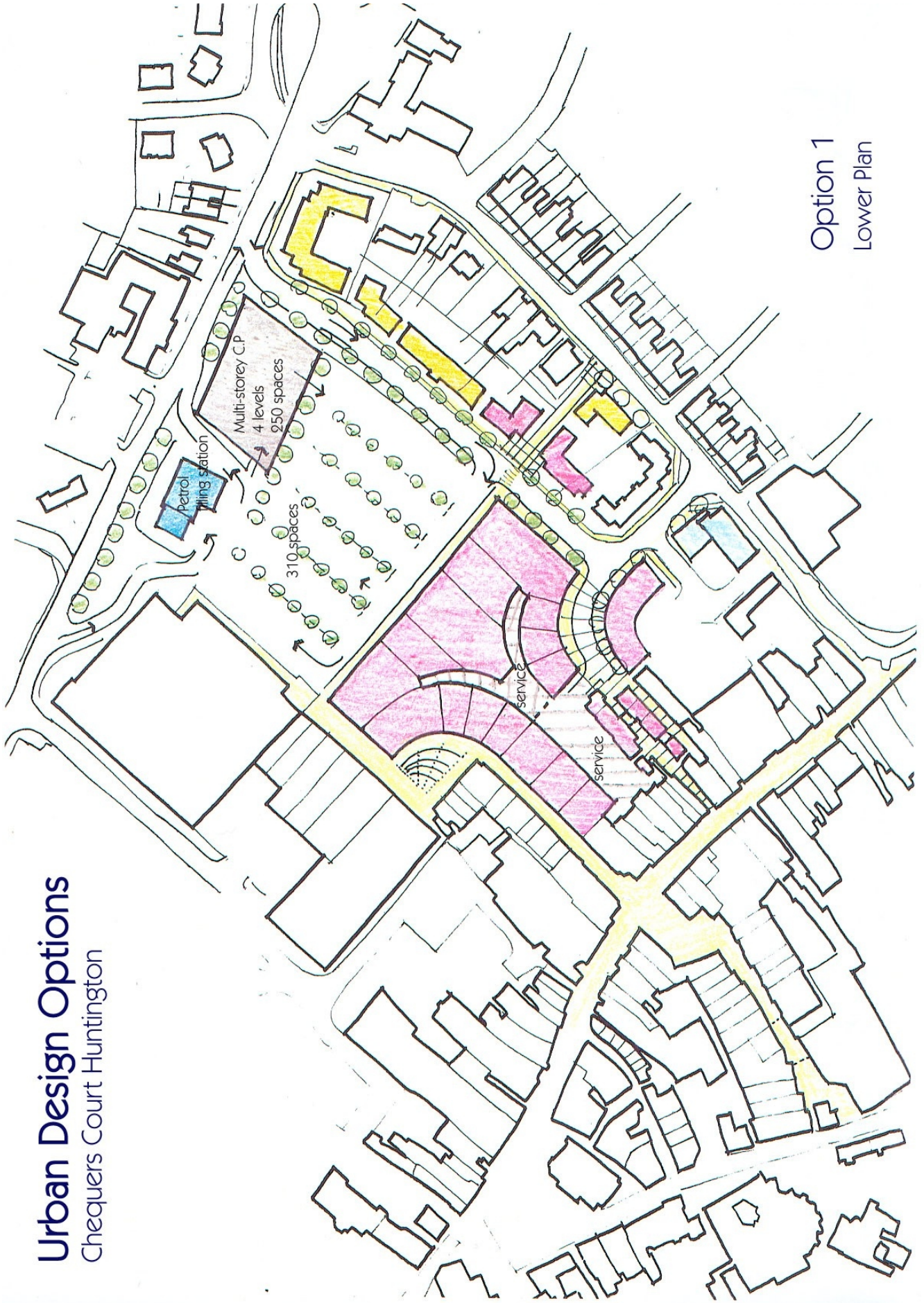
Disadvantages

- Retail facing Newton's Court may be marginal due to lower pedestrian flow and
- M/S car park visually dominant and blocks views of shops from Nursery Road

Retail:	Ground Floor 5,600m2 gross plus 1,000 m2 Blaines Court site
Residential:	First and Second Floor 4,400 m2
Offices:	First and second Floor 900 m2 Blaines Court site
Car Parking:	310 surface spaces 250 spaces in 4 level multi storey structure
Total:	560 spaces

Urban Design Options

Chequers Court Huntington



Option 1
Lower Plan

OPTION 2

Advantages

- Ease of implementation
- No change to position of PFS
- Provides more car parking spaces than option1
- Access for buses

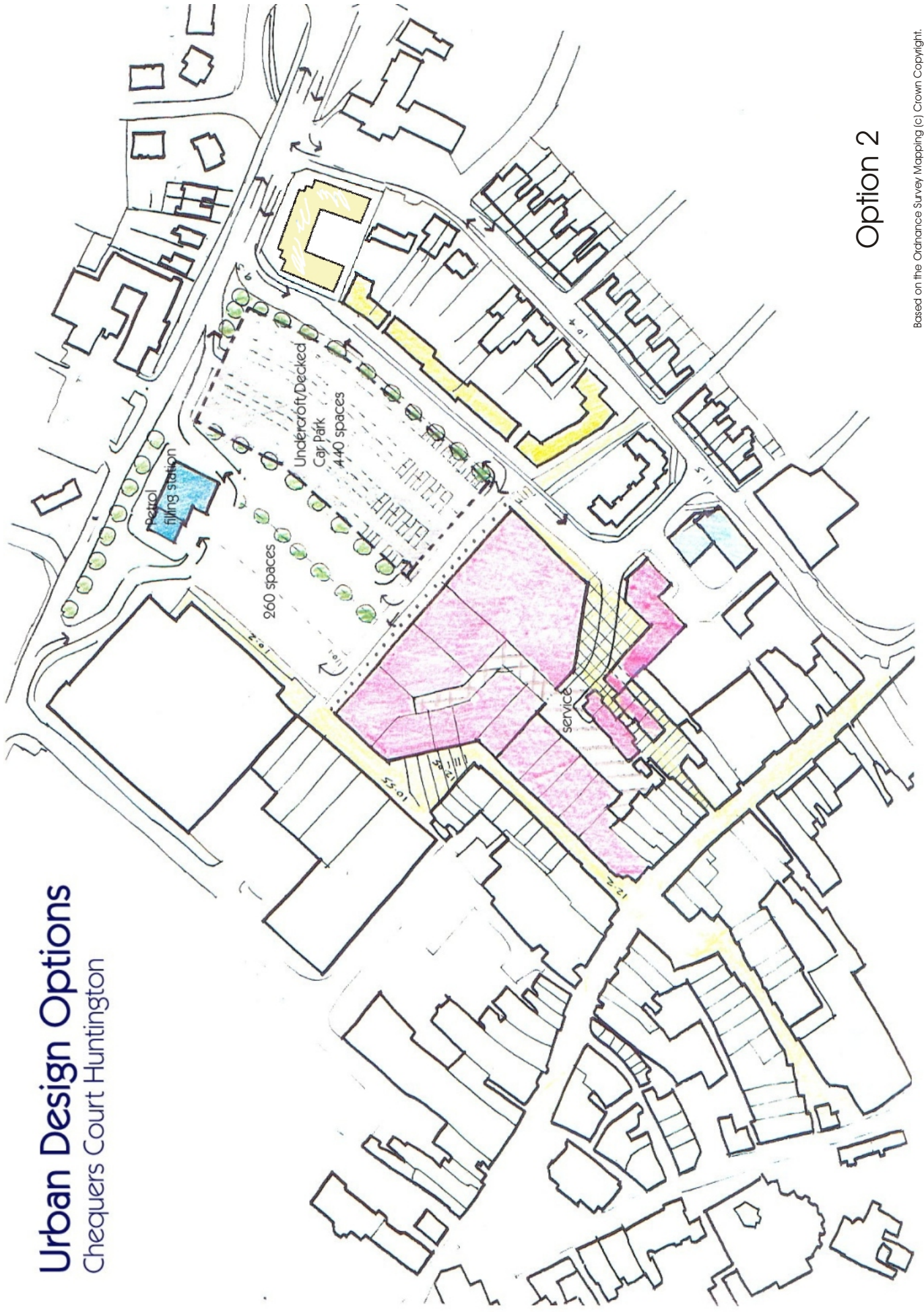
Disadvantages

- Loss of convenient car spaces at PFS site and
- Programming issues, more existing car spaces could be lost during construction of parking structure

Retail:	Ground Floor 5450 m2 Plus 1000m2 Blaines Court First Floor 5450 m2 Plus 1000m2 Blaines Court
Car	260 surface spaces
Parking:	440 spaces in 2 level multi storey structure
Total:	700 spaces

Urban Design Options

Chequers Court Huntington



Option 2

Preferred Option

- 6.2 Options 1 and 2 are schemes that include land outside of the control of the proposed developer and the District Council. In arriving at a preferred option it was considered that a balance needed to be made between the Shillam and Smith vision of an enclosed 'square' (the urban design aspects), the most suitable access arrangements for the site, additional car parking in a form that does not impact adversely on the adjoining conservation area, traffic calming in Hartford Road within the Conservation Area, and the achievement of a successful retail scheme meeting the demands for larger spaces within the next five years.
- 6.3 The conclusion is that due to the demand for improved parking facilities in the town, the need for a larger retail offer and the problems that could be associated with having to deal with additional land owners it would be more beneficial to the town to create a high quality retail environment which will compliment the existing High Street. In turn this would then facilitate sufficient car parking for residents and visitors to be able to stay and shop within Huntingdon town centre and with an all purpose new access onto the ring road that will allow only limited traffic along Hartford Road.
- 6.4 Therefore the preferred option for Chequers Court is a predominantly retail-led development similar to option 2. Buildings will be of high quality design and will compliment the existing scale and heights of the buildings already established at Chequers Court.
- 6.5 A further phase of development could take place in the future to include land to the rear of properties in Hartford Road and on the ATS site.

PREFERRED OPTION

Advantages

- More retail development than option 1
- Eliminates cost of moving PFS
- Provides more car parking spaces than option 1 or 2
- Clear pedestrian routes through car park and links to Newton Court
- Minimises use of land outside of control of HDC and developer

Disadvantages

- Less retail development than option 2
- Majority of car parking is in multi-storey
- More conflict between cars /servicing and pedestrians on route to Newton's Court

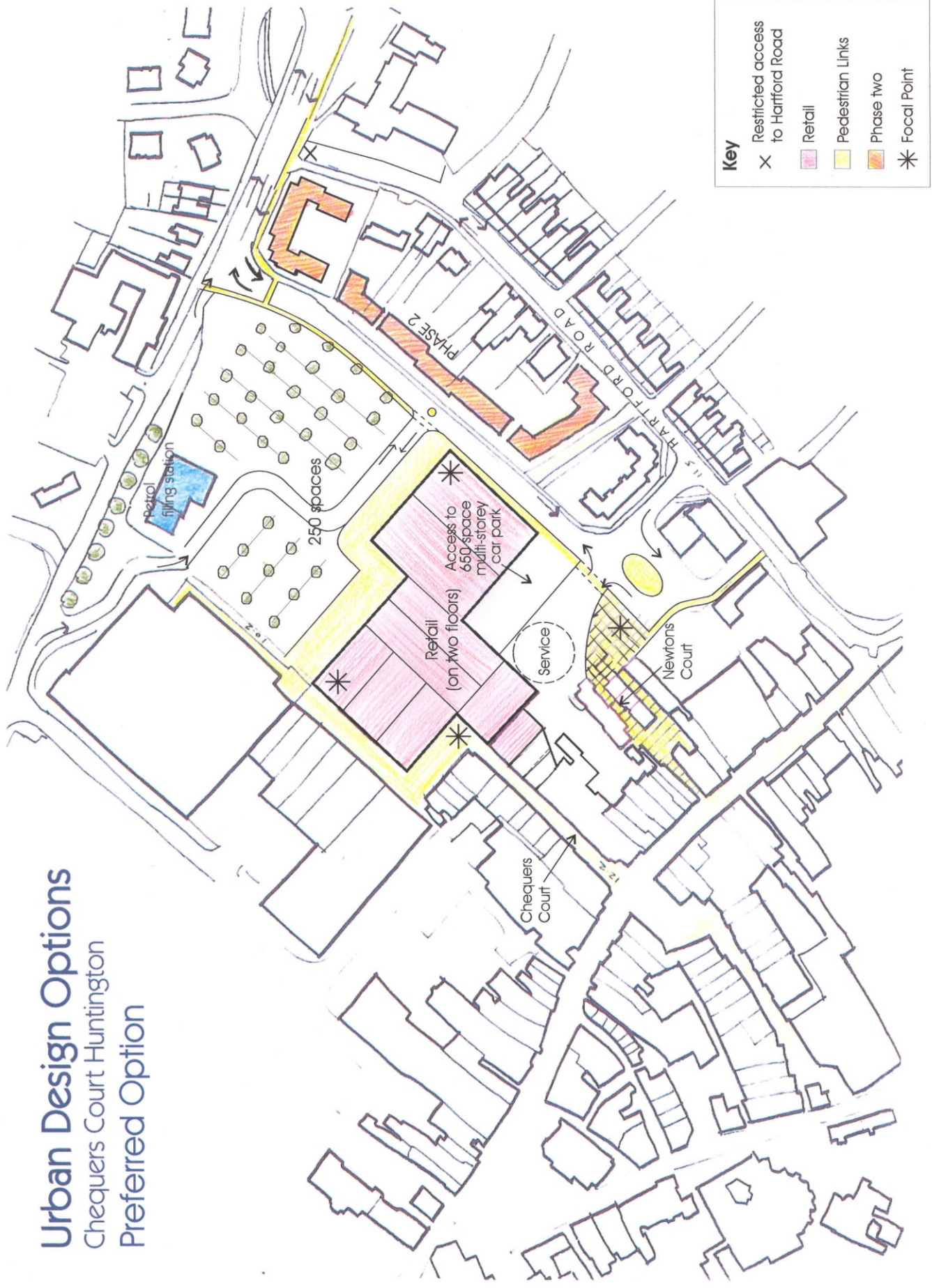
Retail: Ground and first floor 10,000 m²

Car Parking: 250 surface spaces , 650 spaces in 7 level multi storey structure

Total: 900 spaces

Urban Design Options

Chequers Court Huntington
Preferred Option



7 Summary of Development Issues

- 7.1 In the preparation of this Planning Brief both national and local planning guidance have been considered, to ensure a high quality, high profile development.
- 7.2 The vision is to create the opportunity for development that substantially enhances the retail capacity and quality of the Chequers Court retail offer, improves the links to other Town Centre components, and improves the quality of the car parking offer and will significantly improve the urban environment. It will also provide the opportunity for busses to enter and leave the site and become a principle setting down and picking up area in the town centre.
- 7.3 Chequers Court has enormous potential to become a key retail destination in Huntingdon, and already has the benefit of being anchored by two key stores in Sainsbury's and Wilkinsons. In association with Churchmanor (the developer and owner of most of the land) the Council have already established that there is considerable interest from sole and national traders looking for units in Huntingdon.
- 7.4 The redevelopment of this strategically located site in a town centre will inevitably be complex involving a co-ordinated approach from a number of agencies as well as the developers. The Chequers Court redevelopment provides Huntingdon with the opportunity to make major improvements to the range and scale of retail offer and provide more convenient car parking for the Town Centre. Implementation of this redevelopment together with the provision of two way traffic up to a new junction to access the site from the ring road will lead to the alleviation of some traffic bottlenecks and increased choice for car drivers.
- 7.5 It is financially viable, with operators already in advanced discussions for units. In terms of design the proposals should respect, the scale, form and height of the existing Sainsbury's store in order to bring a balance back to the urban form. Through this development the range and scale of units that will be provided will attract new operators to Huntingdon, and add an additional dimension to the current retail offer.
- 7.6 The preferred option provides the Council with the opportunity to contribute in a substantive way to the vitality and viability of the Town Centre. It will put Chequers Court on the map as a 'destination', whilst aiding Huntingdon in its wider role to claw back some of the comparison shopping lost to competing centre such as Cambridge, Peterborough and Bedford.
- 7.7 The rich mix of retailers proposed for this area, will strength the retail core, whilst acting as a catalyst for the comprehensive regeneration of the area, and ensure that Huntingdon remains a place for people to live, work and visit.