



**SITTINGBOURNE
TOWN CENTRE VISION**

SHAPING THE FUTURE

Hazle McCormack Young

October 2002

A study for the future of the town centre of Sittingbourne, Kent, structured to create a 'VISION FOR SITTINGBOURNE' to be used as a concept document to shape a centre which meets the needs of the fast expanding town.

Commissioned by Sittingbourne Town Centre Management with support from Swale Borough Council.

Hazle McCormack Young
Chartered Architects

75 High Street Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 1XZ
Telephone - 01892 515311 • Facsimile - 01892 515285
eMail - mail@hmy.uk.com • Url - www.hmy.uk.com



with

studioengleback

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

t.01892 515326 f.01892 618794 e.info@studioengleback.com

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The Vision:

- Maximising individual opportunities through improved and accessible services and employment
- Improving the physical environment and safeguarding natural resources
- Planning new development to promote high quality design, minimise adverse environmental impact, reflect local needs, and improve economic performance
- Providing more choice in the way people and goods are transported
- Improving quality of life by integrating the provision of houses, jobs, services and travel

Extract from Kent and Medway Structure Plan



Sittingbourne is a former provincial market town in a strategic location in Kent. The current Local Plan envisages the town growing by almost 30% but there is concern that the town centre will be insufficient to serve the needs of the increased population both residential and working communities.

The Town Centre Management Group, with the support of Swale Borough Council, commissioned this study to produce a Vision Statement which will inform the next stage of the Local Plan process for Sittingbourne. This Vision could be described as a precursor to a full masterplan for the town and this stage seeks to develop a three dimensional framework in line with current Government policy.

The Vision Statement illustrates:

- How people move around the town centre
- How the centre links in with the surrounding areas
- The influences and pressures on the area
- Where the buildings might go
- What scale they might be
- What they could be used for

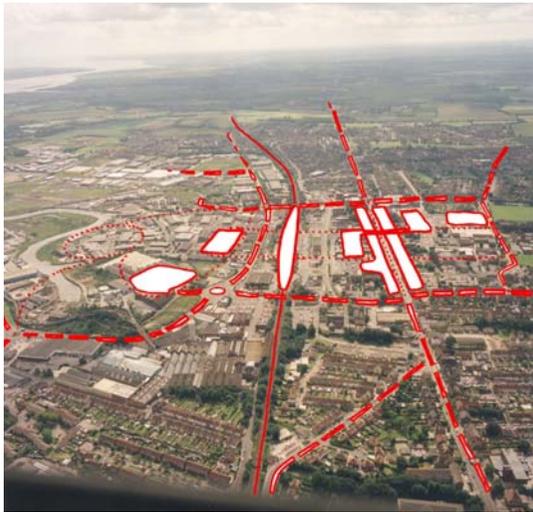
The Vision must be both imaginative and practical to achieve the full development potential, but as it was done without any particular commercial scheme in mind it must be seen as a vehicle for encouraging appropriate development. Consultation exercises were successfully carried out to define the problem and identify potential solutions. These generated extensive public interest and response.

Whilst the concepts proposed must be visionary and exciting, regard must be given to deliverability. The integration of planning and design issues will be critical in achieving cost-effective solutions with appropriate phasing. The proposals examine strategies for investment in appropriate uses and phases which reflect the ability of the Local Authority to deliver infrastructure to meet the needs of the potential developments. While some can be carried out immediately, the study has shown that there is no prospect of the planned developments funding all of the highway improvements necessary, specifically in relation to the Northern Relief Road as it crosses Milton Creek.

The Vision for Sittingbourne needs to respond at many levels, from qualitative issues of character and design, increased density and mixed use, pedestrian movement and transport, through to jobs, community and social pressures.

Sittingbourne has been subject to substantial change in the course of its development from Roman garrison, through pilgrims' rest, then coaching stop, through major waterborne and rail transport interchange supporting growing industry, to substantial residential and employment centre. All of these were accommodated in the gradual organic growth of the town over centuries, but the major changes foisted upon the town in the late 20th century did more to alter its appearance and character than could be accommodated naturally in such a short time. Major highway and shopping changes adversely affect the way locals and visitors view or use the centre and new people moving here dismiss it in preference to other more attractive shopping areas. The situation can only deteriorate unless a strategy for change is adopted.

This study both begins the preparation of that strategy and provides the opportunity for Sittingbourne to create a centre receptive to change and responsive to the needs of local people and commerce.



Background and Methodology

Hazle McCormack Young were commissioned in September 2001 to undertake a two part study of Sittingbourne town centre – analysis of the town's problems and development of the VISION. The analysis stage was then broken down into 2 further phases.

Phase 1a involved a combination of consultation with local people, the Town Centre Management Group and Local Authority Officers, as well as our own observations, to understand how the town works, and where it doesn't, those features people like or dislike and where previous plans or other pressures have shaped the town.

Phase 1b consisted of a series of workshops and public consultation in December 2001 to receive comment and feedback on the analysis to make sure people understood and agreed with the findings.

These then formed the brief for **Phase 2 – the VISION 'Shaping the Future'**.

Extracts from the Phase 1A Report Analysis of the Problem

At the analysis stage we aimed to show:

- An appreciation of the context of the town centre and the strategic importance of Sittingbourne.
- General urban design issues and concepts, in outline form based on examples in the locality, illustrating the potential for development of the town. These illustrations were designed to encourage public comment and to allow a meaningful consultation process.
- Definition of the 'Next Steps' to complete the study and produce the 'VISION FOR SITTINGBOURNE'

Relationship to other documents

The report drew heavily on a number of sources which provided background information and guidance on related topics

- The published Swale Local Plan
- Hillier Parker Town Centre Development Study of August 2000
- Current Government Guidance on the preparation of Local Development Frameworks. The guidance for this had only been published the month before the study commenced and although the exact structure was subject to consultation the general principles were followed in the study.



Defining the Town Centre

The first task in the study is to define what the study area comprises. Although Sittingbourne began as a classic linear town, recent development has followed a more radial form. The study area comprises:

- The 'old' Conservation Area
- The remainder of the High Street
- East Street
- The hinterland behind the shops
- Across Eurolink Way and down to Milton Creek

It is difficult to define a distinct town centre without recognising the peripheral areas which affect it. However, although the study had to take account of these areas, it could not fully examine the potential without diluting the main objective of the study – the town centre.

The Strategic Importance of Sittingbourne

Shopping

The town benefits from easier access and more local parking than at Canterbury or Maidstone. This should be preserved, but in a more controlled way so that the town does not have the appearance of parking in every available backland site. It has to be accepted that local shoppers will travel to regional out of town centres for specific trips, but they should consider that the town serves their needs for other non-retail day-to-day aspects associated with shopping such as banks, hairdressing etc. and leisure.

Transport

The new motorway and trunk roads which bypass the town have revitalised its historical strategic importance as a stopping point before Dover, but instead of stagecoach stops and inns it is now a centre for distribution and warehousing.

Administration

As the administrative town of Swale Borough, Sittingbourne has a number of central and local government buildings. At present, however, these are either dispersed or occupy underdeveloped sites. The study examined the worth of establishing a 'Civic' quarter.

The need for a Townscape (Urban Design) Study

Identifying the best features of the town to build upon

The quality of the older part of the town is a wonderful base from which to expand the character of the whole town centre. While buildings do not make a town - 'people make cities, but cities make citizens' (Lord Rogers - Urban task force) - they do affect the quality of life and 'humanise or brutalise their inhabitants' (ibid). From only this short study we have identified under-used assets, and hopefully those who know the area better and see the possibilities from this report will be encouraged to be even more positive in their outlook.

The 'Do Nothing' Option

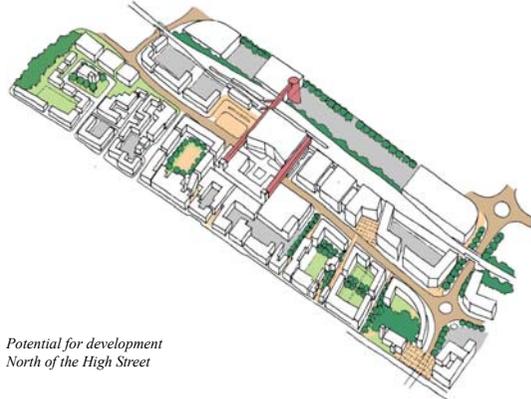
If nothing is done to plan for Sittingbourne's future development the inevitable consequence is that the prime sites will be 'cherry-picked'

This will result in ad-hoc and opportunity - led development

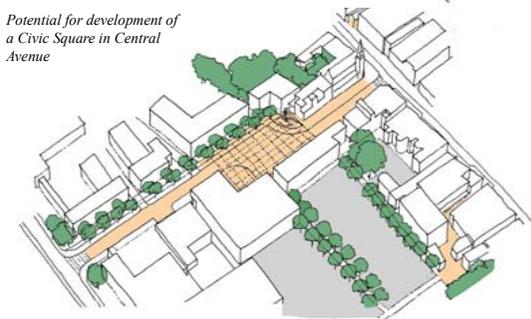
- Unstructured, with no consideration of the bigger picture.
- Unsupported, with insufficient and inefficient infrastructure.
- Problem sites left to the Local Authority to deal with.

Features of Sittingbourne which should contribute to the 'VISION'

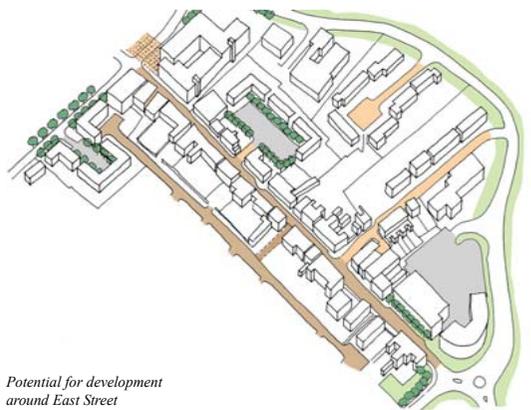
Like many similar towns there has been more change in recent times than at any other. The old street pattern is still identifiable and could be reinterpreted to form new, complete town blocks.



Potential for development
North of the High Street



Potential for development of
a Civic Square in Central
Avenue



Potential for development
around East Street

Some sectors of the town are crying out for new development and some aspects of the urban fabric should influence the form of development.

The Area North of the High Street

The character of the old part of the town which was destroyed with the construction of St Michael's Road could be reinvigorated by removing the excessive roads and making servicing easier. Ultimately St Michael's Road needs to be reduced in importance and weight of traffic. Most of this will be achieved by the construction of the Northern Relief Road, but a possible short term alternative would be the reconstruction of the Crown Quay Lane railway bridge which would encourage more traffic to use Eurolink Way. The development potential released along St Michael's Road could contribute towards the bridge costs. Reducing the dominance of St Michael's Road would encourage better links to the High Street and might allow the expansion of the Forum Shopping Centre, Forum Square and the areas east of the station. Building on the station car park (possibly 2 levels of car parking over a supermarket) would allow 1 or 2 pedestrian bridge links to cross over St Michael's Road to the Forum and northwards, combining with the railway crossing to other parking and facilities adjacent to Eurolink Way.

The Area North of the Railway to Eurolink Way

By linking to the land to the south of the railway via pedestrian bridges and under the improved bridge at Crown Quay Lane, this area could contribute to the expanding town centre, rather than compete with it. It would also lead the way in determining appropriate forms of development between Eurolink Way and Milton Creek.

The Area South of the High Street

Environmentally, the major problem with the south of the High Street is the ugly backs of shops exposed by partial clearances to form service roads to shops. These can be hidden by new developments which could improve the approach to the High Street from car parking whilst still giving service access. The most important area is the revised Central Avenue which forms the 'Civic Square' and offers opportunities to create modern multi-functional buildings uniting public facilities and creating a real heart for the town.

East Street

East Street has a character and scale that is entirely different from the High Street and serves a different purpose. The recent street improvements have enhanced the character, but the shop fronts might benefit from some co-ordinated grant aid. The very domestic scale suggests gap filling by residential developments.

West Street

Currently a virtual island because of traffic re-alignment, West Street offers the chance to form a 'Gateway' to the town from the west. The topography that makes the diversion difficult to negotiate needs to be addressed, but opportunities exist for residential development and a more appropriate setting for Holy Trinity Church.

Existing Built Form

The historic development of the town is still apparent, but large footprint buildings such as Sainsbury's supermarket and the leisure centre can still sit well within the streetscape as does the more suburban scale interwar housing. The close proximity of various uses is a feature of the town and can be accommodated. It is only when the spaces between these elements become too large or uncontrolled that the built form deteriorates.

Character Appraisal

The town is built up of generally 2-3 storey buildings with differing characteristics in East Street, High Street and West Street. Access to the High Street is generally through alleyways from the car parks located in the backland sites amongst varying quality of townscape. The High Street itself has good quality finishes and street furniture which enhances the Conservation Area.

Existing Retail

An interesting feature is the amount of non-retail space in the High Street. The centre has to respond to the other needs of the community for leisure, recreation and business. What is currently the retail quarter could change, but would best be served in an identifiable 'shopping quarter' where shops support each other in providing facilities which attract people.

Civic Quarter

The town should provide for the multi-purpose nature of current visits to the centre. It will maintain vitality if people can undertake a number of tasks at a time e.g. shop, visit the bank, borrow books from the library, have a haircut, consult the local authority. Combining facilities in a civic square will make these facilities more accessible and give the town a more formal administrative heart. By extending off the High Street, the square would allow other communal events like markets and fairs to happen.

Historical/Tourism

The historical links with the Roman settlement, the important link with Milton Regis, barge building and traditional industry is much underplayed. Important sites of historical importance which form the real heritage of the town are ideally located in and around the town and should allow links with the centre to extend outwards.

Development Potential for Retail

The outline study has only concentrated on development potential in the context of urban design. It cannot predict future shopping trends, but shows that flexible spaces of all sizes can be accommodated within the existing urban fabric without peripheral expansion.

Open Space

The structured landscaping in Bell Road and Central Avenue could be reinforced to bring more landscape into the town centre and the car parks could be better landscaped to minimise their impact. St Michael's Road could be tree lined similar to the Avenue of Remembrance. There is established landscape there which is unattended or inaccessible, but which could form the basis of new landscaped spaces.

Perceptions of Sittingbourne

During discussions with various groups of people the town was seen in quite different ways.

Established residents

HABIT - Blinkered to the existing environment by familiarity. Blind to the contorted journey to park the car and the wilderness of exposed service yards they pass through to get to the centre.

Newer Residents

FORGIVING - But may have brought old habits with them and may look elsewhere for shopping and leisure. They like the access to the surrounding area and rail links with ample parking and drop-off points.

Potential Residents & Visitors

FIRST IMPRESSIONS - You only have one chance! If a prospective purchaser has the opportunity to select from a range of locations, it may be the facilities rather than price which makes the difference. If their first impression of a town is conditioned by the drive into it, they might just as easily carry on by without examining the excellent centre.

Shoppers

WANTING MORE - Shoppers like the individual nature of the High Street with familiar local shops responding to their needs with a balance of national multiples, but they would like more. Much of the High Street has non-retail uses. The recent edge-of-town non-food retail park does not seem to have had an effect on town centre businesses, possibly because they are really for bulkier items, collected by car.

Shopkeepers

FEARFUL - Gradual diminution of town centre by car-based peripheral shopping can be controlled by planning for the inevitable changes to shopping habits so that there is a natural link and not a struggle for recognition between varieties of competing centres.

Businesses

CONCERNED - The obvious attraction of new industrial premises to the town has to be balanced with provision of facilities for workers. There would appear to be a lack of high quality housing for higher paid staff, who would otherwise wish to live closer to work. The perception is that the town is well served with schools but there are concerns over employment potential for other family members if a move to the area is being considered.

Other Interested parties

GREAT POTENTIAL - Leisure users are well served with sport facilities, but similar sized towns enjoy a higher provision of cinema, entertainment and eating facilities. Historically the town has turned its back on what had been a smelly mud-filled creek and erected barriers to the waterfront and open space. Environmental improvements have substantially reduced this allowing more to be made of this natural resource.

Aspects of the town

As with people's perception of the town there are features of the town which people regularly referred to.

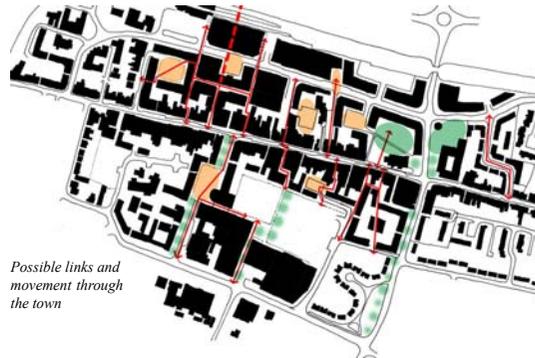
Friendly face

The town centre and its approach has to be welcoming. At present, irrespective of the approach, there is no sense of arrival, quite the opposite. The circuitous diversions to avoid traffic on the High Street only serve to confuse, sufficient for a visitor to give up and pass by.

Links and movement

The historic nature of the coaching inns and their passageways is underutilised and although the street is 'permeable' in the number of passages, these are uninviting, generally lead nowhere, are blocked or conversely lead to a vast expanse of poorly landscaped parking.

Although the town cannot wait until the Northern Relief Road is built to relieve traffic in the centre, there are other highway improvements which would give better access to peripheral housing and ease concentration of access to the centre. It is important to make a connection to the town from the Saxon Shore Way cycle route which at present only passes along Eurolink Way. Safe cycle access to the station would encourage commuters and tourists.



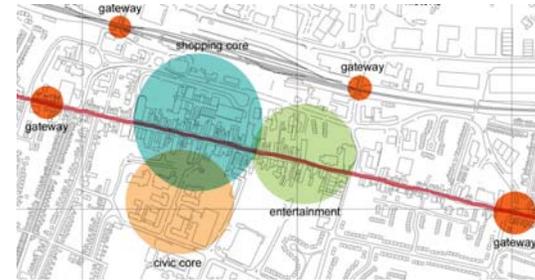
Possible links and movement through the town

Approach

At key road junctions around the town there is development potential where the opportunity of improving the approach to the town can be taken. Some of these occur at 'gateway' locations such as Crown Quay Lane, St Michael's Road and Eurolink Way. With reference to the latter any development along Eurolink Way should be encouraged to locate buildings at these important nodes to reinforce the gateway and create a more logical expansion of the urban grain.

Landmarks

Landmarks are important for people to navigate around a town. They may be buildings, features or landscape, but they should be interesting and well located throughout the town at prominent points. Many of the existing landmarks such as the United Reformed Church spire are diminished because of insensitive recent developments. There are opportunities to maximise existing landmarks such as St Michael's church which is currently obscured by the cinema and to create memorable points in the town at the gateways and public spaces.



The town already has some defined 'quarters' and landmarks

Public parking

It has already been noted how high a priority people give to easy car access to the centre. This does not mean that the quality of the built environment should suffer. There is an optimum number of car spaces to support shoppers on short stays and employees on long term. Lack of service access to some shops (and laziness by delivery drivers) creates unnecessary blockages and the mounting of pavements. The capacity of parking could be maintained in better laid out car parks, possibly in peripheral areas with better links to the centre.



A radical re-think of vehicular movement should form part of the next stage of the masterplan



- Retail
- Non-retail
- Residential
- Commercial
- Public Buildings

Possible development potential and building uses



Possible changes to East Street approach to the town



Possible changes to London Road approach to the town

Sittingbourne Industrial Park

This is a substantial area of land very close to the town centre and almost as large which is prime for development. There is concern, however, about the prospect of food and department store type shopping on this site diminishing the effectiveness of the town centre. Sainsbury's supermarket to the south is seen as having a direct link, where people can walk to and from the High Street, but there is little prospect of that from Eurolink Way.

Paper Mill

Another substantial site. However, in this instance there are substantial reclamation costs which only certain developments could cover. Central Government grant aid may be necessary. Its removal could allow the natural growth of the adjacent residential area and even a better link to Milton Regis.

Milton Creek area

There are opportunities to dam Milton Creek and by a lock preserve appropriate navigation rights which will maintain water all day long and possibly encourage a marina style development. To maximise this it may be necessary to consider both sides of the Creek. Regeneration of the Creek would establish strong links between Milton Regis and Sittingbourne town centre.

Next steps

Workshops

The findings of this study needed to be tested by consulting with members of the public. It was felt that 2 open days for drop in consultations and at least 1 workshop for interested parties were needed. Depending on feedback it might be necessary to conduct other workshops which would be more focused on specific topics.

Consultation

Arrangements were made for a temporary drop-in shop in the High Street which was staffed for 2 days where people were encouraged to comment on the study. The report was also published on the council's own website to gain access to a wider public.



Phase 1B – The feedback stage

Summarises the consultation methodology and response from the various workshops and exhibitions, which were structured to seek people's views on the analysis stage of the project and the outline proposals. While trying to explain the nature of the problems, we attempted to break them down into more understandable elements in layman's terms. This challenged our assumptions on the nature of the problems, highlighted omissions and prioritised the solutions. The analysis of this data forms the basis of the principal objective - to formulate the brief for the masterplan.

Summary of the Consultation Exercise

We believe that the consultation exceeded even our hopes, particularly in relation to the input from young people. Over 300 people attended the High Street drop-in workshops, many taking time to fill in relatively detailed comments in the record book, and even more commenting at the library exhibition. Despite scepticism when the stage one report was published, the response from teenagers was excellent. Although due mainly to interest shown by the school teachers, the fact that the town centre study is part of the national curriculum at GCSE level illustrates how critical educationalists consider town centres to be. To date over 120 young students from 13-17 have participated. More schools have requested workshops and attendees at the consultation have suggested other groups who would like an input, such as the Research Centre and the Access Group. Rather than prolong the consultation stage, these should form part of future detailed design consultation with other groups.

Almost all attendees at the workshops participated in the comments procedure by registering their responses to the questions raised and the detailed analysis is listed in the full report. We were, however, pleased that people took on average 30 minutes to read the exhibition and record their views.



The response from the local media who attended the workshops will also, hopefully, spread the news and maintain the momentum of the VISION.

The questions raised in the consultation were quite detailed and required careful thought, but the time people were prepared to spend on each aspect of the study and the general talk between different visitors showed that there is tremendous interest in the town and concern for its future.

Noteworthy comments:-

Many people felt that a town the size of Sittingbourne should be able to support more facilities, particularly with the potential growth already planned.

The town centre is definitely seen as more than a retail centre (although people will always say 'shopping' if you merely ask why they are in the town).

Most people recognised the under-used resources either side of the railway and appreciated the importance of unblocking access to Eurolink Way to relieve St Michael's Road and make the land between it and the railway more open for town centre development. The image of Sittingbourne as a 'car friendly' town should not be destroyed in improving the undeveloped clearance sites, but most recognised that the current situation is unstructured and inefficient. Newcomers to the town are very aware of the 'image' of Sittingbourne.

The trains are the most important transport method for teenagers below driving age.

Commuter buses seem to be very important but don't feature much in transport studies.

Local buses are under-utilised.

Most people seemed to appreciate the importance of having more people living in the town centre and the contribution this would make to keeping the town alive at night.

Long term residents are very aware of previous proposals which have not been carried out as intended or as they expected.



People living around the High Street were particularly interested in the proposals, making special trips to attend.

Following the announcement in December 2001 by the Secretary of State for the Environment of the Government's Green Paper, **Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change**, Sittingbourne has led the way in producing a study which is the proposed future method of encouraging coordinated plans for towns.



Pavements in the sky in our futuristic town

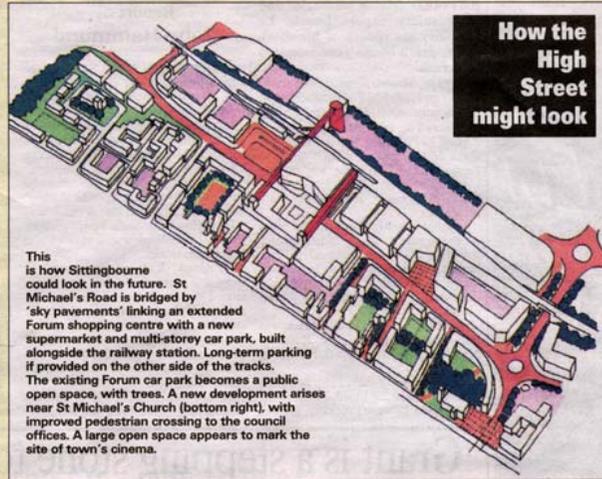
Report by Catherine Dolan

A MULTIPLEX cinema, multi-storey car park, Milton Creek marina and pavements in the sky are part of a radical new plan for Sittingbourne.

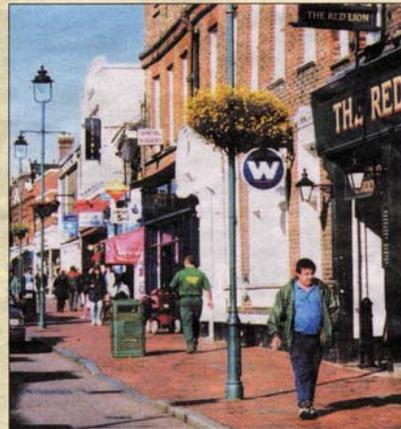
The town, famed for having one of the longest High Streets in Britain, could be changed out of all recognition if planners have their way.

A team of consultants have come up with a spectacular 38-page wish-list to revive the shopping centre and create more entertainment. The scheme was given its first public airing in front of councillors at the town's area committee and includes:

- A multiplex cinema, supermarket, multi-storey car park and enlarged shopping centre north of the High Street, between the railway station and the Forum shopping centre. The new complex would be linked to the Forum by an elevated walkway over St Michael's Road. The supermarket and car-park would be built over the station's existing car park.
- A new all-singing all-dancing performing arts complex and "civic square" in Central Avenue. The area would also become home to a new weekly market. The police will be moved from their current headquarters.
- Reversing the one-way High Street and encouraging more people to live above shops to breathe life back into the town. Better use would be made of the alleys linking the High Street with St Michael's Road.
- Public open spaces with trees, benches and grass to the south of the High Street to replace derelict car parks.
- Bulldozing land adjoining the town's churches so they become "more visible" in a bid to highlight "landmarks" for motorists approaching the town from its four "gateways": A2 (East and West), Crown Quay Lane and Milton Road.
- A new "commercial campus" — a cross between an industrial estate and a technology park — to replace the M-Rear paper mill and create improved road access to Milton Regis.
- Conversion of the run-down Milton Creek into Sittingbourne's answer to London's Docklands with "yuppier-style" property. The consultants say: "Any devel-



This is how Sittingbourne could look in the future. St Michael's Road is bridged by 'sky pavements' linking an extended Forum shopping centre with a new supermarket and multi-storey car park, built alongside the railway station. Long-term parking is provided on the other side of the tracks. The existing Forum car park becomes a public open space, with trees. A new development arises near St Michael's Church (bottom right), with improved pedestrian crossing to the council offices. A large open space appears to mark the site of town's cinema.



The way we are: The old-look High Street may become a memory.

awaited Northern Distributor Road. And they warn that if the council does nothing the town will be subjected to piecemeal development; the prime sites will be "cherry picked"; development will be unstructured and problems will be left for councillors.

The consultants, who were paid more than £13,000 to compile the report, say that if the council fails to act quickly people will lose confidence in the town and seek shopping and entertainment elsewhere, as many do now.

The new vision for Sittingbourne will go on show at the Forum shopping centre next month, so residents will be able to give their views and suggestions.

Town centre manager Tina Pullinger, who stumped up the cash for the survey, said: "This is a very exciting project. I do hope it will be taken forward."

"This has to be everybody's vision. It must belong to the community of Sittingbourne. I will be writing to businesses for their views but hope as many people as possible come forward with their own comments and suggestions."

"After the consultation period there will be a more detailed report taking all views into account. The final report will be produced about the middle of next year."

The vision document can be seen on the Swale Council website, www.swale.gov.uk



The Workshops

The chosen format was an exhibition of 16 A1 printed panels mounted on exhibition panels in a logical sequence, starting with background scene setting, followed by comments on more detailed specific problems and finally outline proposals.

Each panel contained a statement deliberately designed to stimulate a reaction. To encourage interaction the qualitative responses to questions were recorded by means of coloured dots which had the advantage of encouraging responsive decision making and anonymity if so desired.

It also showed how others were replying, and although we thought this might colour people's views, from observation and discussion at the time, it did not appear to. In fact respondents appeared interested to see how others were reacting, which would not have happened in a questionnaire.

The size, location and visibility of the exhibition was critical to the success of the exercise and the offer of a High Street shop, fully glazed on two sides on the frontage of the Bell Shopping Centre was ideal.

This format was adapted to suit the school visits where the boards were used as a backdrop and the project was presented by the speaker to the whole group at a time. The study group was then encouraged to divide into special interest clusters to examine aspects of the town loosely based on the topics in the presentation.

Due to space constraints on other venues the panels were also printed at A3. The comments book which had been started in the shop unit workshop continued around each venue to allow respondents to see earlier comments.

Venues

Jarman's Law Centre - The shop was staffed with a minimum of three members of the team, which was adequate for the numbers of people who attended; generally 8 at any one time.

Highsted School - The project was seen as an opportunity for students to think more laterally about the built environment, particularly as it affects teenagers.

Sittingbourne Community College - Since they were studying tourism the role of the town centre was very relevant to them.

Sittingbourne Central Library - The comments book was left and with the self-adhesive dots attracted attention from a wider audience of people who were unable to get to the drop-in workshops in office hours, children and visitors.

Other consultations

- Sittingbourne Retail Association
- Internet
- Sittingbourne Access Group
- Kent County Council

SITTINGBOURNE IS CHANGING

MORE PEOPLE
On current trends between 1981 and 2006 the town will have grown by a third.

INDUSTRY
The type of jobs are changing with more small businesses, higher skilled jobs and more diversification.

TRAFFIC
Car ownership is increasing and there is more heavy transport going to the industrial areas.

Sittingbourne is growing, large numbers of new houses are being built, and the industrial development on the Euroleik is going from strength to strength, now it is time for the town centre to catch up. Until now there has been no overall, detailed, coordinated plan for Sittingbourne's future, what it could look like in five, ten or twenty years from now, so Town Centre Management and Swale Borough Council have produced a 'Vision'.

This is only the first phase, we want your views before moving to a more detailed Phase Two study. Please have a look at our proposals and let me know what you like about it, what you think are good ideas, what you don't like, and what could be improved. I look forward to hearing from you.

Tina Pullinger
Sittingbourne Town Centre Manager

Recent article in the East Kent Gazette. Come and see **THE VISION** and give us your thoughts.

Have your say on the way you see the town changing

DROP-IN SHOP
6 & 7th DECEMBER
BELL SHOPPING CENTRE

How McCormack from Chatham, Kent, and the 11/97

WHERE CAN WE GROW?

development potential

The growth of a town is dependent on the availability of land for development. The town centre is the most valuable and therefore the most expensive. The town centre is the most valuable and therefore the most expensive. The town centre is the most valuable and therefore the most expensive.

'All development is not necessarily commercial. Development must be mixed or the town centre becomes overly reliant on one user group and will die when this group leaves.'

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

1

LANDMARKS AND GATEWAYS

providing areas of interest in the centre

The use of landmarks within a town helps to orientate pedestrians and motorists and also make a strong contribution to the character of a Town.

'The use of landmarks within a town helps to orientate pedestrians and motorists and also make a strong contribution to the character of a Town.'

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

10

CATCH 22

investment brings growth brings investment

No-one wants to take the first leap of faith in investing in Sittingbourne. This first move is essential to enable the town to grow and create a foundation for future growth.

'No-one wants to take the first leap of faith in investing in Sittingbourne. This first move is essential to enable the town to grow and create a foundation for future growth.'

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

11

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

central avenue and the high street

A result of Roman planning, the use of the land to the rear of the High Street has been neglected since the 18th Century. Full advantage should be taken of these lost pockets.

'A result of Roman planning, the use of the land to the rear of the High Street has been neglected since the 18th Century. Full advantage should be taken of these lost pockets.'

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

12

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

north of the high street

St Michael's Road provides the perfect area for immediate growth. Development of the current car dominated wasteland would provide a natural focus for large scale leisure.

'St Michael's Road provides the perfect area for immediate growth. Development of the current car dominated wasteland would provide a natural focus for large scale leisure.'

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

13

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

east street

East Street plays an important role in both the infrastructure of Sittingbourne and also it's grain and character. This support role should be enhanced in the Masterplan.

'East Street plays an important role in both the infrastructure of Sittingbourne and also it's grain and character. This support role should be enhanced in the Masterplan.'

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

14

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

west street and the approach from the west

West Street currently acts as a large roundabout deflecting the approach to the town from the West. It would better serve the town as a support road similar in style to East Street.

'West Street currently acts as a large roundabout deflecting the approach to the town from the West. It would better serve the town as a support road similar in style to East Street.'

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

15

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

north of the railway

The area to the north of the railway has great potential for future growth. This growth should be well structured to ensure a lively and mixed development.

'The area to the north of the railway has great potential for future growth. This growth should be well structured to ensure a lively and mixed development.'

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

16

Principles for the development of the VISION

Notwithstanding any detailed changes in delivery or scope which implementing the recommendations of the Green Paper might entail, it is clear from our Phase 1 study that the only way to safeguard the future for Sittingbourne Town Centre is to produce a co-ordinated plan which recognises the mistakes or missed opportunities of the past, learns from them and promotes a sustainable deliverable solution.

We have tried to approach the problem from a 'Built Environment' standpoint, considering that if the proposals appear to work initially in townscape terms, we would then look at the implications in consideration of any 'Urban Capacity' work which might be undertaken by others to gauge the appropriateness of building types, uses and densities.

We recognise that developments have to be commercially viable investments; all we seek to achieve is that resources are not squandered on the first scheme that shows an interest in part of the town just because it fits one or more of the criteria, without regard to its overall impact in the regeneration of the town.

The major difficulty is that the primary obstacles to development of the centre are infrastructure:

- The yet to be built Northern Relief Road
- Crown Quay Lane and Milton Road railway bridges

They effectively ensure that excessive amounts of traffic still use St Michael's Road and blight the potential use of the land between the High Street and the railway.

Until sufficient co-ordinated planning gain can be brought to bear to resolve these bottlenecks, any plan will be under-developed. That does not mean to say that it cannot progress, merely that it should be appropriately scaled to respond to the needs of the plan at the time. Waiting until large projects - which require site assembly of vast tracts of land before they have sufficient 'critical mass' to become viable - are ready, will lead to more desolation and blight.

There are opportunities to develop the scarce resources that the town has; such as Milton Creek; and the link to Milton Regis which, if the quality of the environment is correct could lead to a revitalisation of the town from the centre, not around the periphery on Greenfield sites. The use of the creek as a flooded basin by the introduction of lock gates and a simple lifting bridge would remove the need for an expensive bridge to clear the navigation route. The opportunities for waterside development are extensive and well proven locally and across the country. These may be sufficient to fund the alterations to the railway arches.

The short term expedient of building on backland sites cannot progress until decisions about efficient use of car parks have been made. The use of the land to the north of the railway for commuter parking and the development of the existing station parking into a more commercial use such as retail or leisure with parking over, all linked to the town (possibly with walkways over the tracks and

from St Michael's Road to the Forum) would lead the way to opening up that land. The full potential would, however, not be realised until St Michael's Road was reduced in traffic terms by directing vehicles onto Eurolink Way.

The creation of the 'Civic Square' on Central Avenue would allow the town to establish a centre with opportunities for markets and open spaces. These however will not fund the development, but opportunities exist to build over the existing single storey properties to maximise the sites. These could be civic or retail at ground level, with residential or commercial above. There would appear to be sufficient public buildings scattered around the town in inappropriate locations to easily achieve the quantum required to make this a true square.

The introduction of more residential properties right in the heart of the town with easy access to all facilities and services would, we believe, be attractive to young as well as elderly residents. This would also add to the 'out-of-hours' vitality of the centre.

Finally East and West Streets cannot be seen as purely traffic problems. They are important gateways to the town and require special consideration in terms of traffic movement and scale and type of development.



In order to understand the pressures on the town centre it is necessary to place it in context regionally and locally, particularly in relation to major transport infrastructure routes and other town centres.

It is also important to appreciate the current status of the town in terms of regional planning guidance and economic development.

Sittingbourne, the principal town in the Borough of Swale, has successfully diversified from traditional industries into a significant manufacturing and distribution centre. In response to the town's growth, the town centre equally needs to expand to compete with its immediate neighbours – Maidstone the county seat, Medway, the large conurbation, and Canterbury the religious, cultural and tourist centre. In regional terms the town has an excellent opportunity to achieve the objectives of the Kent Structure Plan, in integrating homes, work and services. The current Local Plan indicates substantial areas which have already received, or are in the process of receiving, permission for new residential development and opportunities for new employment. These should create a balance in the town but if this increase is to be sustained, the centre must respond in support of the houses and jobs.

The public consultation indicated that new residents of the town generally came from neighbouring centres and if the services provided in Sittingbourne did not meet their expectations they would merely return to their old neighbourhood for leisure, services and shopping.

The impact of new major regional retail shopping centres, which affects most towns in the area, will be felt even greater in Sittingbourne if there is no reason at all for new inhabitants to use the town. Established residents wishing to buy certain large bulky items and those on major shopping trips are also attracted to other, larger centres but the town seems to provide sufficient facilities for everyday items, including food, and most day to day clothing and household goods.

From comments received it would appear that the town is currently under provided with food shops as some of these are overtrading at present, but equally there appears to be a lack of investment opportunities for major retailers in the town. The August 2000 Hillier Parker report indicated that 'High Street Nationals' had only limited requirements for presence in the town but this is expected to change given Sittingbourne's continued growth.

The initial public consultation showed that the main reason people enjoyed shopping in Sittingbourne was because it is easier to drive to, park, and move around than Maidstone or Canterbury, which are both perceived as difficult to access. Safeguarding the quantum is critical and the Vision proposes the number of car parking spaces in the town is distributed in a way that maximises access and convenience for the town centre without laying waste to substantial areas of land behind the High Street itself.

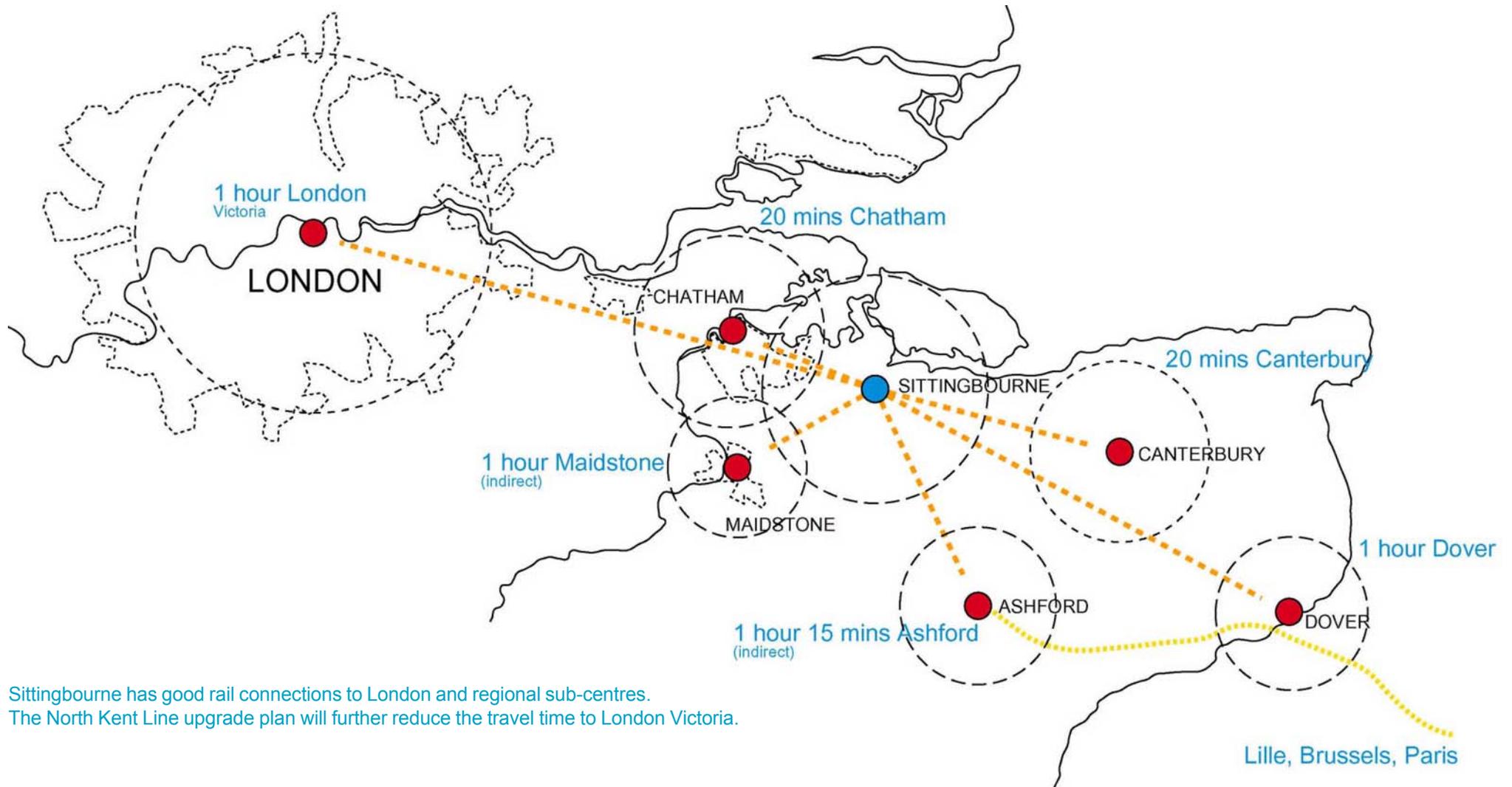
Rail links are, and will remain, important to Sittingbourne, both in terms of workers commuting to London and the local connections with Medway, Sheerness, Faversham and Canterbury. During the consultation exercises, teenagers without cars particularly mentioned the importance of trains in accessing leisure facilities (especially cinemas) in neighbouring towns.

The increased numbers of residents will allow potential investors to re-evaluate the catchment area for future development of leisure facilities. There is a wide range of facilities in the town but these could be developed/re-developed to encourage more local people, and those living outside the area to use them. The town benefits from easy access to the countryside and the seaside, but equally should attract people from these areas into the town centre. The potential for increased knowledge based/managerial jobs should encourage the development of higher quality housing in the area, particularly around Milton Creek. This would enable more people to live and work within the area, thus promoting sustainable lifestyles.

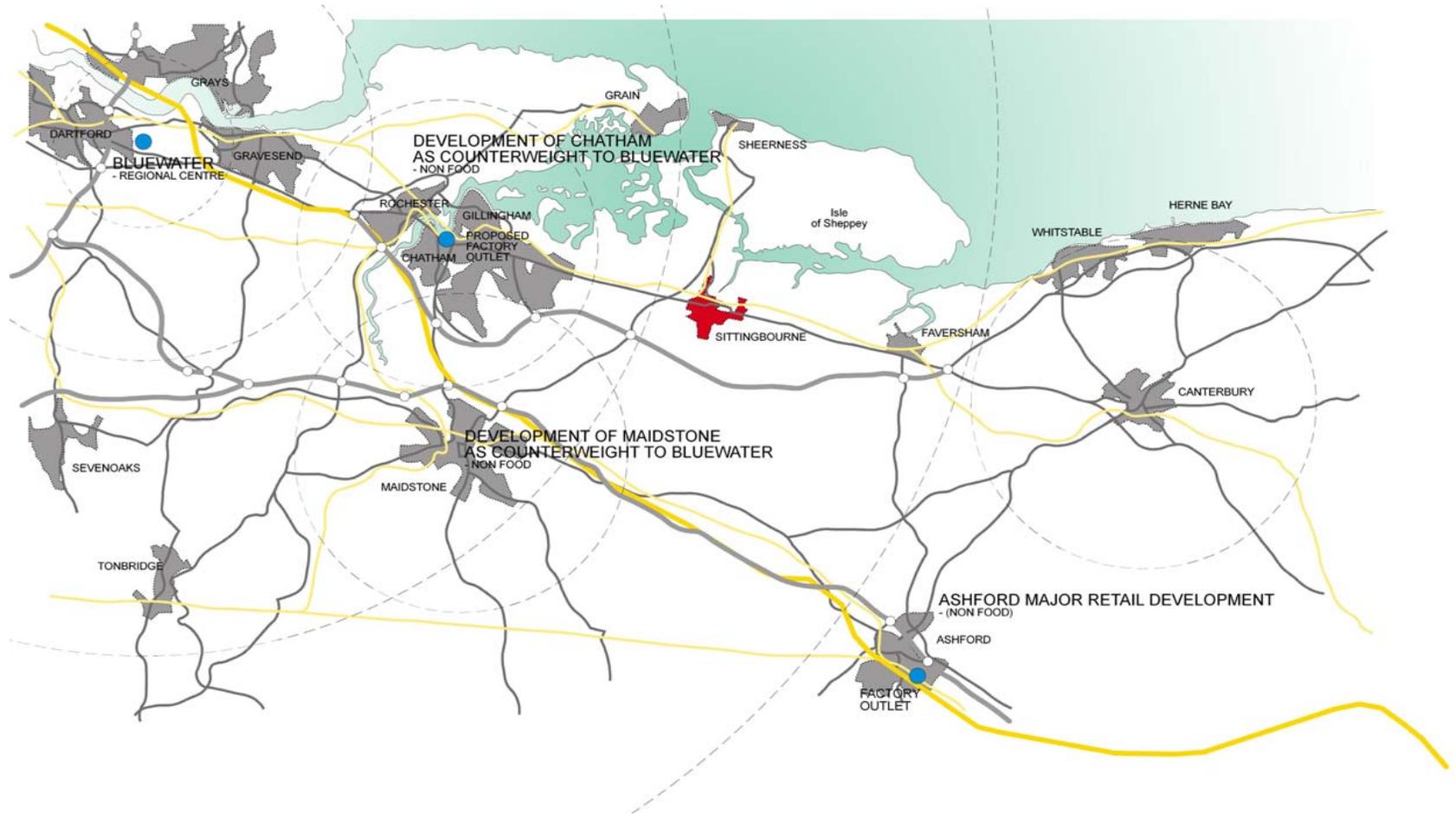
In regional terms Sittingbourne lies within the Thames Gateway, a regeneration initiative of national importance. If the town is to grow in a sustained manner, there is a need for investment to maximise its potential. There are a number of major projects identified and later sections of this report will show how these will be difficult to realise without Central Government or European Funding.

This analysis of the town and its context is designed to show that with a proper strategy for development, the town centre can respond to the needs of future residents and employers by providing a vibrant centre which can accommodate all of the facilities needed to support the town.

Throughout history, Sittingbourne benefited from good transport links which have influenced its development. Examples include use as a Roman garrison town, a coaching stop for horse drawn travel and a railway junction in the 19th Century. As a major manufacturing and distribution centre it is equally well served today as an important location between London and the English Channel. Sittingbourne is also a convenient commuter town to London and other major regional centres.



Sittingbourne has good rail connections to London and regional sub-centres. The North Kent Line upgrade plan will further reduce the travel time to London Victoria.



A town centre is more than a collection of shops. Indeed over a third of the properties in the High Street have other uses such as restaurants, banks, hairdressers and service providers.

Sittingbourne is seen by most of its residents and workers as a convenient shopping centre, but only for certain goods, primarily food. The current large food store (Sainsbury's) is over trading and is about to extend. There is a need for greater competition but the supermarket in the Forum shopping centre is not large enough to compete, although there may be the opportunity to enlarge it.

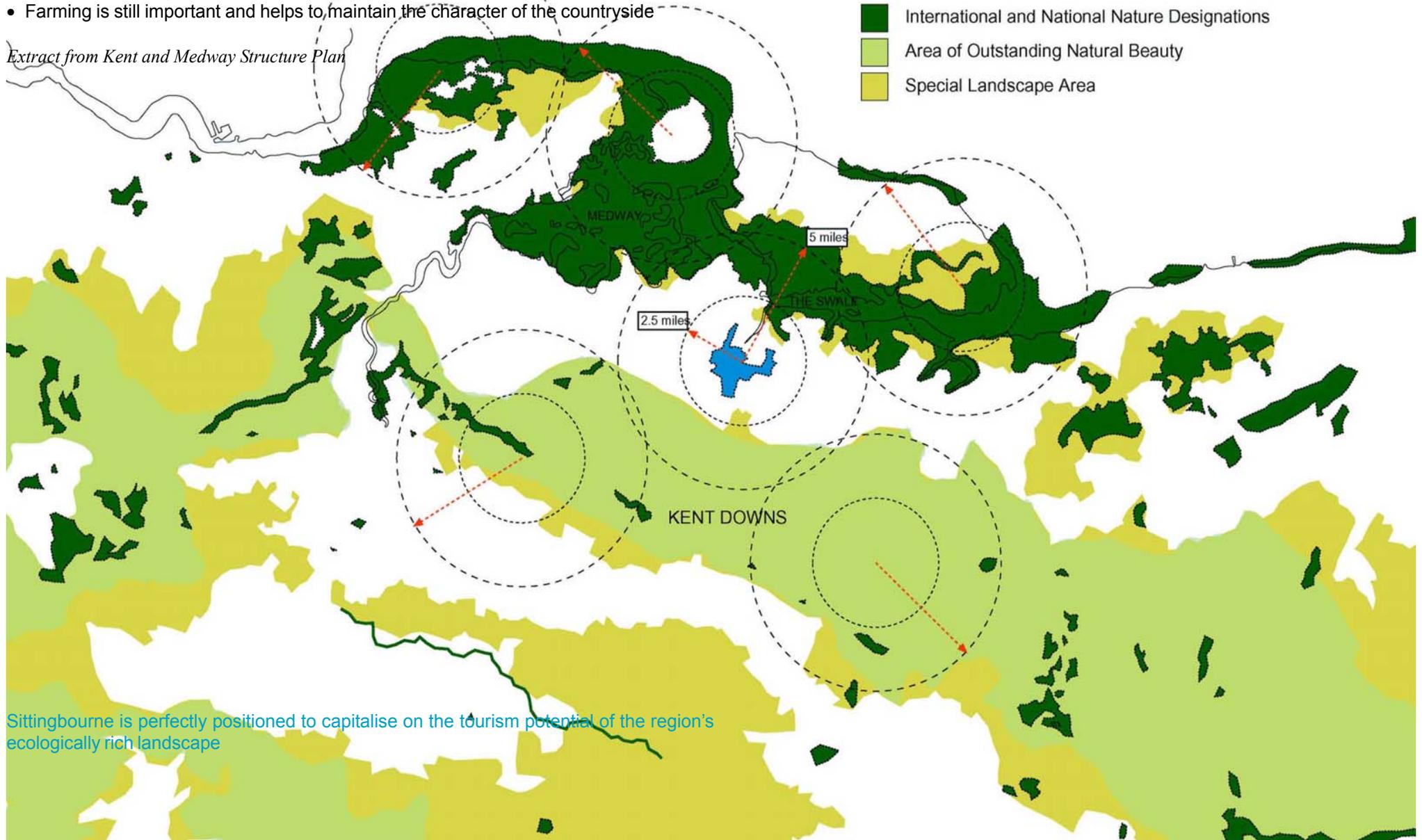
The existing Asda store has applied for permission to relocate into a site currently occupied by redundant buildings on Sittingbourne Industrial Park, but this is not considered close enough to the High Street to enhance the centre. Rather it is in danger of detracting from it since the large store proposed would provide non-food goods and services

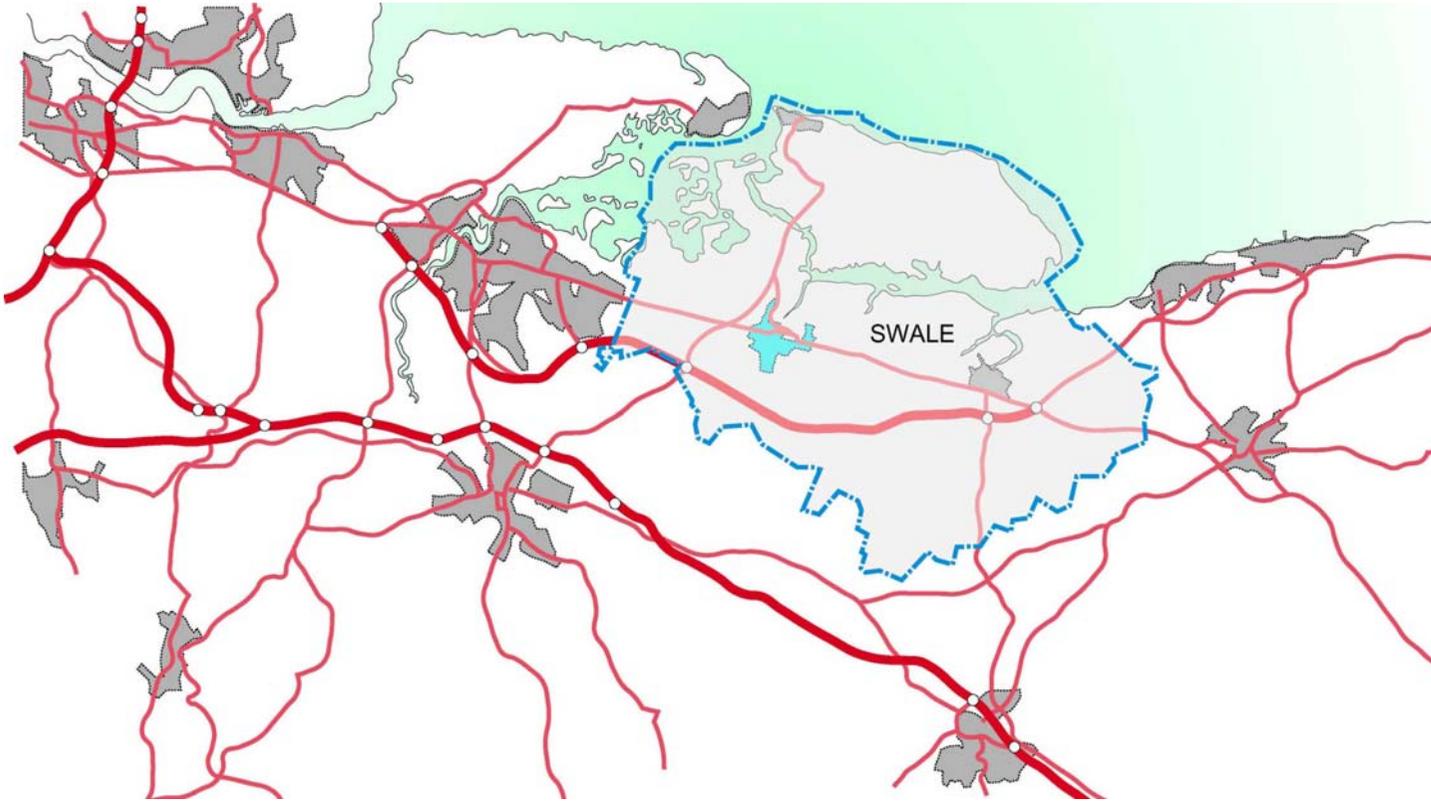
Sittingbourne is seen as particularly convenient because of easy access to car parking. The consultation showed that people are discouraged from shopping in Canterbury and Maidstone because of congestion, and prefer to go to the more accessible out of town shopping centres in Hempstead Valley or Bluewater for substantial shopping trips.

In this respect the highway improvements and clearances which create such an unfriendly face to the areas behind the High Street allow easy access and parking. The Vision seeks to retain this feeling of easy access, but in controlled, strategic ways along attractive routes which allow interconnection between spaces. Additionally the parking needs to be denser and better controlled with properly laid-out and better connected areas. Parking does not need to be banished to unsightly areas, it can form part of the open space, with buildings fronting on to it. This could provide the benefits of using existing access/service roads more efficiently and improving security through natural surveillance.

- Develop high quality tourism as a force for economic and environmental regeneration
- Diversify the rural economy in a manner that respects the quality and distinctiveness of the Kent countryside
- Farming is still important and helps to maintain the character of the countryside

Extract from Kent and Medway Structure Plan

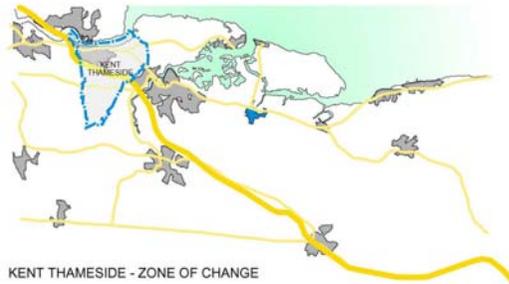




SITTINGBOURNE & SHEERNESS - ZONE OF CHANGE.

Within the Thames Gateway, Sittingbourne and Sheerness together with Medway & Grain and Kent Thameside are identified as major zones of change. Zones of change provide the focal points for future development in relation to the perceived needs and resources of the area. For Sittingbourne and Sheerness, emphasis will be given to manufacturing, logistics and knowledge-based industries, together with supporting infrastructure both human (education and training) and physical.

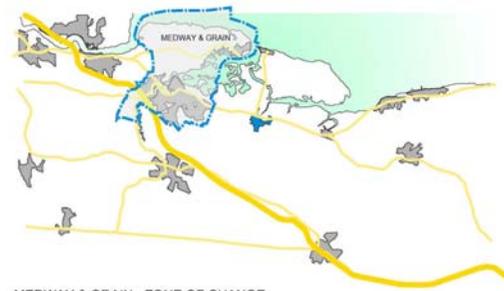
- Scale of development
- Current - 23,000 jobs
 - Future - 35,000 jobs
 - Change - additional 12,000 jobs or 52% increase
 - 455,000 square metres of new business floor space
 - 8,000 new housing units to accommodate approximately 23,000 people



KENT THAMESIDE - ZONE OF CHANGE

High density urban regeneration, manufacturing capacity, International port/logistics

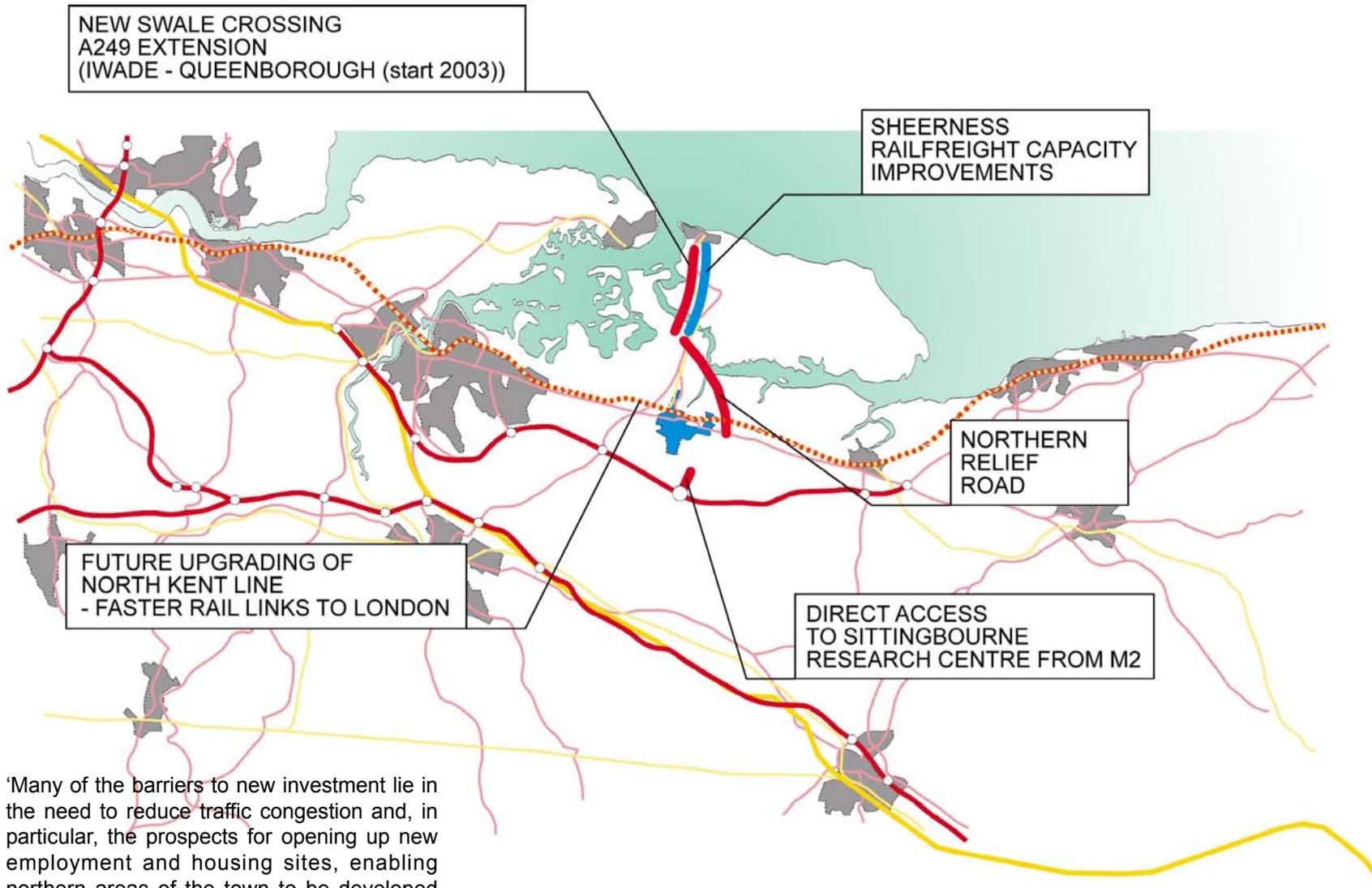
- 49,000 additional jobs
- 1,031,000 sq.metres new business floor space
- 21,000 new dwellings (48,000 people)



MEDWAY & GRAIN - ZONE OF CHANGE

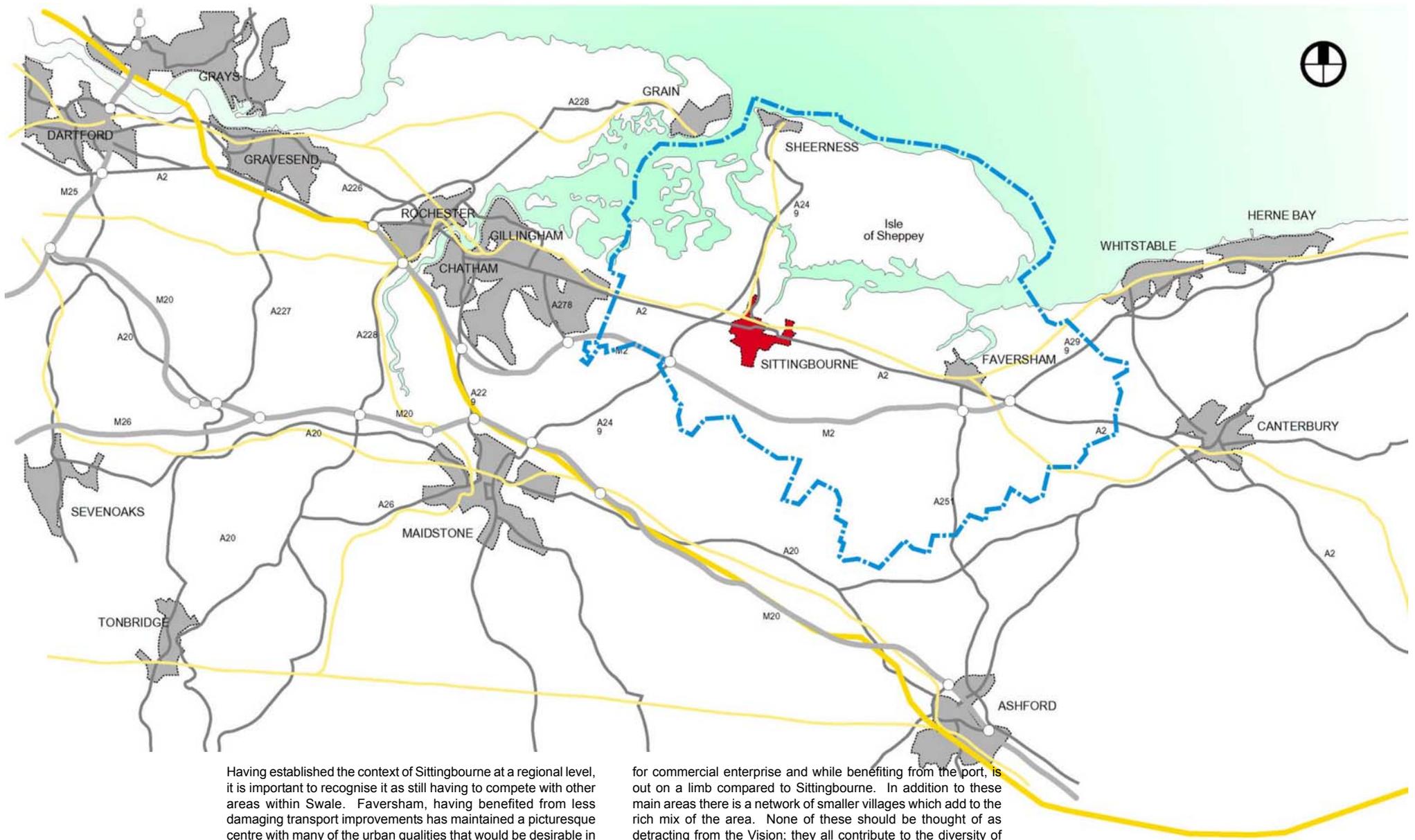
Develop commercial, cultural, education and hi-tech functions

- 23,000 additional jobs
- 1,027,000 sq.metres new business floor space
- 16,000 new dwellings (37,000 people)



'Many of the barriers to new investment lie in the need to reduce traffic congestion and, in particular, the prospects for opening up new employment and housing sites, enabling northern areas of the town to be developed further as a location for manufacturing activity together with the development of the town centre, depend on the Northern Relief Road going ahead'

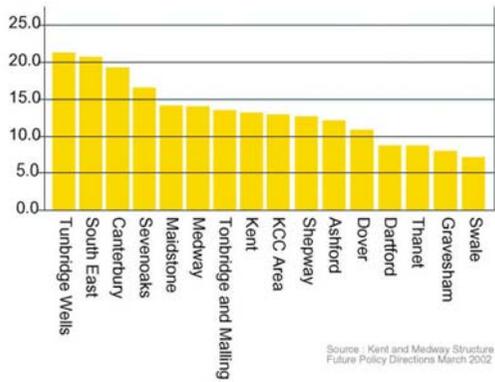
North Kent Area Investment Framework



Having established the context of Sittingbourne at a regional level, it is important to recognise it as still having to compete with other areas within Swale. Faversham, having benefited from less damaging transport improvements has maintained a picturesque centre with many of the urban qualities that would be desirable in Sittingbourne. The Vision has used some of these as precedents to illustrate possibilities, without replicating them out of context. Faversham benefits from better access to the waterfront, and shows what is possible there, whilst Sheerness is also a location

for commercial enterprise and while benefiting from the port, is out on a limb compared to Sittingbourne. In addition to these main areas there is a network of smaller villages which add to the rich mix of the area. None of these should be thought of as detracting from the Vision; they all contribute to the diversity of the Borough and help sustain the services necessary for a balanced settlement.

Employees in 'knowledge-based' industries in 2000
(% of total employees)

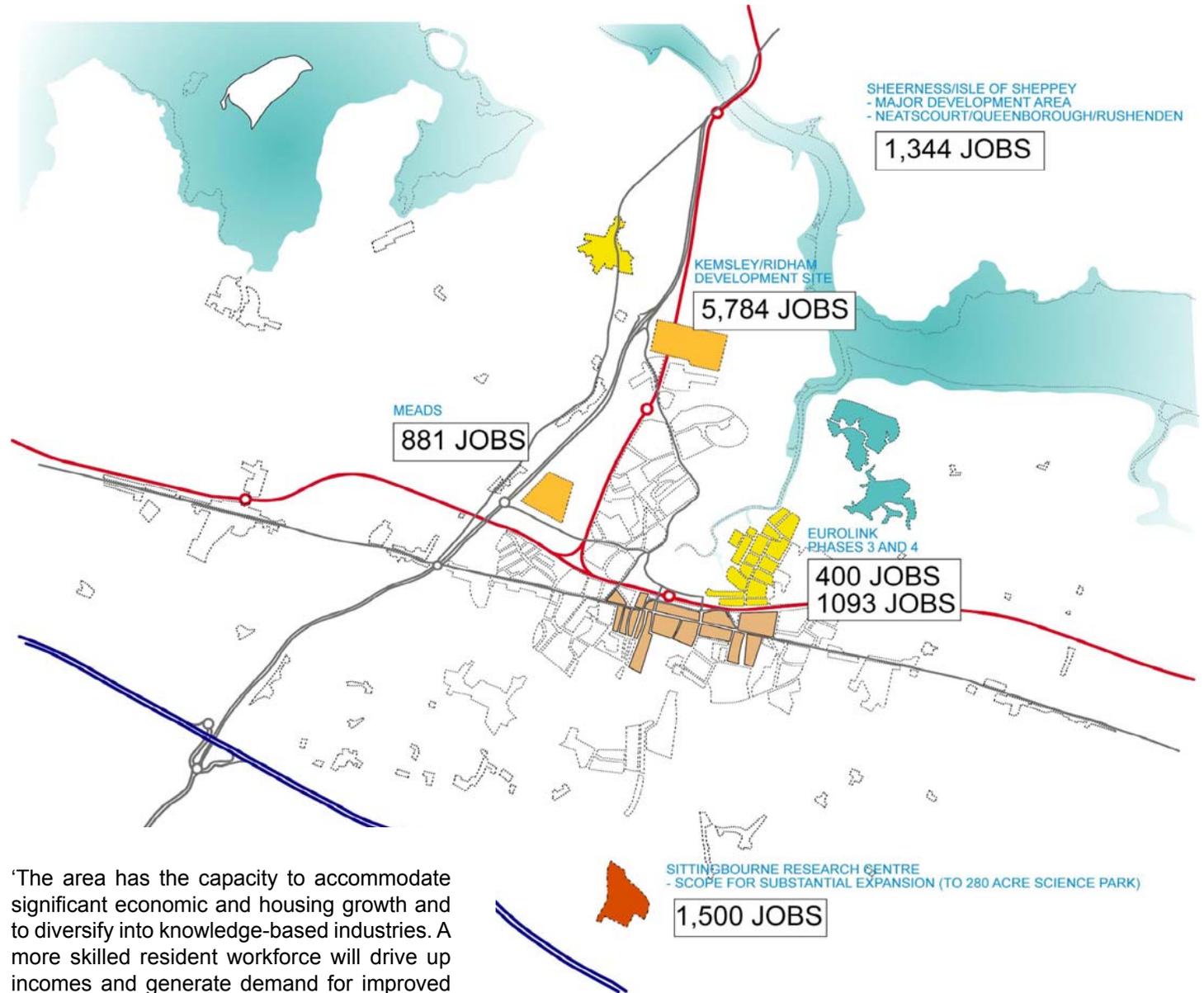


Source: Kent & Medway Structure Plan

There is considerable potential for the further development of the Sittingbourne area as a location for high tech businesses.

Extension of the Sittingbourne Research Centre (SRC) into a campus style science park would provide an ideal location for the commercialisation of Research and Development (R&D) supported by local universities.

Future employment at the SRC, if the additional site of some 210 acres is developed, could be over 1,500 making it a centre of regional significance for life science industries.



'The area has the capacity to accommodate significant economic and housing growth and to diversify into knowledge-based industries. A more skilled resident workforce will drive up incomes and generate demand for improved leisure and social facilities'

North Kent Area Investment Framework



In the previous section, the context of the town in a regional and local setting was established, acknowledging Sittingbourne's role and strategic importance in North Kent. We have also shown how the town might develop naturally within its constrained boundaries and recognising the importance of regional and local infrastructure. This section illustrates the manner by which the town can grow and expand in a way which builds upon its historic core. The size, character and quality of the spaces in the town are seen as being an important influence on movement between the buildings.

This study acknowledges that ultimately it is the construction of buildings which will lead the process, but the Vision is the framework which binds these different elements together. The hierarchy of space promoted here should allow an urban grain to develop which will create an interesting, safe and accessible environment at a scale appropriate to the town.

By the use of precedents from local or appropriate international sources the study illustrates the scale of various spaces and how they might be applied to the town centre. The study also illustrates how the use of appropriate hard and soft landscape materials could unite different spaces. All of these spaces currently exist in the town, but the character of the town has been diluted through the imposition of an unsympathetic highway and transport network. These proposals seek to re-establish and enhance that character.

The landscape analysis also indicates the scale of development considered appropriate for the town. Although in general the bulk of the buildings are of a domestic scale of two to four storeys there may be the opportunity for larger buildings to be created at important node points, for example the Cultural Centre or around Forum Square and the railway station.

These structures will act as landmarks and are critical for orientation when walking around the town. The potential uses (indicated in the diagram) would similarly enhance the spaces, and when seen as part of a diverse mix of buildings, add to the vibrancy of the town, extending its use beyond the normal 9.00 to 5.00 hours associated with town centres.

The town centre and its approach have to be welcoming. At present, irrespective of the approach, there is no sense of arrival, quite the opposite. From both east and west, any visitor gets only a tantalising glimpse of where the centre might be through indicators like the church spire. The circuitous diversions to avoid traffic on the High Street only serve to confuse sufficient for a visitor to give up and pass by. Signs are difficult to read when negotiating lane changes and routes which offer no hint of what lies to either side do not encourage casual interest, merely a desire to go somewhere that looks more interesting.

The A2 may be a Roman road which runs in as straight a line as possible, but it is deceptively undulating. This makes definition of the 'Gateways' important to reinforce the approach to the town centre.



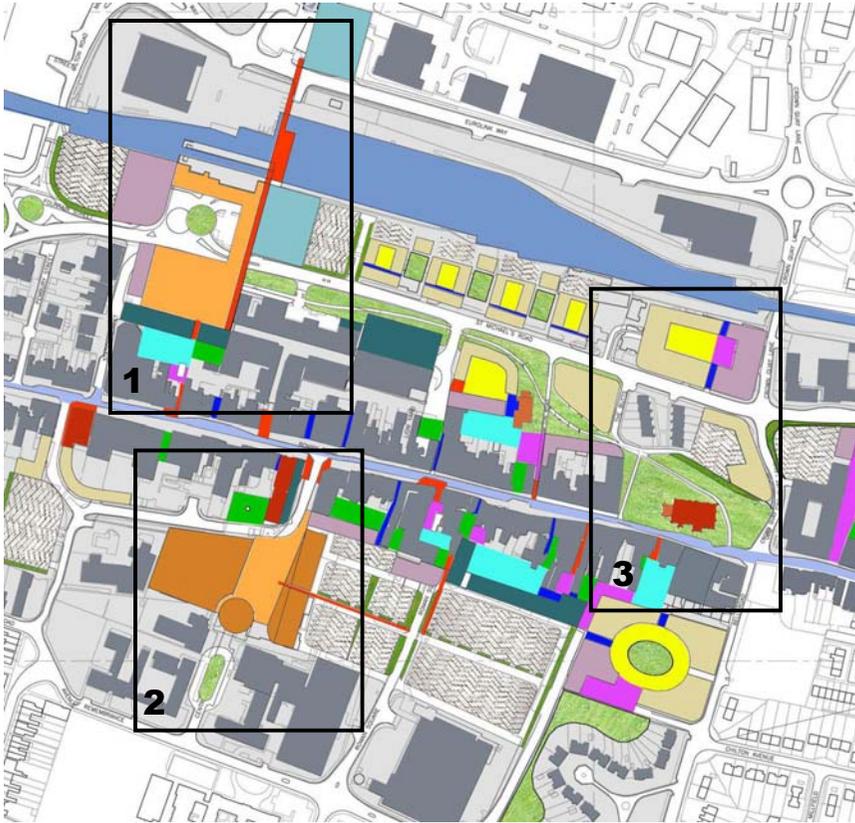
Approaching the town from the West



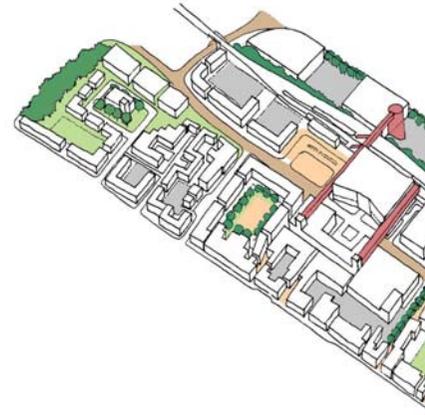
Important Landmarks and Gateways

At a more intimate scale, the old hierarchy of lanes and passages should be re-inforced and used as links to new developments in the areas behind the High Street. Currently these routes lead nowhere, are seen as inhospitable and many have been blocked off. They are, however the principal defining element of the historic character of Sittingbourne and must form part of the new connection and spatial hierarchy.

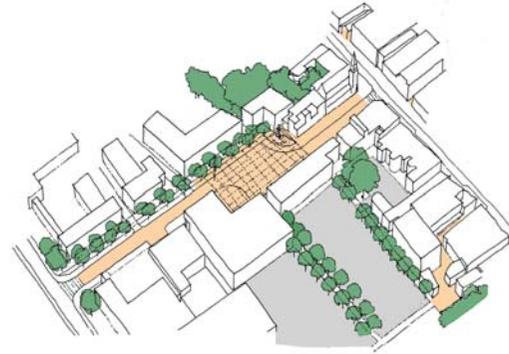




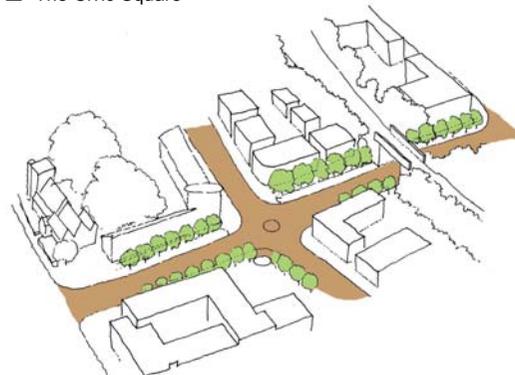
Some of the 'Quarters' which help define the quality and character of the town and promote key landmark buildings aiding orientation.



1 Approaches and spaces around the Station



2 The Civic Square



3 Crown Quay Lane and under the railway to Eurolink Way

At key road junctions around the town there is development potential where the opportunity of improving the approach to the town can be made. Some of these occur at 'gateway' locations such as Crown Quay Lane, St Michael's Road and Eurolink Way.

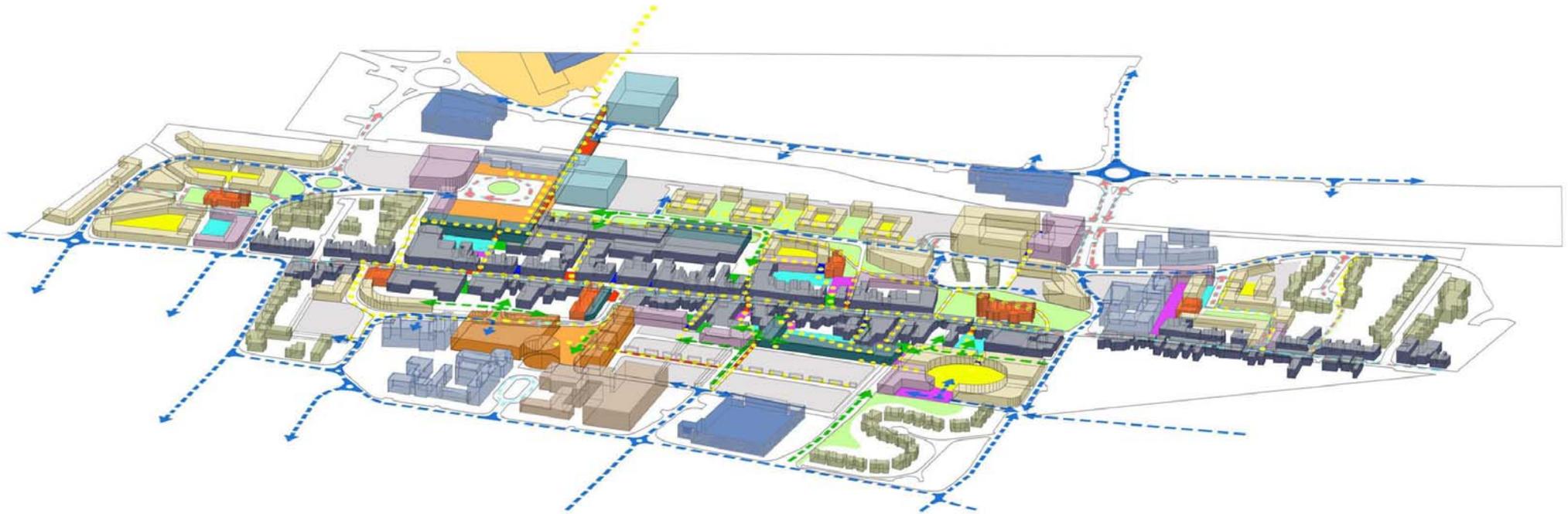
Development should be encouraged to locate buildings at these important nodes to reinforce the gateway and create a more logical expansion of the urban grain.

Landmarks are important for people to navigate around a town. They may be buildings, features or landscape, but they should be interesting and well located throughout the town at prominent points. Many of the existing landmarks such as the church spire are diminished because of insensitive recent developments.

There are opportunities to maximise existing landmarks such as St Michael's church which is currently obscured by the cinema and to create memorable points in the town at the gateways and public spaces.



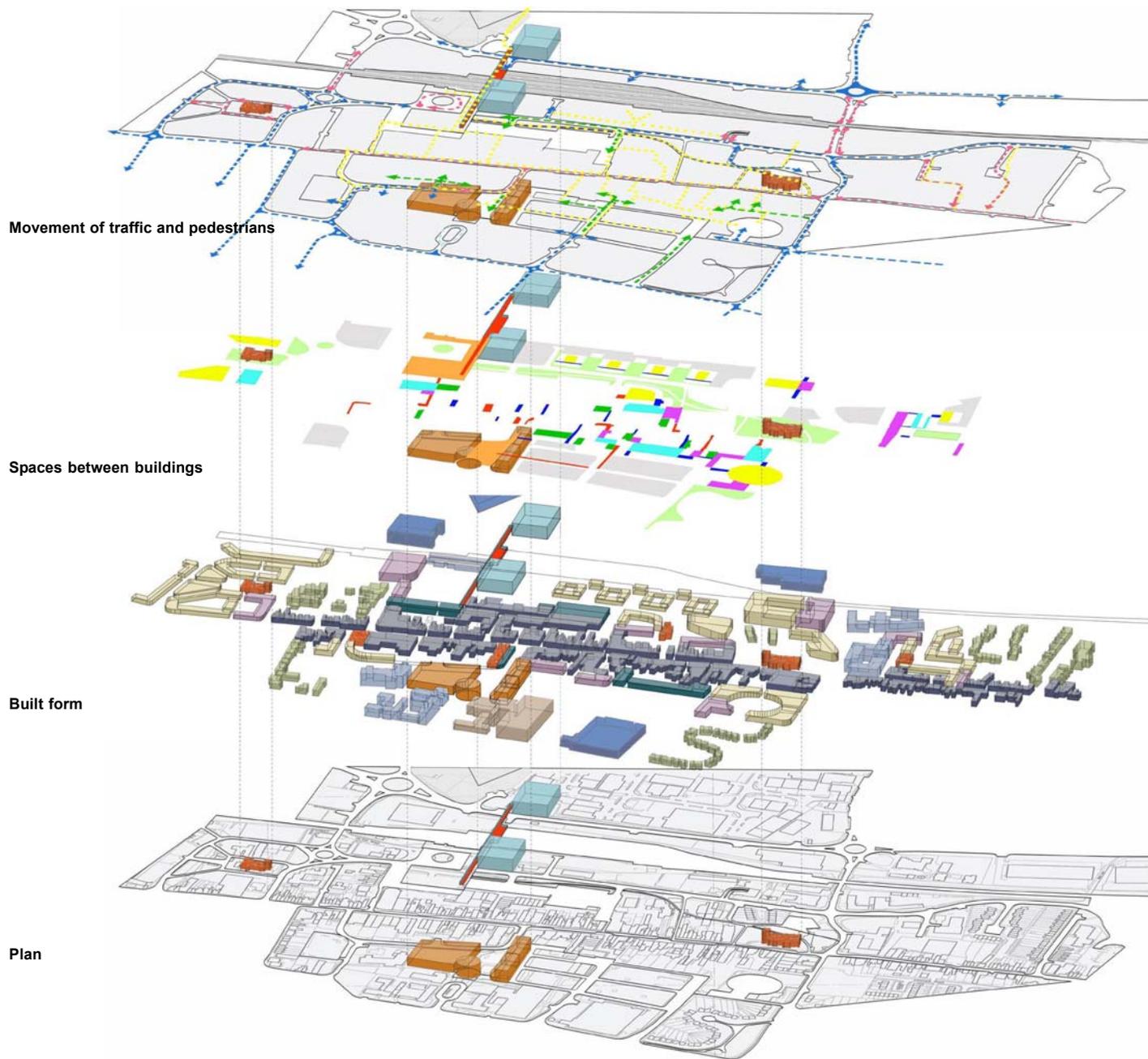
The Gateway at Crown Quay Lane would also form the link to open up the potential for new residential and mixed commercial developments on Milton Creek.



The scale of the town can be enhanced and complemented by appropriate new buildings which reflect the scale of the historic centre, but are as varied and vibrant a mix of uses as the old town was. The centre needs to be alive at night and more housing should be encouraged. There is a need in the area for housing for singles, young couples and the elderly who would benefit from easy access to shops and services and would support more out-of-hours facilities. The presence of more people moving around the town has been proved to reduce vandalism and encourage the increase of restaurants and other social activities. Improved lighting and landscaping would add to the security and the 'feel safe factor' which would further encourage the evening economy.

KEY

Existing Built Environment	Proposed Built Environment	Open Spaces
High Street	Proposed Residential	Public Square
Existing Residential	Proposed Retail	Car Park
Existing Civic/Commercial	Proposed Office	Public Park
Existing Leisure	Proposed Culture/Leisure Centre	Residential Square
Existing Large Scale Retail	Proposed Multi-Storey Carpark	Court
Retail Park	Proposed Pedestrian Bridge	Portal
Church	Two-way traffic	Alley
	One-way traffic	Pocket Park
	Service route	Live/Work Mews
	Pedestrian movement	



In proposing a new Vision, we need to understand not only the context of the town but also the various layers that have built up over the years which define its character and quality.

Understanding these layers allows us to extend the natural grain of the town in a structured way which complements the existing townscape and binds any new development into the framework of the old in a more homogeneous way.

The very dominant linear form defined by the original ribbon development of the High Street has now reached the limit of its expansion to East and West. These extremities of the High Street are now developing their own character and act as bookends which could re-inforce the limits of the town centre. Expansion is therefore more suited to the North and South of the High Street.

These areas are quite different in character. The extent of development to the South of the High Street is already well defined by the Avenue of Remembrance, the school and the residential areas beyond, which need to feed into this side of the town.

The North however extends in concentric circles beyond St Michael's Road, the Railway, Sittingbourne Industrial Park and ultimately to Milton Creek. It is easier, therefore, to assume that the major opportunity exists to the North of the town as this is also where most damage has been done in the past and where most traffic problems exist at present.

The Vision cannot only show an idealised proposal for the development of the townscape but must consider the effect that other infrastructure constraints have on its ultimate achievement. For this reason the plan has been proposed in three phases:

Existing opportunities

A healing process of the existing street pattern (urban grain) which remedies the dereliction caused in some of the back land areas. Previous highway improvements like St Michael's Road, or the car parking to the south of the High Street which have been formed by demolition of original buildings, expose the rear of some of the buildings fronting on to the High Street.

These are the first parts of the town that any visitor sees and create the initial impression. In many cases these new, car orientated arteries are surrounded by ill-defined boundaries and service spaces, which were never designed to be seen when originally built.

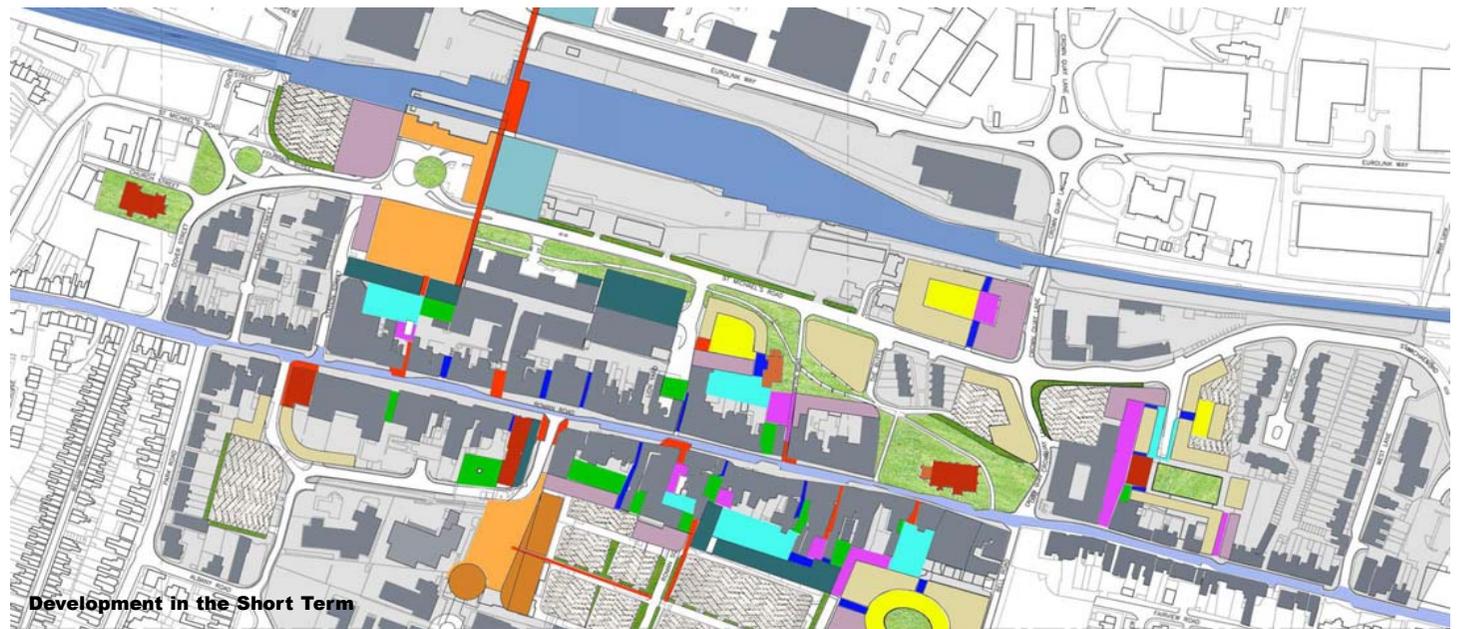
The process here should be to recreate these blocks to provide new frontages onto roads and open spaces and to create new controlled internal service courts. Earlier proposals for service roads, which have not been fully realised, encourage public access in to service areas and further destroy the pattern of the town. These underdeveloped areas could be tackled at an early stage to address this balance and to recreate a more pleasant and a more accessible environment directly behind the High Street.

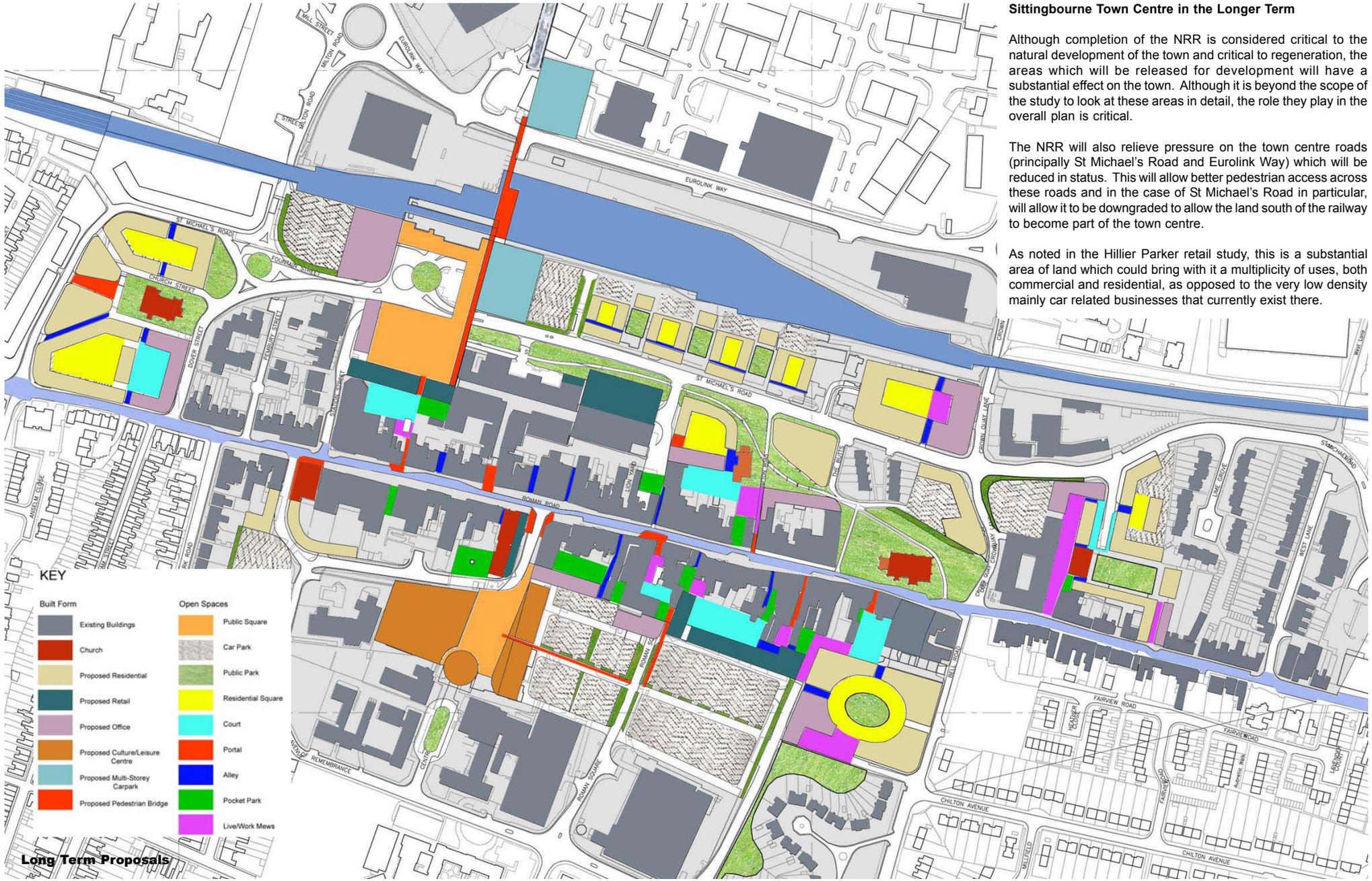
Development in the Short Term

A simple way of defining short from longer term projects is the timescale for the construction of the Northern Relief Road (NRR).

The study notes that there are elements of the Northern Relief Road which can be built as funding is already in place for sections of the road. However, piecemeal development along part of the road, without the connection back to the A249, will not serve to reduce the traffic using the town centre as a through route.

Recent incidents have shown that even if only one of the roads into the town gets blocked (in this case Eurolink Way) the remainder of the town grinds to a standstill. Currently Eurolink Way is at or near full capacity in the morning and evening rush hours, purely because of traffic into the industrial areas. Short term measures therefore look to promote development which assumes that the roads and the town will be as busy as they are at present. This study illustrates a strategy for expanding into these areas whilst accepting the limitations of the existing infrastructure.





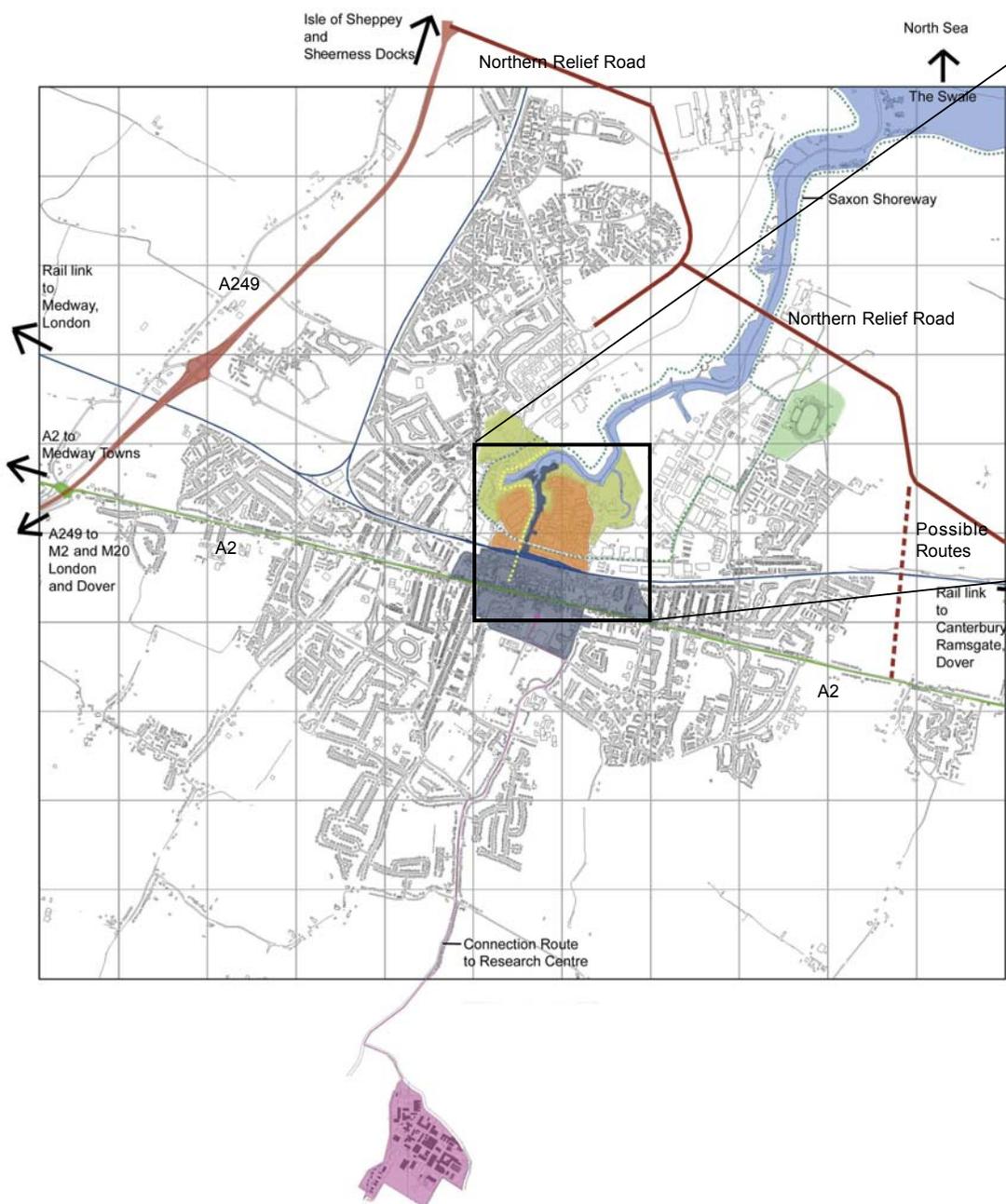
Sittingbourne Town Centre in the Longer Term

Although completion of the NRR is considered critical to the natural development of the town and critical to regeneration, the areas which will be released for development will have a substantial effect on the town. Although it is beyond the scope of the study to look at these areas in detail, the role they play in the overall plan is critical.

The NRR will also relieve pressure on the town centre roads (principally St Michael's Road and Eurolink Way) which will be reduced in status. This will allow better pedestrian access across these roads and in the case of St Michael's Road in particular, will allow it to be downgraded to allow the land south of the railway to become part of the town centre.

As noted in the Hillier Parker retail study, this is a substantial area of land which could bring with it a multiplicity of uses, both commercial and residential, as opposed to the very low density mainly car related businesses that currently exist there.

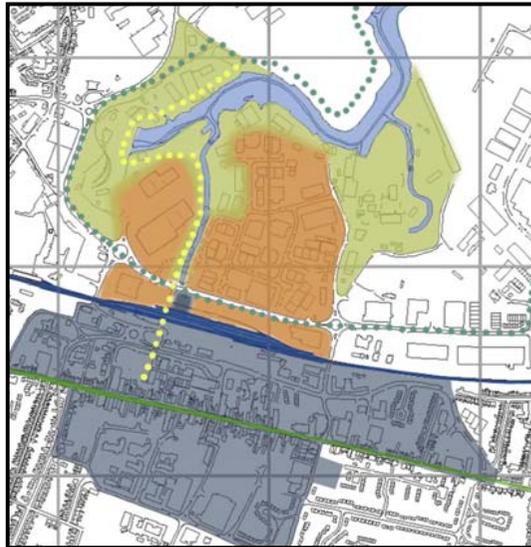
Long Term Proposals



Milton Creekside and Sittingbourne Industrial Park

The area between the railway line and Milton Creek is currently industrial, at the end of its commercial life and a substantial area is subject to a planning application for a large supermarket. The effect on the town centre of such a large supermarket with many in-store facilities is potentially harmful to other services and shops in the centre, particularly if its effect is to prevent a co-ordinated solution to the remainder of the area in which it sits.

- Town Centre
- Mixed Retail/Commercial/Leisure
- Sports Stadium
- Residential
- Research Centre
- Saxon Shore Way
- Proposed Pedestrian Link
- Railway



Phase 1 - Introduction of water linking the town centre with Milton Creek and the link over the railway.



Phase 2 - Increasing the water links into new residential areas and beginning the growth northwards of the town centre. Development of a waterside promenade.



Phase 3 - Further development of the town extension and formation of the link over Milton Creek towards Milton Regis

The Vision study has looked at the possibility of gradually integrating the Creek with the town. This could involve:

- Possible intermediate step of erecting lock gates at the tributary of Milton Creek, where the Barge Museum is, to begin the redevelopment of the area between Crown Quay Lane and the Creek for residential and community open space.
- The creation of a permanently filled Creek (rather than the tidal mud flats) by using locks at the NRR crossing point allowing navigation with only minimal disruption to traffic.
- Creation of a new water feature or canal linking the head of the creek with the town centre to encourage more residential, leisure and public open space to re-establish the link between the town and the water.

The natural attraction for living by the water can be demonstrated throughout Britain, particularly in regeneration schemes of which Faversham is an example.

When a strategy for the whole area has been developed it may be that the planned commercial scheme will play a valid role, in the way the recent retail park has developed the market for shopping for household goods within the area, but to consider it in isolation might prejudice a more coherent development plan.



There are many opportunities within the town centre for potential development. The increased provision of residential properties could probably be justified and delivered at present as a means of reducing the amount of greenfield land needed for housing. Commercial development is more difficult to predict as it has to be shown to be viable, not just that the opportunity exists. The Vision suggests small scale mixed development rather than larger office buildings would be more appropriate.

Leisure is more difficult to predict. An increase of people into the area by 30% will surely encourage operators to review the catchment area for leisure facilities, as the consultation showed that many people were travelling substantial distances to the cinema and bowling. The location of the various facilities is critical to the development of the town centre since locations too detached from the core will divide and diminish the role of the town centre. The analysis shows that there are substantial opportunities available at an appropriate scale without large land assembly programmes.

The illustrated layout is only indicative, but shows the scale of development possible within the existing centre.



The spaces between the buildings are as important in townscape terms as the buildings themselves. Without a strategy for open space, individual developments cannot contribute to the town as a whole since by their very nature they tend to be confined to individual sites. There has to be a clear understanding of space between buildings and how it flows and varies between buildings and contributes to the character and quality of the town.

This is further explored in detail in later sections on spatial hierarchy.



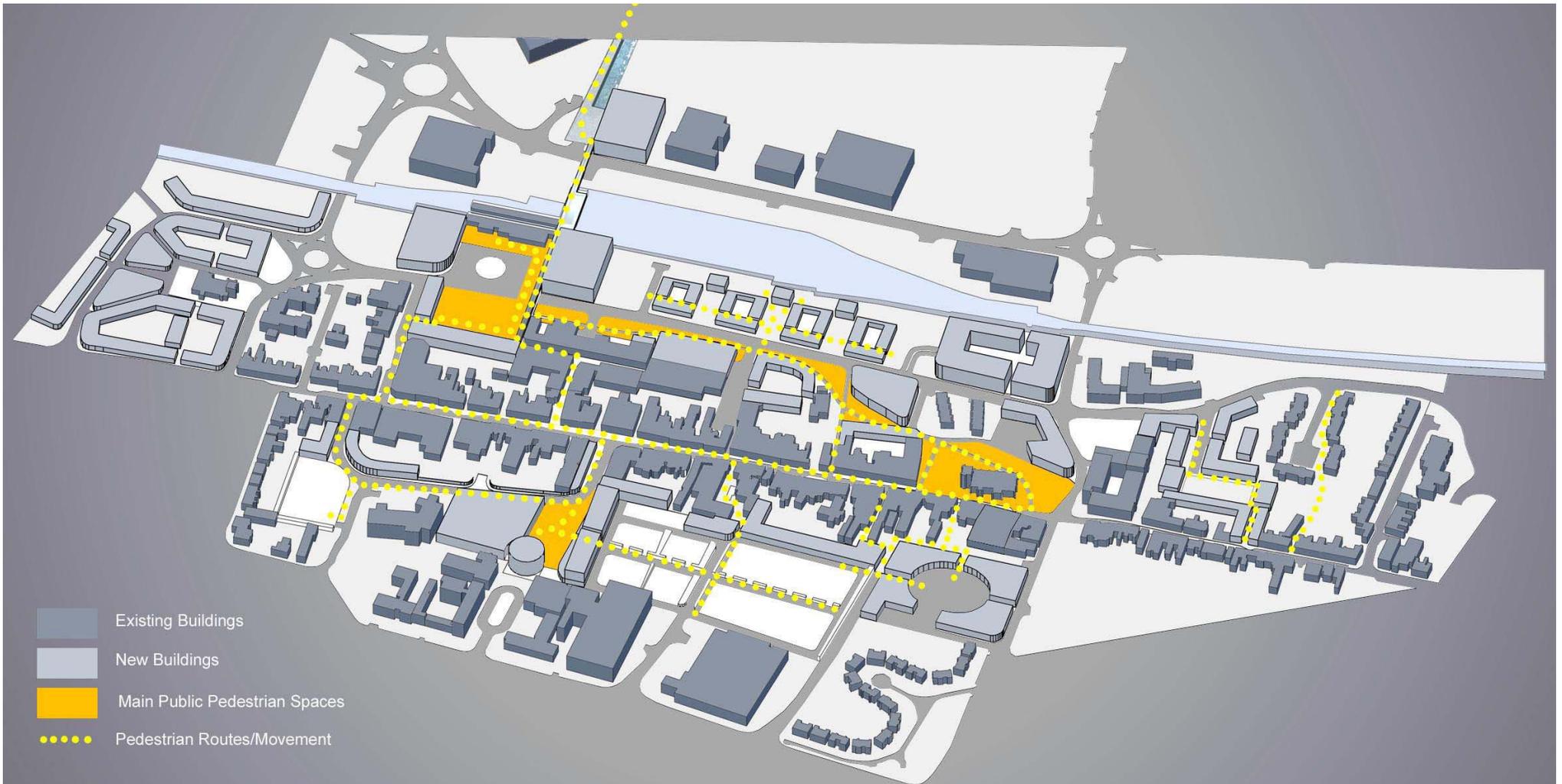
The town has suffered in the past from highway dominated solutions to congestion in the town centre which have either not been fully implemented (the diversion at London Road/West Street/Milton Road railway underpass and the service road to the south of the High Street) or carried out in isolation without concern for the environment created (St Michael's Road). Alterations to the highway infrastructure should include:

- Proposals for the relief of the bottle-necks at Crown Quay Lane and Milton Road railway bridges – possibly by driving new bores adjacent to the existing funded by new Creekside developments – to allow better access to Eurolink Way and the NRR.

- Creation of a new road layout at Central Avenue to form an access to the rear of the High Street and create a new Civic Square.
- Rationalisation of East Street and West Street.
- Formation of better service access points serving the rear of properties in the High Street.
- Creation of new multi-storey car parks adjacent to each side of the railway linking with the station and the Forum Shopping Centre.
- Rationalisation of the current car parks to the south of the High Street to make access between each easier to control.

After the construction of the NRR other more effective solutions can be considered when traffic is eased:

- Reduction in the use of St. Michael's Road to a shared surface.
- Blocking of St Michael's Road together with the Forum Square to form a Piazza outside the station.
- Rationalisation of the West Street/Station Street quarter and formation of new roundabout.
- Better public transport routes in and around the centre.



Potential building sites should not be merely the spaces left over after the roads have been planned, nor should pedestrian routes simply be seen as pavements along the roads.

Specific pedestrian only provision has been considered for:

- The link between the multi-storey car parks over the railway and St Michael's Road to the Forum Shopping Centre
- A footpath linking a variety of spaces between Forum Square and St Michael's Church
- Enhanced access via Portals/Alleys/Courts as illustrated in the next section.

The movement of people around the spaces in the town is at the heart of the townscape strategy as this is probably where the community is least well served at present.

It is the lack of a sense of security and poor facilities for those on foot which dissuade pedestrians from moving around the town, thereby further encouraging the use of cars and bad parking in unauthorised areas.

There should also be facilities specifically for the benefit and enjoyment of pedestrians - for example:

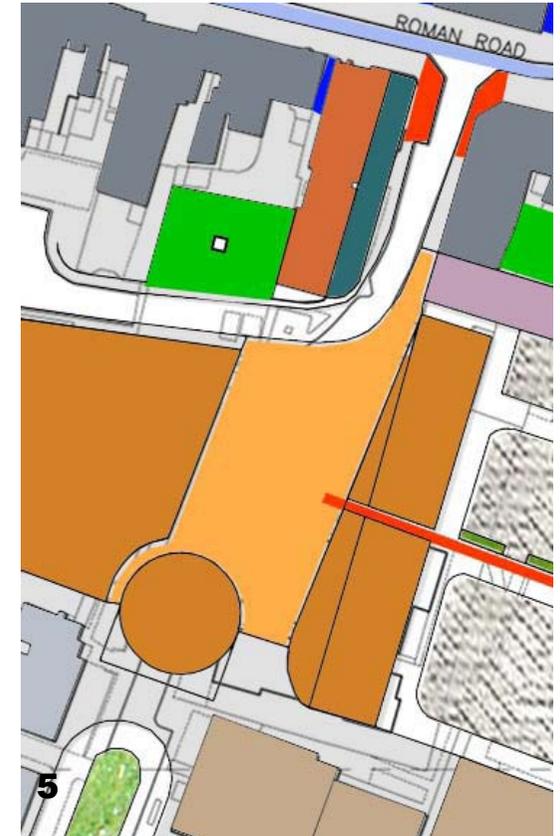
- Shelters
- Stalls
- Seats
- Street furniture.



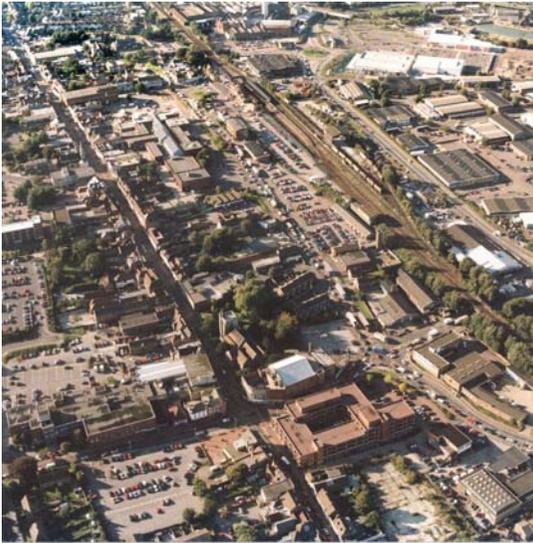
Area 3 – Land off Bell Road
 A mixed scheme on a substantial site providing access for servicing the High Street shops with an enclosed landscaped area surrounded by housing and some commercial space.



Area 4 – Crown Quay Lane
 The existing cinema would benefit from relocation to a better, larger site near the centre with the site redeveloped for housing and/or commercial space. The sites of the existing Ambulance and Fire stations could be developed if the existing emergency services were re-located to a less congested area, or they could be on the ground floor of a multi-storey development as in other towns



Area 5 – Civic Square
 Central Avenue is too low key and under-developed with a single storey Library, Phoenix House, Post Office and public toilets. This could be a true civic square with the new Cultural Centre at its heart and other Civic, Commercial and Leisure buildings forming the enclosure. These would link to the existing civic and leisure facilities forming a worthwhile Civic Quarter.



In previous sections, we have shown the context of the town in a regional and local setting to establish its role and strategic importance in North Kent. We have also shown how the town might use redundant spaces to develop buildings naturally within its constrained boundaries and recognising the importance of regional and local infrastructure. This section illustrates the manner by which the town can grow and expand in a way which builds upon its historic core and develops the character and quality of the spaces in the town by creating a hierarchy of space and movement between the buildings. The study recognises the fact that ultimately it is the construction of buildings which will lead the process but the Vision is the framework which binds these different elements together.

The hierarchy of space promoted here should allow an urban grain to develop which will create an interesting, safe and an accessible environment at a scale appropriate to the town.

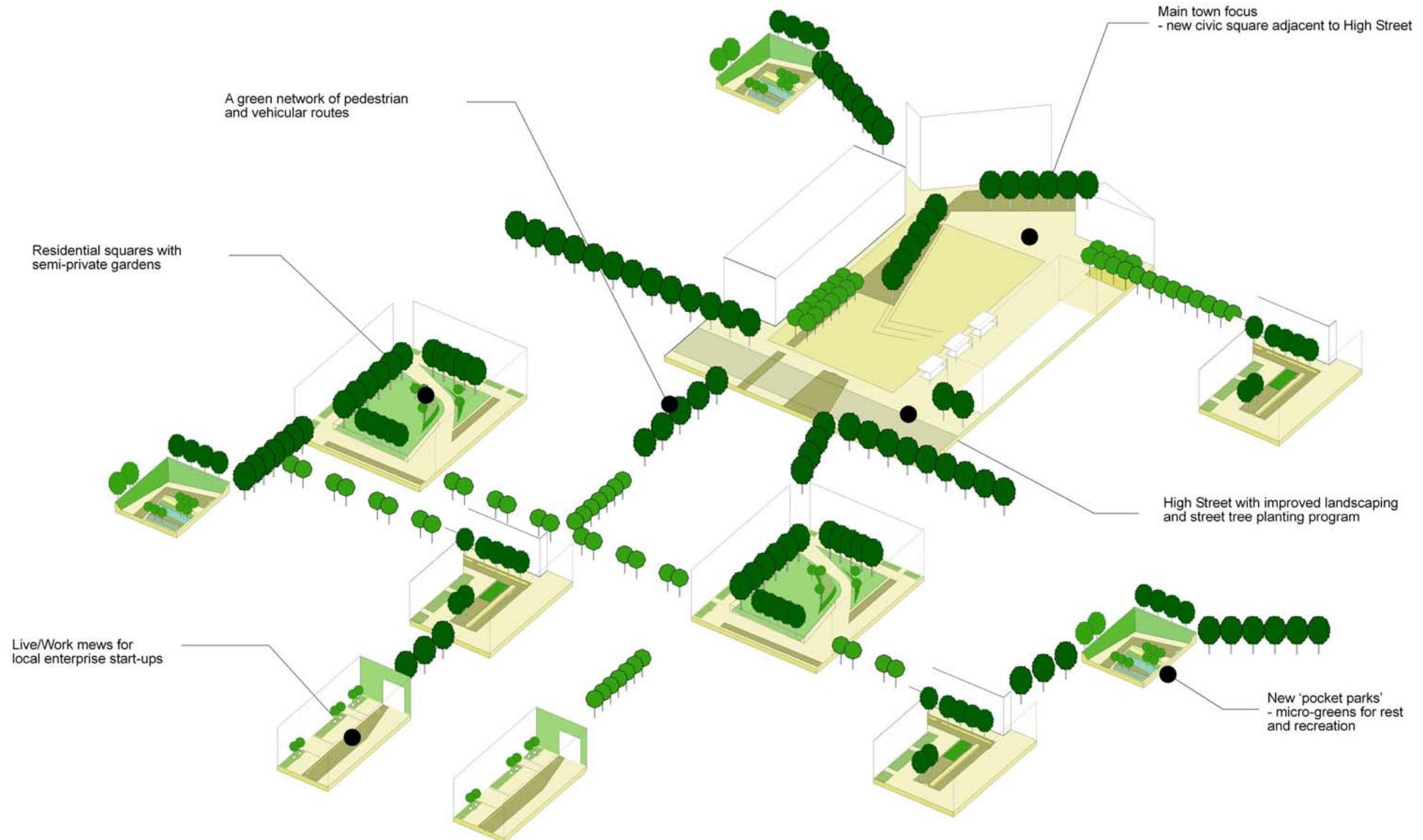
By the use of precedents, and local or appropriate international examples the study illustrates the appropriate scales for various spaces and how they might be applied to the town centre. The study also illustrates how the use of appropriate hard and soft landscape materials could unite different spaces.

All of these spaces currently exist in the town but the hierarchy has been diluted through the imposition of a highway and transport network which has destroyed the character of the town. These proposals seek to re-establish and enhance that character.

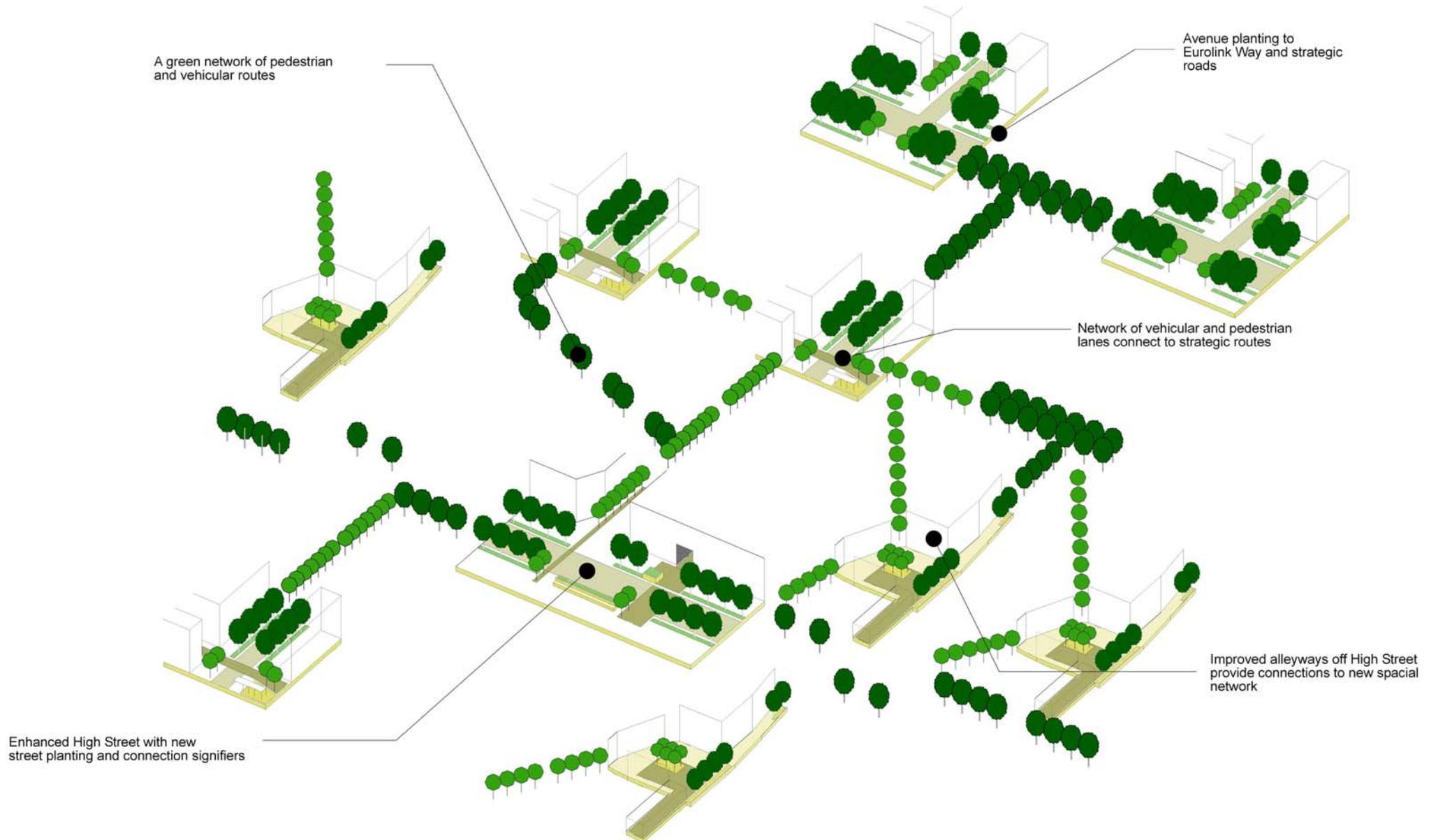
The landscape analysis also indicates the scale of development considered appropriate for the town. Although in general the bulk of the buildings are of a domestic scale of three to four storeys there may be the opportunity for grander, more key landmark buildings to be created at important node points, for example the Cultural Centre or around Forum Square and the station. In the way that the churches at the moment act as landmarks and are critical to orientation when walking around the town, these new landmark buildings would similarly enhance these spaces.

When seen as part of a diverse, rich mix of buildings these will add to the vibrant character of the town which extends life beyond the normal 9 to 5 associated with town centres.

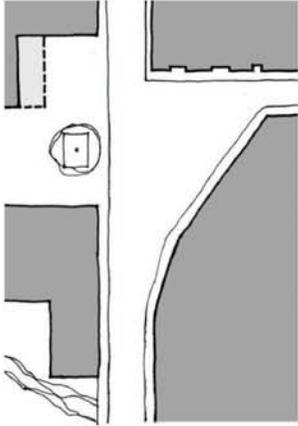
A clear hierarchy of spaces should be defined for Sittingbourne building on the grain of the historic town centre.
A town square located alongside a cultural centre and focused around the 'civic quarter' provides the main focus for the town.
A green network of street planting radiates from this focus, connecting new courts, live/work mews and public green spaces (pocket parks).



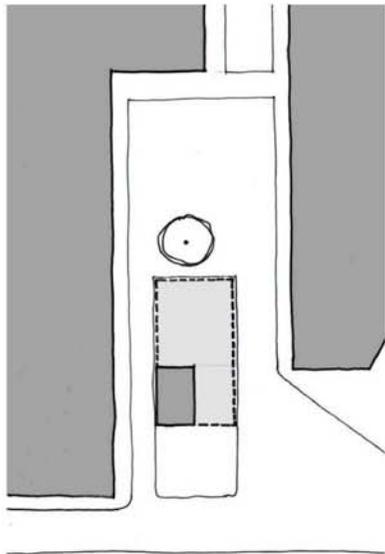
An expanded strategy of street tree planting and landscape improvements should be encouraged to provide an attractive network of pedestrian and vehicular routes. Avenue planting on main strategic roads and streets gives onto intimate lanes and alleys throughout the new network of public spaces.



'The Square' Edenbridge

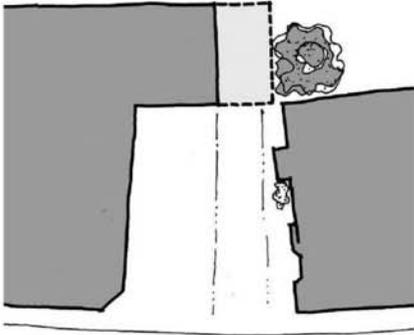


Market Place Faversham

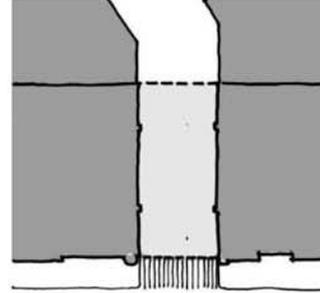


0m 10 20 30m

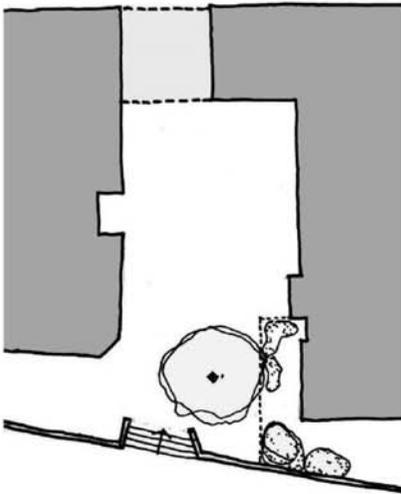
Church Yard Entrance Smarden



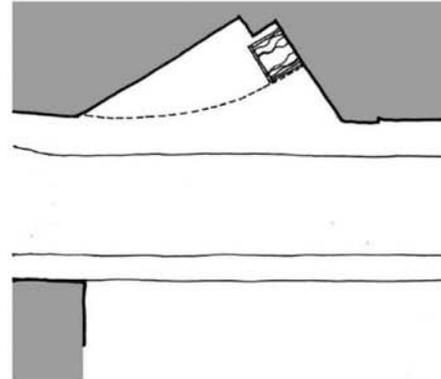
Car Park Alley Faversham



Leicester Square Penhurst



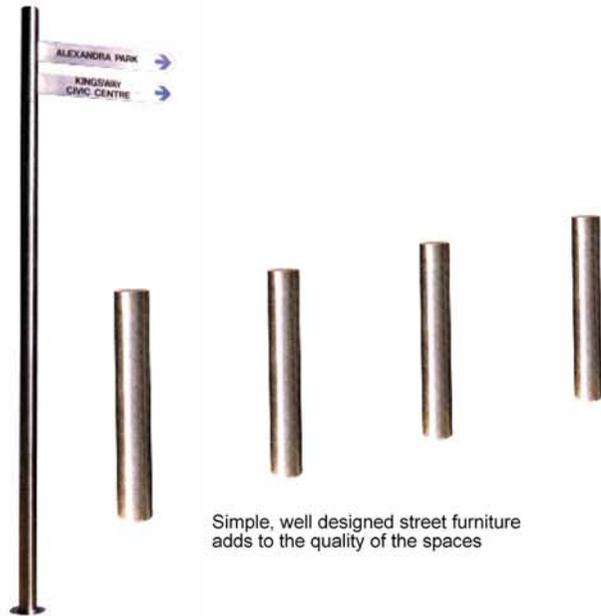
Honours Mill Edenbridge



Pedestrian and vehicle routes could be enhanced to encourage greater diversity of movement throughout the town. Key to these improvements is better connectivity between public transport nodes for pedestrians. A welcoming arrival square at the train station could lead onto green pedestrian links to new spatial 'quarters'. Public art and well designed street furniture will help to enliven the street beyond shop frontages and elevate Sittingbourne to a modern European town.



Many European cities and towns have good public art initiatives to enliven streetscape



Simple, well designed street furniture adds to the quality of the spaces



Pedestrian and cycle friendly streets in Europe

Major road infrastructure construction around Sittingbourne helps to promote the town for industry but can detract from the intimate nature of its historic centre. Avenue planting can help to 'soften' these major routes making them more pedestrian friendly and linking them to the network of green lanes and streets.

Potential Avenue Trees - Large 'forest' trees known to work well in the street environment
Plane (*Platanus acerifolia*)
Small Leaved Limes (*Tilia cordata*)
Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*)
Ash - 'Westhof's glory' (*Fraxinus excelsior*)



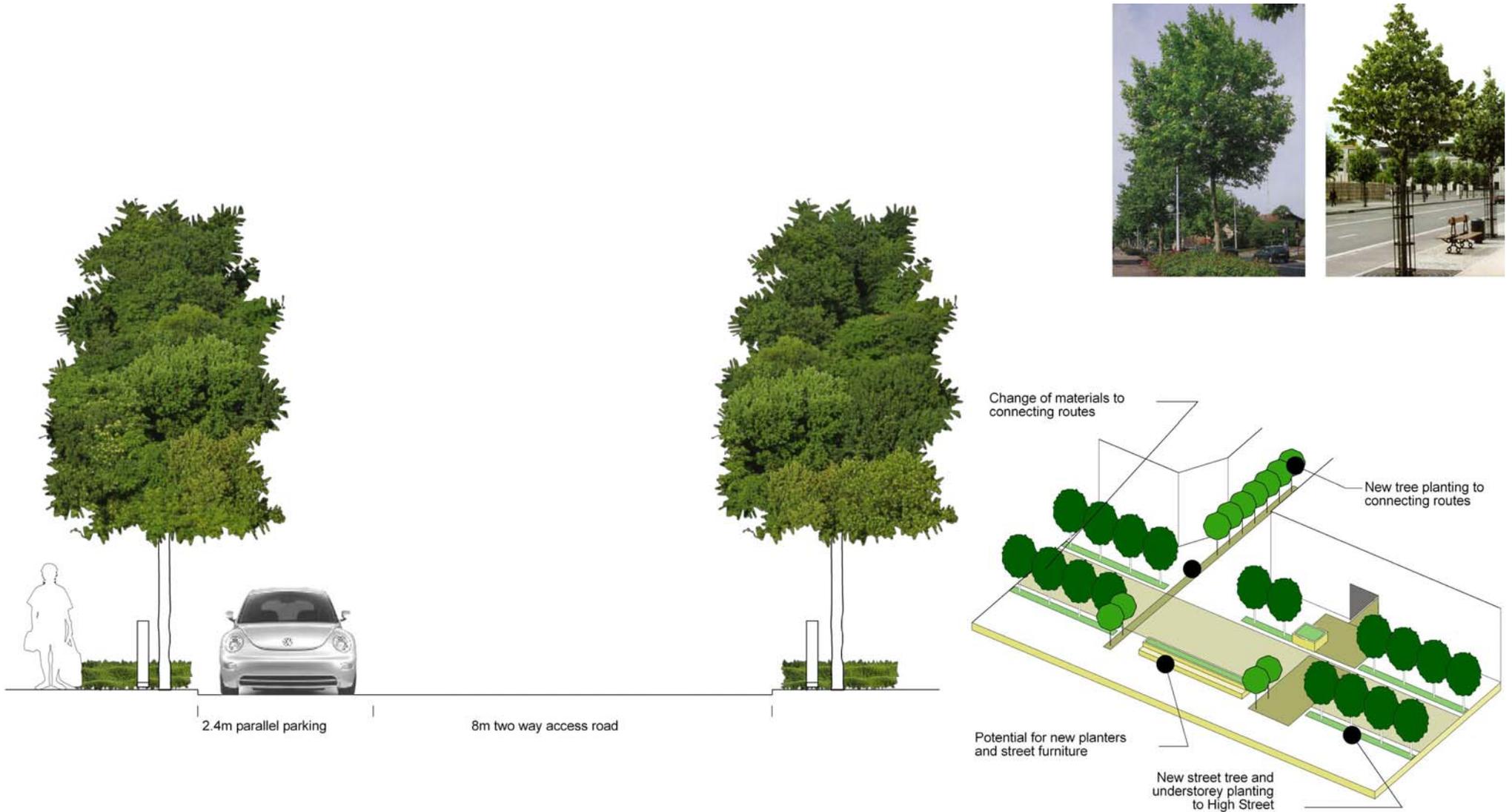
Ash



Horse Chestnuts



Street tree planting throughout the town should be increased to enhance the streetscape for residents and visitors alike. Native tree species together with understorey evergreen planting will help to create 'green' links which will also benefit wildlife and help to absorb noise and air pollution from vehicles. A variety of species would be chosen to create differing character zones.



Tree lined lanes provide a more intimate network of routes for pedestrians and vehicles. A combination of native and exotic species will provide variety of colour and form throughout the year. Lower level ground cover to road edges provides a more attractive and people-friendly way of separating road users and pedestrians.

Potential Trees for Public Spaces (Exotic species)
 A combination of ornamental 'parkland' trees and native 'forest' trees
 Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)
 Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*)
 Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharinum 'Pyramidalis'*)
 Walnut (*Juglans nigra*)
 Tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)



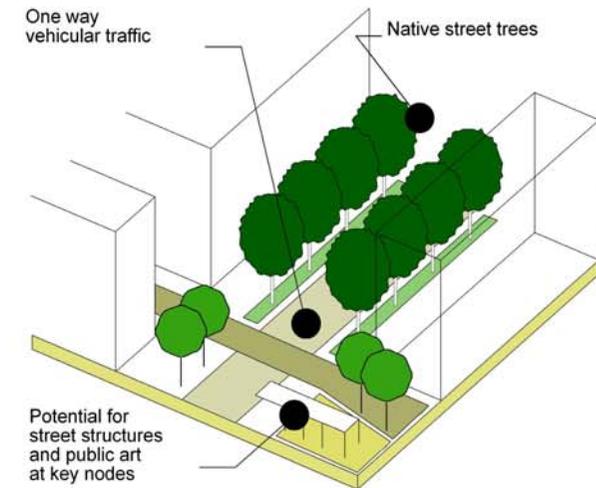
Tulip Tree



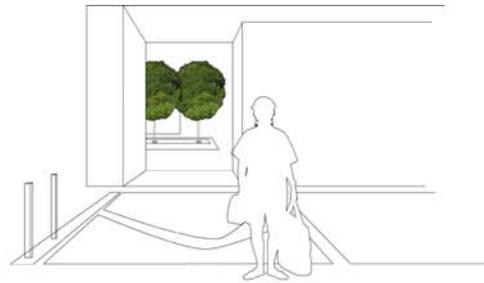
Walnut



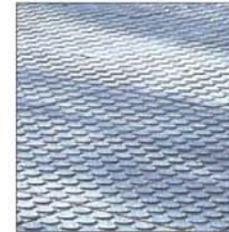
Sugar Maple



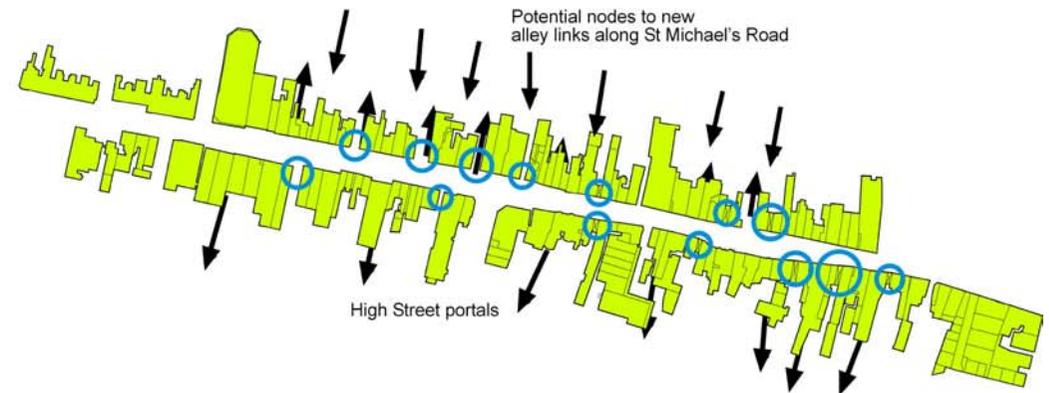
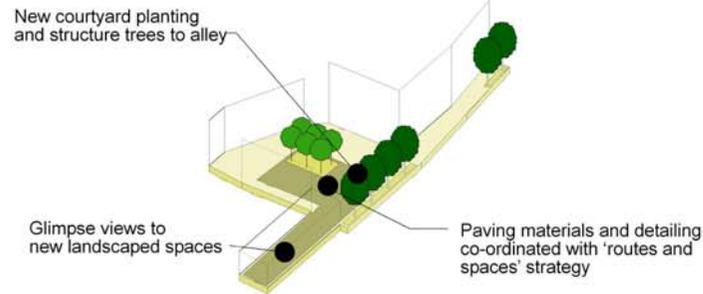
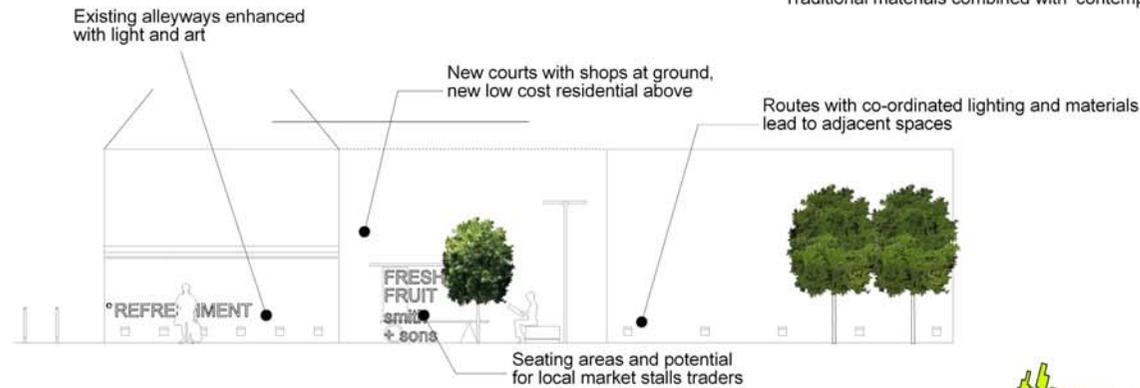
Pedestrian alleyways are abundant in the Sittingbourne historic town centre. The new masterplan strategy should aim to extend and connect this network to provide pedestrian routes throughout the town, and co-ordinate the look and feel to integrate with new spaces. Narrow, enclosed spaces open to diverse courts and mews spaces with activity throughout the day. Pedestrian safety and security is maintained by natural surveillance from new shops and residential property at higher storeys.



Material changes and glimpse views indicate new spaces beyond the High Street frontage



Traditional materials combined with 'contemporary' materials detailing



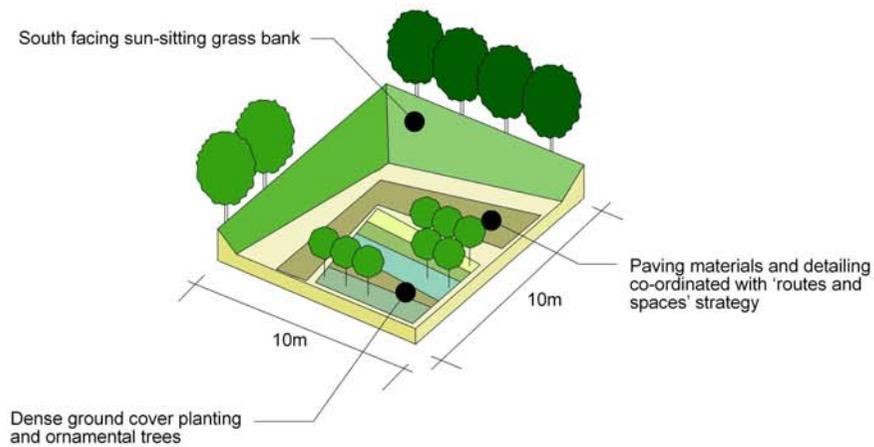
There is currently little public green space in Sittingbourne for rest and recreation. The masterplan for Sittingbourne should address these needs by creating a series of 'pocket parks' in strategic locations. Parks could be themed to correspond with the new cultural 'quarters', and relate directly to adjacent town use such as cafes and bars.



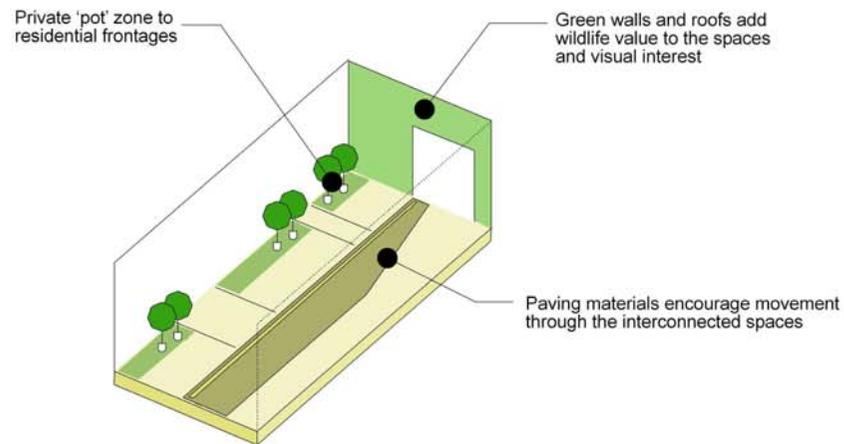
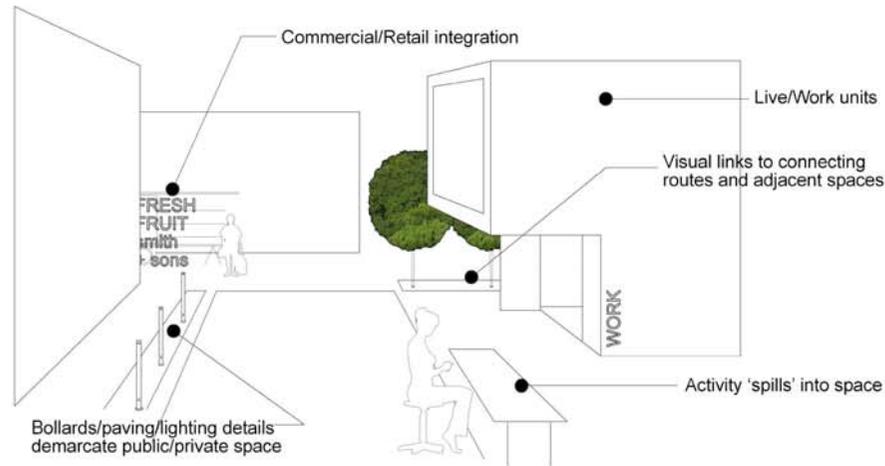
'Contemporary' architectural detailing



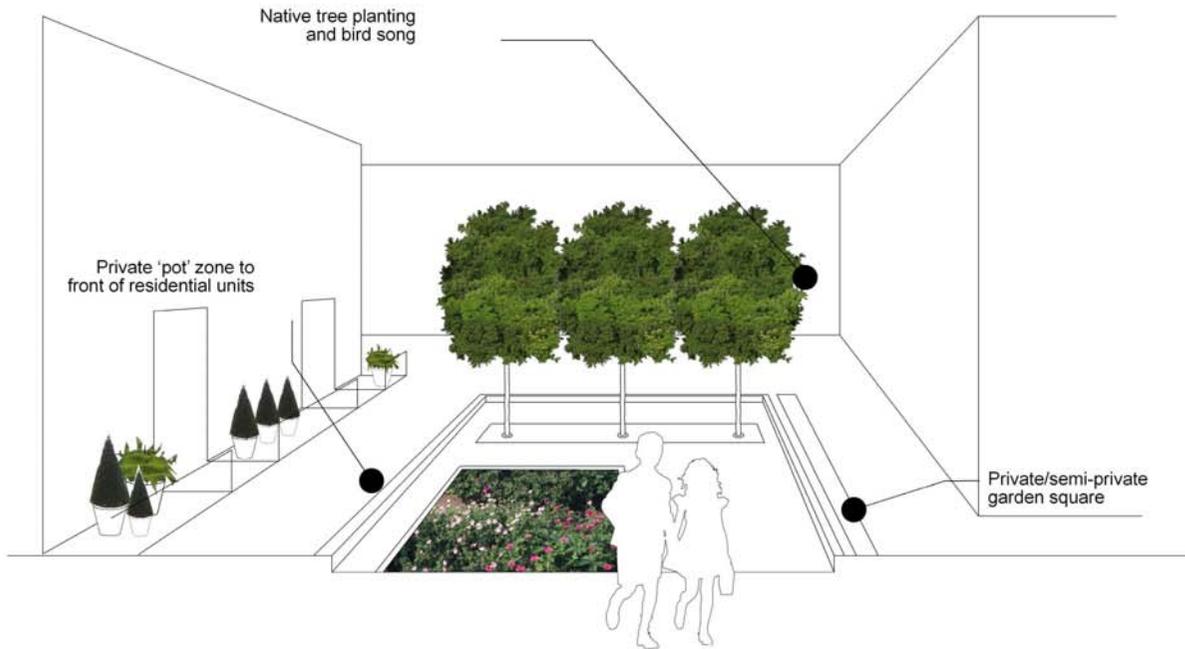
Native tree and shrub planting for wildlife value



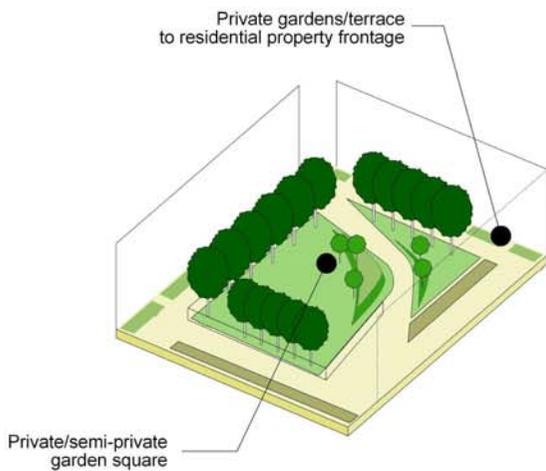
Local small scale enterprise can be encouraged by providing affordable live/work spaces which spill out onto mews and courtyards. Workshops and design studios provide interest for passers by and add to the vibrancy of the public realm.



To activate '24/7 Sittingbourne', residential units within the town centre should be encouraged. Opportunity exists to capitalise on 'above shop' accommodation and new residential development to provide life to the town, and attract associated services. Town houses located around private residential squares create a sense of enclosure and arrival.



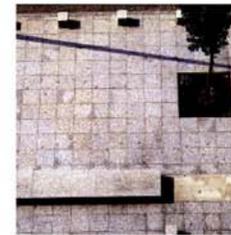
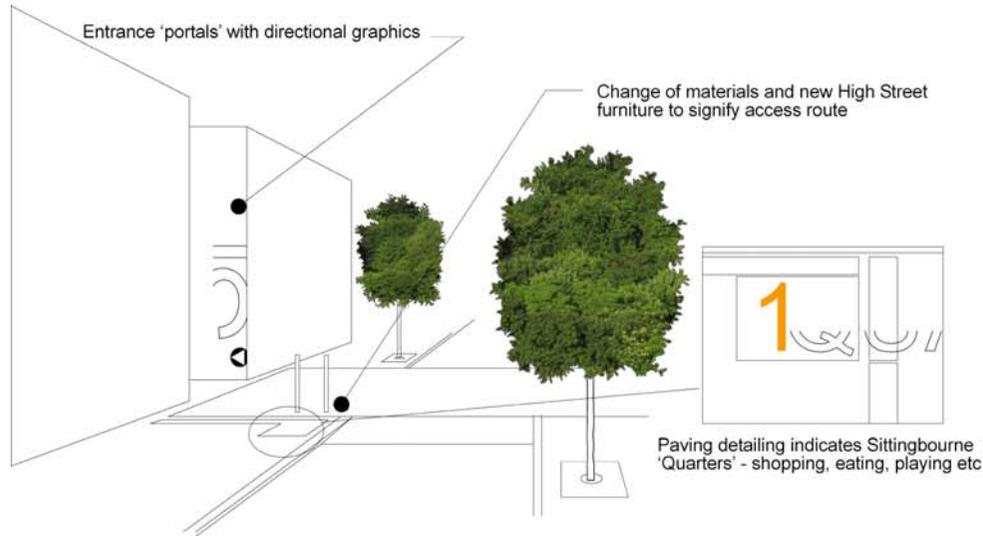
Quality materials and detailing to residential areas



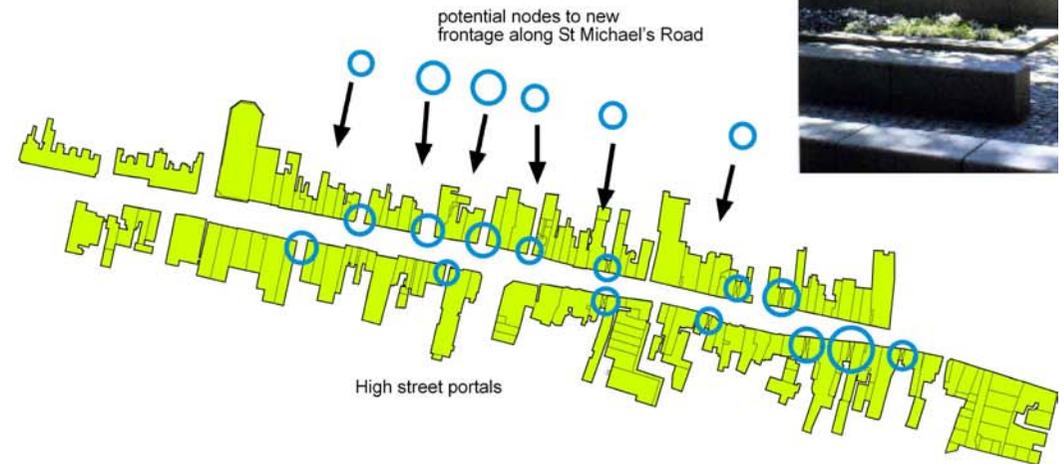
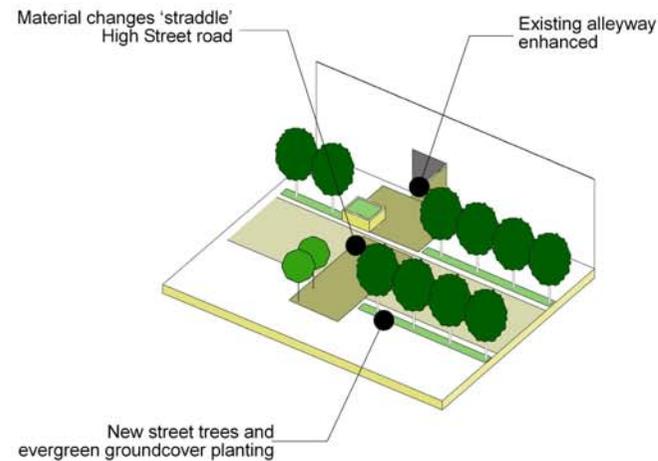
Potential new housing to railside zones

Interface areas between 'civic' zone and existing housing

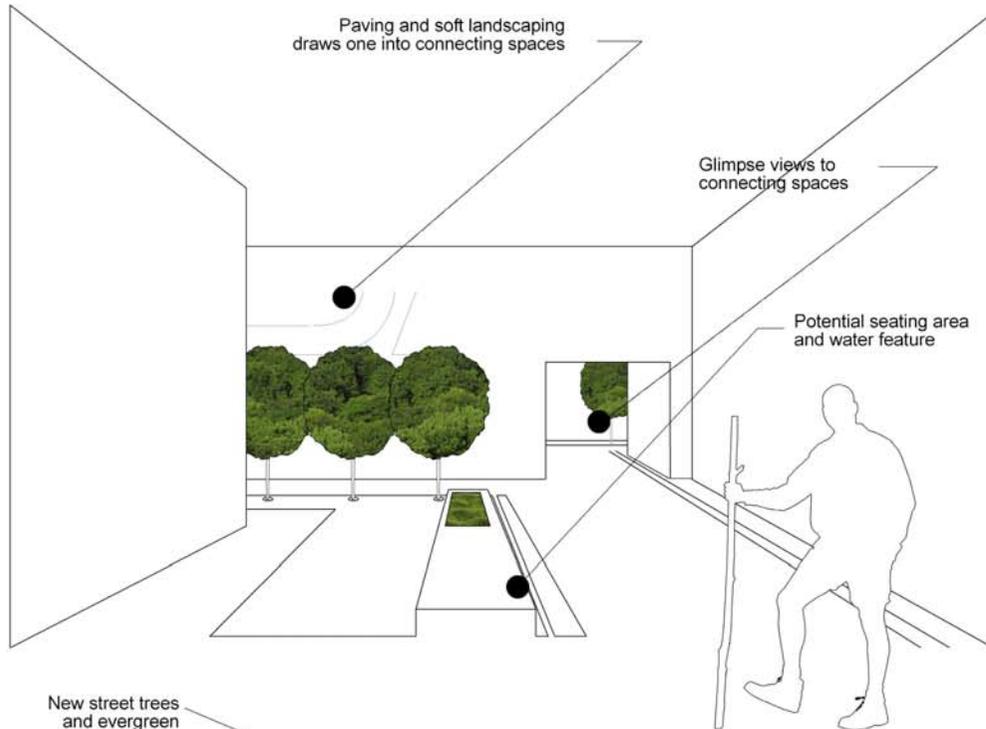
Sittingbourne High Street provides great potential for new and improved routes north and south. Existing alleyways through building blocks are currently underused and would provide the key to new development beyond the High Street. High Street improvements such as new paving and street furniture could provide signifiers to these new spaces. Glimpse views through to new spaces should provide visual interest to draw pedestrians off the High Street and into new retail and commercial spaces.



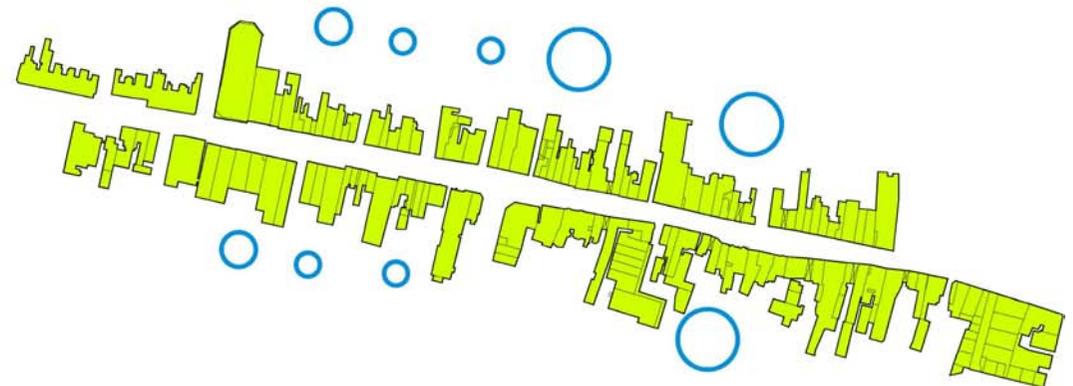
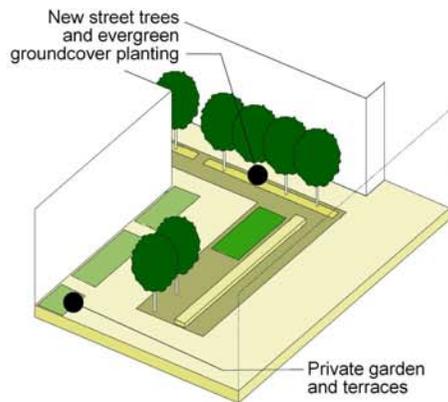
'Contemporary' materials and detailing can complement the historic High Street



Linked from the High Street by Alleyways and High Street Portals, spaces identified as courts complete the chain of interlinking pedestrian zones. The court is defined by its intimate scale and integration of public and private zones. The court is connected to linked spaces through visual glimpses, reinforced by paving and soft landscaping suggesting movement through the space. Street furniture simultaneously invites you to stop, rest and use the court as an external meeting place.



Co-ordinated street furniture connecting routes





Existing



Proposed



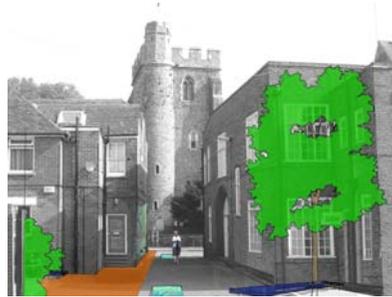
Existing



Proposed



Existing



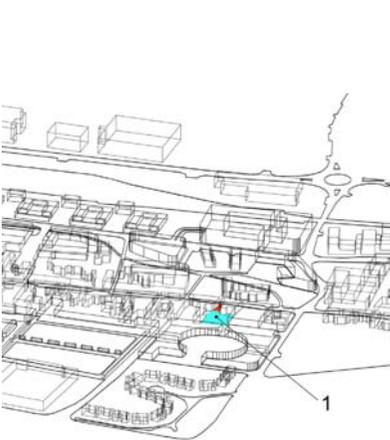
Proposed



Existing

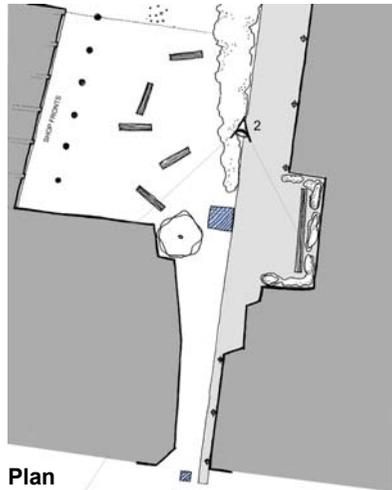


Proposed



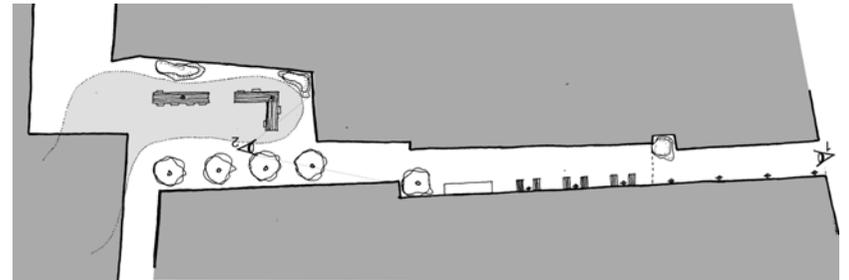
Location

Portal with Court



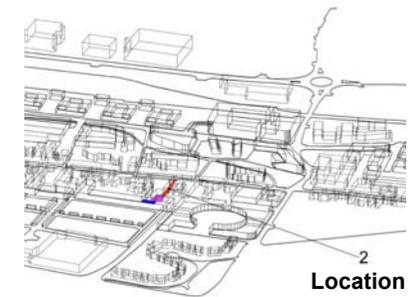
Plan

HIGH STREET



Plan

Alley with Live Work Mews

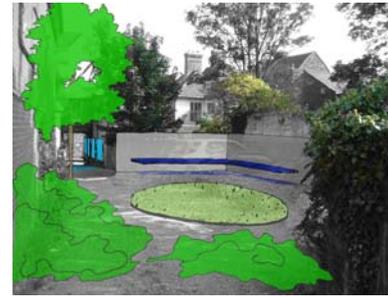


Location

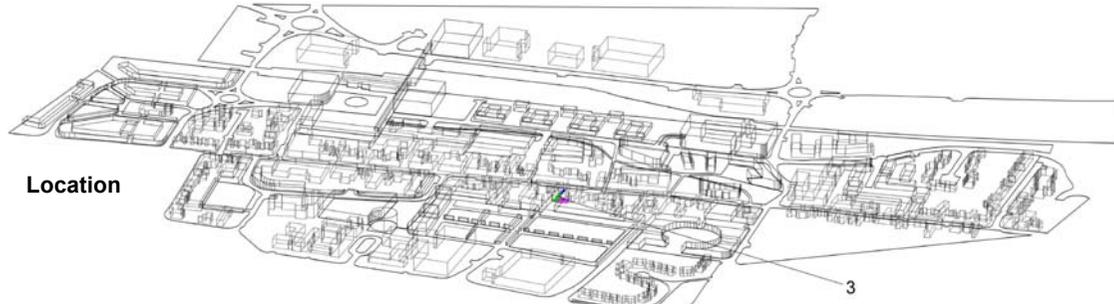
Alley with Pocket Park



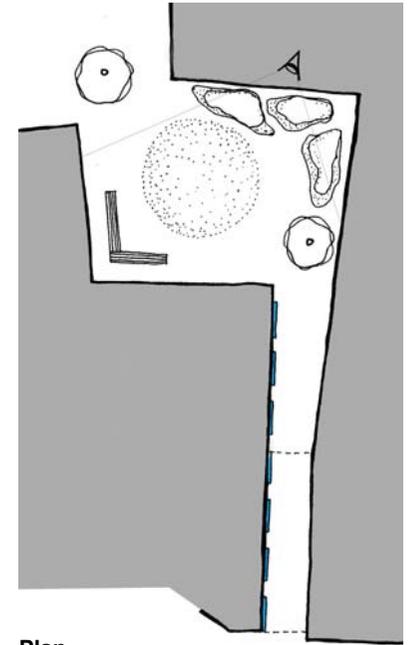
Existing



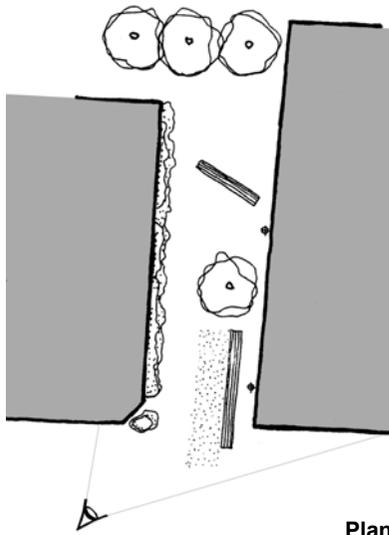
Proposed



Location



Plan



Plan

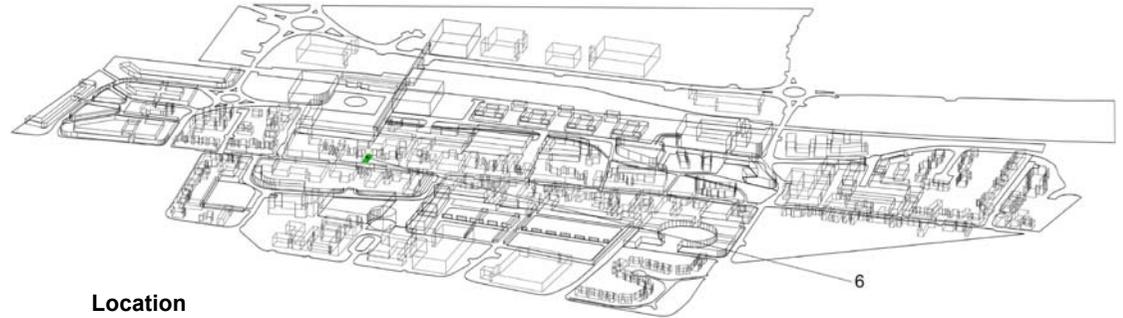


Existing



Proposed

Portal to Residential Square



Location



SITTINGBOURNE IS CHANGING

MORE PEOPLE
On current trends between 1991 and 2009 the town will have grown by a third

INDUSTRY
The type of jobs are changing with more small businesses, higher skilled jobs and more diversification

TRAFFIC
Car ownership is increasing and there is more heavy transport going to the industrial areas

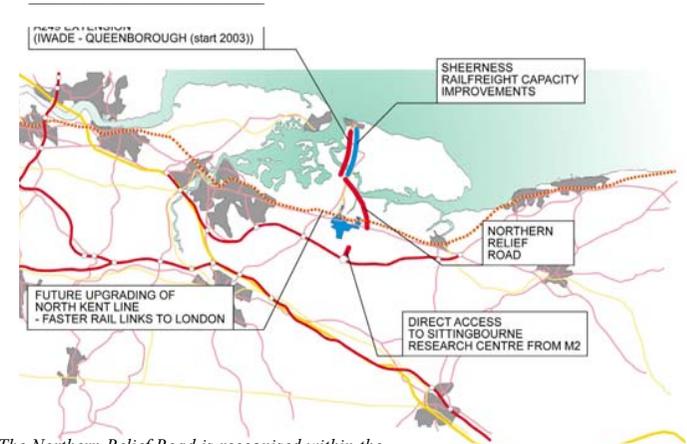
Intelligence is growing, large numbers of new houses are being built, and that industrial development on the Swale is going from strength to strength, now it is time for the town centre to catch up. This may mean that there are no vacant, unoccupied shops in Sittingbourne's future, which could look like a sea, sea or heavily used town centre. To the Central Management and Design through Council have produced a 'Vision'.

Stick to the first phase, we want your views before moving to a more detailed Phase Two study. Please have a look at our proposals and let us know what you like about it, what you don't like and how you think it should be improved. Thank you for your views.

Recent article in the East Kent Gazette: Come and see THE VISION and give us your thoughts.

Have your say on the way you see the town changing

DROP-IN SHOP 6&7th DECEMBER BELL SHOPPING CENTRE



The Northern Relief Road is recognised within the Regional Transport Plan, but until it is built there can be no relief in the already congested industrial areas or the town centre.

Executive Summary

Sittingbourne has reached a significant watershed in its development, having grown as a diversified centre for manufacturing and distribution combined with rapid population expansion during the 1990's, it now faces the further capacity challenges of the Thames Gateway sub-regional regeneration initiative.

There is an awareness that the town centre has not 'kept pace' with recent expansion in providing the expected facilities for the area's increasing population and workforce, but how should it respond?

"We want to be pro-active and encourage new proposals which respond to what we believe is best for the town, not always being on the 'back foot' responding to each individual proposal that comes in, as we have in the past. This is what the VISION will give us."

*Peter Blundell - Chairman
Sittingbourne Town Centre Management Group*

The Vision must be both imaginative and practical to achieve the full development potential, but as it was done without any particular commercial scheme in mind it must be seen as a vehicle for encouraging appropriate development. Whilst the concepts proposed must be visionary and exciting, regard must be given to deliverability. The integration of planning and design issues will be critical in

achieving cost-effective solutions with appropriate phasing. The proposals examine strategies for investment in appropriate uses and phases which reflect the ability of the Local Authority to deliver infrastructure to meet the needs of the potential developments. While some can be carried out immediately, the study has shown that there is no prospect of the planned developments funding all of the highway improvements necessary, specifically in relation to the Northern Relief Route and in particular to the Northern Distributor Road as it crosses Milton Creek.

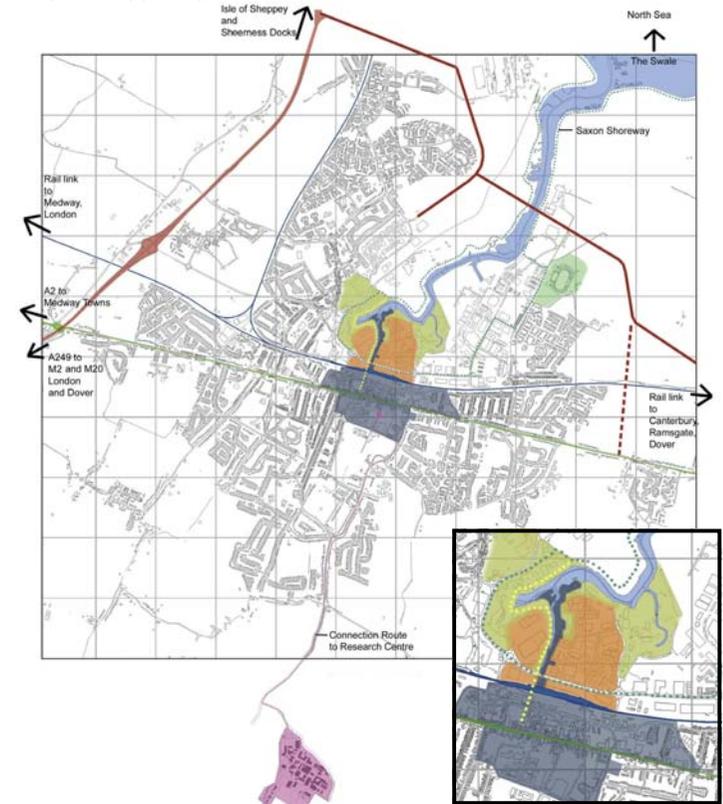
The Vision for Sittingbourne needs to respond at many levels, from qualitative issues of character and design, increased density and mixed use, pedestrian movement and transport, through to jobs, community and social pressures.

Major highway and shopping changes adversely affect the way locals and visitors view or use the centre and new people moving here dismiss it in preference to other more attractive shopping areas. The situation can only deteriorate unless a strategy for change is adopted.

This study both begins the preparation of that strategy and provides the opportunity for Sittingbourne to create a centre receptive to change and responsive to the needs of local people and commerce.

Consultation

Over 300 people attended the High Street drop-in workshops, many taking time to fill in relatively detailed comments in the record book, and even more commenting at the library exhibition. Despite scepticism when the stage one report was published, the response from teenagers was excellent.



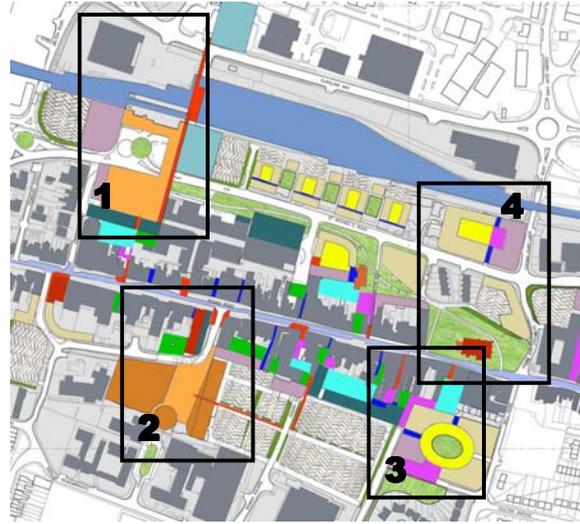


Approaching the town from the East



Approaching the town from the West

The consultation exercise brought home the importance of people's first thoughts of the town. The objective of the VISION is to reverse the impression of a town turned in on itself (eg the impression given when arriving at the station or driving St Michael's Road) and drab and/or confusing points of arrival. Connections to the station, the existing retail at Mill Way, other areas north of the railway line, and ultimately to Milton Creek are important, as are the connections around the town.



Typical 'Quarters of the town' which give identity and contribute to the structured development of the town.

- 1 The Station and Forum Square - Retail
- 2 Civic Square - Institutional/Commercial
- 3 Bell Road- Residential/Commercial
- 4 Crown Quay Lane - Retail/Commercial



The old hierarchy of lanes and passages should be re-inforced and used as links to new developments in the areas behind the High Street.

Methodology

We have approached the problem from a 'Built Environment' standpoint, considering that if the proposals appear to work initially in townscape terms, we would then look at the implications in consideration of any 'Urban Capacity' work which might be undertaken by others to gauge the appropriateness of building types, uses and densities.

Developments have to be commercially viable investments; but resources cannot be squandered on the first scheme that shows an interest, without regard to its overall impact on the regeneration of the town.

The major difficulty is that the primary blocks on development of the centre are infrastructure:

- The yet to be built Northern Relief Road
- Crown Quay Lane and Milton Road Railway bridges.

They effectively ensure that excessive amounts of traffic still use St Michael's Road and blight the potential use of the land between the High Street and the railway.

There are opportunities to develop the scarce resources that the town has; such as Milton Creek; and the link to Milton Regis which, if the quality of the environment is correct could lead to a revitalisation of the town from the centre, not around the periphery on greenfield sites.

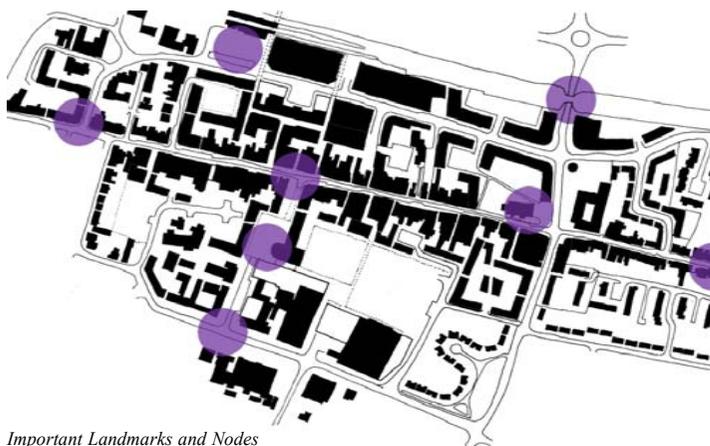
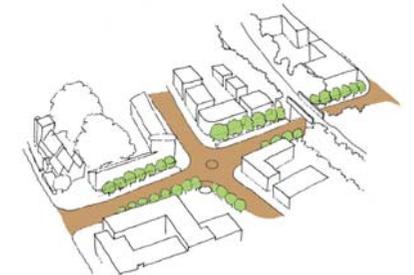
The use of the creek as a flooded basin by the introduction of lock gates and a simple lifting bridge would remove the need for an expensive bridge to clear the navigation route. The opportunities for waterside development are extensive and well proven locally and across the country. These may be sufficient to fund the alterations to the railway arches.

Building on backland sites cannot progress until decisions about efficient use of car parks have been made. The use of the land to the north of the railway for commuter parking and the development of the existing station parking into a more intensive use such as retail or leisure with parking over, all linked to the town (possibly

with walkways over the tracks and from St Michael's Road to the Forum) would lead the way to opening up that land. The full potential would, however, not be realised until St Michael's Road was reduced in traffic terms by directing vehicles onto Eurolink Way.

The introduction of more mixed residential properties right in the heart of the town with easy access to all facilities and services would, we believe, be attractive to young as well as elderly residents rather than living at considerable distances from the town. This would also add to the 'out-of-hours' vitality of the centre.

Finally East and West Streets cannot be seen as purely traffic problems. They are important gateways to the town and require special consideration in terms of traffic movement and scale and type of development.



Important Landmarks and Nodes

A clear hierarchy of spaces should be defined for Sittingbourne building on the grain of the historic town centre. A town square located within a 'civic quarter' provides the main focus for the town. A green network of street planting radiates from this focus, connecting new courts, live/work mews and public courts, live/work mews and public green spaces (pocket parks).

An expanded strategy of street tree planting and landscape improvements should be encouraged to provide an attractive network of pedestrian and vehicular routes.

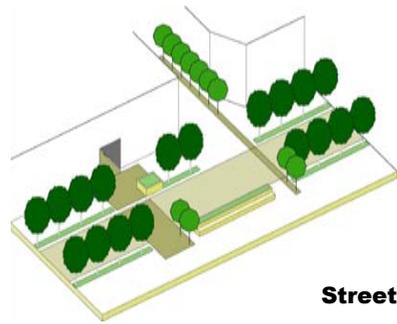
Key to these improvements is better connectivity between public transport nodes for pedestrians. A welcoming arrival square at the train station could lead onto green pedestrian links to new spatial 'quarters'. Public art and well designed street furniture will help to enliven the street beyond shop frontages and elevate Sittingbourne to a modern European town.

Pedestrian alleyways are abundant in the Sittingbourne historic town centre. The new vision should aim to extend and connect this network. Pedestrian safety and security is maintained by natural surveillance from new shops and residential property at higher storeys.

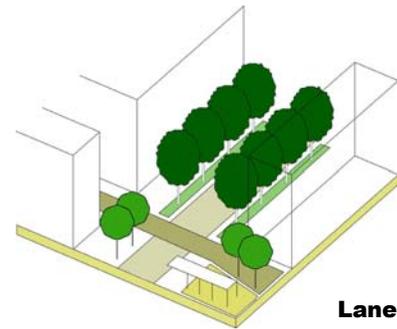
Pocket Parks could be themed to correspond with the new cultural 'quarters', and relate directly to adjacent town use such as cafes and bars.

To activate '24/7 Sittingbourne', residential units within the town centre should be encouraged. Opportunity exists to capitalise on 'above shop' accommodation and new residential development to provide life to the town, and attracting associated services. Town houses located around private residential squares provide another spatial typology to the linked routes

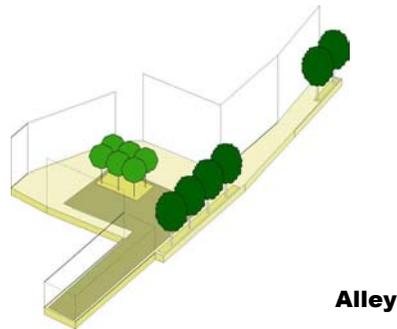
Sittingbourne High Street provides great potential for new and improved routes north and south. Existing alleyways through building blocks are currently underused and would provide the key to new development beyond the High Street. Glimpse views through to new spaces should provide visual interest to draw pedestrians off the High Street and into new retail and commercial spaces.



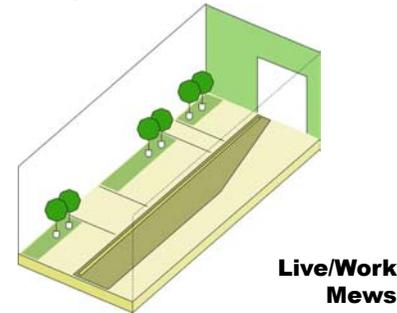
Street



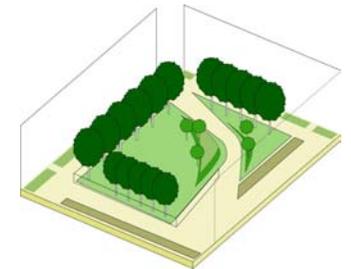
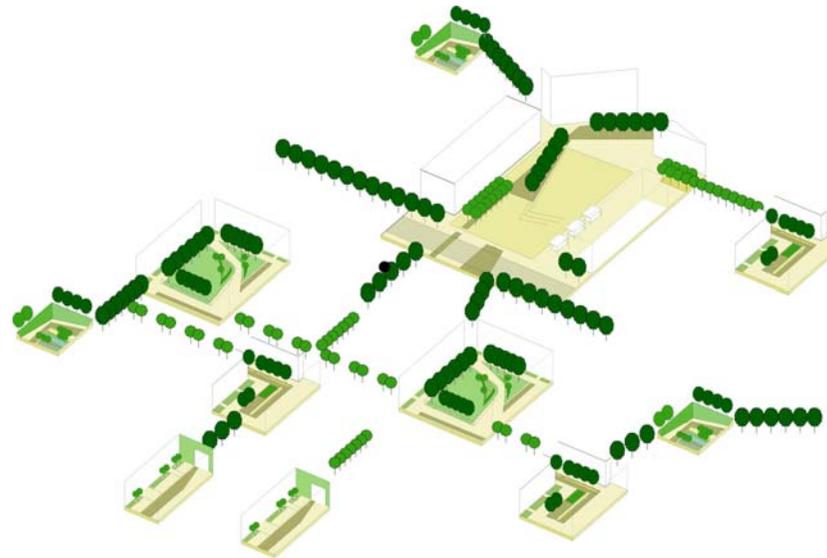
Lane



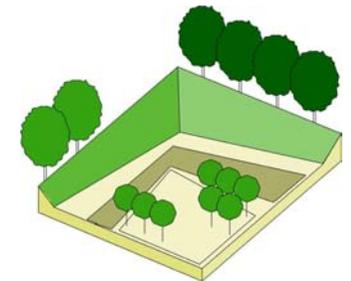
Alley



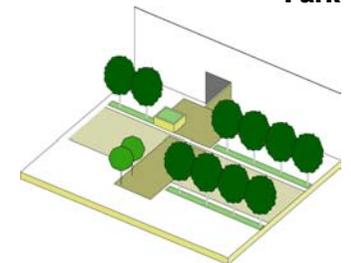
Live/Work Mews



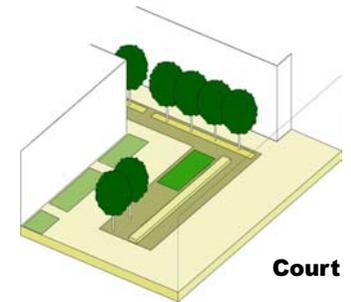
Residential Square



Pocket Park



High St Portal



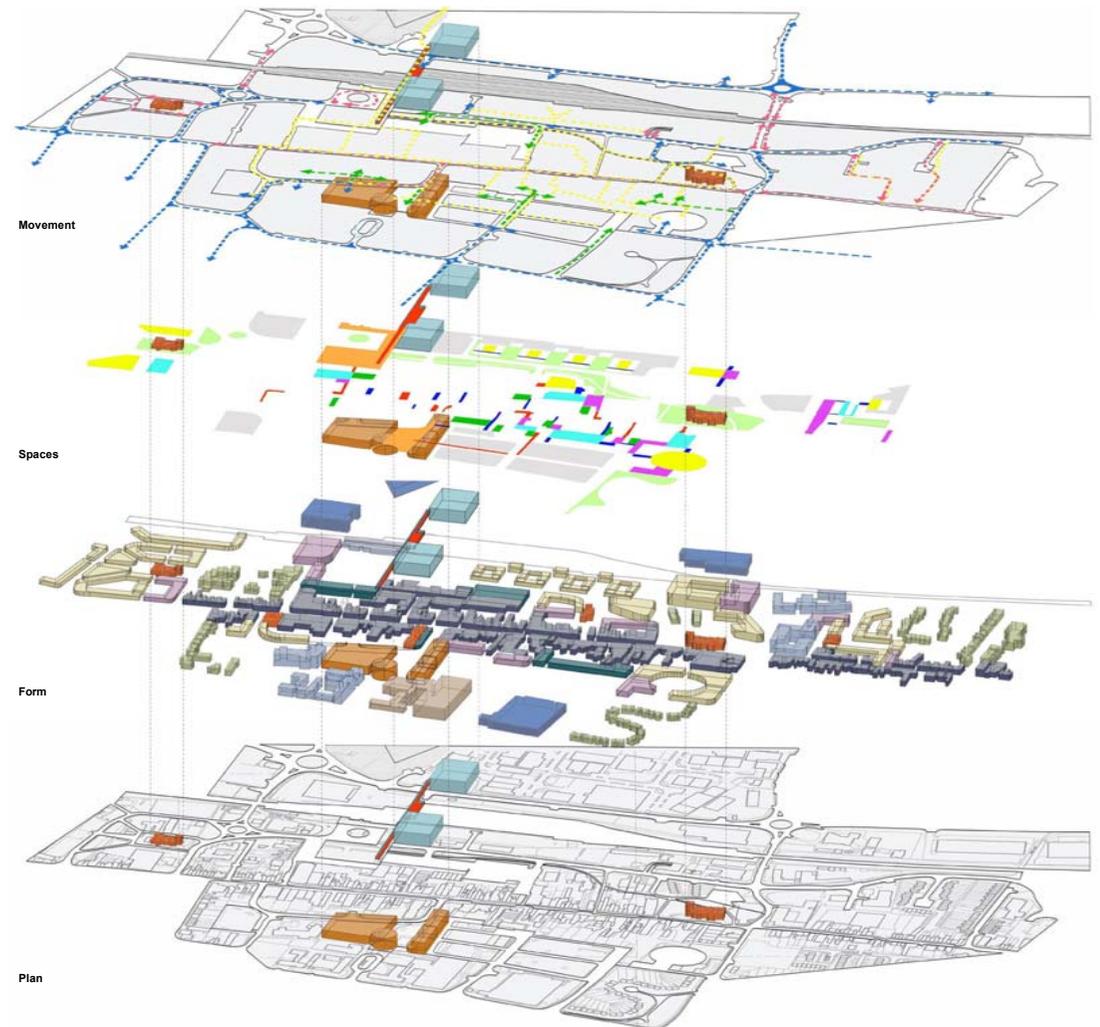
Court



The scale of the town can be enhanced by new buildings which reflect the scale and vibrant mix of the old town. The centre needs to be alive at night and more housing should be encouraged. There is a need for housing for singles, young couples and the elderly who would benefit from easy access to shops and services and support of out-of-hours facilities. The presence of more people has been proved to reduce vandalism. Improved lighting and landscaping would add to the 'feel safe factor' which would encourage the evening economy. In proposing a new Vision, we need to understand the various layers that have built up over the years which define the town's character. Understanding these layers allows us to extend the natural grain of the town in a structured way which complements the existing townscape and binds new development into the framework of the old in a more homogeneous way.

KEY

Existing Built Environment	Proposed Built Environment	Open Spaces
High Street	Proposed Residential	Public Square
Existing Residential	Proposed Retail	Car Park
Existing Civic/Commercial	Proposed Office	Public Park
Existing Leisure	Proposed Culture/Leisure Centre	Residential Square
Existing Large Scale Retail	Proposed Multi-Storey Carpark	Court
Retail Park	Proposed Pedestrian Bridge	Portal
Church	Two-way traffic	Alley
	One-way traffic	Pocket Park
	Service route	Live/Work Mews
	Pedestrian movement	



The very dominant linear form defined by the original ribbon development of the High Street has now reached the limit of its expansion to East and West Streets. These are now developing their own character and act as bookends which re-inforce the limits of the town centre. Expansion is therefore more suited to the North and South of the High Street. These areas are quite different in character. The extent of development to the South of the High Street is already well defined by the Avenue of

Remembrance, the school and the residential areas beyond, which need to feed into this side of the town.

The North however extends in concentric circles beyond St Michael's Road, the Railway, Sittingbourne Industrial Park and ultimately to Milton Creek. It is easier, therefore, to assume that the major opportunity exists to the North of the town as this is also where most damage has been done in the past and where most traffic problems exist at present.

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