

Harrogate Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan Consultation Report



April 2016

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Harrogate town centre plays a pivotal role in driving the local economy as the district's largest retail and leisure destination, service centre, tourist destination, conference and exhibition venue and an important source of local employment. It is therefore vital that the Council works to support the vitality and viability of Harrogate town centre over the long term, and particularly in the light of the current challenges facing centres.
- 1.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) identifies 'promoting the vitality of our main urban areas' as one of the core land use planning principles. The NPPF provides that planning policies should promote competitive town centre environments, and support their vitality, viability and growth.
- 1.3 In recognition of the town centres importance to the district economy, Harrogate Borough Council commissioned Peter Brett Associates and Environmental Associates in May 2013 to prepare the Harrogate Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan (HTCSM) on its behalf. The main objective of this work was to provide a comprehensive assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the town centre and to develop a vision and physical masterplan for the centre, including deliverable area-based projects and proposals that would improve the economic prospects of the town and secure its vitality and viability in the long term.
- 1.4 This report sets out the consultation and engagement that has been undertaken during the various stages in the preparation of the strategy and masterplan.
- 1.5 The Council intends to adopt the HTCSM as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). SPDs are documents which add further detail to the policies in the Local Plan and are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the development plan. The strategy and masterplan supports policies contained within the Harrogate Core Strategy. In particular, it will assist with the implementation of the following policies:
- Policy JB2 which seeks to support conference and business tourism by increasing hotel provision in the town centre, and supporting the expansion and re-development of the Harrogate International Centre.
 - Policy JB4 which states that Harrogate's role as a sub-regional town centre will be reinforced through the expansion of its retail offer, transport improvements, enhanced office, hotel and residential provision, and environmental improvements.
- 1.6 Once adopted, the strategy and masterplan will be used to bring forward town centre improvements, attract inward investment and inform development management decisions.
- 1.7 The strategy and masterplan document does not contain planning policies, nor does it allocate land for development, but it does include policy recommendations and identifies potential development opportunities within the town centre. Where appropriate, these policy recommendations and development opportunities will be taken forward in the emerging Local Plan and therefore tested through the required sustainability and equality appraisal processes.

Baseline Report and Future Option Paper

2.1 The first step in the preparation of the strategy and masterplan was the development of a comprehensive Baseline Report. ⁽¹⁾ The Baseline Report provides an evidence base for the strategy and masterplan and presents the results of a number of inter-related lines of enquiry concerning the current composition and performance of the town centre, its physical environment and infrastructure, and the local property market. The report sought to collect together information on the town centre's existing assets, opportunities for improvement, and constraints on the future development of the town centre. In preparing the report the consultants engaged with businesses, Council officers and other relevant stakeholders in order to collect information, and undertook a review of other relevant strategies and documents. The baseline report was published in October 2014 and was used to inform the development of the draft strategy and masterplan document.

2.2 As part of the baseline Report NEMS Market Research were commissioned to undertake two surveys of visitors and businesses in the town centre. The objective of these surveys was to develop a greater understanding of the views of town centre uses, and those operating businesses within the town centre, in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of Harrogate and the options for the improvement of the town centre.

2.3 The visitor survey consists of a pedestrian survey of 307 people at various points within the town centre undertaken over several days (including during the week and at the weekend) in late July 2014. In summary, the town centre visitor survey has found that:

- whilst the town centre has an important local catchment of regular town centre users, a large proportion of town centre visitors are from outside Harrogate; the
- main reason for visiting the town centre is to shop;
- most visitors spend more than 2 hours in the town centre and a significant number spend more than 4 hours;
- visitors generally have a very positive view of the town centre and the quality of the town centre environment is the main reason for these positive views, particularly for more long distance visitors and tourists;
- the range and quality of shops is also an important factor influencing positive views of the town centre; the comparative advantages of the town centre are based around its shopping environment – its architecture, floral displays and its ambiance;
- where visitors do think the town centre can be improved they point to improved shopping facilities and improved car parking; and
- in particular visitors would like to see more independent shops, more affordable shops, cheaper parking and more long-stay parking.

2.4 In addition to the visitor survey, NEMS Market Research conducted telephone interviews with a representative sample of 100 businesses within Harrogate town centre. The purpose of this survey was to determine whether existing accommodation was considered to be suitable by these businesses, whether there were any future business needs that needed to be taken into account by the masterplan, and key areas for improvement of the town centre. In summary, the business survey found that:

- a significant majority of businesses within the town centre are well established small businesses that have been based in Harrogate for more than ten years;

1 For more information please see <http://consult.harrogate.gov.uk/portal/pp/spd/htcsm/htc?tab=files>

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2 Evidence Base and Early Engagement

- the vast majority of businesses are satisfied with their existing premises, mainly due to their location. Only a small number of businesses are looking to relocate in the next 5 years; and
- improved car parking and reduced town centre congestion are the priority areas for improvement for town centre businesses.

2.5 More information on both of these surveys and the full survey results are provided in the Baseline Report.

2.6 Following the completion of the Baseline Report, Peter Brett Associates produced a Future Options Paper⁽²⁾ that set out three strategic options for the future development of the town centre from which a preferred option and an overarching vision were derived. The paper also set out the objectives required to achieve the vision and a series of emerging approaches that informed the selection of the masterplan projects.

Stakeholder Engagement

2.7 Throughout the preparation of the Harrogate Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan the consultants and council have sought to engage with stakeholders to inform the document. This started with consultation on a draft brief for the strategy and masterplan project with a wide range of stakeholders with an interest in the town including: North Yorkshire County Council; Council Members; relevant council departments; public transport operators; emergency services; prominent town centre developers/landowners; Harrogate Chamber of Trade and Commerce; Harrogate Civic Society; and Destination Harrogate.

2.8 Council Members have been kept up-to-date with the progress made in preparing the strategy and masterplan, and in particular in advance of public consultation stages. This has included two dedicated all member briefing sessions, along with regular updates to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Transport and the District Development Committee. In addition, various meetings and discussions were held between the consultancy team and relevant council services (including Culture, Tourism and Sport, Parks and Environmental Services and Safer Communities) and the Harrogate International Centre.

2.9 Meetings and discussions were also arranged with a range of external stakeholders during the preparation of the draft strategy and masterplan document in order to understand the views of these organisations and to inform the contents of the draft document. Those engaged in this manner include: North Yorkshire County Council, Network Rail, Northern Rail, the Royal Hall Restoration Trust; Harrogate Chamber of Trade and Commerce; and Harrogate Cycle Action.

2.10 Council officers gave a presentation on the strategy and masterplan to the Harrogate Chamber of Trade and Commerce meeting on 13 January 2013 in advance of the appointment of consultants to prepare the document in order to discuss the need for, and proposed scope of, the strategy and masterplan. A presentation was also given at the Chambers meeting on 9 March 2015 (with a follow up article in the Chambers Review newsletter) following the public consultation undertaken in January 2015.

2 For more information please see <http://consult.harrogate.gov.uk/portal/pp/spd/htcsm/htc?tab=files>

Public Exhibition - January 2015

- 2.11** Between 13 and 17 January 2015 the Council undertook a public exhibition at St Peters Church on Cambridge Road in Harrogate. The purpose of the exhibition was to give interested parties, including residents, businesses and other stakeholders, a chance to view and comment on the draft vision and objectives for the town centre, together with a number of potential masterplan projects.
- 2.12** A press release was sent to local media in the week before the event and generated a lot of interest with articles placed in the Harrogate Advertiser, Yorkshire Post and other local media, along with interviews on Stray FM and BBC Radio York. This was accompanied by e-mails to specific local stakeholders and Council Members, along with information items in newsletters prepared and released by the Council's Planning Policy and Economic Development teams before the event.
- 2.13** Copies of the exhibition boards and feedback form were provided on the Council's website throughout the exhibition period along with copies of the Baseline Report and Future Options Paper for the emerging strategy and masterplan.
- 2.14** Officers from the council's Planning Policy Team and representatives from Peter Brett Associates and Environmental Associates attended the exhibition at St Peter's Church on Friday 16 January (between 11.00am and 4.00pm) and Saturday 17 January (between 10.00am and 3.00pm) to discuss the emerging strategy and masterplan proposals with those attending. A feedback form containing a number of questions relating to the exhibition material was available at the exhibition. People could either complete the form at the exhibition and place it in a box provided or take the form away to complete at their leisure and post back to the council.
- 2.15** In total 122 responses were received via the feedback form, letters and e-mails. A consultation feedback report was prepared summarising all of the responses to the public exhibition and is available at **Appendix 1** of this report. The feedback report also includes a copy of the feedback form that was available at the exhibition and on the Council's website, a copy of the exhibition material and the press release for the event.
- 2.16** Tables 2.1 and 2.2 below provide the results of the tick box questions contained on the feedback form whilst a selective summary of the key themes/issues raised in written comments is provided at paragraph 2.16 below.

Question	Responses	Yes	No
Question 1: Do you agree with the proposed vision and strategic objectives for the town centre strategy and masterplan?	89	56 (63%)	33(37%)
Question 3: Do you support the draft proposals for the area around the Cenotaph and Prospect Gardens?	93	60 (65%)	33 (35%)
Question 5: Do you support the draft proposals for the area around Station Parade and Station Square?	85	67 (79%)	18 (21%)
Question 7: Do you support the draft proposals for the area around Crescent Gardens and the Conference Centre?	77	46 (60%)	31 (40%)

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2 Evidence Base and Early Engagement

Question	Responses	Yes	No
Question 9: Do you support the draft proposals for the area around James Street and Princes Square?	86	59 (69%)	27 (31%)

Table 2.1 Responses to feedback form questions 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9.

Question 10: Which of the three options for pedestrian improvements to James Street and Princes Street do you prefer?	
Responses	60
Option 1: Full Pedestrianisation	29 (48%)
Option 2: Pavement Widening	14 (23%)
Option 3: Partial Pedestrianisation	17 (28%)

Table 2.2 Response to feedback form question 10.

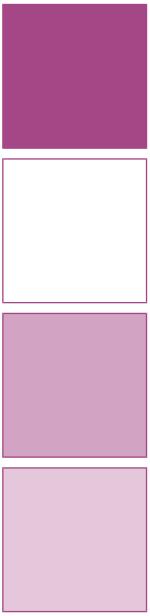
2.17 As can be seen from the results set out in Table 2.1, the majority of the responses received were in favour of the draft proposals displayed at the exhibition, although the level of support varied from project to project. For example, 79% of those who responded supported the draft proposals for the area around Station Parade and Station Square, whilst only 60% of those who responded supported the draft proposals for the area around Crescent Gardens and the Conference Centre.

2.18 Table 2.2 shows that 76% of those who responded to the question supported some form of pedestrianisation along James Street, with 48% preferring full pedestrianisation and 28% partial pedestrianisation. The remaining 23% preferred the option to widen the pavement along James Street only, retaining some on-street parking and the vehicular through-route to Station Parade.

2.19 Provided below is a brief summary of a number of the key themes/issues raised in written comments received during the exhibition in January 2015. It should be noted that this list is not exhaustive and is not a reflection of the validity of the other comments raised during the consultation period (a full list of the feedback received is provided at **Appendix 1**):

- Concern over the loss on-street parking spaces as a result of the masterplan proposals.
- Concern about traffic management and the impact of proposed changes to highways.
- The need to improve the link between the bus and rail stations.
- Disagreement with the closure of Cambridge Crescent and removal of parking spaces in this area.
- Differing views on pedestrianisation elsewhere around the town.
- Objection to the prospect of a casino opening in the town.
- The need for new public toilets in the town to serve the Montpellier area.
- Disagreement with the concept of outdoor dining around the Cenotaph/Montpellier Parade.
- Disagreement with the removal of grassed areas/floral displays.
- Questioning the need for another hotel in the town.
- Preference for the Council to remain at Crescent Gardens.
- Some support for a new family/youth based leisure activity in the town.

2.20 The feedback received during the public exhibition informed the development of a draft strategy and masterplan document.



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3 Consultation on the Draft Strategy and Masterplan

Public Consultation – October 2015

3.1 In 2015 a Draft Harrogate Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan⁽³⁾ was the subject of a six week public consultation between 4 September and 16 October. The draft strategy and masterplan document provided a: summary of the baseline findings; vision of the town centre in 2025 along with a number of strategic objectives necessary to achieve the vision; masterplan for the centre and an outline of the projects and proposals relating to the plan; policy recommendations for the management of the town centre; and an implementation plan.

3.2 It was made clear on the council's website from June 2015 that consultation on a Draft Harrogate Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan document would be taking place during September and October 2015. Throughout the consultation period the draft strategy and masterplan document, along with the Baseline Report, Future Option Paper and January 2015 Consultation Feedback Report, were available on the Planning Policy team's online consultation portal⁽⁴⁾. In addition, copies of the draft Strategy and masterplan document, feedback forms and leaflets were made available in all of the district's libraries and in the council's Crescent Gardens offices reception area, at Knaresborough House and Ripon Town Hall.

3.3 A two week unmanned exhibition was set up in the glazed foyer of St Peter's Church between Tuesday 22 September and Sunday 4 October 2015. Copies of the exhibition boards on display are provided at **Appendix 2**. Two manned events were also arranged where officers from the Planning Policy team were available to answer questions on:

- Thursday 10 September, 9am-4pm – Harrogate Farmers Market, Cambridge Street Harrogate
- Saturday 26 September, 10am-3pm – St Peter's Church, Cambridge Road, Harrogate

3.4 A press notice was posted in the Harrogate Advertiser on the 3 September and numerous press releases were issued during the consultation period to generate interest in the consultation. These can be found at **Appendix 4**. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Transport was interviewed by Radio York, Stray FM and the Harrogate Advertiser during the consultation period and the draft strategy and masterplan generated numerous articles in the local written press and online.

3.5 The dates for the consultation were included in the Planning Policy team's July 2015 'Plan the Future With Us' newsletter that was sent to all those on the planning policy consultation database.

3.6 A letter or e-mail was sent to all those on the planning policy consultation database on 2 September notifying them of the consultation period. A letter was sent to over 400 businesses operating within the town centre (including retail, leisure, and other businesses) on 11 September followed by a letter to almost 1,000 residential addresses within the study area on 22 September. Finally, an e-mail was sent to almost 5,000 addresses on the Council's customer services contact list on 5 October to remind people of the end of the consultation period. Copies of these letters and notifications are provided at **Appendix 5**.

3 For more information please see <http://consult.harrogate.gov.uk/portal/pp/spd/htcsm/htc>

4 For information please see <http://consult.harrogate.gov.uk/portal>

- 3.7** A leaflet was produced to raise awareness of the draft strategy and masterplan, set out the vision for the town centre, provide some basic information on a selection of the masterplan projects and details on how people can respond to the consultation. Copies of the leaflet were placed in the District's libraries, in the council's Crescent Gardens offices reception area, at Knaresborough House and Ripon Town Hall, and were also available at all exhibitions and events. An A5 flyer was also produced and was available during the St Peter's Church exhibition. The content of the leaflet and flyer can be seen at **Appendix 6**.
- 3.8** **Appendix 7** sets out the tweets that were made on the Council's twitter account during the consultation period.
- 3.9** A stakeholder briefing event took place on 17 September 2015. The briefing session was chaired by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Transport and involved a presentation on the purpose and content of the draft strategy and masterplan by the consultants Peter Brett Associates, followed by a questions and answers session. Invites for the event were sent on the 2 September (with a reminder sent on 9 September) to fifty seven organisations with an interest in the town centre along with representatives from residential blocks in the town centre. Twenty two organisations and individuals attended the briefing event. A copy of the invite for the stakeholder briefing and the presentation given at the event are provided at **Appendix 8**.
- 3.10** Council officers also set up and manned the draft strategy and masterplan exhibition at the Harrogate Chamber of Trade and Commerce meeting on 12 October 2015.
- 3.11** People were encouraged to use the Planning Policy teams online consultation portal to make comments on the draft strategy and masterplan but were also able to submit comments via e-mail or letter. In total 159 responses were received via the online consultation portal, letters and e-mails. All of the responses received were entered onto the consultation portal following the completion of the consultation period and are available to view in full at <http://consult.harrogate.gov.uk/portal>. **Appendix 3** provides a summary of the key issues raised during the consultation on the draft strategy and masterplan along with a Council response and recommended changes to the document where considered necessary.

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4 Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Consideration

- 4.1 In accordance with regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the Regulation) the Council undertook a screening consideration of the need to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Harrogate Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan. The SEA screening consideration can be found at **Appendix 9**.
- 4.2 As required by the regulations, consultation on the screening consideration was undertaken with the three statutory consultee bodies, namely Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency. Copies of the responses received from these organisations, and subsequent correspondence, is provided at **Appendix 10**.
- 4.3 The purpose of the Harrogate Town Centre Strategy and Masterplans is to communicate the Council's vision for the centre, based on an analysis of its current strengths and weaknesses, and to set out a series of potential projects that, if delivered, could help to realise the vision. The document does not contain planning policies, nor does it allocate land for development, but does include policy recommendation and identifies potential development opportunities. Where appropriate, these policy recommendations and development opportunities will be taken forward in the emerging Local Plan and therefore tested through the Sustainability Appraisal process.
- 4.4 The draft strategy and masterplan will primarily be used as a visioning document and marketing tool for the town centre, encouraging inward investment into the town and confidence in its continued good health for existing residents and businesses. As a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) it will also be able to influence planning decisions as a material consideration. However, the weight that could be attached to the SPD would be fairly limited due to the status of the document and the level of detail contained within it.
- 4.5 The handful of development opportunities identified in the document are only done so at a high level, providing a description of the potential project and in some instances including a number of specific considerations that would need to be taken into account when developing the project further. In all cases, the detailed design would need to be developed in consultation with the Council, statutory consultees and the public through the pre-application and planning application process. As referred to above, a number of projects are to be brought forward through the Local Plan process and/or more detailed development briefs, namely the transport hub, Dragon Road (should an alternative site be found for the Harrogate International Centre (HIC) vehicle holding area) and proposals relating to the HIC.
- 4.6 Proposals included in the strategy and masterplan to improve the public realm within Harrogate town centre will also be incorporated into the emerging Local Plan alongside other key proposals, similar to existing Core Strategy Policy JB4: Retail and Town Centre Development to which the emerging SPD relates. In most areas, public realm improvements will simply involve a freshening up of already public and pedestrianised areas, but could potentially introduce new materials, and will involve the redesign of spaces to ensure that they are attractive, legible, permeable and manageable. In James Street, the proposal is to fully pedestrianise the street. Obviously, how the design of these areas relates to the historic fabric of the town centre will be of utmost importance and will be guided by the Council's own conservation team and consultation with statutory consultees, including Historic England.
- 4.7 In light of the above, the Council considers that an environmental assessment of the Harrogate Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan is not required.

