

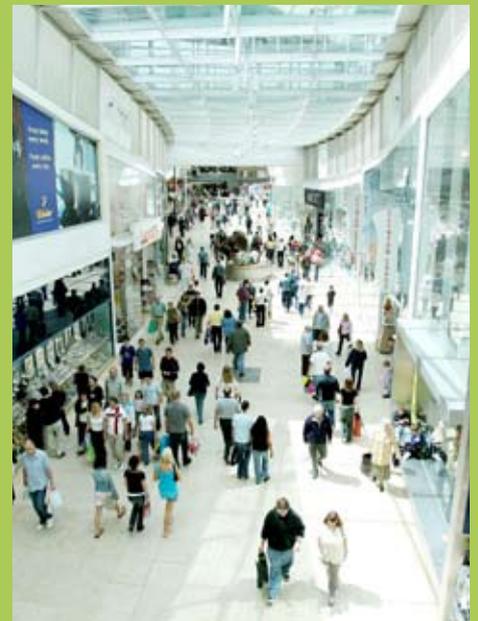


*Basingstoke
and Deane*

**Basingstoke
& Change**

A Vision for Central Basingstoke

December 2007



Introduction

Over the coming twenty years the population of the Borough is forecast to grow from about 157,000 to 177,000; almost all this growth will be accommodated within or on the periphery of Basingstoke. Basingstoke's central area will, therefore, need to continue to adapt and change accordingly.

The scale of the potential change has presented the Council with an opportunity to work in partnership with local people, businesses, and other public agencies to develop a vision to achieve an even more attractive and successful town centre.

This vision for central Basingstoke is to be adopted as Council policy but, like the town centre itself, it does not stand in isolation and must be viewed as part of a bigger picture and timeframe.

Therefore, this vision:

- emerges from the Community Strategy (2006/16) objective for a prosperous Borough, with thriving town centres that contribute to a broad economic base, and the current Council Plan's priority to maintain and enhance local community well-being and meet the challenge of climate change;
- builds from adopted Council strategies for the central area of Basingstoke, most notably the Central Area Action Plan (October 2003), and 'Basingstoke at Night' (October 2005). It was from the public consultation on the latter project that the need to consider the future of the town centre beyond its night-time economy was raised. This led to the decision (March 2006) to produce a vision as a strategic town centre masterplan;
- supports guidance recently adopted by the Council for specific areas within the town centre, such as for Central Car Park (October 2001) and Upper New Road (July 2005), and on emerging projects, such as those for the regeneration of The Malls and Basing View;
- identifies areas for action and future projects across the central area, to be developed further by the Council and its partners, which will, in turn, inform the emerging Local Development Framework, currently being prepared for the plan period to 2026;
- and, importantly, provides a framework and sets out principles through which the aims and aspirations of businesses, organisations, interests groups, agencies, and individuals can contribute to creating a central area of which we can all be proud.

Whilst this vision seeks to be aspirational, there is a need to be realistic as the delivery of ideas will be subject to resources, both within and beyond the Council's control. To that end, an outline action plan forms part of the Vision for Central Basingstoke.

Summary

The scope of some of the issues affecting the centre of Basingstoke (e.g. those relating to the national/global economy, the future of retailing, etc) clearly extends beyond the Council's remit and control. At the same time, the importance of the town centre cannot be under-estimated and extends well beyond local considerations. Cities and towns compete with each other across county, regional and national boundaries and their central areas are vital components in people's perception of each place.

Thus, Basingstoke's central area is a crucial element in the wider image of the town and Borough and the ideas set out in this document are aimed at producing an aspirational vision for the future of Basingstoke over the next 15 – 20 years.

The Council's vision has been produced in response to extensive public consultation, summarised later, which confirmed that there is a great deal about Basingstoke town centre that is successful and well-liked. As a shopping destination in particular, Basingstoke punches above its weight; Festival Place has had a significant impact on the town centre's image and retail offer and is regarded by most people as the heart of the central area.

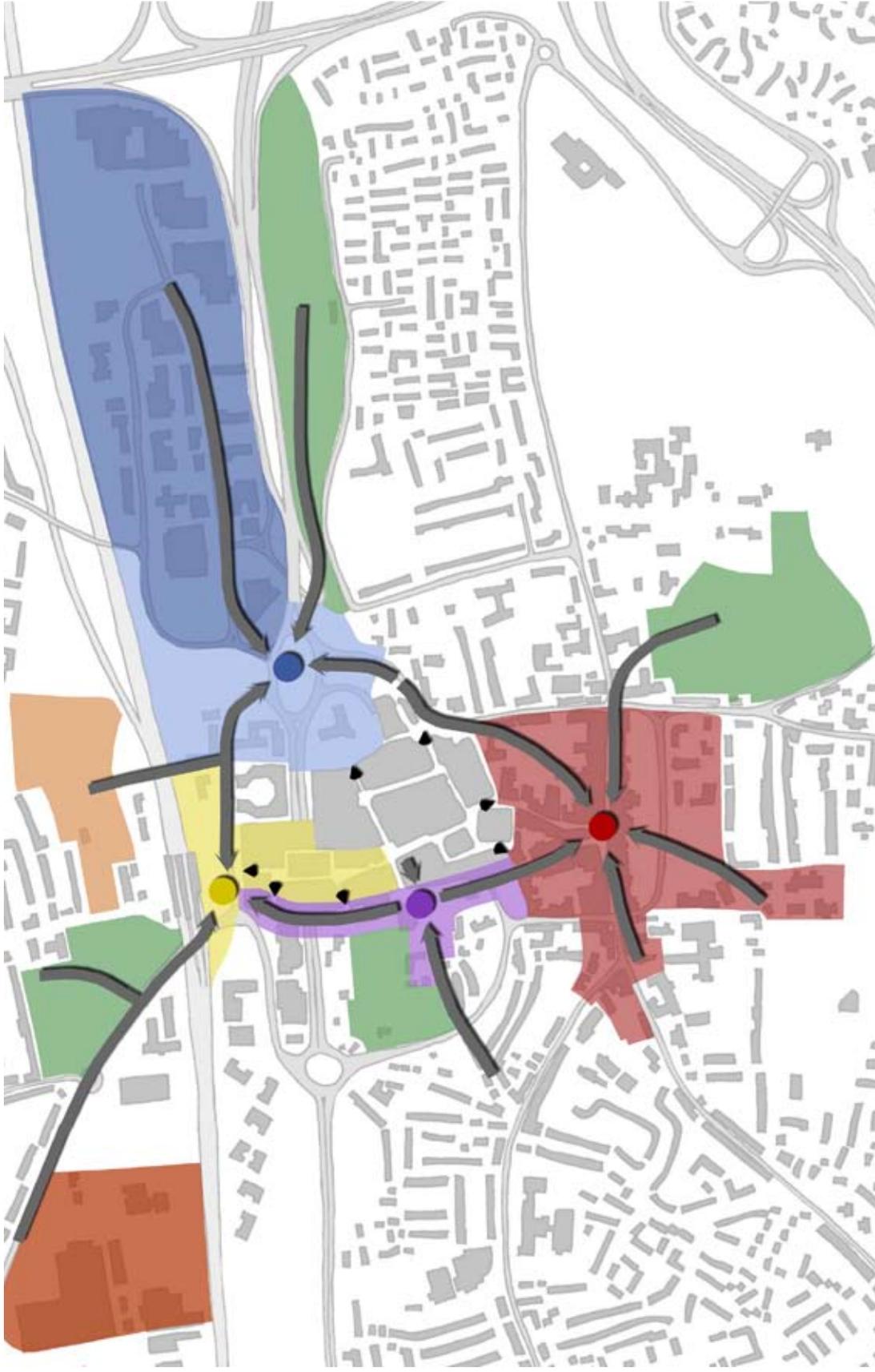
However, central Basingstoke is and must be more than its shopping; there are and must continue to be many other attractions on offer across the wider town centre. The message of the Council's vision, therefore, is that, over the next couple of decades, the continued success of Basingstoke's central area will be best achieved by developing to the full its potential as a social, cultural, educational, business and living environment, as well as a growing shopping destination.

To that end, the Council's Vision aims to:

- create a **well-connected town centre** – with easier and more convenient links between its different parts so that there can be greater synergy between the various activities, venues and attractions that are found across the central area;
- enhance the **vitality, accessibility** and **character and appearance** of, public streets, spaces and areas in the town centre, in particular those found around the edges of Festival Place;
- build on Basingstoke's successful shopping 'heart' by widening the appeal of the town centre to provide a **'day out experience'**;
- ensure, through continued action set out in 'Basingstoke at Night', that enhanced vitality, accessibility and character and appearance is **compatible with town centre living**.

The Framework Concept overleaf identifies areas of the town centre that provide both the greatest challenges and opportunities for actions that will implement this vision over the coming decades.

Central Basingstoke Vision – Framework Concept



- 
Alencon Place
"the place to arrive"
- 
Church Street
"the discovery route"
- 
Top of the Town
"the Old Town quarter"
- 
Town Parks
"the green fringe"
- 
Basing View
"21st century business l
- 
South View (proposed hi
"living in town"
- 
Eastrop Place
"the place to connect"
- 
Learning Campus
"the place for learning and skills"
(site to be confirmed)

Public consultations

1 Themes

1.1 It is clear that a town centre is more than the sum of its constituent parts and it is difficult to examine one aspect in isolation without it impacting on or being influenced by others.

1.2 However, the following three themes were used to help focus public comments on the main issues affecting central Basingstoke:

- **vitality:** what activities go on in the central area
- **accessibility:** how to get to and move around the central area
- **character and appearance:** what the central area looks like

1.3 These three themes, or very similar, have been used in visioning projects for other town and city centres. The themes are inextricably linked and can be mutually reinforcing or undermining across a town centre, but they proved to be a useful means of structuring public consultation events and questionnaires.



2 Initial public consultation

2.1 During the winter/spring of 2006/07 consultations were undertaken with residents, organisations, and businesses to gather base information and to evaluate the issues affecting the town centre. 360 responses to a questionnaire suggest that:

- most people (62%) visit the town centre daily or weekly
- shopping is by far the single main reason (32%) given for visiting the town centre. Entertainment/culture/socialising (17%), eating out (11%), sport/leisure (10%) and banking (10%) are other reasons.
- Eastrop (32%) and War Memorial (24%) are the most popular town centre parks, with Glebe Gardens (7%) and South View Cemetery (>2%) the least visited.
- most people (49%) consider the 'heart' of the town centre to be in/around Festival Place; The Market Place/Top of Town was the next most popular choice (19%)
- most people (57%) travel to the town centre by car, with walking as the second most frequent choice (26%)
- the vast majority of people (84%) find both their journey to/from, and finding their way around the town centre easy
- people are equally divided about the need for education/life-long learning facilities in the town centre.

2.2 Asked what they thought was good about the town centre, 50% of the overall public responses mentioned aspects relating to the theme of its 'vitality', 30% referred to aspects of its 'character and appearance', and 19% cited aspects of its 'accessibility'. Similar proportions were recorded to the question about what could improve the town centre (vitality: 51%; character and appearance 33%; accessibility 16%). The responses to these two questions provide a very general guide to the relative importance, to the public, of the three themes.

2.3 The table overleaf summarises, in terms of the three themes, what people found good about the town centre and what they thought should be improved (listed in order of the number of times each aspect was mentioned).

	what is good	what needs to improve
vitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - variety of shops and services - Festival Place - clean and tidy - places to eat and drink - entertainment / leisure / sport - safe and secure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more / better variety of shops (esp. independents) - quality of shops and large stores - markets - more restaurants / cafes - policing / security / behaviour
accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - plentiful / cheap parking - easy access (esp. by road) - pedestrianised - transport (train / bus) links 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more / cheaper / better laid-out parking - pedestrian / cycle links into / across town centre - public transport and its connections - facilities for disabled
character and appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attractive warm and bright - covered - compact - public parks - Top of Town - modern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Malls - parks, planting, open spaces, seating, public art, etc - Top of Town (ToT) - street care / cleanliness - emphasis on historic character

3 Feedback consultation on the emerging Vision

3.1 From an analysis of the responses to the initial public consultation, an emerging Vision for central Basingstoke was prepared and formed the basis of a further round of focussed consultation during the late summer of 2007.

3.2 Feedback and further consultation was focussed around a leaflet (right), which illustrated the emerging Vision framework and asked if it was “heading in the right direction”.



3.3 Central area stakeholders and other organisations and agencies that had previously responded to the initial consultation were contacted. Further comments and response received from the feedback generally endorsed the aims and concept plan set out in the emerging Vision.

3.4 In addition, two consultative panels representing a cross section of people who, firstly, live within the town centre and, secondly, use the central area for a range of activities were held in September, 2007.

3.5 These panels universally agreed that Festival Place had significantly improved the offer of the town centre during the day and evening, but residents also recognised that the town centre has a number of distinct parts, not merely its shopping centres.

3.6 The panels endorsed the emerging vision and considered that striking a balance between the needs of visitors to and residents of the town centre was possible, but stressed the importance of ensuring that increasing vitality and accessibility is considered alongside and is compatible with town centre living. Residents’ comments on the impact of aspects of town centre ‘vitality’ reinforce the importance of the Council’s on-going work on ‘Basingstoke at Night’, the adopted strategy and action plan on the night-time economy.

3.7 Three of the areas identified in the emerging Vision received particular comment:



- **Alencon Place and The Malls** was seen as a priority, especially redesigning the entrance into the Malls, opening up views of The Anvil, and upgrading The Malls and St. John's Walk to provide a 'joined up' shopping environment.
- **Church Street**, including the older buildings and facilities along it, appeared to be largely forgotten about or ignored. The route was seen as 'leading nowhere' at present, and opening and cleaning up Glebe Gardens was seen as essential if use of it was to increase.
- **Top of Town** was regarded as having poor approaches from New Road and few visited the area during the day. The market was considered too small to be of interest but the Top of Town was considered ideal for specialist shopping, and there was enthusiasm for making better use of the Market Place with outdoor cafes and street entertainment.

4 'Image and reputation'

- 4.1 Concurrent with the consultation on central Basingstoke, a study was carried out in the summer of 2007 into the wider 'image and reputation' of Basingstoke and Deane. Whilst the area of interest was the entire Borough, for many people, Basingstoke town, and its centre, is an important component in their perceptions.
- 4.2 Two main groups were consulted – representatives of businesses and of 'consumers'. The latter group consisted of interviewing visitors in both Basingstoke and in two other Hampshire towns. Initial results from these two groups appear to confirm some of the responses summarised above in relation to central Basingstoke.
- 4.3 Asked 'if someone, within a 20 mile radius, was going to say something good about Basingstoke, what do you think it would be?', the most frequent responses from the business community was 'shopping' (44%), with Festival Place cited as being a big attraction, followed by 'leisure' (24%), particularly The Anvil and sports facilities.

4.4 For 'consumers' the vast majority thought that 'shopping' would be top of the list of good features – again, people frequently cited Festival Place. Next, 'transport links' and 'the people' jointly, followed by 'good education' and 'sports/leisure facilities'

4.5 Asked the same question but about what might be thought bad about Basingstoke, over a quarter of the responses from the business community suggested Basingstoke was 'characterless'.

4.6 For 'consumers' 'transport problems' (the main problems mentioned were "too many roundabouts" and "not enough parking") ranked the highest (despite previously ranking transport links favourably in the positive attribute tests¹). 'Crime levels' and the feeling that Basingstoke was 'characterless and bland' jointly followed.

4.7 From further discussions with the business group about improvements to the area's offer and key future challenges, the predominant issues concerned:

- 'physical changes' (17%) to the area, with the architecture and town centre environment being cited;

- 'road / infrastructure' (14%) – many said it was easy to get out of Basingstoke, but was more difficult to get around within it;

- 'leisure and cultural facilities' (13%) – a number of participants stated that from a retail / leisure point of view, the offer was too mainstream and as a result failed to cater for the higher end of the market.



4.8 It is evident that these issues accord with the themes of character and appearance, accessibility, and vitality. Furthermore, a draft report on the outcome of the preliminary research suggested that any strategy to enhance the 'image and reputation' of Basingstoke should focus on the two key areas of 'perceptions' – the communications element – and 'on the ground' – the physical element.



¹ This also contrasts with parking and road access being regarded as attributes in the initial consultation responses and may reflect the fact that two of the three 'consumer' groups were interviewed in other towns and thus may include people who are only occasional visitors, if at all, to Basingstoke.

Developing the Vision

The consultation responses confirmed the three themes of vitality, accessibility and character and appearance as an effective means of looking at the essential components of the central area. In addition, the results of the feedback consultations and of the residents' and users' panels endorse that the aims of the emerging Vision address strategic issues that are important to the future success of the central area.

However, as suggested earlier, it is only in combination that the three themes exist in the everyday reality of people's use and perception of the central area. The following section attempts to draw together the threads from the consultations in terms of an overview of the central area.

5 The 'heart' of the town centre

- 5.1 When asked "where do you feel the heart of the town is?" just over half of the public said it was in Festival Place or Festival Square, around one fifth said it was the Market Place or the Top of Town. Thus, whilst the majority of people regard the heart of the town centre to be in the 'new', a sizeable proportion recognises the importance of the 'old'.
- 5.2 From the public consultation responses, this mix of traditional and modern is seen as one of Basingstoke's assets by all age groups and reflects two aspects of Basingstoke's town centre: firstly, its historic development and, secondly, the continuing importance of its role for shopping.
- 5.3 Basingstoke developed as a traditional market town, on the main London - Salisbury turnpike road, and the Market Place remains the focus of the historic Top of Town. In the 1960s, as part of the town expansion, much of the lower-lying land between the Top of Town and the railway station was comprehensively redeveloped; quite literally, as a 'box' raised above the Loddon valley (its scale is evident, top right). It was through the more recent regeneration of part of that structure that Festival Place was created in 2002.
- 5.4 The town centre was encircled by inner ring roads and its new primary shopping centre (shown dark blue on the 1967 plan, left) and parts of the Top of the Town (shown light blue), were pedestrianised. Other new 'central' uses, such as major offices, were zoned beyond the shopping core alongside the railway or in Basing View.
- 5.5 Given the primacy of shopping to the 1960s planning of the town centre it is, therefore, no surprise that Festival Place, one of the UK's top twenty² retail shopping centres and a major catalyst in the continuing growth of Basingstoke, is now regarded as the 'heart' of the town centre.

² "Top 100 shopping centres", Retail Week, July 2006

5.6 Despite the fluctuations of the national retail economy, shopping provides a significant and successful core to the central area. Shopping and Festival Place are, for many people, the town centre’s biggest attraction in terms of vitality (variety of shops / restaurants/ cinema, safe, busy, etc), accessibility (easy to get to, plenty of parking, pedestrianised), and its character and appearance (modern, clean, covered).

5.7 Immediately to the north of Festival Place is The Malls, the other part of the 1960s shopping ‘box’, and to the south is the Top of the Town. Both of these areas are very important to people but considered less attractive both in terms of their ‘offer’ and their ‘look’.

5.8 The Malls is regarded by many as in need of updating and suffers in direct comparison with the retail environment of Festival Place. The Top of Town retains more of a mixed character, with small offices, pubs, bars, and restaurants, but its principal retail role remains secondary, as a complement to the ‘multiple’ retailers. It is the erosion of the Top of Town’s traditional character in providing for ‘independent’ shops and markets that is of concern to many.

5.9 From the consultation, the importance of shopping and of Festival Place to people’s view of the town centre cannot be over-estimated, even to the non-retail business community. However, it is also evident that many believe that the relationship and connections between the shopping ‘heart’ and the surrounding parts of the central area, in terms of what is on offer (vitality), how easy it is to move around (accessibility) and what it looks like (character and appearance) will become increasingly important in the future. Significantly, evidence from Festival Place’s management team supports this view.



“The regeneration of town centres is about much more than just developing a new shopping centre, however popular”.

Introduction, ‘Town Centre Regeneration’. ODPM/ Department for Communities and Local Government, 2005/6

5.10 The challenge, therefore, in sustaining the success of its shopping ‘heart’ is through widening the appeal of central Basingstoke to provide a ‘day-out’ experience that encompasses more than shopping.

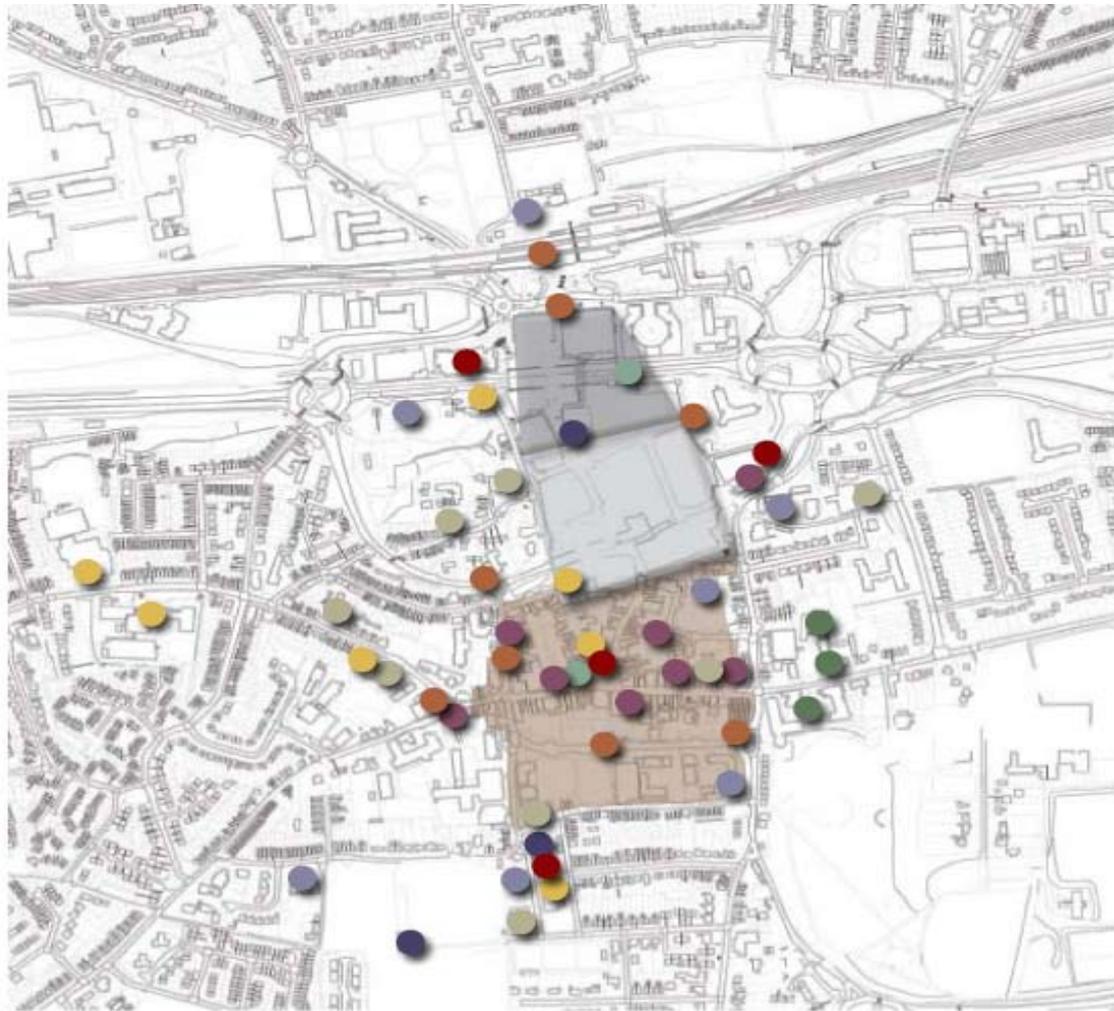
6 More than a shopping centre

- 6.1 As can be seen from the public's reasons for visiting it (see para 2.1), the central area is already more than just a shopping destination. It is a focus for international companies and local businesses as well as for community and civic activities, education and learning, cultural, leisure, sport and entertainment, cafes, restaurants, pubs, etc. Recently, there have also been several new residential developments in and around the central area.
- 6.2 However, as a result of the core area's primary shopping role and the nature of the 1960s redevelopment, many of the other components of the town centre's vitality have, generally speaking, been zoned around its edges (see plan below).



- 6.3 Immediately to the west, north and east of the shopping core are other 'town centre' activities such as offices and the four town parks. Around the railway station a few former office sites have been developed recently for high density housing but the 'inner' residential areas, such as Eastrop, Riverdene, Fairfield, and Brookvale, are generally beyond the central ring roads, with South View further separated by the railway lines.
- 6.4 Both of the town's largest higher educational centres – Basingstoke College of Technology and Queen Mary's College – are situated some distance from the town centre, with Winchester University's presence in Chute House being closer to, but just outside the shopping core. The scale of the possible future 'Learning Campus', to expand higher educational provision in the town, has inevitably looked to a site outside of the town centre's inner ring roads.

6.5 The plan below shows how many of the town centre's non-retail facilities are located around the edges of Festival Place and The Malls, and illustrates the relative importance of the Top of the Town for more than just shopping.



Key:

- Leisure/Sport
- Entertainment/Theatre
- Public Transport
- Learning/Culture/Heritage
- Faith/Community
- Bars/Restaurants
- Night Club
- Civic/Justice
- Private Club

- 6.6 One issue exemplifies the problem to be addressed. The town centre's parks are attractive features that add to its vitality and making more of them was a frequent suggestion for improving the town centre. In a consultation survey of photographs of different places within the town centre, Glebe Gardens was considered a 'good' feature. Yet, despite its central location immediately adjacent to a main entrance to Festival Place, Glebe Gardens is one of the least visited of the town parks. Thus an attractive green space located immediately next to the very 'heart' of the shopping area appears to contribute little to the town centre's image and vitality as it is missing from many people's 'mental map' of the central area.
- 6.7 It is clear to the Council that, in seeking to make the most of the different activities and functions within the central area, the potential benefits must be set against the need to minimise conflicts that can emerge between different users of the town centre. This is particularly the case with regard to the town centre as a place to live and the localised impact of a limited number of town centre activities on the amenities of existing residents.
- 6.8 Thus the priorities in the current Community Safety Strategy include reducing violence in public places, and improving levels of people 'feeling safe in Basingstoke town centre'. In addition, many of the on-going actions emanating from the Council's work on 'Basingstoke at Night' seek to address issues raised by and of concern to town centre residents. These strategies will continue to inform the Council's work on the Central Basingstoke Vision.
- 6.9 The aim in seeking to enhance the town centre's 'day-out' experience, therefore, is to achieve greater economic synergies and physical connections between the shopping 'heart' and the other areas, activities and attractions across the central area. At the same time, 'vitality' within the town centre must always be reconciled with the need to ensure that it remains a sustainable place to live.

"A diversity of uses in centres makes an important contribution to their vitality and viability. Different but complementary uses, during the day and in the evening, can reinforce each other, making town centres more attractive to local residents, shoppers and visitors. Local planning authorities should encourage diversification of uses in the town centre as a whole, and ensure that tourism, leisure and cultural activities, which appeal to a wide range of age and social groups, are dispersed throughout the centre."

para2.22, 'Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres'. ODP, 2005

- 6.10 The challenge is how to 'connect' the inner shopping core to its surroundings so that it is perceived as, and benefits from, being part of a wider town centre that makes the most of all the social, educational, cultural, entertainment, leisure, and residential assets that are found, or could be developed, within central Basingstoke.

7 Moving outside the 'box'

7.1 At a general level, the ease of access to and around Basingstoke town centre, particularly for car drivers, is clear from the public responses and other evidence. The ability to get into the centre quickly and relatively easily from the M3 and surrounding main roads is recognised by many. Bus and train access into the town centre is also good, although there are concerns about the links between them.

7.2 Parking is generally thought to be plentiful and, from evidence from public surveys, its cost is not a significant consideration to most (although some would always wish for more / free parking and there is some concern about the complexity of the lay-out of the car parks above Festival Place and The Malls).



7.3 Whilst the benefits of easy access to/from main roads also apply to more than just shoppers, there are general concerns about peak-hour congestion and, for many businesses, the lack of a clear 'entrance' to Basing View. It is not clear how far the inner ring roads contribute to or manage peak hour congestion, but the existing one-way system does reduce the ease of access to/from and around the Top of Town, as noted by the Taxi Federation and cyclists.

7.4 However, it is the difficulties associated with moving to/from and across the central area for pedestrians, not least for those with physical disabilities, and cyclists that are of most critical significance.

7.5 More than a quarter of people already walk to town and, from the perspective of community health, there is a growing realisation that opportunities to support physical activity should be taken. 8,000 people live within a 10 minute walk of the town centre and safer, more attractive and more direct routes are particularly important to existing central area residents. And clearly, most visitors travelling by car, train, and bus become pedestrians once in the central area.

7.6 Thus the ability of people, primarily as pedestrians, to get easily from one building or part of the central area to another is fundamental not only to the viability of each building or zone but also to the sustained success and vitality of the wider town centre, and its ability to provide a 'day-out' experience

7.7 The pedestrianised streets and areas are well-liked and people generally find it easy to get about within the town centre's shopping 'heart'. The plan below illustrates the pedestrian environment across the central area and shows a well-integrated pedestrianised core serving the main shopping area, particularly within Festival Place and The Malls.

7.8 However, it is when considering movement outside the shopping 'box', or across it, that concerns are most apparent. As shown in the plan below, many of the obstacles to pedestrian movement are found around the edges of the shopping 'box' and alongside the inner ring roads. The problems are exemplified by two of Basingstoke's principal assets.



Key:

-  Pedestrianised Area
-  Subway
-  Pelican Crossing
-  Obstacle
-  Footbridge
-  Approach Routes
-  Footbridge with Steps/Lift
-  Missing Link
-  Constrained Alleyway
-  400m (5mins) from Station, Festival Place and Market Place

7.9 Firstly, before or after performances, many visitors to The Anvil claim that it is difficult to find their way to a suitable restaurant or bar, many of which are located on the other side of the shopping centres in Festival Square or the Top of Town.

7.10 Secondly, once inside, many 'out of town' visitors to Festival Place never go outside that shopping centre. The fact that 75% of the parking spaces for shoppers are located directly above The Malls and Festival Place may well have relevance to this and therefore impacts on the rest of the town centre.

7.11 The problems for pedestrians and cyclists in negotiating a way across / around / out of The Malls and Festival Place shopping centres are exacerbated by both the one-way, inner-ring roads and the natural topography.

7.12 Most pedestrian subways under main roads (right) are disliked and are often avoided because of their inconvenience and perceived insecurity (and occasional flooding). The natural ground levels can present particular problems for the less-able; which is why Dial-a-Ride look to drop off their customers at the top of the slopes and pick them up from the bottom.



7.13 At night, between 1:00am and 6:00am, there is also the issue of the closure of the entrance doors to Festival Place and the need to summon and be escorted through the complex by security staff.

7.14 Fundamentally, it is the ability to move easily and safely from one part of the town centre to another, and to overcome the existing impediments to pedestrian movement, that will be critical to developing a series of successful spaces and places, which themselves will accommodate the range of activities and environments to complement the shopping heart.

“Pedestrian links between the primary shopping area and the wider town centre should where possible be strengthened, in particular with adjoining areas of secondary shopping importance, where links with the primary shopping area are often of critical importance.....Improving the pedestrian environment of a town centre, including areas beyond the primary shopping area, can make a significant contribution to its overall attractiveness and competitiveness.”

Paras 2.12/13, Planning for Town Centres: Guidance on Design and Implementation Tools, ODPM, 2005

7.15 The challenge, therefore, is to overcome the difficulties inherent in trying to get across or around the shopping 'box', and the reluctance of some visitors to leave it and discover other parts of the town centre, and to reduce the severance caused by the 1960s road system to pedestrian connections across the whole central area.

8 The place of character

8.1 As a result of Basingstoke's recent history (see para 5.3), the town centre contains areas of very different character: – old and new, open and enclosed, green and urban. The contrast between the old and the new parts of the town centre, together with the green backdrop provided by the town centre parks, is regarded by many as an asset.

8.2 The 'newer' parts of Basingstoke town centre are largely contained to its north and east, within a belt of land rising above the Loddon valley between the railway line and Churchill Way and running from Victory Hill to the AA Tower in Basing View. The Malls and Festival Place extend as a spur southwards over the Loddon.



8.3 In some places, such as in lower Wote Street, the transition between old and new is well handled. In other parts of the town centre, however, the impact of the comprehensive redevelopment of much of the town centre in the 1960s remains visible.



8.4 Connections between the new and old are poor. The backs of buildings, bins stores, and service yards exposed from surface car parks provide uninviting approach routes for pedestrians. Attractive historic buildings, spaces and parks that lie beyond the shopping centres, which could contribute more to the character of the town centre, are often concealed from general view, especially to visitors to whom first impressions are often lasting.



8.5 As confirmed by responses from the public consultation and evidence from other surveys, the character and appearance within Festival Place is, overwhelmingly, well-liked as being modern, clean, bright, safe, and welcoming. There is clear concern with The Malls and what is perceived as a slightly down-at heel environment within it, and its enhancement is top of most people's list for what would improve the town centre.

8.6 But these responses generally reflect the internal environment of the shopping centres and, again, it is around the outside edges of the shopping 'box', and its impact on the appearance and character of the adjacent areas, that concerns are generally focussed.

8.7 From responses to a photographic survey, most people like the look of Festival Square on its eastern side (upper right), but very few like the dominant western 'town wall' (right) of the shopping centres that runs alongside lower **Church Street** and up to Cross Street.



8.8 To the north of the shopping centres, whilst the area in front of the station (top right) is generally liked, the 'hole-in-the-wall' entrance to **The Malls**, facing **Alencon Link**, is considered by many as an unattractive feature and poor entrance to the rest of the town centre beyond.



8.9 The **Top of the Town** is valued for being a contrast to the modern lay-out and architecture of the two shopping centres, and making more of its historic character, heritage, and 'sense of place' was a frequent response as regards what improvements could be made.



8.10 Within the Top of Town, the Market Place (right) is a much valued space (many people felt that it 'should' be the heart of the town even when they thought it was no longer). Routes into the Market Place from the adjacent surface car parks (middle right) are, however, considered much less attractive.

8.11 In addition, appearance of those parts of the Top of Town where 1960s developments have impacted upon the historic urban fabric is generally regarded unfavourably.



8.12 The appearance of Central Car Park (right), standing between the Top of Town and Festival Place but offering up views mainly of the rear of buildings, is considered in need of improvement.

8.13 Similarly, upper New Road exposes rear service yards and the backs of buildings which, together with extensive surface car parks off New Road, make up a large part of the edges around the Top of the Town and provide entrances (bottom right) into the historic area that are regarded as uninspiring.



8.14 It is to redress such issues that the Council adopted a development brief for Central Car Park and the following design guidelines for upper New Road:

- enhance the attractiveness and character of the area through good quality architecture, materials and detailing
- promote continuous building frontages, to provide a suitable degree of enclosure to streets and public spaces
- use buildings, walls and gates to help conceal private gardens, yards and service areas from public view
- reduce the visual impact of parked cars on the public realm, while providing safe and attractive parking areas
- design new buildings to face the public realm and enhance safety by natural surveillance, particularly along pedestrian routes
- minimise the opportunity for crime, by designing-in high levels of security for new buildings, especially on the ground floor level
- retain and promote small-scale commercial uses (particularly on ground floor level), which are compatible with residential neighbours
- promote adaptable building forms, which can easily cater for a range of possible uses

8.15 The fact that the town centre is made up of areas with distinctly different character has provided opportunities to accommodate new development in both a contemporary design context and in response to more traditional or historic surroundings. The extensive conservation areas across the central area acknowledge and protect the special status of the latter whilst Basing View has and will continue to be characterised by more modern architecture.

8.16 As stated above, this contrast is well liked by many people. However, as with issues relating to vitality and accessibility, it is around the edges of the shopping centres that the character and appearance of the town centre appears least well defined.



8.17 The physical proximity of the new with the old is revealed in the plan on the [right](#), which shows that, to the south and west, Festival Place and part of The Malls directly abut the Basingstoke Town Conservation Area. The plan also reveals the impact of the 1960s inner ring-road on the character of the Top of Town, where it has sliced through the historic urban grain along upper New Road, and now provides a clear division between the Town and Fairfields conservation areas.

8.18 In the coming decades, the need to ensure the highest standards of design and development in both new and older parts of the town centre will remain constant. But, in addition, the inheritance of the 1960s creates a special consideration in those parts of the town centre where the new and the old converge; that is in those areas immediately around the shopping centres.

8.19 The challenge is to reduce the adverse impact of the 1960s shopping centres on their more historic neighbouring streets and spaces, to repair those areas left exposed by the inner ring road, service yards and surface car parks, and to exploit views of attractive buildings and features beyond the shopping centres so that the character and appearance of the central area better reflects the diversity of Basingstoke's past, present and future.

“...design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted... development in town centres, should ... improve the character and quality of the area”

Paras 2.1/2, Planning for Town Centres: Guidance on Design and Implementation Tools, ODPM, 2005

9 Action areas

- 9.1 The consultation feedback confirmed that the concept plan in the emerging Vision identified those areas, or 'nodes', in the central area which provide both significant challenges and real opportunities for putting the aims of the Vision (see page 3) into action.
- 9.2 The Framework Concept (see page 5) has been refined from that concept plan in the light of the consultation feedback and highlights eight action 'nodes' across the central area:
- Alencon 'Place' and The Malls – 'the place to arrive'
 - Church Street – 'the discovery route'
 - Top of Town – 'the old town quarter'
 - Town Parks – 'the green fringe'
 - Basing View – 'the 21st Century business location'
 - South View (proposed housing) – 'living in town'
 - Eastrop 'Place' – 'the place to connect'
 - The Learning Campus – 'the place for learning and skills'
- 9.3 In addition to the above, consideration of the consultations and feedback identified a number of more strategic issues or areas of concern to the wider central area of Basingstoke.
- 9.4 The Action Plan that accompanies this Vision, therefore, includes not only projects and ideas relating to the 'nodes' identified above but also to more strategic studies and policies that relate to the town centre as a whole.

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