

ST. JOHN'S HILL AREA MASTERPLAN

SECOND DRAFT REPORT
MARCH 2025



Sevenoaks
TOWN council

 Urban
Initiatives



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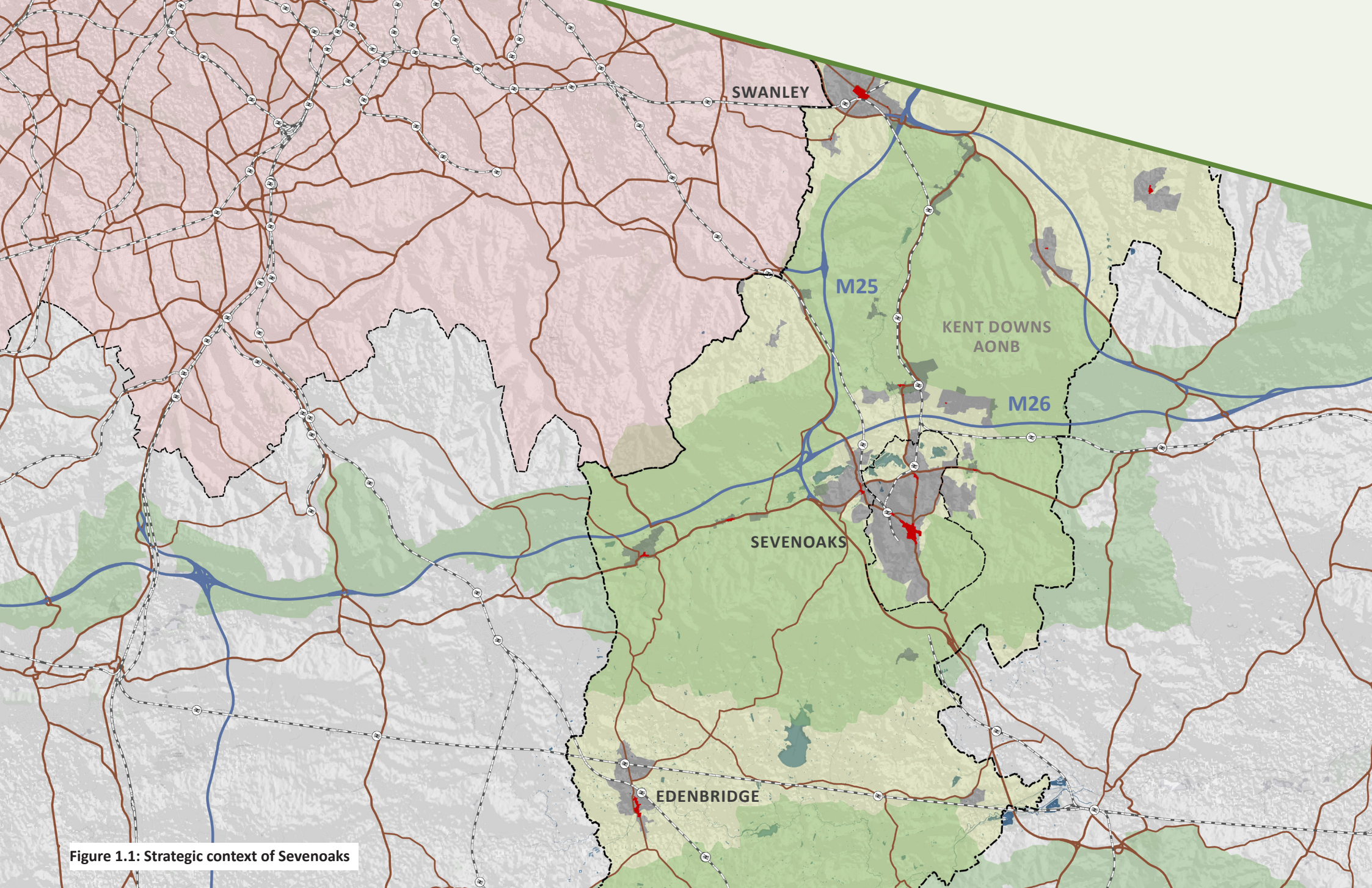
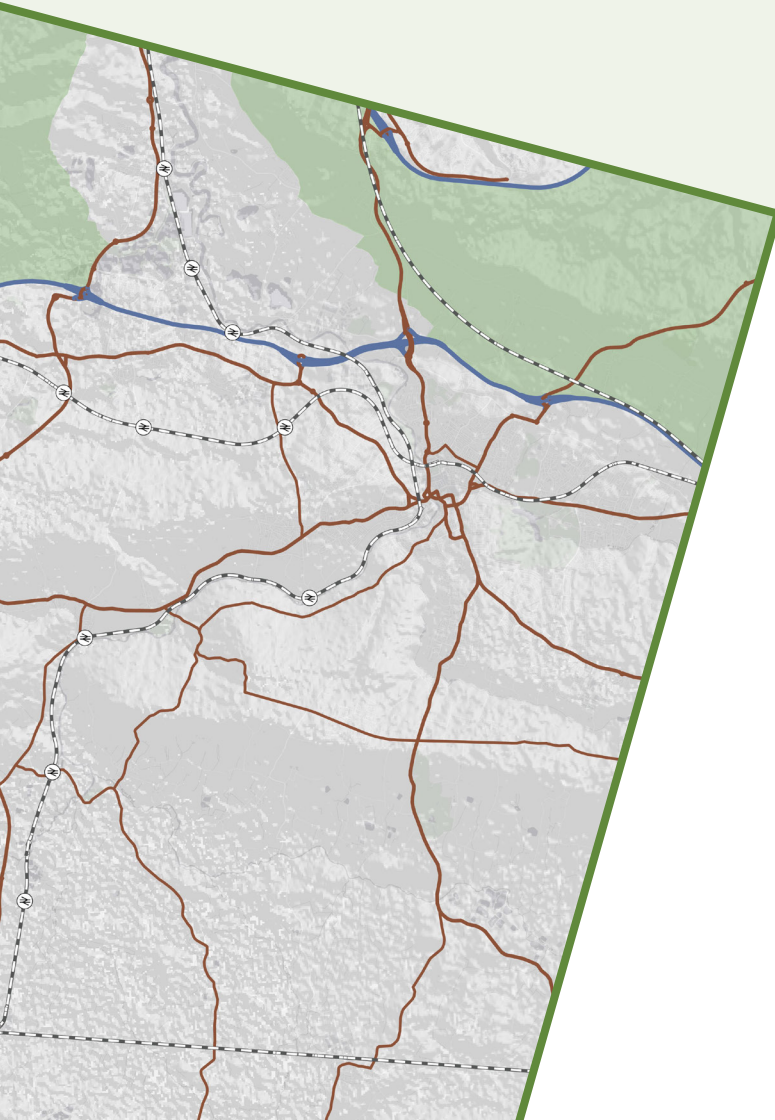


Figure 1.1: Strategic context of Sevenoaks

1. INTRODUCTION



1.1 BACKGROUND

In April 2024 Sevenoaks Town Council commissioned specialist urban design consultant Urban Initiatives to prepare two masterplans. The first focused on Sevenoaks Town Centre and including the Tubs Hill Neighbourhood Centre and Sevenoaks Station and the second on the St. John's Hill area and including both the Holly Bush and St. John's Neighbourhood Centres. Whilst the two masterplans are presented within stand-alone documents they complement one another. This document focuses on the St. John's Hill area located towards the north of Sevenoaks town centre.

Urban Initiatives has been supported by transport and movement specialists Urban Movement through the preparation of the plans.

Sevenoaks is located approximately 20 miles to the south-east of Central London within the county of Kent. It is the principal town in the Sevenoaks District with a population of 20,409 (2011 census).

Sevenoaks is set within rolling countryside with attractive views northwards to the Kent Downs. It is located on one of the principal commuter railway lines to London and benefits from proximity to the M25 and M26 motorways. These connections, and the town's historic character and picturesque setting within the Kent countryside, make it a popular place to live. The town is home to a skilled resident workforce with good access to employment opportunities. People both commute into and out of the town for work to and from central London and other parts of the district and beyond.

There are a number of well-regarded schools in the town, as well as independent shops and businesses and the Stag Theatre and Knole Park to the east and Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve to the north provide wonderful open space resources.

THE CHALLENGES FOR THE NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES

In recent years there has been a substantial change in the retail environment across the country with a significant growth in online shopping and a reduction in people visiting local high streets. This has had a profound impact on town and city centres nationwide with well-known high street retailers disappearing and many town centres experiencing high levels of vacancy and decline.

The Covid pandemic has accelerated this process and also brought about a change in the way that people work with a realisation, for many people, that working from home is a realistic and preferable option. This changes patterns of behaviour with some centres benefiting from additional footfall from those staying at home and others losing custom.

St. John's and Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centres serve a local population offering a mix of convenience retail and services together with a number of specialist shops that draw people from further afield. The centres play an important role in fostering social interaction among residents and contribute to the local economy. Functioning as secondary hubs to Sevenoaks town centre, some businesses in St. John's and Holly Bush start locally and expand into the town centre as they grow.

The centres face challenges including from traffic passing through them, vacant lots and business closures. The pedestrian experience is undermined by narrow footways, inadequate pedestrian infrastructure, a lack of street trees and a tired public realm. Furthermore significant development is anticipated in northern Sevenoaks with consent for 950 new homes at Sevenoaks Quarry in Greatness and 136 homes at the former Sevenoaks Gas Works site on Otford Road.

The centres can benefit from this additional catchment population but their future success will be dependent on them remaining attractive to their local catchment and this will require a proactive approach.

Furthermore there is a need to respond to the climate emergency and to a loss of biodiversity through a more sustainable approach to planning. Sevenoaks has an aging population and this must be considered when planning for the future whilst ensuring that the needs of all members of Sevenoaks' community are provided for.

The Neighbourhood Plan, adopted by the District Council in May 2023, sets out a long-term vision for Sevenoaks Town through a series of Objectives, Policies and Aims. This vision, together with the Sevenoaks District Plan prepared by the District Council, form the starting point for the preparation of the St. John's Hill area masterplan.

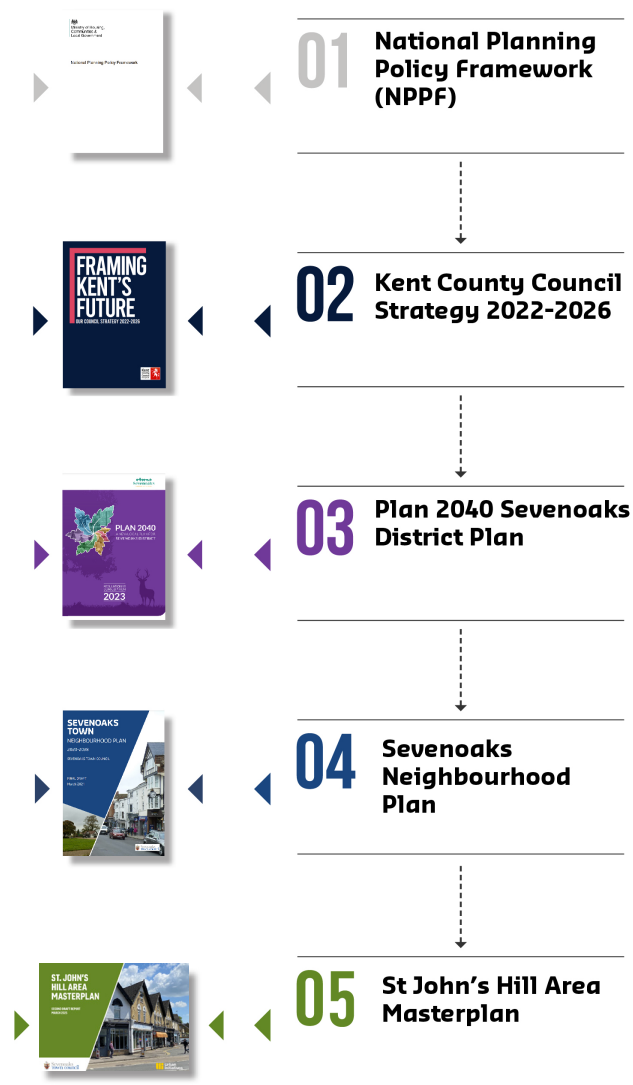


Figure 1.2: Relevant planning policy framework for the St. John's Hill area Masterplan

1.2 ROLE AND PURPOSE OF THE MASTERPLAN

The vision, objectives and policies set out in the Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan were prepared collaboratively through engagement with stakeholders and residents and were endorsed through a referendum. They are not however presented spatially.

The Neighbourhood Plan identifies additional strands of work that should be progressed to help to deliver on these objectives. This includes providing design guidance for potential sites, exploring opportunities to improve the walking and cycling environment and reducing the impacts of traffic.

The St. John's Hill area masterplan will provide this additional spatial detail and, in the spirit of the Neighbourhood Plan, aims to represent the views and inputs of local stakeholders and residents.

The masterplan will:

- Build on the objectives and policies in the Neighbourhood Plan;
- Respond to and aim to address some of the 21st century challenges facing the Neighbourhood Centres;
- Identify where change could take place, including opportunities for new development and improvements in the environment for walking and cycling; and
- Help to guide future decision making and investment in the Neighbourhood Centres.

"A stronger framework is needed for delivering high quality development."



1.3 PREPARING THE MASTERPLAN

The masterplan has been prepared collaboratively with a series of workshops, surveys and community events allowing stakeholders and the wider community to share their thoughts and ideas on the future of the St. John's Hill area and to feedback on, and shape, emerging proposals.

We have worked closely with Sevenoaks Town Council, and engaged with important stakeholders including Kent County Council, Sevenoaks District Council, The National Trust, Sevenoaks Society, Chamber of Commerce, public transport providers, landowners, residents associations, local community members and local business owners throughout the process.

One to one meetings were held with many stakeholders and more than twenty stakeholders were brought together for two workshops, both held in the Town Council Offices on Bradbourne Vale Road.

Workshop One (30 April 2024) - at this first workshop we explored the neighbourhood centres with stakeholders through a 'Placecheck' exercise to understand more about what makes them special and some of the challenges that they face. An important outcome of the workshop was the agreement on 'ten guiding principles' for the masterplan (refer to Chapter 3 of this report).

Workshop Two (14 November 2024) - at the second workshop initial spatial plans for the centres were presented and discussed with stakeholders. These plans indicated how the ten guiding principles could be delivered spatially. Ideas were presented to improve the use of vacant space, connections through the neighbourhood centres, create an environment that is more pedestrian friendly, provide urban greening and manage traffic differently. The potential for new development was also identified. The ideas were discussed and debated through roundtable discussions.

In parallel with the first workshop a resident survey was carried out to understand more about why, when and how people visit the neighbourhood centres and their impressions of the places. Urban Initiatives also had a stall at the Sevenoaks Business Show on 7 June 2024 and were available to answer questions on the masterplan and its scope.

The feedback through the one-to-one meetings, workshops and surveys has guided the draft masterplan presented in this report. Comments made are captured throughout the report. Further detail is provided in Appendix A to the report.

Public consultation on the draft masterplan will be undertaken over a six week period in early 2025 and the feedback received will be carefully considered and inform the final masterplan.





- 1 Bat and Ball Centre
- 2 Bat and Ball Station
- 3 Otford Road
- 4 Bat and Ball Road
- 5 The Old Bat and Ball PH
- 6 Sevenoaks Hospital
- 7 Bat and Ball Road junction
- 8 St. John's Neighbourhood Centre
- 9 Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre
- 10 St. John's Hill
- 11 St. John's Hill URC
- 12 St. John's Road
- 13 Bradbourne Road
- 14 Sevenoaks Primary School
- 15 Knole Academy
- 16 Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve
- 17 Bradbourne Vale Road
- 18 Sevenoaks Town Council Offices
- 19 Holly Bush Lane
- 20 Quaker's Hall Lane allotments
- 21 Seal Road
- 22 Trinity School
- 22 Greatness Park



Figure 2.1: Aerial image of the study area and its context

2. UNDERSTANDING THE STUDY AREA



2.1 LOCATION AND CONTEXT

Sevenoaks Town is the largest town in the Sevenoaks District, in the county of Kent. The town is surrounded by attractive countryside and nestled within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Sevenoaks benefits from good road and rail connections, with close proximity to the M25 and M26 motorways and direct links to London Charing Cross in under 25 minutes.

Sevenoaks is steeped in history, it was first recorded as a settlement in the 13th century, when a market was established. The town grew following the construction of Knole House in the 15th century and the estate and its parkland continues to influence both the character and growth of the town to this day. The town centre is located on elevated land to the west of the Knole Estate at the meeting point of London Road and High Street.

High Street / Dartford Road (A225) extends northwards from the town centre and passes through both the Holly Bush and St. John's Neighbourhood Centres.

Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre is located at the meeting point of Dartford Road with Bradbourne Road, St. John's Road and Holly Bush Lane at a five point junction approximately 1,000m north of the town centre; from here Dartford Road becomes St. John's Hill and drops down to the St. John's Neighbourhood Centre a further 600m to the north at the bottom of the hill.

The St. John's Neighbourhood Centre extends along St. John's Hill until it's meeting point with Bradbourne Vale Road (A25) at the Bat and Ball junction. Bat and Ball Station, (Sevenoaks first station) is located a short distance to the north and the Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve, created following sand and a gravel extraction, is located to the north-west.

The masterplan study area extends approximately 1,000m north to south and focuses on the two Neighbourhood Centres. These are located within a largely residential area and consideration is also given to the relationship of the centres with the surrounding area which also includes a number of schools and other community assets.

2.2 HISTORY AND HERITAGE

HISTORY

EARLY DEVELOPMENT

The earliest records of Sevenoaks date back to the 13th century, when it first became the site of a market. Significant growth occurred in the 15th century with the construction of Knole House, built between 1456 and 1486 by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The St. John's Hill area developed later. For many years it remained predominantly agricultural, with land managed by estates including at Bradbourne, Greatness, and Riverhead. By the 18th century, the area was also home to a number of mills. Notably, Peter Nouaille, a French Huguenot and owner of Greatness House, established a silk mill in the area that employed over 100 workers, including many French refugees.

In the same century, two major turnpike roads were opened in the area: the Reigate to Wrotham route in 1765, running east to west, and the Farningham to Sevenoaks road in 1766, running north to south. These roads intersected at Bat and Ball junction, where a toll gate and inn were later established.



Figure 2.2: Historic plan of the St. John's Hill area dating from circa 1880

INDUSTRIALISATION

The railway came to Sevenoaks in the mid 19th century with Bat and Ball Station (Sevenoaks first station) opening in 1865. The area around Bat and Ball Station became a hive of activity with a large goods yard and coal operation. A gasworks, waterworks and several brickworks located to the area, and it became a focus for employment and industry in the town.

The existing network of streets to the west of St. John's Hill were established in this period but land to the east and north remained largely agricultural. The Sevenoaks and Holmesdale Cottage Hospital opened on St. John's Hill in 1873.

20TH CENTURY GROWTH

Land east and north of St. John's Hill was developed for new homes through the 20th century with Sevenoaks' first council houses built at Greatness. The majority of properties were modest two storey semi-detached and terraced houses.

In the post war years gravel extraction at Bradbourne led to the creation of Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve. The Reserve, established in 1956, was the first of its kind with the excavations flooded to create a series of lakes. The Sevenoaks Quarry in Greatness, currently being worked for sand by Tarmac, will provide a further significant open space for the area together with new homes (planning consent is in place for 950).



Image 2.1: Historic photograph of Bat and Ball Station



Image 2.2: Historic photograph of former Sevenoaks Gas Works site



Image 2.3: Recent image of renovated Bat and Ball Station

HERITAGE ASSETS + DESIGNATIONS

There are a number of heritage assets within, and close to, the St. John's Hill area. The Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre is within the Sevenoaks Hartslands Conservation Area which extends to the south-east of the study area encompassing streets of Victorian housing.

There are a few Grade II listed buildings and many locally listed buildings within the area. The Grade II listed buildings are Bat and Ball Station, 'The Firs', 5, St. John's Hill and 128-134, St. John's Hill. Locally listed buildings include the Masonic Lodge on St. John's Hill and the former Old Bat and Ball Public House, both within St. John's Neighbourhood Centre, and St. John's United Reform Church in Holly Bush.

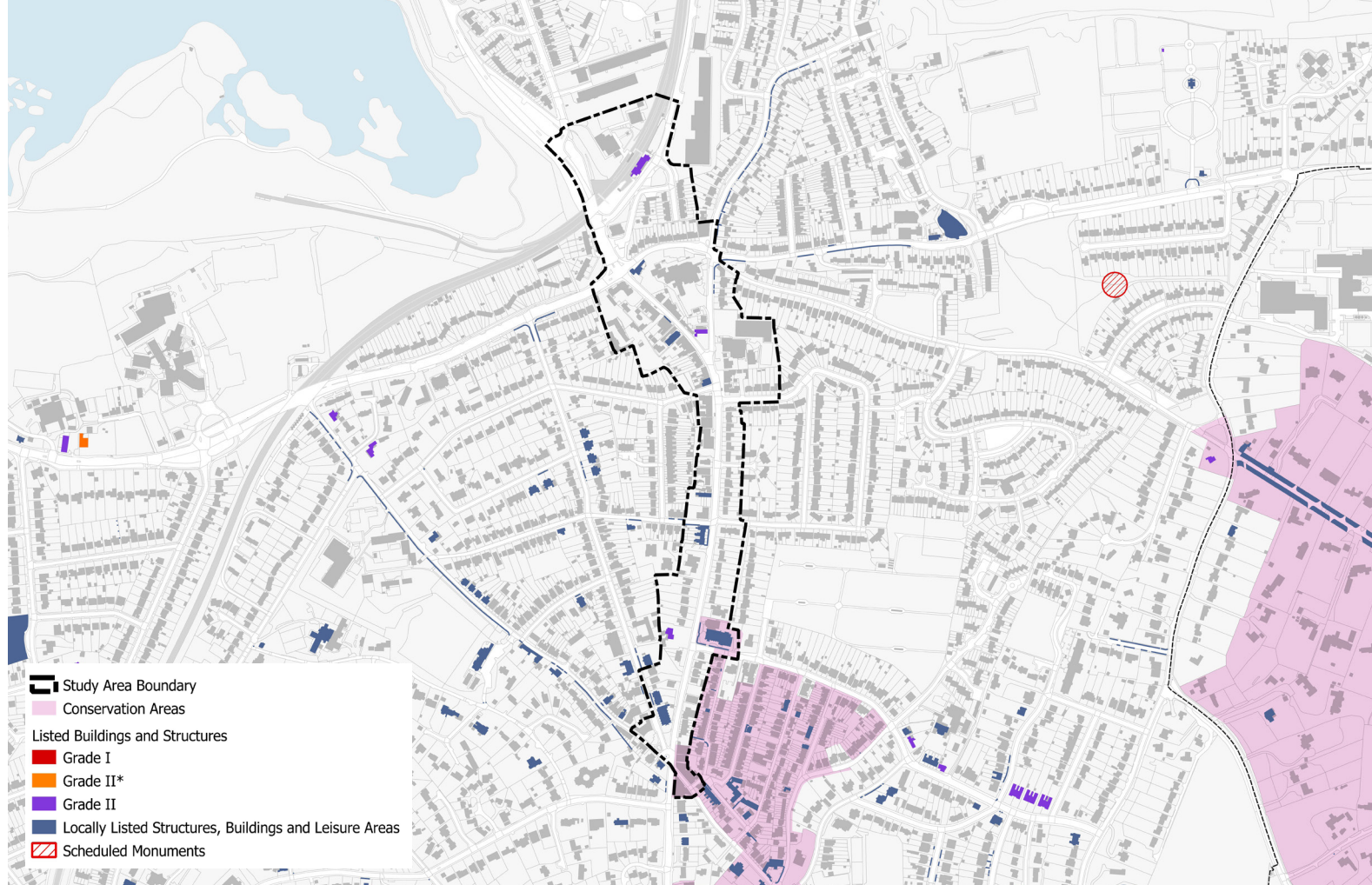


Figure 2.3: Heritage assets and designations

There are 16 listed or locally listed buildings in the masterplan area



Quaker
Meeting House

"The Sense of community is very strong in Holly Bush; you always recognise someone when out."

Image 2.4: St. John's United Reform Church in Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre

2.3 CHARACTER AND TOWNSCAPE

CHARACTER

The St. John's Hill area is largely residential, with the two centres providing a focus, however the character and townscape changes across the area. The Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre is at the top of St. John's Hill and forms the focus for a largely Victorian neighbourhood, which, compared to Sevenoaks Town Centre, has a village-like atmosphere. Homes are modest in scale, largely two storey, and with front gardens which are enhanced by planting and mature trees.

Moving northwards along St. John's Hill the character changes. Homes are still two storey but there are fewer street trees and front gardens often accommodate parking instead of planting that adds to the amenity of the area. Through the St. John's Neighbourhood Centre the main street, St. John's Hill, is lined by shops but footways are narrow and traffic passing along the street reduces the quality of the environment for pedestrians. The public car parks to the rear of the shops are poorly defined and inefficient spaces.

The meeting point of St. John's Hill, Otford Road and Bradbourne Vale Road at the Bat and Ball junction creates a traffic dominated environment that is difficult to negotiate for pedestrians, with Bat and Ball station largely hidden from sight to the north. The environment around the station feels semi-industrial with builders' merchants and small retail sheds at the Sevenoaks Enterprise Centre on Bat and Ball Road.

Sevenoaks is a very green town enveloped by countryside and with 93% of the district designated as green belt. The St. John's Hill area benefits from its proximity to these green and open spaces and this creates a sense of openness with views to the Kent Downs visible along many of the area's streets.



Image 2.5: Views towards the Kent Downs



Image 2.7: Holly Bush roundabout



Image 2.6: Parade of shops on St. John's Hill



Image 2.8: Land behind the High Street, St. John's



Image 2.9: Bat and Ball station with the Kent Downs in the backdrop



Image 2.10: Independent shops in Holly Bush

TOWNSCAPE

There are a number of locations within the St. John's Hill area that contribute to both its identity and that of Sevenoaks more widely. Topography plays an important role in shaping this with views northwards towards the Kent Downs and a sense of arrival experienced when reaching the top of the St. John's Hill at Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre. Equally the historic routes and their meeting points play an important role in linking the area with its surroundings.

Buildings and the uses that animate them are critical to the way the area feels and is experienced, to the enclosure and definition of streets and spaces and to their animation.

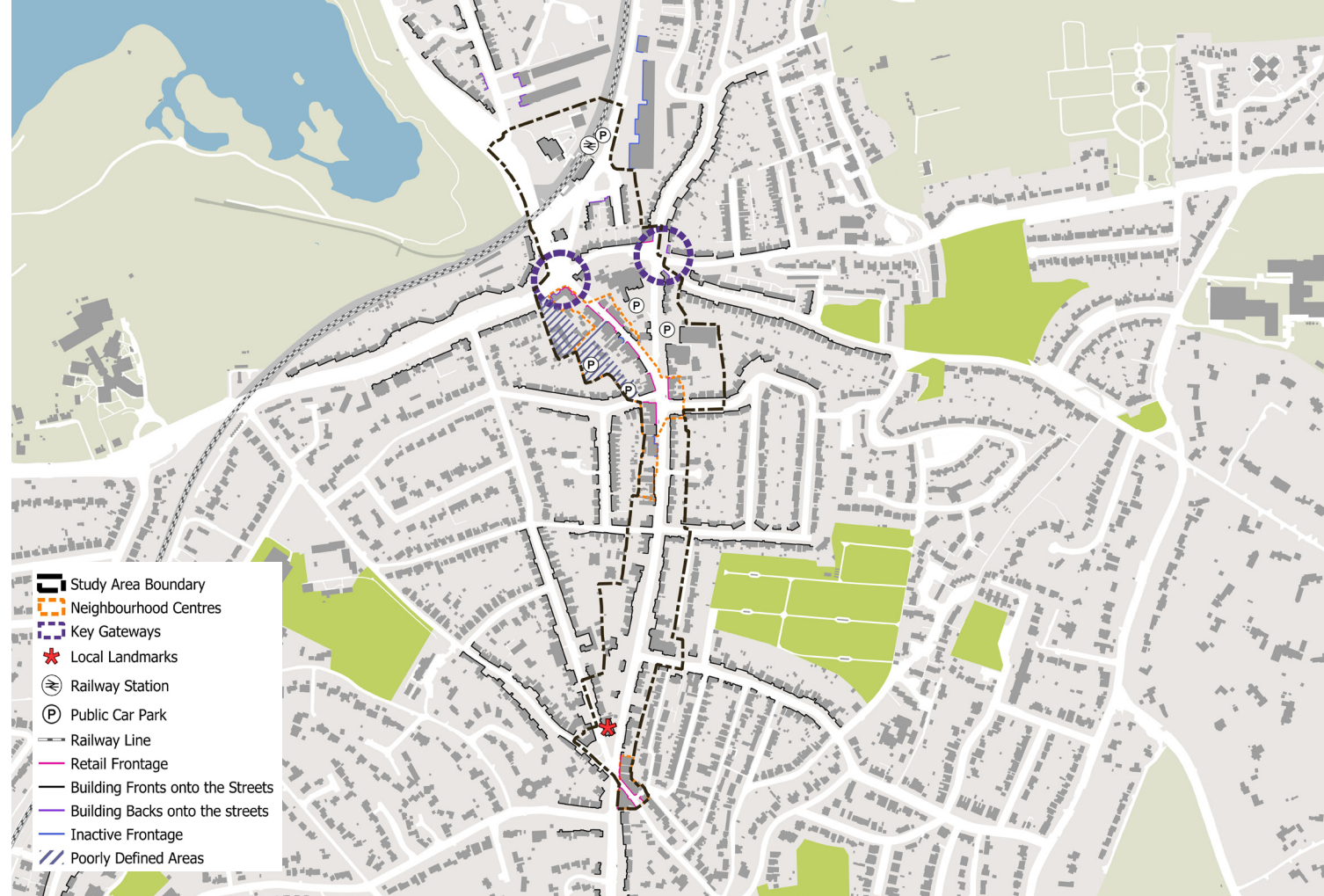


Figure 2.4: Townscape plan

SENSE OF ARRIVAL

The Neighbourhood Plan identifies the gateways / arrival points into the town and supports the preparation of proposals to enhance these arrival points. Two locations were identified in the St. John's Hill study area:

- Bat and Ball junction and station; and
- Junction of Seal Road, Greatness Lane and Hospital Road.

Each of these locations is currently undermined by settings that are dominated by, and designed to cater for, vehicular traffic rather than for people.

Although Bat and Ball Station itself is an attractive Victorian building, the arrival experience is undermined by a poor public realm and a lack of signage and wayfinding.

"Generally, buildings would benefit from having a paint and a tidy-up."



FRONTAGES

Whilst active frontages are present in both St. John's and Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centres these front onto narrow footways that provide limited opportunity for spill-out space for cafes and restaurants. The treatment of the public realm is uncoordinated and lacks investment and the design of retail frontages is often dated and uncoordinated.

LANDMARKS AND SPECIAL BUILDINGS

The Neighbourhood Plan identifies St. John's United Reform Church in Holly Bush as a landmark and it helps to give greater prominence to the centre. There are however other buildings that add to the sense of place through their design and history. These include The Old Bat and Ball Public House (now a solicitor's office) at Bat and Ball Junction, the Masonic Lodge and St. John the Baptist Church on St. John's Hill, and the Bat and Ball Station. The Victorian retail frontages in the Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre also add to the sense of place.

OPEN SPACES

The St. John's Hill area benefits from proximity to several large open spaces, including the Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve, and Knole Park. A small seating area, Rheinbach Gardens is located within the Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre however the tight-knit urban fabric of both centres leaves little room for public spaces. There may however be opportunity to make more of the existing hard paved spaces currently given over to vehicular movement and car parking and claim back some of this to provide a better setting for the shops and people.

The nearby Quaker's Hall Lane and Bradbourne Vale Road allotments highlight the local community's strong interest in gardening and green spaces.

POORLY DEFINED AREAS

The street space in both centres is lined by buildings but there is potential to enhance the public realm, in both locations. In the St. John's centre car parking areas are located to the rear of shops (to the west) and also fronting onto Hospital Road. This land is poorly defined and used inefficiently. The lack of overlooking and active frontage makes the spaces unattractive particularly after dark. Signage and wayfinding is generally poor between the two centres and to the wider area.

BUILDING HEIGHT

Building heights in the St. John's Hill area are characteristic of the wider area, that is low rise. Typically buildings are two storey although there are some three storey buildings for instance the retail parade in Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre.

There are a number of notably taller buildings including Sevenoaks Hospital, St. John the Baptist Church on St. John's Hill and St. John's United Reform Church in Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre.

The topography of the area is important when considering future building heights. Buildings on higher ground are likely to be much more visible than those on lower lying ground. Sevenoaks Hospital is for example is located on significantly higher ground than the adjacent Bat and Ball Public House and modest height increases on this site may be prominent in views along Bradbourne Vale Road and St. John's Hill.



Figure 2.5: Building height plan

2.4 LAND USES

NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE OFFER

The role of a neighbourhood centre differs to that of a town centre. A town centre hosts a variety of uses that attracts visitors on a semi-regular basis. Based on the Town Centre Healthcheck, carried out by Avison Young for Sevenoaks District Council in 2022, visitors to Sevenoaks Town Centre come on average once a week for shopping.

Avison Young make the distinction between a town centre and a village (or neighbourhood) centre in their study and describe the latter as ‘a centre that meets the needs of the local community’. A neighbourhood or village centre focuses on convenience and provides goods that are needed daily. Furthermore, Neighbourhood Centres are visited more regularly and serve a hyper local population. Due to this, more people visiting a neighbourhood centre are likely to come by foot, as they live in very close proximity.

Whilst the neighbourhood centre offer is focused on the local catchment the study area includes a broader mix of uses.

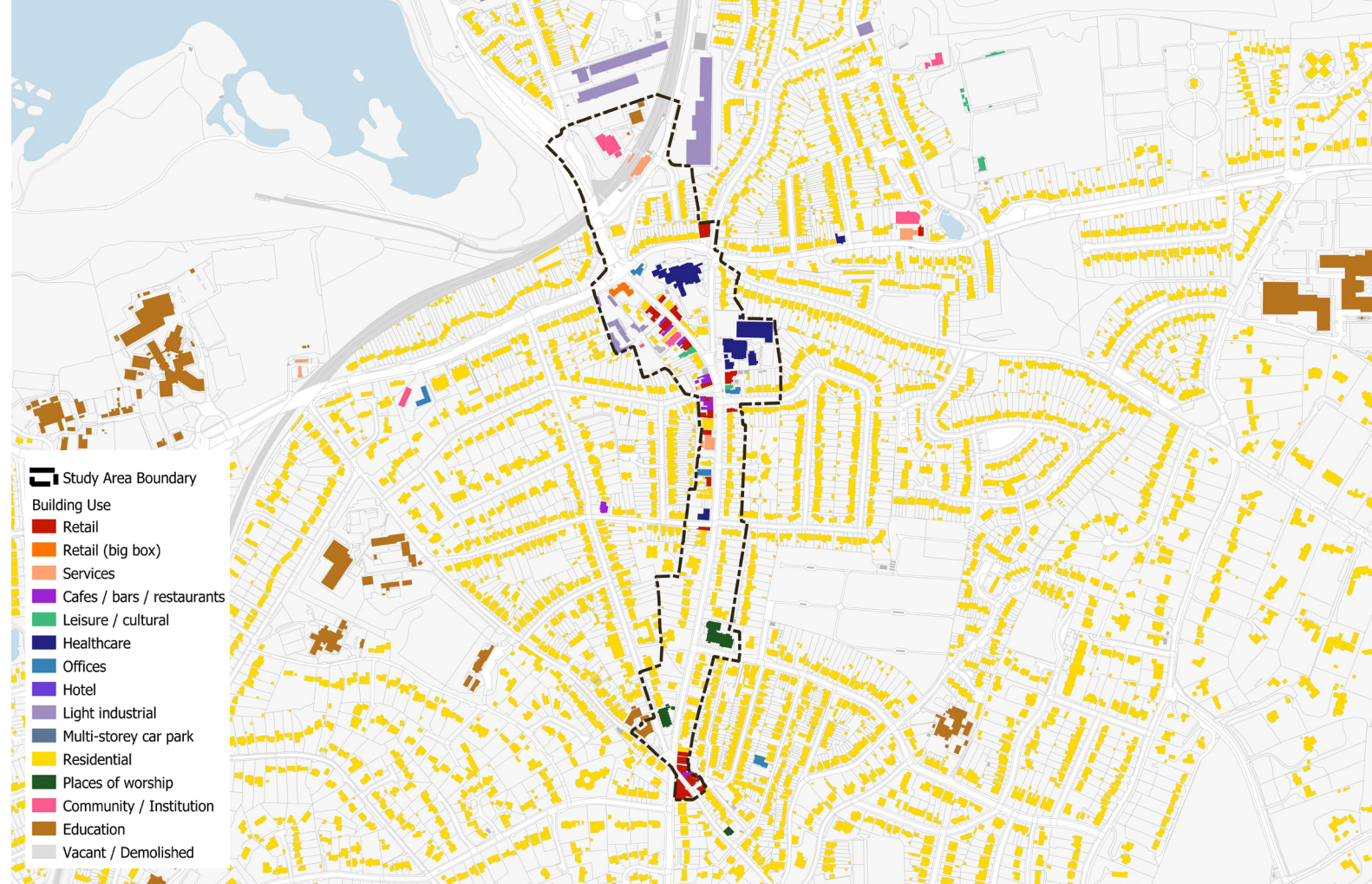


Figure 2.6: Building use classifications

Sevenoaks Commercial Vacancy Rate 6.1% in 2023, well below the national average of 14%

Sevenoaks Ground Floor Commercial Premises Occupancy Report 2024

RETAIL

Retail uses within the study area are focused in the St. John's and Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centres. The offer is mainly for local convenience but there are also some specialist retailers, which attract visitors from further afield. The St. John's centre includes a Sainsburys store on the Bat and Ball junction. Bligh's Meadow and Sevenoaks town centre provide broader shopping options nearby. With low vacancy rates and more affordable rents than the town centre, the Neighbourhood Centres are appealing to new and niche businesses. Some shops relocate to the town centre as they grow, a common trend for expanding businesses.

RESIDENTIAL

The St. John's Hill area provides a mix of housing including large Victorian villas, small terraced cottages and semi-detached inter war properties. Many of the properties are historic with streets laid out when car ownership was lower than today. Some residential roads in the area are private. Further homes are proposed to the north of the area at Greatness Quarry and at the former Sevenoaks Gasworks site and will increase the residential catchment of the area.

OFFICE / EMPLOYMENT

The Sevenoaks Economic Needs Study, prepared by Ramidus for Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) in 2022, highlights that the office market in Sevenoaks is relatively small. Within the St. John's Hill study area, office space is limited to a number of small premises in the St. John's Neighbourhood Centre. Future demand in this area is expected to focus on micro and small businesses, as well as co-working spaces.

The study also reviewed allocated employment sites across Sevenoaks, which include a mix of office and industrial uses. Notably, two such sites are located just north of the study area: one on Vestry Road and the other at the Bat & Ball Enterprise Centre. Both sites are considered successful industrial hubs, with a recommendation to retain and protect them. In particular, the study advises extending the Bat & Ball Enterprise Centre to accommodate future needs. Further small-scale employment uses are located to the rear of properties on St. John's Hill.



Image 2.11: Homes on St. John's Hill

"Diversity of buildings and variety of building uses is special to the area."



COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

The cultural offerings within the study area are primarily centred around religious and community buildings. This includes the recently refurbished Bat and Ball Centre which serves as a venue for local cultural events and leisure activities. Residents also have easy access to Sevenoaks town centre, where they can visit cultural assets such as The Stag Theatre and the Kaleidoscope Gallery. St. John's has also held one-off street markets and festivals that have proved popular with the local community.

There are several schools close by including Sevenoaks Primary School, Knole Academy and Trinity School and Sevenoaks Hospital is within the study area.

LEISURE

Leisure opportunities in the St. John's Hill area are limited, with a primary focus on outdoor recreational spaces. The largest leisure asset, is the Wildlife Reserve, to the north-west of the study area. Sports pitches are provided at Greatness Recreation Ground and it is anticipated that further facilities will be provided at Sevenoaks Quarry site at Greatness when development is brought forward.

"The Bat and Ball Centre is a unique community asset and should be properly maintained, used and advertised."





Image 2.12: The Stag Theatre in the town centre



Image 2.13: St. John The Baptist Church

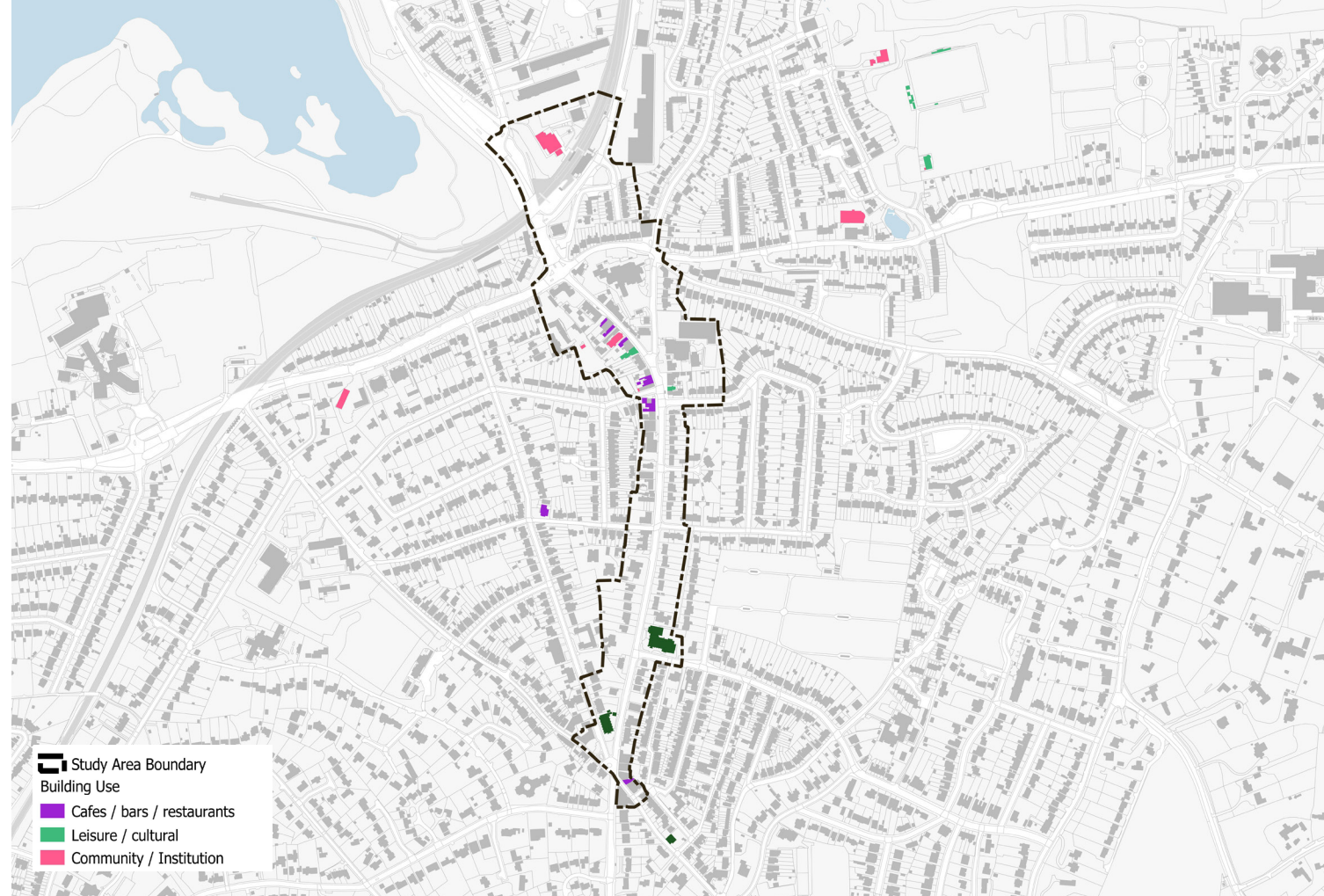


Figure 2.7: Culture and leisure use classifications

"Sevenoaks focuses on theatre due to the Stag, other art forms could be showcased elsewhere in the area."



2.5 MOVEMENT NETWORK AND PUBLIC REALM

VEHICLE MOVEMENT

St. John's and Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centres are connected by the A225, St. John's Hill, that passes through them. The A225 extends in a north to south direction and links the centres with Otford and Dartford to the north and with Sevenoaks town centre and Tonbridge to the south. Local roads branch from this primary route and connect it to the strategic road network including the A25, M25 and M26 to the north of the town and the A21 (Sevenoaks By-pass) that runs in a north to south direction to the west.

Although an A road, the A225 is lined with buildings and becomes very narrow in places. This becomes especially apparent during peak hours when traffic congestion is common, especially in the northern section of St. John's Hill approaching Bat and Ball junction. Pedestrian infrastructure is also sub-standard in places, with narrow pavements and a lack of designated crossings throughout the study area. Congestion and poor quality footways negatively impact the experience passing through the neighbourhood centres.

Several routes meet in a complicated and undefined junction in Holly Bush, a roundabout at the western edge of the A225. There is no clear right of way, a lack of signage and only one pedestrian crossing to the south of the junction along Dartford Road. This encourages unsafe crossing around the roundabout.

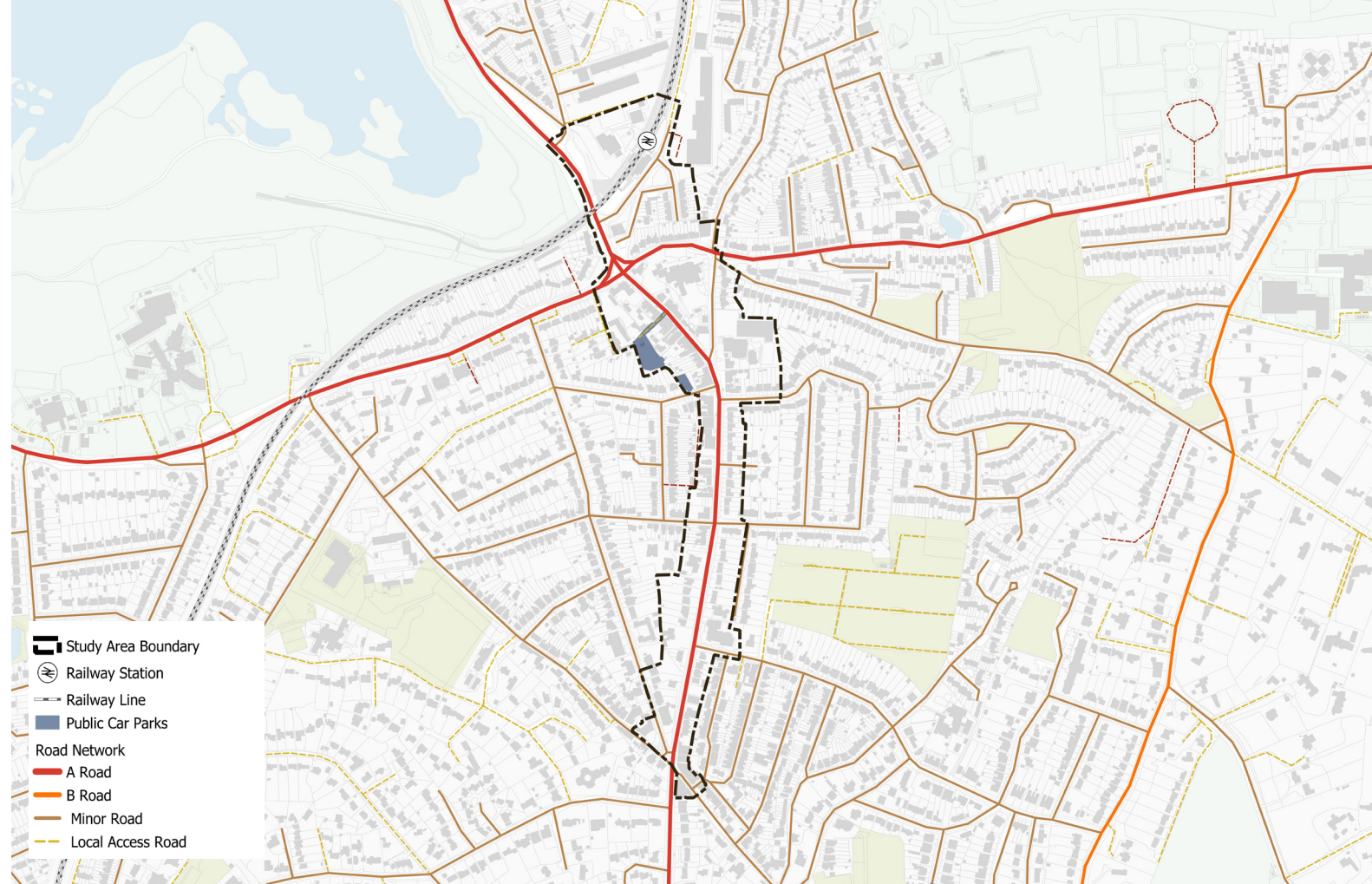


Figure 2.8: Vehicular network plan

An issue for both neighbourhood centres is the presence of heavy goods vehicles passing through, as well as the speed of traffic. The Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan supports the introduction of a 20mph speed limit in close proximity to schools and through some residential areas and this is being promoted by the Sevenoaks Joint Transportation Board (JTB) but not on the A225.

The A225 meets the east to west A25 at the Bat and Ball junction towards the north of the study area. This junction is disproportionately large in scale compared to the surrounding road network. Its complex layout lacks signalised pedestrian crossings and designated cycle lanes, making navigation challenging and potentially hazardous for non-motorised users. Plans have been promoted to replace the existing junction with a roundabout as part of the proposals for Sevenoaks Quarry.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

RAIL

Bat and Ball Station is located approximately 250m to the north of St. John's Neighbourhood Centre. The station provides twice hourly Thameslink stopping services to London Blackfriars and Sevenoaks, with direct journeys to London taking approximately an hour. The station building is Grade II listed and was refurbished in 2017 including the introduction of a café.

Whilst the station buildings itself is architecturally attractive, the environment around the station is unwelcoming, and difficult to navigate for pedestrians. The public realm is poor, with no signage, pedestrian crossing on Bat and Ball Road or welcoming space. The arrival experience is underwhelming and presents a poor first impression of the area.

The Neighbourhood Plan supports proposals to improve access to Bat and Ball Station including the delivery of enhanced walking and cycling routes.

Whilst Bat and Ball Station is the most convenient for residents in St. John's, Holly Bush is equidistant between Bat and Ball and Sevenoaks Station – a both are approximately 1,000m away. Sevenoaks Station provides faster access to central London via Southeastern's high-speed services, with travel times of approximately 25 minutes to London Bridge and 35 minutes to Charing Cross or Cannon Street.

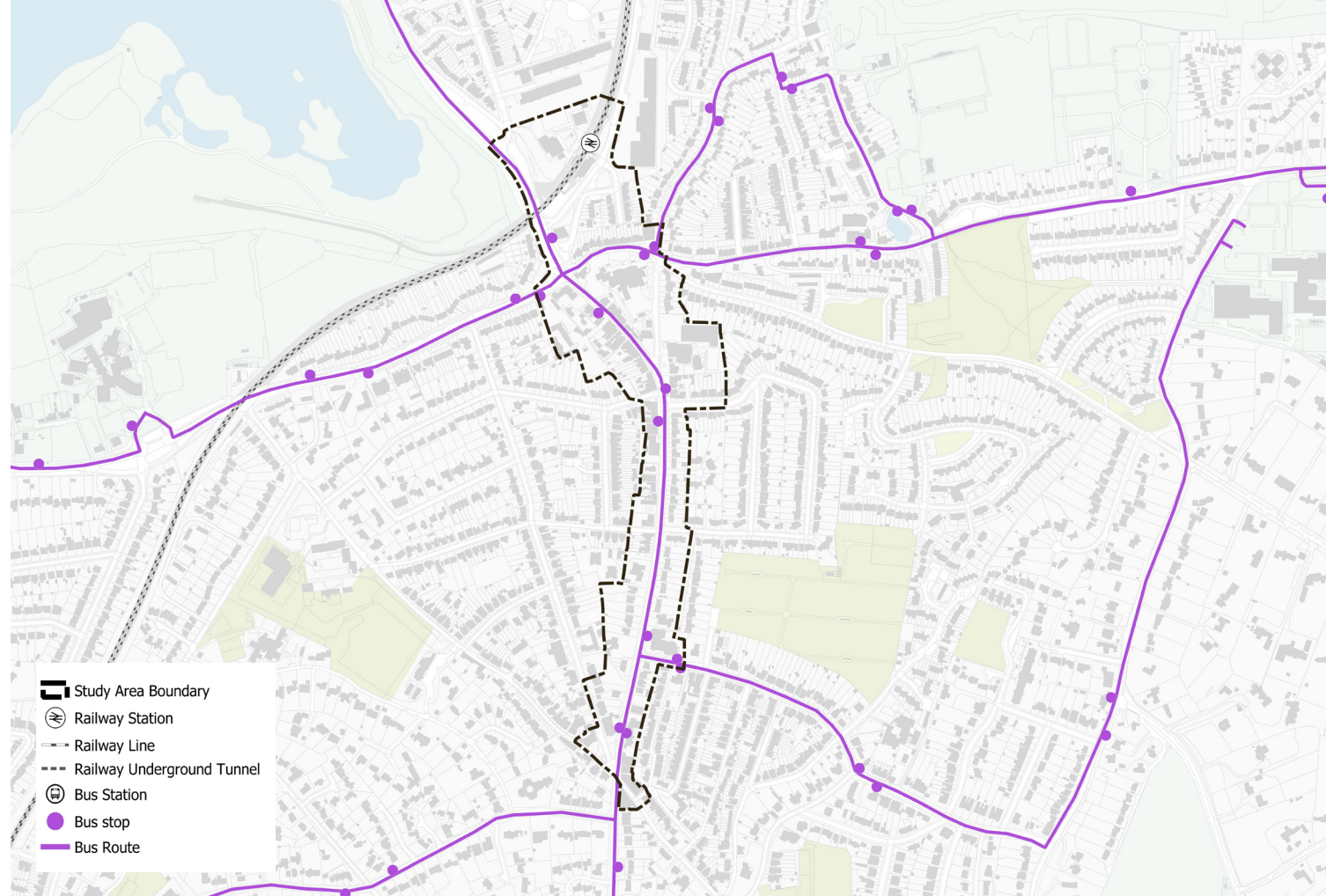


Figure 2.9: Bus network plan

BUSES

Bus routes extend along St. John's Hill with stops in both Neighbourhood Centres. Routes 1, 6, 234 and 402 connect residents to local destinations, including Tonbridge, Westerham, and Sevenoaks town centre. Additional services take pupils to and from local schools.

Bus services provide important connections within the area and to nearby villages but services are not frequent. The St. John's Hill Use and Satisfaction survey carried out as part of this study indicated that taking a bus is not a common means to access the Neighbourhood Centres, indeed no respondents indicated that this was their normal mode of travel.

CYCLING

The study area lacks dedicated cycle lanes or segregated routes, forcing cyclists to share the road with motor vehicles. Many roads, including St. John's Hill, provide insufficient space and separation from traffic, creating a potentially hazardous environment for cyclists. There is also a general shortage of cycling infrastructure, such as secure bike parking within the area.

Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre's hilltop location means cyclists must tackle the steep incline of St. John's Hill although the growing popularity of e-bikes makes this less challenging. Despite manageable distances, the combination of difficult terrain and unsafe conditions discourages cycling.

The 2023 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), prepared by Sevenoaks District Council, proposes primary cycle routes along Bradbourne Vale Road, St. John's Hill, St James' Road, and Wickenden Road, along with other secondary and tertiary routes to improve cycling infrastructure across Sevenoaks.

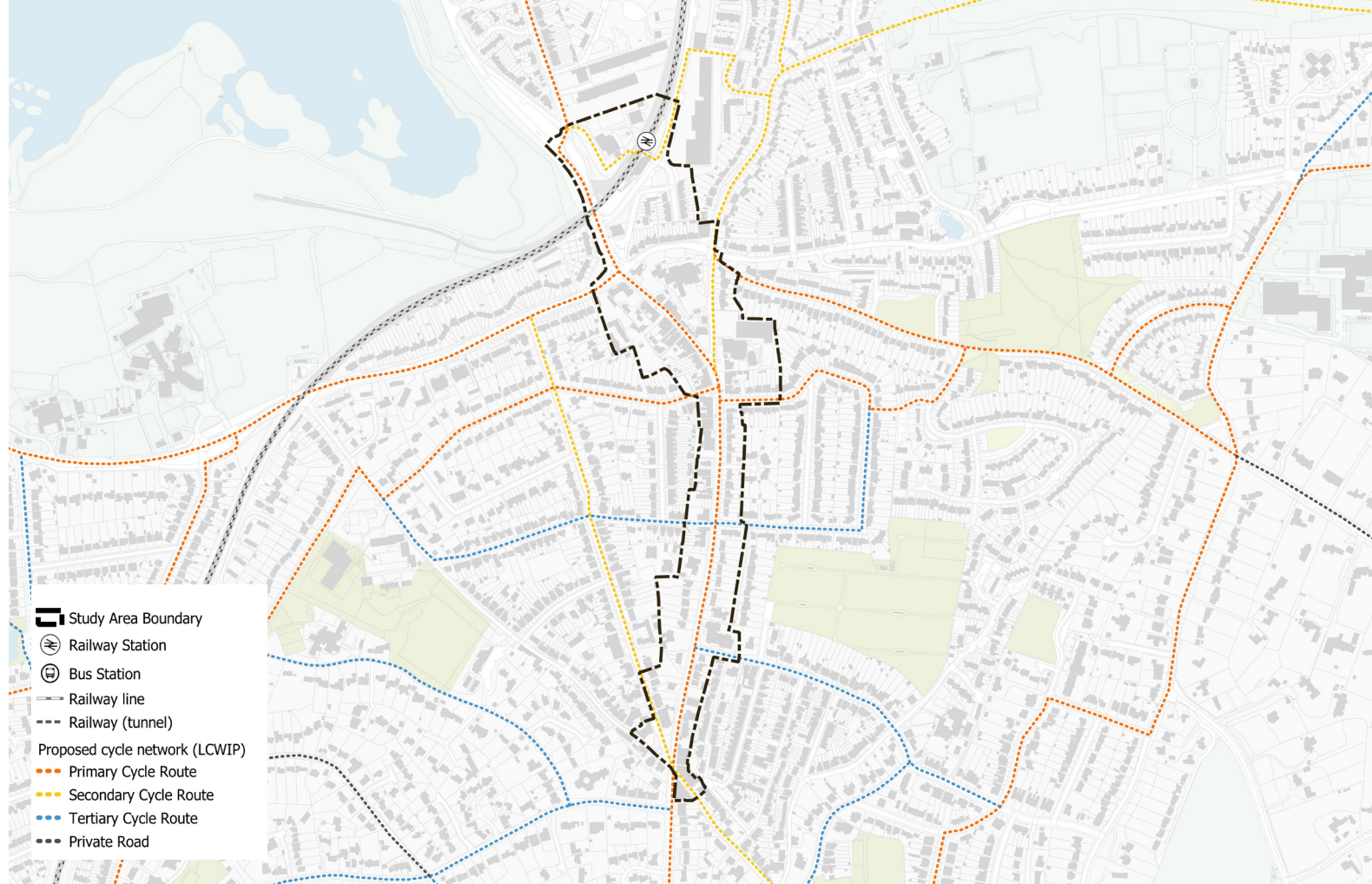


Figure 2.10: Cycling infrastructure plan

"Road users are deterred from cycling due to the busy and unpleasant nature of the junction and road network feeding to Bat and Ball Station."



WALKING

The infrastructure around St. John's and Holly Bush has been primarily designed with motorists in mind, rather than pedestrians. Pavements are often too narrow to accommodate two people walking side by side, or to safely accommodate wheelchairs and prams. There is also a lack of spill-out spaces for shops.

The direct route between the two centres, St. John's Hill, offers a poor pedestrian experience due to high traffic volumes, noise, and substandard infrastructure. Pedestrian crossings are scarce, leading to informal crossings, while insufficient signage further complicates pedestrian movement. Both centres are car-dominated, with limited space allocated for wide footways, reducing the overall pedestrian experience.

Figure 2.11 indicates the locations in the St. John's Hill study area where footway widths are sub-standard.

Early consultation with residents and stakeholders has indicated concerns about heavy goods vehicles using St. John's Hill and the dangers this presents to pedestrians using the narrow footways.

53% normally travel by foot to the neighbourhood centre, 40% by car and 4% by bicycle

Source: St. John's Hill Area - Use and satisfaction survey (2024)

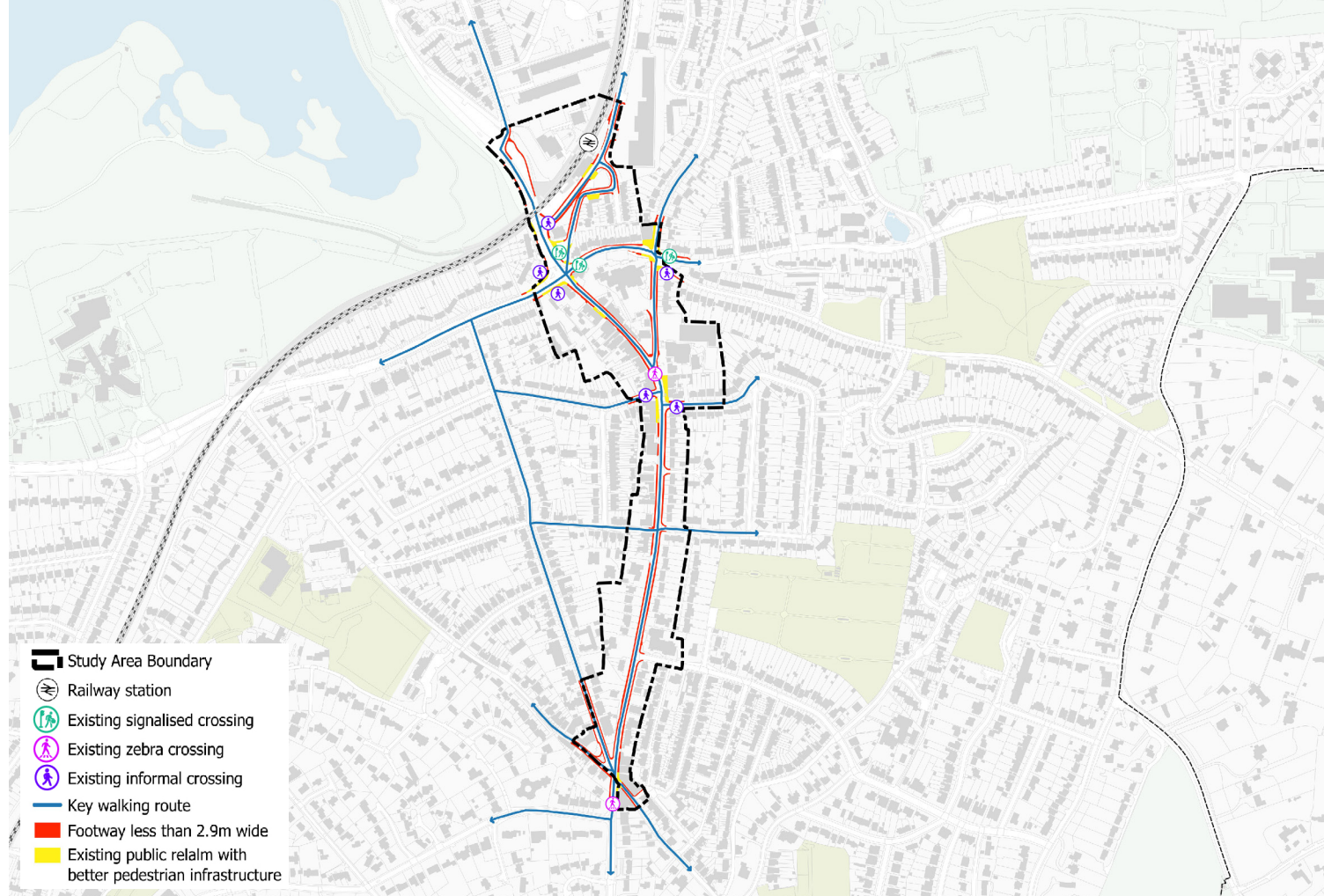


Figure 2.11: Pedestrian infrastructure plan

"Make cycling and walking throughout the area safer, therefore encouraging environmentally friendly modes of transportation for trips that don't require vehicles (i.e. school run)."





Bat and Ball Station has no formal pedestrian crossing leading to its entrance

Chatham Hill Road offers a more attractive alternative walking and cycling route to the station. This requires better signage and crossing facilities. A gap in the wall on Bat and Ball Road would make the route more direct

No indication that the entrance to the Wildlife Reserve is along this route

The area behind the parade of shops on St. John's Hill is under-utilised

St. John's Hill can become very congested at peak hours, resulting in traffic along the hill creating an unpleasant environment for all

St. John's Hill is a long, continuous road, loud and not pedestrian friendly, HGVs going to and from Sevenoaks town centre take this route

Private roads in the study area impact navigability

Bradbourne Road remains a busy route due to people parking on the pavements and school traffic at peak hours

St. John's Road is used as an alternative route to bypass the often busy St. John's Hill

Reinbach Gardens is a popular place for residents to use

Car park at the station was free and now charges £3 a day. The car park is rarely at capacity

Poor public realm and lack of a 'welcome space' at train station with weak pedestrian links to rest of the area

Bat and Ball junction lacks clear pedestrian signals and markings, creating a dangerous environment for all road users. The junction is part of a Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) set out by the Air Quality Action Plan 2022 due to high levels of pollution

Sevenoaks Hospital is located in a central position in St. John's Neighbourhood Centre. The Hospital car park is not used to its full capacity.

Quaker's Hall Lane Allotments are located to the east of St. John's Hill and are popular amongst residents

Five routes come together at the Holly Bush junction and there is only one pedestrian crossing. This undermines safety and is especially problematic as many children pass through the area on their way to school

The Holly Bush junction is car dominated, with a lack of designated pedestrian crossings. Vehicles generally drive too fast through the junction, with residents also noting the route is not appropriate for HGVs

Figure 2.12: Movement network points of interest



Image 2.14: St. John's Hill pedestrian movement impeded by bus stand

ST. JOHN'S HILL

The current volume of traffic on St. John's Hill is incompatible with its width, resulting in frequent congestion and long queues that back up along the route. This issue is exacerbated by heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), which further disrupt traffic flow. The high traffic flows create an uncomfortable and potentially hazardous environment for pedestrians navigating St. John's Hill, as they are often exposed to increased noise, emissions, and limited walking space.

Furthermore the environment is in places obstructed by street furniture that impedes pedestrian movement.

HOLLY BUSH

The junction and roundabout near the Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre presents significant navigational challenges for road users, with an unclear layout and ambiguous right-of-way, leading to potential confusion and delays. Parked cars along the already narrow roads further reduce the navigable space, constraining options for enhancing the public realm and improving pedestrian accessibility. Additionally, there is a lack of designated pedestrian crossings around the Holly Bush area, prompting pedestrians - particularly school children - to cross in unsafe locations. This absence of safe crossings poses a notable risk, highlighting the need for infrastructure improvements to enhance pedestrian safety and traffic flow.



Image 2.15: St. John's Hill pedestrian environment



Image 2.16: Holly Bush pedestrian environment

BAT AND BALL RAILWAY STATION

Ongoing works at the Sevenoaks Quarry site results in the use of Bat and Ball Road by heavy goods vehicles creating a noisy and potentially unsafe environment for pedestrians around Bat and Ball Station. Pedestrian access to the station is currently poorly defined, there is no pedestrian crossing leading to the station on Bat and Ball Road and a lack of adequate signage makes navigation confusing. A more legible connection between the station and St. John's Neighbourhood Centre is required.



Image 2.17: Bat and Ball Station pedestrian environment



BAT AND BALL JUNCTION

Bradbourne Vale Road (A25) is an important connection through the area and many pupils walk along the route to access local schools. The Bat and Ball junction presents an inhospitable environment for pedestrians with confusing crossings, creating a hazardous environment for those attempting to cross safely. High vehicle speeds along this stretch of road exacerbate safety concerns. Two lanes of traffic feed into a junction that feels disproportionately large relative to the surrounding environment. The absence of dedicated cycling infrastructure forces cyclists to share the main traffic routes, further heightening risks for both cyclists and pedestrians. Enhancements in pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure are necessary to create a safer and more balanced transport environment.



Image 2.18: Bat and Ball Junction pedestrian environment



PUBLIC REALM, STREET FURNITURE AND WAYFINDING

ST. JOHN'S

The arrival into St. John's Neighbourhood Centre is underwhelming with the road space dominating the experience and minimal attention given to the public realm. The street environment in the centre lacks a coordinated design, with street signage and furniture cluttering the space and a lack of trees and planting. Whilst the narrow streetscape along St. John's Hill limits opportunities for major change there are opportunities for minor traffic management options that can enhance the space for pedestrians. Furthermore a more direct and legible connection from the centre to Bat and Ball station is required.

Space to the rear of the shops, currently unloved car parking areas, perhaps offers the greatest opportunity for transformational change.

HOLLY BUSH

The Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre is focused around a junction. Whilst the surrounding buildings help to create a sense of place the area feels car-dominated, with the needs of motorists prioritised over pedestrians. Rheinbach Gardens offers a valuable public open space with planting and seating but it functions as an island within a sea of tarmac. The setting of this area could be enhanced to create a more welcoming environment for pedestrians.

Some road space could be claimed to provide spill-out space for local cafés, providing greater street-level activation in the centre.



Image 2.19: Footways are very narrow on Holly Bush Lane in Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre

"Create better spaces outside of shops to encourage people to spend time in the neighbourhood centres."



2.6 PARKING STUDY

BRIEF AND STUDY AREA

Concerns have been raised by local residents about on-street car parking in the 'St. John's Triangle' area. This area encompasses the St. John's Hill masterplan study area but is more extensive and takes in streets within the triangle of land defined by Bradbourne Road to the west, Bradbourne Vale Road to the north and extends east of St. John's Hill to take in Quakers Hall Lane, Holly Bush Lane and Wickenden Road (refer to Figure 2.13).

The Town Council commissioned Urban Movement to carry out a separate detailed study to explore parking in this area and a summary of this has been incorporated into this masterplan report. The full Parking Study is under separate cover.

The issues raised by residents included inconsiderate car parking that blocks vehicular access to residents driveways, and 'two-wheels-up' footway parking that (partially) blocks footways affecting pedestrian access, along with a general frustration that parking in the area is free for those leaving their car here all day whilst commuting from the nearby train stations.

Whilst public off-street car parking is available at St. John's Hill car park (51 spaces) and St. James's Road car park (20 spaces), there is potential for changes here to reduce their capacity in the future. It is important to understand any implications of this on the wider area.

The parking study aims to build an understanding of the challenges and opportunities for parking in the St. John's Triangle', using parking surveys, desktop research and on-site observations. This understanding has been expanded and enriched through dialogue with stakeholders, including local councillors, Kent County Council (KCC) as the Highway Authority, Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) and local schools.

Urban Movement analysed the data and stakeholder input to determine where parking pressures are greatest within the study area and infer the likely reason for the parking (commuting / rail heading, school pick-up / drop-off, resident, etc.) and where existing parking restrictions are being ignored. Following this analysis they have recommended appropriate parking control strategies that aim to address the issues identified (refer to Chapter 4).

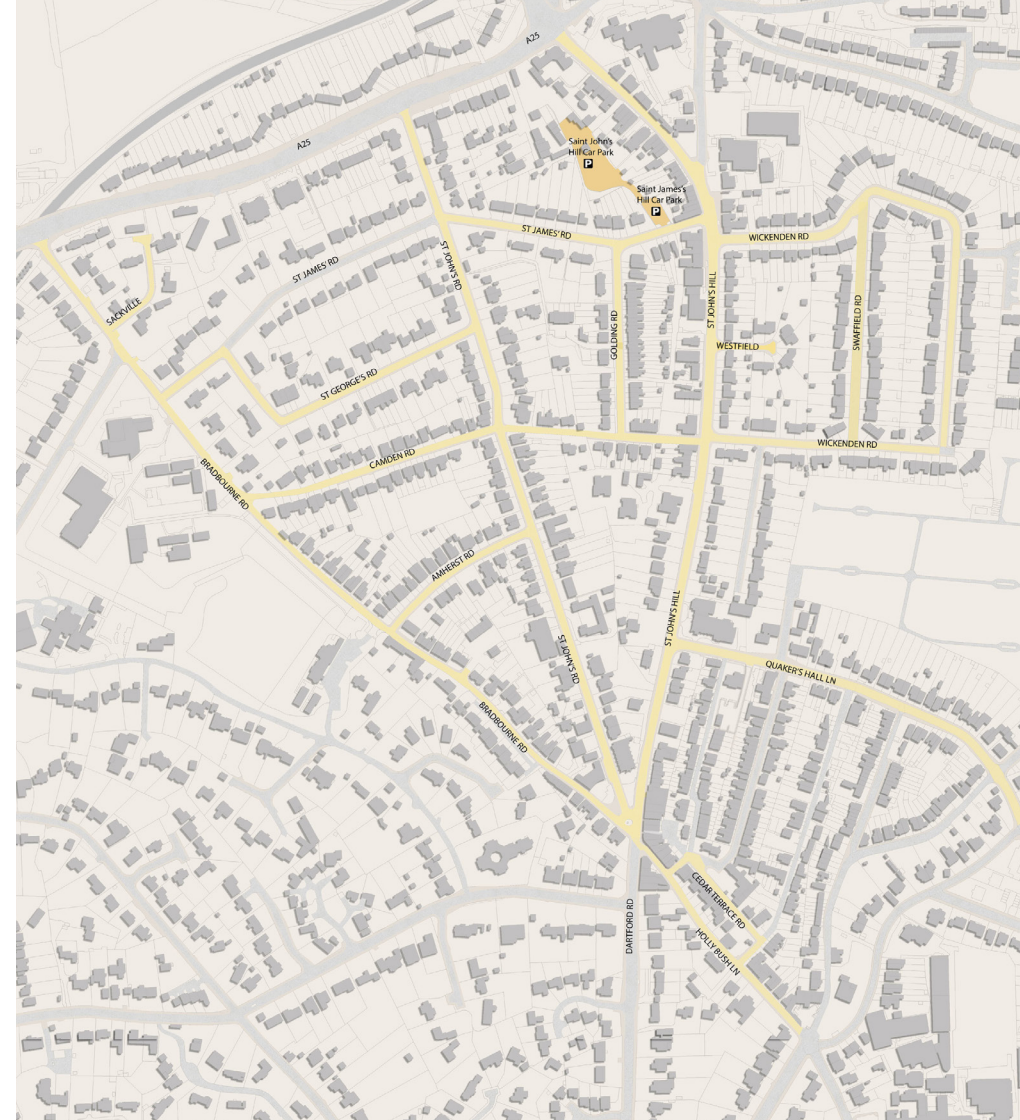


Figure 2.13: Parking study plan

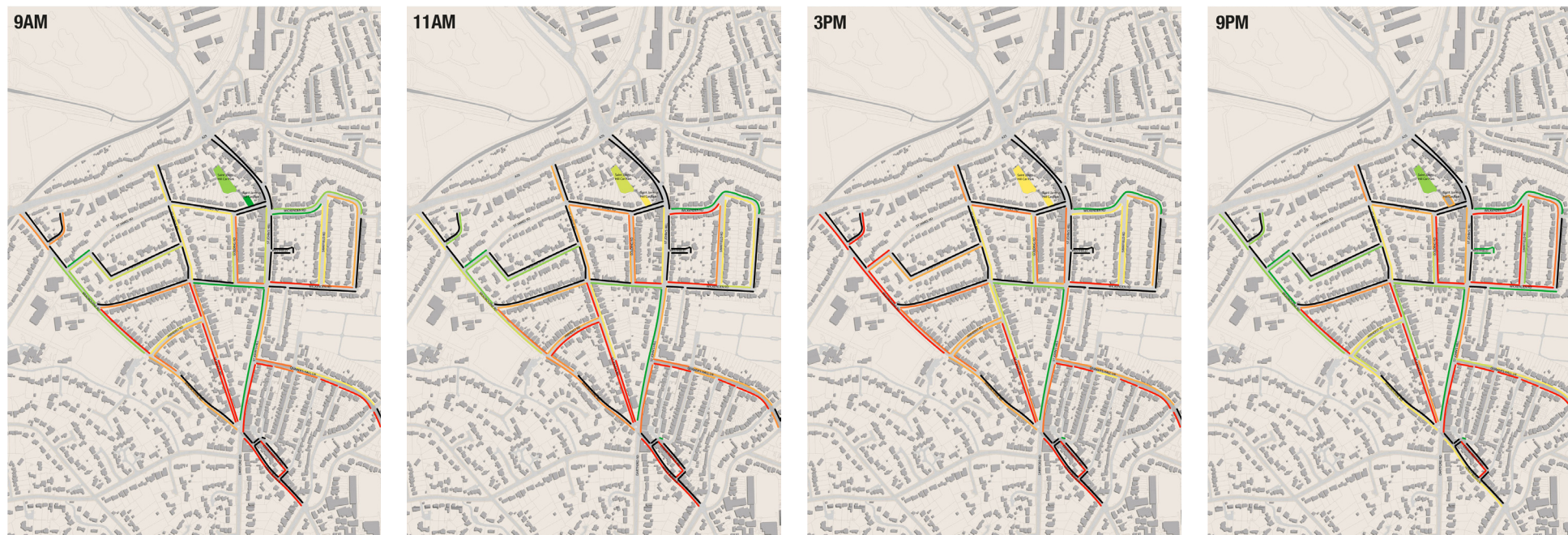


Figure 2.14: Car parking study, beat survey findings plan

PARKING BEAT SURVEY

A parking beat survey was undertaken in September for the area and car parking space stress has been mapped for each zone at different times of day (refer to Figure 2.14 above).

The survey also identified the use of the St. John's Hill Car Park and St. James Road car park in the St. John's Neighbourhood Centre throughout the day on a weekday (a Thursday) and Saturday. Use of the Sainsbury's car park which provides 11 spaces in the centre was not surveyed.

ON-STREET PARKING - DAYTIME TRENDS

Holly Bush Lane is parked up during the day but not late in the evening. Most people parking in the Permit Holder /2 hour zone stayed for up to two hours. This suggests that it is mostly used by visitors rather than residents during the day.

Quaker's Hall Lane is almost fully parked up on one side throughout the day and into the evening, likely taking resident vehicles from the nearby smaller streets such as Prospect Road who struggle for parking. The length of time vehicles are parked for varies, meaning they likely belong to a mix of residents and visitors.

The number of vehicles parked on Bradbourne Road increases around 3pm, likely due to school pick up time, with spillover onto nearby streets.

Wickenden road experiences a high level of stress during the day within its restricted parking bays which offer a 1 hour stay. These are used mostly between 9am and 6pm, suggesting use by visitors. There are limited opportunities to park outside of the zones, due to vehicle crossovers.

ON-STREET PARKING EVENING TRENDS

Feedback from a local resident suggests evening parking is an issue for many residents who can't get a space near their homes. Whilst a small percentage of this may be due to evening visitors to the area, it is likely that this problem mostly stems from there being more private vehicles owned by residents than there are spaces. Some streets have so little parking spaces that it is very easy for them to be at full capacity, and they are likely to spill onto nearby streets.

Car parking space stress/usage

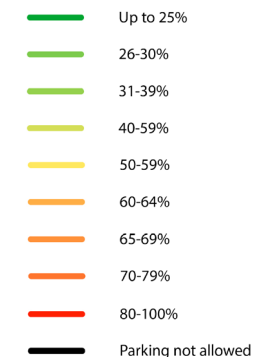




Image 2.20: St. John's car park

CAR PARKS

The St. John's Hill and St. James's Road car parks are operated by SDC. These car parks offer quick access to the northern end of St. John's Hill, but are at least a ten minute walk from the shops on Holly Bush Lane. This is likely to be a disincentive for most shoppers. The costs for parking at these two sites is £0.50 for 30 minutes, £2 for 2 hours and £5 for all day parking. Enterprise Car Hire lease spaces in the car park at the current time but this is on a short-term lease.

On the days of the survey neither of the car parks were ever completely full (refer to Figure 2.15). The maximum use for the St. John's car park was 75% on the Thursday, (which was only for a short time period) and 43% on the Saturday (inclusive of Enterprise Car Hire spaces). The St. James's car park was used up to 65% on the Thursday, and 50% on the Saturday.

The highest number of occupied spaces at any time on either of the surveyed days was 41 whilst the combined capacity of the two car parks is 71 spaces. Figure 2.16 shows that the St. John's car park alone could comfortably contain the current car parking numbers.

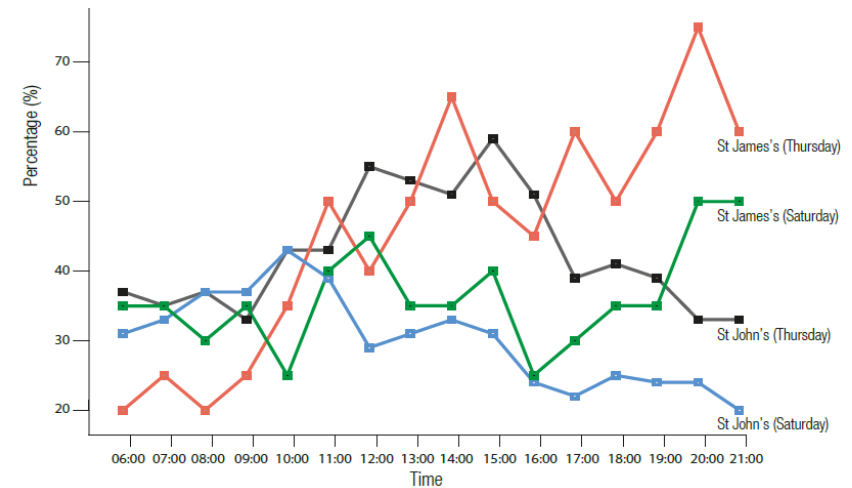


Figure 2.15: Percentage of parking bays in use for both car parks

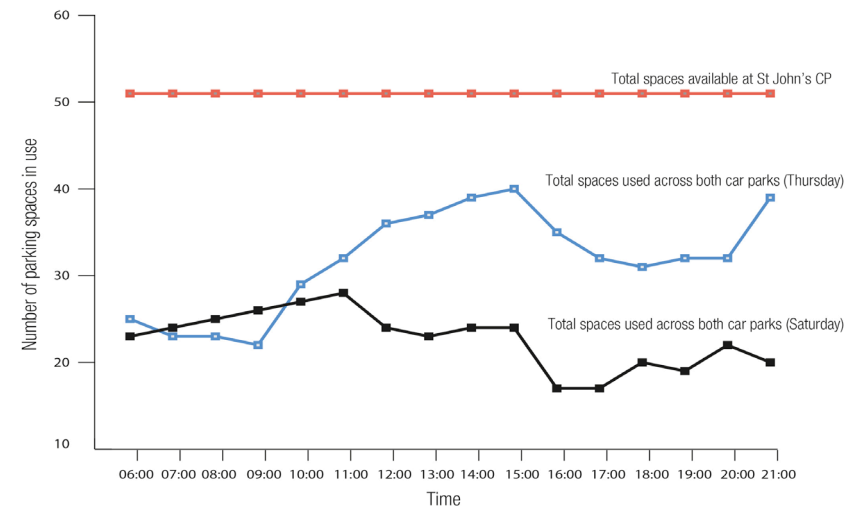


Figure 2.16: Use of parking bays across both car parks compared to total capacity of St. John's car park

2.7 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

CURRENT PROPOSALS

There are no significant development proposals within the masterplan study area however two major developments have recently been consented in northern Sevenoaks that could impact on the area bringing new residents and additional catchment for shops and services.

These are at Sevenoaks Quarry in Greatness where outline consent was granted for 950 homes, together with community uses, a primary school and significant open spaces in October 2024 and at Sevenoaks Gas Works site on Cramptons Road where consent was granted for 136 homes in November 2024. Whilst delivery will be phased over many years the proposals will increase the resident population of the town by more than 10%.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Land to the rear of the shops on St. John's Hill represents a significant opportunity for development within the St. John's Neighbourhood Centre. The unplanned and fragmented space includes the St. John's and St. James' car parks, a builders merchant and a number of single storey office buildings. Existing buildings back onto the area which feels unloved and contributes little to the centre.

There may also be potential for enhancements to the Sevenoaks Hospital sites on Hospital Road. The Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust (KCHFT) are reviewing investment options following a recent safety review of the inpatient building. Proposals for this site are not considered as part of the masterplan.

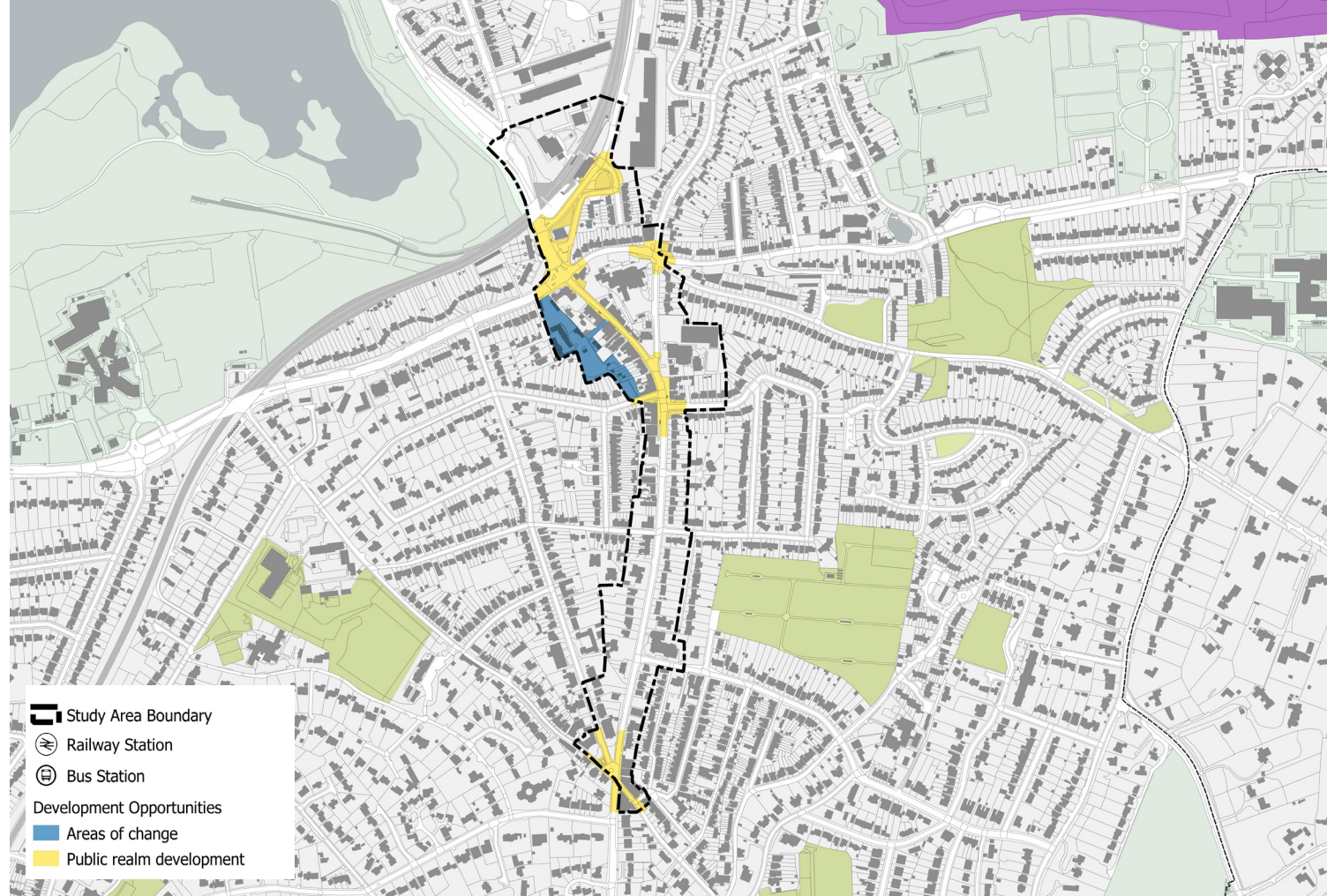


Figure 2.17: Development opportunities

“With the new Tarmac development bringing with it so many new homes, efforts should be made to provide better pedestrian and cycling linkages to Bat and Ball Station as well as St. John's local centre.”



A VISION FOR SEVENOAKS IN 2038

The Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan sets out a Vision which describes what the town will be like in 2038:

*'Sevenoaks will continue to be a successful and friendly market town set on the Greensand Ridge that takes advantage of its good connections and easy access to open countryside and to London. It will continue to have a **strong sense of community** with an active network of volunteers. The town will be **proud of its history** and the legacy of fine historic buildings, spanning six centuries, that contribute to an attractive townscape in its leafy streets.*

*However, Sevenoaks will not be stuck in the past but firmly wedded to the future and the quality of life of its children and their children to come. As one of the UK's first **carbon zero** towns, Sevenoaks will be environmentally responsible and resource-efficient. Despite its undulating topography, walking and cycling will be the standard mode of travel with a network of safe **walking and cycling routes** that provide access to the towns **excellent schools** and to recreational and employment opportunities. New buildings in Sevenoaks will be built to the **highest environmental standards** and the town will celebrate its connection with the surrounding landscape that the views to the Kent Downs provide.*

*The town centre will continue to provide a **good mix of shops**, including many independent traders, and provide a **rich cultural offer** within an emerging cultural quarter and thriving markets. The centre will be easy to access and provides **attractive streets and spaces** for locals and visitors alike. Residents will live in a variety of homes set within well-kept neighbourhoods and also benefit from convenient neighbourhood centres at St. John's, Tubs Hill and Holly Bush Lane.*

*Knole Park, Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve, Greatness Lake and Recreation Ground will provide a **unique and rich natural environment** for both active sports and quiet contemplation, and the town is proud of its remarkable trees.*

*The town will be protective of its landscape assets but also recognises the need to plan for and deliver new homes and community facilities to provide for future generations. **Sevenoaks will celebrate its uniqueness, protects its special assets and plan for future prosperity!***

Figure 3.1: Vision for Sevenoaks in 2038 from the Sevenoaks Town Centre Neighbourhood Plan

3. VISION AND OBJECTIVES



3.1 THE VISION

A vision for Sevenoaks Town was established and agreed through the Neighbourhood Plan process and, following a local referendum, was adopted in the Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan in May 2023. The Neighbourhood Plan includes a series of Objectives, Policies and Aims that will help to deliver this vision.

This vision forms the starting point for the preparation of the St. John's area masterplan.

This St. John's area masterplan builds on the vision and objectives and expresses them spatially through ten design principles. These principles have been shaped through discussion and debate with stakeholders and members of the public through the design workshops.

3.2 TEN DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Ten design principles for the St. John's Hill area masterplan area have been identified. These are set out in Figure 3.2 below and are detailed further on the pages that follow.



Figure 3.2: Ten Design Principles for the St. John's Hill area Masterplan



1 ENHANCE THE IDENTITY OF LOCAL HUBS

- Improve the setting of Bat and Ball Station, Holly Bush and St. John's Hill Neighbourhood Centres
- Improve the sense of arrival into the Neighbourhood Centres
- Enhance visual connection and wayfinding to Bat and Ball Station from Bat and Ball junction and Otford Road

2 RESPECT AND CELEBRATE THE AREA'S UNIQUE HERITAGE

- Enhance the setting of historic assets
- Retain and reuse historic buildings
- Ensure that new development responds to local character and scale and massing
- Protect important views



3 BE ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE

- Encourage active travel modes, including cycles, e-bikes and scooters and provide more electric charging points
- Enhance biodiversity
- Introduce SuDs / rain gardens where appropriate
- Energy efficient buildings and homes

4 ENHANCE THE LOCAL OFFER

- Ensure centres provide for everyday needs
- Provide opportunity for independent shops and services
- Speciality offer that draws customers from further afield
- Restaurants, take aways, cafes and sitting out areas
- Introduce specialist markets
- A variety of workspaces including co-working and studios
- Provide more public toilets



5 ENCOURAGE ACTIVE TRANSPORT AND REDUCE VEHICULAR TRAFFIC

- Provide safe and convenient walking and cycle routes to schools, the Wildlife Reserve, Sevenoaks Quarry, Dunton Green, the train stations and town centre
- Provide a solution for all modes at the Bat and Ball junction
- Provide secure cycle parking in convenient locations
- Introduce e-bike hire options
- Provide pedestrian crossings where people want to cross
- Consider traffic restrictions on some roads to prevent rat runs
- Provide bus stops in convenient locations and real time service information
- Provide car parking but whilst minimising impact on the local environment

6 CREATE A PEOPLE-FOCUSED PUBLIC REALM

- Reduce impact of vehicular traffic
- Introduce 20mph speed limit through Neighbourhood Centres
- Provide wider footways
- Consider reclaiming street space to deliver new public spaces
- Change surfacing materials through Neighbourhood Centres
- Create more places to sit, relax and meet friends



7 GREEN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES

- Introduce more green infrastructure, (trees, planted areas, green roofs, rain gardens)
- Improve access to existing green spaces including the Wildlife Reserve, Bradbourne Lakes and The Vine and to new spaces at Sevenoaks Quarry
- Connect green spaces through a network of green routes
- Protect and retain existing trees
- Consider long term maintenance and management

8 DELIVER SMALL INTERVENTIONS, EVENTS AND EARLY WINS

- Identify a programme of small interventions that are quick and easy to implement e.g. temporary uses, public realm or shop-front improvements
- Encourage community initiatives and activities that bring greater pride and ownership to the neighbourhood
- Encourage urban greening / gorilla gardening
- Introduce specialist markets and events
- Improve signage, wayfinding and interpretation



9 MAKE BETTER USE OF POORLY DEFINED LAND

- Redefine fragmented areas to the rear of St. John's Parade as positive spaces
- Provide a mix of workspace and residential uses to animate areas at different times of the day
- Maximise potential of left over areas

10 DELIVER RESILIENCE TO FUTURE CHALLENGES

- Retain strong sense of local community
- Retain Bat and Ball centre as a hub for community activities and events
- Prepare for an increased catchment population notably from Sevenoaks Quarry



Figure 3.3: Spatial vision for the St. John's Hill area

3.3 SPATIAL VISION

The ten design principles are combined in a spatial concept plan for the St. John's Hill area (Figure 3.3 on the facing page). This identifies the main arrival points in the centres that shape visitors' perceptions, the important links and connections, the community uses, spaces and attractions and sites where development can deliver change to add new interest and vibrancy in the area.

Neighbourhood centres are inherently complex environments with a web of inter-related factors all playing a role in their success. The mix of uses and offer (retail, residential, cultural and leisure); the appearance of the physical fabric (both buildings and public realm), the experience for people moving through streets and spaces all impact on their ability to attract people into them.

Furthermore it is essential to plan for the future, to think long term and to create places that are flexible and adaptable, respond to and enhance the natural environment and encourage sustainable lifestyles. The ten masterplan principles aim to not only achieve this but also to start to establish an action plan to bring about change.

The concept plan and design principles form an important starting point for the preparation of the masterplan that is illustrated in the next chapter of this report.

Image 3.1: View south along St. John's Hill prior to the turn along Wickenden Road



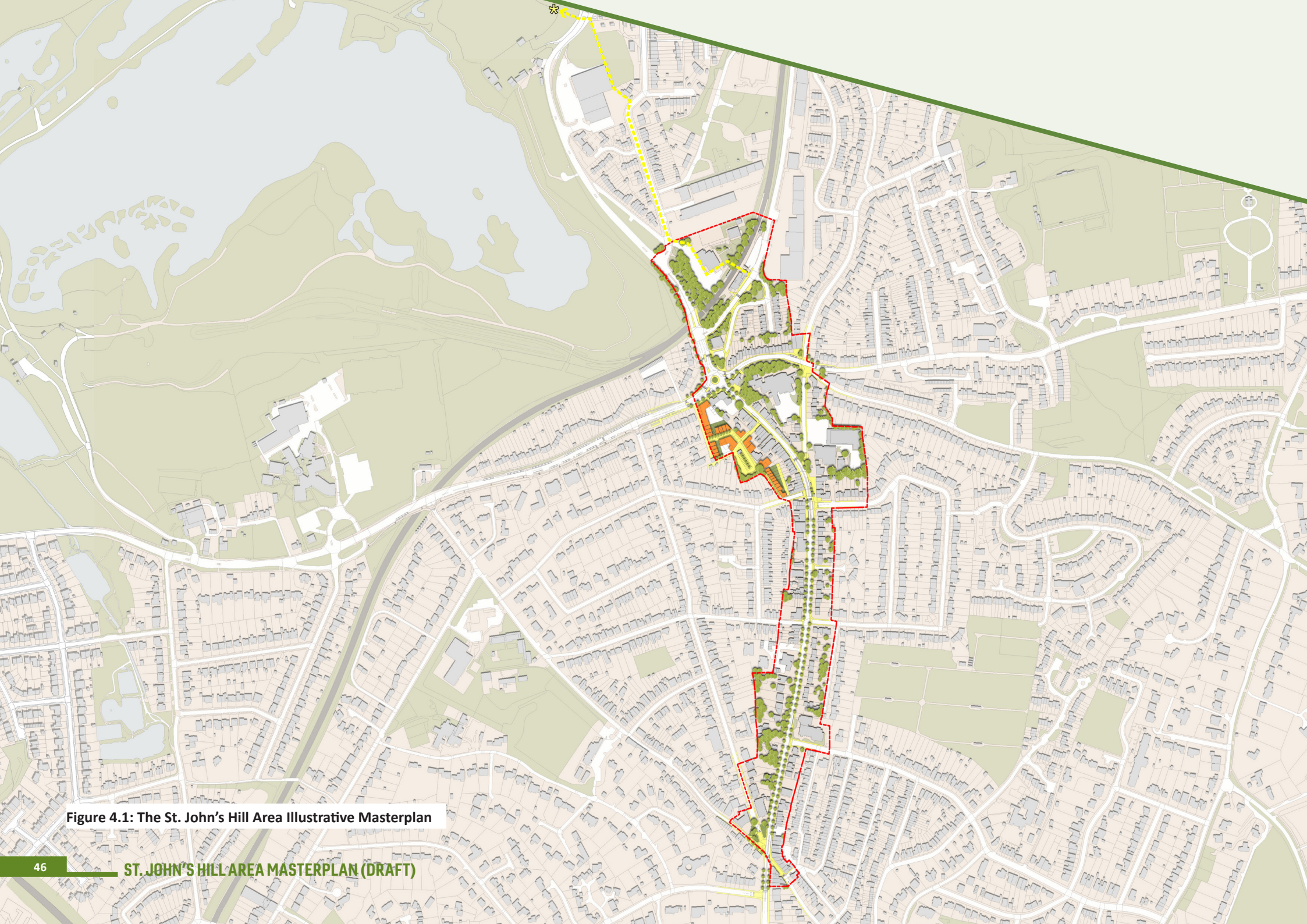


Figure 4.1: The St. John's Hill Area Illustrative Masterplan

4. THE MASTERPLAN

4.1 ILLUSTRATIVE MASTERPLAN

The St. John's Hill area Masterplan is the outcome of an iterative design process, that brings together carefully considered proposals for the study area.

The plan focuses on opportunities for change within the St. John's and Hollybush Neighbourhood Centres whilst also taking account of development activity in the wider area. This includes the planning permissions at the former Sevenoaks Gas Works and Sevenoaks Quarry sites together with the associated transport improvements emerging from these proposals and proposed through the District Council's LCWIP. The masterplan also incorporates proposals recommended as part of the parking study referenced in Section 2.6 of this report.

The masterplan adopts a sensitive approach to development, outlining targeted changes designed to deliver significant and positive improvements to the area. It sets out proposals for the public realm, landscape, land uses, and the mobility network.

Following the ten guiding principles, the masterplan presents a clear vision for the future of the St. John's Hill area. The plan focuses on enhancing and strengthening the sense of place within the Neighbourhood Centres, making more of their positive

qualities through targeted improvements and celebrating the area's heritage and natural environment. Opportunities to revitalise underused spaces are promoted to strengthen the resilience of the centres.

The plan also aims to create an environment that is more attractive to walking and cycling making this a positive choice for residents and visitors.

It is recognised that change will not be delivered overnight and the plan identifies potential early actions and small-scale interventions that can form the foundation for long-term improvements.

This chapter describes:

- Movement and public realm improvements across the masterplan area including focused proposals within each of the two centres;
- Potential proposals to transform the car parks and adjacent land to the rear of shops on St. John's Hill in the St. John's centre;
- A toolkit of parking interventions and improvements in the wider St. John's triangle area drawn from the parking study; and
- A programme of early wins that can generate increased confidence and pride in the area.



Figure 4.2: Plan of public realm interventions

4.2 A CONNECTED PUBLIC REALM

Enhancing the St. John's Hill area will focus on small yet meaningful improvements that integrate existing and new buildings while revitalising the spaces between them. By improving connections between routes and public areas, the aim is to create a welcoming and lively environment that encourages people to spend time there.

Building on the strong sense of local community, the plans include improving routes and spaces to provide a setting for a variety of events and gatherings, enriching the area's social life.

Initiatives include modest updates to existing streets and spaces, provision of new spaces, and better access to nearby attractions including Bat and Ball Station and community centre and Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve. These steps aim to make the area more inviting and enjoyable for residents and visitors alike.

The masterplan assumes that the existing Bat and Ball junction will be replaced by a roundabout delivered as part of the Sevenoaks Quarry development. Ensuring that direct and safe pedestrian and cycle crossing facilities are provided as part of these changes is essential.

The important spatial elements are identified in Figure 4.2. A number of these elements are illustrated and described further on the pages that follow.

PUBLIC SPACES

There are few public spaces within the study area and those that do exist are small. These include Rheinbach Gardens in Holly Bush and the area around the Bat and Ball Centre.

Beyond the study area are more significant spaces; The Vine to the south of Holly Bush along Dartford Road, the Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve and the Environmental Park and Knole Park closer to Sevenoaks Town Centre. Whilst these spaces are close to the neighbourhood centres, pedestrian connections to them, particularly the Wildlife Reserve, are neither legible nor attractive to use.

The masterplan promotes three new public spaces within the study area:

- 1. St. John's Place** – a small hard paved space could be delivered as part of the redevelopment of land to the rear of shops on St. John's Hill as part of a new 'St. John's Quarter'. This space would be animated by active ground floors and include seating, trees and planting.
- 2. Bat and Ball Gardens** – this area would be a landscaped, green space with seating, and delivered as part of the improved connection to Bat and Ball Station along Chatham Hill Road that also knocks through the existing wall on Bat and Ball Road to create a direct connection.
- 3. Holly Bush Square** – the partial closure of Bradbourne Road at its southern end could establish a natural space as a focus for the centre, integrating and enhancing Rheinbach Gardens whilst providing additional space, seating and a hard paved area.

ENHANCING CONNECTIONS

In addition to new spaces the masterplan also proposes enhanced pedestrian connections through the centres. These include new and enhanced east to west routes and also improvements to the streetspace in the centre:

- 4. St. John's Hill** – wider footways, designated pedestrian crossings, tree planting and introduction of SuDs along St. John's Hill Road connecting the two neighbourhood centres;
- 5. Chatham Hill Road** – wider footways, a shared path for pedestrians and cyclists, tree planting and introduction of SuDs. These improvements will create a pleasant and direct route to access Bat and Ball Station;
- 6. Crampton's Road** – provision of wider footways and a pedestrian link through the redeveloped former Gas Works site would create an enhanced pedestrian connection to a new northern entrance to the Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve;
- 7. Bradbourne Road** – closing the southern access to the road will reduce the amount of vehicular traffic, creating a calmer environment for pedestrians on this popular desire route to the primary school.
- 8. Holly Bush Lane** – re-allocating some street space for pedestrians through widened pavements and spill-out areas for businesses along the route. Resurfacing the street with materials that create a more pedestrian-focused environment will change the character of the streetspace. A contraflow cycle lane will promote and support cycling in the area.

PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS

STREET TREES

Street trees play an important role in enhancing the character and quality of an area. They offer both visual and physical benefits, improving biodiversity and reinforcing the town's sense of place. The also improve air quality and enhance local microclimate reducing the urban heat island effect and provide shade delivering greater resilience from climate change.

The masterplan highlights the importance of incorporating tree planting throughout the St. John's area, as shown in the illustrative plan. Along key routes, avenue tree planting is recommended to create continuity, define the street environment, and offer pedestrians protection from traffic and the elements, such as rain and sun.

Wherever feasible, tree planting should be prioritised. However, it is acknowledged that in some areas, due to narrow pavements, limited space, or presence of underground utilities this may not always be possible. In such cases, opportunities to introduce greenery in other forms, such as rain gardens or green walls, should be explored.

Careful consideration must also be given to selecting tree species that are suitable for their location, with attention to their mature size, growth patterns, and long-term management and maintenance needs.

PEDESTRIAN PRIORITY

Prioritising pedestrians in the design of public spaces creates a more inviting, inclusive, and healthier urban environment. By encouraging active modes of transport, such as walking or cycling, pedestrian-focused spaces contribute to improved public health while also fostering a cleaner, more sustainable environment. Additionally, these areas enhance the vibrancy of towns, making them more dynamic and appealing places for people to gather.

The masterplan highlights pedestrian priority in the public realm by widening pavements where feasible, placing pedestrian crossings in intuitive locations, and incorporating additional street furniture and public spaces that offer opportunities to stop and rest. It also proposes improvements to signage and wayfinding to enhance the legibility and navigability of the public realm.

The masterplan promotes a co-ordinated approach to the public realm design throughout the St. John's area, through the use of a co-ordinated palette of high-quality robust materials. The approaches into the Neighbourhood Centres should be marked and celebrated through the design of the streetscape and interventions must aim to create a more welcoming and inviting environment, encouraging people to visit and spend time.



Image 4.1: Tree lined cycle route with parallel pedestrian walkway



Image 4.2: Tree lined high street with wide pavements

SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING

A cohesive and modern signage strategy is necessary across transport hubs, key points of interest, and important routes to enhance navigation and improve the area's legibility. One approach is to utilise a mixture of monolith or totem signs and fingerposts, crafted from robust, low-maintenance materials such as powder-coated aluminium.

A coordinated palette of materials will create a unified aesthetic, guiding users to their destinations and contributing to a clear and legible public realm. Additionally, podium signage will be strategically placed to highlight green infrastructure and encourage intuitive movement through the area and to nearby green spaces, including the Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve.

An independent signage and wayfinding strategy would significantly enhance the neighbourhood centres and help to establish a distinctive identity.



Image 4.3: Monolith signage



Image 4.4: Contemporary fingerpost signage



Image 4.5: Floor marking details help to assist with wayfinding



Image 4.6: Flagpoles on shopfronts can help to celebrate the centres



Image 4.7: Low key signage post

PUBLIC REALM ENHANCEMENTS IN ST. JOHN'S NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE

An initial concept plan to enhance the street environment in St. John's Neighbourhood Centre is indicated in Figure 4.3. This focuses on St. John's Hill in the southern part of the centre where there is more scope and space for change, however the approach taken will also apply for the street as it passes through the northern part of the centre.

The concept plan promotes the following principles:

- Enhance sense of arrival from south through public realm improvements including resurfacing the footways, shopfront improvements, seating and tree planting. The plan also includes introduction of a paved/surfaced median strip in the centre of the street to change the feel and character of the carriageway;
- Tighten up junctions, and widen footways, where possible to provide more space for pedestrians and spill out space for shops and cafes in the centre. This includes converting the existing bus layby into a wider footway on the eastern side of the road. Buses will instead stop in the carriageway, as they do on the northbound route. This is advantageous for bus movement as buses will normally have a clear carriageway to move through when they depart the stop;
- Introduce enhanced pedestrian and cycle crossing facilities where people want to cross. The LCWIP route passes through this area from St. James Road to Wickenden Road. Crossing facilities should be located where this movement can be made most effectively;
- Introduce continuous crossings at road junctions to provide pedestrian priority. This means continuing the paving (using a small unit paver that can withstand vehicle loads) across the minor roads that meet St. John's Hill including Hospital Road, St. James' Road and Wickenden Road; and
- Introduce street trees, planting and seating and minimise clutter from excess signage. Whilst bus shelters will be required ensure that these do not obstruct the space for pedestrians moving through the centre.

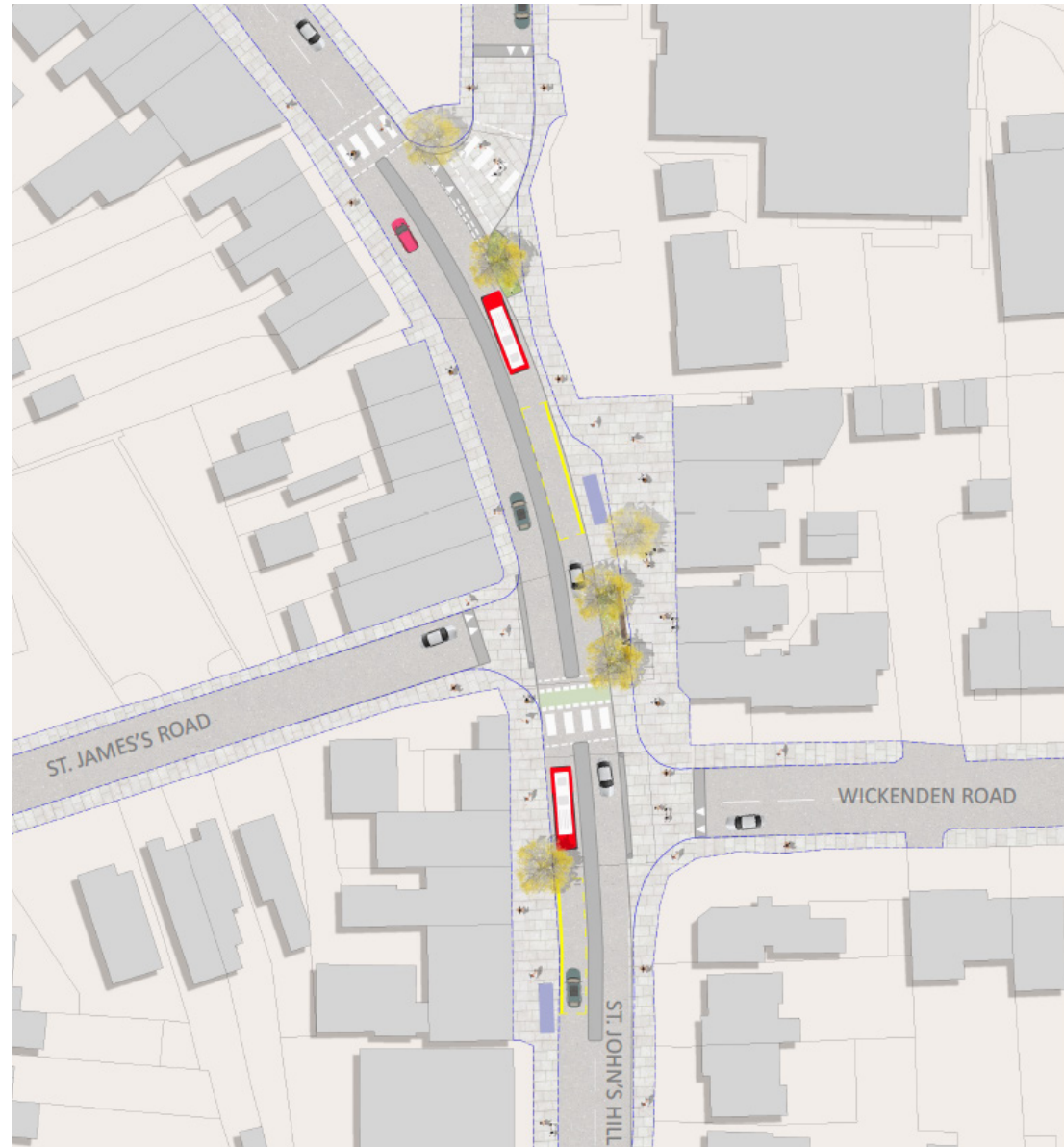


Figure 4.3: Concept plan indicated public realm improvements on St. John's Hill in St. John's Neighbourhood Centre

PUBLIC REALM ENHANCEMENTS IN HOLLY BUSH NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE

PART CLOSURE OF ST. JOHN'S ROAD

During the second public workshop held in November 2024, the first iteration of the concept plan for Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre was presented (Figure 4.4).

The key proposal in the plan involved the closure of the southern end of St. John's Road. This change was intended to preserve access to Sevenoaks Primary School via Bradbourne Road, while also reclaiming space to create a new public square around Rheinbach Gardens.

Feedback during the workshop centred around the closure of the southern end of St. John's Road. This proposal was not supported by participants with concerns raised that it may lead to increased traffic on Bradbourne Road. Bradbourne Road gives access to Sevenoaks Primary School and Knole Academy with many children walking along the route. Footways are narrow and there was concern that additional traffic would make this walking journey less attractive.

An alternative suggestion was to instead close the southern end of Bradbourne Road to through traffic. It was put forward that a partial closure of Bradbourne Road would enhance road safety by reducing traffic along this route, thereby minimising conflicts between vehicles and children walking to school.

Figure 4.5 on the following page presents the updated concept plan, which includes the closure of the southern end of Bradbourne Road in direct response to the feedback received. The revised plan is also guided by a set of principles, which are elaborated upon in the following section.



Figure 4.4: First iteration of the concept plan indicating public realm improvements in Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre, illustrating the closure of the southern end of St. John's Road

PART CLOSURE OF BRADBOURNE ROAD

The revised concept plan to enhance the street environment in Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre is indicated in Figure 4.5. Five routes meet at Holly Bush and this creates a complex environment where the needs of motorists have been prioritised over those for pedestrians.

The concept plan promotes the following principles:

- Simplify the junction by closing the southern end of Bradbourne Road and making it pedestrian priority only. This will reduce traffic on the road, and improve safety for the many school children using the route to access Sevenoaks Primary School and Knole Academy;
- Deliver a new public space, 'Holly Bush Square' that takes advantage of the space reclaimed from Bradbourne Road combined with Rheinbach Gardens, to provide a setting for events and activities in the centre;
- Enhance the sense of arrival into the centre through public realm improvements including resurfacing the footways and shopfront improvements. The plan also includes introduction of a paved/surfaced median strip in the centre of the carriageway on St. John's Hill to change the feel and character of the street;
- Resurface Holly Bush Lane in front of the terrace of shops and give over some of the carriageway as spill out space for shops and cafes. The route will remain as one way for traffic but with a contraflow for cyclists. Two car parking spaces will need to be relocated
- Introduce continuous crossings at road junctions to provide pedestrian priority. This means continuing the paving (using a small unit paver that can withstand vehicle loads) across the minor roads that meet St. John's Hill including St. John's Road and Mount Harry Road;
- Introduce enhanced pedestrian and cycle crossing facilities where people want to cross; and
- Introduce street trees, planting and seating and minimise clutter from excess signage. Whilst bus shelters will be required ensure that these do not obstruct the space for pedestrians moving through the centre.



Figure 4.5: Concept plan indicated public realm improvements in Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre, illustrating the closure of the southern end of Bradbourne Road



Image 4.8: Rheinbach Gardens in Holly Bush Neighbourhood Centre

4.3 ST. JOHN'S QUARTER

Located at the northernmost stretch of St. John's Hill, land behind the parade of shops, currently provides for a mix of car parking, small business units and yards for builder's merchants. Some small-scale development has happened to the rear of plots but this has been delivered in a piecemeal manner on a plot by plot basis and is internalised rather enhancing the area.

The car parks (St. John's and St. James) provide 71 spaces and are managed by Sevenoaks District Council. Enterprise rent-a-car lease some of the spaces. The parking study (refer to section 2.6 of this report) revealed that the maximum number of spaces used at any one time on the days surveyed was 41 (less than 60% of capacity). Many residents describe the area as feeling unsafe, with some choosing to avoid it altogether.

The masterplan promotes the transformation of the area as a positive space for St. John's. A new vibrant 'St. John's Quarter' that provides a mix of small-scale employment uses and new homes. These overlook and animate enhanced multi-purpose public spaces that accommodate car parking and can also be used flexibly for events, markets or other activities. Trees and seating will enhance the feel.

An alternative pedestrian and cycle connection is proposed extending north south through the area and linking Bradbourne Vale Road with St. James Road. This provides an alternative quieter route through the area avoiding St. John's Hill. Mews-style housing will activate the route, fostering safety and vibrancy.

The area is in multiple ownership and it is likely that any change would be phased. Figure 4.6 indicates how this could be progressed over time.



Image 4.9: Workshop units below residential



Image 4.10: Workshop units



Image 4.11: Landscaped car park



Image 4.12: Flexible space used for planting and temporary seating



Image 4.13: Meanwhile uses



Image 4.14: Modern-style mews housing



Image 4.15: Spill-out seating



Image 4.16: Pedestrian passageway behind mews housing and gardens

ST. JOHN'S QUARTER DEVELOPMENT PHASING



Figure 4.6: St. John's Quarter indicative phasing

PHASE ONE

- **Redevelop the rear of plots on St. John's Hill:** Deliver positive frontage onto the St. John's car park area through development at the back of existing plots. This to be workspace at ground floor level with new homes above.
- **Enhance the car park with additional trees:** Integrate more trees into the car park to enhance appearance, provide shade, and contribute to local environmental benefits including increased biodiversity and improved air quality.
- **Explore potential for dual-use functionality:** Consider re-purposing the car park for community or cultural events when not in primary use. This flexible approach could enhance the area's vibrancy, attract visitors, and support local economic and social activity.

PHASE TWO

- **Redevelop builder's merchant and business units:** Replace the existing builder's merchant and business units with a mixed-use, residential-led development. The ground floors, particularly around the car park, would be allocated for workshop spaces or other active uses, ensuring the area remains lively and functional while integrating residential components above.
- **Create a north-south route through the site:** Establish a clear and accessible north-south route to improve connectivity within the site. This route would enhance pedestrian and cycle movement, linking key areas and fostering better integration with the surrounding urban environment.

PHASE THREE

- **Develop new homes at the rear of St. John's Hill plots:** Utilise the under-used land behind High Street plots to deliver new terraced homes. Homes to front onto and animate the north south pedestrian connection through the site. Car parking to be provided to the rear of plots, accessed from an internal lane accessed off St. James Road.

PHASE FOUR

- **Develop additional homes on the St. James car park:** Develop mews style homes on the southern car park area, as an extension of Phase Three development. Development will animate the north south pedestrian route with car parking to the rear of the homes.

4.4 PARKING STRATEGY

PARKING STUDY: TOOLKIT

The focus of the parking study was firstly to provide more parking spaces and manage the existing parking spaces more efficiently, and secondly to mitigate the impacts of on-street parking on the walking environment. Ideas for providing more car parking spaces are set out in the Parking toolkit in Figure 4.7 below.



Figure 4.7: Parking study toolkit

¹ Car clubs: local authority toolkit, DfT (2023) [Online]

4.5 A PROGRAMME OF EARLY WINS

Whilst the development projects identified in the earlier sections of this chapter can bring about transformational change, it is recognised that many will not be delivered overnight. Indeed they require significant funding and energy to deliver and it may be many years before the change is seen on the ground.

Momentum can however be delivered through bringing forward a range of smaller initiatives. These may be lower cost but help to galvanise interest in the Neighbourhood Centres, attract more people to visit or to extend the length of their visit and through this boost the centres' economic performance. Investment builds confidence and encourages others to invest and so small changes can have a big impact.



Image 4.17: Small scale public realm enhancements



Image 4.18: Painting facades and co-ordinating shopfront design can transform a shopping parade

POTENTIAL INITIATIVES FOR ST. JOHN'S AND HOLLY BUSH

There are many opportunities for early win projects within the Neighbourhood Centres. These could include:

PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS

Small scale public realm improvements can have a big impact. Whilst waiting for the bigger investment to happen the introduction of parklets, or street greening or the two combined can start to change the feel of streets. Removal of street clutter and unnecessary signage can also enhance the streetscape at low cost.

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

In addition to the LCWIP improvements, simple traffic management measures could be introduced. These may include introducing a 20mph speed limit through the Neighbourhood Centres which would change the feel of the centres and, or, a temporary closure of the southern section of Bradbourne Road which would reveal any unintended impacts. Simple trials, such as street closures or traffic changes, paired with community events, could effectively test and justify these initiatives.

EVENTS, ACTIVITIES AND MARKETS

Events and activities are great ways to get people engaged with and involved in their area. Holding specialist markets, music or arts related activities would improve vibrancy whilst simultaneously boosting the local economy. These could be combined with temporary traffic management changes.

SHOPFRONT + FACADE IMPROVEMENTS

Public consultation feedback highlighted the need to tidy up the area, with many noting the run-down appearance of shopfronts. Upgrading facades in the Neighbourhood Centres could quickly transform their appearance and character. This could be focused on delivering a coordinated shopfront feel or go further and involve painting facades. These improvements could be encouraged by offering facade improvement grants.



Image 4.19: Parklets



Image 4.20: Community led planting

PUBLIC ART AND LIGHTING

Introducing public art or lighting installations within the centres can engender interest and attract visitors. ‘Instagrammable’ pieces can quickly attract interest and bring life to a centre. Light installations can make the centres or particular buildings within them feel different and special after dark supporting the cultural and night time economy.

TEMPORARY USES

Pop up uses are now becoming very popular in centres as a means to occupy vacant properties when it is hard to find a more permanent tenant. They can be valuable as they often bring a more interesting or specialist use (sometimes seasonal, community led or events related) to a high street.

SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING

Investing in signage and wayfinding is a relatively low cost investment that makes a big difference – helping to link attractions and assisting people with discovering what an area has to offer.

MEANWHILE USES

When a proposal is being developed and may take many years to progress through several phases, such as the St. John’s Quarter development, this can also present challenges. Construction sites are disruptive and land may be unproductive for many years whilst the proposal are progressed. In this case identifying meanwhile uses may be important.

The realm of the meanwhile often gets little consideration. This interim usage, is the ‘missing time frame’, and is often paid too little attention. Meanwhile spaces should not be confused with pop-up places, which are a quick fix, intended to titillate the weary consumer – although meanwhile uses may incorporate elements of the pop-up.

Meanwhile projects are diverse but many involve the capture and re-use of waste materials, often acting as social projects by capturing many kinds of human energy which happen to be unconnected, undervalued or just undiscovered.



Image 4.21: Enterprise space provided as Meanwhile uses

They may have a cultural or educational dimension, promote or engender health and well-being, help to nurture or support entrepreneurial behaviour or just be fun or playful.

Temporary urbanism is a tool for exploring the corners of larger sites; as a way to start building months or years before a main development can start; or as a strategy for building the identity of a place and drawing out talented local collaborators. A proliferation of supported experiments in the town enriches its culture, making it more inclusive and creating a series of interconnected memories that feed communities and keep places alive.

