



## Harrogate Borough Council

# Harrogate Town Centre Strategy & Masterplan Future Options and Emerging Approaches

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# 1 STRATEGIC OPTIONS

## Introduction

- 1.1 Following the completion of the Baseline Report for the Harrogate Town Centre Strategy and Masterplan (HTCSM) this paper sets out the future options for the town centre and the emerging approaches that will guide the preparation of the draft HTCSM.
- 1.2 We set out here the strategic options for the future development of the town centre from which we derive a preferred option and an overarching vision. We go on to set out the strategic objectives and the emerging approaches that will frame how we intend to deliver those objectives, and thereby realise this vision. Once the vision and strategic objectives are agreed with the Borough Council, the emerging approaches will form the basis of the masterplan projects which, together, will form the town centre strategy.

## Strategic Options

- 1.3 The strategic options are the main scenarios for the future of Harrogate Town Centre. Each option carries opportunities and risks, and implies certain levels of public and private sector intervention. We have identified three strategic options which we describe below. We also briefly set out the evidence that would support the adoption of each option (based on the findings of the Baseline Report) and the potential implications of pursuing each option for the future development of the town centre.

### Strategic Option 1 – Managed Growth

- 1.4 The strategic option of ‘managed growth’ would seek to encourage the continuation of the town centre’s recent growth and place this on a sustainable footing so that any competing pressures could be ‘managed’. It would see the HTSCM focus on addressing the issues that currently detract from the performance of the town centre to ensure that they are not exacerbated by future town centre development.

#### *The Evidence*

- 1.5 The evidence gathered at the baseline stage that would support the adoption of this option includes:
  - the existing strong performance of the town centre when set against indicators of vitality and viability such as turnover, vacancy rates and operator demand;
  - the fact that the town centre has weathered the recent, prolonged economic recession well and has been less vulnerable to changes that have damaged weaker centres; and
  - visitor and business survey results, which indicate a high level of satisfaction with the town centre.

### *The Implications*

- 1.6 The existing strengths of the town centre would be developed but this would largely depend on prevailing market conditions and levels of private sector investment. Recent trends such as investment from premium retailers, the diversification of Harrogate's hotel stock and the development of festival-based tourism would be encouraged. Measures would be taken to protect the town centre's existing environmental assets and address problems associated with its further growth such as traffic and congestion.
- 1.7 The HTCSM would comprise limited interventions in terms of both physical projects and policy initiatives, thus requiring relatively low levels of public sector investment at a time when public sector spending faces further restraint. However, the risks of this approach are that the town centre will not 'raise its game' and that it will lose ground to both regional and national competitors. Furthermore, opportunities to secure additional economic, social and environmental benefits will not be fully realised.

## Strategic Option 2 – Enhanced Growth

- 1.8 The second strategic option, 'enhanced growth', aims to build on the town centres existing success to ensure that its strengths are developed and integrated whilst existing causes of underperformance are addressed more comprehensively. The HTCSM would assume a higher level of intervention and will seek to do this by targeted investment which will help to organically and intelligently diversify the town centre's offer.

### *The Evidence*

- 1.9 The evidence gathered at the baseline stage that would support the adoption of this option includes:
- the opportunities to improve the town centre's offer, particularly in the tourism and leisure sectors;
  - the opportunities to further enhance the town centre environment through targeted interventions, particularly relating to public realm and transport; and
  - recognition that the identified areas for improvement are often interlinked and that a higher level of intervention would allow greater co-ordination that would leverage greater benefits for the town centre and the local economy.

### *The Implications*

- 1.10 The existing strengths of the town centre would be encouraged and exploited through key investments that seek to address several strategic objectives. These focused interventions would be designed to encourage and guide private sector investment. This would include development proposals for key sites and environmental improvements that help to better connect the various component parts of the town centre.
- 1.11 The HTCSM would comprise a range of physical projects that would be used to deliver wider, integrated strategies to boost the visitor economy and to overcome

some of the factors that may be limiting investment in the town centre and the realisation of greater long term benefits.

### Strategic Option 3 – Strategic Reorientation

- 1.12 'Strategic reorientation' would see a more significant change in the role of the town centre to be facilitated by significant levels of intervention. It would recognise the current strengths of the town centre and would seek to develop other strengths that might serve different markets or open up new opportunities for town centre development. In order for it to be achieved this option would require higher levels of investment.

#### *The Evidence*

- 1.13 The evidence gathered at the baseline stage that would support the adoption of this option includes:
- the strong emphasis of town centre retailing on a traditional, high-end offer that may limit its appeal to younger and less affluent shoppers;
  - the focus of the visitor economy on business tourism and older people, that may limit its appeal to families; and therefore
  - an apparent need to diversify and expand the town's offering through strategic interventions.

#### *The Implications*

- 1.14 The HTCSM would be framed within an ambitious long-term vision that would be delivered by more significant projects that would change the town centre environment and its existing mix of uses more dramatically. This would carry greater risks as it is possible that these interventions could not be delivered or that their delivery has unforeseen consequences in terms of undermining the town centre's existing strengths.

## Preferred Option and Policy Compliance

- 1.15 On the basis of our analysis, the preferred option is '**Enhanced Growth**'. We consider that this option would strike an appropriate balance between exploiting the existing strengths of the town centre and addressing existing weaknesses. Interventions at this level are considered to be realistic and to be likely to deliver the greatest benefits to a range of town centre stakeholders. Furthermore, the town centre is already strong in many areas and so there is no overwhelming need for wide-ranging, strategic interventions of the sort that might be required to address market failure in weak centres.
- 1.16 The 'Managed Growth' option is not considered to be sufficiently ambitious and we believe that it would leave the town centre vulnerable to future market changes as well as competition from other destinations. We consider there to be limited evidence to support the option for 'Strategic Reorientation' and that this approach would also carry significant risks for the ongoing success of the town centre and its future development. Furthermore a more limited reorientation of the town centre offer could

be achieved by the careful diversification of the town centre's offer that would be envisaged by the option for 'Enhanced Growth'.

- 1.17 The preferred option is also considered to support national and local planning policy, together with local economic strategy. It would respond to the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for local planning authorities to proactively plan to meet the needs of business and support existing business sectors (paragraph 18 of the NPPF), to promote competitive town centres (paragraph 23), plan positively to achieve high quality design (paragraph 57), and to prepare plans that are '*aspirational but realistic*' (paragraph 153).
- 1.18 The 'Enhanced Growth' option would also support the strategic objectives of the Harrogate Core Strategy including:
- focusing the District's growth in the town of Harrogate, subject to appropriate traffic management and new infrastructure;
  - promoting a robust and varied economy;
  - protecting and enhancing the District's town centres, conference, business and holiday tourism; and
  - protecting and enhancing the built and natural environment.



## 2 VISION AND OBJECTIVES

### The Vision

- 2.1 The vision set out below seeks to articulate the preferred approach to the development of the town centre in a short statement. This statement highlights key objectives and priorities for achieving those objectives. The vision is to be agreed with the Borough Council and tested through stakeholder consultation, but our suggested wording is as follows:

***'By [2025 or 2030] Harrogate Town Centre will be a leading UK destination for shopping, leisure and business tourism. The unique qualities of the town centre will be enhanced to provide a distinctive visitor offer that differentiates Harrogate from its regional and national competitors. This distinctiveness will be characterised by an exceptional town centre environment, the key components of which will be:***

- ***public realm of an outstanding quality;***
- ***a special blend of retail and leisure uses;***
- ***unique facilities for conferences and events; and***
- ***integrated and sustainable transport infrastructure.***

***The realisation of this vision will ensure that important economic benefits are delivered for local residents and businesses, and that opportunities for the sustainable development of the town centre are full exploited.'***

### Strategic Objectives

- 2.2 The strategic objectives for the enhanced growth of the town centre and the realisation of the HTCSM's vision are as follows:
1. Preserving and enhancing the elements of the town centre environment that make a key contribution to its current success.
  2. Addressing those elements of the town centre environment that detract from the visitor experience and therefore its economic performance.
  3. Differentiating Harrogate's offer in the key areas of retail, leisure and events so that it can compete more effectively with regional and national competitors.
  4. Growing Harrogate's visitor economy by better integrating its existing strengths, broadening its appeal and raising its profile.
  5. Managing the future growth of the town centre to ensure that existing weaknesses are not exacerbated.

## 3 EMERGING APPROACHES

### Introduction

- 3.1 The emerging approaches sets out how we intend to deliver the strategic objectives and comprises three inter-related strategies, which will be supported by practical proposals for enhanced town centre management.

### Public Realm Strategy

- 3.2 The public realm strategy seeks to respond to Strategic Objectives 1, 2 and 3. The public realm strategy will:
- reinforce the visitor appeal of Harrogate by showcasing the town centre's architecture and complementing its special green spaces;
  - create desirable urban spaces that reflect the aspirational values of key operators and investors;
  - provide new opportunities to enhance the town centre's leisure offer, particularly in terms of food and drink;
  - reduce the negative impacts of traffic and congestion within the town centre;
  - better integrate key destinations within the town centre and particularly the transport hub, the conference centre and the Montpellier Quarter; and
  - create new spaces for holding outdoor events that builds on Harrogate's existing strengths as a visitor destination and a unique retail destination.

### Visitor Strategy

- 3.3 The visitor strategy seeks to deliver Strategic Objectives 3 and 4 by:
- supporting Harrogate's role as a leading destination for business tourism, helping it to compete with other key destinations within the UK;
  - supporting the differentiation of Harrogate's visitor offer, recognising that such differentiation will provide competitive advantages;
  - recovering and promoting Harrogate's heritage as a Spa Town, using this as a means by which to increase the number of staying visitors; and
  - supporting the integration of Harrogate's visitor offer (heritage, retail, and events) in order to both broaden and maximise its appeal.

### Movement Strategy

- 3.4 The movement strategy seeks to respond to Strategic Objectives 2 and 5. The transport strategy will:
- focus on the key town centre development site at Station Parade to deliver a new gateway to the town centre and provide a step-change in the quality of public transport facilities;

- maximise opportunities for sustainable travel through improved transport infrastructure that helps to reduce congestion in the town centre;
- set out proposals for the management of town centre car parking to ensure that this supports rather constrains economic activity; and
- complement the public realm strategy.

## Town Centre Management

3.5 The proposals for town centre management will:

- provide the policy tools necessary to support the town centre strategy;
- provide recommendations in terms of the organisational capacity required to deliver the three strands of the strategy; and
- be sufficiently flexible to respond to future economic, social and environmental change.

3.6 Taken together these strategies will inform the development of the masterplan policies and projects which will be presented in a single, coherent document. The eventual HTCSM will be accompanied by a delivery plan that will set out priorities for investment, indicative timescales and potential partners.