SEVENOAKS TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

FINAL REPORT
JULY 2026



Sevenoaks Town Council

Urban Initiatives



Urban Initiatives

urban movement
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Sevenoaks Town Council

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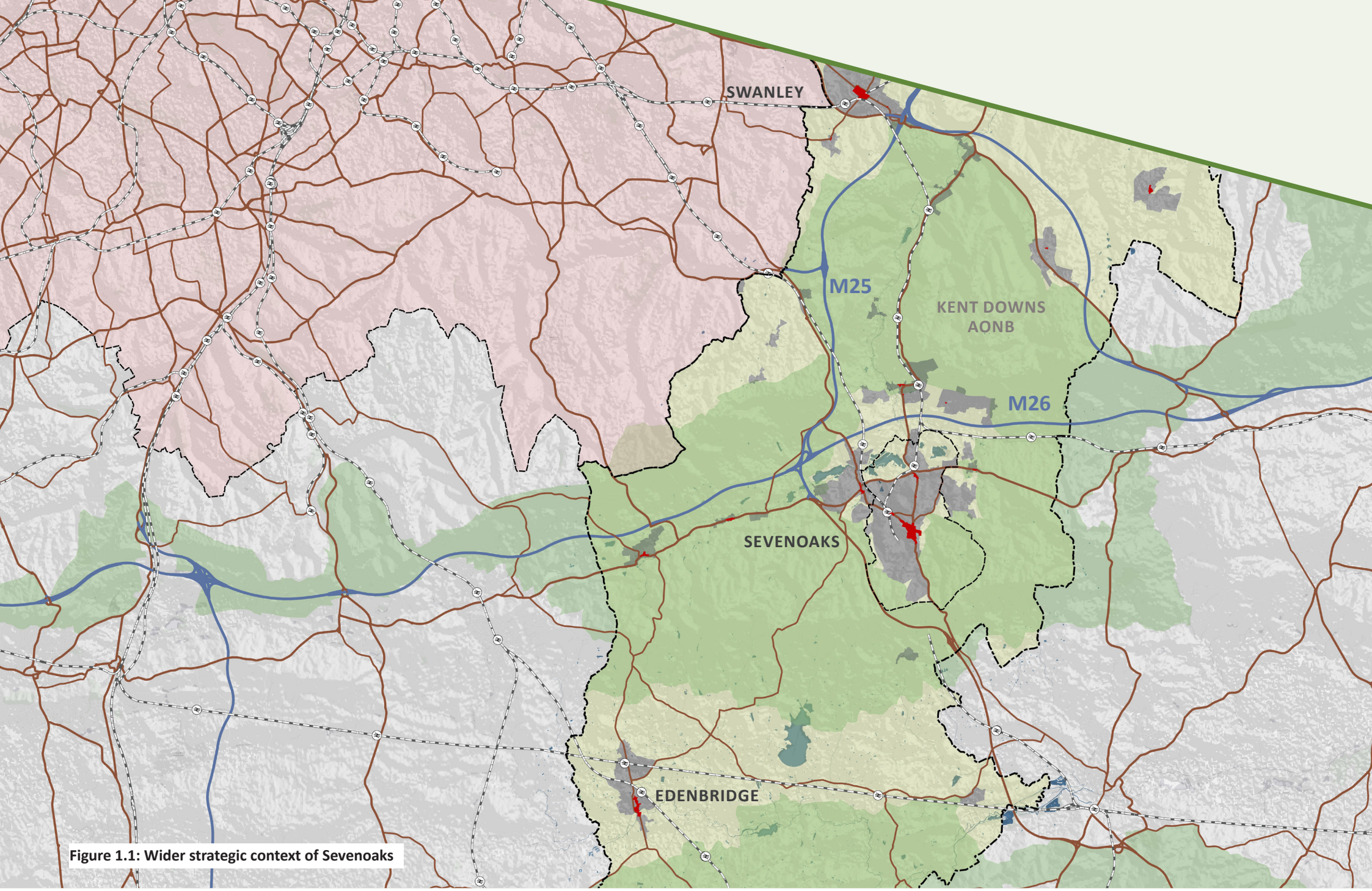
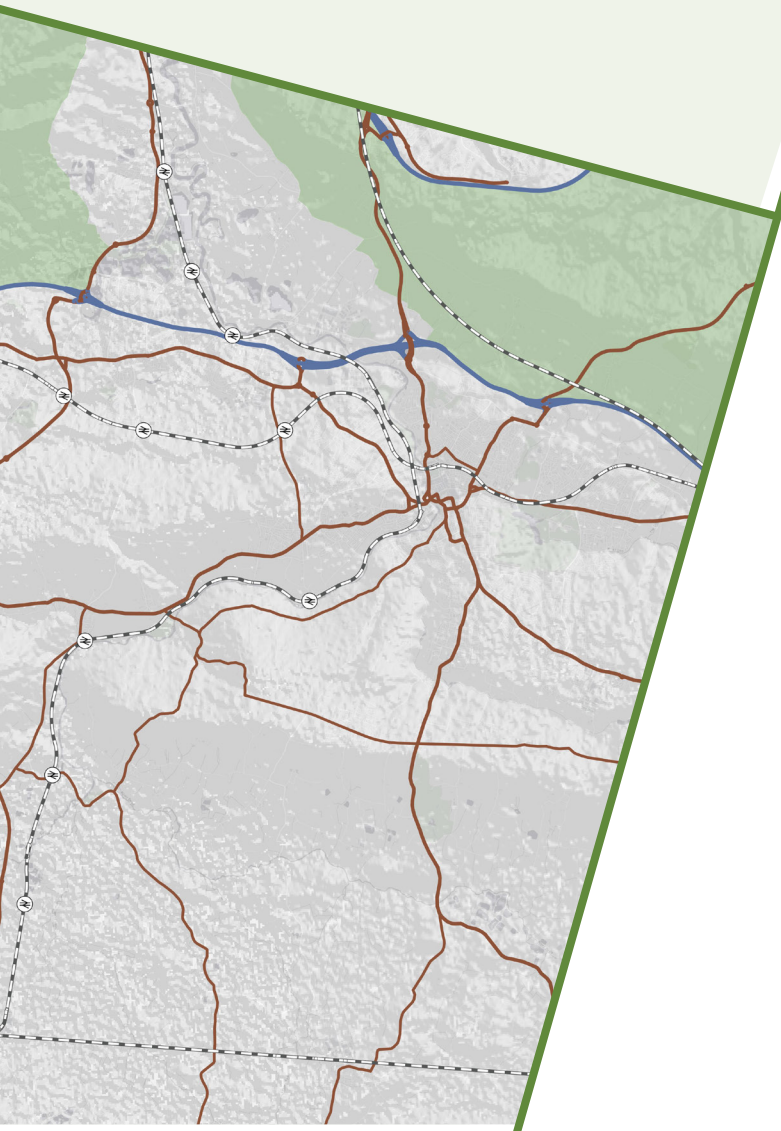


Figure 1.1: Wider strategic context of Sevenoaks

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 - including the Tubs Hill Neighbourhood Centre and Sevenoaks Station, and the second focused on the St. John's Hill area - including both the Hollybush and St. John's Neighbourhood Centres. Whilst the two masterplans are presented within stand-alone documents they complement one another and add detail to the Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan. This document focuses on Sevenoaks Town Centre.

Urban Initiatives have 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 21,167 (2021 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.

The town is home to several well-regarded schools, a variety of independent shops and businesses, the Stag Theatre, and the expansive Knole Park, which offers a wonderful open space on the eastern edge of the town centre.

THE CHALLENGES FOR TOWN 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 changed patterns of behaviour, with some centres benefiting from additional footfall from those staying at home and others losing custom.

Sevenoaks has many strengths that can allow it to prosper in the future, including an attractive and compact historic centre, a relatively wealthy catchment population and a number of cultural assets within or close to the centre. Shop vacancy levels have increased a little in recent years but are still well below national averages.

Sevenoaks High Street shop occupancy / vacancy study completed in March 2026 by Sevenoaks Town Council reported that 95% of ground floor commercial premises throughout Sevenoaks are occupied; a vacancy rate of 5%. This is well below the national average, identified by Knight Frank as being 12-13%.

However, traffic passing through the centre impacts on its attractiveness and on the quality of the pedestrian experience. Some of Sevenoaks' assets are poorly connected to one another and others, notably Knole Park, whilst close to the town centre, has its historic setting protected by natural screening and is therefore hidden from view. The public realm in parts of the centre is tired and in need of renewal and there are vacant sites that undermine the attractiveness of the centre.

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 Local Plan and Town Centre Strategy prepared by the District Council, form the starting point for the preparation of the town centre masterplan.

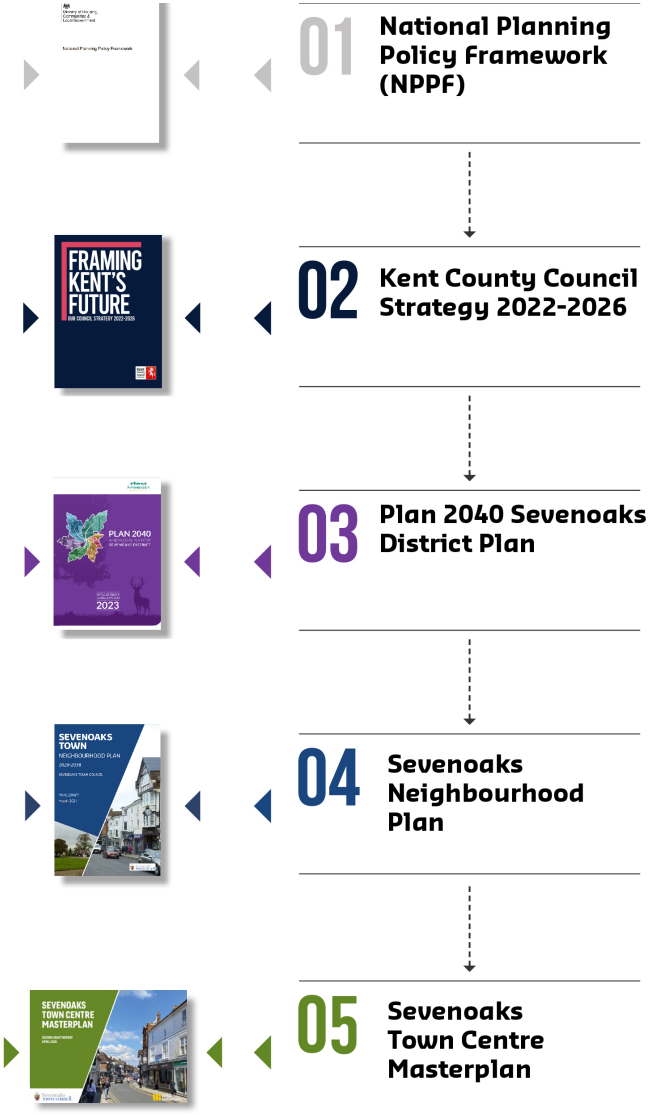


Figure 1.1: Relevant planning policy framework for the Sevenoaks Town Centre Masterplan

"Floreant Septum Quercus - May the seven oaks flourish."

Sevenoaks Town Council

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 housing / business sites, exploring opportunities to improve the walking and cycling environment, reducing the impacts of traffic and developing the spatial aspects of Sevenoaks' Cultural Strategy.

The Sevenoaks Town Centre masterplan provides 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:

- Builds on the objectives and policies in the Neighbourhood Plan;
- Responds to, and aims to address, some of the 21st century challenges facing town centres;
- Identifies where change could take place, including opportunities for new development and improvements in the environment for walking and cycling; and
- Helps to guide future decision making and investment in the town centre.

"The town centre has been moulded by a history of trade in the past, now combined with contrasting high levels of traffic, a growing population, along with changes in shopping patterns."



1.3 PREPARING THE MASTERPLAN

The masterplan has been prepared collaboratively via 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 centre and to feedback on, and shape, emerging proposals.

Sevenoaks Town Council, and their consultants Urban Initiatives and Urban Movement, 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 key stakeholders and more than forty stakeholders were brought together for two workshops, both held in the Stag Theatre.

Workshop One (23 April 2024) - at this first workshop the town centre was explored with stakeholders through a 'Placecheck' exercise to understand more about what makes Sevenoaks Town Centre special and some of the challenges that it faces. 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 (4 November 2024) - at the second workshop an initial spatial plan for the town centre was presented and discussed with stakeholders. This plan indicated how the ten guiding principles could be delivered spatially. Ideas were presented to improve connections through the centre, 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 town centre, as well as their impressions of the place. 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.

Public consultation on the draft masterplan took place over a three month period from 28th June through to 31st September 2025. Over 150 people completed the masterplan questionnaire and many more attended the consultation. This included a launch at The Stag as part of the Sevenoaks Society summer event on 28th June 2025 and attendance at the Sevenoaks Business Show at the Bat and Ball Centre on 13th June 2025.

The feedback through the one-to-one meetings, workshops and surveys and the public consultation has guided the masterplan presented in this report. Comments made are captured throughout the report. Further detail is provided in a Consultation Report under separate cover.



Sevenoaks TOWN COUNCIL











Image 1.1: Images from stakeholder engagement workshops and public consultation held in The Stag, Sevenoaks





1 Sevenoaks Train Station
2 Station Car Park
3 Urban Reform Church
4 Tubs Hill Neighbourhood Centre
5 London Road
6 St. Thomas of Canterbury Church
7 Sevenoaks District Council Offices
8 South Park Road
9 Sevenoaks Telephone Exchange
10 The Stag Theatre
11 Sevenoaks Post Office
12 Waitrose and Partners
13 Pembroke Road
14 Sevenoaks High Street
15 Sevenoaks Town Car Park
16 Sevenoaks Leisure Centre
17 Sevenoaks Kaleidoscope Gallery
18 St. Nicholas Church
19 Sevenoaks School
20 Vehicular Entrance to Knole Park
21 The Old Post Office
22 Bligh's Meadow Shopping Centre
23 Knole House
24 Knole Paddock / Raleys Field
25 The Vine
26 War Memorial

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

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2. UNDERSTANDING THE STUDY AREA



1.1 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 National Landscape. 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 continue 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. The historic market was located within The Shambles area between these two routes. The spatial structure of the town centre was well established by the 17th Century and is still largely intact.

The railway arrived in Sevenoaks in the mid 19th century. Sevenoaks railway station is located approximately 1,000m to the north of the town centre within the valley, with trains passing through a cutting and then tunnel to the west the town centre. The Tubs Hill Neighbourhood Centre is located to the east of the station.

The masterplan covers an area of approximately 540 hectares and extends approximately 2,000m from north to south. It takes in the town centre (as designated in the Local Plan), together with the southern approach to the town centre including Sevenoaks School and extends northwards to include Sevenoaks Station and its' car parks and the Tubs Hill Neighbourhood Centre.

2.1 HISTORY AND HERITAGE

HISTORY

EARLY DEVELOPMENT

First mention of a settlement at Sevenoaks dates from the 12th century with a record of a bill from Rochester cathedral to the church at Sevenoaks for holy oil dating from 1122. The first market established in the 13th century. The town centre developed around a key junction on the London to Hastings Road and the route to Dartford, benefiting from strong transport links that helped attract trade. The layout of Sevenoaks, particularly the area between Sevenoaks School, High Street, and London Road, reflects the town's growth as one of the principal livestock trading centres in west Kent. A church was also constructed during this period, around which the town continued to expand.

The initial development of Sevenoaks was concentrated primarily in the town centre, focused along London Road and High Street. This historic core has been preserved, making it a highly recognisable and distinctive part of the town. To the north of Sevenoaks, the land was predominantly agricultural with several notable estates including Wildernesse, Greatness and Bradbourne.

The 14th century saw the arrival of Flemish weavers, who established a weaving industry that flourished in the district for 300 years. Sevenoaks School was founded in 1432 and is one of the oldest secular school foundations in England. The construction of Knole House between 1456 and 1486 by the Archbishop of Canterbury spurred the town's growth.



Figure 2.2: Historic plan of Sevenoaks dating between 1800-1880

Today, Knole Park is owned and managed by Knole Estate, whilst Knole House is owned and managed by both the National Trust and Knole Estate.

In the Tudor era, the area welcomed new settlers who brought with them various trades, such as papermaking, market gardening, hop cultivation, and coal mining. By the 17th century, iron smelting had gained significance, further diversifying and enriching the local economy.

Sevenoaks School is considered to be the oldest secular school in England.

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INDUSTRIALISATION

Prior to the arrival of the railway, Sevenoaks' primary industry was agriculture, with most other manufacturing activities being small-scale operations related to agricultural production or the building trade, such as stone quarrying for construction materials.

The opening of the first railway station in Sevenoaks at Bat and Ball in 1862 generated increased demand for housing and industrial development. The railway stimulated the brick-making and quarrying industries. It also provided improved connections to London, facilitating access to distant markets and enhancing the prosperity of the town.

The establishment of a second railway station at Tubs Hill, (now known as Sevenoaks Station), further accelerated growth. This led to speculative land purchases and a significant increase in house building. The expansion of the town was largely oriented northwards, in line with the locations of the railway stations and to accommodate the influx of new commuters.

20TH CENTURY GROWTH

Sevenoaks continued to grow throughout the 20th century, and is recognised as an attractive place to live and work within easy commuting distance of central London. However, the designation of the Green Belt around the town and the location of Knole Park immediately to the east of the town centre has constrained further development.



Image 2.1: Historic photographs of Bat and Ball Station (top) and Tubs Hill / Sevenoaks Station (bottom)

"The area has a rich history... but it is not advertised enough. "



HERITAGE ASSETS + DESIGNATIONS

Sevenoaks and its surrounding area boast a diverse array of heritage assets and designations. Much of the study area is designated as Conservation Area. The southern part, including the town's historic centre, is within the Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area, the north-western part is within the Granville and Eardley Road Conservation Area, and a small area to the north-eastern edge is within the Vine Conservation Area. These are designated in recognition of their historic and architectural interest.

The Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area in particular includes numerous listed (Grade II* and Grade II) and locally listed buildings.

Knole Park is a Grade I Registered Park and Garden and Knole House is a Grade I listed building. Knole Park is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is within the Kent Downs National Landscape and designated as Green Belt.

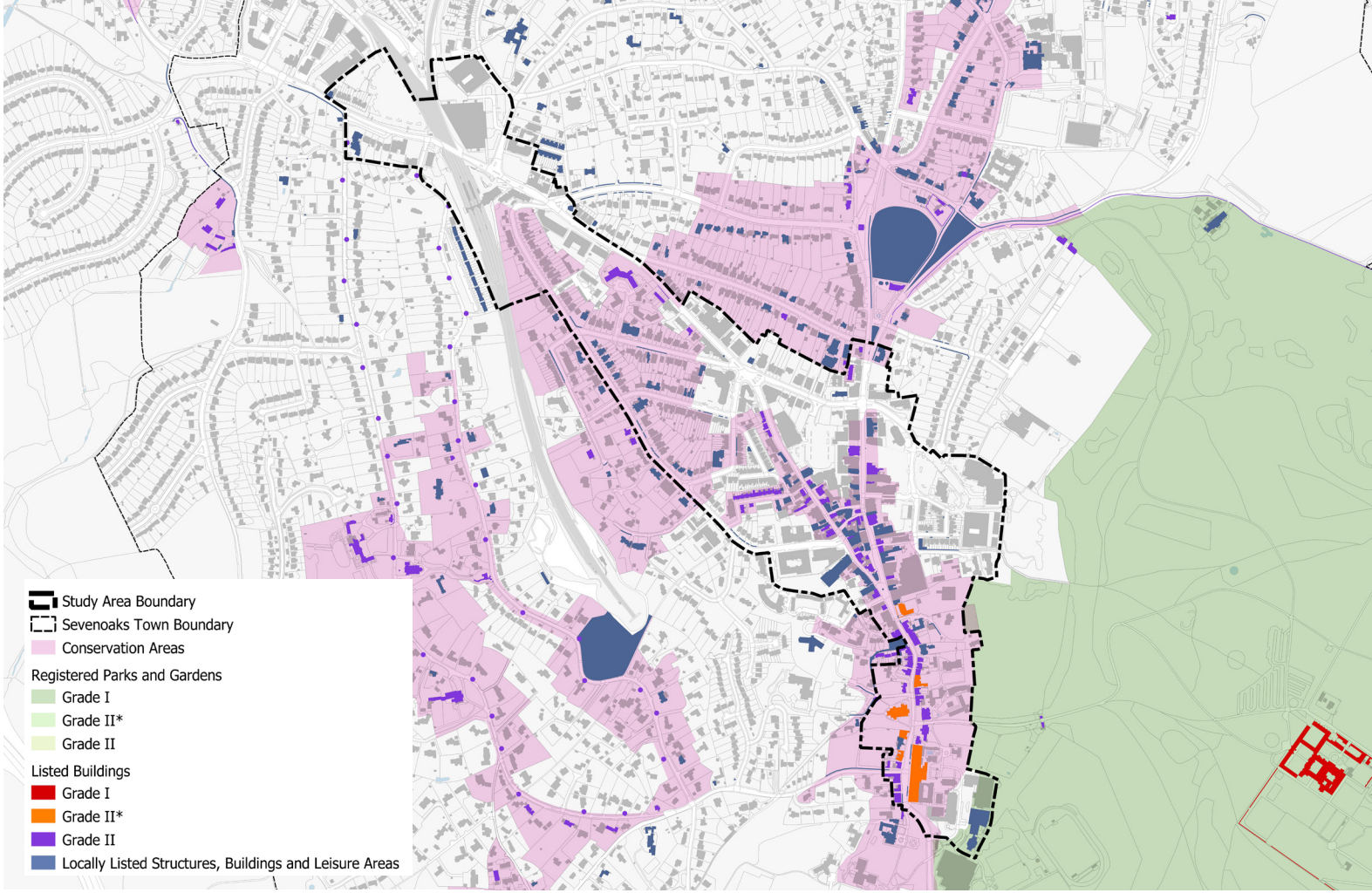


Figure 2.3: Heritage assets and designations

There are 90 listed buildings in the masterplan area.

Sevenoaks Town Council



"The history of Sevenoaks as a market town is special and should be better celebrated."

Image 2.2: Sevenoaks Wednesday Market

2.2 CHARACTER AND TOWNSCAPE

CHARACTER

The character of the town centre is varied, reflecting its history, the land uses, pattern of development and topography. In the historic centre, buildings are generally smaller scale and front onto streets with a fine grain network of alleys and lanes, creating a permeable structure and with shops, cafes and business uses at ground floor activating the streets and spaces.

Moving away from the historic core the character changes. To the west are residential areas with a mix of detached, semi-detached and terraced properties, many dating from the Victorian period. To the east of the High Street and around Sevenoaks Station the character is less well-defined, with buildings at a variety of scales and sometimes set within areas of car parking, providing less defined frontage to the streets.

Sevenoaks is a very green town enveloped by countryside and with 93% of the district designated as green belt. The town 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 town's streets. Mature trees are an intrinsic part of the town's character and a prominent feature in the town's streets.

Whilst Knole Park is located immediately to the east of the town centre, the green character does not penetrate into the historic centre and its main routes (London Road and High Street), which are traffic-dominated and devoid of green. Here the environment is largely hard-paved.



Image 2.3: Views towards the Kent Downs



Image 2.6: Junction of London Road and High Street



Image 2.4: View along London Road



Image 2.7: View of St. Nicholas Church



Image 2.5: View across London Road



Image 2.8: Environmental Park

TOWNSCAPE

Much of Sevenoaks' historic character has been preserved and this forms an important part of the town's identity. The historic centre provides an attractive ensemble of historic buildings dating from the last six centuries. The basic spatial structure found in the 17th century remains to this day with a fine grain of built form with a human scale series of alleys and footways leading to small courtyards and gardens. Buildings are generally modest in scale (two and three storeys) with a dynamic roofscape of mainly pitched roofs, dormers and chimneys.

Architectural historian Nicklaus Pevsner claimed that the southern end of Sevenoaks High Street had 'more worthwhile buildings than in almost any other street in the county'.

"Attractive architecture is a huge asset of the Historic Centre."



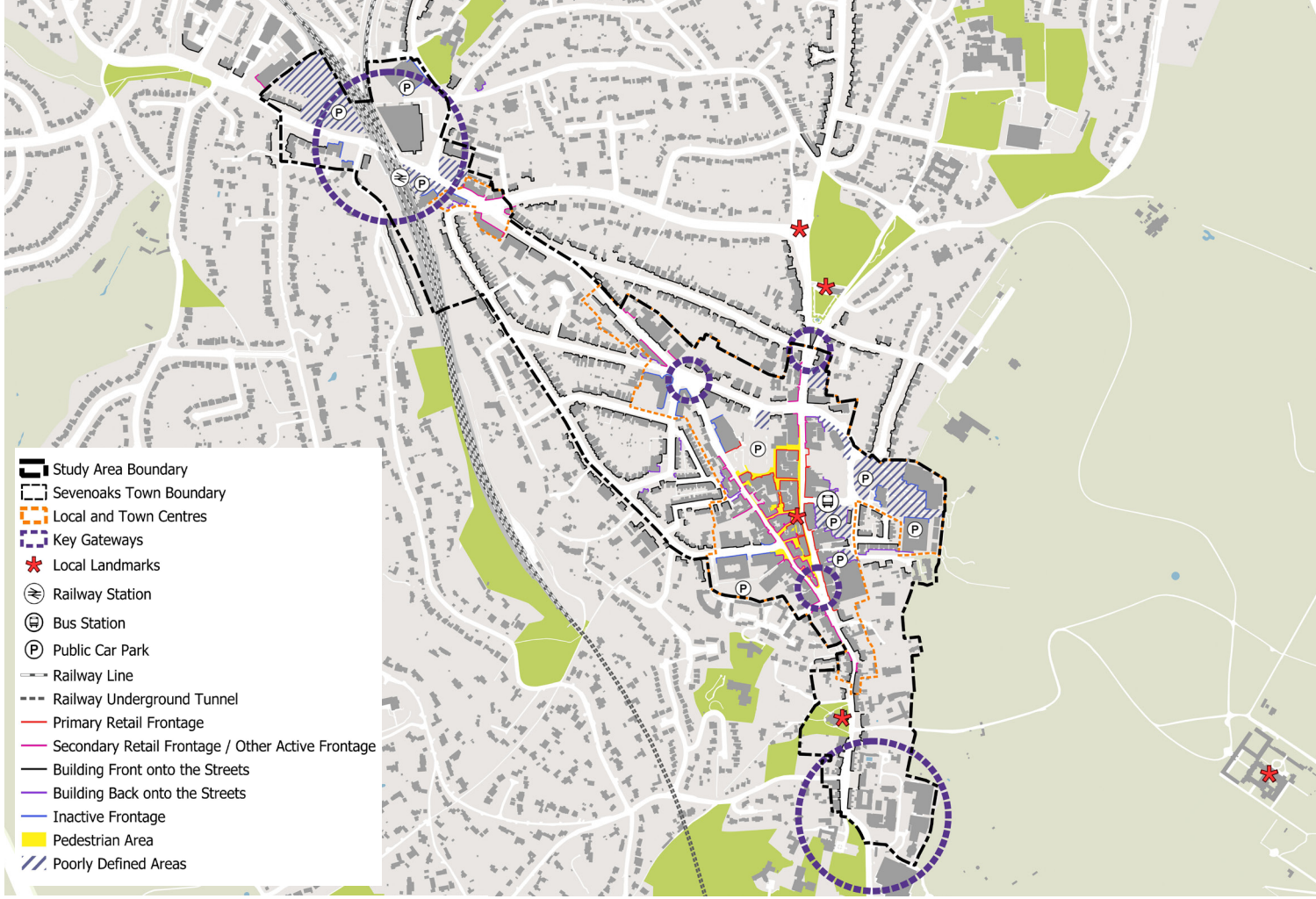


Figure 2.4: Townscape plan

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. Four locations were identified in the town centre study area:

- Sevenoaks Station / Station Square;
- The Vine;
- London Road / High Street junction; and
- London Road / Pembroke Road junction.

Each of these locations is currently undermined by settings that are dominated by, and designed to cater for, vehicular traffic rather than for people. Arrival at Sevenoaks Station is also undermined by a lack of street frontage and poor wayfinding.

FRONTAGES

Shops, cafes, bars, and restaurants line High Street, much of London Road and the network of lanes, alleys and spaces that connect between the two. These bring activity and vibrancy to the centre. The character of the shopfronts vary with some attractive historic premises and other more contemporary properties. Footways are very narrow in places and this compromises the ability to appreciate the townscape, particularly on London Road.

LANDMARKS AND SPECIAL BUILDINGS

The Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan identifies two local landmarks within the town centre; the Old Market House and St. Nicholas Church, both located on High Street. The bandstand and clubhouse at the Vine and Knole House in Knole Park are also identified local landmarks. These landmarks were identified for the positive role they play in the local townscape.

In addition to the local identified landmarks, there are many other buildings and structures that contribute to Sevenoaks' sense of place - both through their architectural form and design and also their use. This includes the fountain and fingerpost at the junction of London Road and High Street, the Stag Theatre and the former Dorset Arms (now Cote restaurant) on London Road, the 16th century timber-framed Old Post Office, Sevenoaks School on High Street and the Grade II Listed War memorial at the Vine. These structures help to shape Sevenoaks' identity.

OPEN SPACES

Within the town centre there are few open spaces. The Shambles area between London Road and High Street provides a pedestrian network of alleys and lanes and these widen into courtyard spaces with café seating. Likewise the edges of the surface car park at Blighs Meadow provide some sitting out areas. The Saturday and Wednesday market is held on the wider footway at the southern end of High Street, the former of which also has stands at Blighs Meadow.

Whilst there are few open spaces within the heart of the town centre, Upper High Street Gardens provides an attractive smaller green space to the south (off High Street), and the Vine to the north and Knole Park, accessed via the Environmental Park on the eastern edge of the town centre, are wonderful open space assets on the edge of the town centre.

POORLY DEFINED AREAS

Whilst properties generally front onto the main streets through the centre, in some places - notably to the east of the High Street - they expose their rear service yards to view. Furthermore, in this part of the centre many buildings do not front onto streets but are set back within their plots and surrounded by car parking. The main entrances to buildings are not easy to find and the environment is unattractive for pedestrians, with a lack of overlooking / natural surveillance of the streets.

Similarly, the environment around Sevenoaks Station feels fragmented, with large areas of surface car parking, vacant sites and a lack of frontage and overlooking of streets and spaces.

BUILDING HEIGHT

Historic buildings within the masterplan area are typically two to three storeys in height, the notable exception being St. Nicholas Church at the southern end of High Street. Some contemporary buildings in the centre are taller including the M & S at Blighs Meadow and office buildings on Suffolk Way and South Park.

A number of taller residential buildings have recently been developed on London Road close to Sevenoaks Station (up to a height of ten storeys). The topography in Sevenoaks is important when considering building height. The town centre is on the top of a hill and greater building height in the centre is likely to be much more visible than on low lying land, for instance around Sevenoaks Station.

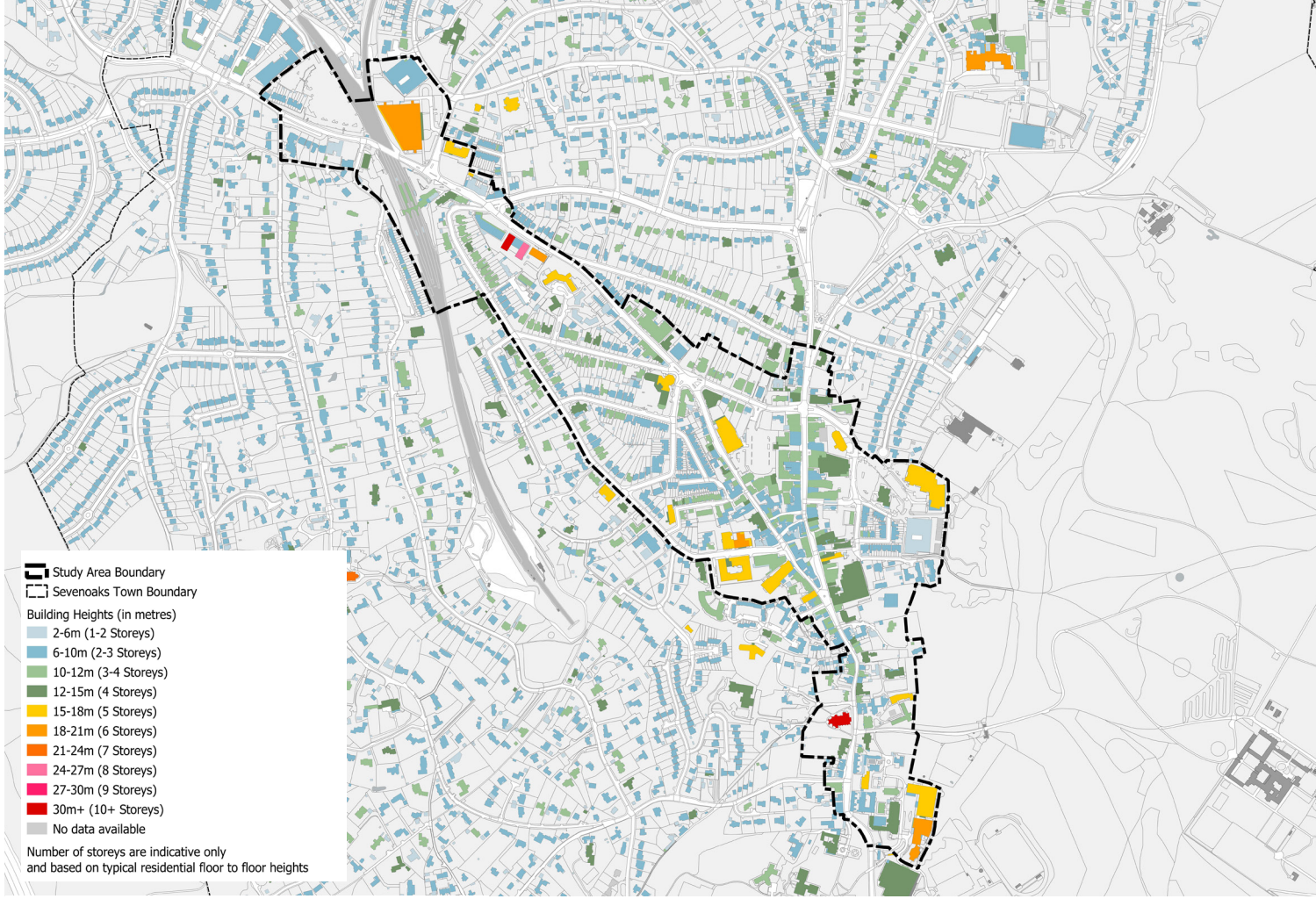


Figure 2.5: Building height plan

2.3 TOWN CENTRE OFFER

THE CHANGING ROLE OF TOWN CENTRES

Whilst people historically visited town centres to shop or work, this is changing and increasingly people visit town centres to meet friends, go to a café, a gym or for another leisure activity.

This is borne out by the Town Centre Healthcheck carried out by Avison Young for Sevenoaks District Council in 2022. This indicated that residents came to Sevenoaks town centre to visit a café or restaurant (89%), for health and fitness (71%) or to come to the Stag Theatre (65%). Most residents did their main food shopping and shopping for clothing and footwear elsewhere and less than half of residents came to the town centre for top up food shopping. The study also indicated that the average stay was 90 minutes and that 64% came by car, 9% by bus and 21% on foot.

Online surveys carried out as part of this masterplan paint a similar picture with only 15% of respondents saying that they came to the centre for food (supermarket) shopping and a further 33% for other shopping. (refer to Appendix A)

The town centre offers a diverse offer which is considered further in the following section.

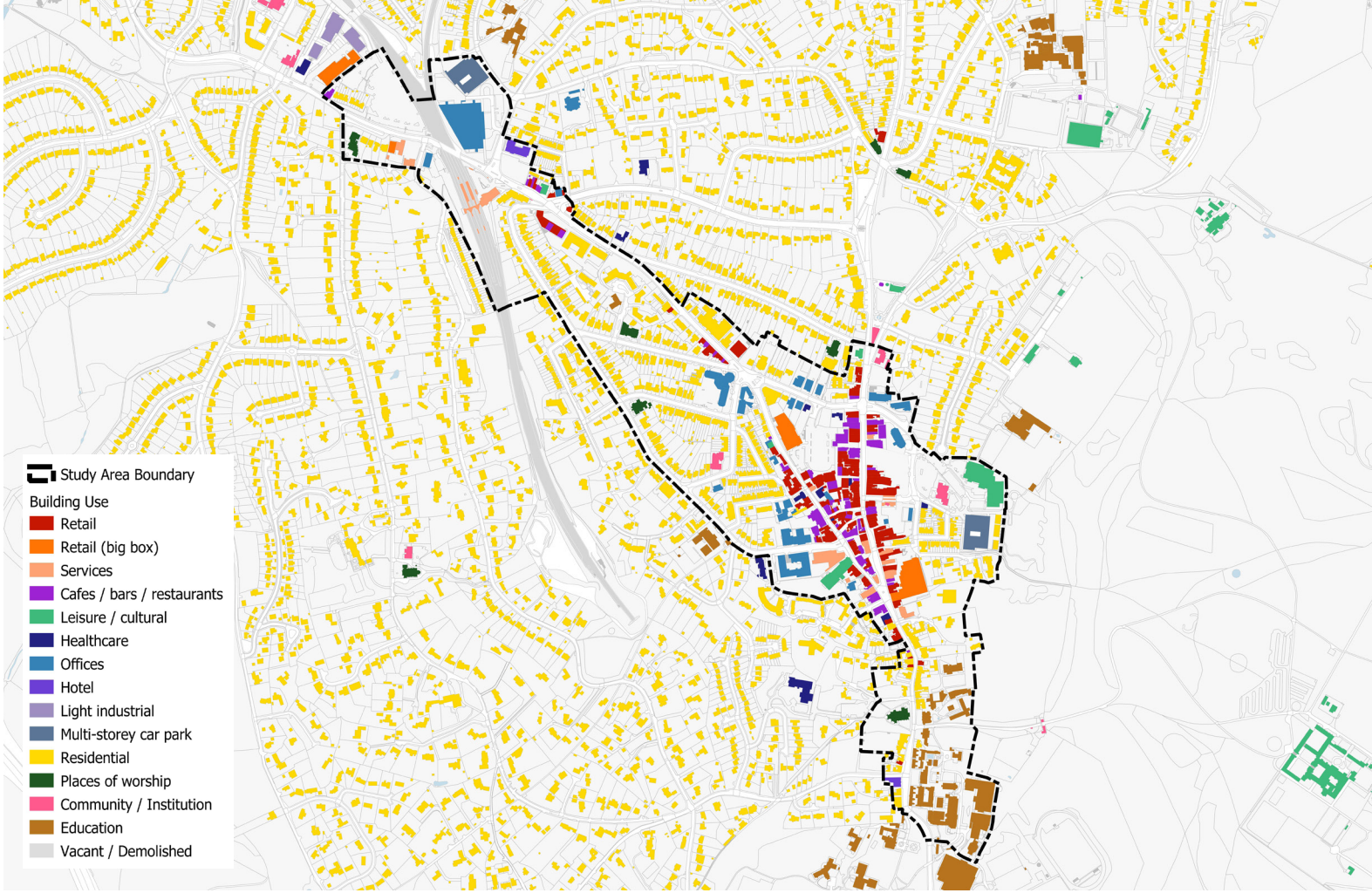


Figure 2.6: Building use classifications

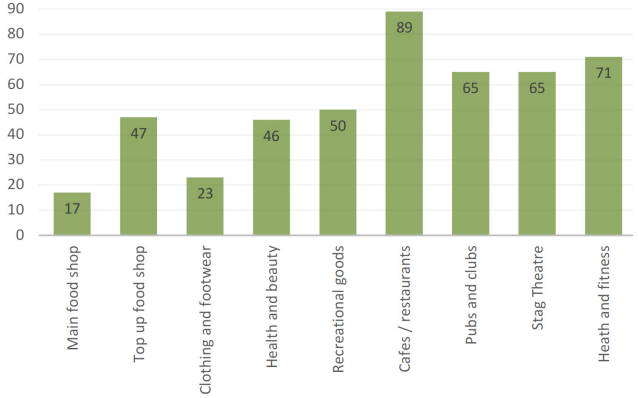


Figure 2.7: Reasons to visit the town centre (Town Centre Healthcheck, Avison Young 2022)

Sevenoaks Town Centre Shop Vacancy Rate 5% in 2026, well below the National average of 12-13%

Sevenoaks High Street Shop Occupancy / Vacancy Study (March 2026) and Knight Frank retail estimate (2026)

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RETAIL

Sevenoaks High Street has been labelled as one of Kent's most desirable shopping destinations. It features many independent and specialist shops, offering goods ranging from piano's and violin's to sports equipment and haberdashery. Bligh's Meadow shopping centre offers over 35 shops and various dining options. The town boasts numerous boutiques and cafes, along with a growing number of charity shops and nail salons.

Its popularity is further illustrated by very low vacancy rates and above average rental values. However, in recent years there have been concerns by locals over the closure of some shops and the retail offer becoming more homogenous and lacking in diversity.

RESIDENTIAL

Sevenoaks is a sought-after place to live, with residential areas to the north and west within easy walking distance of the centre. Properties range in type from large detached homes and individually designed houses, to Victorian and Edwardian properties on streets close to the centre. Some new apartments have been built around Sevenoaks Station in the last decade. Sheltered accommodation and care homes provided by local social landlord, Rockdale, provide specialist accommodation for older residents.

OFFICE

The Sevenoaks Economic Needs Study prepared by Ramidus for SDC in 2022 identifies that the office market in Sevenoaks is small. Aside from Sevenoaks DC offices on Argyle Road there are office buildings on Suffolk Way, Pembroke Way and South Park. The BT building on London Road (opposite the station) is currently vacant. Future demand is likely to be for micro and small businesses and for co-working space.



Image 2.9: Pedestrians in the Town Centre

"Too many coffee shops and not enough variety of shops; I do all my shopping elsewhere."



CULTURE

Sevenoaks has a rich cultural offer, with a number of cultural assets found in the town. The Stag was originally the Majestic Cinema and established in 1936. The venue is located at the southern end of the High Street and now hosts a theatre, two cinema screens, an 'alternative performance space', a Youth Cafe and conference rooms. The space acts as a community hub for the town and is a valued asset by residents and visitors alike.

The Sevenoaks Kaleidoscope, located on Buckhurst Lane to the east of the town, houses a number of attractions including a gallery, museum and library. The Sevenoaks Gallery is run by Sevenoaks Visual Arts Forum (SVAF) as an artist-led space. It showcases talent from emerging local artists, focusing on 'new and experimental' work. The gallery also has a community focus, through encouraging artists to host interactive sessions alongside their exhibitions in order to engage visitors.

The Sevenoaks Museum has a changing programme of exhibitions, generally focusing on events, people and objects that are symbolic to the local area. Sevenoaks library offers a place for all ages to borrow books and is proactive in encouraging reading amongst younger residents.

The Neighbourhood Plan promotes the development of a 'Cultural Quarter' in the town centre that better strengthens the town's cultural offer through amongst other things, provision of new facilities and artists workspace, temporary art installations, improvement and animation of pedestrian links to link cultural venues and events and festivals. Policy COM3 in the Neighbourhood Plan specifically focuses on this.

LEISURE

Sevenoaks town centre and the surrounding area offer a range of leisure opportunities although connections to them and between them could be enhanced. These include Sevenoaks Leisure Centre, Knole Park, The Vine and Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve.

Sevenoaks Leisure Centre, located to the east of the town, close to the Kaleidoscope, offers a range of sporting facilities for the town including swimming pools, a gym, sports hall and exercise studios.

Further to the east is Knole Park, a popular destination managed by Knole Estate and the National Trust. In 2024, the National Trust property attracted 262,000 visitors, with a further 400,000 people visiting the parkland through the 15 pedestrian gates that surround the park. It is a favoured spot for residents who regularly use it for recreation. This provides a significant opportunity for the town to extend the visitors experiences into the town centre to the benefit of local businesses.

The Vine, located north of the town centre, is one of England's oldest cricket grounds and offers a well-maintained garden, pavilion and a popular cafe. The site hosts a variety of community events and activities, including art classes and vegan food markets.

The Sevenoaks Wildlife Reserve, also situated north of the town centre, is one of the area's most valuable ecological assets. It serves both as a recreational and educational resource. The Reserve provides a wonderful tranquil environment, with a network of paths that provide access to bird hides alongside the water bodies.

There is a scattering of multi-purposes spaces throughout Sevenoaks, such as the Pamoja Hall at Sevenoaks School and local churches that host classical music festivals. The town also hosts a number of outdoor festivals, such as Sevenoaks Summer Festival and Rhythm in Oaks.

Sevenoaks offers a variety of daytime leisure options, including shops, food and beverage outlets, and sports and recreational facilities. While these amenities serve daytime needs well, residents have expressed concerns about the limited evening leisure offerings. The Stag Theatre is valued for its evening performances, but there is a desire for more high-end dining options to complement the theatre experience. Additionally, residents have noted a shortage of nighttime venues, such as pubs and other evening social spaces.



Image 2.10: The Stag, London Road



Image 2.11: Cafe and bandstand at The Vine

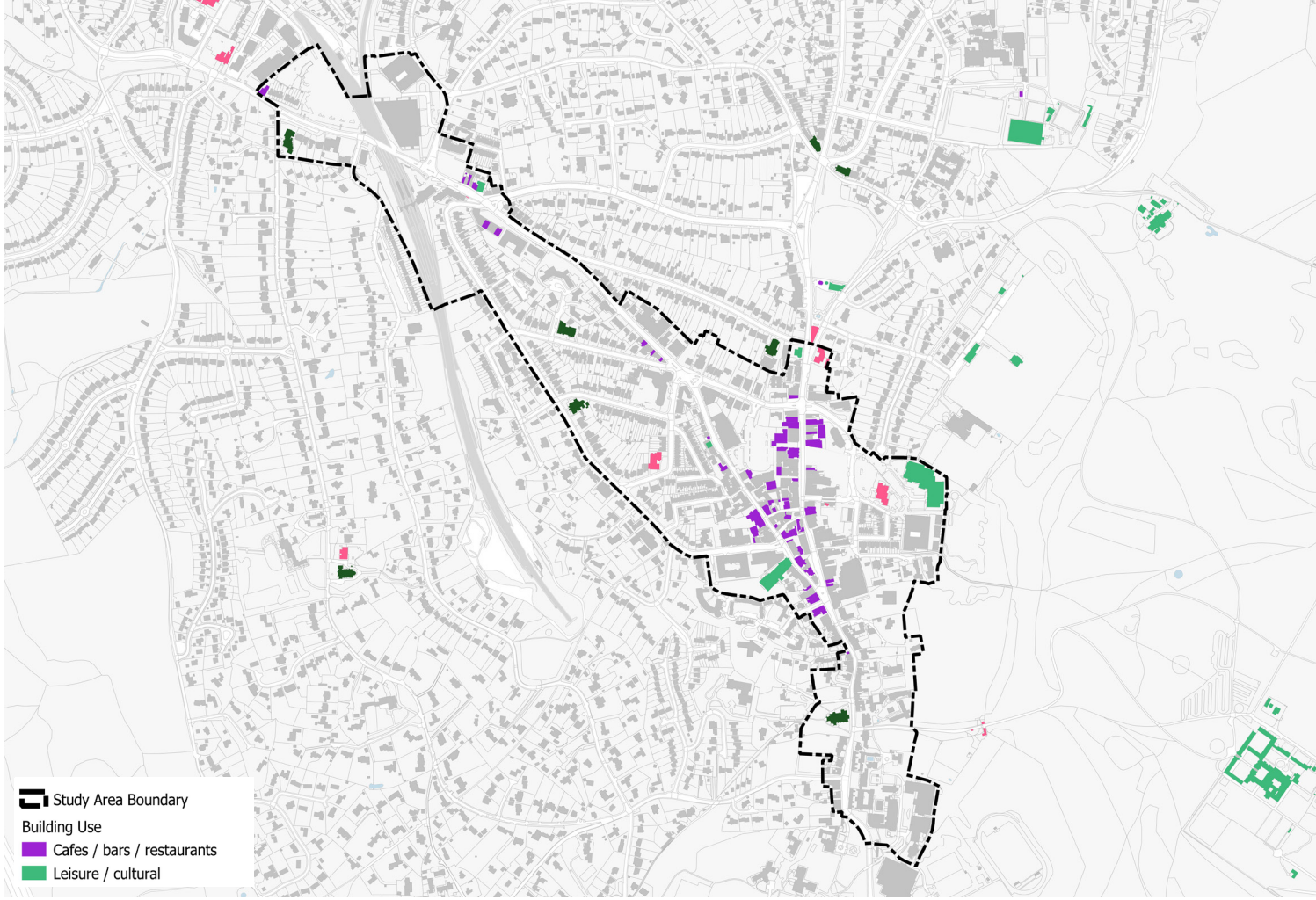


Figure 2.8: Culture and leisure uses

"Shops and cafes are open in the day but there is little to do in the evenings."



2.4 MOVEMENT NETWORK AND PUBLIC REALM

VEHICLE MOVEMENT

Sevenoaks town centre is the meeting point for High Street (A225) and London Road (A224). High Street (A225) extends in a north to south direction through the town and connects Sevenoaks with Otford and Dartford to the north, and with Tonbridge to the south. London Road (A224) connects to Riverhead and Orpington to the north-west of the town and links the town centre with Sevenoaks Station. These routes provide connection 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 of the town.

Both High Street and London Road are historic routes and are lined with buildings as they pass through the town centre. In places the routes are narrow with sub-standard footways. In peak hours the routes can be congested and traffic undermines the environmental quality and pedestrian experience in the town. Heavy goods vehicles passing through the town present a particular challenge. The Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan includes an Aim to ensure that, wherever possible, HGV movements are directed away from the centre.

High Street and London Road are linked east to west by Pembroke Road to form a triangle in the town centre. The Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan promotes the introduction of a 20mph speed limit on these routes.

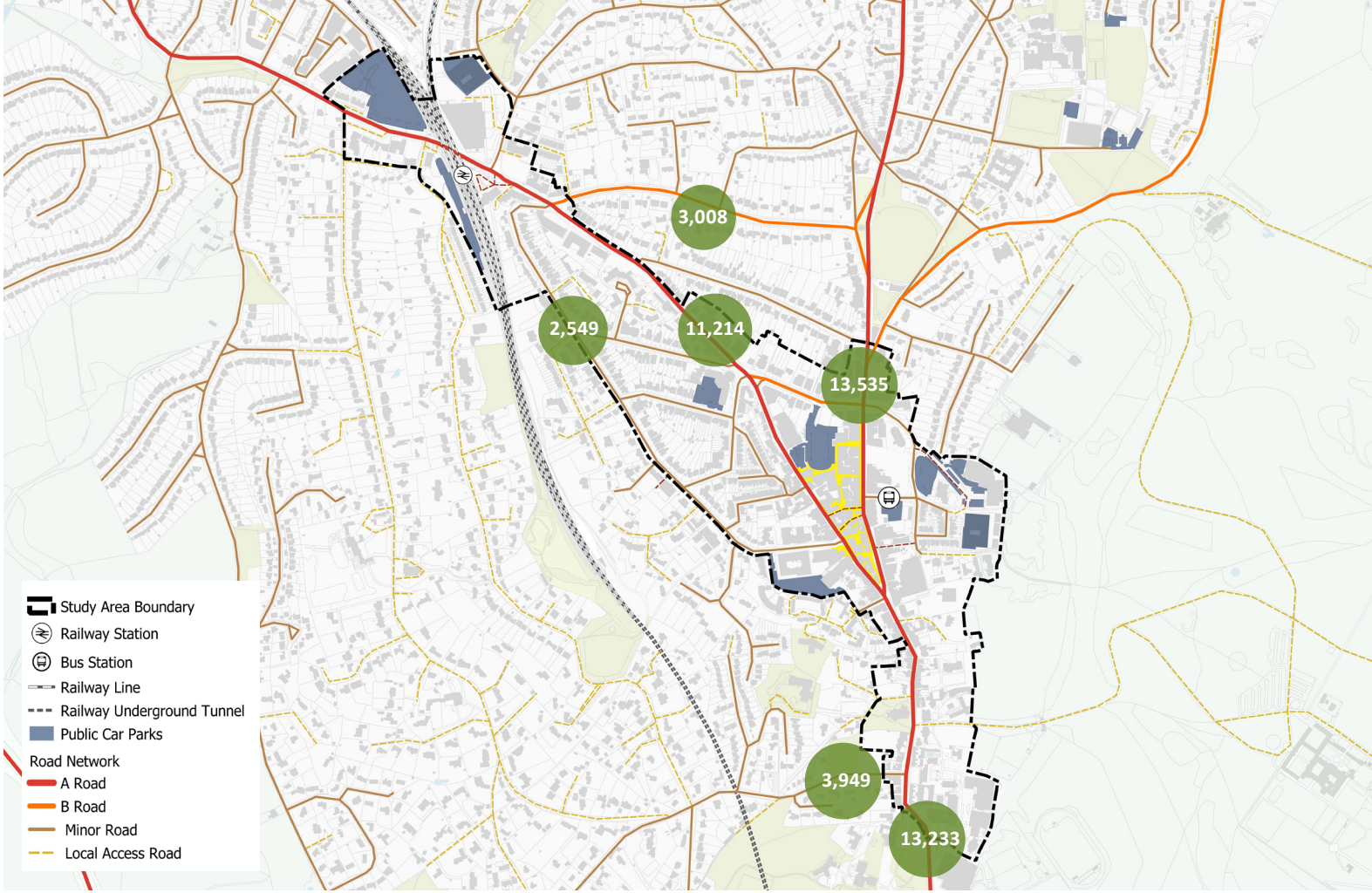


Figure 2.9: Vehicular network and traffic count plan (based on 2023 traffic counts)

CAR PARKING

There are a number of car parks within the town centre. The largest is the Town Centre Car Park, located on Burlington Mews, and provides 480 spaces within a multi-storey structure (including 8 electric charging spaces). Short stay surface car parks are provided at Blighs (205 spaces), Buckhurst Lane (76 spaces), Suffolk Way (221 spaces) and South Park (136 spaces).

There are also on street car parking spaces on High Street, London Road and South Park. Free car parking is available at the District Council offices car park at the weekend and there is further car parking at Sevenoaks Station. Car parks are pay on arrival rather than exit.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

RAIL

Sevenoaks Station is approximately 1,000m from the town centre and provides regular northbound services to London Charing Cross, Cannon Street, London Bridge and Waterloo East and southbound to Ashford International, Ramsgate via Dover Priory or Tunbridge Wells and Hastings.

Whilst the town is well served by trains, the environment around the station is unwelcoming, and difficult to navigate for pedestrians. The area is dominated by guard rails and other street clutter that create a poor first impression of the town and create barriers to pedestrian movement. The Neighbourhood Plan supports proposals to improve transport interchange facilities at Sevenoaks Station including real time travel information for both buses and trains and improved drop-off, pick-up and taxi rank facilities.

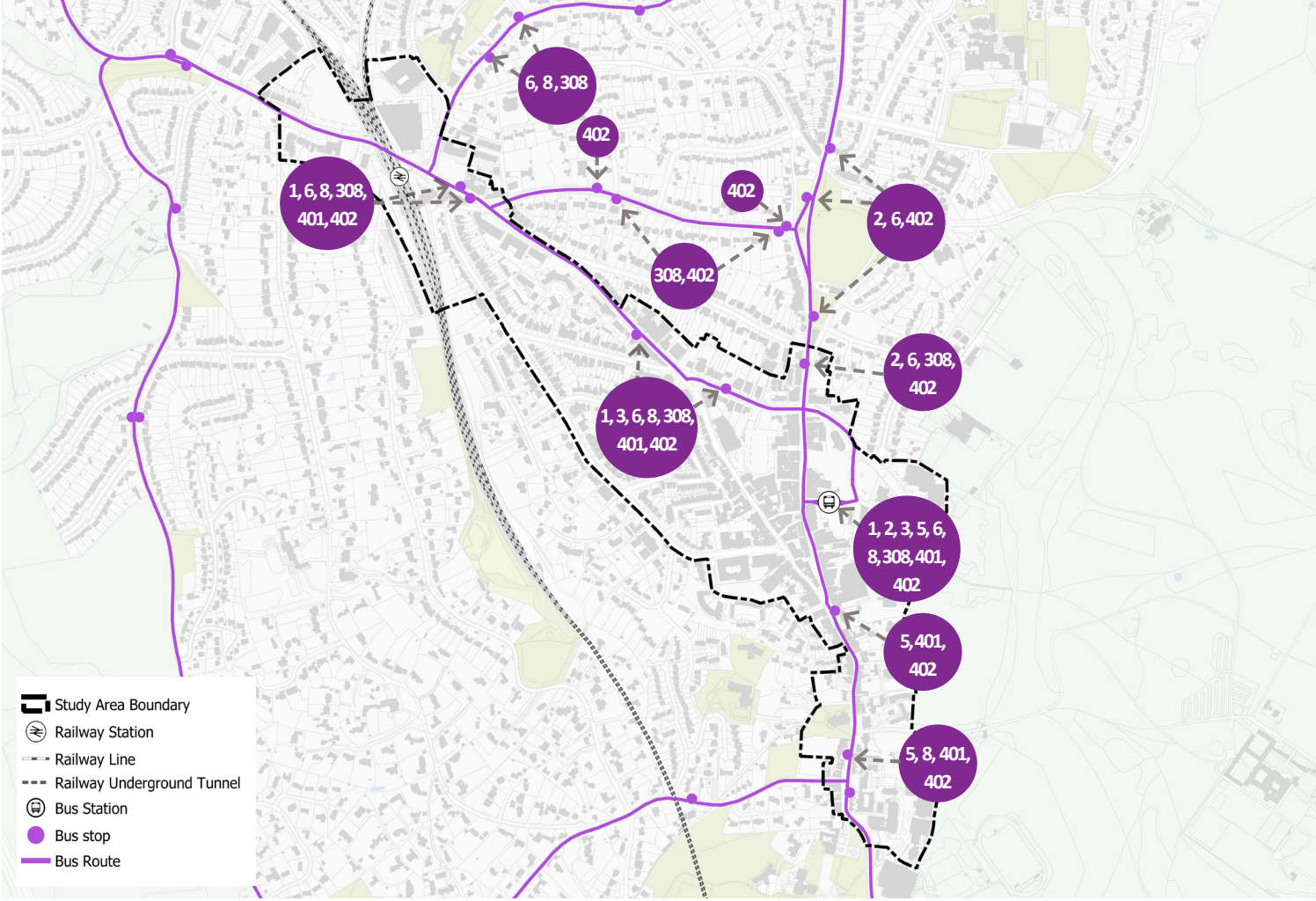


Figure 2.10: Bus network plan

BUSES

Sevenoaks is served by a number of bus routes with stops on High Street, London Road and Pembroke Road. Bus frequency is generally low (less than one bus per hour on most services) and patronage has reduced since the pandemic. Sevenoaks bus station is a modest facility located on Buckhurst Lane, with buses moving in an eastward direction from the High Street and then using an anti-clockwise loop along Suffolk Way. Many bus routes either stop or terminate at this location.

Buckhurst Lane is a side street off High Street and also an important pedestrian connection between High Street and Sevenoaks Library and the leisure centre. The quality of environment at the bus station is unattractive, cluttered by street furniture and signage and at peak times overcrowded, making passage towards the leisure facilities uninviting.

Less than 1% of people normally travel by bus to the town centre.

Source: Sevenoaks Town - Use and satisfaction survey (2024)

CYCLING

The majority of Sevenoaks lacks designated cycle lanes or segregated cycle routes, forcing cyclists to share the road space with other vehicles. Many of Sevenoaks roads provide insufficient space and separation from motorised traffic, creating a potentially hazardous environment for cyclists. Additionally, there is a general lack of cycling infrastructure, including limited secure bike parking.

Sevenoaks Town Centre is situated on top of a hill, requiring cyclists to navigate a steep incline to reach the High Street. While the distances from surrounding residential areas to the town centre are manageable by bike, the combination of challenging terrain and unsafe road conditions further discourages cycling in the area.

In 2023 Sevenoaks District Council prepared a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for Sevenoaks Urban Area. This promotes a network of cycle routes across the town and how the existing street space could be used in order to bring about a step-change in cycling within Sevenoaks. High Street and parts of London Road and South Park are identified as primary cycle routes. Granville Road is identified as a secondary cycle route.

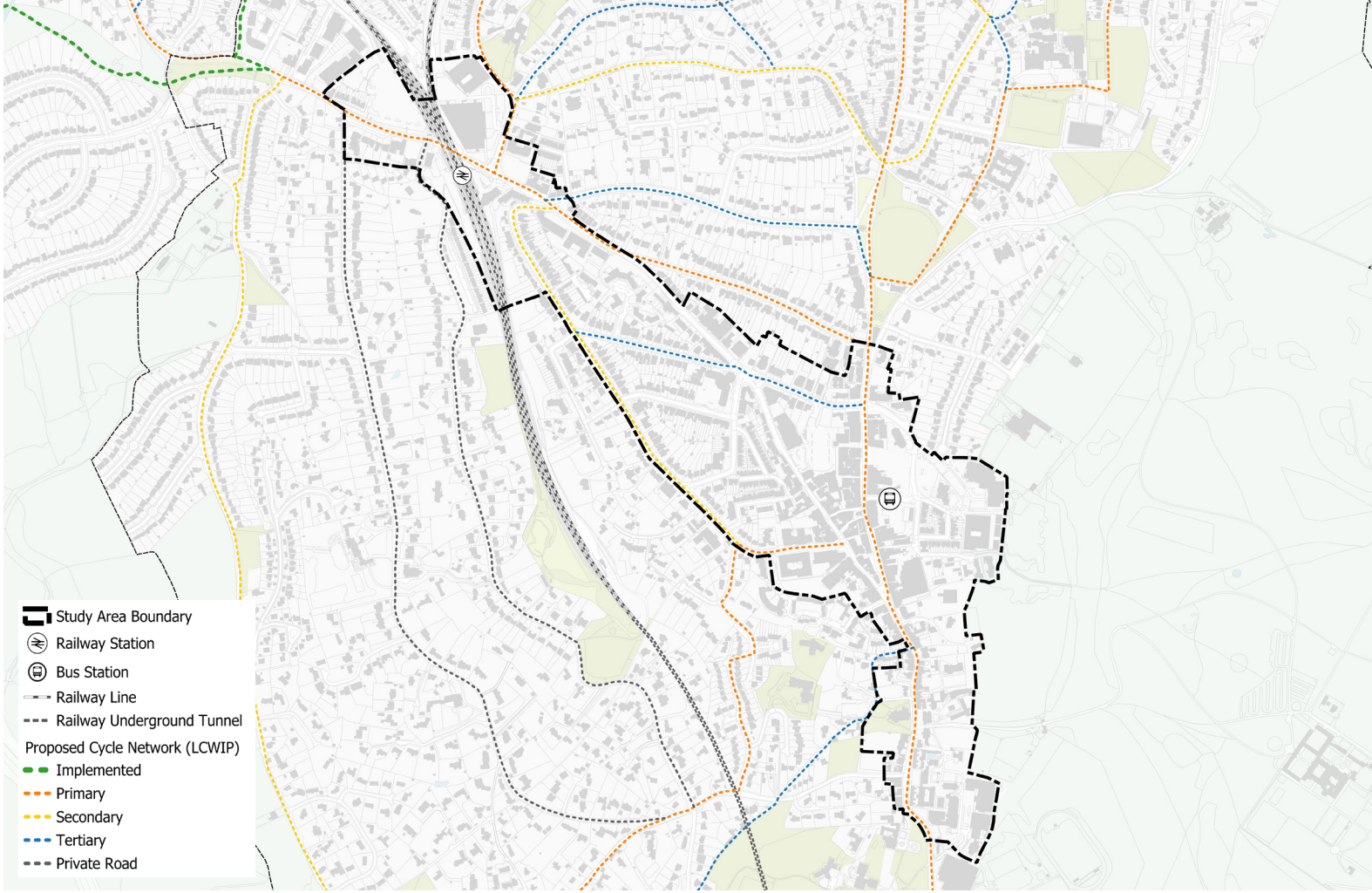


Figure 2.11: Cycling infrastructure plan

An east to west walking, wheeling and cycle route extending from Riverhead in the west towards Seal in the east has been delivered and connects many of the town's schools towards the north of the town and also improves active travel connections with Sevenoaks Station.

"There need to be designated cycle paths around the town, as currently the roads feel too unsafe to cycle."



Sevenoaks Town Council

WALKING

The pedestrian infrastructure in and around Sevenoaks Town Centre is shaped by both the town's historical layout and also design decisions that have focused on the need of motorists rather than those of pedestrians. Pavements vary in width, but are generally too narrow to allow two people to walk side by side comfortably, or to accommodate wheelchairs and prams safely. In some places, pavements end abruptly without offering safe crossing points across a street.

Pedestrian crossings are often placed in non-intuitive locations, resulting in longer and less safe walking routes. Additionally, pedestrian movement is restricted by physical barriers, particularly around Sevenoaks Station where numerous railings impede access. The high traffic volumes along the High Street and London Road, combined with insufficient signage, further complicate pedestrian navigation throughout the town centre.

The town centre is car-dominated, with much of the street space allocated to vehicular traffic. In some places the historic layout and building frontage position means that there is insufficient space for wide footways but in other locations, where there is a little more street width, this additional width is allocated to the carriageway and footways often remain at a sub-standard width, reducing the amount of usable and pleasant space for pedestrians.

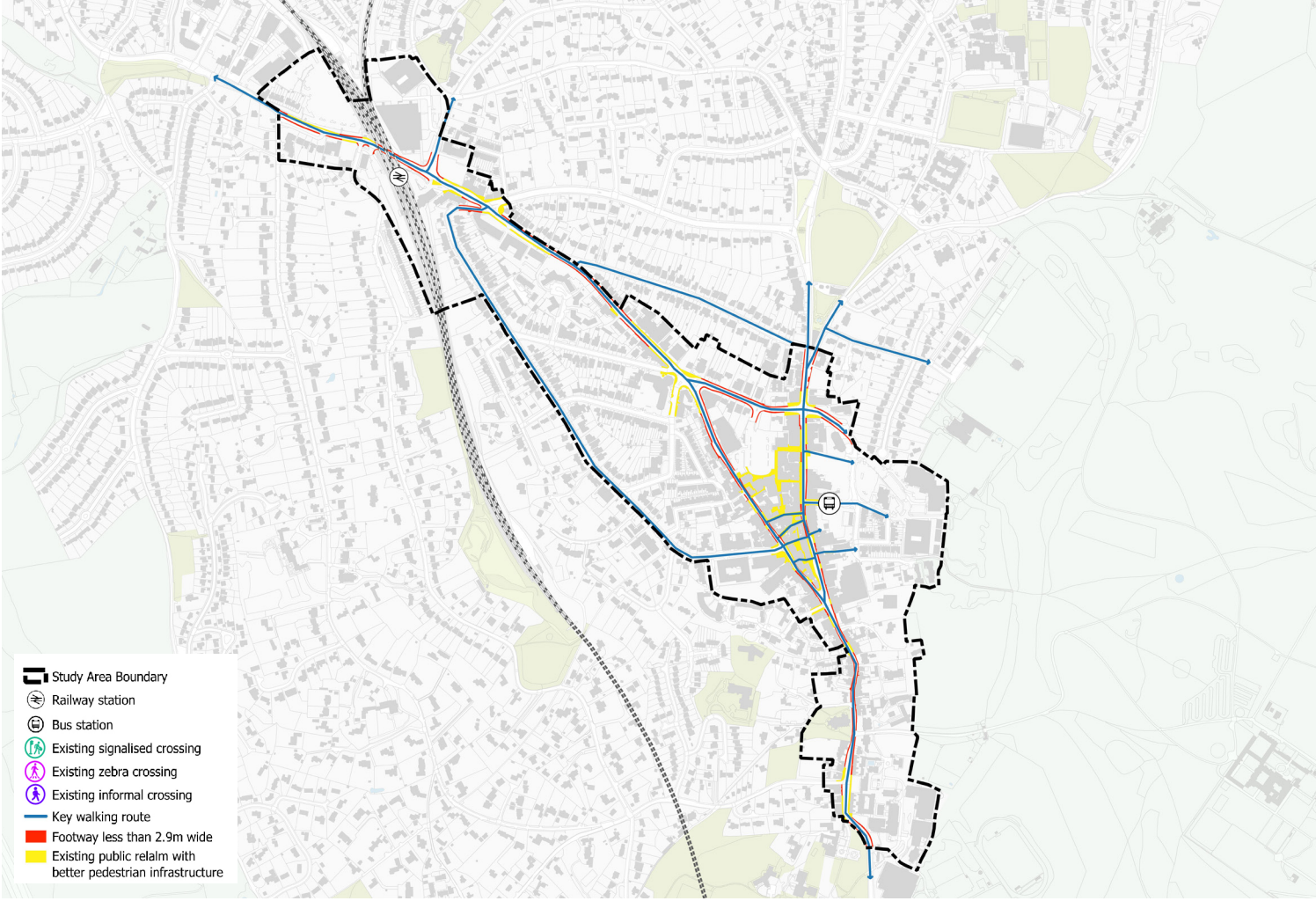


Figure 2.12: Pedestrian infrastructure plan

Figure 2.12 indicates the locations in the town centre study area where footway widths are sub-standard.

Early consultation with residents and stakeholders has indicated concerns about heavy goods vehicles using High Street and London Road and the dangers this presents to pedestrians using the narrow footways.

"Walking with a group, a buggy, a pet or walking stick or wheelchair would be difficult due to the width of the pavements. One of the main safety issues for this area are the narrow pavements."





Figure 2.13: Movement network points of interest

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LONDON ROAD

London Road is a historic street and in some locations, particularly towards its southern end, the building to building distance is narrow, reducing the available street space. Priority is given to vehicles and traffic and footways are very narrow, with people having to walk in the carriageway when passing others. At the southern end of London Road this is due to the limited street width but further to the north in some places there is space for wider footways but space is instead allocated to the carriageway.

Pedestrian crossing points on London Road are often located where they don't align with lanes and side streets to either side, and the Pembroke Road junction provides poor pedestrian crossing facilities.

Despite relatively high traffic volumes and speeds, as well as a steep gradient on London Road, cyclists must mix with general traffic even though there is sufficient width for an uphill, segregated cycle lane.

HIGH STREET

Similar to London Road, a lot of the space within High Street is given over to the needs of motorists through carriageway widths, on-street car parking, taxi ranks and loading bays. Some of this space could be reclaimed for pedestrians.

While loading is not permitted on the majority of the street between 8:30am-6:30pm, loading outside of these hours can pose challenges. Vehicles often block both the carriageway and footway as there are only a few designated loading bays.





Image 2.12: Narrow footways on London Road impact on the pedestrian experience





Image 2.13: Whilst the street width is generally greater on High Street there are pinch points

HIGH STREET AND LONDON ROAD JUNCTION

The High Street and London Road junction is very busy and difficult to navigate. The two routes meet at an acute angle and the junction allows for all vehicle movements. Whilst pedestrians can cross at designated zebra crossings, the difficult driving conditions create a hostile environment for people that are trying to cross the junction by foot.

TRAIN STATION

Upon arrival to Sevenoaks from the station, the pedestrian infrastructure is difficult to navigate and oftentimes inadequate, causing pedestrians to cross at informal points that are risky and unsafe. The footways are very narrow, with insufficient space when large volumes of people are leaving the station. The space is dominated by vehicles, creating an unpleasant public realm.

There is opportunity to create a pedestrian priority junction that creates a more welcoming environment on the arrival to Sevenoaks. Better crossings and narrower junctions will slow down vehicles and ensure pedestrians can cross more comfortably.





Image 2.14: The junction of High Street and London Road is challenging for both pedestrians and motorists



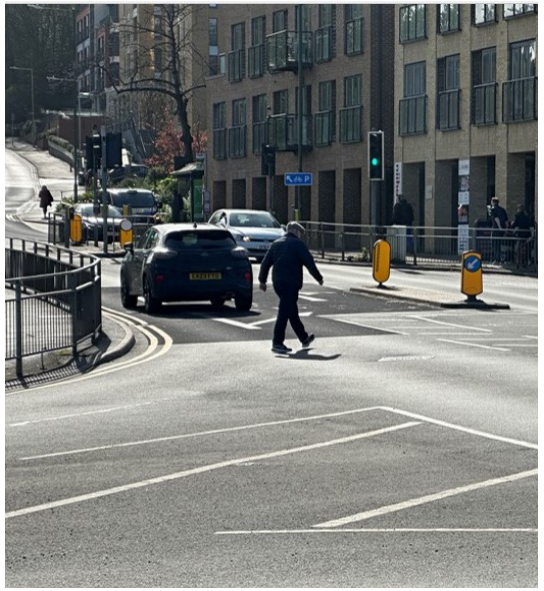


Image 2.15: The environment around the railway station is not well designed for pedestrians



Image 2.16: Congestion at the High Street and London Road junction

PUBLIC REALM, STREET FURNITURE AND WAYFINDING

The historic heart of Sevenoaks between London Road and High Street provides a network or small spaces, courtyards, lanes and alleys and has a lot of charm. Beyond this the quality of the public realm is less attractive and does not provide a particularly welcoming environment for visitors to the town.

The accessibility of public spaces in the town centre could be significantly improved. Uneven surfaces make navigation challenging, particularly for people with mobility issues and priority is given to vehicles at minor road junctions and crossings. Junctions are often over-sized and difficult for pedestrians to use and there is a proliferation of signage and guardrails that undermines the streetscape.

There is also a notable lack of seating, limiting opportunities for people to pause and rest while moving through the area and a lack of signage to help with wayfinding. There is little public art nor trees or planting in much of the town centre.

The town centre lacks a central meeting space or town square; the Vine and Knole Park are nearby, although access and signage particularly to Knole Park is poor.







Image 2.17: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Unattractive and cluttered public realm on Buckhurst Lane; a plethora of signs on Buckhurst Lane; and low key entrance to the Environmental Park (sign to Knole Park is small, weathered and poorly designed to attract attention and provide directions)

"Knole is Sevenoaks USP and it doesn't connect or use it well enough, access to it is awful and it is poorly signposted. "



"A square with a fountain would act as a focal point for the town."



Sevenoaks Town Council

2.5 MEETING LOCAL NEED

Sevenoaks Town Centre serves both existing residents and also a wider catchment that comes to the town for work or leisure. Knole is a particular attractor, with over a quarter of a million visitors to the National Trust property in 2024 and a a further 400,000 people visiting the parkland. Understanding the demographics and context of the wider area assists in understanding how the town centre can meet local need.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Sevenoaks is the principal town in the Sevenoaks District with a population of 21,167 (2021 census). The wider Sevenoaks urban area (including Dunton Green, Otford, Riverhead and Seal) had a population of 32,900 in 2016 (ONS / Sevenoaks Economic Study) with population growing at a faster rate (5%) than England as a whole (4%).

Approximately 60% of the Sevenoaks' Urban Area population is of working age. This is lower than that of England as a whole, which has a 64% working age population. It is also lower than the wider Sevenoaks District and Kent County Council areas. The Sevenoaks Urban Area has a relatively high younger population, with 22% of its population aged between 0 and 14 years, suggesting that there is a large number of young families in the area.

The population is however aging, with a 19.5% increase in residents aged 65 and over across the District (Census 2011 to 2021).

The Sevenoaks District has higher median resident earnings than wider Kent and England. The median resident earns £33,600 per annum, while the median Kent resident earns £30,000 and the median England resident earns £29,000 (ONS 2017).

Sevenoaks Urban Area is, relatively speaking, one of the least deprived parts of England. The north of the Sevenoaks Urban Area is characterised however by small areas that fall into a lower IMD decile, albeit with a ranking that is still in the top 50% of the least deprived nationally.

According to the 2021 Census, Sevenoaks remains predominantly white (92%), with non-white minorities representing just 8% of the population.



Image 2.18: Pedestrian route through Black's Yard

HOUSING STOCK AND RESIDENTIAL TRENDS

Sevenoaks' setting, surrounded by attractive countryside and nestled within the Kent Downs National Landscape, with good schools, proximity to amenities and short commuting time to London, makes the area a sought after place to live.

Sevenoaks has a mixture of homes. According to the 2016 Household Survey, more than three quarters (76.5%) of properties in Sevenoaks are houses (30.3% detached, 26.8% semi-detached, and 19.5% terraced or townhouses). Flats, apartments, and maisonettes account for 13.9% of properties, while bungalows make up 7.8%. The remaining 1.7% fall under other categories including park homes and caravans. In 2021, 13.4% of Sevenoaks households rented privately. This figure increased from 10.8% in 2011.

It has been noted by the District Council that there is a general lack of housing options for young people looking to move into independence, homes for purchase or rent by essential workers, and homes for the elderly.

LABOUR MARKET AND LOCAL ECONOMY

The Sevenoaks Economic Study (2019) indicates that at that time there were 20,300 jobs in the Sevenoaks Urban Area, accounting for around 40% of Sevenoaks District's total employment and 17,800 jobs in the Sevenoaks Neighbourhood Plan area.

Within the Sevenoaks Neighbourhood Plan area a high proportion of jobs are in public administration, education and health (4,740 jobs), financial and professional services (3,065 jobs) and business support services (2,160 jobs), which include activities such as human resource provision, cleaning services and office administrative services.

The Neighbourhood Plan area is characterised by micro-sized businesses (up to nine employees), which represent 87% of the area's total business base. This is a larger proportion than that seen across the rest of Sevenoaks District; however, it is smaller than the profile seen nationally. As of 2019 there were around 235 sole proprietor businesses in the Neighbourhood Plan area. This is low relative to Sevenoaks District and England.

In 2019 there were approximately 50 businesses that employ between 50-249 people (Medium-Sized) and 5 businesses that employ over 250 people (Large) operating in the Sevenoaks Urban Area.

Knole House plays a significant role in the local economy, employing up to 60 staff members and engaging 450 to 500 volunteers, many of whom live nearby. Knole serves as a valuable educational resource, offering programmes for pre-school children, schools, and adult learners. However, there is a disconnect between Knole Park and the town centre, and as a result most visitors to Knole Park do not spend time in Sevenoaks town centre. As a result, the town struggles to fully capitalise on the economic potential of this tourism.

2.6 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of sites within the town centre masterplan study area that offer development opportunities that could contribute to positive change in the centre.

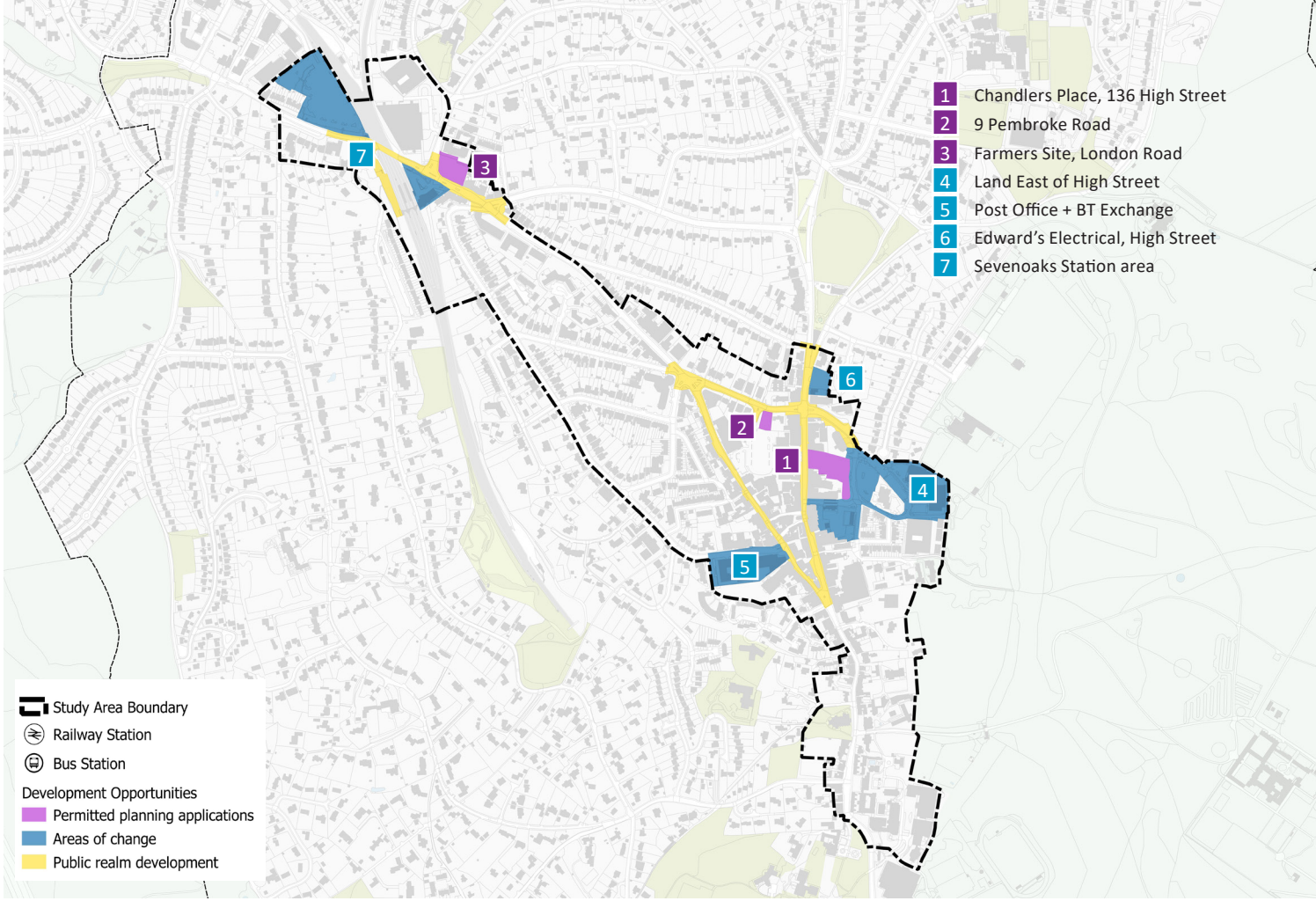
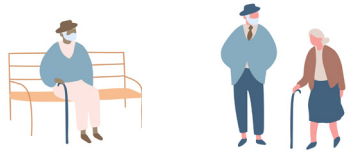


Figure 2.14: Development opportunities plan

"Sites around the station are ideal for young professionals, with quick transport links into London."



"Housing needs to be more strategically allocated, with housing targeting at more elderly people located in the centre of the town, closer to services and amenities."



PLANNING CONSENTS

There are three significant consented proposals within the town centre:

1. **Chandlers Place, 136 High Street**
   Redevelopment of the former Tesco store to provide a mixed-use development that includes active uses at ground floor level (930m2) and 104 apartments above. Development is four storey fronting onto the High Street and increasing to six storey to the east fronting Suffolk Way. The proposals will provide frontage onto High Street, Suffolk Way and also a new east -west pedestrian connection that link the two streets. Construction has started on site.

2. **9 Pembroke Road**
   Redevelopment of existing two storey property and replacement with a five storey office building. Construction has started on site.

3. **Farmers Site, London Road**
   Redevelopment of vacant site with a six storey mixed-use development providing approximately 700m2 of commercial ground floor space and 56 apartments above. Site has been vacant since 2016.



Image 2.19: Chandlers Place, 136 High Street - visualisation of Suffolk Way frontage



Image 2.20: Chandlers Place, 136 High Street - recent as built image (High Street frontage)

VACANT SITES + SITE ALLOCATIONS

There are a number of vacant and under-utilised sites within the masterplan study area. Some of these are identified as proposed Site Allocations within the draft Local Plan.

4. Land East of the High Street

This is an extensive site taking in land to the east of High Street on Suffolk Way and Buckhurst Lane and including Sevenoaks Leisure Centre and the surrounding surface car park areas. The site is a proposed Site Allocation within the draft Local Plan and also identified as an opportunity in the Neighbourhood Plan. The site is in public sector ownership and part owned by SDC and part by KCC. The Kaleidoscope (gallery, library and museum), under the ownership of KCC, will not form part of the project and remain in its existing form.

The District Council have consulted on an early vision to redevelop the site with a mixed-use scheme, featuring new homes, a modern replacement leisure centre, and a cultural hub and market hall housed in the converted former M&Co store at 96 High Street. The proposals aim to create stronger connections with the wider town centre and significantly enhance pedestrian access to Knole Park. This redevelopment plan represents the updated vision for the site.

A procurement process to identify a preferred developer for the site commenced in 2025.

5. Post Office + BT Exchange, South Park

This under-utilised site is a Site Allocation in both the current and draft Local Plan and also identified as an opportunity in the Neighbourhood Plan.

6. Edwards Electrical, High Street

This site is identified as an opportunity in the Neighbourhood Plan but not a proposed Site Allocation.

7. Sevenoaks Station area

The existing station site and the surface car park on London Road are identified as an opportunity in the Neighbourhood Plan and as a proposed Site Allocation in the draft Local Plan.

These sites are identified in Figure 2.14; the Land Esat of High Street development aeas are indicated in Figure 2.15.



Figure 2.15: Land East of High Street - development areas (SDC)

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Beyond the town centre in Northern Sevenoaks two significant proposals have been consented. The most significant is 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% and therefore the town centre catchment significantly.

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 DESIGN PRINCIPLES



3.1 THE VISION

A vision for Sevenoaks Town was established and agreed through the Neighbourhood Planning 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, together with the Town Centre Strategy prepared by the District Council, form the starting point for the preparation of the town centre masterplan.

This Sevenoaks Town Centre 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 and separate 1 to 1 meetings.

"The Vision should focus as much on the social aspect of celebrating the heritage as on physical improvements."



3.2 TEN DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Ten design principles for the town centre masterplan area have been identified. These are set out in Figure 3.2 below and are detailed further on the pages that follow.

1



TRANSFORM THE SENSE OF ARRIVAL

2



RESPECT AND CELEBRATE SEVENOAKS' UNIQUE HERITAGE

3



BE ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE

4



ENHANCE THE TOWN CENTRE OFFER

5



STRENGTHEN THE CULTURAL OFFER

6



ENCOURAGE ACTIVE MODES OF TRANSPORT AND REDUCE VEHICULAR TRAFFIC

7



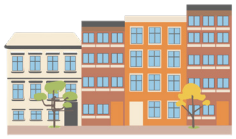
CREATE A PEOPLE-FOCUSED PUBLIC REALM

8



GREEN THE TOWN CENTRE

9



PROVIDE A RANGE OF NEW HOMES

10



DELIVER SMALL INTERVENTIONS, EVENTS AND EARLY WINS

Figure 3.2: Ten Design Principles for the Town Centre Masterplan

Sevenoaks Town Council















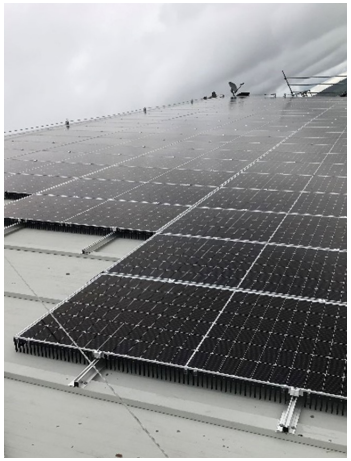


1 TRANSFORM THE SENSE OF ARRIVAL

- Improve the arrival experience for all visitors to the town regardless of mode
- Enhance the points of arrival notably at Sevenoaks Station and also on the main approaches into the town centre
- Explore opportunity for development on sites that impact on the arrival experience
- Improve the appearance and experience of using car parks including more trees and better pedestrian routes
- Improve wayfinding to enhance arrival experience

2 PROTECT AND ENHANCE SEVENOAKS' UNIQUE HERITAGE

- Recognise Sevenoaks' role as an historic market town
- Raise awareness of the town's history through events and activities
- Enhance the setting of historic assets
- Ensure that new development responds to local character and scale and massing
- Protect important views



















3 BE ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE

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

4 ENHANCE THE TOWN CENTRE OFFER

- Focus on the visitor experience
- Enhanced leisure offer
- Specialist markets (outdoor / indoor)
- Higher end restaurants
- Evening economy
- A variety of workspaces including co-working and studios
- Provide more public toilets
- Encourage longer stays in the town centre

















5 STRENGTHEN THE CULTURAL OFFER

- Diversify the cultural offer (galleries, public art, sculpture, murals, lighting)
- Provide spaces for outdoor performance and events
- Extend the stay in the town centre
- Provide hotel accommodation
- Provide affordable studios and start up space
- Link cultural assets (The Stag, Knole, Kalaidoscope)
- The creation of a cultural quarter

6 ENCOURAGE ACTIVE TRANSPORT AND REDUCE VEHICULAR TRAFFIC

- Provide safe and convenient walking and cycle routes to the centre and introduce e-bike hire options
- Provide secure cycle parking in convenient locations
- Provide bus stops in convenient locations and real time service information
- Introduce measures that reduce vehicular movement through the centre
- Control servicing hours
- Provide car parking but whilst minimising impact on the local environment



















7 CREATE A PEOPLE-FOCUSED PUBLIC REALM

- Introduce 20mph speed limit
- Reduce the impact of vehicular traffic
- Ensure pedestrian crossings are provided where people want to cross
- Provide wider footways
- Create more places to sit, relax and meet friends
- Create settings that are flexible to accommodate events and activities

8 GREEN THE TOWN CENTRE

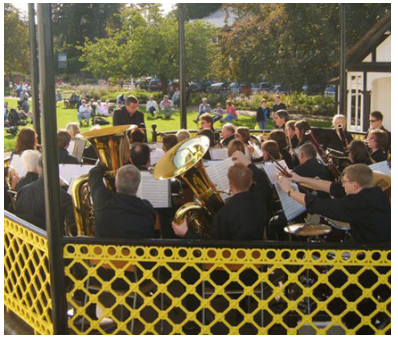
- Introduce more green infrastructure, (trees, planted areas, green roofs, rain gardens)
- Connect green spaces through a network of green routes
- Improve access to existing green spaces including Knole Park and The Vine
- Create naturally shaded areas
- Protect and retain existing trees
- Consider long term maintenance and management









9 PROVIDE A RANGE OF NEW HOMES

- Provide a mix of housing types and tenures to meet local need
- Cater for different demographics – older people and starter homes
- Provide affordable accommodation
- Consider housing type in relation to location
- Provide supporting uses as part of residential development

10 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
- Celebrate community initiatives and activities that bring greater pride and ownership in the town
- Improve signage, way finding and interpretation
- Change car parking management to incentivise longer stays
- Establish stronger business, social and cultural partnerships
- Move the market to a more prominent location
- Use QR codes to provide an interactive experience

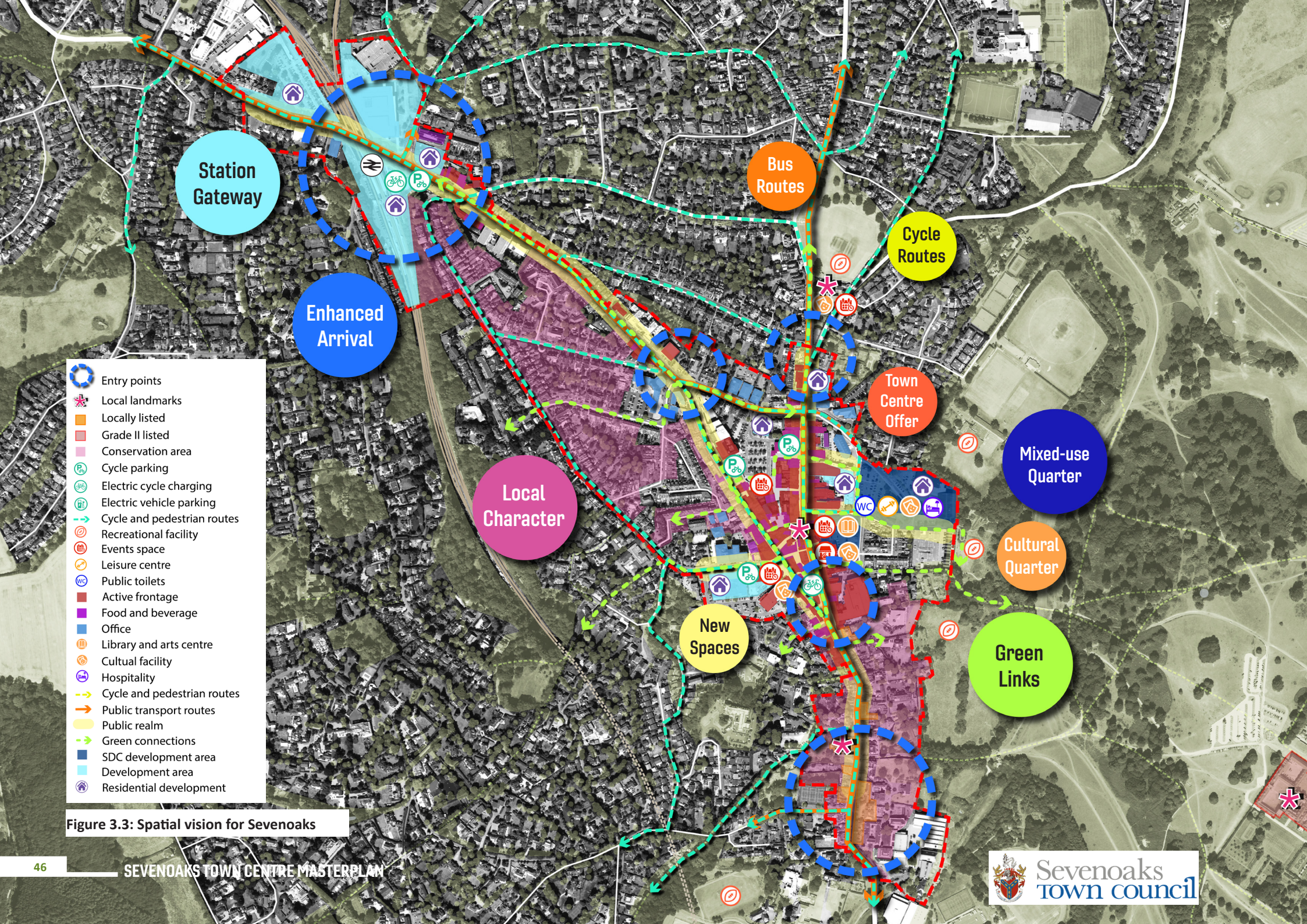


Figure 3.3: Spatial vision for Sevenoaks

Sevenoaks Town Council

3.3 SPATIAL VISION

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

Town 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: Seating outside the Oak Tavern on Bligh's Walk

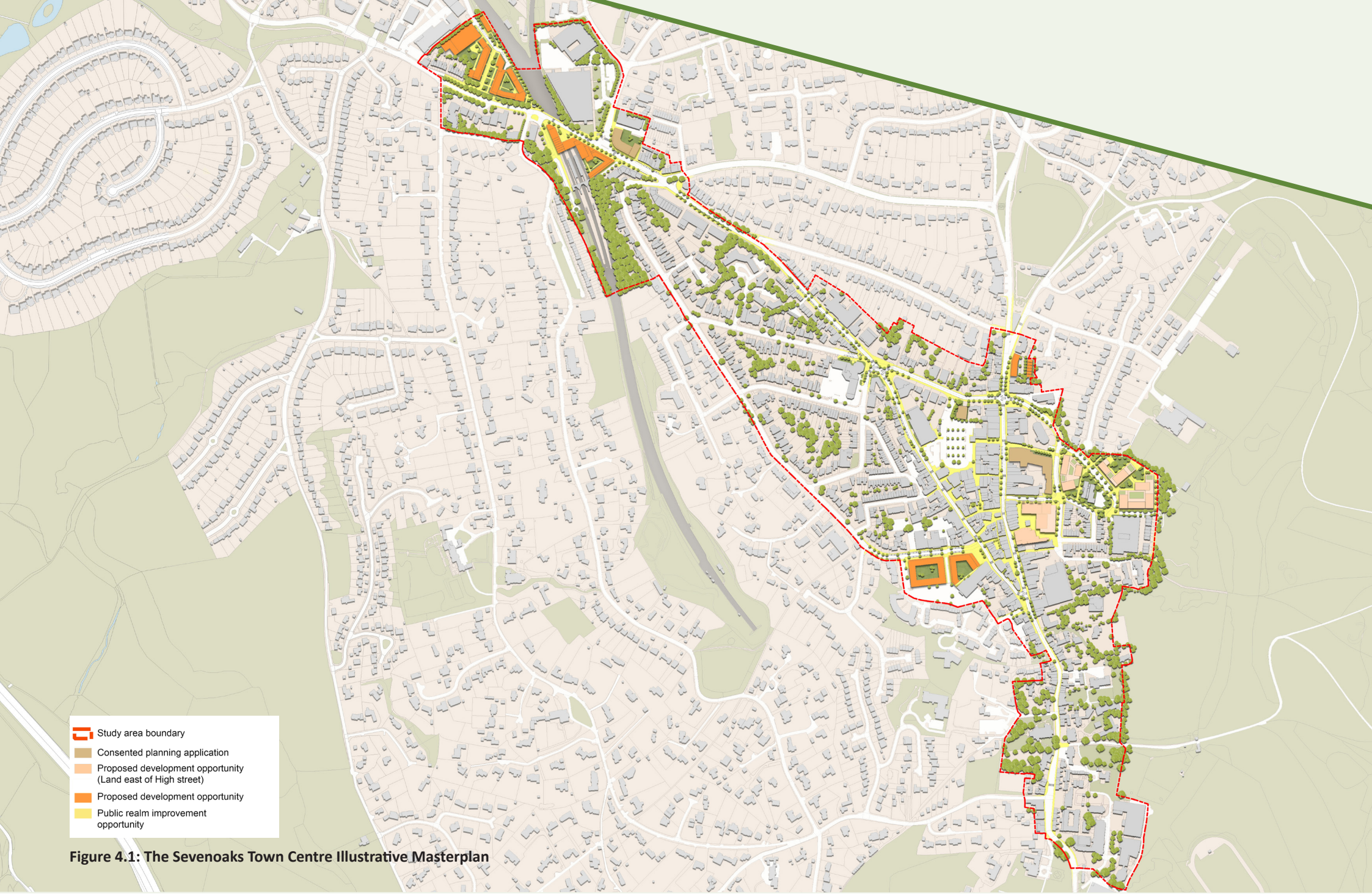
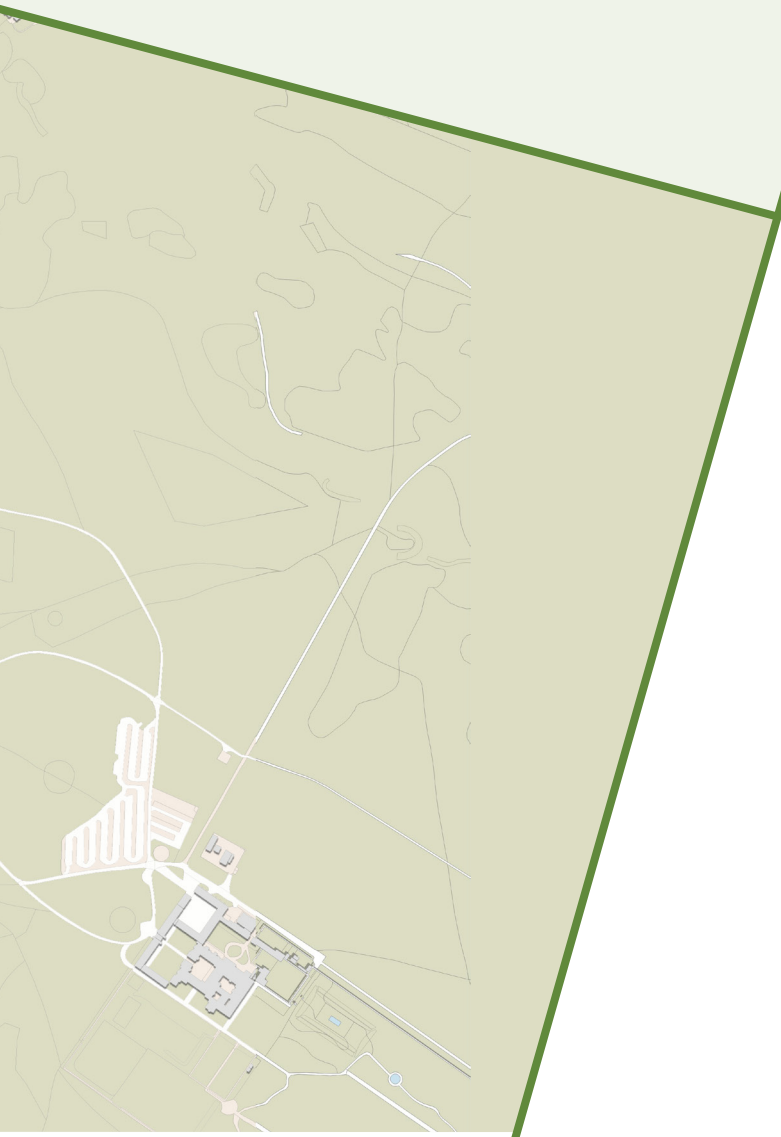


Figure 4.1: The Sevenoaks Town Centre Illustrative Masterplan

4. THE MASTERPLAN



4.1 ILLUSTRATIVE MASTERPLAN

The Sevenoaks Town Centre Masterplan is the outcome of an iterative design process, that brings together carefully considered proposals for the study area. The plan encompasses the Sevenoaks Station area and also land east of the High Street at Buckhurst Lane / Suffolk Way, both of which are subject to separate spatial planning processes undertaken by Sevenoaks District Council.

For the former site (around Sevenoaks Station, and including both the station building and surface car park areas) the District Council has prepared a draft Development Brief as part of the emerging Local Plan. The layout of development, prepared as part of this work, is incorporated into the masterplan.

The latter site, land east of High Street, is subject to a developer procurement process led by the District Council. This seeks to redevelop the existing leisure centre and surface car parks, provide a cultural hub and market hall, together with new homes, public spaces and better access to Knole Park. A new use for the former M&Co building on High Street is also being explored.

These two sites present the greatest opportunity to enhance the offer in the town centre but must be planned as part of the wider vision for the town centre.

Development at the station area offers the potential to significantly enhance the sense of arrival into the town and provides the most sustainable and accessible location for new homes. Whilst the leisure centre is an important community asset, the current building is reaching the end of its life and is set within a poorly planned and unattractive environment east of the High Street. Redevelopment offers opportunity to better integrate the area with the town centre and to enhance links to the Environmental Park and Knole Park on the eastern edge of the town.

Beyond these sites the masterplan explores the potential for changes to the movement network in the town (four options for the main streets are considered), with the aim to improve the pedestrian experience in the town centre through new and improved public space, better continuity of connections, and more planting and street trees.

This improved pedestrian environment will help to link the towns existing and new shopping, leisure and cultural assets and enhance the setting of the important built heritage.

Proposals have been prepared to deliver against the ten guiding principles, and to present a co-ordinated spatial plan that guides future change in Sevenoaks. The plan aims to enhance the sense of arrival, celebrate the town's heritage and natural environment, and create a more vibrant town centre, with an improved cultural quarter an integral part.

This chapter describes:

- Movement options for the main streets and their meeting points and including consideration of bus and cycle use;
- Proposals to provide a greener, more connected network of routes and spaces through the town;
- The opportunity to create a more distinct Cultural Quarter;
- The potential for new development; and
- A programme of early wins that can generate increased confidence and pride in the town.

4.2 MOVEMENT AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

OVERVIEW

The main routes in Sevenoaks town centre, High Street and London Road, follow their historic alignments and are lined with buildings as they pass through the centre. In places the routes are narrow with sub-standard footways and pedestrian crossings are often not located where people wish to cross. The two routes meet towards the southern end of the town centre and a third route, Pembroke Road connects them at the northern end of the centre so that the three routes form a triangle. In peak hours the routes can be congested and traffic undermines the environmental quality and pedestrian experience in the town.

There have been discussions over many years around the potential to change the vehicular movement pattern in the centre to relieve congestion and improve the pedestrian environment.

Historically thought was given to a by-pass running to the east of the centre; this is no longer considered realistic and would cause significant impact on heritage assets and the character of the centre. More recently the potential to introduce one way working has been suggested. This gained additional interest through the pandemic with local architect Roger Fitzgerald promoting the benefits and gaining some local support.

This is however just one of a number of potential approaches to managing traffic in the centre. Through the masterplanning process four alternative options have been considered and their strengths and weaknesses are documented below.

The meeting points of the three routes each represent important arrival points into the town centre. However each junction provides a challenging environment for pedestrians and they are also far from ideal for drivers, particularly in respect of the High Street / London Road junction at the southern end of the centre. Concept plans to enhance these junctions have been prepared. These are high level at this stage and any final design will be dependent on which of the wider movement options is preferred, as well as being subject to identification of funding and a delivery body, production of detailed plans, modelling, traffic impact studies and eventual public consultation.

Changing traffic movement in the town centre could impact on how buses move through, and serve the centre. The bus station is squeezed into Buckhurst Lane, compromises the link between High Street and the land east of High Street, and does not create an attractive or welcoming arrival to the town for bus passengers. The masterplan must ensure that using a bus to come to the town centre will be a more attractive option and that bus movements do not compromise the enjoyment of the public spaces for pedestrians.

MOVEMENT OPTIONS

Four alternative traffic management options for the town centre are considered:

- **Option 1**: Retain two-way working (current arrangement);
- **Option 2A**: Introduce one way loop;
  Option 2B: London Road remains two-way working;
- **Option 3**: Access only High Street; and
- **Option 4A**: Access only London Road but allowing servicing and two-way access to the M&S car park;
  Option 4B: Access only London Road but allowing two-way traffic between South Park Road and the southern end of London Road at the High Street.

For each option a representative section of both London Road and High Street has been taken and the opportunity to deliver changes to the streetscape based on that option presented in both plan and section. A summary of the strengths and weaknesses of each option is then provided.

A preferred option has not been selected at this stage and feedback at the stakeholder workshop and public consultation suggests that there are merits and challenges associated with each.

For completeness the existing conditions are first described.

Options 2B and 4B were a direct response from feedback received during public consultation events.



Sevenoaks Town Council

EXISTING CONDITIONS: SEVENOAKS TOWN CENTRE



Figure 4.3: Section for London Road

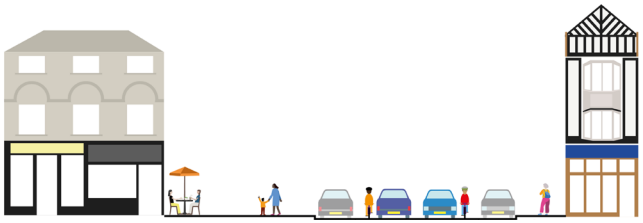


Figure 4.4: Section for High Street



Figure 4.2: Section location plan

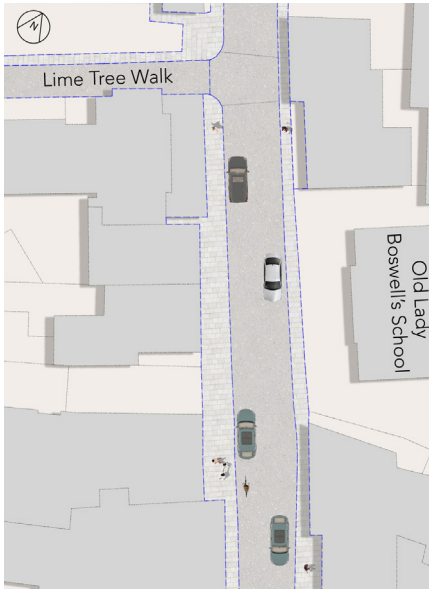


Figure 4.5: Plan for London Road



Figure 4.6: Plan for High Street

EXISTING CONDITIONS

In order to explore what each of these roads could look like under each scenario, sections through London Road and the High Street have been prepared. In some places footways on London Road are narrow and we have chosen a section towards the southern end of the road where the carriageway narrows to 5.8m for two-way traffic and the footway narrows to 1.35m.

While High Street also has very narrow footways and pinch points in some places it also has areas with wider footways and spill out spaces. We have selected a section which has a wide area of carriageway currently used for parking on either side in order to test the opportunity this space could offer under each scenario.

ROGER FITZGERALD

‘A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF SEVENOAKS’

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Roger Fitzgerald, a local architect, proposed a ‘radical plan’ for Sevenoaks Town Centre, focusing on medium and long-term improvements. He aimed to reduce the dominance of cars by introducing a one-way system along the High Street and London Road, freeing up space for social distancing and creating areas where people could linger, socialise, and dine outdoors.

His proposals also included removing excessive signage, installing a coordinated range of street furniture, and creating a permanent market square at Bligh’s Meadows. Fitzgerald emphasised the need to encourage visitors to explore Knole Park through a stronger east - west connection, that would also boost use of the town’s facilities.

Fitzgerald argued that enhancing the public realm would increase social and leisure activity, attract local businesses and offer an environment that supports a range of local shops. He stressed that town centres must be adaptable to remain vibrant and relevant.

Source: Roger Fitzgerald, ‘A vision for the future of Sevenoaks’ - (2021)

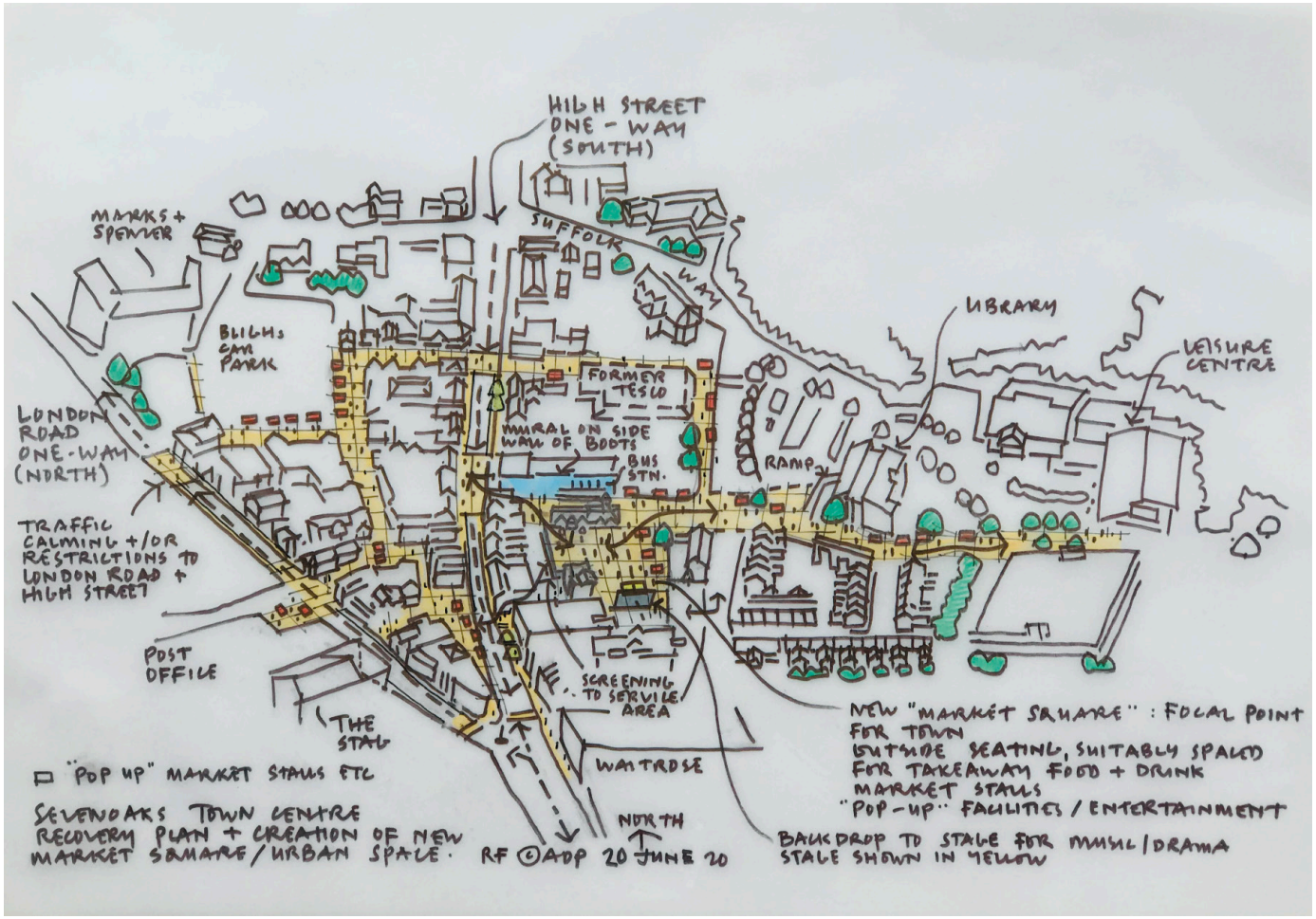
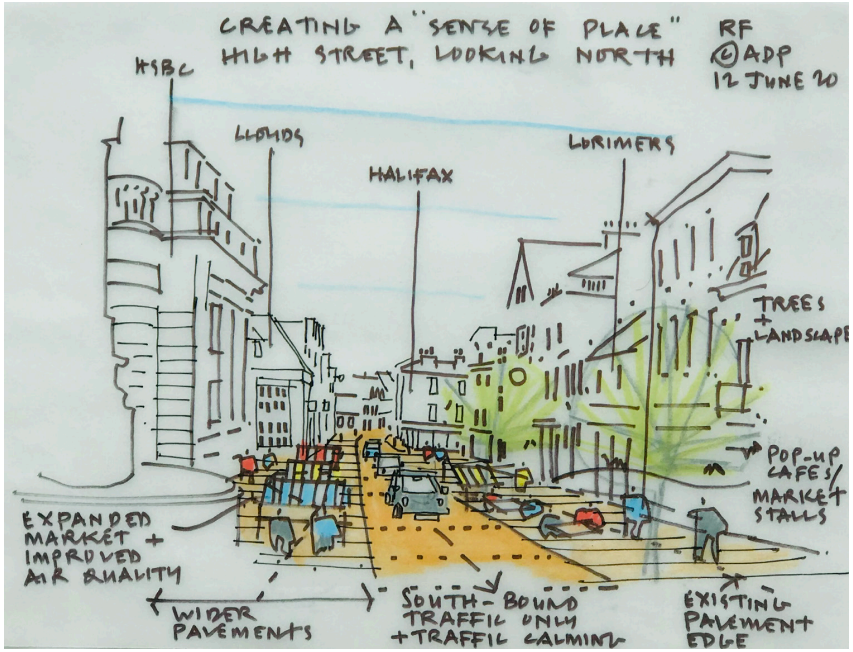


Figure 4.7: Aerial view sketch of Fitzgerald’s proposal

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FITZGERALD'S IDEA

Fitzgerald's proposal for a one-way system, directing traffic south along the High Street and north along London Road, has been refined and incorporated as a movement option for this masterplan. Option Two, presented later in this section, offers a more detailed iteration of his plan.

Additional key elements of Fitzgerald's vision, such as improved wayfinding and signage, a more cohesive and pedestrian-friendly public realm, and a strong east-west connection to Knole Park, are also reflected in the town centre masterplan.



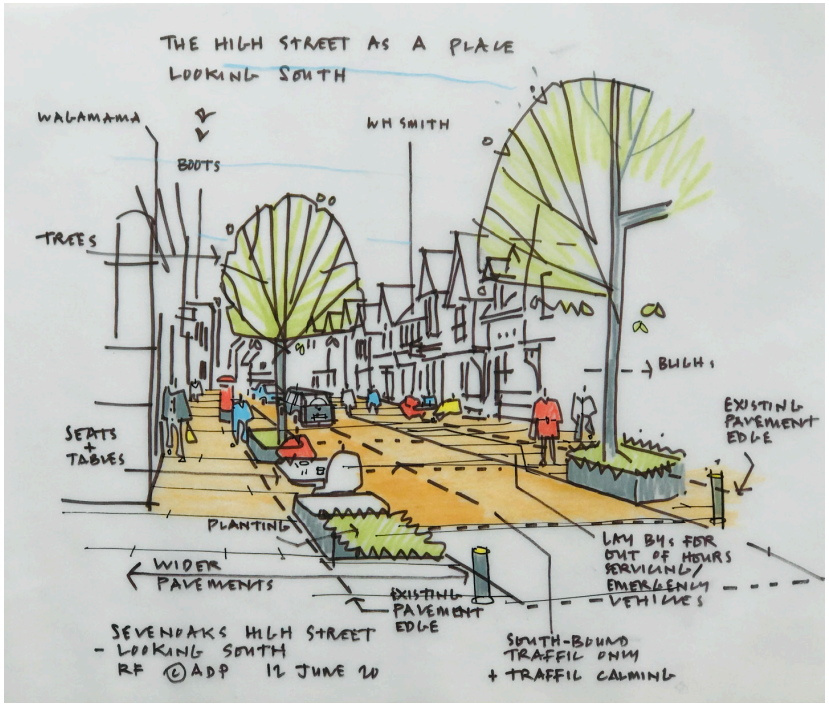




Figure 4.8: Sketches of Fitzgerald's proposal illustrating the High Street and London Road

OPTION 1: TWO-WAY WORKING

OPTION 1 OVERVIEW

- Retains two-way working
- Narrow carriageways to increase pedestrian space where possible
- Introduce street trees and SuDs where possible



Figure 4.10: Section for London Road



Figure 4.11: Section for High Street



Figure 4.9: Option 1 concept plan

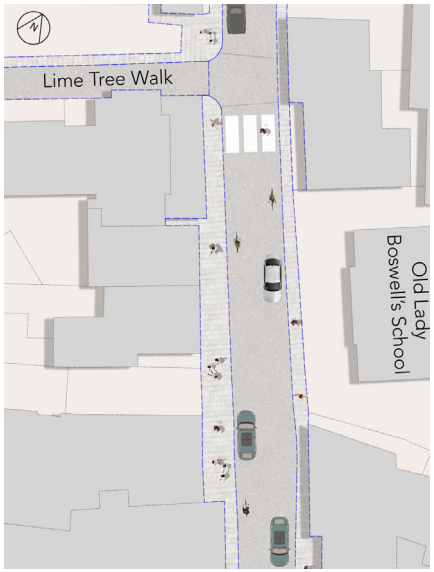


Figure 4.12: Plan for London Road



Figure 4.13: Plan for High Street

OPTION 1 OPPORTUNITY

The sections show what both streets could look like if the existing two-way working is retained but with the pedestrian environment improved. This could involve reducing the carriageway width and removing some car parking spaces and reassigning that space for pedestrians.

On High Street this would allow for the provision of wider footways and the introduction of tree planting and SuDS.

There is less space on London Road and whilst footways could be made a little wider, in some places, this option does not free up enough space, in the section shown, to allow for introduction of green infrastructure.

OPTION 2: ONE WAY LOOP (ROGER FITZGERALD)

OPTION 2 OVERVIEW

- **2A** introduce one way working on London Road and High Street
- **2B** an alternative that maintains two-way working on London Road
- Pembroke Road remains two-way
- Increase pedestrian space through reduction in vehicle lanes
- Introduce street trees and SuDs where possible
- Provide contraflow cycle lanes



Figure 4.14: Option 2 concept plan



Figure 4.15: Section for London Road



Figure 4.16: Section for High Street

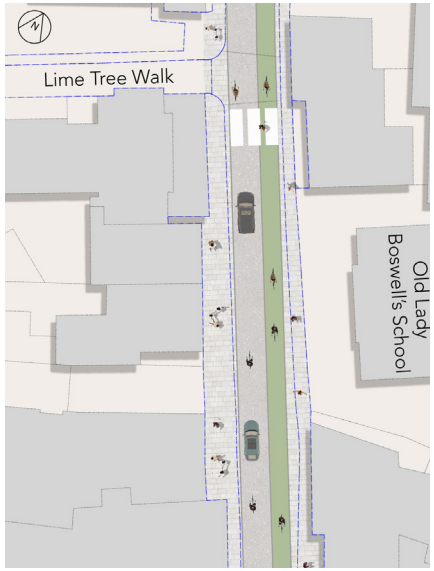


Figure 4.17: Plan for London Road



Figure 4.18: Plan for High Street

OPTION 2 OPPORTUNITY

Option 2A will help to create public realm improvement opportunities on both High Street and London Road. However simply reducing carriageway widths to 3.2m will not be possible as resilience must be designed into the proposals to ensure that streets can still function if a vehicle were to break down. This can be accommodated through introducing a contraflow cycle lane (used by vehicles in case of emergency).

On High Street this option would allow for the provision of wider footways and the introduction of tree planting and SuDS. **Option 2B** provides an alternative that maintains two-way working on London Road, to retain existing access to South Park Car Park.

Wider footways are also possible on London Road but this option does not free up enough space, as shown in the section above, to allow for the introduction of green infrastructure.

OPTION 3: ACCESS-ONLY HIGH STREET

OPTION 3 OVERVIEW

- Make High Street access only
- Retain two-way working on London Road and Pembroke Road
- Change the character of High Street as a pedestrian space
- Introduce street trees and SuDs where possible



Figure 4.20: Section for London Road



Figure 4.21: Section for High Street



Figure 4.19: Option 3 concept plan

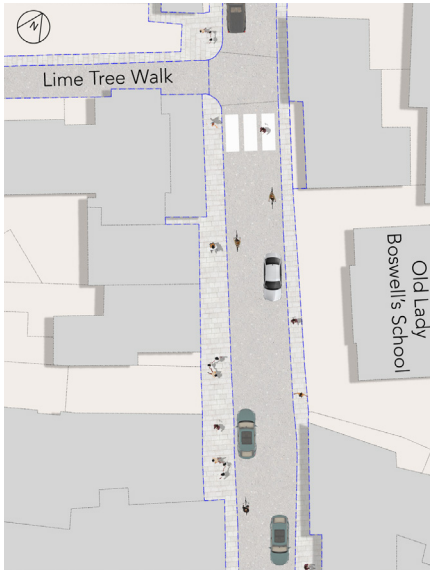


Figure 4.22: Plan for London Road



Figure 4.23: Plan for High Street

OPTION 3 OPPORTUNITY

Closing High Street to through traffic provides opportunity to redefine the street as a largely pedestrian space and could deliver significant benefits to the town. Street trees, SuDs, seating and public art could be introduced into the space. Access for servicing will need to be maintained.

Under this scenario London Road will become the main north-south route through the centre with all High Street traffic diverting onto this route. London Road is already a challenging space for pedestrians with very narrow footways in places and these changes will exacerbate the challenges in this part of the centre.

Furthermore closing High Street will mean that bus services will have to be rerouted onto Pembroke Road and London Road.

Sevenoaks Town Council

OPTION 4: ACCESS-ONLY LONDON ROAD

OPTION 4 OVERVIEW

- **4A** makes the southern end of London Road access only but allows two-way traffic to the M&S car park to the north of the road
- **4B** an alternative also allowing two-way traffic between South Park Road and the southern end of London Road at the High Street
- Retain two-way working on High Street and Pembroke Road
- Change character of London Road as a pedestrian space, green where possible



Figure 4.25: Section for London Road



Figure 4.26: Section for High Street

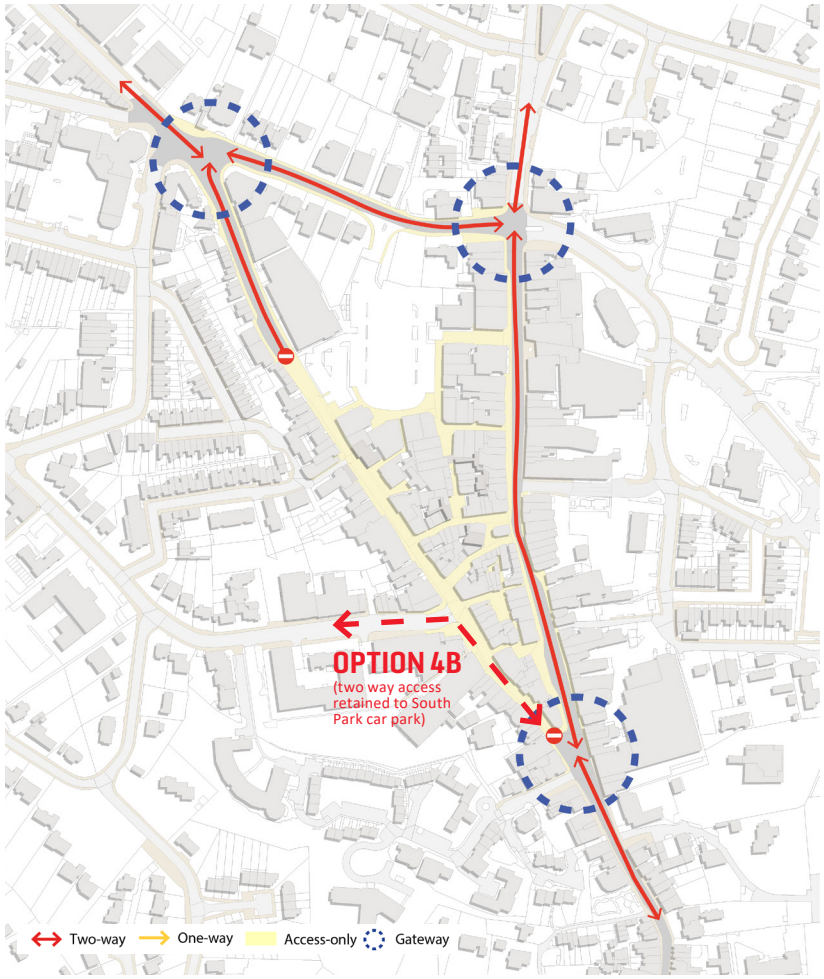


Figure 4.24: Option 4 concept plan

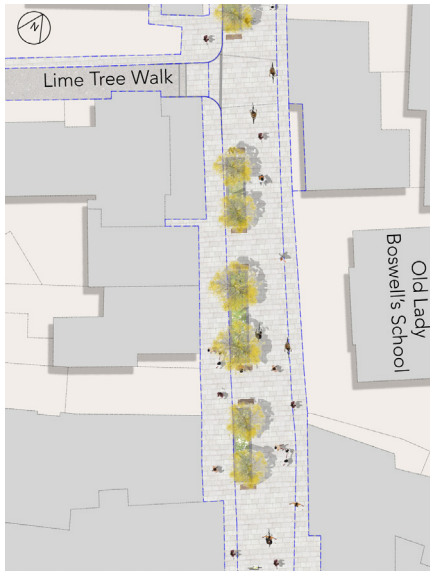


Figure 4.27: Plan for London Road

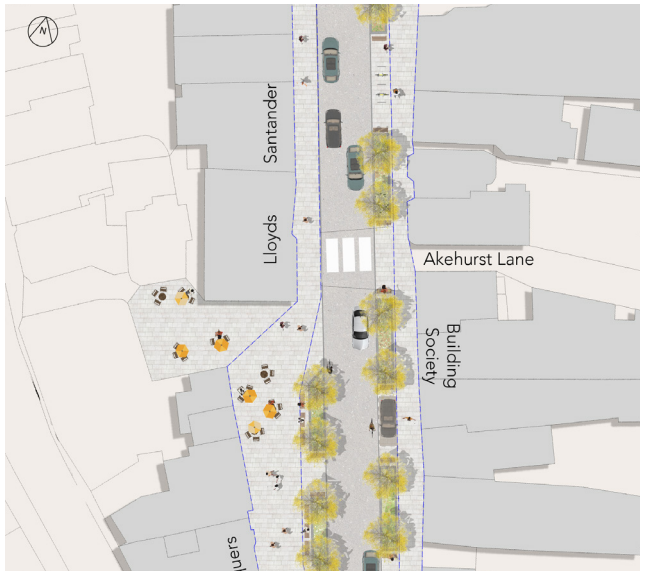


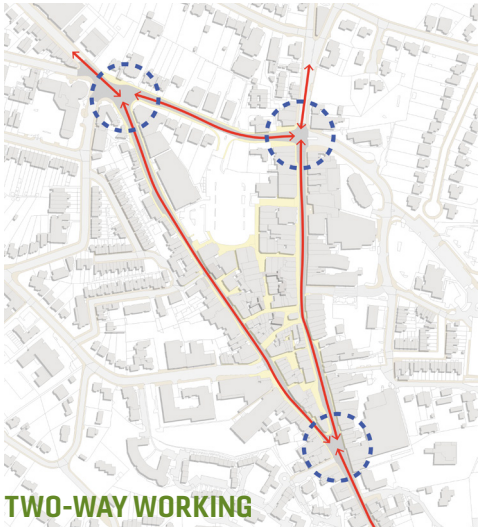
Figure 4.28: Plan for High Street

OPTION 4 OPPORTUNITY

Closing London Road to through traffic provides opportunity to redefine the street as a largely pedestrian space and could deliver significant benefits to the town. In **Option 4A**, street trees, SuDs, seating and public art could be introduced into the space and the environment in front of the Stag Theatre, transforming its setting. However, this option limits access to the South Park Car Park. As a variation, **Option 4B** retains two way access to the South Park Car Park but in doing so would impact on the potential public space outside of The Stag. Access to the M&S car park would be retained and access for servicing will need to be maintained in **both options**.

Under this scenario High Street will become the main north-south route through the centre, with London Road traffic diverting onto this route. High Street could still accommodate tree planting and SuDs, and, with its greater width, is better able to accommodate the additional traffic than London Road.

SUMMARY OF MOVEMENT OPTIONS

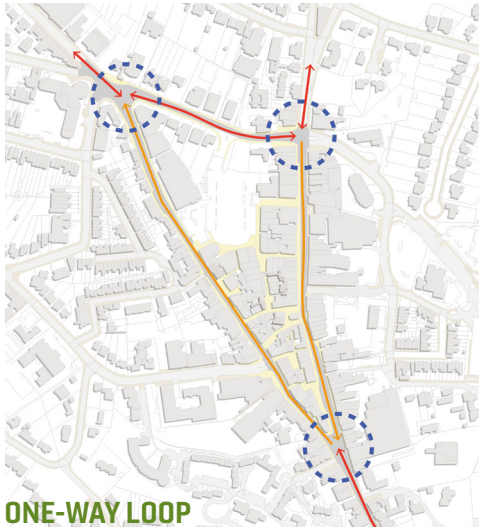


TWO-WAY WORKING

OPTION ONE

Option 1 seeks to optimise the public realm in the town centre whilst working with the existing traffic management arrangements. However, there simply isn't the space to make room for the quantity and quality of space that is required to create a significant improvement in conditions for those walking and cycling to, through and within the town centre. The basic requirements of two-way traffic leave insufficient remaining space for the wider footway widths and cycling infrastructure that are desired.

The other three options all try to create this additional space for pedestrians and cyclists by reducing the carriageway width through changes to the current traffic management.

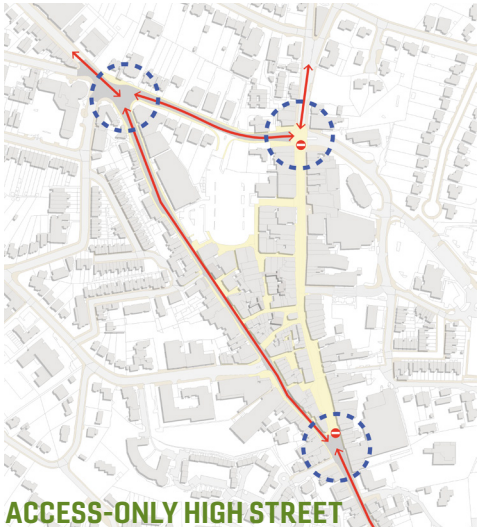


ONE-WAY LOOP

OPTION TWO

Option 2A creates a one-way loop - essentially putting all northbound traffic on to London Road and all southbound traffic on to High Street (Pembroke Road remains two-way). **Option 2B** offers an alternative that maintains two-way working on London Road. However, whilst these options should release significant space in theory, the reality is likely to be that any reduction in carriageway width will be tempered by the need to retain some network resilience. Essentially, if a large vehicle were to break down in a one-way section, Kent County Council (as the highway authority) will likely want to ensure that other vehicles can still pass it.

Whilst this requirement for additional width does present opportunities (such as the chance to introduce contra-flow cycle lanes on both London Road and High Street), the gains in footway space may not be as significant as first expected.

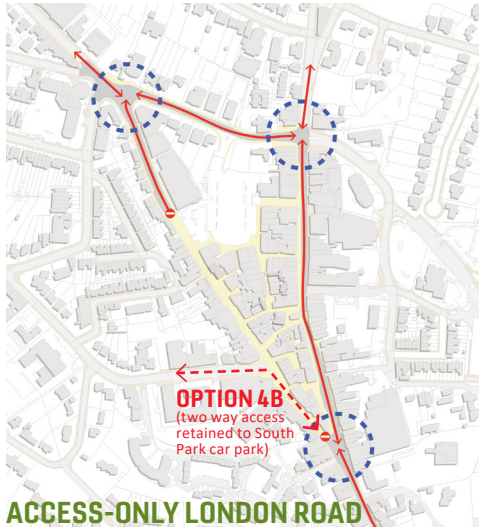


ACCESS-ONLY HIGH STREET

OPTION THREE

Option 3 closes High Street to all motorised traffic (with the exception of emergency service vehicles and some time-limit servicing), essentially pedestrianising it. This would mean that all north-south motor traffic through the town centre would travel via London Road. Whilst this has the potential to create an exemplary pedestrian space along London Road, there are two primary issues with this approach.

The first is bus access to the town centre, with an entirely different approach required to the bus station (possibly as part of the redevelopment of the leisure centre site, or another location). However, perhaps more fundamentally, this arrangement would increase the volume of traffic on London Road, which already feels particularly hostile given the substandard (or missing) footway widths.



ACCESS-ONLY LONDON ROAD

OPTION FOUR

Option 4A has a number of advantages. Firstly, it does not necessitate the relocation / rearrangement of the bus station. Secondly, High Street is wider than London Road, and therefore in a better position to accommodate an increase in vehicular traffic. Furthermore, any negative impacts on High Street could be partially mitigated through improvements to the public realm, particularly resulting from the widening of footways at its southern end. **Option 4B** offers an alternative allowing two-way traffic between South Park Road and the southern end of London Road at the High Street.

The pedestrianisation of London Road would provide a much improved setting for key town centre buildings, and integrate this street into the adjacent network of alleyways and public spaces to the west. However, **Option 4A** limits access to the South Park Car Park and **Option 4B** impacts on the setting of the potential public space outside of The Stag.

Sevenoaks Town Council

JUNCTION IMPROVEMENTS

The meeting points of the main routes, High Street, London Road and Pembroke Road are important arrival points into the town centre and shape the impression for a visitor to the town. Concept plans for the junctions listed below are presented on the following pages:

- Pembroke Road / London Road junction;
- Pembroke Road / High Street junction; and
- High Street / London Road junction.



Figure 4.29: Concept plan for Pembroke Road / London Road junction

PEMBROKE ROAD / LONDON ROAD JUNCTION OVERVIEW

- Tighten the junction and introduce mini-roundabouts
- Reduce carriageway widths to provide additional space for pedestrians
- Provide crossing facilities for pedestrians
- Introduce street trees and SuDs

OPPORTUNITY

The adjacent Figure 4.29 shows a proposal to improve the junction that links London Road and Pembroke Road to the north-west of the town centre.

The existing conditions prioritise vehicles and only one of four arms of the junction is signalised for pedestrians. In addition, there are multiple approach lanes on each arm of the junction making crossing distances wider than necessary for pedestrians.

This proposal explores introduction of a double mini-roundabout to replace the existing junction. A series of zebra crossings improve crossing conditions for pedestrians.

The proposal wins back a considerable area of carriageway space through reducing carriageway widths, the number of vehicular lanes and the signalised junction itself whilst still keeping vehicles moving.

This space is utilised to widen footways and to introduce SuDs and street tree planting.

PEMBROKE ROAD / HIGH STREET JUNCTION OVERVIEW

- Introduce a mini-roundabout
- Reduce carriageway widths to provide additional space for pedestrians
- Provide crossing facilities for pedestrians
- Introduce street trees and SuDs

OPPORTUNITY

Pembroke Road and High Street connect at a four arm junction towards the north-east of the town centre. Suffolk Way extends eastwards from the junction and provides access to the land east of High Street.

Although each arm of this junction is signalised for pedestrians, the wide carriageway widths currently make them unpleasant to cross.

The concept plan at Figure 4.30 promotes the introduction of a mini-roundabout as a possible solution to improve the junction for pedestrians whilst also freeing up space for the introduction of street trees and SuDs. Carriageway widths can be minimised as right turning lanes can be removed and this solution will keep vehicles moving, save space and provide priority to pedestrians over vehicles.

The space created by reducing the carriageway widths on the approach lanes can be utilised for planting and widening footways.



Figure 4.30: Concept plan for Pembroke Road / High Street junction

HIGH STREET / LONDON ROAD JUNCTION OVERVIEW

- Introduce a mini-roundabout
- Rationalise street space to provide additional space for pedestrians
- Provide crossing facilities for pedestrians
- Introduce street trees and SuDs
- Move the historic fountain and fingerpost into the public realm towards the west of the junction (pictured right)
- Potential to introduce weight limit on London Road (apart from local access)

OPPORTUNITY

The junction connecting London Road and the High Street is currently very difficult for drivers to navigate with all manoeuvres possible and very little pedestrian infrastructure in place. This results in vehicles sometimes neglecting to give way to pedestrians at crossing points due to the difficulty of the junction.

The concept plan at Figure 4.31 indicates the introduction of a mini-roundabout at the junction. This will provide a more navigable junction for drivers whilst reclaiming carriageway space for pedestrians.

This space can be used to create wider footways and public realm for people to stop and rest, as well as opportunity to introduce planting where there is space to do so.

The existing listed fountain and fingerpost could be moved into the extended public realm area to the west of the junction, away from vehicles and where it can be better appreciated.



Figure 4.31: Concept plan for the High Street / London Road junction



Image 4.1: Fountain and fingerpost at the junction of High Street and London Road

BUS STATION + SUFFOLK WAY

Sevenoaks bus station is located on Buckhurst Lane on the connection between High Street and Suffolk Way. Buses approach from the west and pass eastwards through the bus station and then northwards up Suffolk Way in an anti-clockwise route. Stops are central, and towards the north of the space, and footways are narrow making the connection from High Street towards Suffolk Way feel cluttered and uninviting.

Furthermore this route leads towards the land east of the High Street and to Knole Park and there is a desire to improve the connection to better integrate the area with the rest of the town centre.

Two options have been considered to improve the bus station environment.

- Option one removes the central bus stand and relocates the bus stops to the northern edge of the route. This provides potential to widen the footway to the south of the space and reduces some of the visual clutter within the area.

- Option two relocates bus stands to the south of Buckhurst Lane and changes the bus circulation so that they move from east to west (circulating clockwise) through the space. This allows for a wider footway and tree planting to be introduced to the northern side of the route. The option also allows for either bus stops or lay over space on Suffolk Way. This option is currently included within the illustrative masterplan as it can form part of a continuous west to east route from High Street towards Knole Park.

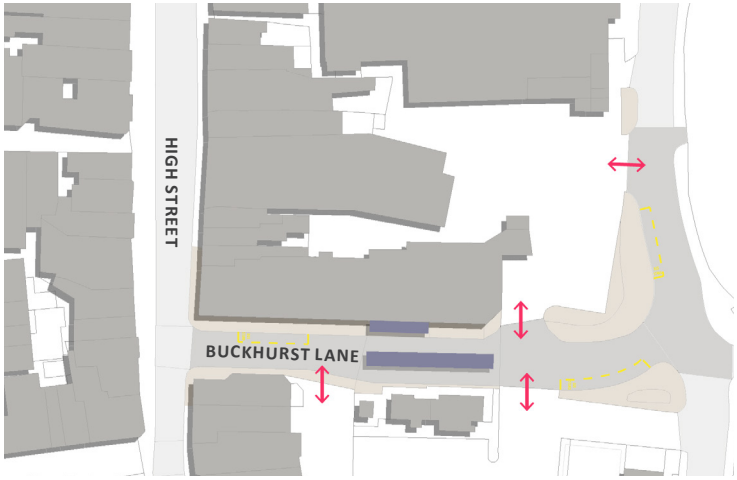


Figure 4.32: Plan of existing bus station

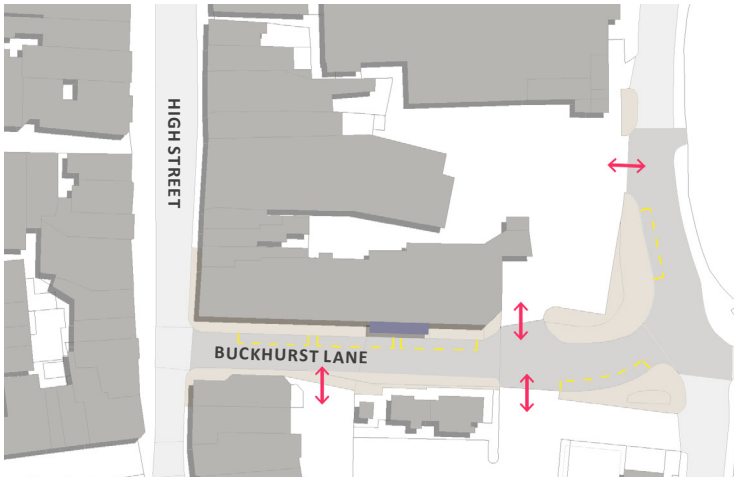


Figure 4.33: Plan of bus station Option One



Figure 4.34: Plan of bus station Option Two

Sevenoaks Town Council

SOUTH OF HIGH STREET

The section of the A225 High Street immediately to the south of the town centre, from the junction with London Road to the main vehicular entrance with Knole Park, is highly constrained by adjacent, historic buildings. This results in a constrained carriageway width and particularly narrow footways.

The resulting air and noise pollution combined with the narrow footways make this section of High Street particularly unpleasant to walk along. Simply holding a conversation with someone can feel difficult.

However, unlike the town centre itself, there are limited options to change the current traffic management or limit certain types of vehicle due to the absence of alternative parallel routes.

The option of a weight limit for this section of the A225 could be explored, but this would then mean that any vehicle exceeding this limit would be required to access the town centre from the north and then, crucially, need to be able to turn around to leave to the north as well.

The junction of High Street with London Road, whilst located in the right place for this, is too acute to accommodate large vehicles making this movement on a regular basis. Furthermore, such an arrangement would not work with any of the alternative traffic management options for the town centre (one-way or pedestrianisation of either High Street or London Road).



Image 4.2: View of High Street South

One possible option would be to explore the use of one-way working, enabling the current carriageway to be reduced in width to accommodate wider footways. This could extend from the town centre to the junction with Oak Lane. Or perhaps utilising a shorter section with alternating one-way working that is signal controlled.

MOVEMENT OPTIONS - NEXT STEPS

Feedback on the movement options for the town centre as part of the public consultation was mixed. Some respondents were supportive of particular options and felt that changes would create a more attractive and people friendly environment, others expressed concern that changes could cause increased congestion and difficulty for access.

It is recommended that further work be carried out to model potential impacts and that road closures or changes to the network are trialled before significant investment is made.

4.3 A CONNECTED PUBLIC REALM

OVERVIEW

Transforming Sevenoaks Town Centre will focus on the integration of both existing and new buildings, underpinned by a comprehensive public realm strategy that focuses on the spaces between them.

Enhancing connections, through, and to the town centre will be essential to creating a vibrant environment where people want to spend time. Given the town's strong sense of community, proposals aim to create a flexible network of routes and spaces that can be used for a variety of events and gatherings, further enriching the local social fabric. This will not only attract investment but also foster a healthier, more fulfilling lifestyle for residents and visitors alike.

The Masterplan outlines plans for new public spaces in the town centre, re-imagines the potential of existing areas, and enhances connections between the town's assets, such as Knole Park, The Stag and The Vine. The aim is to create a more pedestrian friendly, walkable centre that encourages longer stays, linked trips and provides a stronger platform for events and activities.

PUBLIC SPACES

There are few public spaces within the study area and those that do exist are small. These include courtyards, pedestrianised streets, lanes and alleys within the Shambles area, and Blighs Meadow. The footways along High Street widen locally allowing a street market to take place.

Beyond the study area are more significant spaces; The Vine on the northern edge of the centre and the Environmental Park and Knole Park to the east. Whilst these spaces are close to the centre, pedestrian connections to them, particularly Knole Park, are neither legible nor attractive to use.

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

- **South Park** – a small hard paved space could be delivered as part of the redevelopment of the Post Office and sorting office at the junction of South Park and London Road. This space would be animated by active ground floors and include seating, trees and planting
- **Buckhurst Square** – this hard paved space would be delivered as part of the redevelopment of Land East of High Street and provide a setting for the new cultural hub, market hall and leisure centre, and would include seating, trees and planting
- **Station Square** – a new arrival space is proposed at the entrance to Sevenoaks Station as a fitting arrival to the town. This space is located bridging the railway tracks and animated by ground floor retail / cafes.

ENHANCING CONNECTIONS

In addition to new spaces the masterplan also proposes enhanced pedestrian connections through the centre. These include new and enhanced west to east routes that integrate Land East of High Street with the historic centre and also improvements to the main routes in the centre:

- **High Street** – change here will depend on the preferred movement option but is likely to include provision of wider footways, continuous pedestrian crossovers at junctions, tree planting and introduction of SuDs. Enhancements will extend northwards to The Vine to better link this facility with the town centre;
- **London Road** – change here will depend on the preferred movement option but is likely to include provision of wider footways, continuous pedestrian crossovers at junctions, tree planting and introduction of SuDs. Enhancements, including tree planting where space allows, will extend northwards to Sevenoaks Station;
- **Pembroke Road / Suffolk Way** – provision of wider footways, continuous pedestrian crossovers at junctions, tree planting and introduction of SuDs;
- **Granville Road / South Park** – tree planting, footway improvements and installation of street furniture to offer opportunities for resting to this alternative quieter pedestrian route from the station;
- **Bligh's Meadow to Suffolk Way** – a new west to east pedestrian connection delivered as part of the redevelopment of 136 High Street (refer to detailed description on page 67); and
- **High Street to Environmental Park** – A continuous, tree-lined pedestrian route will connect the High Street to the Environmental Park and Knole, with the new leisure centre and homes fronting and animating the path. Trees, rain gardens, and planting will extend the park's natural character into the town centre (refer to detailed description on page 68).

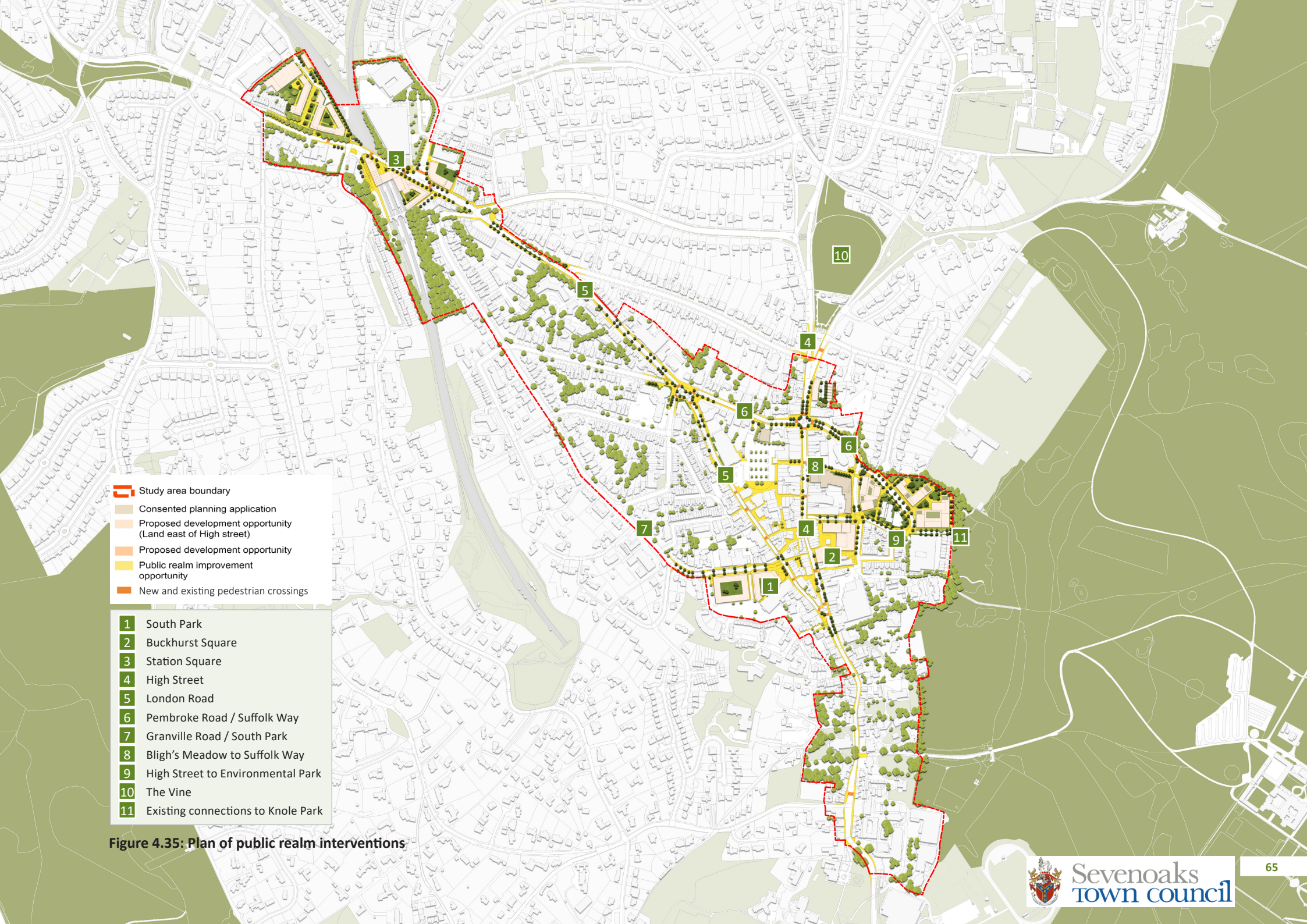


Figure 4.35: Plan of public realm interventions

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.

Street tree planting is promoted on the main routes throughout the town, as shown in the illustrative masterplan. Avenue tree planting will create continuity, define the street environment, and offer pedestrians protection from traffic and the elements - both rain and sun.

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

Trees should be planted at semi-mature size to deliver impact and reduce risk of vandalism. Careful consideration must also be given to selecting tree species that are suitable for each location, with attention to their mature size, growth patterns, and long-term management and maintenance needs.

RAIN GARDENS AND PLANTING

In addition to street trees planting can add to the quality of the streetscape adding visual interest and beauty as well as creating separation from traffic and enhancing biodiversity. Rain gardens also help to reduce risk of surface water flooding.

PEDESTRIAN PRIORITY

Prioritising the needs of pedestrians in the design of streets and 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.

Pedestrian priority is promoted through widening footways where feasible, introducing pedestrian crossovers at junctions, placing pedestrian crossings where people want to cross, and incorporating additional street furniture and public spaces that offer opportunities to stop and rest. The Masterplan also proposes improvements to signage and wayfinding to enhance the legibility and navigability of the public realm.

A coordinated materials palette should be adopted in the town centre. This will aid legibility, enhance sense of place and contribute to a more inviting environment, that encourages people to visit and linger.



Image 4.3: Tree lined cycle route with parallel pedestrian footway



Image 4.4: Tree lined high street with wide pavements

BLIGH'S MEADOW TO SUFFOLK WAY

The consented proposals for Chandlers Place at 136 High Street promote a new connection linking from High Street in the west (opposite the pedestrian entrance to Bligh's Meadow) to Suffolk Way in the east. Buildings are set back on the High Street to deliver a widened footway and the connection will be animated by ground floor active uses whilst also being overlooked by residential apartments on the upper floors.

The route will increase permeability in the town centre, allowing better access from the Bligh's Meadow shopping area, across the High Street to the area East of the High Street including the development site.

A new pedestrian crossing should be provided to facilitate the connection across High Street and a crossing should also be provided on Suffolk Way.

The design of the connection should contribute to the wider public realm within the centre, be surfaced in materials that co-ordinate with those elsewhere in the centre, incorporate planting including trees and also public art that can generate interest

The space could also be designed to be flexible to allow for temporary uses and contribute to and enhance the pedestrian experience. The adjacent images are examples of of what could be done, and are not specific proposals.



Image 4.5: CGI of proposal, view across High Street along Suffolk Way



Image 4.6: Bespoke seating



Figure 4.36: Plan of Bligh's Meadow to Suffolk Way public realm interventions



Image 4.7: Street sculptures



Image 4.8: High quality public realm



Image 4.9: Rain garden



Figure 4.37: Plan of High Street to Environmental Park public realm interventions

HIGH STREET TO ENVIRONMENTAL PARK

The pedestrian route from the High Street to the Environmental Park will become one the primary links in the town centre connecting the new cultural hub and market hall, leisure facility and homes that will be delivered on the Land East of High Street, together with the existing Kaleidoscope and Environmental Park, directly to the High Street.

The route must be continuous, surfaced using a co-ordinated materials palette and with street trees and planted areas helping to extend the green character of the Environmental Park and Knole Park into the town centre.

The entrance to the Environmental Park should be made more prominent, to better signify the important role that the space plays in the life of the town.



Image 4.10: Continuous pavement



Image 4.11: Current entrance gate to Environmental Park (that leads to Knole)

SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING

A cohesive signage strategy is necessary to identify the location of transport hubs, points of interest, and important routes enhancing navigation for town centre visitors and improve the town's legibility. This can be achieved though combining a mixture of monolith or totem signs with fingerposts crafted from robust, low-maintenance materials such as powder-coated aluminium.

A co-ordinated 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 can be strategically placed to highlight green infrastructure and encourage intuitive movement through the town centre and nearby green spaces, including the Environmental Park and Knole Park.



Image 4.12: Monolith sign



Image 4.13: A model of a town or city can help orientation and also celebrate the history of the place



Image 4.14: Fingerpost signage



Image 4.15: Floor marking details can help to assist with wayfinding

4.4 CREATING A CULTURAL QUARTER

Sevenoaks is a historic town that is home to a dynamic cultural scene, including contemporary galleries, and the artist-led Kaleidoscope Gallery. The town also supports a thriving community of artists and creative groups that organise regular exhibitions, with many studios opening their doors each June for the "Art in June" event.

The Stag Theatre is an important cultural hub, drawing large audiences for a variety of performances, from concerts by well-known musicians and jazz ensembles to opera, and popular cover bands.

Looking ahead, the District Council's plans for the Land East of the High Street will further enrich Sevenoaks' cultural landscape. Proposals for the area include a new cultural hub and market hall, leisure centre, and public spaces, all designed to enhance the town's cultural and community infrastructure.



Figure 4.38: The heart of Sevenoaks Cultural Quarter

4% of people responding to the town centre survey thought the town centre's cultural offer was 'excellent', 35% thought it was 'good'.

Source: Sevenoaks Town - Use and satisfaction survey

A NEW CULTURAL QUARTER

As part of the Sevenoaks Town Centre Masterplan, a number of proposals are promoted to establish a vibrant and interconnected Cultural Quarter, that celebrates and enhances the town's existing and proposed cultural assets. Central to this initiative are important cultural venues including The Stag Theatre, the Kaleidescope, and the proposed cultural hub and market hall. By linking these venues together, the aim is to establish a dynamic cultural quarter that will attract both local residents and visitors from further afield.

In addition to the new connections, public realm enhancements, signage and wayfinding that will help raise awareness of the facilities, advertising and promotion of the events that are hosted will be required. Targeted marketing efforts, will make events more visible and appealing, drawing not only local audiences but also attracting visitors from surrounding areas.

The masterplan promotes provision of flexible public spaces close to the cultural venues as settings for external cultural activities. These spaces should be designed to accommodate a variety of temporary structures, such as outdoor markets, art installations, kiosks, and festive celebrations. The flexibility of the spaces will allow Sevenoaks to host a wide range of cultural events, adding vibrancy and encouraging a sense of community.

To further distinguish Sevenoaks' Cultural Quarter, animated facades and creative lighting can help to differentiate cultural buildings. These design elements will enhance the visual appeal of the area, making the cultural buildings stand out and contributing to the town's nighttime atmosphere, whilst also strengthening the identity of the cultural quarter.

Hand in hand with new cultural facilities is the potential to expand the town's nighttime economy. In particular provision of high-end evening dining options, that offer a greater choice for those attending events in the town centre should be encouraged. These could be located fronting onto the proposed new public space on the junction of London Road and South Park. With these additional dining experiences, Sevenoaks can establish itself as a destination for both daytime and evening activities.

Finally, the masterplan proposes improving the visibility of heritage assets and cultural facilities through clear signage and wayfinding systems. This will help guide visitors to the cultural venues and ensure that they can easily navigate the town's offerings. Effective signage will also establish strong connections between different cultural spaces, creating a cohesive experience for visitors exploring the town's cultural heritage.



Image 4.16: Evening economy promoted through temporary art installations using light



Image 4.17: Animated building facades to differentiate key buildings



Image 4.18: Public spaces that can be used flexibly

4.5 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of development opportunities in the town centre study area. These include:

- Land East of High Street;
- Post Office and BT Exchange on South Park;
- The former Edward's Electrical site on High Street; and
- Sevenoaks Station area.

These sites are identified in the Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan with the benefits that their development could bring to the town identified. Further guidance is provided below.

LAND EAST OF HIGH STREET

This extensive site presents a significant opportunity for the town. The District Council have consulted on an early vision to redevelop the site with a mixed-use development that provides new homes, a replacement Sevenoaks Leisure Centre as a new, modern, energy efficient building, as well as new public spaces and better pedestrian links to the Environmental Park and Knole Park. The existing Kaleidoscope (gallery, library and museum) does not form part of the project and will remain in its existing form.

Development can transform the area providing a mix of uses within street blocks that form a natural extension to, and that are integrated with, the historic centre.

Development areas and preliminary building footprints are indicated in Figure 4.39. However, the site is subject to a more detailed study and development procurement process that was commenced by Sevenoaks District Council in 2025.

As these plans are progressed they should be presented to a Design Review Panel and community engagement must be carried out to ensure that the values of the local community are considered.

The following design principles will be important to ensuring that the site integrates successfully into the wider town centre:

- Development to be laid out as part of street blocks with buildings defining streets and spaces and with positive frontages at ground floor level;
- A permeable network of pedestrian friendly routes and spaces to extend through the area helping to integrate and connect the site to the High Street to the west and to the Environmental Park and Knole Park to the east and residential areas to the north and south;
- Active ground floor uses, including the main entrances to the new leisure centre and café uses, to be located where they are visually prominent and help to aid legibility within the area;
- A 'green spine' to extend from High Street on the alignment of Buckhurst Lane towards an enhanced entrance to the Environmental Park. This route to form a legible, green extension of Knole Park to High Street and incorporate low level planting / raingardens and tree planting as part of a high-quality public realm treatment that provides priority to pedestrians over vehicles. Planting should also serve to provide separation between existing homes and the leisure centre;



Figure 4.39: Land East of High Street

- The cultural hub and market hall together with the new leisure centre to open out onto, and animate a new public space on the site of the current Buckhurst Lane car park;
- Bus stops to be located where they bring passengers close to the centre but do not impact on the pedestrian experience and legibility of the 'green spine'; and
- Development form, scale, height and massing to be of a human scale and respect the character within the wider town centre and respond to the wider landscape setting.

Whilst the Kalaidoscope is not part of the current project should it be included at a later date then it's design should follow the above design principles.



Figure 4.40: Post Office and BT Exchange (South Park) plan





Image 4.19: High quality public realm



POST OFFICE AND BT EXCHANGE

The redevelopment of the Post Office and Telecoms building could bring additional life into the western part of the town centre whilst also enhancing the local townscape. The Post Office and sorting office could be delivered independently to the Telecoms building but a comprehensive proposal should be prepared to ensure that the longer term vision and opportunity for the site can be delivered.

The following design principles will be important when developing the site:

- Delivery of a mix of uses that adds to the vibrancy of this part of the town centre. The potential to extend the Stag Theatre, or provide supporting space / complimentary uses, must be considered and should be explored as part of a longer-term investment strategy. This could take the form of creative studios or a supporting food and drink offer;
- Development should be stepped back from London Road to provide a small public space that could serve as a setting for restaurants and cafes to spill out onto, or for gatherings or small-scale events linked to the theatre. The space should be hard paved and include trees, planting and seating;
- Positive frontage that helps to animate the street should be provided on London Road and South Park, with upper floors of buildings to be residential;
- Consideration to be given to the refurbishment / retrofit (rather than the redevelopment) of the Telecoms building to retain the embodied carbon;
- Car parking on South Park should be rationalised and the streetscape enhanced through tree planting and public realm improvements;
- Development proposals must respond to heritage sensitivities (the site is located adjacent to the Sevenoaks High Street Conservation Area and the locally listed Stag Theatre); and
- The site is located on elevated ground with land dropping away to the south and development is likely to be highly visible from a number of locations. The height and massing of development must be carefully considered (three storeys plus an additional set back storey is considered appropriate) and proposals should be tested and modelled in views.

FORMER EDWARDS ELECTRICAL SITE

The redevelopment of the former Edward's Electrical site will consolidate street frontage on the northern approach into Sevenoaks from The Vine.

The following design principles will be important when developing the site:

- Development should provide a positive and active frontage to the High Street that is aligned to frontages on adjacent plots and is sympathetic to adjacent built form;
- Development should improve this less prominent end of the High Street, where limited retail and the junction reduce footfall, to attract more business and better integrate it into the main retail area;
- Development should respond to the character of the existing streetscape both in terms of materials, design language and height and massing - two / three storeys is considered appropriate;
- Development proposals to respond to heritage sensitivities (the site is located immediately to the south of, and adjacent to, the Vine Conservation Area); and
- Uses should be residential with potential for non-residential (retail, community or workspace use) at ground floor level. There is potential for mews houses to the rear of the site.

Development should go hand in hand with improvements to the public realm and footways on High Street. Street tree planting is promoted.



Figure 4.41: Former Edward's Electrical site plan





Image 4.20: Mews style housing

SEVENOAKS STATION AREA

The area around Sevenoaks Station presents a significant opportunity for development that will transform the sense of arrival into Sevenoaks and could establish a new residential led urban quarter for the town.

The following design principles will be important when developing the site:

- Potential to provide a new station building that provides a welcoming point of arrival and departure for the town;
- This should open out onto a public space 'Station Square' providing an arrival space around which retail and food and beverage uses could be located. The square and station building could be located to straddle the railway tracks;
- Further retail uses could be provided on London Road with residential uses above;
- The development frontage on London Road should be set back to allow for the provision of generous footways and for the planting of street trees on London Road;
- The current surface level station car park could be re-provided in the form of a multi-storey structure (accessed from the north) freeing up the majority of the station car park for redevelopment as a new urban residential quarter. Given their proximity to the station the new homes would be highly suitable for young professionals commuting into London and the residential mix should cater for this demographic;
- Some station car parking to remain to the west of the station;
- In this highly accessible location development density could be greater than is typical in Sevenoaks. Buildings of 4 to 6 residential storeys may be appropriate and there may be potential for taller buildings marking the station and for local high points helping to define key locations in the townscape;
- Consideration to to be given to the setting of the lower scale residential properties in the surrounding area including homes on Littlecourt Road and Morewood Close and the Quarry Cottages on London Road;
- Advantage should be taken of the existing site levels (the surface car park is set below street level) so that car parking for homes is provided at undercroft level and homes are set within a well landscaped car free (except for emergency access) environment;
- The streetscape around the station should be enhanced and simplified with vehicular access to the station for drop off and taxis focused to the west of the station and pedestrian access to the east. Clear wayfinding should be provided indicating how to get to the town centre and other destinations;
- A high quality public realm scheme should be delivered along London Road. This should provide a clear uncluttered pedestrian friendly environment that minimises street furniture and provides pedestrian crossings where pedestrians want to cross; and



Figure 4.42: Sevenoaks Station area plan



Image 4.21: Cycle parking



Image 4.22: Bike hire facilities

- The 'Farmers Site' has been included in Figure 4.42 as part of the wider Sevenoaks Station area. Planning permission has been granted for a six storey mixed-use development, which, will help to activate the area and provide housing and commercial space.

4.6 A PROGRAMME OF EARLY WINS

Whilst the development projects identified in the last section or the traffic management ideas presented in Section 4.2 can bring about significant and transformational change it is recognised that they 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 town, attract more people to visit or to extend the length of their visit and through this boost the towns economic performance. Investment builds confidence and encourages others to invest and so small changes can have a big impact.







POTENTIAL INITIATIVES FOR SEVENOAKS

There are many opportunities for early win projects within Sevenoaks. 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

The traffic management plans set out for High Street and London Road will take considerable investment to deliver. Even after modelling the proposals through an expensive transport model there may be unintended or unpredictable consequences. However the easiest way to test impacts may be to run a limited trial – close a street or change the traffic management and test what happens. This could be combined with a town centre event that helps to justify the need.

CAR PARKING

Changing the way that visitors pay for car parking can change behaviours. Parking that operates as 'Pay on arrival' is likely to encourage shorter stays in the town centre with people rushing back to their cars as their ticket gets close to expiring; Parking that operates as 'Pay on exit' encourages a more relaxed approach that is more likely to result in visitors extending their stay. This can be a relatively easy change to make that can prolong visitor stays in the centre.

EVENTS, ACTIVITIES AND MARKETS

Town centres are increasingly attracting visitors through the programme of events and activities that take place within them. Sevenoaks already holds many events including a Summer Festival and Christmas Market. Some events take place on The Vine or nearby in Knole Park or the Wildlife Reserve – bringing more activities into the heart of the centre be they specialist markets, music or arts related would help improve the town's vibrancy whilst simultaneously boosting the local economy.







PUBLIC ART AND LIGHTING

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

TEMPORARY USES

Pop up uses are now becoming very popular in our town 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 proposals around the station or east of the High Street may take many years to progress through several phases, 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.

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.





Urban Initiatives

urban movement
RESEARCH | PLANNING | STRATEGY | DESIGN

Sevenoaks Town Council