

# Annex A

Report on Windsor Town Centre Improvement Workshop

ANNEX A

# Windsor Town Centre Improvement Workshop

**The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead**

24 March 2015

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# 1 Introduction

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) hosted a Workshop on 24 March 2015 for Windsor's local businesses, stakeholders and community organisations to develop ideas and identify priorities for improving Windsor Town Centre – to help inform the Borough's new and up-to-date Retail and Town Centre Study (prepared by Cushman & Wakefield).

The Workshop was held at Guildhall, and was attended by a total of 17 participants from both the public and private sectors and with a range of local interests. On arrival, the participants were divided into discussion groups.

The aim of the Workshop, facilitated by Cushman & Wakefield, was to answer the question "*How can we GROW Windsor Town Centre?*" – where the acronym GROW was used to facilitate a 'brainstorming' session, in which the discussion groups assessed Goals for the town centre, the current Reality, Options for beneficial change, and the Way forward (as follows).

## **GOALS** for the town centre:

- What type of shopping and service destination do you want the town centre to become?
- Is it realistic and achievable?
- What should be the 'vision' for the town centre?

## **REALITY:**

- What is the town centre at present?
- Which way is it moving and why?
- Does it have particular strengths or opportunities which could be developed and exploited?
- What weaknesses and problems need to be overcome?

## **OPTIONS** for beneficial change:

- What actions and improvements are possible?
- Which are desirable?
- Which are quick/ cheap/ easy?
- Which are slow/ expensive/ difficult?

## **WAY** forward:

- What are the really key problems?
- How can these be overcome?
- Who will do it?
- When?
- What further research/ intervention is needed?

At the end of the Workshop, Cushman & Wakefield facilitated a plenary session, providing an opportunity for the discussion groups to report and debate their findings. These findings were documented, and are set out within this short report.

## 2 Findings

### 2.1 GOALS FOR THE TOWN CENTRE

A need to increase dwell time (i.e. the length of visitor's stay) within the town centre, thereby increasing spend within the town centre.

Provide a special welcome for visitors and a high quality experience.

Improve the attractiveness of the town centre beyond the castle area.

The town centre needs to 'provide for' locals as well as tourists/ visitors.

Aim to create a 5\* town centre with excellent shopping and leisure facilities, making it the 'number one' and a mid-high end retail destination in the wider sub-region.

Create a vibrant and busy town centre atmosphere.

An improved 'night time economy' including better hotel provision.

A need for better, more convenient public transport including improved train services to ensure Windsor is accessible to all.

Improve parking within the town centre and make it more affordable.

Some stakeholders advocated the introduction of a 'Boris Bike' initiative within Windsor town centre, while the need for more cycle parking facilities was recognised.

A greater supply of affordable housing within the town centre to meet local needs.

### 2.2 REALITY

The town centre is currently in a state of change, in that along Peascod Street (for example) many retailers are securing short term lets; while the units are becoming increasingly occupied by lower end retailers – a trend which needs to be overcome.

The varied, individual ownership of premises within the town centre is an issue and often a barrier to positive change.

Some concern that the loss of office and commercial space, often resulting from the office to residential permitted development right, is having an adverse impact on daytime trade within the town centre (e.g. Sheet Street).

There is a poor welcome to the town centre upon arrival, as well as poor signage to key attractions.

There is poor connectivity to the river – an attraction which is under-utilised and, indeed, often unfamiliar to some visitors.

Whilst the town centre overall is perceived to have a strong retail offer, some stakeholders reported that High Street in particular has a relatively limited retail offer – instead, it is dominated by cafes and coffee shops and the like.

The 'night time economy' is lacking and under-performing.

Given the nature of the town centre and its heritage assets, some stakeholders cited concern about how such constraints limit the amount of space for future development opportunities.

## 2.3 OPTIONS FOR BENEFICIAL CHANGE

Renaming some of the streets around Windsor town centre (e.g. High Street given that it does not function as a high street in the traditional sense).

Improving signage and making it more visible around the town centre to help improve connectivity to key attractions and create a more welcoming atmosphere.

Introduce 'click and collect' areas within the town centre in response to changing consumer habits and demands.

Improve the Coach Park walkway to/from the town centre – positively contributing to the visitor welcome and experience.

Optimise the river and its high quality food offering an important feature and attraction of Windsor town centre – requiring better marketing and signage.

Improve town centre toilet/ comfort facilities for visitors, including at town centre events where the provision of temporary such facilities would be beneficial.

A new 'park-and-ride' facility (as suggested at M4 Junction 6) to improve accessibility to the town centre and to relieve pressures on town centre parking/ traffic congestion.

Encouraging a mix of retail and leisure uses (including cafes and coffee shops) with an emphasis on high quality standards.

## 2.4 WAY FORWARD

There needs to be investment in the Council-owned car parks to improve their standard and quality – while the need for more affordable parking was recognised.

Improve the key arrival points into the town centre for visitors.

Redesign of Arthur Road roundabout to improve traffic flows in and around the town centre, thereby making it a more convenient place to shop, live, work, etc.

Support and promote local, long established businesses in the town centre, whilst seeking to attract new and diverse, high quality businesses.

Enhance the 'night time economy' and ensure the offering is diverse and safe (i.e. family-friendly).

Provide for more hotels in recognition of demand from tourists/ visitors.

A joined-up commitment to better, more formal town centre marketing and promotional campaigns coordinated by the Council (as opposed to independent marketing and promotional campaigns by town centre stakeholders as previously done).

# Annex B

Report on Maidenhead Town Centre Improvement Workshop

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# Maidenhead Town Centre Improvement Workshop

**The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead**

20 March 2015



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- 1 Introduction ..... 3
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# 1 Introduction

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) hosted a Workshop on 20 March 2015 for Maidenhead's local businesses, stakeholders and community organisations to develop ideas and identify priorities for improving Maidenhead Town Centre – to help inform the Borough's new and up-to-date Retail and Town Centre Study (prepared by Cushman & Wakefield).

The Workshop was held at Maidenhead Town Hall, and was attended by a total of 19 participants from both the public and private sectors and with a range of local interests. On arrival, the participants were divided into discussion groups.

The aim of the Workshop, facilitated by Cushman & Wakefield, was to answer the question "*How can we GROW Maidenhead Town Centre?*" – where the acronym GROW was used to facilitate a 'brainstorming' session, in which the discussion groups assessed Goals for the town centre, the current Reality, Options for beneficial change, and the Way forward (as follows).

## **GOALS** for the town centre:

- What type of shopping and service destination do you want the town centre to become?
- Is it realistic and achievable?
- What should be the 'vision' for the town centre?

## **REALITY:**

- What is the town centre at present?
- Which way is it moving and why?
- Does it have particular strengths or opportunities which could be developed and exploited?
- What weaknesses and problems need to be overcome?

## **OPTIONS** for beneficial change:

- What actions and improvements are possible?
- Which are desirable?
- Which are quick/ cheap/ easy?
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## **WAY** forward:

- What are the really key problems?
- How can these be overcome?
- Who will do it?
- When?
- What further research/ intervention is needed?

At the end of the Workshop, Cushman & Wakefield facilitated a plenary session, providing an opportunity for the discussion groups to report and debate their findings. These findings were documented, and are set out within this short report.

## 2 Findings

### 2.1 GOALS FOR THE TOWN CENTRE

A need for improved parking facilities in and/or on the edge of the town centre, as well as improved transport links to/from the town centre to help attract more visitors from the peripheral areas.

Sustainable modes of transport should be introduced to support the workforce in the local community.

A need for better connectivity throughout the town centre so as to make it less fragmented. There is a need for better physical connections, and a good north/south link.

Some participants would like to see Maidenhead have more residential developments (complementary to the town centre and its mix of uses), and a strong local community.

More bars, restaurants and cafes – including a 24/7 culture.

Goals for retail include a new undercover shopping facility, and potentially an arcade-type area for independent retailers and service businesses.

A busy town centre with lots of choice and variation, and identifiable 'character areas' across the town centre.

Strong aspiration for a new department store development (e.g. Debenhams).

Some participants stated that they hope that the recent purchase of the Nicholsons Centre by Vixcroft could drive forward new retail opportunities, including a new department store – in turn (as footfall increases) creating opportunities for smaller, more traditional local retailers

A general aspiration for more specialist retail, leisure and local service businesses.

Bring elegance as well as vitality back into Maidenhead town centre (in this respect some participants referred to the 'high quality' town centres of Marlow and Windsor).

Take full advantage of Crossrail when it arrives in Maidenhead in 2019.

### 2.2 REALITY

The town centre's physical layout and design is disjointed and fragmented.

The ring road is restrictive and an 'uninviting' gateway to the town centre.

The town centre is 'outdated' and not fit for purpose.

Some participants referenced that a 'poor demographic' is using the town centre.

A perception that Maidenhead has an affluent population and a lucrative catchment area.

Generally the location of the town centre (within the Borough and also its proximity to London) is a strength.

Other strengths referred to include the town's good range of events (e.g. Art on the Street, Farmers' Markets), the Heritage Centre, and the number of attractive parks and waterways in the area.

The town centre's retail offer was cited as 'poor' and as 'going downhill over the last 25 years' – with lack of retail choice and high vacancy rates identified as key weaknesses.

The town centre has a 'down market' feel.

Lack of civic space and meeting place(s).

Poor railway service 'not as good as it could be'.

Lack of engagement from landlords/ agents in regards to the marketing of some retail units throughout the town centre – 'absent landlords' cited as a major issue.

The mismatch between supply (i.e. lack of) and demand for housing is affecting the workforce of the town centre.

Strong competition from other centres (e.g. Reading) means that Maidenhead's residents do look beyond the town centre for shopping purposes.

## 2.3 OPTIONS FOR BENEFICIAL CHANGE

More and improved parking provision (especially if there are to be more residential developments in the town centre), including more affordable parking.

A need for social housing to be brought forward to meet the needs of and support local employment including the retail workforce.

A new 'park-and-ride' facility (as suggested at M4 Junction 8/9).

New bus lanes across the town centre.

A new transport interchange at Maidenhead railway station, potentially as part of a wider station-led redevelopment.

Filling empty shop units identified as a priority for beneficial change; reducing occupancy costs (i.e. rents, business rates) seen as key in order to encourage traders back into the town centre and reduce vacancy rates.

A campaign to encourage high street landlords to 'paint and tidy up' their shop fronts.

More regular events so as to improve the town centre's atmosphere and vibe, and to encourage locals to 'take pride' in Maidenhead as a town (it was acknowledged that more funding is required to facilitate such events).

The use of temporary 'pop up' shops to generate high street activity and interest.

## 2.4 WAY FORWARD

A cohesive vision for the town centre.

Greater, positive collaboration between town centre stakeholders.

Strong Council/ political leadership.

A 'speedy' planning process to drive forward positive change in the town centre – including a revised, up-to-date Maidenhead Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) and a post-AAP vision to ensure a longer term pipeline of development opportunities.

Self-promotion of the town centre (i.e. stakeholders in the town centre should 'talk up' Maidenhead as a place to invest, live, work, visit, etc) to change/ improve the public perception of Maidenhead town centre.

Large scale development capable of improving the town centre's retail offer (including a department store) – Nicholsons Centre was identified as an opportunity in this respect.

A more varied retail offer in the town centre (in response to changing consumer shopping habits and competition from nearby centres e.g. Reading).

Identify and encourage landlords to undertake shop front improvements and maintenance in order to ensure the town centre is a more attractive place to shop, live, work, etc.

Encourage a high quality, well designed public realm throughout the town centre, including pedestrian routes from Maidenhead railway station to the town centre.

Improving the North-South transport links serving the town centre and implementing a parking strategy to ensure Maidenhead is an accessible and convenient place to visit.

The town centre needs to optimise the benefits of and opportunities created by Crossrail.