



Luton Town Centre

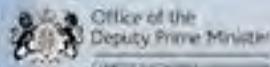
Development Framework



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THE LUTON GROWTH PLAN



Foreword

Foreword

This document presents a vision and development strategy to guide investment and activity in Luton town centre over the next ten years and beyond. The document is intended to provide a framework to manage, guide and target change and inspire action to drive forward the process of rejuvenating Luton town centre.

Consultation and engagement with key stakeholders, investors and the people who use, work, shop and live in the town centre has been critical in shaping the Development Framework. It is hoped that the document will therefore provide a firm foundation for raising the status and profile of Luton, guiding investment and maximising opportunity.





Introduction

1 Introduction

Luton Borough Council (LBC) and its partners English Partnerships (EP), East of England Development Agency (EEDA) and the Government Office for the East of England (Go-East) commissioned a team led by David Lock Associates (DLA) to prepare the Luton Town Centre Development Framework in January 2004. The DLA team comprised:

- Integrated Transport Planning (ITP) advising on transportation;
- Urbancanda advising on public consultation; and
- Camargue advising on communications.

Edna Read provided advice on a public arts strategy and CBRE, separately retained by LBC, provided advice on property demand and implementation structures. During the course of the project an extensive public consultation exercise was undertaken and meetings held with major landowners, developers and other key stakeholders. There is widespread acceptance that change is both inevitable and desirable.

What is a Development Framework?

The Development Framework will help LBC and/or any dedicated delivery vehicle shape the pressures and changes upon the town centre to support its commercial, social and economic regeneration objectives. The Implementation Programme summarises the anticipated changes in the town centre. In short, the Development Framework aims to make Luton a vibrant and attractive place for those living and working here, as well as encouraging more people to invest and visit the town. The Development Framework provides an overall vision for the town centre and increases certainty for all users, developers and LBC & its partners about what the town centre needs. Importantly, it demonstrates that Luton can make a positive contribution to the growth and sustainability objectives of the Milton Keynes & South Midlands Sub-regional strategy (MKSM). The Development Framework clearly identifies the strategic drivers of change and how these can be translated into action at the detailed level through action plans for specific areas of change.



Capitalising on the Drivers of Change

Luton is at a pivotal point in its development. The Development Framework seeks to capitalise upon Luton's inherent locational advantages, impending changes in the sub-region and the exceptional level of committed government funding for transportation infrastructure. Luton is at the heart of planned growth in the sub-region. The town's economic base has robustly diversified in the face of decline in its traditional industries. Vauxhall ceased car production in 2002 and are now bringing forward major development proposals to regenerate that sector of the town with a mixed use development. Further investment in the strategic transportation system is planned – the M1 will be widened, the Thameslink rail line is being improved and London Luton Airport is preparing a Masterplan to guide its continued expansion.

The challenge is for the town centre to improve its attractiveness to take advantage of these improvements in accessibility and ensure that more of its existing residents and those who will come to live in and around the town in future will use the town centre for their retail and services needs. Many of the towns in the vicinity are also planning improvements to their town centres: in a competitive retail environment Luton has no option but to invest and remodel itself just to maintain its position in the hierarchy. The potential for leakage of potential expenditure from Luton's retail catchment area is exacerbated by peripheral location of the town centre in relation to the rest of the conurbation. Both geography and the communications network conspire to make it easy to use other centres.

Luton's civic leaders have shown themselves willing to take up this challenge and the spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation found in the town provides a sound basis for action. This is mirrored by strong developer interest in development opportunities. There is every chance that Luton and its partner authorities will be successful in their ambitions for an Urban Development Corporation (UDC). Such a delivery vehicle would give added impetus to private sector investment and give direct access to central government funding. There can be no doubt that a UDC would both accelerate the current pressures for investment and optimise the town's contribution to the practical delivery of the ODPM's Communities Plan.

The Development Framework seeks to secure the role for the town centre identified in the Milton Keynes and South Midlands surrounding sub-regional strategy.



Milton Keynes & South Midlands sub-regional strategy

The purpose of the MKSM study was to give definition to an area that is currently not identified in the regional planning context. The study identifies a region which has the potential to grow and significantly increase its current performance. Various growth strategies were tested devised by the study. The preferred option seeks to develop the area through urban concentrations and corridors, focusing on five major conurbations:

- Bedford
- Kettering/Wellingborough/Corby
- Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis and now likely to include Leighton Linslade
- Milton Keynes
- Northampton

The option proposes to focus economic growth around centres which have been identified as areas as potential engines for growth or in need of regeneration. The option offers a balance between the location of jobs and workers, and proposes significant improvements to public transport. Luton is an area which has been singled out within the region, RPG 9 has identified Luton as one of the priority areas within the region to undergo economic regeneration. It also points out that the current performance of Luton town centre does not contribute towards sustainable development, nor does it make best use of resources including the land and the people.

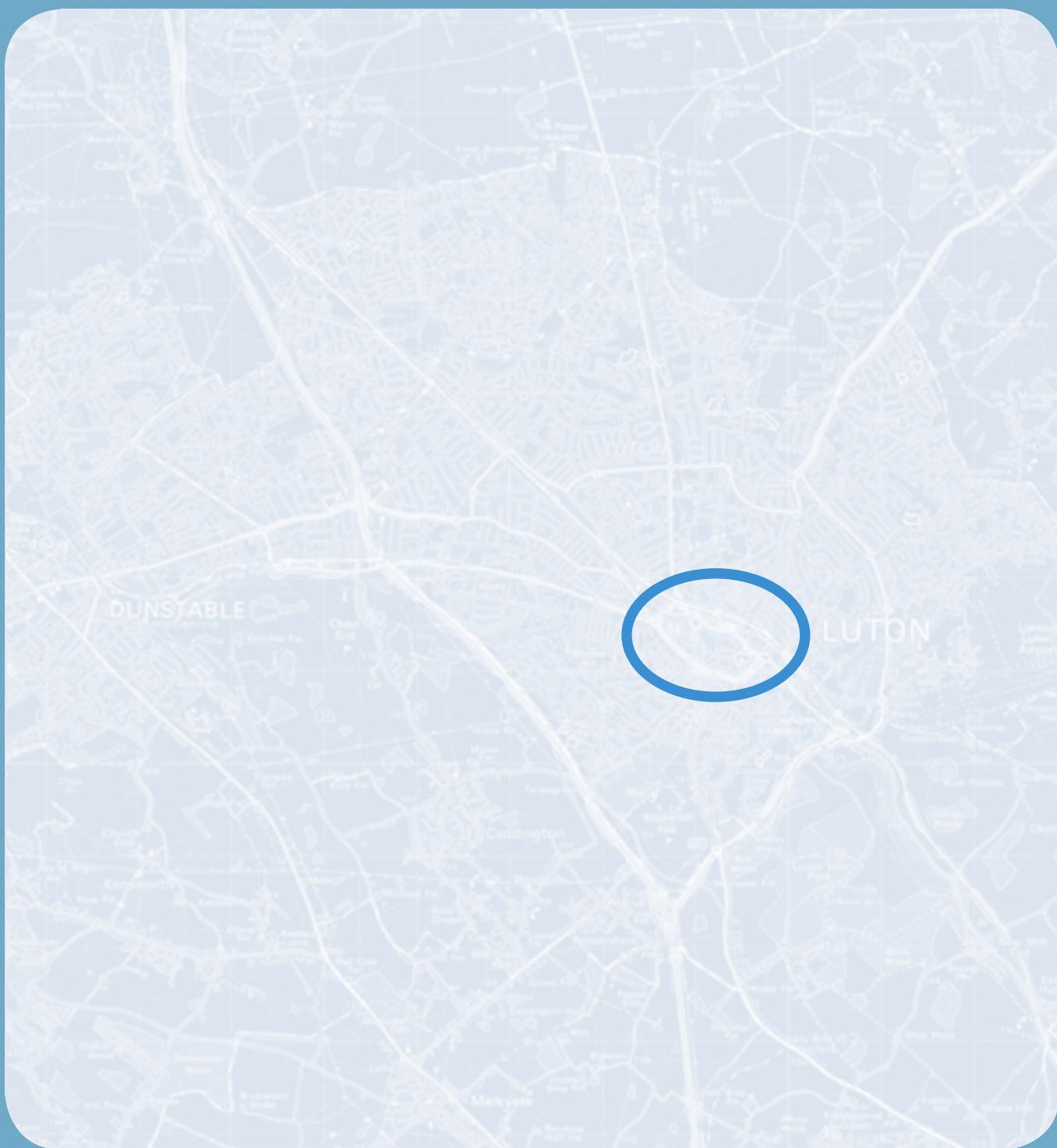
In recent decades the population of Luton has significantly risen, yet town centre development has failed to respond to this population increase. Subsequently, the pressures that have been placed on the area have resulted in an inefficient and unsustainable urban centre. Despite its growth Luton also contains areas with significant deprivation and social exclusion. Luton has not exploited its geographical location, including its close proximity to Central London and the sophisticated infrastructure

that supports the city. Land supply constraints have exacerbated this. The settlement is surrounded by the Metropolitan Green Belt and the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty, peripheral growth can only be achieved by the release of Green Belt land.

In the preferred option there are strategic proposals to redevelop the infrastructure around Luton. This is intended to improve the image of the area and improve both the accessibility of the Luton area and the mobility of its population. Proposals include:

- widening of the M1 through Luton;
- construction of the Northern Luton Bypass;
- implementation of the Translink scheme, which will operate between Luton and Houghton Regis, there are proposals already in place to expand the catchments area of the service to include stops at London Luton Airport, Leighton Buzzard and Milton Keynes
- expansion of London Luton Airport to accommodate 30 million passengers in the next thirty years.

The preferred option also proposes to expand Luton towards the north west and the south east, this would be consistent with the Translink proposals, and the south eastern expansion would be complementary to the regeneration of the town centre. The option would involve expanding Luton into an adjoining district, which would result in the urbanisation of 800 – 1000 hectares of Green Belt. The loss of Green Belt is to be weighed against the cost of regeneration to both Luton town centre and the wider sub-region, bearing in mind that without the revival of the local economy stagnant growth rates and a continuous loss of population would be evident. It is envisaged that this strategic approach will attract new businesses and residents wanting to locate in a sustainable settlement that has a highly sophisticated infrastructure with efficient connections to the remainder of the sub-region and Central London.



Background

2 Background and Analysis

The Development Framework has been prepared following an analysis of the key factors influencing the town centre. These are:

- Policy Framework;
- Property Market Assessment;
- Opportunity Areas;
- Transportation; and
- Urban Design issues.

An Issues and Priorities Report was produced in March 2004 which detailed the findings of this analysis. A summary is provided here together with a summary of the key messages that have been used to develop the draft framework.

Policy Framework

The Luton Borough Local Plan (adopted 1997) provides the current statutory guidance for the town centre. However, the proposals set out in this Development Framework will be worked up in the context of the Replacement Luton Borough Local Plan 2001 – 2011 which establishes some key objectives for the town centre:

- Luton has become a thriving multifunctional centre, which provides important shopping, and entertainment facilities, transport interchanges and employment opportunities, whilst also fulfilling leisure, recreation and educational roles. The town centre should be an attractive and accessible place to visit, with key sites being enhanced to provide facilities for the wider community to enjoy.

- The local plan envisages a conurbation with a balance of uses that add vitality and viability to the town centre during the day and night. It is essential that the town centre retains its retail core and current policies are in place to ensure that ground floor uses are predominantly reserved for retail. Leisure facilities, such as bars, restaurants and cafes could be promoted as successful ground floor uses as they add to the evening vitality of the town and retain active frontages.
- Accessibility and mobility are at the heart of the LBC's policy. It is essential that any new development is permeable and provides convenient and attractive routes for pedestrians throughout the day and night. Short stay parking should be maintained incorporated into the development as it contributes to the vitality of the town centre.
- Development of the retail core should include integration of the Arndale Centre into the rest of the town in order to increase its attractiveness and convenience for shoppers, whilst optimising the surrounding facilities, including those provided for public transport. The external appearance of the shopping centre should be enhanced and successfully contribute to the appearance of the public realm.
- Proposals for the surrounding area and cultural quarter should respect and enhance the Panteers Lea Conservation Area. The following uses could be successfully incorporated into the scheme. Small scale office and industrial units; student/ single person residential accommodation or small scale arts and leisure facilities (including restaurants and nightclubs) could be provided on the upper floors.

- The Council's vision is for Luton to be an attractive focal point, which is accessible to the wider community, and is utilised both efficiently and effectively. New development should create new spaces and places and enhance the townscape and skyline of the town centre whilst complementing the local context.
- Luton has the potential to increase its image as a vibrant area, current strategies are in place to widen the M1 and to construct the Luton Northern Bypass, and these improvements to infrastructure should amplify the areas strategic location and proximity to London.

Property Market Assessment

CBRE have undertaken a property market assessment for the town centre. Their key conclusions are summarised below.

- Luton has a thriving retail sector; current rental levels within the Arndale Centre reflect a strong demand for space. The centre itself is dated, aesthetically lagging and does not contribute successfully to the public realm. Importantly there is potential for increased comparison and convenience goods retailing.
- The adjacent and surrounding areas do not perform to the same standard, these locations suffer from a poor retail range and there is a significant number of vacant outlets, rental values in these areas are significantly lower than those in the Arndale Centre. The integration of the Arndale centre along with improvements to the public realm will increase the vitality and viability of the area whilst broadening the centre's retail base by attracting middle market, convenience and comparison tenants.

- Luton experiences intense competition from other neighbouring retail centres, especially as they are themselves developing and expanding. It is essential that Luton fulfils its retail potential in order to remain attractive and to compete with other centres.
- The available office space is poor and lacks the modern amenities that are required by today's tenants. Although the market is currently weak analysts have envisaged a recovery within the next two years. The strategic location of the town, along with the intended infrastructure improvements suggests that Luton would be a desirable location for office development within the next decade.
- The industrial sector has been identified largely as an inappropriate use for the town centre, and is unlikely to make any significant contribution to the future development of Luton. EEDA are currently promoting a high-tech sector which may generate some positive spin-offs for the town centre.
- There is currently limited activity in the residential sector within the town centre, there is a strong demand for lower end properties and the buy-to-let market has been boosted by commuter demands. Residential development within the town centre would contribute to sustainable growth strategies, improve the round the clock vitality of the town centre and subsequently attract other uses into the area.
- Luton has considerable potential to accommodate additional leisure facilities that would promote vitality within the town centre. The addition of a residential sector would increase the scope and demand for leisure uses as well pubs, bars and restaurants in the centre and create an enhanced mixed use environment.

Opportunity Areas

The town centre has a number of readily identifiable opportunity areas that are awaiting regeneration. These are described below. It is important to note that the list is not exhaustive and that it is expected that additional areas will come forward over time. Sites may be developed in isolation or combined to form larger regeneration areas. More detailed proposals for the opportunity sites are set out as part of the District Action Plans in section 5.

Crawley Road Car Park:

The site is 0.7 ha in size and is strategically located between a mix of residential and commercial units with access routes located on both Telford Way and New Bedford Road. The site has been identified within the local plan as a residential allocation. Development would provide valuable boost to the town centre residential market.

Silver Street Car Park:

This area has been designated as a potential retail site by LBC. The car park is approximately 0.2 ha in size and is located to the rear of the Arndale Shopping Centre. The site also lies within the Plaisters Lea Conservation Area and redevelopment of the site should enhance the importance of this area and improve the pedestrian connections between the transport interchange and the shopping centre.

The Arndale Shopping Centre:

This is the 'retail hub' of the town centre; updating, integrating and expanding the centre would successfully improve the retail footfall. The owners - Prudential – have submitted plans to extend to the centre adjacent to St George's Square.

Power Court:

Is an established key employment area. There is opportunity for high density, mixed use development that contributes to the regeneration of the town centre. The River Lea is an important physical consideration. In addition there is the requirement for a corridor to accommodate Translink.

Bus Station Car Park:

Relocation of the Bus Station will result in the removal of buses from the ground floor of the multi storey car park. This offers the opportunity to consider the future of the whole block including demolition which is one of the most dismal buildings in the town centre.

Bus and Railway Station:

The relocation of the bus station, together with Translink, will result in an efficient transport interchange and gateway to Luton. However the refurbishment/redevelopment of the railway station is not in any Network Rail programme and funding may be required from other town centre development.

St George's Square:

This is a key space within the town centre and its redevelopment has been highlighted as a priority project by LBC. A robust and contemporary design would act as an identifiable landmark within the town centre.

The Gap Site:

The site is only 0.8ha in size but it represents a small but important opportunity to redevelop part of the civic centre. The redevelopment of this site could be an exemplar for a step change in design quality and would enhance the use of St Georges Square and the surrounding area. The location of the River Lea, which runs in a culvert through the site may have an impact on the form of development.

University of Luton:

The University is a key economic driver within the town, and is based at the Park Square Campus. There are over 10,000 students at the university which has a strong range of creative and vocational courses including art and design, media, computing and business studies. Future development is likely to focus on the town centre Park Square Campus.

Other Potential Development Sites

In addition to the major opportunity sites there are series of other opportunities that may arise:

- George Street Cinema
- Surface Parking at Park Viaduct
- Dunstable Place Surface Parking
- Surface Parking at Chapel Viaduct
- South Road Car Park
- Silver Street and Library Road

Transportation

Under the umbrella of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) there will be radical improvement to the transport infrastructure in and around Luton. The main committed projects are Translink and completion of the Inner Ring Road. Subsequently, developers should optimise its effectiveness and fully integrate the infrastructure into their schemes. Current strategies include improvements to the accessibility and attractiveness of the public transport system. This is to be achieved by improving the interchanges between transport modes as well as completing the inner ring road, thus producing an extremely efficient transport network.

The LTP has a sustainable movement strategy aimed at promoting walking and cycling, making both easier and more attractive on a day to day basis. This will help to broaden choice and reduce reliance on the private car which is the preferred mode of transport. Well designed facilities for cyclists should be included in all new road proposals including the key approaches into the town centre and new 'pedestrian friendly' streets.

Urban Design

There are three fundamental design issues affecting Luton town centre. These problems have resulted in an urban centre that lacks vitality, viability and has lost its unique sense of place. Each must be addressed to build up the identity of Luton and create the necessary pre-conditions for successful and beneficial change to occur.

Arriving in Luton:

Firstly, the sense of arrival in Luton is poor. The Inner Ring Road is heavily engineered and provides a rather negative first impression of Luton. Traffic is quickly diverted around the town centre with nothing that actually signals arrival. The roads and streets either side of the ring road have lost contact with one another. There are places where pedestrians and motorists can see straight into the town centre, along New Bedford Road or Upper George Street for example, but are prevented from taking a direct route and this has exacerbated the ambivalent sense of arrival. Pedestrians are secondary in every sense to the motor vehicle, their routes are diverted through hostile engineered tunnels and bridges which are illegible and have poor natural surveillance.

Severance of the Central Area:

Secondly, the central area is both divided and isolated from adjoining residential areas as a result of the impermeable pedestrian environment around the town centre. Many of the routes into and around the town centre are poor and do not encourage pedestrian accessibility or 'walkability'. The lack of people living within the town centre also means that the times at which the town centre is active and peopled is restricted. The limited evening economy is strongly focused on a particular younger age range and the lack of diversity makes the town centre almost a 'no go' area for many. The advantage of introducing greater numbers of people living in the town centre is that a resident population can support a wider range of more locally focused shops and service, including cafes and restaurants, and the town centre is 'policed' by greater numbers of people for longer not only during the day but into the evening and later.

Absence of Quality Public Spaces:

Finally, the lack of quality public spaces and landmarks which are clearly related to one another has resulted in a town centre that has lost a clear sense of identity and character. Although there are many fine buildings and a good mix of uses, the town centre activities feel somewhat dissipated and unconnected without specific areas or districts that celebrate difference and offer choice to the visitor or resident.





Overview of the Development Framework

3 Overview of the draft Development Framework

Objectives

The Development Framework aims to redefine the town centre, identifying areas of change, addressing shifts in land use, building upon strengths and targeting opportunities. Three core objectives therefore underpin the draft development framework:

- **Make Luton town centre a far more accessible destination which is easy to get to by foot, by bike, by public transport, and by car;**
- **Ensure that Luton town centre is a place that people can really enjoy and be proud of, with beautiful public squares and tree lined streets that are lively and well used; and**
- **Target Luton town centre as a focus for investment with realistic, clearly identified opportunities for new retail, leisure, residential and business development.**

Accessibility and Transportation

Underpinning these objectives are commitments to improving accessibility and transportation within and around Luton town centre. Core transportation projects are already well progressed with key funding already in place, and the Development Framework has been drawn up with the assumption that they will be implemented. Specifically the projects comprise:

- Completion of the Inner Ring Road to the north of the town centre area;
- Translink providing rapid guided bus services between Dunstable, the town centre, and Luton airport; and
- Development of a new bus station and Translink interchange adjoining Luton Central station.

Each of these projects offer a considerable opportunity to re-think significant areas of the town centre, freeing up road capacity from through traffic, allowing priority for quality public transport, pedestrians and cyclists, and managing vehicular traffic around a completed inner ring road.





First Class Urban Design

In addition there is a strong commitment to first class urban design, designing the town centre for people first by allowing all users to move around easily, conveniently and safely without getting lost or confused. In order to achieve this the town centre must be clearly structured around easily identifiable places and landmarks such as St George's Square, St Mary's Church or the Town Hall. In addition, it is critical that waymarking and signage across the town centre is improved to assist visitors, residents and shoppers in find their way easily around Luton. This must include pedestrian and cycle routes, key public transport stops including the bus and rail stations, and principal town centre car parks.

Creating a top quality built environment within the town centre, that draws upon the considerable history and identity of Luton, is also crucial . This means ensuring that all new development that takes place is of exceptional quality. It also means that new development must conserve and enhance the existing character and townscape qualities of the town centre, carefully repairing and stitching together those areas that have become fragmented by previous large scale re-development.



Structuring the town centre

It is important to provide a clear structure for Luton town centre. This helps to provide a basis for implementing the objectives through guiding and targeting development opportunities and projects. In order to achieve this, the Development Framework is organised around eight distinct, overlapping districts, each with its own character and identity, which together make up the town centre.

The purpose of identifying different districts is to make the various parts of the town centre more memorable, reinforcing the identity of the town centre as a whole, and helping to ensure that there are a better range of joined-up destinations available for residents, workers, visitors and investors. The districts also form the basis for action plans which set out development aims and opportunities across the town centre. The action plans are detailed in section 5 of this document.

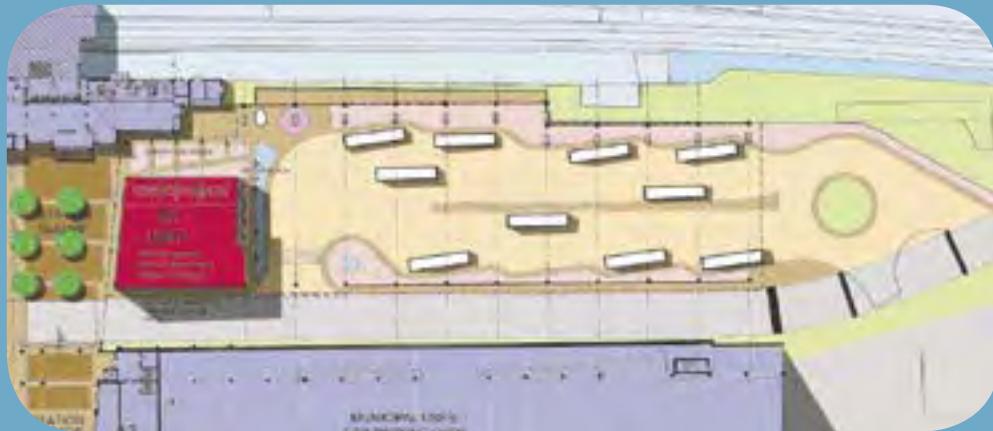


At the intersection between the districts the Development Framework identifies eight public squares, reinforcing the role and character of existing squares as well as proposing new squares. These will be places of choice and decision, marking the points where transition is being made from one district to another, and designed to be attractive, usable and of the highest quality. Linking the squares and districts together is a circuit of enhanced pedestrian friendly streets, designed to ensure ease of mobility for everyone and maximising accessibility around the town centre area. This includes identifying the

key approaches and streets that lead into the town centre and enhancing them to improve 'walkability' by making them attractive and convenient for pedestrians. Crossing the ring road is a key part of the overall picture, linking the town centre to adjoining neighbourhoods with safe surface level pedestrian and cycle crossings.

The structure of these districts, squares and streets will help to guide the location and layout of new development in the town centre making sure that potential opportunities can be progressed in a co-ordinated way which brings maximum benefit to Luton.





In addition, the Development Framework proposes a simplified network of key public transport stops within the town centre in order to enhance usability and coverage. These are focused on the most accessible and well known destinations within the town centre: St George's Square; Luton Central; and the University. Through applying a 400 metre isochrone to each destination, representing an average five minute walk, the vast majority of the town centre area is covered by these three key stops.





Key themes

Five themes are addressed within the Development Framework and have been drawn up to help deliver the key objectives identified for the town centre. The themes form the basis of proposals contained within the district action plans, and have been subject to a programme of consultation with the public and key stakeholders within Luton town centre.

- 1. Getting you there and back**
- 2. Making a real entrance**
- 3. New places to shop, live and work**
- 4. A beautiful place to sit and stroll**
- 5. Greening the streets**

Getting you there and back

Making it easy for everyone to get to and from the town centre is critical. This means improving accessibility for pedestrians, cyclists, people using public transport as well as motorists. Servicing and delivery vehicles will also need to be accommodated. The Development Framework proposes:

- Better pedestrian and cycle routes into the town centre with surface level crossings, new lighting and paving.
- Simplified bus destinations taking people to where they need to be: St George's Square, Luton Central, and the University.
- Completion of the Inner Ring Road with improved signage.
- Secure, attractive, convenient car parking that is organised as part of a wider parking strategy for the town centre.

Making a real entrance

Arriving at the town centre must be straightforward, attractive and give people a good first impression of Luton. The Development Framework proposes a high quality Luton Gateway comprising:

- A brand new bus station and redevelopment of the existing bus station site.
- An integrated Translink interchange.
- A new station square with cafes and restaurants.
- Enhanced pedestrian friendly streets and well defined cycle routes with clear signage and cycle parking facilities.





Shop



Live



Work



Relax

New places to shop, live and work

The town centre provides a focus for the whole community as well as visitors to Luton. Improving the mix and range of uses including shopping, leisure, businesses and in particular housing helps to increase choice and make the town centre more vibrant and interesting at different times of the day and into the evening. It is also important to manage change, recognising that reconfiguration and consolidation of existing functions and uses may be required in order to allow for beneficial change. The Development Framework proposes:

- New districts to build on the town centre's identity and make it more memorable.
- A 'Hat Factory District' focused around Bute Street, with a mix of loft apartments, offices, shops, bars and cafes, including the closure and redevelopment of Silver Street.
- Comprehensive redevelopment of Power Court integrating it into the town centre with new shops, leisure and business uses, houses and apartments, a hotel, and public squares.
- Improvements to the Arndale Centre, broadening its appeal and making it more accessible.
- A new George Street Market.
- Opportunities for cafes and restaurants to make the town centre more lively.
- New leisure opportunities particularly for families and young people.
- Creating an exceptional environment in which to live.

A beautiful place to sit and stroll

Making sure that the town centre is beautiful and a good place to spend time in is really important. Beautiful towns and cities benefit from a strong, positive image and are better able to attract more visitors and investors. Luton already has several attractive squares and streets so the Development Framework proposes:

- New squares at key areas in the town, including around Power Court and Luton Gateway. These public squares will help mark and define the proposed town centre districts.
- Enhancing existing squares and spaces. The Park Street maze and improvements to St George's Square are already proposed and will set the standard for further public realm enhancements.
- Linking the new and existing squares together to create a necklace around the town centre. This will make it easy and attractive for people to walk around and enjoy the time they spend in Luton.
- Creating a linear walkway along the River Lea in Power Court. This will provide an important development focus in this new part of the town centre. Elsewhere, in accordance with Local Plan policy, the River Lea will be restored to an open channel wherever the scale and nature of new development makes this feasible.





Greening the streets

Trees are an important asset in any town. They look good, help filter dust and pollution, and make streets feel quieter and calmer. Tree planting is already underway in the town centre, and there are significant areas of established trees. The Development Framework proposes:

- Significant tree planting around the inner ring road to help soften its harsh, engineered appearance.
- Tree planting in St Mary's Road where the completion of the inner ring road will enable part of the carriageway to be removed. This will help provide a better setting for St Mary's Church.
- Tree planting along the principal pedestrian approaches into the town centre to make the experience of walking more pleasurable.

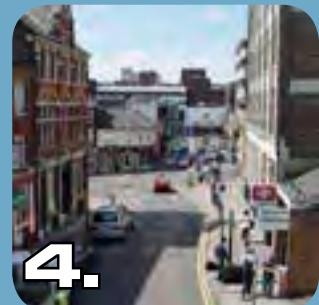


Key Proposals

Key Proposals

A number of key proposals are highlighted as part of the themes. They have also been the subject of extensive consultation and stakeholder engagement and aim to address many of the concerns which have already been expressed by town centre users as part of previous consultation exercises carried out by Luton Borough Council. They are set out and cross referenced on the Development Framework plan and are expanded within the relevant district action plan..



**1.****2.****3.****4.****5.****6.****7.****8.**

1. Tame the Inner Ring Road by completing the northern section so that it can function more efficiently for all users and introducing trees, artworks and new signs.

2. Reconnect adjoining residential neighbourhoods to the town centre through providing new surface level crossings across the inner ring road that are safe, convenient and attractive for pedestrians.

3. Improve Luton's central shopping area by extending the Arndale Centre at St George's Square and broadening the mix of shops, cafes and restaurants along George Street.

4. Establish a new 'Hat Factory District' between the Arndale Centre and the station with its own vibrant mix of shops, new homes, offices, cafes and bars as well as significantly improved links to the bus and rail stations.

5. Create an impressive and welcoming gateway to Luton with dramatic improvements to the station and surrounding area, including the construction of a new bus station and Translink interchange.

6. Ensure that town centre bus destinations connect up with the bus and rail interchange to make using public transport straightforward and convenient.

7. Promote a mix of new development at Power Court including retail, leisure, residential and business uses which will be closely linked to the town centre.

8. Create a series of interlinked public squares and tree lined, pedestrian friendly streets in the town centre including a new public walkway along the course of the River Lea within Power Court.



Design and principles

4 Design and development principles

The importance of good design

The importance of good urban design is stressed within PPG1: General Policy and Principles. Paragraph 15 of the guidance states that good design not only improves the quality of the environment but can also help promote sustainable development. This means promoting designs that make the most efficient use of existing resources such as brownfield land and building materials, and incorporate measures to minimise energy consumption. Good design must therefore be a key determinant of all proposed development in the town centre area.

Good design must be properly considered as an integral part of the Development Framework. A number of overarching design principles have therefore been identified in order to ensure that the role and profile of Luton town centre is enhanced through development of the highest quality. Buildings within Luton town centre must frame a connected pattern of streets and open spaces, punctuated by landmarks in key locations, thereby allowing people to easily navigate their way around. Provision of a sensitively articulated built form that complements the established character and identity of the town centre, together with the use of distinctive building materials, will help re-enforce a strong sense of place and avoid development that is unremarkable, anonymous and has little relationship to its surroundings.

Six design and development principles have been identified that together must help shape and inform the design and layout of proposals that come forward as part of the draft development framework. They are integral to the proposals described within the district action plans in section 5 of this document:



Market place - Cambridge



Contemporary housing - Copenhagen

Inclusive Design

Inclusive design breaks down barriers and exclusion, focusing on the needs of the diverse number of people who use the town centre. Compliance with the Disability Rights Commission guidance on Inclusive Design will ensure that new development complies with the statutory requirements of the Disability and Discrimination Act 1995. The guidance states that an inclusive environment will be:

- Easily used by as many people as possible without undue effort, special treatment or separation;
- Able to offer people the freedom to choose how they access and use it and allow them to participate equally in all activities it may host;
- Able to embrace diversity and difference;
- Safe, legible and predictable; and
- High quality.



Space for play - Copenhagen

Public realm of the highest quality

The public realm comprises the streets, footpaths and open spaces of Luton town centre, as well as the built form that helps to define and contain them. The relationship between buildings and the public realm is a critical part of the design of new development, ensuring that streets and open spaces are naturally surveilled by surrounding buildings to form pleasant, safe 'places'. Development should be designed to maximise opportunities for buildings to front onto streets, with the urban design principle of 'active streets and safe streets' being a key objective.

Perimeter block development should be adopted whereby the public fronts of buildings are clearly distinguishable from the more private backs. These 'back of block' areas can be used for private amenity space, storage, servicing and parking, and there are already good examples of this form of development in Luton town centre, particularly in Guildford Street and in parts of the Southside and Westgate districts.

A public realm of the highest quality will create long term value and underpin investment in Luton town centre. The atmosphere created in the public realm will also play a large part in the "branding" of the area. Luton town centre must have a distinctive, people centred environment focused on a series of high quality public spaces. It should also have a fine grain and permeable movement structure of connected streets, using existing routes but with additional linkages across proposed development areas.

The design of new buildings, the associated hard and soft landscape, and other features contributing to the public realm should help to reinforce identity and a sense of place, with key features highlighted to provide a memorable pattern of streets and spaces.

A connected pattern of lively streets and spaces

Movement through and around Luton town centre should ensure that the relationship between vehicular traffic, pedestrians, and cyclists maximises accessibility for all users.

A network of connected streets should be established which are appropriate in scale and design to a town centre environment. This means tree lined streets with wide pavements and a carriageway for both vehicular traffic and public transport. It also means that places that are either solely for pedestrians or, through the use of shared surfacing, places where vehicular traffic is significantly calmed. The town centre must be designed to ensure that people can walk easily and conveniently to where they need to be without being obliged to detour in order to cross busy, traffic dominated roads so increasing the 'walkability' of the town centre. A circuit of pedestrian friendly streets is therefore a key part of the draft development framework.

Streets should be well lit with surfacing materials that unobtrusively guide pedestrians and cyclists, signalling changes in movement or priority, through texture, tone and pattern. There must also be attractive and convenient pedestrian and cycle links to the surrounding areas enhancing the accessibility of the town centre by a variety of means.

The quality of the streets and spaces is, in part, related to whether buildings are able to address them in a positive way. Blank elevations create monotonous and hostile environments, "no go" places that can feel unsafe. By establishing a network of building frontages which are animated and active, the character of the street or space is enhanced.

Key building frontages should be designed to enliven the public realm, encouraging natural surveillance of adjoining streets and open spaces through the positioning of doors and windows. Buildings must therefore front the street with main entrance points overlooking it. Many entrances create a busier street and help contribute to a well overlooked and safe pedestrian environment.



Thomas Moore Street - Wapping



Cabot Square - Canary Wharf



West India Quay - Docklands

Built form that is strong and distinctive

The nature and spatial quality of the public realm is largely determined by the buildings and activities that front onto it ensuring that associated streets, footpaths and open spaces are well defined. Good quality development is therefore critical in establishing the character and nature of the town centre area.

The built form around Luton Town Centre gives the area much of its character. The mixture of styles, the historic character of many of the buildings, and the industrial hat factory heritage still evident are key characteristics of Luton town centre. There is considerable scope for new buildings to complement this character providing high quality, contemporary additions to the existing built form of Luton Town Centre. The aim will be to stitch development back into the existing townscape, repairing some of the damage done in previous years through less sensitive redevelopment and filling in areas of derelict land. Pastiche of traditional built forms should not be considered as an acceptable design response in Luton town centre. The aim is to promote a progressive design philosophy ensuring that new development is of the highest quality and very much of its time, complementary to existing townscape.

In addition, the skyline and roofscape of Luton town centre is an important feature, defined by bold forms such as the Town Hall clock tower, St Mary's church and the water tower at Brown Brothers' Bute Mills. These features are local landmarks which are useful as they can help people to navigate around a place, or identify with a particular location, through providing a unique or locally distinctive element within the landscape or townscape. Particular attention should therefore be paid to creating a lively and dynamic roofscape for new development within the town centre area, with corners and elevations in particular locations emphasised with a landmark feature such as a tower. Servicing structures, such as lift shafts, telecommunications equipment, or air conditioning units, should be hidden from view or carefully integrated into the design of the building.

Adaptable buildings and layouts will provide opportunities for changes of use to occur over the longer term, increasing flexibility and choice. This means that, should the need arise, the use of an office building could be changed to residential, for example, instead of demolishing and rebuilding. This robust approach must be exemplified through the reuse of buildings within the town centre, for example the Hat Factory development in Bute Street.



Coin Street - London



Paddington Basin - London



Greenwich Millennium Community

Getting the detailing right

A palette of high quality materials would help to firmly establish the character and identity of Luton town centre, in terms of both the public realm of streets and opens spaces and the built form of buildings and structures.

Construction materials, decorative detailing such as towers or balconies, and even basic features such as windows and doorways help reinforce the image of place. They also assist in making a place legible i.e. a place that people can easily find their way around because there are identifiable local landmarks and places that are familiar and distinctive.

As a result particular attention should be paid to these areas. High quality materials that are appropriate to a particular location within the town centre or emphasis a particular use should be utilised. Detailing around doorways and windows, and the use of specific design features within key locations should also be incorporated. This not only helps build upon the considerable character of Luton town centre but it also introduces colour and texture enriching perception and appreciation of place.

Ground surface materials add variety and visual interest through texture, tone and pattern. A high quality standard must be set with the proposed refurbishment of St George's Square. This should provide the benchmark for development across the town centre. Other features, such as boundary walls, railings, and entrance gateways, also provide containment to development and can contribute towards establishing identity and a sense of place.

Street trees are an important asset in any town. They contribute to the appearance and character of an area, filter dust and pollution, and help make streets feel quieter and calmer. In Luton town centre there are already street trees present, notably the London planes in George Street and the limes along St Mary's road, although other locations have few if any trees. Trees are also visible in the distance from many view points within the town centre.

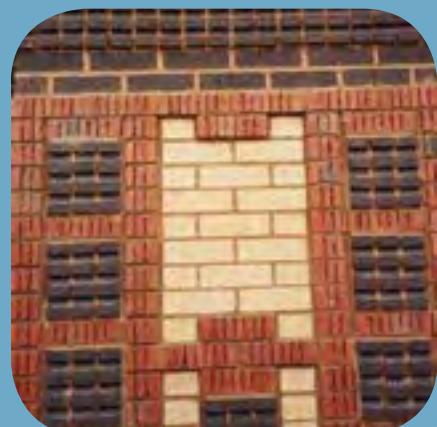
There is a significant opportunity to introduce further street tree planting particularly where existing streets and spaces are proposed to be re-configured, such as Park Square, the ring road, and Bute Street, as well as more comprehensive areas of redevelopment, such as Power Court and Crawley Road car park. Appropriate species should be specified that are already characteristic of Luton town centre and that grow well in urban areas, including London planes (*Platanus x acerifolia*) and an aphid resistant species of lime (such as *Tilia x euchlora*).



Paving detail - Milton Keynes



Railing detail - Exeter



Greenwich Millennium Community

Designing for a mix of uses

Design of new development within the town centre must be able to accommodate a mix of uses. This is important to re-enforce and support the existing range of functions within the town centre area, and to encourage and support new uses at every level from district to street to individual buildings. It also helps to make the town centre resilient to change over time, better able to flexibly accommodate a broad range of different functions should the need arise.

Town centres must offer a broad range of facilities to all potential users including families, children, young people and the elderly. Everyone must feel safe and welcome at all times of the day and evening. Mixed use development should not therefore concentrate exclusively on bars, pubs and shops, but also provide other leisure opportunities that can be enjoyed by everyone. Consideration must be given to broadening the mix of uses when new development proposals come forward in the town centre.

This could include internet cafés, supervised play facilities where parents or guardians could confidently leave their children whilst shopping for example, extreme sport facilities such as a climbing wall or dedicated skate park, quality restaurants that appeal to a broad range of people, or an arts venue. These opportunities would complement the existing leisure facilities within the town including the Galaxy Centre, Library Theatre, and Hat Factory. In addition, there may be scope for a one off 'destination' attraction within Luton town centre. This might be an observation tower, Ferris wheel, or an interactive installation in an events space. One example of this is Schouwburgplein in Rotterdam where raised platforms and adjustable cranes carrying lights allow people to mould and shape the space themselves as well as providing an 'urban stage' for outdoor performance.

An important component to increasing vitality and activity will be an increase in the number of people that make their home in the town centre. A greater concentration of residents will generate demand for a greater range and quality of secondary shops and

services, particularly bars, cafes, restaurants and other small commercial enterprises. New high quality housing is therefore needed in the heart of Luton.

This can be achieved through conversion of existing buildings, particularly upper floors, infill of vacant sites, and redevelopment. There are also large areas within the town centre which can be developed as new residential communities including land at Power Court, and the Crawley Road car park which is within Council ownership. It will be important to incorporate a good vertical mix of uses across the town centre for example considering the upper floors of all new development proposals, including retail schemes, as being suitable for apartments.



Interactive sculptures - Schouwburgplein



Schouwburgplein - Rotterdam

Accommodating cars and bicycles

The location, design and layout of car parking should ensure that it is both safe and useable, yet does not become a dominant or obtrusive element within the public realm. Surface parking, for example, represents an inefficient use of potentially valuable land in the town centre. A mixture of within-plot and on-street parking should be sought, with well designed, multi level car parking discretely accommodated within the centre of development blocks provided in key locations within the town centre.

Residents and occupiers parking should also be provided within plot, in private courtyards or utilising undercrofts beneath buildings for example. Visitor or short stay shoppers parking may be provided on-street, in small groups to avoid an unbroken sea of parking within the public realm. By allowing an element of on street parking the activity associated with arrival and departure will help to enliven the street particularly in the evening. It also means that residents, visitors and employees can enter premises through a 'front door' should they wish.

With regard to cycle parking, this will also need to be accommodated within the built envelope of new buildings. Sheffield stands or similar should be provided for visitor cycle parking within the street.



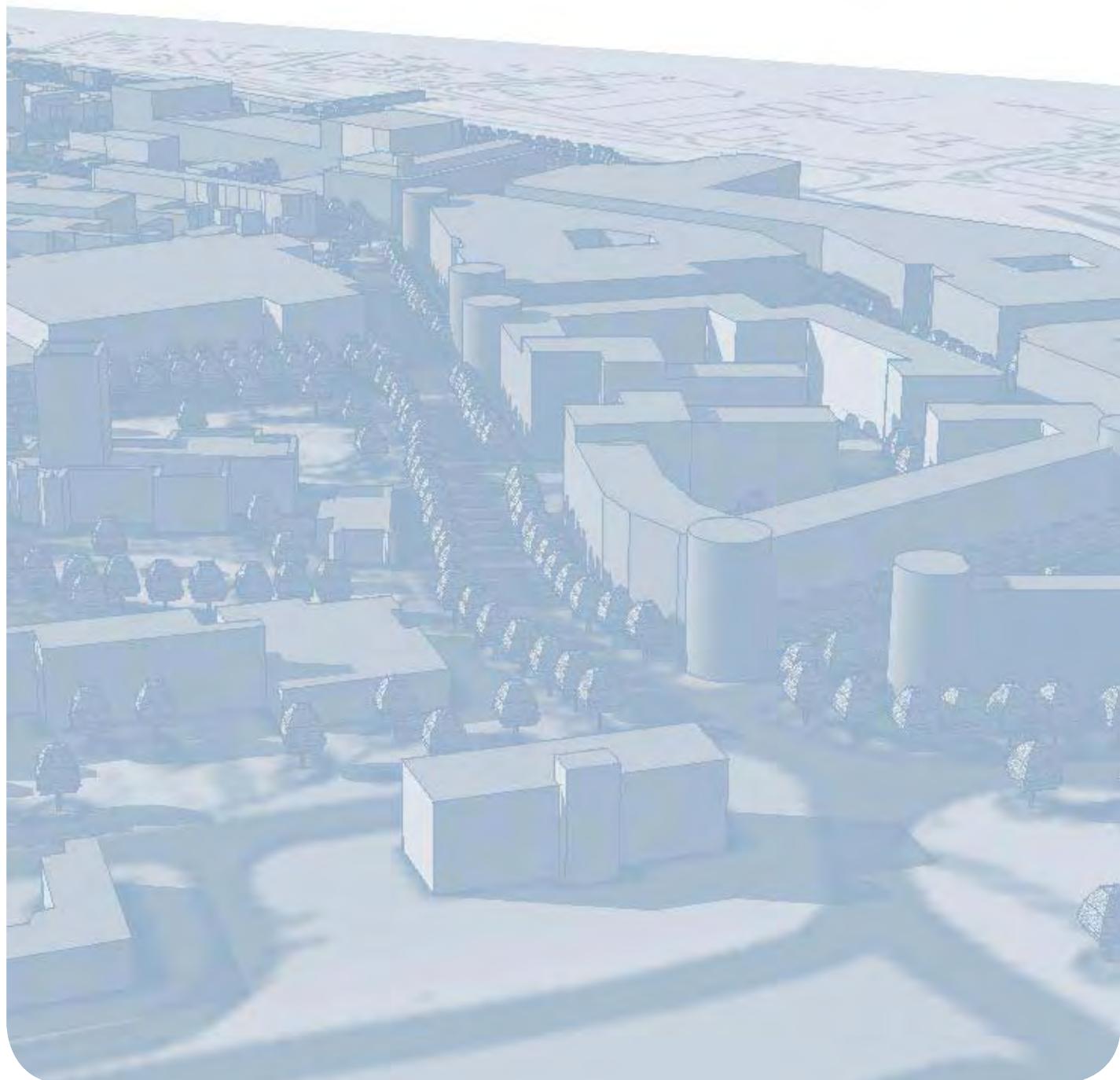
Vaughan Street - Wapping London



Cycle stands - Central London



Cycle stands - Bristol



District Action

5 District Action Plans

The Development Framework is structured around eight distinct districts which make up Luton town centre. These are Westgate, St George's, Southside, Retail Quarter, Hat Factory District, Luton Gateway, University Quarter, and Power Court.

The districts are based on an analysis of the town centre examining land use, urban form, and development opportunity sites. An action plan for each district:

- builds upon the strengths of different parts of Luton town centre and addresses areas of weakness; and

- identifies development or redevelopment opportunities, including public realm proposals, leading to a set of projects that can be taken forward by the appropriate agency.

Prioritising the projects and interventions within each area action plan will be important in order to develop an overall implementation programme. It will also enable a number of early projects to be implemented which will engender confidence in the development framework. This forms the basis of section 6 to this document regarding implementation.

Each District Action Plans is set out on the following pages. Objectives are established for each district together with opportunity sites, development components and public realm proposals. There is also an outline of potential development capacity and the anticipated delivery mechanism.



Westgate

Westgate

Westgate



The Westgate district is in the western part of the town centre. It is focused around the Inner Ring Road and Crawley Road car park and is dominated by Telford Way, the Dunstable Road island and Dunstable Road which create considerable severance between the town centre and the areas beyond.

The district has two important approaches into the town centre: New Bedford Road and Upper George Street which, prior to the construction of the inner ring road, brought traffic and pedestrians onto George Street and through the town centre. Between these two approaches are a grid of connecting streets. The proposed route of Translink also runs through the district on a disused railway embankment.

Uses within the district are principally commercial with offices, small businesses and some retail. There are also small areas of residential mainly around Cardigan Street.



Crawley Road car park



Telford Way



Welcome to Luton?

Objectives for Westgate

Arriving at the town centre: many visitors to and users of the town centre approach from the west. The route of Translink will also pass through Westgate. The initial impression that is given in Westgate will help inform people's overall perception of the character of the town centre area. It is important to create a quality environment through strong built frontage and infill development adjoining the Inner Ring Road and key town centre approaches, and through streetscape enhancements including tree planting, lighting, paving and possibly through introducing public art.

Crossing the Inner Ring Road: reducing the severance created by the Inner Ring Road is critical in order to link across to communities to the west, including Bury Park and south of the town centre. It also increases opportunities for people to walk safely and conveniently into the town centre.

Walking into the town centre: environmental enhancements along the key approaches into the town centre will improve the appearance and character of the streets and make them more attractive to pedestrians. This is important in order to improve the 'walkability' of the town centre and encourage people to walk instead of drive.

A new residential community: increasing the numbers of people who live in the town centre will help to give support to shops and services and extend the time that the town centre is populated. It also increases the mixed use character of the town centre area. A new residential community is proposed on the site of the Crawley Road car park. Further conversion opportunities and development of apartments above ground floor uses will be sought, for example in Mill Street and New Bedford Road.



Opportunity sites and development components

1. Crawley Road car park: the site has significant capacity for high density residential development. This should take the form of apartments up to six storeys in height fronting Telford Way, with a mixture of apartments and town houses provided elsewhere within the site. An emphasis on high quality design will establish a positive image for the development and the town centre as whole, particularly on the Telford Way frontage. There is an opportunity for a landmark corner building to emphasise the entrance into the site. Development along Telford Way should be set back from the road to allow space for a pedestrian footpath and 'boulevard' tree planting.

Parking should be accommodated in well overlooked parking courts with under-croft parking for the town houses. Access to the site should be from Telford Way, with shared surfaces for cars and pedestrians within the site. If, as part of a review of car parking facilities within the town centre, it is determined that an element of public parking should be retained within the site then a multi-deck car park could be provided sleeved with single aspect apartments to key frontages along Telford Way and the site entrance.

2. New Bedford Road: Development opportunities along the top of New Bedford road, including the former John Blundell building, will enhance this key approach into the town centre through either conversion of existing buildings or selective re-development. Mixed use development, with ground floor commercial and retail units and apartments above, will ensure that the street frontage is active and that the best use is made of available land. Buildings should be between 5 and 6 storeys in height and there is an opportunity for a landmark building to emphasise the gateway into the town centre area. Parking should be accessed from the rear off the Crawley Road car park site and accommodated in discrete, well overlooked courtyards.

3. Mill Street: Infill development adjoining Redcliffe House is the principal opportunity. Development of up to six storeys in height should provide continuous frontage development and help to positively frame and address Mill Street. Mixed use development, with ground floor commercial or retail units and apartments above, will ensure that the street frontage is active and that the best use is made of available land. Courtyard car parking should be provided to the rear of the development accessed via a 'carriage arch' from Mill Street.



A13 artscape project



New places to live - Docklands



Contemporary and Stylish - Bristol



Tree planting softening the Inner Ring Road



Good quality frontage development - Bristol



Corner detail - Milton Keynes

Potential Development Capacity

- 850m² retail (450m² New Bedford Road, 400m² Mill Street)
- 157 residential units at Crawley Road
- 66 residential units at Mill Street and New Bedford Road

Anticipated Delivery Mechanisms

- Luton Borough Council
- Private developers

Public Realm Proposals

- New surface level crossings at Crawley Road and at Upper George Street.
- Footpath enhancements along part of Telford Way fronting the Crawley Road car park, Dunstable Road between the island and Upper George Street, and New Bedford Road and Upper George Street to include re-paving, improved lighting and co-ordinated street furniture including public transport infrastructure.
- Significant tree planting along Telford Way, Dunstable Road, and New Bedford Road. Limited tree planting opportunities to be explored along Upper George Street.
- Improved signage and co-ordinated lighting and street furniture to be installed along the inner ring road (Telford Way and Dunstable Road). Public art opportunity to be explored at the Dunstable Road island as this is a key gateway into the town centre. The A13 Artscape project in Essex is an example of public art installations along a major highway including lighting and sculpture

www.a13artscape.org

St George's

St George's



The St George's district is focused on St George's Square, one of the best known and valued locations within Luton town centre. The district also includes Alma Street and Gordon Street to the south and west, and Guildford Street and Library Road to the north. There are a good mix of town centre uses within the district. These include a significant leisure component provided by the Galaxy Centre, and Library Theatre, making St George's an important 'leisure quarter' within the town centre. Retail is provided by the Galaxy Centre and Arndale Centre and civic functions include the Town Hall and Central Library. There are also other commercial and business interests. St George's is a key arrival point into the town centre by bus, by car, there is a large multi storey car park in library road, and by foot via New Bedford Road, George Street and Upper George Street.

The current environment of St George's is varied with a number of fine buildings and traditional streets contrasted with more stark modern development, particularly from the 1960's, which have blank, lifeless elevations at ground floor level. There is a tired landscape treatment with variable paving quality and an uncoordinated mixture of street furniture, bus stops, and pedestrian railings. In St George's Square it is clear that pedestrian desire lines are not addressed and the overall environmental quality is dated. There is also a 'wall' of buses along Manchester Road, with stops, railings and waiting vehicles hampering pedestrian movement and creating an unattractive, albeit well used, edge to the square.



Luton Central Library - A key public facility



St George's Square



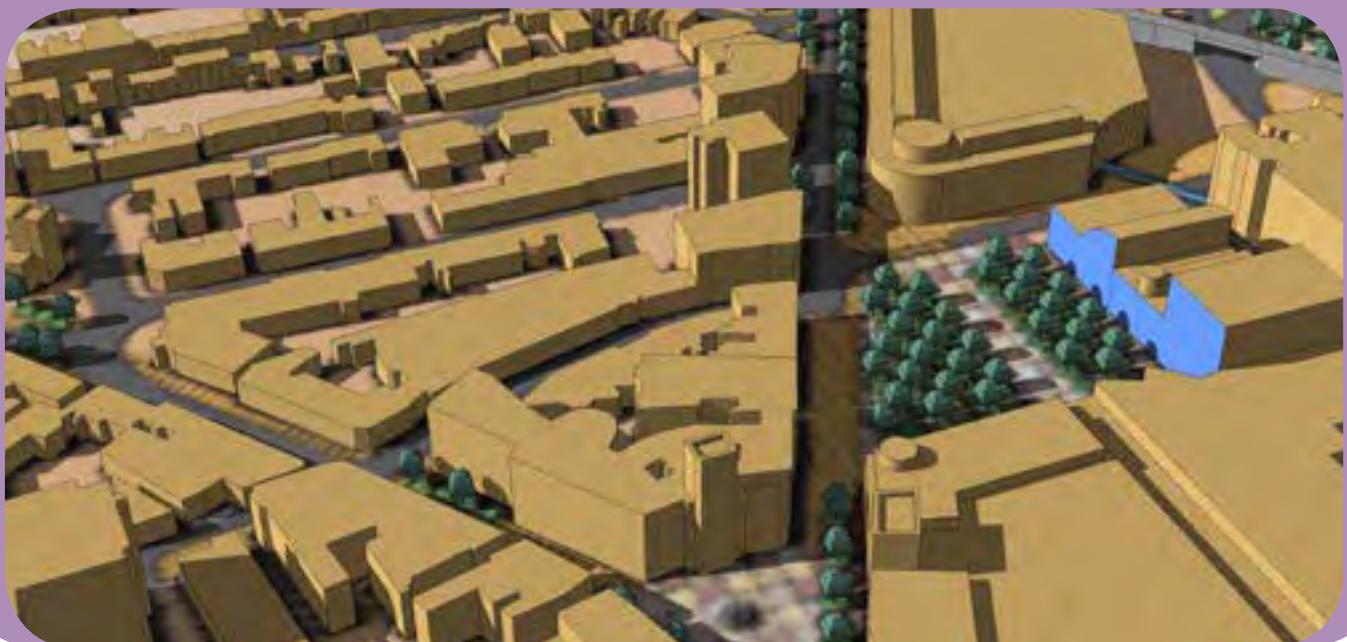
The 'gap' site

Objectives for St George's

Enhancing the Square: as one of the eight key public spaces within Luton town centre St George's square must help define an image of quality that will be reflected across the whole town centre. In order to achieve this significant improvements should be made to the hard and soft landscape of the square with ease of pedestrian movement being a key consideration. Wherever possible the edges of the square must be active, with key entrances to buildings including the Central Library and the Arndale Centre becoming foci for pedestrian movement, and leisure, shop and restaurant frontages animating the square. New entrance points or active frontages should be sought where possible, including the Galaxy Centre, the Thistle Hotel, the Arndale Centre and the 'gap site'. Key routes from New Bedford Road, George Street, the Galaxy Centre, and town centre car parks should be clear enabling easy pedestrian movement. A programme of events could also ensure that activity takes place in the square, possibly associate with the library theatre.

Filling the Gap: the gap site has been vacant for many years and represents a significant opportunity for high quality development to further re-enforce the character of the town centre area. Development in this location must therefore be a priority. A variety of uses could be accommodated to reflect particularly the leisure uses but also the retail and civic mix already present around the square and enhance the mix of uses across the town centre.

Using the bus: as part of a sequence of simplified town centre destinations St George's Square has an important function as a bus interchange point. Currently stopping buses in Manchester Street effectively hinder pedestrian movement from the square into George Street and Upper George Street. The relocation of buses to the western area of the square would give an opportunity to not only extend the size of St George's Square through pedestrianisation of Manchester Street but also enable new high quality bus shelters to be specified. This helps to raise the profile of bus travel and enhances passenger comfort and convenience.



Opportunity sites and development components

1. Gap site: as a key opportunity site within the town centre development of the gap site must be of the highest architectural quality. It must signal that second rate development, which does not respond to its setting or enhance the character of Luton, will be unacceptable. The principal frontage must overlook St George's Square with an active development edge provided by ground floor uses such as retail or café bar or restaurant. The frontage would face south west and therefore be a good place to sit outside. Development could be up to five or six storeys in height reflecting the scale of the adjoining Central Library.

In terms of upper floor use there is an opportunity to provide an extension to the existing Library Theatre which, although well programmed and attended, suffers from limited seating capacity and facilities. Luton does not at present have a large venue or performance space and the provision of space at St George's Square would potentially complement existing facilities at both the Library Theatre and the Hat Factory.

Parking would be available within existing central area car parks, although alternative provision should be made for the disabled spaces that would be lost through development. Servicing should be from Library Road to the rear of the site.

2. Arndale Centre: the Arndale Centre was constructed in the early 1970's and is a key facility within Luton town centre. One of the main entrances to the centre opens onto St George's Square although there is a change in levels necessitating a ramp and stairs. There is a significant opportunity to reconfigure this area to allow for an enhanced entrance giving better accessibility to the centre and also providing a better elevation to the square. The area occupied by the ramp is a key corner fronting Manchester Street. Reconfiguration would provide an opportunity for additional retail space to be provided in an area that is currently little more than relatively inaccessible left over space. A landmark corner building of up to five storeys in height would enhance the character of the area, and a high standard of design will be required. Ground floor uses should provide an active edge with key frontages to both Manchester Street and the square.



High quality public realm - Brindley Place



Using the bus - Wood Green



A central focus - Canary Wharf



Somewhere to sit and relax - Berlin



Somewhere to sit and relax - Berlin



Exchange Plaza - Broadgate

Potential Development Capacity

- 3,220 m² retail (Arndale extension and ground floor gap site)
- 1,280m² cultural/civic use (first and second floor gap site)

Likely delivery mechanism

- Private developers
- Luton Borough Council (cultural centre linking into Central Library and Library Theatre)

Public Realm Proposals

- Manchester Street pedestrianisation to extend the size of St George's Square and improve pedestrian connections into George Street. New paving and surfacing off Manchester Street will also provide an enhanced setting for the listed town hall.
- St George's Square remodelling to include high quality paving and hard surfacing, new tree planting and management of existing trees that are worthy of retention, and provision of a variety of seating options to encourage people to use the square. A central feature such as a sculpture or water feature may be considered to provide a focal point.
- Co-ordinated high quality public transport infrastructure to help raise the profile and status of public transport use and to streamline the appearance of structures in the district.
- Footpath enhancements in Upper George Street and Bridge Street to include re-paving, improved lighting and co-ordinated street furniture.

Southside

Southside



The Southside district is the largest and covers much of the southern part of the town centre from Upper George Street in the west to Cumberland Street in the east. The district functions well as mixed use area with a variety of business, commercial, retail, and some residential uses present. The built fabric of the district is strong in parts with many good quality Victorian buildings and a grid of connected streets principally running north south. Elsewhere, particularly around Chapel Street, Park Street and Flowers Way, development is more fragmented with areas of surface car parking, and retail showrooms and office buildings. This in part is a legacy of the construction of the Inner Ring Road, in particular the elevated Chapel viaduct, Castle Street island and Park viaduct, which necessitated large land take and demolition. The inner ring road does present a considerable barrier to north south movement and severs the residential areas to south of the town centre area.



Chapel Street

Objectives for Southside

Crossing the Ring Road: reducing the severance created by the inner ring road is critical in order to link across to communities to the south of the town centre. It also increases opportunities for people to walk safely and conveniently into the town centre.

Pedestrian connectivity: environmental enhancements along the key approaches, including Wellington Street, into the town centre will improve the appearance and character of the streets and make them more attractive to pedestrians. This is important in order to improve the 'walkability' of the town centre and encourage people to walk instead of drive. In addition the strong north south streets should be linked by an east west route through Southside to improve pedestrian connectivity across the district.

Embracing built heritage: there are many fine buildings within the Southside district and part of the area is covered by a conservation area. Environmental enhancements, restoration and conversion of buildings to other uses will help to improve the character and appearance of the district. Selective redevelopment of less valued buildings or vacant sites will also contribute.

Enhancing the mix of uses: the variety of building types in Southside have responded well to incremental change over time, proving to be robust and flexible, and this contributes to the mix of uses now present. Broadening the mix of uses to include a larger residential component and also additional leisure uses will build upon this characteristic.



Opportunity sites and development components

1. Dunstable Place: prominently located at the corner of Stuart Street (inner ring road) and Dunstable Place the site is currently vacant and used for surface car parking. Given the prominence of the site there is an opportunity for a significant landmark building that responds to the scale of other buildings in the area and helps to define and enclose the broad width of Stuart Street. A building of up to nine storeys would be acceptable with design emphasis given to turning the corner of Stuart Street and Dunstable Place through use of a tower, balconies or other feature. Development must be mixed use with apartments above a ground floor retail or A3 unit, and should front both Stuart Street and Dunstable Place. Access to the site should be taken from Dunstable Place with parking accommodated to the rear in a well overlooked and secure courtyard. Deck, undercroft or underground parking may be necessary and, if needed, must be accommodated without providing a blank or empty street frontage.

2. Cumberland Street: the site is located on Cumberland Street adjoining the Park viaduct. It is a prominent location with Cumberland Street providing an exit point traffic using the inner ring road and entering the south eastern part of the town centre. The site may be appropriate for a health and fitness leisure use given its good accessibility and visibility. Apartments could be constructed above but would need to be carefully designed in order to mitigate any potential noise impacts from the elevated Park viaduct. Development of up to five storeys would maximise visibility from the inner ring road. There should be a frontage to Cumberland Street with parking provided to the rear of the site.

3. Re-use and conversion: The re-use and conversion of existing buildings to other uses can be a more sustainable alternative to demolition and rebuilding and helps to keep valued and historic buildings in use over time. It also reflects shifting patterns of land use. Conversion of redundant or outdated office buildings to residential use is therefore proposed wherever possible across Southside. The inclusion of new residential development increases the numbers of people who live in the town centre. This helps to support other shops and services as well as extending the time that the town centre is populated.



Wellington Street



King Street



Green Streets - Milton Keynes



Loft conversions - Dudley



Potential office conversion - Wesley House

Potential Development Capacity

- 850m² leisure at Cumberland Street
- 1250 m² mixed retail or A3 at Dunstable Place (ground floor)
- 154 new residential units at Dunstable Place
- Additional residential through selective conversion of office stock and upper floor development at Cumberland Street.

Anticipated delivery mechanism

- Private developers
- English Partnerships pilot conversion scheme

Public Realm Proposals

- New surface level crossings at Wellington Street, including the potential removal of the existing underpass.
- Enhancements to the area under the Chapel Street viaduct including lighting installations and re-paving works to improve the appearance of the area and increase pedestrian security and safety.
- Footpath enhancements along Stuart Road and Wellington Street to include re-paving, improved lighting and co-ordinated street furniture including public transport infrastructure.
- Significant tree planting along Stuart Street.

Retail Quarter

Retail Quarter

Retail Quarter



George Street and the retail quarter are at the heart of Luton town centre, and forms the central street within the district. Prior to the construction of the inner ring road all traffic passing through Luton travelled along George Street and, as the most connected point within the town, it became the focus for retail and commercial activity. With the construction of the inner ring road the importance of George Street was maintained with the construction of the Arndale Centre immediately to the north. The majority of principal entrances to the centre are off George Street and the two complement each other in terms of being the retail centre for Luton.

Today, George Street is a fulcrum within Luton town centre zipping together the Southside district with development around the Hat Factory district and Station area, and linking with the University and Power Court beyond. Westgate and St George's Square link into George Street to the west ensuring that George Street has an important role to play in the proposed structure of Luton town centre. Although George Street is lively during the day when shops are open it is much less busy in the evenings. There are some vacant buildings, notably the cinema, and some upper floor areas are also vacant. There are some good street trees but other landscape elements including paving and planters are tired and the Street would benefit from repaving and a more co-ordinated approach to street furniture as has taken place around the Market Hill.



High quality shop front



George Street



Market Hill

Objectives for the Retail Quarter

Broadening the mix of uses: As the retail focus of Luton town centre may gradually expand towards the Hat Factory district and Power Court it will be important for the existing retail area around George Street to be re-invented and rejuvenated. Shifting priority from retail to a broader mix of uses will compensate and ensure that the George Street area continues to be a thriving, active place. Introducing cafes, restaurants and bars along George Street will complement the existing retail mix and extend the period that the area is active. The introduction of other leisure uses such as play facilities or internet cafés will also broaden the appeal of the town centre to a wider number of people. Implementation may necessitate a policy review to enable a broader mix of non-retail uses to take place within the primary shopping frontage.

George Street Market: the introduction of a street market along George Street will contribute towards enlivening activity within the street and add to the colour and vibrancy of the town centre. As well as more traditional stalls special events such as a seasonal farmer's market could be introduced. This would complement the existing static market in the Arndale Centre.

Arndale entrances: in plan the Arndale centre malls and entrances broadly correspond to the traditional pattern of streets that existed prior to the centre's construction. Where possible it will be important to improve and enhance pedestrian accessibility from George Street into the Arndale Centre to ensure that the complementary relationship is maintained. This could be achieved through addressing changes in level with wider terraced entrances featuring glazed enclosures or arcades for example, and improving north south connectivity especially through Bute Street to the station area. Enhancements to the Bute Street entrance are proposed within the Hat Factory District Action Plan. In addition, access through the Arndale Centre outside shopping hours is also an important aspiration to improve north south pedestrian movement through the town centre.

Linking Public spaces: George Street forms part of a wider pedestrian circuit within the town centre. This forms a circle linking all the districts together and making it easy and attractive for shoppers, workers and visitors to move around on foot. In the George Street district a new space at Town Hall Square will provide a much enhanced setting for the listed Town Hall and war memorial and provide an anchor with the other new space at Park Square, described within the University Quarter District Action Plan. Mid way between the two the recently refurbished Market Hill provides the last of three distinctive spaces along George Street.



Opportunity sites and development components

1. Former George Street cinema: this is a key opportunity to bring the prominent 1930's former cinema back into use. Applications for conversion to A3 use have been approved although an operator has yet to bring the proposals forward. It will be important to ensure that upper floors are also effectively utilised and commercial or residential uses will be appropriate provide that effective measures are taken to ensure that amenity is not compromised through noise and potential late evening disturbance. It should be noted that priority will be given to restaurant or café/bar operators in order to broaden the appeal and mix of facilities available to people within the town centre, including families.

2. Park Square Corner: currently this area is an under utilised piece of highway land to the rear of the Arndale Centre. It is edged by blank elevations and although there is some seating it remains largely unused. There is potential to introduce a new A3 unit on the site with outdoor seating to take advantage of the adjoining proposed Park Square. A lightweight glazed structure, potentially with an iconic or landmark quality, would help to lift the appearance of the corner which has a mix of different architectural elements without any strong identity. A principle implementation issue relates to the use of highway land for re-development and outdoor seating which would need to be resolved with Luton Borough Council as Highway Authority.



Performers in Market Hill



Performers in Market Hill



Brindley Place - a model for Park Square



Cafe culture - Bristol

Potential Development Capacity

- Cinema conversion to A3 use: 600m²
- Upper floor cinema commercial use: 600m²
- Park Square Corner: potential A3 use 300m²

Anticipated delivery mechanism

- Private developers
- Local Highway Authority at Park Square Corner

Public Realm Proposals

- Pedestrian realm: Footpath enhancements along George Street to include re-paving to complement the refurbishment of Market Hill, improved lighting and co-ordinated street furniture and enhanced tree planting to match the existing London planes (*platanus x acerifolia*).
- Luton Maze: the Luton Maze project will provide a lively installation of paving and sculpture depicting local history. It has already been funded and has in part been designed with the help of school children.
- Public Squares and spaces: Recent improvements have been made to Market Hill which functions as an outdoor seating and events space and is programmed with various performances and events during the year. Town Hall Square should provide an appropriate, dignified setting for the listed town hall and war memorial with simple, high quality surfacing materials, formal tree planting, and simple seating options such as stone ledges and kerbs.

Hat Factory District

Hat Factory District



The Hat Factory District occupies the area north of the Arndale Centre focused around the Plaister's Lea conservation area. It is an extremely important linking point between George Street, the Arndale Centre, Power Court and the Luton Gateway District around the station area. There are already a mix of uses within the district including secondary independent retailing, business and commercial premises, offices, residential, pubs and bars, and the Hat Factory arts and performance centre. At the moment Guildford Street carries a lot of through traffic. With the completion of the Inner Ring Road (north) much of this will be re-routed giving rise to the re-thinking of the way traffic circulates through this part of the town centre.

The area also represents a significant opportunity within the town centre. Not only are there a number of good quality buildings and areas of high townscape value that should be retained, but there are also important development sites and opportunity areas. These comprise areas of surface parking, buildings that are outdated or do not complement the character of the conservation area, buildings that could be converted to other uses, as well as the potential to close Silver Street and Library Road east and develop the road space.



Bute Street



Bute Street



Loft conversions - Guildford Street

Objectives for the Hat Factory District

New retail offer: broadening the retail offer of Luton town centre is an important objective. The Hat Factory district presents an opportunity for substantial new retail development capacity immediately to the north of the Arndale Centre around Bute Street. This will be achieved through the closure of Silver Street and the eastern stretch of Library Road, and utilising the Silver Street car park for development. Development would enhance the overall offer and mix of retailers present within Luton town centre through being able to potentially provide floor space to suit modern retail needs.

Strengthening links: improving pedestrian attractiveness and 'walkability' is a priority, particularly on the key approach into the town centre from High Town and the station area along Bute Street. It is also important to effectively join the district to adjoining areas, particularly through the Arndale Centre to George Street, and along Guildford Street both east to Power Court and west to the Galaxy Centre, the Central library and St George's Square. This forms part of an enhanced pedestrian circuit around the town centre. The important vistas down Bute Street and Guildford Street should be enhanced through infill development and public realm enhancements to improve the 'legibility' of the town centre, i.e. making it easier for people to find their way around without getting lost or confused.

Enhancing the mix of uses: the variety of building types in the Hat Factory district have responded well to incremental change over time, proving to be robust and flexible, and this contributes to the mix of uses now present. Broadening the mix of uses to include a larger residential component, as well as other commercial uses such as small workshops, office suites, and smaller retail units that may suit independent or specialist traders, will build upon this characteristic. It will also complement the new retail capacity available around Silver Street and Library Road east. New leisure uses to include cafes, bars and restaurants as well as uses aimed at families and other town centre users should also be encouraged to ensure that the Hat Factory district continues to be a vibrant, mixed use area.

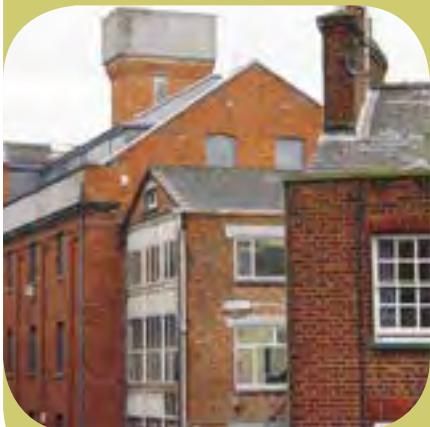
Celebrating built heritage: much of the district is within the Plaister's Lea conservation area reflecting the considerable industrial built heritage and townscape quality that exists. New development must enhance these qualities, stitching the built fabric of the area back together through infill and selective re-development. Buildings should reflect the essential character of the conservation area through use of high quality design and materials, but must be distinctive and 'of their time' not merely recreating pastiche of Victorian or Edwardian styles of architecture.



Opportunity sites and development components

1. Silver Street/ Bute Street: The closure and re-development of Silver Street, Library Road east and the Silver Street car park provides an opportunity to reconsider a large area of land immediately to the north of the Arndale Centre. Currently this area is environmentally blighted through the austere, blank elevation of the centre, and through traffic domination of the public realm. The view west from Bute Street along Library Road highlights the engineered and hostile nature of the site.

A comprehensive mixed use development of shops with apartments above will transform the area. The focus will be Bute Street and the existing northern entrance of the Arndale Centre. Development will front Bute Street and a new area of open space adjoining the entrance to the Arndale Centre: Bute Plaza. A radically improved elevation will be provided to the Arndale Centre to improve not only the image of the centre but of the whole town as it will terminate the vista when viewed down Bute Street, a particularly important view from the Station area. The extra space created would improve circulation and access through the centre to George Street. Bute Plaza will also provide sitting out space for cafes and the exiting public house on the corner of Bute Street and Library Road. Maintaining an east/west pedestrian link across the site will be important to improve pedestrian accessibility. Servicing will take place from either Library Road west or Cheapside, and parking will utilise the existing central area car parks. The area is easily accessible from the Luton Gateway District and public transport interchange. High quality development will be required to enhance the character of the conservation area and reflect the considerable townscape qualities of the Hat Factory District. Implementation will be dependant upon re-routing vehicle movements from Bute Street.



High quality townscape: Bute Street



Bute Street



Guildford Street



Oxo Tower quality mixed use conversion



Paving and tree planting in Milton Keynes



Bull Ring entrance

2. Bute Street corner: the site is currently occupied by an early 1970's built job centre. Should a redevelopment opportunity arise then a more sympathetic building should be sought with an active ground floor use and frontage onto Guildford Street and Bute Street to enliven this prominent corner site. Apartments above an A1 or A3 unit would provide additional residential accommodation in the town centre, with development up to six storeys in height providing good enclosure of the adjoining streets, a characteristic of the conservation area. The building line should re-establish that which originally existed along Guildford Street, and there is an opportunity for a corner feature and local landmark. The existing parking location would retain to the rear of the building with the potential for it to be extended through repositioning the building forward on the site to match the former building line.

3. Cheapside corner: the site is currently vacant and used as a small area of seating and open space. Redevelopment would provide a ground floor retail or A3 unit with apartments above. Adjoining sites in John Street have come forward for consideration as residential development. A building of five storeys in height would respond to adjoining development and help to define and turn the corner from Cheapside into John Street. Frontage development would allow for parking and servicing to take place to the rear of the site, accessed via a carriage arch which is characteristic of development in the conservation area.

4. Re-use and conversion. The re-use and conversion of existing high quality buildings to other uses can be a more sustainable alternative to demolition and rebuilding and helps to keep valued and historic buildings in use over time. It also reflects shifting patterns of land use. Conversion of buildings, particularly upper floors, to residential or small scale commercial use is therefore proposed wherever possible in the Hat Factory District. The inclusion of new residential development increases the numbers of people who live in the town centre. This helps to support other shops and services as well as extending the time that the town centre is populated.

5. Vehicle Management: Although the removal of significant through traffic will radically improve the character and attractiveness of the district it will be important to maintain accessibility for the number of businesses that already operate there. The pedestrianisation of Bute Street is an important component towards improving pedestrian accessibility from the station area into the town centre, but other streets in the area will need to remain open to traffic to enable access, servicing and delivery to take place. John Street, Guildford Street, the top of Bute Street running parallel with Guildford Street will all remain open to vehicular traffic for servicing and access. Enhancements to paving and footways will make them 'friendlier' to pedestrians and improve the appearance and character of the area. In addition, traffic circulating into the Arndale Central car park will need to be managed if Silver Street is to closed. This could be done via Cheapside and John Street.

Potential Development Capacity

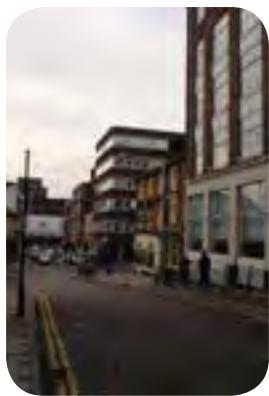
- 5,569 m² retail development
- 63 residential units at Bute Street corner and Cheapside corner
- Addition residential units through construction above retail and through conversion of existing buildings

Anticipated Delivery mechanisms

- Private developers
- English Partnerships pilot development at Bute Street corner
- A comprehensive scheme encompassing the Hat Factory and Luton Gateway districts should be considered.

Public Realm Proposals

- Pedestrianisation of Bute Street: a principal pedestrian route into the town centre from the station area where many people arrive into Luton. It is essential to provide an accessible, high quality pedestrianised street enhanced through uniform paving, co-ordinated street furniture, and tree planting. The route was used as a case study in the companion guide to PPG6 "Going to town, improving town centre access" (section 5.4, page 64) published in 2002 and written by Llewelyn – Davies for DTLR and the National Retail Planning Forum.
- Improvements to pedestrian accessibility and attractiveness of Guildford Street, Cheapside and John Street. Footpath enhancements to include re-paving, improved lighting and co-ordinated street furniture.
- Extensive tree planting along Bute Street, Guildford Street and Cheapside with London planes or a vertiginous species such as quercus robur fastigiatum – koster which is an oak. The use of a different species such as oak within the Hat Factory District would help distinguish its identity and character relative to the rest of the town centre.
- Bute Plaza: an open space focus outside the Arndale Centre entrance would allow broadening of the street to accommodate café spill out space. The plaza would be open to Bute Street but could be partially glazed over as an extension to the Arndale Centre entrance, with escalators or an elevator to overcome the significant change in levels.



Transforming Bute Street



- Potential lighting and screening of the Arndale Centre central car park ramp to enliven this prominent structure, which already has a strong almost sculptural quality, would help to reduce its impact when viewed from Cheapside and Guildford Street. Screening could take the form of tree planting such as London planes, which can have extensive canopies, lightweight cladding, banners, or public art panels. Video projection or lighting would provide a lively night time appearance to the ramp and also to Arndale House above. Lighting schemes have been used to good effect on the town hall with its illuminated and characterful clock tower. Other towns and cities have also used such as Croydon with its imaginative programme of illuminating office buildings.

Luton Gateway

Luton Gateway



Of all the opportunities in Luton town centre Luton Gateway is perhaps the most important. The Luton Gateway is focused on the area around Luton Central railway station and the bus station. As such it is the main focus for public transport within the town centre and, together with a taxi rank and major parking facilities, can already be considered a public transport interchange. This will be supported with Translink which will stop at the station. In addition, there are other commercial uses in the area including business units and some office accommodation. There are also student halls of residence associated with the University of Luton giving a fairly substantial resident population at least during term time.

Despite the importance of the district to the town centre the current environment is poor and unwelcoming. The bus and rail stations are both in need of redevelopment to provide substantially upgraded facilities and the pedestrian environment and public realm is disjointed and extremely poor. Ramps and bridges guide pedestrians from the end of Bute Street towards the railway station and on towards High Town. The basement level bus station is dark and unwelcoming, unloved by passengers and bus operators. Overall, the area gives an extremely poor first impression of the town centre to visitors and public transport users.



Station forecourt



Access from Bute Street



Station car park

Objectives for the Luton Gateway

Arriving at Luton: An emphasis on high quality will ensure that Luton Gateway sets a standard for other parts of the town centre area. As initial impressions often inform people's overall perception of the character of the town centre the Gateway area must send out a strong and positive message to visitors that they have arrived in a modern attractive town. Plans for a new bus station, a station square, and radically enhanced links through to Bute Street and the town centre are already well developed by Luton Borough Council.

Public Transport Interchange: The public transport interchange facilities must be modern and easy to use. Translink, the bus station and the railway station must be close together in order that people can access facilities easily and conveniently. Clear signage and timetable information together with excellent waiting facilities must be provided.

A Business District and a place to live: There are considerable opportunities for new development around the Gateway. This is because of the potential availability of development and re-development sites as well as the proximity and accessibility afforded by the public transport interchange facilities. A mix of uses should include office accommodation, apartments and ground floor retail and A3 uses.

Enhancing pedestrian links to the town centre and High Town: Links to the town centre are currently very poor. Removal of ramps and steps to create a more open and level through route must be provided. This necessitates demolition of part of the existing bus station. Links through to High Town must also be preserved and enhanced as the existing pedestrian bridge gives the only direct route from that area through to the town centre.



Opportunity Sites and Development Components

1. Railway Station: The redevelopment or radical enhancement of the railway station is long overdue. The facility is tired and difficult to access. New and improved passenger facilities must be a priority together with enhanced accessibility for all users. Forecourt improvements and a new station square to link to the new bus station and Translink stop are already well developed and include repaving, tree planting and a new café pavilion building which could also include a travel information centre. The existing bridge from High Town should be replaced with a wider and more welcoming structure improving access into the town centre. This could take the form of a 'living bridge' lined with development.

2. Bus Station: A new bus station is proposed occupying the area between the existing facility and the railway station. The station would also provide an interchange with Translink. A modern, lightweight canopy above the bus station should provide a modern appearance as well as plenty of natural light and ventilation.

3. Bus station car park: With construction of a new bus station the old facility and associated multi-storey car park should be redeveloped. The structure is dated and ugly and provides a barrier to north south movement between the station and the town centre. The site would be suitable for an office development given its high visibility and accessibility. A landmark building could be provided, although a height of around six storeys would ensure that it does not visually dominate some of the older buildings in the Plaister's Lea conservation area. Frontages should be provided facing north towards the bus station and south adjoining Bute Street. A large element of car parking should be retained within the building, in such a way as to make it visually attractive when viewed from Guildford Street and Bute Street. Access to the car park would preferably be gained from Church Street to the east.

4. BP site: The former BP garage site is currently an undeveloped waste land and an eyesore on a major corner within the town centre. Although BP currently have permission for a replacement petrol filling station the construction of the northern section of the Inner Ring Road will mean that less traffic will pass by the site. Consideration must be given to an alternative form of development. This should take the form of a mixed residential scheme fronting Church Street and Guildford Street, possibly comprising loft style apartments or even live work studios. Development of up to six storeys would provide strong enclosure of the junction and respond to development on the Power Court site. A contemporary high quality design will complement the character of the conservation area. Ground floor retail uses should front Church Street, and there should be front doors from the apartment buildings off Guildford Street, Church Street and Bute Street to ensure that the streets are active and well used. Access to parking would be via carriage arches off Bute Street or Guildford Street or from the rear via Church Street.

5. Station approach: The station approach area offers an opportunity for small scale business workshops fronting the approach and backing onto the railway land. Single or two storey buildings would help frame the car parking and access area to the front of the station and provide natural surveillance.



Station Square, Cafe space - Docklands



Landmark development - Milton Keynes



Quality location to live and work - Docklands

Potential Development Capacity

- 1,990m² mixed retail (Station Square and ground floor Guildford Gate)
- 974 residential units at Guildford Street and Guildford Gate
- 13,800m² office accommodation (Station Place and Guildford Gate)
- 750 m² Station approach business units

Anticipated Delivery Mechanisms

- Private developers
- Luton Borough Council

Public realm

- Station Square: a new space linking together the main entrance to the railway station and the new bus station and Translink interchange. An emphasis on high quality will ensure that a good first impression is given to the town centre.
- Pedestrian enhancements along Bute Street to improve access into the town centre to include removal of overhead walkways, tree planting, lighting and high quality paving materials that will link seamlessly into the Hat Factory District.
- Guildford Gate: a new square at the junction of Guildford Street and Church street will provide a transition space between the Hat Factory District, Luton Gateway and Power Court. Part of the necklace of open spaces around the town centre.
- Station approach: environmental enhancements including tree planting, repaving and co-ordinated street furniture.

University Quarter

University Quarter



The University Quarter is focused around the University of Luton Park Square campus and St Mary's church to the east of the town centre area. The district has two important approaches into the town centre: St Mary's Road which currently forms part of the Inner Ring Road until the completion of the northern section, and Park Street. The Park Viaduct defines the eastern boundary of the district and creates considerable severance from the east with areas of vacant land and surface car parking overshadowed by the heavy elevated structure.

There are a mix of uses within the district, principally connected with the university including student accommodation, teaching and lecture theatres, and administrative offices. The students provide a constant mass of people coming to and from the area during term time, and this is partly reflected in the location of a major bus destination around the Park Street area outside the main university buildings. There is also a mix of pubs, secondary shops and commercial premise along Park Street and an entrance to the Arndale Centre from Church Street. The church yard provides an important area of open space with mature trees surrounding the Grade I listed church.



Objectives for the University Quarter

A town centre campus: the University of Luton is a key facility and attraction within the town centre. The university is consolidating its position within the town centre through focusing on its existing Park Street campus. Ensuring that there are clear and attractive physical links from the University into town is therefore critical. The main entrance to the university faces Park Square and this open space has an important role in providing an attractive and high quality interface with the town centre. The University are keen to strengthen physical links with the town centre and are considering options to enhance and re-position the main entrance as part of their estates strategy.

Using the Bus: as part of the sequence of simplified town centre destinations the University Quarter has an important function as a bus interchange point. Bus and pedestrian priority along Church Street will therefore continue to be a key objective. High quality bus shelters must be specified to raise the profile of bus travel and enhance passenger comfort and convenience.

Walking into town: Park Street provides an important pedestrian link from the adjoining residential areas under the Park Viaduct. In addition, Church Street provides a key link into Power Court, round to the Station area and through to Guildford street, part of the wider pedestrian circuit around the town centre. Improved lighting, paving and surface level crossing facilities will make it easier, safer and more attractive for pedestrians to access the town centre.



Opportunity sites and development components

Within the University Quarter the key opportunity site is Youth House situated on St Mary's Road. The site occupies a highly visible location adjoining the Grade I listed St Mary's church. Redevelopment of the site presents a significant opportunity to replace the undistinguished Youth House with an imaginative, high quality building. The Luton Carnival Arts Development Trust are working on a project for this site which will provide a national centre of learning for Carnival Arts. The University fully supports this project which will locate a nationally important education use in the University Quarter.

The design could be up to around three storeys in height, but careful massing will be required in response to St Mary's church. Frontages to the building must positively address St Mary's Road, Vicarage Street and the church yard. The design of the elevations, the positioning of entrances and windows, and the building line should respond to the adjacent church buildings allowing them to remain as the dominant built when viewed from the west. Servicing should take place from the rear of the building with vehicular access from Vicarage Street.



Multi purpose venue - Durham



Multi purpose venue - Durham



Multi purpose venue - Durham



Park viaduct



Transforming a dead space. The Mailbox - Birmingham



Transforming a dead space. The Mailbox - Birmingham

Public Realm Proposals

- Enhancements to the area under the Park viaduct including lighting installations and re-paving works to improve the appearance of the area and increase pedestrian security and safety.
- Park Street approach to improve pedestrian accessibility and attractiveness. Footpath enhancements to include re-paving, improved lighting and co-ordinated street furniture.
- Enhanced public squares including St Mary's Place and Park Square.
- Repaving along St Mary's Road and Park Street
- Extensive tree planting along St Mary's Road/ Church Street to complement the existing lime trees along the south side of the street adjoining the church and create a boulevard character along the road. Aphid resistant limes should be specified (*Tila x euchlora*).
- Shared bus and pedestrian route along Church Street to include areas of shared surfacing to reduce vehicle speeds and co-ordinated bus shelters and infrastructure.
- Surface level pedestrian crossing point at the junction of Church Street and St Mary's Road to form part of the wider pedestrian circuit around the town centre.

Power Court

Power Court



Power Court is the major redevelopment opportunity within Luton town centre. The area has been the subject of enormous change over the years, its name deriving from the power station that used to occupy the site. In addition, there was a large residential population prior to clearance in the 1950's to make way for an industrial estate with a mix of manufacturing and general industrial premises dating from the 1960's and 1970's.

The site is bounded to the north by the Midland Mainline and the route of translink, whilst the southern, western and eastern boundaries are defined by the Inner Ring Road. The site is therefore extremely accessible with the station area a few minutes walk to the north west. When the northern section of the ring road is completed there is a considerable opportunity to connect the area much more closely with the town centre particularly to the west into Guildford Street and John Street, and to the south across St Mary's Road.



Power Court



St Mary's Road



Blank frontages - A no-go place

Objectives for Power Court

A valued part of the town centre: The main objective for Power Court is to ensure that it becomes an integral and valued part of the town centre. It is crucial that development must be joined with, and readily identifiable as, 'town centre' and not 'retail' or 'industrial park'. Establishing close links to other parts of the town centre is therefore important. This means providing surface level pedestrian crossings at key locations including the function of St.Mary's Road and Church Street junction. Also, visual links to the town centre must be established maintaining views from within Power Court to St.Mary's Church and along Church Street to Park Square and the university. Good quality development fronting a connected network of streets will be required, with parking and servicing discretely accommodated. Development will be assessed against the design and development principles in section 4.

A mixed use quarter: In order for Power Court to become part of the town centre it must be able to offer a mix of uses that are complementary to the town centre. This means a mix of retail, residential and commercial development across the site and vertically within buildings. Every opportunity for accommodating apartments above ground floor uses, such as retail, must be taken up in order to maximise the redevelopment potential of this key, highly accessible brownfield site. A need for new hotel accommodation has also been identified in the town centre which could be provided here.

New public spaces: There are three main opportunities for adding to the public realm of the town centre within Power Court. Guildford Gate will provide a new public space at the west of Power Court and link with Guildford Street, the Hat Factory District and Luton Gateway. Power Square will be a new space in the heart of the district, and a linear park along the line of the River Lea will help define the route of the town's river.

Reworking of St Mary's Road and Church street: The retention and enhancement of St Mary's Road and Church Street is a key objective for the town centre. Following completion of the Inner Ring Road and the removal of significant through traffic there is a significant opportunity to improve the character and appearance of this principal street and historic approach into Luton. This will enhance not only the setting of St Mary's church but also improve the pedestrian realm and 'walkability' of this part of the town centre. Key to the proposals will be the creation of an attractive tree lined boulevard accommodating wide pavements and potentially some surface parking through a reduction in width from four lanes to two. Church Street will be retained as an access only street and bus lane but with greater priority given over to pedestrians with wider pavements and surface level crossings.



Development components

The Power Court District represents one of the key opportunities within the town centre area. The site is mainly owned by Ballymore and Luton Borough Council and many of the premises are already vacant. There is considerable interest in bringing development forward on the site. The development components are set out together with details on the structuring elements that should be used to inform the layout of the district.

1. Retail area: The retail area should relate to the existing retail centre of Luton and be located towards the western side of Power Court. The site has capacity for a large foodstore (c.7000m²) and other retail units arranged to ensure there is a frontage presence along both Church Street and any areas of proposed open space.

2. Residential area: a mixture of town houses and apartments should be set out within the site to take advantage of the River Lea linear park and views of St Mary's Church.

3. Hotel/leisure/conference facility: The eastern side of Power Court is visible from the inner ring road and the approach into the town centre from London Luton Airport and is potentially a good site for a new hotel with leisure and conference facilities.

4. Structuring elements: Frontages – key frontages must be established along Church Street and St Mary's Road, and along the route of the River Lea linear park.

Gateways – the eastern part of Power Court adjoins one of the principal gateways into the town centre and development in this location must set a high standard. A hotel may be suitable here as it is visible and accessible. Gateways into the site must be established at Guildford Street and Church Street/ St Mary's Road junction. The form of development should mark the gateway through use of taller buildings, or corner features such as a tower.

Corners and landmarks – landmark development should be provided at the eastern corner of the site adjoining the Park Island, and terminating the vistas along Guildford Street and Church Street.

Views and vistas – vistas out from the site should be maintained towards St Mary's Church, and north along Church Street to Park Square and the university.



High quality development - Brindley Place



Coin Street houses



Wapping apartments



Bronze fish water feature - Docklands



Castle Park - Bristol



Brindley Place

Parking – the car must not be allowed to dominate and a sea of surface parking will not be acceptable. Parking must be discretely accommodated to the north of the site behind frontage development or within the centre of development blocks in multi deck car park. Provision may be supplemented by short stay, on-street parking within the site and along St Mary's Road / Church Street.

Servicing – service yards and access points should be provided to the north of the site behind frontage development and accessed from Crawley Green Road.

Potential Development Capacity

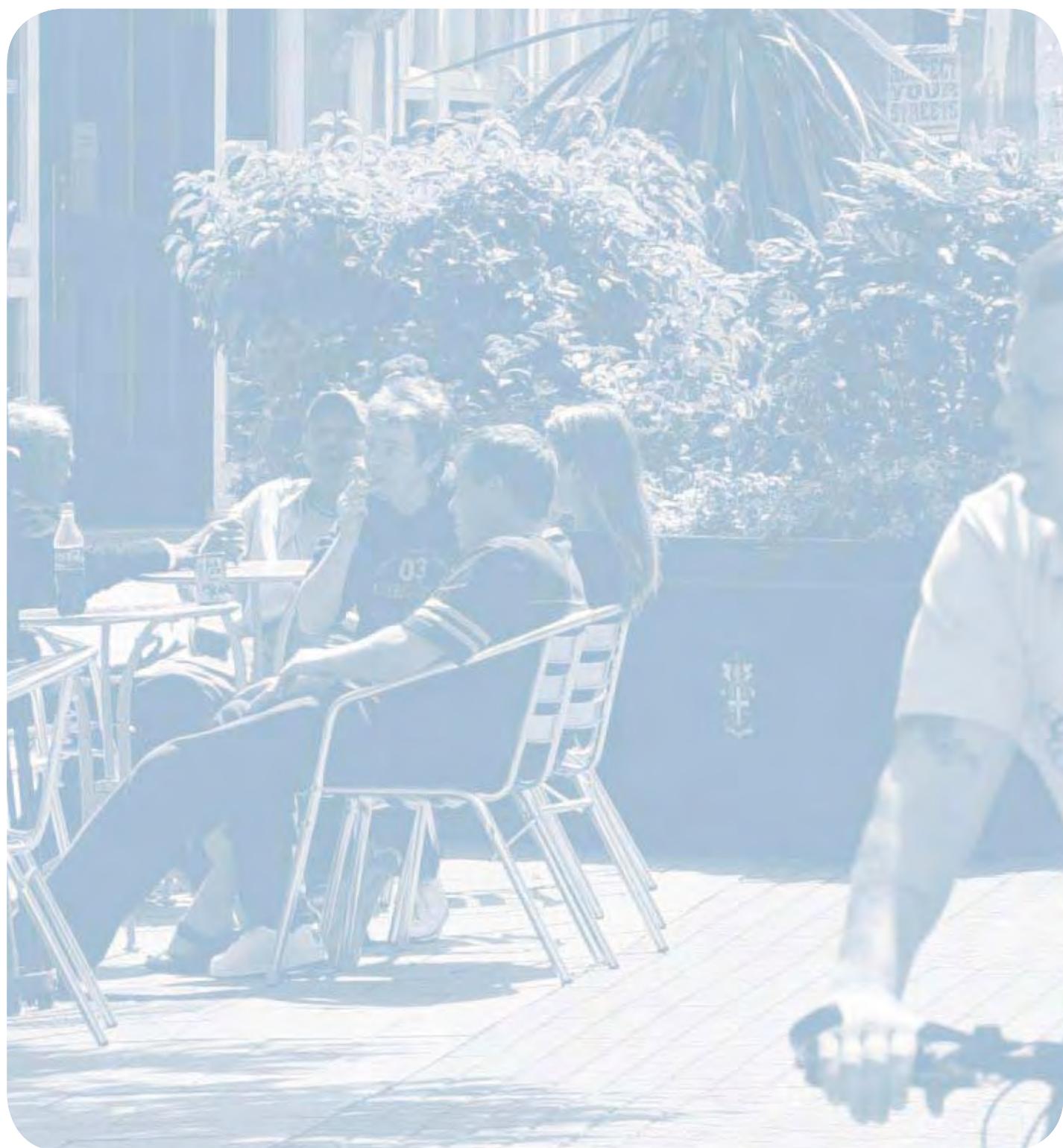
- 10,250 m² retail
- 1,283 residential units
- 80 bed hotel

Anticipated Delivery mechanism

- Comprehensive demolition and redevelopment by private developers

Public Realm Proposals

- St Mary's Road – enhancing the character of the road through widening and re-paving of the pavements, extensive tree planting, co-ordinated street furniture, and on-street parking bays.
- Power Square and Guildford Gate – two new high quality public spaces on the wider pedestrian circuit of the town centre.
- Lea Walk – a linear park running through the site. Opportunities for exposing the river should be explored where practicable, and a water related theme utilising sculpture, paving, and water features will help to give character and identity to the area.



Implementation

6 Implementation

Implementation of the Development Framework demands genuine co-operation between the public sector partners, the wider Luton community and private sector interests. The process of preparation of the Development Framework and the public consultation exercise undertaken during early July 2004 has initiated that essential collaboration. There is every indication that major change is seen as both desirable and essential if the town is to thrive and respond to the emerging urban challenges. Implementation also requires that a dedicated Implementation Group is set up within Luton Borough Council (LBC) that has both the resources, mandate and project management skills to drive through the complex projects that are identified in the Development Framework. The Group must provide strong and consistent leadership for the project whether or not an Urban Development Corporation is established.

Development Framework Baseline

LBC and its partners have already progressed a number of major projects related to the Town Centre. These have now been incorporated into the Development Framework baseline that forms an essential first stage in the implementation process. Importantly, major transportation projects are already funded but will not come on stream for three to five years. LBC have a unique window of opportunity in which to define and shape major development and public realm projects in the town centre with the strong probability (a situation that does not prevail in many of the town's immediate competitors) that significant additional public transport capacity will be delivered. It is vital that these major transportation projects are pursued with the utmost vigour and delivered within the established programme timescales. The expansion intentions for London Luton Airport contribute to the image of Luton as being at the heart of a conurbation that is investing in the progressive transportation system needed to deliver and underpin sustainable growth.

Development Interest

Major development companies are already investing considerable resources to secure opportunities in the town. The Development Framework provides the first step in demonstrating to the market that the Council and its partners are serious about delivering change in the town centre. This will be achieved through the strategic vision embodied within the Framework and also by demonstrating that the Council and its partners are committed to delivering the infrastructure and policy adjustments needed to provide the foundation for change and investment.

The potential formation of an Urban Development Corporation (UDC) is a real benefit. The UDC will have access to substantial public sector funding that will enhance and accelerate change throughout the conurbation but will also give focus to town centre projects. Importantly it will also offer the potential for an expedited decision making process for future development projects. Certain development opportunities in the town centre, with Luton Station the prime example, will require LBC to take a strong lead by defining the development opportunity through preparation of detailed Development & Design Briefs including funding strategies that identify any requirement for gap funding. There are also development situations that would benefit from the confidence and certainty that direct investment by English Partnerships or the East of England Development Agency would inject. Investment by these high profile agencies would increase confidence in Luton.

Implementing the Development Framework

The Council has a dual role in promoting the Development Framework. It has a role as both land owner and separately as planning authority. As land owner, it currently has interests in many of the key development sites including:

- Power Court
- Crawley Road
- Bute Street car park
- The Gap Site (and adjacent land)
- Park Viaduct
- Silver Streer

This land interest provides LBC with the ability to directly influence both the nature of development and programming. LBC must use its role as land owner proactively. Where LBC has only a limited interest in a wider development area it should consider the opportunity (with its public sector partners) to make strategic acquisitions of adjacent land parcels. This enlarged land interest would enable LBC to secure interest from development partners that may act as a catalyst to wider development on adjacent sites.

LBC has also been successful in working with major land owners such as the Prudential and Ballymore, to encourage new development. This approach is welcomed (so long as there is mutuality of objectives), to lever private sector investment. However, it is imperative that prior to these discussions taking place that LBC has reached a clear view on its objectives. To achieve this as landowner it should now prioritise delivery of the key sites through an implementation plan that identifies the principal actions required to bring forward each of the sites. A crucial task in the implementation programme is the preparation of a town centre car parking strategy – given a number of the proposals in the Development Framework will have a direct or indirect impact on car parking numbers and car park distribution across the town centre.

LBC should develop its ‘vision’ for each of the key sites by preparing Development Briefs, or as a minimum, preparing a Statement of Development Principles.

The Development Framework identifies a number of opportunity sites. The schedule is not exhaustive and other sites will come forward for development. This is to be welcomed and the challenge will be to ensure that development continues to support the principles of the Development Framework. Similarly it might stimulate landowners/developers to amalgamate sites; again this is generally to be welcomed. The Development Framework characterises the town centre into a number of districts which provide structure and identity. During the course of implementation these should be kept under review so that changes and amalgamations can be made to respond to changing conditions.



Public square - Copenhagen

Implementation Programme & Project Milestones

The Development Framework identifies a large number of potential projects to be completed over a ten year period from 2005 to 2014. In order to focus activity and provide clear project milestones the Implementation Programme has been distilled into a key target projects to be completed within three scales.

Up to 2006 Early wins to build project momentum and confidence

- Bride Street / Manchester pedestrian priority works
- commence tree planting
- implement George Street Market
- Park Street corner
- Luton Maze
- Consultants appointed for town centre transport scheme
- Market Hall refurbishment
- Luton Carnival Arts Trust
- Arndale extension (St George's Square)
- St George's Square revamp

Up to 2008 Major transportation and access improvements to underpin regeneration

- | | |
|---|--|
| new bus station
complete Inner Ring Road (North) | demolition of Station Car Park & bus station
town centre car park refurbishment |
|---|--|

Up to 2014 Completion ADF development projects & public spaces to complete the transformation

- enhanced retail base
- improved residential/leisure/service offer
- complete town centre squares
- complete pedestrian circulation system
- secure improvements to town centre approaches

Progress on all milestones should be the subject of regular monitoring.

Development Vehicle

The Implementation Programme shows how committed projects integrate with new projects and programmes initiated by the Development Framework. This series of projects should be profiled together under the umbrella of the Development Framework. If an Urban Development Corporation (UDC) is formed the Development Framework would be an important element of its action programme. Luton Town Centre

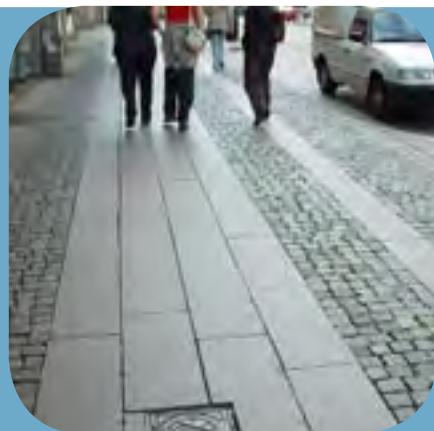
demands that there is a dedicated development agency established to take on the challenge. The Development Framework assumes that this will be the Urban Development Corporation. If this is not to be the case then a dedicated development vehicle needs to be established.

Funding of Essential Town Centre Infrastructure

The public realm elements of the Development Framework provide the physical context for the development of individual sites. The quality of the public realm will influence the quality of the eventual built development. It is therefore appropriate that development projects contribute to the funding of essential new public realm infrastructure.

A further important issue for the Council (and the perception of the town centre) is the physical improvement of the railway station and its connectivity with Bute Street and the Arndale Centre. LBC should develop specific planning policies (potentially through the use of supplementary guidance) to set up a Luton Town Centre Development Fund – through the use of Section 106 (or ‘Planning Contributions’ under the new Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004). Emerging advice contained within a draft Circular on planning contributions highlights the potential for Local Authorities to ‘pool’ contributions from a number of development proposals. These would be clearly linked to specific infrastructure works, including future provision, provided this is set out within an agreed timeframe. There should be a clear and direct link between the development and the infrastructure, and a fair and reasonable scale of contribution sought relative to the nature of the development.

The objective of the fund would be to secure funding from development sites in the town centre – and potentially major proposals outside of the town centre such as the Vauxhall site – to contribute to the public realm improvements and major enhancements to the station/new public transport interchange. It will be necessary to commence early dialogue with Network Rail to achieve their ‘buy-in’ to the extent of improvements to the station that they would consider acceptable; without this there is a danger that the required specification of work could make the proposal unachievable due to the cost.



Paving detail - Copenhagen



Gala Theatre - Durham



Public realm - Milton Keynes

Next Steps and Priorities

The Development Framework sets out a challenging agenda of projects, proposals and other actions required of LBC and its partners. Each project now needs to move to a more detailed level of definition and assessment as part of the implementation process.

We suggest that as a priority a Development Brief is prepared for the Luton Gateway District and the Hat Factory to include the bus station site, railway station and surrounding land, and the Silver Street and Bute Street area.

It is vital that this work on this next stage of work commences as soon as possible in order to maintain the momentum that has already built up. LBC must maintain momentum by delivering the project on St George's Square. There is still considerable merit in holding a Developer Seminar to demonstrate the range of opportunities available in the town centre





Outline Public Realm Strategy

Outline Public Realm Strategy

The public realm comprises the streets, footpaths and open spaces of Luton town centre which are contained by buildings and other structures. The design, quality and appearance of the public realm is an important component in defining the character of a place. It is also influences and shapes people's perceptions of place: well designed and cared for places are always more attractive than tired, run-down areas.

The public realm also has an important role to play in linking together the town centre both visually and physically, helping to make it easy for pedestrians to move around and visually distinguishing the wider town centre as well as more specific districts through the use of surface materials, street furniture and tree planting.

This outline public realm strategy for Luton town centre considers the following:

- Public realm objectives for the whole town centre;
- Animating the public realm;
- The role of public art;
- Projects and proposals; and
- Funding and delivery.



Contemporary housing - Copenhagen



Pedestrian street - Copenhagen



Public space - Bristol

Public Realm Objectives

In order that Luton town centre has a public realm of the highest quality five objectives will underpin the design approach to projects and proposals:

1. **Restore street character:** The character of a town's streets plays a large part in people's understanding of and identification with a particular place. Where streets have become downgraded through insensitive development and poor surface materials, or broken apart with left over land and interrupted frontages then a negative impression is given. It is therefore important to restore street character with good quality frontage development and hard and soft landscape treatments. Vehicles should have access to many streets for access and servicing, and shared surfaces can control traffic speeds. Vehicular access during the evening can contribute a livelier night time economy through maximising town centre accessibility.
2. **Simplify layout and eliminate street clutter:** A clutter of signs, bollards, servicing boxes, lampposts and pedestrian barriers not only undermines the quality and attractiveness of the public realm but can also act as a confusing barrier to people wishing to access the town centre. The removal of unnecessary street clutter and the co-ordination of signage and street furniture is therefore an important aim. This must include a strategy of signposting and waymarking across the town centre to include pedestrian and cycle routes, key public transport stops, car parks, and important facilities and destinations.

The specification of street furniture components such as lamp stands, bus shelters, litter bins and seating, must add to the overall identity, quality and character of the town centre area. In addition, overly complex design and layout of spaces can also lead to clutter and confusion. Simplicity must therefore be allowed to dominate.

3. **Pedestrian crossing points that reflect pedestrian desire lines:** all too often pedestrians are forced to cross streets and public spaces via the least direct route. A basic principle in the design and layout of all crossings and public spaces should be following the lines that people want to take, not forcing alternatives that then have to be guarded using ugly safety barriers which also contribute to street clutter.

4. **Extensive tree planting:** Tree planting is a key objective of the development framework. It should be used to help emphasise the identity of different parts of the town centre. London planes and limes are already present in many areas, and hornbeams have been introduced around the Inner Ring Road, notably along Hucklesby Way. Other species could be used to identify particular districts, such as the use of oaks in the Hat Factory District.

5. **High quality natural materials with simple detailing:** robust, low maintenance and timeless design must be a key component of any public realm works in Luton town centre. A co-ordinated but limited palette of natural surface materials such as stone, brick and gravel will provide a strong setting for development. It will also help to give image and identity to the whole town centre area unifying its appearance and character. If a particular location needs to be differentiated, such as the Hat Factory District, then variations on the overall palette could be specified.

Animating the Public Realm

Activity is one of the key generators of life and vibrancy within any town centre. Activity may take place within the streets, squares and open spaces that make up the public realm or within buildings and covered places. Where there is an interface between the two an active edge is formed such as a street café, bar or restaurant, a shop window, or a busy doorway or entrance point. Luton already benefits from a good range of different activity generators such as shopping, employment, learning, leisure, transport interchange, and some housing.

Enhancing and extending the range of uses increases the amount of activity that takes place and the hours during which it takes place. The Development Framework therefore identifies opportunity sites across the town centre within which a range of different uses and activities could be introduced, as well as a districts that provide a framework within which development proposals can come forward for detail consideration.

Activity, in particular leisure activities, in Luton town centre should not just be associated with café and bar culture. The development framework already includes proposals for potentially accommodating a fitness and leisure use in the Southside of the town centre, as well as a home for the Luton Carnival Arts Trust in the University Quarter, and an extension to the popular Library Theatre in St George's Square.

It will be also important to identify other opportunities to animate the public realm at various times of the day and night, and also provide options for different sections of the community to come and enjoy spending time in Luton town centre. This could include markets, festivals and open air performances building on the popularity of the Christmas Fair that takes in George Street, proposals for an open air street market also in George Street, and programming the recently refurbished events space at Market Hill.



Public square - Bristol



Performers - Market Hill



Animating the public realm

With the creation of new public spaces and the rejuvenation of existing spaces within the town centre the opportunity exists to associate a particular use of function with them. For example:

- St Georges' Square – a major outdoor events space within the town and the conceptual heart of the town centre. The space could feature video projection onto the Central Library for outdoor screenings, part of a rolling programme of activities appropriate to different times of the year or cultural festivals.
- Park Square – young, vibrant, linked with the university supporting cafés, bars, restaurants.
- Market Hill – outdoor performance, linked to the Carnival Arts Trust, part of wider George Street area with the street market and Christmas Fair. Outdoor ice skating could take place here in winter.
- Town Hall Square – Civic plaza with seating and an emphasis on quieter enjoyment.
- Station Square – arrival and interchange place with the bustle of people passing through the town centre gateway.
- Bute Street and Bute Plaza forming a link through the town from Luton Gateway. Cafes, bars and restaurants already play an important role and The Hat Factory performance space could provide further opportunities to enliven the area.
- St Mary's Square – green, quiet, and restful.
- Guildford Gate and Power Square – the potential for animating new public spaces in Power Court must be explored as proposals for this part of the town centre become clearer.

Examining existing events and identifying gaps is an important first step ensuring that there is a broad range of events taking place throughout the year. The role of a town 'animateur' to book, organise and market events and spaces across the town centre should be considered. In addition, a 'tool kit' of equipment such as temporary structures, lighting, demountable stages etc should be procured or sourced in order that full use can be made of a space at relatively short notice.



Places to sit - Copenhagen



Twoli Gardens - Copenhagen

Public Art

The introduction of public art into the public realm can contribute towards giving the town centre additional character and identity as well as providing local landmarks to improve legibility. This can be achieved through relatively modest outlay when compared with the overall cost of public realm enhancements.

Public art nearly always attracts the attention of the local community and can provide a talking point, raising interest in and the profile of the town centre. It can also be a good way of engaging people through, for example, the selection process, including existing foci of creativity such as the University, the Library Theatre, and The Hat Factory, as well as school children as at the Luton Maze project.

Potential points to consider include:

- Create a new, **contemporary exhibition space** within the town centre drawing on the strong art and design courses at the University and other creative forces within the town. Organise a symposium to consider best practice in delivering a new gallery space e.g. the Walsall Art Gallery in the West Midlands, and The Lowry in Salford.
- **Re-brand** Luton not as a 'crap town' but as a place people associate with innovation and design excellence. Exploit all press coverage for maximum benefit.
- Build on **Luton's heritage** particularly manufacturing and millinery.
- **Integrate artists** into design teams when considering public space improvements.
- Take risks, consider the creation of an '**outrage space**' to let people express themselves through art in a provocative way, capturing the imagination and engaging them.
- Create a **public art landmark**, such as the Angel of the North or the A13 Artscape project, at a principal entrance point into the town centre e.g. Luton Gateway or the Dunstable Road Telford Way junction.
- Consider a **percent for art** policy as part of a town centre development fund that can be specifically ring fenced for public art or performance.



Bronze band - Malmö



Deco style sculpture

Projects and proposals

As set out within the development framework proposals and projects for the public realm in Luton town centre are structured around four key elements:

- **Enhancing the Inner Ring Road;**
- **Approaches to the town centre;**
- **A necklace of public squares and spaces; and**
- **A circuit of pedestrian friendly streets.**

Each of the town centre District Action Plans contain a section on public realm proposals. The proposals provide details on individual projects within specific parts of the town centre. The projects have been identified in order to address and help to deliver the four key elements in a manageable and co-ordinated way. They are summarised below.

Westgate

- Surface level crossings at Crawley Road (Telford Way) and at Upper George Street (Dunstable Road)
- Telford Way, Dunstable Road, New Bedford Road, Upper George Street footpath enhancements
- Tree planting along Telford Way, Dunstable Road, New Bedford Road Upper George Street.
- Inner Ring Road improved signage at Dunstable Road island and public art

St George's

- Manchester Street pedestrianisation
- St George's Square remodelling
- Public transport infrastructure
- Upper George Street and Bridge Street footpath enhancements

Southside

- Surface level crossing at Wellington Street removal of underpass.
- Chapel Street viaduct environmental enhancements
- Stuart Road and Wellington Street footpath enhancements
- Stuart Street tree planting

Retail Quarter

- George Street footpath enhancements
- Luton Maze
- Town Hall Square

Hat Factory District

- Bute Street pedestrianisation
- Guildford Street, Cheapside and John Street footpath enhancements
- Bute Street, Guildford Street and Cheapside tree planting
- Bute Plaza public space
- Arndale Centre car park ramp/ Arndale House facade and lighting enhancement

Luton Gateway

- Station Square
- Church Street footpath enhancements
- Guildford gate public square
- High town bridge

University Quarter

- Park viaduct environmental enhancements
- Park Street footpath enhancements
- St Mary's Place and Park Square
- St Mary's Road/ Church Street tree planting
- Church Street bus/pedestrian priority and co-ordinated bus shelters and infrastructure.
- Church Street and St Mary's Road surface level pedestrian crossing

Power Court

- St Mary's Road enhancements
- Power Square and Guildford Gate public squares.

Funding and delivery

In order to help fund and deliver improvements to the public realm S.106 developer contributions should be collected to form part of a **town centre development fund**. Contributions may then be targeted to particular public realm projects within the district that the development proposal is located.

The delivery mechanism will need to be based on detailed costing and design specifications for each of the projects identified above. A design brief should be drawn up to include materials from an identified palette, street furniture from a co-ordinated range for the town centre, and tree species appropriate to the location. The Town Centre Area Development Framework Implementation Group will be responsible for identifying priorities and driving forward projects. It may also be appropriate to have a mixed team writing each design brief drawing upon a full range of local expertise and interest.



Nash Court - Canary Wharf

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