

Watton

Final Masterplanning Report

February 2018



Quality information

Document name	Ref	Prepared for	Prepared by	Date	Reviewed by
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Revision history

Project role	Name	Position	Action summary	Signature	Date
Qualifying Body	Watton Town Council	Neighbourhood Planning Group	Draft Report Submitted for comments	Watton Town Council	17/01/2018
Director / QA	Ben Castell	Technical Director	Revision and approval of Draft Report	Ben Castell	02/02/2018
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Background and Introduction

01

This section is intended to provide context and general information to introduce the project and its location.

1. Background and Introduction

1.1 Background

Through the Department of Communities and Local Government, Neighbourhood Planning Programme, AECOM has been commissioned to provide Masterplanning support to Watton Town Council. The support is intended to provide design assistance to the group's work in producing a Neighbourhood Plan and is designed to complement the neighbourhood planning work that is underway.

1.2 Objective

The overarching objective of this report is to advise on how the town centre can be improved with particular reference to the market.

This objective and area of focus was agreed with the Watton Town Council at the outset of the project, being the area where specialist technical support could best progress neighbourhood plan-making. It was also felt to be useful to demonstrate in a highly visual way the types of interventions that neighbourhood planning could encourage.

1.3 Locational Analysis

The town of Watton is located in district of Breckland in Norfolk, west of Norwich.

The town centre is located at the junction between two strategic roads, the B1108 and the A1075. The former links the A1065 to the west with Norwich to the east, while the latter links Dereham to the north with Thetford to the south.



Fig. 1.1 Aerial view of Watton

1.4 Process

Following an inception meeting and a site visit with Watton Town Council representatives, AECOM carried out an urban design assessment of the study area, largely focused on the market site and the surrounding town centre area.

The following steps were undertaken to produce this report:

- Initial meeting with Town Council representatives and a joint site visit;
- Detailed site visit focused on existing conditions on a market day;
- Urban design analysis;
- Desktop research and policy review;
- Preparation of public realm interventions; and,
- Preparation of this draft report for comment by Watton Town Council.

1.5 The Study Area

The study area focuses on the town centre, especially the market site on Middle Street and the High Street (B1108), where the weekly market is held on Wednesdays. Both streets are bordered by commercial and residential properties. The High Street constitutes the town's main east-west thoroughfare and shopping street, while Middle Street is a quiet low-traffic residential street.



Fig. 1.5.1 The main crossing near the clock tower on the High Street



Fig. 1.5.3 View of Middle Street looking west



Fig. 1.5.2 View of the Town Hall and Middle Street from the High Street



Fig. 1.5.4 View of the High Street looking west



Planning Policy Review

02

This section notes the existing planning policy context and highlights the relevant policies to which the report proposals should comply.

2. Planning Policy Review

2.1 Introduction

The current adopted Local Plan comprises of a group of Development Plan Documents including the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies 2001-2026 (adopted 2009). The adopted Local Plan also includes the Site Specific Policies and Proposals DPD (adopted 2012), the Thetford Area Action Plan and a number of Saved Policies of The Breckland District Local Plan (adopted in 1999); these documents do not relate to the site.

Breckland's emerging Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State in November 2017, with adoption expected in spring 2018.

Breckland District Council is committed to producing a Supplementary Planning Document on design, work is due to commence following the Examination of the Local Plan.

The Core Strategy and Development Control Policies DPD and the emerging Local Plan 2011-2036 have been reviewed and the policies relevant to the site's development are summarised hereafter.

2.2 Core Strategy and Development Control Policies 2001-2026

Policy CP 7 Town Centres

Watton is identified as a mid-sized town with a designated town centre which serves local need. The Core Strategy seeks to maintain and enhance the vitality of town centres and protect their core retail function, in accordance with their identified role, through a combination of promotional or physical improvement measures. The following improvements are highlighted: defining primary and secondary retail frontages and controlling changes of use and encouraging proposals which seek to deliver environmental improvements, enhanced car parking provision and reduce the impact of traffic / dominance of the car for town centre users.

Policy CP 13 Accessibility

The Core Strategy seeks to promote accessibility improvements and highlights that significant emphasis will be given to the design of public spaces, streets and neighbourhoods which should promote the use of these areas through the use of appropriate lighting and natural surveillance.

Policy DC 9 Proposals for Town Centre Uses

The Core Strategy supports development proposals in the defined town centres where they represent the best opportunity to bring forward sites identified for redevelopment and improve the town centre environment.

Policy DC 16 Design

The Council supports the highest standards of design and the Core Strategy sets out that the following design principles should be given due consideration: local character, public realm, connectivity, adaptability, diversity, crime prevention, form and character, density, height, massing and scale, layout, siting and grouping, landscaping, boundary treatments and enclosure and building detailing and materials.

Policy DC 17 Historic Environment

The study area is located within a Conservation Area and is adjacent to a listed building. The Core Strategy sets out that new development will be expected to preserve and enhance the character, appearance and setting of Conservation Areas, Scheduled Monuments, Historic Parks and Gardens and other areas of historic interest.

Policy DC 18 Community Facilities, Recreation and Leisure

The study area is within Watton, a mid-size town. The Core Strategy supports sustainable proposals for community, recreation, and leisure facilities which will improve accessibility to services, support the role of the centre in the development hierarchy and reduce rural isolation.

2.3 Breckland Local Plan Pre-Submission Publication

Policy GEN 1 Sustainable Development in Breckland

The Local Plan seeks to enable development that improves the economic, social and environmental objectives of Breckland including protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

Policy GEN 2 Promoting High Quality Design

A general design policy that seeks high quality design in all development, which should contribute positively to the public realm and public spaces, protecting the high levels of amenity and quality of life making Breckland an attractive, successful and vibrant place for residents, workers and visitors.

Policy ENV 7 Designated Heritage Assets

The study area is located within a Conservation Area and is adjacent to a listed building. The Local Plan affords the highest level of protection to designated heritage assets (including Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings) and their settings.

Policy EC 5 Town Centre and Retail Strategy

The Local Plan town centre and retail strategy seeks to support the diversity of main town centre uses in order to enhance their continued vitality and viability with regard to retail, business, cultural and leisure services; deliver improvements to the built environment, including public realm and streetscape, and promote better accessibility through improvements in pedestrian and cycle environment and the designation and management of car parking where it is demonstrated it will bring a positive improvement.



Urban Design Analysis

03

This section analyses the market site characteristics and highlighting the main constraints and opportunities for public realm improvements.

3. Urban Design Analysis

3.1 Market Characteristics

Watton's weekly market takes place on Wednesdays on both sides of the High Street between Beechwood Avenue to the west and Middle Street to the east, with a minority of stalls spilling onto Middle Street and Chaston Place.

The market benefits from a wide variety of stall holders from food to jewellery and is located on a thriving high street made up of 27 businesses, the large majority of which are independent retailers. Good public transport links, roads, and access to free car parking also increase the accessibility and connectivity of the market.

Market stall holders (see Fig. 3.1.5), as surveyed on 1 November 2017

1. Plants and flower wholesalers
2. Norfolk Pie Man
3. Farm Eggs
4. Dried food
5. Fruits and vegetables
6. Clothing stall
7. Jewellery
8. Brakers
9. Fresh fish
10. Unknown stall holders (not present at time of assessment)



Fig. 3.1.1 Fruits and vegetables



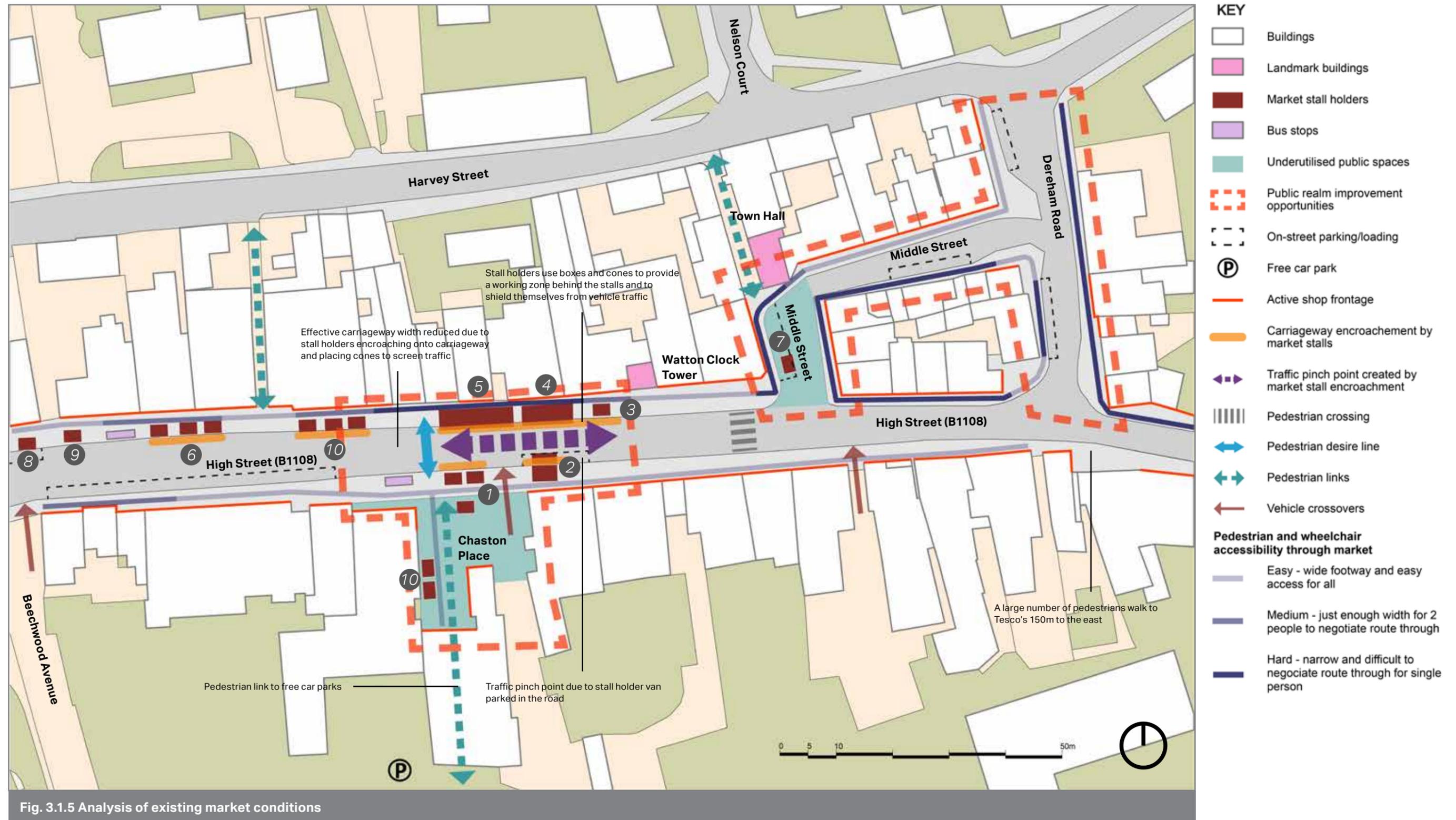
Fig. 3.1.3 Clothes



Fig. 3.1.2 Jewellers



Fig. 3.1.4 Fishmongers



3.2 Existing Issues

The market is currently located on the High Street, where the **stalls spill onto the carriageway**. This is **not safe for stallholders** and **adds to an existing traffic congestion issue** down the High Street with **large farm vehicles occasionally blocking the street**. This is added to by market stall holders whom are very attached to their spots and **some need a van to hold stock or for security, also blocking the High Street**; some even use vans to shield themselves from the traffic. The stalled traffic also **increases local air pollution**.

It is clear from observation that the customer base consists largely of retired and elderly people. Stall holders confirmed this and most food-based stalls, which form the main focus of the market, rely on repeat business from regularly customers. This characteristic, combined with their age, means that some stall holders fear that moving could threaten their profits. The bus and the free car parking south of the High Street are two large factors that contribute to the success of the market; therefore links to them need to be retained and enhanced.

North of the High Street the **stalls are installed very close to the shop frontages**, which the **elderly and disabled find difficult to access** without going one at a time along the pavement. This area along the shop frontages is the most difficult area to navigate as a pedestrian.

Pedestrians regularly cut across the High Street behind the southern bus stop as it constitutes a strong desire line, however this is **not safe** and adds to generally poor traffic conditions in the centre of Watton. This could therefore be a good place for another pedestrian crossing.

There are **no dedicated power points**. Stallholders who require electricity sometimes need to run a cable over the pavement from adjacent properties.

Finally, the market as it is currently configured does not work in harmony with the town to show either in their best light. The market is squeezed into the edges of the busy High Street, **missing opportunities to establish character, a sense of place and an environment that this attractive for both traders and shoppers**.



Fig. 3.2.1 Stall holders park their vans behind their stalls for convenience and to shield them from vehicle traffic



Fig. 3.2.3 Elderly and disabled people struggle to walk between the buildings and stalls on the north side of the High Street



Fig. 3.2.2 Stall holders encroach onto the High Street carriageway with orange cones



Fig. 3.2.4 Traffic congestion on the High Street resulting from encroaching market stalls



Fig. 3.2.5 The market creates a new pedestrian desire line north of Chaston Place



Fig. 3.2.7 The western section of Middle Street is a natural gathering space dominated by the Town Hall but is only used as a car park



Fig. 3.2.9 Dereham Road connects the eastern end of Middle Street with the High Street but is not an essential traffic link

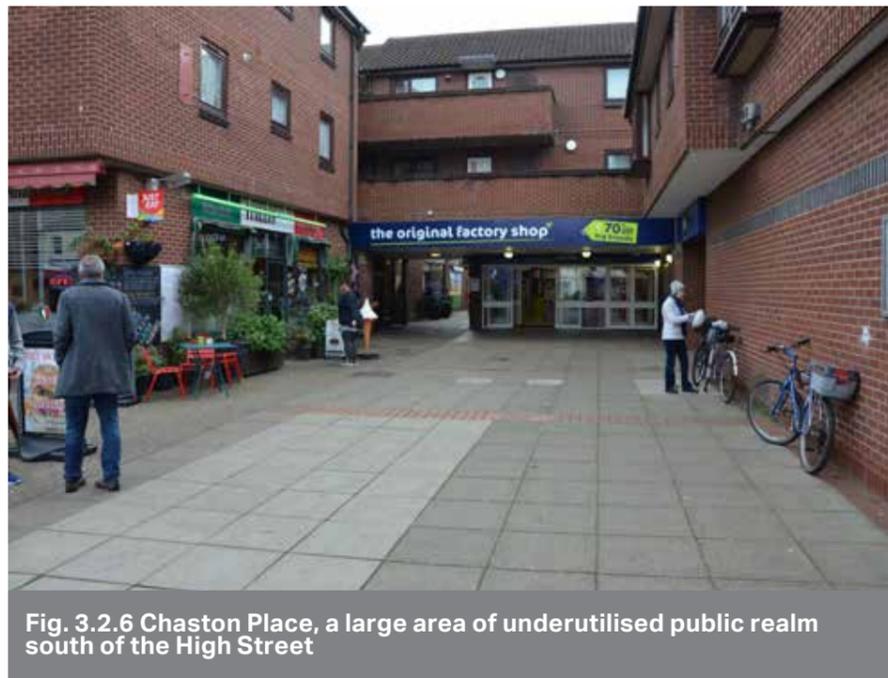


Fig. 3.2.6 Chaston Place, a large area of underutilised public realm south of the High Street



Fig. 3.2.8 The eastern section of Middle Street experiences low traffic volumes and does not form an indispensable link

3.3 Market Relocation Opportunities

Throughout the country there are examples of markets that are struggling. Those that are thriving have often managed to be made as attractive as possible to customers and traders. In Watton, opportunities have been identified to retain the market in an adjacent location in order to resolve the issues described in the previous chapter while safeguarding room for future growth and ensuring the vitality of the Watton town centre.

Middle Street Option

Middle Street provides an opportunity to implement a totally pedestrianised street for market days. The area is framed by shops and residential buildings looking onto the space but is underutilised. The western section of Middle Street forms a small square whose northern end is enclosed by the Town Hall, while the eastern section connects with Dereham Road, a narrow residential street. Middle Street is currently dominated by on-street parking and is bordered by narrow footways. It could instead be reinstated as the heart of the town. Closing Middle Street and Dereham Road would still allow vehicular access around to Harvey Street without significantly impacting traffic in the town centre. Middle Street also has great potential for a landscape design scheme including hard landscaping, street furniture, and street lighting to become an attractive gathering space.

Chaston Place Option

An alternative to Middle Street is Chaston Place, the space currently underutilised west of The Crown Pub. Some stalls are already at this location (flowers and pies) and there is scope to increase the number of stalls to reduce the pressure on High Street. This area has the potential to be redesigned to maximise the potential including street lighting, planting, hard landscaping and furniture.

Preferred Option

The site formed by Middle Street and Dereham Road is large enough to contain the existing market stalls while retaining room for future growth. In addition, this site benefits from more sunlight and is framed by more attractive buildings than Chaston Place. For these reasons, the Middle Street option was preferred over Chaston Place. Because Middle Street is easily accessible and the Town Hall is visible from the High Street, businesses along the High Street would still benefit from the foot traffic generated by the market without the congestion created by encroaching food stalls.

3.4 Place and Movement Functions

A balanced approach to street design promotes its **place** function above the **movement** function, and as Manual for Streets 2 puts it "as the place function becomes more important, the relative weight given to the movement function will be reduced when deciding on priorities and an appropriate street design". Middle Street and Dereham Road present the opportunity for the opposite - to massively increase the quality of place as their role in moving traffic is non-essential and are used for little more than parking space. How this might be done is the focus of the next section.



Fig. 3.4 Street type matrix (source: TfL)

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Possible Interventions

04

This section explores possible design interventions to improve the public realm on the market site.

4. Possible Interventions

4.1 Design Proposals

The market plays a vital role in providing a sense of place to Watton both as one of its main attractions and source of economic vitality. A set of design treatments could be applied to Middle Street and Dereham Road to improve comfortable market conditions while remaining an attractive place on non-market days. Together they would decrease the dominance of the automobile and provide a more pleasant pedestrian environment as well as sustain the economy of the town centre.

A **more inviting market site** must be created through measures that prioritise pedestrians over traffic. The relocation of the market would be a unique opportunity to rethink a space that performs poorly on both place and movement dimensions. Strategically located **electric points** could be introduced for market stalls that require electricity. Ensuring safe market operations would require **traffic and parking suspensions** on Middle Street and Dereham Road to form a pedestrian-only area, possibly delineated by **rising bollards (optional)** during market hours (unless a lower-tech solution is preferred).

A **shared space treatment** whereby the carriageway is raised to footway levels could be applied to the repaving of Middle Street and Dereham Road. This would enable a better distribution of pedestrians on market hours giving pedestrians priority over traffic the rest of the time. **Variations in pavement colour, size, pattern, and/or texture** could guide the placement of market stalls and delineate parking spaces in order to keep the use of unattractive street signs and carriageway painting to a minimum. To further decrease the auto-dominated character of the town centre, the **pedestrian guardrails** adjacent to the main crossing on the High Street could be removed, subject to safety audit. Introducing **opportunities to sit**, both in the form of **public benches** and a designated **outdoor pub seating area**, would help transform Middle Street into a proper town square and gathering place throughout the week. The reconstruction of the public realm could also be an opportunity to integrate new drainage solutions to **improve the site drainage**, thus reducing the likelihood of surface water flooding on the High Street. For example, **permeable paving** could be used as a sustainable and attractive solution to alleviate flooding risks and highlight the new role of the public spaces.

Moving the market to the proposed location will require some stall holders and residents to alter their parking habits. Middle Street currently has 7 parking bays and 1 disabled bay, while Dereham Road has 2 parking bays and 2 disabled bays. While the existing parking and loading bays on the High Street can be retained, those on Middle Street and Dereham Road would need to be suspended on market days. Stall holder vans might also exert additional pressure on nearby loading or parking spaces. For this reason, the relocation of the market would be an ideal opportunity to **revise the current town centre kerbside regulations**.

The following pages show some illustrations of how these types of intervention could look in Watton.

Resident parking and access would be unaffected on non-market days and they would benefit from an improved environment throughout the week.

A Precedent – Thetford Market

Thetford is also a historic market town only 14 miles south of Watton. The market is focused around a dedicated pedestrian only area providing a safe and friendly environment for both stall holders and the public. Both street planting and street furniture are used to achieve this. This should be used to help inform the design stage.





Fig. 4.1 Proposed market place design, market day condition

4.2 View 1A: Middle Street West - Regular Conditions

This spread presents two design alternatives for the western section of Middle Street between the Town Hall and the High Street.

Middle Street would be reconstructed as a proper town square and main gathering space in Watton on non-market days. This design takes advantage the area's location as the gravitational centre of Watton, highlighted by the view from the High Street to the Town Hall at the northern end.

- 1 Shared space treatment with carriageway raised to footway level to improve pedestrian flows and prioritise pedestrians over motor vehicles - subject to consultations with visually impaired groups at the detailed design stage.
- 2 Footways and carriageway repaved with high-quality paving slabs and/or setts sensitive of historic context to assert the role of Middle Street as a central gathering place. Variations in size, pattern, texture, and/or colour to emphasise the place function of Middle Street while guiding motor vehicle movement and parking.
- 3 New benches to emphasise the role of Middle Street as a gathering place.
- 4 Rising bollards (optional) enabling local vehicle access during non-market hours.
- 5 Opportunity to delineate an outdoor pub seating area.



Fig. 4.2.1 Existing view



Fig. 4.2.2 Proposed public realm improvements on non-market days

4.3 View 1B: Middle Street West - Market Conditions

The same design would enable an easy conversion of the space into a market site every week, taking advantage of its location as the natural gravitation centre of Watton. The proposed footway and carriageway reconstruction as a shared space would allow pedestrian to spread more easily during market hours rather than being confined to the footways. The bollards could be raised and parking suspended to create a pedestrian-only area. The new pavement could be designed to guide the placement of market stalls, and new electric points could be provided for those that require electricity.

- 1 Shared space treatment to improve pedestrian comfort and flows on market days by removing the delineation between footway and carriageway - subject to consultations with visually impaired groups at the detailed design stage.
- 2 Rising bollards (optional) to prevent vehicle traffic and create a pedestrian-only area during market hours.
- 3 Parking bays suspended during market hours.
- 4 Potential location of market stalls. Discrete electric points to be provided for stalls that require electricity.



Fig. 4.3.1 Proposed public realm improvements on market days

4.4 View 2: Middle Street East

Middle Street east of the Town Hall and Dereham Road are narrow low-traffic streets framed mostly by residential buildings with a minority of store fronts. The aesthetic quality of the existing pavement is poor and the streets perform few functions other than catering to parking and limited traffic. Extending the shared space design proposed in front of the Town Hall eastward would create one unified gathering space in the centre of Watton. In a similar way to the space in front of the Town Hall, this area could be easily converted into a market space containing the existing stalls with some room for growth, and bollards could be used to prevent vehicle traffic and parking during market hours.

- 1 Shared space treatment to improve pedestrian comfort and flows on market days by removing the delineation between footway and carriageway - subject to consultations with visually impaired groups at the detailed design stage.
- 2 Footways and carriageway repaved with high-quality paving slabs and/or setts sensitive of historic context to assert the role of Middle Street as a central gathering place. Variations in size, pattern, texture, and/or colour to emphasise the place function of Middle Street while guiding motor vehicle movement and parking.
- 3 New benches to emphasise the role of Middle Street as a gathering place.
- 4 Parking bays suspended during market hours.
- 5 Potential location of market stalls. Discrete electric points to be provided for stalls that require electricity.



Fig. 4.4.1 Existing view



Fig. 4.4.2 Proposed public realm improvements on market days

4.5 Examples of Proposed Treatments



Fig. 4.5.1 Shared space designs



Fig. 4.5.2 Street markets in small public spaces

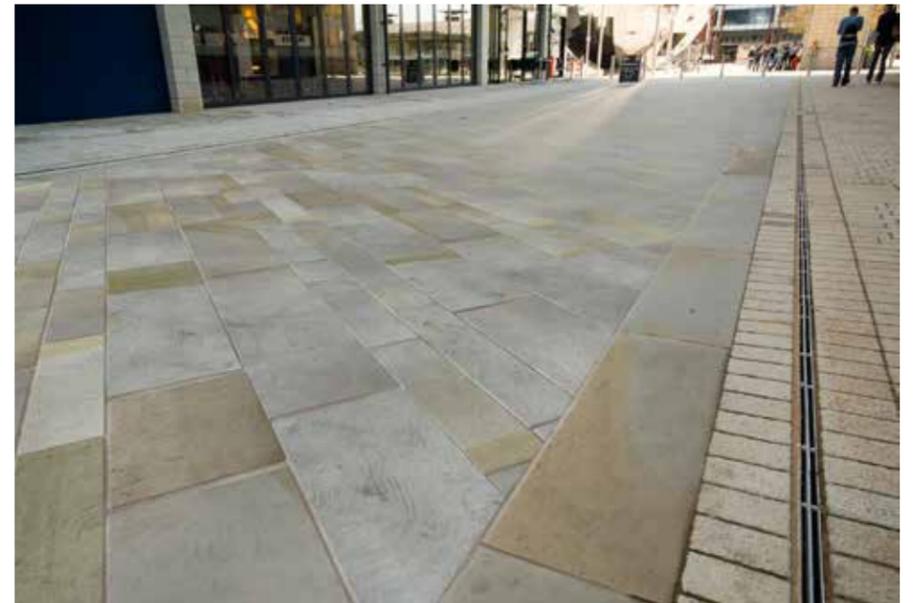


Fig. 4.5.3 Variations in pavement design for delineation



Next Steps

05

This section concludes the report with recommendations on how to embed findings in the Neighbourhood Plan.

5. Next Steps

5.1 Summary of Key Proposals

Proposing design solutions to improve market conditions in the town centre is the focus of this report. It recommends moving the market from the High Street to Middle Street and Dereham Road to improve conditions for shoppers and transform provide the town centre with an attractive gathering space. This needs to be carefully managed as, with careful planning and delivery, the proposed changes will sustain the town centre and market's economic vitality and the attractiveness of Watton as a place to visit and live.

The report sketches a number of improvements that should be considered, including:

- Improvements to market and pedestrian conditions, through:
 - A w market site that provides more space for existing and potential market stalls;
 - Reconstructing Middle Street and Dereham Road as shared spaces to provide more room for pedestrians and reduce footway pinch points and congestion (subject to consultations with visually impaired groups at the detailed design stage);
 - Restricting vehicle access during market hours with rising bollards (or more ad hoc measures); and,
 - Introducing electric points for market stalls that require electricity.
- Improvements to the town centre's streetscape, through:
 - Providing a proper gathering space and reducing the dominance of motor vehicles in the town centre;
 - Designating an outdoor seating area;
 - Repaving Middle Street and Dereham Road with context-sensitive paving slabs and/or setts;
 - Reducing street clutter by removing pedestrian guardrails (subject to road safety audit);
 - Providing opportunities to sit; and,
 - Revising the site drainage to mitigate surface water flooding.
- Improvements to road safety by:
 - Reducing congestion caused by market stalls encroaching the carriageway;
 - Eliminating conflicts between motor vehicles, stall holders, and pedestrians on the market site through bollards that restrict vehicle access; and,
 - Removing traffic pinch points created by vans parked behind market stalls.

5.2 Integration in the Neighbourhood Plan

Neighbourhood Plan policy needs must relate to land use planning – things that must be subject to planning permission. It is not always clear how transport and public realm proposals fit into this category, unless they form part of a site (re)development, which is not the case here.

Frome Neighbourhood Plan, which is now 'made', shows a way. It includes a policy on Town Centre Remodelling that is very much in the spirit of the recommendations in this report, and could be used as an inspiration.

Frome Policy TC1 – Town Centre Remodelling

Remodelling the Town Centre should provide improvements to the public realm.

Remodelling of the Town Centre [...] which accords with the following principles will be permitted:

- Improve the Town Centre environment for pedestrians.
- Reduce the impact of traffic movement from vehicles and re-order the priorities between motorised vehicles, cycles and pedestrians.
- Enhance the character and appearance of the Town Centre, taking into account guidance in the Frome Town Design Statement (October 2015) relating to this area.
- Provide an improved setting and location for the markets.
- Demonstrate that it will cause no deterioration in air quality.

Source: Frome Neighbourhood Plan, Frome Town Council, 2016

The focus of this report has been on public realm design interventions. These should be considered alongside other non-design interventions, such as exploring opportunities for supporting or restricting certain types of uses through use classes.

Other things to consider policies for include:

- Redevelopment opportunities for sites within the town centre; and,
- A shop front improvement scheme – could be linked to a shop front design guide or policy within the plan. In some places, this means the local authority provides a small grant which is then match funded by the individual business. This could be linked to a grant scheme to improve the appearance of existing buildings.

5.3 Delivery

Embedding the proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan is just part of the story; the ultimate aim is delivery.

The Town Council will need to work closely with, and apply pressure to, a number of players to ensure that the town centre transformation meets its potential. Included here are: the District Council; the County Council as highways authority; the businesses directly affected; and market users.

A good way of improving the chances of the improvements taking place is to link them to the wider development proposals through section 106 or Community Infrastructure Levy.

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