

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Housing & Major Projects Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	29 July 2014	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	Midsomer Norton - Projects Update Report	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 Midsomer Norton is the principal market town for the Somer Valley, serving a number of rural settlements. The town centre provides a range of retail outlets, a library, and leisure facilities. It caters for the majority of the local service needs in the Somer Valley area. Reinforcing the town as the service destination for the rural hinterland is a key priority.
- 1.2 A strong and thriving town centre is crucial to retaining and attracting employers to the Somer Valley area. The town centre has suffered from a lack of investment. Job and GVA increases are an important indicator of success, but the focus for Midsomer Norton town centre is to strengthen the retail offer, encouraging more support for local shops and services. This report updates on progress on sites within Midsomer Norton.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Housing & Major Projects Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel is asked to note the progress on Midsomer Norton sites.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 There are no direct resource implications arising from this report. As individual projects are progressed they will be subject to the normal Council decision making processes for any budgetary approval.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The redevelopment of sites within Midsomer Norton is guided by the Council's agreed planning policy framework. These will develop and strengthen existing communities, and will protect the most important assets whilst delivering viable social, economic and environmental benefits.
- 4.2 All development schemes will be the subject of detailed planning applications for consideration of the Council as the Local Planning Authority. Decisions will therefore be taken in accordance with the appropriate statutory and regulatory guidance in due course.

5 BACKGROUND & PROGRESS REPORT

- 5.1 The Core Strategy sets out the Council's vision for the wider Somer Valley Area, and for Midsomer Norton. For the Somer Valley Area the ambition is to:

“create a thriving and vibrant area with a sense of wellbeing, its own identity and promoted as a whole, with Midsomer Norton and Radstock as the focus. Facilities in Midsomer Norton and Radstock will be available and accessible for the communities in the surrounding villages.”

- 5.2 The adoption of the Core Strategy which sets out the Council's five year housing land supply is especially useful for the Somer Valley. It provides the justification for allocated housing developments. It adds certainty to bringing forward development sites within the plan, rather than sites promoted outside of the housing development boundaries which were vulnerable due to the absence of a housing land supply.
- 5.3 Midsomer Norton also provides key employment opportunities, services and leisure provision to the communities. The Town Centre will continue to be the principal centre with improved public realm and enhanced townscape and a Town Park.
- 5.4 New employment floorspace will be focussed at the Westfield Industrial Estates, the Old Mills, Midsomer Norton Enterprise Park and Midsomer Norton Town Centre. The Midsomer Norton Town Centre extract from the Core Strategy (Policy SV2) is shown below.

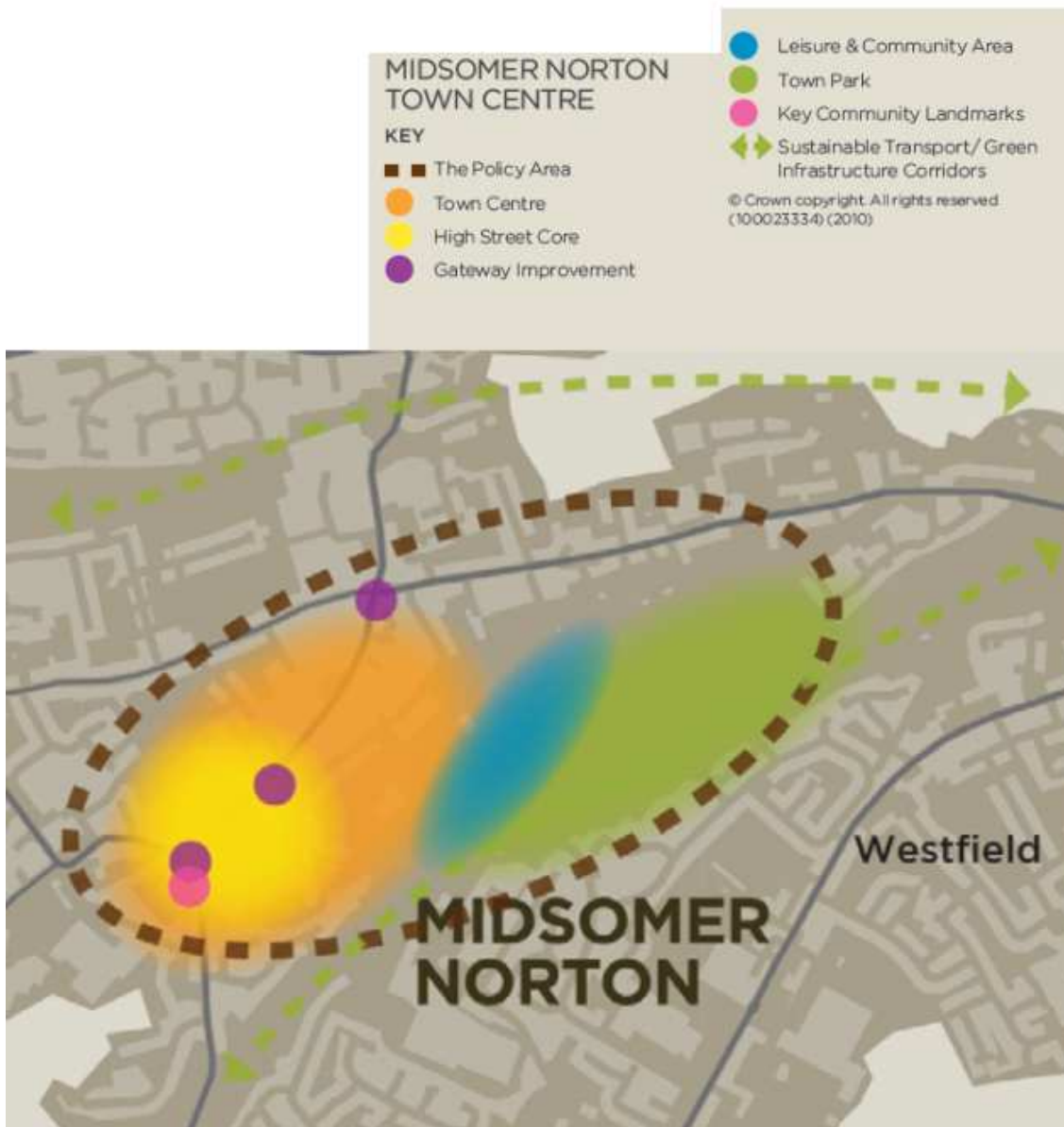


Figure 1: Midsomer Norton Town Centre (Core Strategy Extract)

5.5 The Placemaking Plan will identify key measures required to achieve the ambition. The Placemaking Principles set out in the Core Strategy are;

- a: Strengthen the shopping offer in the southern end of the High Street and provide better pedestrian connections from the main car parks to the core retail area, creating a stronger frontage to South Road.
- b: Enable more intensive use of the South Road car park providing the opportunity to accommodate a modern food store. Any development here should retain public car parking for the town centre.
- c: Conserve the town centre's heritage and unique townscape character.
- d: Enhance the positive feature of the River Somer.
- e: Reduce the amount of traffic using the retail core of the High Street and improve the environment for pedestrians.
- f: Improve routes and major entrances into the centre.
- g: Improve access to green infrastructure including the proposed Town Park.

- h: Improve linkage to Sustainable Transport Routes.
- i: Improve the range of leisure and visitor attractions as part of the total town centre offer

5.6 Following its designation as a Neighbourhood Area in November 2013, Midsomer Norton Town Council has established a core group to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan. This will operate in conjunction with the Placemaking Plan, providing guidance on future developments for the town.

5.7 The Placemaking Plan will identify key measures required to achieve the ambition. This will include:

- Strengthen the shopping heart – provide larger shops in the core area of the High Street to attract national retailers.
- Create the opportunity for redeveloping outdated units to provide a mix of new shops, office and housing.
- Improve local attractions – planting and public realm improvements.
- Maximise the potential of nearby development sites to complement and support the High Street.

5.8 Following its designation as a Neighbourhood Area in November 2013, Midsomer Norton Town Council has established a core group to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan. This will operate in conjunction with the Placemaking Plan, providing guidance on future developments for the town.

Key Sites Update

5.9 South Road Car Park, The Hollies and the High Street Core are shown in the plan below. An update is provided on each. An update on Town Park, Welton Bibby & Baron site is also provided, and expansion at the Midsomer Norton Business Centre.

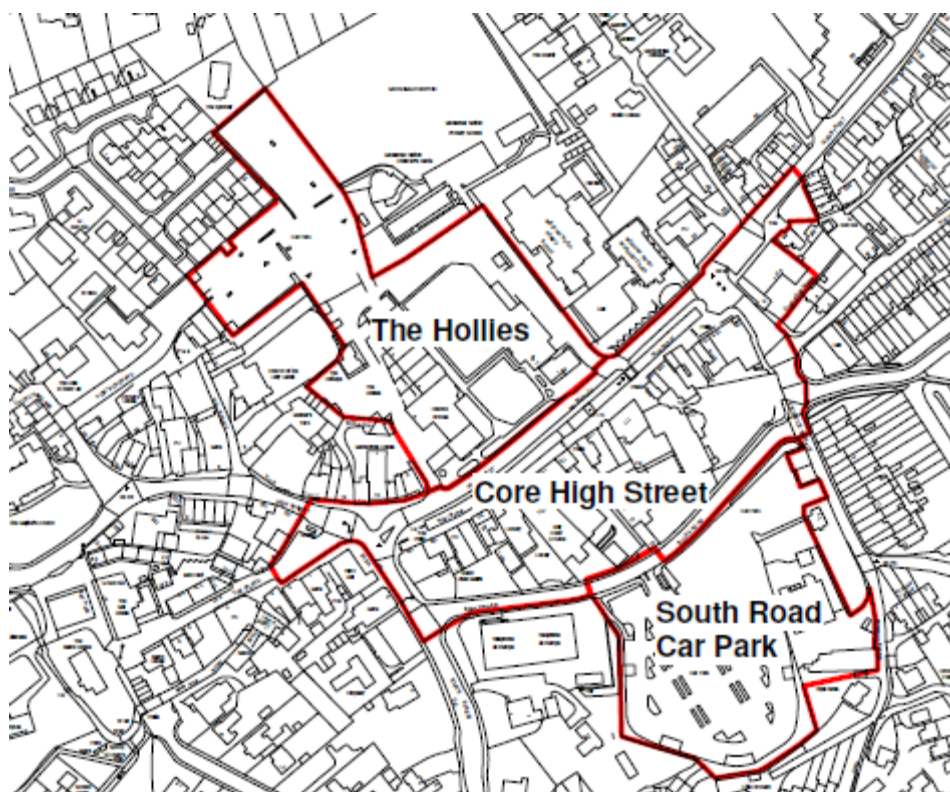


Figure 2: Plan of development sites in Midsomer Norton (Town Centre)

South Road

- 5.10 Feasibility studies show that a food retail unit of around 45,000 sq ft could be sited on **South Road Car Park**, with undercroft parking. The site is designated for food retail within both the Core Strategy and Midsomer Norton's ERDP
- 5.11 Site investigation works have been undertaken. The results have been shared with prospective purchasers. Concept design including scale and massing studies have been submitted for pre-application advice. These have also been shared with interested parties to demonstrate what is acceptable in terms of size and design.
- 5.12 Marketing and a tender process for disposal of South Road through a formal procurement process has taken place and the preferred developer has been named as Wrenbridge Land Limited.
- 5.13 Continued liaison with interested parties, Town Council and traders is necessary to set out how to mitigate car parking losses during the development period and post-development for solutions within the town.

The Hollies

- 5.14 Discussions with the owners of the site are on-going. The expectations for this site are set out in the Core Strategy. Retail expansion, to assist the town centre may be pursued. This will be progressed through the formal pre-application process.
- 5.15 Evidence of retail need indicates that two supermarkets (at Hollies and South Road) would take up the demand for food sales and also contribute to increased footfall within the core High Street area. The aim is to act as a catalyst to regenerate the area around the Palladium/Brewery through private sector investment.

High Street Core

- 5.16 Regeneration of the **Retail Core**, either as a whole or in phases, will provide enhanced retail offer. It is possible to provide larger retail for which there is an identified need. The historic features of the **Palladium and the Brewery** would be retained and the scheme could act as a business hub.
- 5.17 The area gives an opportunity to provide an attractive link between South Road and the High Street. It is therefore important that steps are taken to deliver the South Road site. This will act as a catalyst and will enhance the value and attraction of the Retail Core.
- 5.18 Sources of funds to assist the projects include commercial investment, Section 106 funds and the Revolving Infrastructure Fund (RIF).

Town Park

- 5.19 The **Town Park** proposal is included in the Core Strategy. A formal planning application for change of use to Town Park was submitted by Midsomer Norton Town Council in January 2014.
- 5.20 Its status within the Core Strategy has supported delivery, and the application has been granted. The land is in private ownership. The Council, together with the Town Council are exploring the means of implementation now that the planning permission has been granted..

Welton Bibby & Baron

- 5.21 Terrace Hill has signed up to a conditional purchase of the whole **Welton Bibby Baron** site. They have been consulting locally to gauge views on proposals. This would be likely to include redevelopment for a supermarket and housing, although the details are as yet unknown.
- 5.22 Welton Village Residents have undertaken work on preferred uses at the site. This will help inform the Placemaking Plan, and future development at the site.
- 5.23 It is likely that any development scheme will progress through to a formal pre-application process. For retail purposes, the site is considered edge-of-centre. Town centre sites such as South Road and the Hollies remain preferred sites for retail. It will be necessary to integrate any development here with the wider vision for the town.

Midsomer Norton Business Centre

- 5.24 The Midsomer Norton Business centre fulfils an important role in the economy of the local area, providing 5,000 sq ft of managed accommodation and meeting facilities for local businesses to access and utilise. Since its creation in 1993, the business centre has enjoyed over 90% occupancy and housed between 16-20 local businesses consistently during that period.
- 5.25 Following the termination of the Business Link contract by Central Government, the Centre has struggled to cover its own running costs and cross-subsidisation from Business West is no longer possible. As a result, BANES has been subsidising the running of the Business Centre.
- 5.26 In order to secure a solution for the long term future of the Business Centre, the Economic Development and Regeneration teams will undertake review of options which would enable the continued operation of the business centre without the requirement for

ongoing subsidy. In June, Cabinet agreed a sum of £125,000 allocated to develop proposals and undertake feasibility work.

develop the proposals and

6 RATIONALE

6.1 The report is for noting. Consideration of the schemes as planning applications will be necessary when they are submitted, assessed against the relevant material considerations including the Concept Statements.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

7.1 None.

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 Development Management, Property, Environment.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

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Background papers	
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	