

St Neots Town Centre – The Future

A Centre Vision study prepared for Huntingdonshire District Council by The Civic Trust
in association with DTZ/Pieda, with the support of Waitrose, Marks and Spencer and Land Securities

May 2004



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SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Our research suggests that national prosperity, regional buoyancy and local growth are beginning to feed through into an uplift in the town centre's economy. It makes sense therefore to be looking ahead with a genuine sense of optimism.

Within the town centre, specific initiatives have helped to turn the tide: the investment by Wizard Inns north of the Market Place, the refurbishment and reuse of the Paine's Brewery site on the south side, the improvement of the Market Place itself, the schemes of conservation grant aid and the enthusiasm and activities of the Town Centre Initiative – all have played their part.

There are genuine concerns about the way the town has grown and the way that housing and population growth has outstripped community infrastructure: shopping, cultural and leisure facilities, traffic management within the town, public transport, facilities for health and youth etc. St Neots shares this time lag in community infrastructure provision with many other growth centres in the country and illustrates this widespread national issue perfectly.

The current population of the town is around 28,000. It is likely to reach 34,500 by 2016. It is therefore an urgent requirement to plan ahead for a town with a balanced provision of facilities and one with a prosperous and vibrant town centre. Growth would otherwise be unsustainable. Significant moves in this direction include the development of a new Health Centre, the bids by both Ernulf and Longsands Schools to central government for special status (Ernulf's bid has been successful *), and the feasibility study into the future of the Priory Centre. Future major private housing developers may be expected to contribute to community infrastructure of various kinds through commuted sums and Section 106 agreements.

This points to the need for a spatial strategy for the whole town which goes well beyond the piecemeal allocation of individual plots for housing. This is outside the scope of our report, but we have nevertheless enlarged the boundaries of our brief beyond the immediate confines of the traditional town centre in St Neots in order to provide a realistic context for our

recommendations. This is because the town centre is in reality one of four retail centres divided by the River Great Ouse; it is one of three centres of community provision and the opportunities for growth within the town centre boundary are limited, given the extent of recent and planned infill housing development. Town centre functions are therefore dispersed around a number of destinations.

We have therefore taken account of this new spatial reality for the town in our proposals, which include the development of the River Great Ouse as a linear park – a landscape and leisure corridor that, conceptually, unites the town in one new and dramatic whole, rather than splitting it. This is a new identity for St Neots and a new resource for leisure, recreation and tourism. The first step towards this vision is already being taken with a baseline audit of the whole St Neots river corridor, to be carried out with the backing of the Environment Agency.

Besides uniting the town, we see this new resource also linking the key nodes of activity and providing a coherent basis for a development in their complementary roles: St Neots itself as the main centre and hub, Ernulf/Eynesbury with a supporting retail role plus a growing sports, youth, educational and cultural function. Longsands would link educational provision with sports and leisure, whilst just across the border in North Bedfordshire the Wyboston Lakes Business Park forms a growing centre for training, leisure and fledgling businesses. The improved bus routes and cycle ways will link these centres of activity together better than in the past.

Within this broad pattern there is what we term a “leisure arc” on the east bank of the Ouse which unites the formal and informal sports and leisure venues from Eynesbury to Longsands.

Accessibility is a major issue for the town centre, which the current five-year transportation programme may only partly address. A more robust modelling exercise might be more beneficial – hence the idea for a “market towns traffic model” which is being pursued by the Town Centre Initiative.

The recent parking strategy suggests that there will be a significant shortfall in provision by 2010. We conclude that without additional parking spaces St Neots town centre could well lose more trade to other centres. Our proposals would create more spaces on the key approach roads to the town centre to reduce traffic circulating within it, so allowing scope for much-needed environmental improvements.

According to the studies that have been carried out there is some modest scope for new retail floorspace development on the basis of existing trends. But there could be scope for more if St Neots can claw back some trade currently lost to other centres. There are gaps or weaknesses in current provision, including restaurants, barns and retail warehouses selling bulky goods. Given its heritage and scenic beauty St Neots is well placed to see growth in the latter, even if only to national average activity levels - but possibly more. We recommend a specific set of policies be developed for this sector in the light of the forthcoming deregulation of licensing and the new responsibilities that local authorities will be taking on under the new legislation.

There are three key areas of opportunity within the town centre: The Priory Quarter, the Eastern Gateway/Medieval Crossroads and what we term St Mary’s Urban Village.

The Context Plan

The plan on this worksheet illustrates the town study area in its riverside context, its relationship to adjacent local centres and to the key facilities outside the town centre. The plan clearly shows the importance of the river valley to St Neots: a green corridor linking the component parts. The river setting is one of the key assets, which determines the special character of the town.



River Character

EATON SOCON
Wyboston Lakes



St Neots



Brook Street
Heritage



High Street
Commercial

- 1 Town Centre Primary Study Area – Urban centre and town waterfront
- 2 Paxton Fids – Water park feature
- 3 Ouse Valley – Riverside habitat, linear park and green corridor
- 4 Wyboston Lakes – Water park feature and wildlife habitat
- 5 Ernulf College – Arts and leisure
- 6 Longsands college and parkland
- 7 Eastern Expansion Area – Housing extension to St Neots

Also shown on the plan are the key local centres and out of town shopping facilities.

The Wyboston Lakes Business Park contains The Robinson Centre, which is a residential training and conference centre.

Town Centre Context

1. INTRODUCTION, CONCEPT AND OPPORTUNITY



Our Commission

1.1 In July 2003 Huntingdonshire District Council commissioned The Civic Trust to work with local people and prepare a vision, strategy and action plan for the town centre.

Centre Vision

1.2 The study is part of a rolling programme of work by The Civic Trust in town and city centres. It is supported by sponsorship from The Civic Trust's national Centre Vision partners: Waitrose, Marks and Spencer and Land Securities.

St. Neots is the third Centre Vision project in Huntingdonshire after Huntingdon and St. Ives.

Our Brief and Methodology

1.3 Our brief originally had the following key components:

- Refining the brief, initial surveys and finalisation of work plan together with a partnership of interests
- Policy and project development
- Consultation, including an exhibition and a special edition of Priorities
- Action planning
- Final recommendations

The following approach was adopted:

- A Steering Group was set up comprising public, private and voluntary sectors
- The team worked closely with the Town Centre Initiative, its officers and its specialist committees. (The Town Centre Initiative is a joint group of the Town Council, District Council, businesses and other agencies).
- Intensive sessions were held with HDC officers to avoid duplication of effort and ensure compatibility with existing policy work

- A large measure of public consultation, including the production of a special edition of St Neots Priorities, a public exhibition and a session with pupils of Ernulf School.
- A commercial development analysis by DTZ/Pieda, building on earlier work by Chesterton Planning and Economic Development and leading to proposals for specific sites.

Key Issues to Address

1.4 There are special challenges and opportunities at St Neots. There is the difficulty of linking the two halves of the town that are divided by the river. In plan they resemble the two lungs of the body. Also there is the historical incremental growth of the town, which has lacked form and structure. When so many market towns today are facing major growth St Neots is something of an exemplar.

Key issues for the study included:

- The performance of the town centre in relation to competitor locations
- The future role and function of the town centre and its potential for growth to serve a bigger town better
- The range of cultural, leisure and community services that St Neots should provide for its workers, residents and visitors in its town centre and elsewhere
- The identity of St Neots and the scope for local distinctiveness to play a part in a brighter future

- The way in which higher standards of design quality can become a part of a progressive momentum of change.

St. Neots Past and Present

1.5 *St Neots has a strong identity and a rich medieval heritage.* Eynesbury has the oldest foundation, having been both a Roman and an Anglo Saxon garrison or port. St Neots owes its origin to the founding of a Priory on the outskirts of Eynesbury in around 974AD. St. Neot's relics were stolen from Cornwall to give the new Priory its patron saint. The Priory was completely destroyed at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries. St Neots later became a major stopping point for stagecoaches on the Great North Road and several coaching inns still survive.

Until the mid 20th century St. Neots remained a small town grouped around the market place, river and crossroads. Since then there have been successive waves of growth and development, including London overspill, and today St Neots is the largest town in the District with around 28,000 people (11,500 households). Development is spread on both banks of the Great Ouse and absorbing the settlements of St Neots, Eynesbury, Eaton Ford and Eaton Socon.

The Future is Bright!

1.6 *St Neots is well placed to exploit the potential for the future.* Factors include location, growth, communications, innovation, image and quality of life. The town is within one of the most prosperous areas of the UK. The town is expanding rapidly – over last 17 years it has experienced 22% population growth and 46% household growth. Its

size is expected to reach 34,500 people by 2016 (15,500 households). Job growth in the region has been high, averaging some 4,000 jobs per annum, mostly around Cambridge. Unemployment rate in St Neots is below national and regional average at 1.75%.

The County Structure Plan recognises that there has been a lack of investment in infrastructure to support population growth in the sub region. Whilst transport has been improved, it falls short of future requirements. The provision of affordable housing has been inadequate, resulting in skill shortages and recruitment difficulties. These difficulties affect the region's ability to accommodate growth and prosper as a leading centre. The strategy for the region is to provide for "sustainable development". One of the policies for this is to encourage more local employment, so reducing commuting.

Against this background a "panoply" of national policy instruments are relevant to St Neots' future:

- Arguably, both Urban and Rural White Papers, given St Neots' status as a large market town ("Our Towns and Cities: The Future – Delivering an Urban Renaissance" and "Our Countryside : The Future – A Fair Deal for Rural England")
- The ODPM's policy report "Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future" which includes London, Stanstead, Cambridge as one of four national growth areas
- All the policies relating to the density and tenure of new housing, including PPG3 and the wealth of information from CABE and ODPM on urban design

- The draft revised PPS 6 with a new emphasis on mixed uses, the leisure economy and the need for a hierarchy of centres, including market town centres
- The Licensing Act and its function in relation to the growth of eating and drinking and the development of the 24 hour economy
- The new PPS 12, its proposals for new style plans and wider consultation.

In this report these policies are related to each of the key themes geared to realising the full potential of St Neots and its centre.

The Report

1.7 In the pages that follow we:

- Present the results of the consultation edition of Priorities
- Set out the results of our policy review and market analysis
- Describe our vision and strategy for the future of the town centre
- Supply detailed descriptions of specific areas of opportunity
- Summarise the way ahead in an indicative action plan.

2. PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE



most about. The newsletter included tick boxes for responses and space for individual views and suggestions.

The survey was a success in engaging the interest and support of local partners, the business community and residents generally at an early stage in the programme.

Copies were distributed to around 16,000 addresses throughout St. Neots and the surrounding area together with copies of the local newspaper. 445 were handed in to 13 collecting points in the town and transported to the Civic Trust in London for processing. (Crosshall School submitted 3 forms representing the views of 90 children). The totals for each collecting point give some indication of their activity or appeal. The results were:

Priorities Special Edition

2.1 A public consultation exercise and survey was mounted early on in the study and a special edition of the Town Centre Initiatives' newsletter "Priorities" was produced and distributed. We are grateful to the Town Centre Initiative for its help and support in the design, distribution and collection of this. The aim was to use the exercise to give further shape to our brief by identifying issues, opportunities and potential actions that local people care

▪ Longsands College	110
▪ Waitrose	73
▪ Ernulf School	57
▪ Barretts, High Street	43
▪ Library	34
▪ Boots	26
▪ Eaton Socon Post Office	22
▪ Tesco	21
▪ West End	14
▪ Sealed Air Ltd	7
▪ Railway Station	6
▪ Leisure Centre	5
▪ Crosshall Junior School (90 children)	3

▪ Not known 2
There were three main sections:

- Where Are We Now?
- Where Do We Want to be in Ten Years' Time
- Questions designed to show how people use the town centre now and their perceptions of it.

Where Are We Now?

2.2 There were six propositions and respondents were invited to say how much they agreed or disagreed with them. In order of popularity (i.e. the percentage of those who "strongly agreed" with the proposition) they were (in summary):

- **St. Neots has "grown like topsy"!** (70%)
Attractions and amenities have not kept pace with new housing. St Neots needs more places to go and more things to see and do.
- **St. Neots needs better shops** (65%)
St Neots needs more quality and variety in its shopping, more and better places for eating and drinking.
- **Using the "nooks and crannies"** (57%)
Housing has filled in much of the available space in the town centre. What space is left should be considered for other things: shops, cafes and public facilities.
- **Sharing in the region's prosperity** (39%)
There should be more opportunities for people to learn, develop and work locally. Some of these opportunities could be in and around

the town centre.

- **St Neots is a well-kept secret** (37%)
The historic town and riverside landscape could attract more visitors and boost trade in the town centre.
- **The town is "bypassed"** (36%)
Movement within the town centre is difficult. More people would come if accessibility were better and the centre was less dominated by traffic. (18% disagreed)

Where Do We Want to be in Ten Years' Time?

2.3 There were seven components of a possible future vision for St. Neots and respondents were asked to show their support or otherwise. In order of popularity (the percentage of those who "strongly supported" the idea) the results were:

- **A Retail Destination** (57%)
More and better shops, including well-known names.
- **"Green Tourism" and the River** (57%)
A riverside park and leisure attraction along the Great Ouse corridor.
- **A New Pattern of Attractions** (56%)
A range of modern and interesting venues for films, eating and drinking, swimming, sports etc.
- **Uniting the Town with its River** (50%)
Exploiting the tourism and leisure retail opportunities by creating a lively urban edge to the river.

- **Maintaining An Active, Vibrant Town Centre (46%)**
A developing role for the town centre partnership.
- **Creating a “joined-up” town centre (44%)**
Traffic management coupled with better links and places for those on foot or cycle.
- **A “Switched-on” Centre (34%)**
*A business village, shops, pubs and arts.
(20% disliked)*

How the Town Centre is Used Now

2.4 There were eight questions:

Frequency of Visits. The centre is well used with a third visiting it daily.

- 57% weekly
- 33% visit it daily
- 3% monthly
- 2% less often

Main Purpose of Visit. Mostly for shopping and not much for leisure.

- 55% shopping (57% of children)
- 17% to use other facilities eg library (only 5% of children)
- 13% to meet friends (23% of children)
- 10% for leisure (13% of children)

Likes, Dislikes and Priorities for the Future

2.5 The remaining questions concerned likes, dislikes, priorities for change, attractions to add, ideas and any other thoughts.

Likes (in judged order of popularity):

- River, the scenery and the park
- Market Square, markets and festivals
- Accessible and compact
- Historic buildings
- Friendly people

Dislikes:

- Traffic, congestion, traffic lights and speed humps
- Litter and vandalism
- Boarded-up shops, charity shops, disused buildings
- Lack of entertainment, no night club or reasonably-priced eating places
- Lack of sports shops
- Floods
- Negative attitudes and apathy

Priorities for change:

- Traffic Congestion and traffic lights
- Safer roads for pedestrians
- More diverse shops, better shops, more up-market shops
- Make better use of Priory Park
- Improve the Priory Centre
- Decent toilets
- The museum

Priority attractions to add:

- A cinema
- Theatre/concert hall
- Well known multiple shops
- Restaurant and fast food outlets e.g. a Pizza Hut or McDonalds
- Better swimming pool
- Skate park

Conclusions of Survey

2.6 These are mostly clear from the figures:

- **People are concerned about the growth of the town and the lack of community facilities and attractions.**
- **They want better shops.**
- **The river corridor is justly cherished and the visitor potential is mostly welcome.**
- **The traffic-related propositions had less clear-cut responses, but the issues are felt very strongly.**

The town centre is well-used for shopping and business, despite the lack of a rounded complement of facilities.

Town Centre Waterfront Plan

The plan (right) shows in more detail the immediate riverside context of the town centre and how the High Street, Market Place and the bridging point of the River Great Ouse forms the Historic core sequence of the town. The primary town waterfront is identified and is a key opportunity. At present the town does not make the most of one of its major assets, especially along the Priory site.

The key opportunity areas are also identified on this plan.



St Neots



1. Historic Town Centre and retail core.
2. Key focal landmarks – Parish Church, Non-conformist Church and Paines Mill tower

Primary Town Centre Water Front – Urban Frontage - Bridge and pub terrace, The Priory centre, Boat Club and Green frontage – St Anslem's Place park.

Secondary Water Front – Semi-private Marnas and moorings, Hen Brook linear park and park frontage onto main river course.

3. Town centre 'gateway' – St Neots bridge point of entry into the town and vantage point showing town riverside setting
4. **Riverside Park** – Town centre recreation and leisure activity, Vantage point and views out from town centre edge, Ouse Valley Way informal open space, municipal parkland and wildlife water habitats.

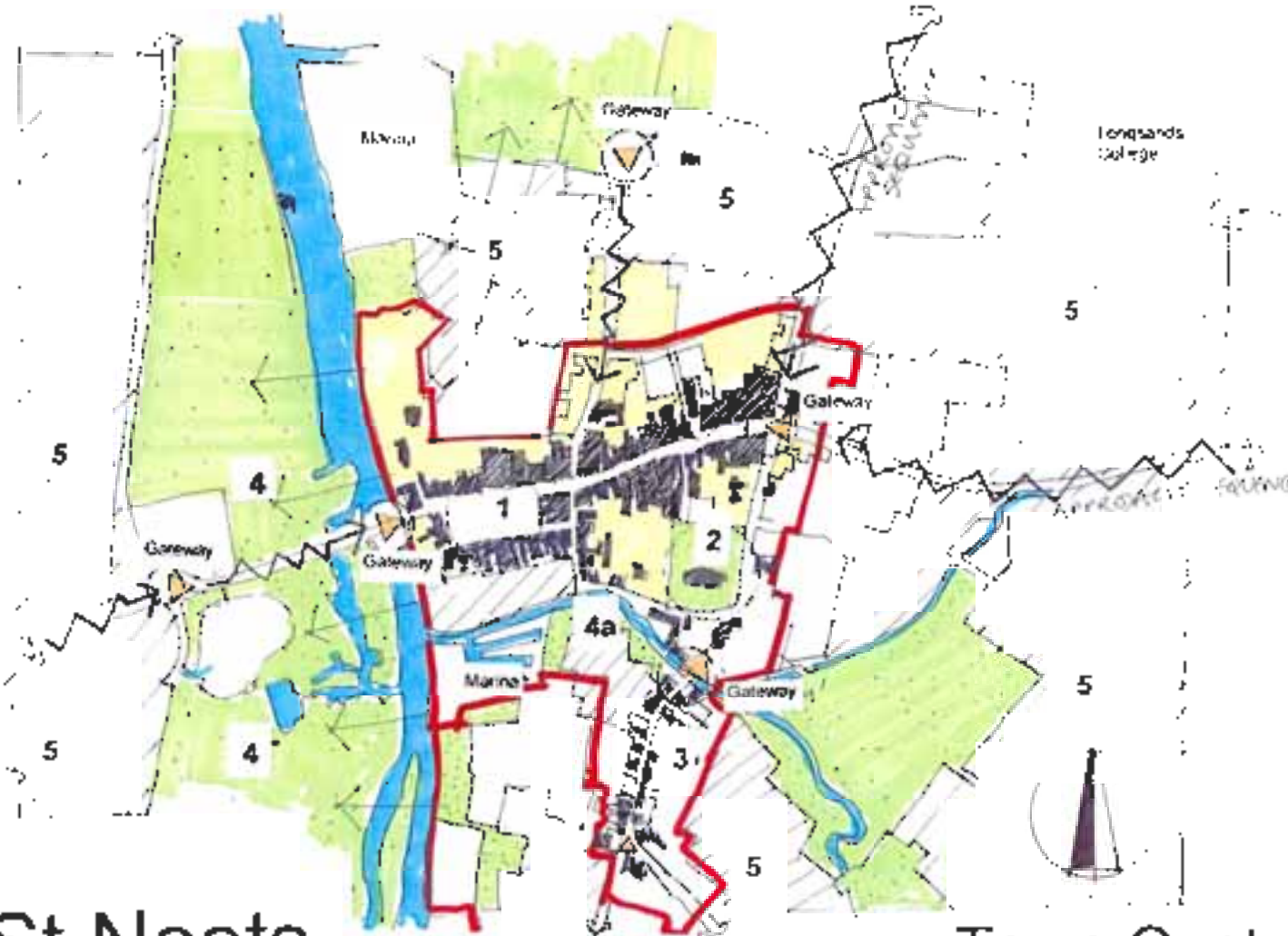
Town Waterfront Context

Character Area Plan

The analysis plan (below) illustrates the component elements and the different character areas that comprise the historic core of the town centre. The town centre is well defined and relatively compact.

The river provides a distinct town edge. Hen Brook is another distinct edge separating the town centre from Eynesbury. St Mary's Street is the important historic link between the two centres and the 2 parish churches.

Key



- 1 Town centre 'Market Place - High Street Sequence' - Historic retail and commercial heart of the town. Good quality urban fabric with historic building (listed shown in red) and quality townscape grouping.
- 2 St Mary's Church - Key town centre landmark and 'green open space'.
- 3 St Mary's Street Approach - Historic link from Eynesbury and key quality approach to the centre. Focus between the two churches and St Mary's and Eynesbury parishes.
- 4 River Great Ouse Corridor - Riverside park, open space and water meadows. Views of town centre in its riverside setting. Strong edge to town. Vistas out from the town centre.
- 4a Hen Brook - Tributary creek. Linked near 'green open space' and corridor network. The cemetery and St Mary's churchyard are also integral elements of this corridor sequence.
- 5 Town Centre Housing

The plan also shows conservation issues such as the Conservation Areas (St Neots Town centre and Eynesbury), key buildings that determine the historic character of the town as well as significant green open space.

St Neots

Town Centre Character Areas

3. A CENTRE FOR TOMORROW

What Makes a Centre?

3.1 In this chapter we examine eight facets of a successful, vibrant and attractive town centre for St Neots. These reflect the views expressed in the Priorities survey, current strategic priorities and our own analysis.



A Retail/Commercial Centre

3.2 *The retail and leisure market in St Neots is fairly buoyant for a market town of this size. It appears to be improving its offer and environment. This in turn is benefiting the vitality and viability of the centre.*

A recent improvement in the town centre's fortunes is only now showing through in the statistics. For example: vacancy rates are now 8% as against 10.6% nationally. This improvement is the result of national factors and recent investment projects. These projects include the improvement of the Market Square, the redevelopment of Priory Mall, the refurbishment of the Paines Brewery site, and the new Lidl at Cambridge Street.

New retail investment is being attracted: This includes Mackays next to Dorothy Perkins in the Market Square and the new restaurant in Market Square. On the southern fringe of the town a new Tesco has been developed and extended, incorporating a petrol station, café and comparison goods – electrical and household. Nearby is a new Travel Inn and Brewster's public house/restaurant.

The retail mix differs from the national average with a lower representation of service outlets (These are mainly restaurants, cafes and fast food. GOAD 2003). There are 184 outlets overall. Within the categories, greengrocers and fishmongers, CTN (confectionary, tobacco and newsagents) and convenience outlets are below average. Car, motorcycle and accessory outlets are above average, together with variety, department and catalogue stores, florists and building societies.

The street market is a key anchor and a major draw for the town on Thursdays, increasing the expenditure to

shops and services on this day. But whilst the area around the Market Place is bustling, the High Street tends to peter out as one moves east to Cambridge Street. The shady southern side is particularly quiet, partly because there is no natural generator of pedestrian footfall, such as a car park. Traffic domination is also worse.

Floorspace projections suggest there is a modest requirement for growth. In 2001 CB Hillier Parker identified a need for an additional 2,800 -3,000 sq. metres. of comparison goods retailing, based on the town's existing market share. No requirement for additional convenience floor space was identified. The town already has Waitrose, Somerfield, Iceland, Lidl and Tesco.

The standard databases do not show a great demand from potential new retailers. The FOCUS database of retailer requirements is low with just 13 including B&Q, Peacocks, Wallis, Gilesport, Gamestation, Adams, McDonalds and Savers health products. Huntingdon has twice the number of requirements. Interestingly, some of the names above would meet the wishes of many of the respondents to the Priorities Survey – especially the younger ones. The disparity with Huntingdon could be because of the town's higher status and because sites have and are being made available for development. (eg Chequers Court)

Some local perceptions are more positive. A more upbeat perception is given by Barfords & Co who say the town is "up and coming" and attracting a rising number of bigger players. Retail premises on the High Street and Market Square are particularly sought after and are quickly let. They feel that there are a high number of retailer requirements for a town of this size.

DTZ/Pieda conclude that there appears to be some demand in St. Neots for additional retail units.

However, the lack of obvious development sites in the town centre is thwarting the potential to cater for this demand.

There are two areas of potential, where sites could potentially be made available to suit the needs of today's national retailers:

- **Priory Lane Car Park and environs**, where re-planning the car parking and re-using adjacent land could release more space for shops close to the prime pitch
- **Around the historic crossroads of the medieval town:** High Street/Huntingdon Street/Cambridge Street/Church Street.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There is a modest, but significant, tide of reinvestment. Proposals in this report will support and encourage this trend.

Key constraints are the lack of land available for development and poor road accessibility. Also, the current higher values for residential use, which make it less lucrative to develop new town centre retail floor space. In addition, St Neots town centre has to compete for custom with higher order centres in the sub – region.

Without a determined effort to steer and encourage investment to the town centre investors will seek sites on the peripheral roads and areas of housing development or go elsewhere. (In 2001 Tesco at Barford Road was found to attract up to 45% of households from the various zones surveyed in the CB Hillier Parker study).

The Hillier Parker study estimates a modest demand for additional comparison retail floor space up to 2016 based on trend. We consider that it may well be possible to increase this figure of around 10,000 sq metres by clawing back some trade lost to competing centres and by adding types of retailing not currently present in St Neots town centre.

We have identified two areas for priority action. These should be brought forward as part of the Local Development Framework/Local Plan and sites within these areas designated for town centre uses, with a specified proportion of A1 uses, plus associated town centre car parking.



A Centre for “Leisure Retailing

3.3 *Eating and drinking is under represented in St Neots, but this is changing. It is a major area of growth nationally and it can enhance the vitality of the town centre*

The Priorities survey showed that people are aware of the lack of places to eat and drink and want change. National trends over the last 10-15 years have seen a massive growth in this sector, which can keep the town centre active into the evening and weekend as well as catering to the traditional lunchtime trade. The catering industry is growing at 7% pa and alcohol sales have grown at 6%. Expenditure on leisure is set to increase by nearly 29% by 2010.

More emphasis should be given to leisure and services within St Neots town centre as a means of enhancing the tenant mix and increasing vitality. Our research suggests that change is already occurring and more is on the way. Currently St Neots caters for a local market and has few big names. There are 7 public houses and 13 restaurants/cafes. Independent chains/outlets dominate the market: eg Il Girasole Pizzeria and Brackenbury’s Restaurant in Barretts. But Wizard Inns has recently opened a bar and restaurant – The Priory.

New legislation makes special policies essential. The major growth in this sector coupled with the provisions of the new Licensing Act (which follows the White Paper “A Time for Reform” 2002) make it highly desirable for the Council and its partners to have a coherent strategy for four aspects: planning, development, management and control.

Grounds for refusal of licenses will in future be limited and the normal permitted opening hours concept will be abolished. New research by The Civic Trust and the University of Westminster shows that local authorities are concerned especially about the implications for law and order, public transport and cleanliness. The initial research has identified ten components of good practice:

- **Area regeneration and the “urban renaissance”.** Consciously using the sector in the wider interests of regeneration
- **Unforeseen effects and the “learning curve”.** Learning from the experience of others and avoiding pitfalls
- **Getting home at night.** Keeping public transport going.
- **Cleansing around the clock.** And also toilets. If individual attractions stay open late so must the town centre
- **Data Management.** To target police intervention cost effectively and to marshal evidence, where needed, to support licensing decisions
- **Micro Management.** From plastic glasses and all-seated establishments to outside drinking bans, noise controls and responsible landlord actions
- **Encouraging diversity and local distinctiveness.** Mixed ages and interests keeps things more balanced, whilst local cultural traditions are a counter weight to the bland uniform commercial establishments
- **Design for night owls.** Lighting, CCTV, secure car parks, etc.
- **Safe and Secure.** Pub and club watch schemes, community wardens etc.
- **A collaborative advantage** from partnership.

The Government will require authorities to prepare a Statement of Licensing Policy once the guidelines are agreed by Parliament (March/April 2004). After this, local

authorities will have six months to submit their statement. But a number of other actions are also advisable, including a review of planning control, late night public transport, secure car parks, public safety/law and order, design of the public realm, cleansing, partnership with operators etc. In addition the appeal of the town for all ages is strongly affected by the characteristics of specific operators. Moreover, some authorities do what they can to support the local independent sector in the interests of jobs and local distinctiveness.

Key opportunity areas are:

- **The Market Place**, which has the right ambience and where tables, chairs and coloured umbrellas could be placed outside on non-market days
- **The river bank** generally or edge of the River Great Ouse floodplain, which is the most exciting place to be, as the Bridge House Pub demonstrates
- **The Priory Centre** in particular, which is currently an opportunity missed and is an obvious place for the creation of a new waterfront piazza or quay, in association with a quality bar/restaurant/wine bar in addition to other key activities mentioned below. Chesterton Planning and Development contacted a number of national operators but found no immediate interest. Nevertheless, they conclude that “a purpose-built unit for A3 use in this particular location, fronting the River Ouse, would be commercially attractive for many national operators”. (May 2003)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on national and local trends St Neots town centre is likely to see a continued growth in eating and drinking outlets. This sector is a vital component of the infrastructure needed for tourist and visitor growth. In addition, there is major growth in the youth-oriented discotheque/club scene.

There is increasing market segmentation in the sector and the characteristics of daytime, lunchtime, early evening, late evening and late night venues differ considerably.

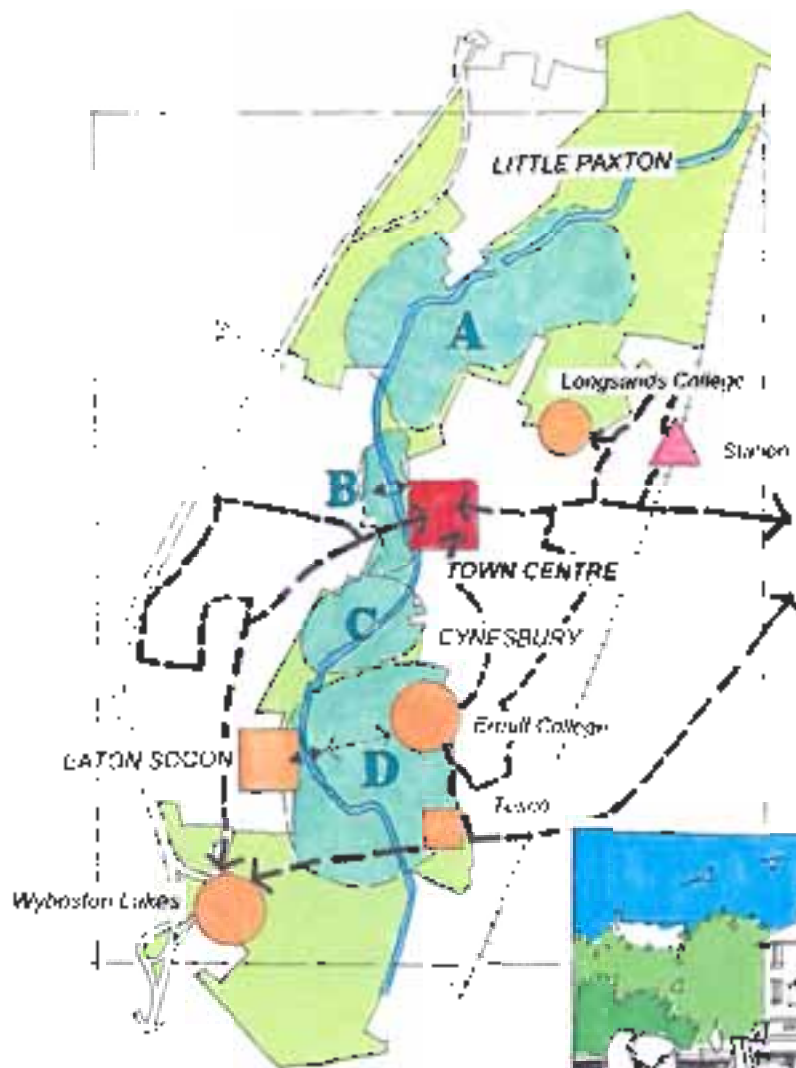
One of the key factors is the growth in premises that sell alcohol. The proposed subdivision of the Use Class Orders to separate this out is to be welcomed in our view

The new Licensing Act will make it easier for applicants to obtain 24 hour licenses. The Government will require local authorities to prepare Statements of Licensing Policy this year, but there are other related issues that are an important part of creating and maintaining a diverse, healthy and safe destination. Put simply, if the town centre is to be a destination after normal hours then it has to operate and be maintained at this time also and there are major resource implications arising from this.

We propose that a town centre leisure strategy be prepared to accompany the Statement of Licensing Policy. Based on good practice elsewhere, one might expect some of the following to emerge:

- **Design and development proposals for the three key venues so that they are safe and secure after normal hours**
- **A forum of licensees, officers, police, transport providers etc. to deal with issues quickly and encourage corporate responsibility and self help initiatives**
- **Positive planning to bring forward attractions that appeal to all age groups**
- **Communication with the community and local residents to allay fears, provide information on how to participate in decision-making.**

River Corridor Plan



The plans on this page show the town valley components along the town centre section and the main public transport and pedestrian linkage through the town and across the river valley linking the adjacent local centres that comprise St Neots.

The plan (left) shows the main bus routes linking the town centre to the Station, Cynesbury and Caton Socon. The component river valley character areas are also identified.

- A Paxton Pits and Lammis Meadow
- B Riverside Park
- C Water Meadows
- D Ervull / Cynesbury river valley and wildlife area

The plan (right) shows the main bus routes linking the town centre to its satellite local centres, attractions and facilities. The town is well linked by a footpath network with the Cuse Valley Way providing a linear long distance strategic path and linkage along the corridor.



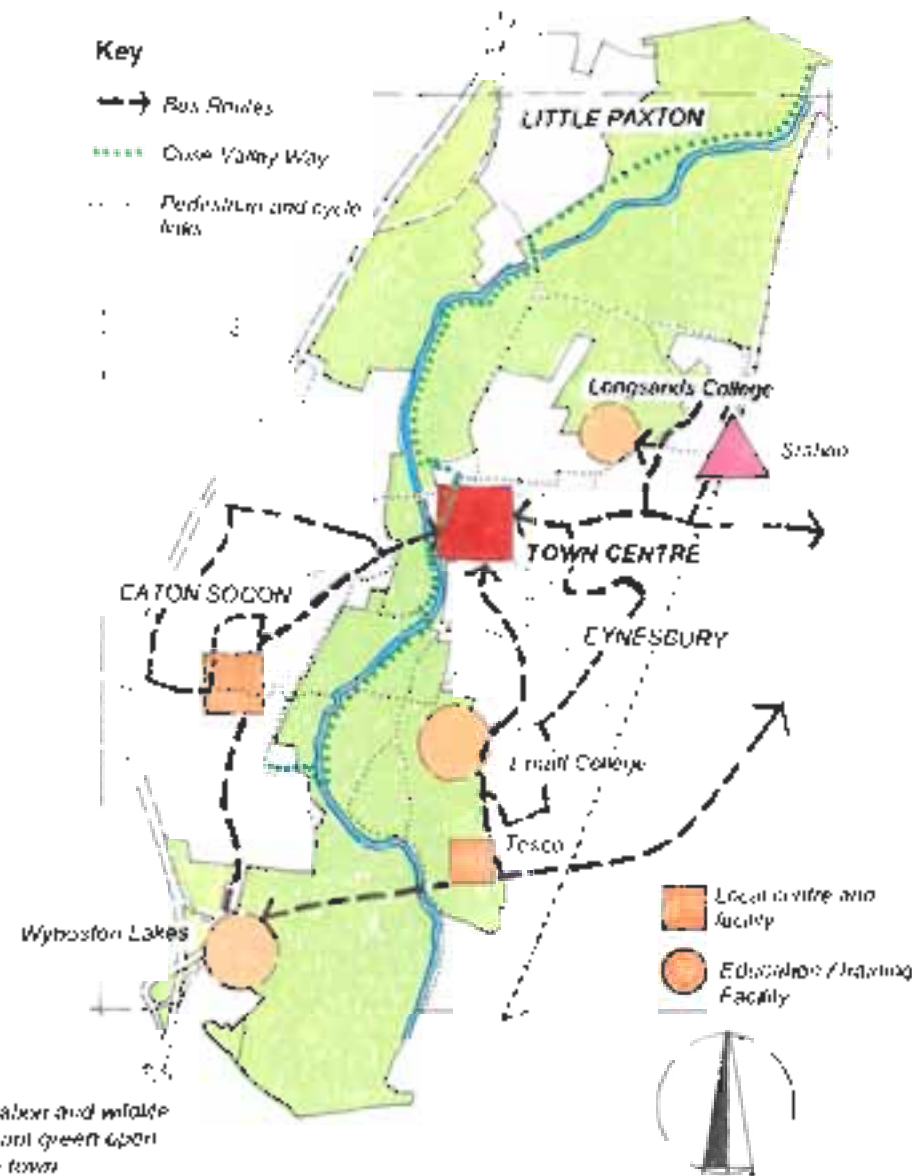
The river is a recreational and wildlife corridor and important green open space facility to the town.

St Neots

Communications Plan

Key

- Bus Routes
- Cuse Valley Way
- Pedestrian and cycle links



River Valley and Communications



A Centre of Attraction

3.4 The town could make more from tourism and leisure and this would be compatible with other policies for the town in this report.

H.D.C.'s tourism strategy (Huntingdonshire 1999 -2004) strikes a balance between the economic potential of tourism and sustainability objectives. Nationally the industry accounts for 8% of all consumer spend and 7% of the workforce.

Tourism appears to be under developed in Huntingdonshire. Until recently, the town had a slightly shabby workaday image. This is changing. Until the Travel Inn opened St. Neots had just three small hotels/bed and breakfast/pubs. St Ives, despite being a smaller town, has more to offer the tourist. Wyboston Park Business Centre, however, just across the border into Bedfordshire has a thriving trade in business tourism and has some 200 bedspaces.

The majority of overnight accommodation in St Neots is provided by the camping/caravan site at Rush Meadow. There are about 200 pitches here on 10 acres. It is one of the biggest in the country according to some. There are also overnight moorings for boats on the river, but river usage has declined in recent years.

The surveys show that the typical visitor to Huntingdonshire is part of a couple aged 45-64, travelling by car August to October as part of a wider tour. The top five activities listed are visiting historic towns, visiting museums, visiting places of interest, eating out, visiting historic houses and shopping. This dominant market is compatible with the business interests of the town centre, but the town centre needs to do more to attract these visitors and retain more of their expenditure locally.

St Neots has a strong history dating back to 947AD, 200 listed buildings, three fine medieval parish churches (St Neots, Eynesbury, Eaton Socon), an award-winning museum. The traditional open air market is a significant attraction and the special events at Christmas and other times of year are clearly popular. The town also has the stunning river corridor that stretches from the Paxton Pits nature reserve to the north of the town to Wyboston Lakes in the south.

The improvement, strengthening and management of the River Great Ouse corridor could be the catalyst for a significant improvement in St Neot's fortunes:

- It is the single greatest asset the town possesses

- It has the power to transform the town's image for tourists, visitors, residents and investors and contribute to the challenge of retaining the interest of more visitors for longer.
- There are significant opportunities for waterfront business growth, for example at the Priory, but there could also be significant knock-on effects for town centre retailers, pubs, bars and restaurants and accommodation providers.
- The popularity of the river for boating enthusiasts will be increased with the proposed Bedford-Milton Keynes link.
- A balanced strategy would protect and preserve fragile wildlife habitats whilst opening up access for sustainable leisure activities, including chandlery and overnight moorings, walking, cycling and fishing, outdoor sports etc.
- Something needs to be done anyway! The land is currently "white land" in the local plan and is vulnerable to piecemeal development that could erode its value, character and role as a flood reserve/water catchment area.
- It could be the flagship for a St Neots interpretation and presentation strategy, which would also include, for example, marking the site of the Priory and telling the story on site.
- Its improvement would be likely to confer a premium on the value of adjacent properties. (The British Waterways Board quotes premiums of 12% plus).

Ideas for a large scale country park go back at least to the early 1970s. (Proposals for the Establishment of The St Neots Country Park in the Valley of the River Great Ouse. D. H. Gosling. St Neots Urban District Council)

The distinctive areas of character and opportunity include:

- Paxton Pits Nature Reserve (400 acres) SSSI. Second largest cormorant breeding stock in the country
- Paper Mill island site and development context
- Lammas Meadows, common and pond
- Riverside Park north and south, to link better and offer more. To include new footbridge and car park extension
- Coneygeare Meadows, Castle Hill, Marina, Ernulf and proposed footbridge
- Wyboston Lakes and business park.

Discussions with the Environment Agency have led to a proposal for an environmental audit, which would provide a sound basis for an improvement plan. This is being followed through by the Town Centre Initiative, HDC, the Environment Agency and other partners, with sponsorship from a local bank.

A landscape and leisure master plan should be prepared to protect and preserve, interpret and present, make accessible as appropriate. The plan should include design polices for all development around the park. The plan should include an assessment of visitor numbers and income generation. It should include Robinson College and Wyboston Lakes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Tourism is under developed in the town, but the Business Park, just across the border, has a lot of accommodation for conferences and training courses. The caravan park at Rush Meadow is said to be one of the biggest in the country. A new Travel Inn, Travel Lodge and Premier Hotel have also been built on the A428 to the south of the town.

The product lacks definition and the profile is low. The interesting stories are not presented well on site. Infrastructure, from accommodation to restaurants and toilets, are inadequate. Tourism is largely left to the market. As a result the town centre is not therefore getting the full benefit of this market.

The improvement of the River Great Ouse as a landscape and leisure corridor, and a specific entity, would do much to change the image of the town and provide a reason for a visit

We consider that there is scope to develop the town's tourism and visitor potential to the benefit of the town centre and the leisure interests of local people.

An overall strategy for St. Neots is needed, to fit within District and regional policies. Without this, tourism could be less sustainable and benefits to the town centre could be lost.

The town's basic resource (its history, heritage and landscape) has not yet been presented or interpreted fully. Such an initiative could be a part of greater local understanding, which in turn would benefit conservation.

We welcome the proposal for a resource audit of the riverside corridor and consider that this should lead on to a landscape and leisure master plan and management plan. External funding should be sought, given the exceptional opportunity of this

This work should be accompanied by a heritage interpretation plan for the historic town centre. Specific sites should be identified in the town centre and riverside for wayside plaques that tell the stories of St Neots.



A Centre for the Community

3.5 Local people feel that a growing town should have more to offer its residents. St. Neots lacks many of the commercial leisure facilities that can be found in nearby towns, such as a cinema, theatre and a well-resourced youth centre. Many people, and especially the young, go elsewhere to enjoy themselves.

The existing facilities are scattered and lack cohesion:

- **The main sporting and leisure facility is the Council-run St Neot's Leisure Centre at Eynesbury**, containing an indoor pool, squash and badminton courts, an Astroturf pitch and an "Impressions" fitness studio.
- **There is an outdoor pool, operated by the Town Council on Huntingdon Road** beside the Longsands campus, which is open and popular in

the summer. The Council has brought forward proposals to improve this attraction.

- **The Priory Centre.** (See below)

The Priory Centre

The Priory Centre is the venue for dances, concerts, bingo, exhibitions, trade fairs, plays and annual events, including the annual St Neots Folk Festival in May and the St Neots Carnival in August. The facility is now dated and fails to exploit its river frontage. It is owned by the District and Town Councils. It has been the subject of a special feasibility study commissioned by HDC. Four options for the Priory Centre were considered by Chesterton plc:

- **Retain the status quo.** No change.
- **Modify the existing building**, Retain the centre in its current form, refurbishing the structure and making minor alterations to its organisation and function
- **Redevelop the building and area to the north.** This was their preferred option. The proposed footprint for redevelopment is an L shape including the Centre, Council Offices and boat House
- **Remove the Priory Centre and redevelop site commercially.**

The Centre is well used for community, sports and commercial events, but the income from these does not cover running costs. There are also problems with the design of the building including a failure to exploit its

waterfront location. Chesterton's feasibility study proposals involved the creation of a new waterfront area linked to a bar/restaurant, new waterfront housing and a new multi-purpose community facility.

A more ambitious concept for the area would include the Library and Snooker Club. The new venue could then have a series of mutually-reinforcing uses: a library/resource centre geared to training and skills development in the new technology and media industry sectors, a multi-purpose space to include an arts cinema, work units for small and fledgling businesses, the festival piazza with boats moored alongside and waterfront apartments. This is not Chesterton's preferred option.

Youth Provision

Provision for younger members of the town is identified as one of the main weaknesses in the town's leisure offer. Whilst there are plenty of formal, club-based sporting venues (rowing, tennis, football, golf, bowls etc) there is a perception by younger residents that the town is dull and boring.

There are a couple of clubs aimed at children/teenagers at St Neots Recreation Centre. The youth centre on Ware Road burnt down and the County Council has been considering how and where to provide replacement facilities. We understand that Ernulf and Longsands are the preferred locations.

There are several areas of potential:

- **The proposed River Great Ouse Landscape and Leisure Corridor.** The proposals in this report

would create an "arc of leisure" uniting all the key leisure venues along its length.

- **A proposal by Ernulf School for special status** as a centre for the performing arts. A 500 seat auditorium is planned as part of a major investment programme for the whole campus, which would make the school a hub for amateur and professional music, film, dance and drama. We understand the school has been successful in attaining a special Government grant.
- **Improvements to the adjacent St Neots Recreation Centre,** coupled with a re-planning of the whole area (including the proposed river bridge) could make this an exciting cultural and leisure destination for the whole town.
- **Longsands School, Regional College and grounds,** where there is room for outdoor sports activities. The private bowls and tennis courts on Anselm Road are not far away and the area could become a stronger sports/leisure destination if a second footbridge were to be built north of the Priory Centre, linking Eaton Ford to Longsands.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is impossible for the town centre itself to satisfy all the youth, sports and leisure needs of local people. There is not enough room. The town centre should therefore complement other venues. Our suggestions are:

- The Priory Centre should offer a multi-purpose auditorium that would host a wide range of events, including, say an art house cinema. This would be complemented by the quayside/piazza with its more informal eating and drinking venues. Small meeting rooms and limited residential accommodation might also be provided as part of a scheme.
- Ernulf School would be the principle indoor sports leisure and cultural centre for the performing arts.
- Longsands could become a stronger attraction for outdoor sports.

All the riverside sports pitches, marinas, sporting clubs could be linked together in one “arc of leisure”, to protect them from encroaching housing development and to give a basis for improved public access to them and the riverside.

All would be linked together by a system of improved pedestrian footways, cycleways and bridges across the River Great Ouse.



A “Switched-on” Centre

3.6 St. Neots shares in the region’s prosperity. It is a good place to work as well as to live.

There are major manufacturing employers on the Industrial Estate and a growing focus of industry and training around the A1/A428 junction.

Both Huntingdonshire District Council and the Town Centre Initiative are keen to see the town benefiting from the industries of the future. These include high tech. businesses and also the creative industries (e.g. design, software, publishing and advertising) whose current rate of growth is more than three times the national average.

The Cambridgeshire Structure Plan states that the sub region is the focus for a strong service sector, with an international reputation for education and research and rapidly-growing high-technology businesses. There are clear expectations that the sub-region will develop further as a leader in educational research and knowledge-based industries. St Neots is identified for the development of high-technology or business clusters – to balance and support further housing growth.

HDC have also embraced the concept, have commissioned research and have made the topic a feature of the current Local Economic Strategy Action Plan. It is suggested that the high quality of life in the District, linked to a growth in tourism, is conducive to the creation of small, creative lifestyle industries in the following potential areas: advertising, architecture, art and antiques, crafts and design, fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software,

music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer games, television and radio.

St Neots currently has a strong manufacturing base and a higher than average proportion of partly-skilled workers (GOAD). The MOSAIC Lifestyle Groupings show there are three times the national average “Blue Collar Owners”. A conclusion could be that there is a major opportunity for growth and diversification of the local economy and that the concept is very relevant to this.

A foundation for the development of high technology and creative businesses could come from linking proposals for the Priory Centre, specialist status of local schools, arts development strategies and the role of the Town Centre Initiative. St. Neots could become a champion in the field and a role model for other market towns:

- **At Wyboston Lakes** an Innovation Centre is proposed, with small managed workspace units linked to special advice and training from St. John’s College Cambridge.
- **Longsands Community College** is keen to submit a bid to Government for special status in media, technology and the arts. Alongside an enhanced school syllabus could be incubator units for emerging businesses, training for business development and growth – possibly linked to the proposed Innovation Centre at Wyboston Lakes.
- The College is coming up for major investment in the next few years and this could be the opportunity to re-plan the campus as a whole to

benefit the sports areas, pool and bowling centre as well as the educational facilities.

- **The Town Centre.** There could be scope for small business suites in St Neots and we see the potential for these to be part of a mixed-use development south of the High Street and west of St Mary’s Church. In this blend of conservation, re-use and new build which we call “St Mary’s Urban Village” a new community of living and working could be created close to the town centre.

Conclusions and Recommendations

We agree with the County, HDC and the Town Centre Initiative that there is an opportunity, through the development of high tech. and creative industries, to diversify local employment. This could provide more opportunities for education, learning and career development within the town.

A major focus of activity would be provided by the proposed Innovation Centre at Wyboston Lakes, but there are other potential points of growth at Ernulf School, Longsands, the Priory Centre and Library and in the town centre.

In discussion with HDC we proposed that St Neots should become a market towns exemplar for this sector and we support the development of a partnership to bring this about. We suggest that this be the subject of external funding bids, e.g the DTI Phoenix Initiative.



An accessible and Joined-up Centre

3.7 Accessibility is one of the biggest and most deeply felt issues in the town. There are some well-developed policies already in place that will improve the situation to some extent. There are also some clear issues that affect the prosperity and convenience of the town centre.

The roads around the town are relatively fast and modern. In town the options are limited. The problems include:

- Only one road bridge across the River Great Ouse
- The growth of the town associated with a pattern of low density culs de sac leading to poor pedestrian links and high car dependency.

- A history of poor publicity, signage and information generally about buses together with dilapidated shelters, bus stops etc.

There is little room to add more road space and current policies and ideas favour making the best of what there is and shifting more trips to modes other than by car. For example, some 78% of the St Neots workforce live in the town and 41% travel less than 2km to work – a distance convenient for walking or cycling. The environment of St Neots also lends itself to “green” solutions to transport problems.

St Neots was chosen by County and District Councils for consultation and planning ahead of other towns partly because of the “20-20 Vision” report prepared by the Town Centre Initiative and the extent of interest generated in the community. A five year programme was drawn up as part of the 2000 Local Transport Plan, Market Town Strategy and St. Neots Action Plan. Measures include:

- Creating a new and enhanced system of cycleways connecting the key points of the town
- Improving the pedestrian network
- Building a pedestrian and cycle bridge across the river to link Ernulf School and Eynesbury with Eaton Ford and Eaton Socon
- Improving the bus service to loop around the two halves of the town on either side of the river in a figure of eight pattern

- Providing an express bus service to Cambridge; in effect a park and ride scheme with St Neots as the embarkation point
- Improving car parking south, west and east of the town centre to reduce the number of vehicles clogging up the roads searching for spaces in the centre and amending the car park charges to favour short stay, and therefore higher usage, of central spaces.

The Town Centre

Despite the above, more space for cars will be needed if the town centre is not to lose out to competitors. The Huntingdonshire Car Parking Strategy forecasts a significant shortfall in peak weekday demand over currently available space. By 2011 about 170 additional off street spaces will be needed to maintain the current level of availability. By 2016 this figure rises to 235 extra spaces.

Accessibility is one of the most important issues for the future of the town and its town centre. The commercial centre needs to grow a little to retain its position. More car parking spaces will be needed for both existing and future commercial floorspace. Town centre-type attractions are likely to be dispersed amongst a number of locations and there should be good links between them to overcome the lack of critical mass resulting from the dispersal of activities. There are three broad components of a local strategy:

- **The Local Transport Plan.** The strategic measures now being brought forward under the Local Transport Plan and Action Plan for bus routes,

bridges, cycleways etc. This provides a framework for connecting the town centre with Eynesbury, Longsands, Eaton Ford and Eaton Socon and Wyboston lakes to the south.

- **Local Development Framework/Local Plan.** Within the town centre car parking should logically be restricted to short stay and the overall amount controlled to reduce congestion. Where possible, additional long stay and other parking should be provided on the periphery: at the Riverside Car Park, at Tebbutts Road, close to the Cambridge Street intersection with Huntingdon Street and at Islands Common. Within this outer ring speeds should be slow and a stronger priority should be given to the safety and convenience of pedestrians.
- **Micromanagement.** Under the Local Transport Plan there are already policies for creating safer routes to school and for “green travel plans” so that major developments are well served by public transport, cycle and foot. The scope for reducing traffic congestion through a package of measures of this kind is highlighted in a recent publication by Transport 2000 “Less Traffic Where People Live – how localised transport schemes can help cut traffic”. Measures which it is claimed can reduce traffic by up to a third include workplace travel plans, teleworking, school travel plans, car clubs, individual marketing, bus improvements, home zones and various schemes to encourage walking and cycling. According to the Local Transportation Plan research, there is already considerable local public support for this broad approach. We suggest that a grass roots-based partnership initiative would

be a good way of capitalising on this goodwill, prompting voluntary collaboration from employers, schools etc and complementing the work of the local authorities and winning “hearts and minds” through positive promotion. The Town Centre Initiative already has an active transport sub group.

A Market Towns Model?

Traffic engineers consider that the reason for the amount of through traffic in the High Street is that, despite the construction of the bypass roads and the A1 improvements, there is still traffic using the old Northampton Road (B645). In addition, many people from Eaton Socon prefer the town bridge to the southern bypass. A second road bridge north of the current crossing has been under discussion for many years and its consideration is on hold until the end of the market town strategy period.

A yearly annual traffic monitoring report is carried out by the County Council, but the numerical/statistical base for policy development is limited. Students at the Institute of Transport Studies at the University of Leeds have undertaken a study of St Neots using spreadsheets, because no transport model exists. Professor Tony May believes that there is a strong case for developing a model specifically suited to the needs of market towns. A model created for St Neots could be a prototype, which could be used more widely elsewhere. Discussions are proceeding between the Town Centre Initiative, Countryside Agency, Transport 2000, ODPM and other potential partners.

Conclusions and Recommendations

We support the policies contained in the Local Transport Plan and the Market Towns Action Plan. These will go some way to mitigate increasing congestion.

The measures also provide a foundation for linking, by all modes, the three main venues that would between them supply the range of town centre functions in this strategy.

Within the town centre itself the traffic congestion and its characteristics are incompatible with a successful town centre.

We support the proposal for a ring of car parks around the centre to reduce the need to enter it. Our proposals later in this report show where more spaces could be provided as part of new development schemes. This policy would be complemented by making central spaces short stay, to increase their utilisation.

We consider that policies should be brought forward, where possible, to reduce the amount of traffic in the centre which has no reason to be there – so releasing more space for town centre users in cars or on foot or cycle. It may be that a formal study is needed and, if so, we support in principle the idea of creating a “market towns model”. This would have technical and promotional benefits.

One of the benefits of these measures should be to improve the environmental conditions for shoppers,

tourists, visitors and employees in the town centre. We propose that a “Streetscape plan” be prepared to set a high standard of design consistent with the historic quality of the town for implementation on a phased basis.



A Centre of Excellence

3.8 *The town has something of a drab image, which is not wholly consistent with the reality. The quality of new design and the layout of the new residential areas has much to do with this image. These are precisely the issues current government policy seeks to change. Doing this in St Neots would be likely to support tourism and inward investment and improve the quality of life for residents. A valuable start has been made with the publication by HDC of its Design Guide at Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment.*

The historic conservation areas, the market place and riverside are the chief obvious attractions. The towers of St Mary’s Church and Paines’s Flour Mill are the principal landmarks. But whilst the historic areas of the town are pleasant, many of the post war housing developments are disappointing.

Government policy now requires much higher design standards, mixed uses and higher densities as part of a national “urban renaissance”. A major ODPM-backed initiative is now under way using CABI and other agencies to raise awareness of good design (including sustainability issues), set standards, establish procedures and drive up design skills throughout the industry (the Egan report).

St Neots needs higher design standards because:

- The town is let down by poor design. St Neots needs to care more about its appearance
- St Neot’s image is weaker than it should be. A design initiative can enhance its image for tourism and investment generally
- A stronger evening economy needs an attractive public realm. The same goes for the leisure economy. These are both key opportunities for the town centre
- The newer creative and knowledge-based industries are strongly influenced by quality of life issues in deciding where to locate.

In short, good design is good business also. We propose that there should be a St Neots Design Initiative. It should address key development issues:

- Major building projects

- “Streetscape”
- The waterfront
- Housing
- Green spaces

A valuable start to such an initiative is provided by two recent supplementary planning reports commissioned by HDC: “Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment” and the “Design Guide”. The components of a design initiative are shown in the chart and include:

- “Flagship projects” to give St Neots the “wow factor”
- Community involvement in the design process to develop a wider understanding
- Requiring and seeking out the best designers
- A supporting foundation of council policy, design guidance and control.

A Design Initiative



Conclusions and Recommendations

The time is right to launch a design initiative for St Neots. Components should include consultation on major projects, the selection of local “flagship initiatives” such as the Priory Centre, the river bridges, the landscape design of the riverside etc. Current work at Castleford illustrates the potential. Design competitions could play a part in introducing flair, innovation and public interest.

4. WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE IN TEN YEARS' TIME?

A Window of Opportunity: Role and Vision

4.1 In the Priorities Survey strong local preferences were given for the kind of town centre people want to see in the future. The three leading priorities were: improving shopping, developing green tourism in connection with the river corridor and improving community venues and attractions. Our analysis shows that there is a real opportunity to match local aspirations with action but there are also challenges and threats. Key issues include:

- Identifying sites for retail growth in and around the town centre when space is limited
- Bringing forward these sites for town centre commercial use when residential values are so high
- Meeting the need for a growth in town centre (particularly short stay) car parking spaces without suffocating the centre with traffic
- Providing for the growth of the leisure economy without spoiling the existing charm of the centre and riverside
- Acting resolutely on the above issues in order to combat the strong competitive pull of other centres
- Developing a sustainable pattern of community attractions and venues
- Raising the standard of design in both private and public realms.

Our vision for St. Neots in ten years' time has seven components:

1. A Lively, Varied Retail Destination

In ten years' time shoppers would find the town centre a more attractive destination with more of the shops they are used to elsewhere. A new shopping parade might be added to the cluster of attractions around the Priory Car Park. New shops might be added in the area near to Lidl on Cambridge Street. The shops might cater for a wider clientele, with products appealing to the discerning eye as well as to the economy shopper.

2. A new pattern of attractions

In ten years' time residents and visitors could have an exciting range of modern and interesting venues to choose from: films, eating and drinking at the Priory Arts Centre, theatre and swimming at Ernulf School and Recreation Centre, sunbathing at the new lido and sports at Longsands. All could be connected to the town centre by frequent buses, attractive footpaths and cycleways, clearly signed for visitors.

3. "Green Tourism" and the river

In ten years' time a visitor to St Neots could find this beautiful semi-natural landscape protected and enhanced. There would be an attractive choice of pursuits: boating, walking, bird watching, or fishing. It could be an educational resource for local schools and a source of custom for the town centre and businesses along the river bank.

4. Uniting the town with its river

In ten years' time it would be the norm to pop into one of the shops and then go on to the riverside to meet a friend, grab a cup of coffee or a drink. There could be places to sit and eat, watch the boats and enjoy the view. Business people might consider it to be the place to take clients. Tourists could take time out to savour the relaxed atmosphere before taking in the shops or seeing the sites. Patrons of a new arts centre might stay in town to have a meal afterwards before going home.

5. Creating a "joined-up" town centre

In ten years' time it could be a pleasure to walk or cycle along green routes to the centre, car parks around the town centre could reduce congestion within it, traffic speeds and flows could be "calmed" and there would be more and better buses. There would be more room for families and buggies on the pavements. An intriguing network of pedestrian lanes, alleys and courtyards could fan out from the Market Place, connecting one part of the centre to another and the car parks to the shops.

6. A "switched-on centre"

In ten years' time the town centre and neighbouring educational campuses would be reinvigorated. Together they could form a thriving "business village" with bright young businesses in the knowledge and creative sectors coexisting with the more traditional activities and supporting the shops, the pubs at lunchtime and the growing arts-based evening economy.

7. A National Profile as a Market Towns Leader. A Partnership Model

In ten years time the town centre partnership would be able to celebrate a decade of achievement in creating a town centre that local people can be truly proud of and that visitors find

remarkable. The partnership can play a strong part in generating the profile the town needs. St Neots can be a special market town in specific ways. It can become:

- *A leader in technological innovation and the creative industries*
- *A centre for learning and culture*
- *A pathfinder for sustainable transport and accessibility*
- *An exemplar for green tourism*
- *A beacon town for new housing and other built design.*

A New Spatial Reality

4.2 The concept plans show how this relates to the structure of the town and its centre:

- A green leisure and landscape corridor running north south
- A "leisure arc" uniting the new and existing sporting and leisure facilities along the east bank of the Ouse
- A "figure of eight" bus system connecting the town centre with the other key nodes of activity: Ernulf, Tesco,
- Longsands, Railway Station, Eaton Ford and Eaton Socon are all important centres of activity.
- Two new pedestrian and cycle bridges, from Eaton Socon at Castle Hills to Ernulf, and from Eaton Ford at Priory Park to the Priory Centre
- Improved and extended car parks at key points on the edge of the town centre to reduce the need to enter it
- Pedestrian and cycle "green lanes" along Hen and Fox Brooks linking residential areas to the town centre

- Within the town centre three opportunity areas at the Priory, “the Crossroads” and “St Mary’s Urban Village”.

What the People Say: The Exhibition

4.3 A public exhibition was held at the Priory Centre on 9th October and was attended by 64 people. A separate event was held for pupils of Ernulf School. Our vision for St Neots was portrayed in the exhibition panels together with our ideas for three key areas of the town centre. A questionnaire accompanied the exhibition. The results are given in the Appendix.

Town Centre Opportunity Areas Plan



River Great Ouse
Town centre Waterfront

Key Notes

- 1 The Priory and Priory Lane Area. Linking the town centre to its waterfront
- 2 Cambridge Street 'Gateway' increasing the town centre retail frontage
- 3 St Mary's Urban Village. Building back the block, historic fabric and enhancing the conservation area

Town and Waterfront

Within the town centre there are three priority action areas. These are identified on the plan (left) and include

- 1 The Priory and Priory Lane area. Linking the town centre to its waterfront
- 2 The medieval 'crossroads' - Cambridge Street gateway and increasing the town centre retail frontage
- 3 St Mary's 'urban village' - building back the block and historic fabric and enhancing the core of the conservation area

Treatment and access to the waterfront (see also inset aerial view, above right) forms a critical component especially any proposals for the Priory site for improving town access to the water.

Access and Parking

The inset plan (below right) shows main vehicular access to the three areas and existing and proposed improved car parking in the town. As shown this configuration could reduce through and access traffic in the heart of St Neots.



The Riverside Park
Town centre green open space



St Neots

Town Centre Priority Area Context

5. THE TOWN CENTRE IN THE FUTURE

Key Sites

5.1 With the assistance of DTZ/Pieda we have reviewed eight sites to assess their suitability for new commercial and leisure/community investment. They are:

- The telephone exchange and car parking areas in and around the Waitrose food store
- The Priory Centre and environs (Separately analysed by Chesterton)
- The car parks at Tebbutts Road
- The car park and County Waste Depot north of Cambridge Street
- The Ford dealership site on Cambridge Street
- Land at Windmill Row, between High Street and Brook Street
- A small site at the rear of Audio Vision at South Street
- The ATS site at the corner of Brook Street/Church Street.

Areas of Opportunity

5.2 These group together into three areas of opportunity:

- The Priory area and Waterfront
- The Eastern Gateway/Medieval Crossroads
- St Mary's Urban Village

The Priory Quarter and Waterfront

5.3 Concept

This is a hub of activity and an area of special potential for the future. It would become a new point of attraction within St Neots, featuring new shops, a waterfront leisure venue with arts, cultural and educational components, set in an enhanced public realm appropriate to the area's history.

Appraisal

Car Park. First impressions are not positive. Divided between north and south of Tan Yard and the Priory Lane car park (285 total spaces). Waitrose own the main area of car parking outside their store. HDC own Tan Yard and Priory Lane car parks. The parking is currently managed by HDC. The long stay car parking to the north is inappropriate to this central location and is to be replaced with short stay parking to create a higher turnover. The design of the space is poor in that it obstructs connections to the waterfront and Market Place. Most surrounding buildings turn their backs on it whilst the key public buildings seem not to have a frontage or a street presence. This contributes to the sense that St Neots lacks a civic heart.

Priory Lane. Connections to the Market Place are poor.

The Priory Mall has now been closed off and the only connection to the Market Place is via Cross Keys Mall, which is charming but circuitous. Priory Lane interrupts the pedestrian flow. Only a couple of units face the car park including Market One discount store.

The Heritage. A missed opportunity. The southern part of the area fall within the central conservation area. Priory House and the Oast House are listed Grade 2. The most significant designation in the area is the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the site of the Benedictine Priory, which is beneath the southern part of the site and affecting the Priory Centre, Priory Lane car park and part of Waitrose car park. The County Archaeologist advised us that excavation work has been partial over the years and the actual extent of the Priory is not fully known. This suggests that any new development in the vicinity would potentially require excavation digs prior to construction. Also, that there is an extraordinary ignorance or disinterest in the historic events that gave rise to the town and its name.

The Telephone Exchange. An Integral part of any development scheme for the area. The Telephone Exchange offers a redevelopment opportunity for ground floor retail premises with residential or, if viable, B1 offices above. It is likely that BT will retain this property in the short term. Development at present is constrained by the service yard to the Waitrose store. Any retail development would need to form a continuous frontage with Waitrose, repositioning the service yard to the rear of the new development, also to serve the new retail units. There will be a need to build to a higher specification due to the flood risk from the River Great Ouse.

North of Tan Yard. The site of the former roller skating hut has permission for housing. The long stay car park (36 spaces) may also be considered suitable for town centre housing or apartments above active ground floor uses. HDC may wish to use the income from the sale of the land to provide new car parking elsewhere. A suitable development here would reinforce the ambience of a "second market place" rather than a back land car park.

Priory Car Park. Owned by HDC and potentially a site for retail and mixed use development, provided that replacement car parking spaces can be found (49 spaces) and the archaeological constraints overcome. Could be considered together with –

Library (and Snooker Club). Tranquil, pleasant and out of date. The snooker club is privately owned. The Library is owned by the County Council. Chestertons discounted the inclusion of these premises in their feasibility study options because of problems of site acquisition, but we understand that the County is considering the future of their facility anyway. The Library is tranquil and pleasant but is possibly a lightly used facility – especially it seems by younger people. New-style libraries, such as the award-winning scheme at Peckham, are more like learning resource centres and are more active, incorporating other facilities: cyber cafes, meeting areas, training centres etc.

Housing at St. Anselm Place. The timber fencing and garage court to the rear makes a poor boundary to the car park. In the longer terms more active uses could be considered. In the short term landscaping improvements would help.

The Priory Centre Complex. This has been investigated in detail by Chesterton plc. They have considered redevelopment options largely driven by housing and A3 retailing, assuming that the scheme should be significantly self-financing. They have looked at the specific site. We consider this should be set in the wider context, to maximise the supporting potential investment of others e.g. the County Council. Apart from housing and hotel/conference facilities the activities considered suitable are:

- Riverside café/restaurant
- Riverside bars/pubs
- Multi-purpose hall for disco, dance, gigs, concerts
- An independent art house cinema
- A youth facility as part of multi use
- Boating, punting, rowing.

This seems correct as:

- The theatre would best go at Ernulf and there is little sense in duplication.
- Sports takes up too much room and is best provided at Ernulf/St Neots Recreation Centre, Longsands and on other sites.
- Major youth provision is likely to be at Ernulf and Longsands.
- A mainstream commercial cinema is not viable.

But:

- There are problems in mixing A3 with residential (see Charter Quay Kingston). Noise, privacy, sterilising the river bank etc.

- A mainly residential development with other uses would not be acceptable.
- The proposals consider commercial uses and aspirations previously surveyed. There could be other possibilities.

Proposals

- A master plan should be prepared for the whole Priory area plus design and development briefs for key sites: Tan Yard, Priory Lane Car Park, BT site, Library and Priory Centre.
- The Priory Car Park to be re-planned and redesigned as “a park with cars in it” and a space of equivalent interest to the Market Place.
- The story of the Priory and the Saxon St Neot to be told on site, possibly as part of a special design feature - a “market cross”.
- Consider revealing part of the Priory remains. Archaeological survey to form part of master plan.
- Proposals to be brought forward for Priory Car Park and Tan Yard Car Park, subject to alternative spaces being found elsewhere.
- Vehicular and pedestrian circulation to be re planned to facilitate connections to and from Market Place and from Waitrose to the Priory Centre.

- Participation of BT to be sought for redevelopment of plot in accordance with overall design and development brief.
- Investigate improvements to south side of Priory Lane and curtilage of Anselm Place housing.
- Seek participation of County in reuse/redevelopment of Priory Centre to include learning resource centre components with youth in mind.
- Develop active frontage to Priory Centre with A3 uses and high quality river quay or piazza.
- Take forward ideas for multi purpose hall, art house cinema and “balanced amount” of residential.
- Take forward idea of pedestrian and cycle footbridge across the Ouse to link to Eaton Ford.
- Reinforce the appeal as a rounded destination by giving priority to the enhancement of Priory Park within the river corridor concept.

Area 1



Priory Water front

The water front should be an active leisure edge making most of the river prospect and a welcoming 'gateway' to river visitors to the town



The aerial perspective (left) shows the Priory Quarter and area to the north of the Market Place – as it could be. The proposals are indicative of the scale and form of the development and refurbishment opportunity

Key to the success of the Priory site will be improving public linkage to the river frontage, making it more accessible with active recreational uses making the most of the wonderful river prospect. The perspective (above right) shows an active quayside with associated leisure uses and improved mooring facilities.

St Neots



Priory Quarter and Waterfront

Prory Water Front

The illustrations (right and below) show two possible options for developing the Prory waterfront

1 Refurbishment Option (right)

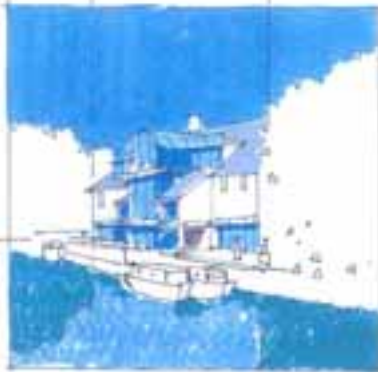
This shows refurbishment of the existing Prory building, making more use and opening up the building to the waterfront. More use could be made of the roof space and improve quayside moorings are shown.

2 Redevelopment Option (below)

This is more radical and shows a complete redevelopment of the entire prory waterfront and site. The image is indicative of the scale and extent of possible rebuild. The style and finer detail of any future design whether traditional form or modern is a debatable question at a next stage of the project.

Option 1 Refurbishment

Conversion of existing building, opening up active frontage onto the river and utilizing the roof space resource. Improved mooring facilities and river access from the town centre.



New housing edge to space with widened and improved pedestrian frontage

Prory Lane Car Park Space

The perspective (left) shows improvement opportunities to the edges of the car park area – Tan Yard – a mixed-use redevelopment of the corner Telephone Exchange site

The car park approach is shown with reduced carriageway width, traffic calming and improved edge tree planting and hard landscaping to the car park

New housing is shown as an edge to the street.

The insets (below) show the opportunity to treat the car parking area as series of two sub 'squares' with a feature pedestrian link through the space linking to the waterfront.



Option 2 Redevelopment

As it could be – Showing the major redevelopment opportunity and key town centre activity facing onto its river frontage.

A New Prory Monument



A new pedestrian axis link to the river with a focal feature

Two Linked 'Squares'



St Neots

Prory Quarter and Waterfront

The “Eastern Gateway” and Medieval Crossroads

5.4 Concept

To “grow the footprint” of the town centre and create more space for retail and commercial activities. Also to reinvigorate the ancient heart of the town and establish a new “gateway” to the town centre from the east.

Appraisal

Car Parks at Tebbutts Road and Moore’s Walk.

The site is two car parking areas on either side of Tebbutts Road and is an important entrance point to the town centre for shoppers and visitors. There are around 200 spaces (GOAD) to the north on 0.6 hectares and 80 spaces to the south on 0.3 hectares. The two are very well used and are an important means of maintaining trade levels in the town.

The northern car park is owned and managed by HDC and may well be inappropriate for development because of the surrounding residential properties to the north and west of the site. A right of way to Russell Street also restricts the opportunities. The car park should be retained for its current purpose. In the medium term a second deck might be considered on part of the site.

The southern car park is owned and managed by Westgate Department Store. It incorporates rear servicing of the shop units fronting Moores Walk and High Street, as well as Iceland’s customer car park and car parking for the office

units above some of the shop premises. Part of this car park falls within the town centre conservation area, which includes the Grade 2 Listed Chapel at Moores Walk. There is no allocation on the car park, although it falls within the town centre boundary and therefore can theoretically be developed for retail uses. Moores Walk currently does not work very well as a shopping centre. Somerfield, Rosebys and Argos seem unrelated to the whole development. The scheme is cramped around the United Reform Church and the smaller units in the centre of the semi-open mall have limited appeal. The development is dated and in need of reinvestment.

There is potential to improve the shopping offer in the town by using some of the space within the southern car park. The key opportunity would be to extend the shop units at the eastern side of Moores Walk and at the northern end of the High Street. The benefit of this would be to attract some of the larger players in the retail market who are seeking space, such as Peacocks, Wallis clothes, Adams Childrensware and others. This might provide a boost to this end of the town centre, raising the profile of occupiers such as Argos and Somerfield.

Car Park and County Waste Depot North of Cambridge Street. The site is about 0.35 hectares in total and comprises two neighbouring uses: the Cambridge Street car park (around 50 spaces) which is owned and managed by HDC and the County Waste Depot which is owned by HDC and leased to CCC. There is also a recreation ground behind Lidl, which is owned by the Town Council. The Waste Depot is a local recycling centre containing several recycling tanks and a temporary office cabin on a tarmac area. Access to the Cambridge Street long stay car park is

via the Lidl store car park (a further 100 spaces), whilst access to the Waste Depot is via Huntingdon Street.

Both the sites are flat and fall within the town centre boundary. There are several constraints on development, including the potential contamination from the waste uses on site, the adjacent residential properties fronting East Street, flood risk, a potential TPO on trees to the south of the waste depot and the car parking easement for the offices at no.12 Huntingdon Street which is a Listed Building.

The site is identified potentially for housing in the Huntingdonshire Urban Capacity Study 2002, but there is now a pressing need to find space for town centre uses. Given the amount of new housing already built and in prospect in and around the town centre the site should in our view be considered for mixed uses.

The site is in a weak retail position with poor visibility. We propose that the waste depot be relocated to provide for an extension to the long stay car park at Cambridge Street (say 50 spaces). Access to the extended car park would continue to be off Cambridge Street, but a new pedestrian and cycle access point could be created off Huntingdon Street to link into the car park.

Ford Dealership, Cambridge Street. The TC Harrison Ford Dealership site located at Cambridge Street represents the largest potential retail site in St Neots town centre. It currently accommodates the car showroom, service/MOT/repair garage and open storage of vehicles and customer car parking. The site has the advantages of being in one ownership, flat, having a wide access point and good visibility off Cambridge Street and no issues regarding

rights of way or right of light. In addition, the southern end of the site has a cluster of trees, which act as an effective screen, which is an important feature considering the proposed housing site immediately to the south.

The site is 0.75 hectares but has the capacity to be extended to the east, forming a larger site capable of attracting one large occupier such as a DIY retailer or a series of smaller operators seeking a retail park environment with dedicated car parking. This car parking would become an additional car park for the town centre and help to meet the forecast shortfall. The presence of a major use such as a bulky goods operator could help to claw back some trade currently lost to other centres. These uses are currently lacking in St Neots.

The relocation of the dealership might affect viability. This would be helped if TC Harrison were in any event seeking to relocate. We understand that this is not the case at the present time. Residential values are strongest in St Neots at present and it is likely that the market would naturally favour this use. There is some justification for protecting this site for retail uses, or at least a mix of uses including retail. A suitable local plan policy would be for town centre mixed uses, including retail/commercial and offices.

Crossroads and Movement. The revitalisation of this eastern end of the town centre will depend on creating safe and convenient pedestrian connections across the crossroads. This should be a priority for traffic management as the characteristics of traffic flows in this area are as unpleasant as the flows. If this can be done, better

pedestrian crossings can be provided and more pavement space made available for shoppers.

Proposals

- Designation of TC Harrison site for town centre uses to include retail and associated car parking.
- Relocation of County Waste Depot and extension of car parking – potential also to include part of recreation ground.
- Creation of new pedestrian route from former Waste Depot to Tebbutts Road.
- Consider decked parking north of Tebbutts Road.
- Support reinvestment in Moors Walk shopping centre to include upgrading, and provision of larger units using part of the southern car park.
- Redesign crossroads to calm traffic and provide for safer, easier pedestrian connections also to revive southern side of High Street.
- Gateway features to be incorporated in new development Cambridge Street.

Area 2

Moors Walk
Refurbishment and improved links to the car parking

The aerial perspective (below) shows the eastern approach sequence to the town centre focusing on the medieval cross roads and the entrance to High Street. The proposals are indicative only and show the opportunity to build back commercial frontage to Cambridge Street extending the retail, improved and new car parking within the block increasing footfall along this end of High Street and traffic calming to improve the cross roads junction and pedestrian movement across it.



Cambridge Street 'Gateway' Improvements

The perspective (below) shows the 'gateway' opportunity along the Cambridge street approach. The style in the illustration is indicative of a more modern approach. It could equally be more traditional. Important though is the principle of reinforcing the entrance into the town centre through the built form.

New development frontage. Retail along the street edge creating a 'gateway' entrance point into the town centre with start of High Street sequence beyond



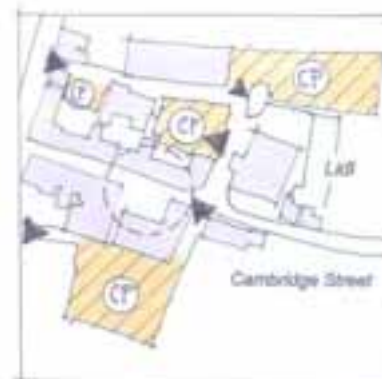
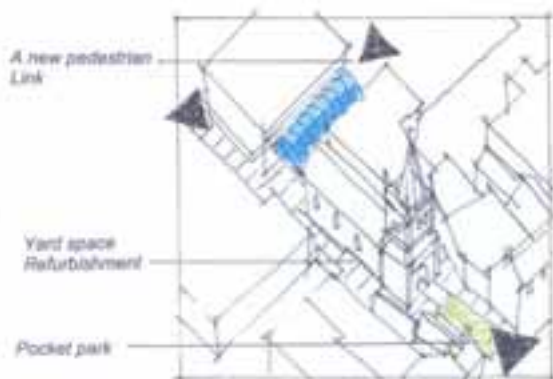
St Neots

Eastern Gateway and Medieval Crossroads

Moore's Walk Yard Opportunity

Improving the linkage from the car parking areas into the 'High Street' will be an important part of improving accessibility to the town centre.

The refurbishment of Moore's Walk (see illustration above right) and improving access to Tebbitts road car park is one such link. The existing link including the 'pocket park' in front of the Church could benefit from a 'facelift', surface treatment including signing and lighting. Edges and arcading could be improved as part of a building refurbishment, including creating a new pedestrian link direct to the Co-op car parking area (see inset below right).



Town Centre Surface Car Parking

The insets (above) show improved parking blocks sub-divided into smaller 'cells'. Wall edges and planting, along with, backland development frontages where possible, street lighting and CCTV should make a safer pedestrian environment away from the 'high street'.



Signage, lighting and CCTV

Reduce width of Carriageway and improve pavement area



High Street Traffic Calming Measures

The High Street needs to be made more pedestrian friendly and the impact of traffic needs to be reduced. The inset perspective (right) illustrates some measures to redress the balance in favour of the pedestrian.

St Neots

Eastern Gateway and Medieval Crossroads

St Mary's "Urban Village"

5.5 Concept

This back land area behind the High Street could be home to a mixed use residential and business village, linked to the High Street, Market Place and Hen Brook to the south.

A sensitively-designed infill development of buildings and courtyards following the grain of existing historic development.

The conservation and reuse of existing buildings

Attractive pedestrian routes and courts linking to the surrounding town centre

The conservation and reuse of the former wharf buildings on Hen Brook for a mixed residential and craft outlet outlet centre, providing another attraction for tourists and visitors near the waterfront.

Appraisal

Land at Windmill Row between High Street and Brook Street has been in poor repair for many years. Various schemes have been proposed, some inappropriate given the historic location. The site is split between several owners and therefore is difficult to assemble. It is 0.45 hectares. The area has a number of existing commercial uses such as a motor garage, tanning studio and tattoo and piercing shop. There is also a hard surfaced car parking area.

The site is relatively flat and in need of improvement as it forms the backdrop to the Grade 1 Listed St Mary's Church. Access is not easy and any new development would need to improve the highway arrangement with the entrance into M A Motors the most appropriate point.

The site is identified in the Huntingdonshire Urban Capacity Study for mixed-use development with a residential-led scheme and an element of B1 offices. The site is allocated for housing in the Local Plan Alteration and falls within the town centre boundary.

Any redevelopment would need to take account of the flood risk and the Listed Buildings at Ibbetts Yard and Brook House. However the multi ownership of the site is the principal barrier to development with no formal agreement or commitment between landowners on how to take the site forward. Several proposed schemes have been attempted in recent years but without success. There are some indications that there is now a greater interest in the potential of the site amongst the landowners.

The residential market in the immediate vicinity is strong with recent developments at Chandlers Wharf and Navigation Wharf, as well as in fill development at South Street.

If an agreement to assemble the site between the landowners can be reached a mixed-use residential-led scheme could be taken forward with an element of B1 offices. This would upgrade the environment, boost patronage of the town centre and provide commercial opportunities for businesses. An extension to the HDC-

owned car park on Brook Street might serve the whole development, as well as retaining parking for shoppers.

ATS Site at Corner of Brook Street and Church Street.

The site (0.15 hectares) is occupied by the ATS garage which occupies part of what appears to be former mill buildings. These may be locally listed. Architecturally the site is an important feature of the town's heritage with the chimney stack and warehouse overlooking Hen Brook.

The current use does not do justice to the site and a relocation of the ATS garage to an alternative site would open up a number of opportunities through the regeneration of the mill buildings.

The location of the site is important with the adjacent Grade 1 Listed St Mary's Church and Hen Brook. The major barriers to development would be the renovation of the mill buildings, possibly some remediation from the previous industrial uses and the ongoing maintenance of the chimney stack.

The market in this position is unlikely to support retail uses and would be more viable as a mixed-use residential/B1 office scheme. Alternatively, the site provides the potential to create a tourist attraction for the town in the form of arts and crafts workshops and heritage centre. This would require significant public funds to make development viable.

Proposals

- Conservation appraisal of area leading to policies potentially to guide policies on future listing, development guidance and conservation grant aid.

- Bid for HERS and HLF New Heritage Townscape Initiative.
- Design and development brief to ensure connections north-south and east-west and form of development.
- Pedestrian crossing with wider pavements at High Street to link to Moores Walk and Tebbutts Road.
- Contact owners to promote interest in residential led mixed use development with strong conservation element.
- Feasibility study into future use of ATS garage site for residential/B1 or as a visitor attraction.

Ernulf and Longsands Campuses

5.6 These are, strictly speaking, outside the scope of our detailed consideration, but the future function and use of these is important to the future of the town centre itself. In our strategy there is a complementary and symbiotic relationship between these two campuses and the town centre. The plans show the importance of their strategic location and point to the need for planning frameworks or master plans to be prepared to realise the opportunities that exist.

Area 3



The aerial perspective (left) shows the opportunities for development within the block to the south of High Street. The proposals are indicative only and show a suggested form of development building the block respecting the grain and fabric of the historic core. Sensitive development would fill a distinct gap in the 'backland' area of the town and could make a positive contribution to enhance the conservation area.



The opportunity 'gap' to the Rear of High Street

The inset plans (below) show the gap in the block and a suggested series of narrow pedestrian yards linking the High Street to Brook Street through the block.

South of High Street



Spatial Hierarchy

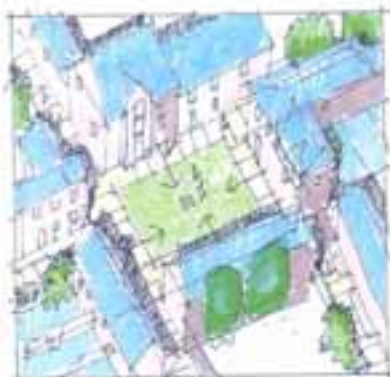


St Neots

St Mary's Urban Village

South of Church Street Spatial Quality

The inset drawings (right) show the suggested character of the new space within the block -



Small Urban Square

The focus within the block could be a small pedestrian square



Narrow Yards

Pedestrian scale space provides linkage through the block

Navigation Wharf Mill

The insets (right - top to bottom) show

- 1 Hen brook water front - As it could be with the residential theme continued to the new mill development and refurbishment.
- 2 An indicative scheme showing a courtyard development utilising the full potential of the waterfront aspect.
- 3 Cross section through new brook side development showing how the development could work

Navigation Wharf Mill
Courtyard



Church Street corner
environmental works

The perspective (above) shows the mill complex with refurbished main building (residential flats and apartments) with new built forming a courtyard (mixed use residential and studio workshops)



St Neots

St Mary's Urban Village

I Ernulf Ouse Valley Eaton Socon Cross Section



2 Longsands Ouse Valley St Neots Bridge Cross Section

The plans on this page show the opportunity improving the educational campus sub centres both north and south of the town centre including improved linkage to and across the river valley.



Eaton Socon



St Neots

Complimentary Sub-Centres

6.INDICATIVE ACTION PLAN

TOPIC/LOCATION	ACTIONS	FOR PUBLIC DISCUSSION			
		TIMESCALE	INDICATIVE COST	IMPLEMENTING AGENCY	POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIP & MATCH FUNDING
A Retail/Commercial Centre	Bring forward proposals within Local Devt. Framework/Local Plan for expansion of town centre uses at the Priory Car Park Area and at Huntingdon St./ Cambridge St. Intersection.				
	Prepare Development Frameworks for these areas as Supplementary Planning Guidance.				
A Centre for Leisure Retailing	Develop Town Centre Leisure Strategy to accompany the forthcoming Statement of Licensing Policy.				
	Within this, develop "after hours" design and accessibility proposals for three key venues: Market Place, Priory Centre and riverside venues - to include late night transport, cleansing and security.				
	Set up After Hours Forum of licensees, businesses, statutory and community interests to encourage self help and provide basis for monitoring.				

	Encourage all age and mixed cultural content of evening and night economies.				
	Establish dialogue guidance for local residents together with TCI.				
A Centre of Attraction	Prepare St. Neots Tourism Development Strategy.				
	Prepare St Neots Heritage Interpretation Strategy and Plan.				
	Implement Resource Audit of Riverside Corridor followed by Landscape and Leisure Master Plan and Management Plan.				
A Centre for the Community	Bring forward scheme for the redevelopment of the Priory Centre as a major waterfront destination with quayside bar/restaurant, multi-purpose auditorium, linked to other uses.				
	Support master plans for Ernulf and Longsands campuses to make best use of HDC property, set proper planning context and seek quality.				
	Take forward "Arc of Leisure" concept with local clubs and venues and consider joint operation/promotional potential.				

A “Switched-on” Centre	Develop proposals for St. Neots as a market towns exemplar for creative industries development in collaboration with partnership of key interests.				
	Include provision for high tech. and creative industry workspace (as appropriate) within proposals for Priory Centre, Ernulf and Longsands Schools and St. Mary’s Urban Village areas.				
An Accessible and Joined up Centre	Support creation and development of St. Neots Market Towns Traffic Model.				
	Bring forward technical analysis to allow inessential traffic to be redirected from town centre, as appropriate.				
	Develop ring of car parks, to include long stay, at riverside, Tebbutts Road, Cambridge St./Huntingdon St. and Islands Common.				
	Develop Streetscape Plan for town centre pedestrian and environmental improvements.				
A Centre of Excellence	Bring forward proposals for a St. Neots Design Initiative to include buildings, streetscape, landscape and potentially commercial design.				
The Priory Quarter and Waterfront	Prepare Development Framework Plan as Supplementary Planning Guidance, to include:				

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Redevelopment of Priory Centre as waterfront destination. ▪ Re-planning of Priory Car Park circulation and design as a quality public space with cars in it. ▪ Interpretation of historic Priory site. ▪ Potential redevelopment of Tan Yard site and BT site. ▪ Consider joint scheme with County re. Library improvement/redevelopment. ▪ Improvements to south side of Priory Lane and improved links to Market Place. ▪ Cycle/pedestrian bridge north of the Priory. 				
Eastern Gateway and Medieval Crossroads	<p>Prepare Development Framework as SPG, to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improvements to vehicular and pedestrian circulation. ▪ Relocation of Waste Depot and extension of car parking. ▪ Designation of T.C Harrison site for town centre uses. ▪ Support for refurbishment and extension of Moore's Walk shopping centre. ▪ Consideration of future decked car parking at Tebbutts Road. ▪ Gateway design features at new edge of town centre on Cambridge Street. 				
St Mary's Urban Village	<p>Prepare SPG and development framework in co-operation with site owners, potentially to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conservation appraisal of area linked to HERS or HLF bid. ▪ North/south and east/west connections. ▪ Form and content of development in heritage context. 				

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feasibility of ATS for residential/B1 plus visitor attraction. 				
Ernulf and Longsands Campuses	Bring forward master plans for the two campuses plus urban design context to link areas to rest of town, transport, new bridges and to make best use of HDC and other council-owned property.				

APPENDIX: Public Exhibition on 9th October 2003. Questionnaire Results

64 visits to the exhibition were recorded. 39 completed questionnaires were returned.

No.	Theme	Response	
1.	The Future is Bright St. Neots is a success story! The town centre should become a more diverse and attractive “heart and hub” for the whole town and nearby settlements.	26 9 2	Strongly support Support Disagree
2.	A Retail Centre There is new investment taking place in shops in the town centre and more could follow. There are opportunities around the Priory Car Park and the Huntingdon Street/Cambridge Street crossroads.	16 19 1	Strongly support Support Disagree
3.	A Centre of Attraction There are relatively few places to eat and drink in the town centre. There are opportunities to create them around the Market Place and as part of a new waterfront piazza at the Priory.	24 11 2	Strongly support Support Disagree
4.	A Centre for Visitors and Leisure A new country park should be created around the River Great Ouse from Paxton Pits in the north to Wyboston Lakes in the south.	27 8 1	Strongly support Support Disagree
5.	A Centre for the Community A bigger town should have more to offer its residents. There are opportunities to provide more community attractions at Priory Park, Ernulf School, the Recreation Centre and the Priory.	19 15 -	Strongly support Support Disagree

6.	<p>A “Switched-on” Centre St. Neots can become a market town champion for skills and economic growth in the high tec. And creative industry fields. Key locations are Wyboston Lakes, Ernulf School, Longsands School and the town centre.</p>	<p>17 18 1</p>	<p>Strongly support Support Disagree</p>								
7.	<p>An Accessible and “Joined-up” Centre In the future town centre attractions may be spread across several locations. Bus, walking and cycling routes need to connect all these together and link to external routes. The system should be user friendly so that people use it and enjoy it.</p>	<p>24 9 1</p>	<p>Strongly support Support Disagree</p>								
9.	<p>Where Do We Want to Be in Ten Years’ Time? Our vision of how it will look and feel to be in St. Neots in ten years’ time.</p>	<p>16 11 1</p>	<p>Strongly support Support Disagree</p>								
10.	<p>Key Opportunity Areas: The Priory An exciting combination of new retailing, a waterfront piazza with bar/restaurant, library/resource centre, community auditorium, art house cinema and small workspace units.</p>	<p>17 11 2</p>	<p>Strongly support Support Disagree</p>								
11.	<p>Key Opportunity Areas: The Crossroads A new “retail gateway” to the town centre, with new shops and more car parking, linked in to a pedestrian circuit around the eastern side of the centre.</p>	<p>18 12 -</p>	<p>Strongly support Support Disagree</p>								
12.	<p>Key Opportunity Areas: St Mary’s Urban Village A sensitive conservation and infill development of housing and small business suites, forming part of a new network of courtyards and pedestrian routes, linked to a visitor destination at Hen Brook.</p>	<p>15 13 3</p>	<p>Strongly support Support Disagree</p>								
	<p>Your reason for being in the town centre today?</p> <table data-bbox="1160 1203 1496 1321"> <tr> <td>Shopping and market</td> <td>14</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Exhibition</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Live/work in town centre</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Job centre/Priory/Library</td> <td>3</td> </tr> </table>	Shopping and market	14	Exhibition	8	Live/work in town centre	7	Job centre/Priory/Library	3		
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