

# WINCANTON TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN



## APPENDICES

Draft for Public Consultation

FOR SOUTH SOMERSET DISTRICT COUNCIL



**Robert West Design**  
architect + urban designer



# Appendix 1: Policy Context



# 1 Policy Context

## Introduction

This appendix provides an overview of the relevant planning policy framework for town centres from a national and local perspective. It provides the context to ensure the Strategy aligns with key policy considerations and accords with relevant South Somerset District Council plans and strategies, which together have helped shape the identified projects and priorities outlined in the Strategy.

The key existing and emerging planning policy influences are as follows:

- National Planning Policy Framework
- National planning Policy Guidance
- South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028
- Wincanton Neighbourhood Plan 2018 – 2028
- South Somerset Early Review Issues and Options Consultation

In addition, a number of Council plans and strategies are relevant, which include:

- Tackling the Challenges: Council Plan 2016-21
- South Somerset District Council District-wide Car Parking Strategy (2013)
- South Somerset Economic Development Strategy 2012 to 2015
- Economic Development Strategy Public Consultation Draft (2018)

A summary of each is provided below together with an overview of the evidence base and other studies considered relevant to the Wincanton Town Centre Strategy.

## National Planning Guidance

### National Planning Policy Framework (July 2018)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlines the Government's planning policies for England and sets out the role of the planning system in contributing to sustainable development based on three overarching objectives – economic, social and environmental. The presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 10) underpins the NPPF and states that planning policies and decisions should guide development to sustainable locations which take account of local circumstances, needs and opportunities.

Section 7 outlines the Government's approach to 'Ensuring the vitality of town centres' in paragraphs 85– 90. It outlines the role and support that town centres play at the heart of local communities alongside the need to plan positively for their growth, management and change, and states in paragraph 85 that positive planning via local plan policies should:

- Promote the long-term vitality and viability of town centres by allowing growth and diversification that can respond to the rapid changes facing town centres, including support for a suitable mix of uses, including housing (bullet a);
- Define the range of uses, extent of town centres and primary shopping area as part of a strategy for the future of centres (bullet b);

- Retain, and enhance existing markets, and re-introduce or create new markets (bullet c);
- Allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet anticipated the needs in full of town centre uses, looking at least 10 years ahead (bullet d), and if not available, allocate appropriate edge of centre sites that are well connected to the town centre (bullet e);
- Encourage residential development on appropriate sites in recognition of the role of residential in ensuring the vitality of centres (bullet f).

The NPPF outlines a number of key ‘town centre first’ tests when planning for main town centre uses. Firstly, it applies a sequential approach to site selection (paragraphs 86-87) although accepts that if suitable sites are not available for main town centre uses, that preference should be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre. It also seeks flexibility on matters such as format and scale to ensure suitable town and edge of centre sites are fully explored.

Secondly, the NPPF requires an impact assessment for retail and leisure proposals located outside of town centres which are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan and which exceed a locally set floorspace threshold (if none applies, the default is 2,500 sq. m), to consider impact of a proposal on investment, and the vitality and viability of a town centre (paragraph 89).

Other chapters and sections of the NPPF of relevant to town centres, include, amongst others:

- Promotion of a mix of small sites to deliver a sufficient supply of homes (paragraph 68);
- Flexibility to accommodate the needs of new working practices (paragraph 81);
- Provision of social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, including ensuring established shops, facilities and services can develop and modernise, and are retained for the community (paragraph 92);
- Improve the quality of parking in town centres (paragraph 106);
- Making effective use of land, including re-use of under-used sites (Chapter 11);
- The promotion of good design as a key aspect of sustainable development (Chapter 12);
- Conserving and enhancing the historic environment (Chapter 16).

### **National Planning Practice Guidance (March 2014)**

The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) provides guidance related to ‘Ensuring the vitality of town centres’ and acknowledges the role of positive planning in creating attractive and diverse centres to live, visit and work. The NPPG outlines the importance of a vision or strategy for town centres, typically articulated through the Local Plan, that is prepared by the local planning authority working alongside the private sector, town teams, neighbourhood planning groups, town centre organisations and

local community groups (Paragraph 002 Reference ID: 2b-002-20140306).

It advises that a strategy should be based on evidence of the current state of a town centre and identify opportunities to meet development needs and support viability and vitality.

Specifically, it outlines that a strategy should consider the following:

- the appropriate role and function of a town centre, including the potential to accommodate new development;
- the vision for the future of the town centre;
- the ability to accommodate the assessed need for main town centre uses;
- the complementary strategies appropriate to deliver the vision;
- parking provision and proportionate parking charges and enforcement to encourage town centre vitality.

Where appropriate, the NPPG states that strategies should also seek to manage those town centres in decline positively, to encourage new economic activity and a mix of uses that is appropriate for its future role (Paragraph 003 Reference ID: 2b-003-20140306). It further states that market signals must be considered to ensure town centre strategy and policy is responsive to changes in market conditions and business requirements (Paragraph: 004 Reference ID: 2b-004-20140306).

The NPPG outlines the key indicators considered relevant for assessing the health of a centre and outlines that improvements to the public realm, transport and parking and other measures form

an equally important component of successful town centre strategies. It states that a strategy should identify relevant sites, actions and timescales, and be regularly reviewed to address changes over time (Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 2b-005-20140306).

## The Development Plan

### South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028 (March 2015)

The adopted South Somerset Local Plan (2006 - 2028) sets out the long-term planning framework for the District up to 2028. It identifies a Vision to 2028 in which the Market Towns will build on their existing roles and functions; offer housing, employment and a range of services that meet the needs of their communities and visitors, and which promote greater settlement self-containment.

The Plan identifies Wincanton as one of four Primary Market Towns in the settlement strategy (Policy SS1) which act as focal points for their area, and collectively are identified to accommodate the majority of the housing provision outside of Yeovil. Alongside self-containment, the growth aims to enhance and expand the employment and service role of the Market Towns.

Chapter 7 of the Plan sets out the vision and proposals for the Market Towns, including Wincanton (paragraphs 7.85 – 7.102). In spatial terms, it identifies Wincanton as:

- the fourth largest settlement by population in South Somerset that serves the needs of the rural east of the district;

- bounded by the A303 to the south that provides excellent east/west road links;
- the focus for residential growth, namely to the New Barn Farms Key Site to the south west, and the main employment areas concentrated to the south and south west;
- characterised by an independent led retail offer, a large out of centre supermarket and key services, including doctors surgery, hospital, leisure centre, library, primary and secondary schools;
- a historic town centre largely covered by a Conservation Area;
- benefitting from a unique number of tourism assets related to Wincanton racecourse and connections to Discworld.

The Plan strategy recognises that Wincanton has supported a significant level of housing growth compared to the other Market Towns, with delivery of 703 homes proposed, many of which have been built or are committed. In employment terms, a preferred 'direction of growth' to the south west of the town to support employment growth (c600 jobs) is identified reflecting its access to the strategic road network (and planned dualling of the A303), proximity to other business users, and potential deliverability of sites. This is intended to support Plan objectives for an employment led approach based on balanced employment and housing growth, as set out for Wincanton in Policy PMT4 (and supported by Policies SS3 and SS5 at the district level).

In retail terms, the Plan at paragraphs 7.98-7.99 outlines the potential for additional retail floorspace capacity in Wincanton, of up to 687 sq. m (comparison) and 1,314 sq. m (convenience) respectively by 2028. It further acknowledges that it will be important to retain and build upon existing retail provision in the town and that retail growth is directed to the town centre compared to recent activity at out of centre locations. The scope for improvement in the level, type and quality of comparison (non-food) retail provision in the town is identified although the Plan acknowledges that improvements are likely to be modest given the catchment area, role of the centre and retailer requirements.

At the district level, the key retail objective of the Local Plan is to retain and promote a mix and range of town centre uses within defined centres, in order to meet community needs and to retain and enhance the vitality and viability of centres. Wincanton is identified as a Market Town in the retail hierarchy (Policy EP9) and is recognised as an important service centre that provides a range of facilities and services for an extensive rural catchment area. The policy is supportive of the development of town centres uses which should be of a scale commensurate with the role and function of the town's position in the hierarchy.

In accordance with national guidance, the preferred location for town centres uses is set out in sequential approach Policy EP11 whilst Policy EP12 requires an impact assessment (based on locally set thresholds). The protection of Primary Shopping Frontages is addressed by Policy

EP13 to focus retail activity in the core shopping areas and resist losses although Wincanton is the only Market Town not to have a designated Primary Shopping Frontage. The Plan notes that such matters will be considered as part of the next plan review.

Given the heritage assets in the town centre and the Conservation Area, Policy EQ3 seeks to conserve and where appropriate enhance such assets in recognition of their contribution to local distinctiveness, character and sense of place.

#### **Wincanton Neighbourhood Plan 2018 – 2028 (January 2018)**

The Wincanton Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2028 forms part of the statutory Development Plan. The Plan is supported by a comprehensive evidence base and was informed by stakeholder and community consultation to identify the needs and aspirations of the local community. It outlines a Vision for the town, as follows:

*“In 2028 Wincanton will be an even better place to live, work and visit. The town will still have its working character, with employment land and facilities that allow existing businesses to grow and attract in new businesses. It will have a thriving town centre that continues to perform a useful retail, social and community purpose for the town. It will have well designed homes and developments that suit residents needs, that are visually unobtrusive and link well to the town centre. The spaces, buildings and other places or features that make Wincanton special, will be protected and respected in new development”.*

To support the delivery of the Vision and the preferred approach for future development in the

town, the Plan outlines five objectives which relate to following:

1. Identifying the most sustainable locations for development
2. Housing suitable for Wincanton's population
3. New employment space near the A303
4. Make the town centre more attractive to users
5. Protect open spaces & improve walking & cycling routes

Objective 4 is specific to the town centre and outlines the desire of residents to maintain and improve the centre that is a pleasure to shop in. In response, the Plan sets out to identify small scale environment improvements that are intended to make the centre more attractive and safer for shoppers on foot through traffic calming and widening of pavements. It also seeks to improve mobility and access to the town centre for cyclists and mobility scooters.

It specifically identifies a priority project, to be developed with the District and County Councils, to extend the 20mph zone in the town centre, alongside two public realm enhancements at High Street and South Street respectively which are considered the main problem locations in the town centre for narrow pavements and pedestrian safety.

Whilst the Plan does not identify or allocate sites for development, the Place Check appraisal undertaken as part of the Plan's preparation has identified sites that may come forward for future consideration, including a number in relative close proximity to the town centre.

### **South Somerset Local Plan Review Issues and Options Consultation (October 2017)**

The Council is undertaking a review of the adopted Local Plan and published the South Somerset Local Plan Review Issues and Options Consultation in October 2017. Whilst the consultation is the first stage in the plan review, the review identifies that Wincanton will need to accommodate more housing and employment land growth, and identifies four potential site options, primarily to the south and west of the town.

In retailing terms, the consultation Plan draws on the South Somerset Retail and Main Town Centre Uses Study (2017) which confirms a limited local catchment area for Wincanton town centre, the main focus for main food shopping at an out of centre location, limited national retailer representation and one of the highest vacancy rates in the District. By contrast, the town centre supports a variety of services although there is recognition that the doctor's surgery has moved out of centre and that the reductions in footfall and high vacancy are potentially a consequence of the out of centre development.

The Plan identifies potential capacity for new retail floorspace in Wincanton, primarily a relatively high projected level of convenience (food) goods floorspace. Whilst it is anticipated that an element of growth could be accommodated by vacant units, there is recognition that the development of further sites will be required to meet the capacity for a food floorspace in the town. A number of potential sites are identified although the majority are

discounted as suitable with the exception of land between Church Street and car park.

In addition, the consultation Plan identifies a suggested Primary Shopping Frontage for Wincanton town centre which is not in the adopted Local Plan.

## **Relevant Council Plans and Strategies**

### **Tackling the Challenges: Council Plan 2016-21**

The Council Plan 2016 - 2021 outlines the corporate focus and aims for the Council and what it will deliver during a period of transformational change.

It identifies a series of Priority Projects for 2018-19 which include:

- To create a town centre action plan for Wincanton and progress implementation.

### **South Somerset District Council District-wide Car Parking Strategy (2013)**

The South Somerset District Council District-wide Car Parking Strategy recognises the importance of well managed and accessible car parking for maintaining and enhancing the attractiveness and vitality of the district's town centres. It further acknowledges the location, quality, cost and provision of car parking play a key influence on viability.

The strategy outlines an analysis by town of the demand, supply and capacity for parking. In Wincanton, it concludes that whilst there is a relatively insignificant shortfall in spaces, there is

need for management or additional off-street parking capacity to overcome this.

### **South Somerset Economic Development Strategy 2012 to 2015**

The adopted South Somerset Economic Development Strategy 2012 to 2015 recognises the importance of protecting and sustaining the retail and employment bases of the market towns across South Somerset. This forms a key element of the Economic Development Strategy (EDS).

### **Economic Development Strategy, Public Consultation Draft (2018)**

The emerging Economic Development Strategy Public Consultation Draft published in December 2018 and builds on the aims of the Council Plan to focus on economic development.

The economic importance of market towns is recognised in Priority Theme 5 which supports the ongoing and expanding programme of rejuvenation and regeneration of the urban centres.

This includes a specific action to prepare a Wincanton Town Centre Rejuvenation Plan and programme to promote, enhance and strengthen the town centre.

## **Evidence Base and Other Relevant Studies**

A number of evidence base reports and other studies have informed the preparation of the Strategy and provide important background information. These relate to the following:

- South Somerset Retail and Main Town Centre Uses Study (2017) – see Appendix 2;
- South Somerset Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (2017 and 2018);
- Wincanton Place Check Report (2016);
- Wincanton Town Council Transport Plan (2013);
- Wincanton Peoples Plan (2012);
- Wincanton Conservation Area Appraisal (2010), and
- Wincanton Peoples Plan 2006-2026 (2007).

## Appendix 2: Town Centre Trends



## 2 Town Centre Trends

### Introduction

An overview of the national trends impacting on town centres is provided to set the context for the challenges and issues facing market towns such as Wincanton. This is important for ensuring full account is taken of the key influences which are shaping the economic vibrancy of market towns. An overview of key studies related to the high street is also provided.

The section also provides a baseline position of Wincanton town centre which draws on published evidence and stakeholder feedback to understand and identify the key issues that influence the role and function of Wincanton town centre. This has helped inform the SWOT analysis and the drafting of the Vision and strategic objectives for the town centre together with the formulation of actions, projects and initiatives.

### National Town Centre Trends and Studies

#### Key Trends

At the national level, town centres are facing significant structural changes and challenges which have ongoing implications for the economic future of the high street. The issue is a political one and has largely focused in on all levels of the traditional retail sector namely due to the closure of many high-profile retailers (such as House of Fraser, Maplin and Toys R Us) and the structural changes impacting on national retailer portfolios and independent shops, including the loss of many jobs. However, other uses such as food/drink, leisure and

entertainment are equally subject to change which have wider implications for the strength, durability and vibrancy of the wider town centre.

The drivers of change are varied although the following key trends can be identified as:

- the growth in internet shopping and impact of new technology has been one of the main trends over the last decade. During this period, Experian (2016) estimate the share of total retail sales on line has risen from 2.8% (November 2006) to 18.3% (November 2016), and is forecast to reach 22.6% by 2025. The impact of new technology, especially smartphones, has brought the high street to the immediate access and convenience of the screen. This has fundamentally changed the manner in which goods are purchased, particularly for comparison goods. In short, the shopping experience no longer exclusively belongs to the high street. Technology has also driven the rise of home delivery services, especially in the takeaway food/drink sector alongside a growth in home food deliveries. Changing demographics and customer behaviour are further impacting on shopping habits particularly as a consequence of 'convenience culture'.
- changing retailer requirements has led to the rationalisation of stores and a more efficient use of floorspace; a reduction and/or closure of representation in weaker centres, and a market polarisation concentrated on the larger retail centres. As a consequence, many smaller towns with localised catchment areas are typically subject to a cautious approach

from new retailer and other commercial investment. This has been particularly relevant in the comparison sector. By contrast, the convenience sector has responded through a wide range of retail business models, particularly driven by the growth in small format convenience stores with extended opening hours and the growth of discount supermarkets. These changing formats have also impacted on the structure of commercial lease terms.

- competition from out of centre development continues although an increasing focus has been on the qualitative improvement of the 'destination' role of such centres. This has led to an extended range, choice and offer of uses to maximise dwell time, particularly through the expansion of services, leisure, entertainment and food/drink uses.
- national economic trends and vulnerability to fluctuations arising from relatively weak domestic demand, declining disposable incomes, low levels of investment, reduced government spending and uncertainty arising from Brexit.
- nationally forecasted retail expenditure from Experian (2016) predict growth will be below recent trends over the medium/long term, with weak convenience growth (circa 0.1% p.a.) and circa 2.3% p.a. comparison growth over the period to 2035. In comparison, the 20 year trend for each average 0.3% and 5.6% p.a respectively.
- the impact of business rates on the retail industry.
- socio-economic trends, in part driven by lifestyle and convenience considerations, has led to changing workspace practices, particularly for small business and the self-employed. This has supported a major growth in innovative and flexible workspace and the development of support services, such as cafes, restaurants, leisure and entertainment facilities.
- the changing composition of the high street, largely due to the trends impacting on retailing and a shift from transactional activity to retail services, has led to a greater mix of uses, particularly from office, residential and community uses.

### Key Town Centre Reports

A number of national town centre reviews and studies have sought to analyse the pressures facing town centres and confirm the impacts of the aforementioned trends on the vibrancy of centres. A brief summary of influential published reports/studies is outlined below.

#### The High Street Report (2018)

The report put together by a government-appointed panel of high street experts, led by Sir John Timpson, outlines actions to help promote a community focused approach to addressing the decline of the high street. It concludes that there would be no return to the high streets that existed 10 - 20 years ago but identifies suggestions to

help centres overcome the difficult structural issues and changes to re-imagine the high street.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-high-street-report>

#### Future High Streets Fund (2018)

Announced as part of the October 2018 Budget, the policy paper Future High Street Fund published by HM Treasury and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government sets out details of a new £675 million Future High Streets Fund. It is intended to help local areas respond and adapt to changes, and to prepare long-term strategies for their high streets and town centres.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-high-streets-fund/future-high-street-fund>

Further details of the Future High Streets Fund were published on 26 December 2018 outlining the objectives of the Fund and the nature of projects that are eligible for funding. The Fund provides co-funding towards capital projects to deliver change and regeneration of town centres in England.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-high-streets-fund-call-for-proposals>

#### Grimsey Review 2: Its time to reshape our high streets (2018)

The Grimsey Review 2 provides an update to the 2013 Grimsey Review 1: An Alternative Future for the High Street study and concludes that high streets are facing enormous challenges which are in need of seismic change to adjust to the

impacts of technology, structural change, business rates and economic conditions. It concludes from its evidence base review that wholesale changes are needed to revitalise town centres and sets out 25 recommendations.

<http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/>

#### Beyond Retail: Redefining the Shape and Purpose of Town Centres (2013)

The report, prepared by the Distressed Town Centre Property Task Force, outlines a number of recommendations aimed at improving the vibrancy of town centres based on a focus beyond retail. It outlines the problems of 'too much retail space of the wrong type' and that town centres should focus on extending the dwell time and be seen as a meeting place for the community driven by a greater mix of uses, café culture with food and drink uses and a vibrant evening economy.

<https://thegreatbritishhighstreet.co.uk>

#### The Future of High Streets: Progress since the Portas Review (2013)

The report by Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) outlined the Government's response to the Portas Review, and particularly the ideas and actions from the Pilot Towns.

It concluded that the high street must adapt to survive and that centres should be promoted as a community facility where people can gather for cultural, entertainment and social activities as well as shopping, eating, and evening activities.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-future-of-high-streets-progress-since-the-portas-review>

High streets at the heart of our communities: The Government response to the Portas Review (2012)

The report by DCLG outlines the Government's response to the recommendations of the Portas Review, including the setting up of the Portas Pilots and Town Team Partners to test the different approaches to revitalising the high street.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-streets-at-the-heart-of-our-communities-government-response-to-the-mary-portas-review>

The Portas review: An independent review into the future of our high streets (2011)

A well known review of the future of the national high streets was undertaken by Mary Portas. The review focused on the recognition of the challenges facing the high street and the need to deliver innovative responses to secure lively, dynamic and multi-functional social places which extend beyond the commercial retail offer. The report set out a number of recommendations. Including Pilot Towns to test the concepts outlined in the report.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-portas-review-the-future-of-our-high-streets>

Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, High streets and town centres in 2030 inquiry (ongoing)

In addition to the above published reports, the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee (HCLG) launched an inquiry in May 2018 to investigate the future of England's high streets and town centres in 2030. It seeks to examine the future role of the high street and the challenges arising from changing demographic, technological and other trends, and has drawn on a significant level of evidence relating to how local areas are planning for the future and the tools needed to help support these changes. As part of the inquiry, a review of previous Government work on the high street is proposed.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/housing-communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/high-streets-and-town-centres-in-2030-inquiry-17-19/>

## Baseline of Wincanton Town Centre

The South Somerset Retail and Main Town Centres Uses Study (2017) provides the most recent retail evidence base for the district. It summarises the key characteristics and role of the identified centres in the retail hierarchy including Wincanton town centre. The 2017 study identified the following key characteristics of the town centre:

- The town is designated a Primary Market Town in the Local Plan and primarily functions as a localised top up shopping and service centre for local residents. The household survey (which informed the retail study) confirmed the town centre has a limited local catchment area with visitors drawn primarily from the Wincanton area.
- Analysis of the quantitative retail modelling confirms the top up convenience role of the town which states Wincanton (including the out of centre facilities) attracts:
  - 12.4% of the total convenience goods spending (£45.84m) in the district
  - 1.9% of the total comparison goods spend (£8.75m) in South Somerset
  - 8.4% of all food and beverage spending (£13.56m) in the district
- Analysis of the total turnover of Wincanton (£68.15m) confirms the dominance of convenience goods trade, which accounts for 67% of all turnover, 20% food and drink, and 13% comparison goods. It is recognised that the Morrisons (and a lesser extent Lidl) located outside the town centre account for much of the market share in the town.
- The retail study identified a relatively high projected floorspace capacity for convenience goods (1,740 sq. m at 2024 rising to 1,884 sq. m by 2029). The study concluded that some of this could be accommodated by existing vacant units but further considered it was unlikely to be feasible to accommodate the projected capacity in a large food store in the town centre at the time of study.
- Wincanton is ranked 2,377th in the Javelin Groups Venuescore (as at 2016). This ranks over 3,500 retail destinations nationally. This is the fourth best performing centre in South Somerset behind Yeovil, Chard and Crewkerne.
- The main convenience provision is focused out of town at the gateway to the town from the A303 and is dominated by Morrisons (2,494 sq. m net) and Lidl (669 sq. m net). The main town centre provision is at Co-op (365 sq.m net) at Carrington Way together with a number of smaller independent shops.
- A range of comparison goods retailers exist in the town centre dominated by local independents. The level of national multiple retailer representation is low and limited to Boots. This limited comparison role is

confirmed by the retail evidence and characterised by lower order provision.

- The town centre supports a mix of retail services together with a variety of non-retail uses and the community library.
- A total of 74 Use Class A (retail) units were identified in the defined town centre as at January 2017, comprising:
  - Comparison (noon food) – 24 units (32.4%)
  - Convenience (food) – 6 units (8.1%)
  - Retail Services/A2/A3/A4/A5 - 32 units (43.2%)
  - Vacant – 14 units (18.9%)
- When compared to the 2010 town centre survey data, the composition of the town centre has changed and resulted in the decline in the traditional food and non-food retail offer by 6 units (largely arising from the loss of comparison uses). By contrast, there has been a marked increase in retail services/A2-A5 uses (7 units). In regard to the national average, the town centre had above average representation of A1 retail services and A4 public houses. All other measures were below the national average.
- The level of vacant units has increased over time (by 4 units since 2010) and equates to a vacancy rate of 18.9% which is significantly above the national vacancy average (11.2%).
- Zone A retail rents were identified in the range £110 - £195/sq. m. This was lower than the evidence for Crewkerne, Chard and Ilminster.
- The Primary Shopping Area and Town Centre Boundary is defined around High Street, Carrington Way, Market Place, eastern end of Mill Street and the northern end of the B3081. The town centre has no defined Primary Shopping Frontage.
- A large area of the town centre is designated as a Conservation Area which includes over 90 listed buildings, and is considered a varied, attractive built environment with the exception of some modern shopfronts along High Street.
- The main road passing through the town centre, combined with the narrow pavements at High Street and Mill Street, impact on pedestrian safety and movement and detract from the overall shopping environment.
- With the exception of Market Place, public realm is limited particularly along High Street.
- The town centre is well served by public car parks (Carrington Way, Memorial Hall and Churchfields) within, and in close proximity to the town centre boundary. The householder survey which informed the retail study confirmed that a significant proportion travelled by car to undertake their shopping visits to Wincanton.



# Appendix 3: Business and Stakeholder Engagement



## 3 Business and Stakeholder Engagement

### Introduction

The preparation of the Wincanton Town Centre Strategy has drawn on a review of published baseline information and studies, consultant team observations and a comprehensive level of engagement with town centre businesses and local stakeholders with an interest in the town centre.

The stakeholder engagement has helped provide background information including the identification of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) facing Wincanton town centre. It also seeks to ensure that local knowledge has informed the key issues, future vision, priority actions and individual initiatives whilst providing for a 'Check and Challenge' of the emerging Strategy to help build consensus and agreement on the aspirations for the town centre.

### Business and Stakeholder Engagement

#### Local Stakeholders

Engagement has been undertaken with a variety of individuals, local organisations and businesses relevant to Wincanton town centre. A summary is listed below:

- Wincanton Town Council
- Wincanton Chamber of Commerce
- Town centre business community
- The Balsam Centre
- Memorial Hall
- Wincanton Library
- Wincanton Museum and History Society

- South Somerset District Council Local Ward Members
- Somerset County Council (Corporate Property and Highways)
- Private landowners
- Local education providers
- Developers and commercial agents
- Wincanton racecourse

#### Engagement Methods

A variety of stakeholder engagement methods have been adopted to inform the preparation of the Strategy and have focused on the following:

- Local Ward Member 'Walkabout' – undertaken as part of the study inception involving local ward members for Wincanton. This was undertaken on 13 June 2018.
- Local Town Centre Business Survey – individual contact was undertaken with business owners in Wincanton town centre based on an introductory visit and postcard invitation to access an online survey to provide feedback to structured questions. This exercise commenced on 13 June 2018.
- Individual Stakeholder Contact – with the Town Council, Chamber of Commerce, community organisations with a town centre presence, landowners, Somerset County Council, Wincanton racecourse and town centre businesses through meetings and/or telephone conversations. A number of

stakeholder meetings have been held including:

- Town centre business meeting held on 23 October 2018
- Local stakeholder meeting held on 12 November 2018
- Public Consultation – undertaken through a open consultation event at the Memorial Hall on 18/19 January 2019 alongside online consultation via the South Somerset District Council website. The consultation provides the opportunity to review the draft Strategy and Action Plan and to invite feedback to the Vision, strategic objectives together with the suggested interventions, projects and initiatives.

In addition, updates on the progress of the Strategy have been reported to South Somerset District Council's Area East Committee on 12 September and 12 December 2018 respectively.

## Feedback from Business and Stakeholder Engagement

### Local Town Centre Business Survey

A survey of town centre businesses was undertaken via invitations (sent by postcard and individually delivered) to c.100 businesses, to participate in an online survey. A total of 68 responses were received of which 25 were from businesses (not all located in the town centre). The Wincanton Chamber of Commerce helped to

further circulate details of the survey amongst its local members.

The survey set out the following questions:

- What are the 3 most important issues/challenges facing Wincanton town centre?
- What are the 3 most important ideas for improving Wincanton town centre?
- Do you have any other suggestions we should consider, information or ideas you want to talk to us about as part of the Study?

Respondents to the survey identified a number of key issues/challenges facing the town centre as follows:

- Community & business apathy;
- Perception of the town;
- Condition and appearance of some heritage buildings in the town centre and the costs of maintenance;
- Gateways to the town create a poor first impression;
- Traffic and parking considerations focused around the issue of potential for parking charges, the need to address traffic speeds and narrow pavements for pedestrians;
- Attraction of the town centre given absence of brands, quality events and key attractors;
- Dominance of retail services (e.g. hairdressers and cafes);
- Low levels of footfall;
- Absence of banking facilities with no cash machine available 24/7, and

- Instances of anti-social behaviour in the evening.

Equally, the survey responses identified key opportunities for Wincanton town centre, as set out below:

- A unique attractor focused on Discworld (Terry Pratchett) and link to overseas visitors;
- Heritage character of the town centre;
- Established presence of 'maker' businesses in the town centre;
- Location strategically located between London and Cornwall;
- Market Place a key local public space;
- Promote free parking an asset and an attraction;
- Weekly Market;
- Costs of property lower than other nearby centres - an incentive to invest;
- Slow traffic down in the town centre and promote as a pedestrian friendly and
- Promotion of initiatives to support marketing and branding of Wincanton e.g. shop local, support for community events, strength of the independent and arts sector, better linking of town and racecourse events.

### **Town Centre Business Meeting**

An open meeting was held on 23 October 2018 with town centre business owners to discuss and explore the vision and initiatives considered most appropriate by the business community for best promoting the town centre and helping boost the local economy.

Invitations were sent to town centre businesses (electronic and postcard) with additional support from the Chamber of Commerce and a number of town centre businesses to publicise the event.

The meeting focused on building on the key issues and challenges identified through the baseline review exercise together with a 'high level' overview of emerging thoughts on what the key opportunities for the town centre could be.

A series of discussion groups were held to further discussion with attention focused on a number of key questions. A summary of the feedback received is provided below.

#### Have we identified/understood the most important issues?

- General consensus that the key issues identified and reported from the business survey were representative of those facing the town centre;
- Lack of a joined-up approach and common vision a major concern;
- Concern nothing to retain visitors in the town centre;
- Recognition of need for an improved restaurant offer;
- Lack of an attraction and destination e.g. former Green Dragon antiques centre;
- Improved linkage and working with Wincanton Racecourse – marketing opportunities to build on race days and non-racing events;
- Improved signage - to direct into the town centre;
- Mixed views (positive and negative) about safety in the town centre;

- Town centre business must take a lead;
- Need to improve vibrancy of the town centre;
- Businesses close early on Saturday - poor impression and no opportunity to connect with resident population that work in the week;
- Number of key assets in the town centre – Post Office, butchers, high quality retailers – more needed;
- Appetite for change;
- Street furniture in Market Place not appropriate;
- Recognition of high value tourist destination in the locality – Emily Estates and Hauser & Worth;
- The town centre lacks atmosphere;
- Car parking charges threaten the vitality of the centre;
- Limited connection for young people with the town centre;
- The evening economy in Wincanton does not appeal to the young and families.
- Need for a sheltered or indoor venue for events and markets – could one of the development sites create this in the heart of the town centre?
- Markets – need to avoid traditional markets and think of something different that works for the local population;
- Super Saturdays – (a new initiative led by the Wincanton Window magazine team); first event is a book theme, other themes might be the Arts, Food, Antiques, Racing;
- Need more opportunities for town centre employment – enterprise space, workshops, co-working space;
- Need more entertainment offer to attract residents and young people;
- Strengthen links with Wincanton Races – people travel to the area throughout the year;
- Embrace the success of the local library to provide access services/cultural facilities;
- Arts trails and creative activity.

Why/how will residents & visitors use Wincanton town centre in the future?

- Need to differentiate Wincanton – local competitor centres can achieve this, so why not Wincanton?
- Build on the ‘human identity’ of Wincanton;
- Iconic buildings in the town centre;
- Car parking is required – use of the centre is typically by car;
- Make more of the geographical location of Wincanton;

What are the most important ideas you would want to see in the Action Plan?

- Business and local town organisations working together – improved communication;
- Promotion as an artistic hub;
- Gateway improvements, Improved signage (‘brown’ sign from A303 and within the town);.
- Develop a marketing committee for Wincanton;
- Promote message of free parking (in the short term);

- Review town slogan/branding 'Gateway to Somerset'/Branding of town essential;
- Investigate greater use of Market Place and Mill Street – street market potential?
- Promotion as a wellbeing destination;
- Discworld – opportunity to revive the Hogswatch event locally?
- Are the suggested of type of initiatives suitable for drawing more people into using their local town centre?
- Thoughts on what would help attract business/enterprises to set up in the town centre?

### Local stakeholder meeting

A local stakeholders meeting was held on 12 November to follow up from the individual contact undertaken earlier in the process. Attendees include SSDC and SCC local ward members, Wincanton Town Council, Chamber of Commerce, other local community organisations (including the Balsam Centre, Museum and Library), and Wincanton racecourse.

The meeting focused on a 'check and challenge' of emerging thoughts on the draft principles for the vision and objectives of the strategy, together with initial thoughts on draft projects, actions and initiatives.

Views were sought on a number of matters to consider:

- Whether the draft Vision principles and strategic objectives are appropriate? Does this capture the ambitions for the town centre? If not, what should the Vision seek?
- Initial thoughts on the potential development locations and public realm improvement suggestions? Are these appropriate? Are there other opportunities?
- The focus of the proposed actions align to the strategic objectives which seek to enhance footfall and extend activity within the town centre through support for a wider mix of uses.
- Generally agreed the draft strategic objectives are appropriate, subject to support, commitment and investment to secure delivery.
- A footfall generator is a key requirement, with some identifying need for a retail anchor.
- Town centre housing supported, but it has to be the right type and quality of housing.
- Support for improved public transport linkages from outer residential areas into the town centre; reinstate shuttle bus service.
- The town centre should engage with the racecourse and local farming community to better draw those markets into the town centre.

Stakeholder feedback endorsed many of the comments and themes identified throughout the engagement process (as summarised in this appendix). In addition, the local stakeholders outlined the following comments from the meeting:

- Support for a system of click and collect in town centre premises, especially for people who work in the day.  
Support for an ATM; some suggestions at the Post Office.
- Importance of promoting the right environment to promote good ideas and recognition it will take time and commitment.
- Marketing an important requirement to encourage investment; a prospectus of development possibilities available in the town?
- Support for free parking in the town centre.
- Suggested other initiatives, including an Innovation Centre and Artisan Centre.



**Wiltshire**

Chilmark Consulting Ltd.  
Albany House  
High Street, Hindon  
Wiltshire  
SP3 6DP

**T:** 0330 223 1510

---

**Bath**

Chilmark Consulting Ltd.  
Cambridge House  
Henry Street  
BA1 1BT

**T:** 01225 618140

---

**E:** [info@chilmarkconsulting.co.uk](mailto:info@chilmarkconsulting.co.uk)

**Twitter:** @chilmarkUK

---

[chilmarkconsulting.co.uk](http://chilmarkconsulting.co.uk)