

Agenda Item No:	<b>10</b>	
Committee:	<b>Cabinet</b>	
Date:	<b>9 January 2020</b>	
Report Title:	<b>Growing Fenland - Town Reports</b>	

## **1 Purpose / Summary**

- The purpose of this report is to outline the process used to produce the four Growing Fenland town reports attached and to request Cabinet approval for the reports to be tabled at future Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) committee meetings.

## **2 Key issues**

- Following a successful pilot scheme undertaken in St Neots, the CPCA Board committed to provide funding to create a masterplan for growth for each market town within the CPCA area.
- With the aim of bringing jobs, infrastructure and growth to the Fenland area, the 'Growing Fenland' masterplans will also enable each of our towns to become and remain "vibrant and thriving places" in their own right whilst helping to boost the local and regional economy.
- It will be imperative that the Growing Fenland work compliments other projects being delivered in the local area to minimise duplication and ensure maximum impact in the local community.
- The Growing Fenland project has the potential to drive a re-branding exercise for the Fenland area following success in other districts, where it has helped to drive economic growth.
- Funding opportunities will be sought from the CPCA and other sources to deliver the projects outlined in the masterplans. This will include staff resources to manage the projects and link to other initiatives being delivered in the local area.

## **3 Recommendations**

- Cabinet members are requested to approve the progression of the reports to future CCC and CPCA meetings as outlined in the main report to enable projects to be delivered through external funding opportunities.

<b>Wards Affected</b>	All Fenland Wards
<b>Forward Plan Reference</b>	
<b>Portfolio Holder(s)</b>	Cllr Chris Boden - Leader of the Council Cllr Ian Benney - Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth
<b>Report Originator(s)</b>	Paul Medd - Chief Executive Carol Pilson - Corporate Director Peter Catchpole - Corporate Director Justin Wingfield - Corporate Director Jo Blackmore - Executive Officer
<b>Contact Officer(s)</b>	Paul Medd - Chief Executive Carol Pilson - Corporate Director Peter Catchpole - Corporate Director Justin Wingfield - Corporate Director Jo Blackmore - Executive Officer
<b>Background Paper(s)</b>	<a href="#">Cambridgeshire &amp; Peterborough Combined Authority Board Meeting minutes - 28.03.18</a> Appendix A: 'Growing Fenland - Chatteris' Town Report Appendix B: 'Growing Fenland - March' Town Report Appendix C: 'Growing Fenland - Whittlesey' Town Report Appendix D: 'Growing Fenland - Wisbech' Town Report

## **1 Background / introduction**

- 1.1 Following a successful pilot scheme undertaken in St Neots, the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Board committed to provide funding to create a masterplan for growth for each market towns within the CPCA area (as recorded in the actions from the [CPCA Board meeting held on 28.03.18](#)).
- 1.1 With the aim of bringing jobs, infrastructure and growth the Fenland area, the masterplans would also enable each of our towns to become and remain "vibrant and thriving places" in their own right whilst helping to boost the local and regional economy.
- 1.2 A commitment of £50k was made by the CPCA to produce a masterplan for each town. In Fenland, funding was originally provided for Chatteris, March and Whittlesey only (£150k in total) due the ongoing Wisbech 2020 Vision work. However, a decision was later made to include Wisbech in the process and a further £50k was committed to the Fenland project.
- 1.3 The master planning project was given a working title of 'Growing Fenland' which linked the proposed growth of the local economy to our important agricultural heritage.
- 1.4 In August 2018, a procurement exercise was undertaken to appoint economic specialists to help deliver the Growing Fenland project alongside a team of FDC officers. Metro Dynamics were appointed having demonstrated substantial masterplanning experience. They also had in depth knowledge of the local area having been the lead consultant for producing the [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review \(CPIER\)](#).

## **2 Governance, Engagement and Research**

- 2.1 Town Teams were convened for each market town, including representatives from Town, District and County Councils as well as community and business representatives, and students from local high schools.
- 2.2 The Town Teams were asked about the strengths in their towns and what improvements could be made. Metro Dynamics also carried out extensive research and data collection in relation to various factors including:
  - Population demographics
  - Retail information (including vacancy rates on the High Street)
  - Transport connectivity and commuter information
  - Occupation categories
  - Housing numbers and planned developments
  - Access to the countryside
  - Educational attainment
  - Job opportunities
  - Health stats
- 2.3 The information was collated to produce an interim report for each of the towns (with the exception of Wisbech) which were discussed with each town team.
- 2.4 Once the interim reports were agreed and published, public consultation was carried out through face to face interaction at public events and through online surveys with the exception of Wisbech (due to ongoing consultation already being carried out as part of

the 'I Love Wisbech' project). Stakeholders were also engaged through themed meetings and telephone interviews.

2.5 The results of the consultation were used to further tailor the reports to ensure that they reflected the views of the local community.

2.6 The final reports are attached in appendices A to D.

### **3 Overarching Strategic Growing Fenland Report**

3.1 In addition to the four Growing Fenland town reports, Metro Dynamics also produced an overarching strategic report which outlined proposals to tackle some of the issues that are common to more than one Fenland town. This report is an independent thinkpiece by Metro Dynamics and will be submitted to the CPCA for their consideration. It will be tabled under a separate agenda item for Cabinet to consider.

3.2 The themes included in the Overarching Strategic Growing Fenland report are:

- Infrastructure, transport and housing
- People, education and health
- Jobs and enterprise
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3.3 Proposals include large scale projects which are already in train (e.g. Wisbech Garden Town, A47 dualling) along with new ideas such as a Health Action Area. The report also recommends the implementation of a Mayoral Task Force which would have the drive and resources to spearhead the delivery of these large scale and wide reaching projects.

### **4 Links to other Projects**

4.1 The Growing Fenland work links to a number of initiatives being delivered in the Fenland and/or CPCA area. These include:

- CPIER
- CPCA Skills Strategy
- CPCA Local Industrial Strategy
- CPCA/FDC Wisbech Garden Town proposal
- FDC Economic Growth Agenda
- FDC Culture Strategy
- FDC led Future High Street Fund proposal (March only)
- CCC Think Communities Project
- Town Council projects
- Various community projects

4.2 It will be imperative that the Growing Fenland work dovetails and compliments the projects outlined above to minimise duplication and to ensure maximum impact in the local community.

4.3 The Growing Fenland project has the potential to drive a re-branding exercise for the Fenland area which has been successful in other districts where it has helped to drive economic growth. However it is recognised that this would require additional funding, capacity and external expertise

## **5 Consideration by Committees**

5.1 The individual town reports were tabled at Town Council meetings as outlined below (please click on the links to access the meeting minutes). Reports were either approved at the meeting or follow up emails were received stating that the reports had been agreed in the weeks following the meeting:

- Chatteris Town Council - [1 October 2019](#)
- March Town Council - [7 October 2019](#)
- Whittlesey Town Council - [9 October 2019](#)

5.2 The 'Growing Fenland - Wisbech' report was approved by Cllr Sam Hoy and Cllr Steve Tierney following a face-to-face meeting and electronic circulation

5.3 Following today's meeting, the Growing Fenland reports will be considered by Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) and CPCA committees as follows:

- CCC Communities & Partnership Committee - 23 January 2020
- CPCA Board Meeting - 29 January 2020

Assuming approval at the above committees, funding opportunities will be sought from the CPCA and other providers to deliver the projects outlined in the masterplans. This will include staff resources to manage the projects and link to other initiatives being delivered in the local area.

## **6 Effect on corporate objectives**

6.1 The corporate objectives which link to the Growing Fenland project area as follows:

### **Communities**

- Support vulnerable members of our community
- Promote health & wellbeing for all
- Work with partners to promote Fenland through culture and heritage

### **Environment**

- Work with partners and the community on projects that improve the environment and our street scene
- Work with partners to keep people safe in their neighbourhoods by reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and promoting social cohesion

### **Economy**

- Attract new businesses, jobs and opportunities whilst supporting our existing businesses in Fenland
- Promote and enable housing growth, economic growth and regeneration across Fenland
- Promote and lobby for infrastructure improvements across the district

## **7 Conclusions**

7.1 The Growing Fenland Town Reports outline a number of proposals to drive economic growth whilst celebrating the unique character and strengths of each individual area.

7.2 Fenland towns will be improved through attracting external funding to deliver the outlined projects whilst linking with other initiatives being delivered in the local area.

7.3 The Growing Fenland plans will help to deliver many of the Council's corporate objectives as well as a number of targets set out within the [CPCA's Business Plan for 2019/20](#).



G R O W I N G  
F E N L A N D

**Chatteris:**  
An Aspirational Community  
Final Report



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## Introduction

### What is Growing Fenland?

The recently published Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER) identified that within the Combined Authority there are three distinct sub-economies. There is the Greater Cambridge economy, which includes the many towns where people commute from into Cambridge. There is the Greater Peterborough economy, and its surroundings. But in an important classification, there is also the fen economy, which includes much of our district of Fenland, as well as parts of East Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.

A lot of strategy has historically focused on making cities work well, and assuming the rest will follow. But because our economy is separate, and in some ways quite isolated with sub-standard transport links, this approach won't work for us. We need a strategy for each of our towns, which helps them prosper, and delivers best quality of life for people who live here. This must acknowledge where we have links to other towns or cities, while seeking to build strength in our places. The Combined Authority is committed to doubling economic output across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by 2040 – to do this, all areas are going to have to succeed, not just the Cambridge economy.

To make this happen, following the CPIER analysis, the Combined Authority has decided to support a process of creating market town plans for each town in our district – Chatteris, March, Whittlesey, and Wisbech. These plans will be used to bid for funding from the Combined Authority and other funding providers, based on the vision for the town.

To develop these plans, each town has established a town team, consisting of representatives from business, local government, schools, and others. The town team has looked at life in the town from every angle, and has developed a vision for each town. They have also worked on ideas which could make a real difference.

The Growing Fenland project tries to capture a balance. On the one hand, each of these towns is unique, with its own particular opportunities, as well as challenges. On the other hand, there are some areas where, by working together, we can have more of an impact. Therefore, we are publishing four separate reports for each of the towns, but under the same banner – and if you read all four, you will see some crossover.

### The Overall Strategy for Fenland

Because some of the challenges we face are common across all four towns, we have published alongside this a Fenland-wide strategy to set out what some of the real “game changers” will be for our district. They key ideas coming forward from this are:

1. Nene River Barrier
2. Opportunity for full bus franchising





3. A47 Dualling
4. Wisbech Garden Town
5. A New Deal for Education
6. A New Partnership for Skills
7. Early Years Support
8. A Health Action Area
9. An Advanced Manufacturing Launchpad
10. Cambridgeshire Jobs Compact
11. A Mayoral Implementation Taskforce

It is at this level that we hope to tackle challenges around some of the bigger, people-based factors, such as health and education, where the opportunities from acting at a district level are much greater.

### **The process to produce this report**

To produce this report, we have gone through several stages of information gathering to ensure our recommendations will work for Chatteris. These are:

- 1) Data collection, using a variety of sources.
- 2) Meetings with the Chatteris town team, which has had representation from the town and district councils, businesses, and educational establishments.
- 3) Public meetings to allow residents to express views on the town, and ideas as they have developed
- 4) Interim reports, which set out a summary of key ideas for the town
- 5) Continued consultation and an online survey to refine and develop ideas, and
- 6) Production of final reports, to generate support for our plans and leverage in funding from the Combined Authority and other funding providers.

## Chatteris – an overview of the town

### A Committed Community

A strong sense of community spirit is a defining feature of Chatteris. This can be seen most obviously at some of the bigger community events – like the Christmas light switch on, the midsummer festival, or last year’s Remembrance Parade – but also in the many interest groups and clubs we have in our town. Our local businesses are also very committed to our community – with two business groupings (Chatteris in Business, and the Chatteris Business Cluster).

Our population is growing – having increased by 5.4% (566 people) since 2012<sup>1</sup> – with some new developments around the fringes of our town. This is forecast to continue, though our population will continue to age – while over-65s are 20% of the population now, this is expected to rise to 25% in 2036<sup>2</sup>.

***“We’ve learned to stand on our own two feet” – Chatteris resident***

### A Struggling High Street

However, the High Street at the heart of our town has seen a decline in recent years. Local retailers have noticed a big decline in footfall, particularly since Budgens left the town. The weekly markets have become smaller, though committed traders remain. Banks have also moved away, now only visiting with temporary pop-up shop style provision. As the two major supermarkets in the town (Aldi and Jack’s) are out of the centre of the town, people use these more often, and don’t come into the town – we have also seen (like much of the UK) some of the damaging effects of increased online shopping.

***“The High Street is dying off” – Chatteris Business***

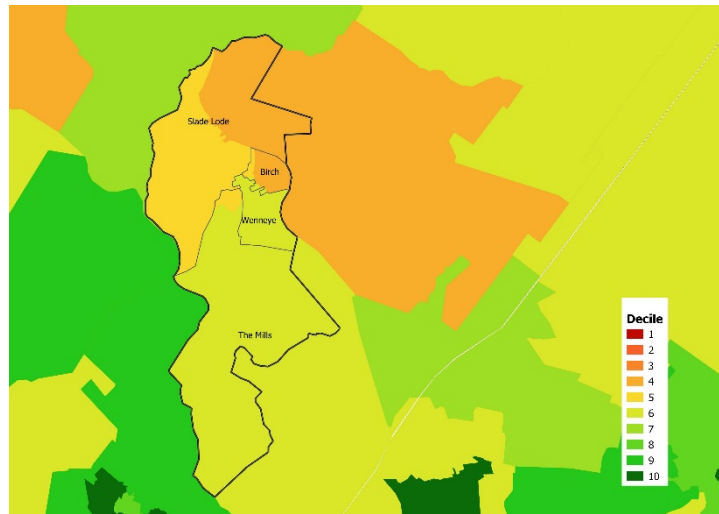
Some residents have perceived these changes to the High Street to reflect increasing levels of deprivation in the town. This is not necessarily correct, however – the evidence shows Chatteris is about average for a town in terms of levels of deprivation.

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<sup>1</sup> ONS population estimates

<sup>2</sup> Cambridgeshire County Council Population Forecasts

## Chatteris – Index of Multiple Deprivation



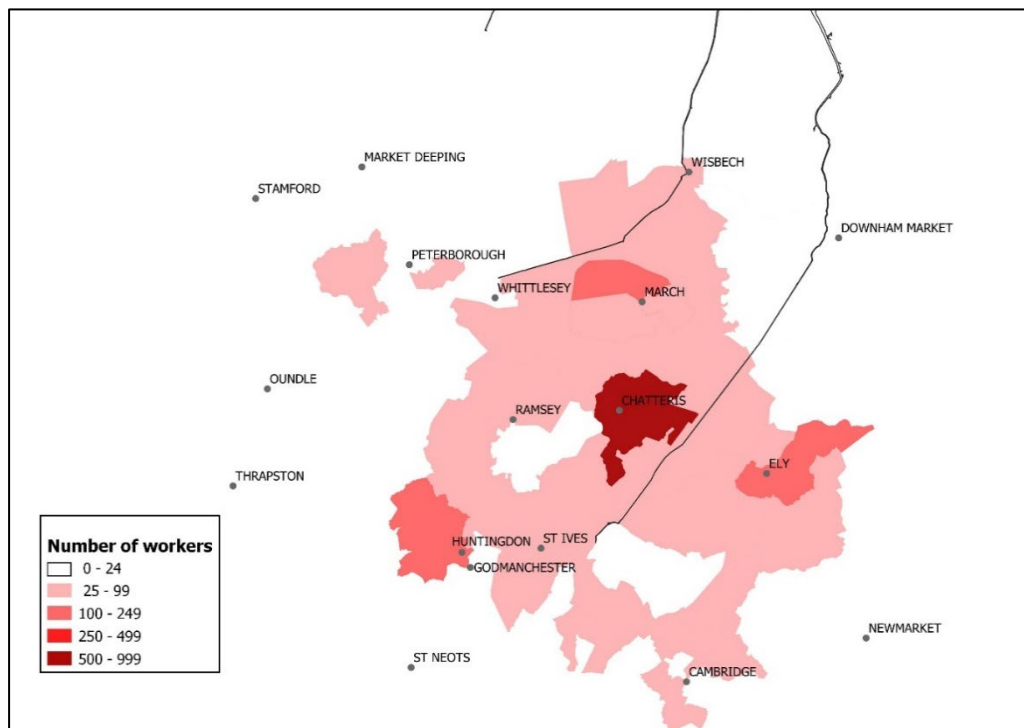
Source: Analysis of Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government Data (2015).

While the proportion of households in poverty (20.3% after housing costs) is above Cambridgeshire levels, it is about average for England and Wales.

## A central location, but poor transport connectivity

Chatteris “looks in all directions” – with workers commuting to March, Ely, Huntingdon, and to a lesser extent, Cambridge and Peterborough.

Where Chatteris Residents Work (Census 2011)



Source: Analysis of Census 2011 data

This central location is a real strength for the town, but currently public transport options let Chatteris down. Buses are infrequent, and some key destinations (such as Peterborough) require changing, leading to lengthy journeys (over two hours). This makes commuting via public transport an impossibility in many ways. As a result, Chatteris is very car dependent – 74.7% of Chatteris workers use their cars to get to work, compared to 60.4% for Cambridgeshire and 57.0% for England.

Levels of cycling to work are also low (2.5%), with no good cycle lanes out of the town. Cars drive very quickly down our local A-roads, and they are very exposed to the wind, meaning it can feel unsafe to travel by bike.

More positively, stops at our closest station (Manea) have increased, meaning it is easier to get to Cambridge and Peterborough by rail than before (though we need to improve our links to Manea station).

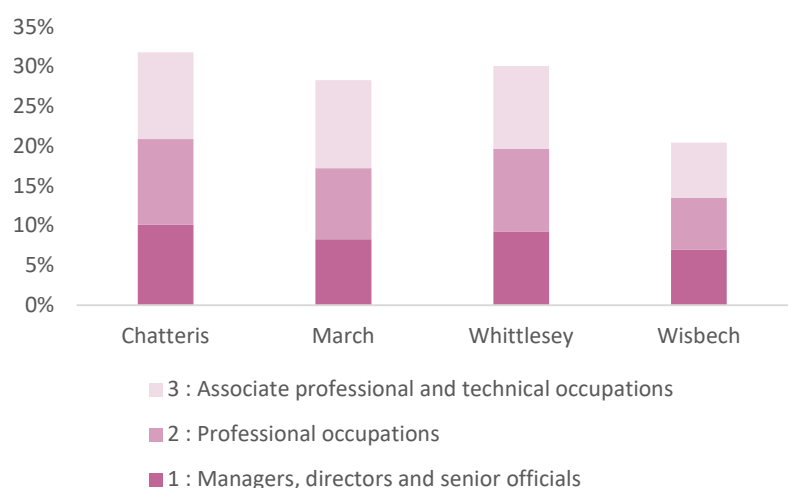
**“Overwhelmingly, the use of public transport was for non-work related activity such as shopping, leisure trips or medical appointments” – Chatteris Community Plan 2018**

### A highly skilled, professional class

Of the four market towns in Fenland, Chatteris has the largest proportions of residents working in the top three occupational categories. 20% of the local employment falls in the “Professional, Scientific, and Technical” sector (ONS Business Register and Employment Survey).

These jobs are provided by some of the high-end businesses around the town, including the emerging Advanced Manufacturing Cluster of high-end firms.

Similarly, 17.9% of Chatteris residents have degree-level qualifications – well above the Fenland average of 14.8%.



Source: Annual Population Survey

### Difficulties in bringing forward development, but affordable housing

There has been some building of new properties in Chatteris recently, however the general trend over the last fifteen years has been downward, with only a temporary recovery following the financial crisis.

### *Housing completions in Chatteris, year ending March*



*Source: Cambridgeshire County Council*

What is behind this, when plenty of land has been allocated for housing in the Local Plan? The big issue is low land values, meaning there is less of an ‘uplift’ for a developer who wants to build. This also makes it challenging to get developer support for some of the infrastructure needed to build more houses – like roads and utilities. In the longer term, we may find we are also constrained by flood zones.

However, this does also feed through to lower house prices, which are an attractive factor to people – in the recent Chatteris Community Plan consultation, 234 people reported that they moved to Chatteris because housing costs were lower than elsewhere.

### **Many outdoor activities, but difficulties accessing the countryside**

There are many opportunities for outdoor pursuits in and around Chatteris, including fishing, boating, and walking. This is a real strength of the town which we can and should shout more loudly about. The recent Pocket Park initiative at Little Acre Fen is a great new space, which has had community involvement in its creation.

However, there are some challenges in accessing the local countryside. Generally, the number of rights of way is somewhat limited. In a recent consultation “access to more parks and green spaces” was highlighted as the biggest priority for local residents.

This may be connected to some health outcomes in Chatteris being worse than national and local averages:

		Healthy Eating Adults	Obese Adults
Chatteris		24.8%	25.9%
Cambridgeshire		32.4%	20.9%
England	28.7%	24.1%	

## Education – a good, and improving picture

The town’s high school – the Cromwell Community College – is a real asset for the town. It has a good reputation, and by September 2020 will be the county’s first state school offering education all the way through from four to eighteen years. Rates of students achieving 5 A\*-Cs in their GCSEs, at 42% is above the national average of 40%. 97.1% of A-levels which are started are completed, above the England average of 95.4%.



However, the town’s primary schools are performing slightly less well, with one being identified by Ofsted as requiring improvement at the most recent inspection, with only 33% of pupils meeting the expected standard (Cambridgeshire – 61%, England – 64%) – though these are improving.

## Chatteris – what residents are telling us

Our work consulting the community brought out the following key themes.

### *Likes*

People mostly express affection for the community spirit, and the aesthetic appeal of the town, with comments like “Sense of community” being common. One resident noted that the affordability of housing was an attractive feature of the town, something we have picked up elsewhere, while another commented the town was “positioned well” – again relating to feedback we have heard about the beneficial geography of the town.

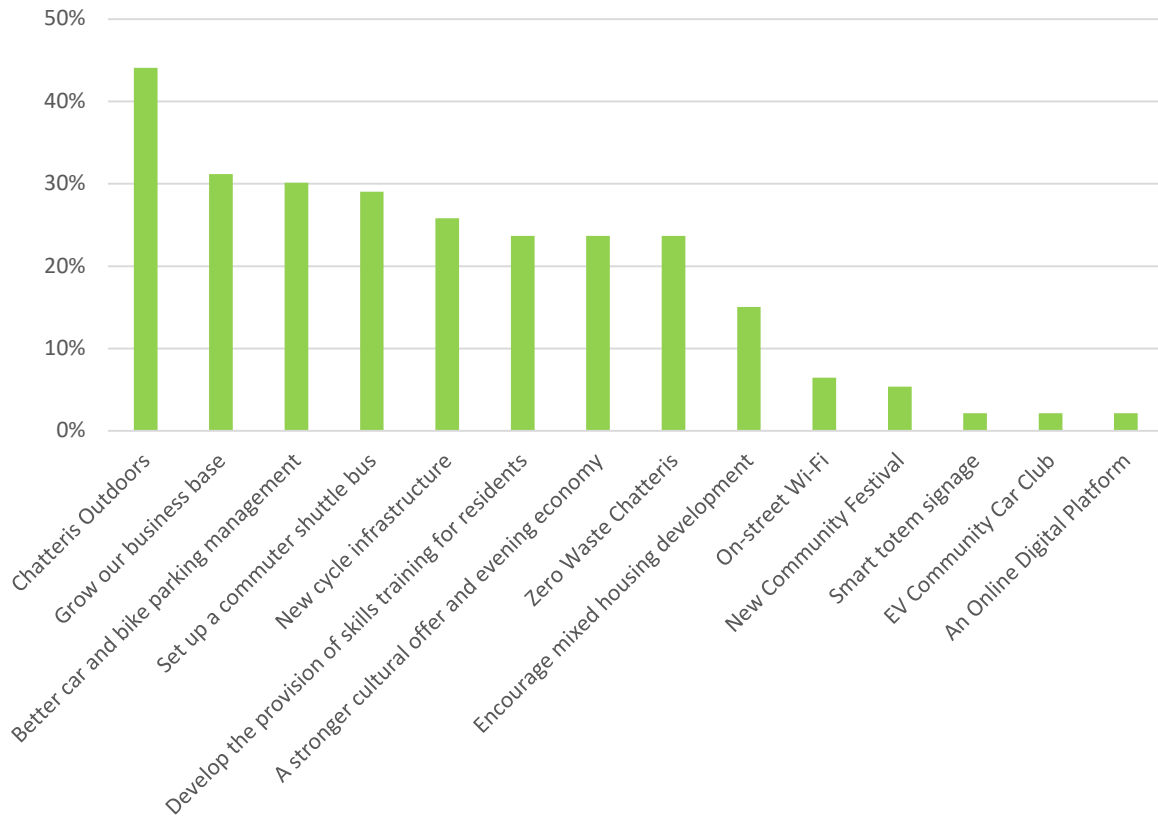
### *Dislikes*

These comments fell into a few categories. The High Street was the predominant concern: “No decent shops”, “demise of high street”, and “Could do with some good shops” were typical. Public transport was another major issue, people feeling the bus service had got “worse and worse”, and linking this to isolation. One commented that there was a real need for more cycleways. Finally, there were also those who felt the town was overlooked relative to other towns, with comments such as “It has not developed as much as surrounding Fenland towns”, and “lack of investment”.

### *Improvements*

This gave a very wide range of responses – with no clear agreement. Again, the high street was the most often mentioned. Improved doctor’s services, support for youth activities, police services, leisure services (including a concern about selling the swimming pool), and local transport were all mentioned.

### *Favourite ideas from the interim report*



*Source: Analysis of Fenland District Council data. Height of bars shows the proportion of residents who chose an idea in their top three.*

Clearly, the Chatteris Outdoors concept was the most popular of the ideas given, with almost half of respondents putting it in their top three. Many of the transportation-themed interventions were also popular, as well as those which focused on business and skills – helping our residents to access opportunity. We have taken forward the key ideas identified for development.



## Chatteris – A vision for an aspirational community

**Chatteris brings together high-tech manufacturing, glorious countryside, nationally significant agriculture, and a new national museum in one place.** Very few towns of our size can make such claims. We have grown our own industries, learned independence and worked hard to create a successful town.

Now, we need to combine these strengths to turbo charge our town and grow our prosperity, providing good jobs, excellent education and green access. It is time for a step change in how our town works, thinks about itself, and is thought about by others. We need to show people that Chatteris is the place to be to start a business, buy a home, and bring up a family.

At the centre of our vision for Chatteris is that it will be home to **an aspirational community**.

This captures two things. Firstly, we want our town to be full of aspirers, those who want to succeed, flourish, and make a difference. We want those who live here to have opportunities – and take them. We want to see high quality career pathways, a variety of activities, and excellent schools, making our town attractive for young families and entrepreneurs looking for a place to live.

But secondly, we want our town to be a community. Community spirit is already one of Chatteris' key strengths – we want this to continue to develop and grow. We want to see a bustling high street where people bump into each other, where cultural events give people the opportunity to throw themselves into the life of the community, and where people never feel lonely or unwelcome.

## Nine key proposals for Chatteris

We have nine areas where we know that interventions will make a transformative difference in Chatteris. We recognise that not all of these will be immediately deliverable. Some are areas where an immediate funding boost can help get things moving – others will take time. But over time, we need all of these to come to fruition for our town to prosper.

These ideas are:

### 1. Grow our business base

An Advanced Manufacturing Launchpad and a potential Agri-tech Launchpad facility with scope to support and grow our existing businesses and increased resource for economic development will help us bring more high quality employment to the town.

### 2. Develop the provision of skills training for residents

Local provision associated with industrial development, adult courses, and connections to other skills providers will make sure members of our aspirational community can access the opportunities on offer.

### 3. Promote mixed housing development

To grow and develop our town, we need places for people to live at different stages of their lives. Mixed housing development, along with support for necessary infrastructure to make it happen, will bring people to our town.

### 4. Set up a commuter shuttle bus

Chatteris suffers from poor public transport provision, particularly to centres of employment. A shuttle bus connecting into key transport nodes on the rail network (Ely, Manea) will help us connect residents to opportunity.

### 5. Develop the Chatteris Outdoors platform

Chatteris Outdoors was our most popular idea in the interim reports. We will improve access to and use of our countryside, and develop this as a key attractor for our town.

### 6. Develop a stronger cultural offer and evening economy

High streets are changing, we need to adapt. By encouraging business to trial early evening opening, and encouraging more creative uses in the town, we will restore the popularity of our high street.

### 7. Create new cycle infrastructure

People avoid active travel in the town because it is seen as dangerous. Links to Somersham and Ely will encourage people to exercise more, tackling our town's health challenges.

### 8. Provide better car and bike parking management

To make our high street more attractive and encourage cycle commuting, we need to better manage parking facilities.

## **9. Create a community project funding pot**

Our community needs to take ownership of the town to drive improvements. By creating a small fund, we can support local projects, including improvements to the visual amenity of the town.

We unpack each of these below in a summary case for making the investment.

# 1. Grow our Business Base

We have excellent businesses. We need to support them, and attract other companies to make Chatteris their home.

## Strategic Case

### **The Advanced Manufacturing Launchpad**

The **advanced manufacturing launchpad** will build upon the presence of Metalcraft, a large business working in the nuclear and medical sectors. This can become the “anchor” by which to attract smaller companies to base themselves in the area, looking to tie into the manufacturing process here. By doing so we can create a dense web of supply chains, to create an innovation ecosystem here. This will increase efficiency, create jobs, and raise the profile of our town.

The mechanism we propose for this idea is to provide capital grants to firms in these sectors which can prove their offering qualifies as advanced manufacturing, and which offer high-paid, high-quality jobs. This will ensure funds are allocated to strengthening the local economy of the town.

This idea is of such significance that it has been recognised as one of the key strategic actions for Fenland District as a whole. This is because it will significantly raise the jobs profile of the district, and, by working with other manufacturing companies across the district, will help other manufacturing firms move up the value chain.

### **Support for our Agri-Tech businesses**

The land around Chatteris is of extremely high quality, and generates a significant proportion of the vegetables eaten by UK consumers. “Agri-Tech” is the big opportunity to drive up the value of this sector. But wafer-thin margins make it difficult for agricultural businesses to invest in better technology. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) states a key intervention as “expansion of the Eastern Agri-tech Research, Development and Prototyping Growth Initiative, enabling direct funding support to more firms”<sup>3</sup> and looks to develop an Agri-Tech launchpad facility or facilities within the Combined Authority.

We need to support our local agricultural businesses in applying the latest technologies and encouraging engagement with existing support and funding initiatives, such as the Agri-Tech fund. We know that with the right approaches we can improve crop yields by tailoring the application of water and fertiliser at the crop level. There have also been successful examples elsewhere of support for glass houses and water management to allow higher value crops, such as fruit and flowers, to be grown.

### **More proactive economic development to bring companies to new sites**

To bring businesses in, we need to tell them why Chatteris is a great place to invest. To do that, we need greater investment in economic development. The Combined Authority has set out plans to

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818886/Cambridge\\_SINGLE\\_PAGE.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818886/Cambridge_SINGLE_PAGE.pdf) p42

create a Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Growth Company, to support the growth of business in the district. This needs to promote Chatteris with the following key themes:

- A highly skilled workforce
- A network of leading companies in the advanced manufacturing and agricultural sectors
- A high quality of life offer, with good countryside and location
- Available land on which to develop

Related to this last point, we note there are key growth opportunities on the Jack's site, and land around the South Fens Business Park, which are primed for commercial development. We want this to come forward, in a way that doesn't take people away from our high street, but rather **creates high value jobs for people to then spend money on the high street.**

## Financial Case

The **advanced manufacturing launchpad** will, by creating new commercial sites on the launchpad, increase local business rates. As is being trialled at Alconbury Weald, it may be possible to split these benefits in order to include provision for marketing the site and attracting more companies. This will also help to offset the cost of small capital grants to move companies to the area.

**Support for Agri-Tech business** will involve finance on a project by project basis to develop key elements of infrastructure. This conversation needs to be taken forward with local agri-businesses to understand what can drive most value without causing damaging environmental impact.

**More proactive economic development** requires funding for extra staff for the District Council to promote the offer of the area.

## Management Case

We look to the Combined Authority to lead on the work on the first two points, as it takes forward work following the Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) process. Fenland District Council will lead on more proactive economic development, but we will use our local resources to frame the Chatteris offer in a way which can be clearly and easily promoted to interested parties.

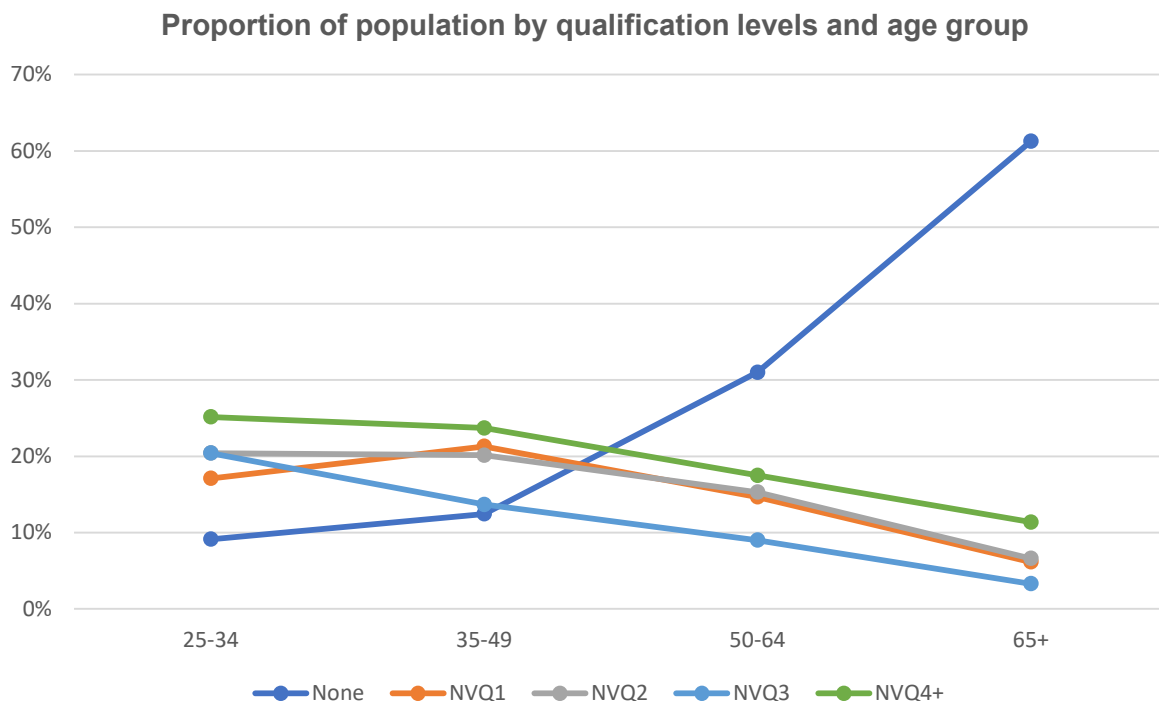
## 2. Develop the provision of skills training for residents

### Strategic Case

Attracting new companies to base themselves in Chatteris will help us provide highly skilled and well-paid employment. However, this, in and of itself, will not be enough to guarantee jobs for local people – if they lack the skills to take up this employment. Therefore, it is vital that we find ways of improving skills provision to our residents, so that they can share in the opportunities coming forward in the town.

Firstly, this means bringing new local provision associated with industrial development. The advanced manufacturing launchpad has training facilities “designed in” alongside a commitment from the companies involved to providing support for local people (particularly those entering the workforce) to get the training they need. The LIS includes a plan to “Create a Skills, Talent and Apprenticeship Hub: connecting employers, providers, and learners”. Our plans for provision on the launchpad must be embedded in this programme, and by working with the Cromwell Community College we can ensure there are good connections with our young people as they come to the end of their schooling.

We will also work with existing training providers in order to create more short courses within the town. These will include adult education courses to help those in older age brackets upskill. We have identified that skills levels in the town are lower among those of older age brackets – with more than three in ten of those aged 50-64 having no qualifications. At the same time people are working longer.



Source: Analysis of ONS Annual Population Survey

In addition to all of this, we realise that there are other excellent further and higher education facilities in our area, and that we will never be able to (nor should we aspire to) provide all the training which our people need within the town – however, efforts should focus on providing a broad mix of academic and vocational qualification pathways which will provide a much greater choice, currently lacking in the town. Other key providers include the College of West Anglia, Cambridge University, iMET at Alconbury Weald, and the forthcoming Technical University at Peterborough.

This means that, as discussions around the approach to transport in the district are taken forward, including the overall approach to bus services, **a top priority must be securing fast access to key local training centres**. Part of this will be met through a shuttle bus to key transport hubs such as Manea and Ely, from where it is possible to get a direct train to either Cambridge or Peterborough (see proposal 6).

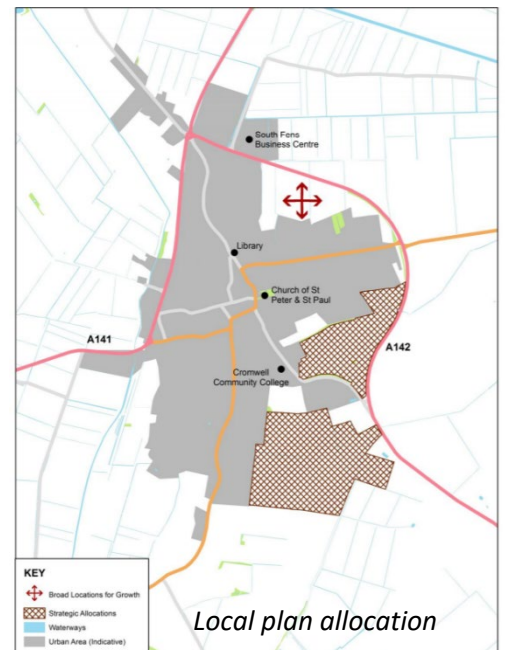
### 3. Promote mixed housing development

#### Strategic Case

We know that to grow our aspirational community, and keep presenting opportunities to new people, we need to give people desirable places to live. Different people will be looking for different things – young people may focus on affordability (already a strength of our town), while there is a need to begin to promote “executive housing” for those looking to move up to a more luxurious offer.

There are two key ways we can start to develop more housing in the district:

- 1) Densification.** This means building more in and around the town centre. This will help to support our town centre, by bringing more people to live in it. We propose a programme of engagement with shop owners about the space over shops to understand what options there are to improve residential provision here. Where retail units have remained vacant for a long time, we will look to work to develop residential units.
- 2) Building around the town.** Key sites around Chatteris are mostly to the East (see local plan map). Some of these have been optioned for a long time. We ask the Combined Authority for some capital funding to help move on the infrastructure requirements to make these a reality, in negotiation with developers.



These things can all help, though we acknowledge that many of the challenges in bringing forward the housing we need comes down to economic and environmental factors, over which we often have little control. Developments struggle to come forward because the uncompetitive nature of housing delivery means big developers often aren’t interested in areas like ours where returns are lower. Chatteris is also surrounded by flood zone 3 land – which in the long run will prevent us from developing.

Our aims around growing our business base will increase demand, and therefore help tackle the viability issue. But we also recognise – as set out in the strategy paper – that new approaches to housing are needed. The innovations in housing being brought about through the Wisbech Garden Town programme – most notably modular build (where costs are lower) and sophisticated flood modelling – will help our housing market to pick up, enabling us to grow our aspirational community.

#### Financial Case

To establish costs involved in allowing infrastructure to develop for housing sites will require convening developers around proposals for specific sites. This will require developers being willing to share the viability calculations they have done to conclude that a site cannot come forward at the present time – to understand how much of this is tied up in delivery of required infrastructure. From this point, it can be established whether a small capital grant or loan will enable a site to come forward.



## Management Case

This work will have to be overseen by Fenland District Council (FDC) as the planning authority. This requires partnership working with developers, which will take time to develop. FDC will also be able to work across the towns to ensure that the lessons learnt through work on other projects, most notably the Wisbech Garden Town, can be shared with Chatteris to help remove the other barriers to development within the town.

## 4. Set up a commuter shuttle bus

### Strategic Case

At the moment, public transport is used almost exclusively for non-work travel in Chatteris. At the time of the last census (2011) less than 2% of the employed population in Chatteris used the bus to get to work – compared to almost 75% who used the private car. This is unsustainable into the long term, and discourages younger people from moving to our town (as a shrinking proportion of young people now drive). A service which focused on employment destinations (Ely, Huntingdon) or other public transport nodes (Manea station) could make using public transport on a day to day basis more viable for our commuter class.

This would be a shuttle bus service (ideally an electric vehicle) to connect with trains to Cambridge and Peterborough at working hours. In Chatteris, for example, a minibus could leave the town at 6.45, dropping people off at Manea at 7, to catch the 07.08 train to Peterborough. It would then return to the town to pick up another load for the 07.39 Manea train to Cambridge. It would do one final run, this time to Ely, to drop people off for the 08.33 service to Cambridge, or the 8.16 to Peterborough.

### Financial Case

The cost of the vehicle for this scheme will depend upon what model is chosen (see below). If the option chosen is to work with existing operators, the capital cost will be zero, but there may be an ongoing revenue cost in the form of a subsidy.

Because some parents choose to send their children to sixth form in Cambridge, there should automatically be some demand for the service – as it will provide an easy link to travel into Cambridge in time for morning lessons. This will help improve the commercial viability of the service.

### Management Case

There are a few approaches to providing a shuttle bus in the town which should be considered:

Approach	Benefits	Disbenefits
Work with existing operators to provide the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Doesn't require the procurement of new infrastructure</li> <li>- Could be a means of "testing" the popularity of the service without incurring sunk cost</li> <li>- There is the potential to build the shuttle into existing routes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Existing operators have little incentive to co-operate if they do not wish to</li> <li>- The fare to the user is likely to be higher (or a greater ongoing subsidy will be required).</li> </ul>
Provide own service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complete control over the route and timings</li> <li>- Ability to "brand" the bus as a Chatteris commuter shuttle, to show people clearly how the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May require navigating legal issues in relation to providing municipal bus services in the Bus Services Act 2017 – particularly if the service is run on a commercial basis. This could be navigated by providing the bus on a</li> </ul>

	service is meant to be used	Community Transport (i.e. free) basis.
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Which option is preferable largely depends upon the policy context. At the present time, it may be best to open up discussions with the current operator in the area, Stagecoach. However, if as the Fenland Strategy paper recommends, bus franchising is taken forward in Fenland, it will be possible to designate this route as one which needs to be provided – either on its own, or as part of a package of bus routes for the area.

We are also exploring this idea for Wisbech as part of establishing immediate connectivity to transport hubs (Wisbech being the other Fenland market town without a railway station), therefore, if the option is to provide the services ourselves, running these two services in tandem will provide economies of scale, reducing the overall cost for both.

## 5. Develop the Chatteris Outdoors platform

Chatteris Outdoors was the most popular idea with the public. It involves both a) developing the provision of outdoor amenity to residents of the town, and b) using our links into the countryside to develop a real selling proposition for the town.

### Strategic Case

For place branding to be successful, it needs to offer three key things:

1. A unique identifier of a place
2. Something which builds on genuine strengths – i.e. has a grounding in reality
3. Something which future ambitions for the place can also be tied to.



*An example of what the platform could look like*

**The Chatteris Outdoors brand does all of these.**

Firstly, it identifies something unique about Chatteris. The outdoor environment is a key attractive feature of the fens, and distinguishes Chatteris from market towns in other parts of the country. It is also not something which other towns in the area have particularly sought to capitalise upon in any branding (heritage is a much more common angle) and therefore, it gives Chatteris a unique selling point.

It is also grounded in reality, and seeks to build on what is there. Many of these activities are based around our waterways, including **angling**, **boating**, and **canoeing**.

While **cycling** is represented in Chatteris by the local cycling club, roads are too busy and unsafe for families to cycle, and cycling to work lags behind national levels. We will kickstart a cycling revolution in Chatteris by turning the old railway to Somersham into a cycle path, extending the current bike path from Ely – Sutton – Chatteris, and creating new cycle parking facilities in town.

There are **walking** opportunities at the new pocket park in Little Acre Fen, and many areas around the town (though accessibility is often a challenge, and we need to promote these opportunities more). **Birdwatching** is a related opportunity at the nearby Block Fen where a Nature Reserve exists, and work is ongoing by Cambridgeshire County Council to develop wetland habitats.

And there are already opportunities for more adventurous sports, such as **skydiving** at the North London Skydiving Centre.

## Financial case

The key element of this, from a cost point of view, will be the online digital platform. It is estimated that this will cost between £5k and £10k to set up (drawing on experience in a nearby and similar size town, Ramsey). If this can then be run on a volunteer basis, this will keep running costs to a minimum. There will be a need for ad hoc developer support to stop the site become clunky.

## Management case

The overall oversight for establishing the website should be with Fenland District Council, who can ensure that the website is of sufficient quality and ties into other developments going on through the Growing Fenland programme. The plan is then to hand it over to volunteers within the town who can manage and run the site, ensuring it also promotes other goings on within the town.

## 6. Develop a stronger cultural offer and evening economy

### Strategic Case

What people are looking for from their towns is changing. High streets are no longer a place people *need* to go to – online shopping and supermarkets have put an end to that. The high streets which thrive are those where people *want* to go there. That means giving them things to do, and places to dwell in and see friends.

This is especially true of the young. A recent report by the events website Eventbrite found that: “this generation [millennials] not only highly values experiences, but they are increasingly spending time and money on them: from concerts and social events to athletic pursuits, to cultural experiences and events of all kinds. For this group, happiness isn’t as focused on possessions or career status. Living a meaningful, happy life is about creating, sharing and capturing memories earned through experiences that span the spectrum of life’s opportunities.”<sup>4</sup>

This also means we need to think again about how and when our high street operates. In general, most of our shops open the standard hours of 9-5. However, for those who work during the week, particularly if they are commuting to cities like Cambridge or Peterborough, this is no good, and means that the income they earn (in sometimes well-paying jobs) does not end up benefitting our local retailers at all. But it is challenging to get to this place as it requires a cultural change – and co-ordination. If only one shop or café opens later, then it will be hard to succeed, as footfall will be lower.

How can we achieve this in a town of our size? There are some concrete steps we can take:

- **Co-ordinate on one night a week when shops and cafes will be open longer.** This can be administered through the Chatteris in Business Cluster, to ensure co-ordination between businesses. Thursday night would be a natural choice generally used in these initiatives – it is later in the week so people are happy to be out later, but not at the weekend when people are more likely to be away. Businesses may also want to co-ordinate to not be open for a couple of hours earlier in the day to compensate for this. In order for this to work it will need to be well publicised.
- **Development of a virtual high street for Chatteris.** One of our media businesses is exploring the option to develop a virtual high street for Chatteris, as has been developed in an area of East London and Aberdeen. This would allow people visiting the town to go online ahead of time and scroll through a panorama of the available shops, with business cards popping up as they clicked on individual outlets. This could be promoted through the town’s Chatteris Outdoors platform (see above).
- **Use planning powers to turn unused retail space into new uses.** The Grimsey review of the High Street sets out this key recommendation: “Accept that there is already too much retail space in the UK and that bricks and mortar retailing can no longer be the anchor for thriving high streets and town centres. They need to be repopulated and re-fashioned as community hubs, including housing, health and leisure, entertainment, education, arts, business/office space and some shops”<sup>5</sup>. We therefore need to:

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<sup>4</sup> Eventbrite, 2015. Millennials: Fueling the Experience Economy.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GrimseyReview2.pdf> p8

- Identify local artists/entrepreneurs who want to try out interesting things in new spaces, and help them move into vacant spaces, possibly with rent relief for a short period (this could include sixth formers looking to develop business skills). We can work with local arts organisations, such as Market Place and Babylon Arts to develop proposals around specific spaces.
- Work creatively with the planning authority (FDC) to ensure spaces can have the use classes needed for this to happen. Converting unused spaces to planning categories which allow a wider range of uses – such as D2 and Sui Generis will enable this to happen.

This will work best if we trial it with one building to see what can work. One example might be the recently closed Barclays Bank on Park Street. Bringing together a group to develop a more creative use for this space would be a stand of defiance against high street decline, by positively embracing new usage for the building.

## 7. Create new cycle infrastructure

This proposal breaks down into three separate elements:

- 1) A cycle lane on the old course of the railway line joining Chatteris to Somersham
- 2) A cycle lane connecting Chatteris to Sutton – which would link to the continuing cycle lane to Ely
- 3) New cycle parking facilities in the centre of town

### Strategic Case

Cycling has multiple advantages over driving as a means of transport. These include:

- 1) Health benefits.** According to the NHS, “Regular cycling can reduce the risk of chronic illnesses such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and stroke. It can also boost your mood and keep your weight under control.” They also note that a regular cycle, such as a work commute, contributes towards the recommended exercise target of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per week. It has been estimated that in the UK, if we cycled at the same rates as prevail in Denmark, we would save the NHS £17 billion within 20 years.<sup>6</sup>

Health outcomes in Chatteris are generally poorer than national and local comparators. 25.9% of adults in Chatteris are obese – compared to 20.9% in Cambridgeshire and 24.1% in England. And in Fenland as a whole, physical activity rates are estimated at 60.7%, which compares unfavourably to England on 66.1%.<sup>7</sup>

- 2) Environmental benefits.** The importance of finding alternatives to fossil-fuel based transport at both a local and global scale cannot be overstated. Locally, switching to cycling will dramatically reduce air pollution. Globally, the World Health Organisation reports that: “the transport sector is the fastest growing contributor to climate emissions. Growth in energy use is higher for the transport sector than any other end-use sector.”<sup>8</sup> Cycling, by contrast, neither pollutes the air, nor contributes to global warming.
- 3) Social benefits.** The private car is an isolating form of transport, with many journeys taken alone. Cycling can easily take place in groups, and at slower speeds it is easier to interact with people while making the journey. The lack of a physical windshield as a barrier between the driver and the environment makes social interaction easier.

Within Chatteris, at the time of the census in 2011, rates of cycling were 2.5% - lower than England (3.0%) and much lower than Cambridgeshire (9.7%).

A lack of decent cycling infrastructure has been highlighted as a cause here. This is particularly important, as the Fen roads are wind swept and very open, increasing the sense of vulnerability felt

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<sup>6</sup>

[https://www.britishcycling.org.uk/zuvvi/media/bc\\_files/campaigning/BENEFITS\\_OF\\_INVESTING\\_IN\\_CYCLING\\_DIGI\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.britishcycling.org.uk/zuvvi/media/bc_files/campaigning/BENEFITS_OF_INVESTING_IN_CYCLING_DIGI_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Figures from Public Health England’s data tool

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.who.int/sustainable-development/transport/health-risks/climate-impacts/en/>



by the cyclist. The main roads leaving our town are all A-roads – which can be a very off-putting factor, particularly for families with children.

The three elements included are:

**1) A cycle lane on the old course of the railway line joining Chatteris to Somersham**

Chatteris used to lie on a branch line between March and St Ives, which was closed during the Beeching cuts. This means there is a clear straight line which is unbuilt on between Chatteris and Somersham, which leaves the town at the South West, off the Huntingdon Road. At current, there is a footpath here.

This would be transformed into a joint footpath/cycle path to attract people to cycle to Somersham. This, in turn, could be connected through to Huntingdon and St Ives in future, in co-operation with Huntingdonshire District Council.

**2) A cycle lane connecting Chatteris to Sutton – which would link to the continuing cycle lane to Ely**

At the moment, there is a cycle lane from Ely to Sutton, which runs alongside the A142. This stops in Sutton, and does not continue on to Chatteris. Ely is one of the key towns we want to develop better connections to, along with Huntingdon. Therefore, we will increase the ease of cycling to Ely by creating an adjoining cycle route for the next section of the A142.

**3) New cycle parking facilities in the centre of town**

While crime is fairly low in Chatteris, 2% of the crimes reported in Chatteris in 2018 related to bicycle theft<sup>9</sup>, and reports of the theft of a bike will discourage people from leaving their bike in town. This in turn will discourage cycle commuting. We want to install secure cycle facilities in the town to give people the confidence to commute to work by bike.

## Financial Case

We have estimated approximate costs for each of these interventions.

**1) A cycle lane on the old course of the railway line joining Chatteris to Somersham**

The Department for Transport document *Typical Costs of Cycling Interventions* gives a range of costs per km for resurfaced cycle routes. The closest example given is for the Leeds-Liverpool canal towpath between Kirkstall and Shipley. “Associated works included signage, repairs to the wall of the canal itself, and upgrade of barriers to improve access for pedestrians and cyclists whilst excluding vehicles and motorbikes.” The cost of this was estimated at £140,000 per km. This seems comparable to the work which would be needed to create a high quality bike lane here, although we wouldn’t need to make any equivalent repairs to canal walls – so we estimate £100,000 per km would be more accurate.

The distance along the course of the old railway between the two towns is 7.5km. This would give a total estimated cost of £750,000 for the route.

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<sup>9</sup> Metro Dynamics’ analysis of Cambridgeshire Constabulary data

**2) A cycle lane connecting Chatteris to Sutton – which would link to the continuing cycle lane to Ely**

Working on the same assumptions, the Chatteris to Sutton cycle route is also approximately 7.5km. Therefore, the estimated cost would again be £750,000. However, we want to work to understand if this cost can be brought down any further.

### **Management Case**

The work would be led by Fenland District Council, working in partnership with the Combined Authority, to ensure the new routes are reflected in the new Local Transport Plan, and with Chatteris Town Council on the location of the new cycle parking facilities and promotion of the new routes. Liaison with Huntingdonshire District Council would also be necessary in relation to any future development of the Somersham route.

## 8. Provide better car and bike parking management

### Strategic Case

One of the challenges facing our high street is facing is that it is often overly cluttered with cars. This makes the streets difficult for pedestrians to navigate, and creates a sense of “clutter”. It also causes problems for high street retailers when potential shoppers decide not to use the high street due to concerns about finding a place to park.

We also want to encourage people to, where possible, move away from their cars, and instead use more sustainable approaches to transport. Those who work in or around the town may be choosing not to cycle in due to concerns about the theft of bikes.

To tackle this problem we need to work with Fenland District Council to implement a stricter regime of parking monitoring (at the moment, parking is unregulated). An approach based on free usage for a set period of time followed by charging would encourage people to still use the town centre, but not to abandon their cars there, while heading off for hours on end. It would also mean using tickets where double yellow lines were being parked upon.

### Financial Case

According to jobs website indeed.co.uk, the average salary of a parking enforcement officer is £10.98. The most cost effective way to run this would be to share resource between the four towns, with the officer adopting a varied pattern to ensure that people didn't learn, and work around the routine. On this basis, plus additional costs for travel between the towns, this would give an estimated cost of £25,000 a year. Between the towns, this would work out at £6,250 per town per year.

### Management Case

This would be managed by Cambridgeshire County Council, as the statutory highways authority.

## **9. Create a community project funding pot**

### **Strategic Case**

One area that the Town Team identified as being a concern was the condition of some ornate street furniture, street lamps and the lack of some basic facilities for the public benefit, such as the availability of secure cycle racks. Many potential initiatives were identified as part of Chatteris Town Council's engagement with its residents and the creation of the Chatteris Community Plan – January 2018.

To ensure that many modest, but highly visible community projects can be delivered, it is recommended that a community project funding pot is created and used to either wholly fund or leverage in match-funded contributions towards projects that benefit the community of Chatteris.

### **Financial Case**

It is recommended that a pot of £50,000 is created that can be administered by Chatteris Town Council against worthy projects that improve the appearance and visual amenity of the Town Centre area.

### **Management Case**

This fund would be managed and administered by Chatteris Town Council.

## Next steps

We have set out a vision for Chatteris to be **an aspirational community**, by showing which interventions can make a real difference to our town.

We now look forward to working constructively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), and its Mayor, James Palmer, to implementing these ideas. This will require both direct support from the Combined Authority, and the resources needed to take these ideas to key government funds such as the Stronger Towns Fund as and when they come forward.

This work will be overseen by Fenland District Council, working in conjunction with the town team that was put together for this work.



# March:

## A Destination Market Town

### Market Town Masterplan



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## Introduction

What is Growing Fenland? This Combined Authority sponsored report is part of a series of reports that together provide a master plan approach for Fenland through 4 town based plans and an overarching strategy report.

A lot of strategy has historically focused on making cities work well, and assuming the rest will follow. But because the Fenland area economy is recognised as separate, and in some ways quite isolated with sub-standard transport links, this approach won't work for us. We need a strategy for each of our towns, which helps them prosper, and delivers the best quality of life for the people who live here. This must acknowledge where we have links to other towns or cities, while seeking to build strength in our places. The Combined Authority is committed to doubling economic output across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by 2040 – to do this, all areas are going to have to succeed, not just the city based economies.

To make this happen, the Combined Authority has decided to support a process of creating market town plans for each town in our district – Chatteris, March, Whittlesey, and Wisbech. These plans will be used to bid for funding from the Combined Authority and other funding providers, based on the vision for each town.

To develop these plans, each town has established a town team, consisting of representatives from business, local government, schools, and others. The town team has looked at life in the town from every angle, and has developed a vision for each town.

***“Our vision is that March will be a destination market town where people want to live and work. We will be a destination for shoppers and visitors looking to enjoy the revitalised high street. We will be a destination for employers looking for ambitious and highly skilled employees. We will be a destination for households looking for affordable homes in friendly, safe, attractive neighbourhoods.***

***We will do this by making the centre of town a high-quality destination for people looking to work, shop, eat, drink and relax. Shoppers will have a choice of prestigious brands and niche, locally rooted offers. The strength of the retail offer will be matched by the night-time economy, offering a wide variety of food, drink and entertainment venues.”***



## March – an overview of the town

***March is a friendly town with many assets and strengths. To continue to prosper we know that we need to improve the town centre, build the right homes in the right places, make best use of empty business premises, help businesses develop and grow, and keep hold of learners and workers.***

### Local assets and a friendly community

March is an attractive and popular place to live. The town's population continues to grow strongly as people are attracted by the offer of good quality housing, new community facilities, including a modern library and recently developed Academy, along with a low crime rate.

Residents take pride in March's strong sense of community and friendliness, its many voluntary groups and societies, and a range of popular events throughout the year, such as St George's Fayre, the Summer Festival, Memorial Service and the Christmas Market all held in the centre of town.

March grew up as a very significant railway town and has retained large railway sidings and network rail operations. The town has the potential for improved connectivity through the existing links by rail, road, and river to other towns and cities.

***"It's friendly, lovely. An amazing place to live."***

We have an active Town Team that includes local businesses who are keen to make a further contribution to the success and vitality of the town.

While the population overall is set to grow, by about a third to 2036, it is also set to grow older. **The proportion of the working age population will decline from 62% to 56%.** This points to one of the most significant challenges facing March.

### Need to boost access to education and job opportunities

**Too many of March's talented and ambitious young people have to leave the town to access the educational and employment opportunities to which they aspire.** We have heard directly from young people about the struggles they face when trying to take opportunities to develop their skills and ready themselves for the world of work.

In recent years, school performance at primary and secondary stages has also trailed behind local and national averages. We have heard that one of the reasons that schools sometimes struggle to deliver on a consistent basis is that there are not enough affordable homes for teachers and other key workers and young professionals.

***"People have to leave March to get a job or an apprenticeship."***

Compounding this problem, **opportunities in the town for apprenticeships, work experience and training from age 16 are limited**, while the opportunities that do exist are not reaching potential candidates. There appears to be a

mismatch between local people looking for apprenticeships, and employers looking for apprentices but struggling to find local candidates.

At the same time, opportunities to learn, work and train outside the town are often made difficult by **transport connections that are too expensive, uncoordinated, or simply not running at the time of the day** when people need them. This applies to both bus and train routes.

## A mixed skilled picture

In terms of adult education and skills, the town retains **the core of an educated professional workforce**. This includes a concentration of public sector jobs, with Fenland District Council offices and HMP Whitemoor nearby. We have a small cluster of high-tech engineering businesses, such as PCML, Qualitetch, Liberate Engineering, and Mundell. As set out in Figure 1 below, a fifth of the local population is educated to NVQ4 or above. This is another of March’s strengths.

However, our overall skill levels are lower than the Cambridgeshire and national averages. Like the rest of Fenland, **nearly a third of the population has no qualifications**.

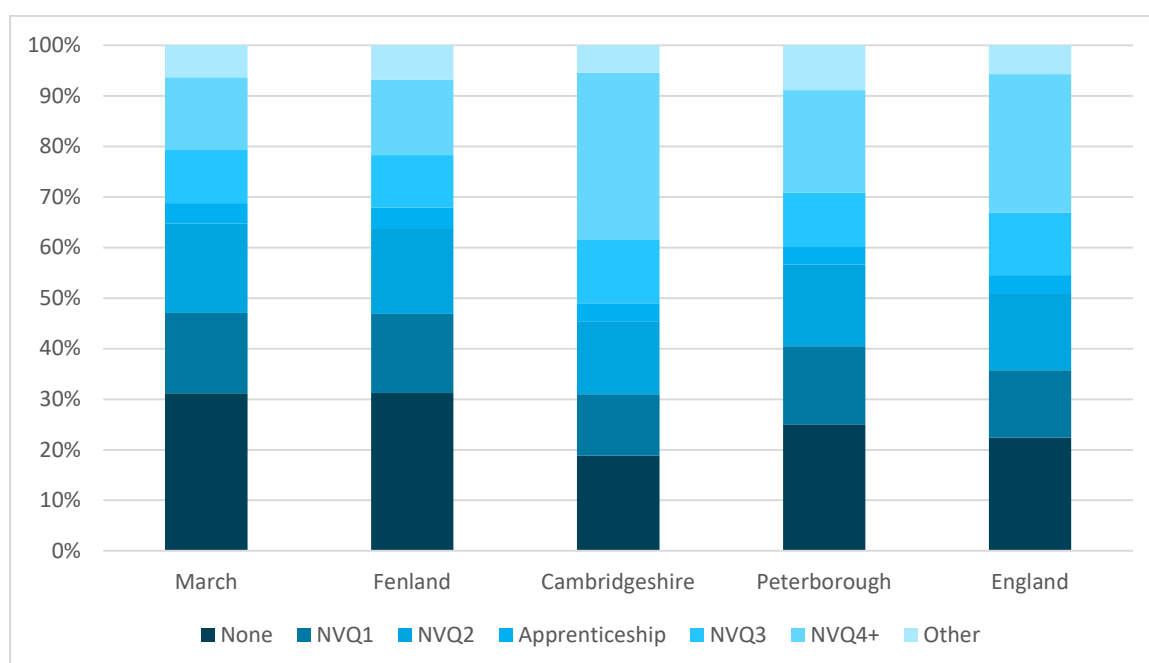


Fig 1: Highest level of academic qualifications

The new Academy, with its range of facilities, dynamic leadership and commitment to working with local partners is part of the answer to this challenge.

However, more effort and coordination are required to achieve three connected goals.

The first is the need to **better link up apprenticeships with potential candidates** within March and

*“The challenge is to create a critical mass of hi-tech, high-value added companies.”*

beyond. Together we will work closely with the Combined Authority on the implementation of the apprenticeship brokerage programme and bring forward local partners to pilot the scheme in March.

Second, we need to make it easier for people in March to **travel to places where they can further their education**

and career.

Third, we need to nurture the **further development of a cluster of high-tech, high-skill jobs** that will retain more of the town's young people and attract new talent. The potential is there, but we need coordinated activity to build on what already exists.

## A high street with huge potential

**March's most under-utilised assets are the high street and the riverfront.**

The town's central shopping parade boasts some beautiful, historic architecture, the iconic war memorial and some popular, long-standing stores. However, **the retail offer as a whole is not as strong as it was – or could be in future.** When we spoke to local residents this was the biggest issue they raised, along with congestion, which we discuss below. Their words are borne out by available data. The retail vacancy rate for the area defined as March Town Centre is 3.3%, which has climbed steeply from 0.3% in 2015. This compares unfavourably to a UK rate of 2.3% and reflects a quite rapid decline. Relatedly, the "Months-on-the-Market" measure shows an average of 19.9 months for a retail property in March to be taken on – well above the UK average of 9.4 months.

**As much as the main thoroughfare needs revitalising, the river and Nene Parade in particular have huge but untapped potential.** Nene Parade is the iconic view of the town and already contains the oldest building in March (the Ship Inn pub) and a few restaurants. These look out over the bank down to the River Nene, and across the river to the historic Town Hall. The river attracts some narrowboaters, but there is much more we can do with this area.

While some of our local treasures are obscured from view, a few highly-visible derelict eyesores – such as the long-vacant Indoor Market, the dilapidated Collingwood's auction house at the top of Broad Street, and the long vacated Freezer Shop in Station Road – send a negative signal to residents and visitors alike.

Improving the appeal of the town centre could also **realise the potential of March's night-time economy.** The town's Pubwatch group attracts upwards of twenty landlords to its meetings. There appears to be an opportunity here to create more of an evening economy to bring additional expenditure and more of a buzz into the town.

In a bid to the government's Future High Street Fund, there is the aim to make a winning case for investment in an iconic new development that will breathe new life into the town. This could include improved leisure and retail opportunities as well as spaces for smaller businesses and start-ups to cluster and network on and around the high street and riverfront.

## Connected but congested

*"The car is King in March."*

*""It feels difficult and dangerous [to walk around]."*

**In some ways, March is a well-connected place.** We have a railway station, unlike other market towns. **However, traffic dominates the centre of town.** Overall, this can make shopping or simply strolling through town a stressful experience. Through initial engagement as part of this process, residents consistently identified traffic congestion as one of the main issues in the town.

The twelve-month average concentration of NO<sub>2</sub> on Broad Street for 2018 was 39.59µg/m<sup>3</sup>, pushing the European Union’s legal limit of 40µg/m<sup>3</sup> (though note, these figures can be subject to revision). This pollution is produced by idling vehicles on this congested stretch of road.

A Combined Authority sponsored Transport Study for March, which will be ready for public feedback early in 2020 is much anticipated. It is expected to provide some options around reduced congestion, an enhanced town centre and improved connectivity for the town. The town team look forward to supporting the outcomes of this study where they match the aims of this report.

The problem of congestion is also driven by the issue identified above. That too many people looking to work and learn have to travel out of town every day, putting great pressure on the road network. This is reflected in Fig 2 below, which shows how many workers currently travel to other parts of Fenland and beyond.

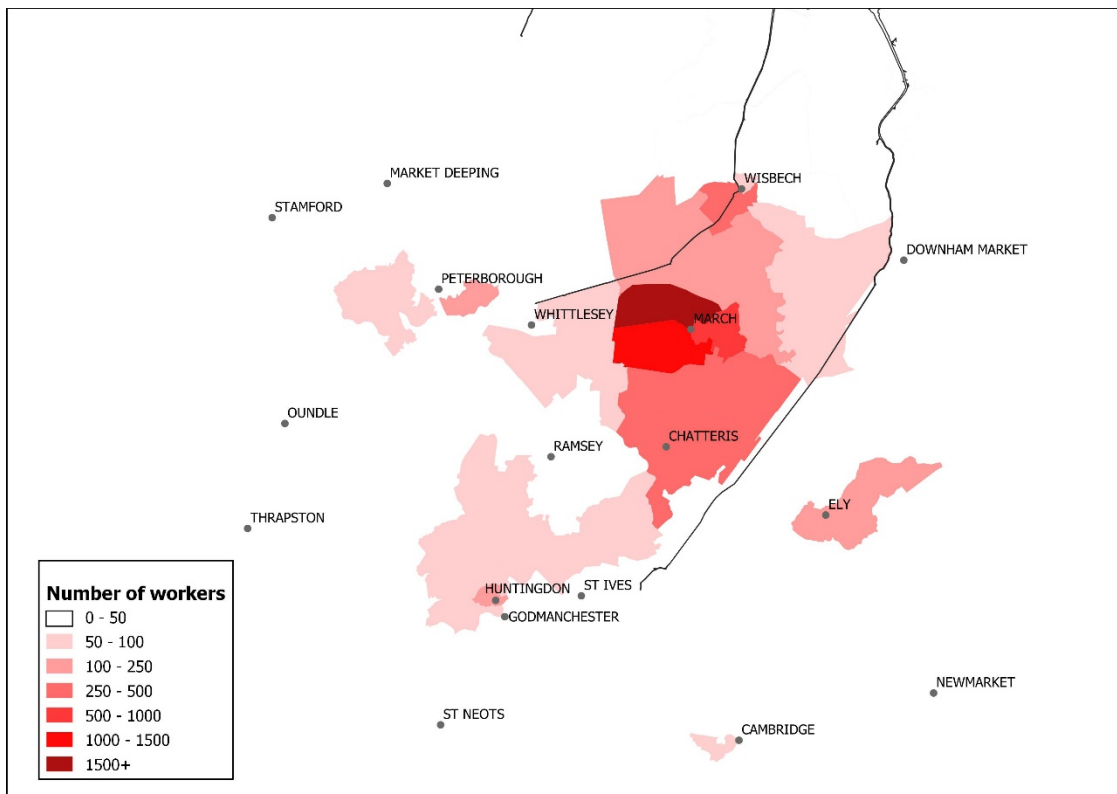


Fig 2: Where March residents work – commuting in all directions

Whilst the majority of the town has good internet connectivity, a further brake on our connectivity, which also impacts on our ability to set the new skills agenda, is the **comparatively slow broadband speeds** in some parts of the town. This was an issue raised by residents in the early initial consultation for this work.

*“The internet speed where we live is slower compared to where we used to live.”*

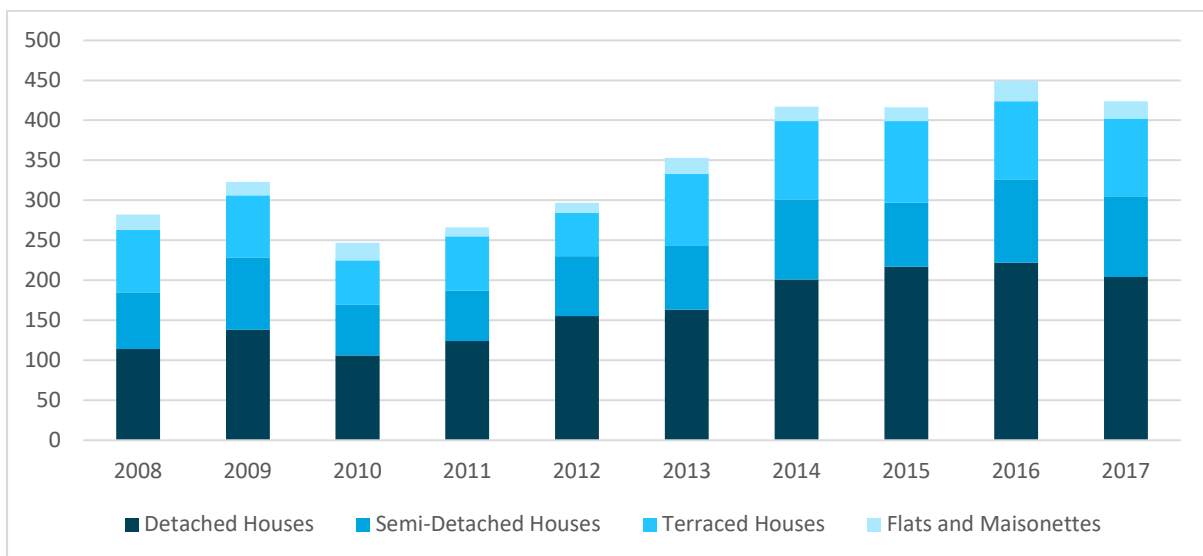
### An under-supply of new homes

While the quality of housing in March is high, **house sales have plateaued in recent years**, as illustrated in Fig. 3 below. Development sites have been identified, to the south east and south west

of the town, taking the western boundary of March closer to the A141. **However, progress through the planning process has been slow.**

**There is a growing risk that March’s pipeline of affordable homes, especially for key workers such as teachers, will run dry.** This is particularly true of build types, especially flats and maisonettes, favoured by some young professionals – detached houses still dominate housing sales in the town.

Meanwhile, there are many areas in the vicinity that are building large numbers of homes and benefitting from wider investment as a result. For example, the North Ely development will deliver 3,000 homes alongside the development of a large new country park and the North Stowe new town development of 10,000 homes will include a range of transport and other opportunities



*Fig 3: Sales of housing types in March since 2008*

It is clear that March would benefit from a means of ensuring that the right properties are available for those who choose to live in March. It isn't clear where the barriers exist to releasing some of the areas already identified for development. For the town to continue to prosper, a range of options need to be considered and made available for decision makers, land owners and developers alongside the developing local plan process.

## **March – what residents are telling us**

Our work consulting the community on the initial ideas in the plan brought out the following key themes.

### ***Likes***

The most common response to what people liked about the town was the ‘sense of community’, with respondents making reference to the friendliness of “good people”. Respondents also made reference to the smallness and quietness of the town, the rural setting / easy access to the countryside, and the pleasantness of having a river running through the centre of town. Events in the town, such as the Christmas Market and St George’s Fair, were also mentioned.

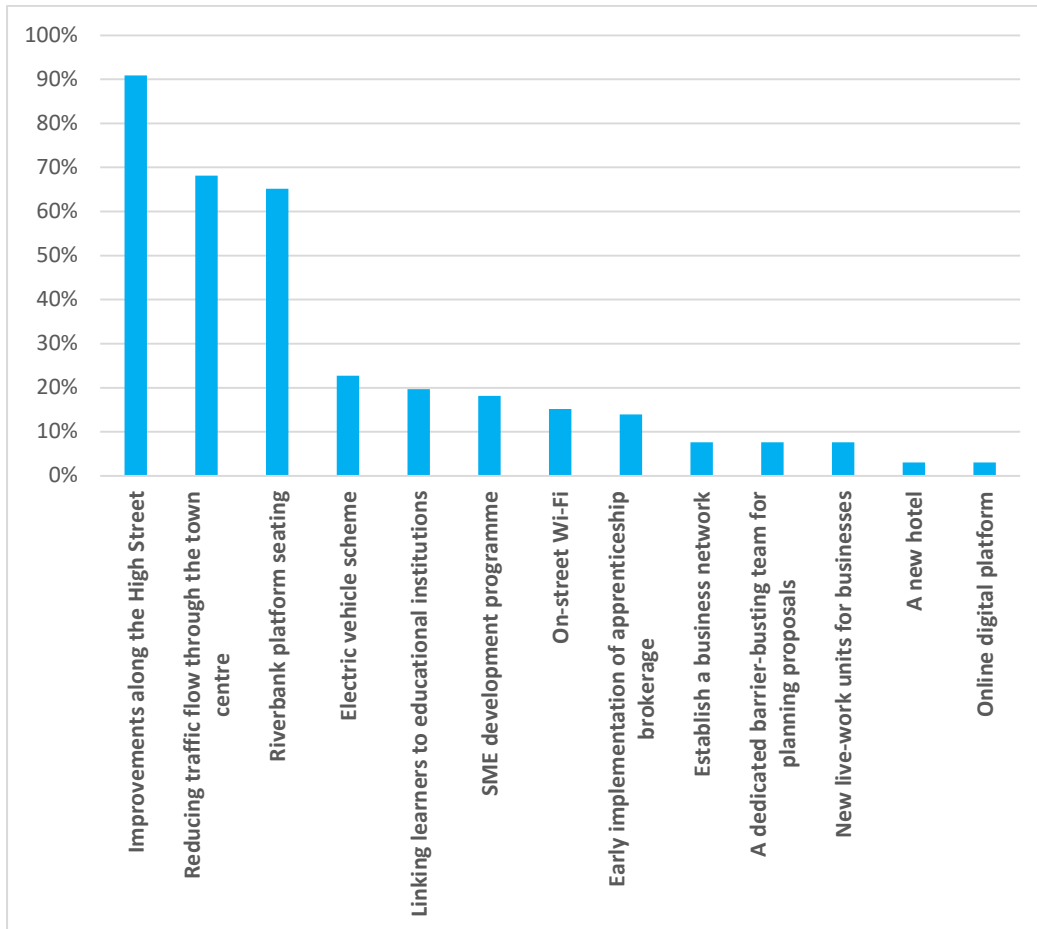
### ***Dislikes***

Traffic emerged as the main dislike residents had. People felt there was “not enough room for pedestrians” and too much “traffic going through town centre”. As a result, these are the issues we aim to address in this document. The other issue often raised was the limited variety of local shops, with lots of the same type of shops and not enough known brands.

### ***Improvements***

The main improvement people identified was the potential to do more with the high street and market square, generally improving the quality and appeal and tackling some of the derelict buildings identified in the profile.

### ***Favourite ideas from the community consultation***



Source: Analysis of Fenland District Council data. Height of bars shows the proportion of residents who chose an idea in their top three.

**When asked to identify their favourite ideas, resident and visitors asked expressed some very clear preferences:**

- **Improvements along the High Street (91%)**
- **Reducing traffic flow through the centre of town (68%);**
- **Riverbank platform seating (65%).**

## March – A destination market town

**Our vision is that March will be a destination market town where people want to live and work.**

We will be a destination for shoppers and visitors looking to enjoy the revitalised high street. We will be a destination for employers looking for ambitious and highly skilled employees. We will be a destination for households looking for affordable homes in friendly, safe, attractive neighbourhoods.

We will do that by making the centre of town a high-quality destination for people looking to work, shop, eat, drink and relax. Shoppers will have a choice of prestigious brands and niche, locally rooted offers. The strength of the retail offer will be matched by the night-time economy, offering a wide variety of food, drink and entertainment venues. The 'star attraction' for March will be a redesign of the area around the River Nene to create a pleasant area to spend time and relax.

Unused buildings in the centre of town will be brought to life, for a range of uses, while street furniture and attractive shop frontages will give the centre a distinctive look and feel.

We will tackle congestion on Broad Street and make it easier and safer to walk and cycle in the centre of town. An in-depth transport study is under way at the moment, which will no doubt inform the final approach, but the ambition is to make the town centre feel less congested and as a result more attractive.

The strategy will support small and medium sized businesses to develop and grow in the town, through a programme of expert support, including access to funding, premises and networking.

Within our other proposals, a town website could promote all the ways that people can shop, have fun and relax in March. It could also be a place where local residents, community groups and enterprises can share and hear about what is going on in the town.



## Key proposals for March

We have identified a package of connected interventions that will make a lasting difference to March:

### 1. Improving the town centre

#### a. Appearance and appeal

Delivering a range of major changes that will remove or activate derelict or vacant buildings and improve the overall appearance and appeal of the high street.

#### b. Reducing traffic flow through the centre of town

We will support and inform the Combined Authority's Local Transport Strategy where it delivers an improved town centre that assists the development of the town centre economy, public transport improvements, and cycling and pedestrian access to the town.

#### c. Development of the riverbank asset

We will investigate the possibility to develop a tiered seating area and platform area on both sides of the town bridge to allow the asset of the river to be seen and enjoyed. The aim is to open access to the riverside and provide new areas for residents, workers and visitors to eat, relax and socialise.

#### d. On street Wi-Fi

To support the enhanced town centre we will install a zone of free to the user Wi-Fi access as a further addition to our high street offer.

#### e. Electric vehicle charging points

We will encourage the use of electric vehicles for those living, working or visiting the town centre by provide charging points within town centre car parks.

### 2. Small and medium sized enterprise development programme

We will invest in a new programme that will enable local small-to-medium sized enterprises to network, grow and develop new products and services, across different sectors.

### 3. Improving the availability of properties

To enable a coordinated solution to the broader development of the town, both minor and major developments, a Challenge Busting Team will bring together land owners, developers and the local councils to ensure that March can continue to deliver the range of properties that the town needs for future years, in line with local plans.

## **4. Other future options**

### **a. New town website**

We will develop a brand new website that will promote everything we have to offer to visitors, and provide a single reference point for all information about the town.

### **b. Develop a 'car club'**

We will trial a new car club that makes available a pool of rechargeable electric or hybrid vehicles to be rented or used by the hour by residents and local small and medium sized enterprises.

We unpack each of these in more detail below.

## 1a. Improving the appearance and appeal of the town centre

### Strategic Case

A programme of targeted improvements to the appearance and overall appeal of our high street. This intervention would work well in conjunction with the riverside platform seating. In tandem, these would bring more activity and vibrancy to the centre of town.

As set out in the profile section of this masterplan, our High Street contains some beautiful and historic architecture, as well as some highly-visible derelict eyesores, such as the long-vacant indoor market, the old auction house at the top of Broad Street, and the old freezer shop on Station Road. Such sites send a negative signal to residents and visitors alike.

There is also a high level of first floor vacancy, where above-shop accommodation lies empty. This results in a deteriorating condition for many buildings along the High Street, including blocked gutters, vegetation in roofs and walls, failing or poor-quality windows, and unattractive shop fronts.

The retail vacancy rate for the area defined as March Town Centre is 3.3%, which has climbed steeply from 0.3% in 2015. This compares unfavourably to a UK rate of 2.3% and reflects a quite rapid decline. Relatedly, the “Months-on-the-Market” measure shows an average of 19.9 months for a retail property in March to be taken on – well above the UK average of 9.4 months.

This decline is driven by wider changes in retail habits, but there is more we can do to improve our high street. As well as making physical improvements to the high street, as described below, a programme of investment would send a strong signal of belief and be used as a powerful hook to attract both a wider range of shops and other activities and amenities.

Our proposal is for a programme of coordinated investment in the high street that would include:

- Dealing with the acknowledged eyesores and vacant buildings as part of the development of the town centre in line with the Future High Street Fund bid outlined below. This could be done through significant re-development to re-purpose, or demolition to make way for a new development.
- Installing eye-catching street furniture. This could be a mixture of traditional features such as benches, bins, water fountains and less conventional features such a ‘hang out space’ as well as electric vehicle re-charging points in nearby car parks.
- Improved signage around the high street and beyond that makes consistent reference to key landmarks (such as the Town Hall and War Memorial) and directs and encourages people to explore the distinct parts of the high street and the areas around it.
- A shop frontage improvement schemes, offering access to experts and a small amount of capital funding to create attractive and modern-looking frontages.
- Ensure local In Bloom and other volunteers are able to continue to make the town look great.
- Work with landlords to arrange obvious improvement work like gutter clearance.
- Bringing currently vacant first-floor units back into use. This could be a mixture of residential use, office or maker space, and live-work units. These would need to be modern, attractive and well-managed and marketed by a qualified agency, as well as being affordable to local businesses. This is in line with our ambition to create a cluster of high-tech, high-skill jobs in March.

- To support the March Area Transport Study in the re-designing of traffic flow through the town centre to encourage walking, cycling and town centre activities and events.
- Create 'space to breath' in the town centre.

The introduction of free wi-fi to the centre of town is also designed to encourage greater activity and interaction.

Whether funded as part of a wider Future High Streets Fund package or as a stand-alone set of improvements, these measures should boost the look and feel of the high street. From a place that is dominated by cars and feels, as per feedback in the overview, "difficult and dangerous" for pedestrians, to a place that is much more attractive and welcoming to shoppers, visitors and workers alike.

## Financial Case

Fenland District Council has included an outline proposal in its initial Future High Streets Fund bid. Funding has now been allocated to work this up into a full business case to attract further funding from government. The return on investment from a successful programme of improvements would be significant.

## Management Case

This is multi-layered project; the extent of which depends on the precise mixture of ingredients. It ranges from immediate, practical changes such as clearing gutters; through to more creative changes that require some design, such as wayfinding and improving shop frontages; to somewhat longer-term shifts, such as bringing vacant first-floor units back into use.

This project would likely to need to engage specialist advice on issues like wayfinding, where expert input could lead to more innovative proposals.

Contractors would be required to deliver certain elements such as the frontage improvement schemes.

Local businesses and retailers on the high street would of course be a core partner. They would need to be engaged early on and throughout, so they benefit from and contribute to the project, and understand the impact of any potential inconvenience.

Another important set of partners are the residents and businesses, some of whom may not currently live in March, who could be attracted to occupy first-floor units.

## 1b. Reducing traffic flow through the centre of town

### Strategic Case

The problem with traffic in March town centre is clear. Traffic data collected as part of the March Area Transport Study revealed speeds of under 10mph both north and southbound through the centre of town.

This heavy traffic has a negative effect on local air quality. The twelve-month average concentration of NO<sub>2</sub> recorded on Broad Street for 2018 was 39.59µg/m<sup>3</sup>. Even allowing for variability, this is pushing the European Union's legal limit of 40µg/m<sup>3</sup>. This pollution is produced by idling vehicles on this frequently congested stretch of road.

Within our public consultation, reducing traffic flow through the centre of town received the second most priority preferences, with 68% of respondents identifying it as one of their three favourite proposals.

Such an unpleasant situation makes it difficult to attract visitors, shoppers and businesses to the town centre and works against the positive impacts of the other proposals in this masterplan. Similar public consultation elsewhere ([Smarter Cambridge Transport](#)) has argued that it is necessary to go beyond minor changes and that we must design urban roads and streets to be attractive and convenient places to walk, cycle and use public transport.<sup>1</sup>

In the above context, it is clear we need to reduce the feel of the overall amount of traffic on Broad Street and make it more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists.

Any changes to traffic in Broad Street could improve other current traffic situations in the town and make it easier to drive out of the market square and similar junctions within the town.

An in-depth transport study supported by the Combined Authority is currently under way and will include public consultation in early 2020. We will support this where it meets our aim to make the town centre more walkable and give a boost to the shops here.

## Funding

Alongside the transport study, Fenland District Council has included an outline proposal in its Future High Streets Fund bid. This is under development, and will result in a business case which looks to government for funding.

## Management

The transport study will inform the final approach, but the changes are likely to require:

- Engagement and communication with residents and stakeholders – including engagement with businesses on the short-term impact of changes to the road.
- Further assessments of likely impact on traffic flow and potential modal shift.
- Detailed assessment of required engineering works.
- Identification of additional changes and modification required to adjoining roads, including signage, and the scope for inbound flow control.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.smartertransport.uk/smarter-cambridge-transport-urban-congestion-enquiry/>

## 1c. Development of the riverside asset

### Strategic Case

New platform or tiered seating on the riverbank, located on either side of the town bridge, will create a new focal point for residents, workers and visitors to eat, relax and socialise. This is part of the bid being submitted to central government's 'Future High Streets Fund'.

As set out in the profile of the town, March faces many of the same challenges encountered by other market towns. The town centre is congested, retail patterns are changing, and there are some empty, derelict and abandoned premises in the heart of the town centre.

Looking ahead, the high street of the future will be less a place where individuals shop, and more of a location for groups of people to socialise, relax and enjoy their leisure time.

March has the potential to become such a 'destination location'. The River Nene runs through the centre of town. We have a range of pubs, with an active and committed group of local landlords. The town has some beautiful and historic architecture; including the Town Hall, Fountain and War Memorial on Broad Street.

To realise that potential we need to do more with the assets we have and address the reasons why March, as it is today, isn't attracting more people.

In the bid to the Future High Streets Fund, this has been focussed upon to deliver the town centre growth of leisure, retail and culture.

The improved riverside seating would be the 'star attraction' of the area along Nene Parade offering an iconic view of the town, including the oldest building in March (the Ship Inn pub) and restaurants. These restaurants look out over the bank down to the River Nene, and across to the historic Town Hall.

The river is currently not accessible to residents of the town, due to the busy roads, high fences and steep banks. The river represents the connection of March to the old trading and access routes within this historic Fenland landscape. By improving access to the river bank, and to leisure options such as day boats, we hope to open up a new appreciation of this valuable asset within the heart of our town.

The seating would offer:

- Spaciously-designed seating arrangements so people can relax and use the space.
- Much easier access to and from the riverside for residents wanting to access the water and visitors to the town e.g. narrow boaters.
- Access to the free wi-fi that is also proposed in this masterplan.
- Safety features such as railings.

The proposal is scalable, but the development would need to be of sufficient size to become a recognised 'feature' and make a meaningful difference to the look, feel and appeal of this central part of town.

## Funding

Estimates are based on experience of a smaller project elsewhere, the Porter Brook Pocket Park, where it is estimated that Sheffield City Council spent £1.35m. There is already evidence that the Porter Brook Pocket Park has revitalised part of the city centre and increased local spend. It is therefore anticipated that this large scale project will cost between £3 and £5 million.

## Management

This would be a significant, but deliverable. Working with Middle Level Commissioners, the project would require several inputs:

- Geotechnical assessment including any flood risk implication
- Detailed design
- Consultation with local residents and stakeholders on potential uses, features and appearance
- Installation

### CASE STUDY

Sheffield's Porter Brook Pocket Park won the 'Contribution to the Built Environment' award at the Living Waterways Awards ceremony in 2016. The purpose of the project was to open up and utilise an under-used part of a small scale riverside space. The project involved removal of a culvert and the development a tiered new terrace that enables residents to access the riverside.

Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oexE1N4WwvU>

## 1d. On street Wi-Fi

### Strategic Case

The development of digital technologies has had an inescapable impact on our high streets. However, prophecies of the total demise of the high street overlook the fact that humans are, and always will be, physical creatures, benefiting from face to face interaction. People will also often want to look at and assess goods before buying them. The fact that Amazon, one of the dominant forces in e-commerce, is now trialling pop-up shops on the UK High Street testifies to the continued importance of the physical high street, and the opportunity which exists to combine the digital and the physical.

Successful high streets of the future will be those which manage to do this. The towns in Fenland enjoy good broadband – with superfast or ultrafast broadband in most of March. The next step to future proof the high street will be the installation of free on-street Wi-Fi – this is one of the basics in providing an integrated digital/physical experience for the future, and may well become a criteria for national chains when deciding where to set up. Bill Grimsey, Former Chief Executive of Iceland and one of Wickes' subsidiary businesses, set out as a key recommendation in his second review of the High Street to "provide free public Wi-Fi and well-connected workplaces that support flexible working patterns and attract freelancers to high streets and town centres."

Our proposal for the Wi-Fi is deliberately constrained to the town centre is to encourage people in to it. It would encompass Broad Street to market square and the proposed new seating area.

## Financial

The estimated total cost for installing the Wi-Fi in March is around £20,000, followed by an annual charge of £2,000 for a seven-year period. We can access Cambridgeshire County Council funding through the Connecting Cambridgeshire programme.

## Management

The installation of the points for the on-street Wi-Fi would be managed by Connecting Cambridgeshire – who already have experience of successfully installing on-street Wi-Fi in Cambridge and Ely. The network could be supported by Cambs Wi-Fi. The Town Team will work with Connecting Cambridgeshire to ensure the user interface is optimised for a visitor to the town.

## 1e. Electric vehicle charging points

### Strategic Case

We will encourage the use of electric vehicles for those living, working or visiting the town centre by provide charging points within town centre car parks. Electric vehicles are becoming increasingly commonplace as awareness grows of the impact of air pollution on the health of current and future generations and the need to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from transport.

There are environmental, economic and social reasons for supporting the shift to electric vehicles. We want to drive this change.

We therefore propose to install **new electric charging points at key locations** in and around the town.

### Financial

Funding will be sought to install charging points within town centre car parks owned by Fenland District Council.

The work is scalable, but to be viable is expected to cost in the region of £35,000.

### Management

The new charging points will be managed by Fenland District Council, subject to resources available. There are local authority powers available to ensure that the charging points remain accessible to electric car users with usual parking enforcement penalties applicable.



## 2. Small and medium sized enterprise development programme

### Strategic Case

Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are crucial to the long-term financial success of market towns and the UK economy as a whole. The programme would provide:

- Tailored packages for individual businesses;
- Generic, cross-business support such as sector networking; and
- Small-scale grant funding to help businesses access additional support.

The programme would be delivered with an experienced partner. It would be designed to become self-sustaining after an initial period of funding.

By their nature, most SMEs have limited access to funding and staff time to look ahead at future opportunities and threats to develop their businesses accordingly. They could, for example, invest in staff skills and develop new business projects if resources were available. Unlike larger companies, which can appoint staff or outside consultants to do this work, most SME are focused on getting by. We are also informed that business networking in Fenland is limited. In addition, nearby in Wisbech research shows that some SMEs that are operating profitably have limited interest or incentive to expand or do things differently.

The development of a project to address these gaps could include:

- Supporting SMEs to access public investment and private capital.
- Liaising between SMEs and educational providers to shape courses to match future skills needs.
- Increasing the amount and quality of networking between businesses.

We therefore propose a programme of work that would deliver:

- Tailored packages of support in individual SMEs across a range of support needs, including:
  - Business planning and financial management
  - Branding and management including online marketing e.g. how use LinkedIn effectively
  - New product / service development testing
  - Market analysis / horizon scanning
  - Applying for loans and other sources of finance
- A general programme of face-to-face and online networking opportunities, designed and facilitated to encourage SMEs to share information and identify opportunities.
- A transparent small grant programme to enable businesses to access further support outside the programme. Such support might be highly technical or sector-specific.

The following aspects would also need to be considered:

- Qualification criteria, such as company size and turnover.
- The amount of support available to companies and communicating that clearly from the beginning – with the option of SMEs purchasing further support as desired.
- Effective marketing and promotion and proactive engagement of businesses – this is a crucial element, given the current lack of networking and engagement from some SMEs.
- Arrangements for consulting on the detail of the programme with local SMEs.

- Which sectors are eligible and which, if any, should be a priority for support.
- Whether the programme should also look to engage SMEs outside of March with an eye to attracting them to locate to the town.
- The scale and assessment criteria for the small grant pot.
- Coordination of locally available premises in a portfolio format to allow growing businesses to relocate locally.

The programme should be coordinated with and signposted to other support opportunities. These should include the new Greater Cambridgeshire and Peterborough local Skills Support for the Workforce (SSW) contracts, which is aimed at SMEs.

## Financial

A three-year contract should give any delivery partners enough time to deliver the programme. The aim should be for the programme, or elements of it, to become self-sustaining after this period through:

- SMEs buying in tailored packages of support;
- Subscriptions to networking activities;
- SMEs undertaking some of the delivery themselves e.g. responsibility for organising network events.
- Link to any existing business groups, such as Chamber of Commerce.
- Coordination of empty premises to encourage use of empty and under used premises.

We would seek specific costings from suppliers, but could allocate £350,000 for a five-year package.

## Management

There are several providers of SME development programmes on the open market, including private companies and universities. The contract would need to be advertised and commissioned in line with Fenland District Council's procurement policies.

It would be advisable to build some element of local consultation with SMEs before the final detailed programme is agreed.

## 3. Improving the availability of properties

### Strategic Case

We recognise that there is a lack of coordinated solutions to the broader development of the town. With both minor and major developments stalling or being delayed, there is a risk that the right properties will not be in place to fulfil the needs of the growing town. The town needs to bring together land owners, developers and the local councils to ensure that March can continue to deliver the range of properties that the town needs for future years. This could involve both enabling improved communication and myth busting, but also utilising pump-prime funding and drawing together funding sources and opportunities in line with existing and developing local plans, planning approval/requirements and funding opportunities.

### Financial

This type of arrangement requires appropriately skilled resource to facilitate the change outlined.

An estimate of costs of this resource is in the region of £350,000 over a 5 year period to enable the appropriate facilitator and support to be provided.

### Management

Either through a third party or by direct employment through Fenland District Council, the required employees are recruited on suitable contracts and arrangements.

Any resulting network would be well placed to be involved in any developing local plans.

## Other Future Options

### 4a. New town website

#### Strategic Case

Successful market towns have a positive, friendly 'brand' that they communicate to the world. Towns such as Skipton and Ludlow have used this approach to great effect with a town website.

The new town website will:

- Promote the brand of March as a destination, especially to outsiders.
- Provide a central repository for local information, such as forthcoming events, business opening hours, and local discounts. While this information is available, it is usually spread across different sources, such as local magazines and Facebook groups, which local residents may not be aware of or subscribe to and outside visitors are very unlikely to know about.
- Link to local organisations to raise their profile and connect them to new members, customers and users.
- Provide information to residents about how to access services online.

We therefore propose to create a new website, clearly branded in line with the vision set out in this master plan, which will provide the information described above. This could be done with a local professional web designer.

While setting up a website is technologically straightforward, with the tools to do so widely available, several factors need to be high quality:

- High quality design, including appropriate and high-quality images, well-written and accurate copy, and ease of navigation – it is vital that the site looks professional and reflects well on the town.
- Importantly, the site needs to be kept up to date to be of value and to avoid disappointing visitors with inaccurate information. This information would need sourcing from liaison with local group and businesses.
- Active management of any discussion boards or discussions forums, including developing a set of rules, and responding to any queries directed to the site.
- Search engine optimisation (known as SEO) so that site appears prominently in response to search terms.

As above, while it is easy to set up a website, setting up and maintaining a good quality site of which the town can be proud requires effort and commitment.

#### Financial

A small amount of funding would be needed at the beginning to design, test and launch the site. This can be between £5k and 10k depending on functionality and design.

Ongoing resources would be needed to maintain the site and volunteer involvement has been used elsewhere to successfully reduce the costs of maintaining such a service.

## Management

There would be huge value in engaging a small group of local stakeholders in the development and testing process. This is useful to the technical process of designing, but also generates buy-in to the idea of the site and generates momentum behind local organisations putting their information on the platform.

Each town team could initially work with a local website designer(s) to develop, test and launch the site. Different skills are required at different points in this process e.g. designing the look and navigation of the site is different from ongoing management. It may be possible to find an organisation with all these skills that can enter into a single contract. Alternatively, different arrangements could be made e.g. one contract to design, test and build up to the point of launch, and another to maintain and promote on an ongoing basis.

As above, there would need to be clear and agreed arrangements for keeping the site regularly up to date. This could be done as part of a contract, or through a local volunteer group.

### CASE STUDY

The first result to searching for “Ludlow” on Google is the town’s website <https://www.ludlow.org.uk/> This presents high quality and attractive images from the town, has a single strapline – “A bustling market towns”, lists for forthcoming events, and provides two short paragraphs summarising the town’s assets and appealing features. It then then provides more detail on each of these aspects – where to stay, things to do, food and drink etc.

## 4b. Car Club

### Strategic Case

Pooled access to such vehicles also offers an affordable and flexible way for younger, older and lower-income people to get around without owning their own car. This is particularly beneficial to people who are looking to study and gain work experience out of town but are currently frustrated by bus and rail services that are inconvenient. We are aware that this is a problem across Fenland.

Car clubs also offer benefits to households who currently do have a car but, for whatever reason, rarely use them. According to [Comouk](#), car owners who drive fewer than 6-8,000 miles per year can save up to £3,500 each year.

Experience from elsewhere, as described below, suggests that once people are familiar with the idea of a car club, they tend to grow and become more popular. Our investment should therefore be seen as seed funding to germinate a long-term shift to a more accessible and sustainable form of transport for rural and semi-rural areas.

### Financial

Up front funding would cover the cost of purchasing a small fleet of suitable vehicles along with any garaging and charging requirements.

Members of the scheme pay a joining fee and a monthly or ad-hoc fee.

The cost of the scheme in the first year could be £100,000.

## Management

The scheme would need to be administered by an organisation with the requisite capacity and suitable rural, transport and community outreach experience.

An important option for the car club is to allow corporate membership for local businesses, so links to the formed SME network and similar are very important. Consideration could be given for small vans as well as cars should the need be established.

### CASE STUDY

In [Harbury, Warwickshire](#), a village of 3,000 people, they have managed to generate enough usage to support two electric vehicles. These are operated by a private company and come with insurance for drivers aged 19 and over. There is a one-off lifetime fee to begin with of £50, and then an hourly payment. This is used for community services, such as services to help the elderly get to appointments or the shops. The scheme was started with a grant from the Department for Transport worth £18k.

## Next steps

We have set out a vision for March and consulted upon the interventions that can make a real difference to the town.

We now look forward to working constructively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), and its Mayor, James Palmer, and other funders or partners to implement these ideas. This will require both direct support from the Combined Authority, and the resources needed to take these ideas to key government funds such as the Stronger Towns Fund as and when they come forward.

It is anticipated that this work will be overseen by Fenland District Council, working in conjunction with a continued team of representatives from the town and developed from those who put together this work.

## The Overall Strategy for Fenland

The recently published Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER) identified that within the Combined Authority there are three distinct sub-economies. There is the Greater Cambridge economy, which includes the many towns where people commute from into Cambridge. There is the Greater Peterborough economy, and its surroundings. But in an important classification, there is also the fen economy, which includes much of our district of Fenland, as well as parts of East Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.

A lot of strategy has historically focused on making cities work well, and assuming the rest will follow. But because our economy is separate, and in some ways quite isolated with sub-standard transport links, this approach won't work for us. We need a strategy for each of our towns, which helps them prosper, and delivers best quality of life for people who live here. This must acknowledge where we have links to other towns or cities, while seeking to build strength in our places. The Combined Authority is committed to doubling economic output across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by 2040 – to do this, all areas are going to have to succeed, not just the Cambridge economy.

To make this happen, following the CPIER analysis, the Combined Authority has decided to support a process of creating market town plans for each town in our district – Chatteris, March, Whittlesey, and Wisbech. These plans will be used to bid for funding from the Combined Authority and other funding providers, based on the vision for the town.

To develop these plans, each town has established a town team, consisting of representatives from business, local government, schools, and others. The town team has looked at life in the town from every angle, and has developed a vision for each town. They have also worked on ideas which could make a real difference.

The Growing Fenland project tries to capture a balance. On the one hand, each of these towns is unique, with its own particular opportunities, as well as challenges. On the other hand, there are some areas where by working together we can have more of an impact. Therefore, we are publishing a separate report for each of the towns under the same banner.

Because some of the challenges we face are common across all four towns, a Fenland-wide strategy has also been produced. This sets out interventions to tackle socio-economic challenges in our district through what could be real “game changers” for the local community and the local economy.

[Link to strategic document to be included].



## The process to produce this report

To produce this report, we have gone through several stages of information gathering to ensure our recommendations will work for March. These are:

- 1) Data collection, using a variety of sources
- 2) Meetings with the March town team, which has had representation from the town and district councils, businesses, and educational establishments.
- 3) Attending local events to allow residents to express views on the town, and ideas as they have developed
- 4) Interim reports, which set out a summary of key ideas for the town
- 5) Continued consultation and an online survey to refine and develop ideas, and production of final reports.



G R O W I N G  
F E N L A N D

# Whittlesey – A Market Town fit for the Future

Final Report



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH**  
COMBINED AUTHORITY



Fenland  
CAMBRIDGESHIRE  
Fenland District Council



Cambridgeshire  
County Council



Whittlesey  
Town Council

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## Introduction

### What is Growing Fenland?

The recently published Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER) identified that within the Combined Authority there are three distinct sub-economies. There is the Greater Cambridge economy, which includes the many towns where people commute from into Cambridge. There is the Greater Peterborough economy, and its surroundings. But in an important classification, there is also the fen economy, which includes much of our district of Fenland, as well as parts of East Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.

A lot of strategy has historically focused on making cities work well, and assuming the rest will follow. But because our economy is separate, and in some ways quite isolated with sub-standard transport links, this approach won't work for us. We need a strategy for each of our towns, which helps them prosper, and delivers best quality of life for people who live here. This must acknowledge where we have links to other towns or cities, while seeking to build strength in our places. The Combined Authority is committed to doubling economic output across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by 2040 – to do this, all areas are going to have to succeed, not just the Cambridge economy.

To make this happen, following the CPIER analysis, the Combined Authority has decided to support a process of creating market town plans for each town in our district – Chatteris, March, Whittlesey, and Wisbech. These plans will be used to bid for funding from the Combined Authority and other funding providers, based on the vision for the town.

To develop these plans, each town has established a town team, consisting of representatives from business, local government, schools, and others. The town team has looked at life in the town from every angle, and has developed a vision for each town. They have also worked on ideas which could make a real difference.

The Growing Fenland project tries to capture a balance. On the one hand, each of these towns is unique, with its own particular opportunities, as well as challenges. On the other hand, there are some areas where by working together we can have more of an impact. Therefore, we are publishing four separate reports for each of the towns, but under the same banner – and if you read all four, you will see some crossover.

### The process to produce this report

To produce this report, we have gone through several stages of information gathering to ensure our recommendations will work for Whittlesey. These are:

- 1) Data collection, using a variety of sources (appendices showing the full data packs created at the back)
- 2) Meetings with the Whittlesey town team, which has had representation from the town and district councils, businesses, and educational establishments.
- 3) Public meetings to allow residents to express views on the town, and ideas as they have developed
- 4) Interim reports, which set out a summary of key ideas for the town
- 5) Continued consultation and an online survey to refine and develop ideas, and

- 6) Production of final reports, to generate support for our plans and leverage in funding from the Combined Authority

We would like to thank all those who participated in producing the reports, and offer our particular gratitude the Town Team representatives from each area who were so generous in sharing their time, thoughts and insights.

## Whittlesey – an overview of the town

*Whittlesey is a great place to live and learn. We want to build on these strengths to make Whittlesey a market town that thrives on its heritage and is fit for the future.*

**Whittlesey is a town with many strengths.** It is a popular and attractive place to live, with a strong community spirit. We have good and continuously improving schools. Our programme of annual events, including the Straw Bear festival, attracts people from far and wide. We have some excellent restaurants and shops that draw people into the town.

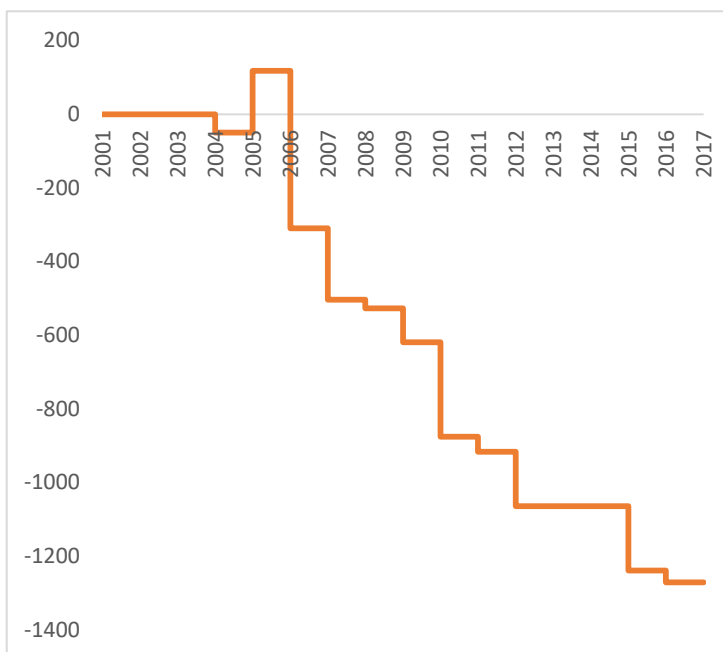
As a place we are always looking to improve and make necessary changes to thrive. Most recently, for example, the relocation of the bus station has brought new life to the centre of town and creates the opportunity to do even more with the square, the area in which it was previously located.

We also benefit from our proximity to Peterborough. As reflected in the CPIER, Whittlesey is considered much more a part of the Greater Peterborough economic geography, compared to the rest of Fenland. This creates opportunities for residents to work, study, and shop, while we still maintain a proudly independent identity and distinct local culture.

We can offer the ‘best of both worlds’ to current and future residents: the sense of community, the calm and closely to the countryside offered by a market town, alongside the benefits of proximity to a city, with everything that it has to offer.

### A High Street in need of regeneration

We have some high-quality shops in Whittlesey which are popular with locals and visitors alike. However, as shown in the graph to the left, the amount of retail floorspace in the town has declined.



*Fig. 1: A1 space (shops) in Whittlesey (m2) – change since 2001*

*Source: Analysis of Cambridgeshire County Council data*

**There are not enough shops in and around the town centre,** and the overall retail offer is not diverse or distinctive enough to compete with the wider range of shops available elsewhere, particularly in Peterborough.

The decline of the traditional high street is very much a national trend. However, as a historic market town, such changes force us to think radically about what our high street and town centre is for. As a priority we want to encourage more specialist markets, such as antique fairs and farmers’ markets, that will attract more people to the town.

We also need to think about how we move with the wider shift from buying things to having experiences

on the high street.

## Rich heritage and culture

**An aspect of the town which is attracting more and more people is our rich heritage and culture.**

Whittlesey is mentioned in Anglo-Saxon documents that precede the Domesday Book. At the centre of town is the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Buttercross. Must Farm, an excavation site describe by the BBC as “Britain’s Pompei” containing the “best-preserved Bronze Age dwellings ever found”, is a precious town asset.<sup>1</sup> Flag Fen Archaeology Park houses a perfectly preserved wooden causeway that is over 3,000 years old The Mud Walls, dotted across town, date back 200 years and were an innovative local way to avoid the unpopular Brick Tax.<sup>2</sup>

That rich history inspires a vibrant local culture, as reflected in a full calendar of events and celebrations. These include music and dance festivals including the famous Straw Bear, the annual Whittlesey festival, ‘BusFest’ vintage vehicle gathering, and our Christmas Extravaganza.

We want to share these assets with the world. We therefore make recommendations in this report for improvements to the market square and town centre that will set the stage for us to do that.

## A well-educated population – but not enough jobs in the town

**Our schools perform well.** At primary level, each school has improved further in recent years, while pupils at Sir Harry Smith perform above the national average in terms of GCSE results, the Ebacc average points score and A Level completion.

**“Schools in Whittlesey are regarded as among the best locally.”**

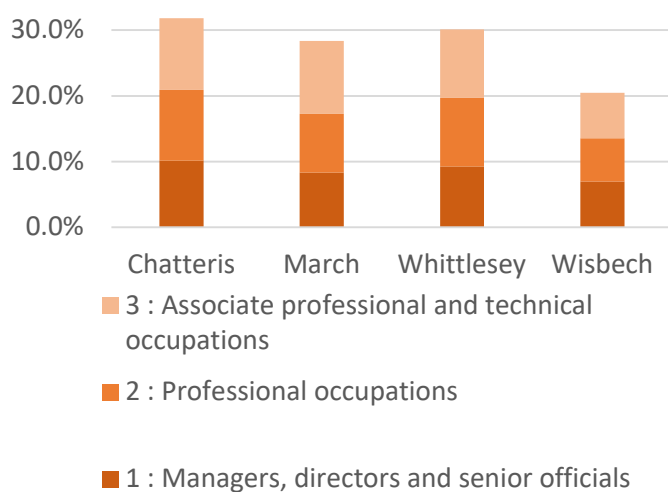
**Our schools’ performances have helped develop a**

**population that is better educated than other parts of Fenland.** As show in Fig. 2 below, just under one in three people in Whittlesey is in a professional, managerial or director-level job. This is a major

asset for our ambition to lead the way as the market town of the future.

*Fig 2: Managerial, professional and technical occupations in the Fenland towns*

Source: ONS Annual Population Survey (APS)



It is true that many of our residents live here and work in Peterborough (45.3% of workers, at the time of the last census). And, according to a 2017 survey, conducted in support of the Neighbourhood Plan, 78% of Whittlesey residents acknowledged that younger people tend to leave the town to find work.

Nonetheless, we have several important local employers such as Forterra and McCain Food.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-36778820>

<sup>2</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/in-your-area/east-of-england/mud-walls/>

Furthermore, recent data also reveals a large increase in the number of professional, scientific and technical jobs in recent years<sup>3</sup>.

In future, we want even more of our young people to live and work in Whittlesey. We will do this by exploring with local partners, including new businesses, what specific, targeted measures might further spur the growth of local enterprises.

## Good quality homes – a mixed picture of connectivity

As well as good schools, another reason that people move to Whittlesey is that we build a range of good quality homes. This includes family homes and affordable homes for teachers and other young professionals. The past five years have seen a strong increase in both house prices and completions; and in the past two years alone we built more homes than any other part of Fenland.

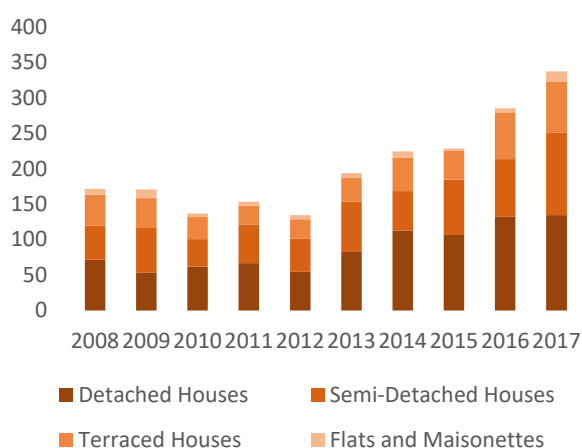
*“Whittlesey is a boom town in building terms.”*

People living in these homes also have access to ultra-fast broadband, as reflected in the map to the right. In a world of digital by default, households need broadband to access services and companies need it to research, trade and promote themselves. The blanket access to high speed broadband is a powerful competitive advantage.

In contrast to our online connectivity, we face some transport challenges. While this is true of many parts of Fenland, three quarters of people here rely on the car to get to work; this is higher than the Cambridgeshire and England averages.

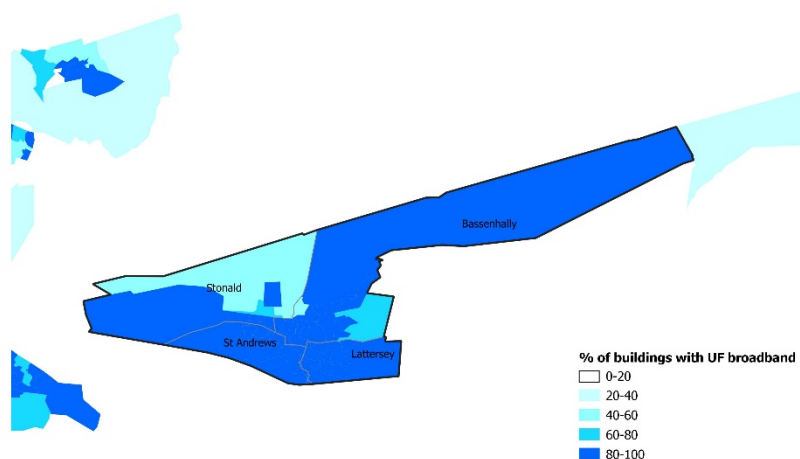
There is a train station at Whittlesey, but it is on the far edge of the town and is felt by some residents to be poorly lit and potentially unsafe at night. In the past, people using the trains have

Fig 3: Whittlesey housing sales since 2008



Source: ONS House Price Statistics for Small Areas (HPSSA)

Fig. 4: Access to Ultra-Fast Broadband



Source: Analysis of Ofcom Connected Nations Data

<sup>3</sup> Analysis of the ONS Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)



complained that services did not stop at Whittlesey and the overall services was unreliable. Improvements to the station are currently being implemented, but to not to the agreed timetable.

As with the other market towns in Fenland, public transport services in Whittlesey do not run frequently enough at all times, finish too early in the evening, and offer an insufficient range of travel options in and out of town. Overall, most people in Whittlesey still opt to drive above all other options.

**People in Whittlesey experience somewhat worse health outcomes than the rest of the country.**

Incidences of cancer, emergency hospital admissions and rates of self-harm are all above the national and Cambridgeshire averages. Healthy eating amongst adults is below national levels, while deliveries to teenage mothers are above the national averages.

It also important to note that **we have a close relationship with Peterborough**, in terms of connectivity, commuting patterns, the housing and job markets, retail options etc. This is unlikely to change, and in fact brings us many benefits; having a city so close by creates opportunities for our residents. The question is how we can further benefit from that connection while also offering something distinct as a place to visit and spend time.

***83% of respondents say they would make journeys by public transport, walking and cycling if services are improved.  
(Neighbourhood Plan Scoping Report)***

## Whittlesey – what residents are telling us

Our work consulting the community brought out the following key themes.

### Likes

The sense of community linked to the “genuine friendliness” of local people was cited as the best things about life in Whittlesey. Respondents linked the sense of community to activities and events, especially the Straw Bear festival. Also linked to this sense of having a good community spirit, people described the place as quiet, safe and a good place to raise a family. Good quality local schools were also identified, which would fit with the feeling of Whittlesey as a good place for families. While people were positive about the small town feel of the place, they were also positive about the easy access to Peterborough.

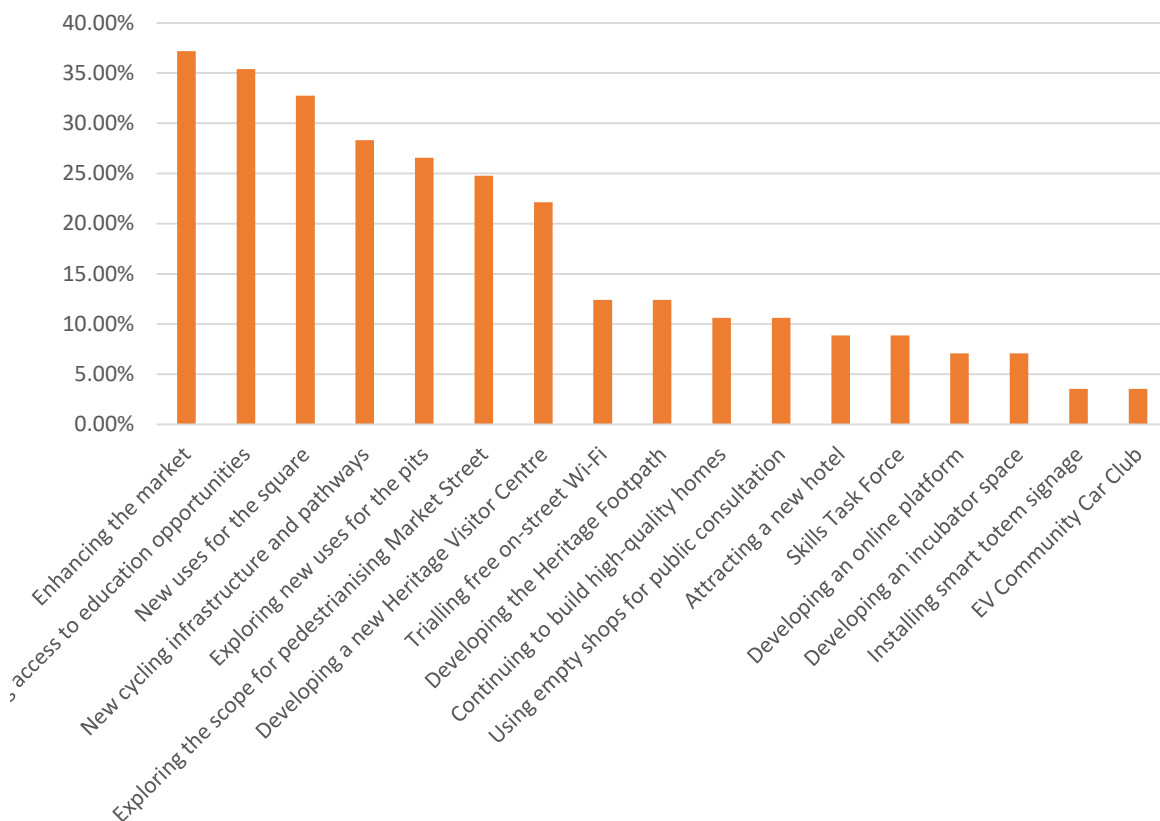
### Dislikes

Residents didn’t identify many things they disliked about Whittlesey. The main issues that people referenced negatively were general transport and accessibility issues, with calls for more public transport in and out town. High school students identified a lack of things to do for their age group.

### Improvements

The main aspects for improvement to emerge from resident feedback were the range of local shops, with calls for more specialised shops and large supermarket. Some residents also identified a need for additional amenities such as GP surgeries and a re-opened police station.

### Favourite ideas from the interim report



*Source: Analysis of Fenland District Council data. Height of bars shows the proportion of residents who chose an idea in their top three.*

When asked to identify their favourite ideas, respondents opted for a fairly wide spread of preferences, with no one option emerging as the clear favourite. The three options with most preferences were: enhancing the market (37%); improving access to education opportunities (35%); and new uses for the square (33%).

The second grouping of expressed preferences, garnering around a quarter of responses were: new cycling infrastructure and pathways (28%); exploring new uses for the pits (27%); exploring the scope for pedestrianising Market Street (25%); and developing a new Heritage Visitor Centre (22%).

## Whittlesey – a market town fit for the future

Whittlesey has so many assets that inspire local pride. We want to build on these and draw on our rich heritage to make Whittlesey a **market town fit for the future**.

We will do this by improving the heart of our town by bringing new life to its centre. We will do this through a programme of enhancements to the market so it becomes an even more important part of life in the town and an extra reason to come and visit. In parallel, we will work with local traders to encourage more activities and events in the square.

Future-facing market towns have a unique and distinctive reputation and ‘offer’ to the rest of the world. That might be connected to food, music or a famous son or daughter of the town. Whittlesey’s offer is our heritage. Whittlesey is mentioned in the *Cartularium Saxonicum* of 973 A.D. and the Domesday Book. Must Farm, “Britain's Pompeii”, magnificent bronze age settlement has been discovered, is precious asset of the town.

We will promote our heritage offer and the other things we have to offer through a new website for the town.

The third way we will ensure we are fit for the future is through increasing skills. We will work with partners to improve transport access to educational opportunities and develop a local skills partnership that will bring together partners to ensure local people can access the skills they need.

## **Eight proposals for Whittlesey**

We have identified a package of eight connected interventions that will make a lasting difference Whittlesey:

### **1. Enhancing the market**

We will explore an alternative location to the market, provide additional support to traders, and better promote the market to residents and visitors.

### **2. New uses for the square**

We will encourage more events and activities on the square, especially in spring and summer, to create a more vibrant 'piazza' feel.

### **3. Heritage Visitor Centre**

We will start to develop a new visitor centre that showcases local artefacts and tells the story of Whittlesey, and Fenland more generally, from the Bronze Age to the modern day.

### **4. Developing the Heritage Walk**

Alongside the visitor centre, the Walk will provide residents with a fascinating guided tour through key landmarks in the town and beyond.

### **5. New town website**

We will promote these new activities and assets, plus existing events like the Straw Bear festival, through a new website.

### **6. Access to educational opportunities**

We will explore with partners short- and long-term opportunities to make it easier for people to access educational institutions in Peterborough and Alconbury Weald.

### **7. Local skills partnership**

We will create a new forum for all those with an interest in skills in the town, including businesses, to ensure that provision matches future skills demands.

### **8. Transport improvement package**

A coordinated set of improvements in and around the town that will facilitate greater mobility and connectivity.

We unpack each of these in detail below.

Some interventions are short term, some medium term, and some longer-term. For each intervention, we set out outline version of the strategic case, the financial case, and the management case.

In most instances, the financial case includes an estimate of costs. We see the CPCA as the primary source of funding, to provide full funding or to provide sufficient funding to enable us to make a strong case to unlock other sources of support. In the latter case, we will also be looking to national government, and its various town support funds.

While we may not attain funding for every intervention immediately, the proposals we set out are 'shovel ready' and could be used as and when further funding from different sources becomes available in future.

# 1. Enhancing the market

## Strategic case

The market is, of course, an important part of Whittlesey's history and identity. Compared to other towns, the market does well. However, as set out in this masterplan, we are ambitious about the future and want to build on that success by further improving the market offer.

While retail patterns are changing, markets still have an important part to play in the future of small towns. They "contribute to the economic, social and political health of towns and cities" and shape the identity of a place by offering something "unique, quirky, unusual and always a bargain".<sup>4</sup> The weekly market is a fixture of life in Whittlesey. It is popular with residents and brings activity and buzz to the Market Place on a Friday.

As we develop the heritage offer of Whittlesey as a whole, we want the market to be a central feature of that offer to visitors. We want to explore with the market traders and others who may be affected, ways to enhance the market. These are:

- The potential for moving the location of the market to the High Causeway. A pedestrianised high street containing shops, this could mean increased footfall as more shoppers could combine visiting the market with using other shops and facilities. A move would also facilitate our proposal to create a 'piazza' feel on the Market Place by working with local bars and cafés to put tables outside.
- Stall appearance. Successful market stalls attract people's attention with striking, appealing branding. We could work with a specialist agency in high street and market brand to develop high-quality signs and an improved visual presence for each stall.
- Attracting more specialist markets, such as antiques fairs, farmers' markets, and fine food markets. This could be done through outreach to potential traders, including local entrepreneurs, and identification of what changes to facilities (see below) might enable a wider range of uses.
- Wider marketing and online presence. As well as supporting the traders to develop better marketing for their stalls, the market as a whole needs to be branded and promoted. Currently, the market does not have its own website. As part of the development of the digital platform for the town as a whole, we could develop a stand-alone page that promoted what was on offer on the market. We would also invest in bold, high-quality signage to be used on market days.
- Customer retention schemes. One way to keep customers returning is to offer them rewards for doing so; such as buy five coffees and get the sixth for free. We would identify ways in which the traders could introduce similar incentives and provide practical assistance for doing so e.g. help with printing high-quality loyalty cards.
- Improving market infrastructure. We would review the scope for improving the practical facilities available on market days and whether they could be improved e.g. the need for more or better refrigeration if that would help stall-holders to offer a wider range of produce.
- A local 'First Pitch' scheme. As well as working with existing stallholders, we would reach out to local entrepreneurs and invite them to take an empty pitch on the market and sell what

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.placemanagement.org/media/19883/markets-matter-final.pdf>

they have to offer. The National Market Traders Federation ran a national 'First Pitch' scheme between 2013 and 2014. This gave opportunities to people who, for examples, were baking cakes or making jewellery at home to get out and sell directly to the public. As well as giving local entrepreneurs a boost, a similar scheme will bring new offers to the market.

A proposal to come through the public consultation was moving market day to Saturday, on the basis that more people are free on the weekends. The potential downside of this proposal is that we may end up attracting fewer people by competing with other Saturday markets. It may be possible to attract specialist, niche market activity on a Saturday to avoid this risk.

## **Financial case**

Based on advice from support providers, a package of support could cost between £30k - £50k including a pot of funding for things like printing business cards, improved refrigeration etc.

## **Management case**

The most effective sequence for this proposal would be:

- Initial consultation with traders on the scope of the enhancement programme.
- Commissioning a specialist package of support from an experienced supplier.
- Delivery of the package of support over 3 – 4 months.
- Launch of new branding and marketing as part of the launch of the online platform for the town.

The market traders are the essential partner in this. Experience shows that enhancing local markets works best when traders feel they are central to the process instead of being 'done to'.

If the relocation were to go ahead, it would also be important to work with current businesses on the High Causeway including communication of how the move can increase footfall for everyone.



## 2. New uses for the square

### Strategic case

We will make it easier for local bars and restaurants to serve food and drink outside, and work with those businesses to develop a programme of annual events. The overall purpose is to create a 'piazza' feel in the square, attracting locals and visitors alike, to eat, drink, mingle and relax, especially in the spring and summer months.

The Market Square is in many ways at the heart of life in Whittlesey. Moving the bus stop from the square has already given it a new lease of life; improving the air quality and making it more pedestrian friendly.

To the sides of the square can be found well-regarded and in some cases award winning restaurants, pubs and hotel including the Grade II listed George Hotel pub, which is part of the Wetherspoons chain. The latter does have a licensed outside drinking area.

Beyond the George's small outside licensed drinking area, the venues on and near the square do not use the whole space. This means we have created the capacity for more activity in the square, by moving the bus stop, but have yet to fully take advantage of that.

As a result, the square is an under-used asset with the exceptions of the weekly market, some monthly events, and of course the annual Straw Bear.

To make even greater use of the square, we will develop an annual programme of locally sourced events, including themed evenings and weekends, that will catalyse the kind of vibrancy described above. We would not prescribe the programme in advance. Instead, as described below, we would work with existing venues and, in parallel, source ideas for new square uses from local organisations, artists and others.

### Financial case

We would look for funding of between £150k and £200k to bring in the specialist agency, deliver an extensive programme of promotion, and purchase additional equipment. This would be relatively modest amount of money for a programme that could generate significantly increased visitor numbers and footfall through the year.

### Making it happen / Delivery

The sequence for making this happen would be to:

- Undertake initial consultation with local businesses
- Deliver a programme of identified improvements to enhance the square amenity, including making the surface more level and user friendly
- Commissioning an event management agency to coordinate and oversee an annual programme of events
- Through the agency, engage local organisations, artists, musicians and others on potential uses the for square
- Work with the existing businesses to ensure that they understand what they can do on the square and address any barriers they identify and to source ideas for what additional events / evenings they would like to run

- Deliver an extensive campaign of promotion locally and more widely in conjunction with local businesses
- Purchase any equipment needed to support the events programme e.g. canvassing and tents.

Throughout, we would work closely with existing square users.

The key partners will be the existing square businesses, and local organisations and individuals who could use the square.

### 3. Heritage visitor centre

#### Strategic case

Market towns in the modern day need a distinctive 'offer' to the outside world. A unique appeal that is rooted in the character and identity of the town. Our offer is our heritage. Whittlesey is mentioned in the *Cartularium Saxonicum* of 973 A.D. and the Domesday Book. On our doorstep is Must Farm, "Britain's Pompeii", where six bronze age boats have been discovered. The vessels are currently being restored and conserved outside of the town.

There is scope for doing more with our heritage. According to the 2017 Neighbourhood Plan scoping report, a majority of people felt that Bronze Age heritage should be promoted as a tourist attraction. Fenland District Council is also currently working with Arts Council England to develop a culture strategy that will have a strong heritage element.

A new Heritage Centre would be built essentially to tell the Story of Whittlesey from Bronze Age to present day. This would have the added advantage of introducing more visitors to the Kings Dyke Nature Reserve. A network of local organisations such as museums, societies and community groups would be invited to use the facilities for exhibition purposes.

The location has been identified and links with Must Farm. The site utilises land given free of charge by Forterra (formerly Hanson Brick) close to the original Must Farm location and directly adjacent to the Kings Dyke Nature Reserve on the A605 with adequate parking facilities. This project was considered in detail by Fourth Street undertaking feasibility. It is acknowledged that exhibiting Must Farm artefacts alone is not sustainable in the long term.

#### Financial case

A new heritage centre should bring additional income to the town. According a recent report commissioned by Historic England, England's heritage sector generated GDP of £13.1 billion in 2016, equivalent to 0.75 per cent of UK's total GVA. The sector also accounted for 196,000 jobs. Our initial assumption is a comprehensive activity plan of around 50 events per year split over small (30 - 50 attendees), medium (100 -150 attendees) or large (300 – 500 attendees) events. The plan would be coordinated by a Community Engagement Officer, supported by a part time assistant and volunteer input.

The anticipated initial expenditure costs are modest at £61,000 with a projected income of £32,000, leaving a deficit of £29,000 in the first year. As interest grows in the Heritage Centre from both a visitor and educational view through schools and colleges the project is anticipated to be financially viable and self-supporting, drawing increased visitors into both Whittlesey and Fenland beyond.

However, up-front funding of around £50k is needed for a further feasibility and options study, including outline business planning.

#### Management case

As above, the next step is to commission a further feasibility and option study that will:

- Articulate the amount and type of artefacts these sites could hold, including preservation requirements.

- Identify potential visitor numbers and segment the potential audience (Whittlesey resident, Fenland resident etc).
- Develop outline budgets, drawing on those visitor projections.
- Identify benchmark examples and identify ways in which the centre can complement existing Fenland museums.

We would then develop a detailed business plan, subject to the findings of this work.

We would engage national partners at an early stage in this work, including Historic England and Arts Council England to ensure our thinking fits with the emerging culture strategy.

At the local level, as already emphasised, we would work closely with local stakeholders.

## 4. Heritage Walk

### Strategic case

As set out in the summary business case for the visitor centre, there are powerful reasons for us to expand our heritage offer:

- Market towns in the modern day need a distinctive 'offer' to the outside world.
- The economic rationale is strong, with heritage growing as a sector and more and more people visiting parts of the UK
- Fenland District Council is investing in a culture strategy which will have a strong heritage aspect.

In this context, there are several reasons why a Walk would be an effective investment:

- It would complement very well the proposed new visitor centre, offering an opportunity for visitors to see for themselves the elements of the story described in the centre.
- It will encourage healthier living amongst residents by giving them a safe and interesting route to explore.
- It will help address the issue of poor-quality pathways in parts of the town and, for routes out of town, accommodate a cycle lane.

At the moment, existing signage and general wayfinding is generic and does not direct local people or visitors to our assets.

We therefore propose to create a new Walk that would include historic landmarks in the town such as St Andrew's and St Mary's churches, the Buttercross, Portland House and the Mud Walls.

The Walk would be designed around the highest quality wayfinding standards. The route would be consistently and strikingly branded, with markings on the pavement and signage along the way. Each landmark on the way would include equally consistently branded information points.

As well as introducing new signage, the installation of the route is an opportunity to improve pavements, footpaths, railings and street furniture on the way.

We would speak to local business about ways they can benefit from the pathways e.g. placing adverts on route maps.

### Funding

We are looking for £150k for the combined package of work described above.

### Management case

The sequence for delivering this proposition is:

- Agreement of a final route and key landmarks, developed in consultation with local organisation and the landmarks, along with the centre to be accommodated at a later stage.
- Commissioning a wayfinding strategy.
- Delivering a combined package of wayfinding installation and improvements to pavements and street equipment.

- Promotion of the Walk, including a dedicated section on the new town website which is also recommended in this report.

The partners for this proposal are very similar to those who would be engaged in the centre. There should be an opportunity to engage partners on both proposals at the same time to avoid replication.

## 5. New town website and social marketing strategy

### Strategic case

Successful market towns have a positive, friendly 'brand' that they communicate to world. Towns such as Skipton and Ludlow have used this approach to great effect.

The new town website will:

- Promote the brand of Whittlesey as a destination, especially to outsiders, and in relation to our heritage offer in particular.
- Provide a central repository for local information, such as forthcoming events, business opening hours, and local discounts. While this information is available, it is usually spread across different sources, such as local magazines and Facebook groups, which local residents may not be aware of or subscribe to and outside visitors are very unlikely to know about.
- Link to local organisations to raise their profile and connect them to new members, customers, users.
- Provide information to residents about how to access services online.

We therefore propose to create a new website, clearly branded in line with the vision set out in this master plan, which will provide the information described above. This could be done with a local professional web designer.

While setting up a website is technologically straightforward, with the tools to do so widely available, several factors need to be high quality:

- High quality design, including appropriate and high-quality images, well-written and accurate copy, and ease of navigation – it is vital that the site looks professional and reflects well on the town.
- Just as importantly, the site needs to be kept up to date to be of value and to avoid disappointing visitors with inaccurate information. This information would need sourcing from liaison with local group and businesses.
- Active management of any discussion boards or discussions forums, including developing a set of rules, and responding to any queries directed to the site.
- Search engine optimisation (known as SEO) so that site appears prominently in response to search terms.

As above, while it easy to set up a website, setting up and maintaining a good quality site of which the town can be proud requires effort and commitment.

We would develop a proactive social media strategy to promote the town via the website. This would involve coordinated messaging across different social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and new platforms), and the smart use of analytics to target tailored content at different audiences (such as shoppers, tourists and young people).

### Financial case

A small amount of funding would be needed at the beginning to design, test and launch each site. This can be between £5k and 10k depending on functionality and whether the contractor would be required to provide the copy or if this would be provided.

Ongoing resources would be needed to maintain the site. This could be a modest cost if the site were updated on a voluntary basis, or through an existing resource, meaning the only cost would be the required licensees for the software including the Content Management System (CMS) and services such as back-up and security. This could be £500 per year.

## Management case

While each site would be different and distinct, tailored to the branding and messaging of each town, Fenland District Council should play a role in ensuring there is consistency of tone and voice in relation to the Growing Fenland brand.

Each town team could then work with a local website designer(s) to develop, test and launch the site. Different skills are required at different points in this process e.g. designing the look and navigation of the site is different from ongoing management. It may be possible to find an organisation with all these skills that can enter into a single contract. Alternatively, different arrangements could be made e.g. one contract to design, test and build up to the point of launch, and another to maintain and promote on an ongoing basis.

There would also be value in engaging a small group of local stakeholders in the development and testing process. This is useful to the technical process of designing and generate buy-in to idea of the site and generate some momentum behind local organisations putting their information on the platform.

As above, there would need to clear and agreed arrangements for keeping the site regularly up to date. This could be done through as part of a contract or through a local volunteer.

The first result when searching for “Ludlow” on Google is the town’s website <https://www.ludlow.org.uk/> This presents high quality and attractive images from the town, has a single strapline – “A bustling market town”, lists for forthcoming events, and provides two short paragraphs summarising the town’s assets and appealing features. It then then provides more detail on each of these aspects – where to stay, things to do, food and drink etc.



## 6. Improving access to education

### Strategic case

Our local schools provide a good quality education at all ages. However, some pupils at age 16 and 18 will be looking for other opportunities to further develop their education outside the town. Adults already in work may want to develop their skills and gain new qualification in order to progress in their careers.

For too many people, these opportunities are out of bounds. Whittlesea train station is on the very edge of the town, the service has a poor reputation for reliability, and the station, until recently, was felt by some to be dark and unsafe.

Residents' dissatisfaction with local bus services emerged clearly from the responses to the online consultation on the interim version of this document. There are insufficient buses out of the town in the morning and in or out of town in the evening (services out might be used for people accessing evening classes). As a result of these restrictions, we have people of all ages being frustrated from developing their full potential.

As part of the Fenland-wide strategy document, which makes recommendations across the four market towns, there is consideration of the scope for franchising bus services. This is made in reference to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Strategic Bus Review, which noted that franchising "may be most easily applied to rural initiatives, and would probably be critical to the holistic approach identified as it gives greater control to the CPCA to integrate bus services with wider rural transport initiatives in areas where there are few (if any) commercial bus operators to partner with."<sup>5</sup>

As part of that discussion, we will make the case for increased bus capacity, through more regular and reliable routes, to be built in to a new and improved timetable.

While discussions are ongoing, there is scope to develop a dedicated shuttle bus service, running in the mornings and late afternoon / early evening, west to Peterborough and south to Alconbury Weald.

Given the time it takes to get to Peterborough during morning or afternoon rush hour, it makes sense to run a single service with sufficient capacity e.g. single decker bus to the city. Given the further distance, it also makes sense to run a single service to Alconbury Weald, although demand will be lower and could be accommodated through a mini-bus.

This service could be developed to demonstrate and define more precisely the level of demand and later be integrated into a new timetable.

### Financial case

Funding a new service would need to be negotiated as part of any wider re-organisation of bus services, including the scope for franchising.

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<sup>5</sup> Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Strategic Bus Review, p65

## Management case

The case for changing the current timetable will need to be made with and through the CA, which commissions local bus services. We will continue these discussions over the next few months in line with the strategic recommendations being developed through the Growing Fenland process.

Creating a new service would require the CA to procure an additional service from a registered transport supplier through a separate contract.

As above, the key partner in relation to this proposition is the CA and, through them, Stagecoach, which is the dominant supplier of bus services in Fenland.

Discussions would be held with relevant educational institutions, to ensure they supported the service and to address practical matters like appropriate drop-off and collection points. There may also be scope to explore whether the institutions had uses for the coaches in between the morning and afternoon service.

## 7. Skills Task Force

### Strategic case

As explored in the portrait of Whittlesey above, our town generally performs well in relation to education and skills. Our schools perform well and our population is more highly skilled than some other parts of Fenland. There has also been an increase in recent years in the number of people in highly skilled professional and technical professions.

We want to build on these strengths and ensure that more residents have access to skills and development opportunities. In turn, this should ensure that businesses will have greater access to highly qualified apprentices, trainees and employees. This is vital to pursuing our ambition of making Whittlesey a hub for highly skilled companies and enterprises.

A specific issue we face is that there is currently no mechanism or structure through which partners in the area of skills development can come together. This means we have no way of ensuring, for example, that the courses on offer locally actually met employers' needs, either now or in future.

We therefore propose the formation of a voluntary grouping to provide that liaison between different stakeholders. Its purpose would be to share information and stimulate action on:

- Horizon-scanning future skills demand. This could be done through light-touch engagement, such as short surveys with local employers on their current and future skills needs.
- Facilitating conversations with providers about the suitability of current provision in light of future demand.
- Identifying work experience / placement / apprenticeship opportunities at local businesses – this element of the work would be coordinated with the Combined Authority's apprenticeship brokerage programme.
- Identifying opportunities to re-train and up-skill adult workers. This could include using local institutions to provide courses to adults and finding findings practical ways to open up existing provision to a wider range of people. This will help individuals progress and contribute to the development of a more highly-skilled and flexible workforce.

The group would not have formal power to effect change. Its role would be to convene partners to take mutually beneficial actions. For example, it is the interests of providers to provide the kinds of courses that meet demand.

The group should also feed into the proposed Education Opportunity Area (please see overarching strategic document) which will look, amongst other things, at ways to improve the linkages between different providers at key points.

This idea is very much in line with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Industrial Strategy. This includes, among its strategic objectives, the goal of:

Bringing employers and skills providers together to understand the current and future skills needs, and planning provision to meet them.<sup>6</sup>

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6

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818886/Cambridge\\_SINGLE\\_PAGE.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818886/Cambridge_SINGLE_PAGE.pdf)

It equally in line with the underlying case for CPCA's emerging Skills Strategy. The independently produced Skills Strategy Evidence Base Report asserted that the CPCA's role is to "commission, to test, and to facilitate collaboration between learners, employers, providers and organisations." We want to see this kind of collaboration developed, even pioneered, here in Whittlesey.

## Funding

As a voluntary partnership, the group would not require funding, but partners would need to commit resource i.e. time and attention to make the group work. If the town council is to provide active development of the group, this too would need to be resourced.

## Management case

As a voluntary arrangement, making it happen would be dependent on the commitment of partners to work together. To assist this, the town council could proactively engage partners to introduce the idea and the rationale for it. It would be important for those identified partners to be able to shape a simple Terms of Reference, or equivalent, so they felt some ownership over the idea.

The group could then meet on a quarterly basis, with smaller sub-groups looking at specific issues in between meetings.

There may be value in identifying and agreeing a knowledgeable and trusted Chair, to mitigate any potential concern about the group being driven by one partner / agenda.

Potential partners include:

- Combined authority
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- District council
- Town council
- Sir Harry Smith Community College
- FE and HE institutions
- Local employers that should cover different sectors
- Skills providers including voluntary as well as commercial providers

It should be clear that partners are not participating as 'delegates' or 'representatives' from their own organisation. Instead they are there to work together as described above to improve access to high-quality skills development for Whittlesey residents.

As above, the group should be plugged in to the proposed Education Opportunity Area.

## 8. Transport improvement package

### Strategic case

As set out in this paper, we want Whittlesey's economy to continue growing sustainably. We want more people to visit and enjoy our rich heritage and cultural offer. We want our residents, of all ages and at different stages in their career, to access opportunities to improve their CV and boost their career.

For these things to happen, we need a coherent package of improvements to make it easier to get in and out of Whittlesey, at all times of day, through an improved range of options.

We propose five interventions:

- **More frequent and reliable bus services.** The Growing Fenland strategy paper, which makes district-wide proposals, makes the case for rethinking the model of bus delivery in Fenland through franchising. As this approach is developed, we will work with our partners on the introduction of more, and more regular, services. This should include services in and out town, to the other market towns and beyond, and within town, including more service to and from the train station.
- **More train services throughout the day and later in the evening.** In parallel to improving bus services, we will work make a strong case for more train to stop at Whittlesey, especially in the evening. This would be obviously complementary to more bus services going to the station.
- **A new park and ride scheme from the town centre to Peterborough** would alleviate pressure on town centre parking spaces that are currently being taken by commuters. It would free those spaces during the day for residents to use local shops and amenities; boosting those businesses and generally contributing to a more vibrant and active feel to the centre of town in the middle of the day.
- **New bridge over the railway crossing.** The level crossing at King's Dyke is widely recognised to have been a cause of "significant delays to traffic travelling between Whittlesey and Peterborough for years". There remains a strong case for completion of a new bridge over the crossing. With a final design and price for the construction phase of the project already submitted by the chosen engineer, we will continue to work with partners on the completion of the project.
- **A new relief road** from Coates to the Morrisons / Cardea Roundabout so that Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) can access industrial sites from the east rather adding to the congestion of residential routes, particularly along Inhams Road and Station Road. As well as adding to the congestion, HGVs degrade the quality of the road and street surfaces and contribute to the problem of air pollution.

### Financial case

The immediate financial asks are for

- £50k for a feasibility and options study into the new relief road. This would look at options for the route and related changes e.g. the introduction of roundabout and other impacts e.g. on the national cycle way.
- £30k for a similar study into the park and ride scheme.

## Management case

We recognise that these proposals are a mixture of short and long term. We will continue to work with our partners on the successful delivery of the package as a whole over time.

## The Overall Strategy for Fenland

Because some of the challenges we face are common across all four towns, we have published alongside this a Fenland-wide strategy to set out what some of the real “game changers” will be for our district. They key ideas coming forward from this are:

1. Nene River Barrier
2. Opportunity for full bus franchising
3. A47 Dualling
4. Wisbech Garden Town
5. A New Deal for Education
6. A New Partnership for Skills
7. Early Years Support
8. A Health Action Area
9. The Manufacturing Launchpad
10. Cambridgeshire Jobs Compact
11. A Mayoral Implementation Taskforce

It is at this level that we hope to tackle challenges around health and education, where the opportunities from acting at a district level are much greater.

## Next steps

We have set out a vision for Whittlesey, showing what interventions can make a real difference to our town, in the context of the overall strategy for Fenland.

We now look forward to working constructively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), and its Mayor, James Palmer, to implement these ideas. This will require both direct support from the Combined Authority, and the resources needed to take these ideas to key government funds such as the Stronger Towns Fund as and when they come forward.

This work will be overseen by the CPCA, FDC and other key partners working in conjunction with the Town Team which was put together for this work.





G R O W I N G  
F E N L A N D

# Wisbech:

## Market Town Masterplan



Wisbech Town Council



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## Introduction

This piece of work is a response to the Combined Authority's plans for Market Town Masterplans. These are being brought forward across the district.

This report is unlike the other three market town reports (Chatteris, March, Whittlesey). This is because Wisbech has done a lot of its strategic thinking already. Throughout the Wisbech 2020 Vision work, there has been extensive consultation of residents to understand the mood of the town. The Wisbech 2020 Vision work is currently being refreshed to create an action plan for the year 2019/20. The Wisbech Garden Town proposals have also been developed, and we are securing buy-in for these.

This document, then, does not represent another strategy, or a totally new set of ideas. Nor will it constitute a new workstream on top of the significant activity already going on in Wisbech.

However, we are excited about the new opportunities that the advent of the Combined Authority brings. We invite the Combined Authority to get involved in the work we are leading on to transform the town of Wisbech: focused on improving economic, social, and environmental outcomes for the benefit of all our residents. We have worked with the Wisbech 2020 Vision team to understand which of the long list of actions are the key proposals where Combined Authority support would be most helpful.

## A strategy that works across Fenland

As well as this report, we are also bringing forward a set of strategy proposals for the whole district. These will move the dial on many of the big challenges experienced right across the district.

It is at this level that we hope to tackle challenges around health and education, where the opportunities from acting at a district level are much greater.

[Include link to strategic document]

## A mandate to be bold

We are acting with courage to transform the town of Wisbech. This reflects our history. Thomas Clarkson was a leading abolitionist, who courageously challenged the dominant views of his day to bring about the end of the slave trade. The Peckovers were philanthropists who stood for improvements in education and pacifist causes. Octavia Hill was a pioneer in creating new models of social housing and founded the National Trust. We have never been cautious of embracing change, or speaking out against the consensus.

Now, more than ever, we need to draw on this tradition of doing things differently. There are many brilliant things about our town – but we have some serious challenges we need to work on, including education and health. And we need to think creatively about how we manage factors which are not directly under our control, such as land values, flood risk, and climate change. We want Wisbech to be a **resilient town of the future**, ready to adapt to whatever challenges come our way.



This call for resilience is in particular reflected in our longer-term ambitions for future housing growth. Our plans embrace the need to be resilient to the impacts of climate change, particularly flooding. This reflects the recommendation in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER) that Wisbech becomes a “UK testbed for new flood-resistant approaches to development”<sup>1</sup>. And by being fully integrated within the Wisbech community, we can also strengthen community resilience.

Now is the time for those standing in the model of our radical past to embrace the opportunity.

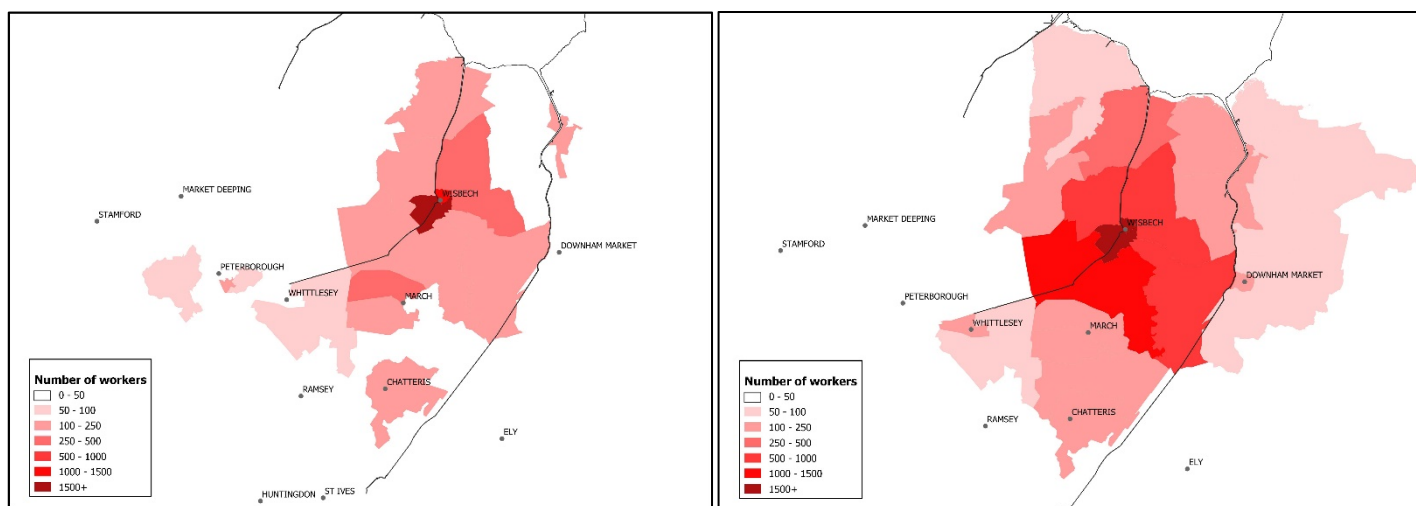
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cpier.org.uk/media/1672/cpier-report-151118-lowres.pdf> p92

## Wisbech – what residents and the data is saying

### A strong local centre

Wisbech, unlike other towns in Fenland, acts as a magnet – it draws in more people than it sends out for work. We can see this by looking at commuting patterns for the town:



*Commuters out...*

*...and commuters in*

*Source: Analysis of Census 2011*

This is the result of a few things. Firstly, Wisbech<sup>2</sup> is by some margin the largest of the Fenland market towns. While it is still some way off city size, in the absence of another city nearby, this makes Wisbech an important local centre.

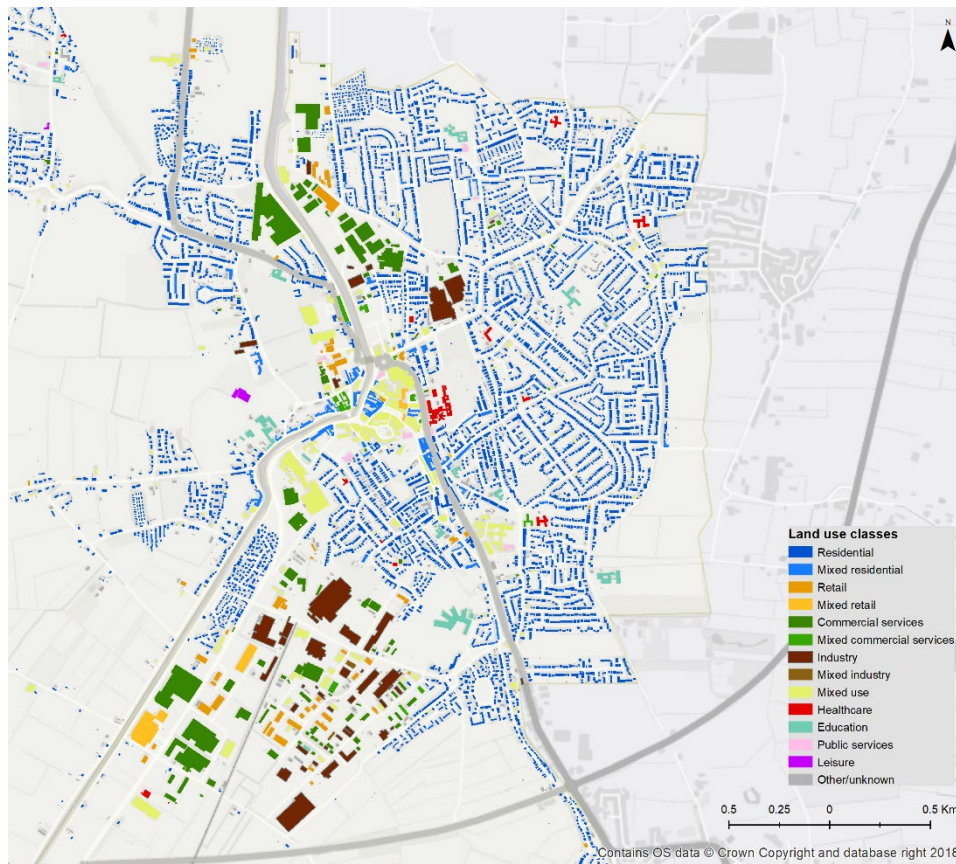
Secondly, Wisbech has high employment – with many larger firms. Total employment is 13,750 in Wisbech, and 15.2% of all business have ten or more staff – very high compared to Fenland (10.1%) and the England average (10.5%).

This can be seen in the large industrial clusters around the town. But Wisbech also offers significant retail and leisure services, as well as healthcare services at the North Cambridgeshire Hospital. The local importance of Wisbech can be seen from the variety of different land use types in the town.

***“We’re a bit in-betweeny in terms of size.” – Wisbech resident***

<sup>2</sup> Our geographical definition is based upon ward boundaries. For more details, please see Appendix

## Land use in Wisbech



Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of Ordnance Survey Points of Interest data

One cause for concern, though, is the lack of substantial amounts of people commuting west to Peterborough. While this may have grown since the data was recorded in 2011, Peterborough is our nearest city, which contains higher-paid employment. There is virtually no commuting south to Cambridge. Much of this comes down to issues with transport – inadequate road links which are prone to closure, and poor public transport provision.

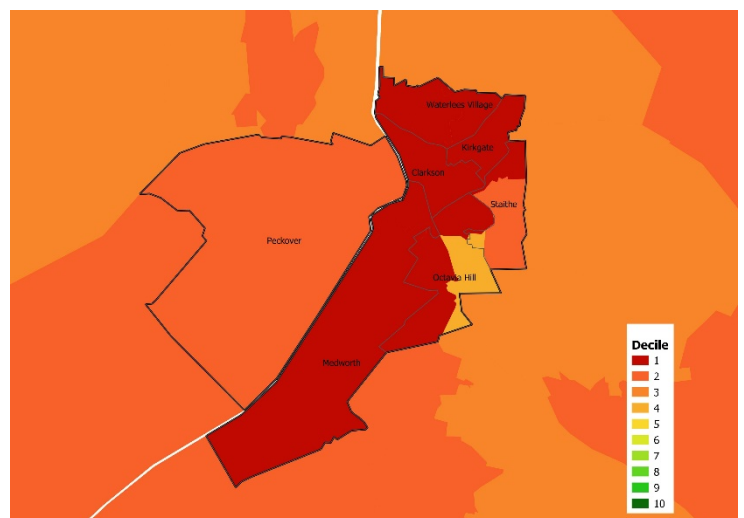
## An educational offer that needs support

While recent improvements have been seen at several schools in Wisbech, educational deprivation remains a big challenge. There are a few elements to this. Firstly, when children arrive at primary school in Wisbech, they are generally performing less well than their peers elsewhere. Phonics skills among young children are among the worst in the country.

Secondly, rates of children staying on for sixth form have historically been low – though this has not been the case at the grammar school.

Thirdly, there are many different cultures in

## Educational Deprivation in Wisbech (2015)



Source: Analysis of Home Office data (2015)



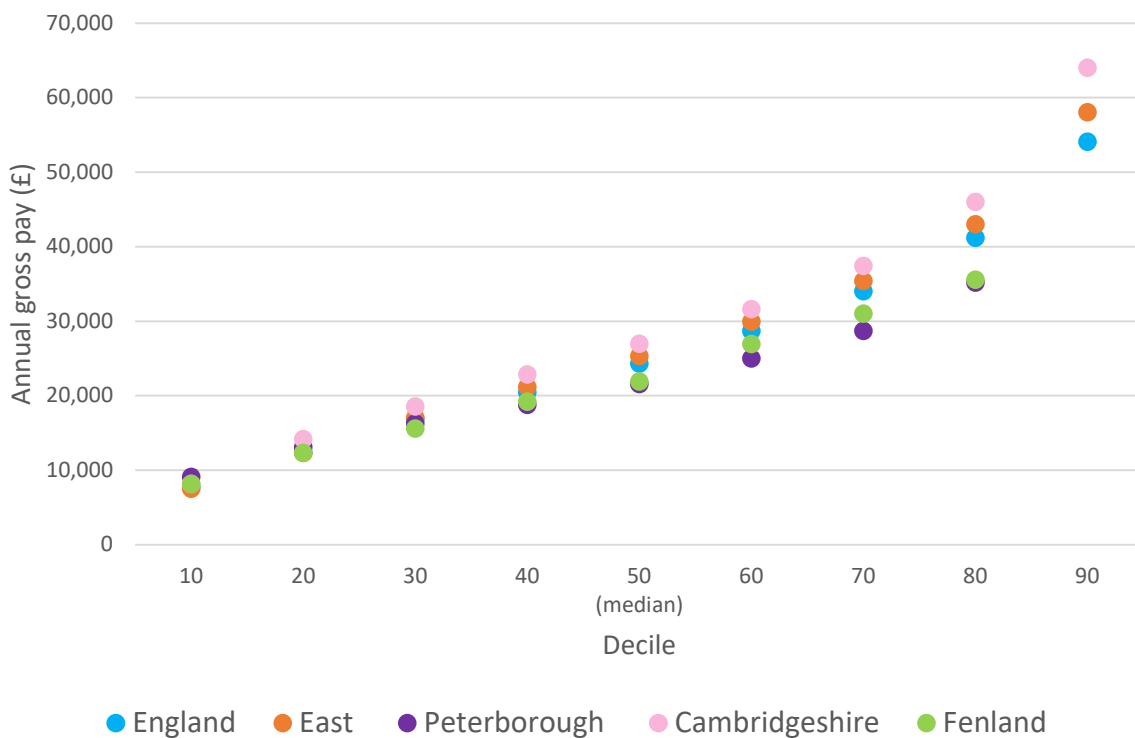
Wisbech, which brings diversity to our town, but can also put extra pressure on resources – with the need to teach children who don’t have English as a first language, and who may come from a culture where schooling starts later.

## Low unemployment – but also low wages

Unemployment is low in Wisbech – with only 2.2% of the working age population claiming Job Seekers’ Allowance (JSA). The large industrial cluster which has grown up around the town testifies to the fact that people work hard in Wisbech, and employers recognise this.

At the same time, much of this work is in lower skilled occupations. At the time of the last census (2011) **43% of Wisbech residents were in occupations that were either “Elementary Occupations” or “Process, plant, and machine operatives”**, compared to 29% in Fenland and 18% in England<sup>3</sup>. This lower skilled work is linked to generally low wages – which lag behind Cambridgeshire across Fenland as whole.

Wages at different deciles for different areas



Source: ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. Data not available for Fenland and Peterborough at the 90<sup>th</sup> decile.

## A mixed picture on the high street

Wisbech High Street has seen conversions from shops to restaurants, cafés, pubs and bars over the last fifteen years – with the amount of floorspace for shops decreasing by

**“There’s no real night time economy” – Wisbech business owner**

<sup>3</sup> Analysis of ONS Annual Population Survey data



2,500m<sup>2</sup> between 2002 and 2017, while the amount of floorspace for eating and drinking increased by 2,350m<sup>2</sup> over the same period<sup>4</sup>.

In many ways, this is in line with national trends, where retailers have struggled with the increase in online shopping. **But the increase in cafés, restaurants and pubs has not yet translated into a busy evening economy for the town, which generally feels quiet post 7pm.** This is probably in part due to the leisure and dining facilities which exist out to the west of the town (including the Light Cinema) which may draw people away from the town centre at this time. Wisbech also suffers somewhat from not having a “flagship store” to bring footfall to the town centre.

However, the town is weathering the declining retail trend well with a busy market and few vacant units. A recent report on the market commented that “the traditional market days are Thursday and Saturday which still appear to be strong trading days as does not unsurprisingly Friday”<sup>5</sup>.

At the same time, the town is blessed by a wealth of brilliant architecture and cultural attractions, including Peckover House, Wisbech Castle, and the Wisbech & Fenland Museum, meaning there is plenty for visitors and residents to see and do. There is a full calendar of events, and numerous community organisations.

## Some challenges with health

Health outcomes are generally worse in Wisbech than England averages (though not on every measure). Most notably, hospital stays for alcohol related harm are 46% above the England average, cancer incidence is 10.6% above the England average, and rates of emergency admissions for heart disease, heart attack, and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) are all over 50% above England averages. As a consequence, premature mortality rates for those under 75 are 30.9% higher than in England, and for those under 65 are 43.8% higher – indicating a significant challenge here.

In terms of lifestyle factors, the available data is less detailed, but there is a notable gap with England in the rates of healthy eating adults – 22.7%, compared to 28.7% in England, and 32.4% in Cambridgeshire<sup>6</sup>.

## A town that is taking the initiative

Wisbech is very unusual for a market town in being very proactive about its future. Through the Wisbech 2020 Vision, the town has actively engaged with the Government, which has resulted in visits from ministers and senior civil servants, signalling support. While cities tend to have more resources for this type of activity, Wisbech has used its assets to make a strong case for investment. A recent visit from Their Royal Highnesses The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall has raised the profile of the town still further.

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Cambridgeshire County Council. Based upon change of use applications for planning categories A1, A3 and A4. Figures rounded.

<sup>5</sup> NABMA: Market Health Check Report

<sup>6</sup> All figures taken from Public Health England data, available through the Local Health tool





The town also benefits from a strong community spirit. In recent surveys undertaken for the 'I Love Wisbech' work, the friendliness of the town was frequently referenced, as well as voluntary sector organisations such as the Ferry Project and local churches. Wisbech Town Council have also tried to be as proactive as possible in enhancing community integration through their wide range of community events.



## **Our key asks of the Combined Authority**

We invite the Combined Authority to be a part of transforming our town. The Combined Authority has recognised, through its response to the CPIER, the importance of the Fens as a separate economic area to both the Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough economies. Wisbech is the largest town in the Cambridgeshire Fens – so realising the potential of this economy has to mean a prosperous and inclusive future for Wisbech.

Our key asks are:

- 1. Provide immediate connectivity to key employment centres**
- 2. A Town Centre Improvement Initiative**
- 3. Support cohesion and community shared space**
- 4. Open up countryside access, and develop the Wisbech Country Park**
- 5. Develop a workplace health award scheme**
- 6. Focus on Tourism**
- 7. Repair Derelict Buildings**
- 8. Commercialisation of Wisbech Port**

We now unpack each of these in turn.



## 1. Provide immediate connectivity to key employment centres

Wisbech suffers from poor transport connectivity. According to Wikipedia, it is among the twenty largest towns in England not to have a train station<sup>7</sup>. The fact that the A47 is single carriageway for much of its journey east and west from Wisbech makes it unsafe and slow. Cycle infrastructure to connect the town to other places is virtually non-existent. All of the above means that it is difficult to work in any of the East of England's primary employment centres – Peterborough, Cambridge, and Norwich – while living in Wisbech.

The economic impacts of this are clear. Within Wisbech there are low levels of professional employment, meaning that many who want to move on in their career feel they need to leave the town. This takes people and resources away. It is also a missed opportunity to bring more money in to flow around the town, which would help the high street immensely.

We know what the real “game-changers” are to make changes to this in the long run, which are covered in the strategy paper. The A47 needs to be fully dualled to open up employment opportunity. In the longer term a rail link to the town will mean young professionals, who are increasingly unlikely to drive, will base themselves in the town. A 45-minute link to Cambridge would increase employment and allow for people working in Cambridge to access more affordable housing. Further ahead, Wisbech may be able to become part of the Cambridge Autonomous Metro (CAM) network, which is initially being developed in the south of the county.

But, even if all goes as best as it possibly can on these projects, construction of heavy infrastructure inevitably takes a long time in both the planning and delivery. It is highly unlikely that either project will be complete before 2030. This is too long to wait – we need solutions now. Business cases for ambitious schemes will also stack up more readily if we can nurture patterns of commuting out of the town. Fenland Association for Community Transport (FACT) is working to help address this – but much more needs to be done, which goes beyond the limits of what a volunteer organisation can provide.

Some ideas which should be developed, tested, and if viable rolled out include:

- **A shuttle bus service to key transport hubs.** Both March and Watlington stations are within 25 minutes' drive from Wisbech. These enjoy quick connections to Cambridge (and Peterborough, in the case of March). A shuttle service which was designed to coincide with train departures would make public transport commuting a feasible option.
- **Testbed for the Cambridge Autonomous Metro (CAM).** The technology for the Cambridge Autonomous Metro will need to be trialled. According to the Strategic Outline Business Case, the CAM will use “high-quality, zero-emission ‘trackless metro’ vehicles, powered by electric batteries recharged overnight and at route termini throughout the day, without the need for overhead wires”. This technology could be trialled to connect Wisbech on the course of one of the old railway line connections. This would help as a proof of concept both for the CAM, and also for future connectivity to Wisbech.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_largest\\_towns\\_in\\_England\\_without\\_a\\_railway\\_station](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_largest_towns_in_England_without_a_railway_station)





These suggestions are fixes for the short term – but impetus must be kept up for Wisbech Rail and the dualling of the A47.



## 2. A Town Centre Improvement Initiative

Throughout the Growing Fenland project, among the normal rivalries between towns, one refrain has been clear from other towns that they believe Wisbech has been the focus an undue amount of resource and attention. That there has been real focus on Wisbech is clearly true. This is to a degree justified by the socio-economic and demographic statistics in the town which are particularly challenging.

In our view, a focus on Wisbech is justified over and above the proposals suggested by the town team, but the focus should be on giving the town the support it needs to capitalise on its assets and deal with its issues so that it has a momentum of its own going forward. We think it is possible and necessary to get Wisbech even more firmly on the right path. This is because the context has changed or is set to do so.

The strategy paper includes a range of transport proposals. Alongside the revenue proposals also considered for improvements to education and health, these capital proposals, if implemented, would change the potential of Wisbech Town Centre, making it both possible and necessary to improve the town's offer.

This is a project that other key stakeholders have a concern with. NPP, owners of the Horsefair Shopping Centre, have reported a marked decline in footfall and wish to work with the Town and District Council and others to develop proposals to improve footfall in the town centre. At the moment, footfall is not tracked in the Town Centre – but as this initiative is taken forward it will be important to do so.

Based on all of these factors, we propose a Wisbech Town Centre initiative.

Its aim should be to make Wisbech a venue of choice for retail, leisure and culture for the widest possible cross-section of local people as well as to a growing number and range of visitors.

The way this will be achieved is through a combination of measures designed to:

- increase footfall in the town centre, thereby embedding and sustaining the existing retail offer as well as creating new opportunities. Footfall counters to be introduced to monitor changes in footfall i.e. when events are held or if a new store is opened. It will be important to do so as anecdotal evidence suggests the market place and surrounding streets are doing better than the Horsefair shopping centre – the only place footfall is currently counted.
- improve the attractiveness of key gateways to the town centre including by potentially remodelling the Horsefair carpark
- improve the range of hotel accommodation on offer
- investigate the possibility of covering the market, or other creative approaches to maximising its potential, while exploring whether there is a case for more retail space in the town centre (or whether existing large retail space in the centre can be made more attractive for large retailers).
- develop a distinctive food and beverage offer which reflects the rich agricultural offer of the Fenland area



- develop the area around the Wisbech Castle and Museum as a cultural quarter, with space for artists to display and sell their products.
- create community owned and managed space as a home for community groups
- Fund and work with Wisbech Town Council to introduce their plans for Wisbech Market Place which includes pedestrianisation as well as visual features
- Introduce policies to encourage nightlife such as restaurants into the Town Centre

We believe that there is a valuable opportunity to take forward these proposals in a joint partnership between the Town and District Councils the owner of the Horsefair shopping centre, NPP, and potentially others including Elgood & Sons Brewery.

This approach would need to be accompanied by other policy changes, including a commitment to more effective policing of the Town Centre and a commitment on the part of the District Council to focus development on the Town Centre, curtailing further developments on the outskirts of town for activity that could reasonably find a location in the town centre.

King's Lynn was improved by a focus on a large retail offer, whilst this is difficult to do in the existing High Street, sites very close to the existing centre should be identified as possibilities to improve the shopping precinct.

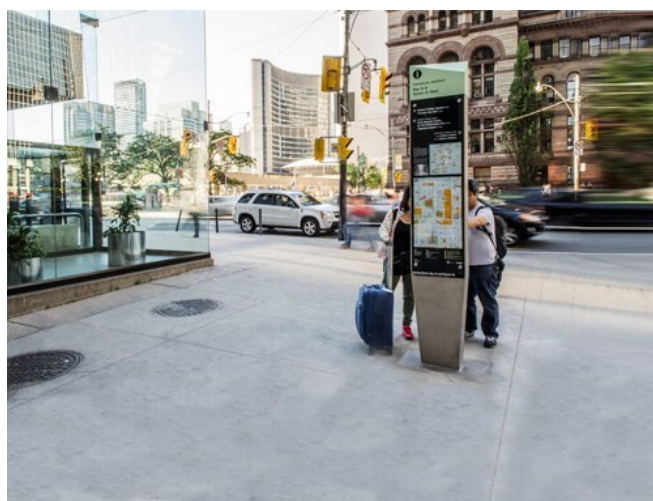
As well as improving the digital offering for the town, there is an important role for doing things around the town which will help to generally improve the “feel” of Wisbech.

But there are some smaller things we can do as well.

## Attractive Totem Signage to improve legibility

Wayfinding totems are smartly presented, with well-designed maps, clean text, and attractive colour palette. These will help to improve the town centre aesthetic. They also send a clear message that the town expects visitors to come and look around – which grows a sense that the town is “on the map” and reminds locals about reasons to take pride in their town. Including historical sections on the signs about key features of the town can also help connect people to the town’s heritage.

The importance of navigability, or “legibility” of places is becoming increasingly appreciated. People will spend longer, discover more, and have a more positive experience if a place has an effective wayfinding strategy.





## Support a “digitally-enabled” town centre which can thrive in the era of online shopping

Online sales as a percentage of total retail sales has grown from 3.4% to 18% between 2007 and 2018<sup>8</sup>. This has been blamed for the challenges we have seen on the high street in Wisbech. Retail space has fallen by 2,500m<sup>2</sup> between 2002 and 2017<sup>9</sup>, though much of this has been absorbed by another trend – towards café culture, pub, and restaurant space.

However, many town centres are thriving, which shows the link between growth in online shopping and high street decline is by no means cast in iron. Shops which are innovating to bring together their digital and physical offerings can continue to maintain a high street presence, where customers can continue to appreciate using the store, even if they then wait until returning home to order. **The integration of the physical and digital offering is a key trend** of the moment.

To adapt to this trend, we need to enact the following:

- **On-street Wi-Fi across the town centre.** This currently exists in Cambridge, and has recently been launched in Ely. As well as giving people a reason to be on the high street, it also increases digital inclusion, by supporting those who would be unable to afford a data-heavy phone contract. In Ely, it has also been shown to really boost the takings of local market stallholders – as it enables them to use contactless for payments, instead of having to take cash. More work needs to be undertaken to identify current Wi-Fi ‘white spots’ and provide coverage in these areas.
- Working with Wisbech Town Council, the potential for **enhancing the existing Town Council website** to be explored, using search engine optimisation to make it easier for potential visitors to see the main attractions in the town.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/retailindustry/timeseries/j4mc/drsi>

<sup>9</sup> Cambridgeshire County Council data on changes of use





### 3. Support cohesion and community shared space

#### A cohesion programme, drawing on the example of Peterborough

Peterborough has been chosen by the Government as one of the UK's five "integration areas". This means it has had funding to respond to some of the challenges associated with high levels of international immigration, and develop responses accordingly. The interim strategy for the programme, "Belonging Together" has been developed, which sets out four key areas of work:

1. **Economic Opportunity** – which focuses on removing barriers to the labour market through interventions such as childcare support and careers fairs
2. **Bringing Communities Together** – which focuses on improving community relations, through support for community projects, and using planning approaches to improve cohesion and control the number of Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)
3. **Young People** – which focuses on how to develop a shared sense of citizenship among the young, and understand their perspectives on integration
4. **English Language** – with tailored English for Speakers of Other Languages training (ESOL), particularly focused on allowing those with skills to put them to use where English Language is a barrier, and developing a partnership of providers

Within the Belonging Together strategy, partners state that: "we welcome the opportunity to share our learning"<sup>10</sup>. We believe Wisbech could offer a great opportunity to apply many of the lessons learnt in Peterborough to our context – where we share many of the same challenges, as well as the same ambitions to ensure our town is inclusive, welcoming, and cohesive. We are already making progress, with mandatory licencing that came into effect in October 2018 is beginning to address the issue of the overabundance of HMOs.

We also believe that **some initiatives can be trialled most successfully within a town setting**, where the scale of the challenge is lessened. We would welcome the opportunity to be involved in conversations with government about the future of Peterborough's Integration Area – and by working with Peterborough we can evidence the benefits of the Integration Area being felt beyond the city itself.

#### A public indoor space to bring the community together

In order to deepen a sense of community in the town, we need to create spaces where people can come to dwell together. The historic market square is one such key space, which could undergo improvements while preserving the heritage. There is also work ongoing to bring in heritage funds to this area.

Another approach which some towns are taking across the UK is to create a new indoor shared space. Altrincham, Cheshire (see example) has used a food court with independent traders to bring people into the town centre, helping to bring it back to life. In Great Yarmouth, a vacant M&S store has been transformed into an art gallery for showcasing work by local talent. An initiative which helps local entrepreneurs – be they artists, craftspeople, or chefs – to display and sell their work in

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<sup>10</sup> <https://pcc-live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.peterborough.gov.uk/council/strategies-polices-and-plans/BelongingTogether-AConversationAboutOurCommunitiesAndFuture-May2019v2.pdf?inline=true> p16

an attractive setting would make our town centre more vibrant. We also know that in and around Wisbech there are many affluent families – testified to by the popularity of the fee-paying grammar school and presence of numerous asset management firms. We need to give these people something unique which cannot be found online to bring them into the town centre and spend their disposable income.

This event space could also be used for town events – such as the annual Wisbech beer festival. **Elgood’s brewery is one of the town’s foremost assets** – a beautiful Georgian brewery on the North Brink with a long history of beer making. At a time when interesting beers are in vogue, we will use our association with beer making to attract people to spend time in the town and advertise our offer.

### Case Study: Reviving the town centre in Altrincham



Altrincham, in Cheshire, has managed to buck national trends by *reducing* its shop vacancy rate – from 25% in 2014 to 10% in 2018. This dramatic reversal of fortunes was sparked by a proactive market development strategy, which has looked to bring in independent “street food” suppliers, breweries, and other retailers. The market has become the new “anchor” for the town, in a way that department stores have traditionally acted in other towns.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/sep/16/uk-market-towns-embrace-foodie-wave-to-revive-ailing-centres>

## A continuation of public events

As one of the Partners of Wisbech 2020 the Town Council was tasked with delivering community events to help cohesion. These events such as the Rock Festival and the WisBEACH Day are attended by thousands. Other organisations in the town are also putting on a number of great free events. We should aim to encourage these events to take place as frequently as possible and aim to reduce bureaucracy as much as possible to allow people to put on more events.

## 4. Open up countryside access, and develop the Wisbech Country Park

While Wisbech is well placed in a rural area, opportunities for access to the countryside are limited. This is due in part to the historic nature of the land – much of which was brought above water with the express purpose of farming it, and therefore doesn't have many rights of way across it (the Nene Way being the only footpath of any length that comes near the town).

Physical activity is one of the most effective ways to tackle the health problems our town faces. As a former Chief Medical Officer for the NHS has commented: "The potential benefits of physical activity to health are huge. If a medication existed which had a similar effect, it would be regarded as a 'wonder drug' or 'miracle cure'."<sup>12</sup> The Active Fenland programme is working to promote physical activity in various different forms across the District, but we need to join this up with making the countryside more accessible to people.

We will work with the Department for Farming, Environment, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Cambridgeshire County Council to explore where we might be able to create extra rights of way to make it easier for residents to access the countryside. This process requires new creation orders, which it is within the power of the County Council to generate. We will use our relationships with local landowners where we have them to smooth this process.

We will explore the inhibiting factors around walking and cycling in the town with the aim of helping people to walk or cycle in a town where rates are currently low compared to Cambridgeshire averages. We could be a trial area for the use of new lightweight recycled plastic bike lanes. These have been developed in the Netherlands, where the geographical terrain is identical to our landscape. They have the added benefit of being much lighter than asphalt, and more durable, so don't need repairing anything like as often.



<sup>12</sup> <http://nbhottopics.blogspot.com/2014/01/helping-gps-promote-exercise-motivate.html>



Within the town itself, a country park is central to the Garden Town vision. Work can begin on this now, even while we wait for support to come in around transport and housing. This will bring a pleasant, green, shared space to the heart of Wisbech, increasing the presence of blue and green infrastructure. This will have numerous benefits:

- **The health and wellbeing of residents will be improved.** Extensive research has shown the benefits which greenery in the local environment provides for tackling stress and lifting mood. The World Health Organisation comments that: “Having access to green spaces can reduce health inequalities, improve well-being, and aid in treatment of mental illness. Some analysis suggests that physical activity in a natural environment can help remedy mild depression and reduce physiological stress indicators.”<sup>13</sup>
- **Social interaction will increase.** The Country Park will be a place to meet people and dwell together.
- **Attractive visitor facility.** As the town looks to become more attractive for visitors, having a Country Park will be a big part of the draw.
- **Flood attenuation.** The Country Park will serve as a basin for holding floodwater in the event that the River Nene floods. This will make construction of housing and infrastructure more viable.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.who.int/sustainable-development/cities/health-risks/urban-green-space/en/>



## 5. Develop a workplace health award scheme

Our big action on health is the **North Cambridgeshire Health Opportunity Area**. This is covered in the strategy paper and will hold across all four market towns.

However, one big opportunity here in Wisbech is to respond to challenges around workplace health. Many of Wisbech's biggest employers are factories where much of the labour is manual and heavy going, with long shifts. This increases health risks – therefore it is especially important here to guarantee good working conditions.

One of the most significant impacts on a person's health, both mental and physical, is their workplace. Employers need to recognise the responsibility they have for supporting the health of their workforce, and by doing so they can enjoy the benefits of more productive workers. Therefore, we propose to launch an occupational health award scheme, which employers can choose to sign up to if they want to make a priority of this issue. This has been developed successfully in Cornwall (see case study) and ties into our aim of developing the degree of networking between businesses in Wisbech. In order to support this, we will work with the health opportunity area, local Clinical Commissioning Group, and Cambridgeshire County Council to develop a clear set of health standards for the workplace.

### Case Study: Occupational Health in Cornwall

Ten years ago, Cornwall Council appointed a Workplace Health Co-ordinator with the sole remit of engaging businesses on this issue. After discussions with businesses about what could help, an award scheme was launched, where businesses would be recognised as bronze, silver, or gold for their contribution to worker health and well-being. A framework and toolkit are published, which is regularly updated to reflect new public health initiatives (such as the recent National Sugar Smart Campaign). Businesses who want to participate then assess themselves against criteria relating to ten key areas, including mental well-being, back pain, smoking, alcohol and substance misuse, and healthier eating, with the Co-ordinator visiting to confirm this assessment.

Companies have really seen the benefits – a director commented: “We recognise that employees perform at their best when they are happy and healthy, and that optimal employee performance is necessary for the company to be a leader in its field.” Another smaller company managed to reduce sickness rates by 10%, saving £20,000, which was put into further worker health initiatives. These examples demonstrate that an interest in worker health can have transformational productivity benefits for business, and transformative lifestyle impacts for workers.



## 6. Focus on Tourism

Wisbech has a very rich heritage with a number of significant buildings which many people come to see. Our history includes Clarkson and Wilberforce fighting against slavery, The Jesuit movement which has roots to Wisbech Castle, The Peckovers who were one of the founders of Barclays Bank and Octavia Hill who founded the National Trust. It also has an extensive network of underground tunnels that have had many uses such as smuggling. This is seen most clearly on Heritage Open Day, where people always come away pleasantly surprised about the amount of heritage the town has to offer.

A focus on tourism will help the town by bringing prosperity. We can do this by:-

- Developing a Cultural quarter in Museum Square and link to the proposed FDC Cultural Strategy
- Look to reopen the tunnels under the town as a tourist attraction
- Reinvigorating the Wisbech Tourism group, using it as a forum to bring together the different visitor attractions in Wisbech to co-ordinate on
- FDC Economic Development team try to focus on attracting hotel and leisure services
- FDC Economic Development Team and Wisbech Town Council to work together to push Wisbech Tourism nationally and increase dwell time in the town by promoting 'The Wisbech Experience'

## 7. Repair Derelict Buildings

Wisbech has a number of derelict buildings which have been caused by neglect and/or arson. It is highly unlikely that these will ever be bought back into use due to viability issues – in particular, the Phoenix Hotel. Work has been done to draw up a list of these buildings and develop approaches to each. With the Phoenix Hotel, a strategy which may succeed is to use a CPO and build flats at the back. Other buildings would simply look better with a fresh lick of paint or cleared gutters. A small fund that was tied to owners making improvements to their properties would incentivise the town being well kept, helping to attract visitors.

## 8. Commercialisation of Wisbech Port

Wisbech is unique in Fenland in the fact it is a port town – a fact which has played a key role in the town's history. The port supplies timber to a local business and has the potential to be more of a commercial opportunity. The land surrounding the Port has also been earmarked for development for a number of years and to begin this could bring up that whole area which is currently not very visually appealing. Providing attractive 1- and 2-bedroom apartments would give the area a big lift. This could be the ideal place for the Combined Authority to trial its plans for the £100k home.



Regarding the commercialisation of the port, it is currently hard for larger vessels to turn in the port due to the tight circle. We also need to think about how the port relates to a possible future Nene barrage – which may require creative solutions to maximise the benefits to the town as whole from both initiatives. The capital works to enhance this are in the region of £1 million. The actions falling out of this are for CPCA to help:

- Accelerate development round the port
- Fund, or help seek funds, to enable works to increase commercialisation

## What happens now?

We have set out a plan for Wisbech which, along with the Fenland-wide strategy document, can transform the town, showing which interventions can make a real difference.

We now look forward to working constructively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), and its Mayor, James Palmer, to implementing these ideas. This will require both direct support from the Combined Authority, and the resources needed to take these ideas to key government funds such as the Stronger Towns Fund, as and when they come forward.

This work will be overseen by Fenland District Council, working in conjunction with the town team that was put together for this work.